



CHAPTER 11

Voting, Elections, and Political Parties

This chapter begins with an examination of “the voting paradox,” and Arrow’s impossibility theorem, which illustrates the difficulty of using any voting procedure to discover public preferences on complex issues. Despite such difficulties, elections are rightly regarded as integral to any democratic system. In liberal democracies, such contests are supposed to be “free and fair.” However, different states operate a wide variety of electoral systems. The chapter critically evaluates the main alternatives: simple plurality, or first-past-the-post, and systems of proportional representation. Some states operate “hybrid” systems, like the German “alternative vote” procedure.

The chapter goes on to discuss political parties. Parties are coming under increasing criticism, particularly in the West, and the various objections are examined. This is followed by an historical account of the emergence of political parties, as they were pioneered in both the US and UK. The chapter then offers a discussion of the functions of political parties, and an analysis of different party systems. The chapter closes with an investigation of the problems facing political parties today, and draws attention to the precipitate fall in party membership in many countries.

Chapter Outline

- The Voting Paradox
- Elections
- Political Parties
- Emergence of Parties
- Functions of Parties
 - Typologies of Political Parties
- Party Systems

- **Problems Facing Parties**
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Alternative member model
Arrow's impossibility theorem
Authoritarian
Cartel parties

Duverger's Law
Interest group
Mass parties
Plurality

Political party
Proportional representation

Discussion Questions

1. What are the seven functions of political parties? Are some more important than others?
2. What are the issues or cleavages upon which the political parties in Canada are differentiated?
3. Do you take an active part in the life of a political party? How do you justify this activity (or lack of it)? How rational is it?
4. Of the various party systems introduced in the chapter, are there reasons to favour one over the others? Why or why not?
5. Is there any argument for a system in which political parties are disallowed? If so, what is it?
6. What are the problems facing political parties today? How might those issues be resolved?
7. Why was the Tea Party movement popular in the United States?

Further Resources

- <http://www.conservative.ca/>
Conservative Party of Canada home page
- <http://www.ndp.ca/>
New Democratic Party of Canada home page
- <http://www.blocquebecois.org/>
Bloc Quebecois home page (in French)
- <http://www.elections.ca/>
Elections Canada (English or French)

- <http://www.liberal.ca/>
Liberal Party of Canada home page
- <http://www.greenparty.ca/>
Green Party of Canada home page
- <http://www.itsyourparliament.eu/groups/>
It's Your Parliament, European Union
- [https://ballotpedia.org/List of political parties in the United States](https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_political_parties_in_the_United_States)
Ballotpedia, List of Political Parties in the US