Public Opinion and Party System

10.1 Defining Public Opinion:

Public opinion can be defined as a psychological and social process in which the behaviour of each member of the public is conditional to that of all others with similar beliefs. In short it is the collective views of the people, their attitudes and opinions.

It is the people's collective preferences on matters relating to government and politics. It is based on the premise that collective individual opinions matters in a democracy and public opinion should carry more weight than individual opinion. Others opine that public opinion can be influenced and controlled by organized groups, government leaders, and media elite.

In fact, democracy derives its authority from the people. Public opinion is not the opinion of an individual, though he or she may be a highly respected person. It is not a private opinion. It is also not an expert opinion, irrespective of the wisdom of the expert. Public opinion is an organized and considered opinion of a section or many sections of the people on any public issue or concern.

Role of Public Opinion:

Public opinion is an essential element for successful working of a democracy where the views of all citizens are respected and no government can survive by ignoring it.

10.2 Hindrances to formation of a genuine public opinion

Public opinion needs to be the true reflection of the peoples` ideas and opinion, however there are some hindrances to genuine public opinion;

Selfish interests (Me above nation): The interest of the people seeking personal advancement over the affairs of their own country. People need to be sensitized towards important issues related to unity, commitment, integrity and progress of the nation.

Illiteracy: It is expected that literate and responsible public make good citizens by exercising their franchise without

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fear or favour. Illiterate masses are often misled by party workers and guided by sentiments, favours and rhetoric. A sound public opinion can be formed only in the environment of free thought and knowledge.

(a) Poverty: The poor in any country are easily influenced by the false promise of political leaders and cast their votes subjectively. Sound and objective public opinion is possible only by alleviating poverty.

(b) Racist and Caste based Discrimination: Sentiments that provoke discrimination based on caste, creed and religion create a divide among the masses that are often manipulated by political parties for their advantage. Social disharmony in the country is detrimental to the effective working of a democracy.

(c) Freedom of speech and the media:

Unbiased, objective and independent media as well as respect for individual freedom of speech and assembly play a very significant role in the formation of healthy opinion. The vital importance of an independent and impartial media that respects peoples freedom and exercises responsible news reporting are important criteria for formation of mature and responsive public opinion.

10.3 Definition of Political Parties

Political parties are indispensable instruments in a democratic system. They are formed with definite ideologies, and programme of action. They enlighten the general public on issues concerning the society and state and they also prescribe alternatives. Through propaganda they educate people on political issues and garner their support for their policies and programme.

There is consistent competition between the various political parties and this competition ensures the mature functioning of a democracy.

ACTIVITY

Following are the lists of various functions of political parties in a democracy:

❖ Parties contest in elections
❖ Parties put forward different policies and programmes
❖ Parties make laws for the country
❖ Parties form and run government
❖ Parities play the role of the opposition
❖ Parties shape public opinion
❖ Parties provide people the access to government welfare schemes

Follow the newspaper for one month and collect news items related to the various functions of political parties

Quotable **Q**uote
In a democracy public opinion is harnessed through political parties.

10.4 Functions of Political Parties

In a democracy, political parties serve as an integral link through which government and the public can interact. Political Parties act as a foundation that orients the people towards political initiatives and public experience. Political Parties work to influence political thought and opinion with the intention of mobilizing votes. They provide a platform for political, economic and social activism that serves as a training ground for future regional and national leadership. In the long run they hold leaders accountable for their actions through rigorous debate and queries both within the party as well as through opposition parties. Thus the people are presented with a diverse choice of candidates, ideologies and approaches to various issues governing the nation. Their confidence in democracy is thus reinforced in the knowledge that they can bring about change and transformation should a majority of the population desire a transformation in the way they are governed.
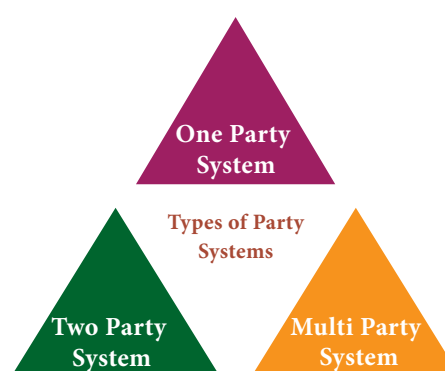
The Party System

The party system helps to operate and stabilize governments and they are particularly relevant for the effective functioning of democracies. The party system provides a system of checks and balances against the government's policies. By soliciting popular support among the masses and providing a structure for leadership and dialogue within the party according to specific party objectives and agenda, it helps sustain good governance.

DO YOU KNOW?

A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. They agree on some policies and programmes for the society with a view to promote the collective good.

Types of Party Systems

Different types of party system have evolved in various parts of the globe depending on the particular elements of democracy practiced. By and large the quality of a democracy is determined by how the government is representative of its people, how accountable the government is to its people, how human rights and equality of status and opportunity is guaranteed to all citizens and the level of political participation exercised by the people. The various types of party system address these issues in different ways, thereby determining the quality of democracy practiced.

A. One Party System

In a one party system, a single political party exercises its right to form the government, which is often derived from a written or unwritten constitution. In most cases under a one party system, there is less participation and weaker accountability. **Examples:** Communist
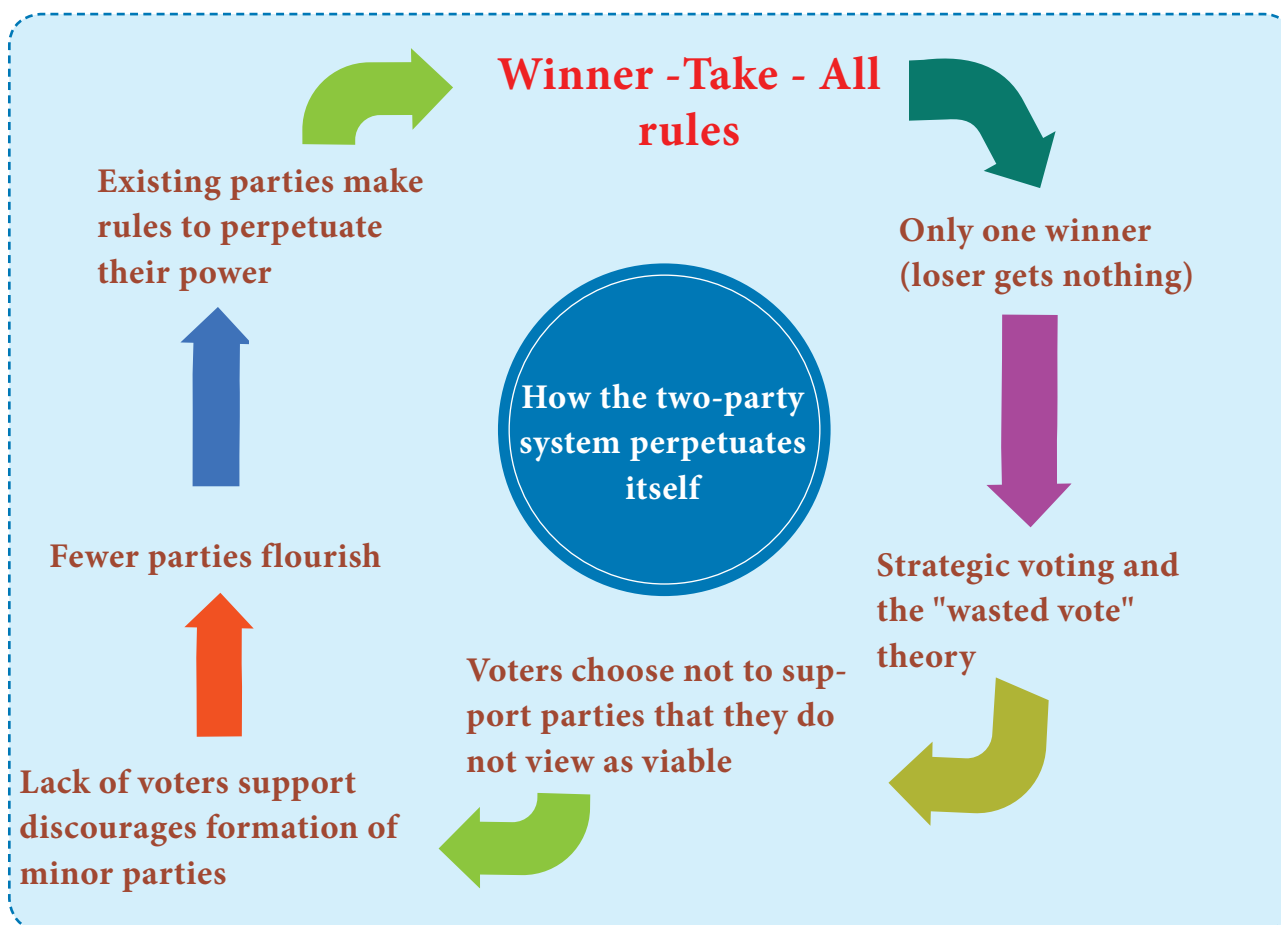
Party of China, (CPC) the Peoples` Action Party (PAP)in Singapore, Korean Workers Party, (KWP) North Korea, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Vietnam, Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) Cuba. The single party system does not provide adequate space for democratic expressions and not provide scope for alternative. For example in the 1920s fascist movements advocating nationalistic militarism, captured power in Germany under Hitler, in Italy under Mussolini and in Spain under General Franco. They prevented other political parties to emerge.

B. Two Party System

In the two party system, two political parties, with distinctly different interests have equal opportunity to attain a majority and form the government. The majority party is the governing party and the minority party forms the opposition party in two-party systems. The Two-Party system has far greater accountability by the political leaders and greater political participation. The threat of being voted out by the opposition hangs as a 'Damocles sword' on the incumbent thereby guaranteeing a higher degree of responsible conduct and action. However since the political atmosphere is heavily polarized, drastic changes can happen once a party loses power which may prove detrimental to national interests. Examples of the two-party system include USA –Democrats and Republicans and UK Conservatives and Liberals.

However, in either country there is no constitutional restriction on number of parties. The constitutional procedures and peoples' political maturity led to the emergence of two party system.

Winner -Take - All rules

Existing parties make rules to perpetuate their power

Only one winner (loser gets nothing)

How the two-party system perpetuates itself

Fewer parties flourish

Strategic voting and the "wasted vote" theory

Voters choose not to support parties that they do not view as viable

Lack of voters support discourages formation of minor parties

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C. Multi-Party system

In the Multi- party system, multiple political parties are capable of garnering popular support and forming a government, either as a majority party or in coalition with many non-majority parties with similar political objectives. In this system, the political leaders are constantly observed and checked by checks and balances by their coalition partners. They are also subject to rigorous accountability to the people. The multi-party system offers the electorate the multiple avenues of political participation and the ability to bring about political change for greater national development.

The proportional representation system in France and Italy results in multi-party systems and coalition cabinets.

Examples of countries with multi-party systems include Canada, France, Germany, India and Sweden.

ACTIVITY

THINK – PAIR – SHARE

Topic for Pair : Why is one party system not considered a good option?

10.5 Role of Political Parties in a Democracy

The existence of political parties is largely responsible for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of a democracy. In a federal multicultural and plural societies such as the United States of America and India, the maintenance of peace, unity and communal harmony are vital for social-economic progress. While single party system may have greater flexibility towards quicker decisions making and cohesive action, these decisions may not represent mass opinion and thus it would create greater opposition and dissent for the government.

The Role of Political Parties in a Democracy

What are political parties?

❖ They recruit and run candidates for public office under the party level

❖ They try to organize and coordinate the activities of government officials under the party name.

Many political scientists believe that parties are essential to democracy

❖ The political party is seen by some as the main instrument of popular sovereignty and majority rule.

❖ When political parties are working properly they can be essential tools of popular sovereignty

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In the dual party system due to the nature of the party structure and leadership, this usually result in public policies and decisions blocked in political polarization rather than collaboration. While in Multi party systems, the performance is on the basis of deliberation and negotiation between coalition members, and issues are mostly settled by reaching a mutually derived consensus after debate and discussion. Thus, political parties are the drivers of a democracy that are necessary to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the people. Through effective Citizenship training and greater civic participation, youth in democratic nations

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can play a greater role in political parties thereby fostering more mature and wider democratization in countries.

10.6 Modern Party system

A. Party system in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, polarization of opinions on issues relating to the status and role of monarchy led to the emergence of two parties:

    A. Tories or Conservatives and

    B. Whigs or liberals.

In the 20th century labour party became a major force eclipsing the liberals.

B. Party System in the USA

✠ The founding fathers of the United States wanted to steer clear of political parties and the ensuing factional conflict between them. Nevertheless, after American Independence, the first parties in the newly constituted nation under the Presidency of George Washington were the Federalist Party supporting a strong national government and the Democratic Republican Party supporting state autonomy.

In 1828, the democratic Republican Party was renamed as the Democratic Party which championed state rights. In 1854, the Republican Party established itself on the anti slavery platform and gained pre-dominance with Abraham Lincoln as President of USA. Since the United States settled for the Two-Party system, the Republican and Democratic parties have dominated the American political scene, though third party candidates have been floated on and off.

Two Party System

- ❖ **Rare around the world**
- ❖ **Evenly balanced national at National and local level**
- ❖ **Electoral system**
- ❖ **Winner take all**
- ❖ **Wasted vote**
- ❖ **Priority system**
- ❖ **Broad coalitions form before election**
- ❖ **Opinion of voters**
- ❖ **Difficult for third parties to get on ballot**

C. Party system in Europe:

After the French Revolution (1789), democratic forces gained strength in European Nations, and political parties emerged. Political parties in Continental Europe were largely divided into Conservatives, Liberals, and Christian Democrats. By the 19th century socialist movements gained popularity and social democratic or labor parties emerged which became popular and gained trade union support.

In Soviet Russia, the Bolshevik Party, was responsible for the Communist Revolution in 1917 which created the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist

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Republics), popularly called the Soviet Union. The COMINTERN (Communist International) was established with the task of encouraging world communist revolution by supporting Communist parties in other countries. After the end of the Cold War era, the Communist party lost its popularity in Russia, though some minor communist parties still influence governmental policies within democratic states. Communist Parties however continue to control authoritarian governments in China and North Korea.

D. Party System in South Africa

The Constitution of South Africa

❖ Universal adult suffrage vote at 18
❖ A national common voters roll
❖ Regular election
❖ A multi-party system of democrate government to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness

E. Party System in India

The party system in India emerged along with the rise of nationalism and out of the freedom struggle against British rule. While Indian politics today represent a multi-party system, for long periods in Indian political history, one party has dominated the political stage. The Indian National Congress (INC) was established in 1885 by A. O Hume, as the indigenous base for the political participation of Indians in legislative and political wings. It demanded political reforms in gradual stages. After the non-cooperation movement (1921-23) Indian National Congress began to demand absolute political freedom. In the 20th century, the parties with communal agenda have also come up i.e. The All India Muslim League in 1906 and Hindu Maha Sabha in 1916. In the Madras Presidency the South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) was formed to project their interest of the Non-Brahmins (Dravidian)

Justice party was formed with the demand that political opportunities and political positions should not be monopolized by one particular small social segment and these must be fairly distributed among all communities.

However, the Indian National Congress represented the urban, upper caste elite, mostly western educated and provided a platform for negotiations with the British government. Gradually the Indian National Congress evolved to play a pivotal role in the development of India's political party system. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the Indian National Congress was divided between the Moderates and the Extremists. The formation of the Muslim league in 1906 resulted in the era of conflicting political bargaining, reflected the true beginnings of the Indian party system.

The entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the political scene with his moral-ethical focus on non-violence as a political ideology and strategy, transformed the Indian National

Congress to represent all sections of Indian society- the poor agriculturalists and lower caste people. Other parties that also emerged representing specific goals which included the Swaraj Party formed by Chittaranjan Das in 1922, the Congress Socialist Party, formed in 1934 by Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan and the Communist Party, formed in the 1920's by the efforts of M. N. Roy were the other major political parties.

There were a number of political parties which carry on political campaigns and propaganda, but do not contest elections, they function as pressure groups. Till 1977, the Communist Party, the socialist parties, and the right wing Janasangh and Swatantra Party were the mentionable opposition parties at the national level. Until 1977, no single party could become an alternative to Indian National Congress at national level. Hence, a number of so called national parties, under the stewardship of Jayaprakash Narayan, merged to create a large national alternative party known as Janata Party. In 1977, it captured power at the centre. Yet this party lacked cohesion and unity and became shattered after 1980. The Jana Sangh was revived with a new name Bhartiya Janata Party, Meanwhile Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party emerged as national level party with social justice as its main plank. After a spert as Communist Party. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) became very powerful in a few states like Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura.

The 1990s was the period of an increasing quest towards coalition governments in Indian politics. The Indian Political System became more competitive, more democratized and more

representative of the multicultural social nexus and diversity that is observed in contemporary India. It is observed that old parties became obsolete and defunct, and new parties have emerged that represent and seek to address the trans formative challenges faced by various diverse sections of the people. Since the 1990's we see a federalization of politics with regional parties gaining greater influence, representative of regional aspirations against the dominance of the Centre.

In the present period, regional alliances indicate a growing trend towards coalition governments that form an effective voice in favour of federal polity. This fragmentation is largely due to the regionalization of politics, with parties having high support base in specific areas.

Regional Parties

Shiromani Akali Dal in the Punjab, Samajwadi Party in the Uttar Pradesh, Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, Telangana Rashtra Samithi in Telangana, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, Shiv Sena in Maharastra, National Conference, People Democratic Party in Jammu & Kashmir, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam(DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra

Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu Trinamul congress in Bengal are some of the major regional parties.

While there is growing political awareness among the electorate, there is also greater mobilization along lines of regional, social and religious identities. There is a widespread difference in the composition of political groups, and characteristics of political and social groups between one region and another.

Party System in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, like most Indian states, the early independence period was dominated by the Congress party. However, issues of caste hierarchy, and the rising North South divide eroded the popularity of Congress leadership in the state. The Dravidian movement regenerated in Tamil Nadu under Periyar E.V Ramasamy and garnered popularity on assertion of Dravidian Rights and Dignity and through an anti-North, anti-Hindi, anti-Brahmin social agenda.

The Party System in Tamil Nadu is a pioneer model of the pre-eminence of the regional parties in state politics of independent India. There are very clear socio-economic, cultural and historical reasons for this development. The long history of rationalist and social justice movements from the colonial era and the mobilization of Dravidian consciousness since the beginning of 20th century have fundamentally transformed the nature of politics and the future of party system in state politics. The past 52 years Dravidian parties have been at the helm of affairs in Tamil Nadu.

10.7 Role of Political Parties in a Democracy

For the effective functioning of a democracy, the existence of political parties that represent conflicting interests is mandatory. While they advocate various interests and policies, largely political parties adopt Rightist ideology (conservative, traditional and capitalistic) or Leftist (pro-equality, liberal and labour interests). While it is true that political parties are essential for attaining the democratic ideal, the rise of individual parties with non-democratic agenda and authoritarian leadership is a critical challenge to Democracy. This is very relevant in the case of a multicultural, multilingual, multi religious and

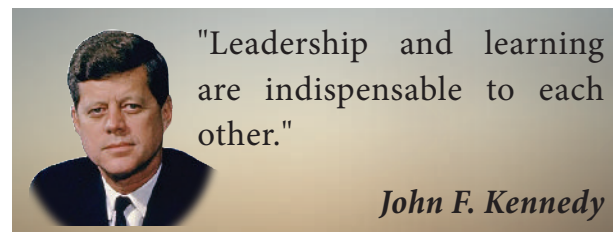TAMIL NADU - POLITICAL

Map not to scale

economically diverse country like India, only political parties can truly represent the multidimensional interests of people from every corner of the country. It is vital in a democracy like India that political parties exercise maturity and maintain a secular position, the precious and precarious unity and stability of India cannot be maintained. It is in the interests of the nation, that responsibly and principled parties show a level of maturity and responsibility in exercising their duties and functions for the sustainability of democratic institutions.

Role of Opposition in a Democracy

The relationship between party system and democracy will be incomplete without the discussion of the role of opposition parties in democracy. Democracy has no meaning without an effective opposition party or parties in the country. The nature of democracy is not only determined by the strength of ruling party alliance but also in the role and functioning of the opposition party alliance. In fact, the leader of the Opposition party enjoys the status and privileges of the rank of cabinet minister. A weak opposition leads to either a government without accountability or the tyranny of the majority.

Pressure or Interest groups also play an important role in special issues and events. These are organized groups, having common political and social interests, which influence decisions from outside. Pressure groups have voluntary membership and lobby for specific interests. Unlike political parties, pressure groups do not contest elections. The Pressure Groups are able to influence the government through various techniques with various public policy issues and are therefore called pressure groups. Professional pressure groups may include business interests, trade unions, Farmers, Teachers and Students, Doctors, culture groups, and institutional groups. Pressure Groups play an important role in the Indian political system by acting as a link and source of communication between the masses and the political parties. They sensitize the public towards vital socio-economic issues and through their lobbying, influence both the government and the administrative policies.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

John F. Kennedy

Psephology

Psephology deals with the study and statistical analysis of elections and polls. Public opinion polls play an important role in psephology. They analyze both Opinion Polls and Exit Polls as well as election results. Opinion Polls and Exit Polls are both important indicators of voter's choice during the elections.

The main difference between the two is that opinion poll is conducted before the voter actually votes and the exit poll is conducted after a voter comes out after casting his or her vote. Results of exit polls are generally considered to be more trustworthy than that of opinion polls.

The result of opinion polls may or may not actually collaborate the actual results. Yet they are important in generating opinions among the unsure and undecided as well as help to sustain a balance in voting practices for all parties concerned.

Glossary

Political Party: An organization that seeks to achieve political power by electing its members to public office

One-party system: A system in which a single political party has the right to form the government, usually based on the existing constitution, or where only one party has the exclusive control over political power

Two-party system: A system where only two parties or alliances, typically placed either side of the centre, have a realistic chance of forming a majority. Other parties are very minor or solely regional.

Multi-party system: A system in which multiple political parties have the capacity to gain control of government offices, separately or in coalition.

Ballot: This piece of paper contains information on the symbols and names of the candidates contesting in a constituency.

By-election: When a seat in Legislature becomes vacant between general elections (often because the incumbent has either resigned, defected to another party or died), a by-election is held.

Election: The process whereby eligible persons vote to determine who will hold a political office.

Elector: A person who is included in the electoral roll for an electorate.

Election Commission: The Election Commission is an independent autonomous entity responsible for the administration of Parliamentary and State Legislature Assembly elections and related works.

Ballot box : The box at a polling place into which a stamped ballot paper is to be dropped.

Coalition: A Government is formed by more than one party when no single party sets absolute majority.

Electoral roll: The list of all the registered electors for a particular electorate kept by the Registrar of Electors.

Electoral System: The general name for all the rules concerning elections, i.e. the voting system, boundaries, registration of electors, candidacy, campaign spending, broadcasting, etc.

Majority Government; A government made up of one or more political parties is formed by a political party which has absolute majority in legislature.

Democracy: Government by the people, through free, fair and periodical elections.

I Choose the correct answer:

1. A group of people who come close to each other to attain their common aim of power is known as
    - a) Political party
    - b) Factional group
    - c) Interest group
    - d) Political leadership

2. Which of these is the main component of political party?
    - (a) Leaders
    - (b) Followers
    - (c) Active members
    - (d) All of these

3. Which of these are a function of political party?
    - (a) To contest election
    - (b) To form and run government
    - (c) To form public opinion
    - (d) All of these

4. Political party that runs the government is ….
    - (a) Ruling party
    - (b) Interest group
    - (c) Opposition party
    - (d) Factional group

5. The rise of political parties is directly linked to….
    - (a) Emergence of representative democracies
    - (b) Large scale societies
    - (c) Mechanism of restrain and support the government
    - (d) All of these

6. System with one party is known as….
    - (a) Single party system
    - (b) Multi-party system
    - (c) Bi-party system
    - (d) None of these

7. System of two parties is known as….
    - (a) Single party system
    - (b) Multi-party system
    - (c) Bi-party system
    - (d) None of these

8. Which of these countries have Uni-party system?
    - (a) China
    - (b) North Korea
    - (c) Cuba
    - (d) All of these

9. Which of these countries have Bi-party system?
    - (a) India
    - (b) England
    - (c) France
    - (d) Pakistan

10. What is the symbol of Congress Party?
    - (a) Symbol of Lotus
    - (b) Symbol of Hand
    - (c) Symbol of elephant
    - (d) Symbol of clock

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11. Lotus' is the symbol of which party?

(a) Indian National Congress   (b) Bahujan Samaj Party

(c) Bhartiya Janata Party   (d) CPI (M)

12. Public Opinion plays a vital role in:

(a) Democratic system

(b) Dictatorial system

(c) Both democratic as well as dictatorial systems

(d) The smooth working of all types of political systems

13. The two major political parties of U.S.A. are

(a) Independent and Democratic   (b) Republican and Democratic

(c) Democratic and Socialist   (d) Republican and Communist

14. Psephology deals with

(a) statistical analysis of elections and polls

(b) Opinion Polls and Exit Polls

(c) Public opinion

(d) All the above.

15. Assertion: Political parties mobilize public opinion.

Reason: Public opinion influences election results.

Directions: Given below are two statements labelled as Assertion (A) and Reason (R) in the context of the two statements which of the following is correct?

(a) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A.

(b) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.

(c) A is true but R is false.

(d) A is false but R is true.

II. Answer the following questions very shortly

1. Define political party.
2. Write a note on Single Party System.
3. Write a short note on Multi-Party system.
4. Make a brief note on regional political party.
5. List out the major political parties in India.
6. Define public opinion.
7. Explain the role of opposition party in India.

III Answer the following questions shortly

1. Explain the role of political parties in a democracy.
2. List out the functions of political parties.
3. Bring out the types of party system.
4. Discuss the merits and demerits of multi- party system.

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IV Answer the following questions in detail

1. Elucidate the merits and demerits of bi-party system.
2. Give an account on political parties in India.
3. Write an essay on Public opinion in India.

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ICT CORNER

Unit-10 Public Opinion and Party System

Through this activity you will learn about the structure of party system in the state level.

Structure of Party System in The State Level

Steps

1. Use the URL or QR code to open the How the state government works page.
2. An activity window will open, click the navigation key on the bottom right corner of the activity window.
3. After a small introduction story, an explanation of state government will start.
4. Explore the different aspects of the state government by clicking the forward navigation button.

Download Link

*Pictures are indicative only.

*If browser requires, allow Flash Player or Java Script to load the page.

URL: mocomi.com/how-does-state-government-work/

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