

# Political Beliefs and the Federal Budget

human capital **debt** **safety net** **reform** **trade-off**  
**deficit** **GDP** **priorities** **spending** **Medicare**  
**mandatory** **budget** **Social Security** **revenue** **health care**  
**governance** **discretionary** **baby boomers** **economic growth**  
**infrastructure**

## ESSENTIAL DILEMMA

**Should political philosophy influence how we view the federal budget?**

## INTRODUCTION

Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past—let us accept our own responsibility for the future.

—John F. Kennedy, 1958 (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, n.d.)

On February 18, 1958, at a speech before the Loyola College Alumni Banquet in Baltimore, Maryland, John F. Kennedy called for citizens with different political philosophies to seek common ground and work together to guide the nation into the future. Modern-day political and economic debates are often mired in partisan gridlock, with neither Republicans nor Democrats willing to compromise on the budgetary issues of the day. The growth of political action committees, partisan think tanks, and other ideologically driven organizations has served to further entrench each party's platform. The parties' reluctance to give ground is at least predictable. Each has a vision for the nation's future that fits with its Republican (predominantly conservative) and/or Democrat (predominantly liberal) political philosophy, and those philosophies differ considerably.

To what extent do those philosophies influence our thoughts about the federal budget process? How consistent are our political views? Can they change? Should they change and, if so, when? Students are often unprepared to answer these questions. Research shows that adolescent political ideas are not well organized or aligned to a particular political philosophy in a way they are able to express (Hahn, 1996; Hess, 2009). Students have difficulty connecting their ideas to a position on a public policy or a choice for an elected public official. As a result, students are often disengaged from the political process. Yet discussion of important public policy issues requires that participants understand the basis of their own points of view and the basis of the ideas of others. In order to make an informed choice among public policy options, students must be able to monitor their own judgment and test the validity of their instinctive responses.

In this lesson, students will learn more about their own political philosophies and then look at some political organizations that seek changes in the budget or the budget process. The students will work to understand the views of these organizations, to position their own beliefs in relation to these organizations, and to locate points of compromise among the diverse opinions.

## **KEY TERMS**

The following terms and concepts are used in this lesson and appear in the online glossary:

**Budget process, Debt, Deficit, Political ideology**

## **STUDENTS WILL UNDERSTAND**

- Differing political philosophies are based on real differences of opinion about how the country should be governed.
- Different points of view about the federal budget often reflect differing political philosophies.

## **STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO**

- Examine sources for information and interpretations, and for cases where they corroborate, complement, or contradict each other.

## **RELATED CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

### **Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative<sup>1</sup>**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1.** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6.** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

1. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. *Common Core State Standards*. Washington, DC. Copyright 2010.

### The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards<sup>2</sup>

**D2.Civ.10.9-12.** Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

**D2.Civ.13.9-12.** Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences

### NCSS's National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies<sup>3</sup>

**6. Power, Authority, and Governance.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

### Council for Economic Education's Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics<sup>4</sup>

**Content Standard 16: Role of Government and Market Failure.** There is an economic role for government in a market economy whenever the benefits of a government policy outweigh its costs. Governments often provide for national defense, address environmental concerns, define and protect property rights, and attempt to make markets more competitive. Most government policies also have direct or indirect effects on people's incomes.

### Center for Civic Education's National Standards for Civics and Government<sup>5</sup>

**II.D. What Are the Foundations of the American Political System?** What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

**III.B. How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?** How is the national government organized and what does it do?

## LIST OF LESSON RESOURCES

The following resources are used in this lesson and can be downloaded online:

1. Cartoon: "Dance of Democracy"
2. Philosophically Driven Organizations
3. Graphic Organizer

2. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History*. Silver Spring, MD. Copyright 2013.

3. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. Silver Spring, MD. Copyright 2010.

4. Council for Economic Education. *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*. New York, NY. Copyright 2010.

5. Directed by the Center for Civic Education. *National Standards for Civics and Government*. Copyright 1994, Center for Civic Education.

DAY 1 of 2

ENTRY

Begin by presenting students with the cartoon “Dance of Democracy” (**Resource 1**) and asking them to consider its meaning. After students have studied the cartoon for several minutes, ask what they notice, drawing them out on the detail of what they see. If students jump to an interpretation of the cartoon, ask them for the basis of the interpretation and ask other students if they agree or disagree.

If students are having difficulty getting into the cartoon, ask them more directed questions, such as:

- ▶ Who do the elephant and the donkey represent?

*[The elephant represents the Republican Party, and the donkey represents the Democratic Party.]*

- ▶ Who are the onlookers? What can we make of their comments?

*[The female describes the action as “The Dance of Democracy!,” but the male disagrees. He appears to be dressed as a professional wrestler, and his comment indicates that he believes that the “dancers” are actually fighting. Note: Teachers may need to explain to students that Fred Astaire was a famous dancer.]*



See Resource 1 online

- ▶ What point is this artist making about the political parties in the United States?

*[Students’ answers will vary, but should indicate that part of the “dance of democracy” is the struggle between groups with different political ideologies.]*

Ask students if they believe the public would generally agree or disagree with the artist’s opinion, and support the range of points of view students express.

LESSON STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Self-Identification of Political Ideology

Begin the lesson by asking students for their general understanding of what it means to be politically conservative or liberal, a Republican or a Democrat. Consider asking them to identify politicians or candidates, the party they represent, and some of the beliefs they espouse. Compile students’ ideas on the board, being careful to explain that not everyone in a political party shares the same beliefs; rather, the party ideology represents a general vision of the role government should play in the lives of its citizens.

If students need additional information, provide them with the following working definitions of each party:

- *Republican Party:* Republicans tend to be politically conservative and believe, “We are the party of maximum economic freedom and the prosperity freedom makes possible. Prosperity is the product of self-discipline, work, savings, and investment by individual Americans, but it is not

an end in itself. Prosperity provides the means by which individuals and families can maintain their independence from government, raise their children by their own values, practice their faith, and build communities of self-reliant neighbors.” Read more at <https://www.gop.com/platform/>.

- *Democratic Party*: Democrats tend to be politically liberal and believe, “. . . wealth and status should not be an entitlement to rule. Democrats recognize that our country and our economy are strongest when they provide opportunity for all Americans—when we grow our country from the bottom up.” Read more at <http://www.democrats.org/about/our-party>.

### Pew Survey of Political Beliefs

This portion of the lesson must be done by students online.

Inform students that they will take a survey to determine how their political beliefs align with conservative and liberal ideologies. The survey they will be taking was originally administered in 2005 by the Pew Research Center and covers a cross-section of economic, social, and political issues. Explain to students that although the Pew Research Center is a trusted source, its survey is included in this lesson as a reflective tool, not as a way of making a definitive analysis of students’ thinking. Students should use the results of the survey as a starting point for thinking about how their views on specific issues align with like-minded individuals and which of their own views do not fall into that pattern.

Direct students to the Pew survey at <http://www.people-press.org/typology/quiz/>.

Before students begin the survey, ask them to answer the questions thoughtfully and carefully, and explain that their answers to the questions are anonymous. Once the survey is completed, the website codes the results and generates a placement along the political “typology” spectrum according to students’ survey responses.

The survey should take 10 minutes. As a reflective device, ask students to pair up with partners to assess the validity of this survey. Pose the following questions for students’ discussion:

- ▶ Do your Pew survey results match up with how you think about your ideas?
- ▶ Which questions did you have difficulty answering, and why?
- ▶ Based on your own results, do you think this survey is a good way of finding out more about how you think?
- ▶ Did the survey cause you to think differently about your political philosophy or about any of the topics included?

In preparation for tomorrow’s lesson, on the results page, ask students to review how their answers compare to the responses of others on Pew’s national survey, especially in the areas of “Government Performance,” “Social Safety Net,” and “Personal Efficacy.” Specifically, instruct the students to compare their results with other groups in relation to the importance of the federal budget, deficit, and debt. Ask students if they have an opinion about the federal budget deficit and to hypothesize as to which ideological groups might consider the deficit and debt a higher priority and why, based on their responses to the questions in these categories.

## DAY 2 of 2

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### Analysis of Budget Groups

Divide students into groups of two or three students each and ask them to explore organizations that are active in the federal fiscal policy debate. Assign each group one of the four organizations listed in **Resource 2**. (Each organization may be assigned to more than one student group.)

Begin by providing students with the organizations' core missions and asking students if they seem to align with conservative or liberal ideologies from the Pew survey they took in the previous exercise. As a class, discuss the mission of each organization and solicit students' hypotheses about each group's political ideology.

Distribute the graphic organizer (**Resource 3**) and instruct students to explore their assigned organization's website in order to determine its opinions about federal budget policy. When the students understand the organization's position on two or three different issues, they should seek to place this organization on the political typology spectrum, based on what they learned from the Pew survey. If time allows, students could retake the Pew survey from the perspective of the organization they were assigned. Students should then determine whether their initial hypothesis about the organization was correct, providing evidence to support their response. They should also note whether their own political beliefs align with those of the organization they researched.

At the conclusion of their research, reassign students to different groups so they can work with students who looked at different organizations. Instruct them to compare the opinions, perspectives, and ideologies of the different organizations they studied, looking for possible points of compromise or agreement among the groups.

### CLOSURE


Lead the class in a discussion guided by the question: Does political philosophy shape advocacy in the area of budget reform? Ask students to share the results of their research with the rest of class, focusing on the way the organizations' political ideologies are represented in their views about federal budgetary policy.

Conclude the class by assigning students a 250-word essay addressing the essential dilemma: Should political philosophy influence how we view the federal budget? Encourage students to consider the ways in which a clearly articulated political philosophy could, on one hand, provide context and grounding to a difficult issue, but on the other hand could narrow one's point of view and mask legitimate alternatives.

### FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

To go into greater depth with each organization, students could analyze a budgetary public policy issue from the perspective of each group. Teachers could choose a relevant issue (health care, entitlements, defense spending, etc.) and ask students to determine—or predict based on evidence of the organization's political philosophies—how the organization would respond to increased spending in this area. Students could then compare the organizations' "responses" and look for areas of potential compromise among the groups.

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**Resource 1**

**Cartoon: "Dance of Democracy"**

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by Pat Bagley, politicalcartoons.com



**Resource 2 (1 of 2)****Philosophically Driven Organizations**

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**Cato Institute**

In 1776 the Founding Fathers declared that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were inalienable rights. By creating an island of political institutions set within a vast sea of civil society, those men envisioned a federal republic guarded by a central government of strictly limited authorities. In time they wrote a Constitution that guarantees those limits and secures our freedoms. Yet, for more than two centuries, those constitutional restraints have continuously been eroded.

Last January the Pew Research Center found that, for the first time, a majority of Americans said that the federal government threatens their personal rights. As the year progressed, those fears were reinforced. From the hemorrhaging state of Obamacare and the politicization of the IRS to the government's expansive surveillance machinery and overextended global military posture, Americans continued to question the country's trajectory. Amid public disenchantment, there is an emerging consensus that the government has grown beyond its competence.

At the Cato Institute, we stand firmly on the bedrock American values of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace. Guided by the light cast from the nation's first principles, our scholars are dedicated to countering the burdens of government growth by standing outside of partisan boundaries. The American Revolution set the stage for extending the benefits of liberty to all. Today, we aim to restore that heritage.

**Source:** Cato Institute. (2014). 2013 annual report. Retrieved from <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/annual-report-2013.pdf>

**United for a Fair Economy**

We need nothing less than a diverse, powerful social movement dedicated to advancing meaningful policy solutions on many fronts to reduce the racial divide. Foreclosure relief, federal aid to states and targeted job creation programs are needed to both combat the current economic slump and to reduce racial economic disparities. Longer-term strategies including wealth-building programs, increasing taxes on the rich, strengthening safety net programs, ending the war on drugs, and humane immigration reform are needed in order to substantially reduce racial inequality.

It is a moral and economic imperative that we address the racial economic divide now. If we are to chart a path to a more promising future, one in which the racial economic divide is significantly narrowed and prosperity is more broadly shared, then we must take immediate action to ensure that the coming majority is not further burdened by the legacy of racism and White supremacy in the United States.

**Source:** Sullivan, T., Wanjiku, M., Miller, B., Muhammad, D., & Harris, C. (2012). State of the dream 2012: The emerging minority. Retrieved from [http://faireconomy.org/sites/default/files/State\\_of\\_the\\_Dream\\_2012.pdf](http://faireconomy.org/sites/default/files/State_of_the_Dream_2012.pdf)

**Resource 2 (2 of 2)****Philosophically Driven Organizations**

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**Tea Party Patriots**

The current U.S. national debt is over \$18 trillion, which means that every single American citizen's share of the national debt is more than \$56,000. This year the federal government will borrow 40 cents of every dollar it spends. The yearly budget deficit now exceeds \$1 trillion while the national debt exceeds \$18 trillion. Washington has not meaningfully reduced spending, regardless of which political party has been in control. Instead, Washington's answer to these problems has been to simply ignore them by taking more of your money through taxation, raising the debt ceiling, and printing more money—instead of cutting back on the runaway spending and reducing the size of the government. This current path is unsustainable and must be reversed with policies that help us repair the damage and create a debt free future so that our children and grandchildren see greater opportunities ahead.

The solution is getting Washington's spending under control. A simple solution to move toward a debt free future is the Penny Plan. Cutting federal spending by just 1 percent every year for the next ten years will cut more than \$4.5 trillion from the debt. This means cutting just 1 penny out of every dollar the government spends each year. Requiring the government to spend one percent less next year than it does this year is a good way to get control of federal spending and finally begin reducing the debt. Ultimately, we need to make these changes permanent. To do that we must pass and ratify a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution which forces spending cuts if Congress fails to maintain a balanced budget once it is achieved.

**Source:** Tea Party Patriots. (2016). Debt-free future. Retrieved from <http://www.teapartypatriots.org/ourvision/debt-free-future/>

**Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**

We apply our extensive understanding of budgets, taxes, low-income programs, and social insurance programs—along with our analytic skills and the keen strategic sense for which we are known—to inform and shape debates, influence outcomes, and achieve concrete results.

Federal and state fiscal issues: We analyze budget proposals, focusing especially on programs for low- and moderate-income families. We also examine long-term budget challenges and promote measures to improve fiscal responsibility in an equitable way. We analyze major tax proposals, examining their likely impact on the economy, on the nation's fiscal health, and on the government's ability to address critical national needs, especially over the long term. We also examine the impact of tax proposals on households at different income levels.

**Source:** Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2016). About the Center: Mission & History. Retrieved from <http://www.cbpp.org/about/mission-history>

**Resource 3 (1 of 2)**

**Graphic Organizer**

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<b>Organization Name</b>	
<b>Organization Mission</b>	
<b>Your Hypothesis of the Organization's Ideology</b>	<b>Explanation of Hypothesis</b>
<b>Research from the Organization's Website</b>	
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Belief</b>

