Chapter 5 in Brief

SECTION 1

Parties and What They Do (pp. 116–118)
★ The primary purpose of the two major American political parties is to control government through winning election to public office.
★ Political parties nominate candidates, rally their supporters, participate in government, act as a “bonding agent” for their own officeholders, and act as a watchdog over the other party.

SECTION 2

The Two-Party System (pp. 119–124)
★ The two-party system is a product of our history and tradition, the electoral system, and the American ideological consensus.
★ Multiparty systems provide more choice for the electorate but a less stable government. In one-party systems only the ruling party can participate in elections.
★ While the two major parties are broadly based, each party does tend to attract certain segments of the electorate.

SECTION 3

The Two-Party System in American History (pp. 126–131)
★ The first American parties originated in the battle over ratifying the Constitution.
★ There have been three eras of single-party domination in U.S. history from 1800–1968.
★ An era of divided government—with neither major party consistently in power—began in 1968 and continues to this day.

SECTION 4

The Minor Parties (pp. 132–135)
★ Minor parties in the United States include ideological parties, single-issue parties, economic protest parties, and splinter parties.
★ Even though they do not win national elections, minor parties play an important role as critics and innovators.
★ Strong third-party candidacies can influence elections.

SECTION 5

Party Organization (pp. 137–142)
★ The major parties have a decentralized structure because of federalism and the sometimes divisive nominating process.
★ At the national level, the four basic elements of both major parties are the national convention, the national committee, the national chairperson, and the congressional campaign committee.
★ At the State level, the party is organized around a State central committee headed by a State chairperson, while local organizations vary widely.
★ Party structure can also be viewed as made up of the party organization, or machinery; the people who usually vote the party ticket; and the party’s officeholders.
★ Parties are currently in decline: fewer people identify themselves as major party members, and many people vote a split ticket.