

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND PARTIES

Terms and concepts to know:

Political parties	Party in the electorate
Party organization	Party in government
“Two-Party” system	Single-member district / plurality vote
Proportional representation	Political ideology
Federalists / Whigs	Democrats / Republicans
Critical elections	Converting / realigning
Party identification	Party coalitions
Conservative	Liberal
Media and political parties	Divided government

Study and discussion questions:

1. Heineman notes that some of the founders felt that parties “represented minority interests working against the larger public interest” and should be suppressed. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Was the 2012 election a “critical” (realigning or converting) election using the criteria given by Heineman? Are we likely to have a critical election in 2016? Why are there so few such elections in the U.S. in your opinion?
3. Are political parties becoming less important to voters? Does the rise in “independent” voters mean anything? If so, what does it suggest?
4. Does television have an inherent bias towards imagery or can substantive discussions of political issues take place through this medium? Can you cite examples of substantive political reporting on TV?
5. What are the major obstacles that minor or third parties face given current election laws and practices? How has the recent passage of Prop 14 made this better or worse?
6. Early in their article, Piven and Cloward cite several scholarly arguments that contend that widespread nonvoting has few, if any, negative political consequences. What do you make of these arguments?
7. Looking at Britt’s 14 characteristics for fascism, do any of them appear to be operating in the US? Identify one or two that you feel are particularly pervasive, and give some concrete examples that you see.
8. Does the single-member district electoral system discourage a multi-party system and would adopting proportional representation allow minority interests and points of view to be represented better? How might excessive fragmentation be avoided?

Readings:

Heineman. *American Government*, Chapter 5.
WEB – Piven / Cloward, Britt, www.politicalcompass.org.

Video:

Third Party: Political Alternatives in the Age of Duopoly and Blood in the Face.