

# Become an Informed Voter

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## Election Overview

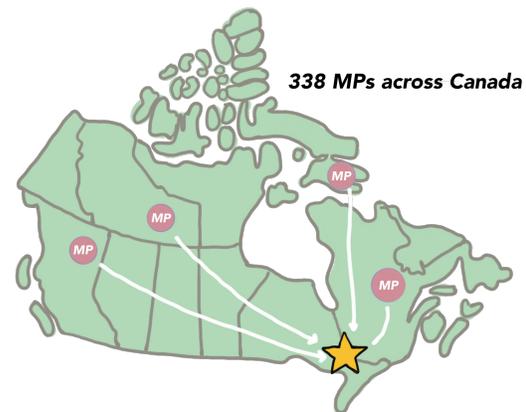
Federal elections are held every four years in Canada (1). Every Canadian 18 years or older is eligible to vote for a Member of Parliament (MP) to represent their riding in the Federal government (1).

Canada uses a first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system, meaning the candidate with the highest number of votes in each riding wins a single seat in the House of Commons (2). The candidate with the most votes will win the seat regardless of obtaining more than 50% of the total votes within their riding (2).

Some individuals believe this system is helpful, due to the straightforward relationship between citizens of a riding and their single representative (1). This leaves the accountability of each representative clearly defined, with each MP responsible for the interests of their electoral district (1).

However, the FPTP system is not favoured by everyone, as some believe it may not be fair across all ridings, as two candidates running in different ridings may achieve the same percentage of votes, but only one would be elected into Parliament due to different overall voting distributions (2).

It is also thought that the FPTP system may encourage strategic voting, which means voters will vote for the candidate most likely to defeat their least favourite candidate (2).



Illustrated by Chloe Graham

**Figure 1.** Members of the federal government are elected representatives called Members of Parliament (MP) (3). Each defined geographical area in Canada, or “riding,” votes for MPs that represent them in the federal government (4). The leader of the political party that gains the most elected MPs is appointed Prime Minister (PM) by the Governor General of Canada.

A popular alternative that has been suggested to overcome these drawbacks of the FPTP system is proportional representation (PR) (3). PR systems are designed to equate the share of votes received to the proportion of seats in the House of Commons (3).

The government will consist of multiple members from a single district occupying seats relative to the proportion of votes received (2). This system is often viewed favourably by smaller parties who may not have strong support in a particular riding, but may receive a significant share of the votes throughout all electoral districts (3). PR has gained attention from politicians as a way to establish a more accurately represented government (4). Moreover, this improvement is also thought to worsen the small differences seen across all voters and will likely make it harder for a party to win a majority government (2,5).

FPTP and PR are only two of many different electoral systems to adopt. While leaders in the Federal government have proposed electoral restructuring, no major actions have been taken to replace the FPTP voting system (6). It is important to note that a voter can only vote for one candidate, while other voting systems may include a ranking system (3).

There are advantages and disadvantages of the FPTP voting system, seen differently by individual voters (2). Different voting systems may create different voting behaviour (1). This emphasizes the impact that the voting system of choice can have on the outcome and turnout of an election (1). Many non-voters in Canada do not identify with a single party, and perhaps an electoral reform that does not require the voter to choose a single party will serve as a new way to build democracy (1).

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# Voting 101

If you are a Canadian citizen who is 18 years or older, you are eligible to vote on election day. For first time voters, it may be difficult to know the exact steps to take to participate in this process, so we will outline some voter basics below:

1. **Register:** If you are a first-time voter, the first step is to register to vote.

You can register to vote:

- At your polling place just before you vote
- Online through Elections Canada's website
- Using the Online Document Submission feature on <https://www.elections.ca/>
- By mail by requesting a registration form from Elections Canada at [info@elections.ca](mailto:info@elections.ca) or 1-800-463-6868

2. **Check your mail:** Once you are registered, Elections Canada will mail you a personalized voter information card about 3 weeks before election day. This card serves as a confirmation of registration and provides information on when and where to vote.

3. **Head to the polls:** Eligible voters will have the opportunity to vote at an advance poll held 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the 10th, 9th, 8th, and 7th days before election day. If voters did not vote at the advanced polls, they will be able to vote on election day itself, and as long as you stand in line at the voting location, they cannot close the station until you cast your vote.

There are several other voting options, including accommodations for those who cannot access their local polling station and/or are out of the country. Voters will have the option to vote at an Elections Canada office or by mail. In order to do so, electors will have to complete an Application for Registration and Special Ballot provided by Elections Canada. This option is suitable for Canadians who are not in their riding during the advance polls or during election day. Elections Canada also provides additional mobile polling stations to accommodate those in long-term care facilities or on a university campus.



*Illustrated by Chloe Graham*

**Figure 1.** All information on when and where to vote can be found on your voter information card or by contacting Elections Canada. To vote, you must provide a piece of identification that confirms your identity and address, which can be confirmed through one piece of ID (e.g. driver's licence) or two pieces of information (e.g. utility bill or lease and student ID card).

## Election Day

If you decide to vote at your local polling place, a worker will direct you to the correct table to prove your identity once you arrive. Once your name and address are confirmed, the election worker will provide you with a ballot. You will be able to take your ballot behind a voting screen to ensure privacy, cast your vote, and fold it before handing it to the worker. The worker will tear off the tab and allow you to place your ballot in the box.

## Informed Voting

To be an informed voter means more than doing your background research. In addition to educating yourself on the various party stances and values, it's important to ensure you are able to make your decision without influence from external sources (2). Becoming resistant to persuasion and knowledgeable about the candidate's positions is not an easy task, and that is why it is important to stay true to yourself. Decide what matters most to you and vote for it.

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