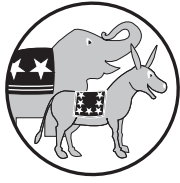
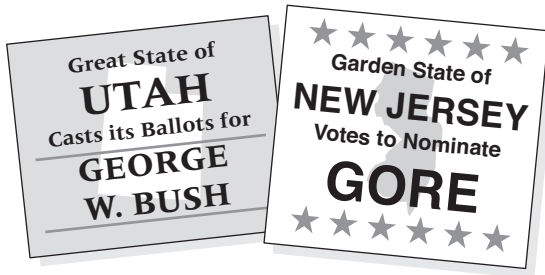


Political Parties: Overview and Function



A **political party** is a group of people who seek to control government by winning elections and holding public office. Usually the group joins together on the basis of common principles. A party seeks to implement its own public policies and programs. Some political parties simply focus on gaining power—they are election-oriented, not policy-oriented.

Political parties serve five major functions in our society.



Nominating

Parties name the candidates who run for political office. Nominees are recruited and presented to voters. Parties ensure that their candidates have a solid base of voter and financial support.

Informer-Stimulator

Parties keep the public informed and stimulate them to participate in public affairs. They accomplish this through campaigning and taking stands on public issues. They use pamphlets, buttons, and stickers as well as television, radio, newspapers, and the internet.



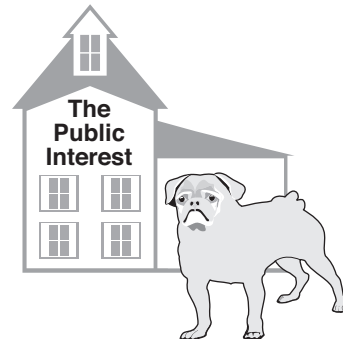
Seal of Approval

The party plants a “seal of approval” on its candidates. This creates loyalty in the candidate and helps to ensure that office-holders do a good job so that the party can stay in power. If the party falls out of favor or an office-holder embarrasses the party, both candidate and party will suffer in upcoming elections.



Government Function

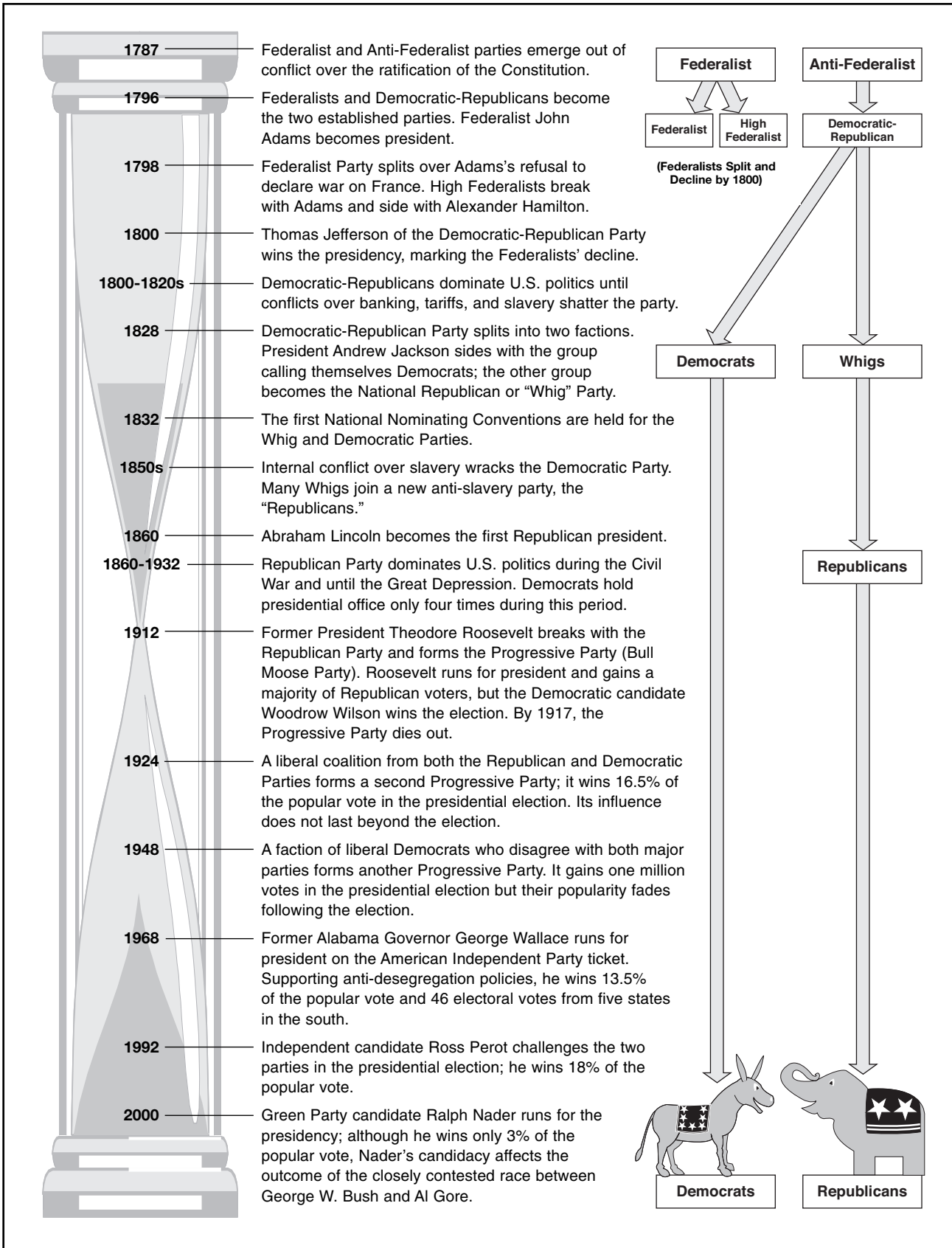
State legislatures and the U.S. Congress conduct much of their business on a partisan basis. Under the system of separation of powers, the party is the agent through which the different branches of government cooperate with one another, especially the executive and legislative branches.



Watchdog

The parties monitor public business. In particular, the party out of power monitors the policies of the party in power.

Development and Highlights of the Two-Party System



Independent and Third Parties

What Are Third Parties?

A “third,” or independent, party is any party other than the Republican or Democratic parties. In an election, more than one party may run against the two major parties, yet they are all considered third parties.

Most Americans do not support third parties, yet they have influenced American politics. Third parties play key roles as critics and innovators. They are much more willing to confront divisive issues than candidates of the major parties. Also, a strong third party candidate can take votes away from the major party candidates, changing the outcome of an election.



Votes for Leading Third Party Presidential Candidates, 1960-2000

(percent of votes)

Year	Candidate	Party	% of Votes
1960	Eric Hass	Socialist Labor	less than 1%
1964	Eric Hass	Socialist Labor	less than 1%
1968	George Wallace	American Independent	14%
1972	John Schmitz	American	1%
1976	Eugene McCarthy	Independent	1%
1980	John Anderson	Independent	7%
1984	David Bergland	Libertarian	less than 1%
1988	Ron Paul	Libertarian	less than 1%
1992	Ross Perot	Independent	19%
1996	Ross Perot	Reform	9%
2000	Ralph Nader	Green	3%

Three Types of Third Parties

TYPE & NATURE OF PARTY

Single-issue party

Focuses on one major social, economic, or moral issue.

Ideological party

Focuses on effecting overall change in society, rather than on a particular issue. The views of these parties tend to be extreme.

Splinter party

Splits away from a major party because of a disagreement. Most splinter parties have formed around a strong leader, usually one who failed to win the party's nomination.

DURATION

Brief. Tends to fade away quickly when the issue is no longer important or is adopted by one of the major parties.

Long-term.

Lasts as long as candidate has support or until party's goals are re-absorbed by a major party.

EXAMPLES

The Citizens Party was organized in 1979 around opposition to nuclear power and nuclear-arms development. In 1980, Barry Commoner was the party's presidential candidate. He won only 0.3% of the vote.

The Socialist Party was organized in 1898 by Eugene V. Debs and other labor activists. In its best year, 1912, the Socialist Party won 6% of the presidential vote. It still exists today.

Theodore Roosevelt's "Bull Moose" Progressive Party splits from the Republican Party in 1912.

Third Party Case Study: 2000 Presidential Election

The Green Party was established in 1996 to promote such causes as environmental justice and grassroots democracy. In the 2000 presidential election, Ralph Nader, the Green Party presidential candidate, received 3 percent of the popular vote, taking critical votes away from the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, and, according to some analysts, costing the Democrats the election.

Ralph Nader on the Issues



On Foreign Policy

Nader believed that the pursuit of human rights should dictate U.S. foreign policy. His platform focused on aid to Third World countries and a cessation of arms to belligerent nations.

Foreign aid must be addressed in the context of retiring this [Third World countries'] debt and not forcing structural adjustments via the IMF and World Bank on the economies of the underdeveloped world.

I support the end of the economic blockade of Cuba. Unjust economic coercion by one state against another constitutes a violation of human rights.



On Health Care

Using Canada's health care system as a model, Nader suggested that the nation should create a universal nonprofit health care plan.

I think we are in a real transitory period, which gives us a real opportunity to recast our health care system in a nonprofit mode and implement universal health care.

Price restraints should be placed on all drugs especially [those] developed with taxpayer money, and multiple licenses should be issued for those drugs in order to stimulate competition and bring prices down.



On the Environment

An environmentalist, Nader proposed more federal funding for the National Park system as well as cutbacks on commercial logging to protect the nation's forests.

I would veto any legislation that makes it impossible to consider increasing fuel efficiency. . . . We need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent to 70 percent immediately just to keep global warming from getting any worse.

I advocate the immediate cessation of commercial logging on U.S. public lands and the protection from road-building of all 60 million acres of large forest tracts remaining in the National Forest system.



On the Economy

An advocate of small government, Nader wanted to reduce the federal budget and spend any surplus funds on the nation's infrastructure and public works.

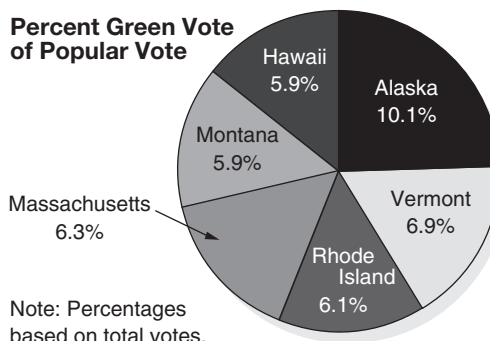
We've got priorities. Abolishing child poverty should be one. Rebuilding and repairing America, the public works, the drinking water systems.

Citizens must have full legal standing to challenge in the courts the waste, fraud, and abuse of government spending.

States with the highest voter percentage for Green Party, 2000

	Democratic Popular Vote	Republican Popular Vote	Green Popular Vote
Alaska	79,004	167,398	28,747
Vermont	149,022	119,775	20,374
Massachusetts	1,616,487	878,502	173,564
Rhode Island	249,508	130,555	25,052
Montana	137,126	240,178	24,437
Hawaii	205,286	137,845	21,623

Percent Green Vote of Popular Vote



Note: Percentages based on total votes.

Campaign Finance

Parties and their candidates receive money from private contributors as well as the public treasury. Campaign donations are a form of political participation. A contributor donates money in hope of electing officials who support his/her interests.

Campaign Finance Regulation

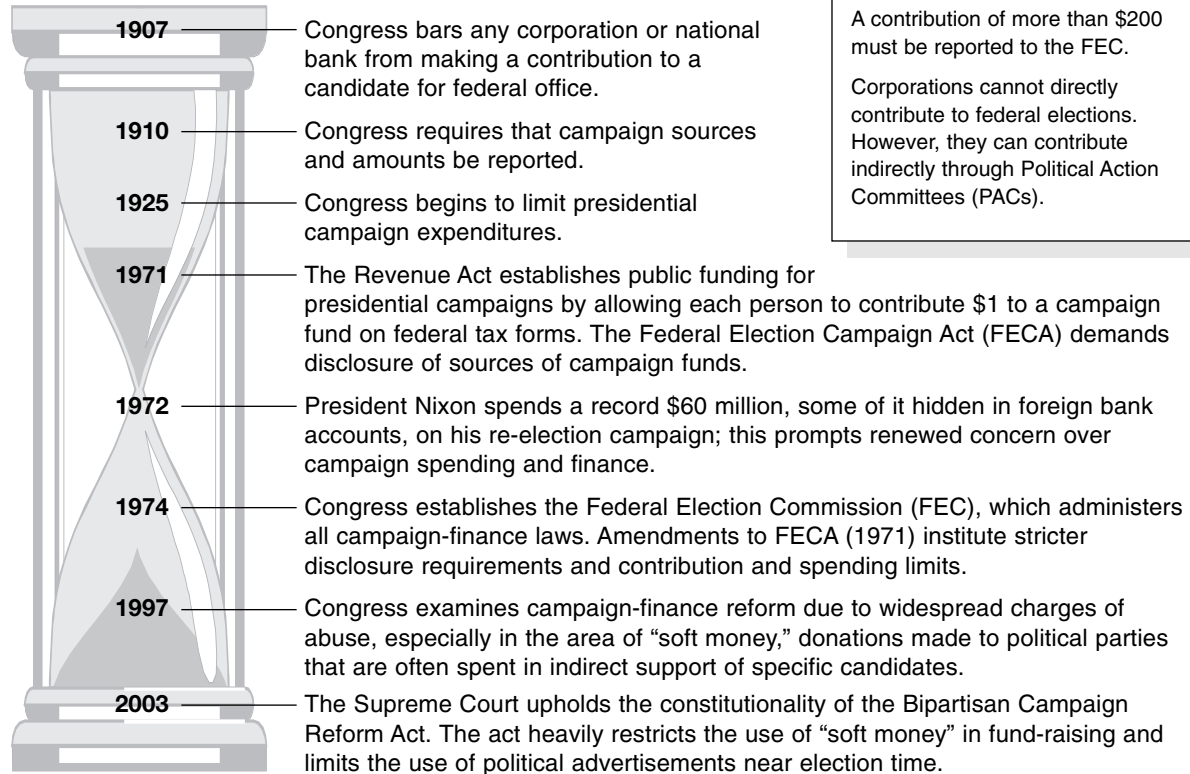
Cash gifts of more than \$100 are prohibited.

A person can give up to \$1,000 to any federal candidate's primary and general election campaign.

A contribution of more than \$200 must be reported to the FEC.

Corporations cannot directly contribute to federal elections. However, they can contribute indirectly through Political Action Committees (PACs).

Timeline: Campaign-Finance Laws



Facts on PACs

Political Action Committees are the political arms of special interest groups.

PACs collect money and provide financial support for candidates.

A PAC must raise funds from at least 50 contributors.

A PAC must give to at least 5 candidates on the federal level.

A PAC must give no more than \$5,000 to a candidate per election.

PAC Contributions to Congressional Elections, 1986–2000

(in millions of dollars)

