

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

**POLITICAL PARTIES
(Continued)**

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. Parties organization in the United States
 - 1. Nominations
 - 2. Structure
 - 3. Money and politics
- II. A CONTRADICTION:
 - A. First, let's start with a seeming contradiction: democracy as a whole may work best when **some** (but only some) of its parts are not democratic.
 - B. A strong party system embodies this idea.
- III. APPROXIMATIONS OF STRONG PARTIES IN AMERICA:
 - A. The Contract With America
 - 1. The promise and the platform
 - B. The 1994 election
 - 1. Gingrich's leadership approximated that of a strong party leader.
 - 2. Enforcement of discipline: committee assignments, fund raising.
 - C. The "breakdown"
 - 1. Contract versus independent constituency interests and pressures.
 - a. Abortion
 - b. Term limits
 - c. Environmental regulation
 - 2. The Contract in a "divided" government
 - 3. In a sense, voters rejected the "platform"
- IV. THE NOMINATION SYSTEM:
 - A. Caucuses and conventions.
 - 1. The federal structure of parties:
 - a. Local to county to state to national
 - 2. The role of party leaders
 - 3. Advantage: party leaders seek to win and nominate accordingly.
 - B. The primary system
 - 1. Elections to select candidates
 - 2. Open and closed primaries.
 - a. Recent reforms

3. National conventions
 - a. Most delegates are pledged to a candidate and have little leeway to bargain.
 - b. Decision (i.e., choice of nominee) is usually a foregone conclusion.
4. Opens nomination process to mavericks, independent operators.
 - a. "Upstarts," "outsiders" frequently win.
 - (1) 1992: Clinton is the most recent example

V. THE AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM:

- A. American parties are de-centralized, somewhat loose coalitions of sovereign powers. They remind one of a feudal system of independent barons and knights.
 1. No hierarchy in the usual sense (e.g., national chairperson is not a "boss" in the usual sense of the word.)
 2. Leaders, legislative members, and candidates are independent entrepreneurs.
 3. No binding platform
 - a. Key elements of their programs are frequently implicit, not explicitly stated.
 - b. There is debate about how closely presidents follow the platform. But in any event, congressional candidates usually do not run on national platforms.

VI. EXPLANATIONS OF PARTY WEAKNESS:

- A. Constitutional system, especially federalism and independently elected legislative members, creates numerous power centers.
 1. Separate constituencies
- B. Candidate-centered campaigns: candidates (e.g., senators and representatives) have their own sources of support and power and do not rely on the central party organization. (Example: Biden)
- C. General-welfare liberalism: distrust of parties and party bosses.
 1. Perot's 1992 candidacy and Colin Powell are examples
- D. Recent trends in party development:
 1. *Nomination system: primaries vs conventions and caucuses
 - a. See above
 2. Television gives candidates independent "access" to voters.
 - a. Party leaders are "circumvented"
 - b. And it increases costs of running for office
 3. Campaign finance reform during the 1970s strengthened interest groups
 - a. Perhaps surprisingly, campaign finance reforms have (in my view) further weakened parties.

VII. CAMPAIGN FINANCES:

- A. The Watergate reforms.

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1. Disclosure
 2. Limits on spending
 3. Public financing of presidential elections.
 4. Political action committees (PACs)
 5. Federal Election Commission.
- B. Some unintended consequences
1. **Political Action Committees** (PACs): organizations that solicit contributions from members and others and distributes to candidates
 2. **"Soft money"**: contributions ostensibly made to parties for purposes such as "get-out-the-vote" drives, but in actuality support candidates at all levels.
 3. Spending limits and *Buckley vs Valeo*
 - a. The "money talks" decision
 - b. Wealth cannot be denied.
- C. The effect of reforms has been to weaken parties by giving group greater access through funding opportunities.
- D. The strength of interest groups and now their PACS.
- E. All of these developments conspire to weaken parties and strengthen both individuals and interest groups.
- F.
- VIII. NEXT TIME:
- A. Films on money and politics.
- B. Interest groups: any one who wants to know how politics must understand interest groups.
- C. Reading:
1. As noted last time, 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.
 2. I will try to schedule a "briefing" on *Debt and Deficits*
 - a. But start it now.
 3. Are you going to read *May God Have Mercy*