

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY 1203

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

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HISTORY 1203

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

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.

Survey the LIFEPAAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. 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	Democracy 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 unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

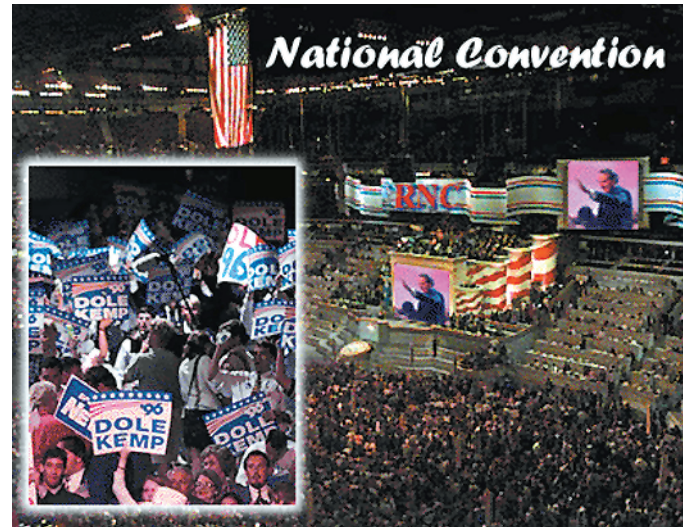
THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM



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 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.