Voting

Voting is a method by which groups of people make decisions. For example, people may vote to choose the leaders of their government. They may vote on whether to build a new school, hire more police officers, or raise tax money for a special project. Voting is one of the most important rights in the United States, Canada, and many other countries.

Some nations have elections, but they do not give people any real choice in voting. In a number of these countries, people may vote, but only for people named by the country's leadership.

Who may vote

Today, citizens age 18 or older may vote in Canada and the United States. In the United States, a person must also be registered to vote. When a person registers, his or her name is put on a list of people allowed to vote. On election day in most states, election judges check each person's name against the list before they let the person vote.

At one time, some U.S. citizens were not allowed to vote. African Americans were not allowed to vote until 1870, five years after the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865). Even then, some whites found ways to keep many African Americans from voting. Women were not allowed to vote in most states until 1920. Today, the United States and some other countries have laws to protect the voting rights of the people.

Many governments take away a person's right to vote in special cases. In the United States, people in prison for committing certain crimes are not allowed to vote.

Methods of voting

The United States and Canada use the Australian ballot system. Under this system, each voter marks a printed ballot while alone in a special voting booth. Many voters in the United States use voting machines. A voting machine records and counts votes during an election. It gives the voter a secret ballot and then immediately records how the person voted.

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