

TYPES OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA

This sub-section of the unit explains the criteria given by the Election Commission

of India to categorise the political parties as national, state/regional and registered/

unrecognized parties.

National Party

According to the Election Commission, for being considered as a national party

a political party should atleast have one of the following qualifications:

i) It has to win a minimum of two percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha from atleast three different States;

ii) In general elections, the party must manage to win six percent of the votes

and win at least four Lok Sabha seats;

iii) It should be recognised as a state-level party in four or more states.

In 2020, there are seven national Parties in India: Indian National Congress (INC),

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 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.

State Party/Regional Party

Election Commission does not use the concept of regional party. Instead, it uses

the notion of state party. However, in academic discourse and general parlance,

state and regional parties are used interchangeably. But there are differences in

ways the Election Commission and academic discourse define state and regional

parties. The election commission identifies a regional party on the basis of its

electoral performance in a number of states. Academic discourse defines a regional or state party in terms of its policies, activities, support-bases and leadership in specific regions or states. According to EC, to be considered as state party, a party should have one of the qualifications to be acknowledged as a state party:

- i) It must have engaged in political activity for at least five years;
- ii) It must have won either four percent of the seats in a general election or three percent in a state election;
- iii) In addition, it must have had the support of six percent of the votes cast;
- iv) The status of a state party can still be bestowed upon an entity even if it fails

to win any seats in the Lok Sabha or the Assembly if it manages to win at least eight per cent of the total votes cast in the entire state.

In 2020, there are 36 recognized state parties in India that represent their respective

states. Some of the recognised state parties include Aam Aadmi Party (AAP),

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Janata Dal (United) JD(U), Rashtriya Janata

Dal (RJD), Samajwadi Party (SP). Registered /Unrecognized Party

Registered party is a party that is neither recognised as a state nor a national

party, but it is registered with the election commission. It is also called unrecognised party. At present, there are more than 2000 registered parties in

India.

NATIONAL PARTIES

Out of seven national parties, two parties – the Congress and the BJP have had

support base in maximum states in India at different points of time since

Independence. For the first two decades after Independence, the Congress was the single dominant party in India. Indeed, on account of its having support base in most parts of India, Rajni Kothari described the period from the 1950s-1960s as the period of one party dominance, i.e., the dominance of the Congress. Since 2010s, the BJP has emerged as the single dominant national party like the Congress was in the first decade after Independence.

The Indian National Congress (I) or The Congress (I)
Established in 1885, India's oldest party, the Indian National Congress was born out of India's freedom struggle. As stated in unit 1, it is generally believed that the Congress was a movement during the Indian national movement. It eventually became a political party after Independence. Its main purpose became to contest elections in Independent democratic India. During the period of its dominance, the Congress drew support from social groups including all castes groups and religious minorities. The Congress-led governments introduced several welfare policies aiming at social change. Most important among them included land reforms, reservations of SCs and STs, community development programmes. Although these policies faced several challenges, they made the Congress popular among the large sections of Society. The Congress's popularity could not remain intact for long. In the 1960s, dissatisfaction brew among people in several states

against the Congress-led governments policies. As a result, the Congress lost in

1967 assembly elections in eight states leading to the formation of non-Congress

governments. This ended the dominance of the Congress in India's party system.

In 1969, the Congress was divided into two parties: Indian National Congress

(Organisation) or Congress (O) led by Kamraj and Indian National Congress

(Requisition) or Congress (R) led by Indira Gandhi. The Congress led by Indira

Gandhi again emerged as the largest winning party in 1971 General Election

getting 352 out of 518 seats in Lok Sabha. As you have read in unit 1, while the

Congress's dominance was challenged by the emergent regional parties and

leaders since the late 1960s in several states. And it was challenged by the Janata Party at the level of centre in the late 1970s. The Congress remained a

strong political force during 1980s. But in the coming decades, though Congress

remained a national party, it lost the status of a single dominant party. It retains

its influence through coalition with regional and other national parties known as

United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

BharatiyaJanata Party

The roots of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be traced to the Bharatiya Jana

Sangh. The Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) was established in 1951 as the political wing of the Hindu nationalist organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The BJS was founded by a renowned advocate, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. The BJS gained substantial support in the Hindi speaking regions in India in the 1960s. As mentioned in unit 1, in 1977, it got merged with Janata Party along with four other parties. Following the disintegration of the Janata Party, its segment, the BJS emerged as a party with a different name the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on April 5, 1980. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was its first president. From its marginal position in the 1980s, when the BJP was a small localized party with a political presence restricted to just a few states in the Hindi heartland, the acquisition of new territory and new allies has transformed it into being the main political force in India with a mass national following. The expansion of the BJP occurred along with the decline of the Congress as the dominant party. At the national level in the Lok Sabha, it increased its seats from 2 seats in 1984 to 303 seats in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Its growth has been more spectacular since 2014 Lok Sabha election in which it had won 282 seats. It mobilised popular support through mobilization on issues such as movement for construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya, abolition of Article 370, abolition of triple talaq, etc. The BJP as a major member of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) has been heading central governments in India since 2014, and the NDA runs government in most states which expanded from 8 states in 2014 to 20 states in

2018. In 2019, 11 state governments were headed by the BJP chief ministers.