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## **UNIT 3 ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

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Structure

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### **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the concept of a political party;
- Describe the role played by political parties in socio-economic development;
- Explain the various advantages of political parties; and
- Examine the issues/challenges of political parties.

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### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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A country's development depends upon various factors, players and institutions. Political system acts as a catalyst in socio-economic development of the country. The tone and pace of the development is set mainly by the political system of the country, which provides the platform for the development in other walks of life. Political parties are fundamental components of a democratic political system. By electing their candidates to legislative bodies, political parties act as such institutions, allowing citizens to participate in the legislative process. They also

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encourage participation in political activities. Political parties being in power as ruling party, chalk out the development process of the country. They formulate and implement various policies and development programmes as a part of government. Being in opposition they suggest better alternatives, provide sensible choice, criticise the weaknesses of the government and ensure accountability of the administration. Political parties also act as a link between government and people and also as a mirror of public opinion. In this Unit, we will understand what these political parties stand for and what functions they serve we will also explain their multifarious roles in the development of a country.

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### **3.2 MEANING OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

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In a democracy, a sizable group of individuals who share some similar viewpoints come together and create a party. In essence, a political party is a gathering of people with common goals and ideology. Edmund Burke defined a political party, ideologically, as a body of men and women united on the basis of their shared political ideas so as to promote the national interest. A political party's primary characteristic that sets it apart from other organisations is that its main goal is to seize power. A pressure group, interest group, or non-party civil society organisation often does not strive to gain power, in contrast to a political party. According to Max Weber, parties are characterized as "office seeking." "Parties reside in the sphere of power. Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power . . . no matter what its content may be" To maintain control over the government, parties declare their candidates for elections. It is a strategy for encouraging voters to support shared interests, issues, and objectives. Lawson states, "Parties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy-makers." Fixing the political agenda and policies is the political party's main responsibility. As a result, each party makes the assertion that their policies are superior to those of the other in an effort to win over voters. Samuel J. Eldersveld defined a political party as a system of patterned activity or a group of individuals populating particular roles and behaving as member-actors of a bounded and identifiable social unit.

An organisation called a political party consists of leaders, supporters, policies, and programmes. Its supporters may be formally affiliated with the party or they may provide it support without being formally affiliated. There are various groups. Parties can be distinguished on the bases of their leaders, programmes, policies, philosophies, and internal operations. Political parties serve as crucial ties between the federal government, the state, and society. Political parties impact debates and policies on matters affecting the interests of various social groups in a political system, serving as the essential link between social processes and decision-makers.

In a broader sense, a political party is a vehicle through which the populace can communicate with the executive branch and influence national policy. So, each political party needs to have these three essential elements:

- Leaders
- Followers; and

- Shared Political Goals

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### **3.3 TYPES OF POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS**

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On the basis of numbers of political parties active in the election process, there are *three* different party systems:

- One-Party System
- Two-Party System
- Multi- Party System

#### **One-Party System**

There isn't any competition under a one-party system. Here, there is only one party that nominates candidates, and there are only two options available to voters like not voting at all or choosing one of the party's nominees. Such a political structure has been prevalent in communist and autocratic nations like China, North Korea and Cuba.

#### **Two-Party System**

In this system, there are major two main dominating parties who contest the elections. One of it forms the government and other plays the role of opposition. Therefore, in order to win the election, the winner must receive the majority votes. In America, Canada and Great Britain two-party system prevails. This system provides a democratic choice to the voters along with the much-needed stability for the government.

#### **Multi-Party System**

The multi-party system is the third and most prevalent type of government. In such a system, there are three or more parties who contest the elections. The party which, secures the majority forms the government. If no party wins a majority of the seats in the legislature, several parties band together to create a coalition government. Countries with a multi-party system include India, France, Germany, New Zealand, Argentina etc. Some believe that a multi-party system frequently causes political instability in a nation.

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### **3.4 POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA**

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India has encouraged the development of the multi-party system because of the country's unique geographical, socio-economic, and cultural problems. National and regional political parties eventually rose to prominence as essential elements of India, the largest democracy in the world.

Every political party has to get itself registered with the Election Commission of India. The Election Commission of India classifies political parties as national, state/regional, and registered/unrecognized parties on the following basis:

## **National Party**

According to the Election Commission, a political party must meet at least one of the requirements listed below in order to be recognised as a national party:

- i) It must garner at least two per cent seats in the Lok Sabha. These members must be from at least three different states.
- ii) The party must secure six per cent of the valid votes in at least four states in the general elections to Lok Sabha or state legislative assemblies.
- iii) At least four states must recognise it as a state-level party.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI(M)), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and All India Trinamool Congress are the seven national parties in India as of 2022.

## **Regional Party**

According to EC, a party must meet one of the requirements to be recognised as a state party in order to be given state party status:

- i) It had to have been involved in politics for at least five years;
- ii) It had to obtain three per cent of the total seats or minimum 3 seats in state legislative assembly whichever is higher,
- iii) It must have obtained the backing of six percent of the valid votes cast in Lok Sabha elections and has secured at least one seat in Lok Sabha.
- iv) It has obtained six per cent of the valid votes cast in state legislative assembly elections and has secured at least two seats in state legislative assembly.
- iv) If a party wins at least per cent of the total valid votes cast in the assembly or Lok Sabha elections, it can still be given the status of a state party even if it doesn't win any seats in the Lok Sabha or the Assembly.

## **Registered Party**

A party that is registered with the Election Commission is one that is neither recognised as a state party nor a national party. It sometimes goes by the name "unrecognised party." In India, there are currently over 2000 registered parties.

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## **3.5 ADVANTGES OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

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Institutions are important in a democratic nation. They make democracy functional by participating in the elections. Without political parties, democracy cannot exist in a contemporary society. They begin by defining and communicating a group's needs in a way that the general public and political system can comprehend and act upon. The essential function of assisting people in placing their local issues in a national context is only performed by political parties. Particularly in varied and pluralizing countries, political parties bring together interests. They establish a foundation for compromise. Out of chaos, they bring about order. They assist societies in becoming and staying cohesive as a result. They can accept direct appeals from the general public since they are seen as the voice of the people in the absence of long-lasting governmental structures. This is particularly true in areas with weak, underdeveloped, or corrupt governments. They provide the system of checks and balances and the respect for the rule of law in a country.

In order to put pressure on the political system, political parties create shared beliefs among a sizable population. The democratic process greatly benefits from a principled difference of opinion and the tolerance of diversity and dissent that this implies. Conflicting opinions being expressed can actually improve comprehension of the problems and hint to potential solutions. These discussions can result in new understandings or feasible compromises that are necessary for the existence of a democratic system when the political system is functioning.

Political parties function regularly to nominate candidates, coordinate political competition, translate policy preferences into public policies, serve as a training ground for political leaders who will eventually assume a role in governing society, and try to win elections in order to control governmental institutions. These objectives are in addition to their core objectives. When out of office, they offer a constructive and critical opposition by portraying themselves as the different type of administration that voters would choose—the incumbents are under pressure to respond to the needs of the people more.

Parties have offered orientation to both individuals and civic groups. Parties can organise citizens who may be divided over ideologies, interests, leaders, or policies. Parties establish connections between the institutions of government and the various facets of civil society, including the business, racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious sectors.

Every political party must carry out a variety of tasks. Here is a list of a few of them.

- Elections are contested by political parties by fielding candidates.
- Candidates are chosen by party leaders and members.
- Every party has a unique set of policies and initiatives. Voters cast their ballots based on the policies and programmes they find favourable.

- The parties who lose in elections make up the opposition. They express various opinions, criticise the administration for its shortcomings, and organise opposition to the government.
- Public opinion is shaped by political parties. The parties start movements to address the issues that the populace is facing with the aid of pressure organizations; and
- Even access to government resources and social programmes is offered by parties. The local party leader acts as a liaison between the public and the elected official.

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### **3.6 ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

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The parties now play a key role in maintaining the state's stability as a result of their functions. Fighting to gain power is typically the ideal function of political parties in modern, democratic societies. The leaders and members of the party make the special policies and norms, while remaining unified, exchanging ideas, and taking proposals from their society. The main goal is to advocate for the welfare of the people before the government. Political parties carry out specific tasks required for managing the political system. They play a greater role in the socio-economic development of the country. Their role can be defined as follows:

#### **Forming the Government**

In the era of representative democracy political parties form government by contesting the elections. People's representation in government would not be possible without political parties. If government is formed only by independent candidates without any political party, there will not be consensus on major issues and the entire system will be in chaos. So political parties provide stability to the government by shared ideology and beliefs. The primary goal of political parties is to nominate and elect as many people as possible to public office. Once in office, these representatives work to advance their party's objectives through legislation and programme initiatives. They organise people to take over the government, create laws that benefit their interests or the interests of the organisations they represent, and convince citizens to vote for their candidates. Not all political parties are able to win the majority and form a government. But political parties are heavily involved in the administration of all levels of government, although they are not the government itself, and the Constitution makes no mention of them. Parties offer crucial internal and external opposition to and criticism of the government. Since government is main vehicle of socio-economic development political parties provide the platform to the development process by enabling the formation of the government. This is an essential function of political parties in governance and development.

#### **Ensuring Accountability**

While the major responsibility of the ruling party is to efficiently administer the government, the opposition also has their important role in governance. They present themselves as governmental

watchdogs, tasked solely with investigating the conduct of the ruling party. They have a responsibility to stop the ruling party from assuming power. At a far larger scale, the opposition takes a critical look at how the government is performing and makes sure that effective governance benefits the entire country, not just certain interests. They openly criticise the government's bad policies and unfair legislation. There have been instances where vehement protests against particular measures forced the administration to back down. Whenever government neglects its duty or is involved in wrongdoing, opposition raises questions, marches protests and mobilise people against them. This always keep the administration on its toes and make them accountable to people. Hence, even in opposition political parties ensure that government is committed to the development goals of the country and is dedicated to its achievement with greater level of efficiency.

### **Representing interest groups**

Political parties seek the broadest participation possible by raising the issues of different interest groups. Additionally, representing the interests of their own political party, elected officials must also work to win over voters from the opposing party in their districts or states. They can gain this support by promoting non-partisan and bipartisan issues that cut across party lines. Regardless of party affiliation, voters voice their issues to their legislators. Both individuals and groups are represented by political parties. These interest groups have unique issues to consider. They may speak for agricultural workers, small business owners, industrialists, sportspersons, labours, salaried or service class or any other group of people who band together to promote a common cause. Numerous parties have run candidates in elections since the 1990s from a variety of social groups, including underrepresented groups like women, OBCs, and Dalits. In this way, political parties raise the voices of concerned people to government and act as a bridge between people and administration. By providing this communication link, political parties help the administration to identify various development issues and solve them at priority.

### **Developing policy**

Political parties are not by themselves organisations that make policy. They undoubtedly take views on crucial policy issues, particularly to offer opposition to the position of the party in power. A party seeks to enact its philosophy through legislation when it is in power. A candidate may have a mandate from the electorate to implement the platform expressed in the campaign if they win office with a significant majority of the vote. Thus, as ruling party they represent their development agenda in legislature and help in achieving it by passing various policies and programmes for the same. When they are in opposition, they find faults with government's various plans and programmes. Thus, they help in rectifying the government's path to development. By mobilising the people through various rallies, protests, meetings and campaigns they set the foundation for government's policies on various development issues.

## **Providing Alternatives**

Every political party has its own ideology and set of agenda on various socio-economic issues. Each political party has its own vision and set of beliefs, which are frequently in line with the demands and issues of the state or region to which they belong. They do this by outlining their objectives in broad terms so that voters are drawn to a general philosophy instead of necessarily focusing on every particular issue. People vote candidates according to the basic philosophies of the political parties. Once a party comes in power it has to work in the interest of people by fulfilling its agenda, In case a party doesn't fulfil its promises or adopt some faulty policies that adversely affect the interest of people and country, opposition parties make issue of the same. They come forward with the criticism of ruling parties and its policies. They bring different set of policies and provide the alternatives to the people. Thus, they make the development process a continuous process by providing different options as and when required.

## **Promote Democratic Development**

Democracies and political parties go hand in hand. This connection is evident in a number of democratic measures, including citizen engagement in decision-making, political mobilisation, raising political knowledge among the populace, articulation of issues, and provision of a vision to address needs. Political parties enable the public to influence governmental decision-making. The parties have the main responsibility for raising political and social consciousness. Parties create a number of smaller goals for themselves under the larger purpose of serving the country and its citizens to make sure that public worries are allayed, social indicators are preferred, and corruption is eradicated. political parties play a democratic role in inspiring public action. In a democracy, opposition parties are supposed to criticise the government's actions and methods of operation. The participation of independent candidates and elected representatives from several parties in the legislative bodies strengthens democracy. Government policies are developed as a consequence of discussions among elected officials, who are typically affiliated with political parties. The parties also help to spread a sense of democracy among the populace.

## **The Electoral Process**

Political parties play an important role in elections in democracies. Candidates are typically chosen by political parties during elections. They provide resources and assistance for political campaigns. To secure votes and safeguard the election of their candidate to the legislature or other public office, political parties must manage their vote bank. However, all political parties work to convince voters that their candidates are more trustworthy than those of their opponents. They establish policies that the electorate must support. Elections have a great role in the development process. Parties declare their manifesto for which the electorate can take ownership since the voter has the power to hold them accountable for the successes or failures of policy. These issues outlined in the manifesto largely depict the development needs of people. So, during elections the tone of future development issues is set by the political parties. Political

parties ensure that problems of social importance are included in the political system through elections. They are the primary input systems that ensure that the needs and aspirations of the society are met.

### **Building Public Opinion and Consensus**

The majority of political campaigners in contemporary, democratic democracies are party members. Political parties serve the primary purpose of inspiring people to become political activists in these nations. They are responsible for providing the states with their political principles. By speaking for the people on a national basis, they become the voice of the people. They educate the public about their ideals and outlook on human welfare. The issues raised by political parties through debates, rallies and protests etc. reach the wider range of people. Media gives wide publicity to the actions of political parties. People start talking and discussions on these issues. Hence public opinions are shaped by political parties. Needless to say, that in a democracy, voice of people acts as guiding force for development. So, political parties set the direction of country's development process by building public opinion on important issues.

#### **Activity**

1. Visit a nearby party office or study the organizational structure of a political party and make a list of functions they perform.

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### **3.7 CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

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Political parties aim to achieve power to fulfill its shared goal and ideology. Due to pressure of winning the majority political parties lend themselves into vote bank politics. This leads to their goal displacement. For gaining power political parties members compromise with their ideology and it gives rise to the political defections. A key issue is the ongoing absence of internal democracy. Power remains limited in top leadership or certain dynasties. All the members don't have access to decision making in the party. Ordinary members generally lack the information about the internal activities of the parties. Parties don't conduct regular elections to different posts and organizational meetings are not conducted smoothly. Personal loyalty to a leader becomes more important than loyalty to party or ideology, as well as the rise of political corruption and clientelist behaviour.

Growing role of money and muscle power in the election also adversely affect the political culture of the country. It leads to proliferation of unworthy candidates in politics. Parties generally give tickets to those candidates who can raise funds for the party. It leads to show off the democracy as common people are in disadvantageous positions regarding their opportunities. Criminalisation of politics is emerging as major issues since political parties give tickets to tainted candidates in the greed of high chances of winning the seats. Political parties have lost a charm for ideology. Most of parties are similar to each other in actions and policies. Moreover, leaders frequently keep on changing their parties. So, it confuses the people and they lose their

belief in the system. So political parties don't provide any meaningful choice to the voters. These issues can be overcome by strong political will and awareness amongst the masses.

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### 3.8 CONCLUSION

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One must agree that India has experienced a democratic uprising and consolidated its base through a large number of political parties. In contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, the last three decades have seen a change in the socio-economic milieu. Earlier Parties had a limited impact on democracy at the time since voter turnout was largely influenced by patron-client relationships and the fact that elected officials typically came from the upper classes of society. Over the past few decades, changes to party structures, their proliferation, the establishment of parties championing the rights of women, minorities, OBCs and Dalits, and a rise in public consciousness have strengthened democracy. However, there are drawbacks to excessive interference at different levels of functioning. The development process is frequently halted by over criticism of government for the sake of criticism. Both the ruling and the opposition political parties in India need to use greater restraint and extend their horizons in order to contribute to the overall development of the nation. Parties would be able to deliver policies for a better, more just society if they had a broader perspective on governance and resisted the desire to consolidate power and pursue personal profit. This Unit discussed some of these features.

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