



# THE AMERICAN TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

## Class Notes | 2016



### I. Why do we have a two-party system?

- A. The British example > Great Britain has traditionally had two stable political parties; today it's the Labor Party and the Conservative Party
- B. Electoral College > "winner-takes-all" in Electoral College favors the two party system; very difficult for a third party candidate to win
- C. Federal and State Laws > the two major parties make election laws
- D. *Federalist v. Anti-federalist* > conflict over ratification of Constitution and the role of government created the basis of the first two American political parties (the Federalist and Democratic-Republicans)

### II. The Two-Party System Emerges: The Election of 1800

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. The Federalist Party (founders Alexander Hamilton and John Adams)<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Rule by the wealthy/elite class</li><li>2. Strong federal government</li><li>3. Emphasis on manufacturing</li><li>4. Loose interpretation of the Constitution</li><li>5. British alliance in foreign policy</li></ol></li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>B. Democratic-Republican Party (Thomas Jefferson and James Madison)<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Rule by the people</li><li>2. Strong state governments</li><li>3. Emphasis on agriculture</li><li>4. Strict interpretation of the Constitution</li><li>5. French alliance in foreign policy</li></ol></li></ol> |
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### III. The Democratic Party (Jackson, FDR, JFK, LBJ, Clinton, Obama)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. FDR and the New Deal Coalition<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Big city machines (ex: Chicago Daly Machine)</li><li>2. Labor unions (ex: AFL-CIO)</li><li>3. Liberal farmers</li><li>4. White South</li></ol></li><li>B. Democratic Party Coalition Today<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics</li><li>2. Jews</li><li>3. Social liberals: pro-choice, pro-gay rights, anti-death penalty</li><li>4. Pro-civil rights organizations</li></ol></li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Racial and religious minorities (African Americans, Jews, Catholics)</li><li>6. Intellectuals</li><li>5. Labor unions</li><li>6. Women</li><li>7. College educated professionals</li><li>8. Young people</li></ol> |
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### IV. The Republican Party a.k.a. GOP (Lincoln, TR, Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, George W. Bush)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Traditional GOP Coalition<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Business owners &amp; capitalists</li><li>2. White men</li><li>3. Northeasterners</li></ol></li><li>B. Reagan and the Conservative Revolution<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A social and economic conservative</li><li>2. Tough on Soviet Union</li></ol></li><li>C. The GOP Coalition Today<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Business community</li><li>2. White males</li><li>3. White southerners</li></ol></li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. Pro-defense (anti-communists)</li><li>5. Fiscal conservatives (small federal gov't, low taxes)</li><li>6. Social moderates</li><li>3. Pro-life, lower taxes, less gov't, limit</li><li>4. Social conservatives (pro-life, oppose same-sex marriage)</li><li>5. Evangelical Christians</li><li>6. Pro-military, pro-gun rights, limit immigration</li></ol> |
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### V. The Trend Towards Party Dealignment

- A. Decrease in the self-identification of the major parties
- B. Of those who label themselves as "independent," only 1/3 are pure independents, 1/3 lean Democrat, and 1/3 lean Republican
- C. Critical Realignments: Southern Democrats are now Republicans, Gender Gap (women vote Democratic, men vote GOP)

### VI. Party Polarization

- A. Two parties more ideologically pure (Republicans are more conservative, Democrats more liberal)
- B. Fewer moderates in either party (especially GOP)
- C. Electorate too more polarized