

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

POLITICAL PARTIES

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. Summaries campaign practices
- B. Political party organization
 - 1. Americans and political parties
 - 2. Ideal parties
 - 3. Parties in reality

II. CAMPAIGNING:

- A. The film demonstrated (to me) the incredible lack of issue content in modern American political campaigns.
- B. The candidates' preoccupation with raising money.
- C. The heavy use of television.
 - 1. But rather than informing citizens, television seems to reduce political discussion to triviality.

III. PROPOSITIONS ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES:

- A. First, note this paradox:
 - 1. On the one hand, Americans by and large distrust political parties.
 - a. This distrust is part of the classical liberalism aspect of our political philosophy and culture that we discussed earlier.
 - b. Bits of evidence: nearly half of the voters call themselves "independent."
 - c. Slogan "Voter for the person, not the party" is taken as gospel.
- B. On the other hand, one can argue that strong political parties are essential for representative democracy.
 - 1. They are instruments for accountability and governance.
 - 2. *Here's a major proposition: the stronger the party system, the stronger the democracy.
- C. Weak parties have contributed to the stalemate that (many argue) characterizes American national government.
 - 1. For a view about political capacity and stalemate that is much less pessimistic than mine see David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern*.
- D. Weak parties especially disadvantage middle and lower classes.

IV. "STRONG PARTY SYSTEM" ON PAPER:

- A. What is a strong party system and why is it potentially useful for popular control of

democracy? The characteristics of a strong or disciplined party system:

- B. Functions of a political party system:
 - 1. Organize elections and educate and mobilize the voters (e.g., create excitement, encourage turnout, etc.)
 - 2. ***“Aggregate”** interests and demands.
 - a. Search for common interests and stress them over **“particular”** parochial demands.
 - 3. Offer meaningful choices by presenting a philosophy of government and a general program of action.
 - a. Develop and support a **platform**
 - 4. Recruit, train, and support legislative members **committed** to the party's general philosophy and platform.
 - 5. Governance: If it wins control of government, run the government roughly according to the platform.
- C. The organization of a strong party: a pyramid of power
 - 1. Leader and **“lieutenants”**
 - 2. Legislative members
 - 3. Party activists and workers
 - 4. **“Party in the electorate”**
 - 5. ***“Discipline”**: legislative members are required to support leaders and platform after debate and discussion.
 - a. Instruments of control: nomination, funding and support; favors
 - 6. Because a strong party **“disciplines”** legislative members voters can be reasonably certain that it will govern according to the platform.
 - 7. Moreover, it can enact policy in a timely fashion.
 - 8. **“Shadow government”**: the **“loyal”** opposition waits in the wings offering the electorate an alternative program. It too has control over legislative members.
 - a. Thus it offers a meaningful choice to the governing party.

V. APPROXIMATIONS OF STRONG PARTIES IN AMERICA:

- A. Is a strong party system desirable? possible? Consider two episodes in recent American political history.
- B. The first Reagan administration
 - 1. Reagan economic policy and the 1980 elections.
 - a. Republican capture the White House, the Senate, and practically speaking had control of the House. Hence government was nearly unified.
 - b. The Reagan platform and reconciliation vote in the summer of 1981.
 - c. Recession in 1981-1982
 - d. The Democratic response and the 1982 election.
- C. Newt Gingrich and the **“Contract with America”**

VI. NEXT TIME:

- A. Political parties as they are organized and function in the United States.
 - 1. The nomination system
- B. Reading:
 - 1. Patterson, *We the People*, Chapter 8. Skim pages 232 to 236 but read the rest of the chapter, especially the section on party organization, carefully.
 - a. Pages 255 to 261 briefly discuss candidate-centered campaigns, a topic of great importance.
 - 2. Be sure to start Heilbroner and Bernstein, *Debt and Deficits*.
 - 3. To explore the philosophies and platforms of the two major political parties go to:
 - a. Democrats: <http://www.democrats.org>
 - b. Republicans: <http://www.rnc.org>