

Two-Party system: A case study of United States of America

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ABSTRACT

The two-party system is firmly rooted in American politics and has been since the first organized political movements emerged in the late 1700s. The two-party system in the United States is now dominated by the Republicans and the Democrats. But through history the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, then the Democrats and the Whigs, have represented opposing political ideologies and campaigned against each other for seats at the local, state and federal levels. For the last 163 years, the president of the United States has been either a Democrat or a Republican. No third-party candidate has come within shouting distance of the presidency. Some historians have suggested that two-party systems promote centrism and encourage political parties to find common positions which appeal to wide swaths of the electorate. A political party is an organized body of like-minded people who work to elect candidates for public office who represent their values on matters of policy. In the U.S., home to a strong two-party system, the major political parties are the Republicans and the Democrats.

Keywords: Two-party, system, democrats, republicans, America.

INTRODUCTION

Two-party system is a condition or system in which two major parties dominate a political unit. It can also be described as a political system consisting chiefly of two major parties, more or less equal in strength. The two party system is firmly rooted in American politics and has been since the first organized political movements emerged in the late 1700s. The two-party system in the United States is now dominated by the Republicans and the Democrats. But through history the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, then the Democrats and the Whigs, have represented opposing political ideologies and campaigned against each other for seats at the local, state and federal levels. Two-party system, political system in which the electorate gives its votes largely to only two major parties and in which one or the other party can win a majority in the legislature. The United States is the classic example of a nation with a two-party system. The contrasts

between two-party and multiparty systems are often exaggerated. Within each major party in the United States, the Republicans and the Democrats, many factions are struggling for power. The presence of divergent interests under a single party canopy masks a process of struggle and compromise that under a multiparty system is out in the open

The modern political party system in the U.S. is a two-party system dominated by the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. These two parties have won every United States presidential election since 1852 and have controlled the United States Congress to some extent since at least 1856

A two-party system is a party system where two major political parties [1] dominate the political landscape. At any point in time, one of the two parties typically holds a majority in the legislature and is usually referred to as the majority or governing party while the other is the minority or opposition party.

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Around the world, the term has different senses. For example, in the United States, the sense of two-party system describes an arrangement in which all or nearly all elected officials belong to one of the only two major parties, and third parties rarely win any seats in the legislature. In such arrangements, two-party systems are thought to result from various factors like winner-takes-all election rules.[2] [3] [4] In such systems, while chances for third-party candidates winning election to major national office are remote, it is possible for groups within the larger parties, or in opposition to one or both of them, to exert influence on the two major parties.[5] [6] In contrast, in the United Kingdom and Australia and in other parliamentary systems and elsewhere, the term two-party system is sometimes used to indicate an arrangement in which two major parties dominate elections but in which there are viable third parties which do win seats in the legislature, and in which the two major parties exert proportionately greater influence than their percentage of votes would suggest. Explanations for why a political system with free elections may evolve into a two-party system have been debated. A leading theory, referred to as Duverger's law, states that two parties are a natural result of a winner-take-all voting system. Although the Founding Fathers of the United States did not originally intend for American politics to be partisan, [7] early political controversies in the 1790s saw the emergence of a two-party political system, the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party, centred on the differing views on federal government powers of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. [8] [9] However, a consensus reached on these issues ended party politics in 1816 for a decade, a period commonly known as the Era of Good Feelings.[10] Partisan politics revived in 1829 with the split of the Democratic-Republican Party into the Jacksonian Democrats led by Andrew Jackson, and the Whig Party, led by Henry Clay. The former evolved into the modern Democratic Party and the latter was replaced with the Republican

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Party as one of the two main parties in the 1850s.

No third-party candidate has ever been elected to the White House, and very few have won seats in either the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. The most notable modern exception to the two-party system is U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, a socialist whose campaign for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination invigorated liberal members of the party [11]. The closest any independent presidential candidate has come to being elected to the White House was billionaire Texan Ross Perot, who won 19 percent of the popular vote in the 1992 election.

History of Two-party System in United States of America

For the last 163 years, the president of the United States has been either a Democrat or a Republican. No third-party candidate has come within shouting distance of the presidency.

There are several reasons why, in some systems, two major parties dominate the political landscape. There has been speculation that a two-party system arose in the United States from early political battling between the federalists and anti-federalists in the first few decades after the ratification of the Constitution, according to several views. [12] [13] In addition, there has been more speculation that the winner-takes-all electoral system as well as particular state and federal laws regarding voting procedures helped to cause a two-party system [14].

Reporting from the floor of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Trace Dominguez examines America's two-party system by rooting through the strangeness of U.S. electoral history, in this strangest of election years. Polls suggest that voters don't much care for either major party candidate this year, and yet the vast majority of us will vote for one or the other. The reason we're stuck with this two-party system has to do with how U.S. congressional and presidential elections work. America's plurality electoral system -- or first-past-the-post (FPTP) -- means that each state has a set number of electorates, and

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whichever candidate gets the majority of votes wins them all.

Since there is no reward for second place, there's little incentive to create or back a party that will get some of the votes, but not the majority. Over time, the system encourages the dominance of two massive political parties. The U.S. is one of just a very few countries that uses this FPTP system. Most other democracies use proportional representation to elect officials, rather than a winner-take-all system. This results in multiple political parties sharing duties. Japan, for instance, has five major political parties along with several smaller parties. In Israel, ten different parties of affiliates are represented in the national legislature.

So why have political parties at all? Actually, we didn't use to. During the first presidential election, there were no political parties and in fact George Washington won without even campaigning. Many of the early Founding Fathers were skeptical of political parties and Washington publicly warned of their dangers.

Nevertheless, U.S. politics were quickly dominated by two major parties. Each went through various incarnations, but by the mid-19th century we had the Democratic and Republican parties as we know them today.

Many critics contend that the two-party system is unjust, limited voters' options at the polls. The system also leads to corrupt practices like gerrymandering. But the situation is not likely to change any time soon. The reason is simple enough: Democrats and Republicans dominate the legislatures that make the very laws that govern elections. And they like the status quo just fine

In a two-party system, voters have mostly two options; in this sample ballot for an election in Summit, New Jersey, voters can choose between a Republican or Democrat, but there are no third party candidates [15]. Political scientists such as Maurice Duverger [16] and William H. Riker claim that there are strong correlations between voting rules and type of party system. Jeffrey D. Sachs

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agreed that there was a link between voting arrangements and the effective number of parties. Sachs explained how the first-past-the-post voting arrangement tended to promote a two-party system. The main reason for America's majoritarian character is the electoral system for Congress. Members of Congress are elected in single-member districts according to the "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) principle, meaning that the candidate with the plurality of votes is the winner of the congressional seat. The losing party or parties win no representation at all. The first-past-the-post election tends to produce a small number of major parties, perhaps just two, a principle known in political science as Duverger's Law. Smaller parties are trampled in first-past-the-post elections.

[17] Consider a system in which voters can vote for any candidate from any one of many parties. Suppose further that if a party gets 15% of votes, then that party will win 15% of the seats in the legislature. This is termed proportional representation or more accurately as party-proportional representation. Political scientists speculate that proportional representation leads logically to multi-party systems, since it allows new parties to build a niche in the legislature. Because even a minor party may still obtain at least a few seats in the legislature, smaller parties have a greater incentive to organize under such electoral systems than they do in the United States.

[18] In contrast, a voting system that allows only a single winner for each possible legislative seat is sometimes termed a plurality voting system or single-winner voting system and is usually described under the heading of a winner-takes-all arrangement. Each voter can cast a single vote for any candidate within any given legislative district, but the candidate with the most votes wins the seat, although variants, such as requiring a majority, are sometimes used. What happens is that in a general election, a party that consistently comes in third in every district is unlikely to win any legislative seats even if there is a significant proportion of the electorate

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favoring its positions. This arrangement strongly favors large and well-organized political parties that are able to appeal to voters in many districts and hence win many seats, and discourages smaller or regional parties. Politically oriented people consider their only realistic way to capture political power is to run under the auspices of the two dominant parties [19]

In the U.S., forty-eight states have a standard winner-takes-all electoral system for amassing presidential votes in the Electoral College system [20]. The winner-takes-all principle applies in presidential elections, since if a presidential candidate gets the most votes in any particular state, all of the electoral votes from that state are awarded. In all but two states, Maine and Nebraska, the presidential candidate winning a plurality of votes wins all of the electoral votes, a practice called the unit rule [21]

Duverger concluded that "plurality election single-ballot procedures are likely to produce two-party systems, whereas proportional representation and runoff designs encourage multipartyism." [30] He suggested there were two reasons why winner-takes-all systems leads to a two-party system. First, the weaker parties are pressured to form an alliance, sometimes called a fusion, to try to become big enough to challenge a large dominant party and, in so doing, gain political clout in the legislature. Second, voters learn, over time, not to vote for candidates outside of one of the two large parties since their votes for third party candidates are usually ineffectual [22]. As a result, weaker parties are eliminated by voters over time. Duverger pointed to statistics and tactics to suggest that voters tended to gravitate towards one of the two main parties, a phenomenon which he called polarization, and tend to shun third parties. [23] For example, some analysts suggest that the Electoral College system in the United States, by favoring a system of winner-takes-all in presidential elections, is a structural choice favoring only two major parties. [3] suggested that America's two-party system was highly

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related with economic prosperity in the country:

The bounty of the American economy, the fluidity of American society, the remarkable unity of the American people, and, most important, the success of the American experiment have all mitigated against the emergence of large dissenting groups that would seek satisfaction of their special needs through the formation of political parties.

An effort in 2012 by centrist groups to promote ballot access by Third Party candidates called Americans Elect spent \$15 million to get ballot access but failed to elect any candidates. The lack of choice in a two-party model in politics has often been compared to the variety of choices in the marketplace.

Politics has lagged our social and business evolution ... There are 30 brands of Pringles in our local grocery store. How is it that Americans have so much selection for potato chips and only two brands - and not very good ones - for political parties?

Advantages of a Two Party System

Some historians have suggested that two-party systems promote centrism and encourage political parties to find common positions which appeal to wide swaths of the electorate. It can lead to political stability [24] failed verification which leads, in turn, to economic growth. Historian Patrick Allitt of the Teaching Company suggested that it is difficult to overestimate the long term economic benefits of political stability. There five major advantages of two-party system we highlighted;

1. Political information is much easier to understand: Although a two-party system limits the options of voters, it allows parties to present information in a convenient manner. Each party is able to represent their own broad political philosophy. As such, voters can better understand the views of a party regarding certain issues.

2. Balance is achieved because multiple interests and opinions are accommodated: Each party is comprised of organized groups and individual voters who all have a broad range of interests.

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As such, a party needs to be able to accommodate these interests when making political decisions. Including voter's interests also allows a party to receive continued support.

3. Political stability is achieved: Having only two parties doesn't encourage sudden shifts in political trends which can lead to government instability. Only with political stability can economic growth be achieved. With a two-party system, one political party gains a real majority in elections. This allows for stability as they have a common platform to adhere to. As a result, there is decisiveness in government. Then again, trends in the US show that having a two-party system is actually disruptive. Democrats and Republicans are constantly bickering and they don't trust each other.

4. Governing them is much simpler: Two-party systems have been preferred over multi-party systems because they are not difficult to govern. This kind of system also discourages radical minor parties and as such, the results are less unruliness and more harmony. Multi-party systems have resulted in hung parliaments in the past. One particular example is Italy which, since 2000, has had divisive politics.

5. There are fewer voting choices: Although some would consider this a disadvantage as having only two options is limiting, there are some who agree that being given two choices helps voters make a much better decision.

Disadvantages of a Two Party System

Michael Coblenz wrote "The two-party system is destroying America. Democrats and Republicans are in a death match and the American people are caught in the middle." America is facing a slew of problems such as inequality and international terrorism but arguments between the two parties regarding these issues have brought government to a standstill. An issue cannot be tackled without the two parties being able to discuss them rationally.

Now, the public is fed up with 80% expressing disapproval of Congress. In a 2015 Gallup poll, 60% of those who

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Coblenz adds, "But what if the problem isn't the politicians, or the parties? What if the problem is the system? What if the problem is a system that makes every election a battle between a single Democrat and a single Republican? Maybe the solution isn't new people, or new parties. Maybe the solution is changing the way we elect people."

Matthew J. Dowd writes "The evolution of the 2016 election has show that the two major parties are going to have to deal with the disruption independents are forcing on the system. This cycle is likely to be an accelerator for the success of independents locally and at the state level - developments that can only be good for our democracy." We highlighted four disadvantages of two-party system;

1. It brings government to a standstill: One only needs to look at America right now to see how the two-party system is failing. Democrats and Republicans cannot agree on certain issues and as such, can't discuss anything rationally. There are no clear solutions to problems and rather than help each other, parties decide to fight one another.

America is facing a lot of issues right now, both complex and controversial. Yet, there seems that there aren't many solutions being thrown out there to get these issues fixed. The divide between Democrats and Republicans is so great that they can't even stay in one room to solve issues to help their country.

2. It offers limited options: Limited options when it comes to voting is seen as an advantage because the less options there are to choose from, the less confusing making a choice would be. However, having only two parties to pick from is also a challenge because it is impossible for one party to tackle all the interests of a particular segment of voters. Voters are individuals who have varied interests and will most likely disagree with one or more points a political party is campaigning for.

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3. It promotes corruption: Politics is always linked with corruption no matter where you are in the world. Practices like patronage may be frowned upon but it's a common sight in the political sphere. Even the awarding of government contracts to party insiders is a practice rampant in two-party systems.

Parties have also faced criticism particularly when it comes to funding. For instance, big contributors would want something in return for having gave a large portion of their fortune to a campaign. Let's say that candidate won the election; that particular candidate might find it difficult to say no to a contributor requesting for something seeing as they partly owe their election to them.

4. It ignores alternative voices: Two-party systems that want to stay united usually ignore alternative options, especially radical ones. In a multi-party system, debate and diverse views are encouraged because coalitions are formed by stronger and weaker parties in order to achieve dominance. Third parties, on the other hand, are often ignored in two-party systems because of the winner-take-all voting mechanism where a losing candidate loses relevance even if they had a significant following.

Brief Explanation of political parties in United States

A political party is an organized body of like-minded people who work to elect candidates for public office who represent their values on matters of policy. In the U.S., home to a strong two-party system, the major political parties are the Republicans and the Democrats. But there are many other smaller and less well organized political parties that also nominate candidates for public office; among the most prominent of these are the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Constitution Party, all three of which have run candidates for president in modern elections. Still, only Republicans and Democrats have served in the White House since 1852.

No third-party candidate has ever been elected to the White House in modern history, and very few have won seats in

George and Arthur either the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate.

The Role of a Political Party

Political parties are neither corporations nor political-action committees, nor super PACs. Nor are they nonprofit groups or charitable organizations. In fact, political parties occupy a vague space in the U.S.— as semi-public organizations that have private interests (getting their candidate elected to office) but play important public roles. Those roles include running primaries in which voters nominate candidates for local, state and federal offices, and also hosting elected party members at presidential nominating conventions every four years. In the U.S., the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee are the semi-public organizations that manage the nation's two major political parties.

Functions of Political Parties

The primary functions of every political party are to recruit, evaluate, and nominate candidates for election at the local, state, and federal levels; to serve as opposition to the opposing political party; to draft and approve a party platform to which candidates typically must abide; and to raise large sums of money to support their candidates. The two major political parties in the U.S. raise millions of dollars each. Money they spend trying to get their nominees into office.

Political Parties at the Local Level

Political "party committees" operate in cities, suburbs, and rural areas to find people to run for offices such as mayor, municipal governing bodies, public-school boards, and Legislature. They also evaluate candidates and offer endorsements, which serve as guidance to voters of that party. These local parties are made up of rank-and-file committee people who are, in many states, elected by voters in primaries. The local parties are, in many locations, authorized by states to provide election judges, observers and inspectors to work at polling places. Judges of elections explain voting procedures and use of voting equipment, provide ballots and monitor elections; inspectors keep an eye on the

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voting equipment to make sure it works properly; observers scrutinize how ballots are handled and counted to ensure accuracy. This is the fundamental public role of political parties.

Political Parties at the State Level

Political parties are made up of elected committee members, who meet to endorse candidates for governor and statewide "row offices" including attorney, treasurer, and auditor general. State political parties also help to manage the local committees and play a crucial role in mobilizing the electorate—getting voters to the polls, coordinating campaign activities such as phone banks and canvassing, and making sure all the candidates on the party ticket, from top to bottom, are consistent in their platforms and messages.

Political Parties at the National Level

The national committees set the broad agendas and platforms for the party workers at the federal, state, and local levels. The national committees, too, are made up of elected committee members. They set election strategy and organize the presidential conventions every four years, where delegates from each state gather to cast ballots and nominate candidates for president.

How Political Parties Came Into Being

The first political parties—the Federalists and the anti-Federalists—emerged from the debate over ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. The formation of the second party further illustrates one of the primary functions of political parties: serving as opposition to another faction with diametrically opposed values. In this particular case, the Federalists were arguing for a strong central government and the opposing Anti-Federalists wanted the states to hold more power. The Democratic-Republicans followed soon after, founded by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to oppose the Federalists. Then came Democrats and the Whigs. No third-party candidate has ever been elected to the White House in modern history, and very few have won seats in either the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. The most notable exception to the two-party system is U.S. Sen. Bernie

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Sanders of Vermont, a socialist whose campaign for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination invigorated liberal members of the party. The closest any independent presidential candidate has come to being elected to the White House was billionaire Texan Ross Perot, who won 19 percent of the popular vote in the 1992 election.

List of Political Parties

The Federalists and the Whigs and the Democratic-Republicans have been extinct since the 1800s, but there are plenty of other political parties around today. Here are some of them, and the positions that make them unique:

- **Republican:** Takes more conservative positions on fiscal issues such as spending and the national debate and social issues such as gay marriage and abortion, both of which a majority of the party opposes. Republicans are more resistant to change in public policy than other parties.
- **Democrat:** Tends to favor an expansion of social programs that assist the poor, broadening coverage of government-sponsored health care, and strengthening public education systems in the U.S. Most Democrats also support the right of women to have abortions and of same-sex couples to marry, polls show.
- **Libertarian:** Favors a dramatic reduction in government functions, taxation and regulation and takes a hands-off approach to social issues such as drug use, prostitution, and abortion. Favors as little government intrusion into personal freedoms as possible. Libertarians tend to be fiscally conservative and liberal on social issues.
- **Green:** Promotes environmentalism, social justice and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans to receive the same civil liberties and rights others enjoy. Party members typically oppose

war. The party tends to be liberal on fiscal and social issues.

- **Constitution:** Formed as the Taxpayers Party in 1992, this party is socially and fiscally conservative. It believes the two major parties, the Republicans and Democrats, have expanded government beyond the powers

CONCLUSION

Political parties are common phenomenon in the modern political systems. In the democratic countries where the people decide the nature of election, political parties are inevitable. The inevitable nature of party system grows according to the socio-economic, cultural and political factors of every society. The sense of two-party system describes an arrangement in which all or nearly all elected officials belong to one of the only two major parties, and third parties rarely win any

George and Arthur granted in Constitution. In that way it is much like the Libertarian Party. However, the Constitution Party opposes abortion and same-sex marriage. It also opposes amnesty for immigrants living in the U.S. illegally, wants to disband the Federal Reserve and return to the gold standard.

seats in the legislature. There are some other countries that practice two-party system like Jamaica, Malta, and most Latin American countries like Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Venezuela, etc. Sometimes two-party systems have been seen as preferable to multi-party systems because they are simpler to govern, with less fractiousness and greater harmony, since it discourages radical minor parties, while multi-party systems can sometimes lead to hung parliaments.

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