POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

# POLITICAL PARTIES IN AMERICA: AN INTRODUCTION

Questions and discussion points – Hershey chapters 1 & 2

Friday, September 7

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

**Hershey chapter 1**: concept of parties as intermediaries (p. 2); definition of political parties; the three interacting parts of American political parties: party organization, party in government, party in the electorate; what parties do, how parties differ from other political organizations; why political parties developed in the early United States; Federalist Party; Democratic-Republican Party; Whig Party; how and why the national party system emerged around 1832; why parties had a “golden age”; why a reform era came after the “golden age”; the core differences between the two major parties today; how parties are shaped by the environment of the American political system

**Hershey chapter 2:** limits on party competitiveness in the states; Duverger’s Law, single-member district, plurality election; why the U.S. has a two-party system and not more than 2 major parties on a regular basis; minor parties – what is distinctive about them, what difference do they make; rise of independent (third) candidates

1. In what ways do parties differ/are parties unique from other political organizations? Is it conceivable that other political organizations could replace all the functions that parties perform? Ponder and discuss.

2. President Obama gave his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention last night, as did Mitt Romney to the Republican National Convention last week. In what ways are these speeches intended to appeal to the (Democratic/Republican) party organization and party in government, versus appealing to the (Democratic/Republican) party in the electorate (consider for both candidates/parties – the answer might not be the same for each)? What kinds of tension might exist between the party organization/party in government on the one hand, and the party in the electorate on the other hand (consider this subquestion for BOTH parties)?

3. (chapters 1 and 2) Why did a national 2-party system emerge by the mid 1830s?

4. What reasons are advanced in chapter 2 to explain why the United States has almost always had a 2-party system? Which of these reasons do you find to be the most compelling in explaining the essential 2-party nature of US politics, and why?

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?

6. Pose a question here about the first 2 chapters, if you have one!