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Political Parties

Chapter 12

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In this chapter we will learn about

- What political parties are and the role they play in a democracy
- What parties in America stand for
- The history of political parties in America
- The central functions of parties: electioneering and governing
- Characteristics of the American party system
- The relationship of citizens to political parties

The role of parties in a democracy

- Political linkage
- Unification of a fragmented government
- A voice for the opposition

Three components of political parties

- Party organization
- Party-in-government
- Party-in-the-electorate

The responsible party model

- Each party presents a coherent set of programs to voters, consistent with its ideology and clearly different from those of the other party.
- The candidates for each party pledge to support their party's platform and to implement their party's programs if elected.

The responsible party model, cont'd.

- Voters make choices based on which party's programs most closely reflect their own ideas and hold the parties responsible for unkept promises by voting members out of office.
- While governing, each party exercises control over its elected officials to ensure that party officials are promoting and voting for its programs, thereby providing accountability to voters.

What do the parties stand for?

- Party ideology
- Party membership
- Policy differences between the parties

The dilemma party candidates face

- Most primary voters are ideological, meaning that candidates must run to the extremes to win the party's nomination

But:

- Most general election voters are moderates, so candidates should position themselves in the center of the ideological scale on positions

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The history of parties in America

- Andrew Jackson and the rise of party machines
- Domination of party bosses in the cities
- Democratization of political parties and the creation of the party primary

The history of party eras

- Critical elections that lead to realignments
- Five agreed-upon party eras
- A sixth party era?

A sixth party era?

- No clear national realignment
- The demise of the New Deal coalition
- Regional realignment in the South
- Dealignment

What do parties do?: Electioneering

- Recruiting candidates
- Nominating candidates
 - Open vs. closed primaries
 - Nominating convention

What do parties do?: Electioneering, cont'd.

- Defining policy agendas
- General elections

What do parties do?: Governing

- Controlling government
- Execution of policy agendas and accountability

Characteristics of the American party system

- Two parties
 - Few serious political splits
 - Ability to change with the time
 - The rules of the game!!
 - Legal barriers faced by third parties

Characteristics of the American party system, cont'd.

- Ideological moderation
- Decentralized party organizations
 - National committees
 - Congressional campaign committees
 - State party committees
 - Local party organizations

Characteristics of the American party system, cont'd.

- Changes in party discipline over time
 - Parties have been less disciplined in the U.S. than in other countries
 - U.S. parties are becoming more ideological, meaning they are becoming more disciplined as well
 - Potential for more political gridlock

The citizens and political parties

- Three things citizens can do to offset their frustration with political parties:
 1. Get real
 2. Get involved
 3. Don't split your ticket