

# Chapter Summary

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## Voting And Elections

### Lesson 1 *Who Can Vote?*

- Constitutional amendments gave African Americans, women, and people aged 18 and up the right to vote. Today, most citizens may vote.
- In most states, people who have been convicted of serious crimes are denied the right to vote while in prison. In addition, people with certain mental illnesses may lose their eligibility.
- Citizens must register to vote by filling out a form. They should prepare to vote by becoming informed about candidates and issues.
- Voters cast their ballots at a designated "polling place." In many states, citizens may cast their ballots before election day during a period of early voting. Absentee ballots are available for people who will not be able to get to the polls.
- Voter turnout rate in the United States is often under 50 percent. Studies show that this is due to apathy, busy schedules, or failure to register.

### Lesson 2 *Elections and Campaigns*

- Parties hold primary elections to choose candidates who will run in the general election.
- General elections include national, state, and local elections. These take place on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November. National elections are held in even-numbered years and presidential elections are held every four years.
- Voters are sometimes asked to vote on issues. Initiatives are laws proposed by citizens. Referendums allow voters to accept or reject a law passed by state or local legislatures.
- In presidential elections, voters choose electors to represent their state. The party that wins the popular vote gets the state's electoral votes. In this winner-take-all system, the candidate who wins the popular vote may actually lose the election.
- Candidates for office run campaigns to win votes. Campaigns may include candidates' appearances at community events, debates, speeches, and interviews. Campaigns pay for advertisements, bumper stickers, and yard signs. Campaigns are primarily funded by donations.

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## Political Parties

### Lesson 1 *History of Political Parties*

- The leaders who wrote the Constitution did not support the idea of political parties, fearing that divisions between parties would weaken the nation. However, by the late 1700s, two groups had formed to compete for political power. These groups had different ideas about the role of government.
- Alexander Hamilton and his followers formed the Federalist Party, which favored a strong national government.
- Thomas Jefferson and his followers formed the Democratic-Republican Party, which supported more power for the states.
- Parties formed and reformed in the early years, until the Democrats and the Republicans emerged as the major parties.
- Today the United States has a two-party political system. Third parties appear from time to time to promote specific issues or candidates, but a third-party candidate has never been elected to the presidency.
- In other countries, two-party systems are rare. Many democracies have three or more parties. Some nations, such as China, have one-party systems, which are not democratic.
- The main difference between the two major U.S. parties is their belief in how involved the government should be in the economy and in people's lives. Democrats tend to want government to regulate the economy and provide help for the poor. Republicans tend to want little government involvement.
- Every four years the parties hold conventions to select their presidential candidates and write their platforms.

### Lesson 2 *Political Parties Today*

- Each party has a national committee that raises money for presidential campaigns and organizes the party's national convention.
- The national convention launches the party's presidential campaign and builds party unity.
- State committees work to elect party candidates to state offices and national offices.