

POLITICAL PARTIES

A group of individuals with some ideological agreement who organize to win elections, run government and make public policy

- Group power
- Parties attempt to create broad coalitions (links to proximity voting)
- Are a key to understanding how government is organized

ROLES OF PARTIES IN AMERICAN POLITICS

1. Provide/recruit candidates
2. Conduct elections
3. Educate the public
4. Organize government
5. Make public policy
6. Provide loyal opposition
7. Provide a “cue” for voters

CHARACTERISTICS OF AMERICAN PARTIES

Two Parties

- Fairly stable coalitions
- Third parties rare win and face structural barriers
- Single member districts, plurality vote winners

Highly Decentralized

- Linked to emphasis on state elections
- Parties have different “meanings” in different states
- “National” party a collection of “state parts”

Semi-public, Open Organizations

- No formal test for entry
- Laws (state) often limit party attempts to discipline members

Loose Coalitions, Fairly Non-ideological

PARTY REGULATIONS

- Founding Fathers generally distrusted parties and did not include them in the Constitution
- Parties quickly became part of how American politics worked
- Because of this key public role, parties were a logical “target” for regulation
- Most regulation comes through State law

Items that are covered

1. Access to ballot
2. Membership
3. Organization and required public meetings
4. Duties and powers of officers (especially endorsement or non-endorsement)
5. Party finances

PARTY ORGANIZATION