

Canada Votes

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

TORONTO STAR

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

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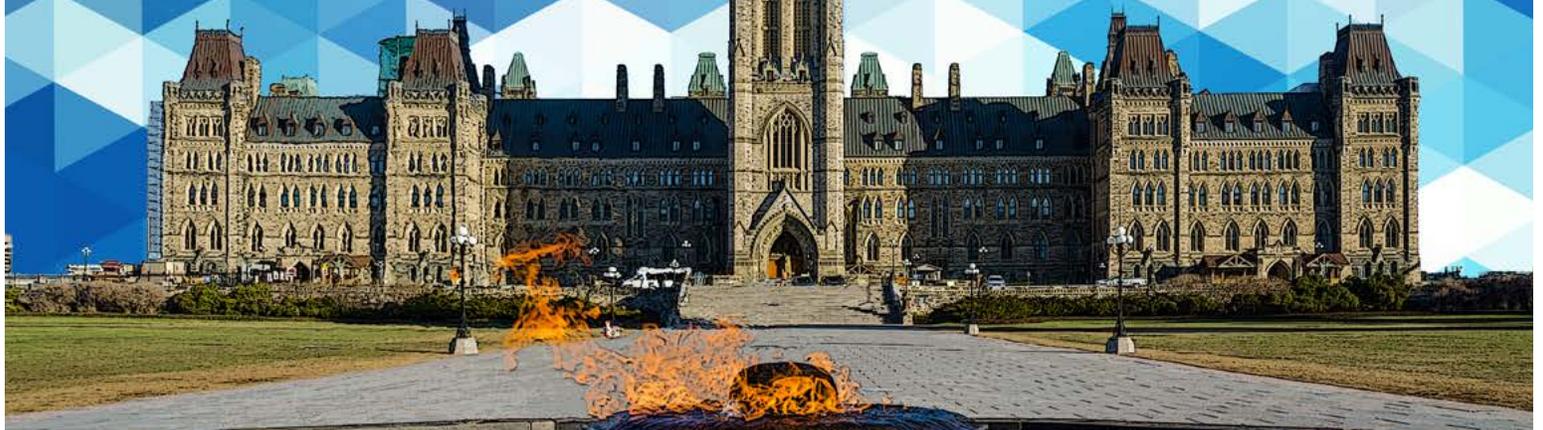


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INTRODUCTION

Imagine you lived back in 1920. It was a new century, a new time. More homes than ever had electricity and electrical light. Movies were popular, although silent; “Talkies” were still a few years away. Baseball and hockey were increasingly popular, while Lacrosse was fading as the national sport. Electric streetlights lit up cities, and electric streetcars provided fast public transportation everywhere.

On a fine Sunday morning, you think visiting the zoo might be fun for your younger brothers and sisters. Later that day, you consider taking a bus or streetcar to the movies, or in the evening, watching a hockey game. Yet, none of these things would have been possible. Theatres and sports venues were not allowed to open on Sundays. Stores were closed. No buses or streetcars ran. Even public beaches were closed. Not even public meetings were allowed. Only Churches were open. That decision was made by elected officials, your government.

Over time, people decided they did want to have entertainment open on Sundays. They did want to use streetcars and busses, and even go for a swim at a public beach. They had the power to make changes, because they had a great superpower, the vote. By convincing elected officials, they were able to have these restrictive laws changed. By 1950, Toronto finally allowed professional sports on Sundays. Some ten years later, theatres, movies and other entertainment opened on Sundays.

Many issues face us all today, many of real concern to you too. Will the minimum wage be high enough to live on? Can we afford college or university? Will there still be pensions for us when we get old? What about better services, from schools to doctors, police and fire departments? Soon, you too will have that superpower, the vote. The people who make the decisions about all of these issues are elected officials. You will decide who gets elected. You too may want to be elected, and to be one of the decision-makers.

That is why the vote, the right to vote, is so important. In this learning material, you will see how people won the right to vote, how the system of voting works, and hopefully, why the right to vote is so important to us all.



Our Government: A Constitutional Monarchy

Canada's government is based on the British Parliamentary system, which evolved over more than a thousand years. The British Parliament has two chambers. The upper chamber, the House of Lords, once held most of the power to govern, along with the Monarch. The British voters elect lower chamber, the House of Commons. Originally, the House of Lords was the most powerful, but over time that shifted. Today, the House of Commons is the key player in British parliament.

Canada's government consists of three parts, like the British government. The three sections are the Executive branch, which is the Monarch, Prime Minister and cabinet. The Legislative branch is the House of Commons and the Senate. The third branch is the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Sovereign is the Head of State. Canada is a monarchy because the Head of State is the King or Queen of Canada. Today, that is Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen of England, Scotland, and many other Commonwealth countries. The Queen cannot be in Canada to oversee Parliament. Instead, she appoints someone to carry out those duties in her place. The Governor General acts as Head of State in her absence.

Canada is also a parliamentary democracy. The House of Commons and the Senate create laws. We elect members of parliament who sit in the House of Commons. They are the heart of Canadian democracy. All citizens 18 years old or older may vote for members of Parliament. If you are a citizen, when you turn 18, you too could run for election to be members of Parliament. These elected representatives create and pass our laws and have the responsibility to see that the government represents the wishes of the people.

The Senate is Canada's version of the House of Lords. The Sovereign appoints Senators, "on the advice of the Prime Minister". In practise, that means the Prime Minister recommends the appointees and the Queen approves the recommended candidates. In theory, the Senate and House of Commons have equal powers, with some exceptions. Both Houses may start legislation. Both Houses must approve all legislation. However, the Senate may not initiate bills involving taxes and finances. In practise, the Senate reviews legislation approved by the House of Commons. It may make amendments.

The Queen or her representative signs approved legislation into effect. Nothing becomes law in Canada until the Sovereign, or in her place, the Governor General, agrees. That is called giving "Royal Assent". The legislation is then proclaimed and comes into effect.

Ontario's provincial government works much the same way. The voters elect members of the provincial legislature. The leader of the party with the most seats in the legislature becomes Premier. The Lieutenant Governor represents the Queen in the province. Some provinces once also had an upper chamber, but eventually all provinces dissolved them.



Activites

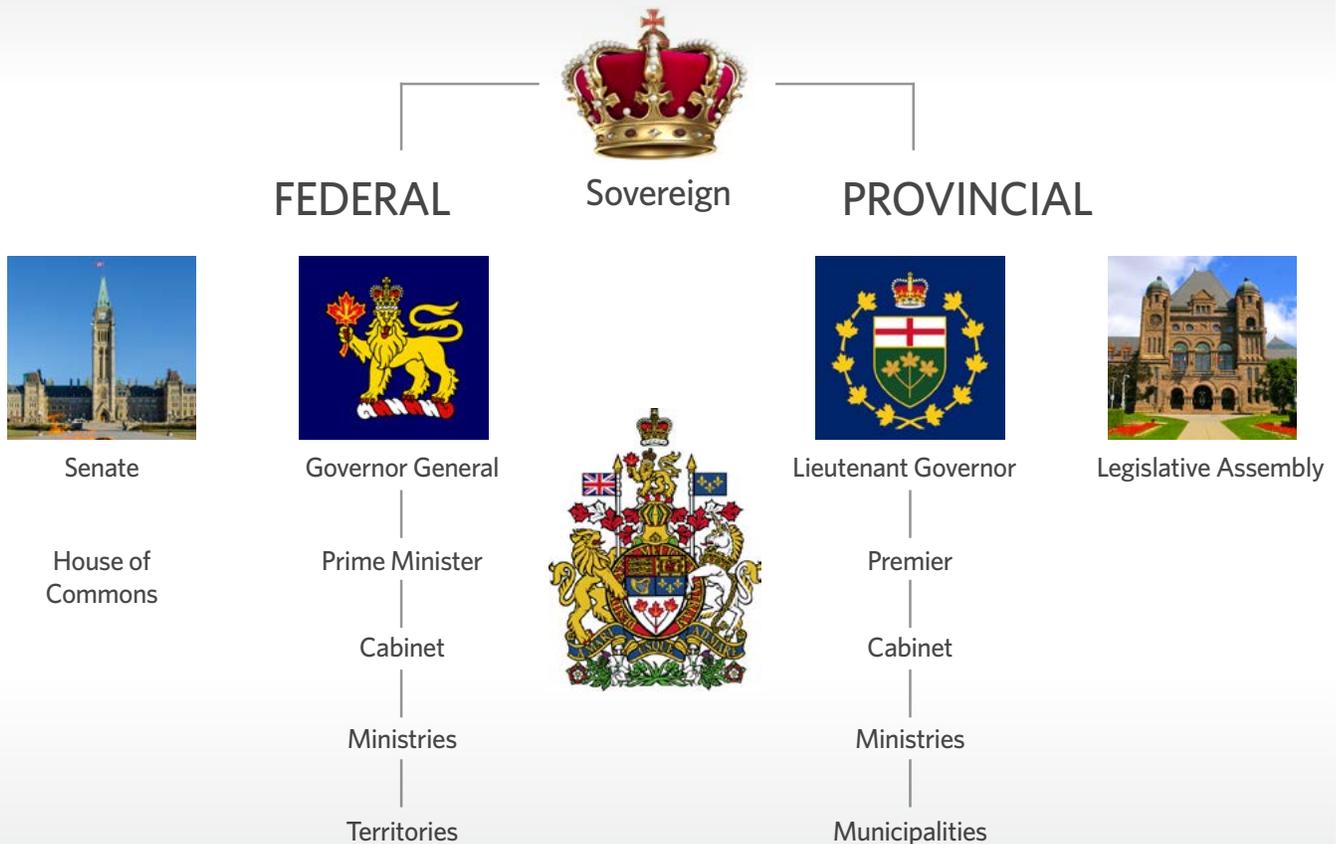
1. Queen of England, Elizabeth II appears on Canadian coins and many bills. Why?
2. The Governor General represents the Sovereign, the Queen. What is the Governor General's job in Canada's government?
3. Our government is a "responsible government." What does that mean? In what ways is the government responsible?
4. Create a poster explaining the meaning of "Responsible Government".
5. Many famous people have been Governors General. List the Governors General for the last fifty years. Divide that list up among work groups in your class. Have each group research one or more persons. When finished, report back to the class why these Governors General were worthy appointments.
6. As a class, select the Governor General you think was the most important. In your groups, prepare a presentation or a poster to explain your choice.
7. Canada's Senate is often called "The Chamber of sober second thought." What does that mean?
8. Look up the powers of the Senate. How much does the Senate contribute to running the country?
9. What happens if the Senate rejects a bill approved by the House of Commons?
10. In your class, prepare a debate on the Senate: Should Canada disband the Senate? Divide the class into six groups, three for and three against. Have one "for" and one "against" group debate at a time. The other four groups will be judges. Repeat until all groups have presented their arguments. At the end of the debate, vote for which group did the best job arguing their case.



Activites

11. Look up the House of Lords in the UK. Compare the role of the House of Lords today to that of the Canadian Senate.
12. The Magna Carta was written in 1215. It was an important first step in reducing the power of the monarch and increasing the powers of parliament. Why is that document still important today?

GOVERNMENT IN CANADA



Governor General, Lieutenant Governors, Prime Ministers, Premiers, and Mayors

The Head of State in Canada is the King or Queen of England. Today, that is Queen Elizabeth II. The Governor General represents her in Canada. In the provinces, the Queen's representative and head of state is the Lieutenant Governor. The Queen appoints these officials on the advice of Prime Minister or the Premier. That means, by tradition, the choice belongs to the Prime Minister or provincial premiers.

The Governor General's duties are largely ceremonial. His or her main duties, on the advice of the Prime Minister, are to dissolve Parliament, call elections, and appoint the Prime Minister.

Prime Ministers are the Head of Government for Canada. Members of their party elect them to lead the party. Those party leaders then run for election in their ridings like any other candidate. If elected, they become members of the House of Commons (MPs). After an election, the Governor

General as the Queen's representative appoints the Prime Minister. Traditionally, one of the party leaders becomes Prime Minister. In practise, that is the leader of the party with the most MPs. However, it can be any party leader who is likely to have the support of more than half the MPs.

Sometimes, Prime Ministers resign as individuals, not as heads of the government. In that case, the Governor General appoints the replacement without an election. The Prime Minister's party has a convention to choose a new leader, and the Governor General appoints that person as Prime Minister. When Brian Mulroney resigned as Prime Minister in 1993, a party convention elected Kim Campbell party leader. The Governor General then appointed her Prime Minister.

In some elections, Prime Ministers may fail to win their own seat. That happened to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in the 1925 federal election. His party won the election but he lost his seat. There are several ways to proceed. Usually, an elected member of the same party resigns and the Prime Minister runs in a by-election in that riding. In King's case, a party member resigned, opening a seat. In a by-election, King won that seat. More recently, John Turner replaced Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau as leader of the Liberal Party. However, he did not have a seat in the House of Commons. The Governor General appointed him Prime Minister, but he worked without being a member of the House until the next election. Senators can also be Prime Ministers. Both Senators Abbott and Bowell became leaders of their party while serving in the Senate. Both were appointed Prime Minister.

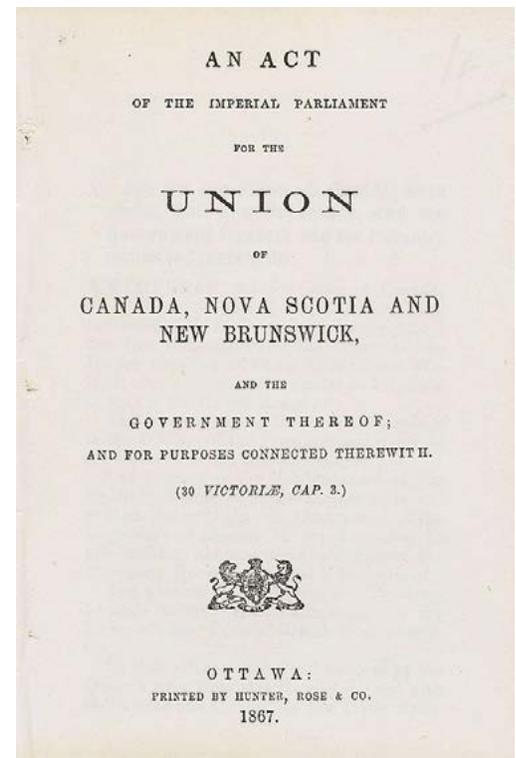
Filling the position of provincial premier works the same way. Members of a party elect their own leader. Traditionally, after an election, the Lieutenant Governor appoints the leader of the party with the most seats in the provincial legislature premier. Party leaders run for election in a riding like any other candidate.

Unlike Prime Ministers or premiers, voters elect mayors directly. Candidates for municipal elections in Ontario do not run as members of a political party. All candidates run as independents. Candidates run either for the position of councillor or mayor. The voters of an entire municipality decide who their mayor will be.



Activites

1. What is the difference between a Head of State and a Head of Government?
2. The Governors General calls elections when the government resigns. What other powers does the Governor General have?
3. The British North America (BNA) Act of 1867 gave the Governor General a great deal of power. Why does the Governor General use only a few of those powers today, and only when asked by the Prime Minister?
4. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation outlining the role of the Governor General today.
5. Look up the King-Byng affair. Was the Governor-General correct in his actions?
6. John Turner became Prime Minister as head of the Liberal party without having a seat in Parliament. What problems might that have caused him as Prime Minister?
7. In many countries, citizens elect their Presidents and other heads of state directly. In parliamentary system around the world, only party members pick the leaders who may become prime ministers. Those party leaders become prime minister without being chosen by all voters in an election. In your work groups, write letters to the newspaper, explaining why, or why not, we should elect our Prime Minister directly.



Activites

8. Find some examples in the Toronto Star of news stories, editorials and columns. Editorials and columns are opinion pieces, based on factual reporting of an event. Write in the style of an editorial, an argument that all voters should (or should not) elect the Prime Minister directly. When you finish, exchange your editorials with others and edit each other's work. Have one member of each group present the editorial to the class, and vote which one you think is best.

The image shows three news article snippets from the Toronto Star. The first snippet is from the 'Queen's Park' section, titled 'Premier surprised controversial PC candidate Tanya Granic Allen is running 'for any party in 2018''. The second snippet is from the 'GTA' section, titled 'Duelling daycare plans pit Liberals against NDP in battle for parent votes'. The third snippet is from the 'Star Columnists' section, titled 'Among Conservative rivals, Andrew Scheer's leadership deathwatch is already underway'.

News · Queen's Park

Premier surprised controversial PC candidate Tanya Granic Allen is running 'for any party in 2018'

Kathleen Wynne says the Mississauga Centre candidate has shown 'divisive' and homophobic attitudes.

News · GTA

Duelling daycare plans pit Liberals against NDP in battle for parent votes

NDP 'ups the ante' with ambitious child-care platform as daycare emerges as early election issue.

Opinion · Star Columnists

Among Conservative rivals, Andrew Scheer's leadership deathwatch is already underway

As his first anniversary as party leader approaches, Scheer still awaits the test that all rookie opposition leaders face, Chantal Hébert writes.

9. In your workgroups, prepare a script for a commercial to promote the idea of direct elections for prime ministers. Shoot the commercial.

10. Prime Ministers and premiers have just one vote in their legislatures. Yet premiers and prime ministers have a great deal of authority. Why do premiers and prime ministers have so much power in government?

11. Mayors also have just one vote in their councils. What influence do mayors have to convince councils to approve their ideas?

12. In some municipalities, citizens elect only the counsellors. The counsellors after the election choose one of their colleagues on city council as mayor. In your groups, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of voting for the mayor directly.



The Vote

The right to vote is important, because the voters' choices set the direction for governments. It is an important right and privilege, one that took many years to achieve. Who can vote changed over time, in Canada and elsewhere. Today, our democracy has universal suffrage. That means all citizens 18 years old or older have the right to vote. That includes you and your friends, if you are citizens. That was not always so.

The right to vote plays an important role in the history of parliamentary government. Since our government is based on the British parliament, let's look at how that evolved. In Britain, the nobility, by birth, were automatically members of the House of Lords for life. All the others, the commoners, were represented by the House of Commons. The people elected the members of that chamber. Those elected held their seats for up to five years.

Originally, the House of Lords was the most powerful part of parliament. That too changed. Today, the House of Lords has mostly symbolic power, while the House of Commons runs government. That makes who has the right to vote for members of parliament very important.

Over time, British voting rights included more people. First it applied only to men of property and wealth. Later, it applied to all men who paid any taxes. About 120 years ago, all men 21 or older and all women 30 and older received the vote. By 1928, British women 21 or older also received the right to vote. Today, any citizen 18 years old or older may vote in parliamentary elections.

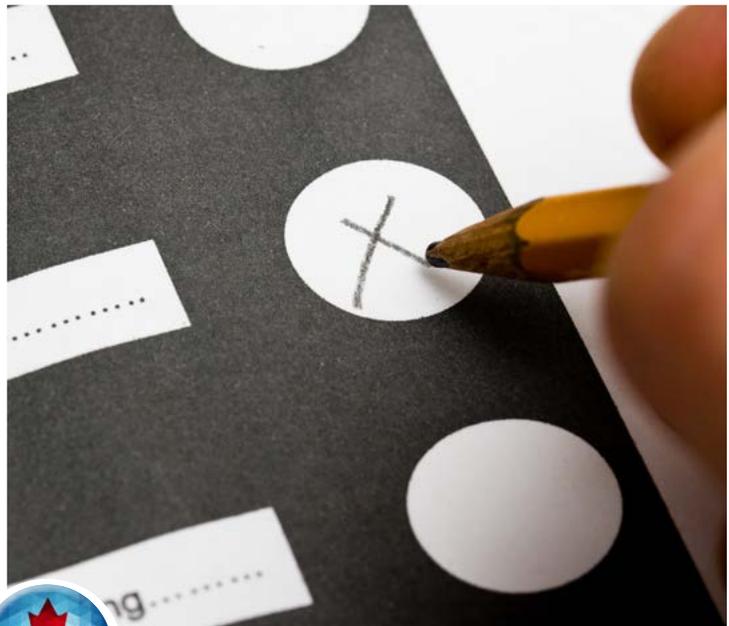
In Canada, the right to vote also expanded over time. Originally only men who owned property, or a minimum amount of wealth, could vote. Voting rights excluded the poor, women, First Nations and Inuit people and certain minorities. The right to vote had expanded to all men 21 or older, regardless of wealth, by 1898. During World War One, voting rights expanded to include women with husbands or sons in the military, or who were in uniform themselves. By 1918, all women 21 or older had the right to vote.

Canada's elections act originally gave the power to decide who votes to the provinces. That became a problem when provinces decided to set rules to prevent women and many minorities from voting. In 1948, that section of the act was overturned. Then the government lifted restrictions on native people. First Nations and Inuit people originally could vote only if they surrendered their "Indian Status". In 1960, the government changed the law so the same voting rights applied to First Nations and Inuit people as all other people in Canada.

The most recent expansion gave people in prisons the right to vote. In 1993, prisoners serving sentences less than two years received the right to vote. In 2002, that right expanded to include all prisoners, regardless of the length of their sentence.

Since 1970, citizens of Canada 18 years of age or older all have the right to vote in Canadian elections. This applies to all levels of government, from federal to municipal.

Each level of government maintains a separate list of eligible voters. Citizens must register on the appropriate Voters List. They must provide identification when they vote, including at least one item with address and photograph. That gives them the right to choose who represents them in the federal, provincial, or municipal government.



Activites

1. Prior to Confederation, before laws gave only men of property voting rights, women did vote in some parts of Canada. This was true especially in what is now Quebec. Why did that change?
2. After Confederation, women were not the only group not allowed to vote. Which other groups could not vote? How did the government justify not granting these people the vote?
3. In earlier days, people simply voted by a show of hands. What does that mean? Why could that have been a problem?
4. What does voting by secret ballot mean? Why was the secret ballot introduced?
5. Many women worked very hard for years to help women obtain the right to vote. Look up some of these women. Create posters for each of them, explaining their roles.
6. Today some people are arguing that teenagers 16 and 17 should also be allowed to vote. In class, list points in favour and against such a change. Discuss that list and create one list with which the class all agree.
7. Organize a campaign in your class supporting that cause. Prepare posters to show in the school. In groups, prepare speeches supporting that cause. Ask permission to present the best speech to the entire school during an assembly.
8. Write a script for, and film, a commercial promoting lowering the voting age to 16. Hold a competition for the best commercial.
9. Write a letter to the Editor explaining why you are for or against such a change. 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 the newspaper.

in my
opinion



Our Voting System

In Canadian elections, the candidate with the most votes in the election wins that riding and a seat in parliament. That is true even when the candidate does not win a majority of votes in a riding. The winner needs only one vote more than any other candidate. This is the “the first past the post” (FPTP) system. The system is simple and straight-forward, but does present problems. Today, three or more parties run for election in each riding. As a result, the winning candidates often receive fewer than half of the votes in a riding.

Nationally, that means federal parties can win a majority of seats in the House of Commons with 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. 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. The Green Party received 3.5% of the vote across Canada, but won only a single seat. Based on the percentage of the vote, they should have received at least ten seats.

There are ways of voting that give all political parties a more even chance, and make it more likely that all voters’ voices will be heard. Here are two examples.

Australia uses the Ranked Ballot system. Voters don’t pick just one candidate from the ballot. Instead, they rank all candidates on the ballot in order of preference. There is only one vote held; alternative choices are right on the ballot. If no candidate wins 50% +1 votes, the candidate with the fewest first choice votes drops from the ballot. The votes for second choice on the dropped candidate’s ballots are added to the remaining candidates’ ballots. That process continues until one candidate has 50% +1 of the votes.

New Zealand and Germany use the Mixed Member Proportional system. Voters cast two ballots, one for the local candidate, and a second one for a party. Candidates win seats under the FPTP system. However, a separate group of seats is set aside. The parties fill those seats with candidates they chose. They are seated in proportion of the popular vote each party received. For example, under this system, our Green Party would have received an additional 10 seats, to reflect the percentage of the national vote.

A referendum of Ontario voters rejected this system in 2007.



Activites - Our Voting System

1. Our voting system has one major advantage: it is easy to explain. Write a brief letter to someone new to our country, explaining our voting system.
2. In the last two elections, the winning party became the government with over half the seats in the House of Commons but received 40% or less of the votes across Canada. Two smaller parties, the NDP and the Green Party received a much larger percentage of the popular vote than seats in the House of Commons. How can it happen that parties can receive more or fewer seats in parliament than the percentage of the vote the party won in an election?
3. Use the Elections Canada, Toronto Star, and Maclean's Magazine websites to create a list of alternative voting systems. (Maclean's Magazine, June 16, 2016) <http://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>
4. In your work groups, divide the list up and have each group research one voting method. Create posters which explain the advantages and disadvantages of that system.
5. France has run-off elections when a candidate wins but does not receive 50% +1 of the total votes cast. The candidate with the lowest number of votes drops off the ballot, and there is a new vote. This is repeated until the first candidate wins 50% + 1 of the votes in that riding. This system is simple to understand. What reasons might governments have for not wanting to use such a system?



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.

You could start a political party. There are no fixed rules on how to form or organize a political party. Any group of 250 or more people may register as a political party. If you could convince 250 of your fellow students, you too could start a political party.

If candidates want the name of their party to appear on the ballot, that party must register with Elections Canada. 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.

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 Marijuana Party, and
- the Rhinoceros Party.

A political party must have at least 12 MPs in the House of Commons to count as an official party in Parliament. Qualified parties gain additional parliamentary funding and a few other perks. Small parties like the Green Party of Canada lose those perks because they have too few seats.

Political parties prepare a “platform”, a set of policy ideas. That explains what the party stands for. Party membership approves the platform before an election. 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.

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. The parties hope voters will like the ideas. They will use social media as well as flyers and ads to spread their ideas and convince voters to support them.

Historically, Canadians have supported two main parties, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. In general, the Conservative Party favours smaller government, less regulation, and “traditional values”. The Liberal party favours a more active government role and social reform. The other parties take positions either more conservative or more liberal, hoping to stand out against the bigger parties.



Activites - Political Parties

1. In groups, write a definition of “political party”. Do some research into political parties, and rework that definition until you all agree.
2. What is a political platform? Using individual research, work out a definition with which your entire work group agrees.
3. Divide the list of the five main political parties among your work groups. Using the party websites and information from newspapers and other media, prepare an outline of the platform of each party.
4. Research what you think are the main national issues, and list them below. You can use the topics listed below as a start. Then prepare a chart comparing how each of the major parties stands on those issues.

Do an internet scavenger hunt. Find out as many details comparing how the five main federal parties stand on:

- Budget deficits
- Infrastructure spending
- Social spending: health care, pensions, housing, child care, social equality
- Support for industry and job creation
- Taxation
- Military spending
- Foreign aid
- First Nations issues

5. Look up several of the minor parties. Present some of the most interesting ideas from their platforms to the class.
6. If you could create your own political party, what ideas would you put forward?
7. Provinces have different areas of responsibility than the federal government. For example, health care and education are the responsibility of the provinces. List those responsibilities.
8. Using the Toronto Star and the party websites, list the main political parties in Ontario. Prepare an outline of their platforms. In your groups create a chart comparing how the parties stand. Compare your findings among the groups.
9. Political parties have a point of view, a philosophy. Create a poster showing which parties are more likely to support:
 - Higher minimum wages
 - Lower taxes
 - Government rules on working conditions or the environment
 - Easier rules for starting a business
 - Public health care and education
 - Private health care and education
 - Multiculturalism

Rank these ideas by how important each is to you.



Running for Elections

Federal elections for members of Parliament must take place every five years, or less. Canada now has fixed election dates, setting the terms of office at four years.

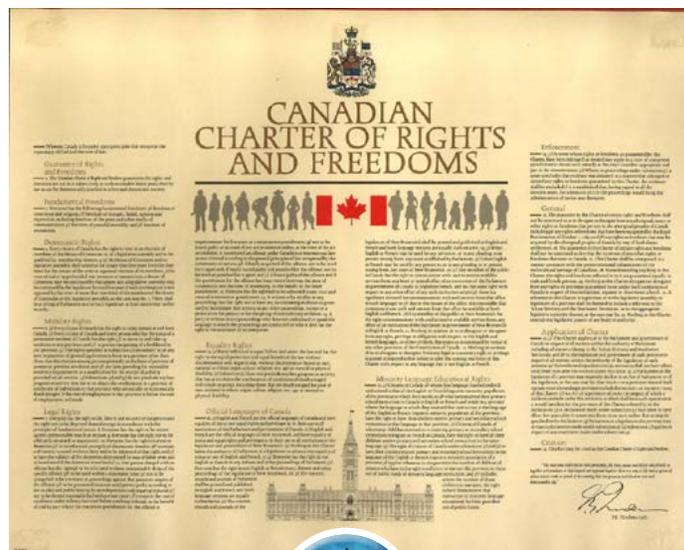
According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, any eligible voter is also eligible to run for election. That means you too could run, if you are 18 and a citizen. Candidates may run for a party or independently. They need to submit a nomination form with at least 100 supporters' signatures from the riding they wish to represent. In more remote ridings, 50 qualified voters are enough. Candidates representing a political party need the approval of the local party riding association. The riding association also provides the nomination papers and signatures. If several candidates want to run for the same party in that riding, an election among local party members decides. Party leadership must also approve candidates in each riding. The nomination papers with signatures go to the Chief Electoral Officer, along with confirmation that the candidates agree to stand for election.

Provincial and municipal rules are very similar. The Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto also require nomination forms with at least 25 voter signatures. Candidates running for a political party in provincial election must have the approval of the party leader and the riding association. Party leaders may also appoint candidates for ridings, but generally leave the choice to a vote of the riding association members. Candidates running for federal or provincial election do not have to live in the riding where they are running. Municipal candidates must either live in or own property in the city or town where they are running.

Money is a major issue in running for elections. It is expensive. Candidates need to promote themselves, advertise, and maintain an office and staff. Earning a living while running for election is also difficult. Spending limits help make elections fairer. These limits vary with the size of the riding and the number of people living there. These are set by the provincial or federal elections office at the time of the election.

So where does the money come from? In federal elections, individuals may donate up to \$1575 annually to a riding association. During an election, supporters may donate up to a total of \$1575 to all candidates. The candidate may give an additional \$5000 of their own money to the campaign. Party candidates may also receive money from their party. Companies and organizations such as trade unions may not give money to political campaigns.

Municipal candidates also have a limit on how much they can spend. Limits reflect the number of voters in their riding. Mayors may spend \$7,500 plus \$0.85 per voter. Candidates for councillor or trustee have a limit of \$5,000 plus \$0.85 per voter.



Activites - Running for Elections

1. Prepare a list comparing the requirements to be a candidate for federal, provincial and municipal election.
2. People in some jobs are not allowed to vote. List those jobs and explain why that is a good or bad idea.
3. At one time, candidates had to submit a \$1000 deposit to run for federal election. They lost that deposit if they received fewer than 5 – 10% of the votes in their riding. Have a discussion in class if this is a good idea.
4. Why is that deposit no longer required today? Is that change an improvement?
5. Political parties have the right to reject candidates who wish to run in their name. Why is that important to political parties?
6. Running for election is expensive. In the 2015 federal election, spending in single ridings ranged from a low of a few thousand dollars to a high of almost \$280,000. Should candidates be allowed to spend as much as they want? Should there be limits on the total amounts of money candidates can spend on their campaign?
7. Are spending limits for federal, provincial and municipal elections fair to candidates?
8. In your work groups, look up how individuals can become a candidate for election. Assign either federal, provincial or municipal government elections to each group. Make sure that at least two groups are looking up each type of election. List the qualifications to be a candidate, and any other information you find interesting.
9. As a class, compare the three levels of election. What do they have in common? Where do they differ?



Canadians elect all three levels of government. Candidates may run in federal elections for the House of Commons. Winners become Members of Parliament or MPs. Others may run provincially. Those elected become members of the provincial assembly or MLAs. Ontario calls the elected representatives Members of Provincial Parliament, or MPPs. Voters in municipal elections choose their mayors, city counsellors, and school board trustees.

The Canadian Constitution gives three reasons for the resignation of the federal and provincial governments. They happen if the Prime Ministers or Premiers call an election. They are free to call elections whenever they please. Government must call an election if it loses a vote on a major issue. Losing that kind of vote is serious. It means the government has lost the “confidence” of parliament or the legislature. The only solution is to let voters decide which party they support. Finally, both levels of government must call for new elections no later than every five years.

Those rules recently came under strong criticism. They gave governing parties a huge advantage. They could call elections whenever they had the most support. Unpopular governments could also delay elections, hoping their fortunes will change. There were also problems with timing. It was possible that provincial and federal elections happened very close together. That could create confusion among voters.

As a result, the federal government and all provinces except Nova Scotia now have set fixed election dates. However, the old rules still exist. Governments may still call elections whenever they wish. So far, they are sticking to the fixed dates. A confusing situation.

The resignation of the government usually triggers an election. Federally, the Governor General dissolves parliament and calls for elections. All 338 members of the House of Commons must resign. They then run for re-election in their local riding, if they wish to return to parliament.

Provincially, all members of the legislature also resign. The Lieutenant Governor calls for elections. Then the MPPs too must run for re-election.

The Ontario legislature in 2016 increased the number of seats in the legislature from 107 seats to 122. That matches the increase in the population of the province. The new riding boundaries and extra ridings come into effect at the next election, in June 2018.

The federal election campaign, the time between the resignation of the government and the vote for a new one, must be at least 36 days. The longest election period was for the 2015 election. It was 77 days long. Ontario allows 28 days for the election campaign.



In Ontario, municipal mayors, counsellors and trustees also have fixed four-year terms. Ontario schedules municipal elections for the fourth Monday in October. However, unlike Prime Ministers or Premiers, voters elect the mayor directly. Candidates run for positions as city counsellors or mayors. Like provincial and federal candidates, counsellors run in ridings, just like MPs, MPPs or MLAs. They are elected to represent a specific part of a community. However, voters of the entire municipality vote for their mayor.

Municipal candidates in Ontario do not run as representatives of a political party. They run as independents. They may be members of a political party, but as private citizens. There are no political ads by parties promoting municipal candidates. No such links appear on the ballot.

Municipal voters must all register on a separate municipal voters' list. Any citizen 18 or older who rents or owns property in a municipality may vote or run for election in that municipality. Their spouses or partners also have the right to vote. People must vote only in the riding where they live or own property. Individuals who own property in several municipalities may vote in all of them.



Activites - Elections

1. Why does the Governor General or the Lieutenant governor have to call an election?
Why not the Premier or Prime Minister?

2. Prime Ministers and Premiers “serve at the pleasure of the Monarch.” What does that expression mean?

3. Why are election campaigns so long? With instant media distribution of information, do we really need election campaigns that last nearly a month, or more?

4. The number of ridings in Canada changed over time. In 1867, there were 181 federal ridings in four provinces. Today there are 338 ridings in 10 provinces. While new provinces need new ridings, why has the government added ridings to existing provinces? What are the rules for the size of ridings?

5. You may have heard a lot about voter fraud, people voting illegally. How can governments prevent voter fraud? Is this a problem today?

6. Political parties receive money from the government in federal elections, in addition to private donations. Research how that works. Should parties receive funding from the government, or be allowed to fundraise privately as much as they can?



After the Election

After the elections, the elected candidates take an oath of loyalty. The Governor General or Lieutenant governor swears them in as members of parliament (MPs) or members of the provincial assembly (MPPs).

The Governor General asks the leader of the party with more than half the seats in the House of Commons to form the government. The party leader becomes Prime Minister. Sometimes, no one party has a majority in the House. One smaller party may agree to support the government, allowing the largest party to form the government. If several smaller parties have enough seats together to form a majority, they can try to govern. They need to work out agreements on how to work together, especially if they have different policies. Governments formed when two or more parties agree to govern together are called coalition or minority governments.

Forming a provincial government after the election work the same way. The Lieutenant Governor swears in the elected MPPs. The party with more than half the seats in the legislature forms the government. The leader of that party becomes Premier. If no party has a majority in the legislature, they can try to form a coalition government.

Both the federal and provincial governments have had coalition governments.

The Prime Minister and Premiers fill various positions in their government. For example, the Prime Minister and Premiers have department leaders known as Cabinet Ministers. They are responsible for specific parts of the government. Cabinet ministers are usually members of the party in power.

Mayors and city counsellors also swear an oath of office. Then Council and the mayor vote to fill positions on city committees. They need heads picked from among the elected counsellors. That in Toronto includes the Executive Committee, Budget Committee, and a dozen others, including Parks and Environment and Public Works and Infrastructure.

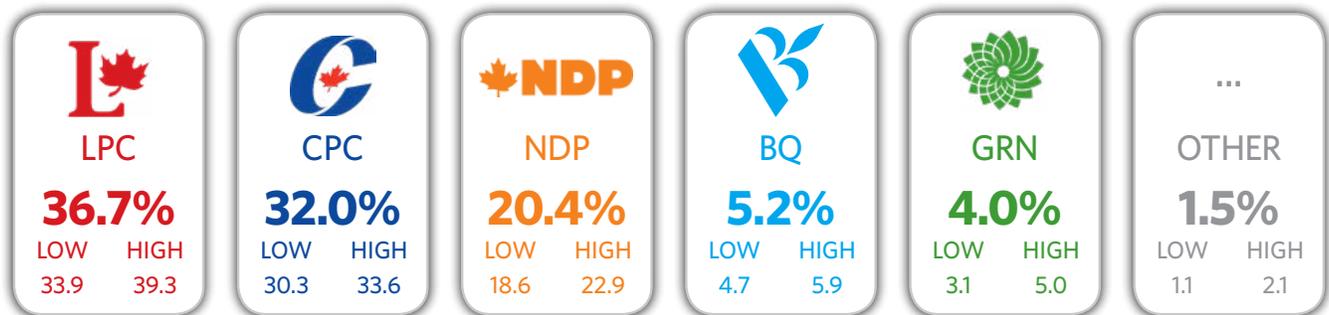


Activites - After the Election

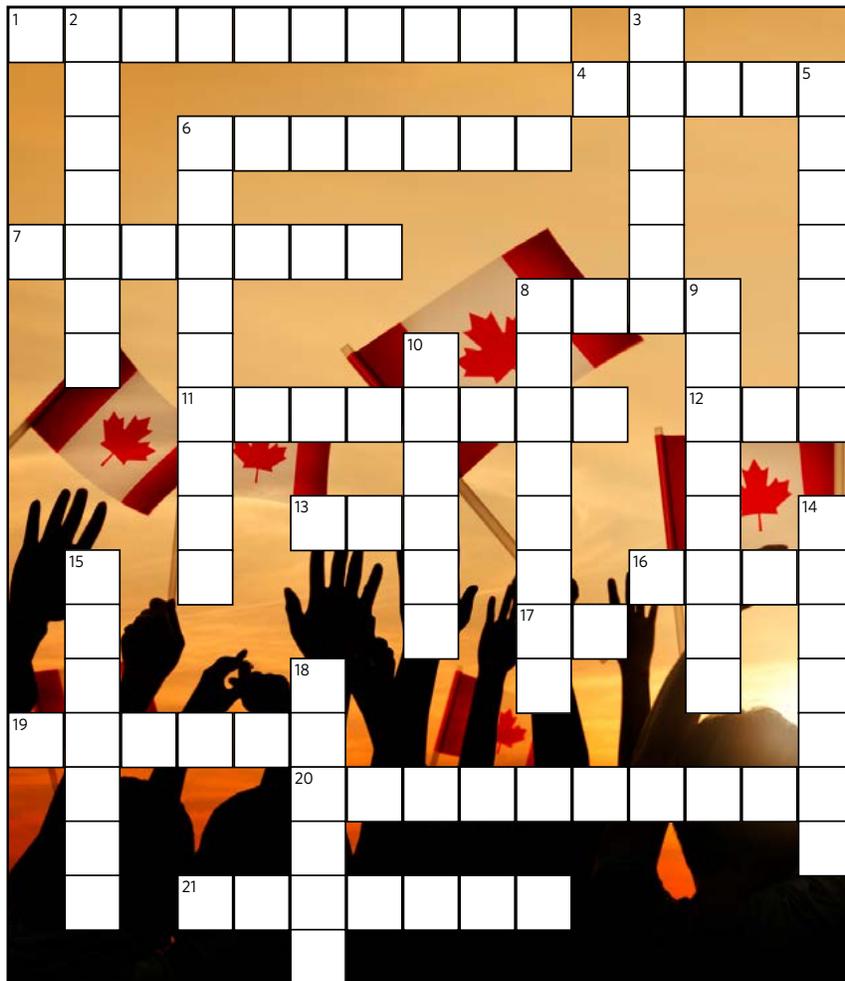
1. If a federal government has a majority in the legislature, it can put forward any legislation and be sure it will pass. What limits the power of a majority government?

2. Some voters like minority or coalition governments; others do not. What are the advantages and disadvantages of minority governments?

3. Parties are always running polls, asking Canadians how they would vote in an election. Private companies do too. Here is a poll result from the Toronto Star, October 19, 2015, taken during the last election campaign. There are concerns that this might influence voters. Explain why you think polls might, or might not, influence voters. Should such poll results be allowed during elections?



Crossword Challenge



ACROSS

1. Checks on ballot counting
4. Head of municipal government
6. Ministers of the Crown
7. Head of State
8. Canada's voting system in short
11. They run school systems
12. Spreading the word
13. Short for member of the Legislative Assembly
14. This is so much
16. Years between federal elections
17. Member of Parliament
19. Canada's Upper House
20. Governments must have this
21. Governor...

DOWN

2. House of ...
3. How one chooses a candidate
5. Election districts
6. Parties working together
8. Charter of Rights and...
9. What a party runs on
10. The capital
14. Provincial head of government
15. Senior level of government
18. Chamber of Sober... Thought

