

Handout 3.4: Indigenous Governance in Canada

The Canadian Constitution recognizes distinct Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Prior to European contact, Indigenous peoples governed themselves as autonomous nations and had distinct systems of governance. In the centuries after the arrival of settlers, Indigenous peoples' self-governance and ways of life were disrupted and constrained. However, Indigenous peoples have continuously advocated for their right to self-government, which has led to reforms in recent decades. In the *Constitution Act, 1982*, Canada recognized self-government as an inherent right of Indigenous peoples.

The system of Indigenous governance in Canada today is the complex and evolving legacy of this history. There are specific governance systems in place for each recognized group, as well as hundreds of Indigenous organizations who engage in advocacy, research, and economic and social provision that make up the landscape of Indigenous governance.

FIRST NATIONS:	MÉTIS:	INUIT:
<p>The <i>Indian Act, 1876</i>, replaced traditional Indigenous governance with the band council system that still dictates the governing of many First Nations. The Indian Act is a highly controversial piece of legislation that many Indigenous groups have sought to reform or repeal; however, due in part to the difficulty of overhauling such a significant law, it has remained largely intact to date with some amendments.</p> <p>Under the Indian Act, members of a First Nation elect a council and a chief who form the local government. Most bands hold a piece of reserve land that is designated for First Nation use. Band councils are responsible for administering and governing First Nation affairs like education, healthcare, housing, roads, and other services on their reserves, many of which are shared with the federal government. Some First Nations have attained self-governing status and are no longer subject to the Indian Act. These self-governing First Nations establish their own governments, constitutions, and elections based on their traditions and community decisions.</p>	<p>Métis are not included in the Indian Act. The <i>Constitution Act, 1982</i>, was the first time the government explicitly recognized the Métis as a distinct Indigenous people, and historic discussions and agreements have since occurred that have recognized Métis self-government rights and sought to establish paths to Métis self-government. Regional and national groups exist to represent Métis interests; the Métis Nations of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C. are members of the Métis National Council, and the Manitoba Métis Federation represents itself independently.</p>	<p>Inuit are also not included in the Indian Act. Inuit self-government rights and territorial boundaries are determined by specific treaties, land claims, and self-government agreements. Each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat (homelands) in Canada have a regional government or corporation to represent Inuit interests and govern certain Inuit affairs, as set out by the specific agreements in each region. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the national organization representing Inuit interests in Canada.</p>