
Chapter 6

Political Parties

❖ Political Parties

- Political parties are one of the most visible institutions in a democracy.
- Is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.
- They agree on some policies and programs for the society with the view of promoting the collective good.
- They seek to implement these policies by winning popular support through elections.
- A political party has three components:
 - Leaders
 - Active members
 - Followers
- **Functions**
 - Parties **contest elections**.
 - Parties have different **policies and programmes** and the voters choose from them. A party reduces a vast multitude of opinions into a few basic positions which it supports.
 - Parties play a decisive role in **making laws** for a country. Laws are debated and passed in the legislature by the members of the various political parties.
 - Parties **form and run** governments.
 - Parties recruit leaders, train them and then make them ministers to run the government in the way they want.
 - Parties **shape public opinion**.
 - Often, opinions in the society are formed on the lines of the party.
 - Parties provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes implemented by governments.
- **Necessity**
 - Political parties are directly linked to the emergence of representative democracies.
 - Political parties help large scale societies in developing a representative democracy.
 - They also help in gathering different views on various issues and present these to the government.
 - They bring various representatives together so that a responsible government could be formed.
 - They support or restrain the government in the formulation of policies.

❖ Party System

- **One-party system**

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- Only one party is allowed to control and run the government. E.g., The Communist Party of China.
 - We cannot consider one-party system as a good option because this is not a democratic option.
 - **Two-party system**
 - Power usually changes between two main parties. E.g., The United States of America and the United Kingdom.
 - Only the two main parties have a serious chance of winning majority of seats for forming the government.
 - Several other parties may exist, contest elections and win a few seats in the national legislatures.
 - **Multi-party system**
 - Several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power either on their own strength or in alliance with others. E.g., India (The National Democratic Alliance, the United Progressive Alliance and the Left Front).
 - The government is formed by various parties coming together in a coalition.
 - This system allows a variety of interests and opinions to enjoy political representation.
 - A multi-party system may often lead to political instability.
 - Party system evolves over a long time, depending on the nature of society, its social and regional divisions, its history of politics and its system of elections.

❖ **National Political Parties**

- Countrywide parties are called ‘national parties’ and these have their units in various states.
- A party that secures at least six per cent of total votes in the Lok Sabha elections or the Assembly elections in four States and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognized as a national party.
- There are six national recognised parties in India.



Indian National Congress (INC)

- Founded in 1885.
- Dominated Indian politics, both at the national and state level, for several decades after India’s Independence.
- Ruling party at the centre till 1977 and then from 1980 to 1989. After 1989, its support declined.
- A centrist party (neither rightist nor leftist) in its ideological orientation.
- The party supports secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities.
- Supports new economic reforms.

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- Currently leads the ruling United Progressive Alliance coalition government at the Centre.



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

- Founded in 1980 by reviving the erstwhile *Bharatiya Jana Sangh*.
- Cultural nationalism (or ‘Hindutva’) is the party’s ideology that defines its concept of Indian nationhood and politics.
- Wants full territorial and political integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India.
- A uniform civil code for all people living in the country irrespective of religion and a ban on religious conversions.
- Its support base substantially increased in the 1990s.
- Earlier limited to North and West and to urban areas, the party expanded its support in the South, East, and the Northeast and to rural areas.
- Came to power in 1998 as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance including several state and regional parties.
- Lost elections in 2004 and is the principal opposition party in the Lok Sabha.



Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

- Formed in 1984 under the leadership of Kanshi Ram.
- Seeks to represent and secure power for the *bahujan samaj* which includes the *dalits*, *adivasis*, OBCs and religious minorities.
- Draws inspiration from the ideas and teachings of Sahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker and Babasaheb Ambedkar.
- It has its main base in the state of Uttar Pradesh and substantial presence in neighbouring states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Punjab.
- Formed government in Uttar Pradesh several times by taking the support of different parties at different times.



Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M)

- Founded in 1964.

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- Believes in Marxism-Leninism.
 - Supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism.
 - Accepts democratic elections as a useful and helpful means for securing the objectives of socio-economic justice in India.
 - Enjoys strong support in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, especially among the poor, factory workers, farmers, agricultural labourers and the intelligentsia.
 - Critical of the new economic policies that allow free flow of foreign capital and goods into the country. Has been in power in West Bengal without a break for 30 years.
 - Currently supports the UPA government from outside, without joining the government.



Communist Party of India (CPI)

- Formed in 1925.
- Believes in Marxism-Leninism, secularism and democracy.
- Opposed to the forces of secessionism and communalism.
- Accepts parliamentary democracy as a means of promoting the interests of the working class, farmers and the poor.
- Became weak after the split in the party in 1964 that led to the formation of the CPI (M).
- Significant presence in the states of Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- Its support base has gradually declined over the years.
- Advocates the coming together of all left parties for building a strong left front.
- Currently supports UPA government from outside.



Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

- Formed in 1999 following a split in the Congress party.
- Espouses democracy, Gandhian secularism, equity, social justice and federalism.
- Wants that high offices in government be confined to natural born citizens of the country.
- A major party in Maharashtra and has a significant presence in Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam.
- A coalition partner in the state of Maharashtra in alliance with the Congress.
- Since 2004, a member of the United Progressive Alliance.

❖ State Parties

- A party that secures at least 6 per cent of the total votes in an election to the Legislative Assembly of a State and wins at least two seats is recognised as a State party.
- These parties are all India parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states and regions.
- National parties are compelled to form alliances with state parties.

❖ Challenges to Political Parties

- **Lack of internal democracy**
 - There is a tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top.
 - Parties do not keep membership registers, do not hold organisational meetings and do not conduct regular internal elections.
 - Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party.
 - More than loyalty to party principles and policies, personal loyalty to the leader becomes important.
- **Dynastic succession**
 - Those who happen to be the leaders are in a position of unfair advantage of favouring people close to them or even their family members.
 - In many parties, top positions are always controlled by the members of one family.
 - This is bad for democracy, since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy positions of power.
- **Growing role of money and muscle power**
 - Parties tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money.
 - Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party.
 - In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.
- The fourth challenge is that very often parties do not seem to offer a **meaningful choice** to the voters.
 - A decline in the ideological differences among parties in most parts of the world has lessened the choices of voters.
 - People cannot even elect different leaders either because the same set of leaders keeps shifting from one party to another.

❖ Reformation of Political Parties

- The Constitution was amended to prevent elected MLAs and MPs from changing parties. Now, if any MLA or MP changes parties, he or she will lose the seat in the legislature.
- MPs and MLAs have to accept the party leader's decision.
- The Supreme Court has ordered to reduce the influence of money and criminals.
- Every candidate who contests elections must file an affidavit giving details of his/her property and criminal cases pending against him.

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- The Election Commission has ordered the political parties to hold their organisational elections and file their income tax returns.
 - **Suggestions to Reform Political Parties**
 - Laws should be made for regulating the internal affairs of political parties.
 - Political parties must give one-third of the total number of tickets to women members.
 - The decision making bodies of the party should provide for a quota for women.
 - The government should fund the parties in order to support their election expenses.