Political parties have shifted many times in 220 years of national politics. Even when parties have kept the same names for long periods, their issues, principles, demographics, and regional support all change over time.

This chart shows the evolution of political party systems in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. Each “party system” is a roughly defined time period in which two major political parties, each with fairly consistent supporters and beliefs, dominated the political scene.

The colored lines represent organized parties that had a significant impact on national politics, electing members of Congress or receiving more than 1% of the vote for President. Where the lines merge and split, parties split or party affiliations changed dramatically in a short period of time.

Presidential candidates are also listed for each party, with the winning candidate in bold.

Political Parties in the United States, 1896–1929

As Democrats began to take up Populist causes, the Populist Party lost influence. In 1896 they ran a “Fusion” ticket, supporting the Democratic nominee for President, William Jennings Bryan.

In 1904, Populists argued that Democratic nominee William Jennings Bryan was too close to business interests. The result was a Republican landslide. The new Republican coalition would dominate national politics for another 36 years.

In 1908, Republicans led by William McKinley argued that Bryan’s liberal economic policies would make everyone poor. McKinley also wooed migrants, especially Germans, that he welcomed them as Americans. His campaign manager, Mark Hanna, raised millions of dollars and used new techniques of advertising. The result was a Republican landslide. The new Republican coalition would dominate national politics for another 36 years.

In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt, who had broken with the Republican Party, ran on the Progressive or “Bull Moose” Party ticket. His split of the Republican vote allowed Democrat Woodrow Wilson to win the Presidency.

In 1916, Woodrow Wilson retired in 1908, but by 1912, he believed that his successor, William H. Taft, was too closely aligned with business interests. He ran for President on the Progressive or “Bull Moose” Party ticket. By splitting the Republican vote, he allowed Democrat Woodrow Wilson to win the Presidency.

In 1924, Wisconsin Republican Senator Robert M. La Follette, Jr., a progressive, broke with the Republican Party and ran for President, winning over 10% of the popular vote but carrying only his home state of Wisconsin. The party dissolved after the election.

The Socialist Party of America was formed in 1901 by a merger of other smaller parties. It drew support from trade unions, progressive social reformers, populist farmers, and immigrant communities. From 1904 to 1914, its candidates drew between 3 and 5% of the vote in presidential elections.

In 1928, Warren G. Harding, who had been President of the United States, won the Presidency in 1920 and received the White House to the Republican Party for another 12 years.