

### TEXT SUMMARY

In the United States, there is a **two-party system**, which means that two major political parties dominate politics. **Minor parties**, or those without wide support, also exist.

The first two American political parties arose during the ratification of the Constitution; several factors have made the two-party system last. One basic factor is tradition; the system remains because it has always been.

Also, the electoral system favors a two-party system. Nearly all U.S. elections are **single-member district** elections, in which voters choose only one candidate for each office. The winner is whoever receives a **plurality**, or the largest number of votes. Most voters tend not to vote for minor party candidates, who are unlikely to win. Also, much of U.S. election law—created by Republicans and

Democrats together, or in a **bipartisan** way—discourages minor parties.

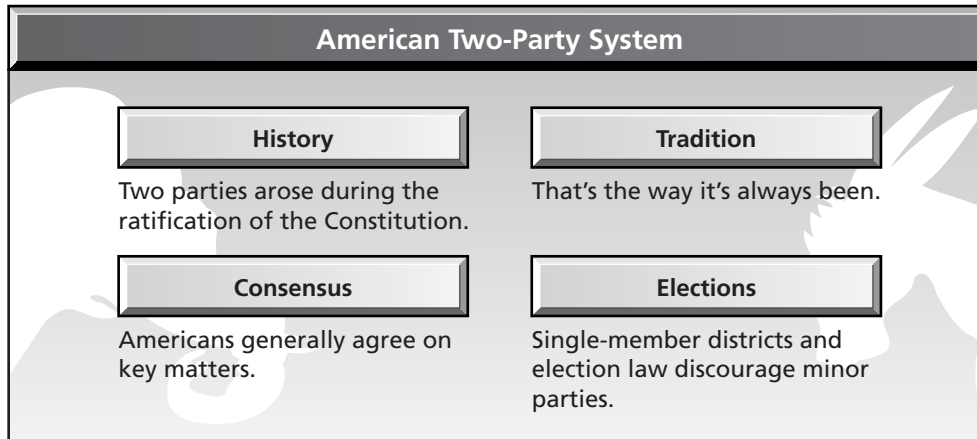
The United States is a **pluralistic society**, or one that consists of distinct cultures and groups. Still, there exists a broad **consensus**—a general agreement among various groups—on fundamental matters. Consensus helps eliminate the need for many parties.

However, alternative political systems exist around the world. In a **multiparty** arrangement, several major and minor parties compete. To gain power, a number of parties often form a **coalition**, or a union of people with diverse interests who will share power. Nearly all dictatorships today have **one-party systems**, in which only one party is allowed.

### THE BIG IDEA

The United States' two-party system is a result of history; several factors have helped maintain it over time.

### GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Factors Behind a Two-Party System



Four main factors account for the two-party system in the United States.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

- Why do minor party candidates have little chance of winning in American elections?
- Chart Skills** What four factors account for the two-party system in the United States?