

THE HISTORY OF ^{POLITICAL} PARTIES

PART ONE

The first political parties were in a sense created before the ratification of the United State Constitution, before George Washington even took office as the country's first president. The Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia, PA in the summer of 1787 to create a new, stronger plan of government that would replace the weak and ineffective Articles of Confederation. Once the document was created it needed to be ratified by 9 of the 13 states before it could go into effect; naturally, debate ensued over whether or not to adopt this new governing document.

The Constitution created a much stronger federal government than the Articles of Confederation had done and those in favor of it were called Federalists. Federalists believed a strong national government, one that had the power to tax, raise an army, and provide for defense was absolutely crucial to the success of the country. Those opposed to the stronger government were known as Anti-Federalists; they believed that the individual states should hold more power and control than the national government. They feared that a strong national government would evolve into the tyranny they had experienced under Great Britain; having power spread among the states would prevent this. Anti-Federalists demanded they would not support the new Constitution unless a Bill of Rights was added to guarantee certain individual liberties to each citizen. Federalists agreed to add ten amendments that would essentially limit the power of government: for example, a citizen is always guaranteed, among many other things, a fair trial by jury, the right to practice religion freely, and the right to not be subjected to illegal searches or seizures.

Political parties today discuss and debate a multitude of other issues that often change from election to election. However, one issue that has remained over time stems back to the debates that took place over the ratification of the United States Constitution: just how much power should the federal government have over the states and their people?

George Washington served two terms as the country's first president without an official "party," however his constant agreement with treasurer Alexander Hamilton and Vice President John Adams over issues facing the nation led many historians to peg Washington as a "Federalist." He so frequently sided with Hamilton that this caused his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, to leave the cabinet since he felt ignored and unappreciated. Despite this, Washington urged in his farewell address to avoid the creation of political parties and instead focus on the best decisions for the nation. The nation ignored his advice and, in 1796, Jefferson organized the Democratic-Republican party and Hamilton and Adams led the Federalist party.



"I warn you, in the most solemn manner, against the baneful effects of the spirit of party..."

- George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

POLITICAL THE HISTORY OF PARTIES

P A R T T W O

Directions: Examine the history of political parties through the graphic organizer below. This chart explains the major political parties that existed (and evolved) throughout the history of the United States of America.

FIRST PARTY SYSTEM: 1800 - 1824

FEDERALISTS

The election of 1796 marked the first election since Washington's departure and the country instantly ignored his advice by creating two political parties. The Federalists, led by Hamilton and Adams, promoted a government by the wealthy since they had the most to lose and would keep the country safe. They also wanted a strong national government since they believed humans were naturally selfish - a strong government would keep the citizens in check. They advocated use of the "elastic clause" (Article 1, Section 8) to expand the power of government.

DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICANS

After departing Washington's cabinet in 1793, Thomas Jefferson eyed running for the country's leading office in the 1796 election. He created the Democratic-Republican party to support his views of how government should operate: small, fiscally conservative, and supportive of the average American. This party promoted a strict interpretation of the Constitution; this means that they believed government can only do what is clearly listed in the Constitution. This is opposite of using the "elastic clause" the Federalists promoted to constantly seek to expand government power.

SECOND PARTY SYSTEM: 1828 - 1850

JACKSONIAN DEMOCRATS

Jefferson's Republican party splintered into three groups by 1828. Andrew Jackson's "democrats" wanted small, limited government and opposed tariffs meant to help U.S. businesses.

NATIONAL REPUBLICANS

Led by John Quincy Adams, National Republicans supported former Federalist ideals: they wanted a strong national government that would fund canals, roads, and turnpikes.

THE WHIGS

Henry Clay founded the Whig party in opposition to Andrew Jackson and the National Republicans. The Whigs promoted banking and protective tariffs to help US businesses grow. Businessmen liked them but farmers did not.

THIRD PARTY SYSTEM : 1854 - 1892

THE KNOW-NOTHING PARTY

Organized in the 1850s, the Know-Nothing Party platform focused on anti-immigration. When asked about this view on this, party member replied, "I know nothing."

THE FREE SOIL PARTY

The Free Soil Party wanted just that - to keep slavery in the east and maintain free soil in the west. Abraham Lincoln began his career as a Free-Soiler.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

In 1854, northern Whigs and Free-Soilers joined forces to create the Republican Party. Their stance was anti-slavery, pro-railroad, pro-education, and equal rights.

THE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In the election of 1860, John Breckinridge ran as a Southern Democrat which supported the protection of slavery. In 1860, he carried the deep south, which was to be expected since it was the only party that advocated slavery.

THE NORTHERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Stephen Douglas split the Democratic Party when he ran as a Northern Democrat in 1860; his main stance was popular sovereignty over slavery (let each state decide for itself). This split led to Lincoln's election as a Republican.

FOURTH PARTY SYSTEM : 1896 - 1932

THE GREENBACK PARTY

Born the 1880s, the Greenback Party was very progressive for its time. The party supported a stable paper currency to help farmers, women's suffrage (right to vote), and an 8-hour workday. All of these initiatives made the party quickly lose support.

THE POPULIST PARTY

The Populist Party supported farmers and factory workers and advocated to have government work for their interests, rather than the interest of the big banks. Eventually, the more popular Democratic Party adopted these ideas which led the party's demise.

THE PROHIBITION PARTY

While never a major contender to win the presidency in any election, the prohibition party's platform focused on one issue: the banning of alcoholic beverages. Their influence was best seen, however, with the passage of the 18th amendment in 1919.

THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY

Organized by Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, or "Bull Moose Party," was actually a party created out of protest. Roosevelt believed his successor, William Taft was too closely aligned with business interests. He split the Republican vote which led to Woodrow Wilson seizing the White House.

THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

The Republican Party began to become synonymous with "big business" during this era of American politics while the Democratic Party began to appeal to lower-income Americans as well as immigrants. While it is during this era that both parties began to take their modern form, one party clearly dominated the fourth party system: the Republican Party. Only one Democratic President held office during this era, Woodrow Wilson, and he only won because Theodore Roosevelt split the Republican vote when he created the Progressive Party (Bull Moose Party).

FIFTH PARTY SYSTEM : 1936 - TODAY

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

From 1936 to today, the Democratic Party's platform has been fairly consistent. The party has sought to promote equal rights to all citizens, strengthen the national government by providing a variety of social services to help the needy, and raise taxes on businesses and the wealthiest Americans to pay for services.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Like the Democrats, the Republican Party has also been fairly consistent in what it represents. The party has sought to help businesses, both large scale and small entrepreneurs, by providing tax relief. Opposite of Democrats, the Republican party also wants more state-control over a variety of issues in order to shrink the size of the national government.

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PART ONE

1.) Describe the atmosphere surrounding the creation of the first political parties in the United States (the Federalists and Anti-Federalists)?

2.) What can you infer about how the origins of political parties divided Washington's cabinet (his group of advisors)?

3.) What were the differing views of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists on the new Constitution? How did they reach a compromise?

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PART TWO

1.) Compare the original Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties with the modern Democratic and Republican parties. Which parties seem to be the most similar? Why?

2.) To win an election a candidate must receive a majority (51%) of electoral votes. There are some elections where a vote is "split" making it very difficult for a side to win the necessary number of votes. Find an election where this happens, explain the two parties and their views, and why this split the vote.

3.) Now that you have examined political parties through history, it is time to give some awards! Which party do you feel was the . . .

Most SUPPORTIVE party? _____

Most REPRESSIVE party? _____

Most ANTI-IMMIGRANT party? _____

Most PRO-WORKER party? _____

Most ANTI-BUSINESS party? _____