POLS 205

American National Government

Elections Unit, Lecture 2:

Democratic Weirdness

Political Parties, Interest Groups, Campaigns, and the Electoral College

Whodunnit?

Who or what is responsible for the decline of American political parties?

Were the parties a “dead man walking” once TV became common?

**1) Political Parties**

Part of our ongoing cultural imperialism

That is, 100 years ago, parties were confined to the US and Europe. Now they are everywhere!

We didn’t start out with them ourselves

They began to develop in the election of 1800: Federalist vs. Democratic Republicans

I hate labels!

But a party provides voters with information through the party label

What is a Party?

An organization that runs candidates for office under the party’s name.

An organizational structure for candidates and volunteers.

Provides information for voters:

Party label

Platform

Raises resources: Money and people to help candidates get elected.

And the number of the parties shall be two…

We have had more options from time to time

Other countries have a vast array of options

Why do you think we tend towards two?

Historic dualism

* The original fight between federalist and anti-federalists

Center-moderate-ism

* We’re not comfortable with revolutionary radicals

Winner take all structures

* Single member districts
* Electoral college
* (We don’t do proportional representation)

Thunder Stealing

* Our parties are very good at bringing in the ideas of third parties, co-opting their potential base

I’m independent!

“The number of political independents has continued to grow, as both parties have lost ground among the public. Based on surveys conducted in 2012, **38% describe themselves as independents**, up from 32% in 2008 and 30% in 2004. Meanwhile, the percentage of self-described **Democrats** has fallen from 36% four years ago to **32%** today. Republican identification has remained largely stable over this period (**24%** today, 25% in 2008). In 1991, however, there were nearly equal percentages of Republicans (31%), Democrats (31%) and independents (33%).” (Pew Poll) http://www.people-press.org/2012/06/04/section-9-trends-in-party-affiliation/

However, we don’t actually have 3 choices…

In the end, they must choose. (Swing Voters)

Thus in 2006 there was about a 52/44 Democratic/Republican voting pattern in the mid-term elections.

The 2008 Presidential Election was 53/46 in favor of the Democrats.

The 2010 mid-term for the House was 51.4/44.8 Republicans/Democrats, and the Senate split was 49.3/45.1.

In 2012, Obama (D) had 51% and Romney (R) had 47%

http://www.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx

Will this be the thing that killed the parties?

Or maybe this…

**2) I’m interested!**

25% of adults have worked for a political party or candidate

Less than 10% have been members of a political club or organization

60% of adults are members of one or more organized interest group

Which is Which?

Political Parties

Link **voters** to government by running candidates for office who advocate certain programs or positions and who will implement them if elected

Interest Groups

Link **people** to government by organizing folks with similar viewpoints on a specific policy area and presenting these views to government official (not necessarily elected)

Political Parties

Primary purpose is to choose and equip candidates

Limited to political activity

Broad array of issue

Stands taken on all policy questions

Must appeal to the broadest spectrum of electorate

Compromise is absolutely necessary

Diversity a fact - “Big Tent”

Interest Groups

Do not run candidates

Carry out political and non-political activities

May be concerned with only one or a very limited scope of issues

Less inclusive, smaller

Not as willing to compromise

More unity among members

Parties vs. Interest Groups

It’s a big enough umbrella…

But it’s always me who ends up getting wet!

Interest groups are the wave of the future!

How will parties adapt?

**3) Campaigns**

Caucus

Party members meet in person to select their candidates

Iowa holds the first caucus

These require a high amount of dedication, and often over represent the activist side of parties

Primaries

An election to select the individual who will represent the party in the general election

Closed primary

Only declared members of the party can vote

Independents have no say

Open primary

No restriction on who can vote, but you must choose on parties slate of candidates

SUPER DUPER TUESDAY! FEBRUARY 5th was a dud!

Now they are all racing to be first. We may even move into December.

* + But Arkansas gave up and went back to May!

Conventions

Every four years (quadrennially) each party holds a convention to nominate their candidates for President and Vice President

Delegates, selected during the primaries cast their votes for the nominee

These used to be actual contest, with political intrigue and multiple ballots. Now they are “week long political info-mercials”.

Debates

Head to head compare and contrast between the two candidates

The most unfiltered view you will get of the candidates!

The lesson of Nixon: shave and wear the face powder!

Ads

Sound Bites (smaller)

Visual Images

“Going Negative” 10:1

Mudslinging by proxy

“I’m George Bush and I approve this message.”

We’ve come a LONG way from:

“Gentlemen don’t run for office” to

Hunting for votes and dollars…

I ask you again, What will be the thing that killed the parties?

Do voters need parties to supply them with information anymore?

Do candidates need the parties to help them raise money?

4) The Electoral College

You are actually voting for an elector, NOT a Presidential Candidate

Each State gets electoral votes equal to the number of Senators (2) plus its number of House members (proportionate to the population).

Courtesy of the 23rd Amendment, DC gets 3 electors

Every state except Maine and Nebraska has a “winner take all” system.

There are 538 electors; you need 270 to win

There are 538 electors; you need 270 to win (the 11 largest states alone would get you 230)

Because of this, plurality (most votes, but not a majority) presidents are not uncommon

Minority Presidents include:

* Abraham Lincoln
* Woodrow Wilson
* Harry Truman
* John Kennedy
* Richard Nixon (1968) and
* Bill Clinton
* The Electoral College, not the popular vote, determined the winner in
* 2000 (Bush-Gore)
* 1888 (Harrison-Cleveland)
* 1876 (Hayes-Tilden) and

All Tied up:

If no one gets 270 electors, then the question goes into the House of Representatives to be decided, and I, and my canned goods go into hiding…

The election between Jefferson and Burr required 36 House votes in early 1801 to settle. Neither wanted to accept the Vice Presidency.

This was one reason for the passage of the XIIth amendment in 1804.

(It also set the stage for the duel between Burr and Hamilton in 1804.)

The House chose John Quincy Adams to be president in 1825. (There were four candidates, none of whom got the required majority. Andy Jackson made great hay of the “stolen election”.)