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**POLITICAL PARTIES**

**SS.7.C.2.8** Identify America’s current political parties, and illustrate their ideas about government.

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***Lesson Summary***

***Essential Questions***

What are America’s current political parties? What are their ideas about government?

***NGSSS Benchmark***

SS.7.C.2.8 Identify America’s current political parties, and illustrate their ideas about government.

***Florida Standards***

LAFS.68.RH.1.1 LAFS.68.RH.1.2 LAFS.68.RH.3.7 LAFS.68.WHST.1.2

LAFS.68.WHST.2.4 LAFS.68.WHST.3.9 LAFS.68.WHST.4.10 LAFS.7.SL.1.1

LAFS.7.SL.2.4 MAFS.K12.MP.5.1

***Overview***

In this lesson, students will learn about the current political parties in the United States, understand their ideas about government and evaluate the impact of these parties on society, government and the political system.

***Learning Goals/Benchmark Clarifications***

* Students will compare current political parties’ ideas about government.
* Students will evaluate the impact political parties have on society, government, or the political system.

***Benchmark Content Limits***

* Items will not require students to identify specific individuals associated with political parties.
* Items will not ask students to evaluate the efficacy of any specific political party.

***Civics EOC Reporting Category***

Reporting Category 3 – Government Policies and Political Processes

***Suggested Time Frame***

* Two 45-50 minute class periods

***Civics Content Vocabulary***

* bias, candidate, Communist Party, Democratic Party, government, Libertarian Party, party platform, political party, political system, Republican Party, Socialist Party, society, third party, two-party system

***Instructional Strategies***

Comparing complex texts Cooperative learning

***Materials***

Computer with internet access to project lesson activity sheets

Media center or computer lab time for students – optional

Student activity sheets and reading materials:

* Political Parties student activity sheet (Untitled handout with the party logos)
* Political Parties in the United States reading
* How Do They Compare? student activity sheet
* How Do The 2016 Political Party Platforms Compare? Reading
* Political Party Functions student activity sheet

***Lesson Activities and Daily Schedule***

Please use the chart below to track activity completion.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** | **Task #** | **Steps in Lesson** | **Description** | **Completed?**  **Yes/No** |
| **Day One** | Task 1 | 1-7 | Political Parties Overview & Reading |  |
| Task 2 | 8-16 | Party Platform Activity |  |
| **Day Two** | Task 3 | 16 | Checking for Understanding A |  |
| Task 4 | 17-22 | Political Party Functions & Impact |  |
| Task 5 | 23 | Checking for Understanding B |  |

***Suggested Student Activity Sequence***

1. Project and pass out the “Political Parties” student activity sheet and ask students to consider the following questions: “Does anything look familiar to you in each of these logos? What do you think these logos represent?”
2. Provide students with a few minutes to brainstorm with a partner or independently and then share out.
3. Lead students to the understanding that they are looking at the logos for some of the political parties in the United States: Communist Party USA, Democratic Party, Libertarian Party, Republican Party, and Socialist Party USA. Instruct students to add the corresponding political party name underneath each logo.
4. Pass out the “Political Parties in the United States” reading and explain to students that they will read as a whole class to understand the five political parties’ views on government. Teacher note: It is important to note to students that this benchmark focuses on political parties, not on individual politicians.
5. Read aloud and instruct students to mark text that helps them define each political party and their ideas about government. Review the text students marked as a whole class and create definitions for each political party on the student activity sheet. Teacher note: Utilize the reading for text evidence and the sample answers to guide the creation of definitions.
6. Instruct students to create a title for their activity sheet. Teacher note: Rotate through the classroom to view the student created titles. Encourage students to create a title that summarizes the main concepts. For example: “Political Parties in the United States” or “Main Political Parties and Third Parties in the United States”
7. Share with students that a party platform outlines a party’s beliefs and perspectives on issues related to government.
8. Pass out the “How Do They Compare?” student activity sheet and “How Do The 2016 Political Party Platforms Compare? reading.
9. Explain to students that they will work to read summarized text from the 2016 Democratic and Republican party platforms. Their task is to read to understand how each political party’s views on different issues help them understand each party’s views on government. Teacher note: View the Sample Answers section to see the original quotes and page numbers from each political party’s platform. As an alternative approach, use the actual quotes from the platforms instead of the summarized text.
10. Direct student attention to the “Taxes” row. Read aloud the text adapted from the Democratic Party’s 2016 platform.
11. Have students think about and identify the main idea of the text.
12. Work as a whole class to summarize the text. Instruct students to take notes on their activity sheet in the corresponding “Taxes” row.
13. Repeat this process for the Republican Party’s platform.
14. Discuss how the views compare.
15. Repeat Steps 11-15 for the remaining issues.
16. Checking for Understanding A (Formative Assessment):

Direct students to the bottom of their “How Do They Compare?” activity sheet and instruct students to write a well-crafted response to the prompt for each political party:

Prompt

Based on the issue statements, how would you summarize each political party’s view of government?

1. Pass out the “Political Party Functions” student activity sheet.
2. Explain to students that they will read to understand the five political party functions and how those functions impact society, government and the political process.
3. Read aloud each political party function. Instruct students to mark evidence that helps them explain the main idea of each function. Have students share out the evidence they marked on their activity sheet.
4. Read aloud the “Political Parties and Their Impact” paragraph and direct student attention to the Scenarios Matching Activity.
5. Place students into pairs and instruct students to work with their partner to read each scenario and identify the political party function being described. Instruct students to list the function next to the correct scenario.
6. Checking for Understanding B (Formative Assessment):

Instruct students to write a well-crafted informative response using the following prompt:

Prompt

Using what you have learned during this lesson, write to explain the impact of political parties on society, government and the political system. Use specific examples and evidence to support your summary.

**NAME:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ DATE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| Screen Shot 2016-01-15 at 5 | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:200px-US_Democratic_Party_Logo.svg.png | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:Libertarian-Party-Logo-1.png |  | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:splogo.gif |
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**Political Parties in the United States**

A political party is a group of citizens or voters with similar views on public issues who work together to put their ideas into action in the government and to elect candidates. They are organizations that try to get political power so that their ideas can become laws or government policies.

The United States has a two-party system. This means that there are mainly two political parties competing for control and running for elections in the U.S., the Democratic and Republican parties. The Democratic and Republican parties have been the two major parties since the 1860’s. As of September 2016, all members of Congress are members of the Democratic or Republican parties, except for Senator Angus King, Independent from Maine and Senator Bernie Sanders, Independent from Vermont. Being labeled as “Independent” means that the person is not a member of a political party.

|  |  |  |
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| **Two**  **MAJOR Parties** | **REPUBLICAN**  **PARTY** | The Republican Party believes that the federal government should play a small role in people's lives and allow private citizens and businesses to provide services for citizens in need. They favor lower taxes, less government spending and more freedom for businesses and individuals. |
| **DEMOCRATIC PARTY**  Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:200px-US_Democratic_Party_Logo.svg.png | The Democratic Party believes that the federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, particularly those who are in need. This means that they are often in favor of creating and paying for government programs and services to help people in need. |

The two major political parties have the most support from the public so it is nearly impossible for third parties to win elections. Third parties are political parties that often form on the basis of one or a few issues. These issues might be related to a foreign or domestic affair and, because the concern is so narrow, it is difficult to gain support of enough people to elect a candidate to public office. For example, the Green Party believes that the government should mainly focus on saving the environment, nonviolence and promoting equality. Third party candidates have never won a presidential election and rarely win election to other offices. Below are some examples of current third parties that exist in the United States.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Examples of THIRD Parties** | | |
| **COMMUNIST PARTY USA** | **LIBERTARIAN PARTY** | **SOCIALIST PARTY USA** |
| The Communist Party USA believes the government shouldScreen Shot 2016-01-15 at 5 control the entire economy and control all production and distribution of goods. They believe that working people should control their own lives and futures through equal distribution of wealth. Additionally, the Communist Party opposes all foreign conflicts. | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:Libertarian-Party-Logo-1.pngThe Libertarian Party believes in individual freedom and that the only purpose of government is to protect this freedom. The Libertarian Party believes in a world where individuals are free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, which creates a world of peace, harmony, and opportunity. | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:splogo.gifThe Socialist Party USA believes people should own and control all businesses through  democratically controlled public agencies (agencies that are created based on the people’s choice/election) or other groups. The Socialist Party supports eliminating the power of government and social classes to create an equal society. |

**NAME:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ DATE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**HOW DO THEY COMPARE?**

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the statement from each political parties platform. Summarize the statement in your own words on the graphic organizer.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Summarize the **DEMOCRATIC PARTY’S** view on the issue. | ISSUE | Summarize the **REPUBLICAN PARTY’s** view on the issue. |
|  | Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:6a00d8341bf73153ef0105359fa532970c-800wi.jpg  **TAXES** |  |
|  | **NATIONAL DEBT** |  |
|  | Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:clip-art-farm-727595.jpg  **AGRICULTURE** |  |
|  | **MILITARY SPENDING** |  |
|  | Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:statueofliberty3.gif  **IMMIGRATION** |  |
|  | **EDUCATION** |  |

Based on the issue statements above, how would you summarize each political party’s view of government**?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DEMOCRATIC PARTY’S** view on government:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | **REPUBLICAN PARTY’s** view on government:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

**HOW DO THE 2016 POLITICAL PARTY PLATFORMS COMPARE?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:200px-US_Democratic_Party_Logo.svg.png  **DEMOCRATIC PARTY** | **REPUBLICAN PARTY** |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:6a00d8341bf73153ef0105359fa532970c-800wi.jpg | The Democratic Party believes the wealthiest Americans and largest businesses must pay their fair share of taxes.  They will offer tax cuts to middle-class families. | The Republican Party believes that whenever taxes impact a person or businesses’ ability to save money or invest in others, those taxes must be lowered. |
|  | The Democratic Party will make sure that new money spent on government programs or tax cuts won’t add to the nation’s debt. They will make sure that the government is spending money wisely and efficiently. | The Republican Party must require firm limits on future debt and speed up repayment of the money we owe. This will help create a more responsible and limited government. |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:clip-art-farm-727595.jpg | The Democratic Party will increase funding to support the next generation of farmers and ranchers. | The Republican Party remains committed to expanding opportunities for farmers to export their crops and trade with other countries. |
|  | The Democratic Party supports a budget that meets the strategic challenges we face, but believes that we must end waste in the defense budget. And they will make sure that the Department of Defense invests its budget wisely. | The Republican Party believes that Congress and the president should work together to approve military spending at the level necessary to defend our country. |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:statueofliberty3.gif | The Democratic Party believes we need to urgently fix our broken immigration system and create a path to citizenship for law-abiding families who are here. | The Republican Party believes that illegal immigration puts everyone in danger. They oppose any form of forgiveness for those who, by breaking the law, have disadvantaged those who have obeyed it. |
|  | The Democratic Party supports neighborhood public schools and high-quality public charter schools. | The Republican Party supports public and private options for learning, including home-schooling, career and technical education, private or parochial schools, magnet schools, charter schools, online learning, and early-college high schools. |

**Political Party Functions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **FUNCTION** | **DESCRIPTION** |
| **Nominate Candidates** | Political parties nominate candidates for public office. They nominate candidates who believe in the party platform. |
| **Influence Policy** | Members of Congress are members of political parties and they work to pass laws that support their political party’s platform. |
| **Unite Government** | People in the same political party are connected because they are members of the same organization. A party unites its members at the federal, state and local levels of government through the party’s political platform. |
| **Create Balance** | The two major parties create balance in the government by working hard to protect the ideas in their party platform. The two parties keep each other in check. |
| **Inform Citizens** | Political parties run campaigns for candidates. They pay for and produce advertisements, create pamphlets, post blogs, and help candidates give speeches. |

**Political Parties and Their Impact**

Political parties play a major role and have a large impact in American society. Political parties are important to the democratic process because they help people to communicate their ideas about government. Because political parties are made up of large groups of people, their group’s ideas can be more easily heard by the government. Political parties also educate citizens about issues during elections. Most people vote for candidates from their own political party because of the issues that their political party supports.

**Scenario Matching Activity**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Directions**: Read each scenario about the impact of political parties. Determine the political party function that is being described and list the function next to the correct scenario. Each function will be used once. | |
| **1.** Most members of Congress belong to a political party and support the ideas in their political party’s platform. Senators and Representatives propose legislation and pass laws based on the ideas from their political party’s platform. These laws impact the government and society. | **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| **2.** Political parties impact the way society views candidates for office. One way this happens is through the campaign advertisements political parties create for or against candidates. | **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| **3.** Political parties provide options of candidates to society. People determine which candidates they will elect to serve in government. Once elected, these public officials will make decisions (such as passing laws) that will impact society. | **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| **4.** Political parties impact the government at the federal, state, and local levels. Because there are many more elected offices at the state and local levels, political parties tend to be more active at these levels. Also, political parties raise and spend money in order to get candidates elected and to help spread their message to voters. | **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| **5.** The political party that wins more seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the majority party in that house of the legislature. The party that wins fewer seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the minority party in that house of the legislature. The majority party in the legislature often has more control over the lawmaking process than the minority power. However, the minority party remains active and uses its influence as much as possible in the lawmaking process. | **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |

Adapted From One Big Party? from iCivics - <http://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/one-big-party>

***Sources***

Political Party information and logos: Communist Party - <http://www.cpusa.org/party-program/>, Democratic Party – <http://www.democrats.org/about/our_party>, Green Party – <http://www.gp.org/2016>, Libertarian Party – <http://lp.org>, Republican Party – <https://gop.com> and Socialist Party - <http://socialistparty-usa.net/join-us.html>

Additional Political Party Information: <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4706>

Party Platform Comparison Activity - <http://democrats.org>, <https://www.demconvention.com>, Accessed September, 2016 <http://gop.com> and <http://convention.gop>, Accessed September, 2016

Political Party Functions Activity Adapted From One Big Party? from iCivics - <http://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/one-big-party>

**Political Parties – Sample Answers**

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| Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:CP_logo.png | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:200px-US_Democratic_Party_Logo.svg.png | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:Libertarian-Party-Logo-1.png |  | Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:splogo.gif |
| **Communist Party USA** | **Democratic Party** | **Libertarian Party** | **Republican Party** | **Socialist Party USA** |
| - a political party that believes the government should control all production and distribution of goods and working people should control their own lives and destinies  - a third party | - a political party that believes that the federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, particularly those who are in need  - Believes in a larger federal government, providing more services for citizens  - one of the two parties that make up the two-party system | - a political party that believes in individual freedom and the only purpose of government is to protect this freedom  - a third party | - a political party that believes that the federal government should play a small role in people's lives; they favor lower taxes and less government spending  - Believes in a smaller federal government, allowing private citizens and businesses to provide services for citizens  - one of the two parties that make up the two-party system | - a political party that believes people should own and control industry through democratically controlled public agencies, cooperatives, or other collective groups  - Businesses are publicly owned  - The economy is based on the public’s need, not to create profit  - a third party |

**HOW DO THE POLITICAL PARTY PLATFORMS COMPARE? – ORIGINAL QUOTE SOURCES**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | <https://www.demconvention.com/platform/>Description: Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:200px-US_Democratic_Party_Logo.svg.png  **DEMOCRATIC PARTY** | <https://www.gop.com/platform/>  **REPUBLICAN PARTY** |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:6a00d8341bf73153ef0105359fa532970c-800wi.jpg | … we believe the wealthiest Americans and largest corporations must pay their fair share of taxes. (Page 12)  We will offer tax relief to hard working, middle-class families… (Page 13) | More than any other public policy, the way government raises  revenue — how much, at what rates, under what circumstances, from whom, and for whom — has the greatest impact on our economy’s performance. (Page 1)  Wherever tax rates penalize thrift or discourage investment, they  must be lowered. (Page 2) |
|  | We will also ensure that new spending and tax cuts are offset so that they do not add to the nation’s debt over time. We will tackle waste, fraud, and abuse to make sure government dollars are spent wisely and efficiently. (Page 26) | Our national debt is a burden on our economy and families. … We must impose firm caps on future debt, accelerate the repayment of the trillions we now owe in order to reaffirm our principles of responsible and limited government,…(Page 8) |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:clip-art-farm-727595.jpg | Democrats will increase funding to support the next generation of farmers and ranchers, with particular attention given to promoting environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. (Page 20) | We are the largest agricultural exporter in the world, and our exports are vital for other sectors of our economy.  That is why we remain committed to expanding trade opportunities and opening new markets for agriculture. (Page 17) |
|  | We support a smart, predictable defense budget that meets the strategic challenges we face… We must end waste in the defense budget. And we will ensure that the Department of Defense invests its budget wisely. (Page 40) | Successive years of cuts to our defense budget have put an undue strain on our men and women in uniform.  Congress and the Administration should work together to approve military spending at the level necessary to defend our country. (Page 42) |
| Macintosh HD:Users:vmcvey:Downloads:statueofliberty3.gif | Democrats believe we need to urgently fix our broken immigration system—which tears families apart and keeps workers in the shadows—and create a path to citizenship for law-abiding families who are here, making a better life for their families and contributing to their communities and our country. (Page 17) | Illegal immigration endangers everyone, exploits the taxpayers, and insults all who aspire to enter America legally. We oppose any form of amnesty for those who, by breaking the law, have disadvantaged those who have obeyed it. (Page 25) |
|  | We support democratically governed, great neighborhood public schools and high-quality public charter schools, and we will help them disseminate best practices to other school leaders and educators. (Page 34) | We support options for learning, including home-schooling, career and technical education, private or parochial schools, magnet schools, charter schools, online learning, and early-college high schools. (Page 34) |

Based on the issue statements above, how would you summarize each political party’s view of government**?**

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| --- | --- |
| **DEMOCRATIC PARTY’S** view on government:  The Democratic Party believes in a larger government that provides services for citizens in need. For example, they want less taxes for the middle class, funding to help farmers and want to develop a process to help illegal immigrants. | **REPUBLICAN PARTY’s** view on government: The Republican Party believes in a small government and more freedom for individuals and businesses. Taxes and the national debt is a big problem and they want to make sure businesses can succeed. They want to help farmers with trade opportunities and they believe in individual choice for education. |

**IMPACT SCENARIOS - Answers**

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| Most members of Congress belong to a political party and support the ideas in their political party’s platform. Senators and Representatives propose legislation and pass laws based on the ideas from their political party’s platform. These laws impact the government and society. INFLUENCE POLICY |
| Political parties impact the way society views candidates for office. One way this happens is through campaign advertisements political parties create for or against candidates. INFORM CITIZENS |
| Political parties provide options of candidates to society. People determine which candidates they will elect to serve in government. Once elected, these public officials will make decisions (such as passing laws) that will impact society. NOMINATE CANDIDATES |
| Political parties impact the government at the federal, state, and local levels. Because there are many more elected offices at the state and local levels, political parties tend to be more active at these levels. Also, political parties raise and spend money in order to get candidates elected and to help spread their message to voters. UNITE GOVERNMENT |
| The political party that wins more seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the majority party in that house of the legislature. The party that wins fewer seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the minority party in that house of the legislature. The majority party in the legislature often has more control over the lawmaking process than the minority power. However, the minority party remains active and uses its influence as much as possible in the lawmaking process. CREATE BALANCE |

***Civics Content Vocabulary***

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| **Word/Term** | **Part of Speech** | **Definition** |
| **bias** | noun | a preference, opinion or attitude that favors one way of thinking or feeling over another |
| **candidate** | noun | a person running for political office |
| **Communist Party** | proper noun | a political party that believes the government should control the entire economy, and there should be no private ownership of business |
| **Democratic Party** | proper noun | a political party that believes that the federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, particularly those who are in need |
| **government** | noun | a system or organization for exercising authority over a body of people |
| **Libertarian Party** | proper noun | a political party that believes in individual freedom and believes the only purpose of government is to protect this freedom |
| **party platform** | noun | a written statement of the goals of a political party |
| **political party** | noun | an organization that tries to get political power by electing members to public office so that their political ideas can become laws or policies |
| **political system** | noun | the members of a social organization who are in power |
| **Republican Party** | proper noun | a political party that believes that the federal government should play a less active role in people's lives and that individuals can take care of themselves without government help |
| **Socialist Party** | proper noun | a political party that believes in democratic government but also that the government should run some of the largest parts of the economy |
| **society** | noun | a body of individuals living as members of a community |
| **third party** | noun | a political party that is not one of the two major parties in the country; a minor party |
| **two-party system** | noun | a political system consisting primarily of two major parties, more or less equal in strength |

***Essential Teacher Content Background Information***

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| **This section addresses the following issues:**   1. Political Parties in the United States 2. Political Parties as Guides to Political Socialization 3. Political Party Organization Roles 4. Political Parties as Public Policy Guides 5. Political Parties in the United States: Conclusion |

**1. Political Parties in the United States**

Political parties serve several interconnected roles in American politics. They serve a socializing role for the public, where they impact political knowledge and political activity. Party organizations oversee nominations and elections, contribute resources to political campaigns, and shape party messages. Parties also impact policy making and political decision making among elected officials. These roles are interconnected in that, how the public perceives political parties will impact their vote choice and campaign contribution decisions, which impacts who wins elections. How elected officials create and shape public policy impacts how the public perceives political parties because most elected officials are identified as political party members.

Political parties serve critical roles in democracies because they combine individual citizens’ political views and communicate them to government. In combining these views, the public’s voice is more readily heard by public officials. In the U.S., there are two major political parties. The two-party system emerged in response to the arguments over the development of a federal system. Those supporting the proposal to create a shared powers system between the national and state governments formed the Federalist Party while those who wanted to retain the Articles of Confederation or, at least, key components of the confederal system, formed the Democratic-Republican Party. The Democratic and Republican parties have served as the two main U.S. political parties since 1860.

**2. Political Parties as Guides to Political Socialization**

Political socialization is the process of learning about politics. Parties act as filters through which the public learns about, sees and understands the political process. For example, positive or negative feelings about Republicans and Democrats may lead to positive or negative feelings about office holders, candidates, and proposed and actual public policies. Political parties also act as a vote guide because voters more often select candidates who represent their own party identification or party registration.

**3. Political Party Organization Roles**

Party organizations function as a loose confederation in the United States because most party activity takes place at the state and local level. There are far more elected seats at the state and local levels when compared with the federal level, so it makes sense that political parties are more active where there are more elected offices.

Party organizations serve many electoral functions. They raise and spend money in order to help candidates get elected, and they shape and represent the party’s message on its core values and policy positions. Party organizations also recruit candidates to run for various offices, and recommend potential appointees to governors and presidents.

Party organizations are best known for their least frequent activity—nominating candidates for president and vice-president. Each party holds its nominating convention every four years. The purpose of these conventions is to nominate the presidential and vice-presidential ticket, and to adopt the party’s platform. Party platforms are written documents that include the party’s policy positions and past policy and election successes, and attacks on the opposing party.

Parties usually (though not always) hold their nominating conventions 6-12 weeks after the June primary so that the last nominating convention is over before the unofficial start of the general election campaign on Labor Day weekend. Conventions normally last 4-5 days; they begin on a Sunday or Monday and end the following Thursday. For various reasons, including media logistics, Democrats and Republicans nominate their presidential tickets during separate weeks.

**4. Political Parties as Public Policy Guides**

The role of parties as policy guides functions particularly well within the systems of separation of powers, checks and balances and federalism.

All elected offices are tied to party labels at the national and state levels although this does not preclude independents from seeking office. For example, as of 2013, two Congress members were elected as independents. At the local level, counties and cities decide if their public officials will seek election under party labels.

Members of Congress who share a party label tend to shape public policy together while different parties tend to take opposing views on key policy issues. Similarly, the president tends to spend more time with members of his own party in Congress compared with members of the opposite party.

**5. Political Parties in the United States: Conclusion**

Political party roles are connected to one another such that each impacts the other. How the public perceives the parties working together in their policy making capacities, and in the policies that the parties support and oppose, impacts public support levels in terms of identification, registration, and vote choice. As the number of Democrats and Republicans increases or decreases, party organizations are similarly impacted. A party with fewer members, registrants or voters will have more difficulty raising money and recruiting good candidates compared with a party that is strong in these areas. Similarly, a party that has fewer members in legislatures, governorships, or does not hold the presidency, will have a more difficult time achieving its policy goals compared with a party that enjoys majorities in state and national legislatures, governorships and the presidency. Thus, even though these three roles impact different populations (the public, party activists, office holders) they are interconnected to one another as success or failure in one arena impacts how well a party does in other are