

4 Political Parties

OBJECTIVE

Students will gain an understanding of the political spectrum and the current political parties in Alberta.

KEY WORDS

political ideology, political spectrum, right wing, left wing, centre, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, fascism, political party, party leader, candidate, campaign, slogan, speech, platform, plank, electoral division

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a political ideology?
- What is the political spectrum?
- What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
- How does a political party form government?
- What is a party platform?
- What are the details of each party's platform for the current election?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Worksheet 4.1: Where Are You on the Political Spectrum?
- Handout 4.2: The Basic Political Spectrum
- Handout 4.3: 2012 Election Results
- Worksheet 4.4: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.5: Understanding the Issues and Platforms
- Worksheet 4.6: Evaluating the Leaders' Debate

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 15 min

1. As a class or individually, have students answer a series of political spectrum questions (Worksheet 4.1 or another of your choosing). Explain to students that the questions are meant to encourage reflection on their beliefs, values and worldview.

Teacher Note: Alternatively, this exercise can be conducted in a kinesthetic manner where students line up in a horizontal line and take a step forward if they 'agree' with the statement or a step backward if they 'disagree' with the statement. Students should assess how far they are away from the original line ('centre'). Students who take the most steps forward are the most left-leaning and the most steps backward are considered more right-leaning.

2. Review the terms and perspectives associated with a linear political spectrum (Handout 4.2).
3. Analyze the results of the political spectrum questionnaire. To visually interpret where students sit on the spectrum compared to others, draw a horizontal line on the board with 0 on the left and 100 on the right. Have students mark their place based on the score they receive on the questionnaire.

Afterwards, share the general positions of the major political parties on the spectrum.

Teacher Note: Due to the complex nature of political parties and individuals, the results of the political spectrum questionnaire will not be completely accurate in pinpointing an exact political standing. The goal of this exercise is to encourage students to reflect on their beliefs and values.

Instruction: 10 min

1. A political ideology is a set of shared ideals or beliefs about how politics and government should function. Common ideologies include liberalism, conservatism and socialism. Other examples are communism and fascism.
2. The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies.
3. A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and a similar political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.
4. Political parties campaign during elections to share their party's ideas and convince citizens to vote for them. A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues concerning government and the public.
5. After the election, the party that elects the most number of MLAs or wins the most seats usually forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Review the results of the 2012 election (Handout 4.3).

Activity: 50-120 min

1. Review the list of political parties in Alberta and identify which have candidates in your electoral division.
2. Organize students into groups randomly or based on similar interests and ideologies (or the results of the political spectrum questionnaire). Assign each group a political party or allow them to choose one based on their preference. Regardless of the method, the goal is to ensure each party running a candidate in your electoral division is covered by a group.
3. Using party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:
 - What does the political party stand for?
 - Who is the current leader of the party?
 - What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
 - Who seems to be the target audience of the party? Who does the party seem to appeal to the most?
 - What are the party's main priorities or policy ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Alberta?
 - Where does the party sit on the political spectrum?
4. Ask each group to prepare a short presentation about their political party and its platform. Students should incorporate an audio-visual component that includes their logo/brand, campaign elements, and images of their leader and/or the local candidate.

Within each group, students could also take on the roles of a campaign team to further learn about how parties are organized. Suggested roles include: leader, campaign manager, local candidate, communications director, policy expert and marketing specialists.
5. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can make notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.4. Afterwards have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

Teacher Note: Organize a presentation schedule that would allow each group to visit other classes in the school on a rotational basis to help inform and prepare the student electorate for Student Vote Day. Alternatively, you could coordinate a school-wide assembly.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, students could be asked

to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Did you find yourself solely on one side of the spectrum? Is it possible to like ideas from opposite sides of the spectrum?
- If a person is running as a candidate of a political party, how closely should their personal political beliefs resemble those of the party? Should candidates be forced to follow the party's position on any particular issue, or every issue?
- What advantages or disadvantages might there be for a person who runs as an independent or without an association to a party?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Research the use of negative campaigning and attack ads in elections. Search the internet for commercials or bring in print ads to share with your class. Discussion questions: Are attack ads effective? Are they ethical? Do they achieve their intended outcomes? What is your reaction to them?

B. Organize students into groups and assign each a major election issue (e.g., health care, education, the environment or the economy). Ask them to use party websites and news articles to research where each political party stands on the issue or what policies they suggest. Students can present their findings to the class. During the presentations have students make notes using Worksheet 4.5.

C. Invite a past parliamentarian to visit your class for a question and answer session or coordinate a Skype interview. Prepare a list of questions in advance (e.g., How does a political party work? How do political parties recruit members? How is policy developed? What was your experience like?).

D. Have students create their own provincial political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and suggested policies. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

E. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the major party leaders to share their platforms, point out holes in their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of the leaders' debate for your class or ask students to watch it with their families and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.6.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

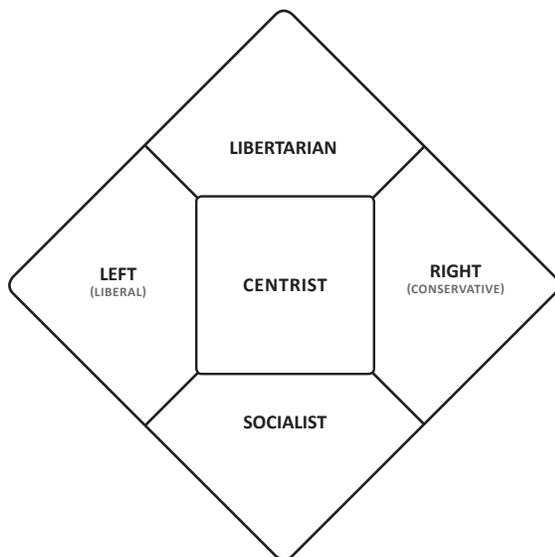
What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political beliefs whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. Political parties

compete against each other during election campaigns and appeal to the public for their support and ultimately their vote on polling day.

What is the political spectrum? How do political parties and the political spectrum relate?

The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies. A linear spectrum is represented as a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing change and parties on the right favouring tradition.

The political spectrum can also be viewed with two scales, one for economic/fiscal policies (horizontal axis) and one for social policies (vertical axis). This creates a quadrant with four areas.



How does a political party form government in Alberta?

Alberta's system of government at the provincial level is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Alberta. During elections, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team, with the intention of spreading their message in the hopes of securing constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Most candidates running for election belong to a party, unless they are running as an independent or are not associated with any party.

How do political parties work?

Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Joining a political party can be an effective way for you to influence the party and the politicians who represent you and your electoral division. Anyone above the required age can be a

member of a political party for most parties the age is 14. Party members can discuss ideas and propose policy. Many parties also have youth wings.

Party members choose their party's leader and local candidates, and help them get elected. Local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local riding association. The party selects the person they feel has the greatest chance of success as their candidate.

Candidates campaign during the election, share their party's ideas and aspire to represent them in the legislature. To become an MLA, a candidate must get more votes than any other candidate in their electoral division during an election.

What is a party platform?

A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues that concern the government and the public. Parties share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events, and share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and to secure votes.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Elections Alberta — www.electionsalberta.ab.ca
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

Alberta Political Parties

(For a current list visit www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)

- Alberta First Party
- Alberta Liberal Party — www.albertaliberal.com
- Alberta New Democratic Party — www.albertandp.ca
- Alberta Party — www.albertaparty.ca
- Alberta Social Credit Party — www.socialcredit.com
- Communist Party - Alberta — www.comunistparty-alberta.ca
- Green Party of Alberta — www.greenpartyofalberta.ca
- Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta — www.pcalberta.org
- Wildrose Party — www.wildrose.ca