

# 8. Nature and Role of Political Parties

**For**  
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# Introduction

- A democracy can not function without Political Parties. It is difficult to imagine modern political systems without political parties.
- Reason being the the representatives chose by us to form a government and make legislation on behalf of all of us has to contest elections and usually in election Political parties play prominent as we not only elect representative but we also select political who we can trust to safeguard our interest.
- Thus the question arises what is a Political Party and what it does?

# Definitions of Political Party

- Edmund Burke defines political party as “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all united.’
- As Joseph Schumpeter observed, ‘the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it.

# Meaning of Political Party

- Political parties, in essence, are a link between the people and government. In this role they seek to educate, instruct and mobilize the electorate.
- Parties present issues, set value goals for the society.
- The main aim of political parties are to seek power either singly or in cooperation with other political parties.

# Nature of Political Party

- They aim to exercise governmental power by winning political offices, ie. An electoral machine;
- They are organised bodies with a formal kind of membership
- They adopt a broad issues and try to mobilize people around that issue by addressing each of the major areas of government policy; and
- They are united by shared political preference and general ideological identity

*(Source: Heywood, Andrew, Politics, Palgrave macmillan, 2013 p.222)*

# Functions of political party

- Uniting, simplifying and stabilising the political process,i.e. Interest articulation’;
- Seek to widen the interests and harmonize them.i.e ‘interest aggregation’;
- Interest representation,i.e. It brings diverse interest into the political process and attempts to resolve them;
- Mobilization of support by means of propaganda, mass rallies, flags, uniforms etc.

# Functions of Political Party

- First, political parties bring the different economic, social and political problems to the limelight and try to formulate an opinion around it.
- Second, Political Parties carry out propaganda for the purpose of winning election. They convince the people about the goodness of their approach through public meetings, speeches, pamphlets or now-a-days the extensive use of audio-visual and social media.
- Third, the party which secures majority in a democracy form the government and other parties work as opposition parties.
- Lastly, Party controls the government by mounting pressure and actively monitoring the functioning of a government.

# Role of Political Party

- Representation;
- Elite Formation and recruitment;
- Goal formation;
- Interest articulation and Interest aggregation;
- Socialization and mobilization
- Organization of government



# Party Structure

French Political Scientist Maurice Duverger outlined four fold classification of party structure. They are:

1. Caucus (having small membership and emphasis on quality, e.g. being British Labour Party before 1918);
2. Branch (a mass party seeking to enrol the maximum membership, usually having a centralised party structure. European Socialist Party, German Social Democratic Party are the befitting examples of it);
3. Cell (its smaller than branch and inclined to have continuous activity and more secretive in its operation, the French Communist Party in early phase); and
4. Militia (hierarchical in character to work like army structure, for e.g. The communist party cell structure). However Duverger was quick to add that no political party has ever been exclusively formed on the basis of militia.

# Determinant of Party Structure

- Ideology ;
- Structure of the government;
- Socio economic factors;
- Historical factors (Parties arise when historical changes occur, therefore a haphazard growth of political party); and last but not the least
- Political Culture;
- These factors sometimes tend to act collectively to form a political formation/party.

# Classification of Party system

- *One party system* (examples are Russia, China)
- *Bi party system*, where two political parties compete for power, for e.g. Democrats and Republican Party in USA, having advantages such as providing political stability.
- *Dominant Party System*-i.e. In a competitive party system where many parties are competing for power but only one dominates and enjoys the dominance of political power. Congress party in India has an unbroken spell of 30 years in power.
- *Multi-party system*-where more than two political parties are found, for e.g. France and India. India is a classic example of multi party system wherein parties are further characterized as National Party, Regional Parties, State Parties.

# Types of Political Party(Modern Classification)

- ***Cadre and mass parties***-a cadre party is often used to denote trained and professional party members who are expected to show a high level of commitment, for e.g Chinese Communist Party, mass party on the other hand, is a broad based party and place more importance to recruitment and organization than on ideology and political conviction.
- ***Representative and integrative parties***-expounded by Neumann to illustrate the way people are mobilized in a democracy.
- ***Constitutional and revolutionary parties***-Constitutional parties try to work within the limits of constitutional system and therefore acknowledges the rights and existence of other political parties, on the other hand Revolutionary Party are anti-system and at times anti-constitutional, sometimes termed as extremist parties.
- ***Left wing and right wing*** parties-on the basis of Ideological orientation. Left wing parties are mainly socialist and communist parties committed to bring radical economic transformation whereas the Right wing parties are mainly conservative and uphold the existing social order.

# Merits of Party System

- Provides the homogeneity;
- Agency of public opinion;
- Organizes and mobilizes people to enable them to express their viewpoint forcefully
- Education of masses
- Act as a connecting link between the ruler and the ruled
- A check against hasty and ill-considered legislation

# Demerits of Party System

- Subordination of individual as Alexander Pope once remarked “the madness of the many for the gain of the few”
- Results in mutual hatred and political bickering thereby spoiling political atmosphere
- Tendency to promote partisan interest than cater to the need of national interest
- Make people fanatical in their obedience
- It leads to corruption.

# References

- Ball, Alan R. Modern Politics and Government, palgrave macmillan, 1988
- Heywood, Andrew, Politics, Palgrave macmillan, 2013