

# Chapter 5: Political Parties

## Section 4 Lecture Notes

# AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

## ► Objectives

1. Understand why the major parties have a decentralized structure.
2. Describe the national party machinery and party organization at the State and local levels.

## ▶ Key Terms

- **ward:** one of several voting districts into which cities are often divided for the election of city council members
- **precinct:** the smallest unit of election administration; voters in a precinct cast their ballots at a single polling place located in that precinct

## ▶ Introduction

- How are political parties organized at the federal, State, and local levels?
  - Parties are decentralized.
  - National Committees represent each party's interests at the national level.
  - Most states have a central party committee.
  - Local party structures vary quite widely from place to place.

## ▶ A Decentralized Structure

- Neither party has an unbroken chain of command running through all levels of government.
  - The President is the nominal leader of his or her party.
    - This means that the party of the President is typically better organized than its rival party.
    - The President's media exposure and power to make appointments is valuable, but does not give him or her complete authority over all party activities.

# ▶ Federalism

- The federal system is decentralized.
  - There are more than half a million elective offices in the United States spread across federal, state, and local governments.
  - The parties must satisfy a very wide range of voters, which makes it hard to have a unified party message.



How does this cartoon illustrate the decentralized nature of political parties?

## ▶ The Nominating Process

- Checkpoint: How does the nomination process contribute to intraparty conflict?
  - The nominating process can lead to competition within the parties.
  - Nominations are made within the party and can divide party members if there is a dispute over nominees.

## ▶ The National Convention

- Checkpoint: What happens at each party's national convention?
  - The national convention is held every presidential election year.
  - The convention names the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates, adopts the party's rules, and writes the official party platform.
  - The convention does not name candidates for other offices and has no control over the actual policies supported by candidates.

## ▶ National Committee

- The national committee handles party issues in between conventions.
  - Each party's national committee includes a committee member from each state.
  - The **Republican National Committee** (RNC) now seats the party chairperson for each state as well as representatives from various Republican groups and the U.S. territories.

## ▶ National Committee, cont.

- The **Democratic National Committee** (DNC) is even larger. It includes the party chair and vice chairperson from each state, additional party members from the larger states, and up to 75 at large members chosen by the DNC.

## ▶ National Chairperson

- The national chairperson leads the national committee.
  - The chairperson is chosen after the national convention by the presidential nominee.
  - Howard Dean (right) served as the Democratic Party's national chairperson in the 2008 election.



## ▶ National Chairperson, cont.

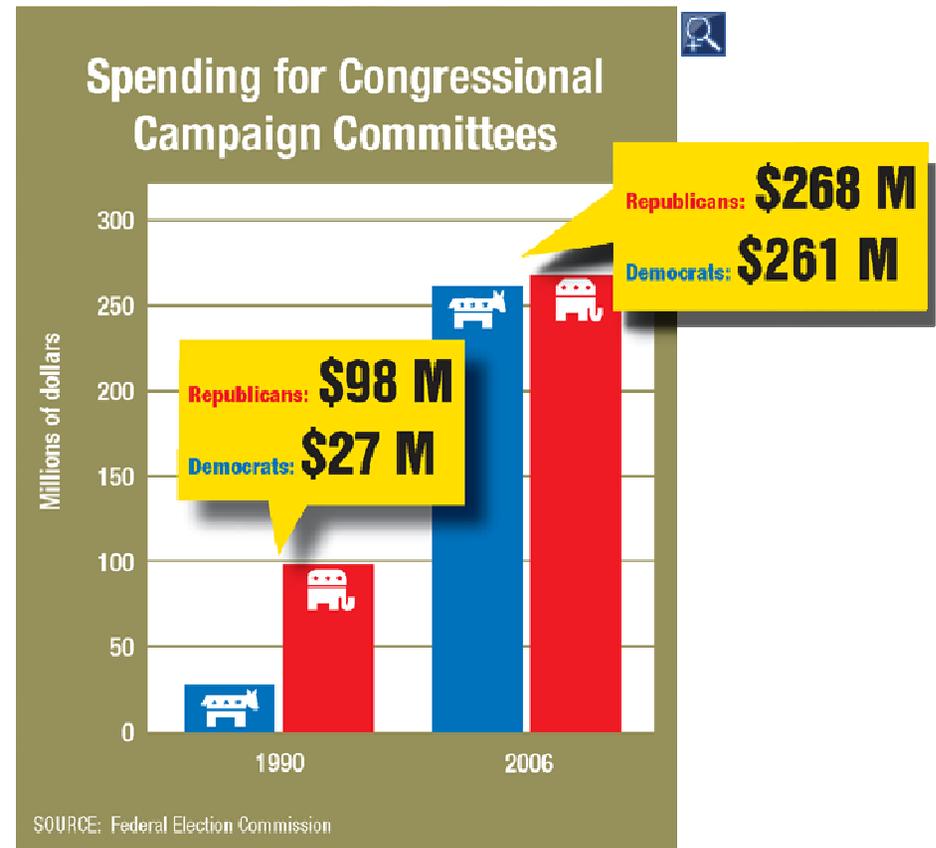
- The national chairperson directs the work of the party headquarters and professional staff in Washington, D.C.
- In presidential election years, the national chairperson's work involves the presidential campaign.
- In other years, the chairperson concentrates on building party unity, raising money, and recruiting new voters for the next election.

## ▶ Campaign Committees

- Each party also has a campaign committee for each house of Congress.
- These committees work to get party members elected or reelected to Congress.

## ▶ Raising Funds

- Both parties spend a great deal of effort to make sure the party's officeholders stay in power.
  - What does the chart show about spending over the last several years?
  - Why might well-known party members be invited to speak at dinners?



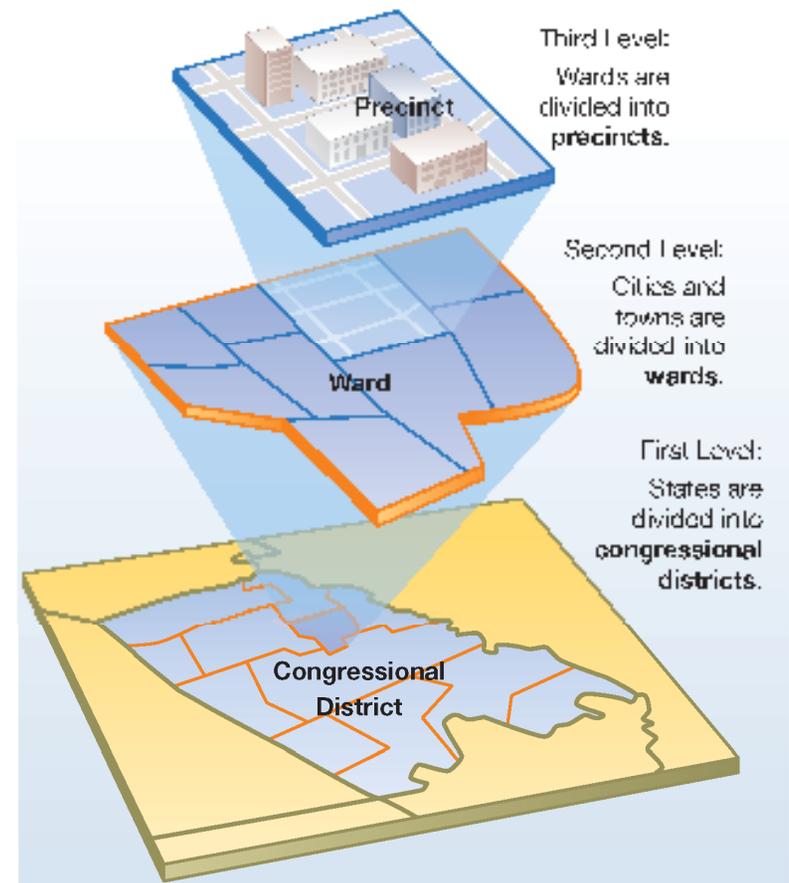
## ▶ State Party Organization

- State law largely determines party organization at the state level.
- Most states have a central party committee headed by a chairperson.
  - The committee members choose the chairperson, who often has a great deal of independence in conducting party affairs.
  - Committee members are chosen by a variety of methods: primaries, caucuses, or state conventions.
  - These officials try to promote party unity, find candidates, and raise funds.

# ▶ Local Party Organization

- Local party structure varies a great deal.
- In some places local party organizations are active year-round, but usually they focus their efforts on the few months before an election.
  - What kind of party jobs do you think exist at each level of organization?

## Local Party Organization



## ▶ Review

- Now that you have learned how political parties are organized at the federal, State, and local levels, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  - Does the two-party system help or harm democracy?