

## CHAPTER 8

# Political Parties

### PARALLEL LECTURE 8.1

This lecture covers the entire chapter on political parties.

- I. Although many Americans regard political parties with suspicion, they believe that parties are necessary for democratic government.
  - A. Citizens' main avenue of participation in government is through voting in competitive elections.
    1. A **political party** is an organization that sponsors candidates for public office under the organization's name.
    2. Interest groups are distinct from parties in that interest groups may support candidates, but never sponsor them as their avowed representatives.
  - B. Parties perform four important functions for the political system.
    1. They **nominate** candidates for election to public office, ensuring not only a minimum level of quality of candidates but also raising it through the peer review process.
    2. They **structure** the voting choice in elections, reducing the number of candidates on the ballot.
    3. They **propose** alternative government programs, helping voters choose between policies, as well as between personalities.
    4. They **coordinate** the actions of government officials, helping to bridge the separation of powers.
- II. American political parties have a long and complex history.
  - A. Parties were not mentioned in the Constitution and did not exist in any recognizable form in the **preparty** period, which lasted through Washington's first term of office.
    1. Groups pursuing some common political interest were thought of as factions.
    2. In colonial times, factions were considered both inevitable and dangerous (see *Federalist* #10).
    3. Presidential elections in the early years of the nation were decided by a handful of political leaders (the president and vice president were elected by **electoral college**) who met in **caucuses** to propose candidates for public office.
  - B. The **first party system** pitted the Federalists, led by Hamilton, against the Democratic Republicans, led by Jefferson. (See Figure 8.1 in the text.)
    1. Early political parties did not exercise all of the functions now associated with parties.
    2. Nomination of candidates began to emerge as a party function in the election of 1800.
    3. By 1820 the Federalists had ceased to exist, and by 1824 the Democratic Republicans had split into factions seeking office within the party.
  - C. The **second party system** involved what became the Democratic party and the Whig party.
    1. The Democratic party originated in 1828 among southerners and westerners who supported Andrew Jackson.

2. The election of 1828 was the first mass election in our history, involving more than a million voters.
  3. **National conventions** for selection of candidates and **party platforms** came into use as a new method for nominating presidential candidates by the early 1830s.
  4. The Whigs were formed in 1834 to oppose President Jackson, who they thought governed like a king.
- D. The **present party system**, featuring the Democratic and Republican parties, developed in the late 1850s.
1. The Whigs split over the issues of slavery and sectionalism and failed to offer a candidate in the presidential election of 1856.
  2. The Republican party was formed in 1854 in opposition to slavery.
  3. The critical election of 1860 established the Democratic and Republican parties as the dominant parties in our two-party system. When one party regularly enjoys support from most voters in an area, it is called the *majority party* in that area, and the other is called the *minority party*.
- E. Three **critical elections**—elections that produced a sharp change in patterns of party loyalty among voters and lasting **electoral realignment**—have marked the present party system.
1. In the election of 1860, the Republican party was dominant in the North, the Democrats in the South; the parties alternated in controlling Congress through 1894.
  2. In the election of 1896, the Republicans became more closely allied with industrial interests in the populous East and Midwest and became the majority party in national politics. (See Figure 8.1.)
  3. In the election of 1932, the Democrats, led by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, forged a new national majority out of urban workers, middle-class liberals, European immigrants, and southerners.
  4. Party loyalties have become less important to voters as they cast their ballots.
- F. Instead of a full realignment we seem to be in a period of **electoral dealignment**.
- III. Why does the United States have a two-party system?
- A. In fact, there have been many minor parties in American history.
1. **Bolter** parties have been formed by factions that split off from one of the major parties (Teddy Roosevelt's Progressive Party; George Wallace's American Independent Party).
  2. **Farmer-labor** parties (such as the Populist party) have represented groups who felt that the working class was not getting its share of society's wealth.
  3. Parties of **ideological protest** (such as the Libertarian and Socialist parties) have gone further and attacked the established system.
  4. **Single-issue** parties (e.g., the Prohibition Party) have been formed to promote one principle rather than a general philosophy of government.
  5. Minor parties have not fared particularly well as vote getters, though as policy advocates they have a slightly better record. At times they have had a real effect on the policies adopted by the major parties (i.e. women's suffrage, the graduated income tax, direct election of senators).
  6. Minor parties may perform their most useful function as safety valves for the political system, allowing discontented groups to argue for their policies within the political system.
- B. For several reasons, only two parties have alternated in power in the United States for more than 125 years.

1. The electoral system—which involves the twin principles of *single winners* chosen by *simple plurality vote*—tends to encourage competition between only two parties for political office within each electoral district (the system of majority representation vs. proportional representation).
  2. The importance of the presidency causes diverse groups across the nation to coalesce into the **same** two parties within each state.
  3. Only those two parties dominate contemporary elections because of their historical claims on citizen loyalties.
- C. The parties retain their strength nationally in large part because of the presidency, but party politics on the state and local levels often functions quite differently.
1. Even in an election where a presidential candidate suffers a substantial defeat, a party can still claim many victories for state offices.
  2. Parties retain their strength in local areas because of the importance and durability of party identification.
- D. Most Americans readily identify with one of the two major parties.
1. **Party identification** refers to the voter's sense of psychological attachment to a party, which is not the same thing as voting for the party in a given election.
    - a) Voting is a behavior.
    - b) Identification is a state of mind.
  2. Three significant points stand out from studies of party identification over time.
    - a) The number of Republicans and Democrats combined exceeds the number of Independents in every year.
    - b) The number of Democrats consistently exceeds that of Republicans.
    - c) The number of Democrats has shrunk over time, to the benefit of both Republicans and Independents.
  3. Analysis of party identification by seven social groupings in 2002 found that cultural factors, such as race and religion, have more effect on party preference than do socioeconomic factors, which in turn are more important than region. (See Figure 8.5)
    - a) African Americans, Jews are linked to the Republican party
    - b) People who are low in education, income, and occupational status tend toward the Democratic party.
    - c) Women are far more likely to be Democratic than are men.
    - d) The influence of age on party identification:
      - (1) The youngest group – independent,
      - (2) Mid twenties to mid forties – heavily Republican
      - (3) The oldest group – strongly Democratic
- IV. Contrary to what many people believe, the Democrats and Republicans differ considerably in political ideology.
- A. The spending priorities are determined by the government programs each party supports.
1. Democrats are more disposed to government spending to advance social welfare.
  2. Republicans decry massive social spending, but support spending billions of dollars on national defense.
- B. Another way to see ideological differences between the parties is to compare party voters and party activists.
1. 19 percent of Democratic voters described themselves as conservative, compared with 61 percent of Republican voters.
  2. Only 3 percent of the delegates to the 2004 Democratic convention described themselves as conservative, compared with 63 percent of the delegates to the Republican convention.

- C. Ideological differences manifest themselves in the differences between party platforms.
  1. The 2000 Republican platform stressed issues of morality, but was much more moderate than the 1996 platform.
  2. The 2000 Democratic platform stressed equality.
  3. Both American parties tend to be more conservative on economic matters than are parties in other two-party systems.
- D. Despite their ideological differences on issues of freedom, order, and equality, the parties are **similar** in that they are both capitalist parties that reject government ownership of the means of production.
- V. American parties parallel our federal system, having separate national and state organizations.
  - A. At the national level, each major party has four main organizational components.
    1. A **national convention** convenes every four years to nominate a presidential candidate and set party policy and rules.
    2. A **national committee**, composed of leaders from state parties, has a steering role.
    3. **Congressional party conferences** try to guide each party's legislative activities within each chamber.
    4. **Congressional campaign committees** are separate bodies in each house for each party.
  - B. The national organization is not hierarchical and has little control over state party organizations.
    1. In the 1970s the roles of DNC and RNC, however, began to expand, but in different ways.
      - a) The Democrats introduced procedural reforms according to which state parties had to take "affirmative action" in the selection of delegates to the 1972 Democratic convention. The delegates had to include women, minorities and young people. Many state parties rebelled at the imposition of sex, race and age quotas.
      - b) The Republicans were making organizational reforms. The RNC strengthened its fundraising, research and service roles.
      - c) The difference between the Democratic and Republican approaches to reforming the national committees shows in the funds raised by the DNC and RNC during election campaigns. The RNC has regularly raised far more money than the DNC.
    2. State and local party organizations vary in strength and resources.
      - a) Big-city organizations were called *party machines* (e.g. the Democrats Tammany Hall in New York City)
      - b) Centralized urban party machines no longer dominate party organizations in the states.
      - c) Recent research has shown that neither party has a distinct advantage with regard to direct campaign activity. In the 1999-2000 election cycle, the national party campaign committees were transferring millions of dollars to state and local parties.
    3. American political parties are among the most decentralized parties in the world.
    4. The proportion of citizens who consider themselves as independents has risen.
  - C. There is some evidence that American political parties, although still organizationally diffuse and decentralized, are now enjoying a period of resurgence.
    1. Neither party's national committee has ever been better funded.

2. Neither party's national committee has ever been more active in grass-roots campaigns.
  3. More votes in Congress are being cast along party lines.
  4. Still, Americans are more likely to call themselves "independent," which suggests that though the parties *as organizations* are enjoying a period of resurgence, fewer Americans are developing the strong party identifications necessary to insure their continued health.
- VI. According to the majoritarian model, parties are essential to making the government responsive to public opinion.
- A. The ideal role of parties has been formalized in the four principles of **responsible party government**:
    1. Parties should present clear and coherent programs to voters.
    2. Voters should choose candidates according to the party programs.
    3. The winning party should carry out its program once it is in office.
    4. Voters should hold the governing party responsible at the next election for executing its program.
  - B. The two major parties basically meet Principles 1 and 3.
  - C. To determine the degree to which the parties satisfy Principles 2 and 4, we must consider the nomination and election processes, which are covered in Chapter 9.