



2025-2026 Research Package

Topic 2: THW require citizens to pass a political general knowledge test to vote

Background:

What is Democracy and Voting as an Informed Citizen?

Democracy, which comes from the Greek words meaning “people” and “rule”, is the foundation of many governments across the globe, including countries in the Western Hemisphere. The power to vote is a fundamental legal right granted to citizens who determine their nation’s future. As with making all decisions in life, the more well-informed citizens are, the more likely the right decision is made collectively. However, recently, questions have been raised about how well-informed citizens are in their nation’s political landscape and how competent their vote is. A healthy government in a democracy is elected by informed citizens, for the benefit of informed citizens.

According to an Ipsos poll, 57% of respondents said they voted uninformed in the 2025 Canadian federal election, and furthermore, many individuals listed social media as their primary

means of accessing news and political information. They also mentioned that more local news and awareness could make them better-informed voters. Furthermore, low voter turnout is currently an ongoing challenge to democracy, and supplemented by growing concerns about informed voting, democracy faces grave risks to its sustainability. It becomes easier for individuals or groups to manipulate and persuade citizens to follow a certain path that may not be ideal in the long term, and often, blind faith can lead to detrimental consequences for the nation and its people. It can also mean that the resolutions passed by governments are not aligning with the values of an informed citizen.

What is Epistocracy?

Epistocracy is a system that challenges the concept of universal suffrage. It believes in 2 main ideas: 1) formally allocating political power on the basis of knowledge or political competence and 2) only informed/politically competent citizens should have the right to vote. To this day, no country has formally adopted an epistocratic model of governance, although the United Kingdom, Ireland, and New Zealand have historically employed a system where citizens' votes could be weighted more heavily if they came from an educated background. This is no longer continued, and all if not most democratic countries have a universal voting right to all citizens.

Arguments can be made on both sides regarding to what extent elements of epistocracy can be adopted within our system, especially when citizens come from many different educational backgrounds that are often negatively impacted by systemic barriers such as inaccessible opportunities and biased perspectives. This can lead to new questions about whether it is accurate to define such governments as truly democratic or not.

Where can the Political General Knowledge test come into play?

Citizens in many countries, including Canada, are required to pass a knowledge test about Canadian History, Languages, and Cultures before obtaining citizenship. There is a minimal threshold set by the ministry to ensure the test is accessible and fair to everyone, while simultaneously ensuring that well-informed residents become informed citizens. The test is evaluated carefully for feedback from many officials and any changes that could be incorporated to further enhance the test and improve how citizens are selected.

Similar propositions have been made to screen voters based on their knowledge and ability to vote in elections. However, this is a brand-new initiative that will require considerable weighing of options to implement in order to improve the democratic model. A decision made today will affect things tomorrow, and citizens exercising their right to vote bear a huge responsibility in shaping what the future will look like.

Questions to Consider

1. What content will be assessed on the test?
2. How reliable and valid will this test be in assessing the knowledge of voters?
3. What are alternative ways of assessing citizen's political general knowledge?
4. What will be the outcome of citizens who do not pass the test?
5. What barriers can citizens face in accessing and writing political general knowledge tests?
6. How can this knowledge test alter the future of a nation's political landscape?
7. What role does the media play in contributing to how well-informed voters are?

Links

1. [University of Lethbridge on Knowledge Test](#)
2. [Should Voters Have to Pass a Test Before Pulling the Lever?](#)
3. [The right to vote should be restricted to those with knowledge](#)
4. [What is epistocracy?](#)
5. [Survey about voting uninformed](#)
6. [Is Epistocracy Irrational?](#)