The Meaning of Party

- **A Political Party**
  - According to Anthony Downs a, "team of men [and women] seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election."

- **Parties can be thought of in 3 parts**
  - Party in the Electorate
  - Party as an Organization
  - Party in government

- **Parties, voters, and policy: The Downs Model**
  - **Rational-Choice Theory**
    - Assumes that individuals act in their own best interest, carefully weighing the costs and benefits of possible alternatives.
  - Downs Model
    - Voters maximize chances that policies they favor are adopted by government
    - Parties want to win elected office

The Party in the Electorate

- **Party image**
  - The voter's perception of what Republicans or Democrats stand for

- **Party identification**
  - A citizen's self-proclaimed preference for one party or the other
  - Republican, Democrat, or Independent

- **Ticket-Splitting**
  - Voting with one party for one office and with another party for other offices
  - Independents are most likely to split tickets
  - No state or race is completely safe due to split tickets

The Party Organizations: From Grass Roots to Washington

- These are the people that work for the party
- Local parties
  - **Party machines**: A type of political party organization that relies heavily on material inducements, such as patronage, to win votes and to govern
  - **Patronage**: A job, promotion, or contract given for political reasons rather than for merit or competence alone
  - Due to progressive reforms, urban party organizations are generally weak
  - Revitalization of party organization at county level
• The 50 state party systems
  o **Closed Primaries**: Elections to select party nominees in which only people who have registered in advance with the party can vote for that party’s candidates, thus encouraging greater party loyalty
    ▪ More power for parties
  o **Open Primaries**: Elections to select party nominees in which voters can decide on Election Day whether they want to vote in the Democratic or Republican primary
    ▪ Less power for parties
  o **Blanket Primaries**: Elections to select party nominees in which voters are presented with a list of candidates from all the parties. Voters can then select some Democrats and some Republicans if they like.
  o State parties are better organized in terms of headquarters and budgets than they used to be
• National Party Organization
  o **National Convention**: The meeting of party delegates every four years to choose a presidential ticket and write the party’s platform.
  o **National Committee**: One of the institutions that keeps the party operating between conventions. The national committee is comprised of representatives from the states and territories.
  o **National Chairperson**: The national chairperson is responsible of the day-to-day activities of the party and is usually handpicked by the presidential nominee.

The Party in Government: Promises and Policy
• Party members actually elected to government
• Which party controls government has policy consequences
  o E.g., Republicans in office = more military spending
• **Coalition**: A group of individuals with a common interest on which every political party depends
• Parties and politicians generally act on their campaign promises

Party Eras in American History
• **Party Era**
  o Historical periods in which a majority of voters cling to the party in power, which tends to win a majority of the elections.
• **Critical Election**
  o An electoral "earthquake" where new issues emerge, new coalitions replace old ones, and the majority party is often displaced by the minority party. Critical election periods are sometimes marked by a national crisis and may require more than one election to bring about a new party era.
• **Party Realignment**
  o The displacement of the majority party by the minority party, usually during a critical election period
• 1796 – 1824: the First Party System
  o Madison warned of “factions”
  o Federalists were the first political party
• 1828 – 1856: Jackson and the Democrats versus the Whigs
  o Modern party founded by Jackson
  o Whigs formed mainly to oppose Jacksonian Democrats
• 1860 – 1928: the Two Republican Eras
  o Republicans rose as the antislavery party
  o 1896 election centered on industrialization
• 1932 – 1964: the New Deal Coalition
  o **New Deal Coalition:**
    ▪ A coalition forged by the Democrats, consisted of the urban working class, ethnic groups, Catholics, Jews, the poor, Southerners, African Americans and intellectuals
• 1968 – Present: Era of Divided Government
  o Divided Government: one party controls Congress and the other the White House
  o Divided government due in part to:
    ▪ **Party dealignment:** The gradual disengagement of people and politicians from the parties, as seen by shrinking party identification
    ▪ Party neutrality: people are indifferent towards the 2 parties

**Third Parties: Their impact on American Politics**

• **Third Parties:** Electoral contenders other than the two major parties. Rarely win elections.
• Third parties are important
  o Are “safety valves” for popular discontent
  o Bring new groups and ideas into politics
• Two Party System
  o Discourages extreme views
  o Contributes to political ambiguity
• Multiparty systems
  o **Winner-Take-All System:** An electoral system in which legislative seats are awarded only to first place finishers. In American presidential elections, the system in which the winner of the popular vote in a state receives all the electoral votes of that state.
  o **Proportional Representation:** An electoral system used throughout most of Europe that awards legislative seats to political parties in proportion to the number of votes won in an election. More votes =more seats.
  o **Coalition Government:** when two or more parties join together to form a majority in a national legislature. This form of government is quite common in the multiparty systems of Europe.

**Understanding Political Parties**

• Democracy and Responsible party government
 Responsible party model
  ▪ Parties have distinct comprehensive programs
  ▪ Candidates are committed to program
  ▪ Majority party must carry out its program
  ▪ The majority party must accept responsibility
 American political parties fall short of these conditions
  ▪ No mechanism for party discipline

 American political parties and scope of government
  ▪ Lack of uniformity keeps government small
    ▪ Big programs like Health Care (1994) fail
  ▪ But also makes cutting government programs difficult
    ▪ Individuals focus on getting more from government for their own constituents

 Is the Party Over?
  ▪ Political parties no longer main source of information for voters; media are
  ▪ Yet parties will play an important but diminished role in American politics
    ▪ State and national party organizations have become more visible and active
    ▪ Majority of people still identify with a party

Vocab to Know for Quiz Verbatim
  ▪ Political Party
  ▪ Rational Choice Theory
  ▪ Party Identification
  ▪ Party Dealignment
  ▪ Winner-take-all system
  ▪ Party Competition
  ▪ Critical Election
  ▪ Party Realignment