12 Political Parties

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why does a nation as diverse as the United States sustain only two major parties?
- If the first generation of leaders elected under the Constitution rejected political parties on principle, why did they create them anyway?
- What roles do parties play as organizations? In the electorate? And in government?
- Ninety percent of Americans claim they always vote for the person best suited for the job, regardless of party. Why, then, is party-line voting so prevalent, and why are partisans so polarized?

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

12.1 Describe the origins of political parties and their basic features.

12.2 Summarize the development and evolution of the party systems.

12.3 Discuss the revival of partisanship over the past two decades.

12.4 Assess modern parties' influence and effectiveness as a vehicle for politicians and voters to act collectively within the established institutional framework.

In 2012 after Republican nominee Mitt Romney lost the presidential election to Barack Obama, the head of the party convened a meeting to discuss the future of the party. The group produced the "Growth and Opportunity Project Report" that argued for a more inclusive vision of the party—one that would appeal to voters who were central to America's changing demography. The report was a road map for how the party would win back the White House. But in 2016, it was as if billionaire real estate investor Donald Trump executed a hostile takeover of the party. Trump swept the primaries by tapping into the rich vein of right-wing populist disdain for cultural, corporate, media, and political elites—and won by delivering messages that were opposite what the party's report on growth demanded. Instead of gaining votes from nonwhite voters relative to 2012, Trump actually earned more votes from white Americans than Romney did in 2012.

Along similar lines, in 2016 and 2020, Vermont senator Bernie Sanders challenged moderate Democrats for his party nomination with palpable enthusiasm from young people who

were drawn to his progressive message. Many of these young voters declared that they would not support the party's eventual nominee, Hillary Clinton, in the general election. She lost the Electoral College by seventy-seven thousand votes across three states with many people arguing that Sanders's unwillingness to rally his supporters to Clinton's side cost her votes in key states. In 2020, Sanders was quicker to back the party's nominee, Joe Biden.

The last decade has seen internal disagreements about the direction and future of the parties for both Democrats and Republicans. Yet on Election Day a vast majority of partisans cast ballots for their party's nominee, despite disagreeing with the choice the party made. Do these patterns suggest that parties, as agents of voters and as organizations, are weak or strong?

Anyone who looks at how people vote and evaluate politicians, which candidates win elections, and how the nation is governed will have to conclude that the two major parties rarely have been healthier—despite their internal struggles. A large majority of voters are willing to identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats, and, of these partisans, a very large majority routinely vote loyally for their party's candidates. Rarely does anyone win state or federal office without a major-party nomination; as of 2020, all fifty state governors and all but 2 of the 535 members of Congress were either Democrats or Republicans.* Moreover, party remains the central organizing instrument in government (covered in Chapter 6).

The difficulty in deciding whether parties are weak or strong has deep roots in American history. None of the politicians who designed the Constitution or initially sought to govern under it thought parties were a good idea—including the very people who unwittingly created them. Even in their heyday in the latter part of the nineteenth century, parties never lacked articulate critics or public scorn. Still, parties began to develop soon after the founding of the nation and, in one guise or another, have formed an integral part of the institutional machinery of American politics ever since. The chief reason for their longevity is that the institutions created by the Constitution make the payoffs for using parties—to candidates, voters, and elected officeholders—too attractive to forgo. American political parties represent the continuing triumph of pure political expedience.

Although expedience explains the existence of the parties, the activities that maintain them contribute to successful democratic politics in unforeseen ways. Indeed, the unintended consequences of party work are so important that most political scientists

*Two independents serve in the 116th Congress (2019–2020): Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Senator Angus King of Maine. Justin Amash of Michigan switched from Republican to independent to Libertarian over the course of this Congress. Of the thousands of citizens serving in state legislatures in 2020, only thirty-three (0.44 percent) were neither Democrats nor Republicans.

agree with E. E. Schattschneider, who said that "political parties created democracy and [that] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties."[1] Parties recruit and train leaders, foster political participation, and teach new citizens democratic habits and practices. Beyond that, they knit citizens and leaders together in electoral and policy coalitions and help citizens to hold their elected agents collectively responsible for what the government does. They also help channel and constrain political conflicts, promoting their peaceful resolution. Finally, parties organize the activities of government, facilitating the collective action necessary to translate public preferences into public policy (covered in Chapters 6 and 7). In short, political parties make mass democracy possible.

What exactly is a political party? Scholars have proposed a variety of formal definitions of **political party**. Two of the most prominent stand in clear contrast to each other (except in their conventional sexism). Edmund Burke, an eighteenth-century British politician and political philosopher, defined a party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed."[2] Anthony Downs, in his modern classic *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, defined a party as "a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election."[3] Although rhetorical references to principle are a staple of party politics, the American parties have displayed a shared appetite for public office a good deal more consistently than they have for the pursuit of shared principles.

The Constitution's Unwanted Offspring

The Constitution contains no mention of political parties. During the nation's founding, parties were widely considered to be dangerous to good government and public order, especially in republics. Conventional wisdom inveighed against political parties. Benjamin Franklin spoke out against the "infinite mutual abuse of parties, tearing to pieces the best of characters."* In *Federalist* No. 10 James Madison called them a species of "faction," which, by definition, holds intentions "adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." George Washington used his farewell address to "warn . . . in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party, generally,"† and his successor, John Adams, averred that "a division of the republic into two great parties . . . is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution."‡ Even Thomas Jefferson once declared, "If I could not get to heaven but

*Richard Hofstadter, "The Idea of a Party System," in *After the Constitution: Party Conflict in the New Republic*, ed. Lance Banning (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989), 20.

†Nobel E. Cunningham, ed., *The Making of the American Party System: 1789 to 1809* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 16.

‡Hofstadter, "The Idea of a Party System," 20.

with a party, I would not go there at all."* In such an intellectual climate, no self-respecting leader would openly set out to organize a political party.

The pervasive fear of parties reflected both historical experience and widely held eighteenth-century social beliefs. Factional conflict brought to mind the bloody religious and political wars of England's past and the internal strife that destroyed the republics in ancient Greece and Rome and, later, the city-states of Renaissance Italy. Society was viewed ideally as a harmonious whole, its different parts sharing common interests that all wise and honest authorities would dutifully promote. People in authority saw themselves as agents acting on behalf of the whole community; any organized opposition was therefore misguided at best, treasonous at worst. Accepting the same perspective, rivals justified their opposition by imagining that those in power were betrayers of the community's trust. When the leaders of the new government took the steps that led to the creation of the first political parties, they did not expect or want party competition to become a permanent feature of American politics. Rather, their aim was to have the common good—their version, naturally—prevail and their opponents consigned to oblivion. The first parties were created as temporary expedients.

Expedient they were, but temporary they were not. The First Amendment's guarantees of freedom to speak, write, and assemble ensured that party activities would be legal. Beyond that, the framework of institutions established by the Constitution created powerful incentives for undertaking the activities that created and sustained parties. The design of the Constitution also had a profound effect on the kind of parties that developed. The party system has changed in important ways over the years as political entrepreneurs have adapted parties to new purposes and opportunities, but the basic features that reflect the constitutional system have reappeared in every period.

Incentives for Party Building

The political incentives that spawned parties are transparent. In any system where collective choices are made by voting, organization pays. When action requires winning majorities on a continuing basis in multiple settings, organization is absolutely essential. The Constitution's provisions for enacting laws and electing leaders therefore put a huge premium on building majority alliances across institutions and electoral units. Parties grew out of the efforts of political entrepreneurs to build such alliances and to coordinate the collective activity necessary to gain control of and use the machinery of government. Indeed, much of what modern parties do is organize people and offices all across the country to make it easier to win the next election.

To Build Stable Legislative and Electoral Alliances

The first American parties appeared in Congress when leaders with opposing visions of the nation's future began competing for legislative votes. Passing legislation requires

*Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 123.

majority support in the House and Senate. Any leader wanting to get Congress to act has to identify enough supporters to make up a majority, arrange a common course of action, and then get supporters to show up and vote. To control policy consistently, then, legislative leaders found it advantageous to cultivate a stable group of supporters, forming durable alliances that sharply reduced the transaction costs of negotiating a winning coalition on each new proposal. Because lawmaking powers are shared by three institutions—the presidency, the House, and the Senate—the value of alliances that cross institutional boundaries was also obvious.

Given the diversity of American society, it is impossible for stable alliances of any appreciable size to be built solely on shared interests or values. Rather, alliances are, by necessity, coalitions: participants have to agree to cooperate on action even though they have different, even conflicting reasons for doing so. Holding diverse coalitions together takes continuing political effort, for participants cooperate only as long as it serves their purposes. The sustained organizational effort needed to keep legislative coalitions working in harmony produces legislative parties.

Organized competition for votes in Congress leads directly to organized competition for votes in congressional elections. Coalitions vying for majority status need to recruit like-minded candidates and work to elect them; successful legislative alliances in Washington depend on successful electoral alliances in the states and districts. The organizational work required to negotiate and maintain electoral alliances expands legislative parties into electoral parties.

The presidential selection rules also offer compelling reasons for building electoral alliances across districts and states. The Constitution assigns selection of the president to the Electoral College or, if no candidate wins a majority of electors, to the House of Representatives. Many early observers expected the House to make the choice most of the time, believing that sectional jealousies would keep a majority of electors from uniting behind a single candidate. In fact, sectional rivalries and the competing ambitions of the larger states were constant sources of political friction. The incentives embodied in the rules for selecting the president provide a powerful counterweight to sectionalism, however. If an alliance can recruit and elect people pledged to one candidate in enough states, it can win the presidency. The alternative is to stack the House of Representatives with enough supporters to make the alliance's choice prevail should no candidate win a majority in the Electoral College. In either case, the problem is to sustain cooperation among numerous politicians, often with divergent purposes and interests, across great distances. To the degree that the effort succeeds, the result is a national party organization.

To Mobilize Voters

No matter how well organized, electoral alliances fail if they cannot get enough people to vote for their candidates. The competition for votes motivates alliance leaders to attract voters and get them to the polls. After the adoption of the Constitution, property and other qualifications for (white male) voting were progressively reduced or eliminated (covered in Chapter 11), and the egalitarian spirit of the frontier gradually eclipsed the

habits of deference, even in the older states. As the size of the electorate increased, so did the task of identifying and attracting supporters and getting them to show up at the polls. Whoever could win over these new voters would enjoy a distinct political advantage. The networks of leaders and activists assembled to mobilize electoral support became the first party organizations.

To Develop New Electoral Techniques

Once organized, electoral parties initiated new relationships between voters and elected leaders. Party organizers turned to mass communications—newspapers, pamphlets, public letters, and printed speeches—designed to excite voters with emotional appeals on issues. The temptation to press hot buttons was irresistible when campaigns sought to persuade politically unsophisticated and uninvolved people that they had a stake in the election and a compelling reason to vote. Anyone trying to mobilize citizens to vote also has to overcome the electorate's tendency to free ride, for a party's victory is a collective good that its supporters get to enjoy whether or not they vote (covered Chapter 11). Since the beginning, then, much of the work of campaigns has been aimed at overcoming, by one means or another, the free-rider problem.

To Use Party Labels and Enforce Collective Responsibility

Voters need a way to distinguish among candidates, and party labels offer a serviceable shorthand cue that keeps voting decisions cheap and simple—as long as the labels are informative. The more accurately a candidate's party label predicts what he or she will do in office, the more useful it is to voters and the more voters will rely on party cues in making their choices. In addition, the more voters rely on party cues, the more valuable party labels are to candidates. Would-be leaders adopt one of the existing political identities to benefit from the electorate's cue-taking habits. Local candidates join national party alliances even though local political divisions may have no logical relation to the issues that national parties fight about.

Getting voters to the polls is among the oldest and most important party activities.
KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/AFP via Getty Images

Once they have adopted the party label, however, politicians have a personal stake in maintaining the value of their party's "brand name," which may impose conformity costs by requiring the subordination of their own views and ambitions to the party's welfare and reputation. Party labels allow voters to reward

or punish elected officials as a group for their performance in office. If voters do not like what the government is doing and want to "throw the rascals out," they have an easy way to identify the rascals: they are members of the majority party. The threat of collective punishment gives the majority party a strong incentive to govern in ways that please voters.

Parties developed into three-part systems connecting (1) the party in government, an alliance of current officeholders cooperating to shape public policy; (2) the party organization, dedicated to electing the party's candidates; and (3) the party in the electorate, composed of those voters who identify with the party and regularly vote for its nominees.[4]

Basic Features of the Party System

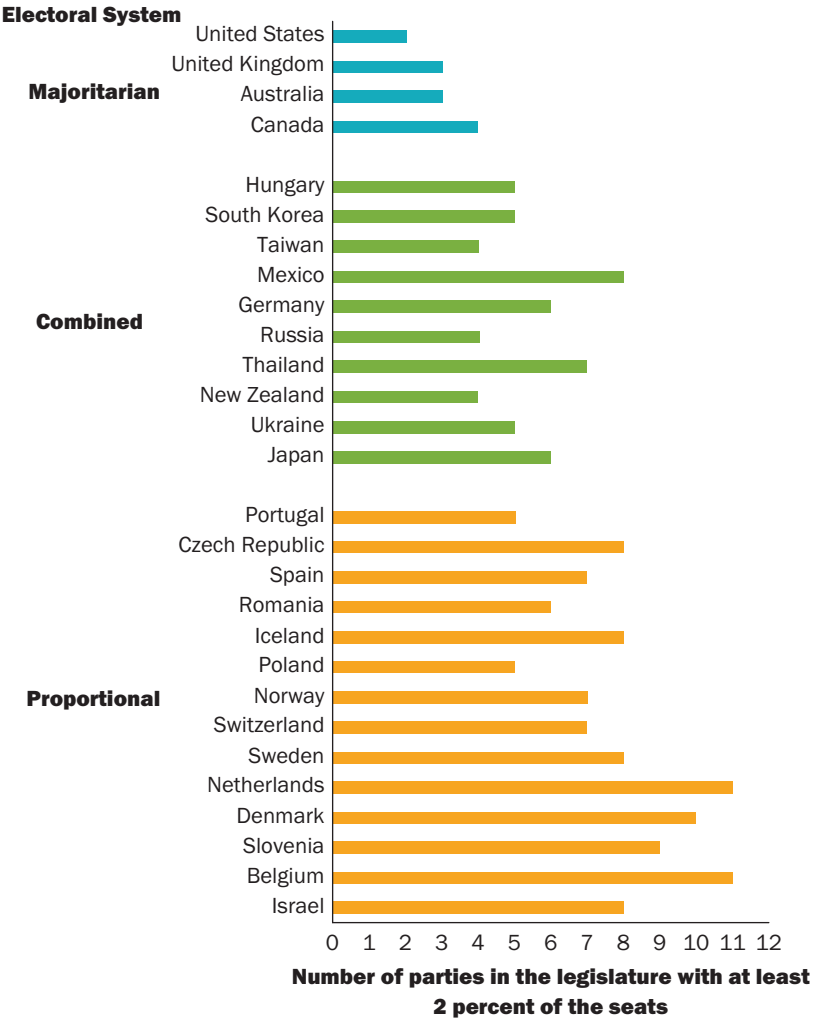
Parties emerged not because anyone thought they were a good idea but because the institutional structures and processes established by the Constitution made them too useful to forgo. Their obvious value to elected leaders competing for political goods, to candidates competing for office and groups competing for political power, and to voters in search of cognitive shortcuts to voting decisions guaranteed that parties' practical virtues would be rediscovered by every political generation. Parties have not always taken the same form, to be sure. But certain features reappear in every historical party system because they reflect the basic constitutional structure of American government. These features include competition between two major parties made up of decentralized, fragmented party coalitions maintained by professional politicians.

Two-Party Competition

During the first few Congresses, national leaders gradually divided into two major camps, initiating a pattern of two-party competition that has continued, with a few brief interruptions, to this day. Americans tend to think of a **two-party system** as normal, but other modern democracies have more than two parties (shown in Figure 12.1). It is, in fact, remarkable that a people continually divided by region, religion, race, and ethnicity, not to mention social beliefs and economic interests, could fit into as few as two major political camps. But this pattern has continued for a compelling reason. In any election where a single winner is chosen by plurality vote (whoever gets the most votes wins), there is a strong tendency for serious competitors to be reduced to two because people tend to vote strategically. If their favorite party's candidate has no chance to win, they turn to the less objectionable of the major-party candidates who does have a chance to win. This tendency is so strong that scholars have given it the status of a law, known as Duverger's law, named after the French political scientist who articulated it.[5] Office seekers, aware of this pattern, usually join one of the two competitive parties rather than pursuing office as independents or third-party nominees.

This logic is sufficiently compelling that, at most, only an election or two is required after the disruption of old party alliances and the appearance of new party coalitions for voters to narrow the viable choices down to two. Competition for survival, not to mention victory, puts strong pressure on party leaders to assemble broad coalitions, extending the party's hand to the voters ready to give up on their first choice. Any idea promoted by a

FIGURE 12.1 Type of Electoral System Determines Number of Parties



Source: Europa World Plus, accessed at www.europaworld.com.

third party that proves to be popular with voters is subject to poaching by one, or sometimes both, of the established parties maneuvering to coopt the disaffected. Thus, incentives to expand electoral coalitions also help reduce the number of parties to two.

Elections in the United States have almost always been winner-take-all affairs, so the rules have continually worked to reduce the viable options to two. An alternative kind of

electoral system—proportional representation, under which a party receives legislative seats in proportion to its share of votes—is used in many democracies. This system helps preserve smaller parties because votes for their candidates are not wasted (hence the proportional systems listed in Figure 12.1 produce an average of 7.1 legislative parties), but it has never been tried in the United States on any significant scale. Once two-party competition was in place, both parties had a stake in preserving electoral rules that discriminate against third parties.

Strictly speaking, the winner-take-all logic applies only within a given electoral unit (a single congressional district or state, for example); it does not require that the same two parties face each other in every electoral unit. But for purposes of electing a president, the entire United States works as a single electoral unit. The contest for the presidency became so central to electoral politics that it shaped party competition for lesser offices as well.

Decentralized, Fragmented Party Coalitions

Another reason the two-party pattern endures is that federalism fragments the political system. Historically, national parties have been assembled from diverse state and local political factions concerned chiefly with the vibrant politics of their states, counties, or cities. The decentralized policymaking system allowed these local parties to work together to elect national leaders while going their own way on matters closer to home. National leaders could maintain diverse, unwieldy coalitions because many of the factions within them had little contact with one another except when choosing the party's presidential candidate. Indeed, since the beginning the major parties have been diverse, unwieldy coalitions, ready to fly apart unless carefully maintained. Skillful management and the compelling need to hold these factions together for any chance at office have usually, but by no means always, kept the parties from self-destructing.

Professional Politicians

At the time the Constitution was adopted, political leadership was the prerogative of successful and prominent men who viewed service in public office as a temporary duty that fell to members of their class. As organization became essential to winning public office, political power flowed into the hands of people with the skills to build networks of party workers, manage alliances of local leaders, and mobilize voters on Election Day. Personal wealth, education, and status were still advantages, but they no longer were essential. Of those attracted to party politics, many were ambitious people who latched onto the party as a vehicle for personal advancement; opportunism made no small contribution to the emergence of political parties.

Eventually the variety and frequency of elections generated by the multilayered federal system made party management a full-time job in many places. To maintain the electoral machinery, party managers had to attract resources and reward the efforts of party workers. Thus **patronage**—jobs, offices, government contracts, business licenses, and so forth—grew in importance. By the 1840s, when they were fully developed, parties had

become ends in themselves to the thousands of local politicos who depended on them, one way or another, for their livelihood. That dependence ended in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, when reforms largely destroyed the patronage-based party organizations. Today, full-time professionals manage the parties, and party activists are mainly amateurs who volunteer their time.

Development and Evolution of the Party Systems

The historical development of parties (shown in Figure 12.2) reveals how they were shaped by politicians' strategic reactions to the opportunities and challenges posed by the Constitution. Scholars of a generation ago identified a sequence of five (possibly now six) distinct historical party systems. Although more recent research suggests that party evolution has been more continuous and less periodic than implied by this schema, it remains useful for identifying important innovations that have shaped and reshaped the parties.[6]

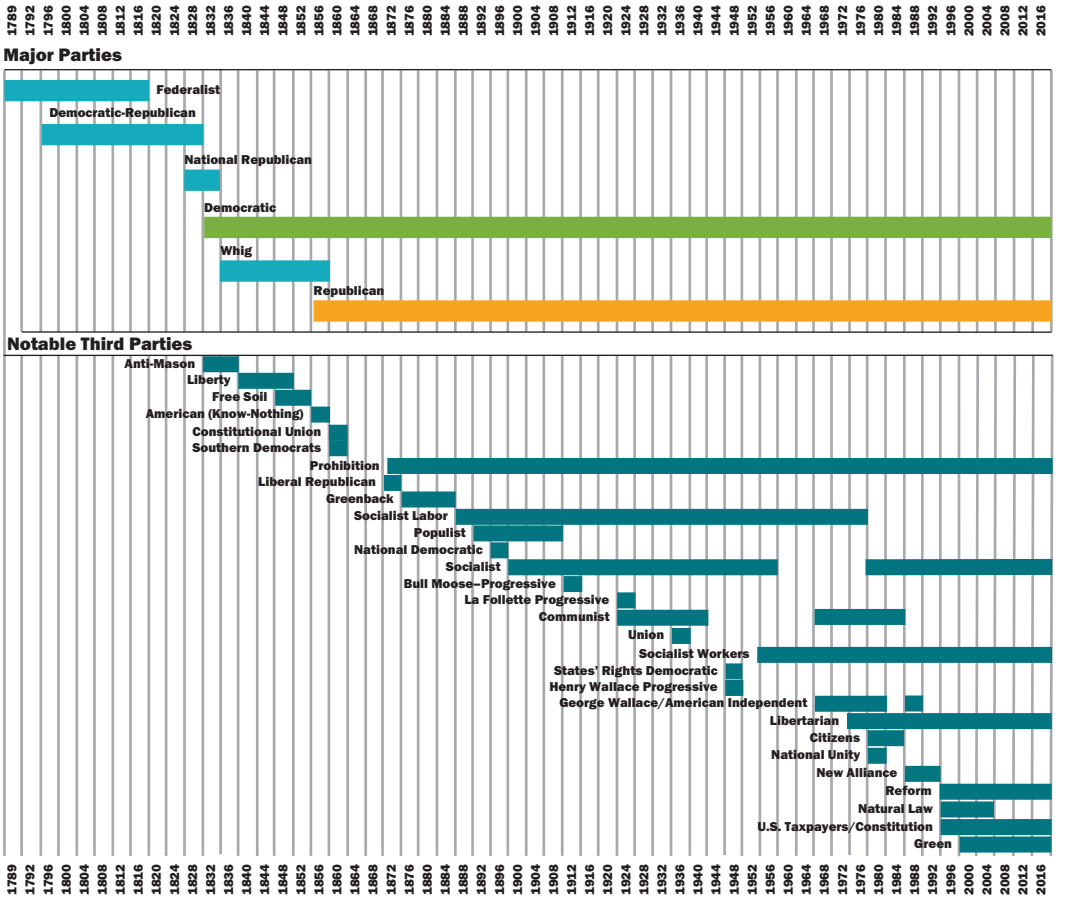
The first party system (1790–1824) illustrates the logic that led to the creation of national parties. Institutional innovation in the second party system (1824–1860) set parties on their basic organizational course. The full flowering and then decline of party machines under Progressive assault characterized the third (1860–1894) and fourth (1894–1932) party systems. Each of these systems also was defined by its distinctive pair of rival coalitions, but the coalitional nature of American parties is clearest in the creation and erosion of the party coalitions of the fifth party system (1932–?). The party coalitions have changed enough since the 1950s to suggest that a sixth party system is now in place, although there is no consensus on its date of origin.

The First Party System: The Origin of American Parties

The American party system was born in the first few Congresses as leaders with opposing views on national political issues sought to have their views prevail. Alexander Hamilton, secretary of the Treasury in George Washington's administration, proposed an ambitious and controversial set of measures designed to foster economic development. Other prominent leaders, notably James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, who saw no constitutional basis for the federal government doing any such thing, opposed Hamilton's program. The two sides also disagreed on foreign policy: Hamilton and his allies wanted strong ties with England, whereas Jefferson's group leaned toward France.

Hamilton's pursuit of votes in Congress led him to create what was, in effect, a legislative party. He cultivated a stable group of allies soon labeled "Federalists" because of their endorsement of a strong national government. Members of Congress who opposed Hamilton's policies gradually coalesced under the leadership of Jefferson and Madison. Protesting the alleged aristocratic inclinations of Hamilton's group, they styled themselves as Republicans. Members of this party also were called Democratic-Republicans until the 1820s, when they became known simply as Democrats. Today, the Democratic Party is the oldest political party in the world.

FIGURE 12.2 American Political Parties



Sources: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections, 5th ed., Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006). Updates provided by Rhodes Cook and the authors.

Note: Throughout U.S. history there have been more than fifteen hundred political parties. This chart provides a selection of parties that achieved national recognition during presidential election years. Not all third parties are included. The spaces between the rules on this chart indicate presidential election years, and the 2016 congressional election. For example, the Constitutional Union Party and the Southern Democrats were in existence for the 1860 election only and were gone by 1964. Similarly, the Green Party first fielded a presidential candidate in 1996.

As the Federalists continued to roll up legislative victories, the Democratic-Republicans realized they needed more votes in Congress if they were to prevail. That meant getting more like-minded people into Congress, which meant recruiting and electing candidates. Because senators were chosen by state legislatures, the Democratic-Republican national leaders began to pay attention to state elections as well. The Federalists recognized the same realities and reached the same conclusions. The two groups began to compete in elections.

The presidential election required the parties' attention as well, for the Federalists had demonstrated the importance of controlling the presidency as well as Congress. Challenging Adams for the presidency in 1800, Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican allies realized that these deliberations could be circumvented if they recruited and elected a majority of electors pledged to support Jefferson. By reaching out to local political leaders who were potential electors and to the growing mass of voters who chose the electors and state legislators, Jefferson successfully patched together an alliance of state and local factions, which led to a historic victory for his Democratic-Republicans and the ousting of the Federalists (covered in Chapter 9).*

It is no accident that the Democratic-Republicans did the innovating: the history of party building is largely a story of the "outs" finding new ways to become the "ins." The losers then imitate successful innovations.

The first parties were by no means the elaborate national organizations that emerged a generation later. Both parties' coalitions were unstable, lacking even uniform names. Any loyalty felt by politicians or voters did not extend much beyond the immediate issue or election. When their pro-British leanings put them on the wrong side in the War of 1812, the Federalists faded as a national force. In the aftermath of the party's collapse, politicians and informed observers hoped that party competition—and therefore parties—would disappear. The idea that organized opposition would or should be a permanent part of American national politics was still unorthodox.

The Second Party System: Organizational Innovation

By the second decade of the nineteenth century the Democratic-Republicans had eclipsed the Federalists nearly everywhere. James Monroe crushed the Federalists' last presidential nominee in 1816 and was reelected without significant opposition in 1820. The Monroe years were so lacking in party conflict that the period was dubbed the Era of Good Feelings. Party competition revived with a fight for the presidency.

In 1824, after Monroe, no fewer than five serious candidates—all of them Democratic-Republicans—sought the presidency. Because no candidate received a majority of electors, the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. There, Henry Clay gave his support to John Quincy Adams, who, upon taking office, made Clay his secretary of state—and, hence, the heir apparent to the White House, for Adams was the fourth president in a row who had previously served as secretary of state.

Supporters of another of the candidates, Andrew Jackson, were outraged that a "corrupt bargain" had denied "Old Hickory" his rightful place in the White House. In the midst of that outrage a shrewd New York politician, Martin Van Buren, recognized the

*Jefferson's victory was complicated by the fact that he and his running mate, Aaron Burr, won the same number of electoral votes; the tie had to be broken by the outgoing House of Representatives, where Federalist votes put Jefferson over the top. The Twelfth Amendment, adopted in 1804, altered the counting procedure to assure this could not happen again.

opportunity to build a new political coalition. Believing that a national party along the lines of the old Jeffersonian alliance of "the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the north"[7] would have the best chance of containing the most explosive issues of the day, particularly slavery, Van Buren reconstructed the Democratic Party using Jackson as the rallying point. Central committees set up in Washington and Nashville, Jackson's hometown, promoted the formation of state organizations, which in turn promoted Jackson clubs or committees in towns and counties. Aided by a nationwide chain of newspapers established to support the cause, Van Buren and Jackson used this network to spread propaganda that kept Jackson and the "wrong" done him in the public consciousness. Local politicians, recognizing Jackson's popularity as a vehicle for their own ambitions, rallied voters with meetings, marches, barbecues, and hickory pole raisings.[8]

Supporters of President Adams had no choice but to put together a network of their own. He did nothing himself to cultivate electoral allies. Yet his backers, in the process of nominating electors and candidates for other offices and working to get people to vote for them, created what amounted to an Adams party. As one historian has put it, "Just by standing for reelection Adams brought a national party into being."[9]

National Conventions

Jackson's smashing victory in 1828 was, among other things, a powerful lesson in the value of political organization. The 1832 election, which he also won handily, featured the first **national party conventions**.* The national convention was promoted as a more democratic alternative to the discredited congressional caucus, allowing much broader popular participation in making presidential nominations. But it also was an eminently practical device for solving problems of conflict and coordination that stand in the path to the White House. The convention was the occasion for assembling, and later refurbishing, the national party coalition. It provided a forum for doing the politicking that convinced diverse party factions to agree to unite behind a single presidential ticket—without necessarily agreeing on anything else. It also was a giant pep rally, firing up the party troops for the contest to come.

The Democrats held a national convention again in 1836, this time to nominate Van Buren as Jackson's successor. Meanwhile, Jackson's leading opponents, including Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, organized themselves as the Whig Party, a name borrowed from British political history that had come to symbolize opposition to royal tyranny—in this case, to the tyranny of "King Andrew" Jackson. A fractious coalition promoting national development but united primarily by their hostility to Jackson, the Whigs did not hold a national convention but instead attempted to divide and conquer by running

*Actually, the Anti-Masonic Party had held a convention in 1831, and Jackson's loosely organized opponents, calling themselves National Republicans, had convened a small national gathering that year as well. But the Democratic convention that met in Baltimore to renominate Jackson in 1832 is considered the original full-scale national party convention.

Former vice president Joe Biden, Democratic presidential nominee, second left, wife Jill Biden, left, Senator Kamala Harris, Democratic vice presidential nominee, second right, and husband Douglas Emhoff, wear protective masks while standing on a stage outside the Chase Center during the Democratic National Convention in Wilmington, Delaware, on August 20, 2020.

Stefani Reynolds/Bloomberg via Getty Images

three regional candidates. Their plan was to combine their strength behind the strongest candidate in the Electoral College or, failing that, to throw the election into the House.

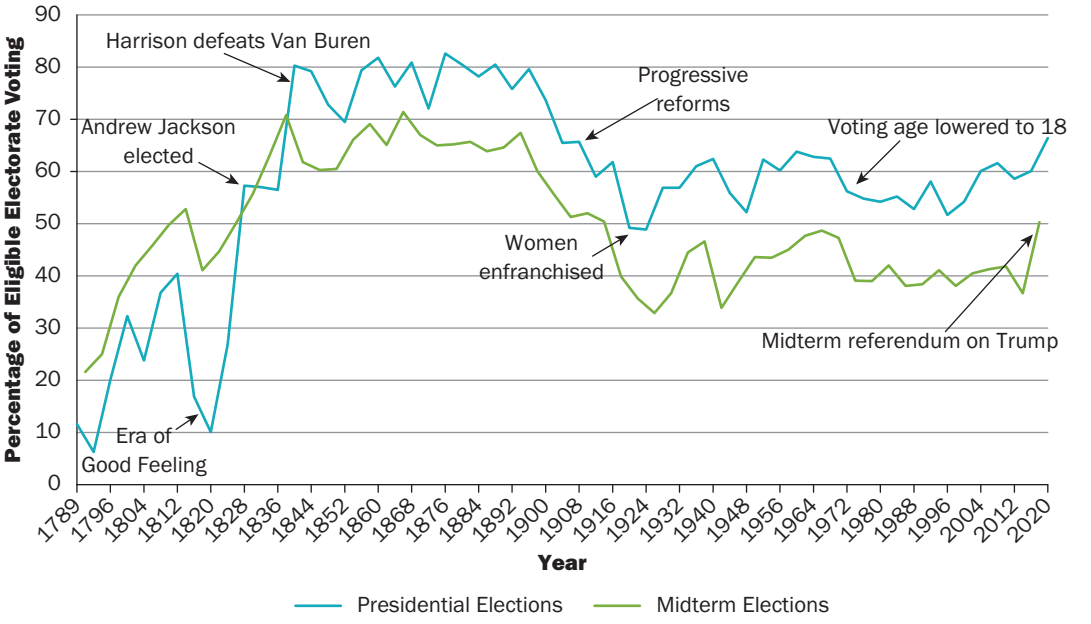
When that strategy flopped in 1836, the Whigs turned to a ploy that won the party its only two presidential victories: nominating a popular military hero without known political tendencies and obscuring party divisions by not writing a platform. The Whig nominee in 1840 was William Henry Harrison, hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe (fought against a confederation of Native American tribes in 1811) and extolled as a rough-hewn man of the people. He defeated Van Buren in a contest that moved party competition to an entirely new level.

The 1840 campaign extended organized two-party competition to every state in the nation, framing not only the contest for president but also competition for offices at all levels of government. Competition inspired unprecedented efforts to involve and mobilize ordinary voters, turning political campaigns into the most exciting spectacles the era offered. As one historian of the period observed,

> Those tens of thousands of men and women who attended the mammoth Whig festival at Nashville in 1840; those untold millions who carried torches, donned uniforms, chanted slogans, or cheered themselves hoarse at innumerable parades and rallies; those puffed-up canvassers of wards, servers of rum, and distributors of largess; and all those simple folk who whipped themselves into a fury of excitement and anxiety as each election day approached, were thrilling to a grand dramatic experience, even a cathartic experience. There was no spectacle, no contest, in America that could match an election campaign.[10]

In effect, the parties solved the problem of free riding endemic to mass electorates by making participation exciting, emotionally compelling, and fun—in other words, they provided a payoff that made the costs worth bearing. One sign of their success was a dramatic increase in turnout (shown in Figure 12.3). In 1824 only 27 percent of the eligible electorate (adult white men) bothered to vote in the presidential election. When Jackson

FIGURE 12.3 Voter Turnout in Presidential and Midterm Elections, 1789–2020



Sources: Jerrold G. Rusk, *A Statistical History of the American Electorate* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), Tables 3-3 and 3-5. Data for 1998–2020 are from Michael P. McDonald, "Voter Turnout," accessed at www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data.

was elected in 1828, turnout rose to 55 percent, and it stayed at about that level for the next two presidential contests. In 1840 fully 78 percent of the eligible voters took part. More striking evidence of the crucial role of parties—and party competition—in making mass democracy a reality could scarcely be imagined.

The Spoils System

Parties on the rise always attract opportunists. The politicians who flocked to Jackson's banner or joined his Whig opponents were not, for the most part, altruists; rather, they carried on the party work because they were ambitious for an office or other favors. These motives are neither surprising nor appalling. Parties pursue a collective good: victory for their candidates and policies. All who prefer the winner will benefit from the party's victory, whether they contribute to it or not. Thus, without some prospect of private reward for party activists as well, the free-rider problem would have left parties stillborn. The men who worked to elect Jackson or Harrison took as their right the spoils of victory—mainly government jobs but also contracts to supply goods and services to the government or special projects from which they might profit.

The pursuit of political spoils, which came to be known as the spoils system (covered in Chapter 8), intensified party competition and put a heavy premium on winning. On the positive side, putting victory ahead of principle made parties open and inclusive. For a time, broad national coalitions helped manage the dangerous intersectional conflict over slavery and other divisive issues. The high stakes also inspired imaginative efforts to mobilize the first mass electorate in history. On the negative side, the desire to win contributed to corruption, moral myopia regarding slavery, and public cynicism about the honesty and motives of politicians. In either case, the Democrats and Whigs of the second party system set the pattern for the future: every successful American party has cared more about winning elections than about furthering a consistent set of principles.

Indeed, principled conflict is often a threat to party coalitions. Established party politicians put unity first because their careers depend on it, but voters and activists have no such stake and may care very deeply about the positions a party takes on controversial issues. The Whigs and the Democrats built coalitions around differences on tariffs, banking, and other economic policies. But both parties had northern and southern wings and so were badly split by the slavery issue. Leaders tried to keep slavery off the political agenda, but this proved impossible. When the extension of slavery became the dominant national issue, the coalitions that formed the second party system fell apart. For the first and only time in U.S. history, a third party emerged to supplant one of the two dominant parties.

The Third Party System: Entrepreneurial Politics

The Republican Party, organized in 1854 as a coalition of antislavery forces, is unusual only in the success of its challenge to the two-party establishment. Third parties have arisen time and again, but most have failed to attract enough of a following to become more than obscure refuges for the disaffected. On a few occasions, however, third parties have managed to shake up the system, leaving notable traces in party politics long after they have disappeared.

The Republican Party was formed in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), which overturned limits on the extension of slavery to the territories enacted earlier in the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Compromise of 1850. It drew leaders and followers from two earlier antislavery parties as well as the Know-Nothings, antislavery Whigs, and dissident Democrats. Its adopted name laid claim to the mantles of both the Jeffersonian Republicans and the National Republicans who had backed Adams against Jackson.

Although founded on the slavery issue, the Republican Party was by no means a single-issue party. It also appealed to business and commercial interests by promising a protective tariff and a transcontinental railway and to farmers by promising free land for homesteading. On only its second try the party elected a president, Abraham Lincoln. His victory over divided opposition in 1860 triggered the South's secession from the Union and then the Civil War, from which the Republicans emerged as the party of

victory and union. For the next generation the party sought to retain its ascendancy by appealing variously to patriotism, national expansion, and laissez-faire capitalism and by distributing pensions to Civil War veterans and protective tariffs to manufacturers. The end of Reconstruction in 1876 restored local control to white southern politicians (covered in Chapter 4) and left the newly revived Democratic Party, dominant in the South and with pockets of strength in the West, border states, and northern urban areas, a nearly equal competitor for national power.

Party Machines

Party organizations reached their peak of development during the third party system. Patronage—jobs, contracts, development rights, zoning favors—generated by the rapid growth of industrial cities provided the capital; party entrepreneurs provided the management. The classic **party machines** were built on simple principles of exchange: party politicians provided favors and services to people throughout the year in return for their votes on Election Day. They found an eager market for their offerings among the growing population of poor immigrants whose basic needs—shelter, food, fuel, jobs, and help in adapting to a new and bewildering country—were far more pressing than any concern for party programs or ideologies.

The late-nineteenth-century party machines represented the culmination of trends reaching back to the Jacksonian era. Politics had become a full-time profession for thousands of individuals. Those who took it up were mostly "men of slender social distinction, whose training came not from the countinghouse or the university, but from the street gang, the saloon, the fire department, the political club."[11] Winning local elections to keep the patronage flowing was the paramount goal of party professionals; issues, programs, and candidates (national as well as local) mattered only insofar as they could help or hinder that goal.

The Progressive Attack

Reformers, working almost entirely from within the two-party system, sought to destroy the party machines by depriving party leaders of the capacity to reward followers. Eventually, they succeeded. The most important changes were introduced during what is now called the **Progressive Era**—the decades just before and after the turn of the twentieth century, overlapping the end of the third party system and the beginning of the fourth. The most important reforms were the civil service, the Australian ballot, and primary elections.

After passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883, reformers replaced the spoils system with a civil service system. Under the spoils system, the winning party filled appointive government jobs with its faithful voters and workers; the civil service system turned government jobs into professional careers. Appointment and advancement depended on merit, not political pull, and civil servants could not be fired except "for cause"—failing to do their jobs or committing crimes (covered in Chapter 8). As more government jobs were brought under civil service, the rewards for party work shrank, reducing the number of party workers.

Official Sample Ballot - General Election

Boleta Oficial de Muestra - Elecciones Generales ★ Echantiyon Bilten Vòt Ofisyèl - Eleksyon Jeneral

ALL REGISTERED VOTERS • PARA TODOS LOS ELECTORES INSCRITOS • TOUT VOTÈ ENSKRI

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT
PRESIDENTE Y VICEPRESIDENTE
PREZIDAN AK VIS PREZIDAN

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Donald J. Trump / Michael R. Pence — REP 10
- ⬭ Joseph R. Biden / Kamala D. Harris — DEM 11
- ⬭ Jo Jorgensen / Jeremy "Spike" Cohen — LPF 12
- ⬭ Roque "Rocky" De La Fuente / Darcy G. Richardson — REF 13
- ⬭ Gloria La Riva / Sunil Freeman — PSL 14
- ⬭ Howie Hawkins / Angela Nicole Walker — GRE 15
- ⬭ Don Blankenship / William Mohr — CPF 16
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, DISTRICT 23
REPRESENTANTE ANTE EL CONGRESO, DISTRITO 23
REPREZANTAN NAN KONGRÈ, DISTRIK 23

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Carla Spalding — REP 17
- ⬭ Debbie Wasserman Schultz — DEM 18
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, DISTRICT 24
REPRESENTANTE ANTE EL CONGRESO, DISTRITO 24
REPREZANTAN NAN KONGRÈ, DISTRIK 24

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Lavern Spicer — REP 19
- ⬭ Frederica Wilson — DEM 20
- ⬭ Christine Alexandria Olivo — NPA 21
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, DISTRICT 26
REPRESENTANTE ANTE EL CONGRESO, DISTRITO 26
REPREZANTAN NAN KONGRÈ, DISTRIK 26

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Carlos Gimenez — REP 22
- ⬭ Debbie Mucarsel-Powell — DEM 23

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, DISTRICT 27
REPRESENTANTE ANTE EL CONGRESO, DISTRITO 27
REPREZANTAN NAN KONGRÈ, DISTRIK 27

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Maria Elvira Salazar — REP 24
- ⬭ Donna Shalala — DEM 25
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

STATE SENATOR, DISTRICT 35
SENADOR ESTATAL, DISTRITO 35
SENATÈ ETA, DISTRIK 35

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Shevrin "Shev" Jones — DEM 26
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

STATE SENATOR, DISTRICT 37
SENADOR ESTATAL, DISTRITO 37
SENATÈ ETA, DISTRIK 37

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Ileana Garcia — REP 27
- ⬭ Jose Javier Rodriguez — DEM 28
- ⬭ Alex Rodriguez — NPA 29

STATE SENATOR, DISTRICT 39
SENADOR ESTATAL, DISTRITO 39
SENATÈ ETA, DISTRIK 39

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Ana Maria Rodriguez — REP 30
- ⬭ Javier E. Fernandez — DEM 31
- ⬭ Celso D. Alfonso — NPA 32

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 103
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 103
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 103

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Tom Fabricio — REP 33
- ⬭ Cindy Polo — DEM 34

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 105
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 105
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 105

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ David Borrero — REP 35
- ⬭ Maureen Porras — DEM 36

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 110
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 110
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 110

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Alex Rizo — REP 37
- ⬭ Annette Collazo — DEM 38

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 111
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 111
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 111

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Bryan Avila — REP 40
- ⬭ Ross Elde Hancock — DEM 41

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 112
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 112
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 112

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Bruno A. Barreiro — REP 42
- ⬭ Nicholas Xavier Duran — DEM 43

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 114
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 114
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 114

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Demi Busatta Cabrera — REP 44
- ⬭ Jean-Pierre Bado — DEM 45

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 115
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 115
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 115

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Vance Aloupis — REP 46
- ⬭ Franccesca Cesti-Browne — DEM 47

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 116
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 116
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 116

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Daniel A. Perez — REP 48
- ⬭ Bob Lynch — DEM 49
- ⬭ Write-in _____
  Agregado por Escrito
  Ekri alamen

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 118
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 118
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 118

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Anthony Rodriguez — REP 50
- ⬭ Ricky Junquera — DEM 51

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 119
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 119
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 119

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Juan Fernandez-Barquin — REP 52
- ⬭ Imtiaz Ahmad Mohammad — DEM 53

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 120
REPRESENTANTE ESTATAL, DISTRITO 120
REPREZANTAN ETA, DISTRIK 120

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ James "Jim" Vernon Mooney Jr — REP 54
- ⬭ Clint Barras — DEM 55

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
SECRETARIO DEL TRIBUNAL DEL CIRCUITO
GREFYE TRIBINAL SIKWI

(Vote for 1) (Vote por 1) (Vote pou 1)

- ⬭ Harvey Ruvin — DEM 56
- ⬭ Rubin Young — NPA 57

JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT
MAGISTRADO DEL TRIBUNAL SUPREMO
JIJ KOU SIPRÈM

Shall Justice Carlos G. Muñiz of the Supreme Court be retained in office?
¿Deberá retenerse en su cargo al Magistrado Carlos G. Muñiz del Tribunal Supremo?
Èske Jij Carlos G. Muñiz Kou Siprèm lan dwe rete an fonksyon?

- ⬭ Yes/Sí/Wi — 58
- ⬭ No/No/Non — 59

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

REMEMBER TO CHECK BOTH SIDES OF THE BALLOT
NO OLVIDE REVISAR AMBOS LADOS DE LA BOLETA • SONJE POU TCHEKE TOUDE BÒ BILTEN VÒT LA

Continued on next page
Continúa en la página siguiente
Kontinye nan pwochen paj la

– 2 –

The advent of the Australian ballot allowed voters to pick candidates across parties. With whole-party tickets at an end, candidate-centered campaigns began their ascendancy.

Courtesy of Miami-Dade County Elections Department

Prior to the 1890s each party produced its own ballots (listing only its candidates), which were handed to voters outside the polling place. Because party ballots were readily distinguishable, voters could not keep their choices to themselves or easily vote a **split ticket**—that is, vote for candidates of different parties for different offices—for this required manipulating several ballots. The system invited corruption and intimidation; party workers could monitor voters and reward or punish them accordingly. Between 1888 and 1896, 90 percent of the states adopted the **Australian ballot**, named for its country of origin. The new type of ballot, still in use today, was prepared by the government, listed candidates from all parties, and was marked in the privacy of a voting booth. This change made it much more difficult for parties to exchange favors for votes because it left no (legal) way for the party to know if voters had kept their side of the bargain.

With adoption of the Australian ballot, the government became involved in party nominations, for someone had to determine officially which parties and names would be listed on the government-produced ballot. Laws were passed to regulate party nominating conventions and, later, to allow a party's voters to nominate candidates through **primary elections**. Strong party machines were still able to dominate primaries, but as party organizations were weakened by other changes, primaries deprived them of a crucial political resource: the ability to control access to elective public office by controlling nominations.

Progressives advocated, and in many places achieved, other reforms intended to detach local politics from national politics on the ground that "there is no Republican or Democratic way to pave a street" (forgetting that Democrats and Republicans may have different priorities in deciding whose streets to pave, who gets the paving contract, and who pays for it). At the local level, elections were made officially "nonpartisan" and held separately from federal elections. States also adopted laws requiring would-be voters to register before Election Day (to reduce the possibilities of fraud) and to pass literacy tests (unlike the old party-produced ballots, the Australian ballot could be used only by literate voters). At the national level a constitutional amendment, ratified in 1913, took the choice of U.S. senators from the state legislatures and gave it to the voters, eliminating the party politics that had governed the selection of senators.

Although ostensibly aimed at rooting out corruption and cleaning up electoral politics, progressive reforms also were designed to enhance the political clout of the "right" kind of people—educated middle- and upper-middle-class folks like the reformers themselves—at the expense of poor urban immigrants and their leaders "of slender social distinction." Stricter voter registration laws discriminated against the poor and uneducated. Literacy tests had the same effect and were used widely in the South to disenfranchise African Americans and sometimes poor whites.

Progressive reforms were adopted to varying degrees in almost every state. And on the whole they worked, weakening or destroying party machines and preventing their resurrection. Vigorous party organizations did survive, though, in some places, often for many years. For example, a tightly controlled Democratic machine ran Chicago until the 1970s. Over the long run, however, progressive reforms deprived state and local party organizations—the basic building blocks of national parties—of much of their political power.

President Franklin Roosevelt and his allies assembled the Democrats' New Deal coalition from remarkably diverse segments of American society. In this 1936 photo Roosevelt chats with members of one group served by New Deal policies, North Dakota farmers who have received drought relief grants.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division

Consequences of Progressive Reforms

These changes had several important consequences for electoral politics. First, turnout declined. Tighter registration laws, the Australian ballot, and literacy tests discouraged voting. With fewer jobs and favors to reward the party workers, fewer people were willing to do the work that wedded voters to the party and brought them to the polls. According to Figure 12.3, from the Civil War to the 1890s about 80 percent of the eligible electorate voted in presidential elections. By the 1910s turnout had fallen to around 60 percent. It fell further when women were enfranchised in 1920; many women initially ignored politics as "men's business," and women's turnout levels—which today surpass men's—took a half century to pull even. Turnout declined most among poor and uneducated people, the very citizens most dependent on parties for incentives to vote. (For more on turnout, refer to Chapter 11.)

The reforms also began to shift the focus of electoral politics from parties to candidates. When party organizations controlled nominations and voters chose between whole-party tickets, political careers were bound tightly to parties. With the advent of the Australian ballot and primary elections, these bonds weakened. Candidates could win nominations with or without the party's blessing by appealing directly to voters; they could campaign separately from the party's team because voters could now split their tickets more easily. The full flowering of candidate-centered electoral politics had to await the development of modern communication technologies, but the seeds were planted by the progressive reforms.

By altering the incentives to perform party work, reforms also contributed to changes in the demographics and goals of party organizations. Traditional party organizations were built on material incentives attractive to working-class people; consequently, parties concentrated on winning elections to keep the material benefits flowing. As their resource base shrank, patronage-based parties were supplanted by party organizations made up of middle-class people inspired by nonmaterial incentives—devotion to a particular candidate, issue, or ideology—people for whom a party victory was often less important than the success of their preferred candidate or cause.

Paradoxically, the Progressive Era left the Republicans and Democrats organizationally weaker but more entrenched than ever in the political system. Once considered

private groups, parties were now treated by the law in many states as essentially public entities charged with managing elections. Regulations tended to privilege the two major parties and discriminate against new parties and independent candidates. Moreover, the advent of primary elections encouraged dissidents to work within the established parties because outsiders could now compete for control of the party's machinery and name. Why should malcontents buck the long odds against winning under a new party label when they could convert an established party to their cause? For insurgent outsider Donald Trump, seizing control of the existing Republican Party through the primary system offered a much more promising road to the White House than an independent candidacy would have offered. Other examples include conservative Christian activists, inspired by their opposition to *Roe v. Wade* (covered in Chapter 5), who took over the Republican Party apparatus in many states and soon made their positions on social issues such as abortion and gay rights the party's official positions, and the antigovernment Tea Party activists who mounted their insurgency within the Republican Party rather than setting up a party of their own. No new party has come close to challenging either of the major parties since the nineteenth century, but those parties have suffered some convulsive changes as the result of challenges from within.

The Fourth Party System: Republican Ascendancy

From the end of Reconstruction in 1876 until 1894, the third American party system settled into place, and the Republicans and Democrats competed on nearly even terms. In 1896 the Democrats reacted to a severe economic downturn by adopting the platform of the People's Party, or Populists, a party of agrarian protest against high railroad rates and the gold standard, and nominating William Jennings Bryan, a candidate with strong Populist sympathies. The Republican campaign persuaded many urban workers that the Democrats' proposal to make silver as well as gold a monetary standard threatened their livelihoods (arguing that "sound" money backed by gold was the backbone of the financial system that sustained the industrial economy) and so converted them into Republicans. The reaction to the agrarian takeover of the Democrats left the Republicans with a clear national majority for the next generation; the new alignment is commonly designated the fourth party system.

The Republican Party ultimately lost its ascendancy to the Great Depression. Having taken credit for the prosperity of the 1920s with policies highly favorable to financial institutions and industrial corporations, the Republicans and their president, Herbert Hoover, were saddled with the blame for the economic devastation and high unemployment that followed the 1929 stock market crash. Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate, defeated Hoover in the 1932 election. Roosevelt's New Deal solidified a new coalition of interests that gave the Democrats a popular majority. Despite the coalition's slow demise since the 1960s, the Democratic Party has retained that majority—sometimes barely—to this day.

The Fifth Party System: The New Deal Coalition

Nothing illustrates the diversity of American party coalitions more strikingly than does the **New Deal coalition**, which brought together Democrats of every conceivable background. It united white southern segregationists with northern African Americans (few southern African Americans could vote), progressive intellectuals with machine politicians, union members and their families with the poorest farmers, Roman Catholics with Southern Baptists. These diverse groups agreed on only one thing—electing Democrats—while having very different reasons for wanting to do so.

Some were attracted by Roosevelt's New Deal policies, which, in tackling the Depression's devastation, radically expanded the federal government's responsibility for, and authority over, the economic and social welfare of all Americans. The Wagner Act of 1935, known as organized labor's "bill of rights," cemented union support. Public works programs pulled in poor and unemployed citizens, including northern African Americans (who until then favored the party of Lincoln), and provided patronage for urban machines. Farm programs appealed to distressed rural voters. Progressive intellectuals applauded the federal government's expanded role in attending to the economic welfare of citizens. The adoption of the Social Security and unemployment insurance systems earned the gratitude of working people whose economic insecurity had been so painfully exposed by the Depression.

Other groups were part of the Democratic coalition by tradition. Southern whites were still expressing political identities forged against the Republican Party in the Civil War. Roman Catholics, already disproportionately Democratic, had become overwhelmingly so in 1928, when the party chose Al Smith, the first of their faith to be nominated for president by a major party. Jews in the cities of the East and Midwest also had supported Smith, in reaction to the rural and small-town Protestant bigotry his candidacy had provoked, and stayed with the Democrats under Roosevelt, an early and staunch enemy of Nazi Germany.

The opposing Republican coalition was a smaller, inverted image of the Democratic coalition: business and professional people, upper-income white Protestants, residents of smaller towns and cities in the Northeast and Midwest, and ideological conservatives. It was united by what it opposed: Roosevelt's New Deal programs and the greatly enlarged federal bureaucracy they engendered (covered in Chapter 8), which Republicans excoriated as unconstitutional, unwise, and un-American.

Erosion of the New Deal Coalition

The complexities of coalition politics aside, national electoral competition during the New Deal period was organized around a single question: are you for or against the New Deal? As long as that was the question, the New Deal alignment held. But when new issues became the focus of electoral politics, the Democratic coalition began to unravel. The Republicans opened the way for new issues to shape electoral politics by finally

recognizing that the major New Deal programs were there to stay; a party in search of a national majority cannot cling forever to losing positions. When they finally regained the White House in 1952 (using the old Whig ploy of nominating a military hero, General Dwight Eisenhower), it was on a promise not to repeal the New Deal but to administer its programs more frugally. Once that question was settled, other issues could come to the fore.

The first and most important of these issues was civil rights for African Americans (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). As the Democrats became the party of civil rights, white southerners began to depart. At about the same time, the war in Vietnam also split the Democrats, largely along the fault lines of class. The party machine politicians and labor leaders whose blue-collar constituents supplied most of the soldiers generally supported the war, as did most southern Democrats. Opposition was led by liberal intellectuals and was most conspicuous on elite university campuses. New controversies over the bounds of acceptable social behavior deepened the split as sexual freedom, pornography, abortion, women's rights, and gay equality became the stuff of politics.

Traditional Democratic constituencies also were divided over new economic initiatives. The Great Society programs enacted during Lyndon Johnson's presidency (1963–1969) lacked the broad appeal of the New Deal. The major New Deal programs—Social Security, unemployment insurance, and Medicare (a New Deal–type program, although not enacted until 1965)—serve politically active majorities. Great Society programs—housing subsidies, school nutrition programs, Head Start, food stamps, and Medicaid—serve a politically apathetic minority: the poor. For many working-class and middle-class Democrats, the New Deal was for "us," but the Great Society's War on Poverty was for "them."

The Republicans, although less diverse than their rivals, could not avoid some serious divisions of their own. The conservative and moderate wings struggled for dominance from the New Deal period until the 1980s. Conservatives took over the national party in 1964, nominating one of their own, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, for president. Goldwater's vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1964 endeared him to southern segregationists but alienated moderates in his own party, as did his hostility to the core New Deal programs. His overwhelming defeat left the party temporarily in tatters. It quickly recovered, however, by taking advantage of the deep divisions within the old Democratic coalition to win five of the next six presidential elections.

Republican candidates since Richard Nixon have sought to build winning coalitions by combining affluent economic conservatives (and, since 2010, antigovernment Tea Party enthusiasts) with white middle-class and working-class nationalists and social conservatives, particularly from what is called the Christian Right. To attract economic conservatives, the Republicans declared war on taxation, regulation, welfare, and deficit spending; to win over social conservatives, they offered law and order, patriotism (opposition to the Vietnam War left Democrats vulnerable here), and "traditional family values," defined to mean a ban on abortion, promotion of prayer in public schools,

and opposition to same-sex marriage. But this coalition was not much more united than its Democratic counterpart. Many affluent economic conservatives were not attracted to the Christian Right's social agenda, and many social conservatives of modest means remained reluctant to expose themselves to the mercies of an unfettered free market. Trump's candidacy in 2016 split the party along a different though related dimension, pitting an enthusiastic constituency of blue-collar whites, particularly men, who applauded his verbal assaults on undocumented immigrants; Muslims; free trade; "political correctness"; and political, economic, and media elites against the more educated, affluent, cosmopolitan, and economically orthodox Republicans who were put off by both the style and content of Trump's campaign. These divisions remained during his term in office, but mainly at the elite level; most ordinary Republicans (and members of Congress) continued to offer Trump overwhelming support, and the post-2016 Republican Party was unquestionably Trump's party—until the novel coronavirus ravaged the globe making the COVID-19 pandemic (and Trump's mishandling of the crisis) central to every American's life.

Changing the Rules

Divisions within the parties' electoral coalitions during the 1960s were played out in intraparty battles that reshaped the parties as organizations, too. One major result was another adjustment to the progressive-style reform of presidential nominations. The Democrats' nominating practices had fallen into disrepute because many southern delegations were discriminating against Black voters just recently activated by the civil rights movement. It was the Vietnam War, however, that triggered wholesale reform. When those Democrats opposed to American involvement in Vietnam sought to nominate an antiwar candidate in 1968, they found the diverse, arcane state procedures for selecting delegates to the national nominating convention a formidable barrier. Only fifteen states held primary elections, and in some of them support in primaries did not translate into convention delegates. In Pennsylvania, for example, the antiwar candidate, Senator Eugene McCarthy, won 72 percent of the primary votes, but Vice President Hubert Humphrey got 80 percent of Pennsylvania's convention delegates. Party leaders chose the delegates in most states, so leaders from the larger states dominated the convention.

In 1968 the convention was still the quadrennial coming together of diverse and fractious state party organizations that it had been since the 1830s. Most party regulars were, by habit, loyal to their president, Lyndon Johnson, and his anointed successor, Vice President Humphrey. Meeting in Chicago, the Democrats nominated Humphrey while antiwar protests filled the streets outside the convention hall. When the demonstrations got out of hand, they were violently suppressed by the Chicago police on the orders of Mayor Richard J. Daley, boss of the strongest surviving party machine and a major Humphrey backer. The party's internal divisions, dramatized by the riots and exposed to the world on national television, helped to doom the Democratic ticket and led to the election of Richard Nixon as president.

Primary Elections and Caucuses

To repair the Democratic coalition and restore the convention's legitimacy, a party commission (the McGovern-Fraser Commission) drew up a new set of criteria specifying that Democratic Party convention delegations had to be chosen in a process that was "open, timely, and representative." The state parties could comply in one of two ways. They could hold a primary election, the outcome of which would determine at least 90 percent of the state's delegation. Or they could hold local party **caucuses** open to all Democrats, who would select delegates to a meeting at the county, congressional district, or state level. These delegates would in turn elect delegates to the national convention. The easiest option was the primary, and most state parties have adopted it.

In another change, the winner-take-all method of allocating delegates went out the window. Instead of awarding all of a state's delegates to the top vote getter, the new rules allocated delegates proportionately to candidates according to the share of votes they received in the primary or the caucus.* To meet the "representativeness" standard, delegations had to include more minorities, women, and young adults.

The Democrats' delegate selection rules created a whole new ball game. Previously the party's supreme plum, its presidential nomination, had been conferred by party leaders, who sought to pick a winner who would be obligated to them and therefore send presidential favors their way. Moreover, they wanted a candidate who would help the whole party ticket on Election Day. Now the nomination goes to the candidate who can best mobilize support among voters in primary elections. If party leaders are to exercise any influence in this process, they must do it by delivering endorsements, money, and other electoral resources to their favorite before and during the primary season.

The new process may be "fairer," as intended, but it has threatened other party goals, namely winning and governing! For example, Senator George McGovern, the 1972 nominee, was the choice of antiwar Democratic voters but no one else; he won only 38 percent of the general election vote, the worst showing for a Democrat since the New Deal realignment.

The system also allows outsiders with tenuous links to other party leaders to compete. Jimmy Carter, an obscure one-term governor of Georgia, won the nomination and then the White House in 1976 but, inexperienced in the ways of Washington, found it nearly impossible to work effectively with his party in Congress (covered in Chapter 7).[12] Responding to such problems, the Democrats altered their rules several more times to give party regulars more influence in the selection process. Prominent elected officials—governors, senators, and representatives—are now automatically among the convention delegates. These so-called **superdelegates** accounted for 771, or 16 percent, of the 4,750 votes at the Democrats' 2020 "virtual" convention. Superdelegate votes have always mirrored the votes of elected delegates. If they didn't, supporters of the candidate with

*The Republican Party also adopted primary elections as the basic method of choosing delegates but allows states to maintain a winner-take-all process.

Battles between Vietnam War demonstrators and the Chicago police outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention caused a revolt in the convention, culminating in the removal of the Chicago mayor, Richard J. Daley (pictured left, with fist raised), as a delegate. Not only did the last of the party machine mayors depart, but the turmoil also stimulated the party to install reforms that have dramatically altered the way the political parties nominate their presidential candidates.

AP Photo/Michael Boyer

the most elected delegates would no doubt be outraged, splitting the party badly, a potential downside overlooked when the party added superdelegates to the mix. Recognizing this problem, Democrats altered the rules again. In 2020, two-thirds of the superdelegates were bound to state primary and caucus results; the other third, made up of sitting senators, governors, and representatives, still had a free vote; superdelegates only voted if the nomination went to a second ballot at the convention. These reforms may seem like they weaken the party, but bear in mind they were done to prevent a serious fracturing of the party should elites (superdelegates) prefer a different candidate than voters in a close contest.

Though the role for party insiders has diminished, they retain a good deal of power. The nomination process enables the parties to solve the coordination problem posed by competing presidential aspirants. Sometimes party elites do the coordinating; if they can reach broad agreement on which candidate to support, they can be decisive, as the nomination of George W. Bush in 2000 illustrated—and to some extent also the nomination of Joe Biden in 2020. Bush initially faced a crowded field of twelve candidates, but by the beginning of the delegate selection process (the Iowa caucuses on January 24), six had dropped out, and by early February only Senator John McCain remained a serious rival. Acceptable to all factions, Bush swept away the competition by persuading the Republican Party establishment, elected officials and campaign donors alike, that his candidacy offered the best chance of returning the White House to Republican control. In 2020, though Biden was not leading in the polls or in fund-raising, once it became clear that his rival Bernie Sanders was amassing enough delegates in early contests to prove viable, elites coordinated behind Biden, and all other competitors dropped out of the race within a few days.

Revival of the Parties: A Sixth Party System?

Despite the forces working against parties, despite the public's doubts about the value of parties in general, and despite their internal divisions, the Democratic and Republican

Parties continue to dominate electoral politics. In many ways, they are now stronger than ever. Parties have survived for the same reasons they came into being: elected officials, candidates, and voters find them indispensable.

Partisanship Endures

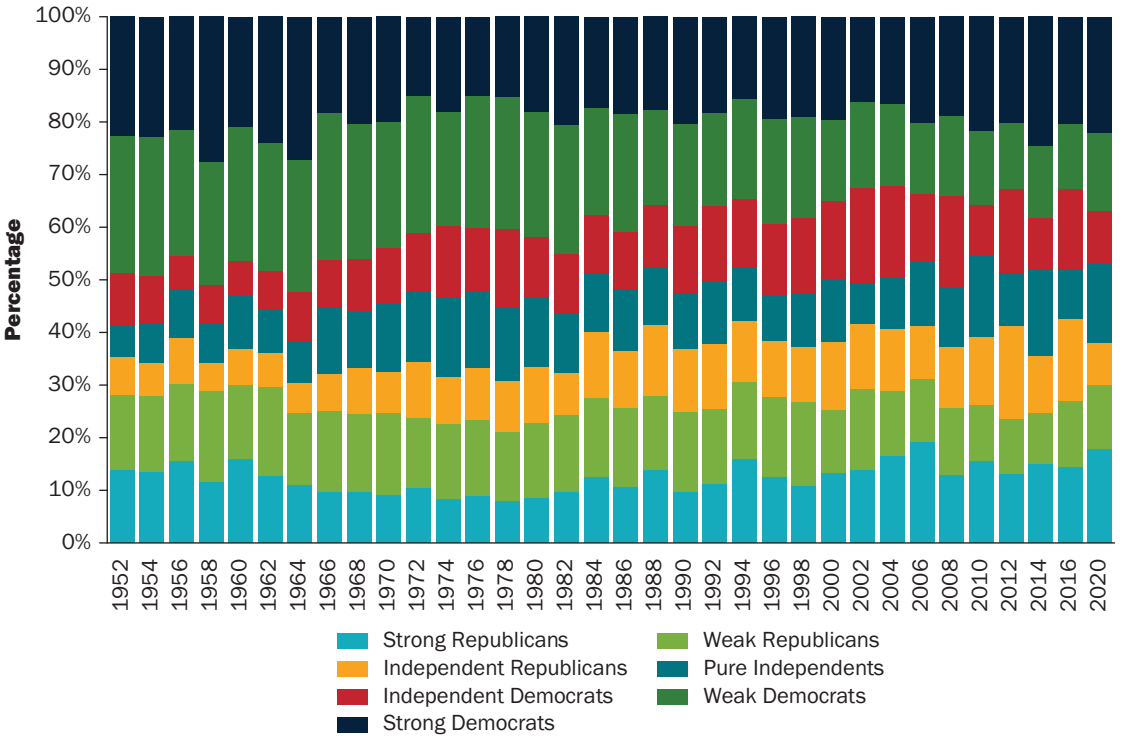
Large majorities of Americans still call themselves Democrats or Republicans, and party affiliation remains the single best predictor of how people will vote. The distribution of partisan identities from 1952 through 2016, shown in Figure 12.4, is surprisingly stable despite the dramatic political events that occurred within that period. The proportion calling themselves independents has grown a bit, but most independents are actually closet partisans leaning toward one of the parties and supporting its candidates as consistently as do weak partisans.[13] The proportion of "pure" independents grew from 6 percent in 1952 to 15 percent in 1976 but has since fallen to an average of about 11 percent over the past two decades. Because self-described independents are less likely to vote, their share of the electorate is actually closer to 5 percent. The proportion of strong partisans (of both parties) declined between the 1950s and the 1970s but has since rebounded. Partisans have also grown more loyal to their party's candidates, and thus the incidence of ticket-splitting has fallen in recent elections to levels last seen in the 1960s.

Party Differences

Voters may not think much of parties, but most still admit to a party preference and use parties to guide their voting decisions. They do so because, despite the divisions within the party coalitions and regardless of how they feel about parties in general, the party labels still carry valuable information about candidates continuing to provide the cheap, shorthand cue so useful to rationally ignorant voters. Indeed, more people think party labels offer clearer guidance now than at any time since 1952; over the past thirty years, the proportion of Americans seeing important differences in what the parties stand for has grown from about half to nearly 80 percent.

Party differences are in fact clear-cut, and realizing this, Americans are now better sorted into the parties than they ever have been. Conservatives are more likely to call themselves Republicans than to call themselves Democrats, and liberals are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. There is also more agreement within parties across issues than in the past. As a consequence, Democrats are more homogenous now as a group—and so are Republicans. This is not to say that all Democrats (or Republicans) care similarly about every issue facing the nation, just that they agree with their fellow partisans on positions. Some people care more about social issues and less about economic issues while other people's concerns are just the opposite; but what is increasingly true is that, within party, voters agree on most things now, even if they care about them with varying levels of intensity.

FIGURE 12.4 Americans' Continuing Identification with a Major Party



Sources: 1952–2004, 2008, 2012, 2016: American National Election Studies; 2006, 2010, 2014: Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2020: The Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape Project.

Republicans typically favor a smaller, cheaper federal government; they advocate lower taxes, less regulation of business and citizens, and lower spending on social welfare. Typically, they would be more generous only to the Defense Department. Republicans generally oppose stricter gun control, restrictions on campaign spending, and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, whereas Democrats mainly favor all three. Democrats are more inclined to regulate business on behalf of consumers and the environment and are more supportive of government programs designed to improve domestic welfare; they would spend less on national defense. Democrats are more concerned with "fairness" and equality, Republicans with letting free enterprise flourish. Republicans would ban abortion and same-sex marriage and allow official prayer in public schools; Democrats would not. Republicans want to reduce immigration and build a wall on the Mexican border; Democrats do not. Democrats accept the overwhelming scientific

consensus that human activity is warming the planet, with potentially disastrous consequences, and advocate government action to cut greenhouse gas emissions; Republicans either deny human responsibility for global warming or consider it insufficiently menacing to justify government intervention. Not all candidates adhere to their party's modal positions; some Republicans support freedom of choice on abortion, and some Democrats advocate large defense budgets; Donald Trump's rejection of free trade was a clear departure from Republican orthodoxy. But the party label continues to distinguish candidates from one another on many issues with considerable accuracy. As the predictive accuracy of party labels has grown in recent decades, so has the usefulness—and therefore use—of party cues.

Changes in the Party Coalitions

The party coalitions of the 2000s still retain traces of the New Deal alignment (for example, lower-income voters are still more likely to be Democrats and higher-income voters Republicans), but they have undergone several crucial changes since the 1960s. In the 1950s white southerners were overwhelmingly Democratic, but they responded to the civil rights revolution—and the Republicans' "southern strategy" to exploit the discontent civil rights aroused—by moving gradually but steadily into the Republican camp. A solid majority of white southerners now identify themselves as Republicans. African Americans favored Democrats even before the 1960s, but the magnitude of the Democratic advantage more than doubled in the 1960s, has remained huge ever since, and was reinforced by Obama's two candidacies. Latino voters, representing a growing share of the electorate, have also become an important component of the Democratic coalition, in part as a reaction to the hard-line stance against undocumented immigrants taken by many Republican politicians, exemplified by Donald Trump.

Men have become more Republican, whereas women have not, creating a "gender gap" between the parties. A similar trend has emerged with education. Those with a college degree have moved into the Democratic Party, while those without one have become more Republican. The Democratic advantage among Catholics has shrunk, and religiously active voters in all Christian denominations have become relatively more Republican, whereas secular voters have become more Democratic.

Changes in the party coalitions have been extensive enough to suggest that a sixth party system is now in place. Because the changes occurred gradually and at different times, the new system's starting date is unclear: some analysts propose 1968, whereas others say 1980 or 1984. Whatever the timing, the most salient difference between the current system and New Deal party systems is the Republican Party's increased strength, exemplified by its winning majorities in the House and Senate in six straight elections (1994–2004), unprecedented since the fourth party system, its retaking of the House in 2010 and the Senate in 2014, erasing the Democratic gains of 2006 and 2008, and its

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib all made history when they were elected as House Democrats in 2018. Cortez is the youngest ever congresswoman. Pressley is the first African American woman to be elected to Congress from Massachusetts. Omar is the first Somali American legislator in the U.S. Tlaib is the first Palestinian American woman to serve in Congress. All four were reelected in 2020.

Alex Wroblewski/Getty Images

sweeping national victory in 2016 (now partially erased by the Democrats' 2018 takeover of the House).

The Republicans' competitive status may be threatened, however, by demographic trends in the country. The Republican coalition includes a disproportionate share of white (86 percent), male, older, less educated, religiously active, and socially conservative Americans, all shrinking segments of the electorate. The Democratic coalition is younger, more female, better educated, and more secular; it includes a much larger share of minority voters (43 percent), including Latinos, the fastest growing segment of the electorate.[14] Younger voters tend to be more secular and socially liberal and are likely to remain so as they age.

Mitt Romney's inability to attract more young, nonwhite, secular, and female voters in 2012 was widely viewed by Republican analysts as a sign that their party faced long-term decline if it did not expand its appeal beyond its current, diminishing base. Trump challenged that perspective in 2016 when he won the electoral if not the popular vote by outperforming his party's 2012 nominee, Romney, among whites, especially white men without college degrees, who were key to his victories in several swing states.

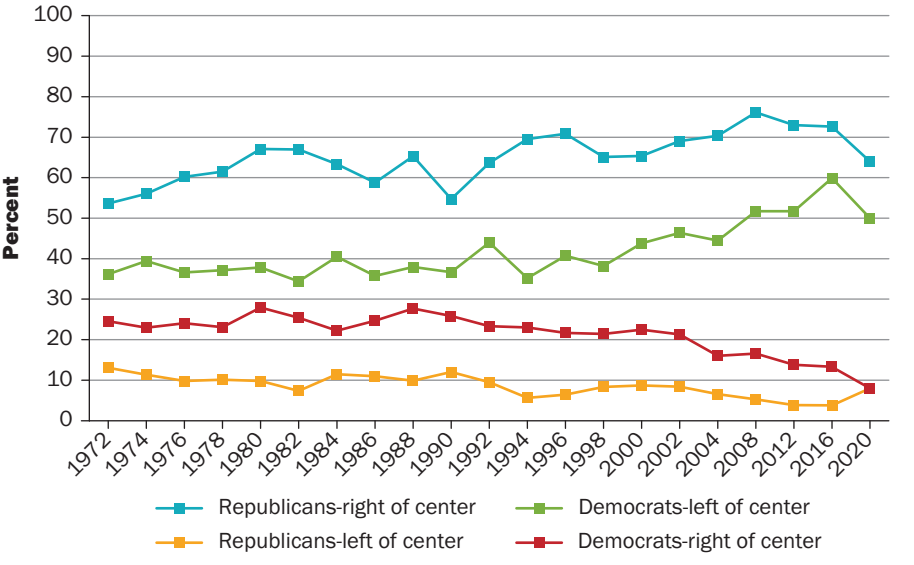
More generally, as America has become more diverse racially and ethnically, whites have responded by becoming more conservative and Republican, while racial and ethnic minorities have remained predominantly liberal and Democratic. Thus, although the parties have grown increasingly divergent demographically—a trend contributing to partisan polarization on issues—the electorate's changing demographic profile has yet to permanently shift the partisan balance in the Democrats' favor.

A second distinctive feature of the current party system is that partisan differences on issues and policy are wider and deeper than they were during the New Deal party system. The widening ideological divide between the parties in Congress over the past several decades has been echoed, to varying degrees, at all levels of the party system. In general, the more actively engaged Americans are in politics, the more separated along party lines they have become. Partisan differences in ideology and policy have widened the most among political professionals; campaign contributors; and the amateur activists who walk precincts and staff phone banks for candidates, put up yard signs, and encourage their friends and neighbors to vote for their side. Scholars still debate whether Americans as a whole have become more extreme (rather than centrist) in their opinions on

political issues, but there is abundant evidence that they have responded to the clearer cues issuing from the more polarized political class by sorting themselves more consistently into the party that best fits their own political beliefs and preferences.[15] As mentioned earlier, people who call themselves conservatives and express conservative opinions on policy issues are much more likely to identify as Republicans, and self-identified liberals and people holding liberal policy views are more likely to identify as Democrats, than was the case a few decades ago. This shuffling between ideology, issues, and partisanship is a marked difference from the last party system.

The sorting process has been gradual; it has been most noticeable among conservative southern whites, but it is by no means confined to them. Figure 12.5 illustrates some consequences. The Republican coalition, predominantly conservative from the start, has grown substantially more so. The proportion of Republicans placing themselves to the right of center on a scale that ranged from very conservative to very liberal grew from 54 percent in 1972 to 64 percent in 2020, while the proportion left of center fell from 13 percent to 8 percent. Meanwhile Democrats grew more liberal, with the proportion placing themselves left of center rising from 36 percent to 50 percent and the proportion right of center falling from 25 percent to 9 percent. Over the same period, the share of Republicans placing themselves in the middle of the scale dropped about 10 points and the share of Democrats by roughly 13 points. The emergence of polarized, nearly evenly balanced party coalitions has ratcheted up electoral competition for federal offices,

FIGURE 12.5 Party Identification and Ideology Are Increasingly Aligned



Sources: American National Election Studies; 2020: The Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape Project.

spurring the invigoration of national party organizations and the formation of lavishly funded auxiliary organizations devoted to electing the party's candidates.

Modern Party Organizations

On paper the modern Democratic and Republican Parties might be depicted as pyramidal organizations. Each party's sovereign body is its national nominating convention, which officially elects the national party chair and ratifies the states' selections to the party's national committee (the Republican National Committee or the Democratic National Committee). The national committee, with at least two members from each state, is charged with conducting the party's affairs between national conventions and hiring and directing a large professional staff. Below the national committees are the state committees and chairs, which oversee the committees representing congressional and state legislative districts and counties. Further subdivisions include diverse township, city, ward, and precinct committees, also with formal leaders, some chosen by caucuses, some in primary elections.*

Control

In reality, however, the national parties are far from orderly hierarchies, and at most levels they are controlled by elected politicians, not party officials. The national party's chair is always the choice of the party's presidential nominee, and the national committee's primary task is to win or retain the presidency, although it engages in other forms of party building between presidential contests. House and Senate candidates have their own separate national party campaign organizations—all under the control of their respective party's congressional leaders (covered in Chapter 6).

Elected officials also usually control state parties, which are in no way subordinate to the national parties; governors are frequently the most powerful figures in their state parties, for example. State parties often have little influence over local organizations, and both state and local parties are sometimes split into personal, ideological, or regional factions. Local party offices sometimes go begging, and on occasion insurgent groups have been able to take over party committee and leadership posts just by getting their people to show up at the usually lightly attended caucuses or precinct conventions where such choices are made. That is how, for example, Christian conservatives came to control local Republican Party organizations in some places in the 1990s, including Texas, South Carolina, and Minnesota.[16]

Although they continue to display the organizational fragmentation that has always characterized them, the American parties of today are in some ways more closely linked than ever. Both national parties and many state organizations have become modern, businesslike enterprises with permanent offices, professional staffs, and relatively stable budgets, producing a stronger institutional basis for ongoing coordination and cooperation in pursuit of power.

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*Party organization at the state and local levels is highly varied, reflecting differences in historical development, local custom, and state law. Moreover, in many places the formal party units are joined by a diverse set of party clubs, caucuses, factional organizations, and allied interest groups that also participate in party politics.

2020 Party Platforms

These excerpts from the 2020 Democratic and Republican platforms reveal some of the differences between positions typically held by the parties. But few voters learn of these differences by reading the platforms. Rather, they learn about the parties' positions through political news and campaign advertising.

	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS
Abortion	We assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution.	Democrats believe every woman should be able to access high-quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion. We oppose and will fight to overturn federal and state laws that create barriers to women's reproductive health and rights.
Taxes	We oppose tax policies that deliberately divide Americans or promote class warfare. . . . Any value added tax or national sales tax must be tied to the simultaneous repeal of the Sixteenth Amendment, which established the federal income tax. . . . We . . . support making the federal tax code so simple and easy to understand that the IRS becomes obsolete and can be abolished.	Democrats will take action to reverse the Trump administration's tax cuts benefiting the wealthiest Americans and rewarding corporations for shipping American jobs overseas. . . . We will make sure the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes. . . . Corporate tax rates, which were cut sharply by the 2017 Republican tax cut, must be raised, and "trickle-down" tax cuts must be rejected.
Guns	We support firearm reciprocity legislation to recognize the right of law-abiding Americans to carry firearms . . . in all 50 states. We support constitutional carry statutes. . . . We oppose . . . laws that would restrict magazine capacity or ban the sale of the most popular and common modern rifle. . . . We oppose federal licensing or registration of law-abiding gun owners, registration of ammunition, and restoration of the ill-fated Clinton gun ban.	Democrats will enact universal background checks, end online sales of guns and ammunition, close dangerous loopholes . . . and adequately fund the federal background check system. We . . . will ban the manufacture and sale of assault weapons and high capacity magazines. . . . Democrats believe that gun companies should be held responsible for their products . . . and will prioritize repealing the law that shields gun manufacturers from civil liability.

(Continued)

(Continued)

	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS
Same-sex marriage	We condemn the Supreme Court's ruling in *United States v. Windsor*, which . . . removed the ability of Congress to define marriage policy in federal law. We also condemn the Supreme Court's . . . ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* . . . [which] robbed 320 million Americans of their legitimate constitutional authority to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.	Democrats applaud last year's decision by the Supreme Court that recognized that LGBTQ+ people—like other Americans—have the right to marry the person they love.
Climate change	Climate change is far from this nation's most pressing national security issue. . . . We oppose any carbon tax. . . . We will . . . forbid the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide. . . . We reject the agendas of both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.	Climate change is a global emergency. . . . We will rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and . . . will follow science and the law by reducing harmful methane and carbon pollution from the energy sector. . . . We agree with scientists and public health experts that the United States . . . must achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, and no later than 2050.
Health care	Improving health care must start with repeal of . . . the Affordable Care Act. . . . We will reduce mandates and enable insurers and providers of care to increase health care options and contain costs. . . . We will return to the states their . . . role of regulating local insurance markets, limit federal requirements on both private insurance and Medicaid . . . we propose to block grant Medicaid and other payments.	We must guarantee health care not as a privilege for some, but as a right for every single American. . . . We need to protect, strengthen, and build upon our bedrock health care programs, including the Affordable Care Act, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Veterans Affairs (VA) system. . . . We will give all Americans the choice to select a high-quality, affordable public option through the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS
Immigration	We oppose any form of amnesty. . . . The executive amnesties of 2012 and 2014 . . . [are] unlawful . . . [and] must be immediately rescinded by a Republican president. [We] support building a wall along our southern border and protecting all ports of entry. . . . Asylum should be limited to cases of political, ethnic, or religious persecution. . . . Refugees who cannot be carefully vetted cannot be admitted to the country, especially those whose homelands have been the breeding grounds for terrorism.	We will immediately terminate the Trump administration's discriminatory travel and immigration bans. . . . We will reinstate, expand, and streamline protections for Dreamers. . . . Democrats will end Trump administration policies that deny protected entry to asylum seekers. . . . It is long past time to provide a roadmap to citizenship for the millions of undocumented workers, caregivers, students, and children. . . . We believe we should expand, not reduce, the annual visa cap for victims of human trafficking.
Social Security	Its current course will lead to a financial and social disaster. . . . Current retirees and those close to retirement can be assured of their benefits. . . . All options should be considered to preserve Social Security. . . . We oppose tax increases and believe in the power of markets to create wealth and to help secure the future of our Social Security system.	We will enact policies to make Social Security more progressive, including increasing benefits for all beneficiaries, meaningfully increasing minimum benefit payments, increasing benefits for long-duration beneficiaries, and protecting surviving spouses from benefit cuts. . . . Democrats will reject every effort to cut, privatize, or weaken Social Security.
Death penalty	The constitutionality of the death penalty is firmly settled by its explicit mention in the Fifth Amendment. . . . We condemn the Supreme Court's erosion of the right of the people to enact capital punishment in their states.	Democrats continue to support abolishing the death penalty.
Minimum wage	Minimum wage is an issue that should be handled at the state and local level.	Democrats will fight to raise wages for working people . . . by raising the federal minimum wage so it reaches $15 an hour by 2026.

(Continued)

(Continued)

	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS
Voter identification	We are concerned . . . that some voting procedures may be open to abuse. . . . We support legislation to require proof of citizenship when registering to vote and secure photo ID when voting. We strongly oppose litigation against states exercising their sovereign authority to enact such laws.	We stand united against the determined Republican campaign to disenfranchise voters through onerous voter ID laws, unconstitutional and excessive purges of the voter rolls, and closures of polling places in low-income neighborhoods, on college campuses, and in communities of color.
Campaign finance	Freedom of speech includes the right to devote resources to whatever cause or candidate one supports. . . . We support repeal of federal restrictions on political parties in McCain-Feingold [and] raising or repealing contribution limits.	Money is not speech, and corporations are not people. Democrats will fight to pass a constitutional amendment that will go beyond merely overturning *Citizens United* and related decisions like *Buckley v. Valeo* by eliminating all private financing from federal elections.
Financial regulation	We must overturn the regulatory nightmare, created by the Dodd-Frank law.	We will strengthen and enforce the Obama-Biden administration's Dodd-Frank financial reform law . . . to protect American workers from the impacts of future financial crises.
Cuba	The Obama administration's "opening to Cuba" was a shameful accommodation to the demands of its tyrants. . . . We call on the Congress to uphold current U.S. law, which sets conditions for the lifting of sanctions on the island: legalization of political parties, an independent media, and free and fair internationally supervised elections.	Democrats will also move swiftly to reverse Trump administration policies that have undermined U.S. national interests and harmed the Cuban people and their families in the United States, including its efforts to curtail travel and remittances. . . . We will promote human rights and people-to-people exchanges, and empower the Cuban people to write their own future.

Sources: Adapted from 2020 Republican and Democratic platforms, accessed at https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/docs/Resolution_Platform_2020.pdf and https://www.demconvention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-07-31-Democratic-Party-Platform-For-Distribution.pdf.

Organizational Innovations

Although both major parties have had permanent national committees since before the Civil War, only since the 1970s have national organizations played a significant role in party politics. Democrats began to nationalize their party structure when the various post-1968 reform commissions operating out of national headquarters imposed rules on state and local parties. But Republicans led the way after that as they sought to undo the damage inflicted by the Watergate scandal and other troubles that cost their president, Gerald Ford, the 1976 election. The first step was to raise money—lots of it. Republican operatives perfected the new technique of computerized direct-mail fund-raising, developing lists of people willing to send modest checks in response to regular solicitations to create a steady source of income for the party.

With the money coming in, Republicans enlarged their organization staff and began to provide a host of services to their candidates. Today they help candidates for federal office raise money, comply with campaign finance regulations, design polls, set up websites, research opponents' records, put together lists of voters to contact, and design campaign strategy. They also contribute some money directly to candidates' campaign war chests. Republican candidates are helped indirectly as well by the money and training the national party has contributed to state and local Republican organizations across the nation to strengthen the party at the grass roots. In addition, the campaign committees stepped up efforts to identify, recruit, and train effective candidates for Congress and, in some instances, for state offices as well.[17]

Democrats were shocked into a similar effort to expand the services offered by their national party committees when in 1980 they lost both the White House (to Ronald Reagan) and their Senate majority. They played catch-up in fund-raising until 2008, when they outspent the Republicans for the first time. Contrary to expectations, the ban on party money enacted in 2002 (a ban on "soft" money"—unrestricted donations for party building) did not put them at further disadvantage, for they were able to make up much of the difference by raising more "hard" dollars (contributions that are regulated and reported). Republicans, too, vastly increased their take of hard money, and between them, the parties raised $1.59 billion for the 2004 federal election campaigns, $1.75 billion for the 2008 campaigns, $2.09 billion for 2012, and more than $2.11 billion for 2016. Instead of transferring soft money to state parties to help federal candidates as they had in the past, the Hill committees simply switched to spending hard money on independent campaigns (as in not coordinated with the candidate) in the most competitive congressional races. Spending of this sort exceeded $232 million in 2018, up from a mere $2.9 million in 2002.[18]

Both parties have now also adopted the most up-to-date technology to perform the oldest of party tasks, getting potentially free-riding supporters to the polls. They have compiled massive databases, with detailed information about tens of millions of individual voters, which are used to support sophisticated local efforts to get out the vote. This

traditional party activity has grown more important because, with fewer voters willing to cross party lines, winning depends increasingly on mobilizing core supporters. Both parties recognized this reality in 2018 and made extraordinary efforts to get their people to the polls. Both succeeded, but Democrats to a much greater extent than Republicans, and this was crucial to their takeover of the House. Their efforts produced the highest midterm voting participation rates in a century, with an estimated 50.3 percent of eligible citizens casting ballots—10 points higher than the midterm average for the last four decades.[19]

Outside groups also now participate extensively in campaigning for (or more often against) candidates, mainly but not exclusively as auxiliaries of the parties; such groups spent $1.1 billion on independent campaigns in the 2018 midterm election.[20] Party committees, the party's candidates, outside groups, and wealthy individuals with compatible political and ideological agendas now operate as flexible partisan networks for acquiring and allocating campaign resources. Factions within these networks often compete for influence over the party's ideological coloration and policy agenda, mainly by supporting their favorites and opposing intraparty rivals in primary elections, but they unite after the primaries to support their party's nominees in pursuit of the presidency and congressional majorities.

Although modern parties continue to play a major financial and organizational role in electoral politics, they have clearly lost the near monopoly they had on campaign resources until the mid-twentieth century. Candidates, rather than party tickets, are the focus of campaigns; the party's activities are aimed more at helping individual candidates compete more effectively than at promoting the party brand. According to political scientist John Aldrich, "A new form of party has emerged, one that is 'in service' to its ambitious politicians but not 'in control' of them as the mass party [of the past] sought to be."[21] Whatever influence the party organizations do exercise over politicians is shared by the wealthy interests and individuals who now invest so heavily in their campaigns.

Expediency Persists

American parties developed and continue to endure because they have proved so useful to politicians and voters attempting to act collectively within the institutional framework established by the Constitution. The federal system offers powerful incentives for organizing and expanding both legislative and electoral coalitions—that is, political parties—to win and exercise political power. For one thing, it rewards political entrepreneurs who can organize collective action across government institutions and electoral arenas. For another, it prompts voters to use party labels to simplify their decisions, giving politicians a reason to cooperate with party leaders to maintain the value of the party's "brand name."

Although the party coalitions have shifted periodically in response to new national issues and conflicts, producing five—perhaps now six—more or less distinct party systems, the basic pattern of competition between two broad, usually fractious coalitions

persists. The two-party system arises from strategic voting in the winner-take-all competition for the presidency (and for all other federal offices as well) and has been strengthened by laws (mandating, for example, primary elections) that treat the parties as official components of the electoral machinery.

Party coalitions remain fractious because party entrepreneurs pursuing majorities must combine diverse groups that are neither natural allies nor disposed to pay high conformity costs for the party's sake. But these coalitions persist because the payoffs for cooperation (and the costs of splitting) are so obvious. Progressive Era reforms, followed by the development of new technologies of communication after the Second World War, weakened traditional party organizations and ended their monopoly control of campaigns, but parties continue to play a central role in electoral politics. Despite their expressed disdain for parties, voters still rely heavily on party cues in making their decisions because party labels continue to provide useful, cheap information about candidates. Party entrepreneurs, for their part, have simply redesigned party organizations to operate more effectively in today's media-based electoral arena. They are walking down the trail blazed by Jefferson and Van Buren, and for the same reason: to elect those who share their views so that they may shape public policy to their liking.

KEY TERMS

Australian ballot 525
caucus 531
national party convention 519
New Deal coalition 528
party machines 523
patronage 515
political party 509
primary election 525
Progressive Era 523
split ticket 525
superdelegates 531
two-party system 513

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Sundquist, James L. *The Dynamics of the Party System.* Rev. ed. Washington, DC: Brookings, 1983. Highly detailed study of historical party realignments; for those who prefer complex stories to simple ones.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where did U.S. parties first arise? Why did they prove necessary in this setting? Why did parties spread from there to other areas of politics?
2. Why do third parties tend to do so poorly in U.S. elections? Why do such parties do so much better in other democracies?
3. How has the nomination process for party candidates changed over time? If national conventions no longer decide on the party's presidential nominee, why are they still held?
4. How do party activists differ from rank-and-file voters of their party? What consequences does this difference have for American politics?
5. How and why have the parties become more polarized on ideology and issues over the past several decades?