



SPHERE Fostering Civil Discourse and Diverse Viewpoints for Every Classroom

# Exploring the 10 Most Common Issues in Presidential Elections

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GRADE LEVEL: HIGH SCHOOL (ADVANCED)

## Objectives

- Identify and define the 10 most common issues discussed during presidential elections
- Analyze the significance of these issues in shaping the political landscape
- Explore the historical context and current debates surrounding each issue
- Develop critical thinking skills by evaluating different perspectives on these issues



## Materials

- Whiteboard or blackboard
- Markers or chalk
- Access to computers or tablets for research

## Procedure

### INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

- Explain that today's lesson will focus on the 10 most common issues discussed during presidential elections.
- Write the 10 issues on the board: economy and jobs, health care, national security, taxes and fiscal policy, immigration, education, social issues, climate change and environment, gun control, and foreign policy.
- Ask students if they can identify any of these issues and briefly discuss their understanding of each.

### RESEARCH ACTIVITY: EXPLORING THE 10 ISSUES (40 MINUTES, REMAINDER OR CLASS PERIOD)

#### Day One

- Assign each student 1 of the 10 issues and a presidential election year.
- Instruct each student to research the assigned issue for the year or years in which they have. Students should identify who the presidential candidates were, content and specifics on the assigned issue, the candidates' perspectives on the issue, links to any campaign ads that mention the issue, and clips of the presidential debate that mention the issue.
- Students should prepare a fact sheet to inform voters about the issue for the assigned year. Students should finish their infographic for homework if they are not able to complete it in class. (You could have students submit a physical copy and submit it to Google Classroom.)

#### Day Two

- Arrange students in groups by their electoral issue (i.e., social issues with social issues, economics with economics, etc.).
- Encourage groups to discuss the following questions:
  - How do these issues impact voters' decisions during presidential elections?
  - Can you identify any connections between these issues and the current political climate?

- Are there any specific presidential candidates who have taken a strong stance on these issues?
- How have these issues evolved over time, and what role do they play in shaping the political landscape?
- Return to the whole class and allow each group to quickly share what was discussed in their groups.

### **CONCLUSION (5 MINUTES)**

- Summarize the main points discussed during the lesson, emphasizing the significance of the 10 issues in presidential elections and how the issues evolve over time.
- Encourage students to stay informed about these issues and to critically evaluate the positions of political candidates.

## **Assessment**

- Assess students' understanding of the 10 issues through their group discussion questions and class participation.
- Evaluate students' critical thinking skills and ability to analyze different perspectives through their answers to reflection questions.
- Evaluate student's infographic/thin slide (slide limited to one image and one word or phrase).

### **EXTENSION ACTIVITY: ANALYZING A PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE (10 MINUTES)**

- Show a short video clip or provide a transcript of a recent presidential debate that touches on 1 or more of the 10 issues.
- Instruct students to analyze the candidates' arguments and responses related to the issue(s) discussed.
- Ask students to write a short reflection on the candidates' positions, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.
- Facilitate a class discussion, allowing students to share their reflections and engage in a respectful debate about the candidates' positions.
- Have students read "How Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Gun Advocates Make the Same Bad Arguments," "Chapter 8: Legislation Pillar," and "Governor Ron DeSantis Signs Strongest Anti-Illegal Immigration Legislation in the Country to Combat Biden's Border Crisis," and complete a comparative analysis by answering the following questions.
  - The author of "How Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Gun Advocates Make the Same Bad Argument," Trevor Burrus argues that both anti-immigration and anti-gun control groups use similar tactics and rhetoric to advance their agendas. How does this analysis

resonate with your own understanding after reading “Chapter 8: Legislation Pillar” and “Governor Ron DeSantis Signs Strongest Anti-Illegal Immigration Legislation in the Country to Combat Biden’s Border Crisis.”

- “How Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Gun Advocates Make the Same Bad Argument,” highlights the potential for unintended consequences when implementing policies based on fear and prejudice. How does this idea relate to your own understanding of social issues, the importance of empathy, and candidate selection?
- Trevor Burrus suggests that both sides of the immigration and gun control debates often rely on anecdotal evidence with forming opinions and making decisions? How can we be more critical consumers of information and avoid falling prey to biased or incomplete data?
- Ask students to listen to “Free Trade in the Name of National Security” and then write an op-ed on how free trade might be a way to support national security.

## Common Core Standards

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2:** Determine 2 or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.