

- Political Parties: Introduction and Types of Party Systems
- National and Regional Political Parties: Challenges and Reforms
- Summary, Glossary, and Additional Resources

Political Parties: Introduction and Types of Party Systems

A political party is an organized group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in government. They mobilize voters to support common interests, concerns, and goals. Political parties set the political agenda and policies, persuading people that their policies are better than those of other parties. They provide a platform for people to communicate with the government and participate in governance.

A political party consists of three components: leaders, active members, and followers.

Functions of Political Parties

- Contest elections by nominating candidates.
- In some countries, candidates are selected by party members (e.g., USA), while in others, top leaders choose candidates (e.g., India).
- Put forward policies and programs for voters to choose from.
- Form the opposition if they lose elections, voicing alternative views and criticizing government policies.
- Shape public opinion and launch movements to solve public problems.
- Provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes.

Need for Political Parties

Democracies cannot function effectively without political parties. Without parties, all candidates would be independents, unable to promise major policy changes or take responsibility for governance. Political parties gather diverse views and present them to the government, enabling representative democracy in large societies.

Types of Party Systems

There are three main types of party systems:

1. **One-Party System (Mono party):** Only one party controls the government with no competition. Voters can only approve or reject candidates nominated by the party. Common in authoritarian regimes like China and North Korea.
2. **Two-Party System (Bi-party):** Power alternates between two dominant parties. Smaller parties merge or drop out. Examples include Great Britain and the USA. This system aims to prevent fragmentation and ensure stable government.
3. **Multi-Party System:** Multiple parties can gain control separately or through coalitions. Coalitions form when no party wins a majority. This system allows diverse views but may lead to political instability. India follows this system with alliances like the National Democratic Alliance and United Progressive Alliance.

Exam Question

Q: What are the main functions of political parties in a democracy?

A: Political parties contest elections, represent people's interests, form the government or opposition, shape public opinion, and provide access to government schemes.

National and Regional Political Parties: Challenges and Reforms

In India, political parties must register with the Election Commission, which treats all parties equally but grants special recognition to large and established parties by

assigning unique symbols.

Criteria for Recognition

- **National Party:** Must fulfill at least one of the following:
 - Win 2% of Lok Sabha seats (11 seats) from at least 3 states.
 - Secure 6% of valid votes in at least 4 states and win 4 Lok Sabha seats.
 - Be recognized as a State Party in four or more states.

Major Political Parties in India

- **Indian National Congress (INC):** Founded in 1885, it was the dominant party after independence.
- **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):** Formed in 1980, it promotes socio-religious values and leads the National Democratic Alliance.
- **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP):** Represents OBCs, SCs, STs, and minorities, inspired by social reformers.
- **Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M):** Supports Marxism-Leninism, socialism, secularism, and democracy.
- **Communist Party of India (CPI):** Formed in 1925, supports parliamentary democracy and opposes communalism.
- **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP):** Formed in 1999, supports democracy, secularism, social justice, and federalism.

State or Regional Parties

Some parties operate mainly in specific states but may have national presence. Examples include Samajwadi Party, Janata Dal (United), Biju Janata Dal, and Sikkim Democratic Front.

Challenges Faced by Political Parties

- **Lack of Internal Democracy:** Power concentrated among few leaders, no regular elections, limited member participation.
- **Dynastic Succession:** Leadership often passed within families, limiting democratic choice.
- **Money and Muscle Power:** Candidates with financial resources are favored; funding influences policies.
- **Limited Choice for Voters:** Parties often have similar ideologies, reducing meaningful alternatives.

Reforms Undertaken and Suggested

- Anti-defection law to prevent party switching.
- Affidavit requirements for candidates to disclose personal information.
- Organizational meetings to improve transparency.
- Proposals for laws regulating internal party affairs, mandatory membership registers, and open elections.
- Reservation of one-third tickets for women candidates.
- State funding of elections to reduce dependence on private money.

Exam Question

Q: What are the main challenges faced by political parties in India?

A: Challenges include lack of internal democracy, dynastic succession, influence of money and muscle power, and limited ideological differences among parties.

Summary, Glossary, and Additional Resources

Quick Reference

- **Political Party:** Group contesting elections to hold government power.
- **Election:** Process to select representatives for public office.
- **Alliance:** Agreement between parties to contest elections together.

- **National Party:** Party recognized based on election performance across states.
- **Defection:** Changing party allegiance after election.
- **Affidavit:** Sworn statement disclosing candidate information.
- **Election Commission:** Autonomous body overseeing elections.

Glossary

Political Party

An organized group seeking to gain political power through elections.

Election Commission

Constitutional authority responsible for conducting free and fair elections.

Coalition Government

A government formed by multiple parties joining together when no single party has a majority.

Dynastic Succession

Passing leadership roles within a family, limiting democratic participation.

Anti-defection Law

Legislation to prevent elected members from switching parties.

Solved Example

Question: Explain why political parties are essential in a democracy.

Answer: Political parties are essential because they organize people with similar views, contest elections, form governments, and provide a platform for public participation. Without parties, elections would have only independent candidates with no clear policies or accountability, making governance ineffective.

Practice Set

Easy

- Define a political party.

- List the three types of party systems.

Moderate

- What are the criteria for a party to be recognized as a national party in India?
- Explain the challenges faced by political parties in India.

Challenging

- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a multi-party system.
- Suggest reforms that can improve the functioning of political parties in India.

Answer Key

- **Political party:** An organized group contesting elections to hold government power.
- **Types of party systems:** One-party, two-party, multi-party.
- **National party criteria:** Win 2% Lok Sabha seats from 3 states, or 6% votes in 4 states plus 4 Lok Sabha seats, or recognized as state party in 4 states.
- **Challenges:** Lack of internal democracy, dynastic succession, money and muscle power, limited voter choice.
- **Advantages of multi-party system:** Represents diverse views, coalition governments. Disadvantages: Political instability, frequent government changes.
- **Reforms:** Internal democracy laws, reservation for women, state funding, transparency measures.

Chronology Table: Political Parties in India

Year	Event	Significance
1885	Formation of Indian National Congress	First major political party in India, led independence movement
1925	Formation of Communist Party of India	Introduced Marxist ideology in Indian politics

1964	Split of Communist Party to form CPI-M	Created ideological diversity within left-wing politics
1980	Formation of Bharatiya Janata Party	Emergence of a major right-wing political party
1999	Formation of Nationalist Congress Party	Split from Congress, regional influence in Maharashtra

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