

POLITICAL PARTIES

WHAT IS IT?

Political parties are organizations of people with similar beliefs and political ideas. People work together to achieve a common goal. Most political parties have a platform, a statement explaining the party's goals, strategies, and principles. Some political parties have millions of members, while others are much smaller. Political parties influence laws, elect leaders, and inform citizens of issues. The party system has an important role in the United States' government.



HISTORY

The U.S. government has one of the oldest political party systems in the world, but political parties were not part of the early United States. The Constitution, the framework of the U.S. government, does not mention political parties at all. There were several early political parties that formed in the United States. The two main current political parties formed more than 100 years ago.

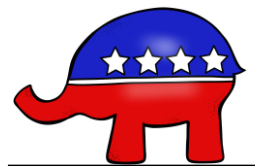
MAIN PARTIES

The United States has a two-party system, meaning there are two main political parties: the Democratic Party and Republican Party. Since the modern party system was established in 1860, every U.S. president has come from one of these parties. There are dozens of other smaller political parties in the United States.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

After its formation in 1854, the Republican Party quickly grew in popularity. One of the main issues in its platform was slavery, which was legal in Southern states, but illegal in Northern states. Americans started spreading out across the continent and new states formed. Some Republicans thought slavery should be banned in the new states. The party worked to end slavery altogether after the American Civil War. Early Republicans believed in a strong federal government with authority over state governments. They supported federal assistance for middle class citizens and passed laws that were friendly to businesses. They were supportive of railroads and interstate trade. Republican leaders passed laws to give free land to settlers who were willing to build homes and farms. They supported government funding for freed slaves, civil rights for African Americans, and state-supported higher education. Most Republicans were Northern businessmen, farmers, and other workers.

The Republican Party changed over time to support a more limited government that was less involved in the day-to-day running of the country. This idea still holds true today. Today's Republicans are typically in favor of lower taxes. They oppose increased government welfare programs to assist low income families. They believe the best decisions are made by individuals, not the government. They think businesses and the U.S. economy should be free to operate without government interference.



REPUBLICAN PARTY
Other names: Grande Old Party (GOP); the Party of Lincoln
Symbol: Elephant
Color: Red

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Democrats were against equal rights for African Americans after the Civil War. They supported laws enforcing separation between African Americans and also agreed with laws that prevented African Americans from voting. During this time, Democrats

supported local government. They were opposed to taxes and federal government activity. The Democratic Party started to change in the early 1900s though. They shifted toward more liberal ideas, such as more involvement by the federal government in the economy and Americans' daily lives. In the 1920s, the U.S. economy was booming and many people agreed with Republicans that the government should play a smaller role in overseeing the U.S. economy. Republicans won all three presidential elections in the 1920s.

In the 1930s, the United States experienced an economic hardship, known as the Great Depression. Millions of Americans were unemployed and banks closed. People struggled for basic needs like food, water, and shelter. In 1932, the Democratic Party's Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president. He created several government programs to help Americans protect their savings and find jobs. Many Americans felt Roosevelt helped get the country out of the Great Depression and the Democratic Party became the most popular party in the country. It continued to support the idea of strong federal government, but also started supporting equal rights for African Americans.

The modern Democratic Party believes the government should help care for the poor, unemployed, and elderly. The party supports government efforts to provide health care and education for all U.S. citizens. It sometimes votes for higher taxes to pay for programs supporting these goals. The party is in favor of the government having strict rules for business and industry. Most Democrats support equal rights for all people.



DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Other names:
Party of the People

Symbol: Donkey

Color: Blue

Other Parties

The United States has many other smaller political parties including the Libertarian Party, the Reform Party, and the Green Party. The Libertarian Party is the third largest in the U.S. Its members believe in an extremely limited government with few powers. Their platform focuses mainly on economic issues. They believe members of the United States should work hard to lower the national debt. The Green Party focuses on environmental issues. Its members want to create a new society that balances nature and communities. They also support equal rights for all U.S. citizens. The U.S. Electoral process requires a majority of votes to win, making it difficult for smaller parties to win presidential elections. Candidates from other parties can be elected to other government positions, allowing them to work on passing laws that promote their party's platform.

Voting

The United States is a democracy, meaning U.S. citizens elect the people who run the country. Voters elect both the president and vice-president, as well as members of Congress. Congress makes the nation's law as the legislative branch. Congress is divided into two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Voters elect members of both houses. They also cast ballots for state officials, governors, mayors, and judges. Members of Congress and other elected officials are almost always associated with a political party. They usually consider their party's platform when making decision.



Name _____

POLITICAL PARTIES

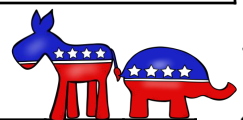


MATCHING: Match each term with its description.

1. ____ Republican	A. Symbol of the Republican Party
2. ____ Roosevelt	B. Party who won all 3 presidential elections in the 1920s
3. ____ Elephant	C. Statement explaining the party's goals
4. ____ platform	D. President who helped the U.S. out of the depression
5. ____ slavery	E. Republicans believe they make the best decisions
6. ____ Constitution	F. Party who focuses on environmental issues
7. ____ Libertarian	G. Framework of the U.S. government
8. ____ Green	H. The Republican Party was against this
9. ____ Red	I. Third largest political party in the United States
10. ____ individuals	J. Color that represents the Republican Party

WHICH PARTY?: Place a check in the correct column.

D: Democratic; **R:** Republican



STATEMENT	D	R
11. Represented by blue		
12. Nickname is the Grande Old Party		
13. Symbol is a donkey		
14. Franklin D. Roosevelt was a part of this party		
15. Formed in 1854		
16. Supports government efforts to provide health care		
17. In favor of the government having strict rules for business		
18. Changed over time to support a more limited government		
19. Believes the government should help care for the poor and elderly		
20. Think businesses and the U.S. economy should be free to operate without government interference.		

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

21. Which of the following best describes how the article is organized?
- A. It describes the causes of the formation of political parties.
 - B. It describes the formation of the Republican Party.
 - C. It describes what a political party is and compares and contrast the Republican and Democratic parties.
 - D. It explains problems both parties have encountered and their solutions.
22. What is the main reason it is difficult for candidates from smaller parties to get elected as the president?
- A. Their ideas are too outlandish for the general public.
 - B. The U.S. Electoral process requires a majority of votes to win, making it difficult for smaller parties to win.
 - C. They believe in an extremely limited government with few powers.
 - D. Their platform focusses mainly on economic issues.
23. What led the Democratic Party to become more popular in the 1930s?
- A. The U.S. economy was booming and many people felt the government should not play a large role in people's lives.
 - B. People were supportive of equal rights for all people and passed many laws to help diverse groups.
 - C. The United States experienced an economic hardship, known as the Great Depression and Roosevelt helped people out of it.
 - D. They supported government funding for freed slaves.
24. How does the Republican Party feel about the government's role in its citizens day-to-day life?
- A. They support a more limited government that is less involved.
 - B. They support the government's high involvement in people's lives.
 - C. Its members believe in an extremely limited government with few powers.
 - D. Its members believe the government should only intervene when it comes to environmental issues.
25. Which political party mainly focuses on economic issues?
- A. Democratic
 - B. Green
 - C. Republican
 - D. Libertarian
26. What is the author's main purpose in writing this selection?
- A. To persuade the reader to join the Republican Party.
 - B. To explain how to vote for a leader in the United States.
 - C. To inform the reader of the different U.S. political parties.
 - D. To entertain the reader with an interesting story about political parties.

