

# Political Parties & Conventions

This presentation can be used alone or in conjunction with the Consortium's lesson "Political Parties & Conventions," available in the Database of K-12 Resources.

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# Warm Up –

# Political Party

- Brainstorm. What comes to mind when you think of these words?
- Why do political parties exist?
- What are the purposes and goals of political parties in general?

# Political Party:

- An organized group of people with common values and beliefs who try to get their candidates elected to political office

What do these symbols represent?



# Democrat - The Donkey

- Presidential candidate Andrew Jackson was the first **Democrat** ever to be associated with the donkey symbol.
- His opponents during the election of 1828 tried to label him a "jackass" for his "stubborn" populist beliefs and slogan, "Let the people rule."
- Jackson was entertained by the notion and ended up using it to his advantage on his campaign posters.
- But cartoonist Thomas Nast is credited with making the donkey the recognized symbol of the Democratic Party.
- It first appeared in a cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* in 1870, and was supposed to represent an anti-Civil War faction. But the public was immediately taken by it and by 1880 it had already become the unofficial symbol of the party.


# Republican - The Elephant



- Political cartoonist Thomas Nast was also responsible for the **Republican Party** elephant.
- In a cartoon that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1874, Nast drew a donkey clothed in lion's skin, scaring away all the animals at the zoo. One of those animals, the elephant, was labeled "The Republican Vote." That's all it took for the elephant to become associated with the Republican Party.

# Party Platform

- A list of the principles which a political party supports in order to appeal to the general public for the purpose of having a party's candidate(s) voted into office.
- This often takes the form of a list of support for, or opposition to, controversial topics.
- Individual topics are often called **planks** of the platform.

 In what ways are political parties helpful?  
In what ways might they be problematic?







G.O.P.  
JOBS  
PROGRAM



G.O.P.  
ENERGY  
POLICY



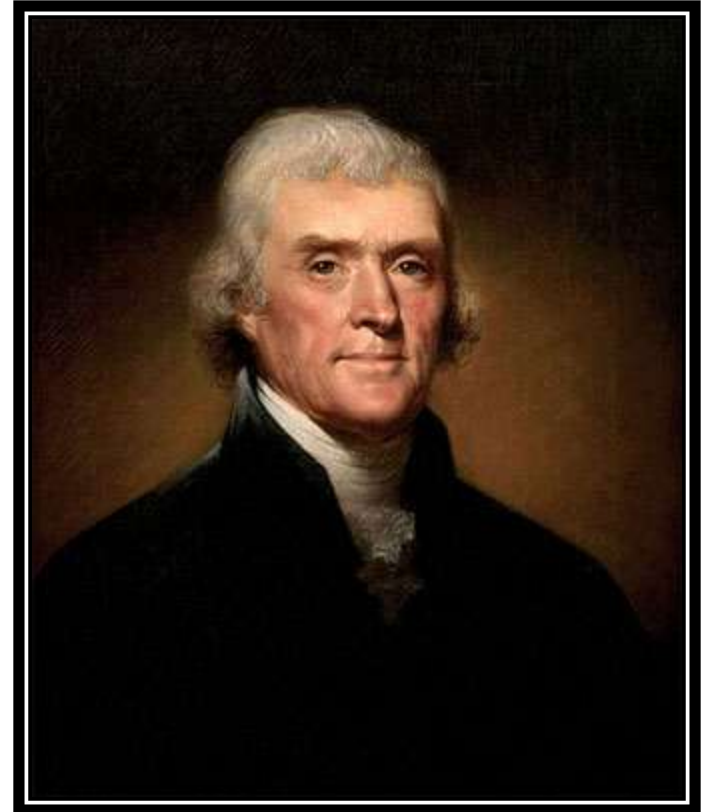
G.O.P.  
EDUCATION  
PLAN



SCOTT  
CAGLE CARTOONS

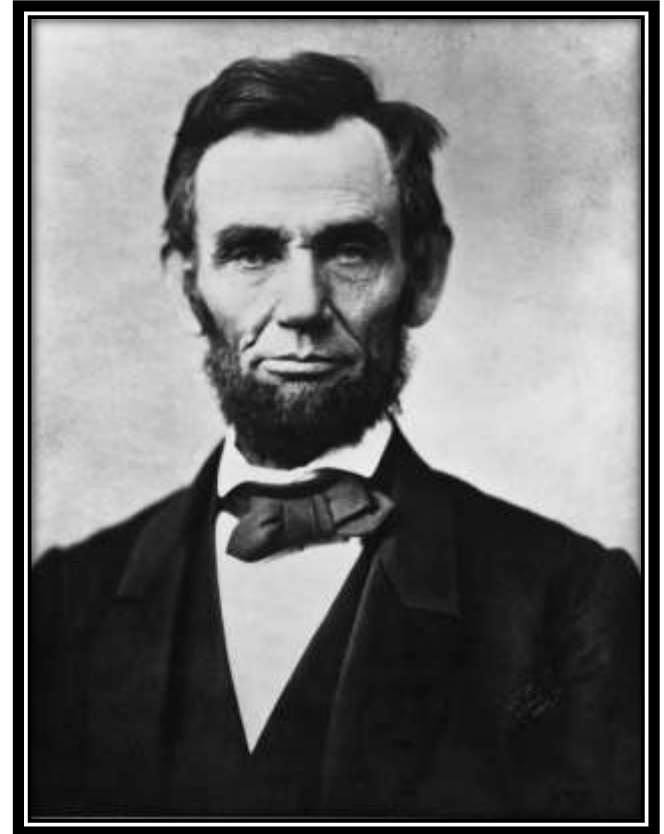
# A brief history of political parties

- **Federalists** and **Anti-Federalists** were the first political parties
- Federalists soon faded under opposition by the **Democratic-Republicans**, led by Thomas Jefferson
- The first issues they disagreed on was the power of the national government.
- Democratic-Republicans would soon become the modern day **Democratic party** with opposition from the newly formed **Whig party**.



# A brief history of political parties

- Our current system emerged in 1854 when the **Republican Party**, or Grand Old Party was born.
- Support bases for these parties has changed over the years. Republicans were initially formed to fight slavery (Lincoln was a Republican), and they largely had the support of a majority of minorities.
- Since FDR and the Great Depression, along with Johnson's Great Society and civil rights, many minorities and advocates for minority rights are largely Democrats.



# The two party system


- A two-party system is a system where two major political parties dominate voting in nearly all elections at every level of government.
- As a result, all or nearly all elected offices are members of one of the two major parties.
- Typically, one of the two parties holds a majority in the legislature - the *majority party* - while the other is the *minority party*.



What do you think the benefits of having a two-party system are?

# The two party system

- Proponents note that a two party system limits the choices of candidates, keeping the process from being a “free for all.”
- Defined platforms and clearly defined opposition helps voters align themselves with a candidate.
- Individuals have the chance to get involved with a cause that they agree with or believe in by identifying with one of the party’s.

 What are the problems associated with a two-party system?



# Independents

- An **independent** or **non-party politician** is an individual not affiliated to any political party.
- Independents may hold a centrist viewpoint between those of major political parties, a viewpoint more extreme than any major party, or they may have a viewpoint based on issues that they do not feel that any major party addresses.
- Other independent politicians are associated with a political party and may be former members of it, but choose not to stand under its label.
- A third category of independents are those who may belong to or support a political party but believe they should not formally represent it and thus be subject to its policies.
- Finally, some independent candidates may form a political party (a “third party”) for the purposes of running for public office.

# Two's Company, Three's a Crowd?

- The U.S. uses a **winner-takes-all** or **plurality system** in elections -- the candidate with the most votes is the sole winner. This system encourages candidates to gravitate towards the two major party's.
- The Electoral College, campaign finance laws and ballot access laws also contribute to the dominance of the two party system.
- No third party candidate has ever taken the White House -- and only one man, George Washington, ever held the position as an independent.
- Although politics in the US have long been dominated by a two-party system, various groups at state and federal levels have tried to break into the system -- each supporting issues and views unrepresented by the dominant parties.
- Even barriers like the ballot access laws that make it difficult for **third parties** to get on a ticket haven't stopped these alternative parties from occasionally rising to the forefront.

# Third Parties

- Third parties are most often formed in response to specific issues.
- In 2000, the **Green Party** was just such a group, nominating political activist and former independent candidate Ralph Nader for president. The Libertarian Party is another popular third party.
- Third parties contribute to the system by making the two major parties focus on certain issues. If the third party and their issue get enough attention, the other two parties are then forced to deal with that issue.
- Third parties have a hard time getting on ballots in most states; many people think they are wasting their vote by voting for a third party.



What problems might a third-party pose to the election process?






# Third Parties



- In 2000, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader ultimately took 2.7 percent of the popular vote in a race where a gap of only 0.5 percent separated Republican candidate George W. Bush from Democratic candidate Al Gore.
- Because our system is so heavily weighted as a two-party system, opponents believe that third parties only complicate the process, stealing votes from viable candidates.

 What do you think?

# The Functions of Political Parties

- *Selecting candidates* - through open and closed primaries, caucuses, national conventions, or by write-in which is a popular method for third parties who can't get on the ballot
- *Set goals for government* - parties have platforms made up of planks, which are ideas for what government should do
- *Play watchdog* - if Republicans are in power, Democrats act as a check on that power and vice versa

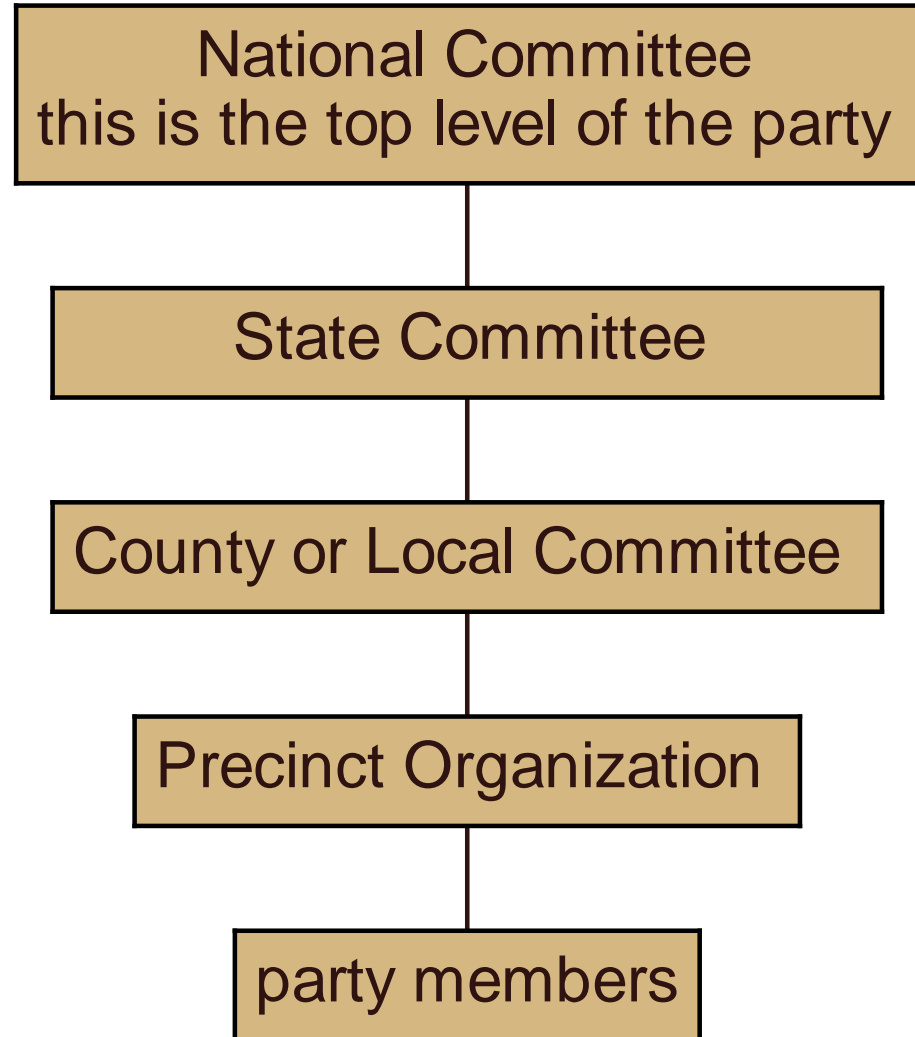
# Functions of Political Parties

- *Give people a voice* - like-minded people band together in political parties to improve their chances of getting their problems or issues heard by government
- *Jobs* - It is customary for candidates to give jobs to campaign workers who helped him or her get elected. This is called patronage.



## Political Party Organization

- All political parties have one thing in common: how they are organized.



# Election Process



- Candidates for office must first go through **primaries** to narrow down the field to one nominee from both of the major political parties.
- Primaries can be open or closed.
- Some states use a **caucus** instead of a primary to choose candidates.
- Candidates for President are whittled down to one and are announced at the **Democratic and Republican National Conventions**.
- A **general election** is then held to decide the winner between the Democrat, Republican and any third party candidates. Everyone votes in the general election.

# Political Conventions



- A political convention is a meeting of a political party, typically to announce party candidates.
- In the US, this refers to a presidential nominating convention, held every four years by the Democratic and Republican parties.
- The original/formal purpose of such a convention is to select each party's nominee for President, to adopt a statement of party principles and goals (the platform), and to adopt the rules for the party's activities, including the presidential nominating process for the next election cycle.
- Due to changes in election laws and the campaign process, conventions since the later half of the 20th century have virtually abdicated their original roles, and are today mostly ceremonial affairs.
- The first political convention held in America took place in Hartford, Connecticut in March 1766, held by the Sons of Liberty to challenge the governor.

• *Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_presidential\\_nominating\\_convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_nominating_convention)*

# Political Conventions

- The convention is typically held in a major city selected by the national party organization 18–24 months before the election is to be held.
- As the two major conventions have grown into large, publicized affairs with significant economic impact, cities today compete vigorously to be awarded host responsibilities, citing their meeting venues, lodging facilities, and entertainment as well as offering economic incentives.
- During the day, party activists hold meetings and rallies, and work on the platform.
- Voting and important convention-wide addresses usually take place in the evening hours.
- In recent conventions, routine business such as examining the credentials of delegations, ratifying rules and procedures, election of convention officers, and adoption of the platform usually take up the business of the first two days of the convention. Balloting is usually held on the third day, with the nomination and acceptance made on the last day.

# Political Conventions

- Minor figures in the party are given the opportunity to address the floor of the convention during the daytime.
- The evening's speeches — which are broadcast by networks to a large national audience—are reserved for major speeches by notable, respected public figures;
  - Speakers at the 2004 Democratic convention included Ted Kennedy and Jimmy Carter,
  - Speakers at the Republican convention speakers included Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger Governor George Pataki of New York.
- The organizers of the convention may designate one of these speeches as the keynote address, one which above all others is stated to underscore the convention's themes or political goals.
- The final day of the convention usually features the formal acceptance speeches from the nominees for President and Vice President.





# 2012 Conventions – Democratic Convention

- It was announced on February 1, 2011, by First Lady Michelle Obama in an email to supporters that **Charlotte, North Carolina**, had been chosen as the site for the 2012 Convention.
- The event is the first nominating convention of a major party held in North Carolina
- It is expected that Charlotte hosting this event will generate more than \$150 million for Charlotte and surrounding metropolitan areas and bring over 35,000 delegates and visitors.
- North Carolina was a close state in 2008, with Barack Obama winning the state's 15 electoral votes by just 13,692 votes (out of more than 4.2 million votes cast) and Democrats Kay Hagan and Bev Perdue winning close elections for U.S. Senate and Governor, respectively.

# 2012 Conventions – Republican Convention

- On August 14, 2009, the Republican National Committee named a 13 person Site Selection Committee to start the process of selecting a host city for the 2012 convention.
- The decision was announced on May 12, 2010, when Tampa, FL was selected as the host city.