

What are the functions of political systems?

- **Selection of individuals to fill offices***
- Articulation of demands of the public
- Provision of clues to elected officials on policies that the public wishes adopted

*This function is the one that the American system performs best.

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Main environments that influence political systems

- **Physical-landforms, climate, size, transportation, natural resources***
 - *Least likely to change except over a long period of time
- Legal and constitutional issues
- Social- ethnic/racial/religious/educational levels
- Economic-overall wealth levels/economic activities/wealth distribution

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Major types of democratic systems

Elitist- power held by few individuals who protect their own interests (1870-1950s) (Generally economic or social position)

Pluralistic-power centered in groups that dominate the political process

(Generally agreed that this is the form that Texas currently has)

Participatory-wide distribution of power, universal participation in political process

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Suffrage

- Constitutional issues-
 - U.S. Constitution prohibits discrimination on basis of race/gender/taxes/age
- Legal requirements- age/residency/non-felon/mental competent
- Methods of registration
 - **periodic** v permanent (Texas uses 2 year cycle)
 - in person or mail

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Interest Groups

Organized collection of individuals that are organized

- To make demands on political institutions in order to realize goals
- Are bound together by shared attitudes or concerns

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Classification Schemas for Interest Groups

- Degree of involvement- primary, secondary, incidental
- Distribution of membership- local, regional, national
- Membership- individual or group (or both)
- Membership structure- unitary, federated, confederated

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Functional Classifications of Interest Groups

- Economic- groups active to promote the economic interests of those who belong
- Ideological- groups whose goals involve a belief system of how the political system ought to deal with a particular public policy issue (examples, minority rights, environmental issues)

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Organizational Patterns

- Unitary- only one national organization exists. Members belong directly
- Federated- may have local, state, and national units
- Confederated- groups belong, may share goals and efforts

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Factors Determining Group Effectiveness

- Size
- Unity- (Cohesion)
- Geographical distribution
- Economic Resources- allows “purchase” of access
- Leadership- can overcome lack of resources
- Reputation- aids in gaining access
- Public Support of goals –extremely valuable

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Reasons to Join interest groups

- Material benefits-insurance/discounts
- Social benefits-sharing/friendship
- **Ideological/shared benefits- belief in that which the organization does is valuable**
 - (most significant for political action)

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Tools of Influence

- Lobbying-direct communication to influence public policy
- Public Opinion- attempting to shape public views on issues
- Legal Action- filing court actions
- Direct Action- protests/picketing, etc
- **Electioneering***- direct involvement in campaigns
- **Campaign Contributions***- to candidates

* Not an option for 501(c)(3) organizations

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Lobby Registration

- When required-when level of covered costs exceeds \$500 or level of compensations reaches a pre-determined amount
- **Register with whom?- Texas Ethics Commission**
- Costs of registration
 - 501(c)(3) group \$100/annual
 - Others- \$300/annual

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Definition of Political Parties

- Political party- “any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect governmental officeholders under a given label”

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Party Roles - Ideal Party

- Intermediaries between public and officials
- Candidate recruitment
- Contesting of elections
- Conflict resolution
- Agenda setting
- Organization of government
- Accountability to public for policies adopted

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Party History Eras

- One party era – 1876-1952
 - (Texas was a one-party Democratic state- dominated by economic conservatives)
- Modified one party- 1952-1978
 - (Growth of Republican Party/ Shift of conservative Dems to Republican Party)
- Two party era- 1978 to present
 - (Republican domination of state-wide offices/Dems gaining in urban areas/So.Texas)

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Classification of Parties

- Major- candidate for governor received 20% or more of the vote*
 - (Must use Direct Primary to nominate candidates for general election)
- Minor- candidate for governor receive less than 20 % of the vote
 - (May use any legal method to nominate- generally utilize conventions)

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Legal Requirements

- Required machinery
- Use of required methods
- Reports

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Required Structure

- Committees-
 - County Executive Committee-members are selected by the voters in primary
 - State Executive Committee- selected by attendees at the State Convention
- Conventions- precinct, county (or Senatorial district), state

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Party Membership

- Major parties- voting in primary declares membership
- Minor parties- signing a nominating petition or attending a precinct convention

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Recent Trends in Parties

1. Growing importance of political parties in recruiting candidates, financing candidates, and managing campaigns
2. Increased partisanship at all levels of politics in Texas
3. Merger of state and national politics

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Types of Media

- Newspapers-Daily newspapers are best source of information
- Magazines-few at state level, mostly national issues
- Radio & Television-main source of information for most voters/ poor source of state news
- Internet- of growing importance/ limited audience but rapidly growing

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Trends in Mass Media

- Concentration of ownership in major media corporations
- Cross ownership of media- above organizations own different forms of information distribution
- Entertainment vs News

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Sources of Information

- Capitol Press Corps
 - Associated Press- most significant news gathering
 - Major Daily Newspapers
 - Dallas Morning News/FW Star-Telegram/Houston Chronicle/Austin American-Statesman
 - TV and Radio bureaus- generally cover the more sensational aspects of state government

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Major Media Organizations

- **Freedom of Information Foundation- political arm which works on Open Meeting/Records- focuses on protecting access**
- Texas Media- lobby arm of media organization
- Representatives of specialized sectors
 - Texas Daily Newspaper Association*
 - Texas Press Association*
 - Society of Professional Journalists*

*501(C)(3) organizations

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Main concerns with Media

- Pack journalism-all media focus on particular issues or events
- Flacks- paid press agents who influence reporting of news
- Protection of news sources- shield laws
- Open meeting/open records- protecting public access to meetings/records

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Role of Media

- Agenda setting-determines which issues will receive coverage and degree of coverage
- Agenda building-shapes public discourse on the issues
 - Reactive- covers events already in evidence
 - Proactive- tries to uncover issues

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Media & Campaigns

- Coverage-
 - Soundbites- short clips from speeches
 - press conferences (spoon feeding)-
 - staged events- focus items on issues of interest to the candidate
- Advertising
 - feel good ads
 - attack ads

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Types of Elections

- Public Elections
 - Partisan- candidates nominated by parties
 - non-partisan- candidates qualify by paying filing fee or gathering petition signatures
- Primaries- held by the major parties. Conducted by the **parties** (except for early voting)
 - **Open primaries- any voter may participate (Texas uses the open primary for the first round)**
 - Closed primaries- only registered party members

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Types of ballots

- Party column-
 - Candidates listed by party affiliation
 - used only in the November General Election of the even-numbered year
- Office column
 - Candidates listed by office sought only
 - used in all other elections in Texas

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Campaign Technology

- Consultants
- Public Opinion polling
- Advertising
 - direct mail
 - television/ radio
- Phonebanks

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Funding of Campaigns

- Sources
 - personal funds
 - friends
 - political action committees
 - parties (soft money)
- Limits
 - no state restrictions on spending
 - federal (\$1000 individual/\$5000 PAC)

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Trends in Texas Politics

- Role of Ideological groups
- Impact of PACs
- Inclusion of new voters
- Domination of state-wide elections by Republican Party

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Future Changes in Political Environment

- Current budget crisis
- Growth of minority voters
- Decreased partisanship of voters

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