

Political Parties Lecture Notes

What is a Political Party?

- A group of people seeking to control government through elections
- United by common principles and goals
- Aims to implement specific public policies and programs
- Can be either election-oriented or policy-oriented
- Fundamental to American democratic process

Core Functions of Political Parties

- Nomination: Selecting and supporting candidates
- Public Engagement: Informing and stimulating voter participation
- Quality Control: Providing "seal of approval" for candidates
- Government Operations: Facilitating cooperation between branches
- Oversight: Monitoring public business and opposing party's actions

Evolution of the Two-Party System (1787-1828)

- 1787: Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists debate Constitution
- 1796: Federalists and Democratic-Republicans emerge
- 1800: Jefferson's victory marks Federalist decline
- 1828: Democratic-Republican Party splits into:
 - Democrats (led by Andrew Jackson)
 - National Republicans ("Whigs")

Rise of Modern Two-Party System (1850-1932)

- 1850s: Republican Party forms from anti-slavery movement
- 1860: Abraham Lincoln becomes first Republican president
- 1860-1932: Republican dominance era
- Democrats hold presidency only four times
- Period marked by Civil War and Industrial Revolution

Notable Third-Party Movements

- 1912: Progressive (Bull Moose) Party - Theodore Roosevelt
- 1924: Second Progressive Party - Liberal coalition
- 1968: American Independent Party - George Wallace
- 1992: Ross Perot's Independent campaign
- 2000: Green Party - Ralph Nader

Types of Third Parties

- Single-issue parties
 - Focus on specific social/economic issues
 - Usually short-lived
- Ideological parties
 - Seek broad societal change
 - Often hold extreme views
- Splinter parties
 - Break away from major parties
 - Usually form around strong leaders

Impact of Third Parties

- Serve as critics and innovators
- Introduce new ideas and policies
- Can influence election outcomes
- Force major parties to address ignored issues
- Historically achieved between 1-19% of popular vote

Case Study: Green Party 2000

Presidential candidate: Ralph Nader

- Key platform issues:
 - Environmental protection
 - Universal healthcare
 - Economic reform
 - Foreign policy changes

Won 3% of popular vote

Influenced election outcome between Bush and Gore

Modern Two-Party System Today

Democrats and Republicans dominate Third parties continue to emerge

- Key factors in maintaining system:
 - Electoral College structure
 - Campaign finance rules
 - Voter registration laws
 - Media coverage

Ongoing debate about system's effectiveness