The Two-Party System

Chapter 5
Section 2
Why a Two-Party System?

- A number of factors, collectively, have contributed to having a two-party system
  1. The Historical Basis
  2. The Force of Tradition
  3. The Electoral System
  4. The American Ideological Consensus
The Historical Basis

• Two opposing groups since the beginning of our nation’s history
• Federalists v. Anti-Federalists
• However, George Washington hated the idea of political parties altogether
• Because the Framers did not think they would exist, there is no mention of political parties in the Constitution
The Force of Tradition

• Nation started out as a two-party system
• Americans today generally accept the two-party system
• Minor Parties have had little success
The Electoral System

• Single-member districts – one winner per race
• Voters feel like a vote is often “wasted” on a minor party candidate
• Republicans and Democrats shape elections laws to discourage minor parties
• Ballot access for minor party candidates can be difficult
The American Ideological Consensus

• Although the U.S. is a pluralistic society, Americans share the same principles and beliefs
• Americans have a consensus on fundamental matters
• Because sharp disagreements do not exist, minor parties have been deemed obsolete
Multiparty Systems

• Multiparty Systems contain several major and many lesser parties – exist in European democracies
• Parties are typically principle/issue oriented
• Believed to provide a broader representation of the public and provide more choices to voters
• However, this is usually not the case
• Government tends to be unstable
• Parties will often form **coalitions** to win elections and control the government
• In many instances these governments have had several crises
• Frequent party changes
• Due to single-member districts the multiparty system is near impossible in the U.S.
One-Party Systems

• A one-party system can be classified as a “no party system”

• Two-Types of One-Party Systems
  1. Dictatorships – only one party is allowed
  2. Modified – one party in a region controls all offices (1/3 of all U.S. States today)
Party Membership Patterns

• Memberships is strictly VOLUNTARY
• Parties tend to appeal to broad representations of the public
• For example African Americans, Catholics, Jews, and union members often vote Democrat
• White males, Protestants, and business community lean more Republican
• Reasons why people identify with a specific party:
  1. Family
  2. Major Events
  3. Economic Status
  4. Minor Factors: Age, Place of Residence, Level of Education, and Work Environment