

By custom also, Ontario and Quebec must have 10 or 12 ministers each, provided each province has elected enough government supporters to warrant such a number. By custom, at least one minister from Quebec must be an English-speaking Protestant and there must be at least one minister from the French-speaking minorities outside Quebec, normally from New Brunswick or Ontario, or both. It used to be necessary to have also at least one English-speaking (usually Irish) Roman Catholic minister, and in recent years Canada's multicultural nature has been reflected in Cabinet representation from Jewish and non-English, non-French, ethnic minorities.

The speakers

The speaker of the Senate is appointed by the governor general on the recommendation of the prime minister.

The speaker of the House of Commons is elected by the House itself after each general election. He or she must be a member of the House. The speaker is its presiding officer, decides all questions of procedure and order, controls the House of Commons staff and is expected to be impartial, non-partisan, and as firm in enforcing the rules against the prime minister as against the humblest Opposition backbencher.

The speaker is, by custom, chosen from members of the party in power, though there are cases (the most recent in 1979) where a speaker of one party carried on after a change of government, and one (1957) where the government was ready to support a member from one of the minor parties. The speaker sometimes drops his or her membership in a party and runs in the next general election as an independent.

In 1985, the Commons adopted a new system whereby any member, except ministers of the Crown and party leaders, may stand for election as speaker, and the election itself is conducted by secret ballot in the Commons Chamber. The system goes a further step toward securing the speaker against any lingering suspicion that he or she is the government's choice and that the speakership is simply one of a number of prime ministerial appointments.

This new procedure also interrupts the custom of alternating French- and English-speaking speakers in the Commons, although this tradition is still retained in the Senate. In the House of Commons, if the speaker is English-speaking, the deputy speaker is French-speaking, and vice versa. The deputy speaker is sometimes chosen from the Opposition.