

Political Parties

Carl Johnson
Government
Jenks High School

Political Parties and What They Do

- Political Parties are one way in which people can participate in politics
- A political party is a group of persons who seek to control government through the winning of elections and the holding of public office
- There are two major political parties in the United States today
 - Republicans
 - Democrats

Functions of Political Parties

There are five functions of a political party

1. Nominating function –

- Selection of candidates who are then presented to voters (Recruitment)
- Work to get candidates elected to office
- This sets them apart from other groups in politics
 - Is an exclusive function of the party

Functions of Political Parties (con't)

2. Informer/Stimulator Function –

- Campaign for their candidates
- Take position on the issues
- Criticize the candidates and positions of their opponents
- Selects information to be presented that puts their party in the best possible light

Functions of Political Parties (con't)

2. Informer/Stimulator Function –

- Educates the voters through the use of
 - Pamphlets
 - Signs
 - Buttons
 - Stickers
 - Advertisements
 - Speeches, Rallies and Conventions
- Goal is to win the election by attracting the most voters possible, while at the same time offending the least amount of voters possible

Functions of Political Parties (con't)

3. Bonding Agent Function –

- Ensures the good performance of its candidates and officeholders
- Screens potential candidates for qualifications and character
- Prompts it's successful candidates to perform well in office

Functions of Political Parties (con't)

4. Governing Function –

- Our government is a government by party
- Organized along party lines
 - Partisanship – the strong support of the party and it's stance on the issues
- Most appointments to executive offices are made with party considerations
- Parties provide a basis for the conduct of government
 - Cooperation between the branches is essential if anything is to be accomplished
 - Parties allow the branches to cooperate

Functions of Political Parties (con't)

5. Watchdog Function –

- Parties, especially the party out of power, act as watchdogs over the conduct of the public's business
 - Criticize the policies and behavior of the party in power in order to gain power themselves
 - Ex. State of the Union address

Historical Beginnings of Political Parties

- The Framers of the Constitution were opposed to political parties
- The battle over ratification saw the birth of our first political party, The Federalists
- The Federalists were in favor of:
 - The Constitution
 - Stronger National Government/Strong Executive
 - Appealed to financial, manufacturing and commercial interests
 - Urged a liberal interpretation of the Constitution
- In opposition to the Federalists, another party called the Anti-Federalists were formed
 - More sympathetic to the "common man"
 - Wanted a limited government
 - Felt that Congress should dominate the new government
 - Urged a literal interpretation of the Constitution
 - Now called the Democratic party

Minor Political Parties

- Minor political parties have played important roles in American politics
- Provided alternatives to the positions of the major parties and have sometimes affected particular elections and shaped public policies
- There are four types of minor political parties
 1. Ideological parties are those based on a particular set of beliefs
 - A comprehensive view of social, political and economic matters
 - Most have some type of Marxist view involved
 - Socialist party
 - Communist party
 - Others, like the Libertarian party, emphasizes individualism and doing away with most of government's present functions

Minor Political Parties (con't)

2. Single issue parties focus on only one public policy matter and is usually indicated in their name
 - Most single issue parties have faded into history as events have passed them by, or as their themes have failed to attract voters
 - Some of the issues championed by single issue parties have become a part of the two major parties platform

Examples

The Free Soil party - opposed to slavery

The Right to Life party - opposes abortion

Minor Political Parties (con't)

3. Economic protest parties have been rooted in periods of economic trouble

- Unlike ideological parties, these have no clear-cut ideological base
- Some have focused their disgust and anger on the major parties due to the prevailing economic conditions in the country
- Some have been sectional parties drawing their strength from the agricultural South and West
- Each of these parties have disappeared as the nation has recovered from the economic trouble

Examples

The Greenback party

The Populist party

Minor Political Parties (con't)

4. Splinter parties are those which have split away from one of the major political parties
- Most of the more important minor parties in U.S. history have been splinter parties
 - Most are formed around a strong personality – most often someone who failed to gain a party's presidential nomination
 - These parties have faded when that leader has stepped aside

Examples

The Bull Moose party (1912)

The American Independent party (1968)

The Green party (2000)

Why Minor Parties Are Important

- Minor parties have had a major impact on both American politics and the major parties
- The Anti-Masons used the first national convention to nominate a presidential candidate in 1831
 - Now both major parties use this practice
- A strong minor party candidate can play the "spoiler" in an election and pull votes away from one of the major parties
- Unlike the major parties, minor parties have been willing to draw attention and take stands on controversial issues

Party Identification

- There are several factors why people choose and are loyal to a particular political party which is called party identification
 - Family – 66% choose the same party as their parents
 - Major Events – Civil War, Great Depression, etc.
 - Economic Status – Generalizations
 - Republican ~ Rich
 - Democrats ~ Poor
 - Age
 - Level of Education
 - Work Environment
- These are long term factors when it comes to voting behavior

Other Terms To Know

- Straight ticket voting is the practice of voting for candidates of only one party in an election
- Split ticket voting is the practice of voting for candidates of more than one party in an election
- Independents are those who have no political party affiliation
 - This group has grown large in number in the last 30 years or so...