

# Political Parties



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## WHO GOVERNS?

1. How has America's two-party system changed, and how does it differ from the party systems of other representative democracies?
2. How much do parties affect how Americans vote?



## TO WHAT ENDS?

1. Did the Founding Fathers think that political parties were a good idea?
2. How, if at all, should America's two-party system be reformed?

**D**emocratic party leaders, it seemed, had reason to smile. In the November 2006 midterm congressional elections, they won control of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Since 1994 Republicans had ruled the House and had led the Senate in all but two years (2001–2002). But did the win clearly signal a large and stable shift in mass public support for the Democratic Party?

No. Four years earlier, it was Republican party leaders who were smiling. Normally, the incumbent president's party loses, not gains, seats in midterm congressional elections. In November 2002, however, with first-term President George W. Bush, a Republican, in the White House, his party gained members in both chambers and won back the Senate. It was the first national election following the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. Many people who voted for Republican candidates were expressing support for the president in the war on terrorism. But by 2006, many who had voted Republican in 2002 had soured on the president and the war in Iraq. When voters favoring Democratic candidates in 2006 were asked whether they favored them mainly because they agreed "with the policies of the Democratic party" or because they wanted "a change of leadership," they chose the latter reason by over four to one.<sup>1</sup>

Nowhere in either election's results was there any evidence that voters were becoming more highly attached than they were before to one party or the other. As we will see, these two most recent midterm congressional elections are better understood in relation to much other evidence indicating that political parties in America today, though they retain many vital functions and boast many loyalists, are in several respects weaker than they were during the period from their birth in the early nineteenth century to the 1960s. This decline poses serious challenges for our representative democracy.

## ★ Parties—Here and Abroad

A **political party** is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public office by supplying them with a label—a "party identification"—by which they are known to the electorate.<sup>2</sup> This definition is purposefully broad so that it will include both familiar parties (Democratic, Republican) and unfamiliar ones (Whig, Libertarian, Socialist Workers) and will cover periods in which a party is very strong (having an elaborate and well-disciplined organization that provides money and workers to its candidates) as well as periods in which it is quite weak (supplying nothing but the label to candidates). The label by which a candidate is known may or may not actually be printed on the ballot opposite the candidate's name: in the United States it does appear on the ballot in all national elections but in only a minority of municipal ones; in Australia and Israel (and in Great Britain before 1969) it never appears on the ballot at all.

**political party** A group that seeks to elect candidates to public office.

American political parties are the oldest in the world. They may be in decline, but they are not dead or dying. New parties (like the Green party launched in 2000 by consumer advocate Ralph Nader) still come and go. Two old parties (Democratic and Republican) still dominate the country's campaigns and elections. Nor have party leaders been wholly replaced by media consultants, pollsters, or others whose profession is raising money or devising strategies for whichever candidates bid highest for their services.

Still, America's political parties do not matter as much, or in the same ways, as they once did. For instance, one reason voter turnout is higher abroad than in this country is that political parties in other democratic nations are more effective at mobilizing voters than are those here. The sense of being a party member and the inclination to vote the party ticket are greater in France, Italy, and Sweden than they are in the United States.

It was not always thus. At one time being a Democrat or a Republican was a serious commitment that people did not make lightly or abandon easily. In those days it would have been hard to find anything in Europe that could match the vote-getting power of such party organizations as those in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia.

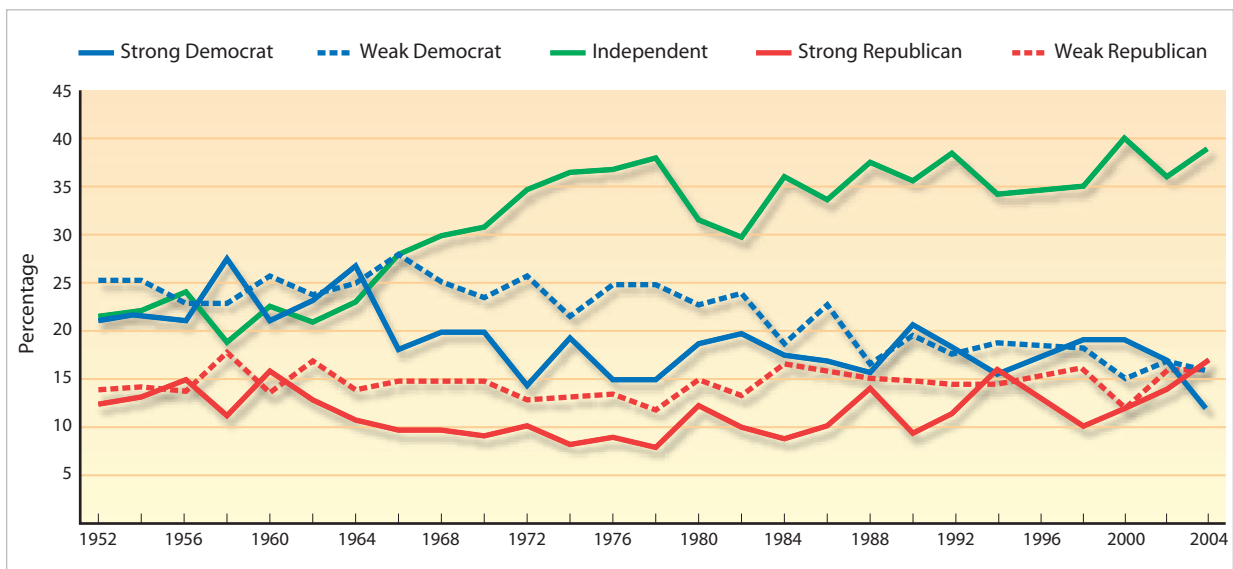
Parties in the United States are relatively weak to-

day mainly because the laws and rules under which they operate have taken away much of their power at the same time that many voters have lost their sense of commitment to party identification. This weakening has proceeded unevenly, however, because our constitutional system has produced a decentralized party system just as it has produced a decentralized governmental system, with the result that parties are strong in some places and almost nonexistent in other places.

There are three political arenas in which parties may be found, and in which changes in their strength may be assessed. A party exists as a *label* in the minds of the voters, as an *organization* that recruits and campaigns for candidates, and as a *set of leaders* who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government. A powerful party is one whose label has a strong appeal for the voters, whose organization can decide who will be candidates and how their campaigns will be managed, and whose leaders can dominate one or all branches of government.

American parties have become weaker in all three arenas. As a *label* with which voters identify, the parties are probably much weaker than they were in the nineteenth century but only somewhat weaker than they were forty years ago (see Figure 9.1). In 1952, a total of 36 percent of the electorate identified strongly as Democrats (22 percent) or Republicans (14 per-

**Figure 9.1** Decline in Party Identification, 1952–2004



Source: American National Election Studies, November 2005, table 2A.1.

cent), while a total of 23 percent of the electorate identified as independents. By 2004, total strong party identifiers had dropped to 33 percent of the electorate, while all independents had risen to 39 percent of the electorate. But the best evidence of weakening party identification is what voters *do*. As we shall see in the next chapter, in some elections many people vote split tickets—that is, supporting a president from one party and members of Congress from the other.

As a *set of leaders* who organize government, especially Congress, political parties remain somewhat strong in ways that will be described in Chapter 13. As *organizations* that nominate and elect candidates, parties have become dramatically weaker since the 1960s. In most states parties have very little control over who gets nominated to office. The causes and consequences of that change are the subject of this chapter.

In Europe things are very different. Almost the only way a person can become a candidate for elective office is to be nominated by party leaders. Campaigns are run by the party, using party funds and workers, not by the candidate. Once in office the elected officials are expected to vote and act together with other members of their party. The principal criterion by which voters choose among candidates is their party identification or label. This has been changing somewhat of late: European parties, like American ones, have not been able to count as heavily as in the past on party loyalty among the voters.

Several factors explain the striking differences between American and European political parties. First, the federal system of government in the United States decentralizes political authority and thus decentralizes political party organizations. For nearly two centuries most of the important governmental decisions were made at the state and local levels—decisions regarding education, land use, business regulation, and public welfare—and thus it was at the state and local levels that the important struggles over power and policy occurred. Moreover, most people with political jobs—either elective or appointive—worked for state and local government, and thus a party's interest in obtaining these jobs for its followers meant that it had to focus attention on who controlled city hall, the county courthouse, and the state capitol. Federalism, in short, meant that political parties would acquire jobs and money from local sources and fight local contests. This, in turn, meant that the national political parties would be coalitions of local parties, and



Election posters put up in 2005 during Iraq's first free election in half a century.

though these coalitions would have a keen interest in capturing the presidency (with it, after all, went control of large numbers of federal jobs), the national party leaders rarely had as much power as the local ones. The Republican leader of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, for example, could often ignore the decisions of the Republican national chairman and even of the Ohio state chairman.

Political authority in the United States has of late come to be far more centralized: the federal government now makes decisions affecting almost all aspects of our lives, including those—such as schooling and welfare—once left entirely in local hands. Yet the political parties have not become more centralized as a result. If anything, they have become even weaker and more decentralized. One reason for this apparent paradox is that in the United States, unlike in most other democratic nations, political parties are closely regulated by state and federal laws, and these regulations have had the effect of weakening the power of parties substantially. Perhaps the most important of these regulations are those that prescribe how a party's candidates are to be selected.

In the great majority of American states, the party leaders do not select people to run for office; by law those people are chosen by the voters in primary elections. Though sometimes the party can influence who will win a primary contest, in general people running for state or national office in this country owe little to party leaders. In Europe, by contrast, there is no such thing as a primary election—the only way to become a candidate for office is to persuade party leaders to put your name on the ballot. In a later section of this chapter, the impact of the direct primary will be



discussed in more detail; for now, it is enough to note that its use removes from the hands of the party leadership its most important source of power over officeholders.

Furthermore, if an American political party wins control of Congress, it does not—as in most European nations with a parliamentary system of government—also win the right to select the chief executive of the government. The American president, as we have seen, is independently elected, and this means that he will choose his principal subordinates not from among members of Congress but from among persons out of Congress. Should he pick a representative or senator for his cabinet, the Constitution requires that person to resign from Congress in order to accept the job. Thus an opportunity to be a cabinet secretary is not an important reward for members of Congress, and so the president cannot use the prospect of that reward as a way of controlling congressional action. All this weakens the significance and power of parties in terms of organizing the government and conducting its business.

## Political Culture

The attitudes and traditions of American voters reinforce the institutional and legal factors that make American parties relatively weak. Political parties in this country have rarely played an important part in the life of the average citizen; indeed, one does not usually “join” a party here except by voting for its candidates. In many European nations, on the other hand, large numbers of citizens will join a party, pay dues, and attend regular meetings. Furthermore, in countries such as France, Austria, and Italy, the political parties sponsor a wide range of activities and dominate a variety of associations to which a person may belong—labor unions, youth groups, educational programs, even chess clubs.

In the United States we tend to keep parties separate from other aspects of our lives. As Democrats or Republicans, we may become excited by a presidential campaign, and a few of us may even participate in helping elect a member of Congress or state senator. Our social, business, working, and cultural lives, however, are almost entirely nonpartisan. Indeed, most Americans, unlike many Europeans, would resent partisanship’s becoming a conspicuous feature of other organizations to which they belong. All this is a way of saying that American parties play a segmental, rather

than a comprehensive, role in our lives and that even this role is diminishing as more and more of us proclaim ourselves to be “independents.”

## ★ The Rise and Decline of the Political Party

Our nation began without parties, and today’s parties, though far from extinct, are about as weak as at any time in our history. In between the Founding and the present, however, parties arose and became powerful. We can see this process in four broad periods of party history: when political parties were created (roughly from the Founding to the 1820s); when the more or less stable two-party system emerged (roughly from the time of President Jackson to the Civil War); when parties developed a comprehensive organizational form and appeal (roughly from the Civil War to the 1930s); and finally when party “reform” began to alter the party system (beginning in the early 1900s but taking effect chiefly since the New Deal).

## The Founding

The Founders disliked parties, thinking of them as “factions” motivated by ambition and self-interest. George Washington, dismayed by the quarreling between Hamilton and Jefferson in his cabinet, devoted much of his Farewell Address to condemning parties. This hostility toward parties was understandable: the legitimacy and success of the newly created federal government were still very much in doubt. When Jefferson organized his followers to oppose Hamilton’s policies, it seemed to Hamilton and *his* followers that Jefferson was opposing not just a policy or a leader but also the very concept of a national government. Jefferson, for his part, thought that Hamilton was not simply pursuing bad policies but was subverting the Constitution itself. Before political parties could become legitimate, it was necessary for people to be able to separate in their minds quarrels over policies and elections from disputes over the legitimacy of the new government itself. The ability to make that distinction was slow in coming, and thus parties were objects of profound suspicion, defended, at first, only as temporary expedients.

The first organized political party in American history was made up of the followers of Jefferson, who, beginning in the 1790s, called themselves *Republicans*

(hoping to suggest thereby that their opponents were secret monarchists).<sup>\*</sup> The followers of Hamilton kept the label *Federalist*, which once had been used to refer to all supporters of the new Constitution (hoping to imply that their opponents were “Antifederalists,” or enemies of the Constitution).

These parties were loose caucuses of political notables in various localities, with New England being strongly Federalist and much of the South passionately Republican. Jefferson and his ally James Madison thought that their Republican party was a temporary arrangement designed to defeat John Adams, a Federalist, in his bid to succeed Washington in 1796. (Adams narrowly defeated Jefferson, who, under the system then in effect, became vice president because he had the second most electoral votes.) In 1800 Adams’s bid to succeed himself intensified party activity even more, but this time Jefferson won and the Republicans assumed office. The Federalists feared that Jefferson would dismantle the Constitution, but Jefferson adopted a conciliatory posture, saying in his inaugural address that “we are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.”<sup>3</sup> It was not true, of course: the Federalists detested Jefferson, and some were planning to have New England secede from the Union. But it was good politics, expressive of the need that every president has to persuade the public that, despite partisan politics, the presidency exists to serve all the people.

So successful were the Republicans that the Federalists virtually ceased to exist as a party. Jefferson was reelected in 1804 with almost no opposition; Madison easily won two terms; James Monroe carried sixteen out of nineteen states in 1816 and was reelected without opposition in 1820. Political parties had seemingly disappeared, just as Jefferson had hoped. The weakness of this so-called first party system can be explained by the fact that it was the first: nobody had been born a Federalist or a Republican; there was no ancestral party loyalty to defend; the earliest political leaders did not think of themselves as professional politicians; and the Federalist party had such a limited sectional and class base that it could not compete effectively in national elections. The parties that existed in these early years were essentially small groups of local notables. Political participation was limited,

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**When Andrew Jackson ran for president in 1828, over a million votes were cast for the first time in American history. This poster, from the 1832 election, was part of the emergence of truly mass political participation.**

and nominations for most local offices were arranged rather casually.

Even in this early period, the parties, though they had very different views on economic policy and somewhat different class bases, did not represent clear, homogeneous economic interests. Farmers in Virginia were Republicans, but farmers in Delaware were Federalists; the commercial interests of Boston were firmly Federalist, but commercial leaders in urban Connecticut were likely to be Republican.

From the beginning to the present elections have created heterogeneous coalitions, as Madison anticipated.

## *The Jacksonians*

What is often called the second party system emerged around 1824 with Andrew Jackson’s first run for the presidency and lasted until the Civil War became inevitable. Its distinctive feature was that political participation became a mass phenomenon. For one thing, the number of voters to be reached had become quite

<sup>\*</sup>The Jeffersonian Republicans were not the party that today we call Republican. In fact, present-day Democrats consider Jefferson to be the founder of their party.

large. Only about 365,000 popular votes were cast in 1824. But as a result of laws that enlarged the number of people eligible to vote and of an increase in the population, by 1828 well over a million votes were tallied. By 1840 the figure was well over 2 million. (In England at this time there were only 650,000 eligible voters.) In addition, by 1832 presidential electors were selected by popular vote in virtually every state. (As late as 1816 electors were chosen by the state legislatures, rather than by the people, in about half the states.) Presidential politics had become a truly national, genuinely popular activity; indeed, in many communities election campaigns had become the principal public spectacle.

The party system of the Jacksonian era was built from the bottom up rather than—as during the period of the Founding—from the top down. No change better illustrates this transformation than the abandonment of the system of having caucuses composed of members of Congress nominate presidential candidates. The caucus system was an effort to unite the legislative and executive branches by giving the former some degree of control over who would have a chance to capture the latter. The caucus system became unpopular when the caucus candidate for president in 1824 ran third in a field of four in the general election, and it was completely discredited that same year when Congress denied the presidency to Jackson, the candidate with the greatest share of the popular vote.

To replace the caucus, the party convention was invented. The first convention in American history was that of the Anti-Masonic party in 1831; the first convention of a major political party was that of the anti-Jackson Republicans later that year (it nominated Henry Clay for president). The Democrats held a convention in 1832 that ratified Jackson's nomination for reelection and picked Martin Van Buren as his running mate. The first convention to select a man who would be elected president and who was not already the incumbent president was held by the Democrats in 1836; it chose Van Buren.

Considering the many efforts made in recent years to curtail or even abolish the national nominating convention, it is worth remembering that the convention system was first developed in part as a reform—a way of allowing for some measure of local control over the nominating process. Virtually no other nation adopted this method, just as no other nation was later to adopt the direct primary after the convention sys-

tem became the object of criticism. It is interesting, but perhaps futile, to speculate on how American government would have evolved if the legislative caucus had remained the method for nominating presidents.

## *The Civil War and Sectionalism*

Though the party system created in the Jacksonian period was the first truly national system, with Democrats (followers of Jackson) and Whigs (opponents of Jackson) fairly evenly balanced in most regions, it could not withstand the deep split in opinion created by the agitation over slavery. Both parties tried, naturally, to straddle the issue, since neither wanted to divide its followers and thus lose the election to its rival. But slavery and sectionalism were issues that could not be straddled. The old parties divided and new ones emerged. The modern Republican party (not the old Democratic-Republican party of Thomas Jefferson) began as a third party. As a result of the Civil War it came to be a major party (the only third party ever to gain major-party status) and to dominate national politics, with only occasional interruptions, for three-quarters of a century.

Republican control of the White House, and to a lesser extent of Congress, was in large measure the result of two events that gave to Republicans a marked advantage in the competition for the loyalties of voters. The first of these was the Civil War. This bitter, searing crisis deeply polarized popular attitudes. Those who supported the Union side became, for generations, Republicans; those who supported the Confederacy, or who had opposed the war, became Democrats.

As it turned out, this partisan division was, for a while, nearly even: though the Republicans usually won the presidency and the Senate, they often lost control of the House. There were many northern Democrats. In 1896, however, another event—the presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan—further strengthened the Republican party. Bryan, a Democrat, alienated many voters in the populous northeastern states while attracting voters in the South and Midwest. The result was to confirm and deepen the split in the country, especially North versus South, begun by the Civil War. From 1896 to the 1930s, with rare exceptions northern states were solidly Republican, southern ones solidly Democratic.

This split had a profound effect on the organization of political parties, for it meant that most states

were now one-party states. As a result, competition for office at the state level had to go on *within* a single dominant party (the Republican party in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and elsewhere; the Democratic party in Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and elsewhere). Consequently there emerged two major factions within each party, but especially within the Republican party. One was composed of the party regulars—the professional politicians, the “stalwarts,” the Old Guard. They were preoccupied with building up the party machinery, developing party loyalty, and acquiring and dispensing patronage—jobs and other favors—for themselves and their faithful followers. Their great skills were in organization, negotiation, bargaining, and compromise; their great interest was in winning.

The other faction, variously called **mugwumps** or **progressives** (or “reformers”), was opposed to the heavy emphasis on patronage; disliked the party machinery, because it permitted only bland candidates to rise to the top; was fearful of the heavy influx of immigrants into American cities and of the ability of the party regulars to organize them into “machines”; and wanted to see the party take unpopular positions on certain issues (such as free trade). Their great skills lay in the areas of advocacy and articulation; their great interest was in principle.

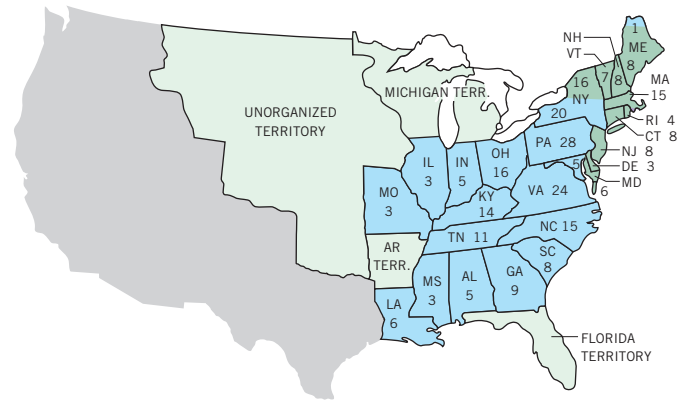
At first the mugwumps tried to play a balance-of-power role, sometimes siding with the Republican party of which they were members, at other times defecting to the Democrats (as when they bolted the Republican party to support Grover Cleveland, the Democratic nominee, in 1884). But later, as the Republican strength in the nation grew, progressives within that party became less and less able to play a balance-of-power role, especially at the state level. Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa were solidly Republican; Georgia, the Carolinas, and the rest of the Old South had by 1880 become so heavily Democratic that the Republican party in many areas had virtually ceased to exist. If the progressives were to have any power, it would require, they came to believe, an attack on the very concept of partisanship itself.

## The Era of Reform

Progressives began to espouse measures to curtail or even abolish political parties. They favored primary elections to replace nominating conventions, because

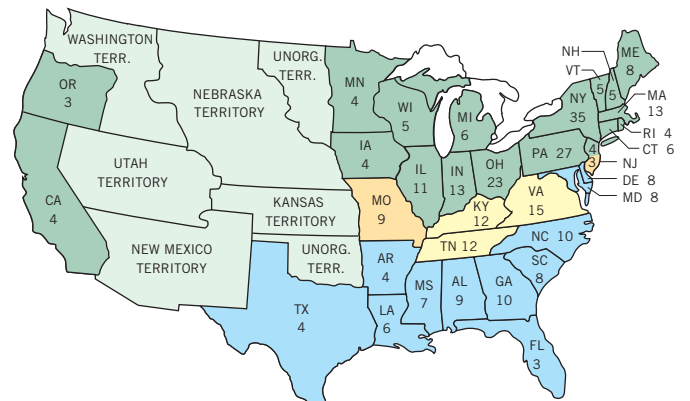
### The Election of 1828

	ELECTORAL	POPULAR	
Jackson (D)	178	647,286	Divided
Adams (Nat. R.)	83	508,064	Territory (no returns)



### The Election of 1860

	ELECTORAL	POPULAR	
Lincoln (R)	180	1,866,452	Divided
Douglas (No. D)	12	1,375,157	Territory (no returns)
Breckenridge (So. D)	76	847,953	
Bell (Const. Union)	39	590,631	



#### mugwumps or progressives

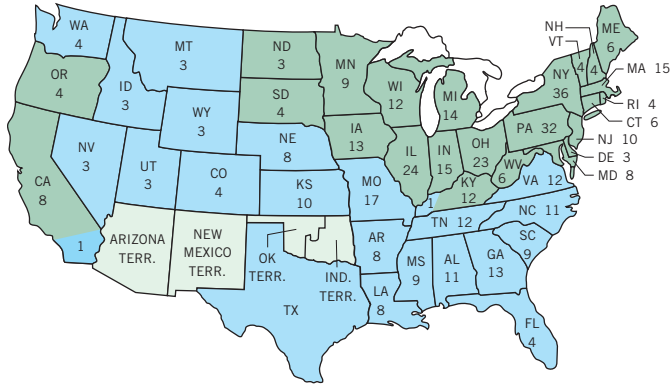
Republican party  
faction of the 1890s to  
the 1910s, composed of  
reformers who opposed  
patronage.

the latter were viewed as being manipulated by party bosses; they favored nonpartisan elections at the city level and in some



## The Election of 1896

	ELECTORAL	POPULAR	
McKinley (R)	271	7,104,779	Divided
Bryan (D)	176	6,502,925	Territory (no returns)



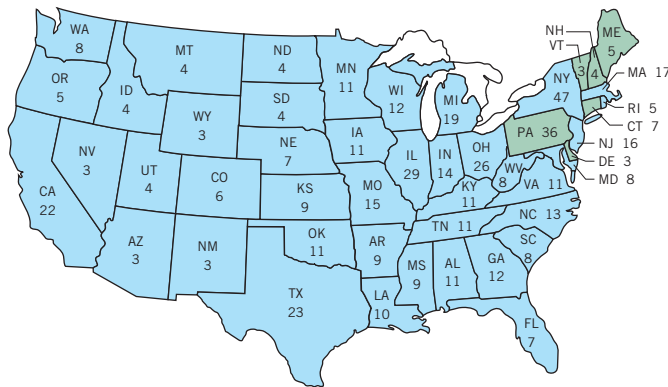
bersome from voting); they pressed for civil service reform to eliminate patronage; and they made heavy use of the mass media as a way of attacking the abuses of partisanship and of promoting their own ideas and candidacies.

The progressives were more successful in some places than in others. In California, for example, progressives led by Governor Hiram Johnson in 1910–1911 were able to institute the direct primary and to adopt procedures—called the *initiative* and the *referendum*—so that citizens could vote directly on proposed legislation, thereby bypassing the state legislature. Governor Robert La Follette brought about similar changes in Wisconsin.

The effect of these changes was to reduce substantially the worst forms of political corruption and ultimately to make boss rule in politics difficult if not impossible. But they also had the effect of making political parties, whether led by bosses or by statesmen, weaker, less able to hold officeholders accountable, and less able to assemble the power necessary for governing the fragmented political institutions created by the Constitution. In Congress party lines began to grow fainter, as did the power of congressional leadership. Above all, the progressives did not have an answer to the problem first faced by Jefferson: if there is not a strong political party, by what other means will candidates for office be found, recruited, and supported?

## The Election of 1932

	ELECTORAL	POPULAR
F.D. Roosevelt (D)	472	22,821,857
Hoover (R)	59	15,761,841



Republicans under Lincoln came to power), 1896 (when the Republicans defeated William Jennings Bryan), and 1932 (when the Democrats under Roosevelt came into office).

There are at least two kinds of realignments—one in which a major party is so badly defeated that it disappears and a new party emerges to take its place (this happened to the Federalists in 1800 and to the Whigs in 1856–1860), and another in which the two existing parties continue but voters shift their support from one to the other (this happened in 1896 and 1932).

The three clearest cases seem to be 1860, 1896, and 1932. By 1860 the existing parties could no longer straddle the fence on the slavery issue. The Republican party was formed in 1856 on the basis of clear-cut opposition to slavery; the Democratic party split in half in 1860, with one part (led by Stephen A. Douglas and based in the North) trying to waffle on the issue and the other (led by John C. Breckinridge and drawing its support from the South) categorically denying that any government had any right to outlaw slavery. The remnants of the Whig party, renamed the Constitutional Union party, tried to unite the nation by writing no platform at all, thus remaining silent on slavery. Lincoln and the antislavery Republicans won in 1860; Breckinridge and the proslavery Southern Democrats came in second. From that moment on, the two major political parties acquired different sources of support and stood (at least for a decade) for different principles. The parties that had tried to straddle the fence were eliminated. The Civil War fixed these new party loyalties deep in the popular mind, and the structure of party competition was set for nearly forty years.

In 1896 a different kind of realignment occurred. Economics rather than slavery was at issue. A series of depressions during the 1880s and 1890s fell especially hard on farmers in the Midwest and parts of the South. The prices paid to farmers for their commodities had been falling more or less steadily since the Civil War, making it increasingly difficult for them to pay their bills. A bitter reaction against the two major parties, which were straddling this issue as they had straddled slavery, spread like a prairie fire, leading to the formation of parties of economic protest—the Greenbackers and the Populists. Reinforcing the economic cleavages were cultural ones: Populists tended to be fundamentalist Protestants; urban voters were increasingly Catholic. Matters came to a head in 1896



**William Jennings Bryan giving a campaign speech during one of his three unsuccessful presidential campaigns.**

when William Jennings Bryan captured the Democratic nomination for president and saw to it that the party adopted a Populist platform. The existing Populist party endorsed the Bryan candidacy. In the election anti-Bryan Democrats deserted the party in droves to support the Republican candidate, William McKinley. Once again a real issue divided the two parties: the Republicans stood for industry, business, hard money, protective tariffs, and urban interests; the Democrats for farmers, small towns, low tariffs, and rural interests. The Republicans won, carrying the cities, workers and business people alike; the Democrats lost, carrying most of the southern and mid-western farm states. The old split between North and South that resulted from the Civil War was now replaced in part by an East versus West, city versus farm split.<sup>5</sup> It was not, however, only an economic cleavage—the Republicans had been able to appeal to Catholics and Lutherans, who disliked fundamentalism and its hostility toward liquor and immigrants.

This alignment persisted until 1932. Again change was triggered by an economic depression; again more than economic issues were involved. The New Deal coalition that emerged was based on bringing together into the Democratic party urban workers, northern blacks, southern whites, and Jewish voters. Unlike in 1860 and 1896, it was not preceded by any third-party movement; it occurred suddenly (though some groups had begun to shift their allegiance in 1928) and gathered momentum throughout the 1930s. The Democrats, isolated since 1896 as a southern and mid-western sectional party, had now become the majority

party by finding a candidate and a cause that could lure urban workers, blacks, and Jews away from the Republican party, where they had been for decades. It was obviously a delicate coalition—blacks and southern whites disagreed on practically everything except their liking for Roosevelt; Jews and the Irish bosses of the big-city machines also had little in common. But the federal government under Roosevelt was able to supply enough benefits to each of these disparate groups to keep them loyal members of the coalition and to provide a new basis for party identification.

These critical elections may have involved not converting existing voters to new party loyalties but recruiting into the dominant party new voters—young people just coming of voting age, immigrants just receiving their citizenship papers, and blacks just receiving, in some places, the right to vote. But there were also genuine conversions—northern blacks, for example, had been heavily Republican before Roosevelt but became heavily Democratic after his election.

In short, an electoral realignment occurs when a new issue of utmost importance to the voters (slavery, the economy) cuts across existing party divisions and replaces old issues that were formerly the basis of party identification.

Some people wondered whether the election of 1980, since it brought into power the most conservative administration in half a century, signaled a new realignment. Many of President Reagan's supporters began talking of their having a "mandate" to adopt major new policies in keeping with the views of the "new majority." But Reagan won in 1980 less because

of what he stood for than because he was not Jimmy Carter, and he was reelected in 1984 primarily because people were satisfied with how the country was doing, especially economically.<sup>6</sup>

Just because we have had periods of one-party dominance in the past does not mean that we will have them in the future. Reagan's election could not have been a tra-

ditional realignment, because it left Congress in the hands of the Democratic party. Moreover, some scholars are beginning to question the theory of critical elections, or at least the theory that they occur with some regularity.

Nevertheless, one major change has occurred of late—the shift in the presidential voting patterns of

the South. From 1972 through 2004 the South was more Republican than the nation as a whole. The proportion of white southerners describing themselves to pollsters as "strongly Democratic" fell from more than one-third in 1952 to about one-seventh in 1984. There has been a corresponding increase in "independents." As it turns out, southern white independents have voted overwhelmingly Republican in recent presidential elections.<sup>7</sup> If you lump independents together with the parties for which they actually vote, the party alignment among white southerners has gone from six-to-one Democratic in 1952 to about fifty-fifty Democrats and Republicans. If this continues, it will constitute a major realignment in a region of the country that is growing rapidly in population and political clout.

In general, however, the kind of dramatic realignment that occurred in the 1860s or after 1932 may not occur again, because party labels have lost their meaning for a growing number of voters. For these people politics may *dealign* rather than *realign*.

## Party Decline

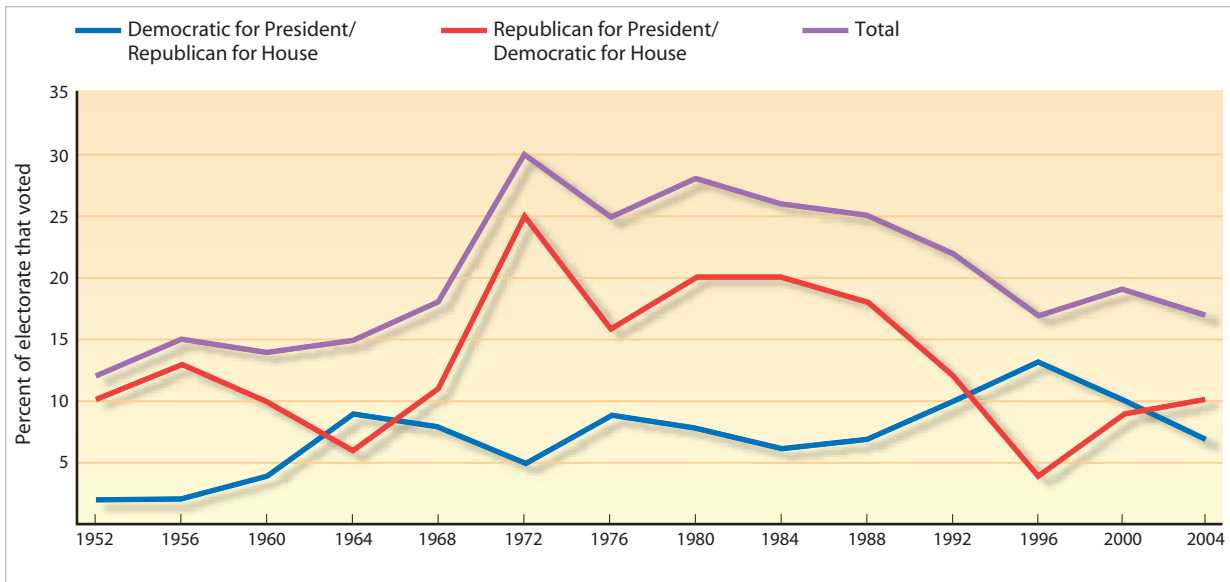
The evidence that the parties are decaying, not realigning, is of several sorts. We have already noted that the proportion of people identifying with one or the other party declined between 1960 and 1980. Simultaneously, the proportion of those voting a **split ticket** (as opposed to a **straight ticket**) increased.

Split-ticket voting rose between 1952 and 1972, and hovered around 25 percent until it declined somewhat after 1992 (see Figure 9.2). For example, in 1988 more than *half* of all House Democrats were elected in districts that voted for Republican George Bush as president. This ticket splitting was greatest in the South, but it was common everywhere. If every district that voted for Bush had also elected a Republican to Congress, the Republican party would have held a two-to-one majority in the House of Representatives. Ticket splitting creates divided government—the White House and Congress are controlled by different parties (see Chapter 14). Ticket splitting helped the Democrats keep control of the House of Representatives from 1954 to 1994.

Ticket splitting was almost unheard-of in the nineteenth century, and for a very good reason. In those days the voter was either given a ballot by the party of his choice and he dropped it, intact, into the ballot box (thereby voting for everybody listed on the ballot), or

**split ticket** Voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in the same election.

**straight ticket** Voting for candidates who are all of the same party.

**Figure 9.2** Split-Ticket Voting for President/House, 1952–2004

Source: American National Election Studies, November 2005, table 9B.2.

he was given a government-printed ballot that listed in columns all the candidates of each party. All the voter had to do was mark the top of one column in order to vote for every candidate in that column. (When voting machines came along, they provided a single lever that, when pulled, cast votes for all the candidates of a particular party.) Progressives around the turn of the century began to persuade states to adopt the **office-bloc** (or “Massachusetts”) **ballot** in place of the **party-column** (or “Indiana”) **ballot**. The office-bloc ballot lists all candidates by office; there is no way to vote a straight party ticket by making one mark. Not surprisingly, states using the office-bloc ballot show much more ticket splitting than those without it.<sup>8</sup>

## ★ The National Party Structure Today

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that parties have declined simply because many voters now split tickets in national elections. Despite many changes and challenges (see Figure 9.3), America’s two-party system remains strong. In most elections—national, state, and local—voters registered as Democrats still

vote for Democratic candidates, and voters registered as Republicans still vote for Republican candidates. In Congress, state legislatures, and city councils, members still normally vote along party lines. Local political machines have died, but, as we shall now explain, national party structures remain alive and well.

Since political parties exist at the national, state, and local levels, you might suppose that they are arranged like a big corporation, with a national board of directors giving orders to state managers, who in turn direct the activities of rank-and-file workers at the county and city level.

Nothing could be further from the truth. At each level a separate and almost entirely independent organization exists that does pretty much what it wants, and in many counties and cities there is virtually no organization at all.

On paper the national Democratic and Republican parties look quite similar. In both parties

**office-bloc ballot** A ballot listing all candidates of a given office under the name of that office; also called a “Massachusetts” ballot.

**party-column ballot** A ballot listing all candidates of a given party together under the name of that party; also called an “Indiana” ballot.

**national convention** A meeting of party delegates held every four years.



party by finding a candidate and a cause that could lure urban workers, blacks, and Jews away from the Republican party, where they had been for decades. It was obviously a delicate coalition—blacks and southern whites disagreed on practically everything except their liking for Roosevelt; Jews and the Irish bosses of the big-city machines also had little in common. But the federal government under Roosevelt was able to supply enough benefits to each of these disparate groups to keep them loyal members of the coalition and to provide a new basis for party identification.

These critical elections may have involved not converting existing voters to new party loyalties but recruiting into the dominant party new voters—young people just coming of voting age, immigrants just receiving their citizenship papers, and blacks just receiving, in some places, the right to vote. But there were also genuine conversions—northern blacks, for example, had been heavily Republican before Roosevelt but became heavily Democratic after his election.

In short, an electoral realignment occurs when a new issue of utmost importance to the voters (slavery, the economy) cuts across existing party divisions and replaces old issues that were formerly the basis of party identification.

Some people wondered whether the election of 1980, since it brought into power the most conservative administration in half a century, signaled a new realignment. Many of President Reagan's supporters began talking of their having a "mandate" to adopt major new policies in keeping with the views of the "new majority." But Reagan won in 1980 less because

of what he stood for than because he was not Jimmy Carter, and he was reelected in 1984 primarily because people were satisfied with how the country was doing, especially economically.<sup>6</sup>

Just because we have had periods of one-party dominance in the past does not mean that we will have them in the future. Reagan's election could not have been a tra-

ditional realignment, because it left Congress in the hands of the Democratic party. Moreover, some scholars are beginning to question the theory of critical elections, or at least the theory that they occur with some regularity.

Nevertheless, one major change has occurred of late—the shift in the presidential voting patterns of

the South. From 1972 through 2004 the South was more Republican than the nation as a whole. The proportion of white southerners describing themselves to pollsters as "strongly Democratic" fell from more than one-third in 1952 to about one-seventh in 1984. There has been a corresponding increase in "independents." As it turns out, southern white independents have voted overwhelmingly Republican in recent presidential elections.<sup>7</sup> If you lump independents together with the parties for which they actually vote, the party alignment among white southerners has gone from six-to-one Democratic in 1952 to about fifty-fifty Democrats and Republicans. If this continues, it will constitute a major realignment in a region of the country that is growing rapidly in population and political clout.

In general, however, the kind of dramatic realignment that occurred in the 1860s or after 1932 may not occur again, because party labels have lost their meaning for a growing number of voters. For these people politics may *dealign* rather than *realign*.

## Party Decline

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**split ticket** Voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in the same election.

**straight ticket** Voting for candidates who are all of the same party.

tional advertising campaigns on behalf of the party as a whole.

When the Democratic National Committee (DNC) decided to play catch-up, it followed the RNC strategy. Using the same computerized direct-mail techniques, the Democratic party committees—the National Committee, Senatorial Committee, and Congressional Committee—raised more money than they had ever raised before, though not as much as the Republicans. In 2004 the Democrats and their allies outspent the Republicans. The Democrats, like the Republicans, ship a lot of their national party money to state organizations to finance television ads supporting their parties.

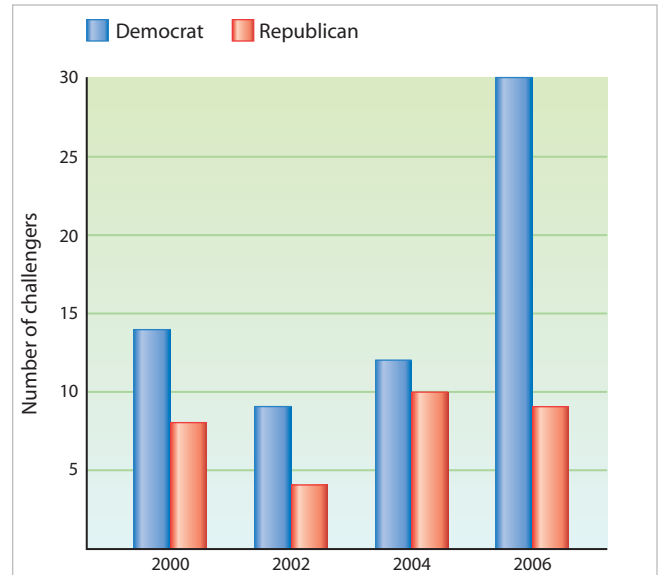
Despite the recent enactment of campaign finance laws intended to check the influence of money on national elections, in 2004 both Democrats and Republicans redoubled efforts to raise what is called *soft money*—that is, funds to aid parties (and their ads and polls). In the Democrat presidential primary, Howard Dean alone raised \$30 million over the Internet with average contributions under \$100. In 2006, new records were also set for spending on congressional races. In thirty-nine House races, challengers raised over \$1 million. About three-quarters (30 of the 39) of these “million-dollar challengers” were Democrats (see Figure 9.4).

## National Conventions

The national committee selects the time and place of the next national convention and issues a “call” for the convention that sets forth the number of delegates each state and territory is to have and also the rules under which delegates must be chosen. The number of delegates and their manner of selection can significantly influence the chances of various presidential candidates, and considerable attention is thus devoted to these matters. In the Democratic party, for example, a long struggle took place between those who wished to see southern states receive a large share of delegates to the convention, in recognition of their firm support of Democratic candidates in presidential elections, and those who preferred to see a larger share of delegates allotted to northern and western states, which, though less solidly Democratic, were larger or more liberal. A similar conflict within the Republican party has pitted conservative Republican leaders in the Midwest against liberal ones in the East.

A compromise formula is usually chosen; never-

**Figure 9.4** House Challengers Who Raised \$1 Million or More (2000–2006)



Source: Campaign Finance Institute, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2006, figure 1, summarizing data from the Federal Election Commission.

theless, over the years these formulas have gradually changed, shifting voting strength in the Democratic convention away from the South and toward the North and West and in the Republican convention away from the East and toward the South and Southwest. These delegate allocation formulas are but one sign (others will be mentioned later in this chapter) of the tendency of the two parties' conventions to move in opposite ideological directions—Democrats more to the left, Republicans more to the right.

The exact formula for apportioning delegates is extremely complex. For the Democrats it takes into account the vote each state cast for Democratic candidates in past elections and the number of electoral votes of each state; for the Republicans it takes into account the number of representatives in Congress and whether the state in past elections cast its electoral votes for the Republican presidential candidate and elected Republicans to the Senate, the House, and the governorship. Thus the Democrats give extra delegates to large states, while the Republicans give extra ones to loyal states.

The way in which delegates are chosen can be even more important than their allocation. The



The Internet is the latest means through which people are becoming politically informed and active. It has also become an important way to raise money for candidates and parties.

Democrats, beginning in 1972, have developed an elaborate set of rules designed to weaken the control over delegates by local party leaders and to increase the proportion of women, young people, African Americans, and Native Americans attending the convention. These rules were first drafted by a party commission chaired by Senator George McGovern (who was later to make skillful use of these new procedures in his successful bid for the Democratic presidential nomination). They were revised in 1974 by another commission, chaired by Barbara Mikulski, whose decisions were ratified by the 1974 midterm convention. After the 1976 election yet a third commission,

#### superdelegates

Party leaders and elected officials who become delegates to the national convention without having to run in primaries or caucuses.

chaired by Morley Winograd, produced still another revision of the rules, which took effect in 1980. Then a fourth commission, chaired by North Carolina governor James B. Hunt, recommended in 1981 yet another set of rules, which became effective with the 1984 convention.

The general thrust of the work of the first three rules commissions was to broaden the antiparty changes started by the progressives at the beginning of this century. Whereas the earlier reformers had tried to minimize the role of parties in the election process, those of the 1970s sought to weaken the influence of leaders

within the party. In short, the newer reforms were aimed at creating *intraparty* democracy as well as *interparty* democracy. This was done by rules that, for the 1980 convention, required:

- Equal division of delegates between men and women
- Establishment of “goals” for the representation of African Americans, Hispanics, and other groups in proportion to their presence in a state’s Democratic electorate
- Open delegate selection procedures, with advance publicity and written rules
- Selection of 75 percent of the delegates at the level of the congressional district or lower
- No “unit rule” that would require all delegates to vote with the majority of their state delegation
- Restrictions on the number of party leaders and elected officials who could vote at the convention
- A requirement that all delegates pledged to a candidate vote for that candidate

In 1981 the Hunt Commission changed some of these rules—in particular, the last two—in order to increase the influence of elected officials and to make the convention a somewhat more deliberative body. The commission reserved about 14 percent of the delegate seats for party leaders and elected officials, who would not have to commit themselves in advance to a presidential candidate, and it repealed the rule requiring that delegates pledged to a candidate vote for that candidate.

Rules have consequences. Walter Mondale was the chief beneficiary of the delegate selection rules. He



National party conventions no longer make important decisions, but they generate enthusiasm as among Republicans who unanimously nominated George W. Bush in 2004.

won the support of the overwhelming majority of elected officials—the so-called **superdelegates**—and he did especially well in those states that held winner-take-all primaries.

But the “reform” of the parties, especially the Democratic party, has had far more profound consequences than merely helping one candidate or another. Before 1968 the Republican party represented, essentially, white-collar voters and the Democratic party represented blue-collar ones. After a decade of “reform” the Republican and the Democratic parties each represented two ideologically different sets of upper-middle-class voters (see Table 9.1). In the terminology of Chapter 7, the Republicans came to represent the more conservative wing of the traditional middle class and the Democrats the more leftist wing of the liberal middle class.

This was more troubling to the Democrats than to the Republicans, because the traditional middle class is somewhat closer to the opinions of most citizens than is the liberal middle class (and thus the Republican national convention more closely reflected public opinion than did the Democratic national convention). And for whatever reason, the Republicans won five out of six presidential races between 1968 and 1988.

**Table 9.1 Who Are the Party Delegates?**

*Characteristics of delegates to Democratic and Republican national conventions in 2004.*

	Democrats	Republicans
<b>Sex and Race</b>		
Women	50%	43%
Blacks	18	6
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant	43	65
Catholic	32	—
Jewish	8	—
<b>Education</b>		
College degree and beyond	77	73
Post graduate	53	44
<b>Family Income</b>		
Under \$50,000	15	8
\$100,000 and over	42	44
<b>Belong to union</b>	25	8
<b>Born-again Christian</b>	13	33
<b>Gun owner in household</b>	22	45

Sources: *New York Times* (August 29, 2004); CBSNEWS.COM, July 24, 2004; *Boston Globe*, August 31, 2004.

## Trivia

### Political Parties

- First national political convention  
Anti-Masonic party, 1831, in Baltimore
- First time incumbent governors were nominated for president  
Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio, by Republicans in 1876  
Samuel J. Tilden of New York, by Democrats in 1876
- First African American to receive a vote at a national party convention  
Frederick Douglass, at Republican convention in 1888
- First year in which women attended conventions as delegates  
1900 (one woman at both Democratic and Republican conventions)
- Most ballots needed to choose a presidential nominee  
103, by Democrats in 1924 to select John W. Davis
- Closest vote in convention history  
543<sup>3/20</sup> to 542<sup>7/20</sup>, defeating a motion to condemn the Ku Klux Klan at 1924 Democratic convention
- First Catholic nominated for president by a major party  
Al Smith, by Democrats in 1928
- Only person nominated for president four times by a major political party  
Franklin D. Roosevelt, by Democrats in 1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944
- First presidential nominee to make an acceptance speech at the party convention  
Franklin D. Roosevelt



Before the 1988 convention the Democrats took a long, hard look at their party procedures. Under the leadership of DNC chairman Paul Kirk, they decided against making any major changes, especially ones that would increase the power of grassroots activists at the expense of elected officials and party leaders. The number of such officials (or superdelegates) to be given delegate seats was increased. For example, 80 percent of the Democratic members of Congress and all Democratic governors were automatically made convention delegates in 1988. The official status of some special-interest caucuses (such as those organized to represent African Americans, homosexuals, and various ethnic groups) was reduced in order to lessen the perception that the Democrats were simply a party of factions.

The surface harmony was a bit misleading, however, as some activists, notably supporters of Jesse Jackson, protested that the rules made it harder for candidates like Jackson to win delegates in proportion to their share of the primary vote. (In 1984 Jackson got 18 percent of the primary vote but only 12 percent of the delegates.) The DNC responded by changing the rules for the 1992 campaign. Former DNC chairman Ronald H. Brown (later President Clinton's secretary of commerce) won approval for three important requirements:

- The winner-reward systems of delegate distribution, which gave the winner of a primary or caucus extra delegates, were banned. (In 1988 fifteen states used winner-reward systems, including such vote-rich states as Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.)
- The proportional representation system was put into use. This system divides a state's publicly elected delegates among candidates who receive at least 15 percent of the vote.
- States that violate the rules are now penalized with the loss of 25 percent of their national convention delegates.

Even though the Democrats have retreated a bit from the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, the conventions of both parties have changed fundamentally, and probably permanently. Delegates once selected by party leaders are now chosen by primary elections and grassroots caucuses. As a result the national party conventions are no longer places where party leaders meet to bargain over the selection of their presiden-

tial candidates; they are instead places where delegates come together to ratify choices already made by party activists and primary voters.

Most Americans dislike bosses, deals, and manipulation and prefer democracy, reform, and openness. These are commendable instincts. But such instincts, unless carefully tested against practice, may mislead us into supposing that anything carried out in the name of reform is a good idea. Rules must be judged by their practical results as well as by their conformity to some principle of fairness. Rules affect the distribution of power: they help some people win and others lose. Later in this chapter we shall try to assess delegate selection rules by looking more closely at how they affect who attends conventions and which presidential candidates are selected there.

## ★ State and Local Parties

While the national party structures have changed, the grassroots organizations have withered. In between, state party systems have struggled to redefine their roles.

In every state there is a Democratic and a Republican state party organized under state law. Typically each consists of a state central committee, below which are found county committees and sometimes city, town, or even precinct committees. The members of these committees are chosen in a variety of ways—sometimes in primary elections, sometimes by conventions, sometimes by a building-block process whereby people elected to serve on precinct or town committees choose the members of county committees, who in turn choose state committee members.

Knowing these formal arrangements is much less helpful than knowing the actual distribution of power in each state party. In a few places strong party bosses handpick the members of these committees; in other places powerful elected officials—key state legislators, county sheriffs, or judges—control the committees. And in many places no one is in charge, so that either the party structure is largely meaningless or it is made up of the representatives of various local factions.

To understand how power is distributed in a party, we must first know what *incentives* motivate people in a particular state or locality to become active in a party organization. Different incentives lead to different ways of organizing parties.

## The Machine

A **political machine** is a party organization that recruits its members by the use of tangible incentives—money, political jobs, an opportunity to get favors from government—and that is characterized by a high degree of leadership control over member activity. At one time many local party organizations were machines, and the struggle over political jobs—patronage—was the chief concern of their members. Though Tammany Hall in New York City began as a caucus of well-to-do notables in the local Democratic party, by the late nineteenth century it had become a machine organized on the basis of political clubs in each assembly district. These clubs were composed of party workers whose job it was to get out the straight party vote in their election districts and who hoped for a tangible reward if they were successful.

And there were abundant rewards to hope for. During the 1870s it was estimated that one out of every eight voters in New York City had a federal, state, or city job.<sup>9</sup> The federal bureaucracy was one important source of those jobs. The New York Customhouse alone employed thousands of people, virtually all of whom were replaced if their party lost the presidential election. The postal system was another

source, and it was frankly recognized as such. When James N. Tyner became postmaster general in 1876, he was “appointed not to see that the mails were carried, but to see that Indiana was carried.”<sup>10</sup> Elections and conventions were so frequent and the intensity of party competition so great that being a party worker was for many a full-time paid occupation.

Well before the arrival of vast numbers of poor immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and elsewhere, old-stock Americans had perfected the machine, run up the cost of government, and systematized voting fraud. Kickbacks on contracts, payments extracted from officeholders, and funds raised from business people made some politicians rich but also paid the huge bills of the elaborate party organization. When the immigrants began flooding the eastern cities, the party machines were there to provide them with all manner of services in exchange for their support at the polls: the machines were a vast welfare organization operating before the creation of the welfare state.

The abuses of the machine were well known and gradually curtailed. Stricter voter registration laws reduced fraud, civil service reforms cut down the

**political machine** A party organization that recruits members by dispensing patronage.

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Ex-Senator George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany Hall explains machine politics from atop the bootblack stand in front of the New York County Courthouse around 1905.

number of patronage jobs, and competitive-bidding laws made it harder to award overpriced contracts to favored businesses. The Hatch Act (passed by Congress in 1939) made it illegal for federal civil service employees to take an active part in political management or political campaigns by serving as party officers, soliciting campaign funds, running for partisan office, working in a partisan campaign, endorsing partisan candidates, taking voters to the polls, counting ballots, circulating nominating petitions, or being delegates to a party convention. (They may still vote and make campaign contributions.)

These restrictions gradually took federal employees out of machine politics, but they did not end the machines. In many cities—Chicago, Philadelphia, and Albany—ways were found to maintain the machines even though city employees were technically under the civil service. Far more important than the various progressive reforms that weakened the machines were changes among voters. As voters grew in education, income, and sophistication, they depended less and less on the advice and leadership of local party officials. And as the federal government created a bureaucratic welfare system, the parties' welfare systems declined in value.

It is easy either to scorn the political party machine as a venal and self-serving organization or to romanticize it as an informal welfare system. In truth it was a little of both. Above all it was a frank recognition of the fact that politics requires organization; the machine was the supreme expression of the value of

**ideological party** A party that values principled stands on issues above all else.

organization. Even allowing for voting fraud, in elections where party machines were active, voter turnout was huge: more people participated in politics when mobilized by a party machine than

when appealed to by television or good-government associations.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, because the party machines were interested in winning, they would subordinate any other consideration to that end. This has meant that the machines were usually willing to support the presidential candidate with the best chance of winning, regardless of his policy views (provided, of course, that he was not determined to wreck the machines once in office). Republican machines helped elect Abraham Lincoln as well as Warren G. Harding; Democratic machines were of crucial importance in electing Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

The old-style machine is almost extinct, though important examples still can be found in the Democratic organization in Cook County (Chicago) and the Republican organization in Nassau County (New York). But a new-style machine has emerged in a few places. It is a machine in the sense that it uses money to knit together many politicians, but it is new in that the money comes not from patronage and contracts but from campaign contributions supplied by wealthy individuals and the proceeds of direct-mail campaigns.

The political organization headed by Democratic congressmen Henry A. Waxman and Howard L. Berman on the west side of Los Angeles is one such new-style machine. By the astute use of campaign funds, the "Waxman-Berman organization" builds loyalties to it among a variety of elected officials at all levels of government. Moreover, this new-style machine, unlike the old ones, has a strong interest in issues, especially at the national level. In this sense it is not a machine at all, but a cross between a machine and an ideological party.

## Ideological Parties

At the opposite extreme from the machine is the **ideological party**. Where the machine values winning above all else, the ideological party values principle above all else. Where the former depends on money incentives, the latter spurns them. Where the former is hierarchical and disciplined, the latter is usually contentious and factionalized.

The most firmly ideological parties have been independent "third parties," such as the Socialist, Socialist Workers, Libertarian, and Right-to-Life parties. But there have been ideological factions within the Democratic and Republican parties as well, and in some places these ideological groups have taken over the regular parties.

In the 1950s and 1960s these ideological groups were "reform clubs" within local Democratic and Republican parties. In Los Angeles, New York, and many parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota, issue-oriented activists fought to take over the party from election-oriented regulars. Democratic reform clubs managed to defeat the head of Tammany Hall in Manhattan; similar activist groups became the dominant force in California state politics.<sup>12</sup> Democratic club leaders were more liberal than rank-and-file Democrats, and Republican club leaders were often more conservative than rank-and-file Republicans.

The 1960s and 1970s saw these “reform” movements replaced by more focused social movements. The “reform” movement was based on a generalized sense of liberalism (among Democrats) or conservatism (among Republicans). With the advent of social movements concerned with civil rights, peace, feminism, environmentalism, libertarianism, and abortion, the generalized ideology of the clubs was replaced by the specific ideological demands of single-issue activists.

The result is that in many places the party has become a collection of people drawn from various social movements. For a candidate to win the party’s support, he or she often has to satisfy the “litmus test” demands of the ideological activists in the party. Democratic senator Barbara Mikulski put it this way: “The social movements are now our farm clubs.”

With social movements as their farm clubs, the big-league teams—the Democrats and Republicans at the state level—behave very differently than they did when political machines were the farm clubs. Internal factionalism is more intense, and the freedom of action of the party leader (say, the chairperson of the state committee) has been greatly reduced. A leader who demands too little or gives up too much, or who says the wrong thing on a key issue, is quickly accused of having “sold out.” Under these circumstances many “leaders” are that in name only.

## Solidary Groups

Many people who participate in state and local politics do so not in order to earn money or vindicate some cause, but simply because they find it fun. They enjoy the game, they meet interesting people, and they like the sense of being “in the know” and rubbing shoulders with the powerful. When people get together out of gregarious or game-loving instincts, we say that they are responding to **solidary incentives**; if they form an organization, it is a solidary association.

Some of these associations were once machines. When a machine loses its patronage, some of its members—especially the older ones—may continue to serve in the organization out of a desire for camaraderie. In other cases precinct, ward, and district committees are built up on the basis of friendship networks. One study of political activists in Detroit found that most of them mentioned friendships and a liking for politics, rather than an interest in issues,



The personal following of former President George Bush was passed on to his sons, George W. (left) and Jeb (right), both of whom became governors of large states, and the former of whom became president.

as their reasons for joining the party organization.<sup>13</sup> Members of ward and town organizations in St. Louis County gave the same answers when asked why they joined.<sup>14</sup> Since patronage has declined in value and since the appeals of ideology are limited to a minority of citizens, the motivations for participating in politics have become very much like those for joining a bowling league or a bridge club.

The advantage of such groups is that they are neither corrupt nor inflexible; the disadvantage is that they often do not work very hard. Knocking on doors on a rainy November evening to try to talk people into voting for your candidate is a chore under the best of circumstances; it is especially unappealing if you joined the party primarily because you like to attend meetings or drink coffee with your friends.<sup>15</sup>

## Sponsored Parties

Sometimes a relatively strong party organization can be created among volunteers without heavy reliance on money or ideology and without depending entirely on people’s finding the work fun. This type of **sponsored party** occurs when another organization exists in the community that can create, or at least sponsor, a local party structure. The clearest example of this

### solidary incentives

*The social rewards (sense of pleasure, status, or companionship) that lead people to join political organizations.*

**sponsored party** *A local or state political party that is largely supported by another organization in the community.*



is the Democratic party in and around Detroit, which has been developed, led, and to a degree financed by the political-action arm of the United Auto Workers union. The UAW has had a long tradition of rank-and-file activism, stemming from its formative struggles in the 1930s, and since the city is virtually a one-industry town, it was not hard to transfer some of this activism from union organizing to voter organizing.

By the mid-1950s union members and leaders made up over three-fourths of all the Democratic party district leaders within the city.<sup>16</sup> On election day union funds were available for paying workers to canvass voters; between elections political work on an unpaid basis was expected of union leaders. Though the UAW-Democratic party alliance in Detroit has not always been successful in city elections (the city is nonpartisan), it has been quite successful in carrying the city for the Democratic party in state and national elections.

Not many areas have organizations as effective or as dominant as the UAW that can bolster, sponsor, or even take over the weak formal party structure. Thus sponsored local parties are not common in the United States.

## Personal Following

Because most candidates can no longer count on the backing of a machine, because sponsored parties are limited to a few unionized areas, and because solidary groups are not always productive, a person wanting to get elected will often try to form a **personal following** that will work for him or her during a campaign and then disband until the next election rolls

around. Sometimes a candidate tries to meld a personal following with an ideological group, especially during the primary election campaign, when candidates need the kind of financial backing and hard work that only highly motivated activists are likely to supply.

To form a personal following, the candidate must have an appealing personality, a lot of friends, or a big bank account. The Kennedy family has all three, and the

electoral success of the personal followings of John F. Kennedy, Edward M. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Joseph P. Kennedy II are legendary. President George H.W. Bush also established such a following.

After he left office, one son (Jeb) became governor of Florida and another one (George W.) became governor of Texas and forty-third president of the United States.

Southern politicians who have to operate in one-party states with few, if any, machines have become grand masters at building personal followings, such as those of the Talmadge family in Georgia, the Long family in Louisiana, and the Byrd family in Virginia. But the strategy is increasingly followed wherever party organization is weak. The key asset is to have a known political name. That has helped the electoral victories of the son of Hubert Humphrey in Minnesota, the son and daughter of Pat Brown in California, the son of Birch Bayh in Indiana, the son of George Wallace in Alabama, and the son and grandson of Robert La Follette in Wisconsin.

By the mid-1980s, the traditional party organization—one that is hierarchical, lasting, based on material incentives, and capable of influencing who gets nominated for office—existed, according to political scientist David Mayhew, in only about eight states, mostly the older states of the Northeast. Another five states, he found, had faction-ridden versions of the traditional party organization.<sup>17</sup> The states in the rest of the country displayed the weak party system of solidary clubs, personal followings, ideological groups, and sponsored parties. What that meant could also be seen in the composition of Democratic national conventions. In 1984, over half of the delegates were drawn from the ranks of the AFL-CIO, the National Education Association, and the National Organization for Women.<sup>18</sup> By 2004, both national party organizations and their respective conventions had been dominated for at least two decades by ideological groups and the like.

## ★ The Two-Party System

With so many different varieties of local party organizations (or nonorganizations), and with such a great range of opinion found within each party, it is remarkable that we have had only two major political parties for most of our history. In the world at large a **two-party system** is a rarity; by one estimate only fifteen nations have one.<sup>19</sup> Most European democracies are multiparty systems. We have only two parties with any chance of winning nationally, and these parties have been, over time, rather evenly balanced—between 1888 and 2004, the Republicans won seventeen presi-

### personal following

*The political support provided to a candidate on the basis of personal popularity and networks.*

### two-party system

*An electoral system with two dominant parties that compete in national elections.*

dential elections and the Democrats thirteen. Furthermore, whenever one party has achieved a temporary ascendancy and its rival has been pronounced dead (as were the Democrats in the first third of this century and the Republicans during the 1930s and the 1960s), the “dead” party has displayed remarkable powers of recuperation, coming back to win important victories.

At the state and congressional district levels, however, the parties are not evenly balanced. For a long time the South was so heavily Democratic at all levels of government as to be a one-party area, while upper New England and the Dakotas were strongly Republican. All regions are more competitive today than once was the case. Parties are not as competitive in state elections as they are in presidential ones. States have rarely had, at least for any extended period, political parties other than the Democratic and Republican.

Scholars do not entirely agree on why the two-party system should be so permanent a feature of American political life, but two explanations are of major importance. The first has to do with the system of elections, the second with the distribution of public opinion.

Elections at every level of government are based on the plurality, winner-take-all method. The **plurality system** means that in all elections for representative, senator, governor, or president, and in almost all elections for state legislator, mayor, or city councilor, the winner is that person who gets the *most* votes, even if he or she does not get a *majority* of all votes cast. We are so familiar with this system that we sometimes forget that there are other ways of running an election. For example, one could require that the winner get a majority of the votes, thus producing runoff elections if nobody got a majority on the first try. France does this in choosing its national legislature. In the first election candidates for parliament who win an absolute majority of the votes cast are declared elected. A week later remaining candidates who received at least one-eighth, but less than one-half of the vote, go into a runoff election; those who then win an absolute majority are also declared elected.

The French method encourages many political parties to form, each hoping to win at least one-eighth of the vote in the first election and then to enter into an alliance with its ideologically nearest rival in order to win the runoff. In the United States the plurality system means that a party must make all the alliances it can before the first election—there is no second chance. Hence every party must be as broadly based

as possible; a narrow, minor party has no hope of winning.

The winner-take-all feature of American elections has the same effect. Only one member of Congress is elected from each district. In many European countries the elections are based on proportional representation. Each party submits a list of candidates for parliament, ranked in order of preference by the party leaders. The nation votes. A party winning 37 percent of the vote gets 37 percent of the seats in parliament; a party winning 2 percent of the vote gets 2 percent of the seats. Since even the smallest parties have a chance of winning something, minor parties have an incentive to organize.

The most dramatic example of the winner-take-all principle is the electoral college (see Chapter 14). In every state but Maine and Nebraska, the candidate who wins the most popular votes in a state wins *all* of that state’s electoral votes. In 1992, for example, Bill Clinton won only 45 percent of the popular vote in Missouri, but he got all of Missouri’s eleven electoral votes because his two rivals (George H. W. Bush and Ross Perot) each got fewer popular votes. Minor parties cannot compete under this system. Voters are often reluctant to “waste” their votes on a minor-party candidate who cannot win.

The United States has experimented with other electoral systems. Proportional representation was used for municipal elections in New York City at one time and is still in use for that purpose in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Many states have elected more than one state legislator from each district. In Illinois, for example, three legislators have been elected from each district, with each voter allowed to cast two votes, thus virtually guaranteeing that the minority party will be able to win one of the three seats. But none of these experiments has altered the national two-party system, probably because of the existence of a directly elected president chosen by a winner-take-all electoral college.

The presidency is the great prize of American politics; to win it you must form a party with as broad appeal as possible. As a practical matter that means there will be, in most cases, only two serious parties—one made up of those who support the party already in power, and the other made up of everybody else.

**plurality system** *An electoral system in which the winner is the person who gets the most votes, even if he or she does not receive a majority; used in almost all American elections.*

**Table 9.2** Party Voting in Presidential Elections

Party Affiliation of Voter	1988		1992			1996			2000			2004		
	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Democrat	85%	15%	82%	8%	10%	84%	10%	5%	85%	10%	3%	89%	11%	0%
Republican	7	93	7	77	16	13	80	6	7	91	1	6	93	0
Independent	43	57	39	30	31	43	35	17	37	42	9	49	48	1

*Source:* Data from CNN exit polls for each year.

Only one third party ever won the presidency—the Republicans in 1860—and it had by then pretty much supplanted the Whig party. No third party is likely to win, or even come close to winning, the presidency anytime soon. Despite the decline in mass party attachment, among Americans who actually vote in presidential elections, party voting is almost as strong today as it was in the early 1950s. As Table 9.2 shows, in the presidential elections of 1988 through 2004, the vast majority of Democrats voted for the Democrat, and the vast majority of Republicans voted for the Republican. Meanwhile, most independents voted for the winning Republican in 1988 and 2000, and pluralities of independents voted for the winning Democrat in 1992 and 1996. In the 2004 presidential election, Independents voted for Democrat John Kerry by a margin of 49 percent to 48 percent, but Republican George W. Bush still won the national popular vote by a margin of 51 to 48 percent.

The second explanation for the persistence of the two-party system is to be found in the opinions of the voters. Recent national surveys have found that most Americans see “a difference in what Democratic and Republican parties stand for.”<sup>20</sup> For the most part, the majority has deemed Democrats better at handling such issues as poverty, the environment, and health care, and the Republicans better at handling such issues as national defense, foreign trade, and crime; but, voters have generally split on which party is best at handling the economy and taxes.<sup>21</sup> And when it comes to which party is best able to handle whatever individuals see as the “most important problem” facing the nation, normally about fifteen percent to a quarter each choose either Democrats or Republicans, while about 45 to 55 percent answer “not much difference.”<sup>22</sup>

As we learned in Chapter 7, however, public opinion is often dynamic, not static. Mass perceptions

concerning the parties are no exception. For instance, by 2004, a few years after President George W. Bush passed his No Child Left Behind education plan, Republicans cut into the Democrats’ traditional slight edge in public school support concerning which party does better on public schools. After 2004, as the war in Iraq became unpopular, Republicans lost ground to Democrats on national defense. And, on certain complicated or controversial issues, such as immigration policy, opinions can shift overnight in response to real or perceived changes in policy by those who the public views as each party’s respective leaders or spokespersons.

Though there have been periods of bitter dissent, most of the time most citizens have agreed enough to permit them to come together into two broad coalitions. There has not been a massive and persistent body of opinion that has rejected the prevailing economic system (and thus we have not had a Marxist party with mass appeal); there has not been in our history an aristocracy or monarchy (and thus there has been no party that has sought to restore aristocrats or monarchs to power). Churches and religion have almost always been regarded as matters of private choice that lie outside politics (and thus there has not been a party seeking to create or abolish special government privileges for one church or another). In some European nations the organization of the economy, the prerogatives of the monarchy, and the role of the church have been major issues with long and bloody histories. So divisive have these issues been that they have helped prevent the formation of broad coalition parties.

But Americans have had other deep divisions—between white and black, for example, and between North and South—and yet the two-party system has endured. This suggests that our electoral procedures are of great importance—the winner-take-all, plural-

ity election rules have made it useless for anyone to attempt to create an all-white or an all-black national party except as an act of momentary defiance or in the hope of taking enough votes away from the two major parties to force the presidential election into the House of Representatives. (That may have been George Wallace's strategy in 1968.)

For many years there was an additional reason for the two-party system: the laws of many states made it difficult, if not impossible, for third parties to get on the ballot. In 1968, for example, the American Independent party of George Wallace found that it would have to collect 433,000 signatures (15 percent of the votes cast in the last statewide election) in order to get on the presidential ballot in Ohio. Wallace took the issue to the Supreme Court, which ruled, six to three, that such a restriction was an unconstitutional violation of the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>23</sup> Wallace got on the ballot. In 1980 John Anderson, running as an independent, was able to get on the ballot in all fifty states; in 1992 Ross Perot did the same. But for the reasons already indicated, the two-party system will probably persist even without the aid of legal restrictions.

## ★ Minor Parties

The electoral system may prevent minor parties from winning, but it does not prevent them from forming. Minor parties—usually called, erroneously, “third parties”—have been a permanent feature of American political life. Four major kinds of minor parties, with examples of each, are described in the box on page 214.

The minor parties that have endured have been the ideological ones. Their members feel themselves to be outside the mainstream of American political life and sometimes, as in the case of various Marxist parties, look forward to a time when a revolution or some other dramatic change in the political system will vindicate them. They are usually not interested in immediate electoral success and thus persist despite their poor showing at the polls. One such party, however, the Socialist party of Eugene Debs, won nearly 6 percent of the popular vote in the 1912 presidential election and during its heyday elected some twelve hundred candidates to local offices, including seventy-nine mayors. Part of the Socialist appeal arose from its opposition to municipal corruption, part from its opposition to American entry into World War I, and part from its critique of American society.

No ideological party has ever carried a state in a presidential election.

Apart from the Republicans, who quickly became a major party, the only minor parties to carry states and thus win electoral votes were one party of economic protest (the Populists, who carried five states in 1892) and several factional parties (most recently, the States' Rights Democrats in 1948 and the American Independent party of George Wallace in 1968). Though factional parties may hope to cause the defeat of the party from which they split, they have not always been able to achieve this. Harry Truman was elected in 1948 despite the defections of both the leftist progressives, led by Henry Wallace, and the right-wing Dixiecrats, led by J. Strom Thurmond. In 1968 it seems likely that Hubert Humphrey would have lost even if George Wallace had not been in the race (Wallace voters would probably have switched to Nixon rather than to Humphrey, though of course one cannot be certain). It is quite possible, on the other hand, that a Republican might have beaten Woodrow Wilson in 1912 if the Republican party had not split in two (the regulars supporting William Howard Taft, the progressives supporting Theodore Roosevelt).

What is striking is not that we have had so many minor parties but that we have not had more. There have been several major political movements that did not produce a significant third party: the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the antiwar movement of the same decade, and, most important, the labor movement of the twentieth century. African Americans were part of the Republican party after the Civil War and part of the Democratic party after the New Deal (even though the southern wing of that party for a long time kept them from voting). The antiwar movement found candidates with whom it could identify within the Democratic party (Eugene McCarthy, Robert F. Kennedy, George McGovern), even though it was a Democratic president, Lyndon B. Johnson, who was chiefly responsible for the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. After Johnson only narrowly won the 1968 New Hampshire primary, he withdrew from the race. Unions have not tried to create a labor party—indeed, they were for a long time opposed to almost any kind of national political activity. Since labor became a major political force in the 1930s, the largest industrial unions have been content to operate as a part (a very large part) of the Democratic party.

One reason some potential sources of minor parties never formed such parties, in addition to the dim



## How Things Work

### Types of Minor Parties

**Ideological parties:** Parties professing a comprehensive view of American society and government that is radically different from that of the established parties. Most have been Marxist in outlook, but some are quite the opposite, such as the Libertarian party.

*Examples:*

Socialist party (1901 to 1960s)  
 Socialist Labor party (1888 to present)  
 Socialist Workers party (1938 to present)  
 Communist party (1920s to present)  
 Libertarian party (1972 to present)  
 Green party (1984 to present)

**One-issue parties:** Parties seeking a single policy, usually revealed by their names, and avoiding other issues.

*Examples:*

Free-Soil party—to prevent the spread of slavery (1848–1852)  
 American or “Know-Nothing” party—to oppose immigration and Catholics (1856)  
 Prohibition party—to ban the sale of liquor (1869 to present)  
 Woman’s party—to obtain the right to vote for women (1913–1920)

**Economic-protest parties:** Parties, usually based in a particular region, especially involving farmers, that protest against depressed economic conditions. These tend to disappear as conditions improve.

*Examples:*

Greenback party (1876–1884)  
 Populist party (1892–1908)

**Factional parties:** Parties that are created by a split in a major party, usually over the identity and philosophy of the major party’s presidential candidate.

*Examples:*

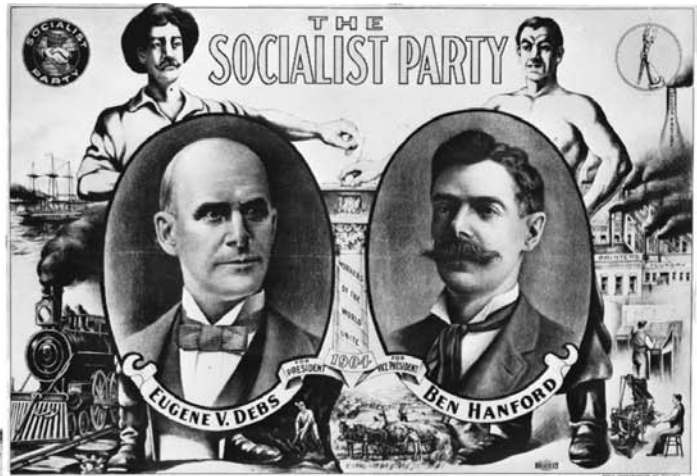
Split off from the Republican party:  
 “Bull Moose” Progressive party (1912)  
 La Follette Progressive party (1924)  
 Split off from the Democratic party:  
 States’ Rights (“Dixiecrat”) party (1948)  
 Henry Wallace Progressive party (1948)  
 American Independent (George Wallace) party (1968)  
 Split off from both Democrats and Republicans:  
 Reform party (Ross Perot)

chance of success, is that the direct primary and the national convention have made it possible for dissident elements of a major party, unless they become completely disaffected, to remain in the party and influence the choice of candidates and policies. The antiwar movement had a profound effect on the Democratic conventions of 1968 and 1972; African Americans have played a growing role in the Democratic party, especially with the candidacy of Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988; only in 1972 did the unions feel that the Democrats nominated a presidential candidate (McGovern) unacceptable to them.

The impact of minor parties on American politics is hard to judge. One bit of conventional wisdom holds that minor parties develop ideas that the major

parties later come to adopt. The Socialist party, for example, is supposed to have called for major social and economic policies that the Democrats under Roosevelt later embraced and termed the New Deal. It is possible that the Democrats did steal the thunder of the Socialists, but it hardly seems likely that they did it because the Socialists had proposed these things or proved them popular. (In 1932 the Socialists got only 2 percent of the vote and in 1936 less than one-half of 1 percent.) Roosevelt probably adopted the policies he did in part because he thought them correct and in part because dissident elements within his *own* party—leaders such as Huey Long of Louisiana—were threatening to bolt the Democratic party if it did not move to the left. Even Prohibition was adopted

The Socialist party and the Progressive party were both minor parties, but their origins were different. The Socialist party was an ideological party; the “Bull Moose” Progressive party split off from the Republicans to support Theodore Roosevelt.



more as a result of the efforts of interest groups such as the Anti-Saloon League than as the consequence of its endorsement by the Prohibition party.

The minor parties that have probably had the greatest influence on public policy have been the factional parties. Mugwumps and liberal Republicans, by bolting the regular party, may have made that party more sensitive to the issue of civil service reform; the Bull Moose and La Follette Progressive parties probably helped encourage the major parties to pay more attention to issues of business regulation and party reform; the Dixiecrat and Wallace movements probably strengthened the hands of those who wished to go slow on desegregation. The threat of a factional split is a risk that both major parties must face, and it is in the efforts that each makes to avoid such splits that one finds the greatest impact, at least in this century, of minor parties.

In 1992 and again in 1996, Ross Perot led the most successful recent third-party movement. It began as

United We Stand America and was later renamed the Reform party. Perot's appeal seemed to reflect a growing American dissatisfaction with the existing political parties and a heightened demand for bringing in a leader who would “run the government without politics.” In 2000 and again in 2004, Ralph Nader led the Green party and rallied supporters by promising to remain above partisan politics and avoid making compromises if elected. Of course it is no more possible to take politics out of governing than it is to take churches out of religion. Though unrealistic, some people seem to want policies without bargaining.

## ★ Nominating a President

The major parties face, as we have seen, two contrary forces: one, generated by the desire to win the presidency, pushes them in the direction of nominating a candidate who can appeal to the majority of voters



Ross Perot founded the independent Reform party in 1996.

and who will thus have essentially middle-of-the-road views. The other, produced by the need to keep dissident elements in the party from bolting and forming a third party, leads them to compromise with dissidents or extremists in ways that may damage the party's standing with the voters.

The Democrats and Republicans have always faced these conflicting pressures, but of late they have become especially acute. When the presidential nomination was made by a party convention that was heavily influenced, if not controlled, by party leaders and elected officials, it was relatively easy to ignore dissident factions and pick candidates on the basis of who could win. The *electoral* objectives of the party were predominant. The result was that often a faction left the party and ran a separate ticket—as in 1912, 1924, 1948, 1968, and 1980. Today the power of party leaders and elected officials within the parties is greatly diminished, with most delegates now selected by primary elections. A larger proportion of the delegates is likely to be more interested in issues and to be less amenable to compromise over those issues than formerly. In these circumstances the *policy* interests of the party activists are likely to be important.

### ***Are the Delegates Representative of the Voters?***

There would be no conflict between the electoral and policy interests of a political party if the delegates to

its nominating convention had the same policy views as most voters, or at least as most party supporters. In fact this is not the case: in parties, as in many organizations, the activists and leaders tend to have views different from those of the rank and file.<sup>24</sup> In American political parties in recent years this difference has become very great.

In 1964 the Republican party nominated the highly conservative Barry Goldwater for president. We have no opinion data for delegates to that convention as detailed and comprehensive as those available for subsequent conventions, but it seems clear that the Republican delegates selected as their nominee a person who was not the most popular candidate among voters at large and thus not the candidate most likely to win.

At every Democratic national convention since 1972 the delegates have had views on a variety of important issues that were vastly different from those of rank-and-file Democrats. On welfare, military policy, school desegregation, crime, and abortion, Democratic delegates expressed opinions almost diametrically opposed to those of most Democrats. The delegates to the 1980, 1984, and (to a lesser extent) 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 conventions were ideologically very different from the voters at large. The Democratic delegates were more liberal than the Democratic voters, and the Republican delegates were more conservative than the Republican voters.<sup>25</sup>

What accounts for the sharp disparity between delegate opinion (and often delegate candidate preference) and voter attitudes? Some blame the discrepancy on the rules, described earlier in this chapter, under which Democratic delegates are chosen, especially those that require increased representation for women, minorities, and the young. Close examination suggests that this is not a complete explanation. For one thing, it does not explain why the Republicans nominated Goldwater in 1964 (and almost nominated Ronald Reagan instead of Gerald Ford in 1976). For another, women, minorities, and youth have among them all shades of opinions: there are many middle-of-the-road women and young people, as well as very liberal or very conservative ones. (There are not many very conservative African Americans, at least on race issues, but there are certainly plenty who are moderate on race and conservative on other issues.) The question is why only *certain* elements of these groups are heavily represented at the conventions.

## Who Votes in Primaries?

Maybe delegates are unrepresentative of the party rank and file because they are chosen in caucuses and primary elections whose participants are unrepresentative. Before 1972 most delegates were picked by party leaders; primaries were relatively unimportant, and voter caucuses were almost unheard-of. Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and Hubert Humphrey in 1968 won the Democratic presidential nominations without even entering a primary. Harry Truman once described primaries as “eyewash.”<sup>26</sup>

After 1972 they were no longer eyewash. The vast majority of delegates were selected in primaries and caucuses. In 1992 forty states and territories held primaries, and twenty held caucuses (some places had both primaries and caucuses).

Only about half as many people vote in primaries as in general elections. If these primary voters have more extreme political views than do the rank-and-file party followers, then they might support presidential delegates who also have extreme views. However, there is not much evidence that such is the case. Studies comparing the ideological orientations of primary voters with those of rank-and-file party voters show few strong differences.<sup>27</sup>

When it comes to presidential primaries, a good fight draws a crowd. For example, in twelve of the first eighteen Republican presidential primaries in 2000, voter turnout hit record highs as Governor George W. Bush battled state by state to stay ahead of Senator John McCain. But the “crowd” represented only 13.6 percent of the voting-age population, up 4.3 percent from the 1996 turnout, and the highest since Senator Barry Goldwater’s campaign for the nomination divided Republicans in 1964.<sup>28</sup> In the states that voted after Bush had the nomination all but won, turnout was considerably lower. Likewise, the contest between Vice President Al Gore and Senator Bill Bradley resulted in the second-lowest Democratic presidential primary turnout since 1960.

Primaries differ from caucuses. A **caucus** is a meeting of party followers, often lasting for hours and held in the dead of winter in a schoolhouse miles from home, in which party delegates are picked. Only the most dedicated partisans attend. For the Democrats these have been liberals; for the Republicans, conservatives. In 1988 the most liberal Democratic candidate, Jesse Jackson, got more delegates in the Alaska,

Delaware, Michigan, and Vermont caucuses than did Michael Dukakis, the eventual nominee. Republican evangelist Pat Robertson did not win any primary, but he won the caucuses in Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington.

## Who Are the New Delegates?

However delegates are chosen, they are a different breed today than they once were. Whether picked by caucuses or primaries, and whatever their sex and race, a far larger proportion of convention delegates, both Republican and Democratic, are issue-oriented activists—people with an “amateur” or “purist” view of politics. Far fewer delegates are in it for the money (there is no longer much patronage to pass around) or to help their own reelection prospects. For example, in 1980 only 14 percent of the Democratic senators and 15 percent of the Democratic members of the House were delegates to the national convention. In 1956, by contrast, 90 percent of the senators and 33 percent of the representatives were delegates.<sup>29</sup> Party activists, especially those who work without pay and who are in politics out of an interest in issues, are not likely to resemble the average citizen, for whom politics is merely an object of observation, discussion, and occasional voting.

The changing incentives for participation in party work, in addition to the effects of the primary system, have contributed to the development of a national presidential nominating system different from that which once existed. The advantage of the new system is that it increases the opportunity for those with strong policy preferences to play a role in the party and thus reduces the chance that they will bolt the party and form a factional minor party. The disadvantage of the system is that it increases the chances that one or both parties may nominate presidential candidates who are not appealing to the average voter or even to a party’s rank and file.

In sum, presidential nominating conventions are now heavily influenced by ideologically motivated activists. Democratic conventions have heavy representation from organized feminists, unionized schoolteachers, and abortion rights activists; Republican conventions have large numbers of antiabortion

**caucus** *A meeting of party members to select delegates backing one or another primary candidate.*



activists, Christian conservatives, and small-government libertarians. As a result the presidential nominating system is now fundamentally different from what it was as late as the mid-1960s.

★ Parties Versus Voters

Since 1968 the Democratic party has had no trouble winning congressional elections but great difficulty winning presidential contests. Except for 1994–2006, the Democrats have controlled both houses of Congress; except for 1976, 1992, and 1996, they have lost every presidential election. The Republican party has had the opposite problem: though it won five out of seven presidential elections between 1968 and 1992, it did not control Congress for the forty years preceding its big win in 1994.

There are many reasons for this odd state of affairs, most of which will be discussed later. But one requires attention here. The difficulty the Democrats have had in competing for the presidency is in part because their candidates for the presidency have had, on certain issues—chiefly social and taxation issues—views very different from those of the average voter. That disparity to a large degree mirrors (and may be caused by) the gulf that separates the opinions of delegates to Democratic nominating conventions from the opinions of most citizens.

The Republicans have not been immune to this problem. In 1964 they nominated a candidate, Barry Goldwater, whose beliefs placed him well to the right of most voters. Not surprisingly, he lost. And the delegates to recent Republican conventions have held opinions on some matters that continue to be very different from most people’s. Still, the problem has been somewhat more acute for the Democrats.

The problem can be seen in Table 9.3. A lot of information is shown there; to understand it, study the table step by step. First, look at the middle column, which summarizes the views of voters in 2004. (Because there are about the same number of Democratic and Republican voters, the opinion of the average voter is about halfway between those of the followers of the two parties.) Now look at the columns on the far left and the far right. These show the views of delegates to the 2004 Democratic and Republican conventions. On almost every issue the delegates are in sharp disagreement. There were hardly any conservatives at the Democratic convention or liberals at the Republican convention. On each and every issue, the delegates were at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Still, either party can win if its delegates nominate a candidate whose views put him or her closer to the average citizen than to the average delegate or if the campaign is fought out over issues on which the delegates and the voters agree. For example, if the election turned on what to do about an economic

Table 9.3 Political Opinions of Delegates and Voters, 2004

	Democratic Delegates	Voters	Republican Delegates
<b>Who They Are</b>			
Male	50%	49%	57%
Female	50	51	43
African American	18	14	6
Income over \$75,000	61	28	58
<b>What They Think</b>			
Government should do more to solve national problems.	79	42	9
Abortion should be generally available.	75	34	13
Religion is extremely important in daily life.	21	28	39
Government’s antiterrorism laws restrict civil liberties.	77	43	15
The penalty for murder should be death, not life in prison.	19	50	57
Protect the environment even if jobs are lost because of it.	62	52	25
There should be no legal recognition of a gay couple’s relationship.	5	39	49

Source: *New York Times*/CBS News polls as reported in Katharine Q. Seelye and Marjorie Connelly, “The Conventioneers; Delegates Leaning to the Right of G.O.P. and the Nation,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2004.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Elizabeth Bunting, *All for Life* president

**From:** Ralph Marx, *political consultant*

**Subject:** *Upcoming presidential election*

Without regard to your organization's cause or issue, I have been hired to brief you on the pros and cons of backing or beginning a third-party candidate in the presidential election.

#### Arguments for:

1. Independent and third-party candidates can garner votes for president or tip an election result. In 1992 Ross Perot won nearly a fifth of the votes. In 2000 Green party candidate Ralph Nader got only 3 percent, but that included 100,000 votes in Florida where Republican Bush was credited with only 600 votes more than Democrat Gore.
2. Third-party candidates (Eugene Debs, Robert La Follette, George Wallace) can make a mark on American politics. Third parties have advocated policies later championed by the two main parties: abolishing slavery (Free-Soil party), women's right to vote (Woman's party), direct election of U.S. senators (Progressive party), and many others.

#### Arguments against:

1. It is virtually impossible to win, thanks to the winner-take-all system of elections. Since the 1850s, over a hundred third parties have come and gone. There will be a brief media frenzy when you bolt; but, after that, you might be ignored. Better to grumble but be heard inside a major party than to shout but not be heard with a minor party.
2. Splitting off from a major party could weaken support for your issue and lead one or the other major party to "resolve" it in a watered-down way. In the 1930s the Democrats plucked Social Security from the Socialist party's far-reaching plan. In the 1980s the Republicans' position on taxes only faintly echoed the Libertarian party's.

#### Your decision:

Back or begin a third party \_\_\_\_\_. Stay with the major party \_\_\_\_\_

## Big Anti-Abortion Group Might Leave GOP, Back a Pro-Life Party

June 6

NEW YORK

The head of one of the largest pro-life groups in the United States announced yesterday that her organization will not endorse the Republican presidential candidate unless the party's platform includes a detailed plan for outlawing all abortions. "The days when Republicans could take us for granted are over," said Elizabeth Bunting. "If the platform is not satisfactory, we might just get behind a third party," she threatened . . .

recession, the delegates, the voters, and the candidate would probably all agree: do whatever is necessary to end the recession. Exactly that happened in 1992, and the Democrats won.

Of course, even without a scandal, recession, or some other unifying issue, the need to win an election will lead all candidates to move toward the middle of the road. That is where the votes are. But this

creates a dilemma for a candidate of either party. The stance one takes to win support from party activists in the caucuses and primaries will often be quite different from the stance one should take to win votes from the general public. In the next chapter we shall look more closely at how politicians try to cope with that dilemma.

## ★ SUMMARY ★

A political party exists in three arenas: among the voters who psychologically identify with it, as a grass-roots organization staffed and led by activists, and as a group of elected officials who follow its lead in law-making. In this chapter we have looked at the party primarily as an organization and seen the various forms it takes at the local level—the machine, the ideological party, the solidary group, the sponsored party, and the personal following.

The spread of the direct primary has made it harder for parties to control who is nominated for elective office, thus making it harder for the parties to influence the behavior of these people once elected. Delegate selection rules, especially in the Democratic party, have helped shift the center of power in the national nominating convention. Because of the changes in rules, power has moved away from officeholders

and party regulars and toward the more ideological wings of the parties.

Minor parties have arisen from time to time, but the only ones that have affected the outcome of presidential elections have been those that represented a splinter group within one of the major parties (such as the Bull Moose progressives). The two-party system is maintained, and minor parties are discouraged, by an election system (winner-take-all, plurality elections) that makes voters reluctant to waste a vote on a minor party and by the ability of potential minor parties to wield influence within a major party by means of the primary system.

In the next chapter we shall look at the role of parties in shaping voter attitudes, and in Chapter 13 we shall look at the role of parties in Congress. In each of these areas we will find more evidence of party decay.

## RECONSIDERING WHO GOVERNS?

### 1. *How has America's two-party system changed, and how does it differ from the party systems of other representative democracies?*

American parties during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were strong organizations that picked their candidates for office. Parties in European democracies still do that, but America has changed. Now, candidates are usually picked by direct primary elections as the American voters' loyalty to parties has weakened.

### 2. *How much do parties affect how Americans vote?*

Registered Democrats are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates, and registered Republicans are more likely to vote for Republican candidates, but more voters now register as independents, the proportion of people identifying with one or the other party has declined, and split-ticket voting has been common in the American electorate. The declining attachment of voters to parties and their weaknesses as organizations have led many candidates for president and other offices to run more as individuals than as party members.

## RECONSIDERING TO WHAT ENDS?

### 1. *Did the Founding Fathers think that political parties were a good idea?*

No. For example, George Washington denounced parties as “factions.” But as soon as it was time to select his replacement, the republic’s first leaders realized they had to organize their followers to win the election, and parties were born. It was not, however, until well into the nineteenth century that the idea of a permanent two-party system was considered legitimate by virtually all of the country’s political leaders.

### 2. *How, if at all, should America’s two-party system be reformed?*

Any answer should depend, at least in part, on how one evaluates the many reforms that already have been made. For instance, some argue that the parties should become more open to popular influences. To a large extent, however, that has already happened. Whereas once presidential can-

didates were selected by party leaders, today they are selected by primaries. Others maintain that there is little real difference between the two parties. That opinion, however, is at variance with the wide differences on many important issues one finds in party platforms, as well as with the fact that delegates to the Republican National Convention and delegates to the Democratic National Convention differ widely on the issues. Still others contend that the plurality system in which the winner is the candidate who gets the most votes, even if he or she does not receive a majority, is unfair to minor or third-party candidates. Perhaps, but Bill Clinton was twice (1992 and 1996) a popular plurality president. Besides, America has had little experience with other voting or party systems, and democracies that have proportional voting or multiparty systems have other shortcomings (such as unduly empowering small parties with extreme views).

## WORLD WIDE WEB RESOURCES

Democratic National Committee:

**[www.democrats.org](http://www.democrats.org)**

Republican National Committee: **[www.rnc.org](http://www.rnc.org)**

Green party: **[www.greens.org](http://www.greens.org)**

Libertarian party: **[www.lp.org](http://www.lp.org)**

Reform party: **[www.reformparty.org](http://www.reformparty.org)**

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Chambers, William Nisbet, and Walter Dean Burnham, eds. *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. Essays tracing the rise of the party system since the Founding.

Goldwin, Robert A., ed. *Political Parties in the Eighties*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980. Essays evaluating parties and efforts at reform.

Key, V. O., Jr. *Southern Politics*. New York: Knopf, 1949. A classic account of the one-party South.

Mayhew, David R. *Placing Parties in American Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. A state-by-state description of state party organizations.

Nader, Ralph. *Crashing the Party: Taking on the Corporate Government in an Age of Surrender*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002. An impassioned attack on the two-party system by a well-known activist who ran for president as a minor-party candidate in 2000 and 2004.

Polsby, Nelson W. *Consequences of Party Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. Fine analysis of how changed party rules have affected the parties and the government.

Ranney, Austin. *Curing the Mischief of Faction: Party Reform in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. History and analysis of party “reforms,” with special attention to the 1972 changes in the Democratic party rules.

Riordan, William L. *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*. New York: Knopf, 1948. (First published in 1905.) Insightful account of how an old-style party boss operated.

Schattschneider, E. E. *Party Government*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1942. An argument for a more disciplined and centralized two-party system.

Shafer, Byron E. *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983. Detailed, insightful history of how the Democratic party came to be reformed.

Sundquist, James L. *Dynamics of the Party System*. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1983. History of the party system, emphasizing the impact of issues on voting.

Wilson, James Q. *The Amateur Democrat*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. Analysis of the issue-oriented political clubs that rose in the 1950s and 1960s.