

Political Thinking Concepts

Political significance

Ask questions about political significance when you want to understand which policies, issues, developments, or people are important today.

You can use the concept to:

- explain how people, ideas, and events contribute to political change in society;
- analyse the degree to which political decisions represent turning points;
- assess the impact of a political decision or action made by a governing organization on a variety of interested parties; and
- evaluate how the importance of political actions/decisions may shift for various people and over time.

Here are some sample research questions that focus on political significance:

- What do you think is the most important reason for engaging in civic action?
- What criteria should be used when deciding which events or people to formally recognize?
- Why do some people not vote? What is the significance of their lack of participation for Canadian citizenship?

Check your understanding

Read the following issues and determine which one is the most "politically significant" from your point of view:

- Traffic gridlock in Toronto
- Federal government passes an assisted dying bill
- Falling oil prices deepens economic downturn in Western Canada
- The falling birth rate in Canada
- The poor record of human rights regarding Indigenous peoples in Canada

Record your choice.

Suggested answer: In the case of any one of these issues, you can judge its significance by looking at a number of factors. These include examining its impact; looking at how many people are affected; how notable it is; its frequency and duration; and exploring how deeply and directly it affects you. Depending on your perspective, you may have chosen any of the issues listed as most significant and you would not be wrong, but you'd have to support your opinion.

End of suggested answer.

Objectives and results

When you focus on objectives and results, you're looking at the factors that lead to events, policies, decisions, and plans of civic importance.

You can also look at the effects of civic policies or decisions and recognize the varied effects they have on different groups of people.

You can also compare the initial purpose of a decision with its actual effect and see which results were intended and which were not.

Using the concept of objectives and results during the inquiry process, you can:

- identify the intended motive(s) for political responses to issues;
- explain how political events or developments can be caused by more than one factor;
- evaluate how well proposed solutions address the identified issue(s); and
- assess the intended or unintended effects of a decision.

Here are some sample research questions that focus on objectives and results:

- Why do you think that students have to complete community involvement hours in high school in Ontario?
- What is the purpose of declarations of human rights? Do all people enjoy similar rights? What are the intended and unintended results of having a declaration?

Check your understanding

Imagine that a decision has been made to improve water quality for everyone in Canada. These strategies are being considered, in order to implement this plan. Which strategy would you choose as your first step?

- Start cleaning the water
- Find out where the water quality is unacceptable
- Don't allow waste to be disposed of in rivers
- Distribute bottled water

Record your answer.

Suggested answer: In a plan to improve water quality for Canadians, all of the first steps listed above would have unintended results. It would be wise to anticipate the unintended as well as the intended results, to try to avoid negative unintended results.

End of suggested answer.

Stability and change

You can use the concept of stability and change to examine how and why political institutions and government policies change over time or why they remain the same.

The concept of stability and change could be used during the inquiry process to:

- explain links between past and current political policies, decisions, and responses;
- determine to what extent government policies create or prevent political change;
- analyze reasons for political continuity or variation over time;
- assess how political institutions, groups, or individuals resist or support change; and
- look at how the stability of different communities is affected by political decisions.

Here are a few research questions that focus on stability and change:

- How can you contribute towards the political stability of your community?
- What impact can consumers' choices have on the natural environment?
- Why is it important to make a change on this issue?

Check your understanding

How does each of the following decisions include consideration of the concept of stability and change? Think about your answer.

- Taking action on a UN report on the living conditions of Indigenous peoples
- Revising some lines in Canada's national anthem
- Implementing a new Health and Sex Education curriculum in schools
- Changing how marriage is defined in Canada

Record your answer.

Suggested answer: Each decision takes into consideration how Canadians have evolved to become more inclusive when it comes to human rights regarding subjects like gender, LGBTQ, and Indigenous equality. People are trying to adjust their language to be more sensitive and to better represent all Canadians.

End of suggested answer.

Political perspective

You can use political perspective to analyze the beliefs and values of various groups, including different governments, in local, national, and/or global communities. Using this

perspective enables you to see how people's beliefs, values, and ways of thinking about others can affect their positions on civic issues.

Vary your point of view. As you collect information, use different "lenses" to help you build a more complete interpretation of what the information means. You can look at one issue or person from a number of perspectives in order to develop a better understanding of that issue/person.

During the inquiry process, use the concept of political perspective to:

- identify the influence of beliefs/values on people's political viewpoints and actions;
- analyze the factors that influence how and why people push for political change;
- compare and contrast how different groups respond to the same political issue; and
- evaluate political courses of action from the viewpoint of key stakeholders.

Sample research questions that focus on political perspective are:

- How could you find out how well your municipal government represents the perspectives of all citizens in the community?
- How important are media in swaying public opinion on social/political disputes? Whose opinions do you think the media reflect?
- Why might some people's perspectives be valued more than others?

Check your understanding

Of the following variables, select the one that you believe would have the most impact on your political perspective:

- Age
- Gender
- Religion
- Level of schooling

Record your answer.

Suggested answer: Depending on the issue, any and all of these variables could have an effect on your political perspective. For example, age would influence your perspective on taxes; gender could influence your views on marriage law; religion could affect your perspective on statutory holidays; and your level of education would influence your ideas on tuition fees.

End of suggested answer.