HOW DO POLITICAL PARTIES GENERATE THEIR PLATFORM? (9-12)

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to explain political party platforms and how they are created. Students will be able to connect the idea of the SPB Brainstorm Ideas Phase with real world political platform creation.

STANDARDS:

- **HS.SP2.1** Analyze how contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.
- **HS.SP2.2** Analyze the ways in which perspective shapes recorded history.
- **HS.C3.3** Analyze the impact of political parties, interest groups, elections, and the media on political institutions.

CIVICS EXAM QUESTIONS:

- Name one of the two current U.S. Senators for the state of Arizona.
- Name one of the nine current U.S. Representatives for the state of Arizona.

TIMELINE: This lesson is best suited early in the process, before or after idea collection.

APPROXIMATE LESSON LENGTH: 50-60 minutes

SUPPORTING MATERIALS:

- *Teacher Resource 1*
- *How do Political Parties Generate Their Platform* student materials

VOCABULARY: Political Party, Platform, Values

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Engage

- Identify your US. House and Senate Representatives
  - Students look up their US House and Senate Representatives, along with their political party
  - Discussion: What does the party designation mean? How might it influence voting in Congress?

- Search representative(s) political platform and/or policy.
- Brainstorm on how students believe representatives/parties develop political platforms or policy priorities. (Refer to *Teacher Resource 1*)

2. Explore

- Read *"Where does the platform come from?"*
- Answer questions on reading.
- Research two policy agenda items from each political party.
  - o Democratic Party
  - o Republican Party
  - o Libertarian Party
  - o Green Party

3. Explain

- Discussions
  - o Which platforms did you find most persuasive?
  - o What issues were most and least common? Example: economy, immigration, health care, education
  - o How are political platforms similar to the "Idea Collection" Phase of SPB?
  - o How could community ideas be used to create future project proposals?
  - o How is the steering committee similar to our representatives in supporting student values and needs?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OR ARTIFACT:

- **Artifact:** students will track thinking and learning on a student handout *How do Political Parties Generate Their Platform* student materials.
- **Assessment:** Students will be able to name their US House and US Senate member for the Civics Exam.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:
Design a hypothetical political platform that strikes a perfect balance between broad school values and specific student group demands, explaining how this balance would contribute to effective project proposals.

Teacher Resource 1

Here are several brainstormed ideas on how students might believe representatives or political parties develop their platforms or policy priorities:

RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

1. **Polling and Surveys:** Representatives and parties use polls and surveys to gauge public opinion and identify key issues that matter to their constituents.
2. **Market Research:** Conducting focus groups and analyzing demographic data to understand the preferences and concerns of different voter segments.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

1. **Town Hall Meetings:** Engaging directly with the public through town halls and community meetings to listen to voter concerns and suggestions.
2. **Social Media Interaction:** Monitoring social media platforms for trending topics and public sentiment.

EXPERT CONSULTATION

1. **Think Tanks and Research Institutes:** Collaborating with think tanks to develop evidence-based policies.
2. **Academic Research:** Consulting academic experts and universities for insights and innovative solutions to policy issues.

PARTY IDEOLOGY AND VALUES

1. **Core Principles:** Basing platforms on the party's core values and ideological beliefs, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, etc.
2. **Historical Precedents:** Reviewing past policies and platforms to maintain consistency with the party's historical positions.

POLITICAL STRATEGY

1. **Electoral Competitiveness:** Developing policies that are likely to attract swing voters or solidify the base in key electoral regions.
2. **Opponent Analysis:** Crafting platforms that contrast with opponents' weaknesses or capitalize on their unpopular stances.

LOBBYING AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

1. **Industry Influence:** Receiving input and funding from businesses and industry groups that push for favorable policies.
2. **Advocacy Organizations:** Collaborating with advocacy groups and NGOs to incorporate social, environmental, or economic issues into the platform.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY SUCCESS

1. **Past Legislation:** Building on successful past legislation or popular policies to show continuity and reliability.
2. **Feasibility Studies:** Conducting feasibility studies to ensure that proposed policies are practical and achievable within budget constraints.

CRISIS RESPONSE

1. **Current Events:** Responding to current events, crises, or emerging issues that demand immediate attention and action.
2. **Public Health and Safety:** Prioritizing policies that address pressing health, safety, or environmental concerns.

VOTER FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

1. **Constituent Services:** Using feedback from constituent services to identify common problems and needs among the electorate.
2. **Petitions and Public Campaigns:** Responding to large-scale petitions and grassroots campaigns that highlight specific issues.

COLLABORATIVE PLATFORMS

1. **Bipartisan Efforts:** Engaging in bipartisan discussions to develop policies that have wider acceptance and are more likely to pass.
2. **International Comparisons:** Looking at successful policies in other countries for inspiration and adaptation to local contexts.

How do Political Parties Generate Their Platform?

1. Who are your US House and US Senate members? What political party do they belong to?

2. Research the views of each political party on two different topics? (ex: death penalty)

3. What are some ways representatives/parties develop political platforms or policy priorities?

Where does the platform come from?

Each national party has a platform-writing committee, composed of major party figures and representatives of interest groups closely linked with the party. They do their work in the spring and summer prior to the presidential conventions.

When there's a first-term president, his or her party's committee gets its direction from the White House; presidents don't want to run for reelection on a platform other than their own. This year, the Republican platform is very much under the control of Donald Trump and his closest advisers.

For parties challenging a sitting president – such as the Democrats in 2020 – the platform committee holds hearings around the nation, in person and online, to hear from the public. In reality, those who testify are almost always leaders of interest groups. The party's presidential nominee will also have great influence over its contents.

Writers of party platforms must combine the stirring – though very abstract – values that brought supporters to the party with the specifics desired by the party's allied interest groups as the price of their loyalty.

This means simultaneously touting rhetorical key points such as strong national defense, fair treatment of all people or a great educational system, while making particular promises, such as pledges to nominate right-wing judges, ban specific policing methods or reduce particular emissions that cause climate change. The strongest party factions can get their goals written directly into the text of the party platform.

As a result, platform writers have to navigate the tension between candidates' desire for a broad appeal to voters and interest groups' insistence on explicit commitments to their goals. Typically, most of the platform's language involves stirring appeals to the broader electorate. The rest is a laundry list of specific promises to organized groups.

Once it's written, the platform is adopted by the party's quadrennial national convention. In times past, fierce debate ensued over some platform elements, such as abortion. Now, the parties are so polarized, and the national conventions have become such a public display of unity and enthusiasm, that they try to avoid debate about the platform.

Signals of coming action

Platforms may not bind elected officials, and they may go unread by almost everybody. Yet they do have meaning. Those who do read them can make a good guess about how a party's elected officials will behave in office. Researchers find that when a party controls Congress and the White House, its spending priorities reflect issues emphasized in its platform most of the time. Most presidents make some effort to carry out their campaign

promises; when they fail, at least until 2017, it's normally been due to congressional opposition.

Changes in the platform are often significant indicators of change in the party. When the 1980 Republican platform dropped the party's longstanding commitment to the Equal Rights Amendment and adopted strong anti-abortion language, that was clear evidence of the shift toward right-wing conservatism that now characterizes the Republican Party.

So you may never read a party platform, but don't dismiss it as fluff; at least since World War II, it can tell you a lot about how the party will spend your tax dollars if it wins power.

Adapted for the classroom from: *Hershey, Marjorie. "What are political parties' platforms – and do they matter?" The Conversation, 23 July 2020, https://theconversation.com/what-are-political-parties-platforms-and-do-they-matter-141422. Accessed 29 May 2024.*

4. How do political parties create their platform?

5. Why is it important for platform writers to balance broad party values with specific interest group demands?

6. How can a party's platform provide insights into how they would govern if elected?

Political Party Platform

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

GREEN PARTY

SIMILARITIES

REPUBLICAN PARTY

LIBERTARIAN PARTY

7. Design a hypothetical political platform that strikes a perfect balance between broad school values and specific student group demands, explaining how this balance would contribute to effective project proposals.