



Election Experiences

Voting is sometimes identified as the most important action that a citizen can take to be politically involved in a representative democracy. Every eligible voter has the right to vote in Canada's democratic system, although some choose not to vote.

A democracy cannot exist without free and fair elections. A free and fairly run election ensures that everyone is equal, as every citizen has one vote. Therefore, their vote gives every individual an equal say. **Collectively**, or taken all together, election results can send a message to politicians, political parties and the public, letting them know about positions and points of view that are supported by the majority.

The concept of **majority decision-making** is important to the electoral process:

- The political party with the majority of seats forms the government.
- Decisions to pass laws are made through a majority of votes.
- Representatives are chosen through a system that is often called "**first-past-the-post**." In other words, the candidate winning the majority of votes in a constituency is the winner, even if he or she received less than 50% of the "popular vote," which is the total number of votes cast.
- Alternative systems of majority decision-making are used in other countries. There has been increasing discussion about the advantages of changing Canada's electoral system. These alternatives include **proportional representation**, **ranked ballots** (also called preferential voting), **single transferable vote** and **mixed member proportional**.
- **Electoral divisions** are established with approximately the same number of people. One representative is elected to represent the people in the riding, giving everyone an equal say. However, when electoral divisions shrink or expand, this equality is affected.

Student Governance



Is the electoral process fair and equitable? You decide. Use the election process you are about to have to consider what changes could make it more fair or equitable. What would you change right now in Canada's electoral process if you could?

Pause and Reflect



When have you made decisions by majority decision-making? What other forms of decision-making have you used?



Find Out More

Explore some facts about the voting process in the **Identities and Ideologies** section of the **Building Future Voters** senior high webpage. Go to www.buildingfuturevoters.ca to find information and examples of voting processes and procedures.

Did You Know



The most common voting age around the world is 18, with a few countries that have lower voting ages. For example, East Timor, Indonesia, the Seychelles and Sudan have a national minimum voting age of 17. Austria and Brazil have a minimum age of 16. People who are between the ages of 16 and 18 and employed can vote in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro. However, in Uzbekistan, the minimum age to vote is 25. In Italy, the minimum voting age for elections to the Senate is also 25.

Hold an election for a student government or council with a function such as the following:

- Elect a mini-council for your classroom. Identify the issues and responsibilities this council will have.
- Hold referendum around an issue relevant in your school or classroom. Instead of electing a representative, adapt election materials and tools to determine and decide on a course of action.



What powers will elected representatives hold? What roles and responsibilities will they have?

Voter Eligibility

In Alberta, there are criteria that must be met for **voting eligibility**. To be eligible to vote in a provincial election in Alberta, a person must:

1. Be a Canadian citizen
2. Be 18 years old or older
3. Be ordinarily resident in Alberta for at least six months prior to polling day

People who are guilty of corrupt practices during an election are excluded from voting. Section 45 of the *Election Act* identifies people who are not eligible to vote.



What are the criteria for voting in federal elections?

Should there be changes to voter eligibility at different levels of government?

What criteria will establish voter eligibility in your election?

Find Out More



The *Election Act* is the main legislation that guides the conduct of elections in Alberta.

It sets out all the rules and procedures that must be followed to ensure that elections are fair and impartial. Elections Alberta is responsible to ensure the *Election Act* is followed. They must remain independent from any political party or government in power.

The *Election Act* and other election-related legislation can be accessed on the Elections Alberta website at www.elections.ab.ca/resources/legislation/.

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vote representation
student voice

Electoral Divisions

In some ways, your school is like an electoral division. Your classroom is like a polling subdivision. In a provincial election, each electoral division must elect a representative. In order to vote, each eligible voter must **register**, or identify themselves by adding their name to the List of Electors. Voting takes place in polling places within each polling subdivision.



Why do you think it is important that all voters register?

In most elections, there are issues that people are concerned about. Your election or referendum should address issues that are important to you, your classroom, your school or your community. The issues may relate directly to a project that you are already involved with.



What issues were raised in your election?

How might your issues differ from other classrooms, groups of people or communities?

Use your research from previous activities to identify alternatives to a first-past-the-post, or majority, decision. What changes would you have to make to the election materials and resources used? Consider:

- Does the ballot have to be redesigned?
- Do election officers have different responsibilities?
- Will election results be counted and recorded using different processes?



Make It Matter

Make your election matter for your action project. What actions or policies are important for the candidates' election campaigns? Consider strategies like these, depending on your project.

- **Communicate and lobby for change** with your MLA or the government by making a presentation, sending a letter, sharing research and findings or sending an invitation to meet with the class.
- **Implement the project in the classroom or school** by creating an awareness campaign, organizing student meetings or working groups or holding lunch hour take-action meetings.
- **Implement the project in the community** by preparing a community information night, holding a press conference, organizing a public service announcement or campaign or planning a mini-conference.

Encourage your candidates to campaign on the basis of how they promote your action project.