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## Election Types

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM is a constant in American politics. However, the ideology and the electoral base of these parties have suffered several major changes during the last 200 years. Elections play a crucial role in this process of change, and scholars have developed a typology of elections based on how important and lasting the impact of an election is on the party system. During realigning or critical elections, the balance of power between the two parties changes radically, and there are major shifts in both the policies they endorse and their constituencies.

These changes have a durable impact, and shape the party system until the next realignment, with one party emerging as the majority party. Maintaining elections preserve the status quo, with the majority party retaining control of Congress and the White House. Deviating elections resemble realigning elections in one important way: the majority party suffers major losses. However, unlike realigning elections, the setback of the majority party is only temporary. Reinstating elections follow deviating elections, during which the majority party recovers the losses suffered in the previous election. Whenever the majority party suffers a major defeat in an election, it is only with the benefit of hindsight that it can be determined if that election was realigning or deviating.

There is also a more ambitious, full-fledged theory of realignments that goes beyond this mere typology, it makes the claim that a realignment occurs in party politics in the United States every 30 years or so. However, the last realignment about which there is relatively little controversy occurred in 1932; since then, there were several elections that were characterized as realigning, but there is far less consensus about them. Realigning elections separate party systems, including:

the first party system (roughly 1792–1828), the second party system (1828–60), the third party system (1860–96), the fourth party system (1896–1932), and the fifth party system (1932–).

The first party system was structured by conflicts over the strength of the national government, foreign policy, and the developmental path to be followed by the new republic. There were the Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, representing the urban elite of bankers, merchants, and industrialists, who wanted a strong central government and an economy based on industry and commerce. The Democratic-Republican Party, which opposed these policies, was led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who promoted states' rights and the interests of farmers. These two political factions were not truly parties; suffrage was very limited, and voters did not select presidential electors in most states, so there was no need for parties to mobilize voters.

The 1828 presidential election marked the beginning of the second party system. Political parties in the United States actually emerged as partisan vehicles for nominating candidates, structuring choice, proposing programs, and coordinating the action of government. Suffrage expanded, and this led to a dramatic increase in the quantity and impact of voter participation. The total number of votes cast rose from 370,000 in 1824, to 1.1 million in 1828. Moreover, voters directly elected an increasing number of presidential electors. As the electorate expanded, the relation between political elites and voters changed.

Presidential candidates were no longer chosen by a caucus of party representatives in Congress. Instead, parties chose these candidates in national conventions. New parties developed from the political factions existing in the previous era. A wing of the former Democratic-Republicans, led by Andrew Jackson, created the Democratic Party, which claimed to represent the interests of common people in the expanding south and west. Another wing, led by John Quincy Adams, was known as National Republicans. A coalition of National Republicans, Anti-Masons, and people opposed to Jackson (whom they criticized for authoritarian tendencies) formed the Whig Party in 1834, and Democrats and Whigs dominated political competition until 1850s.

The 1860 election, when Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States, marked the beginning of the third party system, 1860–96, characterized by a

relative balance of power between the Democratic and Republican parties. The Democratic Party survived after the Civil War with a base of conservative whites in the south.

The Republican Party was formed in the 1850s by a coalition of antislavery forces including Whigs, Free Soilers, and antislavery Democrats. During the previous decades, the most salient political conflict pitted the agrarian interests of the west and south against the commercial interests of the northeast. United States' westward expansion added new states, in which agriculture and rural interests were predominant. Therefore, a promising strategy for the Democratic Party was to capture the rural vote, but this was conditional upon keeping the issue of slavery muted, as the coalition of rural interests included pro-slavery and anti-slavery constituencies.

### NEW COALITIONS

Thus, slavery had the potential to cut across the existing coalitions, and lead to the formation of new ones, the very essence of realignment. Slavery stayed dormant until the 1850s, but then emerged in the forefront of political debate. In 1860, it broke the Democratic Party into a southern, pro-slavery wing, and a western, anti-slavery wing. On the other hand, support for Lincoln came from a coalition among business and white and newly freed black workers and farmers. This Republican coalition won all but one of the presidential elections held between 1860–88.

Tensions related to economic development and industrialization, worsened by a severe economic crisis, triggered a new realignment in 1896. The 1896 presidential election pitted Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who also won the endorsement of the Populist Party, against Republican William McKinley. While Democrats and Republicans retained their monopoly over the government, there was new set of policies dividing them and their constituents that remained salient after this election. Before 1896, the two parties were divided primarily by their position over civil rights and the Reconstruction. The 1896 election was essentially a choice between two fundamentally different views about economic policies and modernization.

There was an agrarian, populist-fundamentalist platform represented by Bryan, who was backed by labor and western and southern farmers, in particular. Then there was a pro-business, industrial, and modernizing

program, represented by McKinley. This realignment, which created the fourth party system, 1896–1932, reinforced the regional cleavage between the northeast and the western coast, which were dominated by Republicans, and the rest of the country, where the Democrats had the upper hand. It was a mirror image of the maps of the 2000 and 2004 presidential contests.

The 1932 election, which brought Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt into the White House, marked a new realignment and the transition to the fifth party system. This election was a clean break with the politics of previous decades in several ways. First, the balance of power shifted in favor of the Democrats. The Democratic Party controlled the Senate for 50 years and the House for 58 years, 1932–94. The Democrats had majorities in both Houses for 48 years; during this time, the Republicans controlled Congress for only four years: 1947–49 and 1953–55.

Second, the Democratic vote outside the solid south was increasingly urban, foreign-born, and non-Protestant, while the Republican vote was increasingly rural, native-born, and Protestant-based. With respect to economic policies, if the Republicans remained firmly committed to laissez-faire policies, the Democrats abandoned populism and relied on Keynesian solutions, instead. So the changing balance of power between the two parties was paralleled by changes in their social and regional base.

The legacy of the Civil War was still strong, so southern conservative whites maintained their attachment to the Democratic Party, while the limited number of African Americans who voted at that time stayed loyal to Republicans, the party that abolished slavery.

### LAST REALIGNMENT

Whether the 1932 realignment was, in fact, the last realignment in the history of party competition in America is controversial. Some scholars considered Lyndon Johnson's victory in 1964, others Reagan's victory in 1984, and others the Republican triumph in 1994 as realigning, or at least signaling another realignment. The current ideological positions, the constituencies, and the regional bases of the two parties differ substantially not only in comparison to 1896, but also to 1932 or the 1960s.

As the United States moved from an advanced industrial society to a post-industrial society, an increasing share of its population joined the middle class, and this

was reflected in a higher level of support for policies friendly toward business. This has been beneficial to the Republican Party, and has probably played an important role in their success in recent decades. However, Americans have not only become richer; they have also become better educated. Better education tends to make people more liberal on social issues, and this is more beneficial for the Democratic Party.

Clashes over civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, followed by conflicts over moral questions such as abortion, the death penalty, or gay marriage, make the competition between the two parties in the beginning of the 21st century at least two-dimensional. That is, voters are not only interested in the economic positions of parties and candidates; they are equally interested in their positions on social issues. In recent decades, as the Republican Party became more conservative socially, conservative white voters from the south deserted the Democratic Party. The African-Americans' movement toward the Democratic camp paralleled this, as both the economic and the social policies endorsed by this party had more appeal for them than Republican policies. Perhaps there has been no realigning election since the New Deal, but there was at least a secular realignment, a slow process whose end result is similar to that of a realigning election.

Most elections held between two realignments are normal, preserving the status quo. Such was the majority of legislative and presidential elections in the decades following the New Deal. The Democrats were the majority party, and they won every election for almost two decades after 1932. The first Republican success came in 1946, when the minority party gained a majority in the legislature for two years. However, the Democrats regained the majority in both houses in 1948.

Therefore, the Republican victory in 1946 is an example of a deviating election, due to short-term factors that did not affect its majority status in the long run. The Democratic victory in 1948 is an example of a reinstating election, which reversed the effect of the deviating election. In recent years, the Republican Party appeared on its way to become the new majority party. If Republicans regain the majority in Congress and retain control of the White House in 2008, and then continue to win most elections afterward, this would confirm its status as majority party, and the 2006 election would, with the benefit of hindsight, appear as a deviating election.

**SEE ALSO:** Civil War and Realignment; Conservatism; Liberalism; Realignment; Two-party System.

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## Election Verification Exit Poll

AN ELECTION VERIFICATION exit poll (EVEP) is a relatively new concept in exit polling, differing in approach and purpose from traditional exit polls, usually done for the media. The purpose of a media exit poll is to strategically poll many precincts to obtain a representative sample for an entire district (such as a state or city) so that election outcomes can be predicted. A series of demographic data are gathered in media exit polls so pollsters can tell, for example, how African Americans, women, union members, church goers, rural people, and other demographic groups voted. Most of the polling is done well before polling places close on Election Day, so that the exit poll results can be tabulated and presented by the news outlets immediately after the polls close.

In sharp contrast, an election verification exit poll's objective is not to predict election results, but, rather, to audit or verify the accuracy of vote counts in selected precincts. Therefore, EVEP pollsters focus on targeted precincts, polling very comprehensively so that official election results in these targeted precincts can be verified. For example, in the 2006 congressional elections, The Warren Poll, sponsored by Election Integrity, interviewed close to 6,000 voters in selected precincts in Montgomery, Delaware, and Chester counties in Pennsylvania. However, because verifying particular precinct