



Political Parties

To preserve and protect individual rights and freedoms, a democratic people must work together to shape the government of their choosing. And the principal way of doing that is through political parties.

➤ Political parties are voluntary organizations that link the people and their government. Parties recruit candidates and campaign to elect them to public office, and they mobilize people to participate in selecting government leaders.

➤ The majority party (or the party elected to control the offices of government) seeks to enact into law a number of different policies and programs. Parties of the opposition are free to criticize the majority party's policy ideas and offer their own proposals.

➤ Political parties provide a way for citizens to hold elected party officials accountable for their actions in government.

➤ Democratic political parties have faith in the principles of democracy so that they recognize and respect the authority of the elected government even when their party leaders are not in power.

➤ Like any democracy, members of various political parties reflect the diversity of the cultures in which they arise. Some are small and built around a set of political beliefs. Others are organized around economic interests, or shared history. Still others are loose alliances of different citizens who may only come together at election time.

➤ All democratic political parties, whether they are small movements or large national

coalitions, share the values of compromise and tolerance. They know that only through broad alliances and cooperation with other political parties and organizations can they provide the leadership and common vision that will win the support of the people of the nation.

➤ Democratic parties recognize that political views are fluid and changeable, and that consensus can often arise out of the clash of ideas and values in peaceful, free, and public debate.

➤ The concept of the loyal opposition is central to any democracy. It means that all sides in political debate — however deep their differences — share the fundamental democratic values of freedom of speech and faith, and equal protection under law. Parties that lose elections step into the role of opposition — confident that the political system will continue to protect their right to organize and speak out. In time, their party will have a chance to campaign again for its ideas, and the votes of the people.

➤ In a democracy, the struggle between political parties is not a fight for survival, but a competition to serve the people.