**Democratic and Republican parties**

From 1790 to 1830, there was an expansion of democracy in the United States. Few Americans represented this change better than Andrew Jackson. Born into poverty in the Carolina backcountry, Jackson managed to prosper as a planter, buying land and slaves. He went on to become a judge, a U.S. senator, and a military hero. Despite his wealth and fame, Jackson maintained a common, man-of-the-people image. This image and a new spirit of democracy in the country helped sweep Jackson to the presidency in 1828.

**Democracy for the Common Man—But Not Woman** Jackson owed his victory in part to an expansion of **suffrage**, or voting rights. By 1828, most states had dropped the requirement that voting citizens must own property. The number of popular votes increased from around 350,000 in 1824 to some 1,155,000 the year Jackson was elected president. Although these changes marked an expansion of democracy, many Americans were still denied this most basic political right. No states allowed women, American Indians, or slaves to vote. Only a few granted suffrage to free African American men.

Other changes were also making the election process more democratic. In many states, secret paper ballots were replacing the more public voice-vote system. This change encouraged people to vote without fear of intimidation at the polls. By 1832, open national conventions had replaced private party meetings, called caucuses, to nominate candidates for president and vice president.

Political parties made politics more democratic by involving more people in election campaigns. By the 1820s, parties were using newspapers, campaign songs, and get-out-the-vote rallies to drum up interest in voting. The percentage of eligible voters who actually went to the polls increased sharply as campaigns became more interesting.



Click to read caption

**Jackson Loses, Then Wins, the Presidency** Jackson first ran for president in 1824. That year, four candidates ran for president, all of them claiming to be Democratic-Republicans. Each candidate represented the interests of a different section of the country. Jackson managed to attract enough voters in all sections to win the popular vote. However, he did not have enough votes in the Electoral College to win the presidency. In accordance with the Constitution, the election went to the House of Representatives, which chose John Quincy Adams to be president. Jackson's supporters vowed revenge in the next election.

Jackson knew there would be many new voters in 1828, most of them "common people." To gain their support, he formed a new political party known as the **Democratic Party**. Democrats claimed to speak for ordinary farmers and workers, rather than for the wealthy and privileged few. This new party supported a decentralized government and states' rights.

Jackson's opponent, John Quincy Adams, also headed a new party, the National Republican Party. The National Republicans represented business, shipping, and banking interests in the Northeast. This party favored a strong central government that would fund internal improvements, such as roads and canals, to grow the economy. Southerners feared that they would be taxed in the form of high tariffs to pay for these improvements. They also worried that a stronger federal government might be tempted to interfere with slavery.

Both parties tried to win voters by avoiding sectional issues and flinging nasty charges at one another. When the mudslinging was over, Jackson's "common man" appeal won him a landslide victory. At his inauguration, Jackson threw open the White House doors to his followers. They tromped through the residence with muddy boots and spilled punch on the furniture. It was a raucous celebration of popular democracy.



Click to read caption

Once in office, Jackson rewarded his loyal supporters with government jobs. Those who lost their jobs to make way for Jackson supporters denounced this practice as a **spoils system**. The name comes from the ancient wartime saying, "To the victor belong the spoils [prizes] of war." Jackson, however, defended "rotation in office" as a democratic reform. Government jobs, he argued, were not the property of an elite few but should be open to all.

**Nullification: Defining the Limits of State and Federal Powers** A key issue facing the young republic was the balance between state and federal power. This issue first came up in 1798, when Congress passed two controversial laws known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Believing the laws to be unconstitutional, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison penned protests known as the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions. The resolutions called on states to nullify, or declare void, any federal law that violates the Constitution. This principle of **nullification** would become a flash point in a later battle over states' rights.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall made a number of rulings that affirmed federal power. The first ruling came in 1819 in *McCulloch v. Maryland*, which arose when Maryland tried to tax the Baltimore branch of the Bank of the United States, a national bank created by an act of Congress. The **Marshall Court** ruled that "the power to tax involves the power to destroy." Under the Supremacy Clause, no state had the right to destroy or in any way nullify what Congress had enacted. In *Gibbons v. Ogden*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the power of Congress to regulate interstate commerce. The case arose when the New York legislature granted two men the exclusive right to run steamboats on the Hudson River. New Jersey, which shares the river with New York, protested. The Court rejected New York's effort to control boat traffic on the river, on the ground that it interfered with interstate commerce.

The issue of states' rights reached a boiling point in 1832, when South Carolina tried to nullify two federal tariff laws. Like many southern states, South Carolina relied on imports of cheap manufactured goods, and tariffs raised the prices on these goods. As the nullification crisis heated up, state leaders threatened to withdraw from the Union if the tariff laws were enforced. President Jackson stood his ground, preparing to use force if necessary. At the same time, he rushed a lower tariff bill through Congress. The crisis passed, but the tension between states' rights and federal power did not go away.