

**Linkage Institutions:  
Interest Groups,  
Political Parties,  
and  
Mass Media**

**Unit 4**

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **INTEREST GROUPS: THE POLITICS OF INFLUENCE**

# THE MISCHIEFS OF FACTION

- Interest groups were called "factions" by James Madison
- Madison's dilemma: wanting both liberty and order, yet allowing people the liberty to form groups and express their views could destroy the hope for an orderly society. *Political factions were inevitable → need to control their effects.*
- Madison addressed the problem of establishing a stable constitutional system that at the same time would respect liberty in *The Federalist, No. 10* (freedom but limit factions)
- Source of factions - "unequal distribution of property"
- Pluralism: growth of interest groups prevents the concentration of excessive power in the hands of few, and thus enhances democracy → rebuttal: wealthier groups tend to be over represented, and poorer groups tend to be under represented.

# WHAT ARE INTEREST GROUPS?

- **Interest group (special interests – term used in a negative way): organization of people whose members share policy views on specific issues and attempt to influence public policy to their benefit.**
- **Interest groups are protected under the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the Constitution**

# **INTEREST GROUPS LINK CITIZENS TO GOVERNMENT**

- **Express their members' preferences to government policymakers**
- **Convey government policy information to their members**
- **Raise and spend money to gain access to policymakers**

# FUNDAMENTAL GOALS OF INTEREST GROUPS

- **Influence public policy (change laws)**
  - **Get legislation passed to benefit their members**
    - **Successful because constituency is narrow, but the costs are spread broadly across the population**
- **Gain access to policymakers**
- **Support sympathetic policymakers**

# DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTEREST GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

- Parties nominate candidates, contest elections, and seek to gain control over government. *In contrast, interest groups seek to support public officials and influence government policies.*
- Parties have positions on a wide range of public issues. *In contrast, interest groups focus only on specific issues that directly affect their members. As a result, interest groups are able to articulate specific policy positions.*
- Political parties are public organizations that are accountable to the voters. *In contrast, interest groups are private organizations that are accountable to their members.*

# REASONS FOR GROWTH OF INTEREST GROUPS

- **Economic developments.**
- **Government policies, whenever govt. creates an agency, it creates an entry point for interest groups – more groups needed to form in order to protect their stakes in these agency activities.**
- **Diversity of population – countless social, racial, economic and geographic cleavages.**
- **Diffusion of power in government. Political power shared by many → plenty of places in which a group can argue its case. The more places there are to influence policy, the more organizations there will be to exercise that influence.**



# REASONS FOR GROWTH OF INTEREST GROUPS

- **Weakness of political parties.**
- **Reforms of the 1970's opened up the lobbying process, (FECA and the explosion of PACs).**
- **Interest groups tend to beget interest groups ( when one is formed, another may be formed to counter it).**
- **Technology, e.g., computerized mailing lists to solicit funds, use of communications media and Internet.**

# TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

## TRADITIONAL

- **Goal: to promote economic interests of its members**
- **Types:**
  - **Agricultural: Grange, American Farm Bureau Federation**
  - **Labor: AFL-CIO, UAW, and Teamsters. Recent Decline.**
  - **Business: Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers**
  - **Professional: AMA, ABA**

# TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

## EQUALITY INTEREST

- **Goal: to protest the status of its members and to convince government to take remedial action**
- **Examples: NAACP, NOW**

## SINGLE ISSUE

- **Goal: to get government action on one overriding issue.**
- **Examples: Right to Life League, National Abortion Rights Action League, NRA, and MADD**
- **Polarizing effect of these**

# TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

## **PUBLIC INTEREST**

- **Goal: to bring about good policy for society as a whole**
- **Examples: Common Cause, various Nader organizations, Consumer's Union, environmental groups**

## **IDEOLOGICAL**

- **Goal: to convince government to implement policies consistent with their philosophies**
- **Examples: Christian Coalition, People for the American Way, Free Congress Foundation**

## **GOVERNMENTAL**

- **National League of Cities, National Association of Governors**

# FACTORS INFLUENCING INTEREST GROUP STRENGTH

## SIZE

- More members = more money, more votes
- More members also mean greater cross-pressure among members and possibly less focus
- As size increases, free rider problem increases.
  - Free riders are people who benefit from the interest group without making any contribution.
  - i.e., an elderly person will benefit from the group's lobbying efforts whether or not he joins AARP.
  - I.G. try to prevent this by giving incentives for people to join the group.

## SPREAD

- The extent to which membership is concentrated or dispersed - is important

# FACTORS INFLUENCING INTEREST GROUP STRENGTH

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: CENTRALIZED OR DECENTRALIZED

- An organization with separation of powers tends to be less cohesive than a centralized, disciplined group

## LEADERSHIP

- Leaders may either bring the various elements of a group together or sharpen their disunity

## RESOURCES

- Money
- Expertise
- Reputation
- Connections
- Volunteers

# TACTICS (TECHNIQUES) OF INTEREST GROUPS

## MASS MAILING (COMPUTERIZED AND TARGETED)

## LITIGATION (USED BY NAACP, ACLU, NOW, ETC.)

- *Amicus curiae* briefs - someone who is not a party to a case who offers information that bears on the case but that has not been solicited by any of the parties to assist a court

## USE OF MASS MEDIA

- Independent expenditures
- Issue advocacy

## BOYCOTTING

# TACTICS (TECHNIQUES) OF INTEREST GROUPS

## ELECTIONEERING

- Funneling volunteers to campaigns
- Encouraging members to vote
- Campaign contributions
- Endorsement of candidates
- “Targeting” of unfriendly candidates
- Issuing “report cards” to rate candidates

## INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM AND RECALL AT STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS

## LOBBYING



# **INTEREST GROUPS AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

## **THE POWER ELITE THEORY**

- **A small number of super rich individuals, powerful corporate interest groups, and large financial institutions dominate key policy areas.**
- **PACs encourage a close connection between money and politics.**

# INTEREST GROUPS AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

## THE PLURALIST THEORY

- **Many interest groups compete for power in a large number of policy areas.**
- **Pluralists emphasize that America's fragmented federal system and division of power into three branches provides many points of access to influence.**
- **As a result, no one group can dominate the entire system.**

# **INTEREST GROUPS AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

## **THE HYPERPLURALIST THEORY**

- **There are too many interest groups trying to influence public policy.**
- **When political leaders try to appease competing interest groups, they often create policies that are confusing and at times contradictory. As a result, legislators avoid making hard choices that are in the national interest.**
- **i.e., anti-smoking campaigns by public health groups and subsidizing the crops of tobacco farmers.**

# THE INFLUENCE OF LOBBYISTS

## WHAT IS LOBBYING?

- **Attempting to influence the decisions of policymakers.**
- **Interest group lobbying is generally most effective on narrow technical issues that are not well publicized (nobody has expertise on the issue except for the lobbyist)**

# THE INFLUENCE OF LOBBYISTS

## WHO ARE LOBBYISTS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

- **A person who is employed by and acts for an organized interest group or corporation to try to influence policy decisions and positions in the executive branch (bureaucratic agency) and legislative branch (congressional committee)**
  - Influence governmental decisions, especially legislation
  - Provide information to Government (Lobbyist = policy specialist, congressman = policy generalist)
  - Testify at hearings
  - Help write legislation
- **The revolving door is the employment cycle from government to interest group**
  - Government employee to lobby the agency they came from is illegal – conflict of interest
  - Congress to lobbyist is legal (with a “cooling off” period)
  - Iron triangles are mutually supporting relationships among
    - Interest groups
    - Congressional committees and subcommittees
    - Government agencies

# THE CASE FOR LOBBYISTS

- They provide useful information to government
- They provide a means of participation for people
- They provide a means of representation on the basis of interest rather than geography. A “third house of Congress.”
- 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment protection
- Lobbyists have always spent money. It’s more out in the open.
- As Madison points out in *Federalist #10*, the “remedy” of curing the evils of faction by eliminating their causes is worse than the disease. Potential loss of liberty is worse than the abuses of lobbyists.

# THE CASE AGAINST LOBBYISTS

- **Rich and powerful interests are over represented.**
- **Average and poor people are under represented.**
- **By safeguarding, liberty, equality is sacrificed.**
- **Single-issue lobbies, especially, contribute to political polarization.**
- **Lobbies contribute even further to diffusion of power, making it even more difficult for govt. to get things done.**

# REGULATION OF LOBBYING

## 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act and 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act

- **Provisions**
  - Defines lobbyist as one whose “principal purpose” is to influence legislation.
  - Registration required of lobbyists.
  - Disclosure required of lobbyist’s employer, finances, and legislation to be influenced.
- **Loopholes**
  - “Principal purpose” is ambiguous – only 6800 of 80,000 lobbyists are registered.
  - Disclosure statements are merely filed, not analyzed.
  - No enforcement mechanism.
  - The act covers only lobbying of Congress, and omits lobbying of executive branch.



# MONEY AND POLITICS

## EXPLOSIVE GROWTH OF PACs

- Interest groups use PACs to raise and spend money on election campaigns
- A PAC is a registered organization that donates money to campaigns and causes
  - In 1974, only 600 PACs existed. Now: more than 4600.
  - Reason: Congressional legislation that had the intent of preventing a few wealthy campaign contributors from helping candidates “buy” elections. Instead, Cong. wanted to “open up” campaign contributions to the masses, as represented by PACs.
  - PACs even donate to candidates facing no opposition. Why?
  - Important to keep things in perspective: most congressional campaign money comes from individual contributions.

# **THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES (PACs)**

- **PACs link two techniques of influence**
  - **Giving money and other political aid to politicians**
  - **Persuading officeholders to act or vote "the right way" on issues**

# THE GROWTH OF PACs

- **The 1970s brought a near revolution in the role and influence of PACs, as the result of post Watergate reforms, increasing the number of PACs from 150 to more than 4,000 today**
- **Corporations make up the majority of all PACs**

# HOW PACs INVEST THEIR MONEY

- **Campaign Contributions – Factors influencing who gets PAC money:**
  - **Incumbents (Political party affiliation is of little importance.)**
    - Incumbents win
    - Incumbents have shown to support the PAC's positions
    - Incumbents hold committee seats = more power
  - **Winners**
  - **Those who share a similar philosophy**
  - **Those who are likely to grant access**
  - **Tightness of a race, and the likelihood that the money will help make a difference in the outcome**
  - **Whether or not a candidate holds a committee seat of special importance to the PAC**
  - **PAC money makes up a higher % of congressional campaign funds than presidential campaign funds**

# HOW PACs INVEST THEIR MONEY

- **Voter education projects (mailings, fliers, commercials)**
- **Independent expenditures**
- **Through "bundling" contributions, PACs increase their clout with elected officials**

# DANGERS OF PACs

- **Ethical concerns: does a contribution “buy” anything?**
- **Special access of PACs that the average person lacks**
- **Drives up the cost of campaigning**
- **Over representation of those wealthy enough to have PAC representation**
- **Under representation of those who lack such representation**
- **Further incumbency advantage in elections**

# IN DEFENSE OF PACs

- **PACs provide a means of participation and representation for the average person**
- **Without PACs, only the wealthy could afford to run for office**
- **1<sup>st</sup> Amendment's right to petition the government**
- **Contributions are nonpartisan**
- **No conclusive evidence that PACs change congressional votes. Contributions likely to make a difference in arcane, obscure issues with little public awareness more than in issues of major importance with much public awareness.**
- **PACs provide political education**
- **PACs diversify political funding. W/over 4600 PACs, many interests are represented.**

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PACs

- **Depends on the context in which money is given and received**
- **Significant relationship exists between PACs giving money and receiving favorable treatment in congressional committees; still debatable on impact of contributions upon election outcomes**
- **PACs can help friendly incumbents with soft money contributions (unlimited contributions that presumably go for "party-building" activities)**



# **CHAPTER 7**

## **POLITICAL PARTIES: ESSENTIAL TO DEMOCRACY**

# WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?

- **A group of people seeking to control government by gaining office in elections and determining public policy**

# WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?

## THREE COMPONENTS OF PARTIES

- **Party-in-Government.** Party leaders occupy positions in:
  - **Presidency**
  - **Congress**
  - **State governors**
  - **State legislatures**
  - **Local governments (though sometimes these are nonpartisan positions)**

# WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?

## THREE COMPONENTS OF PARTIES

- **Party-in-Electorate**
  - **Registered Democrats**
  - **Democratic identifiers/leaners**
  - **Registered Republicans**
  - **Republican identifiers/leaners**

# WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?

## THREE COMPONENTS OF PARTIES

- **Party Organizations.** Parties are decentralized, along federal lines.
  - **National level**
    - **National Convention.** Highest authority
    - **National Committee.** When convention not in session.
    - **National Chairperson.**
    - **Congressional Campaign Committees (for House seats).**
    - **Senate Campaign Committees.**
  - **State Committee**
  - **Local Committees:** city, ward, precinct levels
  - **Neither DNC or RNC can “punish” state/local committees if they stray from the party line – again, parties are decentralized.**

# **FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

- **Control over many of these functions has been declining**
- **Register voters, mobilize voters, and get them to the polls**
- **Unify the electorate**
- **Provide “loyal opposition”**
- **Agents of political socialization**
- **Linking mechanism between people and government**
- **Provide Patronage**

# **FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

- **Organize the competition by designating candidates to run under their label**
  - **A party's ability to organize the competition is influenced by how states organize their ballots or the type of elections they provide**
    - **The party column ballot makes it easier for voters to vote a straight ticket**
    - **The office block ballot makes it harder to cast a vote for all the candidates of a single party**
- **Nominate candidates**
  - **Previously: caucuses >> nominating conventions**
  - **Now: primary elections**
  - **With advent of primaries, nominating function now seriously lessened.**

# **FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

- **Raise and spend campaign funds**
  - Declining importance w/advent of “candidate-centered” campaigns.
- **Simplify decisions for voters: provide “shorthand” through which busy and uninterested voters can base a voting decision, use of “party lens” by voters.**
- **Act as Moderating Influence on Government**
  - To win elections, parties must usually nominate moderate candidates who appeal to the vast center of the American electorate. Fringe elements squeezed out.
  - Criticism: To appeal to such a wide variety of party members, parties must avoid taking strong stands
- **Inform public about political issues through party platforms**
  - However, few people check platforms, which in any case are often broadly-worded, i.e., like train platforms: “something to get on rather than something to stand on.”



# RISE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

## OUR FIRST PARTIES

- Dangers of factions mentioned by Madison in *Federalist #10* and Washington's warning about the "baneful effects of the spirit of party."
- Parties became necessary to get things done, e.g., Hamilton's financial plan and support for Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase.
- Necessity of an institution that unifies government in order to overcome the systems of separation of powers and checks and balances that divide government.

# RISE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

**Historical development: the Six Party Systems in American history.  
Realignment occurs roughly every 36 years or so.**

- **1796-1820: 1<sup>st</sup> party system**
  - Federalists v. Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans
- **1824-1856: 2<sup>nd</sup> party system**
  - Jacksonian Democrats v. Whigs
- **1860-1892: 3<sup>rd</sup> party system**
  - Republican dominance as the party against slavery and the party that put the Union back together.
- **1896-1928: 4<sup>th</sup> party system**
  - Second period of Republican dominance with its coalition of big business and the working classes against the Democratic rural interests.
- **1932-1964: 5<sup>th</sup> party system**
  - Democratic dominance begun under FDR and the New Deal. FDR's grand coalition included urban dwellers, labor unions, Catholics, Jews, the poor, Southerners, Blacks, farmers.

# RISE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

**Historical development: the Six Party Systems in American history.  
Realignment occurs roughly every 36 years or so.**

- **1968-present: 6<sup>th</sup> party system**
  - **Era of Divided Government and Dealignment**
    - **Much split ticket voting**
    - **Presidents of one party (typically Republican) with Congresses of the opposite party (typically Democratic).**
    - **An era of party dealignment, as voters are moving away from both parties and are increasingly independent.**
    - **Nixon (“Southern strategy”) and Reagan built a coalition of disenchanting white suburban middle class, Southern white Protestants, big business**
    - **Clinton won twice in part because of his resurrection of FDR’s grand coalition, especially Southern middle class moderates (“Reagan Democrats”). Women’s votes were also decisive.**
    - **Election of 2000 gave us a Republican president who won only a minority of popular votes, a 50-50 Senate (which became a 50-49-1 Democratic Senate after Jeffords defection), and a House w/a narrow Republican majority**
    - **2004 unified Republican government**
    - **2006 divided government**
    - **2008 unified Democratic government**
    - **2010 divided government**
    - **2012 divided government**

# DIVIDED GOVERNMENT

- **Since 1953, we have had divided government twice as often as we have had one party in control of both legislative and executive branches**
- **Republican President and a Democratic Congress (control of even one house) or Democratic President & Republican Congress (control of even one house)**
- **Relative party strengths**
  - **National Government 2013-2015**
    - **President: Democrat**
    - **House: 233 Republicans, 200 Democrats, 2 vacancies (113<sup>th</sup> Congress)**
    - **Senate: 53 Democrats, 45 Republicans, 2 Independents (113<sup>th</sup> Congress)**

# MINOR (THIRD) PARTIES

## TYPES

- **Ideological**
  - **Communist Party, Libertarian Party**
- **Single issue**
  - **Free Soil opposed the spread of slavery**
  - **Right to Life opposes abortion**
  - **Know Nothings opposed Irish-Catholic immigration**
- **Parties centered around a strong personality**
  - **Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party**
  - **George Wallace's American Independent Party**
  - **Ross Perot's Reform Party**

# MINOR (THIRD) PARTIES

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIRD PARTIES

- **Raise issues that other parties must address, and often incorporate into their own party platforms. “Champions not of lost causes, but of causes yet to be won” (e.g., Populist Party: direct election of senators, income tax, etc.)**
- **Voice for the fringe elements in society**
- **Safety valve for discontent in society**

## EFFECTS OF THIRD PARTIES

- **Rarely win elections**
- **Influence the outcome of presidential elections (e.g., 1968, 1992, 2000): “spoiler role”**

# MINOR (THIRD) PARTIES

## OBSTACLES

- Two-party tradition (because of single-member legislative districts)
- Single-member, winner-take-all, plurality district system for *congressional* seats, as opposed to the multi-member, proportional system that is common in other countries
- Electoral College's Winner-Take-All system: Perot won 19% of the vote in 1992, but had zero electoral votes.
- Getting candidates on the ballot
  - Democrat and Republican candidates are automatically placed on state ballots
  - Minor party candidates must persuade registered voters to sign petitions in order to have their names placed on the ballot.
- Money
- Media coverage
- Exclusion from TV debates

# PARTY WEAKNESSES

## WHY ARE PARTIES LOSING POWER?

- **Parties lack strong rank-and-file membership/lack strong grass roots organization**
  - Anyone can join merely by registration
  - No duties or dues
  - Most activities occur only at election time
  - Most Americans are mere spectators, rather than participants, in party activity
  - Small percentages of “Strong Democrats” and “Strong Republicans”
  - Increase in percentage of Independents (though most of these are “leaners”)
- **Parties have lost many of their traditional functions, or these functions have been weakened:**
  - Nomination of candidates (now done by primary elections)
  - Funding of political campaigns (trend towards candidate-centered campaigns).
  - Unifying govt. (we often have divided government, and intra-party conflict can be strong).
  - Providing patronage (jobs now filled by Civil Service)



# PARTY WEAKNESSES

## WHY ARE PARTIES LOSING POWER?

- **Weak party discipline**
  - Split ticket voting (voting for some candidates from one party and candidates from another party). Voters feel less loyalty to parties.
  - Few penalties for politicians who stray from the party line. Since candidates are nominated by the people rather than by the party bosses, candidates feel less beholden to the party.
  - Candidates finance their campaigns on their own rather than rely upon the parties -> more willing to stray from the party line
- **Intra-party divisions**
  - Between party regulars and candidate loyalists/issue advocates.
  - Between Democratic liberals and moderates (e.g. “Blue Dogs” in Congress).
  - Between Republican conservatives and moderates.

# IMPACT OF PARTIES ON GOVERNMENT

## CONGRESS

- Majority party controls all committees.
- Majority party has chairmen on all committees.
- Majority party controls key leadership positions.
- Staffers are partisan.

## EXECUTIVE BRANCH

- Nearly all appointments to White House staff are partisan. Many go to people from election campaigns.
- Nearly all appointments to top positions in other parts of Executive branch are partisan.
- Development of Civil Service System has greatly reduced party influence over the bureaucracy.

## JUDICIAL BRANCH

- Nearly all appointments are partisan

# PARTY REFORM

## HISTORICAL ABUSES

- Control of nominations by bosses and caucuses
- Corruption of party machines (local, political organization in which an authoritative boss or small group commands the support of a corps of supporters and businesses - usually campaign workers - who receive rewards for their efforts), e.g., Tweed, Daley
- Unrepresentative nature -- young, poor, and minorities often excluded

## REFORMS OF PROGRESSIVE ERA

- Direct primary elections.
- Nonpartisan elections at state and local level.
- Civil Service expansion.
- Initiative, referendum, and recall.
- 17th Amendment.

# **OTHER FACTORS THAT HAVE WEAKENED THE PARTIES**

- **Candidate-centered campaigns (esp. after FECA).**
- **Rise of campaign consultants to take over many of the functions of parties.**
- **Public disenchantment with parties and politics during the 60s.**
- **Growth of interest groups -- have taken on some party functions.**
- **Development of mass media -- candidates rely on media rather than party organization to get message across. The Internet, especially, has become important for candidate fund raising, candidate web sites, candidate Facebook profiles, candidate advertising on web sites. Candidates can do these themselves and do not need the parties for these things.**

# EVIDENCE OF “DEALIGNMENT”

- **Rejection of parties rather than changing of party membership, as in realignment.**
- **Growth of political independents.**
- **Trend to "vote the man, not the party" and rise of ticket-splitting since 1950s. (Go over congressional and presidential elections in last 50 years).**
- **Counter arguments to dealignment theory:**
  - **Even though % of independents has increased, 2/3 of “independents” are actually “leaners.” They are, in effect, “closet Democrats” and “closet Republicans.”**
  - **Same % of pure independents in 1992 as in 1956.**

# REFORMS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY SINCE 1970

- **Prohibited unit rule, in which a state's entire vote at the convention was cast for the candidate with the most votes from the state's delegation (winner-take-all)**
- **Developed a "quota system" to ensure that the young, women, and minorities were represented in party affairs (esp. the national convention).**
- **Super Tuesday to give more clout to the South, and perhaps a more moderate nominee**
- **Superdelegates (those who can attend the convention by virtue of holding public office) give the "party regulars/pros" a chance to do what is good for the party, and not necessarily for the people. These were "created" in 1982 amidst concern that liberal activists and outsiders were taking over the party.**

# PARTY RESURGENCE

- **National party organizations are better funded than in the past. Soft money donations to national parties, though now banned, were important factors in elections in 1990s.**
- **National parties compensated for loss of soft money by raising more hard money.**
- **Both parties, w/better funding, hold training sessions for candidates: how to plan, raise funds, and organize.**
- **Very strong party unity scores (where a majority of 1 party voted against a majority of the other party) within Congress: 70%-80%.**
- **Party ID is still the best predictor of voting.**

# AMERICAN PARTIES TODAY

## REALIGNMENT AND CRITICAL ELECTIONS

- **Realignment - Sharp changes in issues, party leaders, the regional and demographic bases of power of the two parties, and structure or rules of the political system resulting in a new political power structure.**
- **Realigning elections are elections during periods of expanded suffrage and changes in the economy and society that prove to be turning points, redefining the agenda of politics and the alignment of voters within parties.**
- **A "critical" election usually serves as the basis for realignment.**



# AMERICAN PARTIES TODAY

## REALIGNMENT AND CRITICAL ELECTIONS

- A "critical" election usually serves as the basis for realignment.
- **Characteristics**
  - Intense electoral involvement by the voters
  - Disruptions of traditional voting patterns
  - Changes in the relations of power within the community
  - The formation of new and durable electoral groups
- **Four critical (or realigning) elections (each realignment lasts roughly 36 years)**
  - 1824: Andrew Jackson and the Democrats
  - 1860: The Civil War and the rise of the Republicans
  - 1896: A Party in transition
  - 1932: Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal alignment

# AMERICAN PARTIES TODAY

## DEALIGNMENT

- **Dealignment is the process whereby a large portion of the electorate abandons its previous partisan affiliation without developing a new one to replace it. It is contrasted with realignment.**
- **We are experiencing dealignment - that people have abandoned both parties to become Independents; however, most Independents are really partisans in their voting behavior and attitudes**
- **Dealignment has led to ticket splitting in recent times**
- **Other factors that have weakened the parties and contributed to dealignment**
  - **Candidate-Centered campaigns (especially after FECA).**
  - **Public disenchantment with parties and politics during the 60's.**
  - **Growth of interest groups – have taken on some party functions.**
  - **Development of mass media – candidates rely on media rather than party organization to get message across.**
  - **Growth of political independents.**
  - **Trend to “vote the man, not the party” and rise of ticket splitting (voting for candidates from both political parties).**

# INTO THE NEW CENTURY

- **A divided nation (Red States vs. Blue States)**
  - **Areas of party strength**
    - **South: Republican strength (very conservative)**
    - **Great Plains: Republican strength**
    - **Rocky Mountains: Republican strength**
    - **West Coast: Democratic strength**
    - **New England: Democratic strength**
    - **Swing (Battleground) states**
- **Democrats attracted Hispanics, African-Americans, union members, etc.**
- **GOP did well with white males, religious conservatives, higher income voters**
- **Differences over tax cuts, social issues, privatization of Social Security**

# PARTY IDENTIFICATION

- **Informal and subjective affiliation with a political party that most people acquire in childhood, a standing preference for one party over another**
- **Seven categories of party identification**
  - **Strong Democrats**
  - **Weak Democrats**
  - **Independent-leaning Democrats**
  - **Pure Independents**
  - **Independent-leaning Republicans**
  - **Weak Republicans**
  - **Strong Republicans**
- **Party identification is the single best predictor of how people will vote**

# **PARTY PLATFORMS AND PARTY DIFFERENCES**

- **Party platform - the official statement of party policy - is ambiguous by design**
- **Party platform positions rarely help elect a presidential candidate, but can hurt a candidate**
- **Differences at the national level between the two major parties were very sharp just before the Civil War and again during the New Deal**
- **Both major parties typically have been moderate, support a strong defense, a stable Social Security system, and economic growth**

# PARTY SYSTEMS

- **United States' electoral two-party system versus multiparty systems**
- **United States' winner-take-all system versus proportional representation in multiparty systems**
- **United States' two-party system tends to create centrist parties versus influence of extremists in multiparty systems**
- **Two-party systems lead to stable governments versus multiparty systems make governments unstable (coalitions form and collapse)**

# THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

- **To involve more voters and reduce the power of the bosses to pick party nominees, states adopted the direct primary, in which people could vote for the party's nominees for office.**
  - **By 1920, direct primaries were the norm for some offices in almost all states.**
  - **Direct primary reduces the power of political parties.**
  - **Direct primary = people vote directly for the party's nominee.**
  - **Direct primary is the typical method of picking party candidates.**
  - **Primaries vary significantly from state to state. They differ in terms of:**
    - **who may run in a primary and how one qualifies for the ballot;**
    - **whether the party organization can or does endorse candidates before the primary;**
    - **who may vote in a party's primary—that is, whether a voter must register with a party in order to vote;**
    - **how many votes are needed for nomination—a plurality, a majority, or some other number determined by party rule or state law.**

# THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

- **Open primaries**
  - Any voter, regardless of party, can participate in whichever primary he or she chooses (must state which party you are going to vote for)
  - Permits crossover voting—Republicans and Independents helping determine who the Democratic nominee will be, and vice versa.
- **Closed primaries**
  - Only persons already registered in that party may participate.
- **Blanket primaries**
  - All voters could vote for any candidate, regardless of party.
  - Permitted voters to vote for a candidate of one party for one office and for a candidate from another party for another office
    - Not permitted under either closed or open primaries
  - In 2000, the Supreme Court held that California's blanket primary violated the free association rights of political parties
- **Caucuses**
  - Local caucuses choose delegates to attend regional meetings, which in turn select delegates to state and national conventions, where they nominate party candidates for offices
  - The Iowa presidential caucuses >> first important test of potential presidential nominees



# **CHAPTER 10**

## **THE MEDIA AND AMERICAN POLITICS**

# **MASS MEDIA AS LINKAGE INSTITUTION**

- **The mass media are means of communication, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the internet, that can reach large, widely dispersed audiences.**
- **The mass media connect people to their government officials by interviewing citizens, presenting poll results, and covering protests.**

# CHANGING FACE OF MEDIA

- **The “old media”**
  - Newspapers: NY Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal
  - Television: CBS, NBC, ABC, FOX – decline of 4 major networks w/advent of greater competition from cable
  - Magazines: Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report
- **The “new media”**
  - Examples: CNN, MTV, Larry King Live, O’Reilly Factor, Hardball with Chris Matthews, Rush Limbaugh and talk radio, MSNBC
- **Characteristics:**
  - More interactive
  - More emphasis on entertainment – “infotainment”
  - Personalized
  - Emotional
  - Informal

# CHANGING FACE OF MEDIA

- **Media called "fourth estate" or "fourth branch"**
  - **Mass media vs. news media (part of mass media that stresses news)**
  - **Mass media - messages often simplified, stereotyped, formulaic**
  - **Investigative journalism – people focus on scandal, not political issues**
  - **"Horse race" journalism – who's leading in the polls**

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

## ***TELEVISION***

- **The 1960 presidential debate between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon marked a watershed event when television replaced newspapers and radio as America's principal source of political news.**
- **Most people now get their news from television; This innovation has changed the character of American politics**
  - **Focus is more on image and appearance**
  - **Communication is through "sound bites" (something quick and easy to remember); No in-depth analysis**
  - **30-second commercials influence elections; 10 seconds for "sound bites"**

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

## *TELEVISION*

- **Concern that television is allied with “big government:” use of television as electronic throne of President**
  - President can now bypass journalists’ annoying questions and go right to the people with a speech
  - Decline of press conferences
  - White House manipulation of television with photo opportunities and sound bites.
- **Concern that television has fostered cynicism, distrust and negativism towards government and politics – adversarial journalism**
- **Lack of competition (although advent of cable has made this less of a problem)**
- **Concern that people look at politics through the “camera lens” rather than the “party lens” → further decline of parties**

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

## *RADIO*

- **FDR was the first president to take advantage of radio – fireside chats**
- **Talk radio has been a major growth medium in the last decade (Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck) – talk show hosts have begun to play a prominent and controversial role in discussing political issues**

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

## ***NEWSPAPERS***

- **Typical perception of liberal bias, but they generally endorse Republican candidates. (Publishers tend to be Republicans.)**
- **Complaints from both liberals and conservatives:**
  - **Conservatives claim that reporters are too liberal: college graduates (often from elite schools) with hostility towards middle class values.**
  - **Liberals claim that publishers are conservative and therefore are more concerned with sales and profits than exposing social/political/economic evils → status quo bias.**
- **Concern about “revolving door” in journalism: former govt. leaders who become journalists → reporting is tainted.**
- **Newspaper circulation rates continue to decline because of television and the internet**



# THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

## *THE INTERNET*

- Although TV continues to be the most widely used source for political news, the internet is rapidly becoming a key source of information for the American public
- Especially popular with people under 30

# DOES THE MEDIA INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION?

## YES

- **Media help set national agenda**
  - **Agenda setting focuses public attention on certain aspects of American politics and ignores others**
    - **Influences what issues people think are important or not important**
  - **Stories that are likely to receive high ratings**
  - **Media can force politicians to confront issues that they might not have otherwise addressed**
- **Television “personalizes” elections**
- **Media stress short-term elements of elections at expense of long-term elements (e.g., party affiliation)**
- **Those who “consume” media in turn influence others**
- **Politicians frame issues; Influence the “spin” the media will give to their issues**
- **Rise of advocacy journalism/adversarial journalism rather than a mere reporting of the news**

# DOES THE MEDIA INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION?

## NO

- **Mass public pays little attention to the news (e.g., surveys showing how little people know about current affairs)**
- **Selective attention: many focus in on media sources they already agree with**
- **Selective exposure: screening out those messages that do not conform to their own biases**
- **Selective perception: many perceive news in the way they want to view it – they see what they want and filter out the rest**
- **Media are only one source of influence – political socialization suggests importance of family, schools, peers, and other influences**

# **EFFECTS OF THE MEDIA ON POLITICS**

## **SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESS**

- **Journalists need politicians to inform and entertain their audiences**
- **Politicians need journalists for media exposure**

# ROLES OF MEDIA

## GATEKEEPER

- Influence which subjects are of national importance, i.e. help to set national agenda. They make us believe what is important >> government has to address those issues.

## SCOREKEEPER

- Keep track of, and help make, political reputations, e.g., importance attached to Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary. Media follows day-to-day campaign activities, but emphasis on horse race element of elections at expense of issues.

## WATCHDOG

- Scrutinize people, places and events (e.g., Watergate). “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

# MEDIA INFLUENCES

- **Provide forum for building candidate images.**
- **Provide means for politicians to get public attention, e.g., McCarthy, Nixon's role on House committee on Un-American Activities).**
- **Act as linking mechanism between govt. and people:**
  - **In the past: People → Parties → Government**
  - **Now: People → Media → Government**
- **Contribute to higher cost of campaigning.**
- **Contribute to candidate-centered campaigns.**
- **Increase the role of campaign consultants.**
- **White House manipulation of media:**
  - **Photo opportunities**
  - **Sound bites**
  - **Spin control**
  - **Staged events**

# THE MEDIA AND VOTER CHOICE

- **Information about candidates**
  - What voters know about candidates is based largely on media coverage
  - The images voters require from the media tend to be more stylistic than issue oriented
  - Journalists are more likely to comment on the "horse race" (who's leading in the polls)
- **Negative advertising-widespread perception among consultants is that it works; idea of vote suppression**
- **Information about issues**
  - Ignoring charges of the opposition is no longer done, as candidates trade charges and countercharges
  - Advertising is the most important source of information in referendum elections
  - Negative ads may reduce turnout
- **Decision making**
  - Newspapers and television seem to have more influence in determining the outcome of primaries than of general elections
  - The mass media are more likely to influence undecided voters