Citizens Effecting Change

TIMELINE

- **1854**: Sir John A. Macdonald founds Liberal Conservative Party, known after 1873 as the Conservative Party.
- **1873**: The Liberal Party of Canada emerges as a united force under Alexander Mackenzie.
- **1898**: National plebiscite on prohibition.
- **1932**: Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, Canada’s first socialist party, is founded; J.S. Woodsworth is its first leader.
- **1942**: National plebiscite on conscription.
- **1944**: CCF forms the first socialist government in North America.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Politics & Government

- What does active citizenship look like in Canadian politics?
- How do lobbyists and pressure groups influence government decisions?
- What role does the media play in effecting change?
- What are the characteristics of civil disobedience?
- What are the similarities and differences among key political ideologies?
- Explain the political spectrum. What characterizes the left, centre, and right portions of the spectrum?
- How do Canada’s political parties differ and where do they fit on the political spectrum?
- How do B.C.’s political parties differ and where do they fit on the political spectrum?
- What are the stages of passing a bill?
- What are the benefits and challenges of a minority government?
- What are the steps of the electoral process in Canada?

Get involved!
CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION

How are governments formed in Canada and how can individuals influence government?

We are so used to living in a democracy that sometimes we forget the responsibilities that go with our right to choose the people who make the laws and regulations that govern our lives. Sometimes we forget to ask ourselves how we would handle an issue, what we would want to accomplish, and how we can ensure that our government represents our wishes. In democracies, government is not separate from the people. In fact, democracy needs active citizen involvement or it ceases to be democracy.

In this chapter, you will learn how you can make your voice heard in Canada’s system of democracy. You will also learn about political ideologies, and where Canada’s political parties fit on the political spectrum. This will help you match your own beliefs and values with a political party. You will also learn how the Canadian government works and how political parties try to gain and maintain power.

KEY TERMS
- democracy
- lobbyist
- ideology
- socialism
- liberalism
- conservatism
- totalitarian
- authoritarian
- communism
- fascism
- political spectrum
- party platform
- patronage
- Senate
- Cabinet
- House of Commons
- Cabinet solidarity
- Order-in-Council
- royal assent
- party discipline
- free vote
- private member’s bill
- majority government
- minority government
- coalition
- prorogue Parliament
- dissolve Parliament
- electoral district, riding, constituency
- nomination
- enumeration
- balloting
- tabulating

1948
Racial exclusions are removed from election laws

1961
CCF is disbanded and replaced by New Democratic Party

1983
The Green Party of Canada is founded in Ottawa

1987
The Reform Party of Canada, led by Preston Manning, is founded in Winnipeg

1992
National referendum on the Charlottetown Accord

2000
The Reform Party of Canada becomes the Canadian Alliance

2003
The Canadian Alliance merges with the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada to become the Conservative Party of Canada
Democracy Begins with the People

Democracy is a form of government that gives the people who are ruled by its laws and policies certain rights over the actions and careers of those in power. However, democratic governments still do things that people do not like, and making those who rule us answer to us is not often easy. Making government responsive to our needs is important. Active citizenship means that we learn how best to accomplish this.

Suppose you think that government should do more to protect the environment, or that a new social program should be introduced, or you feel that the voting age for elections should be lowered. How could you work to make your goal a reality? Would letters to the editor of a widely read newspaper accomplish anything? Or a letter to the government or opposition? Should you start a blog? Should you speak to somebody who works in a government department? Should you join the youth wing of a political party, or join a group of like-minded people that is pressuring the government? How could you become more involved in the democratic process?

Issues Important to Canadians

The issues important to Canadians change over time. Some make headlines for a time and then fade out of the spotlight. Others, such as whether Canada should go to war, are often time specific. Some issues are so basic to our view of Canada and ourselves that they arise again and again. We expect political candidates to know about important issues and to take positions on them, and we hope to learn, through news reports, editorials, and analysis, that the candidates are working to address these issues. Recurring Canadian issues include Aboriginal rights, Québec and bilingualism, continentalism (how closely we align ourselves with the United States), minority rights, civil liberties, the influence of big business, the environment, defence, spending priorities and taxation, crime, and maintaining social programs. What issues are important to you? Has government addressed these issues? How effective has government action been? Is it possible for ordinary people to have a say on an issue and to influence how government addresses it?

KEY TERMS

democracy a system of government in which people freely choose in elections who will govern them; the principles and ideals of such a government, including free speech and the rule of law
civil servant someone who works for a government department
pressure groups organized groups of individuals with common interests and concerns who attempt to pressure political decision makers; also known as interest groups
Influencing Government

People can and do participate in democracy between elections. One way is to contact one’s Member of Parliament (MP), Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), or local representative, which is surprisingly effective. Another is to contact civil servants, who conduct the daily business of the government. Writing letters to the editor, e-mailing, blogging, or participating in radio phone-in shows also help citizens communicate their thoughts and ideas to government. While individuals can make a difference, especially at the local level, it is usually more effective to join a group of like-minded people who are committed to a specific goal.

Special interest groups, called pressure groups, organize to influence government policies and decisions. Such groups are made up of people who share a certain viewpoint and want to promote their common interest. Institutionalized pressure groups, such as the Assembly of First Nations, are well-established and have formal organizations. Issue-oriented groups are not permanent because their purpose is to accomplish limited aims and they usually disband once their goal is reached. A group that lobbies a local government to have a traffic light installed would be an example of an issue-oriented group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Methods/Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Bear Youth Coalition</td>
<td>To protect kermode (spirit) bears and their habitat</td>
<td>Created international youth-led environmental coalition; B.C. government announced plans to protect two thirds of kermode bear habitat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wilderness Committee</td>
<td>To protect old-growth forests and the environment</td>
<td>Raises public awareness of environmental issues; lobbies government to protect old-growth forests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.C. Citizens for Public Power</td>
<td>To prevent privatization of power supplies in B.C.; to promote energy conservation</td>
<td>Lobbies government on power generation and supply issues; organized class-action lawsuit against sale of portion of B.C. Hydro to the private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance for Arts and Culture</td>
<td>To protect the arts in B.C.</td>
<td>Raised awareness of effects of cuts to arts programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Native Nations</td>
<td>To represent Aboriginal people whose status is defined “solely on Aboriginal ancestry, not on the artificial definitions created by an outdated Canadian Indian Act”</td>
<td>Lobbies and raises awareness on housing and other social issues, particularly for Aboriginal people living in cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 9-3 Canadian pressure groups

WEB LINK
Find out more about Canadian pressure groups on the Pearson Web site.
Letter-writing campaigns can be very effective. Governments listen to citizen complaints and concerns, and it is a policy of most Canadian government departments to respond to all letters. This does not mean that a government minister will personally respond to every concern. Usually, letters are prepared for the minister’s signature by officials who are responsible for the program or issue in question. But letters can have positive results since governments know that for every person who writes a letter, there are likely many more people who share the same view. To be effective, your letter must be directed to the right department or person, and it should also be well thought out, even if it takes the form of an e-mail. You should follow these guidelines when communicating with a politician.

**Letter-Writing Tips**

**Research which level of government deals with the area of your concern.** It makes little sense to direct a letter about Canada’s defence policy to the provincial government, or a complaint about street cleaning to the federal government. Effective letter writing requires that you target your request or complaint to the appropriate department or person.

**Know where to direct your message.** Decide whether it would be more effective to direct your letter to the opposition, to the government, or to both. Although all elected representatives will answer your letter and even bring your issue to the attention of the government, it is up to you to decide where your letter will be most effective. If your letter is about a provincial matter, it is also usually better to target your message to a minister rather than to the premier.

**Identify yourself.** Tell the reader who you are and why you are writing the letter. Tell the politician something about yourself and why the issue is important to you.

**Keep it simple.** Your letter should address a single issue and you should explain what your concerns are in a straightforward way. Do not confuse the reader or bury your concerns by including off-topic items. Try to limit your letter to one page. Politicians are often very busy and reading long letters is time consuming.

**Request that a specific action be taken.** Make concrete suggestions as opposed to vague reminders. A request such as “Please pass legislation banning free plastic bags” has more authority than “Please think about the environment.”

**Be courteous.** Always be respectful in letters to politicians. Rude comments or insults will make it less likely that your message will find a sympathetic ear. Always thank the person for taking the time to read your letter.

**Make it clear that you expect a reply.** Close your letter with “I look forward to receiving your response.”

**Applying the Skill**

1. List issues or problems that might warrant a letter to the government or the opposition. Sort these by level of government and responsibility, and then identify the office holder in each to whom you would address your concern.

2. Pick an issue that is important to you and outline a letter to a newspaper expressing your concern.

3. Summarize a concern in one paragraph that could be included in a letter to a politician. In another paragraph, suggest a solution or strategy that you think might help.
The Controversial Role of Lobbyists

Institutions and groups also use lobbyists to deal with lawmakers. Lobbyists are people paid to try to influence key decision makers, such as high-level bureaucrats in the public service or politicians. In fact, many professional lobbyists are former high-ranking members of the public service and thus have influential connections.

Paid lobbyists get contracts from the companies or groups they serve. Most public interest groups do fundraising and some get funds from government. While receiving government funds is helpful, it can also limit the actions of the group, as in the case of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. This lobby group had its funding drastically cut in 1988 after it spoke out against government policies.

Lobbyists and the Public Interest

The danger with lobbying is that insiders can persuade governments to put in place policies that are not necessarily in the public interest. For example, prior to the 1997 enactment of the Tobacco Act that regulated the sales and promotion of tobacco products in Canada, the tobacco company lobby long fought government efforts to limit advertising for tobacco products. In 1989, a new law required lobbyists to be registered and new guidelines restricted public servants from lobbying for a year after leaving their positions.

Well-funded, highly organized groups with professional lobbyists can have great influence over government policy. But is lobbying democratic? Some critics argue that if pressure groups are too successful, then democracy is put at risk. They argue that if government is influenced too greatly by well-organized minority interest groups, then the wishes of the majority may not be heard—or even sought.

KEY TERMS

- lobbyist: a person hired to represent the interests of a pressure group by influencing policy decision makers in the group’s favour
- bureaucrats: government officials and administrators
- public service: the government administration

FIGURE 9–4 Alberta oil sands.

Environmental lobby groups, including those fighting Alberta oil sands projects, are one of the largest special interest groups in Ottawa. Oil and gas producers form one of the largest industrial lobbying groups.

Thinking Critically: What advantages would environmental groups have when lobbying government officials? What advantages would oil and gas lobbyists have? Who do you think will have more influence? Why?
The Courts and Democracy

Interest groups and individuals can also use the courts to influence government and effect change, since courts are bound to interpret laws within the context of the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For example, in 1988 Canada’s law prohibiting abortion was struck down by the Supreme Court in a case backed by a coalition of pro-choice groups. The court ruled that anti-abortion laws violated women’s Charter rights to “life, liberty and security of person.” Court cases, however, can cost a lot of money, and the desired outcome is not guaranteed. Also, while courts can strike down a law, they cannot order that it be replaced by something else. That is up to the government. For those individuals or pressure groups who are hoping to convince the government to create new laws or policies, the best the courts can do is to make governments aware that a new law may be needed.

The Role of the Media

Active citizenship requires you to be aware of the role and power of the media in politics. People often try to get media attention for a cause or to enhance their political profile. Social networking sites such as Facebook have also become a new form of public media. The traditional media (also called mass media)—television, radio, magazines, and newspapers—are still very important. They give politicians and political commentators the chance to establish a presence in people’s lives. Without a media presence, a politician would not have the brand recognition necessary to gain people’s votes. The media also provide feedback that lets politicians know how citizens feel about issues and government programs. The media can also frame an issue or debate by focusing on what generates the most public interest.

For politicians, the popular media are both a blessing and a curse. They give candidates very wide exposure, but they also magnify faults the candidates may have or political gaffes that may occur. For this reason, political parties hire media consultants, or spin doctors, to coach candidates on what to say and make sure they look good in the media.

The Internet has opened up a whole new area for political contact and publicity. Blogs and other forms of reporting are probably as important today as the mainstream media. Political parties and candidates have Web sites to get their message out and garner support for their campaign. In other times, people voted the same way their families voted, but now many wait until election day to make up their mind. Sometimes the last powerful message carries the day, which is why media experts are so important to political parties.
Civil Disobedience

Citizens can make their voices heard in many ways: with their votes, through individual actions such as letter writing, and by joining pressure groups and using the media. While such actions may not be successful in changing government policies, citizens must have the opportunity to express concerns. Suppose you feel that the actions of the government are unethical or undemocratic. Is it ever acceptable to break the law as a way of protesting government actions?

Civil disobedience is the act of intentionally breaking the law while protesting laws one considers unjust. This form of protest has been used by some of the greatest moral leaders of our time, including Indian political and spiritual leader Mohandas Gandhi, U.S. civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., and South-African anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela. Both Gandhi and King embraced non-violent civil disobedience in their quest for justice, and both ultimately died for their cause. Mandela resorted to violence only as a last resort after many years of peaceful protests with no progress.

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

—Nelson Mandela, 1964

Of course, if everyone in society disobeyed laws with which they disagreed, the result would be chaos. Civil disobedience is warranted only when the law itself causes significant harm. Relatively trivial matters do not merit breaking the law, as the harm to society could be greater than the benefit. As well, those who choose to practise civil disobedience should be willing to face the consequences of their actions. This gives the act of civil disobedience for a good cause great moral authority.

The Three Principles of Civil Disobedience

1. Civil disobedience should not involve violence.
2. Civil disobedience should be directed against laws that are seriously harmful.
3. Civil disobedience requires taking responsibility for one’s actions. Willingness to face punishment shows the strength of one’s beliefs.

FIGURE 9–6 Gandhi used non-violent civil disobedience to protest unjust taxation of the poor, and discrimination against women and the under-privileged. His theories about non-violence inspired Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela.

FIGURE 9–7 Greenpeace activists hang a banner on the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

Thinking Critically How could social networking help or hinder civil disobedience?
Clayoquot Sound: Civil Disobedience in Action

Acts of civil disobedience, including blocking logging roads near Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, brought the issue of clear-cut logging to the public’s attention in 1993. In response, the provincial government announced a compromise. It would set aside 34 percent of the area as protected lands, and allowed selective and environmentally sensitive logging of another 21 percent. The government claimed that opinion polls showed a majority of the population was in favour of this solution.

However, opposition to logging intensified and resulted in the largest example of civil disobedience in Canadian history. Protesters organized blockade after blockade, holding “sit-downs” in the middle of roads to prevent loggers from entering the forest. Police were forced to drag people away and arrest them, including Aboriginal Elders well-advanced in years. The arrests generated maximum media exposure and worldwide interest. More than 750 people were arrested in the summer of 1993 alone. Most were given warnings, but some received fines of up to $2000 or jail sentences. Since that time, logging practices in the area have been closely monitored and all decisions regarding the clear-cutting of old-growth forests are closely examined.

KEY TERMS
ideology political and social principles or beliefs

direct democracy a system in which citizens vote directly on every issue

representative democracy a system in which citizens elect a politician who then makes decisions for them

socialism a political and economic system in which the means of production and distribution in a country are publicly owned and controlled for the benefit of all members of a society

liberalism a political philosophy supporting individual freedoms and governmental protection of civil liberties

FIGURE 9-8 The 1993 anti-logging protests at Clayoquot Sound resulted in the largest mass arrests in British Columbia’s history.

Thinking Critically Why would protesters want to be publicly arrested? How would a totalitarian government deal with such protests?

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have traditional media been replaced or changed by new technologies? In your opinion, will new technology help voter awareness and participation? Explain.

2. What are the three basic guidelines for practising civil disobedience? Why are these guidelines an important part of this approach to changing government policies?

3. Why were blockades more effective at Clayoquot Sound than a violent protest might have been?

4. In your opinion, when should civil disobedience be used? Do you think governments have the right to limit civil disobedience? Explain your position.

5. Cause and Consequence With a partner, develop a ten-point strategy for direct political action. Explain how you will use the media to help your cause.
Political Ideologies and Parties

Like all modern nations, Canada is governed by one or more political parties. Political parties are a relatively recent invention and no party is more than a few hundred years old. Most are organized around political and social principles—an ideology—that guide them in everything they do. Most of Canada’s political parties believe in a balance between the powers of the state and the rights of the individual. They support some form of capitalism and the kind of parliamentary democracy we currently enjoy.

Democracy: Rule by the People

Canada operates on democratic principles. In Europe, democracy, which means “rule by the people,” was first practised by the ancient Greeks. In the Greek city states, every eligible citizen participated directly by voting on all decisions that affected society. This was called direct democracy. In modern societies, our large populations make this much involvement by each individual impractical. Instead, citizens in representative democracies such as Canada allow elected representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

The main principles of democracy are equality and freedom. All citizens are equal before the law, meaning that everyone is subject to the same laws, and no one is above the law. The rights and freedoms of people living in a democracy are protected by a constitution or other written laws (see Chapter 10). Democracy refers to a very broad form of government, and most countries around the world are democratic. Under the umbrella of democracy, there are various political philosophies, as outlined below.

Socialism

Early socialism was a backlash against the industrial revolution and the resulting capitalist laissez-faire economy. Socialism developed when capitalism was causing great social harm and poverty was widespread. Socialists believe that government should control important parts of the economy and major industries. As you learned in Chapter 4, Canada’s first socialist party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, was formed during the Depression when people were disillusioned with Canada’s capitalist system.

Liberalism

Liberalism began as a political theory that favoured individual freedom above all else. Originally this belief was tied to the right to own property and to the conviction that government should have minimal involvement in the lives of citizens, so as not to infringe on people’s liberty. This focus on property rights lost favour in the late 19th century when it became clear that the growing working class had few, if any, property rights. In the 20th century, liberalism shifted its focus from property and individual rights and evolved into a belief that the government should intervene to regulate the economy. On a social level, liberalism supports government intervention to maintain basic standards of living for all people and to protect the rights of individuals and groups.
Conservatism

Conservatism is less of an ideology than a stance taken against change, innovation and reform, and for maintaining established political and social institutions and values. It supports laissez-faire capitalism, or minimal government intervention in the economy. In the late 20th century, many conservatives came to believe that government has a role in encouraging traditional behaviours and they opposed same-sex marriage and abortion, for example. Fiscal conservatives support reductions in government spending and a balanced budget.

Totalitarianism: Total Control

Not all political ideologies are based on democratic principles. Totalitarian governments are authoritarian, as opposed to democratic, and control every aspect of life within a country—its culture, religion, government, and economy. These regimes use harsh laws and restrictions on freedom to maintain their power.

Communism

Communist ideology is based on the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, political theorists of the 19th century who believed that the ruling class should be overthrown by the working class. In The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, Marx claimed that capitalism creates a class struggle in which those who own the means of production (the ruling class or bourgeoisie) exploit those who work for them (the proletariat). Marx believed that a proletarian revolution would result in a classless society in which all property would be collectively owned. Communist governments that developed from Marx’s ideology were one-party states, and maintained their power through propaganda, secret police, and government control of its citizens. Until the end of the Cold War, many countries, including the Soviet Union, had communist governments. Today, communist countries include the People’s Republic of China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Fascism

Fascist ideology is about the importance of the state and the responsibility of people to serve it. Fascists believe that a country is an organic community requiring strong leadership, a collective identity, and military strength. Fascist governments emphasize nationalism and militarism; war is glorified and viewed as a means to keep the nation strong. Political opposition or individual freedom is forbidden in fascist states. Fascism was born after the First World War, a period of time that was particularly unstable. It originated in Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Germany under the Nazis was another fascist state (see Chapter 5).
The Political Spectrum

A political spectrum is a visual used to illustrate how various political ideologies relate to one another. The linear left–right spectrum is the most common (see Figure 9–11), with totalitarian ideologies at the extreme left and right. Socialism is left of centre and commonly referred to as “left wing.” Liberalism is generally considered to be slightly left of centre on the spectrum, with conservatism situated right of centre. Many political theorists believe that the traditional left–right spectrum is too simplistic and have added other axes (see Figure 9–12).

Canadian Politics and Ideology

In Canadian politics today, the major political parties cluster around the centre of the political spectrum. The lines between them are somewhat blurred. You cannot equate the Liberal Party of Canada too closely with liberalism, nor the Conservative Party of Canada with conservatism. The Liberals adopted some of the progressive social policies of the socialists, such as universal health care and other social programs, place less emphasis on the military, and provide more support for arts and culture. Conservatives, however, are more likely to support tradition and business interests, such as tax breaks for large corporations. They tend to be nationalistic and pro-military.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) supports social assistance programs and government-funded health care and education, and is against privatization of Crown corporations. Of the major political parties in Canada today, the NDP is the most socialist. The Bloc Québécois is the third-largest party in the House of Commons today. Its main objectives are to protect the
interests of Québec and to support Québécois sovereignty. The Green Party of Canada is devoted to green politics, which focuses on achieving environmental goals through grassroots democracy.

If a shared ideology is a major reason for forming and maintaining a political party, how do Canada’s major parties differ? The best way to understand a party’s ideology is to look at its stated positions on important issues. What political parties state in their election platforms about these issues helps us to understand their ideology.

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**FIGURE 9–13** Party platforms are greatly publicized and debated during election campaigns, but are difficult to find once elections are over.

**Thinking Critically** Why do you think political parties do not keep their party platforms easily accessible between elections?

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**Party Platforms**

A party platform is a list of priorities and a plan for governing published by a political party. This platform helps the public to understand what the party stands for and it reminds party members about goals and core beliefs. In the 2008 election campaign, the Liberals promised to encourage a green economy and reduce the number of people living below the poverty line by 30 percent. Conservatives promised to lower both the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and taxes paid by lower-income families and seniors, and to establish sovereignty over the Arctic. The New Democratic Party also promised a new green energy economy and to train and hire more doctors and nurses. On the environment, all parties promised new greenhouse gas emissions targets. Other federal political parties, such as the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, also included statements about these issues in their platforms.
Party Membership

Many people join political parties because they believe strongly in the ideology of the party and share values with members of the party. Others want to serve the public and bring about change. Still others are attracted to the power and influence that politics generates. Perhaps the real question is, But why do so few people—only about two percent of the population—join political parties? Individuals are far more likely to seek change by participating in a special interest group or a non-governmental organization (NGO) than by joining a party. Even so, joining a party and becoming involved in the political process is also a very effective way of gaining a voice on issues.

Party Politics and Accountability

As in all modern democracies, Canada’s political parties dominate government and there is little room for independent politicians. For this reason, those interested in political life usually decide which party they want to join, and which ideology they feel comfortable with. Parties have their own power structures, with the leader at the top. The strength of a party and its leader help it win elections and form governments. But this also makes it difficult, sometimes, for party members to know whether their first loyalty lies with the party or with the people. For this reason, citizens must be vigilant. Once a party is in power, it is very difficult to keep it accountable. Strong leadership and good party discipline, the very qualities that help it win power, help the party stay in power. The prime minister or premier also has great executive power, and the advantage of the rules and procedures of parliament, that can also make the governing party less accountable.

Patronage

Patronage refers to the giving, by premiers and prime ministers particularly, of offices and rewards in return for loyalty or favours to the party. Although opposition parties always criticize patronage and promise to avoid it if they form the government, the practice continues. A large part of government is deal making, and it is very difficult to make deals with others if you have nothing to offer in return. Also, powerful party members need to be rewarded and appeased. A prime minister has a lot to offer in the way of patronage, such as Senate seats, ambassadorships, and committee chairpersonships. In some cases, patronage serves more than one purpose. For example, appointing a long-time party supporter to the Senate not only rewards the supporter but also adds to the number of senators loyal to the party, which makes implementing policies easier.

KEY TERMS

Québec sovereignty a movement advocating that Québec separate from the rest of Canada and become a country of its own
libertarianism a political ideology that supports maximum individual freedom and minimal government involvement in the lives of its citizens
party platform a list of priorities and a plan for governing published by a political party
non-governmental organizations (NGOs) local, national, or international groups that work independently of government on issues such as health, the environment, or human rights
patronage a favour, often a government position, given in return for political support

FIGURE 9–14 NGOs such as Right to Play, Oxfam, and World Wildlife Fund are non-profit organizations that work to change unfair laws or policies or to better people’s lives.
B.C. Politics

Politics in British Columbia has always been intense and proceedings in the legislature are very combative. **Populism**—a style of politics that pits the people against the *elite*—has always been important in B.C. Also, at least within the past 50 years, B.C. politics has been *polarized*. Two parties on opposite sides of the political spectrum, the socialist NDP and the “free enterprise” party represented first by the Social Credit Party and, later, by the B.C. Liberals, have alternated in power. The members of both parties are intensely *partisan* and there often seems to be little room for compromise. Although other parties exist, it has proved extremely difficult for them to make inroads because many people think that voting for a minor party is, in essence, throwing away a vote. Although the Green Party—the largest of the other parties—has increased its presence and fielded strong candidates, it has, at time of writing, yet to seriously contest a riding.

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**KEY TERMS**

- **populism**: a political movement that advocates the interests of ordinary people
- **elite**: a group of people who hold power
- **polarize**: to go in opposite directions
- **partisan**: loyal to a party or cause

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**PRACTICE QUESTIONS**

1. What characteristics place fascism and communism on the extreme ends of the political spectrum?
2. List Canada’s main political parties. What are their main policies and priorities? State where each party is located on the political spectrum.
3. Why do political parties that are in the middle of the political spectrum do better in elections?
4. Explain the term *patronage*. Why is it controversial?
5. Which socialist ideas of the 1930s and 1940s do all parties now consider essential social services?
Canadians regularly revisit the issue of Senate reform. Some claim that the Senate should be abolished altogether, since patronage has weakened its original purpose and lowered its prestige. Many people feel that Senate positions have been given to people who are not necessarily best qualified for the position. Given that a senator’s role is to give legislation “sober second thought,” the assumption is that he or she is qualified to do so. Senators should be exemplary and highly experienced individuals capable of examining legislation in detail and holding the government to account.

Some appointments seem to revive the idea that senators ought to be exceptional citizens with a lot to offer the country. This is the case with Roméo Dallaire, a former general who led the United Nations force during the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and later wrote about the tragedy in his book *Shake Hands with the Devil*.

Ireland will never ever leave me. It’s in the pores of my body. My soul is in those hills, my spirit is with the spirits of all those people who were slaughtered and killed that I know of, and many that I didn’t know.... Fifty to sixty thousand people walking in the rain and the mud to escape being killed, and seeing a person there beside the road dying. We saw lots of them dying. And lots of those eyes still haunt me, angry eyes or innocent eyes, no laughing eyes. But the worst eyes that haunt me are the eyes of those people who were totally bewildered. They’re looking at me with my blue beret and they’re saying, “What in the hell happened? We were moving towards peace. You were there as the guarantor”—their interpretation—“of the mandate. How come I’m dying here?” Those eyes dominated and they’re absolutely right. How come I failed? How come my mission failed? How come as the commander who has the total responsibility—We learn that, it’s ingrained in us, because when we take responsibility it means the responsibility of life and death, of humans that we love.

Deeply affected by the experience of the genocide and the failure of UN peacekeeping, Dallaire is now a human rights activist, speaking out on issues such as genocide and child soldiers. Dallaire has also been a senior civil servant and has received a number of honorary degrees and prizes. General Dallaire was appointed to the Senate as a Liberal in 2005 by Prime Minister Paul Martin.

1. In what ways does Roméo Dallaire represent the ideal senator?
2. In your opinion, does the appointment of Senator Dallaire, or other prominent citizens, make reform or abolition of the Senate less of an issue? Explain.
3. Outline your own view of what should, or should not, happen to the Senate.
A Guide to Government

Active citizens need to know how governments operate. As you know, Canada’s government operates as a federal system—an organization of provincial governments each acting on behalf of its own residents, with a central government in Ottawa responsible for matters vital to the nation as a whole. There are also municipal governments and Aboriginal governments. Knowing which level of government is responsible for a particular matter is very important. Federal and provincial governments also have legislative, executive, and judicial branches and bureaucracies to carry out the policies and responsibilities of government.

The executive and legislative branches of the federal government make and administer the laws and regulations of the country, and the judicial branch administers the courts and interprets and enforces the law. The provinces have the same branches of government, with similar powers and responsibilities over those areas for which they have jurisdiction.

**KEY TERMS**
- **Senate** the second legislative body in Parliament consisting of appointed members whose role is to give sober second thought to the passage of bills
- **Cabinet** the group of ministers chosen by the prime minister who decide government policy; each Cabinet minister has a responsibility for a particular department
- **House of Commons** the first legislative body of Parliament whose members are elected

**WEB LINK**
For more information on Canada’s Parliament, visit the Pearson Web site.

**FIGURE 9–16** Structure of the federal government of Canada
What Government Does

In general, we expect government to do things that keep Canada safe, prosperous, and strong. Beyond these basics, Canadians are often divided about how much of a role government ought to play in our lives. Think back to what you learned about ideology. Political parties often identify themselves by describing what they think government should do, and what the relationship between citizens and government ought to be. Usually this means that they think government should do more, including enhancing social services, or less. They also have plans for spending and taxation. In Canada, parties to the right of centre want less government involvement and lower taxes, while those on the left want more government involvement and think that taxes should pay for needed services.

Taxes and Spending

It is always important to know how much government takes in taxes, its methods and sources, and the ways it spends the money it collects. Federal and provincial governments collect corporate taxes, income taxes, ad valorem taxes such as the HST, excise taxes such as taxes on alcohol and gas, payroll taxes, and fees on services, which some people think are also a form of taxation. Municipalities rely mostly on property taxes. In Canada, income taxes are graduated—how much a person pays relates to income level. The amount governments take in taxes seldom matches the amount they spend. When a government takes in more than it spends, it has a surplus; when it takes in less, it runs a deficit. When the deficit increases beyond what a government can repay easily, it borrows money and adds to its debt, on which it pays interest. Money is the lifeblood of government and knowing where it comes from and where it goes is very important to the citizens who, by and large, supply it.

How Government Works

The actual work of government is carried out by the civil service, also called the bureaucracy. Ideally, the civil service is non-political. Civil servants are organized into ministries, each headed by a minister who, in turn, relies on a deputy minister to oversee the administration of the ministry’s work. The government will also have an information office, which will review anything bureaucrats want to report to the public and answer controversial queries. When a citizen has a complaint and writes to the government about it, or when the Opposition has a question, bureaucrats supply the answer. Typically, a response will begin with someone low down in the hierarchy of a ministry, be “signed off” by superiors, and end up with the minister who will answer the question.

KEY TERMS

- **ad valorem tax** a tax that is proportional to the value of goods
- **excise tax** an added tax on certain goods produced or sold in the country, for example, alcohol, gas, and tobacco
- **surplus** the amount of money remaining when a government takes in more than it spends
- **deficit** the amount of money a government owes when it takes in less money than it spends
- **civil service** the body of people who work in government administration
- **bureaucracy** officials and administrators who carry out the work of government

FIGURE 9–17 The British Columbia legislative buildings. Like all provinces, British Columbia has a parliament, usually called a legislature, where government ministers have their offices. Bureaucrats in their ministries occupy buildings in cities and towns throughout the province.

Thinking Critically Do you think government services should be centralized in major centres, or located close to where services are needed? Why?
Political parties are fundamental to our parliamentary system, and much of what happens in government relates to party politics. Many of the things done by the party with the mandate (the right to form a government) help the party to keep that mandate. The government party leader at the federal level, the prime minister, has enormous executive power that, in principle, he or she shares with Cabinet. Neither the prime minister nor the Cabinet are directly chosen by the people. Committees play a very important role too, as does the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) and the Privy Council Office (PCO).

**The Executive Branch: Consolidating Power**

The prime minister, or premier in the provinces, is the chief minister of the Crown and the head of the Cabinet. Together, the prime minister and Cabinet form the executive branch of government. In practice, due to tradition, the prime minister has considerable powers. The prime minister can choose and discipline Cabinet members, directs the activities of the legislature, has the right to be consulted on all important Cabinet decisions, controls appointments to the Senate and to the judiciary, and can recommend that Parliament be adjourned or dissolved and an election called. Publicly, Cabinet ministers must display full support for the prime minister and the decisions of the government. This show of strength is called Cabinet solidarity.

The Cabinet initiates laws, and its ministers are responsible for the smooth running of government and the spending of public money. Usually, but not always, Cabinet ministers are part of the governing party and have a seat in the House of Commons. Members of Cabinet are chosen by the prime minister and are called ministers. Each is responsible for a department of the government, called a portfolio. We have a Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, a Minister of Justice, a Minister of Foreign Affairs, and so on. Once appointed, the minister is held responsible for everything that happens in his or her department. This is called ministerial responsibility, and the minister is expected to resign if certain serious breaches of office take place. The minister introduces new legislation pertaining to the ministry and guides it through the House.

**The PMO and the PCO**

In the past, the Cabinet was the most powerful part of the federal government next to the prime minister. This has changed as the executive power of the prime minister has grown. The Office of the Prime Minister consists of the prime minister’s political advisors and staffers. The Privy Council Office is used by the prime minister to set the agenda for Cabinet meetings and to organize its work. Both the PMO and the PCO are at the service of the prime minister and are staffed by his or her appointed and unelected officials. Some think that these two bodies have too much power.
Orders-in-Council

Orders-in-Council make laws or regulations without the necessity of a parliamentary vote. At the federal level, they are signed by the Governor General on the advice of the prime minister and Cabinet. Orders-in-Council are used for Senate appointments, for necessary changes in law, and in the case of real or perceived emergencies. Although they may seem undemocratic, Orders-in-Council are part of parliamentary tradition, and governments are generally wise to use the power sparingly.

1. Speaker
2. Pages
3. Government Members
4. Opposition Members
5. Prime Minister
6. Leader of the Official Opposition
7. Leader of the Second-Largest Party in Opposition
8. Clerk and Table Officers
9. Mace
10. Hansard Reporters
11. Sergeant-at-Arms
12. The Bar
13. Interpreters
14. Press Gallery
15. Public Gallery
16. Official Gallery
17. Leader of the Opposition’s Gallery
18. Members’ Gallery
19. Members’ Gallery
20. Members’ Gallery
21. Speaker’s Gallery
22. Senate Gallery
23. TV Cameras

FIGURE 9–19 House of Commons floor plan

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Create a three-column chart showing the three branches of government. For each branch, list the positions and their roles.
2. How does the government pay for its programs?
3. Explain the role of the civil service.
4. What are the responsibilities of Cabinet ministers?
5. Explain the term Order-in-Council. Why is it seen as being undemocratic?
Passing Legislation

One of the most significant tasks of parliament is making and passing laws. A bill becomes law in the federal parliament after it goes through three readings in the House of Commons, is amended by a committee, has three readings in the Senate, is signed by the Governor General (referred to as royal assent), and is proclaimed. Bills introduced in the provincial legislature must also undergo three readings and are passed into law by the Lieutenant-Governor who represents the monarch in the provincial executive.

**KEY TERMS**
- royal assent: the final stage a bill must complete before it is passed into law in which the Governor General (or Lieutenant-Governor in the provinces) signs or grants approval for the bill
- Lieutenant-Governor: the provincial representative of the Crown appointed by the Governor General
- party whip: a member of the legislature assigned the specific role of ensuring all members of his or her party are present in the legislature to support party interests
- party discipline: all party members voting the same way, as one voice
- free vote: members voting according to their own conscience
- backbenchers: members of a legislature who are not Cabinet ministers, party leaders, or opposition critics
- private member’s bill: a bill introduced into the legislature by a member of the legislature who is not a member of the Cabinet

**FIGURE 9–20** How a bill becomes a law

**Thinking Critically** Why are there so many steps in the process of making laws? Why do we use such a lengthy process?
Party Loyalty and Party Discipline

Parties make sure their members vote as the party wishes in the legislature. Often they do this through the whip system. The party whip makes sure that members of his or her party are in the House of Commons (or legislature in the provinces) for important votes and vote as the party requires. This almost always guarantees that MPs (and MPPs and MLAs at the provincial level) vote as part of a block. In the past, some parties have campaigned against this and promised not to follow the tradition—notably the Progressive Party in the early part of the 20th century and later the Reform Party. Unfortunately for such parties, lack of party discipline seriously weakens them and they either break up or change. Whips have various ways to enforce discipline, but mostly they persuade their fellow party members to put the interests of the party first. The party leader, especially as prime minister, has the greatest disciplinary powers.

Free Votes and Private Members’ Bills

Some parliamentary procedures seem, on the surface, to be more democratic than others. For example, free votes allow members to vote on legislation according to their own conscience, but party leadership will only allow a free vote if it is in the interest of the party for this to happen. For example, in 1987, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney allowed a free vote on reintroducing capital punishment. Mulroney, knowing that a free vote would fail anyway, apparently used it to placate Conservative backbenchers who were pressuring the government on the issue.

Most bills are introduced by Cabinet ministers. At the federal level, any member of the House of Commons or the Senate may introduce a bill. If the member is not in the Cabinet, the bill is referred to as a private member’s bill. Many private members’ bills do not get passed. Passing a law requires a great deal of party support, which is rarely the case for a private member’s bill. Some federal private members’ bills passed in 2008 include an Act respecting a National Peacekeepers’ Day, an Act to protect heritage lighthouses, and an Act to increase the criminal penalty for animal cruelty.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. At which stage of passing a bill is it most heavily debated?
2. How do political parties ensure support among their members?
3. When might free votes occur in the House of Commons?
4. Why are private members’ bills seldom passed?
Minority Governments: Advantages and Disadvantages

The first goal of a political party is to gain power and the second is to keep it. When a party wins a general election and becomes a majority government, hanging onto power is much easier since the party holds more than half the total number of seats in the House of Commons. A majority government can implement its policies and can govern without much compromise. But parties do not always win majorities. Minority governments have to compromise to stay in power.

A minority government is one in which the governing party has more seats than any other party, but the other parties combined have more seats than the government. When this happens, the governing party has to be careful not to introduce legislation that will not pass. Votes on budgets and other money bills are votes of confidence and the government traditionally resigns when it loses such a vote. Canada has had a number of minority governments and some people think they are more democratic than majority governments because they are more responsive to the public. However, a party in minority cannot fully implement its policies or make important changes because to do so would risk defeat. Minority governments tend to maintain the status quo even if change would be better for the country.

Coalitions and Mergers

Ideally, a political party has a platform that represents the pure political views of its members and never compromises these views. In reality, sticking to principles can mean that the party never forms a government, or even becomes significant in opposition. Sometimes, several small parties oppose the government but, individually, none is strong enough to threaten it. When this occurs, parties have two options: they can form a coalition in which each party maintains its identity, or they can merge and become a new political party. Canada has had coalition governments in the past, as in the First World War. Parties also merge. In 2003, the Canadian Alliance merged with the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada to form the Conservative Party of Canada, with Stephen Harper as its first leader.
Proroguing Parliament

To prorogue Parliament means to suspend it for a period of time until the opening of another session. Members are released from their duties until the next session of Parliament begins. All bills, other than private members’ bills, are dropped from the agenda and all committees are dissolved. A government can use prorogation to get itself out of a jam on a particular issue, to kill legislation it has problems with, to shuffle the membership of committees, and to otherwise keep itself in power. Although it is a legitimate use of parliamentary procedure, proroguing often seems undemocratic. Nevertheless, it is part of the gamesmanship of parliament and all governments will use it if it helps them stay in power. Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien prorogued Parliament four times from 1996 to 2003, the last time to allow a new Liberal Party leader, Paul Martin, to be appointed prime minister. The opposition, however, suggested it was done to avoid a sponsorship scandal.

Dissolution

A parliament ends when the Governor General (or Lieutenant-Governor in the provinces) dissolves it, which is always done at the prime minister’s (or premier’s) request. This happens when the government loses a vote of non-confidence or when the prime minister wishes to call a general election. The ability to ask for dissolution, and thus call an election, at a time of its choosing gives the governing party the huge advantage of being able to avoid elections when it is weak and to hold them when it is strong. The prime minister can also use the threat of an election to discipline backbenchers who are rebelling against his or her leadership. In any case, once a parliament is dissolved, an election campaign officially starts.

Practice Questions

1. Define majority and minority governments. Describe the benefits and challenges for each of these types of governments.

2. Explain the term prorogue. Why is it seen as undemocratic?

3. Under what circumstances might Parliament be dissolved?
Aboriginal leaders and other critics protested that the referendum questions were simplistic and misleading, and that the voting process was too complicated. More than 80 percent voted yes to all eight principles, which the government promised to use to guide it in treaty negotiations. Many Aboriginal peoples, who represent less than 5 percent of the population of the province and could not possibly carry the vote, boycotted the process.

More input into government means more direct democracy, which requires people to accept their responsibilities as active citizens. This means actively learning about legislation and policy and about how government operates. Would this happen? Only two percent of people actually join political parties and a large sector of the population does not even vote in elections. Voter apathy has important ramifications. When large numbers of voters do not participate, the influence of those that do is magnified. The issue of increasing citizen input into the processes of government is complicated and it is debatable whether it is desirable.

Analyzing the Issue

1. Create an organizer to show the pros and cons of each of the reforms suggested.
2. a) Should the general public be able to participate during question period? Why or why not?
   b) Draw up a plan for allowing citizens to participate in question period. Consider, for example, who would choose the questions, how many citizen questions would be asked, and if the government would be made aware of the questions beforehand.
3. Do you think that citizens should have more say in deciding government policy? Consider the pros and cons and explain your answer.
4. Why are so few referendums held?
5. Was the 2002 referendum on B.C. treaty negotiations fair or unfair? Explain. Why might such a referendum cause anger among minority groups?
Choosing the Government

As you saw in Figure 9–16, the federal Parliament of Canada consists of the Senate and the House of Commons. Members of the Senate are appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the prime minister. Members of the House of Commons are elected by citizens in general elections. Representation in the House of Commons is based on geographical divisions known as electoral districts, commonly called ridings or constituencies. Since Canada’s population is spread over an immense area, some electoral districts are very large and sparsely populated. Nunavut is a good example, covering 2 million square kilometres and serving approximately 29 000 people. Papineau in Québec, Canada’s smallest riding, covers only nine square kilometres and serves a population of almost 104 000.

Election Basics

The Chief Electoral Officer is an independent officer of Parliament who is responsible for managing federal elections and referendums in Canada. Elections are held at least every five years for federal and provincial parliaments. In British Columbia, election days are set for every four years and municipal elections are held on the same day every three years. All Canadian citizens over 18 years of age are eligible to cast a ballot in an election.

Voting in elections is how citizens choose the government. Provincial voter participation varies from election to election and from province to province. Participation in municipal elections also varies considerably, but is usually lower than in provincial or federal elections. Depending on the size of the municipality and the election issues, voter turnout can range from 20 to 70 percent.

Those who choose not to vote make the votes of others more important. Some say that not voting means that one has no right to criticize the policies or conduct of the ruling party. Certainly, it is less likely that whoever forms the government will share one’s views if one does not vote for the candidate who does. In some elections, fewer than half of eligible voters cast a ballot. The successful candidate may represent the views of a minority of eligible voters. Low voter turnout or voter apathy is a real problem for Canadian democracy (see Case Study on page 318).

Party Mechanics

Political parties regularly hold conventions to discuss the party platform and other important issues, such as the need to pick or change a party leader. Traditionally, leadership races were held at conventions and generated a lot of publicity for the party. Currently all parties have adopted a “one-member, one-vote” system to choose a new party leader, which means that each registered member of the party has one vote, thereby having a direct say in who will lead their party. The winning candidate must receive a majority of votes, either through multiple ballots or a preferential ballot.

WEB LINK

For more information on Canada’s electoral system, visit the Pearson Web site.

FIGURE 9–24 Democracy requires active citizens to take part in the electoral process.
Choosing Candidates

Political parties always wish to pick the best candidates to run in elections. Whether the chosen person can win the riding or constituency is important but there are other qualities to consider. The person must be loyal to the party and be able to take on the responsibilities of an elected member, perhaps even of a Cabinet minister. In addition, the person should not be an embarrassment or have a personal history that might harm the party.

Parties have their own ways and criteria for choosing candidates. Sometimes leaders personally choose the candidate to run in a riding. Others are chosen by riding associations. Since the person’s nomination papers must have the leader’s signature, all candidates must be acceptable to the party leadership. Becoming a candidate gives a person an opportunity to become a member of the federal parliament or the provincial legislature. When a party has held a riding for a long time, election of its candidate is somewhat guaranteed. It may be very difficult for other parties to get elected in that riding. Why, then, do people run when they are likely to lose? Sometimes, it is a matter of political presence. The candidate hopes to show, through effort and loyalty, that he or she has a place in the party. This allows the person to gradually build a reputation and gain influence.

Most of the major political parties have special youth wings that allow young people under 18 to have input into policies and future directions for the party. Youth wings often have considerable influence over party policies, because they ensure the party’s survival in the future.

Articulating the Party Platform

A political party crafts its platform very carefully as it contains the party’s central message in an election campaign. The platform tells voters what to expect if the party is elected and outlines its political philosophy. There is no guarantee, voters realize, that the party’s platform will be realized should it gain power. But the platform is important as a statement of intent. Candidates and party spokespeople must know the platform by heart and be consistent with its message, even if they do not agree with some features. Parties also employ spin doctors who make sure news that is bad for the party is “spun” in the media so that it seems less important or misunderstood.

KEY TERMS

nomination choosing a candidate to run for office

tenumeration process of compiling a list of voters
ballooning voting

tabulating counting votes

tollers people who conduct public opinion polls
Public Opinion Polls

During elections, parties and others poll public opinion, and the media report the results. Parties allocate a small percentage of their campaign budget to polling. Polling companies contact people from a statistical cross-section of the population that represents the views and opinions of voters. Pollsters ask about candidates, party leaders, party positions and statements, the issues, and other things. Then they tabulate and interpret the results, which they give to party strategists. Campaign organizers will often change candidate speeches, ads and commercials, debate responses, blogs, and even the candidate's appearance to reflect what they have learned from the polls.

Public opinion polls published during election campaigns can affect voter choices. Voters may believe their vote is unnecessary, even wasted, if one party seems to have a large lead just prior to an election. Or they may switch their vote to be with the winner. For this reason, the results of public opinion polls cannot be published or broadcast on election day.

Election Campaigns

The prime minister calls an election by asking the Governor General to dissolve Parliament. This is usually done near the end of his or her five-year term when public opinion polls show that the ruling party is popular, but there are strategic reasons to consider as well. In 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien called an election less than three and a half years into his term—before the new, untired leader of the Canadian Alliance Party, Stephen Harper, could garner wide public support. Where possible, a party will look for a chance to split the vote that might go to a rival. For example, many of the people who support the Green Party might also support the NDP. It is therefore in the interests of the B.C. Liberals, for example, to provide an issue that will polarize the vote for these parties, while not affecting its own core vote.

Most candidates in federal and provincial elections are members of political parties, although some run as independents. A candidate needs money and plenty of volunteers to run an election campaign. Citizens often become actively involved at this stage, answering phones, distributing campaign literature, putting up signs, canvassing for support from door to door, driving voters to polling stations, and raising money.

Political parties usually pay for their campaigns with donations from individuals. Campaigning costs are high. Some candidates have lots of money to spend, while others do not. This can distort the election process, giving an advantage to the candidate who can pay for an image or presentation that attracts voters. Some believe that expensive advertising and other campaign tactics divert attention from real issues and problems, which are glossed over or ignored.
The Voting Process

Polling stations have nothing to do with voter opinion polls. They are the places where citizens in a riding cast their ballots on election day. (People who are unable to vote on election day may cast their ballots earlier at advance polls.) Polling stations are often in schools or public buildings. Voting is not complicated. When you arrive at a polling station, your name is crossed off the voters list and you are given a ballot. Voting, putting an X in the circle beside the candidate’s name on the ballot, takes place behind a privacy screen. No campaign signs or literature are allowed at or around the polling station. When the polls close, electoral officers count the votes. The candidate with the most votes in a riding wins the riding and a seat in the legislature.

What happens when a seat is vacated in the middle of a legislative session, for example, if a Member of Parliament passes away? A smaller by-election is held to fill the vacant seat.

Voter Apathy

One of the most worrying trends in Western democracies is that voter apathy, the reluctance of people to vote, is increasing. Voter turnout has also declined in France, Britain, the United States, and other countries. Even in the 2008 election in the United States that brought Barack Obama to power, only about 60 percent of the population voted. In Canada, voter turnout has declined from around 75 percent in 1988 to around 59 percent in 2008. The problem is even greater in British Columbia where the voting rate is only 50 percent (2009). The causes of voter apathy are not well understood, but it is a serious problem for democracy. In Canada, as in other countries, the relationship between age and interest level seems to be a factor, as the following chart shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of reason for not voting (% very or fairly important)</th>
<th>68+</th>
<th>58–67</th>
<th>48–57</th>
<th>38–47</th>
<th>30–37</th>
<th>25–29</th>
<th>21–24</th>
<th>18–20</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just not interested</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t like parties/candidates</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote wouldn’t matter</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t care about issues</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy at work</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of town</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t know where or when</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not on the list</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many elections</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 9–27** Reasons given for not voting in a federal election, by age group
FPTP Versus STV

Canadian elections are decided by the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. The winner does not necessarily have to win a majority of the votes cast; he or she simply has to win more votes than any of the other candidates. This system has the virtue of being simple and straightforward. Its supporters also argue that it means there is usually a clear winner of elections and that minority governments do not often happen. However, the result does not always represent the wishes of the majority of voters.

In 2004, the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform recommended that British Columbia replace FPTP with single transferable vote (STV), which would have allowed a form of proportional representation. That is, parties would gain seats by the proportion of votes they received in a large electoral district rather than having a single party win a riding by simple majority. British Columbians overwhelmingly rejected STV in a referendum in 2009.

Electronic Voting

Can technology increase the effectiveness of democracy? Various democratic countries around the world are exploring electronic voting via electronic kiosks, the telephone, or the Internet. In Canada, electronic voting has occurred at both provincial and municipal levels, but not yet at the federal level. Electronic voting has resulted in increased voter participation.

1. What are other advantages of electronic voting? What are some disadvantages?
2. Cause and Consequence How might electronic voting, especially by telephone or on the Internet, change voter participation for different age groups?
Compulsory Voting in Australia

Compulsory voting is, surprisingly, not very controversial in Australia (almost 60 to 70 percent are in favour). Those who oppose it say that compulsory voting denies people their democratic right not to vote, that it penalizes those who cannot find a candidate or party to vote for, that it makes things easy for political parties, and so on. Supporters claim that, among other things, compulsory voting is no more undemocratic than serving on juries or paying taxes, that it makes certain that all parts of the electorate are represented, and that it increases interest in the issues and in politics in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries with compulsory voting (CV) that is enforced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Cyprus</td>
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<td>Fiji</td>
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<td>Lichtenstein</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (one canton only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries with compulsory voting that is not enforced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France (Senate only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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What is democracy worth? Should we allow uninterested people in one or two generations to throw away rights that have taken centuries to achieve simply because people are not interested enough to vote? Voter apathy is a serious problem for democracies such as ours, but it is one that is difficult to solve. Some countries, such as Australia, make voting compulsory. In fact, many other countries require citizens to vote, although some do not enforce the law. Would compulsory voting be a good idea for Canada? Is compulsory voting, a measure designed to ensure citizens accept their responsibility to maintain democracy, actually undemocratic?

How Compulsory Voting Works

By law, Australians over the age of 18 must register to vote. Votes are always held on Saturdays when all voters must attend a polling station and vote in private “without delay.” Since the vote is secret, officials do not check to see whether the ballot is marked correctly or even marked at all. Electors who fail to vote must satisfactorily explain themselves to the Returning Officer or face a $20 fine or be jailed. About five percent of voters either accidentally or deliberately spoil their ballot.
Looking Further

1. Why do you think some countries with compulsory voting do not enforce the practice?

2. Compare the graphs above. What conclusion can you draw from them?

3. Create a PMI chart on compulsory voting in Canada.

4. People criticize the referendum process because a referendum on issues may result in the “tyranny of the majority.” Should issues be resolved through compulsory voting in referendums? Explain your position.

5. Review Figure 9–27. What were the major reasons for each age group not voting? Do you think that compulsory voting might change their attitudes? Why or why not?
CHAPTER REVIEW

CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION

How are governments formed in Canada and how can individuals influence government?

To be effective and active citizens, we need to know about ideologies, alternative systems of government, how our own system works, and our role in the process. Democracy works best when groups of people join together to try to achieve certain goals. Understanding how our democracy works and taking part in the process are essential features of active citizenship.

1. Create a mind map for the unit. Use each of the guiding questions as a category for your mind map (see the Chapter 9 opening spread). Your mind map should do the following.
   - Convey a clear central idea. Use graphics, humour, or metaphor to communicate the idea.
   - Show ideas moving out from the central idea, from most to least complex. Include images to add visual interest.
   - Use colours to make connections between ideas.
   - Cover all guiding questions and Key Terms and demonstrate your understanding.

Vocabulary Focus

2. Check your knowledge of the Key Terms on page 289 by forming pairs and then writing the terms and their meanings on separate index cards. Shuffle both piles and exchange them with another pair of students. Match the terms with their meanings as quickly as possible and check your results. Reshuffle the cards and hand them on to another team and repeat the exercise until all teams have matched all terms and meanings.

Knowledge and Understanding

3. Why do you think so few people join political parties in Canada? What advice would you give to party organizations to help them recruit members from your age group?
4. Describe the role of the media in the democratic process.
5. Describe how professional lobbyists, pressure groups, and polls influence government.
6. Do you think it is appropriate for lobbyists to do favours or raise money for politicians? Explain.

7. You have just formed a new provincial (or federal) party, the Youth Party of British Columbia (or Canada). Develop policy statements covering at least three different areas of government. What issues would you want to see on the political agenda?

8. Make a list of suggestions for increasing voter turnout in federal and provincial elections. How might you persuade students to vote in school elections? Would you use similar or different techniques to promote voter turnout?

9. How might social networking make participating in the democratic process more appealing to youth?

10. Why do you think voters are hesitant to change from the FPTP to STV?

Critical Thinking

11. You may work in small groups to create a graphic organizer, such as a flow chart, with the individual as the focus. Consider important national, provincial, or municipal issues and use the organizer to describe how citizens can take action to address those issues. Consider the role of the media, government, pressure groups, individual citizens, and the private sector.
Evidence

12. Why do you think the majority of Canadian citizens do not make the effort to vote in elections? If this trend continues, what effect might it have on our government?

13. How legitimate is a government that is established when voter turnout is less than 60 percent?

14. How do you think people in non-democratic countries might view Canada’s government?

15. People who live in democracies often criticize governments where citizens’ rights are not respected. In what ways could those countries be critical of Canada and its government selection?

Document Analysis

16. View the cartoon in Figure 9–32 and answer the following questions.

a) What does the term *prorogue* mean?

b) Describe how Prime Minister Harper is being portrayed by the cartoonist. What message is being sent by this portrayal?

c) Describe the way Canada has been illustrated. Why did the cartoonist choose to show Canada in this way?

d) Is there evidence of bias on the part of the cartoonist? Provide examples.

e) Explain the play on words used by the cartoonist.

**FIGURE 9–32**