

SOCIAL STUDIES 1202

AMERICAN POLITICAL CHALLENGES

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II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

The American party system has a very complex structure from the national level down to the local level. Since the formation of political parties in the United States, these parties have refined their structure similar to a smooth-running engine. In this section we shall examine the functions of the

political parties: the process of selecting candidates, designing the platform, conducting and financing the campaign, carrying out programs, and criticizing the party in office. We shall look at every level of party organization and discover the importance of **politics**.

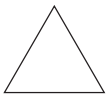
SECTION OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able:

3. To describe the functions of political parties.
4. To outline party structure on the national, state, and local levels.
5. To define the importance of politics.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.



nominate
patronage
plank

platform
political boss
politics

precinct
ward

FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The Constitution of the United States made absolutely no provision for the selection and nomination of candidates, the method of conducting campaigns, or the financing of campaigns for elections. It left the organization of political parties up to the people. As vital issues developed during Washington's administration, people began to take sides, just as people do today, over vital issues and problems that confront society. As these early groups discussed the issues that confronted them, organizations were formed and our first political parties developed.

Political parties have many functions. They are responsible for selecting the candidates they want to represent them in office. After the candidate for each party has been selected, the party program or **platform** is designed for the coming campaign. That each party finance its campaign properly is essential. Fund-raising is one of the most important functions of the party. The party is also responsible for carrying out the programs it designed before and during the campaign and for criticizing the party that is in office.

Selecting the candidates. Few candidates or office-seekers are **nominated** outside the party lines. That parties do the job of selecting candidates is important, because the number running for

public office must be small if one person is to get a clear majority of the votes necessary to win. Party Republicans will therefore choose leaders who will reflect their ideas, and party Democrats will do the same. After the candidates are chosen by their respective parties, the voters are given an opportunity to choose between them.

Designing the platform. The platform or program which a party's candidate stands on is put into writing and is adopted by the party at its national convention every four years. The parts of this platform are presented to the people in the form of **planks** or issues. Each plank represents a principle or point of view, such as civil rights, taxes, energy, or education, for which the party is willing to fight. Because both major parties try to appeal to as many voters as possible, the issues are seldom clear-cut. Party platforms have often been compared to those of buses or streetcars, to get in on, not to stand on.

Most candidates will pledge that, if they are elected, they will help translate these ideas into law. Candidate Douglas, for instance, might say, "If you want lower taxes, vote for me. I will reduce your taxes."

When issues are very controversial (hot), the platform writers of both parties will tend to use

words and phrases that become high-sounding generalities. Therefore the individual candidate must decide what stand on the issue he wishes to take. Once the candidate has been selected and the platform has been adopted, then the campaign is conducted.

Conducting the campaign. Few candidates for state or national offices could be elected without the support of their party. The party prints and distributes literature and contracts and pays for radio and television time including as much prime time as possible. The party does everything it can to sell its candidate to the voters. The party coins campaign slogans to help reflect the position of the party and its candidate. Billboards along all the major highways are plastered with names and pictures of the candidates. The party collects as much information as possible and distributes this information on behalf of its candidate. It is not uncommon to find bumper stickers and posters distributed everywhere. The party will often dig up facts, and sometimes fiction, that will work against the opposing candidate and will broadcast this information in hope of influencing the voters on election day. The national committee assigns leaders to go to certain states to help campaign for their party's candidate, especially in states where the opposition may be stronger.

Political campaigns waged by rival organizations focus the spotlight of public attention on the candidates, their qualifications, and sometimes the issues. The public is, thus, bombarded with party slogans, campaign promises, and speeches to the point that the fate of the nation is made to appear at stake. Locally, party workers strive to get people out to vote in their **precincts** on election day, even by offering free transportation and babysitting services. Every effort is made to get the voters to the polls to vote for the man or woman of their choice. After the election the losers normally congratulate the winners and then start making plans for the next election.

Financing the campaign. It takes money to win an election. In 1964 the cost of all political spending during the Presidential election was an estimated \$200 million, a rather staggering sum. The costs for the Presidential candidates alone was over \$29 million, or an average of 41 cents per voter. With the exception of extremely wealthy persons, most candidates cannot possibly finance their own campaigns on a district, state, or national level without the support of the party they represent.

The party acts as the central agency for collecting funds for all its candidates and often campaigns for all of these candidates as a unit. The party

distributes funds among them. If a candidate does not have a good chance of winning, he may find that the party will not allot him as much money as it would to a candidate who has an excellent chance of winning. The party prefers to spend the money that has been contributed on candidates who can get into office with the help of the party.

The problem of how to regulate the raising and spending of campaign funds in the public interest is vital. A law passed in 1966 allows each taxpayer to mark a box on his income-tax return requesting that one dollar of his tax (or two dollars for couples) go into a Presidential campaign fund to be shared by the parties. Nonresistant Christians would not mark this box. This law was suspended indefinitely in June 1967, and reinstated in 1972. Congress has also considered numerous proposals for permitting tax deductions for political contributions up to \$100, for requiring television stations to offer reduced rates for television campaigning, and for putting new limits on campaign spending.

The parties have to depend largely on private donations for their campaign funding. They also hold plate dinners that range from \$50 to \$10,000 a plate. Other donations come from corporations.

Carrying out programs and criticizing the party in office. The party in office is held responsible by the public for running the government and for the achievement of the party's program. If a Democratic President and Congress have been elected, they are considered responsible for laws passed and actions taken, even though many of these laws and actions may have been supported by the Republicans. Thus the Democrats have received both praise and blame, depending on the point of view, for such programs as Social Security, civil rights, or the Vietnam War. On the other hand, the Republicans and President Eisenhower were credited with the National Defense Education Act and the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The party out of office, desiring to get in, keeps a critical eye on the party in power to discover mistakes and to use those mistakes to their own advantage in the next campaign. However, this function is more than campaign strategy. A duty of the "loyal opposition" is to take a firm stand on the program of the administration and publicize its views. It must bring to the attention of the public any misuse of power, any serious blunders or errors of judgment, and any violation of constitutional principles by the party in control of the government. Various means are used, such as press conferences by minority party leaders and rebuttals of Presidential speeches.



Answer these questions.

- 2.1 What are the four functions of political parties?
a. _____ c. _____
b. _____ d. _____
- 2.2 How often is the party platform written? _____
- 2.3 What are planks in relation to the party platform? _____

- 2.4 What are five ways the party helps the candidate conduct his campaign?
a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

- 2.5 What committee sends political leaders to certain states to campaign for their party's candidate? _____
- 2.6 On an average, how much did it cost per voter to finance a Presidential campaign in 1964? _____
- 2.7 Who does the party distribute campaign funds to? _____

- 2.8 How can the average taxpayer be involved in campaign financing? _____

ORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The Democratic and Republican parties are complicated organizations. Both parties are highly organized at the national, state, and local levels. At each level each party has three basic units: the mass meeting, the committee, and specific leaders. The relationship of each unit varies at the three levels of government. It also varies from one state or community to another.

National conventions and committees. In theory the national convention of each party has the final authority in party matters. However, the national convention has very little power. The national

convention of each party meets only once every four years, when it nominates the candidates for President and Vice President of each party. The national convention also goes through the motions of electing the national committee, which acts for the party between conventions. Each state party, in reality, chooses its representatives on the committee.

The national committee of both major parties consists of one committeeman and one committeewoman from each state and from the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Republican National Committee includes each chairman of certain state committees.

A Republican state chairman becomes a member of his party's national committee if (1) his state cast its electoral votes for the Republican candidate in the preceding Presidential election, (2) most members of the Congress from his state are Republicans, or (3) his state has a Republican governor.

Both the Democratic and Republican national committees have their headquarters in Washington, D.C. They meet only one to three times a year. A main task of each party committee is to organize its next national convention. It chooses the city where the convention will meet and makes arrangements for a smoothly run convention. It prepares campaign literature; secures speakers; arranges tours for the candidates from city to city and state to state; contracts for billboards, radio, and television time; and assists the state and local committees to start their political machinery rolling. It organizes itself into working committees to provide money, publicity, and speakers. Most work of the national party organization is done by the national committee chairman and his staff.

The chairman of the national committee is generally selected by the party candidate for President. He is usually an outstanding party figure who has organizing ability and a great deal of popular appeal and money-raising ability. During Presidential election years, the chairman serves as national campaign manager and fund-raiser for his party. He decides where the campaign funds are to be spent and where the campaigning is to be heaviest. The chairman acts for the national committee in directing the public rela-

tions of the party. He assists the President in **patronage** matters by recommending appointees for federal jobs. Because appointees are cleared through his office, he grants favors where they do the most good, rewarding faithful party workers with jobs. Jobs are the fuel for the party machine.

The national chairman of the party out-of-power is also a busy man. His primary duty is to organize a program of positive education about the party to the public, to build up the party image, to direct publicity, and to keep the machinery from getting rusty. In other words, he needs to keep the party active on every level of the organization and to take political advantage of every mistake the majority party might make.

The national chairman also organizes the national headquarters of his party. He is the chief decision-maker within the national organization; but the headquarters staff, which consists of more than one hundred permanent members, does the detailed work for the party. It has campaign, public relations, and research divisions.

The Republican Party, for example, established a research and editorial division at its national headquarters in 1936. This agency is still in existence; and it prepares material for Republican members of Congress, coaches them on legislative subjects, issues propaganda material, and acts as the research agency for the Republican National Committee. It publishes *The Republican*, a monthly digest of information for Republicans. The Democratic Party publishes the *Democratic Digest*.



Complete these statements.

- 2.9 The three basic units of each party at each level are a. _____ ,
b. _____ , and c. _____ .
- 2.10 The national convention meets every a. _____ years to nominate candidates
for b. _____ and c. _____ .
- 2.11 The national convention consists of one a. _____ and one
b. _____ from each c. _____ , d. _____ ,
e. _____ , f. _____ , and the g. _____ .
- 2.12 The chairman of the national committee is usually selected by _____ .
- 2.13 The headquarters for both major parties are located in _____ .



Answer these questions.

- 2.14 How can a Republican state chairman become a member of his party's national committee?
a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

2.15 What are four duties of the national chairman?

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____

2.16 What are the official publications for the Republican Party and the Democratic Party?

- a. _____ b. _____

State committees. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have a state committee in each state. In most states the committee members are chosen in party primaries or at conventions. The state committees organize and manage campaigns for state offices and assist in local campaigns. They also raise money, make arrangements for primary elections, and organize the state conventions.

The chairman of the state committee is the official head of the state party. The committee formally elects him; but the governor, a United States senator from the state, or a group of powerful local officials actually handpicks the chairman. In most states these officials are also powerful enough to lead the party and to control the state committee. In some states, however, the committee chairman is an effective leader and controls or even chooses key state party officers.

Local organizations. Each of the two major political parties has a county committee in most counties of the United States. Committee members are chosen by county conventions or in primaries. The county committee elects the county chairman. He maintains communication with the state party organization and, in most states, is a delegate to the state committee. County chairmen have a great patronage power, which they use to sway the votes of delegates at both state and

national party conventions.

Below the county committees are the city, **ward**, and precinct organizations. Leaders of these organizations have the closest contact with the voters. City and ward committeemen are selected in local conventions or primaries. In some states precinct committeemen or captains are also chosen in primaries. In others the county committee selects them.

The United States has approximately 150,000 election precincts. In most of them, either one or both major parties have a precinct captain or committeeman. This official prepares the party *poll book*, which lists the names of the voters in his precinct and to which party, if any, they belong. He and his assistants try to make sure that all members of their party are registered to vote.

In the past, precinct captains or committeemen have frequently won votes by assisting voters and would-be voters in many ways. For example, they have helped immigrants become citizens, bailed out prisoners under arrest, found jobs for unemployed persons, and sometimes even given out charity. However, in many cities, the local party leaders and **political bosses** have lost the great influence they once had. Government welfare programs and rapid economic growth have made many voters less dependent on the help of the precinct leader.



Complete these activities.

- 2.17 How are committee members chosen in most states? _____
- 2.18 List five functions of state committees.
- _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- 2.19 How are political parties organized below the state level? _____



Complete these statements.

- 2.20 There are approximately _____ precincts in the United States.
- 2.21 Each precinct is run by a precinct a. _____ or b. _____.

IMPORTANCE OF POLITICS

Politics is the science of government. Every citizen is encouraged to take part in it. Party workers are needed on the local level. A greater understanding of the purposes and inner workings of government is also needed.

Various political clubs exist throughout the country that help to increase party loyalty. In 1964, for example, the Democrats had their "Volunteers for Johnson" groups; and the Republicans organized the "Citizens for Goldwater." Throughout the country each year, Democrats have held "Jackson Day" dinners, and Republicans have held "Lincoln Day" dinners. These dinners serve as a means of organizing the party and helping refill the party treasury. The price of these dinners goes as high as \$100 per plate. Loyal party officials, jobholders, and those whom the party has served well look upon the sum as an investment. Sometimes it takes years to pay off campaign debts. Various women's organizations support the party and do a great deal of the routine work to win elections. Other active groups are the Young Republicans and the Young Democrats.

For a democratic society to function effectively it is necessary to have an informed participating electorate. This presents a dilemma for nonresistant Christians. Those who profess Christianity and believe it is ethical to participate in government and fight in wars advance the following arguments for political involvement:

(1) The Old Testament records many great men of God who not only ruled (like David and Hezekiah), but also godly men (like Joseph and Daniel) who advised pagan kings and held high

positions of authority.

(2) Christians are to be light and salt; if good men fail to govern, the evil will triumph.

(3) There are notable examples of great Christian rulers like Constantine, Charlemagne, and others who advanced the cause of Christianity by the use of authority.

(4) Christ came to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. Thus, Christian legislators should pass laws designed to promote righteousness and suppress evils such as Gay Rights, abortion, etc. . . .

(5) Jimmy Carter was a "born again" Christian who sought to bring integrity to the government and peace to the world.

Our Anabaptist forefathers wrestled with this question. In Article 6, of the Schleithem Confession of Faith adopted in 1527, the question is asked, "Shall one be a magistrate if one should be chosen as such?" The answer is as follows:

They wished to make Christ king but He fled . . . For He Himself says he who wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Also, He Himself forbids the employment of the force of the sword saying, the worldly princes lord it over them, etc. . . . but not so shall it be with you. Further, Paul says, "Whom God did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Also, Peter says, "Christ suffered (not ruled) and left us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

To whom shall we listen today? Shall we turn our backs on the views of our church fathers and

support the Evangelical movement which seeks to elect “born again” men to office?

To answer the five Evangelical reasons for involvement in politics we would say:

(1) David, Hezekiah, Joseph, and Daniel were all Old Testament men who lived under the Old Covenant but now we have a New Covenant and a different set of principles.

(2) True Christians are light and salt, but Christ commanded His disciples to seek the servant role, not the role of rulers. He said the pagans seek lordship, but we should seek servanthood.

(3) Men like Constantine and Charlemagne professed Christianity, but their devotion to Jesus Christ is open to grave question. The era of Christian rulers only occurred after the church compromised with the Roman Empire and was no longer faithful to many apostolic practices and beliefs.

(4) Legislatures can pass laws to promote righteousness, but unless people’s hearts are changed, they will not obey them. Many states had laws forbidding adultery, fornication, and many other Biblical taboos, but they are no longer enforced as many people openly practice sin.

(5) While Jimmy Carter tried to bring integrity to government and peace to the world, he used the world’s methods to accomplish his ends. He increased the military budget and used methods of force and threat to accomplish his aims. Jesus made

it clear to Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world. If it were, His servants would fight. If His kingdom is not of this world, neither should His true disciples try to rule it. Our witness is to be the witness of pilgrims and strangers who testify to all men the good news of salvation and teach repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. This does not mean we should not encourage honest government by being examples of good stewardship and citizenship. The role of the Christian is to submit to those in authority, pray for those in authority, respect those in authority, and pay taxes.

Men who rule wisely should be commended by Christians. Tyrants and evil men need to be warned that they will need to answer before the God of heaven for their evil deeds and tyrannical rule. When Paul spoke to the Roman governor, Felix, about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, Felix trembled and said, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

It is good for Christians to be informed as to the issues of the day. We often make ourselves the laughingstock of the world with our ignorance of the times and the issues. It is important that we know why we refuse to participate in war and politics, so that we can give an answer to every man that asks us the reason for the hope that lies within us.



Do these activities.

- 2.22 Define *politics*. _____
- 2.23 Give three examples of Biblical political leaders. _____
- 2.24 Give five reasons why Evangelical Christians support political action.
- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____