

CHAPTER 14

Political Parties

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: **Political parties** are voluntary associations of people who seek to control the government through common principles based upon peaceful and legal actions, such as the winning of elections. Political parties, along with interest groups, the media, and elections serve as a linkage mechanism that brings together the people and the government while holding the government responsible for its actions. Political parties differ from interest groups in that interest groups do not nominate candidates for office.

Key Terms

political parties
party in the electorate
party in government
party in organization
two-party system
single-member districts

New Deal coalition
divided government
gridlock
dealignment
realignment
national chairperson

soft money
straight ticket
candidate centered
campaigns

Roles of Political Parties



- **party in the electorate**—All of the people who associate themselves with one of the political parties.
- **party in government**—All of the appointed and elected officials at the national, state, and local levels who represent the party as members; office holders.
- **party in organization**—All of the people at the various levels of the party organization who work to maintain the strength of the party between elections, help raise money, and organize the conventions and party functions.

Party Systems

One-Party System

In a one-party system only one party exists or has a chance of winning elections. Generally, membership is not voluntary and those who do belong to the party represent a small portion of the population. Party leaders must approve candidates for political office, and voters have no real choice. The result is dictatorial government.

Two-Party System

In a **two-party system** there may be several political parties but only two major political parties compete for power and dominate elections. Minor parties generally have little effect on most elections, especially at the national level. The Electoral College system makes it difficult for third-party candidates to affect presidential elections. It would be difficult for a third-party presidential candidate to actually win a state, which is necessary to capture electoral votes. Systems that operate under the two-party system usually have a general consensus, or agreement, among citizens about the basic principles of government, even though the parties often differ on the means of carrying them out. The use of **single-member districts** promotes the two-party system. Voters are given an “either-or” choice, simplifying decisions and the political process. The two-party system tends to enhance governmental stability; because both parties want to appeal to the largest number of voters, they tend to avoid extremes in ideology.

Multi-Party System

Multi-party systems exist when several major parties and a number of minor parties compete in elections, and any of the parties stands a good chance of winning. This type of system can be composed of from 4 to 20 different parties, based on a particular region, ideology, or class position, and is often found in European nations, as well as in other democratic societies. The multi-party system is usually the result of a proportional representation voting system rather than one with single-member districts. The idea behind multi-party systems is to give voters meaningful choices. This does not always occur because of two major problems: In many elections, no party has a clear majority of the vote, and not receiving a majority forces the sharing of power by several parties (coalitions). The multi-party system tends to promote instability in government, especially when coalition governments are formed.

What Do Political Parties Do?

- *Recruit candidates*—Find candidates interested in running for public office, especially if no incumbent is running.
- *Nominate and support candidates for office*—Help raise money and run candidate campaigns through the party organization.
- *Establish party platforms*—Develop and support the goals of party members through an established platform.
- *Mobilize and educate the electorate*—Inform the voters about the candidates and encourage voters to participate in the election.
- *Organize the government*—The organization of Congress and state legislatures is based on political party controls (majority vs. minority party); political appointments are often made based on political party affiliation.

Party Identification and Membership

Membership in American political parties is voluntary. There are no dues to pay; membership is based on party identification. If you believe you are a member of a particular political party, then you are. Most states require citizens to identify their political party when registering to vote. Most people choose to belong to a political party that shares their views on issues or the role of government. Several factors may influence party identification:



- ideology
- education
- income
- occupation
- race or ethnicity
- gender
- religion
- family tradition
- region of the country
- marital status

However, a large number of Americans choose not to join any political party, instead registering as independents.

The Two-Party Tradition in America

The Constitution did not call for political parties, and the Founding Fathers at first did not intend to create them. James Madison, in *Federalist #10*, warned of the divisiveness of “factions.” George Washington was elected president without party labels and in his farewell address warned against the “baneful effects of the spirit of the party.” During the process for ratification of the Constitution, Federalists and Anti-Federalists conflicted over ideals concerning the proper role of government. This conflict resulted in the development of the first political parties: the Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans, or Democratic-Republicans as they were later called.

Why a Two-Party Tradition?

Although there have been numerous minor parties throughout its history, why has the United States maintained the two-party tradition?

- *historical roots*—British heritage, Federalist, and Anti-Federalist divisions.
- *electoral system*—Single-member districts mean that only one representative is chosen from each district (one winner per office).
- *election laws*—Vary from state to state, which makes it difficult for minor parties to get on the ballot in many states.

Rise of Political Parties: Party Development (1789–1800)

The earliest political parties began to develop under the administration of George Washington. Alexander Hamilton, secretary of the treasury, supported a strong national government; his followers became known as Federalists. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson supported states’ rights and a less powerful national government. The clash between these two individuals

and their supporters led to the development of political parties. In the election of 1796, Jefferson challenged John Adams, the Federalist candidate, for the presidency but lost. By 1800 Jefferson was able to rally his supporters and win the presidency.

Democratic Domination (1800–1860)

The Democratic-Republicans dominated the government from 1800 to 1824, when they split into factions. The faction led by Andrew Jackson, the Jacksonian Democrats or Democrats, won the presidency in 1828. The major opposition to the Democrats during this time was the Whig Party. Although the Whigs were a powerful opposition party in the U.S. Congress, they were able to win the presidency only twice, in 1840 with the victory of William Henry Harrison and in 1848 with that of Zachary Taylor. From that election until the election of 1860, Democrats dominated American politics. The Democratic Party became known as the party of the “common man,” encouraging popular participation, and helping to bring about an expansion of suffrage to all adult white males.

Republican Domination (1860–1932)

The Republican Party began as a third party, developed from a split in the Whig Party. The Whigs had been the major opposition to the Democrats. By 1860 the Whig Party had disappeared and the Republican Party had emerged as the second major party. The Republican Party was composed mostly of former members of other political parties, appealing to commercial and antislavery groups. The Republican Party was successful in electing Abraham Lincoln president in 1860, and by the end of the Civil War had become a dominant party. Sometimes called the Grand Old Party or GOP, the Republican Party often controlled both the presidency and Congress.

Return of Democrats (1932–1968)

With the onset of the Depression, new electoral coalitions were formed and the Republicans lost their domination of government. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was able to unite blacks, city dwellers, blue-collar (labor union) workers, Catholics, Jews, and women to create a voting bloc known as the **New Deal coalition**. The election of 1932 brought the Democrats back to power as the dominant party in American politics. Roosevelt was elected to the presidency an unprecedented four times. From 1932 to 1968 only two Republican presidents (Eisenhower and Nixon) were elected. Not until 1994 did the Republicans gain control of both houses of Congress.

Divided Government (1968–Present)

Since 1968 **divided government** has characterized American institutions, a condition in which one political party controls the presidency and the opposing party controls one or both houses of Congress. This division creates a potential **gridlock** when opposing parties and interests often block each other’s proposals, creating a political stalemate. In the election of 2000, George W. Bush won the presidency and the Republican Party won control of the House of Representatives and Senate (until Jim Jeffords changed affiliation to Independent). In the mid-term election of 2002, the Republicans again gained control of the executive and legislative branches, creating a unified government. In the 2006 off-year election, the Democrats won control of both houses of Congress, returning divided government to U.S. politics. In the 2008 elections, the Democrats won control of the presidency and both houses of Congress, although few predicted that this would permanently end the era of divided government.



KEY IDEA

Electoral Dealignment

When significant numbers of voters no longer support a particular political party, **dealignment** has occurred. Often, those voters identify as independents and believe they owe no loyalty to any particular political party.

Electoral Realignment

Historically, as voting patterns have shifted and new coalitions of party supporters have formed, electoral **realignment** has occurred. Several elections can be considered realigning elections (**critical elections**), where the dominant party loses power and a new dominant party takes its place. The elections of 1860 and 1932 are examples. Many consider the 1980 election in this light; the long-term impact of the 2008 and 2010 elections will be studied in the future.

Third or Minor Parties



Although the Republican and Democratic parties have dominated the political scene, there have been minor, or third, parties throughout U.S. history. Minor parties usually have great difficulty in getting candidates elected to office, although they have been more successful at the state and local levels. A few minor party candidates have been elected to Congress, but no minor party candidate has ever been elected president. The limited successes of minor parties is attributed to obstacles that exist within the electoral process.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS	ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS
Single-member districts	“Wasted vote” syndrome
Winner-take-all electoral system	Support by voters for moderate policies
State ballot access laws	
Federal funding guidelines	

Minor parties have been instrumental in providing important reforms that have been adopted by the major parties. Success rather than failure often brings an end to minor parties, as the major parties often adopt popular reforms or ideas, especially if they appeal to the voters.

Types of Third Parties

Some third parties have been permanent, running candidates in every election; however, many third parties disappear after only a few elections. Several types of minor parties have emerged:

- *ideological*—Those based on a particular set of social, political, or economic beliefs (communist, socialist, libertarian).
- *splinter/personality/factional*—Those that have split away from one of the major parties; usually formed around a strong personality who does not win the party nomination; may disappear when that leader steps aside (Theodore Roosevelt’s “Bull Moose” Progressive, Strom Thurmond’s States’ Rights, George Wallace’s American Independent).
- *single issue*—Parties that concentrate on a single public policy matter (Free Soil, Right to Life, Prohibition).
- *protest*—Usually rooted in periods of economic discontent; may be sectional in nature (Greenback, Populist); some observers place the “Tea Party,” which supported many candidates in the 2010 congressional elections, in this category.

Structure and Organization of Political Parties



A political party must have an effective organization to accomplish its goals. Both of the major parties are organized in much the same manner. Both parties are highly decentralized, or fragmented. The party of the president is normally more solidly united than the opposition. The president is automatically considered the party leader, while the opposition is often without a single strong leader. Usually one or more members of Congress are seen as the opposition leaders.

National Convention

The national convention serves as the party's national voice. Party delegates meet in the summer of every fourth year to select the party's candidates for president and vice president. They are also responsible for writing and adopting the party's platform, which describes the policy beliefs of the party.

National Committee

The national committee manages the political party's business between conventions. They are responsible for selecting the convention site, establishing the rules of the convention, publishing and distributing party literature, and helping the party raise campaign contributions.

National Chairperson

The party's national committee, with the consent of the party's presidential nominee, elects the **national chairperson**. The chairperson is responsible for directing the work of the national committee from their national headquarters in Washington, D.C. The chairperson is involved in fundraising, recruiting new party members, encouraging unity within the party, and helping the party's presidential nominee win election.

Congressional Campaign Committee

Each party has a committee in the House of Representatives and Senate that works to ensure the election or reelection of the party's candidates by raising funds and determining how much money and support each candidate will receive. The committee often works to defeat an opposition party member who appears weak and might be open to defeat.

State and Local Organization

State law largely determines state and local party organization. Differences exist from state to state; however, state and local parties are structured in much the same way as the national party organization. Generally, state parties today are more organized and better funded than in previous years. As a result of **soft money**, money that is distributed from the national political party organization and that does not have to be reported under the Federal Election Campaign Act (1971) or its amendments, state parties have become more dependent on the national party organization and are subject to their influence. In 2002, however, the use of soft money was significantly restricted by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, also known as the McCain-Feingold Act. The Supreme Court, in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010), ruled that limiting the ability of businesses, unions, and other groups to fund their own efforts to elect or defeat candidates for office is unconstitutional.

Political parties must consider election laws, as well as the political and financial realities under which campaigns function. Campaign finance laws restrict how political parties nominate candidates and raise and spend funds.

Future of Political Parties

The future of political parties in the United States is uncertain. Political parties must modify their policies and present their messages in ways that will appeal to the various demographics of the voters. In recent decades, political parties have been in decline. This decline may be attributed to several factors:



KEY IDEA

- *third-party challenges*—In recent elections third-party challengers have taken votes from the major candidates, lessening their ability to win a majority of the vote.
- *loss of support by party loyalists*—The number of independent voters has increased.
- *increase in split-ticket voting*—Many voters no longer vote a **straight ticket** (only for candidates of one political party) but rather split their vote among candidates from more than one party.
- *lack of perceived differences between the parties*—Voters often believe there are no major differences in the parties or their candidates.
- *party reforms*—Changes within the parties themselves to create greater diversity and openness have allowed for greater conflict within some parties.
- *methods of campaigning*—New technologies have allowed candidates to become more independent of parties and more directly involved with the voters. The role political parties play in the nomination process is weakened as candidates can appeal directly to voters.
- **candidate-centered campaigns**—election campaigns and other political processes in which candidates, not political parties, have most of the initiative and influence.

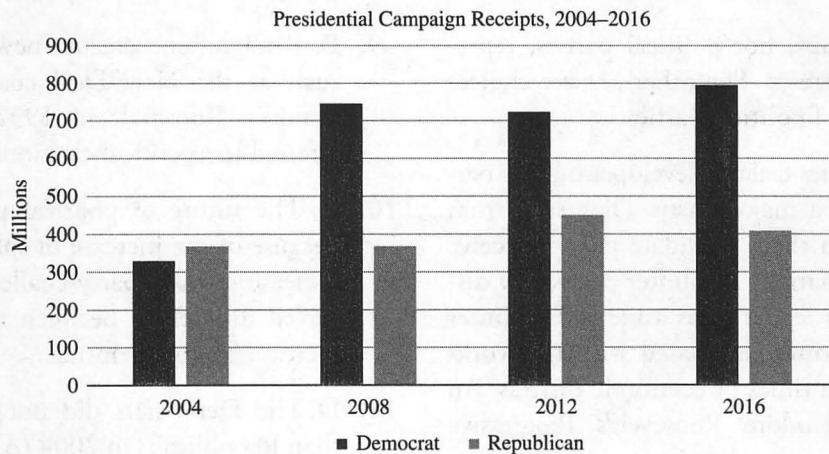
› Review Questions

Multiple-Choice Questions

- Which of the following best describes a multi-party system?
 - Membership in the party of choice is not generally voluntary.
 - There is usually a consensus of agreement as to basic principles of government.
 - Multi-party systems usually give the voters meaningful choices.
 - Parties tend to avoid extreme ideologies.
- Which of the following is NOT a responsibility of a political party?
 - organize the government
 - represent special interests
 - recruit candidates
 - educate voters
- The Republican and Democratic parties have dominated the political scene throughout American history. Minor parties have often surfaced to fill the void left by the major parties. A splinter party can best be characterized by
 - the fact that it is the result of a revolt within a major party
 - the fact that it is usually built around the working-class American
 - the permanence of its presence on the political scene
 - its presence during times of economic discontent
- Minor parties seldom win elections at the national level. Which of the following best describes a factor that prevents minor parties from winning elections?
 - gridlock
 - lack of political efficacy
 - proportional member districts
 - winner-take-all electoral system
- The national convention serves what major purpose for a political party?
 - to allow the people to direct the work of the national committee through a system of national participation
 - to establish the rules of party campaigning
 - to serve as the party's national voice in the selection of the party's candidate
 - to manage the political party's business by the vote of party constituents
- Which of the following best describes state party organizations?
 - They are independent of the national party.
 - They are subject to their own jurisdiction according to party doctrines.
 - They are determined and organized by the national party in accordance with national law.
 - Their funding has been affected by campaign reform law.
- Membership in an American political party is voluntary and based on party identification. Which of the following factors influence party identification?
 - education
 - cost of membership
 - history of the party
 - national law
- Which of the following best describes the structure and organization of a political party?
 - They are close-knit and very organized.
 - They are highly decentralized or fragmented.
 - After election day, they are usually less responsible to the people.
 - The president plays no role in party leadership after his election.

9. The shifting of voting patterns and formation of new coalitions of party supporters is known as
- alignment
 - realignment
 - divided government
 - dealignment
10. The future of political parties in the United States is uncertain due to
- decline of third-party challenges
 - perceived differences between the parties
 - increase in split-ticket voting
 - lack of party reform

Use the graph below to answer question 11.



11. Which of the following best describes presidential campaign receipts as shown in the graph?
- Democrats have raised more money in each election cycle than Republicans.
 - Republicans have not increased the amount of money raised since 2004.
 - The party that raises the largest amount of money wins the election.
 - Democrats have more than doubled the amount of money raised since 2004.

Free-Response Question

12. The future of political parties in the United States is uncertain. In recent decades, political parties have been in decline.
- Define each of the following terms:
 - Dealignment
 - Split-ticket voting
 - For each of the terms above, explain how they have contributed to the decline of political parties.
 - Explain how minor parties contribute to the decline of the major political parties.

> Answers and Explanations

1. C. Multi-party systems tend to give voters a greater variety of major and minor party candidate choices. Party membership is voluntary (A). Parties represent a wide variety of ideologies (D). Multi-party systems often result in government by coalition, indicating a general lack of consensus (B).
2. B. Interest groups, not political parties, represent special interests. The other answer choices represent roles of political parties.
3. A. Splinter parties usually develop around a personality within a major party. They split from that party when their candidate fails to receive the party nomination. A splinter party may disappear when its leader steps aside (C). Splinter parties are not often associated with the working class or with times of economic distress. An example is Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party (B, D).
4. D. Gridlock occurs when opposing parties and interests block each other's proposals, creating a political stalemate (A). The lack of political efficacy occurs when voters lose faith that they can influence politics and public policymaking (B). A proportional member district gives representation in the legislature in proportion to the popular vote of each party (C).
5. C. Two major functions of the national convention are to write the party platform and to nominate the party's candidates for president and vice president. The national committee directs the party (A) and its campaign (B), manages the party's business (D), and promotes party unity and fundraising.
6. D. State parties have often received soft money from the national organization. In 2002, the use of soft money was restricted by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.
7. A. Education is one of the several factors that influence party identification. Other factors include ideology, income, occupation, race or ethnicity, gender, religion, family tradition, geographical region, and marital status.
8. B. Political parties tend to be highly decentralized and fragmented (A), especially at the national level and when no election is immediate. The president is the party leader after his election (D). After election day, political parties continue to communicate with their registered members through party mailings (C).
9. B. Realignment creates new voting coalitions such as the New Deal coalition that elected Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. These are often referred to as critical elections.
10. C. The future of political parties is uncertain because of the increase in split-ticket voting, an increase in third-party challenges, a lack of perceived differences between the parties, and an increase in party reforms.
11. D. The Democrats did not raise more money than Republicans in 2004 (A). Republicans have slightly increased the amount of money raised since 2004 (B). The graph shows no information about who won the elections (C).
12. (A) Dealignment, or a dealigning election, occurs when party loyalty become less important to voters, and significant numbers of voters identify with no political party. Split-ticket voting occurs when voters vote for candidates from more than one political party in the same election.

(B) Dealignment contributes to the decline of political parties because the loss of party voters may mean that party candidates are not going to win elections. Party candidates must appeal to the more moderate voters to attract voters. The party cannot depend on voters automatically supporting their ticket. Split-ticket voting allows voters to vote for members of both political parties, again causing a loss to party candidates in elections and a decline of political parties.

(C) In recent elections, minor party challengers have taken votes from the major candidates, lessening their ability to win a majority of the vote. This contributes to the decline of political parties, because voters may lose interest in the party or election and either vote independent or not at all.

› Rapid Review

- Political parties are voluntary associations of voters.
- Political parties are different from interest groups.
- Political parties serve the party in the electorate, in government, and in organization.
- One-party, two-party, and multi-party systems exist throughout the world.
- Political parties recruit candidates, nominate and support candidates for office, educate the electorate, and organize the government.
- Party identification may be based on several factors.
- The Constitution does not call for political parties. Two parties developed from factions during the ratification process.
- Historically, there have been periods of one-party domination of the government. More recently, divided control of the branches of government has led to potential gridlock.
- Minor parties have existed throughout American history. There are four major types of minor parties: ideological, splinter/personality, single-issue, and protest parties.
- Political parties must have organization to accomplish their goals. American political parties tend to be decentralized and fragmented.
- The future of political parties in America is uncertain; some maintain that the two-party system is in jeopardy.