

### 3 What do you mean, our votes don't count?



Student Resource 3-2

## ■ An Election Experience

Can you think of times when someone has represented you? Or you have represented others? When you are a group leader or spokesperson, you represent the members of your group. For example, when a classmate attends a school meeting, he or she represents your class. Representation in government works much the same way.



### Pause and Reflect

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

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Canada is a **representative democracy**, in which citizens elect representatives to form a government and make decisions on their behalf.

**Residents**, people who live in Canada (whether or not they are citizens), have many of the same rights. However, residents who are not citizens cannot vote in elections. Canada's system of representative democracy is based on **principles**, or important values and ideas, that are hundreds of years old.

Voting is sometimes described 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 a democracy, although some choose not to vote.

A democracy can not exist without free and fair elections. A free and fairly run election makes everyone equal because each citizen has one vote. Therefore, voting 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 what positions and points of view are supported by the majority.

The idea 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 percent 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**.

### Find Out More



Explore some facts about the voting process in the **Voting Counts** section of the **Building Future Voters** junior high webpage.

Go to [www.buildingfuturevoters.ca](http://www.buildingfuturevoters.ca) and find information and examples of voting processes and procedures.

- **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.



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.

Investigate one of the alternatives to the first-past-the-post system. Describe one advantage and one disadvantage of your alternative.

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# vote representation

## student voice leadership

A student government or council can be meaningful if it has a purposeful focus. It can represent the interests and voices of students. A student government or council can take responsibility for leadership tasks related to a school or classroom project or action plan.



Does your school involve students in decision-making? How are you represented? What opportunities are there for students to show leadership?

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As a class, decide on the focus and function of your student government or council. Describe it.

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### Did You Know

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 for making sure the *Election Act* is followed. They must remain independent from any political party or government in power.

The electoral processes you will use in your election experience are based on those in the *Election Act*, which is the legislation governing electoral procedure in Alberta.



What should the responsibilities of your student government or council be? Think about this question as you prepare to hold your election. Make a list and check it with other classmates.

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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 6 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.

### Did You Know



The most common voting age around the world is 18, with a few countries that have lower voting ages. East Timor, Indonesia, North Korea, the Seychelles and Sudan have a national minimum voting age of 17. Austria, Brazil, Cuba and Nicaragua 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.



Find out what the criteria is for voting in federal elections.

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What criteria will establish voter eligibility in your election?

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In some ways, your school is like an electoral division. Your classroom is like a polling station. 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 stations.



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

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In most elections, there are issues that people are concerned about. Your election 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 do you think will be raised in your election?

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

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## Make It Matter

Make your student 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 holding a school 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 organizing a mini-conference.

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