

# GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA



Canada is a **parliamentary democracy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures.

With the exception of Northwest Territories and Nunavut, most federally and provincially elected representatives are affiliated with a **political party**. A political party is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision and political ideology whose intention is to achieve power and create meaningful political change.

In a parliamentary democracy, the dominant political party or the party with the most members in the parliament or legislature usually determines the leader of the government. Citizens do not vote for the leader directly.

If the governing party has more than half of all the seats, they will have a **majority government**. If they have less than half, they will have a **minority government**.

In a parliamentary system, there are three branches or divisions: legislative, executive and judicial.

The **legislative branch** is responsible for debating, amending and passing laws. At the federal level, the legislative branch is made up of an upper and lower house: the **Senate** includes 105 appointed Senators and the **House of Commons** is made up of elected **Members**

**of Parliament** (MPs). There are currently 338 MPs and each represents a different geographic area called an **electoral district** or **constituency**.

At the provincial level in British Columbia, the legislative branch is termed the **Legislative Assembly** and the elected representatives are called **Members of the Legislative Assembly** (MLAs). There are currently 87 MLAs across the province, each representing an electoral district.

The **executive branch** is responsible for implementing laws and consists of the monarch, the leader of the government and the cabinet. The monarch is represented by the governor general at the federal level and the lieutenant governor at the provincial level. The leader is called the prime minister at the federal level and a premier at the provincial level. The prime minister and the premier both appoint several elected members, usually from their own party, to head the departments or ministries of the executive council (known as the cabinet). Each minister is in charge of one (or more) of the government responsibilities and acts as an advisor to the leader of the government and the legislative body in their area(s) of expertise. The executive branch implements and enforces laws, rules and regulations, with the support of the public service.

The **judicial branch** is responsible for overseeing and administering the law. Federally, the judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Court and nine appointed judges. At the provincial level, the judicial branch is led

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by the Chief Justice of British Columbia. The judicial branch interprets the law and punishes those who violate established laws, rules and regulations, and operates independently and separately from the executive and legislative branches of government.

The federal and provincial/territorial governments handle different areas of responsibility. The division of powers is based on the principle of **subsidiarity**, in which the government closest to the issue governs it. The distribution of responsibilities is found in Sections 91–95 of the *Constitution Act*, 1867.

The **federal** government takes responsibility for the whole country and matters of national and international concern, such as the armed forces, relations and trade with other countries, currency, fisheries and oceans, criminal law and public safety.

**Provincial** and **territorial** governments are responsible for their own province or territory and regional matters including education, healthcare, social welfare and transportation.

There are also policy areas where the federal and provincial governments share jurisdiction, such as the environment, taxation, agriculture and natural resources. This is called **concurrency**.

Other forms of government exist in Canada and they are responsible for more local issues, but they also work collaboratively with the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

**Local governments** take responsibility for their city or town and community matters such as water and sewage treatment, libraries, roads and bridges and local parks and recreation. The local government system in B.C. includes municipal governments, regional districts and improvement districts, and they acquire their responsibilities from the provincial government. Each municipal government has an elected council made up of local **councillors**. The leader of the council is called a **mayor** and they are elected by the people.

There are also other forms of government in some Indigenous communities or First Nations reserves. **Indigenous governments** often share certain responsibilities with the government of their province/territory and the federal government.

The term **self-government** refers to a First Nation, Métis or Inuit community with control over its own affairs. The level of autonomy varies, but federal and provincial laws still apply and the other levels of government will often work together for the benefit of all community members. Self-governing First Nations have the ability to sign treaties (formal agreements) with the various levels of the Canadian federal government (referred to as Crown). Comprehensive land claims agreements (modern treaties) between Canadian governments and First Nations often result in Indigenous peoples having greater autonomy to choose their own method(s) of representation and decision-making.

### BIG IDEA

Canada has three levels of government, each with its own elected representatives and areas of responsibility.

### LEARNING INTENTIONS

Upon completion of the lesson, students are expected to know the following:

- The levels of government, their main functions and sources of funding; and
- Participation and representation in Canada's system of government.


Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Assess which level of government is responsible for issues; and
- Understand the impact of government on the lives of citizens.

### RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 3: The Levels of Government
  - Video: The Levels of Government
  - Video: Parliamentary Democracy in British Columbia
  - Activity Sheet 3.1: Government Responsibilities
  - Activity Sheet 3.2: A Day in My Life
  - Activity Sheet 3.3: Investigating Government
  - Handout 3.4: History of Indigenous Self-Government
  - Activity Sheet 3.5: First Nation Profile
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at [www.studentvote.ca/bc](http://www.studentvote.ca/bc))

### ACTIVITIES

 **Hook: 5-15 min**

1. Have a discussion about the division of responsibilities within your own school. Guiding questions: Who would you talk to if you were having problems with your homework? Who would you tell if water was spilled in the hall? Who would be responsible for cleaning it up? Who would you speak to if someone was bullying you at recess?

2. Review the idea of a representative democracy. Then, ask students if they know how many levels of government there are in Canada. Write down the levels of government on the board or recite them verbally.

3. Ask students to consider which level of government they would contact in the following scenarios:

- a) You and your friends would like to see a skate ramp added to the local park.
- b) You think there should be more financial aid available to help youth pursue post-secondary education or skills and training programs.
- c) The streetlight near your home is broken and needs to be replaced.
- d) You are traveling to a foreign country and need to find out if there are any travel advisories.
- e) The hospital in your town is in need of a new X-ray machine.

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4. Debrief on the activity: Why is it important to know the roles and responsibilities associated with each level of government?

### Discussion: 10 min

Consider all the things you do on a daily basis (e.g., what do you do when you wake up, how do you get to school, what do you do at school, after-school activities). How does government influence these activities?

### Essential Concepts: 20 min

Use Slide Deck 3, the 'Levels of Government' video and the 'Parliamentary Democracy in British Columbia' video, review the key terms and concepts regarding the levels of government in Canada: federal, provincial/territorial, local/municipal, Member of Parliament, Member of the Legislative Assembly, councillor, parliament, prime minister, premier, mayor, self-government.

### ★ Action: 20-25 mins

1. Ask students to complete Activity 3.1. They should highlight or circle all of the government areas that affect their life, make connections where governments must work together, and analyze which level of government affects them the most.

2. Ask students to create an artwork or comic strip that shows the different things they do on a daily basis or that depicts a "day in my life." For each graphic or image, students should link or label what they are doing in relation to government legislation or services. Activity Sheet 3.2 can be used for a comic strip.

### Extensions:

A. Review Handout 3.1 and ask students to identify a provincial responsibility they care about. Alternatively, students could highlight all of the government responsibilities that impact their life directly. In pairs, groups, or individually, ask students to prepare a creative presentation about why it is important. Students can use any form of presentation they choose — it could be a speech, poster, skit, song or rap.

B. Have students find a story related to government in the local newspaper. Ask them to identify whether the story concerns the local, provincial or federal government by highlighting the key words that reveal this information. Have students answer the following questions and share their findings with the class: What is this news story/article about? What are the arguments or supporting points being made? Who is this story most important to?

C. Assign Activity Sheet 3.3 for homework. Provide the following links to support research.

- Governor General of Canada — [www.gg.ca](http://www.gg.ca)
- Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia — [www.ltgov.bc.ca](http://www.ltgov.bc.ca)
- Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Elections Canada — [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)
- Elections BC — [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of British Columbia — [www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)

*Teacher Note: This activity could also be completed in a computer lab.*

D. Learn more about Indigenous self-government in Canada by reviewing Handout 3.4 with your class. Use the First Nations Map and other resources on the Government of Canada website (<https://geo.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/cippn-fnpim/index-eng.html>) to locate the First Nations or Métis communities or reserves closest to your school. As a class or in small groups, have students select a First Nation and complete Activity Sheet 5.5. Alternatively, assign different First Nations or Indigenous communities to different students and have them present their completed activity sheets to the class.

E. Have students draw a community picture or map and label five government services (e.g., school, park, hospital, roads, cars, police officer). The labels should include the level of government and the responsibility. Students could additionally build a physical model of their community.

F. Invite an elected representative, past politician, public servant (at any level) or Indigenous community leader to speak to the class and discuss their role and the responsibilities of their level of government.

### Reflection: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about government in Canada. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What have you learned about the levels of government in Canada?
- How does government affect your life?
- Is government important? Why or why not?
- Why might Indigenous peoples prefer their own system of self-government?

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "How Canadians Govern Themselves," *Parliament of Canada* — [lop.parl.ca/about/parliament/senatoreugeneforsev/home/index-e.html](http://lop.parl.ca/about/parliament/senatoreugeneforsev/home/index-e.html)
- "Discover Canada," *Citizenship and Immigration Canada* — [www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/discover-canada.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/discover-canada.html)
- Elections BC — [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)
- Legislative Assembly of British Columbia — [www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)
- Parliament of Canada — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- Government of Canada — [www.gc.ca](http://www.gc.ca)
- Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada — [www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca)
- First Nation Profiles Interactive Map — [geo.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/cippn-fnpim/index-eng.html](https://geo.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/cippn-fnpim/index-eng.html)
- First Nations in B.C. Knowledge Network — [www.fnbc.info](http://www.fnbc.info)
- "A Guide to Indigenous Organizations & Services," *Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation* — [www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html](http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/services/guide.html)