



*Voting and Elections: SS.7.CG.2.6*  
**Political Parties**  
**VIDEO SCRIPT**

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1. Since the end of Washington’s presidency (who you’ll remember didn’t have a party), our country has had a tradition of a two-party system. This means that two major political parties have dominated the elections and have the most participation by voters. The first two real political parties in the United States were the Federalists, led by John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, and the Democratic-Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Today the two major parties are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.
2. After watching this video, you’ll be able to
  - Explain the origins of the Democratic and Republican Parties and evaluate their roles in shaping public policy.
3. So let’s get started. The Democratic Party can trace its roots back to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and their Democratic-Republican Party. The Democratic-Republicans primarily represented Southern interests, which included support for low tariffs (taxes on imported goods), no national bank, a focus on agriculture over industry, and more rural communities, as well as individual rights and smaller government. Eventually, the Democratic-Republicans would break apart (over a variety of issues), and a new party would be established: the Democratic Party.
4. Established in 1828, by supporters of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the Democratic Party believed in the ideals of ‘the common man’, and advocated for farmers and independent, rural, workers. The Democrats continued with the Democratic-Republican’s belief in low tariffs, and opposition to a national bank, but believed in a powerful executive branch and were strong supporters of slavery. This is in part because much of, the Democratic Party was based in the South, and it continued to be a predominately Southern party until at least the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Today, the Democratic Party is sometimes considered to be more liberal on many issues and tends to support a larger national government and greater spending on social programs like welfare, public schools, and healthcare.
6. The Federalists, under John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, believed in a national bank, higher tariffs, the growth of industry, and the expansion of railroads and cities under a strong national government. Over time, the Federalists split apart into different parties and disappeared. A new party appeared to oppose the Democratic Party, the Whigs. They lasted from around 1833 to 1856.
7. The Whigs, led by men like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, shared similar beliefs to the Federalists. They supported what was known as the American System (strong tariffs, national bank, industrialization). The party opposed too much power in the hands of the people, a strong executive

branch, Manifest Destiny and the Mexican American War. They had no strong position on slavery but tensions over it DID impact the party. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, violence erupted between pro and anti-slavery forces, and helped end the Whigs. The collapse of the Whig Party helped give rise to the Republican Party.

8. By 1860, the Republican Party quickly became the main opponent to the Democratic Party and defeated the Democrats for the presidency in that important year of 1860, led by Abraham Lincoln. The Republican Party itself was founded by Lincoln, the newspaper publisher Horace Greeley, and other men. The Republican Party was primarily a party of the North, Midwest, and Western United States, particularly until at least mid 20th century. However, many African Americans, both in the South and nationally, would join the Republican Party after the Civil War because of its role in ending slavery and supporting the fight for civil rights until the end of Reconstruction in 1877.
9. The Republican party, also referred to as the Grand Old Party (GOP), was established in 1854 by anti-slavery activists, modernizers, ex-Whigs and ex-Free Soilers. The Free-Soil Party was **another** political party that appeared in the 1840's, made up of anti-slavery Democrats and Whigs and abolitionists who opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories won in the Mexican American War.
10. The Republican Party opposed the expansion of slavery, and eventually slavery itself, They supported the growth of industry, higher tariffs, western expansion, railroads, and a strong national government. After the Civil War, it also supported the expansion of civil rights for African Americans, through the era of Reconstruction.
11. Today, the Republican Party is sometimes considered to be conservative on many issues, and tends to support a smaller national government and greater spending on programs and issues like the military and immigration enforcement.
12. Political parties play a significant role in shaping public policy. This is done through elections. As you may have learned in the video on elections and voting, parties campaign for office in order to implement their ideas about government into policy. For example, , a government led by Democrats may see a policy that implements higher taxes but puts more money into public schools. A government led by Republicans may see, for example, lower taxes on corporations but greater spending on the military. Ultimately, public policy is shaped by the implementation of the beliefs of a political party. Who we choose to vote for in an election can play a significant role in our society for many years.
13. Of course, the Republicans and the Democrats are not the only political parties today. There are many other smaller parties that compete in our elections. For example, in the 2020 presidential election, in addition to the Republicans and the Democrats, candidates that represented the Libertarian Party, the Constitution Party, the Reform Party, and the Green Party were all on the ballot. Ultimately, as citizens, it is up to us to decide on a political party we want to support, though remember that we don't have to support one at all!