

## Political Parties

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**Abstract:** Political Science studies domestic politics of a state or states, and contains political dynamics as one of its sub-fields of study which in turn has as one of its sub-sub-fields – **political parties**, a special topic for examination of this article. As a factual statement, **political parties** occupy an important place and play a significant role in the governmental process of a state having democratic political institutions. However, in countries with government systems characterized by a combination of authorization, a term which signifies **non-democratic government**, and **democratic parties**; parties resembling those found in democracies are likely to develop, but their importance depends on the degree to which representatives of the people are permitted to participate in the determination of governmental policy. Under thoroughly authoritarian governments the right to organize parties is either denied or confined to the membership of the ruling oligarchy. Consequently, party systems of the type which operate in a democratic or partly democratic environment fail to materialize. As events of the twentieth and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have demonstrated, authoritarian governments may be controlled by the leaders of an organization, known as a party, which monopolizes the field of organized political activity. Examples are the **Communist Party** of the former Russia; the Communist Party of China; and the socialist Party of Cuba under Fidel is Castro. Cases of this kind are often attributable to a combination of **authoritarianism** and **totalitarianism**. And in this article consideration is first given to the nature of political parties, to different varieties of parties, and to the functions which parties normally perform. Thereafter the discussion covers such matters as the character of party organization, the several kinds of party systems, and the reasons why political parties are invaluable in a democracy.

**Keywords:** political parties, political dynamics, democracy, authoritarian government, political participation, authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

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### I. Introduction

From comparative political studies it is observed that both developed and developing democratic and communist as well as socialist countries have numerous associations of individuals that have an interest in public affairs and undertake to influence the formulation and the administration of governmental policies. Some are created solely for this purpose. Others exist for the attainment of entirely different objectives but find it expedient to exert pressure on public officials because the activities of government directly or indirectly affect their primary interests. Comparatively, a few of the innumerable associations which make “public business” their business, either exclusively or to some extent, qualify as **political parties**.

### II. The Purpose Of The Article

This article **focuses** on **political parties** as an essential element of the **sub-field of political dynamics** whose **purpose is manifold**. Its specific objectives, however, are to:

- a) define a political party;
- b) give the nature of political parties;
- c) show different varieties of parties;
- d) examine the functions which parties normally perform;
- e) discuss such matters as the character of party organization;
- f) expose the several typologies of party systems, and
- g) state the reasons why political parties are invaluable in a democracy, including some examples from Africa.

### III. Political Parties

The nature of political parties is better understood by considering carefully the following essential aspects.

#### 3.1 Leading political scientists, writers and scholars.

Here we need to know: who the leading authorities on the subject are? Answers to this question include:

• S.D. Bailey	• A. Ranney	• W. Kendall
• S. Neumann	• H. Finer	• I. Bulmer Thomas
• W. A. Kleyhans	• M. A. Barnard	• J. J. N. Cloete
• J. S. Reshetar	• P. H. Odegard	• E. A. Helms
• D. Wit	• D. W. Brogan	• B. Meissner
• B. J. Roux	• W. Goodman	• H. Pelling
• R.T. McKenzie	• R.E. Baldwin	• H.A. Turner

### 3.2 What is a political party?

There are various answers to this question. A political party is defined as **an organized and presumably durable association**, either of **individuals** or of **distinguishable groups of individuals**, which endeavours to place **its members in governmental offices** for the purpose of bringing about the **adoption of favoured political policies or programmes**. Of all the characteristics of parties, the one which distinguishes them from all other associations evincing a substantial interest in public affairs is their effort **to secure the election** or the **appointment of their own personnel** to the **public positions** through which the policies of **government** are prescribed for implementation.

### 3.3 Characteristics of a political party

**One** of the **primary characteristics** of a political party is its endeavour to control the exercise of governmental powers by placing its own members in the public offices through which the policies of government are determined. Among these offices are those endowed with law-making authority and those invested with the power to direct and supervise the execution of laws. The technique for attaining the aforesaid objective of a party depends on the methods by which such offices are filled under a given system of government. A party strives to capture elective positions by placing its members in nomination and by campaigning for their election; in the case of appointive posts, its efforts are directed toward persuading the appointing authority to make selections from its membership.

A **second characteristic** of a political party is its intention to **use governmental powers** for purposes which meet with the general approval of **its leaders** and the rank and file of its membership. Usually it maintains that certain principles and policies should be adhered to in the operation of a government. Theoretically, the ultimate objective of a party is to secure adoption of its programmes for governmental action, whereas the placement of its members in key governmental positions is merely an essential means to this end. In practice it sometimes seems as if the programme is the **secondary** rather than the **primary objective**. Generally speaking, however, one of the factors accounting for the origin and survival of a party is some degree of consensus among its members concerning the general way in which the powers of government ought to be exercised. As might be expected, parties differ in regard to the unity of purpose within their convictions on questions of principle and policy. Some parties are far doctrinaire than others.

Since political parties strive to attain control of the machinery of government, their programmes usually are broad enough to cover the entire area of governmental activity. A party which confines its policy proposals to but one or two matters, such as the farm problem and/or management-labour relations, is unlikely to be entrusted with governmental responsibilities. Even a party which is primarily interested in one objective, e.g., a Prohibition Party, finds it expedient to devise some sort of a programme for dealing with other issues of concern to the general public.

**Two other common characteristics** of political parties are **organization** and **durability**. Organized effort is necessary to the attainment of both the immediate and the ultimate objectives of a party. Without some sort of organization, parties stand little chance of winning control of the government and of directing its activities along desired lines. As for durability, the founders of parties intend that they will continue in existence indefinitely. Contrary to the expectations of their original sponsors, some of them may perish after a comparatively a short lapse of time, but many of them cling tenaciously to life and survive for many years, often for a generation or longer.

An association may fall outside the "political parties" category even though the sole reason for its existence is the exertion of influence in the field of government. Examples are the many taxpayers' leagues and the League of Women Voters in the United States of America. An association of this type may provide its members with information concerning governmental problems, conduct discussion groups, endorse the candidates of various persons for elective offices, take a definite stand on some or all of the issues of the day, and bring pressure to bear on public officials in behalf of some policy or some change in governmental practice. But until it regularly engages in a concerted effort to attain mastery of the government by installation of its members in key positions, it falls short of being a political party. The same observation holds true for many other associations, among them labour unions, manufacturers' associations, and associations of veterans, which refrain from nominating their own members as candidates for public office but commonly press for the

enactment of legislation favourable to their interests and often openly support or oppose the candidates and programmes of particular political parties.

### 3.4 Varieties of political parties

Political parties differ in the nature of their membership and in the character of the established relations between **their leaders** and **the bulk of their members**. These matters have an important bearing on the way in which particular parties function. Many parties, particularly, those which develop in countries with democratic political institutions, are composed of persons of all descriptions who join a party for whatever reasons seem adequate to them. They may be attracted by its leaders and by its programmes, or they may adhere to it because of a family tradition or because of some equally irrational consideration. Whether it is easy or difficult to become a member of a party of this type depends on the party and/or on existing legislation, if any, pertaining to parties.

The requirements for membership in the **Republic** and **Democratic** parties of the United States of America are so easily met that all practical purposes a person becomes a member merely by declaring himself/herself to be one. In some of the 48 states of this country registration as a party member with designated public officials is sufficient; in others an individual claiming to belong to a particular party is required by law, if his claim be challenged, to take an oath to the effect that he has supported and intends to support the party's candidates at elections.

Becoming a member of some parties is **not so** simple a matter. Applications for membership sometimes are necessary; admission may depend on evidence of belief in the party's doctrines and programme; and there may be a dues-paying requirement. **Communist** and many **socialist parties**, among others, deal with the membership problem along the lines. Parties which pursue a policy of selective membership are usually those which lay great stress on doctrinal matters.

The parties referred to in the preceding paragraphs exist outside the government in as much as their membership is not confined to office-holders. In fact, the bulk of their members never hold office. If these parties are successful in their efforts to obtain seats in the legislature and to place their members in other governmental positions, they have a representation within the government – and that being the case, the party organization within the government ordinarily is distinguishable from that outside. Thus the members of a particular party in a legislative body may function through a machinery which might include a party conference or caucus, a committee on policy, a committee on committees, and a party floor leader, whereas the party organization outside the government might consist of a convention of delegates meeting at periodic intervals, a **central executive committee**, various officers such as the national chairman, the secretary, and the treasurer, and officers or committees of a regional or local type. The details of organization vary with the party and the country in which it operates. One of the major **challenges** to be solved by every such party is the relationship between its leaders outside and inside the government. To what extent should partisans within the government who are public officers as well as party members be bound by decisions reached through party organs established outside the government? Practice varies in regard to this issue which will be given in subsequent consideration.

**Another type of party** is one with a membership consisting entirely or for the most part of persons holding governmental positions, especially in the legislative branch. It may have its supporters outside the government but it makes no effort to extend its organization to include these outsiders within its ranks. This variety of party amounts to a group of public officials who are in general as to the policies which the government should pursue and who join hands regularly in sponsoring or opposing programmes of governmental action. Such a party, especially in a country operating under the **cabinet-parliamentary system**, may gain sufficient strength to form a cabinet or to share in the **formation of a coalition cabinet**. Parties of this kind are essentially legislative parties, that is, associations of like-minded members within the legislature. The Whigs and Tories of eighteenth-century Great Britain were parties of this nature, as are some of the parties of **contemporary France and other countries**.

From the standpoint of the established relationship between leaders and the general membership of a party, two basic types of party are identifiable. There are centralized and decentralized varieties. A centralized party is one which is organized and operates in such a way that its national leaders are dominant in the determination of party policy, in the control of the party's activities, and in the selection of party's candidates, especially for elective positions in the national government of the country. Party discipline is maintained to an extent sufficient to discourage partisans from refusing to follow the leadership of the party's recognized leaders. A member of a centralized and well-disciplined party, if elected to a seat in the legislature, finds it expedient to vote for or against bills in accordance with the wishes of the party leaders, regardless of his personal convictions. His constituents generally expect him to do so. In a centralized party, too, the established leaders usually control the party organization both inside and outside the government. Examples of **centralized parties** are the **Conservative Party of Great Britain** and the **Communist Party** in whatever countries it is to be found.

A **decentralized party** is characterized by lack of unified and effective national leadership, by the weakness of party discipline, and by the resultant freedom of action of party members who attain seats in the legislature. The most powerful and influential partisans are the leaders of the local organizations which function under the national party label. Such a party is a loose federation of factions of a regional or local nature. The **Republican and Democratic Parties** of the United States of America are of this type. In each of these parties, organizations in the states, in the cities, and in the counties wield the greatest influence in the selection of candidates and in the conduct of party activities. The President of the United States of America is the nominal leader of his/her party but the effectiveness of his/her leadership varies with the man/woman and the times. Even the strongest Presidents must win and retain the support of the leading members of their party in the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives** – something which is difficult of achievement because Congressmen are ever mindful of the fact that their chances of re-nomination and of re-election depend on primarily on their standing with the **state and local party organizations**. As for the party out of power, it lacks even a nominal leader, but its defeated aspirant for the Presidency sometimes functions as its most prominent spokesman. A decentralized party, since it usually is unable to develop a unified leadership and maintain effective discipline over its members, experiences difficulty in presenting a unified front to the public.

### 3.5 The functions of political parties

Political parties perform a variety of functions which are of primary significance in the process of government. The nature of their services is affected by the character of the political environment in which they operate. Under authoritarian regimes the functions of parties usually differ from those which are discharged in countries with democratic or partially democratic political institutions. Considerations will be given first to the normal activities of parties in a democracy.

One of the most important functions of parties is **to nominate candidates for elective public offices**. Parties almost always can be depended upon to provide nominees for whatever positions are to be filled by **popular vote**. Moreover, they commonly make recommendations which carry weight with governmental authorities empowered to select the **appointive personnel** in the various branches of the public service. Poor as the record of some parties has been in the personnel field, it is unlikely that other associations would do better if they undertook the task of furnishing manpower for governments under the same conditions and on as large a scale as parties do. Parties can be counted on to see to it that the supply of persons willing to render public service is at least as great as the demand.

Parties also assume the responsibility of giving continuous thought to governmental problems and of proposing ways of solving them. Of course, numerous other associations do the same sort of thing, but as a rule they concentrate on problems in which they have a peculiar interest instead of covering the entire field of governmental activity. Parties specialize in the development of over-all programmes of governmental action.

A related service of parties is to enable people who are in general agreement concerning desirable public policy to work together effectively to bring about adoption of the programme which they favour. A party that gains control of government is in a position to take positive action; one which is presented in the legislature, even though not in command of that body, nevertheless may exert influence in the formulation of policy; and every party has the opportunity to cultivate public opinion in support of its objectives. Parties can accomplish what individuals acting alone are unable to achieve.

Another function of parties is to provide the people with information concerning public affairs, candidates, and the particular issues involved in elections. Their educational activities are carried on in various ways, for example through speeches from the platform and over the radio, by the publication and distribution of literature of one description or another, and by the house-to-house canvassing of voters. Although parties, as “educators,” usually show bias, their “pupils” are at least exposed to a variety of points of view. Moreover, popular interest in government affairs is stimulated by competition among parties in their efforts to indoctrinate and to inform the voting public. In conducting election campaigns and preparing for them, parties perform a function which involves various activities, besides endeavouring to sell their candidates and their programme to the electorate, party workers are instrumental in persuading individuals to register for voting and in getting out the vote at election time. They serve as watchers at the polls to look out for the interests of their parties in connection with the administration of elections; they provide transportation of voters; and they instruct voters in regard to the mechanics of voting.

Parties perform various helpful services for individuals and for groups. They keep the government informed as to what the people in general desire. A person who has a problem involving dealings with public authorities may obtain assistance from party members at the seat of government or he may be aided by local party leaders who are only too glad to win the gratitude of voters and possibly their votes. Intercession with officials in behalf of pressure groups and of various seekers of special privilege often occurs – sometimes to the detriment of the interests of the public. In the hope of winning voter support, parties are also likely to engage in

a certain amount of charitable work for the underprivileged, for example, providing food and clothing for the poor.

Last but not least, parties discharge **two other functions**. The party or coalition of parties in power undertakes the tasks of directing the government and bears the responsibility for the results achieved. Parties which are not in control of the machinery of government keep a watchful eye on what is being done and serve as critics of the party in power. The “outs” are ever ready to point out the errors and the sins of the “ins” and the fact that the party or group of parties which is operating the government is under the constant surveillance of an “opposition” tends to prevent abuses and misuses of governmental authority.

The foregoing account of party functions applies primarily in democratically organized bodies politic. In countries with authoritarian systems involving some concessions to democratic principles, parties carry on similar activities provided that competition for election to some sort of a representative assembly is permitted and provided also that this assembly’s role in the governmental process is not too insignificant. They cannot, of course, acquire full control over the government as parties in a democracy. Under the one-party authoritarian systems, the single party dominates the government. Its leaders use it to maintain themselves in power, to indoctrinate the people, and to detect and suppress any opposition which may arise. It carries on **propaganda activities** and even participates in the functioning of private associations to whatever extent may be necessary to keep the latter in line with programme of the party and government. If there are elections of some type, for example, the popular election of the members of **national, regional, and local soviets** in Russia, the party controls the nomination of candidates and conducts a campaign to assure an election outcome favourable to the party and its leaders. The single parties of thoroughly authoritarian regimes are instrumentalities for keeping the masses in subjugation instead of being voluntary associations of the people in the purpose of maintaining popular control over the government.

### **3.6 The character of party organizations**

The ways in which parties are organized depend on a number of influencing factors. In some countries, for instance, the United States, governmental regulation of parties accounts for certain features of organization in as much as parties, like individuals, are obliged to conform to the laws of the land. In the absence of controlling legislation, each party is free to develop whatever type of organization it deems suitable. The character of organization is affected by a **party’s objectives**, by **the composition of its membership**, by **the ingenuity of its leaders**, by **its financial resources**, and by **the political environment in which it operates**. Among other influential factors are the number and nature of **elective positions**, **the methods for election**, **the size of electoral districts**, **the frequency of elections**, and **the nature of the governmental system**. Despite extensive variations in detail, parties in general resemble one another with respect to **a number of organizational features**.

Parties usually make use of **two kinds of organs**, namely, **permanent and temporary**. Examples of **permanent agencies** for party action are **executive committees**, **party chairmen**, **district leaders**, **central offices**, and such **party officials** as **treasurers** and **secretaries**. The **temporary variety** is exemplified by **conventions**, **conferences**, and **caucuses**. These agencies are temporary in the sense that they are brought into being **occasionally**, **discharge the functions assigned them**, and **then disband**.

**Temporary organs** such as **conventions** or **conferences** usually deal with questions of party policy, decide on the stand which the party will take in regard to public issues of the day, and select the members of party committees as well as a number of other party officials. In some jurisdictions they also nominate the party’s candidates for various elective positions. A type of temporary party agency widely employed in the **United States of America** for nominating purposes and for the selection of committee members and convention delegates is the direct primary. This primary is an election conducted under governmental supervision and participated in by the members of a party.

**Permanent organs** engage in a variety of activities. Their members usually furnish the leadership which is required for the proper function of the temporary agencies. They **also direct and conduct election campaigns**, **raise funds** for the party, **distribute literature**, **arrange for meetings and speeches**, and **do the field work that is necessary to strengthen the party and to enable it to meet with success at the polls**. These agencies maintain close contact with the voters and “get out the vote” on Election Day. **In many countries they also perform the function of nominating candidates**.

**Another common feature of party organizations** is the establishment of regional and local as well as central agencies. Usually, both **temporary and permanent organs**, especially the latter, are utilized in political subdivisions and in electoral districts. The extent of this practice depends on various factors, among them **the methods of electing national officials**, **the nature of a country’s system of local government**, and **the variety of party**. Arrangements differ in regard to the character of the relations between the party organs functioning at different geographical levels. In some parties the central organs are dominant, whereas in others regional and/local agencies over-shadow the central ones in importance. The most elaborate organizations

including **central, regional, and local organs** are maintained by parties have little or no organizations of any kind except that which their members employ for the purpose of collaboration in the promotion of desired policies. However, individual members of these parties, if holding seats in an elective legislature, are likely to have developed a sort of personal organizations among their supporters in the constituency from which they have been elected and in which they seek re-election from time to time.

In view of the diversities in party organization from country to country and even among parties within a particular body politic, brief descriptions of the organizations of a few parties are given. Those selected for this purpose are the **Democratic and Republican Parties of the United States**, the **Conservative and Labour Parties of Great Britain**, and the **Communist Parties** of Russia, China and Cuba.

### **3.6.1 The Democratic and Republican Parties**

The organizations of the Democratic and Republican Parties are sufficiently alike to be selected delegates every four years for the primary purpose of nominating candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency and of adopting a party platform. This convention nominally selects the members of a national committee and a national chairman. The latter actually is chosen by the presidential nominee and the **committee members are nominated by the state delegations** to the **convention** in conformity with state legislation, if any, stipulating the mode of choice or in accordance with instructions of the state party organizations. Permanent headquarters are maintained by the national committee of each party, but this committee is most active in the years when a **president** is to be elected. It is an agency which meets infrequently and plays a comparatively minor role in developing party organizations and discipline. The **chairman** manages the **presidential campaign** but thereafter his significance ordinarily declines unless his party wins the presidency. In that case he/she usually becomes the **chief dispenser** of patronage at the disposal of the president. Two other committees at the national level are maintained by the members of each party in the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**. These are the **senatorial and the congressional campaign committees**.

Greatly, overshadowing the national agencies in importance are **the state and local organs of the parties**. Each party maintains a **state central committee, a state chairman, and various sub-committees and officers**. Practice varies in regard to the method of selecting the members of the central committee. The central committee usually selects the state chairman. State conventions no longer possess the significance they once had. In a few states they nominate candidates for various state offices, but their principal function in most jurisdictions is to prepare the state party platform and to select certain party officials.

In all, or practically all, of the minor political subdivisions and electoral districts of every state, party committees are to be found. The most important of these usually are the county committees and the central committees in the larger cities. Each of these committees has a chairman whose political responsibilities and influence are likely to be great. Local conventions are held in some jurisdictions but their functions are of minor significance except in the comparatively few instances in which they name candidates for certain elective offices. Cities are commonly divided into wards and ward committees and their chairmen play an important role in election campaigns and in building up party strength in the intervals between elections.

At the base of the party organizations is the **precinct leader, captain, or committeeman** as he is variously known. Sometimes there is a precinct committee. The success of a party at the polls depends in large measure on the proficiency of its precinct leaders. A good precinct committeeman is on the job every day in the year doing whatever he can to win support for his party in his district. His rating as a leader is determined by his ability to "deliver the vote" on Election Day, particularly in primary elections.

The organization of the **Democratic and Republican Parties** lacks the integration from the standpoint of control relationships between the different levels of committees, chairmen, and other party agencies. Generally speaking, each set of organs in what appears to be a structural hierarchy functions with a substantial degree of autonomy except for in so far as it depends on the national and state organs for financial assistance, for a sharing of patronage, and for general guidance in the conduction of national and state elections campaigns. There is no line of authoritative control running downward from the national party officials, through the state committees, and to the numerous local committees. Nor do authoritative controls run upwards. The state and local organizations are quite powerful and on the whole self-controlling and self-sufficient in their operations. The weakest agencies are found at the national level.

### **3.6.2 The Conservative and Labour Parties of Great Britain**

#### **3.6.2.1 The Conservative Party**

The **British Conservative Party** is organized in such a way that its national agencies are dominant. Supreme authority within the party is wielded by the national party leader who becomes **prime minister** when the Conservatives control the House of Commons.

The local organization of the **Conservative Party** includes **constituency organizations** and **regional organizations**. A constituency organization consists of an association of the Conservative Party members in a district which elects a member of the **House of Commons**. This association, which usually maintains branches in wards and polling districts, functions through meetings, councils, committees of various kinds, and such officials as a **chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, and secretary**. Its most powerful organ is a small executive committee which takes the initiative in selecting a parliamentary candidate and in conducting election campaigns. A local organization which can afford to do so – and most of them have the necessary resources – employs an agent whose principal responsibility is to build up an effective organization between elections, to direct the work of campaigning when an election occurs, and to act as secretary of the association. The agent has been trained for this task by the **Conservative Party**.

In the regions (12) into which the **Conservative Party** has divided the country, the regional organization consists of an annual council composed of representatives of the constituency associations, an executive committee, and a regional chairman. The secretary of the council is an agent of the Party's Central Office. Regional organizations engage in such activities as conducting educational programmes, establishing youth organizations, and raising funds.

The various local organizations are combined in a National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. This Union holds an annual Conservative Conference attended by representatives of the constituency and regional organizations. At this conference party principles and policies are discussed, resolutions passed, and address presented by the party's leaders in Parliament. Its primary function is advisory and to serve as a clearing house of party opinion.

The Union maintains a Central Council which is large in size, meets twice a year, and is nominally the governing body of the Union; an Executive Committee which is responsible to the Council; and a Central Office. Of these agencies, the last-mentioned is of major importance. The other two serve the principal purpose of maintaining an effective contact between the Conservative Party's Leader and its component local organizations.

The Central Office is located in London. It plays a significant part in the functioning of the Conservative Party. Among its activities are the handling of publicity and propaganda, the preparation of lists of recommended candidates, the training of the agents who are employed by the local organizations, and the raising of money. It also concerns itself with the organization of local party groups and with the development of an efficient party organization. This Central Office is controlled by the **Party Leader** who appoints its **Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Treasurer. The Chairman selects the General Director of the Office.**

The **Leader of the Conservative Party** is named by a gathering composed of the Conservative members of Parliament, Conservative candidates for the **House of Commons**, and the members of the Union Executive Committee referred to above. He is chosen for an indefinite period of service. The Leader is extremely powerful. He is a national figure who dominates the determination of party policy and exerts effective control over the party's national and local organs. The Central Office responds to his desires and unless this Office approves of the contemplated candidates of the local constituency associations the Leader's official letter of support will be withheld. **Authority in the Conservative Party runs downward from the Leader to the local organizations.**

### 3.6.2.2 The Labour Party

The **British Labour Party**, like the Conservative, is featured by an integration of authority and the maintenance of effective discipline. Its organization resembles that of the Conservative Party in many respects but there are a number of significant differences.

**The Labour Party is a federation of a variety of associations**, viz., trade unions; various socialist and professional societies; producers' and consumers' cooperatives; and local and regional party organizations. Its Conference, which meets annually and occasionally oftener, is composed of the representatives of these associations, the Labour members of Parliament, the endorsed candidates of the Party, and its secretary. The representation of the associations is proportional to their size. Ultimate control of the party is vested in this Conference which decided upon the party's policies and program, directs and regulates its activities, appoints the powerful National Executive Committee, the party secretary, and the party treasurer, and maintains a Central Office in London.

The National Executive Committee is charged with the duty of executing the decisions and orders of the Conference and with the general management of party affairs. It may expel persons from party membership and terminate the affiliation of organizations which violate the constitution and by-laws of the party. One of its specific responsibilities is direction of the Central Office which carries on the same kind of activities as the like office of the Conservative Party. Moreover, all Labour candidates for the House of Commons must meet with its approval. This Executive Committee, although in theory simply the agent of the Conference, really exerts a dominant influence over that body. The membership of the committee consists of representatives of the various

associations comprising the party, five women members, and the treasurer, the secretary, and the leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party as ex officio members.

**The Leader of the Labour Party** is chosen by the Labour members of Parliament, i.e., the Parliamentary Labour Party. Unlike the Conservative Leader, he is not the possessor of supreme authority within the organization of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, his influence and that of other leading Labourites in Parliament over the regular party organs is substantial. Apparently the Parliamentary Labour Party and its Leader are not bound to abide by directives of the Party's Conference and Executive Committee even though the later are recognized as having the right to be consulted and to make recommendation. If these recommendations were binding on members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, their obligations to the party would be placed above their duties to the general public as holder of governmental offices.

At the local level, the **Labour Party's** organization includes the constituency labour parties and regional or area federations of the constituency parties. The membership of a constituency party consists of unattached individuals who have joined the party and of the members of local branches of the trade unions, the socialist and professional societies, and the cooperatives that are affiliated members of the national party. These local organizations have their councils, committees, and officers. An increasingly large proportion of them employ the services of a trained agent who performs the same functions as the trained agents of the Conservative Party. The Labour Party's Central Office, which arranges for the training of agents, exercises considerable control over their geographical distribution and over their activities.

Probably the most noteworthy features of the Conservative and Labour Parties are (1) the concentration of controlling authority in their national organs, (2) the maintenance of effective party discipline, and (3) the extent to which they make use of trained agents as permanent party organizers and campaign managers in the constituency and regional organizations. The Labour Party exerts greater control over its constituency associations and maintains a stricter discipline over its members than does the Conservative Party. However, unlike the former party, the Conservatives have bestowed upon the leader of the Parliamentary Conservative Party supreme control over the party organization outside the government. The Central Offices of both parties play a vital part in the direction of campaign activities, in the selection of candidates, and in the development and maintenance of an effective party organization.

### **3.6.3 The Communist Party**

The Communist Party of Russia affords an outstanding example of a highly integrated and extremely well-disciplined party. Authority runs downward from the top and responsibility upward from the bottom. As the rules of the party provide, the decisions of the higher organs are absolutely binding on the lower organs and on all party members.

At the base of the party structure are "primary party organizations" which are established in villages, factories, plants, collective farms, machine-tractor stations, educational institutions, units of the army and the navy, and similar groups. A minimum of at least three party members is required for the creation of a primary organization. The principal organs of a primary unit are the "general meeting" of its members, an executive committee or bureau which guides the operations of the unit, and a secretary. These primary organizations carry on agitational and organizational work among the masses, attract and train new members, and carry out the directions of higher party authorities in regard to party as established through the governmental agencies of the country.

Above the primary organizations are those of the cities and of urban or rural districts. In these areas the party functions through a conference composed of delegates elected by the primary units, an executive committee and an inspection commission chosen by the conference, and a bureau including several secretaries which is selected by the executive committee.

At the next higher level are the party organizations of regions into which the larger republics, territories, and provinces of the Russia are divided. Each region has its conference, executive committee, and bureau of the executive committee including secretaries. The conference is composed of delegates chosen by the city and district conferences.

Above these regional organizations are the party agencies of provinces, territories, and republics. In each of these jurisdictions, with the exception of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, there is either a congress or a conference consisting of delegates selected by the conferences of the party organization units immediately below, viz., regional, city, or district conferences. The congress or conference chooses the members of a central committee and of an inspection commission; the central committee appoints an executive bureau including a number of secretaries. Delegates to the ALL-Union Congress of the Communist Party are elected by the congresses or conferences of the republics, territories, and provinces.

At the apex of the pyramidal structure of the Communist Party is the All-Union Congress which is supposed to be convened at least once every four years. It is a large and unwieldy body that theoretically functions as the supreme authority of the party. This Congress selects the members of the Central Committee

and of a Central Inspection Commission. The latter commission inspects the functioning of the various central agencies of the party. The Central Committee serves as the executive organ of the Congress and discharges its responsibilities through a variety of agencies of which the most important are the Secretariat, the Party Control Committee, and the Presidium.

The Secretariat operates the elaborate headquarters of the Communist Party in Moscow. It consists of a number of secretaries in charge of an organization which includes various sections and bureaus that perform the function of directing, supervising, and checking on both party and governmental operations. The Party Control Committee is an agency which keeps a watchful eye on party members and candidates to detect and to deal in a disciplinary way with deviations from party line and with cases of disloyalty to the party.

The Presidium was substituted in 1952 for the former Politburo of the Central Committee. Its size varies. Of all the organs of the Party the Presidium is by far the most important for both governmental authority and party of the Soviet Union. The leader of the Communist Party, if there be one comparable to such former leaders as Lenin and Stalin, probably dominates the functioning of the Presidium.

The Communist Party structures, policies and principles of Russia best resemblances to those of Communist and Socialist parties of China and Cuba notable examples of world, communism and socialism.

As the foregoing sketches of the party organization in the United States, Great Britain, and the Russia indicate, the detailed structure of parties varies considerably and the manner of their operations even more. Formal structural arrangements sometimes are misleading because at any given time the centre of power within a party may be located in **a boss, a leader**, or a group of partisans who may not even hold party offices. Nevertheless, the formal party organization always is a significant factor in determining the way in which a party functions. All other things being equal, a well-organized party is more likely to be successful in attaining its objectives than one which suffers from organizational weaknesses.

### **3.7 Party systems**

By a party system is meant the general pattern of party life within a body politic as determined by the degree of freedom to organize parties, and by their comparative strength. Party systems may be classified as: (1) **closed or open** and (2) **single-party, two-party**, or (3) **multiple-party systems**.

#### **3.7.1 Closed Systems:**

A closed system is one which is characterized by denial of unlimited freedom of association for political purposes. The number and the nature of the parties which may be organized is restricted by law, by decree, or by some equally effective means. Closed systems are very likely to be single-party affairs, but occasionally a system of this type is featured by the existence of two or more 'approved' parties. Typically, however, under a closed system, one party enjoys a legal monopoly in the matter of organized political action and therefore is politically dominant. This single party closed system has been a feature of such twentieth-century regimes as those of the former Soviet Union, National Socialist German, and Fascist Italy. It is an arrangement that is inconsistent with the principles of modern democracy.

#### **3.7.2 Open systems:**

Open party systems are founded on a condition of free competition among as many parties as groups of individuals within the body politic care to organize. Although the legal requirements for recognition as a party sometimes may be difficult to fulfill, a system qualifies as 'open' as long as the right to organize and to attain party status by meeting minimum standards remains unrestricted by stipulations demanding adherence to designated doctrines and policies. **Depending on the number and relative strength of parties over an extended period of time, open system are classifiable as one-party, two-party, and multiple-party systems.**

#### **3.7.3 One –Party Systems:**

An open system of the one-party variety exists in those jurisdictions in which a particular party is so much stronger than any of its nominal competitors that it almost invariably is successful in winning control of the government. Any defeat administered to it at the polls is an abnormal occurrence. This kind of system is found in the southern states of the United States and in a number of states in other parts of the country. The Democratic Party's monopoly of victories in such states as Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi is matched by the repeated conquests of the Republican Party in Maine and Vermont. The continued dominance of a single party is due to political circumstances rather than to denial of the right of political association. Other parties are simply too weak in terms of their voting strength to offer significant competition for control of government. Most 20<sup>th</sup> century African parties of Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Zaire were on party systems.

### 3.7.4 Two-Party Systems:

The earmark of a two-party system is their existence of **two major parties** which are so strongly supported that one or the other ordinarily emerges as the victor in elections and consequently gains mastery of the government. Although one of these parties may win a series of victories, its chief competitor always is the runner and sooner or later manages to defeat its opponent. There usually are minor parties in addition to the two principal contestants, but none of them is strong enough to present a serious challenge to the two parties which dominate the political scene. These minor parties are not without influence in the political life of the jurisdiction within which they operate. They may win occasional local victories and gain seats in the legislature, but their principal contribution is such continuous agitation for particular policies that in time one of the major parties is likely to adopt one or more of their proposals, provided that it has become politically expedient to do so.

Great Britain and the United States are among the comparatively few countries with two-party systems. The two major parties in Britain are the Conservatives and the Laborites. Throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century the Liberals and the Conservatives were the principal parties, but as a result of the decline of the Liberal Party following the termination of World War I and the rapidly growing strength of the Labour Party, the status of the Liberals now is that of a minor party. For a time in the early 1920s Britain had three rather than two major parties. However, this situation proved to be no more than a temporary interlude in the political life of the country.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the two major parties in the United States have been the Republican and the Democratic. Various minor parties have come and gone without displacing either of the two principal contestants. Both the Democratic and the Republican Parties are loose federations of state and local organizations and, as national parties, are characterized by decentralized organization and lack of discipline. Members of both parties in Congress frequently vote in disregard of party lines; there are important factions within each party; and agricultural, labour, and other blocs composed of members of the two parties are to be found in Congress. For these reasons it sometimes is asserted that the United States has a multiple party system in disguise. This claim may be warranted if attention be confined to the party situation within the national legislature, but it is difficult to uphold in regard to partisan behaviour outside the government. Neither the factions nor the blocs strive to win control of the national government by nominating their own slates of candidates and campaigning for the election. They function within the major but not compete against them. Locally, a faction may dominate the organization of one of the parties in a state, county, or city. Even so, it operates under a major party label. The existence of parties of the decentralized type is a condition that differs from a situation characterized by the activity of a multiplicity of competing political parties.

### 3.7.5 Multiple-Party Systems:

Multiple-party systems are featured by the presence of a fairly large number of parties which compete with one another on relatively equal terms. Several parties may be considerably in comparison with their minor competitors, but they lack the strength of the major parties under a genuine two-party system. None of them is regularly able to muster sufficient voting strength to capture control of government. Among the numerous countries in Europe and elsewhere with multiple-party systems, the case of France probably is the best known because of the international importance of France as one of the leading powers and because of the frequency with which its coalition cabinets have been forced to resign. Due to increasing pressures for democratization in many the 21<sup>st</sup> century many African countries were forced to accept multi-party systems for example Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria and so on.

### 3.7.6 Factors Accounting for type of Party System

Why some countries have a multiple rather than a two-party system, or vice versa, is a question which is difficult to answer. Generalization is hazardous in view of the lack of sufficient number of exhaustive case studies. The determining factors probably vary in number and nature from country to country.

In all likelihood much depends on the presence or absence of general agreement with respect to the basic features of the **prevailing social order** in a particular body politic. If there be extensive disagreement concerning "fundamental" matters, uncompromising attitudes are likely to lead to the organization of quite a few parties – the number depending on the number of vital issues, on the variety of suggested remedies for the asserted defects of the social order, and on how the people divide with respect to these issues and proposed solutions. Thus the population of a country may be divided on such questions as **democracy** versus **authoritarianism**, the proper relations between church and state, and capitalism versus some collectivistic economy. Moreover, those who condemn some feature of the existing order of things may disagree vigorously concerning the appropriate remedy. For instance, among the opponents of capitalism are advocates of socialism, communism, guild socialism, syndicalism, or some other type of political-economic order. Unless these groups

eschew political action entirely, as was true of the nineteenth century French Syndicalists, they usually organize separate political parties.

In countries in which consensus concerning fundamentals exists, dissident parties either fail to develop or have too few supporters to be of political significance. This situation has prevailed in the United States for the greater part of its political history, especially since the conclusion of the Civil War. For example, there never has been a well –organized and strongly supported movement against democracy and in favour of some species of authoritarianism. Nor has there been any significant effort to bring about departure from the universally accepted principle of separation of church and state. Furthermore, opponents of capitalism have been too few in number to cause the rise of powerful communistic or socialistic parties. The slavery and states' rights questions pertained to “fundamentals” and the heated controversy over these issues caused the breaking up of the Democratic Party at the time of the election of 1860, but this development proved to be temporary.

Issues other than those pertaining to the fundamentals features of a way of life also may give rise to distinct political parties. Any division of opinion over ways and means as well as over basic principles and objectives is likely to result in the organization of a party if the adherents of a particular policy feel strongly enough about it to give it priority over all other considerations. Cases in point are prohibition parties, paper money parties, and the abolitionist movements of the era preceding the Civil War in the United States. Whether the rise of such parties results in a multiple-party system depends upon their ability to survive and on the extent of the support which they are able to muster.

Apart from conflicting opinions concerning desirable ways of life or appropriate public policies and the intensity of the convictions of those advocating one programme of action or another, there are other factors which may have a bearing on the existence of a two-party rather than a multiple-party system, or vice-versa. To what extent they account for the type of party system requires separate determination for each body politic.

One of these factors is **political habit**. If conditions happen to be such that only two parties come into being at the time of origin of a party system, and if this situation continues for a fairly long time, the political habit of supporting one or the other of two major parties may become so firmly established that minor parties experience great difficulty in gaining enough adherents to become serious competitors. Similarly, the survival of a multiple-party system may be attributable largely to political tradition.

Another factor may be the timing and the order of historical events. For instance, settlement of the main outlines of Great Britain's constitutional system prior to the industrial revolution and the gradualism with which the suffrage was broadened during the nineteenth century are suggested as having significant factors in the retention of Britain's two-party system.

It sometimes is contended that two-party or multiple-party systems are attributable to the form of government and to methods of election. However, the evidence in support of these contentions is too weak to justify generalizations to this effect. Cabinet-parliamentary plans are to be found in both two-party and multiple-party countries and the same observation holds true for the presidential-congressional type of government. Nor is there any correlation between the unitary or federal character of a country's governmental system and the number and comparatively strength of its political parties. As for methods of election, some bodies politic which use the single choice-plurality method in choosing representatives from single member districts have a two-party system, whereas others that use or have used the same method fall in the multiple party category. The opponents of proportional representation, either of the list or of the single transferable vote varieties, contend that its use promotes the creation and survival of a multiplicity of parties. As a matter of fact multiple party systems have antedated the adoption of P.R. in various countries e.g., France, Italy, and Germany, and the weight of evidence now available indicates that the establishment of P.R. usually is the effect rather than the cause of the existence of a number of parties of comparatively equal strength. However, once P.R. is in use it often encourages the development of splinter parties and thereby increases the number of parties under a given multiple party system.

In some cases the structure of government and methods of election may be contributing factors in the origin and survival of a party system of a certain type. The continued competition between two major parties in the United States at the national level appears to be attributable in part to the requirement of an electoral college majority for the selection of a President and also to the fact that not party can hope to gain control of Congress unless its strength is sufficiently widespread throughout the United States to obtain pluralities in enough states and congressional districts to elect a majority of Senators and Representatives as well as a majority of Presidential electors. Realization of this fact on the part of politicians and voters probably has been a factor in maintaining the strength of the two major parties and in preventing the growth of powerful third and fourth parties. Various interest groups and voters that dislike both the Republicans and Democrats nevertheless give their support to one or the other party because of the conviction that they stand a better chance of gaining their objectives through membership in a party that control the government than by organizing as separate parties and at best gaining a limited representation in the legislature.

The primary causes of the nature of a country's party system probably are the conditions under which its people live, the character of the social, economic, and political situations which confront them, the diversity and intensity of conflicting interests and beliefs, the temperament of the people, the political traditions and habits which have developed in the course of time, and the timing and sequence of historical events. Each country constitutes a special case and the major causative factors in one country are likely to differ from those in another. Sweeping generalizations concerning the why and wherefore of different party systems are apt to be erroneous.

### **3.7.7 Relative Merits of Two-Party and Multiple-party Systems**

Opinion differs as to whether a two-party system is preferable to the multiple variety. An apparent advantage of the former is that one party normally gains complete control of the government and therefore may proceed to carry out its programme with a minimum of difficulty. Government is more stable and effective if a single party, rather than a coalition of parties, is placed in charge of governmental operations. Major compromises on questions of policy are reached within the two principal parties prior to election time and afterwards as well. As a result the policy-determination process within the government takes place more expeditiously and more smoothly than would be the case if compromises had to be worked out among many minority parties in the legislature. Moreover, the single party in power can be held wholly responsible for results by the voters who may shift their support to the other major party if dissatisfied with the way governmental powers are exercised. Since one party operates the government and the other furnishes an apparently undivided opposition, the electorate has a comparatively simple choice to make whenever election occur. Two programmes, presumably different from each other, are offered the voters. Consequently issues are less confused than if many parties are striving to sell their wares to the public.

From the voter's standpoint, a multiple party system is advantageous in as much as he is more likely to find a party to which he can give whole-hearted support. He is not forced to make what may be his approval. Under a two-party system he may, of course, have the opportunity to vote for some minor party, but he realizes that a vote cast for such a party is really wasted because minor parties are hopelessly out of the running and cannot gain control of the government. For this reason he is likely to cast a reluctant vote for one of the two major parties.

Another point in favour of a multiple party system is that the inevitable compromises which are involved in the determination of governmental policy take place somewhat openly within the legislature rather than more or less obscurely within the parties. The fact that compromises occur is more apparent to the general public if they are reached within instead of outside the legislature. Moreover, there may be less "behind the scenes" lobbying on the part of pressure groups at the seat of government if major interest groups are organized as parties and function as such under a multiple party system. It is observed that, the majority of African political parties which were former liberation movements are reluctant to accept the existence of other political parties for example, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and to some extent Democratic Republic of Congo.

### **3.8 The importance of parties in a democracy**

Consideration has been given to the functions which parties ordinarily perform. They specialize in doing many things that need to be done in connection with the operation of governments.

- (a) However, their existence is not essential under **authoritarian systems**. They may in fact be **a menace to the survival of authoritarianism** and that is why freedom to organize them is likely to be denied or severely curtailed. Authoritarian regimes usually tolerate only one party, if any, and that serves as an instrument of the ruling oligarchy or of an autocratic leader.
- (b) The importance of political parties in a democracy is especially great because without them effective popular control of the government probably would be unattainable in politically organized communities of any significant size. In the absence organized effort on the part of groups of like-minded voters it is unlikely that public officials would be aware of or responsive to the desires of the people. The individual voter, acting alone, stands little chance of exerting an influence on the formulation and adoption of governmental policy. He is unable, as a rule, to make himself heard, and if heard, to obtain serious consideration for his views. As an isolated individual he carries no weight, whereas if he associates himself with others in an organization equipped to contend for control of the government and to press systematically for the adoption of favoured policies, his efforts in the political field may very well prove fruitful. If his party and other parties devote full attention to public affairs, the democratic ideal of responsible government for the benefit of the general public is in large measure attainable.
- (c) Political parties' endeavour to mobilize majorities in support of their leaders and programmes. Their sponsorship of policies and candidates promotes development of widespread backing for specific solutions of social problems.

- (d) Competition among them gives meaning to elections.
- (e) The **danger of parties** to democracy **lies in the subordination of public interest** to considerations of party survival and success. The practices of many parties often have been harmful from the standpoint of the requirements of good government, for example, **spoils systems, election frauds, or corrupt deals with private interest. Unscrupulous politicians frequently have used parties to enrich themselves or to satisfy a personal lust for power and this is most characteristic of most African political leaders.**
- (f) In the long run, however, these hazards are not particularly great as long as **freedom to organize new parties remains unrestricted and as long as free competition among parties survives – provided**, of course, that the **people of a country are sufficiently intelligent and community-minded to discriminate between parties that show concern for the public welfare and those that do not. In a community which is tolerant of fraud, corruption, and graft, reprehensible conduct on the part of individuals and groups would continue even if political parties were to disappear.**

#### IV. Summary

It has been possible **to define** a political party as an aspect of political dynamics; **explain** the nature of political parties; show their functions; / **discuss** the character of party organisations. As regards the classification of political party systems, it has been interesting to differentiate broadly the following:

- (a) Closed or open systems;
- (b) Single or two party systems, or,
- (c) Multiple – party systems.

Another classification roughly indicates:

- United States of America Republican and Democratic Parties;
- Great Britain's Conservative and
- Labour Parties;
- Communist Parties of Russia, China and Socialist Cuba; and
- African political party systems, generally transitional in nature, from authoritarian to quasi- authoritarian and quasi-democratic with some communist socialist characteristics.

Lastly, it has become apparent that the existence of political parties is a menace to the survival of authoritarianism and that is why freedom to organize them is likely to be denied or severely curtailed. Authoritarian regimes usually tolerate only one political party, if any, and that serves as an instrument of the ruling oligarchy or autocratic leaders and leadership.

The importance of political parties in a democracy is particularly great because without them effective popular control of the government probably would be unattainable in politically organized communities of any significant size. In the absence organized effort on the part of group of like-minded voters it is unlikely that public officials would be aware of or responsible to the desires of the people.

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