

# 1 Do we live in a democracy?

## ■ Government and Democracy

Canadians often use the term "government" to mean everything connected with making laws, collecting taxes, enforcing laws and providing public services. However, in the Canadian parliamentary system, "government" has a very limited and specific meaning:

- **Government** is the team of elected representatives with the support of a majority in the Parliament or a provincial or territorial Assembly.
- It provides leadership by making laws and developing policies.
- It is responsible for the government ministries that deliver the programs and services mandated by those laws.

Each of the three levels of government is organized in a similar way.

### Find Out More

Get a summary of the provincial level of government in Alberta in *The Citizen's Guide to the Alberta Legislature* at [www.assembly.ab.ca/pub/gdbook/CitizensGuide.pdf](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/pub/gdbook/CitizensGuide.pdf).

Find information on the federal level of government, as well as the governments of the provinces and territories, on *ParlInfo* from the Parliament of Canada at [www.lop.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/](http://www.lop.parl.gc.ca/ParlInfo/).

Level of Government	Elected Officials	Some Responsibilities
Federal	Members of Parliament (MPs)	National Defence Foreign Policy Citizenship Policing
Provincial and Territorial	Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Members of the National Assembly (MNA) or Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPP) or Members of the House of Assembly (MHA)	Education Health Care Highways Policing
Municipal (Local)	Mayor Councillors	Policing Firefighting Snow Removal Recycling Programs



How do the three levels of Canadian government compare? Each diagram in the chart shows the organization of each level of government. Complete the **Retrieval Chart** by responding to the questions below.

- How would you describe and compare the organization of each level of government? Start with the organizational diagrams in the first row of the chart. Describe the organization and structure in the second row.
- Use other sources to research the responsibilities of each level of government. Identify three points that summarize key responsibilities of each level of government in the third row.

Federal	Provincial	Local
<p><b>Parliament of Canada</b></p> <p><b>Queen</b> Represented in Canada by the Governor General</p> <p><b>Senate*</b> Appointed on the Prime Minister's recommendation</p> <p><b>Prime Minister and Cabinet</b></p> <p><b>House of Commons</b> Elected by voters Government Members   Opposition Members</p> <p><small>Please note that some ministers of the government are members of the Senate.</small></p>	<p><b>Queen</b> Represented in Alberta by the Lieutenant Governor</p> <p><b>Premier and Cabinet</b></p> <p><b>Legislative Assembly</b> Elected by voters Government Members   Opposition Members</p>	<p><b>Local Authorities</b></p> <p>Municipalities</p> <p>Special Areas and Improvement Districts</p> <p>School Districts</p> <p>Health Authorities</p> <p>Métis Settlements*</p>
Organization		
Responsibilities		



Do we live in a democracy? Many believe that political participation is an essential aspect of a democracy. What opportunities to participate with government are provided to youth? To all Canadians?

Use a **Sphere of Influence** to reflect on the impact of possible actions that youth may take.

### Pause and Reflect



What opportunities do you think there **should** be for youth to participate? Is there a difference between these ideas and what you think currently exists?

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Do you think opportunities to participate are provided equally to everyone? Why or why not?

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- Start in the inner circle with things you use or do everyday that are affected by government responsibilities and decisions.

Consider taxes or services and facilities that are used on a daily basis. Consider rules or regulations that the government sets. For example, you might say "When we buy things, we have to pay a tax that goes to the government to provide services that we need and use" or "The government helps pay for roads and sidewalks we use every day" or "The government sets the age at which we can drive and vote."

- In each outer circle of the sphere, describe actions you could take to influence the decisions of governments.

Place each action the one of the circles of the sphere. If you think an action has the potential to influence a government's decisions, place it closer to the centre of the sphere. If you think an action is less likely to influence a government's decisions, place it in an outer circle.

For example, you could identify talking to or writing a letter to an MP as an action that may influence government decisions. Which circle of the sphere would you put this in? You could identify joining a group that promotes lowering the voting age as an action that may influence government decision-making. Which circle of the sphere would you put this in?

Consider how a sphere of influence could look different if it is completed from other perspectives, such as a young person, a senior or a recent immigrant.

