



HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

STUDENT BOOK

▶ **12th Grade** | Unit 3

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY 1203

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

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The American Party System

Introduction

Where did they come up with the Republican and Democratic party symbols? The donkey and elephant symbols have a long heritage and a humorous history! In 1828 the Democratic hopeful Andrew Jackson was mocked by his political rivals as being stubborn and as stupid as a donkey. The political cartoonists began portraying Jackson as a donkey, and the symbol stuck on him. However, after Jackson won the election, the once-mocking donkey now became a symbol of strength in the political cartoons. It grew more and more popular until it eventually became the symbol of the Democratic Party.

Objectives

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAAC®. When you have finished this LIFEPAAC, you should be able to:

1. Understand the importance and goals of the American political party system.
2. Understand the history and development of the Democratic party.
3. Understand the history and development of the Republican party and the significance of third parties in America.
4. Understand how a political party is formed; from selecting candidates to financing a campaign.
5. Understand the organization of a party, from national conventions to local organizations.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the nomination process and the strengths and weaknesses of closed vs. open primaries.
7. Explore the possibilities and ideas for making voting more effective and efficient.
8. Understand the process and variations of voting worldwide.

1. POLITICAL PARTIES

“We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.”
— Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

Section Objectives

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Understand the importance and goals of the American political party system.
2. Understand the history and development of the Democratic party.
3. Understand the history and development of the Republican party and the significance of third parties in America.

Vocabulary

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

administration	Executive branch of the American government; as in “the Clinton administration”.
ballot box	The container into which votes are put.
candidate	A person who desires a position in a political office.
constituency	People of a region who elected a representative; the representative is answerable to these people.
dictatorship	A country with a one-party leader who is in complete control; usually one who is unfair.
partisan	A type of person who will staunchly campaign or vote for only one political party.
political parties	A group of people organized with a governmental agenda in mind.
program	A political plan of action.
provincial	Pertaining to Canada; regional or territorial.
representative democracies	Democracies where the people elect representatives to act as their agents in making laws.

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are not sure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

The Republican's symbol of the elephant first appeared in 1874, drawn into political cartoons by artist Thomas Nast of the magazine *Harpers Weekly*. The elephant was meant to symbolize the huge Republican vote throughout the country. It, too, was accepted eagerly, and by 1904 the Republican elephant was the party's symbol. Why do they call themselves the G.O.P.? That term first came along during the election of 1896—when the Republican party captured both houses of Congress in addition to the presidency with William McKinley! That was indeed a “large” victory and a boisterous atmosphere of optimism permeated Washington, D.C. A dramatic economic upturn accompanied the Republican sweep, and a grateful American nation nicknamed the Republicans the “Grand Old Party.”

Practically every day you read or hear of news about the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. But you may have never heard of the Prohibition Party, the Libertarian party, or even the Bull Moose Party. These were all part of the political scene at some time in American history. **Political parties** have played, and will continue to play, a vital role in the American political drama. For as long as the Constitution has been in existence, the United States has rarely gone without a competitive national two-party system. During the eight-year **administration** of George Washington the United States was without an organized, competitive two-party system. Also, in the early 1800s, the Democratic Republican Party's opposition was too weak to be significant. Since that time we have seen a healthy and vigorous “battle” between at least two parties throughout the lifetime of the United States.

Political parties are more than televised gatherings. We see a lot of balloons, banners, and excitement whenever we watch a political party's convention, but there is much more to the party than just a rousing atmosphere. Serious strategy, long hours of labor, and much sacrifice goes into the formation and growth of a political party. A political party is an organized group of people who control or seek to control a government. In democratic countries, like the United States and Canada, political parties are

extremely active on the national, state or **provincial**, and local levels.

Political parties are absolutely necessary to democratic governments such as ours. Most modern democracies are called **representative democracies**. A representative democracy is a democracy where the people elect representatives to act as their agents in making and enforcing laws. In a representative democracy, some process is needed for nominating **candidates** for public office and for selecting issues for public debate. Political parties perform these functions for a representative democracy. At election time, the people go to the polls and vote into office the candidates of their choice. Political parties are totally voluntary organizations and want to obtain as many members as possible. Some of these parties have rules to be obeyed and membership dues. Others have practically no rules and require no dues of their members.

Some countries have only one political party. This type of political system is known as a dictatorship. Under a dictatorship form of government, the party controls the government. For example, in communist nations the Communist Party is always in power. It controls very tightly who may or may not run for election. Therefore, the people have only one choice, the choice of the party.

In this unit you will examine the political party structure in the United States. You will look at the two major political parties and also the minority parties. You will examine the rules for who is eligible to vote and the voting process. You will also examine the different groups who control various aspects of the government regardless of the level.

In the United States political parties are voluntary organizations of voters seeking to gain or keep control of the government, whether on a national, state or local level, in order to achieve the goals of the party. The party members name their candidates, draw up party **programs**, and encourage people to vote for their candidates so that their goals may be reached. The political parties in our country use the **ballot box** instead of revolt and guns to achieve the changes desired for our country.

WHY ARE POLITICAL PARTIES SO IMPORTANT?

For as long as you, your parents, or their parents can remember, we have had political parties. Our two-party system of government assures us of representation in the government and of a continued free nation. If you had been born in a country that had a one-party system, you would face the dangers of a government that could severely limit the freedoms of its citizens. Having a multi-party system helps assure that no particular party can abuse the politics and welfare of the people.

Our American political system is a two-party system. Political parties are the instruments for expressing the wishes of the people. Our political experience in the United States has led to the development of a two-party system. Our two-party system is perhaps the strongest in the world. In addition to the two main political parties, the United States has a history full of minority or third parties which have helped shape American politics. The third parties have played a significant role in the strengthening of our two major parties. After these third parties have served their purpose of protest or proposal, they have often seen their issues and their members taken over by one or the other of the major parties. This type of give-and-take helps keep either of the major parties from becoming too narrow-minded in their agendas.

With very few exceptions, we Americans think of ourselves as either Democrats or Republicans. Even independents, who pride themselves on remaining outside the party organizations and using the attitude of “voting for the best regardless of the party,” are forced to choose candidates that are already chosen for them in party conventions or primaries. Two-party systems are most common in the English-speaking countries of the world. Two-party countries include Great Britain, with its Conservative and Labor parties; Canada; and the United States, with both its Democrat and Republican parties. Although these countries may have other parties, one of the two major parties in each country usually controls the government.

The voting patterns are similar in most two-party countries. Generally, the industrial areas of a nation will support the more liberal party; but the rural areas will normally vote for the more conservative party.

Although a nation may have a strong two-party system, one party may control politics in certain areas of the country. For example, Canada has a number

of parties from which the voters can choose, but the Liberal Party had almost 40% of the vote, nearly double of the runner-up party, the Reform Party. There are other parties in Canadian politics, such as the Tories, Bloc Quebecois, and the New Democratic Party, but the Liberal party has been dominant in recent elections, holding the most seats in Canadian Parliament. One party can continuously hold a strong power in elections for years and years on end. The party has gained this control because the voters in those particular areas have continually voted for its candidates. In Great Britain, for example, certain constituencies have always supported the Conservative Party, but in certain other areas the Labor Party receives all the support. Therefore, in national elections each party considers certain areas safe for their candidates. If a party leader wants to be sure a certain candidate wins a seat in Parliament, they have him run in a safe constituency. In Great Britain a candidate for national office does not have to live in the **constituency** he hopes to represent. In America, a candidate must live in the constituency for a specified amount of time.

In many states in our country, both the Democratic and the Republican parties have considerable strength. In other states, however, only one of these two parties has traditionally controlled the politics of that state. For example, from the Civil War (1861-1865) until the mid-1960s, the Democrats strongly controlled most of the southern states. During that time span, the Republicans, though not as strong, controlled some New England and Midwestern states. Since the 1960s the Republicans have won increasing support in the South and the Democrats have been making gains in New England and the Midwest. Several of the large industrial and commercial cities in the United States, such as Chicago and New York City, usually vote for the Democratic Party. The rural areas, however, usually support the Republican Party.

Both the Republican and Democratic parties have a spirited and colorful rivalry for the office of president, and in almost every political race. Because of a healthy two-party system, representative government is alive and responsible in the United States. It avoids the extreme of the single party **dictatorship** that is so common in both communist and fascist countries. It also prevents the endless succession of stalemates and weak coalition governments that are common to countries with numerous political parties. France, for example, has suffered from this

condition for many years. Weak coalitions do not tend to allow a country to grow properly because of the excessive compromising necessary and because of the behind-the-scenes maneuvering against the party in power.

Because we have active political competition and frequent elections, we are not plagued with the bloody revolutions as other countries have experienced. Sometimes a shift in party control in the government, as occurred in 1932 with the Democrats and in the early 1990s with the Republicans, keeps the political balance and stability that is so important for our government to function properly. State and national elections show hard-fought contests for political party-control of seats in the Senate, House of Representatives, and State legislatures. Even the campaigning for offices in thousands of counties, cities, towns, and lower districts throughout the United States serve as a constant reminder of the importance of political parties in our political system.

People who staunchly campaign or vote for only one political party are known as **partisans.** Many times a political party is accused of partisan politics if it appears to put their party's agenda ahead of the good of the people. However, although there is the possibility of showing overbearing loyalty to one political party rather than working alongside all elected leaders, there are advantages to becoming an active member of a political party. From learning the political process to seeing an important piece of legislation gain power, an active role in a political party can be quite beneficial to a citizen. You become a member of a political party merely by

registering with the party of your choice. In some states registering is not required, nor is it necessary to pay dues or to carry membership cards. With the exception of special officers and active workers in the political machine, no regular party meetings are held.

Political parties play an important role in shaping the future of our nation, so it seems surprising that most people know very little about the activities of party organizations. Many voters are content to confine their political activities to the few minutes required at the voting booths once or twice a year. Because of the lack of interest, the major parties are reaching out to enlist the interests and energies of young people of the nation. Young people can do many things to help like distributing handbills, putting up posters and removing them after the election, addressing and filling envelopes, making phone calls, sending emails, running errands and doing other useful activities. Each individual can do many things to aid the party of his choice.

One of the primary goals for an American political party is to put their candidate in the office of the presidency. Political parties have helped forty-five men achieve that honored post. The political party's victorious candidate can then take the following oath of office: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best to of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." The following is a list of the presidents of the United States, along with their party affiliation.

PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES

Time in office	President	Party
1789–1797	George Washington	(Federalist)
1797–1801	John Adams	(Federalist)
1801–1809	Thomas Jefferson	(Democrat-Republican)
1809–1817	James Madison	(Democrat-Republican)
1817–1825	James Monroe	(Democrat-Republican)
1825–1829	John Quincy Adams	(Democrat-Republican)
1829–1837	Andrew Jackson	(Democrat)
1837–1841	Martin Van Buren	(Democrat)
1841 (March–April)	William Henry Harrison	(Whig)
1841–1845	John Tyler	(Democrat)

Time in office	President	Party
1845–1849	James Polk	(Democrat)
1849–1850	Zachary Taylor	(Whig)
1850–1853	Millard Fillmore	(Whig)
1853–1857	Franklin Pierce	(Democrat)
1857–1861	James Buchanan	(Democrat)
1861–1865	Abraham Lincoln	(Republican)
1865–1869	Andrew Johnson	(Republican)
1869–1877	Ulysses S. Grant	(Republican)
1877–1881	Rutherford B. Hayes	(Republican)
1881 (Mar–Sept)	James Garfield	(Republican)
1881–1885	Chester A. Arthur	(Republican)
1885–1889	Grover Cleveland	(Democrat)
1889–1893	Benjamin Harrison	(Republican)
1893–1897	Grover Cleveland	(Democrat)
1897–1901	William McKinley	(Republican)
1901–1909	Theodore Roosevelt	(Republican)
1909–1913	William Howard Taft	(Republican)
1913–1921	Woodrow Wilson	(Democrat)
1921–1923	Warren G. Harding	(Republican)
1923–1929	Calvin Coolidge	(Republican)
1929–1933	Herbert Hoover	(Republican)
1933–1945	Franklin D. Roosevelt	(Democrat)
1945–1953	Harry S. Truman	(Democrat)
1953–1961	Dwight D. Eisenhower	(Republican)
1961–1963	John Fitzgerald Kennedy	(Democrat)
1963–1969	Lyndon Baines Johnson	(Democrat)
1969–1974	Richard M. Nixon	(Republican)
1974–1977	Gerald R. Ford	(Republican)
1977–1981	Jimmy Carter	(Democrat)
1981–1989	Ronald Reagan	(Republican)
1989–1993	George H. W. Bush	(Republican)
1993–2001	Bill Clinton	(Democrat)
2001–2009	George W. Bush	(Republican)
2009–2017	Barack Obama	(Democrat)
2017–present	Donald J. Trump	(Republican)

Matching.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1.1 _____ partisan</p> <p>1.2 _____ program</p> <p>1.3 _____ representative democracy</p> <p>1.4 _____ constituency</p> <p>1.5 _____ convention</p> <p>1.6 _____ administration</p> | <p>a. people of a certain region who elected a representative to whom the representative is answerable</p> <p>b. a type of person who will staunchly campaign or vote for only one political party</p> <p>c. a political plan of action</p> <p>d. the executive branch of the American government; particularly used in relation to the office-holder</p> <p>e. a political party's assembly, usually for the purpose of presenting a candidate</p> <p>f. a democracy where the people elect representatives to act as their agents</p> |
|--|---|

Fill in the blanks.

- 1.7 Political parties are _____ to express the wishes of the people.
- 1.8 The two major American political parties are the _____ and the _____ parties.
- 1.9 Three countries with two-party systems include _____, _____, and _____.
- 1.10 The two major parties in Great Britain are the _____ and _____ parties.
- 1.11 People who will staunchly campaign or vote for only one political party are known as _____.
- 1.12 What is a constituency? _____.
- 1.13 Where have dictatorships been most common? _____ and _____ countries.
- 1.14 Name six Democratic presidents. _____

- 1.15 Many times a political party is accused of _____ if it appears they put their party's agenda ahead of the good of the people.
- 1.16 The third U.S. president was _____.

Choose one.

- 1.17 Third parties play a highly important role in _____ strengthening the two major parties.
 _____ weakening the two major parties.



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