LESSON 3: POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND BUDGET PRIORITIES

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What is the relationship between beliefs and values and positions on political issues?

SUMMARY

The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework to view and evaluate political parties and public policies. Politics is rife with controversial issues and opposing arguments, and it is important to question each other's viewpoints while also respecting the opinions of others. Political discussion surrounding Budget 2019 will launch months of debate on what Canada's priorities should be, and where the money to pay for that spending should come from, which will culminate with the upcoming federal election.

In the introductory activity, students consider different positions and arguments for government spending and taxes through a Both Sides Now activity. Students review the concept of the political spectrum and right-learning and left-leaning views associated with the economic spectrum. Using the *Party Perspectives* videos, students listen to the views of the major political parties. In the culminating activity, they participate in the consultation survey and afterwards reflect on the learning.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to:
- Explain the different political ideologies that exist in Canada;
- Compare and analyze the positions and priorities of Canada's political parties;
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills and decision-making skills about public policies; and,
- Identify where they fit on the political spectrum.

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- Activity Sheet 3.1: Graphic Organizer
- Slide Deck F: The Political Spectrum
- *Party Perspectives* videos (video responses from federal political party representatives)
- Student Budget Consultation survey (paper and online versions available)

LESSON

Introduction: 10-15 min

Individually or in pairs, ask students to complete the Both Sides Now worksheet (Activity 3.1) to analyze views about government spending and taxes. Have students review with a partner or pair, and/or have a class discussion.

Teacher Note: Alternatively, the statement could be reversed to say "Canadians should pay less taxes even if that means that government services and programs are reduced or eliminated" (Activity 3.1b).

Instruction and Action: 45-50 min

1. Review the concept of the political spectrum and different sides of the economic/fiscal scale.

- The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and that it provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and public policies.
- The spectrum can be viewed with two distinct scales: social and economic. The economic scale is often defined by the wide range of opinions on taxation, government debt, the role of government with regards to wealth inequality and creating jobs.
    - Left-leaning views – government can positively impact the economy, there is good value in social services and a larger government, higher taxes may be necessary, inequality should be prevented, policies that might be considered bad for businesses but are intended to alleviate social or environmental problems, are important for the greater good.
    - Right-leaning views – Smaller government and less government services and intervention in the economy, inequality is not a concern, governments should not go into debt, regulation on businesses is not necessary because the free market provides sufficient incentives for businesses to pursue important social and environmental outcomes.

2. As a class, watch the *Party Perspectives* videos on the Student Budget Consultation website to introduce students to the different perspectives offered by Canada's federal political parties in relation to the upcoming budget. The representatives featured belong to each party in the House of Commons, including:

- Justin Trudeau (leader, Liberal Party of Canada)
- Andrew Scheer (leader, Conservative Party of Canada)
- Jagmeet Singh (leader, New Democratic Party)
- Elizabeth May (leader, Green Party of Canada)
- Maxime Bernier (leader, People's Party of Canada)
- Gabriel Ste-Marie (finance critic, Bloc Québécois)

3. Afterwards, students can complete Activity Sheet 3.2 in groups or pairs. Students should summarize the priorities of each party and respond to the following questions.

- How does each party's response reflect their position on the political spectrum?
- Which political party's opinion/position did you agree with the most?

4. Provide students 20 minutes to fill out the 2019 Student Budget Consultation survey.

- Students will be asked to respond to questions about spending decisions and budget priorities. Their opinions, along with thousands of students across Canada, will be shared with the Department of Finance and all political parties so that they can see what matters most to young Canadians as they develop their platforms for the October 2019 federal election.
- The online survey is compatible with smartphones and tablets.

Teacher Note: Paper copies of the survey are available on request. Please contact CIVIX at 1-866-488-8775 or by email at hello@civix.ca and they will be sent within a few days.

Consolidation: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about political perspectives regarding Canada's federal budget and government spending. Alternatively, ask students to prepare a written reflection.

- Which political party's fiscal policy do you agree with most and why? Is there a party you would consider supporting if they changed aspects of their fiscal policy?
- Have your views about politics or fiscal policy changed during the course of the project? Explain.
- What have you learned about yourself and your views? What or who do you think has shaped your views the most?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using a graphic organizer (Activity Sheet 3.3), organize the views of left-leaning and right-leaning individuals according to the major economic policies (e.g., debt, inequality, government services, government intervention in the economy, individual taxes, corporate taxes).

B. Have students review their results from the political spectrum questions from the Student Budget Consultation Survey and compare them against the views of young Canadians who participated in last year's Student Budget Consultation (Slide Deck F). Discussion questions:

- Were you surprised about where you sit on the political spectrum? Do you think it is accurate?
- Did you feel more strongly about some value statements than others? Or did you feel like you were in the middle?
- Where do you fit compared to the Canadian youth who participated in last year's Student Budget Consultation?

C. Review the results of the last Student Budget Consultation, held in advance of the 2018 federal budget (2018 Student Budget Consultation Results).

Guiding questions: What findings are most interesting? Are any of the results surprising? Do students agree or disagree with the opinions of those surveyed? What events in the past year might influence a change in any of these results?

D. Divide the class into groups and assign each a party currently represented in the House of Commons. Each group should conduct research into the party's fiscal policies and prepare a plan for the 2019 federal budget. Afterwards, have each group present their findings or have an in-class debate. As a further extension, groups could explore how their respective party would expand their plans to prepare for the 2019 federal election.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
- Student Budget Consultation website – http://budgetconsultation.ca/
- 2018 Student Budget Consultation Results – http://budgetconsultation.ca/the-results
- Parliament of Canada – www.parl.gc.ca