

THINKING CONCEPT

Political significance

FOCUS: What is most important?

How do you decide whether some concerns are more important than others? How can citizens know when action is necessary? How do governments decide which issues to address? The concept of **political significance** can be a useful tool in understanding why governments formulate laws and policies, and why citizens hold certain points of view or take action. It can also help us measure the consequences of actions and decisions.

Using decision criteria is one way to help analyze the political significance of an issue, policy, or event. You may want to consider all of the criteria given below, or you may decide that some are more important to you than others. You may also have other criteria to add.



SOURCE 2: Supporters and opponents strongly disagree about whether same-sex marriage should be legal. However, both would likely agree that the legalization of same-sex marriage is politically significant.

Sample criteria for evaluating political significance	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
Is the impact long lasting?				
Is the impact extreme — positively or negatively?				
Are many people affected — positively or negatively?				
Does it directly affect you, your family, friends, and/or community?				
Are many people for and/or against it?				
Are the differences between supporters and opponents great?				
Is it an ethical issue involving right and wrong?				

▲ **SOURCE 1:** The more you can answer “Definitely,” the more confident you can be that an issue or action is politically significant. If one criterion is more important to you than the others, you may still feel that action is required based on that criterion alone. Choose an issue and assess its significance.

The power of political significance

What is significant to some may be of little or no importance to others. Different conclusions about significance can result from different political perspectives, beliefs, and values. These differences may be important because if one group, value system, or community has more political power than others, they can influence political action in favour of what matters most to them.

Every day, on a variety of issues such as the ones below, governments, politicians, communities, and individual citizens make decisions and take action based on their assessment of what is politically significant.



HEALTH CARE

While many in Canada debate how best to manage health care, few citizens or politicians disagree about its significance to all Canadians today and in the future.



FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit have long argued that their basic human rights, treaty rights, and cultural aspirations have been considered insignificant by Canadian governments.



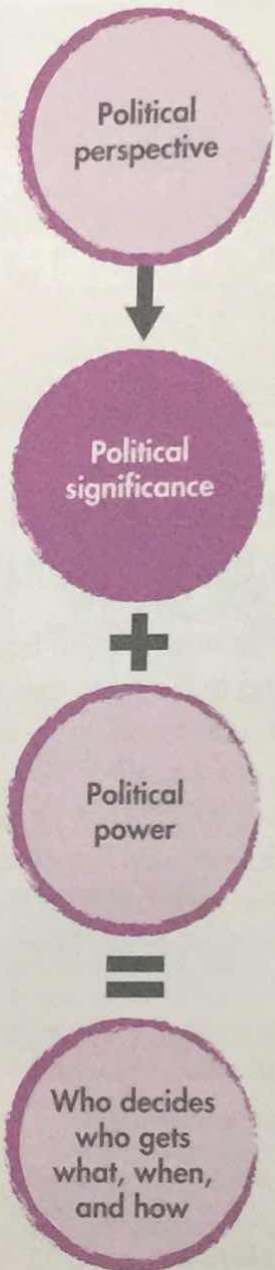
QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE

For many years, Canadians may not have considered the cultural and political aspirations of Quebecers to be significant. However, the election of the separatist Parti Québécois in 1976 changed that.



CLIMATE CHANGE

It is becoming clear that climate change cannot be denied, but is it a significant issue for all governments, businesses, and individuals—enough for them to take action?



▲ **SOURCE 3:** Your political perspective affects your conclusions about political significance. Those with political power can influence whose view of significance is regarded as most important. Is that fair?

Q1 Which of the above issues do you think is the most politically significant for Canada? Explain your answer.

Q2 If you are healthy or ill, well-off or facing poverty, employed or unemployed, male or female, young or elderly, how might your perspective on significance change?

Q3 For you personally, which issue is the most politically significant and why?