

Political Parties

Long Answer Questions

1. What are the main functions of a political party?

Ans. Main functions of a political party are as follows:

(i) Contesting elections: In most democracies, elections are contested mainly among the candidates put up by political parties. Parties select their candidates in different ways. In India, top party leaders choose candidates for contesting elections.

(ii) Forming policies and programmes: Parties put forward different policies and programmes and the voters choose from them. Each of us may have different opinions and views on what policies are suitable for the society.

(iii) Making laws: When parties come to power, they make laws for the country. Formally, laws are debated and passed in the legislature.

Members of the ruling party follow the directions of party leaders, irrespective of their personal opinions.

(iv) Parties form and run governments: Parties recruit leaders, train them and then make them ministers to run the government in the way they want.

(v) Role of opposition: Parties that lose in elections play the role of opposition to the parties in power by criticising the government for its failures or wrong policies.

(vi) Shaping public opinion: They raise and highlight issues. Parties have lakhs of members and activists spread all over the country. Many of the pressure groups are the extension of political parties among different sections of society. Parties sometimes also launch movements for the resolution of problems faced by people.

(vii) Access to government machinery and welfare schemes: For an ordinary citizen, it is easy to approach a local party leader than a government officer. That is why they feel close to parties even when they do not fully trust them. Parties have to be responsive to people's needs and demands.

2. Why can modern democracies not exist without political parties?

Ans. (i) We can understand the necessity of political parties by imagining a situation without parties. Every candidate in the elections will be independent. So no one will be able to make any promises to the people about any major policy changes.

(ii) Elected representatives will be accountable to their constituencies for what they do in the locality. But no one will be responsible for how the country runs.

(iii) India also has non-party based elections to the panchayats in many states. Although parties do not contest formally, it is generally noticed that the village splits into more than one faction, each of which puts up a 'panel' of its candidates. This is exactly what the party does. That is why, we have political parties in almost all the countries of the world.

(iv) The rise of political parties is directly linked to the emergence of representative democracies. Large-scale societies need representative democracy. Large societies need some way to bring various representatives together so that a responsible government can be formed.

Thus, can say that parties are a necessary condition for a democracy.

3. Describe the various party systems existing in different countries.

Ans. Party systems:

(i) One-party system:

(a) In some countries, only one party is allowed to control and run the government. It is called a one-party system.

(b) We cannot consider one-party system as a good option because this is not a democratic option.

(c) Any democratic system must allow at least two parties to compete in elections and provide a fair chance for the competing parties to come to power.

Example: Communist Party of China.

(ii) Two-party system:

(a) In some countries, power usually changes between two main parties.

(b) Here, only the two main parties have a serious chance of winning majority seats to form the government.

Example: USA and UK.

(iii) Multi-party system:

(a) If several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power, either on their own or in alliance with others, it is called a multi-party system.

(b) The multi-party system often appears very messy and leads to political instability.

(c) At the same time, this system allows a variety of interests and opinions to enjoy political representation.

Example: India.

Major Coalitions—NDA, UPA, Left Front.

4. What are the various challenges faced by political parties?

Ans. (i) Lack of internal democracy:

(a) All over the world, there is a tendency of political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top.

(b) Parties do not keep membership register.

(c) They do not regularly hold organisational meetings.

(d) They do not conduct internal elections regularly.

(e) Ordinary members of the party do not have sufficient information as to what happens inside the party.

(f) As a result, the leaders assume greater power to make decisions in the name of the party.

(ii) No transparency:

(a) Since most political parties do not practise open and transparent procedures for their functioning, there are very few ways for an ordinary worker to rise to the top in a party.

(b) Those who happen to be the leaders are in a position of unfair advantage to favour people close to them or even their family members.

(c) In many parties, the top positions are always controlled by members of one family.

(d) This is also bad for democracy since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy positions of power.

(iii) Money and muscle power:

(a) Since parties are focussed only on winning elections, they tend to use short cuts to win elections.

(b) They tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money.

(c) Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party.

(d) In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.

(e) Democrats all over the world are worried about the increasing role of rich people and big companies in democratic politics.

(iv) Meaning full choice:

(a) In order to offer meaningful choice, parties must be significantly different.

(b) In recent years, there has been a decline in the ideological differences among parties in most parts of the world.

(c) Those who want really different policies have no option available to them.

(d) Sometimes, people cannot elect very different people either, because the same set of leaders keep shifting from one party to another.

5. How do political parties help in shaping public opinion?

Ans. (i) Parties do shape public opinions and raise and highlight issues.

(ii) Parties have lakhs of members and activists spread all over the country.

(iii) Many of the pressure groups are the extensions of political parties among different sections of society.

(iv) Parties sometimes also launch movements for the resolution of problems faced by people.

6. What are recognised political parties?

Ans. (i) National parties are some countrywide parties and almost follow similar policies and programmes at the national level.

(ii) Every party in the country has to register with the Election Commission.

(iv) The Commission offers some special facilities to the large and established parties. These parties are given unique symbol—only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol.

(iii) Parties that get this privilege and some other special facilities are 'recognised' by the Election Commission for this purpose. That is why these parties are called 'Recognised Political Parties'.

(iv) The Election Commission has laid down detailed criteria of the proportion of votes and seats that a party must get in order to be a recognised party.

7. What are the main policies of Indian National Congress?

Ans. (i) It was founded in 1885 and played a dominant role in Indian politics at the national and state level for several decades after India's independence.

(ii) A centrist party in its ideology, it favours secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities. It supports new economic reforms but with a human face.

(iii) It emerged as the largest party with 145 members in the Lok Sabha elections held in 2004. Currently, it leads the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government at the Centre.

8. What are the main features of BJP manifesto?

Ans. (i) It was founded in 1980 by reviving Bharatiya Jana Sangha.

(ii) It wants to build a strong and modern India by drawing inspiration from India's ancient culture and values. Cultural nationalism is an important element of its manifesto.

(iii) It wants full territorial and political integration of Jammu & Kashmir with India.

(iv) It also promotes a Uniform Civil Code for all people living in the country irrespective of religion and ban on religious conversions.

9. Who formed BSP? What are its main policies?

Ans. BSP was formed in 1984 under the leadership of Shri Kanshi Ram.

(i) It seeks to represent and secure power for the bahujan samaj which includes dalits, adivasis, OBCs and religious minorities.

- (ii) It draws inspiration from the ideas and teachings of Sahu Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Periyar, Ramaswami Naiker and Babasaheb Ambedkar.
- (iii) It stands for the cause of securing the interests and welfare of the dalits and oppressed people.
- (iv) It has its main base in UP and substantial presence in neighbouring states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Punjab.
- (v) It formed government in UP several times by taking the support of different parties at different times.

10. What are the chief characteristics of Communist Party of India (Marxist)?

- Ans.
- (i) It was founded in 1964, believes in Marxism and Leninism.
 - (ii) It supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism.
 - (iii) It accepts democratic elections as a useful and helpful means for securing the objective of socio-economic justice in India.
 - (iv) Enjoys strong support in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, especially among the poor factory workers, farmers, agricultural labourers and intelligentsia.
 - (v) Always critical of the new economic policies that allow free flow of foreign capital and goods into the country.
 - (vi) It had been in power in West Bengal without a break for 30 years and currently supports the UPA government from outside, without joining the government.

11. What do you know about Communist Party of India?

- Ans.
- (i) It was formed in 1925 and also believes in Marxism, Leninism, secularism and democracy.
 - (ii) It opposed the forces of secessionism and communalism.
 - (iii) It accepts parliamentary democracy as a means of promoting the interests of working class, farmers and the poor.
 - (iv) It became independent after the split in the party in 1964 that led to the formation of CPI(M).
 - (v) It has significant presence in Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
 - (vi) It advocates the coming together of all Left Front. Currently, it supports UPA government from outside.

12. How was Nationalist Congress Party formed? What are its policies?

- Ans.
- (i) It was formed in 1999 following a split in the Congress Party.
 - (ii) It supports democracy, Gandhian secularism, equality, social justice and federalism.
 - (iii) It wants that high offices in government should be confined to natural born citizens of the country.
 - (iv) A major party in Maharashtra and has a significant presence in Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam.
 - (v) It's a coalition partner in Maharashtra government with Congress.
 - (vi) Since 2004, it is also a member of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

13. What is the status of regional parties in India?

- Ans.
- Some of the regional parties have succeeded only in some states. Parties like the Samajwadi Party, Samata Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal have national level political organisation with units in several states. Over the years, the number and strength of these parties have expanded. No one national party is able to secure majority on its own in Lok Sabha. As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with state parties. Since 1996, nearly everyone of the state parties got an opportunity to be a part of one or the other national level coalition government. This has contributed to the strengthening of federalism and democracy in our country.

14. "The growing role of money and muscle power is a major challenge in India." Explain.

- Ans. (i) Since parties are focussed only on winning elections, they tend to use short cuts to win elections.
(ii) They tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money.
(iii) Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party.
(iv) In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.
(v) Democrats all over the world are worried about the increasing role of the rich people and big companies in democratic politics.

15. What is the role of an ordinary citizen in reforming the political parties?

- Ans. (i) People can put pressure on political parties. This can be done through petitions, publicity and agitations. Ordinary citizens, pressure groups, movements and the media can play an important role.
(ii) In a democracy, everybody has been given the right to speak, right to express his ideas and right to agitate.
(iii) Political parties can improve if those who are interested, also join the political parties. The quality of democracy depends on the degree of public participation.
It is difficult to reform politics if ordinary citizens do not take part in it and simply criticise it from outside.
The problem of bad politics can be solved by more and better politics.

16. Dynastic succession is a challenge to political parties." Comment.

OR

Why do you think transparency is needed in a democracy?

- Ans. (i) Since most political parties do not practise open and transparent procedures for their functioning, there are very few ways for an ordinary worker to rise to the top of a party.
(ii) Those who happen to be the leaders are in position of favouring people close to them or even their family members.
(iii) In many parties, the top positions are always controlled by members of one family.
(iv) This is unfair to other members of that party. This is also bad for democracy, since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy positions of power.

17. Is it true that meaningful choice is not given to the voters?

- Ans. Often parties do not seem to offer meaningful choice to voters.
(i) In order to offer meaningful choice, parties must be significantly different from each other.
(ii) In recent years, there has been a decline in the ideological differences among parties in most parts of the world.
(iii) In our country, the differences among all the major parties on the economic policies have reduced.
(iv) Those who want really different policies have no option available to them.
(v) Sometimes, people cannot even elect very different leader either, because the same set of leaders keep shifting from one party to another.