

LESSON 10

THE VOTING PROCESS

Elections Ontario is a non-partisan agency of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and is responsible for the organization and conduct of general elections and by-elections. Elections Ontario's job is to make sure that provincial elections are fair, secure and transparent and therefore, they must be strictly non-partisan.

Ontario established fixed-date elections in 2005, with provincial general elections to take place on the first Thursday in October every four years. In December 2016, the *Election Act* was amended to the first Thursday in June every four years.

Regardless of fixed-date election legislation, a provincial election can be held at any time if the government loses the confidence of the legislature or if the lieutenant governor were to dissolve the legislature on the advice of the premier.

You are eligible to vote in an Ontario provincial election if:

- You are a Canadian citizen;
- You are at least 18 years of age or older;
- You are a resident of Ontario.

Voters must prove their identity and residential address in order to receive a ballot or register to vote. You have two options:

1. One document that has your name, address and signature; or
2. One document that has a name and signature, plus one document that has your name and address.

If you have no fixed address, you can vote where you eat or sleep most often in the five weeks before the election.

Elections Ontario maintains a **voters list**, which includes the name and address of registered eligible voters. You can register to vote using Elections Ontario's online system or by contacting their office. **e-Registration** is an online tool that allows Ontario voters to confirm, update or add their voter information online in a few easy steps. During an election, you can also register as a voter at the voting location prior to casting your ballot.

In an effort to improve registration among young voters, Elections Ontario has started a **Register of Future Voters**. To be eligible, you must be 16 or 17 years old, a Canadian citizen and a resident of Ontario. Registration is available on the Elections Ontario website. The eligible voter is automatically added to the voters list on their 18th birthday.

A **Voter Information Card (VIC)** is issued by mail to every elector whose name and address appears on the voters list. The card contains individual information about when and where an elector can vote. You can also access this information by accessing the Voter Information Service on the Elections Ontario website during an election.

Voters may choose to cast their ballot in one of several ways:

On Election Day – You can vote in person on election day from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. ET at your assigned voting location.

At an advance poll – You can vote before election day by going to an advance voting location in your electoral district. You can find your advance voting locations by checking your Voter Information Card (VIC) or visiting the Elections Ontario website. Advance voting locations are open from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET.

By special ballot – All eligible electors can vote by special ballot. Options include:

- In person, at your **returning office** (From the day after an election is called until 6:00 PM ET the day before election day)
- By mail
- By home visit if you have a disability and require assistance
- By hospital visit in participating hospitals during a general election only

Where you vote is determined by where you live. Your **voting locations** for advance voting and voting on election day are based on your address, which means you can only vote at the locations assigned to you.

Voting in government elections is done by **secret ballot**. This ensures the privacy of each voter's preference. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

A **ballot** lists the names of the candidates running in your electoral district and their political party affiliation, where applicable. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for one candidate, your ballot will be accepted.

The voting process at a voting location works as follows:

1. Once you confirm your eligibility, you are given a ballot that has the election official's initials on the back.
2. Go behind a voting screen and mark your ballot for only one candidate.
3. Hand your folded ballot back to the election official to check for the initials.
4. Place your folded ballot in the ballot box.

If you make a mistake and mark your ballot incorrectly, you may return the incorrectly marked ballot to the election official. The election official will cancel the ballot and reissue you a new ballot. The election official will then write "cancelled" on the back of the ballot. **Cancelled ballots** are not placed in the ballot box, and are not part of the official results.

A **rejected ballot** is a ballot that cannot be counted because the voter's intention cannot be interpreted from the mark on the ballot. This can include marking the ballot for more than one candidate (even if different symbols are used), ranking the candidates or identifying who the voter is.

Ontario's election law allows voters to decline their ballot. To decline your ballot, tell the election official that you are declining your right to vote when they hand you a ballot. This is a public process and is done out loud. The election official will mark "declined" on the election documentation and your ballot will not be placed in the ballot box but in an envelope for **declined ballots**.

When preparing to vote, you can consider reasons to support a candidate for MPP, a political party or leader, a specific policy idea and/or an entire political platform. Voting requires that you do your research and devote the necessary time. You will know you are ready to vote when you feel confident in your ability to make a choice.