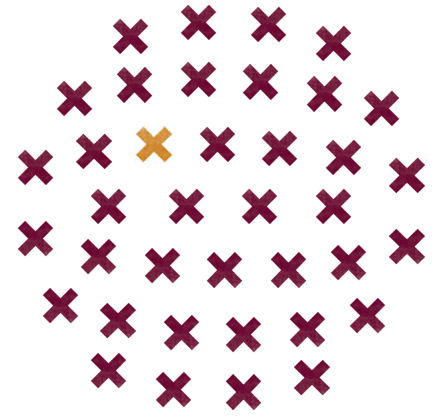


Voting Around the World series

Voting methods



Voting is one of the most powerful tools in a democracy. Around the world, people vote in a variety of ways: publicly or privately, on paper or electronically. No matter what voting method is used, people need a way to vote that is secure and accessible.

How voting works in Canada

In Canada, voting is usually done in person using paper ballots at assigned polling stations. Polling stations are places where you go to vote. They are often set up in schools or community centres.

When you go to vote in a federal election, you will:

- Get a paper ballot listing the names of all the candidates in your electoral district
- Go behind a private voting screen
- Clearly mark the ballot in the circle next to your chosen candidate's name
- Fold the ballot to keep your choice secret
- Put it in the secure ballot box

One of the most important features of voting in federal elections is the secret ballot. There is nothing on the ballot that could identify you. This ensures that your vote is private. No one will know who you voted for unless you choose to tell them.

There are a few different ways to cast your vote in federal elections. Of course, you can vote on election day. You can also vote early at advance polls. There are other ways to vote early using a special ballot:

- at an Elections Canada office
- at a Vote on Campus office
- by mail

When you vote by special ballot, a double-envelope system ensures the secrecy of your vote.

As for provincial and territorial elections, each province and territory sets its own rules. For example, in some provincial elections, you vote on a paper ballot that is then tabulated electronically to safely and quickly count all the ballots.

Like voters in all provinces and territories, voters in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories use a secret ballot to elect their members of the legislative assembly (MLAs). In both territories, MLAs then use a secret ballot to elect the premier of the territory and the cabinet.

In many democracies, voting is done in public, often by raising hands or using objects. In Canada, we use this system in certain contexts, such as when members of Parliament vote in the House of Commons. Whether they vote by standing up in the House, by saying “yea” or “nay” or by casting their vote online, each member’s vote is a matter of public record.

Voting in public can also be a part of voting customs for some Indigenous Peoples in Canada. For example, in 2024, the Chiefs of Ontario used a traditional election process to choose a new Regional Chief. To vote, they stood in line behind the candidate of their choice. Then, the candidate with the least supporters was eliminated. The process was repeated until a consensus was reached and all the Chiefs stood behind the same candidate.

✕ Other ways of voting around the world

There’s a lot of variation in how people vote. Many elections around the world use culturally rooted methods of voting, as well as different technologies.

Here are some examples:

Electronic voting machines

In some places, voting is done in person at polling stations, but instead of using paper ballots, voters press a button next to the symbol for their chosen candidate. This is the case in India, home of the largest electorate in the world. Electronic voting machines were introduced in the 1990s and are now used in all federal and state elections.

Internet voting

In 2005, Estonia was the first country to offer nationwide online voting. Citizens can vote online from anywhere in the world using a secure ID system. Ballot secrecy is maintained through encryption.

Voting with marbles

Instead of using paper ballots, voters in Gambia enter a private polling booth and drop a marble into a metal drum representing their chosen candidate. When the marble falls in, a bell rings to prevent the person from trying to vote more than once. It’s fast, easy and accessible.

Symbols on ballots

In places where many people cannot read or write in the official language, ballots list party symbols instead of names. Voters can identify their candidate by a recognizable image, such as a tree, a hand or a bicycle. Some places that use this kind of system are Liberia, Nigeria and India.

Fingerprint voting technology

Kenya uses biometric voter registration and paper ballots. Voters' fingerprints are scanned to quickly confirm their identity at the polls. Then, voters use a paper ballot that is not connected to the digital database so that their vote remains secret.

All these systems show that voting methods don't have to look the same everywhere to be fair and democratic. What matters most is that the voting process is secure, accessible and respects voters' choice.