

Collectively, the Cabinet provides leadership and initiative in the determination of national policy and the appointment of other chief officers of state, including lieutenant-governors of the provinces, judges and ambassadors. The Cabinet is at all times responsible to the House of Commons.

A federal general election is only one of many opportunities for Canadian citizens to make known their wishes respecting the management of public affairs. Each of the ten provinces and two territories in the Canadian federation has its own elected legislature and each has its own system of local government under which elected councils direct the affairs of cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities and school districts.

The federal Parliament, however, is the only body that makes laws for and speaks for Canada as a whole. Headed by the Queen, represented in Canada by her viceroy the governor general, it consists of the appointed Senate and the House of Commons, members of which are elected by universal suffrage.

The Queen's powers, exercised through the governor general, are used only on the advice of the Cabinet, in respect to executive decisions, and of the two Houses of Parliament, in respect to legislation. The powers of the Cabinet, too, are often exercised through the governor general, by orders-in-council that she must sign.

The Senate's powers are limited in two fundamental respects. It may not initiate financial legislation. This means that it has little more than a negative say on the taxes to be levied on Canadians and the use to which public funds may be put. Furthermore, unlike the House of Commons, it has no control over the executive. It cannot unseat a government.

Senators are appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister. There are 104 members of the Senate.

The House of Commons derives its power from the fact that the prime minister and most members of the Cabinet also belong to the House and are responsible to it. They are called upon to explain their conduct and policies daily while the House is in session, especially during the question period. Their positions depend on the confidence of the House. If the House votes lack of confidence in them, they must resign or bring on an immediate election. Through the latter device they can appeal the verdict of the House to the voters at large. For example, this happened in December 1979, when the government was defeated in the House of Commons and then obtained from the governor general a dissolution of Parliament so that a new federal general election could take place February 18, 1980.