History of American Political Parties

1848 Whig Party candidates
Zachary Taylor & Millard Fillmore

History of American Parties

• Six “party systems” or historical eras
• Changes in the nature of the two parties
  – Which voters support which party
  – What issues each party adopts
• This change called a realignment

First Party System:
1790-1824

Federalist Party | Democratic-Republican Party

Alexander Hamilton | Thomas Jefferson | James Madison
Strong national government | Strong state governments

First Party System:
1790-1824

• No parties in Constitution
• Develop at elite level
• Issues
  – National bank
  – Relations with France and England
First Party System: 1790-1824

• Develop inside Congress
  – Loose coalition of supporters or opponents to Hamilton versus Jefferson/Madison
    • facilitates passage of legislation
  – Coordination needed to win presidency

Constituencies

• Constituency
  – Limited electorate
  – Weakly organized
• Federalists: New England, English ancestry, commercial interests
• Democratic-Republican: South and Mid-Atlantic, Irish/Scot/German ancestry, farmers and artisans, prosperity through western expansion

First Party System: 1790-1824

• Electoral outcomes
  – 1796 John Adams (Federalist)
    • Thomas Jefferson, Vice President
  – 1800 tied vote and 12th Amendment
  – Democratic-Republican won next three
    • Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams

All election maps from nationalatlas.gov

Source: http://nationalatlas.gov/elections/elect01.gif
Federalists disappear by 1820
- Policy disputes within party
- Failure to organize public support
- Burr-Hamilton duel, 1804
- Opposition to War of 1812
- Republican-Democrats co-opt issues

Second Party System: 1828-1852
- Old Democratic-Republican party split into factions in 1824
  - Four factions nominate different president
  - No majority in Electoral College, House selects J.Q. Adams
- Andrew Jackson comes to dominate one faction
- Another faction becomes the Whig party

Second Party System: 1828-1852
- First real party organizations
- First mass-based parties
- Professional politicians

Democratic Party
- Jackson wins presidency 1828
- Issues – limited federal government, hard money policy
- Other presidents (Van Buren, Polk, Pierce, Buchanan)
- Congressional and organizational leaders (Calhoun, Van Buren)
Whig Party

- Webster
- Clay
- Issues - economic development, reform
- Presidents: Harrison, Tyler, Taylor, Fillmore
  - mostly nonpolitical military heroes
- Congressional leaders
  - Daniel Webster - great orator
  - Henry Clay - compromise leader

Constituencies

- Democratic Party
- Small farmer, frontier
- Foreign-born
- Catholic

- Whig Party
- Middle/Upper class
- Native-born or British
- Evangelical Protestant

Changes in Parties in 2nd Party System

- Recognition of legitimacy of parties
- Patronage
- Mass-based parties
- Party convention to nominate president

End of Second Party System

- Failure of compromises over slavery
  - Divides North and South and splits both major parties
- Number of third parties
  - Free Soil (anti-slavery)
  - American or Know-Nothing (anti-immigrant)
- Whig party disappears, Democrats transformed
Third Party System: 1856-1894

- Post Civil War party system
- Era of business expansion more than political leaders
- Current Republican versus Democrats, but different issues and constituencies

Republican Party

Lincoln
Grant

- Combination of Whigs, northern Democrats, Free Soil, Know Nothing
- Control presidency with Civil War heroes
- Issues: industrial growth with high tariff laws, restrictions on labor, tight money policy, Homestead Act, land grants to railroads

Republican Presidents: Third Party System

- Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881)
- James A. Garfield (1881)
- Chester A. Arthur (1881-1885)
- Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)

Democratic Party

- Party of the South
- Only won presidency once (Cleveland)
- More competitive in Congress
- Toward turn of century add urban immigrants, who were locked out of the Republican party

Grover Cleveland
Golden Age of American parties

- Strong party organization
- Strong leaders in Congress and state legislatures
- Loyal party supporters in electorate
- Rise of party machines in urban areas

Fourth party system: 1896-1930

- Failure to realign along class lines
- Economic strains in 1890s, urban & rural
- Populist movement
  - Use government to aid “little guy”
  - Silver standard
  - For income tax
  - 8 hour day for labor

William Jennings Bryan

“You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Populist leader and 1896 Democratic presidential nominee

Republican Party

- Republican William McKinley won in 1896
- Reemerges as a much stronger party
- Control presidency 1896-1932, except for Wilson elected due to split in Republican party

President McKinley
Changing Competition

- One party control in many states
- Regional split in party constituencies
  - Conservative southern Democratic party
  - Republican party of business in the North
- Decline in voter turnout

Progressive Movement

- Middle class reform movement
- Clean up abuses of power in politics and business
- Registration laws
- Primaries
- Civil service rather than patronage
- Nonpartisan local elections & city managers

Fifth Party System: 1932 - 1960

- Great Depression
- Hoover blamed
- 1932 Democratic
  Franklin Delano
  Roosevelt won by “default”

New Deal Realignment

- Large Democratic majority allow dramatic new policies to be passed
- Benefits cement loyalties of new voters
  - recent immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe, Catholic or Jews, northern blacks, union members, poor
- Retained conservative southern Democrats
Fifth Party System: 1932 - 1960

- Democratic majority party but split between liberal North and conservative South factions
- Republicans minority
  - Only President Dwight Eisenhower in 1950s
  - Control Congress only twice

Changes in party structures

- Increasing decline in party machines
- Rise of politician more independent from party
- Media & technology
- Mixed presidential nomination system
- Multiple leadership positions in Congress

Sixth Party System: 1964 -

- Evenly matched parties
- Rise of independent voters & split-ticket voting
- Frequent divided government
- Frequent switch of presidential party
- Candidate-centered campaigns
- Presidential nominations through primaries

Changing Constituencies

- Exit of southern Democrats to southern Republican party
- Strengthening loyalties of African Americans to Democratic party
- Emergence of gender gap
Realignments

• Long-term (30 years) change in nature of parties
• Change in constituencies
• Change in issues
• Change in majority status
• Later years decay in alignment
  – new issues
  – conflicts between constituent groups