American Political Parties

What are major / third political parties?
What is the “two-party system”?
How has it effected American politics / elections?
What Is a Political Party?

• A *political party* is a group of citizens who agree on major issues facing the nation
  – Economic, social, foreign policy, etc.

• This group works together to win elections and create public policies that reflect their views of society
Political Parties in the US

- The United States has a “two-party system”.
  - Two (2) major parties
  - Both parties work to win over voters and control of local, state, and national offices

- Why only two parties?
  - Our History
  - Tradition
  - Our Election System
What is the difference between a “liberal” and a “conservative”?

• “Liberal” -
  - Equal rights of all individuals
  - Government protection / assistance
  - Gradual change

• “Conservative” -
  - Personal empowerment
  - Limited government
  - Personal liberty
  - Keep the status quo (unless…)

• Issues:
  - Equal rights for all
  - Social services
  - Government assistance

• Issues:
  - Less taxation / assistance
  - More traditional values
  - More economic independence
US Political Spectrum

“Left”

“Right”
Radicals
“move forward quickly”

Reactionaries
“go back” to the old days
How do these terms effect our American political parties?

• Democrats:  
  – (“liberal” - “the left”)
  
• Beliefs:  
  – “Big” Government
  – Strict Regulations
  – More social programs
  – Pro-Choice
  – Smaller military

• Republicans:  
  – (“conservative” - “the right”)
  
• Beliefs:  
  – “Small” government
  – Less Regulations
  – Less taxes / spending
  – Pro-Life
  – Strong military
Parties Move Towards The Center

• A platform is a statement that puts forth the party's positions on issues.
  – Each individual issue is called a **plank**.

• Both parties want votes. As a result, parties moving away from extreme positions.
  – “Moderate” (“The Middle”)
Not to Be Confused with...
Hamilton vs. Jefferson

• Political parties first emerged when followers of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson disagreed over major issues on the Constitution and government.

• Jefferson’s group: Democratic-Republicans.
  – Feared a powerful central government.
  – Wanted the states to hold more power.

• Hamilton’s group: Federalists
  – Championed a strong national government
Two Parties...One Administration?
Jacksonian Democracy Reigns

In 1828, the Democratic Party formed under the guidance of President Andrew Jackson.
– Stood for the common citizen
– Looked out for southern and western interests (slavery)

• Those who did not support Jackson formed their own party called Whigs

• The Whigs and Democrats made up the two key parties in American politics for the next two (2) decades (20 years).
Whigs = A Failed Party?
The Two Major Parties Emerge

• In 1854 the Republican Party formed
  – Opposed the spread of slavery in US territories
  – Gained prominent w/ the election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860

• The Whigs faded from American politics leaving the Democrats and Republicans in a two-party system that has dominated American politics ever since.
How is a political party organized at the national level?

- Political parties at the national level are organized around four (4) levels:
  - **Party Convention**
    - Develops platforms
  - **National Committee**
    - Handles party affairs
  - **National Chairperson**
    - Directs party affairs
  - **Campaign Committees**
    - Run elections
How are political parties organized at the state / local level?

• **State:**
  – Similar to the national level, but for the state

• **Local:**
  – Varies widely
  – Often focused on city districts / individual polling place
What are “third parties”?

• Any party other than the two major parties is known as a “third party.”

• No third party has ever gained control of the White House.
  – Success in Congress
  – Offices in lower levels of government.

• When these smaller groups challenge the two major parties, they can change the outcome of elections

Ralph Nader, Green Party Candidate, 2000
Successful Third Party Politicians
Successful Third Party Politicians
Successful Third Party Politicians

[Images of Ralph Nader and associated campaign materials]
Is the Tea Party Next?
What are “third parties”?

• **Ideological Parties:**
  – Third Parties who base their political platform on a particular set of social or moral beliefs

• **Examples:**
  – Libertarian Party
  – Socialist Party
  – Communist Party
What are “third parties”?

- **Single-Issue Parties:**
  - Third parties who base their political platform on a single-primary issue

- **Examples:**
  - Free-Soil Party
  - “Know-Nothing” Party
  - Right to Life Party
What are “third parties”?

- **Economic Protest Parties:**
  - Third parties who base their political platform on economic problems

- **Examples:**
  - Greenback Party
  - Popularist Party
  - The Tea Party
What are “third parties”?

- **Splinter Parties:**
  - Third parties who have broken away from the major parties to pursue their own agenda

- **Examples:**
  - “Bull Moose” Party
  - Progressive Party
  - American Party
How do voters generally receive third parties?

- Generally, third parties play the role of “spoiler” in an election
- Sometimes their issues get absorbed into the two-major parties