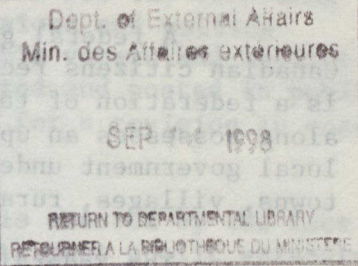


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GENERAL ELECTIONS IN CANADA

All Canadian citizens share in the government of their country through general elections for the House of Commons. That body is the most powerful element in the Parliament of Canada, which is responsible for Canada's relations with other countries, national defence, finance, criminal law and other fields of administration on which common policy for the whole of Canada is deemed desirable.

The constitution requires the election of a new House of Commons at least once every five years. These elections are called "federal general elections" to distinguish them from the many other elections which are held in the country. Directly, through the federal general elections, Canadians seat 264 of their fellows in the House of Commons as legislators. Indirectly, through the same election, they decide who will be their Prime Minister.

Under the Canadian constitution, representation in the House of Commons must be reviewed at ten-year intervals - i.e., after each decennial census. Since 1964, this revision has been carried out by independent bodies created for the purpose.

Members of Parliament are elected by the voters of the constituencies in which they stand. With a few exceptions provided for in the constitution, the populations of constituencies vary from 55,000 to 88,000 according to their rural or urban character.

The Prime Minister chooses 20 or more individuals, all of whom must be Members of Parliament, to serve with him as Ministers in the Cabinet. Usually all, except possibly one or two who may be members of the Senate, are Members of the House of Commons or secure election to that House after their appointment.

The Cabinet, consisting of the Prime Minister and the other Ministers, discharges the executive functions of government. Individual members administer different departments of government, such as Finance, Agriculture, External Affairs, Justice. In addition, there are usually several Cabinet members, known as "Ministers without Portfolio", who have no departmental responsibility. 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.

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A federal general election is only one of many occasions on which Canadian citizens record their will as to the conduct of public affairs. Canada is a federation of ten provinces, each with its own elected legislature. Quebec alone possesses an upper chamber as well. Each province 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 which makes laws for and speaks for Canada as a nation. It consists of the Queen, the appointed Senate, and the elected House of Commons.

The Queen's powers are exercised through a Governor General. Nominally important, they 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 order-in-council.

The Senate's powers are subject to two important limitations. It may not initiate financial legislation. That means it has little more than a negative say on the taxes to be levied on the Canadian people and the use to which public funds may be put. Unlike the House of Commons, it has no control over the executive. It cannot unseat a Government.

The House of Commons derives its power from the fact that the Prime Minister and, usually, most members of the Cabinet are chosen from among its members and are responsible to it. They are called upon to explain their conduct and policies day by day while the House is in session. They owe their positions to 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.

If five years pass without an election, Parliament is dissolved by "effluxion of time" and an election automatically becomes necessary. More often, before the end of this term, the Prime Minister fixes an election date that he considers convenient for his party or consistent with its interests and those of the nation.

Normally, however, an election takes place after an interval of between four and five years from the previous election. Governments do not like to appear too fearful of an election by deferring it for the full five-year term.

Election Arrangements

However it occurs, the dissolution of Parliament sets the complicated election machinery in motion. Essentially, it consists of a board headed by the Chief Electoral Officer in Ottawa and of as many chief returning officers as there are constituencies. Each chief returning officer is responsible for conducting the election in his own constituency.

As insurance against being caught unprepared, the Chief Electoral Officer starts to get ready for a new election as soon as the latest one is over. The holding of a general election requires the production of several tons of printed material, such as background papers, manuals of instruction and forms of many kinds.

When the date is set, appropriate lots of this material are shipped off to the constituencies. Returning officers complete plans for the recording of the votes of people in their areas, set up polling divisions and polling-stations, set enumerators at work compiling lists of eligible voters and appoint deputy returning officers. These lists of voters are printed and posted in public places so that anyone may check them for accuracy and call for a revision in case names have been wrongly omitted or wrongly included.

The independence of the Chief Electoral Officer is ensured by the fact that he is nominated by the House of Commons and not, as with most public servants of similar rank, by the Governor-in-Council. In addition, his salary is set by law and not by order-in-council. Finally, he is responsible not to the Government but to the House of Commons, and can be removed only for cause and in the same way as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Voters

Every Canadian citizen or other British subject 21 years of age or over has the right to vote. However, British subjects who are not Canadian citizens must have resided continuously in Canada for the 12 months immediately preceding the election day. Persons born in Canada or born in a foreign land of Canadian parents are automatically Canadian citizens. Persons born in a foreign country may acquire Canadian citizenship after a residence of five years in Canada.

A member of the Armed Forces may vote even if he is not 21 years old, and he may have his vote recorded in the constituency of his residence, even if he is absent on service. Other electors must vote in the constituencies where they live and at the appropriate polling-station.

Among those who are deprived of their franchise -- but only so long as the cause of this deprivation lasts -- are prisoners in penal institutions and persons confined to hospitals for mental illness. Certain classes of person are deprived of their vote on account of their official functions; such are the Chief Electoral Officer and his Deputy, judges and chief returning officers. The last-named officials must cast the tie-breaking ballot when two candidates for election have received the same number of votes. Finally, any person who has been found guilty of electoral fraud may lose the franchise for a specified period.

The Candidates

In general, anyone eligible to vote is eligible for nomination and election to the House of Commons. There are no property or educational qualifications.

Some exceptions to this rule are: persons holding or sharing in the benefits of government contracts; members of provincial legislatures; judges; persons who have been found guilty of corrupt electoral practices. None of these people may run for the House of Commons.

In most cases, candidates declare their intentions long before an election is called. Most of them are the official representatives of the various political parties. Sometimes they have waged lively battles at party nominating conventions and defeated other aspirants.

The nominations, which must be addressed in writing to the chief returning officer of the constituency in which the aspiring candidate wishes to stand, close, in general, 14 days before election day. In a few constituencies, nominations are held 28 days before the date of the election because of distance and substandard communications. A nomination sometimes assumes the guise of a public meeting at which the candidate is in attendance.

A candidate need not reside in the constituency he hopes to represent. His nomination, however, must be endorsed by at least 25 electors in the constituency. He must put up a deposit of \$200 which is returned to him if he wins the election or polls half as many votes as the winning candidate. This is considered a discouragement to frivolous nominations.

Parties

Everyone is free to form a political party and to join or support any party he chooses.

Two parties, commonly called "old", "conventional" or "historic", have hitherto shared the allegiance of most Canadian voters. They are the Conservatives, officially the "Progressive-Conservative Party" and the Liberals. Every Canadian Government up to now has been formed by one or other of these parties or a merger of elements from both. On occasion, other parties have succeeded in winning provincial elections and electing groups of members to the House of Commons. Two such parties are the New Democratic Party and the Social Credit Party. A fifth party, based in Quebec, is the Ralliement des Cr ditistes.

Voters, however, get no help from the electoral system in learning either the identity of the candidates of the different parties or the policies and programmes they advocate. On entering a polling booth, a voter is handed a ballot listing the candidates by name, address and occupation but not by party. Unless he has been previously informed, through unofficial channels, a voter has no clue as to which candidates represent which party.

Party organizations make up for this by means of propaganda and solicitation. In this the party leader plays an increasingly important role as modern means of communication -- television, radio and speedy travel facilities -- enable him to become known to a large proportion of the voters.

The principal political parties function through voluntary associations with headquarters in the national capital but in more or less intimate association with organizations at the provincial and constituency levels.

Thus a party will have an association in a constituency concerned with the selection of a suitable candidate to represent it at elections, with enlisting members, with soliciting funds and with political education. The local association will send delegates to provincial and national assemblies for the selection of leaders as vacancies occur and for the transaction of other party business.

The same party may also have a voluntary association functioning for all Canada and another for each province, each with an executive and, often, a full-time permanent staff. In between elections these organizations busy themselves

with keeping the party's policies up to date, publicizing them and generally preparing for elections to come.

As the time for election approaches, they prepare and launch massive campaigns aimed at popularizing the party's policies and the personality of the leader. These campaigns reach their peak in the weeks immediately before an election as leaders scurry across the country, addressing meetings in large centres and visiting as many smaller places as possible for short speeches and personal meetings with individual voters.

Expenses

Canadian elections are expensive. The country is vast and many parts of it are sparsely populated. Yet, as far as is humanly possible, every voter, no matter where he lives, must be given a chance to mark a ballot.

Chief Electoral Officer J.M. Hamel expects to spend \$13,500,000 of public funds at the next election. That will be about \$1.25 for every voter. It will be spend in printing, salaries and fees of electoral officials, transportation -- all in order to enable the voters to record their decisions.

Campaign expenses by candidates and political parties will exceed several million dollars. These funds come from private sources, the candidates themselves, their friends and well-wishers, or from the supporters of the various parties.

Individual candidates must maintain records and, following the election, make a public declaration of the total amount of their electoral expenses. They are required to appoint official agents to receive all contributions and make all disbursements on their behalf. There is no limit to the amount of money they may spend. In recent elections, candidates' financial statements have shown expenses ranging from a few hundred to many thousands of dollars.

Large sums are also required to finance the general campaigns. These sums are disbursed by the central party organizations. They go for advertising in newspapers and other publications, radio and television broadcasts, printing and distribution of literature, travelling expenses of leaders, organizers, and other speakers, rental of rooms for campaign headquarters and of assembly places for meetings.

Immediately before and on election day the law imposes limits on campaigning and propaganda activities. Radio and television broadcasts in the interests of any party or candidate are prohibited on election day and the two days immediately before.

Premature publication of election results is prohibited. Owing to the variation in time zones, election results in Eastern Canada are known before voting ends in the far West. It is illegal to publish in any province, before the closing of the polls in that province, the result of the polling in any electoral district in Canada. This is intended to prevent voters in the West being influenced by indications that one party is winning or another is losing in the East.

Compilation of Results

As soon as the polls close, counting of ballots begins. The deputy returning officer and his assistant are responsible for counting the votes in each polling division. These counts are transmitted to the constituency returning officer and made public as they are completed. Within a few hours of the close of polling, results in most constituencies are known. The result of the election is usually known by midnight.

Consequences of an Election

If the party forming the Government before the election wins a majority or has the largest number of seats in the new House of Commons, the members of the Cabinet must be sworn in again. Even when a general Election returns the same party to power, there are usually changes in the make-up of the Cabinet.

If another party wins a majority or has the largest number of seats in the new House of Commons, the Prime Minister, within a few weeks, submits his resignation and that of his Cabinet to the Governor General with a recommendation that the leader of the winning party be called on to form a Government. That leader then proceeds to select a Cabinet and, when he is ready to take office, is sworn in as Prime Minister. Canada has a new Government.

The Parliamentary system, combined with the Canadian electoral system, appears to have served Canada well. During more than 100 years of Canadian federation, it seems to have produced Governments responsive to the will of the people and sufficiently secure in their tenure of office to permit of the development and application of long-range policies.

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