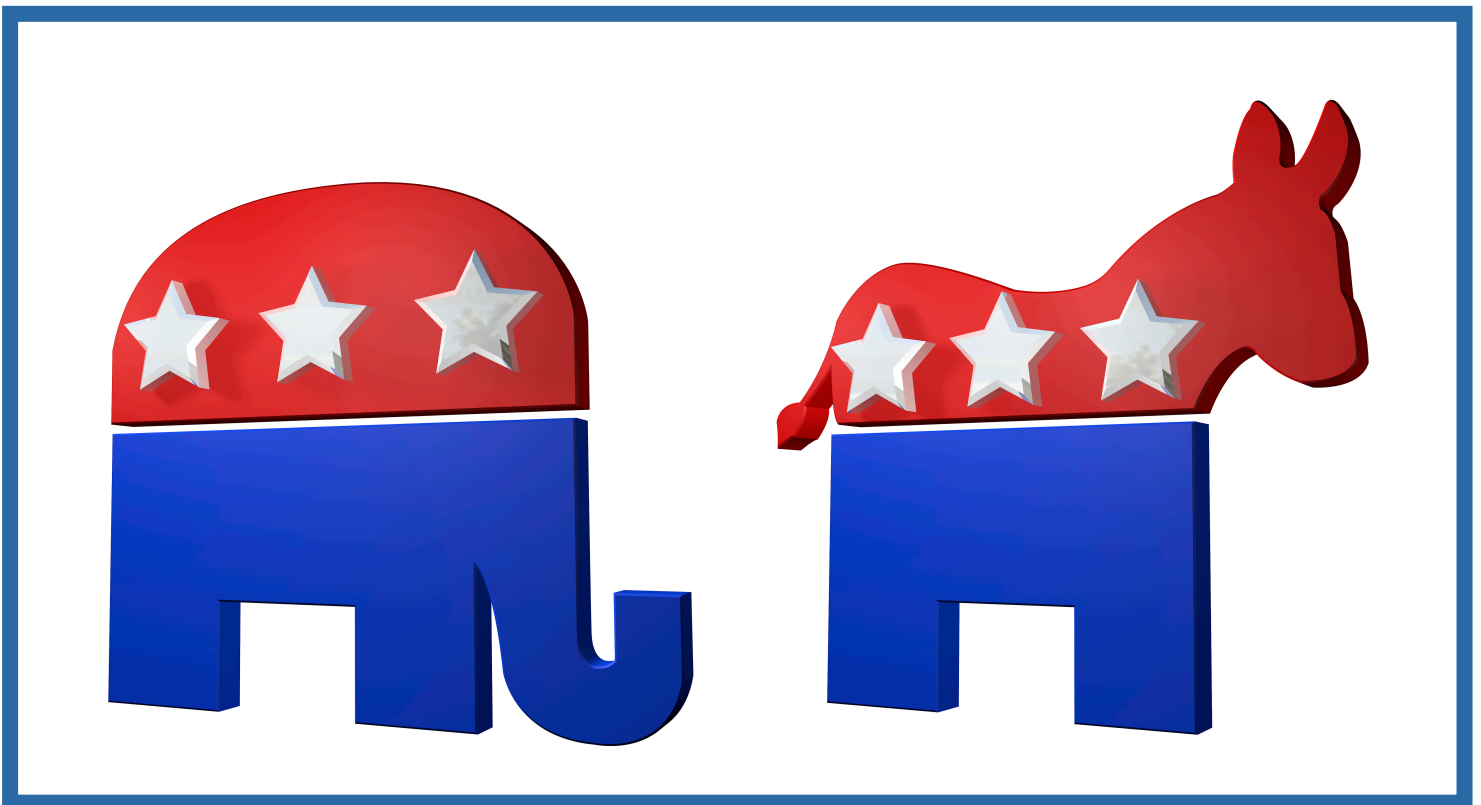


## 12th Grade Political Party Inquiry

# Do Any Political Parties Represent Me?



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### Supporting Questions

1. Which international issues are most important to me?
2. Which domestic issues are most important to me?
3. Which national party platform best supports my stance on political issues?
4. How do politicians address issues that are important to me?



## 12th Grade Political Party Inquiry

### Do Any Political Parties Represent Me?

<p><b>New York State Social Studies Framework Key Idea &amp; Practices</b></p>	<p><b>12. G4 POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION:</b> There are numerous avenues for engagement in the political process, from exercising the power of the vote to affiliating with political parties to engaging in other forms of civic participation. Citizens leverage both electoral and non-electoral means to participate in the political process.</p> <p>✔ <b>Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence</b> ✔ <b>Civic Participation</b></p>
<p><b>Staging the Question</b></p>	<p>Students take a political quiz through the University of Virginia Center for Politics that places them on a political continuum.</p>

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting Question 4
<p>Which international issues are most important to me?</p>	<p>Which domestic issues are most important to me?</p>	<p>Which national party platform best supports my stance on political issues?</p>	<p><b>Research Opportunity</b></p> <p>How do politicians address issues that are important to me?</p>
<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>Formative Performance Task</b></p>
<p>Rank international issues from most to least important to you, and write a paragraph explaining that ranking.</p>	<p>Rank domestic issues from most to least important to you, and write a paragraph explaining that ranking.</p>	<p>Chart how different political parties respond to your stances on political issues, and make a claim or series of claims that answers the supporting question.</p>	<p>Research a politician and make a claim that addresses the supporting question.</p>
<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>	<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>	<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>	<p><b>Featured Sources</b></p>
<p><b>Sources A–D:</b> Description of current international issues: foreign policy, war and peace, immigration, and free trade</p>	<p><b>Sources A–E:</b> Descriptions of current domestic issues: jobs, environment, health care, gun control, and civil rights</p>	<p><b>Sources A–D:</b> Excerpts from the official Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, and Green party platforms</p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> Sources found by students and/or teachers</p>

<p><b>Summative Performance Task</b></p>	<p><b>ARGUMENT</b> Do any political parties represent me? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question “Do any political parties represent me?” using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.</p>
<p><b>Taking Informed Action</b></p>	<p><b>EXTENSION</b> Create a political party platform based on the issues students believe are the most important.</p> <p><b>UNDERSTAND</b> Research a specific political issue that has affected the local area.</p> <p><b>ASSESS</b> Examine the extent to which that issue has been addressed.</p> <p><b>ACT</b> Organize a debate between local politicians (or party members) in which they answer questions prepared by the students about a political issue.</p>



## Overview

### Inquiry Description

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This inquiry leads students through an investigation of political issues and political parties. By exploring the compelling question about how well political parties represent individuals, students consider their own political ideology as a lens for learning about the extent to which political parties address international and domestic issues. In investigating political issues and political party platforms, students begin to develop an idea of how well the parties represent them and, more importantly, begin to develop their own political ideologies.

In addition to the Key Idea listed previously, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understanding:

(12.G4d) The United States and New York have political party systems, and the political parties represent specific political, economic, and social philosophies. Debate over the role and influence of political parties continues, although they play a significant role in United States elections and politics. The role of political parties and the platforms they represent varies among states in the United States.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take five to eight 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Inquiries are not scripts, so teachers are encouraged to modify and adapt them to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

### Structure of the Inquiry

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In addressing the compelling question “Do any political parties represent me?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument with evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

## Staging the Compelling Question

The inquiry opens by engaging students in a political quiz created by the Youth Leadership Initiative of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. The quiz asks students to answer a series of issue-based questions and then calculates their answers in order to help them determine which political party most closely mirrors their opinions. Students also learn the names of representatives who share a similar ideology. After the exercise, teachers should ask students to discuss their quiz results. NOTE: Teachers should respect the privacy of students and should be sure that students feel comfortable expressing their political beliefs publicly. If they do not, teachers should consider changing this exercise to include a journal entry rather than a class discussion.



## Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“Which international issues are most important to me?”—helps students begin to establish a foundational understanding of their own political ideologies by examining issues associated with the international role of the United States. The formative performance task calls on students to rank international political issues from most to least important to them and then write a paragraph explaining why they ordered the issues in this way. The featured sources are one-page fact sheets from Ontheissues.org that cover foreign policy, war and peace, immigration, and free trade. These sources provide general history on the issues as well as legislation proposed and opposed in the recent past. If teachers want to expand the number of issues included, more fact sheets are available on the On the Issues website.

## Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“Which domestic issues are most important to me?”—also helps students begin to establish a foundational understanding of their own political ideologies by focusing on domestic issues in the United States. The formative performance task calls on students to rank domestic issues from most to least important to them and then write a paragraph explaining why they ordered the issues in this way. The featured sources are one-page fact sheets from Ontheissues.org and cover the following topics: jobs, the environment, health care, gun control, and civil rights. These sources provide general history on the issues as well as legislation proposed and opposed in the recent past. If teachers want to expand the number of issues included, more fact sheets are available on the On the Issues website.

## Supporting Question 3

By answering the third supporting question—“Which national party platform best supports my stance on political issues?”—students break down political party platforms to see where each party stands on a range of issues. During this formative performance task, students build on their knowledge of where they stand on international and domestic issues to chart their issue stances by political party and to make a claim (or series of claims) that answers the supporting question. The featured sources for this task are the political platform statements for the Republican, Democratic, Libertarian, and Green parties. Teachers should note that these platforms are updated every couple of years. Each platform update can be found at the particular party’s website:

- Republican: <https://www.gop.com/platform/>
- Democratic: <http://www.democrats.org/party-platform>
- Libertarian: <http://www.lp.org/platform>
- Green: <http://www.gp.org/what-we-believe/our-platform>



## Supporting Question 4

Having examined political issues at the international and domestic levels as well as political party platforms, students answer the question “How do politicians address issues that are important to me?” The formative performance task requires that students address the supporting question by researching a politician from the political party that best supports their stances on issues (see Supporting Question 3) and by examining the politician’s voting record, public statements, and actions. It is important to note that this may be difficult for students who may identify more closely with the Libertarian or Green parties because those groups do not have a large pool of elected officials. In this case, teachers may want to highlight members of the major parties that share attributes of the Libertarian or Green parties. For instance, although Rand Paul is a Republican, he champions many economic and social ideas that are congruent with the Libertarian Party. The featured sources for this task vary because it is based on student research, but teachers may wish to direct students to the official political party websites as a starting point for their research. In addition, teachers may want to access Project Vote Smart: <http://www.votesmart.org>.

## Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined political issues at the international and domestic levels to develop their own political ideologies, examined the political platforms of parties in the United States, and assessed the extent to which a politician has addressed issues that are important to them. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their distinct claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question “Do any political parties represent me?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments will likely vary but could include any of the following:

- The Republican Party truly does represent me because its platform takes the same stances I do on key issues that I feel are most important, such as gun control, the economy, and foreign policy, and my local senator has said publicly that she will not vote for legislation that hurts small businesses.
- There is no political party that truly represents me. Even though the Democratic Party takes the same stance on civil rights and education that I do, I do not agree with their stance on environmental regulation.
- I think the Democratic Party represents me because the issues that are most important for me are social issues, such as civil rights and the environment.
- I do not think the Republican Party fully represents me, even though I agree with their stance on international issues of foreign policy and war and peace.
- I think the Libertarian Party best represents me because of its stance on limited foreign policy and limited government interaction within the health care system.

Students could extend their arguments by imagining they are forming their own political party and creating political platforms based on their stances. Students could take their rankings of issues from Supporting Questions 1 and 2 to further develop their stances into a platform.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by drawing on their knowledge of political parties and issues. They demonstrate that they *understand* by researching a political issue that has an impact on their area (community, town, city, or state). They show their ability to *assess* by examining why the issue is so important to

their locale and the extent to which the issue has been addressed. Doing so would include a discussion of the positives and negatives of the issue as well as ideas about how they would want their local politicians to respond. And they *act* by organizing a debate between local politicians (or party officials) in which the participants answer student-prepared questions about the political issue.

## Staging the Compelling Question

**Featured Source**

**Source A:** Youth Leadership Initiative, online survey about political beliefs, “Political Ideology Survey,” 2010

www.youthleadership.net/econgress/political\_ideology\_survey

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### E-CONGRESS

#### Political Ideology Survey

Which political party do you belong to?

Many factors contribute to a person's choice of political party. Research indicates that the strongest factors are family and community influences. The platforms and positions of the two major parties can also have an influence, but these can change and evolve over time. For that reason, it is helpful to examine contemporary issues to be sure that your party preference matches your **political ideology**, or personal beliefs about government.

Take the survey below to help you determine your political party preference. You must take this survey before moving forward.

Question	Agree	Disagree
1. The Federal Government places too many restrictions on modern corporations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Union workers receive wages and benefits so high that they damage their company's ability to compete.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. High government taxes hurt the economy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Only people who cannot work should be eligible for welfare programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Illegal immigration lowers wages and increases crime.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. New government programs should be created to further assist poor people in the United States.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. The wealthy should be taxed at a higher percentage than the lower and middle classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. One of the best ways to help the poor is to set policies that help businesses earn a profit and create new jobs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Government programs discourage able bodied people from helping themselves.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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- [Mock Election](#) - Vote online for real candidates
- [E-Congress](#) - Interactive online legislative simulation
- [Democracy Corps](#) - Our complete service learning program
- [A More Perfect Union](#) - A political campaign simulation

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[http://www.youthleadership.net/econgress/political\\_ideology\\_survey](http://www.youthleadership.net/econgress/political_ideology_survey).





## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source

**Source A:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current foreign policy issues, "Background on Foreign Policy," On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The foreign policy background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of foreign policy topics.*

### New Foreign Policy Topics for 2014–2015

These topics arose during the 2014 Senate primary debates as new topics...

- **Crimean Crisis of 2014:**

- On March 16, 2014, Crimea held a referendum vote on whether to declare independence from Ukraine; the vote passed with 96% in favor. Russia recognized the independent Crimean Republic the next day; and the day after that, signed a treaty with Crimea's leaders annexing it to Russia. Russia then invaded and annexed Crimea.
- Ukraine protested but its army was insufficient to oppose the Russians. Russia also threatened the same sort of referendum vote (and invasion) of Eastern Ukraine, which distracted attention from Crimea.
- A 1954 Soviet Decree was hence undone: Transfer of the Crimean oblast from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (February, 1954)

- **Ebola outbreak:**

- The largest Ebola outbreak in history began in West Africa in December 2013. The disease was first identified in 1976, but the 2014 outbreak was the first to infect cities rather than rural areas. After one year, about 6,000 people have died from 17,000 cases, mostly in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The infection rate is still increasing in those three countries.
- Unlike most viruses, Ebola is infectious even after its host has died; hence many people get infected while preparing the dead for burial (until special Ebola-safe burial practices took effect). At greatest risk are the doctors and nurses treating the ill, since the virus spreads through contact with bodily fluids, which are commonly exposed during treatment.
- President Obama's response has been to send US military personnel to assist with constructing more hospital beds and other needed infrastructure. The medical infrastructure of the affected countries has been severely damaged, with the deaths of many doctors and nurses.
- Obama has stated that he will not impose travel restrictions on West Africa, an action which has been demanded by many Americans, except to screen incoming air passengers. Obama states that restricting air travel would hinder the medical response because fewer doctors and nurses could fly into the affected area.

- **Cuba normalization:**

Obama said on Dec. 17, 2014 that he would ease economic and travel restrictions on Cuba and attempt to partner with Congress to end the trade embargo. His announcement came after Cuba released American Alan Gross, who had been imprisoned for five years, and a Cuban who had spied for the US. In exchange, the US freed three Cubans jailed in Florida. The Pope worked behind the scenes to make many of the arrangements.





## Foreign Aid

The 2012 election has candidates demanding a decrease in foreign aid (or an increase). The actual numbers are listed below; the foreign aid allocation, while controversial, is not economically large: it represents 1.5% of federal expenditures (\$47.6 billion out of \$1.3 trillion in 2009). Total foreign aid is broken down into military and nonmilitary components, since many would not consider military assistance to be foreign aid but rather war spending by proxy.

Billions / year	Economic Assistance	Military Assistance
2000	\$13.20	\$4.90
2001	\$12.90	\$3.90
2002	\$15.20	\$4.80
2003	\$19.10	\$6.70
2004	\$27.40	\$6.10
2005	\$29.70	\$7.40
2006	\$27.10	\$12.30
2007	\$27.70	\$13.20
2008	\$33.00	\$15.90
2009	\$33.90	\$13.70

## Iraq

- Since the Gulf War in 1991, the US has launched 4 major military strikes against Iraq, most recently Operation Desert Fox in December 1998.
- The US and UN continue to actively enforce a containment policy against Saddam Hussein; our primary tools are the “no-fly zones” and an economic embargo.
- During the US War on Terror, Saddam has been regularly accused of state-sponsored terrorism and of building bioterrorism weapons, but has laid low during the prosecution of the war.
- The Iraq War formally ended on Dec. 15, 2011. Approximately 5,000 "security contractors" will remain to guard the US Embassy in Baghdad, plus several thousand more "general support contractors." Another 9,000 US troops are just over the border in Kuwait.

## North Korea

- **North Korean Nukes:** Pakistan and its nemesis India both successfully tested nuclear weapons in 1998. Neither country signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and hence their nuclear tests were not subject to international criticism. Iran, in contrast, signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996 and hence is subject to international criticism for developing nuclear weapons. North Korea never signed the treaty, but was criticized internationally anyway for its first nuclear test in 2006. Pakistan and India have about 100 nuclear warheads each, compared to 8,500 possessed by the United States; 11,000 possessed by Russia; and fewer than 10 possessed by North Korea.

- **North Korea:** As many as 2 million have died from starvation since 1995. Drought and famine continue today, and South Korea is concerned that the North will attack if facing imminent political collapse.
- Naval clashes threatened open warfare in spring and summer 1999.
- In 2000, the regime placed emphasis on expanding foreign trade links, embracing modern technology, and attracting foreign investment, but in no way at the expense of relinquishing central control over key national assets or undergoing market-oriented reforms.

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Foreign\\_Policy.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Foreign_Policy.htm).



## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source

**Source B:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current issues related to war and peace, “Background on War and Peace,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The war and peace background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of topics related to war and peace.*

The **War and Peace** category encompasses situations around the world where the US is involved in a prolonged military intervention, or where the US is involved in prolonged peace negotiations. Currently, that includes four regions of the world:

- Islam: background on Shi’ite vs. Sunni Islam and its relevance for the Middle East.
- Syria: the US intervention in the Syrian Civil War.
- Israel and Palestine: history since 1948 through the current peace process.
- Persian Gulf: situation regarding Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, and the Gulf War.
- Central Asia: the War on Terrorism, focusing on Afghanistan.
- The Balkans: history of Kosovo, Bosnia, and other former Yugoslav republics.

Other foreign affairs are covered in other pages of this website:

- Foreign Policy: other world hotspots, as well as strategy and principles of foreign affairs.
- China: specifics regarding China and Taiwan, including human rights and trade issues.
- Defense: defense spending, weapons planning, and other military issues.

Several urgent Mideast trouble spots can be identified by whether the religion of the ruling group matches the religion of the majority of the population. When the majority is Sunni and the Shias are in power, or vice versa, the country is often a “trouble spot.” That same analysis holds for determining which terrorist groups are on which side.

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_War\\_+Peace.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_War_+Peace.htm).



## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Sources

**Source C:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current US immigration issues, “Background on Immigration,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The immigration background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of immigration topics.*

### 2014–16 Election Immigration Issues

- Talking about immigrants means talking about Latinos: half of all immigrants today are from Latin America. And talking about immigrants means talking about the Latino vote: 70% of Latino voters supported Obama in the last election. The most important demographic is that Latinos make up 17% of the voting population now, but that will rise to 29% by 2050.
- Latinos support immigration reform (and in particular, amnesty) with the same lopsided support with which they support Democrats: over 70% favor amnesty.
- The Latino vote will become increasingly determinative of future election results, which is why Republicans are so actively recruiting Latino candidates (for example, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX, and Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL), to try to switch the current party loyalty.
- “Comprehensive reform” is a politicized buzzword that means “provide amnesty and citizenship benefits for illegal immigrants already here, while securing the border and prosecuting illegal employers against new illegal immigration.” Opponents of comprehensive reform would prefer a piecemeal approach: their buzzword is “secure the border first,” before dealing with any benefits or any other issues.
- President Obama in late 2014 issued an Executive Order deferring deportation of five million illegal immigrants who came to America as minors (known as DREAMers, for the DREAM Act). Opponents claim Obama unconstitutionally bypassed Congress. Supporters claim that Congress failed to pass comprehensive reforms for years, so Obama had to act unilaterally.

### 2012 Election Immigration Issues

- Anti-immigration advocates often seek Official English status (the US has no official language), which would enforce assimilation of non-English-speaking immigrants. Similarly, anti-immigration advocates seek to terminate bilingual education, which is currently funded in school systems with large non-English-speaking populations.
- The “Simpson-Mazzoli Act” refers to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, the immigration reform supported by President Reagan. Its opponents claimed that it granted amnesty in exchange for tightening immigration law, but that the tightening never occurred while the amnesty did.

### Arizona Law

- In April 2010, the state legislature of Arizona passed a law, S.B. 1070, which allowed state police to check for legal papers of people suspected of being illegal immigrants.
- Proponents say that the Arizona law only enforces federal law in a circumstance where the federal government has failed to enforce its own law.
- Opponents say that the Arizona law constitutes “racial profiling” and targets Latinos and especially Mexicans.
- The author of the Arizona law, State Senate President Russell Pearce, was subjected by the people of his legislative district to a recall vote as a result of the Arizona law, and lost his seat in November 2011.



## Immigration Issues

- The US admits about 660,000 legal immigrants per year (1998 figures).
- The Immigration Act of 1990 allows for 480,000 immigrants with family in the US; 140,000 immigrants in needed employment fields; and the rest under per-country limits and diversity limits.
- Foreign-born people accounted for 8% of the US population in the 1990 census; in the decades prior to 1930, the figure was 13%.
- About 5 million illegal aliens reside in the US (1996 figures).
- 55% of all illegal aliens come from Mexico. (Other Latin American countries account for another 20%).
- 40% of all illegal aliens live in California. (Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois account for the next 40%).
- The illegal alien population is growing by about 275,000 each year.
- The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) runs the Border Patrol as well as interior enforcement.

## Immigration Advocacy

- Pro-immigration advocates sometimes accuse anti-immigration advocates of racism, because of the large Hispanic component of current immigration. In that view, immigration restrictions are seen as limiting growth of the Hispanic population.
- Anti-immigration advocates often seek Official English status (the US has no official language), which would enforce assimilation of non-English-speaking immigrants. Similarly, anti-immigration advocates seek to terminate bilingual education, which is currently funded in school systems with large non-English-speaking populations.

## Immigration Buzzwords

- The biggest components of the immigration debate are how many legal immigrants to allow and how to prevent illegal immigration.
- Liberals and libertarians generally oppose restricting immigration. Look for buzzwords like “promote diversity” to define the liberal attitude, or “we’re a nation of immigrants” to define the libertarian attitude. Any reference to providing illegal immigrants with services beyond emergency medical treatment, or any reference to “clemency” for illegal immigration, implies a strong pro-immigrant stance.
- Moderate liberals and libertarians will oppose restricting immigration while paying lip service to restrictions on illegal immigration. Look for buzz-phrases like “promote immigration, block illegal immigration” and “separate the functions of the INS and the Border Patrol,” which mean the same thing.
- Conservatives and populists generally favor restricting immigration. Look for buzzwords like “protect our borders” or “strengthen the INS.” A call for Official English is a strongly anti-immigration stance, because most immigrants are from non-English-speaking countries. That’s the same attitude as “end bilingual education,” which focuses primarily on Spanish-speaking immigrants.
- Moderate conservatives and populists will favor restricting illegal immigration while paying lip service to allowing legal immigration. The result is the same as moderates in favor of immigration: calls for separating out legal immigration from illegal, but with a focus on enforcement against illegals instead of a focus on respecting immigrant rights.
- **H-1B Visas** refer to visas for “specialty occupations.” Generally, H-1B visas are issued in the fields of science, technology, engineering, or other professional services. H-1B visa holders are nonresidents but may apply for permanent green cards.

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Immigration.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Immigration.htm).



## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Sources

**Source D:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current trade issues, “Background on Free Trade,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The free trade background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of trade topics.*

### International Trade Buzzwords

- **NAFTA:** refers to the North American Free Trade Agreement, which in 1994 established a free trade zone between the US, Canada, and Mexico. NAFTA passed with some important compromises to protect the environment and labor standards. In 2001, President Bush formalized the proposal of expanding NAFTA to a Free Trade Area for the Americas (FTAA), encompassing 34 countries and 800 million people by 2005. President Obama continues to push for expansion to CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement).
- **WTO:** refers to the World Trade Organization, an international organization intended to reduce trade barriers, formed in 1995. WTO members (which include China since 2001) charge minimal import tariffs on each other. The WTO adjudicates international disputes over trade barriers, such as currency manipulation.
- **Currency Manipulation:** The Republican primary contenders, especially Mitt Romney, accuse China of manipulating their currency. That means they maintain an artificially low exchange rate which makes Chinese goods relatively inexpensive for export. The result is that the US imports more goods from China, at lower cost for US consumers, but the manufacturing jobs are in China.
- **TPP:** The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a proposed free trade agreement between the US and Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. Negotiations began in 2005; China, Mexico, and South Korea may also join. The TPP is potentially the largest free trade agreement in the world, laying the framework for a “free trade area of the Pacific.” Negotiations have been mostly held in secret, a source of some controversy. Other controversial topics include trade barriers and currency manipulation (by the Asian nations) and labor and environmental issues (by China).
- **FTAA:** The “free trade area of the Americas” is an extension of NAFTA to include the entire North American continent; negotiations began in 2001. It was scheduled to take effect by 2005, but has been met by strong anti-corporate protests.
- **Fast-Track:** means authorizing the President to sign trade deals with a single yes-or-no Congressional vote after only limited debate. Supporting Fast-Track implies the speaker supports free trade.
- **Fair Trade:** means placing restrictions on imports based on environmental, labor, or other concerns. Supporting Fair Trade implies the speaker is against free trade.
- **Trade Deficits:** mean that the US imports more than we export to a particular country. Concern over trade deficits implies supporting trade restrictions against Mexico, Japan, and East Asia, with whom the US has large trade deficits.
- **China,** the world’s largest Communist country, will soon become the world’s largest economy (estimated to pass the US in 2024). In 2014, China's economy grew at an annual rate of 7.4%, despite the lingering Great Recession (which only slowed China's growth slightly). US trade with China totaled \$562 billion in 2013, but with a \$319 billion trade deficit. The US has issues with China on currency manipulation, export dumping, and labor conditions within China. Those trade-related issues will dominate US–China relations in the 2016 campaign and afterwards.



## NAFTA

- The North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 establishes a free trade zone between the US, Canada, and Mexico.
- A “free trade zone” means that goods can cross the border in either direction without tariffs or taxes of any kind.
- Canada is the largest trading partner of the US, accounting for over 25% of both our imports and exports.
- Mexico and Japan account for about 15% each; Europe combined for about 20%; and East Asia combined for about 15%.
- NAFTA passed with some important compromises to protect the environment and labor standards; these are referred to as “side agreements.”
- In 1994, President Clinton invited Chile to join NAFTA as the next step toward a Free Trade Zone for the Americas. In 2001, President Bush formalized the proposal of expanding NAFTA to a Free Trade Area for the Americas, encompassing 34 countries and 800 million people by 2005.

## GATT and WTO

- The World Trade Organization is an international organization intended to reduce trade barriers, formed in 1995.
- The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs is the international treaty which preceded the WTO’s formation; it began in 1947.
- The “Uruguay Round” was the most recently completed round of GATT negotiations, completed in 1994.
- Negotiations to start a new “round” took place in Seattle in December 1999, but were disrupted by riots.
- WTO members (which includes the US and most industrialized countries) grant each other MFN or Most Favored Nation status, which means minimal import tariffs.

## Globalization

- “Globalization” refers generally to free trade, open borders, improved communication and transportation, and the commerce implications of the Internet.
- Specifically, anti-globalization advocates refer to the negative aspects of free trade on environmental and labor standards. At issue is that open borders cause corporations to seek out the lowest environmental and labor standards to minimize production costs, thereby pressuring for lower standards globally.
- Anti-globalization advocates primarily focus on the secrecy of WTO proceedings, but also criticize other international trade organizations as too favorable to corporate interests.
- Anti-globalization protests have been particularly effective since a large protest at a WTO meeting in Seattle in late 1999. The 2001 WTO meeting was held in Qatar (in the Persian Gulf) partially to make protest more difficult by its remoteness.
- While the anti-corporate aspect of anti-globalization is primarily a liberal cause, many conservatives join the anti-globalization movement on grounds of protection of national sovereignty. At issue is that the WTO and international trade agreements override national law, and hence place the US Congress and the US President subordinate to an unelected foreign organization.

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Free\\_Trade.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Free_Trade.htm).





## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Sources

**Source A:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current jobs issues, “Background on Jobs,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The jobs background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of jobs topics.*

### Jobs Issues

- **Card Check:** refers to a unionization process where potential union members sign (or check off) a card indicating they would join the union. When a majority of workers have checked their cards, the union forms. Most Republicans argue that Card Check inappropriately replaces a secret ballot process, and is inherently coercive. Most Democrats argue that Card Check protects workers from corporate anti-union tactics during unionization efforts.
- **Right-to-Work:** refers to a state law against requiring union membership. The opposite is a “union shop” (or “closed shop”), where employees are required to pay union dues as a condition for working. Twenty-two states are “right-to-work” states (mostly in the South and West) and 28 are not. A national right-to-work law would abolish union shops, and convert them all to “open shops,” where employees may join the union voluntarily but are not required to.
- **American Jobs Act:** refers to a series of legislative proposals made by President Obama beginning in September 2011. Initially, the legislation was proposed as one large bill (S. 1549 and H.R. 12), but the bill stalled in Congress. Hence Obama broke up the bill into numerous smaller pieces. The key components are:
  - \$245 billion for Payroll tax cut extension (maintaining a reduction in the Social Security FICA deduction).
  - \$57 billion for extending unemployment benefits
  - \$65 billion for direct hiring of municipal employees, focusing on teachers, police, and firefighters
  - \$65 billion for infrastructure construction
  - The term “shovel ready” refers to the previous round of stimulus bills, which focused on projects which could start immediately.
- **Job Creators** is the 2012 campaign’s term for business owners and other wealthy people who “create jobs.” Generally, conservatives refer to “job creators” as a euphemism for cutting taxes for the wealthy, based on the “trickle-down” theory that doing so will create jobs. Liberals use the term “the Top 1%” as an opposing euphemism, implying that the wealthiest top 1% should pay more taxes than the rest of the 99%.

### Unemployment Issues

- Unemployment insurance is paid by all employees as “state UI taxes,” at a rate of 0.8% of income for the first \$7,000 of annual income.
- As a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress in February 2009 (known as “The Stimulus Bill”), many unemployed people can receive up to 99 weeks of unemployment benefits.
- Normally, unemployment payments are taxable income; but the Stimulus Bill exempted the first \$2,400 worth of unemployment income received during the “tax year” of 2009 from being considered as taxable income on the Federal level, when American taxpayers file their 2009 IRS tax return paperwork in early 2010.
- Many candidates in 2011 push for extending unemployment benefits beyond 99 weeks, since 7 million people have maxed out (known as “99ers”).



## Union Issues

- Total union membership stands at about 16 million workers, or 14% of the workforce.
- Union membership has been falling steadily since 1958, when it stood at 35% of the workforce.
- Twenty-two states in the US are right-to-work states. In the other 28, if a business is a union shop, you have to join the union if you want to work there. There is no federal right-to-work law; it's determined by each state.
- H-1B Visas, a key issue in the immigration reform debate, refer to visas for “specialty occupations.” Generally, H-1B visas are issued in the fields of science, technology, engineering, or other professional services. H-1B visa holders are nonresidents but may apply for permanent green cards.
- Governor Scott Walker (R-WI) pushed a “union-busting” bill in early 2011, restricting collective bargaining rights of all public employees, including teachers. The bill passed, but large-scale protests led to a recall election in 2012. Governor Walker survived the recall, and got re-elected in 2014. In July 2014, the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the law.

## Minimum Wage

- The minimum wage is currently \$7.25, increased from \$5.15 in 2009, by an act of Congress.
- The last increase took place in three stages over a period of years; another increase will require another act of Congress.
- Some candidates want to increase it again now, and automatically increase it to keep up with inflation (known as “indexing”).
- President Obama has proposed (and by 2014, some states have already adopted) a new minimum wage of \$10.10 per hour.

## The Farm Bill

- The annual Farm Bill provides for numerous subsidies to numerous classes of farmers. The Farm Bill is heavily supported by senators from farm states.
- Since 2000, the farm bill has cost taxpayers more than \$168 billion per decade, using loans, price supports, and payments to protect family farmers from fluctuations of weather, price, and economic conditions. One of its controversial programs pays farmers NOT to grow crops—to avoid oversupply which would drive down prices.
- About 75% of farm subsidies go to the biggest 10% of farming companies, such as Archer-Daniels-Midland (ADM), a major employer in farm states.
- Farm subsidies originated during the Great Depression in the 1930s, when President Roosevelt initiated the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Its original intent was a temporary solution for the Dust Bowl crisis, but it was made permanent in 1949 and has been renewed for six decades since.
- In 1996, the Freedom to Farm Act proposed removing price supports and letting the free market determine prices. But the farm lobby—big agribusiness like ADM who contribute generously to congressional campaigns—has stopped Congress from killing the subsidies.
- The farm lobby primarily funds Republican Party candidates, but Democrats also support the farm bill because it contains food stamp funding. In 2013, Republicans attempted to separate food stamps from the farm bill but President Obama threatened to veto any farm bill which did not include food stamps.

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## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source

**Source B:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current environmental issues, “Background on Environment,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The environment background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of environmental and energy topics.*

### Environment and Energy

Energy issues have so dominated the 2012 election that all other environmental issues have fallen aside. In fact, the term “environmental issues” in this election cycle has come to mean “energy issues.” In this section, we stick to non-energy environmental issues—see our Energy & Oil section for the energy-based issues. Some hot topics in the 2012 election cycle:

- **Yucca Mountain:** A federally owned mountain in Nevada which the federal government has proposed as a long-term repository for nuclear waste. Yucca Mountain was selected because, in theory, it is geologically stable enough to survive intact for the tens of thousands of years until the nuclear waste becomes harmless. The site was first proposed under President Reagan in 1985–1987; Congress approved it under President Bush in 2002; and then Congress canceled the program under President Obama in April 2011.
- **Big Dig:** The “Big Dig” refers to Boston’s Central Artery/Tunnel Project, conducted in large part while Mitt Romney was governor of Massachusetts. The Big Dig converted an elevated highway, I-93, into a 3.5-mile tunnel through central Boston, and added a third tunnel under Boston Harbor to Logan Airport. The original cost of the project in 1998 was proposed at \$3 billion; it grew into a \$22 billion project by the latest 2012 estimate. In addition to several construction deaths, a motorist was killed when a section of ceiling collapsed in 2006, attributed to inappropriate glue to hold up the concrete ceiling. The project was also plagued by water leaks for several years, attributed to failure to meet contract specifications.
- **Conservation Easements:** Refers to land deeds that restrict future usage of a parcel of land to protect habitat, ban hunting or logging, or otherwise meet conservation goals. Also known as “Land Trusts,” they have been tremendously successful in preserving open space and wildlife habitat. To assure that open space and habitat will be there for future generations, Congress provided targeted income tax relief to small farmers and ranchers who wish to make a charitable contribution of a qualified conservation easement.
- **Green Jobs:** “Green Jobs” refers to subsidizing environmentally friendly industries, usually alternative energy.

### Endangered Species

- **Endangered Species Act (ESA):** 1973 law prohibiting activities that harm endangered plants or animals or their habitats. Threatened and endangered species are listed or “delisted” by the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce. The controversy comes from limitations on private property to protect one species.
- **Takings:** The federal government is allowed to take private property when it serves the public interest (via “eminent domain”) but must pay fair market value. When the ESA regulates private property use (such as disallowing development), the value is decreased even though the property is not fully taken. The “takings” controversy concerns how much the government should pay to property owners when their property is only partially taken.



### Pollution Control vs. Cost Control

- **The Clean Air Act:** (CAA) regulates industrial smokestacks and other sources of smog, acid rain, and other air pollutants. The CAA uses numerous market incentives, including “pollution permits” that are traded on open markets, to minimize costs.
- **The Clean Water Act:** (CWA) regulates “point-source” (sewage pipes) and “non–point-source” (land and road runoff) water pollution. The EPA’s approach since the early 1990s is “watershed-based,” which means cooperating across political boundaries.
- **CAFE standard:** The Corporate Average Fuel Economy requires that all automobile manufacturers maintain an average of 28 miles per gallon (mpg) for all vehicles sold.
- **Command-and-control:** standardized regulations with central enforcement (usually by EPA), as opposed to market-based incentives.

### Land Use Buzzwords

- **Devolution:** Some candidates believe that land use decisions should “devolve” from the federal government to state or local government, to encourage community involvement.
- **Wise Use:** a code word which means “stop federal land use restrictions.” It comes from the Forest Service’s founding doctrines, which say that wise land use includes commercial use plus recreational use.
- **Land Trusts:** privately held land which has restrictions on development (e.g., wildlife sanctuaries).
- **Suburban Sprawl:** uncontrolled development that fosters automobile usage rather than mass transit.
- **Urban Redevelopment:** restoring inner-city “blighted” communities via “empowerment zones,” etc.
- **Brownfields:** Locating industrial development on former waste sites (versus wide-open “greenfields”).
- **Superfund:** EPA cleanup of toxic waste sites.

Used with permission. On The Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Environment.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Environment.htm).



## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source

**Source C:** Jesse Gordon, article describing current health care issues, “Background on Healthcare,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The health care background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of health care topics.*

### ObamaCare

- **ObamaCare** refers to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) of 2010, which reformed healthcare insurance with the goal of near-universal coverage.
- Critics refer to ObamaCare as **socialized medicine**—which could mean the government runs the healthcare system, as in the United Kingdom, but more accurately in the United States means that the federal government mandates individual health coverage.
- **Individual Mandate:** The crux of the opposition to ObamaCare is whether the federal government can mandate that individuals purchase health insurance—that was tested in a Supreme Court case in 2012.
- The Supreme Court decided the case “National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius” on June 28, 2012, on the constitutionality of ObamaCare’s individual mandate. Justices Roberts and Kennedy were very skeptical that the mandate was justified under the “commerce clause.” But the government’s lawyer made a strong case for the government’s taxing power—that argument eventually won the day—because the mandate would be administered by the Internal Revenue Service, paid on your Form 1040 on April 15th. The president had argued that the mandate was not a tax; the court decided it was.
- **Mental Health** ObamaCare suggested some mental health coverage but the details are left to each state. Mental health is one of ObamaCare’s “10 Essential Health Benefits.” This is an example of healthcare issues that were not fully worked out under ObamaCare, and will be left to the 2016 election to decide.

### HMOs and Managed Care

- Prior to ObamaCare, comprehensive national healthcare reform had died in Congress in 1994 (after a report by a commission run by Hillary Clinton, hence the moniker “HillaryCare”).
- 16% of Americans (42 million people) have no health insurance (and hence must pay for health services in full, or receive hospital charity).
- 14% of Americans receive some form of public healthcare or health insurance (70% have private health insurance).
- 20% of Americans are members of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs).
- ObamaCare ensures that mental health services are available as part of health insurance services, but leaves implementation to the states, and leaves all aspects of mental health coverage as optional. An estimated 25% of American adults suffer from a diagnosable mental illness, but stigma and funding cuts often prevent diagnosis and care. The current focus is on youth mental health, in the wake of several school shootings, and veteran mental health, in the context of PTSD in those returning from war zones.

### Patient’s Bill of Rights

Congress and the presidential candidates are debating a “Patient’s Bill of Rights” which would establish rules of dealing with HMO managed care. The buzzwords in this debate are:

- **External Appeal:** Patients cannot currently appeal an HMO’s decision to deny coverage, even if the HMO doctor agrees with the patient. The Bill of Rights would establish some form of expert appeal board external to the HMO.

- **Medical Necessity:** At issue is whether the doctor or the HMO management determines what is necessary. Determination of “necessity” may become subject to expert review as well, or it may become measured against established standards of “generally accepted practices.”
- **Legal Liability:** Patients would be granted the right to sue HMOs for medical costs and damages, which is not a right under current law. Generally, liberals support the right to sue HMOs while conservatives do not. This is the primary distinction between Republican and Democrat versions of Patient Bill of Rights proposals.
- **Scope of Coverage:** Some states regulate HMOs in ways similar to those described here; a Bill of Rights could apply to them, to all HMOs, or to all patients.
- **Prevention:** Advocating prevention implies support for removing government from healthcare, or opposition to more federal healthcare funding or national insurance.
- **Consumer Choice:** Advocating consumer choice or reduction in healthcare bureaucracy implies support for removing government from healthcare, or opposition to national insurance.

### Medicaid / Medicare

- **Medicaid** is the federal health insurance program for people whose income is insufficient to pay for health insurance privately, including their children. Medicaid is “means-tested.”
- **Medicare** is the federal long-term health insurance program. It provides insurance for elderly nonworking people, as well as younger people with disabilities who are unable to work.
- **CHIP:** (originally called SCHIP, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program): CHIP is the federally funded and state-run program for health insurance for children whose families earn over the Medicaid means-testing limits.
- **Means Testing:** The limit for qualifying for Medicaid is 130% of the poverty line. The poverty line was \$23,050 for a family of four in 2012 (it goes up each year, and goes down for fewer kids).
- **Medicaid Expansion:** Under ObamaCare, the limit for qualifying for Medicaid is raised from 130% to 133% of the poverty line, with subsidies for families earning up to 150% of the poverty line. As of September 2014, 27 states have adopted the Medicaid expansion. For states that do expand Medicaid, the federal government pays for 100% of the expansion through 2016, and the subsidy tapers to 90% by 2020. Several opposing states argue that their 10% responsibility of funding the expansion will be too much for their states’ budgets.
- **Medicare Part D:** The most recent major change to Medicare was to include prescription drug coverage, which is called “Part D.” The four parts of Medicare are:
  - Part A: Hospital insurance
  - Part B: Supplementary medical insurance
  - Part C: Medicare Advantage plans
  - Part D: Prescription drug plans
- **Coverage Count:** Medicare covers 49 million Americans; Medicaid covered 58 million people prior to ObamaCare’s expansion.
- **Medicaid Expansion:** The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare) expanded Medicaid eligibility beginning January 1, 2014. Under pre-ObamaCare rules, eligibility varied from 100% to 130% of the poverty line; under ObamaCare, eligibility is increased to 133% (and 138% for most cases). The expansion of Medicaid and CHIP make 6.3 million additional Americans eligible for coverage. States individually decide whether to accept additional federal funds for Medicaid expansion; many Republican-run states which oppose ObamaCare have turned down the funds. Federal funding fully covers the Medicaid expansion initially, but scales down to 90% over a decade.
- Medicare and Medicaid background is covered from a financial/budgetary perspective in the Social Security section (with many excerpts cross-referenced here).

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Health\\_Care.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Health_Care.htm).





## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source

**Source D:** Jesse Gordon, article describing gun policy issues, “Background on Gun Control,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The gun control background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of gun control topics.*

### Statistics on Gun Ownership

- 40% of all US homes have guns.
- 81% of Americans say that gun control will be an important issue in determining which Congressional candidate to vote for.
- 91% of Americans say that there should be at least minor restrictions on gun ownership.
- 57% of Americans say that there should be major restrictions or a ban.

### Child-Safety Locks

- In 1996, 140 children died after being accidentally shot; in 2012 the figure was 259 with comparable numbers in between.
- About 1,500 children are hurt by guns every year.
- “Trigger Locks” require entering a combination to use the gun (or some other locking method); they are intended to reduce inadvertent use by children or other unauthorized users.

### Gun control

- Advocates of gun control cite the large number of people killed in gun-based homicides each year: over 8,000 per year, peaking at 14,000 in 1993.
- Over 100,000 people are shot each year in the US; 72% of all violent killings use guns as the weapon.
- In comparison, in Japan, where gun laws are very strict regarding both ownership and punishment, only 4 people were killed by guns in 2012. Japan has a smaller population, but even counting that, the per capita death rate is 1,000 times higher in the United States.

### Background Checks

- The “Gun-Show Loophole” means that there are no background checks when purchasing guns in a private transaction.
- Guns sold at gun shows through dealers ARE subject to background checks; only those sold privately are not.

### Right to Bear Arms

- The Supreme Court ruled in 1939, in a case called “US v. Miller,” that the Second Amendment only protects guns suitable for a well-regulated militia—for example, sawed-off shotguns can be banned because they’re not “ordinary military equipment.”
- Since 1939, the Supreme Court has not heard any further Second Amendment cases; the most recent ruling prior to “Heller,” in 1997, overturned part of the 1993 Brady Bill, but did not address Second Amendment rights.





- “Heller” refers to a ruling on the issue of “individual rights.” The Supreme Court ruled, in the 2008 case called “District of Columbia v. Heller,” that the Second Amendment does define an individual right to gun ownership, as opposed to a “collective right” for a state-run and state-armed National Guard.
  - Much discretion was left to the states and to Congress, but Heller opens up the issue to further Supreme Court cases.
  - Hence, gun control issues are still primarily the subject of Congressional legislation.
  - Federal discussions on gun control often focus on the “D.C. handgun ban” because Congress has direct control over the gun laws of the District of Columbia. One such law was at issue in the Heller case.

### **Gun Control Buzzwords**

- The biggest component of the Gun Control debate is whether existing gun laws are sufficient, or whether more gun laws are needed.
- Liberals and populists generally favor more gun laws. Look for buzzwords like “more registration” or “more licensing” to describe seeking further restrictions legal ownership; or “close the loopholes” and “restrict access” for further restrictions on illegal ownership.
- Moderate liberals and populists will generally favor more restrictions on ownership while paying lip service to “sportsmen’s rights” or respecting “the right of self-protection.” A moderate compromise is to “extend waiting periods” before allowing ownership, to perform “background checks” of varying degrees of severity.
- Conservatives and libertarians generally oppose gun laws. Look for buzzwords like “Second Amendment rights” or “allow concealed carry.” A call for “instant background checks” pays lip service to gun-control advocates: it sounds like a restriction, but means allowing purchasing guns on the spot.
- Moderate conservatives and libertarians oppose gun laws while acknowledging that restrictions are inevitable. Look for buzzwords like “enforce existing gun laws,” which implies not passing any NEW gun laws. Similarly, “more strict enforcement” of gun laws implies a pro-gun rights stance, unless it is accompanied by a call for new gun laws.
- Centrists and moderates from both the right and left generally support restrictions on juvenile access to guns, especially in the wake of tragedies like Littleton and other gun-related deaths.
- Positive mentions of the NRA (the National Rifle Association, the largest pro-gun rights lobbying group) implies support of gun rights, while opposing the NRA or “taking on the gun lobby” implies support of gun restrictions.
- Many states have “stand your ground” laws, justifying the use of deadly force when threatened, in contrast with the legal principle of an “obligation to retreat” first. The Florida version of the “stand your ground” law gained national attention in February 2012 in the case of Trayvon Martin shooting. Martin, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed by a “neighborhood watch” coordinator, George Zimmerman. Citing the “stand your ground” law, authorities did not initially charge Zimmerman, but he was later arrested. Zimmerman was acquitted of both murder and manslaughter in July 2013. Since then, the mainstream media report regularly on Zimmerman’s new arrests and police encounters, including a “road rage” incident in September 2014.
- The Newtown, Connecticut shootings in December 2012 reignited the debate on gun regulation. On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza, 20, fatally shot twenty children and six adult staff members in a mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Several bills were proposed in the 2013 Congressional session: banning the sale of semiautomatic firearms, and restricting large-capacity magazines.

### **Amendment II to the US Constitution**

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. (1791)

Used with permission. On the Issues website: [http://www.ontheissues.org/Background\\_Gun\\_Control.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Gun_Control.htm).



## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source

**Source E:** Jesse Gordon, article describing civil rights issues, “Background on Civil Rights,” On the Issues website, April 23, 2015

*NOTE: The civil rights background page is constantly updated, and updates may be even more frequent with the upcoming 2016 presidential election. The issues depicted here are current as of April 23, 2015. Teachers, however, may want to go to the website for the most current list of civil rights topics.*

### Women’s Rights

- **Equal Pay for Equal Work:** addresses discriminatory salary differences that exist between certain groups. The Fair Pay Act of 1999 would provide equal wages and benefits for work of equivalent value.
- **“Glass Ceiling”:** Term was popularized in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article describing the invisible barriers (usually prejudice) that women and minorities face as they move up the corporate hierarchy.
- **Domestic Violence:** At the heart of the Domestic Violence Act of 1995 is the protection order. It names the person who is abusive and states what behavior is illegal under the order. The Family Law Act 1996 provides for a single set of civil remedies to deal with domestic violence.

### Minority Rights

- **Hate Crimes:** Congress defines as a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim because of the actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation of that person.
- **Affirmative Action:** Minority applicants are preferentially hired to make up for past discrimination. The equivalent negative term is “reverse discrimination.” Candidates discuss whether “preference” implies a fixed “quota.”
- **Racial Profiling:** Also known as “Driving While Black.” Law enforcement practice of using race to decide which motorists to stop.
- **Redlining:** Practice where banks draw lines around certain low-income and minority neighborhoods. The banks then refuse to lend to those neighborhoods.
- **Bilingual education:** Government requirement that US public schools teach children in their native languages. Since 1974, all schools that accept federal funding must provide special language programs.

### Disabled Rights

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Handicapped Access
- Mental Illness Discrimination

### Religious Rights

- School Prayer
- Posting Ten Commandments in public places
- The flag desecration amendment is considered a proxy issue for free speech (if you oppose the amendment) or a proxy issue for patriotism (if you support the amendment). A flag-desecration law was introduced in every Congress from 1995 to 2006; it passed the House in each session, and failed to pass the Senate by only one vote in 2005. A flag-desecration bill has been sponsored in both the House and Senate (without a vote) in every Congress from 2007 to 2013.



## Gay Rights

### *Don't Ask Don't Tell*

- The Clinton administration in 1993 enacted a “don’t ask/don’t tell” (DADT) policy for gays in the military. Under the DADT rules, gays could be discharged from the military for homosexual contact and for stating their sexual orientation, but the military was not allowed to ask them their orientation.
- The DADT policy was repealed in 2010; since then, gays may serve openly in the military. Hence gay and lesbian people may now openly serve in the US military. Since 1993, the DADT policy held that homosexuals may serve as long as they do not announce their homosexuality (“Don’t Tell”), but also that the military may not investigate their homosexuality (“Don’t Ask”).
- The policy banning open homosexuals serving in the military was repealed on Sept. 20, 2011. Hence gay and lesbian people may now openly serve in the US military.

### *Family and Relationships*

- **Adoption:** Nineteen states allow gay and lesbian couples to adopt children in a complex and expensive two-step process, in which one parent first adopts and then the second can petition for joint rights.
- **Ceremonial Marriages:** Same-sex marriages may be officiated by church officials, or anyone else, but ceremonial marriages in and of themselves involve no civil laws and carry no legal benefits or responsibilities.
- **Domestic Partnership Registration:** is a means by which some cities allow opposite- and same-sex couples to go on public record as a nonmarried couple. The major benefit is used to establish legal responsibility for debts after a relationship ends.
- **Domestic Partnership Affidavit:** Many private employers and municipalities offer domestic partner benefits to their workers, based on signing a legal affidavit that defines an economic relationship.

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## Supporting Question 3

### Featured Source

**Source A:** Democratic National Committee, *Moving America Forward: 2012 Democratic Party National Platform* (excerpt)

*NOTE: This is an excerpt from the Democratic Party Platform. For a complete version of the platform, including a statement of party beliefs, click on this website: <http://www.democrats.org/party-platform>. As the 2016 presidential election approaches, check for the release of a new party platform.*

Moving America Forward  
2012 Democratic National Platform

Moving America Forward

Four years ago, Democrats, independents, and many Republicans came together as Americans to move our country forward. We were in the midst of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the previous administration had put two wars on our nation’s credit card, and the American Dream had slipped out of reach for too many.

Today, our economy is growing again, al-Qaeda is weaker than at any point since 9/11, and our manufacturing sector is growing for the first time in more than a decade. But there is more we need to do, and so we come together again to continue what we started. We gather to reclaim the basic bargain that built the largest middle class and the most prosperous nation on Earth—the simple principle that in America, hard work should pay off, responsibility should be rewarded, and each one of us should be able to go as far as our talent and drive take us.

This election is not simply a choice between two candidates or two political parties, but between two fundamentally different paths for our country and our families.

We Democrats offer America the opportunity to move our country forward by creating an economy built to last and built from the middle out. Mitt Romney and the Republican Party have a drastically different vision. They still believe the best way to grow the economy is from the top down—the same approach that benefited the wealthy few but crashed the economy and crushed the middle class.

Democrats see a young country continually made stronger by the greatest diversity of talent and ingenuity in the world, and a nation of people drawn to our shores from every corner of the globe. We believe America can succeed because the American people have never failed and there is nothing that together we cannot accomplish.

Reclaiming the economic security of the middle class is the challenge we must overcome today. That begins by restoring the basic values that made our country great, and restoring for everyone who works hard and plays by the rules the opportunity to find a job that pays the bills, turn an idea into a profitable business, care for your family, afford a home you call your own and health care you can count on, retire with dignity and respect, and, most of all, give your children the kind of education that allows them to dream even bigger and go even further than you ever imagined.

This has to be our North Star—an economy that’s built not from the top down, but from a growing middle class, and that provides ladders of opportunity for those working hard to join the middle class.

This is not another trivial political argument. It’s the defining issue of our time and at the core of the American Dream. And now we stand at a make-or-break moment, and are faced with a choice between moving forward and falling back.

The Republican Party has turned its back on the middle class Americans who built this country. Our opponents believe we should go back to the top-down economic policies of the last decade. They think that if we simply eliminate protections for families and consumers, let Wall Street write its own rules again, and cut taxes for the wealthiest, the market will solve all our problems on its own. They argue that if we help corporations and wealthy investors maximize their profits by whatever means necessary, whether through layoffs or outsourcing, it will automatically translate into jobs and prosperity that benefits us all. They would repeal health reform, turn Medicare into a voucher program, and follow the same path of fiscal irresponsibility of the past administration—giving trillions of dollars in tax cuts weighted towards millionaires and billionaires while sticking the middle class with the bill. But we’ve tried their policies—and we’ve all suffered when they failed.

It is not enough to go back to where the country was before the crisis. We must rebuild a strong foundation that ensures it never happens again.

Democrats know that America prospers when we’re all in it together. We see an America where everyone has a fair shot, does their fair share, and plays by the same rules. We see an America that out-educates, out-builds, and out-innovates the rest of the world.

We see an America with greater economic security and opportunity, driven by education, energy, innovation and infrastructure, and a tax code that helps to create American jobs and bring down the debt in a balanced way. We believe in deficit reduction not by placing the burden on the middle class and the poor, but by cutting out programs we can’t afford and asking the wealthiest to again contribute their fair share.

These values are why we enacted historic health care reform that provides economic security for families and enacted sweeping financial reform legislation that will prevent the recklessness that cost so many their jobs, homes, and savings. They’re why we rescued the auto industry and revived our manufacturing supply chain. They’re why we helped American families who are working multiple jobs and struggling to pay the bills save a little extra money through tax cuts, lower health care costs, and affordable student loans.

They’re why we fought to reclaim the value of treating all Americans with dignity and respect. And they’re why President Barack Obama has ended one war and is responsibly drawing down another. They’re why we’re restoring our alliances and image around the world and pursuing a foreign policy that’s making us safer.

But there is more to be done. We knew that renewing the American Dream wouldn’t be easy—we knew it would take more than one year, or one term, or even one president.

The problems we’re facing right now have been more than a decade in the making. We are the party of inclusion and respect differences of perspective and belief. And so, even when we disagree, we work together to move this country forward. But what is holding our nation back is a stalemate in Washington between two fundamentally different views of which direction America should take.

We must keep moving forward and doing the hard work of rebuilding a strong economy by betting on the American worker and investing in a growing middle class. We need a government that stands up for the hopes, values, and interests of working people, and gives everyone willing to work hard the chance to make the most of their God-given potential.

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## Supporting Question 3

### Featured Source

**Source B:** Republican National Committee, "Preamble," *We Believe in America: Republican Platform 2012*

*NOTE: This is an excerpt from the Republican Party Platform. For a complete version of the platform, including a statement of party beliefs, click on this website: <https://cdn.gop.com/docs/2012GOPPlatform.pdf>. As the 2016 presidential election approaches, check for the release of a new party platform.*

The 2012 Republican Platform is a statement of who we are and what we believe as a Party and our vision for a stronger and freer America.

The pursuit of opportunity has defined America from our very beginning. This is a land of opportunity. The American Dream is a dream of equal opportunity for all. And the Republican Party is the party of opportunity.

Today, that American Dream is at risk.

Our nation faces unprecedented uncertainty with great fiscal and economic challenges, and under the current Administration has suffered through the longest and most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression.

Many Americans have experienced the burden of lost jobs, lost homes, and lost hopes. Our middle class has felt that burden most acutely. Meanwhile, the federal government has expanded its size and scope, its borrowing and spending, its debt and deficit. Federalism is threatened and liberty retreats.

For the world, this has been four years of lost American leadership, leadership that depends upon economic vitality and peace through strength.

Put simply: The times call for trustworthy leadership and honest talk about the challenges we face. Our nation and our people cannot afford the status quo. We must begin anew, with profound changes in the way government operates; the way it budgets, taxes, and regulates. Jefferson's vision of a "wise and frugal government" must be restored.

Providence has put us at the fork in the road, and we must answer the question: If not us, who? If not now, when?

That is the choice facing the American people this November. Every voter will be asked to choose between the chronic high unemployment and the unsustainable debt produced by a big government entitlement society, or a positive, optimistic view of an opportunity society, where any American who works hard, dreams big and follows the rules can achieve anything he or she wants.

The American people possess vast reserves of courage and determination and the capacity to hear the truth and chart a strong course. They are eager for the opportunity to take on life's challenges and, through faith and hard work, transform the future for the better. They are the most generous people on earth, giving sacrificially of their time, talent, and treasure.

This platform affirms that America has always been a place of grand dreams and even grander realities; and so it will be again, if we return government to its proper role, making it smaller and smarter. If we restructure government's most important domestic programs to avoid their fiscal collapse. If we keep taxation, litigation, and regulation to a minimum. If we celebrate success, entrepreneurship, and innovation. If we lift up the middle class. If we hand over to the next generation a legacy of growth and prosperity, rather than entitlements and indebtedness.

That same commitment must be present both here at home and abroad. We are a party that knows the difference between international acclaim and world leadership. We will lift the torch of freedom and democracy to inspire all those who would be free. As President Reagan issued the clarion call to “tear down this Wall,” so must we always stand against tyranny and oppression. We will always support and cherish our men and women in uniform who defend our liberties with their lives.

As we embark upon this critical mission, we are not without guidance. We possess an owner’s manual: the Constitution of the United States, the greatest political document ever written. That sacred document shows us the path forward. Trust the people. Limit government. Respect federalism. Guarantee opportunity, not outcomes. Adhere to the rule of law. Reaffirm that our rights come from God, are protected by government, and that the only just government is one that truly governs with the consent of the governed.

The principles written in the Constitution are secured by the character of the American people. President George Washington said in his first inaugural address: “The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained.” Values matter. Character counts.

Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan understand these great truths. They share a positive vision for America—a vision of America renewed and strong. They know America’s best days lay ahead. It will take honest results-oriented, conservative leadership to enact good policies for our people. They will provide it.

We respectfully submit this platform to the American people. It is both a vision of where we are headed and an invitation to join us in that journey. It is about the great dreams and opportunities that have always been America and must remain the essence of America for generations to come.

May God continue to shed his grace on the United States of America.

Governor Bob McDonnell, Chairman

Senator John Hoeven, Co-Chair

Congressman Marsha Blackburn, Co-Chair

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## Supporting Question 3

### Featured Source

Source C: Libertarian Party, "Preamble," *Libertarian Party Platform*, 2014

*NOTE: This is an excerpt from the Libertarian Party Platform. For a complete version of the platform, including a statement of party beliefs, click on this website: [https://www.lp.org/files/2014\\_LP\\_Platform.pdf](https://www.lp.org/files/2014_LP_Platform.pdf). As the 2016 presidential election approaches, check for the release of a new party platform.*

As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty; a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives and no one is forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others.

We believe that respect for individual rights is the essential precondition for a free and prosperous world, that force and fraud must be banished from human relationships, and that only through freedom can peace and prosperity be realized.

Consequently, we defend each person's right to engage in any activity that is peaceful and honest, and welcome the diversity that freedom brings. The world we seek to build is one where individuals are free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government or any authoritarian power.

In the following pages we have set forth our basic principles and enumerated various policy stands derived from those principles.

These specific policies are not our goal, however. Our goal is nothing more nor less than a world set free in our lifetime, and it is to this end that we take these stands.

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## Supporting Question 3

### Featured Source

Source D: Green Party, "Democracy," *Green Party Platform*, 2012

*NOTE: This is an excerpt from the Green Party Platform. For a complete version of the platform, including a statement of party beliefs, click on this website: <http://www.gp.org/platform-democracy>. As the 2016 presidential election approaches, check for the release of a new party platform.*

Our nation was born as the first great experiment in modern democracy. We seek to rescue that heritage from the erosion of citizen participation. Moreover, we seek to dissolve the grip of the ideology, intoned by big-money interests for more than twenty years, that government is intrinsically undesirable and destructive of liberty and that elected officials should rightly "starve the beast" by slashing all spending on social program, in the name of freedom. We challenge that tactic by calling on all Americans to think deeply about the meaning of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In a democracy, individuals come together to form structures of governance that protect and advance the common good. We the citizens are the government, and we the citizens can direct it to fulfill its finest goals and purposes. Our citizens must not permit usurpation of their authority by acts of individuals and government agencies that isolate or insulate government from their oversight and control. We, the People, have a responsibility to participate in self-government through all the means that our Constitution provides.

Citizens of a democracy must have the information and ability to determine the actions of their government. Vast concentrations of wealth and power that have occurred in recent years are inherently undemocratic. The deregulation of corporate activity and the decentralization and underfunding of the regulatory structures that remain—accompanied by the centralizing of big money—has been a disaster for our country. The true owners of the public lands, pension funds, and the public airwaves are the American people, who today have little or no control over their pooled assets or their commonwealth.

The power of civic action is an antidote to the corporate control of so much of our lawmaking and regulating. The pervasive abuse imposed by corporate power increasingly undermines our democracy, but the Green Party seeks to rekindle the democratic flame. As voting citizens, taxpayers, workers, consumers, and stakeholders, we unite to exercise our rights and, as Thomas Jefferson urged, to counteract the "excesses of the moneyed interests." Toward this end, we consider serious reform of campaign funding to be essential, as well as curbs on the influence of corporations on lawmakers and regulatory agencies.

The Green Party considers American democracy to be an ongoing, unfolding project that is dynamic and creative in nature. We are committed to the strengthening of our civil society, including the many mediating institutions at the community level that have always characterized our democracy. We seek to heal the alienation and apathy that has been cultivated in the citizenry by the power brokers of the status quo. Righteous anger about the crippling of our democracy is rising in the land, and the Greens offer constructive alternatives. In addition, we seek to repair the plummeting opinion of the United States in the international community resulting from our arrogant, narcissistic foreign policy of recent years. A growing and grave imbalance between the citizens of this country and the interests that extract power from the citizens is an imminent danger to our security and national and global social stability. We strongly feel that our country should view itself as a member of the community of nations... not above it. The United States could well play a leadership role in that community but only if we become committed to an eco-social vision of peace, national self-determination, and international cooperation.

Our goal is to become an important political force in this country, and to present candidates for election at every level of government.

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## Supporting Question 4

**Featured Source**

**Source A:** Sources found by students and/or teachers

Students and/or their teachers locate sources in order to research politicians from the political parties that best support their stances on issues and to examine the politicians' voting records, public statements, and actions.