

SS.7.C.2.8

Identify America's current political parties, and illustrate their ideas about government.

SS.7.C.2.8 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will compare current political parties' ideas about government.

A **political party** is a group of citizens or voters with similar views on public issues who work to put their ideas into government action and who work together to elect a candidate. One of the jobs of political parties is to nominate candidates to run for office. That is, to select them to represent their particular political party in an election. Parties choose a **candidate** who agrees with their beliefs and try to persuade voters to support their candidate running for office. Competing political parties give voters a choice among candidates and ideas. To know where a party stands on the major issues, the voters can look at the party's platform. A **platform** is a series of statements expressing the party's principles, beliefs, and positions on issues. Each individual part of a platform is called a plank. The platform communicates to voters what the political party plans to do if it wins. (Examples: Platform Issue = Healthcare; Plank = Agreeing/Disagreeing with universal healthcare)

The United States has had a long tradition of a **two party system**. This means that two major political parties have controlled elections and have the most participation by voters. The two major political parties today are the Democrats and the Republicans.

Political Party	Year Founded (Created)	Core Beliefs
Democratic	1828	The federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, especially those in need. Democrats are not opposed to raising taxes to pay for social programs.
Republican	1854	The federal government should take a limited role in people's lives. Republicans favor lowering taxes and less government spending

Because these two major parties have the most support from the public, it has made it nearly impossible for **third parties** to win elections. Third parties are political parties that often form on the basis of one or a few issues. These issues might be related to a foreign or domestic concern and, because the concern is so particular, it is difficult to gain popular support. Third party candidates have never won a presidential election and rarely win election to other offices. Below are some examples of current third parties that exist in the United States.

Political Party	Year Founded (Created)	Core Beliefs
Communist Party	1919	The federal government should control all production and supply of goods and the workers should control their own lives and destinies.
Libertarian Party	1971	The only purpose of the federal government is to protect freedom; this party believes in individual freedom.

Political Party	Year Founded (Created)	Core Beliefs
Socialist Party	1901	People should own and control all businesses through democratically controlled public agencies (these are agencies that are created based on the people's choice/election) or other groups.

candidate - a person running for political office

Communist Party - a political party that believes the government should control all production and distribution of goods and working people should control their own lives and destinies

Democratic Party - a political party that believes that the federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, particularly those who are in need

Libertarian Party - a political party that believes in individual freedom and the only purpose of government is to protect this freedom

platform - a document stating the aims and goals of a political party or candidate

political party - an organization that seeks to gain political power by electing members to public office so that their political ideas can be reflected in public policies

Republican Party - a political party that believes that the federal government should play a small role in people's lives; they favor lower taxes and less government spending

Socialist Party - a political party that believes people should own and control industry through democratically controlled public agencies, cooperatives, or other collective groups

third party - a political party that is not one of the two major parties in the country; a minor party

two party system - a political system consisting primarily of two major parties, more or less equal in strength



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SS.7.C.2.8 Benchmark Clarification 2: Students will evaluate the impact political parties have on society, government, or the political system.

Political parties play a major role and make an important impact in American society. Political parties are important to the democratic process because they allow individuals to communicate their beliefs to the government. Because political parties are made up of large groups of people, it allows their group's voices and shared ideas to be more easily heard by the government. Political parties also educate citizens about issues and acts as a guide during elections. Generally, people tend to vote for candidates from their own political party or for issues that their political party supports.

Political parties also impact the government at the federal, state and local levels. Political parties act as loose confederations (groups that come together for similar reasons/causes) at the state and local levels. Because there are many more elected offices at the state and local levels, political parties tend to be more active at these levels. Also, political parties raise and spend money in order to get candidates elected and they use funds to help spread the message about their beliefs and ideas to the people. Candidates representing the major political party that wins more seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the **majority party** in that house of the legislature while the major party that wins fewer seats in one house of the national or state legislature becomes the **minority party** in that house of the legislature. The majority party in a legislative house enjoys more control over the lawmaking process compared with the minority party in that same legislative house.

majority party - the political party with the most elected members

minority party - the political party second in number of elected members to the majority party

political party - an organization that seeks to gain political power by electing members to public office so that their political ideas can be reflected in public policies



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