

15. Campaigns & Elections

Breakout Sessions

POLS 1101

**12:40pm-1:30pm Park Hall 145
& 1:50pm-2:40pm Leconte Hall 135**

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Nomination

- Nomination mostly happens *within* the party (not given by party leaders).
- **Nomination for Congress and state offices**
 - Primary election – highly decentralized; competition tends to decline.
 - Closed primaries: voters must declare a party affiliation before voting the nominees
 - Open primaries: voters needn't declare a party affiliation
 - Modified closed primaries: allowing individual state parties to decide who can vote
 - Modified open primaries: entitling independents to vote in a party's primary
 - Placing the nomination of party candidates in the hands of voters (even not party members) contributes to **the pluralist democracy**.
 - However, **why hasn't decentralization brought about more competition?**

Characteristics	Open Primary (State A)	Closed Primary (State B)
Voter Eligibility	Any registered voter can participate	Only registered party members can vote
Role of National Party	Weak	Strong
Opportunity for New Candidates	High	Low
Party Unity	Low	High
Voter Influence	Broad but dispersed	Limited but concentrated

Nomination (cont`d)

- **Nomination for President**

- After the chaotic 1968 Democratic National Convention — where party leaders chose the nominee (Hubert Humphrey) **without most primary voters having a say,**

Before 1972	After 1972
Party elites controlled delegates and convention outcomes	Candidates compete directly in primaries and caucuses
National conventions <i>chose</i> nominees	National conventions now <i>confirm</i> nominees already chosen through primaries
Party organization raised and distributed funds	Candidates build their own fundraising networks (e.g., PACs, small donors)
Party loyalty and hierarchy dominated	Media exposure, personal image, and campaign strategy dominate

- **After 1972, the presidential nomination process shifted from party-centered to voter-centered. Is this a democratic improvement or a loss of institutional stability?**
 - E.g. Consider: **can party-controlled nominations protect democracy by filtering out extremist candidates?** Do you think it is good, or bad?
 - By definition it's a "party nomination", so who should play a more important role, ordinary party members, or the party convention / caucus?

Nomination (cont`d)

- **Nomination for President**

- How do the state parties select delegates to their national conventions?
 - **Presidential primary:** proportional / winner-take-all; mainstream method
 - **(local) caucus / (state) convention**
 - To gain popular attention, states practice **front-loading** strategies.

- Campaigning for the nomination

- First “TESTS” in Iowa (party caucuses) and New Hampshire (primary)
 - Given that Iowa and New Hampshire are less demographically representative of the U.S. population (mainly white & rural), thus bearing the risk of undermining democratic representation, **why could this happen in past decades? If you could redesign the nomination calendar, which states would you put first?**
 - **Path Dependence, “Lock-in” Effect, vested interests**
- Campaigning results in several consequences / fun facts
 - No incumbent president seeking for reelection -> fierce competition in both parties
 - Dispersed / fragmented resources, discourses, powers, ...
 - An incumbent president can usually be renominated within the party
 - In the nonincumbent party, numerous hopefuls seek the presidential nomination

Presidential Elections

- A president is elected not in a national election, but in a **federal** election.
 - **Interesting for me!** The key to win a presidential election lies in **the state level**, not **the individual level**, which shows differences between **unitary and federal** system.
- **The electoral college**
 - **538** electoral votes: one vote for each Congress member + the District of Columbia
 - Each state selects their electors through **popular vote**.
 - From “independent” to “pledged” electors – party dominates!
 - *Chiafalo v. Washington (2020)*: States can require electors to follow the popular vote.
 - **Why should we have the electoral votes system?**
 - The federal form of government
 - Balancing candidates’ attention between large and small states, urban and rural areas, people of different SES; avoiding being captured by a few easily accessible groups
 - Lower administrative cost: potential risk of a nationwide recount in a close election

Are these ideas convincing enough for you? Should we (attention: not “Do we”) continue to have the electoral votes system? Why or why not?

Congressional Elections

- General election (presidential election; congressional / midterm / off-year elections)
- Party affiliation now dominates, but it was NOT this way.
 - **Straight ticket:** Voting for a single party's candidates for all the offices.
 - **Split ticket:** Voting for candidates from different parties for different offices.

Split-ticket voting suggests that voters may trust different parties for different levels of government. Does it make sense, or seem ridiculous to you?
- There can be sizable discrepancies between **votes won** and **seats won**.
 - **First-past-the-post elections:** elections conducted in single-member districts that award victory to the candidate with the most votes. (no need to be more than 50%; relative majority, not absolute majority)
 - **Extreme example:** a party got **45%** of the votes in all the districts, where it was always the one with the most votes, then it could get all **(100%)** the seats.

If you could redesign the congressional election system, would you keep the single-member, first-past-the-post model or replace it with proportional representation? Why?

Campaigns

- **Goals of an election campaign**

- Acquiring and analyzing information about voters' interests (via opinion polls)
- Developing a strategy and corresponding tactics to appeal to these interests
- Delivering the candidate's message to the voters (via mass / social media)
- Getting voters to cast their ballots

- **What influences the achievement of such goals?**

- **Political context**

- Role: incumbent or challenger (**open election** is one lacking an incumbent.)
- The office the candidate is seeking: geographical / demographical / professional characteristics? Preferences of the electorate / constituents?
- Significant political issues (economic recession, personal scandals, war, COVID, ...)
 - Especially unfriendly to incumbents (2016, 2020, 2024)
 - **Fundamentals can have a lag to them. (e.g. inflation)**

Campaigns (cont`d)

➤ Financing

- Regulating campaign financing
 - **1971, the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA):** party-reform era; limiting media spending and imposing new rules for full reporting of campaign contributions & expenditures
 - **1974, the Federal Election Commission (FEC):** an independent agency that oversees the financing of national election campaigns (but hardly “independent”)
 - **Political action committees (PACs):** under limits, it can collect campaign contributions from group members and donates them to candidates for political office
 - **1976, SC** upheld limits on **contributions** while striking down limits on **spending by individuals or organizations made independently** on behalf of national candidate (free speech)
 - **2002**, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) raised old limits on individual spending.
 - **2007, SC** struck down BCRA’s ban of issue ads run before elections
 - **2010, SC** ruled against BCRA’s ban on spending by corporations in candidate elections
 - **2010, SC** legalized Super PACs – No limit on independent private money
 - **2014, SC** struck down all limits on contributions

Early reforms in the 1970s aimed to limit the role of money in politics, yet Supreme Court rulings since then have repeatedly weakened these restrictions. Why does U.S. campaign finance reform move “two steps forward, one step back”?

Campaigns (cont`d)

➤ Financing

- **Public financing of presidential campaigns (originated from the 1974 FECA)**
 - It has become much less important this century, both in primaries and general elections.
 - The president candidate can **EITHER** get public funds **OR** receive private money.
 - In a word, public financing is insufficient to cover a big election campaign, and tends to be abandoned in practice.
- **Private financing of congressional campaigns**
 - Each party has separate House and Senate campaign committees that aid its congressional candidates.
 - Candidates can also raise campaign funds themselves, and typically they get more than that from the committees.

Why are presidential candidates in the United States prohibited from receiving both public funding and private contributions, while congressional candidates are allowed to accept funds from both individuals and political committees?

Campaigns (cont`d)

➤ Strategies

- **Party-centered strategy:** relying on voters' party identification
- **Issue-oriented strategy:** talking about substantive policies
- **Candidate-oriented strategy:** the candidate's perceived personal qualities

➤ Tactics

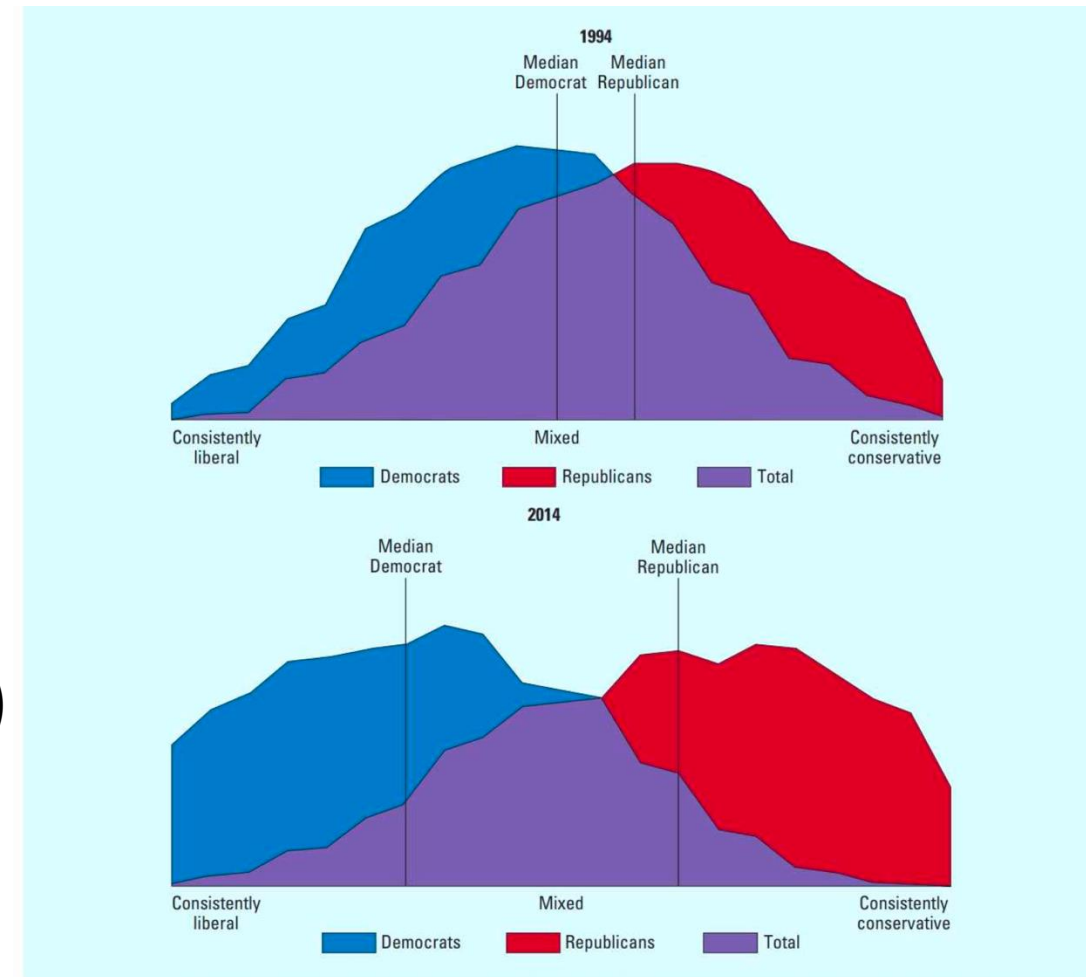
- **Making the news:** free, and seems objective to the audience
- **Advertising the candidate:** raising name recognition, presenting their virtues, and attacking one's opponent or playing on emotions
- **Using the Internet and social media:** cheap, timely targeted ads; sometimes leading to junk news

What do you think contributes more to the outcome of the election, campaigns or governance performance?

Should overt bias / discrimination / hate speech be allowed in campaigns?

Explaining Voting Choice

- Voting can always be “irrational” (recall “bounded rationality”).
 - **Party identification > Candidates’ attributes > Issues and policies**
- Campaign Effects
 - **The television campaign**
 - Television news is not enough.
 - TV shows, advertisements, and social media can help better influence voters.
 - **The presidential debates**
 - 1960, JFK v Nixon – the first debate
 - 1987, Commission on Presidential Debates
 - Relatively low influence in votes, but sometimes it can play a role (Biden v Trump)
 - **The election strategy**
 - Technical influence (e.g. personal contact, the candidate’s persuasion in person, ...)



Campaigns, Elections, and Democracy

- **Majoritarianism – incompatible**

- **Recall: the Model of Responsible Party Government**

- American parties formulate their platforms and pursue their announced policies.
 - But... candidates and voters are not well connected through campaigns & elections.
 - In nominating **presidential candidates**, party principles matter; but **Congress members** nominations count rarely on the party platform.
 - Both parties may be “responsible” for their own constituents, but not respond to the rest of voters, who are ideologically more moderate.

- **Pluralism – more compatible**

- Two parties are like two giant interest groups (if not two religions)
 - Stronger parties may strengthen democratic government (like a strong interest group), but there are differences with interest groups – under a divided government, strong parties may lead to **gridlocks**.
 - The decentralized nature of campaigns & elections offer opportunities for interest groups to exert their influence, but can frustrate majority interests on occasion.

Next week...

- Remember that we have our last class on Dec 2nd, a Tuesday with the Friday schedule.
- We have covered all of the substantive materials (maybe some were overlooked, but you can go through by yourselves at any time you like.)
- **Next time: take-aways sharing, final review, parting thoughts, (and course evaluation)**
- Wish you a happy Thanksgiving Week!