

# One Big Party?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## The Party Platform

People in political parties need a simple way to explain their beliefs so they can attract other people to join their party. Political parties take the complicated issues we hear about every day and create easy-to-understand statements that describe the party's views about those issues. This set of statements is called the party's **platform** because it is what the political party stands on. Political parties keep their platforms broad and simple to attract as many supporters as possible. The ultimate goal of political parties is to get their candidates elected to office. Once in office, the elected official can create policy that supports the party's platform.

## Influence of Political Parties on Policy

Political parties do not pass policy, but they do have a big impact on the way policy is shaped. These are just a few of the ways that political parties influence policy:

- Organize people that can put pressure on their legislators to impact public policy.
- Bring officials on the local, state, and national level together to communicate about common goals.
- Support candidates' platforms and make sure that elected officials follow through on supporting the party's platform.



COUNTRY	# PARTIES IN OFFICE
Australia	7
Denmark	11
Germany	5
Guatemala	11
Iceland	5
Israel	12
Turkey	4
United States	2
Vietnam	1

Source: CIA World Factbook 2011

## How Many Parties Are There?

Countries can have different numbers of political parties. Some countries have no political parties at all. Most of these countries are either very small or are controlled by military or theocratic governments.

Countries with a **single-party system** have one major political party. These countries are not considered democracies because there is no opposition or choice in candidates. China is an example of a single-party system.

Countries with a **two-party system** have two major political parties that hold all of the power. Third parties may exist, but they hardly ever gain enough support to win elections. This is the least common system around the world. In the United States we have a **two-party system**.

Countries with **multi-party systems** have three or more political parties with members holding office in the government. (Some countries have as many as 20 or more!) Usually no party gains control of the government, so parties must work together to get things done.

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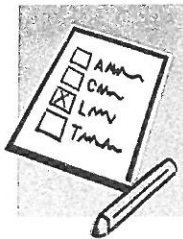
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## It's a Party...

...but not the kind with ice cream and cake (usually). **Political parties** are groups of people who share similar beliefs about how the government should be run and how the issues facing our country should be solved. 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



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.






### 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.

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**Party Systems.** Use the strengths and weaknesses your teacher gives you to complete the chart.

# of Political Parties	Strengths	Weaknesses
None or One 		
Two 		
Multiple 		

**Define.** Circle the correct phrase on each line to make a sentence that defines political parties.

- A) Political parties are groups of people / Political parties are silly people / Political parties are individuals  
 B) who all like to hang out together / who feel the same about key issues / who are really into politics  
 C) that have organized to work together / that don't really get along / that plot against politicians  
 D) to throw a really big party / and fight a lot / to gain political power by electing  
 E) candidates to office. / donkeys and elephants into power. / their friends to power.

**Key Terms.** Match the following terms with their definitions.



- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. political parties | A. Having the most people as supporters; means the party can set the agenda for the government                   |
| _____ 2. nominate          | B. Countries can have none to many political parties. The number of political parties is described as the _____. |
| _____ 3. policy            | C. A set of simplified statements that explains a party's beliefs.   |
| _____ 4. majority          | D. Principles, rules, or laws. Parties can influence this.   |
| _____ 5. minority          | E. Groups of people who share similar beliefs about how the government should be run.                            |
| _____ 6. platform          | F. Having fewer supporters; means the party must work hard to oppose the majority party.                         |
| _____ 7. party system      | G. Selecting candidates who will run for political office and announcing their intent to run.                    |

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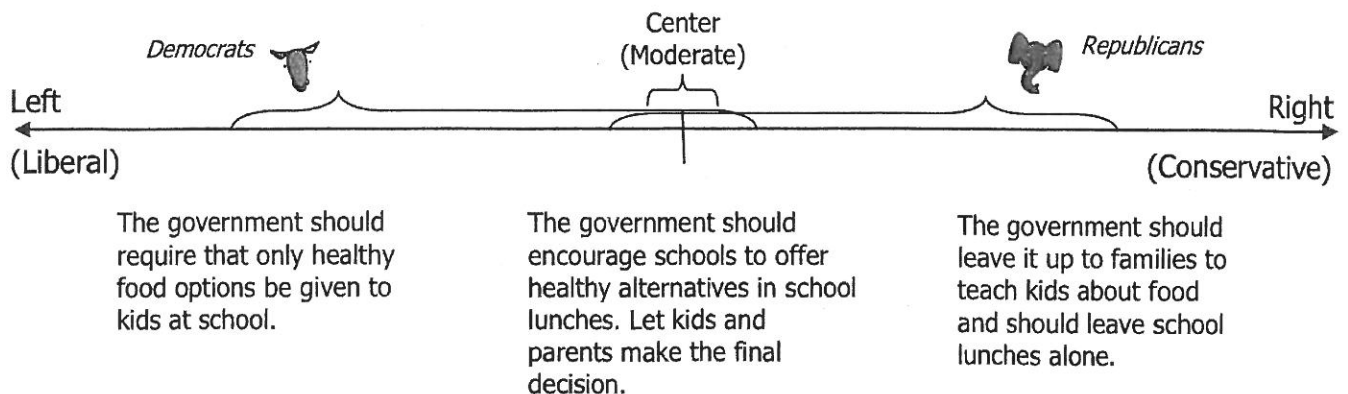
## Donkeys to the Left, Elephants to the Right

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:

 <b>DEMOCRATIC PARTY</b>	 <b>REPUBLICAN PARTY</b>
<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><b>Where Democrats stand on...</b></p> <p><u>Environment:</u> The environment is important and it should be protected and kept clean</p> <p><u>Health Care:</u> The government should help make health care available to people who can't afford it</p> <p><u>Energy:</u> The U.S. should focus on renewable energy sources to achieve independence</p> <p><u>Education:</u> The government should support teachers and public school funds to make existing public schools better</p> <p><u>Economy:</u> During hard times, the government should help create jobs</p> <p>Source: 2008 Democratic National Platform</p>	<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><b>Where Republicans stand on...</b></p> <p><u>Defense:</u> Keep peace by having a strong military</p> <p><u>Health Care:</u> The government should not pay for peoples' health care</p> <p><u>Energy:</u> The U.S. should rely on oil as well as renewable sources to be independent</p> <p><u>Education:</u> 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</p> <p><u>Economy:</u> Businesses will create jobs and opportunities for people to prosper</p> <p>Source: 2008 Republican Party Platform</p>

### The Political Spectrum

Example Issue: Healthy Choices for Kids



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**What About You?** First, check the statement that you most closely agree with for each issue. Then look at all the choices you made and analyze the results!



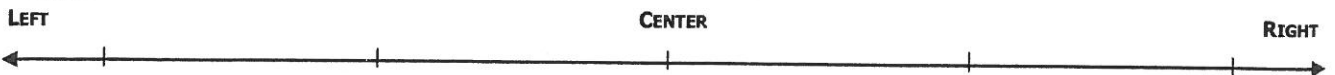
## TAXES



- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax everyone at a high rate. Use the money to provide free government services for everyone, not just for poor people. | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep taxes low for poor and middle class people and higher for the wealthy. Taxes should fund programs to help people in need. | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep taxes low for everyone. Save money by cutting government programs that help people. | <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminate taxes. The government should not be providing services, so it doesn't need much money. |
|---|---|---|---|



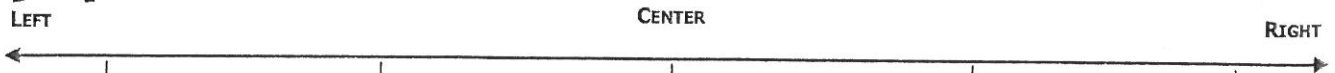
## DEFENSE



- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Withdraw troops from around the world and cut the military's budget. Use the money to provide services to people. | <input type="checkbox"/> Having strong relationships with other countries will keep peace. We need a strong military too, but the best way to protect ourselves is to work with others. | <input type="checkbox"/> Having a strong military will keep peace. We need good relationships with other countries, but protecting our country is most important. | <input type="checkbox"/> Our military should aggressively defend our nation against all threats. This should be our highest priority when making the federal budget. |
|--|---|---|--|



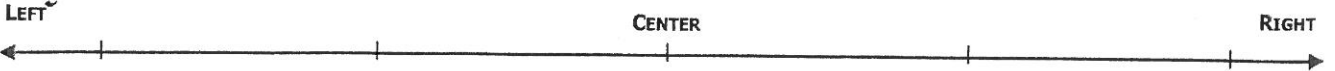
## IMMIGRATION



- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> International borders should be open. People should be free to go wherever they want. | <input type="checkbox"/> Secure the borders against illegal immigrants, but allow people already here illegally to become citizens. | <input type="checkbox"/> Secure the border and enforce existing laws. Do not reward people here illegally by giving them citizenship. | <input type="checkbox"/> The United States border should be closed. No new immigrants should be allowed in. |
|--|---|---|---|



## ENERGY



- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The government should take over all energy production and use only renewable resources. | <input type="checkbox"/> The U.S. should focus on finding renewable sources of energy. Laws should limit exploration for oil. Nuclear energy should not be expanded. | <input type="checkbox"/> The U.S. should develop all sources of energy, including oil. New nuclear energy plants should be built. | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic growth is the most important thing. If people can make money off our natural resources they should be able to. |
|--|--|---|--|



## You!

Do all your answers fall on the same place along the spectrum?  YES or  NO

Were most of your answers on the same side of the spectrum?  YES or  NO

Do people's responses usually fall in the same place along the spectrum?  YES or  NO

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Going to Extremes.** One of the easiest ways to see the difference between the right and the left is to look at extreme viewpoints. Read each statement and decide whether it expresses a belief on the *right* or the *left*. Remember: These beliefs are not held by everyone who identifies as a liberal or a conservative, a Democrat or a Republican.

1. The government should not pay for any schools. All schools should be private.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

4. The government should not provide services that a person or business could provide.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

2. The government should guarantee that everyone will have a job and receive an annual income.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

5. The government should own all of the forests to make sure timber is managed properly.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

3. People should pay for their own retirement. Social Security should be abolished.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

6. The government should ban the use of pesticides on food crops.



- Extreme Right  
 Extreme Left

**Left or Right?** Read each proposed government action. Would it be supported by people on the left or the right? How *far* to the left or the right? Or is it a moderate plan? Place an **X** where you think the proposed government action lies on the political spectrum.

If the government decided to...	Where is that on the political spectrum?
Support community programs that encourage parents to get involved in lowering the high school dropout rate.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>
Pass a law raising the minimum wage, helping workers earn more by making businesses pay more.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>
Repeal a law requiring businesses to install pollution filters in factory smokestacks.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>
Start a government program that lets kids eat dinner free every night at school if their parents won't be home.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>
Create public charter schools that students can choose to attend instead of their regular public school.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>
Encourage everyone to get health insurance by letting people deduct the cost of health insurance from their taxes.	<p>LEFT ← —————→ RIGHT</p>