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. The chart shows the evolution of political party systems in the U.S. since 1789. 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. (Of course, people switch parties all the time, but we can't show that on the chart.)

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

- John Adams  - Candidate for president
- Martin Van Buren  - Winning candidate for president
- Andrew Jackson  - Winning candidate for president
- John W. Davis  - Winning candidate for president
- James Polk  - Winning candidate for president
- Franklin Pierce  - Winning candidate for president
- Horace Greeley  - Winning candidate for president
- Adlai Stevenson  - Winning candidate for president
- Franklin D. Roosevelt  - Winning candidate for president
- Richard Nixon  - Winning candidate for president
- George W. Bush  - Winning candidate for president
- Ralph Nader  - Winning candidate for president