

Political Parties

SECTION 1

PARTIES AND WHAT THEY DO

TEXT SUMMARY

A **political party** is a group of people who try to control government by winning elections and holding public offices. The United States' two **major parties** are the Republicans and the Democrats.

Political parties are essential to democratic government. Parties help link the people and their wishes to government action. Parties also help unify the people by finding compromise among contending views.

Political parties perform five major functions. First, they nominate, or name, candidates for public office. Parties present these candidates to the voters and then gather support for them.

Second, parties inform the people and inspire them to participate in public affairs. Third, political parties help ensure that their candidates and officeholders are qualified and of good character.

Fourth, political parties have some governing responsibilities. Congress and State legislatures are organized along party lines. They conduct much of their business based on **partisanship**, or firm allegiance to a political party. Fifth, parties act as watchdogs over the conduct of government. The party out of power keeps an especially close eye on the policies and behavior of the **party in power**, or the party that controls the executive branch of each national or State government.

THE BIG IDEA

Political parties, essential to democratic government, shape the way government works and perform important functions.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *Functions of Political Parties*

Function	Explanation
Nominate candidates	Select and gain support for candidates for office
Inform and inspire voters	Inform people about and stimulate interest in public affairs
Ensure candidate quality	Try to ensure that candidates and officeholders are qualified and of good character
Help govern	Operate on partisan lines in Congress and State legislatures
Act as watchdogs	Observe and criticize the operation of government, especially officials of the other party

Political parties perform five important functions in American government.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a political party?

2. **Chart Skills** How does a political party act as a watchdog?