Effects of Third Parties in the US

Course
Political Science I

Unit VI
People and Politics

Essential Question
How do third parties affect the political process?

Rationale
Third parties are an important factor of the two-party political system in the US. Understanding what third parties are and how they affect the US political process is imperative knowledge for GPA professionals.

Objectives
The students will be able to:
1. Identify third parties in the US
2. Understand how third parties affect the political process
3. Determine barriers that inhibit third-party success
4. Identify past elections in which third parties have affected an election
5. Create their own third party while working as a team

Engage
Display around the room the logos for some of the third parties in the US and have the students examine them. (Note: Third-party logos may include: The Socialist Party, The Green Party, The Libertarian Party, Independent American Party, Constitution Party, etc.). After the students complete their observations, ask the students what they inferred from the logos. Discuss what they might know about the third parties from prior experience. Then lead a class discussion about why third parties are important to the political process. Use the Discussion Rubric for assessment.

Key Points
I. What are the third parties of the US?
   A. The Formation of Third Parties
      1. Goals
         a) Many third parties are rooted in social movements formed by activists
         b) The primary goal of these founders is to influence the public policy that supports their cause
            (1) The two major parties have the same goal; third parties’ public policy is often much more exclusive and specific to their cause
         c) Many times, third parties have attempted to run campaigns to elect their candidates for office, but they have not been as successful as the two major parties
         d) Third parties also work to raise money so that they can compete in elections with the two major parties
            (1) Many of these activists’ groups never evolve into actual political parties because they do not have enough funds

Estimated Time
1-2 hours
e) Even the groups that do eventually become political parties oftentimes have little influence on political elections

2. Sectionalism
   a) The major third parties find their roots in sectionalism
      (1) These are minor parties based on causes often neglected by the major parties
   b) Third parties achieve their greatest success when they incorporate new ideas or alienated groups, such as
      (1) The Green Party: Environmentalists who broke away from the Democrats
      (2) The Bull Moose/Progressive Party: The faction of the Republican Party that gave Theodore Roosevelt the platform to run for President
   c) Third parties are often the most successful when there is declining trust in the two major political parties
   d) The two major political parties however eventually adopt some of the ideas of the popular third parties in hopes that they can secure voters who support third party causes

B. Types of Third Parties
   1. Issue Advocacy Parties
      a) These parties are formed to promote a stance on a particular issue
         (1) Most of these parties are short-lived since issues are constantly evolving
      b) For example, the Green Party promotes environmental protection as a primary issue
         (1) Other issues addressed in their 2000 platform were greed, corruption, globalization, and human rights
         (2) The Green Party only obtained 3 percent of the popular vote in the 2000 presidential election and after the 2004 election, the popular vote had decreased to less than 1 percent. (Harrison & Harris, 2011, p. 262)
   2. Ideologically Oriented Parties
      a) The agenda of an ideologically orientated party is typically broader than that of an issue advocacy party
      b) These parties are structured around ideology, a highly organized and coherent framework concerning the nature and role of government in society
         (1) The political views of these parties are oftentimes more broad than issue advocacy parties
      c) This type of third party includes the Libertarian Party and the Socialist Party
(1) Libertarian Party: the ideological position that government should not interfere with individuals’ social, political, and economic rights
(2) Socialist Party: the ideological position that government should play a large role in ensuring economic equality for all people
   (a) The Socialist Party is one of the longest standing ideologically orientated parties in the US

3. Splinter Parties
   a) A political party that breaks off, or “splinters”, from one of the two major political parties
   b) A third party often splinters off from the major party because of internal disagreement on a particular issue
      (1) The Tea Party is considered a splinter party because of disagreements within the Republican Party
      (2) However, the Tea Party has not officially separated from the Republican Party because they do not run for election as “Tea Party candidates”

II. How do third parties impact the political process?
   A. Influencing Elections
      1. Third parties have not won elections in the US; however, they can influence electoral outcomes
      2. Third parties provide an outlet for voters who are dissatisfied with the major parties
         a) Although third parties rarely win elections, it is an opportunity for like-minded people to come together and try to affect change
      3. Although third parties are not necessarily effective at the national level, they can influence politics at the local level
      4. Third parties tend to help the major out-of-power party that is trying to win a national election
      5. The two-party system does not favor parties with extreme or unconventional views
   B. Influencing the National Agenda
      1. Third parties also attempt to influence the national political agenda by drawing attention to particular issues
      2. Government officials within the two major parties respond to the concern even if the third party has no chance of winning an election
         a) If the officials do not respond, it can cause backlash within the electorate
         b) Government officials also alter their political agendas in hopes of swaying these third-party voters
III. What barriers do third parties face?

A. Winner-Take-All System
   1. Unlike many European nations, the US has a plurality electoral system
      a) Third parties would benefit more from proportional representation
   2. Proportional representation is a voting system that would apportion legislative seats according to the percentage of votes a political party receives
   3. The winner-take-all system encourages the grouping of interests into as few parties as possible
      a) The democratic minimum number of parties is two, such as the US has

B. Campaign Finance
   1. The rules of public financing for US presidential elections also make it difficult for third parties
   2. If a candidate does not receive at least 5 percent of the popular vote in the presidential election then their party is not eligible for federal matching funds
      a) In 2000 Ralph Nader missed the federal matching funds cut off by 2 percent, so the Green Party did not receive funds in the 2004 presidential election

IV. How have third parties affected past presidential elections?

A. Affecting the Popular Vote
   1. 1992 Presidential Election
      a) Ross H. Perot ran in the 1992 presidential election against Democratic candidate Bill Clinton and Republican candidate George H. W. Bush
      b) Ross H. Perot ran as an “independent” in the election
         (1) By 1995, Ross H. Perot founded what is known as the Reform Party
      c) Perot received 19 percent of the popular vote in the 1992 presidential election
      d) Perot ran on issues like cutting the national budget and reducing the national debt
         (1) His policies were focused on fiscal issues
      e) Since Perot’s ideology appealed more closely to that of some Republicans, he likely took votes away from incumbent George H.W Bush
         (1) This could have contributed to Bill Clinton’s victory in 1992
   2. 2000 Presidential Election
      a) Ralph Nader was the Green Party candidate who ran against Republican candidate George W. Bush and
Democratic candidate Al Gore

b) Ralph Nader’s Green Party was focused on environmental issues and appealed to voters who would most likely be voting Democratic

c) Although Ralph Nader received a small portion of the popular vote, 3 percent, political scientists argued that it was enough to cost Al Gore the presidency due to the election’s narrow margin

Activities
Create a Third Party. Divide the class into groups of five and have them work as a team to create a third party. Their parties may be an issue advocacy party, an ideologically-oriented party, or a splinter party. The group must clearly identify its policy or policies by creating a party platform that represents their party. (Extra credit option: Ask the students to design a logo for the third party.) Use the Cooperative Teams Rubric for assessment.

Assessments
Effects of Third Parties in the United States Quiz and Key
Cooperative Teams Rubric
Discussion Rubric
Individual Work Rubric
Research Rubric

Materials
Effects of Third Parties in the US computer-based presentation
Effects of Third Parties in the US Key Terms
Copies of or access to logos for third parties

Resources

Accommodations for Learning Differences
For reinforcement, the students will make a political spectrum chart in which they identify the two major parties and then identify where five of the third parties fall on the political spectrum. Use the Individual Work Rubric for assessment.

For enrichment, the students will write a 2-3-page research paper about the third parties in the US. Use the Research Rubric for assessment.

**State Education Standards**

**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Career and Technical Education**

§130.183. Political Science I (One to Two Credits).

(10) The student examines the role of political parties in the United States system of government. The student is expected to:

(B) evaluate the role of third parties in the United States;

**College and Career Readiness Standards**

Social Studies Standards

I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills

C. Change and continuity of political ideologies, constitutions, and political behavior

1. Evaluate different governmental systems and functions.
Effects of Third Parties in the US Key Terms

Third Parties – electoral contenders other than the two major parties; American third parties are not unusual, but they rarely win elections

Sectionalism – a tendency to be more concerned with issues of a particular region or group than with interests of the larger group or country

Issue Advocacy Party – a party formed to promote a stance on a particular issue

Ideologically Oriented Party – a party structured around ideology, a highly organized and coherent framework concerning the nature and role of government in society

Splinter Party – a political party that breaks off, or “splinters”, from one of the two dominant parties
Effects of Third Parties in the US Quiz

1. _____ Which of the following is considered to be the goal of third parties?
   A To influence public policy that supports their cause
   B To run candidates for office
   C To raise money so that they can run candidates for office
   D All of the above

2. _____ Which of the following is not considered to be a type of third party?
   A Issue Advocacy Party
   B Ideologically Oriented Party
   C Separatist Party
   D Splinter Party

3. _____ Third parties are oftentimes the most successful when:
   A There is declining trust among the two major parties
   B There is not an incumbent running in an election
   C The political views of the third party are centered around advocacy for minority groups
   D They form as a result of a split within one of the two major political parties

4. _____ Which of the following statements is true about third parties?
   A Third parties oftentimes win local elections
   B Third parties provide an outlet for dissatisfied voters
   C Third parties are well-funded by advocacy groups
   D Third parties have never influenced a national election

5. _____ How do the major political parties attempt to influence third-party voters?
   A The major political parties have little concern for third-party voters
   B Nominate candidates that will appeal to third-party voters
   C Alter the political agenda of the party in hopes to sway third-party voters
   D The major parties will draw attention to particular issues

6. _____ Third parties in American politics typically do which of the following?
   A Encourage major-party candidates to take extreme positions
   B Win elections in American politics
   C Bring new groups into politics
   D Replace one of the two major parties

7. _____ The America two-party system does which of the following?
   A Makes third parties illegal
   B Makes it difficult for third parties to win elections
   C Creates a bias towards third parties
   D Does not allow for third parties to run candidates for office
8. _____An Ideologically Oriented Party is best defined as which of the following?
   A  A party that breaks off from one of the two dominant parties
   B  A party structured around ideology that has a coherent framework about the role of
government in society
   C  A party concerned about the ideologies of a particular region or group rather than the
ideologies of the larger group or country
   D  A party that promotes a stance on a particular issue

9. _____Which of the following third-party candidates influenced the 1992 presidential
election?
   A  Ralph Nader
   B  Ron Paul
   C  Ross Perot
   D  Jesse Jackson

10. _____What percentage of the popular vote does a third-party candidate have to obtain in
order to receive federal matching funds for a future election?
   A  2 percent
   B  3 percent
   C  4 percent
   D  5 percent
Effects of Third Parties in the US Quiz Key

1. D
2. C
3. A
4. B
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## Cooperative Teams Rubric

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