

POLITICAL PARTIES IN AMERICA

What important roles do political parties play in America?

One Big Party?

It's a party, but not the kind with ice cream and cake (usually). A political party is defined as an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office.

Parties tend to be deeply and durably entrenched in specific substructures of society in a sustainable and well-functioning democracy. They can link the governmental institutions to the elements of the civil society in a free and fair society and are regarded as necessary for the functioning any modern democratic political system.

By organizing into political parties, people have more power to make their voices heard than they would have if they acted alone. Political parties are powerful organizations that fight to get the government to act in ways the political party believes is best. Political parties are organized at every level of government, from the national level right down to your own neighborhood.

Five Roles of Political Parties

1) Nominate Candidates

Political parties are responsible for selecting candidates who will run for political office. The parties choose candidates who believe in the party's platform. These candidates represent the party's members and help to spread the party's message during elections.

2) Influence Policy

Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives are also members of political parties. The senators and representatives from each party often work together as a group to create and pass laws that support their party's platform. The laws Congress passes affect the policies of our government. People in each political party want the government's policies to reflect their own party's platform.

3) Unite Government

People in the same political party are connected because they are members of the same organization. Most members of the government on the local, state, or national level are party members. A party can link its members at different levels of government to achieve big goals for the party.

4) Create Balance

The most powerful political party is the one that has the most members elected to office. Being in the majority means the party can focus the government's attention on issues that are important to the party's platform. The party in the minority works hard to oppose the majority party and keep it in check. Usually the majority party is able to get many laws passed. Depending on the minority party's strength, the majority may need to compromise with the minority before a law will pass. In this way the opposing party protects the interests of its own party supporters. A similar balance exists when the president and the majority in Congress are from different parties.

5) Inform Citizens

Political parties run campaigns for candidates. During campaigns, political parties run television ads, distribute pamphlets, post blogs, and help candidates give speeches. All of this media helps people understand what the political issues are and how government works. But beware: All of the information a political party distributes is biased toward its own party platform. Because of this, a political party should not be a citizen's only source of information.

The Party Platform: A Road Map for a Political Party

One of the most common complaints about politics these days is that the two major parties seem almost indistinguishable. Of course, everyone knows this isn't really so - it's clear they're not 'exactly' the same, since they're fighting all the time - but the policy differences between the two parties can sometimes be hard to figure out. Each party produces a platform. The platform is something like a roadmap; it's the path the parties would like to follow if they can find their way to a place where they can make those decisions. The platform usually contains a list of the party's beliefs, policy choices, and ambitions. These are often a lot more specific than candidates tend to be when they're running for office.

Platforms are written by each party's leadership. Each party has a set of directors, policy experts, and committee heads that form the working nucleus of the organization. When the party nominates a candidate to represent it, there's an expectation that the nominee will, for the most part, reflect the platform. The party's platforms are usually updated between national elections to get in line with contemporary issues, but there are rarely a great deal of significant differences.

TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN AMERICA

Supplemental Reading – [How did the Republican and Democratic parties get their animal symbols?](#)

Supplemental Video – [You'll Never Guess Why Republicans Are Red, Democrats Blue](#)

Supplemental Reading – [Why are Republicans called "the right" and Democrats called "the left"?](#)

Liberal Blue Donkeys to the Left, Conservative Red Elephants to the Right

The two major political parties in the United States are the Democrats and the Republicans. When you turn 18 and get ready to vote, you will listen to many candidates from both sides (and also some from smaller parties). But what makes someone a Republican or a Democrat? What is the difference? And how will you decide which party best fits the way you think? It's important to remember that these platforms are written to be broad on purpose, and that people who identify strongly with one party may still disagree with the party platform on other issues. Here is a quick comparison:

- **Democrats are considered liberal. They** believe in government action to achieve equal opportunity and equality for all. It is the duty of the government to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights. Believe the role of the government should be to guarantee that no one is in need. Liberal policies generally emphasize the need for the government to solve problems.
- **Republicans are considered conservative. They** believe in personal responsibility, limited government, free markets, individual liberty, traditional American values and a strong national defense. Believe the role of government should be to provide people the freedom necessary to pursue their own goals. Conservative policies generally emphasize empowerment of the individual to solve problems.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
<p>The Democratic Party is concerned with equality, cooperation, and social progress. Supporters of this party are more likely to be concerned with civil rights issues, stronger government regulation in business, and social support networks for those in need of assistance. Democrats are more likely to believe that the federal government has a responsibility to be involved solving problems.</p> <p>Where Democrats stand on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment: The environment is important and it should be protected and kept clean • Health Care: The government should help make health care available to people who can't afford it • Energy: The U.S. should focus on renewable energy sources to achieve independence • Education: The government should support teachers and public school funds to make existing public schools better • Economy: During hard times, the government should help create jobs 	<p>The Republican Party and its supporters want the government to spend less money and have less of a say in business and society. Most Republicans believe people and businesses should have the liberty to do what they want without much government interference. This party also tends to believe the government should protect traditional social values.</p> <p>Where Republicans stand on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense: Keep peace by having a strong military • Health Care: The government should not pay for peoples' health care • Energy: The U.S. should rely on oil as well as renewable sources to be independent • Education: Schools must have high standards, and students should be able to use public education funds to attend private schools if those schools are better than public schools • Economy: Businesses will create jobs and opportunities for people to prosper

MINOR (THIRD) PARTIES

Minor parties (third parties) exist in the American political system, but they seldom wield great influence or achieve electoral success. Minor parties do a good job of bringing attention to issues that the two major political parties sometimes overlook. The most successful third-party movements tend to be drafted into one of the two major parties. For example, the Green Party highlighted the issue of the environment and global warming before the Democratic Party addressed the issue and "absorbed" many voters from the Green Party.

In the U.S., a minor party or third party refers to any party other than the major two, which are the Democratic and Republican parties at present. Third parties have sometimes launched large campaigns and have won public offices, but have not obtained significant or consistent representation in the federal government. Barriers to third party success include a winner-take-all election format, ballot access laws, debate rules, and the vast resources of the two major parties.