

Glossary

A

acclamation — A candidate is elected by acclamation if he or she has no opponents. No vote is held.

advance polls — An opportunity to vote before polling day. Also sometimes called advance voting. Advance polls take place from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday prior to polling day.

alderman — See *councillor*.

analyze — To examine methodically and in detail for the purpose of explanation and interpretation.

anarchy — A system defined by the absence of government or any enforced authority, giving each individual complete liberty.

apathy — A state of indifference, or a lack of feeling or emotion towards someone or something.

aristocracy — See *oligarchy*.

autocracy — A system of government run by a ruler with total power and authority over all aspects of life.

B

backbencher — A member of parliament or legislative assembly who is not a party leader, cabinet minister or opposition critic.

ballot — A document used by voters to indicate their preference in an election, electoral event or referendum.

bias — A preconceived opinion, a one-sided view or a prejudice against something or someone or an issue formed without evidence or adequate reasoning.

bill — Proposed legislation or law introduced to the parliament or legislative assembly. It becomes an act when passed by the parliament or legislative assembly and given royal assent.

by-election — An election held in a particular riding or division to fill a vacancy in the House of Commons or legislature at any time other than during a general election. Several by-elections may be held on the same day.

C

cabinet — This governing body is made up of the ministers of government ministries or department. This body advises the premier. The ministers are appointed by the lieutenant governor on the recommendation of the premier and are usually chosen from elected members of the party that forms the government.

cabinet minister — A member of the cabinet or executive council. Cabinet ministers introduce and debate bills. They also administer specific government ministries and formulate government policy.

candidate — A person who seeks election to public office. A candidate running in a provincial election or by-election is trying to become a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

caucus — A group composed of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) of a given party.

centre (spectrum) — A political party or individual holding moderate views or middle-of-the-road opinions.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) — An independent officer of the legislature appointed by the lieutenant governor on the recommendation of the legislative assembly. The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for the administration of the provincial electoral process.

communism — A political ideology that promotes the establishment of an egalitarian, classless, stateless society based on common ownership and control of the means of production and property.

coalition government — When two or more political parties join together to form a government, neither of which would be a majority government on their own.

concurrency — When federal and provincial/territorial, and/or municipal powers overlap in jurisdictional responsibilities.

conservatism — A political ideology advocating the preservation of society and opposing radical changes.

constituent — An individual who lives in a geographically and politically defined area with an elected representative.

constituency association — An organization formed for an electoral division as the local organization of a political party. Also known as a riding association.

constitutional monarchy — A government headed by royalty. Canada is a constitutional monarchy in that the Queen is the official head of state, represented by the governor general at the federal level and the lieutenant governor at the provincial level.

councillor — An elected member of a municipal government, such as a city or town council. Also known as an alderman.

councils — Elected bodies for a municipal government that exercise a range of powers that are given to a municipality on behalf of local residents and ratepayers.

D

declined ballot — A ballot handed back to the deputy returning officer by an elector who declines to vote due to dissatisfaction with the options. When the elector declines to vote, the deputy returning writes “declined” on the back of the ballot.

democracy — A type of government where power is held by all the people and citizens are meant to participate equally in making decisions.

deputy returning officer (DRO)

— The election official who supervises a polling station. The deputy returning officer's tasks include making decisions about a person's eligibility, counting the ballots and certifying the results.

dictatorship — See *autocracy*.

E

editorial — The process by which news organizations and their columnists or pundits openly share their opinions or analysis.

election — The process where citizens vote for a person to act as their representative at the federal, provincial/territorial or municipal level. Elections are usually held at regular intervals.

election officer — An election worker at a polling station.

Elections Alberta — A non-partisan, independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, which is responsible for administering the electoral process in the province.

elector — A person eligible to vote. Also known as a voter.

electoral division — A geographical area represented by an elected official. Also known as a riding or constituency. There are 87 provincial electoral divisions in Alberta.

electoral system — The process by which votes are translated into seats in a legislature. In Canada we use the First-Past-The-Post system (or Single-Member Plurality).

electorate — The whole body of electors.

enfranchise — Extend the right to vote to a particular group of people.

executive council — See *cabinet*.

F

fascism — An authoritarian or totalitarian right-wing political ideology. Usually found in one-party states that are highly nationalistic and militaristic.

federal — Referring to one of the three levels of government in Canada; pertaining to the whole country.

first-past-the-post — The system in which the candidate who has more votes than any other single candidate wins the election.

freedom — The power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.

G

general election — An election usually held at regular intervals or at fixed dates in which candidates are elected in the constituencies of the nation or province/territory.

government — Refers to the government body of a country, province, city or town, which makes and administers laws.

H

House of Commons — The federal body that creates, implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations for the entire country. Located in Ottawa, the House of Commons currently consists of 308 MPs, each representing a different riding.

I

incumbent — The existing holder of a political office. An electoral division or riding without an incumbent candidate is known as an open seat.

independent — A candidate or elected representative who does not represent a political party.

issue — An important topic of debate and discussion.

L

left wing — On the political spectrum, one who favours liberal, socialist or progressive views.

legislative assembly — A provincial legislative body composed of elected members (87 MLAs in Alberta), who each represent a single electoral division. The role of the legislative assembly is to pass legislation, approve public finances and scrutinize government.

legislative branch — The branch of government that has the power to create, change and repeal proposed and existing bills.

legislature — The building in which the legislative assembly gathers.

liberalism — A political ideology that favours social progress by reform and by changing laws rather than by revolution.

lieutenant governor — The provincial representative of the Queen and the ceremonial head of state. This person is appointed by the governor general on the recommendation of the prime minister. The lieutenant governor opens, suspends and dissolves the legislative assembly, and gives or withholds royal assent to bills passed by the legislative assembly.

list of electors — The list of names and addresses of all eligible electors, which is used at the polling station.

M

majority government — A government formed by the party or the coalition of parties holding the majority of seats in the legislature.

mayor — The highest-ranking officer in the municipal government of a town or large urban city. The term reeve is used in smaller communities.

Member of Parliament (MP) — An individual elected by the people in a particular electoral division or constituency to represent them in the House of Commons.

Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) — An individual elected by the people in a particular electoral division or constituency to represent them in the Alberta provincial legislature.

minister — See *cabinet minister*.

ministry — A specialized department of the government with a specific area of responsibility (e.g., Health, Education, Transportation).

minority government — A government that does not hold a majority of seats, but it usually holds more than any other party and must maintain the confidence of parliament to continue in power. The government can be a single party or a coalition of parties.

municipal — Referring to one of the three levels of government in Canada. Municipalities are the most local level of government, existing as a result of provincial or territorial legislation.

N

new media — Refers to media content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, functions in real-time and is deemed borderless.

nomination paper — A document that gives the name and address of the candidate being proposed and is signed by at least 25 qualified electors from the electoral division in which the candidate seeks to be nominated.

non-partisan — An individual or organization with no party affiliation or bias.

O

official opposition — The party that holds the second-largest number of seats in the legislature or parliament. It is accorded certain financial and procedural advantages over other parties in opposition.

old media — Refers to traditional media sources in broadcast and print format, such as television, newspaper, radio, magazines and pamphlets/flyers. Old media is typically one way communication, delivered at a specific time, has limited jurisdictional reach and strives

to maintain journalistic integrity and standards.

oligarchy — A form of government system in which power rests with a small number of privileged people. Also sometimes called an aristocracy.

opposition party — A political party that is neither the governing party nor part of a coalition of parties forming the government.

P

paid media — Awareness gained through paid advertising.

parliament — A legislature. The term used for Canada's federal legislature. It is also the period from the opening of the first session immediately following a general election to the end of a government's term and the calling of another election at the federal level. Each parliament consists of one or more sessions.

parliamentary democracy — A type of representative democracy in which members are elected to parliament. The dominant political party in the parliament or legislature determines the leader of the government.

partisan — Support of a political party, cause or person.

party leader — An individual chosen or elected to act as the head of a political party.

party member — An individual who belongs to a political party.

party platform — A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues concerning government and the public. Parties announce their platforms and spread their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and ultimately secure votes.

plank — Individual topics or issues in a party's platform.

political ideology — A political ideology is a set of shared ideals or beliefs about how politics and government should function. Common ideologies

include liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism and fascism.

political party — A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political ideals whose intention is to achieve power through an election, form government and create meaningful political change.

political spectrum — The political spectrum is a means of characterizing beliefs, values and priorities, and provides a conceptual framework in which to view and evaluate political parties and policies.

poll clerk — The official who assists the deputy returning officer at a polling station by checking to see if a person's name is on the list of electors and dealing with the paperwork.

polling station — A voting location to which electors are assigned for the purposes of voting.

popular vote percentage — The percentage of all ballots cast for a particular party or candidate. A reflection of support across a jurisdiction.

premier — The leader of the provincial government. After a provincial election, the leader of the party with the greatest number of elected members heads the provincial government as premier.

provincial — Referring to one of the three levels of government in Canada; pertaining to the province.

R

rejected ballot — A ballot that has been placed in the ballot box, but declared unacceptable for counting by the deputy returning officer. A ballot that has not been marked properly.

representative democracy — Representatives are selected by the people through elections to make decisions on their behalf.

responsibility — A responsibility is a social force that binds you to your obligations and courses of action demanded by that force.

returning officer (RO) — The election official responsible by law for the administration of the electoral process within a single electoral division. Returning officers are appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

riding — See *electoral division*.

right — A right legally entitles you to take certain actions. A right is a protected freedom.

right wing — On the political spectrum, one who favours conservative views and tradition. Individuals on the right believe that government should not interfere with people and businesses.

S

scrutineer — A person representing a candidate at the polling station to observe the voting and the counting of the ballots. Only one scrutineer per candidate is permitted to remain in the polling station at any one time.

seat count — The number of seats that each political party has in the parliament or legislature. The party or coalition of parties with the highest seat count traditionally forms the government.

secret ballot — Canada uses a secret ballot, which means no one except the elector knows the choice that was made.

single-member plurality — Electoral system based on single-member districts, where the successful candidate is elected if they win the most votes in their electoral division. Also known as First-Past-The-Post.

slogan — A catchy phrase created and repeated in advertising and politics.

socialism — A political ideology where the means of production, distribution and exchange are owned by the community collectively, usually through the state.

special ballot — A method of voting that allows eligible electors to cast a ballot by mail during the election period. A special ballot is only extended to persons who are physically incapacitated, away from their electoral division, serving as an inmate, an election officer or living in a remote area.

speech from the throne — The speech delivered by the lieutenant governor for each new session of the legislature or parliament. This speech outlines the government's plans and initiatives for the session. Also known as the Throne Speech.

spoiled ballot — A ballot that has been kept separate and never placed in the ballot box because it was mistakenly marked or torn and exchanged for a new ballot.

subsidiarity — The principle regarding the division of responsibilities among the different levels of government; where the government closest to the issue governs it.

T

tabulation — The counting of ballots following an election. Ballots are counted and recounted to ensure an accurate election result is recorded.

theocracy — A form of government where a god or deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler. Government policy and leaders are determined by religious officials who are seen to be directly guided by a god or deity. Laws are interpreted by religious authorities, such as bishops or mullahs, and are enforced by religious officials.

U

universal suffrage — The extension of the right to vote to all adult citizens, including the removal of restrictions against women, various ethnic and religious groups, and property ownership requirements.

V

valid ballot — A ballot that is properly marked for only one candidate.

voter turnout — The total number of people accepting ballots in an election or participating in the electoral process. Usually expressed as a percentage of the total number of qualified voters.

voters list — See *list of electors*.

voting screen — The place at the polling station where electors go to mark their ballot in private. Also known as a privacy screen.

W

writ of election — The document signed by the Chief Electoral Officer that instructs the returning officer in antelectoral division to conduct an election on a specific date. After the election, the returning officer signs the writ containing the voting result and returns it to the Chief Electoral Officer.