

ELECTIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



Elections are contests of leadership, ideas, politics and power. They provide citizens an opportunity to decide on their next government and the future direction of their country, province or community.

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the job of elected representative is called a candidate. At the federal level and the provincial level in British Columbia, most candidates are affiliated with a political party.

There are many different systems used around the world to determine which parties and candidates are elected and who will lead the government.

An **electoral system** is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. British Columbia uses a system called **Single-Member Plurality** or **First-Past-The-Post** (FPTP).

The province is divided into 87 **electoral districts** (also known as ridings), which are defined geographic areas. The size of electoral districts is determined by factors such as population size, demographic make-up and geography. Each district is represented by one Member of the Legislative

Assembly (single-member districts). Urban electoral districts are often smaller and more populous, while rural electoral districts are larger with less dense populations.

In FPTP, voters are only allowed to choose a single candidate on the ballot (categorical or exclusive ballot) and the candidate with the most votes wins. The successful candidate does not need more than 50 per cent of the vote; they only require one more vote than any of the other candidates (**plurality**).

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. Political parties are made up of interested members of the general public. Anyone above the required age (usually 14 years old) can be a member of a political party. Party members choose their party's leader and local candidates, and help them get elected.

Most local candidates are party members selected through a nomination process by the local riding association, unless they are running as an independent or are not affiliated with any party. The party selects the person they feel has the

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greatest chance of success as their candidate. Candidates and parties use a communications strategy that incorporates all three types of media (paid, earned, owned) to share their platforms through announcements, advertising and events, and to gain support from constituents.

During an election, an organized course of action is taken by a political party, its candidates and campaign team with the intention of spreading its message and ideas to secure constituent support. A political platform is a series of declared principles and policies on jurisdictional issues concerning government and the public.

Under British Columbia's parliamentary system, the party that elects the most number of representatives (wins the most seats in the Legislative Assembly) usually forms government and their leader becomes the premier.

BIG IDEA

Political parties bring together people with similar political ideals and goals who are seeking to effect change by being elected.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

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

- Election processes and electoral systems in Canada and British Columbia; and
- Their local electoral district and the candidates running for election.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Understand how to research the candidates running for election;
- Identify election processes and electoral systems; and
- Recognize the relationships between citizens and governments.

RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 6: Political Parties and Local Candidates
 - Video: Parliamentary Democracy in British Columbia
 - Activity Sheet 6.1: My Electoral District
 - Handout 6.2: 2017 Provincial Election Results
 - Activity Sheet 6.3: Getting to Know the Parties
 - Activity Sheet 6.4: Election Candidate Profile
 - Activity Sheet 6.5: Watching the Leaders' Debate
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at www.studentvote.ca/bc)

ACTIVITIES

 **Hook: 20-30 min**

1. Watch the 'Get Ready to Vote' video to review the key steps involved in preparing to cast your ballot. Invite students to ask any questions they may have.
2. Explain to students that British Columbia is divided into 87 different areas or electoral districts. Find your school's electoral district on the provincial map and write the name on the blackboard, chart paper or Smartboard. If you do not know your school's electoral district, visit the Elections BC website (www.elections.bc.ca).
3. Ask students if they notice differences between their electoral district and others across their province (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population, geography, landmarks).
4. Show students an individual map of the school's electoral district, which can be found on the Elections BC website. Answer the following questions:
 - Where is the school located?
 - What are the boundaries of the school's electoral district?
 - What major landmarks or attractions are included in the school's electoral district?
 - What makes it unique?
5. List all of the candidates (and their party association, if applicable) running for election in your school's electoral district.

6. Give students an opportunity to fill out sections of Activity Sheet 6.1 or assign it for homework.

 **Essential Concepts: 20 min**

Use Slide Deck 6 and the 'Parliamentary Democracy in British Columbia' video to review the key terms and concepts regarding the election process in British Columbia: electoral system, candidate, electoral district, Single-Member Plurality/First-Past-the-Post, premier, political party, party leader.

 **Discussion: 10 min**

Using Handout 6.2, review the results of the 2017 British Columbia provincial election. How did the Student Vote results compare to the general election results? Which party formed government initially? Who became the premier? What events followed? Which party eventually formed government and how?

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★ **Action: 60+ min** (should be conducted over two classes with homework)

1. Organize students into groups and assign each group a political party that is running a candidate in your school's electoral district, or allow them to choose one based on their preference. The goal is to ensure that each party with a candidate running in your electoral district is covered by a group.

Using candidate and 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?
- Who is the local candidate?
- What are the party's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the party's key messages?
- What are the party's main priorities or ideas (platform)? What is their vision for B.C.?

2. Using the information collected, each group will create a presentation about their party/candidate and its campaign platform. Students can also produce videos, posters or multi-media works to share this information.

3. Have each group share their political party with the rest of the class. Students can take notes on each presentation using Activity Sheet 6.3. Afterwards, have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

✚ Extensions:

A. Invite each candidate in your electoral district to participate in a phone or video interview. Students should record their impressions of each candidate and feedback on their positions and perspectives. Alternatively, students can use Activity Sheet 6.4 to conduct research on each candidate.

B. Have students take on the role of an actual candidate in your electoral district and write a campaign speech to attract supporters. Students should focus on three main arguments or points and use information from the candidate's website and campaign literature to guide their arguments. Students can be assessed on their persuasive writing skills.

C. Have students create their own B.C. political party. The political party should have a name, logo, slogan, key priorities and ideas for helping the people of British Columbia. Presentations could include posters, campaign literature, speeches and other election paraphernalia.

D. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the leaders of the major political parties to share their platforms, criticize their opponents' ideas and perform in front of the electorate. Plan a viewing of the provincial leaders' debate for your class or ask students to watch it with their family and friends. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Activity Sheet 6.5.

💡 Reflection: 5 min

Have a closing discussion about political parties and local candidates with your class. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What are the strengths and limitations of each candidate?
- Which party or candidate would you support and why?
- What does it mean to run as an independent? Why would someone choose to run as an independent?
- Would you ever consider running as a candidate? Why or why not?
- Would you ever join a political party? Why or why not?

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- British Columbia political parties — www.elections.bc.ca
- Provincial electoral district maps — www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/maps
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, campaign flyers)
- "Electoral Systems," *Parliament of Canada* — www.parl.gc.ca
- British Columbia political parties — www.elections.bc.ca