

# 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. Each district is represented by one Member of the Legislative Assembly (single-member districts). The size of electoral

districts is determined by factors such as population size, demographic make-up and geography. 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

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any party. The party selects the person they feel has the 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:

- The development, structure and function of Canadian political institutions;
- British Columbia's electoral system and how it works; 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 parties and candidates running for election;
- Analyze party platforms and positions on specific issues;
- Compare the candidates running for office; and
- Recognize the relationships between citizens and governments.

### RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 6: Elections in British Columbia
  - Video: Parliamentary Democracy in British Columbia
  - Handout 6.1: 2017 Provincial Election Results
  - Activity Sheet 6.2: Getting to Know the Parties
  - Activity Sheet 6.3: Evaluating the Leaders' Debate
  - Activity Sheet 6.4: Election Candidate 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: 10-15 min

1. Watch the 'Get Ready to Vote' video with students to review the key steps involved in preparing to cast your ballot.
2. Find your school's electoral district on a provincial electoral district map. Ask students if they notice any differences between their electoral district and others across British Columbia (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population density, demographic make-up, geography, landmarks).
3. Show students an individual map of the school's electoral district on the Elections BC website ([www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/maps/](http://www.elections.bc.ca/index.php/maps/)). Ask students the following questions:
  - What are the boundaries of the electoral district?
  - What major landmarks or attractions are included in the electoral district?
  - What makes the electoral district unique?
  - What issues do you expect people in your electoral district to be talking about?
  - What promises or commitments do you expect the local candidates to make?

#### 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: 5 min

Using Handout 6.1, review the results of the 2017 British Columbia provincial election. Which party formed government? How did the Student Vote results compare to the general election results? What events followed after the last election? Which party eventually formed government and how?

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### ★ Action: 50-120 min

1. Review the list of candidates running in your school's electoral district. These can be found on the Elections BC website ([www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca)).

2. Organize students into groups and assign each group a candidate/political party or allow them to choose one. Ensure that each candidate/party in your electoral district is represented by a group.

3. Using candidate and party websites, online resources and campaign literature, each group should conduct research into the following:

- Who is the local candidate? Are they affiliated with a political party?
- What does the political party stand for? Who is the current leader of the party? (If applicable)
- What are the party's or candidate's logos, slogans, posters and advertisements? What are the key messages?
- What are the party's or candidate's main priorities or policy ideas (platform)? What is their vision for B.C.?
- Where does the party or candidate sit on the political spectrum?

4. Ask each group to prepare a short multi-media presentation about their political party/candidate and their platform. Students should incorporate an audio-visual component that includes the party's logo/brand, campaign elements and images or video clips of the leader and/or the local candidate. Students can take notes during each presentation using Activity Sheet 6.2. Afterwards, have students vote on the political party they like best – excluding their own party.

### ✚ Extensions:

A. The leaders' debate is an opportunity for the major party leaders to share their platforms, criticize 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 friends or family/guardians. Afterwards, have students evaluate the performance of each leader using Activity Sheet 6.3.

B. Create a list of three to five pertinent questions to ask the local candidates. Email the questions to each of the candidates or contact them through social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and give them a few days to respond. Students should compare the responses received and reflect critically while deciding with whom they agree most strongly. Alternatively, students can use Activity Sheet 6.4 to conduct research on each candidate.

C. Have students engage in a mock debate to immerse themselves in the issues and gain a better understanding of the role of a local candidate. In small groups, select one student to represent each candidate in your school's electoral district. The rest of the group will be that candidate's campaign team and will help research and prepare the candidate. Ask students to examine candidate websites, social media platforms, newspapers and other campaign literature for their candidate as well as their opponents. Using the research collected, the campaign teams should prepare key talking points that could be used during the debate to strengthen the candidate's position and weaken their opponent's viewpoints.

D. Political parties use various types of advertising and media to promote themselves and garner votes. Some of these ads are positive and speak to their own party's platform, while others are negative and focus on attacking the other leaders or platforms. Compare the advertising campaigns of several political parties and encourage students to analyze the strategy of each party's campaign. Discussion questions: What messages are the parties trying to get across? What methods are they relying on most? Who are the parties targeting with their advertising? Which party's ads are most effective and why? Is election advertising useful in securing the support of voters?



### 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 (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What advantages or disadvantages might there be for a person who runs as an independent or without an affiliation to a party?
- Should candidates be forced to follow the party's stance on some issues, or every issue?
- What are the strengths and limitations of each candidate in your electoral district? Who do you feel will most effectively serve the community?
- Which party or candidate's platform do you most agree with?

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

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