

## 2 How do our votes influence government decision-making?

### Find Out More

Explore some examples of political and economic effects on voter and government decision-making in **Voter Influence** on the junior high webpage of **Building Future Voters** at [www.buildingfuturevoters.ca](http://www.buildingfuturevoters.ca).

Find out more about the Pembina Institute, found at [www.pembina.org](http://www.pembina.org). What perspectives or biases do you think an organization like this might have when it conducts research studies or surveys? Do you see any evidence of bias in the news release?

## ■ Political and Economic Decision-Making

Are you a voter? You probably are, even though you can't yet vote in local, provincial or federal elections. You have likely voted as a member of a group, with friends to make a choice or perhaps in a community meeting. The point is, you participate and express your opinion when you vote.

The participation of **electors**, or those eligible to vote, as well as the results of their vote, can send important messages to and about government.

- What are some factors that you think influence the ways people vote?
- Do you think more people vote when there is public interest in specific issues? Do you think more people vote if they want to send a message to the government in power?
- Do you think that candidates and the government listen more to groups like seniors, farmers, oil producers or business leaders, that have the highest voter turnout in elections? Why or why not?



What do these articles tell you about the impact of voter perspectives on government actions?

### MEDIA RELEASE

## Poll: Most Albertans want stronger climate change policies

### Survey shows public support for climate action and a stronger price on carbon

EDMONTON — New public opinion research shows that 53 per cent of Albertans want the province to adopt stronger policies to cut carbon emissions. This result comes from a survey of more than 1,800 Albertans conducted by EKOS Research Associates and commissioned by the Pembina Institute.

Half of Albertans (50 per cent) also support the introduction of a carbon tax that applies to all polluters, including both individuals and companies. Support for this kind of carbon price is 10 to 20 percentage points higher when the revenue is directed to specific sources, such as infrastructure projects or technologies that reduce carbon emissions.

### Quick facts

A majority (56 per cent) of Albertans think the province has an obligation to cut emissions to address climate change, with only 26 per cent disagreeing.

A large majority of respondents (70 per cent) support investing in renewable energy sources to reduce the province's reliance on coal-fired electricity.

Most Albertans (53 per cent) want the province to adopt stronger climate change policies, even if that means oilsands companies must pay higher costs to produce oil.

Two-thirds of Albertans (66 per cent) think the government should prioritize diversifying the province's economy over helping the oil and gas industry be more competitive (29 per cent).

Roughly half of respondents (48 per cent) think that the oilsands industry is currently large enough, or that its size should be reduced.

Pembina Institute and EKOS Research Associates (2015). *Poll: Most Albertans want strong climate change policies*. Pembina Institute [www.pembina.org/media-release/poll-most-albertans-want-stronger-climate-change-policies](http://www.pembina.org/media-release/poll-most-albertans-want-stronger-climate-change-policies)

## New Alberta climate-change plan includes carbon tax for individual Albertans, cap on oilsands emissions

JODIE SINNEMA, November 23, 2015

Alberta's new climate-change plan will introduce a carbon tax on every Albertan, phase out coal pollution and plants by 2030, set a greenhouse-gas-emissions cap on oilsands production and pump money back into the pockets of Albertans and businesses to help with the transition.

While the plan doesn't set greenhouse gas emission targets with dates, the entire climate-change policy puts Alberta on track to reduce emissions by approximately 20 megatonnes in 2020 compared to what would be the case if no changes were made, and 50 megatonnes by 2030.

It will also cut methane emissions from flaring and leakage by 45 per cent from 2014 levels by 2025. Methane is roughly 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a heat-trapping gas.

The plan was hailed by energy and environmental leaders as a "game changer" that will make Alberta a global leader in fighting climate change. But it will also

require Albertans to pay 4.7 cents more per litre of gas at the pumps in 2017, and 5.5 cents more per litre of diesel, plus an extra \$320 to heat their homes in 2017, rising to \$470 by 2018. The \$3 billion raised by these carbon taxes won't go into government coffers, but will go back to Albertans through a rebate program and by building green infrastructure and public transit, the premier said.

"This is the day that we set a better course for our economic future," Premier Rachel Notley said Sunday, addressing environment and energy groups at the Telus World of Science. "This is the day that we start to mobilize capital and resources to create green jobs, green energy, green infrastructure and a strong, environmentally responsible, sustainable and visionary Alberta energy industry with a great future ... This is the day we stop denying there is an issue, and this is the day we do our part."

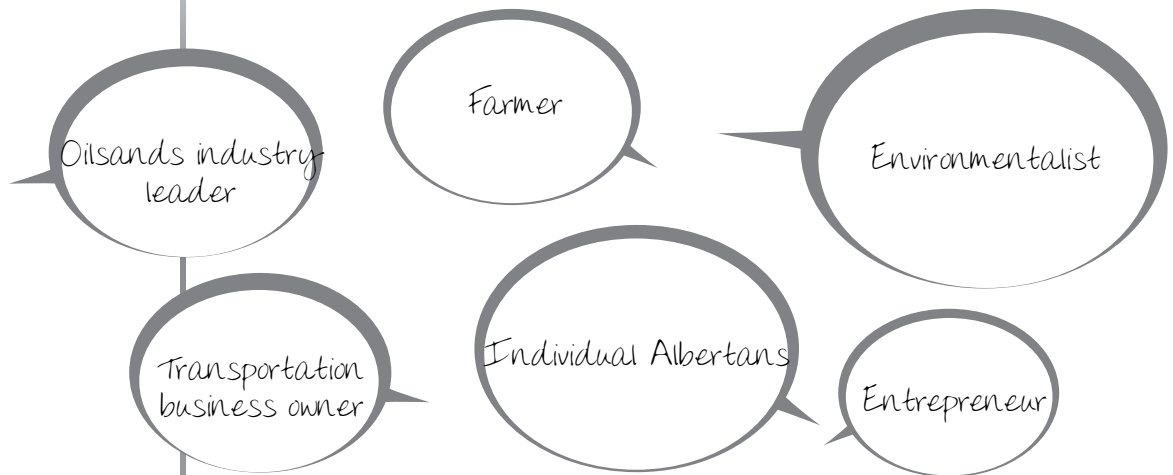
Sinnema, J. (November 23, 2015). *New Alberta climate-change plan includes carbon tax for individual Albertans, cap on oilsands emissions*. Edmonton Journal. <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/new-alberta-climate-change-plan-includes-carbon-tax-for-individual-albertans-cap-on-oilsands-emissions>

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public interest  
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issues

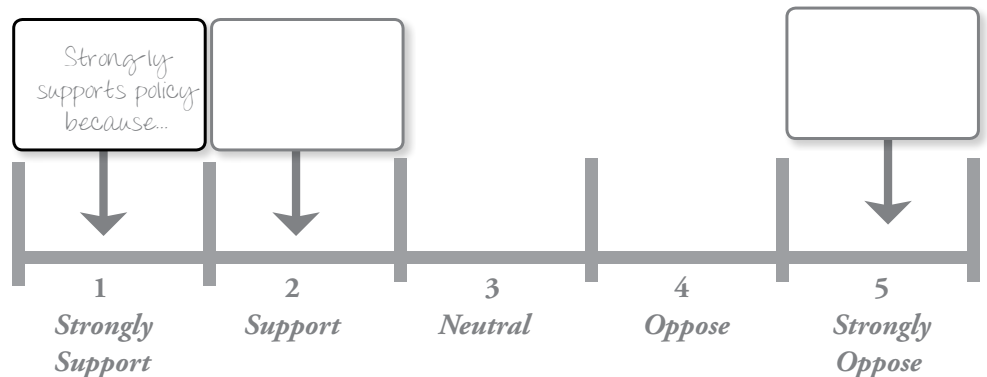


What other perspectives are involved in this issue? Find out how three of the individuals identified below feel about climate change and government policy.

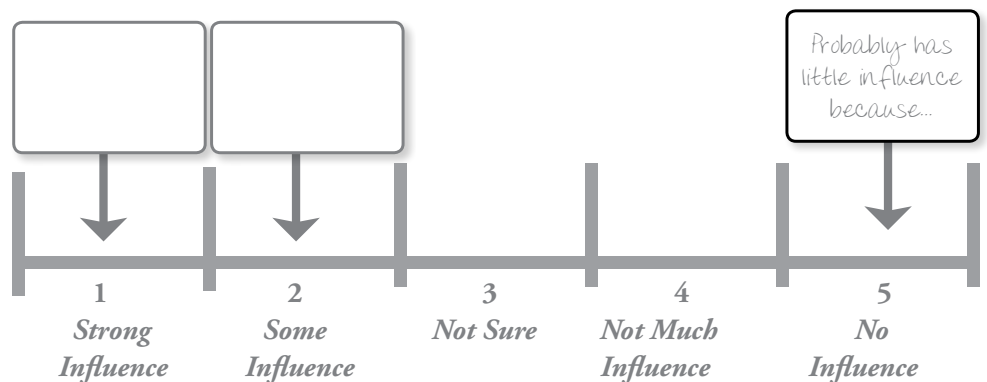


Use two copies of the **Continuum** graphic organizer. Place and describe the points of view of each of the three individuals on the appropriate position on the first continuum. On the second continuum, identify and describe how much influence you think each group or individual has on government decision-making about climate change policy. Use the examples below to help you start.

### Support of Climate Change Policy



### Influence on Government Decision-Making on Climate Change Policy



## ■ Impact of Political Involvement

Many people find it rewarding to be informed about **public issues**, which are issues that concern society. They are interested in others' opinions and perspectives and like to make the effort to find information. Some people believe that being informed provides them with the knowledge they need to communicate their own opinions and influence public decision-making. Some just get involved because it gives them satisfaction to be part of the democratic process.

Many people believe that lack of participation in the electoral process can have a concrete impact. For example:

- Elected representatives may target their campaigns towards those groups that do participate more in elections. For example, if seniors have a higher participation rate in elections, seniors' issues may be a priority that candidates focus on during an election.
- Once elected, representatives may pay more attention to those issues and groups that got them elected. If environmental or economic issues are important during a campaign, the government that is elected may make promises to develop new policies in those areas. If seniors' issues are a concern during a campaign, they may become part of the priorities of the government. What evidence have you seen of this?

## ■ The Economics of an Election

In Alberta, the **electoral process**, or the steps and actions involved in an election, is run by an organization called Elections Alberta. This organization is **non-partisan**, which means it is not influenced by or affiliated with any political party or government. Elections Alberta makes sure that when an election happens, the following conditions are met.

- The election is open, fair and impartial.
- Voters have the necessary information to participate in the election.
- Political participants have the information and assistance to make sure they are following election rules.
- Election officers are trained to make sure elections are run properly and results are made available to people.
- Elections are evaluated to recommend any changes that could be made to improve the electoral process.

### Pause and Reflect



If youth do not express their concerns and identify their issues, what do you think the chances would be that these concerns and issues are paid attention to?

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## Pause and Reflect

Why do you think Elections Alberta is non-partisan?

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What about economic issues that relate to elections themselves? Most places in North America and across the world have **campaign finance legislation**, which is legislation that deals with the impact of money on elections and public policy. This legislation is usually based on the premise that campaign spending is a significant factor in determining electoral success – in other words, getting a candidate elected.

Campaign finance legislation promotes financial equity and fairness, or creates a "more level playing field." In Alberta, the *Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act* is a law that maintains the accountability of candidates and those who run the electoral process. It does this through rules that provide contribution limits and the disclosure, or making public, of contributions that individuals or groups make to political parties and their campaigns during an election.

**Public transparency** is another term that is used to describe the disclosure of political financing.

In Alberta, there are different financial requirements during campaign periods and for non-election years that involve political parties, candidates and **constituency associations**, which are volunteer organizations that handle the activities of a political party in an electoral division.

Annual reporting is the responsibility of the political party and the constituency association and is based on a calendar year. Campaign reporting is the responsibility of a political party and the candidate. It occurs in a year in which there is a provincial general election, a by-election or a Senate nominee election.

## Find Out More



Information about financial requirements for candidates and political parties can be found at [www.elections.ab.ca/parties-and-candidates/](http://www.elections.ab.ca/parties-and-candidates/).

transparency  
election finance  
LEGISLATION  
disclosure



Participate in a fund raising campaign based on an issue that is important to you and your classmates. What insights does the campaign provide about the economic aspects of an election?

1. Identify and describe an issue that will be the focus of an election campaign.

For this activity, you will take the role of either a candidate for election or a contributor.

- The job of the candidates will be to raise money to pay for their campaign in an election.
- The contributors will make a decision to support a candidate who they think will best represent their or their organizations' views and opinions on the issue.

2. Record the criteria for campaigning that you establish as a class. Use a Campaign Criteria T-Chart to record the rules and guidelines for candidates and contributors.

3. Conduct the fund raising campaign.

- If you are a contributor, you will receive money cards that you will use to make your contributions. You can choose how much you will give to one or more candidates. You will be responsible for preparing a list of priorities that you will use to allocate your contributions.
- If you are a candidate, you will prepare and present a brief statement that explains why you are the best choice to receive financial support from contributors. Your statement should address where you stand on the issue. You will be asked to present your statement at a press conference to the contributors.
- You will have a set amount of time during class to distribute or collect contribution funds.

4. Analyze the results with your class and answer the Fund Raising Results Analysis questions on the next page.

## ■ Campaign Criteria



Use a T-Chart like the example on the left to establish the criteria for campaign funding. Consider these questions:

- Should there be limits on how much can be contributed?
- Should we limit who can contribute?
- Should there be limits on how much candidates can spend on their campaigns?
- Should the public know how much is contributed, who contributes and how much candidates spend on campaigns?

Criteria for Campaign Funding	Reason
1.	
2.	

## ■ Fund Raising Results Analysis

After the fund raising campaign has been run, consider and respond to these questions:

1. Were some candidates better than others at fundraising?
2. What influenced the negotiations between candidates and contributors?
3. Do those with money to spend have an advantage?
4. What impact does campaign funding have on the outcome of an election?
5. Why do you think there are contribution limits in a campaign?
6. Is the system fair and equitable?
7. Should the government reimburse political parties and candidates for their campaign spending?



What do you think?

- How do you think political and economic decisions made by government affect opportunities that citizens have to participate during an election campaign?
- What are these opportunities?
- Are these opportunities fair and equitable?
- How should these opportunities be communicated to others in the school or community?

Construct your response using a format from the choice board below. Pick one strategy to participate with government.

Write a letter to post on a blog site

Create a poem or lyrics to a song

Design a graphic message for a website

Create a comic strip that communicates a message

Create a collage with current media examples

Develop Twitter or Instagram messages

