

If five years pass without an election, Parliament is dissolved through the expiry of its mandate, and an election automatically becomes necessary. More often, before the end of this term, the prime minister fixes an election date. An election takes place usually four years or so after the previous one. In a minority-government situation, however (where no party has an absolute majority in the House of Commons), the vote is likely to come sooner, since the government is more vulnerable.

Since 1982, the period for a federal election campaign has been reduced from approximately 60 to a fixed minimum of 50 days.

### *Election arrangements*

The dissolution of Parliament sets the complicated election machinery in motion. Essentially, it consists of an office, called Elections Canada, headed by the chief electoral officer in Ottawa, and a returning officer for each constituency. The returning officer is responsible for the conduct of the election in his or her constituency and for setting up polling division boundaries between elections.

As insurance against being caught unprepared, the chief electoral officer starts to get ready for a new election as soon as the last one is over. A general election requires the production of several hundred tonnes of paper material, such as ballot paper, manuals of instruction and forms of many kinds.

Sufficient quantities of these materials are shipped to the returning offices, some before and some after the calling of the election. Returning officers then complete plans for taking the votes in their areas, arrange for the rental of polling stations, assign enumerators to compile lists of eligible voters, and appoint deputy returning officers. In urban areas, the voters' lists are no longer posted in public places as a result of public outcry at the invasion of privacy it created in the past. Instead, each elector on the list prepared by the enumerators is sent a notice of enumeration card informing him or her that their name is on the voters' list and when and where they may vote. Following the enumeration of electors is a period of revision of the lists during which changes and additions can be made.

The independence of the chief electoral officer is assured by the fact that he is appointed by resolution of the House of Commons and not by the Cabinet, as are most public servants of similar rank. His salary is set by law and not by order-in-council. Finally, he is responsible to the Commons, and not to the government, and can be removed only for cause (not fulfilling his duties) by the governor general on address of the Senate and the House of Commons.