

Political Parties

“A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life.”

—John Stuart Mill (1859)

John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher, noted the benefits of two competing political parties. In this country, the balance of power has historically switched between two broad-based parties. Our major parties choose candidates and play important roles in government. Minor parties have challenged, but never really changed, this two-party system.



You Can Make a Difference

ONE GOOD WAY to study party politics is to work in a campaign. Early in the 2000 presidential race, some college students learned about politics first hand in the New Hampshire primary. Political science majors from Quinnipiac College spent their winter break as volunteers in the Bush, Bradley, Gore, or McCain campaigns. They canvassed voters, helped with mailings, held up signs, and met candidates. “I like to have the hands-on kind of learning,” said Jessica Cieslak about the Bradley campaign. Sally Roden, addressing postcards for Governor Bush, commented, “It seems like we’re contributing small pieces to a greater puzzle.”

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.



◆ A political party holds its national convention.

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Parties and What They Do

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Define a political party.
2. Describe the major functions of political parties.

WHY IT MATTERS

Political parties are essential to democratic government. In the United States, political parties have shaped the way the government works. Today, the major parties perform several important functions without which our government could not function.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ political party
- ★ major parties
- ★ partisanship
- ★ party in power

“**W**inning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” So said legendary football coach Vince Lombardi. Lombardi was talking about teams in the National Football League. His words, however, could also be used to describe the Republican and Democratic parties. They, too, are in the business of competing and winning.

What Is a Party?

A **political party** is a group of persons who seek to control government through the winning of elections and the holding of public office. This definition of a political party is broad enough to fit any political party. It certainly describes the two **major parties** in American politics, the Republican and the Democratic parties.

Another, more specific definition can be used to describe most political parties, both here and abroad. That is, a political party is a group of persons, joined together on the basis of common principles, who seek to control government in order to affect certain public policies and programs.



▲ Bumper stickers reveal party loyalty.

This definition, with its emphasis on principles and public policy positions, will not fit the two major American parties, however. The Republican and Democratic parties are not primarily principle- or issue-oriented. They are, instead, election-oriented.

What Do Parties Do?

It is clear from American history, as well as from the histories of other peoples, that political parties are essential to democratic government. Parties are the major mechanisms behind the development of broad policy and leadership choices; they are the medium through which those options are presented to the people.

Political parties are a vital link between the people and their government; that is, between the governed and those who govern. Many observers argue that political parties are the principal means by which the will of the people is made known to government and by which government is held accountable to the people.

Parties serve the democratic ideal in another important way. They work to blunt conflict; they are “power brokers.” Political parties try to bring conflicting groups together. They modify and encourage compromise among the contending views of different interests and groups, and so help to unify, rather than divide, the American people. They usually soften the impact of extremists at both ends of the political spectrum.

Again, political parties are indispensable to American government. This fact is underscored by the major functions they perform.

Nominating Candidates

The major function of a political party is to nominate—name—candidates for public office. That is, the parties select candidates and then present them to the voters. Then the parties work to help their candidates win elections.

To have a functioning democracy, there must be a procedure for finding (recruiting and choosing) candidates for office. There must also be a mechanism for gathering support (votes) for these candidates. Parties are the best device yet found to do those jobs.

The nominating function is almost exclusively a party function in the United States.¹ It is the one activity that most clearly sets political parties apart from all of the other groups that operate in the political process.

Informing and Activating Supporters

Parties inform the people, and inspire and activate their interest and participation in public affairs. Other groups also perform this function—in particular, the news media and interest groups.

Parties try to inform and inspire voters in several ways. Primarily, they campaign for their candidates, take stands on issues, and criticize the candidates and the positions of their opponents.

Each party tries to inform the people as it thinks they should be informed—to its own advantage. It conducts this “educational” process through pamphlets, signs, buttons, and stickers; with advertisements in newspapers and magazines and via radio, television, the Internet, and now text messaging; in speeches, rallies, and conventions; and in many other ways.

Remember, both parties want to win elections, and that consideration has much to do with the stands they take on most issues. Both the Republicans and the Democrats try to shape positions that will attract as many voters as possible—and that will, at the same time, offend as few voters as possible.

The Bonding Agent Function

In business, a bond is an agreement that protects a person or company against loss caused by a third party. In politics, a political party

¹The exceptions are in nonpartisan elections and in those rare instances in which an independent candidate enters a partisan contest. Nominations are covered at length in Chapter 7.



▲ **Campaign Fundraiser** Candidates rely on the money raised at political party fundraisers to help pay for their campaigns. Here President G. W. Bush waves from the podium at a fundraiser for his reelection campaign in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

acts as a “bonding agent,” to ensure the good performance of its candidates and officeholders. In choosing its candidates, the party tries to make sure that they are men and women who are both qualified and of good character—or, at least, that they are not unqualified for the offices they seek.

The party also prompts its successful candidates to perform well in office. The democratic process imposes this bonding agent function on a party, whether the party really wants to perform it or not. If it fails to assume this responsibility, both the party and its candidates may suffer the consequences in future elections.

Governing

In several respects, government in the United States is government by party. For example, public officeholders—those who govern—are regularly chosen on the basis of party. Congress and the State legislatures are organized on party lines, and they conduct much of their business on the basis of **partisanship**—the strong support of their party and its policy stands. In addition, most appointments to executive offices, at both the federal and State levels, are made with an eye to party considerations.



▲ From left to right: Democratic presidential hopefuls Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts and former Vermont governor Howard Dean shake hands; Republican senators speak publicly to request cuts to the federal budget; the powerful House Ways and Means Committee holds a hearing. **Critical Thinking**
What party functions are represented by these three photos?

In yet another sense, parties provide a basis for the conduct of government. In the complicated separation of powers arrangement, the executive and legislative branches must cooperate with one another if government is to accomplish anything. It is political parties that regularly provide the channels through which these two branches are able to work together.

Political parties have played a significant role in the process of constitutional change. Consider this important example: The Constitution's cumbersome system for electing the President works principally because political parties reshaped it in its early years and have made it work ever since.

Acting as Watchdog

Parties act as watchdogs over the conduct of the public's business. This is particularly true

of the party out of power. It plays this role as it criticizes the policies and behavior of the party in power.

In American politics the party in power is the party that controls the executive branch of government—the presidency at the national level or the governorship at the State level.

In effect, the party out of power attempts to convince the voters that they should “throw the rascals out,” that the “outs” should become the “ins” and the “ins” the “outs.” The scrutiny and criticism by the “out” party tends to make the “rascals” more careful of their public charge and more responsive to the wishes and concerns of the people. In short, the party out of power plays the important role of “the loyal opposition”—opposed to the party in power but loyal to the people and the nation.



The Two-Party System

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the reasons why the United States has a two-party system.
2. Understand multiparty and one-party systems and how they affect the functioning of government.
3. Describe party membership patterns in the United States.

WHY IT MATTERS

The two-party system in the United States is a product of historical forces, our electoral system, and the ideological consensus of the American people. It provides more political stability than a multiparty system and more choice than a one-party system.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ minor party
- ★ two-party system
- ★ single-member district
- ★ plurality
- ★ bipartisan
- ★ pluralistic society
- ★ consensus
- ★ multiparty
- ★ coalition
- ★ one-party system

You probably don't recognize this name: Earl Dodge. Yet Mr. Dodge has sought the presidency more often than any other person in this nation's history. He has been the Prohibition Party's presidential nominee seven times, first in 1984 and most recently in 2008.

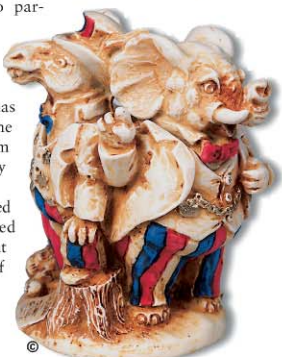
One reason Mr. Dodge is not very well known is that he belongs to a **minor party**, one of the many political parties without wide voter support in this country. Two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, dominate American politics. That is to say, this country has a **two-party system**. In a typical election, only the Republican or the Democratic Party's candidates have a reasonable chance of winning public office.

system. None of those factors, alone, offers a fully satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon. Taken together, however, the group of them is quite persuasive.

The Historical Basis

The two-party system is rooted in the beginnings of the nation itself. The Framers of the Constitution were opposed to political parties. As you know, however, the ratification of the Constitution saw the birth of America's first two parties: the Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, and the Anti-Federalists, who followed Thomas Jefferson. In short, the American party system *began* as a two-party system.

The Framers hoped to create a unified country; they sought to bring order out of



► The symbols of the political parties turn up in many forms—especially in an election year.

Why a Two-Party System?

In some States, and in many local communities, one of the two major parties may be overwhelmingly dominant. And it may remain so for a long time—as, for example, the Democrats were throughout the South from the post-Civil War years to the 1960s. But, on the whole, and through most of our history, the United States has been a two-party nation.

Several factors help to explain why America has had and continues to have a two-party

Section 1 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. What is a **political party**?
2. Identify two functions of political parties.
3. In what ways is American government conducted on the basis of **partisanship**?
4. (a) At this time, which is the **party in power** in your State?
(b) In the nation?

Critical Thinking

5. **Analyzing Information** In what ways do political parties tend to unify, rather than divide, the American people?

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6. **Drawing Conclusions** The party out of power serves an important function in American government. Explain that function.

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Voices on Government

Mary Matalin is a leading Republican campaign consultant. She worked in the Bush campaign in 2000 and 2004. She was an Assistant to the President and Counselor to the Vice President from 2001 to 2003. Here, she comments on political campaigns from the inside:



“ Politics is about winning. . . . Participating in a presidential campaign full-time, as a professional, is very emotional and very draining. You don’t want to put that much effort into a race unless you have a real chance. . . . In the culture of campaigns it’s not ideological. Most of us have a philosophical grounding—we’re working for Republicans only—but in terms of issues the differences between candidates are often pretty small.”

Evaluating the Quotation

How does Matalin’s view of political campaigns fit in with what you have read about the two major parties?

the chaos of the Critical Period of the 1780s. To most of the Framers, parties were “factions,” and therefore agents of divisiveness and disunity. George Washington reflected this view when, in his Farewell Address in 1796, he warned the new nation against “the baneful effects of the spirit of party.”

In this light, it is hardly surprising that the Constitution made no provision for political parties. The Framers could not foresee the ways in which the governmental system they set up would develop. Thus, they could not possibly know that two major parties would emerge as prime instruments of government in the United States. Nor could they know that those two major parties would tend to be moderate, to choose middle-of-the-road positions, and so help to unify rather than divide the nation.

The Force of Tradition

Once established, human institutions are likely to become self-perpetuating. So it has been with the two-party system. The very fact that the

nation began with a two-party system has been a leading reason for the retention of a two-party system. Over time, it has become an increasingly important, self-reinforcing reason.

The point can be made this way: Most Americans accept the idea of a two-party system simply because there has always been one. This inbred support for the arrangement is a principal reason why challenges to the system—by minor parties, for example—have made so little headway. In other words, America has a two-party system *because* America has a two-party system.

The Electoral System

Several features of the American electoral system tend to promote the existence of but two major parties. That is to say, the basic shape, and many of the details, of the election process work in that direction.

The prevalence of **single-member districts** is one of the most important of these features. Nearly all of the elections held in this country—from the presidential contest on down to those at the local levels—are single-member district elections. That is, they are contests in which only one candidate is elected to each office on the ballot. They are winner-take-all elections. The winning candidate is the one who receives a **plurality**, or the largest number of votes cast for the office. Note that a plurality need not be a majority, which is more than half of all votes cast.

The single-member district pattern works to discourage minor parties. Because only one winner can come out of each contest, voters usually face only two viable choices: They can vote for the candidate of the party holding the office, or they can vote for the candidate of the party with the best chance of replacing the current officeholder. In short, most voters think of a vote for a minor party candidate as a “wasted vote.”

Another important aspect of the electoral system works to the same end. Much of American election law is purposely written to discourage non-major party candidates.² Republicans and Democrats regularly act in a **bipartisan** way in

²Nearly all election law in this country is State, not federal, law—a point discussed at length in the next two chapters. But, here, note this very important point: Nearly all of the nearly 7,400 State legislators—nearly all of those persons who make State law—are either Democrats or Republicans. Only a handful of minor party members or independents now sit, or have ever sat, in State legislatures.

this matter. That is, the two major parties find common ground and work together here.

They deliberately shape election laws to preserve, protect, and defend the two major parties and the two-party system, and thus to frustrate the minor parties. In most States it is far more difficult for minor parties and independent groups to get their candidates listed on the ballot than for the major parties to do so.

The 2004 presidential election offered a striking illustration of the point. George W. Bush and John Kerry were on the ballots of all 50 States and the District of Columbia. None of the several other serious presidential hopefuls made the ballot everywhere in 2004.

To this point, non-major party candidates have made it to the ballot everywhere in only seven presidential elections. The Socialist Party’s Eugene V. Debs was the first to do so, in 1912. The Socialist candidate in 1916, Allan L. Benson, also appeared on the ballots of all of the then 48 States. In 1980 Ed Clark, the Libertarian nominee, and independent John Anderson, and in 1988 Lenora Fulani of the New Alliance Party made the ballots of all 50 States and the District of Columbia. So, too, did Libertarian Andre Marrou and independent Ross Perot in 1992. Every ballot contained the names of Libertarian Harry Browne and the Reform Party’s Ross Perot in 1996.

In 2004 Libertarian Michael Badnarik was on the ballot in 48 States and the District of Columbia. Michael Peroutka of the Constitution Party was listed in 38 States, and the Green Party’s nominee, David Cobb, in 28. All of the other minor party aspirants fell far short of those totals, however. (Independent candidate Ralph Nader made it to the ballots of 34 States in 2004.)

The American Ideological Consensus

Americans are, on the whole, an ideologically homogeneous people. That is, over time, the American people have shared many of the same ideals, the same basic principles, and the same patterns of belief.

This is not to say that Americans are all alike. Clearly, this is not the case. The United States is a **pluralistic society**—one consisting of several distinct cultures and groups. Increasingly, the members of various ethnic, racial, religious, and other



Interpreting Political Cartoons What does the cartoon imply about what parties—and candidates—stand for?

social groups compete for and share in the exercise of political power in this country. Still, there is a broad **consensus**—a general agreement among various groups—on fundamental matters.

Nor is it to say that Americans have always agreed with one another in all matters. Far from it. The nation has been deeply divided at times: during the Civil War and in the years of the Great Depression, for example, and over such critical issues as racial discrimination, the war in Vietnam, and abortion.

Still, note this very important point: this nation has not been regularly plagued by sharp and unbridgeable political divisions.



Alabama Senator Richard Shelby was elected as a Democrat in 1986 and reelected in 1992. He became a Republican in 1995 and was easily reelected in 1998 and 2004. **Critical Thinking** What might cause a politician to switch parties?



▲ **Multiparty System** Italian Prime Minister Prodi heads a coalition of 11 center-left political parties today. Mr. Prodi's government took office following Italy's most recent parliamentary elections, held in 2006.

The United States has been free of long-standing, bitter disputes based on such factors as economic class, social status, religious beliefs, or national origin.

Those conditions that could produce several strong rival parties simply do not exist in this country. In this way, the United States differs from most other democracies. In short, the realities of American society and politics simply do not permit more than two major parties.

This ideological consensus has had another very important impact on American parties. It has given the nation two major parties that look very much alike. Both tend to be moderate. Both are built on compromise and regularly try to occupy “the middle of the road.” Both parties seek the same prize: the votes of a majority of the electorate. To do so, they must win over essentially the same people. Inevitably, each party takes policy positions that do not differ a great deal from those of the other major party.

This is not to say that there are no significant differences between the two major parties today. There are. For example, the Democratic Party, and those who usually vote for its candidates, are more likely to support such things as social welfare programs, government regulation of business practices, and efforts to improve the status of minorities. On the other hand, the Republican Party and its adherents are much more likely to favor the play of private market forces in the economy and to argue that the Federal Government should be less extensively involved in social welfare programs.

Multiparty Systems

Some critics argue that the American two-party system should be scrapped. They would replace it with a **multiparty** arrangement, a system in which several major and many lesser parties exist, seriously compete for, and actually win, public offices. Multiparty systems have long been a feature of most European democracies, and they are now found in many other democratic societies elsewhere in the world.

In the typical multiparty system, the various parties are each based on a particular interest, such as economic class, religious belief, sectional attachment, or political ideology. Those who favor such an arrangement for this country say that it would provide for a broader representation of the electorate and be more responsive to the will of the people. They claim that a multiparty system would give voters a much more meaningful choice among candidates and policy alternatives than the present two-party system does.

Clearly, multiparty systems do tend to produce a broader, more diverse representation of the electorate. At the same time, that strength is also a major weakness of a multiparty system. It often leads to instability in government. One party is often unable to win the support of a majority of the voters. As a result, the power to govern must be shared by a number of parties, in a **coalition**. A coalition is a temporary alliance of several groups who come together to form a working majority and so to control a government.

Several of the multiparty nations of Western Europe have long been plagued by governmental crises. They have experienced frequent changes in party control as coalitions shift and dissolve. Italy furnishes an almost nightmarish example: It has had a new government on the average of once every year ever since the end of World War II.

Historically, the American people have shunned a multiparty approach to politics. They have refused to give substantial support to any but the two major parties and their candidates. Two of the factors mentioned above—single-member districts and the American ideological consensus—seem to make the multiparty approach impossible in the United States.

One-Party Systems

In the typical dictatorship, only one political party—the party of the ruling clique—is allowed to operate. For all practical purposes, the resulting **one-party system** really amounts to a “no-party” system.

Many Americans are quite familiar with one-party systems of a quite different sort. What are often called “modified one-party systems” are found in roughly a third of the States today. That is, one of the two major parties, either the Republicans or the Democrats, regularly wins most of the elections held in those States. And, while in the other two-thirds of the States there is vigorous two-party competition at the State level, there are many locales in most of them where the political landscape is regularly dominated by a single party.

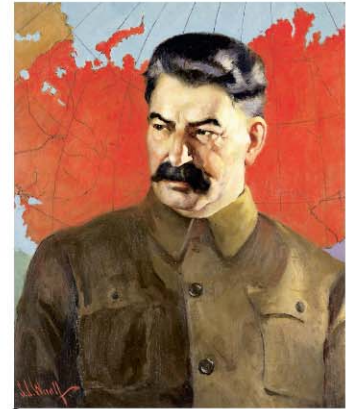
From the 1860s until the 1960s, the Democratic Party was so dominant throughout the southern States that that quarter of the country came to be known as the Solid South. Over the past forty years or so, however, the GOP has become the leading party in that region.³

Party Membership Patterns

Membership in a party is purely voluntary. A person is a Republican or a Democrat, or belongs to a minor party, or is an independent—belonging to no organized party—because that is what he or she chooses to be.⁴

Remember, the two major parties are broadly based. In order to gain more votes than their opponents, they must attract as much support as they possibly can. Each party has always been composed, in greater or lesser degree, of a cross section of the nation's population. Each is made up of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews; whites, African Americans, Latinos, and other minorities; professionals, farmers, and union members. Each party includes the young, the middle-aged,

³GOP is common shorthand for the Republican Party. The initials stand for Grand Old Party, a nickname acquired in the latter part of the 19th century. The nickname may owe its origins to British politics. Prime Minister William Gladstone was dubbed “the Grand Old Man,” often abbreviated “GOM,” by the English press in 1882. Soon after, “GOP” appeared in headlines in the *New York Tribune*, the *Boston Post*, and other American papers.



▲ Dictator Joseph Stalin, who was both leader of the Communist Party and premier of the Soviet Union, ruthlessly crushed all political opposition. **Critical Thinking** Why might silencing other political points of view be a disadvantage to a government?

and the elderly; city-dwellers, suburbanites, and rural residents among its members.

It is true that the members of certain segments of the electorate tend to be aligned more solidly with one or the other of the major parties, at least for a time. Thus, in recent decades, African Americans, Catholics and Jews, and union members have voted more often for Democrats. In the same way, white males, Protestants, and the business community have been inclined to back the GOP. Yet, never have all members of any group tied themselves permanently to either party.

Individuals identify themselves with a party for many reasons. Family is almost certainly the most important among them. Studies show that nearly two out of every three Americans follow the party allegiance of their parents.

⁴In most States a person must declare a preference for a particular party in order to vote in that party's primary election. That declaration is usually made as a part of the voter registration process, and it is often said to make one “a registered Republican (or Democrat).” The requirement is only a procedural one, however, and wholly a matter of individual choice.

Political Party Contacts

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES



Republican Party
310 First St. SE, Washington, DC 20003
<http://www.mc.org>



Democratic Party
430 So. Capitol St. SE, Washington, DC 20003
<http://www.democrats.org>

SIGNIFICANT MINOR PARTIES

Libertarian Party (Founded 1971)
2600 Virginia Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20037 <http://www.lp.org>
Stresses individual liberty; opposes taxes, foreign involvements, government intrusion into private lives.

Reform Party (Founded 1995)
Box 126437, Fort Worth, TX 76126 <http://www.reformparty.org>
Formed by Ross Perot; advocates trade agreements to protect American jobs, balanced budget, tax and electoral reforms, term limits.

Constitution Party (Founded 1992)
23 North Lime St., Lancaster, PA 17602 <http://www.constitutionparty.org>
Anti-tax party; strongly pro-life; pro-school prayer; opposes gun control, immigration, free trade, UN, gay rights.

Communist Party USA (Founded 1919)
235 West 23rd St., New York, NY 10011 <http://www.cpusa.org>
Promotes Communist ideology; seeks complete restructuring of American political and economic institutions.

America First Party (Founded 2002)
1630-A 30th St., Boulder, CO 80301 <http://www.americafirstparty.org>
Splitter from Reform Party; promotes Christian beliefs and originalist interpretation of the Constitution; opposes immigration, free trade, UN.

Green Party of the United States (Founded 1996)
1700 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 <http://www.gpp.org>
Committed to "environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice, and grass-roots democracy."

Socialist Labor Party (Founded 1981)
P.O. Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042 <http://www.slp.org>
Marxist party; seeks "a classless society based on collectivist ownership of industries and social services."

Socialist Party USA (Founded 1900)
339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012 <http://www.sp-usa.org>
Staunchly anti-Communist; advocates democratic socialism; seeks "a non-racist, classless, feminist, socialist society."

Interpreting Tables Which of the minor parties shown in the table has the most specific platform?

Individuals identify themselves with a party for many reasons. Family is almost certainly the most important among them. Studies show that nearly two out of every three Americans follow the party allegiance of their parents.

Major events can also have a decided influence on the party affiliation of voters. Of these, the Civil War and the Depression of the 1930s have been the most significant in American political history.

Economic status also influences party choice, although generalizations are quite risky. Historically though, those in higher income groups are more likely to be Republicans, while those with lower incomes tend to be Democrats.

Several other factors also affect both party choice and voting behavior, including age, place of residence, level of education, and work environment. Some of those factors may conflict with one

Face the Issues

Open Debates

Background Presidential debates, featuring the leading candidates for the nation's highest office, have been held during each presidential election since 1980. They are sponsored by an independent, nonpartisan group, the Commission on Presidential Debates. Its rules determine who may take part in those contests. Participants must be party-nominated candidates who are supported by at least 15 percent of the respondents in five national polls. In addition, they must be listed on the ballots in States which, taken together, will cast at least a majority (270) of the electoral votes necessary to win the presidency. In effect, the Commission's rules exclude minor-party candidates.



© Ross Perot (center)

Let Minor Party Candidates Debate

The Commission on Presidential Debates is staffed and run by Republicans and Democrats. Not surprisingly, since the commission was created in 1987, only one non-major party candidate, has qualified—Ross Perot in 1992.

Minor parties have promoted ideas that have radically changed American life. Women's right to vote, Social Security, child labor laws, and the 40-hour work week were all championed by minor parties before becoming law. The debates provide a forum for introducing new ideas.

The 1992 presidential campaign offers an important example. The three-way debates featuring President George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot that year electrified voters and attracted almost 70 million viewers, well above the average. Perot forced the candidates to discuss the budget deficit and the costs of free trade. He won nearly 20 percent of the vote in November. But could he have gotten his message out without a debate seat? Our democracy is poorer when new voices cannot be heard.

Serious Contenders Only

The two-party system has been an enduring feature of American politics since the 1860s. Democrats and Republicans have maintained a stable government and presided over orderly transfers of power. The two parties offer constructive ways to improve America. By working within a party, an activist can introduce new ideas and programs and hope to get things done.

Only the two major parties have the popular support, the track record, and the alliances to get their message out, election after election. The major parties have a valuable brand that motivates voters.

Minor party candidates may have great ideas and high energy, but they often fail to get many votes on election day. Unlike major party nominees, failed minor party candidates usually leave no significant party or movement to continue to promote their ideas.

Debates offer voters a chance to learn about the candidates who might become the next President. Devoting scarce minutes of debate time to candidates who have no hope of winning only distracts voters and defeats the purpose of the debate.

Exploring the Issues

1. Did Ralph Nader have a right to participate in the 2004 debates? Why or why not?
2. Should Congress set the qualifications for participation in the Presidential debates? Why or why not?

For more information on minor parties, view "Open Debates."



Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. Briefly explain four reasons why the United States has a **two-party system**.
2. How do the terms **pluralistic** and **consensus** both apply to American society?
3. (a) What is a **multiparty system**? (b) Why do some people favor it for the United States?
4. Many factors tend to influence party choice. Name four.

Critical Thinking

5. **Synthesizing Information** What does the fact that the major parties cooperate to discourage minor parties and yet compete vigorously against each other during elections tell you about party politics in the United States?

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: mqa-2052

6. **Recognizing Ideologies** You are campaigning for one of the two major parties. Create a short political advertisement to appeal to large numbers of voters and to distinguish your party from the other major party.

Go Online

PHSchool.com

For: An activity on political polling
Web Code: mqd-2052

3 The Two-Party System in American History

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the origins of political parties in the United States.
2. Identify and describe the three major periods of single-party domination and describe the current era of divided government.

WHY IT MATTERS

The origins and history of political parties in the United States help explain how the two major parties work today and how they affect American government.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ **incumbent**
- ★ **faction**
- ★ **electorate**
- ★ **sectionalism**

Henry Ford, the great auto maker, once said that all history is “bunk.” Ford knew a great deal about automobiles and mass production, but he did not know much about history or its importance.

Listen, instead, to Shakespeare: “The past is prologue.” Today is the product of yesterday. You are what you are today because of your history. Therefore, the more you know about your past, the better prepared you are for today, and for tomorrow.

Much the same can be said about the two-party system in American politics. The more you know about its past, the better you will understand its workings today.

The Nation's First Parties

The beginnings of the American two-party system can be traced to the battle over the ratification of the Constitution. The conflicts of the time, centering on the proper form and role of government in the United States, were not stilled by the adoption of the Constitution. Rather, those

conflicts were carried over into the early years of the Republic. They led directly to the formation of the nation's first full-blown political parties.

The Federalist Party was the first to appear. It formed around Alexander Hamilton, who served as secretary of the treasury in the new government organized by George Washington. The Federalists were, by and large, the party of “the rich and the well-born.” Most of them had supported the Constitution.

Led by Hamilton, the Federalists worked to create a stronger national government. They favored vigorous executive leadership and a set of policies designed to correct the nation's economic ills. The Federalists' program appealed to financial, manufacturing, and commercial interests. To reach their goals, they urged a liberal interpretation of the Constitution.

Thomas Jefferson, the nation's first secretary of state, led the opposition to the Federalists.⁵ Jefferson and his followers were more sympathetic to the “common man” than were the Federalists. They favored a very limited role for the new government created by the Constitution. In their view, Congress should dominate that new government, and its policies should help the nation's small shopkeepers, laborers, farmers, and planters. The Jeffersonians insisted on a strict construction of the provisions of the Constitution.

⁵As you recall, George Washington was opposed to political parties. As President, he named arch foes Hamilton and Jefferson to his new Cabinet to get them to work together—in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid the creation of formally organized and opposing groups.

Jefferson resigned from Washington's Cabinet in 1793 to concentrate on organizing his party. Originally, the new party took the name Anti-Federalist. Later it became known as the Jeffersonian Republicans or the Democratic-Republicans. Finally, by 1828, it became the Democratic Party.

These two parties first clashed in the election of 1796. John Adams, the Federalists' candidate to succeed Washington as President, defeated Jefferson by just three votes in the electoral college. Over the next four years, Jefferson and James Madison worked tirelessly to build the Democratic-Republican Party. Their efforts paid off in the election of 1800. Jefferson defeated the **incumbent**, or current officeholder, President Adams; Jefferson's party also won control of Congress. The Federalists never returned to power.

American Parties: Four Major Eras

The history of the American party system since 1800 can be divided into four major periods. Through the first three of these periods, one or the other of the two major parties was dominant, regularly holding the presidency and usually both houses of Congress. The nation is now in a fourth period, much of it marked by divided government.

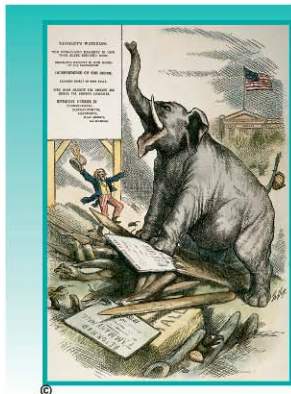
In the first of these periods, from 1800 to 1860, the Democrats won 13 of 15 presidential elections. They lost the office only in the contests of 1840 and 1848. In the second era, from 1860 to 1932, the Republicans won 14 of 18 elections, losing only in 1884, 1892, 1912, and 1916.

The third period, from 1932 to 1968, began with the Democrats' return to power and Franklin Roosevelt's first election to the presidency. The Democrats won seven of the nine presidential elections, losing only in 1952 and 1956. Through the fourth and current period, which began in 1968, the Republicans have won seven of ten presidential elections, and they hold the White House today. But the Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress over much of this most recent period—and they do so today.

The Era of the Democrats, 1800–1860

Thomas Jefferson's election in 1800 marked the beginning of a period of Democratic domination that was to last until the Civil War. As the time line on pages 128–129 shows, the Federalists, soundly defeated in 1800, had disappeared altogether by 1816.

For a time, through the Era of Good Feeling, the Democratic-Republicans were unopposed in national politics. However, by the mid-1820s, they had split into **factions**, or conflicting groups.

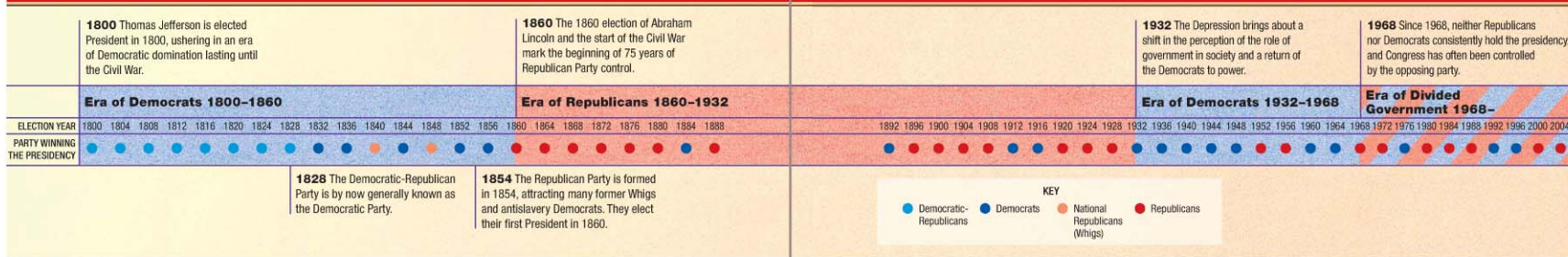


Interpreting Political Cartoons Political cartoonist Thomas Nast is credited with popularizing the party symbols in his 1874 cartoons for *Harper's Weekly*. At left, the Republican elephant trumps Democratic Party defeats. At right, the Democratic donkey kicks Lincoln's Secretary of War. **What characteristics of the elephant and the donkey do you think Nast wanted to associate with each party?**



▲ This ticket provided admission to the convention that nominated President Roosevelt for a second term.

Four Eras of Political Parties



Interpreting Time Lines This time line shows the parties that have won each presidential election. **Since 1860, which party has controlled the presidency for the longest period of time?**

By the time of Andrew Jackson's administration (1829–1837), a potent National Republican (Whig) Party had arisen to challenge the Democrats. The major issues of the day—conflicts over public lands, the Second Bank of the United States, high tariffs, and slavery—all had made new party alignments inevitable.

The Democrats, led by Jackson, were a coalition of small farmers, debtors, frontier pioneers, and slaveholders. They drew much of their support from the South and West. The years of Jacksonian democracy produced three fundamental changes in the nation's political landscape: (1) voting rights for all white males, (2) a huge increase in the number of elected offices around the country, and (3) the spread of the spoils system—the practice of awarding public offices, contracts, and other governmental favors to those who supported the party in power.

The Whig Party was led by the widely popular Henry Clay and the great orator, Daniel Webster. The party consisted of a loose coalition of eastern bankers, merchants and industrialists, and many owners of large southern plantations. The Whigs were opposed to the tenets of Jacksonian democracy and strongly supported a high tariff. However, the Whigs' victories were few. Although they were the other major party from the mid-1830s to the 1850s, the Whigs were able to elect only two Presidents, both of

them war heroes: William Henry Harrison in 1840 and Zachary Taylor in 1848.

By the 1850s, the growing crisis over slavery split both major parties. Left leaderless by the deaths of Clay and Webster, the Whigs fell apart. Meanwhile, the Democrats split into two sharply divided camps, North and South. During this decade, the nation drifted toward civil war.

Of the several groupings that arose to compete for supporters among the former Whigs and the fragmented Democrats, the Republican Party was the most successful. Founded in 1854, it drew many Whigs and antislavery Democrats. The Republicans nominated their first presidential candidate, John C. Frémont, in 1856; they elected their first President, Abraham Lincoln, in 1860.

With Lincoln's election, the Republican Party became the only party in the history of American politics to make the jump from third-party to major-party status. As you will see, even greater things were in store for the Republicans.

The Era of the Republicans, 1860–1932

The Civil War signaled the beginning of the second era of one-party domination. For nearly 75 years, the Republicans dominated the national scene. They were supported by business and financial interests, and by farmers, laborers, and newly freed African Americans.

The Democrats, crippled by the war, were able to survive mainly through their hold on the “Solid South,” after the era of Reconstruction came to a close in the mid-1870s. For the balance of the century, they slowly rebuilt their electoral base. In all that time, they were able to place only one candidate in the White House: Grover Cleveland in 1884 and again in 1892. Those elections marked only short breaks in Republican supremacy. Riding the crest of popular acceptance and unprecedented prosperity, the GOP remained the dominant party well into the twentieth century.

The election of 1896 was especially critical in the development of the two-party system. It climaxed years of protest by small business owners, farmers, and the emerging labor unions against big business, financial monopolies, and the railroads. The Republican Party nominated William McKinley and supported the gold standard. The Democratic candidate was William Jennings Bryan, a supporter of free silver, who was also endorsed by the Populist Party.

With McKinley's victory in 1896, the Republicans regained the presidency. In doing so, they drew a response from a broader range of the **electorate**—the people eligible to vote. This new strength allowed the Republicans to maintain their role as the dominant party in national politics for another three decades.

The Democratic Party lost the election of 1896, but it won on another score. Bryan, its young, dynamic presidential nominee, campaigned

throughout the country as the champion of the “little man.” He helped to push the nation's party politics back toward the economic arena, and away from the divisions of **sectionalism** that had plagued the nation for so many years. Sectionalism emphasizes a devotion to the interests of a particular region.

The Republicans suffered their worst setback of the era in 1912, when they renominated incumbent President William Howard Taft. Former President Theodore Roosevelt, denied the nomination of his party, left the Republicans to become the candidate of his “Bull Moose” Progressive Party. Traditional Republican support was divided between Taft and Roosevelt. As a result, the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson, was able to capture the presidency. Four years later, Wilson was reelected by a narrow margin.

Again, however, the Democratic successes of 1912 and 1916 proved only a brief interlude. The GOP reasserted its control of the nation's politics by winning each of the next three presidential elections: Warren Harding won in 1920, Calvin Coolidge in 1924, and Herbert Hoover in 1928.

The Return of the Democrats, 1932–1968

The Great Depression, which began in 1929, had a massive impact on nearly all aspects of American life. Its effect on the American political landscape was considerable indeed. The landmark election of 1932 brought Franklin Roosevelt to the presidency and the Democrats back to power at the



▲ This 1900 campaign poster uses powerful imagery to win Republican votes. **Critical Thinking** How does the poster contrast Republican achievements since 1896 with earlier conditions when the Democrats were in power?

national level. Also, and of fundamental importance, that election marked a basic shift in the public's attitude toward the proper role of government in the nation's social and economic life.

Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats engineered their victory in 1932 with a new electoral base. It was built largely of southerners, small farmers, organized labor, and big-city political organizations. Roosevelt's revolutionary economic and social welfare programs, which formed the heart of the New Deal of the 1930s, further strengthened that coalition. It also brought increasing support from African Americans and other minorities to the Democrats.

President Roosevelt won reelection in 1936. He secured an unprecedented third term in 1940 and yet another term in 1944, each time by heavy majorities. Roosevelt's Vice President, Harry S. Truman, completed the fourth term following FDR's death in 1945. Truman was elected to a full term of his own in 1948, when he turned back the GOP challenge led by Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York.

The Republicans did manage to regain the White House in 1952, and they kept it in 1956. World War II hero Dwight Eisenhower led the Republicans to victory in those elections. Both times, Eisenhower defeated the Democratic nominee, Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois.

The Republicans' return to power was short-lived, however. Senator John F. Kennedy of

Massachusetts recaptured the White House for the Democrats in 1960. He did so with a razor-thin win over the Republican standard bearer, then Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Lyndon B. Johnson succeeded to the presidency when Kennedy was assassinated in late 1963. Johnson won a full presidential term in 1964, by overwhelming his Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

The Start of a New Era

Richard Nixon made a successful return to presidential politics in 1968. In that year's election, he defeated Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey was the candidate of a Democratic Party torn apart by conflicts over the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and a variety of social welfare issues. Nixon also faced a strong third-party effort by the American Independent Party nominee, Governor George Wallace of Alabama. The Republicans won with only a bare plurality over Humphrey and Wallace.

In 1972, President Nixon retained the White House when he routed the choice of the still-divided Democrats, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota. However, Nixon's role in the Watergate scandal forced him from office in 1974.

Vice President Gerald Ford then became President and filled out the balance of Nixon's second term. Beset by problems in the economy, by the continuing effects of Watergate, and by his pardon of former President Nixon, Ford lost the presidency in 1976. The former governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, and the resurgent Democrats gained the White House that year.

A steadily worsening economy, political fallout from the Iranian hostage crisis, and his own inability to establish himself as an effective President spelled defeat for Jimmy Carter in 1980. Led by Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California, the Republicans scored an impressive victory that year. Reagan won a second term by a landslide in 1984, overwhelming a Democratic ticket headed by former Vice President Walter Mondale.

The GOP kept the White House with a third straight win in 1988. Their candidate, George H.W. Bush, had served as Vice President through the Reagan years. He led a successful campaign against the Democrats and their nominee, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts.

The Reagan and Bush victories of the 1980s triggered wide-ranging efforts to alter many of the nation's foreign and domestic policies. President George H.W. Bush lost his bid for another term in 1992, however. Democrat Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, defeated him and also turned back an independent challenge by Texas billionaire Ross Perot. Mr. Clinton won a second term in 1996—defeating the Republican candidate, long-time senator from Kansas, Bob Dole, and, at the same time, thwarting a third-party effort by Mr. Perot.

The GOP regained the White House in the very close presidential contest of 2000. Their candidate, George W. Bush, was then the governor of Texas, and is the son of the former Republican President. Mr. Bush failed to win the popular vote contest in 2000, but he did capture a bare majority of the electoral votes and so the White House. His Democratic opponent, Vice President Al Gore, became the first presidential nominee since 1888 to win the popular vote and yet fail to win the presidency; see pages 379–381.

The years since Richard Nixon's election in 1968 have been marked by divided government. Through much of the period, Republicans have occupied the White House while the Democrats have usually controlled Congress.⁶ That situation was reversed in the midst of President Clinton's first term, however. The GOP took control of both houses of Congress in 1994, and they kept their hold on Capitol Hill on through the elections of 2000.

Historically, a newly elected President has almost always swept many of his party's

candidates into office with him. But the victories of several recent Presidents—most recently, George W. Bush in 2000—have not carried that kind of coattail effect.

The Republicans lost seats in the House and Senate in 2000. They did manage to keep a narrow hold on both chambers, however—by a nine-seat margin in the House and by virtue of a 50-50 split in the Senate. But the Democrats reclaimed the upper house in mid-2001, when Senator James Jeffords of Vermont bolted the Republican Party and became an independent.

Sparked by the prodigious campaign efforts of President Bush, the Republicans won back the Senate and padded their slim majority in the House in the off-year congressional elections of 2002. They continued their winning ways in 2004: Mr. Bush defeated his Democratic opponent, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, in a bruising presidential campaign and his party kept its narrow grip on both the House and Senate in the hard-fought congressional elections of that year.

The GOP suffered significant losses in the most recent off-year elections, however. The Democrats regained control of both houses of Congress in November 2006.

How much longer will the era of divided government that began in 1968 last? Clearly, only time will tell.

⁶The Democrats held almost uninterrupted control of Congress from 1933 to 1995. Over those years, the Republicans controlled both houses of Congress for only two two-year periods—first, after the congressional elections of 1946 and then after those of 1952. The GOP did win control of the Senate (but not the House) in 1980; the Democrats recaptured the upper chamber in 1986.

Section 3 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. When did the American two-party system begin to emerge?
2. Why would the development of **factions** within a political party hurt that party's chances for success?
3. Explain how **sectionalism** played an important role in party politics during at least one period of American history.
4. Describe one period of single-party domination.

Critical Thinking

5. **Drawing Conclusions** To which of the major parties of today do you think Thomas Jefferson would belong? Alexander Hamilton? Explain your reasoning.

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Web Code: mqa-2053

6. **Drawing Inferences** What factors in the nation's history, politics, demographics, or other areas might explain the reasons behind the era of divided government that began in 1968?

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For: An activity on comparing political parties
Web Code: mqd-2053

4 The Minor Parties

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. **Identify** the types of minor parties that have been active in American politics.
2. **Understand** why minor parties are important despite the fact that none has ever won the presidency.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many minor parties have played important roles in American politics. They have provided alternatives to the positions of the major parties, and sometimes have affected particular elections and shaped public policies.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ **ideological parties**
- ★ **single-issue parties**
- ★ **economic protest parties**
- ★ **splinter parties**

Libertarian, Reform, Socialist, Prohibition, Natural Law, Communist, American Independent, Green, Constitution—these are only some of the many parties that will field presidential candidates in 2008. You know that none of these parties or their candidates has any real chance of winning the presidency. But this is not to say that minor parties are unimportant. The bright light created by the two major parties too often blinds us to the vital role several minor parties have played in American politics.

Minor Parties in the United States

Their number and variety make minor parties difficult to describe and classify. Some have limited their efforts to a particular locale, others to



▲ Earl Dodge has been the nominee of the Prohibition Party in every presidential election since 1984.

a single State, and some to one region of the country. Still others have tried to woo the entire nation. Most have been short-lived, but a few have existed for decades. And, while most have lived mothlike around the flame of a single idea, some have had a broader, more practical base.

Still, four distinct types of minor parties can be identified:

1. The **ideological parties** are those based on a particular set of beliefs—a comprehensive view of social, economic, and political matters. Most of these minor parties have been built on some shade of Marxist thought; examples include the Socialist, Socialist Labor, Socialist Worker, and Communist parties.

A few ideological parties have had a quite different approach, however—especially the Libertarian Party of today, which emphasizes individualism and calls for doing away with most of government's present functions and programs. The ideological parties have seldom been able to win many votes. As a rule, however, they have been long-lived.

2. The **single-issue parties** focus on only one public-policy matter. Their names have usually indicated their primary concern. For example, the Free Soil Party opposed the spread of slavery in the 1840s and 1850s; the American Party, also called the “Know Nothings,” opposed Irish-Catholic immigration in the 1850s; and the Right to Life Party opposes abortion today.

Most of the single-issue parties have faded into history. They died away as events have



Interpreting Charts (a) According to the chart, which type of minor party is the most closely related to a major party? **(b)** Which type is likely to be the most cohesive and united?

passed them by, as their themes have failed to attract voters, or as one or both of the major parties have taken their key issues as their own.

3. The **economic protest parties** have been rooted in periods of economic discontent. Unlike the socialist parties, these groups have not had any clear-cut ideological base. Rather, they have proclaimed their disgust with the major parties and demanded better times, and have focused their anger on such real or imagined enemies as the monetary system, “Wall Street bankers,” the railroads, or foreign imports.

Most often, they have been sectional parties, drawing their strength from the agricultural South and West. The Greenback Party, for example, tried to take advantage of agrarian discontent from 1876 through 1884. It appealed to struggling farmers by calling for the free coinage of silver, federal regulation of the railroads, an income tax, and labor legislation. A descendant of the Greenbacks, the Populist Party of the 1890s also demanded public ownership of railroads, telephone and telegraph

companies, lower tariffs, and the adoption of the initiative and referendum.

Each of these economic protest parties has disappeared as the nation has climbed out of the difficult economic period in which that party arose.

4. **Splinter parties** are those that have split away from one of the major parties. Most of the more important minor parties in our politics have been splinter parties. Among the leading groups that have split away from the Republicans are Theodore Roosevelt’s “Bull Moose” Progressive Party of 1912, and Robert La Follette’s Progressive Party of 1924. From the Democrats have come Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party and the States’ Rights (Dixiecrat) Party, both of 1948, and George Wallace’s American Independent Party of 1968.

Most splinter parties have formed around a strong personality—most often someone who has failed to win his major party’s presidential nomination. These parties have faded or collapsed when that leader has stepped aside. Thus, the Bull Moose Progressive Party passed away

when Theodore Roosevelt returned to the Republican fold after the election of 1912. Similarly, the American Independent Party lost nearly all of its brief strength when Governor George Wallace rejoined the Democratic Party after his strong showing in the 1968 election.

The Green Party, founded in 1996, points up the difficulties of classifying minor parties in American politics. The Greens began as a classic single-issue party but, as the party has evolved, it simply will not fit into any of the categories set out here. The Green Party came to prominence in 2000, with Ralph Nader as its presidential nominee. His campaign was built around a smorgasbord of issues—environmental protection, of course, but also universal health care, gay and lesbian rights, restraints on corporate power, campaign finance reform, opposition to global free trade, and much more.

The Greens refused to renominate Ralph Nader in 2004. They chose, instead, David Cobb—who built his presidential campaign around most of the positions the Greens had supported in 2000.

Why Minor Parties Are Important

Even though most Americans do not support them, minor parties have still had an impact on American politics and on the major parties. For example, it was a minor party, the Anti-Masons, that first used a national convention to nominate a presidential candidate in 1831. The Whigs and then the Democrats followed suit in 1832. Ever since, national conventions have been used by both the Democrats and the Republicans to pick their presidential tickets.

Minor parties can have an impact in another way. A strong third-party candidacy can play a decisive role—often a “spoiler role”—in an election. Even if a minor party does not win any electoral votes, it can pull votes from one of the major parties, as the Green Party did in 2000. This spoiler effect can be felt in national, State, or local contests, especially where the two major parties compete on roughly equal terms.

The 1912 election dramatically illustrated this point. A split in the Republican Party and Roosevelt’s resulting third-party candidacy produced the results shown below. Almost certainly, had Roosevelt not quit the Republican

Party, Taft would have enjoyed a better showing, and Wilson would not have become President.

Historically, however, the minor parties have been most important in their roles of critic and innovator. Unlike the major parties, the minor parties have been ready, willing, and able to take quite clear-cut stands on controversial issues. Minor-party stands have often drawn attention to some issue that the major parties have preferred to ignore or straddle.

Over the years, many of the more important issues of American politics were first brought to the public’s attention by a minor party. Examples include the progressive income tax, woman suffrage, railroad and banking regulation, and old-age pensions.

Oddly enough, this very important innovator role of the minor parties has also been a major source of their frustration. When their proposals have gained any real degree of popular support, one and sometimes both of the major parties have taken over those ideas and then presented the policies as their own. The late Norman Thomas, who was the Socialist Party’s candidate for President six times, complained that “the major parties are stealing from my platform.”

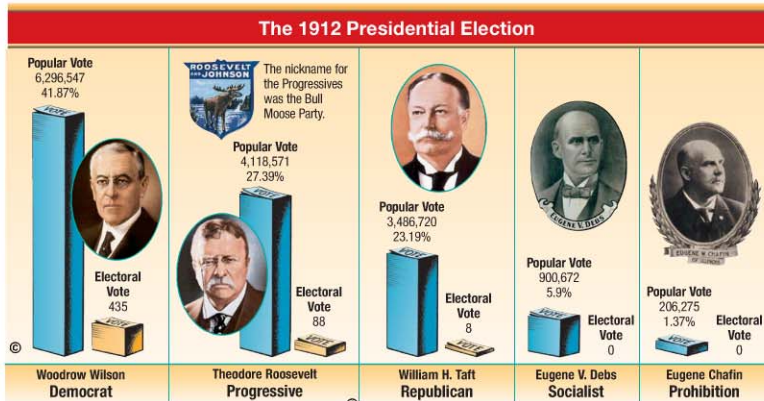
Seventeen minor party presidential candidates, some of them nominated by more than

Significant Minor Parties in Presidential Elections, 1880–2004*				
Year	Party	Candidate	% Popular Vote	Electoral Vote
1880	Greenback	James B. Weaver	3.36	—
1888	Prohibition	Clinton B. Fisk	2.19	—
1892	Populist	James B. Weaver	8.54	22
	Prohibition	John Bidwell	2.19	—
1904	Socialist	Eugene V. Debs	2.98	—
1908	Socialist	Eugene V. Debs	2.82	—
1912	Progressive (Bull Moose)	Theodore Roosevelt	27.39	88
	Socialist	Eugene V. Debs	5.99	—
1916	Socialist	Allan L. Benson	3.17	—
1920	Socialist	Eugene V. Debs	3.45	—
1924	Progressive	Robert M. La Follette	16.61	13
1932	Socialist	Norman M. Thomas	2.22	—
1948	States’ Rights (Dixiecrat)	Strom Thurmond	2.41	39
	Progressive	Henry A. Wallace	2.37	—
1968	American Independent	George C. Wallace	13.53	46
1996	Reform	Ross Perot	8.40	—
2000	Green	Ralph Nader	2.74	—

*Includes all minor parties that polled at least 2% of the popular vote
Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; Federal Election Commission

Interpreting Tables Which of these minor-party presidential candidates played a spoiler role?

one party, appeared on the ballots of at least one State in 2004. The most visible minor-party presidential campaigns in 2004 were those of the Libertarian, Constitution, and Socialist parties. More than a thousand candidates from a wide variety of minor parties also sought seats in Congress or ran for various State and local offices around the country.



Interpreting Graphs This bar graph shows the votes received by the major and the minor parties in 1912. (a) Which party “came in second”? (b) Even though the Bull Moose Progressives were a minor party, how did they help determine which major party won the election?

Section 4 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

- Why do single-issue parties tend to be short-lived?
- (a) What are economic protest parties? (b) Why are they formed in times of economic distress?
- Most of the more important minor parties in our history have been of which type? Explain the effect of one such party.
- Why is the innovator role a source of frustration to minor parties?

Critical Thinking

- Expressing Problems Clearly** Suppose you are considering voting for a presidential candidate from a minor party. Explain the benefits and drawbacks of casting your vote that way.

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For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
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- Predicting Consequences** Minor parties usually are willing to take definite stands on controversial issues. How might voters react to this tendency?

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The Republican Campaign

As Chairman of the Republican National Committee, Ed Gillespie led the Republican Party's efforts to win the presidency and congressional elections in 2004. During the campaign, Mr. Gillespie spoke to party members at the West Virginia State Convention to spell out his party's message and drive Republicans to work hard for the election.

This presidential election presents the clearest choices we've seen in 20 years—since Ronald Reagan ran for re-election against Walter Mondale in 1984.

Let's talk a little about these choices that are before us.

The President's economic growth policies are working. Our economy is strong, and getting stronger.

Economic growth over the last year has been the fastest in nearly 20

years. . . . Employment over the last year was up in 44 of the 50 States and the unemployment rate was down in all regions and in 47 of the 50 States. . . .

The President's critics act as if none of these positive developments ever occurred. They long ago came to the cynical conclusion that what's worst for the American people is what's best for them politically. . . .

While we are seeing positive results, we have much more to do. The President, Republicans in Congress, and Republican Governors are committed to making sure that every American who wants a job can find a job. . . .

John Kerry has a different plan: one that calls for higher taxes, more regulation, and more litigation [law suits] that would kill jobs and derail our recovery. . . . Senator Kerry favors policies from a retired playbook, one that has failed many class warfare candidates in the past.

John Kerry voted for higher taxes. . . .

In these challenging times we cannot hope that magic is real; we need steady leadership.



Ed Gillespie

The President's decision to put more money in the pockets of America's families has laid the foundation for growth and job creation for years to come.

When it comes to national security, when it comes to homeland security, when it comes to creating jobs, and when it comes to who shares our values, President Bush is right, his opponent is wrong, and we are going to prove it come November. It is for

reasons like this our Party is united under George W. Bush in a way I have not seen since it was under President Reagan.

Our Party is growing. . . . We are successful when, at the grassroots, people are energized, and we're a bottom up Party. And our supporters are talking to one another after religious services, at soccer games, in grocery store aisles.

Every dollar you donate, every phone you call, every e-mail you forward, every door you knock, every neighborhood you walk, every yard sign you post, every bumper sticker you stick—matters!

Analyzing Primary Sources

1. According to Mr. Gillespie, why should Americans vote for his candidate, George W. Bush?
2. What words and phrases does Mr. Gillespie use to describe Bush's opponent, Senator John Kerry? Why does he describe Kerry in these terms?
3. What does Mr. Gillespie mean when he says the Republican Party is a "bottom up Party"?

5 Party Organization

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why the major parties have a decentralized structure.
2. Describe the national party machinery and how parties are organized at the State and local levels.
3. Identify the three components of the parties.
4. Examine the future of the major parties.

WHY IT MATTERS

Both major parties are highly decentralized, fragmented organizations. In neither of them is there a chain of command running from the national to the State to the local level. The President's party usually is somewhat more cohesively organized than the party out of power.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ ward
- ★ precinct
- ★ split-ticket voting

How strong, how active, and how well organized are the Republican and Democratic parties in your community? Contact the county chairperson or another official in one or both of the major parties. They are usually not very difficult to find. For starters, try the telephone directory.

The Decentralized Nature of the Parties

The two major parties are often described as though they were highly organized, close-knit, well-disciplined groups. However, neither party is anything of the kind. Rather, both are highly decentralized, fragmented, disjointed, and often beset by factions and internal squabbling.

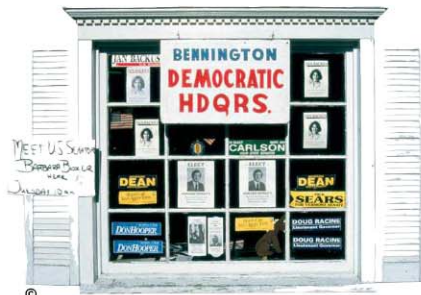
Neither party has a chain of command running from the national through the State to the local level. Each of the State party organizations is only loosely tied to the party's national structure. By the same token, local party organizations are often quite independent of their parent State organizations. These various party units usually cooperate with one another, of course—but that is not always the case.

The party does have a temporary leader for a brief time every fourth year: its presidential candidate, from nomination to election day. A defeated presidential candidate is often called the party's "titular leader"—a leader in title, by custom, but not in fact. What's more, if he lost by a wide margin, the defeated nominee may have little or no role to play in party affairs.

The Role of the Presidency

The President's party is usually more solidly united and more cohesively organized than the opposing party. The President is automatically the party leader. He asserts that leadership with such tools as his access to the media, his popularity, and his power to make appointments to federal office and to dispense other favors.

The other party has no one in an even faintly comparable position. Indeed, in the American party system, there is seldom any one person in the opposition party who can truly be called its leader. Rather, a number of personalities, frequently in competition with one another, form a loosely identifiable leadership group in the party out of power?



The parties have many local headquarters, such as this one in Bennington, Vermont.

Government Online

Taking the Public Pulse “When I die, I want to come back with real power—I want to come back as a member of a focus group,” a powerful campaign strategist once said. Joking aside, the strategist was attesting to the growing influence of focus groups on who gets elected in this country, and who doesn’t.

Focus groups were first used by businesses to test consumer products. Used as part of a political campaign, these groups can vary in number from 10 to as many as 30 or more people, typically members of the general public. They usually meet in two-to-three-hour sessions. Guided by trained monitors, their discussions help candidates identify issues that are important to voters. Focus groups are also used to test reactions to political commercials, speeches, and debates. They can be employed to probe opponents for weaknesses, as well.

Focus groups have had an important place in presidential campaigns since at least 1988. That year, they helped the Republican candidate George H. W. Bush defeat his Democratic opponent, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, by identifying several weaknesses in the Dukakis campaign.

Go Online Use Web Code mqd-2058 to find out more about the use of focus groups in political campaigns and for help in answering the following question: *What kinds of issues might a campaign strategist address in order to find out about the opposition’s weaknesses?*

The Impact of Federalism

Federalism is one major reason for the decentralized nature of the two major political parties. Remember, the basic goal of the major parties is to gain control of government by winning elective offices.

Today there are more than half a million elective offices in the United States. In the American federal system, those offices are widely distributed at the national, the State, and the local levels. In short, because the governmental system is highly decentralized, so too are the major parties that serve it.

The Role of the Nominating Process

The nominating process is also a major cause of party decentralization. Recall, from page 117, that the nominating process has a central role in the life of political parties. You will consider the selection of candidates at some length in Chapter 7, but, for now, look at two related aspects of that process.

First, candidate selection is an intraparty process. That is, nominations are made *within*

the party. Second, the nominating process can be, and often is, a divisive one. Where there is a fight over a nomination, that contest pits members of the same party against one another: Republicans fight Republicans; Democrats battle Democrats. In short, the prime function of the major parties—the making of nominations—is also a prime cause of their highly fragmented character.

National Party Machinery

The structure of both major parties at the national level has four basic elements. These elements are the national convention, the national committee, the national chairperson, and the congressional campaign committees.

The National Convention

The national convention, often described as the party’s national voice, meets in the summer of every presidential election year to pick the party’s presidential and vice-presidential candidates. It also performs some other functions, including the adoption of the party’s rules and the writing of its platform.

Beyond that, the convention has little authority. It has no control over the selection of the party’s candidates for other offices nor over the policy stands those nominees take. You will take a longer look at both parties’ national nominating conventions in Chapter 13.

The National Committee

Between conventions, the party’s affairs are handled, at least in theory, by the national committee and by the national chairperson. For years, each party’s national committee was composed of a committeeman and a committeewoman from each State and several of the territories. They were chosen by the State’s party organization. However, in recent years, both parties have expanded the committee’s membership.

Today, the Republican National Committee (RNC) also seats the party chairperson from each State in which the GOP has recently had a winning record and members from the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Representatives of such GOP-related groups as the National Federation of Republican Women also serve on the RNC.



▲ **Step Right Up** Volunteers of all ages help their parties in national, State, and local races.



◎ **Madam Chairperson** Mary Louise Smith was national chairperson of the Republican Party in the 1970s.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) is an even larger body. In addition to the committeeman and -woman from each State, it now includes the party’s chairperson and vice-chairperson from every State and the several territories. It also includes additional members from the party organizations of the larger States, and up to 75 at-large members chosen by the DNC itself. Several members of Congress, as well as governors, mayors, and Young Democrats, also have seats.

On paper, the national committee appears to be a powerful organization loaded with many of the party’s leading figures. In fact, it does not have a great deal of clout. Most of its work centers on staging the party’s national convention every four years.

The National Chairperson

In each party, the national chairperson is the leader of the national committee. In form, he or she is chosen to a four-year term by the national committee, at a meeting held right after the national convention. In fact, the choice is made by the just-nominated presidential candidate and is then ratified by the national committee.

Only two women have ever held that top party post. Jean Westwood of Utah chaired the DNC from her party’s 1972 convention until early 1973; and Mary Louise Smith of Iowa headed the RNC from 1974 until early 1977. Each lost her post soon after her party lost a presidential election. Ron Brown, the Democrats’ National Chairman from 1989 to 1993, is the only African American ever to have held the office of national chairperson in either major party.

The national chairperson directs the work of the party’s headquarters and its small staff in Washington. In presidential election years, the committee’s attention is focused on the national convention and then the campaign. In between presidential elections, the chairperson and the committee work to strengthen the party and its fortunes. They do so by promoting party unity, raising money, recruiting new voters, and otherwise preparing for the next presidential season.

The Congressional Campaign Committees

Each party also has a campaign committee in each house of Congress.⁸ These committees work to reelect incumbents and to make sure that seats given up by retiring party members remain in the party. The committees also take a hand in selected campaigns to unseat incumbents in the other party, at least in those House or Senate races where the chances for success seem to justify such efforts.

In both parties and in both houses, the members of these campaign committees are chosen by their colleagues. They serve for two years—that is, for a term of Congress.

State and Local Party Machinery

National party organization is largely the product of custom and of the rules adopted by the national conventions. At the State and

⁸They are the National Republican Campaign Committee and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in the House; in the Senate, they are the National Republican Senatorial Committee and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Local Party Organization



Interpreting Diagrams (a) According to the diagram, which unit of local party organization is the largest in a State? (b) Which is the smallest?

local levels, however, party structure is largely set by State law.

The State Organization

At the State level, party machinery is built around a State central committee, headed by a State chairperson.

The chairperson may be an important political figure in his or her own right. More often than not, however, the chairperson fronts for the governor, a U.S. senator, or some other powerful leader or group in the politics of the State.

Together, the chairperson and the central committee work to further the party's interests in the State. Most of the time, they attempt to do this by building an effective organization and party unity, finding candidates and campaign funds, and so on. Remember, however, both major parties are highly decentralized, fragmented, and sometimes torn by struggles for power. This can complicate the chairperson's and the committee's job.

Local Organization

Local party structures vary so widely that they nearly defy even a brief description. Generally, they follow the electoral map of the State, with a party unit for each district in which elective

offices are to be filled: congressional and legislative districts, counties, cities and towns, wards, and precincts. A **ward** is a unit into which cities are often divided for the election of city council members. A **precinct** is the smallest unit of election administration; the voters in each precinct report to one polling place.

In most larger cities, a party's organization is further broken down by residential blocks and sometimes even by apartment buildings. In some places, local party organizations are active year-round, but most often they are inactive except for those few hectic months before an election.

The Three Components of the Party

You have just looked at the makeup of the Republican and Democratic parties from an organizational standpoint. The two major parties can also be examined from a social standpoint—that is, in terms of the various roles played by their members. From this perspective, the two major parties are composed of three basic and closely interrelated components.

1. *The party organization.* This basic component of the party includes its leaders, its other activists, and its many hangers-on—all

those who give their time, money, and skills to the party, whether as leaders or followers.”⁹

2. *The party in the electorate.* This element of the party includes the party's loyalists who regularly vote the straight party ticket, and those other voters who call themselves party members and who usually vote for its candidates.

3. *The party in government.* These are the party's officeholders, those who hold elective and appointive offices in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the federal, State, and local levels of government.

You have taken a quick look at the party as an organization here. You will consider the party in the electorate in the next chapter, and then take a look at the party in government in several later chapters.



▲ **Direct Access** Voters can judge the candidates for themselves by watching televised events such as this Republican debate during the 2008 presidential primary campaign.

3. Various structural changes and reforms that have made the parties more “open,” but have also led to greater internal conflict and disorganization. These changes range from the introduction of the direct primary in the early 1900s to the more recent and far-reaching changes in campaign finance laws.

4. Changes in the technology of campaigning for office—especially the heavy use of television and of the Internet, professional campaign managers, and direct-mail advertising. These changes

The Future of the Major Parties

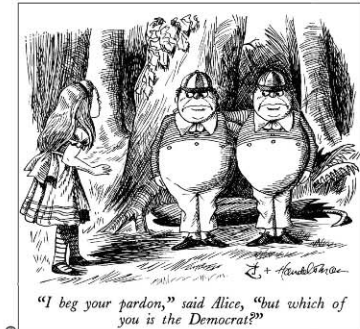
Political parties have never been very popular in this country. Rather, over time, most Americans have had very mixed feelings about them. Most of us have accepted parties as necessary institutions, but, at the same time, we have felt that they should be closely watched and controlled. To many, political parties have seemed little better than necessary evils.

Political parties have been in a period of decline since at least the late 1960s. Their decline has led some analysts to conclude that the parties not only are in serious trouble, but that the party system itself may be on the point of collapse.

The present, weakened state of the parties can be traced to several factors. They include:

1. A sharp drop in the number of voters willing to identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats, and a growing number who regard themselves as independents.

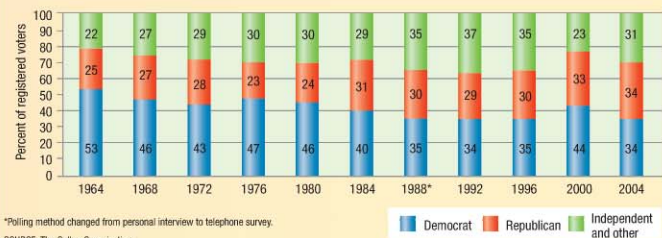
2. A big increase in **split-ticket voting**—voting for candidates of different parties for different offices at the same election.



© **Interpreting Political Cartoons** The two major political parties have been criticized as failing to distinguish themselves from one another. Do you agree with the point of view presented in the cartoon? Explain your answer using specific current issues.

⁹Frank J. Sorauf and Paul Beck, *Party Politics in America*, 6th ed.

Political Party Identification, 1964–2004



Interpreting Graphs This graph shows the percentage of voters who identify with the two major parties and the percentage of independents. (a) Which group shows the biggest gain in support between 1964 and 2004? (b) Which group lost the most support during that time?

in campaign technology have made candidates much less dependent on party organizations since, in many cases, they can now “speak” directly to the electorate.

5. The growth, in both numbers and impact, of single-issue organizations in our politics. These groups support (or more often, oppose) candidates on the basis of the group’s own closely defined views in some specific area of public policy—for example, the environment, gun control, or abortion—rather than on a candidate’s stands on the full range of public policy questions.

You will look at these and several other matters affecting the condition of the parties over the next four chapters. As you do so, remember these points: Political parties are indispensable to democratic government—and so, then, to American government. Our two major parties have existed far longer than has any other party anywhere in the world. And, as you have seen, they perform a number of quite necessary functions. In short, the reports of their passing may not only be premature, they might in fact be quite farfetched.

Section 5 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. What are the major causes of the decentralized nature of political parties?
2. What are the four main elements of major party organization at the national level?
3. Describe how **wards** and **precincts** are part of the local party organization.
4. (a) What is **split-ticket voting**? (b) How has its increase contributed to the weakened state of the two major parties?

Critical Thinking

5. **Drawing Conclusions** Based on what you know about parties, their goals, and the American people, why do you think local party organizations vary so widely?
6. **Formulating Questions** A growing number of voters consider themselves to be independents. Compose three

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questions that a pollster might ask in an attempt to learn why this is the case.

7. **Predicting Consequences** Do you think the major parties will survive and emerge from their current period of decline? Why or why not?

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on the Supreme Court

Can Judicial Candidates State Legal Views?

The 1st Amendment gives Americans the right to express freely their opinions on matters of public concern. But should the government be able to restrict free speech to protect other important governmental interests? For example, should judges who may have to decide a particular legal issue be free to tell the public in advance how they would decide?

Republican Party of Minnesota v. White (2002)

A Minnesota Supreme Court rule said that lawyers running for judgeships could not announce their views on any legal matter that might come before their court if they were elected. This rule was intended to keep judges impartial and to maintain for the public a sense of judicial impartiality. Candidates could discuss their judicial philosophy in the abstract, but could not say what they believed about concrete issues that they might later decide or vote on.

In 1996, Attorney Gregory Wersal was running for associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. As part of his campaign, he wrote and distributed documents criticizing several of that court’s controversial decisions. He withdrew from the race after being accused of an ethical violation, but ran again in 1998. This time he sued the officers of the Lawyer’s Professional Responsibility Board and the Minnesota Board of Judicial Standards, chaired by Suzanne White, in U.S. District Court. Wersal claimed that the rule prevented him from telling voters his positions on matters of public importance. The Minnesota Republican Party joined the suit, saying that the rule prevented them from learning Wersal’s views, so they could not decide whether to support his candidacy.

Arguments for Wersal and the Republican Party

1. The constitutional right of free speech applies to candidates for elected office, and a candidate may not be prevented from expressing those beliefs during the campaign.

2. Minnesota cannot show that the restriction on free speech is necessary to protect important governmental interests.
3. Judges do not give up their impartiality just because they have opinions on controversial topics, and voters should be able to know what those opinions are.

Arguments for White

1. Judicial impartiality and the public’s perception of impartial justice will be harmed if prospective judges publicly discuss their views on matters that may come before their courts.
2. Judicial decision-making will be harmed if judges have previously stated public opinions on important topics, because then judges will feel obligated to decide cases according to their prior statements rather than on the merits of the particular case.
3. The parties to a case would be denied fair judicial process if the judge had previously announced his or her view on the case.

Decide for Yourself

1. Review the constitutional grounds upon which each side based its arguments and the specific arguments each side presented.
2. Debate the opposing viewpoints presented in this case. Which viewpoint did you favor?
3. Predict the impact of the Court’s decision on States’ attempts to restrict the speech of public officials in other contexts. (To read a summary of the Court’s decision, turn to pages 799–806.)



Use Web Code mqd-2055 to register your vote on this issue and to see how other students voted

CHAPTER 5 Assessment

Political Dictionary

political party (p. 116)
 major parties (p. 116)
 partisanship (p. 117)
 party in power (p. 118)
 minor party (p. 119)
 two-party system (p. 119)
 single-member district (p. 120)
 plurality (p. 120)
 bipartisan (p. 120)

pluralistic society (p. 121)
 consensus (p. 121)
 multiparty (p. 122)
 coalition (p. 122)
 one-party system (p. 123)
 incumbent (p. 127)
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ideological parties (p. 132)
 single-issue parties (p. 132)
 economic protest parties (p. 133)
 splinter parties (p. 133)
 ward (p. 140)
 precinct (p. 140)
 split-ticket voting (p. 141)

Practicing the Vocabulary

Using Words in Context For each of the terms below, write a sentence that shows how it relates to this chapter.

- multiparty
- pluralistic society
- party in power
- minor party
- split-ticket voting
- one-party system
- consensus
- splinter parties
- single-member district
- two-party system

True/False Determine whether each of the following statements is true or false. If it is true, write "true." If it is false, rewrite the sentence to make it true.

- A plurality is more than half the votes cast.
- A ward is a unit into which cities are often divided for the election of city council members.
- An ideological party arises over a particular issue or crisis and soon fades away.
- Partisanship means membership in one of the major parties.

Reviewing Main Ideas

Section 1

- What is the major function of a political party?
- Which term better describes political parties in American politics: *divisive* or *unifying*? Why?
- Cite two examples that show why American government may be described as government by party.

Section 2

- In what two ways does the American electoral system tend to promote a two-party system?
- How can the diversity of views represented in a multiparty system be seen as both a strength and a weakness?
- How is the ideological consensus of the American electorate reflected in the membership of the major parties?

Section 3

- (a) Which political party was the first to appear in the new United States? (b) Who was its leader and what type of government did it favor?

- (a) How did the Republican Party begin? (b) How was its development unique in American politics?
- What effect did the Great Depression have on American political parties?
- What unusual feature characterizes the present era of American two-party history?

Section 4

- Briefly describe the four types of minor parties.
- Historically, what have been the most important roles of minor parties? Briefly explain one of these roles.

Section 5

- Why is the party in power more cohesive than the opposition party?
- Describe the role of the national chairperson.
- List and explain four factors that have contributed to the present weakened state of the major parties.

Critical Thinking

- Face the Issues** Study the role of minor party candidates in the most recent presidential election. In your opinion, would including these candidates in the debates have changed the outcome of the election? Explain.
- Determining Relevance** If there had not been a group opposed to the adoption of the Constitution in the 1780s, do you think a strong two-party system would have developed in the United States? Why or why not?
- Distinguishing Fact from Opinion** Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement: "A vote for a minor party candidate is a vote wasted."
- Recognizing Cause and Effect** (a) How has television affected the state of the two-party system? (b) How has the Internet impacted the two-party system?

Analyzing Political Cartoons

Using your knowledge of American government and this cartoon, answer the questions below.



- What does the cartoonist imply about the relationship between the two major parties? Explain how he conveys this idea.
- Does the cartoonist regard the minor parties as a serious threat to the status quo? How do the major parties react to this threat?

You Can Make a Difference

Even if you are not yet eligible to vote, you can still find a place in party politics. Local party organizations welcome volunteer help during a campaign. You may find yourself answering phones, tacking up posters, or stuffing envelopes—all part of grassroots politics. To begin, look up the local headquarters of the two major parties and any minor parties that are currently active in your area. Choose a candidate whose positions on issues are similar to your own. Then offer your help.

Participation Activities

- Current Events Watch** Look in newspapers or news magazines for a local or national issue on which there is public disagreement. See if the two major parties have taken stands on the issue. If not, look for the positions taken by elected officials and other representatives of the major parties. Using the information you have found, prepare a report telling whether each party is united or divided in its response to the issue and whether the two major parties oppose each other on this issue. Support your conclusions with examples.
- Time Line Activity** Using information from the chapter, create a time line showing the major political events of the current era of divided government. Include at least ten entries in your time line. You might begin with Richard Nixon's election to the presidency in 1968. So far, which party has held the White House more frequently during this era?
- It's Your Turn** Election law in this country is often written to discourage minor party candidates. Draw a political cartoon in which you comment on this situation. Take either the pro or the con position in your cartoon. (Drawing a Cartoon)

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As a final review, take the Magruder's Chapter 5 Self-Test and receive immediate feedback on your answers. The test consists of 20 multiple-choice questions designed to test your understanding of the chapter content.