

POLITICAL PARTIES

I. INTRO

- a. Example of 133 candidates for non-party election in L.A.
- b. Parties are both a consequence and an instrument of democracy
- c. Narrow the choice for voters and make elections work
- d. Help stabilize democracy

II. WHAT PARTIES DO FOR DEMOCRACY

a. PARTY FUNCTIONS

- i. **POLITICAL PARTIES** are organizations that seek political power by electing people to office who will help party positions (platforms) and philosophy become public policy
- ii. **ORGANIZE THE COMPETITION** – organizing mechanism to win elections and win control of government.
 1. Local and judicial elections in most states are **NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS** which means no party affiliation is indicated
 2. Fewer voters turn out for nonpartisan elections
- iii. **UNIFY THE ELECTORATE**- accused of creating conflict but actually unify the electorate within the party; need to fight internal differences
 1. Build coalitions on controversial issues such as gun control, abortion rights ,etc.

iv. HELP ORGANIZE GOVERNMENT

1. Organize state and national governments along party lines
2. Party that controls White House, Governor's Mansion, etc. gets PATRONAGE- can select party members as public officials or judges
 - a. Provides incentive for people to become engaged in politics for certain party

v. TRANSLATE PREFERENCES INTO POLICY

1. Even if party wins election, needs to moderate policy to win reelection; National Health Care policy
2. We are much more limited than Europe in setting policy based on party; they are RESPONSIBLE PARTY SYSTEM where candidates will not be nominated if they don't enact party platform, vs. U.S. which is CANDIDATE CENTERED - politicians nominated based on qualifications and personal appeal

vi. PROVIDE LOYAL OPPOSITION

1. Party out of power demands accountability for party in power.
2. Polite interval just after election or disaster known as HONEYMOON

b. NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

- i. From beginning parties have been the mechanism by which candidates are chosen to run for public office. Initially done by CAUCUS

- ii. 1830s and 40s a system of PARTY CONVENTIONS were initiated where platforms were decided and spirit for the party was celebrated
- iii. To draw more voters to the parties, DIRECT PRIMARIES were enacted to directly vote for candidate to represent the party; by 1920, they were the norm
 - 1. Today is the most typical means of picking party candidates
 - 2. OPEN PRIMARIES – either party can vote; permits CROSSOVER VOTING
 - 3. CLOSED PRIMARIES- only specific person registered for that party can vote
 - 4. California and Washington experimented with BLANKET PRIMARIES in which all voters could vote for any candidate; Supreme Court ruled against it. Pg 182
 - 5. Direct primaries nominate most candidates but there are still some caucuses like Iowa.

c. PARTY SYSTEMS

- i. U.S. is a two-party system. We do have some MINORITY PARTIES, such as the Green Party and Libertarian party, but only the candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties have a real chance to win elections
- ii. Parliamentary systems usually have a HEAD OF STATE, often called the president, but they also have a HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT called the prime minister or chancellor who is the leader of

the large parties in the legislature.
President's responsibilities are mostly ceremonial. Great Britain has a COALITION GOVERNMENT where no party dominates.

- iii. In some multiparty parliamentary system, many legislators are on the ballot and the winners are determined by PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION based on the proportion of votes received for the candidates; in our single member districts the winners are decided by a WINNER-TAKE-ALL SYSTEM. Since there is nothing for second place, that is why we have developed into a two-party system; called DUVERGER'S LAW.
- iv. Under a multiparty system, more extreme parties can have power versus our system where we are more CENTRIST in our political leanings.
- v. Multiparty systems can make governments more unstable due to coalitions forming and collapsing

d. MINOR PARTIES: PERSISTENCE AND FRUSTRATION

- i. Sometimes called THIRD PARTIES; Ross Perot in 1992
- ii. Organized under an ideology more than a particular leader; Green Party or Libertarian Party
- iii. Minor parties known as "spoilers" taking votes away from major candidates; Nader and Perot
- iv. Review table 7-1 on page 184

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES

a. OUR FIRST PARTIES

- i. Formed out of practical necessity; stating opposition, needed to organize officeholders who shared their views
- ii. 1787 parties organized to ratify the Constitution
 1. Hamilton organized the Federalist party
 2. Jefferson opposed Hamilton and wanted less government influence; soft on Britain; Republicans, Republican-Democrats; then Democrats

b. REALIGNING ELECTIONS

- i. Historically a two-party system with some minor parties; different than other nations
- ii. Fairly open to differing viewpoints and been shaped by events and turning points called **REALIGNING ELECTIONS** or **CRITICAL ELECTIONS**
 1. Characterized by intense voter involvement and changes in relationship and power
- iii. 1824: **JACKSON AND THE DEMOCRATS** – birth of the two party system with the Democrats and the Whigs (after the Federalists)
- iv. 1860- **THE CIVIL WAR AND THE RISE OF THE REPUBLICANS**- issues over slavery; Democrats survived with the male base in the South
- v. 1896: **A PARTY IN TRANSITION**- Industrialization versus agrarian policies; gold vs. silver standard; Progressivism

- vi. 1932: FDR AND THE NEW DEAL ALIGNMENT – rise of Democratic party over anti-Hoover and anti-Republican sentiment; altered relationship between government and society
- c. DIVIDED GOVERNMENT
 - i. Since 1953 DIVIDED GOVERNMENT, where one party controls the White House and the other controls Congress, has been in effect twice as long as UNITED GOVERNMENT in which one party controls both the legislative and executive branches of government
 - ii. Could 2008 have been a long-awaited realigned election?
 - 1. Young and Latino voters went for Obama in large numbers
 - 2. Too early to tell

IV. AMERICAN PARTIES TODAY

- a. Most people are critical or distrustful of parties today
- b. Most people understand parties are necessary
 - i. Most people view themselves as Democrats or Republicans
 - ii. Democratic and Republican parties are mostly moderate in their views
 - iii. Both parties do retain differing ideological viewpoints
- c. PARTIES AS INSTITUTIONS- like other government institutions, parties have rules, procedures and organizational structures
 - i. NATIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP- supreme authority for both parties is the

NATIONAL PARTY CONVENTION

which meets every 4 years

1. In charge of the national party is the NATIONAL COMMITTEE
2. Each party has a NATIONAL CHAIR as its top official' whoever owns the White House, the chair serves at the pleasure of the president; the other chair works primarily with the party members of Congress and is more independent.
3. National party organizations are often agents of an incumbent president to secure re-nomination
4. There are national congressional and senatorial campaign committees; recruit candidates and make limited contributions to their campaigns

ii. PARTY PLATFORMS

1. Policy platform decided every four years at the national convention.
2. Ambiguous in design and vague; statement of party policy
3. Rarely help anyone but can hurt presidential candidate
4. Neither party platform in 2008 generated much attention

iii. PARTIES AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

1. Both major parties are DECENTRALIZED around state and local elections
2. State and local committees are structured much like national committee

3. Powerful state committees have developed in recent years
4. Below the state committee is the county committees

iv. PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

1. IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH- power and influence are determined by which party is in control of the House and/or Senate

- a. Chairs of standing committees come from majority party
- b. Political parties help bridge the separation of powers between legislative and executive branches
- c. Congressional staffs are also partisan

2. IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH- the president picks all senior White House staff from his party due to loyalty; same with Cabinet members for the most part.

3. IN THE JUDICIAL BRANCH- designed to operate in an expressly non-partisan manner with time tenure and political independence

- a. Appointment process is very political; Marbury vs. Madison (1803); stacking the court

4. AT STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS – varies among states and localities; NY and IL very important; NE, not at all important.

v. PARTIES IN THE ELECTORATE

1. PARTY REGISTRATION- act of declaring party affiliation; required by some states when registering to vote
 - a. Limits participants in primaries
 - b. Easier to contact like people
2. PARTY ACTIVISTS
 - a. PARTY REGULARS- place party first; value winning elections and are prepared to compromise to achieve ends
 - b. CANDIDATE ACTIVISTS- followers of a particular candidate; not concerned with operation of party
 - c. ISSUE ACTIVISTS –particular issue or range of issues and want to push party towards issue
 - d. Candidate and Issue Activists would rather lose election than compromise on candidate or issue
3. PARTY IDENTIFICATION- many people are not ideologically connected to either party; many find parties irrelevant
 - a. PARTY IDENTIFICATION – psychological attachment to a political party that most people acquire in childhood from parents
 - b. Many vote according to party identification without compelling candidate or issue

- c. Review changing face of politics on page 195 and table 7-2 party identification on page 197
- d. Party identification is the single best predictor of how people will vote

4. PARTISAN REALIGNMENT AND DEALIGNMENT

- a. Party alignment is based on New Deal and 1932; last major shift
- b. Strength of independents indicates that the two major parties might be going through a stage of DEALIGNMENT – weakening of party preferences
- c. 1/3 Republicans ,1/3 Democrats and 1/3 Independents with little political interest

V. HOW PARTIES RAISE AND SPEND MONEY

- a. Under the Federal Election Campaign Act as amended in 1974, the Federal Election Committee (FEC) permits unlimited SOFT MONEY- money raised for party-building purposes; as compared to HARD MONEY – after Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002, limits were incurred on raising and spending money
- b. PARTY EXPENDITURES- party committees make contributions to KEY races that can change the party structure in Congress. Parties can also spend unlimited amounts as long as they are independent of the candidate or party.

VI. ARE THE POLITICAL PARTIES DYING?

- a. Critics of U.S. party system make 3 allegations

- i. Parties do not take meaningful and contrasting positions on most issues
 - ii. Party membership is essentially meaningless
 - iii. Parties are too accommodating to the middle of ideological spectrum
- b. Critics point to the long-run adverse impact on political parties of the Progressive movement; the rise of TV and electronic media have made parties less relevant in educating the electorate- strengthened the role of the candidate and reduced the role of the party
- c. Advocates disagree; national party organizations are better funded; can differentiate between races that are competitive and non-competitive
- d. REFORM AMONG DEMOCRATS – After the 1968 convention, reforms were put in place
 - i. Greater use of direct primaries
 - ii. Winner-take-all was out and proportionality was in
 - iii. Greater diversity among delegates
- e. REFORM AMONG REPUBLICANS
 - i. National committee had more control over campaigns
 - ii. Broader participation by all demographic groups
 - iii. Republicans have historically been better organized than Democrats
 - iv. Trend toward smaller donors
- f. Political parties organize the government and provide an important way for citizens to influence government