Chapter Activities

# Chapter 12: Politics and Economics: Penetrating Power and Privilege

## Debating Capitalism Versus Socialism

**Objective:** This exercise provides a fun way for students to learn about capitalism and socialism.

**Directions:** Break the class into a capitalism side versus a socialism side at least one week before the debate and have students bring with them arguments to provide for their assigned side. Have a formal class debate on the virtues of capitalism versus the virtues of socialism, inviting three students on each side to present their best arguments in favor of their preferred system. Allow time for rebuttal and counterrebuttal, as well as for questions from audience members directed toward the debate participants. Afterward, have the class decide which side made the more convincing argument. Second, regardless of which side made the more convincing argument, ask students which economic system they would prefer to live under: capitalism or socialism.

## Views to Candidates

**Objective:** This activity allows students to connect their opinions on social issues to the candidates that share these views.

**Directions:** Tell students to go to VoteSmart.org and take the issue quizzes to match candidates. **Note:** Depending on the year this may be available for congressional candidates or presidential candidates. They can do this in class if they have computers or take the quiz before class and bring in the results to discuss.

After students take the quiz have them answer the following questions:

* Did the candidate you ended up with match who you expected to match with?
* What was the percentage of match?
* What three issues are most important to you? (You do not have to share your opinion—just what issues are important).
* Did the candidate you expected to match with share your views on these issues? How or how not?

## Do Your Leaders Have Power Over You?

**Objective:** This activity connects students to Weber’s forms of legitimate power by giving them personal and easy to remember examples of the concept.

**Directions:** Ask your students to list five entities they are a part of at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Then ask them to list and describe the leader in charge of that group. Have them list if they believe that leader is traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal. The instructor can either put students in small groups or lead a classroom discussion that explores leadership. Have students discuss what trends they observed, where the different types of leaders seem to be concentrated, and whether leaders can share types of authority.

## Participation of Your Peers

**Objective:** This activity allows students to investigate ways they can be politically active. It also lets them see the variation in activity among their peers and colleagues.

**Directions:** Give students 20 minutes to briefly interview their classmates on how politically active they are (or the instructor could take students to a high-traffic space on campus to complete this activity). Make sure students ask for multiple dimensions of activity (voting, volunteering, learning about issues, discussing politics with family or friends, protesting, campaigning, donating, etc.) and at various levels (national, school, community, etc.). Then, either in groups or individually, ask students to provide a 3- to 5-minute presentation about how involved their peers are. Lead a discussion highlighting the range of activity your students discovered and see how they explain it. Did they find students who felt alienated by or apathetic toward the political process? Are they convinced, given the amount of inactivity they found (if any), that our democracy is healthy? What activities and actions are most popular among youth they sampled? Why do they think this is? All these questions can lead you to a discussion about the state of democracy in the United States.

## What Would Your Government Look Like?

**Objective:** This activity will give students insight on just how difficult it is to run and maintain a government. It will also allow them to see what purposes political institutions serve. It will also provide them with information that will help them create or reassess their vision of Utopia.

**Note to Instructors:** It is highly recommended that instructors use the NationStates online game developed by Max Berry online at <http://www.nationstates.net/>. If the instructor does not use the NationStates game, they will need to come up with taxonomy of questions to determine students’ governments. Not all the suggested directions will be possible without using the NationStates game.

**Directions:** Have each student log on to the NationStates website at <http://www.nationstates.net/> and create a nation. The game will ask students to answer a series of questions about their politics, and then the game will create a nation-state for them. After the nation is created, the students will need to log on once daily to answer a question about a potential policy change or issue that arose in their nation-state and read the update about how their nation is developing. Instructors can either have a lab time designated for students to create their nation or they can require the students create their nation as an out-of-class activity. Instructors will have to allow some time to pass for the activity. The best way to conduct the activity seems to be to have the students construct their nation when the Politics chapter is covered, having a discussion in class about the various types of nations that were created and how students felt about how the game summarized their ideology. Then instructors can either revisit the activity weekly to get updates on how the game is progressing, have students keep a journal of their nation’s development, or revisit the activity when you cover Chapter 15 to discuss politics and social change.

## Researching Regimes

**Objective:** This activity encourages students to learn about the diversity of political systems in the world. It will also help provide a base for instructors to discuss variations in political systems.

**Directions:** Based on the number of students in your class, either assign each student to a small group or allow students to do the activity independently. Assign the group or student a nation. When you are selecting the nations, make sure to select a diverse range of government types. For a list of nations with current political type, instructors can visit the CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2128.html>. Have students research their nation’s government and classify it. Also have them see how the government serves the six functions of meso-level political institutions discussed in the text. Have the students get into groups when their research is completed to discuss the various forms of government they found in the world. Instructors can also use this activity to construct an “ideal-type” government through students’ research and perceptions of what they found.

## Parties: How Real Is the Divide?

**Objective:** This activity requires students to learn about political parties in the United States. It should also get students questioning similarities and differences among the parties.

**Directions:** Have your students research the mainstream political parties in the United States. You may also want to include the three predominant independent parties (the Constitution Party, the Libertarian Party, and the Green Party). Have students research the variations in the parties’ views along the following lines:

1. Government intervention in the economy
2. Taxation
3. Immigration
4. Abortion
5. Access to marriage and family rights
6. Defense
7. Homeland security
8. Education
9. Religion
10. Environmental concerns
11. Foreign policy
12. Health care
13. Poverty

The instructor could also do this research and provide students with a summarized factsheet to have a less time-consuming activity. After the research is collected, have a discussion about the differences among the parties. Were the parties more or less similar than the students expected?

**Note to Instructors:** An interesting addition to this activity would be to incorporate news clips or campaign ads discussing the differences among the parties (although this is likely only possible for a Republican-versus-Democrat comparison). Have students discuss whether they believe that the framing of the differences in the ads is representative of the actual differences.

## Working to Avoid War?

**Objective:** This activity gets students to explore the role of diplomacy in conflict resolution at the macro level.

**Directions:** Either compile a quick factsheet or ask students to research the ongoing conflicts in the world. (For a quick reference, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ongoing_conflicts>). Have students (or in the factsheet) pay particular attention to what diplomatic efforts were pursued both before and since the conflict arose. Have students discuss, either in small groups or as a class, whether they believe the parties were working to avoid war or are currently working to avoid it. This can lead to a larger discussion about diplomacy and conflict in the global system.

## Women in Politics

**Objective**: This activity will allow students to learn about the underrepresentation of women in government in the United States.

**Directions:** Review the current state of women in office in the United States by presenting the facts from the Center for American Women in Politics at <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers> Have students break up into groups and discuss the results. This works best if the groups are mixed sex. Ask students to discuss as a group the following issues: Are you surprised about the current numbers? What does this mean for women? Why do not more women run for political office? Do you think this will change going forward given the 2016 presidential election? Are there any differences of opinion based on sec in your group?