

LESSON 4:

Political Parties

OBJECTIVE

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

KEY WORDS

political ideology, political spectrum, right wing, left wing, centre, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, political party, party leader, candidate, slogan, party platform, plank, riding

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

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

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Handout 4.1: The Basic Political Spectrum
- Worksheet 4.2: The World's Smallest Political Quiz
- Handout 4.3: The Self-Government Compass
- Handout 4.4: 2011 Election Results
- Worksheet 4.5: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.6: Understanding the Issues and Platforms
- Worksheet 4.7: Evaluating the Leaders' Debate

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 15 min

1. Using Handout 4.1, review the terms and perspectives associated with a linear political spectrum.

2. As a class or individually, have students complete the World's Smallest Political Quiz (Worksheet 4.2). Explain to students that the questions are meant to encourage reflection on their beliefs, values and worldview.

3. Analyze the results of the World's Smallest Political Quiz using Handout 4.3. Visually interpret and compare where students sit on the political spectrum. Draw the Self-Government Compass on the board and have students mark their place based on their results from Worksheet 4.2.

Teacher Note: Due to the complex nature of individuals, the results of the World's Smallest Political Quiz or another political questionnaire will not be completely accurate in pinpointing a precise political standing. It is also important to note that people's views may be different depending on the topic. For example, you may be more left leaning on some issues and right leaning on others. The goal 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. A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.

3. 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.

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. In an election, political parties are represented by candidates in each riding. A riding (also known as a constituency or electoral district) is a geographical area represented by an elected official.

Teacher Note: More information on local candidates can be found in Lesson 5.

6. After the election, the dominant political party in the House of Commons (the party that elects the most number of representatives or wins the most seats) usually forms government and their leader becomes the prime minister. Using Handout 4.4, review the results of the 2011 election.

Activity: 50-120 min

1. Review the list of political parties in Canada and identify which have candidates running in your riding. These can be found using the Voter Information Service on Elections Canada's website (www.elections.ca).

2. Organize students into groups randomly or based on similar interests and ideologies (like the results of Worksheet 4.2). Assign each group a political party that is running a candidate in your school's riding or allow them to choose one based on their preference. Regardless of the method, the goal is to ensure each party 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 key messages?
- Who seems to be the target audience of the party? Who does the party seem to appeal to?
- What are the party's main priorities or policy ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Canada?
- 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 specialist.

5. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can take notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.5. 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. A school-wide assembly could also be coordinated.

Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

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

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Organize students into groups and assign each a major election issue (e.g., taxes, national defence, public safety, 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 take notes using Worksheet 4.6.

B. Using the Vote Compass online survey for the 2015 federal election, ask students to discover where they fit in Canada's political landscape. Vote Compass was developed by political scientists and uses a series of issues-based questions to assess which party is most closely aligned with the views of the user. Have students visit the Vote Compass website (www.votecompass.ca) during the campaign to take the survey.

C. Invite a past parliamentarian to visit your class for a Q&A 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? Why did you get involved in politics? What was your experience like?).

D. Have students create their own federal political party. The party should have a name, logo, slogan, key

priorities and suggested policies. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

E. Leaders' debates are an opportunity for the major party leaders to share their platforms, criticize their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of one of the federal debates for your class or ask students to watch it with their family and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.7.

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 ideals 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 election 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 by a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing social equality, social services and government intervention in the economy, and parties on the right favouring individual liberty, free markets and lower taxes.

The political spectrum can also be viewed with two intersecting scales: one for economic/fiscal policies and one for social/personal policies. This creates a quadrant with four areas.

How do political parties form government in Canada?

Canada's federal system of government is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Canada. 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 to secure constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the prime minister. Most candidates 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 riding. 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 the party leader and local candidates and work together to 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 their vision in the parliament or legislature. To become an MP, candidates must get the most votes in their riding 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. They share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and secure votes.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Elections Canada — www.elections.ca
- Vote Compass — www.votecompass.ca
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

Registered Political Parties (For the most up to date list, visit www.elections.ca)

- Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada — www.environmentvoters.org
- Bloc Québécois — www.blocquebecois.org
- Canadian Action Party — www.canadianactionparty.org
- Christian Heritage Party of Canada — www.chp.ca
- Communist Party of Canada — www.comunist-party.ca
- Conservative Party of Canada — www.conservative.ca
- Forces et Démocratie — www.forcesetdemocratie.org
- Green Party of Canada — www.greenparty.ca
- Liberal Party of Canada — www.liberal.ca
- Libertarian Party of Canada — www.libertarian.ca
- Marijuana Party — www.marijuanaparty.ca
- Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada — www.mlpc.ca
- New Democratic Party — www.ndp.ca
- Party for Accountability, Competency and Transparency — www.onlineparty.ca
- Pirate Party of Canada — www.pirateparty.ca
- Progressive Canadian Party — www.pccparty.org
- Rhinoceros Party — www.neorhino.ca
- The Bridge Party of Canada — www.thebridgeparty.ca
- United Party of Canada — www.unitedpartyofcanada.com