



Republican nominee John McCain's selection of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin (seen here with McCain at the convention) helped McCain with the base of his party and helped energize volunteers.

especially in the Obama campaign which set new records not only for total contributions but also for the number of individuals contributing to the campaign. Many of these donors were new donors making contributions that did not exceed \$200.

As we have demonstrated in this chapter, political parties are vital to the functioning of democracy. They organize electoral competition, unify large portions of the electorate, simplify democracy for voters, help transform individual preferences into policy, and provide a mechanism for opposition.

Parties are just as important in organizing the government. They help straddle the separation of powers as fellow partisans cooperate between the executive and legislative branches, or between the House and Senate. Senior government appointees get their jobs in part because of their party loyalty.

Parties also provide an important way for citizens to influence government. As a well-known political scientist wrote many years ago, "The political parties created democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties."⁵⁶ Because they are the means by which politicians secure office, participation in the parties can help determine the course of American government. Parties also provide opportunities to learn about how other people see issues and to learn to compromise. Rather than being an impediment to democracy, they make government by the people possible.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- 1 Explain why parties arise in democracies and their primary functions.

Political parties are essential to democracy. They simplify voting choices, organize electoral competition, unify the electorate, help organize government by bridging the separation of powers and fostering cooperation among branches of government, translate public preferences into policy, and provide loyal opposition.

- 2 Contrast the unique features of the American party system with those of other countries.
American elections are based on single-member-district, winner-take-all election rules. In systems with proportional representation or multimember districts, there is a greater

tendency for more parties to form and consequently a need to assemble governing coalitions of several parties. Compared to some European parties, American parties remain organizationally weak.

Another unique feature is the candidate nomination process. With rules determined by each state, voters determine party nominees for office through primaries, caucuses, or mixed systems.

- 3 Understand the history of American political parties.
American parties have experienced critical elections and realignments. Most political scientists agree that the last realignment occurred in 1932. In recent years, there has been divided government and an increase in the number of