

Chapter 10

Elections and Campaigns

REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

CHAPTER FOCUS

This chapter takes you on a cook's tour of some of the scholarly examinations, the common folklore, and the amazing intricacies of America's most enduring and exciting political institution, the election. Major topics include, but are not limited to, the debate over just how democratic elections are (given a very low voter turnout), the new personalistic nature of campaigning in the latter part of the twentieth century, the role that money plays in determining outcomes, the role of special-interest groups, so-called realigning elections, and the elements of successful coalition building by Democrats and Republicans. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. Explain why elections in the United States are both more democratic and less democratic than those of other countries.
2. Demonstrate the differences between the party-oriented campaigns of the nineteenth century and the candidate-oriented ones of today, explaining the major elements of a successful campaign for office today.
3. Discuss how important campaign funding is to election outcomes, what the major sources of such funding are under current law, and how successful reform legislation has been in purifying U.S. elections of improper monetary influences.
4. Discuss the partisan effects of campaigns, or why the party with the most registered voters does not always win the election.
5. Define the term *realigning election* and discuss the major examples of such elections in the past, as well as recent debates over whether realignment is again underway.
6. Describe what the Democrats and the Republicans, respectively, must do to put together a successful national coalition to achieve political power in any election.
7. Outline the major arguments on either side of the question of whether elections result in major changes in public policy in the United States.

STUDY OUTLINE

I. Introduction

A. 2008 presidential race

1. Over a dozen candidates
2. Early start
3. Millions of dollars raised

B. Comparison with previous elections

1. 1968, Humphrey won nomination without competing in state primaries

2. 1968, Humphrey raised little money compared to today's also-rans
3. 1988, Bush campaign relatively small scale

II. Campaigns then and now

A. Key changes relate to parties, media and money

B. Parties

1. Once determined, or powerfully influenced who was nominated
2. Congressional caucuses were replaced by national nominating conventions and local party leaders
3. Most people voted straight party ticket
4. Candidates are "on their own" with assistance from
 - a) Media consultants
 - b) Direct mail firms
 - c) Polling firms
 - d) Political technology firms

C. Media and money

1. Today's candidates depend—and spend—the most on media
2. Impact of ads not clear
 - a) No clear relationship between exposure and victory
 - b) Recent study found plurality of ads appealed to voter's fears
 - c) More effective with those interested in politics, with higher levels of information

D. Better or worse?

1. Increasing emphasis on polling
 - a) Commonly used to guide ads, communications, positions on issues, speeches and attire
 - b) Also used to shape or change voters' attitudes
 - c) Micro targeting and grass roots campaigns
2. Increasing dependence on the strategic expertise of political consultants
3. Campaigning has become synonymous with fundraising

III. Elections here and abroad

A. Two phases: getting nominated and getting elected

1. Getting on the ballot is largely an individual effort
2. An organizational effort in most European nations
3. Parties play a minor role here

B. Presidential and congressional campaigns

1. Presidential races are more competitive
 - a) House races have lately been one-sided for Democrats
 - b) Presidential winner rarely gets more than 55 percent of the vote
 - c) Most House incumbents are reelected (more than 90 percent)
2. Fewer people vote in congressional elections
 - a) Unless election coincides with presidential election
 - b) Gives greater importance to partisan voters (party regulars)
3. Congressional incumbents can service their constituents
 - a) Can take credit for governmental grants, programs, and so forth
 - b) President can't: power is not local
4. Congressional candidates can duck responsibility
 - a) "I didn't do it; the people in Washington did!"
 - b) President is stuck with blame
 - c) But local candidates can suffer when their leader's economic policies fail
5. Benefit of presidential coattails has declined
 - a) Congressional elections have become largely independent
 - b) Reduces meaning (and importance) of party

C. Running for president

1. Getting mentioned
 - a) Using reporters, trips, speeches, and name recognition
 - b) Sponsoring legislation, governing large state
2. Setting aside time to run
 - a) Reagan: six years. Mondale: four years.
 - b) May have to resign from office first
3. Background of candidate can make a difference
 - a) Voters seem to prefer those with experience as governor or military heroes
 - b) Some members of Congress and former members with experience as vice-president have been elected
4. Money
 - a) Individuals can give \$2,000, political action committees (PACs) \$5,000
 - b) Candidates must raise \$5,000 in twenty states to qualify for matching grants to pay for primary
5. Organization
 - a) Need a large (paid) staff
 - b) Need volunteers
 - c) Need advisers on issues: position papers
6. Strategy and themes
 - a) Incumbent versus challenger: defend or attack?
 - b) Setting the tone (positive or negative)
 - c) Developing a theme: trust, confidence, and so on
 - d) Judging the timing
 - e) Choosing a target voter: who's the audience?

D. Getting elected to Congress

1. Malapportionment and gerrymandering
2. Establishing the size of the House
3. Winning the primary
 - a) Ballot procedures
 - b) Developing a personal following for the "party's" nomination
 - c) Incumbent advantage
4. Sophomore surge
 - a) Using the perks of office
 - b) Campaigning for/against Congress
5. Impact of the way we elect individuals to Congress
 - a) Legislators closely tied to local concerns
 - b) Weak party leadership

IV. Primary versus general campaigns

A. Kinds of elections and primaries: general versus primary elections and caucuses

B. Each election or caucus attracts a different mix of voters so strategy must change

1. Primaries and caucuses
 - a) Must mobilize political activists who give money, do volunteer work and are willing to attend caucuses
 - b) Such activists are more ideologically stringent than the average voter
 - (1) So Democratic candidates need to be more liberal in their tone and theme
 - (2) Republican candidates must be more conservative in their tone and theme
2. Example: the Iowa caucus
 - a) Held in February so winner can gain an early advantage in media attention and fund raising efforts

- b) Participants are not representative of party members in the state, much less the nation
 - c) Procedural oddities exist as well
- C. The balancing game exists in every state where activists are more ideologically polarized than the average voter
 - 1. Possible result: the “clothespin vote”
 - 2. John Kerry in 2004 and George McGovern in 1972
 - 3. Front runners in early polls rarely prevail
- D. Two kinds of campaign issues
 - 1. Position issues
 - 2. Valence issues
 - 3. Trends in recent elections
- E. Television, debates, and direct mail
 - 1. Paid advertising (spots)
 - a) Has little (or a very subtle) effect on outcome: spots tend to cancel each other out
 - b) Most voters rely on many sources of information
 - 2. News broadcasts (visuals)
 - a) Cost little
 - b) May have greater credibility with voters
 - c) Rely on having TV camera crew around
 - d) May be less informative than spots
 - 3. Debates
 - a) Usually an advantage only to the challenger
 - b) Reagan in 1980: reassured voters
 - c) Three debates between Bush and Kerry did not seem to have an impact on the results of the election
 - 4. Risk of slips of the tongue on visuals and debates
 - a) Ford and Poland, Carter and lust, Reagan and trees
 - b) Forces candidates to rely on stock speeches
 - c) Sell yourself, not your ideas
 - 5. Free television time to major presidential candidates in 1996
 - 6. The Internet
 - a) Makes sophisticated direct-mail campaigns possible
 - b) Allows candidates to address specific voters and solicit contributions
 - c) Creates increased importance to mailing lists
 - 7. The gap between running a campaign and running the government
 - a) Party leaders had to worry about reelection
 - b) Today’s political consultants don’t

V. Money

- A. The sources of campaign money
 - 1. Presidential primaries: part private, part public money
 - a) Federal matching funds
 - b) Only match small donors: less than \$250; \$5,000 in twenty states
 - c) Gives incentive to raise money from small donors
 - d) Government also gives lump-sum grants to parties to cover conventions
 - 2. Presidential general elections: all public money
 - 3. Congressional elections: all private money
 - a) From individuals, PACs, and parties
 - b) Most from individual small donors (\$100 to \$200 a person)

B. Campaign finance rules

1. Watergate
 - a) Dubious and illegal money-raising schemes
 - b) Democrats and Republicans benefited from unenforceable laws
 - c) Nixon's resignation and a new campaign finance law
2. Reformlaw
 - a) Set limit on individual donations (\$2,000 per election)
 - b) Reaffirmed ban on corporate and union donations, but allowed them to raise money through PACs
 - c) Set limit on PAC donations (\$5,000 per election to individuals, \$15,000 per year to a party)
 - d) Federal tax money made available for primaries and general election campaigns
3. Impact of the law
 - a) Increase in the amount of money spent on elections
 - b) Dramatic increase in PAC spending
 - c) More clever methods of solicitation (direct mail, telephone solicitation, etc.)
 - d) Additional problems: independent expenditures and soft money
4. A second campaign finance law
 - a) Reforms can have unintended consequences
 - b) Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002
 - (1) Ban on soft money
 - (2) Increase on individual contributions (to \$2,000 per candidate per election)
 - (3) Restrictions on independent expenditures
 - (a) Constitutional challenges as a violation of freedom of speech
 - (b) Court upheld almost all of the law
 - c) New sources of money: 527 organizations
 - (1) Designed to permit soft money expenditures once made by parties
 - (2) Unlimited expenditure allowed as long as there is no coordination with a candidate and no direct lobbying for that candidate
 - (3) Over 500 such organizations in 2004

C. Money and winning

1. During peacetime, presidential elections usually decided by three things
 - a) Political party affiliation
 - b) State of the economy
 - c) Character of candidates
2. Money makes a difference in congressional races
 - a) Challenger must spend to gain recognition
 - b) Jacobson: big-spending challengers do better
3. Advantages of incumbency
 - a) Easier to raise money
 - b) Can provide services for constituency
 - c) Can use franked mailings
 - d) Can get free publicity through legislation and such

VI. What decides elections?

- A. Party identification, but why don't Democrats always win?
 1. Democrats less wedded to their party
 2. GOP does better among independents
 3. Republicans have higher turnout

B. Issues, especially the economy

1. V. O. Key: most voters who switch parties do so in their own interests
 - a) They know which issues affect them personally
 - b) They care strongly about emotional issues (abortion, etc.)
2. Prospective voting
 - a) Know the issues and vote for the best candidate
 - b) Most common among activists and special-interest groups
 - c) Few voters use prospective voting because it requires information
3. Retrospective voting
 - a) Judge the incumbent's performance and vote accordingly
 - b) Have things gotten better or worse, especially economically?
 - c) Examples: presidential campaigns of 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1992
 - d) Usually helps incumbent unless economy has gotten worse
 - e) Most elections decided by retrospective votes
 - f) Midterm election: voters turn against president's party

C. The campaign

1. Campaigns do make a difference
 - a) Reawaken voters' partisan loyalties
 - b) Let voters see how candidates handle pressure
 - c) Let voters judge candidates' characters
2. Campaigns tend to emphasize themes over details
 - a) True throughout American history
 - b) What has changed is the importance of primary elections and tone of campaigns
 - c) Theme campaigns give more influence to single-issue groups

D. Finding a winning coalition

1. Ways of looking at various groups
 - a) How loyal, or percentage voting for party
 - b) How important, or number voting for party
2. Democratic coalition
 - a) Blacks most loyal
 - b) Jews slipping somewhat
 - c) Hispanics somewhat mixed
 - d) Catholics, southerners, unionists departing the coalition lately
3. Republican coalition
 - a) Party of business and professional people
 - b) Very loyal, defecting only in 1964
 - c) Usually wins vote of poor because of retired, elderly voters
4. Contribution to Democratic coalition
 - a) Blacks loyal but small proportion
 - b) Catholics, unionists, and southerners largest part but least dependable

VII. The effect of elections on policy

- A. Political scientists are interested in broad trends in winning and losing
- B. Cynics: public policy remains more or less the same no matter which official or party is in office
 1. Comparison: Great Britain, with parliamentary system and strong parties, often sees marked changes, as in 1945
 2. Reply: evidence indicates that many American elections do make great differences in policy
 3. Why, then, the perception that elections do not matter? Because change alternates with consolidation; most elections are only retrospective judgments