



Political Parties: Notes

In this lesson:

- Roots & History of the American Party System
- 3rd Parties
- Presidential Elections: The Electoral College

Roots & History of the American Party System:

- Political Parties: members/groups joining together to achieve common goals by gaining power (goal: to win office, exercise power)
- Linkage Institution: channel by which people's concerns become political issues
- Birth of American Politics:
 - Federalists: Federal (Nat.) Government
 - John Adams
 - Alexander Hamilton
 - Democratic Republicans: State Government
 - Thomas Jefferson
 - James Madison
 - 1816 - 1830's: Era of Good Feelings
 - Post war of 1812 (Monroe): Dem-Rep party dominant
 - Expansion of suffrage, transition to popular election of electoral college members by states
- Rise of Popular Parties (1832):
 - Whig Party: 1832, Henry Clay
 - Rise to power: "Corrupt Bargain" of John Quincy Adams, hatred of Andrew Jackson
 - Republican Party: 1860, Abraham Lincoln
 - Rise to Power: Abolition of slavery, split of Democratic Party
 - Democratic Party: 1832 (1st convention); Andrew Jackson
 - Rise to power: Popularity of Jackson, idea of "Common Man" presidency, taking into account "will of the people"
 - Jacksonian Democracy: suffrage to all white males
 - Spoils System: patronage; rewarding supporters with jobs and favors
- 1874 - 1912:
 - Political Machine: party organization that recruits members by dispensing patronage (job, promotion, contract given for political reasons rather than merit)
 - Effects of this political machine:
 - Immigration: European immigrants = new voters



- Benefits: jobs, housing, food, alcohol: help to new Americans
 - Voter Turnout: 75% (Golden Age); participation was all for self interest
- Era of Democratic Dominance (1933 - 1953):
 - Great Depression: Rise of Franklin Roosevelt
 - President from 1933 - 1945
 - New Deal = party shouldn't give perks, government should; economic and political reforms
 - Realignment: groups shift; new coalitions of party supporters from lasting changes in party preferences
 - Critical Election/Realigning Election: dramatic change in political system, party control shifts, many terms of one party control
 - New Deal Reforms & Political Changes
 - Direct Primary: party candidates selected by public vote NOT by party bosses
 - Civil Service Laws: ended patronage; government jobs awarded based on merit
 - New Deal Coalition: rules politics from 30s to 60s; made up of urban workers, ethnic groups, catholics, jews, poor, southern, intellectuals
- The Modern Era (1960s - Present):
 - Dealignment
 - Gradual shift of people away from political parties = shrinking party ID
 - Most people are "independent"
 - Most "independents" still vote as Democrat or Republican
 - Ticket Splitting
 - Vote for candidates from different parties for different offices in same election
 - Issue Oriented Campaigns
 - Focus on specific issues rather than party or candidate's personality
 - Candidate Centered Campaigns
 - Elections based on candidates, their personal qualities, who is the best person for this job
- Structure and Organization of Parties:
 - National Convention: Party's national voice; members (delegates) meet to select President and Vice President candidates; write/adopt platform - document that describes policy beliefs of the party
 - National Committee: manage business, select convention site, establish rules, distribute literature, raise money
 - National Chairperson: picked by nominee/committee, direct committee, help party win



- Congressional Campaign Committee: D/R committees in Congress that work to reelect their parties by raising/distributing funds
- State & Local Party: organized like national party, volunteer, activities, door to door, get out the vote, nominate local candidates
- Functions of the Party System:
 - Recruit Candidates: find candidate interested (especially if there is no incumbent)
 - Nominate and Support Candidates: help raise money, run campaigns with help of party structure
 - Educate the Electorate: inform voters about their candidates, encourage participation
 - Create a Policy Agenda/Organize Government: organization of Congress and state legislatures is based off of the 2 major parties and who has control (majority vs. minority); political appointments are often made based on party affiliation

3rd Parties:

- Why a 2 party tradition?
 - Single member districts/first past the post: only one top vote getter is chosen from district
 - Ballot access: election laws vary by state, minor parties lack resources to get on ballot in more than a few states (\$\$\$)
 - Strategic voting: since 3rd parties are unlikely to win, voters are unlikely to support/vote
- Types of 3rd Parties:
 - Ideological: based on broad social, economic, and political beliefs
 - Splinter: personality based, factional; split away from major party because of candidate
 - Single Issue: concentrate attention on single public policy matter
 - Protest: correlated with economic discontent
- Importance:
 - “Spoil elections”: taken voters away from major parties; possibly changed winner
 - Introduce New Ideas: bring different ideas into public view
 - Change Major Parties: they adopt 3rd party positions
 - Expose corruption: attention to problems with political system
 - Trouble getting Elected: success at local level, not presidential
- Why can't they win?
 - Winner take all states in the electoral college (10% doesn't really matter)
 - People don't want to waste/throw away their vote
 - Lack of money and nation/statewide organizations get on ballot
 - Fear of being a spoiler and being the reason some bad is elected



- 3rd party candidates are usually excluded from presidential debates

Presidential Elections: The Electoral College:

- How does it work?
 - Each state gets votes based on population; 2 per Senator, 1 per House of Representative member
 - Reapportionment: changed based on census data every 10 years, reallocation of House Reps. based on changed in population (some states gain, lose, stay same)
 - Winner take All: getting most votes in state gets you all of the electors
 - Originally electors were chosen by state legislatures and meant to be independent, smart people
 - Today electors are selected by state's winning party and are expected to vote for the party's candidate
- Electoral College Pros:
 - Usually agrees with winner of the popular vote
 - Candidates may focus on moderate message to appeal to swing states (toss up)
 - Candidates can't ignore the smaller population states
 - Stable system: has always produced a winner
 - "Mandate": electoral college makes the margin of victory look wider, which empowers the president to pursue campaign promises
- Electoral College Cons:
 - Can tie or have no majority
 - Winner of EC can lose popular vote
 - Candidates ignore safe states
 - People's votes aren't equal based on the state they live in
 - Sometimes, electors don't vote for who they say they will
 - Swing and small states get too much attention
 - Voter turn off: people think it's too weird, complicated, unfair, etc.
- Why do we still have the electoral college?
 - Requires a constitutional amendment to change (really hard to do)
 - Collectively benefits small states - guaranteed at least 3 votes
 - No consensus on how to reform electoral college (all systems have drawbacks)