

## Political Parties



**What is a Political Party? A definition is that a Political Party is an organized group of party leaders, officeholders, and voters who work together to elect candidates to political office.**

Political parties, along with elections, interest groups, and the media, are **linkage institutions** connecting citizens with government.

Advisors, campaign managers, and leaders of political parties must create an appealing and consistent message that gets their candidates elected and maintain party cohesion.

Elections still hinge on getting supporters out to vote but today's campaigns use sophisticated technology to target people and group them based on their political opinions. Contemporary campaigns use social media to target and motivate voters.

**Microtargeting** allows the Democratic and Republican Parties to maintain data on every voter in the country – more than 200 million people! Recent congressional and presidential elections have been won or lost by thin margins so by being able to sway a handful of swing state votes for one's party can be the difference between winning and losing.

Microtargeting is also used to increase voter turnout among sympathetic voters, persuading voters who are undecided, and identifying potential donors.

**How does Microtargeting work?** Each political party has compiled a file on nearly every voter in the country. They pull together public data such as age, gender, education, place of employment, income, property ownership, vehicle ownership, and past voter turnout along with consumer data (such as gun ownership, magazine subscriptions) tracked by Google, Facebook, and other social media sites. They then create a profile of likely voters and then the campaigns target these people through social media with specific messages. These messages can either expand or suppress voter turnout within specific groups.

One technique to identify political attractions is **geofencing**. By creating a specific geographic area and using cell phone data, it is possible to identify those who enter an area, such as houses of worship, political rallies, or protest demonstrations. Ads can be created that target those voters and creating a specialized message to those who are not registered to vote. An advantage is that sometimes these messages are “forwarded” to another person, which is at no cost to the campaign, and magnifies the message’s impact.

Microtargeting allows political parties to engage with voters in a personal way and provide them with information about the issues that they care about the most. It is a low budget apparatus that saves campaigns from spending resources on voters who are not likely to support that party.

### **The Roles that Political Parties Play**

The political scientist, Mr. V.O. Key Jr. Identified **three main roles that political parties play in American representative democracy:**

1. As organizations, political parties recruit, nominate, and support candidates for political office
2. In the electorate, parties provide labels that voters can use as shortcuts in identifying candidates closer to their own political ideologies
3. In government, a party enacts the policy positions of its members and acts as an opposition to the majority party when it is in the minority

A political party unites people with shared social, economic, and ideological goals. It finds and supports candidates to run for federal, state, and local offices. Parties educate and mobilize voters. They raise money and develop a media strategy to try and have their candidates elected. If these candidates win, parties try to keep them in office. The parties also come up policy platforms that they want their candidates to follow.

Today, national party organizations are struggling. This is partly due to the ability of outside organizations and groups able to raise and spend large amounts of money on behalf of political causes. The 2010 decision of ***Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*** allows for unlimited spending independent of a campaign or candidate. The campaign finance system restricts the ability of parties to raise and spend money and to coordinate campaigns so that candidates of the same party can pool their expenses. These restrictions on spending, combined with relatively unrestricted spending by independent groups, reduces the influence of political parties over campaigns. As a result, parties no longer exercise the strong control they had over nominations and campaigns in the past, and campaigns are now more candidate-centered.

**Party Identification is the degree to which a voter is connected and influenced by a particular political party.**

Parties influence voter choices and support policies consistent with a broad set of beliefs. An “R” or a “D” next to a candidate’s name serves as a cue to voters about what a candidate stands for. Voters often use party labels as a shortcut in the voting booth.

**Party-line voters**, committed members of a party who pick candidates based on their party affiliation, use the process of **straight ticket voting to mark their ballots: voting for all of the candidates on the ballot from one political party.**

**Voters sometimes support candidates from different parties in a single election, a practice called split ticket voting.** However, this practice has declined in recent years.

Despite the decline in split ticket voting, an increasing number of people do not identify with either party, a trend that is frustrating for the two major parties. The percentage of independent voters has grown sharply over the past two decades. A major reason for this has been the inability of the federal government to enact policies.

Despite the growing number of independent voters, the Democratic and Republican Parties have maintained a great deal of power and continue to control government.

<div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>General Election (Elección General)</b>  <b>November 5, 2024 (5 de Noviembre de 2024)</b>            (Condado de) El Paso County, Texas - OFFICIAL BALLOT/BOLETA OFICIAL         </div>		
<b>INSTRUCTIONS:</b> Darken in the oval (●) provided to the left of the statement indicating the way you desire to vote. <b>NOTA DE INSTRUCCIONES:</b> Llène completamente el espacio ovalado(●) a la izquierda de la frase que indica la manera en que quiere votar. <b>Vote on both sides. (Vote en ambos lados.)</b>		
<b>Mayor, City of El Paso</b> <i>(Alcalde, Ciudad de El Paso)</i> <input type="radio"/> Steven B. Winters (74) <input type="radio"/> Renard U. Johnson (75) <input type="radio"/> Cassandra Hernandez (76) <input type="radio"/> Elizabeth Cordova (77) <input type="radio"/> Isabel Salcido (78) <input type="radio"/> Brian Kennedy (79) <input type="radio"/> Marco Antonio Contreras (80) <input type="radio"/> Ben Mendoza (81)	<b>President/Vice President</b> <i>(Presidente/Vicepresidente)</i> <input type="radio"/> Donald J. Trump/JD Vance (165) Rep <input type="radio"/> Kamala D. Harris/Tim Walz (166) Dem <input type="radio"/> Chase Oliver/Mike ter Maat (167) Lib <input type="radio"/> Jill Stein/Rudolph Ware (168) Grn  <input type="radio"/> Write-In (Voto Escrito)	<b>Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Place 7</b> <i>(Juez, Corte de Apelaciones Criminales, Lugar Núm. 7)</i> <input type="radio"/> Gina Parker (207) Rep <input type="radio"/> Nancy Mulder (208) Dem
<b>Judge, City of El Paso Municipal Court No. 1</b> <i>(Juez, Ciudad de El Paso Corte Municipal Núm. 1)</i> <input type="radio"/> Michelle Morales (120)	<b>United States Senator</b> <i>(Senador de los Estados Unidos)</i> <input type="radio"/> Ted Cruz (171) Rep <input type="radio"/> Colin Allred (172) Dem <input type="radio"/> Ted Brown (173) Lib	<b>Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals, Place 8</b> <i>(Juez, Corte de Apelaciones Criminales, Lugar Núm. 8)</i> <input type="radio"/> Lee Finley (211) Rep <input type="radio"/> Chika Anyiam (212) Dem
<b>Judge, City of El Paso Municipal Court No. 2</b> <i>(Juez, Ciudad de El Paso Corte Municipal Núm. 2)</i>	    	<b>Member, State Board of Education, District 1</b> <i>(Miembro de la Junta Estatal de Educación, Distrito Núm. 1)</i> <input type="radio"/> Michael (Travis) Stevens (215) Rep <input type="radio"/> Gustavo Reveles (216) Dem
		<b>State Senator, District 29</b> <i>(Senador Estatal, Distrito Núm. 29)</i>

During national party conventions, party members write, argue over, and vote on a **party platform: an official set of positions and policy objectives of a political party.**



The 2024 **Republican Party** platform emphasized traditional family values and structures, crime reduction, military and defensive spending, border security, low taxes, and support for American businesses and manufacturing.

The 2024 **Democratic Party** platform focused on economic growth, particularly for the middle class, lower housing costs and health care, securing the border, addressing climate change and energy independence, reducing gun violence, protecting freedoms for citizens, and strengthening America’s image overseas.

The organizations that run the two major parties are the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Their national party chairs raise money, and serve as spokespersons to the media. However, the national party organization’s power over the state and local parties is advisory. It cannot tell them what to do. In fact, the state parties can put pressure on parties to change their national platform on issues where voters have shifted their opinions.

Parties use **recruitment – the process through which political parties identify potential candidates** who best reflect the party’s philosophy and who will attract more voters. While parties try to discourage prospective candidates who do not have a good chance of winning, they cannot stop specific candidates from running.

Parties have to provide political expertise and support for their candidates. They hire political consultants to help them raise money and to refine their public message. The parties also hire campaign staff, arrange for public appearances, coordinate media strategy, and conduct public opinion polls.



## The Development of American Political Parties

Since the mid-1800s, most politicians have belonged to either the Democratic Party (donkey) or the Republican Party (elephant), also called the GOP (Grand Old Party).

Parties seek to build a **coalition consisting of demographic groups of voters who will support the party's policies and vote for their candidates**. However, coalitions will shift over time and join another party. For example, the New Deal coalition was made up of northern liberals, working-class union members, Blacks, and white southerners. That coalition broke up over the issue of civil rights in 1964.

Shifting coalitions explains how Nixon was able to capture the votes of white southerners in the 1968 election as part of the backlash against civil rights legislation passed during the Lyndon Johnson administration. In 2016, Donald Trump won over the blue-collar white voters in the northeastern and midwestern states (the Rust Belt), where the industrial sector had steadily diminished over the prior decades. Each major party seeks to appeal to the weakest links in the opposing party's coalition.

Control of government goes back and forth between the Republican and Democratic parties during periods of **realignment: when groups of people who support a political party shift their allegiance to a different political party**. Periods of realignment may take place during a **critical election: a major national election that signals a change in the balance of power between the two parties**.

Periods when one party wins most national elections are called **party eras**. Since 1969, government has often been a **divided government: with one party controlling one or both houses of Congress and the president coming from the opposing party**. Divided government is a result of the Constitution's separation of power.

Over the past decade, the Democratic and Republican parties have tried to remain relevant in an age of intense **polarization** where some voters have participated in politics not just to support their party but out of intense dislike of the other side. This was seen in the 2016 and the 2020 elections where both parties saw major challenges to their parties' status quo. **Bernie Sanders** and **Elizabeth Warren**, though unsuccessful in obtaining their party's presidential nomination, challenged the Democratic Party to focus more on economic inequality issues and the power of Wall Street on the nation's financial sector.

Donald Trump's 2016 candidacy exposed differences between the Republican Party's corporate-backed wealthier donors and its less affluent, Trump-aligned blue-collar supporters. Many Trump supporters shared his deep distrust of government and the party elites, electing an unconventional candidate to the presidency.

At the same time, voters returned to the House and the Senate many congressional Republicans who did not initially embrace Trump.

In the 2020 presidential election, Trump ran for a second term and emphasized border security, tax cuts, and job growth. The campaign for the Democratic nomination was much less predictable, as there were twenty-seven (27) candidates vying for the nomination. On March 3, (Super Tuesday), Joe Biden had won ten states and the momentum shifted in his favor, Biden won the election as well as his party taking control over both the House and Senate.

In the 2022 midterm elections, the pattern of divided government reemerged, with Democrats maintaining control of the senate with a slim margin, (51-49) and the Republicans winning control of the House of Representatives.

In 2024, former president Trump emerged as the front-runner and on Super Tuesday, March 5, 2024, only former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley remained in the race. After only winning Vermont, Haley dropped out. On July 17, Trump survived an assassination attempt while in Pennsylvania and the following day accepted the Republican party nomination at their national convention. Despite a second failed assassination attempt, Trump continued to campaign with his slogan **“Make American Great Again”** promoting his two main issues of the economy, including the prices of food, fuel, housing, and border security.

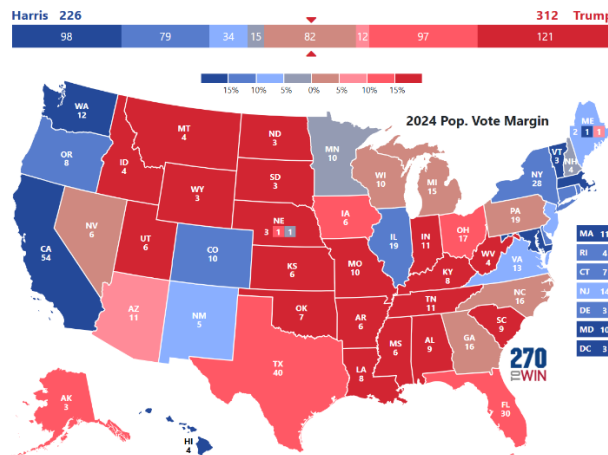
As is the tradition with incumbent presidents, Joe Biden was the Democratic nominee. However, after a terrible televised debate where Biden appeared confused, Biden announced that he was ending his campaign and endorsed Kamala Harris. The Harris campaign promised **“a new way forward”** and focused on protecting fundamental freedoms, including abortion rights, and strengthening democracy.



Donald Trump won the 2024 election with just over 50% of the popular vote and 312 Electoral College votes. The Republican Party won control over both the House and Senate, The House 218 to 208 seats, the Senate 53 to 47 seats.

This was only the second time in American history where an executive returned to office after losing an interim presidential election. (The first being Grover Cleveland in 1884, 1888, 1892).

Republicans won the popular vote for the first time since 2004. The Republicans now presided over **a unified government**, controlling both the House, the Senate, and the presidency.



Despite the 2024 victory, the Republican Party coalition has some potential for instability. For example, fiscal conservatives who want a balanced budget, disagree with other Republicans who favor tax cuts that raise the federal deficit. Socially liberal Republicans, who support a less restrictive approach to abortion and the legalization of marijuana, disagree with the social conservatives who oppose both policies. Some Republicans favor reducing international trade barriers, and with Trump promoting tariffs, others are isolationists. While some Republicans favor continued funding for military conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, others oppose the spending and prefer to spend these funds domestically.

The Democrats have their own disagreements. They are split on several issues, including Israel and Gaza. The party is also divided between the more liberal wing who favor extensive social programs for lower and middle-classes, including higher tax rates for the rich and the moderates who favor less progressive fiscal policy and are wary of the party moving too far to the left. The democrats are also divided over border security and stricter immigration enforcement as some are focused more on humanitarian protection for migrants and easier access to asylum.