

# CANADA VOTES

2019

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FEDERAL ELECTION

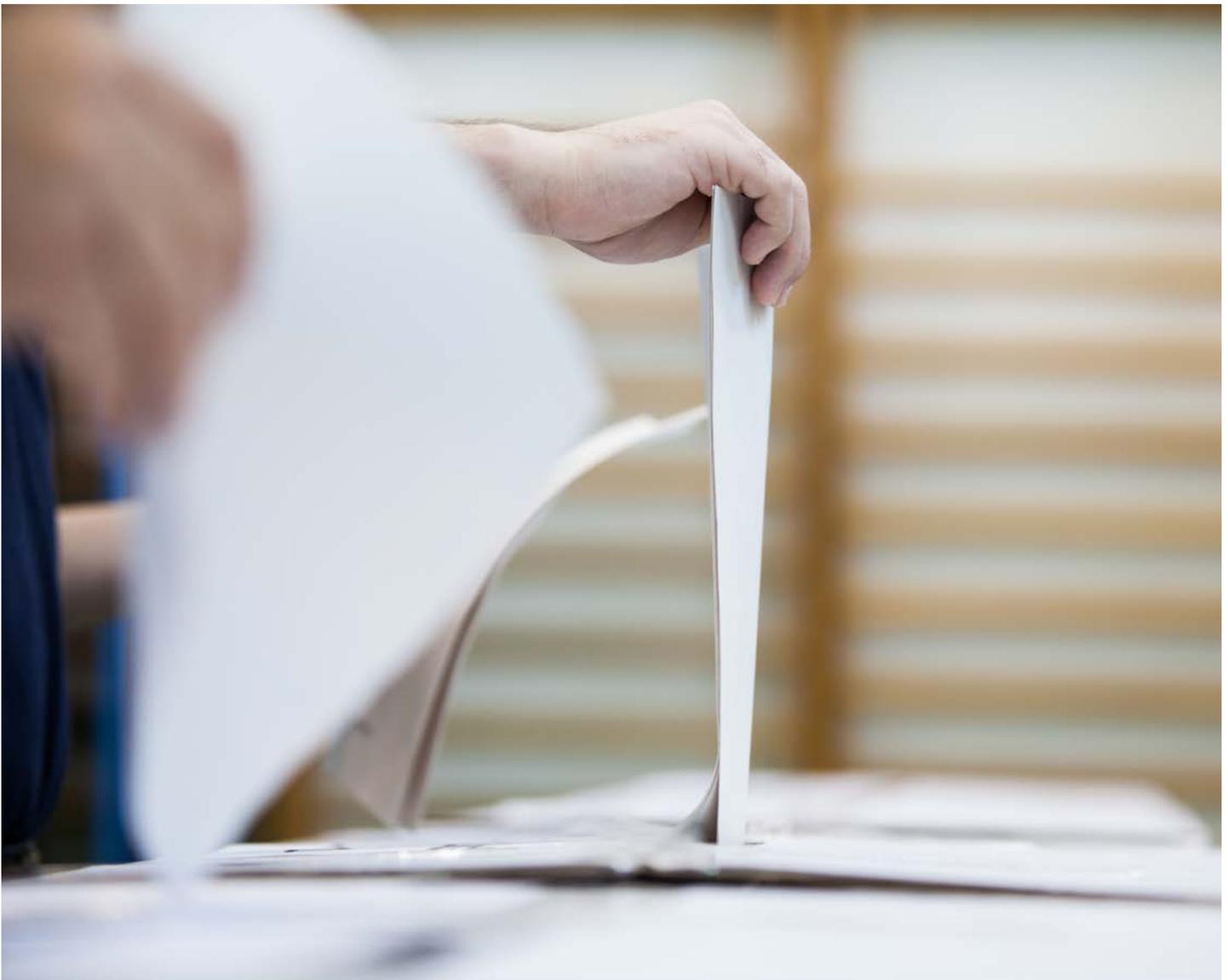




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## INTRODUCTION

We are about to have another federal election, which means it is once again decision time in Canada. Elections are all about choices. Political parties all have ideas how to deal with the issues facing us. The voters will help decide Canada's direction for the next four years. To do that, voters need to identify which party's ideas are closest to their own. This learning material will help you identify the issues and choices in this election.





## ELECTIONS AND OUR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Canada is a parliamentary democracy. All citizens 18 or older may vote. The people of Canada struggled over many years to bring about a fair election system that would allow all citizens to have a say. Now we have the right, and the duty, to vote. We can choose candidates who reflect our ideas. We want candidates who will represent our wishes, our needs and wants in Parliament.

Those Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons are the heart of Canadian democracy. They prepare, debate, and vote on the legislation which will become law. Once you turn 18, if you are a citizen, you too have the right to vote, to make that choice.

Canada is also a constitutional monarchy, based on the British Parliamentary system. Our government, like the British government, consists of three parts, the executive and legislative branches, and the judiciary. The Executive branch consists of the Monarch, Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Legislative branch is the House of Commons and the Senate. The Supreme Court of Canada is the third branch.

The Head of State, the person at the very top of the government hierarchy, is the Sovereign. Today that is Queen Elizabeth II. She is the Queen of the United Kingdom and other countries, including Canada. The Governor General acts as Head of State here in her absence.

The Queen, or in her place, the Governor-General, calls for elections when the government resigns. Today the Queen's duties are largely ceremonial. Besides calling elections, she signs Acts of Parliament into effect and to appoint the Prime Minister based on election results. Since 2009, those elections happen on a fixed date. Every four years, on the third Monday of October, Canadians vote for a new federal government.



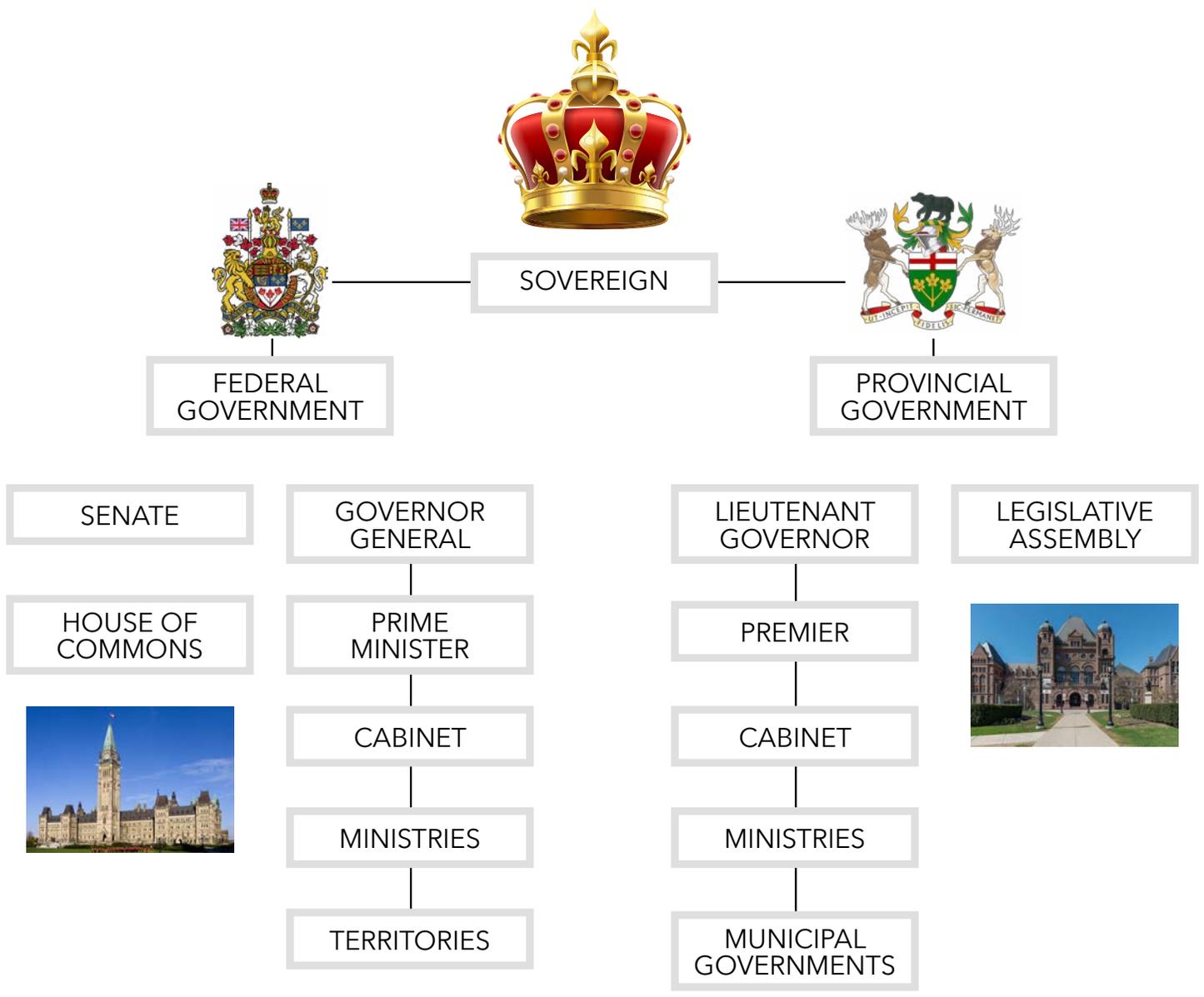
## ACTIVITIES

1. Why does the Queen of England, Elizabeth II, appear on Canadian coins and bills?
2. The Governor General represents the Sovereign, the Queen. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation outlining the Governor General's job.
3. What is the difference between "Head of State" and "Head of Government"?
4. Our government is a "responsible government." What does that mean? In what ways is the government responsible?
5. Canada's federal government once could call elections whenever they wanted. When did that change?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a fixed election date?
7. Under what circumstances must the federal government still call elections at other times?



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## GOVERNMENT IN CANADA





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## THE VOTE

Today, our democracy has universal suffrage. That means all citizens 18 years old or older have the right to vote. We may take that right for granted today, but this universal right and privilege took many years to achieve. Canadian women struggled for decades for the right to vote. It took decades more to include aboriginal people and minority groups.

### Getting Elected

In Canada, the candidate with the most votes in a riding wins that riding and a seat in parliament, even if they did not win a majority of votes. We use the “First Past the Post” (FPTP) system. When only two candidates are running, the winning candidate clearly has more than half the votes cast. When three or more candidates run in a riding, this system presents problems. The winning candidate must still have the most votes cast, but that may be fewer than half of the votes cast. The winner does not need a majority to be elected. They just need one more vote than any other candidate.

In the past, we had governments by parties that had received less than half the total votes cast. In 2008, the Conservative party took 46% of the seats in the House with only 38% of the votes across the country. They formed a minority government. In 2011, they captured 54% of the seats in the House with only 40% of the popular vote. In the 2015 election, the Liberals won 184 seats (55% of the total) with 39.5% of the vote.

Some voters may feel not represented. Their party of choice did not get enough votes in any one riding to elect a candidate. The Green Party across Canada received 3.5% of the vote in 2015 but won only a single seat. Based on the percentage of the vote, they should have received at least ten seats.



## ACTIVITIES

1. After Confederation, women were not the only group without the right to vote. Which other groups could not vote? How did the government justify not granting these people the vote?
2. In earlier days, people simply voted by a show of hands. What does that mean? Why could that have been a problem? How did “voting by secret ballot” change elections?
3. Why did so many women work so hard for years for the right to vote? Look up some of these women. Create posters for each of these women, explaining their roles.
4. Today some people think that 16- and 17-year-old teenagers should also be allowed to vote. In class, list points for and against such a change. Discuss that list and create one list with which you all agree.
5. Write a script for, and then create a video commercial promoting lowering the voting age to 16. Hold a competition for the best commercial.
6. Write a Letter to the Editor explaining why you are for or against changing the voting age. Exchange your letter with someone else in the class. Edit and rewrite each other’s letters. As a class, select the best letter and send it to your local newspaper.
7. Some people think we should elect our Prime Minister directly, separate from other MPs. In your work groups, research the options, and have a class debate.



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## Elections

Under the 2009 election rules, the Governor General calls a new election every four years on the third Monday of October. The last two elections also followed the four-year rule. However, the old rules still exist. Those allow governments to call elections whenever they wish. Also, governments must call an election if they lose a vote on a major issue in parliament. Finally, the governments must hold elections no later than every five years.

There is an inherent conflict between the old and new rules. A confusing situation.



## ACTIVITIES

1. Why did opposition parties consider the old rules, allowing the government to call an election whenever they chose, unfair?
2. Outline the advantages and disadvantages of a fixed date for elections. How does that differ between parties in power and the other parties?

## Political Parties

The Canada Elections Act defines a political party as:

*“an organization one of whose fundamental purposes is to participate in public affairs by endorsing one or more of its members as candidates and supporting their election.”*

Political parties are groups of people with similar ideas. They want to work together to promote their idea. They run for election to government to influence the future of a province or the country.

Anyone could start a political party. There are no restrictions on how to organize a political party. Any group of 250 or more people may register as a political party.

Five parties today have elected candidates to parliament. They are the Bloc Quebecois, Conservative Party of Canada, the Green Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party.



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Many other small parties run candidates for election but do not win any seats. Other registered parties without elected candidates in parliament include:

- the Alliance of the North
- the Animal Protection Party
- the Christian Heritage Party
- the Communist Party
- the Libertarian Party of Canada
- the People's Party of Canada
- the Rhinoceros Party

Political parties have very different ideas about what Canada's government should do. Some parties may place more importance on issues of taxation, others on social issues. Political parties turn their ideas into a "party platform", a set of policy ideas that the party membership approves. Platforms include proposals on taxation, policies on energy, the military, or the environment. They can also include social issues such as poverty and homelessness reduction, aboriginal affairs, and social reforms. Each party tries to make its platform as distinctive as possible, to stand out from the others, and to win votes.



## ACTIVITIES

1. In groups, research the idea of "political parties". Work on creating a definition on which you all agree. Present your definition to the class, and revise until you have one class definition.
2. What is a political platform? Using individual research, work out a definition with which your entire work group agrees.
3. Use the newspaper or a credible online news source to list the parties and their candidates which are running in your school district.
4. Political parties have a point of view, a philosophy. Create a poster showing one major idea that each political party supports. For example, "Support the Rhinoceros Party if you think swamps are important".



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## THE ISSUES IN 2019

In every election, political parties put forward ideas that they think will be popular with the voters. Their party platform defines who they are and what they represent.



## ACTIVITIES

1. Do research to find out how the five main parties stand on these issues in this election:

- Budget deficits
- Climate Change
- International trade
- Social spending: health care, pensions, housing, child care,
- social equality
- Taxation
- Military spending
- Foreign aid
- First Nations issues
- Immigration and refugees
- Our voting system
- Any other issue of importance

2. What do you think are the main national issues? As a class, review the issues you found, and the arguments surrounding them. You can use the topics above as a start.

3. Divide your class into six or seven groups. Assign one main political party to each group. The others should explore some of the minor parties that had no elected candidates. Using party websites, newspapers and other media, outline the platform of each party.

4. Fundraising is an issue in elections. How might private donations influence political parties?





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## Issues in Detail

Here are some election issues for a start. Review these and add any other topics that you think are important.

Newspaper stories report just the facts as accurately as they can. They use editorials and columns to present opinions. For each of the topics below, and any you choose to add, write a newspaper-style editorial explaining why this issue is important.

### PIPELINES

For several years the Federal government and several provinces have disagreed on the future of pipelines in Canada. Alberta needs an expansion of pipeline capacity to sell its oil to other countries. Because it cannot move its oil to overseas markets in the volumes required, Alberta oil sells for less than oil from other countries.

Any new pipeline would run through British Columbia. However, that province opposes any such expansion. To complicate matters, pipelines must pass through aboriginal tribal lands. While some aboriginal people support the pipeline expansion, others are vehemently opposed.

Environmentalists argue that increased tanker traffic along the West Coast would strain the environment and put marine species at risk. They further argue that an accident would create major oil spills, with massive environmental damage.



## ACTIVITIES

1. There were several recent pipeline proposals. One has been rejected; others are still under consideration. Briefly outline the options for pipelines to a British Columbia seaport.
2. Compare how each political party stands on that issue. What does your class think about that issue?



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## CLIMATE CHANGE

Few people today would argue that climate change is not happening. Canada's arctic ice cap and mountain glaciers have shrunk over the past decades. Year over year, average summer temperatures have increased. Eight out of ten of the hottest summers on record have occurred in the last decade. Warmer temperatures have made storms both more frequent and stronger, and contributed to increased forest fire risk.

However, politicians have conflicting ideas about how to deal with climate change. The current Federal government has implemented a carbon tax. Some provinces established a "Cap and Trade" system. Both approaches argue that human activity is at least in part responsible for climate change. Supporters state we must limit climate change by reducing carbon emissions. Taxes and "Cap and Trade" have been shown to work. Other politicians strongly opposed to any form of taxation, arguing there are better ways to deal with climate change.



## ACTIVITIES

1. In your work groups research both the "Cap and Trade" system, and a carbon tax. Discuss which system you think is more effective.
2. Prepare a video for any social media platform explaining the system you prefer and why you think it is better for people and for the environment.
3. Why do several provincial governments strongly oppose both a carbon tax and "Cap and Trade" systems? What alternatives do they propose?
4. Prepare a chart comparing how the different federal parties plan to deal with climate change.



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## TAXATION, SPENDING, AND THE DEFICIT

Most governments run deficits. They spend more money than they receive from taxes and other revenues. That extra spending each year is the deficit. To cover the deficit, governments borrow money. That money is then paid back with interest over several years. In each budget, a portion of our taxes pay for the interest charges and principle on the accumulated debt.

Some level of debt will happen. Most people borrow for big purchases like cars or homes. Similarly, the government cannot pay for everything it does in one year. New icebreakers for the Coast Guard or aircraft for the Royal Canadian Air Force must be paid for overtime.

Political parties disagree on how to handle debt and deficits. Some believe that some level of debt is inevitable. As long as the debt is not too great, it is quite manageable. Other parties believe that Canada's government should avoid debt and work towards a balanced budget. A balanced budget simply means that the amount the government spends and the money brought in from taxation and other revenues is the same. No new debts accumulate.

Like your own family's budget, you have few choices when you spend more than you earn. Either you cut back on spending, or you earn more money, or both. For the Federal government, that means it either cuts back the services it provides to Canadians, or raises taxes, or both. Few politicians want to raise taxes. However, most Canadians like the services that the government of Canada provides. As a result, politicians must make hard and unpleasant decisions.



## ACTIVITIES

1. In your work groups collect information from your local newspaper and other sources comparing how political parties stand on the issue of taxation, debt and deficits.
2. One way to measure the size of the debt is called the "Debt to GDP Ratio". It compares the debt to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) any one year. Create a table comparing the "Debt to GDP Ratio" for Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. How does Canada compare? At what point would you describe the debt as too big?
3. Families, companies, and governments all go into debt from time to time. Have a debate in class on the topic: "Governments should never go into debt".



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## MAKING CHOICES

Elections are about making choices. Voters in each riding must choose among several candidates representing different political parties. Each candidate will reflect the positions of their political party. Sometimes independent candidates also run. They do not belong to any political party. Independent candidates also will put forward ideas to appeal to voters.

So how do you make a choice? Like school, there's a lot of homework to do. Time to dig through credible media sources, campaign ads and literature from candidates.

- First, find out as much as you can about each party.
- Does that party reflect your ideas? With how much of their platform do you agree?
- Where you disagree, how serious is that?
- Which party's platform is closest to your ideas?

The leader of a political party is also very important. Use newspapers and other media to learn more about the leaders of the various political parties. Their abilities as leader as well as their opinions and ideas will shape the actions of their political party. Consider how much experience the party leader has, both as a politician and as a leader. Leaders must also understand what is going on in the rest of the world. That's where experience and a willingness to learn counts.

Research the candidates in your riding the same way you researched the parties. You may like a political party but not the candidate. You may like the candidate but not the party. Research time again: Visit the candidate's website. Look at their social media postings.



## ACTIVITIES

1. Use your preferences and concerns list to chart how each political party stands on issues.
2. Let the suggestions in the section above help you decide which candidate and party comes closest to your preferences.

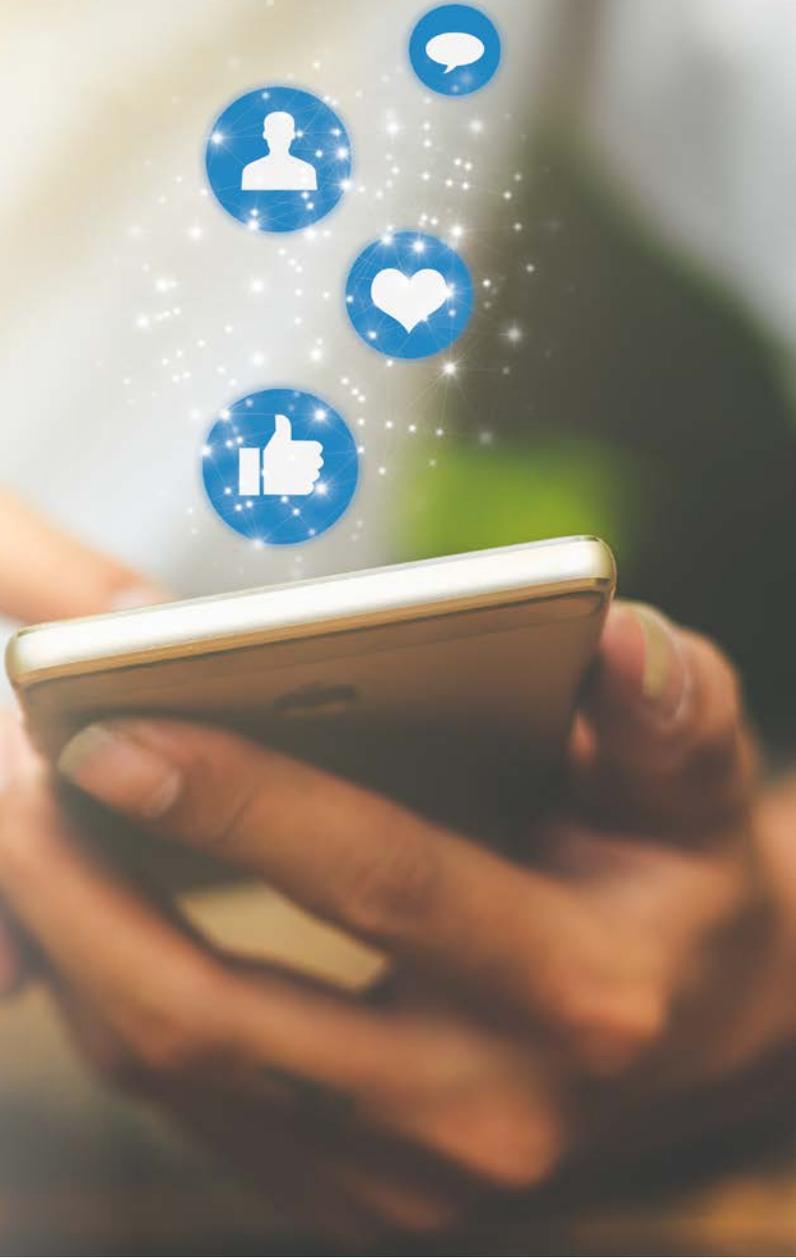


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## FAKE NEWS

“Fake News” has become a problem. Some social media postings deliberately spread fake news, deliberate lies about politicians, issues or news events. Sometimes fake news begins with some truth, but then twists the story to give a totally wrong impression. Sometimes it is an outright lie. Some fake news is spread as “click bait”, simply to earn advertising revenues. At other times, it deliberately spreads misinformation and creates distrust. In other elections “fake news” had tried to influence how people vote.

Because social media allows ideas to spread quickly, fake news becomes difficult to stop. A malicious tweet may be repeated hundreds of times in a matter of minutes.





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So how can you tell if something is “Fake News”? Legitimate media outlets make sure that they present the facts correctly. Here are some steps to take when you read or see something you believe might be fake:

1. Try to find the same story in traditional media. Does it compare?
2. Look up who posted the story. Is that source believable?
3. Check the web address of that site. Is it a .com, .ca, .org, .edu site or something different?
4. Some websites present themselves as legitimate news sites. However, they may carry information that is either wrong or very biased. Check stories on those sites against stories in trusted news media.
5. Some fake news sites masquerade as real legitimate media sites. If you’re not sure that a site is legitimate, search for the news organization’s URL. That will link you to the real site.
6. Some websites will present part of a real story but twist the rest to suit their bias. Never accept the story from only one source. Double check against trusted media sites. Traditional newspapers and radio and television news always fact check their stories.
7. You can always look up the author of the story. Do they work for a trusted source? Some fake news authors claim to have won prizes and worked for many news sources. When you double check, you may find that they have won no prizes and never worked for any credible news source.
8. If you can’t find any further information, look up the story on a fact-checking website. There are several websites you can try. Search the internet using the key words: “fact-checking websites Canada”.



## AND IN CONCLUSION:

Elections are the most important way that we can make our voices heard. Our vote will decide who forms the next government and what policies that governments will implement. Only about two thirds of Canadians eligible actually do vote. When you turn 18 make sure you register to vote. Don’t pass up the opportunity to help shape our future.

# TEST YOUR POLITICAL PROWESS



## ACROSS

- 1. Runs for election
- 5. Longterm weather
- 6. Electoral district
- 7. Where we govern
- 9. Member of Parliament
- 11. How we vote
- 13. How we pay for government

## DOWN

- 15. Our current voting system
- 17. Climate ...
- 18. King or Queen
- 20. Small party
- 21. Election issue out west
- 22. Political party

## DOWN

- 2. The Toronto Star for example
- 3. A form of news, not.
- 4. Prime ...
- 8. Source of information
- 10. Election promises

- 11. Quebec party
- 12. Current governing party
- 14. How we get our government
- 16. People who choose
- 19. Political party

# VOTE 2019 WORD SEARCH

I	U	T	A	X	A	T	I	O	N	H	C
M	T	N	E	M	A	I	L	R	A	P	E
B	A	H	N	A	I	D	E	M	C	L	Y
N	R	E	G	E	M	T	P	K	E	A	C
E	E	E	I	R	T	P	O	C	A	A	C
W	T	N	E	I	V	A	T	L	N	F	C
S	S	I	R	D	P	I	M	D	L	H	S
P	I	L	E	I	O	T	I	I	A	A	J
A	N	E	V	N	I	D	P	N	L	Y	B
P	I	P	O	G	A	V	G	F	T	C	P
E	M	I	S	T	T	E	V	O	T	E	R
R	M	P	E	M	R	O	F	T	A	L	P

## FIND THE WORDS LISTED BELOW

BALLOT

CLIMATE

FPTP

MP

PIPELINE

SOVEREIGN

CANDIDATE

ELECTION

MEDIA

NEWSPAPER

PLATFORM

TAXATION

CHANGE

FAKE

MINISTER

PARLIAMENT

RIDING

VOTER