POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

# THE PARTY CORE – MEMBERS AND STRUCTURE

Questions and discussion points – Hershey chapters 3 and 4 (Wednesday), 5 (Friday)

Wednesday, September 12

Friday, September 14

KEY TERMS

**Chapter 3**: definition of strong party; levels of party organization within the state and what each level does; why local and state parties have become more active and stronger organizations since the 1970s; traditional weaknesses of state parties; state party fundraising activities; campaign services provided by state party organizations; why the South is a special case

**Chapter 4**: national committee and its functions; “Hill committees” and their functions; Democratic and Republican Governors’ Associations; the Republican “service path” versus the Democratic procedural reform path; changes in party strategies due to campaign finance reform; how the parties targeted their financial contributions in 2008, 2010, and likely will in 2012; impact of stronger national party organizations on candidate campaigns, and on state and local party organizations; 50-state strategy

**Chapter 5**: the three types of incentives (material, solidary, purposive) and what the political parties have to offer activists within each type; professionals versus amateur activists, key differences; how parties recruit, factors that make people want to become active; characteristics of party activists that make them different from non-activists

**(Leftover question from F September 7)** 5. What are the implications of increased competitiveness between the Republican and Democratic parties in recent years (discussed in chapter 2)? What limits on party competitiveness exist, and why? Consider Figure 2.1 on page 29 – in thinking about competitiveness between the two major parties, is anything in this figure surprising, and would we expect the same chart 10 years from now to look the same or different, and why?

**Wednesday/Chapter 3 & 4 questions**

1. The story in chapters 3 and 4 is that party organizations at all levels of U.S. politics have increased their visibility and strength in recent decades. Why has this occurred, and what difference has it made in campaigns specifically?

2. What tensions may exist in the relationships across different levels of party organization – between local (precinct, city, county) and state, between state and national, between local and national? What can or should national party organizations do to deal with these tensions?

2A. Toward the end of chapter 4, Hershey notes that “the national parties’ new strength has lessened the **de**centralization of the party organizations” (85). What does this mean in practice and what difference does it make for party organizational levels below the national level?

3. What key differences emerge between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in terms of each party’s national organization, its strategies and its influence on campaigns? What reasons or factors explain these differences?

4. Consider the arguments in the p. 85 box “Could a stronger national party help you?” Having read these arguments and considering the material in chapters 3 and 4, ponder – could a stronger national party help you?

**Friday/Chapter 5 questions**

5. Which of the incentives described in chapter 5 seems most appealing or interesting to a party activist? Put another way, with no pay and little publicity, what would be the primary reasons why people choose to volunteer for their preferred political party?

6. How do parties recruit activists?

7. Does it matter that party activists hold more certain (more ‘extreme’?) views than the electorate at large? In what ways does it matter, or why does it not matter?

8. You are a candidate for Congress (House of Representatives) in the major party of your choice, running for an open seat with a good chance of winning. You have read about the services offered by parties, the organizational structure of parties, and the characteristics of party activists, some of whom live in your district. What difference do these services, organizational structure, and the presence of party activists make to your campaign strategy? Put another way, what types of assistance do you want from the party and its most committed activist members? Are there types of services/aid from the party that you do NOT want to have? How would you manage a conflict between your own political views and campaign strategy versus potentially differing views and strategic concerns by county party officials, or precinct captains, or active party members who might want your job down the road? Be as specific as possible on all aspects of this question.

x. Ask your chapter 3-4-5 questions here!