

What Is a Party?

- A **political party** is a group of persons who seek to control government by winning elections and holding office.
- The two **major parties** in American politics are the Republican and Democratic parties.
- Parties can be principle-oriented, issue-oriented, or election-oriented. The American parties are election-oriented.



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

4

5

Chapter 5, Section 1

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What Do Parties Do?

- **Nominate Candidates**—Recruit, choose, and present candidates for public office.
- **Inform and Activate Supporters**—Campaign, define issues, and criticize other candidates.
- **Act as a Bonding Agent**—Guarantee that their candidate is worthy of the office.
- **Govern**—Members of government act according to their **partisanship**, or firm allegiance to a party.
- **Act as a Watchdog**—Parties that are out of power keep a close eye on the actions of the **party in power** for a blunder to use against them in the next election.



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

4

5

Chapter 5, Section 1

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Single Member District [two-party system]



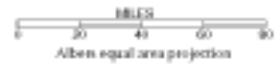
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Where We Are

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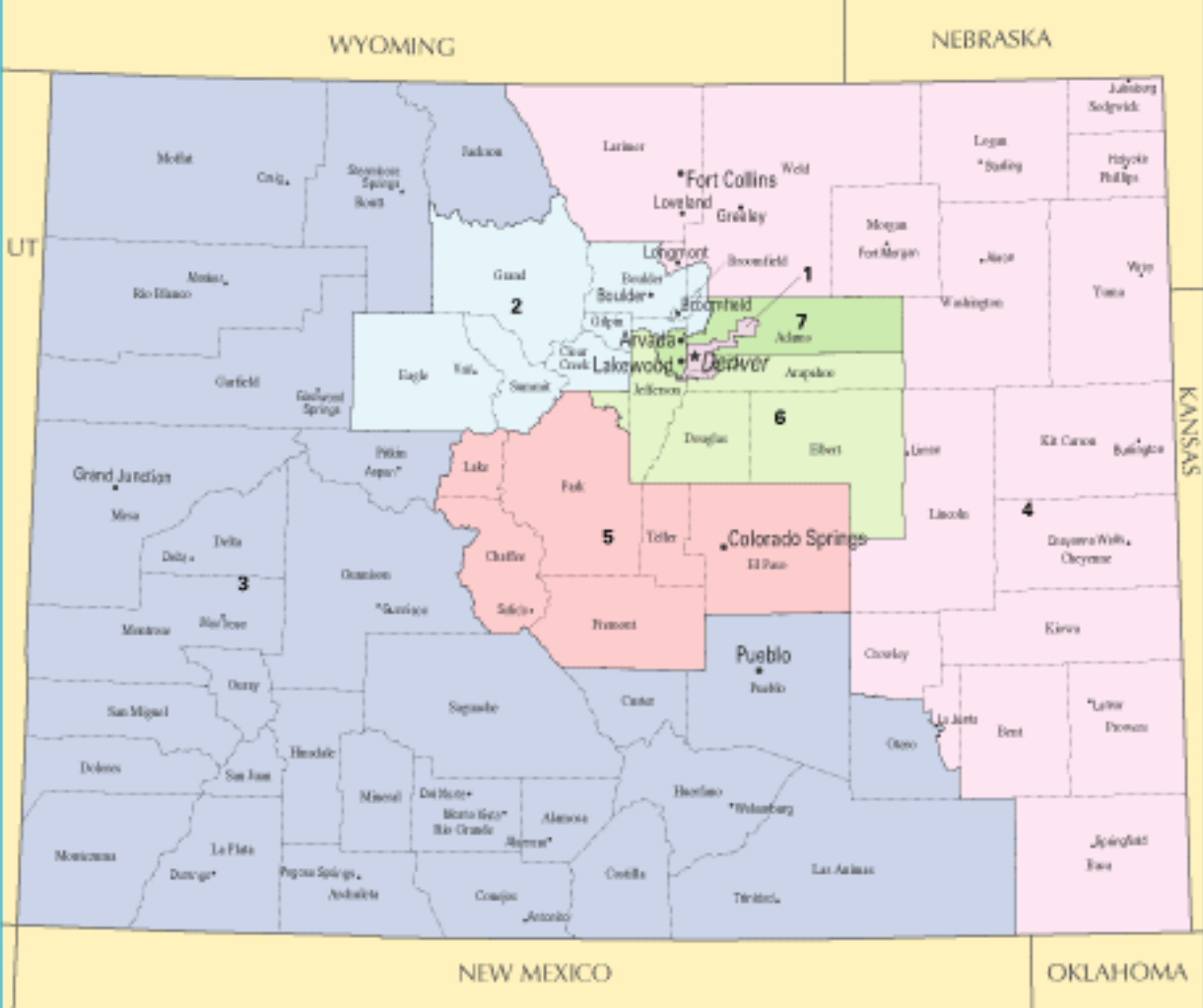
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS
109th Congress (January 2005 - January 2007)

The Constitution prescribes Congressional apportionment based on decennial census population data. Each state has at least one Representative, no matter how small its population. Since 1941, distribution of Representatives has been based on total U.S. population, so that the average population per Representative has the least possible variation between one state and any other. Congress fixes the number of voting Representatives at each apportionment. States delineate the district boundaries. The first House of Representatives in 1789 had 65 members; currently there are 435. There are non-voting delegates from American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7



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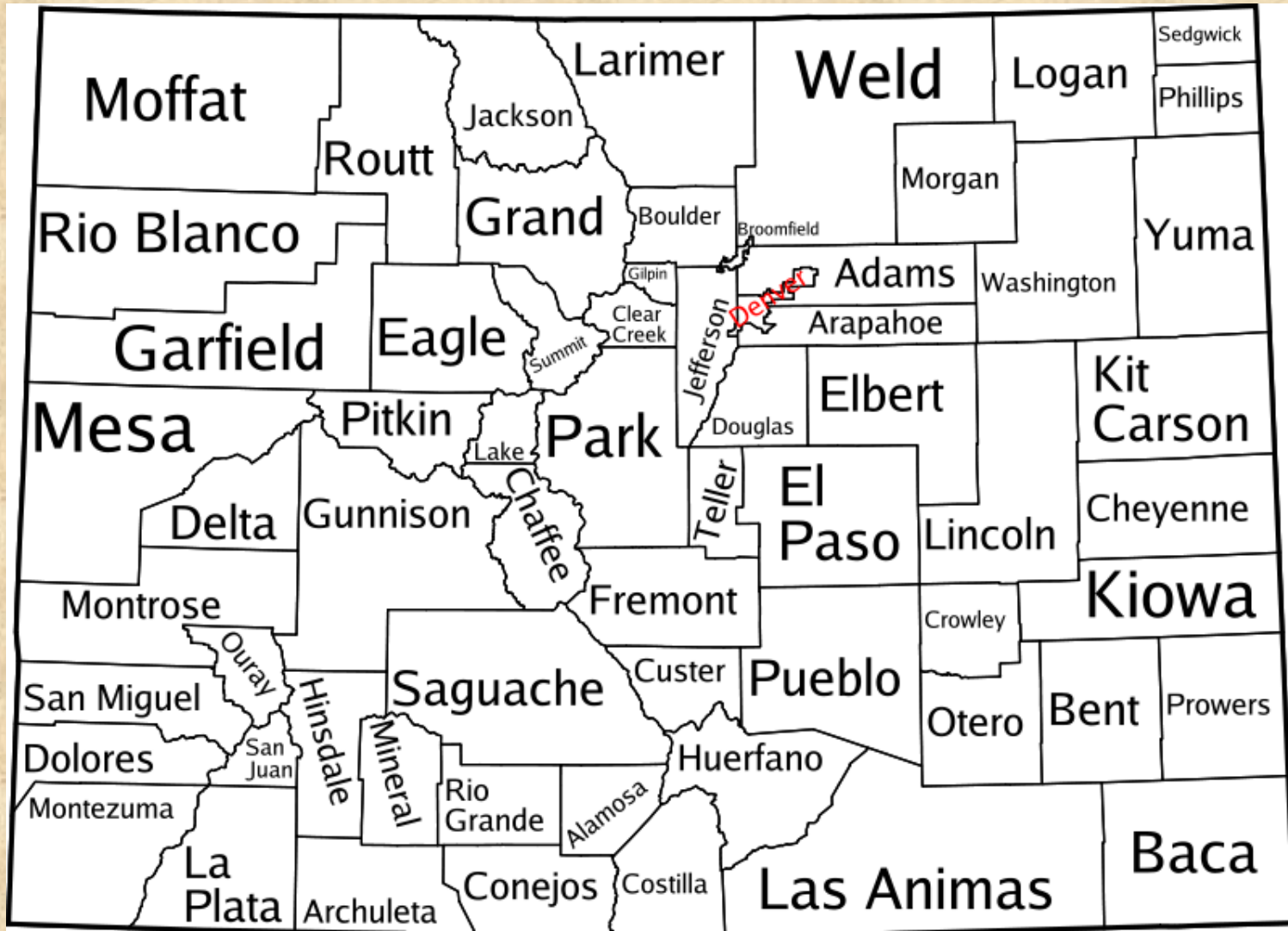


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Section:

Multi-member district [multi-party system]



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

4

5

Two party v. Multi-party results

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| • Democrats: | 1,216,793 | • Democrats: | 1,200,213 |
| • Republicans: | 1,020,315 | • Republicans: | 1,000,015 |
| • Green Party: | 6,440 | • Green Party: | 22,440 |
| • Libertarians: | 3,648 | • Libertarians: | 23,648 |
| • Socialists: | 436 | • Socialists: | 936 |
| • Natural Law: | 216 | • Natural Law: | 516 |
| • Reform: | 100 | • Reform: | 180 |

The Decentralized Nature of the Parties

Both the Democratic and Republican parties are highly decentralized and fragmented.

Why?

- The party out of power often lacks a strong leader.
- The federal system distributes powers widely, in turn causing the parties to be decentralized.
- The nominating process pits party members against one another because only one person can be chosen to be the party's presidential candidate.



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

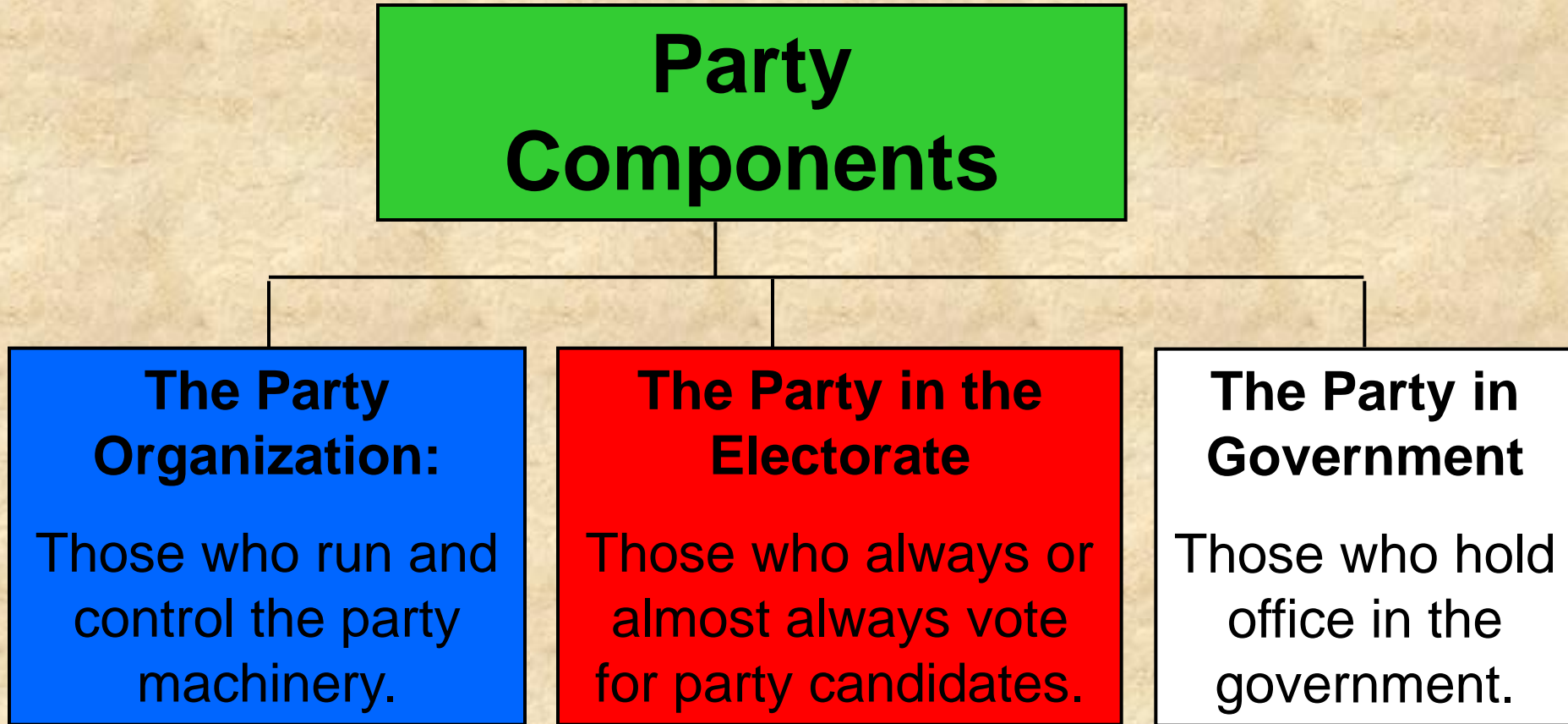
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5

Chapter 5, Section 5

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The Three Components of the Party



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

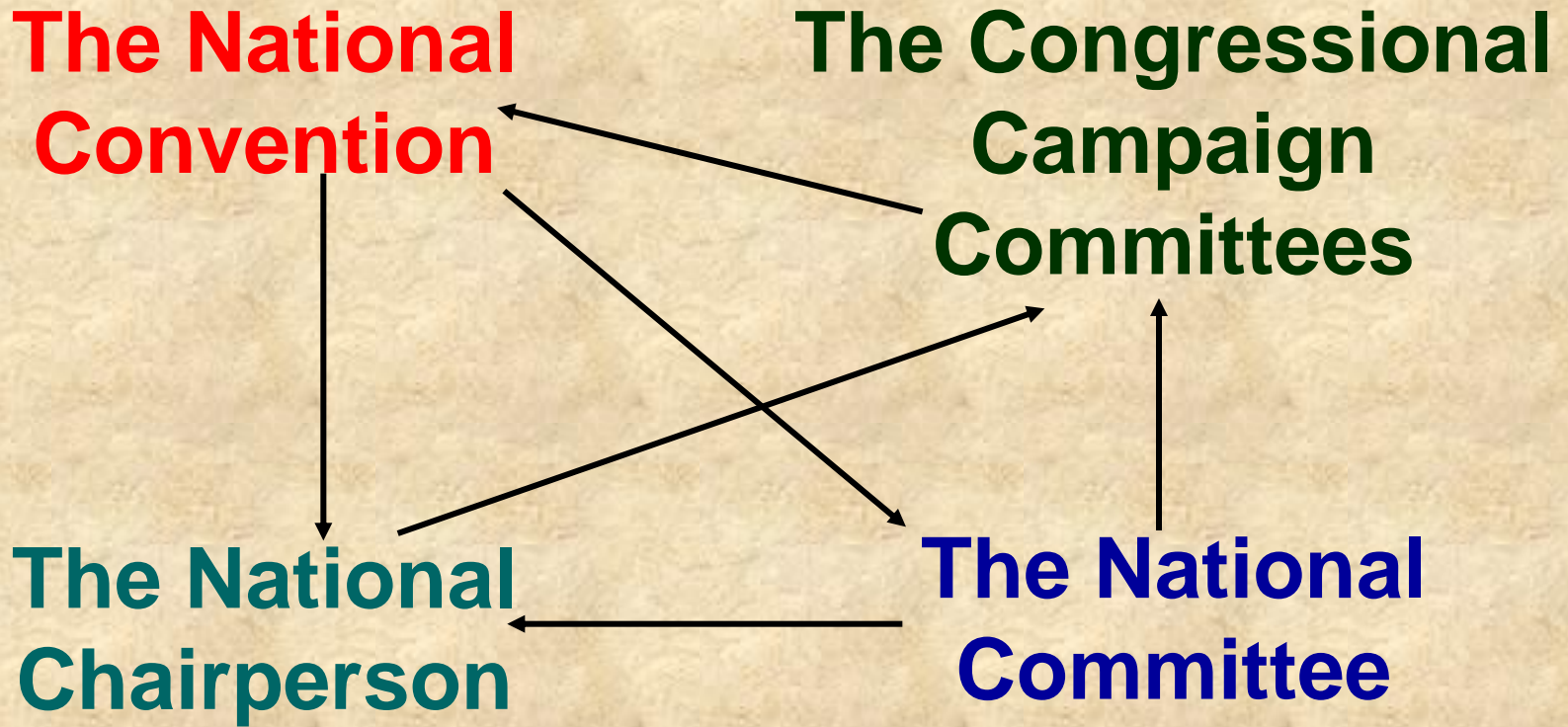
4

5

Chapter 5, Section 5

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National Party Machinery



All four elements of both major parties work together loosely to achieve the party's goals.



Go To
Section:

1

2

3

4

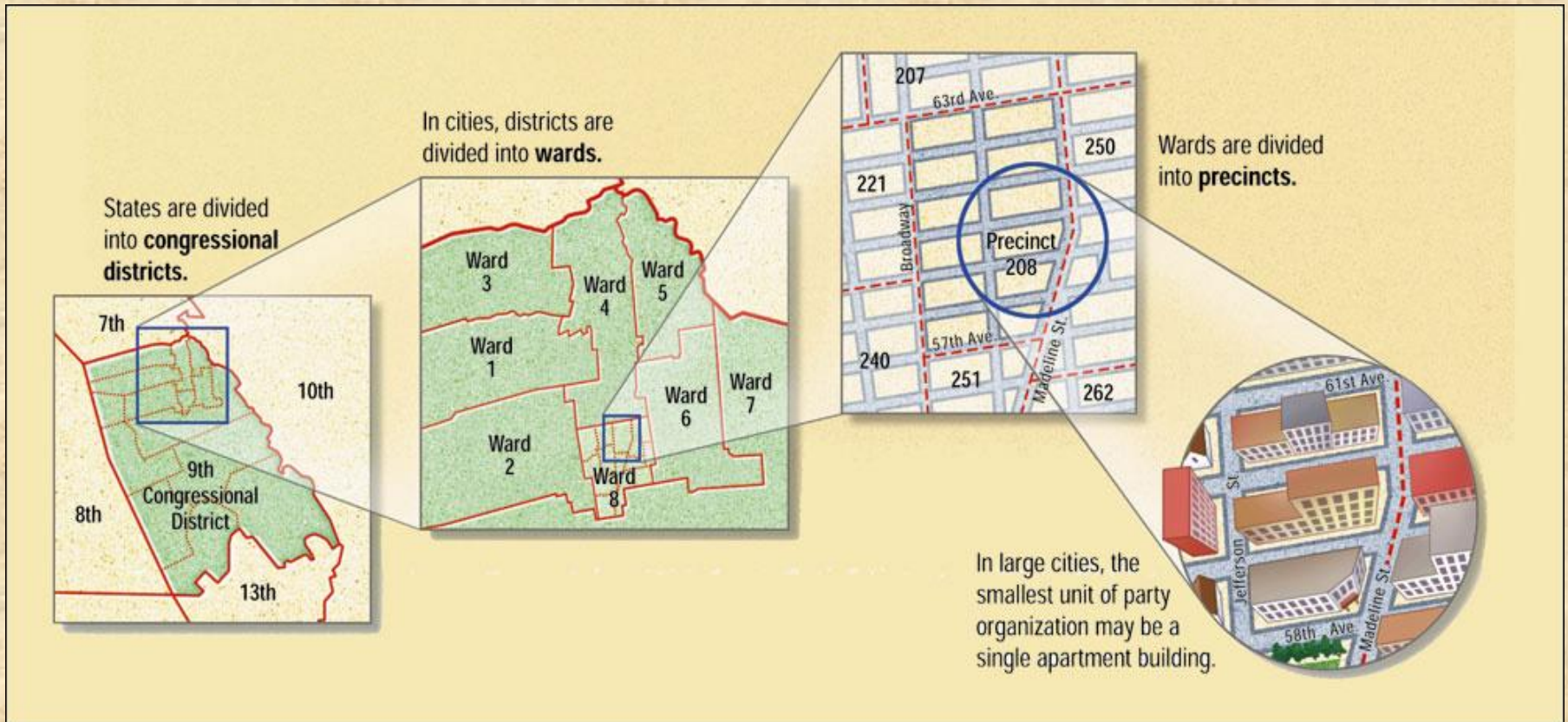
5

Chapter 5, Section 5

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State and Local Party Machinery

State and local party organization varies from State to State, but usually follow the general principles below.



The Future of Major Parties

Weakened connections to political parties:

For voters :

- More people are unwilling to label themselves as “Democrats” or “Republicans”
- Split-ticket voting—voting for candidates of different parties for different offices at the same election

For candidates:

- Changing priorities have increased conflict and disorganization within parties
- Changes in the technology of campaigning, especially the use of television and the Internet, have made candidates more independent of the party organization
- The growth of grass-roots organizations provides candidates with another source of financial support