

Lesson 4

Political Perspectives and Parties



GUIDING QUESTIONS

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

SUMMARY

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 political parties, students participate in an online tool (*Vote Compass Newfoundland and Labrador*) to better understand the provincial political landscape and where they fit.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze how beliefs and values shape perspectives and actions on political issues;
- explain the function of the political spectrum compared to Newfoundland and Labrador political parties;
- assess their position on the political spectrum compared to Newfoundland and Labrador political parties;
- 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. 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 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 opinions 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 position. After several opinions have been heard, ask if anyone wishes to re-assess their position.

TEACHER NOTE

Emphasize 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 and Handout 4.1, review the concept of the **political spectrum**. The political spectrum provides a way to characterize and distinguish between different beliefs, ideologies, political parties and policy ideas. It can have one or more dimensions represented by its own axis. Often, economic issues and social issues are separated.
 - On **economic/fiscal 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 form government.
3. Ask students if they can name any of the political parties at the provincial level. Using Slide Deck 4, review the list of registered parties and the parties represented in the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly.
4. Have students complete *Vote Compass Newfoundland and Labrador*, an online political spectrum survey designed for the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial election (<https://votecompass.com>).
 - The survey presents a series of political statements and asks participants how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement.
 - At the end of the survey, you will be placed on the political spectrum and you will see how your views compare to the policy proposals of the provincial political parties.
 - It is estimated to take about 15 minutes. Give students time to analyze their results afterwards.

TEACHER NOTES

- Explain to students that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. They are meant to encourage reflection about your political views.
- Due to the complex nature of individuals, the results of the survey 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 other issues.

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 *Vote Compass Newfoundland and Labrador*? What conclusions can you make about the provincial political landscape?
- How are people's beliefs and values connected to their political views?
- 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 SUGGESTION

Have students write an opinion piece where they agree or disagree with one of the statements found in *Vote Compass Newfoundland and Labrador*.

Steps to writing an opinion piece:

- a) Decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement.
- b) 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.
- c) Write an introductory paragraph, making sure it clearly states your opinion.
- d) Write at least one body paragraph, which gives your reasons for your opinion and the examples from your own experience.
- e) Write a concluding paragraph that summarizes your opinion.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

English Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.• Support students' understanding of political positions from Handout 4.1 with real-world examples.• Review terminology on <i>Vote Compass Newfoundland and Labrador</i> that may be challenging for your students.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know your learners and be sensitive to triggers. Be aware of the cultural backgrounds of your students and that some issues/discussions may include sensitive topics and could trigger an uncomfortable or unsafe environment.• 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.• Ensure a respectful environment remains a focus as students share opinions with which others may disagree.
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Google Docs or Google Jamboard for the <i>Starter</i> activity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A **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.

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

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

Individuals 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.

Individuals 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 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 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.

REGISTERED POLITICAL PARTIES IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

- **Liberal Party** - www.nlliberals.ca
- **New Democratic Party** - www.nl.ndp.ca
- **NL Alliance Party** - www.nlalliance.ca
- **Progressive Conservative Party** - www.pcparty.nl.ca