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# The History of Political Parties in the United States

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Throughout the history of the United States, there have been two main political parties. Starting with the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, the parties have developed over the years to the current system - Democrats and Republicans. Although the freedom to create new political parties exists, no other party has been able to gain the support they need to develop. These minor parties usually focus on specific issues and lack the following to win a national election. The majority of the voters believe their vote will count only when it is used to select a candidate from one of the two major parties.



Many of the Founding Fathers had a negative view of political parties. Despite their objections, many of these men found themselves affiliated with a political party during their careers in government. As parties came into being, one would gain and hold prominence for many years. In our history, five major party eras have emerged.

From 1796 to 1828 the first political parties were formed. During the time when our country was in its formative years, two opposing factions arose. Each was concerned with how the new government was to be organized. The Federalists believed in a strong central government and supported the ratification of the Constitution. Additionally, they supported industrialization, a national bank, and government aid to build roads and canals. The Anti-Federalists - who were eventually called the Democratic - Republican Party, held the opposite views. The Anti-Federalists strongly supported the rights of the states. They were opposed to a national bank and favored farming over manufacturing. They were firmly against the government helping to further industrialization by building roads and canals. The Federalists won their cause for the Constitution. However, efforts by the Democratic-Republican Party to influence people to the Anti-Federalist cause eventually weakened the Federalists. By 1824, the party was virtually non-existent.

Between the years of 1828 and 1860, the Democratic-Republican Party began to gain tremendous power. Shortly after Andrew Jackson was elected president in 1828, the party shortened its name to The Democratic Party. Their focus became the ordinary citizen. Their policies included supporting small businesses, farmers, pioneers, and slave owners. They worked to strengthen voting rights. In addition, they were opposed to government assistance to larger businesses and government tariffs on foreign products. During this time, they established the current convention system. This took the power of choosing the party's candidate from the party leaders and gave it to party representatives from the states. In opposition to the Democrats, the Whig Party arose. The Whigs opposed slavery and supported tariffs and federal involvement in building roads and canals, which would help larger businesses to thrive. As this period drew to its end, slavery became a dividing issue in the Whig Party. By 1852, the party had crumbled. However, a new party was on the horizon. In opposition to slavery, the Republican Party was formed.

From 1860 to 1932, the Republican Party was the dominant force in our country. Beginning with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, a Republican Era began. The issue of slavery had divided the Whig Party, and now divided the country. For four years, the Civil War was fought. During the period of reconstruction, the issues that would guide the Republicans and Democrats took shape. Freed slaves and antislavery Democrats supported the Republican Party. They took on the concerns of businesses by working to build roads and canals. The Democrats' support came from southerners and laborers in the north - many of whom had emigrated from other countries. Toward the end of this era, both the Democratic and Republican parties had gained tremendous power. Elected officials became political pawns in the hands of party leaders who actually controlled government policies. Corruption ensued with practices such as bribery and stuffing ballot boxes.

The time between 1932 and 1968 saw a rise of the Democratic Party. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected as The New Deal President, it ended Republican control. Roosevelt went on to serve an unprecedented four terms during a time of great turmoil in our country - The Great Depression. His policies brought a rise in government responsibility toward the individual. In a time when many people were out of work and had no means of supporting themselves or their families, the government came to their aid. These circumstances helped to change the way both Republicans and Democrats viewed government involvement in people's lives. The Democrats favored government programs to assist people with their everyday lives. The Republicans felt that government involvement should be limited.

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Today, we live in an era of divided government. Republicans and Democrats remain fixed on the views they developed during the Great Depression. Since 1968, control of the government has shifted back and forth between the two parties without one or the other gaining extended control. The trends of this era seem likely to continue for many years.

### The History of Political Parties in the United States

## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What were the first two political parties in the United States?
  - A. Democratic and Republican
  - B. Democratic-Republican and Whig
  - C. Federalist and Whig
  - D. Federalist and Anti-Federalist
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Why don't minor parties gain the influence of the two major parties?
  - A. They don't have enough members to get organized.
  - B. They usually concentrate on specific issues.
  - C. They usually concentrate on a broad set of issues.
  - D. They don't have enough money.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Many of the Founding Fathers believed political parties were important to the future of the government in America.
  - A. true
  - B. false
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What did the Federalists believe about the government?
  - A. It should help the individual.
  - B. It should be limited.
  - C. It should give more rights to the states.
  - D. It should be strong.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which party changed its name to The Democratic Party in 1828?
  - A. the Federalists
  - B. the Democratic-Republican
  - C. the Anti-Federalists
  - D. the Whig Party
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What issue divided the Whig Party and led to its downfall?
  - A. slavery
  - B. the development of a national banking system
  - C. the government's involvement in building roads and canals
  - D. the Civil War
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. When did the Republican and Democratic Parties develop their current views of how the government should be involved in the lives of individuals.
  - A. when the Constitution was written
  - B. during the Civil War
  - C. during the Great Depression
  - D. during the reconstruction period
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Today, we live in an era of divided government.
  - A. false
  - B. true

**Write a paragraph using the Thesis, Detail, Detail, Detail, Closing format describing the first political parties and what they believed.**

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