

Are You a Democrat or a Republican? Are You *Really*?

Overview

Through introducing students to the major beliefs of each political party, this lesson is designed to educate students on the actual platforms of the major political parties. Students will discuss how political beliefs are formed and how party affiliation affects political behavior. The lesson incorporates brief writing assignments, online party affiliation quizzes, and Internet research of the 2016 state and national party platforms.

Materials

- Access to internet enabled device for each student
- Online political quizzes; options include:
 - Pew Research Center Political Typology quiz: <http://www.people-press.org/quiz/political-typology/>
 - Link to ISideWith political quiz: <http://www.isidewith.com/>
- Notecards titled with a political issue (there should be 4 note cards titled with each issue selected)
 - Political issues can include: taxes, foreign affairs, labor and employment, K-12 education, higher education, environment, LGBTQ issues, criminal justice, racial justice, healthcare, etc.
- Post It Notes
- Party platforms
 - Democratic Party (national platform): <https://www.democrats.org/party-platform>
 - North Carolina Democratic Party (state platform): <http://www.ncdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-NCDP-Platform-Final-Cmte-Version.pdf>
 - Republican Party (national platform): <https://www.gop.com/platform/>
 - North Carolina Republican Party (state platform): <http://www.nc.gop/about/organization/>
 - Libertarian Party (national platform): <https://www.lp.org/platform>
 - Libertarian Party of North Carolina (state platform): http://www.lpnc.org/our-principles_platform-of-the-libertarian-party-of-north-carolina
 - North Carolina Green Party: <http://ncgreenparty.nationbuilder.com/platform>
 - Green Party (national platform): <http://www.gp.org/platform>
- Optional: "How to Write an Op Ed Article" at http://newsroom.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped.html.

Duration

45-60 minutes

Procedure

Introduction to Political Parties

1. As a warm up, students should respond to the following prompt:
 - How would you describe your political beliefs? Do you identify with a specific political party? If so, which one and why? If not, why not?
 - Teachers can determine whether to ask students for a paragraph/narrative, or whether to allow them to brainstorm and include words/phrases, art work (symbols, drawings, etc.)
2. As students begin thinking and writing, remind them that a political party is an organized group of people with common values and beliefs who try to get their candidates elected to political office. The United States has a two party system featuring the Democratic and Republican parties, the Libertarian Party and the Green Party have also recently grown in popularity on the national level. After around 5 minutes of writing, have students partner up and share their responses with one another:
 - If you identify with a political party, how do you know your affiliation? Is it similar or different from your family?
 - If you do not identify with a party, why not? Would you describe your views as a mix of parties?

3. Next, instruct students to take an online quiz to determine (or confirm) the political party with which they best align. The Pew Research Center or ISideWith political quiz are both good options, but will require each student having a device (laptop, desktop, smartphone, etc.) with internet access.
 - The Pew quiz (<http://www.peoplepress.org/quiz/political-typology/>) includes twenty-three questions asking participants to select one of two statements which comes closest to their opinion. Results are presented along a spectrum (dark blue, medium blue, light blue, light red, medium red, dark red, etc.) with each section given a name (solid liberals, steadfast conservatives, etc.). The quiz also breaks down results by topic area and compares poll results from a student's identified section to the general public. Benefits of this quiz is that it is relatively quick and easy, but the disadvantage is that it places participants on a Democrat-Republican spectrum with no consideration of alternative parties.
 - In the ISideWith quiz (<http://www.isidewith.com/>), questions are initially divided into multiple topic areas, and participants can choose to expand the number of questions. Participants can also select answers beyond the yes/no binary (such as "Yes, but only in cases of..." or "No, except for...") and rate the importance of particular issues. The quiz identifies the percentage to which participants agree with certain candidates and parties (be sure to click on "Party" near the top of the results page). An advantage of this quiz is that it references current events and accounts for a great deal of nuance in policy positions and parties, but it is can be considerably longer than the Pew quiz depending on how much effort participants expend.
4. After students take the quiz, have them discuss in pairs:
 - Which party (or parties) best match your affiliation?
 - Did your quiz result match what you originally identified as your party affiliation?
 - What does it mean to belong to a political party? Can someone hold views from multiple parties?
 - What are some advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a party?
 - Does belonging to one party mean that you always have to vote for that party's candidate? Do you think people typically vote for the party (i.e., think about "straight party ticket" voting,) or vote for the candidate? Explain.

But Are You *REALLY*? Digging Into Party Platforms

5. Divide students into pairs and provide each pair with a political issue to focus on. Each pair should receive four notecards, each of which will be labeled with their one issue. (Issues assigned to each pair can include: taxes, foreign affairs, labor and employment, K-12 education, higher education, environment, LGBTQ issues, criminal justice, racial justice, healthcare, etc. Using smartphones or computers, each pair should access the party platforms linked in the "Materials" section at the top of this lesson. Students should read each party's stance (Republican, Democrat, Green, and Libertarian) on their assigned issue and work together to summarize each party's issue on their cards (one party per card.) Summaries should incorporate the party's stance on current events and laws whenever possible. Teachers can also instruct students to include artistic embellishments if desired. Remind students that the notecard itself should only be labeled with the issue at the very top. However, students should write the party name on a Post-It provided, then fold the Post-It and attach it to the back of the notecard. (Students should ensure the party associated with the issue stance can't be seen.)
6. After students have finished, transition pair into groups of 6. Each group of 6 should trade notecards with another group of 6. In their new groups, students should:
 - Circulate the new issue cards (they will have 12 cards discussing 3 different issues) around their group and review the positions on each issue. Each group member should choose which of the four summaries for each of the three issues they most agree with, without consideration of which party it might represent. Remind students to not peek at the folded/attached Post-It containing the actual party affiliation for each issue stance.

- Next, the group should try to match each paragraph to its political party by dividing the issue cards into four columns for the four political parties. (If students in the groups disagree, they should offer evidence to one another in an attempt to figure it out.)
 - Finally, students can open the Post-Its and reveal which party's stance each issue card summarized.
7. Teachers should hand four pieces of chart paper in the room labeled with the four political parties, and have students hang each issue notecard on the correct piece of paper. (This will allow students to review the parties and their stances on these various issues at a later point.) Debrief as a class:
- Did you find it difficult to figure out which issue stance match to which party? Explain.
 - Personally, did you find that you agreed with one party exclusively or a mix of multiple parties? Explain.
 - Think about your perceptions before class. Has class today, including taking the party quiz and interacting with the party platforms on various issues, make you reassess your party affiliation in any way? Explain.
 - If you agree with one party on some issues but another party on other issues, how might this impact your voting patterns?
 - Do you think most people who identify with a particular party have a good indication of what each party stands for? Why or why not?
 - How do you think most people across the country make decisions when it comes time to vote?
8. As an optional culminating assignment, have students write an Op Ed responding to the question, "Are political parties hurting American politics?" See Duke University's "How to Write an Op Ed Article" at http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped.html.