

# 7 The Voting Process

## OBJECTIVE

Students will acquaint themselves with the voting process while evaluating the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates.

## KEY WORDS

advance polls, elector, candidate, electoral division, issue, constituent, ballot, secret ballot, valid ballot, rejected ballot, spoiled ballot, declined ballot

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- Why is voting by secret ballot important?
- Who is eligible to vote in Alberta provincial elections?
- How does the voting process work?
- How do I mark my ballot?
- How do I make my decision about who to vote for?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 7: The Voting Process
- Worksheet 7.1: Preparing to Vote

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 10 min

1. Demonstrate the importance of voting by secret ballot through a mock vote or through the following discussion points:
  - If you had to share the name of your favourite song, which would you choose? What song would you choose if your choice was private or announced anonymously? Would your answer be different?
  - Have you ever voted publicly (i.e., voting by raising hands)? Did you vote honestly? Why or why not?
2. There are a lot of people in the world who do not have the chance to vote at all due to violence, intimidation, discrimination or corrupt politics. Discuss the importance of voting by secret ballot in Alberta elections, and the effort to preserve individual choice and fair elections. What sort of negative consequences could develop if elections were held publicly? What does voting in private ensure? Why is it important to ensure a fair electoral process?

### Instruction: 20 min

1. To be eligible to vote in an Alberta provincial election, you must be:
  - A Canadian citizen,
  - At least 18 years of age or older,
  - Ordinarily resident in Alberta for the past six months.

2. When you arrive at your polling station, the deputy returning officer will ask your name and the poll clerk will check for your name on the list of electors. If your name is on the list, you will be issued a ballot to vote. If your name is not listed, you will be required to produce government issued identification containing your name, photograph and current address prior to being provided with a ballot. Alternatively, if you do not have a government photo ID, you can provide two other pieces of ID and one must confirm your address.
3. A ballot lists the candidates (and their political party association) running in your electoral division. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot to mark your choice. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate (e.g., checkmark, X, shading in), your ballot will be valid.

*Teacher Note: Show students what a ballot looks like and how to fill it out correctly. Review the following ballot terms: valid, rejected, declined and spoiled. Use ballot examples (refer to the Student Vote Election Operations Manual).*

### Activity: 20 min and homework

1. Using Worksheet 7.1, have students evaluate the campaign issues, party platforms, leaders and local candidates.
2. Allow students the opportunity to share their views of the parties, candidates and the campaign overall. Some individuals may jump at the opportunity to share their opinions and even try to persuade others to adopt their choice, while others may opt for silence and prefer to keep their politics personal.

*Teacher Note: This could turn into a fruitful discussion about the privacy of voting decisions (see Extension Activity A).*

3. Encourage students to take their worksheets home and start discussions with their family and friends. Have students ask their parents or guardians if they plan to vote and whether they have chosen a

candidate to support. Suggest to students that they accompany their parents to the polling station and observe the process.

### Debrief: 10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about casting your ballot and making your decision. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Do you feel ready to vote? Why or why not?
- Have the class activities, campaign events, dialogue with family and friends, and media had any impact on your decision to vote for a particular party or candidate? Reflect on why your decision has changed or remained the same over the course of the election.
- What moment or event in the election campaign has attracted the most attention from the media? Why do you think this is the case?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Individually, students are to support or refute the following statement in a one-page reflection: “Politics and voting decisions are private and should not be discussed with others.”

B. Have students create a tutorial or presentation to prepare the rest of the school for Student Vote Day. This presentation should demonstrate what happens at the polling station and how to fill out a ballot. Schedule time to make the presentation in each participating classroom or broadcast it on the AV system.

C. Online voting has been suggested as a way to improve voter turnout. What are potential advantages and disadvantages of online voting? Is it more or less convenient or efficient? Is it more or less expensive? Is voter coercion a risk or not? Would the system be more or less secure? Have a class discussion, or ask students to write an opinion piece about why they do or do not support online voting.

D. Create a pledge-to-vote activity for all Student Vote participants. This could include a ceremony or an official “I am a Voter” agreement, whereby students pledge to vote when they become eligible.

E. Ask students to make predictions about the election results in the Student Vote and general election and provide a rationale for the outcome (e.g., seat count, popular vote percentage). Collect the predictions and reveal the student who is closest to the actual outcome after the election.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

#### Who can vote?

To be eligible to vote in an Alberta provincial election, you must be:

- A Canadian citizen,
- At least 18 years of age or older,
- Ordinarily resident in Alberta for the past six months.

#### What type of identification do I need in order to vote?

- An elector whose name is on the list of electors is not required to produce identification prior to voting.
- An elector whose name is not on the list of electors may vote after producing government issued identification containing the elector’s photograph, current address and name. This includes an Operator’s (Driver’s) Licence or an Alberta Identification Card.
- An elector whose name is not on the list of electors, and who is unable to produce government issued identification, must produce two pieces of identification from the list posted on the Elections Alberta website ([www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca)). Both pieces of identification must establish the elector’s name, and one piece must establish the elector’s current address.

#### How do I get on the List of Electors?

You can register to vote using Election Alberta’s secure on-line registration system called Voterlink. You can also contact Elections Alberta in person or by phone, e-mail or fax. Your information will be added to the Register of Electors to ensure that it will appear on subsequent lists of electors.

#### Where do I vote?

- Each electoral division is divided into smaller polling subdivisions, which are defined geographic areas. Eligible voters residing within each polling subdivision vote at the polling station designated for their area.
- During the election period, you can find your polling station on the Elections Alberta website and in local newspapers. In addition, notices are delivered to all residences in the province.

#### How does the voting process work?

1. Once you confirm your eligibility, you are given a ballot that has the election officer’s initials on the back.
2. Go behind a voting screen to mark your ballot. Choose only one candidate on the ballot.
3. Hand your folded ballot back to the election officer to check for the initials.
4. Place your folded ballot in the ballot box.

#### What is a secret ballot?

Voting across Canada is done by secret ballot. This ensures the privacy of each voter’s choice. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

#### How do I mark my ballot?

A ballot lists the candidates (and their political party association) running in your electoral division. There is a space beside each candidate’s name on the ballot where you can mark your preference. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be valid. This includes a checkmark, X, shading in or another marking.

*What is a rejected ballot?*

A rejected ballot is a ballot that cannot be counted due to a deliberate or accidental unrecognizable choice. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate even if different symbols are used, ranking the candidates, leaving the ballot blank, writing your name or anything on the ballot.

*What is a declined ballot?*

A voter may also choose to use their vote to express their dissatisfaction with the options given. This is called a declined ballot. In Alberta, this is done by receiving a ballot, then giving the unmarked ballot back to the poll clerk. The voter states that he or she does not want to vote. The deputy returning officer will write the word “declined” on the ballot and place it in the declined ballot envelope.

*What is a spoiled ballot?*

A spoiled ballot is 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. The deputy returning officer shall write the word “spoiled” on the back of the ballot and place it in the spoiled ballot envelope.

*What are advance polls? What are other ways to vote?*

Electors, who are away, busy or unable to vote on polling day, have the option of voting at advance polls. Advance polls are held from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday prior to polling day.

You can also vote by special ballot (mail-in ballot) if you are unable to vote on polling day. You must request a special ballot from the returning officer in your electoral division. You can only request a special ballot if you are unable to vote at the advance polls or on polling day because you are:

- Physically incapacitated,
- Away from your electoral division,
- Serving as an inmate,
- An election officer, candidate, official agent or scrutineer, or
- Living in a remote area, as defined in the *Election Act*.

Visit [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca) for more information.

*How do I prepare to vote?*

Get informed. Learn about the candidates, the political parties and the issues. When preparing to vote, you consider reasons to support a candidate for premier, a local candidate for MLA, a political party, a specific issue or a whole party platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time.

*How do you know if you are ready to vote?*

You feel confident in your ability to make a choice.

**EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

- Student Vote Election Operations Manual
- Elections Alberta — [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)