

## One Big Party?

**Time Needed:** One to two class periods

**Materials Needed:**

Student Materials  
Projector

**Copy Instructions:**

- Transparency (*if using overhead*)
- Reading (*class set; 2 pages*)
- Review worksheet (*class set; 2 pages*)

**Learning Objectives** Students will be able to:

- Define "political party."
- Describe the roles of political parties.
- Identify ways that political parties influence public policy.
- Differentiate between single-party, two-party, and multi-party systems.

## STEP BY STEP

- ANTICIPATE** the lesson by asking your class to name the two major political parties in the United States. Then ask whether they can name any other political parties. Assuming they have trouble with this, ask why they think it is so hard to name other parties.
- DISTRIBUTE** the One Big Party? reading to the class .
- READ** the pages with the class, pausing to discuss as appropriate.
- PROJECT** the *Party System Strengths & Weaknesses* transparency. Cover up the statements so you can reveal them one at a time.
- EXPLAIN** that you will be reading statements that illustrate strengths and weaknesses of the different political party systems.
- UNCOVER** the first statement. Read it with the class.
- ASK** whether this is a strength or a weakness. Have the class answer as a chorus. Mark the answer on the transparency.
- ASK** whether it applies to a 1-, 2-, or multiple-party system. Have the class answer as a chorus. Mark the answer on the transparency.
- WORK THROUGH** the rest of the statements.
- ASSIGN** the One Big Party? Worksheets.
- REVIEW** the answers to the worksheets with the class, pausing to discuss. The worksheet activities include additional concepts, information, and examples, so reviewing them together can help further your discussion of political parties.
- CLOSE** the class by asking students to silently recall the 5 roles of political parties. Call on students until all five roles have been named, or have students tell the 5 roles to a partner. If there's time, have students recall examples of each role.

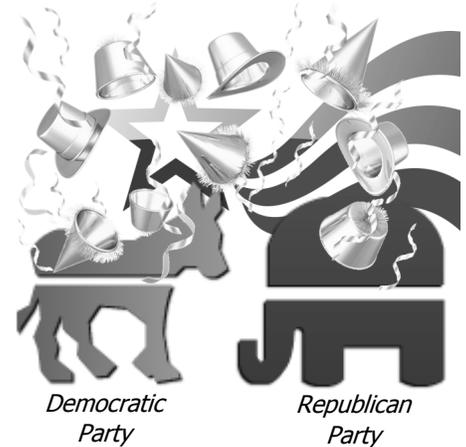
# One Big Party?

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

## It's a Party...

...but not the kind with ice cream and cake. A **political party** is an organized group of people who share similar political views and work to influence the government in support of those views.

*Political views* are a person's ideas about how the government should run and how the issues facing our country should be solved. Political parties fight to gain political power by having candidates elected to office. They exist at every level of government, from the national level to your very own neighborhood. By organizing into political parties, people have more power to influence government than if they acted alone.



COUNTRY	# PARTIES IN OFFICE
Australia	7
Denmark	11
Germany	5
Guatemala	11
Kuwait	0
Israel	12
Turkey	4
United States	2
Vietnam	1

Source: CIA World Factbook 2011

## How Many Parties Are There?

That depends on the country you live in. Some countries have **no political parties** at all. Most of these countries, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, are not democracies, and citizens have limited influence on the government.

A few countries, such as China, Vietnam, and North Korea, have a **single-party system** with one major political party. These countries are under very strict rule that gives citizens little or no say in government. They are not democracies, and it is usually illegal to oppose the main political party.

The United States and some other countries have a **two-party system** with two major political parties that hold all the power. Other parties exist, and they sometimes gain enough support to win an election, but this is rare. This is the least common system around the world.

Most countries have **multi-party systems** where three or more political parties share power. Some parties may have more influence than others, but there are always more than two parties with members elected to government office. Most European countries, and many others countries around the world such as Mexico, Australia, and Japan, have multi-party systems.

## The Party Platform

One thing political parties have in common is that they stand for something. If you want to know what a party believes, read its **platform**—the set of statements describing the party's views on all the major issues facing the nation. This set of statements is called a "platform" because it is the set of beliefs the political party stands on.

In the U.S., the two major political parties are Democrats and Republicans. They keep their platforms broad and simple to attract as many supporters as possible. At first, it can be hard to tell the difference on some issues. Both parties might say they want better education or more jobs, but what does that mean? The party's platform explains what that party thinks "better" education looks like and how the jobs should be created. You can find a political party's platform by going to the party's website.



# One Big Party?

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

## Political Parties Support Candidates

In the U.S., you'll be most aware of political parties during an election season. **Candidates** who are running for political office almost always declare themselves a member of a political party. By doing this, a candidate gains support from the political party and makes it easier for voters to figure out what the candidate believes in.

At the same time, political parties fight hard to get candidates from their party elected. Every four years, the national committees for the two major parties must nominate candidates to run for President and Vice-President. At the state level, state committees push to support candidates for the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as for the state's own legislature. Political parties also have local branches that work on behalf of candidates for offices at the county and city levels.

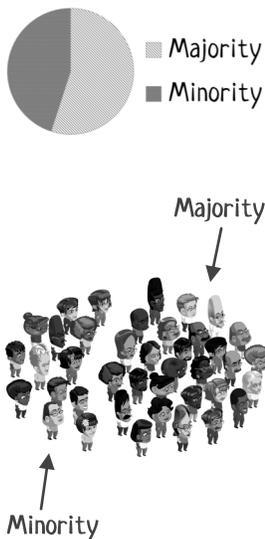


*Political parties donate lots of money to help their candidates.*

## Political Parties Work Inside Government

Candidates who are elected to office work to pass laws and solve problems. What laws get passed and how problems are solved depends on the government's **public policy**—the stand the government takes about how issues should be handled. What stand does the government take? That depends on which political party has the most power. The **majority party**—the one with the most elected members—can most easily influence laws and policy by getting all its members to vote the same way on a bill. This isn't always easy, though, because members of one political party don't necessarily agree on all the issues. But in American politics, it's common for most lawmakers from one party to vote the same way when deciding whether to pass a law.

Meanwhile, the **minority party** works to promote the views of its supporters by forcing compromise with the majority party. If the minority party is successful, this can create laws that are balanced between the two parties' viewpoints.



## Political Parties Influence Voters

During elections, political parties also try to influence voters by distributing information about candidates and issues. Next time you see a campaign ad on television, look closely at the fine print at the bottom and you might see that a political party has funded the ad. But beware: All the information a political party distributes is *biased* toward its own views. That means information from political parties should not be your only source of information about candidates and issues.



## Joining a Political Party

Your first personal experience with political parties might be when you turn 18 and register to vote. Voter registration applications usually let you check a box to join a political party. Joining a political party isn't a requirement, and even if you check a box you can still vote for anyone you want. During a presidential election, in many states joining a political party lets you participate in that state's primary election or caucus to help decide who your party's presidential candidate will be. Some states let you participate even if you don't belong to a party.



# PARTY SYSTEM

## STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

	Strength or weakness?	Which kind of party system?
1) There are <u>too few parties for citizens to choose from.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
2) The <u>public has almost no voice.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
3) Party <u>platforms must appeal to so many people</u> that party members can't agree on core beliefs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
4) <u>Parties have to work together to get things done.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
5) More parties have a say in government so <u>everyone can join a party they believe in.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
6) There is <u>no opportunity for opposing views</u> to be represented.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
7) Too many parties create divisions and make it <u>hard for the government to accomplish reform.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
8) <u>Reform is easy</u> because there is no opposition.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple
9) Encourages parties to create broad <u>platforms that include many types of voters.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> multiple

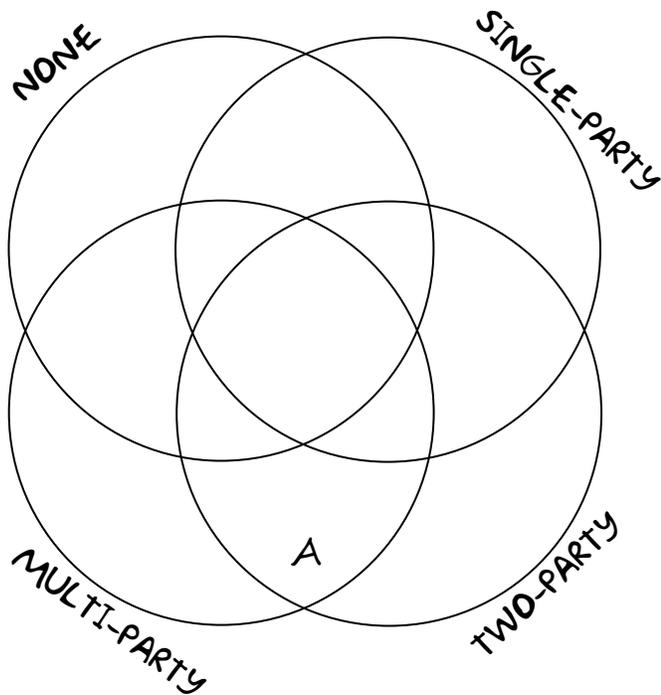
# One Big Party?

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

**A. Matching.** Match each key term with its definition.

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. political party     | A. Two major political parties hold all the power  |
| _____ 2. single-party system | B. A person's ideas about how government should run and how issues should be solved                |
| _____ 3. public policy       | C. Political system with one political party   |
| _____ 4. minority party      | D. Political party with the most elected members   |
| _____ 5. two-party system    | E. The stand the government takes about how issues should be handled                               |
| _____ 6. platform            | F. Three or more political parties have officials elected to office                                |
| _____ 7. political views     | G. An organized group of people who share similar political views and work to influence government |
| _____ 8. multi-party system  | H. Set of statements describing a party's views on major issues                                    |
| _____ 9. candidate           | I. Political party that does not have a majority of the elected members                            |
| _____ 10. majority party     | J. A person running for political office   |

**B. Crazy Quadra-Venn!** Do the different party systems have anything in common? Decide whether each characteristic on the list applies to party systems with 0, 1, 2, or multiple parties. Find the right spot on the 4-way Venn diagram (if you can!) and write the letter there. The first one is done for you.



- A. Likely to be found in a democracy.
- B. Illegal to oppose the main party
- C. Usually found in countries that are not democracies.
- D. Citizens can belong to a political party.
- E. Some parties don't have as much power as others.
- F. Two parties hold all the power
- G. Individual citizens have personal political views.
- H. Government includes elected officials from more than two parties.
- I. Political parties don't exist.
- J. Usually found where citizens have little or no influence on government.
- K. Found in the United States.
- L. Citizens are ruled by a government.

# One Big Party?

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

**C. Five Roles of Political Parties.** Read each example of political parties at work. Decide which of the 5 roles the example best illustrates. Write the underlined letter in the button next to the example.



**Support Candidates**



**Influence Laws & Policy**



**Unite Levels of Government**



**Create Balance**



**Influence Voters**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1)  Party leaders meet with a senator who is not supporting the party's platform on environmental issues.</p> <p>2)  A party's state office asks party members to write their legislators and ask them to vote "no" on a state tax bill.</p> <p>3)  A party's state office runs a phone bank before the election to call party supporters and remind them to support the party's candidates.</p> <p>4)  A party's state office hosts a conference for state and local officials to discuss the party's goals for the state.</p> <p>5)  A committee of legislators from one party meets to draft a law that will be acceptable to everyone in the party.</p> <p>6)  A group of legislators from the minority and majority parties meets to discuss compromise after a failed vote on a budget bill.</p> | <p>7)  A political party pays for a series of televised attack ads against a candidate from the other party.</p> <p>8)  A political party holds a huge convention to nominate and celebrate the party's presidential candidate.</p> <p>9)  A state governor meets with a city mayor and state senator from the same party to discuss the governor's policy on education.</p> <p>10)  The President refuses to sign a bill passed by the opposing party and meets with legislators to discuss possible changes.</p> <p>11)  Party volunteers spend a Saturday afternoon at the park handing out party-sponsored voting guides.</p> <p>12)  A new law passes the Senate, where one party has a majority, but fails in the House of Representatives, where the other party has a majority.</p> |
|--|--|

**D. The U.S. Two-Party System.** Draw lines to match each characteristic of the two-party system to a fact about political parties in the United States.

In two party systems...

Party platforms are so broad that many people believe a third party is needed.

Third parties rarely gain enough support to win elections.

Most citizens identify with one of the two major parties.

In the United States...

In 2012, 60 percent of Americans identified themselves as either a Republican or a Democrat.

In 2012, 46 percent of Americans thought a third major party was needed and 45 percent didn't.

In July 2012, only 7 percent of Americans planned to vote for a third-party presidential candidate.

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\*\* *TEACHER GUIDE* \*\*

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  E   3. public policy

  I   4. minority party

  A   5. two-party system

  H   6. platform

  B   7. political views

  F   8. multi-party system

  J   9. candidate

  D   10. majority party

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E. The stand the government takes about how issues should be handled

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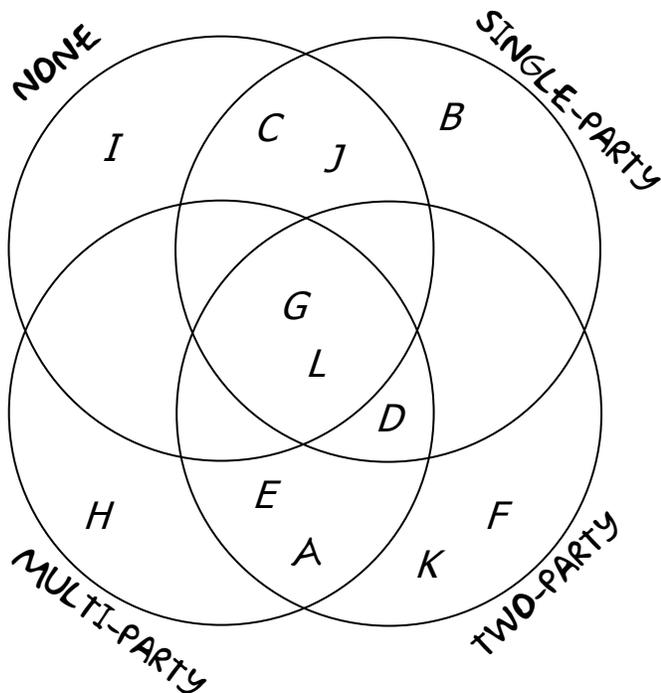
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\*\* TEACHER GUIDE \*\*

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In the United States...

