American Government

Political Parties
By the End of Today’s Class…

• You should be able to answer four questions:
  – Why do we have political parties?
  – Why do we have a *two-party* system in the United States?
  – How ideologically distinct are the two major parties?
  – What role do third parties play?
Origins of Political Parties

• Framers’ intentions
  – No mention in Constitution
  – Considered threat to good government

• The first parties developed in the first few Congresses
  – Hamilton faction (“Federalists”)
  – Jefferson and Madison faction (“Republicans”, then “Democratic-Republicans”, then “Democrats”)
The Republican Party

- Organized in 1854 as a coalition
- Founded on the issue of slavery
- Failed with first candidate, but won in 1860
Why Do We Have Parties?

• To facilitate of collective action
  – Simplify political choices (by narrowing down options to two)
  – Build majority alliances

• To help citizens hold elected leaders accountable
  – Party labels = shorthand cue
  – Voting decisions cheap and simple
  – Not satisfied with government? Punish the party in power.
## Parties as shortcuts

### Vote 2006—House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party ID</th>
<th>Voted Dem</th>
<th>Voted Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Only Two Major Parties?

- **Single Member Districts**
  - 3rd party must beat the other two parties within a district to gain any representation
  - Disincentives for contributors and voters to invest in 3rd parties

- **Legal Barriers to 3rd Parties**
  - Partial public funding
  - Participation in debates
Proportional Representation (PR): How it Differs from SMDs

• Encourages more parties

• Leads to more ideologically pure parties

• Leads to higher voter turnout
Instant Runoff Voting

• A hybrid of SMDs and PR
• How it works:
  – Rank candidates
  – If a candidates receives a majority, he/she wins
  – If no majority winner, eliminate candidate with fewest 1st place votes and reallocate to second choices
  – Repeat until there is a majority winner
Advantages of Instant Runoff Voting

• Minimizes wasted votes
  - Encourages 3\textsuperscript{rd} parties and greater choice without spoilers

• Advocates say it is a closer approximation to majority rule than plurality voting

• So why don’t we have this type of voting system?
Consequences of Two-Party System

• How much do the two major parties differ?

• If third parties have no chance of getting elected, what role do they play?
Median Voter Theorem

- Voters are placed on a continuum
  - Left = more liberal, right = more conservative
  - Most people in the middle
Median Voter Theorem

- People vote for candidate closest to them
  - Kerry gets all votes to left of Kerry and half between Kerry and Bush
  - Bush gets all votes to the right of Bush and half between Kerry and Bush
Median Voter Theorem

• To get more votes, each candidate moves closer to the middle
• The result: ideologically similar candidates
Median Voter Theorem

- What assumptions about “reality” does the Median Voter Theorem make?

- Do those assumptions hold true?

- Are the candidates (and parties) similar or do you see real differences?

- How do third parties fit in?
Role of Third Parties

• They have little chance of winning—so what purpose do they serve?
## The Most Successful Third Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent of Presidential Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bull Moose Progressive</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American (Know-Nothing)</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perot (as independent)</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributions of Third Parties

• Third parties could replace major parties
  – This has only happened once; the Republican party replaced the Whigs

• Greater impact at state and local level
  – 46 out of 179 Green party candidates won in 2005
  – Most positions were local—school boards, town councils, etc.