

# 1 Governance and Democracy

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of government around the world to better understand the principles of democracy.

## KEY WORDS

government, autocracy, dictatorship, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, theocracy, constitutional monarchy, representative democracy, democratic principle

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What is the role of government?
- What types of government exist around the world?
- How do other forms of government compare to democracy?
- What are some key principles of democracy?
- Why is democracy important?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 1: Governance and Democracy
- Video 1: Government and Democracy
- Handout 1.1: Principles of Democracy
- Worksheet 1.2: What are the Principles of Democracy?
- Worksheet 1.3: Who Should Decide?

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 15-20 min

1. Split the class into three groups and have them sit together. Assign an actual or hypothetical decision (e.g., desk arrangements, theme for a school dance, charity fundraiser) and ask each group to brainstorm ideas for a few minutes. Provide enough time to allow all students to share their opinion.
2. Now assign each group one of the following decision-making models and ask them to make a final decision based on the rules given. These decision-making models are based on real types of government found throughout the world.

Group A – Only one person (i.e., the first person on the class list) will make the decision (autocratic)

Group B – Only a select few (i.e., only males or females) may be involved in the decision-making process (oligarchic)

Group C – All group members will have an opportunity to have a say in the decision-making process (democratic)

3. While groups are working out their decisions, observe how each group is functioning and make mental note of engagement among those with power versus those without, interactions among members and length of time to make the decision. This will help bolster lively discussion afterwards. (Alternatively, you can ask one student to be the observer in each group and take notes.)

*Teacher Note: Group A may become unruly as most members of the group will lack a voice — but this will make for a productive discussion afterwards.*

4. Bring the groups back together and ask each to describe their experience. Ask each group to mention their thoughts on the following discussion questions:
  - How quickly was a decision made?
  - Did everyone agree with the decision?
  - Was the decision-making process fair?
  - How happy were you with the decision made? Why?
  - What kind of feeling developed within the group?
  - How engaged were all members in the activity?

### Instruction: 5-15 min

Various types of government exist in the world and they make rules and decisions for their people in different ways. Governments can be compared by how they share power and the types of rights and freedoms given to citizens.

*Teacher Note: Show Video 1 or use PowerPoint 1 to summarize the different government types to students.*

a) An autocracy or dictatorship is a type of government where one person has full control through the use of a party or military, without the consent of the people. Autocratic countries have limited individual rights and freedoms, with a high level of security and restricted media. Human rights abuses are common. These countries are usually one-party states where there is little or no political opposition (e.g., Syria, North Korea).

b) An oligarchy, or aristocracy, is a type of government where power rests with a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful (often due to family lines or wealth). People living under oligarchic rule usually have some rights and freedoms (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait).

c) A democracy is a type of government where power is held by all the people and citizens are meant to participate equally in making decisions. Citizens elect people to represent them in government and make decisions on their behalf. This is called a representative democracy. Citizens also have access to power and can run for political office. In democratic countries the people have protected rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech and religion, and free and fair elections (e.g., Canada, the United States, Japan, England).

d) A theocracy is 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 (e.g., Iran, Vatican City).

#### Discussion: 5-10 min

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of government? Consider the following and relate it back to the Hook activity.

- The process for making decisions and laws (time, cost and efficiency)
- The fairness and effectiveness of the decision-making process
- The ability of citizens to live their lives freely
- The feelings developed among citizens

#### Activity: 35-45 min

1. Introduce Handout 1.1 and explain that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and assign each group one or two principles of democracy. Give students 10 to 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with their principle(s) and design a brief presentation to inform the rest of the class about their principle(s). Students can design a poster, symbol or graphic, create a skit, or provide actual examples that demonstrate the principle working or not working. Make chart paper available for any visual or written material.
3. Give each group 1 to 2 minutes to present. During the presentations have students take notes on Worksheet 1.2.

*Teacher Note: Afterwards, post the presentations around the classroom for future reference.*

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about governance and democracy. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection in their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What does democracy mean to you?

- Is there a better system of government than democracy?
- Are there some countries that operate under the guise of a democracy?
- Why does a healthy democracy rely so heavily on citizen participation?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. To further explore the advantages and disadvantages of decision-making models in a range of scenarios, assign students Worksheet 1.3. Discuss the answers as a class and debate the choices where applicable.

B. Use media and news stories to discuss global struggles to participate democratically (e.g., overcoming violence to vote, long lines at polling stations). In pairs or groups, have students choose a topic, search for a clip and present it to the class. Key discussion questions: What do these struggles signify? Does it make you appreciate our ability to vote in Canada?

C. Investigate the events of the ‘Arab Spring,’ which began in 2010 and ended in 2012. What happened? How and why did it happen? What is the current status of those affected nations, several years later?

D. As a class or in groups, have students debate the principles of democracy and evaluate the health of our democracy today. Defend your answers by providing examples of where a principle is or is not working (e.g., citizen participation in elections, multi-party systems, abuse of power, transparency). Do we, as Canadians, need a refresher in the principles of democracy?

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

##### *What is government?*

Government is made up of the people and institutions put in place to run or govern a country, state, province/territory or community. The role of government is to make decisions and laws for the people for whom it is responsible. The purpose of government is to protect its citizens and provide services.

##### *What types of government exist?*

Different systems of government exist around the world. They are distinguished by how they are formed, the allocation of power and by the types of rights and freedoms given to their citizens.

An autocracy, or dictatorship, is a type of government where one person has full control without the participation or permission of the people. The leaders or dictators often force their way to power because they were associated with or related to the previous leader. Autocratic countries generally have limited individual rights, freedoms and civil liberties. There is usually a heavy military presence and the media is limited on what it can report on. Examples include Syria and North Korea.

An oligarchy, or aristocracy, is a type of government where power rests with a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful (often due to family lines or wealth). People living under oligarchic rule usually have some rights and freedoms. Examples include Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

A democracy is a type of government where power is held by all the people and citizens are meant to participate equally in making decisions. Citizens elect people to represent them in government and make decisions on their behalf. This is called a representative democracy. Citizens also have access to power and can run for political office. In democratic countries the people have rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech and religion, and free and fair elections. Examples include Canada, the United States, Japan and England.

A theocracy is a type 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 these religious authorities, such as bishops or mullahs, and are enforced by religious officials. Examples include Iran and Vatican City.

*What type of government do we have in Canada?*

Canada is a parliamentary democracy, which is a type of representative democracy. It is also a constitutional monarchy; the Queen, our head of state, holds symbolic power. A constitutional monarchy can be either a democracy or an autocracy.

*What is a principle? What are the principles of democracy?*

A principle is a fundamental belief or rule of action. There are several principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Most democratic countries exhibit some or all of these principles, including equality and respect for human rights, economic freedom, a bill of rights, the rule of law, control of the abuse of power, free and fair elections, multi-party systems, citizen participation, accountability and transparency, an independent judiciary, political tolerance and accepting the results of elections.

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Government Type, CIA World Factbook — [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)
- Libya begins election amid violence, Al Jazeera (June 25, 2014) — [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)
- Ukraine votes in presidential poll amid fears of violence, France24 (May 25, 2014) — [www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com)
- Iraqis vote amid looming threat of violence, Al Jazeera (April 30, 2014) — [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)
- Zimbabwe voters stand in long lines for crucial election, The Associated Press (July 31, 2013) — [www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)
- Florida's Long Lines On Election Day Discouraged 49,000 People From Voting: Report, Huffington Post (December 29, 2012) — [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)

# 2 Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

## OBJECTIVE

Students will develop an appreciation for the fundamental rights and responsibilities that exist within a democracy.

## KEY WORDS

representative democracy, right, responsibility, elections, voter turnout, universal suffrage

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What rights and freedoms do we have in Canada?
- What responsibilities come along with our rights?
- What is universal suffrage?
- Why is it important to exercise your right to vote?
- What is a democratic citizen?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 2: Democratic Rights and Responsibilities
- Video 1: Government and Democracy
- Handout 2.1: Highlights from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- Handout 2.2: History of Voting Rights in Canada
- Worksheet 2.3: The Right to Vote
- Handout 2.4: Voter Turnout by Age Group (Federal Elections)

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 10 min

1. Play a game of “Use it or lose it” using the directions and rules below.

Students have five minutes to accomplish three goals.

- a) Find a partner.
- b) Draw detailed portraits of one another using at least five different colours.
- c) Accumulate as many writing utensils as possible.

Rules for the game:

- Each student begins with three writing utensils in front of them.
  - They can write with only one utensil at a time.
  - Students can ask for utensils from each other.
  - Whenever students are asked for a utensil they are not using, they must give it up.
2. Once the five minutes are up, identify how many students were able to achieve each of the goals. Ask students if it was difficult to accomplish all three goals and how they felt during the experience.

3. Afterwards, explain to students that the exercise was meant to represent rights and freedoms. Ask students to reflect on how they would feel if their right to have a say or make decisions (in class, at home, in their social group) was removed or was temporarily revoked.

### Instruction: 15-20 min

1. All citizens living in a democracy have guaranteed rights and freedoms. A right is a legal entitlement. Rights are more often fought for and claimed (in courts or even violently), and less often simply granted.



2. In Canada, our rights are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official language rights and minority language education rights. Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, aged 18 and older, to vote in an election (Handout 2.1). Elections are the process by which our elected representatives and government are chosen.
3. The right to vote in Canada has not always been universal. It has been withheld from many groups throughout history, including women and various ethnic and religious groups. See Handout 2.2 and other suggestions listed in the *External Resources* section.

*Teacher Note: Assign Worksheet 2.3 for homework.*

**Discussion: 5-10 min**

What is a responsibility? What responsibilities come along with our rights? Make a list of rights and corresponding responsibilities on the board. Some examples include:

Right	Responsibility
The right to vote	The responsibility to cast a ballot and make an informed decision
The right for any person to not be discriminated against	To demonstrate tolerance and respect for diversity of background, gender, ethnicity, race and religion
Freedom of expression	The responsibility not to slander someone or to spread hate propaganda

**Activity: 20-30 min**

- Electoral participation is declining across Canada at all levels of elections. In the last three Alberta provincial elections, only half or less than half of citizens cast ballots. What does this reflect?

*Teacher Note: Voter turnout was 45 per cent in 2004, 41 per cent in 2008 and 54 per cent in 2012.*

- Voter turnout is typically much lower among younger age groups. Examine voter turnout rates by age group at the federal level (Handout 2.4).
  - Which age group had the highest voter turnout? Which group had the lowest?
  - Discuss the impact. How does it influence the results? Who would politicians want to speak to more?
  - Consider possible reasons for these differences. What does it say about different age groups? What does it say about our election process?
- Watch Rick's Rant — March 29, 2011 ("The Rick Mercer Report") with your class for a humorous but insightful look at voting in Canada and youth participation.
- Ask students to imagine they are marketing advisors or a marketing firm hired by Elections Alberta to attract young voters to participate in the 2015 provincial election. In small groups or independently, students should design an advertising campaign that will encourage youth to vote by incorporating social media, digital, print and/or audio-visual elements. Post advertisements around the school or play videos in the lead-up to Student Vote Day. Submit your productions to CIVIX by email or upload them to YouTube or Facebook.

**Debrief: 5 min**

Have a brief closing discussion about the right and responsibility to vote. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Is the decline in voter turnout disrespectful to those who had to fight for their right to vote? Why or why not?
- Is not voting ever a legitimate choice? What are some reasons for not voting?
- Should voting be mandatory? Why or why not?
- Will you vote when you become eligible? Why or why not?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

A. In groups or individually, have students promote various aspects of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Students can create a short speech, comic strip, dramatic presentation, essay, news article, poster or multi-media presentation.

B. Divide the class into five groups and provide each with a section from Handout 2.2 (or History of the Vote — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)). Ask students to create a dramatic or multi-media presentation to inform the rest of the class about the pathway to universal suffrage and improved accessibility for voters.

C. Using Handout 2.2 and additional research, have students design a chronological timeline of events depicting the history of voting rights in Canada and the contributions by various individuals, agencies and non-governmental organizations.

D. Australia has a governmental system similar to Canada's, but non-voters are fined \$20 by the Australian Electoral Commission if they do not have a valid reason for not voting. As a class or in small groups, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of such a system. Ask the following discussion questions:

- Would mandatory voting make you more or less likely to vote?
- Do you think this would enhance or decrease the value Canadians put on voting?
- Would it increase voter turnout?

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

*What rights and responsibilities do we have in Canada?*  
The rights and freedoms of citizens are vital to a democratic government.

In Canada, citizens' rights and freedoms are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter contains seven sections that define our rights as Canadians: fundamental rights, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, official language rights and minority language education rights.

Democratic rights include the right for every Canadian citizen, 18 years and older, to vote in an election and to be a candidate, as well as the requirement that governments hold elections at least every five years and that these governments meet at least once per year. An election is the process of choosing individuals from among a group of candidates who will run a government.

With all rights come responsibilities. A responsibility is a social force that binds you to your obligations and courses of action demanded by that force.

The right to vote comes with the responsibility to cast a ballot in an informed and purposeful manner.

*What is universal suffrage?*

Universal suffrage is 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.

#### **EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

- A History of the Vote in Canada, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- The Evolution of the Franchise, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- The Electoral System of Canada, Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right, CBC Digital Archives — [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)
- Women’s Right to Vote, Telling Times Documentary — [www.cpac.ca](http://www.cpac.ca)
- A History of Voting Rights, New York Times — [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)
- Rick’s Rant — March 29, 2011 (“The Rick Mercer Report”)

# 3 Governments in Canada

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the roles and responsibilities associated with the three levels of government and understand how government policy and services influence their lives directly.

## KEY WORDS

municipal, provincial, territorial, federal, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of Parliament (MP), legislative assembly, legislature, parliament, House of Commons, prime minister, premier, subsidiarity, concurrency, executive council, ministry, minister

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- How is your life affected by government?
- How is government structured in Canada?
- What roles are associated with the three levels of government?
- How are responsibilities divided among the levels of government?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 3: Governments in Canada
- Video 2: Canada's Democracy
- Video 3: The Levels of Government
- Worksheet 3.1: Government in Canada
- Handout 3.2: Government Responsibilities
- Worksheet 3.3: Investigating Government
- Worksheet 3.4: Government All Around
- Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* (available online)

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 15-20 min

1. Have an opening conversation: How does government impact you or your life? Create a list for all students to see on the board, overhead or SmartBoard.
2. Invite students to share all of the activities they do on a daily or weekly basis. Try to refine the list so that activities can be easily connected to government policy or services (e.g., make breakfast, listen to music, ride the bus, go to school, drive a car, go clothes shopping, go to the park/skate park, buy groceries, take out the garbage).
3. Next, ask students if they know how government affects these activities, either through funding or legislation.

Examples include:

- Food — farming/agriculture, use of electricity
  - Music — Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, copyright laws/downloading music
  - Buses and local transportation — public transit, roads
  - School — curriculum outcomes, teachers, school boards
  - Driving a car — driver's licenses, traffic laws, speed limits
  - Shopping — sales tax
  - Parks and playgrounds — development and maintenance
  - Festivals — tourism, celebrations
4. Considering the list of government services mentioned, ask students how they would go about organizing one of the items if there was no government involvement (e.g., residential street snow removal, parks). How would this change their relationship with government?

### Instruction: 15-20 min

1. Canada is a federal state with three levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal).
  - The division of responsibilities is based on the principle of subsidiarity (whoever is closest to the matter governs it). There are also cases where responsibilities are shared between levels of government (concurrency).
2. Canada is a parliamentary democracy.
  - We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and provincial/territorial legislatures. Members are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills.
  - The political party with the most seats in the parliament or legislature usually determines the leader of the government.
  - The leader selects a cabinet (made up of ministers) and is responsible for the operations and policy of their level of government.
3. Canada is a constitutional monarchy.
  - Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king).
  - The sovereign is represented by the governor general (GG) at the federal level and the lieutenant governor (LG) at the provincial level.

- Both the GG and LG have similar roles and are responsible for ensuring that there is a leader and a functioning government. They summon, dissolve and prorogue parliament, call elections, give assent to acts of parliament and read the Speech from the Throne.

*Teacher Note: Use PowerPoint 3 to aid in the knowledge transfer. Ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.1 as they review the terms or assign it for homework. Copies of Handout 3.2 could also be distributed.*

#### Activity: 20-25 min

1. Watch Video 3 with your class to quickly review the roles and responsibilities at each level of government.
2. As a class or in groups play a game of political trivia (e.g., What is the title given to the leader of our country? Who holds this position? Which party do they represent?). You can use or modify the Political Trivia *Jeopardy!* game available online or create your own list of questions and answers. Worksheet 3.3 could also be used for reference.

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about government in Canada. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- What have you learned about government in Canada?
- If you became premier of Alberta, what would your three top priorities or goals be over the next four years? What would your vision for Alberta be?
- How involved should governments be in the lives of their citizens?
- Would you rather pay taxes to have public services provided, or be responsible for them yourself?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Using online resources, ask students to fill out Worksheet 3.3. This could be completed in a computer lab or assigned for homework. Use the following links as a starting point:

- The Governor General of Canada – [www.gg.ca](http://www.gg.ca)
- The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta – [www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca](http://www.lieutenantgovernor.ab.ca)
- Parliament of Canada – [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta – [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)
- Elections Canada – [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Elections Alberta – [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)

B. Distribute copies of Worksheet 3.4 and ask students, individually or in pairs, to label or identify all the government services in the picture. Take up the worksheet as a class and have a discussion about all the ways government impacts our lives.

C. Have students research and choose a political hero from the past – a municipal, provincial or federal politician who made a significant mark in the community, province or nation. Have them write a short summary of their hero's impact and present it to the class.

D. Create questions as a class or individually and ask students to contact one of their local elected representatives. Sample questions: What is an example of a recent law or by-law passed? Why was it passed? What are three pressing issues on the table right now? What issue are you most passionate about? How will your decisions and efforts affect me?

Alternatively, you could invite a former politician into the class for a Q&A about their experiences. Sample questions: Why did you want to get involved in politics? Which accomplishments are you most proud of while you were in office? What was the most challenging aspect of your job?

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

*How is government structured in Canada?*

Canada is a federal state, parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

A federal state brings together a number of different political communities with a central government (federal) for general purposes and separate local governments (provincial/territorial) for local purposes.

In Canada's parliamentary democracy, the people elect representatives (members) to the federal parliament and to the provincial and territorial legislatures. The local representative is called a Member of Parliament (MP) at the federal level and a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) at the provincial level in Alberta.

The dominant party in legislature or parliament (usually) determines the leader of the government. At the federal level, the leader of the government is called the prime minister. At the provincial or territorial level, the leader of the government is called a premier.

As a constitutional monarchy, Canada's head of state is a hereditary sovereign (queen or king), who reigns in accordance with the constitution. The sovereign is represented by and chooses the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. In each of the ten provinces the sovereign is represented by the lieutenant governor, who is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. Usually, the governor general and lieutenant governors have five-year terms.

Territorial commissioners serve in a role similar to a lieutenant governor in Canada's three territories. Commissioners do not represent the sovereign, however. They are appointed by and represent the federal government.

*How are responsibilities divided among the levels of government?*

Canada has three levels of government: federal, provincial/territorial and municipal. Each level of government has its own structure of elected and appointed representatives as well as a unique set of responsibilities.

The constitutional division of powers is based on the principle of subsidiarity, in which the government closest to the issue governs it. The division of powers is found in Sections 91–95 of the *Constitution Act*.

- The federal government takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national and international concern, such as our armed forces, relations with other countries, money and currency, fisheries and oceans, and criminal law and public safety.
- Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for their own province or territory and regional matters including education, health care delivery, natural resources and transportation/highways.
- Municipal governments take responsibility for their city or town and local matters such as garbage and recycling, libraries, public transit, and local parks and recreation. Municipal governments acquire their responsibilities from their province.

Some powers may overlap between federal and provincial jurisdictions. This is called concurrency. For example, federal, provincial and municipal governments are concurrently responsible for the environment. The federal government enforces the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* and regulates waterways used for fishing and shipping. Provincial governments regulate land use, mining, manufacturing and harmful emissions. Municipal governments are responsible for zoning, garbage disposal, and sewage and water treatment.

*How is the Alberta government structured? What roles exist?*

The Alberta government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial.

The legislative branch, termed the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, is made up of elected representatives called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The legislative branch creates laws, rules and regulations for areas under provincial jurisdiction. The legislative assembly consists of 87 MLAs and each represents a different geographic area, called an electoral division.

In the executive branch, the Queen is the head of state and is represented by the lieutenant governor. The leader of the government is called the premier. The executive branch implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations. The premier appoints several MLAs to head ministries of the executive council (cabinet).

Each minister is in charge of one of the provincial responsibilities and acts as an advisor to the premier and the legislature in their area of expertise.

The judicial branch of government is headed by the Chief Provincial Judge of Alberta. The judicial branch interprets the law and punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. In Alberta, there are nine assistant chief justices, judges and supernumerary judges to serve the population of the province. The judicial branch punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations. The Alberta court system is responsible for deciding who has broken the law and for dispensing the appropriate punishment for the crime committed.

*Where does the legislative assembly meet? What do they do?*

The Legislative Assembly meets at the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton.

When the legislature is sitting, MLAs are responsible for proposing, studying, debating and voting on bills (potential laws), and raising issues put forward by their constituents (people living in the electoral division they represent). When the legislature is not sitting, MLAs meet with their constituents to discuss their concerns and to provide guidance and advice relating to government services.

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- How Canadians Govern Themselves — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Discover Canada — [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of Alberta — [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)
- Government of Alberta website — [www.alberta.ca](http://www.alberta.ca)
- Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Government of Canada website — [www.gc.ca](http://www.gc.ca)

# 4 Political Parties

## OBJECTIVE

Students will gain an understanding of the political spectrum and the current political parties in Alberta.

## KEY WORDS

political ideology, political spectrum, right wing, left wing, centre, liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, fascism, political party, party leader, candidate, campaign, slogan, speech, platform, plank, electoral division

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a political ideology?
- What is the political spectrum?
- What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?
- How does a political party form government?
- What is a party platform?
- What are the details of each party's platform for the current election?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 4: Political Parties
- Worksheet 4.1: Where Are You on the Political Spectrum?
- Handout 4.2: The Basic Political Spectrum
- Handout 4.3: 2012 Election Results
- Worksheet 4.4: Getting to Know the Parties
- Worksheet 4.5: Understanding the Issues and Platforms
- Worksheet 4.6: Evaluating the Leaders' Debate

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 15 min

1. As a class or individually, have students answer a series of political spectrum questions (Worksheet 4.1 or another of your choosing). Explain to students that the questions are meant to encourage reflection on their beliefs, values and worldview.

*Teacher Note: Alternatively, this exercise can be conducted in a kinesthetic manner where students line up in a horizontal line and take a step forward if they 'agree' with the statement or a step backward if they 'disagree' with the statement. Students should assess how far they are away from the original line ('centre'). Students who take the most steps forward are the most left-leaning and the most steps backward are considered more right-leaning.*

2. Review the terms and perspectives associated with a linear political spectrum (Handout 4.2).
3. Analyze the results of the political spectrum questionnaire. To visually interpret where students sit on the spectrum compared to others, draw a horizontal line on the board with 0 on the left and 100 on the right. Have students mark their place based on the score they receive on the questionnaire.

Afterwards, share the general positions of the major political parties on the spectrum.

*Teacher Note: Due to the complex nature of political parties and individuals, the results of the political spectrum questionnaire will not be completely accurate in pinpointing an exact political standing. The goal of this exercise is to encourage students to reflect on their beliefs and values.*

### Instruction: 10 min

1. A political ideology is a set of shared ideals or beliefs about how politics and government should function. Common ideologies include liberalism, conservatism and socialism. Other examples are communism and fascism.
2. 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.
3. A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and a similar political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.
4. Political parties campaign during elections to share their party's ideas and convince citizens to vote for them. A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues concerning government and the public.
5. After the election, the party that elects the most number of MLAs or wins the most seats usually forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Review the results of the 2012 election (Handout 4.3).

**Activity: 50-120 min**

1. Review the list of political parties in Alberta and identify which have candidates in your electoral division.
2. Organize students into groups randomly or based on similar interests and ideologies (or the results of the political spectrum questionnaire). Assign each group a political party or allow them to choose one based on their preference. Regardless of the method, the goal is to ensure each party running a candidate in your electoral division is covered by a group.
3. Using party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:
  - What does the political party stand for?
  - Who is the current leader of the party?
  - What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
  - Who seems to be the target audience of the party? Who does the party seem to appeal to the most?
  - What are the party's main priorities or policy ideas (platform)? What is their vision for Alberta?
  - Where does the party sit on the political spectrum?
4. Ask each group to prepare a short presentation about their political party and its platform. Students should incorporate an audio-visual component that includes their logo/brand, campaign elements, and images of their leader and/or the local candidate.  
  
Within each group, students could also take on the roles of a campaign team to further learn about how parties are organized. Suggested roles include: leader, campaign manager, local candidate, communications director, policy expert and marketing specialists.
5. Have each group present their political party to the rest of the class. Students can make notes on each presentation using Worksheet 4.4. Afterwards have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

*Teacher Note: Organize a presentation schedule that would allow each group to visit other classes in the school on a rotational basis to help inform and prepare the student electorate for Student Vote Day. Alternatively, you could coordinate a school-wide assembly.*

**Debrief: 5 min**

Have a brief closing discussion about political parties with your class. Alternatively, students could be asked

to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Did you find yourself solely on one side of the spectrum? Is it possible to like ideas from opposite sides of the spectrum?
- If a person is running as a candidate of a political party, how closely should their personal political beliefs resemble those of the party? Should candidates be forced to follow the party's position on any particular issue, or every issue?
- What advantages or disadvantages might there be for a person who runs as an independent or without an association to a party?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

A. Research the use of negative campaigning and attack ads in elections. Search the internet for commercials or bring in print ads to share with your class. Discussion questions: Are attack ads effective? Are they ethical? Do they achieve their intended outcomes? What is your reaction to them?

B. Organize students into groups and assign each a major election issue (e.g., health care, education, the environment or the economy). Ask them to use party websites and news articles to research where each political party stands on the issue or what policies they suggest. Students can present their findings to the class. During the presentations have students make notes using Worksheet 4.5.

C. Invite a past parliamentarian to visit your class for a question and answer session or coordinate a Skype interview. Prepare a list of questions in advance (e.g., How does a political party work? How do political parties recruit members? How is policy developed? What was your experience like?).

D. Have students create their own provincial political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and suggested policies. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

E. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the major party leaders to share their platforms, point out holes in their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of the leaders' debate for your class or ask students to watch it with their families and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Worksheet 4.6.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

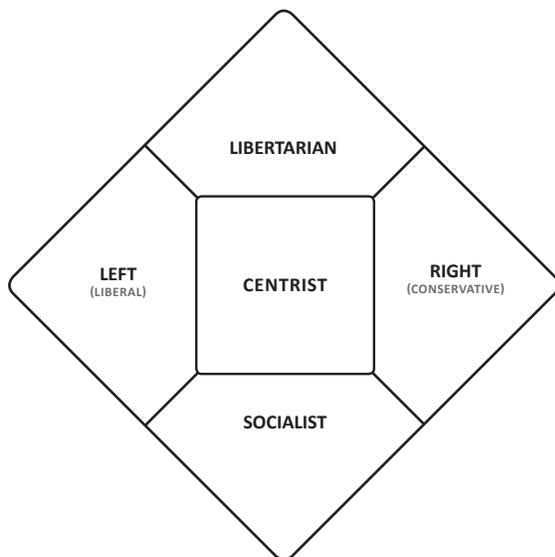
*What is a political party? What purpose do they serve?*  
A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and similar political beliefs whose intention is to achieve power through an election and create meaningful political change. Political parties

compete against each other during election campaigns and appeal to the public for their support and ultimately their vote on polling day.

*What is the political spectrum? How do political parties and the political spectrum relate?*

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. A linear spectrum is represented as a horizontal line, with parties on the left embracing change and parties on the right favouring tradition.

The political spectrum can also be viewed with two scales, one for economic/fiscal policies (horizontal axis) and one for social policies (vertical axis). This creates a quadrant with four areas.



*How does a political party form government in Alberta?*

Alberta's system of government at the provincial level is based on political parties. Parties are required to register with Elections Alberta. During elections, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team, with the intention of spreading their message in the hopes of securing constituent support and votes.

The political party that elects the most candidates (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the premier. Most candidates running for election belong to a party, unless they are running as an independent or are not associated with any party.

*How do political parties work?*

Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Joining a political party can be an effective way for you to influence the party and the politicians who represent you and your electoral division. Anyone above the required age can be a

member of a political party for most parties the age is 14. Party members can discuss ideas and propose policy. Many parties also have youth wings.

Party members choose their party's leader and local candidates, and help them get elected. Local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local riding association. The party selects the person they feel has the greatest chance of success as their candidate.

Candidates campaign during the election, share their party's ideas and aspire to represent them in the legislature. To become an MLA, a candidate must get more votes than any other candidate in their electoral division during an election.

*What is a party platform?*

A party platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues that concern the government and the public. Parties share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events, and share their ideas in order to attract support from the electorate and to secure votes.

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Elections Alberta — [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)
- Campaign literature (pamphlets, advertisements, articles)

#### Alberta Political Parties

(For a current list visit [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca))

- Alberta First Party
- Alberta Liberal Party — [www.albertaliberal.com](http://www.albertaliberal.com)
- Alberta New Democratic Party — [www.albertandp.ca](http://www.albertandp.ca)
- Alberta Party — [www.albertaparty.ca](http://www.albertaparty.ca)
- Alberta Social Credit Party — [www.socialcredit.com](http://www.socialcredit.com)
- Communist Party - Alberta — [www.comunistparty-alberta.ca](http://www.comunistparty-alberta.ca)
- Green Party of Alberta — [www.greenpartyofalberta.ca](http://www.greenpartyofalberta.ca)
- Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta — [www.pcalberta.org](http://www.pcalberta.org)
- Wildrose Party — [www.wildrose.ca](http://www.wildrose.ca)

# 5 Local Candidates and Issues

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about their electoral division, the candidates and local issues.

## KEY WORDS

electoral division, riding, electoral system, candidate, independent, incumbent, issue, constituent, Single-Member Plurality, First-Past-The-Post

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is an electoral division?
- What is an electoral system?
- Which electoral system is used in Alberta?
- What is the name of my electoral division and who are the candidates running?
- What are the most important issues in my electoral division?
- How can I learn about my local candidates?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Electoral Divisions and Local Candidates
- Worksheet 5.1: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.2: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Find your school's electoral division on the provincial electoral division map. Ask students if they notice any differences between their electoral division and others across the province (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population, geography, landmarks).
2. Show students an individual map of the school's electoral division (found at [www.elections.ab.ca](http://www.elections.ab.ca) under MAPS). Answer the following questions:
  - What are the boundaries of the electoral division?
  - What major landmarks or attractions are included in the electoral division?
  - What makes the electoral division unique?
3. Following the electoral division analysis, ask students to consider and discuss the following questions:
  - What issues do you expect people in our electoral division to be talking about?

- What promises or commitments do you expect the local candidates will be making?

### Instruction: 15 min

1. An electoral division (also known as known as an electoral district, riding or constituency) is a geographical area represented by an elected official. The size of each electoral division is determined by factors such as population and geography. Urban ridings are often smaller and more populous, while rural ridings are larger with less dense populations.
  - At the provincial level in Alberta, the elected official is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).
  - Alberta will elect 87 MLAs in the coming election.
  - Each MLA represents approximately 50,000 people.
2. An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats in the parliament or legislature.
  - Different types of electoral systems are used around the world and they differ by the number of representatives elected per division/district, the type of ballots used and the formulas used for declaring winning candidates.
3. Alberta uses a system called Single-Member Plurality or First-Past-The-Post (also used across Canada).
  - One representative is elected per electoral division (single-member districts).
  - Voters are only allowed to choose one candidate/party on the ballot (categorical or exclusive ballot).
  - The candidate with the most votes wins. The successful candidate does not need more than 50 per cent of the vote; they only must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (plurality).

*Teacher Note: It would be helpful to demonstrate FPTP with a sample ballot and voting results for your electoral division in the last election.*

### Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and qualifications do you expect from an MLA? Why are these qualities necessary for this job?

**Activity: 30 min or more**

1. List all of the candidates (and their party association if applicable) running for election in your school's electoral division. Show students where they can find this information ([www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)).
2. Ask students to create profiles by examining candidate websites, social media platforms, newspapers and other campaign literature. For each candidate, students should focus on the following questions to narrow their research:
  - What experience, skills and qualifications does the candidate possess?
  - Why does the candidate want to be elected? What are their priorities? What goals do they want to achieve?
  - What do you like or dislike about the candidate?
  - Would you feel proud if this candidate represented your electoral division at the Alberta Legislature? Why?

*Teacher Note: This activity can be completed independently or by jigsaw method using Worksheet 5.1. Ensure that all candidates in your electoral division are researched. Have students share their findings with the class.*

3. Have students prepare questions for each of the candidates to help evaluate their priorities and their capacity to take on the role of MLA. Before students prepare their questions, ask them to consider the following:
  - Which issues facing the province do you feel need to be addressed?
  - Which jurisdictional issues facing your community do you feel need to be addressed?
  - Which issues impact you, your family and friends?
  - What can you ask a candidate in order to evaluate their abilities to become an effective MLA?
4. As a class or in groups, email each candidate with three or four well-written questions.

*Teacher Note: Alternatively, consider inviting each candidate for a class visit, conducting a phone or Skype interview, or holding an all-candidates meeting at your school (refer to Handout 5.2).*

**Debrief: 5-10 min**

Review each candidate's profile and their responses to the questions. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Who is best suited for the job of MLA? Who do you feel will most effectively serve the community?

- Do you share the same opinions or values expressed by any of the candidates? Explain.
- Which candidate would you support and why?

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

A. Ask students to engage family and friends in a conversation about the election and the local candidates. Students could create a short take-home poll, or simply record the views of their family and friends based on a few specific questions. Have a follow-up discussion the next day. Do students share the same opinion as their parents? What are the reasons for shared or differing opinions?

B. Have a class discussion about geographical differences in an election campaign. Questions to consider: Does an MLA from Calgary-West have the same priorities as an MLA from Vermilion-Lloydminster or Drumheller-Stettler? What geographical, cultural or socio-economic differences might there be between the people of these different electoral divisions? How might these differences affect the interactions between MLAs in the Alberta Legislature?

C. Have students organize and engage in a mock debate to gain a better understanding of the job of a candidate in a local campaign. In small groups, select one student to take on the role of each local candidate (and persona, if possible); the rest of the group will be that candidate's campaign team. Using existing arguments taken from media coverage, candidate websites and campaign literature, have each group prepare for the debate.

D. Examine different electoral systems used around the world (e.g., proportional representation, two-round/run-off voting system, mixed member proportional). Research and debate the strengths and weaknesses of each system. Do you think Alberta should investigate electoral reform? Why or why not?

E. Have students attend an all-candidates' debate organized by the community or a local organization. Students should record their impressions of each candidate and their overall experience at the debate. Encourage students to ask one of their own questions, or select a representative to ask a question on behalf of the class.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

*What is an electoral division?*

An electoral division is a geographical area with defined boundaries represented by an elected official. An electoral division is also known as an electoral district, constituency or riding.

In Alberta, the provincial elected official is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Each electoral division has one MLA who represents the local needs and interests of his or her constituents

(people living in the electoral division) in the provincial legislature. The MLA also addresses issues at the local level.

The number of electoral divisions changes over time and is established by a formula. Electoral division boundary adjustments reflect changes and movements in population. Currently Alberta has 87 electoral divisions, each represented by one MLA.

#### *What is an electoral system?*

An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. All electoral systems have three basic elements:

- District magnitude: The number of members elected per division/district.
- Ballot type: The way in which choices are presented and voters express their preference(s).
- Electoral formula: The method for determining which candidate gets elected (or wins).

#### *How does First-Past-The-Post/Single-Member Plurality work?*

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used in Alberta (and across Canada). Another name for FPTP is Single-Member Plurality.

- The district magnitude is single-member districts. Citizens elect one representative per electoral division.
- The ballot type is categorical or exclusive ballot. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate/party on their ballot.
- The electoral formula is plurality. The successful candidate must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (or the most votes).

Example of FPTP: In an electoral district with 100 ballots cast.

#### VOTE TOTALS BY CANDIDATE

Lisa (Banana Party)	40
Josh (Pear Party)	15
Nancy (Apple Party)	11
Norman (Independent)	34

In this case, Lisa becomes the elected representative because she has the most votes. Note: Lisa wins even though 60 per cent of the voters chose other candidates. Under FPTP, it is not necessary to win more than 50 per cent of the votes — the candidate simply needs to win the most votes.

#### *How does one find out which electoral division they are in?*

You can visit the Elections Alberta website and search using your postal code or location/address to find out your electoral division. During a provincial election campaign, Elections Alberta also posts a list of candidates running for election in each division. The final list is posted after nominations close (14 days

before polling day) and once all candidacies have been confirmed.

#### *What are the most important issues facing my electoral division?*

An individual's political views are personal and highly subjective. They are unique and shaped by their experiences and feelings. Therefore, each person is responsible for forming his or her own opinions. Sometimes those opinions can be formed by listening to other people whose opinions you respect, researching information through media, and sometimes it simply takes a period of reflection to come to your own conclusions.

No one can tell you how to vote, although this is the primary objective of all candidates and political parties. It is up to you, the voter, to decide what is most important, who you should listen to and, ultimately, who you will support.

#### *How can I learn about my candidates and the issues they support?*

There are many ways to gather information about your local candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings where constituents are invited to listen to candidates speak on issues they and their parties support. Information can also be found on radio and television, and in newspapers and magazines. Individuals may also visit local campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to the candidates when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing, or campaign in public settings. Information is easily found online through party websites, media websites and social media platforms.

#### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Provincial electoral division maps — [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca) (Under MAPS)
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)

# 6 The Role of Media in Elections

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of media and their role in election campaigns.

## KEY WORDS

media, paid media, earned media, owned media, old media, new media, social media, news media, reporter, columnist, pundit, editorial, bias, opinion

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- Is it important to pay attention to the news?
- What are the different types of media?
- How is media used by candidates and political parties?
- What is the role of news media in an election?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 6: The Role of Media in Elections
- Worksheet 6.1: My Media Analysis
- Worksheet 6.2: Facts vs. Opinions

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 5-10 min

People get their news in different ways. Some people watch a nightly newscast, listen to news radio, or read the newspaper in the morning. Others use computers, smartphones or tablets to gain instant access to the latest news through websites, apps or social media platforms. The rapidly evolving technological landscape and the rise of digital consumption have changed the way information reaches the public.

As a class, have students discuss their news consumption habits.

- Do you read the newspaper? If so, which one(s)? Do you read them in print or online?
- Do you watch the news on TV or listen to the news on the radio? If so, which news programs?
- Where do your parents/guardians get their news from? What about your grandparents or other older relatives?
- Do you have the same habits as your parents/guardians? Why or why not?
- What do you consider the most trusted source of news? Why?
- Do you think it is important to follow the news? Why or why not?

## Instruction: 10-15 min

1. In general, media refers to the communication of information and messages to the masses through various channels.
2. Media can be divided into three main types: Paid, Earned and Owned.
  - Paid Media: Awareness gained through paid advertising.
  - Earned Media: Awareness gained through efforts other than advertising, such as news coverage or external blogs/websites.
  - Owned Media: Internally managed promotional platforms, such as your website, blog, Facebook page, YouTube channel and Twitter feed.
3. The various types of media can be further defined as Old (or Traditional) or New media.
  - Old media encompasses traditional sources in broadcast (television or radio) or print format (newspaper, 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.
  - New media includes content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, functions in real-time, is borderless and does not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.
4. The news media play an important role in elections and in ensuring a well-functioning democracy. Overall the news media are responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency, informing citizens and adhering to journalistic standards. Media reports on the developments of an election campaign, provides a platform for parties/candidates to get their message out, provides a platform for the public to communicate their concerns and opinions, helps foster debate between parties and candidates, advertises the election process to voters and reports on the results.
5. In most cases, the news media provides factual and informational coverage without letting their opinions (biases) interfere. The news media also

produces opinion pieces or editorials, where news organizations and their columnists or pundits will openly share their opinions or analysis. Some argue that the process of choosing the stories that will or will not be published or broadcast is also a form of bias.

### Discussion: 10-15 min

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of media?

### Activity: 30 min and homework

- In groups or individually, have students collect and/or analyze different forms and sources of media from the election campaign. If possible, have students focus on a single event, particular issue or one development for their tracking and analysis. Students should collect the following:
  - Two news stories
  - One editorial
  - One opinion piece by a regular columnist
  - One blog post
  - One social media posting
- Using Worksheet 6.1, students should summarize the piece and identify the following:
  - The source
  - Type of media
  - Key information highlighted or emphasized
  - Detected bias
- Afterwards, have students share their findings from the research assignment. Which source is the most credible and why? What was the most interesting to read and why? Did any media piece help shape your opinions? Explain.

### Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about the role of media in elections.

- What have you learned about the different types of media?
- Why is it important to read multiple sources of news?
- Why is it important to differentiate between opinion and fact?
- How do the media influence the health and strength of our democracy?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Assign Worksheet 6.2 to your class. Ask students to determine which of the ten fictional statements provided could be fact or opinion-based. How might each be used in a news article? Have each student pick a statement and use it as the inspiration to write a short newspaper article. Have students discuss their articles the next day. Did they choose a fact or opinion-based statement? How was it incorporated into their article?

B. Political campaign strategies have shifted recently with more of a focus on new media. Where in the past, the goal would be to advertise or promote the party's message widely and use traditional sources, now there is a greater focus on micro-targeting where parties and candidates focus on communicating to specific groups of voters they believe will support their message. Compare the advertising campaigns of several political parties. Encourage students to analyze the strategy of each party's campaign. What messages are the parties trying to get across? What methods are they relying on the most? Who are the parties trying to target? Which party's ads are most effective and why?

C. As a class or in groups, have students read through a recent print edition of the local newspaper and ask them to locate as many articles as possible about the provincial election. Once all relevant articles have been found and clipped from the paper, have students determine whether each is fact or opinion-based. Have a follow-up discussion. How many are there of each article type? Is there a balance, or are there more of one type? What position do most of the opinion articles seem to take? What does this say about the newspaper? To what degree is this news organization biased or unbiased?

D. Create a classroom social media account (e.g., Twitter) to track campaign news and your local candidate and/or the parties running candidates in your electoral division. You can follow CIVIX (@CIVIX\_Canada) and Student Vote (@studentvote), major news outlets, and particular journalists or pundits. Each day you can review the news coming through your classroom's personalized Twitter feed.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

*What are the different types of media?*

Media can be divided into three main types: Paid, Earned and Owned.

- Paid Media:** Awareness gained through paid advertising.
- Earned Media:** Awareness gained through efforts other than advertising, such as news coverage or external blogs/websites.
- Owned Media:** Internally managed promotional platforms, such as your website, blog, Facebook page, YouTube channel and Twitter feed.

The various types of media can also be defined as Old (Traditional) or New media.

- Old media** encompasses traditional sources in broadcast (television or radio) or print format (newspaper, 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.
- New media** includes content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media

platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, functions in real-time, is borderless and does not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.

*What is the difference between factual and opinion-based news coverage?*

In most cases, the news media provides factual and informational coverage to inform the public without letting their opinions (biases) interfere.

The news media also produces opinion pieces or editorials, where news organizations and their columnists or pundits will openly add their opinions or offer their analysis.

*How does the news media operate during an election campaign?*

Most news organizations remain officially neutral during elections. These organizations will balance the amount of coverage given to any party or candidate, so that no one gains a real or perceived advantage.

During an election, some newspapers will endorse a candidate or party and explain their decision in an editorial.

#### **EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

Provincial, regional and local media websites. Major examples include:

- Calgary Herald — [www.calgaryherald.com](http://www.calgaryherald.com)
- Edmonton Journal — [www.edmontonjournal.com](http://www.edmontonjournal.com)
- Edmonton Sun — [www.edmontonsun.com](http://www.edmontonsun.com)
- Calgary Sun — [www.calgarysun.com](http://www.calgarysun.com)
- Lethbridge Herald — [www.lethbridgeherald.com](http://www.lethbridgeherald.com)
- Red Deer Advocate — [www.reddeeradvocate.com](http://www.reddeeradvocate.com)
- Medicine Hat News — [www.medicinehatnews.com](http://www.medicinehatnews.com)
- Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune — [www.dailyheraldtribune.com](http://www.dailyheraldtribune.com)
- Fort McMurray Today — [www.fortmcmurraytoday.com](http://www.fortmcmurraytoday.com)

# 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)

## 8

## Post-Election Analysis

**OBJECTIVE**

Students will analyze the results of the official election and Student Vote election, and reflect on the outcome and their participation.

**KEY WORDS**

analyze, seat count, popular vote percentage, voter turnout, governing party, minority government, majority government, official opposition, opposition party

**QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON**

- What was the outcome of the Student Vote election locally and provincially?
- What was the outcome of the general election locally and provincially?
- Who will form the next government? What type of government will it be?
- How did campaign events influence the outcome of the election?
- How has this election experience helped prepare you for the future?

**SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS**

- Handout 4.3: 2012 Election Results

**TEACHING STRATEGIES****Hook: 15-20 min**

1. Announce the results of your school's Student Vote election. Who received the most number of votes? Was it a close race?
2. Compare the results of your school's election with the results of other schools in your electoral division. Are the results similar or different? Is this surprising? Why? (All individual school results can be found at [www.studentvote.ca/ab2015](http://www.studentvote.ca/ab2015))
3. Share the province-wide results of the Student Vote election. Which party attracted the greatest support? Which party won the most seats and formed the government? Which party formed the official opposition? Are you surprised with the Student Vote results?

*Teacher Note: Remember to wait until the day following the official election to share the Student Vote results. Student election officers at your school should be sworn to secrecy.*

**Instruction: 10 min**

1. Seat count is the term used to show the number of representatives that each party will have in the legislature. It reflects the number of local election races won by each party.
2. Popular vote is the term used to show the support a political party received across the province. It is shown as a percentage and is calculated by dividing the number of votes a party received by the total number of votes in the election.
3. The party that has the most seats (usually) forms government. The party that has the second-highest number of seats becomes the official opposition. Any other party is called an opposition party.
4. If the governing party has more than half of all the seats (44 or more in Alberta), they will have a majority government. If they have less than half (43 or fewer), they will have a minority government.
5. In order to pass any legislation (laws) or budgets, the bills must have support from more than half of the members of the legislature. If the governing party has a minority government, they will need to gain the support of the opposition parties in order to pass anything. If the government does not have their support on money-related bills, the governing party can lose confidence of the legislature. This usually results in another election.

**Discussion: 5-10 min**

Which local candidate was elected in your electoral division in the general election? Which party formed the new government? Is it a minority or a majority government? What are the benefits and challenges of each type of government?

**Activity: 25-40 min**

1. In groups, have students analyze and compare the results of the official election and the Student Vote election.

Use the following comparisons for reporting, analysis and discussion:

- a) Province-wide seat count comparison (General election vs. Student Vote)
- b) Province-wide popular vote comparison

- (General election vs. Student Vote)  
 c) Province-wide seat count comparison (2012 vs. current election)  
 d) Province-wide popular vote comparison (2012 vs. current election)  
 e) Local electoral division results comparison (General election vs. Student Vote)

*Teacher Note: The 2012 election results are displayed on Handout 4.3.*

- Compare news stories from several media websites and regional and/or local newspapers. Analyze the portrayal of the election outcome and results. Did the sources report the results in a similar way? Can you detect any bias? What groups seem the most happy or unhappy with the results?
- Have a follow-up conversation after analyzing the results and media reports. Consider the following questions:
  - Which parties gained or lost seats? Why?
  - Does the popular vote reflect the seat count? If not, should it?
  - Were there any big surprises or upsets in the election results?
  - Did certain regions change drastically? If so, why?
  - Did the Student Vote results reflect the general election results? Why or why not?
  - Which type of graph works best for displaying election results?

### Debrief: 5 min

Have a brief closing discussion about the outcome of the election and participation in the Student Vote program. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook.

- Were you pleased with the results? Why or why not?
- What did you learn about politics and the election process from your participation in the Student Vote program?
- Will you vote in the future? Why or why not?
- In what ways can you influence government during and between elections?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Once a candidate is elected to the legislature, he or she has to make decisions about how to pursue issues on behalf of his or her constituency. Have students write to their newly elected MLA regarding an issue they believe should be considered a priority to address.

B. After the election, the premier must confirm the organization of government ministries and also select their cabinet. What criteria should the premier use for selecting their cabinet? Follow the news and analyze the decisions made by the premier.

C. Choose a local candidate in your electoral division who received a significant proportion of the votes in

the Student Vote election but did not secure a seat in the provincial legislature. Invite the candidate into your class for a post-election debrief to discuss their experience and future plans.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

#### *How do I analyze election results?*

Under a Single-Member Plurality system, election results are analyzed by the number of candidates elected by each political party. In other words, the number of seats each political party will have in the legislature. In Alberta, the 87 seats will be divided among registered political parties and independent candidates.

The number of votes cast for each political party can also be examined. This analysis provides an indication of the level of support across the province and is expressed by a percentage (popular vote percentage).

#### *Who will form government? What kind of government will it be?*

The political party with the most seats (usually) forms government and their leader becomes the premier of the province.

A minority government is a government in which the governing party has the most seats but less than half the total (43 or fewer in Alberta).

A majority government is a government in which the governing party has an absolute majority of the seats (more than half). In Alberta, a political party has to win at least 44 seats to win a majority government.

#### *Which party will form the official opposition?*

The political party that receives the second-highest number of seats takes on the role of the official opposition. It is their responsibility to hold the government to account and to question their actions. The official opposition organizes a shadow cabinet to act as expert critics to each government ministry.

#### *Which issues will be forefront on the agenda for the new legislature?*

The throne speech outlines the government's plans and initiatives. The speech is delivered by the lieutenant governor at the beginning of each new session of the legislature.

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Alberta general election results — [www.electionsalberta.ab.ca](http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca)
- Student Vote Alberta results — [www.studentvote.ca/ab2015](http://www.studentvote.ca/ab2015)
- Newspaper and media websites