Political parties in the United States

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article presents the historical development and role of **political parties in**[**United States politics**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_United_States), and outlines more extensively the significant modern [political parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_party). Throughout most of its history, American politics have been dominated by a[two-party system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-party_system). However, the [United States Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution) has always been silent on the issue of political parties; at the time it was signed in 1787, there were no parties in the nation. Indeed, no nation in the world had voter-based political parties. The need to win popular support in a [republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republicanism_in_the_United_States) led to the formation of political parties in the 1790s. Americans were especially innovative in devising new campaign techniques that linked public opinion with public policy through the party.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-0)

Political scientists and historians have divided the development of America's two-party system into five eras.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-1) The modern two-party system consists of the [Democratic Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Democratic_Party_(United_States)) and the [Republican Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Republican_Party_(United_States)). In general, since the 1930s the Democratic Party positions itself [left-of-center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre-left) in American politics while the Republican Party positions itself as [right-of-center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centre-right).

Several [third parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_party_(United_States)) also operate in the United States, and from time to time achieve relatively minor representation at the national and state levels.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-2)

History

The [United States Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution) has never formally addressed the issue of political parties. The [Founding Fathers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding_Fathers_of_the_United_States) did not originally intend for American politics to be partisan. In [Federalist Papers No. 9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_No._9) and [No. 10](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_No._10), [Alexander Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton) and [James Madison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison), respectively, wrote specifically about the dangers of domestic [political factions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_faction). In addition, the first [President of the United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States), [George Washington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington), was not a member of any political party at the time of his election or throughout his tenure as president. Furthermore, he hoped that political parties would not be formed, fearing conflict and stagnation.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-3) Nevertheless, the beginnings of the American [two-party system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-party_system) emerged from his immediate circle of advisers, including Hamilton and Madison.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-4)

**First Party System**

*Main article:*[*First Party System*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Party_System)

The First Party System of The United States featured the [Federalist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_Party_(United_States)) and the [Democratic-Republican Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic-Republican_Party_(United_States)). The Federalist Party grew from Washington's [Secretary of the Treasury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Secretary_of_the_Treasury), [Alexander Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton), who favored a strong united central government, close ties to Britain, an effective banking system, and close links between the government and men of wealth. The Democratic-Republican Party was founded by [James Madison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison) and by Washington's Secretary of State, [Thomas Jefferson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson), who strongly opposed Hamilton's agenda.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-5)

The [Era of Good Feelings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Era_of_Good_Feelings) (1816–1824), marked the end of the First Party System. The elitism of the Federalists had diminished their appeal, and their refusal to support the [War of 1812](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_1812) verged on secession and was a devastating blow when the war ended well. The [Era of Good Feelings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Era_of_Good_Feelings) under President James Monroe (1816-24) marked a brief period in which partisanship was minimal.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-6) These good feelings inspired the first short-lived "era of [internal improvements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internal_improvements)" from the [18th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/18th_United_States_Congress) through the [25th Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/25th_United_States_Congress), which ended with the [panic of 1837](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1837).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-7)

**Second Party System**

In 1828, The Second Party System saw a split of the Democratic-Republican Party into the [Jacksonian Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacksonian_Democracy" \o "Jacksonian Democracy), who grew into the [modern Democratic Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States_Democratic_Party), led by [Andrew Jackson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Jackson), and the [Whig Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_Party_(United_States)), led by [Henry Clay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Clay). The Democrats supported the primacy of the Presidency over the other branches of government, and opposed the [Bank of the United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Bank_of_the_United_States) as well as modernizing programs that they felt would build up [industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry) at the expense of the [taxpayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxpayer). The Whigs, on the other hand, advocated the primacy of [Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress) over the [executive branch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)) as well as policies of modernization and economic protectionism. Central political battles of this era were the [Bank War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_War) and the [Spoils system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spoils_system) of federal patronage.

The 1850s saw the collapse of the Whig party, largely as a result of deaths in its leadership and a major intra-party split over slavery as a result of the [Compromise of 1850](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compromise_of_1850). In addition, the fading of old economic issues removed many of the unifying forces holding the party together.

**Third Party System**

The Third Party System stretched from 1854 to the mid 1890s, and was characterized by the emergence of the anti-slavery [Republican Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_United_States_Republican_Party), which adopted many of the economic policies of the Whigs, such as national banks, railroads, high tariffs, homesteads and aid to land grant colleges.

**Fourth Party System**

The Fourth Party System, 1896 to 1932, retained the same primary parties as the Third Party System, but saw major shifts in the central issues of debate. This period also corresponded to the [Progressive Era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Era), and was dominated by the Republican Party.

]**Fifth Party System**

The Fifth Party System emerged with the [New Deal Coalition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal_Coalition) beginning in 1933.

Modern U.S. political party system

The modern political party system in the United States is a [two-party system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-party_system) dominated by the [Democratic Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_(United_States)) and the [Republican Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Party_(United_States)). These two parties have won every [United States presidential election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election) since 1852 and have controlled the [United States Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress) since at least 1856. Several other [third parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_party_(United_States)) from time to time achieve relatively minor representation at the national and state levels.

**Democratic Party**

The Democratic Party is one of two [major](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_party) political parties in the United States. It is the oldest political party in the United States and among the oldest in the world.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-8)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-9)[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-10)

The Democratic Party, since the division of the Republican Party in the election of [1912](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1912), has consistently positioned itself to the [left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-wing_politics) of the Republican Party in economic as well as social matters. The economically left-leaning philosophy of [Franklin D. Roosevelt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin_D._Roosevelt), which has strongly influenced[American liberalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism_in_the_United_States), has shaped much of the party's economic agenda since [1932](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1932). Roosevelt's [New Deal coalition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal_coalition) usually controlled the national government until the 1970s.

In 2004, it was the largest political party, with 72 million voters (42.6% of 169 million registered) claiming affiliation.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-Neuhart20040122-11) The president of the United States, [Barack Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama), is the 15th Democrat to hold the office, and since the [2006 midterm elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_general_elections,_2006), the Democratic Party is the [majority party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-party_system) for the [United States Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senate).

**Republican Party**

The Republican Party is one of the two major contemporary political parties in the United States of America. It is often referred to as the Grand Old Party, GOP, and "Gallant Old Party". Founded in 1854 by [anti-slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolitionism) expansion activists and modernizers, the Republican Party rose to prominence with the election of [Abraham Lincoln](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln), the first Republican president. The party presided over the [American Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War) and [Reconstruction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstruction_era_of_the_United_States) but was harried by internal factions and scandals toward the end of the 19th century. Today, the Republican Party supports an [American conservative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism_in_the_United_States) platform, with further foundations in [economic liberalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_liberalism), [fiscal conservatism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiscal_conservatism), and [social conservatism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_conservatism).

Former President [George W. Bush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_W._Bush) is the 19th Republican to hold that office. The party's nominee for [President of the United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) in the [2008 presidential election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_2008) was Senator [John McCain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCain) of [Arizona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arizona). It is currently the second largest party with 55 million registered members, encompassing roughly one third of the electorate.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-Neuhart20040122-11) Since the [2010 midterm elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_elections,_2010), the Republicans have held a majority in the United States House of Representatives.

**Major Third Parties**

**Constitution Party**

The Constitution Party is a [conservative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative) [United States political party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_political_party). It was founded as the U.S. Taxpayers Party in 1992. The party's official name was changed to the *Constitution Party* in 1999; however, some state affiliate parties are known under different names.

According to ballot access expert [Richard Winger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Winger), the editor of [*Ballot Access News*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballot_Access_News), who periodically compiles and analyzes voter registration statistics as reported by state voter agencies, it ranks third nationally amongst all United States [political parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_party) in registered voters, with 438,222 registered members as of October 2008.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-12) This makes it currently the largest third party in the United States.

The Constitution Party advocates a platform that they believe reflects the [Founding Fathers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding_Fathers_of_the_United_States)' [original intent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Originalism) of the [U.S. Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution), principles found in the [U.S. Declaration of Independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Declaration_of_Independence), and morals taken from the [Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible).[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-13)

In 2006, [Rick Jore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rick_Jore) of [Montana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montana) became the first Constitution Party candidate elected to a state-level office,[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-14)[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-15) though the Constitution Party of Montana had disaffiliated itself from the national party a short time before the election.

The Constitution Party's 2008 presidential nominee was [Chuck Baldwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Baldwin).

**Green Party**

In the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States), the Green Party has been active as a [third party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_party_(United_States)) since the 1980s. The party first gained widespread public attention during [Ralph Nader](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Nader)'s second presidential run in [2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._presidential_election,_2000). Currently, the primary national Green Party organization in the U.S. is the **Green Party of the United States**, which has eclipsed the earlier [Greens/Green Party USA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greens/Green_Party_USA).

The Green Party in the United States has won elected office mostly at the [local](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government) level; most winners of public office in the United States who are considered Greens have won [nonpartisan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonpartisan)-ballot elections (that is, elections in which the candidates' party affiliations were not printed on the [ballot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballot).[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-16) In 2005, the Party had 305,000 registered members in states that allow party registration.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-17) During the 2006 elections the party had [ballot access](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballot_access) in 31 states.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-18)

Greens emphasize [environmentalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmentalism), non-[hierarchical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierarchy) [participatory democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_democracy), [social justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_justice), respect for [diversity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diversity_(politics)), [peace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace) and [nonviolence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonviolence).

The 2008 Green Party presidential nominee was [Cynthia McKinney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynthia_McKinney).

**Libertarian Party**

The Libertarian Party was founded on December 11, 1971.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-19) It is one of the largest continuing [third parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_party_(United_States)) in the United States, claiming more than 200,000 registered voters and more than 600 people in public office,[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-lpfaq-20) including [mayors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor), county executives, county-council members, school-board members, and other local officials. It has more people in office than all other minor parties combined.[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States#cite_note-lpfaq-20)

The [political platform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_platform) of the Libertarian Party reflects that group's particular brand of [libertarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarianism), favoring minimally regulated, [*laissez-faire*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laissez-faire) markets, strong [civil liberties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_liberties), minimally regulated [migration across borders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_immigration), and [non-interventionism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-interventionism) in foreign policy that respects [freedom of trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_trade) and travel to all foreign countries.

The 2008 Libertarian Party nominee for United States President was [Bob Barr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Barr).<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_parties_in_the_United_States>