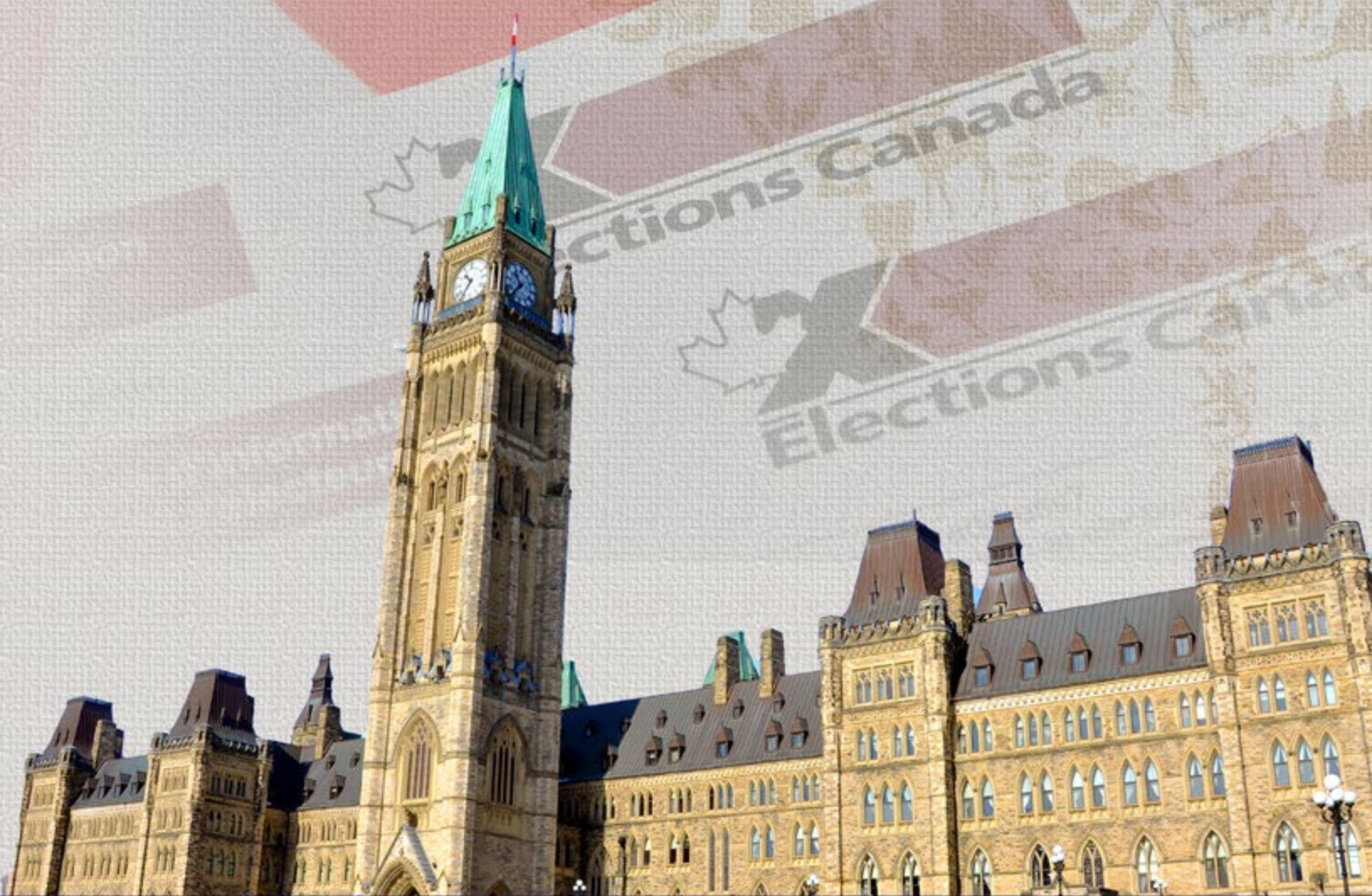


VOTING RIGHTS IN CANADA

LEARNING TOOL



A project of



Funded by the Government of Canada

Canada

MESSAGE TO TEACHERS

This guide is designed to give educators tools to help students think critically about the history of voting rights in Canada. The guide complements the [Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline](#) video by expanding on featured timeline points and providing activities to help students explore the history of voting rights in more depth. While the education guide activities follow a chronological order, the lessons may be used in order or on their own.

This guide was produced by the [Citizenship Challenge](#), a program of [Historica Canada](#), with the generous support of the Government of Canada. The Citizenship Challenge produces resources exploring Canadian civics and citizenship and operates a mock citizenship exam. Historica Canada offers programs that you can use to explore, learn, and reflect on our history, and what it means to be Canadian. Historica Canada's bilingual education guides are part of a collaborative process that engages educators, academics, and community stakeholders in content creation and lesson planning.

FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Closed captions are available on the [Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline](#) video. A transcript of the video can be found on the [Historica Canada Education Portal](#) to assist language learners in following along with the narration. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* has a collection of [plain-language summaries](#) of some popular and complex articles, created to support language learners.

INTRODUCTION

Today, voting is seen as a key element of Canadian democracy, but there has been a long history of democratic participation here since well before Canada became a country. From Indigenous systems of governance to modern elections, people have participated in the decision-making process for centuries. The nature of voting has changed over time – what is voted on, how and where voting takes place, and even who has the right to vote.

The question of who has the right to vote in Canada has not always been straightforward. Race, ethnicity, religion, property ownership, age, and gender were among the many factors that ruling elites used to exclude people from voting throughout history. At one point or another, the majority of people in Canada have had to press their claim for their right to vote, sometimes more than once.

As the country grew, changing social values impacted who had the right to vote. The franchise was a tool used strategically by governments to create electoral bases they could benefit from. Voting rights did not evolve evenly across the country. Federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal franchise regulations varied widely.

Generations of people living in what is now known as Canada were excluded from participating in democracy, and the battle for universal suffrage in Canada has been hard fought. We must never take the right to vote for granted.

TERMINOLOGY

Franchise: The term *franchise* denotes the right to vote in elections for members of Parliament, provincial legislatures, and municipal councils. To *disenfranchise* is to remove the right to vote from a group of people. To *enfranchise* is to grant the right to vote to a group of people. Note that *enfranchisement* has a different meaning in the context of Indigenous voting rights. Read more [here](#).

Indian Status: Indian Status is a legal identity defined by the *Indian Act*. It applies to some Indigenous peoples in Canada. People with status, known as Status Indians (or Registered Indians), fit the criteria for status as laid out in the Act. The terms of status—who is defined as Indian under the law—have changed over time. Outside legal contexts, the term 'Indian' is now recognized as derogatory and is rarely used.

Learn more with the [Indian Act](#) and [Indian Act \(Plain-Language Summary\)](#) articles.

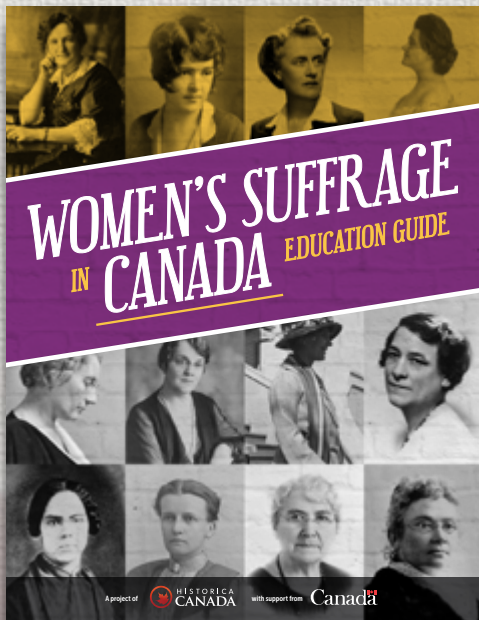


ONLINE RESOURCES

The following list of bilingual resources supports educators and students.

- [Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline](#)
- [Voting Rights in Canada Timeline](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*: an expanded version of the timeline in the video
- *The Canadian Encyclopedia* timelines on [Indigenous Suffrage](#) and [Women's Suffrage](#), as well as Women's Suffrage in the [West](#), in the [North](#), and in [Atlantic Canada](#)
- [Women's Suffrage in Canada](#) collection on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
- [Voting Rights Collection](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*
- [The chaotic story of the right to vote in Canada](#) from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights
- Elections Canada
 - [A History of the Vote in Canada](#)
 - [Elections Canada's 100th Anniversary](#)
 - [Voting Rights through Time](#)

You may be interested in related education guides produced by Historica Canada. Explore more [here](#).



SECTION 1:

Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline Video

The history of voting rights in Canada is long and complex. Begin by watching the [Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline](#) video for an overview of the centuries-long battle for the right to cast a ballot.

ACTIVITY 1: VIDEO VIEWING

1. Before watching the timeline video, have a classroom discussion or write individual responses to the following questions.
 - What is voting? What are some of the methods used to vote, now and in the past? What are other ways for people to be involved in democratic processes besides voting?
 - What does voting mean to you? Why is it important in a democracy?
 - All Canadian citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote – what does having this right mean in Canadian society?
 - What do you know about the history of voting rights in Canada? Do you know who has previously been barred from voting?
2. Watch the [Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline](#) video as a class or on your own.
3. After watching the video, have a classroom discussion or write an individual response to the following questions:
 - Did any points surprise you? What did not surprise you?
 - Did you see any themes emerge in the video?
 - Are there any questions you have about the information in the video?
4. After completing the questions, pair up with a classmate and discuss your responses. Identify any similar responses and record any differences between your responses.
5. Once you have shared in your pairs, share your responses as a group.

TEACHER TIP

Language learners can follow along with the [transcript of the video](#).

To provide more context on the video, have students read the [Right to Vote in Canada](#) article or the [Voting Rights in Canada timeline](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

Test your knowledge of Voting Rights in Canada with the [Easy](#) and [Hard](#) level quizzes developed by the Citizenship Challenge.

SECTION 2:

Indigenous Systems of Governance

Before Europeans colonized what would become Canada, Indigenous peoples governed themselves in different ways, which included democratic systems. These systems differed from group to group and from modern-day Canadian democracy – remember that not all systems of democratic governance look the same. Over time, colonization, Confederation, and assimilationist policies would forcibly strip Indigenous peoples of their systems of governance and their voting rights. Today, some of these systems can still be found and many groups are working to regain the right to self-govern.

ACTIVITY 2: INDIGENOUS VOTING SYSTEMS

In small groups, choose one of the pre-colonization Indigenous systems of governance mentioned in the video.

- [Haudenosaunee Confederacy](#)
- [Blackfoot Confederacy](#)
- [Mi'kmaq Grand Council](#)
- Village Councils in the [Huron-Wendat Confederacy](#)



Leaders from five Iroquois nations (Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca) assembled around Dekanawidah, ca. 1570. French engraving, early 18th century (courtesy Smithsonian Libraries/Second Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1880-1881, edited by J.W. Powell, 1883).

2. Using the relevant *TCE* article, timeline, and secondary research, take notes on how their system of voting operated.

- When did the system begin?
- How was leadership decided?
- Who was involved in the decision-making process?
- How were decisions made? Note that democratic participation in some of these systems of governance may not look the same as Western-style voting today.
- How did colonization affect this system of government?

TEACHER TIP

Have each group indicate on a map of North America the area(s) where their system of governance was, or still is, in use.

5.



SECTION 3:

New France and British North America

As colonies, New France and British North America were ruled by their overseas leaders. The earliest record of colonial democracy in what is now known as Canada was a *syndic* election in New France in 1647. Residents of Quebec City, Montreal, and Trois-Rivières elected *syndics*, or trustees, to a colonial council responsible to the governor. They acted as liaison between residents and the council but had little to no power to affect policy.

Voting in the British colonies began to evolve in the mid-18th century. In 1758, the first elected legislative assembly formed in what is now Nova Scotia, with elected representatives enacting legislation. But there were strict limits on who could vote – only property-owning Protestant men over the age of 21 were enfranchised. Other colonial provinces would follow suit, with their own restrictions on who could vote. Limits based on age, gender, religion, race, and property qualifications meant that the vast majority were excluded from the electoral process. Women in Lower Canada (Quebec) who owned sufficient property won the vote in 1791, but this right was revoked in 1849. Women in Quebec wouldn't win the right to vote again for nearly a century, when Quebec became the last province to enfranchise women in 1940.

However, these legislative assemblies were responsible to the monarch or their representatives (governors) and had comparatively little influence. The mid-19th century saw a rise in Responsible Government, which fought for the government to be accountable to the people through elected representatives (learn more with our [Responsible Government Education Guide](#)). But Responsible Government did not mean a widespread franchise. Originally under this system, only a small group of privileged men and property owners could vote, and the majority of people were barred from voting until the franchise slowly expanded over the following century.

The government policy of assimilation was used to grant some First Nations men the right to vote, but only if they adhered to strict requirements and relinquished their status. In the Province of Canada, under the *Gradual Civilization Act* of 1857, First Nations men who were deemed to be “of good moral character,” were debt-free, could read and write in French or English, and were educated could qualify. The act's aim was to assimilate these men so that they were no longer considered to be “Indians” and were thus granted the same rights held by settlers at the time. Under this act, only one person voluntarily enfranchised. (Read more about [Enfranchisement](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.)

Even when some groups received the vote, discrimination could still impede access to the ballot box. For example, although Black men in Canada had become British subjects, and thus won the vote, they faced racism and violence and their civil rights and civil liberties were limited, including their ability to vote. Learn more about [Black Voting Rights in Canada](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

ACTIVITY 3: VOTING RESTRICTION EXPOSÉ

Think about the different restrictions placed on who could vote in the colonies – what impact did these restrictions have?

1. Choose one of the restrictions on pre-Confederation voting in Canada: age, gender, religion, race, or property qualifications.
2. Read more about your chosen restriction on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and in Chapter 1 of [A History of the Vote in Canada](#).
3. Imagine that you are an investigative reporter writing an exposé about your chosen voting rights restriction. Using your research from step 2, consider some of the following questions.
 - Who did the restriction impact? How did being restricted from voting impact their lives?
 - Why was the restriction imposed? What was the reasoning behind it?
 - What were some of the arguments against that restriction? Were there any groups or individuals working to have it removed?
 - Consider what the impact not having the right to vote – or access to voting – had on this community. How did this affect them? Think about how this systemic oppression might have affected elections and ensuing laws and policies.
 - Write a 300–500-word exposé addressing the issue you investigated.



Religion and Voting

Most colonies initially followed the British practice that required eligible voters to take an oath of loyalty. These oaths explicitly renounced papal authority, which disenfranchised Catholics. The references in oaths to the “Christian faith” also excluded Jewish people. In addition, some religious communities, such as Quakers, were prevented by their faith from taking oaths.

SECTION 4:

Confederation to the First World War

At the time of Confederation in 1867, voting rules were determined by each province – including who was allowed to vote federally. Typically, the franchise was extended to male British subjects over the age of 21, with most provinces having a property ownership requirement. However, at this time most Canadians did not own property or meet the income threshold established by these provinces, resulting in most people being excluded from voting. Eligible voters were determined by the provinces – a group that was disenfranchised provincially was also disenfranchised federally. Around the turn of the 20th century, the majority of these property and income-based restrictions were lifted.

In 1876, the *Indian Act* consolidated laws affecting Status Indians. It introduced compulsory enfranchisement, which meant that any Status Indian who received a university degree or became a medical doctor, lawyer, or clergyman was automatically enfranchised, and their status was terminated. If they also met the property qualifications, they could then vote federally. However, the majority were still disenfranchised. It wasn't until 1960 that all First Nations could vote federally without losing status and treaty rights.

The *Indian Act* also imposed the band system on Indigenous peoples in Canada as a way to control their governance and try to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture through Western democracy. Bands are Indigenous groups whose use of reserve lands, monies, and other resources were managed by the federal government. Bands were forced to adopt colonial government structures akin to municipal governments, electing members to chief and council positions. These councils were held accountable to the Minister of Indian Affairs. Indian agents – primarily non-Indigenous men – were assigned to manage the day-to-day affairs of bands, including overseeing elections, and could veto band council decisions. These agents enforced the assimilationist policies of the government. Today, bands are overseen by the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. Status Indian women were banned from running in or voting in these elections until amendments were made to the *Indian Act* in 1951. However, the 1951 amendments also placed tighter restrictions on Status Indian women; they were involuntarily enfranchised if they married non-Status men, meaning they lost their band rights and privileges, as did their children.

Read more about [Bands](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

The 1885 *Electoral Franchise Act*, which was repealed in 1898, gave the federal vote to male Reserve First Nations in eastern Canada who met the property qualifications, without removing their status. The property qualifications once again meant that many First Nations members were barred from voting.

During the same period, federal and provincial policies removed the right to vote from many groups based on race. With large waves of immigration at the end of the 19th and the early 20th century, the demographics of Canada shifted. In provinces where white settlers were threatened by the influx of non-white settlers, race-based policies shifted to exclude voters. Few rights were granted until the First World War.



A Japanese-Canadian man with souvenir cap, August 1917 (courtesy Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada).



Laurier campaigning in Berlin (Kitchener), Ontario for the federal election. (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-463).



Nursing Sisters at a Canadian Hospital voting in the Canadian federal election, France, 1917 (courtesy William Rider-Rider/Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-002279).

The *Indian Act* is the primary law the federal government uses to administer Indian status, local First Nations governments, and the management of reserve land. The act was designed to assimilate First Nations into Euro-Canadian society. Read more about the [Indian Act](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

ACTIVITY 4: PUTTING TIMELINE POINTS IN CONTEXT (CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE)

The timeline provided in the video is a select overview. While it includes significant events in the history of voting rights in Canada, it does not provide details on how these events came about. In studying history, it is important to understand the **context** and learn what people, events, and actions caused something to happen.

1872	Chinese Canadians are banned from voting in BC provincial elections.
1876	The <i>Indian Act</i> stipulates that Status Indians have to give up Status and treaty rights to vote, effectively removing their right to vote.
1885	The <i>Electoral Franchise Act</i> gives Reserve First Nations with property qualifications the right to vote, but this is primarily in eastern Canada. Chinese Canadians lose the right to vote in federal elections.
1895	BC bars Japanese Canadians from voting in provincial elections.
1898	Federal legislation allows Chinese Canadians to vote in federal elections. Status Indians are banned from voting again unless they give up their status.
1907	BC removes provincial voting rights for South Asian Canadians.

1. Individually or in pairs, choose one of the timeline points from the video between 1867 and 1914 (listed above).

2. Research the causes of the timeline event – what happened to reach that point?

- If you chose an event where a group was granted voting rights: who fought for that right and how did they do it? If you chose an event where voting rights were taken away, research what was happening in Canada and the world at the time that led to the disenfranchisement.
- Were there any significant events leading up to this point?
- Were there any laws or policies that came before your event that had an impact?
- Were there any individuals or organizations that played a role in making this event happen?

3. Create a new timeline using the **Timeline Worksheet** on the following page to detail 5-7 events that caused your chosen timeline point to happen. If relevant, you can also add timeline points that are consequences of your event happening. For each new timeline point, include the date as well as 2-3 sentences about the event, and how it is related to the original timeline point. Consider the 5W+s (who, what, where, when, and why, and how). Does your timeline answer these questions? If you chose a group who had their voting rights removed, when was their right to vote restored? What led to that restoration?

Historical Thinking Concepts: **Cause and Consequence**

Historical events are not inevitable, but the result of complex relationships between causes and consequences. Short- and long-term causes are the product of context (existing conditions) and agency (the power humans exercise). Some consequences are intended, others unintended.

For more information on the Historical Thinking Concepts, visit historicalthinking.ca.

Timeline Worksheet

Date:	Event #1
Description:	
Date:	Event #2
Description:	
Date:	Event #3
Description:	
Date:	Event #4
Description:	
Date:	Event #5
Description:	
Date:	Event #6
Description:	
Date:	Event #7
Description:	
Date:	Original Chosen Timeline Point:
Description:	

SECTION 5:

Voting and the World Wars

The First World War and Second World War were significant events in Canadian history and catalysts for changes in voting rights – both the removal and granting of the franchise.

First World War

The war brought a fear of immigrants and their descendants who were from countries that Canada was at war with. Through the *Wartime Elections Act*, voting rights were taken away from these “enemy aliens.” During the First World War, this included immigrants from the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires, and Bulgaria. Support for the war also impacted voting rights. Religious groups with pacifist ideologies, such as Mennonites and Doukhobors, also had their right to vote removed under the act.

The First World War disrupted the women’s suffrage campaign and divided activists, but the *Military Voters Act* of 1917 gave the first women in Canada the federal vote – those who were serving in the military. That same year, the *Wartime Elections Act* gave female relatives of men in the military the vote. Some provinces began granting the provincial vote in 1916, but full provincial and territorial suffrage for women was not achieved until 1969. Federally, many women won the vote in 1918. In both cases the franchise was restricted by race, meaning that not all women won the vote at the same time.

The participation of disenfranchised groups in the war helped some of them win the vote. In 1924, Status Indian veterans of the war won the federal vote, without having to give up status or treaty rights. In BC, Japanese-Canadian veterans won the provincial vote in 1931.



Canadians voting in the Field for the British Columbia elections. France, September 1916 (courtesy W.I. Castle/Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-000554).



Elders and [Indigenous] soldiers in the uniform of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, ca. 1916-17 (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/PA-041366).

Second World War

During the Second World War, the Canadian government forcibly removed around 21,000 Japanese Canadians from their homes in coastal British Columbia. (Learn more about the [Internment of Japanese Canadians](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.) In 1944, amendments to the *Dominion Elections Act* withdrew the right to vote from Japanese Canadians who had been forcibly removed from BC, even if they lived in provinces where they otherwise would have had the vote. This included Japanese-Canadian veterans of the First World War, who had won the vote in British Columbia in 1931.

For some groups, participation in the war led to the vote. In 1944, Status Indian veterans of the Second World War, and their spouses, were able to vote in federal elections without losing status, although some conditions persisted.¹ The involvement of Chinese Canadians during the war helped pave the way for the 1947 *Canadian Citizenship Act* and the repeal of the *Chinese Immigration Act*, through which Chinese Canadians were able to gain full citizenship rights. Finally, changes to the *Dominion Elections Act* in 1948 gave the right to vote in federal elections to Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian Canadians.

¹ www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/voting-rights-in-canada

ACTIVITY 5: CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF WARTIME VOTING RIGHTS

- 1. Divide into pairs or small groups. Half the groups should cover the First World War and the other half the Second World War.
- 2. Fill out the chart below using the timeline video and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* timeline and articles.

World Wars Worksheet

First World War

Group	Why was their right to vote removed?	When did their right to vote get reinstated?
“Enemy Aliens”		
Pacifist Communities		
Group	Why/how did they win the vote?	
Women serving in the military		
Female relatives of military men		
Status Indian Veterans		
Japanese-Canadian veterans in BC		

Second World War

Group	Why was their right to vote removed?	When did their right to vote get reinstated?
Japanese Canadians who had previously won the vote		
Group	Why/how did they win the vote?	
Status Indian veterans		
Chinese Canadian veterans		

3. After filling out the chart, compare your notes with a group that chose the other war. Compare your answers – are there similarities or differences between how voting rights were treated in the two World Wars?
4. What was the impact of the changes in voting rights during the wars? Using the information from your research and chart comparisons, choose one of the prompts below and write a 500-word response.
- Analyse how the World Wars reflect changing prejudices in Canadian society.
 - Explain how an event can be both progressive and regressive for voting rights.
 - Besides determining who could vote or not, how else do you think the wars impacted voting and elections? (Example: How did overseas military personnel vote?)
 - A national referendum was held in 1942 where 64% of voters were in favour of allowing the government to use any means necessary to increase military enrollment, which could include conscription (compulsory overseas military service). What impact might this have had for people who did not have the right to vote at the time?

Extension Question

What other major events in Canadian history (that were not primarily about elections/government) have affected voting rights?

SECTION 6:

Indigenous Voting Rights within the Canadian State



While Status Indian veterans of the First and Second World Wars had won the right to vote, most First Nations across Canada were still barred. The *Indian Act* of 1876, and subsequent amendments, put strict conditions on First Nations voting rights. The Act tied voting rights closely with status and treaty rights in an effort to assimilate Status Indians into Euro-Canadian culture. In 1948, a Special Joint Committee on the *Indian Act* produced a final report after three years of hearings, which recommended that Status Indians be allowed to vote in federal elections. Apprehensive politicians worried how Status Indian voting could affect electoral bases and that they might lose votes as a result. Status Indians did not win the federal franchise until 1960, when they were finally allowed to vote without having to give up status or treaty rights. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker championed the *Canadian Bill of Rights*, which emphasized equal rights for all, and in 1960 his government amended the *Canada Elections Act* to repeal the restrictions on the federal vote for Status Indians. Provincially, unconditional Status Indian voting rights were won starting in 1949 (British Columbia), but were not achieved in all provinces until 1969 (Quebec).

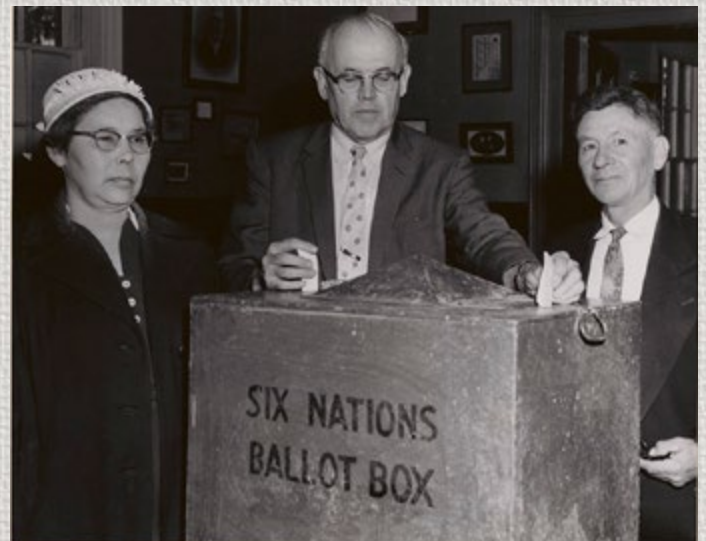
In 1951, amendments to the *Indian Act* gave Status Indian women the right to vote in band council elections. In the 1960s, First Nations succeeded in having the Indian agent position eliminated due to the growing movement towards Indigenous rights recognition and self-determination.



Elections in the North (courtesy Elections Canada).

Inuit were formally disqualified from voting with the 1934 *Dominion Franchise Act*. They won citizenship rights and the right to vote federally in 1950 as part of a government strategy to claim Arctic sovereignty during the Cold War. However, having the right to vote did not necessarily mean having access to voting. Because many Inuit lived in remote or isolated communities, many could not cast a ballot until 1962, when ballot boxes were placed in more Inuit communities and became more widely accessible.

Although Métis were not formally restricted from voting, for many, poverty and prejudice restricted their access to voting. For more information about the Indigenous fight for the right to vote, check out the [Indigenous Suffrage Timeline](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.



Voters in Six Nations of the Grand River, ca. 1954-1960 (courtesy James Harding/Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds/e011308110).

Self-Government

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Indigenous groups in Canada have negotiated for self government agreements, a formal structure through which Indigenous communities can regain control of the administration of their people, land, resources, and related programs and policies. This has been done through agreements with federal and provincial governments. While these agreements allow for Indigenous groups to use their own systems of governance, at their core they take the form of Western-style democracies, aligning with modern-day provincial, territorial, and federal systems of democracy in Canada. Read more about [Indigenous Self-Government in Canada](#).

ACTIVITY 6: INDIGENOUS SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS

1. As a group, choose one of the following existing Self-Government Agreements that were negotiated in the Northwest Territories. Visit <https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/en/priorities/concluding-and-implementing-land-claim-and-self-government-agreements/existing-agreements> for an overview and primary documents on each of the six Agreements:

- [Déljine](#)
- [Gwich'in](#)
- [Inuvialuit](#)
- [Sahtu Dene and Métis](#)
- [Salt River First Nation](#)
- [Tłıchǫ](#)

2. Working in small groups, form a “legal team.” As a legal team, your group is responsible for researching, investigating, and presenting a case in favour of self-government for one of these cases. You may want to use the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) to justify your case.

3. Read the details of your selected case on the website above and answer the following questions. In addition, read [Indigenous Self-Government in Canada](#) and [Constitution Act, 1982](#) on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* for historical context.

- Who were the signatories of the Agreement?
- When and where was the Agreement negotiated?
- What were the central issues in the negotiation? What was included in the Agreement?
- Why is this Agreement important?

4. Take notes, writing down ideas that may be helpful in persuading your audience. You may need to read articles associated with earlier court cases to make informed arguments.

5. Using your research, work with your group to write a three-paragraph persuasive brief to make a case. Be sure to only include pertinent information. Ensure that your brief achieves the following aims:

- Clearly represents the legal team’s perspective on the case
- Has a clear argument
- Uses persuasive language in defending your team’s argument and presenting the issues



First Nation Chiefs and councillors and community leaders from North-western Ontario at the Kawene Training Centre, 1961 (courtesy Department of Citizenship and Immigration/Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds/e011308444).

SECTION 7:

1960s Onwards and Modern Voting

In 1969, Quebec removed the final race-based restriction to voting in Canada when Status Indians won the right to vote in provincial elections. Though race and gender-based restrictions were now eliminated in Canada, barriers to voting remained for many people. Through the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, laws and policies have been made or amended to increase access to voting.

- **Language barriers:** In 1969, the *Official Languages Act* required that all materials and information relating to federal elections must be available in both French and English. However, this does not accommodate for language minorities or Indigenous peoples.
- **Age:** The age requirement for voting in federal elections was 21 until it was lowered to 18 in 1970, which added nearly two million Canadians to the electoral roll.
- **Physical access to voting:** In the 1960s, access to voting increased for remote Inuit communities (see [page 13](#)). In 1992, Bill C-78 mandated that voting and the electoral process must be made accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Methods of voting:** Changes to how people could cast their ballot made voting more accessible. Mail-in ballots, mobile polling stations, and advance polling stations make the voting process easier for many. Special ballots allow for electors who are overseas during the election and those hospitalized or incarcerated to still have access to voting.



Won Alexander Cumyow voting in the 1949 federal election at age 88 (courtesy UBC LibD36:D37rary Rare Books and Special Collections/RBSC-ARC-1153-BC-1848-9).

The 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* affirmed the right of every Canadian citizen 18 and older to vote and stand as a candidate in elections. Groups who were disenfranchised won the vote through Charter challenges; they include federal judges, ex-patriots living abroad, prisoners, and Canadians with intellectual disabilities. Read more about these Charter challenge successes in [Chapter 4 of Elections Canada's A History of the Vote in Canada](#).



Answering students' questions after giving a speech at York Mills Collegiate, Opposition Leader Robert Stanfield sits with high school students. 18 April 1970 (Doug Griffin/Getty Images).

ACTIVITY 7: BARRIERS TO MODERN VOTING

Over the last century, laws and policies have been made or amended to increase both the franchise and access to voting. This does not mean that everyone who can vote does vote. The voter turnout rate for the 2019 federal election was 67% – meaning that a third of Canadians eligible to vote did not. Why?

While legal barriers to voting have been effectively eliminated, there are still many obstacles that stop voters from casting their ballot. Some of these barriers include:

- Discrimination and stigma
- Language barriers for language minorities
- Apathy (e.g., “my vote doesn’t count”)
- Voter intimidation
- Disinformation
- Identification and address requirements
- Lasting effects of colonialist policies
- Unfamiliarity with the voting process
- Lack of education about the voting process
- Difficulty obtaining accommodations for disabilities

Some members of First Nations groups, such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, view themselves as independent nations, and not as Canadian citizens. As such, many do not participate in Canadian elections as it is seen as a relinquishment of their sovereignty.



Mrs. Takenaka voting in a School Board Plebiscite [Local Election]; Greenwood, BC, 1948 (courtesy Nikkei National Museum/Canadian Centennial Project fonds/2010.23.2.4.666).

1. As a class, discuss what barriers currently exist that stop people from voting. Are there any you can think of that are not on the list?
2. Individually or in pairs, choose one of the barriers discussed to research. In your research, be sure to address:
 - What is the issue?
 - Who is affected by the barrier?
 - What efforts are being made to overcome this barrier? Who is doing this work?
 - What efforts do you think should be enacted?
 - What are some ways that individuals can help combat the barrier in their communities?

Suggested resources to get you started:

- [Inspire Democracy](#)
- [Apathy is Boring](#)
- Elections Canada: [The Voter Information Campaign](#) (with sections on [New Canadians](#), [Indigenous Electors](#), [People with Disabilities](#), and [Youth](#))
- [Elections Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit electors](#)

3. Using your research, share the information about the barrier you chose using one of the following formats:
 - Brochure or informational booklet (you can use a free website such as Canva for templates)
 - Slideshow (e.g., Powerpoint, Google Slides, Prezi)
 - Informational report

Your information should address the questions asked in step 2 and include a list of resources used and for further reading.

SECTION 8:

Summative

ACTIVITY 8: OPTION A – VOTING RIGHTS CASE STUDY PODCAST

The road to the vote in Canada has been a complicated, and often long, journey. At one point or another, most Canadians were barred from voting. As a class, develop a podcast series about the history of the right to vote in Canada.

1. In small groups, choose one of the communities featured in the *Voting Rights in Canada: A Select Timeline* video to be featured in a podcast episode.

- Black Canadians
- Chinese Canadians
- Japanese Canadians
- South Asian Canadians
- Inuit
- First Nations
- Women
- Canadians with disabilities
- Pacifist groups (e.g., Mennonites, Doukhobors)
- Another group that you have identified who were barred – or faced obstacles – from voting at one point

Teacher tip: Assigns groups or have a sign-up list to ensure there is no repetition.

2. Research your chosen group's road to the right to vote or their fight for barrier-free voting. Use relevant timeline points from the video and *TCE* timeline as a starting point but conduct more research (see Online Resources on [page 3](#) for suggestions).

Use these questions to help guide your research and podcast:

- Who was fighting for the community's right to vote? Who was resistant to it?
- How were they fighting for it?
- What were some significant events or turning points in the fight?
- Were there any major Canadian or world events that influenced their voting rights? (e.g., world wars, industrialization, waves of immigration).
- What were the relevant government policies surrounding their right to vote? When were they enacted?
- Are there lasting effects from the group's inability to vote? Does your chosen group still face barriers to voting today?

3. Using your research notes, write and record a 5-minute podcast episode about your chosen group's fight for the right to vote. Be sure to address the research questions in step 2. You can choose to structure your podcast in different ways, such as an interview or panel, a conversation between two or more people, a monologue, or descriptive storytelling.

Teacher tip: Before the activity, listen to some podcast episodes as a class to give students ideas about how podcasts are structured. Check out Historica Canada's podcast series: [A Place to Belong](#), [Strong and Free](#), [Record of Service](#), and [Residential Schools](#).

4. As a class, listen to each episode of your podcast series. Have a class discussion or write short responses on the following questions:

- What were some of the similarities between different communities' fight for the vote?
- What were some of the differences between their fight for the vote?



ACTIVITY 8: OPTION B – HISTORICAL ACTORS AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

History does not just happen; people make it happen. While the federal and provincial governments ultimately had the power to grant or take away voting rights from groups of people, it was the work of the people that allowed them to reach that point.

1. Choose an individual, group, or organization who fought for the right to vote, for sovereignty, or for increased voter participation.

- Women's suffrage organizations such as the [Woman's Christian Temperance Union](#), the [National Council of Women of Canada](#) or one of the organizations listed in the [Women's Suffrage in Canada](#) collection on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (select 'Organizations' from the Articles by Topic section on the left side of the page)
- [Mary Ann Shadd](#), [Emily Stowe](#), [Thérèse Casgrain](#), or one of the suffragists listed in the [Women's Suffrage in Canada](#) collection on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (select 'Suffragists' from the Articles by Topic section on the left side of the page)
- Japanese Canadian Citizens League (JCCL), [Masumi Mitsui](#)
- Indigenous voting activists [Harold Cardinal](#), [Frederick Ogilvie Loft](#), [Chief Peter E. Jones](#), or the [National Indian Brotherhood](#)
- Naginder Singh and the Khalsa Diwan Society
- Second World War [Chinese-Canadian veterans](#); [Kew Dock Yip](#)
- Another individual or group you've identified

2. Research their role in voting activism. Consider the following questions in your research.

- What period were they living in? Consider what was going on in Canada and the world at that time.
- Who or what were they fighting for?
- How did they advocate for the vote?
- What resources were available to them?
- What impact did they have?

3. Use the information you have researched to nominate the person/group to appear on a Canadian stamp or banknote. Refer to the **Nomination Worksheet** below for the criteria for each. In your nomination, be sure to outline who the person/group was, what they did, and how they were historically significant (refer to the Historical Significance Criteria on [page 19](#)). What image or design would you use for the stamp/banknote?



Nomination Worksheet

Canada Post Stamp Nomination Criteria

We encourage Canadians to participate in proposing stamp subjects. Suggestions should include:

- A brief description of the subject.
- Its importance in the Canadian context.
- Any significant anniversaries or upcoming events.

Your suggested subject for a stamp should:

- Have broad appeal to the Canadian population, encouraging Canadians of all ages to buy and collect stamps.
- Relate primarily to Canada and is of national significance, and:
 - Evoke Canadian history, traditions, accomplishments, or natural heritage.
 - Illustrate the social, cultural, political, or economic life of Canada.
 - Commemorate people (generally after their death), their work, their birth, or a life event to recognize outstanding contributions to Canada.
- Enhance the high regard for Canadian stamps in Canadian and international philatelic circles.

Bank of Canada – Banknote Subject Nomination Criteria

Through a deliberative process reinforced by research, open dialogue, and a wide range of perspectives and experiences, the Advisory Council agreed to a set of guiding principles in compiling their short list:

- Positive change: The shortlisted nominees should have changed Canada and Canadians for the better.
- National icon: Their impact is known nationally across Canada.
- Universality: They have had an impact in Canada and this impact should reflect Canadian values.
- Uniqueness: They are uniquely Canadian and known beyond their local/regional communities.
- Relevancy: They had an impact that is relevant today.

Historical Thinking Concepts – Establish Historical Significance

People and events have historical significance if they created change that has affected many people over time, or if they revealed something about larger issues in history or the present day. For more information on the Historical Thinking Concepts, visit historicalthinking.ca.

Historical Significance Criteria

- Prominence: Was the person or event recognized as significant at the time? Why or why not? What did it mean to be “significant”?
- Consequences: What effect(s) did the person or event have?
- Impact: How widespread and long-lasting was the person or event’s impact?
- Revealing: What does the person or event reveal about the larger historical context or current issues? How do they inform our understanding of a historical issue or period?