



Marking a Century of Women's Suffrage  
Commémorer un siècle du droit de vote des femmes

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## Making Change: Party Politics - To Join or Not to Join?

*Making Change* is a collection of skill-based education modules, created to equip young women for a variety of political engagement.

These toolkits have three objectives:

1. To **engage and educate** women on a variety of issues that affect their daily lives in work and day-to-day
2. To **enable** women across Canada to explore different pathways to make change and engage in politics and policy on these issues
3. To **provide** policy options, strategies for engagement, and tools of empowerment to allow women to participate in the political and policy process in Canada



Parties are some of the biggest players in the political scene in Canada, but they are not the only way to get involved and to be engaged. This guide offers some things to think about when considering whether or not to join a party and what party you might join. It also offers some guidance on how to be an effective and engaged member.

If you live in **Nunavut** or the **Northwest Territories**, there are **no parties** operating in your territorial elections, but you may still want to get involved with national parties.

Some municipal elections also have political parties (like Vancouver and Montreal) also have parties you could consider becoming involved in.

### Things to consider when deciding whether partisan politics is for you:

- Do I feel like my interests are represented by a particular party?
- Do I like the representatives in the party or the work that they have done?
- Have I met a member or representative who inspires me in the work they do? Are they a member of political party or have they worked outside partisan politics?
- Do I have goals that may be hindered by public allegiance to a particular political party?

### Where you can learn about parties & candidates to see if they are a match for you:

- Check out the parties' webpage, look at their announcements and news releases.
- Sitting MPs or MLAs also have webpages, check out what issues they talk about and what positions they hold.
- If you want to dig deeper, check out election platforms (try googling "Liberal 2015 election platform or something similar, for example) or policy resolutions from conventions (try googling "2017 NDP policy convention", for example).
- Follow parties, candidates, MPs/MLAs, or municipal representatives on social media! Almost all have Twitter and Facebook.



## Benefits of being a member of a political party:

- Being able to help select the candidate who you think will best represent your party by voting in Party nomination races.
- A community of like-minded people.
- Attend the annual conference and other events. It is a great chance to network and learn about the internal mechanisms of how politics “happens.”
- The opportunity to directly influence party policy, whether by submitting draft policy resolutions, advocating for those resolutions at conventions or council meetings, or speaking at internal pre-campaign platform town halls.
- You have the right to run for the executive of your riding association -- meaning you can shape the advocacy and the public image of your party in your riding.
- The opportunity to have a vote in choosing the next leader of the party.
- Networking within the party, garnering support for a future run in elections

## Perspectives of women engaged in party politics

You can read this [article](#) written by a Daughter of the Vote about making change within a party

*“I joined for the first time this year, as one of the candidates for the nomination in my riding is someone I have worked with and respect a lot. Although I consider myself to be non-partisan, I believe very strongly in her ability to represent our riding, so I joined so that I could vote for her to be the nominee.”*

*“I joined a provincial political party because I have been disappointed by the provincial governments in my province regardless of the party in the past few elections. This may seem counterintuitive but I think the only way to make change is to start from within. It did not feel right to be complaining about the choices for provincial governments when I myself was not doing anything to change it.”*



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*“I joined federal because my key issues are generally of federal jurisdiction and so I’m more interested in advocating at that level and choose to do so through a party. For example, many Indigenous issues (ie funding, housing on-reserve, Indian Status requirements) are federal jurisdiction and federal legislation and parties can be a stronger avenue to advocate through on these issues rather than provincial.”*

*“I joined a federal political party initially because I wanted to vote in a leadership campaign. However, I made the choice to retain my membership because I typically find the areas that I am most passionate about are decisions that happen at the federal level. Therefore, it made sense to retain a membership to a Federal party.”*

*“I joined before the leadership race to, essentially, vote against two candidates ...Either way, it is my civil right to join and make my voice heard in an important election and I was proud to exercise it.”*



*“Working with a team with like-minded values is rewarding in that you can collaborate with diverse perspectives to reach a common goal.”*

*“As an Indigenous woman, I feel personally it is necessary to be engaged in Party Politics as most policies come from partied-politicians. To me, in order to solve large scale Indigenous issues, we need more Indigenous representation in politics. The best way to have a policy pass and become implemented is with party support, therefore being involved in party politics gives me the support I need to make change.”*

### **Benefits of *non-partisan* political engagement:**

- There isn't the pressure to vote a particular way because you have ties to a certain party. This means you could change your vote election to election if you like a local candidate or if a party takes a new position on an issue important to you.
- You can focus your efforts on supporting *candidates* from any party who you feel best represent your interests.
- You can critique policy or politicians' actions without appearing to do so in order to promote your own party. You can also critique all parties / candidates if none of them align with the change you would like to see.
- You can work on a particular issue by engaging with people from all parties.
- You are keeping doors open in terms of future opportunities (eg. not having people dismiss or discount you because of (past) party affiliation). This includes opportunities within the federal public service and other leadership roles where partisanship is not appropriate.
- Public servants' support Ministers responsibility to provide professional and frank advice. Public servant's have respect for democracy by serving the public interest in a non-partisan public sector, which is integral to our democracy.



## Perspectives of women who engaged in politics and make change by staying non-partisan

Perspective of Public Servants: You can read this interesting [article](#) that has 5 tips on how to manage your social graph as a public servant.

One Daughter of the Vote was interviewed in this article about her non-partisan work - Election 2015: [How five millennials in BC are working to get out the youth vote.](#)

*"I am highly involved in municipal politics which is non-partisan, which I personally think works better. Individuals run on their own ideas and platforms in your ward and for mayor, and you vote for them based on their experience, ideas and capabilities. All of the parties have certain aspects I appreciate, but have never found one party in particular that I like enough to become a member. I personally would like there to be no parties, as I think it places people in boxes, or situates them in an impossible situation where your ideal candidate for premier/PM may be from one party, but your ideal candidate for your local riding is from another."*

*"I am involved in grassroots activism and fundraising for nonprofit organizations. I have witnessed public partisanship narrowing activists' social networks and the perceived validity of their critique. It is more difficult for people affiliated with a party to critique policies or politicians without being accused of hyper-partisanship"*



*"I stay non-partisan so I can support different parties at the provincial and federal levels as their different policies best support my views."*

*"I think the biggest reason [I stay nonpartisan] is because I'm so hopeful for change. If I stuck with one side it's hard to bring about that. If you are an outsider you can agree or disagree with a party but if you are within a party, i feel like it's more difficult to disagree with your fellows and just agree even if you have other opinions. I've volunteered with both PC and liberal."*

*"Personally, I have man different interests throughout the political spectrum, which are represented by not just one party. I feel that I can have very productive and meaningful conversations with others about politics when I don't identify with a particular political group, which allows me to be open to other ideas and solutions. Also, I find value in being able to identify and fight for a cause with individual politicians or candidates, without having the obligation to associate with a certain party."*



## Should I get involved with Provincial/Territorial Party, a Federal Party or Both:

For Liberals and Conservatives, the provincial parties and the federal parties are different and in some cases have diverse policy positions and approaches. The federal and provincial/Yukon NDP territories share their memberships, meaning that if you sign up, you are automatically a member of both. You may chose, however, to be more engaged with one or the other. Also keep in mind that despite the connection, these parties are often influenced by regional political culture, so the resolutions your Provincial Party passes may look different from those passed at the Federal Party.

### **Provincial Party Politics:**

- Provincial parties offer individuals the ability to impact policy at the provincial or territorial level. This means you can shape your party's approach to education, healthcare (including mental health care), provincial taxation, advanced education, Provincial Parks, and more.
- Provincial Parties can offer a unique experience of shared political culture, or rather, political views/opinions.

### **Federal Party Politics:**

- Joining a federal party is a way to engage on issues that are primarily the federal government's responsibility. You can see the issues that the federal government looks after [here](#).
- Joining a federal party is also a good way to build connections and networks across the country and work towards improve Canada for all Canadians.



## Indigenous Canadians, Political Parties, & Formal Political Participation:

Some Indigenous communities and folks **choose to not participate** in Canadian political systems as it can be viewed as legitimizing a colonial state, or because of the principles behind the Two Row Wampum of not interfering in each others' systems.

The Two Row Wampum belt refers to a beaded belt with two rows of purple wampum beads that run parallel to each other. This symbolizes a separate relationship where two cultures respect each other. The white wampum beads symbolize peace and purple signifies the seriousness of political matters. You can read more [here](#).

*"I have recently distanced myself from partisan politics for multiple reasons, though a main one is that I have often been tokenized in partisan spaces as the "one Indigenous girl" and I find my voice is rarely truly and fully heard. There have been times where I have spoken up about the impacts that an action may have on Indigenous folks and my comment will be acknowledged, discussed briefly, then put on the backburner in order for the partisan group to continue to uphold their colonialist practices/actions. It is extremely disheartening to participate in a party that claims to want to uphold Indigenous voices and then ultimately feel tokenized and ignored if my views or opinions don't ultimately align with their goals/vision as a party."*

Other Indigenous folks do **engage in partisan politics** as a way to improve communities, increase representation and amplify Indigenous voices in formal party politics, and to improve relationships between Canada and Indigenous peoples.

*"Before Indigenous peoples were allowed to enter the political sphere, settlers had no problems making laws that would ban our ceremonies, no problem destroying our communities by forcefully removing children from their homes, or by inflicting genocide, or destroying our sacred waters and lands. The list goes on and on. It's only been in relatively "recent" "Canadian" history (or as I'll call it, recent colonialist-Canadian history) that we are finally seeing an increase in positive and progressive relationships between the Canadian Government and Canada's Indigenous Nations and communities. I think this is in part due to having an increase in Indigenous voices in politics. Although the relationship between Indigenous folks and the Canadian government is very far from perfect, I think by continuing to elect officials across all parties who not only represent the interests of our communities but actually are community members themselves, Canada will only continue to improve its relationships with Indigenous peoples."*