

Chapter 5: Political Parties

Section 3

Lecture Notes



AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Identify the types of minor parties that have been active in American politics.
2. Understand why minor parties are important despite the fact that none has ever won the presidency.

▶ Key Terms

- **ideological parties:** parties based on a particular set of social, economic, and political beliefs
- **single-issue parties:** parties focused on only one public-policy issue
- **economic protest parties:** parties whose members are united by anger over economic hard times and dislike for the major parties
- **splinter parties:** parties that have split off from one of the major parties; often focused on a single popular leader

- What role have minor parties played in American politics?
 - American minor parties have fallen into four broad categories: **ideological parties**, **single-issue parties**, **economic protest parties**, and **splinter parties**.
 - Minor parties can play a spoiler role in elections by taking critical votes from a major party.
 - They can also be the first to bring key issues to public attention with their campaigns.

► Ideological Parties

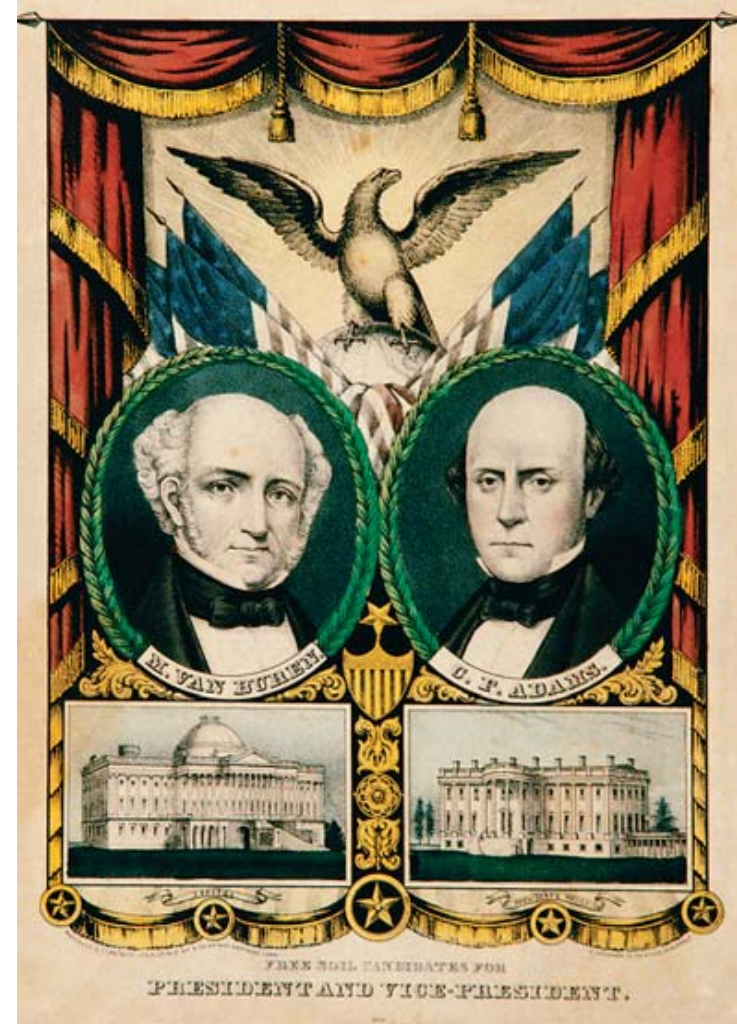
- Ideological parties are based on a particular set of beliefs that usually involve society, politics, and the economy.
 - Most of these parties have involved Marxist ideas, such as Socialist, Socialist Labor, Socialist Worker, and Communist parties.

► Ideological Parties, cont.

- The Libertarian Party promotes the opposite view, calling for the elimination of most government functions and programs.
- Ideological parties rarely win many votes, but can last for many years.

▶ Single Issue Parties

- Single issue parties emphasize one public policy issue.
 - For example, the Free Soil Party opposed the spread of slavery to the West.
 - Most single issue parties fade away when their issue is resolved or no longer attracts public interest.



▶ Economic Protest Parties

- Checkpoint: How are economic protest parties different from single-issue parties?
 - Economic protest parties arise in periods of economic trouble.
 - They call for economic reforms.
 - The Populist Party of the 1890s arose from the Greenbacks. They demanded public ownership of railroads, telephone, and telegraph companies along with political reforms.
 - These parties disappear when the hard economic times end.

► Splinter Parties

- Splinter parties split away from one of the major parties.
 - They are often centered on a particular candidate who fails to win his or her major party nomination, or arise from a strong disagreement within a major party.

► Splinter Parties, cont.

- The Dixiecrat and American Independent parties split from the Democratic Party over states' rights and civil rights issues.
 - George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama campaigned for President in 1968 as a member of the American Independent Party.



▶ The Bull Moose Party

- The Progressive parties of Theodore Roosevelt and Robert La Follette split from the Republican Party.
 - Roosevelt's party was nicknamed the Bull Moose Party.
- Splinter parties tend to break up when their leaders step aside.



Former President Theodore Roosevelt became the Progressive or "Bull Moose" party's nominee in 1912 after losing the Republican Party's nomination. *How might this image have been used by the Progressive Party in the 1912 election?*

▶ Minor Party Influence

- Minor parties can also play a spoiler role.
 - By winning electoral votes or even enough popular votes to affect the outcome in a key state, a minor party can affect the outcome of an election.

▶ Affecting Presidential Elections

- It is not common for a minor party candidacy to shift the outcome of a presidential election.
- Theodore Roosevelt's candidacy as a Progressive Party member most likely cost Republican William Taft the presidential election of 1912.
- Ralph Nader's Green Party may have cost Democrat Al Gore the very close presidential election of 2000 by gaining votes in swing states such as Florida.

▶ Raising Public Awareness

- The most important role of minor parties is to raise public awareness of controversial issues.
 - Women’s suffrage, income tax, and regulation of banking and railroads were all first championed by minor parties.
 - Minor parties challenge the major parties to take action on issues, often accusing them of being part of the problem.
 - The more successful minor parties’ efforts are to raise awareness of an issue, the more likely it is that major parties will put the idea into their own campaign platforms.

▶ Minor Party Candidates

- In 2008 there were seventeen minor party presidential candidates appearing on the ballot of at least one state.
- More than 1,000 minor party candidates also sought seats in Congress or offices in various state and local elections.

► Review

- Now that you have learned about the roles that minor parties have played in American politics, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Does the two-party system help or harm democracy?