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John W. Bibby: Politics, Parties, and Elections in America Study Guide

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JOHN W. BIBBY: POLITICS, PARTIES, AND ELECTIONS IN AMERICA: STUDY GUIDE, 1996

Steven Alan Samson

Ch. 1 Parties and Politics in America: An Overview

1. What is the nature of politics and how may it be defined?

2. What is the nature of a political party? What, according to Key, is its structure?

3. Why did parties develop in the eighteenth and nineteenth century? What innovations did Americans contribute to the modern political party system? What is the relationship between political parties and democracy? What are some of the party's rivals as intermediaries?

4. Who influences the selection of nominees? What is the impact of the nomination process on political success or failure? What social and political changes have affected the process? Why has control of the process shifted to the electorate?

5. How do parties help mobilize and channel the vote? How do parties help organize the government? How they enhance accountability? In what ways do they simplify electoral choices? How do they help manage conflict?

6. WHat are some of the rivals of parties in shaping electoral decisions? What traditional functions are to some extent being taken away from parties by competitors? What is perhaps the most powerful competing intermediary institution?

7. How do parties differ from interest groups?

8. How do parties assist the peaceful transfer of authority?

Ch. 2 The Party Battle in America

1. Identify the chief characteristics of each of the five party systems in American history. What was unique about each period? Identify the major and minor parties in each period. How did the parties differ from one period to another? Identify the chief factors that led to the shift from one party system to another? What were their effects?

2. What explanations have been given for the two-party system? How do they compare?

3. How does the New Deal coalition differ from the Republican coalition? Identify some of the political fault lines that aggravate intraparty conflict. Identify the three types of party politics, according to Samuel Eldersveld.

4. How does Eldersveld account for the stability of Republican-Democratic conflict since 1860 despite major social and economic dislocations?

5. How does Walter Dean Burnham view the phenomenon of realignment? What role is played by third party movements? Has a realignment taken place since the New Deal? Identify some of the peculiarities of party politics in recent years.

Ch. 3 Characteristics of the American Party System

1. On what basis did the United States develop the first modern political parties? What are some of the shared attributes of parties in western democracies?

2. Identify some of the characteristics of party competition at the national level. At the state level. What is the evidence from increasing interparty competition at the state level? What accounts for the low turnover in Congress? At the state

level? How important has the party organization been to incumbents?

3. How has the Constitution itself contributed to the looseness of American political parties?

4. How have direct primaries weakened the influence of party organizations? How do American parties differ from their European counterparts? Where has influence in the nominating process shifted?

5. What about the general election campaign process makes it difficult to secure high levels of party unity on congressional roll calls? Why are presidential campaigns organized to a significant degree outside the party structure? Why are British MPs more dependent upon their parties?
6. Identify three nationalizing influences that tend to counteract decentralization. Who were the Boll Weevils? How has the role of the DNC and the RNC been expanded?

7. Distinguish between the core elements or core constituencies of the two parties. What makes American parties, in contrast to European parties, "nonprogrammatic parties?" What was the Conservative Coalition and how long did it last?

8. What does party membership usually entail? Why is it that American parties are considered weak and yet pervasive in their influence?

Ch. 4 Party Organizations

1. Why are American political party organizations considered **cadre** rather than **mass membership** parties? What makes the party organization a **stratarchy** rather than a hierarchy? What does Eldersveld mean by *reciprocal deference*?

2. Why was national committee politics described as "politics without power" in the 1960s? How did Democrats change the basis for representation on the DNC in 1974? How does the DNC visibly differ from the RNC?

3. How do "speaking chairmen" differ from "nuts and bolts chairmen?" What are the chief activities of the national committees? What factors have increased their inflouence in more recent years?

4. What has been the effect of FECA on the national committees? Its effect on the Capitol Hill committees?

5. Identify some of the unofficial party groups. What is the Democratic Leadership Conference?

6. Identify various ways parties are regulated by state law. What accounts for the proliferation of state regulations? Where have courts dawn the line on such regulation?

7. Identify the various components of the state parties? What role does the governor typically play? How have the very weak state parties been strengthened since the 1960s? Why are Republican organizations usually stronger than their Democratic counterparts?

8. Identify the different types of county and local parties. How do they compare?

9. What are some of the incentives to party activism? Identify some of distinguishing characteristics of party activists. How do amateur and professional activists differ?