





HANDOUT 1.2: The Principles of Democracy

There are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.

PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION
<p>FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All people living in a democracy have guaranteed rights, such as freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion, and the right to gather with others in public or private. • In Canada, our fundamental freedoms and equality rights are protected by the <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i>, part of Canada’s Constitution. • The Charter also guarantees equality rights. You may not be discriminated against because of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. Other grounds can be added as society changes. • In most democracies, individuals are valued equally according to their own laws.
<p>FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult citizens have the opportunity to run for political office. • Adult citizens also have the right to vote in elections to choose their representatives. • Elections are conducted regularly in an honest manner without influence or intimidation. • All candidates and parties have an equal chance to share their ideas and compete for support and the results accurately reflect the will of the people. • In Canada, there must be elections to choose a federal government every five years or less.
<p>ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected representatives are accountable for their actions. They must perform their duties according to the wishes of those they represent, not for themselves or other interests. • In Canada, elected representatives participate in activities like Question Period to be held to account for their actions and respond to questions from the opposition parties, and engage in meetings with the public. • In a democracy, the media holds the government to account and aims to keep citizens informed.
<p>THE RULE OF LAW</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently, and no one is above the law. • This means that everyone, including government officials, must obey the law. • It also means that governments cannot punish people unless they have broken the law. • All Canadians have a responsibility to respect the laws of the land, even if they disagree with them.
<p>CITIZEN PARTICIPATION</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy demands citizen involvement. • This includes participating in elections, being an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. • All citizens in a democracy have a responsibility to uphold and support these principles, because without them, we are not a democracy.