

The *Interim Plus* is a periodical dedicated to educational matters and specifically designed to assist teachers in integrating relevant life issues in their lesson planning.

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Elections are a vital part of a healthy democratic system of government. Too often we take this aspect of the political process for granted. The fact is that fewer than 6 in 10 eligible voters actually bother to cast their ballot during a federal election in Canada. The turnout traditionally is even worse at the provincial and municipal levels of government.

This curriculum resource will explore why Canada has the system of government that it has, how the government is chosen and how elections are conducted. Hopefully, studying these elements will help students understand the relatively low participation level of the electorate and what could be done to improve that public engagement.

There will be a series of lessons devoted to this general topic of elections and its various components – political parties, election platforms, election finances, political leadership, voter turnout, polling, candidate debates, media coverage, use of social media. This first set of lessons and related material will serve as a general introduction. Subsequent lessons and learning material will address more specific components. We will also include a politically focused crossword puzzle to challenge student knowledge in a fun manner. There is enough material to occupy students productively over several weeks as the federal election campaign unfolds. Students will learn about their society and how to take an active part in its public affairs. It is important to the well being of the body politic that its youngest members become knowledgeable, responsible and capable of contributing to the process for making decisions.

The suggested curriculum lessons and recommended classroom activities are based on the research of summer interns and flow from the learning objectives of Ontario curriculum document *Civics (CHV2O)*, more specifically, *B2.5 Governance in Canada: identify Canada's form of government and demonstrate an understanding of the process of electing governments in Canada (e.g., the first-past-the-post electoral system, riding distribution, voters' lists, how elections are called, campaigning, candidates' and party leaders' debates, advance polls, election day procedures)*. However, other provincial guidelines would be equally applicable.

At the end of the election material we include information about the Father Ted Colleton Scholarship for 2019-2020 academic year. Please note the relevant dates for submission of applications, the theme for the essay portion, and where students may go online to obtain further details, including how to download the actual brochure with application.

Our System of Government and Why We Have Elections

Canada is legally a constitutional monarchy with a monarch as titular Head of State. This means that in a ceremonial sense the Queen, Elizabeth II, is the reigning monarch, but she rules through her representative in Canada, the Governor-General, currently Julie Payette. As such Canada enjoys a parliamentary, representative government with a Prime Minister who rules and exercises power. Because of history and geography Canada is a confederation, meaning that it has two major levels of government according to the British North America Act (now The Constitution Act, 1982).

There is a national government located in Ottawa and there are provincial and territorial governments. Each level of government has its own distinct powers and responsibilities.



Julie Payette

There is one Parliament for the whole country. The practical ruler or head of government in Canada is a Prime Minister who functions as the monarch's chief minister and whose advice she and her representative (the Governor-General) must accept according to long established parliamentary traditions.

Canada's Parliamentary System boasts three branches of government: the **executive** consisting of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office; the **legislative** branch which introduces and passes the laws (two chambers, the House of Commons whose 338 members are elected by the people in various ridings or designated representative districts) from across the country, based on population and according to allotment by province, and the Senate, having 104 members who are appointed by the Governor-General upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister; and the **judicial branch**, consisting of the Supreme Court of Canada and corresponding provincial Superior Courts. It is their responsibility to interpret the constitutionality of laws passed by the legislative branch in light of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms passed in 1982.

The Prime Minister is a member of House of Commons and is the leader of the political party that obtains the majority of the parliamentary seats or ridings as a result of a national election. The leader of that winning party is invited to form a "government", that is, to choose a Cabinet to run the affairs of state and to be held responsible by the House of Commons. The Prime Minister governs through a Cabinet, a group of elected officials who head up various departments of government like defense, health & welfare, justice, transport, finance, immigration, etc. Political parties compete in elections for the privilege of governing. The party that wins the greatest number of seats gets to form that government. A change in government occurs either as a result of a national election or as the result of a vote of confidence in the House of Commons.

If there is no clear majority following an election there are two choices possible: the original Cabinet can resign and the leader of the largest opposition party can be asked to form another Cabinet that would enjoy the confidence of the majority of the members of the House of Commons. Or, the original Cabinet can stay in office and meet the newly elected House hoping to enjoy its confidence. If the majority of the members in the House of Commons vote "no confidence" then the "government" is deemed to have been defeated, thus triggering an election prematurely. Since an election would have just been held, in this case the Governor-General would ask the leader of the next largest party to attempt forming a government. This is the scenario that could result in a coalition government, where there is power sharing among the parties forming the coalition. Traditionally a Member of Parliament is elected for a 5-year term of office but this has become a 4 year term in practice since election dates are now fixed for every 4 years. That is why the election date for 2019 is October 21.

Members of the Cabinet (whether federal or provincial) have no fixed "term". Instead every federal cabinet minister serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister and all of them must be or become members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. The Cabinet has sole power to prepare and introduce bills providing for the expenditure of public money or imposing taxes on the population. If one or more cabinet ministers do not agree with a policy or action of the Government they must either resign, or accept it and defend the policy. This is known as the principle of "cabinet solidarity". Take a close look at the adjoining photo of the Cabinet and notice how several members are no longer part of this body because of resignations for one reason or another.



There has been growing cynicism and criticism of our political system in the past two decades. Many pundits bemoan the lack of public interest in politics and the lack of substantive discussion in the House of Commons itself. These critics can point to worrisome trends in political participation by the masses and stringent control exercised by all the party leaders over their caucus members. The party leaders also control the local nomination process for their parties. In one case, the leader, Justin Trudeau has gone so far as to insist that candidates wishing to run for the Liberal Party must be pro-abortion and must vote accordingly on such issues if elected.

Despite these deficits there are a considerable number of journalists who praise the enduring qualities of our parliamentary system, as being respectful of the core principles that have evolved over the centuries since the signing of the Magna Carta at Runnymede, England in 1215.

General information about our system of government can be found at these sites, with the last two listed being videos explaining the government system. A humorous rendition is the dated, but still entertaining explanation, by Rick Mercer. Most large and regional newspapers also provide website links to their own local stories on the election as it develops. Check the newspapers in your locality and ditto for local television stations in addition to Global, CBC, and CTV national networks.

<http://www.canada.ca/en/gov/system/index.html>

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/MarleauMontpetit/DocumentViewer.aspx?Sec=Ch01&Seq=2>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi1yhp-x7A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTLaQua1LiQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erP9-gjRoTY>

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<https://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>

<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&document=index&lang=e>

Questions

1. What was the Magna Carta?
2. Are there internal checks and balances within the Canadian system of government?
3. Which branch seems to have become more powerful in the last three decades? Why?
4. Do Members of Parliament represent the constituents in the House of Commons or do they represent their party in their constituency? What is the difference in role? Why has the role changed in practice?
5. What are the strength and weaknesses of the Parliamentary system?
6. Do unelected key players (PMO, political party strategists, senators, judiciary, senior bureaucrats) have too much power or influence? Consider the recent case of Trudeau’s Chief of Staff, Gerald Butts and the Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick.
7. What factors likely play important roles in how and whom the Prime Minister chooses for the Cabinet? (Regional representation, ethnicity, etc.)
8. What factors tend to limit the independent voice of MPs?
9. What changes/developments have worked to erode the importance of Parliament and contribute to the creation of a “democratic deficit”?
10. Explain the intended function of the parliamentary opposition parties. Have they been effective in fulfilling that function?
11. Investigate the nomination process for each of the political parties. Are the processes equally free or undemocratic? Visit this site for a good introduction to this topic. https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/reports/party-favours-by-the-samara-centre-for-democracy.pdf?sfvrsn=a888052f_4
12. Are there any good arguments in favour of the party leader having a certain discretionary power over the process?
13. Are there special interest groups wielding power or influence beyond their numbers or official status but rather based on such concepts as gender, lifestyle, ethnicity, professional association, labour organization, socio-economic status? Is this a problem in a democracy?
14. Watch the video “How do political parties work?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XUICruITE> Was there anything you did not know before watching it? What do you think of the “trained seals” remark? When might strict party discipline be a good/bad thing? (Hint: Jane Philpott and Jody Wilson-Raybould)



Gerald Butts



Jody Wilson-Raybould

The Election Campaign

In order for the electorate to make intelligent choices when voting, they need to be informed about the issues at stake and what the various major and minor political parties have to say about those issues. There is a formal period for a “campaign” whereby the parties are allowed to spend money to convince the voters to vote for their candidates. There are laws governing the time period of the election campaign and the amount of money that parties and individual candidates can spend during the election writ period. Failure to abide by the rules can result in financial penalties for the parties and the individual candidates and even jail terms if found guilty of contravening the election laws.

If issues are supposed to decide the outcome of elections, who determines what constitutes the key issues? **Political parties** build political platforms that ostensibly reflect party philosophy and principles as shaped and approved by party leaders, local party associations at national party conventions. Parties also conduct internal polling and use focus groups to help identify those issues that they feel will gather maximum support from the electorate. **Advertising** is a huge expenditure for parties preceding the election writ and during the campaign season itself. It is a principal means by which parties get their positive message out (what they promise to the electorate) and what is bad about the opposition parties and their leaders (negative or **attack ads**).



Rod Taylor
Christian Heritage Party



Justin Trudeau
Liberal Party



Andrew Scheer
Conservative Party



Maxime Bernier
People's Party of Canada



Elizabeth May
Green Party



Jagmeet Singh
New Democrat Party



Yves-François Blanchet
Bloc Quebecois

Parties may rely partially on the media to promote their messages. The **media** in turn plays an important role by giving some issues prominence and ignoring some issues altogether. (An interesting exercise would be to track the amount of coverage given to any life and family issues like abortion, euthanasia, pornography, embryonic stem cell research, dementia,, palliative care, same-sex marriage, transgenderism, gender equality). As an election campaign unfolds there is a frenetic com-

petition among the parties, through their spin doctors and media talking heads, trying to turn certain topics/problems/developments/gaffes into hot issues. The public can be swayed by the presentation of “the issues” and the debate of those “issues”. Given the complexity of some of the issues and the opposing points of views it is a challenge to exercise one’s franchise intelligently. The media will host **debates** among the leaders as a means of informing the electorate and playing an active part in the election process. Then there is the **role of polls** and the influence that the release of such information may have on the election process. Many people never stop to take stock of what is being debated or reported. They either find it too confusing or they simply lose interest in the entire process.

Classroom Election Activities

As mentioned above voter apathy prevails among all sectors of the population. But since youth is relatively the most inactive segment, perhaps teachers can consider classroom activities that might make the whole election experience more meaningful for the students. How can they keep track of what parties and candidates say about the issues? If they qualify for voting, how can they make an intelligent decision in casting a ballot? Here are some activities that might get them excited and informed, whether to cast a vote in the real election, or in a mock school-based election.

They can also be directed to check out *Samara Canada’s* political participation list for high school students. <https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/political-participation-activities-blank-checklist2d-ca589a50cd6a04a19bff0000c565b1.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

The list could serve a variety of purposes, for example it could be used: as a check-in at the beginning of lessons on the political process (students will realize that they’ve probably already performed some activities and are already on their way to active citizenship); as a challenge to see how many activities your students can do during the rest of the semester. The teacher could ask the students to complete a manageable number of the activities and write up a page on their experiences (what they enjoyed, what they found challenging and any barriers they found to accomplishing the activity).

Another excellent website to consult regarding the election process and the rules governing the various aspects of electioneering is the official site of Elections Canada.

<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=bkg&document=index&lang=e>

Activity I

1. Divide the class into 5 groups and have each group track the Canadian election campaign. The groups create a chart (or use the one on p. 6) on which they record the positions of the major Canadian leaders and parties. (Note: The Bloc Quebecois is not listed in the chart since it has a very narrow interest in the national election, only representing or fielding candidates in one province. Nonetheless, it can help or hurt the prospects of other parties in that province and affect the final outcome of the election in that regard. However, its stance on the national issues are not of great importance for this curriculum purpose). To persuade voters, parties usually try to come up with a short statement or slogan. Note those as well.
2. Have students research the issues as reported in news magazines, newspapers, television, radio, internet sites and blogs run by various organizations with distinctly partisan views. Have students also consider other issues that do not make it on to the main radar screen and inquire as to why that may be.
3. Groups can divide the task further by getting each member to concentrate on 2 issues each and become class experts/authorities on those issues.
4. Each group presents its summary. Each group should note whether their particular summary includes or excludes issues found in that of the other groups, and if so, let the group explain what may account for the differences.
5. On an individual basis a student may want to explore the relationship between lobbying/petitions/letters to the editor and political issues. How important is the ability to be courteous and persuasive? They may research an issue that is important in the federal election and make their own voice heard using one of these methods – or contact lobbying organizations like Campaign Life Coalition that lobbies for just laws protecting the vulnerable unborn and seniors alike or a similar organization that lobbies for some other cause.
6. Each group should also find an issue that is not national in scope but rather particular to a region, a province, or even just a single riding. How does that “more local” issue affect the outcome of the election locally?

Activity II

As mentioned above, political apathy abounds in Canada as only 60% of the electorate bother to vote in general elections. Schools can help to elevate political intelligence among youth by encouraging students to become involved. Consider these suggestions and incorporate one of them into a lesson plan or individual assignment.

Video Recording the Candidates During the Election Cycle

Democracy cannot function properly without an informed and active citizenry. People must be free to express their political preferences. But, people should also take their responsibilities seriously, becoming sufficiently informed so as to cast an informed vote at elections. The reality is that votes are cast on a variety of issues and for a variety of motives. But even the most interested and well-informed citizen cannot always make it to an all-candidates’ meeting where voters have the personal opportunity to interact with and ask questions of the local candidates. Young people can help these voters become informed and at the same time contribute to the democratic process by:








1. video recording ‘all-candidates’ meetings
2. then posting the video on You Tube or
3. sending it to an organization like Campaign Life Coalition (jack@campaignlifecoalition.com) that has the capacity to collect and disseminate such videos as part of their efforts to educate the public on life issues in particular.

In fact, students can become citizen-reporters by engaging in this exercise. The activity could be done through groups of three to four students or by individuals. It could be an independent study unit for the individual student. Considerations should include: equipment needed; obtain dates of all-candidates’ meetings in the local riding; prepare questions; decide on who will ask the questions; form of evaluation for the activity.

Encourage students to be a part of the election process. It’s a sure-fire way to learn first hand about the ins and outs of politicking. Remind senior students who qualify to vote to actually do so. Turnout in federal elections is inexcusably low in Canada: Almost four out of 10 people don’t bother. We are reminded that we can’t control the weather, but we can definitely help choose our government.

Continued on p. 7



 <p>Election Issues</p>						
Campaign slogan						
general economy						
health care						
trade agreements						
demographics immigration						
taxation policies, new tax credits						
national security, terrorism						
crime and punishment						
euthanasia, dementia, abortion, same-sex marriage						
climate change, carbon taxes						
energy prices costs						
national unity						
budget deficits						
problems with China						
Employment job creation changing opportunities						
external affairs						
national pharmacare, dental and other medical needs						

Election Debates

In the modern era television has been a key medium for the presentation of information during an election campaign. The televised debates among the party leaders can make a difference in the outcome of the election. But who decides that debates are to be held? Who chooses the dates for the debates? Who decides which leaders should be invited to the debates? What should be the criteria for participation? Do the common folk have any say as to format or timing?

Should only the leaders of the major parties be involved? For strictly logistical reasons does it make sense to have more than five or six people debating? (Although, in the early sessions of the American presidential primary debates among Democrat candidates, there were 20 candidates in total, with two groups of 10 debating on successive nights.) Placing limits on the number of participants would give enough time and space to each debater to explain their policies and poke holes in their opponents' positions. Others make the case for including all party leaders thus giving each person a fair hearing. These observers argue that by giving all the leaders a chance to speak, the process is truly democratic as all party platforms can be vetted, supported or critiqued, and voters get to hear and evaluate a diversity of options. However, the drawback for including all leaders is that there may be a superficial discussion of the issues since there would not be enough time in a two or even three hour debate format.

It appears that with each election cycle each debate has done something to win more people over to a particular cause. Unsurprisingly, the greatest impact of the debate is not on the night of the debates, or on the actual audience watching them live, but rather on the viewers who later catch snippets from the debates and then are won over. The reason for this delayed reaction may lie in the fact that those who usually watch debates are already politically informed and very often quite opinionated, with only a select few being open to change. On the other hand, the post-debate news greatly affects the wider population which is less informed or less interested/involved and is more easily swayed by the coverage that follows. So in a sense, the media can still make a huge difference by what they choose to emphasize from the debates and what statements or exchanges between leaders they want to play over and over. [teachers ought to ask students to watch at least one debate and to assess the debate based on their own criteria and then compare the media's take on the debate]

Usually debates on a local level receive less attention due to their less significant impact on the election in comparison to national debates which raise greater concerns for the national and international communities. The greater impact produces greater media coverage and greater public attention in general.

Some of the more popular and known reasons for the significance of the debates are the ideas that: *they give the media a chance to hold candidates' feet to the fire; they give voters a way to see how candidates handle the pressure of a big audience in a prize fight atmosphere; or they give the candidates a chance to close the deal; or one last chance to raise questions about their opponents' readiness to govern.*

The debates do give greater insight into the policies, the personalities, and the politics of a campaign than the regular daily media coverage can do. It is often more real than any advertisements or campaign websites.

For a critical view of the current rules for debates here are links to a blog written by a young man and one written by Rex Murphy of the *National Post*. The title of Peter N.'s blog article is *The Undemocratic Debate Commission* and that of Rex Murphy is *Who else would have the empathy to interrogate our feminist PM?* The writers take issue with various aspects of the debate format, the criteria established for inclusion in the debate and the composition of the debate moderators.

<https://www.campaignlifecoalition.com/youth-blog/id/169/title/the-undemocratic-debates-commission>

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/rex-murphy-who-else-would-have-the-empathy-to-interrogate-our-feminist-pm>

Questions

1. Have you ever watched a leaders' debate? At what level of government? Did they impress you? In what way, negatively or positively?
2. Give students the assignment of watching a leaders' debate live. Have them analyze the debate according to some criteria: e.g. clarity of arguments presented; effectiveness of speaking; power of the arguments or issues presented; ability to answer questions posed and to poke holes in the answers of opponents.
3. How many leaders should be allowed in a debate? If not all, then by what criteria would you choose the participants? On what basis has Maxime Bernier been excluded from the debates? Is this a fair decision?
4. How can media affect the result or impact of a leaders' debate? How much does media influence what is said about debates?



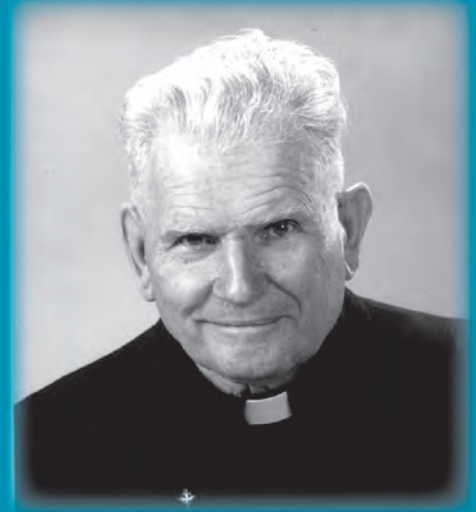
5. Are leader debates important? Why or Why not?
6. Do you think, that with so much use and accessibility of social media, leaders could get the same impact or even a more powerful one than is obtainable through the televised debates?
7. What should be the objectives in holding party leaders' debates?
8. Does the nature of the questions being posed by the moderators in a debate influence the outcome?
9. Does the choice of moderators influence the debate process and outcome? Why or why not?
10. What is the specific criticism that Rex Murphy levels against the choice of moderators?
11. Should television debates be publicly or privately funded?
12. Should there be any limits on the topics at these debates?
13. Are debates given a disproportionate degree of importance in comparison to the campaign as a whole?
14. How can youth get involved in the debates?
15. Should people be allowed to ask questions in addition to questions posed by the moderators?
16. Are the current rules for inclusion in the debates fair and democratic? (the blog mentioned above will be helpful in this regard).

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FATHER TED COLLETON SCHOLARSHIP



Niagara Region Right to Life is once again pleased to offer The Father Ted Colleton Scholarship essay contest as part of its mandate to reach out to society in an educational format. In particular, Niagara Region Right to Life wishes to help educate and inform the younger generation about the preciousness and possibilities of human life from conception to natural death and how certain threats affect those possibilities in its beginnings.

All students in grade 11 or 12, attending a Canadian high school (or being homeschooled in Canada) are invited to participate.

Three prizes of \$1500 (1st), \$800 (2nd) and \$500 (3rd) respectively will be awarded. Candidates are required to submit a personal profile, a letter of recommendation and a 1200 word essay on the theme outlined below:

“Choose a feature film or documentary that deals with sensitive material regarding pregnancy and the abortion issue. Analyze the film as to its content, plot, and main characters and explain how it promotes a positive outlook about human life.”

**SUBMIT DOCUMENTS VIA EMAIL BY
MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2019**

Email: dirocco@theinterim.com

Phone: (416) 204-1687 ext 233