

THIRD PARTIES: “THEY AIN’T GOT A CHANCE”
AP Gov | Class Notes

AP Exam Study

I. Third Parties

- A. Any political party organized in at least some states, other than the two current leading parties
- B. Third Parties are “Shooting Stars”

II. History of Third-Partyism

- A. No minor 3rd party as ever come close to winning the presidency
- B. Only 8 have one as a single elected vote
- C. Only 5 3rd party candidates including TR in 1912 and Ross Perot in 1992 have won more than 10% of popular vote

III. Purpose and Importance of Third Parties

- A. “The electoral progress of third parties is in direct proportion to the failure of the two major parties to incorporate new ideas.”
- B. Importance of Third Parties in American Politics:
 - 1. Though very rare, a Third Party may replace one of the major parties (Ex: Republican Party replaces the Whig Party in 1856)
 - 2. Major parties often take on Third Party’s ideas:
 - Republican Party in 1970s took on George Wallace’s States’ rights plank
 - Both Democratic and Republican Parties in 1992 took on Perot’s reform government ideas, reduce the deficit
 - 3. Third parties promote democracy and engage voters who have been frustrated with the major parties
- C. Third Parties often “burn out” once the major parties incorporate their ideas

IV. Types of Third Parties

- A. *Sectional Parties* - Example: Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrat Party, 1948 ran on a segregationist platform
- B. *Economic Protest Parties* - Example: James Weaver and the Populist Party in 1892 won over 1 million popular votes and 22 electoral votes
- C. *Ideology Parties* Socialist, Communists, Libertarian
- D. *Charismatic Personality Parties*: Example: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive “Bull Moose” Party in 1912
- E. *Specific Issues Parties*: Prohibition Party in 1992
- F. *Combination Parties*: George Wallace in 1968 (dynamic leader with firm geographic base with segregationist platform; Wallace won 13% popular vote and 46 electoral votes (won 5 states)

IV. Barriers to Third Parties

- A. *Electoral College* - “single-member, plurality” winner-take-all > 3rd Parties rarely win a plurality in any one state
- B. *Ballot Signature Requirement* - most states have laws that require 3rd parties to secure a place on the ballot by gathering large numbers of signatures (example 50,000 required); Democratic and Republican parties granted automatic access
- C. *Republicans and Democrats in State Legislatures* do not want to share the political pie with third parties – votes for a 3rd party candidate are lost votes for Rep and Dem
- D. *Public Funding in Presidential Elections* (a.k.a. federal matching funds)-- public (i.e. government) funding of presidential campaigns more generous to the two major parties >>> 3rd parties only get public funding if they got more than 5% of public vote in the previous election >>>> federal matching funds
- E. *News media* gives relatively little coverage to minor parties
- F. *3rd Parties Excluded from Televised Presidential Debates* – unless 3rd Party candidates are polling 10-15% of the popular vote at the time of the debate (Perot in 1992 last 3rd party candidate to participate in televised debates
- G. *Federal Election Committee* (FEC) controlled by Democrats and Republicans i.e. make rules that favor major parties and discriminate against 3rd parties
- H. *Failure 3rd Parties* to develop a national base of support