Political Education 101:
Deconstructing Political Systems to Build Community Power

Positive Women’s Network – USA
Political Education Series Webinar #1
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Background

The purpose of PWN-USA’s Political Education Program is to build capacity among women living with HIV to participate effectively and strategically in the political process, democracy, community organizing, and movement-building.

This will expand our community’s participation in existing systems.

We are also committed to visioning and building new systems and dismantling existing ones that are not working for our communities.
What is Political Education?

Analysis of the social, political and economic trends impacting our work, our lives and our rights is critical “to develop strong, clear political strategies that [can] result in revolutionary transformation and fundamental shifts in power.”

- Center for Political Education
Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will have an introductory understanding of:

- Why political education matters
- Political systems
- What is a Democracy?
- Public policy – domestic and foreign policy
- The role of civic engagement
- How to make change through advocacy
Presenters

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a: the art or science of government

b: the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental procedure

c: the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government

d: political affairs or business; especially: competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership (as in a government)
Political Systems
Political Systems

Political System = The way a nation is governed

5 most common types of political systems today

• Democracy
• Republic
• Monarchy
• Communism
• Dictatorship
democracy (definition)

a: government by the people; especially: rule of the majority
b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.

Two different types of democracy:
1) Direct democracy: every citizen has an equal say in the workings of government (example: participatory budgeting processes)
2) Representative democracy: citizens elect representatives who make the laws (example: US government: Congress and President)
The US is a **representative democracy**

1. **Voters** elect Members of Congress, who make **laws**.
2. **Voters** also elect the **electoral college**, which elects the **President**.
3. The **President** nominates Federal judges, who are **confirmed by Senate**.
What does it mean that we are a representative democracy?

• Voters work through intermediaries, who are supposed to represent our interests in making policy.

• This is why your elected officials work for YOU
Is the US really a ”democracy”?

6.1 MILLION Americans CANNOT VOTE because of a felony conviction

1 OF EVERY 13 African Americans has LOST THEIR VOTING RIGHTS due to felony disenfranchisement laws, vs. 1 IN EVERY 56 non-black voters

U.S.

VOTER ID LAWS ARE DISCRIMINATORY EFFORTS TO DISENFRANCHISE, COURTS RULE

BY NICHOLAS LOFFREDO ON 7/30/16 AT 5:41 PM
Public Policy

• government policies that affect the whole population
  - Merriam Webster

• the laws, the actions of the government, the funding priorities and the regulations that reflect given positions, attitudes, cultural ideals or accepted rules.
Public Policy

- the objectives that a government sets regarding the health, welfare and safety of its citizens and the actions it takes to accomplish the objectives.

- Two types:
  - **domestic policy**
  - **foreign policy**
**Domestic Policy** are administrative decisions that address the health, safety and welfare of the citizens within a nation's borders.

The **Domestic Policy Council (DPC)** of the United States is the principal forum used by the President of the U.S. for considering **domestic policy** matters.

{Excluding **economic** matters, which are the domain of the **National Economic Council**.}

The **Domestic Policy Council (DPC)** forms part of the Office of White House Policy which contains various subordinate offices, such as the **Office of National AIDS Policy**.

The Director of the DPC is titled the Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy Council.
Categories of US Domestic Policy

- Social Policy
- Public Health Policy
- Education Policy
- Environmental Policy
- Criminal Justice Policy
- Economic Policy
1. **Social Policy** relates to issues that affect the general welfare of everyday citizens. In the United States, this includes social insurance programs, like Social Security and unemployment insurance. It also includes public assistance programs, like cash assistance, housing assistance and food stamps.

2. **Public Health Policy** focuses on the health of the population and includes both efforts to promote and protect the health of the population. Federal programs providing health care include Medicare and Medicaid. Public health also involves implementing and enforcing regulations protecting the public, such as food and drug regulations.
3. **Education policy** is concerned with the education of citizens. Traditionally, primary and secondary education has been the purview of local government, but federal and state governments have become more involved. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education is a cabinet-level department.

4. **Environmental policy** focuses on regulating the manner in which we interact with the environment, such as clean water and air regulations.
5. **Criminal justice policy** is concerned with law and order. It involves deciding what behavior will be illegal and how perpetrators will be punished. It may also involve crime prevention programs.

6. **Economic policy** attempts to create and maintain a strong economy. It seeks to accomplish this through manipulation of the tax rate, government spending, interest rates and money supply. Economic policy also involves regulating business activities and consumer transactions.
• Many of our systems were designed to disenfranchise and oppress people.

• Our goal as human rights and social justice advocates is not just to help the systems work better. We must fundamentally transform systems and sometimes build new ones in order to have justice for our communities.
The ways a government advances its interests internationally or globally

Examples:

• global economic policies, trade agreements
• aid to other countries (eg PEPFAR – may have restrictions on spending which are tied to ideology, for example ban on aid to organizations working with sex workers)
• Global Gag rule: reinstated and expanded by 45, prohibits foreign non governmental organizations receiving US funding from counseling health clients about abortion or advocating for abortion law liberalization.
• war
Advocacy is the responsibility of everyone who lives in a democracy;

To engage policymakers, the media, and other citizens in meaningful discussions about issues that affect the public.
Why does Political Education Matter

• Educating ourselves about the political process will help us survive the next 4 years and beyond.
• Here is the GOOD NEWS!
• The election process gives us a chance to turn both the Senate and Congress

• There are a number of election opportunities ahead
  • November 2017
  • -May 2018
  • November 2018

• Prepare our communities by ensuring everyone is registered to vote ---- TODAY.
Why Advocate?  
Why Organize?  
Why Speak Out?

“Power concedes nothing without a Demand.”

Frederick Douglas
Using our **Collective Power** to make Domestic Policy work in ways they were designed

1. **Social Policy**
   - Social safety net programs – i.e., cash assistance, stable affordable housing.

2. **Public Health Policy**
   - Implementing AHCA, & Medicaid expansion & the protecting the ACA

3. **Education policy**
   - Federal assurance that all students (regardless of citizenship) have access to safe and health learning environments with competent, dedicated educators & funding.

4. **Environmental policy**
   - Making neighborhoods safe from gun violence & drugs, in addition to having clean air and water

5. **Criminal justice policy**
   - Ending HIV criminalization, Mass incarceration, policing of pregnant bodies, sex work as real labor

6. **Economic policy**
   - Addressing the gender & race pay gap, Income disparities and tax burden
Types of Group Power

• Civilian Power:
  • Ability to support what we value.
  • Ability to form government - a representation of what we value.
  • Ability to conduct a boycott, start petitions, draft sign on letters, use social media, and participate in non-violent actions,
  • Ability to disrupt business as usual
    • (engage in civil disobedience, Sit-Ins, Sit-Downs, Die-Ins)

• Economic/Spending Power:
  • Ability to raise money/how we spend money/withhold from retail sales.

• Political/Legislative Power:
  • Ability to win elections or to pass legislation. Voter registration drives.

• Legal Power:
  • Ability to sue in court (Use the legal system to affirm civil rights)
• Power generally consists of:
  Having lots of money or having lots of people.

• Civilian organizations tend to have people—\textbf{not} money.

• Thus our ability to win depends on our being able to do with people what the other side is able to do with money.
Power generally takes 3 forms.

• We can deprive the other side of something it wants: example - a public official is deprived of votes, or a landlord is deprived of rent through a rent strike.

• We can give the side we are advocating for something it wants: example - our members’ testimonies help get a bill passed.

• Our organization can elect someone who supports our issues.
Knowledge is **POWER** - but not until we use it

The most common way people give up their **POWER** is by thinking they don’t have any.

- Alice Walker
What is Civic Education
Civic, relates to a citizen or community affairs

• **Civic Education** in a democracy is *education* in self government. Democratic self government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance; they do not just passively accept the dictums of others or concede to the demands of others.

• **Civic Education** is also intended to make all citizens, or at least prospective leaders; Reduce disparities in political power by giving everyone the knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to participate.
Civic Engagement – builds power

• Recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric *{beyond HIV}* and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own affairs.

• Civic engagement means working with other social justice groups and movements and developing the *combination* of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.

• Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official in opposition to a bill, organizing a town hall, registering community members to vote and voting.
Why does Civilian Power, Civic Education & Civic Engagement Matter?

Civic Engagement helps develop the *combination* of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference in reducing disparities in political power by giving everyone the knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to participate.

*The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.*

- Alice Walker
Policy Watch - Keeping Our Eyes and Ears Open

Calls to Action!
Call(s) to Action are Not to be Ignored!

- Calls to Action are speaking directly to you.
- Calls to Action are speaking directly to all of us.
- Calls to Action are not to be ignored.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

Barack Obama

Send me an email... and I’ll ignore it later.
Calls to Action are connected to threats to Categories of US Domestic Policy

- Social Policy
- Public Health Policy
- Education Policy
- Environmental Policy
- Criminal Justice Policy
- Economic Policy

• Take Action: Call on Members of Congress to Protect Our Health Care!
  https://pwn-usa.org/action-alert/

The bill (called the “American Health Care Act,” or AHCA) is packed with giveaways to the rich—While implementing changes to that would result in over 24 million people losing health care coverage by 2026
Take Action: Call on Members of Congress to Protect Our Health Care!

https://pwn-usa.org/action-alert/

- Roughly 1.3 million people losing substance abuse and mental health services.
- This bill serves as congressional Republicans’ vehicle to defund Planned Parenthood.
- It does nothing to guarantee that coverage will be affordable to low- and middle-income people.
- Rates could also go up significantly for older people.

- Calls to Action are connected to threats to Categories of US Domestic Policy
  - It becomes necessary to
    - Use our Civilian Power
    - Civic Education
    - Civic Engagement
Sample Script for Email or Phone Call

“Hello, my name is ____ and I’m a constituent of Representative/Senator ____ in zip code ____. I’m calling to express my opposition to the new Republican health care bill that is currently in the House. The bill will cause millions of people like me to lose access to coverage and could make coverage far more expensive, especially for older people and people with preexisting conditions. This is unacceptable. Any new health care policy should result in more people being covered at lower cost with better coverage; this bill would do the exact opposite. I strongly urge Rep./Sen. _____ to vote NO on this bill and to work to improve upon the Affordable Care Act, rather than gutting its protections for low-income people and people with preexisting conditions.”

https://pwn-usa.org/action-alert/
Go right onto PWN’s Website and Express your opposition to the Republican health care bill, comment on it and send a message to your lawmakers through the page, https://pwn-usa.org/action-alert/

Then share on social media so others can take ACTION!
Other ways to make an Impact

• Collect contact information of all our constituents & supporters

• Form relationships with other non-HIV specific movements

• Use our organizing skills to lead our communities to resist injustice

• Voter Registration Drives (not just for PLHIV)

Attend community forums- civic participation in “Domestic Public Policy

- Social Policy
- Public Health Policy
- Education policy
- Environmental policy
- Criminal justice policy
- Economic policy
Why do Action Alerts Matter

• Calls to Action are connected to threats to Categories of US Domestic Policy.
• Calls to Action are speaking directly to all of us.
• Calls to Action are not to be ignored.

Means:
• Using our Civilian Power
• Civic Education
• Civic Engagement

We just can afford to sit this one out.
Thank you for your attention.

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