Chapter 12: Political Parties

Political Parties - Important Questions -

I. If the first generation of leaders elected under the Constitution rejected political parties on principle, why did they create them anyway?

II. Why does a nation as diverse as the United States sustain only two major parties?

III. Today national party conventions merely certify the winners of primary elections instead of choosing the presidential nominees, as they did in the past. So why do the parties continue to hold these gatherings?

IV. Ninety percent of Americans claim they always vote for the person best suited for the job, regardless of party. Why then is party line voting so prevalent and why are partisans so polarized?

Political Parties - Definitions -

- Scholars have proposed a variety of formal definitions of political party.
  - Two of the most prominent stand in contrast
    - Burke's (eighteenth century): A body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.
    - Downs' (twentieth century): a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- The Constitution
  - No mention of political parties.
- Parties were widely considered to be a threat to good government and public order.
  - Pervasive fear of parties/factions => not taking into account society as a whole/leading to internal strife
  - Based on historical evidence => England, Greece, Rome

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- “A division of the republic into two great parties […] is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution” — John Adams
- “If I could not get to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all” — Thomas Jefferson

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- But major incentives for party building:
  - a) To build stable legislative and electoral alliances
  - Organized competition for votes in Congress leads directly to
    - organized competition for votes in congressional elections.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- This requires negotiating and maintaining electoral alliances
  - expands legislative parties into electoral parties

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

– The presidential selection rules
  - incentives for building electoral alliances across districts and states.
  - organizational work required for the collective pursuit of political office results in a national party organization.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- But major incentives for party building:
  - b) To mobilize voters

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- But major incentives for party building:
  - c) To develop new electoral techniques
    - Politics was not simply “local”, a larger, more dispersed electorate had to be reached.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- Parties turned to mass communication: newspapers, pamphlets, public letters, and printed speeches.
- These were designed to excite voters emotionally so that they would be motivated to vote and avoid the free-rider problem.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- But major incentives for party building:
  - d) To use party labels and enforce collective responsibility
  - Party labels offer a shorthand cue that keeps voting decisions cheap and simple
    - as long as the labels are informative.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- The more accurately a candidate's label predicts behavior in office, the more useful it is to voters, and the more it will continue to be used.
- Candidates: personal stake in value of label.
  - Require some sacrifice of preference (conformity cost).

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- “Political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.” — E.E. Schattschneider, American Political Scientist, 1892–1971

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- Overall political and organizational expedience may explain parties' existence, but
  - The activities that maintain them contribute to successful democratic politics in unforeseen ways.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- Recruit and train leaders, foster political participation, and teach new citizens democratic habits and practices.
- Knit citizens and leaders together in electoral and policy coalitions.
- Allow citizens to hold their elected agents collectively responsible for what the government does.

Political Parties - I. Unwanted Parties: Why Create Them? -

- Help channel and constrain political conflicts, promoting their peaceful resolution.
- Organize the activities of government, facilitating the collective action necessary to translate public preferences into public policy.
- In short, they make democracy possible.

Political Parties
- II. Why Two Parties? -

- Two party system (seen as) norm in U.S.
  - Most modern democracies have more than two parties.
  - Electoral rules: FPTP / Plurality / Majoritarian - our system of elections where only a single winner is chosen by plurality vote, generally reduced competition to two.

Political Parties
- II. Why Two Parties? -

- People tend to vote strategically, that is, if favorite party's candidate has no chance to win, voters tend to turn to the less objectionable of the major-party candidates who does have a chance to win => Duverger's Law
- Office-seekers thus tend to join one of the two competitive parties rather than pursuing office as independents or third-party nominees.

Political Parties
- II. Why Two Parties? -

- Popular aspects of third parties are copied by the major parties.
- Erected legal hurdles to getting on the ballot, such as banning “fusion tickets”

Political Parties
- II. Why Two Parties? -

- An alternative to the American system is one based on proportional representation.
  - Here a party receives legislative seats in proportion to its share of votes.
  - The system helps to preserve smaller parties.
  - Votes for their other candidates are not wasted.

Political Parties
- II. Why Two Parties? -

- Straight PR Example: Dutch elections 2010 -Tweede Kamer (lower house): 150 seats = electoral threshold of 0.67%

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- First party system (1790–1824): creation of national parties.
- Second party system (1824–1860): basic organizational structures set.
- Third party system (1860–1894): rise of party machines.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Fourth party system (1894–1932): fall of party machines.
- Fifth party system (1932–?): pattern of coalitional nature of American parties clearly illustrated.
- Sixth party system (c. 1950s–1960s?)...

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- First Party System (1790–1824):
- The American party system was born in the first few Congresses as leaders with opposing views on national issues fought to prevail.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- The conflict involved two opposing factions:
  - The Hamilton faction => took name of Federalists
    - promoted commercial and manufacturing interests following the British economic model; wanted strong ties with England.
    - Later associated with unpopular policies and began to fade away after 1816.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- The Jefferson and Madison faction
  - sought to protect the interests of farmers, tradesman, and agrarian states in general, and supported diplomatic relations with France.
  - Later, the Jeffersonian Republicans would become the Democratic Party (1820s), now the oldest political party in the world.
  - Rufus King crushed by James Monroe in 1816 and Monroe reelected without significant opposition in 1820.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Second Party System (1824–1860):
- There was so little party conflict, the time was called the Era of Good Feelings.
- Conflict took place within one party rather than between two.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Presidents were nominated by congressional caucuses.
  - Members assembled with their allies to make party decisions.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- With the Federalists gone, almost everyone in Congress was a Democratic-Republican.
  - Worked while there was consensus, but in 1824 no fewer than five serious Democratic-Republicans candidates sought the presidency.
  - But while caucus nominated he came in last in the general election's popular vote (third in the electoral vote).

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Andrew Jackson came in first in popular and electoral votes, but had no majority in either.
- John Quincy Adams came in second to Jackson.
- House Speaker Henry Clay was third in popular vote and fourth in the electoral college.
- John C. Calhoun withdrew early (became VP).
- Because no candidate had a majority, the election was thrown to the House of Representatives.

• John Quincy Adams wins with Clay's support (promise to make him Secretary of state)

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Jackson's supporters were outraged at the "corrupt bargain."
- Jackson trounces Adams and wins the presidency under a new Democratic party in 1828.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- With help of Martin Van Buren establishes
  - Central committees set up in Washington and Nashville.
  - Promoted the formation of state organization which supported Jackson clubs and committees in towns and counties.
  - Chain of newspapers established to support the cause.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

  - Local politicians saw Jackson as a vehicle for their own ambitions.
- Jackson won in 1828, and upon his campaigning for his second term (1832), a new innovation was introduced to party politics—the national party convention.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- It was promoted as a more democratic alternative to the discredited congressional caucus, allowing for more popular participation in the nomination process.
  - Practical devise for solving problems of conflict and coordination
  - Occasion for assembling the national party coalition
  - Giant pep rally

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Jackson’s strong presidency and personality generated some opposition (Whig Party).
- The Whigs lost in 1836, but won following campaign year with a popular war hero—William Henry Harrison—defeating Van Buren.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- By 1840, the Whigs and Democrats were organized in every state.
- The two-party competition for president framed competition for offices at all levels of government.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Parties solved the problem of free riding endemic to mass electorates by making participation exciting and fun.
  - Hoopla
  - Also helped by the spoils system
- Party loyalty began to emerge.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Party Machines:
  - Party organizations reached their peak of development during the third party system.
  - built on simple principles of exchange: favors and services for votes on election day.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Party machines were often not discernible from the local government.
- Attacked as inefficient and corrupt
  - Leads to reforms (Progressive Era)

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Civil service reform
- Australian (Secret) Ballot
- Direct Ballot

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Primary elections
- Detach local politics from national politics
  - No Democratic or Republican way to pave a street

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Party System (1860–1894):
- The Republican Party
  - organized in 1854 as a coalition of forces on the issue of slavery; example of a successful challenge to the two-party system.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Failed with their first candidate , but won four years later with Abraham Lincoln in a complicated (and regionally split) presidential election.
  - Triggered South's secession from Union and then the Civil War
  - Republicans emerged as the party of victory and union

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- At end of Reconstruction, Republicans maintained a strong base in the North.
- Democrats emerged as a competitor in the South and had pockets of strength in the West and in the border states.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Additional third parties that shook the political system temporarily (pre-Civil War):
  - Anti-Masonic Party => later joined the Whigs
  - American Party [Know-Nothing] => later joined Republications

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Consequences of Progressive Reforms:
  - Turnout declined due to tighter registration laws, the Australian ballot, and literacy tests
  - Shift from parties to candidates => seed of candidate-centered politics

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Incentives shifted from material to non-material: so did who participated: working class no longer base; middle class instead

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Parties weaker, but more entrenched => treated as quasi public entities
- Advent of primary elections encouraged dissidents to work within the established parties,
  - Example: Tea Party 2010

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Fourth Party System (1894–1932):
- From the end of Reconstruction in 1876 until 1896, the third American party system settled into place and Democrats and Republicans competed on nearly even terms.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- BUT: In 1896, Democrats reacted to a severe economic downturn by supporting
  - Making silver as well as gold a monetary standard,
    - which would increase the money supply,
    - ease interest rates,
    - and therefore the pressure on debtors, which included farmers and westerners.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Republicans were able to paint these policies as unsound (a SCHEME), convincing urban workers that it was a threat to their jobs => Realignment of voters in favor of the Republicans commonly designated as the fourth party system (Republican ascendancy)
- BUT: GREAT DEPRESSION

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Fifth Party System 1932–??):
- FDR and the New Deal Coalition
  - White segregationists with northern African Americans.
  - Progressive intellectuals with machine politicians.
  - Union members and poor farmers.
  - Catholics and Baptists.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Republican coalition was a smaller, inverted image of the Democratic coalition:
  - Business and professional people.
  - Upper-income Protestants.
  - and residents of small towns and cities in the Northeast and the Midwest.
  - Only after promise not to repeal the New Deal, but to administer it frugally, election of Republican Eisenhower in 1952.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Erosion of New Deal Coalition:
- The first and most important issue was civil rights for African Americans.
  - Democrats took on fight for civil rights
  - Republicans used states rights appeal
  - Southern Democrats began to leave party: Wallace

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Vietnam splintered Democrats as well—along class lines
- Great Society—lacked general appeal—too focused/economy tightened

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Republicans
  - Infighting between conservative and moderate wings
  - Goldwater debacle in 1964

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Republicans gradually recovered from their tremendous loss in 1964
- Nixon, Reagan, and Bush built winning coalitions
  - Combined affluent economic conservatives with middle and working class social conservatives.
    - Christian Right

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- They declared war on taxation, regulation, and welfare.
- Made prominent their concerns over law and order and traditional family values.
- Neither party has a completely stable and unified coalition.

Political Parties - III. Why Still Hold Conventions? -

- Recall: 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention debacle and subsequent reforms
- Today: Conventions no longer choose the party's candidate; caucus activists and voters in primaries do

Political Parties - III. Why Still Hold Conventions? -

- BUT: Conventions are important = image of the party that it portrays.
  - In 2008 both parties' conventions became venues for patching up party divisions arising from the bruising primary season as well as for trumpeting the candidates central themes for the fall.

Political Parties - III. Why Still Hold Conventions? -

- Display at convention is not without risk.
  - Party activists often hold more extreme views on the issues of the day than do ordinary party voters.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- The Revival of Parties: A Sixth Party System? (1950/60s—?)
- Parties continue to dominate electoral politics and partisanship revived somewhat modestly.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Ticket splitting has fallen to 1960s levels
- Voters steadily less neutral about the major parties since 1980. More likely to express positive or negative views of the major parties.
- Parties are still indispensable to elected officials, candidates, and voters.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Most people still call themselves Republicans or Democrats.
- Independents have increased.
- But most are closet partisans.
- “Pure” Independents are less likely to vote in general.

Political Parties
- Party Differences -

- Republicans:
  - Tend to favor a smaller, cheaper federal government
  - Advocate lower taxes
  - Less regulation of business
  - Lower spending on social welfare
  - Let free enterprise flourish
  - More generous only to the Defense Department
  - Would ban abortion and gay marriage
  - Allow official prayer in public schools

Political Parties
- Party Differences -

- Democrats
  - More inclined to regulate business on behalf of consumers and the environment
  - More supportive of government programs designed to improve domestic welfare
  - Would spend less on national defense
  - More concerned with “fairness” and equality
  - Support legal abortion
  - Do not support official prayer in school

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Today party coalitions still retain strong traces of the New Deal alignment.
- Lower income voters are still more likely to be Democrats.
- Higher income voters are more likely to be Republicans.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- The crucial changes:
  - White southerners moving into the Republican camp.
  - African Americans strongly loyal to the Democratic party.
    - Reinforced by the Obama presidency

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Men have become more Republican
- Women have not—creating the famous “gender gap” between parties.
- Democratic advantage among Catholics has shrunk.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Regular churchgoers of all kinds have become more Republican.
- During the Reagan years, electorate became more Republican, less Democratic.
- During G.W. Bush administration trend began to move in the opposite direction.
  - Democrat's advantage grew

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- These changes suggest that a sixth party system is now in place.
  - But the changes have occurred gradually and at different times, so the new system's starting date is unclear.

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- Most salient change:
  - Republicans grew stronger.
  - Democrats maintain an edge in party identifiers, but those who vote at higher rates tend to be Republicans (higher levels of formal education and higher incomes).

Political Parties - Development and Evolution of the Party Systems -

- A second distinctive feature is that partisan differences on issues and policy are wider and deeper than they have been during the New Deal party system.
  - Polarization, both of elites and activists and those who simply vote

Political Parties
- IV. Why Prevalence of Party-Line Voting? -

- Expediency persists:
- American parties developed and continue to endure because they have proven so useful to politicians and voters.

Political Parties
- IV. Why Prevalence of Party-Line Voting? -

- Basic pattern of two party competition continues
- Despite disdain, voters still rely heavily on party cues.

Political Parties
- IV. Why Prevalence of Party-Line Voting? -

- Party entrepreneurs have simply redesigned party organizations to operate more effectively in today's media-based, candidate-centered electoral arena.