



# Voters in training

## Enrichment Activity – Youth Organizations Component

### **Mandatory Voting: For or Against?**

Staff Sheet

In the course of this activity, voters in training are asked to debate the possibility of making voting mandatory.

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#### **Skills developed**

- ✓ Knowledge on the evolution of the right to vote
- ✓ Reflection on voting: is it a right or a duty?

#### **Length**

45 minutes

#### **Material required**

- ✓ Internet access
  - ✓ Board
  - ✓ Removable sticky notes (*Post-it*)
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#### **Icebreaker activity**

Ask youths to read various articles on the Internet on the topic of voter participation. Here are some examples:

- <http://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/english/provincial/voting/participation-rates.php>
- <http://inm.qc.ca/fed2015/recherche/>

## A bit of theory

The opportunity to exercise one's right to vote has not always existed and, even when that right was adopted, some people, for instance women and Aboriginal peoples, did not get that right.

In Canada's early years, there were far fewer people who could vote than those who couldn't. Today, nearly 70% of the population can vote. The other 30% consists of youths under the age of 18 and people who do not yet have Canadian citizenship.

## Evolution of the right to vote in Canada and in Québec

CANADA	QUÉBEC
<p><b>Right to vote based on property ownership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before 1867: To be able to vote, all voters must own property or assets of a certain minimum value, or pay a certain amount of taxes or rent. Female property owners can therefore exercise the right to vote, but few do.</li> <li>• 1867: Female property owners lose the right to vote.</li> <li>• 1920: Adoption of the Dominion Elections Act abolishes ownership criteria.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1791: A law allows anyone meeting certain ownership criteria to vote.</li> <li>• 1849: A person is now defined as "a male property owner." Women therefore lose their right to vote.</li> <li>• 1936: All ownership criteria are abolished for having the right to vote.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Women's right to vote</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before 1867: Female property owners can vote, but they lose this that right in 1867.</li> <li>• 1917: As the right to vote is granted to all active members of the Canadian Armed Forces, military nurses are the first women to once again exercise the right to vote.</li> <li>• 1918: Suffrage in federal elections is extended to all women aged 21 or older.</li> <li>• 1919: Women obtain the right to run as candidates for the House of Commons.</li> <li>• 1921: Agnes Macphail becomes the first woman elected to the House.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1791: The Constitutional Act grants the right to vote to property owners, without mention of gender. This "error" is corrected in 1849, prohibiting women from voting.</li> <li>• 1922: The Québec suffragette movement is born. Among its ranks are Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Idola Saint-Jean and Thérèse Casgrain.</li> <li>• 1940: The right to vote and to be elected is finally granted to women in Québec, while their Canadian counterparts had all obtained this right for provincial elections between 1916 and 1925.</li> <li>• 1961: Claire Kirkland-Casgrain becomes the first woman elected to the National Assembly and to become a Minister.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Right to vote of Aboriginal peoples</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Before 1867: Most Aboriginal peoples had the right to vote.</li><li>• 1920: The Dominion Elections Act extends this right to everyone, but in return, they must give up their benefits as "status Indians." In addition, few efforts are made to reach them in their communities.</li><li>• 1960: The Canada Elections Act abolishes these restrictions. Now, First Nations living on reserves, who had not had the right to vote, can exercise this right. Also, voting instructions are provided in several First Nations languages.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1969: It is not until this year that Aboriginal people obtain the right to vote in provincial elections. Voting instructions are provided in all written First Nations languages of Québec.</li></ul>
<p><b>Modern evolution of the right to vote</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1970: Voting age is lowered from 21 to 18 years of age.</li><li>• 1988: The right to vote is granted to federally appointed judges.</li><li>• 1988: Persons with mental disabilities obtain the right to vote.</li><li>• 1988: Inmates serving sentences of less than two years can exercise their right to vote.</li><li>• 2002: All incarcerated electors can vote.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1963: Voting age is lowered to 18.</li><li>• 1979: Judges and inmates obtain the right to vote.</li><li>• 1989: Persons with mental disabilities obtain the right to vote.</li></ul>

While many struggles have led to the adoption of universal suffrage as we know it today, it is because the importance of the right to vote is recognized by the population. It is a powerful bond that unites the citizens of a community. It is the most important symbol of citizen participation in the workings of the state. Furthermore, it is a right protected under the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. The right to vote, while not obligatory in our country, can be considered a privilege as well as a duty.

## Suggested steps

1. As an introduction, make a brief historic presentation of the evolution of the right to vote in Canada and in Québec. Use the information provided in "A Bit of Theory."
2. Group the young people into teams.
3. In a democratic society, can a citizen be obliged to vote? Ask the young people to think about the question and find arguments for and against mandatory voting.

Here are some possible arguments:

FOR Mandatory Voting	AGAINST Mandatory Voting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Voting is a duty, so we should be obliged to exercise it.</li> <li>✓ Mandatory voting would increase voter turnout.</li> <li>✓ Citizens would take more interest in politics, because they would have to inform themselves before voting.</li> <li>✓ Mandatory voting works well in other countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Voting is a right; we should also have the right not to exercise it.</li> <li>✓ People would go to vote without being informed; the choice of these voters might not reflect their interests and concerns.</li> <li>✓ Not voting can also be an opinion, with regard to politicians and their politics.</li> <li>✓ There are always some who will prefer to pay fines, especially those who have money.</li> </ul>
Potential Compromise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ We could make voting mandatory, with the condition that abstentions would be counted, by adding an "Abstention" box on the ballot.</li> </ul>	

4. Ask youths to write each argument on a sticky note.
5. In a table divided into two columns (one column for "for" and one for "against"), place the arguments given by the youths in the right spot.
6. In view of the arguments given, answer the following questions:
  - Would making voting mandatory in Canada and in Québec be a good idea?
  - Is voting a right or a duty?