

Students will learn about the different political offices individuals can hold and investigate the election process to understand how officials ensure elections are free and fair.

Supplies

- Copies of the worksheets “Elected Officials” and “The Election Process in North Dakota”
- Access to the internet for research

Setup

- Have the worksheets ready to be distributed to the students.
- This lesson will likely take more than one class period.

Objectives

- Students will understand the role and responsibilities of North Dakota’s elected officials.
- Students will analyze the importance of election integrity and the role of government officials in ensuring fair elections.
- Students will develop critical thinking skills through research and analysis of election administration processes.

Background

Involvement in the democratic process is essential in the United States. There are many elected officials who represent individuals in the state of North Dakota. In fact, on one ballot during a presidential election year, North Dakotans may vote for more than 25 offices. Some of those offices, like county commissioner, may require you to vote for more than one person (burleigh.gov/elections/sample-ballot-measures). Knowing the responsibilities of these elected officials helps us understand who the best candidates will be for the job.

Elections also need to be free and fair. North Dakota has many processes in place to ensure elections are fair, transparent, and accessible. The electoral process in North Dakota incorporates various measures and

practices aimed at ensuring elections are both free from coercion and manipulation and fair in their administration.

The state ensures free and fair elections in numerous ways. Universal suffrage grants all eligible citizens the right to vote without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. This is fundamental to ensure every citizen has the opportunity to participate in shaping their government. Voter registration is not required in North Dakota, but citizens must still have proof that they live in the district they vote in.

The state employs a decentralized system where county auditors and local election officials play pivotal roles in overseeing election administration. County auditors serve as the chief election officers within their jurisdictions, responsible for voter registration and ballot preparation and for ensuring polling places are accessible and efficiently managed. This local oversight helps maintain accountability and responsiveness to the needs of voters at the grassroots level. Election boards play a key role in the election process. Each county polling location must have an election board present. The election board is responsible for the operation of the polling location including checking-in voters, issuing ballots, and ensuring a smooth and successful Election Day. Independent election observers and poll watchers are permitted to monitor polling places to uphold the integrity of the process, reporting any irregularities or concerns.

The secrecy of the ballot is upheld through private voting booths and procedures that safeguard voter anonymity, ensuring individuals can freely express their political preferences without fear of reprisal. Additionally, North Dakota uses paper ballots, which provide a tangible record of votes cast and contribute to the integrity and auditability of election results.

Running for political office has clear guidelines and receives support from the secretary of state's office. Candidates and parties are afforded equitable opportunities to present their platforms and engage with voters through debates, forums, and media appearances. This balanced access helps voters make informed decisions based on comprehensive information about a candidate's qualifications, policies, and campaign finances.

Despite current skepticism about elections and their fairness, these numerous safeguards and opportunities for observance help ensure that elections are indeed fair. North Dakota's electoral system reinforces democratic principles of accountability and representation.

Activity

1. Begin the lesson by discussing the importance of elections in a democratic society. Ask students to share what they know about how elections are administered in their state or local community.
2. Explain that they will complete different tasks that inform them about voting and the election process.
3. Tell students an important part of voting is understanding whom and what you are voting for. Explain there are many elected offices that are not widely known or understood. Oftentimes, those offices are locally elected and have more of an impact on people's daily lives.
4. Hand out the "Elected Officials" worksheet. Have the students use the internet or *Governing North Dakota, 2015-2017* to complete the chart. The worksheet can be turned in as homework or discussed in class.
5. Next, ask students what they think is meant by "free and fair" elections. If students are uncertain, you can ask them to look it up. Many definitions for this phrase exist; definitions can be found at [Principles of Democracy](#), [Civics Academy](#), [U.S. Mission to the OSCE](#), and elsewhere.
6. Inform the students they will complete the worksheet "The Election Process in North Dakota." This can be assigned as homework or done in groups during class.
7. Discuss the answers to the worksheet.
8. As an assessment for this lesson, students will write a persuasive essay based on the prompt:
A concerned member of your community feels that elections in North Dakota are not secure, and people are going to cheat in the next election to make sure a favorite candidate wins. Write an essay to convince them that North Dakota's elections are free and fair using specific examples from what you have learned to illustrate your point.

Extension

1. Invite a guest speaker, such as a county auditor, election official, or other local politician, to discuss their experiences and perspectives on election integrity or to discuss what their role is in local government.
2. Have students investigate the federal government's role in elections.
3. Have students look at different types of measures that can be added to the ballot. They can research those measures to determine how they would vote in the next election.

Reflection questions

1. Is there anything else North Dakota should be doing to ensure that elections are more secure? Why or why not?
2. Which political office in the state do you think has the biggest impact on you as an individual? Why?

Elected Officials

If you were to vote in the next election, some or all of the following are elected offices you might find on the ballot. Complete the chart to understand who the official represents and their role.

Position	Represents (state, district, county, city)	Role
Governor		
Secretary of State		
State Auditor		
State Treasurer		
Attorney General		
Insurance Commissioner		
Agriculture Commissioner		
Public Service Commissioner		
Tax Commissioner		
Superintendent of Public Instruction		
Supreme Court Justice		
District Court Judge		
Municipal Judge		
County Commissioner		
County Auditor		
State's Attorney		
Sherriff		
Mayor		
City Council member		
City Commissioner		
School Board member		
Park Board member		

Elected Officials Answer Key

Position	Represents	Role
Governor	State	Executes what the state Legislature approves and proposes an agenda
Secretary of State	State	Chief election official. Oversees state documents and approves businesses in the state
State Auditor	State	Audits funds of the state to ensure they are used appropriately
State Treasurer	State	Receives and manages the state's money
Attorney General	State	Legal representative and advisor for the state
Insurance Commissioner	State	Oversees insurance companies and agents, investigates consumer complaints
Agriculture Commissioner	State	Oversees agriculture in the state from regulations to marketing to disease prevention
Public Service Commissioner	State	Oversees public utility companies, weights and measures, and grain elevators
Tax Commissioner	State	Oversees tax funds in the state
Superintendent of Public Instruction	State	Leads education for the state
Supreme Court Justice	State	Serves as a judge for the highest court in the state. All state appeals go to the North Dakota Supreme Court.
District Court Judge	Counties in a district	Serves as a judge for the initial state trials
Municipal Judge	City	Serve as a judge for violations of city ordinances
County Commissioner	County	Boards of three to five members who have lawmaking and oversight duties for the county they represent.
County Auditor	County	Chief election official who keeps and oversees records for the county
State's Attorney	County	Represents the county in court
Sherriff	County	County law enforcement officer
Mayor	City	The executive leader of a city
City Council member	City	Member of a legislative body of a city (cities have councilors or commissioners)
City Commissioner	City	Member of a legislative body of a city (cities have councilors or commissioners)
School Board member	School district	Member of the board that oversees education for that district
Park Board member	County or city	Member of the board that oversees parks and recreational activities offered for the area

The Election Process in North Dakota

It's important to be an informed voter who understands the election process. Here are some of your responsibilities as members of our community. Using this worksheet, you will analyze how North Dakota ensures election integrity by understanding the election process. Most, if not all your answers, can be found through the [North Dakota secretary of state's office](#), but you are not limited to this source.

1. North Dakota is one of the few states where you don't have to register to vote. How does the state ensure an individual is able to vote?
2. What restrictions are there in North Dakota on who can run for office? Are these restrictions reasonable?
3. How does a person go about voting before the election if they are not able to vote on Election Day?
4. If you were to vote in the upcoming election, where is your polling place?
5. Which legislative district do you reside in?
6. What elected official determines the location of polling places?
7. What does the state do to ensure voting machines are secure and working properly?
8. What measures are taken to ensure ballots are secure after they are cast?
9. Who counts the votes?
10. What is an election board and how does it ensure the election is free and fair?
11. What does an individual have to do to become a poll worker?
12. What is the role of the election inspector?
13. What are the requirements regarding voting booths?
14. What is the role of an election observer?
15. What is a canvassing board?
16. How are ballots returned to the auditor?
17. List five election offenses.
18. What measures are taken throughout the voting process to ensure the election is secure?
19. Are individuals required to vote for every office or initiative on the ballot? Explain.
20. How can an individual citizen/resident of the state participate in the election process?

The Election Process in North Dakota Answer Key

1. Your ID matches the polling book.
2. Answers will vary based on office, but generally the candidates need to meet minimum age requirements and be from North Dakota and the district they represent. For the most part, these restrictions are seen as reasonable.
3. Absentee, early voting, or Election Day voting.
4. Answers will vary based on where the students live.
5. Answers will vary based on where the students live.
6. County auditor
7. Voting machines are tested before and after elections. North Dakota uses paper ballots to check against electronic machines. The machines are not connected to the internet. All machines are certified by the state and federal government.
8. Officials ensure that electronically counted ballots equal the number of names listed in the poll books. Ballots are sealed and delivered to the auditor's office. Numerous people work to ensure election integrity. There is a chain of custody for the ballots, and the process is open to the public.
9. The auditor's office counts ballots through canvassing boards.
10. Individuals who oversee the election process to make sure all laws are followed and ensure the integrity of the election. They are made up of judges and inspectors from both political parties.
11. Volunteer through the election board and attend mandatory training.
12. Supervise the election process.
13. Privacy; there must be one for every 150 voters
14. Observe all parts of the election process.
15. Individuals that count the votes.
16. Wrapped, secured, and delivered to the auditor through the proper channels.
17. Numerous answers can be found here: [The Election Officials' Manual](http://vip.sos.nd.gov/pdfs/Portals/2024%20Election%20Officials%20Manual.pdf) (vip.sos.nd.gov/pdfs/Portals/2024%20Election%20Officials%20Manual.pdf).
18. Some examples include checks on identity and residency; election observers; bipartisan representation among the officials that oversee the elections; sealed and secret ballots, etc.
19. No, individuals can choose to skip voting for certain offices or measures altogether, or they can choose fewer than the maximum number of candidates to vote for each position. Individuals cannot overvote; it invalidates their ballot.
20. Answers will vary but could include serving as a poll worker or observer and voting, etc.