Context Card

Case study 3: Youth

In 1867, at the time of Confederation, only certain men who were 21 and older could vote in federal elections. During the two world wars, people under 21 could vote if they were in the military. Once the war was over, they lost those rights.

In 1970, a full century after Confederation, the voting age was reduced to 18. Today, our society talks about how to get more youth involved in democracy and voting. Many people support lowering the voting age to 16.

Source: Dave Chidley / The Canadian Press

1867

Youth

Source: © House of Commons Collection, Ottawa

When Canada is formed in 1867, 21 is the minimum age for voting in federal elections.
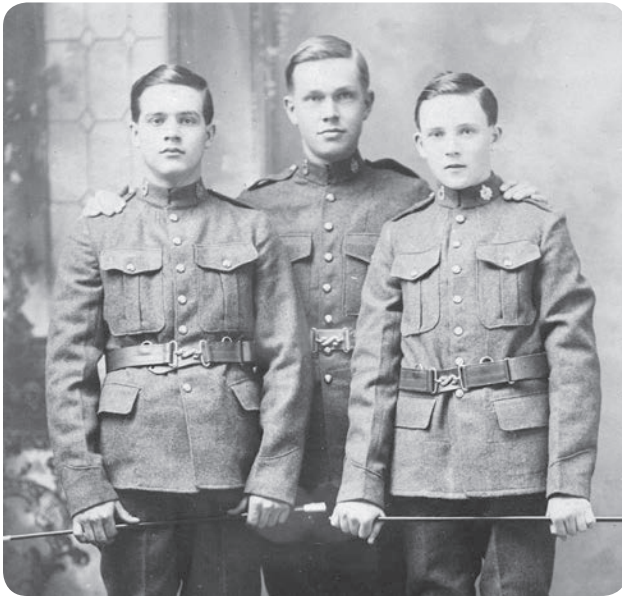
1917

Youth

Source: Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada, PA-002318

People are supposed to be 18 to serve in the military. However, many soldiers are younger than 18. During the First World War, everyone in the military is allowed to vote, no matter how old they are.

1919

Source: Jean-Baptiste Dorion, Library and Archives Canada, PA-122937

When the First World War ends, the minimum voting age returns to 21 for everyone.

1940

Source: Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada, PA-005160

During the Second World War, everyone serving in the military is able to vote in a federal election, no matter how old they are.

1944

Source: Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, R-B5749

In 1944, Tommy Douglas is the premier of Saskatchewan. Under his leadership, Saskatchewan lowers the voting age to 18 for provincial elections. It is the first province to do so.

1948

Source: Courtesy of The St. Catharines Standard, photographer Don Sinclair

Youth speak to a panel of parliamentarians at a national conference. They ask the panel whether the voting age should be lowered.

1968

Source: Dick Loek, Toronto Star via Getty Images

Youth are active in the 1968 election, when Pierre Trudeau is elected as prime minister.

1970

Source: © Library of Parliament - Roy Grogan

Parliament lowers the voting age for federal elections to 18. Millions of new voters cast votes in the 1972 election.

2016

Source : Brian Higgins, CBC Licensing

Prince Edward Island allows youth ages 16 and 17 to vote in a provincial plebiscite. During a plebiscite, people vote on an important question. In this case, the question is about whether to change the way provincial elections are run. These youth in Prince Edward Island are allowed to vote because they will be 18 by the time of the next provincial election.