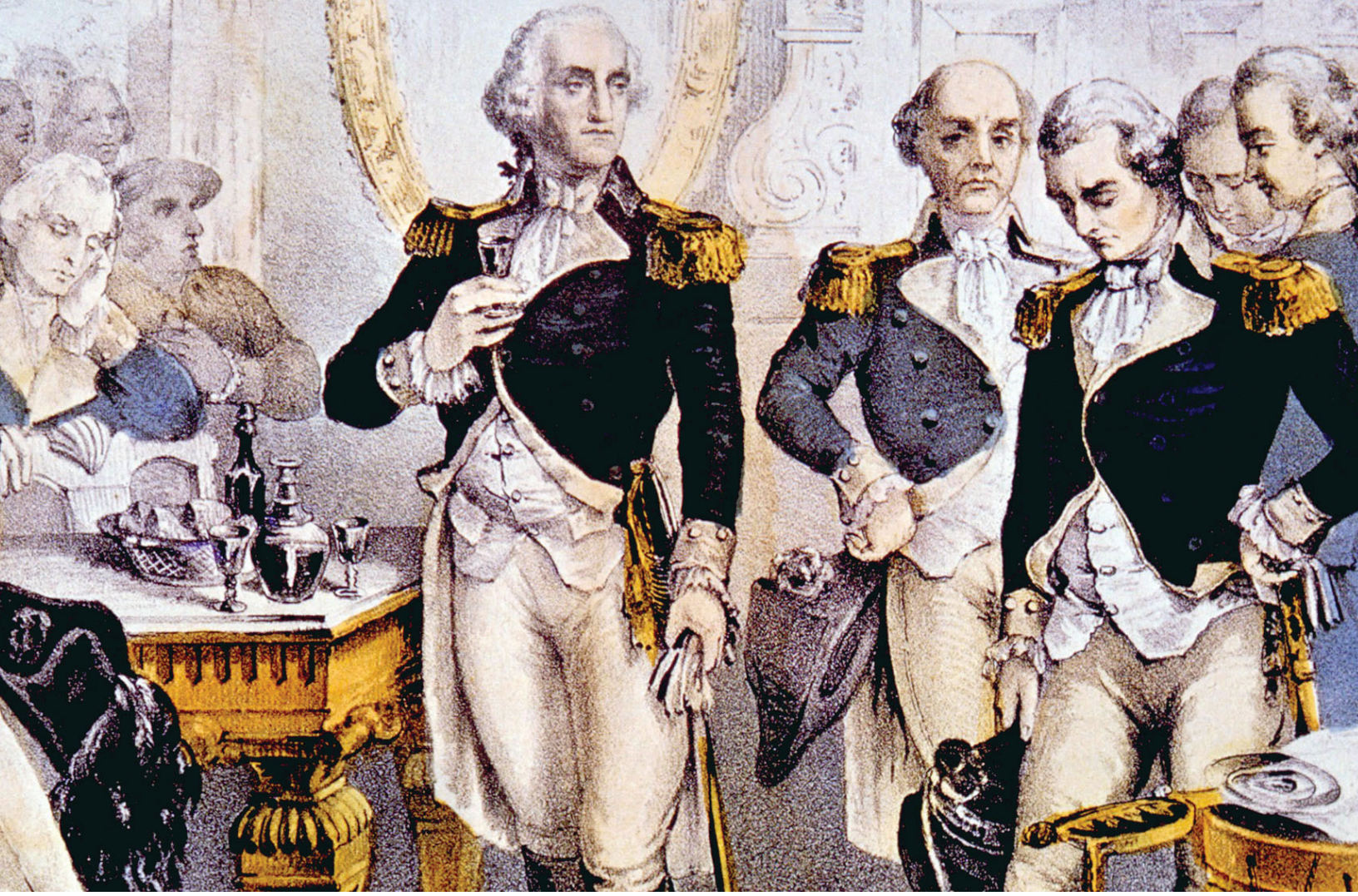
Chapter 07

Interest Groups & Political Parties

In This Chapter



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Chapter Objectives

People get involved in politics not just as individuals but also as groups. This chapter examines the uniquely important role that two kinds of groups—interest groups and political parties—play in the American political system. The first part of the chapter focuses on interest groups, their activities, and the reasons behind differences in their effectiveness. This discussion sets the stage for an examination of some of the major interest groups on the American political scene today and an evaluation of the role that interest groups play.

The second part of the chapter focuses on parties, which differ from interest groups in that political parties run candidates for public office. By trying to elect members to office, the party serves a variety of important political functions, for example, channeling and clarifying political consensus and conflict, training political leaders, and organizing elections and government.

The American parties form a loosely organized two-party system, a system that is in transition. Are the parties in trouble? What does the future hold for them? These questions are considered in this chapter.

7.1 Interest Groups in American Politics

Interest groups are associations of people who hold common views and who work together to influence what government does. Their interest is in a position, benefit, or advantage (such as favorable treatment under the tax laws) that they want to protect and perhaps enlarge. Interest groups look out for their members' political interests by campaigning for policies that promote their goals and by opposing policies that work against those goals. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), one of the largest groups of unionized labor in the nation, obviously seeks to win favorable wage and job benefits from companies employing its members; however, it also exists to ensure that government protects its unionizing activities and adopts policies on issues such as trade, interest rates, and education that promote the well-being of its members.

AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D.C. (Wikimedia Commons)

Interest groups have been a prominent feature of American politics since the earliest years of the Republic. During the thick of the public debate over the adoption of a new constitution in 1787, James Madison wrote in *Federalist* No. 10 about the divisions he saw as naturally developing in a society:

> A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points … have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for the common good. … The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government.

interest groups
Associations of people who hold common views and who work together to influence what government does

pluralist democracy
A system in which the people rule and have their interests protected through the interaction of many different social, political, and economic groups, and in which the principal task of government is to manage group conflict and cooperation

melting pot
Characterization of America as the coming together of a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and religious groups

Compared to other countries, interest groups in the United States play a particularly prominent role in political life. Chapter 5 reported Verba and Nie's finding that roughly 30 percent of Americans (communalists and complete activists) engage in group activities and that joining and working through groups to solve community problems is more common in the United States than in other democracies. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars studying the American social and political system have focused on interest groups as a uniquely important element of American life. As noted in "Politics and Ideas: Pluralism and Elitism," many see these groups as the basic building blocks of American political life. Perhaps the dominant view is of America as a **pluralist democracy**: American society is made up of many different groups, each looking to secure its members' interests. The principal task of government is, therefore, one of managing the interplay of group interests.

Why American society and politics should be so group-conscious is hard to say. Probably the best explanation is that America is the coming together of so many diverse groups—the "**melting pot**" of different races, nationalities, religions, cultures,

and languages—that the variety itself constantly calls attention to the existence and the activities of groups. Beyond being one of the most universally identified features of American politics and society, interest groups are also among the most controversial. Interest groups have long been praised as one of the most important contributors to the success of American democracy. As interest groups have become more visible, more sophisticated in their tactics, and more powerful, they are now sometimes condemned as one of the greatest threats to the continuing viability of the American political system. These are concerns that we will return to later.

7.1a Characteristics of Interest Groups

A stunning variety of organizations fit under the general definition of interest group. The different forms and features that interest groups assume can have an impact on a group's political effectiveness. Of course, no determinant of effectiveness is absolute. A group's influence must be measured relative to the groups with which it contends. Several major characteristics distinguish interest groups and affect their influence.

One of the most obvious characteristics is size. Interest groups vary dramatically in size. All other things being equal, the bigger the group, the more effective it is likely to be. Large groups can mobilize more members, raise more money to support lobbying activities and favored political candidates, and swing more votes in an election. Although, as will be seen shortly, being large is not an unequivocal advantage for an interest group, given a democracy's reliance on plurality and majority decision-making, being large is generally better than being small. Sometimes, when an interest group is large or a number of interest groups band together in a common cause, the result is referred to as a **movement**, as in the civil rights movement, environmental movement, feminist movement, or Tea Party movement.

Interest groups vary in membership procedures. Some groups enroll members formally, as when labor unions ask workers to join and pay dues. Other groups rest on a more informal notion of membership in which people just think of themselves as belonging. People may never go to church but nevertheless think of themselves as Catholics. Even this informal sense of membership can vary. Some groups evoke in their membership a very strong sense of identification with the group, whereas others do so only weakly. For still other groups, membership is not even a choice of the individual involved—people belong by the fact of having a particular characteristic. African Americans and women are often identified as important interest groups, but most African Americans and most women belong to no race- or gender-based organization. They may not even think of themselves as belonging to some large group. Rather, they are labeled as a member of the group simply because they possess a particular characteristic. Generally speaking, the stronger the bonds of the individual members to the group, the more effective the group will be.[1]

Membership in some interest groups can be involuntary, with people belonging simply by sharing a particular characteristic, such as women in the military. (Wikimedia Commons)

Groups also differ in how well they are organized, and the success of an interest group in advancing its interests depends in some measure this criteria. A strong network of communication and control can amplify the power of one

movement
An effort to attain an end through an organized set of actions and individuals

POLITICS & IDEAS

Pluralism and Elitism

Pluralism is one of the fundamental ideas of American politics. It is hard to appreciate this unique American contribution to political thought without understanding a little about the political perspective with which it so sharply contrasts. Elitism holds that power in a society is concentrated in the hands of a small group of powerful people, a ruling class. This "elite" is often seen as exercising its power in ways that work to its own benefit and to the disadvantage of those whom it rules, the "masses." Other commentators portray elites as more benevolent, using their power to improve the lot of the less fortunate and to promote democratic values. The major American contributor to elitist theory was C. Wright Mills.[1] He saw real power in the United States as concentrated in the hands of the highest political, military, and corporate leaders. Mills did not argue for malevolent conspiracy. Rather, he saw the leaders of these institutions as coming from similar backgrounds, sometimes trading positions, interacting with one another, and therefore tending to hold similar values. Foremost among them was a belief in a strong and stable society.

Pluralism, in contrast, sees power as dispersed among many different centers of power, the leaders of various groups that make up society: labor organizations, professional associations, veterans, industries, and the like. Sometimes these centers of power are in agreement, but other times they are not. In any case, collective action is difficult without a reasonable amount of consensus among the groups about what should be done. This need for consensus compels politics to be moderate and stable. For example, laws passed since the early 1970s to reduce harmful automobile emissions were not imposed on the nation by a single small elite. The laws do not represent a "perfect" solution but rather a compromise among many groups: environmentalists, health care specialists, automobile manufacturers and dealers, labor unions, and petroleum companies.

What evidence of a power elite do you see in American society? Who is in it? To what ends does it use its power? What evidence do you see of pluralism in American society? What are the dominant groups? How do they use their power? How do the recent Tea Party and Occupy movements fit into this discussion?

1. *The Power Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

group, whereas poor internal organization and an inability to coordinate common efforts can dissipate the influence of another. Groups also differ in how democratic they are. Some groups are run as virtual autocracies with the leadership exerting almost dictatorial control over the group; others are very democratic. The relationship between how democratic a group is and its effectiveness is an uncertain one. Groups run democratically may benefit from the additional commitment that broad membership participation engenders, as long as members can reach substantial consensus in the group. When a lack of consensus hinders decision-making, however, the group may suffer from a lack of common purpose. Conversely, groups run by narrow elites may benefit from singleness of purpose but suffer a lack of support if members feel estranged from the leadership.

How connected a group is to politics can also affect its influence. Some interest groups have little if any connection to politics. They are generally not concerned with political issues or involved in political activity. A town's bowling league rarely has anything to do with politics. Indeed, it would probably suffer as an organization if it became embroiled in partisan political struggles. Its political significance lies in its potential to become politically active should its interests somehow be threatened in the political arena. Legislation to outlaw bowling as an immoral pastime would undoubtedly inspire it to take up the cudgels of politics. However, under normal circumstances it stands completely aside from the political fray. Other interest groups exist solely to pursue political ends. A political action committee, about which we will say more later, exists in most cases solely for the purpose of channeling money

to political candidates sympathetic to the interests of the group. Between these two extremes reside many organizations that are involved in politics to a greater or lesser degree. The more closely a group is tied to political issues, personalities, and organizations, the more likely it is to be effective politically.

Finally, groups differ in terms of their adherence to the essentially mainstream views of society. Some groups pursue a course outside the American mainstream. For example, the American Nazi Party leaned to the right of the mainstream and the Communist party to the left of it. Where a group stands in relation to the consensus of American politics has considerable effect on how influential it will be. The most passionate, best-organized interest group in the country will make little headway if it pursues policies that are far off the beaten track of American politics. Groups that argue for complete elimination of income taxes, for example, are likely to make less headway than those that argue for modest reform in the current system.

7.1b What Interest Groups Do

Interest groups engage in a broad range of activities to protect and advance the well-being of their members. Foremost among these activities is the attempt to influence public opinion. Many interest groups try to create public support or sympathy for their political goals. The major channel for accomplishing this is the mass media. When a group's political interests are threatened, representatives of the group use the media to make the group's views known. Interviews on radio and television news broadcasts, quotations in newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, blog posts, and essays for newspaper op-ed pages are all tools of influence for interest groups. In recent years, interest groups have developed the use of an individual (as opposed to mass) medium to influence public opinion. This is the **direct mail** method, in which computers generate thousands of personally addressed letters soliciting support and financial contributions from potentially sympathetic citizens. Even more recently, savvy interest groups have begun direct email efforts—targeting potential donors, providing them with a secure method of payment, and saving a stamp in the process.

Interest groups, of course, are involved in the electoral process through the votes their members cast. More important, interest group members can work in the campaigns of their favored candidates. In recent years, interest groups have been deeply involved in the financing of political campaigns, usually through **political action committees** or **PACs**. PACs are organizations devoted to channeling money from members of interest groups to political candidates sympathetic to the groups' policy preferences. By law, PACs must register with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), have at least fifty contributors, and make contributions to at least five candidates for federal office. No contributor can give any one PAC more than $5,000 per calendar year, and no PAC can give any one candidate more than $5,000 per election. Until recently, individuals were limited in their total contributions to candidates, parties, and committees to $123,200 over a two-year campaign cycle. In 2014, however, the Supreme Court case *McCutcheon v. FEC* held that limiting an individual's overall contributions was a violation of First Amendment freedom of speech guarantees.[2] So, while per-candidate limits still exist, individuals can give money to as many different candidates and PACs as they choose. One study estimated that this ruling could allow a single donor to contribute over $700,000 to candidates and parties in a single election cycle.[3] There is also no limit on how much PACs may raise or give in total. Nor is there any limit on the total amount that a candidate can accept from different PACs. In addition to making direct contributions to candidates, PACs may also spend as

direct mail

Method of contacting citizens by mail, rather than through personal contact or the mass media

political action committee (PAC)

Political organization set up to channel campaign money from a group to political candidates sympathetic to the group's political views

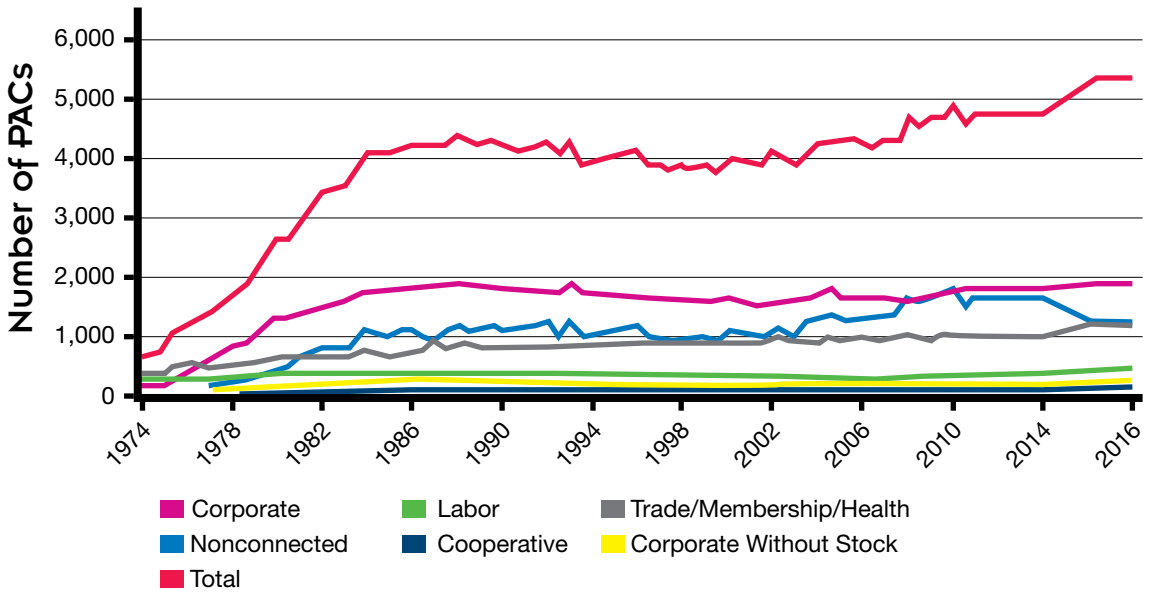
much money as they want on independent activities in behalf of one or more candidates, usually purchasing advertising in the broadcast or print media.

PACs blossomed as a result of the **Federal Election Campaign Act**, passed in 1971 and amended significantly in 1974 in an attempt to prevent the misuse of campaign funds brought to light in the Watergate scandal. A few PACs existed previously; but the 1974 act, by setting limits of $1,000 on individual contributions and $5,000 on group contributions, made group contributions more attractive and led to a proliferation of PACs. From 1974 to 2016, the number of PACs increased from about 600 to over 4,600 (see Figure 7.1). During the same period the amount of money spent by PACs rose from about $10 million to well over $1 billion. PACs have become a controversial issue in American politics, with many questioning whether the post-Watergate reforms have not been a cure that is worse than the disease.

Figure 7.1 | The Proliferation of PACs, 1974–2016

The number of political action committees has soared since the post-Watergate campaign reforms made them the preferred vehicle for channeling money from interest group members to political candidates.

SOURCE: Federal Election Commission, 2016.



In an effort to rein in what many perceived as out-of-control campaign spending, Congress passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002 (also known as BCRA or the McCain-Feingold Act, after its sponsors). Among the notable features of this law were a disclaimer rule that required candidates to verbally acknowledge their approval of radio and television advertisements created on their behalf and a "Millionaire's Amendment" that allowed increased contribution limits for candidates running against wealthy opponents. The Supreme Court, in the case of *Davis v. FEC* (2008), held that this amendment was unconstitutional. The Court found the burden imposed on wealthy candidates is not justified by a compelling government interest

Federal Election Campaign Act

Law that regulates campaign financing, requiring full disclosure of sources and uses of campaign funds, and limits contributions to political candidates

in lessening corruption. The most controversial feature of the BCRA has been its effort to control "soft money" (unregulated) donations. Although the law closed some loopholes for PACs, it spawned a rise of "527" organizations—so called because they are defined by section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code. These organizations are not permitted any communication with a candidate or allowed to expressly attempt to elect or defeat a particular candidate; but since they are not regulated by the FEC, many contributors have used them as a way to influence politics free from monetary limitations by making independent expenditures. Again, the effort for reform seems to have been thwarted by the desire to use money to influence political outcomes.

Efforts to regulate campaign spending were dealt a blow in 2010 when the Supreme Court held in *Citizens United v. FEC* that prohibiting corporations and labor organizations from independently spending money to advocate for or against candidates for federal office was a violation of the First Amendment's free speech protections.[4] This decision has led to the rise of "super PACs"—organizations that are able to collect and spend money with practically no limitation or regulation, as long as they do not coordinate their efforts directly with political parties or candidates. In the 2014 and 2016 campaign cycles, this often led to super PACs far outspending the campaign organizations of individual candidates. By October 2016, about 1,200 super PACs were registered with the FEC.

The National Association of Realtors building in Washington, D.C., houses one of the largest lobbying groups in the United States. (Wikimedia Commons)

Lobbying, the attempt to influence the shape of legislation emanating from the U.S. Congress and other political decision-making bodies, has traditionally been a mainstay of interest group activity. Lobbying involves more than just hobnobbing with legislators; in many cases, lobbyists are a major source of reliable information for the legislature. Lobbyists provide published materials and advisory letters and testify before congressional committees. They sometimes become deeply involved in the actual process of writing legislation by collaborating with members of Congress and their staffs on the drafting of bills or amendments. In some cases, they may even draft legislation themselves and pass it on to a senator or representative willing to introduce it on the floor. Modern lobbyists are a far cry from the shady figures of folklore. Some are among the most highly paid, respected, and influential figures in Washington.

The idea of lobbying extends beyond the corridors and offices of Capitol Hill. The effect of a law depends not just on how the legislation is written but also on how it is translated into action. Therefore, interest group representatives keep close watch on the rules and regulations set by the many agencies of the executive branch of government and the various independent regulatory commissions. When group interests appear to be threatened, representatives swing into action. They publicize the potential threat, mobilize group and public opinion, meet with agency officials, and ask legislators sympathetic to the "true intent" of the original legislation to intercede with the erring bureaucrats. Interest group representatives are so closely involved with legislators and administrators in the making and implementation of public policy that the threesome has come to be called the **iron triangle** of American politics.

lobbying
Attempting to influence legislation under consideration, particularly through personal contact by group representatives

iron triangle
The combination of interest group representatives, legislative committees, and government administrators seen as extremely influential in determining the outcome of political decisions

Some special interest groups are a response to an immediate issue or concern, such as protests about how the government responded to the 2010 BP oil spill and its effect on New Orleans. (Wikimedia Commons)

Traditionally, the American judiciary has been seen as isolated from external political pressures. However, a more realistic appraisal is that the courts, like the other branches of government, are susceptible to the influence of interest groups in several ways. First, interest groups can affect the selection of judges who sit on state and federal benches. Most prominently, when the president nominates a candidate to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court, interest groups line up to express their views to the Senate Judiciary Committee. For example, pro- and antiabortion rights groups and women's groups angered by Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment lobbied vigorously after Clarence Thomas was nominated for the high court in 1991. Second, interest groups can play a role in the judicial process as parties in cases brought before the courts, either as litigants themselves or in **class action suits**. Class action suits allow litigation to be initiated on behalf of a large number of individuals without any formal connection other than their sharing a grievance against another party. Third, interest groups can encourage individuals to bring legal action and provide the financial, legal, and moral support they need to do so. Fourth, interest groups can formally make their views known to the courts, even in cases in which they are not themselves parties. This is done by filing an ***amicus curiae*** ("friend of the court") **brief**, in which a group offers "friendly" advice about how to decide a case.

7.1c Major Interest Groups

Americans belong to a myriad of interest groups. As noted, some are members of more than one group. The *Encyclopedia of Associations*, which confines itself to formal organizations, lists over 24,000 different national groups and over 100,000 state and local organizations. There is even a lobby for lobbyists: the Association of Government Relations Professionals. Taking into account all of the uncounted formal groups and the multitude of informal groups, there are tens of thousands more. Interest groups can be categorized by their characteristics, goals, tactics, and degrees of success. Major groups usually fit into economic, social, religious, ideological, or issue categories. Table 7.1 summarizes the major concerns of different types of interest groups and gives examples of each type of group.

class action suit
Legal action initiated on behalf of a large number of individuals without any common interest other than their grievance against the person or institution being sued

***amicus curiae* brief**
Latin for "friend of the court"—persons, government agencies, or groups that are not parties to a case but nonetheless have an interest in its outcome can make their views known by filing this brief with the court

grass roots lobbying
Attempting to influence members of Congress by encouraging citizens in the home district or state to contact their legislators

Economic Groups

Interest groups frequently form around economic issues. In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison wrote, "The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property." The various ways in which people gain their livelihood lead to great diversity in the array of groups that form.

Business groups are among the most powerful of all interest groups. Perhaps business's most prominent advocate is the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, which pursues efforts to influence government on a broad front. It engages in extensive **grass roots lobbying** by encouraging its members across the country to contact their elected officials about issues of concern. However, its effectiveness is sometimes diminished, due to the fact that the breadth of its membership makes it difficult for it to take stands that are satisfactory to all its members.

Business interests combine into other, larger organizations based on their special concerns. Large manufacturing companies, for example, have come together in the National Association of Manufacturers. A vast array of industry-wide trade

Table 7.1 | Types of Major Interest Groups

The table includes only a few of the thousands of groups that exist. In addition, note that a group may be of more than one type. This occurs when economic groups, for example, make statements about social and ideological questions.

Type	Concerns	Examples
Economic	Business, labor, agriculture, and professions	National Association of Manufacturers; American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; American Bar Association; American Farm Bureau Federation
Social	Gender, race, and ethnic discrimination; economic advancement	National Organization for Women; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund; National Congress of American Indians
Religious	Religious freedom; values reflected in public policy	U.S. Catholic Conference; National Council of Churches; American Jewish Committee; Mennonite Central Committee
Ideological	Political impact of specific public policy	Americans for Democratic Action; People for the American Way; Heritage Foundation; MoveOn
Single Issue	Narrow agenda; limited political goals	Environmental Defense Fund; National Right to Life Committee; National Abortion Rights Action League
Public Interest	Broadly defined consumer and general welfare goals	Common Cause; Public Citizen; Consumers Union; Equal Justice Foundation; League of Women Voters

associations, such as the American Iron and Steel Institute and the American Gas Association, represent more particular interests. At the other end of the spectrum are small businesses—the hundreds of thousands of small manufacturing concerns, neighborhood TV repair shops, and "mom and pop" grocery stores. The National Federation of Independent Business is one of the best-known small business–oriented groups. Particular professions are represented by important organizations such as the American Medical Association (the leading organization of doctors), the National Association of Realtors, and the American Bar Association. Business groups do not always speak with one voice, however, because political issues sometimes pit one business interest against another. For example, in the early 2000s, many software companies found themselves at odds with industry giant Microsoft when the latter fought against federally imposed antitrust actions.

When people think of labor as an interest group, they usually think first of its more visible side, labor as organized into unions. Individual unions themselves function as independent interest groups. The United Auto Workers, the Teamsters, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees are just a few of the many unions recognized as politically active. The AFL-CIO is an umbrella organization of unions with a total membership of approximately 11 million that spearheads political activity on behalf of organized labor. Disagreements over strategy led several member unions to split from this parent organization in 2005 and form their own umbrella organization of about 5.5 million workers called the Change to Win federation. Organized labor was once seen as a monolithic mainstay of the Democratic coalition; but in recent years its influence has diminished, primarily because the share of the labor force belonging to unions has dropped considerably in

the last fifty years. The creation of Change to Win indicates a redirection of political efforts in light of this decline in union membership.

Labor has another side that is less visible but numerically larger than the unionized contingent. The majority of American working people do not belong to unions. In fact, workers in the new high-technology industries are much less likely to be unionized than workers in the old smokestack industries they are supplanting. The nonunion workers' lack of organization limits their political influence. Although their more organized counterparts advance some of their interests, their opportunities for political representation are often limited to the actions of their individual members.

Farmers have long been a potent force in American politics. Even today, agriculture is a huge industry. Long-standing organized groups include the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Grange. They lobby furiously as Congress, once every five years, revises the rules governing agricultural subsidies. Dwindling numbers and hard economic times, however, have conspired to reduce the political power of agricultural interests. In 1930, more than 25 percent of all Americans lived on farms; today that number has fallen to less than 1 percent. Such pressures have spawned several more-radical and aggressive farm groups, such as the National Farmers Organization and the American Agriculture Movement. The heyday of the farm lobby is over, but agriculture remains a sector that cannot be ignored.

Social Groups

Birth, not choice, determines membership in some interest groups. One of these groups, women, composes one of the potentially largest interest groups in the United States. Slightly more than half of the American population is female, but relatively few belong to politically relevant women's organizations. The most prominent organization is the National Organization for Women (NOW), which presses for economic and political equality for women and, particularly, freedom of choice on abortion. NOW has over five hundred thousand members, about one out of every three hundred American women. Within such a group, the sense of identification can run strong, although it may not run as strong in the female population as a whole.

The women's movement is closely tied to politics in that many of its goals relate to political issues. The increasing number of female candidates running for public office has also strengthened ties. For many years the legitimacy of female involvement in politics was impugned by the old saying that "a woman's place is in the home," but today women are increasingly accepted as equal participants in the American political process. Perhaps the best indication of change is the growing number of women who have been elected to public office in the past forty years (see Figure 7.2). The nomination of the first major-party female candidate for president or vice president occurred in 1984, when Geraldine Ferraro was the Democratic candidate for vice president. Senator Hillary Clinton's (D–NY) bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2008 came up just short, but it solidified her position as a key contender and led to her

U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meet with Afghan civil society leaders at the Presidential Palace in Kabul, Afghanistan (Wikimedia Commons)

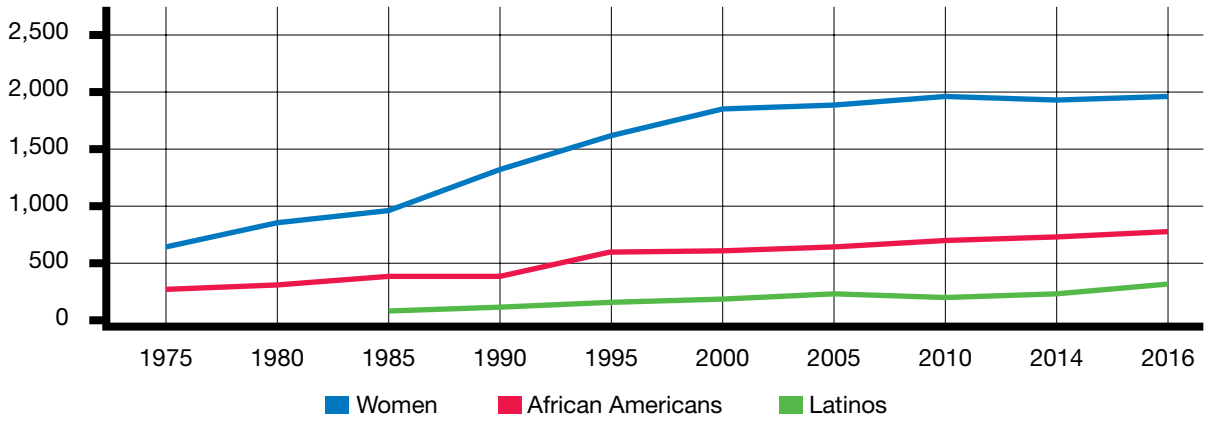
eventual nomination in 2016. In 2017, there were eighty-three women in the House of Representatives and twenty-one in the Senate. The percentage of female state legislators was 24.6 percent in 2016, more than five times what it was in 1971.

Certainly the most prominent of all biologically based interest groups in recent American history is the African American population. Whereas African Americans constitute only about 13 percent of the American population, they gain considerable influence from two sources: their strong sense of group identification and the close ties between the group and the world of politics. Shut out from the social and economic establishment, African Americans had little recourse but to pursue advancement through the political system, which in itself has given their cause a special political legitimacy. Further, forceful African American leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, have not hesitated to spur African Americans to political action. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) remains perhaps the most visible African American interest organization. Although only a small percentage of African Americans (less than 2 percent) belong to the NAACP, it is the most widely recognized formal African American organization in America, with a membership of about three hundred thousand.

Figure 7.2 | Female, African American, and Latino National and State Legislators and Executives, 1975–2016

The increasing numbers of women, African Americans, and Latinos elected to public offices such as the U.S. Senate and House and state legislatures and to state executive offices in the past forty years demonstrates how the political process has opened up to members of these groups.

SOURCES: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2012; Center for the American Woman and Politics, 2016; NALEO Educational Fund, 2014 Vital Statistics on American Politics, *4th ed., 1999–2000; Pew Research Center, 2016; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016.*



Although the United States is far from total resolution of its racial problems, the African American civil rights movement has, over the long term, met with considerable success. This success is at least partly due to the fact that the movement's goals are not an attack on fundamental values but rather a push for broader realization of traditional American social, political, and economic equality. In recent years, a major effort has

been aimed at encouraging African Americans to use their hard-won right to vote and get more African Americans elected to public office. All told, the United States now has more than nine thousand elected African American officials[5] (see Figure 7.2). The number of African Americans in the House of Representatives rose from seventeen in 1981 to forty-six in 2017.

Another prominent ethnic group is the growing Latino segment of the American population—primarily Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Although Latinos in the United States currently number about 55 million, they confront a situation similar to what African Americans faced forty years ago. Like African Americans, Latinos lag in educational level and are only now developing a strong sense of collective political identity. Fewer Latinos are registered to vote (only 52 percent of the 24.8 million eligible Latinos); and those who are registered do not always vote (53 percent, compared to 68 percent for whites and 63 percent for African Americans in 2014).[6] Those who cast ballots do not necessarily vote for Latino candidates. Latinos lack a cohesive national organization on the order of the NAACP. As a result, there are fewer elected Latino leaders (see Figure 7.2). Outside the Southwest and a few big cities, Latinos are seldom recognized as a significant political bloc. However, the Latino people have considerable political potential. They are concentrated in a number of populous states that can be critical to victory in a presidential election. Partly because of this fact, the number of Latinos in the House jumped from six to thirty-five between 1981 and 2017.

Religious Groups

Although the Constitution provides for separation of church and state, the religious freedom the Constitution also guarantees inevitably results in the existence of religious groups that are active on a wide variety of political issues. This involvement has engendered some controversy. The **Christian Right**, as fundamentalist groups are often called, has worked for a constitutional amendment to allow prayer in the public schools, tax credits for private school tuition, and the teaching of creationism in public schools, and against laws favoring the rights of women and homosexuals and the teaching of anything but abstinence in sex education.

The religious right loomed as a major factor in American politics through the early 1980s; however, its visibility receded in the late 1980s after revelations of sexual and financial misconduct by such well-known figures as Jim and Tammy Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. Since then, though, conservative Christians have been working quietly but diligently around the country to elect their adherents to state and local offices and have virtually taken over the Republican Party organization in several states. Perhaps the most prominent organization spearheading this activity is television evangelist Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition. The Christian Right was credited with playing an important role both in the election of a Republican congressional majority in 1994 and the election of President George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004. In 2008, Christian conservatives made former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee a viable candidate in the Republican presidential primary. Other more socially liberal denominations such as the United Church of Christ—in effect an emerging "Christian Left," have involved themselves in controversies over arms control, human rights abroad, and U.S. policy in Central America, among others.

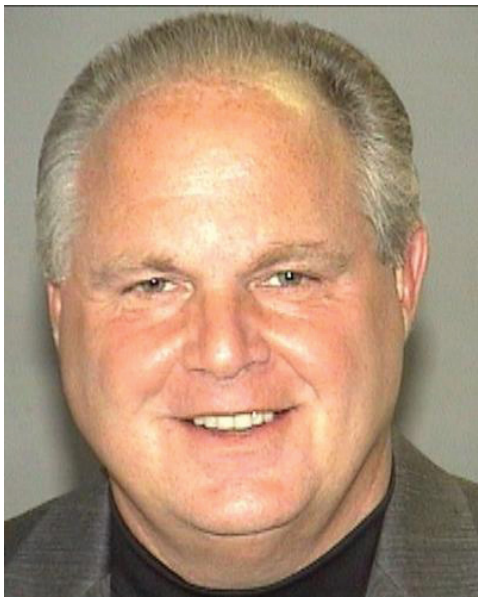
No issue in recent years has drawn religious groups more into the political fray than abortion. The Catholic Church and the Christian Right have both worked hard to make abortion a political issue through support of sympathetic candidates and demonstrations outside abortion clinics. A particularly dramatic example by the Roman Catholic Church was its use of the threat of excommunication against Catholics who support or even tolerate abortion.

Christian Right

Conservative, religion-based groups that involve themselves in the political process

Ideological Groups

Some groups pursue an explicitly political agenda almost exclusively. When that agenda is broad, the group is characterized as an ideological one. Such groups typically have a clear philosophy of governmental action and evaluate public policy proposals in those terms. Perhaps the best example is the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), a relatively small group with about 65,000 members that has long espoused a liberal perspective on American politics. Thus, it has become a beacon to those on the American left and an enemy to those on the right. The ADA is best known for the ratings of members of the House and the Senate, which it publishes every year as a way of calling attention to individual legislators' fidelity to liberal values. In recent election cycles, the organization MoveOn has played a growing role in supporting progressive causes by making use of the Internet and electronic mailing lists to build a network of supporters and contributors. At the other end of the political spectrum, Tea Party organizations around the country have backed an array of conservative or libertarian candidates and causes, with a particular focus on reducing taxes and budget deficits.



Rush Limbaugh is a conservative political commentator. Conservatism is an ideological political group. (Wikimedia Commons)

Single-Issue Groups

In contrast to the broad political agenda of ideological groups, single-issue groups have narrower agendas and more limited political goals. One of the most visible of all the narrow single-issue groups has been the antiabortion, or right-to-life, movement. Groups such as the National Right to Life Committee have been single-minded in their attempts to ban abortion. These groups regard the issue of abortion as the overriding issue of contemporary politics—a so-called litmus test of whether a candidate should be supported. The uncompromising position of antiabortion groups has spawned some similarly uncompromising reactions from single-interest abortion-rights groups. The most prominent among these groups is the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, which claims some 250,000 members.

Single-issue groups are a controversial political phenomenon. Advocates contend that there are indeed some overriding moral issues that people should rightly pursue to the exclusion of everything else. Others see single-issue groups as a threat to democracy because they refuse the compromise that helps to make a democratic system work.

Chipotle Mexican Grill closed forty-three restaurants in Washington and Oregon in response to the initial outbreak of E. coli *in early November 2015. Public interest groups focus on issues of product safety and the effectiveness of government regulation of public utilities and industry. (Wikimedia Commons)*

Public Interest Groups

With so many interest groups vying for advantage in the political arena, it sometimes seems that everybody's individual political interests get served, but not the public's as a whole. Thus, organizations have formed to represent broad-based notions of the public's interest. These groups focus on issues such as product safety and the effectiveness of government regulation of public utilities and

industry. Perhaps the most prominent such group is Common Cause, the self-styled "citizens' lobby" founded in 1970. It has taken on a broad range of issues, including that of campaign financing.

7.2 Perspectives on Interest Groups

Given the visibility and the pervasiveness of interest groups in American democracy, it is not surprising that they evoke strong reactions from both the general public and political experts. Some citizens view interest groups in highly positive terms, seeing them as essential elements of a successful democracy. Others take a dimmer view, finding them to be perpetual and inevitable dangers to the common good.

7.2a Interest Groups as the Foundation of Democracy

Classical democratic theory demands that citizens be interested in politics, informed about politics, rational in their political judgments, and active in the political process. As Chapter 5 made clear, many people fall short of these expectations. The question is how American democracy can continue to function, and even prosper, in the face of this disparity.

Some observers see interest groups as the answer. As noted earlier, the United States is a pluralist society. Most Americans belong to at least one formal group as well as to a number of other groups. The leaders of these various interest groups act on behalf of their members to protect and advance their causes. Because there are so many groups, sheer force of competition prevents any single group or handful of groups from dominating the others. Thus, every member of society has his or her interests protected without having to be politically active. Democracy functions through representation—not just formal representation via elected officials, but also representation of individual citizens by the leaders of the interest groups.

Further, because most Americans belong to several groups, political disputes seldom run along the same lines. To illustrate, one woman may be a white, Catholic homemaker, whereas her neighbor is a white, Protestant, public school teacher. The two will probably agree about property taxes but disagree about tuition tax credits for parents with children in private schools. Political scientists call this tendency for different coalitions to form on different issues **cross-cutting cleavage** and see it as a brake on polarizing conflict in society. These two elements, competition between interest groups and cross-cutting cleavages, contribute to an equitable and stable society. Indeed, some scholars laud the pluralistic character of American society as an essential factor in the success of its democratic system.[7]

cross-cutting cleavage

The overlapping of interest group membership from individual to individual, with the result that society rarely finds the same people lined up on opposite sides on all the issues and is thus protected against political polarization

Not surprisingly, critics have found flaws in this flattering portrait of American politics. Not every citizen belongs, in any meaningful way, to a significant interest group; and group leaders do not necessarily represent the best interests of all the group members. In fact, the structure of some interest groups may be very undemocratic. Also, pure competition cannot exist among all the interest groups in a society. Some groups are big and powerful and can dominate; others are small and weak and can be dominated. After all, with what does a small and powerless interest group have to bargain? It is very hard for a group to enter into negotiations with nothing and emerge with something. Thus, pluralist democracy may, in reality, turn out to be **interest group elitism**. The elites within interest groups

interest group elitism

The idea that the leaders of interest groups may act in ways that promote their own interests rather than the interests of the broader membership of the group

pursue their own interests rather than their members' interests; and the elite interest groups—the biggest and most powerful groups—pursue their interests at the expense of the small and powerless groups.

7.2b Interest Groups Versus the Public Interest

Interest groups are most widely reviled when they are seen as using the political process to achieve selfish objectives. A manufacturing group that resists regulation by the Consumer Product Safety Commission may claim that it is only defending the public's right to buy whatever it wants at the lowest possible price. Instead, the public may perceive the group as demanding the right to make money by producing shoddy and unsafe goods. This kind of spectacle is no doubt one of the greatest frustrations of democratic government and has caused many people to favor tighter regulation of lobbying and other interest group activities. What is the "common good"? Who gets to define it? Should the common good never be impaired in the slightest, even to do a great good for a small number? Does a common good exist, in fact, apart from the outcome of the democratic process that defines it?

Interest group obstructionism of the majority may seem indefensible until it is our own interests upon which that majority is about to trample. A person might protest loudly when import quotas on automobiles make imported cars more expensive and push up prices of domestic models. That same person would probably think differently if he or she worked in a Detroit auto assembly plant or owned a Ford dealership. The real quarrel of those who decry interest group activities may not be with interest groups themselves but rather with the political processes that strike the balance between majority and minority interests.

7.2c Interest Group Gridlock

Pluralist theory envisions a myriad of interests doing battle in the political arena and the government emerging with policies that, although probably not ideal for any, are acceptable to all. What if no consensus could be reached, however? Critics charge that a pluralistic system could arrive at a virtual state of paralysis, in which an overabundance of interest groups develops, each refusing to compromise. One commentator has called this situation *interest group gridlock,* analogous to the traffic gridlock that often develops in large cities.[8] In an analogy to the clogged arteries that threaten many people's health, another commentator has characterized these stalemates as "demosclerosis"—a state in which the political process is so clogged by the piling up of numerous permanent commitments to interest groups that the government lacks the resources to deal with new problems that arise.[9] Interest group gridlock and demosclerosis may be stark warnings of the dangers of pluralism run amok. The hope of democracy is that good "traffic regulation" by public officials and a more moderate diet for interest groups can help to smooth the way for the successful development of public policy.

The health-care bill was an example of interest group gridlock. (Shutterstock)

7.3 Political Parties

A **political party** is an organization that seeks to influence public policy by putting its own members into positions of governmental authority. In the United States and other democratic nations where most important public officials are chosen by popular election, this means placing a party member's name on the ballot, identifying the candidate as a member of that party, and then working to elect the party member to the office. Parties and interest groups are alike in that their members may share common political views or objectives and may engage in collective political activities. They differ in that interest groups do not run their own candidates for public office. Further, there are many interest groups, each with narrower agendas; however, there are just two major parties, each with a broader agenda.

7.3a What Parties Do

In the pursuit of elective office, parties can perform several important functions that help to bring order to the electoral process and coherence to government. First, by making themselves visible actors on the stage of politics and trying to gain public support, parties accomplish several important **socialization functions**. Because people tend to identify with political parties, parties provide a psychological hook that pulls people into the world of politics. Parties also help to structure people's perceptions of politics. They provide important cues to citizens as they perceive and try to make sense of the political world around them. Parties educate citizens about politics and mobilize them into political action. In their attempts to attract voters to their causes, parties tell voters about what is going on in politics, how it affects them, and why they should get involved. Finally, whereas candidates and issues come and go from one election to the next, parties tend to persist. By providing relatively fixed reference points in a changing political scene, parties help people keep their political bearings and thus help to maintain political and social stability.

Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein announcing her 2016 presidential campaign (Wikimedia Commons)

Winning elective office requires getting votes. Given the wide range of voters' interests, a single issue will probably not appeal to enough voters to win. The party, therefore, must put together a package of positions on a variety of issues that will attract sufficient numbers of voters. In doing so, parties accomplish four important **electoral functions**. The first is to integrate interests. It is unlikely that any one candidate will offer everything that every voter seeks; however, candidates who satisfy needs common to large numbers of voters will receive their support. Second, the set of alternatives from which voters can pick is simplified. Because substantial numbers of voters find their views reflected by one or the other of the coalition candidates, fewer candidates are needed on the ballot. Third, the parties complement the legally established process for choosing public officials. By setting up procedures for determining who will represent a party in a campaign and for supporting these candidates in the election, parties fill important gaps in the selection process. Finally, parties are a prime means of recruiting and training political leaders. Parties provide many people with an entry into politics and opportunities to develop their political skills.

political party
A group that seeks to influence public policy by placing its own members in positions of governmental authority

socialization functions
With reference to political parties, the ways in which parties, by seeking to win elections, help to socialize voters into politics and form public opinion

electoral functions
With reference to political parties, the ways in which parties, by seeking to win elections, help to bring order to campaigns and elections

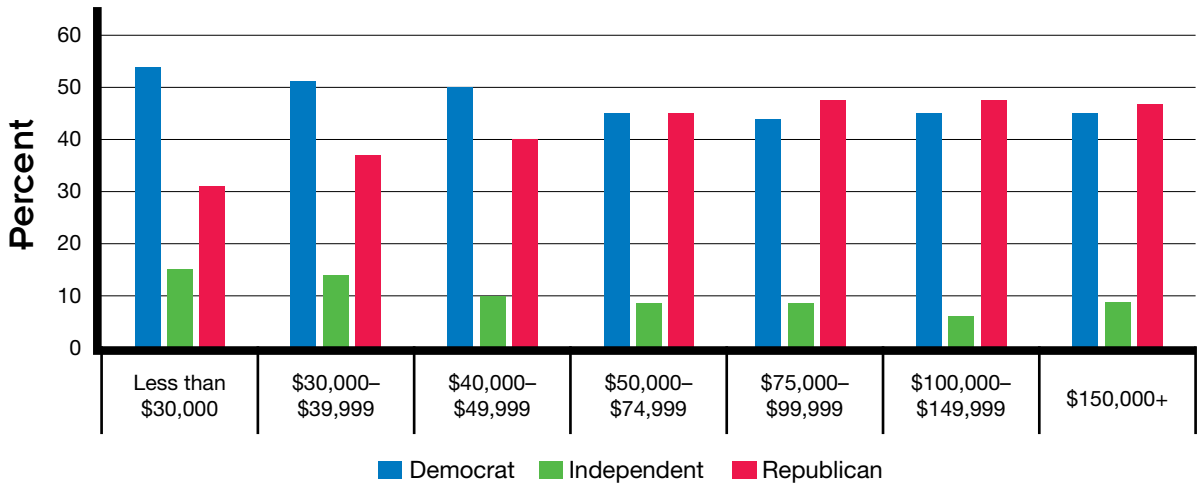
Economic Status and Party Identification

Traditional wisdom portrays the Democrats as the party of the economically less well-off and the Republicans as the party of the more economically successful. How well does this image square with current reality? Figure 7A shows the relationship between party identification and income. Interestingly, a small number of Americans at every income level identify themselves as purely independent—not leaning toward the Democrats or the Republicans. Apart from this fact, the trends anticipated by the traditional image of the parties do appear. Far more of the poorest people are Democrats than Republicans, and more of the wealthiest people are Republicans than Democrats. However, a significant number of the poorest people are Republicans, and an even larger number of the wealthiest people are Democrats. Thus, economic status has some effect, but party choice in the United States is not made on the basis of economic self-interest alone.

Why is the Democratic Party traditionally associated with the less well-off and the Republican Party with the better-off? Why does party affiliation not divide more clearly along economic lines—that is, why are some poorer people Republicans and some richer people Democrats?

Figure 7A | Party Identification by Income

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "A Deep Dive into Party Affiliation," April 7, 2015.



*This figure groups respondents who indicated they "leaned toward" a particular party with that party.

Once a political party achieves electoral victory, it confronts the task of governing. By trying to achieve what they have proposed during the campaign, parties accomplish two important **governmental functions**. First, they organize government and give coherence to governmental policy. Because the founders saw centralized political power as a threat to individual freedom, the Constitution dispersed power to avoid the tyranny of the majority. Power was broken up by function in the separation of powers in the federal system and by geography. Experience soon showed, however, that this fragmentation of power led to a lack of coordination, stagnation, and even paralysis in government. Political parties evolved as a new source of coordination in the political system. With like-minded individuals pursuing common objectives dispersed throughout the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the national and state governments, coherence and coordination were restored to policy making.[10]

governmental functions

With reference to political parties, the ways in which parties, by seeking to win elections, help to organize the government, give coherence to public policy, and make government responsible to the people

Second, parties help make government responsible to the people. Because parties are stable features on the American political scene, the electorate can reward a party that does a good job of governing and punish a party that does not. Thus, even though the public is not in a position to supervise every detail of governmental action, parties allow the public to exert some degree of oversight and control over what the government does.

7.4 Basic Characteristics of the American Party System

Political parties exist under almost every form of government. However, the particular shape a party system assumes varies from one country to another. In the United States, the party system is characterized by having just two major parties and a loose relationship between the national, state, and local parties and the three components that make up the party: the formal party organization, the party in the electorate, and the party in the government.

7.4a A Two-Party System

From its beginnings, the United States has had a two-party system. Never have there been more than two large and enduring political organizations at the same time. Party fortunes, of course, have ebbed and flowed. At some times, minor parties have flourished. At other times, some people have feared that one party would rule the nation unchallenged; but the minor parties have always faded, the party with the overwhelming majority has faltered, or the opposition party has rebounded.

Why does this pattern consistently recur? One theory is based on the old saying that "there are two political parties because there are two sides to every question." This explanation sounds good, but many political questions have more than two sides. Also, unless there are fewer sides to political questions in the United States than in other countries, every country should have a two-party system. Many of them do not.

Another old adage may come closer to the truth: "There are two political parties because there are two sides to every office—inside and outside." In the American system, where most offices are contested on an individual basis (i.e., one person wins a single office such as mayor or governor or congressional representative), winning usually requires simply getting more votes than anybody else. This is called **plurality election**. Plurality elections contrast with **majority elections**, in which the victor must receive more than half of all the votes. A **run-off election** is required under a system of majority elections if more than two candidates run and none gets a majority. With plurality or majority elections, most electoral contests in the United States have a single winner and one or more losers—one "in" and one or more "outs." Because the only way for an outsider to displace

Both major political parties draft statements of beliefs, called platforms, every presidential election year. You can find the most recent Democratic and Republican platforms at the below websites.

Republican platform

http://www.bvtlab.com/QqM67

Democratic platform

http://www.bvtlab.com/96WR7

plurality election
Election in which a candidate wins simply by getting more votes than any other candidate, even if it is less than a majority of the votes

majority election
Election in which a candidate wins by getting more than one-half of the votes cast

run-off election
An election pitting the leading candidates of a previous election against each other when the previous election has not produced a clear-cut winner

an insider is to win more votes, the natural tendency is for political organizations to form around those in power and those out of power.

An alternative electoral system is **proportional representation**, whereby offices, such as seats in a legislature, are awarded in proportion to the percentage of votes a party receives. Proportional representation may encourage the growth of more than two parties because a party may place third or fourth in an election and still win seats. Proportional representation is relatively rare in the United States; it is more common in other countries, such as France and Italy.

The plurality election system is not the only reason the United States has a two-party system. Undoubtedly other factors enter in as well, including the predominantly centrist distribution of opinion, the impact of history, and the absence of consistently intense ethnic and religious divisions that might lead to chronic political fragmentation. However, the electoral system has certainly played a significant role in shaping the basic structure of the American party system.

This discussion of the two-party system should not obscure the fact that third parties do have a place in the American political system. As shown in Figure 7.3, third parties have existed for a long time. Although most third parties have been little more than temporary vehicles for a particular candidate or issue, they nevertheless have played an important role in influencing the actions of the major parties. They have raised issues that the major parties were eventually forced to address. For example, the abolitionist parties of the mid-nineteenth century forced slavery onto the agendas of the major political parties. Persistent advocacy of egalitarian ideas such as female suffrage, government regulation of big business, Social Security, and low-cost health care by the Populists, Progressives, and Socialists laid the groundwork for much of the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson, the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, and the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson.

In a few cases, the presence of third parties in the field has tipped the balance from one of the major parties to the other. In 1912, in the middle of a long period of Republican dominance, former President Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party garnered 27 percent of the popular vote and eighty-eight electoral votes, siphoning off enough votes from the Republican incumbent William Howard Taft to give the Democrat Woodrow Wilson the victory. (This was, by the way, the only time in American history that a **third party** actually outpolled one of the major parties in a presidential election.) In 1968, American Independent candidate George Wallace won 14 percent of the popular vote and forty-six electoral votes, probably drawing off enough votes from Democrat Hubert Humphrey to give Republican Richard Nixon the victory.

In 1992, independent presidential candidate Ross Perot, running under the banner of his United We Stand movement, garnered 19 percent of the popular vote, making his the most successful third-party movement in recent American history. Because Perot seemed to draw votes almost equally from Bush and Clinton, it is unlikely that he changed the outcome of the election. However, Perot participated in the three presidential debates and was instrumental in making deficit reduction and economic revival major issues in the campaign. Perot ran again in 1996, but only managed to gain about half of the total vote that he had earned in 1992. In 2000, Pat Buchanan ran on the Reform Party ticket, and Ralph Nader ran as a Green Party candidate. The two combined to garner over 3.3 million votes in a very tight election. Since Nader, who generated about 2.9 million of those votes, was a decidedly liberal candidate, some have suggested that he cost Gore the election. Such conclusions, however, overlook the fact that many Nader voters were disenchanted with the two-party system and might not have voted at all if Bush and Gore were the only choices available. The

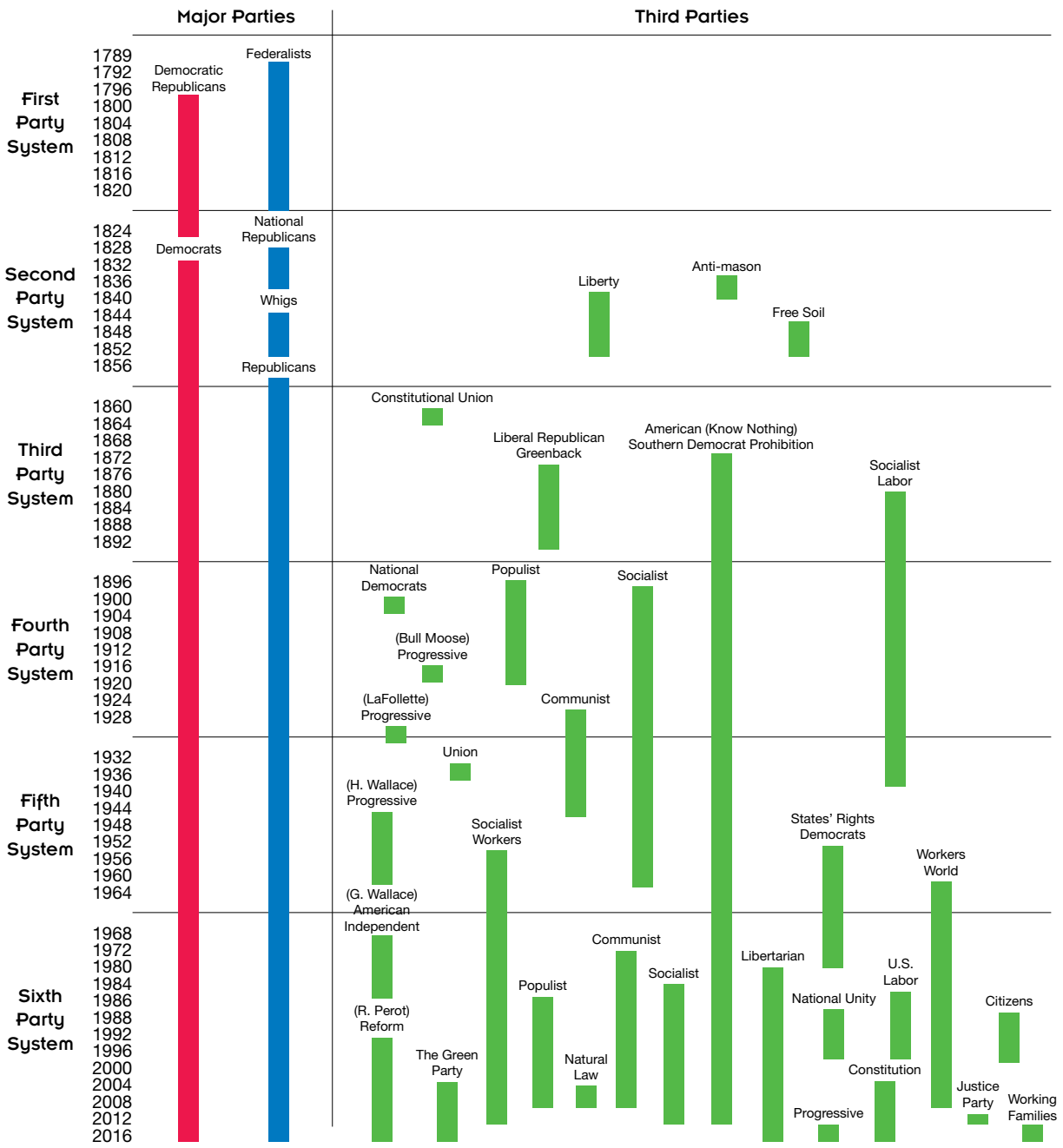
proportional representation
A system for allocating seats in a legislative body in which the number of seats a party gets out of the total is based on the percentage of votes that the party receives in an election

third party
In the American political context, a minor party that attracts only a small share of the electorate's vote and is a party other than the two major parties that have dominated politics through most of American history

Figure 7.3 | American Political Parties Since 1789

The chart indicates the years during which parties either ran presidential candidates or held national conventions. The life span for many political parties can only be approximated because parties existed at the state or local level before they ran candidates in presidential elections and continued to exist at local levels after they ceased running presidential candidates. For example, in the year 2016, at least a dozen parties ran a candidate for president in one or more states, but only five candidates were on the ballot in over ten states: Donald Trump (Republican), Hillary Clinton (Democrat), Gary Johnson (Libertarian), Jill Stein (Green), and Darrell Castle (Constitution).

SOURCES: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to the U.S. Elections, *2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), p. 224;* Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, *November 5, 1988, p. 3184; Federal Election Commission, "1992 Official Presidential General Election Results," Press Release, January 14, 1993; Federal Election Commission, http://www.fec.gov/; Ballotpedia, https://ballotpedia.org.*



lesson Americans took away from that election, though, may have been that it is risky to vote for a minor party candidate during a close presidential race. In 2004, Pat Buchanan backed the incumbent Republican president and the Green Party refused to nominate Ralph Nader, choosing to go instead with a candidate who vowed to campaign only in states where the outcome was not expected to be close. Ultimately, less than 1 percent of the popular vote went to minor party candidates in 2004. This trend continued into 2008 and 2012. Given the many contrasts between the two major party candidates, voters largely stuck with the Democratic and Republican choices in 2008 and 2012, not providing more than 1 percent of the vote for any third-party candidate. In 2016, faced with a choice between two very unpopular major party candidates, about 5 percent of the vote went to minor party candidates. Libertarian Gary Johnson led the way with about 3.3 percent of the vote, and Green Party candidate Jill Stein received about 1 percent, with write-ins and other minor parties making up the remainder.

In August 2016, Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson's poll numbers began to approach the 15 percent threshold necessary to make him the first third-party candidate since Ross Perot in 1992 to participate in broadcast presidential debates. Ultimately, Johnson's numbers fell short, and he was excluded from the fall debates. (Wikimedia Commons)

7.4b A Complex Party Structure

An American political party is not a single organization but rather a broad family of related formal organizations and informal groupings. It is complex, not in the sense that it is particularly hard to understand, but in that it is made up of many different parts. Perhaps the most useful way to think about all these parts and the relationships between them is to imagine the party as being divided along two dimensions: a vertical dimension corresponding to the levels of government in the United States and a horizontal dimension corresponding to the different components that make up a party.

Parties and the Levels of Government: National, State, and Local

Because party organizations tend to develop and operate around institutions of government, it is only natural that their structure tends to parallel that of government. One of the most important divisions of government in the United States is the federal system. Just as the American government is divided into national, state, and local institutions, so also are parties divided into national, state, and local organizations and groupings. As in the government, the relationship among the levels is not a strictly hierarchical one; each level retains some level of independence and autonomy from the others.

Parties and Their Components: Formal, Electoral, and Governmental

Even at any one level of government, a political party is not just a single organization. Rather, it has at least three distinguishable sectors or components: the formal party organization, the party in the electorate, and the party in the government.[11] The **formal party organization** is the party narrowly construed and that which most people would think of if asked to define the political party. It consists of the people who actually work for the party as leaders or followers, professionals or volunteers, and members of committees or attendees of meetings.

The formal structure of American parties parallels the structure of federalism. Power is vested at both the national and state levels. Ultimate authority lies with the party's **national convention**, which meets prior to the presidential election every four years. Because political parties exist to contest elections, most of what the convention does is related to the upcoming presidential campaign: writing a **platform** (a statement of the party's proposed program) and selecting the party's candidates for president and vice president. These activities are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

formal party organization
One of the three components or distinguishable sectors of a political party; the official structure of a political party and includes people who officially belong to it, elected and appointed officers, and committees

national convention
The quadrennial meeting of an American political party that focuses on the upcoming presidential election

platform
A broad statement of the philosophy and program under which a party's candidates run for election

Some of the convention's activities have a more strictly organizational slant. The convention is the ultimate authority in setting the party's rules; and it formally designates the **national committee**, the permanent body that oversees the party's affairs on an ongoing basis. Each state's members on the national committee are usually picked by state party organizations in conventions or primaries. The national committee, in turn, formally elects the party chairperson. The national chairperson supervises the work of the headquarter staff, a role that has become more significant in recent years, for reasons to be seen shortly. From 2011 until the end of July 2016, the Democratic Party chairperson was Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a member of Congress from Florida. Schultz resigned just prior to the Democrats' national convention after leaked emails indicated that she had actively sought support for candidate Hillary Clinton and attempted to discredit Bernie Sanders' campaign. A party chair's role is to remain neutral until the party's voters have decided on their candidate. Schultz was replaced temporarily by Donna Brazile, a former campaign manager. The Republican Party was led by Reince Priebus, an attorney and former chair of the Wisconsin Republican Party. After the 2016 election, President Trump named Priebus his chief of staff.

What issues affect the public in your state?

The Public Interest Research Group's website is a good starting point for answering this question.

http://www.bvtlab.com/BH8T9

For years, state and local parties were the bedrock of the American party system, often due to the influence of state and local "political machines." A **political machine** is a political organization that recruits and controls its membership through the use of its governmental authority to bestow benefits on its supporters and withhold them from its opponents. This patronage includes benefits such as obtaining government jobs, government contracts, and "favors." To gain benefits, people had to support the machine by voting for its candidates and campaigning for the machine. The great urban political machines, in large part, have faded from the American political scene, although the use of public power to perpetuate partisan dominance lives on in many municipalities and some states.

The structure of the state and local parties is, in many respects, similar to that of the national parties with state party conventions and **state committees** that are usually made up of representatives from the state's counties or congressional districts. The party typically elects a state chairperson, who is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the party. Underlying the statewide party organization is a hierarchy of county, city, ward (or district), and precinct committees and chairpersons. In some locales this organization constitutes a formidable political force, while elsewhere the structure is moribund, with many of the positions not even filled.

There is more to a party than just its formal organization. A party includes, not in any formal sense but psychologically and socially, the citizens in the electorate who support it. This **party in the electorate** can be viewed in two different ways. At the individual level, the defining component of the connection of an individual to a party is party identification, "a psychological identification" or "sense of individual attachment to a party," independent of "legal recognition or even without a consistent [voting] record of party support."[12] Appropriate to the definition, party identification has typically been measured simply by asking people whether they think of themselves as Republicans, Democrats, Independents, and so on, and following up with questions about strength of feeling. Thus, the party in the electorate is really defined by people who claim to think of themselves as belonging to the party. Figure 7.4 shows how the distribution of party identification has varied over the last fifty years.

national committee
The body responsible for guiding political party organization on an ongoing basis

political machine
Political organization that recruits and controls its membership through the use of its governmental authority to give benefits (jobs, contracts, etc.) to its supporters and deny them to its opponents

state committee
The body responsible for guiding a state political party organization on an ongoing basis

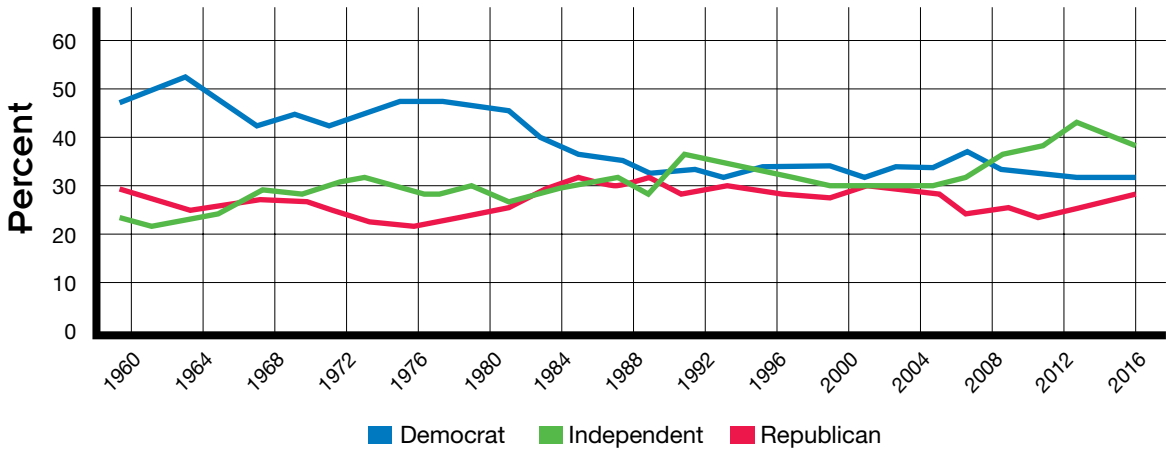
party in the electorate
The individual citizens throughout the country who identify with a political party

Individuals who identify with a party relate to it, not just as individuals, but also as members of the various groups to which they belong. Parties, in other words, can be seen as coalitions of the various social, economic, regional, and religious groups. The Democratic Party was traditionally seen as the party of the working class, the rural and southern constituents, and Catholics, whereas the Republican Party has been seen as the party of the upper classes, big businesses, and Protestants. These relationships have changed in recent years as new political battles have reshaped party lines, but the fact remains that both parties must rely on their appeal to large groups of the electorate to maintain their appeal. Thus, the party in the electorate also includes these groups that are thought of as belonging to the party's **coalition**.

Figure 7.4 | Party Identification of the American Electorate, 1960–2016

The Democratic Party held a substantial edge in party identification from the 1960s into the 1970s, but Republican resurgence beginning in the 1980s eroded that edge. Today, Democrats maintain the advantage over Republicans, but more Americans identify as Independents than with either party.

SOURCE: American National Election Studies, 2006; The Gallup Organization, 2016.



Finally, there is the **party in the government**. Once a party's candidates are elected, the elected officials (at least in theory) need to organize themselves and work together to implement the policies on the basis of which they campaigned. Thus, the party in government consists of the elected candidates of a party—president, governors, mayors, senators, members of the House, state legislators, city council members—as well as the organizations these officials establish and the leaders they designate to help carry out their work. The most visible of these are the legislative party meetings (caucuses, as the Democrats call them, and conferences, as the Republicans call them), the congressional campaign committees, and the majority and minority leaders and whips. The party in government also includes, however, the less visible and informal *executive party* created by the president and governors who tend to appoint members of their own party to administrative positions, and even the shadowy *judicial party* suggested by patterns of party-oriented bloc voting in some courts.[13]

coalition
A subgroup of a party, based on common social, economic, and religious characteristics

party in the government
One of the three components or sectors of a political party: the party as embodied in those of its members who have been elected or appointed to public office, the organizations they establish, and the leaders they choose to help them carry out their work

7.5 American Political Parties: Past, Present, and Future

The health of the American party system has been one of the most talked-about political subjects over the past fifty years. To understand the current state of the American party system and what its future may be, it is necessary to understand a little about the history of the American party system.

7.5a Parties Past

Political parties emerged early in the history of the American republic and have existed ever since. American history up through 1968 can be divided into six major **party systems** (see Figure 7.3). The first party system (1789–1824), which developed from the pre-Revolutionary alignment of parties paralleling the British system of the period (conservative Tories and progressive Whigs), pitted Federalists against Antifederalists. The two parties disagreed primarily on whether the new government should be relatively centralized and elite (the Federalist view) or decentralized and democratic (the Antifederalist view). The Federalist Party faded away after 1800; but the Democratic Republicans, as the Antifederalists came to be called, continued on to govern through a period of comparatively little national political conflict between 1815 and 1825, called the Era of Good Feelings.

By the mid-1820s, the weak framework of the Democratic Republican Party began to fall apart. Andrew Jackson emerged from this factional conflict as the founder of the Democratic Party, which continues as an active party today, making it the oldest party in the world. The Democrats confronted a new Whig party in the second party system (1824–1860). The Democrats were the party of lower-class rural and urban "working people" and old-fashioned machine politics, whereas the Whigs were the party of business and political reform. Slavery destroyed the Whig-Democratic party alignment; through the 1850s, both parties split into northern and southern branches over the issue that would soon tear apart the nation as well.

Andrew Jackson, as depicted on the U.S. $20 bill, was the founder of the Democratic Party. Founded in the mid-1820s, the U.S. Democratic Party is still active, making it the oldest in the world today. (iStock)

Beginning in 1860, under the third-party system (1860–1896), former Whigs, led by Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, combined with some progressive remnants of the northern Democrats to form the new Republican Party, built on opposition to slavery and also on the idea of government as a promoter of commerce. The Democratic Party receded into the Confederacy during the Civil War. After the war and the restoration of the union, the Democrats reemerged on the national scene to compete vigorously with the Republicans for the favor of business. The pro-business tilt of the third-party system fostered progressive and populist sentiment for more regulation of big business and protection of common people's interests.

party system

Period during which the pattern of support for political parties based on a particular set of important political issues remains reasonably stable

These sentiments, fired by a series of disastrous recessions and depressions, came to a head in the presidential election of 1896, when the populist Democrat William Jennings Bryan challenged the candidate of the business establishment, Republican William McKinley. The failure of the populist challenge marked the beginning of the fourth party system (1896–1932), throughout which the Republicans dominated the national political scene and allowed the capitalist system free rein. Only when former Republican President Teddy Roosevelt's progressive Bull Moose Party split Republican ranks were the Democrats able to put their candidate, Woodrow Wilson, into the White House from 1912 to 1920.

The onset of the Great Depression in 1929, in part the result of the lack of restraint placed on the free enterprise system, drove Republican President Herbert Hoover from office. Franklin Delano Roosevelt swept into the White House in 1932 on a flood tide of national discontent and despair. In a bold effort to use the power of the federal government to end the Depression and restore economic prosperity, he ushered in a new era of governmental involvement in economic affairs and government responsibility for ensuring the people's basic well-being. FDR also initiated a period of Democratic dominance that constituted the fifth party system (1932–1968).

In each of these years—1824, 1860, 1896, and 1932—a new party system evolved from an old one in a relatively short period of turmoil and change called *realignment*. **Realignment** occurs when a reasonably stable pattern of party support, based on a particular set of important political issues, is replaced by a new pattern of party support based on a new set of issues. Because realignments are such landmark events in the American party system, scholars have devoted much effort to determining when and why they occur. They have identified a number of significant changes that seem to accompany realignment, most notable of which is the period before each realignment in which the old party structure seems to fall apart, or **dealign**. Why do realignments occur? As the preceding discussion suggests, the single most important factor may be the emergence of some new issue that cuts across the existing party lines and divides the electorate in some new way—for example, slavery in the third-party system, and the Great Depression and the role of the federal government in the economy in the fifth party system. Also, quite clearly, realignments have tended to come at approximately thirty-six-year intervals.

7.5b Parties Present

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the fifth party system began to falter. This was most evident in the woes of the Democratic Party, whose long-standing dominance began to unravel. Consistent with the pattern of a major partisan shift every thirty-six years, the Democratic Party, which had won the White House in every election over the thirty-six years from 1932 to 1968 except 1952 and 1956—seven of nine elections—lost the 1968 election; and over the next twenty years it would win only one of five more. The only bright spot for the Democrats was that they did manage, mostly, to hold on to their majorities in the House and Senate throughout the period; the one exception being the Republican's majority in the Senate from 1981 to 1987, which primarily was a result of Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980.

That exception alone set political analysts abuzz. Dealignment was clearly underway. While some saw realignment into a new Republican majority in the offing, others worried that the party system was confronting an even more fundamental crisis—the possibility of complete collapse.

Certainly, beginning in the 1960s, both parties were beset by signs of deterioration. At the national level, the national party headquarters, the national chairperson, and the national committee seemed increasingly irrelevant to the course of American politics

realignment
A major change in the pattern of support for political parties and the important issues on which that pattern of support is based

dealignment
Period during which the partisan ties of the public diminish and the party system breaks down

Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration, 1981 (Wikimedia Commons)

and to political campaigns, specifically. Their principal function seemed to be to organize the national party convention once every four years. The title of a study published in 1964 seemed to sum up their plight, "Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees."[14]

The party in the electorate, the mass base of the political parties, also showed signs of weakening. Through the early 1960s, more than 75 percent of the American people said that they identified strongly or weakly with one or the other of the parties and less than 25 percent described themselves as Independents. Beginning about 1964, attachments to parties started to weaken substantially. By the late 1970s only about 60 percent said that they identified with a party, and more than a third said they were Independents. Not only were people less likely to identify with the parties, voters were also less likely to see the parties in favorable terms and to vote according to their party identification.

Trouble loomed, as well, for the other aspect of the party in the electorate, the party coalitions. The coalitions that had supported the major parties, particularly the Democratic coalition, seemed to be coming apart. At its peak in the Johnson landslide, the Democratic Party had expanded to encompass not just the Roosevelt New Deal coalition of the working class, unions, the poor, urban residents, citizens of the South, Catholics, Jews, and liberals, but also African Americans. The Republican Party was left as the party of the upper class, big business, and people residing in the suburbs. Clearly through the 1970s and peaking in 1980, the Democratic coalition fell into disarray, as working-class people, Catholics and some Jews, and white Southerners were drawn away in the Reagan landslide and left the Democratic Party looking more and more like the party of liberals and African Americans—two groups too small to have much of a future as a winning coalition for the party.

The parties in government also suffered their own difficulties through the 1970s and 1980s as party discipline and coordination seemed to deteriorate. Party discipline seemed to sag in the Congress, as members less dependent on the party for help in getting reelected increasingly broke party ranks when local needs or special interest groups dictated.[15] Party coordination between the executive branch and the legislative branch suffered as presidents and members of their own party in Congress were often at odds on legislation.

What caused the parties to go into **decline**? A number of governmental, electoral, and socialization changes seem to have contributed to the deteriorating condition of American political parties since the mid-1960s. As noted earlier, patronage was one of the traditional reservoirs of party strength. It provided party leaders with bargaining chips to use in the game of politics, but reformers intent on reducing the power of the bosses and increasing the competence and integrity of public employees pushed for the establishment of a system of civil service. As more public jobs fell under civil service, politicians found themselves with fewer "goodies" to give out and were, thus, less able to marshal political support.

decline

The idea that the American political parties are collapsing and may, perhaps, eventually disappear

Another governmental change that hurt the parties was the rise of the public welfare system. The parties of earlier years built support by serving as a kind of informal welfare system for their supporters. A faithful party member in financial trouble could seek help in the form of money, food, or shelter from the neighborhood party organization. People came to owe the party. With the rise of the modern welfare system, the government itself formally began to ensure a minimal level of well-being among citizens. Consequently, the party lost its exclusive role as a source of help and its ability to put people in its debt.

Electoral changes played an important part in hurting the parties, as well. In earlier years, political parties were an essential part of the electoral apparatus of the United States. To get a message to the electorate, a candidate needed an army of workers to fan out over the constituency—buttonholing passersby, knocking on doors, handing out party literature, and twisting arms. Modern technology provides less labor-intensive alternatives. Nowadays, with a string of appearances on television news programs and in campaign advertisements, a candidate can make more frequent and seemingly more "personal" contact with far more voters than could an army of party workers on the streets. Computerized direct mailing and emailing techniques and smart use of social media like Facebook and Twitter can yield large sums of money, which can be used to buy more television time and send out more mail, which can generate more money, and so on. Simply put, candidates no longer need to rely as much on parties and party workers to serve as their intermediaries with the public.

Traditionally, parties have also been important sources of campaign funds for their candidates. Today, however, members of Congress benefit from the support of the PACs, and presidential candidates can rely on public financing. Access to these new sources of money has made candidates less dependent on parties for help and has, consequently, contributed to the weakening of the parties. Also, in an earlier era, parties tightly controlled the process by which candidates for public office were selected. Party leaders got together in party **caucuses** (meetings) or conventions to pick the party's candidates. However, political reformers fought to open up the nomination process to represent a broader cross section of the population, leading to selection of convention delegates by open conventions or primary elections.

Delegates at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, on July 21, 2016. (Wikimedia Commons)

Parties long existed as standing armies of campaign workers, ready to step into political battle on behalf of the party candidates. Now, more and more candidates are relying not on the party machinery but on their own personal organizations for campaign assistance. Although candidates obviously want to capitalize on their party's name, many run without the aid of the party machinery. Once in office, they are likely to feel little obligation to help the party. Single-issue groups also pose a challenge to the existing party system by threatening to siphon off precious campaign resources and public support. The antiabortion movement is perhaps the most prominent recent example.

caucus

A meeting of members of a political party or the members of a party in a legislature—also referred to as a party caucus; in some states used to select delegates to the national conventions, which nominate presidential candidates

Finally, most people acquire their sense of party identification through socialization by their parents, but that process of transmission has appeared to break down in recent years. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the percentage of young people adopting the same party as their parents dropped by about 15 percent. Expansion of the Vietnam War tarnished both parties, the Republican Party was scarred by the Watergate scandal, and the Democratic Party suffered from the economically difficult Carter years. Party disenchantment in one generation sows party disenchantment in the next. Thus, it is not hard to understand why the ranks of the party faithful dwindled and the ranks of the Independents swelled.

Many of these changes were viewed with concern; analysts were not clear whether what was occurring was dealignment leading toward realignment or dealignment leading toward collapse. The deeper concern was that the weakening or disappearance of political parties might impair the functioning of our democratic system. Think of all the valuable functions parties perform, and then think about what might happen if the parties were not around to perform them.

Just as the idea that the parties were dead or dying began to gain widespread currency, a new group of commentators rose to argue that the parties were making a comeback. Led by Xandra Kayden and Eddie Mahe Jr.'s *The Party Goes On: The Persistence of the Two-Party System in the United States*,[16] a number of new studies found evidence of the parties in **resurgence**. The major center of revitalization in the formal party organizations has been within the national party organizations, particularly the national party headquarters supervised by the national chairperson and operated on a day-to-day basis by an increasingly professional, sophisticated, and well-paid staff. These staff employ modern data technology to gather and analyze polling results, conduct direct mail and email campaigns, and raise money.

Although the American public has not flooded back to embrace the political parties, the trend against them has at least been arrested, perhaps even slightly reversed. There is also some evidence that the party coalitions are reforming along somewhat different lines. The Democratic Party has suffered from the loss of the white South and some working-class Catholic and union support, but it has gained a new constituency in female and racial and ethnic minority voters. The Republican Party has gained substantially among working-class whites and in the South.

The primary reason for party resurgence is that the parties, instead of standing on the sidelines and allowing themselves to be kept out of the game, have at last recognized the changing environment of the American political system and adjusted their activities accordingly. For example, they have recognized that modern political campaigns depend less on armies of party volunteers tramping from door to door and more on money and the media. Thus, they have moved to become a major source of political money, in effect not fighting the PACs but joining them. They have seen how candidates must rely on a modern media campaign and have moved to provide candidates with the training and production services that they need to conduct such campaigns. They know that candidates want to use polling results and social media, so they share polling results and social media strategies and technologies.

7.5c Parties Future

resurgence

The idea that American political parties, following a period of decline from the 1960s to the early 1980s, are now making a comeback, gaining in organizational, electoral, and governmental strength

Realignment, dealignment, and resurgence—it is hard enough to say where the American party system is now, much less where it is going. The Democrats' victory in the 1992 presidential election did not make the task any easier. Certainly some sort of realignment took place in the transition from the fifth party system's clear Democratic dominance to what seemed to be a sixth party system starting in 1968 of divided government—Republican domination of the presidency and Democratic

domination of Congress. Was 1992 a return to Democratic dominance? Events since 1992 suggest that, despite Bill Clinton's victory in 1992, we were still very much in the era of divided government. United Democratic governance lasted only until the 1994 midterm elections when the Republican Party won majorities in both the House and Senate. Clinton won reelection in 1996; his last six years in office were a continuation of the dealignment era's divided government pattern, although this time with a Democratic president and Republican Congress.

At first, the 2000 election looked to be another opportunity for realignment as the Republicans gained unified control of the government for the first time since the Eisenhower administration. George W. Bush's opportunity to lead a united Congress, however, was even shorter-lived than Clinton's had been. After the election, the Senate stood evenly divided, with fifty Democrats and fifty Republicans. The Republicans maintained a procedural majority because Vice President Dick Cheney, in his role as president of the Senate, could break any tie votes. In May 2001, however, Jim Jeffords, a third-term senator from Vermont, left the Republican Party and became an independent. This action provided Democrats with a fifty to forty-nine majority and returned the nation to divided party government. The Republicans reestablished their majority in 2002, so the 2004 election was seen by many as a potential turning point. Republican victory would solidify arguments for the party's resurgence, while a Democratic victory in the presidential race could spell a return to divided government. Although the campaign was neck and neck up to the very end, the Republican Party emerged victorious, winning the presidency and strengthening majorities in both the House and Senate. The year 2006 spelled a reversal of fortune for the Republicans with Democrats regaining the majority in both the House and the Senate for the first time in a dozen years. The Democratic victory created another period of divided government, once again calling into question the future direction and momentum of American political parties.

The 2008 campaign was another important moment for the two political parties. Barack Obama and the Democratic Party rode to victory on a wave of dissatisfaction with a faltering economy. Gaining support from new voters and younger voters, turnout was the highest it had been in four decades; and the Democrats gained seats in both the House and Senate, as well as claiming a decisive victory in the presidential race. The Republican Party's only modest success was in maintaining at least forty Senate seats—the number required to make a viable filibuster threat.

Partly as a result of the 2008 election, and partly in reaction to "big government" proposals to stimulate a stalled economy, a movement adopting the moniker "tea party" emerged in 2009. By mid-2010, an organization called the Tea Party Patriots could boast of hundreds of local chapters and over one hundred thousand members nationwide. The organization identifies its core values as fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets.[17] Is this "party" more like a political party, or more like an interest group? Thus far, they have campaigned on behalf of (or against) particular candidates, but have not sought recognition on the ballot. Officially, the Tea Party remains nonpartisan, but whether it will emerge as a third party in the future remains to be seen. In any event, the movement's priorities likely helped the Republicans gain a majority in the House of Representatives in 2010. The movement was not well-represented by either candidate in the 2012 presidential election—where President Obama handily defeated Mitt Romney. Tea Party adherents did play a role in securing some Republican seats in the 2014 midterm elections, but some of the Republican primary candidates they supported held extreme positions that likely worked to the advantage of the Democrats in other districts. Those losses were the beginning of the end for what turned out to be a fairly short-lived movement.

The impact of the 2016 elections on both political parties will likely be debated for years to come. The success of Donald Trump—a political outsider who had very weak ties to the party and its platform—in securing the Republican presidential nomination seemed to epitomize the power of individual candidates in a weak party system. On the Democratic side, the nearly successful primary campaign of Senator Bernie Sanders (I–VT)—who had spent years as an independent and identified as a socialist—pointed to a similar party weakness. Donald Trump's victory served to highlight both the power of individual candidates and the necessity of party. Though Trump clearly called the shots during his campaign for the White House, he would not have emerged the victor if the Republican party structure and a large percentage of Republicans in the electorate had not backed him. Individuals may lead the charge, but they need a well-organized party apparatus to support them.

Bernie Sanders supporters on the streets of Philadelphia during the first day of the Democratic National Convention on Philadelphia, July 25, 2016 (Shutterstock)

Is the recent resurgence of the parties just the last gasp of a dying system? Some critics think that it is and that the two-party system is really on its last legs;[18] however, the parties' comeback probably represents a broader and more permanent change. Through much of American history, political parties were decentralized because political power in the United States was decentralized. Political power has become more centralized; and parties, although slow to react, have now adapted to that new reality with stronger central party organizations. It makes little sense to think that parties will move again toward decentralization unless the government does—and that does not appear to be in the offing. Similarly, the resurgence of the national party organizations occurred in response to the rise of the modern media campaign and the increased demand for campaign money. It would make sense to think that the organizations would again wither away only if the media and money somehow became less important, but there is no sign that such changes are on the immediate horizon.

Of course, this analysis does not take into account the many other factors that might change and affect the parties, either strengthening or weakening them. The recent episode of decline and resurgence, though, does teach us something about parties that is useful when contemplating their future: The parties have demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing circumstances—not always quickly, not always entirely successfully, but eventually and sufficiently. Unforeseen social and political changes involving circumstances hardly envisioned in this chapter may occur and lay the parties low again; past experience, however, suggests that parties—perhaps not exactly as we know them today, but parties nevertheless—will adapt again.

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. Groups are an essential element in the functioning of the American democratic system. A group's political effectiveness depends on its size, the strength of its members' identification, its proximity to politics, its internal organization, and its closeness to the broader societal consensus.
2. Interest groups engage in a wide array of politically relevant activities. They press their views on their own membership, the general public, and the political elites of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. One of their most potent weapons of late has been the political action committee (PAC).
3. Some of the major group participants in the American political process are based on different interests: economically based groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce of the United States and the AFL-CIO; socially based groups, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); ideological groups, such as the liberal Americans for Democratic Action; single-issue groups, such as the right-to-life and pro-choice movements; and public interest groups, such as Common Cause, the "citizens' lobby."
4. The role that interest groups play in a democratic society is as controversial as it is pervasive. Pluralistic theory sees interest groups as working to overcome the deficiencies of individual citizens and to perpetuate a functioning democracy. Other perspectives see interest groups as failing to serve their own members' interests, the public interest, or both.
5. In a democracy, political parties try to influence public policy by backing members as candidates in elections to public offices. In the course of getting their members elected to public office, political parties perform a number of important functions for the system of government: socializing citizens, pulling together the diverse interests contending in a society, simplifying the alternatives confronting the voters, structuring campaigns and elections, recruiting and training political leaders, and organizing and coordinating government.
6. The American party system is a two-party system, probably due primarily to the plurality election system commonly used in the United States and the generally centrist distribution of political beliefs in America. The parties are characterized by a relatively loose relationship among their component parts—divided into national, state, and local at one level and into formal party organization, the party in the electorate, and the party in the government at another level.

KEY TERMS

READINGS *for Further Study*

James Madison's *Federalist* No. 10 remains mandatory reading for anyone interested in exploring the role of groups in American political life.

A more modern, yet classic, study is *The Governmental Process* (Berkeley, CA: Public Policy Press, 1993) by David Truman.

Interest groups are important elements in the pluralist perspective on American democracy. Robert A. Dahl sets out that perspective most clearly in *Who Governs?* 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). Another important work is Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis, eds., *Interest Group Politics*, 9th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015).

As a central feature of American politics, parties are one of the most written-about of all American political institutions. V. O. Key Jr. provides a classic description of the role that parties play in the American political system in *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York: Crowell, 1964).

Jeffrey M. Stonecash's *Political Parties Matter: Realignment and the Return of Partisan Voting* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005) offers a historical perspective on the parties, centering on the notion of realignment, and his *Understanding American Political Parties* (New York: Routledge, 2012) provides a contemporary look at their strategic choices.

Good overviews of the changing role of American parties are John C. Green and Daniel J. Coffey, eds., *The State of the Parties*, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), and Marjorie Randon Hershey's *Party Politics in America*, 16th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson give an account of a the most recent party and interest group phenomenon in *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford, 2013).

A good account of the future of political parties is Larry J. Sabato and Bruce Larson, *The Party's Just Begun*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2009). Theodore J. Lowi and Joseph Romance debate the fundamentals of a two-party system in *A Republic of Parties?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

NOTES

1. The ideas in this section and the next are drawn in part from the seminal discussion of group influences in politics in Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), pp. 295–332.
2. 572 U.S. ___ (2014).
3. NPR.org, "How Hillary Clinton Could Ask a Single Donor for Over $700,000," December 28, 2015.
4. *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 50 (2010).
5. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2012*.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration," http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ (July 5, 2016).
7. The leading advocate of this point of view is Robert A. Dahl. See, for example, his classic book *Who Governs?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961).
8. Robert J. Samuelson, "Interest Group Gridlock," *National Journal* (September 25, 1982): 1642.
9. Jonathan Rauch, "Demosclerosis," *National Journal* (September 5, 1992): 1998–2003.
10. V. O. Key Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York: Crowell, 1964), p. 656.
11. This distinction is another legacy of V. O. Key Jr., originated in his *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*. (It has now been widely adopted by students of the American party system. See, for example, Frank J. Sorauf and Paul Allen Beck, *Party Politics in America*, 6th ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1988).
12. Campbell, et al., *The American Voter*, pp. 121–122.
13. Sorauf and Beck, *Party Politics in America*, pp. 396–446.
14. Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy (New York: Atherton, 1964).
15. William J. Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America* (Hinsdale, MN: Dryden Press, 1976), pp. 139–140; Barbara Sinclair Deckard, "Political Upheaval and Congressional Voting: The Effects of the 1960s on Voting Patterns in the House of Representatives," *Journal of Politics 38* (1976): 326–345.
16. New York: Basic Books, 1985.
17. Tea Party Patriots, "Mission Statement and Core Values," http://www.teapartypatriots.org/Mission.aspx (June 14, 2010).
18. Theodore Lowi, "The Party Crasher," *The New York Times Magazine* (August 23, 1992): 28–33.

POP QUIZ

1. Interest groups, legislators, and administrators are sometimes called the _____ _____ of American politics.
2. America has been known as the _____ _____ society because it consists of people of all races and nationalities.
3. The tendency for different coalitions to form on different issues is called _____ __ _____.
4. One of the _____ functions of parties is to educate citizens and mobilize them into political action.
5. The increase in party identification since 1978 has primarily benefited the _____ Party.
6. Most PACs are registered with the Federal Election Commission. T F
7. The influence of the Christian Right declined dramatically in the late 1980s. T F
8. Political parties are formally sanctioned in Article III, Section 4 of the Constitution. T F
9. Third parties have had very little influence on the American political system. T F
10. The increase in the number of single-issue interest groups has contributed to the resurgence of political parties based on new coalitions. T F
11. The major means by which interest groups try to create public support or sympathy for their political goals is/are _____.
    A) the mass media
    B) direct mail
    C) opinion leaders
    D) political action committees
12. The iron triangle of American politics consists of which of the following?
    A) interest group representatives, legislators, and judges
    B) Congress, the presidency, and the Supreme Court
    C) interest group representatives, legislators, and administrators
    D) interest group representatives, PACs, and political candidates
13. In recent years the most important political issue concerning religious groups has been _____.
    A) the Middle East conflict
    B) abortion
    C) school prayer
    D) poverty
14. When a pluralistic system becomes paralyzed from too many interest groups refusing to compromise, this is known as interest group _____.
    A) gridlock
    B) anarchy
    C) elitism
    D) cleavage
15. Each party system evolved from its predecessor in a relatively short period of political turmoil and change called _____.
    A) factionalization
    B) dealignment
    C) realignment
    D) anarchy

ANSWERS:
1. iron triangle 2. melting pot 3. cross-cutting cleavage
4. socialization 5. Republican 6. T 7. T 8. F 9. F
10. F 11. A 12. C 13. B 14. A 15. C