

CHAPTER 4

Political Parties And The Electorate

Political parties, the “factions” the founding fathers so carefully tried to control, are an essential bridge between people and government. From James Madison's treatment of them as “evil” factions in *Federalist 10*, which begins this chapter, to the present, political writers have both criticized and praised them. The expansion of the voting franchise that accompanied the nineteenth century growth of democracy supported the rise of parties. Parties are the key to a successful democracy, although our system of *constitutional* democracy restrains them.

After beginning with *Federalist 10*, the most famous and widely read of James Madison's and Alexander Hamilton's acclaimed constitutional treatise, the chapter proceeds to E. E. Schattschneider's overview of parties in the constitutional system in a selection from his classic work, *Party Government*. The Schattschneider selection has long been out of print but has been kept alive through every edition of the reader. He emphasizes that while the Constitution makes it difficult for parties to function effectively, constitutional freedoms of expression, protected in the Bill of Rights, permit parties to organize and allow them to flourish.

After students have become acquainted with the constitutional context of parties, they are exposed to a variety of readings, both contemporary and classic, that discuss various aspects of parties and the role they play in the political process.

Parties were not part of the eighteenth century Madisonian (separation of powers and checks and balances) or Hamiltonian (strong, unitary president) constitutional models. What political scientists refer to as the “party model” of government really did not come into its own until the end of the nineteenth century. Woodrow Wilson called for a party model in his famous 1885 book, *Congressional Government*.

Political scientists of all stripes began to address the need for party government as the APSA formed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Although it's difficult of course to generalize, American political scientists did not emphasize the centrality of the Madisonian model (some describing it as a “deadlock of democracy”). They addressed the role of parties and interest groups, some calling for more disciplined parties, others stressing the importance of pluralism in the democratic process.

Sir Ernest Barker's classic argument for a “government by discussion” introduces students to the party model. After Barker comes an excerpt from the report issued by the American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties in 1950 calling for more disciplined parties to strengthen Congress and reduce the power of the imperial presidency. Democratic demands should be channeled to parties, not entirely to the president. David Mayhew offers a revisionist theory of the party model in his reading on divided government.

Other classics in the chapter include V. O. Key, Jr.'s theory of critical elections, and his sanguine view of voters in *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). Key argues that voters are essentially rational but that politicians, largely on the advice of their consultants, continue to appeal more to emotion than to reason.

CONSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

James Madison's famous *Federalist 10* provides the constitutional setting not only of political parties, but also of interest groups. “Faction” is inherently opposed to the national interest, argues Madison, the clear implication

being that political parties and interest groups, which by definition represent faction, should not be allowed to govern without impediment. There is no way in which a free government can prevent faction without destroying the very liberty upon which it is based. However, faction can be controlled through constitutional devices, and Madison suggests that the instrument of federalism, enabling a large geographical area with diverse interests be brought together to form one nation, will tend to isolate particular factions within the states and make any one faction less capable of dominating the entire nation.

Reading 31: James Madison, <i>Federalist 10</i>
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The discussion of *Federalist 10* should highlight Madison's definition of faction as being opposed to the national interest, and his statement that the major cause of faction is the unequal distribution of property, a secondary cause being the inevitable diversity of group opinions. Government must be designed to control and channel faction rather than prevent it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What, according to Madison, is the principal cause of faction in society, and do you feel that his view accurately reflected his own times? What about the present? (“But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property.” Note also that Madison stated other reasons for faction, such as “a zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points...an attachment to different leaders . . .”)
2. How does Madison propose to deal with the problem of faction? Can faction be eliminated? How is it to be controlled? (“Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment, without which it instantly expires. But it could not be a less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency.” To control faction, Madison rejects the idea of a pure democracy, which he feels would be most subject to the evil effects of faction. He proposes a republic, “by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place....” Moreover, a republic can cover a greater expanse of territory than a pure democracy, which requires a relatively small community in which to function. The larger the republic, the more faction will be diluted, according to Madison. Factionous leaders will be more or less isolated in the various compartments of government—the states. It will be very difficult for faction to spread from state to nation. Faction will tend to have a parochial cast rather than a national orientation.)
3. What other constitutional devices, besides those mentioned by Madison, tend to prevent the control of government by a faction? (Here mention the separation of powers, the various provisions for extraordinary majorities, and the Bill of Rights. The entire thrust of the Constitution is to prevent the easy rule of the majority.)
4. What are the implications of Madison's theory for political parties and interest groups within our political system? (Note that Madison's view is definitely anti-party and anti-interest group, and the constitutional provisions which he mentions and also those which he does not mention tend to frustrate the development of party government; but, paradoxically, they increase the potential power of interest groups by fragmenting the political process and expanding the number of access points for interest groups to control policymaking.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In *Federalist 10*, James Madison suggests that the most enduring cause of faction is:
 - a) differing political opinion.
 - b) unequal distribution of property.**
 - c) the separation of powers.
 - d) the large geographical area of the country.

2. James Madison argues, in *Federalist 10*, that faction:
 - a) should be stamped out.
 - b) helps to advance the national interest.
 - c) is always opposed to the national interest.**
 - d) provides an important underpinning for democratic government.

3. In *Federalist 10*, Madison suggests that faction may be controlled by:
 - a) a republican form of government.**
 - b) a powerful Supreme Court.
 - c) a strong presidency.
 - d) a national legislature.

4. *Federalist 10* suggests that the framers of the Constitution were:
 - a) in favor of strong political parties.
 - b) suspicious of parties.**
 - c) in support of parties as a necessary condition of democratic government.
 - d) oblivious to parties.

Reading 32:

E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government*

Although James Madison in the preceding selection states the premise that faction, i.e., parties and interest groups, is inherently evil, E. E. Schattschneider points out in the following section that in fact the Constitution contained provisions that supported and nourished the development of parties as well as interest groups. This is in no way a contradiction of Madison's views, for in *Federalist 10* he also declared that the Constitution must necessarily support the liberties that made faction possible.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways does Schattschneider describe the Constitution as pro-party and anti-party? (The pro-party aspects of the system are those that guarantee civil rights and civil liberties, particularly freedom of speech and press, which allow parties to develop. The anti-party aspects are the separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. As Schattschneider says, "It was hoped that the parties would lose and exhaust themselves in the futile attempts to fight their way through the labyrinthine framework of the

government, much as an attacking army is expected to spend itself against the defensive works of a fortress.”)

2. Describe Schattschneider's “law of the imperfect political mobilization of interests.” (This is the theory of overlapping group memberships. It is impossible for any one individual to be mobilized totally in a political sense by any one group, because of the individual's overlapping group memberships.)
3. To what extent do you feel the operation of the law of the imperfect mobilization of political interests protects the system against domination by interest groups? Are what Schattschneider calls “the raw materials of politics” (overlapping group membership, etc.) a more effective check upon “faction” than formal constitutional devices?

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. E.E. Schattschneider argues that the major pro-party aspect of the Constitution was:
 - a) the separation of powers.
 - b) its guarantee of the right to agitate and to organize.
 - c) federalism.
 - d) a strong presidency.
2. Which of the following statements does E. E. Schattschneider *not* make?
 - a) The Constitutional Convention produced a constitution that was pro-party in one sense and anti-party in another.
 - b) In the American republic, parties are tolerated but are invited to strangle themselves in the machinery of government.
 - c) James Madison was unequivocal in stating that parties should not control the government.
 - d) Because the Constitution made the rise of parties inevitable, it was compatible with party government.
3. E.E. Schattschneider argues that interest groups:
 - a) are bound to control the government.
 - b) do not have the unanimity and concentration of power to control all of their members or the government.
 - c) reflect the unanimity of the political interests of their members.
 - d) represent the perfect political mobilization of interests.
4. The law of the imperfect political mobilization of interests:
 - a) is derived from the unanimity of group interests.
 - b) was an important part of the theory of *The Federalist*.
 - c) reflects the fact that every individual is torn by a diversity of his or her own interests, making an individual a member of many groups.
 - d) reflects the undemocratic character of special interests.

5. Which of the following statements is *incorrect*?
- a) There are many interests in the American polity, including a great body of common interests.
 - b) The government pursues a multiplicity of policies and creates and destroys interests in the process.
 - c) Each individual is capable of having many interests.
 - d) Most citizens are represented by a single interest group.

THE PARTY MODEL OF GOVERNMENT

Reading 33: Sir Ernest Barker, <i>Government by Discussion</i>

Theme

Democratic government supports discussion that begins with political parties, proceeds to the electorate, and moves to the legislature and executive. Political parties facilitate rational electoral choice and bridge the gap between people and government.

Argument

Democracy is based on a belief in the principles of the Enlightenment. Reason and progress are the foundations of democracy. Parties make rational electoral choice possible.

A system of government by discussion proceeds through four main stages:

- first of party,
- next of the electorate,
- then of parliament,
- and finally of cabinet.

This is the British model that Barker used. Here the last two stages are Congress and the Presidency.

Discussion

Can our Madisonian system accommodate government by discussion? The Madisonian system was one of government by deliberation, discussion among the branches and components of government to achieve the national interest.

The separation of powers arguably puts roadblocks in the way of discussion. The separate constituencies of the President and Congress, the House and the Senate, give the different branches conflicting incentives. Some have argued this deadlocks democracy.

Barker put parties and rational choice at the center of his paradigm. Madison emphasizes balanced, deliberative, government. Barker suggests factions can give the electorate programmatic choice. Madison sees factions are undermining a national interest.

Barker's model seems a bit idealistic. Madison knows what might be called the existence of original political sin. Men are not angels, politics can be demagogic, requiring balanced institutions. Madison's system is realistically based on the laws of natural political behavior. Barker, in making government by discussion the democratic ideal, perhaps ignores political realities. His democracy is the Oxford Union, Madison's model is rooted in political reality.

Students undoubtedly haven't thought much if at all about the complex theories of democracy. I try to stress to students that our government is based in the eighteenth century Enlightenment in France, England, and here as well. Madison is the political Newton. Government is about balance, the necessary quality to give us a statesman-like government rather than one of partisan bickering.

I also stress that our government has been Hamiltonian in times of crisis, when the President, now with popular support, rises above the separation of powers to save the nation. Lincoln and F.D.R. come to mind.

All of the preceding raises many lively discussion topics about "government by discussion."

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Sir Ernest Barker's Government by Discussion model:

- a) attacks factions as evil.
- b) requires a plurality of parties.**
- b) stresses the importance of coalition government.
- c) puts the Cabinet ahead of Parliament.

2. The electorate in Barker's government by discussion is:

- a) irrational.
- b) rigidly partisan.
- c) rational and enlightened.**
- c) apathetic.

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

Reading 34:
Report of the Committee on Political Parties, American Political Science Association
Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System

Theme

In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association produced a highly influential report defending the two-party system and citing the benefits of a party-government style system. The Committee's Report remains relevant as an excellent defense of strong parties, a line of reasoning that runs from

Woodrow Wilson in the late nineteenth century through modern calls for strengthened parties and warnings about the fragmenting of American politics.

Support of party government arose in the United States in the nineteenth century as a reversal from the eighteenth century affinity for mixed government. The latter had informed the founding fathers and the Constitutional system, but by the nineteenth century it had begun to look outmoded and inefficient. As government's responsibilities broadened and the electorate grew, and as fear of factions was replaced by the ideal of democratic majority rule, the party government model grew in popularity. Wilson was hardly the only supporter of a system reliant on parties to design broad programmatic directions in order to organize and aggregate the electorate around clear-cut policy alternatives.

Party government is attractive for its order, efficiency, and accountability. Factions can be disordered and evanescent, and government under a mixed system with weak parties can be fluid and volatile. Supporters of party government envision clear policy choices and an informed electorate unconfused by changing initiatives, policy directions, and temporary coalitions. Under the party government theory, a modern government with far-flung responsibilities is ordered and therefore able to provide leadership and coordination.

The Committee's Report

The APSA Committee's Report endorses the idea of strong parties, writing that popular government in a large country “requires political parties which provide the electorate with a proper range of choice between alternatives of action.”

The Committee acknowledges that parties function both in the electorate, as devices for coordinating partisanship and debating principles, as well as in government as mechanisms for debating and coordinating the implementation of public policy. This last function requires parties because of “the extraordinary growth of the responsibilities of government.”

The Committee reasons that modern public policies require a broad base of public support, in large part because so many people are involved in the execution of policy decisions. Only parties can provide this base.

The Committee's Warnings About the Decline of Parties

The Report warns of four dangers associated with the decline of parties. The first of these is that the inability to sustain programs and support “may lead to grave consequences in an explosive era.” The Report was written in 1950, in the throes of the Cold War, and the Committee is clearly worried about the United States' ability to function in the face of powerful enemies. The concern for the ability of the nation to function effectively and coherently in a period of extended crisis has not ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, and similar concerns about the United States' lack of policy planning and coordination continue to be heard from economic, trade, labor, and education sources.

The second danger is that the executive may step into the void left by an unguided Congress, extending not only the power of the presidency but also pushing its responsibilities beyond its capacities. This fear demonstrates concern for the delicate balance of shared powers, and echoes earlier fears about executive power and responsibility. A key factor here is the Committee's understanding of the parties' role in building popular support for programs and policy directions. Recognizing that there is a natural tendency to look to the president for initiatives and guidance, the report warns that “when the political parties fail to [build popular support], it is tempting once more to turn to the president [to do this as well].” Making the president himself garner support for programs undercuts parties at their base: “either his party becomes a flock of sheep or the party falls apart. . . .

[This] favors a president who exploits skillfully the arts of demagoguery, who uses the whole country as his political backyard, and who does not mind turning into the embodiment of personal government.”

These are serious concerns, and they remain current: Sidney Milkis' selection on the presidency (selection 51) describes exactly this danger. The president exists at great risk when his support is direct and based on personality, without the mediation and reliability of support based on political parties.

Third, the Committee warns that a decline in party strength and importance may create a cycle of increasing cynicism about the parties' roles, leading eventually to the complete disintegration of parties. This “is an ominous tendency. It has a splintering effect and may lead to a system of smaller parties”—dangerous because of the American system's grounding in a two-party system.

Finally, the Committee argues that a decline in the importance of the major parties may create support for extremist parties of fanatics determined to impose their own “particular panacea[s]” on the country's problems.

Conclusion

The Committee's report remains an excellent defense of strong parties, and it offers a concise summary of several reasons why a decline in the two-party system may be very dangerous for the future of the United States. Continued calls by contemporary scholars for stronger parties, continued worry over the gradual disintegration of parties, and the increasing reliance on candidate-centered politics are all testaments to the Committee's prescience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss with students the merits of the eighteenth-century mixed government system and the nineteenth-century party government model. How does each account for the presence and importance of factions? Which is more likely to chart a path in the “national interest”? Are the promises of a party government model realistic in an American system of federalism and shared powers, one which encourages and even actively multiplies factions and one which has, in the last several decades, witnessed an explosion of new and diverse viewpoints? Can a party government model work in a heterogeneous environment like America, or is it better suited to a relatively homogeneous, smaller nation like England? Can parties be strengthened without moving to a full-blown party government system?

(Woodrow Wilson, by the time he became president, had decided that a party government model was inappropriate for America. Strong parties are not necessarily the same as party government, however, and asking parties to provide organization and policy alternatives does not seem unrealistic. As the Democrats and Republicans grow closer to each other, though, it becomes increasingly difficult to make choices based on party affiliations. Republicans can no longer be assumed to be pro-life, and Democrats can no longer be expected to support large government entitlement programs. The parties have failed recently to provide clear-cut alternatives, exacerbating worries about coordination and accountability in government.)

2. Strengthening parties is usually accepted as a laudable endeavor, but how to do it is often a much more difficult proposition. Discuss with students some of the forces that elevate personalities above parties: the media, the committee system, the desire for reelection. Even the need to be seen as a free agent can lead candidates and officeholders to make a public point about going against their own party: See, for example, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's endorsement of Democrat Mario Cuomo in New York State's 1994 gubernatorial campaign. What mechanisms can students suggest to strengthen parties in a candidate-centered polity?

3. The Committee's two most important warnings regard the extension of executive power and the rise of smaller, possibly extremist parties to replace the two dominant parties. Has this occurred since the Committee published its report? (See Sidney Milkis' entry in this volume, where he discusses the separation of the presidency from party support. At the same time, recent years have seen the rise of Ross Perot and the United We Stand America campaign, exemplifying the increasing presence of powerful political forces outside of the two traditionally dominant parties.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In 1950, the APSA's Committee on Political Parties argued that:
- a) the decline of parties in America could have dangerous consequences.
 - b) American political parties were healthier than they had ever been.
 - c) the strength of American political parties threatened individual freedoms.
 - d) Republicans were undercutting the proposals of the Truman administration.
2. The party government model envisions:
- a) two weak parties.
 - b) many weak parties.
 - c) two strong parties.
 - d) no parties.
3. According to the APSA's Committee on Political Parties, weakened parties might result in:
- a) a new constitutional convention.
 - b) an overextension of presidential responsibilities.
 - c) better coordination of policy initiatives.
 - d) greater interest in politics among the electorate.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN DIVIDED GOVERNMENT

<p>Reading 35: David R. Mayhew, <i>Divided We Govern</i></p>
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David Mayhew argues, against conventional wisdom, that divided government produced by the separation of powers works as well as the unified government many critics favor.

Observers of the American political scene argue that divided government produces a deadlock of democracy. Many of these analysts have argued that strengthened political parties unifying the executive and legislative branches might overcome the institutional stalemate encouraged by the separation of powers.

Regarding the amount of legislation approved in Washington and the oversight role of Congress, Mayhew writes that “[u]nified versus divided control has probably *not* made a notable difference during the postwar era.”

Mayhew makes his points by analyzing the history of the postwar United States, comparing, for example, disputes over foreign policy in times of unified control and in times of divided government.

Attacking the usual arguments for the effects of divided government, Mayhew makes five central claims to support his thesis:

1. The argument that divided government produces *worse* laws than unified control is dubious.
2. Ideological and budgetary coherence in policymaking is not necessarily affected by divided government.
3. Increased congressional micro-management of executive affairs bears no correlation to periods of divided government.
4. The conduct and “coordination” of foreign policy is not damaged by divided government.
5. The argument that the country's lower-income strata are not well-served under divided party control is not necessarily true.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If Mayhew is correct to argue that divided government seems to have little effect on the outcome of policymaking, why do so many critics of the system hold to the idea as the root of governmental gridlock? If Mayhew is correct, is the separation of powers overrated? Could Mayhew's findings be the *result* of the decline in party strength in the twentieth century, rather than evidence that party control is unimportant? In other words, if policy outcomes are the same under unified and divided control, is this evidence that party control is unimportant or might it be the result of party decline? If the latter, is Mayhew's argument against strengthening the party system convincing?
2. Mayhew states that the critics of divided government often look to European party-government models as a kind of grail. Why is this? Is the party government model incompatible with American political culture and institutions, as Mayhew suggests?
3. In 1994, voters elected a Republican Congress for the first time in 40 years, ending a brief period in which the Democrats controlled the White House and Congress. Does this suggest that voters have an allegiance to divided government? Do voters support divided government, even as many political scientists criticize it? Why? If Mayhew is correct in arguing that there is little difference in outcomes between unified and divided regimes, why do voters seem to prefer divided government?

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. David Mayhew, in *Divided We Govern*, suggests that:
 - a) unified versus divided control of government makes little difference in the outcome of policymaking.
 - b) a divided government writes as many laws as a unified one, but the laws are not as good.
 - c) a unified government is more able to attach an ideological coherence to its programs.
 - d) divided government is the preference of irrational voters.

2. Mayhew argues that congressional micro-management of executive affairs:
 - a) increases with divided government.
 - b) decreases with divided government.
 - c) is independent of divided or unified control.
 - d) helps end divided government by attacking presidents from other parties.

3. David Mayhew argues that:
 - a) the promotion of a European-style party government system will solve many of the United States' problems.
 - b) “party government” schemes are a mistake.
 - c) the United States needs to maintain separation of powers but increase the power of the two major political parties.
 - d) American foreign policy is not as coherent as foreign policy made under a parliamentary system.

FUNCTIONS AND TYPES OF ELECTIONS

The existence of free elections is a major difference between democracies and totalitarian or authoritarian forms of government. It is through elections that most people attempt to transmit their views to government, and although group theorists suggest that all relevant political views are subsumed within organized or potential interest groups, nevertheless even they would not deny that elections are, at least symbolically, vitally important in the process of democratic participation.

Reading 36:

V. O. Key, Jr., *A Theory of Critical Elections*

In this selection, V.O. Key, Jr. develops his classic theory of critical elections, elections which demonstrate a *long-term* realignment of party loyalties. The significance of critical elections is that they reflect major changes in political sentiment that are nevertheless accommodated through the democratic electoral process. A close reading of V.O. Key reveals that the critical election process is incremental, and long before party realignments appear at the national level, as they did in 1932, permanent shifts have taken place among parties at the state and local levels of government.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Key define a critical election? (A critical election is one in which a permanent realignment of voters occurs along party lines.)

2. What do you think Key means when he refers to “the consequences for public administration, for the legislative process, for the operation of the economy of frequent serious upheavals within the electorate”? Discuss the role of critical elections in the political system. How frequent have they been? (They occur only very rarely.) Is this good or bad for the political system? How much stability does a political system require, and to what extent must this stability be reflected in the electoral system? (Point out that

the decline of party attachments on the part of voters may make it more difficult to apply the critical election theory in the future.)

3. Was the election of 1968 critical in Key's terms? (No permanent party realignment occurred.) The election of 1972? (Even though Richard Nixon in 1972 was elected by a landslide, this hardly constituted a critical election because of the election of a Democratic Congress at the same time. Moreover, Nixon ran ahead of Republican candidates in most parts of the country. Critical elections are built from the bottom up, not from the top down. Elections based upon the pull of a political leader for whatever reasons, such as the charismatic pull of an Eisenhower, do not produce critical elections but rather "deviating" elections.) The election of 1976? (Again it is difficult to classify the 1976 election. It was not a "reinstating" election because party alignments remained indefinite, less than a majority clearly identifying as Democrats.) The election of 1980? (The scope of Reagan's victory and the election of a Republican Senate for the first time since 1952 led some observers to conclude that the 1980 election was "critical." For contrasting views see the *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1980, p. A15; and the *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 12, 1980, p. 34.)

What of more recent elections? 1988? (George Bush's election following Reagan's two terms might be considered a maintaining election, depending on how one sees the Reagan elections. The elections of Democratic Congresses through much of Reagan's terms, though, clouds the situation.) 1992? (Bill Clinton's first election might have first appeared as critical or reinstating, but party allegiances fail to suggest a solid Democratic majority. In fact, given the low turnout in recent years and the Republicans' gains in Congress, the issue of divided government is as prevalent as ever.) 1996? (Clinton's reelection, together with the victories by congressional Republicans and the Democrats' inability to retake the House, have continued divided government.) Does the persistence of divided government suggest that Key's assessment of elections and parties is less valid now than it was in the past? (The rise of "candidate parties," fostered by the presidential primary system and the rise of independent voters, makes Key's analysis perhaps less useful in the 1990s. Use the Key selection to help students understand the various party systems in American history, and to help them understand what changes have occurred in recent years.)

4. The elections of 2000, 2004, and 2008.

Red states clearly dominated blue states in 2000 and 2004, but the anomaly of Florida in the 2000 election and Gore's popular vote victory throws critical election analysis out of kilter.

The 2008 Election: Critical?

Stuart Rothenberg writes in Roll Call after the 2008 election: "The big question that everyone is asking is whether this month's general election marked the beginning of a political realignment that will create a new dominant party. Have Americans shifted their loyalties and fundamental assumptions about the parties and about the government, or did we just witness a short-term reaction to years of bad news?" (http://www.rollcall.com/issues/54_55/rothenberg/29988-1.html)

Put your students to work on this question. How do we define a fundamental critical election realignment? Did the 2006 congressional and gubernatorial elections presage what happened in 2008? Is it too early to say a long-term realignment is in the works?

Ask students to look into voter turnout and the composition of the turnout in 2008. How did elections for the president, congress, and in the states compare in terms of parties? What issues did the electoral

choice reflect? Compare 2008 with 1932. Key discusses the 1928 elections as a precursor to 1932, can we do the same for 2006 and 2008?

Student Understanding

What are students to make of esoteric critical election theory and political scientists' pursuit of certainty in classifying elections? We care about the character of elections because of what that tells us about trends and political continuity and stability. Critical elections represent electoral upheavals that put a strain on the system. Politics must be aggregated to generalize about electoral effects. Critical election theory depends upon at least minimal party government to draw conclusions.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. V.O. Key, Jr. defines critical elections as:
 - a) elections that take place during economic depression.
 - b) elections occurring during crises.
 - c) elections reflecting the realignment of party allegiances.
 - d) a frequently recurring phenomenon of the political system.

2. Critical elections reflect:
 - a) short-term shifts in voter attitudes.
 - b) long-term changes in voter allegiances.
 - c) the decline of political parties.
 - d) the rise of the imperial presidency.

3. Critical elections occur:
 - a) every two years.
 - b) relatively frequently.
 - c) relatively infrequently.
 - d) every eight years.

VOTING BEHAVIOR: RATIONAL OR IRRATIONAL?

The concept of critical elections and their importance within the political system is predicated upon a belief in the rationality of the electorate. V. O. Key, of course, believed in this throughout his life. Even Key's comprehensive analysis of voting studies and data emerging from the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies Research did not dissuade him, nor was he put off by the evidence of numerous studies suggesting elite control of the political process. V. O. Key's views on voting, public opinion, and the democratic process are perhaps best expressed in two of his books, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), and *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), which was published posthumously. Having just read Key, and now turning to a classic voting study that would seem to contradict the efficacy of the electoral process as an expression of mass democratic views, students would undoubtedly be interested in V. O. Key's values and in a general discussion of the value context within which voting studies actually occur, even though many political scientists who conduct these studies would consider themselves empirical and not in any way normative.

Reading 37:
Bernard R. Berelson, et al., *Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory*

While this selection points out that the classical requirements of democracy cannot be met in light of empirical evidence regarding voting behavior, it nevertheless concludes, in a way characteristic of so many voting studies, that in fact the proper working of modern democracy requires less popular participation and more political apathy that could ever be supported by classical democratic theory.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the classical requirements for the democratic citizen, as outlined by Berelson? (Interest, participation in political affairs, knowledge, and rationality, all of which should show up in the electoral process.)
2. How do the requirements for the system differ from the requirements for the individual in the democratic process? (The system requires a distribution of the classical qualities of the democratic voter among the population, rather than electorate, in which each individual possesses these qualities. A mass democracy cannot work if all the people become involved in politics. Too great participation in politics may render the system unstable, because it is an indication of desire for change within the electorate. Probably the most important point to mention here to students is the Berelson thesis that apathy plays a very important role in a political system. The system simply cannot stand everyone being politically active at the same time. In general, our complex system requires a division of political labor just as it requires a division of labor in other areas.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In the selection by Berelson, et al., titled “Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory,” the authors argue that:
 - a) political apathy does not exist.
 - b) some political apathy is desirable in the democratic process.
 - c) voters are rational.
 - d) attempts should be made to increase the rationality of political campaigns.
2. Berelson, et al., conclude that an effective democratic system requires that:
 - a) all voters be members of political parties.
 - b) all voters be rational.
 - c) some voters be rational while others are apathetic.
 - d) political parties be disciplined.

3. Which of the following statements is *incorrect*?
- a) The democratic citizen is expected to be interested and to participate in political affairs.
 - b) The democratic citizen is expected to be well informed about political affairs.
 - c) The democratic citizen is supposed to cast his or her vote on the basis of principle, not fortuitously or frivolously or impulsively or habitually, but with reference to standards not only of his or her own interest but of the common good as well.
 - d) In democratic theory, rationality is not a requirement for the democratic citizen.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE ELECTORATE

Facile public relations more than a serious discussion of issues seems to characterize many political campaigns. Marshall McLuhan observed after the Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960 that the medium is the message. McLuhan simply reinforced the widely held views of political consultants and media experts that candidates are consumer products like any other and can be sold in the same way. What a far cry from democratic theory! But V. O. Key, Jr.'s classic analysis of the electorate in the next selection belies the public relations cynics and fortifies the belief that democracy is working after all.

Reading 38:

V. O. Key, Jr., *The Responsible Electorate*

V. O. Key's categorically states that voters are not the fools that many politicians and their advisors often take them to be. The electorate "behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect, given the clarity of the alternatives presented to it and the character of the information available to it."

Student Understanding

Key's argument in this selection is made against the backdrop of the extensive voting studies of the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center and political scientists in voting studies that often followed along the lines of the Berelson reading suggesting voter irrationality can trump rational electoral choice. Key deeply believe in the rationality of democracy and spent his life studying electoral behavior, parties, and interest groups.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does V. O. Key, Jr., argue that the "voice of the people is but an echo"? ("For a glaringly obvious reason, electoral victory cannot be regarded as necessarily a popular ratification of a candidate's outlook....The output of an echo chamber bears an inevitable and invariable relation to the input. As candidates and parties clamor for attention and vie for popular support, the people's verdict can be no more than a selective reflection from among the alternatives and outlooks presented to them. Even the most discriminating popular judgment can reflect only ambiguity, uncertainty, or even foolishness if those are the qualities of the input into the echo chamber. A candidate may win despite his tactics and appeals rather than because of them. If the people can choose only from among rascals, they are certain to choose a rascal.")
2. According to V. O. Key, Jr., what were the conclusions from the voting study literature about why people vote as they do? (The literature explains many variables in voting behavior, including income, family

background, and group identification. “Yet, by and large, the picture of the voter that emerges from a combination of the folklore of practical politics and the findings of the new electoral studies is not a pretty one. It is not a portrait of citizens moving to considered decision as they play their solemn role of making and unmaking governments. The older tradition from practical politics may regard the voter as an erratic and irrational fellow susceptible to manipulation by skilled humbugs. One need not live through many campaigns to observe politicians, even successful politicians, who act as though they regarded the people as manageable fools. Nor does a heroic conception of the voter emerge from the new analyses of electoral behavior. They can be added up to a conception of voting not as a civic decision but as an almost purely deterministic act. Given knowledge of certain characteristics of the voter—his occupation, his residence, his religion, his national origin, and perhaps certain of his attributes—one can predict with a high probability the direction of his vote. The actions of persons are made to appear to be only predictable and automatic responses to campaign stimuli.”)

3. What is the importance of theories about how voters behave? (While the voters themselves are largely unaware of the theories, and indeed may be far more rational than is commonly thought, the candidates and political leaders often do believe in theories about the irrationality of voting behavior. Political consultants often encourage such views on the part of politicians. “If leaders believe the route to victory is by projection of images and cultivation of styles rather than by advocacy of policies to cope with the problems of the country, they will project images and cultivate styles to the neglect of the substance of politics. They will abdicate their prime function in a democratic system, which amounts, in essence, to the assumption of the risk of trying to persuade us to lift ourselves by our bootstraps.”)
4. What is V. O. Key, Jr.'s “perverse and unorthodox argument”? (It is that “voters are not fools. To be sure, many individual voters act in odd ways indeed; yet in the large the electorate behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect, given the clarity of the alternatives presented to it and the character of the information available to it. In American presidential campaigns of recent decades the portrait of the American electorate that develops from the data is not one of an electorate straitjacketed by social determinants or moved by subconscious urges triggered by devilishly skillful propagandists. It is rather one of an electorate moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public policy, of governmental performance, and of executive personality.)

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. V. O. Key, Jr., concludes that studies of electoral behavior:
 - a) present a picture of voter rationality.
 - b) give a vivid impression of the variety and subtlety of factors that enter into individual voting decisions.
 - c) reveal that voters do not take their economic interests into account in making their choices.
 - d) conclude that group identification determines electoral choice.
2. V. O. Key, Jr., argues, in discussing the responsible electorate, that theories about how voters behave become important because:

- a) voters are aware of them and vote accordingly.
 - b) candidates and their advisers are aware of them, and act as if voters' behavior conforms to the theories.
 - c) they demonstrate that economic interests are always paramount in political campaigns.
 - d) they reveal that most electoral outcomes depend upon a single issue.
3. In discussing the responsible electorate, which of the following statements does V. O. Key, Jr. *not* make?
- a) It can be a mischievous error to assume, because a candidate wins, that a majority of the electorate shares his views on public questions.
 - b) Election returns tell us precious little about why a candidate wins.
 - c) The voice of the people echoes candidate inputs, and even the most discriminating popular judgment can reflect only ambiguity, uncertainty, or even foolishness if those are the qualities of the input candidates make into the echo chamber.
 - d) The electorate is rarely moved by concerns about central and relevant questions of public policy and governmental performance, but rather are always persuaded by the facile public relations techniques of political candidates.