

The Democratic Party



The Democratic Party traces its roots to the founders of the United States of America. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and others founded the party in 1792. These men started the Democratic-Republican Party, the original name, as the party of the common man. Jefferson was later elected as the third president (in office 1801-1809) and Madison was the fourth president (1809-1817). Both the United States government and the Democratic Party are vastly different than they were in the early 1800s.

In 1824 John Quincy Adams was elected president but the election caused a four-way split in the Democratic-Republican Party. Andrew Jackson became the leader of the party and was elected as the next president (1829-1837). Historians say that Andrew Jackson formed the modern Democratic Party and in 1844 the party name was officially changed to Democratic Party. The symbol of the Democratic Party is a mule and this symbol dates back to Jackson's presidential campaign. Under Jackson's leadership the party created the first national convention and the first party platform. A party platform is a list of what the party believes about current issues facing the government.

Democratic Party President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) was elected for four terms and his New Deal social programs helped to shape the ideas that Democrats, as members of the Democratic Party are called, now hold. The Democratic Party's web site (www.democrats.org) states the basic ideas that the party believes in today as "an agenda that emphasizes strong economic growth, affordable health care for all Americans, retirement security, open, honest and accountable government, and securing our nation while protecting our civil rights and liberties." The focus of the Democratic Party is in "protecting the interests of working Americans and guaranteeing personal liberties for all."

At the present time about 72 million registered voters say that they are Democrats, the largest political party in the U.S. today.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Who were original founders of today's Democratic Party?
 - a. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson
 - b. George Washington and Benjamin Franklin
 - c. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin
 - d. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison

2. Which president is responsible for creating the national convention?
 - a. George Washington
 - b. Thomas Jefferson
 - c. James Madison
 - d. Andrew Jackson

3. As president, Franklin Roosevelt introduced
 - a. Political reform
 - b. Social programs
 - c. Affordable health care
 - d. All of the above

4. What a political party believes in about government issues is called
 - a. The party platform
 - b. The New Deal
 - c. Democratic-Republican
 - d. None of the above

5. Today Democrats are working towards
 - a. Affordable health care
 - b. Economic growth
 - c. A secure nation
 - d. All of the above

6. The symbol of the Democrat Party is a(n)
 - a. Elephant
 - b. Mule
 - c. Eagle
 - d. None of the above



The Republican Party

The Republican Party had its first formal meeting on July 6, 1854 in Jackson, Michigan. The founders of the Republican Party were against slavery and believed that the government should give public land in the West to settlers for free. Long before the Republican Party formed, the Democratic-Republican Party had been active in American politics. The Democratic-Republican Party was formed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in 1792 but it split apart when Andrew Jackson was president (1829-1837). In 1844 the Democratic-Republican Party changed its name to just Democratic Party. The newly formed Republican Party was not related to the old Democratic-Republican Party.

Abraham Lincoln was the first Republican president. While he was president, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves in the Confederate States and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution which abolished slavery was enacted. Republicans also worked to pass the Fourteenth Amendment which guarantees equal protection under the law and the Fifteenth Amendment that gives equal voting rights based on race.

In 1874 the symbol of the elephant became associated with the Republican Party because of a political cartoon and the elephant is still the party symbol. The Republican Party is often called the GOP. Most people think that GOP stands for "Grand Old Party" but Republican history accounts favor the words "Great Old Party." Members of the Republican Party are called Republicans.

The Republican Party believes in a free market economy and individual decisions about economic matters rather than government controls. Republicans believe that private groups should help the poor rather than having massive government programs. Republicans believe that health care belongs in the private sector instead of being sponsored by the government. In general, Republicans believe that governmental programs should be centered in the states rather than with the federal government.

About one-third of the registered voters are Republicans.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The founders of the Republican Party opposed
 - a. Expansion of the western United States
 - b. Slavery
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above

2. The first Republican president was
 - a. Thomas Jefferson
 - b. James Madison
 - c. Andrew Jackson
 - d. Abraham Lincoln

3. The Republican Party
 - a. Was originally part of the Democratic-Republican Party
 - b. Split from the Democratic-Republican Party over slavery
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above

4. The symbol of the Republican Party is a(n)
 - a. Elephant
 - b. Mule
 - c. Hawk
 - d. None of the above

5. Republicans favor
 - a. A free market economy
 - b. A private health care system
 - c. State rather than federal control of programs
 - d. All of the above

6. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution
 - a. Abolished slavery
 - b. Guaranteed equal rights under the law

Why and How Do You Register to Vote?



Twenty-four million young people, ages 18 to 29, voted in the 2008 presidential election but many more couldn't vote because they failed to register properly. The American democracy is based on the idea of one person gets one vote. Every voice needs to be heard through voting in order to make our system of government work. To be eligible to vote you must: be a U.S. citizen; be a resident of, that is actually live in full time, the state you will be voting in; and be at least 18 years-old when the election occurs.

These are simple rules but if everyone had to prove that they were eligible to vote when they arrived at the polling place (the location for voting), the voting process would be very complicated and slow. Instead voters register in advance, some time before the election, and prove that they meet the criteria for voting. Each state sets its own deadline for voter registration.

The local voter registration board checks the information and makes lists of registered voters. In most states voters are assigned a polling place where to go to vote but as computerized voting is becoming a national trend, polling places and dates for voting are becoming more flexible. This flexibility meets the needs of the American people who are increasingly busy.

Most states accept mail-in voter registration. New voters must provide a photocopy of proof of identification and address. Anytime people move out of their current polling area, they must re-register in the new location or update their voter registration in order to vote in the next election.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. To be eligible to vote how old must the voter be at the time of the election?
 - a. 16 and over
 - b. 18 and over
 - c. 21 and over
 - d. 25 and over

2. Being a resident of a state means
 - a. Attending college in the state
 - b. Living there full-time
 - c. Working there for the summer
 - d. Visiting family there for a vacation

3. People register to vote
 - a. If they will be old enough at the time of the election
 - b. In advance of the election
 - c. By the deadline in the state
 - d. All of the above

4. In most states people can register to vote
 - a. In person
 - b. By mail
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above

5. The place set aside for voting is called
 - a. Voter registration
 - b. Voting venue
 - c. Polling place
 - d. None of the above

6. A voter needs to re-register to vote or update the registration
 - a. Every year
 - b. Whenever they move
 - c. Both a. and b. above
 - d. None of the above



Why It Is Important to Vote

Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.

--George Jean Nathan (1882-1958)

It is easy to see that well over 100 years ago American citizens were promoting the importance of voting. The American way of life depends upon democracy and a basic principle of democracy is that every citizen is allowed to participate in how the country and the government are run. The primary way the citizens participate is by voting for elected officials. We probably forget that Americans fought long and hard to achieve independence from Great Britain over 200 years ago during the Revolutionary War. Meanwhile, today American soldiers are being wounded and dying to help people in other countries, like Iraq, achieve democracy and have a say in their government.

Many countries are ruled by a dictator like Saddam Hussein who is the only ruler and controls everything about the country. With a dictator people have no say in the laws and taxes in their country. People don't participate in the government in a Communist country either. In a Communist country the rulers control everything including housing, jobs and education.

Voting is the key to maintaining American freedoms and American society yet American people are ignoring their right and duty to vote. About 60% of the total registered voters voted in the 1960 Presidential Election, less than 40% in the 1996 election and about 63% in the historic 2008 election. In 1998 only about 20% of eligible voters who were 18 to 24 years-old voted while only about 50% of young people ages 18 to 29 voted in the 2008 Presidential Election. Not enough eligible voters are participating in our democracy and even fewer young people are taking the time to vote.

Elected officials make important life and death decisions about what happens in the United States. Leaders decide about death when they enact legislation about ethical medical treatments and sending soldiers to war. Leaders decide about life when they consider abortion. They legislate the quality of your life, for example, when they set the tax rate or how Social Security operates in old age. It's up to everyone to select the best possible leaders by learning about candidates and going out to vote. It's important.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The American system of government is
 - a. Communism
 - b. Socialism
 - c. Democracy
 - d. Dictatorship

2. A basic principle of democracy is
 - a. The dictator sets all the laws and rules
 - b. Citizens have no say in who runs the country
 - c. Citizens vote for elected officials who run the country
 - d. None of the above

3. Before the Iraq War the Iraqi government was
 - a. Communist
 - b. Socialist
 - c. Democratic
 - d. A Dictatorship

4. About what percent of the eligible voters participated in the 2008 Presidential Election?
 - a. 40%
 - b. 60%
 - c. 80%
 - d. 100%

5. Young people ages 18 – 29 turn out to vote in numbers that are
 - a. Less than the rest of the voters
 - b. The same as the rest of the voters
 - c. More than the rest of the voters
 - d. None of the above

6. Elected officials decide about important matters like
 - a. Health care
 - b. Taxes people pay
 - c. Social Security and retirement
 - d. All of the above

COMPARING CANDIDATES



Use this chart to help you compare two candidates for an upcoming election.

Candidate #1:

Candidate #2:

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