

Being "political" and "thinking politically" are part of everyday life. When you try to influence decisions or change someone's mind, you are being political. Politicians and government officials think politically to decide how best to govern. As a citizen, you can use political thinking to help you make sense of the world and get important things done. Use the political thinking questions above to help you think critically about issues that matter.

BIG IDEA

You are political

FOCUS: What is politics?

Have you ever organized your friends to get something done, or given someone permission to make a decision for you? Have you ever influenced a decision so that it worked in your favour? These activities all involve politics. When most people think of politics, they think of politicians, elections, and governments. But more broadly, **politics** is about how groups of people—large and small—make decisions about how to live together and govern themselves.

If everyone's interests were the same or resources were unlimited, politics wouldn't be needed. But since that is not the case, we need to manage competing interests and scarce resources. Politics is how we do that.

Civics is a branch of politics that focuses on the role of citizens and governments, and how citizens can get involved in the political process and take action on important issues.

"Politics is who gets what, when, and how."

Harold Lasswell

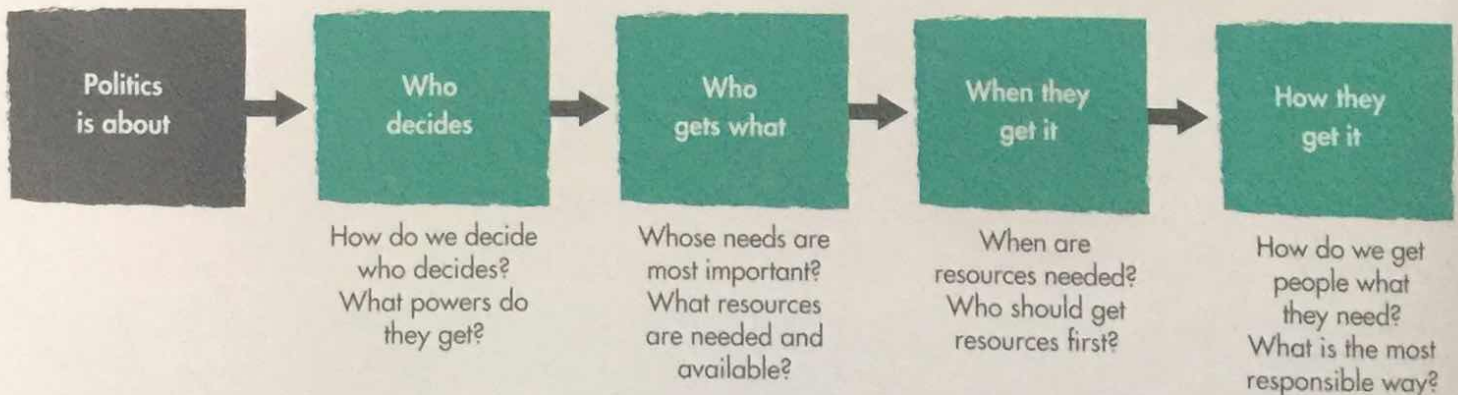
"Everything you do is political."

Nándor Tanczos

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

Haudenosaunee Teaching

▼ **SOURCE 1:** Politics helps answer the most fundamental questions about how we live together and govern ourselves, whether in small groups, communities, provinces, territories, or countries. How are these questions answered in a group to which you belong?



Politics and political power

In order to govern anything, you need to have political power. Political power is about the ability to affect the behaviour of others to do something they might not otherwise do. There are basically two sources of political power.

Influence is the power to change other people's thinking or actions through argument, example, or force of personality. Influencing people means they act voluntarily because they are persuaded that they need to or should.

Authority is official power given to some to act on behalf of others. The power of authority often includes the power to enforce and punish through rules and laws. Exercising authority means people act because they know they must, not necessarily because they want to.

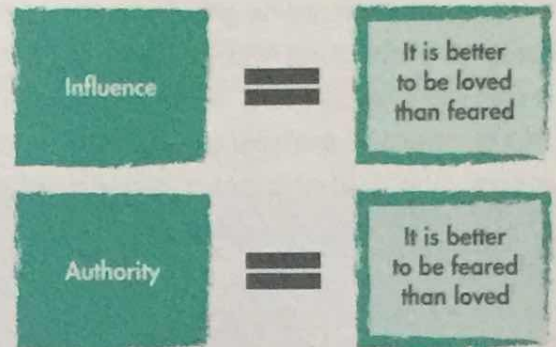
Political power—good or bad?

Political power itself is neither good nor bad—it is how and why it is used that matters. Political power can be used to create **compromise** that balances many different interests and ideas. Political power can also be **partisan** and be used to promote the interests of some at the expense of others. Compromise and partisanship both have advantages and disadvantages. Knowing which approach to take is part of the exercise of political power.

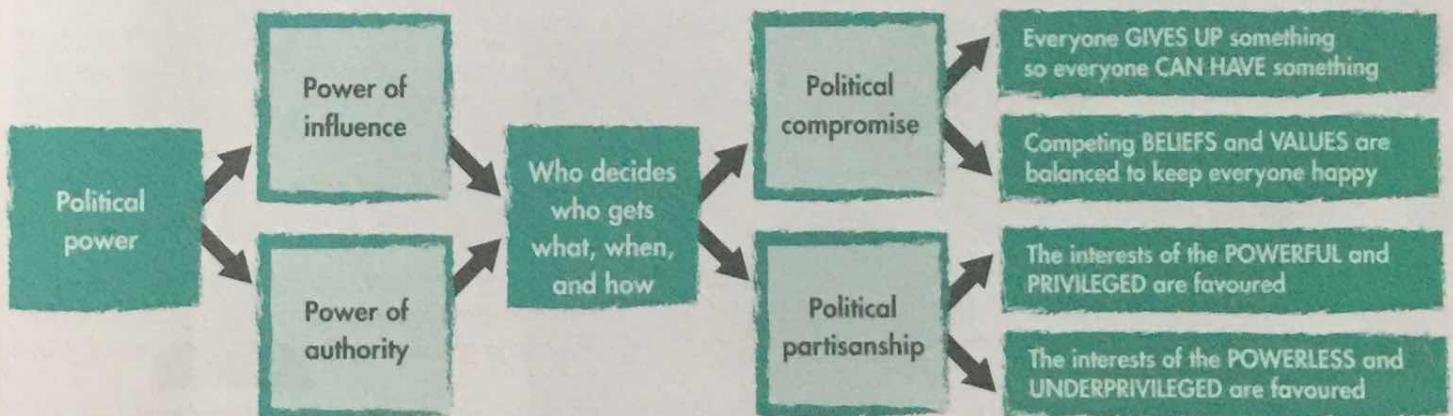
▼ **SOURCE 4:** Political decisions can be made in the interest of some or many. Why might the outcomes of these decisions be seen as positive or negative, depending on one's political perspective?



SOURCE 2: Politicians use the power of influence to convince citizens to vote for them. If elected, they are given the power of authority to pass laws and run the government. How do signs like these influence voters?



▲ **SOURCE 3:** Is it more effective to govern people's behaviour when they love you or when they fear you? What role does respect play? Is authority always necessarily about fear?



Q1 What would happen if we lived in a world without politics?

Q2 Is using political power to balance the interests of many always better than favouring the interests of some?

Q3 In your life, who has the power to influence you or the authority to tell you what to think and do?