



OUR
GOVERNMENT
OUR
ELECTION

OUR GOVERNMENT, OUR ELECTION

2020 (Version 3.0)

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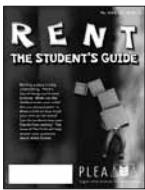
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SELECTED PLEA LEARNING RESOURCES

Check out teachers.plea.org for a wide range of learning resources. Print copies available at no charge.



RENT: THE STUDENT'S GUIDE

Renters have many rights and many responsibilities. This resource is useful for all young adults and is of particular interest to teachers of Life Transitions 20/30.



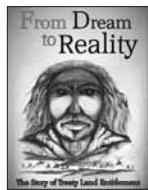
THE BATHROOM BARRISTER

The law is all around us, a concept that can be illustrated by using a room common to everyone. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Law 30 and History 20.



DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

In Canada, nobody is exempt from the law. Ideally, it is an equalising force that forms the basis of our governance. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Law 30 and Social Studies 30.



FROM DREAM TO REALITY

Treaty Land Entitlement explores how land has been set aside for the exclusive use of First Nations, in order to live up to Treaty agreements. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Native Studies 30.



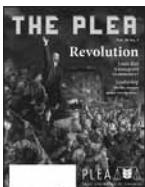
DIRECT DEMOCRACY: PLEBISCITES AND REFERENDUMS

Saskatchewan has a fascinating history with the concepts of plebiscites and referendums. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Law 30 and Social Studies 30.



CANADA'S LEGAL SYSTEM: AN INTRODUCTION

The legal system may appear complex, but it does not have to be this way. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Social Studies 8.



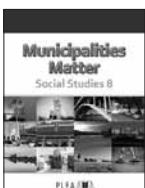
REVOLUTION

Sometimes political change can come about through dramatic upheaval. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Social Studies 30 and Native Studies 30.



LORD OF THE FLIES: THE NOVEL STUDY

William Golding's classic novel offers many lessons about how societies break down without laws. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of English 30.



MUNICIPALITIES MATTER

Municipalities are the governments most connected to our daily lives. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Social Studies 8.



HAMMURABI'S CODE

Hammurabi's Code is a foundational document of western legal systems. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of Social Studies 9 and Law 30.



70 YEARS OF THE BOMB

What can happen when conflicts escalate? This resource is of particular interest to teachers of History 20.



LEARNING ABOUT LAW WITH THE SIMPSONS

Network television's longest-running series can teach us many things about the law. This resource is of particular interest to teachers of English 30.

INTRODUCTION

The social studies classroom is a public square. Young citizens assemble to understand society as it exists, debate the ways society should change, and propose how to accomplish change. With this understanding, PLEA has created the third edition of *Our Government, Our Election* to build civic-mindedness.

Our Government, Our Election explores Saskatchewan's government, politics, and the electoral process. Each of its three sections has a specific focus:

SECTION ONE: THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

Section One introduces the foundational purpose of government in society. It considers

- the concept of democracy;
- how laws and regulations play a role in society;
- the role of public services; and
- how governments raise revenue.

SECTION TWO: THE MECHANICS OF GOVERNMENT

Section Two explores how laws are made and how governments can be held to account. It considers

- the make-up of the legislature;
- the creation of written laws;
- the role of opposition parties;
- the role of the media; and
- the role of the citizen.

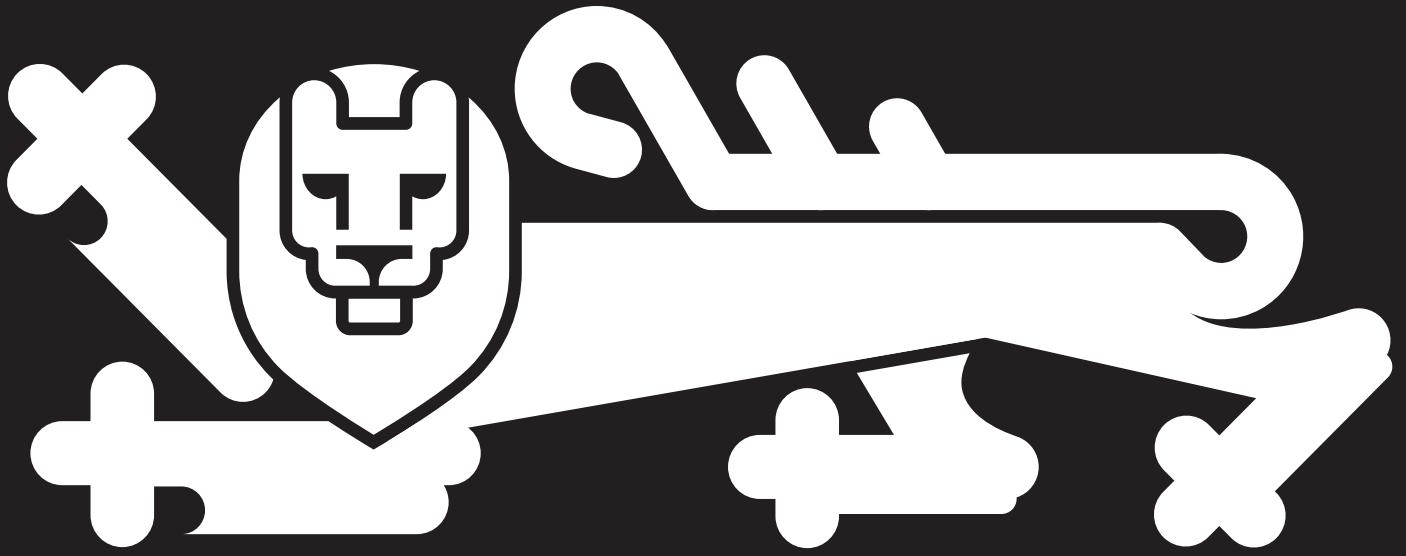
SECTION THREE: THE ELECTION OF GOVERNMENT

Section Three explains how we elect our governments. It considers

- forming governments;
- voting processes;
- political parties;
- local candidates; and
- election results.

These lessons are not meant to be prescriptive or holistic. Teachers are the professionals best-situated to facilitate student learning. Thus, the material in *Our Government, Our Election* is only meant to act as a suggested starting point. There are many other excellent resources on governance and elections, some of which are referenced in this resource's lessons.

Feedback on this or any other PLEA learning resource is always appreciated. Drop us a line at plea@plea.org.



SECTION ONE

THE PURPOSE

OF

GOVERNMENT

LESSON 1.1

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

OBJECTIVE

To understand how we are governed, concepts of democracy will be considered.

MATERIALS

What is Democracy?

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Defining Democracy

Democracy is a complex term. The word is rooted in the Greek nouns *demos* (people) and *kratein* (rule). At first this seems simple: the people rule. However, in practice it becomes complicated. Can every person rule? If not, then who actually rules? And what gives legitimacy to their rule?

To ground our understanding of democracy, we will look at its ancient forms in Greece and Rome and its modern-day practice in Canada.

The cradle of western democracy is widely considered to be Athens of 5th century B.C. Athenian citizens directly participated in law-making. They gathered in public squares to debate and then vote on policies. Such an approach is called direct democracy. In Athens, the right to participate was taken seriously: the state paid citizens a day's wages to attend the assembly. However, Athenian direct democracy was not democracy for all. Only males with citizenship—a mere ten percent of the population—had the right to participate. Around

the same time direct democracy began in Athens, representative democracy emerged in the Roman Empire. Roman representative democracy was similar to how we choose our governments today. Individuals elected representatives to government to govern on their behalf.

Greek democracy ended when Macedonia conquered Greece in 338 BC. Roman democracy ended when power centralised in the Imperial Palace following Augustus's death in 14AD. Pockets of democratic rule could still be found around the world, but for the most part democracy went into hibernation. It was not until the last half of the early modern period (c. 1500–1800) that democracy re-emerged. By the beginning of the 21st century, the majority of countries were considered democracies.

Today, a key aspect for a country to be considered a democracy is a universal franchise (the right to vote for all adult citizens). In Canada, the franchise is almost universal: virtually every adult citizen has the right to vote. The lone exception in Saskatchewan is the chief electoral officer, the person who coordinates and oversees provincial elections. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Canadian democracy was disappointingly close to its ancient Greek derivative: women, minorities, prisoners, younger adults, and people without property could not vote. Many of these restrictions were not lifted until the 1970s.

Since the time of ancient Athens, the concept of the state has grown: states are geographically bigger, have larger populations, and take on more responsibilities. The growth of the state makes the idea of the Athenian public square—where all citizens directly participate in all decision-making—almost impossible. Hence, Canadian democracy is primarily based in the Roman concept of representative democracy. Occasionally we directly decide an issue by referendum, but most often we choose representatives to govern on our behalf.

Towards a Definition of Democracy

We know that Canada's federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous governments under the *Indian Act* are representative democracies, all with a universal franchise. This gets us closer to understanding what exactly democracy is in Canada.

To better define democracy, it is helpful to turn to Canadian political scientist Henry Bertram Mayo. In his

1960 book *An Introduction to Democratic Theory*, he said that modern western democracy usually includes the four following elements:

- popular sovereignty: the people have the final say, usually in the form of elections
- political equality: every person's vote counts equally
- political freedom: today, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees foundational freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of political association
- majority rule: the larger number takes precedent over the smaller number, with due consideration given to minority rights.

Mayo's framework may not definitively define democracy, but it helps capture the basic parameters upon which Canadian representative democracy operates: every adult citizen is free to participate with equal voice, and collectively the larger number will prevail so long as the majority does not trample the rights of minorities.

Our Government, Our Election

It is difficult to overstate the importance of democratic education. As Canadian senator Eugene Forsey said, “Government is our creature. We make it, we are ultimately responsible for it.” Because we choose the people who govern us, our rights and responsibilities are the product of the democratic decisions we make. Put more simply, we are not subservient to government. Government is subservient to us.

PROCEDURE

1. Brainstorm with students what democracy means to them. Use the varied answers to establish that it is hard to precisely define democracy.
2. Break students into smaller groups and distribute What is Democracy?. Each group should discuss the statements about democracy amongst themselves. Have groups share with the class the statement that they believe to be most compelling, and explain their reasoning.
3. Reconvene groups so they may create their own definition of democracy.

4. Bring class together to share each group's definition of democracy.

KEY QUESTION

- How was the process of working together to create a definition of democracy similar to the concept of democracy itself?

5. One more round to the definition-creation process can be added by having the class work together as a whole to define democracy.

6. For a summary of the lesson, have class discuss the following statement:

“Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.”

- George Bernard Shaw

FURTHER EXPLORATION

7. Canada is a representative democracy. Canada is also a liberal democracy. This means that the broad principles of liberalism guide our democratic rule. To better understand the principles of liberal democracy, check out Lesson Three: What is Liberal Democracy? in *Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

8. For an exploration of the history of the right to vote in Canada, check out Indigenous People and the Right to Vote in Lesson One of *Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

9. For an overview of how the Haudenosaunee governed themselves, check out “Roots of Indigenous Democracy” in Lesson One of *Direct Democracy: Plebiscites and Referendums*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

10. Astra Taylor's recent work on the origins and forms of democracy provides valuable insights into the different meanings of democracy. An excellent introduction can be found on CBC's October 2019 *Ideas* episode “What is Democracy?” Find it at cbc.ca/ideas.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Discuss the following statements about democracy. Some of them are complicated, so the discussion questions will guide you.

1. “Democracy is a system in which no one can choose himself, no one can invest himself with the power to rule, and therefore, no one can arrogate to himself unconditional and unlimited power.”

- Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*

DISCUSS: Why should no single person have unlimited power?

2. “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

- Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

DISCUSS: Suffrage is the right to vote. Why must everyone have the right to vote? Why must each vote count equally?

3. “Democracy as a political culture generally implies the simultaneous operation of several elements, two of which are fundamental: government by the majority (either directly or through representatives), and the protection of individual or minority rights.”

- Israelite Rubinstein and Chaim Adler, *The Development of Democratic Culture in a Society with Powerful Traditional Forces: The Case of Israel*

DISCUSS: Is the majority always right? Can the majority sometimes trample over the rights of individuals and minorities?

4. “Democracy is a political system in which different groups are legally entitled to compete for power and in which institutional power holders are elected by the people and are responsible to the people.”

- Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries*

DISCUSS: Do the groups with the best ideas always win power in a democracy?

5. “Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”

- Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl
What Democracy Is . . . And Is Not

DISCUSS: What are the merits of competition?
What are the merits of cooperation?

6. “Participation in a democracy is not a matter of subservience to power or blind loyalty to the state but is a willingness to be responsible for the state and to engage at all levels in the decisions that will chart its course.”

- Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa,
Education for Democratic Citizenship

DISCUSS: Why is blind loyalty dangerous?

7. “Democracy makes the sustained achievement of social goals more likely; and social progress makes more likely the survival and development of democracy.”

- UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*

DISCUSS: How would you define social progress?

8. “Democracy is not simply a theory of self-interest that gives people license to pursue their own goals at the expense of others; the common good is a central feature of democracy.”

- Michael W. Apple and Jeffery Beane,
Democratic Schools

DISCUSS: Why is the common good a central feature of democracy?



LESSON 1.2

WHY LAWS?

OBJECTIVE

To understand how laws contribute to social stability, the purpose of laws will be examined.

MATERIALS

[The Purpose of Laws](#)

[Case Studies on the Purpose of Laws](#)

[Renting a Home in Saskatchewan](#)

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Legislative Powers in Canada

Publisher, author, and political activist Mel Hurtig once stated that Canada's premiers are virtual kings when compared to American state governors. The development of these "kingships"—the broad scope of jurisdictional authority held by Canadian provinces—can be traced back to at least 1840.

In 1840, the Act of Union united Upper Canada and Lower Canada into one legislative territory and renamed them Canada East (modern-day Quebec) and Canada West (modern-day Ontario). Because Canada East and Canada West were very culturally divergent, governing them under one legislature was difficult.

The difficulties of governing Canada East and Canada West as one jurisdiction has led to speculation that Confederation in 1867 was not only done to unify the British territories north of the United States. It also was done to divorce

Canada East and Canada West from their legislative union and return some of their political autonomy. In this sense, Confederation both politically unified Canada and gave each province considerable power.

The distribution of powers between the federal and provincial governments were set out in *The British North America Act, 1867*. It was later renamed *The Constitution Act, 1867*.

Federal Government

Section 91 of the constitution gives the federal government control over areas such as:

- banking
- criminal law
- broadcasting
- the RCMP
- air transportation
- national defence
- national parks
- international trade
- postal service
- oceans and fisheries

Provincial Governments

Section 92 of the constitution gives provincial governments control over areas such as:

- education
- highways
- health care
- forestry and mining
- agriculture
- labour standards
- liquor and gaming licences

Municipal Governments

Provincial governments delegate some of their powers to municipalities. Through bylaws and other actions, municipalities can deal with a wide range of matters such as:

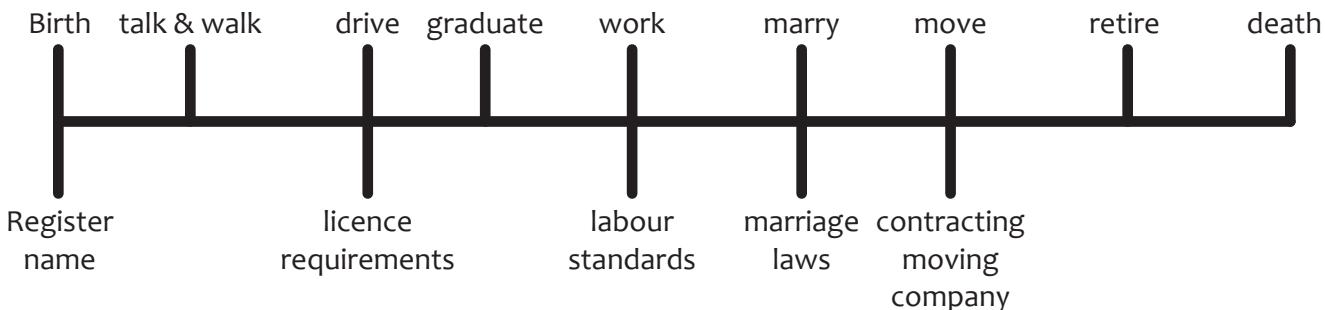
- streets and roads
- property taxes
- utilities such as water

- sewage and garbage disposal
- local police and fire protection
- parks and playgrounds
- building codes
- nuisances, such as noise, junked vehicles and litter
- store hours
- curfews
- animals and dangerous dogs

In addition to federal, provincial, and municipal governments, there are also various First Nations governments. The structure and authority of these governments differ with each nation. There are parameters for reserve governance under the Indian Act, but the full scope of power of each First Nation is largely determined by the agreement each nation strikes with the federal government. It can range from minimal governance to self-government agreements with Canada.

PROCEDURE

1. Draw a line on the board. At one end write birth and at the other write death. Ask students to think of various events of our lives, and write them chronologically along the line.
2. Have students think of laws related to those life events, and label them underneath the line. An incomplete example is provided below.



3. Discuss the resulting line and the laws.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do laws unnecessarily interfere with the right to live life as one chooses?
- When do public needs override the individual's right to do what they choose?
- What would life be like without laws?

Class also may explore what level of government has jurisdiction for each law to illustrate the distribution of powers in Canada.

4. Summarise discussion with overhead The Purpose of Laws.
5. Read Case Studies on the Purpose of Laws, then assign Renting a Home in Saskatchewan. PLEA's *Rent: The Students' Guide* is helpful for this activity. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

6. To better understand how law helps keep order in a democracy, check out Lesson Five: Freedom and Law in Democracy and the Rule of Law. Find it at teachers.plea.org.
7. The Great Stink of London is an excellent case study on the purpose of laws. Find it in *The Bathroom Barrister* at teachers.plea.org.

THE PURPOSE OF LAWS

- Law supports broad social values with goals, such as promoting democratic processes, protecting the right to a fair trial, prescribing honest business practices, and establishing social programs.
- Law is a way of resolving disputes in an orderly manner following legal rules.
- Law protects citizens, their property, and rights.
- Law provides a framework for order in our society and ensures some degree of predictability and stability.



OVERHEAD

CASE STUDIES ON THE PURPOSE OF LAWS

Sometimes we think of laws as restricting our freedoms. For example, we are not free to speed through a school zone. Society believes that there should be a limit on how fast we drive in a school zone. Therefore, we created laws to limit vehicle speeds in school zones. Laws, therefore, spell out society's beliefs.

However, laws do more than just spell out our beliefs. Laws also are meant to have a positive effect. By regulating the speed of vehicles in school zones, we reduce the chances of children being struck by vehicles.

Nevertheless, some people will view certain laws as too prohibitive, even if the intention behind that law is good. They will say things like "Government should stay out of our lives."

It is true that we need to limit how far the law intrudes into our lives. Yet the absence of laws is often dangerous. Consider the following scenarios that illustrate what can happen without laws.

JAPAN AND HAITI: Two Earthquakes, Two Outcomes

On March 11th, 2011, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck Japan. It was the seventh most powerful earthquake ever recorded. The quake and resulting tsunami caused widespread devastation and killed 20,000 people.

On January 12th, 2010, a much less powerful 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti. Even though the earthquake did not trigger a tsunami like the Japanese quake, the damage was far more catastrophic. 230,000 people were killed, 300,000 were injured, and a million people were left homeless. Almost all deaths and injuries were the result of collapsing buildings.

Engineering professor Karl Stephan noted that the widespread death and destruction in Haiti was an example of "what happens when government absents itself completely from the supervision of private and even public construction. Things can go well for a while, but when an earthquake hits, the devastation is nearly total."¹

Japan's strict building codes and routine earthquake and tsunami drills ultimately saved lives. On the other hand, Haiti's loose building codes and lack of emergency drills contributed to their high death toll.

¹ "Building Codes, Earthquakes, and Haiti," *Engineering Ethics*, January 25 2010

CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES: Two Banking Systems, Two Outcomes

In 2008, the "Great Recession" devastated the global economy. When millions of Americans lost their jobs, they were unable to make their loan payments. This led to 465 banks collapsing in the United States. Canada also experienced widespread job losses. However, no bank here collapsed. One reason was government regulation.

Economist Paul Krugman compared American and Canadian bank regulations, noting "the United States used to have a boring banking system, but Reagan-era deregulation made things dangerously interesting. Canada, by contrast, has maintained a happy tedium."

Canada's "boring" regulations force our banks to be more careful when loaning money: our banks have tight limits on how much money they can lend and their ability to offload risky loans to other banks is restricted.

Krugman concluded that "[Canadian] restrictions meant fewer opportunities for bankers to come up with clever ideas than would have been available if Canada had emulated America's deregulatory zeal. But that, it turns out, was all to the good."² Our bank regulations helped Canada withstand the global recession.

² "Good and Boring," *New York Times*, January 31 2010

RENTING A HOME IN SASKATCHEWAN

Rental property regulations are an ongoing issue in Saskatchewan, especially for young people. Virtually everyone will either rent a home at some time in their life, or know someone who does.

Use PLEA's Rent: *The Student's Guide* (find it at teachers.plea.org), various local news sources, and the experiences of people in your community to consider how rental regulations balance the rights of landlords and tenants.

1. What kind of rental regulations exist in Saskatchewan? List the rules you deem most important.
2. How do Saskatchewan's rental regulations reflect the four purposes of law:
 - Law supports broad social values with goals, such as promoting democratic processes, protecting the right to a fair trial, prescribing honest business practices, and establishing social programs.
 - Law is a way of resolving disputes in an orderly manner following legal rules.
 - Law protects citizens, their property, and rights.
 - Law provides a framework for order in our society and ensures some degree of predictability and stability.
3. Do you believe the regulations are adequate? What changes would you make?
4. What are some potential consequences of having no rental regulations whatsoever?



ACTIVITY

LESSON 1.3

PUBLIC GOODS AND SERVICES

OBJECTIVE

Government's role extends beyond creating and enforcing laws. Governments also provide us with public goods and services. This lesson introduces the concept.

MATERIALS

[Government of Saskatchewan Public Spending](#)
[The Purpose of Public Spending](#)

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Foundational Reasons for Public Goods and Services

Generally, public goods are goods that have shared consumption and are non-exclusionary. To illustrate these two concepts, consider a local park. The park allows shared consumption because many people receive the benefit from it at one time. The park is also non-exclusionary because everyone is entitled to use it, regardless of social or economic status.

The same logic applies to roads, sidewalks, and bridges, which are all public goods. Most museums and libraries are also public goods. In Canada, the vast majority of health care and K-12 education fall into the realm of public goods, though they are often referred to as public services.

Public goods and services are paid for by taxes. Sometimes, the costs are offset by user fees. For example, consider public transportation. Governments invest tax dollars in public transportation systems. However, we also

pay a fare when we board a bus. Together, the government subsidy and the user fees cover the full cost of the bus service.

Because bus fares have a greater impact on low-income earners like students and seniors, certain people are eligible for discounted fares. Basing fares on ability to pay helps ensure that the cost is more fairly distributed. Some critics, however, say that a good like the bus is not truly public unless it is free for everyone.

According to the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain—named after the influential 19th-century social reformer—“the value of [public] services does not relate to the cost of providing them but rather to the value that would be lost if they were not provided.” Think again of the example of public transportation.

It provides an affordable means to travel, be it for work, shopping, or socialising. This helps individuals, businesses, and community groups. There is also the advantage of reducing the number of vehicles on roads. Reduced traffic benefits people who use their own car. As well, reduced traffic cuts back on pollution, improving the overall health of society and the environment. Thus, the value of public transportation cannot be reduced to the simple cost of running busses.

Think about other public services, such as fire and police protection, sewage and sanitation systems, public housing, and health care and education. Their value as a whole simply cannot be measured by their financial cost. Their value must be considered in the broader context of how the good or service contributes to the well-being of society as a whole.

Another reason why governments provide particular goods and services is due to a concept called market failure. Market failure exists when:

- a good or service would not or cannot be adequately provided by the private sector, or
- the risk to society is high if the private-sector provider failed

To illustrate market failure, consider water utilities. It is doubtful that it would be economically feasible for a private-sector provider to build a city’s entire water system. Even if a private provider built the infrastructure, if they went bankrupt the company could just walk away, leaving the public without access to safe water. After all, private-sector organisations are ultimately responsible to their shareholders, not their customers. The public

sector, on the other hand, is ultimately responsible to *all* citizens, accountable through the democratic process. Since the state will always be there, it is best-suited to provide cities with water.

Of course, the government does not provide non-necessary goods and services that can be provided by the private sector. For example, a functioning society would not be at risk if there was a collapse in the provision of pantyhose. Therefore, government does not manufacture, distribute, or sell pantyhose.

Public goods and services fulfill a unique social purpose. They help create an equal, functioning, and healthy society. Further, public goods and services have a democratic function. With public goods and services, every citizen is an equivalent owner. Thus, every citizen—regardless of wealth or social status—has an equal say in how these goods and services are provided.

PROCEDURE

1. To introduce the idea of public spending, discuss how K-12 schooling is a public good.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are citizens unable to attend public school if they are unable to pay?
- Would that be different if school was not a public good?
- What would be the short- and long-term consequences if education was not public, but rather based on ability to pay?

2. Using background information, discuss the concept of public goods and services. The overhead Government of Saskatchewan Public Spending can help illustrate the discussion.
3. Lead classroom reading of The Purpose of Public Spending.

KEY QUESTION

- All citizens are equal. Why must we ensure that certain goods and services are equally available to all citizens?

4. Students may research and report on the goals, benefits, and critiques of a particular public good or service. Starting points for research could include policy think-tanks, such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (www.policyalternatives.ca) and the Fraser Institute (www.fraserinstitute.org).

FURTHER EXPLORATION

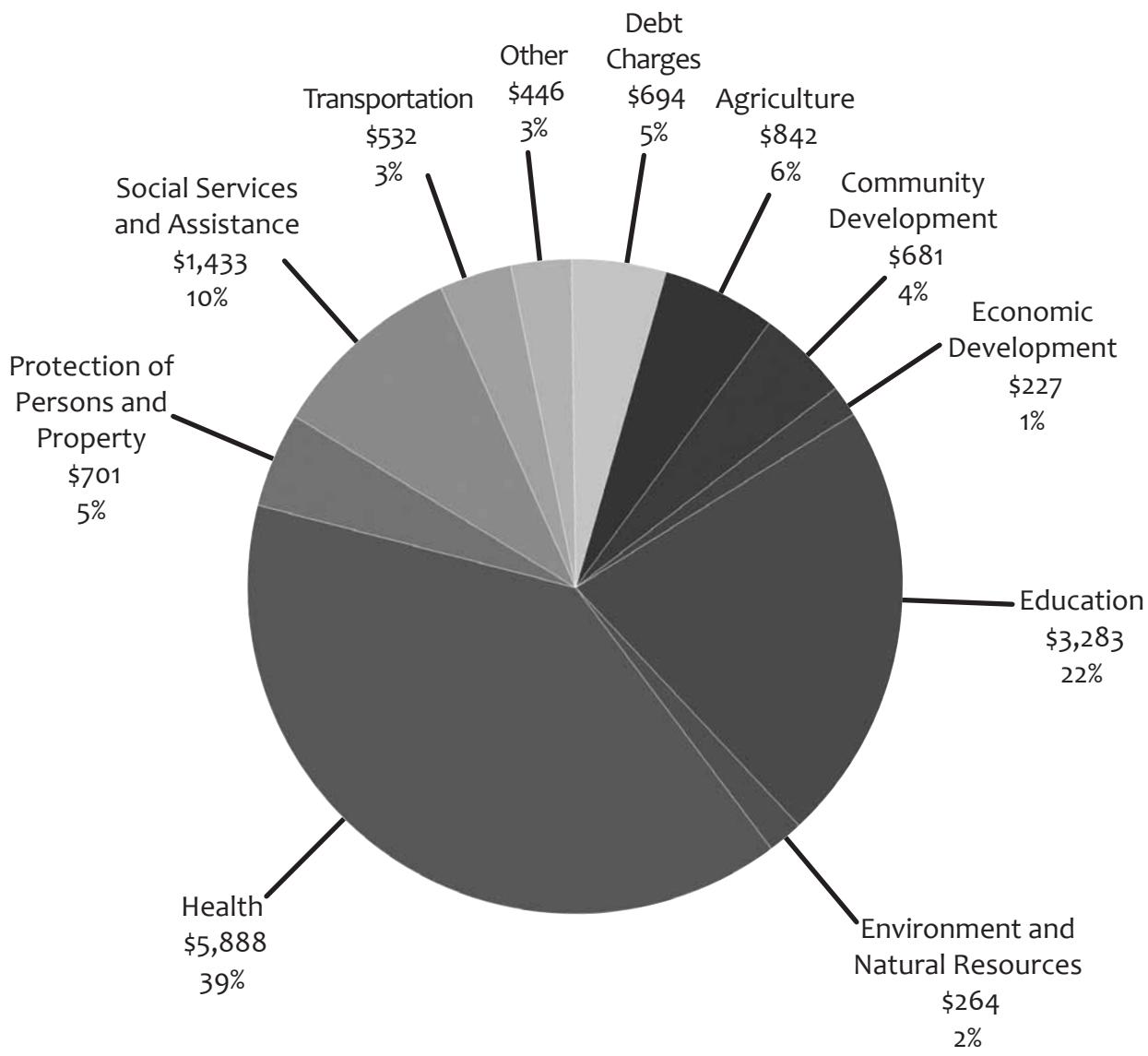
5. To introduce ways that public goods and services are accountable to citizens, check out Ombudsman Saskatchewan. Their learning resources offer:
 - information about the role of the ombudsman
 - case studies about how the ombudsman ensures fairness for citizens
 - guest speakers for classrooms

Learn more at www.ombudsman.sk.ca.

6. Social Services and Assistance is the third-biggest area of provincial expenditure. Social Assistance is direct cash payments to citizens whose incomes are inadequate to meet basic needs. Nick Falvo, Director of Research and Data at Calgary Homeless Foundation, has written a useful introduction for understanding the purpose and shortcomings of social assistance. Check out “Ten Things to Know About Social Assistance in Canada” at <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2017/05/09/ten-things-know-social-assistance-canada/>

GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN PUBLIC SPENDING

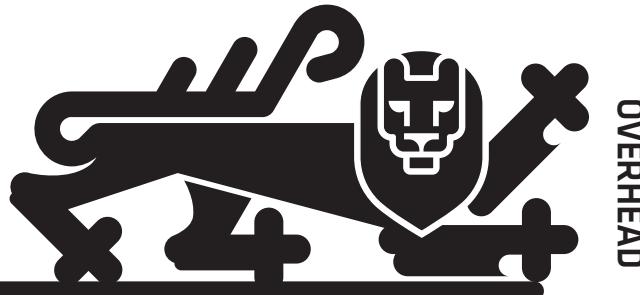
(In millions of dollars)



TOTAL EXPENSES: \$14.99 BILLION*

Source: Government of Saskatchewan Provincial Budget 2018/2019

* Does not include \$1.1 billion “Saskatchewan Builds” infrastructure expenses



THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC SPENDING

Public spending serves many functions. The roads we drive on, the schools we attend, and the hospitals we visit are just a few examples of how public money is put to use in Saskatchewan. Other examples include seniors' drug plans, farm income stability programs, and provincial parks. The list is very long: in total, the Government of Saskatchewan spends over \$16 billion a year.

To help understand the purpose of public spending, consider the example of how roads are planned, built, and maintained.

Without government, how would roads be constructed? Perhaps you could build the road directly in front of your home, then hope your neighbours would continue the road. But even if that could be done, who would plan where the road should ultimately go? How would the road be maintained? And who would build connecting roads across areas where nobody lived?

By having government build and maintain roads, there are many positive results:

- **Costs are reduced**
the theory of “economies of scale” suggests it is cheaper to build roads by central planning than to build them piece-by-piece
- **Citizens have greater mobility**
facilitating travel by foot, bike, or vehicle gives citizens more freedom
- **Businesses generate wealth**
access to and from business is created for customers, employees, and suppliers
- **Society has more freedom**
freeing individuals and businesses from the task of creating their own road networks gives people more time to devote to their personal interests
- **All citizens have an equal say**
if suggestions about or problems with the road arise, each person can have their say as an equal owner of the road and a moral equivalent as a citizen

The above example of roads, although simplified, illustrates economist and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen's research on the purpose of public spending. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen pointed out that countries with higher public spending have healthier and better educated citizens. He believed when government adequately provides core services, citizens are free to pursue individual choices that bring about personal and social development.

Public spending also can help make society more fair. For example:

- social assistance programs help ensure the poorest in society—such as seniors and the unemployed—have a minimum income and affordable housing
- agriculture stabilisation programs help protect farmers and farm communities from fluctuations beyond their control, such as bad weather and global market shocks
- health care and education ensures that all citizens receive services essential to a healthy and informed life

THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC SPENDING... CONTINUED

When government provides goods and services to all citizens, the middle class and the poor have access to the same services as the rich. In other words, public spending helps equalise society. This benefits everyone in society, including the rich. *The Spirit Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's study of equality in societies, found that when the gap between the rich and the poor narrowed, life was better for everyone: crime was reduced, drug abuse was less prevalent, child well-being was higher, educational achievement was stronger, communities exhibited higher degrees of mutual trust, and people lived longer and healthier lives. Investing in public goods and services builds up the well-being of individuals in a society, which in turn builds up the well-being of society as a whole.

Discuss

1. What basic services or facilities do you believe should be available to all citizens?
2. What services and facilities are actually available to all citizens through public means?
3. How do the public goods and services you identified in questions #1 and #2 enable citizens to pursue individual choices that bring about personal and social development?
4. How do the public goods and services you identified in questions #1 and #2 build a fairer society for everyone?
5. What kinds of goods and services should not be provided by government? Why not?



LESSON 1.4

PAYING FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES

OBJECTIVE

To understand how we pay for public goods and services, their relationship to taxation will be explored.

MATERIALS

Trudeau government has failed to produce promised tax relief

“Tax freedom day?” Not really

Government of Saskatchewan Revenue

Universality vs Means Testing

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Progressive Personal Taxation

A recurring theme in recent public discussion has been income and wealth inequality. A central flashpoint for this discussion was the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests, with their rallying call of “We are the 99%.” The basis of this slogan is that following World War II, all of society shared in the significant economic growth of Western democracies. However, in the 1970s the richest few began taking a disproportionately larger share. This shift has led to economic inequality not seen since the 1930s. Today, about half of the world’s wealth is owned by the richest 1% of people.

Although economic disparity in Canada is less exaggerated than in the world as a whole, recent data from Statistics Canada has shown our country continues to follow this trend. In 2017, the average total income of Canadians rose 2.5% compared to the previous year. In the same

period, the average income of the top 1% rose 8.5%. The wealthiest Canadians did even better. Income for the top 0.1% rose 17.2%, while the top 0.01% raked in 27.2% more money in 2017 than in 2016.

Simply put, the earnings of the wealthiest Canadians are growing faster than anybody else’s earnings.

Not surprisingly, when the share of total income rises for the rich, so too does their share of society’s total wealth. According to Statistics Canada, by 2012 the top 10% of the population owned half of Canada’s wealth. In fact, the richest 87 families in Canada possess almost as much wealth as everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island combined. That’s nearly 1.5 million people.

While there will always be some degree of income and wealth inequality in market-based democracies, many experts have identified the concentration of wealth as problematic. As discussed in Lesson 1.3, when societies become more economically unequal, the well-being of everyone begins to disintegrate. Literacy, life opportunities, and life expectancy goes down for society as a whole.

Perhaps even more alarming from a democratic perspective is that the growth of economic disparity can lead to a breakdown in social cohesion.

Wealth and Social Cohesion

Warnings that society could break down due to wealth inequality have come from the highest levels. For example, Janet Yellen—then the chair of America’s central bank—told an American senate hearing that growing inequality “can shape [and] determine the ability of different groups to participate equally in a democracy and have grave effects on social stability over time.”¹ In other words, inequality undermines democracies.

Research backs up Yellen’s worries. For example, one study analysed nearly 1,800 public policies in the United States. The authors, Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, concluded in part that:

preferences of economic elites ... have far more independent impact upon policy change than the preferences of average citizens do. To be sure, this does not mean that ordinary citizens always lose out; they fairly often get the policies they favor, but only because those policies happen also to be

preferred by the economically-elite citizens who wield the actual influence.²

Quite simply, the rich are more likely than the poor to get the laws that they want.

Such claims give reason for pause. That being said, one also must be careful not to directly transpose the American political experience with that of Canada. This is especially true given the loose political financing laws and greater income inequality in the United States. However, the broader point should not be missed: Every voice should count equally in a democracy, but steep economic stratification could result in laws and public policies that do not always reflect the wishes of the majority.

Taxation for Equality

Because economic inequality is harmful to democracy, how have we used government to help mitigate it? Lesson 1.3 examined the role of public goods and services in equalising society. When everyone is provided with the same essential services, society becomes more equal.

For example, wealthy Canadians and poor Canadians use the same health care system. The rich cannot buy their way to the front of the line for treatment, because health care in Canada is rationed by your health needs, not by your ability to pay. Public health care makes society more equal.

Further, this shared experience helps contribute to our sense of mutual responsibility. Because the rich and the poor rely on the same health care system, everyone shares an interest in seeing it work well.

Nevertheless, wealthier citizens are better-able to financially contribute to the health care system, along with other public goods and services. It would be patently wrong to ask a poor widow to contribute the same amount of taxes for public services as a wealthy CEO. Reflecting this reality, income tax in Canada—the single-biggest source of government revenue—is levied in a progressive manner.

Progressive income tax means that the more a person earns, the higher the marginal rate of tax that they pay. In Saskatchewan in 2020, the very lowest income earners pay no provincial income tax whatsoever. Those who earn more than \$16,000 pay 10.5% tax on every dollar earned over \$16,000 up to \$45,000. The

additional earnings between \$45,000 and \$130,000 are taxed at 12.5%. Finally, there is a top tax bracket of 14.5% on any earnings over \$130,000.

Canada's federal income tax structure is very similar. When provincial income tax is combined with federal income tax, the top income tax rate in Saskatchewan is 47.5%.

Higher tax rates in each bracket are what makes Canada's tax system progressive. However, the system's progressivity has been in a general decline for fifty years. In 1965, there were 17 income tax brackets. In 1987 there were 10. Today there are five.

Along with the reduction in tax brackets has come a reduction of tax rates, especially for the wealthy. It began in 1972 when the top rate was slashed from 80% to 60%. While 80% tax seems high, Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman has pointed to research that suggests that the ideal tax rate for top earners is between 70-80%, if the goal is to generate optimal tax revenue.

Curiously, 70-80% tax rates on top earners do not generate more tax revenue from the rich. Rather, high tax rates on the rich have been shown to increase tax revenues coming from the middle class. Political economists such as Mark Blyth have explained this phenomenon well.

Following World War II, tax rates on very high incomes reached upwards of 90%. Such high taxes reduced the incentive to pay people millions upon millions of dollars for their work. Why hand out multi-million dollar paycheques when most of it goes straight to the government? With less people being paid exorbitant sums, more money was left to pay better wages to middle and lower class workers. As a result, low-income earners were pushed into tax-paying middle-class wages, and middle-class workers started earning even better wages. Hence, overall tax revenue rose as the middle class flourished. This phenomenon was known as the great compression.

To be sure, factors such as well-organised labour forces and restrictions on foreign investment also contributed to the middling of salaries following World War II. However, highly progressive taxes on the rich were a key component.

Other ways Canada's tax system has become less progressive is the nature in which income from capital gains is taxed. Generally speaking, the tax rates discussed above only apply to labour. When money is earned from selling property or investments, it is considered a capital gain. Unlike wages earned from labour, only half of the money earned as capital gains is taxed. (As recently as 2000, 75% of these earnings were taxable.) Because the super-wealthy often earn considerable sums from capital gains, their tax rate can be significantly less than the tax rates of working-class people. Even some billionaires, such as Warren Buffet, have remarked that capital gains tax exemptions are unfair: Buffet frequently complains that his secretary pays a higher tax rate than he does.

That being said, not all changes to the income tax system have been at the expense of progressivity. Federal and provincial basic personal income tax exemptions have risen in recent years, raising the amount of money a person can earn before having to pay income tax. As well, the federal government has slightly raised taxes on the highest income earners. So to claim that tax trends have been entirely to the benefit of the wealthy at the expense of the poor is not true.

Overall though, despite a few tweaks, the long-term trend of income taxes has been a story of declining progressivity. Nevertheless, some argue the system is still progressive enough. There may be merit to the arguments that the rich contribute a fair share. Data from 2010 showed that in Canada the top 1% of income earners paid 21.2% of all the country's personal income tax revenue. The Top 10% paid 54.8%. Meanwhile, the bottom 50% contributed 4% of the country's entire income tax revenues.

Regardless of where one stands on the issue of income tax progressivity, the fact remains that government must generate revenue to pay for public services. Canada's progressive taxation demonstrates that our society has a degree of mutual responsibility, and as such those with more financial ability pay more. How

we came to this conclusion can be partially explained through Canada's political development.

Canada's History of Mutual Responsibility

Rand Dyck explained in *Canadian Politics* that the logic guiding Canada's relatively strong sense of mutual responsibility can be traced back to the United Empire Loyalists. Loyalists opposed the American Revolution, so they fled to British North America. As Dyck wrote, “[t]hey saw society not as a mass of grasping, ambitious, ‘free’ individuals, but as an organic community in which all people had their place and did their respective part to contribute to the welfare of the whole.” This belief in our responsibility to society as a whole may seem left-wing, but it actually links back to the roots of Canadian conservatism. According to Charles Taylor, Canadian conservatism descended from the British Tory tradition, influenced by the French along with the ex-American Empire Loyalists. Together, this dynamic created a conservatism that was wholly different than the United States' libertarian-based conservatism. “Unlike the caricatured capitalist,” wrote Taylor in the early 1980s, “Canadian conservatives believe in an organic society and the mutual obligations among all classes. Which is why... they embrace the principle of social justice and even the welfare state.”³ That said, many have argued that this framework of Canadian conservatism has slowly been replaced by a more American libertarian model over the past thirty to forty years.

All of this helps explain Canada's progressive taxation, but also why Canada has traditionally been a more equal society than our neighbours to the south. Rallying calls for the 99% have certainly been made and heard across Canada. Given rising income inequality, these calls are not without merit. Even so, because of Canada's unique political history our situation—at least right now—is more level than that of the United States.

¹ “Bernie Sanders Asks Fed Chair Whether the US Is an Oligarchy,” *The Nation*, May 7, 2014

² “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics*, September 2014

³ Radical Tories

PROCEDURE

1. With the class, compile a list of goods and services that the students have made use of in the past 24 hours. Determine which are public goods and services.
2. Explain that taxes pay for public services. To consider differing views on the role of taxes in paying for public services, lead classroom reading of Trudeau government has failed to produce promised tax relief and “Tax freedom day?” Not Really.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are taxes a cost to society or an investment in society?
- Generally speaking, lower taxes mean less public services. Would you be willing to forgo public services for lower taxes?
- What would be the consequences of your decision?

3. Use the overhead Government of Saskatchewan Revenue to break down sources of public money.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Can taxes be used to change the behaviour of citizens? Think about carbon taxes, liquor taxes, and taxes on junk food, for example.
- Should certain sectors or certain groups contribute more taxes? Less? Think about corporations or high-income earners, for example.

4. Using teacher's background information, narrow the discussion to the idea of progressive income tax to help inform a class discussion of Universality vs Means Testing.

5. To move towards considerations of the role of elected officials and of the purpose of elections, lead class discussion of the responsibilities of governments when using public money.

KEY QUESTION

- If citizens are unhappy with how public dollars are spent, what recourse do they have?

FURTHER EXPLORATION

6. Discussion around the concepts of taxation and public expenditure may be illustrated with the activity “Taxes and Public Expenditure: Springfield’s Bear Patrol” in *Learning About Law with The Simpsons*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

Winnipeg Free Press

July 9, 2019

Trudeau government has failed to produce promised tax relief

Jake Fuss and Milagros Palacios,
The Fraser Institute

Providing tax relief for Canadian families has been a stated priority for the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau since it assumed office. However, despite any rhetoric to the contrary, the tax burden for the average Canadian family has increased over the last four years.

And it's clear now that Trudeau must change course if tax relief remains a goal for this government.

Since 2015, this government has enacted a series of tax increases on Canadian families. It introduced a carbon tax, raised payroll taxes and removed several personal income tax credits, including income splitting, the children's fitness tax credit and the public transit tax credit.

Whether you agree with those measures or not, these changes have increased the average family's tax burden.

Each year, the Fraser Institute measures the average Canadian family's tax burden to demonstrate how it's changed over time. Canadians pay many different taxes to federal, provincial and local governments. Some of these taxes are visible but many are hidden, which adds to the confusion about how much we actually pay.

Not only do we pay income taxes, we also pay property taxes, payroll taxes (including the Canada or Quebec Pension Plans tax), health taxes, sales taxes such as the GST, carbon taxes, taxes on gasoline, taxes on imported goods, 'sin' taxes and so on.

Adding up all the taxes isn't easy. But in 2019, we estimate the average Canadian family (consisting of two or more people) will pay \$52,675 in total taxes—or 44.7 per cent of their \$117,731 income. Of the total amount of taxes paid, 53.2 per cent will go to the federal government.

If you paid all your taxes for 2019 up front, you'd give the government every dollar you earned before June 14, which is what we call Tax Freedom Day. After working the first 164 days of the year for government, you're finally working for yourself and your family.

Tax Freedom Day in 2015 arrived two days earlier, on June 12. For the average Canadian family, the federal portion of their total tax bill has increased by 10.5 per cent over the last four years. So the federal tax burden for Canadian families is higher today than when this government took office in 2015.

And the total tax burden on Canadian families grows even larger after we account

for the federal government's deficit problem.

Despite the increasing levels of taxation over the last four years, this government has not been able to fully finance its spending preferences. This year, the federal government is projected to spend nearly \$20 billion more than it collects in revenue.

Who will pay that \$20 billion?

Future taxpayers. A deficit today is nothing more than a tax deferred to a later date.

By kicking today's debt down the road, the federal government is passing the burden of repayment to young Canadian families. In fact, if Canadian governments at all levels raised taxes to balance their budgets instead of financing spending with budget deficits, Tax Freedom Day would arrive eight days later this year, on June 22..

The tax bill for the average family is rising and expected future tax increases will only exacerbate the issue.

Given the increasing tax burden on Canadian families, the government must re-evaluate its plans. So far, it has failed to deliver on the promise of meaningful tax relief.

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The Toronto Star

June 27, 2005

"Tax freedom day?" Not really

Neil Brooks and Linda McQuaig

Tax Freedom Day has come and gone. Feel any richer yet? Almost every cause has designated a day of the year to draw attention to its message, from World Leprosy Day to Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Day. Few, however, have enjoyed the success of Tax Freedom Day, an event that routinely prompts loud laments about the heavy tax burden weighing on Canadians.

This is a remarkable achievement on the part of the Fraser Institute, the right-wing think tank that promotes Tax Freedom Day (according to Fraser, it was yesterday) and has succeeded in presenting it as simply a day of public education about taxes. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

If anything, it's a day of public misinformation, in which the tax burden is grossly exaggerated and the nature of taxes hopelessly distorted.

The institute bills "Tax Freedom Day" as the day when the average Canadian family has earned enough to pay off its tax bill for the year. Only then, it says, will Canadians stop "working for the government."

So does this mean that, for the rest of the year, Canadians will be working for Loblaws, Canadian Tire, Shoppers Drug Mart and other places we'll spend our money? Of course, when we shop at these enterprises, we don't think of ourselves as employees, but as consumers buying things we need and want.

But our taxes also pay for things we need and want—health care, education, pensions, highways, police and fire services, libraries—that we've decided through our democratic system to pay for collectively. If we paid individually for these benefits on the open market, they'd cost us a lot more. In what sense is paying for public services that benefit us all a denial of freedom?

In calculating when Tax Freedom Day occurs, the institute further distorts the picture. It bases its calculations on a family's "cash income," rather than the more meaningful measure of a family's "total income." This shrinks the size of the family's income and makes the tax burden therefore seem heavier.

So, for instance, the institute determined last year that Tax Freedom Day fell on June 28, leaving Canadians with the impression they spent almost half the year "working for the government." But if the institute had used the more meaningful measure of "total income," Tax Freedom Day would have fallen near the end of April—about two months earlier.

For most Canadians, Tax Freedom Day arrives even earlier. That's because most Canadians have less income and pay less tax than the "average" family cited by the institute. The average includes well-to-do families, who are few in number but who, in some cases, have really big incomes and therefore pay more tax.

The institute's own numbers show that, for low-income earners, Tax Freedom Day would arrive in late February; for the huge group of those who straddle the middle range of incomes, Tax Freedom Day would arrive by mid-April.

The institute also calculates that our taxes have risen by a staggering 1,550 per cent since 1961. Sounds dramatic. But the number is essentially meaningless; it fails to take into account inflation and the real increase in Canadian incomes. Once these factors are accounted for, a different picture emerges: the effective tax rate in Canada has risen by about 40 per cent—not 1,550 per cent—in the last few decades.

Of course, over those decades, some major government programs have been established, including universal health insurance and the Canada Pension Plan. Failing to mention the extra government benefits we now receive is like complaining the family's Loblaw's bill is 40 per cent higher, without acknowledging the family now gets a lot more groceries on each shopping trip.

Unions have attempted to draw attention to how little tax corporations pay, noting that Corporate Tax Freedom Day would fall in late January. The concept has been attacked as an attempt by unions to advance an ideological agenda.

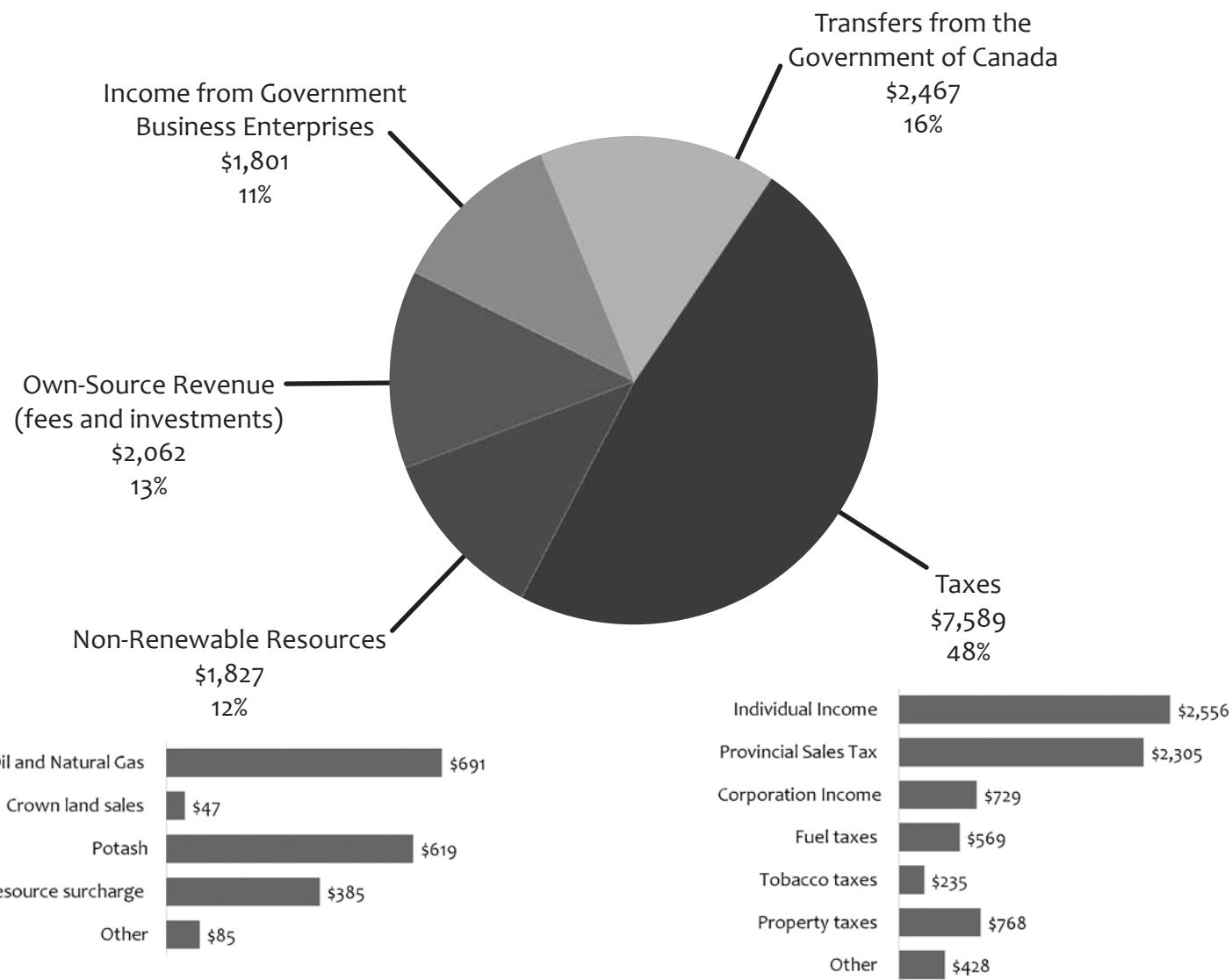
Oddly, however, the media seem blind to the blatantly ideological agenda of the Fraser Institute. And so it is that the institute's Tax Freedom Day is given extensive media coverage each year, while Corporate Tax Freedom Day gets about as much attention as Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Day.

Neil Brooks teaches tax law and policy at Osgoode Hall Law School. Linda McQuaig is a Toronto-based author and commentator.

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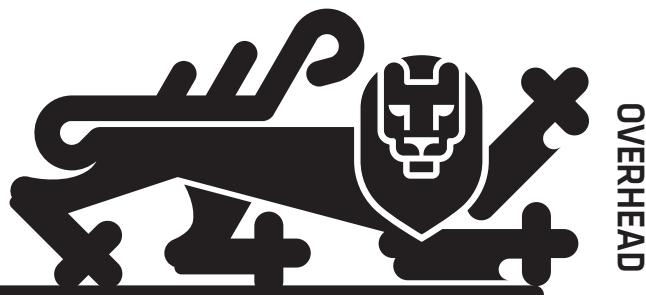
GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN REVENUE

(In millions of dollars)



TOTAL REVENUE: \$15.280 BILLION

Source: Government of Saskatchewan Provincial Budget 2019/2020



UNIVERSALITY VS. MEANS TESTING

Some people believe that government programs such as public pensions, child care plans, and pharmacare should be “means-tested.” In other words, if an individual is above a certain income level, they will not be eligible for the government program.

Other people believe that such government programs should be fully universal. In other words, regardless of income everyone qualifies for the program.

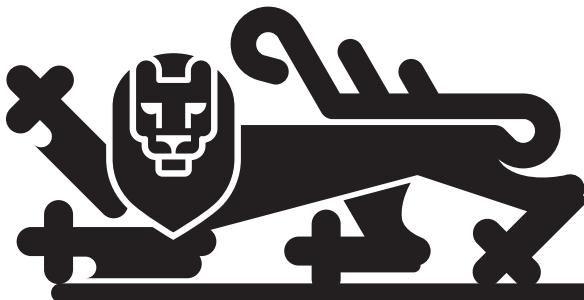
Arguments for universality include:

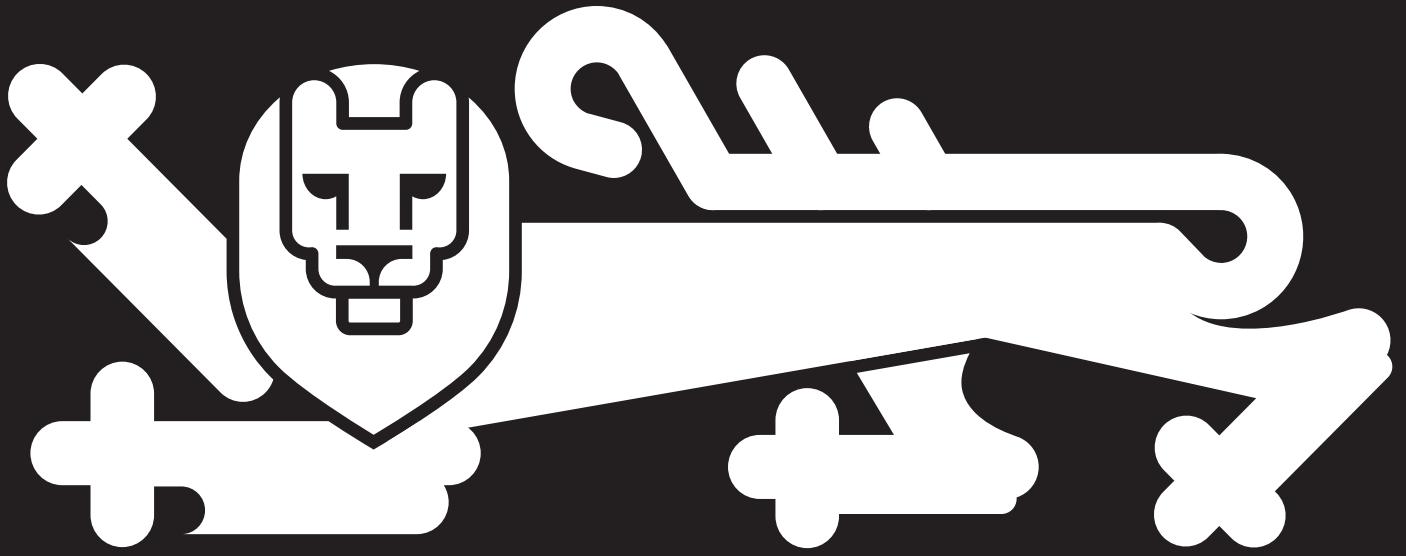
- progressive income tax already acts as a means test
- there are administrative costs to implement means tests
- shared experiences can lead to a stronger societal cohesion across classes

Arguments against universality include:

- programs for individual classes can build class solidarity
- there is higher overall cost when programs are universal
- the rich simply do not need extra benefits

What do you think? Should the wealthy be entitled to the same services and benefits as the poor? Some services but not others? No services whatsoever? Justify your position.





SECTION TWO

THE MECHANICS OF GOVERNMENT

LESSON 2.1

THE STRUCTURE OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE

OBJECTIVE

To understand how governments are elected and laws are made, students will learn about the structure of Saskatchewan's provincial government. The primary focus is the elected members of the legislature, but the Lieutenant Governor and the judiciary are also examined.

MATERIALS

[The Three Branches of Government](#)
[Saskatchewan's Governance: An Overview](#)
[Politician Names and Places](#)
[Considering MLAs and Ministries](#)

PROCEDURE

1. Use the overhead [The Three Branches of Government](#) to introduce governance in Saskatchewan.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What politicians can you name? (This is an opportunity to distinguish Canada's three levels of government, as well as First Nations governments, as defined in Lesson 1.2)
- What do you know about these people and the work they do?

2. To build on understandings of government and politicians, read [Saskatchewan's Governance: An Overview](#).

KEY QUESTIONS

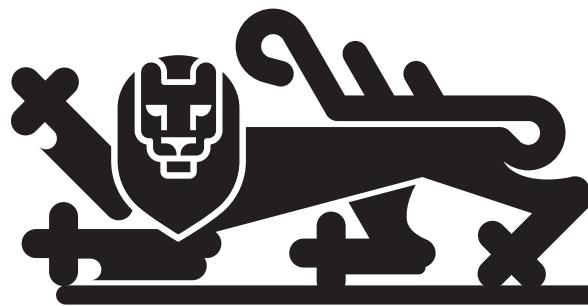
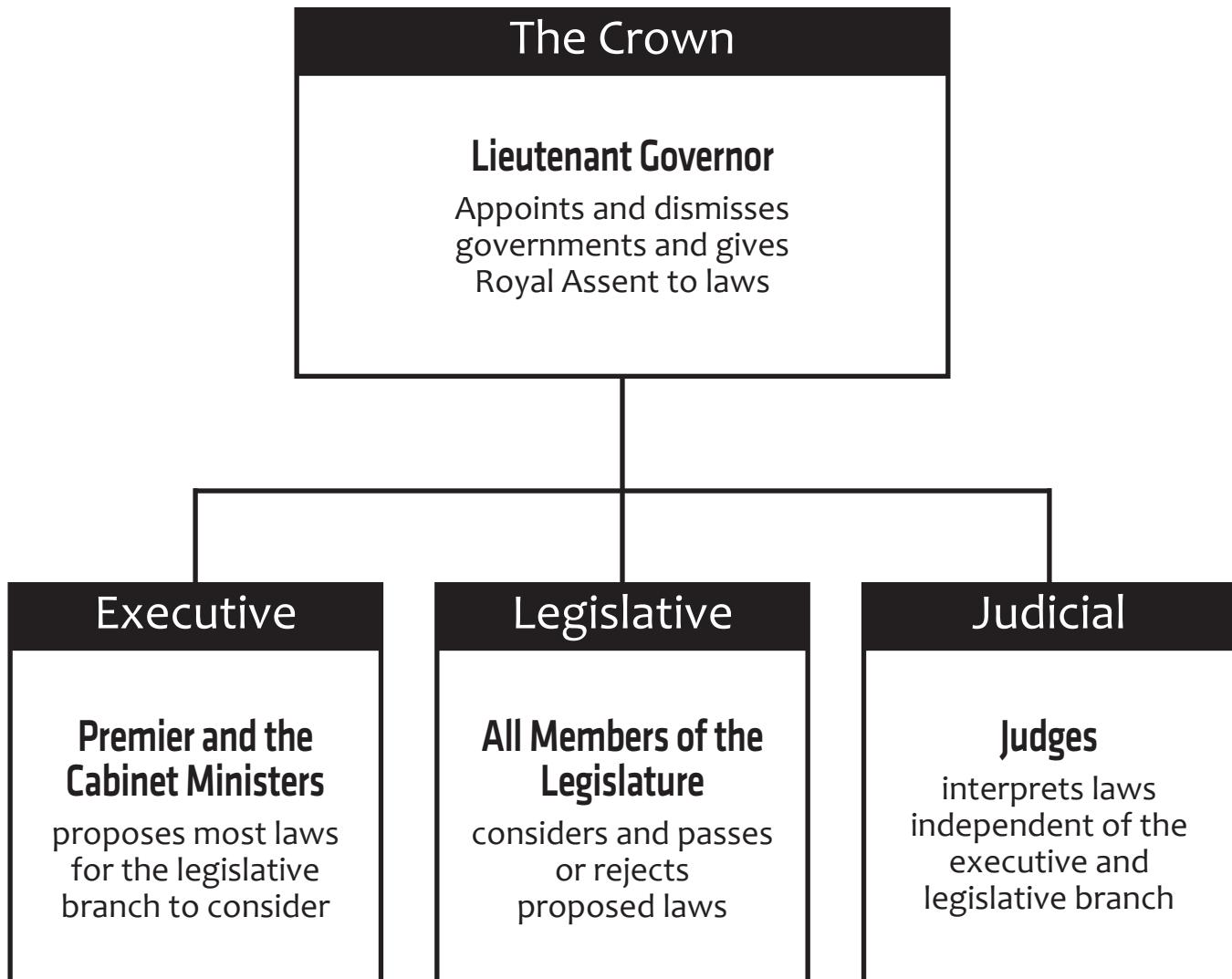
- Should elected representatives consider issues for the people, or consider issues with the people?
 - MLAs divide their time between the provincial legislature and the communities they represent. Have you seen or read about an MLA at work in the community? If so, where and how?
3. To learn about some of Saskatchewan's past MLAs and MLA candidates, assign [Politician Names and Places](#). Answers on page 106.
 4. To broaden understandings of government's functions and specific MLAs, assign [Considering MLAs and Ministries](#). Teachers may wish to assign specific MLAs and ministries.

NOTE: If this resource is being taught during an election period, this assignment should be adapted by profiling candidates for public office.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. For a closer examination of the judiciary's role in governance, check out *Canada's Legal System: An Introduction*. For an explanation of how judges are required to stay above the political fray, check out "Judges and the Rule of Law" in *Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Find both resources at [teachers.plea.org](#).
6. Class tours of Saskatchewan's Legislative Assembly are an excellent opportunity to better-understand provincial government. Learn more at [www.legassembly.sk.ca/visitors](#).
7. To understand similarities between Canada's colonial governance and the colonial governance of Ireland, check out *Reconsidering A Modest Proposal*. Find it at [teachers.plea.org](#).

THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT



SASKATCHEWAN'S GOVERNANCE: AN OVERVIEW

In Saskatchewan we elect people to be members of the legislative assembly (MLAs). This group makes up one branch of our government: the legislative branch. The legislative—together with the executive and the judicial—form our three branches of government. All of it is overseen by the British monarchy.

To understand this structure of governance requires a quick look to Canada's past. Following Columbus's "discovery" of the western world, European countries began to lay claim to various First Nations lands. Britain, France, Spain, Denmark, and Russia all made claims to parts of modern-day Canada. Slowly, Britain took control of the vast majority of the territory, through war, negotiation, and treaties. As the British gained dominance, they put in place governing institutions that recognised the British monarch (or Crown) as the head of state.

At first, Britain sent governors to rule their Canadian colonies. These governors were the highest authorities in the colonies: the representatives of the Crown. They set policy direction for the colony, generally following the instructions of the British government.

To help rule the colony, each governor would appoint an executive council. Executive councils performed much of the day-to-day work of governing and creating laws. However, their power was limited. The governor could instruct the executive council on what to do and had final say over their decisions.

As the colonies grew, government grew more complex. A significant step towards democracy in the colonies was the establishment of elected legislative assemblies. The first colonial legislature appeared in Nova Scotia in 1758. Property-owning men could now vote for representatives in government. The legislatures debated and voted on laws and policies. However, the power of the legislatures was limited: the executive and governor were free to ignore their wishes.

Political reformers wanted change. They thought that colonial governors had too much power. They believed that wealthy locals were too cozy with the governors. And most importantly, they believed that laws must be approved not just by the governor, but also by the legislature.

These beliefs gave rise in the 1830s to the responsible government movement. Responsible government is a system where the executive branch of government is responsible to the legislative branch. In other words, laws must be approved by legislative assemblies.

The responsible government movement was well-timed. In the mid-1800s, Britain was looking for ways to reduce their overseas commitments. The British saw responsible government as a way to slowly spin off their colonies, while keeping them loyal to the Crown. So with the support of Queen Victoria, in the 1840s the North American colonies were granted responsible government. Any law proposed by the executive council would now be approved or rejected by the legislature. To be sure, the British governor still retained the right of final approval, but only after the legislature had their say.

Responsible government remains in Canada and its provinces today. Generally, the executive proposes laws, the legislature approves or rejects the executive's proposals, and a governor representing the British monarchy—or Crown—signs laws into power.

In Saskatchewan, the Crown's tasks are the responsibility of the Lieutenant Governor. Like earlier times, our Lieutenant Governor is an appointed position. And like earlier times, the Lieutenant Governor is our head of state. However, the British no longer choose our Lieutenant Governor. Instead, the Prime Minister consults with the province, and together they recommended someone for the position. Canada's Governor General then appoints that person to a five-year term.



EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Saskatchewan's executive branch of government consists of the premier and cabinet ministers. The executive is generally chosen from elected members of the legislative assembly (MLAs). This branch of government proposes most of the laws considered by the legislature. It also oversees the civil service and the enforcement of provincial laws.

The Premier

The premier is the head of Saskatchewan's government. Usually, the premier is the leader of the political party with the most elected MLAs. The premier's duties include:

- selecting a cabinet,
- addressing the public on issues of provincial concern,
- representing the province and speaking on behalf of the province's citizens on a national level, and
- working with stakeholders (elected officials, community organisations, labour organisations, business owners, etc.) to advance the province's social and economic prosperity.

Cabinet Ministers

Each cabinet minister leads a department of government. They are chosen by the premier, based on their individual skills. However, when forming a cabinet as a whole—which generally consists of about twenty people—consideration is given to such things as gender, ethnicity, occupation, and geographic representation. This is done so that the cabinet better-reflects the diversity of Saskatchewan.

There is no law stating a person must be elected to the legislature to serve in cabinet. Eleven people have served in Saskatchewan's cabinets without being elected to the legislature. Perhaps the most interesting example is the story of Herb Pinder.

In the May 1964 general election, Herb Pinder narrowly won the constituency of Hanley as the Liberal candidate, over the incumbent CCF candidate Robert Walker. Premier Thatcher immediately appointed Pinder as Minister of Industry and Information.

A recount revealed Pinder had actually lost to Walker by two votes. Pinder thus lost his seat in the legislature, and Walker became the MLA for Hanley.

The Liberals questioned the neutrality of the recount. Pinder remained in cabinet, and the Liberals went to court to ask that the election result for the Hanley constituency be declared null and void.

Rather than having questions linger about the legitimacy of his victory as the courts considered the case, Walker resigned the seat. The resignation meant a by-election would have to be called. Pinder and Walker again faced off in a December contest. Walker won by 744 votes, so Pinder resigned his cabinet position and returned to private life.

Even Pinder had remarked that his time in cabinet was rather unremarkable. Nevertheless, his seven-month reign made him Saskatchewan's longest-serving unelected cabinet minister.

SASKATCHEWAN'S GOVERNANCE: AN OVERVIEW... CONTINUED

Cabinet ministers do not have to be from the governing party. In fact, it is not even necessary for a cabinet minister to be an MLA. However, they almost always are. Their duties include:

- overseeing the development of new laws to be considered by the legislature,
- responsibility to the legislature for the actions and management of their department, and
- representing their department to the public.

When a cabinet minister has an idea for a new law, they present it to the cabinet as a whole. If they approve of the concept, then a bill will be written by lawyers in that ministry. The bill can then be presented to the legislature for consideration.

Discuss

1. What kind of qualities would you want our premier to have?
2. The cabinet is the most politically-powerful group of people in the province. Why is it important that when a premier selects the cabinet, the group as a whole is broadly reflective of the provincial population?

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

From a purely democratic perspective, the legislative branch is the most important branch of our government. It is made up of 61 MLAs. These 61 MLAs include the twenty or so people who are appointed to the executive branch of government.

The legislative branch is responsible for considering the laws proposed by the executive, then passing or rejecting those laws. Every MLA is also responsible for acting in the interests of the residents of their constituency. This may involve handling complaints about government services, and advocating for programs that advance their community. However, they cannot simply put their community over the well-being of the province as a whole.

As a principal of parliamentary democracy, the executive is accountable to the legislative. This helps ensure that the people remain supreme: the premier and cabinet must answer to elected MLAs.

The Opposition Leader and Shadow Cabinet

The party with the second-most elected representatives usually forms the official opposition. Called Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the opposition—while generally opposed to the government's policies—are still loyal to the Crown. As such, they act in the manner which they believe to be in the best interest of the province.

One of the duties of the leader of the opposition is to scrutinise the actions taken by the government. To help accomplish this, several opposition MLAs are assigned critic roles. Together, the opposition leader and critics form a shadow cabinet. They follow the actions of their government counterparts to ensure the province is being governed well.

The opposition is often viewed as the government in waiting. Their goal is to gain enough support to win the next election and form the government. Thus, in addition to criticising the government, opposition parties propose alternative ideas for how the province should be run.



Speaker of the House

The Speaker of the House is the MLA chosen to be the legislative assembly's presiding officer. The speaker impartially oversees the legislature's debates and votes, ensuring they follow established rules. As well, the speaker is responsible for overseeing many administrative functions of the legislative assembly. The speaker is chosen by all MLAs through a secret ballot.

Unlike all other MLAs, the speaker does not normally vote on legislation. The exception is if there is a tie vote. If this is the case, the speaker must cast a vote to break the tie. The precedent is that the speaker will vote for the status quo. This means the vote will be cast so that as little change happens as possible.

Discuss

1. Members of the opposition occasionally will support government initiatives. Similarly, at times MLAs from the governing party will support opposition ideas. Why must MLAs consider the merits and drawbacks of each issue presented to them, regardless of whose idea it is?
2. The speaker ensures rules are followed in the legislative assembly. Why is it vital that we have an orderly way to debate and create laws?

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The judicial branch is made up of judges. It is independent of the legislative and executive branches of government. Because no written law can possibly envelop every possible circumstance, the judicial branch is responsible for interpreting the laws passed by the legislative branch, when cases come before the court.

Judges are not elected in Canada. Instead, they are appointed by the Governor General upon advice of the Prime Minister in the case of federal courts, and by the Lieutenant Governor upon advice of the premier in the case of provincial courts. One reason why we appoint judges is so they are free to make fair decisions, based on the facts of each case and what the law says. Judges do not have make decisions based on popular will of the day. Nor do they make decisions to please supporters and campaign contributors. Instead, their decisions are based on the law and what other judges ruled in earlier, similar cases.

Because judges are independent of the legislative and executive branches, they protect the rule of law. The rule of law is the idea that we all must follow the law. If citizens believe government or a particular elected representative is breaking the law, the judiciary can be a neutral arbiter. Put another way, the judiciary helps ensure that everyone in government respects the law.

Discuss

1. Canada's judges are appointed. They may keep their jobs until the age of 75. Do you think electing judges would make them more concerned about making popular rather than correct decisions?
2. In some cases, a judge's decision can be appealed to a higher court. The higher court can overturn the lower court's decision. How do appeals ensure that laws are properly interpreted by judges?

POLITICIAN NAMES AND PLACES

Buildings, public infrastructure, and other landmarks are often named in honour of people who committed their lives to public service. Match the past MLAs or candidates for MLA in Saskatchewan with the place bearing their name.

1. _____ Saskatchewan's first female MLA, she successfully ran for office in 1918 to replace her husband, the MLA for Pelly who died from the Spanish Flu pandemic.
 2. _____ The province's first Minister of Agriculture and founder of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, he became the federal Minister of Agriculture in Mackenzie King's Liberal government.
 3. _____ The long-time MLA served the Tisdale constituency from 1938 to 1967. He is recognised as a pioneer in the growth and development of Saskatchewan's potash, oil and uranium industries.
 4. _____ A former Regina teacher and principal, he became the first Minister of Finance in Tommy Douglas's CCF government.
 5. _____ In his early years, he helped found the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and the Prince Albert Board of Trade and Agriculture Society. In government he established the Department of Co-Operation, spurring significant growth in the cooperatives and credit unions.
 6. _____ While many consider him Saskatchewan's most controversial premier, he came to power on the then-biggest landslide victory in the province's history.
 7. _____ This former teacher and leader of the Saskatchewan Progressive Conservative Party went on to serve as a member of the House of Commons from 1958 to 1988, losing only one election in that period.
 8. _____ This former Prime Minister was a perpetual loser at elections. Other than a successful run for Wakaw village council, he failed to win a mayoral race in Prince Albert, lost in two provincial elections, and failed at two federal races for MP. He finally became an MP in 1940 in a constituency in which he had never lived.
 9. _____ Following World War II, Saskatoon sent two MLAs to the provincial legislature. These two CCF MLAs were elected in Saskatoon in 1944, one worked towards restorative justice programs in Saskatchewan's prisons, the other was a supporter of organised labour.
 10. _____ This leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party began his life in politics as a city councillor and ended it as a senator.
- a) Brockelbank Place, Tisdale
 - b) Grant Devine Dam, near Alameda
 - c) Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker Bridge, Prince Albert
 - d) C. F. Fines Building, Regina
 - e) Motherwell Building, Regina.
 - f) Dave G. Steuart Arena, Prince Albert
 - g) Sturdy-Stone Building, Saskatoon
 - h) Francis Alvin George Hamilton Building, Regina
 - i) Ramsland Building, Yorkton
 - j) L. F. McIntosh Building, Prince Albert



CONSIDERING MLAS AND MINISTRIES

Your assignment is a two-fold activity to learn more about MLAs and Ministries.

PART ONE: PROFILES

A) Profile of an MLA

Select a member of the legislative assembly from either the governing or opposition side. Create a professional profile of this person. The profile could include:

- volunteer and community experience
- academic background
- work or business experience
- beliefs and values
- applicable aspects of their personal interests
- their ideal vision for Saskatchewan

B) Profile of a Ministry

Select a government ministry in Saskatchewan. Links to all major government departments can be found at www.saskatchewan.ca/government. Create an introduction to the ministry. The profile could include:

- what services the ministry is in charge of or directly offers
- who are the people, community organisations, or businesses that benefit from this ministry's services
- examples of major undertakings or initiatives of the ministry

PART TWO: MLA - MINISTRY MIX / MATCH

Now that you and your classmates have information on both a ministry and an MLA, you need to find matches for each. Rotate through the classroom, sharing your research information with classmates. You will need to accomplish two things:

- For your selected MLA, find a ministry that is suited to that person's skill set and justify your decision. If your chosen MLA is already a cabinet minister, choose a different ministry.
- For your selected ministry, find an MLA that would make a good cabinet minister for that department. Justify the reasons as to why this MLA is suited to the ministry.



LESSON 2.2

CREATING LAWS IN SASKATCHEWAN

OBJECTIVE

Students will understand how provincial governments create statutory laws.

MATERIALS

[How Laws are Made](#)
[Private Member's Bills in Saskatchewan](#)

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Statutory Law vs. Common Law

Most of us think that the laws in Canada are passed by the legislative branch of government: parliament or provincial legislatures. And we're right, because most of the important laws on the books are pieces of legislation—or statutes—which are examined, debated and passed by our elected representatives.

Some statutes passed by Saskatchewan's legislature are *The Education Act*, which frames how Kindergarten to Grade 12 education is provided in Saskatchewan, or *The Consumer Protection and Business Practices Act*, which sets out obligations and responsibilities of businesses and consumers in their transactions.

Governments try to make statutes that are easy to understand and that apply to many situations. This is often a difficult task. The words or phrases used in a law may not always be clear. The judicial branch of government may be asked to interpret or define the meaning of these words. When

judges interpret a statute, they are using a system of justice known as common law or case law.

Common law—the practice of looking at judges' past decisions to make a ruling—comes from a time in England before there was a parliament with the power to pass legislation. Then, judges applied a common standard of rules to all cases heard in the country. These rules originated from local customs. Under common law, a judge deciding a case was bound by an earlier judge's decision in a similar case in the same or higher court. These earlier decisions set precedents.

The practice of using previous decisions as a guide is part of the Canadian legal system today. When judges are asked to interpret laws, they look at the decisions of other judges in earlier cases. Similar legal problems are decided similarly, and lower courts will follow higher court decisions. This ensures consistency in the law.

Let's look at a simple example. Suppose the provincial government wanted a park where citizens could, by law, enjoy nature in peace. To help achieve this goal, they passed a law stating "No team sports may be played in the park." The law may seem clear enough at first. However, questions may arise in certain situations. Would the law apply to four people throwing a frisbee, a relay team informally practising for a track meet, or a group of children playing tag? It might not be easy to decide. If there was an earlier case in which a judge had ruled that young children's activities or other informal games are not "team sports" that decision would act as a precedent for how a judge could decide on a game of tag. Judges will also look at what the lawmakers intended the law to do when it was passed.

This simple example helps illustrate that interpreting the law is rarely a straightforward matter. Most laws require interpretation, which is done by the judicial branch of government.

PROCEDURE

1. Review the purpose of having laws in society, as discussed in Lesson 1.2.
2. Read [How Laws are Made](#).

KEY QUESTIONS

- **Why is it valuable to review proposed laws three times?**
- **What is the purpose of using committees to review bills after second reading?**

3. To consider the role of private member's bills, assign [Private Member's Bills in Saskatchewan](#). Answer to question 2 on page 106.
4. To explain the judiciary's role in interpreting laws passed by the legislature, return to Lesson 2.1's overhead [The Three Branches of Government](#) in conjunction with this lesson's background information.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. For additional consideration of the difficulties in interpreting laws, check out the activity No Vehicles in the Park. Find it at teachers.blea.org.
6. For historical perspective on the development of statutes, check out *Hammurabi's Code*. Find it at teachers.blea.org.

HOW LAWS ARE MADE

Laws help maintain order in our society. Because of this, it should come as no surprise that an orderly process is necessary to create laws. Unlike a dictatorship where leaders can rule by decree, Saskatchewan has a defined process to guide the creation of laws, from their first idea to becoming rules we are expected to obey.

When a law is first proposed, it is called a bill. Bills are most often brought forward by a minister of the government. Backbench and opposition MLAs can also propose bills, provided that they do not contain financial provisions.

Bills are not created on a whim. They usually are developed through a larger planning process.

In a democracy the will of the people sets the course for government. Generally, the governing party's election platform and ideology sets the stage for what kinds of laws the government will attempt to pass.

Winning an election gives the government a mandate from the people to implement their agenda. The first legislative step to develop their agenda of laws is the Speech from the Throne. The Speech from the Throne does not contain any specific bills. Instead, it outlines the government's coming priorities.

The legislature will vote on the speech. If they approve, the government may go forward with their law-making plans. If the legislature rejects the speech, the government falls. This means a new government must be put in place: The Lieutenant Governor will either ask an opposition party to form government, or allow for a new provincial election.

Ideas introduced in the Speech from the Throne are worked into specific bills by a policy and planning division of the government. They create a legislative proposal. It outlines in more detail what the law is meant to accomplish. Once the legislative proposal is completed, a lawyer who specialises in writing legislation drafts the actual proposed law, or bill. At this point it is ready for consideration by the legislature.

A bill is considered in three stages, called readings. It is worth pointing out that there is no actual "reading" of the bill in the legislature: copies of it are distributed so that MLAs and the public may consider the proposed law.

FIRST READING

After a law is developed and drafted, the bill is introduced in the legislature. This is called first reading. There is no debate or vote at this point. The bill is simply introduced so that MLAs may begin examining it.



SECOND READING

The next stage is called second reading. The minister or MLA proposing the bill explains what it is supposed to achieve. At this stage the principle and objective of the bill are debated. There usually will be no debate of the bill's finer points.

If a bill passes a vote at second reading, it is referred to committee. In committee, a group of MLAs examines it in more detail. Some of the reasons why the committee stage is crucial for creating good laws include:

- committees can examine and consider a bill in greater detail
- committees are able to call in experts to discuss a bill so that they may learn more about its purpose and implications
- committees are able to propose and debate amendments to a bill

While the public pays little attention to committees, they are vital for creating good laws. Thorough and properly-functioning committee work prevents society from being saddled with poorly-thought-out laws.

If the Lieutenant Governor has concerns about a bill passed by the legislature, they have two options to stall or stop the bill.

The Lieutenant Governor's first option is to refuse royal assent. This means the bill must be reintroduced in the legislature and be reconsidered.

Refusal of royal assent is virtually unprecedented in the modern history of the British Monarchy. The last time it was used in the United Kingdom was by Queen Anne in 1707. In Canada, the only time it was used was in Prince Edward Island in 1945.

The Lieutenant Governor's other option is the reservation of royal assent. If a bill is "reserved," it will be reviewed by the Governor General, who will rely upon the advice of the federal cabinet to determine whether or not it should become law.

Reservation of royal assent was originally intended so that the federal government could intervene in legislation that threatened the interests of the country as a whole. It has been used 79 times in Canada, mostly in the early nation-building days before 1900.

Only once has Saskatchewan's Lieutenant Governor practised the right of reservation. In 1961, the Woodrow Lloyd government passed Bill 56, *The Alteration of Certain Minerals Contracts*. Lieutenant Governor Frank Bastedo had doubts about the validity of the bill. He also wondered if the bill was in the public interest. Bastedo's advisors told him that the bill was constitutionally valid. Nevertheless, he reserved Bill 56 and sent it to the Governor General.

Following protocol, the Governor General turned to the federal cabinet for advice. The Diefenbaker government's cabinet passed an order in council (a motion created by cabinet and carried out by the Governor General) to give Bill 56 royal assent. This was the last time reservation of royal assent has been used anywhere in Canada.

THIRD READING

After the committee stage, the bill in its final shape is again presented to the legislature. This is its third reading. At third reading, MLAs vote on the bill. If the bill is passed, it is ready to become law.

To actually become a law, bills must receive royal assent. This is the signing of the bill by the Lieutenant Governor on behalf of the Crown.

Most bills become law when they receive royal assent. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, provisions are written into a bill specifying the date it will become law. Other times, bills will not become law until the Lieutenant Governor is instructed by cabinet to put the law into force.

CLOSURE

There are normally no limitations on the length of time that a bill can be debated in the Saskatchewan legislature. The purpose of debate is to critically analyse and bring about public awareness of bills. This is why debate is normally allowed to go on for as long as is required to understand legislation. However, a procedure called closure can be enacted to limit the amount of time for debating a measure. Closure can be enacted if the majority of MLAs agree.

Closure had never been used in Saskatchewan until August 7th, 1989. The government was attempting to pass legislation to privatise the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. The opposition had planned to carry on the debate for as long as possible to stop the privatisation, a strategy that is called a “filibuster.” It became the longest debate over a piece of legislation in provincial history. To stop the filibuster, the government passed a motion to limit all stages of the debate on the privatisation bill to three days.

Discuss

1. Can you envision an instance where the Lieutenant Governor would withhold Royal Assent on a bill passed by the democratically-elected legislature? What would be the consequences of such a decision?
2. There is usually little chance of a private member’s bill becoming law. Why would a member propose legislation?
3. Think back to the idea of democracy, especially the concept that the majority gets its way only after the minority has its say. Even if it is a foregone conclusion that a majority of MLAs will support a bill, why must that bill be thoroughly debated?



PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILLS IN SASKATCHEWAN

The following are just a few private member's bills that have been presented to the legislature in Saskatchewan for consideration. Not all of these have become law.

1. Bill 609 (2010) - *The Whistleblower Protection Act*

granted Saskatchewan's public sector employees protection from reprisal for reporting wrongdoing in their workplace.

2. Bill 201 (2006) - *The Bio-diesel Fuel Act*

required minimum amounts of bio-diesel fuel blends to be used in Saskatchewan.

3. Bill 227 (1999) - *The Grain Elevators Sales Act*

required sellers of grain elevators to locally advertise its sale, and if any offer was rejected an arbitrator could decide if the offer price was fair.

4. Bill 617 (2010) - *The Protection of Service Animals Act*

prohibited the touching, feeding, impeding, or interfering with service animals such as guide dogs, helper monkeys, or police dogs.

5. Bill 612 (2010) - *The Earth Day Recognition Act*

formally designated April 22nd as Earth Day in Saskatchewan.

6. Bill 603 (2012) - *The Seniors' Bill of Rights Act*

declared rights of Senior Citizens, including freedom to plan their own lives, protection from abuse and neglect, and a right to long-term care regardless of income.

7. Bill 618 (2018) - *The Saskatchewan Strategy for Suicide Prevention Act*

required a provincial suicide prevention strategy that would be evaluated annually.

8. Bill 602 (2012) - *The School Bus Drivers of Saskatchewan Appreciation Day Act*

formally designated a day to appreciate the work of school bus drivers.

9. Bill 606 (2009) - *The Protection of the Wild Ponies of the Bronson Forest Act*

gave protected status to the wild ponies in the Bronson Forest north of Lloydminster.

10. Bill 612 (2015) - *The Respect for Diversity—Student Bill of Rights Act*

declared rights of public school students, including positive and safe environments, freedom of expression, and the freedom to establish safe and inclusive activities and groups.

Discuss

1. Decide in principle if each law would be a good idea, and explain why.
2. Have any of these bills become law?
3. Even if a private member's bill does not pass, do you see a purpose in it being proposed and debated in the legislature?
4. Is it important that private members and not just the cabinet and premier are able to put forth legislation?
5. Private member's bills cannot oblige the government to spend money. Why do you think this is? Do you think this is fair?
6. If you were an MLA, what kind of private member's bill would you put forth?

LESSON 2.3

OPPOSITION PARTIES

OBJECTIVE

To understand the role that loyal opposition plays in Saskatchewan's governance, the concepts of how opposition parties hold the government to account will be explored.

MATERIALS

Question Period—Debate or Spectacle?

Considering Question Period

Video of Question Period

Hansard Question Period proceedings

PROCEDURE

1. Briefly reconsider the role of a member of the legislature. Discussion points can include the countless hours they spend in the legislative chamber, in committee meetings, in meetings with various community and business groups, and meeting citizens in their constituencies. Then point out that a great deal of media coverage of politicians and almost all coverage of legislative proceedings focuses on the half-hour window of the day, known as Question Period.

2. Read Question Period—Debate or Spectacle?

KEY QUESTIONS

- Question Period has been called political theatre. Does the emphasis on political theatre help propel good performers into public office, regardless if they have good ideas?

3. View Question Period for the activity Considering Question Period. Find it live and archived at www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/watch-legislative-proceedings. Transcripts are found in Hansard at www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/debates-hansard.

4. To illustrate that much of the work legislators do is tedious and rather non-acrimonious, share a brief clip of a legislative committee meeting, possibly one that links to a relevant current event. Find live and archived committee meetings at www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/watch-legislative-proceedings.

KEY QUESTION

- Would public debate be better-served if the media and the public paid more attention to legislative debates and committee meetings, and less attention to Question Period?

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. Students interested in learning and practising parliamentary procedure can check out Saskatchewan Youth Parliament at www.facebook.com/saskatchewanyp.
6. Students interested in learning speech and debate skills can check out The Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association (SEDA) at www.saskdebate.ca.

QUESTION PERIOD—DEBATE OR SPECTACLE?

Government and opposition parties spend much time discussing and debating laws in the legislative chamber, in committees, and in the community. Perhaps the best-known of these discussions is the thirty minutes set aside every day for Question Period. This is a forum where the opposition parties question the government on issues of the day.

Question Period was introduced to the Saskatchewan legislature in 1976 on an experimental basis, at about the same time it was introduced in the House of Commons in Ottawa. Following a successful trial period, it was formally made part of routine proceedings on November 22nd of that year.

Because Question Period is sometimes more a performance than a substantial debate, it is sometimes thought of as political theatre.

The goal of the opposition is to eventually form government, so their questions in Question Period are often simply designed to discredit the government and its policies. They try to catch the government off-guard, and point out differences between what the government has said it will do and what it is actually doing. The government has no advance warning of what the questions will be.

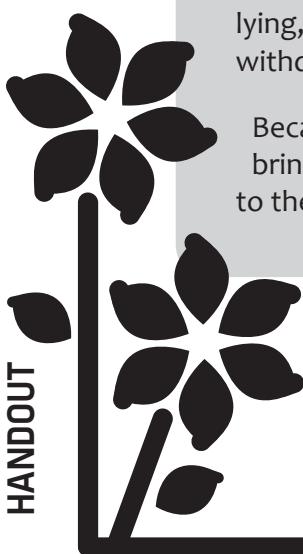
Questions are usually based on current events. In preparation for each question period, advisors for the opposition and the government monitor provincial trends, largely through mainstream and social media.

While the questions in Question Period are to the government, like all procedures in the legislature, MLAs must direct statements to the Speaker of the House. In fact, members must not refer to each other by name. Instead, they refer to one-another by title, such as the Minister of Labour or the Leader of the Opposition. If the MLA has no title, then they are referred to by their constituency, such as the Member from Cannington. This keeps with parliamentary tradition: it is a sign of respect and helps to avoid personalising debate.

During procedures in the legislature, members are immune from slander or libel laws. This means they are free to make statements about other members without fear of legal repercussions. This does not mean, however, that MLAs can say anything they wish. If MLAs use unparliamentary language—such as swearing or accusing other members of lying—they will be asked by the speaker to retract the statement.

In 2005, a new recording system was installed in the legislature. Shortly after, a microphone picked up the agriculture critic referring to the deputy premier as a “lying s.o.b.” This broke two protocols of parliamentary language: accusing another member of lying, and uttering an obscenity. The speaker asked the agriculture critic to apologise and withdraw his remarks.

Because good humour is not considered unparliamentary, the agriculture critic was able to bring levity to the situation. He began his apology by saying “First of all kudos, Mr. Speaker, to the new sound system in the Assembly and to whoever designed and installed it.”



CONSIDERING QUESTION PERIOD

It is often said that there is a reason why Question Period is not called Answer Period. Consider the following questions while you watch Question Period and/or follow along with a copy of *Hansard*.

1. Do you think the questions dealt with important issues? Should different matters have been raised?
2. Did the responses seem relevant to the questions?
3. If questions were not answered, what techniques were used to avoid answering?
4. Did the opposition listen to the government's response, or just move on to their next question?
5. Did you notice theatrics by opposition or government members? If so, what?
6. Did the Speaker of the House have to intervene and ask for order?
7. Consider Question Period as a whole. Does it serve a valuable function for our democracy?



ACTIVITY

LESSON 2.4

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about traditional media's role in scrutinising government, and consider why citizens should scrutinise the media itself.

MATERIALS

[Traditional Media and Political Coverage](#)
[Editorials and Opinions](#)

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Brief History of Journalism

We may expect journalism to be a neutral, objective, and non-partisan account of events. However, this is not consistent with journalism's history. Media historian Robert McChesney explored this issue in *The Political Economy of Media*.

According to McChesney, journalism has a history of partisanship. In fact, that was its original purpose. Prior to 1900, countless newspapers permeated society with different ideological ideas. Freedom of the press was meant to preserve every newspaper's right to disseminate its political opinion. Government even subsidised printing and mailing costs for all newspapers to ensure diversity of opinion. McChesney noted that a "partisan press system has much to offer a democratic society as long as there are numerous well-subsidized media providing a broad range of opinions" (p. 27). By the end of the nineteenth century, every major North American city had

several newspapers, each espousing their owner's political viewpoints.

However, the press transformed by the end of the 19th century. The primary purpose of newspaper publishers shifted from disseminating ideas to becoming a profit-based business. To achieve this new purpose, owners consolidated papers to increase the efficiency and reach of advertising. Papers shut down, and the remaining ones generally espoused the viewpoints of business interests. Ideologies that did not put a primary focus on profit began to vanish from newspapers.

Critique emerged about how this new business model silenced broader political debate. A groundbreaking study was Upton Sinclair's 1919 book *The Brass Check*. It exposed how the journalism of the few newspapers that were left simply promoted the values and desires of newspaper owners, the owners' bankers, and the paper's advertisers. Gone was the ideological diversity of the 1800s.

Owners recognised the need for their newspapers to appear neutral. If newspapers could be seen as trustworthy sources of information, readers would not have to worry that media consolidation was leading to a monopoly on news provision in their community. Thus, a push began to create schools of journalism. The theory was that trained editors and journalists who were granted autonomy from the newspaper owners could hold professional standards that would separate the owner's political beliefs from the news. McChesney observed that:

over time it has become clear that there was one problem with the theory of professional journalism, an insurmountable one at that. The claim that it was possible to provide neutral and objective news was suspect, if not entirely bogus. Decision making is an inescapable part of the journalism process, and some values have to be promoted when deciding why one story rates front-page treatment while another is ignored. This does not mean that some journalism cannot be more nonpartisan or more accurate than others; it certainly does not mean that nonpartisan and accurate journalism should not have a prominent role to play in a democratic society. It only means that journalism cannot actually be neutral or objective, and unless one acknowledges that, it is impossible to detect the values at play that determine what becomes news, and what does not. (p. 30)

Media ownership, according to McChesney, has structural power that latently if not overtly shapes the news content we see.

PROCEDURE

1. Play the Whisper Game to consider the shortcomings of second-hand information. Have a student write down a statement, then whisper it to their neighbour. The next student will whisper it to their neighbour, and so on. Compare what the final student heard to what was originally said. Use this to illustrate that news coverage is second-hand information.
2. Read Traditional Media and Political Coverage as a class.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What kind of Saskatchewan-specific news sources are available in your community?
- What are the qualities and weaknesses of traditional media?

3. Read Editorials and Opinions as a class.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Editorial stances and the opinions of media owners—in theory—are not supposed to impact the work of journalists. Do you think this is the case in practice?
- Should media outlets that offer opinions be obliged to provide a balanced diversity of opinions?

4. Summarise topics of this lesson with a wider class discussion of the question:

Do you trust the news in traditional media?

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. For an in-depth case study of the media's role in shaping common sense see “Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Damage and the Reporting” in *70 Years of the Bomb*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL COVERAGE

Citizens cannot be present at every government meeting, or hope to understand all the goings-on in their community. Yet, for citizens to make well-informed political choices, we need to know what is happening. This is why society relies on the media. It helps us learn about our community, stay informed of what governments are doing, and keep powerful institutions in check. Because the media provides such vital information, they can significantly influence our beliefs and decisions.

In order to provide accurate knowledge, the media must be able to pursue stories free of government interference. Because freedom of the press is an essential cornerstone of democracy, it is enshrined in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Saskatchewan has several traditional media outlets that help inform us. Many communities are served by weekly newspapers. These papers predominantly are owned locally. There also are larger daily newspapers, and major radio and TV stations. They predominantly are owned by large corporations. In addition, some communities have not-for-profit community radio stations.

There is also the public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada. It differs from other traditional media outlets because it is owned by the public. The CBC was created by the federal government in 1936, in the face of expanding broadcast technology. It is mandated to provide all of Canada with culture and information programs. Because CBC/Radio-Canada is a public service, it can act as a counterbalance to corporate and American media interests.

HOLDING GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT

One particular strength of traditional media is its ability to cover news from the legislature. This is largely due to the press gallery. The press gallery is a group of reporters with special access to the legislature. Reporters or media organisations pay a fee to join, and are given access to offices in the legislature to report on the government. All major media outlets in Saskatchewan have membership.

The reporters of the press gallery play an important role in democracy. Their first-hand accounts of the legislature acts as society's window into government. They watch question period, legislative proceedings and committee work. They also take part in scrums, an unstructured questioning of politicians that often takes place in the hallways of the legislature. Because they are based out of the legislature, they are also better-positioned to engage in investigative reporting that holds the government to account. Saskatchewan's political journalists work hard to provide a balanced perspective on the events of the day.

However, most members of the press gallery only cover the legislature part-time, popping in and out of the legislature as need be. Only a few reporters work out of the legislature's press gallery offices full time.

During elections, the nature of political coverage changes. The leaders of major political parties spend most of their time touring the province. Reporters are embedded with each leader's tour, reporting on their activities and announcements. Meanwhile, candidates spend their time campaigning in their constituencies. These activities are often covered by local media.

MEDIA BIAS?

It is easy to find complaints about the "liberal media," a largely American idea that the media favours left-wing perspectives. It is true that decision-making is part of any news gathering and news reporting process. Certain issues and ideas will be brought to the forefront while other issues and ideas will be neglected. Because choices must be



TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL COVERAGE... CONTINUED

made in what will be reported, there will always be some degree of bias in the media, no matter how responsible reporters are in trying to get the facts right. Some stories will get more attention. Some stories will get less attention. Some stories will get no attention whatsoever. And within all these stories, not every perspective can be discussed.

However, countless studies have found that the primary driver of news bias is the corporate interests of the media's ownership. Given that media's owners are ultimately responsible for creating publications and programs and choosing who works there, some bias towards the ownership is to be expected.

Because no single news report or single news outlet can possibly envelop every perspective on every issue, it is important to seek out multiple sources. By reading multiple reports of the same news story, we will be better-equipped to form opinions on the news of the day.

Discuss

1. By law, Canadian media is almost entirely Canadian-owned. Do you think it is important to restrict foreign ownership of our media?
2. Choose a news story about a current Saskatchewan political issue. Find many different sources to compare the coverage.
 - a) What elements of the story have been reported by all media outlets?
 - b) What elements are in some stories but not others?
 - c) Are there issues related to this story that are completely absent from all coverage?
 - d) Do you see any evidence of a bias towards any particular perspective?
 - e) If there are differences in the news stories, can you think of reasons why this would be?

Journalist independence is important to democracy. Journalists should be free to pursue their stories without interference from the government. Just as importantly, journalists should be free to pursue their stories without direct interference from owners of the media. This principle was tested in a dispute between Bell Media, the company that owns CTV, and the CRTC, Canada's broadcasting regulator.

In March 2015, the CRTC ruled that cable TV companies—including Bell Media—must make major changes to their offerings, including offering low-cost basic cable packages. This infuriated Richard Crull, Bell Media's president.

Crull called the head of CTV News. He decreed that CRTC chairman Jean-Pierre Blais was not to appear on any news coverage of the ruling. A 5:00pm interview with Blais on CTV News Channel was cancelled. As well, stories on 6:00 CTV newscasts across the country excluded Blais. However, senior CTV reporters felt that Blais's perspective must be part of a story about a CRTC ruling. They defied Crull, and included Blais on CTV National News at 11:00 that night.

Learning of Crull's interference, Blais put out a stern press release. It said, in part:

One of the pillars of Canada's broadcasting system—and, in fact, of our country's democracy—is that journalists are able to report news stories independently and without undue editorial influence.... An informed citizenry cannot be sacrificed for a company's commercial interests.

Crull apologised. However, Bell Media fired him less than three weeks later.

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Editorials and opinion pieces are different than regular news stories. They are designed to share a perspective and influence beliefs.

Opinion pieces are easily found in most newspapers. The writers—often called columnists—will share their opinions on events of the day. For example, the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* and Regina *Leader-Post* feature regular columns by writers such as Doug Cuthand and Murray Mandryk, who offer valuable perspectives on current events.

Editorials are found in many newspapers. Editorials are unsigned articles written by the newspaper's editorial board. Editorial boards oversee a newspaper or magazine's general direction. Their editorials present the newspaper's "official" opinion on a particular topic. Editorial beliefs are not supposed to directly influence the work of journalists.

The fair and open exchange of ideas in opinion columns and editorials is essential to democratic society. However, the line between journalism and opinion is becoming increasingly blurred.

NEWS OR OPINION?

At one time, editorials and opinion pieces were aired as special segments on TV and radio broadcasts, and placed on a dedicated page in newspapers. The segments were clearly marked as opinion pieces. Often this is no longer the case.

Many traditional media outlets and online news portals have shifted their focus from providing news to providing opinions. Writer Jonathan Schell has observed this trend. Citing Fox News as the worst offender, he wrote in Project Syndicate that:

news and commentary are mingled in an uninterrupted stream of political campaigning. Ideology trumps factuality. And major Republican figures, including possible contenders for the party's presidential nomination, are hired as 'commentators.' Indeed, its specific genius has been to turn propaganda into a popular and financial success.

One reason for this shift is that most news organisations are businesses. Businesses try to maximise their profits. It costs less to broadcast opinions than to produce in-depth investigative journalism. Meanwhile, opinion articles and programs tend to be more popular than investigative journalism. As a result, many news organisations have shifted their focus from journalism to opinions.

Canada's media tends to act more responsibly than its American counterparts. However, our media often focus on opinions, too. As an example, consider radio stations branded as news/talk. How much of what they broadcast is news? And how much of what they broadcast is opinions on the news?

To be sure, sharing opinions is vital for democracy. Nevertheless, professional journalists will try to provide a balanced perspective on the news of the day. Opinions-givers have no such obligation.

Because government generally does not and should not interfere with free expression in the media, it is our own responsibility to choose news, opinions, and other information responsibly. To do this, we need to be aware of the differences between journalism and opinions.



EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS... CONTINUED

Discuss

1. Why do you think opinion-based programming is more popular than investigative journalism?
2. Find an opinion/editorial that appeared in Saskatchewan media.
 - a) Is it made clear to the audience that it is an opinion/editorial?
 - b) What is the topic?
 - c) What facts does the opinion/editorial use to support its stance?
 - d) Does the opinion piece give a balanced perspective on the issue?
3. Look more closely at your chosen opinion/editorial.
 - a) Who stands to benefit from its stance?
 - b) Who stands to be disadvantaged from its stance?
 - c) Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the piece, do you think it adds a valuable perspective to public debate?



ACTIVITY

LESSON 2.5

SOCIAL MEDIA

OBJECTIVE

Students will consider how social media differs from and is similar to other ways of sharing news and information.

MATERIALS

[History Repeating? The Rise of Digital Media](#)

PROCEDURE

1. A 2019 Reuters/University of Oxford report found that 52% of Canadians trust the news on traditional media. Conversely, trust of news on social media is only 20%. Ask students to consider why social media is less-trusted than traditional media.
2. Read [History Repeating? The Rise of Digital Media](#) as a class.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do we treat people the same way online as we do in person? If not, how does this damage ourselves as a society?
- The internet has allowed almost everyone to have a platform to challenge dominant narratives. What are the benefits and drawbacks of this?

3. To close discussion on the importance of the internet to public discourse, think back to Lesson 1.3, Public Goods and Services. SaskTel is owned and controlled by the public, providing most of the province with internet and mobile access.

- Is it important for democracy that SaskTel remains a public good?
- Given the internet's central role in informing citizens, should internet access become a true public good: available to everyone at no charge?

FURTHER EXPLORATION

4. To further consider social media's role in understanding government and political issues, check out "Do the People Know Best?" in Lesson Four of *Direct Democracy: Plebiscites and Referendums*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.
5. The CBC has an excellent two-part series to help students understand and identify "fake news." Find it at www.cbc.ca/news/technology/fake-news-misinformation-online-1.5196865.
6. Kirsten Kozolanka and Paul Orlowski's *Media Literacy for Citizenship: A Canadian Perspective* is useful for more deeply considering how to analyse media messages. Find it at your public library.

HISTORY REPEATING? THE RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

In the 20th century, news was largely a one-way flow. Traditional media reported the news. For the most part, audiences consumed it by reading the daily and weekly newspapers, and watching or listening to news on TV and radio.

The internet changed that.

Today, news is a very participatory affair. Traditional media outlets continue to report the news. But now, people are able to instantly share what they read with the world, along with their comments or opinions about the articles. And they are instantly able to have conversations with reporters on social media about the stories they write.

An even bigger change is how virtually anyone can create and post their own news. In the past, this was an expensive and ambitious undertaking. A television or radio station could only be established with a licence from the government. Newspapers and magazines were easier to set up, but still required considerable resources to print and distribute. Today, anyone with a computer and an internet connection can create and distribute news.

The expansion of online information reminds us of our right to freedom of expression. We are all free to report the news, so long as we do not engage in libel (false statements that damage a person's reputation) or hate speech. A side-effect of all this news and information, however, is growing skepticism with what we read.

MORE SOURCES, MORE SKEPTICISM

Major media organisations—especially traditional media—have editors and boards who scrutinise the work of their reporters. Editors and boards are not perfect, but they act as a second set of eyes. We can be reasonably sure that reports from the CBC, *The National Observer*, or the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, for example, are accurate even if at times they are not perfect.

On the other hand, some publications—especially ones that popped up in the internet era—can have strong biases. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, a few of these publications are not only interested in providing different perspectives: they are also interested in stirring up our tempers. By showing little regard for fairness and using inflammatory language, public discussion is poisoned. This approach undermines the democratic ideal: it does not encourage us to find common ground, but rather it pits us against each other.

Such problems with online media are not limited to news and opinion publications. Consider how we have moved towards relying on tweets, blogs, message boards, and other social media tools to gather information. First-hand reports posted on Twitter or reddit, for example, could be completely accurate. Or they could be completely made-up. The problem is that there is no editorial board to screen social media posts beforehand. Adding to these complications is the simple fact that there is often a tendency to be argumentative and rude when posting online.



HISTORY REPEATING?

The way we share news and information in the digital era may not be radically different from how we did it in the past. Consider these examples of how information spread in the past:

The 15th- and 16th-century rise of the pamphlet

The invention of the printing press made it easier to share information. Waves of pamphlets began to spread across Europe, promoting various ideas. They were short, often unsigned, and usually written in common language. The philosopher Erasmus worried that the popularity of pamphlets undermined learning, especially when compared to the more in-depth approaches of books and formal education.

- How was the pamphlet's simplification of knowledge similar to the ways we share information today?

The 16th-century spread of Martin Luther's ideas

Martin Luther's idea on religious reform spread rapidly, in part due to the printing press. Luther was not paid for his writing, and editors did not review it for accuracy. Nevertheless, many people found his ideas interesting so they reprinted his pamphlets and passed them along.

- How was the spread of Martin Luther's ideas similar to the ways we share information today?

The 17th-century coffeehouse culture of London

Coffeehouses became London social hubs in the mid-1600s. For the price of a cup of coffee—about a penny—people congregated to learn about and discuss issues. Coffeehouses provided patrons with pamphlets and newspapers. Social class was left at the door, and travellers from afar were welcome. Unlike the ale-drinkers at rowdy taverns, coffeehouse-goers were expected to be polite and respectful.

- How was London's coffeehouse culture similar to the ways we discuss information today?

The rise of the printing press, the pamphleteering of Martin Luther, and the rise of London's coffeehouse culture suggest that even if history does not repeat, it can echo. In less than twenty years, the world has experienced dramatic changes in how we gather and share news and information. Nevertheless, the dramatic changes of today have many similarities to the dramatic changes of the past.



Who Gives a Tweet?

Political discussion is prolific on Twitter. Given that 22% of Americans and 18% of Canadians use Twitter, it would seem to be a good place to understand public opinion. However, this is not the case.

A recent Pew Research Center study found that Twitter is not representative of society. Compared to the general population, Twitter users are younger, have higher levels of education, are wealthier, and lean further to the political left than society as a whole. The only way that Twitter users look like society is in ethnicity and gender. Further skewing reality, a handful of Twitter addicts steer the conversation: 80% of posts are made by a mere 10% of users.

Pew's study is one of many that raise questions about politics and social media. For example, *The Perception Gap* found that social media users tend to hold distorted views of their political opponents.

Such findings have led political scientist Yascha Mounk to conclude:

It is not the mental health of Twitter addicts that concerns me, though; it is the well-being of the nation they collectively rule. To decision-makers who spend most of their days ensconced in an elite bubble, Twitter can seem like a way out, a clear window into pure public opinion. In reality, it's an extreme distortion.¹

Twitter can be many useful things. A tool to gather information. A space to keep up with friends. A portal for occasionally-productive debates. But Twitter is not the real world.

¹ “The Problem Isn’t Twitter. It’s That You Care About Twitter.” *The Atlantic*. April 29, 2019 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/04/political-leaders-should-stop-caring-about-twitter/588004/>

Discuss

1. Private companies like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube can pick and choose who gets access to their platforms.
 - a) Do you know of anyone being suspended or banned from social media? What happened?
 - b) Who makes the rules for behaviour on social media platforms?
 - c) What are the possible consequences of too few corporations controlling too many social media platforms?
2. Think about access to technology and wealth disparity.
 - a) Who is excluded from using the internet and social media?
 - b) Is access to technology vital for citizenship today?

LESSON 2.6

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

OBJECTIVE

Students will consider ways to involve themselves in the political process.

MATERIALS

Participating in the Political Process

Saving Saskatchewan Libraries:

“We’re not afraid to admit we made a mistake”

PROCEDURE

1. On the board, create five columns. Label them:
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Read the statement: “It is important to express your thoughts about how we are governed.” Ask students to stand in column with the stance they most agree with. Have students justify their positions, then give students opportunity to change their position. Ask those who moved to share why they changed their opinion.

2. Read Participating in the Political Process.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What kind of interest groups and political groups exist in the community?
 - If you express opposition to a law or policy, should you also propose an alternative?
 - Is it important to voice your support when you agree with a law or policy?
3. To demonstrate how citizen engagement can create change, read the case study Saving Saskatchewan Libraries: “We’re not afraid to admit we made a mistake”.
 4. To broaden understandings of citizen participation, have students create an action plan to observe and/or participate in any activity in Participating in the Political Process. For example, students could observe a rally put on by organised labour or a civil society group, write a letter, speak at a public meeting, volunteer with a community group, or report on or create posters with political messages.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. To understand how Saskatchewan law allows citizens to propose legislation, check out *Direct Democracy: Plebiscites and Referendums*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.
6. For further consideration of the ways that citizens have come to the rescue of libraries, check out the case study “Bypassing the Saskatoon Public Library” in *Municipalities Matter*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

PARTICIPATING IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Voting is not the only way to participate in the political process. Democracy relies on participation by informed citizens. Here are just a few ways to raise awareness and get involved. And remember, you don't just need to participate if you oppose something. When government does something right, don't hesitate to show your support.

INTEREST GROUPS

Interest groups form civil society: the non-governmental, non-business organisations that influence and shape our world. They include such things as local heritage societies, advocacy groups for minority rights, and environmental groups. Supporting civil society helps focus the government's attention on community issues.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Joining a political party can help us learn more about political and law-making processes. Party members influence party policies and candidate selection, thus helping shape the laws that govern us. Most parties have youth chapters.

POLITICAL RALLIES OR PROTEST

All Canadians have the right to peaceful assembly. Rallies and protests help raise awareness about particular issues. Even if we do not believe in a cause, attending a rally or protest as an observer help us understand the multiple viewpoints that exist in a diverse society.

POSTERING

Many communities have public spaces dedicated to displaying posters. We can make use of these spaces for posting information about issues, concerns, and causes relevant to the community.



CREATING PETITIONS

Petitions can be used to share an opinion. Collecting signatures for a petition can also create awareness about the issue. If a proper process is followed, a petition may be read by and entered into the record of the provincial legislature. Find these rules at www.legassembly.sk.ca/media/1308/practicalguidepetitions.pdf.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Platforms such as Facebook or Twitter create digital spaces to voice our thoughts on issues of the day. By posting on social media and engaging in productive discussion and debate, we can influence fellow citizens, politicians, and the media.

CONTACT MLAs

Writing letters and emails, signing petitions, and visiting government representatives are effective ways to express opinions. MLAs—like all elected representatives—are there to represent their constituents, so it is important that we let them know our thoughts.

PLEBISCITES

A plebiscite is a province-wide vote on an issue of public interest. If at least 15% of voters sign a petition that requests a plebiscite, and the issue is within the provincial government's jurisdiction, then a province-wide vote on the issue must happen.

SAVING SASKATCHEWAN LIBRARIES

"WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO ADMIT WE MADE A MISTAKE"

Political engagement can take on many forms and often involves finding common interests across different groups. Consider this as you read the following case study about how citizens of Saskatchewan convinced the government to reverse a funding cut to the public library system.

The Background

In April 2016, the Saskatchewan Party was re-elected into government with an overwhelming 62% of the vote. Their re-election platform talked about "Growth to Build a Better Quality of Life" and "Growing Active and Vibrant Communities." However, facing a collapse in commodity prices, their 2017 provincial budget increased taxes and cut funding for many public services.

One cut was a \$4.8 million reduction to library funding. The operating grant for rural libraries was reduced from \$6 million to \$2.5 million, and the \$1.3 million operating grant for the Saskatoon and Regina public libraries was entirely eliminated. The cuts were announced without consultation.

Education minister Don Morgan defended the cuts several ways, including:

- library circulation had dropped by 1.6 million items since 2007
- the number of library cards were down by 175,000
- many small towns already have school libraries, so why would they need a separate public library?

The Libraries React

The Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA) warned that the cuts would devastate the library system. Staff would be laid off, programs would be eliminated, and interlibrary loans would be axed.

They countered that the minister's arguments showed a limited understanding of what happens at public libraries:

- even though resource circulation was dropping, library use was increasing: for example, Saskatoon had a 30% increase in program attendance and a 10% increase in wireless internet and desktop computer use in 2015
- cards were a poor measure of library use: families often had one card for their entire family; institutions like seniors' homes often had a single card to serve dozens of members; and a new integrated card system in 2015 eliminated many duplicate cards
- combining school libraries with public libraries would be costly and difficult, given the many ways they serve very different purposes

The SLA encouraged people to contact their MLA and ask that the cuts be reversed.

The Public Reacts

Immediately, people went online to voice their concern. A Facebook group Save Saskatchewan Libraries popped up, soon boasting over 7,000 members. Meanwhile, a website www.savesasklibraries.ca appeared along with a #saveSKlibraries hashtag. These tools helped people gather and share information on why libraries are important and what could be done to restore the funding.



SAVING SASKATCHEWAN LIBRARIES... CONTINUED

Christine Freethy, one of the founders and administrators of the Save Saskatchewan Libraries Facebook group, told the *Library Journal* that it was important that the group be non-partisan:

We had a strategy of being officially non-partisan... We were able to attract a lot of people to our movement who voted for [the Saskatchewan Party] in the last election, a lot of rural people who their base is, by being officially non-partisan and pretty much staying pretty clean. Not that we weren't critical of the government, but we didn't let anything get too crazy or too much political rhetoric. We kept it really accessible.¹

They focussed on one thing: restoring library funding.

Meanwhile, a petition began to circulate across the province. It was created in accordance with *The Referendum and Plebiscite Act*, and demanded a province-wide vote on the cuts. Over 32,000 people signed it before the effort was withdrawn. As well, draft letters were created to help people write their own letter to their MLA about the cuts.

People, however, did not just go online, write letters, or sign petitions to voice their displeasure. Public demonstration were a key element. The first protest happened on March 25th, when the Canadian Union of Public Employees rallied people in Regina to voice their displeasure with the library cuts.

The most visible action, though, was the province-wide DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) rallies. The idea was simple. On April 7th, people would show up outside their MLA's office or library and read for 15 minutes. Leslie Richards, who thought of DEAR, told the CBC that "there are so many people that are upset and outraged by this... the goal is to rally them together in a peaceful manner."

Grassroots organisation for DEAR began in countless communities. When the day arrived, it was one of the biggest protests in Saskatchewan's history. More than 100 people showed up in Yorkton, 50 in Shellbrook, 200 in Swift Current, 65 in Lumsden, 150 in Estevan, 40 in Fox Valley, and so on... In total an estimated 6,500 people came out in over 70 communities to support public libraries. For many people, it was their first time taking part in a protest. For many towns, it was the first time a protest had ever taken place in their community.

The letters, petitions, social media posts, and protests were working. A poll conducted from April 11th-13th showed that support for the ruling Saskatchewan Party had plummeted almost 20 points from the election, down to 44%. The NDP polled at 40%, and the Progressive Conservatives—the all-but-dead predecessor of the Saskatchewan Party—were at a distant but noticeable 7%. To be sure, the library protests were not the only thing hurting the government's popularity but there can be no doubt of the library supporters' impact on public opinion.

The Government Reconsiders

The government recognised how deeply the public was opposed to the budget in general, and the cuts to libraries in particular. On April 24th, the government reversed the cuts to library funding.

When announcing the funding restoration, Minister Morgan told reporters:

We're not afraid to admit we made a mistake on something.... We've heard from people pretty clearly that they value the library in its present form. It's important for them not just to have the electronic capability, but they also want to have the physical space to go to.²

The collective effort of thousands of citizens had worked, proving the importance of political engagement.

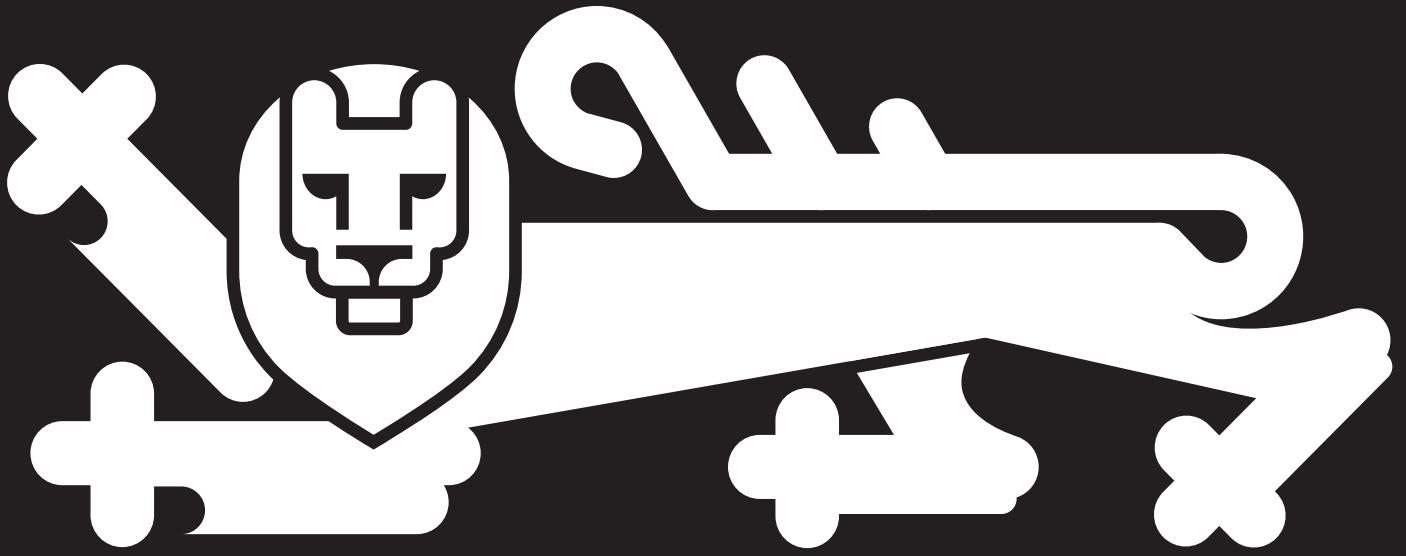
SAVING SASKATCHEWAN LIBRARIES... CONTINUED

Discuss

1. Minister Morgan told the *Library Journal* that there was “no doubt” that the protests had a role in the governing party’s change of heart. He congratulated the protesters for their “peaceful and respectful” behaviour.
 - a) Some studies have shown that peaceful protests are more likely to gain broad public support for a cause than violent protests. Do you think peaceful protest is more effective than violent protest?
 - b) Are there times when violence is necessary?
2. The campaign to restore library funding took place on several fronts. This included social media, letter-writing, petitions, rallies, and letters to local media. What does this tell us about the importance of engaging in politics on multiple fronts?
3. If common citizens do not politically engage with issues important to them, who will have the most influence in a democracy?

- 1 “Public Outcry Saves Saskatchewan Library Funds,” Bob Warburton, *Library Journal*, May 15, 2017. www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=public-outcry-saves-saskatchewan-library-funds
- 2 “‘We made a mistake’: Sask. government turns back page on library cuts,” Stephanie Langenegger, CBC News, April 24th, 2017. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-libraries-budget-reversal-1.4082965





SECTION THREE

THE ELECTION OF GOVERNMENT

LESSON 3.1

THE PROVINCIAL ELECTION PROCESSES

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the process and history of Saskatchewan's provincial elections.

MATERIALS

[Nominating Candidates for Election](#)

[Triggering an Election](#)

[The Fix is In? Fixed Election Legislation](#)

[Forming a Government](#)

[Thinking about Forming a Government](#)

[Saskatchewan Elections: A History](#)

[Saskatchewan Election Crossword](#)

TEACHER'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Electing Governments in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's system of government is based on the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy, which we inherited from the United Kingdom. This system tends to rely upon political parties. Political parties are voluntary associations of people with similar political views. Political parties and the party leaders—as opposed to individual candidates—are strong motivators for how people cast ballots. One public opinion poll from 2015 found that when people make voting decisions,

- 51% are most strongly motivated by a party's stance on issues
- 33% are most strongly motivated by the party leader

- 16% are most strongly motivated by the local candidate

The strong influence of political parties and their leaders helps explain why independent candidates with no party affiliation rarely get elected to the legislature.

Nominating Candidates for Election

Candidates for office generally hold the views of the political party they represent. Sometimes the party will appoint a candidate to their liking. Most often though, party members in each constituency hold a nomination contest to decide who will be their candidate.

When somebody wants to run for a party nomination, the party will vet them. This helps ensure that potential candidates reflect the party's values. Vetting decisions mostly happen behind closed doors. If the party rejects a candidate, they cannot compete in the party's nomination process. The rejection of potential candidates is not an everyday occurrence, but it is not uncommon either.

Occasionally, a candidate will be allowed to run, win the nomination, and then be rejected by the party. For example, in 2003 the Saskatchewan Party rejected the nomination of Grant Schmidt.

Grant Schmidt was an outspoken minister in Grant Devine's Progressive Conservative government of the 1980s. In 1991, Schmidt lost his bid for re-election and returned to practising law in Melville. In 2003, he decided to make a political comeback. Schmidt ran for and won the Saskatchewan Party nomination in the Melville-Saltcoats constituency. The party, however, refused to endorse his candidacy. They said he supported policies that were not those of the Saskatchewan Party. A second nomination contest was held, and Schmidt was not allowed to take part.

Even if a candidate is rejected by a party, they still have the right to run for office as an independent candidate. Schmidt chose to run as an independent in the 2003 general election. Reflecting how difficult elections are for independents, Schmidt came in third. He received 19% of the vote, behind the Saskatchewan Party candidate (39%) and the NDP candidate (32%).

To run as either an independent or party-affiliated candidate in a provincial election, a person must be a Canadian citizen 18 years of age or older, and have lived in Saskatchewan for six months prior to the election. The

candidate must submit nomination papers signed by four voters, and have it witnessed by a fifth voter. As well, a \$100 deposit is required.

Triggering an Election

Saskatchewan has fixed election legislation. Elections are scheduled every four years, on the last Monday in October. To begin the election, the premier must ask the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the legislature and “drop the writ.”

Elections can be triggered by other means. For example, some votes in the legislature function as an endorsement of the legitimacy of the government. These are called confidence votes. Confidence votes typically include votes on throne speeches, budgets, major changes to the law, and most bills that involve spending money. If a government loses a confidence vote, it loses its right to hold power.

Generally speaking, if the government loses a confidence vote one of two things will happen. Either the government will resign and the Lieutenant Governor will ask another party or coalition of parties to form a new government. Or, the Lieutenant Governor can dissolve the legislature and then call a general election.

Caretaker Government

The Lieutenant Governor must ensure an executive branch of government is always in place. Thus, the premier and ministers keep their ministerial jobs during an election. However, the caretaker convention limits executive powers to routine and non-controversial tasks, or urgent tasks in an emergency. Their power is limited because during an election there is no legislature in place to hold the executive to account.

Electing Members to the Legislature

Voters from each of the province’s electoral constituencies cast ballots for a member of the legislative assembly. The number of MLAs and constituency sizes and boundaries are determined through a combination of provincial legislation and an independent commission. In Saskatchewan’s first provincial election, there were 25 constituencies, but for most of the province’s history there have been about 60. Controversial changes in 1991 that were fought all the way to the Supreme Court increased

the seats to an all-time high of 66. Today, we have 61 electoral constituencies.

For political parties, the optimal goal in an election is to form a majority government. A majority government is when more than half of the seats are won by a single political party. If a single party has a majority, they do not need to rely on votes from other parties’ MLAs to get their bills through the legislature. Minority governments, on the other hand, require the support of MLAs who are not in the governing party.

Even though Saskatchewan has 61 MLAs, the legislative chamber can accommodate 125. Saskatchewan was growing exponentially when construction of the legislature began in 1908. Then-premier Walter Scott envisioned a province that would be home to millions of people, and had the legislature designed accordingly.

Forming a Government

Regardless of the result of an election, the premier in power prior to the writ being dropped remains in power. They have the first opportunity to demonstrate to the Lieutenant Governor that they can gain the support of the legislature. In fact, technically whoever is appointed premier by the Lieutenant Governor could remain in that role until resignation, death, or being advised by the Lieutenant Governor that they no longer require the premier’s advice (the constitutional way of saying the Lieutenant Governor fired the premier). In practice, if the governing party loses the premier usually resigns and the Lieutenant Governor invites the party with the most seats in the legislature to form a new government.

Choosing a government becomes more complicated for the Lieutenant Governor if no party emerges from an election with a clear majority. A minority situation will unfold. To determine who forms government, the Lieutenant Governor must be satisfied that a party can provide stable government. Making this determination can be complex.

For example, consider if the governing party emerges from an election with the most seats in a minority situation, but a coalition of other parties say they want to form a government. The governing party could argue to the Lieutenant Governor that they have the first right to try and form a stable government.

This happened in 1929. For the election, the Conservatives entered into a non-competition agreement with the Progressives, and supported several independent candidates. The election resulted in the governing Liberals winning the most seats, at 28. However, forces opposed to the Liberals won 35 seats (24 Conservatives, five Progressives, and six independents).

Five days after the election, the Conservatives, Progressives, and independent MLAs signed an agreement supporting a Conservative-led “Co-operative” government. They called for the Liberals to resign. However, the Liberals believed they could hang on to power by driving a wedge between the Conservatives and their allies. The Lieutenant Governor agreed that the Liberals should have the opportunity to win the confidence of the legislature. In September, the legislature convened and the Liberals fell in a confidence vote. The Lieutenant Governor then asked the Conservative Party and its allies to form a government. Lest we think this example is too old to be relevant today, an almost-identical situation unfolded following British Columbia’s 2017 provincial election.

Saskatchewan saw another minority situation unfold in 1999, albeit this was less complicated. The NDP won 29 out of 58 seats. The Saskatchewan Party took 25 seats, and the Liberals won four. Within days, the NDP made an agreement with the four Liberal MLAs to form a coalition government, thus ensuring a stable majority government.

Because the governing party has the first right to form a government, it is also possible for a government to remain in power even if they lose an election outright. This scenario unfolded at the federal level in 1925. William Lyon Mackenzie King’s governing Liberals won 100 seats, coming in second to Arthur Meighen’s Conservatives who won 115. The Progressive Party won 22 seats. Instead of resigning, King told the Governor General he would like to meet Parliament and let them decide. King gained the support of the Progressives, and remained Prime Minister until the Progressives withdrew their support in June 1926.

While it is common to hear people say that “the party that wins the most seats should form

government,” these examples show that our system of government is more nuanced. Forming a government relies upon gaining the support of a majority of members of the legislature, and the party in power before the election has the first opportunity to prove they can command majority support in the legislature.

PROCEDURE

1. Use the overhead [Nominating Candidates for Election](#) to explain how the slate of candidates is formed for an election.

KEY QUESTION

- **What unique difficulties do independent candidates face when attracting votes?**

2. Use the overhead [Triggering an Election](#) to explain how elections begin, then assign [The Fix is In? Fixed Election Legislation](#) to consider the merits and drawbacks of fixed election date legislation.
3. Use the overhead [Forming a Government](#) to explain possible outcomes from elections, then use [Thinking about Forming a Government](#) for discussion or independent student work.

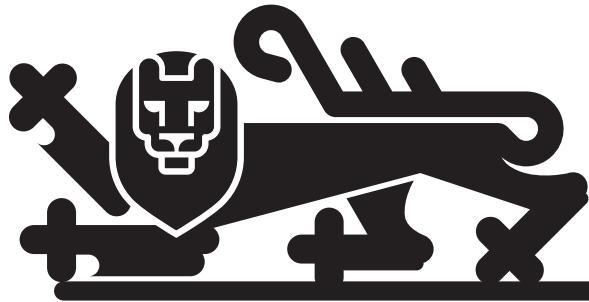
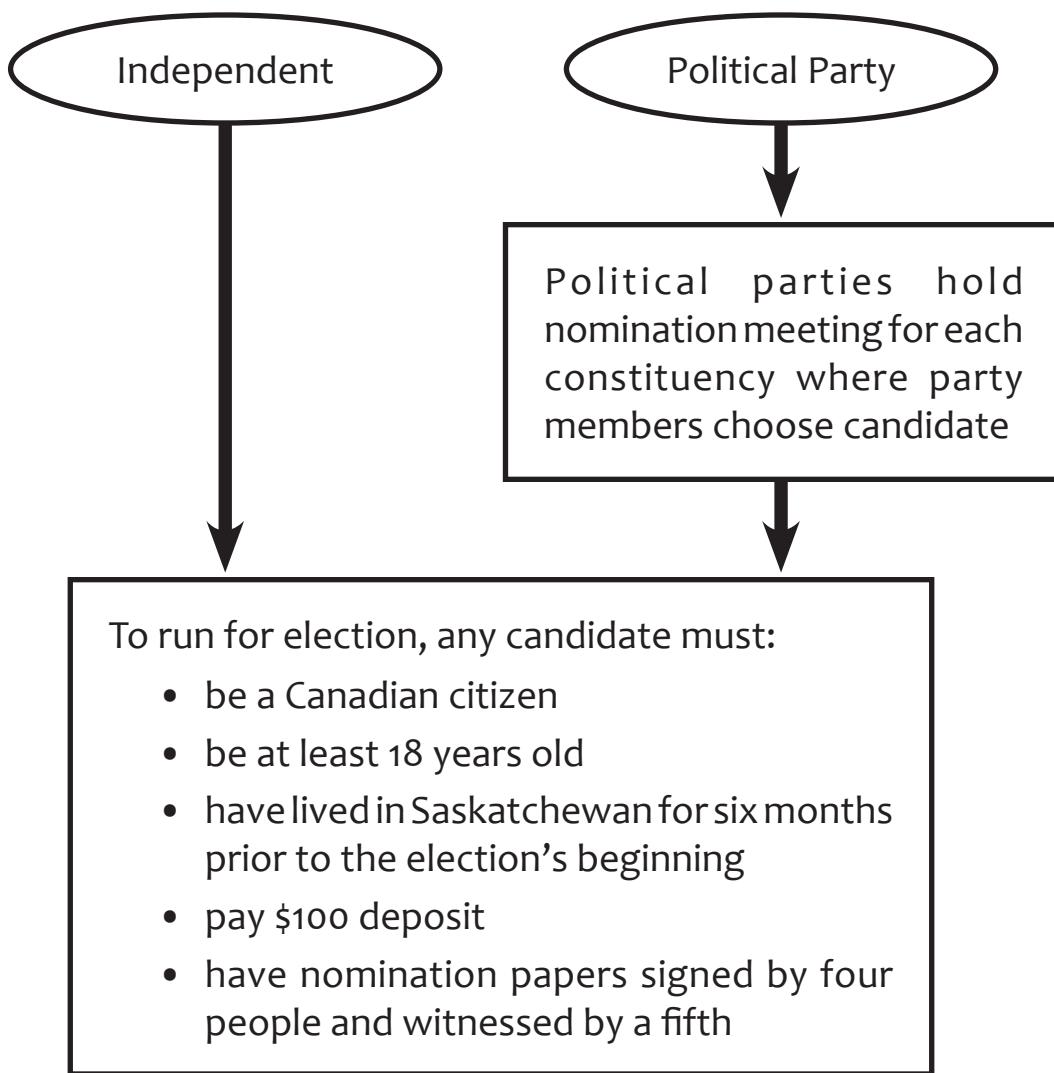
4. To build student understandings of the history of Saskatchewan elections, use [Saskatchewan Elections: A History](#) in conjunction with [Saskatchewan Election Crossword](#). Answers on page 106.
5. [Saskatchewan Elections: A History](#) can be a launch point for researching a political party, government, politician, or election in Saskatchewan’s history. One excellent secondary resource is the CBC Archives feature *Showdown on the Prairies: A History of Saskatchewan Elections*. Find it at www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/showdown-on-the-prairies-a-history-of-saskatchewan-elections.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

6. Government House, the office of Saskatchewan’s Lieutenant Governor, has several education programs and resources that help explain the Crown’s role in governing Saskatchewan. Check them out at www.governmenthousesk.ca/educational-programs.

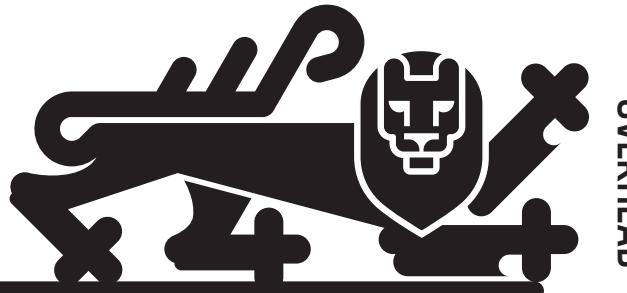
NOMINATING CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION

Candidates may either run as an independent or for a political party



TRIGGERING AN ELECTION

- Fixed-date election legislation calls for an election every four years, on the last Monday of October
- The premier remains free to call an early election, despite fixed-date legislation
- Elections may also happen if
 - a) the government loses vote of confidence, and
 - b) the Lieutenant Governor is not convinced another party can form a stable government



THE FIX IS IN? FIXED ELECTION LEGISLATION

For decades, the date of a provincial election was at the discretion of the premier. When a premier felt the time was right, they would approach the Lieutenant Governor and ask for an election. While there was an expectation of an election about once every four years, the only limit that the premier faced was the constitution: a provincial election must take place at least once every five years.

Sometimes, premiers called early elections if political circumstances were in their favour. Ross Thatcher (1967) and Allan Blakeney (1978) called elections 3.5 years into their terms. Other times, premiers who appeared to be headed for defeat hung on to power. J.T.M. Anderson (1934) and Grant Devine (1991) called elections after five-year terms.

This discretion led to constant speculation. The public, the media, and the opposition parties were trapped in a guessing game: when would the election be called? Meanwhile, Elections Saskatchewan—the independent agency that runs provincial elections—faced planning difficulties, especially with regard to arranging polling locations and hiring staff.

To help end all this, in 2007 fixed election date legislation was put into place. The law originally scheduled provincial elections for the first Monday of November, every four years. Changes to the law now peg provincial elections for the last Monday of October, every four years.

AVOIDING CONFLICTS

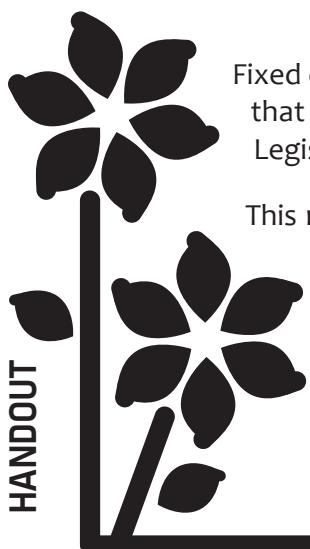
Saskatchewan's fixed election law prevents provincial elections from overlapping with federal elections. If a federal election is scheduled for the same time as a provincial election, the provincial election will be moved to the following spring.

However, conflicts still exist. The current provincial election cycle puts our provincial vote in a perpetual conflict with two other major elections.

First, municipal and school board elections are held at the beginning of November, every four years. This means that only two weeks after a provincial election, voters must again go to the polls to elect urban and rural municipal councils and school boards.

Second, the American presidential elections take place at the beginning of November, every four years. Of course, we do not vote in American elections. Even so, the American presidential race is the most-watched election campaign in the world, taking up a lot of our political attention.

IS IT ALL MEANINGLESS?



Fixed election legislation does not supersede constitutional rules. The fixed election law states that nothing in it “alters or abridges the power of the Crown to prorogue or dissolve the Legislative Assembly.”

This means, for example, that if the government falls in a vote of no confidence before the fixed election date, the legislation will not halt an election from taking place.

This also means that the premier is still free to call an election whenever they please. In fact, Premier Scott Moe openly considered calling an early election in April 2020, pointing out that he still retained that power. Courts have affirmed that fixed election legislation does not restrict an early election call.

THE FIX IS IN? FIXED ELECTION LEGISLATION... CONTINUED

In fact, fixed election legislation cannot even prevent a premier from holding onto power past the fixed election date. The government could remain in office so long as the legislature passed a new law that voided the “fixed” election date. The only limit the government would face is the constitution, which requires a provincial election at least once every five years.

USEFUL OR NOT?

Fixed election legislation has not changed the basic foundations of how elections are triggered in our system of government. But it does provide some general guidance for the scheduling of elections. This provides some basic order which helps everyone plan for elections. Unfortunately, by fixing election dates to particular days, conflicts with other elections have been created.

Discuss

1. Should Saskatchewan’s fixed election legislation ensure that provincial and municipal elections are scheduled far apart? Why or why not?
2. Should Saskatchewan avoid scheduling elections around the same time as American presidential elections? Why or why not?
3. Newfoundland and Labrador has a unique clause in their fixed election legislation. If a premier leaves office in the middle of their term, an election must take place within a year. Is this a good idea?
4. What reasons would justify postponing an election?



FORMING A GOVERNMENT

- Voters in 61 constituencies choose their local representative to form the legislature
- If one party elects a majority of members (at least 31), they will become a majority government
- If no single party elects a majority, the sitting premier has first chance to demonstrate to the Lieutenant Governor that they can form a stable government
- A stable government could be:
 - a) a minority government, where support for legislation is gained on an issue-by-issue basis
 - b) a coalition government, where two or more parties agree to a partnership to govern



THINKING ABOUT FORMING A GOVERNMENT

WE ELECT MLAS, NOT PARTY LEADERS

We do not directly elect the premier. Instead, 61 elections happen in 61 constituencies across the province, to choose 61 MLAs. Each voter casts a ballot for their local member of the legislature. Usually, the party with the most elected members forms government. The leader of that party becomes the premier.

1. Party leaders and party policies are important factors in how we vote. However, if we focus too heavily on parties and party leaders, will we make good choices when picking our local MLAs?
2. What is more important? The quality of our local representative, or the qualities of the party and leader they represent?

MINORITY AND COALITION GOVERNMENTS REQUIRE COMPROMISE

Sometimes no party will win enough seats to form a majority government. If this is the case, usually a minority or a coalition government will form. Minority and coalition governments are common, having ruled most everywhere from Israel to Japan to Brazil and beyond. Saskatchewan has twice been governed by a coalition, from 1929 - 1934 and from 1999 - 2003.

1. The support of a majority of MLAs is required to pass laws. This means that minority and coalition governments must take many diverse views into account.
 - a) Do you believe compromise between political parties can create better laws?
 - b) Can there be times when compromise is not the best solution?
2. A coalition or minority government takes many views into consideration when creating laws. However, this does not guarantee that every law will satisfy everyone.
 - a) Even if you do not support a law, is it important to respect it?
 - b) What can we do to change a law we do not believe in?



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY

DECEMBER 13TH, 1905

The Liberal Party formed Saskatchewan's first elected government. The Liberals were led by Walter Scott, an MP representing the area of Saskatchewan in Wilfrid Laurier's federal government. Frederick Haultain, the former premier of the Northwest Territories, led the Provincial Rights Party. Haultain was linked to the Conservative Party and had advocated for Alberta and Saskatchewan to be one province named Buffalo. He begrudged Laurier for creating two provinces, and fought Saskatchewan's first election by opposing federal interference in provincial areas of jurisdiction.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Walter Scott	25	16	52.25%
Provincial Rights	Frederick Haultain	24	9	47.47%
Independent		1	-	0.28%
Total Seats			25	

AUGUST 14TH, 1908

The number of MLAs expanded to 41, reflecting the rapidly growing population. The Liberals ran 40 candidates in 41 constituencies: William Turgeon ran in both Prince Albert City and Duck Lake. He won Duck Lake but lost Prince Albert. At the time it was common for candidates to run in multiple constituencies to help ensure their election. If the candidate won in two or more constituencies, they would resign from all but one. By-elections would then be held to find representatives for the vacated constituencies. This practice is no longer allowed.

RESULTS:

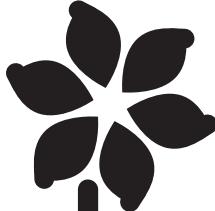
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Walter Scott	41	27	50.79%
Provincial Rights	Frederick Haultain	40	14	47.88%
Independent-Liberal		1	-	0.67%
Independent		2	-	0.66%
Total Seats			41	

JULY 11TH, 1912

The Provincial Rights Party morphed into the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan, and continued to campaign for expanding provincial jurisdiction. Only 53 members were elected out of the 54 seat legislature, as the constituency of Cumberland's results were declared void and a by-election had to be held at a later date to fill the seat.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Walter Scott	53	45	56.96%
Conservative	Wellington Willoughby	53	7	41.98%
Independent		5	1	1.06%
Total Seats			54	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

JUNE 26TH, 1917

Walter Scott resigned amid failing mental health and scandals over alleged kickbacks from government contracts going to people with Liberal connections. Scott's replacement, William Martin, was new to the provincial Liberals. He successfully distanced the party from previous scandals. Women gained the provincial franchise in 1916, making this the first Saskatchewan election where they could vote. However, this right was first exercised in a 1916 provincial plebiscite on prohibition.

RESULTS:

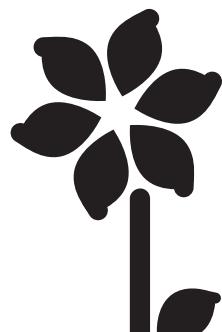
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	William M. Martin	58	51	56.68%
Conservative	Wellington Willoughby	53	7	36.30%
Non-Partisan League		7	-	3.87%
Independent		10	1	2.36%
Labour	William G. Baker	2	-	0.79%
Total Seats			59	

JUNE 9TH, 1921

The Conservative Party fell into disarray, hindered by a growing anti-party mood. It split into several pieces, with many party members running as independents. This fray benefited the Liberals. Meanwhile, William G. Baker won the Labour Party's first seat in Saskatchewan. Unlike in the United Kingdom, Labour was poorly organised in Canada. It was common for Labour candidates to align themselves with Liberals upon election. Thus, Baker next ran as a Labour-Liberal in 1925. He eventually ran as a Liberal in 1938.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	William M. Martin	60	45	51.39%
Independent		35	7	25.73%
Progressive		7	6	7.52%
Conservative	Donald Maclean	4	2	3.94%
Independent Conservative		3	1	3.48%
Independent Pro-Government		1	1	Acclamation
Labour	William G. Baker	3	1	3.34%
Non-Partisan League		3	-	2.06%
Independent Labour		1	-	0.93%
Government		1	-	0.84%
Independent Non-Partisan		1	-	0.77%
Total Seats			63	



JUNE 2ND, 1925

Saskatchewan Liberals suffered under Martin's leadership. The party severed ties with the unpopular federal Liberals, but Martin still openly supported federal Liberal candidates. Meanwhile, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association—a politically-powerful group with ties to the provincial Liberals—threatened to form its own political party. All this helped spur the Liberals into choosing a new leader, Charles Dunning. Dunning was the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company's manager, and Liberals believed he could strengthen their party in farm communities. The farmer-based Progressive Party formed official opposition.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Charles A. Dunning	62	50	51.51%
Progressive		40	6	23.04%
Conservative	J.T.M. Anderson	18	3	18.35%
Independent		6	2	3.51%
Labour-Liberal		1	1	1.90%
Independent Liberal		1	1	1.07%
Independent Conservative		1	-	0.62%
Total Seats			63	

JUNE 6TH, 1929

Two governments followed the 1929 election. The Liberals won a minority, and were given the first chance to form a government. Three months after the election, the Liberals faced the legislature. They lost a vote of confidence, and the Conservatives and Progressives along with some independents formed a coalition known as the Cooperative government.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	James Gardiner	62	28	45.56%
Conservative	J.T.M. Anderson	40	24	36.44%
Independent		17	6	9.06%
Progressive		16	5	6.92%
Liberal-Labour		1	-	1.16%
Economic Group		3	-	0.54%
Independent Liberal		1	-	0.32%
Total Seats			63	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

JUNE 12TH, 1934

The governing Conservative coalition was battered on many fronts. The Great Depression made their time in government difficult, and the president of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party Association campaigned against his own party, dissatisfied with Anderson's Cooperative government. Meanwhile, the Farmer Labour Party, the precursor to the modern-day NDP, emerged. It was created by the Saskatchewan section of the United Farmers of Canada and the Independent Labour Party. They campaigned for public health care and financial protections for farmers.

RESULTS:

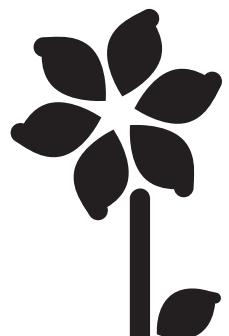
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	James Gardiner	56	50	48.00%
Conservative	James Anderson	52	-	26.75%
Farmer-Labour	M.J. Coldwell	54	5	23.96%
Independent		3	-	0.69%
Labour	William G. Baker	1	-	0.33%
United Front		3	-	0.24%
Independent Liberal		1	-	0.03%
Total Seats			55	

JUNE 8TH, 1938

The Great Depression spurred many political movements as people looked for solutions to harsh social and economic conditions. The Communist Party of Saskatchewan made its first election appearance under two fronts: two candidates ran as independents while three others ran under the Unity Party banner. Meanwhile, the Social Credit movement, a right-wing populist party that governed Alberta from 1935 - 1971, elected its first members in Saskatchewan. The Farmer-Labour Party joined the national Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, becoming the Saskatchewan CCF. Despite the Conservatives, Social Credit, and the CCF agreeing not to compete against each other in several constituencies, the Liberals swept back to power.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	William Patterson	53	38	45.45%
CCF	George Williams	31	10	18.73%
Social Credit	Joseph Needham	40	2	15.90%
Conservative	John Diefenbaker	24	-	11.87%
Independent Labour		3	-	2.73%
Unity		3	2	2.24%
Labour Progressive		2	-	1.93%
Independent		2	-	0.91%
Independent Conservative		1	-	0.19%
Independent Social Credit		1	-	0.05%
Total Seats			52	



JUNE 6TH, 1944

Because of World War II, this election was held six years after the previous one. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association—strongly linked with the Saskatchewan Liberals—lost clout as the voice of the farmer, weakening Liberal support. The CCF swept to power, forming North America's first socialist government. The Communist Party changed into the Labour Progressive Party due to its banishment in Canada in 1940 under the War Measures Act.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
CCF	Tommy Douglas	52	47	53.13%
Liberal	William Patterson	52	5	35.42%
Progressive Conservative	H.E. Keown	39	-	10.69%
Labour Progressive		3	-	0.52%
Independent		5	-	0.18%
Social Credit	Joseph Needham	1	-	0.06%
Independent Liberal		1	-	0.00%
Total Seats			52	

JUNE 24TH, 1948

The Liberals accused the CCF government of being Russian communists, following “a direct line laid down from Moscow.” Liberals campaigned on the slogan Tucker or Tyranny, and attempted to consolidate the anti-CCF vote by having a handful of Liberals and Conservatives run as joint Conservative/Liberal candidates. Only one of these candidates won, Alexander McDonald, and immediately joined the Liberal caucus.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
CCF	Tommy Douglas	52	31	47.56%
Liberal	Walter Tucker	41	19	30.60%
Social Credit		36	-	8.09%
Progressive Conservative	Rupert Ramsay	9	-	7.63%
Independent		5	1	2.23%
Liberal-PC		3	-	1.92%
Conservative Liberal		1	1	1.05%
Independent Liberal		1	-	0.66%
Labour Progressive		1	-	0.26%
Total Seats			52	



JUNE 11TH, 1952

The Liberals were unsuccessful in trying to paint the CCF as Russian operatives, so instead they tried to paint the CCF as corrupt. The CCF finance minister, Clarence Fines, was their primary target. The tactic proved enormously unsuccessful, as the CCF returned to office with their highest share of the vote ever.

RESULTS:

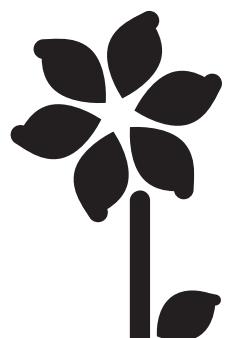
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
CCF	Tommy Douglas	53	42	54.06%
Liberal	Walter Tucker	53	11	39.27%
Social Credit		24	-	3.90%
Progressive Conservative	Alvin Hamilton	8	-	1.97%
Independent-PC		1	-	0.29%
Independent		3	-	0.28%
Labour Progressive		2	-	0.21%
Independent Liberal		1	-	0.02%
Total Seats			53	

JUNE 20TH, 1956

The Social Credit party returned to the legislature, on the coattails of their rise to government in British Columbia. Social Credit flooded Saskatchewan with outside cash and Alberta and BC party members to bolster their cause.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
CCF	Tommy Douglas	53	36	45.25%
Liberal	Alexander McDonald	52	14	30.34%
Social Credit		53	3	21.48%
Progressive Conservative	Alvin Hamilton	9	-	1.98%
Independent		2	-	0.85%
Labour Progressive		2	-	0.10%
Total Seats			53	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

JUNE 8TH, 1960

Saskatchewan's medicare election saw the Canadian Medical Association vigorously campaign against the CCF proposal for universal health care. They spent \$100,000 on television, radio, and newspaper advertisements, and put leaflets in their offices filled with spurious claims like patients would be reassigned to new doctors based on their name, and the government would nefariously use private patient medical records. Except for Social Credit who were firmly opposed, all other parties held tepid stances on the medicare issue. 1960 also marked the first provincial election where Indigenous people could vote, a right Tommy Douglas granted without full approval of Indigenous people.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
CCF	Tommy Douglas	55	37	40.76%
Liberal	Ross Thatcher	55	17	32.67%
Progressive Conservative	Martin Pederson	55	-	13.95%
Social Credit	Martin Kelln	55	-	12.35%
Independent		3	-	0.21%
Communist		1	-	0.06%
Total Seats			55*	

*one result was declared void so only 54 members were elected out of 55 seats.

APRIL 22ND, 1964

Tommy Douglas resigned as premier in 1961 to lead the federal New Democratic Party. His successor Woodrow Lloyd successfully implemented medicare, but could not hold back the Liberals in the subsequent election. Ross Thatcher, a former CCF MP, led a Liberals campaign framed around expanding free enterprise. The first Conservative member of the legislature in 30 years was elected, while the Social Credit Party fell into disarray. The result in Hanley was disputed, leading to a December by-election to fill that seat.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Ross Thatcher	59	32	40.40%
CCF	Woodrow Lloyd	59	25	40.30%
Progressive Conservative	Martin Pederson	42	1	18.90%
Social Credit	Martin Kelln	2	-	0.39%
Communist		1	-	0.01%
Total Seats			59	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

OCTOBER 11TH, 1967

Prior to 1967, Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw were multiple-member-at-large constituencies. On a single ballot, people could vote for as many candidates as there were seats in the city. The top vote-getters would become MLAs. This changed so that Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw were divided into several separate constituencies. Shortly after the election, the CCF became the New Democratic Party.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Liberal	Ross Thatcher	59	35	45.57%
CCF	Woodrow Lloyd	59	24	44.35%
Progressive Conservative	Martin Pederson	41	-	9.78%
Social Credit		6	-	0.30%
Total Seats			59	

JUNE 23RD, 1971

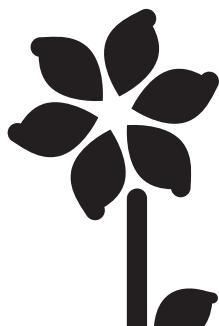
With 45 of the seats available outside of Saskatchewan's three largest cities (Saskatoon, Regina, and Moose Jaw), Ross Thatcher tried to paint the NDP as more concerned with organised labour than with farmers. The tactic failed, the Liberals lost, and Thatcher passed away only three weeks later.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Allan Blakeney	60	45	55.00%
Liberal	Ross Thatcher	60	15	42.82%
Progressive Conservative	Ed Nasserden	16	-	2.13%
Independent		1	-	0.04%
Communist		1	-	0.01%
Total Seats			60	

JUNE 11TH, 1975

Allan Blakeney easily won a second term for his government, claiming an established leader was needed for dealings with the federal government. However, the Progressive Conservatives began a comeback, arguing that "nobody can hate a party that's been out of office for four decades." Between the 1975 and 1978 elections, two Liberal MLAs (Gary Lane and Colin Thatcher) left the Liberals to join the Progressive Conservatives.



RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Allan Blakeney	61	39	40.07%
Liberal	David Steuart	61	15	31.67%
Progressive Conservative	Dick Collver	61	7	27.62%
Independent		5	-	0.64%
Total Seats			61	

OCTOBER 18TH, 1978

The NDP argued for greater public control of resource development, while the other parties argued for greater private control. For the first time in the province's history, not a single Liberal was elected to the legislature. They were suffering because Pierre Trudeau was unpopular in the west, as well as internal divisions over the leadership race between Ted Malone and Tony Merchant. The Progressive Conservatives also suffered some disarray after the election. Dick Collver resigned as leader, then broke away from the PCs to form the Unionest Party, advocating for western Canada to join the United States.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Allan Blakeney	61	44	48.12%
Progressive Conservative	Dick Collver	61	17	38.08%
Liberal	Ted Malone	61	-	13.78%
Independent		2	-	0.02%
Total Seats			61	

APRIL 26TH, 1982

The NDP campaigned on the theme Tested and Trusted to emphasize the province's low unemployment and robust economy. The Conservatives countered that the NDP were tired and rusted, and promised lower taxes. Meanwhile, the Aboriginal People's Party emerged but failed to elect any members despite an endorsement from the Canadian Union of Public Employees. The Western Canada Concept—a western separatist party—also failed to elect any members. Nevertheless, two MLAs elected as PCs switched parties to sit as WCC members, but they were never popular with the WCC membership and were soon expelled from the party.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Progressive Conservative	Grant Devine	64	55	54.07%
New Democratic	Allan Blakeney	64	9	37.64%
Liberal	Ralph Goodale	64	-	4.51%
Western Canada Concept	Ray Bailey	40	-	3.26%
Independent		8	-	0.30%
Aboriginal People's Party		10	-	0.22%
Total Seats			64	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

OCTOBER 20TH, 1986

The NDP won more votes than the Progressive Conservatives, but the PCs won more seats. It marked the only time in Saskatchewan's history that the winning party won a majority government while the official opposition won more of the popular vote.

RESULTS:

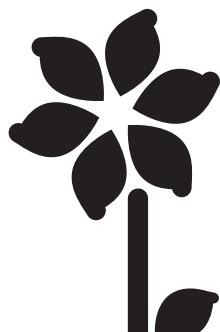
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Allan Blakeney	64	25	45.20%
Progressive Conservative	Grant Devine	64	38	44.61%
Liberal	Ralph Goodale	64	1	9.99%
Western Canada Concept	Hilton J. Spencer	9	-	0.08%
Independent		3	-	0.07%
Alliance		6	-	0.04%
Communist		1	-	0.01%
Total Seats			64	

OCTOBER 21ST, 1991

1991 was a near-reversal of the 1982 election. The NDP returned to power, as the public balked at the enormous provincial debt and poorly-thought-out PC programs like Fair Share Saskatchewan, a plan to move 2,000 civil servants from Regina to rural areas. Despite Grant Devine urging people not to vote Liberal for fear of splitting the “free enterprise” vote, provincial Liberal support strengthened under Lynda Haverstock.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Roy Romanow	66	55	51.05%
Progressive Conservative	Grant Devine	66	10	25.54%
Liberal	Lynda Haverstock	66	1	23.29%
Independent		8	-	0.11%
Independence (Western Canada Concept)		1	-	0.01%
Total Seats			66	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

JUNE 21ST, 1995

As part of the NDP's efforts to steer the province from the brink of bankruptcy, the legislature was reduced from 66 to 58 seats. This redistribution left some incumbents to fight nomination battles against colleagues from their own party. The Progressive Conservatives branded themselves as The New PCs to distance themselves from their record in government and the constant drip of news stories about former PC MLAs now being charged with fraud. The Liberals became the official opposition, winning 11 seats and placing second in 41 others.

RESULTS:

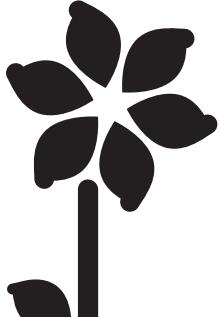
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Roy Romanow	58	42	47.21%
Liberal	Lynda Haverstock	58	11	34.70%
Progressive Conservative	Bill Boyd	58	5	17.92%
Independent		4	-	0.17%
Total Seats			58	

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 1999

In 1997, four of the five Progressive Conservatives MLAs aligned themselves with four disaffected Liberal MLAs to form the Saskatchewan Party. The Liberals carried on, but the PC party chose to put itself into hibernation, merely running paper candidates to keep its official party status. The election saw the Saskatchewan Party gain the most votes but come in second in seat count. The NDP was reduced to a minority, and forged a coalition with the Liberals.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Saskatchewan Party	Elwin Hermanson	58	25	39.61%
New Democratic	Roy Romanow	58	29	38.73%
Liberal	Jim Melenchuk	58	4	20.15%
New Green Alliance	Neil Sinclair	16	-	1.01%
Progressive Conservative	Iris Dennis	14	-	0.40%
Independent		2	-	0.10%
Total Seats			58	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

NOVEMBER 5TH, 2003

The Liberals disavowed their coalition with the NDP and ran a full slate of candidates in an election where the Saskatchewan Party was considered the favourite. However, concerns about the Sask Party privatising crown corporations and a focussed NDP campaign led to a fourth term for the NDP. The Liberals were shut out of the legislature.

RESULTS:

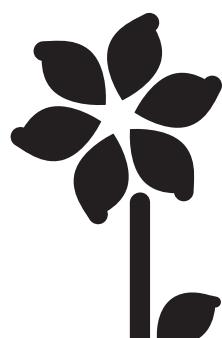
Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
New Democratic	Lorne Calvert	58	30	44.68%
Saskatchewan Party	Elwin Hermanson	58	28	39.35%
Liberal	David Karwacki	58	-	14.18%
Western Independence	Bruce Ritter	17	-	0.61%
New Green Alliance	Ben Webster	27	-	0.55%
Independent		5	-	0.47%
Progressive Conservative	Iris Dennis	11	-	0.16%
Total Seats			58	

NOVEMBER 7TH, 2007

With the economy entering a boom, the NDP promised to instate a universal pharmacare program to ensure prescription drugs would be available to all citizens. Meanwhile, the Liberals chose a new leader, the New Green Alliance changed its name to the Green Party (though remained unaffiliated with the federal Green Party) and ran a nearly-full slate of candidates, the Marijuana Party made its only appearance in a provincial election, and the PCs actively campaigned for the first time since 1995. None of these forces could stop the Saskatchewan Party's rise to power.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Saskatchewan Party	Brad Wall	57	38	50.92%
New Democratic	Lorne Calvert	58	20	37.24%
Liberal	David Karwacki	58	-	9.40%
Green	Sandra Finley	48	-	2.01%
Progressive Conservative	Rick Swenson	5	-	0.18%
Western Independence	John Nesdoly	8	-	0.13%
Marijuana	Nathan Holowaty	5	-	0.11%
Total Seats			58	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTIONS: A HISTORY... CONTINUED

NOVEMBER 7TH, 2011

A resource-based economic boom helped push the governing Saskatchewan Party to the highest-ever share of the popular vote in a Saskatchewan general election. The Liberals continued to sink, and for the first time in their history placed fourth, behind the Greens. Even though the PCs placed fifth overall, of the four smallest parties they received the most votes per candidate.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Saskatchewan Party	Brad Wall	58	49	64.25%
New Democratic	Dwain Lingenfelter	58	9	31.97%
Green	Victor Lau	58	-	2.87%
Liberal	Ryan Bater	9	-	0.56%
Progressive Conservative	Rick Swenson	5	-	0.33%
Western Independence	Dana Arnason	1	-	0.01%
Independent		1	-	0.01%
Total Seats			58	

APRIL 4TH, 2016

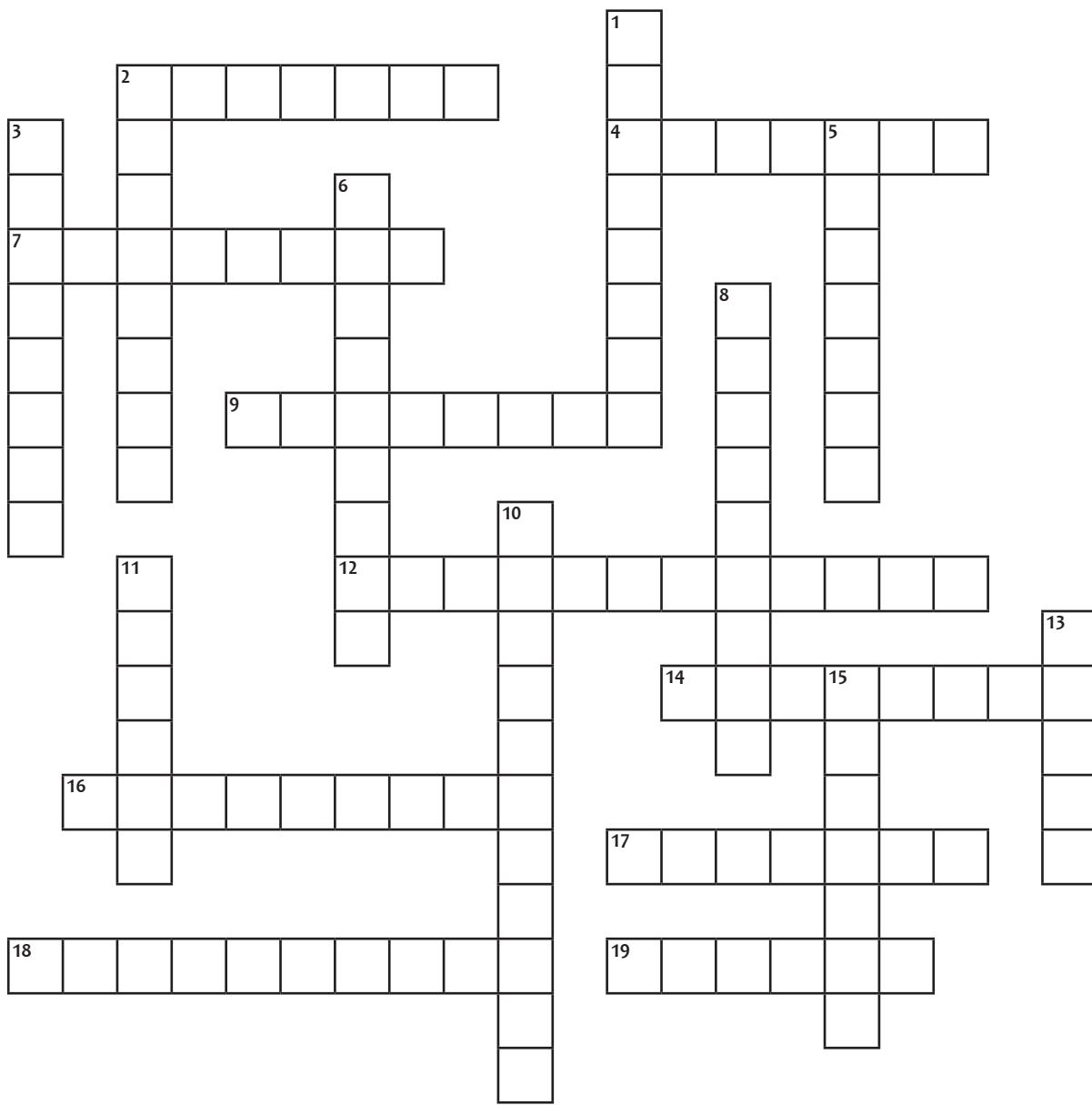
The popularity of Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party—especially in rural areas—helped make the 2016 election a foregone conclusion. However, this certainty in the election's result also pushed voter turnout to an all-time low of 57.8%.

RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Candidates	Elected	Popular Vote
Saskatchewan Party	Brad Wall	61	51	62.36%
New Democratic	Cam Broten	61	10	30.20%
Liberal	Darrin Lamoureux	61	0	3.59%
Green	Victor Lau	58	0	1.83%
Progressive Conservative	Rick Swenson	18	0	1.28%
Western Independence	Frank Serfas	4	0	0.07%
Independent		5	0	0.39%
Total Seats			61	



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTION CROSSWORD



ACROSS

2. This provincial Liberal leader also served as a federal Liberal MP from 1974-1979 and 1993-2019.
4. This premier won more elections than any other.
7. This Conservative premier tried to publicly distance himself from the support offered to his party by the Ku Klux Klan.
9. This opposition leader lost three elections to Walter Scott.
12. Despite having formed governments in Alberta and British Columbia, this political party has only elected a total of five members to the Saskatchewan legislature.



SASKATCHEWAN ELECTION CROSSWORD... CONTINUED

14. The precursor to the modern NDP won its first five seats under the leadership of this person.
16. This opposition leader was one of only two in Saskatchewan's history to win the most votes in an election, but not win enough seats to take government.
17. This was the only Saskatchewan premier to win an election with less than 40% of the popular vote.
18. This Liberal leader later went on to become the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan.
19. This person led the Progressive Conservatives to the biggest landslide victory, seat-wise, in Saskatchewan history.

DOWN

1. This Progressive Conservative leader ended a 30 year spell of no Conservatives being elected to the Saskatchewan legislature.
2. This Liberal was premier, opposition leader, and again premier. He has a dam named in his honour.
3. This premier battled five elections as NDP leader, winning three of them.
5. This political party won nine consecutive elections in Saskatchewan, even though they did not hold government consecutively through this time.
6. This political party made its first appearance in a Saskatchewan provincial election in 1938.
8. Although Ross Thatcher was Saskatchewan's first premier born in Saskatchewan, this premier was the first one born in territory that is now present-day Saskatchewan.
10. This Conservative Party leader led the party to no seats in 1938, but later went on to lead the federal party to the biggest majority government in federal history.
11. As part of his election campaign, this Progressive Conservative leader argued that "nobody can hate a party that's been out of office for four decades."
13. This CCF leader became premier after Tommy Douglas moved on to federal politics, but subsequently led the CCF to two consecutive defeats.
15. This person came to Saskatchewan in 1902 penniless and with no knowledge of farming, was Minister of Agriculture by 1916, and by 1922 was leading the province.



LESSON 3.2

CONSIDERING HOW WE VOTE

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn that voting is a democratic right and consider if it is a democratic responsibility.

MATERIALS

[Considering Voter Turnout](#)
[Declined Ballots](#)
[Lower the Voting Age?](#)

PROCEDURE

- As a class, brainstorm reasons why it is important to vote.
- Bridge discussion into reading of [Considering Voter Turnout](#).

KEY QUESTIONS

- What difficulties would students or homeless people face in having the proper identification for voting? How could this be remedied?
- Is mandatory voting a good idea? Why or why not?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of using paper ballots? What about online voting?

3. To introduce how to participate in the voting process without casting a ballot for a candidate, read [Declined Ballots](#). Reviewing Lesson 2.6: Participating in the Political Process may be useful for answering Question 1 of this handout.

4. For consideration about voter turnout, read [Lower the Voting Age?](#)

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. For an exploration of how Indigenous people gained the right to vote in federal elections, and the resistance many Indigenous people had to being granted this right, check out the case study Indigenous People and the Right to Vote in *Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

6. The CBC Archives has an examination of voting history in Canada, *Voting in Canada: How a Privilege Became a Right*. Find it at www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/voting-in-canada-how-a-privilege-became-a-right.

7. Elections Canada's comprehensive guide to *A History of the Vote in Canada* can be found at www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=index&lang=e.

CONSIDERING VOTER TURNOUT

Virtually every resident of Saskatchewan who is a Canadian citizen 18 years or older may vote in our provincial elections. The only limitation is that they must have lived here for six months prior to the election call.

When voting, citizens need to prove their identity and address. They may do this by showing one piece of government-issued photo ID with a name and address (for example, a driver's license) or showing two original documents with the voter's name from a list approved by Elections Saskatchewan. One of these documents must have the voter's address (for example, a Saskatchewan health card and power bill).

If a voter cannot provide identification, another eligible voter can vouch for their identity and place of residence, so long as both of them are assigned to vote at the same polling district. An eligible voter can only swear an oath for one other person.

Identification requirements can create obstacles to voting. People such as the homeless or students living away from their hometown may not have the documentation needed to vote, and obtaining it can be difficult. These problems must not be overlooked or minimalised: creating barriers to practicing basic democratic rights is wrong.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Saskatchewan citizens have the documentation required to vote. Despite how easy it is for the masses to vote, a surprising number of people fail to exercise this right. The percentage of registered voters casting ballots fell sharply in the mid-1990s, and has yet to return to its historical levels.

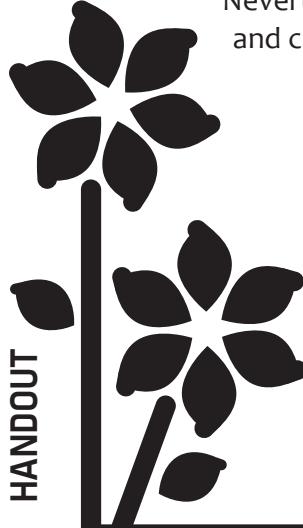
One way to increase voter turnout is to make voting mandatory, like in Australia. Australians who do not cast a ballot are fined unless they have a valid reason for not voting. This has led to roughly 95% voter turnout.

Mandatory voting increases turnout. However, requiring people to vote restricts our freedom by taking away the right to freely sit out an election. Not voting can be a legitimate form of political protest.

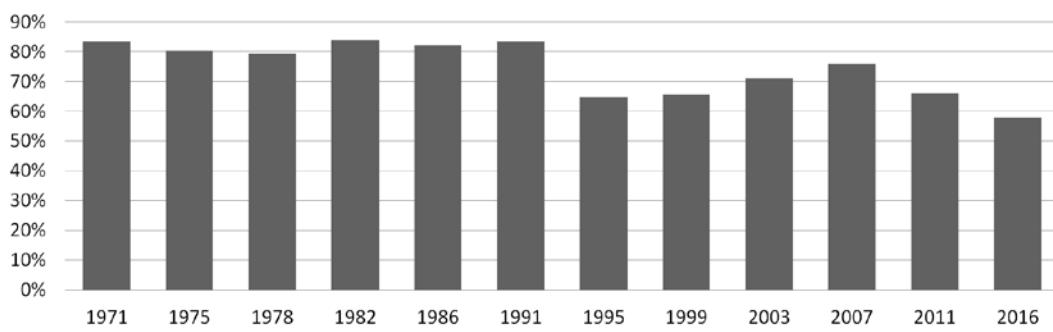
In Saskatchewan, we have chosen to voluntarily encourage people to vote. One method we encourage turnout is by providing greater access to polling stations. In the province,

- advance polling stations are opened for five days just prior to the election
- polling stations are set up in seniors' and personal care homes
- polling stations are opened in hospitals for patients
- people who are homebound due to a disability (and their caregivers) may vote by appointment in their homes
- people can apply to vote by mail

Nevertheless, more could be done. For example, having advanced polling stations at universities and colleges during provincial elections could encourage younger people to vote.



VOTER TURNOUT IN SASKATCHEWAN



TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

A spirited debate has opened up on how to use modern technology to make voting more efficient and accessible. Our current method of casting ballots is based on norms developed in the 19th century. Voters are given a paper ballot, they mark who they are voting for, and place it in a ballot box. When the polls close, the ballots are counted by hand. Scrutineers from all the candidates and political parties are invited to oversee the counting process. If a result is close, a judge may be asked to re-count the votes. This has been the method used for voting and counting since our first territorial elections in the 1800s.

Elections Saskatchewan—the independent agency that oversees Saskatchewan elections—had plans to start changing how votes are counted for the 2020 provincial elections, but these plans were postponed. The first wave of change had included the trial use of electronic tabulators. Unlike our current method of hand-counting ballots, machines would have been used to count ballots.

Changes to how we count votes must be carefully made. For example, in the United States reports constantly emerge about problems with their electronic ballot-counting systems. In contrast, Saskatchewan's paper-ballot elections almost never end with lingering doubts about the vote count. That said, electronic tabulators have been used in many Saskatchewan municipal elections with no reported problems. While tabulators may speed up vote counts, it is hard to imagine electronic vote counts leading to increased voter turnout.

VOTING ONLINE?

A more radical change that has yet to be seen in Saskatchewan provincial elections is online voting. There is little doubt that being able to vote over the internet would make the process easier for tech-savvy people, and could possibly increase voter participation. Estonia was the first country to try online voting for a national election, in 2007. It has proven so popular there that almost half of all votes are now cast online. Voter turnout in Estonia has also increased, although the research is not clear as to whether or not the increased turnout is the result of online voting. After all, many factors shape a person's decision on whether or not they will vote. Closer to home, online elections have been implemented in several Ontario municipalities, and have had few difficulties.

Detractors fear that online voting is far less secure than casting physical ballots. Computer systems could be subject to tampering, fraud, and cyber-attacks. Even the principle of the secret ballot could be at risk, given that your vote is transferred over the internet.

Regardless of how or if we vote, we can be confident in the accuracy of election results in Saskatchewan. Our provincial elections have been virtually free from allegations of fraud and vote-counting irregularities. Citizens should carefully consider any changes proposed to our voting process, but should also be confident in the independence of Elections Saskatchewan, the province's election oversight body.

Paper ballots were first used in Rome in 139 BCE. Our modern system where voters are provided with a standard paper ballot that they secretly mark and immediately place in the ballot box originates in New South Wales Australia, in 1858. Prior to the Australian experiment, voters brought their own ballots to polling stations, marked with their candidate of choice. Sometimes, political parties would even print ballots for their supporters to use. Because the bring-your-own ballot method was open to all sorts of fraud, ballots were usually cast publicly. In fact, it was common practice to use glass jars as ballot boxes to see what was being dropped inside.



DECLINED BALLOTS

For many reasons, some people choose to not vote. This is their right. However, citizens who do not want to vote for any candidate on election day have options other than staying at home. They can show up and cast a ballot that will be rejected in the counting process, or they can show up and formally decline their ballot.

BALLOTS THAT DO NOT COUNT AS A VOTE FOR ANY CANDIDATE

1. Rejected Ballots

For a ballot to be rejected, it must be marked improperly or illogically by the voter. For example, if a ballot is marked for more than one candidate, it will be rejected during the counting process. (Improperly or illogically marked ballots are commonly called spoiled ballots. However, spoiled ballots are something different. Under Saskatchewan election law, a spoiled ballot is a ballot kept by the deputy returning officer and not counted. Ballots are considered spoiled if there is a printing problem with the ballot. Ballots are also considered spoiled if a voter improperly fills it out, and instead of placing the ballot in the ballot box they give it back to the returning officer and exchange it for a new one.)

With rejected ballots, it is impossible to know the voter's motivations. Some voters may be genuinely expressing dissatisfaction with the options available or the system of government in general. However, other people may have simply made a mistake when filling in their ballot. There is no way of distinguishing the people who made an honest mistake from the people who specifically rejected their options.

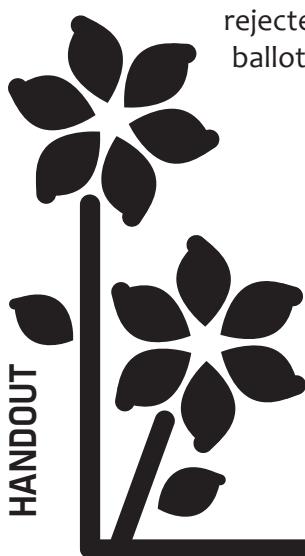
To bring more clarity and options to voters who wish to reject all the choices on a ballot, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta have given provincial election voters the option of declining their ballot.

2. Declined Ballots

When a voter receives a ballot at the voting station, they have the option of declining to use it. To exercise this option, the voter must return the ballot to the election official without filling it in, and declare that they wish to "decline their ballot." When this is the case, the election official must record the ballot as declined.

Ballots can be declined in Saskatchewan's provincial elections. However, our election laws do not require declined ballots to be specifically reported with election results. Instead, the declined ballot count is lumped in with the spoiled ballot count. This means that the public does not know how many ballots were intentionally declined.

The other jurisdictions with allowances for declined ballots believe that declined ballots should be publicly and separately reported. For example, Alberta and Manitoba election results include a breakdown of rejected ballots and declined ballots. Ontario goes one step further, by breaking down rejected ballots, declined ballots, and ballots left blank but placed in the ballot box.



DECLINED BALLOTS... CONTINUED

PRESERVING THE SECRET BALLOT

Declining your ballot is a legitimate form of political expression, but it is not a secret process. Voters must publicly declare their desire to decline a ballot and hand it back at the polling station. Compare that to the voters who cast a vote for a candidate or deface their ballots: their decision is secret.

The lack of secrecy when declining a ballot poses problems. Secret ballots help prevent people from being intimidated, threatened, or bribed. When a ballot is secret, nobody can force you to vote a certain way, nor can they reward you for your voting choice. As well, the secret ballot limits your ability to demand favours for your voting choice. Declining a ballot, however, is a public act. This undermines political privacy, a principle that Canada has recognised since its first use of the secret ballot in the 1874 federal election.

Manitoba's election laws acknowledge the importance of secrecy for voters who wish to decline their ballot. They allow voters to write "declined" on their ballot and place it in the ballot box. This method retains political privacy while having the ballot counted as declined.

WHY DECLINE YOUR BALLOT?

Declined ballots offer voters a chance to officially register dissatisfaction. If they reject all of the candidates—or perhaps even the system of government in general—declining their ballot is a way to have their voice heard on election day. Conversely, simply defacing a ballot and putting it in the ballot box can mean any number of things, from political protest to honest mistake.

Nevertheless, declined ballots are not individually reported in Saskatchewan elections. Instead, the count is lumped into the spoiled ballot category. This lack of reporting can potentially reduce the political effectiveness of a declined ballot in our provincial elections.

Discuss

1. Under what circumstances is it okay to decline a ballot? Are there better ways to address political dissatisfaction than declining a ballot?
2. In 2014, an Ontario citizen launched a non-partisan "Decline Your Vote" campaign to raise awareness of declined ballots. The campaign appeared to impact that year's provincial election: 31,399 ballots were declined, compared to just 2,335 in the previous election.
 - a) Would more people decline their ballots if they were aware of the option?
 - b) Whose responsibility is it to make people aware of the declined ballot option?
3. What would happen if declined ballots outnumbered ballots cast for candidates in an election? In other words, what would happen if declined ballots "won"?
4. Would you make any changes to Saskatchewan law in relation to declined ballots? If so, what would you change?

Voters cannot post photos of their ballots to social media. In fact, cell phones and cameras must not be used in polling places, even to photograph your ballot for your own private collection. A photo could allow another person to confirm your vote. This undermines the principle of the secret ballot and creates possibilities to punish or reward people for voting a certain way.



LOWER THE VOTING AGE?

Struggles for the right to vote are as old as democracy itself. When the western concept of democracy emerged in Athens around 2500 years ago, only a handful of adult male citizens could vote. It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that the right to vote was substantially liberalised. The movements to grant women the right to vote were on the forefront of expanding voting rights. New Zealand was the first modern-day country to grant this right in 1893. Saskatchewan women gained this right in 1916. Then-premier Walter Scott's wife, Jesse Florence Read, signed a petition in support of this in 1909. Scott was on side with his spouse, and encouraged women to gather support around the province to pave a path for the right to vote.

Women were one of only several groups in society who gained voting rights in the 20th century. Canadian legislation specifically allowed for the discrimination against minority voting rights. This meant the federal government could arbitrarily limit voting rights. For example, Doukhobors could not vote until 1945. Chinese and Indo-Canadians did not receive this right until 1947. Japanese Canadians were given the right to vote in 1948. It wasn't until 1960 that Indigenous Canadians no longer had to give up their Treaty rights and renounce their status under the *Indian Act* in order to vote in a federal election. The provincial government granted voting rights to Indigenous people that same year.

Further voting rights were gained in 1988, when the right to vote was granted for those in mental health care facilities. In 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that prisoners have the right to vote.

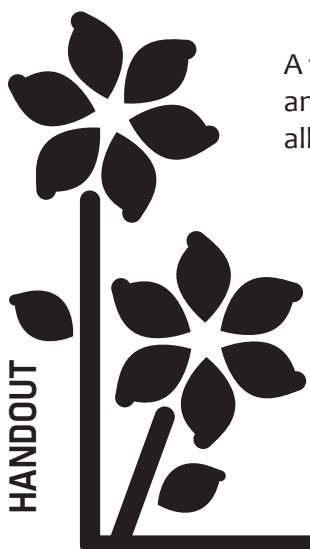
For young people, expanding the right to vote has also been a point of contention. It was not until 1970, following the lead of the United Kingdom, that the Canadian voting age was reduced from 21 to 18. More recently, the idea of lowering the voting age to 16 has been floated but has gained little traction. A private member's bill was put forth in the House of Commons in 2005 to have the federal voting age lowered, but it did not pass. As well, in 2008 the concept was proposed in Nova Scotia but went nowhere.

Arguments for a younger voting age include:

- teaching civics in conjunction with enabling voting would ingrain a sense of duty and habit in voting
- if younger people began to vote, politicians would have to better address their needs
- young people are already instilled with many other adult rights such as driving

Arguments against a younger voting age include:

- young people lack the adult maturity to make decisions about governance
- voter turnout amongst young people is low, so granting them the vote would accomplish little



A few places around the world have voting ages lower than 18. For example, Austria, Brazil, and Cuba all have minimum voting ages of 16, and East Timor and Sudan have provisions to allow 17-year-olds to vote. Globally, though, voting ages below 18 are very rare.

LOWER THE VOTING AGE?... CONTINUED

Discuss

1. Almost all young people learn about voting and elections in school. However, they do not get the chance to vote until adulthood.
 - a) Will the time lapse between learning about voting and actually voting make you less likely to vote as an adult?
 - b) Are young people mature enough to vote?
2. People under 18 have some but not all responsibilities of adults. Many laws acknowledge this. For example, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* generally deals with young people differently than adults. As well, Saskatchewan's alcohol laws deal with people under 19 differently than adults.
 - a) Would lowering the voting age strengthen arguments for changing other youth-related laws? Why or why not?
 - b) If liquor or criminal laws were changed due to a recognition of the maturity of young people, would those changes necessarily be good for you?
3. What would be the broader consequences of young people voting?



LESSON 3.3

ELECTORAL REFORM

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about the first-past-the-post electoral system, the kinds of legislatures it produces, and some of the reforms that have been suggested.

MATERIALS

[Smaller Political Parties](#)
[Reasons for Electoral Reform](#)

PROCEDURE

1. Brainstorm with class a list of parties running for election. If the list is incomplete, share with class missing parties.
2. Use overhead [Smaller Political Parties](#) to introduce how we have broader political choice in Saskatchewan than what is often perceived.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why do smaller parties and their candidates tend to get less support than mainstream candidates? Discuss these possibilities.
 - Local candidates have become less important during elections as the campaign focuses on the leaders.
 - The media only pays attention to the main parties.
 - Individuals do not have or make time to thoroughly research all candidates.

- Smaller parties often do not operate province-wide campaigns like the major parties.
- Smaller parties do not reflect the beliefs of a critical mass of people.
- People tend to vote for parties that they believe have better chances of winning.
- Smaller parties simply have views that represent a fringe opinion.

- What instances in Saskatchewan history have seen smaller parties become major parties?

It may be worthwhile to examine the policies of one or more smaller parties to enlighten or follow-up this discussion. Activities in Lesson 3.4 will help guide such an examination.

3. Bridge discussion of the lack of representation of smaller political parties in the legislature to a discussion of the first-past-the-post voting system, using [Reasons for Electoral Reform](#).

4. There are healthy debates on the best types of electoral systems. Students may embark on research projects that critically examine different types of voting. This could include:

- variations of proportional representation, such as single transferrable vote, party-list PR, and mixed-member constituency PR
- run-off voting, including instant run-off voting
- first-past-the-post

An excellent starting point to understand various voting systems is the Law Commission of Canada's 2004 report *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*. Find it at <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/J31-61-2004E.pdf>.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

5. Several provinces have held plebiscites and referendums on electoral reform. For a case study on the experience in Prince Edward Island, check out the case study "Setting Minimums: PEI Votes on Electoral Reform" in *Direct Democracy: Plebiscites and Referendums*. Find it at teachers.plea.org.

SMALLER POLITICAL PARTIES

Most people are aware of the two largest political parties in Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP. These are not the province's only political parties. Currently, Saskatchewan has six registered political parties:

- New Democratic Party (NDP)
- Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Green Party
- Saskatchewan Liberal Party
- Saskatchewan Party
- Wexit Saskatchewan

In addition, some constituencies may have independent candidates with no official political affiliation who run for office.

Smaller political parties have not had much success in gaining seats in the legislature. This has been especially true since the 1940s.



REASONS FOR ELECTORAL REFORM

Elections in Saskatchewan are based on what is called the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. Under FPTP, the candidate with the most votes in each constituency becomes the MLA for that constituency.

For example, consider the result of this hypothetical three-way race:

Candidate A: 37% of the votes

Candidate B: 35% of the votes

Candidate C: 28% of the votes

Candidate A is elected and will take a seat in the legislature.

In a general election, this voting process happens in every constituency across the province. The party with the most winning candidates across the province will usually form the government.

A problem with the first-past-the-post system is that the number of seats each party takes in the legislature does not reflect the number of votes each party receives across the province.

To better understand the discrepancy between votes cast and seats gained, look at the results from the 2016 provincial election. Compare the percentage of seats each party won to their percentage of the popular vote:

Party	Popular Vote	# of Seats Won under FPTP	% of Seats Won under FPTP
Saskatchewan Party	62.36%	51	84%
New Democratic	30.20%	10	16%
Liberal	3.59%	0	0%
Green	1.83%	0	0%
Progressive Conservative	1.28%	0	0%
Western Independence	0.07%	0	0%
Independent	0.39%	0	0%

The Saskatchewan Party won 84% of the seats in the legislature with 62% of the votes. Meanwhile, people who voted for other parties were under-represented in the legislature, if they were represented at all.

In Saskatchewan, first-past-the-post elections almost always put the party with the most votes into government. However, FPTP has once ended in government by the second-place party. In 1986, the NDP won the popular vote but the Progressive Conservatives won the most seats and formed government. Somewhat differently, in 1999, the Saskatchewan Party won the popular vote but the NDP won the most seats. To form a government, the NDP agreed to a coalition with the third-place Liberals.



ELECTORAL REFORM

Many people have advocated for electoral reforms to remedy the perceived problems of first-past-the-post elections.

One proposed reform is proportional representation (PR). There are several types of PR, but they all have one common goal: parties are given seats based on their popular vote. For example, if Party A receives 55% of the vote and Party B receives 45% of the vote, Party A is granted 55% of the legislature's seats and Party B is granted 45% of the legislature's seats. This more accurately reflects provincial voter intentions.

A different proposed reform is run-off voting. There are several types of run-off voting, but they all have one common goal. In run-off voting systems, a candidate must receive 50% or more of the vote to take a seat in the legislature. When votes are counted if no candidate receives 50% of the vote, the bottom candidate is dropped off the ballot and a run-off process begins. The run-off process continues until a single candidate has 50% or more of the votes. Unlike PR, run-off systems tend to favour larger parties.

Discuss

1. Is first-past-the-post a fair way to choose a government? Explain.
2. Would you be more inclined to vote for a smaller party if you thought your vote would have a higher likelihood of electing somebody?



LESSON 3.4

CONSIDERING PARTY PLATFORMS

OBJECTIVE

Students will research issues facing Saskatchewan and consider where parties stand on them.

MATERIALS

Public Policies: Issues and Stances

PROCEDURE

1. As a class, brainstorm issues that are important to the people of Saskatchewan. Single out issues which can be changed, controlled, or influenced by the provincial government. The background information on the separation of governmental jurisdictions, found in Lesson 1.2, may be useful for determining jurisdiction.
2. Break students into groups to determine which issues they find most interesting. Using Public Policies: Issues and Stances as a guide, students should research campaign literature, party websites, news reports, and other information to find mainstream and smaller party stances on these issues.
3. Assign each group one particular issue to thoroughly examine. Students should prepare a brief presentation for the class.

PUBLIC POLICIES: ISSUES AND STANCES

During the 1993 federal election campaign, then-Prime Minister Kim Campbell was asked about her government's plans to cut social programs. In response, Campbell famously said "this is not the time, I don't think, to get involved in a debate on very, very serious issues."

The opposition parties and the media quickly attacked Campbell for avoiding a conversation about an issue during an election campaign.

Admittedly, her statement may have had some fairness to it. Societal issues are complex, can rarely be explained with a single reason, and usually require thoughtful solutions. Nevertheless, for many people elections are the only time they take an active interest in politics and governance. Thus, elections are a time to debate "very, very serious issues."

Several issues relevant to life in Saskatchewan will emerge during this election campaign. Choose a handful of issues you find interesting and important. For each issue, answer the following questions.

1. Examining the Issue

- a) What is the issue?
- b) Why is it an issue to you? Is it an issue for other people as well?
- c) Which political parties have addressed the issue?
- d) What is the policy/stance of each party on the issue?
- e) If the issue has not been addressed by one or more parties, why do you think that is the case?

2. Deconstructing the Party Stances

- a) Who will benefit the most from each party's solution to the issue?
- b) Who will benefit the least?
- c) What problems are left unresolved by the proposed solution?
- d) What problems could the solution create?



LESSON 3.5

LOCAL CANDIDATES

OBJECTIVE

Because we elect a local representative in every constituency in the province, students will learn about the candidates vying for election in their constituency.

MATERIALS

[Local Candidates Research Guide](#)

PROCEDURE

1. Write the name of the premier or leader of the opposition on the board. Ask students to raise their hands if they know who that person is. Next, write the name of the local MLA on the board, and have students raise hands if they know who that person is. Use this informal survey to discuss how local MLAs are often lesser-known than their political leaders.
2. Assign [Local Candidates Research Guide](#). Methods of completion could include breaking students into groups to create presentations/bulletin boards/reports on a particular local candidate.
3. Some questions in the [Local Candidates Research Guide](#) could be better-answered by candidates in person. Thus, teachers may wish to organise an all-candidates forum in their school, or a class trip to such a forum. This will help students and the community learn more about local candidates.

4. Once students have fully considered all the candidates in the constituency, lead class discussion of the following question:
 - Which candidate would make the best local MLA?

LOCAL CANDIDATES RESEARCH GUIDE

The role of a member of the legislative assembly is important. They propose and vote on laws, advocate for their constituents, and bring attention to pressing needs of the province as a whole.

Unfortunately, local candidates are overshadowed by their parties and their leaders during an election campaign. This is a problem: when citizens vote in a provincial election, they are voting for a local representative. It is key to know about your local candidates.

For each candidate vying for election in your constituency, consider the following questions:

1. Who is the candidate?
2. What has the candidate done outside of politics that would make them a good local representative?
3. Has the candidate made themselves available to the public, such as by appearing at local candidate forums, holding meetings, and giving interviews on social media or to local media?
4. What policies is the candidate focussed on?
5. How do the policies the candidate supports help your constituency? How do the policies help the province as a whole?
6. Does the candidate have ideas that are unique to your constituency, or are they just repeating their party's policies?
 - a) What would the candidate do if a party policy was different than what most of their constituents wanted?
 - b) What would the candidate do if the needs of the province as a whole were in conflict with a local need?
7. MLAs have to balance the views of their constituents, the political party whose platform they stood behind to get elected, and the needs of the province as a whole.
 - a) What would the candidate do if a party policy was different than what most of their constituents wanted?
 - b) What would the candidate do if the needs of the province as a whole were in conflict with a local need?
8. Would you trust this candidate to research, debate, and vote on the laws that govern our province?



LESSON 3.6

POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

OBJECTIVE

Election results will be analysed so students can consider what the results mean for their community and for the province.

MATERIALS

Media coverage of results
Saskatchewan census data

PROCEDURE

- As a class, read through and/or watch pertinent election results as reported in traditional and social media.
- Analyse the results of the election.

KEY QUESTIONS

- If there was a parallel election held in class, compare the results of the students' vote to overall election results.
- What factors contributed to the wins and losses?
- What promises were made by the winning party and candidates? How should they be held accountable for these promises?
- What were the most significant events of the campaign?

- Reconsider traditional and social media election coverage studied in Lesson 2.4 and 2.5.

KEY QUESTION

- Did the media have an influence on the election results? If so, how?

- Reconsider voter turnout studied in Lesson 3.2.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What was the voter turnout across the province? In your constituency? How does this compare to other elections?
- What factors influenced voter turnout?

- Reconsider proportional representation studied in Lesson 3.3.

KEY QUESTION

- What percentage of the vote and what percentage of seats did each party win? What does this say about our electoral system?

- Break down the gender and ethnicity of all candidates and the winning candidates. Statistics Canada's community profile of Saskatchewan can provide current data. Find it at www.statcan.gc.ca.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Did one party proportionately elect more women and minorities than another?
- Will the legislature look like the province as a whole?
- Did a disproportionate number of women or minorities lose their campaigns? If so, can you point to reasons why?
- Is a candidate's identity more important than their policies and beliefs?
- What ways can we help make our legislature look like our province as a whole?

- Reconsider George Bernard Shaw's quote from Lesson 1.1, "Democracy is a device that ensures we will be governed no better than we deserve."

KEY QUESTIONS

- Do we deserve the local MLA we elected?
- Does Saskatchewan deserve the government we have formed?

ANSWER KEYS

Lesson 2.1 - Politician Names and Places

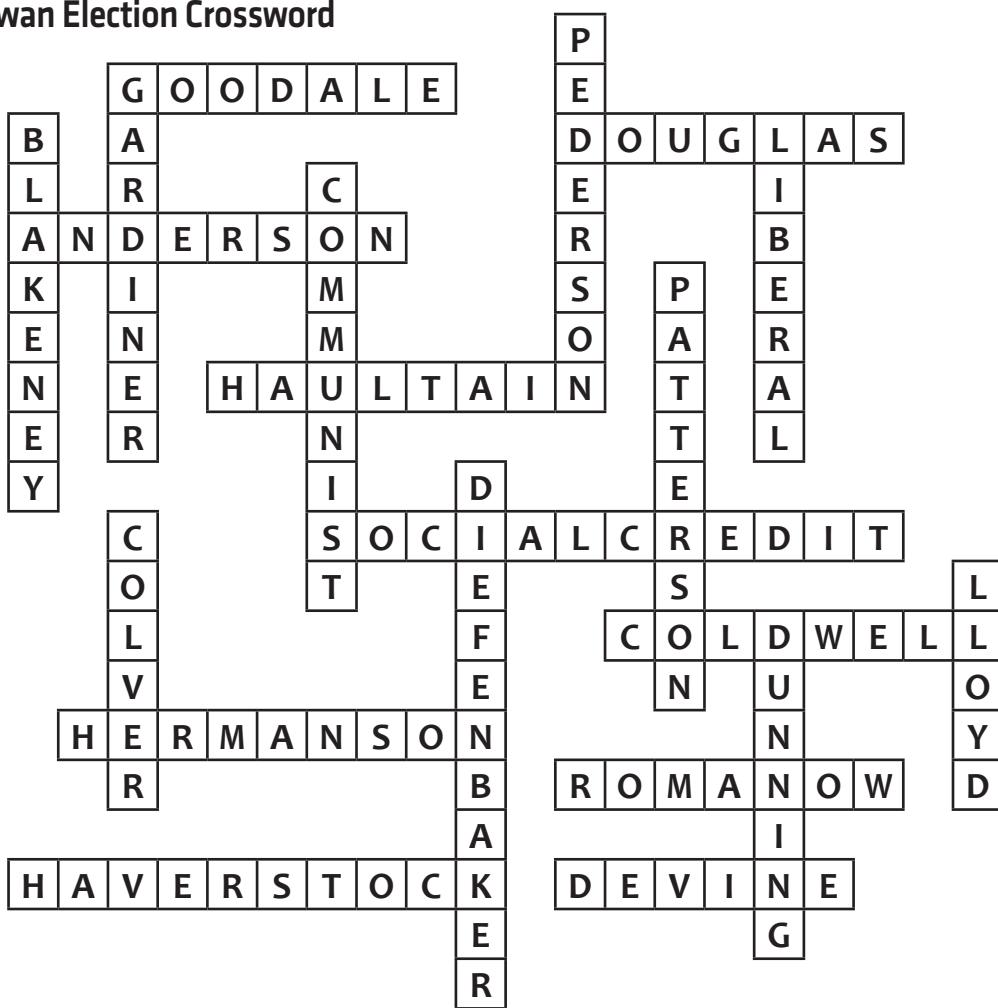
1. i) Ramsland Building, Yorkton
2. e) Motherwell Building, Regina
3. a) Brockelbank Place, Tisdale
4. d) C. F. Fines Building, Regina
5. j) L. F. McIntosh Building, Prince Albert
6. b) Grant Devine Dam, near Alameda
7. h) Francis Alvin George Hamilton Building, Regina
8. c) Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker Bridge, Prince Albert
9. g) Sturdy-Stone Building, Saskatoon
10. f) Dave G. Steuart Arena, Prince Albert

Lesson 2.2 - Private Member's Bills in Saskatchewan

Question 2

The only bill passed was *The Protection of the Wild Ponies of Bronson Forest Act*.

Lesson 3.1 - Saskatchewan Election Crossword



PLEA



Legal Information for Everyone