

Module 8: Politics

Topic 2 Content: Political Parties

Introduction



Demi Tracy: George Washington famously warned American citizens about the dangers of political parties in his farewell address. James Madison also worried about factions, which is what political parties were originally called. Despite believing that a faction pursued its own interests at the expense of the common good, Madison would end up forming one of America's first political parties. Glover, what other information about political parties can you share with our audience?

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Roles of Political Parties

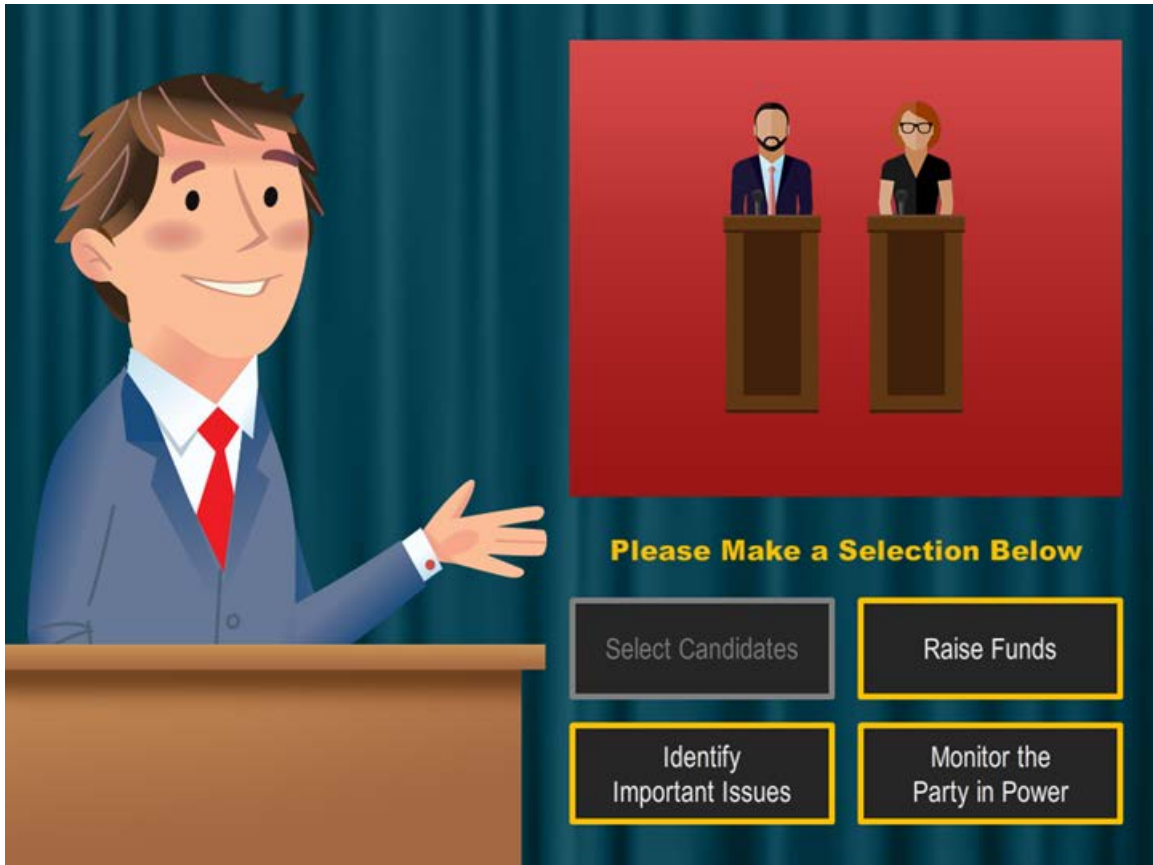


Glover Mint: Political parties are composed of people with similar political beliefs. These shared political beliefs form the basis for the platform of the political party. Political parties want to influence public policy and control the government, which they do by winning elections. Conducting campaigns is one of the main roles of a political party. This is because when a party holds powerful positions in the local, state, and national governments, it is able to influence public policy at all levels of American society. In addition to conducting campaigns, political parties serve other important roles in the American political process.

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Select Candidates



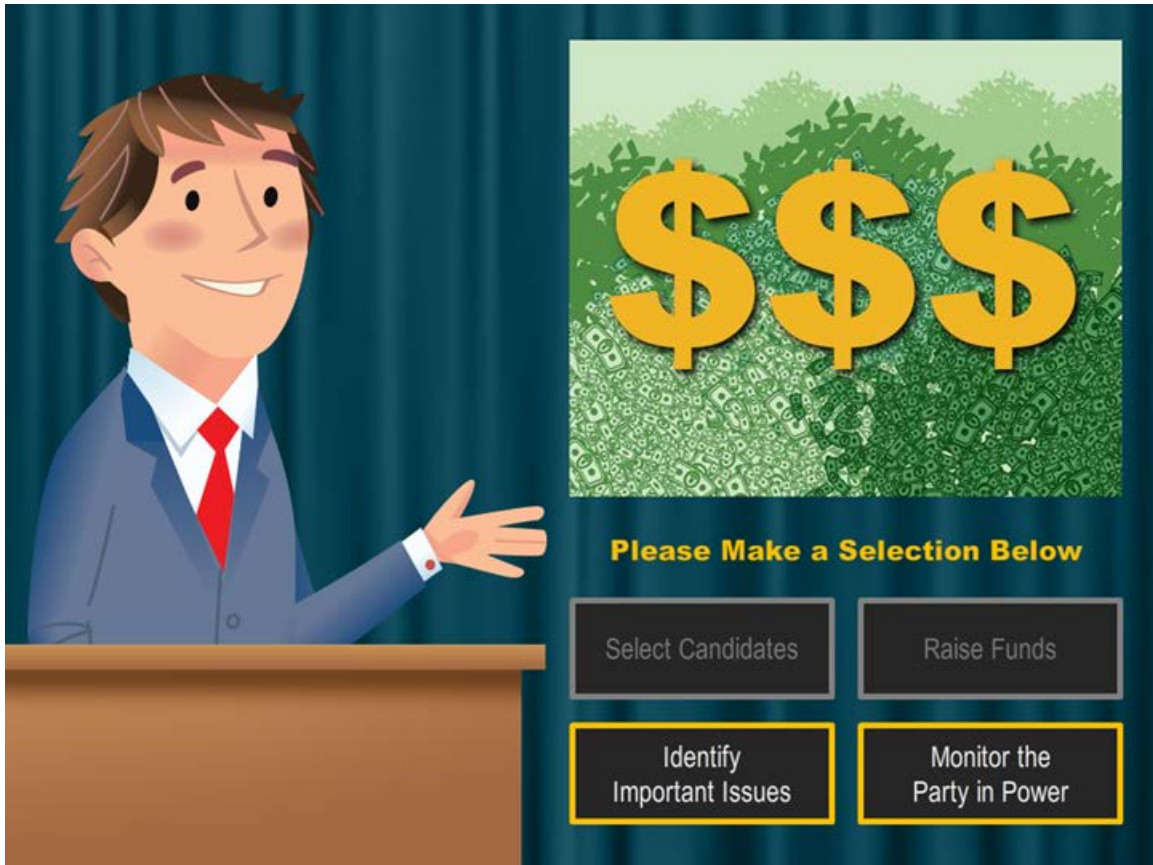
The illustration shows a man in a blue suit and red tie speaking at a podium. To his right, a red rectangular area contains two smaller figures of a man and a woman at podiums. Below this area, the text "Please Make a Selection Below" is displayed in yellow. Underneath, four buttons are arranged in a 2x2 grid: "Select Candidates" (grey), "Raise Funds" (yellow), "Identify Important Issues" (yellow), and "Monitor the Party in Power" (yellow).

Glover Mint: One of the main roles of a political party is to select candidates for elective office, through the nomination process. Not every member of a political party holds the exact same beliefs, but there are some general issues that receive the party's support. Parties narrow down the potential candidates to the best person, in order to successfully promote and enact the party's platform. This person automatically receives a degree of "brand recognition," by being affiliated with the party.

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Raise Funds



The illustration shows a man with brown hair, wearing a blue suit, white shirt, and red tie, standing behind a wooden podium and gesturing with his right hand. To his right is a large screen with a dark blue background. At the top of the screen is a green field of money, with three large yellow dollar signs (\$\$\$) in the center. Below this, the text "Please Make a Selection Below" is written in yellow. Underneath are four dark grey buttons with white text: "Select Candidates", "Raise Funds", "Identify Important Issues", and "Monitor the Party in Power". The "Identify Important Issues" and "Monitor the Party in Power" buttons have a yellow border.

Glover Mint: Campaigns require a lot of work and can be incredibly expensive, especially for presidential and congressional elections. When a candidate receives a political party's support, he or she also receives funding and campaign workers to assist with the campaign.

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Identify Important Issues



ISSUES

Please Make a Selection Below

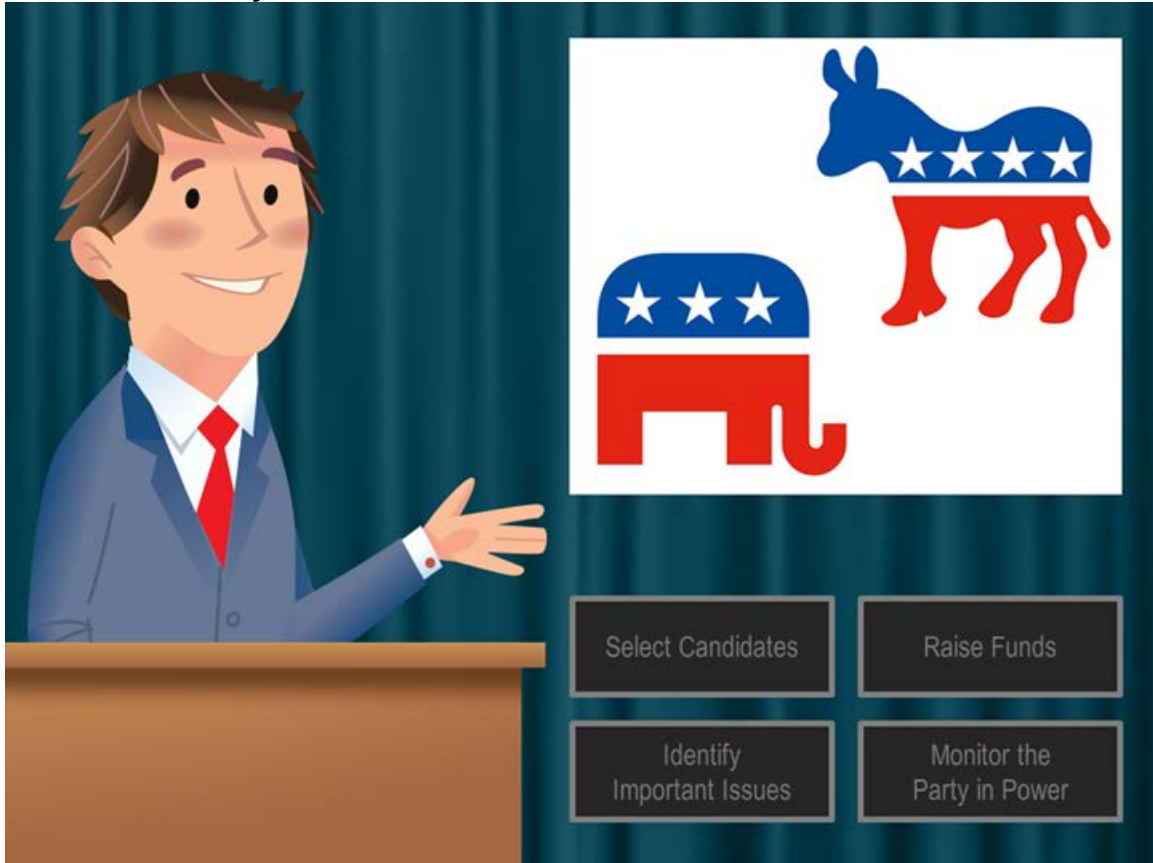
- Select Candidates
- Raise Funds
- Identify Important Issues
- Monitor the Party in Power

Glover Mint: When a political party promotes its platform, it brings those issues to the forefront of the political environment. Citizens receive information about these issues, which can help them make an informed decision when it is time to vote.

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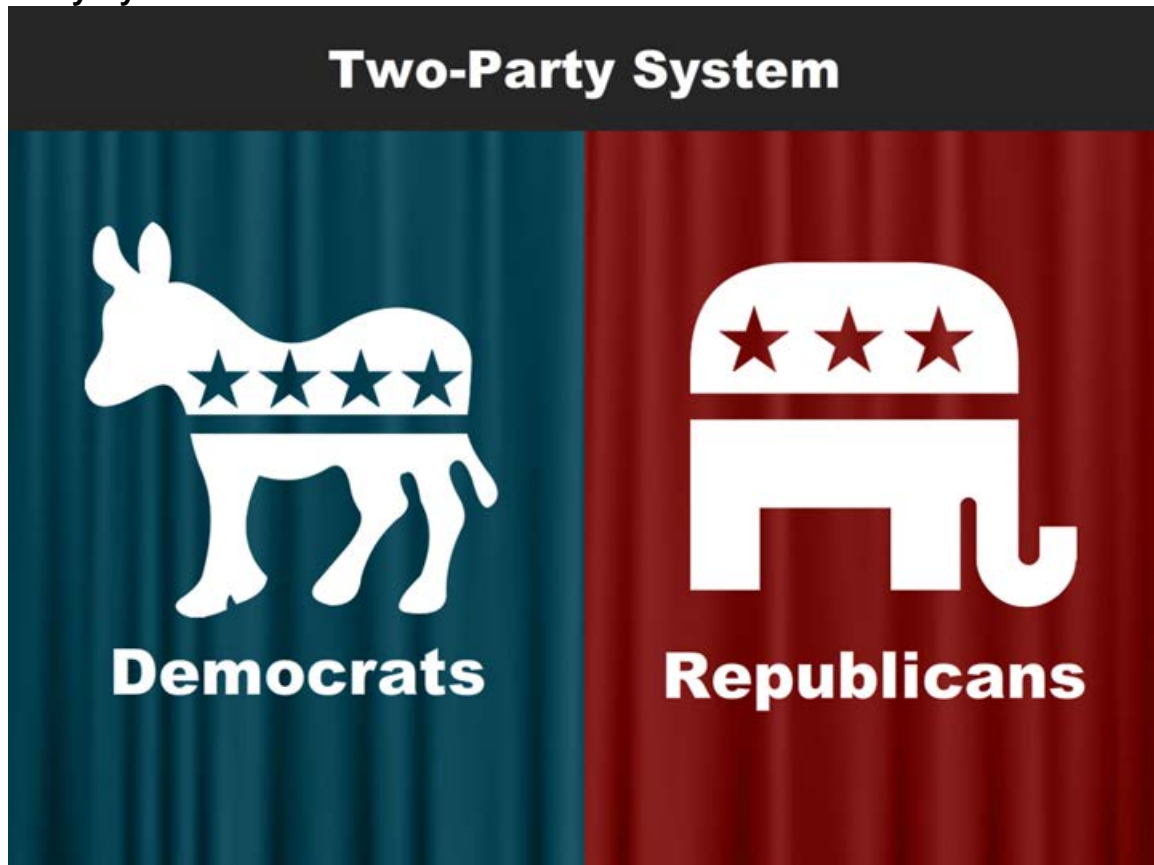
Monitor the Party in Power



Glover Mint: Political parties usually monitor the members of other political parties. Any mistakes made by the opposing party can be highlighted in order to gain or maintain majority control of the government. By keeping a close eye on the opposing party, both parties are held accountable to the people.

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Party Systems



Glover Mint: American politics uses a two-party system. There may be numerous political parties at any given time, but the balance of power shifts between the two major parties. Currently, these parties are the Democrats and Republicans.

A one-party system occurs in a country where a single political party controls the government. Elections may or may not be held, but if elections are held, voters are limited to candidates who belong to the same political party. The People's Republic of China is a current example of a one-party system.

A multiparty system occurs when a nation has numerous political parties, both large and small, that are represented in the government. This type of system is practiced throughout much of Europe today. Voters have more choices, but it is difficult for one party to win the majority in an election.

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Third Parties



Glover Mint: Although America is a two-party system, independent third parties have appeared throughout U.S. history. Typically, these smaller parties fail to win major elections, but some of these third parties have had significant impact on public policy. An independent party may highlight a single issue or provide a forum for minority views. If a minor party becomes popular in the public opinion, the major parties may be forced to acknowledge these minor party issues and absorb them into the major party platform.

In some elections, popular support for a third party may spoil the election for the Democrats or Republicans. For example, third parties may form as a splinter party of one of the major political parties. President Theodore Roosevelt formed the Progressive Party, also known as the Bull Moose Party, after becoming disappointed with the executive decisions of his successor, President Taft. Both Roosevelt and Taft were members of the Republican Party, but when Taft ran for reelection in 1912, Roosevelt formed the Bull Moose Party and ran against him. Roosevelt received far more electoral votes than Taft, but far less than the Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson. Essentially, Roosevelt had split the Republican vote and secured the election for President Wilson.

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Ending of Episode



Demi Tracy: Thank you, Glover. Some other notable third parties are the Libertarian Party, which supports individual rights and the smallest government possible, and the Green Party, which arguably split the vote for the Democratic Party in the 2000 presidential election. The Green Party candidate Ralph Nader received a lot of support from liberal voters, helping Republican George W. Bush win the White House.