

Adapted from, "*The Evolution of American Party Democracy.*" Pp.417-422

O'Conner, Karen & Sabato, Larry J. *American Government: Continuity and Change.* New York: Pearson, Longman. 2006.

The Birth of Political Parties

It is one of the great ironies of the early republic that George Washington's public farewell, which warned the nation against parties, marked the effective end of the brief era of partyless politics in the United States. Washington's unifying influence ebbed as he stepped off the national stage and his successor, John Adams, occupied a much less exalted position. Adams was allied with Alexander Hamilton. To win the presidency in 1796 Adams narrowly defeated Thomas Jefferson, Hamilton's former rival in Washington's cabinet. Before ratification of the Constitution, Hamilton and Jefferson had been leaders of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists respectively. Over the course of Adams' single term, two competing congressional party groupings or caucuses gradually organized around these clashing men and their principles: Hamilton's Federalists supported a strong, central government; the Democratic-Republicans of Thomas Jefferson and his ally James Madison inherited the mantle of the Anti-Federalists and preferred a federal system in which the states were relatively more powerful.

Jefferson actually preferred the simpler name "Republicans," a very different group from today's party of the same name, but Hamilton insisted on calling them "Democratic-Republicans" to link them to the radical democrats of the French Revolution.

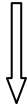
In the presidential election of 1800, the Republicans prevailed with their nominee, Jefferson, who became the first U.S. president elected as the nominee of a political party. Jefferson was deeply committed to the ideas of his party, but not nearly as devoted to the idea of a party system. He regarded his party as a temporary measure necessary to defeat Adams and Hamilton. Neither Jefferson's party nor Hamilton's enjoyed widespread loyalty among the citizenry akin to that of today's Democrats and Republicans. Although southerners were overwhelmingly partial to the Democratic-Republicans and New Englanders to the Federalists, no broad-based party organizations existed on either side to mobilize popular support.

After the spirited confrontations of the republic's early years, political parties faded in importance for a quarter of a century. The Federalists ceased nominating presidential candidates by 1816, having failed to elect one of their own since Adam's victory in 1796, and by 1820 the party had dissolved. James Monroe's presidency from 1817-1825 produced the so-called Era of Good Feelings, when party politics was nearly suspended at the national level. Every during Monroe's tenure, party organizations were continued to develop at the state level. With the expansion of the voter roles due to changes in voting eligibility political parties continued to increase in popularity and in power. No longer the concern of society's upper crust, the election of the president became a matter for all qualified voters to decide.



Alexander Hamilton

- Favored a strong, central government
- Favored an economy based on commerce and manufacturing
- From New England
- Wanted the Federal government to have broad powers
- Loose interpretation of the Constitution
- Federal government supreme over the states
- Wanted to create a National Bank
- All states had to pay for the revolutionary war debt



FEDERALIST

FEDERALIST PARTY



Thomas Jefferson

- Favored strong state governments
- Favored an economy based on farming and agriculture
- From Virginia (the South)
- Wanted limited powers for the Federal Government
- Strict interpretation of the Constitution
- Supporter of the Bill of Rights
- Against the creation of a National Bank
- States who had repaid war debt should not have to contribute
- Supported the ideas of the French Revolution

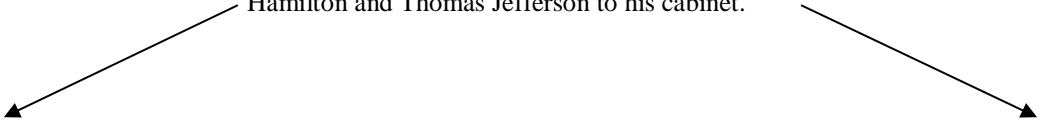
ANTI-FEDERALISTS

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICANS

Flowchart: Birth of Political Parties



George Washington appointed two rivals- Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson to his cabinet.



Bio:

Bio:

The two men had different backgrounds and different ideas about how the new nation should be governed. Their arguments included:



[Empty box for Alexander Hamilton's arguments]

[Empty box for Thomas Jefferson's arguments]

Followers of Alexander Hamilton formed a political party, they were called...

Followers of Thomas Jefferson and the Anti-Federalists formed a political party called the...



[Empty box for Hamilton's party name]

[Empty box for Jefferson's party name]

Fishing for Issues



www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/9686

Clifford K. Berryman, 1919

National Archives and Records Administration

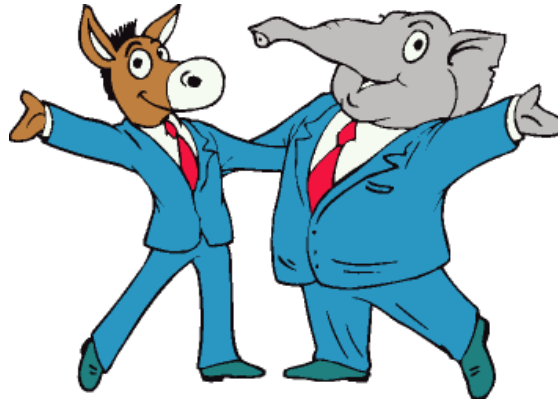
When this cartoon was published the 1920 Presidential election was nearly a year and a half away. There were no clear front-runners and both major parties were in need of a campaign platform that would lead their party to victory. The cartoon captures the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey seated on the same log fishing on different sides of the “campaign issues pool.”

What images or symbols do you recognize?

What is the artist trying to say about political parties?

Based on this cartoon, what is the role of the political party?

The Roles of American Political Parties Today



Political parties are less popular today than in previous times but still serve as important change agents in our political system. The parties provide vital services to society and it is difficult to envision political life without them.

1. **Mobilizing Support and Gathering Power-** Party affiliation is enormously helpful to elected leaders. Parties aid office holders by giving them room to develop their policies and mobilizing support for them. They also gather support for tight votes and for general political and legislative matters.
2. **A Force for Stability and Moderation-** Because of a party's unyielding, practical desire to win elections, it in a sense acts to moderate public opinion. The party tames its own extreme elements by pulling them toward an ideological center in order to attract a majority of votes on Election Day.
3. **Unity, Linkage and Accountability-** Parties make governance more efficient by linking all the institutions of power to one another. The partisan affiliations of the leaders of each branch constitute a common basis for cooperation, as the president and his fellow party members in Congress usually demonstrate daily.
4. **Electioneering-** First the parties funnel eager, interested individuals into politics and government. Thousands of candidates are recruited each year by the two parties, as are many of the candidates' staff members. Elections can have meaning in a democracy only if they are competitive, and in the U.S. they probably would not be competitive without the parties.

5. **Party as a Voting and Issue Cue-** A voter’s party affiliation acts as an invaluable filter for information, a perceptual screen that affects how he or she digests political news. Parties try to cultivate a popular image and inform the public about issues through advertising and voter contact. Party affiliation provides a useful cue for voters, particularly for the least informed and least interested, who can use the party as a shortcut or substitute for interpreting issues and events they might not fully understand.

6. **Policy Formation and Promotion-** The national party platform is the most visible instrument that parties use to formulate, convey and promote public policy. Every four years, each party writes for the presidential nominating conventions a lengthy platform explaining its positions on key issues. Platforms have considerable impact. About two-thirds of the promises in the victorious party’s presidential platform have been completely or mostly implemented. The party platform is also very influential on the new president’s legislative program and on the president’s State of the Union Address.

The Role of Third Parties:



Third Partyism, or the rise of alternative minor parties based on a single cause neglected by the major parties, has had an important impact on American politics, even if its existence has been sporadic and intermittent. Third parties find their roots in sectionalism, in economic protest, in specific issues such as the Green Party’s support of the environment, in ideology and in appealing, charismatic personalities. Many minor parties have drawn strength from a combination of these sources. Third parties tend to do best when trust in the two major parties plagues the electorate. In order to win elections, the major parties tend to absorb the minor parties and add their issues to the party platform. In this way, third parties do influence policy making and thus are important to a thriving democracy.

Adapted from:

O’Connor, K & Sabato.L. *American Government: Continuity and Change*. New York: Pearson & Longman, 2006. Pp. 427-450.



Political Parties: Good for Democracy?

Task: Create a promotion campaign that will inform the public about the history of political parties, the roles that they play in American democracy and expresses your ideas as to whether or not political parties are beneficial to our democracy.

You need to include the following in your promotional campaign. A slogan and logo that expresses your belief that political parties are either beneficial or detrimental to American democracy. Then you need to create a list of talking points that briefly inform the public about the history, roles and characteristics of American political parties. You should refer to the materials from this lesson in your campaign.

Criteria	Points Possible	Peer Review	Evaluation
Slogan: Communicates the advantages/ disadvantages of the party system	1		
Talking Points: Elaborates on the history, roles and usefulness of the American party system	3		
Logo: symbolizes the roles of the political parties in modern American democracy	1		

Teacher Comments: