Politics and Policy

Canada's National Identity Will Be Determined by Your Vote! Past Blogs

A Generational Divide?

What do Canadians Value in a Voting System?

First Past the Post Effective?

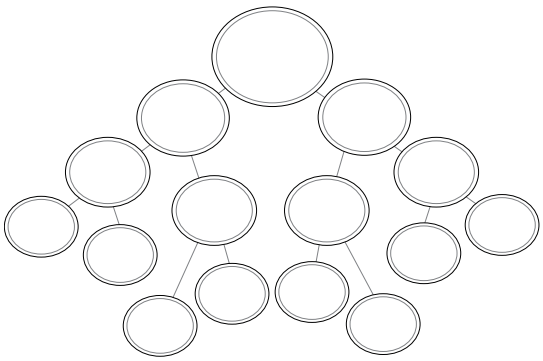
Representation by Population Stretched Thin

Introducing Technology to the Electoral Process

Movement growing to lower Canadian voting age to 16

What do you think these headlines mean? What issues are associated with each?

Brainstorm questions that come to mind when you read each headline. Use a list, or a graphic organizer such as a Mind Map or a T-Chart, to organize your questions.



Find Out More

Find additional sources and examples about issues related to the electoral process and Canadian democracy in **Identities and Ideologies** on the **Building Future Voters** senior high webpage at **www.buildingfuturevoters.ca**.

Check out the **ISideWith.com** website to find out what Canadians think about various issues. Go to the **Polls** tab and look for electoral issues. Filter results by province, city and political party. What can these results help you understand?

A Matter of Policy?

Some say that Canada's citizenship policies and legislation encourage citizens to participate and engage with issues that are important to them. Others say that our policies and legislation doesn't do enough to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities to be heard. What do you think?

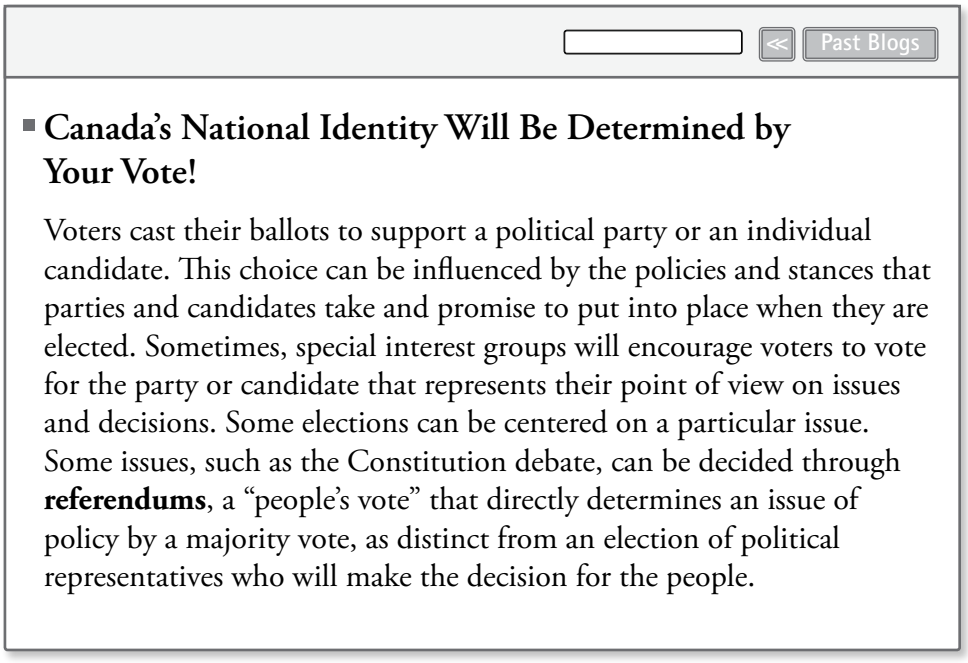
Through the **electoral process**, citizens give representatives the authority to make decisions, develop policies and enact laws on their behalf. The electoral process is therefore a critical aspect of the democratic process. However, there continue to be questions about the effectiveness of Canada's electoral system.

Some people believe that Canada's political and cultural realities require more reflection on what we want the Canadian democracy to be and how this vision should be represented in the electoral system. Others raise questions about whether existing electoral procedures really meet the democratic needs of Canadian society.

What are perspectives and evidence related to each of the headlines you just explored? Each of the following sources presents a starting point to help you build understandings of some issues connected to Canada's electoral system and democracy.

Start with these sources, but do some of your own research as well. Use a graphic organizer such as a Triple T-Chart or Retrieval Chart to organize information from the sources that you find. Ensure that you analyze each source for perspective and bias by applying these questions:

- **Who wrote or created the source?**
- **How reliable is it? What biases are present in the source? Why and how do you know this?**



Canada's National Identity Will Be Determined by Your Vote!

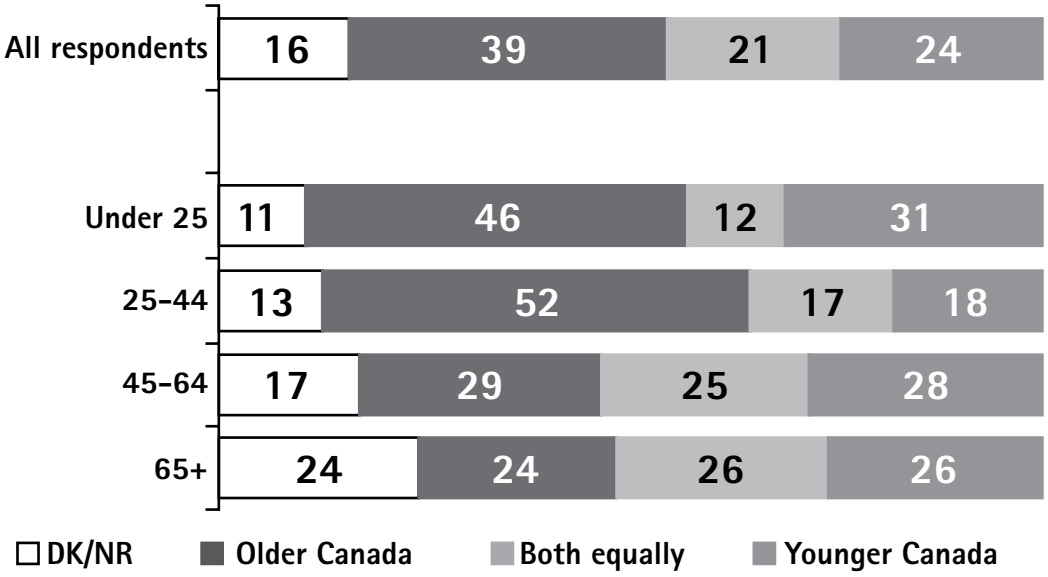
Voters cast their ballots to support a political party or an individual candidate. This choice can be influenced by the policies and stances that parties and candidates take and promise to put into place when they are elected. Sometimes, special interest groups will encourage voters to vote for the party or candidate that represents their point of view on issues and decisions. Some elections can be centered on a particular issue. Some issues, such as the Constitution debate, can be decided through **referendums**, a "people's vote" that directly determines an issue of policy by a majority vote, as distinct from an election of political representatives who will make the decision for the people.

A Generational Divide?

Canadians themselves see growing generational and class conflicts on the horizon. Among younger Canadians there is clear sense that the playing field is tilted to favour older voters. This perception may be grounded in harsh realities about how the economy, our democracy and our public institutions are performing. The youth vote is increasingly irrelevant to the business of winning elections — so political agendas tend more and more to reflect the wishes and fears (both real and imagined) of older Canada. This, in turn, may be leading to the permanent political disengagement of the young — who increasingly see a political process that doesn't reflect their needs, their concerns and their ethics.

IPolitics asked Canadians the following question. Do you think political campaigns ignore the needs and concerns of younger voters? What implications does this have for the political engagement of youth?

About half of Canada's population, younger Canada, is under the age of 42, while the other half, older Canada, is over 42. Do you think the government of Canada focuses more on the values and interests of younger or older Canada?



BASE: Canadians; February 21-28, 2012 (n*3, 699), MOE +/- 1.6%, 19 times out of 20

Graves, F. *The Grey Divide: How generational conflict twists our politics.* iPolitics.
http://ipolitics.ca/2014/12/09/the-grey-divide-how-generational-conflict-twists-our-politics/

Find Out More

Macleans provides an article that explains the choices between the current electoral process and four options that other countries use.

Shendruk, A. (June 16, 2016). *On electoral reform, what are Canada's options?* Macleans. **www.macleans.ca/politics/making-sense-of-electoral-reform-what-are-canadas-options/**

FairVote provides a perspective on electoral reform in *Why Proportional Representation? A look at the evidence* at **www.fairvote.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Why-PR-Review-of-Evidence-updated-version-2016-01-13.pdf**.

Find out what Canadians think. Check out *Canadian Electoral Reform: Public Opinion on Possible Alternatives*, a report prepared for the Broadbent Institute. The report can be downloaded at **www.broadbentinstitute.ca/canadian_electoral_reform**.

First-Past-the-Post Effective?

Ongoing discussions and debates about the effectiveness of Canada's current electoral system are not new. Our current **first-past-the-post** system has both supporters and opponents. Many Canadians believe that the first-past-the-post system results in inequalities in representation.

Some Canadians are in favour of a system called **proportional representation**. In this system, political parties are assigned seats in the House of Commons or provincial legislatures according to the percentage of the vote they receive. Candidates also win on the percentage of the vote they receive.

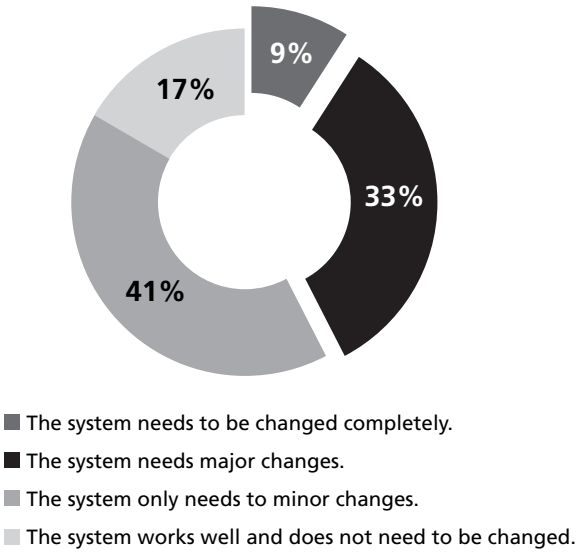
However, the first-past-the-post system has its supporters.

- The system is easily understood by the average voter, as voters simply mark the ballot (with a cross or other mark) beside the name of their preferred candidate.
- It can produce majority governments that take decisive action.
- This system allows voters to oust an unpopular government at the next election.
- It creates a clear geographic link between Members of Parliament and constituents.

Canadians surveyed in a 2015 public opinion study had the following opinions on the electoral process.

Feelings about the way we elect Members of Parliament

Based on what you know and feel about the way we elect Members of Parliament, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?



Coletto, D. & Czop, M. (December, 2015). *Canadian Electoral Reform: Public Opinion on Possible Alternatives*. Prepared for the Broadbent Institute. Abacus Data. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/broadbent/pages/4770/attachments/original/1448994262/Canadian_Electoral_Reform_-_Report.pdf?1448994262

What do Canadians value in a voting system?

When asked to choose five of their most important goals for a voting system (from a list of 15), a majority of Canadians ranked ballot simplicity (55%) and a system that produces strong and stable governments (51%) as one of their most important goals. These goals were chosen most consistently among respondents.

Other goals considered important to a large number of respondents included the ability to directly elect MPs who represent their community, and that government has MPs from every region of the country.

Moreover, a large portion of Canadians also valued a system that produces proportional representation in the House of Commons. Forty-one percent of Canadians want a system that "ensures that the number of seats held by a party in Parliament closely matches their actual level of support throughout the country" as a top voting system goal. Nearly four in 10 Canadians (38%) also chose "ensures seats in Parliament reflect the proportion of the vote a party receives nationally."

Representation a Concept That is Stretched Thin

The issue of who is represented and who is not by Canada's electoral system raises a number of different questions.

Canada uses a representation by population system and has a constitutional guarantee of a minimum number of seats for the provinces. Some Canadians ask whether it is really individual citizens who are represented in Parliament or is it the provinces?

Another issue involves representation of minority groups, women and Aboriginal peoples at all levels of government.

Questions have also been asked whether established residents of Canada, who pay taxes and live in Canadian communities, should be able to vote even if they are not citizens.

Some believe that by lowering the voting age, youth will be more effectively represented and engaged in political processes.

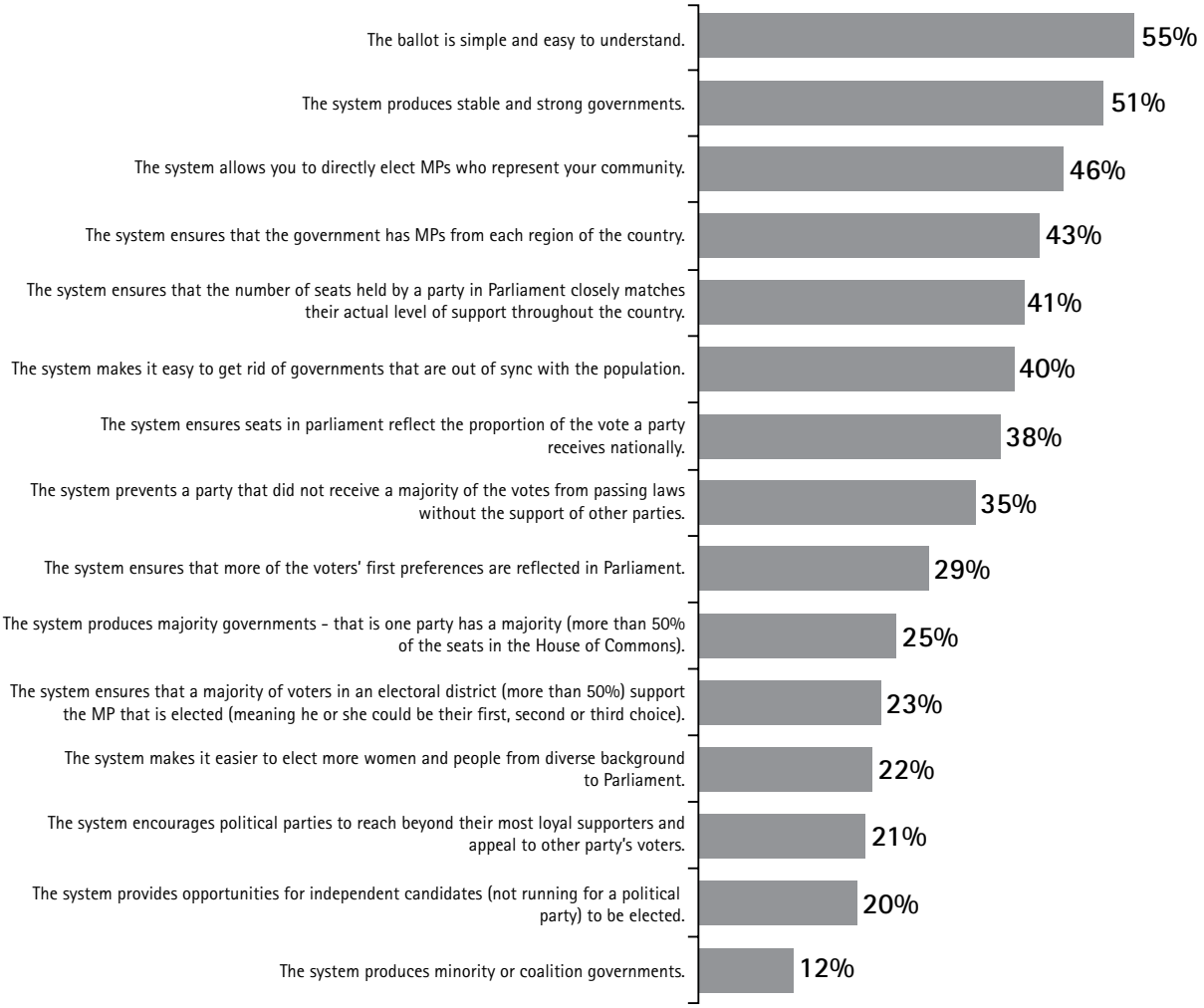
Find Out More

The Library of Parliament provides a comprehensive overview of Canada's electoral system and electoral reform. Check the articles in *Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: An Overview* at **www.lop.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2016-06-e.html?cat=government**.

Check out information on proportional representation on Fair Vote Canada at **www.fairvote.ca**.

Top 5 goals of a voting system

Please choose five goals of a voting system that are most important to you personally.



Coletto, D. & Czop, M. (December, 2015). *Canadian Electoral Reform: Public Opinion on Possible Alternatives*. Prepared for the Broadbent Institute. Abacus Data. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/broadbent/pages/4770/attachments/original/1448994262/Canadian_Electoral_Reform_-_Report.pdf?1448994262

Pause and Reflect

What five goals of a voting system are most important to you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

<< Past Blogs

Movement growing to lower Canadian voting age to 16

There have been a number of movements to lower the voting age, and even more debate and controversy about whether or not it is a good idea. In 2005, MPs from four political parties – the Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc and NDP introduced a private members bill to change Canada's *Election Act* and lower the voting age to 16. The bill was voted down in parliament.

Other countries have also introduced bills to lower the voting age, including the United States and Britain. Iran lets young people vote at 16 in some elections, and in Brazil, the Philippines and many municipalities in Germany, the voting age
is also 16.

In January 2005, two teenagers – Eryn Fitzgerald and Christine Jairamsingh – from Edmonton, Alberta attempted to voice their opinions on the issue to the Supreme Court. They were refused.

In the June 2005 House of Commons debate, Conservative Pierre Poilievre, the youngest Member of Parliament at 25, opposed the idea of lowering the voting age with the reasons that "the responsibility ... to pay taxes usually arrives around the age of 18… Values such as thrift, responsibility and hard work are most exemplified in the years that follow, having reached the age of majority." Others disagreed, stating that everyone pays GST and most pay provincial sales taxes.

Find Out More

There are a number of different sources that present arguments for and against lowering the voting age. Try searching online with "lower voting age Canada" or "lower voting age Alberta" to find sources.

<< Past Blogs

Introducing Technology to the Electoral Process

Elections Alberta now uses an online voter registration system called Voterlink. Eligible voters can register to vote using the internet at **www.voterlink.ab.ca**. To register, you need an Alberta Driver's License or an Alberta Identification Card. Any Canadian citizen who has been ordinarily resident in Alberta for at least six months and who is aged 16 or over can register.

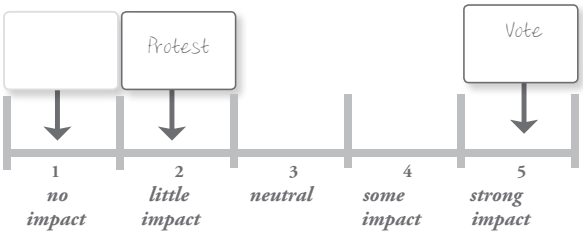
My Office is restricted from introducing best practices identified by other election agencies and in modernizing the electoral process in Alberta. The prescriptive and outdated language of the existing Election Act and Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act restricts the introduction of technology and product innovation needed to meet the changing needs of our stakeholders.

I have included recommendations to address my concerns under the Election Act in this report. A significant re-write of the legislation needs to be undertaken to ensure an enabling legislative structure rather than a prescriptive legislative structure for elections that protects the key principles of fairness of process, accessibility for all stakeholders and integrity of the results while ensuring that it is written in plain language that is easy to understand and interpret for all interested parties.

Resler, G. (2016). Remarks of the Chief Electoral Officer. ***Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the May 5, 2015 Provincial General Election***. Elections Alberta. www.elections.ab.ca/reports/general-elections/2015-general-election/

Work with a group to create a poster session to present information on one issue that you and your group identify and research. A poster session is a way of communicating information in a brief format. The poster is designed to communicate concepts and data to an audience using a combination of visuals and text. Poster sessions tend to be more informal than oral presentations.

- Clearly identify your issue.
- Plan your poster, including the issue, visuals and textual information.
- Collect and organize your research.
- Create your poster.

Reflect on and discuss the following questions after you have shared your research.

- How can a choice to vote represent a choice to affiliate with particular values, ideologies or stances on issues and concerns?
- In what ways can the process of voting be used to find out how citizens feel about an issue or decision? What is meant by the "popular vote?"
- Can voter participation patterns, or voter turnout rates, provide insights into what citizens believe to be important or not important? What might these insights include?
- What actions other than voting can represent political participation and affiliation with a particular stance or ideology?
- What degree of impact do you think different forms of political action, including voting, have? Use a **Continuum**, such as the example below, to indicate degree of impact.
- Whose voices are excluded from the electoral process? Why? Is this fair?