

Chapter 5 Political Parties



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What Is a Political Party?

- A **political party** is a group of citizens who agree on major issues facing the nation. These groups work to create public policies that reflect their views.
- Parties choose, or **nominate**, people they want to elect to public office. These **candidates** campaign to get elected.

Parties in the US

- Any American citizen may join a political party regardless of age, but most members are **eighteen or older**.
- The United States has a **two-party system**. The **Republicans** emerged as a major party in 1860 with the election of Abraham Lincoln. The **Democratic Party** formed under Andrew Jackson twenty years earlier.



Hamilton vs. Jefferson



- Political parties first emerged when followers of **Alexander Hamilton** and **Thomas Jefferson** disagreed over major issues on the Constitution and government.
- **Jefferson's** group took the name **Democratic-Republicans**. Due to experience with Britain, they feared a powerful central government. They wanted the states to hold greater power.
- **Hamilton** championed a strong national government with a powerful **chief executive**. His followers called themselves **Federalists**, after those who supported the Constitution.

Jacksonian Democracy Reigns



- In 1828, the farmers and small business owners who made up Jefferson's party, calling themselves the **Democratic Party**, nominated **Andrew Jackson**. He stood for the common citizen, but looked out for southern and western interests.
- Those who did not support Jackson formed their own party called **Whigs**, after a Scottish political leader.
- Their real name was the **National Republican Party**.
- The **Whigs** and **Democrats** made up the two key parties in American politics for **two decades**.

The Two Major Parties Emerge

- In 1854, Whigs, former Free Soil Party members, and ex-Democrats formed the **Republican Party** to oppose the spread of slavery in US territories.
- The Whigs faded from American politics leaving the Democrats and Republicans in a **two-party system** that has dominated **American politics** ever since.

Third Parties

- Any party other than the two major parties can be called a “**Third party**.”
- No **third party** has ever gained control of the **White House**. Sometimes, third parties win seats in **Congress** or **gain office in lower levels of government**.
- When these smaller groups challenge the two major parties, they can **change the outcome of elections**.
- Their most important role is to **influence policy** on one or more issues.



Ralph Nader, Green Party Candidate, 2000

Third Parties at the Turn of the Century

- In the late 1800s, the People’s Party, or “**Populists**” became popular.
- They had the support of farmers and workers who called for **better working conditions**.
- They never succeeded in getting a **national candidate** into office, many of their ideas on **workers’ rights** became laws in the 20th Century.



The Republicans Split

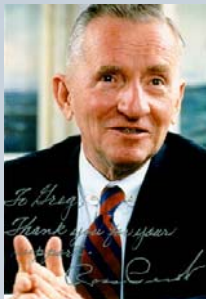
- Former Republican President **Theodore Roosevelt (TR)** left the Republican Party and was nominated by the **Progressive Party**.
- It was nicknamed the “**Bull Moose Party**” because TR said he was “fit as a Bull Moose”.
- TR **split the 1912 Republican vote**, allowing Democrat **Woodrow Wilson** to defeat President **William H. Taft**.



Ideological Third Parties

- An **ideology** is a body of ideas put forth by a person or group.
- Minor third parties are often formed to support a specific issue. These rise and fall over time.
- Ideological parties want to **change society** in major ways.
- The **Socialist** and **Communist** Parties want to **nationalize** major industries. The **Green** Party calls for companies to respect the **environment**.

Cult of Personality



- Some third parties form from the efforts of famous people.
- If they cannot gain support from one of the major parties, they form their own.
- **H. Ross Perot’s Reform Party** was a force in the 1992 and 1996 elections. This party also helped to elect pro wrestler **Jesse Ventura** governor of **Minnesota**.
- These parties usually fade after their candidate is defeated.

The Odds Are Against Them

- It is difficult for third parties candidates to **raise enough money** to compete with the major parties.
- Only one candidate can win in a **given district**. Usually the winner is either Democratic or Republican.
- Third-party candidates must show they have support by getting voter **signatures** to even be placed on the ballot for national office.

American Politics Today

- **Democrats** usually feel that the federal government has a responsibility to help the poor through government **intervention**.
- **Democrats** are generally seen as **liberal**.
- **Republicans** hold the view that leaving the economy alone will allow for growth, giving people greater ability to help themselves. In general, they believe in less **regulation**.
- **Republicans** are generally viewed as being **conservative**.

Parties Move Towards The Center

- A **platform** is a statement that puts forth the party's positions on issues. Each individual issue is called a **plank**.
- Both parties want votes. As a result, parties become more **moderate** in their platforms, moving away from extreme positions.
- The American people **generally agree about many issues**. This unity forces the two parties toward the **center of the political spectrum**.



Party Systems in other Countries

- Most democracies have **multi-party** systems.
- One party **rarely wins the number of seats** in the Parliament needed to control the government. This instability forces several parties to **cooperate** in running the government. When parties work together to pass laws, a **coalition** has been formed.
- If a small party pulls its support, the government can **collapse** and **new elections** must be held. This process occurs in nations with a **parliamentary** system of government.
- The US has a **presidential** system and a **Congress** rather than a **prime minister** and a **parliament**.

Following The Party Line

- A **one-party** system cannot exist in a democracy. There is no choice of candidates in the elections.
- Where **one-party** systems exist, **opposition** parties are usually banned.
- **Communist China, Cuba, and North Korea** operate under one-party systems. One-party systems may be based on other ideologies such as religion.
- **Iran's Islamic Republican Party** has established a **Muslim** state.
- This type of religion-based government is called a **theocracy**.

• Communist Party Congress, China

