



# POLITICAL PARTIES

FOR HIGH SCHOOL  
**STUDENTS**

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## SUMMARY

In this lesson, students are introduced to different types of political parties. After reviewing one party's deliberations about how to respond to climate change, students compare party policy on different issues. After this, students consider a scenario and are called to discover the underlying issues that could help inform a Christian how to cast their vote.

For more information or to give feedback, contact [info@arpacanada.ca](mailto:info@arpacanada.ca)

# POLITICAL PARTIES

## OVERVIEW

Canadian politics requires the organization of political parties.

**Political parties** are voluntary associations of individuals who agree to work together based on common ideas about public affairs. Political parties are membership based. Canadian citizens are able to buy a membership in a party and receive the privileges that are associated with their membership (such as choosing a candidate to run for office, choosing a leader, and voting on party policy). Whichever party has the most MPs elected to the House of Commons forms the **government**. The leader of the governing party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister selects some of the MPs in his or her party to serve as cabinet ministers – special positions responsible for various aspects of governing such as health or defense. The party with the second greatest number of MPs forms the **official opposition**.

There are many parties in Canada. The Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, Bloc Quebecois, People's Party, and Greens are the most well-known because they have a presence in our House of Commons or run candidates in almost every riding. But many other parties exist, such as the Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of

Canada, the Marijuana Party, and the Western Bloc Party. The ninth largest party in Canada is the Christian Heritage Party (CHP). They describe themselves as "Canada's only pro-life federal political party, and the only federal party that endorses the Judeo-Christian principles enshrined in the Canadian Constitution." Individuals from Reformed churches were very involved in the creation of the CHP in the 1980s.

The two largest parties in Canada – the Liberals and Conservatives – are classified as **brokerage parties**. This means that they try to reach out to as wide a variety of people as possible. In contrast to ideological parties which run on specific principles such as environmental responsibility or a fondness for marijuana, brokerage parties try to make their policies adapt to the consensus of Canadians.

Christians work within many different parties. Some choose to work for secular brokerage parties with the hope of using their power to influence Canada for the better. Others believe that the only option is a Christian party because the other parties require a compromise of faith. Choosing which party to support is an important decision that all Canadian citizens have a responsibility to consider.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What issues can be considered to help Christians decide how to vote?

This essential question is intended to get to a deeper issue than "Should all Christians vote only for a Christian political party?" or "Can a Christian vote Liberal?" This question is intended to get students considering how they would vote if they had the right.

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## ENGAGE THE STUDENTS

Engage students by writing out the names of the more mainstream federal political parties (Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Bloc Quebecois) as well as some developing parties (Green or People's Party) and fringe parties (Christian Heritage Party, Marxist-Leninist Party, Maverick Party).

Encourage students to volunteer ideas on what they think each of these parties stand for. Depending on the level of prior knowledge, students may realize that the mainstream parties have changed policy positions before or that sometimes they share quite a bit in common.

Display the news article in *Handout 1 - Conservative carbon tax policy change* and highlight several portions to illustrate how mainstream political parties can change their policies. The main point here is how one political party will sometimes support both sides of an issue at different points in time, depending on what they think voters want.

Distribute *Handout 2 - Conservative policy handbook changes*. This illustrates that brokerage parties have a constantly evolving platform depending on what they think their members and the broader electorate wants.

Students might find it easier to highlight what the fringe parties stand for, as these ideological parties hold to an ideology and niche voter group that rarely shifts or changes.

## EXPLORE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TYPES OF PARTIES

Distribute *Handout 3 - Brokerage and Ideology*. Discuss the similarities and differences between these two types of parties. Ask students to consider which approach they like better and why.



## EVALUATE POLITICAL PARTIES ON KEY ISSUES

Individually or in groups, students can select another issue and review the different party platforms, policy handbooks, or recent policy convention proposals on that issue. Sometimes between elections, party platforms are in a state of flux so the teacher can modify this assignment to have students use the most recent platform OR interview a local candidate from each party to determine their position on the issues that the class determines they will be discussing.

This task could also include an email or telephone interview with the local candidates from the previous election on each group's chosen issue.

These issues can range from single issues to more broadly defined issues such as the following:

- Same-sex marriage
- Euthanasia or Medical Assistance in Dying
- Abortion
- Pornography
- Climate change
- Free speech / hate speech
- Conversion therapy
- Balanced budgets
- LGBTQ2S+ "rights"
- Child care

Students should submit a 2-3 page report that outlines the similarities and differences between the brokerage and ideological parties on their chosen issue. This report should answer key questions like:

- What are five key similarities and/or differences between the parties on your issue?
- What does this reveal about the nature of the brokerage and ideological party on this issue?
- Based solely on this issue, for which party would you recommend casting your vote?
- Is this issue urgent enough that it would become a deciding factor for you in casting your vote? (i.e. the candidate's position on this issue might be so important that all other issues are secondary.)

A student version of this task is in *Handout 4 – Comparing Party Positions*.

## EVALUATE HOW STUDENTS MIGHT VOTE

Distribute *Handout 5 – Who Should I Vote For?* The purpose of this assignment is to try to discover the underlying issues, not necessarily to come to a definitive answer on the question. Understand that this situation is complicated and can involve more than one correct answer.

To complete this assignment students should:

- Read through the account and highlight the different facts (verifiable truths).
- For each fact, outline who the different affected groups and parties are. Describe what interests those groups have in this problem as it relates to that particular fact.
- Once you have noted all the facts and outlined the different parties and interests, discuss the important issues that are underlying these competing interests.
- You will know if you have correctly outlined the underlying issue if:
  - The issue is relevant for more people than just John.
  - The issue should gather opinions from others about an appropriate course of action.
  - The issue should allow for disagreement on the solution.
- Now write a recommendation for John telling him who you think he should vote for.

## ENCOURAGE ACTION

## LESSON PLAN VARIATIONS

Consider inviting in a local or recently retired politician to speak about their work and life as a politician. Invite them to speak on what their experiences are as a Christian in politics.

Focus on provincial political parties instead of federal provincial parties, particularly if a provincial election is looming or recently wrapped up. You can access the following provincial election guides for context:

- 2022 Ontario election: [https://arpacanada.ca/action\\_items/2022-ontario-election-2/](https://arpacanada.ca/action_items/2022-ontario-election-2/)
- 2020 British Columbia election: <https://arpacanada.ca/2020-bc-election/>
- 2019 Alberta election: <https://arpacanada.ca/2019-alberta-election-guide/>

or

Choose another issue (other than climate change/carbon tax) as the case study on a political party or leader switching their positions on an issue.



# CONSERVATIVE CARBON TAX POLICY CHANGE

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How Conservatives came around to supporting a carbon tax — and whether it's here to stay

**O'Toole now admits the most efficient way to reduce emissions is through putting a price on carbon**

Kyle Bakx | CBC News | Aug 31, 2021 |  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/bakx-o-toole-conservatives-carbon-policy-1.6158942>

For more than a decade, federal Conservatives across the country have taken aim at carbon tax policy with great vitriol, attacking every aspect of what they saw as its hefty financial expense, to its ineptitude at actually combating climate change.

Vilifying any mention of a carbon tax was a common refrain.

Take Michelle Rempel Garner, speaking in the House of Commons in the spring of 2019: "A carbon tax does not reduce greenhouse gas emissions; it kills jobs and it is bad public policy.

It is bourgeois public policy. It is elitist public policy."

Later that year, burying the tax was a pillar of the Conservative election campaign, as then-leader Andrew Scheer vowed his first order of business, if elected, would be repealing the carbon tax.

(His climate plan had no firm reduction targets, instead focusing on tax credits and imposing strict emissions standards on heavy polluters, with penalties that would fund green research and technology.)

But now — just two years after that election — the Conservatives have pulled a 180-degree turn. Inside the Conservative platform are the words "price on carbon." If you're not familiar with the term, it's support for a carbon tax.

"I think it's an evolution for parts of our party — but there's also many parts of our party that have been pushing forward for environmental solutions of all types," said Greg McLean, the Conservative candidate running for re-election in the riding of Calgary Centre.

While the climate strategy has been heavily scrutinized and criticized by some, it also means



all the major federal parties now support some version of a carbon tax.

Although it's a milestone of sorts, it doesn't necessarily mean the issue will be any less politicized in the future. And depending on the outcome of the election, it's also not a guarantee the policy will remain in future Conservative platforms.

Still, many experts say supporting a carbon tax is a necessity for the party.

"Some members still think fighting a tax is always the right thing to do," said Ken Boessenkool, with the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University and a former senior policy adviser to Stephen Harper.

"The reality is that the Conservatives federally cannot get elected without a credible climate plan."

### **CARBON SAVINGS ACCOUNT**

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole still plans to scrap the carbon tax currently in place, replacing it with a Conservative version.

Under his plan, Canadians would pay a carbon levy, initially amounting to \$20 per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions — half the current federal rate — every time they buy hydrocarbon-based fuels, such as gasoline. The Conservatives would divert the money to personal low carbon savings accounts, which can then be tapped to help Canadians live a greener life, such as by purchasing a bicycle or a new efficient furnace.

O'Toole has also finally admitted what most experts have said for years: The most efficient way to reduce emissions is through putting a price on carbon.

For Boessenkool, the Conservatives had to change direction on this issue, because rallying against a carbon tax was no longer a point of strength, but rather a liability.

"When you have issues that you can get defeated on, you have to address them before the election starts. This is why the carbon policy came out months ago," said Boessenkool.

### **LIABILITY IN LAST ELECTION**

Former Conservative MP Lisa Raitt has admitted the reason she believes she lost her Ontario seat in the last election was because "we opposed a carbon tax."

She made the remark in March, during a virtual forum on climate change hosted by Clean Prosperity, an organization which advocates for carbon policy to tackle climate change.

Between the elections in 2008 and 2019, Raitt noticed how voter perception was changing on the issue, even while the anti-carbon tax stance became more deeply entrenched in the Conservative Party's DNA with every passing year.

"It always came back to the fact that we opposed a carbon price meant that we were opposed to the climate — and that was table stakes at each and every single door," Raitt said about campaigning in 2019. "They could not get their head around our climate plan, and it was fizzling at the doorstep."

Ultimately, the Conservatives found themselves out of step on climate policy, said Mitchell Davidson, former executive director of policy for Ontario Premier Doug Ford and current executive director with the StrategyCorp Institute of Public Policy and Economy.

"It's always tough when you take a political party that one of its main stances is lower cost of living, lower taxation — and then stand up for something that increases taxes," he said. "But we're at a point now where the crisis is too great."

If every major federal party continues to support a carbon tax, the issue could become less politicized — and the sticking points would instead be around the best way to implement the policy.

### **CARBON TAX IN PLACE — FOR NOW**

But not everyone is convinced the Conservatives will continue to support a carbon tax if O'Toole is not elected and suffers a fate worse than Scheer's vote total in 2019.

"I think a lot actually does hinge on the result of this election, in terms of the carbon tax debate. I don't think it's over yet," said Davidson.

Barinder Bhullar, the former director of policy for British Columbia Premier Christy Clark, agrees.

"I don't think the debate is settled within the Conservative Party, particularly amongst its members," he said.

"I think the elected MPs of the Conservatives understand it, and do get it, and will move on. But I think there is a faction within that party that still doesn't believe in carbon taxes and carbon pricing."

Some Conservatives insist the strategy is not, in fact, a carbon tax.

Several Conservative premiers, including Alberta's Jason Kenney and Saskatchewan's Scott Moe, continue to bash carbon tax policy, even as scientific warnings about climate change become increasingly dire and even after the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that carbon pricing is constitutional.

In his 2018 book, *Right Here, Right Now*, former prime minister Harper described carbon taxes as "wildly unpopular" and wrote "political parties, including mine, have won elections just by opposing a carbon tax."

Now, just a few years and two election cycles later, his own party has changed its tune.

# CONSERVATIVE POLICY HANDBOOK CHANGE

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## Conservative delegates reject adding 'climate change is real' to the policy book

Delegates voted down green-friendly policies by a margin of 54 per cent to 46

John Paul Tasker | CBC News | March 20, 2021 | <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-delegates-reject-climate-change-is-real-1.5957739>

Conservative delegates at the party's policy convention have voted to reject adding green-friendly statements to the policy book — including a line that would have stated the party believes "climate change is real" and is "willing to act."

The Portneuf—Jacques—Cartier riding in Quebec, which proposed the policy change, also asked delegates to recognize that "Canadian businesses classified as highly polluting need to take more responsibility" and "reduce their GHG emissions."

The policy proposal also included a call to support "innovation in green technologies" so that Canada can become "a world-class leader" in an emerging industry.

Delegates issued a rebuke to climate-minded Conservatives and rejected the policy shift by a margin of 54 per cent to 46. In fact, it was one of only four policy proposals or modifications on a list of 50 pitched by electoral riding associations (EDAs) that were voted down by the delegates.

While delegates from each of the Atlantic provinces and Quebec embraced the "climate change is real" proposal — 70 per cent of delegates from New Brunswick and Quebec were onside with it — those from every other province and the territories voted against the change.

In B.C., the "no" side had just a two-point edge, while the vote was much more lopsided in Saskatchewan (73 per cent against), the territories (69 per cent opposed), Alberta (62 per cent opposed) and Ontario (58 per cent opposed).

A double majority of delegates — a majority of delegates overall and the majority of delegates in the majority of provinces — must agree to an official policy change.

The clear rejection came hours after Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole urged party members to embrace change or risk losing again to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberals in the next election.

O'Toole said if party members are serious about winning, they must embrace new ideas — even if they go against party orthodoxy.

O'Toole told delegates the party "cannot ignore the reality of climate change" and that the debate "is over."

"We must also recognize that Canadians expect us to have a real plan for the environment. We need to boldly reclaim the environment as an area where Conservatives are leaders," he said.

O'Toole also said he doesn't want Conservative candidates to be branded as "climate change deniers" in the next election campaign.

During a question-and-answer session with delegates today, O'Toole was asked about members rejecting calls for a more forceful approach to climate action.

One delegate, Moshe Appel, said the failure to adopt the policy proposal could hurt the party's standing with voters.

O'Toole said he won't be dissuaded from addressing the problem of climate change. "Climate change is real. We will have a serious and comprehensive plan," he said.

"It's important to me as a father of young children, as a member of Parliament. Fighting climate change is important to the Conservative Party."

O'Toole did, however, vow to scrap the national carbon tax — he said it's "unfair for working families" — while promising to make "big emitters" pay.

The party's national campaign manager, Fred DeLorey, also tweeted that, despite the vote, "the debate is over and we need a real plan that works, not Trudeau's carbon tax."

While delegates rejected the "climate change is real" proposal, the "policy document already has a section on climate change," DeLorey said. "Akin to us needing to say 'water is wet.'"

(The policy book does state that "in order to have a strong economy and maintain good health, Canada must have strong, coordinated and achievable environmental policies.")

## DELEGATES ALSO REJECT MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Delegates also rejected a modification to the policy book that would have changed the party's stance on medical assistance in dying — swapping the statement that the party would not support any legislation that would "legalize euthanasia or assisted suicide" for one that says it would oppose "the extension of euthanasia and assisted suicide" to minors and people living with "psychological suffering."

By a 55-45 vote, delegates voted to keep the status quo.

This policy modification may have been rejected because delegates also voted for a similarly worded resolution that reaffirms the party "opposes euthanasia and assisted suicide" and will stand against any expansions of the current law. The federal government recently extended access to medical assistance in dying with Bill C-7.

Delegates also voted down proposals that would have scrubbed a Conservative policy position backing a national missing persons' registry.

They also voted to maintain their stance on section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

That section — which is no longer in force, having been repealed by a Conservative private member's bill in 2014 — prohibited online communications which were "likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt" on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination, such as race, national or ethnic origin, colour or religion. Complainants could bring their cases to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

This section of the act was loathed by free speech advocates, who said it went too far in policing online content.

Walied Soliman — O'Toole's fundraising director in the leadership race and chair of Norton Rose Fulbright, one of the country's largest law firms — said Saturday the party needs to grow its base and "speak to more Canadians" if it wants to win the next election. He said the membership needs to hear O'Toole's call for renewal.

Soliman said the party can only win if it recaptures crucial battleground ridings like those in the suburbs around Toronto — and O'Toole's call for a policy shift will help in that effort.

"That doesn't mean we dilute who we are — we should never do that," he said. "Our membership has to listen to Erin's speech over and over again and realize we have to grow this tent."



# COMPARING BROKERAGE AND IDEOLOGICAL POLITICAL PARTIES

	Brokerage Party	Ideological Party
<b>Examples</b>	Liberal, Conservative, NDP	Green, CHP, Marxist-Leninist
<b>Purpose</b>	To win an election and govern	To advance an ideology
<b>Size</b>	Large – diverse composition	Smaller – more united on policy
<b>Popularity</b>	Almost always form governments or form balance of power. Gain the vast majority of votes.	Generally smaller parties. They attract some support but it usually does not result in large enough numbers of votes to get seats in the House of Commons.
<b>Benefits</b>	More likely to achieve power and have influence.	More committed to the values of the membership base, uncompromising in beliefs.
<b>Drawbacks</b>	Provides little leadership because it tends to follow public opinion. Policies change quickly.	Canada’s “first-past-the-post” electoral system leaves most small ideological parties in the dust. They don’t elect MPs and therefore don’t have an opportunity to advance their agenda within government.

# COMPARING PARTY POSITIONS

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**For this task, you are required to select an issue that is important to you and conduct some research comparing where different parties stand on this issue.**

First, review the websites of three parties that had candidates run in the last election. At least one of these should be an ideological party (a party that runs based on a single issue, not a mainstream party).

Once you have an idea of what your selected parties stand for, attempt to connect (via email or telephone) with the local candidates from each of those parties who ran in the last election. Speak with them about their position and their party's position on the issue you are interested in.

Submit a 2-3 page report that outlines what you learn, included evidence of similarities and differences between the brokerage and ideological parties. This report should answer key questions like:

1. What are three key similarities and/or differences between the parties on your issue?
2. What does this reveal about the nature of the brokerage and ideological party on this issue?
3. Based solely on this issue, for which candidate would you recommend casting your vote?
4. Is this issue urgent enough that it would become a deciding factor for you in casting your vote?

# WHO SHOULD I VOTE FOR?

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## JOHN'S DILEMMA

*John has just turned 18 and in a few short weeks there will be an opportunity for him to vote in his first election. He's learned in high school that the opportunity to vote needs to be taken seriously.*

*His older sister has volunteered for a local Conservative party candidate who is a pretty nice guy. There's nothing objectionable or offensive about him - in fact, he has helped bring jobs and economic development into the riding. John has not heard anything from this candidate on moral and social issues in the past.*

*A member of the Catholic Church down the street is running in the upcoming election as a representative for the Christian Heritage Party. John knows the CHP candidate stands for a platform that has respect for biblical values but that he doesn't have much of a chance of winning.*

*John's best friend Craig has been involved in politics for a few years already and surprised everyone by being picked to be the NDP candidate in the riding too. Craig has been asking if he can help convince the rest of their friends to vote for him*

*The election results in the last election were a pretty narrow win for the Conservative candidate, and that was when there was no CHP candidate. John feels a tug to vote for the candidate that most closely aligns with his conscience. On the other hand, John feels like his vote carries a lot of weight and doesn't want it to contribute to the election of*

*a Liberal candidate if the Conservative loses by just a few votes. He also doesn't want to let down his friend Craig by not voting for him.*

*John wonders which issues he should be most concerned about. He has spoken to both the Conservative candidate and Christian Heritage Party candidate, and both assured him they are pro-life. Craig doesn't really think that abortion is much of a problem and is preoccupied by trying to get the government to allow more Christian refugees who are facing persecution in other countries to be allowed in to Canada.*

*Should the economy or euthanasia be a more important voting issue? What about same-sex marriage? That issue seems to no longer be discussed as much as it used to be, and John is wondering whether he should even bother thinking about it. Should he vote for the party name, or should he vote for the person? Will Craig still be friends with him if he know that John doesn't vote for him or like his political views? What if the candidates differ in other areas like the economy, education, and immigration policies? Are some issues more urgent than others?*

*John's friend argues that he should vote with his conscience while John feels like he has to make sure his vote is cast to ensure that he doesn't contribute to a Liberal candidate winning in a tight riding.*

*John turns to you for advice: What should I do? How should I cast my vote? Any advice on these issues?*

## WRITING TASK:

In this assignment you are presented with a fictional account where John is facing a very realistic problem. He thinks that a vote for the Christian candidate is the right thing to do, but then he thinks it might contribute to vote-splitting. He also wants to stay friends with Craig. The purpose of this assignment is to

understand the underlying issues and not necessarily come to a definitive answer on the question. Understand that this situation is complicated and can result in more than one correct answer.

Write a recommendation for John on who you recommend he vote for and why he should vote for that person. Your recommendation should be at least one page long.