CHAPTER SEVEN

Voters and Political Parties

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter begins by examining the reasons for the growth of non-voting in America. Among these are social class, the political socialization process, electoral barriers (registration), and income and educational levels. Subjectively, there is the growing lack of political efficacy and distrust of government. The historical development of American political parties and the two-party system is discussed, as are maintaining, deviating, and realigning elections. The arguments of whether we are currently undergoing a political realignment are covered as well. The functions, organization, and present viability of our two major political parties are then discussed. The chapter concludes with a case study on “E-Campaigning in the 2000 Election.”

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading chapter 7, the student should be able to:

1. Explain those factors that condition whether a citizen will vote or not vote, such as class, occupation, income, partisan loyalty, registration requirements, and the sense of political efficacy.

2. Define and explain the significance of the political socialization process.
3. Diagram the structure of the modern American political party.

4. Discuss the evolution of the American party system, from the Federalists to the Whigs to the Republicans and Democrats.

5. Distinguish among maintaining, deviating, and realigning elections.

6. Itemize the main functions of a political party.

7. Explain the factors that have promoted, and currently weaken, the two-party system in America.

8. Discuss the arguments for and against a current presidential realignment.

9. Discuss the pros and cons of “E-campaigning,” using the 2000 election as a basis for that discussion.

10. Differentiate between “hard” and “soft” money and discuss the impact of the McCain-Feingold-Cochran campaign finance reform bill.

OUTLINE

I. Voters

   A. Who Votes, While citizens who are 18 or older and who have satisfied residency requirements are eligible to vote, voter turnout has declined in most recent presidential elections. The first significant increase since 1960 occurred in 1992, when 54 percent of the voting-age population voted, but declined again in 1996. In the 2000 presidential election, 51.2 percent (105 million people) of the eligible population voted (up. 2.2 percent from 1996, but lower than the 62.8 percent who voted in 1960). In 1998, only 36 percent of eligible voters turned out. So, what
influences people voting and why has non-voting generally increased?

B. Political Socialization. This is the process of learning political attitudes and behavior. Family background, schooling, peer groups, and ethnic and religious characteristics all influence the way people vote. Catholics vote Democratic more than Protestants and overwhelmingly favor aid to parochial schools; Jews and Blacks tend to vote Democratic and are more supportive of social programs.

C. Class and Voting. Class is defined as a group’s occupation and income and its awareness of its relation to other classes. Class is very important in shaping political attitudes. The three broad classes—upper, middle, and working—show differences in people’s political views. But these “objective” categories are “subjective,” because most Americans, whatever their incomes, view themselves as being middle class. However, class reflected in education, income, and occupation does influence people’s attitudes. For example, working-class people tend to be more conservative on civil liberties and more liberal on economic issues. Middle-class people show opposite tendencies in these two areas.

Government policies and economic growth impact classes differently. During the prosperous 1990s, the income for 90% of families barely changed, compared to a $69,000 increase in average income for the top 1 percent of Americans from 1996-1997. This increase was nearly triple the total average income of the bottom 90 percent.

II. Who Doesn’t Vote
A. Non-voting has grown in recent years and appears greater among the lower classes. Non-voters are less educated, non-White, rural, southern, poor, blue-collar, and very old or very young. Part of the reason for increased apathy derives from
alienating events, like Watergate and Vietnam. More important has been the socialization of the working class and the American belief in a “classless society,” which discourages working-class issues and participation. Generally, the “people with the biggest stakes in society are the most likely to go to the polls.”

B. Barriers. Electoral barriers and a lack of political efficacy have also been identified as reasons for low turnout among the poor and working classes. State registration laws often make voting inconvenient. But the 1993 Motor Voter legislation made registration easier by allowing voters to register when they get their drivers’ licenses. Still, in 1996, fewer people registered to vote and even fewer voted. By 1998, registration numbers increased, but voter turnout continued to decline.

C. Subjective Explanations. The category of “non-voters”—more than half of the American population—covers a great deal of ground. While it is true that non-voters feel alienated from government, this is also true for voters. Since the mid-1960s people have lost confidence in Washington. Indeed, today three out of four people say they no longer trust government—the exact opposite from the early in 1960s. Events such as Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Monica Lewinsky have contributed to a popular distaste for government. There remains an uncertainty about the causes of growing non-voting in America.

The vote is still a powerful agent of change. For example, even though Jesse Jackson was an unsuccessful presidential candidate, his two races increased the registration of new Black voters. This is turn allowed the election of officials who were more sympathetic to the needs of the poor. Another example was the 1994 congressional elections, when GOP control of Congress led to new conservative approaches to policy.
III. History of Political Parties

A political party is an organization that supports candidates for public office under a specific label. The Constitution, by decentralizing and diffusing power, created a need for political parties to centralize and concentrate power.

A. The Rise of Today's Parties: The Federalists and Anti-Federalists were originally factions that formed because of disagreement on constitutional issues. They later developed into parties. The Federalists championed a strong national government, while the Anti-Federalists became the Democratic-Republican party (led by Thomas Jefferson), supported the interests of the small farmer, and kept control of the government until 1828, when it split into two new parties, the Whigs and the Democrats. Under Andrew Jackson, the Democratic party became identified at that time with the common people. The Republican party, formed in 1854 as an antislavery party, first won the presidency with Abraham Lincoln.

B. Maintaining, Deviating, and Realigning Elections. Elections are either maintaining (keeping party strength constant), deviating (showing a temporary shift in popular support), or realigning (showing a permanent shift in support and strength). Between 1860 and 1932, the Republicans maintained control with only temporary deviations, for example, in the elections of Wilson in 1912 and 1916. In 1932, there was a major realignment in which the Democrats became the majority party under FDR. Some analysts feel that the 1980 election may have reversed this alignment, but even though Bush’s 1988 win was solid, lower voter turnout and the Democrats’ control of Congress make a near-term pattern of partisan balance seem more likely than realignment. Bill Clinton’s victories in 1992 and 1996 made the argument for Republican realignment doubtful, while the GOP’s control of Congress since 1994 (for the first time, a majority of southerners voted Republican for Congress) counters the
Clinton effect. The GOP kept its majority in Congress through the 1996 and 1998 elections, but through the 1990s, slightly more voters identified themselves as Democrats. Furthermore, the emergence of Ross Perot stressed the theme of party dealignment.

The year 2000 produced “ambiguous Republican victories.” For the first time since 1952, the GOP won control of both houses of Congress and the presidency. But the Senate was divided 50-50, George W. Bush lost the popular vote, and “liberal-leaning positions” (Gore plus Nader) accounted for 52% of the vote. In short, there remained an unsteady balance between the parties. Republican inroads in the South had not expanded nationally, while Clinton’s centrist policies promised that the Democrats might become a new “moderate majority.” Democrats also appeared confident that they would retake Congress in 2002.

C. Democrats versus Republicans versus Independents. There is a difference between party image and party reality. The image of the typical Republican (WASP, big business, law and order, etc.) and the typical Democrat (minority, working class, urban, etc.) are stereotypes, and the reality is more complex. Party leaders are more extreme in their views than are their moderate followers, and both parties are divided within by moderate and extreme wings. Independent voters are growing as party ties weaken. The “new independents” are as politically astute as partisans, although there is a debate over whether they are really closet partisans (the “myth of the independent voter”). Party identification is still the strongest predictor of voter behavior. But a decline in partisanship has led to the 2000 exit poll trends, revealing that 27 percent were independents, 39 percent Democrats, and 35 percent Republicans. In short, voters are less attached to the two parties (rise of media, candidate-centered campaigns, divisive events, issue voting).
D. Party Functions

1. To contest elections. The party takes positions on issues and gives people a basis for making a choice. It educates voters on the process and the issues, and recruits people to work directly in campaigns.

2. To organize public opinion. The party provides a channel of communication for people’s ideas, and for voter approval or disapproval.

3. To aggregate interests. The party organizes many special interests into larger coalitions under the party umbrella.

4. To incorporate changes. The party responds to movements outside the major parties that show widespread support.

IV. View From the Inside: Party Organizations

A. Machines—Old and Modern. Parties are no longer strongest at local levels. Rigidly organized local parties (“machines”) have been weakened by the institution of public welfare agencies, civil service reforms, and direct primaries. An example of the “old” machine was Richard Daley’s Democratic party organization in Chicago. It was based on ethnicity and patronage. “Modern machines” based on candidates, not parties, have used new voter-contact technology to prosper. Many members of Congress now maintain Leadership PACs that promote their ambitions for higher office through raising of money. Finally, most recent White Houses have been charged with using campaign staffers to form modern political machines (i.e., the “permanent campaign”).

B. American Party Structure. The pyramid structure of local, county, and state parties continues to underpin the national party organizations. Note that the job of “out-party” officials is “to show that the party is still alive” through fundraising and voter registration drives. For the in-party, government officials use the
party organization, not vice versa. Finally, state parties are usually stronger than local parties due to their linkages with the national party structure, professional staffers, distribution of funds, and patronage.

C. National Party Organization/Soft Money. Between elections, the national committee governs. Each party is officially governed by a national committee, which maintains a professional staff. Recently, led by the Republicans, the national parties have been strengthened. The GOP has retained a fundraising advantage over the Democrats, although the gap has narrowed (in 1999-2000, GOP party committees raised $692 million, the Democratic party committees $513 million). The GOP also holds a substantial lead in “hard money” compared to the Democrats. The GOP “remains the single most important source of money in American politics.” The GOP funding base also has produced party loyalty in Congress and the ability to buy expensive campaign technology.

Much of the party activity on the state and local levels are supported by “soft money,” which includes unregulated contributions that are supposed to be used for party-building and get-out-the-vote activities. The national party committees raise soft money from wealthy individuals, corporations, and unions. These large donations are very controversial, and led directly to the 1996 fundraising scandals. In response, the McCain-Feingold-Cochran Campaign Reform Bill, banning all soft money contributions to national political parties and phony advocacy ads run by corporations and unions around election time, was introduced in the 107th Congress. It eventually passed the Senate, but its future remained unclear in the House.

D. The National Convention. National conventions are held every four years. The delegates, chosen by state party organizations in various ways (70 percent chosen now through primary elections), adopt a platform, a statement on issues used to
distinguish the party’s position from that of the opposition. Individual “planks (issues)” in a platform can be controversial during a convention, as witnessed by GOP women in 2000 pushing (unsuccessfully) for a plank supporting abortion rights. By a simple majority vote, the delegates elect their nominee for president. In recent decades, the presidential nominee has been chosen on the first ballot. The nominee usually chooses a vice president who will “balance” the ticket. A good example was the Dukakis (Mass.) choice of Bentsen (Texas) in 1988. In 2000, the vice-presidential nominees were aimed at bolstering the weaknesses of the presidential nominees (i.e., Cheney’s experience in the federal government and Lieberman’s anti-Clinton stand on moral issues).

V. View From the Outside: The Two-Party System

The United States has a two-party system nationally, but locally, various arrangements have existed; the “solid” (Democratic) South traditionally had, until recently, a one-party system, and Minnesota is said to have a three-party system (Ventura and the Reform party).

A. Causes of the Two-Party System

1. Historic dualism. The original Federalist/Anti-Federalist division established the tradition of two-party domination in the country.
2. Moderate electorate. Did the system make voters moderate, or vice versa? Still, Americans do not like extreme political choices.
3. Structure of our electoral system. Plurality penalizes minority parties. By contrast, proportional representation ensures minority parties at least some representation.
4. The adaptability of the two major parties. This allows for the absorption of third parties and their ideas. Thus, the Democrats co-opted organized labor from the Socialists.
Al Gore tried to win votes from Ralph Nader in 2000 by stressing populist themes and charging the GOP with being the party of the very wealthy.

B. The End of the Two-Party System? The diminishing loyalty of voters to either political party and the rise of sentiment for third parties has led to the questioning the viability of the two-party system. The two-party system has prevented the country from being polarized, or severely divided. Yet, voter restlessness, as demonstrated by Ross Perot’s vote in 1992, has made the emergence of a third party a real possibility in the future. Nevertheless, the high cost of campaigning, electoral rules, and the single-member districts continue to favor two parties.

VI. Case Study: E-Campaigning in the 2000 Election

In the 2000 Election, the Internet proved valuable in the areas of fundraising, voter contact and advertising, and research. In terms of fundraising, Senator McCain raised $6 million from online sources (in the 2000 election up to 10% of all campaign funds were derived from Internet activity). The Internet was faster and more cost-effective than either mail or phones (Internet fundraising costs about 8 cents per dollar, compared to 50 cents by phone, 70 cents by mail). Regarding campaign content, both Bush and Gore used the Web, from allowing downloading of position papers to including video footage of campaign ads and online polling. As the author puts it, “the great advantage of the Web was that it allowed candidates to lay out their positions on issues without space or time limits.” Conversely, Internet ads were not widespread in 2000, due to uncertainty about its impact (compared to TV or mail) and concern that such e-mail ads would antagonize voters.

Virtual Grassroots Campaigning in 2000 was expanded, with both parties establishing thousands of e-mail precincts around the nation. Both sides used their sites to bash each other, with the GOP’s National Committee site being called “Gorewillsayanything.com.”!
E-mail for campaigning is cheap and can be done instantly. However, it requires e-mail addresses of voters, who in turn can assist in getting out the vote (Jesse Ventura used e-mail in his 1998 election for Governor, stamping out rumors that he favored legalized prostitution; Senator McCain recruited 26,000 online volunteers). In conclusion, much of the e-campaign lacks human emotion and personal contact, but further advances in technology may rectify this shortcoming.

**KEY CHAPTER TERMS AND IDENTIFICATIONS**

voter turnout
political socialization
social class--working, middle, and upper
class as reflected in education, income, occupation
“Motor Voter” legislation
electoral barriers to voting—registration, residency
nonvoters (half or more of the population)
political efficacy
political apathy
Jesse Jackson
subjective explanations for non-voting
political party
Federalists versus Anti-Federalists
Democrats and Whigs
Republican Party
maintaining, deviating, realigning elections
dealignment
Ross Perot, Ralph Nader
2000 election
the “typical” Republican
the “typical” Democrat
party followers versus leaders
liberals versus conservatives
strong and weak partisan voters
independent voters
myth of the independent voter
party functions--contest elections, organize public opinion, aggregate
interests, incorporate changes or reforms
political machines (Richard Daley in Chicago)
leadership PACs, GOPAC (Newt Gingrich)
the “permanent campaign”
“pyramid-shaped” party structure
in-party; out-party
national party committee
professional political staff
soft money (no federal regulation)
the McCain-Feingold-Cochran Campaign Reform Bill
hard money (regulated funds for federal candidates)
the “Keating Five”
national convention
party platform and individual “planks”
presidential primaries and caucuses
“balance the ticket”
one-party, two-party, multiparty systems
historic dualism
single-member district/plurality
proportional representation
adoption of third-party programs
prevention of “polarization”
E-Campaigning, online donations
Jesse Ventura and Senator John McCain
“Gorewillsayanything.com.”

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

1. Ask the class if American voters should be required to vote. Would a fine for not voting increase voting in America--why or why not? Second, ask for a show of hands on how many members of the class
are actually registered to vote (those students 18 or older). For those who are not, probe more deeply as to the reasons why.

2. Discuss with members of the class their earliest memories of political issues. Did parents discuss politicians and issues? Also, are the students’ political party affiliations the same as their parents? An informal poll could prove interesting.

3. What should be the role of money in politics? Should campaign money be regulated or should it be considered like free speech? How does the high cost of campaigns hurt the potential for third-party organizations?

4. Ask students if they have ever used political websites to find out more about American politics. If some have, then ask which sites have been used and why they are helpful (this could also take the form of a research assignment).

SUGGESTED RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

1. Examine why people vote the way they do. Have students do some informal polling to examine how people decide what presidential candidate to vote for. Are parties, the individuals, or issues most important in the decision? How important was what they heard during the campaign in making up their minds?

2. Assign several students to examine which issues influenced the outcome of the 2000 presidential election. Did the students interviewed mention the impact of these issues on how they decided to vote? How did both political parties try to “package” Al Gore and George W. Bush? Be sure the students cover the presidential TV debates.

3. Study the role of PACs and soft money in the political process. What interests do the big donors represent? Ask the students to analyze the current campaign reform bills.
4. How has the Motor Voter legislation worked in your locality? Have students interview people registering new voters to get a sense of the change that this reform has brought.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Class identification in the United States is
   a. constant.
   b. weak.
   c. strong.
   d. irrelevant.

2. Motor Voter legislation
   a. allows voters to register when they get their drivers’ licenses.
   b. was directly responsible for the increase in voter turnout in 1992.
   c. was struck down as unconstitutional.
   d. a and b only

3. Non-voters who feel “it won’t make any difference” act
   a. from a sense of arrogance.
   b. from a lack of political efficacy.
   c. due to a lack of partisanship.
   d. from a strong sense of class consciousness.

4. Trust in government
   a. rose when the Congress impeached President Clinton.
   b. is identified by non-voters as the main reason for not voting.
   c. has declined since the 1960s.
   d. all of the above
5. Which of the following is learned by children in the family regarding political attitudes, beliefs, or values?
   a. the political party preferred by their parents
   b. the advantages of a democracy
   c. pride in the nation
   d. all of the above

6. Jesse Jackson used his two presidential bids to
   a. register new Black voters.
   b. bargain with Democratic leaders on issues concerning poor Americans.
   c. alienate voters who opposed his liberal message.
   d. both a and b are correct

7. The best predictor of how a person will vote is his or her
   a. social class.
   b. income.
   c. party identification.
   d. age.

8. Who was the founder of the Democratic-Republican party?
   a. George Washington
   b. Thomas Jefferson
   c. Alexander Hamilton
   d. Andrew Jackson

9. Which of the following is a false statement about American voters?
   a. over three-quarters know the name of their representative in Congress
   b. most are well-informed about politics in general
   c. the majority engages in a wide variety of political activities
   d. all of the above are false
10. Which of the following was not part of the New Deal Coalition?
   a. eastern liberals
   b. White Southerners
   c. upper-class WASPs
   d. union members

11. The following is true regarding registered voters in America:
   a. Over 80 percent of them actually vote.
   b. They tend to be better educated than unregistered voters.
   c. Turnout for registered voters in the United States is about the same as it is for other nations.
   d. All of the above are true

12. The “typical” Republican voter
   a. supports limited government.
   b. supports affirmative action.
   c. belongs to a labor union.
   d. none of the above

13. According to the chapter, a party _____ political power.
   a. polarizes
   b. centralizes
   c. decentralizes
   d. balances

14. American political parties
   a. organize public opinion
   b. put together coalitions of different interests
   c. demand party loyalty on all issues
   d. a and b only
15. The two Republican elections of Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956 were examples of _____ elections.
   a. maintaining
   b. dealigning
   c. deviating
   d. realigning

16. Leadership PACs
   a. promote party interests across the country.
   b. lost their effectiveness with the resignation of Speaker Newt Gingrich.
   c. a and b are incorrect
   d. a and b are correct

17. Jewish voters
   a. vote like middle-class Protestant voters.
   b. vote like Black voters.
   c. are the most independent voters.
   d. support candidates promoting an “American First” agenda.

18. The newer style of political machines
   a. are centered on candidates, not party.
   b. is not as focused on ethnic group identity.
   c. use the mass media rather than personal contacts.
   d. all of the above

19. The Whig party joined others to form the _____ party.
   a. Republican
   b. Democratic-Republican
   c. Federalist
   d. Socialist
20. The national party committees
   a. have representatives from each state party organization.
   b. maintain large professional staffs.
   c. raise money from special interests.
   d. all of the above

21. Richard Daley’s political machine was located in the city of
   a. Chicago.
   b. New York.
   c. San Francisco.
   d. Boston.

22. Soft money
   a. helps fund state and local parties.
   b. is limited to $1,000 per election.
   c. funds congressional candidates.
   d. none of the above

23. What is now the single most important source of money in American politics?
   a. federal taxes
   b. oil companies
   c. the Republican party
   d. the Treasury Department

24. John Huang and Charlie Trie
   a. are examples of Bill Clinton’s “permanent campaign.”
   b. raised questionable donations in 1996.
   c. sponsored campaign reform legislation in 1998.
   d. coined the term “dead cat.”
25. According to the chapter’s case study, E-Campaigning
   a. is relatively useless in obtaining campaign research.
   b. was shunned by Senator John McCain.
   c. was especially effective in conveying the emotion inherent in politics.
   d. was more cost-effective than either direct mail or telemarketing.

26. Thomas E. Patterson has argued that
   a. media coverage of elections emphasizes the horse race too much.
   b. balancing the presidential ticket leads to defeat.
   c. the party platform is essential to understand politics.
   d. balancing the presidential ticket is essential for victory.

27. Which of the following is associated with proportional representation?
   a. single-party political systems
   b. multiple-party political systems
   c. two-party systems
   d. authoritarian political systems that have no political parties

28. The “myth” of the independent voter refers to this:
   a. the non-existence of independent voters
   b. that most of them follow politics closely
   c. that most are really undeclared partisans
   d. that most of them don’t follow politics closely

29. The two vice presidential nominees in 2000 were
   a. Lieberman and Cheney.
   b. Kemp and Gore.
   c. Mondale and Quayle.
   d. none of the above.

30. The New Deal Coalition has been weakened by
   a. the rise of independent voters.
   b. the strength of the Republicans in the South.
   c. the 1994 elections.
   d. all of the above
TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS

1. Throughout American history, there have always been many active and successful parties.

2. Most Americans view themselves as members of the middle class.

3. Non-voters tend not to be as wealthy as voters.

4. Motor Voter has been an unqualified success.

5. Voter turnout is greater in the U.S. than in any other democracy in the world.

6. The “Keating Five” illustrates the problem of wealthy individuals trying to buy influence through campaign contributions.

7. Single-member districts are an important support for the two-party system.

8. Soft money funds candidate activities such as Leadership PACs.

9. The “myth of the independent voter” is that they are as politically knowledgeable as partisan voters.

10. Democratic and Republican party followers often disagree more with each other than with their party leaders.
ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Political parties have in some ways strengthened, and in some ways weakened in recent years. Give examples of both trends. Why, in your opinion, did this happen?

2. Imagine that you are giving a speech to a group of poor people—welfare mothers, homeless, etc.—explaining why it is important for individuals to vote. What would you say to them?

3. Imagine that you are asking business leaders to contribute money to support your campaign for Congress. How would you ask? What would you promise them?

4. Are political campaigns too expensive? How can one balance the First Amendment with limiting the influence of wealthy political contributors?

5. Study a country that maintains a multi-party system. What is gained by having many parties? What is lost? Will the U.S. ever adopt that form of politics?

6. How do political parties in Africa and Asia differ from those in America?

7. Specify which political beliefs are likely to be preferred by liberals or conservatives?

8. Do you consider yourself an independent voter? Why or why not?

9. What recommendations can you think of to increase voter turnout? Conversely, how could you argue that apathy is good for the U.S. political system?

10. What is meant by both “old” and “new” party machines?