

# Government and politics of Canada



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Government: In Canada, there are three levels of government. Each level of government has different responsibilities.

- Federal government (the Government of Canada) – Responsible for things that affect the whole country, such as citizenship and immigration, national defence and trade with other countries.
- Provincial and territorial governments (for example, the Province of Ontario) – Responsible for things such as education, health care and highways.
- Municipal (local) governments (cities, towns, and villages in Ontario) – Responsible for firefighting, city streets and other local matters. If there is no local government, the province provides services.
- Federal Government

At the federal level, there are 3 parts of government:

- Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, is Canada's formal head of state. The Governor General represents the Queen in Canada and carries out the duties of head of state.
- The House of Commons makes Canada's laws. Canadians elect representatives to the House of Commons. These representatives are called Members of Parliament (MPs) and usually belong to a political party. The political party that has the largest number of MPs forms the government, and its leader becomes prime minister.
- The prime minister is the head of government in Canada. The Prime Minister chooses MPs to serve as ministers in the cabinet. There are ministers for citizenship and immigration, justice and other subjects. The cabinet makes important decisions about government policy.
- The Senate reviews laws that are proposed by the House of Commons. Senators come from across Canada. The prime minister chooses the senators.
- Provincial Government

At the provincial level:

- The Lieutenant Governor represents the Queen.
- The Legislative Assembly makes law. In Ontario, elected representatives are called Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs).

The political party that has the largest number of MPPs forms the government, and its leader becomes premier. The premier is the head of government in Ontario.

The premier leads the government and chooses MPPs to serve as ministers in the cabinet. The cabinet sets government policy and introduces laws for the Legislative Assembly to consider.

- Municipal (Local) Government

At the municipal level:

- The Province of Ontario defines the structure, finances, and management of the local governments of cities, towns and villages.
- Residents of the municipality elect the mayor and council members to lead the local government. Committees of councilors discuss budget, service and administrative issues that are then passed on to the council for debate. Citizens, business owners and community groups can present their concerns to councilors at committee meetings.
- Municipalities may also be part of a larger county or regional government (for example, York Region).

## Constitution

### Parliament of Canada

Canada is a constitutional monarchy, with Queen Elizabeth II (Queen of Canada) as head of state, represented by a Governor-General appointed on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The British North America Act of 1867 set up a machinery of government that has remained basically unchanged; however, the constitution is contained in the Constitution Act of 1982, which includes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as procedures for amending the constitution.

The federal parliament is bicameral. The House of Commons has 308 members directly elected in general elections which, if not called earlier, must be held on the third Monday in October in the fourth calendar year following the last election. The Senate has 105 members appointed on a regional basis by the Prime Minister, in consultation with the cabinet. The leader of the party with the most seats in the House of Commons becomes Prime Minister and appoints a cabinet which has executive power at the federal level.

## Politics

In a surprise early general election in November 2000, the Liberal Party gained a decisive 173 seats, including 100 of 103 seats in the largest province of Ontario and 37 of 73 in Québec, increasing its majority by 18. Jean Chrétien continued as Prime Minister. The opposition Canadian Alliance increased its share of the popular vote – largely at the expense of the Progressive Conservative Party (PCP) – but failed to challenge the Liberal Party in the east of the country.

In December 2003, Chrétien retired and was succeeded by former Finance Minister Paul Martin, and an early general election followed in June 2004, in which the ruling Liberal Party, taking 135 seats, was ahead of the Conservatives (99 seats, the Conservative Party was formed by a merger of PCP and Canadian Alliance), but did not achieve an overall majority in the House of Commons and depended on the support of the smaller parties.

Only 17 months into its new term, in December 2005 opposition parties challenged the government on the payment by the previous Liberal government in the late 1990s of large sums of public money to advertising agencies, and, for the first time ever, carried a vote of no confidence in the government. Martin then had to call a new general election for January 2006. In this election, on a platform of tax cuts and measures to combat corruption, the Conservative Party won 124 seats, the Liberal Party 103, Bloc Québécois 51 and the New Democratic Party (NDP) 29. Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper became Prime Minister but, short of an outright majority, he was only able to introduce new legislation with support from members of other parties.

In a bid to strengthen his minority government, Harper called an election in October 2008. In the contest when turnout was 59 per cent, his Conservatives won 143 seats with 37.6 per cent of votes. Their gain was largely at the expense of the Liberals who took 77 seats; while Bloc Québécois was also down at 49 seats, NDP won 37 and independents two. Harper was returned as Prime Minister, once again in a minority government.

At an early general election, held in May 2011 after the government lost a parliamentary vote of no confidence on 25 March 2011, the ruling Conservatives secured a majority in the House of Commons with 167 of the 308 seats (39.6 per cent of votes). The NDP (102 seats and 30.6 per cent) overtook both the Liberal Party (34 seats and 18.9 per cent) and Bloc Québécois (4 seats and 6.0 per cent); the remaining seat was won by the Green Party (3.9 per cent). The new legislature included 76 women, more than ever before.

### The Canadian Political Parties System Today

Canada has what is sometimes called the “two party-plus” system. This means the country is usually dominated by two large parties — one of the left (broadly favoring social reform and activist government), and one of the right (broadly favoring social tradition and limited government) — there is almost always a strong third-place party as well, either of the further-left or further-right, that threatens to bump off one of the “big two.”

Historically, the Canadian two-party plus system has been dominated by the center-left Liberal Party and a center-right Conservative Party (that has gone by several different names). Since the 1980s or so Canada’s dominant third-place party has been the further-left NDP. There is also a consistently fourth-place party known as the Bloc Quebecois, which is devoted to Quebec separatism, but it obviously has fairly narrow appeal. People sometimes consider the Green Party of Canada to be Canada’s fifth “major party” but it has never won more than one seat in a federal election.

Sources: <https://thecommonwealth.org> / <https://thecanadaguide.com>