

## OVERVIEW

A political party exists in three arenas: Among the voters who psychologically identify with it, as a grassroots organization staffed and led by activists, and as a group of elected officials who seek to act on its ideals. This chapter studies the party primarily as an organization that takes on various forms at the local level. These include the political machine, the ideological party, the solidary group, the sponsored party, and the personal following.

National parties are weak coalitions of these local forums. As organizations that influence the political systems, parties are becoming even weaker. Voters no longer strongly identify with one of the major parties. The spread of the direct primary has made it harder for parties to control who is nominated for elective office, thus making it harder for the parties to influence the behavior of officeholders they once elected. Delegate selection rules, especially in the Democratic Party, have contributed to shifting the center of power away from officeholders and party regulars and toward the parties' more ideological wings.

Minor parties have arisen from time to time, but the only ones that have affected the outcome of presidential elections have been those that began as splinter groups within one of the major parties. An example of such a party is the Bull Moose Progressives. The two-party system is maintained, and minor parties are discouraged, by an election system of winner-take-all, plurality elections. This arrangement makes voters fear that they will “waste” their vote if they vote for a minor party. Meanwhile, the primary system makes it possible for minor parties to wield influence through the major parties.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### I. Introduction

- American political parties are the oldest in the world, dating back to the first decade of the republic.
- They may be in decline, but they are not dead or dying.

### II. Parties—Here and Abroad

- Decentralization
  - A *political party* is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label (party identification) by which they are known to the electorate.
  - Arenas of politics in which parties exist:
    - The party exists as a *label* in the minds of the voters;
    - as an *organization*—recruiting and campaigning for candidates; and
    - as a *set of leaders* organizing and trying to control the legislative and executive branches.
  - U.S. parties have become weaker in all three arenas.
    - As label, they are weaker as evidenced by the fact that there are more independents and more split-ticket voting.
    - As organizations, parties have become weaker since 1960s.
    - As set of leaders, though, parties are still somewhat strong.

- Reasons American and European parties are different
  - European parties are disciplined gatekeepers, to which voters are very loyal, though this has been declining recently.
  - Federal system decentralizes power in United States.
    - Early in U.S. history, the most important government decisions were made by the state and local governments, and this is where most of the political jobs were.
    - National parties in those times were coalitions of local parties.
    - As political power became more centralized, parties became even more decentralized and weaker.
  - Parties are closely regulated by state and federal laws, which weaken them.
  - Candidates are now chosen through primaries, not by party leaders.
  - President is elected separately from Congress, and presidential appointees are drawn from many sources.

### III. The Rise and Decline of the Political Party

#### A. THE FOUNDING

- Emergence of Republicans, Federalists: Jefferson versus Hamilton
  - Loose caucuses of political notables
  - Republicans' success (Jefferson, Madison, Monroe) and Federalists' demise
  - Reflection of the newness of parties is seen in the weakness of this system.

#### B. THE JACKSONIANS

- Political participation became a mass phenomenon.
  - More voters to be reached; by 1832, presidential electors selected by popular vote in most states.
  - Party built from the bottom up, rather than top down.
    - This transformation is illustrated by the abandonment of presidential caucuses composed of congressional members.
  - The caucus system was an effort to unite the legislative and executive branches by giving the former some degree of control over who would have a chance to capture the latter.

#### C. THE CIVIL WAR AND SECTIONALISM

- Jacksonian system was unable to survive slavery and sectionalism.
- New Republicans became dominant because of:
  - Civil War—Republicans relied on Union pride.
  - William Jennings Bryan's alienation of northern Democrats in 1896 deepened sectionalism.
- Most states were dominated by one party.
  - Factions emerged within each party.
  - Republicans broke into professional politicians (Old Guard) and *progressives (mugwumps)*.
  - Progressives initially shifted between parties to gain power, but then began attacking partisanship when the Republicans became dominant.

**D. THE ERA OF REFORM**

- Beginning in the 1900s, but chiefly since the New Deal
- Progressives pushed measures to curtail parties' power and influence.
  - Primary elections favored to replace nominating conventions.
  - They also favored nonpartisan elections at city and (sometimes) state level.
  - They argued against party-business alliances on the grounds that they were corrupting.
  - They wanted stricter voter registration requirements in order to reduce fraud.
  - They pressed for civil service reform in order to eliminate patronage.
  - They were also able to institute the direct primary and to adopt procedures—called the *initiative* and *referendum*—so that citizens could vote directly on proposed legislation
- Effects
  - It reduced the worst forms of political corruption.
  - It also weakened all political parties—parties became less able to hold officeholders accountable or to coordinate across the branches of government.

**E. PARTY REALIGNMENTS**

- *Critical or realigning periods:* Periods when a sharp, lasting shift occurs in the popular coalition supporting one or both parties.
  - The issues that separate the parties change, so the kinds of voters supporting each party change.
  - Shift may occur at the time of the election or just after.
- Five realignments so far:
  - 1800 (Jeffersonian Republicans defeated Federalists)
  - 1828 (Jacksonian Democrats came into power)
  - 1860 (Whig party collapsed; Republicans came into power)
  - 1896 (Republicans defeated William Jennings Bryan)
  - 1932 (Democrats came into office under FDR)
- Two kinds of realignments
  - A major party is defeated so badly that it disappears, and a new party emerges.
  - Two existing parties continue, but voters shift their loyalty from one to another.
- Clearest cases of realignment: 1860, 1896, 1932
  - 1860: Slavery issue fixed new loyalties in the popular mind.
  - 1896: Economic issues shifted loyalties to East versus West, city versus farm split.
  - 1932: Economic depression triggered new coalition for Democrats.
- 1980: Not a new realignment
  - Reagan won in 1980—not because of what he stood for, but because he was not Jimmy Carter.
  - Could not have been a traditional realignment, because Congress was left in the hands of the Democrats

- Major shift in presidential voting patterns in the South
  - 1972–2004: South has been more Republican than nation as a whole.
  - If this continues, it will constitute a major regional realignment.

#### F. PARTY DECLINE

- Evidence that parties are declining, not realigning
  - Proportion of people identifying with a party declined between 1960 and 1980.
  - Proportion of those voting a split ticket increased.
  - Was almost unheard of in the nineteenth century, because voters were given ballots by the parties
  - Became more common with the adoption of the *office-bloc ballot* (listing candidates by office instead of party)

### IV. The National Party Structure Today (THEME A: PARTY STRUCTURE TODAY)

- Parties similar on paper
  - State and local party organizations enjoy a great deal of autonomy from the national party apparatus.
    - They control the process of delegate selection to the national nominating conventions by using primaries to select delegates.
    - In recent years, there has been a trend where states compete to have their primaries held at the beginning of the delegate-selection process.
    - Earlier primaries force presidential candidates to pay particular attention to these states in order to develop momentum by winning earlier primaries.
    - This has resulted in a front loading of the delegate-selection process that the national parties are helpless to control.
  - *National convention* has ultimate power; meets every four years to nominate the presidential candidate.
  - *National committee* is composed of delegates from states; manages affairs between conventions.
  - *Congressional campaign committees* support the party's congressional candidates.
  - National chair manages daily work
- Party structure diverged in late 1960s and early 1970s.
  - RNC moved to bureaucratic structure.
    - It became a well-financed party devoted to electing its candidates, especially to Congress.
    - Beginning in 1980s, RNC used computerized mailing lists to raise money.
    - Money was used to provide services to candidates.
    - RNC effectively created a national firm of political consultants.
  - Democrats moved to factionalized structure and redistributed power.
    - Democrats lost five out of six presidential elections between 1968 and 1988.
    - By the 1990s, DNC had learned from the RNC: Adopted the same techniques, with some success.
  - DNC and RNC send money to state parties to sidestep federal spending limits (soft money).

- Campaign fundraising has reached new levels in both Presidential and Congressional campaigns. Significant amounts of money are raised using the Internet.

#### A. NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

- National committee sets time and place; issues a “call” setting the number of delegates for each state and the rules for their selection.
- Formulas are used to allocate delegates.
  - Democrats’ formula shifts delegates away from the South, to the North and West.
  - Republicans’ formula shifts delegates away from the East, to the South and Southwest.
  - Result: Democrats move left, Republicans move right.
- Democratic formula rewards large states whereas Republican formula rewards loyal states.
- Democrats set new rules.
  - In 1970s, rules were changed to weaken local party leaders and increase the proportions of women, youth, blacks, and Native Americans attending the convention; superdelegates.
  - Hunt Commission in 1981 increased the influence of elected officials and made the convention more deliberative.
- Consequence of reforms: Parties represent different sets of upper-middle-class voters.
  - Republicans represent traditional middle class—more conservative.
  - Democrats represent more leftist wing of the liberal middle class.
- To become more competitive, Democrats adopted additional rule changes.
  - In 1992, three rules were set:
    - Winner-reward system of delegate distribution banned—this had previously given the winner of primaries and caucuses extra delegates.
    - Proportional representation was implemented.
    - States that violated the rules were penalized with the loss of convention delegates.
  - Delegates once selected by party leaders are now chosen by primaries or local caucuses.
- Conventions today only ratify choices made in primary season.

#### V. State and Local Parties (THEME B: UNITED STATES PARTIES AS BROAD COALITIONS)

- State-level structure
  - State central committee
  - County committees
  - Various local committees
  - Distribution of power varies with the state, because different incentives are at work.

**A. THE MACHINE**

- *Political Machine*: A party organization that recruits members via tangible incentives (money, jobs, political favors).
- High degree of leadership control over member activity
- Abuses were extensive.
  - Gradually controlled by reforms—voter registration, civil service, Hatch Act (1939)
  - Machines continued until voter demographics and federal programs changed, decreasing the need for the parties' resources.
- New machine: Uses money to knit together many politicians, though money comes from campaign contributions, not from patronage and contracts.
  - New machines are a blend of the old machine (regarding campaign finance) and today's ideological party traits (regarding issues).
  - Money once raised by patronage and contracts is now supplied by wealthy contributors and funds raised through direct mail.

**B. IDEOLOGICAL PARTIES**

- Extreme opposite to machine
- Principle is more important than winning election, so ideological parties are contentious and factionalized.
- Usually outside Democratic and Republican parties—"third parties"
- Currently are generally focused social movements, which advance specific demands
- Political machines were once the "farm club" of the national party, but today's social movements perform that function.
  - Factionalism is therefore more intense.
  - Party leaders have less freedom.

**C. SOLIDARY GROUPS**

- Members are motivated by solidary incentives (enjoying the game; companionship).
- Advantage: Neither corrupt nor inflexible
- Disadvantage: Not very hard working

**D. SPONSORED PARTIES**

- Created or sustained by another organization
- Example: Detroit Democrats were developed and led by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union
- Not very common in United States

**E. PERSONAL FOLLOWING**

- Requires an appealing personality, an extensive network, name recognition, and money
- Examples: Kennedys (MA), Talmadges (GA), Longs (LA), and Byrds (VA)