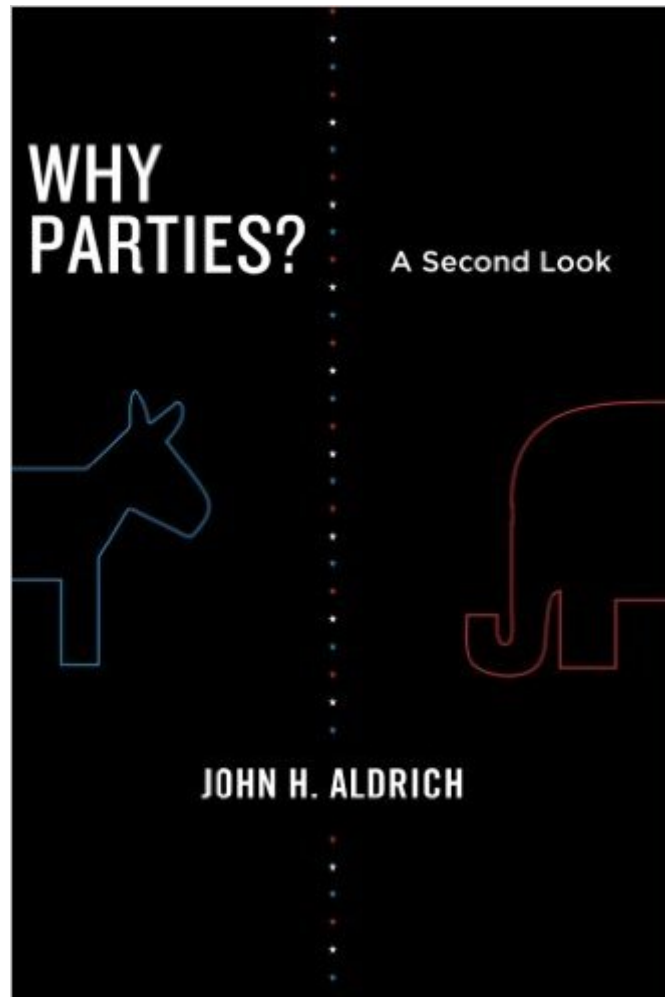


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Why Parties?: A Second Look (Chicago Studies In American Politics)



Synopsis

Since its first appearance fifteen years ago, *Why Parties?* has become essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the nature of American political parties. In the interim, the party system has undergone some radical changes. In this landmark book, now rewritten for the new millennium, John H. Aldrich goes beyond the clamor of arguments over whether American political parties are in resurgence or decline and undertakes a wholesale reexamination of the foundations of the American party system. Surveying critical episodes in the development of American political parties—from their formation in the 1790s to the Civil War—Aldrich shows how they serve to combat three fundamental problems of democracy: how to regulate the number of people seeking public office, how to mobilize voters, and how to achieve and maintain the majorities needed to accomplish goals once in office. Aldrich brings this innovative account up to the present by looking at the profound changes in the character of political parties since World War II, especially in light of ongoing contemporary transformations, including the rise of the Republican Party in the South, and what those changes accomplish, such as the Obama Health Care plan. Finally, *Why Parties? A Second Look* offers a fuller consideration of party systems in general, especially the two-party system in the United States, and explains why this system is necessary for effective democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a great update from the 1995 edition. The book is divided into three main parts; all of them

really interesting and engaging. In the first part, the author provides a theory of political parties. Why do we have political parties in democracies? According to the author, parties are endogenous institutions that help office-seeking politicians to get votes and solve various problems (the mobilization of voters, for example). In the second and third parts the author provides multiple evidence to test his theory (in fact, in these two parts, Aldrich demonstrates that he is a great political scientist: he writes clearly, he knows history and he dominates an array of methodological techniques). If you want to understand why parties form and how they dominate democratic politics, then this book is for you.

Aldrich's book is a good overview for the political science rationale for political parties. The book doesn't drive home a single theory quite as well as some works in the literature, but rather explores several different ideas. This actually ends up making it great as a general reader or textbook. It's also quite accessible, even to non-political scientists.

Aldrich's new book is not a simple update of his WHY PARTIES?, published in 1995. He expands upon his theory, takes account of recent research, and evaluates political developments in the last fifteen years. It is another major contribution.

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