Citizens and Government

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Ch 10 Notes for Students
Structure of Canada’s Government - Review

- A Federal State: 1 Federal government + 10 Provincial governments. Note: Municipal level of government is under Provincial control
- The Monarch (a symbol)
- Parliament: House of Commons + Senate + Governor General (Legislative Branch)
- PM + Cabinet + GG (Executive Branch)
- Supreme Court (Judicial Branch)
Making a Bill into a Law

- To become law, a bill must first be introduced in either the Senate or the House of Commons. It must then pass through stages in each House: first, second and third reading. Then it must receive Royal Assent (GG signs).

- Most legislation originates with the Government. A proposal requiring legislation is typically submitted to Cabinet by a Cabinet Minister(s).
Making a Bill into a Law

- Policy proposals are considered by an appropriate Cabinet committee and recommendations are made to the Cabinet.
- If Cabinet approves, the responsible Ministry issues drafting instructions to the Department of Justice.
- A draft bill is prepared in two official languages and approved by the responsible Minister.
- The draft bill is sent to Cabinet for approval.
- If approved the draft bill is ready to be introduced in Parliament.
The Process in Parliament

- **FIRST READING**
  First reading in either the Senate or the House of Commons. Bill is printed.

- **SECOND READING**
  Second reading in the same House of Parliament. Members debate and vote on the principle of the bill. The House may decide to refer the bill to a legislative, standing or a special committee, or to Committee of the Whole.

  - **CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE**
    Consideration by the appropriate parliamentary committee (clause-by-clause study of the bill). Committee can summon witnesses and experts to provide it with information and help in improving the bill.

  - **REPORT STAGE**
    Committee reports the bill to the House clearly indicating any amendments proposed. House considers amendments and votes for or against them.

- **THIRD READING**
  Debate and vote on bill as amended.
  **NOTE:** Once bill has been read 3 times in the House, it is sent to the Senate for its consideration.
Elections

To Vote:

- Must be 18 years of age
- Must be a Canadian citizen
- Elections must be held at least every 5 years for Federal and Provincial parliaments

- **VOTING IS AN ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CITIZENS!**

  2006 federal general election participation rate was 64.7% of eligible voters
Campaigns

- PM decides when to call an election
- PM asks GG to dissolve Parliament
- Most candidates in both federal and provincial elections are part of a political party, e.g., the Conservative Party of Canada
- Some candidates are Independent, i.e., not connected with a party
Costs of Campaigning

- Wide-open election spending can distort the election process.
- There are election spending limits in Canada to provide a ‘level playing field’ for candidates from all parties.
- **Election expenses limits**
  The Elections Act limits the amount a candidate may spend during an election. This limit is calculated according to a formula based on the number of names on the preliminary lists of electors in the electoral district in which the candidate is running. The limit, therefore, varies from district to district. Some recent examples are: $63,362.29 in Humber-St. Barbe-Baie Verte; $54,177.96 in Labrador, $66,323.09 in Lac-Saint-Jean; $53,615.51 in Papineau-Saint-Michel; $55,718.76 in Saint-Laurent-Cartierville; $56,303.35 in Etobicoke North.
- **Spending limits on election advertising**
  A third party may spend up to a total of $150,000 nationally on election advertising. Of this amount, it may spend no more than $3,000 in any single electoral district.
- **Re-imbursement of Expenses**
  Candidates can receive re-imbursement of up to 50% if he/she receives at least 15% of the votes cast.
Public Opinion Polls

- Why is public opinion polling a valuable tool in modern democratic societies?
- Can public opinion polling be a problem?
- Who would you vote for: A leader or a follower?
- Are principles important?
Electoral System

- In Canada the first-past-the-post system is used: Winners capture the most votes in each riding/constituency.
- No need for a majority of all voters.
- Is this a good system? What is the main problem with this system? What is a main advantage?
The Political Spectrum in Canada

- Left wing (Government should play a large role, especially re: social programs, taxation of ‘wealthy’ people)
- Centre
- Right wing (Small government, low taxes, emphasis on private enterprise)
**Proportional Representation**

- Used in Israel, Holland, Italy
- Number of seats won based on the percentage of total votes received
- Problems:
  > Reduced local representation
  > Regional interests minimized
  > Majority governments less frequent
- Coalitions are typical, and brief
Pressure Groups

- Two types:
  - Institutionalized and issue-oriented.
- How to exert pressure:
  - Provide information (and be seen!)
  - Conduct research polls
  - Complete reports
  - Offer advice to government ministries
- Lobbyist: An individual paid to represent the interests of a particular group to key decision makers.
Mass Media

- Media influence:
  - Media organizations have different points of view
  - Media can influence public opinion by focusing or not focusing on an issue.
  - Protest groups can ‘manipulate the media’

- Concentration of media ownership

- Can the public interest be represented by powerful media owners?
Civil Disobedience

- The act of intentionally breaking, or refusing to keep, laws one considers unjust.
- Is the majority always right? Evidence?
- American writer Henry Thoreau felt that majority rule existed only because it was more powerful and could force the minority to comply.
Examples of Civil Disobedience

- Martin Luther King/Mahatma Gandhi
- Key principle behind the concept of civil disobedience is NON-VIOLENCE
- Civil disobedience only warranted when a law significantly harms the people
- Those who use civil disobedience must be willing to cope with the consequences of their actions.
- Avoidance of such consequences can reduce the moral authority of civil disobedience.