

1 Why is voting both an individual and collective responsibility?

Pause and Reflect

How important is it to voice your concerns and participate in society?

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?

What about concerns that are not perceived to be popular? How important is it to voice your opinion and take action even if you are perceived to be “rocking the boat?”

Times Change

Canadian citizenship as we know it today was only ushered into existence in 1947, when the *Canadian Citizenship Act* came into force. In January of that year, 26 new citizens received their certificates under the new act. Prior to 1947, there was no such thing in law as a Canadian citizen. Canadian nationals were still British subjects, many of whom had already fought in two world wars for Britain. In fact, it was the Second World War that inspired Paul Martin Sr. to initiate the changes that would lead to the *Citizenship Act* of 1947.

With this act, Canada became the first Commonwealth country to create its own class of citizenship separate from that of Great Britain. Immigrants who had been naturalized in Canada, non-Canadian British subjects who had lived in Canada for five or more years, and non-Canadian women who had married Canadian citizens and who had come to live in Canada could now acquire Canadian citizenship, with all its rights and responsibilities.

The snapshots that follow provide some examples of changes that individuals and groups made in the fight for rights and equality and the development of democracy. They do not represent all individuals and groups who contributed to change. What other events, individuals and groups could you add to these snapshots?

Find Out More



Explore events and conditions that include those in the snapshots in the **Individual or Collective** timeline on the **Building Future Voters** senior high webpage at www.buildingfuturevoters.ca.

What events do you think had the most impact on the development of a democratic society?



Snapshot 1: The Evolution of Voting Rights

Some think that Canadians take their rights for granted and do not always recognize the challenges and struggles that have influenced those rights. Over different time periods, not everyone had the same access to rights that are part of the foundation of our society today.

What injustices and inequalities did people face in the past? The legal and political system of English common law and French civil law is based on rule of law, which means that the government, like the people, is accountable to the law. However, it has not always been this way. Before the 1900s, there were no laws that protected people against discrimination or prejudice, except criminal laws. Those rights that did exist were reserved for male property owners. Although there were some gains made in the 1800s to expand rights to different groups, there were many who still experienced discrimination based on their gender, race, religion, ethnicity and language.

By the middle of the 1920s, women started to gain political and legal rights, both federally and provincially. They insisted on, fought for, and won the right to enter "non-traditional" professions and gain their independence. However, most of the power was still held in the hands of economically dominant white males.

Other groups in Canadian society also did not have access to many rights. Aboriginal people could not vote until 1960. Asian Canadians did not gain the vote until 1949. It wasn't until 1988 that people with intellectual disabilities gained the right to vote.

Equality in the workplace, equal access to places to live and the ability to use public services was not part of many Canadians' daily lives until well into the 1900s. However, laws against discrimination were slowly established and people started to pay more attention to the importance of working toward equality for all.

Although there was still rampant discrimination and exclusion in the legislation of the time, during the 1930s, some provincial legislation made discrimination based on race, religion and political affiliation illegal, primarily through unemployment relief and insurance acts. Over the years, different laws have improved equality for citizens and residents of Canada.

Snapshot 2: Working Toward Equality

With the emphasis today on respecting diversity and our multicultural heritage, it can be hard to imagine the extent of discrimination and prejudice against groups and individuals in Canadian society in the past. Discrimination and racism were not just a social convention of the day, but institutionalized by government policies and practices.

Over time, people and groups have worked to change these policies and influence people's attitudes. From the discrimination faced by Canada's Aboriginal, Black and Asian communities to the inclusion of individuals in all aspects of society, outstanding individuals such as Carrie Best, Harriet Tubman, Thomas Shoyama and Jackie Robinson worked to break barriers and right injustices.



Find Out More

Visit the **Historica Voices** website at www.historica.ca/voices/index.do.

Explore the history of the vote and perspectives on citizenship, as well as what some young people have to say about voting.

A comprehensive history of the vote is available on the Elections Canada website at www.elections.ca.

The CBC Archives provide a number of video clips and articles that deal with the history of the vote on *Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right*, found at www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/voting-in-canada-how-a-privilege-became-a-right.

Explore the **Time Portal on Human Rights** cases www.chrc-ccdp.ca/historical-perspective/en/timePortals/1900.asp



Find Out More

Investigate what the groups or individuals referenced in the snapshots contributed to equality rights in Canada. Search online or check biographical sources in your library.

Find Out More



Explore the events that influenced Canadian politics and its evolving national identity through video and audio clips in the CBC Archives. Go to <http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/>.

Snapshot 3: Times of Struggle

Canada's development as a nation has been marked by periods of hardship and struggle. In these times, people have organized, protested, motivated and fought to overcome challenges and fight for rights, equality and better ways of life. Highlights of some of these events follow, but do not represent the full spectrum of the growing pains Canadians experienced.

When Canada became a nation in 1867, it faced the challenges involved in keeping a vast, diverse territory connected and under the control of the federal government. One of the events that marked Canada's identity as a nation was the building of a railway from coast to coast. When the railway was completed, the Chinese community in Canada organized to provide support to those workers who were left with no jobs, no means of support and no way of paying their way back to China. This community of individuals had no status as either residents or access to rights guaranteed to citizens.



The end of World War I in 1918 transformed Canadian society, both economically and socially. The income tax, temporarily imposed, was made permanent and Canada started to move away from Britain. The Canadian soldiers who fought for Britain in the war left a mark on the of all Canadians through stories of valour and tragedy. John Macrae's poem, "On Flanders Fields" – represented the losses that many Canadians felt after the war.

As cities grew and ways of life changed, the nature of work and labour was affected by changes in technology, the growth of an urban labour force and unions that grew to protect workers' rights. By 1919, conditions in Winnipeg came to a head and the resulting general strike was the biggest in Canada's history. Although the actions of unions and workers during the strike did not gain them the better pay and hours they were demanding, it did gain workers the right to bargain through their unions. Just as importantly, these actions affected attitudes toward labour conditions and rights.

When the Great Depression hit Canada in the early 1930s, almost everyone living in Canada at the time was affected. People concentrated on survival, but some focused on improving attitudes to help cope with the difficulties of everyday life.

The passage of the *Statute of Westminster* after World War I solidified Canada's independence from Britain. Therefore, when World War II started, Canada independently declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939.

The contributions made to the war effort from the diverse peoples of Canada were often not recognized until much later, as were many of the injustices that occurred during the war years.

One of these injustices involved Asian and Aboriginal Canadians. At the beginning of World War II, many Asian Canadian men like Thomas Shoyama and Douglas Jung attempted to join the Canadian armed forces but were turned away. Some influential politicians such as B.C. Premier Duff Patullo, federal cabinet minister Ian Mackenzie, and Vancouver Alderman Halford Wilson argued against allowing Asians into the armed forces in case they used their military service as grounds for gaining the right to vote.

It was only towards the end of the war that Chinese and Japanese Canadians were recruited to serve in military intelligence in Asia. For many Asian Canadians, serving in the military was their way of proving their commitment to Canada. Democracy for these individuals did not come until a few years after the end of war. For Aboriginal peoples, the right to vote in federal elections was not to come until 1960. In Alberta, it was not until 1962 that the law was changed, and until 1965 that Aboriginal peoples voted in their first provincial election.



Pause and Reflect

How do you think each of the events described in this snapshot has contributed to a Canadian national identity? Or do you think there is any such national identity?

If there is no national identity, why is that? Is there any country that has a distinct national identity? If yes, which one and why?



Find Out More

What can you find out about each of the individuals mentioned in this snapshot?

Snapshot 4: Changing the Electoral System

In the late 1970s, discussions over threats to Canada's national unity and identity, mainly from the issues of Quebec separation and western alienation, resulted in the formation of the Pepin-Robarts Task Force on Canadian Unity by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government in 1978.

Although the Task Force on Canadian Unity viewed electoral reform as a more minor issue, it suggested that the size of the House of Commons be increased by about 60 members, and that additional seats to be awarded to candidates selected from party lists and distributed on the basis of a party's share of the national vote. This is called **proportional representation**.



Since then, some provinces looked at ways to make changes in their electoral systems:

- The Parti Québécois was the first administration in North America to disallow contributions to political parties from corporations.
- The Liberal government of Gordon Campbell in British Columbia established a non-partisan Citizens' Assembly to hold public hearings to consider changes in the ways that representatives would be elected to the provincial legislature, including proportional representation.
- Prince Edward Island held public consultation meetings on possible changes to the provincial electoral system, including the advantages of changing from the first-past-the-post system to proportional representation because overwhelming majorities for the winning political party excluded half or more of the people from meaningful representation.

These are only a few examples of an increasingly louder discussion on the need for electoral reform across Canada.

- Out of 29 general federal elections since 1921, only five resulted in a governing party that was elected with 50 percent or more of the popular vote
- In 2004, the Law Reform Commission suggested electoral reform was necessary to increase Canadian engagement with their democracy.
- In 2015, the Liberal government made promises to reform the electoral system.

"In Canada, as is the case with all democracies, how elected officials are selected is at the very core of how decisions are made in our democracy. Effectively representing the interests of the people of Canada as a whole requires that our electoral system reflect, as closely as possible, how we each vote as individual Canadians. In the interests of social cohesion and citizen engagement, it is particularly important that members of the electorate who voted for someone other than the governing party feel that their views and perspectives are afforded fair and accurate representation throughout the life of a parliamentary session.

Achieving fairness and accuracy in representation requires that the balance of power that is created by the electoral system mirrors, as closely as possible, the views and perspectives expressed by voters at election time.

And yet, our current first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system has regularly awarded 100 per cent power to one of Canada's two established "centrist" political parties -- the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party (formerly, Progressive Conservative Party) -- even when their share of the popular vote has been well below 50 per cent of total votes cast, nationwide. Bestowing 100 per cent power to one political party based on a minority of votes cast creates a power imbalance in our democracy, and increases the risk that decisions made by our government and parliamentarians may not reflect the wishes of a true majority of Canadians."

O'Connor, K. (July 4, 2016). *Electoral Reform: What does history tell us?* The Blog: Huffington Post Canada. www.huffingtonpost.ca/kathleen-oconnor/electoral-reform-history_b_10798160.html



What would you identify as the five most influential events, groups or people in the development of Canadian citizenship and the evolution of voting rights we have today?

- Think about Canadian citizenship as a legal status that can be defined by who has rights and the ability to participate in decision-making and the activities of the nation.
- Identify the five events or changes that you think were most significant. Use a Cause and Effect Timeline to describe these events.

