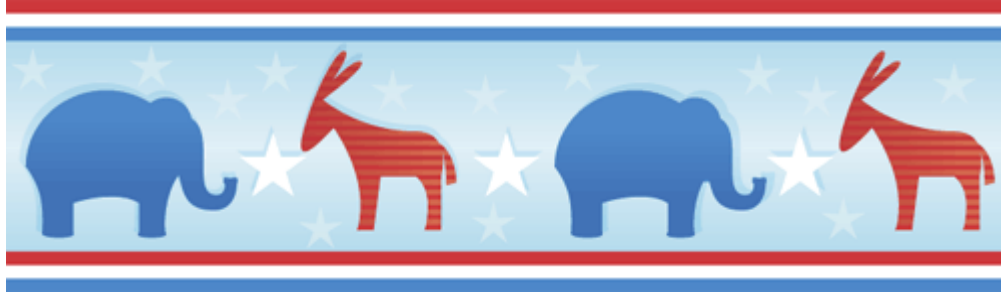


## What Are Political Parties?



Party is one of many English words that has multiple meanings. Most of us think of a party as a gathering of people who want to celebrate and have fun, like at a birthday party. Another meaning of the word party is “a group of people united by some common interest or for some common purpose.” For example, when a hiker is lost in the mountains the police send out a search party. The group’s common purpose is to find the hiker.

People who share similar ideas about how government should operate unite to form a political party. Usually a political party is a large group of people. In the United States there are two major political parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The Democratic Party started in 1792 and the Republican Party started in 1854.

The United States has seen other political parties come and go. Former President Theodore Roosevelt formed the Progressive Party in order to run for the presidency again when the Republican Party did not nominate him a second time. The Progressive Party lasted only from 1912 until 1916. More recently, in 1995 Ross Perot founded the Reform Party and he was their presidential candidate in the 1996 election. This party disintegrated in the early 2000s.

While the United States operates a successful democracy with just two political parties, other countries have numerous parties, also called factions. For example, one list of Israeli political parties has seventeen entries. A government operates quite differently when there are seventeen points of view instead of two dominant points of view like in the United States.