

HANDOUT 1.3: The Principles of Democracy

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



HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

- All people living in a democracy have guaranteed rights, such as freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion, and the right to organize and take part in peaceful protests.
- In most democracies, individuals are valued equally regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation.
- In Canada, our fundamental freedoms and equality rights are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, part of Canada's Constitution.



FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

- Adult citizens have the right to vote in elections to choose their political representatives.
- Adult citizens also have the opportunity to run for political office.
- There are no obstacles to voting and no threats made to citizens before or after an election.
- In Canada, there must be elections to choose governments every five years or less.



ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

- Elected representatives are responsible for their actions. They must perform their duties according to the wishes of those they represent, not for themselves or other interests.
- In a democracy, the media holds government to account and aims to keep citizens informed.
- 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. They also engage in meetings with the public.



THE RULE OF LAW

- Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently. This means that everyone, including government officials, the police and members of the military, 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.



POLITICAL TOLERANCE

- Society is comprised of people with different cultural backgrounds, who practice different religions, come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and have different gender identities and sexual orientations. The voices of these different groups are valued.
- Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant and protect the rights of minorities.
- Those who are not in power allowed to organize and share their opinions.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

- Citizen participation in government is more than just a right – it is a responsibility.
- Participation includes voting in elections, being an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting.
- Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.