**Political Parties:**

In earlier, prerevolutionary, aristocratic and monarchical regimes, the political process unfolded within restricted circles in which cliques and factions, grouped around particular noblemen or influential personalities, were opposed to one another. The establishment of parliamentary regimes and the appearance of parties at first scarcely changed this situation. To cliques formed around princes, dukes, counts, or marquesses there were added cliques formed around bankers, merchants, industrialists, and businessmen. Regimes supported by nobles were succeeded by regimes supported by other elites. These narrowly based parties were later transformed to a greater or lesser extent, for in the 19th century in Europe and America there emerged parties depending on mass support.

The 20th century saw the spread of political parties throughout the entire world. In developing countries, large modern political parties have sometimes been based on traditional relationships, such as ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliations. Moreover, many political parties in developing countries are partly political, partly military. Certain socialist and communist parties in Europe earlier experienced the same tendencies.

These last-mentioned European parties demonstrated an equal aptitude for functioning within multiparty democracies and as the sole political party in a dictatorship. Developing originally within the framework of liberal democracy in the 19th century, political parties have been used since the 20th century by dictatorships for entirely undemocratic purposes.

**Types of Political Party**

A fundamental distinction can be made between cadre parties and mass-based parties. The two forms coexist in many countries, particularly in western Europe, where communist and socialist parties have emerged alongside the older conservative and liberal parties. Many parties do not fall exactly into either category but combine some characteristics of both.

**Cadre parties**

Cadre parties—i.e., parties dominated by politically elite groups of activists—developed in Europe and America during the 19th century. Except in some of the states of the United States, France from 1848, and the German Empire from 1871, the suffrage was largely restricted to taxpayers and property owners, and, even when the right to vote was given to larger numbers of people, political influence was essentially limited to a very small segment of the population. The mass of people were limited to the role of spectators rather than that of active participants.

The cadre parties of the 19th century reflected a fundamental conflict between two classes: the aristocracy on the one hand and the bourgeoisie on the other. The former, composed of landowners, depended upon rural estates on which a generally unlettered peasantry was held back by a traditionalist clergy. The bourgeoisie, made up of industrialists, merchants, tradesmen, bankers, financiers, and professional people, depended upon the lower classes of clerks and industrial workers in the cities. Both aristocracy and bourgeoisie evolved its own ideology. Bourgeois liberal ideology developed first, originating at the time of the English revolution of the 17th century in the writings of John Locke, an English philosopher. It was then developed by French philosophers of the 18th century. In its clamouring for formal legal equality and acceptance of the inequities of circumstance, liberal ideology reflected the interests of the bourgeoisie, who wished to destroy the privileges of the aristocracy and eliminate the lingering economic restraints of feudalism and mercantilism. But, insofar as it set forth an egalitarian ideal and a demand for liberty, bourgeois classical liberalism expressed aspirations common to all people. Conservative ideology, on the other hand, never succeeded in defining themes that would prove as attractive, for it appeared to be more closely allied to the interests of the aristocracy. For a considerable period, however, conservative sentiment did maintain a considerable impact among the people, since it was presented as the expression of the will of God. In Roman Catholic countries, in which religion was based upon a hierarchically structured and authoritarian clergy, the conservative parties were often the clerical parties, as in France, Italy, and Belgium.

Conservative and liberal cadre parties dominated European politics in the 19th century. Developing during a period of great social and economic upheaval, they exercised power largely through electoral and parliamentary activity. Once in power, their leaders used the power of the army or of the police; the party itself was not generally organized for violent activity. Its local units were charged with assuring moral and financial backing to candidates at election time, as well as with maintaining continual contact between elected officials and the electorate. The national organization endeavoured to unify the party members who had been elected to the assemblies. In general, the local committees maintained a basic autonomy and each legislator a large measure of independence. The party discipline in voting established by the British parties—which were older because of the fact that the British Parliament was long established—was imitated on the Continent hardly at all.

The first U.S. political parties of the 19th century were not particularly different from European cadre parties, except that their confrontations were less violent and based less on ideology. The first U.S. form of the struggle between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, between conservative and liberal, was carried out in the form of the Revolutionary War, in which Great Britain embodied the power of the king and the nobility, the insurgents that of the bourgeoisie and liberalism. Such an interpretation is, of course, simplified. There were some aristocrats in the South and, in particular, an aristocratic spirit based on the institutions of slaveholding and paternalistic ownership of land. In this sense, the Civil War (1861–65) could be considered as a second phase of violent conflict between the conservatives and the liberals. Nevertheless, the United States was from the beginning an essentially bourgeois civilization, based on a deep sense of equality and of individual freedom. Federalists and Anti-Federalists, Republicans—all belonged to the liberal family since all shared the same basic ideology and the same system of fundamental values and differed only in the means by which they would realize their beliefs.

In terms of party structure, U.S. parties in the beginning differed little from their European counterparts. Like them, the U.S. parties were composed of local notables. The ties of a local committee to a national organization were even weaker than in Europe. At the state level there was some effective coordination of local party organizations, but at the national level such coordination did not exist. A more original structure was developed after the Civil War—in the South to exploit the votes of African Americans and along the East Coast to control the votes of immigrants. The extreme decentralization in the United States enabled a party to establish a local quasi-dictatorship in a city or county by capturing all of the key posts in an election. Not only the position of mayor but also the police, finances, and the courts came under the control of the party machine, and the machine was thus a development of the original cadre parties. The local party committee came typically to be composed of adventurers or gangsters who wanted to control the distribution of wealth and to ensure the continuation of their control. These men were themselves controlled by the power of the boss, the political leader who controlled the machine at the city, county, or state levels. At the direction of the committee, each constituency was carefully divided, and every precinct was watched closely by an agent of the party, the captain, who was responsible for securing votes for the party. Various rewards were offered to voters in return for the promise of their votes. The machine could offer such inducements as union jobs, trader’s licences, immunity from the police, and the like. Operating in this manner, a party could frequently guarantee a majority in an election to the candidates of its choosing, and, once it was in control of local government, of the police, the courts, and public finances, etc., the machine and its clients were assured of impunity in illicit activities such as prostitution and gambling rings and of the granting of public contracts to favoured businessmen.

The degeneration of the party mechanism was not without benefits. The European immigrant who arrived in the United States lost and isolated in a huge and different world might find work and lodging in return for his commitment to the party. In a system of almost pure capitalism and at a time when social services were practically nonexistent, machines and bosses took upon themselves responsibilities that were indispensable to community life. But the moral and material cost of such a system was very high, and the machine was often purely exploitative, performing no services to the community.

By the end of the 19th century the excesses of the machines and the bosses and the closed character of the parties led to the development of primary elections, in which party nominees for office were selected. The primary movement deprived party leaders of the right to dictate candidates for election. A majority of the states adopted the primary system in one form or another between 1900 and 1920. The aim of the system was to make the parties more democratic by opening them up to the general public in the hope of counterbalancing the influence of the party committees. In practice, the aim was not realized, for the committees retained the upper hand in the selection of candidates for the primaries.

In its original form the British Labour Party constituted a new type of cadre party, forming an intermediate link with the mass-based parties. It was formed with the support of trade unions and left-wing intellectuals. At the base, each local organization sent representatives to a district labour committee, which was in turn represented at the national congress.

The early (pre-1918) Labour Party was thus structured of many local and regional organizations. It was not possible to join the party directly; membership came only through an affiliated body, such as a trade union. It thus represented a new type of party, depending not upon highly political individuals brought together as a result of their desire to acquire and wield power but upon the organized representatives of a broader interest—the working class. Certain Christian Democratic parties—the Belgian Social Christian Party between the two World Wars and the Austrian Popular Party, for example—had an analogous structure: a federation of unions, agricultural organizations, middle-class movements, employers’ associations, and so on. After 1918 the Labour Party developed a policy of direct membership on the model of the Continental socialist parties, individual members being permitted to join local constituency branches. The majority of its membership, however, continued to be affiliated rather than direct for most of the 20th century. At the 1987 annual conference, a cap on the proportion of union delegates was set at 50 percent.

**Mass-based parties**

Cadre parties normally organize a relatively small number of party adherents. Mass-based parties, on the other hand, unite hundreds of thousands of followers, sometimes millions. But the number of members is not the only criterion of a mass-based party. The essential factor is that such a party attempts to base itself on an appeal to the masses. It attempts to organize not only those who are influential or well known or those who represent special interest groups but rather any citizen who is willing to join the party. If such a party succeeds in gathering only a few adherents, then it is mass based only in potential. It remains, nevertheless, different from the cadre-type parties.

At the end of the 19th century the socialist parties of continental Europe organized themselves on a mass basis in order to educate and organize the growing population of labourers and wage earners—who were becoming more important politically because of extensions of the suffrage—and to gather the money necessary for propaganda by mobilizing in a regular fashion the resources of those who, although poor, were numerous. Membership campaigns were conducted, and each member paid party dues. If its members became sufficiently numerous, the party emerged as a powerful organization, managing large funds and diffusing its ideas among an important segment of the population. Such was the case with the German Social Democratic Party, which by 1913 had more than one million members.

Such organizations were necessarily rigidly structured. The party required an exact registration of membership, treasurers to collect dues, secretaries to call and lead local meetings, and a hierarchical framework for the coordination of the thousands of local sections. A tradition of collective action and group discipline, more developed among workers as a result of their participation in strikes and other union activity, favoured the development and centralization of party organization.

A complex party organization tends to give a great deal of influence to those who have responsibility at various levels in the hierarchy, resulting in certain oligarchical tendencies. The socialist parties made an effort to control this tendency by developing democratic procedures in the choice of leaders. At every level those in responsible positions were elected by members of the party. Every local party group would elect delegates to regional and national congresses, at which party candidates and party leaders would be chosen and party policy decided.

The type of mass-based party described above was imitated by many nonsocialist parties. Some cadre-type parties in Europe, both conservative and liberal, attempted to transform themselves along similar lines. The Christian Democratic parties often developed organizations copied even more directly from the mass-based model. But nonsocialist parties were generally less successful in establishing rigid and disciplined organizations.

The first communist parties were splinter groups of existing socialist parties and at first adopted the organization of these parties. After 1924, as a result of a decision of the Comintern (the Third International, or federation of working-class parties), all communist parties were transformed along the lines of the Soviet model, becoming mass parties based on the membership of the largest possible number of citizens, although membership was limited to those who embraced and espoused the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

The communist parties developed a new structural organization: whereas the local committees of cadre and socialist parties focused their organizing efforts and drew their support from a particular geographical area, communist groups formed their cells in the places of work. The workplace cell was the first original element in communist party organization. It grouped together all party members who depended upon the same firm, workshop, or store or the same professional institution (school or university, for example). Party members thus tended to be tightly organized, their solidarity, resulting from a common occupation, being stronger than that based upon residence.

The workplace cell system proved to be effective, and other parties tried to imitate it, generally without success. Such an organization led each cell to concern itself with problems of a corporate and professional nature rather than with those of a more political nature. These basic groups, however—smaller and, therefore, more numerous than the socialist sections—tended to go their separate way. It was necessary to have a very strong party structure and for party leaders to have extensive authority if the groups were to resist such centrifugal pressure.

This resulted in a second distinctive characteristic of the communist parties: a high degree of centralization. Although all mass-based parties tend to be centralized, communist parties were more so than others. There was, in principle, free discussion, which was supposedly developed at every level before a decision was made, but afterward all had to adhere to the decision that had been made by the central body (see democratic centralism). The splintering that has from time to time divided or paralyzed the socialist parties was forbidden in communist parties, which generally succeeded in maintaining their unity. A further distinctive characteristic of communist parties was the importance given to ideology. All parties had a doctrine or at least a platform. The European socialist parties, which were doctrinaire before 1914 and between the two World Wars, later became more pragmatic, not to say opportunistic. But in communist parties, ideology occupied a much more fundamental place, a primary concern of the party being to indoctrinate its members with Marxism.

The 1920s and ’30s saw the emergence of fascist parties that attempted, as did the communist and socialist parties, to organize the maximum number of members but that did not claim to represent the great masses of people. Their teaching was authoritarian and elitist. They thought that societies should be directed by the most talented and capable people—by an elite. The party leadership, grouped under the absolute authority of a supreme head, constituted such an elite. Party structure had as its goal the assurance of the obedience of the elite.

This structure resembled that of armies, which are also organized in such a way as to ensure, by means of rigorous discipline, the obedience of a large number of individuals to an elite leadership. The party structure, therefore, made use of a military-type organization, consisting of a pyramid made up of units that at the base were very tiny but that, when joined with other units, formed groups that got larger and larger. Uniforms, ranks, orders, salutes, marches, and unquestioning obedience were all aspects of fascist parties. This similarity rests upon another factor—namely, that fascist doctrine taught that power must be seized by organized minorities making use of force. The party thus made use of a militia intended to assure victory in the struggle for control over the unorganized masses.

Large parties built upon the fascist model developed between the two wars in Italy and Germany, where they actually came to power. Fascist parties also appeared in most other countries of western Europe during this period but were unable to achieve power. The less-developed countries of eastern Europe and Latin America were equally infected by the movement. The victory of the Allies in 1945, as well as the revelation of the horrors of Nazism, temporarily stopped the growth of the fascists and provoked their decline. In the decades after the war, however, neofascist political parties and movements, which had much in common with their fascist forebears, arose in several European countries, though by the early 21st century none had come to power.