



## POLITICAL PARTIES

### The Four Functions of Political Parties:

#### 1. Recruiting and Nominating Candidates Who Will Win an Election

- The people who make up political parties play an important role in the American system of government. Each party has a ***national committee*** made up of delegates from every state. This committee meets every four years to hold the ***national convention***. The delegates sit down to write the party's ***platform***. This is a challenging task, as they tend to argue extensively over each ***plank!*** These delegates then nominate candidates for office based upon the interests of their state and how well their nomination will represent the platform that they just established. After a list of possible candidates is agreed upon, parties hold elections called ***Primary Elections***. ***Primary Elections*** are where people from the same party run against each other in an attempt to become their party's candidate in an election. Since the main function of the political party is to win the election, the objective here is to decide on the candidate who they think will be able to gain the most votes.

#### 2. Educating the Electorate About Campaign Issues

Political parties want to win the election. In order to do that, they must inform us (*the electorate*) of what the issues are.

- Political parties use **Mass Media** as a way to educate the voters (the electorate). Political parties distribute pamphlets, posters and political mailings and tv commercials. These are meant to educate potential voters about the issues and the candidate and to persuade voters to vote for their candidate.
- The use of mass media is also very expensive so the party needs to raise A LOT of money

### 3. **Helping Candidates Win Elections – The Most Important Function**

- Political parties try to appeal to the political center called the moderates during campaigns. They want to appeal to as many voters as possible so they will often reflect both liberal and conservative views.
  
- Political parties raise money in order to run successful campaigns for the candidate. Remember, one of their jobs is to educate us about the issues. These campaign advertisements are very expensive!
  
- Another way that the party helps their candidate win is by making sure that party supporters are registered to vote. They work to make sure that we go to the polls once we are registered.

### 4. **Monitoring Actions Of Office Holders**

- The party that is out of power (the party that loses the election) becomes what is called the “watchdog party.” They watch the actions of the party in power for any mistakes or misuses of power. They are also called the “opposition party.” They may criticize the party in power and offer its own solutions. By doing this, the party is hoping to attract voters to support it in future elections.

## **Third Parties**

The two-party system characterizes the American political process. Third parties rarely win elections but they do play an important role in public politics.

- Third parties introduce new ideas or press for a particular issue (the Green Party is)
- Third parties often revolve around a political personality (Ralph Nader is an example)

## **Differences in Political Parties**

While all political parties are organized the same way and have the same goal, the differences are evident in the party's **platform**. The platform is the parties stated beliefs and positions on election issues. The party platform is a reflection of their political ideology. In other words, a party is either conservative or liberal.