

# Lesson 9

## The Federal Political Landscape



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the relationship between people's beliefs and values and their positions on political issues?
- 2 How does your position on the federal political landscape compare to others?

### PURPOSE

In a democratic society, people have different beliefs and values, which influence their position on political issues. Political parties bring together people with similar beliefs and political perspectives who are seeking to effect change by being elected.

In this lesson, students are introduced to political issues and the political spectrum. After learning about Canadian political parties, students participate in an online tool (*Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition*) to better understand the federal political landscape and which party they might be more closely aligned with.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze how beliefs and values shape positions and actions on political issues;
- explain the function of the political spectrum;
- assess their position on the political spectrum and compare it to others;
- demonstrate respect for others' perspectives.

## Starter

1. Review the concept of a political issue and ask students to provide a few examples. A political issue is a topic or subject that affects society as a whole and, often there are multiple opinions on various sides of any given issue.
2. Use a 'Values Continuum' activity to explore different opinions on a particular political issue. Sample issues are listed after the instructions.

### SUGGESTED FORMAT

- A Prepare the spectrum:** Draw a line on the blackboard or whiteboard. Post one of the paired statements at one end and its opposite at the other end of the line.
- B Formulate an opinion:** Read the opposing statements for the topic selected and give students a few minutes to reflect on their views or ask them to jot down notes in their journal.
- C Take a stand:** Ask students to post a sticky note or write their initials on the spot along the line that represents their opinion. They may place it anywhere between the two extremes, depending on how much they do or do not agree with the statement. If they are at either extreme, they are in complete agreement with the given statement.
- D Explain your position:** Ask students to explain their reasoning. Encourage students to refer to evidence and examples when defending their stance. After several viewpoints have been heard, ask if anyone wishes to re-assess their position.

### TEACHER NOTE

Reiterate the importance of respect for the opinions of others, and remind students to be honest but not insulting or critical towards others. If you disagree with someone, it is better to use "I" language rather than the more accusatory "you."

Sample political issues:

### SMARTPHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

- Smartphones give students a wealth of creative options to enhance the learning experience in the classroom.
- Smartphones are a distraction in the classroom and their educational value is overstated.

### ZOOS

- Zoos educate the public about animals and conservation efforts.
- Zoos do not educate the public enough to justify keeping animals captive.

## Activities

1. Using Slide Deck 9 and Handout 9.1, review the concept of the **political spectrum**. The political spectrum can have one or more dimensions represented by its own axis. Often, economic issues and social issues are separated.
  - On economic issues, left-leaning people tend to support social services and government intervention in the economy. Whereas right-leaning people tend to support lower taxes, free markets and less government intervention in the economy.
  - On social issues, people who identify as progressive tend to support the improvement of society through change and the promotion of social justice values. People who identify as social conservatives tend to support the preservation of traditions and established values.
2. Using Slide Deck 9, review the function of **political parties**.
  - A political party is a group made up of people who share a similar political ideology and goals about society and government.
  - In order for the political party to have the chance to work towards its goals, the party tries to win an election and form government.
3. Ask students if they can name any of the political parties at the federal level. Using Slide Deck 9, review the list of registered parties and the parties represented in the House of Commons.

### TEACHER NOTE

There are many more active political parties in Canada. All of the registered political parties are listed on the Elections Canada website ([www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)).

4. Explain to students that the *Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition* ([youth.votecompass.com/can](http://youth.votecompass.com/can)) is a political spectrum tool, which helps young people familiarize themselves with different ideological positions at the federal level. At the end of the survey, you will be placed on the two-dimension political spectrum so that you can see where you sit compared to other students and people aligned with the political parties in Canada.

### TEACHER NOTES

- Arrange for computer or internet access so that students can complete the survey. It is estimated to take about 15 min.
- Reinforce to students that there are no right or wrong answers, but the questions are meant to encourage reflection on their political views.
- Background information has been included, along with definitions, to help students better understand the issues and terms.
- Consider reviewing some key terms in advance to help students understand the questions. See Handout 9.2.
- Give students time to analyze their results (the area where they locate themselves on the spectrum, how they compare to the student population and general population).
- If you sign up for a class code and students input the code when completing the survey, you will be emailed a link where you can access the results for your class along with the analytics for students throughout Canada.

## Assessment For Learning

Have students write an opinion piece where they agree or disagree with one of the statements in the *Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition* ([youth.votecompass.com/can](https://youth.votecompass.com/can)).

Steps to writing an opinion piece:

- i. Decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement.
- ii. Think of reasons why you hold that opinion (try to come up with at least three), and at least one example from your own experience that supports your opinion.
- iii. Write an introductory paragraph, making sure it clearly states your opinion.
- iv. Write at least one body paragraph, which gives your reasons for your opinion and the examples from your own experience.
- v. Write a concluding paragraph that summarizes your opinion.

## Consolidation

Through a written reflection, ask students to consider their responses to one or more of the following questions:

- Do you agree with how you were placed on the political spectrum? Why or why not?
- What insights can you draw from the results of the *Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition*? What conclusions can you make about the federal political landscape?
- How are people's beliefs and values connected to their positions on political issues?
- What do you think has shaped your political views most and why?

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **civic or political issue** is a topic or subject that people speak about because it affects society as a whole and, often there are multiple opinions on different sides of any given issue.

A **perspective** is one particular point of view or outlook. Our perspectives are shaped by who we are and our environment or experiences. High school students may have a different perspective about life and priorities than their parents or guardians. Alternatively, people living in different countries may have different priorities or values in life.

How does a perspective differ from an opinion? Your perspective is where you are standing and how you look at something. Your opinion is what you see or believe about something.

The **political spectrum** provides a way to characterize different beliefs and ideologies, and distinguish between actions on political issues, as well as political parties.

The political spectrum can be constructed with one or more dimensions, where each dimension represents a distinct set of issues. One common method is to have one dimension (or axis) for economic policies and one dimension (or axis) for social policies, which creates a quadrant.

Canadians who are **left-leaning on economic issues** tend to support higher taxes and more government spending, more government involvement, and more social services.

Canadians who are **right-leaning on economic issues** tend to support low taxes and less government spending, less government intervention, and the free market.

Canadians who are **progressive on social issues** tend to support policies that advocate the promotion of social justice issues by changing established practices and institutions. An example of such a policy could be addressing inequities by giving preferential treatment to disadvantaged groups.

Canadians who are **conservative on social issues** tend to support policies that advocate the preservation of traditional values and established institutions. An example could be ensuring that everyone follows the same established rules and has equal access.

A **political party** is a group of like-minded individuals with similar goals and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.

Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Anyone above the required age (usually 14-years-old) can be a member of a political party. Party members choose their party's leader and local candidates, and help them get elected.

