



Canada's

SECTION 3

Democracy in Action

Elections

According to the *Constitution Act*, national elections must be held at least once every five years to decide who will represent Canadians in the **House of Commons**.

Canada is divided into areas called **ridings** (also called **constituencies** or electoral districts). Canadian **citizens vote** for the candidate in their riding they think will

best represent them. In a riding there may be several different candidates, each from a different political party or running independently.

How does a person become a candidate? First, he or she has to be *nominated* (or chosen) by fellow party members in his or her riding during a special meeting called a *nomination meeting*. If more than one person in the party wants to be a candidate for that riding, there is a vote during the nomination meeting to decide who it will be.

If a person does not belong to a party, then he or she can run for election in his or her riding as an *independent candidate*.

On Election Day, the candidate who gets the most **votes** becomes a **Member of Parliament** (MP) and represents his or her riding in the House of Commons in Ottawa. The party with the most number of elected MPs across the country usually forms *the Government*. The leader of that party becomes the **Prime Minister**.

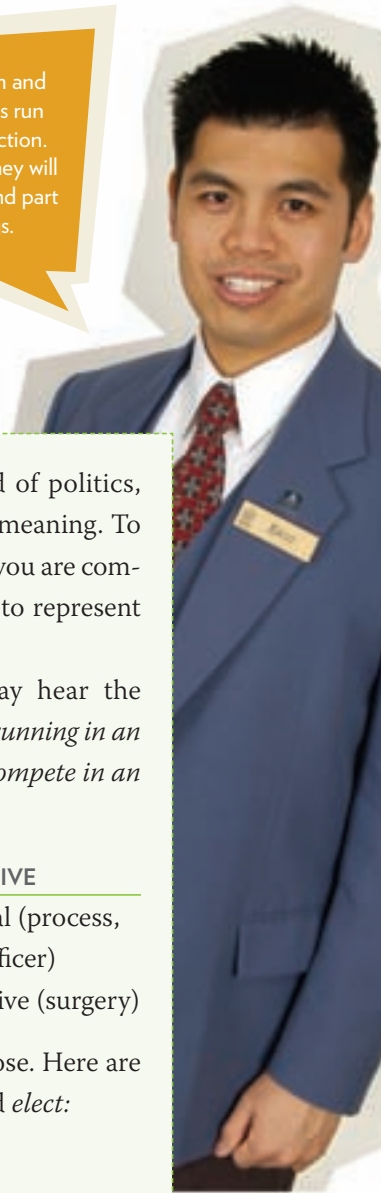
TALK ABOUT IT!

Find a partner. Talk about other ways the word *run* is used (examples: running to catch a bus, running a business, a runny nose, running out of time). Use a dictionary to find other examples. Write down all the uses you can. How would some of these things be expressed in your home language?



DID YOU KNOW? — Because each riding should represent a relatively fixed number of people (approximately 70,000), as the population increases, the number of ridings has to be increased and the boundaries redrawn. In 1867, Canada had only 4 provinces and 181 ridings. In 2009, with 10 provinces and 3 territories, the number of ridings was 308.

Running for office takes dedication and lots of hard work. Some candidates run many times before they win an election. Once the candidates are elected, they will spend part of the year in Ottawa, and part of the year in their home ridings.



WORD BUILDER –

In the world of politics, the verb *to run* has a specific meaning. To run in an election means that you are competing with other candidates to represent your riding.

During an election, you may hear the expressions *run for office* and *running in an election*. They both mean *to compete in an election as a candidate*.

VERB	NOUN	ADJECTIVE
to elect	election	electoral (process, vote, officer) or elective (surgery)

The word *elect* means to choose. Here are a few sentences with the word *elect*:

- She was elected in 2006.
- An election will be held this year.
- He is the **Chief Electoral Officer**.





Dissolving Parliament

The Prime Minister asks the **Governor General** to end (or dissolve) **Parliament** and call an election. **Dissolution** (the act of dissolving) happens when:

- the Government's fixed four-year term is complete
- the Government loses a vote on certain important **bills** – on the **budget**, for example – in the House of Commons
- a majority of MPs vote to defeat the Government in the House of Commons on a *vote of confidence*, including a vote against certain important government measures or bills, such as the budget

Even with the fixed four-year term, an election could still be held after the Government loses an important vote in the House of Commons.

Campaigns

After an election is called and before the day voting takes place (usually called Election Day), each candidate competes with the other candidates in the riding to convince voters why he or she is the best choice. This is called a *campaign*. A candidate tells voters his or her message in many different ways:

- campaign signs
- door-to-door canvassing
- advertising campaigns (on television, radio, billboards and in newspapers, for example)
- public meetings
- **debates**

Many of these activities cost money. There are rules about how much money candidates are allowed to spend on campaigns, and how much money people are allowed to give to candidates.

Of course, to do all this work, candidates have several people helping them. These people are called *campaign workers*. People of any age, including youth, can help out on campaigns.

WORD BUILDER – A teacher can dismiss class – that is, the teacher can tell the class that they can go home. The Governor General can dissolve Parliament, which is somewhat similar. These words both start with *dis-*. Take a look at these words:

- disable
- dissolve
- disappear
- disagree

Like the prefix *un-*, *dis-* makes the root word into its opposite. Try using *dis-* with the following familiar words, then create some sentences with them: advantage, approve, believe, colour, comfort, connection, courage, engage, infect, illusion, satisfy, respect.

Sometimes, the *dis-* word is used more than the root: disgust, for example. The root *gust* (which is associated with the sense of taste) is not as familiar to English speakers as *disgust*.





THESE ARE CAMPAIGN SIGNS.

What things do these signs have in common? What is different? What message do you think each candidate is trying to tell voters?



Vote for the Future!
Martine
Robert for MP

Voice of the People
Vote for
Annie Roy!

**Good for Business,
Good for Neighbourhoods**
Omar Lopez

**On
Your
Side**

**Raymond
Lee, MP**

 **WHAT ABOUT ME?**

Have you ever participated in an election? Some ways that young people across Canada get involved in elections are by helping candidates, by bringing up important issues at public debates and forums and by expressing their opinions in letters to newspapers. Some issues that are often important to young Canadians are crime, access to colleges and universities, employment and skills training and equal rights. Think about what election issues are important to you.

farmers

religion

climate change,

health-care

WAR:

WORLD

schools

military

Political Parties

Canada has many different political parties. People in the same party usually have similar opinions about public issues. In Parliament, members of different parties often have different opinions. This is why there are sometimes disagreements during elections and when Parliament is **sitting**.

Having different parties allows criticism and encourages watchfulness. Canadians have a choice in expressing different views by voting for a member from a specific party during election time. This is called the *party system*.

 **WHAT ABOUT ME?**

You probably have opinions and ideas of what would be good for Canada. Think about one issue that is important to you (the environment, immigration, education, or **law** and order, for example). Research some of the major political parties in Canada to find out where they stand on your issue. Which one do you think has the best ideas? Imagine you are creating a political party. What issues are important?

W WORD BUILDER – The word *campaign* comes from the Latin *campus*, which means *field*. In ancient times, armies would *take to the field* when they fought. In English, we still use the word *campaign* to mean a military battle or series of battles. We can also use the word *race* to describe an election competition. *Race* comes from the Old Norse *ras*, meaning *running water*. Like many words in English, we can use *race* either as a noun or as a verb.

NOUN	VERB	EXAMPLES
race	to race	She ran a very good race. He raced to the finish line.
vote	to vote	
form	to form	
act	to act	
help	to help	

W WORD BUILDER

- issue
- policy
- idea
- opinion

These words are difficult to explain because they are abstract. Look them up in a dictionary if you do not know them. Can you use these words in a sentence?

Voting

A Canadian citizen who is 18 years of age or older by Election Day can vote after he or she has registered with Elections Canada. Elections Canada will then send out a voter information card and add him or her to the voters' list.

On Election Day, most voters go to a nearby location called a *polling station*, where their names are checked off the voters' list if they are already registered. If they have not yet registered, they can do so at this time. At the polling station, each voter is given a ballot (a piece of paper listing all the candidates in the riding). Voters do not have to tell anyone who they are voting for — it is a secret ballot.

Voters make an *X* beside the name of the candidate they prefer. Then they fold up the ballot and place it into a ballot box.

If they incorrectly mark a ballot, or mark more than one name, that is called a *spoiled ballot* and it will not be counted.

Citizens can vote even if they are travelling away from home or out of the country on Election Day. Elections Canada has information on how to vote by using a special mail-in ballot.

Once the voting ends, the votes are collected and added up. This can take a long time. Television stations have special news programs to report the election results. Some races are very close and are decided by a small number of votes.

The minimum age to run in an election is 18 years old. The youngest person ever elected to Parliament was Claude-André Lachance, who was 20 years old when he was elected in 1974.



TALK ABOUT IT!

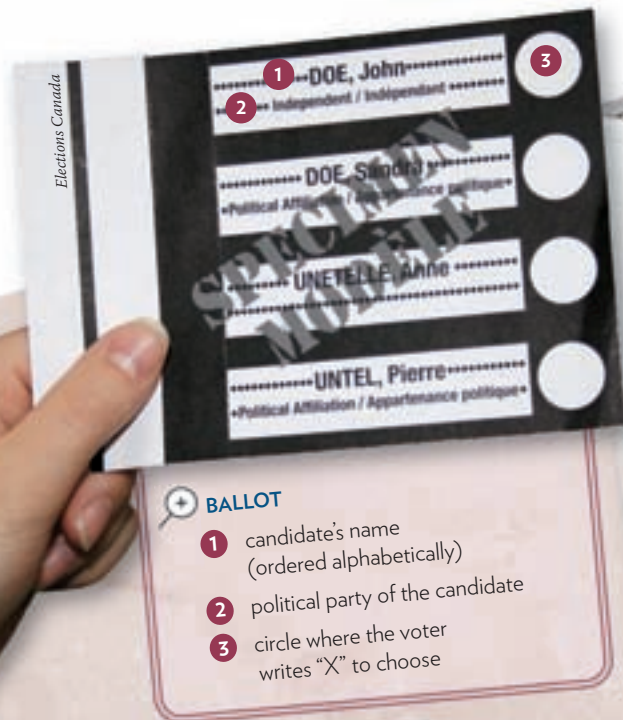
You or someone in your family probably know about elections in other countries. Ask your family about elections in your country of origin. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- Who was allowed to vote?
- How often were elections held?
- Where did people vote?
- Was the ballot secret?
- How did people find out who had won?

Back in your classroom, find out if your classmates have similar stories.

BALLOT BOX

- 1 Elections Canada logo
- 2 polling station number
- 3 slot for completed ballot



Forming a Government

When the election is over, all winning candidates are called Members of Parliament, or MPs for short. The MPs who belong to parties that are *not* forming the Government are called **opposition** MPs. The **Official Opposition** is usually the party with the second-highest number of elected members after the winning party. The leader of this party is called the **Leader of the Official Opposition**.

DID YOU KNOW? – Canada’s first Prime Minister, the **Right Honourable** Sir John A. Macdonald (pictured at right), called the **Senate** a place of “sober second thought.”



House of Commons Collection, Ottawa

When it is time for Parliament to sit, all **Parliamentarians** will discuss and debate new bills (proposed laws), and make decisions that affect every Canadian. For more information on bills, see *Process of Passing a Bill* in Section 4.

I work in the Parliament Buildings. When Parliament is in **session**, the **Senators** and MPs are in town. They meet to discuss issues and policy, and to debate bills, both in the **Chambers** and in **committee**.

WHAT ABOUT ME?

Who is your MP? What riding do you live in? What party does your MP belong to? Do you know where your MP’s riding office is? Look it up if you do not know! Your MP has people working in his or her office who can help you if you have a problem, such as difficulty getting a government service, or if you have a complaint or question about government. It is your MP’s job to listen to *all* his or her **constituents** (people who live in a riding), even if they did not vote for him or her or did not vote at all.

THINK ABOUT IT

Elders often have a lot of experience to share. Sometimes we call this wisdom. How are elders treated in your family and community?

WORD BUILDER

SENATE

This word comes from the Latin *senex*, meaning *elder*. Literally, it means a *council of elders*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The word *commons* comes from the Latin *communis*, which means *shared by many*. Other related words are community, communication and commune.