

Political Science 10 – American Politics, Political Parties & Elections

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May 7, 2013

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- Social forces (e.g., interest groups; group experiences; unions) work through the parties to gain control over government personnel and policies
- Elections are mechanisms through which citizens can change their government; but at the same time they are ways that leaders can consolidate their power (e.g., Hitler and plebiscites)

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- The power/influence of political parties at the mass level has declined somewhat in recent decades, as some candidates (think Obama for America/Organizing for America (OFA)) have set up their own organizing campaigns, and political action committees (PACs) have increased their influence

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 - **Nomination: the process by which political parties select their candidates for election to public office. Can precede the general election by many months.**

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- Presidents need political parties. Presidents use their ties with members in Congress to help enact their legislative/policy agenda

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- **Two-party system:** A political system in which only two parties have a realistic opportunity to compete effectively for control of the government.

The First Party System – Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans

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- Jeffersonian Republicans gradually came to be known as the Democrats. Until the 1830s, the Democrats were the only major political party, but were divided along pro-Andrew Jackson/anti-Jackson lines

Alexander Hamilton



Andrew Jackson



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- During the late 1840s/early 1850s, conflicts over slavery produced sharp differences between Whigs and Democrats, but by 1856 the Whig Party buckled under the strain. Many anti-slavery Democrats and Whigs joined the emerging Republican Party

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- Upon the completion of the Civil War, the Republicans attempted to turn the South into a Republican hot-bed via Reconstruction policies. However, this collapsed in the 1870s, and the post-Civil War South became solidly Democratic

The System of 1896: Republicans and Democrats

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- **During this time, the GOP controlled 15 of the 18 Congresses.**

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- **New Deal system strained during 1960s conflicts over civil rights and Vietnam War.**

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- Intense party conflict and party polarization characterize the contemporary American Party System

Realignments

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- Five, possibly six have occurred since the founding: Around 1800, when Jeffersonian Republicans defeated Federalists; 1828 when Andrew Jackson won presidency; 1860 and rise of Lincoln and Republican Party; 1896 Republican candidate McKinley defeated Bryan; FDR and New Deal

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- Ralph Nader nearly captured 3% of the national vote in the 2000 election, but that was enough to swing the election to George W. Bush. Nader captured over 90,000 votes in Florida; Bush won Florida by 537 votes and thus the election

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- Often hard for third parties to get onto ballots; states often have difficult ballot access laws such as signatures, registration fees, etc.

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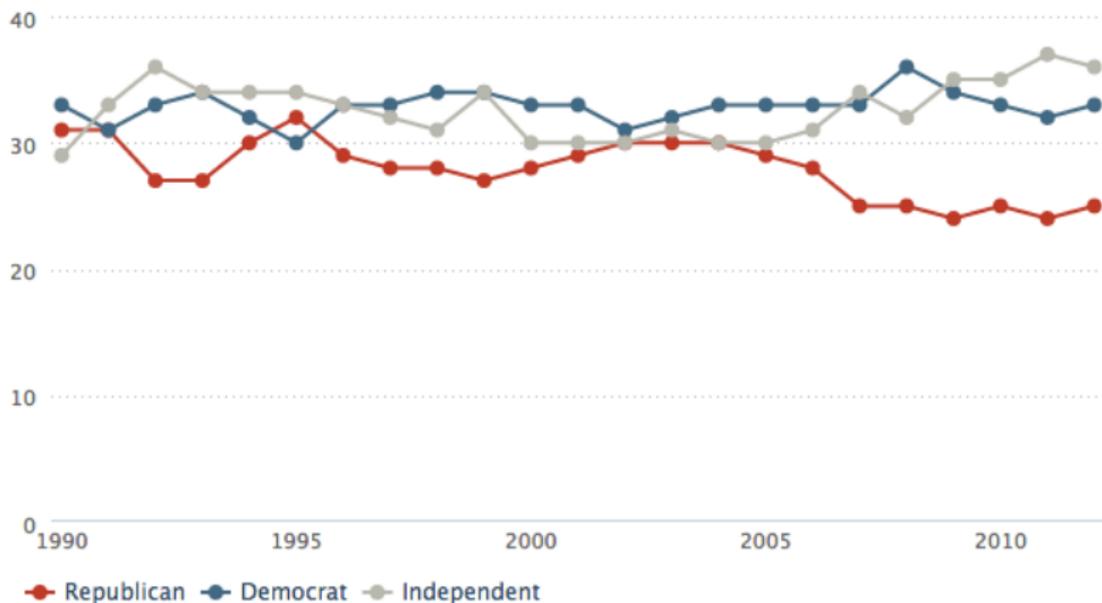
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- Over time, however, party identification for the two parties has waned

Party Identification Over Time

CLICK AND DRAG IN THE PLOT AREA TO ZOOM IN

Do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?



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