**Republicans and Democrats in the Twenty-first Century**

While all kinds of Americans support either party, a Republican is more likely to be white, male, and relatively affluent. A Democrat is more likely to be a member of a minority group, female, and less affluent. This graph shows other differences between the Republicans and Democrats.

In general, Republicans hold more conservative views, and Democrats more liberal views, on the issues that follow.

*Size of the national government*. In general, Democrats support a strong federal government and look to it to solve a wide variety of problems. Most Republicans favor limiting the size of the national government and giving more power to the states to solve problems at a local level.

*Taxes*. Republicans favor broad-based tax cuts to encourage economic growth and to allow people to keep what they earn. Although Democrats favor tax cuts for the poor, they are more willing to raise taxes on affluent Americans in order to support programs that they see as beneficial to society.

*Regulation of business*. Democrats generally support government regulation of business as a way to protect consumers, workers, or the environment. Most Republicans oppose what they see as excessive business regulation by the government believing that too much regulation prevents economic growth.

*Social issues*. Republicans tend to oppose legalizing same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun control laws. Democrats are more likely to support same-sex marriage rights, abortion, and gun control laws.

*Environment*. Most Democrats favor strict environmental regulations. Republicans tend to oppose such regulations because they believe it hurts businesses and the economy.

While these generalities hold for the two political parties, individual Democrats or Republicans may not share the same views on every issue. Republicans who call themselves Log Cabin Republicans, for example, strongly support equal rights for gay and lesbian Americans. At the same time, many traditional Republicans are just as strongly opposed to granting certain rights, such as the right to marry, to gay and lesbian couples.

Nevertheless, for most Americans, identifying with one party or the other provides a useful way to make sense of the candidates at election time. In effect, party labels tell voters what the candidates stand for and help them make choices when they vote.

### Third Parties: Single-Issue, Economic Protest, Ideological, and Splinter Groups

Not all Americans identify with the two major parties. Throughout our country's history, people frustrated with the status quo have formed third parties to express their opinions in constructive ways.

There are four main types of third parties in the United States. Single-issue parties tend to focus on one issue, such as taxes or immigration. Economic protest parties unite opponents of particular economic policies or conditions. Ideological parties view politics and society through the lens of a distinct ideology, such as socialism. And splinter parties develop as offshoots of the major parties. The table below lists an example of each type of third party.

Third parties have had some electoral successes. The Socialist Party gained a substantial following in the early 1900s. More recently, Independent Party candidate Lincoln Chafee won election as governor of Rhode Island in 2010. That same year, the Tea Party movement was also successful when members obtained seats in both the Senate and House. Although the Tea Party is not officially recognized as a political party, it is considered a third party by some. The Green Party has also enjoyed some success in elections, particularly at the local level.

Third parties have also advocated reforms that have eventually been adopted by the major parties. In the 1990s, for example, the Green Party helped raise awareness of environmental issues. Today “green” positions on the environment can be found in the platforms of the two main parties.

In general, however, third parties face an uphill battle given the strength of the two-party system. Smaller parties find it hard to raise money and get the media coverage they need to challenge the two major parties.

### The Moderate Middle: Centrist and Independent Voters

In recent years, a growing number of Americans have identified themselves as political independents. As such, they are not aligned with any political party. According to some political analysts, the rise of independent voters represents a turn away from the more liberal or conservative views of the two major parties toward a centrist, or middle-of-the-road, position.

Nevertheless, political scientists note that many people who embrace the “independent” label still tend to lean toward one or the other major party at election time. In other words, although these voters call themselves independent, they still vote like either Democrats or Republicans. The proportion of voters who are truly independent of either party has hovered around 10 percent since the 1950s.

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Directions: Read the reading on the political parties in the US, and fill out the chart. Identify at least 4 beliefs held by each party.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Republicans | Democrats | Independence |
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