Chapter 10. Political Parties and Elections: Good Citizens Acting Irrationally

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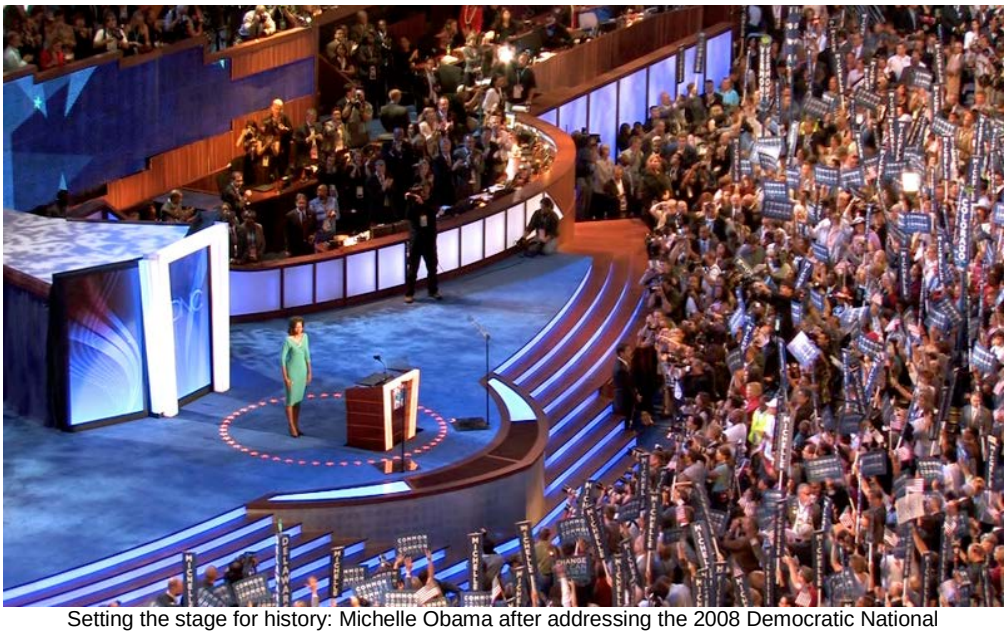

Setting the stage for history: Michelle Obama after addressing the 2008 Democratic National Convention, yet almost half the nation did not vote (photo by Ava Lowery, Creative Commons)

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I. The Logic of Voting—an Irrational Activity

Consider the act of voting. Before you can vote, you must register. If you change your place of residence, you have to register all over again. That requires time and some planning. Moreover, if you want to take voting seriously, then you need time and effort to decide exactly how you will vote. What I am saying is that voting has costs. Let's go through the logic of exactly what's involved.

Deciding for whom to vote can take considerable effort because we have so many offices for which we vote in the United States. These typically include

city and county government council members, mayors, county officials like sheriff, leaders of special purpose districts (including school boards, water, soil conservation, fire and dozens of nearly invisible governments), members of the state house and senate, state constitutional officers (like Secretary of State, Treasurer, Secretary of Agriculture, State Superintendent of Education, Lieutenant Governor, Governor, and possibly several others—you might look them up for your state), a United States Representative, each of the two U.S. Senate seats in your state every six years, and a president every four years, as well as ballot questions like state constitutional amendments. In a general election that is held every two years, you may easily be choosing people for a dozen offices. Local elections, as well as state elections in some states, are often scheduled in odd years and at different times of the year. On top of all that, add the primaries that usually determine each party's candidates for each of the offices! As a result, making voting decisions becomes at least a yearly exercise.

Because of this tradition of electing so many different people to so many different offices, the U.S. has what is called "**long ballot.**" Assuming a dozen offices, you will need to make decisions on two dozen candidates if both major parties contest each office and if you do not consider third party or independent candidates. Again, if you add primaries you may have several more candidates to choose for running in each of these offices that same year. So the number is often even higher.

Choices on the 2012 General Election in Pickens County, South Carolina

(Note: A long ballot that would be even longer if more offices were contested!)

Blue names are incumbents

President and Vice President (no write-in candidate option)
Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, President
Gary Johnson and James P Gray, Libertarian
Barack Obama and Joe Biden, Democratic
Virgil Goode and Jim Clymer, Constitution
Jill Stein and Cheri Honkala, Green

US House of Representatives, District 3
Jeff Duncan, Republican
Brian Ryan B Doyle, Democratic

State Sentate, District 1
Thomas C Alexander, Republican

State Senate District 2
Larry A Martin, Republican
Rex Rice, Petition

State House of Representatives District 3
B R Skelton, Republican
Ed Harris, Petition

State House of Representatives District 4
David Davey Hiott, Republican

State House of Representatives District 5
Phil Owens, Republican

State House of Representatives District 10
Joshua Putnam, Republican

Sheriff
Rick Clark, Republican
Tim Morgan, Petition
Stan Whitten, Petition

County Council District 3
Randy Crenshaw, Republican
Kevin Link, Petition

County Council District 4
G Neil Smith, Republican

County Council District 5
Jennifer H Willis, Republican
Chris Bowers, Petition

County Council District 6
Tom Ponder, Republican

Auditor
Brent Suddeth, Republican

Clerk of Court
Pat Welborn, Republican

Coroner
Kandy C Kelley, Republican

Treasurer
Dale M Looper, Republican

School Board District 1
Herbert P Cooper Jr, Nonpartisan

School Board District 3
Alex Saitta, Nonpartisan

School Board District 5
Judy Edwards, Nonpartisan
Valerie Ramsey, Nonpartisan
David Whittemore, Nonpartisan

Georges Creek Watershed District Commission (3-Seats to Fill)
R Stewart Bauknight, Nonpartisan
John H Cutchin, Nonpartisan
Cynthia Wise, Nonpartisan

Brushy Creek Watershed District Commission (2-Seats to Fill)
Adelaide M Gantt, Nonpartisan
Eric McConnell, Nonpartisan

Three and Twenty Watershed District Commission (3-Seats to Fill)
J Mark Bishop, Nonpartisan
W H McAbee III, Nonpartisan
Phil Tripp, Nonpartisan

Leonard Allen Williams, Nonpartisan

Constitutional Amendment Question 1

Beginning with the general election of 2018, must Section 8 of Article IV of the Constitution of this State be amended to provide that the Lieutenant Governor must be elected jointly with the Governor in a manner prescribed by law; and upon the joint election to add Section 37 to Article III of the Constitution of this State to provide that the Senate shall elect from among the members thereof a President to preside over the Senate and to perform other duties as provided by law; to delete Sections 9 and 10 of Article IV of the Constitution of this State containing inconsistent provisions providing that the Lieutenant Governor is President of the Senate, ex officio, and while presiding in the Senate, has no vote, unless the Senate is equally divided; to amend Section 11 to provide that the Governor shall fill a vacancy in the Office of Lieutenant Governor by appointing a successor with the advice and consent of the Senate; and to amend Section 12 of Article IV of the Constitution of this State to conform appropriate references?

Explanation

A 'Yes' vote will require, from 2018 onward, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor to run on the same ticket and be elected to office jointly. As a result, the Lieutenant Governor will no longer preside over the Senate and the Senate will elect their presiding officer from within the Senate body.

A 'No' vote maintains the current method of electing the Governor and Lieutenant Governor separately. The Lieutenant Governor shall continue to serve as President of the Senate.

The task of voting not only involves knowing who the candidates are, but also where they stand on a variety of issues. Assuming you can find all their issue positions, you must then decide which issues are most important and weight them in some way to account for relative importance. And you need to know if your weights match the weights of candidates. That is, you had better be sure that your top priority issue is not the lowest priority issue for the candidate you decide to vote for. And if you want to consider personal factors like experience and leadership qualities, then more effort and weighting is involved. In sum, to get all the information needed and work it all out for each office is almost mission impossible.

Is voting worth all the time and effort involved? The answer is a clear "no" if you balance the time and effort to do it right against the probability that your vote will be the deciding vote for your favorite candidate. The odds of your vote being the deciding vote are about the same as a big payoff on a state lottery. And certainly the time and effort you put in would be worth far more than the few dollars you might spend on lottery tickets. Put this way, the act of voting is irrational. The expected payoff is far lower than the cost of even minimally thoughtful participation.

Considering all this, what we should wonder is not why so few people vote (a little over half of those potentially eligible in presidential elections, about a third in congressional elections, and the percentage goes down from there to single digits in local primaries). The question should be why does anyone go to the trouble to vote at all?

Certainly we have all heard many times that any good citizen should vote. Thus, we have the paradox of good citizens and voting. If good citizens vote and voting is irrational and being irrational is foolish, then being a good citizen requires you to be foolish.

Perhaps we vote for payoffs that are psychological or social, not payoffs on issue or candidate preferences. We are certainly taught (or "socialized," to use the social science term) to believe that we should vote. You have almost certainly heard that if you don't vote, you should not complain. Of course, this is nonsense in a legal sense—the right of expression does not rest on the act of voting. To the extent that you feel good about voting, about wearing one of those "I voted" stickers they give out when you leave the polls, you have been conditioned to respond to symbolic rewards, even if none of your preferred candidates win.

Typical sticker handed out at polling stations all over the nation to make voters feel that they have done something important (Google Images)

For now I will offer you no answer to the question of whether you should vote. I will leave the question for you to ponder as we go through the several major voting-related topics in this chapter.

First, we will consider the central role that political parties play in the voting and election process. I will argue that you should value parties far more than the average citizen does, because parties play a large number of essential roles in our democratic republic. In fact, our republic could not survive without them. Moreover, political parties help lower the costs of voting so that the act of voting is not quite so irrational.

Second, we will turn to election rules and the many different kinds of elections. By now you should know that rules are very important in politics.

Third, parties and elections have important policy implications. After discussing these implications, we shall return to the question of whether you should act irrationally and vote.

II. Elections without Political Parties?

A. Complaints about Parties

From the beginning of our history Americans have complained about political parties. You may remember the arguments in *Federalist Number 10*, where Madison lumped interest groups and parties together and considered them a mortal enemy to the public interest in popular governments. The Founders generally hated parties. They hoped we could operate without them. You will not find a single mention of the word “party” in the Constitution.

Today citizens and candidates alike criticize parties for petty bickering and for gamesmanship. We see each side looking for something wrong with the other side instead of trying to work together. We yearn for candidates who will work across partisan divides and put country above politics. Part of this gamesmanship is criticizing the other side for being too partisan. So we have another little paradox—candidates win partisan elections by attacking the other side as overly partisan! You might look for these kinds of attacks in campaigns.

Thomas Jefferson shared these feelings. He once said that if he had to have a political party to go to heaven, then he would rather go to hell. Yet, he founded a party under his name (which later after several name changes evolved into the Democratic Party). Why would someone who hates party so much go to the trouble to found a political party? This is another paradox for you.

The answer to this paradox is rather simple, at least conceptually. Though filled with potential dangers and problems, political parties were necessary for the operation of our democratic republic. We hated them and hoped to avoid them, but we had to have them. We still do. Why parties are necessary and how they operate is much of the rest of this chapter.

B. What Parties Are and How They Differ from Interest Groups

Let’s start by defining what we mean by political parties. Although the Founders lumped parties and interest groups together and although the two entities have some things in common, they also have some differences. Both parties and interest groups are collections of people who have a common set of concerns about what government does—about policy. Both have formal organizations, as well as formal names. However, interest groups usually have a narrower set of concerns than parties. More important, while both are involved in campaigns, parties run slates of candidates for office under a label in order to win control of government. Interest groups fall far short of this. Interest groups try to influence government, but generally do not try to capture control of government by running candidates for office under the label of the interest group. So **political parties** are people organized around a wide range of policy preferences who

recruit and run slates of candidates for office so that they can capture control of government and then enact their policy preferences.

Characteristics and Goals	Political Parties	Interest Groups
People w/common interests	X	X
Influence policy	X	X
Formal organizations	X	X
Formal Names	X	X
Broad policy concerns	X	
Help candidates in elections	X	X
Run slates of candidates under a label	X	
Attempt to capture control of all branches of government	X	

Because interest groups and parties significantly overlap in what they do, they have an inverse relationship in their power. Generally speaking, the stronger interest groups are, the weaker political parties are. In modern American politics, interest group power has significantly weakened the power that political parties have. Candidates get far more campaign money from interest groups than from political parties. Officials need a lot of information to make policy, and they get far more from interest groups than from party organizations.

Interest groups are also closely attached to and interwoven with parties. Interest groups have so infiltrated political parties that parties can be seen as a shifting coalition of interest groups that attempt, with significant success, to capture control of the party, at least in key policy areas of concern to the groups. Note in the table below of the top 12 contributors to the DNC and RNC in 2012 that sometimes groups hedge their bets and give to both parties (data from the Center for Responsive Politics at www.opensecrets.org)!

2012 Dem Nat Com Top 12 Contributors		2012 Rep Nat Com Top 12 Contributors	
Contributor	**Total**	**Contributor**	**Total**
Time Warner	$650,673	Goldman Sachs	$1,212,960
Google Inc	$622,626	Ryan for Congress	$1,000,000
Microsoft Corp	$581,259	KKR & Co	$822,350
Blackstone Group	$527,200	Bain Capital	$693,500
Harvard University	$494,411	Blackstone Group	$673,110
Goldman Sachs	$486,014	Elliott Management	$662,150
Skadden, Arps et al	$485,042	Rothman Institute	$590,500
Comcast Corp	$446,129	Las Vegas Sands	$586,200
University of California	$371,382	Arclight Capital Partners	$585,600
Stanford University	$361,725	JPMorgan Chase & Co	$512,973
Nix, Patterson & Roach	$338,800	Morgan Stanley	$490,552
News Corp	$327,559	Bank of America	$462,668

If we looked at the complete list of groups, we would see some differences. The Democratic Party gets more support from labor unions, civil rights groups, environmental groups, and pro-choice groups. The Republican Party has more support from fundamentalist religious groups, anti-abortion groups, and business and corporate groups (especially health insurance, hospitals, banks and financial institutions, oil companies, and military contractors).

Given the inverse relationship we see between interest group power and political party power, I wonder if Madison might revise his ideas in *Federalist Number 10* if he could come back and write a new edition. Perhaps he would conclude that parties could be a correcting factor for the relatively more narrow focus that interest groups have. However, I suspect that he would still be troubled by the financial hold that interests have on parties and candidates.

Two things would have to happen for parties to play a stronger correcting role in offsetting the power of interest groups. First, reforms would have to disentangle parties from interest groups and candidates from interest group money. Second, we would need to strengthen parties. How could we strengthen parties? We might find ways to encourage large numbers of average people to give small amounts of money to political parties. It would have to be enough so that most candidates would receive most of their campaign money from parties rather than directly and indirectly from individuals closely associated with interests and Political Action Committees representing interests. We might create incentives for candidates to pursue such contributions rather than large amounts of money from interests. This might enable elected leaders to ignore narrow interests. However, while theoretically possible, such reforms would be very hard to put in place.

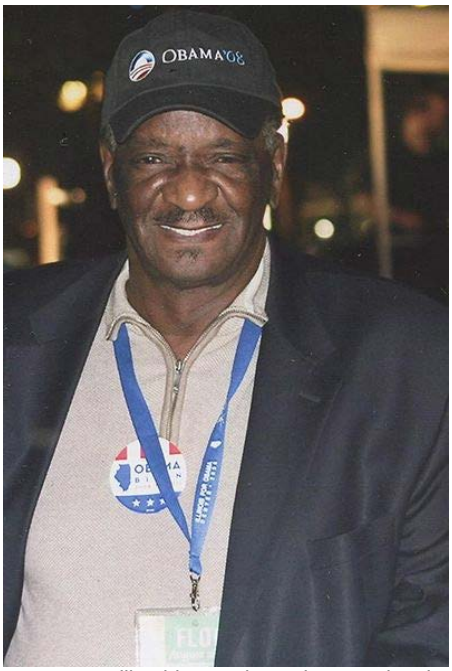
C. Why Political Parties Are Necessary

One way to evaluate the importance of political parties is to consider the many things they do. They don't do some of these things very well because of the power of interest groups and a variety of other reasons. But these things need to be done, and the alternative ways to get them done might be far worse than the fears we have about parties. These are the reasons why Jefferson created a party even though he disliked parties so very much.

1. Simplify Voting

We have already noted the difficulties of voting in terms of costs and expected payoff. Having a party identification greatly reduces the cost in terms of time and effort involved.

Suppose you know that you are a Republican and you share general values and issue positions with most other Republicans. You know that the vast majority of the time Republican officeholders will try and move government policy in the direction you want. Then voting is really quite simple. You just choose the Republicans on the ballot. No further research necessary! The same kind of argument applies if you are a Democrat.



Strong party supporters like this one do not have to do a lot of research to decide how to vote. They just vote for all candidates of their party knowing that if elected those candidates will agree with them on most issues. Party works as an excellent short-cut IF people carefully choose the party that best fits their policy preferences. Many people fail to do that (photo by Kwame Raoul, Creative Commons).

Party identification makes voting choice really simple. You just vote for candidates running under that label. You know that most of the time you will be supporting people who share more things with you than you would get if you voted for someone under another party label.

However, bragging that you vote on the basis of party is not something that will win you much admiration today. American culture encourages us to make choices based on our own evaluation of issues or character. Most people proudly say “I vote on the basis of issues” or “I vote the person.” This sounds sophisticated and educated. However, if you ask exactly what those issues are and exactly what the individual characteristics are and how they learned about these things, the answers you will get are likely to be superficial. Most people really do not do any significant research on either issues or character. Most people (about three-fourths) have partisan leanings and see the candidates through the psychological filter of their party identifications. So whether they admit it or not, they will generally see candidates of their own party as closer to them on issues and as having a better character. For example, they tend to see the candidate of their party as strong, while the other party’s candidate as merely

power hungry. They see their party's candidate as really caring about people, while the other party's candidate as only pretending to care.

Voting research strongly supports the hypothesis that party identification makes voting easier. The stronger the party identification a person has, the more likely they are to vote. Those who identify themselves as pure independents, that is, having no partisan leanings in either direction, are less likely to vote than those who at least have leanings one way or the other. Quite simply, the difficulty of making a choice is often too great, so they just do not vote.

2. Recruit and Screen Candidates

Over the course of American history, parties have used different ways to choose candidates they run for office. For the first few decades, party leaders in Congress or in legislatures gathered together in a **party caucus**, which was a meeting to decide who would be the best candidates for them to put forward. This method tied candidates closely to existing party leaders, but it also meant that elites rather than average citizens played the most important role. Of course, the elites needed to choose candidates who would have some popular appeal so that they could win the election. So concern for the desires of average citizens played an indirect role in the party caucus decision process.

By the late 1820s pressure began to build to allow more participation among party supporters in choosing their candidates for office. The 1828 election of Andrew Jackson as president played a role in this because of the emphasis Jackson placed on popular appeal. His re-nomination in 1832 marked the first national party nominating convention, held in a saloon in Baltimore. The idea took hold, and more nominations began to take place in conventions rather than in party caucuses. By the middle and late 1800s, nominating conventions were being held at all levels of government.

National nominating conventions allowed more popular participation than did the old party caucus

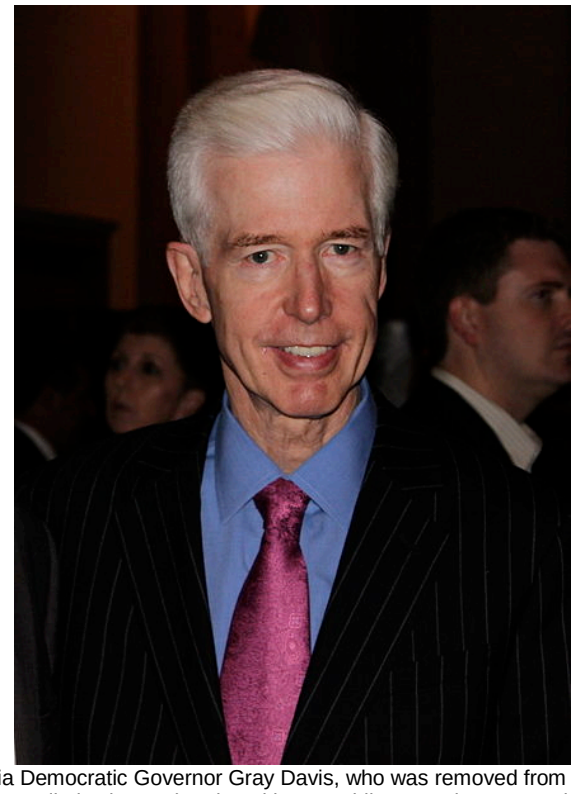
method in which small groups of party leaders made the decisions. Yet political machines and their bosses often dominated the national conventions behind the scenes. This is the 1868 Democratic National Convention Hall in N.Y. City, where the Tammany Hall Democratic machine had a lot of influence behind the scene in what were describes as “smoke-filled” rooms (public domain).

Conventions certainly included many more people than party caucuses, but numbers were still limited compared to the total number of citizens. Moreover, party leaders were usually able to use convention rules to control enough votes so that they still had the major say in nominations. By the late 1800s more and more people began to call for greater openness and popular participation in the nomination process. Citizens saw party leaders as corrupt party bosses who manipulated conventions in “smoke-filled” rooms.

Wisconsin Senator Robert Lafollette was one of the leaders of the Progressive Movement in the early 1900s, a movement that promoted the use of primaries to select party candidates to take power away from party leaders and give average citizens more control over nominations. They had only partial success at the time, but by the 1970s primaries became the standard for selecting candidates at all levels across the nation. Here Lafollette is speaking to a crowd of supporters in Illinois in 1905 (Library of Congress, public domain).

Reformers called themselves **Progressives**, and they pushed for democratic reforms that would move the nation toward a more popular democracy in which average voters would have more power. Some wanted to end parties altogether, promoting **non-partisan elections** that would ban candidates from running under a party label. They had significant success at the local government level, where many elections today are nonpartisan elections.

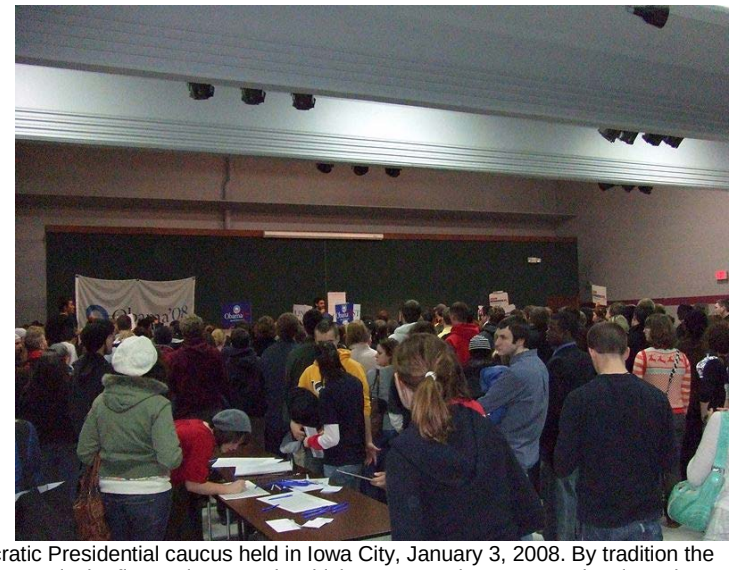
Other reforms included allowing people to initiate laws by signing petitions and then holding referenda to actually pass laws. This is called the **initiative**. They also wanted voters to be able to force someone out of office, using a similar process involving signed petitions and then a vote, called the **recall**. Some governors have been removed from office this way. Many states and local governments allow these measures today, especially in the Midwest and West where the Progressive Movement was strongest.



California Democratic Governor Gray Davis, who was removed from office in a recall election and replaced by Republican movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2003. Allowing recall elections was another Progressive reform measure designed to move power more directly to average citizens which some states, like California, adopted in the early 1900s. In practice, those who had financial resources to run petition drives and run media campaigns to influence voters really had the power (photo by Neon Tommy, Creative Commons).

Getting back to our discussion about choosing candidates for office, the Progressive Movement had a great impact, though it happened quite slowly over many decades. In some areas of the country the movement created its own party, but in most states progressive reformers became wings within the two major political parties that existed, the Democrats and the Republicans.

The progressives pushed for nominations to take place by primaries rather than by convention. This method of nomination gradually worked its way up to presidential nominations in the 1960s and 70s. By the 1970s, to win the presidential nomination for either major party you had to win a majority of the delegates through primaries that most states scheduled, starting with the famous New Hampshire primary. Some states held caucuses, like Iowa, which by tradition holds its presidential caucus shortly before the New Hampshire Primary. But these presidential nomination caucuses are very different than the old party leader caucuses held in the early 1800s. In a modern caucus, average voters meet in their precincts and express support for candidates, often debating with each other and trying to win converts prior to actually counting the numbers for each candidate.



Democratic Presidential caucus held in Iowa City, January 3, 2008. By tradition the Iowa Caucus is the first major event in which party members meet at local precincts to choose delegates to the state convention based on which presidential candidate they support. Barak Obama's Iowa victory in 2008 helped launch his successful campaign (public domain).

Because we live in a federal system in which each state organizes its own primary rules for each party, today we have separate rules for each party in each state for nominations for different offices. Needless to say, this makes the nomination process extremely complex. You might search the web for the rules in your own state for nomination for key offices, including the presidency.

The bottom line today is that primaries are the most important method of winning party nominations at all levels. Rather than having party leaders play the central role in screening acceptable candidates to run, the citizens who take the time and trouble to turn out for primaries play that role.

Choosing candidates this way has important implications. A great deal of research concludes that those who act "irrationally" and vote in primaries tend to be more motivated by strong partisan and ideological feelings, which means that more moderate candidates are at a disadvantage in primaries. Once elected, the more extreme candidates are less likely to compromise with the other side. Some of the gridlock we see in government today is an unintended consequence of a reform that was supposed to make elections more democratic.

A few states have adopted the **nonpartisan blanket primary** system to remedy this problem. In California, for example, all candidates for an office of all parties run in one big primary. Each candidate can have her or his party preference listed on the ballot, but that does not mean party endorsement. If someone gets a majority, that person is elected without a general election. If no one gets a majority, then the top two are in a runoff in the general election, even if they are of the same party! With all parties on the same ballot, candidates need to attempt to attract supporters from across the political spectrum, including independents. Moreover, because this single primary could decide who the

winner is without a general election, more people, including voters other than extreme partisans, are more likely to participate. This gives an advantage to more moderate candidates. Time will tell whether this reform is successful in electing leaders who are willing to compromise. If so, pressures could increase for other states could adopt it.

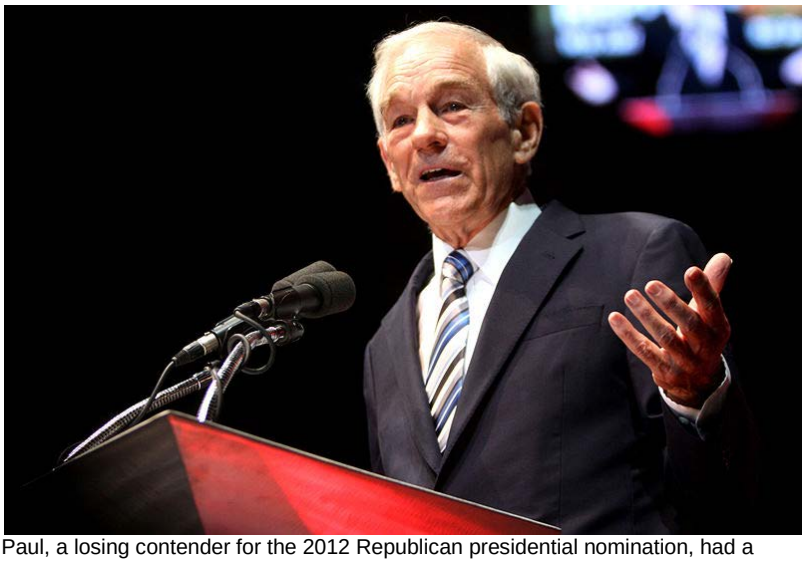
Endorsements and support by party leaders can still play a role in building support in primaries, but a much less important role than once was the case when nominations were by party leader caucus or conventions. Because of this, once elected, officeholders are less closely tied to party leadership than in the past.

If you dislike political parties, you probably see the weakening of party influence on nominations as a good thing. However, unless candidates are independently wealthy, they have to get campaign resources somewhere. That somewhere could be from interest groups and wealthy individuals, from large numbers of small donors, or some combination of all of these. Rare is the candidate who comes into office with ties only to the voters.

Considering that primaries are the method by which candidates are chosen today, do conventions matter anymore? Although everyone knows who the presidential candidates will be before the conventions (or candidates for governor in the case of a state party conventions), conventions still have other things to do.

Some of these things take place at all party conventions. They adopt a party platform, which tells voters where the party stands on issues. They set rules for the next set of primaries, which have a great impact on strategy for the next election. Activist party members meet and compare notes on what they are doing at home, learn from each other (much like a convention of any professional group) and energize themselves for the upcoming campaign.

Conventions may have an additional task if the primaries leading up to the convention have been divisive. They provide an opportunity for reuniting the party. The disappointed followers of the losing candidate or candidates need to feel that their efforts were not wasted and need to be re-energized for the upcoming general election. If a winning candidate does not do this, she or he is likely to lose in November.



Ron Paul, a losing contender for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination, had a strong following of dedicated supporters whose support Mitt Romney would need in the general election. So Paul, as is traditionally done for all major losing contenders, was given an important speaking role at the national convention in the hope that this would help reunite the party for the fall campaign (photo by Gage Skidmore, Creative Commons).

Finally, conventions serve as a "kick-off" for the upcoming campaign. Although the media do not cover national conventions like they once did when conventions had dramatic fights about nominations, the media still cover major speeches and especially the acceptance speech of the presidential candidates. Those speeches set the tone for the upcoming campaign and still get considerable audiences. The speech provides the candidate an opportunity to either introduce or redefine him or herself to the nation. So conventions still matter, even though they are less newsworthy today.

Nixon supporters showing their enthusiasm to national television audiences at the 1968 Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, which set the stage for a successful run for the White House. "Kicking off" the campaign is an important role that national nominating conventions continue to play. Conventions are often held in key states to give a the party a boost from all the local coverage in the state (photo by the state of Florida, public domain).

3. Get Government Moving

Without political parties, our checked and balanced and separated and federalized government would probably accomplish nothing. By now you know many of the obstacles that the Founders built into our democratic republic. Their concern for preventing the tyrannical accumulation of power led them to create a structure that included so many safeguards that a new danger was created. Would government be able to do anything when faced with any kind of crisis that required quick action?

One way to overcome all these safeguards is for some charismatic leader to accumulate enough power to overrun the obstacles. The office best situated to accomplish this is the president. At times the president has acted as though the office has unlimited power. For example, at the outbreak of the Civil War Lincoln claimed a wide range of emergency powers. But that was relatively short-lived, and Congress reasserted its powers shortly after Lincoln's death. When other presidents started acting like kings, political and cultural obstacles limited the expansion of power. Franklin Roosevelt was limited in his efforts to control the Supreme Court. Lyndon Johnson was unable to continue in office in the face of an unpopular war. Richard Nixon found that he was not above the law in covering up political espionage in the Watergate scandal. Nevertheless, in the face of some great crisis, a president might gain sufficient popular support to overcome the checking powers of the other branches. That is precisely what the Founders feared.

President Nixon, under great pressure from special prosecutors, released a highly edited version of the Watergate tapes in April 1974. He hoped that this would satisfy the public and prosecutors. Later that year the Supreme Court forced him to release all the tapes, including one that showed he played a key role in the conspiracy to cover up White House involvement in the burglary of Democratic campaign headquarters in the Watergate complex. This revelation led Nixon to resign in order to avoid impeachment by the House and removal from office by the Senate. Checks and balances worked to remove a potential tyrant (U.S. National Archives, public domain).

Short of crisis and an all-powerful charismatic leader, party offers an alternative way to overcome the checks and balances and get our government

moving in a coordinated way. Party is an external organization with a set of policy proposals, called the party platform, which all those running for office under the party label at least partially support. Members of Congress, governors, state legislators and judges, who were nominated and confirmed along party lines, share most of these policy goals and work together to enact them into law. If a party captures control of all the branches of government, enacting the policies in the platform gets easier.

This does not happen most of the time. Rarely does one party control enough of government to pass almost whatever it wants. But at times parties have been dominant enough to enact a wide range of new policies. The best examples of this were Democratic dominance in passing New Deal legislation following the election of FDR in 1933 and the passage of the Great Society program after the 1964 election gave Lyndon Johnson large majorities in both houses of Congress. Using party to bridge the checks and balances is far less dangerous to freedom than granting unlimited power to a single leader to run roughshod over the safeguards against tyranny.

4. Nonviolent Outlet for Discontent

Suppose you are really angry with what current elected officials are doing. What are your alternatives? You can leave and go live somewhere else. That's usually impractical. You can suck it up and just put up with discontent and anger. Many people do this, but nothing changes as a result. You can try to overthrow these leaders through violent revolution, which has very high human and economic costs. You do not have to look very far around the world to see the costs of violent revolutions.

Political parties offer another alternative. You can join an opposing party and work to win sufficient popular support to elect a new set of leaders pledged to the policy proposals in their platform. Party activity channels discontent into activities that can lead to change but falls short of violence when the party in power respects the right of an opposition party to organize and criticize—the idea of the **loyal opposition**. That condition, a very important condition, usually holds true in our political culture. Considering these alternative ways to deal with discontent, which would you prefer?

5. Promote Compromise and Moderation

Because parties are coalitions of people and interest groups with differing particular interests, no one can get everything they want. At the same time, party leaders know that they must have the support of all groups in the party if they are to have any chance of winning an election. So leaders work hard to forge compromises on issues to keep as many people in the party as happy as possible. That usually requires that extreme ideas get turned into more moderate

ideas. Parties that stick with extreme ideas usually do not win elections and usually fail to get them enacted into policy.

The Tea Party movement within the Republican Party came to dominate the party around the 2012 election. Many observers concluded that this rather extreme anti-government faction that refused any compromise with Democrats made winning the White House more difficult for the Republicans because moderation usually beats extremism in presidential elections (photo by Matthew Reichbach, Creative Commons).

In addition, party leaders know that in order to win elections the party must expand its appeal to independents and sometimes to some people who lean toward the other party. If both parties hold their base supporters in an election, the party that does best in winning the independents will usually win. Again, the best way to do this is to take issue positions that are relatively moderate.

This argument assumes that on most issues American opinion is distributed along a bell shaped curve. In a bell shaped curve most people are in the middle. It also assumes that two major parties are competing for votes, so that the one that captures the middle wins the most votes. If many parties were competing, then a more extreme party could win if several parties split the votes in the middle. Both of these assumptions—opinion is bell shaped and two major parties—apply pretty well in American politics.

Let me offer one example to illustrate, the issue of abortion. This was a highly emotional issue when I first began teaching American government about three decades ago, and it will almost certainly remain an emotional issue long after I end my teaching career. How do Americans feel about abortion? Relatively few take either the extreme “no abortions ever” or “abortions on-demand at any time during the pregnancy” positions. Most Americans would allow abortions to be legal in a variety of situations, especially those that put the health of the mother at risk. (You might look up some polls on the Web on this issue.) The Republican Party, which includes most anti-abortion groups (or “pro-life,” to use the term these groups prefer), certainly supports more limits on abortion. But many Republican candidates are careful to allow exceptions in their policy

positions, exceptions for rape and incest and when the mother's life or health is in danger. Democrats include most groups that would allow abortions as a matter of choice on the part of the woman (calling themselves "pro-choice"). But most Democratic candidates would allow some restrictions in the latter part of the pregnancy. Both parties generally moderate their positions to better fit the actual distribution of public opinion. But when they take extreme no-compromise positions, they usually lose votes.

6. Organize Campaigns

Parties have long played a role in organizing political campaigns. We have already talked about recruiting and screening candidates. After candidates were chosen, parties recruited volunteers, raised money, planned strategy, worked to get people out to vote, and provided a great deal of campaign advice. Before the electronic media, party organization was about the only way for candidates to get their messages to voters, especially candidates running for election statewide or nationally. Back in the 1800s most newspapers were run by party organizations and made no pretense about being neutral in campaigns, clearly favoring one party's candidates.

Recruiting campaign volunteers is still an important function for political parties, but most candidates recruit their own volunteers because they need the volunteers to win the primary election. Here Congressional candidate Susan Davis is thanking her volunteers for her victory (photo by Pattymooney, Creative Commons,).

The rise of the electronic media in its many forms reduced the role of political parties in campaign organization. Candidates could bypass party organization to reach voters in a variety of ways, including paid advertisements on television and radio to email, web sites, and social media today. Candidates must win primaries to run for office today, and they get no party help there. So they develop their own personal organizations and raise their own money. Raising a lot of money is really important in the modern campaign because of the great expense of media advertising, especially television. If candidates win the

nomination, they certainly get some help from the party. But they almost always keep their own campaign organization. As a result, if they ultimately win office, they are less indebted to party leaders than they once were.

Thinking back to the idea of party getting elected officials moving in the same direction, you can see how the declining role of party in organizing campaigns and the rise of personal campaign organizations and campaign consultants have weakened the ability of the party to count on loyalty from candidates after the election. Quite simply, candidates do not need help from party as much as they once did.

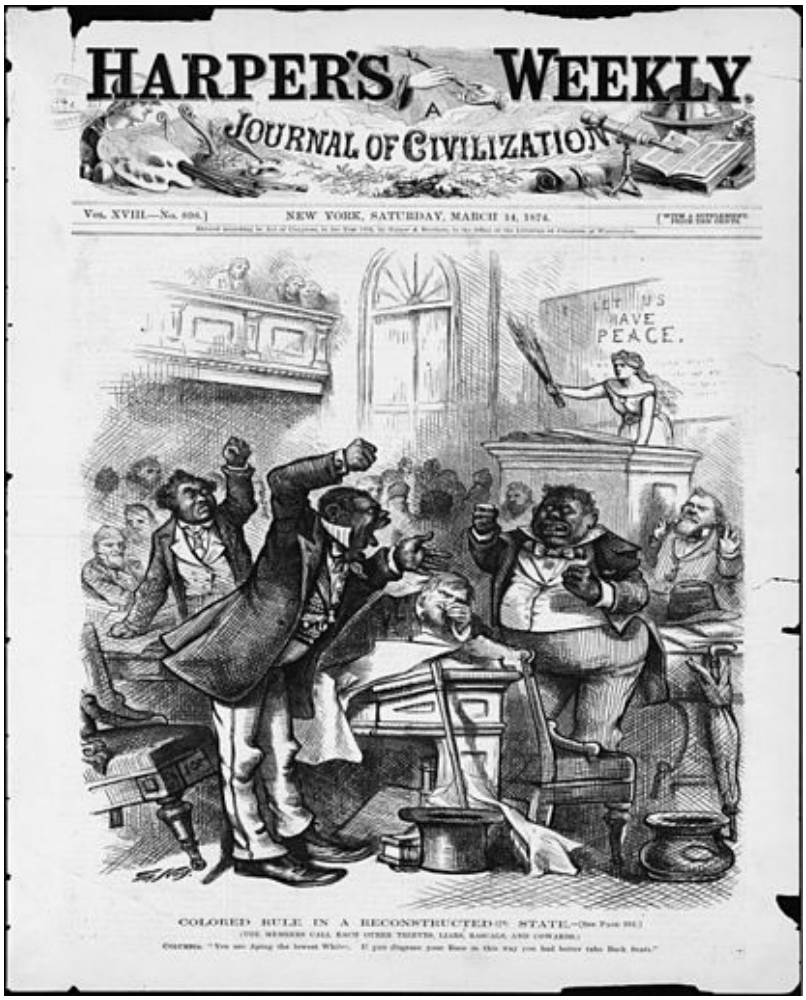
Nevertheless, parties still do provide significant campaign support, including some money, especially for candidates in lower level offices. Parties run seminars and workshops to help new candidates learn the things they need to know to run successful campaigns. In a sense parties train candidates in the minor leagues, but once a candidate is ready for a higher level office, party makes less difference.

7. Recruit New Groups of Voters

Historically, as new groups came to the United States, political parties sought them out and worked to recruit them as supporters. Why? These groups had something the parties needed—votes. Urban party machine operatives would contact immigrants right after they got off the boat, offering help in finding housing and jobs. New citizens would return favors by giving political support. So whether it was Irish immigrants or Italian immigrants, parties sought them out and helped get them involved in the political process.

Immigrant landing station at Ellis Island in New York harbor, a major point of entry for immigrants into the U.S. in the 1800s and early 1900s. After being accepted and often going to work in the factories of northeastern cities, political party organizations worked hard to help the immigrants and won their votes in return, playing the role of helping integrate new groups of people into our political culture (Copyright expired, public domain).

The story of African American political participation might be seen as an exception to this generalization. For nearly a century after the Civil War, whites in the South agreed that no candidate would seek out votes from African Americans to gain political advantage. This agreement along with segregation laws minimized voting participation by African Americans and relegated them to second class citizenship. Though African Americans suffered greatly under this system, the entire South paid a heavy toll in wasted human potential. It is still trying to catch up. However, for a brief period right after the Civil War during Reconstruction, the Republican Party recruited the formerly enslaved people to temporarily build a Republican majority in most Southern states. And beginning in 1960, Democratic presidential candidates recruited African American voters across the nation.



Republican recruitment of African Americans for a brief period after the Civil War enabled the party to win control of some state governments in the South. This ugly caricature of African American legislators in the South Carolina House published in 1874 in a national magazine, *Harper's Weekly*, showed that even in the North many white people held strong feelings of prejudice that would prevent parties from fully integrating this important group of Americans into our political system for many decades (Copyright expired, public domain).

Hispanic voters are the most recent group who are being recruited. Their potential numbers are increasing as more and more Hispanics gain citizenship

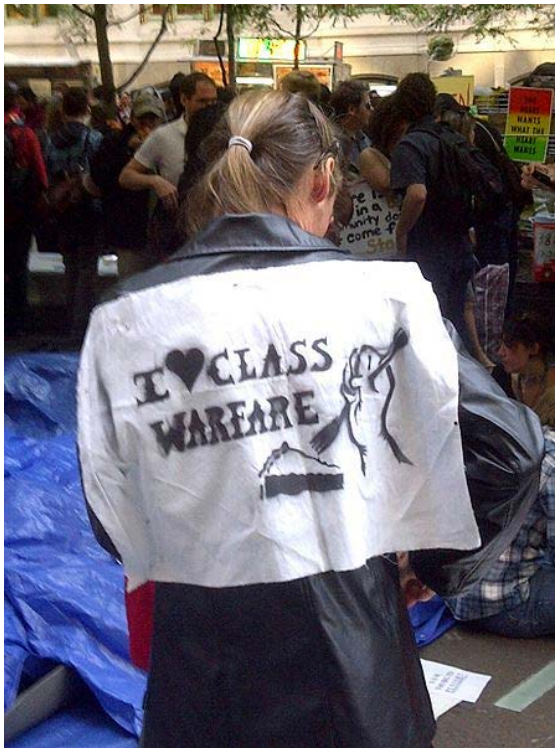
and more and more are voting in primaries and general elections. Failure to win very many Hispanic votes in the 2012 presidential election was a significant factor in the Republican loss. Shortly after that election some Republican leaders began seeking ways to attract more Hispanics to their party. If they fail to do this, winning many state and especially presidential elections becomes far more difficult.

8. Counterweight to Powerful Interest Groups

If you remember the chapter on interest groups, many political scientists see the operation of interest groups as central in understanding how our government makes policy decisions. You may remember my saying that if I could only teach you one chapter on how American government actually works, it would be the chapter on interest groups. You may also remember that the most important groups tend to be those with a lot of money, specifically business and corporate groups representing mostly upper class citizens.

Political parties can provide a counterweight to the advantages that the wealthy have in interest group politics. Working class people do have some interest group representation, but they are no match for the interest groups that represent wealth. What working class citizens do have is votes. Votes can be very effective, if they choose to use them and if they are united behind a political party—two big “if’s!”

Joining political parties and then voting on the basis of economic class is called class based politics. Critics of this idea call it “class warfare.” We find relatively less of this in the United States than we find in European nations, where the parties are more along economic class lines and people generally feel more resentment toward those in different economic classes. Classes are less well defined in the United States where most people self-identify as working or middle class, even though their incomes cover a very wide range. In the 2006 General Social Survey of about 3,000 citizens across the nation, 45% said they were working class and another 45% said they were middle class. Only 3% said they were upper class. Another reason why Americans do not tend to feel as much class resentment is that they generally believe that anyone can become wealthy and move up in the class structure. Because of these feelings, many minimum wage workers oppose raising taxes on those with high incomes because they think that they might one day make that kind of income!



Protester at a 2011 “Occupy Wall Street” demonstration in N.Y. City, showing her anger at the growing disparity of income in the U.S. (photo by Adam Jones, Ph.D, Creative Commons)

Nevertheless, at certain points in American history the income gap grew to the point that the have-nots began to lose hope and were willing to vote along class lines. Organized parties gave them a way to capture control of government and challenge powerful economic interests. This is rare, but it has happened. This is one way of looking at the New Deal in the 1930s.

If the wealthy and their powerful interest groups fully understand this, then they will understand that they have a self-interest to provide opportunity and a decent standard of living for those who are less well off. (This may remind you of a classic political observation made by Socrates: it is in the interest of the stronger to look out for the interests of the weaker.) But if the wealthy and their interest groups let disparities grow too great and ignore the many, then a political party might attract enough voters to bring about great change. Some observers say that we are approaching this point in the United States today. You might search the Web and look at trends in income disparity and see the extent to which Americans still believe that any young person can grow up to become wealthy.

9. Develop Policy Proposals—Real Party Differences

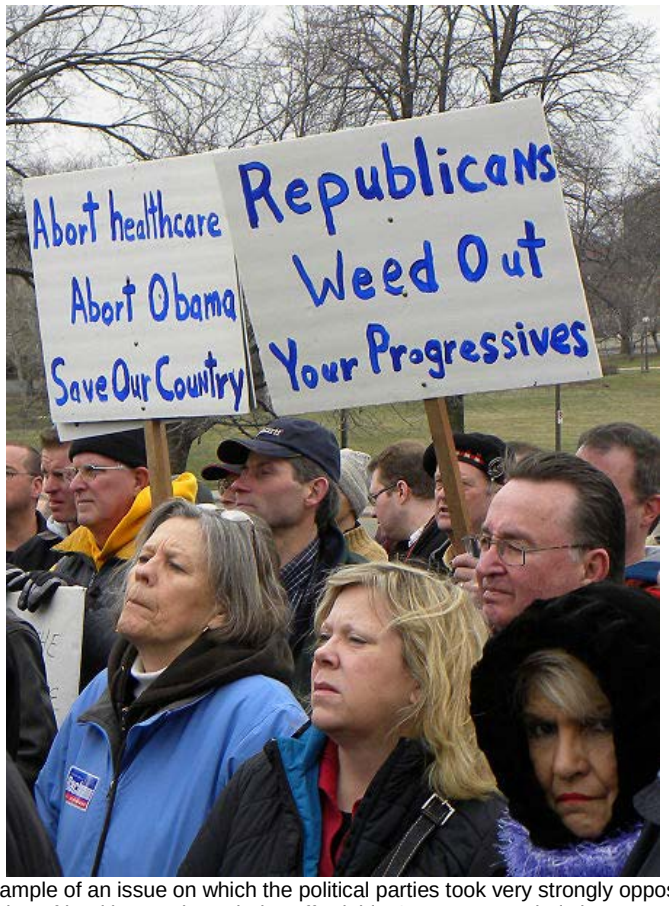
Over the course of American history, political parties have developed many policy proposals that have become programs we take for granted today. I should not have to say more than the New Deal (think Social Security) or the

Great Society (think Medicare) to illustrate this point. Many of the wide range of economic, social, educational, and environmental policies that came from the Roosevelt and Johnson administrations were at least partly developed through the political parties. Of course, some also came through interest groups that are part of the coalition of groups that support political parties.

Until relatively recently, many citizens believed that few differences existed between the two major political parties. This belief rested either on political ignorance or on viewing the political landscape from an extreme position. Members of third or minor parties often have an extreme perspective. From the perspective at one extreme or the other, the two major parties would appear similar, because the major parties are competing for voters near the middle of the political spectrum. This misperception is less likely today because of the polarization of the two parties and their seeming unwillingness to compromise on taxes or the budget.

Yet even if most people today think the parties are different, they often cannot give many examples of differences. One of the best places to get details on differences is to examine and compare the most recent party platforms that you can find on the Web. That would be a good exercise.

Let me offer some generalizations on these differences. Democrats generally want more government involvement in providing equal economic and educational opportunity for citizens who are less well off. Democrats want government to play a stronger regulatory role in protecting the environment. Republicans would rely more on market forces and voluntary action to deal with social and environmental problems. Democrats would pursue a foreign and defense policy that relies more on cooperation with allies and international agencies, while Republicans prefer more unilateral action using the military. Democrats would spend more on social and economic aid to other nations while Republicans would spend more on the military equipment and hardware. For a long time Republicans were opposed to the Social Security program, but its great popularity has led them to shift to a position that would make it a private and more voluntary program, which Democrats see as gutting a program that they feel should cover everyone. Republicans oppose a universal health care system regulated by the national government, preferring to keep market forces dominant in determining what is available to whom, while Democrats support a national system that covers everyone, even if it works through private insurance companies, which they would regulate far more than Republicans would. This is what the battle over “Obamacare,” or the Affordable Care Act, was all about. Of course, the specifics on any of these proposals shift from year to year and from candidate to candidate, but the general differences have existed for a long time and will continue to exist.



A recent example of an issue on which the political parties took very strongly opposing stands was the expansion of health care through the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as “Obamacare.” Here anti-Obamacare protesters in a 2010 rally call for defeat of the proposal and for moderate Republicans to be purged from the party (photo by Fibonacci Blue, Creative Commons).

10. Increase Continuity in Public Policy

If we had no political parties and if we elected political leaders on the basis of their specific ideas, then policies would change every time we elected new leaders. Having parties operate throughout government means that each party will defend the policies it enacted, even if it no longer controls the entire government. If you remember that our government structure is designed to make change difficult, you can see how this works. Republican control of the presidency and both houses of Congress did not enable President George W. Bush to privatize Social Security in his first term in office, even though that is what he proposed. Democrats had too many ways to block such a major change such as filibuster in the Senate.

If you have been reading and considering this list of things that political parties do, you might see a contradiction here. I have argued that political parties can be a force for change by developing new policies, recruiting voters and helping win campaigns and then capturing control of government and getting it moving to enact the policies. And now I have said that they can also slow change down by using the many obstacles built into our system of government to defend

existing policies against the other party. So we have another paradox: parties both promote change and slow change.

How is that possible? The answer rests on the extent to which a party gains control of the government structure and the length of time they have that control. During periods of great change a single party was able to dominate most of government. Again, consider the Democratic majority during the New Deal in the 1930s and the 1964 landslide re-election of Lyndon Johnson that also gave the Democrats overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress. Without those majorities the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the creation of Medicare probably would not have happened. Consider the degree of partisan control of government that exits today. Does one party have sufficient control of government today to bring about great change?

We will see more evidence of when parties are able to make major changes as we now turn to a brief history of political parties in the United States.

III. A Brief History of American Political Parties

A. The Creation of American Political Parties: Federalists and the Jeffersonians

Right after the new government under the new Constitution took office in 1789, we had no organized political parties. This was just as the Founders hoped. That situation did not last for long. During President George Washington's first administration, two sides within the administration began to emerge, those favoring strengthening the national government and having it promote commerce and those wanting a weaker national government and favoring the interests of small farmers who wanted most matters left to the states. Washington's administration also split over what role the nation should take in the war between Great Britain and France.

On one side, led by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and supported by Vice President John Adams, was a group that kept the name **Federalists**, the same name that they had used when they had promoted the federal union that was central to the new Constitution. They favored a strong and active national government and staying neutral in the war by negotiating the Jay Treaty with Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson, Washington's Secretary of State, along with his close friend, James Madison, who was a leader in the House of Representatives, found themselves opposing Hamilton's ideas and were much more sympathetic to the French side in the war. They were initially called **Jeffersonians** because of their association with Jefferson. Later they chose the name Republicans. Opponents attached the name Democrats to the label, making them Democratic-Republicans. One story is that the label Democrat was attached as an insult to suggest that the party favored mob rule by the ignorant

many. Jefferson and his supporters preferred the term Republican. A variety of names were used until middle 1830s when the name Democratic Party was accepted. But I am getting ahead of the story.

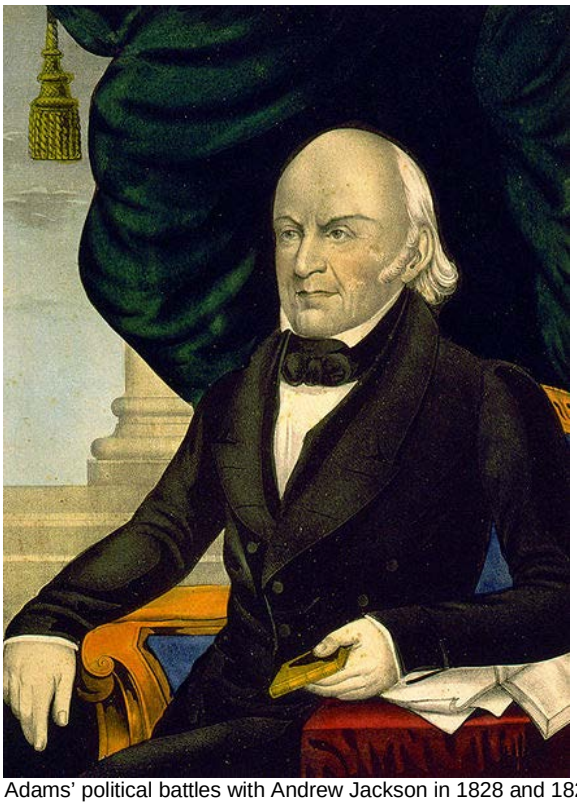
With the passing of both Hamilton (shot dead by Aaron Burr in a dual in 1804) and John Adams, the Federalist Party lacked leadership and began to decline. Following the War of 1812, the nation united under the Democratic-Republicans and President James Monroe, who had no effective opposition.

B. The Second Party System: Whigs and Democrats

By the 1820s we had only one party. But again, this situation did not last for long. The Democratic-Republicans split over the personalities and ambitions of presidential contenders Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, son of John Adams. In terms of group support, the split was along familiar lines. Adams had the support of the commercial and banking interests while Jackson was the candidate of small farmers and western settlers.

Adams won the presidency in 1824 in one of the most controversial elections in American history. No one received a majority of the electoral votes. The election went to the House of Representatives where Adams won by a single vote. The Jackson wing of the party was bitterly angry because they had won more popular votes than had Adams. Of course, at this point in history only a minority of presidential electors were chosen by popular vote. Most state legislatures selected electors directly themselves.

Jackson and his supporters organized themselves and set out to change the rules. They were successful in changing rules in enough states so that by 1828 a majority of electors were chosen by popular vote. So in 1828 Jackson got his revenge, defeating the incumbent Adams.



John Quincy Adams' political battles with Andrew Jackson in 1828 and 1828 led to a split in the Democratic Party, with those supporting Adams forming the Whig Party, which lasted till the 1850s when the battle over abolition of slavery destroyed the Whigs and split the Democrats and gave birth to the Republican Party (copyright expired, public domain).

By 1832 all of Jackson's enemies organized themselves into a party called the **Whigs**. With the adoption of the name Democratic Party by Jackson's supporters, we had two new major parties that competed with each other for the next two decades.

C. The Third Party System: Republicans and Democrats

The issue of the abolition of slavery ultimately destroyed the Whig/Democrat party system. Many Northern Democrats who opposed enslavement joined the new party that was forming around the cause for abolition, the **Republican Party**. Southern Democrats defended human enslavement and threatened secession. The Whigs also split along regional lines. In the South many Whigs joined the Democrats even though they disagreed with Democrats on many economic issues. In short, issues surrounding race and preserving the union trumped economic issues.

When Lincoln was elected as the first Republican president, the South chose to rebel rather than to accept the election results. So the Southern states declared independence—secession—and the North went to war to force them back into the Union. Party allegiances hardened in the highly emotional atmosphere of war. Many Northern workers and farmers who had Democratic

sympathy saw the Democratic Party as the party of treason and rebellion. These feelings greatly weakened the Democrats in the North. Most of the Democrats' remaining support in the North came from urban political machines founded on immigrant groups, like the Irish support for the Tammany Hall machine in New York City, headed by William "Boss" Tweed.

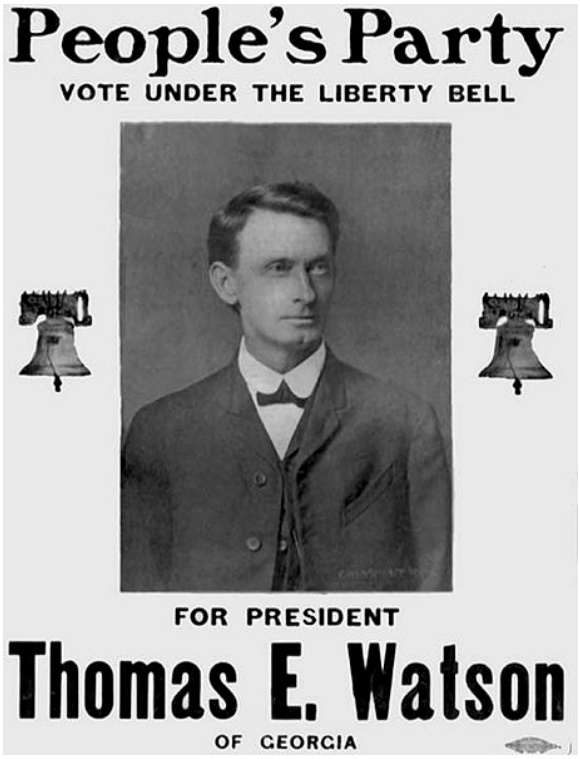
Following the war was a short period of Reconstruction when Republicans had political power in the South. But then Southern whites forcibly regained control over southern state governments, took the vote away from black Republicans and sent segregationist Democrats to Washington. The Republican Party dominated the North and most of the new states joining the nation in the West. The result was a regional basis for the political parties with Republican domination of the national government. For several decades resentments and anger over the Civil War dominated economic issues that might have made the two parties more competitive in all parts of the nation. In the South the issue of race and the role that African Americans should play in politics dominated all other issues for more than a century.

1876 Thomas Nast political cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* condemning the Hamburg Massacre in which whites killed seven blacks. The bloody incident, which took place in what is now part of North Augusta, South Carolina, launched a violent movement to forcibly return control of South Carolina to whites. For well over a century after the Civil War questions of race dominated party activities in the South (copyright expired, public domain).

D. Realignments in the Third Party System

1. Rise and Fall of the Populist Challenge

During the industrial revolution farmers and workers suffered greatly under the economic and political power of railroads and large corporations. This created the potential for change in the late 1880s. As noted earlier in our discussion about the things that political parties do, parties could provide an outlet for all this discontent. The progressive movement attracted many middle class reformers. The movement operated both as a political party in the Midwest and as a faction within the Republican Party. In addition, a new political party, the **Populist Party**, tried to represent the economic interests of the have-nots. It attracted significant numbers of workers and farmers across the nation, including in the South.



Tom Watson, Populist Party leader in Georgia, was one of the few in the Populist Party to win a seat in Congress (1891-3). He began his career trying to unite whites and blacks on the basis of shared economic interests, but later became a white supremacist when that proved an easier political path to power. This poster was for his unsuccessful run for the presidency as the candidate of a dying third party in 1904 (out of copyright, public domain).

The Populists elected some members to Congress and ran presidential candidates, but failed to get much beyond this. The failure can be attributed to several things, including the split along racial lines in the South that prevented white Populists from seeking black votes that might have allowed them to win elections. Again, racial issues trumped economic concerns. In 1896 and 1900 the weakening Populists nominated the same presidential candidate as the

Democrats, William Jennings Bryan. His defeat ended the Populist challenge to the two major parties.

Most southern white Populist supporters either went back to the all-white Democratic Party, whose major purpose was to maintain white supremacy, or they dropped out of politics altogether. Voting rates dropped dramatically in the South following the Populist defeat.

While few African Americans in the South were able to vote, African Americans in the North were loyal to the party of emancipation, the Republicans. White workers in the North split between both major parties, but the Republican Party had the clear edge.

The regional basis for the two parties that had existed before the Populist challenge was reinforced. The Democrats were the only viable party in the South. Republicans dominated the North and the West and the nation as a whole.

The only Democrat to be elected president between 1896 and the 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt was Woodrow Wilson in 1912. He won only because the Republicans were splintered by the third party candidacy of Teddy Roosevelt, who took many progressive Republicans with him into his Bull Moose Party. You should remember the importance of party unity for winning presidential elections.

2. The New Deal Realignment

Political scientists have long observed that great crises can lead to realignments in who supports which political party. And these shifts can create new parties and new majorities within existing parties. The crisis surrounding abolition led to the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s. The economic crises in the late 1800s almost, but did not quite, lead to a major shift. But the economic crisis of the Great Depression did lead to a major realignment.

Republican President Hoover took some action to address the economic crisis of the Great Depression, but not enough to turn things around. Unemployment grew to about 25%. Hoover's greatest failure was his belief that private charity should and could be the way to help people who had lost everything. He rejected the idea that the government should help very much.

Voters rejected Hoover in the 1932 election. The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt was more a rejection of Hoover than a vote of confidence in Roosevelt and his vague plans or promises. What happened <u>after</u> FDR's election made all the difference. The huge Democratic majorities elected in 1932 enacted FDR's New Deal plan during the famous "100 days." The New Deal provided many unemployed with jobs in massive public works projects. The plan and FDR's

personal style gave average people hope. They flocked to the Democratic Party, creating the New Deal realignment.

New Deal programs like the REA (Rural Electrification Administration) were immensely popular, bringing jobs and appliances, like this electric stove, to rural families across the nation, and building popular support for a landslide realigning election for Roosevelt and the Democrats in 1936 (FDR Library, public domain).

The new Democratic majority in the **New Deal realignment** included many groups: most Northern workers, especially those in unions, rural Americans across the nation who were subsisting on small farms, and Southerners who remained in the party for reasons of race but now had economic reasons as well. In addition, significant numbers of African Americans began to migrate to the party for economic reasons.That shift would not be complete till the 1960s when the Democratic Party became the party of civil rights. The Republicans remained the party of small businesses and corporations. As FDR and the Democrats created more and more social programs, such as Social Security, the Republicans began to view Democrats as taking the nation down a path to socialism. In short, the parties became realigned along economic lines more than regional lines.

While the election of 1932 was a rejection of Hoover, the election of 1936 was a referendum on the New Deal. And FDR and his party won by a landslide. The new Democratic majority would last for decades as parents passed their identifications on to their children.

3. Dealignment and Regional Realignment—Civil Rights and Social Conservatives, Red States and Blue States

The New Deal Democratic majority began to erode as new crises arose and as generations passed away. Because children sometimes went their own way, the intergenerational transfer of party identification was less than perfect. Over several generations this made a difference. In another sense the New Deal

was a victim of its own success. As living conditions improved for average people, they had less self-interest in helping those who were still at the bottom. More people began to see themselves as paying taxes to help others rather than being the beneficiaries of opportunities paid for by others.

The civil rights revolution had a major impact on the Democratic majority in the South. After John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson supported civil rights and after the Republican Party started to oppose the passage and enforcement of civil rights laws, white southerners began to abandon the Democratic Party. New African American voters supported the party of civil rights and offset some of this loss. But what had been the solid Democratic South changed first to a two party competitive region and then to a strongly Republican region. Political scientists see this as a regional realignment driven by white resentment of national government actions to undo a society built on white advantage.

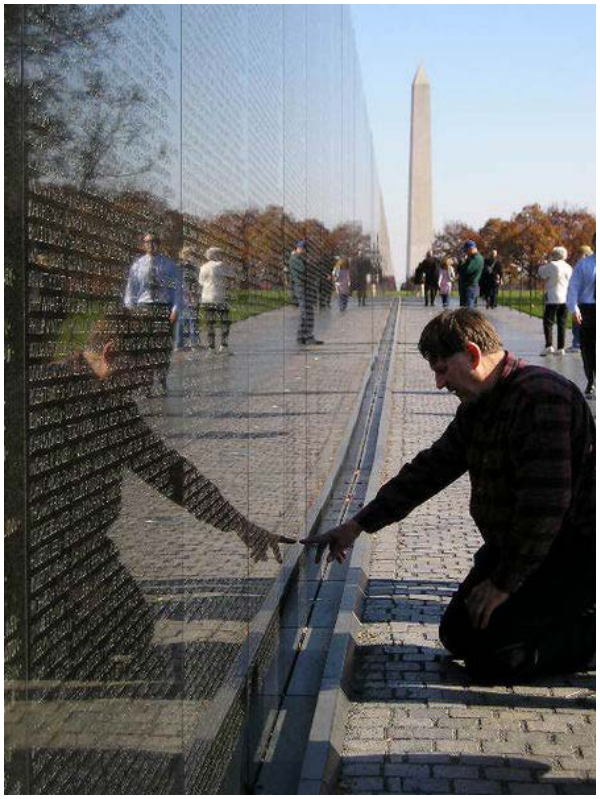
President Lyndon Johnson signing the 1965 Voting Rights Act into law with Rev. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders watching. This and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that forced the integration of all facilities and businesses serving the public, cemented the growing bond between African Americans and the Democratic Party. Resentment about forcing change on southern social relationships began driving white southerners toward the Republican Party (LBJ Library, public domain).

A range of social and moral issues reinforced the movement of the white South to the Republican Party. Conservative white Christians in the South rejected liberal positions taken by the national Democratic Party on such issues as women's equality, gay rights, prayer in school, and abortion.

Foreign policy also eroded the Democratic majority created by the New Deal. Until the 1960s most citizens saw the Republicans as the party of isolationism, rejecting military action to promote American interests. The triumph of America in WWII was also a triumph for the Democrats led by Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt.

But then the Korean War went badly. The first Republican President since Hoover, Dwight D. Eisenhower, came to the rescue. He was able to win a truce, using the threat of nuclear weapons.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson deepened our commitment to a military adventure in Vietnam in the 1960s. That also went badly. Americans turned to another Republican to find “peace with honor,” to use Richard Nixon’s own words. Democrats had turned against the war. Nixon prolonged the war, and in the process gained the support of Americans who supported strong military action. Vietnam flipped the images of the two parties. Citizens began to see the Republicans as the party supporting strong military actions to promote American interests.

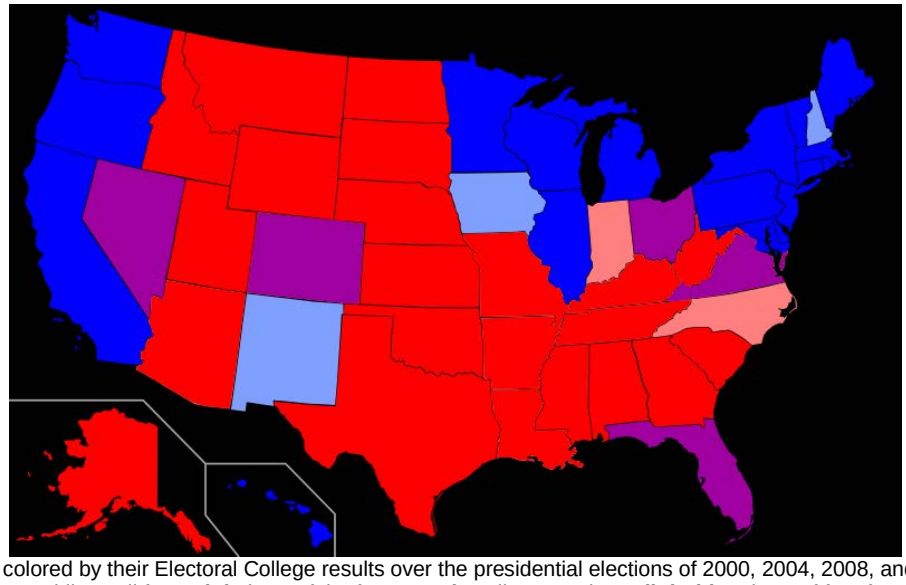


Touching one of the more than 58,000 names on the Vietnam Memorial wall, commemorating the fallen in a war that flipped the images of the two parties on military interventions. The Republicans had been the party of isolationism and the Democrats the party of military action in places like Korea and Vietnam, but when Democrats turned against the war in 1968 and Nixon pursued the war, the parties reversed their images on pursuing military interventions (photo by “ownself,” Creative Commons).

Americans who favored military actions against nations that we saw as threats moved to the Republican Party. This helped Republicans in the South, where many military bases are located and where many military veterans retire. Ronald Reagan’s build-up of the military in the 1980s and George W. Bush’s strong military response after 9/11 continued to reinforce these trends.

Together these forces shifted the political balance of power. Democrats still had more identifiers than Republicans, but the margin of difference was close

enough so that short term issues and personalities could win or lose the elections for either party. Republicans were strongest in the South and in some of the rural mountain states that had a lot of land but few people. Democrats were strongest in the Northeastern seaboard and the Pacific coast. The pattern is clear in maps of Democratic **blue states**, Republican **red states**, and the swing **purple states**. The two parties were reflecting cultural differences among the regions of the nation. Whichever party won more of the states that had more cultural diversity (typically Ohio and Florida, and more recently Virginia, Nevada, and Colorado) usually won national elections.



States colored by their Electoral College results over the presidential elections of 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. **Red** went Republican all four; **pink** three of the four; **purple** split two and two; **light blue** three of four for Democrats; and **blue** went for the Democrats all four. In 2012, Obama won all of the purples, just as he did in 2008. This was only two states less than he won in 2008 when he also won two pink states, Indiana and North Carolina. Remember that this map gives the impression that the Republicans have more support because of the geographical size of the red states. But most of them, with the exception of Texas, are relatively small in population and therefore have relatively fewer Electoral Votes (map by Angr, Creative Commons).

E. Future Changes?

Current trends and unknown future crises will certainly make a difference in the American party system. The percentage of people who do not associate themselves with either major party, the independents, is significantly higher than a few decades ago. They may remain independents, but some crisis could move them to one party or the other.

Political scientists have been looking for a new realignment for decades now. We may have come close in the early 1970s when Nixon was extremely popular, but his misdeeds in the Watergate scandal did great damage to the Republican Party. One could say the same for the Democrats in the late 1990s. Clinton maintained the peace and brought prosperity, but was undone by personal failures rather than political failures. Democratic candidates across the nation suffered as a result. Bush's failure to successfully address the crises of 9/11 by overextending the American military and the economic recession of 2008

squandered another opportunity for realignment. President Obama had that same opportunity handed off to him.

Changing demographics in the nation might have a long term effect in favor of the Democratic Party. Minority groups have tended to be more Democratic in identification over the last half century, and minority groups, especially Hispanics, are growing in their proportion of the population. Assuming current trends continue, Hispanics along with other minorities as well a growing number of people who consider themselves multi-ethnic, will create in the years to come a nation that is comprised of a majority of minorities. Single working females, who tend to identify more with and vote more for Democrats than Republicans (creating something called the **gender gap**), are a growing part of the population. Young voters, especially singles, another growing demographic, who are more accepting of cultural diversity, including same sex marriage, have been trending Democratic as well. Whites, who tend toward Republican identifications, will become a minority. According to U.S. Census projections, "non-Hispanic whites," who were 72% of all voters in 2012, will fall to about half of the population and well under half the population by 2065. In short, Republicans cannot count on winning national elections with only white votes from conservative areas of the nation in the not too distant future.

% Who Voted Democratic in 2012 Among Growing Demographic Groups			
Latino (10% of all voters)	**Young:** 18-29 (19% of all voters)	**Singles** (40% of all voters)	**Single Women** (23% of all voters)
71%	60%	62%	67%

IV. The Organization of Political Parties—Three Part Structure

Political scientists often break political parties down into three connected components: party organization, elected officials, and the party in the electorate. By "electorate," I mean citizens who are potential voters. Let's look at each one in turn.

A. Party Organization

Party organization refers to the people who run party affairs on a day-to-day basis. Some are volunteers who do only a few things. For example, precinct chairs or captains at the local level often do little more than preside over precinct meetings. Unless the precinct is really active, these meetings might only take place when the party has a caucus (meeting) to measure the presidential

preferences of party members in that precinct. If the state holds presidential primaries, then these kinds of meetings do not even take place.

At the county level, most parties have some kind of organization. They often elect a county party chair at the county party convention that usually takes place every two years. County chairs are usually unpaid positions. But depending on the size of the county and the strength of the party, the county party could have an office with paid staff. The county level is important in the United States because we elect so many officials at the county level.

State level organizations are far more substantial and sophisticated. A state chair speaks for the party and works closely with the governor, if the governor is of that party. The governor plays a key role in choosing the state party chair. The structure varies from state to state, but usually the party has vice chairs and other officers as well as representatives to the national party, usually called national committee members. The leadership selects someone usually called an executive director as a full time head of the staff to oversee party activities and efforts. As you can see, the structure of the parties parallels our federal structure. You might look up the structure of the two state parties in your home state.

At the national level a similar structure to the state structure usually exists. This includes a chair who serves at the pleasure of the president if the president is in that party, or at the pleasure of the presidential candidate once the party selects a candidate every four years. A national committee includes representatives from the states. A hired executive director oversees day-to-day activities.

In addition, each party in each house of Congress has its own structures. They hire people to assist in campaigns to re-elect their members to Congress and help win seats held by the other party when possible. For example, the Democrats in the Senate have the DSCC, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and the Republicans have the NRSC, the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

This structure reveals many ties between officeholders and the party organizations. The organizations speak for the party, help recruit candidates, train them, give campaign advice, help in fundraising, run get-out-the-vote drives (called GOTV), and recruit and train volunteers at all levels. Despite all this, you should keep in mind that candidates have their own personal campaign organizations that they rely on far more than party organizations.

B. Elected Officials

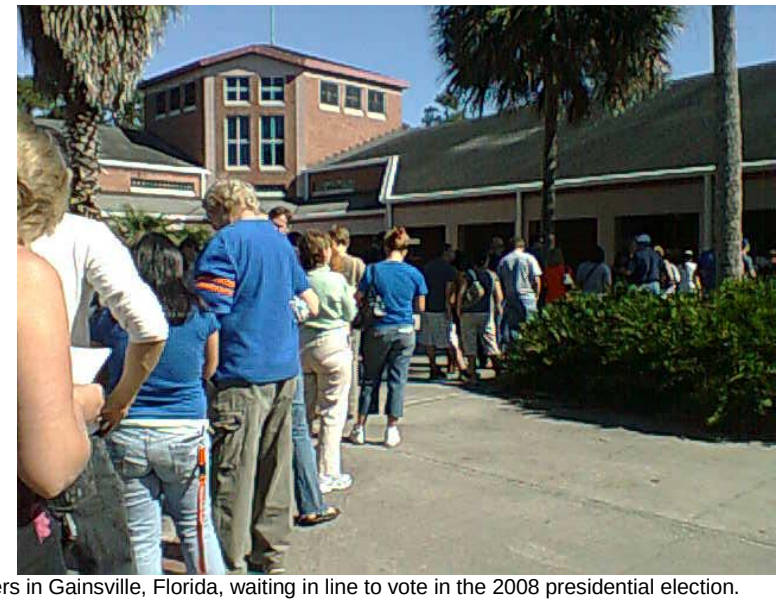
The ultimate goal of those who actually win offices is to help their party to control government and enact policies that the party supports. Political scientists call these elected officials the **party in government**.

Working together is the norm, but many disagreements also take place. Governors do not always get along with their party members in the legislature. Party leaders in one house of a state legislature or the Congress do not always get along with the leaders in the other house. Even members of a party on one house of Congress might have bitter differences with each other that can be seen in electing their leaders. The president often has conflicts with party members in Congress and with governors over policies that affect the states. Even governors of the same party from different parts of the nation may have different views. For example, a Republican governor in a relatively liberal state may have very different views on environmental policy than a governor from a conservative state. You might look in the news for stories about conflicts between elected officials in the same political party. They are not hard to find.

Yet, despite all this, most of the time party members vote together in legislative bodies and chief executives of the same party move in similar directions. In recent years in Congress, a majority of party members voted with each other well over 80% of the time, according to studies done by Congressional Quarterly. From the average citizen's point of view, this means that if you generally agree with what a party wants to do, then you will get what you want from members of that party about eight times out of ten. That's not too bad. This takes us to the last part of the party structure, the voters.

C. Voters

What political scientists call the **party in the electorate** refers to average citizens who consider themselves members of political parties. **Party identification** is more of a psychological self-identification than any kind of formal membership. About as formal as party membership gets is in states that have closed primaries. In states with closed primaries people must register some kind of party membership. That includes no membership—being an independent. Voting in a party's primaries is restricted to those registered in that party. Those registered as independent do not get to vote in any primary.



Voters in Gainsville, Florida, waiting in line to vote in the 2008 presidential election. Voters are the third and most important leg of the party structure, because the power of the first and second legs depend on building a loyal and active base of voters (public domain).

Who are in the two major parties? You can easily find current survey data indicating party identification by a variety of demographic variables as well as the current division between the two major parties. But for now let me give you a few generalizations, some of which you saw earlier in the discussion of party history.

Let's start with the division in party identification. In most surveys respondents are asked something like "generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, independent, or what?" Then they are asked "how strongly" they identify with whatever party they name, or if they say "independent," they are asked if they "lean to" either of the two parties. Surveys end up with a range of identifications from strong identifiers to one party through leaners and then independents and leaners to the other party and so on.

What is critical in counting partisan strength is how one counts the **party leaners**, those who feel slightly inclined toward one party or the other if pressed to give an answer. If party leaners are counted with the party toward which they lean, we get a much higher percentage of party identifiers. Typically, leaners are counted as independents. Of course, this boosts the percentage of independents that get counted.

Okay, you see the complexity. If we just count pure independents, those who do not even lean in either direction, we get a little over one in ten voters. Most people have at least some leaning. Counting this way Democrats are most recently a little under half of all voters. And Republicans are just under 40% (see http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/07/a-deep-dive-into-party-affiliation/).

If we count the leaners as independents, then the independent group is the largest at about 40%. Counting this way, Democrats generally have about a

third identifying with them and Republicans about a fourth. So Democrats have the advantage in party identification no matter how we count the independents.

Does this mean that Democrats win nearly all elections? Definitely not, for several reasons. First, voters are not evenly distributed across the nation, so certain areas—especially the South and rural western states—do have a Republican advantage. Second, some people defect and vote for the other party's candidate. Republicans are generally more loyal than Democrats. And perhaps most important, most people do not vote most of the time. Only in presidential elections do we see a majority of the adult population voting. Republicans generally vote at higher rates than Democrats. So Republicans have several ways to make up for their numerical deficiency. This last point about turnout reinforces one of the things that election experts frequently say: turnout is everything in elections.

Democratic identifiers tend to have different demographic characteristics than Republican identifiers. Democrats are more likely to be minority group members, single females, lower income, of a non-Protestant religion such as Catholic or Jewish or nonreligious, from the North or far Northwest, live in urban areas, and union members. Republicans are just the opposite on these things.

Age is an interesting factor in party identification. Young people tend to identify with the party of a successful president or against the party of an unsuccessful president when they were young. Then that identification tends to last the rest of their lives. So the children of the New Deal, who are almost gone from the political scene, tended to be Democrats in identification. Those who went though their young years in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan was president tended to be Republican. George W. Bush's rather unsuccessful presidency helped recruit relatively more young people for the Democratic Party. Being more accepting of diversity, in recent years the young, especially well educated young, have tended toward Democrats because of issues such as immigration and gay rights. The other difference between the young and older people is that younger people tend to have weaker identifications and relatively more of them are independents.

V. Why We Have a Two Party System

Unlike many European democratic republics which have multi-party systems, the United States has a **two party system**. This does not mean that only two political parties exist in the U.S. Rather it means that the other parties, called third parties, rarely win any elections at the national level. Two major parties have almost always dominated politics in the U.S. When one of the parties fades away, another party replaces it as a major party. You may have noticed this in our earlier discussion of the history of political parties.

Why just two? Given that Americans complain so much about the parties that do exist, why aren't other parties more successful? This question has several possible answers.

A. Tradition?

Certainly a tradition of two major parties exists in the United States. That is apparent from American history. Following the organization of the Federalists, Jefferson and his supporters created another party, which eventually evolved into the Democratic Party. Following the death of the Federalists, the two parties became the Democrats and the Whigs. Out of the death of the Whigs came the Republicans. Ever since then we have had Democrats and Republicans. That is more than a 200 year tradition of having two parties for virtually all the time.

However, nothing magic exists about a tradition. We have a history of traditions that have been broken by both necessity and preference. Republicans were the party traditionally associated with isolationism in foreign policy—true no more. Democrats were associated with white supremacy—true no more. Traditions get broken and even reversed. So even though two major parties do have a tradition, I suspect that if the need arose and other factors changed, that tradition would end.

About the best that can be said for this explanation is that it has a certain self-fulfilling aspect to it. If those with the ambition and skill to win political office think they have to run under one of the two major party labels, they choose to run under one of those labels. Well-qualified candidates do not choose to run under third parties because they want to win.

B. Two Sides to Issues?

Some argue that two parties fit how most Americans feel on issues. This explanation has a logical foundation. Consider the bell shaped distribution of public opinion on many issues. Even though ideological identification has trended in recent years toward conservative, with self-identified conservatives slightly outnumbering self-identified moderates, on actual issues most people take more moderate positons. If parties need votes, then the most votes are relatively close to the middle. So logically the middle is where parties go to find votes. Only so much room exists in the middle, and the two relatively moderate parties divide up that vote. Third parties are forced out to the extremes where they cannot find enough votes to win.

However, while this explanation works well in the sense of describing where our two major parties are on many issues and where third parties are, not all issues have bell shaped distributions of opinion. To put it another way, many issues have more than two sides. For example, many different positions exist on how health care should be provided. Many positions exist on how to best foster a

strong economy—Keynesian economics, free market economics, monetarism, supply side economics, all of which we have talked about earlier in this text. Many positions exist on the ownership and regulation of weapons, on abortion, and so on. So why could not third parties find enough votes on some of these issues and some of these positions to win some offices? The answer lies in our next explanation, our election rules.

C. Rules? Plurality Winner-take-all Elections

Election rules are critical in any political system. In the United States we use **plurality winner-take-all election rules**. This means that almost all elections involve a single seat to be won, and the single winner is the person with a plurality, that is, the most votes. So if three candidates run, the one with the most votes—a plurality—wins, even if that is less than a pure majority (defined as more than 50%).

Elections for the president might seem different because the winner is required to have a real majority of the electoral votes. But presidential elections are really 51 separate elections in each of the states and the District of Columbia. In almost all of these, the plurality state winner gets all the state's electoral votes. The need to win enough of these state-based presidential electoral contests every four years is a major reason why each of the major parties in the states work with each other on the national level as a national party. We will discuss the Electoral College in more detail later in this chapter.

This set of rules has profound implications for the prospects of a third party. Suppose three parties exist with one having a little more support than the other two (say 40% and 35% and 25%). The party with 40% will win virtually all the elections, though the 35% party could occasionally win if it found enough converts. But the party with 25% stands no chance at all—at least if they run as a separate party.

However, if they realize that they could guarantee a win for either of the other two parties, then what is the rational thing for them to do? You guessed it! They see what kind of a deal they can make with each the other two parties and then join the one that makes the better offer. Of course, the other parties also realize this, so if they behave rationally they will try to recruit members from the smallest party. And pretty soon, the third party exists no more. One of the other parties absorbs most of its members. If it survives at all, it only has members who are unwilling to compromise on what they want.

Party A—40% of the citizens	Party B—35% of the citizens	Party C—25% of the citizens
• Always wins if everyone remains loyal to their party • Needs help from C if C might make a deal with B	• Sometimes wins if it can win a few converts • Needs help from C to improve chances	• Never wins if everyone remains loyal to their party • Can decide whether A or B wins if willing to make a deal

Imaginary rectangular shaped state or county or city or district with three parties that must elect a single person to office
using the **plurality winner-take-all election rule**. Logic compels the C Party, the third party, to make a deal with
either A or B, unless it is willing to lose every election.

That in a nutshell is the major reason why we have had only two major parties for almost all of our history. The rules make it irrational for any third party to continue to run candidates for office and lose when they can get much more by forming a coalition with one of the major parties.

If you talk to the supporters of third parties, they will blame their losses on rules that disadvantage them, like state laws that create difficulty in getting third party candidates on the ballot. I have even had third party supporters blame me when I am doing a survey and do not include questions on candidates from minor parties who stand little chance of being elected. Somehow they want to believe that not asking questions about a third party candidate in a survey of several hundred citizens hurts their chances. When third parties start getting elected I will start including their names in general survey questions.

To be sure, legal barriers like state ballot access rules created by the two major parties do exist. But they are very minor compared to our basic election rules. If the United States were to move from plurality winner-take-all rules to a system of **proportional representation**, in which each party got the same percentage of seats in the legislature as the percentage of the vote they received, we would soon have several more viable parties. Countries that use proportional representation usually have several rather than just two major parties.

Party A—40% of the citizens	Party B—35% of the citizens	Party C—25% of the citizens
• Runs a slate of 20 candidates for the legislative body • Wins 40% of the vote, so the party gets 40% of its 20 candidates elected, or wins 8 seats	• Runs a slate of 20 candidates for the legislative body • Wins 35% of the vote, so the party gets 35% of its 20 candidates elected, or wins 7 seats	• Runs a slate of 20 candidates for the legislative body • Wins 25% of the vote, so the party gets 25% of its 20 candidates elected, or wins 5 seats

Imaginary rectangular shaped state or county or city or district with three parties that elects a 20 seat legislative body using **proportional representation**.
As you can see, the results are very different when each voter casts twenty votes and votes for the twenty candidate slate put forth by each party—Party C
wins some representation without making a deal with either of the other two parties.

VI. Third Parties: Splinter Protest Parties and Ideological Parties

Even though third parties rarely win any national level elections in the United States and only a very few at the local level, we do have many third parties. You might look on the Web to find the wide range of such parties that exist and the many candidates they run in presidential elections. Knowing that they will lose, what motivates them? Do they perform any useful function?

We can classify third parties into two basic categories, splinter protest parties and ideological parties. **Splinter protest third parties** are groups that temporarily break off from one of the two major parties because of some major disagreement where the party failed to reach an acceptable compromise. Sometimes it is an issue that is particularly hard to resolve. Sometimes the disagreement concerns a strong party leader with frustrated ambitions. Sometimes it is a combination of both.

For example, the Bull Moose Party of Teddy Roosevelt involved both factors. In 1912, Roosevelt, a former two term Republican president, was frustrated that William Howard Taft, the incumbent Republican president and Teddy's hand-picked successor, was not following his advice. Teddy also represented the progressive reform oriented wing of the party, which was not happy with Taft's policies. So Roosevelt bolted from the party and ran in a new party, a party that died after his candidacy. He did succeed in punishing the Republicans by getting enough votes to allow Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson to win.

Other examples include Strom Thurmond and the States' Rights or Dixiecrat Party in 1948, though that protest against the Democrats did not deny Democratic incumbent President Harry Truman a reelection victory. In 1968 segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace bolted from the Democratic Party over the issue of civil rights and ran under the banner of the American Independent Party. Ross Perot ran as an independent in 1992 and lost. To keep his movement alive, Perot formed a third party, the Reform Party, and ran again under that banner again in 1996.

Governor George Wallace announcing his run as a third party candidate in 1968 based on his opposition to civil rights and support for an all-out military effort to quickly win the Vietnam War. Wallace won five southern states (Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas) and about ten million votes. This splinter party served as a kind of halfway house for angry southern white Democrats who later moved to the Republican Party (Library of Congress, no known restrictions).

None of these parties lasted very long. Their supporters either moved back to their original party or to the other party. For example, many of the white segregationists who had supported Wallace found a new home in the Republican Party, when under Richard Nixon it began to pursue what was called the **Southern Strategy**, promising to go slow on civil rights.

Ideological third parties tend to last a lot longer, because they take rather extreme positions on issues and are unwilling to compromise at all. They would rather lose and lose and lose than get less than everything they want—an all or nothing approach. They would rather have an empty glass than a half full glass. You get the idea! A lot of these parties exist, including the Libertarian Party, the Green Party, the Constitution Party, a Prohibitionist Party that still

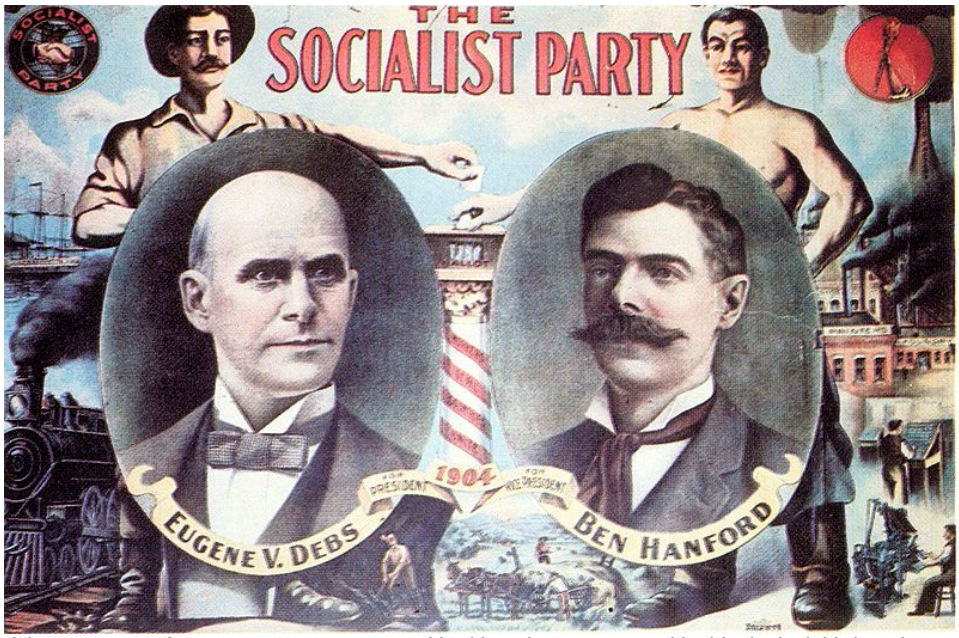
wants to ban all sales of alcoholic beverages, a variety of parties with socialist in their names, and dozens of others. You might want to do a search of the web for these parties and the positions they take.

The National Prohibition Party Convention in 1892, an ideological third party that peaked in the early 1900s pushing for passage of the 18th Amendment that put in place Prohibition. It declined after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, but it continues to run presidential candidates, winning 516 votes from individual voters across the nation in 2012 (copyright expired, public domain).

Most of the time these parties have no impact on election results, but on very rare occasions they can affect the outcome of an election, usually hurting the major party candidate who is closer to their own position. The clearest recent example of this is Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader in 2000. Overwhelming evidence exists that he took enough votes from Democrat Al Gore in Florida and possibly some other states to enable George W. Bush to win those states. So rather than getting a moderately strong environmentalist president, the Greens and the rest of the nation got a president at the other extreme. This was because the Green's wanted the strongest possible environmentalist in the White House and refused to support a compromise candidate—typical behavior of ideological third party members.

Anyone who questions the value of third parties should remember that the Republican Party started as a third party, growing out of the anti-slavery movement, and nominating John C. Freemont as its first candidate in 1856—they won with Lincoln four years later (copyright expired, public domain).

As long as we have the freedom to associate, we will have third parties. They do serve some useful functions. They are an outlet for protest, and sometimes that protest causes the major parties to shift their positions to regain support. That is not a bad thing if you want parties to respond to shifts in public opinion. Third parties also introduce new ideas. For example, third parties pushed many of the ideas that FDR later adopted as part of his New Deal. Such ideas included Social Security, minimum wage, rights to organize unions, and a limited work week.



Some of the programs of Democrat FDR's New Deal had long been supported by ideological third parties, such as the Socialist Party. Democrats of that time would argue that they had to modify capitalism in order to save it and would deny any relationship to socialists (copyright expired, public domain).

VII. Voting and Election Rules

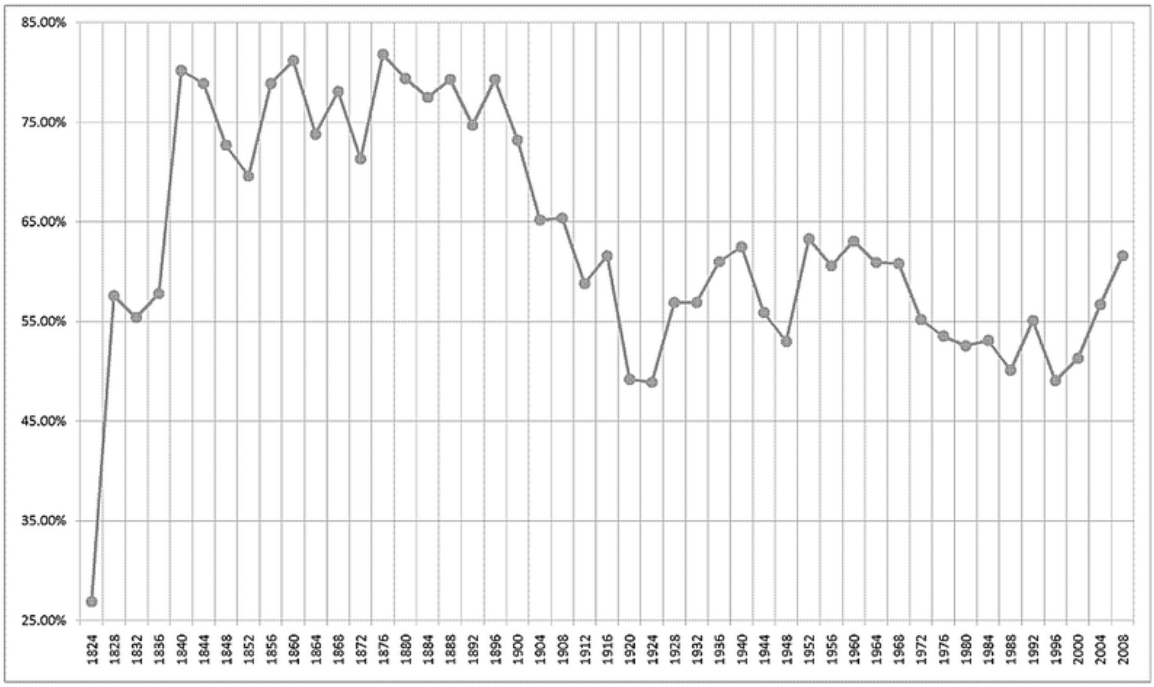
Now we will turn to things you should know about the different kinds of elections we have and how people participate in them. Political scientists have done a lot of research about voting behavior for two reasons. First, elections are an important aspect of how democratic republics operate. Second, voting is relatively easy to measure and quantitatively study. We will start with the idea of turnout, that is, who votes. Then we will talk about the different kinds of elections, financing these elections, and end with a discussion of how people make voting decisions.

A. Local, State, and National Elections—Turnout

Americans are relatively less likely to vote than citizens in other western democratic republics. One reason, mentioned earlier, is that we have a lot of elections and have a lot of choices to make—the long ballot. So many decisions to make so often cause citizens get tired and skip voting, what political scientists call **voter fatigue**.

Voter turnout, the percentage of citizens who vote, can be measured in several ways. When you read news stories on turnout, you need to know how it is being measured. If it is the percentage of those registered who vote, then turnout will be high, typically in the 75% range for presidential elections. If it is the percentage of those potentially eligible (which is based on the adult population over the age of 18), then the numbers will be lower, typically in the 50-60% range for presidential elections. The reason for this difference is that registration, which

usually has to take place a minimum of 30 days before an election, is a major barrier for citizens. Most nonvoters do not get past the registration barrier. Registration requires planning well ahead of the election and must be redone after every change in place of residence.



Voter Turnout since 1824 in Presidential elections as percentage of voting age population. Not the decline following the
defeat of the Populists in 1896—the modern high point was 63% in 1960 (public domain).

Turnout varies quite a bit depending on the level of the election and type of election. As we move from national elections to state to local elections, turnout falls. Off-year (non-presidential year) congressional elections typically run in the 35% of potentially eligible citizens, and state elections slightly lower. Local elections are often in the 20% range or lower.

General elections usually get higher turnout than primaries. Primaries also vary in turnout depending on the level. A presidential primary will have far greater turnout than a city council primary, which is usually in the 10% range. Choosing nominees by party caucuses in precincts has even lower turnout, because the caucus takes a lot more time and is more inconvenient. Turnout in these elections may be in the range of 5% or lower.

Nonpartisan elections, where candidates cannot run under a party label, usually have lower turnout, in large part because making voting decisions is harder. People no longer have party identification to help them decide how to vote.

In addition to the level and type of election, several other factors affect the turnout in particular elections. The more competitive the election, the closer it seems, the more people will turn out to vote. For example the extremely tight

1960 presidential election that John Kennedy narrowly won over Richard Nixon had a turnout of 63%. Candidates who have charismatic personalities increase turnout. A crisis atmosphere increases turnout. You might think about an upcoming election and consider whether it will have higher or lower turnout based on these kinds of factors.

B. Primaries—Different Types

Primary elections vary from state to state, because our federal system allows states to make up their own election rules for nominations. And the rules also vary from party to party within the states because state governments usually allow each party to make up their own rules within broad guidelines set by state law. In general, two kinds of primaries exist, open and closed, though variations exist on each type. For example, winning a primary by a clear majority (more than 50%) in Louisiana ends the entire election process. The primary winner does not even have to run in a general election!

In an **open primary** any registered voter can vote in either party's primary (but not both of them). Typically, the voter just shows up at the polls and votes in that primary. This allows both independents and even people who identify with the other party to vote in a party primary. Potentially, those in the other party could vote for whomever they see as the weaker candidate, but that would preclude them from voting in their own primary. Rarely does this kind of strategic voting across party lines make a difference. However, allowing independents to vote usually helps candidates who are less tied to strong partisans within the party. My home state, South Carolina, has open primaries. You decide on the day of the primary in which party's primary you want to vote.

In a **closed primary**, voters have to register with a political party when they register to vote. They can change party registration before a primary (usually 30 days before), but once registered, they are restricted to voting in that party's primary. When I became old enough to vote where I grew up in North Carolina, my parents advised me to register as a Democrat. They told me that because we lived in a one-party state, the only real competitive election was the Democratic Primary. Republicans did not even run candidates for most offices. Whoever won the Democratic Primary would win the general election. So if I did not vote in that primary I would have no influence over who was elected. Of course, this changed as the Republican Party grew in strength across the South. But North Carolina still has closed primaries.

The newest kind of primary is the **nonpartisan blanket primary**, which we described earlier in the chapter in the changing role of parties in screening potential nominees. To review, in this kind of primary, used in California and Washington (with Louisiana using the same system for its general elections), all candidates for an office of all parties run in one single primary together. Each candidate can have her or his party preference listed, and if someone gets a

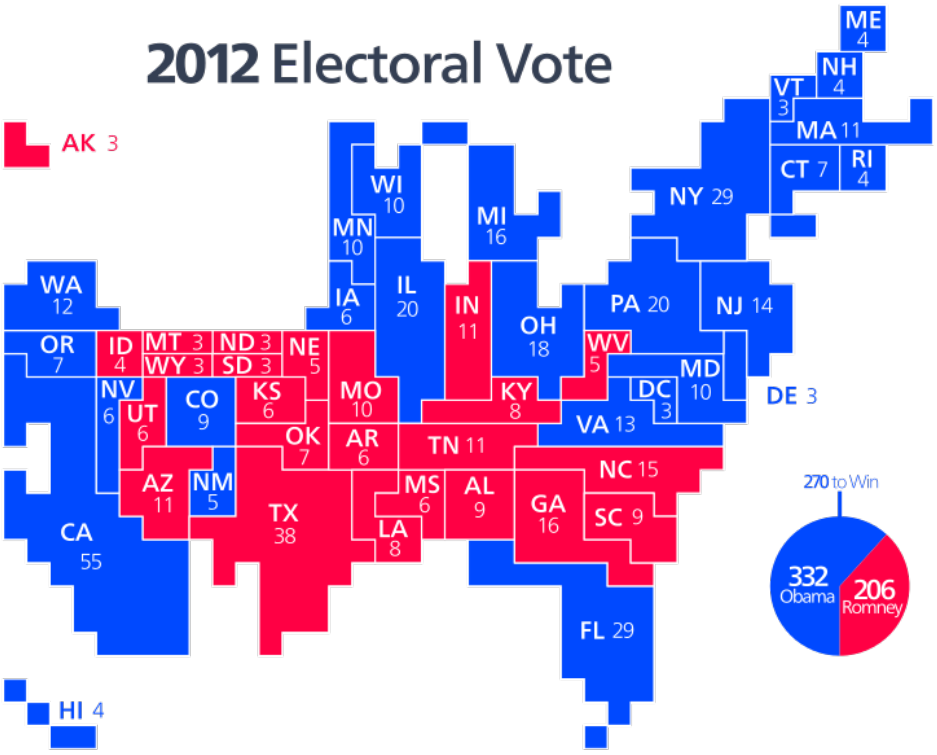
majority, that person is elected without a general election. If no majority winner, then the top two are in a runoff in the general election, even if they are in the same party.

C. The Electoral College

The **Electoral College** was created by the Founders as a compromise between having the Congress choose the president and allowing popular election. It also gave states an important role in the process, giving them the power to decide how the electors would be chosen. As you might remember, initially most state legislatures just chose the electors directly themselves. But gradually more and more states allowed popular election of electors until, in 1828, a majority of electors were chosen by popular vote. Today all electors are chosen by popular vote in the states. So when you vote for, say the Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates, you are really voting for a slate of Republican electors nominated as electors by the Republican Party in your state.

Most states use a plurality winner-take-all rule in electing electors. That is, the party with the most votes gets all their electors chosen. Two states, Maine and Nebraska, use a different rule in which two votes are allocated to the statewide winner and the others are by each congressional district, giving each electoral vote to whoever wins the plurality in each congressional district. So they could split their electoral votes, though this rarely happens.

The number of electoral votes depends on the number of members each state has in Congress. So the number for each state is the number of their members in the U.S. House of Representatives plus two for its two Senate seats. The District of Columbia gets three votes, matching the minimum number that any state has. This creates a total of 538 electoral votes. You can get this number by simply adding the membership of the U.S. House of Representatives (435) plus the Senate (100) plus three for D.C. The winning candidate must win an absolute majority (half plus one). Therefore 270 electoral votes are required to win the presidency. Strategy in running for the presidency is based on winning some combination of states to get the 270 electoral votes. You should look up how many electoral votes your home state has, if you have not already figured this out.



The Electoral College map with each state drawn in size proportional to the number of Electoral Votes it has. Note that big geographical states may have few people and therefore few Electoral Votes (public domain).

Many debates take place on whether the Electoral College favors large or small states. Mathematically speaking, the rules clearly favor small states because each state gets two bonus votes no matter how large or how small the state is. So states with less than a million people in them, like the mountain states of Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota, each get those two extra electoral votes for a total of 3 electoral votes. California, with its more than 36 million, gets those two votes in addition to the votes it gets for the members it has in the U.S. House of Representatives, for a total of 55 electoral votes. On an electoral vote per resident basis, citizens in small states have far more power than citizens in large states. For example, each resident in California has about .0000015 electoral votes (by dividing the 55 electoral votes by the population). Citizens in Wyoming have .0000058 electoral votes each (3 electoral votes divided by 515,000 residents). Therefore, Wyoming residents have 3.9 times the voting power that California residents have (.0000058 divided by .0000015).

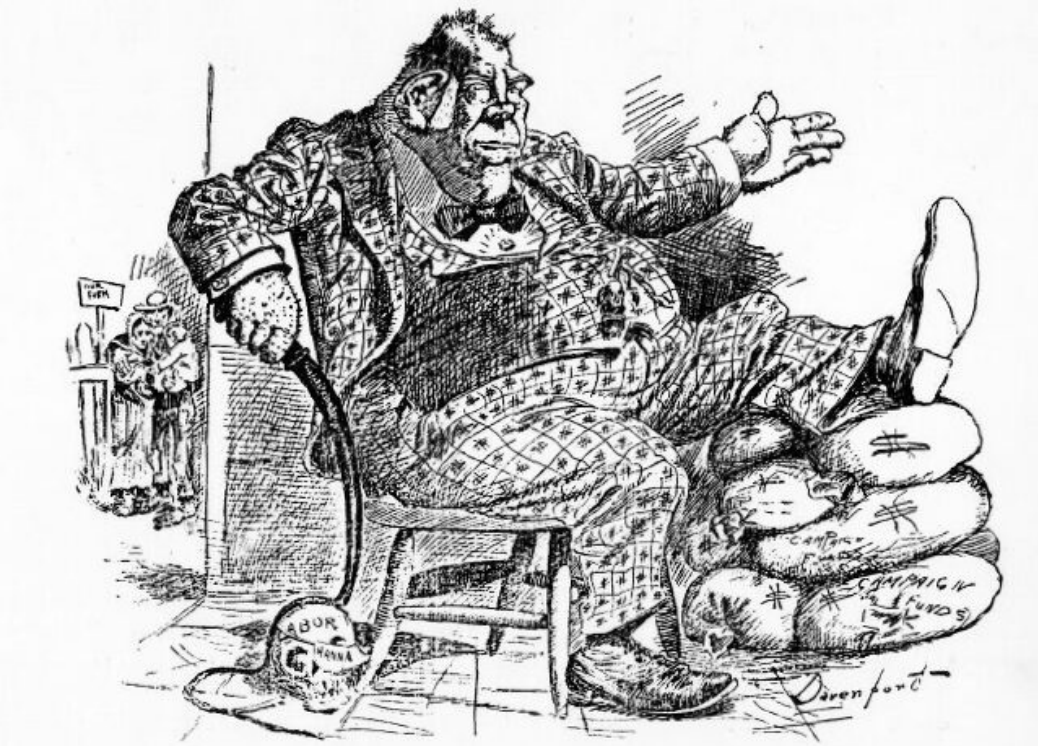
However, in politics mathematical rules do not always apply in a straightforward manner. Politically speaking, large states have some advantage. Because almost all states use the “plurality winner-take-all” rule for electing presidential electors, presidential candidates often place more emphasis on large states where a victory can win a large block of electoral votes.

But even that oversimplifies political reality. Presidential candidates focus on any states where the election is close. Why waste campaign resources in any state where you are likely to lose? For example, if a Democrat spent a lot of money and effort in a reliable Republican state, the Democrat might get 45% of the vote rather than the usual 40%. Either way, the Democrat gets zero electoral votes from that state. So candidates spend resources where they think they have a chance of winning.

It turns out that large states do tend to be more competitive, in part because large states have greater diversity in their populations. But that is not true of all large states. California and New York have been solidly Democrat in recent elections, so Republicans rarely spend many resources in these states. Texas has been solidly Republican (in part because of its ties to the Bush family), so Democrats have not spent resources there. But large states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida are competitive, so both parties spend a lot of their campaign resources there. However, some small states that are competitive can be critical, so both parties work hard to try and win those states. For example, West Virginia, with only 5 electoral votes, was critical in the 2000 election. Had Al Gore won that small state, he would have won the Electoral College and the election, even without Florida.

D. Campaign Finance

How campaigns are financed is critically important. Perhaps the best statement on campaign finance was back in 1896, when William McKinley's fundraiser Mark Hanna said that "in campaigns three things are important—the first is money, and I can't remember the other two." Perhaps an overstatement, but the statement is close to true. Money alone will not win campaigns. Many well funded candidates lose to dynamic charismatic opponents who run smart campaigns. But without a minimal amount of money to get your message out, you cannot win a modern campaign at almost any level in American politics.



"I am Confident the Workingmen are with Us."—1896. Davenport's cartoon of Mark Hanna uses the industrialist's own words as a caption.

Mark Hanna raised vast amounts of money for presidential candidate William McKinley and recognized the critical importance of money in winning campaigns—that is even more true today in the age of media driven campaigns (copyright expired, public domain).

Campaign finance is an incredibly complex subject. Every few years reforms get passed after some kind of scandal, and soon after the reform those with money and those seeking money for campaigns find ways around the reforms. About all that voters can agree upon is that campaigns cost too much and that they are disgusted with the influence of money on campaigns.

The first set of modern campaign reforms followed after Watergate campaign scandals. These scandals touched on many things, including the unscrupulous raising of huge amounts of campaign money by the Nixon campaign, money that was secretly raised in return for campaign promises to a variety of interest groups. The post-Watergate reforms involved three things: 1) reporting, 2) limits, and 3) public funding of presidential primaries and the general election.

Candidates for any federal office (president and Congress) must report where they get their money and how they spend it. (Most states have their own reporting requirements for state level offices.) That much is pretty noncontroversial today, though some groups presenting themselves as nonprofit groups can even avoid reporting contributors and amounts.

The reforms also set limits on how much people can give in a campaign for an office. This is more controversial, because people can give in a variety of ways. They can give to a candidate's campaign (primaries count separately from the general election). They can also give to political parties, to PACs (Political Action Committees) set up by interest groups, and to independent committees that run their own ads about issues. They can also spend money themselves advocating some point of view. The courts have allowed limits on contributions to candidates and parties and PACs that give money directly to candidates. But the courts have not allowed limits on contributions to independent committees, to independent PACs, on spending one's own money to advocate some point of view, and most recently on independent expenditures by unions and corporations (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission,* 2010). In a five to four decision the Supreme Court equated these contributions with free speech that is protected by the first amendment. This controversial decision gave unions and corporations the same free speech rights as citizens.

More recently the Supreme Court, in another five to four decision along the usual ideological lines, threw out the total amount that individual contributors can give to all candidates combined in federal elections, again based on free speech (*McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*, 2014). But it kept in place the limit that can be given to a single candidate. One wonders how long that limit can last. If the number of candidates to which one can give cannot be limited because of free speech, one might guess that free speech might also prohibit limits on what one can give to a single candidate.

Public funding of campaigns is very controversial. Reform groups like Common Cause advocate public funding of all campaigns (calling this "Clean Elections"). They argue that citizens are better off using tax money for campaigns than paying higher prices for goods and services that in turn pay for PAC contributions which then tie officeholders to interest groups. A few states have public funding of state campaigns, but at the federal level this only exists for presidential elections. Congress did not apply this reform to itself. Reformers charge that members of Congress wanted to keep their ability to raise large sums of money because that gave them a huge advantage in getting re-elected. If they raise enough money early, it discourages anyone from even trying to run against them in the primary or the general electon.

The Presidential Election Campaign Fund comes from a check-off on the federal income tax form. Selecting this check-off takes $3 ($6 for joint returns) from taxes you already pay. It does not increase your taxes. That money goes into the fund for presidential primaries, for helping major parties run their conventions, and for the general election.

However, in recent years this system has been coming apart. Public money for primaries is on a matching basis for small contributions and candidates do not have to participate. If a candidate accepts matching money,

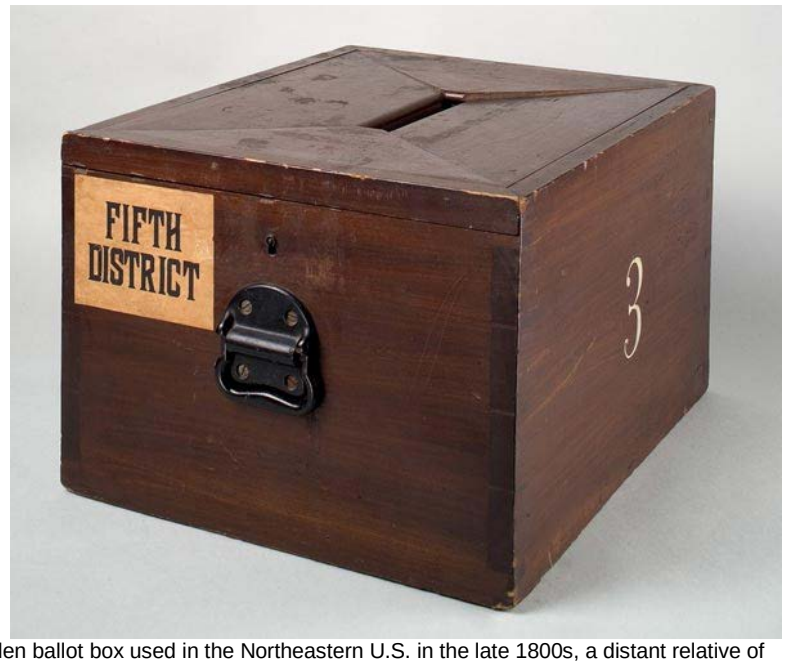
the candidate must also accept the limits for spending in each primary. Front-running presidential candidates today choose to raise all their own money to avoid these limits. With modern techniques like raising money over the internet, they can raise far more than they can get in accepting the matching funds. So the matching system for primaries is mostly irrelevant today except for less well-known candidates who cannot raise much money on their own.

For the first time in 2008, one of the major party candidates, Democrat Barack Obama, rejected the public money for the general election campaign because he was able to raise far more through private donations. His opponent, Republican John McCain, was limited to the $84 million provided in public money, though this was supplemented by the fundraising ability of the Republican Party. In 2012 both President Obama and Republican nominee Mitt Romney opted out of the public money, and both raised and spent far more than they would have had under the system.

About all that is left is that both parties still accept the money available to help run their conventions. The percentage of people choosing to use the check-off on their tax returns has fallen dramatically, from about a third in the late 1970s to about one in ten in 2013. Most observers feel that within a few years the entire public funding system at the national level will totally collapse, just as we see a series of court rulings eroding limits on contributions.

E. How People Make Voting Decisions

If you ask someone how they make voting decisions, they are most likely to say they vote for the best person, vote on the basis of issues, or if they are of a cynical nature, vote for “the lesser of the two evils.” As you know from our earlier discussion on how parties simplify voting choice, voting in any of these ways involves a great deal of effort. It imposes a cost of time and effort that most citizens are unwilling to pay. So people say these things not because they are true, but because saying these things makes them feel sophisticated.



A wooden ballot box used in the Northeastern U.S. in the late 1800s, a distant relative of computer voting machines used in most places today—yet people still make their voting decisions the same way (Smithsonian, public domain).

Political scientists have done a lot of research on how people make voting decisions. We know which factors are most and least important in how most people make their decisions. I have listed these factors in rough order of importance, though importance varies from election to election and some factors are more important to some kinds of people than others. We will begin with party identification, which of course is only relevant to those who have a party identification. But that is about two-thirds of all voters.

1. Party Identification

The single most important factor in helping people decide how to vote is their party identification. Yes, I know that most people do not admit this to be the case and most people make fun of those who vote along party lines. Saying we vote the person or issues is considered a sign of political sophistication, and most people like to seem sophisticated. But if we were to look at a whole range of issues and compare them to votes, none would explain vote as well as party identification. This is because party identification works as a psychological filter for most people. It colors how people view both candidate personalities and issues. Of course we should add that if people choose party on the basis of general issue positions, party is a good shorthand way of choosing candidates. Voters generally vote for the candidate of their party between 85% and 95% of the time. No issues come close to that strong a relationship to voting choice.

2. Group Membership

Group memberships also have a profound effect on how people vote. People get cues from other members in the group on how they should vote. For example, if you are in a church that is politically active, you will get cues on which candidates take morally acceptable positions. If you are in a professional association that is impacted by public policy, you pretty quickly learn which candidate is most friendly to your group.

3. Nature of the Times

In the 1980 election, Ronald Reagan, challenging incumbent President Jimmy Carter, asked Americans, “Are you better off today than you were four years ago?” This was a powerful question that defined much of the campaign. It assumes some very important things.

First it assumes that we should hold presidents accountable for our everyday lives. You know that we do, fairly or unfairly, and that we have felt this way ever since Franklin Roosevelt redefined the role we expect presidents to play in our lives.

It also assumes that elections are about continuity or change. That is also true—nearly all elections are about continuity or change. If we are satisfied and want things to continue as they are, we reward the person and party that holds office. If we are not and want change, we vote for any challenger whom we deem acceptable. Americans were dissatisfied with the way things were going in 1980 and they found Reagan to be acceptable, so they voted Carter out of office. I call 1980 the “ABC election,” anybody but Carter.

Borrowing Reagan’s words, pollsters ask a standard question that taps this feeling: whether your family is better off than it was four years ago. People who vote on the basis of this perception of change in condition for themselves and/or the nation are called **nature of the times voters**. Political scientists sometimes call this “retrospective voting.”

One of the better predictors for a party or incumbent holding office is change in real per capita income. If it’s up, then the incumbent or the party currently holding the White House has the advantage. If not, then the other party has the advantage. People do tend to vote their pocketbooks. They generally know how badly stretched they are over a period of time. But once again, if the situation is at all close, party identification can color how people perceive their own family’s changing situation.

4. Personality

We vote on perceptions of personality. We vote for people with whom we feel comfortable. Of course, this only applies to candidates for offices that are high profile enough for us to pay attention to the candidates. Most offices below

the governor or state legislator do not merit enough attention to even make an evaluation of personality. So we go back to party or just name familiarity.

John Kennedy on the Jack Parr late night television show—few, if any, presidents had a better television image than Kennedy (published without copyright notice, public domain).

Where do we learn about the personalities of candidates for major offices? Television is where we meet them. And we are pretty good at making judgments about tv personalities. We do that every new tv show as we meet new characters. So when we see a candidate on television, we make this judgment pretty quickly and with some measure of confidence.

Political party plays an indirect role here as well. We tend to like people who share a common identity like party. As we have said, party is a psychological filter that biases our judgment. So for those with a party identification, personality evaluation is far from objective.

5. Ideology

We looked at ideology way back in the first chapter. It is heavily correlated with political party. Democrats tend to be more liberal and Republicans tend to be more conservative. You can find populists in both parties (more among the Democrats) and libertarians in both parties (more among the Republicans). But all these are statistical tendencies. Some Democrats are conservative on moral issues, especially African Americans. And some Republicans, especially those in the Northeast and in the West, still tend to be moderate or even slightly liberal on social and environmental issues. So you should know that party and ideology are different—pretty closely related, but not the same. Moreover, party colors ideological evaluations, as it does many other things.

You also know that many people do not use the term ideology or they misunderstand what it means. So while it does help some people sort out which candidate better fits their views on what government should and should not do, ideology is irrelevant to many, if not most Americans. Nevertheless, ideology is another factor that helps voters sort out candidate choices.

6. Issues

Finally, issues do make a difference. But for most voters, despite what they say, most issues are rather far down the list. How many people do you know who actually do research on where each candidate stands on each issue and then weights these positions against their own positions to make a choice?

Perhaps the best we can say is that issues enter through the framework of party. In that sense issues are important—if you choose party based on the basis of issues. Those who do not have a party identification are less likely to vote, largely because deciding on the other factors like issues just takes too much work and is too confusing.

The exception to these generalizations on the importance of issues are single issue voters. These are people who care so much about one issue that almost all their voting choices rest on that particular issue. Probably the two issues that most often serve this role are abortion, in particular those who oppose abortion, and guns, in particular those against any regulations or restrictions.

If you want to see how you might vote on the basis of issues, you can go to a variety of websites that allow you to answer questions on issue preferences and then the site shows you which candidates best fit your own personal positions on issues. If you are reading this text during an ongoing campaign, this might be a good exercise.

VIII. Policy Implications

A. Cycles in the Public Mood—Change and Stability

Almost any study of United States history illustrates that elections lead to major changes in public policy. Party realignments caused by crises are the vehicles of great policy change, for example the movement to end enslavement that was associated with the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s or the Democratic New Deal coalition of the 1930s.

Some political scientists argue that the public mood shifts in cycles that bring about change and then wanting to slow down and have stability for a while. So following a Franklin Roosevelt and all the changes of the New Deal that expanded government activity, we see a period in the 1950s in which voters

wanted to move more slowly. This was followed by the expansion of government activity and new policies in the 1960s, followed by slowing down in the 1970s and 1980s.

You might consider where the nation is now in these terms. Has the public had so much change in recent years that it wants to slow down and digest these changes? Or has it become restless? Is the current mood one in which the public desires more change? While simplistic, this theory reinforces the idea that almost all elections are about change or stability.

B. Policy Mandates

Those running for office often claim that voters elected them to enact policies that were in their platform. That is, they claim a **policy mandate**. While this may sometimes be the case, it is rare. You know that most voters only know a few things about details of policy proposals. Therefore, while someone may win because of dissatisfaction with the status quo and because of the desire for change, exactly what that change should be is another matter.

Political scientists argue that successful leaders must create their mandate after winning. That is, they must persuade others in government to support their policy proposals. To put it another way, candidates must do more than just win. After winning they must sell the mandate to both the public and to other policymakers. Having large majorities elected with you in Congress from a landslide election certainly helps. This helped Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, Lyndon Johnson in 1965, and Barack Obama in 2009-10. Having a crisis in which the nation looks for strong leadership helped Woodrow Wilson at the outbreak of WWI and George W. Bush after 9/11 in persuading the public and those in Congress that new policies needed to pass.

In foreign policy, for example, George W. Bush changed course from carefully working with allies, **multilateralism**, and only attacking other nations after we were attacked. He sold a new foreign policy of **unilateralism**, in which the United States would chart a course and then get support where it could, but act alone if necessary. The United States also embarked upon a defense policy of **preemption**, claiming the right to attack nations that we felt posed a threat to our security, whether or not they had actually attacked us. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 is the best example of these changes. The crisis atmosphere following the 9/11 attacks helped the president sell these changes to Congress. Only after the policies failed to bring about quick and cheap results did Congress begin to challenge this policy change.

My point here is that elections do not automatically lead to major changes in policy. Elected leaders have to sell those changes after they get elected—politics does not end when they take office.

IX. Should You Vote?

We began with the observation that the time and effort required for voting compared to the expected benefits make voting seem irrational. Yet about half the population still votes in presidential elections and somewhere in the range of a fifth to a third in most lower level elections. So a lot of citizens are acting irrationally and voting. Should they continue to do so? Should you?

We can lower the costs of voting by using party identification as a shorthand way of voting on issues. So perhaps the costs are not as high as would be the case if we had to research a wide range of issues for every individual candidate. This makes the act of voting not quite as irrational as we thought.

Nevertheless, our individual votes will rarely make a difference. But perhaps we vote for that rare case when it will. We buy lottery tickets knowing full well that we are unlikely to win. We watch many athletic games to the bitter end when our favorite team or player seems hopelessly behind so that we can see that rare instance when the impossible happens. So perhaps we continue to vote hoping that some day it might make a difference. Perhaps we continue because we want to be there and be counted when it does. This kind of argument places a value on hopes and dreams, a psychological value that is often overlooked, but real nonetheless.

In addition, voting is more than doing something for expected rewards. It is a **civic ritual** in which we participate to affirm our membership in our democratic republic, just as religious rituals affirm membership in a body of believers of some faith. It gives us a sense of connection, of being part of something bigger than ourselves. Voting helps us keep the democratic republic Ben Franklin and the other Founders started. It also honors those who struggled to gain that right for us, and in some cases died fighting for that right. To fail to vote dishonors their sacrifice. All of these considerations are social and psychological and moral, not part of a cold economic analysis of self-interest.

Suffragettes fought for the vote for decades before winning that right in the Nineteenth Amendment passed in 1920. Some were imprisoned and force-fed when they went on hunger strikes. Is failing to vote a dishonor to their sacrifice? (Library of Congress, no known restriction on use)

So should you vote? Surprise! I will not tell you. All I will say is that you should consider all the factors involved. You must decide for yourself.

KEY TERMS AND IDEAS

long ballot
political party
party caucus
Progressives
nonpartisan elections
initiative
recall
nonpartisan blanket primary
loyal opposition
Federalists
Jeffersonians and Democratic-Republicans
Whigs
Republican Party
Populist Party
New Deal realignment

Blue states, Red states, and Purple states
gender gap
party organization
party in government
party in the electorate
party identification
party leaners
two party system
plurality winner-take-all election rules
proportional representation
splinter protest third parties
Southern Strategy
ideological third parties
voter fatigue
voter turnout
open primary
closed primary
Electoral College
nature of the times voters
policy mandate
multilateralism
unilateralism in foreign policy
preemption in defense policy
(voting as a) civic ritual

Possible Internet Exercises

1. Use of the long ballot in the United States results in our electing people to many different offices. Search the Web, and using your home address, find the names of people who represent you at both the local and national level, including your U.S. Representative, your state representative and state senator, city council member (if you live in the city), your county council member, your school board representative, and the sheriff. Of course, this does not include representatives you may have for other special purpose districts in which you may live, but these are much harder to find. While at it, you should also identify the names of all statewide elected officials, starting with the governor, lt. governor, and in most states about a half dozen others, like Secretary of State or Agricultural Commissioner, and so on. Can we reasonably expect voters to research the issue positions and personal qualities of candidates for each of these offices?

2. Find out how parties choose candidates for office at the local level where you live and for state level offices. Find out whether your state uses open or closed primaries or caucuses in the presidential nomination process.

3. Search the internet for studies of income inequality in the U.S. Has inequality been decreasing, staying the same, or growing?

4. Find the most recent national platforms for the two major parties and compare the positions they take on several important issues.

5. Find the names of the current chairs of the Democratic and Republican National Committees, noting their backgrounds.

6. Find a list of third parties on the Web. Find two that interest you and look at their websites. Describe their issue positions on some key issues.