



1 Why does democracy need participation?

Did You Know



The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words: “demos,” which means people, and “kratia,” which means rule. The idea that the people should rule themselves was an important part of life in Greece about 2 500 years ago. Ancient Greece was divided into small units called city states. All citizens got together in an Assembly to make decisions and govern the city state.

In today’s democracy, citizens elect people to represent them in the Assembly. They do not attend the Assembly themselves.

But the basic idea that was important in ancient Greece is still the same – that people have common interests which they can promote by making decisions and acting together.

Development of Democracy

What do you know about Canada’s history? It is made up of many stories, people and events. Democracy has a history too. There are many events and ideas that have contributed to the way the democratic system in Canada works.

A British Heritage

The Greeks contributed some of the principles and ideas that are part of the parliamentary system of government, but today’s parliament developed in what is now Great Britain. It came into being because **monarchs**, rulers who were kings and queens, needed more and more money to fight wars and run the kingdom. They got this money by taxing people.

Eventually, these people refused to pay taxes unless they had a say in how that money would be spent. Over time, the government in Britain gained more control over decision-making and the monarch held less and less power.

A First Nations Legacy

The Iroquois Confederacy was a sophisticated political and social system. It united the territories of five First Nations in a “symbolic longhouse.”

The people of the Iroquois Confederacy call themselves the Haudenosaunee (hoe-dee-no-SHOW-nee) meaning “people who build a house.” These united First Nations influenced some principles of democracy in Canada today.

The original five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy were divided into two groups: the Elders, consisting of the Mohawk, the Onondaga, and the Seneca; and the Younger, the Oneida and the Cayuga.

Pause and Reflect



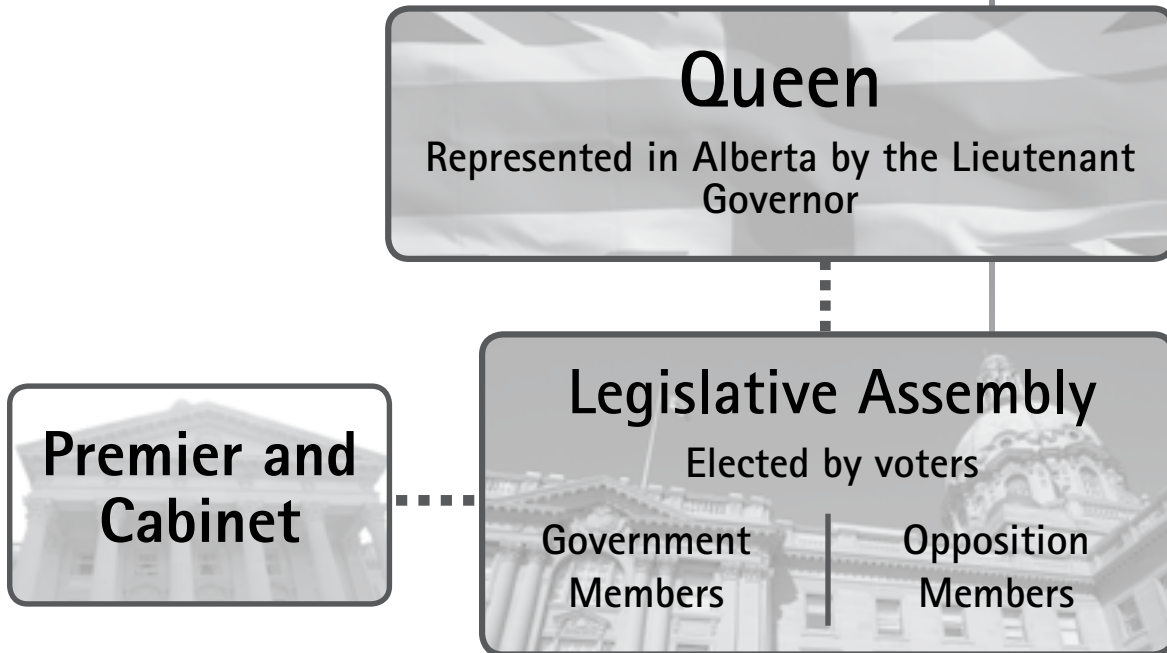
How do you think decisions made by the Haudenosaunee longhouse compare with decisions made in a democracy?

All decisions of the Confederacy had to be **unanimous**, or agreed to by everyone. Decisions were made when all nations agreed. If they could not agree, they continued to negotiate until an agreement could be made. Decisions were recorded in the belts of wampum, which kept track of important events.

■ The Process of Responsible Government

The government in Canada can be described as a **responsible government**. This means that elected representatives are responsible to the people who elect them.

- Canada's federal government has a two-house system that came from Britain. The two houses are called the parliament and the senate.
- The provinces have one house. It is called the legislature. In the Alberta Legislature today, the monarch is represented by the **Lieutenant Governor**, who is the formal head of state.



- The power and authority to make laws is given to the premier and his or her cabinet. The premier is the leader of the political party that has the most elected representatives in the entire legislature.
- The **cabinet** consists of the premier and cabinet members. The cabinet is responsible for putting government policy into practice. The premier is the head of the cabinet and chooses cabinet ministers from the elected members of his or her party.
- To govern, the premier and cabinet must have the support of the majority of elected representatives, known as **Members of the Legislative Assembly**. These representatives are also called MLAs. Members of the cabinet are called **ministers**. Ministers propose most of the laws that pass, and they vote on them along with their fellow MLAs. Ministers are also responsible for running government ministries and the laws that guide them. If a major policy or law is defeated, the government must resign and call an election.
- Elections are held to elect representatives.



Find Out More

Consult other sources for more information about the provincial level of government.

- What questions do you have about the provincial level of government? Make a list of three or four questions to answer.
- What can you find out about the responsibilities of the premier, ministers and MLAs?

Compare what you find out to the local level of government. What are two similarities or differences?

Voting has changed a lot since **1867**... Check out some milestones in the history of the vote in Canada!

Did You Know



Did you know that when the first election in Canada was held, the people who were **not** eligible to vote outnumbered those who were eligible to vote?

Find Out More



Is democracy all about voting and elections? Find out how the right to vote has changed over the years.

Explore these events and others in the history of democracy in Canada on the **Democracy and Participation** timeline on the **Building Future Voters** elementary webpage at www.buildingfuturevoters.ca.

In **1867**, only 11% of Canada's population was eligible to vote. Today, that percentage is over 68%, almost every Canadian citizen aged 18 and over.

In **1917**, during World War I, the *Wartimes Elections Act* and the *Military Voters Act*, gave all members of the armed forces, both male and female, the right to vote in the 1917 federal election. This included First Nations peoples and individuals under the age of 21.

In **1918**, women were given the right to vote in federal elections.

In **1920**, the position of Chief Electoral Officer of Canada was created. The Chief Electoral Officer was given the responsibility to make sure federal elections across Canada were run according to the laws of the time.

In **1948**, Canadians of Asian origin obtained the right to vote.

In **1874**, people could now vote in private. Paper ballots and voting booths were used for the first time.

In **1885**, the first version of a federal *Election Act* was passed by the federal government. The right to vote was applied differently from one town and one province to the next. The right to vote was based on property ownership.

In **1919**, women obtained the right to run as candidates in federal elections.

In **1920**, First Nations peoples were given the right to vote but they had to give up their treaty rights and status under the *Indian Act*.

In **1921**, Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected as a representative to parliament. She would be the only woman in the federal parliament for the next 14 years.

In **1950**, Inuit people obtained the right to vote and the right to run as candidates in federal elections.

In **1960**, First Nations people living on reserves were granted the right to vote and the right to run as candidates in federal elections without having to give up their status under the *Indian Act*.

In **1982**, the right to vote and the right to be a candidate in an election were guaranteed in the Constitution by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

In **1992**, special measures, such as blind voting templates, wheelchair access to polls and interpreters, were put into the *Canada Elections Act* to ensure access to vote for people with disabilities.

In **1955**, religious discrimination was removed from federal election laws. Previously, peoples such as the Doukhobors, who objected to war, were not allowed to vote.

In **1970**, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18.

In **1988**, federally appointed judges and persons with intellectual disabilities obtained the right to vote in federal elections.

In **1993**, a special, or mail-in, ballot was made available for citizens who were away on election day, on vacation or temporarily living outside of their electoral divisions.

In **2002**, following a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada, voting rights were given to all inmates, for federal elections. This also occurred in Alberta, with inmates voting in the 2015 provincial election.



Find Out More

Find out more about the development of voting rights in Canada. Explore pictures, videos and news stories on the CBC digital archives, *Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right*, at www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/voting-in-canada-how-a-privilege-became-a-right.



Build your own timeline. Pick what you think are the five most important events in the history of the vote. Consult the information and images on the **Democracy and Participation** timeline.

Write or draw what is important about each event, placing it in chronological order on a **Timeline** graphic organizer.