

11

Political Parties



In August 2012, at their quadrennial national convention in Tampa, the Republican Party nominated Governor Mitt Romney as its candidate for president of the United States. He was joined on the ticket by Representative Paul Ryan, the Republican Party's nominee for vice president. A week later, in Charlotte, the Democratic Party formally renominated President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden as the standard bearers for their ticket.

In many ways, the Republican and Democratic conventions were a study in the dramatic differences that exist between two major parties. For example, the keynote speakers who appeared at each of the conventions were designed to appeal to the each party's base of supporters. Actor Clint Eastwood and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke at the Republican National Convention, while former President Bill Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama were featured at the Democratic National Convention.

The issue positions taken by the parties' platforms similarly reflected the often-opposing identities of the Democrats and the Republicans. The Democratic Party's platform, for example, advocated for a woman's right to choose if she wishes to have an abortion. It also supported the legalization of same-sex marriage and cutting the defense budget. The Republican Party's platform, in contrast, took a pro-life stance on abortion, advocated for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, and called for maintaining federal spending on national defense.

Despite these differences in content and emphasis, the essential purposes of the Republican and Democratic conventions were quite similar. First, the conventions served as a venue to formally nominate the parties' candidates for president of the United States. Second, the gatherings were designed to engage the party faithful and energize them for the general election campaign. And finally, the conventions were an attempt to increase voters' interest in the upcoming contest. The parties' decision to hold their conventions in the swing states of Florida and North Carolina clearly reflected this goal.

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CONVENTIONS ARE PEP RALLIES FOR THE PARTY FAITHFUL Above, delegates celebrate the nomination of Wendell Willkie at the Republican Party convention in Philadelphia in 1940. Below, Michigan delegates show their support for Mitt Romney in 2012.



political party

An organized group with shared goals and ideals that joins together to run candidates for office and exercise political and electoral power.



At the most basic level, a **political party** is an organized effort by office holders, candidates, activists, and voters to pursue their common interests by gaining and exercising power through the electoral process. The goal, of course, is to win office in order to influence public policy. Nominating candidates to run under the party label is, notably, the key differentiating factor between political parties and interest groups. However, as we will discuss later in this text, political parties and interest groups now work together so closely that it may be difficult to tell where one stops and the other begins.

Political scientists sometimes describe political parties as consisting of three separate but related entities: (1) the office holders who organize themselves and pursue policy objectives under a party label (the governmental party); (2) the workers and activists who make up the party's formal organization structure (the organizational party); and, (3) the voters who consider themselves allied or associated with the party (the party in the electorate).¹

In this chapter, we will address contemporary party politics from each of these vantage points. We will trace parties from their roots in the late 1700s to today and will cover reforms to party politics that have been sought throughout American history. A discussion of the increasing polarization of American political parties will conclude the chapter.

Roots of the Two-Party System

11.1 Trace the evolution of the two-party system in the United States.

American political parties have been inclusive and pragmatic since the founding of the republic. By tracing the history and development of political parties, we will see that even as dramatic shifts in party coalitions and reforms have taken place to democratize the electoral process, the competitive two-party system has always featured prominently in the United States.

□ The Development of Political Parties, 1800–1824

Though the Framers warned against a government ruled by permanent political alliances, these alliances actually had their roots in the creation of the U.S. Constitution. Those who supported the stronger central government fashioned in the new Constitution identified with what eventually became the Federalist Party, while the future Democratic-Republicans favored a system of greater state authority similar to that created by the Articles of Confederation. These alliances, however did not codify into permanent groups until President George Washington stepped off the national stage. To win the presidency in 1796, his vice president, John Adams, narrowly defeated archrival Thomas Jefferson. According to the Constitution, Jefferson became vice president. Over the course of Adams's single term, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans became increasingly organized around these clashing men and their principles. In the presidential election of 1800, the Federalists supported Adams's bid for a second term, but this time the Democratic-Republicans prevailed with their nominee, Jefferson, who became the first U.S. president elected as the nominee of a political party.

Jefferson was deeply committed to the ideas of his party but not nearly as devoted to the idea of a party system. He regarded his party as a temporary measure necessary to defeat Adams, not a long-term political tool or an essential element of democracy. As a result, Jefferson's party never achieved widespread loyalty among the nation; rather, it drew most of its support from the agrarian South. The Federalists, too, remained a regional party, drawing their support from the commercial New England states. No broad-based national party organizations existed to mobilize popular support.² Just as the nation was in its infancy, so, too, was the party system.



WHERE DID THE PARTY SYMBOLS ORIGINATE?

In 1874, the cartoonist Thomas Nast published a cartoon depicting the upcoming election at the Central Park Zoo. The elephant was labeled "The Republican Vote" running away from the donkey, which was the symbol chosen by Andrew Jackson for his campaign, after being known as "the jackass."

□ Jacksonian Democracy, 1824–1860

After the spirited confrontations of the republic's early years, political parties faded somewhat in importance for a quarter of a century. By 1820, the Federalist Party dissolved. James Monroe's presidency from 1817 to 1825 produced the so-called Era of Good Feelings, when party competition was nearly nonexistent at the national level (see Figure 11.1).

Party organizations, however, continued to develop at the state level, fueled in part by the enormous growth in the electorate that took place between 1820 and 1840. During this twenty-year period, the United States expanded westward and most states abolished property requirements as a condition of white male suffrage. The number of votes cast in presidential contests rose from 300,000 to more than 2 million.

Party membership broadened along with the electorate. Formed around President Andrew Jackson's popularity, the Democratic Party, which succeeded the old Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans, attracted most of the newly enfranchised voters, who were drawn to Jackson's charismatic style. Jackson's strong personality polarized many people, and opposition to the president coalesced into the Whig Party. Among the Whig Party's early leaders was Henry Clay, Speaker of the House from 1811 to 1820.

The incumbent Jackson, having won a first term as president in 1828, defeated Clay in the 1832 presidential contest. This election was the first in which the party's nominee was chosen at a large party convention rather than the small undemocratic caucuses popular until that time. Thus, Jackson was the first chief executive to win the White House as the nominee of a truly national, popularly based political party.

The Whigs and the Democrats continued to strengthen after 1832. Their competition usually proved fierce and closely matched, and they brought the United States the first broadly supported two-party system in the Western world.³ Unfortunately for the Whigs, the issue of slavery sharpened the many divisive tensions within the party, which led to its gradual dissolution and replacement by the new Republican Party. Formed in 1854 by anti-slavery activists, the Republican Party set its sights on the abolition (or at least containment) of slavery. After a losing presidential effort for John C. Frémont in 1856, the party was able to assemble enough support primarily from former Whigs and anti-slavery northern Democrats to win the presidency for Abraham Lincoln in a fragmented 1860 vote. From the presidential election of 1860 to this day, the same two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, have dominated elections in the United States, and control of an electoral majority has seesawed between them.

□ The Golden Age, 1860–1932

Party stability, the dominance of party organizations in local and state governments, and the impact of those organizations on the lives of millions of voters were the central traits of the era called the “Golden Age” of political parties. This era, from the end of post-Civil War Reconstruction until the reforms of the Progressive Era, featured remarkable stability in the identity of both the Republican and Democratic Parties. Such stability has been exceptionally rare in democratic republics around the world.

Political machines, organizations that use tangible incentives such as jobs and favors to win loyalty among voters, were a central element of life for millions of people in the United States during the Golden Age. In fact, for city-dwellers, and particularly immigrants from European countries such as Ireland, Italy, and Germany, party and government were virtually interchangeable during this time. In addition to providing housing, employment, and even food to many voters, parties in most major cities offered entertainment by organizing torchlight parades, weekend picnics, socials, and other community events. Many citizens—even those who were not particularly “political”—attended, thereby forming some allegiance to one party or the other.

The parties also gave citizens the opportunity for upward social mobility as they rose in the organization. As a result, parties generated intense loyalty and devotion

political machine

A party organization that recruits voter loyalty with tangible incentives and is characterized by a high degree of control over member activity.

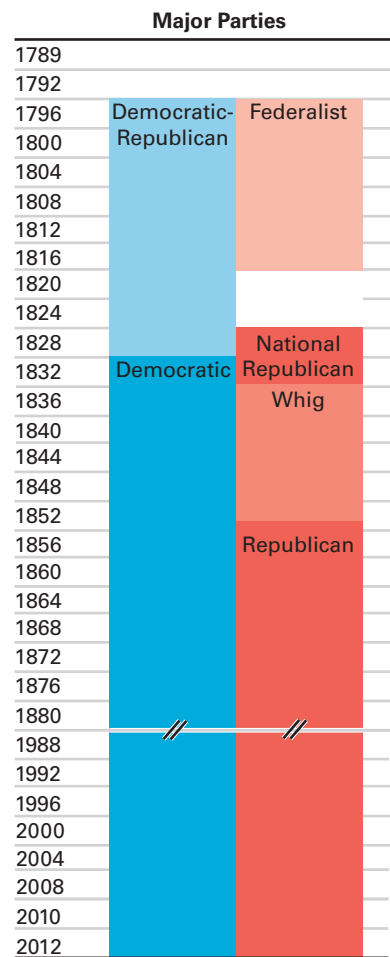


FIGURE 11.1 HOW HAS THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPED?

The United States has had two political parties for much of its existence. Though the names of these parties have changed over time, the central controversies over the role of government in citizens' lives have remained constant. The two parties we know today, the Democrats and Republicans, have existed since 1856.

SOURCE: Based on Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007). Updated by the authors.

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candidate-centered politics

Politics that focus on the candidates, their particular issues, and character rather than party affiliation.

among their supporters and office holders, which helped to produce startlingly high levels of voter turnout—75 percent or better in all presidential elections from 1876 to 1900—compared with today’s 50–60 percent.⁴

□ The Modern Era

Between 1900 and the 1930s, the government gradually took over a number of important functions previously performed by the parties, such as printing ballots, conducting elections, and providing social welfare services. These changes had a major impact on party loyalty and strength. Beginning in the 1930s with Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, social services began to be regarded as a right of citizenship rather than as a privilege extended in exchange for a person’s support of a party. The flow of immigrants also slowed dramatically in the 1920s, causing party machines to lose even greater power in many places.

In the post–World War II era, extensive social changes continued to contribute to the move away from strong parties. A weakening of the party system gave rise to **candidate-centered politics**, which focus on candidates, their particular issues, and character, rather than party affiliation. Parties’ diminished control over issues and campaigns also has given candidates considerable power in how they conduct themselves during election season and how they seek resources. Interest groups and lobbyists have stepped into the void that weaker parties have left behind. Candidates today compete for endorsements and contributions from a variety of multi-issue as well as single-issue organizations.

The population shift from urban to suburban locales has also weakened parties. During the post–World War II era, millions of people moved from the cities to the suburbs, where a sense of privacy and detachment can deter even the most energetic party organizers. In addition, population growth in the last half-century has created legislative districts with far more people, making it less feasible to knock on every door or shake every hand.

The Living Constitution

It is difficult to imagine modern American politics without political parties, but where in the text of the Constitution do we find the provision to establish them?

Nowhere in the Constitution do we find a provision establishing political parties. Some might point out that the First Amendment sets forth the right to assemble as a constitutional right, and this right certainly helps to preserve and protect parties from governmental oppression during rallies and conventions. However, the right to assemble is not the same as permission for two organizations to mediate elections. Furthermore, James Madison, in *Federalist No. 10*, feared that a majority tyranny created by the domination of a single faction fighting for one set of interests posed one of the greatest dangers to the new American republic. For that reason, he hoped that extending the sphere of representation among many members of Congress would prevent a majority of representatives from coming together to vote as a bloc.

How well the modern Democratic and Republican Parties embody Madison’s ideal is an open question. On one hand, the members of Congress who represent

each of the parties are not monolithic blocs. Regional, religious, and ethnic variations, to name a few, characterize these individuals. On the other hand, we have heard growing cries in Washington, D.C., in recent years regarding the difficulties of being a political moderate; longtime Senator Olympia Snowe (R–ME), for example, cited the growing partisanship of Congress as a key reason behind her decision not to seek reelection in 2012. The growing polarization of the parties in government is discussed throughout this chapter.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How could the Constitution be amended to officially establish political parties as an institution of government? Would this be a good idea? Why or why not?
2. Are modern political parties inclusive enough of varied citizen interests? Why or why not?

□ Citizen Support and Party Realignment

Periodically, voters make dramatic shifts in partisan preference that drastically alter the political landscape. During these **party realignments**, existing party affiliations are subject to upheaval: many voters may change parties, and the youngest age group of voters may permanently adopt the label of the newly dominant party.⁵

Preceding a major realignment are one or more **critical elections**, which may polarize voters around new issues and personalities in reaction to crucial developments, such as a war or an economic depression. Three tumultuous eras in particular have produced significant critical elections. First, Thomas Jefferson, in reaction against the Federalist Party's agenda of a strong, centralized federal government, formed the Democratic-Republican Party, which won the presidency and Congress in 1800. Second, in reaction to the growing crisis over slavery, the Whig Party gradually dissolved and the Republican Party gained strength and ultimately won the presidency in 1860. Third, the Great Depression caused large numbers of voters to repudiate Republican Party policies and embrace the Democratic Party in 1932 (see Figure 11.2). Each of these cases resulted in fundamental and enduring alterations in the party's base of supporters. During the New Deal realignment, for example, blue-collar workers, labor union members, African Americans, and the poor gravitated toward the Democratic Party.

A critical election is not the only occasion when changes in partisan affiliation are accommodated. More gradual shifts in party coalitions, called **secular realignments**, may also change voters' loyalties.⁶ This piecemeal process depends not on convulsive shocks to the political system but on slow, barely discernible demographic shifts—the shrinking of one party's base of support and the enlargement of the other's, for example—or simple generational replacement (that is, the dying off of the older generation and the maturing of the younger generation).

party realignment

Dramatic shifts in partisan preferences that drastically alter the political landscape.

critical election

An election that signals a party realignment through voter polarization around new issues and personalities.

secular realignment

The gradual rearrangement of party coalitions, based more on demographic shifts than on shocks to the political system.

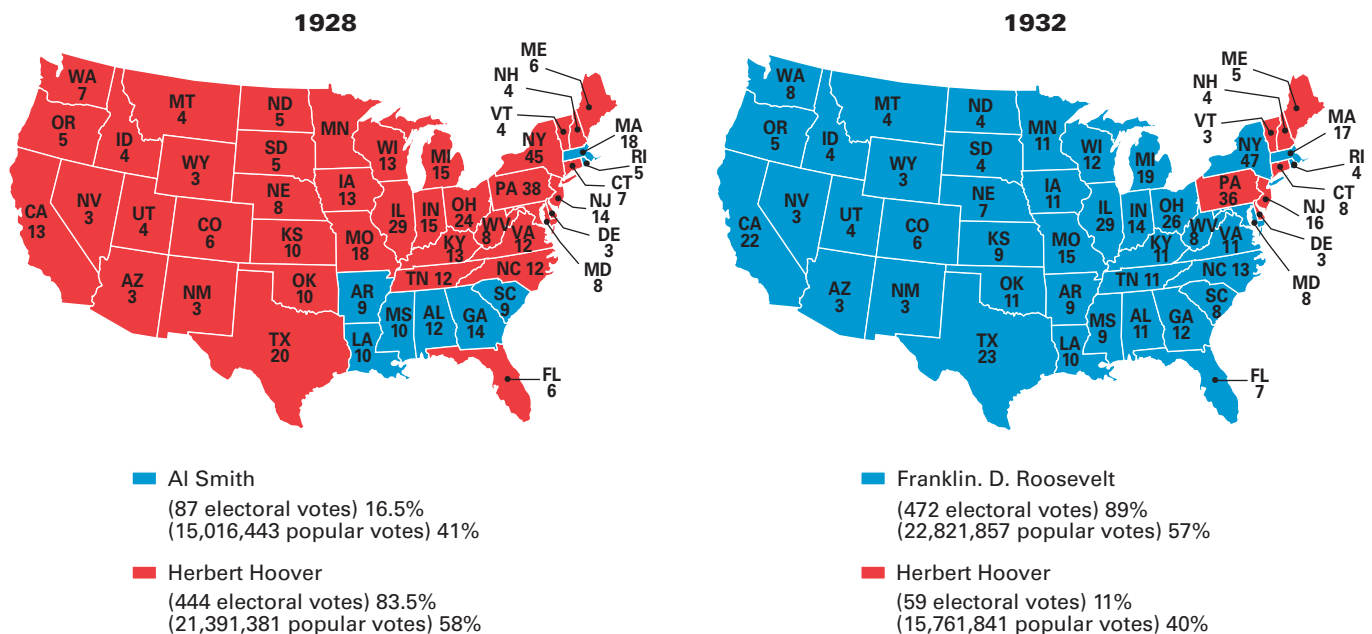


FIGURE 11.2 WHAT DOES A REALIGNMENT LOOK LIKE?

The map on the left shows the Electoral College results of the 1928 election, won by Republican Herbert Hoover. The map on the right shows the results of the 1932 election, won by Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. The numbers in the maps represent the number of Electoral College votes allocated to each state. Note the obvious increase in the number and percentage of “blue states.”

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The most significant recent example of this phenomenon occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the southern states, traditionally Democratic stalwarts since the Civil War, shifted dramatically toward the Republican Party. Many factors contributed to this gradual regional shift in party allegiance. Southern Democrats were the most conservative of the New Deal coalition, favoring the social status quo and opposing civil rights reform and affirmative action. As the Democratic Party turned toward more liberal social causes, such as civil rights and social spending, many southern voters and politicians shifted their allegiance toward the Republicans.⁷

The Organization of American Political Parties

11.2 Outline the structure of American political parties at the national, state, and local levels.

Despite significant changes in their structure and functions, the two major parties remain fairly well organized. Parties organize conflict and represent citizens' interests in Washington, D.C., state capitals, and local governments throughout the nation (see Figure 11.3). They also engage in many of the fund-raising activities necessary to run candidates for political office and provide the manpower and electoral expertise to deliver voters on Election Day. Examining the national, state, and local parties separately should not lead us to overlook the increasing integration of these party units, however.

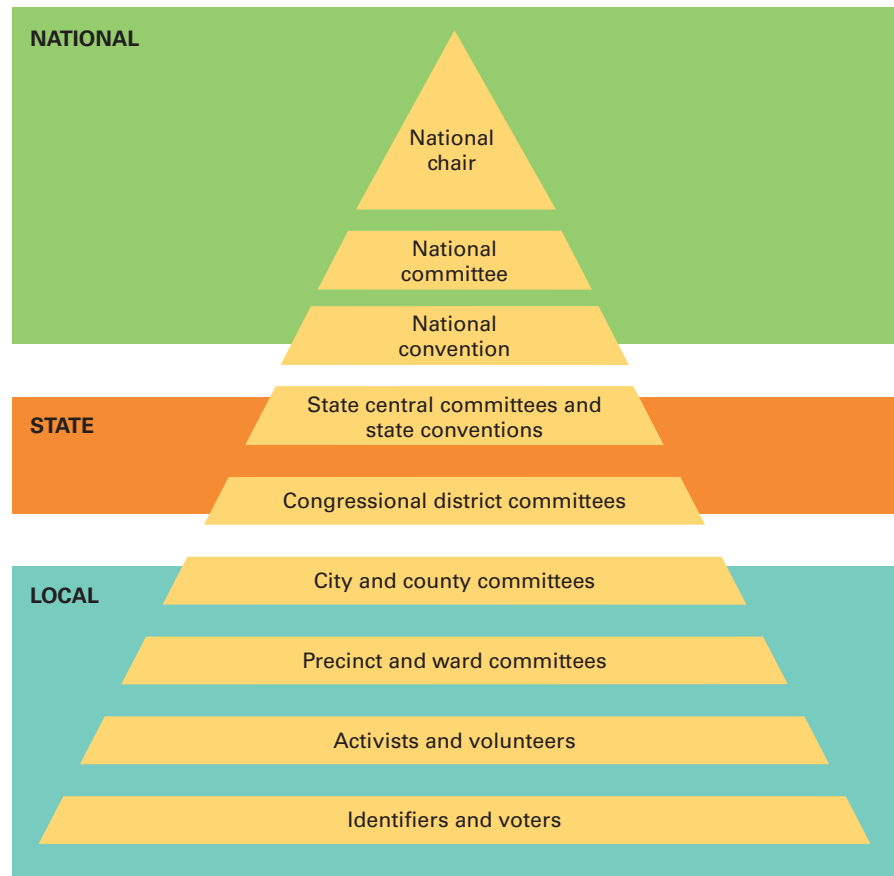


FIGURE 11.3 HOW ARE POLITICAL PARTIES ORGANIZED?

American political parties are national in scope, but their real roots—and power—lie in state and local party organizations. Thus, the organization of political parties in America is often presented as a pyramid, with identifiers and voters as the “base” and the national chair as the “pinnacle.”

□ The National Party

The national party organization sits at the pinnacle of the party system in the United States. Its primary function is to establish a cohesive vision for partisan identifiers nationwide and to disseminate that vision to party members and voters. A chairperson, who serves as the head of the national committee, leads the national party. Every four years, the national committee organizes a convention designed to reevaluate policies and nominate a candidate for the presidency.

THE NATIONAL CHAIRPERSON The key national party official is the chair of the national committee. The chair is usually selected by the sitting president or newly nominated presidential candidate, who is accorded the right to name the individual for at least the duration of his or her campaign. The national committee may also choose the chair when the election has ended and the party has been defeated.

The chair is the primary spokesperson and arbitrator for the party during the four years between elections. He or she has the responsibility of damping down factionalism, negotiating candidate disputes, and preparing the machinery for the next presidential election. Perhaps most critically, the chair is called upon to raise funds and keep the party financially strong. Balancing the interests of all potential party candidates is a particularly difficult job, and strict neutrality is normally expected from the chair. In 2012, the chair of the Republican National Committee was Reince Priebus. His Democratic counterpart was Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL).

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE The first national party committees were skeletal and formed some years after the first presidential nominating conventions in the 1830s. First the Democrats in 1848 and then the Republicans in 1856 established national governing bodies—the Democratic National Committee, or DNC, and the Republican National Committee, or RNC—to make arrangements for the national conventions and to coordinate the subsequent presidential campaigns.

Each party has also formed party committees in both chambers of Congress that are loosely allied with the DNC and RNC. The Democratic committees are called the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC). The Republican committees are called the National Republican Campaign Committee (NRCC) and the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). These organizations raise and distribute campaign funds for House and Senate seats, develop campaign strategies, recruit candidates, and conduct on-the-ground campaigns.

Ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1913 initiated the popular election of U.S. senators causing both parties to organize separate Senate campaign committees. This three-part arrangement of national party committee, House party committee, and Senate party committee has persisted in both parties to the present day, and each party's three committees are located in Washington, D.C. An informal division of labor, however, does exist among the national committees. Whereas the DNC and RNC focus primarily on aiding presidential campaigns and conducting general party-building activities, the congressional campaign committees work primarily to maximize the number of seats held by their respective parties in Congress. In the past two decades, all six national committees have become major players in American campaigns and elections.⁸

□ The National Convention

Every four years, each party holds a **national convention** to nominate its presidential and vice presidential candidates. Because the party's chosen candidate is now usually known before the event, organizers of modern party conventions can script the event to mobilize supporters and engage more casual observers. The convention also fulfills its function as the ultimate governing body for the party. The rules adopted and the party platform that is passed serve as durable guidelines to steer the party until the next convention. In addition, party rules play a role in determining the relative influence of factions within the party and can increase or decrease the party's chances for electoral success.

national convention

A party meeting held in the presidential election year for the purposes of nominating a presidential and vice presidential ticket and adopting a platform.

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delegate

Representative to the party convention.

superdelegate

Delegate to the Democratic Party's national convention whose vote at the convention is unpledged to a candidate; this position is reserved for a party official.

Delegates, or representatives to the party conventions, do much of the work at these events. Delegates are no longer selected by party leaders, but by citizens participating in primary elections and grassroots caucuses. The apportionment of delegates to presidential candidates varies by party. A Democratic Party rule decrees that a state's delegates be apportioned in proportion to the votes cast in support of each candidate in the state primary or caucus (so that, for example, a candidate who receives 30 percent of the vote gains about 30 percent of the convention delegates). In contrast, the Republican Party allows states to choose between this proportional system or a winner-take-all system.

Who the delegates are, a topic of less importance today than when delegates enjoyed more power in the selection process, still reveals interesting differences between political parties. Both parties draw their delegates from an elite group whose income and educational levels are far above the average American's. About 40 percent of delegates at the 2012 Democratic convention were minorities, and half were women. Only 13 percent of the delegates to the 2012 Republican convention were racial and ethnic minorities. Although this number may seem small when compared to the Democrats, it represents an increase in minority representation from 2008, when 7 percent of the delegates were minorities.

The Democratic Party also allows party officials to serve as **superdelegates**. Superdelegates are not pledged to a candidate and thus may support whichever candidate they choose. Superdelegates allow the party to maintain some level of control over the selection process, while still allowing most delegates to be pledged by the people.

□ State and Local Parties

Although national committee activities attract most of the media attention, the roots of the party lie not in Washington, D.C., but in the states and localities. Virtually all government regulation of political parties falls to the states. Most importantly, the vast majority of party leadership positions are filled at subnational levels.

The arrangement of party committees provides for a broad base of support. The smallest voting unit, the precinct, usually takes in a few adjacent neighborhoods and is the fundamental building block of the party. The United States has more than 100,000 precincts. The precinct committee members are the foot soldiers of any party, and their efforts are supplemented by party committees above them in the wards, cities, counties, towns, villages, and congressional districts.

The state governing body supervising this collection of local party organizations is usually called the state central (or executive) committee. Its members come from all major geographic units, as determined by and selected under state law. Generally, state parties are free to act within the limits set by their state legislatures without interference from the national party. One key exception is the selection and seating of presidential convention delegates. Here, the national committee may establish quotas or mandates regarding type, number, or manner of electing delegates.

Increased fund-raising, campaign events, registration drives, publicity, and distribution of campaign literature have also enabled parties to become more effective political actors over the past three decades.⁹

□ Informal Groups

Numerous official and semi-official groups also attempt to affect the formal party organizations. Both the DNC and RNC have affiliated organizations of state and local party women (the National Federation of Democratic Women and the National Federation of Republican Women), as well as numerous college campus organizations, including the College Democrats of America and the College Republican National Committee. The youth divisions (the Young Democrats of America and the Young Republican National Federation) have a generous definition of "young," up to and including age thirty-five. State governors in each party have their own party associations, too (the Democratic Governors Association and the Republican Governors Association). Each of these organizations provides loyal and energetic foot soldiers for campaigns and voter mobilization.

Explore Your World

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Political parties are the building blocks of governmental systems across the globe. They are a fundamental representation of the values and ideals of the people, and are essential for the long-term development of emerging democracies. Countries use party systems to shape and maintain their chosen system of government, with varying degrees of effectiveness. While the United States has only two major parties, other states may have as few as one or more than fifty political parties. Review the table below for information on parties in the legislatures of several other countries.

	Left Wing	Centrist	Right Wing
 United States	Democratic		Republican
 Brazil	Worker's Socialist Democratic Labour Communist Socialist People's	Brazilian Democratic Movement Republic Brazil Republican Brazilian Social Democracy Democrats Brazilian Labour	Social Christian
 Canada	New Democratic	Liberal	Conservative
 China	Chinese Communist		
 Israel	Israeli Labour	Kadima Independence	Likud Yisrael Beietenu Shas United Torah Judaism
 Nigeria	Action Congress of Nigeria	People's Democratic Party	All Nigeria People's Party
 United Kingdom	Labour Sinn Fein	Liberal Democrats Democratic Unionist Scottish National	Conservative

The twelve political parties shown in this table are only a subset of the political parties represented in the Brazilian legislature. Some parties are represented by only one or two members. This diversity of parties is common in countries like Brazil and India, which are large and have significant social and political variations.

NOTES: Parties are listed only if five or more members in the legislature represented them in 2012. Within ideological labels, parties are arranged from top to bottom based on number of seats held.

In some states, such as China, only one political party is allowed to exist upon order of the government. The Chinese Communist Party is the world's largest political party, claiming over 80 million members.

Many states, like the United Kingdom, have significant nationalist or regional parties represented in their legislatures. Sinn Fein, the Democratic Unionist, and the Scottish National Parties all represent this ideal in the United Kingdom.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What geographic and political factors do you think contribute to the number of political parties in each state?
2. How are common words such as "democratic" used differently across political systems? Why do you think these variations exist?
3. Do you feel that your views can be adequately represented by the two-party system in the United States? Do you completely agree with the views of one party, or do you find yourself more moderate in your opinions?



HOW DO COLLEGE STUDENTS HELP POLITICAL PARTIES?

College students can be important volunteers for political parties and candidates. Here, students volunteer to make phone calls on behalf of 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

think tank

Institutional collection of policy-oriented researchers and academics who are sources of policy ideas.

Just outside the party orbit are the supportive interest groups and associations that often provide money, labor, or other forms of assistance to the parties. Labor unions, progressive groups, teachers, African American and women's groups, and Americans for Democratic Action are some of the Democratic Party's most important supporters. Businesses, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, evangelical Christian organizations, and some pro-life groups work closely with the Republicans.

Each U.S. party also has several institutionalized sources of policy ideas. Though unconnected to the parties in any official sense, these **think tanks**, or institutional collections of policy-oriented researchers and academics who are sources of policy ideas, influence party positions and platforms. Republicans have dominated the world of think tanks, with prominent conservative groups including the Hudson Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Heritage Foundation. And, the libertarian Cato Institute is closely aligned with the Republican Party. While generally fewer in number, prominent think tanks that generally align with the Democratic Party include the Center for American Progress, Center for National Policy, and Open Society Foundations.

Activities of American Political Parties

11.3 Identify the functions performed by American political parties.

For over 200 years, the two-party system has served as the mechanism American society uses to organize and resolve social and political conflict. Political parties often are the chief agents of change in our political system. They provide vital services to society, and it would be difficult to envision political life without them. They are mainly involved in running candidates for office, getting out the vote, facilitating electoral choice, providing leadership in policy formulation, and organizing institutions of government, such as congressional committees.

□ Running Candidates for Office

Recruiting candidates for local, state, and national office is one of the most important tasks of the parties. Party leaders identify strong candidates and interest them in running for the thousands of open or vulnerable state, local, and congressional seats each year. However, it has become increasingly difficult to find and persuade attractive candidates to run for office, particularly in an era when candidates know they will be intensely scrutinized by the press and public.

RAISING MONEY Although candidates must raise substantial funds on their own (a candidate for a House seat must raise between \$500,000 and \$1 million; and a candidate for a Senate seat must raise several million dollars), political parties, particularly during mid-term and presidential election years, spend a great deal of time raising and disseminating money for candidates. Historically, Republicans enjoyed greater fundraising success than Democrats, due in large part to a significant number of wealthy identifiers and donors. However, in recent years, Democrats have caught up, even out-raising Republicans during the 2008 presidential election (see Figure 11.4).

The parties can raise so much money because they have developed networks of donors accessed by a variety of methods. Republican efforts to reach donors through the mail date back to the early 1960s and accelerated in the mid-1970s, when postage and production costs were relatively low. Nowadays, both parties have highly successful mail, phone, and e-mail solicitation lists. They also use Internet sites, online advertisements, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter to help reach supporters and raise money for their candidates' electoral pursuits.

MOBILIZING SUPPORT AND GETTING OUT THE VOTE The parties take a number of steps to broaden citizens' knowledge of candidates and campaigns in the days leading up to the election. Parties, for example, spend millions of dollars for national, state, and local public opinion surveys. In important contests, the parties also commission tracking polls to chart the daily rise or fall of public support for a candidate. The information provided in these polls is invaluable to developing campaign strategy in the tense concluding days of an election.

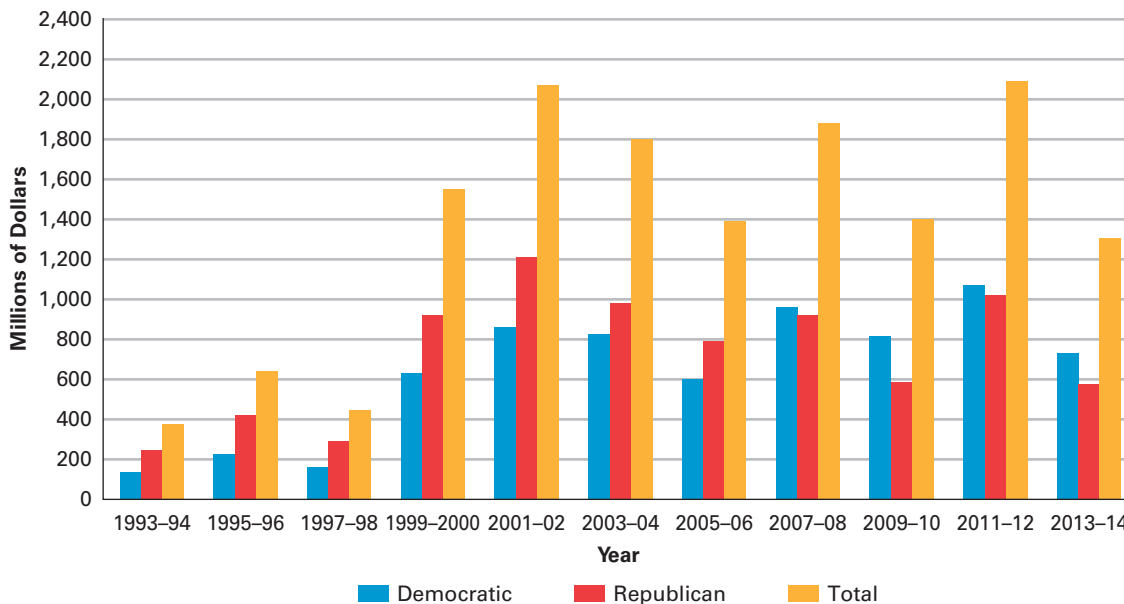


FIGURE 11.4 HOW MUCH MONEY DO PARTIES RAISE?

Changes in political campaigns and campaign finance laws have allowed both political parties to raise increasing amounts of money over the past twenty years. Historically, the Republican Party's fund-raising dwarfed that of their Democratic counterparts, but beginning in 2008, the Democratic Party has come much closer to and even surpassed Republicans' fund-raising.

SOURCES: 2000–2014 from Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org/parties, and earlier years from Harold W. Stanley and Richard Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2003–2004* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004).

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national party platform

A statement of the general and specific philosophy and policy goals of a political party, usually promulgated at the national convention.

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Both parties also operate sophisticated media divisions that specialize in the design and production of TV advertisements for party nominees at all levels. And, both parties train the armies of political volunteers and paid operatives who run the candidates' campaigns. Early in each election cycle, the national parties also help prepare voluminous research reports on opponents, analyzing their public statements, votes, and attendance records.

In addition, the parties, along with civic organizations, register and mobilize large numbers of people to vote. Both parties greatly emphasize their duty to “get out the vote” (GOTV) on Election Day. One tactic used by modern parties is “micro-targeting,” a practice derived from the field of consumer behavior. With data obtained from a growing volume of government census records and marketing firms, parties use advanced computer models to identify potential voters based on consumer preferences, personal habits, and past voting behavior. Once identified, these voters' names are stored in a database—Republicans call theirs the Voter Vault—and shared with individual campaigns, whose volunteers contact voters by phone and personal visits. The detailed information accessed from these databases allows campaigns to carefully tailor their messages to individual voters. The voter turnout drive culminates during the final seventy-two hours of the campaign, when party operatives personally contact voters and remind them to vote. During the 2012 election, Democrats attributed much of their victory in the presidential election to their successful GOTV efforts—or ground game—which led to Democrats out-voting Republicans by significant margins in most states.

□ Formulating and Promoting Policy

The **national party platform** is the most visible instrument that parties use to formulate, convey, and promote public policy. Every four years, each party writes a lengthy platform explaining its positions on key issues. In a two-party system, a party's platform argues why its preferences are superior to those of the rival party. This is particularly true for contentious social issues that have little room for compromise and that divide the electorate, such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

Scholarship suggests that about two-thirds of the promises in the victorious party's presidential platform are completely or mostly implemented. Moreover, about one-half or more of the pledges of the losing party also tend to find their way into public policy, a trend no doubt reflecting the effort of both parties to support broad policy positions that enjoy widespread support in the general public.¹⁰ For example, in 2012, both party platforms supported budget reform, an issue that Democrats and Republicans in Congress vowed to quickly address (see Table 11.1).

TABLE 11.1 WHAT DO PARTY PLATFORMS SAY?

Issue	Democratic Platform	Republican Platform
Abortion	Strongly supports <i>Roe v. Wade</i> (1973) and a woman's right to choose.	Upholds the “sanctity of human life”; believes unborn children have “individual right to life.”
Defense	Supports reductions in federal defense spending.	Believes that cuts in defense spending would be “disaster” for national security.
Medicare	Opposes any movement toward privatization of or vouchers for Medicare.	Believes in “premium-support” model for Medicare.
Public-Employee Unions	Opposes attacks on collective bargaining undertaken by some Republican governors.	Supports Republican governors' efforts to reform laws governing unions.
Same-Sex Marriage	Supports marriage equality and equal treatment under law for same-sex couples.	Supports constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman.

SOURCES: “Moving America Forward: 2012 Democratic National Platform,” <http://www.democrats.org/democratic-national-platform>; and http://www.gop.com/2012-republican-platform_home.

□ Organizing Government

Political parties are able to implement their policy agendas in part because they play such a significant role in organizing the operations of government and providing structure for political conflict within and between the branches. Here, we consider the role of parties in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches at the federal and state levels.

PARTIES IN CONGRESS Nowhere is the party more visible or vital than in the Congress. In this century, political parties have dramatically increased the sophistication and impact of their internal congressional organizations. Prior to the beginning of every session, the parties in both houses of Congress gather (or “caucus”) separately to select party leaders and to arrange for the assignment of members of each chamber’s committees. In effect, then, the parties organize and operate Congress.

Congressional party leaders enforce discipline among party members in various ways. These leaders can, for example, award committee assignments and chairs to the loyal, or withhold them from the rebellious, regardless of seniority. Pork-barrel projects—government projects yielding rich patronage benefits that sustain many legislators’ electoral survival—may be included or deleted during the appropriations process. Small favors and perquisites (such as the allocation of desirable office space or the scheduling of floor votes for the convenience of a member) can also be useful levers.

Perhaps as a response to these increased incentives, party labels have become the most powerful predictor of congressional voting. In the past few years, party-line voting has increased noticeably, as reflected in the upward trend in both Democrats’ and Republicans’ party unity, shown in Figure 11.5. Although not invariably predictive, a member’s party affiliation proved to be the best indicator of his or her votes. In 2011, party unity among both parties in the House and Senate topped 85 percent. The House Republicans and the Senate Democrats—who controlled their houses of Congress—set records for party unity at 91 and 92 percent, respectively.¹¹

THE PRESIDENTIAL PARTY The president carries the mantle of leader of his party and he is often the public face of his party’s agenda. Some presidents have taken their party responsibilities more seriously than others. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated themselves to building their party in both the electorate and in government. Republicans Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush also exemplified the “pro-party” presidency.

With few exceptions, presidents appoint members of their own party to key executive departmental offices and other positions. The president and White House also work closely with congressional party leaders to pass legislation. Because the president cannot introduce legislation on his own, he must rely on party members to propose and support White House-backed initiatives in Congress. Presidents reciprocate the support they receive from members of Congress by appointing many activists to office, recruiting candidates, raising money for the party treasury, and campaigning extensively for party nominees during election seasons.

The electoral fortunes of the parties rise and fall with the success of the president. Even when the president is not on the ballot during mid-term elections, voters still hold the president’s party accountable for current problems.

PARTIES IN THE FEDERAL COURTS Although federal judges do not run for office under a party label, judges are creatures of the political process, and their posts are considered patronage plums. Judges are often chosen not only for their abilities but also as representatives of a certain philosophy or approach to government. Most recent presidents have appointed judges overwhelmingly from their own party. Democratic executives tend to select more liberal judges who are friendly to social programs or labor interests. Republican executives generally lean toward conservatives, hoping they will be tough on criminal defendants, opposed to abortion, and supportive of business interests. These opposing ideals may lead to conflict between the president and the Senate. President



HOW HAS PARTY UNITY AFFECTED POLITICS?

Although she rose to prominence in New Hampshire as a moderate and pragmatic Democratic governor who was willing to work with a Republican-controlled legislature, Senator Jeanne Shaheen's solidly Democratic voting record—97 percent with her party between January 2013 and March 2014—was a central issue in her reelection bid. Her voting record underscores the increasingly partisan nature of the Senate in which both parties pressure their members to remain loyal, but few bills become law. Shaheen is pictured here with Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), both of whom joined a small bipartisan group that pushed for an end to the government shutdown in 2013.

Barack Obama, for example, has seen many of his judicial appointments blocked by Senate Republicans, who refused to allow a vote on the nominations. This tactic is an attempt to forestall ideological changes that can last far beyond the next election cycle.

PARTIES IN STATE GOVERNMENT Most of the conclusions discussed about the parties' relationships to the national legislative, executive, and judicial branches apply to those branches at the state level as well. State legislators, however, depend on their state and local parties for election assistance much more than do their congressional counterparts. Whereas members of Congress have significant support from interest groups and large government-provided staffs to assist (directly or indirectly) their reelection efforts, state legislative candidates need party workers and, increasingly, the party's financial support and technological resources at election time.

Governors in many states hold greater influence over their parties' organizations and legislators than do presidents. Many governors have more patronage positions at their command than the president, and these material rewards and incentives give governors added clout with party activists and office holders. In addition, tradition in some states permits the governor to play a part in selecting the legislature's committee chairs and party floor leaders, and some state executives even attend and help direct the party legislative caucuses, activities no president would ever undertake.



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WHAT DOES A NONPARTISAN PRESIDENT LOOK LIKE?

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a former military general and World War II hero, is as close to a nonpartisan president as modern America has ever had. Though he was very popular personally, his moderate agenda and unwillingness to work with party leaders translated into little support for the Republican Party.

The influence of party organizations in state judiciaries varies tremendously. Some states have taken dramatic actions to ensure that their Supreme Court judges can make independent decisions. Many of these states use a selection system called the Missouri Plan, which relies on a nonpartisan judicial nominating commission, to choose appointed state court judges. But, in other states (and in many local judicial elections), Supreme Court judges run as party candidates. These partisan elections have received a great deal of criticism in recent years, as they have become more costly and personal. Many commentators argue that they are contrary to the ideal of blind justice.

□ Furthering Unity, Linkage, and Accountability

Parties, finally, are the glue that holds together the disparate elements of the U.S. governmental and political apparatus. The Framers designed a system that divides and subdivides power, making it possible to preserve individual liberty but difficult to coordinate and initiate action in a timely fashion. Parties help compensate for this drawback by linking the branches of government. Although rivalry between the branches is inevitable, the partisan and ideological affiliations of the leaders of each branch constitute a common basis for cooperation, as the president and his fellow party members in Congress usually demonstrate daily. Not surprisingly, presidential candidates and presidents are also inclined to push policies similar to those advocated by their party's congressional leaders.

Even within each branch, party affiliation helps bring together members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, or the president and the department heads in the bureaucracy. Similarly, the division of national, state, and local governments, while always an invitation to struggle, is made more workable by the intersecting party relationships that exist among office holders at all levels. Party affiliation, in other words, provides a basis for mediation and negotiation laterally among the branches of government and vertically among national, state, and local layers.

party identification

A citizen's personal affinity for a political party, usually expressed by a tendency to vote for the candidates of that party.

The party's linkage function does not end there. Party identification and organization foster communication between the voter and the candidate, as well as between the voter and the office holder. The party connection represents one means of increasing accountability in election campaigns and in government. Candidates on the campaign trail and elected party leaders are required from time to time to account for their performance at party-sponsored forums, nominating primaries, and on Election Day.

Party Identification in the Electorate

11.4 Analyze how political socialization and group affiliations shape party identification.

The party in the electorate—the mass of potential voters who identify with a party label—is a crucial element of the political party. But, in some respects, it is the weakest component of the U.S. political party system. Although **party identification**, or a citizen's attachment to a political party, tends to be a reliable indicator of likely voting choices, the trend is for fewer voters to declare loyalty to a party; 29 percent of voters called themselves independents on Election Day in 2012.

For those Americans who do firmly adopt a party label, their attachment is likely to persist and become a central political reference symbol and perceptual screen. Strong party identifiers are more likely than other Americans to turn out on Election Day. Party activists who not only vote but also contribute time, energy, efforts, and financial support to the party are drawn from the ranks of the strong identifiers.

□ Political Socialization

Not surprisingly, parents are the single greatest influence in establishing a person's first party identification. Parents who are politically active and share the same party identification raise children who will be strong party identifiers, whereas parents without party affiliations or with mixed affiliations produce offspring more likely to be independents.

Early socialization is hardly the last step in an individual's acquisition and maintenance of a party identity; marriage, economic status, and other aspects of adult life can change one's loyalty. Charismatic political personalities, particularly at the national level (such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan), can influence party identification, as can cataclysmic events (the Civil War and the Great Depression are the best examples). Hot-button social issues (for instance, abortion and same-sex marriage), sectionalism, and candidate-oriented politics may also influence party ties.

□ Group Affiliations

Just as individuals vary in the strength of their partisan choice, so do groups vary in the degree to which they identify with the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Variations in party identification are particularly noticeable when geography, gender, race and ethnicity, age, social and economic status, religion, and marital status are examined (see Table 11.2). It is important to note, however, that all of the general party identifications discussed below are broad tendencies that reflect and reinforce the issue and policy positions the two parties take.

GEOGRAPHY Many modern states, particularly in the Mid-Atlantic, Rust Belt, and Southwest, are rather closely contested between the parties; these states are often referred to as "swing states" in electoral politics. Democrats, however, dominate in the Northeast and California, while Republicans are strongest in the South and Midwest. In 2012, the most Democratic states were Hawaii, Maryland, Rhode Island

TABLE 11.2 WHO IDENTIFIES AS A DEMOCRAT? A REPUBLICAN?

		Democratic Identifiers	Independents	Republican Identifiers
Gender	Male	29	38	29
	Female	40	29	27
Race	Black	69	22	5
	Hispanic	32	46	11
	White	26	38	32
Age	18–29	36	38	23
	30–49	32	38	27
	50–64	36	31	29
	65 and over	36	31	29
Income	<20,000	42	34	20
	20,000–29,999	40	34	23
	30,000–49,999	35	34	29
	50,000–74,999	33	33	31
	75,000+	30	40	31
Education	High School or Less	38	40	23
	Some College	33	33	30
	College Graduate	32	36	29
	Postgraduate Degree	39	35	25
Religion	White Evangelical	17	27	52
	White Mainline Protestant	28	35	34
	Jewish	49	28	19
Ideology	Conservative	18	28	51
	Moderate	36	42	18
	Liberal	64	29	5

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because the category “Other/don’t know” is omitted. In this survey, this category was always 2–5 percent of respondents.

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, *A Closer Look at the Parties in 2012*, August 23, 2012, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/08/23/a-closer-look-at-the-parties-in-2012/>.

and New York. In contrast, the most Republican states were Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, and North Dakota.¹³

GENDER Some political scientists argue that the difference in the way men and women vote first emerged in 1920, when newly enfranchised women registered overwhelmingly as Republicans. Not until the 1980 presidential election, however, did scholars observe a noticeable and possibly significant gender gap in party identification. This pattern continues to play an important role in politics. Today, 40 percent of women identify as Democrats, and 27 percent as Republicans.

Most researchers, however, now explain the gender gap by focusing not on the Republican Party’s difficulties in attracting female voters, but rather on the Democratic Party’s inability to attract the votes of men. As one study notes, the gender gap exists because of the lack of support for the Democratic Party among men and the corresponding male preference for the Republican Party. These differences stem largely from divergences of opinions about social welfare and military issues.¹⁴

RACE AND ETHNICITY Race is a significant indicator of party identification. African Americans, for example, provide approximately 25 percent of the Democratic Party’s



WHICH POLITICAL PARTY DO HISPANICS SUPPORT?

Hispanic voters increasingly support Democratic candidates, although this may vary with an individual's country of origin. Here, a Hispanic delegate to the Democratic National Convention shows her support for President Barack Obama.

support in presidential elections. The advantage they offer the Democrats in party affiliation dwarfs the edge given to either party by any other significant segment of the electorate, and their proportion of strong Democrats is three times that of whites.

Hispanics supplement African Americans as Democratic stalwarts; by more than two-thirds, Hispanics prefer the Democratic Party. Some divisions do exist by country of origin. Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans have historically aligned with the Democratic Party. Although Cuban Americans have historically identified as Republican, during the last five years they have shifted toward the Democratic Party. Asian Americans also tend to be divided based on country of origin, but higher-income Asian Americans tend to identify as Republican.

As the Hispanic population has increased rapidly in recent years and now exceeds that of African Americans, Republicans have fought to make inroads with Hispanic voters. During the 2012 Republican National Convention, for example, the party showcased a number of visible Hispanic leaders, including Senator Marco Rubio (FL) and Governor Susana Martinez (NM). Still, debates and proposals regarding immigration and the DREAM Act continue to reveal how difficult it is for Republicans to appeal to a potentially supportive new voting bloc while also satisfying their conservative base with immigration restrictions and increased enforcement.

AGE Individuals in the same age range are likely to have experienced similar events during the period in which they formed their party loyalties. Today, middle-aged voters disproportionately favor the Republican Party. These voters, often at the height of their career and, consequently, their earning potential, tend to favor the low taxes championed by Republicans.¹⁵ In contrast, the Democratic Party's more liberal positions on social issues tend to resonate with today's moderate but socially progressive young adults. The nation's oldest voters, who were alive during the Great Depression, also tend to favor the Democratic Party and its support for social insurance programs.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS Occupation, income, and education are closely related, so many of the same partisan patterns appear in all three classifications.

Higher-income Americans are more likely to affiliate with Republicans, and lower-income Americans are more likely to identify with Democrats. The same pattern is generally evident with regard to education, although those with advanced degrees tend to be Democrats.¹⁶ The GOP remains predominant among executives, professionals, and white-collar workers, whereas the Democrats lead substantially among trial lawyers, educators, and blue-collar workers. Labor union members are also Democrats by nearly two to one. Women who do not work outside the home tend to be conservative and favor the Republicans.

RELIGION Religion can be evaluated based on both denomination and religiosity, or how frequently an individual engages in activities such as prayer and church attendance. With respect to religious denomination, Catholic and, even more so, Jewish voters tend to favor the Democratic Party, while Mormons and white Protestants—especially Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians—align with the Republicans. The Republican Party has also made gains among the most religious identifiers of all sects; between 2008 and 2011, the Pew Research Center observed a 9 percent increase in support for the GOP among both practicing Catholics and Jews. These increases may reflect the party's visible support for socially conservative viewpoints, including opposition to abortion and contraception.¹⁷

MARITAL STATUS Even marital status reveals something about partisan affiliation. People who are married tend to favor the Republican Party, while single people who have never married tend to identify with the Democratic Party. Taken as a group, the widowed lean toward the Democrats, probably because these voters are older and there are many more widows than widowers; here, the age and gender gaps are again expressing themselves. The divorced and the separated, who may be experiencing economic hardship, appear to be more liberal than the married population.¹⁸

Minor Parties in the American Two-Party System

11.5 Evaluate the role of minor parties in the American two-party system.

To this point, our discussion has focused largely on the activities of the two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. This is not an entirely complete picture of the political system. Although minor parties face a challenge in surviving and thriving in the American political system, these parties continue to make important contributions to the political process, revealing sectional and political divides and bringing to light new issues and ideas.

□ The Formation and Role of Minor Parties

The decision to form a political party can be a difficult one. Most parties are rooted in social movements made up of activists and groups whose primary goal is to influence public policy. Parties aim to accomplish the same goal, but they also run candidates for elective office. Making this transition requires a substantial investment of financial and human resources, as well as a broad base of political support to compete in elections. Throughout history, therefore, very few social movements have evolved into parties. Those that have succeeded in this mission have had the support of political elites and uninhibited access to the ballot.

For example, during the 1840s and 1850s, the Liberty and Free Soil Parties formed around the abolition issue. The parties' leaders were well-educated Northerners who accounted for a significant proportion of the electorate at the time. In contrast, when civil rights issues emerged on the agenda again in the early twentieth century, it was through a

Take a Closer Look

Although minor parties have enjoyed only limited electoral success in the United States, they have been successful in bringing to the table many new issues ripe for consideration. In recent elections, the Libertarian Party, the United States' third largest and fastest growing party, has enjoyed this type of success. Though its candidates have won few electoral victories, the party's emphases on small government, laissez-faire economics, and personal liberty have received increasing attention from supporters of the Tea Party movement. Republican presidential candidate and Representative Ron Paul also advocated for many of these positions.

The Libertarian Party's platform seeks an "America at peace with the world" and supports an end to "the current U.S. government policy of foreign intervention, including military and economic aid."

The Libertarian Party's platform argues that all individuals should enjoy their natural rights. It further argues that "sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity should have no impact on the government's treatment of individuals."



The Libertarian Party advocates for personal liberty in all aspects of life. The platform states that "individuals should be free to make choices for themselves and to accept responsibility for the consequences of the choices they make."

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How are the Libertarian Party's ideas similar to and different from those of the Republican and Democratic Parties?
2. Why do so few Americans know about and understand the positions of minor parties such as the Libertarian Party?
3. Can the Libertarian Party become a major party in the United States? What changes would be necessary to the U.S. electoral system in order for this to happen?

TABLE 11.3 WHAT ARE SOME OF AMERICA'S MINOR PARTIES?

Minor Party	Year Founded	Primary Purpose
Liberty/Free-Soil	1840	Abolition of slavery
Prohibition	1880	Prohibition of alcohol sale and consumption
Progressive/Bull Moose	1912	Factionalism in Republican Party; gave Theodore Roosevelt the platform to run for the presidency
American Independent	1968	States' rights; opposition to desegregation
Libertarian	1971	Opposition to governmental intervention in economic and social policy
Reform	1996	Economic issues; tax reform, national debt, federal deficit
Green	2000	Environmentalism and social justice

social movement led by activists in groups such as the NAACP. One reason why this social movement did not become a party was the fact that black voters in areas where segregation had the most significant impact were largely denied the franchise and thus could not have voted for potential party candidates. The ability of the current Tea Party movement to develop into a full-fledged third party will hinge on many of these same variables. To date, it appears the group has become a faction—albeit highly vocal—within the larger Republican Party. It has, however, had success in controlling the party's agenda and demanding budget cuts.

Minor parties based on causes neglected by the major parties have significantly affected American politics (see Table 11.3). These parties find their roots in sectionalism (as did the Southern states' rights Dixiecrats, who broke away from the Democrats in 1948); in economic protest (such as the agrarian revolt that fueled the Populists, an 1892 prairie-states party); in specific issues (such as the Green Party's support of the environment); in ideology (the Socialist, Communist, and Libertarian Parties are examples); and in appealing, charismatic personalities (Theodore Roosevelt's affiliation with the Bull Moose Party in 1912 is perhaps the best example).

Minor parties achieve their greatest successes when they incorporate new ideas or alienated groups or nominate attractive candidates as their standard-bearers. They also thrive when declining trust in the two major political parties plagues the electorate.

□ Barriers to Minor-Party Success

The ability of the two major parties to evolve and co-opt politically popular issues of minor parties is one explanation for the short duration of third parties. When Democratic or Republican candidates adopt the issues that gave rise to a third party, they are able to secure the allegiance of the minority candidate's supporters. For example, the Republicans of the 1970s absorbed many of the states' rights planks of George Wallace's 1968 presidential bid. More recently, both major parties have also attempted to attract independent voters by sponsoring reforms to the governmental process.

Scholars have pointed out that third parties also are hampered by the single-member-district plurality election system in the United States. Many other countries use **proportional representation**, a voting system that apportions legislative seats according to the percentage of votes a political party receives. However, the United States has a single-member, plurality electoral system, often referred to as a **winner-take-all system**, or a system in which the party that receives at least one more vote than any other party wins the election. To paraphrase the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, finishing first is not everything, it is the *only* thing in U.S. politics; placing second, even by one vote, doesn't count. The winner-take-all system encourages the grouping of interests into as few parties as possible (the democratic minimum being two).

The Electoral College system and the rules of public financing for American presidential elections also make it difficult for minor parties to seriously compete. Not only must a candidate win popular votes, but the candidate also must win majorities in states that allow him or her to gain a total of 270 electoral votes.

proportional representation

A voting system that apportions legislative seats according to the percentage of the vote won by a particular political party.

winner-take-all system

An electoral system in which the party that receives at least one more vote than any other party wins the election.

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polarization

The presence of increasingly conflicting and divided viewpoints between the Democratic and Republican Parties.

Toward Reform: United or Divided?

11.6 Assess party polarization in the modern era.

In recent years, the existence, consequences, and causes of partisan **polarization**, or the increasingly conflicting and divided viewpoints of the Democratic and Republican Parties, has incited much debate. In this section, we detail each of these factors, making a careful distinction between elite polarization, or divergence among members of the party in government and the most engaged citizens, and mass polarization, or division among members of the general public.¹⁹

□ Causes of Polarization

Scholars have noted increasing partisan divisions between members of Congress over the past two decades. As northern liberal Republicans, and particularly, southern conservative Democrats have become increasingly rare, the parties have retreated in two separate directions, with the Republican caucus appearing to move rightward and their Democratic counterparts appearing to shift to the left. These changes have created a Congress with a bimodal distribution of members' ideologies, and few members left in the center. It is, however, important to note that the parties are not equally polarized—Republicans in Congress are further right and more homogeneous than their Democratic counterparts. It is also worth noting that partisan rancor is not just a current phenomenon; some scholars argue that every major transformation in American politics, beginning with the contest between Hamilton's Federalists and Jefferson's Republicans, has included intense partisanship.

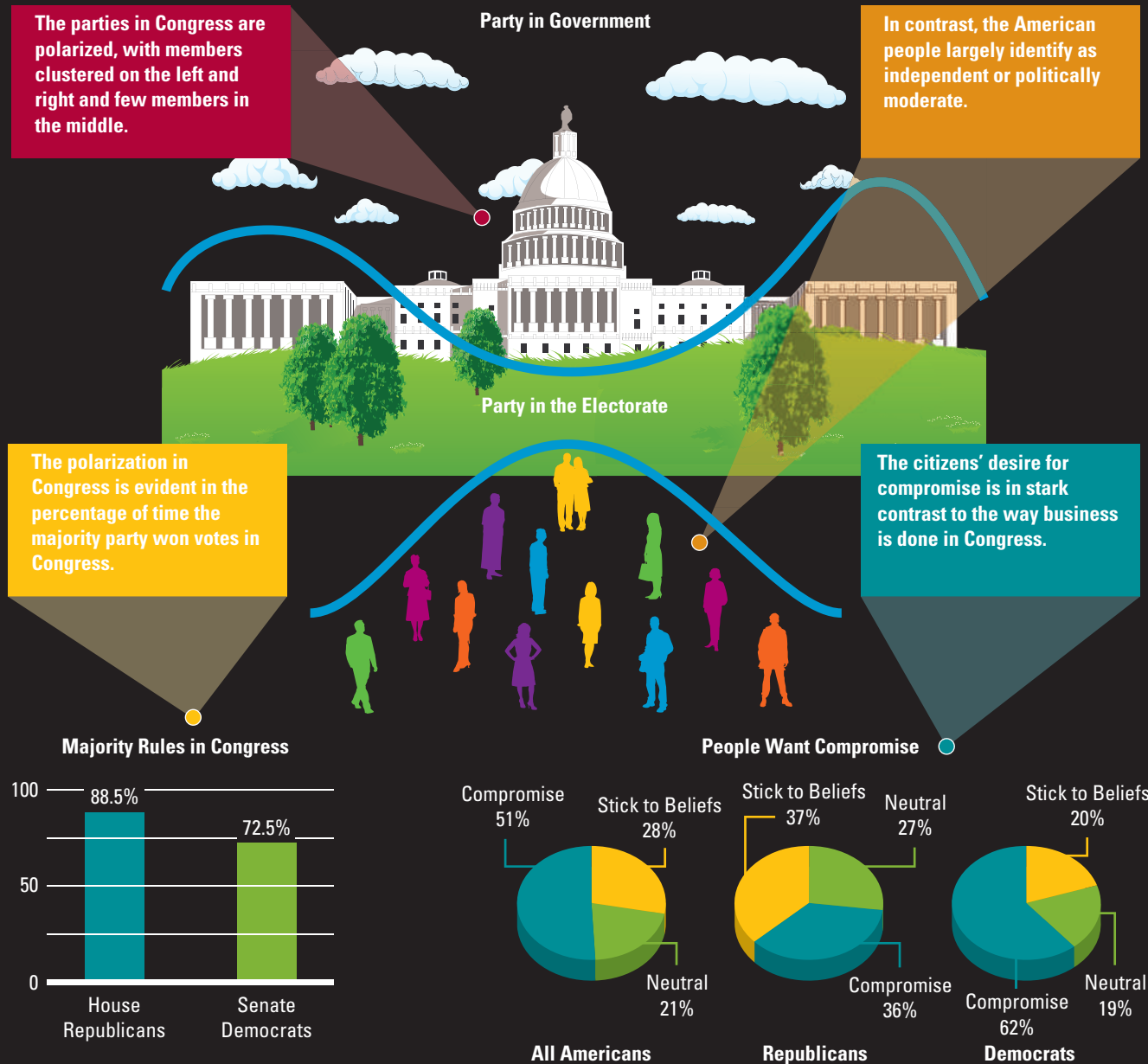
What is less clear is whether the American people are also polarized. Some scholars assert that bipartisanship remains elusive, not because of politicians in the Capitol, but because of the American public and its fixation on party membership and loyalty.²⁰ Other scholars argue that the complex realignment of parties along different issues, the decline of civic responsibility and good citizenship, and the segregation of citizens into "lifestyle enclaves" where they no longer live around people who share differing views are sources of polarization. Still others take a more middle-of-the-road approach, asserting that polarization has electoral roots, but also that the reactions to members of Congress have amplified the effect of polarization in the electoral environment.

Most Americans still identify as politically moderate. However, the issue positions of the most politically active citizens seem to suggest a growing division among this segment of the electorate. Some scholars contend that this is not polarization—a term carrying a negative connotation—but, rather, party sorting, which means that parties develop clear issue positions that more efficiently and effectively cue the electorate to identify with a particular label.

To some degree, a major cause of our belief that we live in a polarized nation is our own perception. This perception is fed by the 24-hour and Internet news cycles, which constantly need to sell a story to fill the voluminous airtime and attract viewers in a market-driven media environment. The idea that we might live in a world of "red states" and "blue states" is one such story that has provided the media with much fodder for discussion. The perception of deep division not only in Congress but in the mass electorate also has its roots in changing political campaigns. As parties have increasingly used microtargeting to identify partisans, we have created stereotypes of party identifiers in our heads.

Are American Political Parties Polarized?

In the past ten years, scholars have hotly debated the question of whether American political parties are polarized. As we have argued in the text, the answer to this question appears to vary based on our definition of the political party. The ideological distribution of the party in government and the party in the electorate varies dramatically, as shown below. These differences may have consequences for how Americans view the political parties.



SOURCE: Data from Gallup, www.gallup.com, and CQ Roll Call, media.cq.com.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- How does the party in government compare to the party in the electorate? Why do you think these differences exist?
- How does polarization affect the way that citizens view the Democratic and Republican Parties? What are the consequences of these views?
- Will growing polarization in Congress eventually translate into greater polarization in the electorate? Why or why not?

Finally, polarization between the parties may be rooted in the clearer articulation of party positions on a range of issues, from national defense and foreign policy to economic affairs to so-called cultural “wedge issues.” These cultural issues—summarized by some commentators as “guns, God, and gays”—include such matters as religious freedom, same-sex marriage, and abortion and contraception, on which the parties have taken increasingly opposing viewpoints in recent years. Today, for example, being pro-choice on abortion is a litmus test for Democratic candidates in most areas of the country.

□ Consequences of Polarization

Perhaps just as critical as understanding the sources of partisan rancor is understanding its implications for democratic governance. The consequences of the growing division between the two parties in government have been on clear display in recent Congresses. These Congresses have been among the least productive in history. The lack of moderate members, lower incentives to compromise and cross party lines, and the close margins by which the parties have held both the House and the Senate have made it nearly impossible to enact important policy proposals. Furthermore, as some scholars have noted, polarization might also undermine the integrity of governmental institutions and contribute to a decline in unbiased information.

The consequences of potential polarization in the electorate, however, are less obvious. Some scholars have suggested that forcing the generally moderate American people to choose between two clearly divided political parties will lead to increased political apathy, less trust in government, and lower rates of participation and engagement in politics and government. Other scholars charge that polarization has positive outcomes, including more meaningful choices for the electorate between the parties, parties that are more attentive to their bases, higher voter turnout in elections, and greater engagement in campaign activism. Empirical evidence to date has been mixed. But, as Congress grows increasingly divided, monitoring the electorate for changes in partisan identification, issue positions, and political activity becomes significant for the health of American democracy.

Review the Chapter

Roots of the Two-Party System

11.1 Trace the evolution of the two-party system in the United States, p. 306.

Political parties have been a presence in American politics since the nation's infancy. The Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans were the first two parties to emerge in the late 1700s. In 1832, the Democratic Party (which succeeded the Democratic-Republicans) held the first national presidential nomination convention, and the Whig Party formed around opposition to President Andrew Jackson. The Democratic and Whig Parties strengthened for several years until the issue of slavery led to the Whig Party's gradual dissolution and replacement by the Republican Party (formed by anti-slavery activists to push for the containment of slavery). From 1860 to this day, the same two political parties, Democratic and Republican, have dominated elections in the United States.

The Organization of American Political Parties

11.2 Outline the structure of American political parties at the national, state, and local levels, p. 310.

The national party organization sits at the top of the party system. A chairperson leads the national party, and every four years the national committee of each party organizes a national convention to nominate a candidate for the presidency. The state and local parties are the heart of party activism, as virtually all government regulation of political parties falls to the states. The state governing body, generally called the state central or executive committee, supervises the collection of local party organizations.

Activities of American Political Parties

11.3 Identify the functions performed by American political parties, p. 314.

For over 200 years, the two-party system has served as the mechanism by which American society organizes and resolves social and political conflict. The two major parties provide vital services to society, including running candidates for office, proposing and formulating policy, organizing government, and furthering unity, linkage, and accountability.

Party Identification in the Electorate

11.4 Analyze how political socialization and group affiliations shape party identification, p. 320.

Most American voters have a personal affinity for a political party, which summarizes their political views and preferences and is expressed by a tendency to vote for the candidates of that party. This party identification begins with political socialization; parents are the single greatest influence on a person's political leanings. However, different group affiliations, including geographic region, gender, race and ethnicity, age, social and economic factors, religion, and marital status, also affect individuals' loyalties to political parties, and these may change over the course of a lifetime.

Minor Parties in the American Two-Party System

11.5 Evaluate the role of minor parties in the American two-party system, p. 323.

Minor parties have often significantly affected American politics. Ideas of minor parties that become popular with the electorate are often co-opted by one of the two major parties eager to secure supporters. Minor parties make progress when the two major parties fail to incorporate new ideas or alienated groups or if they do not nominate attractive candidates for office. However, many of the institutional features of American politics, including the winner-take-all system and the Electoral College, encourage the grouping of interests into as few parties as possible.

Toward Reform: United or Divided?

11.6 Assess party polarization in the modern era, p. 326.

In recent years, scholars have debated the presence and origins of growing polarization between the two political parties. Though the cause of these growing divisions can in part be attributed to our own perceptions of polarization and the 24-hour news cycle, clear differences also exist between the parties' positions both in government and in the most active segments of the electorate. The divide between the two parties can make it difficult to create policy in American political institutions.

Learn the Terms



Study and Review the Flashcards

candidate-centered politics, p. 308
critical election, p. 309
delegate, p. 312
national convention, p. 311
national party platform, p. 316

party identification, p. 320
party realignment, p. 309
polarization, p. 326
political machine, p. 307
political party, p. 306

proportional representation, p. 325
secular realignment, p. 309
superdelegate, p. 312
think tank, p. 314
winner-take-all system, p. 325

Test Yourself



Study and Review the Practice Tests

- Who was the first president to win election as the nominee of a truly national, popularly based political party?
 - Thomas Jefferson
 - Andrew Jackson
 - John Adams
 - James Monroe
 - Andrew Johnson
- Which of the following was true of the Golden Age of political parties?
 - Parties were unstable.
 - There was very little political activity in local communities.
 - Very few candidates ran for office.
 - Party organizations dominated local and state governments.
 - Citizens were dissatisfied with national party organizations.
- Which of the following is NOT a way that the chair of the national committee comes to the position?
 - Selected by the sitting president
 - Chosen by the national committee when the election has ended and the party has been defeated
 - Picked by the newly nominated presidential candidate
 - Nominated by the vice president with presidential approval
 - None of the above
- What is/are the ultimate governing body/bodies for political parties?
 - The national chair
 - Identifiers and voters
 - The national committee
 - Congressional and district committees
 - State central committees and state conventions
- Which of the following is NOT a function performed by modern American political parties?
 - Organizing Congress
 - Job creation
 - Running candidates for office
 - Furthering unity, linkage, and accountability
 - Formulating policy
- What is the most powerful predictor of congressional call voting?
 - Tenure in office
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Party affiliation
 - Race/ethnicity
- What is party identification?
 - A citizen's affinity for a political party
 - A rule that requires a citizen to vote for their party's candidates after they have registered as a member of that party
 - The number of times a person has voted for a particular party
 - The chance an independent will choose to vote for a certain party in a presidential election
 - How often a citizen votes in his or her party's primary elections
- Which of the following groups of people tend to favor the Republican Party?
 - Catholics
 - Women
 - Young people
 - Cuban Americans
 - Northerners

9. Why do some observers say minor parties benefit the American political system?

- a. Minor parties often win election to office and lead to greater diversity in politics.
- b. Minor parties increase voter turnout.
- c. Minor parties promote change in electoral rules.
- d. Minor parties can bring attention to new issue areas.
- e. Minor parties lead to compromise between the Democrats and the Republicans.

10. Where are American political parties most polarized?

- a. Electorate
- b. Supreme Court
- c. Local party organizations
- d. Executive branch
- e. Legislative branch