

Magna Carta in Britain are equally important in Canadian constitutional law. Fundamental among these laws are political liberties and the principles governing the cabinet system of responsible government. A variety of statutes, Orders-in-Council and judicial decisions are also part of the constitution.

The Fathers of Confederation gave the French-speaking majority in Quebec specific constitutional protections. French and English were made the official languages of the federal Parliament and courts, and in Quebec the French and English languages were given equal status in the courts, government and administration. The province also retained French civil law, and controlled education and such public services as existed at the time. However, French language rights were not protected outside Quebec, and today New Brunswick is the only province with an official bilingual policy. The other provinces have voiced general support for minority language rights.

The Constitution of the United States has a complicated but complete system of amendment. In Canada certain aspects of the constitution can be amended only

by the British Parliament on petition from Ottawa. This reflects not a desire in Britain to hold on to power but the inability of Canadians to agree on a new procedure for amending their constitution. A new method would have to safeguard basic provincial and minority rights while permitting a flexibility that would allow the constitution to be altered to meet changing circumstances. Several federal-provincial conferences have been called in pursuit of this goal.

Two proposals, one in the 1960s and another, known as the Victoria Charter, in the 1970s, won wide but not unanimous acceptance. The Victoria Charter came closest, having been approved by all the provinces and by the Federal Government in 1971; Quebec later withdrew its support because its leaders decided the Charter did not provide sufficient guarantees for its security as a French-speaking province.