

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Chapter 17 Political Parties

Lesson 2 Party Ideology and Identification

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the two-party system influence American democracy?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

ideology a set of basic beliefs about life, culture, government, and society

symbol something that stands for something else

Content Vocabulary

liberal the belief that the proper role of government is to actively promote health, education, and justice

conservative the belief that the government should play a limited role in citizens' lives; also the belief in "traditional family values" and what is viewed as a moral lifestyle

moderate the belief in both liberal and conservative viewpoints

Democratic Party the party more associated with liberal and moderate-liberals

Republican Party the party more associated with conservative and moderate-conservatives

platform a statement of a political party's principles, beliefs, and positions on vital issues

party identification loyalty to a political party

independent a voter who does not support any particular party

polarize to divide into opposing groups

centrist a person whose views tend to be moderate

TAKING NOTES: *Integrating Knowledge and Ideas*

DESCRIBING Use the graphic organizer to list the major and minor political parties in the United States and then describe the viewpoints of those political parties.

Political Party	Viewpoints
Republican	
Democratic	
Green	
Libertarian	
Constitution	

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the two-party system influence American democracy?

In your view, what is the proper role of government? Your beliefs about the size and function of government are the foundation of your political philosophy or ideology. Consider the following pairs of positions that help identify political ideology. In each pair, choose the statement closest to your view.

Government needs to be big enough to provide the services people need.	The best government is the smallest government.
Taxes should be high enough to fund government programs; rich people should pay higher taxes to help people in need.	Taxes should be kept as low as possible for everyone so that people have money to invest in business.
The government must act to meet the needs of people who are struggling economically.	Most needs can be met through the free market and charities.
The government should not interfere with people's right to live as they wish, as long as they do not hurt anyone else.	The government should protect society against behavior that violates traditional beliefs about right and wrong.
The government should rely more on diplomacy than military power to keep us safe.	A strong military and willingness to use it are necessary to our nation's security.

Summarize your responses by explaining your political philosophy in two sentences.

Political Ideology

Guiding Question *How are political ideology and political party affiliation related?*

An **ideology** is a set of basic beliefs about life, culture, government, and society. People on the left of the political spectrum usually have a **liberal** ideology. People on the right of the political spectrum usually have a **conservative** ideology. Most Americans fall somewhere along a spectrum between those two ends.

Liberals typically believe that the proper role of government is to actively promote health, education, and justice. They are usually willing to reduce economic freedom in order to increase equality. They believe the government should not restrict most individual freedoms. Conservatives typically believe in limiting the government's role. Conservatives believe that citizens can better solve their problems without government involvement. They also typically support "traditional family values". Some conservatives may support a government role in protecting what they see as a moral lifestyle.

Most people do not completely accept either of these ideologies. Many people are **moderates** who fall somewhere in between liberal and conservative. Some are liberal on certain issues, and conservative on others. This might be most obvious when comparing an individual's beliefs about economic and social issues. For example, some people believe in strong free markets and reduced government regulation of the economy. At the same time, they may also support liberal social causes such as affirmative action.

A political ideology can give a person an organized way of looking at government and public policy. It can also give a person clues about which political party they identify with. In recent decades, the

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Democratic Party has been more associated with liberals and moderate-liberals. The **Republican Party** has been more associated with conservatives and moderate-conservatives. However, these are simple labels for complex groupings of different viewpoints on different issues. It might be more accurate to think of political ideology and party positions as a group of connections and beliefs instead of a simple line.



Reading Progress Check

Differentiating What is the difference between a liberal ideology and a conservative ideology?

Exploring the Essential Question

Diagramming What would the web of your beliefs look like? Draw a circle representing you in the center of a piece of paper. Write some of your basic beliefs about government around the circle. Pick three different colors to represent conservative, liberal, or moderate views.

As you read about the Republican and Democratic parties' platforms, add additional beliefs in the appropriate color. When you have finished, show connections among your beliefs by drawing lines between beliefs that you see as being linked. What does this web show about your political philosophy that the two-sentence description did not?

Party Platforms

Guiding Question *What are the major differences in viewpoints between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party?*

Republicans are sometimes referred to as the GOP ("Grand Old Party"). They are often represented by the color red and the **symbol** of an elephant. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Democrats are often associated with the color blue and the symbol of a donkey. These two parties

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The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic of a network or starburst, consisting of several thin lines radiating from a central point, with some lines extending further outwards.

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agree on some basic beliefs and values. Both parties believe America should have a mixed capitalist economy. Both parties support the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They both believe in the value of private property and support individual achievement. However, the two parties disagree on many key social, economic, and business issues. Each party sets out a **platform**, or statement of its beliefs on issues. The platforms are adopted in party conventions. We can look at the party platforms as a guide to each party's philosophy. Of course, many party members disagree with some parts of the official party platforms described below.

Republican Party

The Republican Party supports individuals' rights and is opposed to a large, intrusive government. The party opposes too much government involvement in the economy. They do not believe government should put excessive regulation on businesses. Republicans generally prefer lower taxes. They oppose taxing wealthy people at much higher rates than poorer people. Republicans support limits on public employee unions.

The Republican Party argued that marriage should be limited to one man and one woman in its 2012 platform. The party also restated its opposition to abortion. The party supports Medicare, a government healthcare program for the elderly. However, it believes Medicare is unsustainable. The Republican Party wants to replace it with a plan to pay some or all of older Americans' premiums in private health insurance plans.

The party believes that environmental protection is needed. However, it believes that environmental protection is best accomplished by private land owners instead of the government. The 2012 party platform does not mention climate change or global warming. The platform does say that the Republicans oppose a "cap and trade" system to reduce greenhouse gases. The Republican Party encourages use of all energy sources but believes the free market should drive choices about which energy to use. Republicans generally support strong coal, oil, and gas industries. Republicans promote exploration and development of those resources on American lands and in the oceans. They typically want federal lands open for timber harvesting, mining, or other resource extraction.

The Republican Party believes that America occupies a unique place in human history. They believe that it is America's responsibility to take a major role in world affairs. This philosophy is known as American exceptionalism. It leads Republicans to prefer increased military spending and reduced dependence on the United Nations. It also leads them to support strong counter-terrorism efforts and strong presidential power to maintain our national security.

Democratic Party

The Democratic Party says that Americans are better working together than working individually. It believes that the United States succeeds when everyone has a fair chance and does their fair share. The Democrats believe that the government should usually take a bigger role in providing social services and security to Americans. Democrats would prefer to increase taxes on the wealthy and reduce taxes on poorer Americans. They encourage a variety of government regulations to protect consumers in the financial, housing, healthcare, and energy industries.

The 2012 Democratic Party platform argued for an increase in the federal minimum wage. It also expressed strong support for unions, including the right to unionize for public employees. The Democrats stated their support for same-sex marriage. They also supported women's rights to various reproductive services, including abortion. The Democratic Party supports legislation to ban

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employment discrimination against gay and lesbian people and to prevent wage discrimination based on gender. The Democratic Party opposes the Republican suggestion that Medicare should be privatized.

The Democratic platform identifies climate change as a major threat. Democrats prefer to address the problem using policies like fuel efficiency standards and carbon pollution limits for power plants. They are also more likely to prefer conserving federal lands and limiting resource extraction from those areas.

The Democratic Party is less likely than the Republicans to want to become involved in military conflicts around the world. The Democrats supported the removal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Democratic Party supports the United Nations as an important key to international order. Democrats generally want to reduce military spending and reduce supplies of nuclear weapons. The Democratic Party still supports strong counter-terrorism measures. These include creating a cyber security command within the military and aggressively hunting down leaders of terrorist groups.

Minor Parties

The Green Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Constitution Party are the most prominent third parties. These three parties have major ideological differences with the major parties.

The Green Party is usually more liberal than the Democratic Party. The Green Party was originally founded to focus on environmental issues. Today, the Green Party has developed a full issue platform. It includes major topics like foreign policy, civil rights, economics, education, criminal justice, and political reforms. The Green Party supports nonviolence, environmental sustainability, alternative energy, universal healthcare, and electoral reform.

The Libertarian Party believes in personal responsibility and minimal government intrusion into Americans' lives. Libertarians believe that the government should not interfere at all with the free market or with individuals' liberties. They oppose regulation of wages, prices, guns, marriage, abortion, and the media. They oppose the criminalization of drugs and would gradually end Social Security. They believe the only role for American military force is in response to attack.

The Constitution Party is generally more conservative than the Republican Party. The Constitution Party supports getting rid of most federal taxes, including the income tax. It also supports getting rid of several federal agencies. The party opposes abortion in all cases and opposes same sex marriage. It would limit immigration, make English the official language, gradually end Social Security, and end social programs like welfare.



Reading Progress Check

Defining What is American exceptionalism? How does it influence Republican foreign policy?

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Party Identification

Guiding Question *What are the demographic differences between voters who identify as Republicans and voters who identify as Democrats?*

Party identification measures a voter’s sense of psychological connection to a political party. Party identification is a state of mind. Voting is different. Voting is a behavior. In any given election some voters who usually identify with one party may vote for a candidate from another party.

In 2012, 32 percent of voters identified with the Democratic Party. Another 24 percent of voters identified with the Republican Party. **Independents** are people who do not identify with any party. They made up 38 percent of American voters in 2012. A very small percentage of Americans identified with one of the minor parties.

The Republican Party tends to have more white, male, educated, and religious members than the population at large. Usually the Democratic Party has more women, minorities, and young members than the population at large. In 2012, 34 percent of Democrats identified themselves as working class. Fifty percent of Democrats identified themselves as middle class or upper middle class. Among Republicans in 2012, 33 percent said they were members of the working class. Sixty-two percent of Republicans said they were middle class or upper middle class.

It is possible to know where members of different political parties live in the country as a whole. There tend to be more Democrats in the Northeast. There tend to be more Republicans in the South and the mountain West. Both parties are represented in proportion to the population in the Midwest. The Democratic Party tends to have more supporters among people who live in cities and along both coasts. The Republican Party tends to have more supporters among people in rural areas and the suburbs. This has not always been the case. After the Civil War, the Republicans were the party of the industrial cities. The Democratic Party was the dominant party in the South. In the 1960s, Republicans began to win over conservative voters in the South. By the 1980s, most states in the Deep South voted Republican in presidential elections. There were still small sections of Democratic support in urban areas.



Reading Progress Check

Describing In which parts of the United States do people tend to be members of the Republican Party? In which parts of the United States do people tend to be members of the Democratic Party?

Political Party Polarization

Guiding Question *How does political polarization affect political parties and vice versa?*

In recent years, Americans have become increasingly **polarized**, or divided into opposing groups. Both parties have become more ideologically homogeneous. This means that in each party the members and elected officials are more likely to agree on all points in the party platform. They are less likely to

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cross party lines on key issues. People with strong ideological beliefs dominate the parties. For example, there are twice as many conservatives as moderates in the Republican Party.

Voters can become stronger in their positions. They can become more insistent that their elected officials follow the party ideology. Then the parties are more likely to nominate ideological, rather than **centrist**, candidates. States have redrawn district boundaries in ways that often protect incumbents. This means that seats are often “safely” Democratic or Republican. Primary elections become hotly contested by people within the same party in this situation. The result of the primary election will determine which candidate gets the party’s support.

In 2009 some conservative Americans were dissatisfied with the positions of the major parties. These people formed grassroots “Tea Party” organizations. The groups organized local meetings and protests. They supported strongly conservative candidates in 2010 Republican primaries. Several of these candidates won the party’s nomination over candidates backed by the Republican establishment. Some of those nominees went on to win the general election. Others lost to Democrats in the general election. The Tea Parties’ activism and participation helped to move the Republican Party’s ideology to the right.

Sometimes, more ideological challengers win the party’s nomination. Then the legislatures have fewer moderates and more liberals and conservatives. Gridlock can result when the more extreme party members are unwilling to compromise or break with the party on some issues. A review of congressional voting records in 2012 showed a decrease of voices in the middle.

Some people are unhappy with this process. They have left the major parties and have become independents. They are no longer members of any political party. Other people were never members of a political party and simply prefer being independents. The number of people who say they are independents has increased in recent years. However, many independents still usually favor one of the two major parties.

Various strategies have been suggested to reduce polarization. One strategy is to expand the number of voters by encouraging more Americans to vote. Another strategy is to move toward proportional representation in order to increase the influence of third parties. Some people argue that this period of partisanship is just a phase. They believe that it will peak and then pass. Others say that partisanship is healthy. Supporters of partisanship believe it is good for our democracy because it shows that multiple viewpoints are being supported.



Reading Progress Check

Applying What led to the formation of Tea Party organizations?
