

American Government

Unit 2

Chapter 16

“Political Parties”

Political Parties

- **Political Parties** – a group of people (joined together on the basis of common principles) who seek to control government (through the winning of elections) in order to affect certain public policies and programs.
 - a group with common interests who organize to win elections, control government, and influence policy.
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Party Systems

- **One-Party System** – (aka “no-party system”)
 - Usually found in dictatorships or areas that are dominated by one of the major parties with no real opposition.
 - Also exist in places where government is dominated by one religion (theocracy).
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Party Systems

- **Multi-Party System** – a system in which several major and minor parties seriously compete for and win elections.
 - Usually found in Europe – many believe this system represents broader interests.
 - Difficulty is in building ***coalitions*** (temporary alliance of several groups who come together to form a working majority to control a government)
 - Tend to be politically unstable.
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Party Systems

- **Two-Party System** – only the two major parties have a reasonable chance of winning an election.
 - could have more than two parties but these are weak/minor parties.
 - We began as a two-party system with the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists and have changed parties over time but always stayed a two-party system.
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The Minor Parties (3 types)

- ❑ **Ideological** – based on a particular set of beliefs – a comprehensive view of social, economic, and political matters – usually focus on overall change in society (Communist, Socialist, Libertarian, etc.)
 - ❑ **Single Issue** – concentrate on only one public-policy matter (one economic, social, or moral issue). Usually short-lived – only exist while issue is important or until major party adopts issue. Ex – Free Soil (against slavery), Prohibition (against alcohol), Right to Life (anti-abortion), etc.
 - ❑ **Splinter** – split from a major party because of a disagreement. (Bull Moose – split from Rep in 1912, Progressives in 1924) (Dixiecrats – State's Rights Party split from Dem in 1948 and the American Independent Party in 1968.)
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Importance of Third Parties

- ❑ **Impact** – “spoiler role”, critics or innovators, bring certain issues to major parties/public agenda, etc.
 - ❑ **Obstacles** – difficult to get on the ballot, single-member districts (one person wins) as opposed to proportional representation (several are elected), campaign financing, difficult to gain enough broad based support.
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Party Organization

Local Party Organization

- Precinct – the basic (smallest) local unit or voting district.
 - When you vote, you vote at a local polling place within your precinct.
 - Precinct Captain – a volunteer worker who organizes party workers, distributes information about candidates and gets people out to vote.
 - Ward – a larger unit made up of several precincts. Each ward selects a representative to send to the county committee.
 - Each county sends representatives to the state level.
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Party Organization

□ **National Party Organization**

- **National Convention** – nominates pres. Candidates, writes/adopts party platform
 - **National Committee** – selected by state organization, controls platform and policies between conventions
 - **National Chairperson** – leader of the national committee, serves for 4 years, directs convention and campaign, raises money, recruits voters, etc.
 - **Congressional Campaign Committees** – in each house of congress to help re-elect incumbents in the party, unseat incumbents in other party, and fill open seats with party members.
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Functions of Political Parties(4)

- ❑ **Recruiting/Nominating Candidates** – parties seek people who have the personal qualities, background, and ability to get elected.
 - ❑ **Inform/Activate the Public** – inform, inspire, and activate public interest and participation in public affairs. Bring important issues to the attention of the public.
 - ❑ **Operate Government/Govern** – congressional leadership is organized by party, party leaders try to gather member support for party sponsored legislation, the President works through party leaders to promote his programs.
 - ❑ **“Watch Dog”**- observes and criticizes the party in power/opposing party. Tries to offer other solutions, point out shortcomings/failures, wants to swing public opinion in their favor.
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4 Ways to Nominate Candidates

- **Caucuses** – private meetings of party leaders where candidates for office are chosen.
 - “old style” – secret process, undemocratic.
 - “modern” method – rules require more openness
 - 19 states use caucuses

 - **Nominating Conventions** – local and county party organizations send representatives to state convention where they select state and national candidates.
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4 Ways to Nominate Candidates

- **Primary Elections** – an election in which party members select people to run in the general election.
 - Closed primary – only registered members of the party can vote.
 - Open primary – all voters may participate but you can only vote in one primary.
 - Direct primary – the person who gets the most votes becomes the party's candidate.
 - Run-off primary – when no one gets a majority of the votes a second primary takes place between the two top vote winners.
 - **Petition** – a potential candidate need to gather a certain number of signatures to get on the ballot.
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