Party Organizations

Overview

- Basic definition & characteristics
- Three levels of party organization
  - Local
  - State
  - National
- Historical changes in party organizations

Party Organization Basic Characteristics

- Loose confederation of local, state and national committees and officers
- Increasing organizational strength in recent decades
- But weak in comparison to parties in other countries

State and Local Organization

- State committee
- Congressional district committees
- County committees
- Intermediate committees (city, legislative, judicial)
- Ward committees
- Local party (ward, precinct) committeeperson

Source: Hershey, Figure 3.1
Local Party

- Precinct, ward, township
  - elected committeepersons
  - 100,000 slots per party
  - volunteers
- Caucuses
  - open meeting, a few for presidential nomination
- committee meetings of elected members

Activity of Local Party

- Depends on initiative of volunteers
- Voter registration
- Get-out-the-vote drives
- Minor aid to candidates
- Most active around elections

State Parties

- Traditionally weakest link
- State regulations since 1890s
- Revitalization since 1980s
  - Money from national organization
  - Soft money ban
- Services for candidates
- State conventions, state party platform

National Party

- National convention
- National committee and chair
- National headquarters
- Auxiliaries
- Congressional campaign committees
National Convention

- Ultimate authority
- Only once every four years
- Officially nominates president and vice president
- Ratifies party platform
- Ratifies changes in party rules

Republican National Committee

- National Committeeman from each state
- National Committeeewoman from each state
- State Party Chair from each state
- Plus Washington, D.C. and territories
- N = 165 people


Democratic National Committee

- Party Chair and Vice Chair from each state
- Other state members based on population
- Representatives from Congress, state and local governments
- Representatives of various groups, such as Young Democrats
- N = 440


National Chairperson

- Technically elected by national committee
  - Winning party is presidential choice
  - Losing party is rebuilders
- Duties
  - Party spokesperson
  - Chief administrator
  - Strategy and changes
  - Support or opposition to presidential programs
Presidential Control of National Party

Source: Newsweek
December 10, 2001, p. 8

Current National Chairs

DNC Chair
Howard Dean
(since Feb. 2005)

RNC Chair
Ken Mehlman
(since Jan. 2005)
Previous Bush campaign manager

Activities at National Headquarters

- Campaign division
- Finance division
- Communication division
- Research division
- Compliance
- Marketing

Congressional Campaign Committees

- DCCC - Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee
- NRCC - National Republican Congressional Committee
- DSCC - Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee
- NRSC - National Republican Senatorial Committee
Changing Nature of Parties

- **Service Party Path**
  - Republicans 1960s, Democrats 1980s
  - Build state/local party
  - Services to candidates

- **Procedural Reform Path**
  - Democrats 1960s
  - Nationalization of rules, especially for presidential nominations

Party Machines

- **Urban machines**
  - 1870s-1940s
  - 75% of largest cities
  - Bosses party positions and in later period mayors

- **State-level machines**
  - 1870s-1910s
  - Mostly in Northeast
  - PA, NY, RI, MD, WV, VA, ND, CT
  - Bosses usually senators

Mayor Richard J. Daley
Chicago, 1951 - 1976

Machine Strength

- Trade votes for benefits
  - Jobs - patronage
  - Assistance - food to legal aid
  - Government contracts
- Gave political power to working class and new immigrant groups
- Unified government

Machine Problems

- Corruption & bribery
- Made government more expensive
- Government benefits to select few
- Integrity of government and vote
- Became conservative and not open to newer urban groups
Decline of Political Machines

- Progressive reforms - civil service, voter registration, primaries
- Requirements for competitive bids
- Government social welfare programs - 1930
- Change in core constituency

Summary

- Legal entities of political parties
- One for each level of government
- Stronger but still weak
- Change in structure over time