

TEXT SUMMARY

The major parties are decentralized, or fragmented. At the national level, the party machinery has four basic elements: the national convention that nominates the party's candidates, the national committee that runs the party's affairs between conventions, the national chairperson who heads the national committee, and the congressional campaign committees that work to elect party members to Congress.

From the perspective of its members, a party has three basic and loosely connected parts. The party organization consists of the party machinery's leaders. The party in the electorate refers to those followers who usually vote for the party's

candidates. The party in government describes the party's officeholders.

At the State and local levels, party structure is largely set by State law. At the State level, a central committee is headed by a chairperson. Local party structure varies widely, with a party unit for each district in which elections are held. The districts include congressional and legislative districts, counties, cities and towns, wards, and precincts. A **ward** is a small unit of a city; a **precinct** is a subdivision of a ward.

Political parties have been in decline since the 1960s. More and more voters regard themselves as independents. Also, **split-ticket voting**, or voting for candidates of different parties in the same election, has increased.

THE BIG IDEA

The structure of the major parties is decentralized; their different parts work together mostly during national elections.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Party Organization

Party Organization	
National Party Machinery	Basic Components of the Party
national convention	party organization
national committee	party in the electorate
national chairperson	party in government
congressional campaign committees	

Political parties are fragmented, but work together.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What defines party structure at the State and local levels?
2. **Chart Skills** What are the major parts of the national party machinery?