

Introduction

India has more than 2300 political parties, being the largest democracy in the world. The presence of so many political parties signify a healthy ruling system for the nation. It gives people a choice to make a more effective and rational decision.

A political party is an association of people having a common perspective, principles and aims, concerning the political system. The party members work together to win elections and form the ruling Government, by getting their candidates elected in the assembly. In order to do so, they nominate candidates before the election and campaign for them to win the election. India has a multi-party system, where there are three or more parties which have the capacity to form Government separately or in a coalition.

Role of Political Parties

- ❑ The motive of political parties is to add people who hold similar point of view about the Government. Even though many people are associated with the same party, they don't exactly share the same beliefs but the core beliefs about how the Government should run, remain the same.
- ❑ The parties hold true to a core set of beliefs which enables the voters to understand the basic beliefs of one of the nominated candidates.
- ❑ Opposition parties are responsible for keeping an eye on the activities of the Government. They spend much of their time investigating the ruling party's policies and activities which help us, citizens, to be informed of both sides of an issue. Although voters tend to get tired of the debates and arguments, it helps to present balanced information.
- ❑ People in the same political party remain connected with each other through their party. A party can link its members at different levels of Government- local, state or national. This plays a uniting role for all the members.
- ❑ Parties even offer access to Government machinery and welfare schemes. Local party leaders act as a string between the citizens and Government officials.
- ❑ Political parties shape public opinion. With the help of the Government, they get to understand the ongoing issues in the nation.

Need of Political Parties

The functions that political parties perform demonstrate that democracies cannot exist without them. If there were no political parties, then:

- i. All election candidates would run as independents. They can't promise the people any major policy changes. No one will be in charge of the country's administration.
- ii. Only representative democracy can function in large societies. Political parties have evolved into a clearing house for different points of view on various issues, which they then present to the Government.

Party System

There are three types of party systems:

- ❑ One-Party System
- ❑ Two-Party System and
- ❑ Multi-Party System

One-Party System

- ❑ There is no competition in this system. The lone party nominates the candidates and the voters have only two choices:
 - Not to vote at all or
 - write 'yes' or 'no' against the name of the candidates nominated by the party.
- ❑ This system has been popular in Communist countries and other authoritarian regimes e.g., China, North Korea and Cuba. This system was also prevalent in USSR till Communism collapsed.

Two-Party System

- ❑ In a Two-party system power shifts between two

major, dominant parties. In this system, to win elections, the winner has to get maximum number of votes, but not necessarily a majority of votes. The smaller parties usually merge with the bigger parties or they drop out of elections.

- ❑ This parliamentary system prevails in Great Britain and Canada, in which only two parties hold significant numbers of seats. Supporters of this system believe that this prevents dangers of fragmentation (too many parties winning seats from different constituencies) and the Government can run smoothly.

Multi-Party System

Multi-Party System is the most common type of party system.

- ❑ In this system, three or more parties have the capacity to gain control of the Government separately or in coalition.
- ❑ When no party gains a majority of the legislative seats in multi-party parliamentary system, then several parties join forces and form a coalition Government.

Supporters of this system point out that it allows more point of views to be represented in the Government. Critics of this system point out that multi-party system sometimes leads to political instability.

What is an Alliance?

When several parties in a multi-party system join hands for the purpose of contesting elections and winning power, it is called an alliance or a front.

India, in 2004 and 2009, had three such Alliances for Parliamentary elections:

- ❑ National Democratic Alliance
- ❑ The United Progressive Alliance and
- ❑ Left Front.

Famous Political Parties in India

India has a multi-party system where political parties can be classified as national, state or unrecognized parties. The Election Commission accords the status of the parties and keeps on reviewing it from time to time. All the parties have to be registered with the Election Commission. A special and unique election symbol is allocated to every registered party by the Election Commission.

Recognised Parties:

Are given a unique symbol – only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol. It comprises of two types of Parties

- ❑ National
- ❑ Regional/State Parties

National Parties

There are currently 8 National Parties in India. A registered party is recognised as a national party if it fulfils any one of three given conditions-

- ❑ If a party wins 2% of seats in the Lok Sabha from at least 3 different States, or
- ❑ At a general election to Lok Sabha, the party polls 6% of votes in four States along with 4 additional Lok Sabha seats, or
- ❑ A party is recognised as a State Party in at least four States.

Currently, the national parties are:

- ❑ Bhartiya Janata Party,
- ❑ Indian National Congress,
- ❑ Communist Party of India (Marxist),
- ❑ Communist Party of India,
- ❑ Bahujan Samajwadi Party,
- ❑ Nationalist Congress Party,
- ❑ All India Trinamool Congress,
- ❑ National People's Party.

State Parties/ Regional Parties

Owing to rich cultural diversity, India's political fabric has seen the necessity of state parties which can cater to the interests of their particular states, and are often critical to make or break alliances in the Lok Sabha elections.

A political party in order to become a state party should fulfil at least one of the following criteria:

- ❑ A party should win at least 1 seat in the Lok Sabha for every 25 states or any fraction thereof allocated to that State by the Election Commission or
- ❑ A party should win at least 3% of the total number of seats or at least 3 seats in the Legislative Assembly or
- ❑ The party should win at least 6% of the total number of valid votes that are polled in the Lok Sabha or

Legislative Assembly, in addition to 1 Lok Sabha seat and 2 Legislative Assembly seats or

- ❑ If the party fails to win any seat in the State general elections to the Legislative Assembly of the State or the Lok Sabha, the party will still be eligible for recognition if it secures at least 8% of the total valid votes polled in the State.
 - Currently, there are 53 State parties in India. Some of the famous state-level political parties are Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Forward Bloc, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Aam Admi Party.

According to the Election Commission of India, there are over 2000 political parties in India, which include eight "recognized national" and more than 50 "recognized state" parties

Evolution of Regional Party

- ❑ Over the last four decades, the number and strength of regional parties has expanded. This has made the Parliament of India politically more diverse. Regional political parties have emerged to fulfil regional aspirations.
- ❑ No one national party is able to secure on its own a majority in Lok Sabha. As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with State parties. The regional political parties started playing a crucial role in coalition politics since 1989.
- ❑ It is because of the regional political parties that our party-system has been federalized. The Centre has begun to address their problems and respond their aspirations through accommodation. The evolving nature of our party system has strengthened the cooperative trends of our federal system.

Unrecognized Parties

An unrecognized party is one which does not have the privilege of contesting elections on a symbol of its own. This party has to choose one symbol out of the list of 'free symbols' issued by the poll panel during an election. There are more than hundred unrecognized political parties in India.

Example: Akhil Bhartiya Gorkha League, Amra Bangali, Hindustani Awam Morcha, Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party etc

Advantages of being recognized as a State or National Party

There are certainly many benefits of being a recognized state or national party.

Reserved Party Symbol:

- ❑ The biggest advantage of being recognized is getting the reserved symbol. If a political party is recognized as a state party, it becomes entitled to the exclusive allotment of its reserved symbols to the candidates set up by the said party in states in which it is recognized. It can also allocate symbols to its candidates in other states and UTs, by fulfilling the conditions mentioned.
- ❑ If it's a National Party, it exclusively allocates its symbol to the candidates set up throughout the country.

One Proposer for filing nomination:

- ❑ Recognized parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and they also get two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of the revision of rolls.
- ❑ Their candidates also get one copy of the electoral roll free during General Elections.

Broadcast Facilities:

- ❑ They are also entitled to broadcast or telecast facilities over Akashwani or Doordarshan during elections.
- ❑ The telecast and radio facilities can be best used to address the people and convey their message to the masses.

Star Campaigners:

- ❑ Political parties, be it recognized or unrecognized, can nominate Star Campaigners during elections.
- ❑ A recognized National or State Party can have a maximum of 40 Star Campaigners while registered unrecognized parties can have a maximum of 20 Star Campaigners.
- ❑ The travel expenses of these star campaigners are not included in the election expense accounts of candidates of these parties. They also get subsidized land for their party offices at the national or state capitals.

Additional benefits:

- ❑ The State parties also entail the right to participate in the all-party meeting convened by Election Commission or State or Central Government.

- ❑ The candidates set up by these parties are arranged alphabetically and presented on the top of the ballot paper followed by candidates of registered unrecognized parties and lastly, the independent candidates.
- ❑ If the candidate nominated by a recognized party dies before the polling begins, then the elections in that constituency are adjourned and that party is given an additional time of a week to nominate another candidate.

Advantages of Political Parties

The advantages of being a political party are mentioned below:

An average person can make a change

- ❑ It might be difficult for a single person to create change. By having political parties, individuals get to work together with people who share the same opinion about specific issues. This gives rise to a collective voice rather than an individual one, which makes it easier to convey to people what is being offered.

Growth of personal and professional networks

- ❑ People are subconsciously attracted to others who have similar values, beliefs and perspectives. When someone joins a political party, they may discover many people who share the same perspective. This process can form many new friendships and hence form a meaningful and potentially profitable network of people who can make the world a better place.

Makes the process faster

- ❑ Political parties help to shape the conversations around governing because they group the conversations into various categories that are appropriate. If you ask 100 different people their opinion, there is a possibility that they come up with the same answer if their political views are the same.
- ❑ When this group process is simplified, the governing process can operate quickly and efficiently.

Encourages political participation

- ❑ As a democratic nation, India allows its citizens to freely express their opinions and to support the political party that shares their interest and opinion. Unlike China, India supports the public to participate and cast their votes at the polls. Hence,

citizens can contribute toward making important changes that will benefit everyone.

Ensures distribution of information

- ❑ The presence of political parties ensures that the necessary information about governance is available to those who want it.

Encourages people to become politically active

- ❑ Everyone has the capability of casting a vote. It takes no special skill to cast a vote but a political party works hard to ensure that people are informed about the ongoing issues and can make empowered decisions about the future of their society and Government.

Helps decisions be made quicker

- ❑ When people can come together in a party and debate over the ideas and policies, they can create legislation faster than if they were to do it alone. This seems to be an advantage if the party is managed properly.

Creates checks and balances

- ❑ In India, with multiple parties, the parliamentary system is designed so as to bring politicians from major political parties to negotiate over legislation and policies. The goal of multiple party systems is to create a balance of power.

Disadvantages of Political Parties

The disadvantages of being a political party are listed below:

Might have selfish propaganda

- ❑ Political parties might carry vested interests and self-centred propagandas that benefit only a few and are not in the interest of the whole nation. This damages the country's political, social and economic infrastructure. When a certain group pays heed to its members rather than the entire country, it disturbs the nation's peace and order.

Could create factionalism

- ❑ A country with multiple party systems could create a difference of ideologies. It could create animosity between parties, encourage jealousy and develop occasional riots which would lead the public to form factions as it would be hard for all of them to agree on certain levels.

Could ruin individuality

- ❑ Parties may expect its members to support and

share their views blindly without questioning the decision-makers. They might not allow them to criticize their opinions or decisions. So, this would prohibit the members from forming individual opinions on certain issues because they are expected to follow what their party is telling them.

Could encourage corruption

- ❑ It is often seen that parties distribute money to the electorate to secure votes for their candidates during elections. Aside from that, their candidate may be making abundant promises about delivering food, electricity, shelter and all the necessities only to persuade the voting population into electing them. But once they are elected into office, they might never deliver to their promises. They might also place those who supported them during the election, in higher positions in exchange for their votes.

Can become abusive

- ❑ Every country may not be a democracy. Communism and dictatorships also have political parties. The

purpose of these parties is usually only about enforcement of laws and expectations without taking the public's consent into consideration or being politically active from an individualized perspective. If a political party has too much strength or leverage, they can become abusive.

May prioritize themselves

- ❑ Indian political parties and candidates spent nearly \$8.65 billion in India's 2019 general election according to a report by the Centre for Media Studies making it the most expensive election ever, anywhere. The incumbent Bhartiya Janata Party was the biggest spender, accounting for 45-50% of the total expenditure.
- ❑ This figure is almost twice the amount, estimated by the Centre for Media Studies for the last general polls in 2014. Just one election in India at those figures is enough to solve its hunger issues for an entire year. This depicts that the goal of most political parties is to prioritize themselves so that they can be in power. For them, these costs are investments.