

The background of the book cover is a stylized American flag. It features a blue field with white stars in the upper left corner, and white stripes on a blue background for the rest of the cover. The stars and stripes are arranged in a way that suggests the flag is waving or draped.

The Parties RESPOND

*Changes in
the American
Party System*

edited by
L. Sandy Maisel

Westview Press

The Parties Respond

CHANGES IN THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

EDITED BY

L. Sandy Maisel

Colby College

Westview Press

BOULDER • SAN FRANCISCO • OXFORD

FOR JOYCE

Transforming American Politics

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Acknowledgments

A book such as this one reflects the efforts of many people. Those of us who teach courses on political parties and elections in the United States have long recognized the need for a collection of essays bringing together the work of scholars who study various aspects of partisan politics. But it was Larry Dodd, the editor of the series of which this book is a part, who took the additional step of asking for a proposal to address that need. This book has benefited greatly from his comments at all stages, from conceptualization through final editing. Let me also say that I have never worked with an editor who has been as thoughtful, helpful, and supportive as Jennifer Knerr. For those of us who have worked with Jennifer, she has come to define the ideal against which other editors should be measured. I feel very much the same way about the others at Westview who have aided in the production of this book, especially Christine Arden, Jeanne Campbell, Amy Eisenberg, and Ellen Kresky.

As an editor myself, I cannot say enough for my friends and colleagues who have contributed the essays of which this book is composed. They shared my view that a book such as this one was important. They permitted me to define the approach they would take in covering their topics. They put this topic on the top of their research agendas, so that we could meet our deadline and produce the book on schedule. To each of the contributors I am deeply indebted. The same can be said of those who worked with me in readying this book for the publisher. As I have said often in the past, I am fortunate to work with a secretary like Patricia Kick. I also want to thank Nancy Morrione for her assistance in editing, and especially Gretchen Anglund, perhaps the best undergraduate research assistant with whom I have ever worked, as she provided immeasurable aid throughout this entire project.

I completed this work on Thanksgiving morning; under other circumstances I would have spent that time with my family. Over the years Dana, Josh, and Dylan have come to understand that I am not always the easiest father to be around when I am finishing a project. I hope they all know that I appreciate their acceptance and understanding of my need to be alone in a quiet place.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Joyce. How simple the transformations in the party system seem when compared to the changes that take place in the individual and shared lives of a married couple. I hope Joyce realizes how lucky I consider myself to be to share the learning and joys of those changes with her.

L. Sandy Maisel
Waterville, Maine

Prologue

Americans have always loved to hate political parties. From George Washington's Farewell Address, through the rhetoric of the Progressives, to the pleadings of this generation's good-government lobbies, reformers have warned against the evils of party—the mischief of factions, the pernicious dealings of the smoke-filled room, the purveyors of personal favor.

The persistence of American political parties through nearly two centuries of criticism stands as a testimony to their role in our system of government. Despite the fact that they are never mentioned in the Constitution, parties have had an impact on virtually every aspect of American political life.

The role of political parties has deserved particular attention in recent decades as they have responded to ongoing transformations in American politics. Think of the environment in which political parties operate. In broadest terms, parties seek to attract voters to support candidates for office, based on allegiance to the party label and on agreement with the policy positions supported by the party. They do so within a legal and political context that is constantly changing because of world events, a context that varies from state to state and even from community to community within states. Rarely in this nation's history have those changes been as marked as during the past thirty years.

Thirty years ago the civil rights movement was the major social and political force in the nation. In 1954 the Supreme Court had ruled, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that separate was no longer legally equal; but government officials throughout the South were resisting integration as a matter of public policy, and northern society was nearly as segregated as southern. Politics reflected a society in which racial taboos still dominated. James Meredith had to be accompanied by federal marshalls when he integrated the University of Mississippi over the objections of Governor Ross Barnett in 1962; Sidney Poitier broke another racial barrier when he starred in and won the Best Actor Oscar for *Lilies of the Field* in 1963, a feat matched in television by Bill Cosby's Emmy-winning starring role in "I Spy" two years later (see Weisbrot, 1990).

A variety of Jim Crow laws kept black Americans from voting throughout the South; in Mississippi, fewer than 10 percent of the black population were registered to vote when John Kennedy was elected president. Even in the supposedly liberal North, few black politicians successfully sought elective office, and virtually none was elected except in areas where they constituted a racial majority.

The civil rights movement began to change American society in important ways. In 1964 the Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the Constitution banned the Poll Tax, a lingering example of Jim Crowism. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 led directly to a dramatic increase in black participation in the political process; at the time of the passage of that act, fewer than 100 African Americans held elective office. According to the Joint Center for Political Studies in Washington, that number is now approaching 7,000, including 4,000 in the South. And the political parties have had to respond to those changes. The changes have been so profound that the chief beneficiary of a rule change to increase the influence of southern states in the Democratic party's nominating process was Jesse Jackson, a black minister whose political roots were in the civil rights movement that brought about these changes.

But the civil rights movement has not been the only force influencing American politics in recent decades. Indeed, the Vietnam War dominated the political landscape for nearly ten years. Its political legacy included not only the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, which gave those old enough to fight in Vietnam the right to choose the governing officials who make foreign policy, but also a generation of young people who were uncertain if electoral politics and the traditional political parties could meet their needs. And, again, as the political landscape was transformed, parties had to respond.

The women's movement also had a profound impact. Thirty years ago most of the women active in electoral politics were widows of prominent politicians. Even the legendary Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), so prominent early in the 1950s for her defiance of Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), first sought office to fill a seat vacated by the death of her husband. But the role of women in American society and American politics was fundamentally transformed in the 1970s and 1980s. Female politicians, many of them initially drawn to politics through their participation in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements, became more and more prominent. And just as the civil rights movement led to increased participation by black voters, to increased concern for political issues of particular concern to racial minorities, and to an increase in the number of black office holders, so too did the women's movement lead to the mobilization of women as active political participants, to definable differences (the so-called gender gap) between male

and female voters, to a concern for issues of gender from the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to abortion to improved day-care facilities, and to an increase in prominent female politicians. Once again the parties had to respond as the body politic underwent a transformation.

Other changes could be added to this list—the Supreme Court rulings requiring apportionment schemes that, to the extent possible, equalized the value of votes, the increase in the numbers of Hispanic and Asian Americans, an increased public concern about ethics in government largely as a result of the Watergate affair, the movement of the nation's population from the Snowbelt states to the Sunbelt states with consequent shifts in the size of congressional delegations—but the lessons remain the same. As the nation has undergone dramatic changes, the political parties, as institutions that must function within this changing context, have had to respond.

And there is no doubt that the parties—as well as the politicians who run under party labels, and the institutions in which they serve—*have* responded. Some of their responses have been abrupt and some more subtle. Some have been successful and some have failed. Some have been welcomed and some criticized. By any account, however, the list of reforms, many of which were promulgated during the turbulent 1970s, is impressive—major changes in the committee and seniority systems in the Congress, Government in Sunshine laws and sunset legislation to close the books on unneeded programs, imposition of more stringent ethical standards in the Congress and the executive branch, redefinition of the relationship between the executive and the legislature as they work on the federal budget and conduct foreign policy, public funding of presidential campaigns and restrictions on the financing of congressional campaigns and campaigns in nearly every state, restructuring of the delegate-selection process for national conventions (reflecting a move toward more popular and less organization influence), and, finally, the reactions to those reforms, such as affirmative action programs for women and minorities.

The Democrats and the Republicans have not always responded in the same way to these changes in American politics; partisan differences on some reforms have been pronounced. But the parties have been involved in all of these matters, and neither party in 1990 comes even close to what it was in 1960 in terms of organization, membership, how it appeals to the electorate or serves its candidates, and its impact on governing. This book examines the parties' responses.

The essays written for this volume examine contemporary political parties. But the historical context of that examination is important as well. As Joel Silbey persuasively argues in the opening essay, the centrality

of the party role has varied significantly over time. Not only the intensity of that role but also the locus of its impact have shifted.

The essays that follow Silbey's historical introduction do not examine political parties as a whole; rather, each chapter looks at one aspect of the role played by these resilient institutions as they have adapted to a changing political context. For instance, the second through fourth chapters look at party organization. The next two chapters focus on the role of the party in the electorate; the four after that examine the role of parties in the more broadly defined electoral arena. The three subsequent chapters on the role of party in government recognize the fact that party as an institution has more than an electoral role. And the final two essays speculate on how this role will change in the decades ahead.

The fifteen essays that make up this book represent the most recent thinking by leading scholars; yet they have been written with an undergraduate audience in mind. They not only cover the varying aspects of this topic from differing perspectives, but they also employ a range of research methods so that students can be exposed to the various modes of analysis used by contemporary researchers.

In Chapters 2 and 3, John Bibby and Paul Herrnson examine political parties as organizations in search of a role, at the state and national levels, respectively. In each case, the question is whether these organizations, perceived as weak and ineffectual, can find a niche through which they can regain the influence they once had. And in each case, the answer is a qualified "yes." In Chapter 4, Walter Stone, Ronald Rapoport, and Alan Abramowitz refer to surveys of state convention delegates in their examination of the views of political activists who influence party decisions. When activists in the two parties, among them the party leaders, emphasize different issue positions and thus become further separated in ideological terms, their positions might well presage similar differences among their followers.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Warren Miller and Morris Fiorina analyze the relationship between parties and voters. Using national survey data from the presidential elections of the 1980s, Miller refutes the arguments of those who claim that the electorate has lost its allegiance to the major political parties. He maintains that the voters (as opposed to citizens who do not vote) retain party as an important referent group, and that the evidence points to a realignment toward the Republicans that began during the Reagan administration and was cemented in the election of 1988. Fiorina, looking at how voters decide on the array of choices with which they are presented on each election day, and contrasting the elections of the 1980s with those a half-century earlier, concludes that elections, once party-centered, are now office-centered (i.e., voters view

presidential elections and congressional elections in different ways) and person-centered (i.e., voters relate to those candidates they come to know). Now that ticket-splitting and divided government are accepted parts of the electoral scene, the traditional concept of realignment caused by divisive issues is no longer meaningful.

The next four chapters concern the role of political parties in the conduct of elections. In Chapter 7, Sandy Maisel, Linda Fowler, Ruth Jones, and Walter Stone present a model to explain candidate decision-making and explore the limitations of the role that party can play in determining who will be candidates in state and local elections. The authors also speculate on how that role can be enhanced. In Chapter 8, Elaine Kamarck demonstrates the effect of national party rules on the strategies and outcomes of recent presidential nominations. She concludes with a discussion of the party context in which future nominating contests will occur. In Chapter 9, Frank Sorauf and Scott Wilson explore the means by which political parties have responded to the evolving cash economy of modern campaigns. As modern campaigns require more money and less manpower, parties have found a new niche; but Sorauf and Wilson reveal evidence that this new role may prove to be as transitory as previous ones. Then, in Chapter 10, Gary Orren and Bill Mayer examine the functions of the media and political parties as intermediaries between public officials and the electorate. They conclude with a discussion of the challenge that the media must face in walking the line as private institutions that serve public purposes.

Decades ago, V. O. Key directed political scientists to look at the role of political parties in government as well as in the electoral arena. In Chapters 11 and 12, accordingly, Barbara Sinclair and David Brady analyze the complex impact of party on Congress. Drawing on her experiences as a participant observer, Sinclair shows evidence of re-emerging strength in party leadership in the process by which the legislature defines the policy agenda and structures the two chambers. But Brady claims that, despite evidence of increased party voting in recent Congresses, structural factors and many of the same political factors on which Fiorina commented lead one to conclude that one must increasingly look at cross-party coalitions in order to understand legislative behavior. Cal Mackenzie, in Chapter 13, then argues that party is much less a resource on which presidents can draw to staff their administrations than it once was, largely because party leaders do not tend to be as concerned about issues as they are about the techniques of winning office. Thus, the party in government connection has been further weakened.

In Chapters 14 and 15, E. J. Dionne and Sandy Maisel conclude with a look to the future. Dionne explores the first year of the Bush admin-

istration and raises questions about its implications for future partisanship. And Maisel speculates on the evolution of political parties—in their various roles—as the twenty-first century approaches.

Taken together, these fifteen essays paint a fascinating picture of American political parties. Parties in the role of institutions have adapted as the nation has changed over two centuries. But as parties are not monolithic, any analysis must take into account not only their complexity but also the various points at which they affect the American polity. The authors of these chapters come to the topic from different perspectives—not only as political scientists but also as historians, journalists, and activists, as students not only of political parties but also of organizations, of voting behavior, of elections, of the Congress, and of the presidency. Only by looking at the entire picture can one begin to understand the complexity of American political parties, the ways they have responded to a changing country, and the reasons for which they have persisted as they have.

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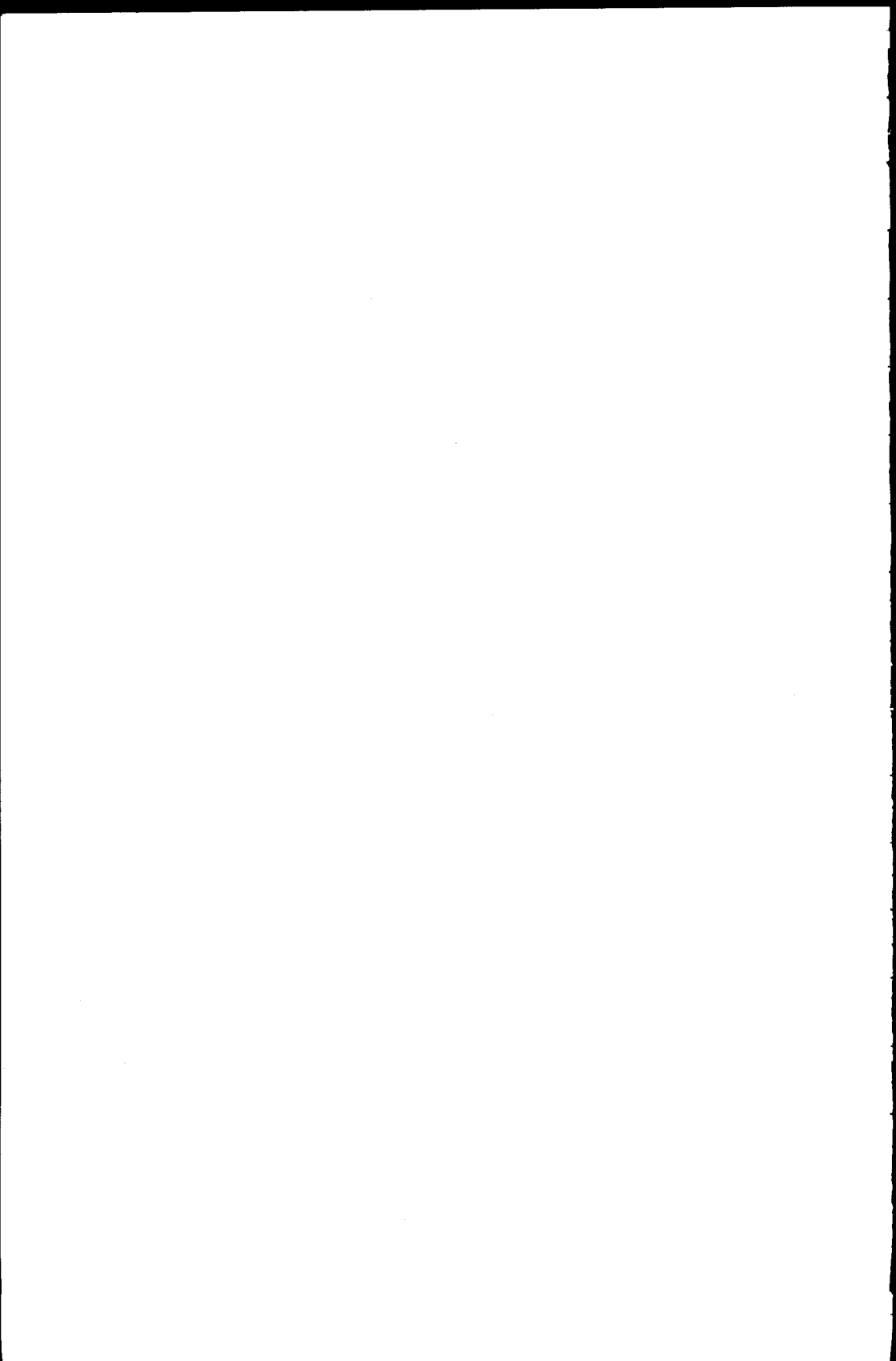
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PART ONE

Parties in the American Context



The Rise and Fall of American Political Parties 1790–1990

JOEL H. SILBEY

The 1790s were contentious years in American politics. The recently ratified Constitution had established a new national political arena with a central government of great potential, power, and authority. The efforts of Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton to invigorate the federal government were not universally supported, however. Given all that was at stake and the geographic extent of the political battlefield, those opposing the Hamiltonian initiatives as detrimental to their own interests came together under the banner of Jeffersonian Republicanism in time to contest the congressional elections of 1794. Two years later they bitterly fought to wrest the presidency away from their still-dominant enemies (Chambers, 1963). These dramatic contests, occurring early in our history as a nation, were only the forerunners of ever-recurring conflict in American life and the constant need to mobilize in the battle for political power.

From the 1790s onward there were few national or state elections held in the absence of political parties, which organized and energized the regular combat taking place between the different interests on the scene. In their electoral functions and appearance, these political parties have seemed to enjoy great stability over 200 years. Analysts have distinguished five distinct party systems, however: (1) the original Federalist-Republican system, which lasted until about 1815; (2) a Democratic-Whig system, between 1828 and the 1850s; (3) the first Republican-Democratic system, from 1860 to 1896; (4) a second such system, lasting between 1896 and 1932; and (5) the New Deal party system, after 1932. These analytic distinctions are based on the lineup of the particular interests and social groups supporting each party—not occasionally and haphazardly, but in a sustained, repetitive fashion in election after