
Political Engagement and Accountability

WRITTEN BY

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Many of us may find ourselves overwhelmed when it comes to the word “politics.”

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a party where a group of people are having a heated discussion about a new policy, but you simply walked away because “politics are never easy to understand”? Or you’re in the middle of the lunchroom, and your colleagues are discussing the political candidates of their ridings, but you are not sure who is running in your riding? You may think to yourself, *who has the time to research all the latest updates?*

Maybe you relate to these situations, or you can think of a friend or colleague who has expressed the same frustration at some point. This begets the question: why is the topic of politics often avoided?

While there are a multitude of reasons why people may avoid this topic, one of the challenges we face in our increasingly digital world, despite – or maybe because of – an abundance of sources, is scrambling through scattered information, misinformation, and conflicting sources. This becomes extremely confusing and overwhelming – and we even shy away from asking others for answers or help in navigating through this.

Despite such challenges, it is commonly recognized that being politically engaged is important. I would like to highlight at this

juncture that when we think of politics, election-time party politics are often the first thought – when, in reality, you can be politically engaged at any point in time. At the heart of political participation is a commitment to the world around you. Whether at the municipal, provincial, federal, or international level, there are many topics that are near and dear to us.

From the parking ticket you pay, to the taxes you file, to the international development commitments the Canadian government makes, legislation is a vehicle through which policies are made by politicians. Politicians are voted in by citizens like you and me and we are affected by politics and policies in more ways than we can think of. In fact, during COVID-19 we have found ourselves possibly more attentive than ever towards new governmental policies and programs; Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, as part of economic recovery, is a major example.

While politics may appear to be abstract, daunting or complicated, it is important to realize that your voice does matter. It plays an irreplaceable role. And you can make it heard in more ways than one. Political engagement, in its many forms, is a manifestation of our commitment to the world around us.

Voting is undoubtedly a major one. When you have questions such as how to better understand the electoral system, how to

learn more about your local candidates, or educate yourself on party platforms, you may not be sure who to ask or what to ask. Some ways to better understand the political system are to access quality and reliable information from trusted news sources, expert answers, well-informed discussions, and academic literature. One such source is youcount.ca, a non-partisan one-stop platform that allows you to access consolidated information about the Canadian governance system, political representatives, and election candidates. This grassroots initiative is just one example of the growing civil society efforts in addressing the gap of democratic participation in Canada.

Now, what are some ways to get involved? As mentioned above, at the root of different forms of political participation is knowledge and awareness. In addition to voting, you can write to your elected representatives, join a civil society organization, volunteer at an issue-based club or organization, sign a petition, share on social media, and understand and discuss issues in your community. These different forms of participation can also serve as a way to express challenges and concerns to make

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policies and systems more inclusive. After all, accountability is the key to democracy. And importantly, engaging in discussion with fellow citizens – be it your friends, family, peers, coworkers – is a great way to understand different perspectives. It is

completely okay to not have all the right answers when you start.

At the end of the day, whatever your method of political engagement may be, it must be understood how important it is to have one, and a well-informed one. The main ingredient of political participation is knowledge, awareness and actions; it is a way of making concerns known, of playing a role in decisions, of contributing to the health of democracy.



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