

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 1) work together to put their ideas into action in the government, and 2) work together to elect candidates.

One of the most important jobs of political parties is to nominate candidates to run for office as the representatives of their party. Parties choose a **candidate** who agrees with their beliefs and try to persuade voters to support their candidate. 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 written statement of the party's principles, beliefs, and positions on issues. Party platforms are often the length of short books. 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 government-funded healthcare.)

The United States has 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 sometimes support raising taxes and government spending to pay for social programs.
Republican	1854	The federal government should take a less active role in people's lives and that individuals can take care of themselves without government help. They sometimes support lowering taxes and government spending.

Because these two major parties have the most support from the public, it is 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 affair 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 elections 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. 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.
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 the entire economy, and there should be no private ownership of business

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

federal government - the national level of government; the government of the United States

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

party platform - a written statement of the goals of a political party

political party - an organization that tries to get political power by electing members to public office so that their political ideas can become laws or policies

Republican Party - a political party that believes that the federal government should play a less active role in people's lives and that individuals can take care of themselves without government help

Socialist Party - a political party that believes in democratic government but also that the government should run some of the largest parts of the economy

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