

The first formula covers amendments dealing with the office of the Queen, the governor general, the lieutenant-governors, the right of a province to at least as many seats in the House of Commons as it has in the Senate, the use of the English and French languages (except amendments applying only to a single province), the composition of the Supreme Court of Canada, and amendments to the amending formulas themselves.

Amendments of this kind must be passed by the Senate and the House of Commons (or by the Commons alone, if the Senate has not approved the proposal within 180 days after the Commons has done so), and by the legislature of every province. This gives every single province a veto.

The second formula covers amendments taking away any rights, powers or privileges of provincial governments or legislatures; dealing with the proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons; the powers of the Senate and the method of selecting senators; the number of senators for each province, and their residence qualifications; the constitutional position of the Supreme Court of Canada (except its composition, which comes under the first formula); the extension of existing provinces into the territories; the creation of new provinces; generally, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (which is dealt with later).

Such amendments must be passed by the Senate and the House of Commons (or, again the Commons alone if the Senate delays more than 180 days), and by the legislatures of two-thirds of the provinces with at least half the total population of all the provinces (that is, the total population of Canada excluding the territories). This means that any four provinces taken together (for example, the four Atlantic provinces, or the four Western) could veto any such amendments. So could Ontario and Quebec taken together. The seven provinces needed to pass any amendment would have to include either Quebec or Ontario.

Any province can, by resolution of its legislature, opt out of any amendment passed under this formula that takes away any of its powers, rights or privileges; and if the amendment it opts out of transfers powers over education or other cultural matters to the national Parliament, Parliament must pay the province "reasonable compensation."

The third formula covers amendments dealing with matters that apply only to one province, or to several but not all provinces. Such amendments must be passed by the Senate and the House of Commons (or the Commons alone, if the Senate delays more than 180 days), and by the legislature or legislatures of the particular province or provinces concerned. Such amendments include any changes in provincial boundaries or changes relating to use of the English or French language in a particular province, or provinces.