

*Parties and Elections in America, Fourth Edition*  
*Chapter Seven*

**Outline**

7 State and Local Elections

- I. The Conventional Wisdom: Old versus New Politics
- II. The New Politics: Campaigning in a Media Age
  - A. The Role of Political Parties
  - B. The Role of Organized Groups
  - C. Media Politics
  - D. The Candidate's Organization
  - E. The Structure of a Modern Campaign
    1. Public Opinion Polling
    2. Media Consultants
    3. Fund-Raisers
    4. Scheduling and Advance Work, Press Relations, Field Organization, and Liaison to the Political Party and Organized Groups
- III. Old-Style Politics: A More Prominent Role for Parties
  - A. Reexamination of the Role of Political Parties
  - B. Local Campaigns in the Absence of Party
- IV. Do Campaigns Determine Who Wins Elections?
  - A. Lack of Competition in American Elections
  - B. Incumbent Advantage in U.S. House and State Legislative Races
  - C. Competition in U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial Races
  - D. Credible Competition in American Elections
- V. Third Parties in State and Local Elections
- VI. Politicians View the General Election

### *Key Concepts*

#### **CANDIDATE-CENTERED**

The focus of a campaign or an organization is on a particular candidate, not on a party or a group of candidates running together

#### **DIRECT MAIL**

A campaign technique through which voters are contacted by mail because of a campaign's prior knowledge concerning those voters' views

#### **INCUMBENT ADVANTAGE**

Advantages that current officeholders have in seeking reelection by virtue of the fact that they hold the office

#### **MARGINAL SEATS**

Seats in which either major party has a legitimate chance of winning

#### **TERM LIMITS**

Statutory limits on the number of successive terms an elected officeholder may serve

### *Questions for Discussion*

1. How do you decide which candidates you will vote for below the top of the ballot? Why are public officials such as registrar of deeds or judge of probate elected? What is your impression of our "long ballots"?

2. One recurring question about the way in which American campaigns are contested deals with issue content—even for the more salient races. What issues were discussed in the most recent elections in your hometown? What impact did they have on the outcome of the election? If you cannot name substantive issues that were discussed, why not?
3. How serious a flaw is it in our electoral system that so many offices are uncontested? Why should we worry about the lack of competition if incumbents are so popular that they always get reelected? Would you favor a system that allowed citizens to vote “none of the above” in an election, requiring the winner to receive a certain percentage of positive votes?
4. Should parties play a more or less prominent role in state and local elections? What should that role be? Why?
5. Do interest groups—through campaign contributions and influence over their members—play too prominent a role in American elections?
6. Candidate-centered campaigns are often dominated by political consultants—hired guns who travel from state to state and clearly have a great deal of influence over local politics because of their technical campaign expertise. Do you view their role as positive or negative? If positive, justify that evaluation. If negative, how can their function be performed without deleterious effects?