CHAPTER 9: THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Section 1: Public Opinion
Section 2: Interest Groups
Section 3: Political Parties
Section 4: The Electoral Process
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- **What is Public Opinion?**
  - The aggregation of views shared by a segment of society on issues of interest or concern is called public opinion. These views may focus on foreign, domestic, or local policy issues. Public opinion is complex and some who agree on one issue may disagree with each other on another issue.
  - **Public Opinion and Public Policy**
    - Public opinion helps leaders shape public policy: the choices government makes and actions it takes in response to a particular issue or problem.
    - **One view:** public as single, centralized body—public opinion led, formed by decisions and actions of political and social leaders
    - **Second view:** public as many separate, individual “publics”—public opinion, people’s attitudes lead public policy, public agenda
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

Expressing Public Opinion

- Responsible citizens try to shape public opinion.
- Express opinions by writing blogs, letters to public officials, testifying at public hearings, participating in marches, demonstrations.
- Many join, support groups representing their views.
- Some groups donate money to political campaigns, provide information to try to influence local, state, or federal legislation.
- Responsible citizens express opinions by voting.
- Outcome of elections reflects overall public opinion about candidate, issues.

- Voting behavior complex
  - Some vote for candidate because he/she agrees with their views.
  - Some vote because he/she agrees with a particular issue.
  - Some vote because candidate seems more friendly, or is incumbent.
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- How do we Form Public Opinion

- Influences
  - Opinions influenced by: family and friends; school and work; age, gender, race, religion
    - *Political socialization: process by which people acquire political beliefs*

- Family
  - Often most direct influence
  - Children hear family members discussing political, current events
  - Conversations help shape attitudes on race, religion, politics, more

- School and Work
  - At school, formally learn about government, citizenship, values
  - Peer groups influence decisions about clothing, music, fairness

- Other Personal Factors
  - Age, race, gender, religion
  - Opinion about Social Security may differ with age
  - Religious beliefs influence opinions on marriage, abortion
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

Media and Public Opinion

- Public opinion and public agenda may be shaped or determined by mass media—the means of communication that provide information to a large audience. Your daily routine is probably filled with mass media such as magazines, radio, television news, news on the Web, and videos on the internet.

Media Impact

- Effect on public opinion, public policy, most visible in two areas
- Media monitors, shapes, determines public agenda
- Media covers politics—issues, leaders public consider important
- Also reports when officials ignore public opinion
- Does not force people to take sides, focuses attention on issues
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- The Growth of Mass Media
  - Print media most enduring form of mass media
  - 1789: Federalist paper Gazette of the United States published
  - 1791: Whigs countered with National Gazette.
  - Other examples:
    - **Penny press**: inexpensive newspapers, covered issues of interest to working-class people
    - **Yellow journalism**: sensationalism, scandals, appeals to patriotism
  - Average daily newspaper readership declined after 1970s; today about 40% of adults read newspapers daily.
  - Radio first form of electronic media, beginning in 1920s
  - 1950s: television replaced radio as most influential electronic media
  - Internet has changed mass media: 1 in 3 people regularly get news online.
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- Roles of Media
  - Media shape public opinion by issues they cover, and issues they ignore
  - Type of coverage important
  - Some stories describe candidate’s experience; others focus on issues
- Criticism of the Media
  - Bias in reporting and/or story selection
  - Factual inaccuracy
  - Media consolidation
- The Future of Media
  - News more accessible than ever before, not necessarily more accurate
  - Multiple sources help avoid propaganda, incomplete statements meant to influence public opinion, promote one cause or viewpoint
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- Measuring Public Opinion
  - Sooner or later you may be asked to share your opinions about new products or an upcoming presidential election. You may be part of a public opinion poll—a survey of people scientifically selected to provide opinions about something. Scientific polling is a way to determine public attitudes or preferences about consumer products, social issues, and political candidates. Most surveys today are scientific polls.
  - The Polling Process
    - Well-designed poll an accurate measure of public opinion
    - Accuracy depends on number of people answering; how people chosen; how questions asked; absence of bias
    - Sample: the group of people who take part. Sample size important; must be chosen at random from total population
    - Sampling error: possible margin of error above and below poll’s results; should be stated
SECTION 1: PUBLIC OPINION

- Evaluating Polls
  - Properly conducted polls produce reliable, accurate, objective, bias-free results.
  - Bias refers to errors introduced by methods that lead to one outcome over another.
  - Objectivity: freedom from bias, outside factors, that could influence results of poll

- Polls and Public Opinion
  - Most major polls created, conducted scientifically
  - Polls can be conducted in ways to produce certain results; wording of questions critical
  - Results of polls can be used to shape public opinion in support of certain agendas.

- Exit Polls
  - Election day exit poll surveys randomly selected fraction of voters after they have voted to find out how they voted before the official vote count
  - Such polls can be used to predict winners of all but very close races.
Section 2: Interest Groups

- Interest Groups And What Do They Do
  - People who share similar views and goals may form an interest group.
  - Interest groups represent a wide variety of attitudes and opinions.
  - Interest groups can affect public policy.

- An interest group is an association of people who hold similar views or goals; they are sometimes called advocacy groups. They work at every level of government: local, state, and national.

- What They Do
  - Represent views and goals of interest groups, try to influence public policy, public agenda
  - Represent those who feel their views might otherwise be overlooked

- How They Do It
  - Organize people who share concerns, provide with means of political participation
  - Supply information to public and to policy members
  - Many also have political action committees (PACs) to raise and contribute money legally to political campaigns.
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

Organizing Interests

- Individuals can initiate, influence or change public policy by writing letters, giving speeches, voting; but sometimes one person’s actions are not enough.
- Interest groups give individual’s opinions more impact than he/she acting alone
- Groups include: environmentalists; business owners; musicians; teachers; minorities

Encouraging Participation

- Membership in interest groups gives a way to take part in political process at every level of government, influence public policy
- Active membership declining in recent years
- “Checkbook memberships,” meaning financial contributions to interest groups, have increased, however.
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

- **Supplying Information**
  - Greater resources allow many groups to hire experts, engage in new kinds of activities: lobbying campaigns, creating interactive Web sites
  - Result: groups influence in ways that exceed results from membership alone
  - Influence often comes more from information provided than from activities of members.

- **Types of Interest Groups**
  - **Agricultural Groups**
    - Represent nation’s farmers, agricultural industry, some broad-based, others more specific to certain products
    - **American Farm Bureau Federation** represents farmers as a whole.
    - **National Potato Council**—commodity group representing certain type of farmer, product
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

• Business Groups
  • Business interest groups include U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Federation of Independent Business
  • Trade associations represent specific industries, parts of industries
  • Support laws and policies that benefit their particular industry

• Labor Groups
  • Labor unions, groups of workers who do the same job, or who work in related industries
  • Unions and members contribute to political campaigns, have political education committees

• Cause-Based Groups
  • Represent or promote a cause rather than segment of society
  • Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) fights drunk driving
  • Common Cause works to increase public participation in government.
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

- Professional Groups
  - Represent a particular profession
  - American Medical Association
  - American Bar Association
  - Establish standards for profession, influence training, licensing
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

- Functions of Special Interest Groups
  - Interest groups do not change laws, but they do affect public opinion and public policy at every level of government by supporting candidates and lobbying to influence public officials and public policy.
  - Endorsing Candidates
    - Interest group may **endorse**—publicly declare support for—particular candidate in election
    - Endorsement depends on candidate’s position on, support for, group’s interest
    - May have PACs to contribute money, sometimes to candidates on both sides hoping for support from both
  - Lobbying
    - Interest groups participate by **lobbying**—contacting public official to persuade him/her to support group’s interest
    - Lobby decision-makers in government as well as legislators
    - E-mail campaigns used, but most effective are telephone calls and personal visits
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

- **Informing Public Opinion**
  - Groups often provide someone to testify to express and explain group’s interest to local, state, or federal meetings, hearings, to generate support for group, influence lawmakers
  - **Grass-roots** politics, on lowest level of organization, includes organizing demonstrations, groups to contact lawmakers, officials

- **Filing Lawsuits**
  - Interest groups influence through legal system
  - Supreme Court ruled racially segregated schools illegal, African American students be admitted “with all deliberate speed”
**SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS**

- **Interest Groups and the Public Good**
  - American democracy includes both the principle of majority rule and the requirement that minority rights be protected. As you might expect, interest groups that represent majority interests and others that represent minority interests actively try to influence public policy and political issues.
  - **Benefits of Interest Groups**
    - Give minority interests voice in political process, such as civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s
    - Other political minorities, like neighborhood associations, hunters, may form own interest groups
    - Rural landowners might unite to oppose plan to build state highway
  - **Criticism of Interest Groups**
    - Some believe interest groups have too much influence.
    - Criticized for focusing on one narrow issue, ignoring broader needs
    - Often appeal to emotions rather than find reasonable solutions
    - Some say, with effective interest groups on all sides, Congress may decide not to act on particular issue
SECTION 2: INTEREST GROUPS

- Limits on Interest Groups
  - 2007: Congress passed ethics and lobbying reform legislation
  - Tightened House and Senate ethics rules for legislators, limited some types of lobbying activities
  - Many previous reforms have had only temporary success.
  - Citizens need to learn about who supports, opposes major issues

Interest Groups and Their Impact

One goal of most interest groups is to elect candidates who support the group’s point of view. What does this political cartoon say about the relationship between interest groups and elected officials?
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

- The Role of Political Parties
  - Political parties are formal organizations that work to elect candidates to public office. Our political system is dominated by two major parties, but other parties are actively involved in the system.

- Political Parties
  - Constitution established republican form of government, representative democracy
  - Political party: an organization that tries to elect its members to public office so its views become policy
  - Important to our system is the way we nominate, elect, monitor our representatives

- Party Ideology
  - Each party has basic set of ideas, theories, aims about society and government shared by members
  - Ideology is the unification of those ideas into a social, political program
  - Ideology sets one party apart from others, determines place on political spectrum—the continuum of general political beliefs
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

- Today’s political spectrum: Democrats liberal, support government action for change; Republicans conservative, support limited government.
  - Parties’ Three Main Roles
    - Nominating candidates, assisting electoral process, helping operate government
    - Nomination process, naming candidates is party’s main function
    - Each party has position on all major issues connected to its ideology
    - Provides “brand name” so voters have indication of candidates’ views
    - Helps electorate—people entitled to vote—register, learn about issues
    - Watches how officeholders perform, criticizes mistakes of opposition party
    - Party leaders and members help run government.
    - Members of majority party control each house of Congress
    - Political appointees usually of same party as president
    - Interest groups focus on one issue; parties address variety of issues
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

• The America Two-Party System
  • Role Parties Play
    • Depends on type of party system a country has
    • The more parties, the smaller the role and influence of any particular party
  • Party Systems
    • One-party: controls government
    • Two-party: parties compete to control government
    • Multi-party: several compete to control; most common type

American Political Parties
  • Federalist and Democratic-Republican Parties were the first
  • After 1824, Democratic-Republican party split into today’s two major parties—Democrats, Republicans
  • Third party: any political party in a two-party system besides the two major ones
  • Independent candidate: one not associated with any party
American Political Parties

The history of U.S. political parties since 1800 can be divided into four eras, as shown on this chart. For most of that time, our political system has been dominated by only two parties, the Democrats and Republicans, but third parties have also played a role in our political history. Use the key to track changes in major political parties since 1800.
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

Party Organization

- Political parties are organized at all levels, from small local committees to the large national committees. Each level contributes to the success of the party.

Local Parties

- Structures vary; county party formed from precincts—smallest unit for administering elections
- Some cities have wards, made up of several precincts

State Parties

- Run by central committee made up of representatives from county committees
- Party leaders, members try to elect local, state, national candidates from their party in their state

National Parties

- Headed by national committees of members from state parties
- Include committees for fundraising, supporting campaigns, education
- Sponsor organizations at lower levels to attract specific groups of voters, like women, students
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

- Political Parties and the Public Good

  - Benefits of Political Parties
    - Some political scientists believe two-party system serves public good by filtering out extreme, unconventional ideas
    - Provide stability against rapid, disruptive change
    - To maximize votes, parties try to include broad base of support
    - Each made up of distinctive groups with own range of views
    - Democratic Party constituencies include labor unions, women, racial and ethnic minorities, educated urban voters
    - Republican Party constituencies include religious conservatives, corporate and business interests, white men
    - Party loyalty promotes stability by discouraging short-term shifts in power.
    - Parties provide political “brand name”—voters who support party views may not need to know everything about candidates to reach political decisions
SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

- Criticisms of Political Parties
  - Some critics argue by trying for broad-based appeal, majority parties lack unity, discipline, loyalty
  - Parties may not be able to fulfill all campaign promises made
  - U.S. officeholders stick together on issues less than those in other countries
  - Money from public interest groups may influence parties and officeholders to act in ways that benefit narrow interests rather than the larger public good.
  - Critics charge parties full of office-seekers interested more in personal success than serving the public good
  - Some people angered by partisan bickering between two major parties charge that parties offer simple, narrow solutions to complex problems, more interested in winning public opinion than solving issues
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- The Constitution creates a system in which citizens elect representatives to public office. Each citizen has the responsibility to help make this system work. Citizens can affect the electoral process in many ways, but the most powerful is by voting on election day.

- Organizing and Financing Campaigns
  - Political campaigns are expensive in both time and money. So why do people bother to run for office? Holding elective office is considered an honor and most candidates are public-minded people who want to contribute to society. However, some do run for office because they want the power.
  - Political Campaigns
    - Campaigning is hard work.
    - Local candidates walk door-to-door, attend local functions
    - Presidential candidates travel from state to state.
    - Candidates try to reach and attract enough voters to win.
    - Candidates rely heavily on media.
**SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

- **Money and Campaigns**
  - Candidates spend a lot of time raising money.
  - Sources: PACs, candidate’s party, private individuals, personal funds
  - **Hard money**: money donated to an individual campaign, regulated by state and federal laws
  - **Soft money**: given to party rather than specific candidate

- **Choosing Candidates**
  - How does a person get his or her name on the ballot as a candidate? Nomination is the first step. This is one of the functions of a political party. Candidates are selected by primary elections or caucuses. Nomination processes vary from state to state, but involve one or more of the following:
    - **Self-announcement**
      - First step, announce you are running.
      - Seek party’s nomination, or run as independent candidate
      - Register and pay filing fee; sometimes must circulate petition to get on ballot
    - **Avoiding petition process**
      - **Write-in candidates** announce they are running as independent, ask voters to write name in on ballot; almost always lose If they had more support they would not run as write-in
Section 4: The Electoral Process

- **Caucuses**
  - Caucus: meeting of party members who select candidates to run for election
  - Began in early 1800s; state leaders would meet, select all candidates
  - 1831, 1832: first national party conventions held; state party leader met in state-level caucuses to select delegates to national conventions
  - Party leaders controlled who went to convention, how they voted
  - 1890s: reformers began to take nominating power out of the hands of party leaders, let party members vote for candidate of choice
  - Caucuses still used in states like Iowa; precinct caucuses open to all party members in precinct
  - Precinct caucuses endorse candidates for local offices, select delegates to caucus of next level, such as county, district
  - Candidate with most votes at precinct generally has most delegates at next level
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- **Conventions**
  - Similar to, yet different from, caucuses
  - Only party members take part, in both; both are ways to nominate candidates.
  - Convention open to public; delegates represent party members not present
  - Local convention delegates choose delegates to state convention and nominate candidates for local office.
  - State conventions choose candidates for statewide office.
  - In presidential election years, state conventions select delegates to party’s national nominating convention, which chooses party’s candidates for president and vice president.
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- **Primary Elections**
  - If more than one member of same political party seeks same office, direct primary election held
  - Direct primary: party’s candidate for office chosen directly by voters
  - Two types of direct primary: closed, open
  - **Closed primary**: only voters registered as party members can vote
  - **Open primary**: any registered voter may vote in either party’s primary
  - Most states hold primary elections.
  - Each party’s presidential candidate is chosen after all states have held primary elections.
  - 2008 primary season ran from January to June 2008, a long process in which each state had own rules for selecting delegates
  - Primaries play greatest role in determining candidates for president
From self-announcement to national party conventions, the process of presidential-candidate selection can last from about nine months to a year and a half.

**Self-Announcement**
Candidates for political office almost always self-announce, or declare publicly that they are running for office.

**Pay Filing Fee**
Candidates usually pay a filing fee in each state to get their names placed on that state’s election ballot.

**Collect Signatures**
Candidates who lack funds to pay the filing fee may get their names on the ballot by collecting enough signatures on a petition.

**Write-In Candidates**
A candidate who can neither raise the money nor collect enough signatures may ask voters to write his or her name on the ballot.

**Party Primary Election**
In most states, if two or more candidates from the same party are running for president, the party conducts a primary election to choose a candidate.

**Nominating Caucus**
Several states use a party caucus, or a “meeting of neighbors,” to choose the party’s candidates.

**National Party Convention**
Delegates to each party’s national convention officially select the party’s presidential candidate.

In July 1992 Bill Clinton won the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Clinton was elected president in 1992 and again in 1996.
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Voting and Voting Behavior

- After the candidates run their campaigns, it is time for the voters to choose. Voting is a right, and to many people a duty, in our democracy. It is a person’s most direct and powerful act of popular sovereignty. In recent elections, however, fewer than two-thirds of eligible voters voted. Why don’t people vote? They offer a number of reasons, such as difficulty in registering to vote, or belief that one vote will not make any difference.

Voting Requirements

- Must be U.S. citizen at least 18 years of age, resident of state in which he or she wishes to vote
- Some believe registration process is main reason voting rate is low
- Registration made easier in recent years; register by mail or when renewing driver’s license

Voting Behavior

- Four main factors influence the way voters vote:
  - Party identification, Issues, candidate’s background, voter’s background
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

More About Elections

• General Elections
  • General election marks end of campaign. One candidate elected to each office. In most states only plurality required for election
  • Plurality: candidate wins if he/she has more votes than anyone else. Some states require majority—more than 50%—to win

• Special Elections
  • Sometimes held at local, state level
  • Let people, rather than government leaders, decide issue
  • Issue could be whether to raise taxes
  • Special election might be called to replace officeholder who has died or resigned from office

• All elections are held according to state and federal laws. In addition, each Native American nation establishes its own procedures, rules and requirements for electing its leaders.
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- **Holding an Election**
  - Dates of general election set by law
  - Federal elections: first Tuesday following first Monday in November
  - Most states hold statewide elections on same day
  - Voters go to polling places in precinct where they live
  - Voters cast secret ballot
  - Many voting machines now electronic
  - **Absentee ballot** may be cast when voters are not able to be at polling place on election day; early voting rules vary by state.
    - Some voters may be seriously ill.
    - Some voters may be in Armed Forces, not in U.S.
    - Some voters may plan to be away from home on election day.

SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- Campaigns and the Public Good
  - Political parties, interest groups, and individuals all play a part in determining who represents us in our local, state, and national government. Parties nominate candidates and help define the public issues and public agenda the campaigns will cover. Interest groups lend their voices to the public debate. Individuals vote, and the results determine which issues become priorities.
  - Elections and the Public Good
    - Elections allow citizens to express opinion on how country should be run
    - Campaigns spend much time, money to inform voters about candidates, issues
  - Criticism of Campaigns
    - Dislike of television, radio advertising
    - May distort or omit information, leaving viewer misinformed
    - Dislike of negative advertising, though some feel criticism more effective in influencing voters
SECTION 4: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

- Landmark Supreme Court Cases
  - Buckley v. Valeo (1976)

- Campaign finance laws aim to limit the influence that wealthy individuals and organizations might exert over elections and public officials. The court’s decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* established the basic rules that govern how modern presidential campaigns are financed.