



Political Parties and Constitutional Government: Remaking American Democracy (Interpreting American Politics)

Sidney M. Milkis

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The U.S. Constitution makes no mention of political parties, yet parties began to form shortly after its ratification. Today, American democracy would not work without them. In *Political Parties and Constitutional Government*, Sidney Milkis explores the uneasy relationship between the Constitution and the party system to advance a novel argument: political parties arose as part of a deliberate program of constitutional reform.

Forged on the anvil of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy, parties initially formed as decentralized political associations that engaged the attention of ordinary citizens and held presidents accountable to local constituencies. But as the power of the presidency and the federal government grew, parties shifted their attention from building political support in the states and localities to vying for control over national administration and, in the process, lost their vital connection to the electorate. In the past thirty years, partisan disputes have more often than not involved confrontations between the president and Congress that have undermined the public's respect for American political institutions.

With the decline of localized parties, Milkis concludes, there has arisen an administrative politics of rights and entitlements that belittles the efforts of Democrats and Republicans alike to define a collective purpose. Ending with a discussion of possible methods of revitalization and reform, this timely book does much to explain the reasons behind Americans' disenchantment with parties and the party system.

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