

from widely different backgrounds and interests, parties and society by aggregating and mediating conflicts and contributing to political and social stability.

It is not fashionable to argue in favor of political parties and point to their contributions to democracy. Most Americans see parties as part of the "mess in Washington." Many believe that parties are responsible for the government's inability to act in dealing with the nation's problems and that partisan debates are meaningless squabbles. Many feel that parties create differences where none exist rather than reflect and represent real differences in how to solve the nation's problems.

In fact, without political parties, it is likely that our political system would be more fragmented and media and interest groups even more powerful. Parties are organizations that bind together people from all regions, religions, and economic groups.

## Development and Change in the Party System

Most Americans think of the Democratic and Republican Parties as more or less permanent fixtures, and indeed they have been around a long time. The Democratic Party evolved from the Jacksonian Democrats in 1832, and the Republican Party was founded in 1854. Nevertheless, the current party system is only one of five distinct party systems that have existed in American history (see Figure 2).

In tracing the development of these systems, we need to keep two things in mind. First, parties developed after the nation's founding, grew to be very powerful in the late nineteenth century, and have declined in influence since then.

Second, there have been periods of stability in the party system when one party has dominated American politics and won most elections. There have also been periods of transition and instability when neither party has dominated, and control of government has been divided between the parties or has shifted back and forth. In transition periods, issues emerge that are difficult to resolve, and voters establish new party loyalties based on them. The transition from one stable party system to another is called a **realignment**.

### Preparty Politics: The Founders' Views of Political Parties

Most of the Founders viewed political parties as dangerous to stable government. This antiparty feeling was rooted in three basic beliefs. First, the Founders

thought parties created and exploited conflicts that undermined consensus on public policy. Second, they thought parties were instruments by which a small and narrow interest could impose its will on society. Third, they believed parties stifled independent thought and behavior.<sup>11</sup>

James Madison feared political parties as much as interest groups because he felt both pursued selfish interests at the expense of the common good. He referred to both as "factions" in *Federalist* 10. John Adams dreaded what he considered the greatest political evil, the formation of rival political parties.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Constitution does not mention political parties. Nevertheless, it created a system in which parties, or something like them, were inevitable. When the Founders established popular elections as the mechanism for selecting political leaders, an agency for organizing and mobilizing supporters of political candidates was needed. Indeed, despite their antiparty feelings, several of the Founders were active in the first parties. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, for example, were the founders of the first political party.

### First Party System: Development of Parties

With Washington's unanimous election to the presidency in 1788, it appeared the nation could be governed by consensus. But differences of opinion soon arose. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's secretary of the treasury, supported a strong national government. His following, the Federalists, were opposed by Thomas Jefferson, secretary of state, who feared a strong central government. The conflict led Jefferson to challenge Federalist John Adams for the presidency in 1796. Jefferson lost, but he then recruited able leaders in each state, founded newspapers, established political clubs, and in 1800 ran again and won. Jefferson's victory demonstrated the utility of political parties.

By Jefferson's second term, more than 90 percent of members of Congress were either Federalists or Jeffersonians (later called Jeffersonian Republicans) and consistently voted in support of their party.<sup>12</sup>

### Second Party System: Rise of the Democrats

After a brief period of one-party rule ("the era of good feelings"), the Jeffersonian Republicans split into factions. One of these developed into the Democratic Party, led by Andrew Jackson, who won the presidency in 1828.

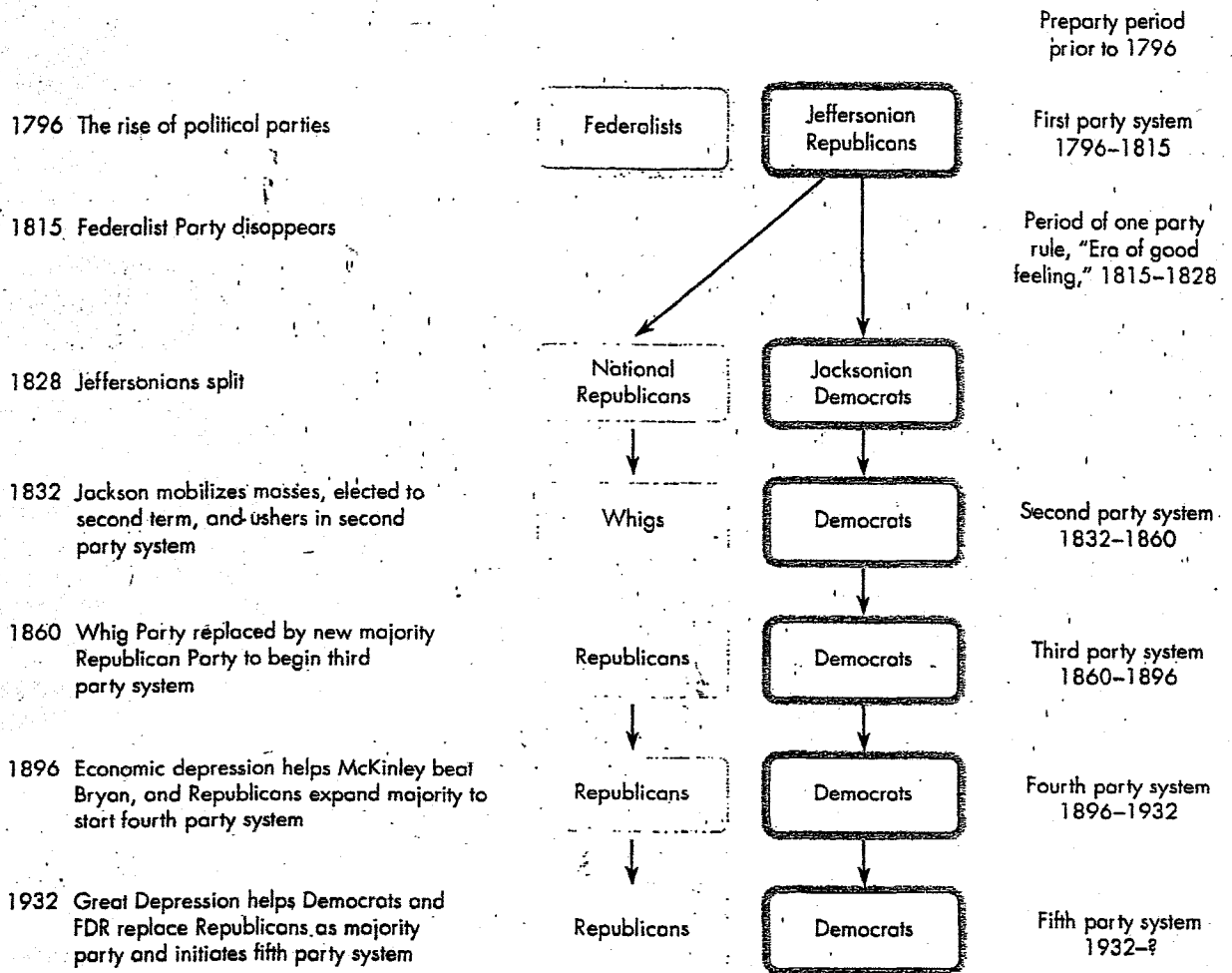


FIGURE 2 ■ *The Five American Party Systems*

The Jacksonian Democrats emphasized the common person and encouraged popular participation. As a result of their efforts, the vote was expanded to all white adult males. Presidential electors were selected in popular elections rather than by state legislatures, and the party convention became the instrument used to nominate presidential and other party candidates. No longer did members of the party in Congress select the party's presidential nominee. Instead, conventions opened up decisions to local as well as national party elites.

Many political leaders deplored Jackson's efforts to mobilize the masses. John Quincy Adams called Jackson a "barbarian." An Adams supporter referred to Jackson's victory as "the howl of raving Democracy."<sup>13</sup>

Jackson's popular appeal and the organizational effort of his party brought large numbers to the polls for the first time. By 1828, more than a million votes were cast for president. Building on the efforts of Jefferson, Jackson introduced a uniquely American idea, a mass-population-based party organization.

### Third Party System: Rise of the Republicans

The conflict over slavery brought a new party alignment. Abolitionists and proslavery factions split the Whig Party, which had been the primary opposition to the Democrats. By 1860, the Whigs disappeared and a new party, the Republicans (not related to the Jeffersonian or National Republicans), emerged. The Republicans (also known as the GOP—Grand Old Party), reflecting abolitionist sentiment, nominated Abraham Lincoln for president. Northern Democrats who opposed slavery joined Republicans to form a new majority party.

After the Civil War, the Republicans usually won the presidency and controlled Congress. After 1876, however, elections were close and the parties evenly matched in Congress.

Parties were strong during this period. They controlled nominations for office and mobilized voters through extensive local organizations. Big-city political



*The factions that developed into the first political parties were already vying with each other in Washington's administration. Thomas Jefferson (second from left) and Alexander Hamilton (fourth from left) are pictured here with Washington (right).*

The Granger Collection, New York

machines provided employment and other help for many new immigrants in exchange for their allegiance. Corruption—vote buying and political payoffs—linked poor immigrants, big business, and party leaders in strong party machines.

### Fourth Party System: Republican Dominance

The election of 1896 ushered in another party alignment. Democrat William Jennings Bryan appealed to southerners and farmers of the plains. He played to their hostility toward the Northeast, with its large corporations and growing ethnic working class. His was a religious appeal too, pitting fundamentalists against Catholics. But his appeal was too narrow, and the Democrats were soundly defeated.

During this period a third party, the Progressives, gained strength, chiefly among middle-class Americans

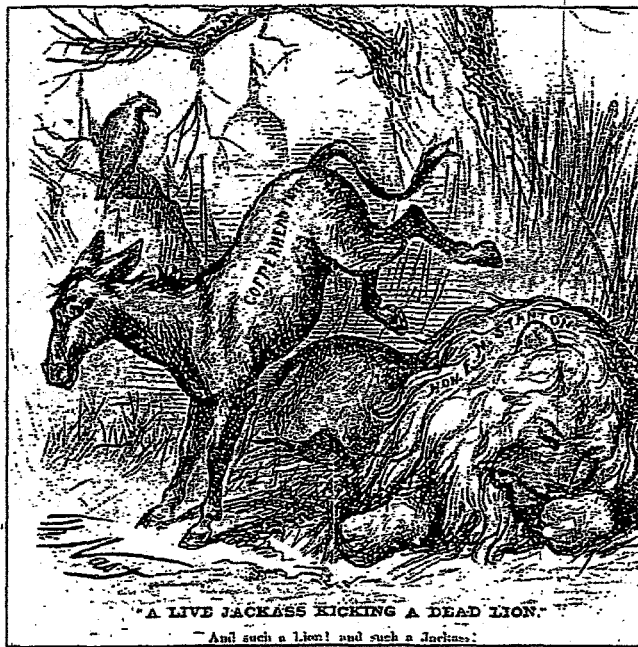
concerned with the corruption of big-city machines. The movement championed a number of reforms designed to wrench political control from political parties and the lower-class immigrant groups they served. These included voter registration and the secret ballot, which reduced election fraud; the direct primary, which allowed voters rather than party bosses to nominate candidates for public office; and a merit system, which eliminated political patronage in the awarding of government jobs and contracts. The Progressives never captured the presidency, but their ideas did win favor with a larger audience and were enacted into law. In addition to checking corruption, the reforms weakened political parties, undermining their capacity to mobilize voters and their ability to use government to meet the needs of the citizens who support them.

### Fifth Party System: Democratic Dominance

In the 1920s, the Republicans began to lose support in the cities. The party ignored the plight of poor immigrants and in Congress pushed through quotas limiting immigration from southern and eastern Europe. After the Depression hit in 1929, these immigrants, along with many women voting for the first time, joined traditional Democrats in the South to elect Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. This election reflected another party alignment.

The **New Deal coalition**, composed of city dwellers, blue-collar workers, Catholic and Jewish immigrants, blacks, and southerners, elected Roosevelt to an unprecedented four terms. The coalition was an odd alliance of northern liberals and southern conservatives. It stuck together in the 1930s and 1940s because of Roosevelt's personality and skill and because northerners did not seriously challenge southern racial policies.

But the coalition came unglued after Roosevelt's death. The Republicans, by nominating a popular war hero, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, won the presidency in 1952 and 1956. Although the Democrats regained the White House in 1960, the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War divided them sharply, and they lost again in 1968 and 1972.<sup>14</sup> They won in 1976 by nominating a southerner—Jimmy Carter—and because the Republicans suffered from the Watergate scandal. Even though the Democrats dominated Congress until 1994, they had much less success in winning the presidency. Democrats won the White House only three times after 1964, suggesting that the fifth party system may have ended.



In 1828, opponents of Andrew Jackson called him a jackass (left). Political cartoonists and journalists began to use the donkey to symbolize Jackson and the Democratic Party. In the 1870s, Thomas Nast popularized the donkey as a symbol of the party in his cartoons and originated the elephant as a symbol of the Republican Party. His 1874 cartoon (right) showed the Democratic donkey dressed as a lion, frightening the other animals of the jungle, including the Republican elephant.

The Granger Collection, New York

## Has the Fifth Party System Realigned?

The fifth party system has changed, but has a major realignment occurred? Many of the signs that preceded major realignments of the party system have been present for some time. **Ticket splitting**, voting for a member of one party for one office but a member of another party for a different one, reached an all-time high in 1992, owing in part to the strong showing of third party presidential candidate Ross Perot. In 1996, ticket splitting fell off a bit but was still twice as common as it was in the 1950s (see Figure 3).<sup>15</sup> At the national level, the Republicans have occupied the White House and the Democrats have controlled Congress most of the time since 1968.

Realigning periods also are characterized by compelling issues that fracture the unity of the major parties.<sup>16</sup> In the years before 1860, slavery was such an issue. It divided the Democrats and destroyed the Whigs. In 1932, economic issues led many Republicans away from their party to the Democrats. As memories of the Depression and influence of Depression-era economic issues fade, the potential exists for new issues to mobilize and realign voters.

The dominant Democratic coalition is less cohesive than in the heyday of the fifth party system. Blue-collar

ethnics and Catholics have found the Democrats much less attractive.<sup>17</sup> As New Deal policies succeeded, blue-collar workers became much less concerned with economic security and turned their attention to other issues. Many were upset with the party's promotion of civil rights. Divisions in the party over the Vietnam War pushed many who were in favor of the war, particularly blue-collar union members, to the Republicans. Some objected to the Democratic Party's positions on social issues such as opposition to capital punishment, prayer in schools, and support for abortion and the rights of criminal defendants.

In the 1980s, economic concerns returned. Blue-collar workers found their standard of living eroding and felt left behind.<sup>18</sup> This did not move them back to their Democratic roots, however. They resented what they believed to be the Democrats' favoritism toward minorities and policies that seemed to free citizens from personal responsibility for their actions (for example, crime policies that some saw as "coddling criminals"). The big-city machines that once mobilized workers to vote Democratic are gone, and the labor unions, which did the same, are dramatically weakened.

On the other hand, some changes drove some voters to the Democratic Party. Northern white Protestants and white-collar workers are somewhat less Republican

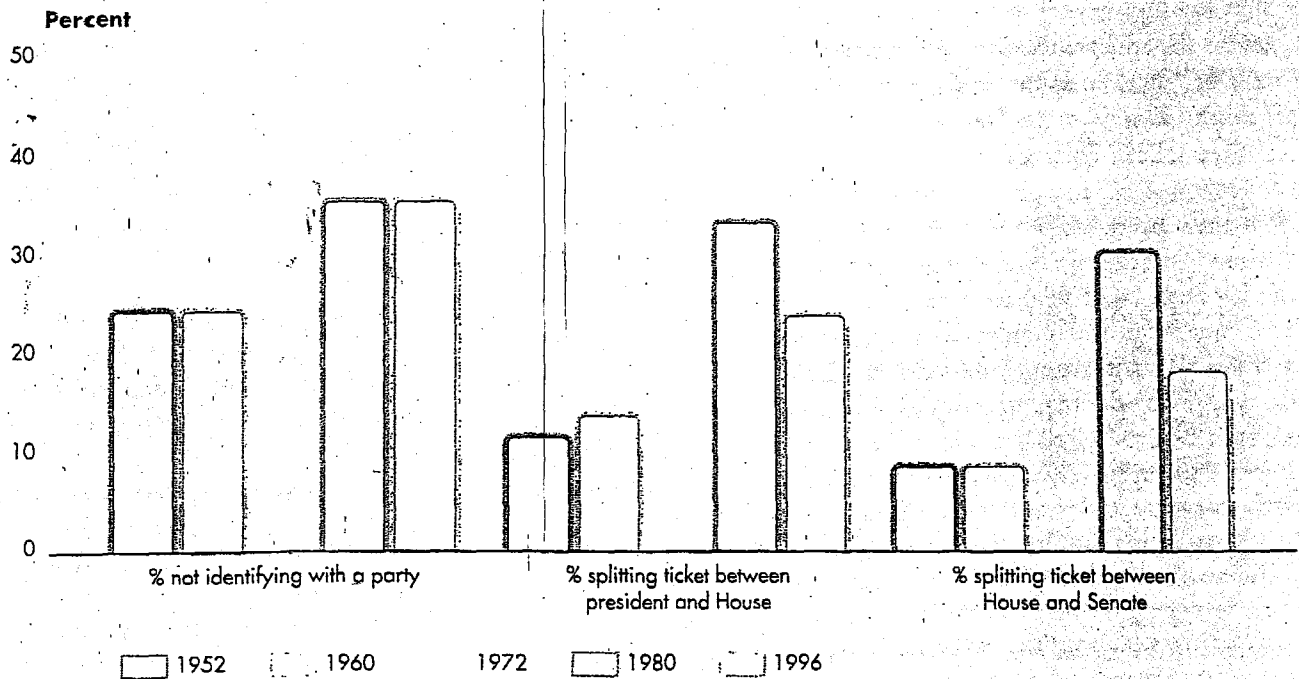


FIGURE 3 ■ *Is Partisanship Reemerging?*

SOURCE: CPS National Election Studies.

than they used to be. Many of them are employed by government and more sympathetic to government's role in solving societal problems. The Democrats also increasingly appeal to better-educated voters, who support Democratic initiatives such as health care reform, commitment to the environment, and abortion rights.<sup>19</sup>

In general, then, there has been some evidence of realignment focused on issues of government size and scope, with parties becoming more homogeneous.<sup>20</sup> Although only a modest realignment has occurred nationally, a regional one, confined to the South, has certainly occurred. Long a bastion of Democratic Party strength, the South began to drift away in the 1950s and showed major signs of change in 1964. For the first time in a century, the Republicans carried several southern states in the presidential election.

At the time he signed the 1964 civil rights bill, President Johnson confided that he believed the event would deliver the South to the Republicans for the next fifty years. And as predicted, in 1964 many white southerners voted for Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee. Since 1968 Republicans have carried the South in all presidential elections, except for Jimmy Carter's election in 1976. Even then, a majority of white southerners voted for Ford. Clinton carried his home state,

Arkansas, and that of his running mate, Tennessee. He also picked up Louisiana and Georgia, but these states were recaptured by the Republicans in 2000.

White southerners increasingly vote for Republicans in congressional races, too. Since 1994, they have cast the majority of their votes for Republicans. The shift has led a few Democratic members of Congress to change their party in an effort to take advantage of the changing loyalties of white southerners. For the first time since Reconstruction, a majority of governors, U.S. house members, and senators from the eleven southern states are Republican.<sup>21</sup>

The change in party identification among white southerners is the main reason that polls have shown a decline in Democratic loyalties nationwide. The shift of white southerners to the Republican Party not only makes the South more Republican but also makes the Republicans more conservative. The change also gives the party system a somewhat more ideological look. The southern Democrats who changed tend to be conservatives and are more ideologically compatible with policies of the Republican Party.

The race issue, which spurred this realignment, continues to play a role. Where white southerners in the 1950s and 1960s claimed "betrayal" by the national

Democratic Party for its policies urging equality for blacks, they now say they object to its policies accepting affirmative action for minorities. The polarization between the races has sharpened the realignment. Defection of white southerners from the Democratic Party has left a southern Republican Party that is largely white and a Democratic Party that is largely black. Southern whites who are asked their party affiliation sometimes retort, "I'm white, aren't I?" meaning "I'm Republican."<sup>22</sup>

There also has been some **dealignment**.<sup>23</sup> More individuals have opted for independence as parties become less and less relevant. About one-third of all citizens do not choose to identify with a political party. Many voters who became eligible to vote for the first time during the 1980s and 1990s have not been attracted to either party, and some older voters lack firm attachments to their party. Many say that there is nothing that they like or dislike about parties. Similarly, the number who have something positive to say about one party and something negative to say about the other has declined; these trends suggest that parties are not as important to citizens as they were in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>24</sup>

Candidates and the issues they choose to focus on have become more important. Citizen indifference to political parties and their decline in importance make it difficult for parties to link citizens to government and to enhance citizens' influence over government actions.

Dealignment also makes realignment less likely. Citizens who think parties are not important are unlikely to switch when their party fails to deal with the nation's problems. Nor are independents likely to be drawn to a political party in search of answers to national problems. Though some believe that the country is in the midst of a "rolling realignment," a movement of the nation to the right and the Republican Party in fits and starts since the early 1970s, the Democratic Party continues to be the party of choice for a plurality of Americans—a fact that is inconsistent with the idea of a rolling realignment.

In 2000, Republicans clung to their slim majority in Congress owing to incumbent advantage, superiority in raising campaign funds, and a reasonably satisfied electorate. However, this does not necessarily signal a realignment and permanent Republican majority. It is a reflection of continued volatility among voters as they respond to economic conditions and specific issues. The 2000 election revealed a closely divided nation. Both House and Senate are split almost evenly, and the presidential vote was the closest in modern history. Regional, race, and gender differences seem clear, yet the contours of a new party system are not.

## Characteristics of the Party System

The American party system is characterized by some intriguing and even unique qualities.

### Two Parties

First, the American party system is a **two-party system**. Only two parties win seats in Congress, and only two parties compete effectively for the presidency. The development and perpetuation of two parties is rare among the nations of the world.

In western Europe, for example, **multiparty systems** are the rule. Italy has nine national parties and several regional parties; Germany has five. Great Britain, although predominantly a two-party system, now has at least three significant minor parties. Multiparty systems also are found in Canada, which has three parties, and Israel, which has more than twenty.

Why do we have a two-party system? The most common explanation is the nature of our election system.<sup>25</sup> Public officials are elected from **single-member districts** under a **winner-take-all** arrangement. This means only one individual is elected from a district or state—the individual who receives the most votes. This contrasts with **proportional representation**, in which public officials are elected from multimember districts and the number of seats awarded to each party within each district is roughly equal to the percentage of the vote the party receives in the district. Thus, representation in the national legislature is approximately proportional to the popular vote each party receives nationwide.

In single-member district, winner-take-all systems, only the major parties have much chance of winning legislative seats. With little chance of winning office, minor parties tend to die or merge with one of the major parties. However, where seats are awarded in proportion to the vote, even a modest showing in the election—15 percent or less—may win a seat or two in the national assembly and provide a foundation upon which to build. Under such a scheme, a party, regardless of its electoral strength, has a presence in the legislature and someone to speak in support of its policy positions and issues.

While the election system influences the party system, the party system also influences the election system. Where only two parties exist, it is to their advantage to maintain an election system that undermines the development and growth of minor parties. For example, legislatures, controlled by the two parties, have tried to

## Matrix Exercise—The Five Party Systems—Mr. Singiser

<b>Party System</b>	<b>Two Parties</b>	<b>Dominant Party</b>	<b>Cause for Change</b>	<b>Key Events</b>
<b><u>First Party System</u></b>				
<b><u>Second Party System</u></b>				
<b><u>Third Party System</u></b>				
<b><u>Fourth Party System</u></b>				
<b><u>Fifth Party System</u></b>				

## QUESTIONS FROM MATRIX

1. Identify each party system by the years in which it took place:

First System: \_\_\_\_\_

Second System: \_\_\_\_\_

Third System: \_\_\_\_\_

Fourth System: \_\_\_\_\_

Fifth System: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the name given to the one period in US History of one-party rule?

3. During which years did this period take place?

4. What were the three reasons the Founders were fearful of political parties?

5. Define "realignment" and "dealignment", with examples of each.