

## LESSON 5:

# Local Candidates and Issues

### OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about their constituency, the candidates and local issues.

### KEY WORDS

constituency, electoral system, candidate, independent, ballot, incumbent, issue, constituent, Single-Member Plurality, First-Past-The-Post

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- What is a constituency?
- What is an electoral system?
- Which electoral system is used in Saskatchewan?
- What is the name of my constituency and who are the candidates running?
- What are the most important issues in my constituency?
- How can I learn about my candidates?

### SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 5: Constituencies and Local Candidates
- Worksheet 5.1: Election Candidate Profile
- Handout 5.2: A Framework for Planning an All-Candidates Meeting

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### Hook: 10-15 min

1. Find your school's constituency on the provincial constituency map. Ask students if they notice any differences between their constituency and others across Saskatchewan (e.g., size, shape). Ask them to consider why there are differences and what those differences might be (e.g., population size, demographic make-up, geography, landmarks).

2. Show students an individual map of the school's constituency on the Elections Saskatchewan website ([www.elections.sk.ca/voters](http://www.elections.sk.ca/voters), under 'Maps'). Answer the following questions:

- What are the boundaries of the constituency?
- What major landmarks or attractions are included in the constituency?
- What makes the constituency unique?

*Teacher Note: If your constituency has changed since the 2011 election, compare your 2011 constituency to your 2016 constituency. How has it changed? Extension Activity E also explores constituency boundary changes.*

3. Following the constituency analysis, ask students to consider and discuss the following questions:

- What issues do you expect people in your constituency to be talking about?
- What promises or commitments do you expect the local candidates to make?

#### Instruction: 15 min

1. A constituency (also known as a riding, electoral district or electoral division) is a geographical area represented by an elected official. The size of each constituency is determined by factors such as population size, demographic make-up and geography. Urban constituencies are often smaller and more populous, while rural constituencies are larger with less dense populations.

- At the provincial level, an elected official is called a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).
- 61 MLAs will be elected in the 2016 provincial election.
- Each MLA represents approximately 18,000 people.

2. An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats.

- Different types of electoral systems are used around the world and they differ by the number of representatives elected per constituency (or district), the type of ballots used and the formulas used for declaring winning candidates.
3. Saskatchewan uses a system called Single-Member Plurality or First-Past-The-Post (FPTP).
- One representative is elected per constituency (single-member districts).
  - Voters are only allowed to choose one candidate on the ballot (categorical or exclusive ballot).
  - 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).

*Teacher Note: It would be helpful to demonstrate FPTP with a sample ballot and voting results for your constituency in the last provincial election.*

#### Discussion: 10 min

How should you evaluate candidates? What qualities and qualifications do you expect from an MLA? Why are these qualities necessary for this job?

#### Activity: 30 min or more

1. Have students organize and engage in a mock debate to immerse themselves in the issues and gain a better understanding of the job of a local candidate. In small groups, select one student to take on the role of each candidate in your school's constituency (and their persona, if possible). The rest of the group will be that candidate's campaign team and will help research and prepare the candidate. Ensure that all candidates in your constituency are represented.
2. Ask students to prepare for the debate by examining candidate websites, social media platforms, newspapers and other campaign literature for their candidate as well as their opponents. For each candidate, students should consider some of the following questions to narrow their research:
  - What experience, skills and qualifications does the candidate possess?
  - Why does the candidate want to be elected? What are their priorities or goals?
  - Why did they decide to run for their political party, or as an independent?
  - Which issues facing the province do they feel need to be addressed?
  - Which issues facing your community do they feel need to be addressed?

Using the research collected, the campaign teams should prepare key "talking points" or "zingers" that could be used during the debate to strengthen the candidate's position and weaken the opponent's viewpoints.

3. During the debate, ensure that all candidates receive equal speaking time and the opportunity to make

opening and closing remarks. Refer to Handout 5.2 for additional suggestions.

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about the local candidates. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate?
- Who is best suited for the job? Who do you feel will most effectively serve the community?
- Do you share the same opinions or values as any of the candidates? Explain.
- Which candidate would you support and why?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Invite each candidate in your constituency for a class visit, conduct a phone or Skype interview, or hold an all-candidates meeting at your school. Students should record their impressions of each candidate and their overall experience. Encourage students to ask their own questions or select a representative to ask questions on behalf of the class. Refer to Handout 5.2 for additional suggestions.

B. Have a class discussion about geographical differences in an election campaign. Questions to consider: Does an MLA from Athabasca have the same priorities as an MLA from Regina Northeast or Saskatoon University? Are MLAs in rural regions of the province dealing with the same issues as MLAs from urban areas? What geographical, cultural or socio-economic differences might there be between the people of these different constituencies? How might these differences affect interactions between MLAs in the provincial legislature?

C. Canada's current federal government is considering electoral reform in time for the next general election. Examine different electoral systems used around the world (e.g., proportional representation, two-round/runoff voting system, mixed-member proportional). Research and debate the strengths and weaknesses of each system. Do you think Canada should further investigate electoral reform? Why or why not?

D. Ask students to engage family and friends in a conversation about the election and the local candidates. Students could create a short take-home poll, or simply record the views of their family and friends based on a few specific questions. Have a follow-up discussion the next day. Do students share the same opinion as their parents? What are the reasons for shared or differing opinions?

E. For the current provincial election, the number of constituencies being contested has increased from 58 to 61. Following the 2011 election, a provincial commission was asked to investigate the possibility of adding three new constituencies to better represent the province's growing population and ensure that

all constituencies are similar in size. What do you think of the decision to adjust electoral boundaries for this election? Is your constituency affected by the boundary changes? Do you agree with the decision to increase the number of representatives in the legislative assembly? Why or why not?

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

#### *What is a constituency?*

A constituency is a geographical area with defined boundaries represented by an elected official. Also known as a riding, electoral district or electoral division.

In Saskatchewan, the elected official is called a Member of the legislative assembly (MLA). Each constituency has an MLA who represents the local needs and interests of their constituents (people living in the constituency) in the legislative assembly. An MLA can also address issues at the local level.

The number of constituencies in the province has increased over time to reflect changes and movements in Saskatchewan's population. The number of constituencies has increased by three since the last election, and Saskatchewan residents are electing 61 MLAs to the Legislative Assembly in the current election.

#### *What is an electoral system?*

An electoral system is the way citizens' choices, expressed as votes, are translated into legislative seats. All electoral systems have three basic elements:

- District magnitude: The number of members elected per district.
- Ballot type: The way in which choices are presented and voters express their preferences.
- Electoral formula: The method for determining which candidate gets elected (or which candidate wins).

#### *How does First-Past-The-Post/Single-Member Plurality work?*

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used across Canada, including Saskatchewan. Another name for FPTP is Single-Member Plurality.

- The district magnitude is single-member districts. Citizens elect one representative per constituency.
- The ballot type is categorical or exclusive ballot. Voters are allowed to choose one candidate on their ballot.
- The electoral formula is plurality. The successful candidate must receive at least one more vote than any of the other candidates (the most votes).

Example of FPTP: In a constituency with 100 ballots cast.

#### VOTE TOTALS BY CANDIDATE

Lisa (Banana Party)	40
Mohamed (Pear Party)	15
Emma (Apple Party)	11
Thomas (Independent)	34

In this case, Lisa becomes the elected representative because she has the most votes. Lisa wins even though 60 per cent of the voters chose other candidates. Under FPTP, it is not necessary to win more than 50 per cent of the votes—the candidate simply needs to win the most votes.

#### *How does one find out which constituency they are in?*

You can visit the Elections Saskatchewan website and search using your address or postal code to find your constituency. During a provincial election campaign, Elections Saskatchewan also posts a list of candidates running for election in each constituency. The list is updated regularly and the final list is posted after nominations close (sometime between March 12 and 19) and once all candidacies have been confirmed.

#### *What are the most important issues facing my constituency?*

An individual's political views are personal and highly subjective. They are unique and shaped by their experiences, values, knowledge and feelings. Therefore, each person is responsible for forming their own opinions. These opinions can be formed by listening to other people whose opinions you respect, researching an issue or idea, discussing with your parents/guardians, elders, and peers and thinking seriously about what matters to you in order to come to your own conclusions.

No one can tell you how to vote, although this is the primary objective of all candidates and political parties. It is up to you—the voter—to decide what is most important, who you should listen to and, ultimately, who you will support.

#### *How can I learn about my candidates and the issues they support?*

There are many ways to gather information about local candidates. Community groups hold town hall meetings where constituents are invited to listen to candidates speak on various issues of local and provincial importance. Information can also be found on radio and television and in local or regional newspapers. Individuals may also visit local campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to the candidate when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information can also be found on party websites, media websites and social media platforms.

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Provincial constituency maps — [www.elections.sk.ca/voters/maps](http://www.elections.sk.ca/voters/maps)
- Candidate information/literature (candidate websites, campaign flyers)
- Electoral Systems — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)