An 1852 Whig Party campaign banner for candidates Winfield Scott and William A. Graham.

Winfield Scott against their own incumbent President Fillmore in the 1852 election because Fillmore signed the Fugitive Slave Act. In 1854, northern and southern Whigs were divided over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a bill devised by Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas that would repeal the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and be a major precursor to the American Civil War.

Many northern Whigs, including Abraham Lincoln, joined the Republican Party in strong opposition. In 1854, other Whigs joined the Republican Party. Over time, the remainder of the Whigs either defected or formed other parties, including the Democratic Party, the Opposition Party, the Know Nothing Party, the Constitutional Union Party, and the Native American Party. During the Reconstruction Period, in the south, Whigs tried to reform and called themselves the Conservatives, but this resurgence was defeated by the Democrats.

SEE ALSO: Presidential Election of 1828; Presidential Election of 1852; Political Parties in American Elections.

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Winner-Take-All System

IN A WINNER-TAKE-ALL system, the goal of an election is to pick a winner, and the winner takes all. This is in contrast to proportional representation, where the goal is to choose a legislature that will mirror the preferences of voters as closely as possible. There are several kinds of winner-take-all systems, and a key distinction can be made between plurality and majority formulas. Among countries using winner-take-all formulas for legislative elections, single-member district plurality is by far the most widely used (in 54 cases out of 91 studied). This system is used for legislative elections in countries such as Britain and former British colonies such as the United States or India. In this case, the candidate who receives the largest number of votes wins the election.

If a majority is needed to win an election, the requirement can be met in either of two ways. The first possibility is the system used in France for presidential elections (and, in a slightly modified form, for electing the French parliament). To be elected, a candidate must win a majority (at least 50 percent plus one of the total votes cast). If no candidate wins a majority, a runoff election is held between the top two vote getters, which ensures that the winner of the second round is elected with a majority of votes. About 30 countries, mostly former French colonies and former Soviet republics, use this system, known as the two-round system or majority-runoff, for their legislative elections. An even larger number of countries, approximately 50, hold their presidential elections under such system. This system is also used in Louisiana.

The second possibility to ensure a majority for the winner, while avoiding the need for a second round, is the alternative vote (also known as preferential voting). This system is used in Australia for legislative elections and in Ireland for presidential elections. Instead of choosing just one candidate, each voter ranks candidates: first choice, second choice, third choice, and so on. If no candidate gets a majority of first preferences, the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated, and voters' second preferences are counted from the ballots on which that candidate was ranked first; the process continues until one candidate gets a majority of votes.

For example, in a district in which a Republican, a Democrat, and a Green candidate are running, if 100,000 voters cast a ballot, and the results (first preferences) are: 48,000 votes for the Republican candidate, 47,000 votes for the Democratic candidate, and 5,000 votes for the Green candidate, no candidate received a majority of first preferences. The Green candidate, who received the lowest number of first preferences, is eliminated. The next step is to look at the second preferences on the 5,000 ballots on which the Green candidate was marked as the first preference. If, for instance, the Democratic candidate appears as the second choice of 4,000 of Green voters, and the Republican candidate is the second preference of only 1,000 of Green voters, the total vote of the Democratic candidate becomes 51,000, and he or she is elected, despite being in the second position after the first count.

Another possible criterion for classifying winner-take-all electoral formulas is to look at the number of representatives elected in a district. The alternative vote and majority-runoff are always employed in single-member districts; for plurality, that is not always the case. The single non-transferable vote provides an example of the use of plurality in multiple member districts. The system was used 1948–93 for electing Japan's lower house, and is still used for legislative elections in Jordan and Vanuatu. Under this system, each elector has just one vote, but there are multiple seats to be filled in each district. In a three-member district, for instance, the top three vote getters are elected, and any candidate who receives 25 percent of the vote is guaranteed a seat. Another possibility is to have parties, rather than candidates, running in multimember districts, with the party winning a plurality of votes winning all seats in the districts. This is the party block vote, a system used in Singapore,; this method tends to give a huge seat bonus to the largest party.

SEE ALSO: Plurality Vote; Proportional Representation.

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Wisconsin

NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE are known to have lived in Wisconsin since 10,000 B.C.E.; the first European to visit was the French explorer Jean Nicolet in 1634. A Jesuit mission was built, in 1671, at Green Bay and, gradually, a number of French traders started trading in the region. The British gained possession of the area at the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and permanent European settlement began soon afterwards. It became a part of the United States in 1783, and was a part of the Indiana Territory beginning in 1800. After the War of 1812, the Americans started organizing it, and an act of Congress on April 20, 1836 creating the Wisconsin Territory, which included not only what is now Wisconsin, but also Iowa, Minnesota, and parts of North and South Dakota.

Belmont became the capital of the territory with an elected legislature. Wisconsin voting against the introduction of its "first" constitution in April 1847. In December of that year, another constitutional convention was called and, in March 1848, another referendum was ratified; Wisconsin attained statehood on May 29, 1848. The first governor was Nelson Dewey, a Democrat from Connecticut, who had been active in politics in Wisconsin since the early 1830s. He won the 1848 election at the age of 35, getting 19,538 votes to Whig John H. Tweedy's 14,449 votes. Dewey was reelected two years later, with a much lower turnout, winning with 16,649 votes to Whig Alexander L. Collins's 11,317 votes. However, Dewey chose not to run for a third term in 1852, instead moving to the Wisconsin