



# **Understanding American Political Parties: Democratic Ideals, Political Uncertainty, and Strategic Positioning**

*Jeffrey M. Stonecash*

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How do parties respond to the electorate and craft winning strategies? In the abstract parties are the vehicles to make democracy work, but it is often difficult to see the process working as well as we think it might. Indeed, voters often struggle to see parties as the valuable vehicles of representation that so many academics describe. There is a clear discrepancy between the ideal expressed in many textbooks and the reality that we see playing out in politics.

Noted scholar Jeffrey Stonecash gives us a big picture analysis that helps us understand what is happening in contemporary party politics. He explains that parties behave the way they do because of existing political conditions and how parties adapt to those conditions as they prepare for the next election. Parties are unsure if realignment has stabilized and just what issues brought them their current base. Does a majority support their positions and how are they to react to ongoing social change? Is the electorate paying attention, and can parties get a clear message to those voters? This book focuses on the challenges parties face in preparing for future elections while seeking to cope with current conditions. This coping leads to indecisiveness of positioning, simplification of issues, repetition of messages, and efforts to disparage the reputation of the opposing party. Stonecash sheds much needed light on why parties engage in the practices that frustrate so many Americans.

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