The concept of political parties in the United States began a long time ago. In 1789, shortly after George Washington became the first president of the United States, two political parties began to take shape. These two parties were called the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party.

The Federalist Party was led by John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington. Members of the Federalist Party were called Federalists. Federalists supported having a strong federal, or central, government.

The Democratic-Republican Party was led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Members of this party thought that the United States should not be run by a large central government. Rather, they thought that individual state governments should retain power and be responsible for running the nation.

James Monroe won the presidential election of 1816. Both political parties split after this election. Andrew Jackson led the Democratic-Republican Party, and this party became known as the Democrats. The Whig Party was formed around 1832 to oppose Jackson and his ideas. The issue of slavery led to further division and new branding of the political parties of the United States in 1854. There were two groups that were against extending slavery into the territories in the west. These two groups were the Northern Democrats and many of the Whigs. They combined and formed the Republican Party. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican elected as president of the United States.

To this day, Democrats typically believe in having a strong federal government, much like the Federalists believed in. Today’s Republicans are also similar to the original Democratic-Republicans, since they tend to distrust big government. Instead, they tend to think that the federal government should have less power over the state governments. They also generally believe that the federal government should have less control over individuals and businesses. Stereotypically, Democrats support the common people, and Republicans support businesses and the wealthier population.

In addition to political parties that describe a person’s political ideals, there are other labels that are used to describe a person’s political leanings. A person can be described as a conservative or a liberal. They can also be described as “leaning to the right” or “leaning to the left.” Conservatives and people that lean to the right are usually Republicans. Liberals and people that lean to the left are typically Democrats.

Since the United States has had a history of having only two major political parties, it is said that the United States has a two-party political system. Although there are only two major political parties, there is no law that limits the number of political parties that can exist in the United States.

The two political parties frequently need to try to work together in spite of their differences, since both parties hold seats in Congress. Additionally, one party never fully maintains control over the other party. They frequently reverse roles as one party loses control to the other. This occurs after elections, because a Democratic majority in Congress may be replaced by a Republican majority if more Republicans are elected to office. Conversely, a Republican majority in Congress may be replaced by a Democratic majority if more Democrats are elected to office. Political power is constantly shifting back and forth between the two parties.
Political Parties in the United States - Questions

**Fill In:**

1. Federalists supported having a strong federal, or central, ____________.

2. In 1789, shortly after ____________ became the first president of the United States, two political parties were formed.

3. The issue of ____________ led to further division and new branding of the political parties of the United States in 1854.

4. Since the United States has had a history of having only two major political parties, it is said that the United States has a ____________ political system.

5. To this day, Democrats typically believe in having a strong federal government, much like the ____________ believed in.

**Matching:**

___ 7. Andrew Jackson b. Republican
___ 8. Abraham Lincoln c. Federalist

**Multiple Choice:**

9. The Democratic-Republican Party was led by Thomas Jefferson and:

   a. John Adams
   b. Alexander Hamilton
   c. James Madison
   d. George Washington

**True or False:**

___ 10. Conservatives and people that lean to the right are usually Republicans.

___ 11. One political party always fully maintains control over the other party and they never reverse roles as one party is always in control.

___ 12. Today's Republicans are similar to the original Democratic-Republicans, since they tend to distrust big government.

___ 13. There is a law that limits the number of political parties that can exist in the United States.