

Hello welcome to my lecture on multiparty system in France.

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In this lecture you will understand the evolution of multiparty system in France. Features of multiparty system in France and the reasons why France has multiplicity of parties and at the end of the lecture you understand the growth of multi-party system in France, describe the features of party system in France and understand the reasons for multiplicity of parties in France.

Evolution and features of multiparty system in France.

Political parties as definite organisations based on precise political program there were none in France. Until the end of the 19th century, it took about 100 years of political activity with 50 years of universal suffrage for the conflict of ideas to find channel of expression.

A novel feature of the French constitution is that it gives constitutional recognition to political parties and allows them to be freely formed and carry on the activities subject to the requirement that they must request respect the principles of national sovereignty and democracy.

France has witnessed many political upheavals and experimented with different forms of government each time, beginning with knew. Beginning from 1795, France had been a Republic on three different occasions, an absolute monarchy, a constitutional monarchy and twice an empire.

Political parties cannot exist and develop unless there is something approaching a consensus. It is only with the beginning of the 20th century the French as a nation have reconciled themselves to the Republican form of government as permanent institution. Even in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, there were groups of Royalists and fascist extremists who would have liked the Republican Government to do away the Communist, now constitutes a powerful and well organized party in France. Since the beginning of the Fifth Republic established in 1958, party system in France has undergone a transformation. Some parties have disappeared, others have combined under a single name and amalgamated their organization into one.

It may be said that in the 5th French Republic, the party system in France has moved from a loose to almost describable configuration of parties to a streamline system. No doubt it is still a multiparty system with a breakaway groups of federation. However three parties the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Gaullist have been the main political parties of the Fifth Republic.

Now let us understand the features of the multi-party system in France.

France has multi-party system one in which large number of competing political parties is sufficiently large as to make it almost inevitable that in order to participate in exercise of power, any single party must be prepared to negotiate with one or more with a view of forming electoral alliances or coalition and agreements. multiplicity of parties is an important feature of French party system in general election. What may be labelled as national parties, they number anything from 12 to 20. some consist little more than label attached to some personality or special interests between 9 to 15 are normally represented in the assembly. Constitutional recognition to the role of parties in France. Unlike the American Constitution, which is totally silent about the role of political parties. The French constitution accepts the role

of political parties and political groups. Article four of the French constitution reads. Parties and political groups play a part in the exercise of the right to vote, the right to form parties and their freedom of action are unrestricted. They must respect the principle of national sovereignty and democracy.

Third, diversity in organization and policy. The organization and policies of different parties exhibit great diversity. In France the parties cover a very large interests extending from Communist on the Left , and even fascist groups on the extreme right. Some of the parties attach great importance to political principles and doctrines, while others have no agreed principles or even coherent policies. Some of the parties are very well organized, while others have loose organization. For example, the leftist parties are highly organized while the right wing parties have no permanent organisations outside the assembly.

Fluidity of parties in France – Parties come and go in bewildering numbers after the World War Two, and a number of parties were born while sound disappeared. Some of the groups which take their birth at the time of elections disappear after two or three assembly sessions during. In the initial years of the Fifth Republic. The Algerian crisis brought new parties and divided the older ones. Almost all parties except the Communists had break away once the crisis was over. The splinter groups either faded into oblivion. All went back to their old orientations.

Fifth- adherence to personality cult.- another unique feature of the French party system is that most of the parties revolve around the personalities of their respective leaders for popular support. Members of the party depend upon the personality of their leader or some leader. The leader is the source of party unity. The members are united because of common allegiance to a particular leader,

Political defections and frequent changes - In another way, French party system is quite similar to Indian party system. In France the evil practice of political defection prevails frequently. The members of one political party defect to another or other political parties. A number of political parties of France have similar ideologies and that is why the members of one political party do not hesitate to defect or join another political party. "French parties come and go in bewildering number, sometimes within a very short time"

Leftist and rightist parties- Almost all the French political parties can be categorized in under 2 heads, leftist parties and rightist parties. The leftist parties have socialist leanings. They favour state control over industry and state intervention in the plan economy. The Rightist party opposed to both this above measures. However, many rightist parties support state action for helping small and uneconomic producers. The Communist Party and the Socialist Party belonged to the leftist group and the Conservative and the Central Democratic Party belong to the rightist group.

Let us now understand why France has multiplicity of parties.

First is the French temperament- a French man by temperament is more a philosopher with idealistic conceptions in life. He thinks of politics in intellectual rather than practical terms and holds strongly to his views. Such a mindset creates political fanatics to reconcile to practical politics where compromise is needed for realizing the common end.

Second, France had a turbulent history in 1719 one monarchy was overthrown and Republic Set up 1799, Napoleon became the first consul and in 1804 . He became the emperor in 1841. New monarchy was set up in 1870 or Republic was established. As a result, they grew several groups, some pro monarchy and some Pro Republic revolutionary habits. There is in France what is called a legacy of revolutionary habits. And this anarchic tendency leads to resentment of authority, reluctance to work as a team to sink one's personality into an autonomous unit that is a party and every French voter does not relish the idea of being yoked to the program and policy of a party. He does not like party discipline. Any attempt to control and regulate his political conduct is deemed to be an invasion on his freedom French economic stability- Another important factor which has contributed towards instability is the French economic stability or some would say economic stagnation. The traditional economy of France is one of small enterprises in both agriculture and industry. It is a country of small towns and villages, scattered farms and small one man or family business. They think of politics as symbols and doctrine rather than of concrete policies.

With this you understand why France has multiplicity of parties.

For further reading you may refer to following online and offline resources.

Thank you.