

PERIODICALS

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Party Paradox

"Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline" by Cornelius P. Cotter and John F. Bibby, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Spring 1980), Ste. 500, 619 West 114 St., New York, N.Y. 10025.

Though the Democratic and Republican parties appeal to a lower percentage of voters than in the past, they have, on the national level, become increasingly sophisticated bureaucracies — putting a tighter rein on state and local parties and providing more services to community loyalists than ever before. So write Cotter and Bibby, political scientists at the University of Wisconsin.

As recently as 1920, the Democratic and Republican National Committees were ad hoc groups of politicians who simply gathered every four years to run the presidential campaigns. The RNC was the first to acquire a permanent staff, after the 1920 election, as Democrat Woodrow Wilson gained the White House. The Democrats followed suit in 1928, with one innovation. They hired a public relations man, Charles Michelson, who "trained his guns on the Hoover Administration" and, claim the authors, began the tradition of the out-party as perpetual critic of the in-party. In recent decades, the party chairmen have gained strength and independence — even from Presidents. Both national committees now secure financing apart from presidential campaign fund-raising operations.

In 1948, threatened with secession by the Southern arm of the party, the DNC faced the need for strict party conformity. Important show-downs came at the 1964 and 1968 Democratic conventions, when the national leadership sided with blacks to force the integration of Southern state delegations. In 1968, the McGovern-Fraser commission established a quota system for women and minority delegates.

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Meanwhile, the Republican National Committee has increased its influence through services to state and local parties. Under Chairman Bill Brock, the RNC provides state organizations with salaried managers, finance directors, and low-cost computer service. Even candidates for state legislatures can obtain funds from the RNC.

This new institutional strength has resulted in a paradox: increasingly disciplined parties, whose domination of electoral politics is reinforced by recent federal election laws, persuade a *decreasing* proportion of the voters to identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans.

When Do Voters Really Decide?

“Time of Decision and Media Use During the Ford-Carter Campaign” by Steven H. Chaffee and Sun Yuel Choe, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1980), Subscription Dept., Elsevier North Holland, Inc., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Are autumn presidential campaigns a waste of time for voters and candidates? Since the 1940s, political scientists have believed that most voters make up their minds either before Labor Day, when campaigns traditionally begin, or during the last few days before the balloting.

Chaffee and Choe, researchers in journalism at the University of Wisconsin, polled a group of Wisconsin voters four times during the presidential race of autumn 1976: before and after the first Ford-Carter debate (September 23), after the second debate (October 23), and immediately following the November 2 election. They found an unexpectedly high 40 percent of respondents who made their choices during the *middle* weeks of the presidential campaign.

These “campaign deciders” (who split their votes between Ford and



Jeff MacNelly's 1978 cartoon depicts the traditional view of America's undecided voters.

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