

# Lesson 4

## The Federal Political Landscape



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How are people's beliefs and values connected to their political views?
- 2 What is your position on the political spectrum?

### OVERVIEW

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 political spectrum survey (*Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition*) to better understand the federal political landscape and which party they might be most 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;
- describe different ideologies on the political spectrum;
- analyze their position on the political spectrum and compare it to others;
- assess which political party they might be aligned with; and,
- demonstrate respect for others' perspectives.

## Starter

1. Review the concept of a political issue (or civic issue) and ask students to provide a few examples. A political issue is a topic or subject that affects many people in society, on a local, regional, national or international level. There are often different opinions about how to view or address the issue, which usually involves government.
2. Use a 'Values Continuum' activity to explore different opinions on a particular political issue. This can be completed with paper sticky notes or an online tool, such as Google Jamboard.

Sample political issues:

### Social media

- Social media is more helpful than harmful for society.
- Social media is more harmful than helpful for society.

### Zoos

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

Steps for the activity:

- a) **Prepare the spectrum:** Draw a line on the blackboard or whiteboard. Post one of the paired statements at one end and the opposite statement at the other end of the line.
- b) **Formulate an opinion:** Read the opposing statements for the selected topic and give students a few minutes to reflect on their views or ask them to jot down notes.
- 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 respecting others' opinions, 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."

## Activities

1. Using Slide Deck 4 (slides 2-10) and "The Political Spectrum" video, review the concept of the **political spectrum**. The political spectrum provides a way to characterize and distinguish between different political ideologies, positions and political parties. It can have one or more dimensions represented by its own axis. Often, economic issues and social issues are separated into two distinct dimensions (Handout 4.1).
  - 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 4, 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 lead the government.
3. Ask students if they can name any of the political parties and party leaders at the federal level. Using Slide Deck 4 (slides 12-13), review the list of registered parties and the parties represented in the House of Commons.

### TEACHER NOTE

To see a current list of registered parties, please visit 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/canada/](http://youth.votecompass.com/canada/)) 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, they will be placed on the two-dimensional political spectrum so that they can analyze their position compared to voters who support different 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 key terms.
- Give students time to analyze their results (the area where they locate themselves on the spectrum and how they compare to voters of various political parties).
- Teachers who sign up in advance and create a class code will receive analytics about their class(es) via e-mail. These are aggregate results only. Individual student results are not shared. To create a class code, select the 'I am a teacher' option at <https://youth.votecompass.com/canada/>
- The 'student code' option is just for tracking participation in the activity.

## Consolidation

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

- Do you agree with where 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* 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?
- Why is it important to consider and respect others' opinions and perspectives?

## Assessment

Have students write an opinion piece focused on a position they agree or disagree with from *Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition* ([youth.votecompass.com/canada/](https://youth.votecompass.com/canada/)).

Steps to writing an opinion piece:

- i) Decide whether you agree or disagree with the position.
- 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 position.
- 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 position.

## ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

<b>Language Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with key terms and definitions in advance (e.g., political issue, perspective, political ideology, political spectrum, political party).</li> <li>• Support students' understanding of political positions with real-world examples.</li> <li>• Review terminology on <i>Vote Compass: Canada Youth Edition</i> that may be challenging for your students.</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know your learners. Consider the cultural backgrounds of your students and be aware of discussions that may involve sensitive topics and could trigger an uncomfortable or unsafe environment.</li> <li>• Sharing opinions is always challenging. Be aware of issues that may be controversial and support students in positive ways if they are uncomfortable sharing their opinions. Offer written alternatives.</li> <li>• Ensure a respectful environment remains a focus as students share opinions with which others may disagree.</li> </ul>
<b>Accommodations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Google Docs or Google Jamboard for the <i>Starter</i> activity.</li> </ul>

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **civic or political issue** is a topic or subject that people speak about because it affects many people in society and, often there are different opinions about how to view or address the 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 lower 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 special 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.

Many people believe that society is becoming increasingly polarized or politically divided, causing political debate to become hostile with little room for compromise. We must respect that everyone has different influences and life experiences that shape their values and political perspectives, and that those things impact how they approach different issues.