

Political Parties

Meaning of Political Party

- A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government.

Functions of a Political Party

- Parties contest elections.
- Parties put forward different policies and programmes and the voters choose from them. A party reduces a vast number of opinions into a few basic positions which it supports.
- Parties play a decisive role in making laws for a country.
- Parties form and run governments.
- Those parties that lose in the elections play the role of **opposition** to the parties in power.

How many Parties should we have?

- There are three types of party system a country can have.

One Party System

- Only one party is allowed to control and run the government.

Two Party System

- Power usually changes between two main parties.

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.

Election Commission

- Every party in India has to register with the Election Commission.
- The Commission treats every party as equal to the others, but it offers special facilities to large and established parties.
- They are given a unique symbol and are called, recognised political parties.

State Parties

- A party that secures at least **six percent** 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.

National Parties

- A party that secures at least **six percent** of the total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four States and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognised as a national party.

Indian National Congress (INC)

- Popularly known as the Congress Party.
- Founded in 1885.
- Played a dominated role in Indian politics, at the national and state level for several decades after India's Independence.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

- Founded in 1980 by reviving the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh.
- Cultural nationalism (or 'Hindutva') is an important element in its origination of Indian nationhood and politics.
- Wants full territorial and political integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India.

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.

Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M)

- Founded in 1964.
- Believes in Marxism- Leninism.
- Supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism.

Communist Party of India (CPI)

- Formed in 1925.
- Believes in Marxism-Leninism, secularism and democracy.

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

- Formed in 1999 following a split in the Congress party.
- Accepted democracy, Gandhian secularism, equity, social justice and federalism.

State Parties

- Other than these six parties, most of the major parties of the country are classified by the Election Commission as 'State parties'.

Challenges to Political Parties

- Lack of Internal Democracy
- Challenge of Dynastic Succession
- Growing Role of Money and Muscle Power
- Meaningful choice

How can Parties be reformed?

Recent efforts and suggestions in India

- The Constitution was amended to prevent elected MLAs and MPs from changing parties.
- New law states that if any MLA or MP changes parties, he or she will lose the seat in the legislature.
- The Supreme Court passed an order to reduce the influence of money and criminals.
- The Election Commission passed an order making it necessary for political parties to hold their organisational elections and file their income tax returns.

Some suggestions to reform political parties

- A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties.
- To give a minimum number of tickets, about one-third, to women candidates
- There should be state funding of elections.
- There are two other ways in which political parties can be reformed.