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PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN ALBERTA



Alberta is a **parliamentary democracy**. In a parliamentary system, government is separated into three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch.

The **legislative branch** is composed of all elected representatives, called **Members of the Legislative Assembly**, or MLAs. Each MLA represents a different geographic area within Alberta called an **electoral division**, and most are associated with a political party.

Typically, the **political party** with the greatest number of elected MLAs in the provincial legislature becomes the governing party and their leader then becomes the leader of the government (the **premier**).

In our system of parliamentary democracy, the government must be supported by a majority of MLAs. This is called **responsible government**.

A **majority government** results when one political party wins more than half of all seats in the legislative assembly. Whereas, a **minority government** occurs when a governing party wins less than half of the seats, but is able to maintain the support of a majority of the MLAs.

Of the other parties in the legislature, the party that holds the largest number of seats becomes the **Official Opposition**.

MLAs meet at the **Legislative Assembly of Alberta** in Edmonton located at the Alberta Legislature Building. Here, MLAs debate issues, pass laws and legislation, approve finances and scrutinize government activity.

The **executive branch** is responsible for developing policies, delivering programs and implementing laws. The executive branch is led by the premier and the **executive council** or **cabinet** and is supported by the public service.

Cabinet ministers are responsible for leading ministries, which deliver vital programs and services associated within one area of responsibility.

The provincial government currently has 23 ministries, including Advanced Education, Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Economic Development and Trade, Education, Energy, Environment and Parks, Executive Council, Health, Indigenous Relations, Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, Labour, Municipal Affairs, Public Service Commission, Seniors and Housing, Service Alberta, Status of Women, Transportation and Treasury Board and Finance.

The ministers of these government ministries are chosen as advisors to the premier in their respective areas. The number and names of the ministries change over time and generally reflect the governing party's priorities.

LESSON 9: PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN ALBERTA

The **judicial branch** is a group of independent courts that act separately from the legislative and executive branches. It is their responsibility to interpret and enforce laws, to protect citizens and discipline offenders.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How does the provincial government work? How does voting influence government?

PURPOSE

The provincial government is separated into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. The branches work together to serve all Albertans.

In this lesson, students explore the role of each branch and get a better understanding of the areas of responsibility of the provincial government. Students deepen their understanding about how government affects them and they reflect on how they can influence government by voting in elections.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, I can...

- describe how a parliamentary democracy works;
- collaborate with my peers and critically analyze information about government ministries;
- demonstrate positive attitudes towards voting and civic engagement;
- analyze the ways in which a person's beliefs and values can affect their voting preferences and their attitudes towards about voting.

INTRODUCTION

1. Ask students to fill out the 'Before' column in the *Anticipation Guide* (Activity 9.1).

2. Review the election results of the 2015 Alberta provincial election (Handout 9.2). Ask students which party formed government. How did the Student Vote results compare to the general election results? What other observations can be drawn from the results? How have the political parties changed since the last election?

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the 'Alberta's Provincial Government' video and Slide Deck 9 to review the key terms and concepts regarding the provincial government in Alberta: legislative branch, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), electoral division, Legislative Assembly, executive branch, premier, cabinet, ministry, judicial branch.

2. Divide students into small groups and assign each group a different provincial government ministry. Task each group with presenting information about their ministries to the rest of the class through a skit, role play or interactive presentation.

Students could use one or more of the following questions as their focus.

- What do they do and why? How do they aim to help Albertans?
- What type of programs or services do they offer?
- What are some recent announcements or legislation?
- How are you, your families or your community impacted by these new announcements or legislation?

Teacher Note: This activity can be completed using Handout 9.3 (descriptions of Alberta government ministries) or by reviewing the Alberta government website – <https://www.alberta.ca/ministries.aspx>

Prior to the beginning of the task, discuss what makes a good presentation and write down a list of criteria. Considerations: creativity, effort, knowledge of the content, knowledge-transfer, etc.

CONCLUSION

Based on the group presentations or a review of Handout 9.2, ask students to rank the government ministries in two ways with different considerations.

- Rank the top five ministries in order of importance to your life.
- Rank the top five ministries in order of importance for your family or the community at large.
- How do the rankings differ? What is the significance of voting in elections? How do you think the Student Vote results will compare to the general election results?

ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Ask students to fill out the 'After' column in the *Anticipation Guide* (Activity 9.1).