

What to
Expect When
You're:

Getting
Started

Getting
Oriented

Getting
Informed

Getting into
Discussions

Getting
Involved

Getting to
the Polls

Staying
Engaged

Election Day is
October 21

what to expect when you're ELECTING

Presented by
The Samara Centre
for Democracy

1 Getting Started



Welcome to What to Expect When You're Electing, a series of short explainers designed to help you navigate the federal election! First up: **an overview of how Canadian federal elections work** (and why we *don't* actually elect the prime minister).

LEARN ABOUT:

- ✓ Canada's representative democracy (and what that means!)
- ✓ Canada's four orders of government
- ✓ Canada's voting system

1 Who's being elected, and when?

The next federal election is on October 21, when millions of Canadian citizens aged 18 and older will vote to elect the **Members of Parliament** (MPs) who will *represent* them in the **House of Commons** in Ottawa. That's why Canada's system of government is known as a **representative democracy**.

HOUSE OF
COMMONS

SENATE

2 Didn't I just vote in an election last year?

Possibly, but it was likely for a different order of government. Canada has **four orders of government**, each with its own set of responsibilities and its own elections that happen at different times:

- Federal (or national) government
- Provincial and territorial governments
- Municipal (or local) governments
- Indigenous governments

The **federal government**, which we focus on here, mainly looks after issues that affect the whole country like:

- Citizenship
- Foreign affairs
- National defence
- Relations with Indigenous Peoples
- Old age security
- Fisheries

...and much more! It also shares some responsibilities with other orders of government, such as health, immigration, and the environment.

If you care
about any of
these issues,
voting is one
of the easiest
ways to express
your opinion!

3 Who am I voting for?

To know who will be on your ballot this fall, here are the two things you need to understand:

1. You live in one of 338 federal **constituencies**: Constituencies are geographic areas of Canada. Some are enormous (like all of Nunavut) and others are tiny (like a dozen square blocks in downtown Toronto). They also vary in population size, but on average, about 100,000 people live in a constituency.



To find out which constituency you live in, go to elections.ca.

2. You vote in one of 338 **election races**: You vote to elect the Member of Parliament who will represent your constituency at the federal level. The people competing to win in each race are called candidates, and the candidate who gets the most votes—even just one more than anyone else—wins the seat in the House of Commons and becomes the MP.



4 But when people talk about federal elections, they often mention political parties. Why do parties matter so much?

A **political party** is made up of people who generally agree on how government should be run. Parties select election candidates, create platforms (we'll explain those next week), and encourage the Members of Parliament in their party to vote as a group to support or oppose new laws. Almost every MP belongs to a party, and the few who don't are known as Independents. The party that wins the most seats in an election typically forms government and gets to lead the country. So parties matter a lot!

5 So then who elects the prime minister?

In the lead-up to a federal election, the leaders of political parties get so much attention that you might think that we're voting for one of them to be the next **prime minister**—but we're not! We only vote for a local Member of Parliament to represent the constituency we live in. Once the election results are in, the leader of the party that forms government becomes prime minister.

You may also be thinking of the United States, where the president is directly elected.

6 All right, so what do Members of Parliament do anyway?

During the next four years, MPs will meet in the House of Commons to debate and pass **legislation** (laws) and to make sure that the government's decisions on how to spend public money are carefully thought-out and explained. They also hear from people in their constituencies on issues that matter to their communities.

Still have questions? Want to learn more?

Visit samaracanada.com/what-to-expect or email info@samaracanada.com

Coming up next:

Tips on what to consider when voting, including party platforms and why they matter

The **Samara Centre for Democracy** is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada's democracy. To learn more, visit samaracanada.com.

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