1. Define a *political party*.
2. Describe the major functions of political parties.
3. Identify the reasons why the United States has a two-party system.
4. Understand multiparty and one-party systems and how they affect the functioning of a political system.
Key Terms

- **political party**: a group of persons who seek to control government by winning elections and holding public office
- **political spectrum**: the range of political views, from the so-called left to the right
- **partisanship**: strong support for a specific political party and its policies
- **single-member districts**: a voting district in which only one candidate is elected to each office on the ballot
• **plurality**: the largest number of votes cast for an elected office; this number does not have to be a majority of all votes cast

• **bipartisan**: an approach to policy making in which the two major parties find common ground on an issue

• **consensus**: general agreement among different groups on an issue

• **coalition**: a temporary alliance of several groups who join to form a working majority in a multiparty system
Introduction

What are political parties, and how do they function in our two-party system?

- A party is a group of people who try to control government by winning elections and holding public office.
- Political Parties:
  - Nominate candidates
  - Inform and inspire supporters
  - Encourage good behavior among members
  - Govern once in office
  - Perform oversight on government actions
Checkpoint Answer: The *party organization*, the *party in government*, and the *party in the electorate*.
• Parties express the will of the people in government. They can also encourage unity by modifying conflicting views and encouraging compromise.

• Parties nominate—find, recruit, prepare, and gather public support for—qualified political candidates.

• Parties inform the public and try to shape public opinion, using all forms of media to campaign for or against opposing candidates and policy issues.
Roles of Parties

- Parties act as a “bonding agent” to encourage accountability among their candidates and office holders.
- Parties play a key role in governing at all levels.
  - Legislatures are organized along party lines and parties shape the electoral process.
  - Partisanship guides many legislative votes and appointments to public office.
  - Parties provide channels of communication between the branches of government.
• The Republican and Democratic parties dominate American politics.
  – Only the candidates from the two major parties have a chance to win most elections.

• Why is this the case?
  – The Framers opposed political parties.
  • They saw parties as “factions” that caused disunity and conflict. George Washington warned against the dangers of parties.
Tradition

- Once established, parties became part of tradition.

- The nature of the election process supports the two-party system.
  
  - Nearly all American elections take place in single-member districts--only the one candidate who wins the largest number of votes gets elected to office.
  
  - This works against third-party candidates, who have little chance of finishing in the top two.
Function, cont.

- The two major parties write election rules that discourage non-major parties.

- For example, it is very difficult for a third party candidate to get on the ballot in all 50 states.
• Americans tend to share a broad ideological consensus.
  – The United States is made up of many different cultural groups.
  – While Americans don’t agree on every issue, they do support the same basic freedoms.
  – Strongly divisive issues have tended not to last for generations.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: Above image depicts a national party convention.
• Both major parties try to be moderate and build consensus.

  – Both parties tend to have a few major areas of policy differences while being rather similar in other areas.

  – The similarities between parties arises because both parties are after a majority of voters in any given election. Both parties must compete for the many voters in the middle of the political spectrum.
### Political Spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>Favors extreme change to create an altered or entirely new social system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Believes that government must take action to change economic, political, and ideological policies thought to be unfair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Holds beliefs that fall between liberal and conservative views, usually including some of each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Seeks to keep in place the economic, political, and social structures of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactionary</td>
<td>Favors extreme change to restore society to an earlier, more conservative state.</td>
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• Multiparty systems are used by many democracies.
  – They have several major and many smaller parties.
  – Each party is based on a particular interest.
    • These interests can include economic class, religion, or political ideology.
• Multiparty systems tend to represent a more diverse group of citizens.

  – Supporters admire this feature, arguing that it gives voters many more choices among candidates and policies.
  
  – However, this diversity often makes multiparty systems less stable. The power to govern must usually be shared by several parties who join in a coalition.
Political Cartoon Question Answer: *The cartoon is poking fun at how one-party systems do not really represent democracy. If the people lived in a real democracy, they would have it without needing the leader to give it to them.*
Review

• Now that you have learned about political parties and how they function in our two-party system, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  – Does the two-party system help or harm democracy?