



NEWS IN EDUCATION

NIE 4-Week Lesson Series: All About Elections & Government - Week 2

Week 2: Parties, Politics & Voting: Are You A Member?

You've probably heard of political parties, namely Republicans and Democrats. Maybe you even call yourself one or the other. If you're into politics, or if you're especially interested in what's going on in America today, it's likely that you have strong feelings about the issues we face and the way our leaders handle them. The feelings and opinions you have regarding our country and the issues it faces show which political party you most closely relate with.

Left and Right

Do you hear these terms being thrown around a lot in conversations? Do you ever wonder why we use them?

Fact/Myth.com states: *"The modern usage of the political terms [left and right](#) comes from the French Revolution of 1789 when supporters of the king stood to the president's right, and supporters of the revolution to his left.*

Here are some great resources on Left vs. Right, including an easy infographic:

[The Left-Right Political Spectrum Explained](#)

[Left vs. Right Infographic](#)

[The Origin of the Political Terms Left and Right](#)

RED: All About the Republican Party

The Republican party, also called the GOP (Grand Old Party), was founded in 1854. It formed as a coalition that opposed the advancing of slavery into Western territories, and after the Civil War, continued to fight to protect the rights of African Americans. The GOP today generally has conservative views.

What are [Conservative](#) views?

Conservatives typically favor smaller government, less regulation, and less federal intervention in the lives of American citizens.

Here are a few **Conservative values**:

- Support self-defense and the right to bear arms
- Support legal immigration only
- Support a free market and equal taxation rather than a socialist economy
- Support the sanctity of life (oppose legalized abortion)
- Support free market healthcare
- Support traditional family values (oppose gay marriage & adoption)

BLUE: All About the Democratic Party

The Democratic party, founded in 1848, is America's oldest existing political party. Initially opposed to civil and political rights for African Americans, Democrats dominated the South after the Civil War. Thankfully, this all changed in the 20th century. Democrats today generally have progressive ideals and liberal views.

What are **Liberal** views?

Liberals typically favor a strong federal government, and more government regulation.

Here are a few **Liberal values**:

- Support government funded healthcare
- Support legal immigration and amnesty for illegal immigrants
- Support socialism and a higher taxation for the wealthy rather than a capitalistic economy
- Support reproductive rights and legalized abortion
- Support gay marriage and adoption of children for gay couples
- Support gun control laws

INDEPENDENT: No Party Affiliation

Many states require individuals to register to vote by political party. This means that voters must specify whether they will be affiliated with the Republican or Democratic party. However, there are many Americans who refuse to label themselves one way or the other, for different reasons. Perhaps they are unsure of which party's values they most closely align. Perhaps they don't consider

themselves as aligning with either party's values, or further - maybe they align with values from both parties.

These voters choose no party affiliation, and are called **Independent**. Sometimes people who are registered as Independent are not allowed to vote in primary or local elections or caucuses, because these elections only accept voters who have a party affiliation. Being an Independent is considered having no party.

Third Parties

A political third party is often formed by factions that have decided to break away from one of the two major political parties, usually over policies and issues. There are many third parties involved in politics, some that most people haven't even heard of! Let's talk about two third parties that are more well-known.

- First, the **Green Party**. In 2001, the Federal Election Commission granted National Committee Status to the Green Party of the United States, which meant that they were now recognized as a legal political party, just like the Democratic and Republican parties. The Green Party holds strongly to environmentalism and supports single-payer universal healthcare, anti-war policies, higher taxation for the wealthy, reproductive rights, legal status for immigrants, the right of workers to form a union, and gender equality.
- The **Libertarian Party** was founded in 1971 and currently runs hundreds of candidates in every election cycle. Libertarians strongly oppose government interference in all aspects of citizens' lives. They support a free market, voluntary tax exchange, self-defense and the right to bear arms, immigration policy reform to allow for peaceful immigrants to gain status, and equal rights for all citizens.

VOTE!

The legal age for voting in the USA is eighteen. That means that you'll be able to vote in your senior year of high school or shortly after. Maybe you've watched your parents vote in a few elections. Is it exciting to think of driving to the polling place, standing in line and filling out a ballot of your own? Voting is a great experience and one that can make you feel like a real adult! Casting your ballot and knowing that you had a say in who gets to make our laws is a great feeling. It's especially exciting to watch live news coverage of an election and find out that your candidate won!

Sources: <https://www.gop.com/>, <https://www.democrats.org/>, <http://www.gp.org/>, <https://www.lp.org/>