

# Chapter 5: Political Parties

## Section 1

### Lecture Notes

# AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

## ► Objectives

1. Define a *political party*.
2. Describe the major functions of political parties.
3. Identify the reasons why the United States has a two-party system.
4. Understand multiparty and one-party systems and how they affect the functioning of a political system.

## ▶ Key Terms

- **political party:** a group of persons who seek to control government by winning elections and holding public office
- **political spectrum:** the range of political views, from the so-called left to the right
- **partisanship:** strong support for a specific political party and its policies
- **single-member districts:** a voting district in which only one candidate is elected to each office on the ballot

## ▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **plurality:** the largest number of votes cast for an elected office; this number does not have to be a majority of *all* votes cast
- **bipartisan:** an approach to policy making in which the two major parties find common ground on an issue
- **consensus:** general agreement among different groups on an issue
- **coalition:** a temporary alliance of several groups who join to form a working majority in a multiparty system

## ▶ Introduction

- What are political parties, and how do they function in our two-party system?
  - A party is a group of people who try to control government by winning elections and holding public office.
  - Political Parties:
    - Nominate candidates
    - Inform and inspire supporters
    - Encourage good behavior among members
    - Govern once in office
    - Perform oversight on government actions

## ▶ What is a Party?

- Checkpoint: What are the three elements that make up a political party?
  - The **party organization** is the party professionals who run the party at all levels by contributing time, money, and skill.
  - The **party in government** includes the candidates and officeholders who serve at all levels of government.
  - The **party in the electorate** are the millions of voters who identify strongly with a particular party and support its policies.

## ▶ What Parties Do

- Parties express the will of the people in government. They can also encourage unity by modifying conflicting views and encouraging compromise.
- Parties nominate—find, recruit, prepare, and gather public support for—qualified political candidates.
- Parties inform the public and try to shape public opinion, using all forms of media to campaign for or against opposing candidates and policy issues.

## ▶ Roles of Parties

- Parties act as a “bonding agent” to encourage accountability among their candidates and office holders.
- Parties play a key roles in governing at all levels.
  - Legislatures are organized along party lines and parties shape the electoral process.
  - Partisanship guides many legislative votes and appointments to public office.
  - Parties provide channels of communication between the branches of government.

## ▶ Parties as “Watchdogs”

- Checkpoint: How do parties perform the watchdog function?
  - In particular, the minority party keeps a close eye on the actions of the party that controls the executive branch to make sure that it does not abuse its power or violate the public trust.

## ▶ The Two-Party System

- The Republican and Democratic parties dominate American politics.
  - Only the candidates from the two major parties have a chance to win most elections.
- Why is this the case?
  - The Framers opposed political parties.
    - They saw parties as “factions” that caused disunity and conflict. George Washington warned against the dangers of parties.

## ▶ Tradition

- Once established, parties became part of tradition.
- The nature of the election process supports the two-party system.
  - Nearly all American elections take place in single-member districts--only the one candidate who wins the largest number of votes gets elected to office.
  - This works against third-party candidates, who have little chance of finishing in the top two.

## ▶ Tradition, cont.

- The two major parties write election rules that discourage non-major parties.
- For example, it is very difficult for a third party candidate to get on the ballot in all 50 states.

## ► Ideological Consensus

- Americans tend to share a broad ideological consensus.
  - The United States is made up of many different cultural groups.
  - While Americans don't agree on every issue, they do support the same basic freedoms.
  - Strongly divisive issues have tended not to last for generations.



## ▶ Building Consensus

- Both major parties try to be moderate and build consensus.
  - Both parties tend to have a few major areas of policy differences while being rather similar in other areas.
  - The similarities between parties arises because both parties are after a majority of voters in any given election. Both parties must compete for the many voters in the middle of the political spectrum.

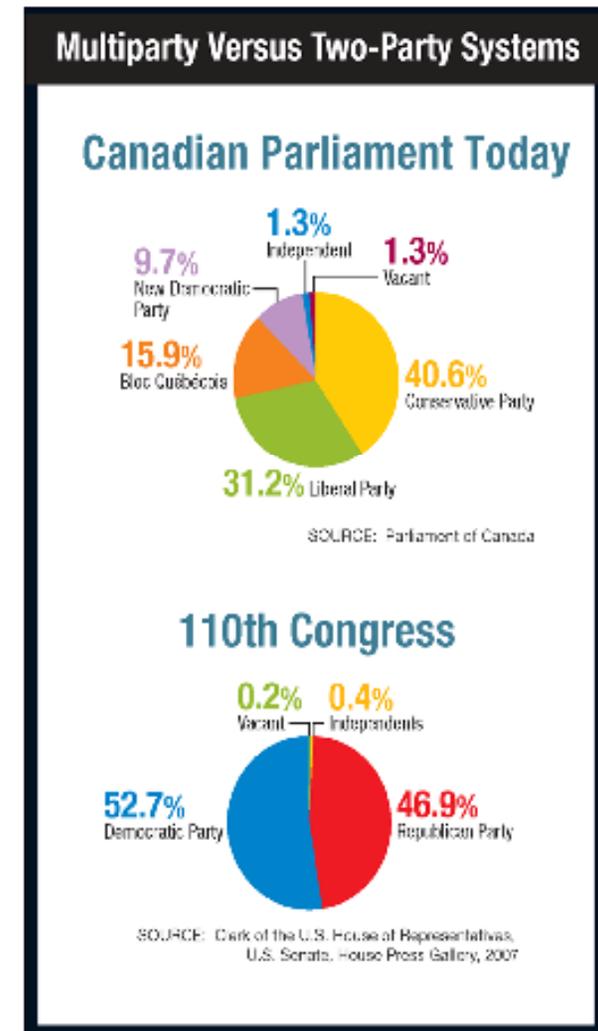
# ▶ Political Spectrum

<b>Radical</b>	Favors extreme change to create an altered or entirely new social system.
<b>Liberal</b>	Believes that government must take action to change economic, political, and ideological policies thought to be unfair.
<b>Moderate</b>	Holds beliefs that fall between liberal and conservative views, usually including some of each.
<b>Conservative</b>	Seeks to keep in place the economic, political, and social structures of society.
<b>Reactionary</b>	Favors extreme change to restore society to an earlier, more conservative state.



# ▶ Multiparty Systems

- Multiparty systems are used by many democracies.
  - They have several major and many smaller parties.
  - Each party is based on a particular interest.
    - These interests can include economic class, religion, or political ideology.



## ▶ Multiparty Systems, cont.

- Multiparty systems tend to represent a more diverse group of citizens.
  - Supporters admire this feature, arguing that it gives voters many more choices among candidates and policies.
  - However, this diversity often makes multiparty systems less stable. The power to govern must usually be shared by several parties who join in a coalition.

# ▶ One-Party Systems

- Only one political party exists, offering no real choice.
- Some U.S. states and districts are “modified one-party systems.”
  - In these places, one party repeatedly wins most of the elections and dominates government.



*“My goodness, if I’d known how badly you wanted democracy I’d have given it to you ages ago.”*

## ▶ Review

- Now that you have learned about political parties and how they function in our two-party system, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  - Does the two-party system help or harm democracy?