Before political parties, candidates were listed alphabetically, and those whose names began with the letters A to F did better than those later in the alphabet.

Parties give structure to national and state elections.

“The political parties created democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable save interns of the parties.”

Experience has taught us that free people create political parties to promote their own goals.

Parties serve many functions, including the important one of narrowing the choices for voters. They are both a consequence of democracy and an instrument of it.

Well-established parties help stabilize democracy.

WHAT PARTIES DO FOR DEMOCRACY

Party Functions

Political parties- organizations that seek political power by electing people to office so that their positions and philosophy become public policy.

1. Organize the Competition- by designating candidates to run under their label, parties recruit and nominate candidates for office, register and activate voters and help candidates by training them, raising money for them, providing them with research and voter lists, and enlisting volunteers to work for them.

Caucus/Convention system- permits party leaders to play a role in the selection of nominees.

Primary elections- the people vote to elect the nominees through the popular vote.

As more and more states turn to primary elections, the ability of party leaders to influence who runs under their party label is reduced.

Party column ballot- candidates are listed in party columns, which makes it easier for people to vote straight party.

Office Block ballot- organize the ballot by each office, which makes straight-party voting harder.

Nonpartisan elections- candidates do not indicate any party affiliation-state/local offices like treasurer, sheriff, etc.

2. Unify the Electorate- strong incentive in both parties to fight out their differences inside the party but then come together to take on the opposition. Parties need to reach out to voters inside their party and gain their support. They hope that if voters disagree with the party’s stand on one issue, they will support the party because they agree with it on other issues.

3. Help Organize the Government- Congress is organized along party lines. The political party with the most votes in each chamber elects the officers of that chamber, selects the chair of each committee, and has a majority on all the committees. Party control of both chambers was an issue in 2002.
Patronage - the party that controls the White House, gets to select party members as public officials or judges. Patronage provides an incentive for people to become involved in politics.

4. Translate Preferences Into Policy - even the party that wins an election usually has to moderate what it does in order to win reelection. The party that wins the election has a chance to enact its policies and implement its campaign promises.

Responsible Party System - European model of party government assumes that parties discipline their members through their control over nominations and campaigns. Officeholders are expected to act according to party wishes or they will not be allowed to run again under party label.

Candidate Centered politics - US system by which politicians are nominated largely on the basis of their qualifications and personal appeal, not party loyalty. Party leaders cannot guarantee passage of their program, even if they are in the majority.

5. Provide Loyal Opposition - accountability comes from the party out of power closely monitoring and commenting on the actions of the party in power.

The Nomination of Candidates

- Caucus - a meeting of local party members to choose party officials or candidates for public office and to decide the platform.

- Efforts have been made to make the caucus more representatives of rank-and-file party members. The Mixed caucus brought in delegates from districts in which the party had no elected legislators.

- Party Conventions - delegates, usually chosen directly by party members in towns and cities, selected the party candidates, debated and adopted a platform and built a party spirit - used in the 1830s and 1840s

- Direct Primary - election in which voters choose party nominees for office. Wisconsin was first to adopt in 1905. Today this is the typical method of picking party candidates, however they differ from state to state in terms of:
  - Who may run in a primary and how one qualifies for the ballot.
  - Whether the party organization can or does endorse candidates before the primary.
  - Who may vote in a party’s primary - whether a voter must register with a party in order to vote.
  - How many votes are needed for nomination - plurality, or majority, or other number.

- Open Primary - any voter, regardless of party, can participate in whichever primary he or she chooses.

- Crossover Voting - people from one party can vote for members of another party, vice versa.

- Closed Primary - only persons already registered in that party may participate.

Direct primaries have diminished the influence of leaders of political party - they now have less influence over who gets to be the party’s candidate, and candidates are less accountable to the party.
Iowa Presidential caucuses- 100,000 participate and are the first real test of a presidential nominee.
Candidates who attain at least 15% of the vote in the convention have an automatic right to challenge the winner at the convention, but they do not always exercise this right.

**Party Systems**
- Ours is a two party system- most other democracies have a multiparty system.
- Parliamentary Systems- usually have a head of the nation, often called the president, but also have a head of government- a prime minister or a chancellor, who is the leader of one of the large parties in the legislature.
- The multiparty system favors the existence of minor parties by giving them incentives to persevere.
- Proportional Representation- the parties receive a proportion of the legislators corresponding to their proportion of the vote.
- Winner-take-all system- only the candidate with the most votes in a district or state takes office.
- Majority- receive more than 50% of the vote
- Plurality- the candidate with the most votes (more than any other)
- In multiparty systems, parties at the extremes are apt to have more influence than in our two-party system. With a multiparty, their legislatures more accurately reflect the full range of views of the electorate.

**Minor Parties: Persistence and Frustration**
- Minor Parties- (third parties) those that arise around a candidate usually disappear when the charismatic personality does.
- Minor parties that are organized around an ideology usually persist over a longer time than those built around a particular leader.
- Minor parties have had an indirect influence in our country by drawing attention to controversial issues and by organizing such groups as antislavery and civil rights movements, however they have never won the presidency nor more than a handful of Congressional seats.
- “Spoilers”- often times third parties are accused of diverting votes away from the major party candidate and costing that candidate the election.

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES**

**Our first Parties**
- Parties were started largely out of practical necessity- the founding fathers recognized the need to organize officeholders who shared their views so that government could act.
Realigning Elections

- We have a two-party system with minor parties. Our parties are moderate and accommodative and open to people with diverse outlooks.
- Realigning elections- turning points that define the agenda of politics and the alignment of voters within parties during periods of historic change in the economy and society.
- 1824: Andrew Jackson and the Democrats- AJ failed to get a majority of the electoral college, and was defeated by John Quincy Adams in runoff election in the HOR - Jackson used interest groups to win in 1828.
- 1860: Civil War & Rise of the Republicans- dubbed the “Grand Old Party GOP” was supported by industrialists, financiers and merchants. The Democratic Party survived with its durable white male base in the South.
- 1896: A party in Transition- the two parties also differed over whether US currency should be tied to a silver or gold standard, with Republicans favoring gold and Democrats silver. Progressive era took over and was a period of political reform led by the Progressive wing of the Republican party. Women obtained the right to vote during this time as well.
- 1932: FDR and New Deal- was as turning point in American politics.
- Laissez-faire Economics- a hands-off approach of government staying out of the economy.
- Keynesian Economics- asserted that government could influence the direction of the economy through fiscal and monetary policy. New Dealers stepped in and fundamentally altered the relationship between government and society.
- FDR Democrats argued that the government had to take action to pull the country out of the Depression, but Republicans objected to enlarging the scope of government activity and intruding it into the economy.
- Each realignment lasted roughly 36 years.

Divided Government

- “Solid South- once loyal to the Dems, is now loyal in Presidential and increasingly in Congressional elections, to the Republicans.
- The shift in the South is explained by the movement of whites out of the Democratic party, largely as a result of the party’s position on civil rights. Made the Democratic party more unified and more liberal than in the days when more of its Congressional members had “safe” southern seats.
- Divided Government- since 1953, with one party controlling Congress and the other the White House, has been in effect twice as long as one party control of both legislative and executive branches.
- Republicans reaped the rewards of Democratic party divisiveness and generally weaker Democratic presidential candidates.

The 2000 and 2002 Elections: Into the New Century

- Tightly contested, they ended in a 50-50 tie in the Senate, a slim Republican majority in the House and a presidential race hotly contested for weeks.
- The 2002 election revealed a nation divided.
Dems raised large majorities of votes from African Americans, Hispanics, union households, Jews and Gays.

Republicans raised large majorities among white males, religious conservatives and higher-income voters.

AMERICAN PARTIES TODAY
- Americans are largely indifferent about political parties. Parties are seen as distrusted.
- Critics charge that the parties evade the issues; they fail to deliver on their promises, have no new ideas, follow public opinion rather than lead it or they are just one more special interest.
- Still, Americans understand that parties are necessary.
- Far more individual contributions are given to the Republicans than the Democrats.
- Successful party leaders must learn to be diplomatic and to compromise.

Parties as Institutions
- National Party Convention- supreme authority in both major parties, meets every four years for four days to nominate candidates for president and vice president and to ratify the party platform, adopt its rules.
- National Committee- in charge of the national party when not assembled in convention- they are now more representative of the rank and file members.
- National Chair- top official in each major party. They are formally elected by the national committee, but in reality it is the choice of the presidential nominee.
- Chairs are the heads of their national party apparatus, yet they remain largely unknown to the voters.
- Campaign Committees- from each party, work to recruit congressional candidates, train them and assist with financial backing.

**WEB SITE ADDRESSES ON PG. 175**

Parties at the Grassroots:
- The two major parties are decentralized, organized around elections in states, cities, or congressional districts.
- State Committees are led by state chairs- smaller versions of the national thing.
- Members of state committees are usually elected from local areas.
- The trend is toward stronger state organizations.
- Below state committees are county committees whose key role is to recruit candidates for local office like county commissioner, sheriff and treasurer.
- In recent elections, state party organizations have been the means by which millions of dollars in soft money have been spent.
- Focus of their soft money expenditures was candidate promotion.
- State parties simply became local bank accounts for national party committee candidate- centered campaign communications.

Parties in Government
- In Legislative Branch: their power and influence are determined by whether their party is in control of the House of Senate. The chairs of all standing committees in
Congress come from the majority party, as do the presiding officials of both chambers. Members of congressional staffs are also partisan.

- **In Executive Branch:** Presidents select almost all senior White House staff with people who have proven their party loyalty. The party that wins the White House has around 5,000 noncareer positions to fill and party commitment, including making campaign contributions is expected of those who seek those positions.

- **In Judicial Branch:** this branch is designed to operate in an expressly nonpartisan manner. Marbury v. Madison was landmark case separating partisanship from the judiciary. Today party identification remains an important consideration the naming of federal judges. Although party affiliation is not called for on any form, the individuals responsible for screening and evaluating candidates do take party and ideology into account.

- **At the State & Local Levels:** importance of party in the operation of local government varies among states and localities. In most states and many cities, parties are important to the operation of the legislature, governorship, or mayoralty.