What is a Party?

– The **party organization** is the party professionals who run the party at all levels by contributing time, money, and skill.

– The **party in government** includes the candidates and officeholders who serve at all levels of government.

– The **party in the electorate** are the millions of voters who identify strongly with a particular party and support its policies.
What Parties Do

• express the will of the people
• encourage unity
• Parties nominate find, recruit, prepare, and gather public support for qualified candidates.
• Parties inform the public
• try to shape public opinion
Roles of Parties

Parties play a key role in governing at all levels.

- Legislatures are organized along party lines and parties shape the electoral process.
- Partisanship guides many legislative votes and appointments to public office.
- Parties provide channels of communication between the branches of government.
Parties as “Watchdogs”

– minority party keeps a close eye on the actions of the party that controls the executive branch to make sure that it does not abuse its power or violate the public trust.
The Republican and Democratic parties dominate American politics.

Why is this the case?
– The Framers opposed political parties.
• Once established, parties became part of tradition.

• The nature of the election process supports the two-party system.
  – Nearly all American elections take place in single-member districts--only the one candidate who wins the largest number of votes gets elected to office.
  – This works against third-party candidates, who have little chance of finishing in the top two.
Tradition, cont.

• The two major parties write election rules that discourage non-major parties.
• Americans tend to share a broad ideological consensus.
Building Consensus

• Both major parties try to be moderate and build consensus.
  
  – Both parties tend to have a few major areas of policy differences while being rather similar in other areas.
  
  – Both parties must compete for the many voters in the middle of the political spectrum.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Spectrum</th>
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<td>Radical</td>
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<td>Liberal</td>
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<td>Reactionary</td>
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Multiparty Systems

- Multiparty systems are used by many democracies.
  - They have several major and many smaller parties.
  - Each party is based on a particular interest.
Multiparty Systems, cont.

- Multiparty systems tend to represent a more diverse group of citizens.
  
  The power to govern must usually be shared by several parties who join in a coalition.
One-Party Systems

• Only one political party exists, offering no real choice.

• Some U.S. states and districts are “modified one-party systems.”
  – In these places, one party repeatedly wins most of the elections and dominates government.
The Federalist Party was formed by supporters of the Constitution.

– They wanted a stronger national government
• Opposing the Federalists was the **Democratic-Republican Party**.

  – They wanted a more **limited national government**
The Democratic Party

• The election of 1796 was the first time two parties fought for the presidency.
  – The Federalists won, but faded from power after losing the 1800 election.
  – The Democratic-Republicans later split apart and gave rise to the Democratic Party.
The Era of the Democrats

• The Democratic Party won 13 of 15 presidential elections from 1800 to 1860.

• In the 1830s, President Andrew Jackson began a period of so-called Jacksonian democracy, marked by three major political changes:
  
  – Voting rights were expanded to include all white males, not just those with property.
  – A huge increase in the number of elected offices around the country.
  – The spread of the spoils system.
• The **Democrats** drew much of their support from **small farmers, pioneers, and slaveholders** in the South and West.

• Their greatest rivals were the **Whigs**, who were supported by **wealthier merchant and industrial interests** in the East.

Thomas Jefferson became President in 1803, ushering in an era of Democratic domination that lasted until the Civil War.
• The debate over slavery split the Whigs and the Democrats apart in the 1850s.

  – The Democrats were split between northern and southern factions.

  – Many Whigs and antislavery Democrats joined the new Republican Party in 1854.
Era of the Republicans

• The Republican Party won 14 of 18 presidential elections from 1860 to 1932.
• The Civil War crippled the Democrats.
• The Republican dominated nationally.
  – They had the support of farmers, laborers, business and financial interests, and freed African Americans.
  – The Republicans benefited from years of economic prosperity.
• An economic downturn made the election of 1896 critical.

  – Labor unions joined small farmers and small business owners to back the Democrats.

  – The Republicans won by appealing to a wider range of voters, but the Democrats gained new support outside the South.
– The Republicans lost the presidency in 1912 largely due to a third party candidate.

  • Former Republican Theodore Roosevelt ran as a member of the new Progressive Party and split the Republican vote, helping Democrat Woodrow Wilson win.
Return of the Democrats

- The Democrats won 7 out of 9 presidential elections from 1932 to 1968.
- The Great Depression sparked the comeback of the Democrats.
  - With the economy in ruins, the Democrats gained the support of southerners, small farmers, big-city political organizations, labor unions, and minority groups.

Era of Democrats, 1932–1968

1932 The Depression brings about a shift in the role of government, led by FDR (left), a return of the Democrats to power.
Era of Divided Government

• The Republicans won 7 out of 10 presidential elections from 1968 to 2004.

• The Democrats controlled Congress for most of this period.
  – Republicans controlled Congress from 1995 to 2000 while Democrat Bill Clinton was President.

• This division of power meant that neither party could easily control the agenda of the government without making compromises.
Republicans in the 1980s

• The Republicans made major changes to U.S. foreign trade and domestic policies during the 1980s.

  – Republican candidates Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush won three landslide victories during this period.
In recent years, control of Congress, particularly the Senate, has shifted back and forth between the major parties.

- Typically newly elected Presidents have a “coattail” effect that brings other candidates from their party to Congress. In recent years, this has not been the case.
Chapter 5: Political Parties
Section 3
Lecture Notes
Ideological parties are based on a particular set of beliefs that usually involve society, politics, and the economy.
Single Issue Parties

- Single issue parties emphasize one public policy issue.
  - For example, the Free Soil Party opposed the spread of slavery to the West.
Economic Protest Parties

- Economic protest parties arise in periods of economic trouble.
- They call for economic reforms.
Splinter Parties

• Splinter parties split away from one of the major parties.

  – They are often centered on a particular candidate who fails to win his or her major party nomination, or arise from a strong disagreement within a major party.
The Bull Moose Party

- The Progressive parties of Theodore Roosevelt and Robert La Follette split from the Republican Party.
  - Roosevelt’s party was nicknamed the Bull Moose Party.

- Splinter parties tend to break up when their leaders step aside.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt became the Progressive or “Bull Moose” party’s nominee in 1912 after losing the Republican Party’s nomination. How might this image have been used by the Progressive Party in the 1912 election?
• Minor parties can also play a spoiler role.

– By winning electoral votes or even enough popular votes to affect the outcome in a key state, a minor party can affect the outcome of an election.
• It is not common for a minor party candidacy to shift the outcome of a presidential election.

  – Theodore Roosevelt’s candidacy as a Progressive Party member most likely cost Republican William Taft the presidential election of 1912.

  – Ralph Nader’s Green Party may have cost Democrat Al Gore the very close presidential election of 2000 by gaining votes in swing states such as Florida.
Raising Public Awareness

• The most important role of minor parties is to raise public awareness of controversial issues.
A Decentralized Structure

- The President is the nominal leader of his or her party.
  - This means that the party of the President is typically better organized than its rival party.
  - The President’s media exposure and power to make appointments is valuable, but does not give him or her complete authority over all party activities.
– The nominating process can lead to competition within the parties.
– Nominations are made within the party and can divide party members if there is a dispute over nominees.
The national convention is held every presidential election year.

The convention names the party’s presidential and vice-presidential candidates, adopts the party’s rules, and writes the official party platform.
National Committee

• The national committee handles party issues in between conventions
National Chairperson

- The national chairperson leads the national committee.
  - The chairperson is chosen after the national convention by the presidential nominee.
– The national chairperson directs the work of the party headquarters and professional staff in Washington, D.C.

– In presidential election years, the national chairperson’s work involves the presidential campaign.

– In other years, the chairperson concentrates on building party unity, raising money, and recruiting new voters for the next election.
• Each party also has a campaign committee for each house of Congress.

• These committees work to get party members elected or re-elected to Congress.
Raising Funds

- Both parties spend a great deal of effort to make sure the party’s officeholders stay in power.
State Party Organization

- State law largely determines party organization at the state level.

- Most states have a central party committee headed by a chairperson.
• Local party structure varies a great deal.
• In some places local party organizations are active year-round, but usually they focus their efforts on the few months before an election.