

# 10

## The Citizen and Government

### FOCUS ON

- What roles do political parties play in Canadian politics and decision making?
- Is our first-past-the-post electoral system fair?
- How do lobby and pressure groups influence government decisions?
- How can individuals influence political decision makers?
- What role do the media play in influencing policy decisions?

### Counterpoints Issue

- Should citizens have more input in the processes of government?



*Clayoquot Protest*, 1993, one of nine panels by Ian Wallace. The panels show the artist's impression of a protest by about 12 000 people against logging of old-growth rainforest in the Clayoquot Sound area on the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1993. They objected to an agreement between the B.C. provincial government and the logging industry to open a large percentage of the area for logging. The forest industry is a mainstay of the B.C. economy, and the protest split communities.



**Expressing ideas** In the course of the protest, 859 people were arrested and charged with breaking the law. What do you think is the artist's opinion about this act of civil disobedience?

## Introduction

Let's say you live on a busy street. Cars speed past your home every day, and you worry that someone will be injured. It seems to you that some form of traffic calming, such as narrowing the road, installing crosswalks or speed bumps, or handing out more speeding tickets, is called for. How would you get your ideas put into action?

Or suppose you feel strongly that the voting age for elections should be lowered. How could you work to make that aim a reality? Would letters to the editor of a widely read newspaper accomplish anything? Or should you speak to somebody who works in a government department? Should you join the youth wing of a political party, or join a group that is pressuring the government to change the voting age?

An important aspect of citizenship is working to make changes that you feel will improve your community, region, or the country as a whole.



**Figure 10-1** Students protest cuts to education funding.

**Developing understanding** How effective do you think protest demonstrations are for getting decision makers to pay attention to a cause? Why is media attention important to these demonstrators? How else can students such as you make their voices heard by government?

In order to be effective, you need to know how to direct your efforts. You need to know who is responsible for making decisions, and who can help you achieve your goals. How can citizens get their views and opinions heard? What opportunities are there for unelected citizens to influence decision making? In this chapter, you will explore answers to these questions.

## Choosing the Government

Canadians have a democratic government. All voters have an equal opportunity to choose their representatives, and the freedom to express their views freely. As you have seen, we live in a representative democracy, and the way that most Canadians take part in political decisions is to vote in elections for the representative of their choice.

### Elections

If you are over eighteen years of age and a Canadian citizen, you are eligible to cast a ballot. Elections are held at least every five years for federal and provincial parliaments. Municipal elections usually occur more frequently—often every two to three years. In British Columbia, municipal elections are held on the same day every three years.

Voting in elections is perhaps the most widely used method for citizens to influence government. Provincial voter participation varies from election to election and from province to province. Participation in municipal elections also varies considerably, but is usually lower than in provincial or federal elections—and the difference of a few votes often determines the winner. Depending on the size of the municipality and the election issues, voter turnout can range from 20 to 70 per cent.

Those who choose not to vote make the votes of others more influential. For example, imagine that fewer than half of the eligible citizens in your municipality cast ballots in a mayoralty election. The person who is elected mayor may not have the support of the majority of citizens because

### Federal Voting Participation

Year	Percentage
1980	69
1984	75
1988	75
1993	70
1997	67
2000	63

Source: Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer.

**Figure 10-2** The percentage of eligible voters who voted in Canadian federal elections, 1980–2000.

**Thinking critically** What is the average voter turnout in federal elections for this period? The voting average for provincial elections and for municipal elections is lower than this average. How would you explain this? Why do you think voter participation has dropped so drastically since 1988?

only a minority bothered to vote. In this case, each vote cast was of greater influence than if every eligible citizen voted.

## Election Campaigns

When the prime minister decides it is time to call an election, he or she asks the governor general to dissolve Parliament. Usually, the prime minister

chooses a time near the end of his or her five-year term when public opinion polls show that the ruling party is popular. However, sometimes the government will call an early election to test whether it still has the support of the people. For example, in 1979, Prime Minister Joe Clark, who was leading a minority government, had to call an election because a key policy, his budget, was defeated in the House of Commons. In 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien called an election less than three and a half years into his term—before the new, untried leader of the Canadian Alliance, Stockwell Day, could garner wide public support.

Most candidates in federal and provincial elections are members of political parties, although some run as independents. Usually, local party members choose candidates, although sometimes the leader of a party will select a candidate to run. The names of all candidates, including any independents, go onto the ballot. A candidate needs money and plenty of volunteers to run an election campaign. This is when some citizens are most actively involved in politics. They answer phones, distribute campaign literature, put up signs, canvass for support from door to door, drive voters to the polling station, and raise money.

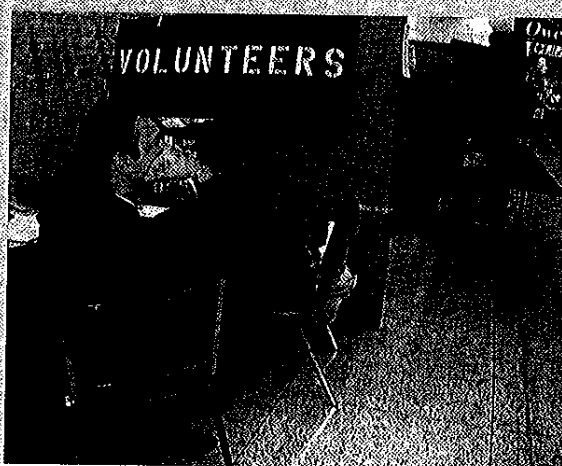
Political parties usually solicit donations from individuals and businesses to pay for their campaigns. The costs of campaigning have become an issue of concern to many people, including those involved in political parties. Some candi-

### Rules of the Election Expenses Act

Rule	Reason
Political parties' campaign spending is limited by the number of eligible voters in a riding.	To prevent parties from launching massive campaigns against opponents in smaller ridings.
The source of all donations of more than \$200 to a political party in a single year must be made public.	To hold the parties accountable for the money they receive and to make public any particularly large contributions by a single company or group.
When they register to run in the election, all candidates must pay a deposit, which is returned when they submit their expense records. Candidates who receive more than 15% of valid votes are reimbursed for 50% of election expenses.	To help candidates with fewer funds to campaign, and to discourage candidates who are not serious from campaigning.

**Figure 10-3** These rules are part of the Elections Expenses Act, 1974.

**Thinking critically** Why is it important to have rules governing election spending? What other rules would you like to see imposed on election campaigns?



**Figure 10-4** Volunteers on the campaign trail, 2000 (clockwise from top left): A poster crusade aimed at getting voters to the polls; a worker delivering campaign signs; “down time” for an exhausted volunteer on election night.

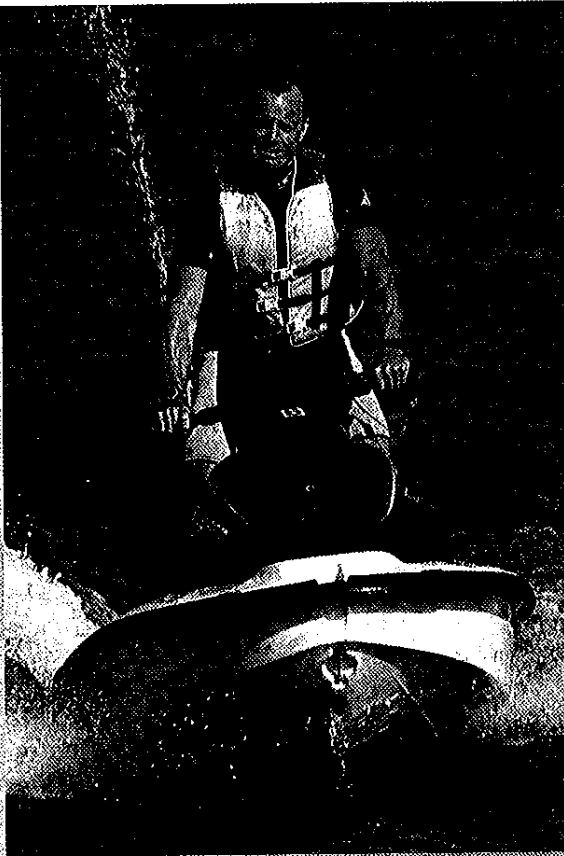
dates have a great deal of money to spend, while others do not. This can distort the election process, giving an advantage to the candidate who can pay for an image or presentation that attracts voters. Others believe that expensive advertising and other campaign tactics divert attention away from the examination of real issues and problems.

### Public Opinion Polls

During elections, public opinion on projected voting behaviour is constantly surveyed and the results reported by the media. Political parties seek public opinion throughout the year, but particularly during elections. Parties typically spend 15 per cent of their election budgets on polling. Polling companies hired by political parties contact a cross-section of the population that is believed to

represent the views and opinions of Canadians in general. The people are asked questions about voting preferences and their opinions regarding political leaders, parties, and issues. The answers collected from the polls are tabulated and given to campaign organizers, who often alter the speeches of candidates to emphasize issues of importance to voters. Television commercials, debate responses, and even candidates' appearance may be altered to reflect the findings of the polls.

Some commentators are concerned that public opinion polls published during election campaigns affect voters' choices. If a party is shown to have a large lead in popular support just prior to an election, for example, some voters may believe their vote is unnecessary, or wasted if they plan to vote for an alternative party. This is one reason why public opinion polls showing the level of voter

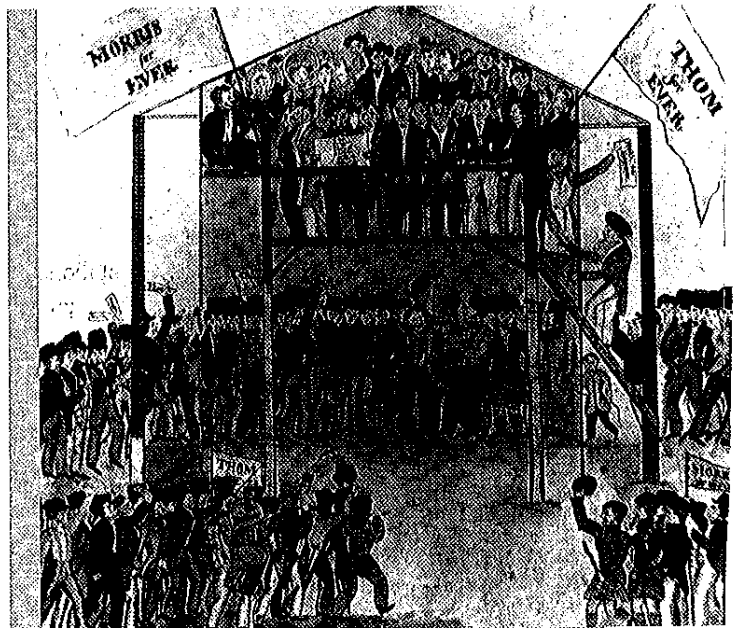


**Figure 10-5** Less than a month before the 2000 federal election was called, Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day arrived at a news conference on a personal watercraft.

**Thinking critically** How important do you think the appearance of political leaders is to their success? Explain your answer.

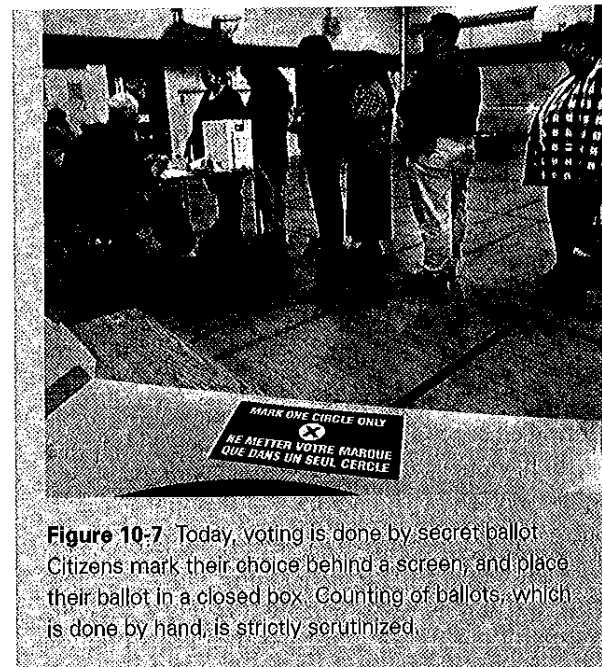
support for parties are not allowed to be published in the twenty-four hours immediately prior to an election.

On election day, polling stations are set up in every riding. Schools and places of worship are often used as polling stations. The names of all eligible voters who have registered are listed at each poll, and a polling officer crosses off the name of each individual as he or she votes. Voting takes place in private, behind a small screen, and no campaign signs or literature are allowed at or around the polling station.



**Figure 10-6** Before the advent of the secret ballot in 1874, Canadian voters used to have to declare their vote in public.

**Developing understanding** What are the disadvantages of voting publicly, as shown in this picture?



**Figure 10-7** Today, voting is done by secret ballot. Citizens mark their choice behind a screen, and place their ballot in a closed box. Counting of ballots, which is done by hand, is strictly scrutinized.

## ACTIVITIES

1. In some countries, like Australia, voting in elections is compulsory for eligible voters. Do you think Canada should adopt this system? Why or why not?
2. Because of the size of the country and the number of time zones, results of federal elections in the East are announced half an hour before voting stations are closed in British Columbia. Some people argue that this can influence the way people in the West vote. Do you consider this a problem that should be addressed? Why or why not?
3. Do you think the voting age should be lowered to seventeen? Prepare a letter to send to your member of Parliament to explain your opinion.
4. An election, it is often said, is won on the backs of the volunteers. What types of jobs are done to help get someone elected in Canadian elections? How important do you think volunteers are in running election campaigns? Why might people volunteer to work in a campaign?
5. Research how public opinion polls are conducted. What are their drawbacks? How reliable do you think they are in reflecting public opinion?

## The Electoral System →

When the polls close, the votes are counted and the candidate with the most votes in each riding is announced the winner. This is called the **first-past-the-post system**. The winner does not necessarily have to win a majority of the votes cast; he or she simply has to win more votes than any of the other candidates. This system has the virtue of being simple and straightforward. Its supporters also argue that it means there is usually a clear winner of elections and that minority governments do not often happen. However, the result does not always represent the wishes of the majority of voters (see Figure 10-8).

First-past-the-post is so named because a candidate has only to win more votes than his nearest competitor to take the riding, not an absolute majority of the votes cast. The most direct conse-

Candidate	Votes
Herb Dhaliwal, Liberal	17 705
Ron Jack, Canadian Alliance	15 384
Herschel Hardin, New Democratic Party	3 848
Dan Tidball, Progressive Conservative	2 649
Others	1 880

**Figure 10-8** The results of the federal election of 2000 in the riding of Vancouver–Burnaby.

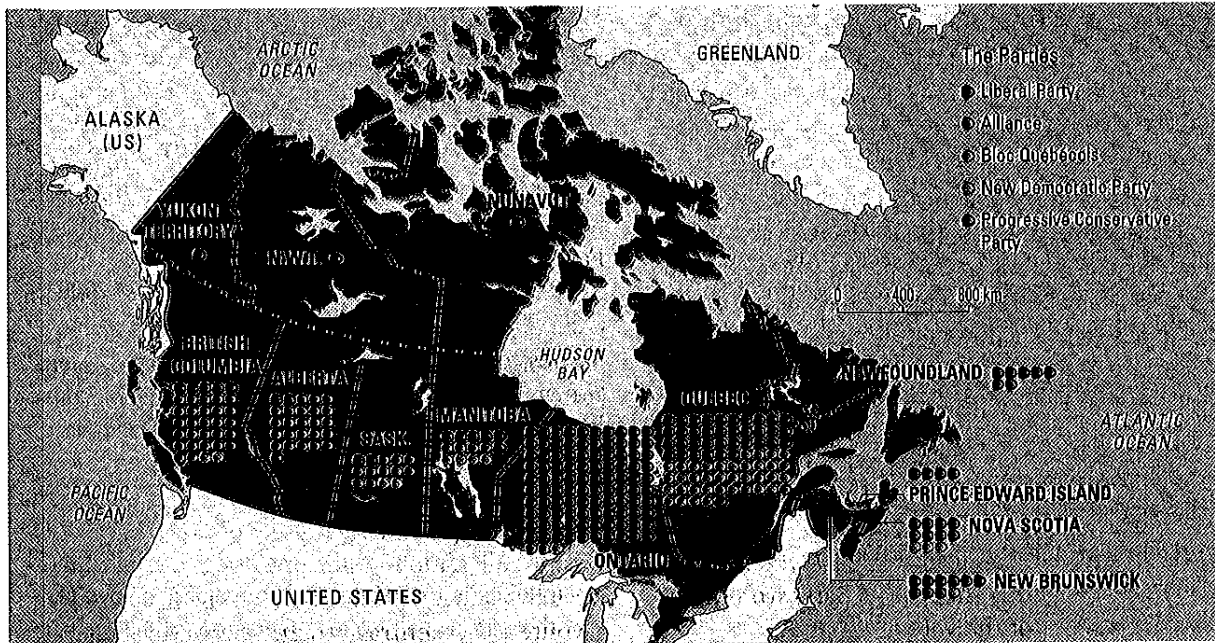
**Thinking critically** Did Herb Dhaliwal win 50 per cent or more of the votes? Should a candidate or a government have to win 50 per cent or more of votes cast? Explain your opinion.

quence is to exaggerate the majority enjoyed by the winning party, often grotesquely; with less than half the popular vote, governments have been formed with nearly all of the seats.... [I]t produces results that are increasingly at odds with voters' desires.

Source: Andrew Coyne, *Toronto Star*, October 17, 1996.

For this reason, some people advocate a switch to some form of **proportional representation** (PR). PR systems are used in countries such as Israel, Holland, and Italy. Each political party puts forward a list of all its candidates. Voters support a candidate on the basis of the party he or she represents. The number of seats a party wins in the legislature is based on the total number of votes it receives. For example, in a 100-seat legislature, a party that received 38 per cent of the popular vote would have thirty-eight seats in the legislature. The candidates who got the most votes from the party's list would fill the thirty-eight seats.

One objection is that this kind of PR system would mean that local representation—having an MP allocated to each riding—would disappear, or change. Another is that, since most elections using PR do not give one party a majority, parties often have to create coalitions, or alliances, to form a government. The experience in some other countries appears to be that these coalitions often cannot be maintained for very long.



**Figure 10-9** Results of the 2000 election by province.

**Reading a map**

1. How does this map support the view that the Bloc Québécois and Canadian Alliance are regional parties?
2. The Liberal Party claims to be the only party that can call itself a "national" party. How does this map support that claim? How does it not?

**Figure 10-10** In 2000, a simple majority in Parliament required 151 seats.

**Reading a table**

1. In which year did the governing party win 50 per cent of the vote?
2. Explain how the Liberal Party formed the government in 1997 with less than 40 per cent of the vote.
3. Explain how in 1993 the Bloc Québécois became the opposition party when the Reform party gained a larger number of votes.
4. Why do you think the present system of voting causes regional dissent in Canada? Explain your answer.

Party	1984	1988	1993	1997	2000
<b>Bloc Québécois</b>					
% of votes			13.5	10.7	11
Number of seats			54	44	38
<b>Reform/Canadian Alliance</b>					
% of votes		n/a	18.7	19.4	26
Number of seats		1	52	59	66
<b>Liberal</b>					
% of votes	28	32	41.3	38.4	41
Number of seats	40	83	<b>177</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>New Democratic Party</b>					
% of votes	19	20	6.9	11.1	n/a
Number of seats	30	43	9	21	13
<b>Progressive Conservative</b>					
% of votes	50	43	16	18.9	n/a
Number of seats	<b>211</b>	<b>169</b>	2	19	12
<b>Others</b>					
% of vote	3	5	3.6	1.5	0
Number of seats	1	2	1	2	0
<b>Total seats</b>	282	295	295	301	301

n/a = not available  
Governing parties are indicated in bold type.

This increases the number of elections and diminishes the stability of the government. Some countries, however, such as Germany and New Zealand, have developed systems that combine elements of PR and first-past-the-post, and these appear to work very well.

An important argument favouring a change in the first-past-the-post system for Canada is that the present system accentuates regionalism in Canada. For example, although the Canadian Alliance won all but three seats in Alberta in the 2000 federal election, 25 per cent of voters in that province voted Liberal. In Ontario, a large number of voters supported the Canadian Alliance, but the party won only two seats there. The same problem exists at a provincial level. In Prince Edward Island, the opposition in 2001 consisted of one member, even though his party won more than 40 per cent of the vote.

## Political Parties

Most elected representatives at the federal and provincial level belong to one of the political parties. Political parties act as a way of representing the views of Canadians in the decision-making process. Members of a political party share a common set of beliefs. These beliefs together are called an *ideology*. The ideology of a party pro-

vides a framework for its decisions and policies. One way of describing the ideology of a party is to describe it as generally left wing, centre, or right wing, as shown in Figure 10-11.

From 1867 to 1988, two long-established political parties were dominant in Canada: the Progressive Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. In the federal election of 1988, as you saw in Figure 10-10, the Progressive Conservative Party lost a massive number of seats. Two new parties took their seats: the Reform Party, which became the Canadian Alliance in 2000, and the Bloc Québécois.

The Canadian Alliance, like its predecessor, the Reform Party, gets most of its support from the western provinces. It grew out of feelings of western alienation—the conviction among many westerners that the federal government in Ottawa favoured the central provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and that western voices were not being heard. The party hopes to extend its appeal to voters in other provinces who would like to see substantial changes in the way government operates, particularly how the federal government responds to the concerns of various regions in Canada.

As you saw in Chapter 8, the Bloc Québécois formed after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, and became the official opposition after the election of 1993. Its support comes entirely from Quebec.

Left-Wing	Centre	Right-Wing
Support change in order to improve the welfare of all citizens.	Tradition is important, but change must be supported if most people want it.	Tradition is important; change should be treated with caution.
Governments should play a larger role in people's lives, especially in providing social services.	Governments should play a role only when it improves the lives of citizens.	Governments should play a small role. Private businesses should ensure needs of citizens are met.
Law and order are important to protect the rights of all citizens fairly and equally.	Law and order are important to encourage and protect the rights of individuals.	Emphasizes law and order to protect society and its traditions.

**Figure 10-11** The political spectrum in Canada. People who study politics sometimes use a political “spectrum” to explain the range of beliefs and views on a civic issue. In this political spectrum, beliefs and views are categorized “left-wing,” “centre,” or “right-wing.” Often, political parties are linked with these categories.

**Identifying viewpoint** What words or phrases would you use to summarize the three ideologies shown in the political spectrum? Which of the positions on the spectrum is most attractive to you? Explain.



## Joining a Political Party

Those who choose to join a political party can nominate and vote for the candidates who will run in their riding. To join a political party, you need to be eighteen years of age. However, most of the major political parties have special youth wings that allow young people to have their say regarding policies and future directions for the

party. Youth wings often have considerable influence over party policies, as parties are anxious to get young people involved to ensure the party's survival in the future.

Why do people join political parties? Some wish to improve the quality of life in their community, region, or nation. Others believe strongly in the ideology of the political party and act on their beliefs. Still others are attracted to the power

up close

## Jenny Kwan: Politics with Passion

Jenny Kwan's political career is full of firsts. At the age of twenty-seven she became the youngest person ever elected to Vancouver City Council. Then, at thirty, she and Ida Chong were the first Chinese-Canadian women to sit in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly. In 1998 she became the first Chinese-Canadian cabinet minister in B.C. history, when she was appointed minister of Municipal Affairs. Since then she has held two more provincial cabinet posts, first as Minister of Women's Equality and then as Minister of Community Development, Co-operatives, and Volunteers. Here is what she has to say about how and why she entered politics.

"When people ask me how I got politicized, I think back to my childhood. My family arrived in Vancouver in 1975, when I was nine. I had childlike expectations, and the reality shocked me. My mother had to work for \$10 a day in the farms outside Vancouver. We lived in worse accommodation than we had in Hong Kong. There were six kids and my parents, living in a tiny two-bedroom basement suite.

"At school I was made fun of by other children. I remember one incident in the washroom. Two girls started to call me Chink. I locked myself in a stall, but they climbed over each side. . . . I grew up wishing that I wasn't Chinese. As a child, I had full command of the language, but I made myself forget it. It's ironic because

now I spend a lot of time trying to relearn the language and culture.

"When I was twenty-one, I was asking myself soul-searching questions about life and purpose. I decided to answer them by going back to Hong Kong and China. I talked to people in the villages who all wanted to go to more progressive places. I grew to love China, but the more I saw, the more I realized it was up to me to take advantage of the opportunities in Canada.

"I went back to Vancouver and worked for an advocacy group called the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association. On the first day, I knew I had found my calling. All kinds of people came to see us. Some had been wrongfully evicted by a landlord. Many were immigrants. Most were poor. We helped them exercise their rights. Housing is fundamental to providing stability in people's lives.

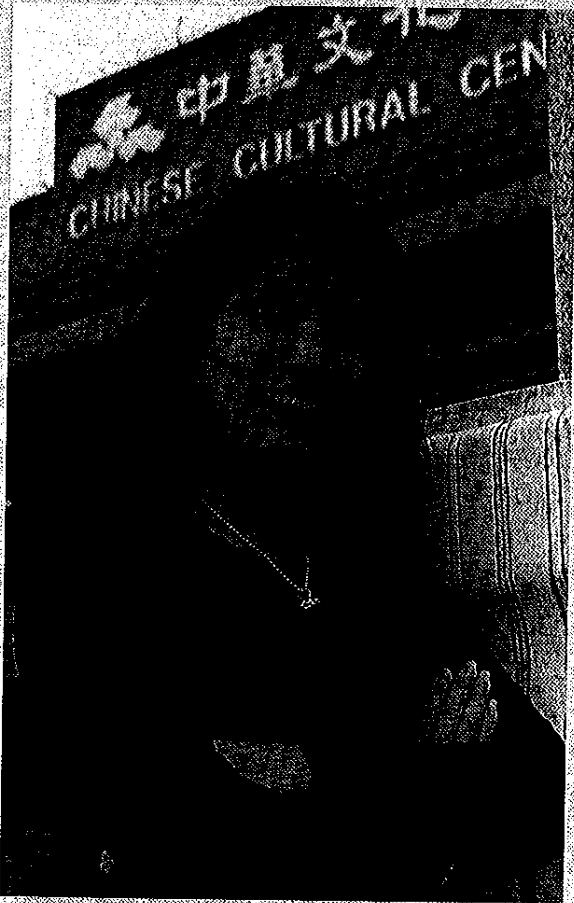
"My career goal had always involved ensuring there is equality and justice for everyone. When I was approached to run for City Council, I thought it might allow me to achieve my goals. But when I was elected, I was the only representative of my party, the Coalition of Progressive Electors, and the youngest person on Council. It was the toughest three years of my career. . . .

"That time on Council got me ready for the fight of running provincially. I went door knocking for a whole month. The residents of the riding took me into their homes. They wanted to discuss crime and safety.

and influence of politics. Many influential people in politics today got their start by joining a political party.

Perhaps the real question is why do so few people—only about 2 per cent of the population—join political parties. Individuals are far more likely to seek change by participating in a special-interest group or a **non-governmental organization** (NGO) than by joining a party.

NGOs are non-profit organizations that work to improve some aspect of people's lives. Many NGOs work internationally, providing services and lobbying governments to change unfair laws or policies. Examples of some NGOs are the United Way, the Canadian Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.



**Figure 10-12** Jenny Kwan, member of the British Columbia legislature for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant

Employment, Poverty, Education. Just like my parents, these residents wanted a better quality of life for their children.

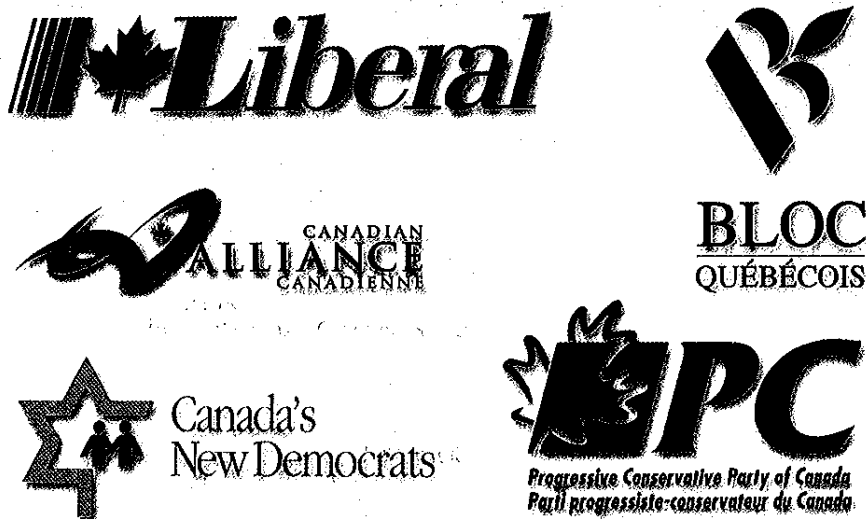
"When Ida Chong and I got elected to the legislature, it sent a strong message: we all have a legitimate role to play in our democratic society. We should never forget that the Asian community didn't have the vote until 1948. That wasn't long ago.

"People say I'm too idealistic, but I take it as a compliment. Women campaigned to get the vote and were criticized for being idealists. Well, thank God they were because otherwise I wouldn't be here as an elected official. I have a saying: If I get up in the morning and know not what I want to achieve, then what is the purpose of getting up? I believe in my ideals so strongly, I'm willing to fight for them."

### Questions

1. Jenny Kwan has worked for change both as part of an advocacy group and as an elected representative. What do you think are the pros and cons of each of these forms of political involvement?
2. Why is it important to encourage people from all ethnic backgrounds to participate in politics? What barriers might immigrants such as Jenny Kwan face in pursuing a political career? What can we do as a society to overcome those barriers?
3. What qualities do you think are needed to be an effective politician? What educational background do you think would be a good preparation for such a career? Does this career choice interest you at all? Why or why not?

**Figure 10-13** The logos of the main political parties in 2001.



## ACTIVITIES

1. a) What is considered to be the strength of the first-past-the-post system? What is the major disadvantage of this system?  
b) What problems associated with first-past-the-post would proportional representation (PR) address? What new problems might PR create?
2. Why do you think politicians are reluctant to change the system of first-past-the-post?
3. Choose one of the political parties shown in Figure 10-13, and research its policies and ideologies. Then decide where on the political spectrum shown in Figure 10-11 you would place it. Explain your decision.
4. a) What reasons would you give to explain why so few people join political parties in Canada?  
b) What advice would you give to party organizations to help them recruit members from your age group?

## Influencing Government

Between elections, individuals can and do influence their government by contacting their MP, MLA, or alderperson to express their view, or sim-

ply to request information, assistance, or intervention. Canadians also communicate with public servants, who conduct the daily business of the government. Letters to the editor and radio phone-in shows are another way that citizens communicate their thoughts and ideas to government.

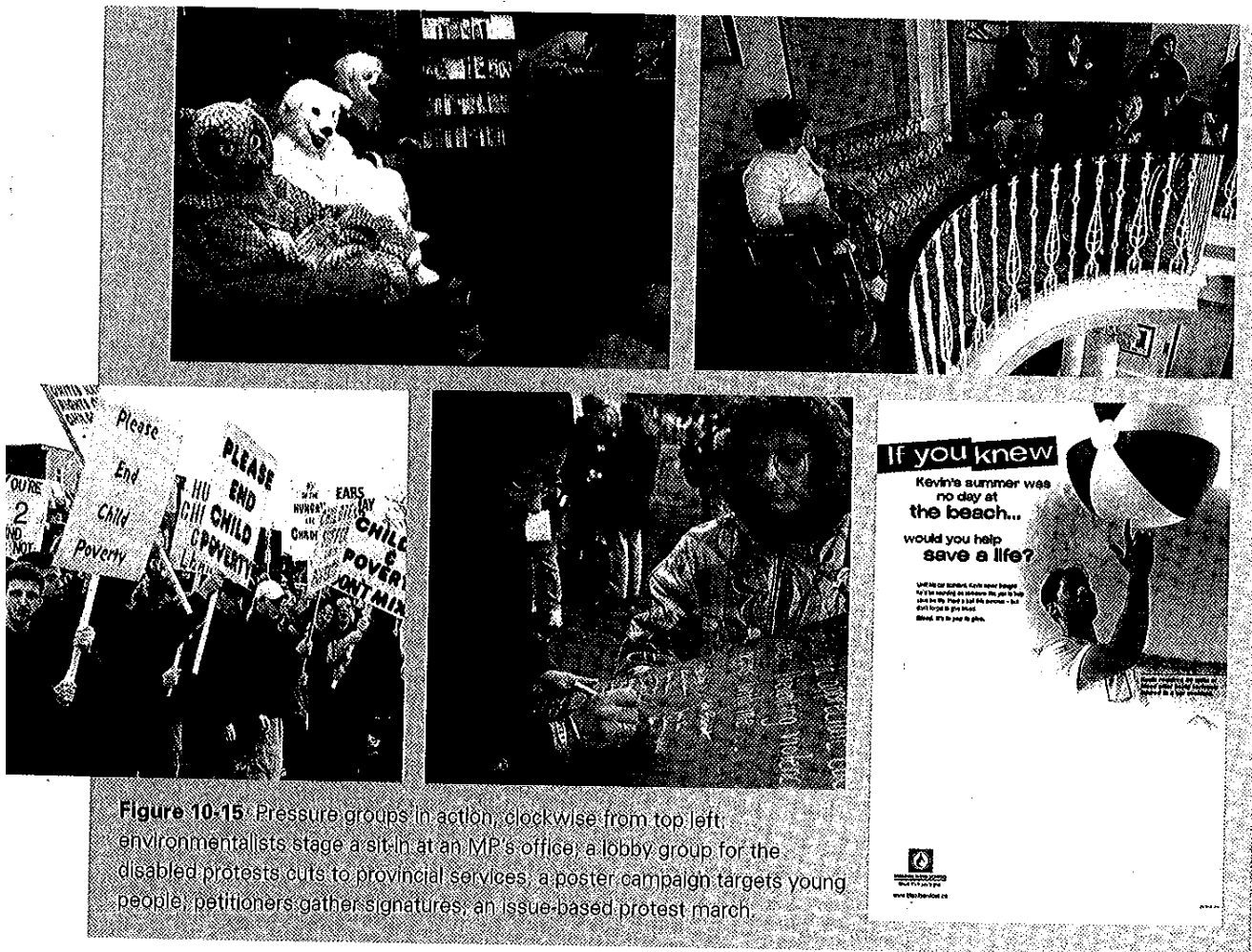
While individual contact between citizens and government can make a difference, especially at the local level, and is welcomed by most elected representatives, it is not the most effective way to initiate change. Individual action may also be slow and too time-consuming and expensive.

## Pressure Groups and Lobbyists

Groups who seek to influence government policies and decisions are called interest groups or **pressure groups**. A pressure group is made up of people who share a certain viewpoint and want to change or influence government policy in order to promote their common interest. There are two kinds of pressure groups. *Institutionalized pressure groups* are well established and have formal organizations. Examples of these groups are shown in Figure 10-14. *Issue-oriented groups* are less permanent. People form these groups to accomplish limited aims, and disband after they have accomplished their aim. A group that lobbies a local

Area	Group
Economics	Business Council on National Issues Canadian Manufacturers Association Canadian Labour Congress Consumers' Association of Canada
Religion	Canadian Council of Churches Canadian Jewish Congress
Health	Canadian Medical Association Canadian Cancer Society
Gender, race, or ethnicity	National Council of Women Black Action Defence Committee Arab Palestinian Association Canadian Polish Congress
Environment	Greenpeace Sierra Club
Human rights	Amnesty International Free the Children

**Figure 10-14** Some institutionalized pressure groups in Canada.



**Figure 10-15** Pressure groups in action, clockwise from top left: environmentalists stage a sit-in at an MP's office; a lobby group for the disabled protests cuts to provincial services; a poster campaign targets young people; petitioners gather signatures; an issue-based protest march.

government to have a traffic light installed would be an example of this kind of pressure group.

Over the years, pressure groups have persuaded the government to write new legislation, move airports and industries, establish parks and wildlife reserves, reduce taxes for certain industries, control or not control pollution, and provide more government funding for research and development of certain products and services.

## Free the Children: Young People in Action

One pressure group that has been remarkably successful on an international level is Free the Children. Craig Kielburger started the group when he was just twelve years old. Its goal was to end child labour around the world. The group began by

writing letters, circulating a petition, and speaking out in their school and community about the issue. They gained a reputation as passionate and convincing speakers. A trip to South Asia gave Craig an opportunity to witness the conditions of child labourers first hand. It also helped the group to gain media attention, as Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who was visiting the region on a trade mission, agreed to meet with Craig to discuss the issue of child labour.

Since its beginnings in 1995, Free the Children has raised awareness of children's rights, and has grown from a small group of friends to an international organization operating in over twenty countries. The group's members

...have become international spokespersons for children's rights. They have built schools, created

## building your skills

### Conducting an Interview

Conducting an interview is an important skill. If you want to collect opinions and information from individuals, what kind of preparation should an interviewer do before an interview? Here is how one journalist interviewed Craig Kielburger about his visit to India and Pakistan in 1996 and the aims of his pressure group.

**Q:** How did you first become interested in the issue of child labour?

**A:** In April 1995, I read about Iqbal Masih, the young Pakistani rug weaver who was killed because he spoke out against child labour. I was horrified. I did more research on the issue and found out that over 200 million children worldwide have to work, many under conditions of terrible exploitation. I made a presentation on the topic to my class and, after that, a few of us decided to form Free the Children, a group dedicated to ending child labour. Since then, our group has grown to over two hundred members all across Canada, and we're still growing.

**Q:** Why do you think that Canadians in general, and especially young people, should be concerned about this issue?

**A:** Canadians should be concerned about issues that affect them, either directly or indirectly. Children under the age of eighteen have rights that are internationally recognized. Among these is the right to an education. Young people in Canada can identify with children in other countries who are being mistreated and abused. It is our moral responsibility to speak out against this situation. We should learn more about the issue and work to bring child labour to an end by pressuring governments and businesses to take action.

**Q:** What led you to go on your own fact-finding trip to Asia?

**A:** My visit was organized by a branch of the International Labour Organization dedicated to the elimination of child labour. For seven weeks, I visited a number of Asian countries, gathering information. ... During



**Figure 10-16** Craig Kielburger, meeting with the press in India in 1996.

**Using evidence** How does this photograph support the view that Kielburger was skilful in getting his view across to the media?

my trip, I learned that the Team Canada trade mission was going to be arriving in Asia. A press conference was organized, where I was asked if I was going to be meeting with Prime Minister Chrétien. I said that I would like to discuss the issue with him, and ask him to talk about it with the leaders he was going to meet. [Later I did meet with him, and he] promised me that he would do this.

**Q:** Do you think that your meeting with Prime Minister Chrétien accomplished anything positive?

**A:** Yes, I think it did. He raised the issue with the leaders of India and Pakistan, two countries where child labour is quite common, especially in the rug-making trade. Government and business leaders also promised that they would follow up on the issue by making Canadians more aware of it. Education is the key to getting people more involved and active in trying to end child labour.

**Q:** What do you say to adults who think that young people like yourself lack the knowledge and maturity to speak out on issues like trade and human rights?

**A:** Young people have a special interest in working to end social injustice around the world. It's our future we're concerned about, and practices like child labour really have no place in society today. Despite our youth, we care a lot about the things that are going on in the world, and with knowledge, enthusiasm, and teamwork, we can bring about some positive changes.

**Q:** What do you say to young people who think that it's pointless to try to change things, and that they're wasting their time doing so?

**A:** I would say to them that they should think about the potential power that young people have. Imagine if thousands of teenagers from across Canada put pressure on governments and businesses to stop importing products made by child labour. Young people have the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication to make changes. What we need is more education and the opportunity to form groups that can get the job done. That's what we're trying to do with Free the Children, and we seem to be making our point to the people in power.

### Applying the Skill

1. Read the questions that the journalist asked Craig Kielburger. Make up three further questions that you would add to find out more about how to organize a pressure group like Free the Children.
2. Make up a list of questions that you would like to ask Jenny Kwan to find out more about her aims and how she became involved in political life.
3. Arrange an interview with a politically active individual in your community. Your goal is to find out more about why this person is politically active, and what strategies his or her group has found to be successful in initiating change. Summarize what you have learned about political activism during the interview in a report to the class.

alternative sources of income for poor families, led campaigns against sweatshop and child labor, convinced governments to stiffen laws to charge tourists who sexually exploit children, are raising funds to build a peace center and have created an international network of children helping children.

Source: Free the Children Web site,  
[www.freethechildren.org/info/Whatistfc1b.htm](http://www.freethechildren.org/info/Whatistfc1b.htm)

One of the goals of Free the Children is to encourage young people to exercise their rights and become politically active. Children set the policies of the group; adults play a supportive role as secretaries and advisers, but cannot vote on major decisions.

## counterpoints

### Should Citizens Have More Input in the Processes of Government?

In Chapter 9, you saw that the caucus of the governing political party and the Cabinet approve policies and new legislation before they are introduced to the legislature. Sometimes these policies are based on the party platform—the promises that the leader and candidates made when they ran for election. By electing the governing party, electors (although usually not the majority) have given approval for these policies. Other times, the policies are new initiatives introduced by the government without input from the general public.

Prime ministers, who have the most control over the direction government will take, have two bodies to advise them on policy: the Privy Council Office (PCO), which is made up of senior public servants, and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which is made up of party members who are trusted by the prime minister. Members of the PMO are not elected, and have special access to the leader of the government. Provincial premiers have similar unelected advisers. The number of people serving in the PMO has risen dramatically since 1968, and with it, the body's power. In Ontario in the late 1990s, even elected members of the governing

party complained about the power that the people in the premier's office wielded in policy making.

So, it is not surprising that many people feel they have little say in government policies. Elected officials sometimes seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen. The levers of power seem to be firmly in the hands of bureaucrats, advisers, and pressure groups that do not always represent the views of the majority.

What avenues are there for the citizen who is not involved in the political system to be heard? People can contact members of Parliament and voice their opinions; join a pressure group or political party; protest in a public demonstration; phone in to talk shows; or write letters to newspapers. If they are more persistent, they can prepare submissions to present to standing committees if these are held when legislation is being passed, although there is no guarantee their concerns will be addressed. Still, many Canadians feel that their governments do not hear them. Should steps be taken to allow the general public to have more say in policies and decision making?

Dennis Strelfel (see Chapter 9, page 243) has two suggestions to allow more public input: that the public be allowed to ask questions in question period, and that legislation should be publicly debated before it is introduced. Electronic mail and other forms of rapid communication make it easier for people's opinions to be known. The Canadian Alliance want to include more use of referendums, so that the public can vote on accepting or rejecting proposals for legislation. They also favour the recall of representatives who do not follow the electors' wishes. All these suggestions are aimed at increasing the level of citizen participation.

However, Canada has a representative democracy. With over 30 million people in the country, it is impossible to have direct democracy. We elect people to act

## Applying Pressure

How do pressure groups try to achieve their aims? One way to influence government is by providing research, polls, reports, and advice to government ministries. The government often seeks out the technical expertise of such groups. These resources provide the government with clear and accessible information that they can use in mak-

ing decisions. However, it also gives the group more influence over decisions made by the government, and in some cases presents the group with a conflict of interest, in which the goals of the interest group are likely to prevail. For example, the minister of finance routinely consults with business groups in setting tax policy. While these consultants' knowledge of the market can be

on our behalf. They belong to political parties, and in order to have a stable government, the party members vote as one on legislation, even if some may disagree with a policy. If a member disagrees continually, or on an important issue, he or she must resign from the party. These members usually continue to sit in the legislature, and the voters can decide whether to reelect them in the next election. Some political commentators feel that party discipline is too strict, and that there should be more free votes; but on major policy initiatives, this is unlikely.

The federal government has held very few referendums in its history, the most recent being the one on the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. Voters were given the opportunity to vote on whether or not they accepted the Accord. The Accord was rejected, but the vote illustrates some of the problems with referendums. Voters have to respond with a simple "yes" or "no" to complex issues. Even a seemingly simple question like, "Should Canada adopt capital punishment?" is more complex than it seems. What crimes should be punishable by capital punishment? Who will make this decision?

Direct democracy assumes that the people will be actively engaged in learning about legislation and policies. Usually, issues in politics are complex, with many compromises to be made for agreement to be reached. Yet surveys show that most voters are too busy with their families and working lives to spend much time on political issues. Only 2 per cent actually join political parties; sometimes more than 30 per cent do not vote in federal elections. What percentage of the population would be prepared to spend the time to be properly informed about issues, and convey their thoughts to the government? Lack of participation by a large number of voters would mean that those who make the effort

to be heard have more influence than those who are silent.

The era of electronic communication certainly makes it easier to convey individual voters' opinions on issues, but not everyone has access to these tools. A system that asked for more citizen participation would have to ensure that each person's voice is heard only once on an issue. We have careful supervision of voting in elections to make sure that there is no pressure applied to people, and that counting of votes is carefully scrutinized. A similar system would have to apply to public input on policy decisions and voting on legislation. No such system is in place.

### *Analysing the Issue*

1. Suppose that the government is proposing to introduce a bill or policy that you disagree with. Outline three steps that you could take to show your opposition. Rank them in order of effectiveness.
2.
  - a) Should members of Parliament be able to ask questions from the general public in question period? Why or why not?
  - b) Draw up a plan for allowing citizens' questions to be asked in question period. For example, who would choose the questions? How many citizen questions should be asked? Should the governing party be made aware of the questions beforehand? Do you think this reform would make governing parties more responsive to citizens' concerns? Why or why not?
3. Prepare an organizer to show the pros and cons of each of the reforms suggested in this feature.
4. Do you think that citizens should have more say in deciding on government policies? Explain your answer.



helpful to the government, these groups have a vested interest in the outcome of such policies, and cannot be expected to give objective advice.

Institutionalized groups often use **lobbyists**. A lobbyist is someone who is paid to represent the interests of a particular group to key decision makers, such as high-level bureaucrats in the public service or politicians. They often have expertise in the field of the pressure group. Some professional lobbyists are former high-ranking members of the public service and maintain contact with their former colleagues, such as deputy ministers, Cabinet ministers, other key government officials, and the opposition. Outside the government, lobbyists may target other pressure groups, the media, and important party members.

The danger with lobbying is that people with special influence can persuade governments to put in place policies that favour their group but are not necessarily in the public interest. An example is the tobacco company lobby, which has fought government efforts to limit advertising for tobacco products. In 1989, when people were very concerned about the power of lobbyists in influencing decisions, a bill was passed requiring lobbyists to register. Public servants who resigned from their jobs could not work as lobbyists until a year had passed since their resignations.

Another avenue that groups can use is the courts. For example, in 1988 Canada's law prohibiting abortion was struck down by the Supreme Court. The case was backed by a coalition of pro-choice groups. However, court cases can cost a lot of money, and the outcome is not guaranteed. Also, while courts can strike down a law, they cannot order that it be replaced by something else. That is up to the government. For those pressure groups who are hoping to convince the government to create new laws or policies, the best the courts can do is to make governments aware that a law may be needed.

One aspect of pressure group activity that causes some concern is funding. Some groups are large enough to be self-financing. However, public interest groups are often dependent on funds from government. While receiving government funds can help give a group a voice in policy making, it can also limit the effectiveness of the group.

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NACSW) began receiving operational grants from the government in 1973. However, its funding was drastically cut in 1988 by the Progressive Conservative government, after the NACSW spoke out against government policies.

Some critics argue that if pressure groups are too successful, then democracy is put at risk. They argue that if government is influenced too greatly by well-organized minority interest groups, then the wishes of the majority may not be heard—or even sought. They are critical of the influence that certain pressure groups seem to have over government, particularly those well-funded and highly organized groups with professional lobbyists.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Explain in your own words the meaning of the terms *pressure group* and *lobbyist*.
2. a) Make a list of the steps that Craig Kielburger used to organize political action.  
b) What organizations helped him apply political pressure? What role did the media play in his success?  
c) Do you agree with Kielburger that young Canadians have a responsibility to speak out about injustices in other countries? Give reasons for your views.
3. Identify an issue that is important to you. How would you like to influence the government on this issue? Write a letter to your MP, MLA, or local representative explaining your position.
4. Develop a code of ethics for professional lobbyists to use in dealing with government and other officials. For example, is it acceptable for a lobbyist to take an official to lunch? Contribute to a politician's election campaign or political party? Buy an official gifts?

## Role of the Mass Media

The mass media include television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. They are the chief methods of communicating ideas and information in our society. Citizens get most of their day-to-day

information about government actions from media reports. Journalists are free to criticize government actions, or to question the decisions made by elected representatives and officials. As well, the media report on public opinion polls. This gives the government feedback on what people think about its policies. For these reasons, the media are very important in the political process.

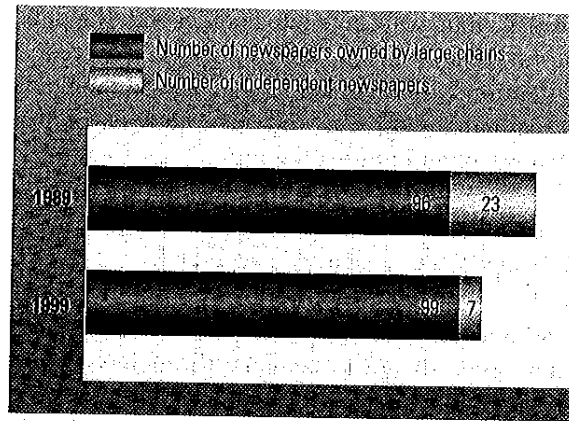
The influence of the media goes beyond the role of go-between. In many ways, the media can actually influence government—and citizens' attitudes towards it. Issues that receive large amounts of media coverage often get more attention from government. Since there are always more stories to report on than there is space to report them, editors must make choices about what they think is important. In this way, the media can actually change the direction of government policy.

Yet what makes a good media story is not always what is most deserving of attention. Sometimes important issues are not given any attention by the media. Activist groups know that simply making a statement about an issue is unlikely to get them much attention in the media, but organizing an event of some kind—a protest rally, for example—may be more successful. Sometimes crowds march in silence until the television cameras appear. Then, organizers encourage the marchers to shout slogans and chant so their message will appear in the news.

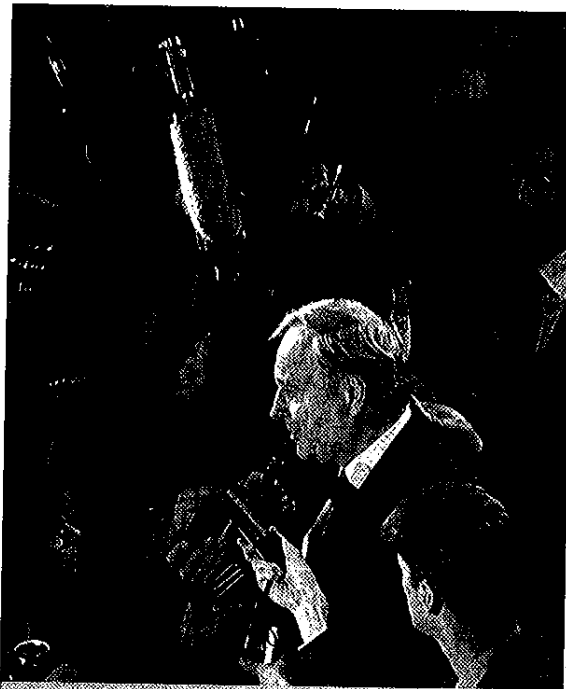
## Media Concentration

In recent years, media ownership has become more and more concentrated in the hands of a few corporations. For example, between 1989 and 1999, the number of daily papers that were run independently of a large newspaper chain dropped from twenty-three to seven. Two or three large chains, such as Southam/Thomson, Hollinger, or CanWest Global, owned most of the remaining papers.

This concentration means that the news read by significant numbers of Canadians is from limited sources, rather than from a variety of sources. At some point, critics argue, if ownership is in the hands of a very small group, it will go against the intent of diversity and plurality in a democracy. Like a powerful pressure group, media owned by



**Figure 10-17** Describe the trends in newspaper ownership in Canada shown by this graph.



**Figure 10-18** Finance Minister Paul Martin is surrounded by reporters outside the House of Commons in the wake of concern over Canada's response to a crisis in the global economy, 1998.

**Developing understanding** Why do politicians usually welcome attention from the media? What problems might they have if they refuse to talk to the media when the public wants answers to an issue?

a small group will come into conflict with the public interest while promoting its own interests. Questions about bias arise. Can the views of Canadians be represented accurately and fairly by a select and powerful group?

## Civil Disobedience

There are numerous ways for citizens to make their voices heard in Canada: through the vote, through individual actions such as letter writing, and through joining pressure groups and using the media. Yet, they may not be successful in changing the policies and actions of governments, because governments must balance the needs and wants of many different segments of society.

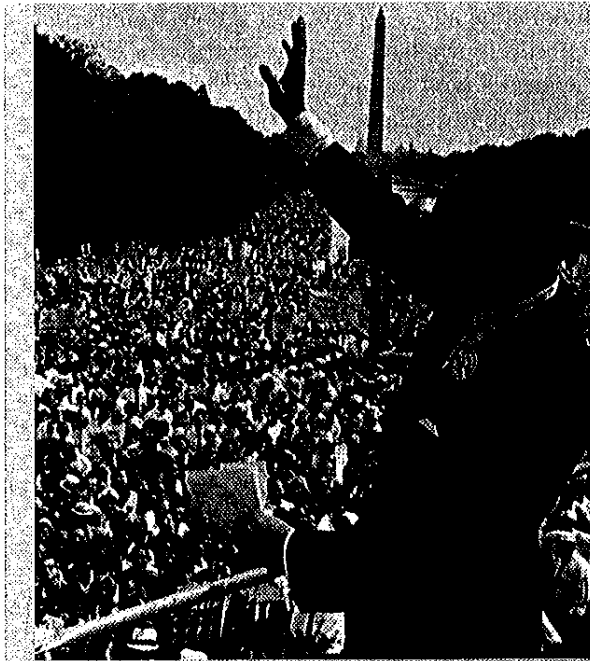
Suppose you feel that the actions of the government are actually unethical or undemocratic. Is it ever acceptable to break the law as a way of protesting government actions?

**Civil disobedience** is the act of intentionally breaking, or refusing to keep, laws one considers unjust. The term was coined by a nineteenth-century U.S. writer, Henry Thoreau. He felt that the basic democratic principle of majority rule existed not because the majority was always right but because it was more powerful and could force the minority to comply. "If the machinery of government is unjust," Thoreau said, "break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine."

This form of protest has been used by some of the greatest moral leaders of our time—including the U.S. civil rights activist Martin Luther King and the Indian politician Mohandas Gandhi.

- 1 Civil disobedience should not involve violence.
- 2 Civil disobedience should be directed against laws that are seriously harmful.
- 3 Civil disobedience requires taking responsibility for one's actions. Willingness to face punishment shows the strength of one's beliefs.

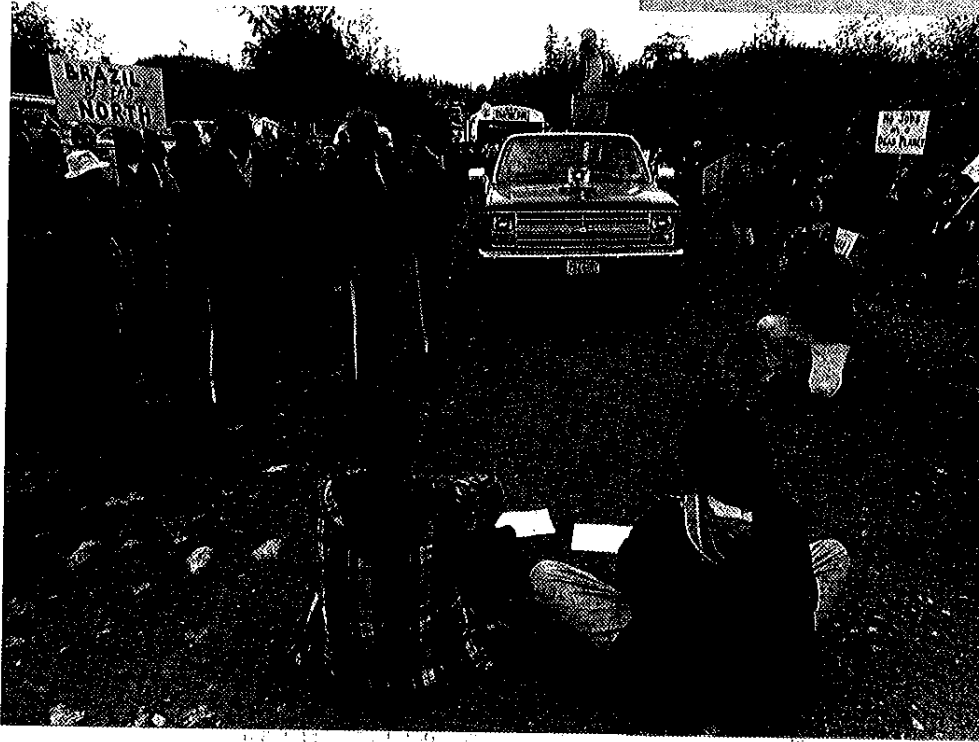
**Figure 10-19** The principles of civil disobedience.



**Figure 10-20** The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. waves to the crowd before his "I have a dream" speech during the March on Washington, DC, August 28, 1963. The march was organized to support proposed civil rights legislation and to end segregation in the U.S. South.

Both these men embraced non-violent civil disobedience in their quest for justice, and both ultimately died for their cause.

If everyone in society disobeyed laws with which they personally disagreed, we might have no effective order. Different people would be living by a variety of rules, and the result would be chaos. Imagine your classroom if every student could choose which rules he or she would obey. Great thinkers such as Gandhi and King agree that civil disobedience is warranted only when there is significant harm from the law itself. Relatively trivial matters do not merit breaking the law, as the harm to society of that violation could be greater than the benefit. As well, those who choose to practise civil disobedience should be willing to face the consequences of their actions. Running away from this responsibility would diminish the moral authority being demonstrated.



**Figure 10-21**  
The 1993 protests against logging in the Clayoquot Valley brought the largest mass arrests in British Columbia's history.

## Clayoquot Sound

Acts of civil disobedience—blocking logging roads near Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia—brought the issue of clear-cut logging to public attention in 1993. The provincial government had been faced with a difficult decision about the future of the area. It opted for compromise. It set aside 34 per cent of the area as protected lands, and allowed selective and environmentally sensitive logging of another 21 per cent. The area available for general logging was reduced from 80 per cent to 40 per cent. The government claimed that opinion polls showed a majority of the population was in favour of the solution.

However, opposition to the compromise was vocal, and led to the largest example of civil disobedience in Canadian history. Protesters organized blockade after blockade, sitting in groups in the middle of the road to prevent loggers from entering the forest. Police had to drag each individual from the road. Most protesters offered no resistance, other than to refuse to move. Over 800 people were arrested in the summer of 1993 alone.

Most received warnings, fines of up to \$500, or jail sentences. Since that time, the issue of logging practices in the area has been monitored, and all decisions regarding the clear-cutting of old-growth forest are closely examined.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Do you think it is dangerous to allow newspaper ownership to be concentrated in the hands of a small group? Explain your response. What are the potential benefits of such concentration?
2. Working in a small group, think of an issue or cause you would like to bring to the media's attention. Then brainstorm a list of events you could stage in order to gain some media attention for the issue. Remember that, especially for television, your event needs to provide opportunities for interesting visuals, as well as getting your message across.
3. Explain the three basic guidelines for practising civil disobedience. Why are these guidelines an important part of this approach to changing government policies?

## LOOKING BACK

### Develop an Understanding

1. Explain how each of the following allows you to influence the government of Canada.
  - a. voting in an election
  - b. joining a pressure group
  - c. membership in a political partyUse mind maps, ideas webs, flow charts, or other graphics to clarify your written explanations.
2. Describe the role of the media in the democratic process. Give examples to illustrate each aspect of the media's role.
3. Explain the following terms and their possible role in political decision-making: professional lobbyists; pressure groups; the Prime Minister's Office; public opinion poll.
4. List three statements that Craig Kielburger makes in his interview that particularly impressed you. Explain why these statements had an impact on you.

### Explore the Issues

5. A pressure group called Fair Vote Canada formed after the 2000 federal election. Members want to reform the electoral system so that the distortions caused by the first-past-the-post system are lessened.
  - a. How would you advise this pressure group to organize?
  - b. Whom would you suggest they target with their ideas?
6. What advice would you give to political party organizers who want to increase membership in their party?
7.
  - a. In your own words, describe the difference between a left-wing and a right-wing ideology for a political party.
  - b. Where on the ideological spectrum do your own beliefs fall? Why?
8. You have just formed a new provincial (or federal) party, the Youth Party of British Columbia (or Canada). Develop policy statements covering at least three different areas of government. What issues would you want to see on the political agenda?

### Research and Communicate

9. Make a collage from newspaper clippings and other illustrations of your choosing that show the importance of citizens influencing government.
10. Create a poster that shows your view of how individuals and groups can affect government decision making. Consider how to get your message across to other students and concerned citizens.
11. Examine your local newspaper, listen to a news broadcast on a local radio station, and watch a news report on television, paying attention to editorials and letters to the editor in the newspaper. Working with one, two, or three other students, analyse the editorials and news reports by answering the following questions.
  - a. What news reports about government are emphasized in each medium? Does each medium concentrate on the same stories, or is a variety of stories presented? Why do you think this is so?
  - b. What is the general tone of the reports—critical, supportive, or both?
  - c. If the news reports express opinions about the government, do they present more than one side of an issue? Do the reporters express a personal preference in the issues?
  - d. How do different stations or papers cover the same event? Why do you think this occurs?
  - e. Write a paragraph to present your opinion about the influence of the media in politics. Provide reasons and examples to support your view of the role of the media in the making of political decisions.
12. Investigate the recent changes in South Africa and its voting laws. Black South Africans—the majority of citizens—have only recently gained the right to vote. How did these changes come about? What were the results of the first election in which blacks could vote? Why are the changes to the voting laws in South Africa so important for the future of that country?

13. Investigate the voting patterns of Canadians in either provincial or federal elections. The Web site for Elections Canada at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca) is a useful source. Choose one of the following topics to focus on, or create one of your own.
- Do voters who live in rural areas tend to support the same party as urban voters?
  - Are there certain regions that are more likely to support a particular party, regardless of the leader or the issues?
  - Do certain areas of your own province tend to be dominated by particular parties or ideologies?
  - Are people more likely to vote in municipal, provincial, or federal elections?
- What conclusions can you draw about the voting patterns of Canadians? Present your findings on maps, charts, or graphs, as well as in written form.
14. Organize a list of suggestions for increasing voter turnout in federal and provincial elections. How might you persuade students to vote in school elections? Would you use similar or different techniques to promote increased voter turnout?
15. Select one of the pressure groups mentioned in this chapter (or another group of your choosing) and investigate its history, political activity, membership numbers, and goals. Try to evaluate the influence of the group on government policy and decision making.