

Youth DemocRAID: Education, Debate, Action

WORKSHOP

“Youth and Civic Engagement”

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Disclaimer on Ethical Standards

Welcome, everyone, to this workshop. Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to highlight some important values and ethical standards that will guide our discussions and activities. These principles are not only central to this workshop but also reflect the core values of the European Union under the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values (CERV) program.

- **Respect for Human Dignity:** Everyone deserves respect. All voices and perspectives are welcome, and we'll listen with open minds.
- **Equality:** Every person is valued equally, regardless of gender, race, religion, or background. Discrimination won't be tolerated.
- **Gender Equality:** All genders are treated equally, ensuring equal opportunities to contribute and participate.
- **Non-Discrimination & Anti-Racism:** We embrace diversity and stand against racism and discrimination. Let's challenge any biased behavior.
- **Freedom of Expression:** Share your ideas freely, but always with respect for others' dignity and rights.
- **Tolerance & Understanding:** Our differences are strengths. We'll focus on dialogue based on mutual understanding.
- **Participation & Inclusion:** Every voice matters, especially those that are often marginalized. Let's ensure everyone feels heard.
- **Solidarity & Cooperation:** Let's support and collaborate with each other to find solutions that benefit all.
- Our **Child Protection Policy** aims to protect children and young people from harm, exploitation, negligence, and violence in all activities organized by our organization, while ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for everyone involved.

By upholding these values, we'll foster a positive, respectful, and productive environment. Thank you, and I look forward to our session!

Introduction to the CERV program

The Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values (CERV) program is an important initiative by the European Union aimed at protecting and promoting the fundamental rights and values laid out in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The program supports civil society organizations working at local, regional, national, and transnational levels. Its goal is to help build open, inclusive, and rights-based societies founded on democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

The CERV program strengthens civil society by providing financial and strategic support to various projects. These projects focus on promoting social inclusion, fighting discrimination, and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, such as minorities and migrants. It also addresses issues like racism and xenophobia, encouraging respect for diversity across Europe.

A key part of the program is promoting democratic engagement and encouraging citizens to participate in decision-making processes. By fostering dialogue between civil society and government, the CERV program aims to make sure people's voices are heard in shaping the future of Europe.

Additionally, it works to preserve Europe's shared history and cultural heritage, which strengthens the sense of unity among European citizens. It supports initiatives that celebrate common values while recognizing the richness of Europe's diverse cultures.

Overall, the CERV program plays a vital role in creating a more inclusive and fair European society. By empowering civil society and promoting civic participation, the program helps ensure that equality, democracy, and human rights remain central to life in the European Union.

Presentation of Youth DemocrAID

In today's rapidly evolving world, the importance of engaged and informed citizens cannot be overstated. Active participation in democratic processes, from voting to community involvement, is fundamental to the health and vitality of any democracy. However, recent research and surveys have highlighted a concerning trend: a significant decline in political participation among young people, particularly those aged 15-25, across various countries in Europe and beyond. Low voter turnout, disengagement from institutional politics, and a lack of civic awareness have become pressing issues.

“Youth DemocrAID” is a project created in the framework of Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme). Its main focus is on aiding and supporting democracy, particularly as it pertains to youth involvement, since they represent the emerging generation of citizens whose active engagement is essential for strengthening democracy and shaping a more inclusive and united European Union.

Youth DemocrAID seeks to prepare engaging learning materials with the use of non-formal education methods, provide workshops specifically tailored for young people and connect them with their peers from partner countries by organizing an international youth forum.

The actions are focused mainly on young people 15-25 years old, allowing them to confront their peers from 5 participating European Countries (IT, PL, SK, PT, GR) during a cycle of local workshops and debates led in each country.

Theoretical Introduction: Youth and Civic Engagement

At Youth for Equality, we have identified a pressing need to improve civic education and foster a stronger engagement with political and civil society among young people in Slovakia. Unfortunately, current educational methods do not adequately prepare or encourage young people to engage actively in civil life or political processes. Civic education, where it exists, often lacks the interactive, engaging approach necessary to captivate and inspire students, leaving them underprepared and disconnected from these crucial aspects of society.

Moreover, many young people feel that their voices and concerns are not valued in decision-making processes, which creates a sense of detachment and discouragement. They may perceive politics and civil engagement as complex, distant, or even untrustworthy, often because these subjects are presented as abstract, rather than directly relevant to their lives. Additionally, a lack of hands-on experience and exposure to real-life civic activities in schools means that many young people do not see a clear path to becoming active citizens, let alone feel the urgency to do so. This disconnection from civic life, compounded by limited access to educational resources that emphasize active participation, results in a general lack of motivation and understanding about how they can contribute meaningfully to their communities and society at large.

Our mission is to bridge this gap through dynamic, non-formal educational approaches. We aim to encourage young people to take an active role in civic matters, understanding that participation in both local and international politics is vital for a thriving and representative society. We believe that teaching the significance of civic involvement early on—whether through participation in student bodies like student councils or university boards—helps young people realize their potential to influence positive change within their communities.

Participation in student bodies, such as student councils or university boards, offers students a voice in shaping their educational experience and advocating for the needs of their peers. These organizations represent the student body, with members often elected by their classmates to serve as their voice on important issues. Typically, any student who meets basic eligibility criteria, such as academic standing or length of enrollment, can run for a position, though specific requirements vary by institution. Student councils and boards address a wide range of topics, from academic policies and campus facilities to social issues, inclusion efforts, and student wellness programs. By working closely with faculty, administration, and sometimes local government, student representatives can bring changes, such as adjustments to campus policies, improvements in facilities, new student services, or funding allocations for student projects. These bodies serve as a platform for meaningful change and also provide members with valuable experience in leadership, teamwork, and civic engagement.

When young people experience firsthand the impact of their voices and actions, they begin to recognize their capacity to drive meaningful change. Student councils, for example, are more

than platforms for organizing school events or representing student interests; they are a training ground for critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. These opportunities enable young people to learn how decisions are made, how compromises are reached, and how to advocate effectively on behalf of others. Similarly, involvement in university boards introduces young adults to larger institutional systems, where they can gain insights into complex decision-making processes, governance structures, and resource management.

This early experience with civic participation instills a sense of agency and responsibility that extends beyond academic settings. When young people are actively engaged in shaping their environments, they begin to see themselves as stakeholders in their communities, with the ability to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development. This early foundation helps to build future citizens who are more likely to participate in broader civil society, whether by voting, advocating for community initiatives, or even pursuing roles in local or national governance.

In fostering these skills and values, we aim to equip young people with the tools they need to understand the structures that govern their lives, envision and realize the positive impact they can have within these structures. We believe that instilling the importance of civic involvement early on can transform how young people see themselves and their communities, cultivating a generation that is both empowered and committed to building a more inclusive and engaged society.

In addition to local civic engagement, many young people lack foundational knowledge about political systems beyond their borders, particularly regarding institutions like the European Council and European Parliament. We see this as an opportunity to introduce youth to these governing bodies, explaining their roles and their relevance to everyday life. By demystifying these institutions, we hope to foster a generation that feels empowered and informed about the impact of their voice on both a local and global scale.

Youth for Equality is committed to creating an environment where young people understand the structures of political systems and recognize the importance of their voice and action within them. Through civic education we can inspire a generation that will actively shape the world around them and contribute to a more inclusive and engaged society.

Online articles related to the topic:

- <https://www.mladireporter.sk/manual21/obcianska-participacia/obcianska-participacia-pojmy-zdroje>
- <https://ipao.sk/zivot-v-ipao/nezaujeme-mladych-o-veci-verejne/>
- https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/civic-education-and-youth-participation_en
- <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/blog/citizen-z-strengthening-participation-young-citizens-democratic-and-civic-life>
- [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL_STU\(2023\)745820_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL_STU(2023)745820_EN.pdf)

Agenda

2 hours proposal

| | |
|--------|--|
| 10 min | I. Introduction - Ethical Standards and European Values, Introduction to the CERV program, presentation of the project |
| 10 min | II. Theoretical Introduction: Youth and Civic Engagement |
| 15 min | III. Icebreaker |
| 45 min | IV. Non formal activity: My first political party |
| 30 min | VI. Debate |
| 10 min | VIII. Conclusions, Feedback and thanks |

4 hours proposal

| | |
|--------|--|
| 10 min | I. Introduction - Ethical Standards and European Values, Introduction to the CERV program, presentation of the project |
| 25 min | II. Theoretical Introduction: Youth and Civic Engagement |
| 20 min | III. Icebreaker |
| 50 min | IV. Activity 1: My first political party |
| 15 min | V. Coffee Break |
| 50 min | VI. Activity 2: Political compass |
| 15 min | VI. Coffee Break |
| 40 min | VII. Debate |
| 15 min | VIII. Conclusions, Feedback and thanks |

Ice breaker: Counting done easy

In this icebreaker activity, we will divide the group into pairs and assign them the task of counting sequentially to five, with each participant taking turns to say the next number. The pairs will repeat this counting exercise until they find a rhythm together. Once the pairs are comfortably synchronized, we will introduce a challenge by replacing the spoken number "2" with a clap. Each time a participant reaches "2," they will clap rather than say the number, continuing this pattern until they are once again fully synchronized.

As pairs achieve rhythm with this adjustment, we will gradually introduce additional actions to replace the numbers. For "3," participants will spin in place; for "4," they will jump; for "1," they will squat; and finally, for "5," they will whistle. Each new instruction will be introduced sequentially, allowing time for the participants to practice and synchronize with each change.

This icebreaker is an energizing activity designed to awaken participants, sharpen their focus, and engage their coordination skills in a fun and interactive way.

Activity 1: My first political party

In this 45-minute workshop, participants will gain an understanding of the fundamentals of political party formation and the importance of articulating clear values and policies. By engaging in a hands-on, collaborative process to design and present their own political party, students will experience the thought process involved in representing diverse interests and developing a coherent political vision. The workshop will culminate in each group presenting their party to the rest of the participants, simulating the process of conveying their ideas to a broader audience.

Preparation

Explain that political parties are groups of individuals who come together to represent specific values, beliefs, and policies, with the goal of improving their communities and countries. Highlight that while each party may have its unique perspective, they all share the goal of making a positive impact. Today, the participants will be putting themselves in the shoes of political leaders by forming their own political parties.

Introduce the task by telling the students they'll have 30 minutes to create a political party with a unique name, clear core values, and at least three key policy proposals. Each group will also need to prepare a short, two-minute presentation to introduce their party to the rest of the class. To keep the session lively and engaging, mention that they should think creatively and consider real-world issues that matter to young people.

Creating the Party

Divide the students into small groups of four to five, and assign each group a table with markers, paper, and a timer. Explain that their first task is to brainstorm and agree on three elements of their party: its name, core values, and main policies (see Annex 1). Encourage them to think about issues that they find important in their own lives, such as education, the environment, technology, health, youth employment or their local surroundings.

Each group begins by discussing a name for their political party. Emphasize that the name should reflect the essence of their values or mission, and it should be something that feels meaningful and memorable. If they need inspiration, suggest considering words associated with positive change, community, and action. Once the group has chosen a name, they should move on to defining their party's core values.

Explain that core values are the foundation of a political party's identity—they help to communicate what the party believes and stands for. Give a few examples, such as “sustainability,” “equality,” “innovation,” or “community.” Encourage students to select values that resonate with them and to briefly write down why each value is important to their party. After deciding on core values, the groups should then outline three main policy proposals. These

should be specific, realistic ideas that their party would advocate for to create positive change. If they feel stuck, suggest some broad categories like environmental protection, improving education systems, increasing mental health support, or promoting youth employment opportunities. Remind students that they need to be able to explain why these policies align with their party's values.

Once the groups have defined their party's name, values, and policies, they should focus on preparing a **two-minute pitch** to introduce their party to the rest of the class. The pitch should include a brief explanation of the party's name and values, and a quick overview of each policy. Encourage students to think about the language they use to make their ideas persuasive and engaging, as if they are speaking to potential voters.

Presenting and Reflecting

Bring everyone back together for the presentations. One by one, each group will stand up and present their party to the rest of the class. Ask each group to keep their presentation to two minutes so that everyone has a chance to share. Encourage the audience to listen attentively and to think about which policies resonate with them personally. If time allows, after each presentation, give the audience a chance to ask one or two quick questions to each presenting group. This will help simulate real-world political discourse and encourage the participants to think critically about the ideas presented.

After all groups have presented, lead a brief reflection on the workshop experience. Ask students to consider what they found challenging or exciting about creating their political party, and what they learned about the values and issues that are important to their peers. You might also ask whether they think they would be interested in joining a political party someday or engaging more actively in their communities.

Conclusion

Remind them that while forming a political party is a big task, every step towards civic engagement—whether through voting, joining student councils, or simply staying informed—is important. Conclude by inviting them to continue thinking about ways they can make a difference in their communities, whether through formal politics or everyday actions.

Activity 2: Political compass

By exploring the political compass, students will gain insight into how political beliefs can vary widely and how they are not simply limited to “left” and “right” but also extend to issues of authority, freedom, economy, and social values. Through engaging activities and discussions, students will learn to identify where they might fit on the compass, deepening their understanding of political ideologies and how these relate to real-world issues.

Explaining the Political Compass

Introduce the political compass in more detail, explaining that it’s a two-dimensional model (see Annex 2) that captures two major aspects of political ideology. First, there is the “left-right” economic dimension, which measures how much one believes in state control versus free markets. On the “left” end, people tend to favor more government intervention to promote equality, while on the “right” end, people generally support economic freedom with less government control. Second, there is the “authoritarian-libertarian” social dimension, which reflects beliefs about social order and personal freedom. Those leaning toward the “authoritarian” side believe in stronger regulations and state authority to maintain order, while those on the “libertarian” side emphasize individual freedom and autonomy, often opposing government restrictions on personal choices. Use simple, relatable examples of each quadrant, such as a preference for environmental regulation (left-leaning) or support for individual freedom in personal lifestyle choices (libertarian-leaning).

Activity: Positioning Perspectives

Divide students into small groups of three to four and give each group a set of statements related to social, economic, and political beliefs. Here are examples of the statement you can use.

1. People should be free to say anything they want, even if it offends others.
2. It is okay for the government to increase taxes to pay for public services.
3. Businesses should prioritize the well-being of their employees over maximizing profit.
4. Wealthier individuals should pay higher taxes to support social programs.
5. Education should be free for everyone, from elementary school to university.
6. The government should regulate large corporations to protect workers’ rights.
7. Military spending should be reduced in favor of funding education and healthcare.
8. Climate change policies should prioritize environmental protection over economic growth.
9. The government should have the right to monitor people’s online activities to maintain national security.

10. People should have the freedom to choose assisted death if they are terminally ill.
11. Immigration should be limited to protect the culture and economy of the country.
12. The government should control rents and housing prices to make housing more affordable.
13. Laws should require all citizens to vote in national elections.
14. Social media platforms should be held responsible for content that spreads misinformation.
15. Schools should include courses on how to be active citizens and participate in politics.
16. Gender equality is a core value, and policies should enforce equal pay for equal work.
17. National identity should be promoted, even if it means restricting the influence of foreign cultures.
18. The government should intervene in the economy to prevent monopolies and protect consumers.
19. People should be allowed to own firearms to protect themselves and their families.
20. The government should provide free healthcare to everyone.

These statements touch on a variety of issues related to freedom, equality, government intervention, and individual rights, offering a broad basis for discussion and positioning on a political compass.

Instruct each group to read through the statements together and discuss where they think each statement falls on the political compass. They should try to agree as a group on whether a statement is more left or right, authoritarian or libertarian, and plot it accordingly on a large, blank compass drawn on a piece of paper.

After each group has plotted their statements, ask them to reflect on the process. Did any statements spark debate? Was it difficult to categorize certain beliefs? Encourage them to consider how different perspectives influence political opinions and how nuanced these ideas can be. This will highlight that not all beliefs fit neatly into one quadrant, and that many people hold a mix of views that can place them in different areas of the compass.

Personal Exploration and Reflection

Administer a simplified, age-appropriate political compass Quiz that each student can complete individually. Standard quiz is available online in several languages. Find the link for the political compass test [here](#). Preview of the quizz is available in the Annex 3. This consists of about ten questions covering a range of social and economic topics, with response options like “agree,” “neutral,” or “disagree.” As they answer the questions, they’ll tally up their responses and place themselves on the compass according to the results. Emphasize that this is not a “test” but rather a tool to help them see where their own beliefs might fit within the broader political spectrum. Explain that political beliefs often change over time, and this is only an exercise to get them thinking about where they stand currently.

After completing the quiz, encourage students to reflect on their results quietly and consider what surprised them. Did they fall where they expected? If they're comfortable, they can share their placements with a neighbor or friend, discussing if there are any aspects of the result that resonate with them or, conversely, if they feel some answers don't fully represent their beliefs.

Discussion and Wrap-Up

Bring the group back together for a concluding discussion. Ask students to share any new insights they gained about themselves or political beliefs in general. If they feel comfortable, they can also mention where they placed on the compass and whether they expected it. Use this time to emphasize that political beliefs are complex and multi-dimensional, and that understanding the political compass helps us appreciate the diversity of viewpoints in society. Highlight that the compass is only a tool, and real-life politics are even more nuanced.

Conclude the workshop by encouraging students to keep exploring and learning about different perspectives. Remind them that political beliefs are personal and that respectful discussion and curiosity are essential parts of a healthy democracy. Thank the students for their participation and let them know they are always welcome to further explore their political views in a safe, respectful environment, whether in future workshops or other settings.

Final Debate

In our final debate we will talk about what we learned and how we now see the political landscape and if our perspective changed after the workshops. How did exploring the political compass change or reinforce your understanding of political ideologies?

Here is the list of possible questions to discuss after the activities:

1. Were any of the results in the political compass surprising for you or others in the group? If so, why?
2. Do you think it's important for young people to be aware where they stand on the political compass? Why or why not?
3. How might understanding different political perspectives help improve discussions or debates on important issues?
4. In what ways do you think young people could be more involved in politics or civic activities in their communities?
5. Why do you think some young people may feel disconnected from politics? What could help change that?
6. How could schools and communities make political and civic participation more engaging and relevant for youth?
7. How do you think the issues you care about are represented (or not represented) by the political spectrum today?
8. If you could introduce one policy or initiative to encourage more youth participation in politics, what would it be?
9. How can understanding both your political perspective and others' perspectives help you make a positive impact in your community?

These questions will help participants reflect on their personal experiences, deepen their understanding of the political compass, and consider ways to increase youth engagement in politics. We encourage that the participants should openly debate about these questions, listen to the perspectives of others and try to understand each other.

Annexes

1. Handout: My first political party

In this annex we have a printable part of the workshop where participants will add the name and information about their political party. This printable part is on the next page.

Name of your party:

Core values:

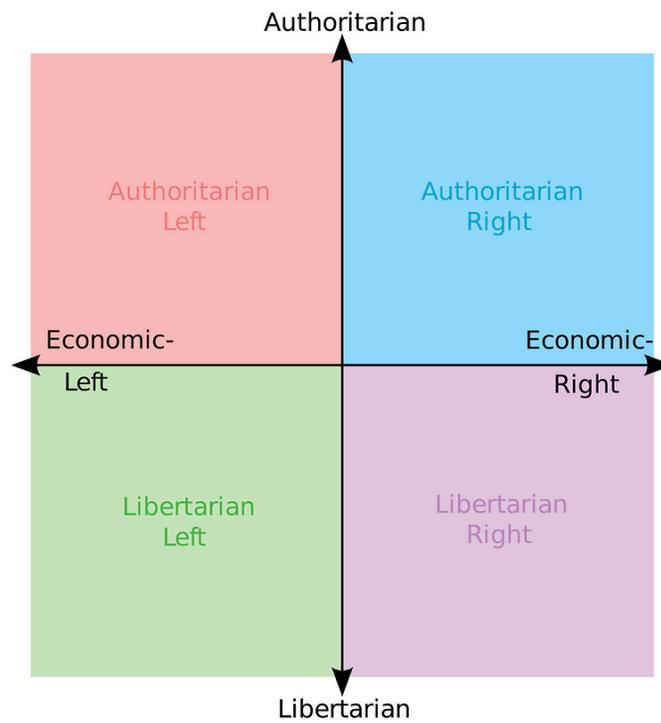
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Key policies:

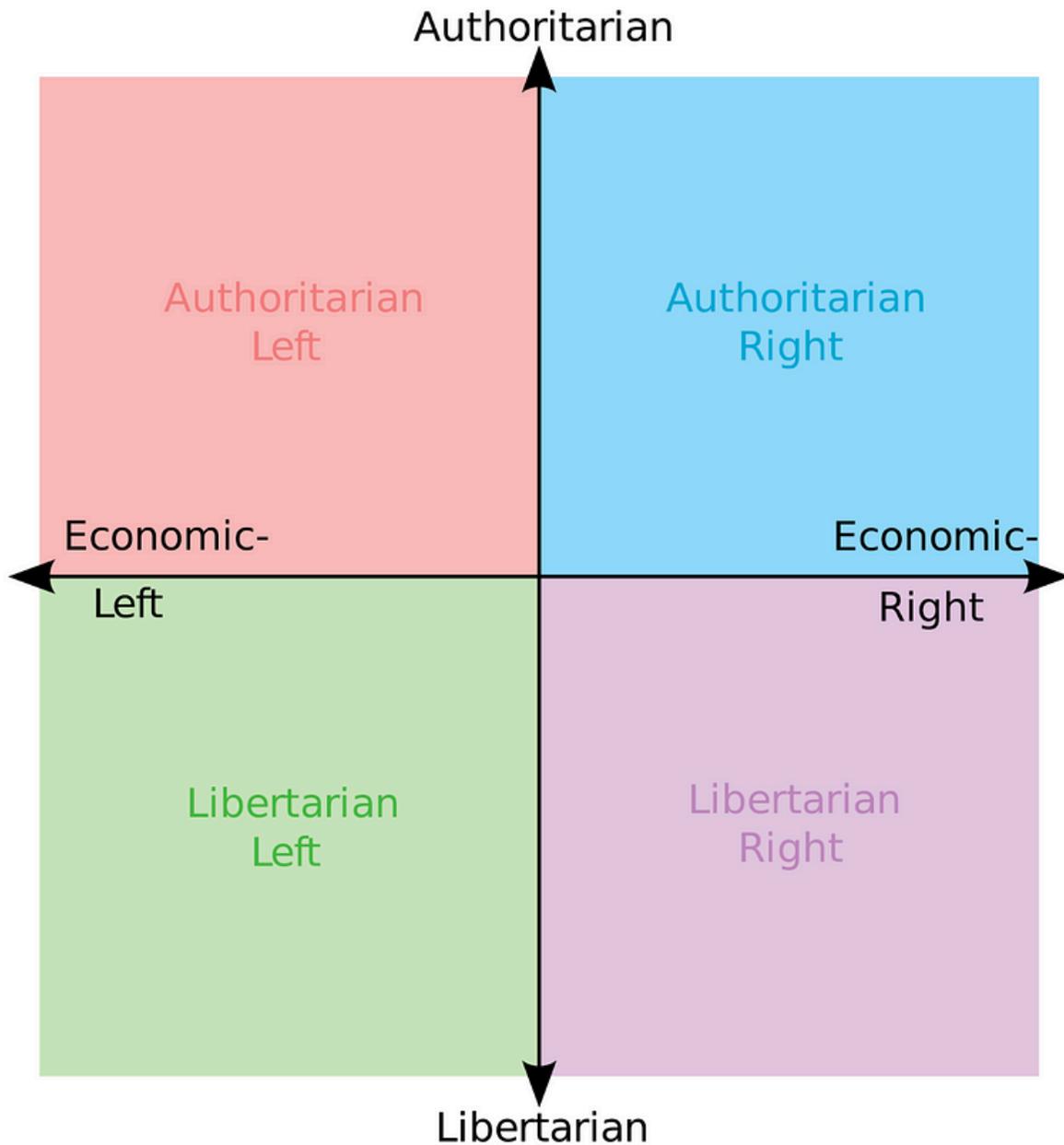
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2. Handout: Two dimensional model of political compass

Two dimensional model of political compass. Use this handout to explain the model, to position and mark the set of statements and/or to mark where the participants stand after filling out the Quiz. At the final discussion they can show it to the other participants and they can discuss their results. Printable version is on the next page.



Political compass



3. Preview of the Quiz: Political Compass

Link for the political compass test is available [here](#). Preview of the quiz follows:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>If economic globalisation is inevitable, it should primarily serve humanity rather than the interests of trans-national corporations.</p> | <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly agree</p> |
| <p>I'd always support my country, whether it was right or wrong.</p> | <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly agree</p> |
| <p>No one chooses their country of birth, so it's foolish to be proud of it.</p> | <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly agree</p> |
| <p>Our race has many superior qualities, compared with other races.</p> | <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly agree</p> |
| <p>The enemy of my enemy is my friend.</p> | <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Strongly agree</p> |