

4 Political Parties

Why do we need 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.