

Need a refresher on our electoral system?

How does our electoral system work? Here is a five-point refresher.

1. The Canadian electoral system is modeled after a parliamentary system of government similar to that of the United Kingdom.

This system consists of three important parts:

- The **Governor General** represents the Queen, who is the head of state in Canada.
- The **Senate** is also known as the Upper House. Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.
- The **House of Commons**, also known as the Lower House. Members of Parliament are chosen by the citizens of Canada through the federal election process.

More about the House of Commons

- Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected from different parts of Canada known as ridings, with one member elected in each riding.
- MPs serve as representatives of the people who live in their riding.

More about the Senate

- acts as a second review, a chamber of sober second thought, on government action and legislation proposed by the House of Commons;
- its members are appointed by region so that all areas of Canada are represented;
- engages in detailed studies of complex or controversial issues.

More about the Governor General:

- ensures the continuity of government;
- summons and dissolves Parliament;
- sets out the government's program by reading the Speech from the Throne;
- gives Royal Assent, the last step of making a law after a bill has been passed in Parliament.

2. In Canada's electoral system, the candidate with the most votes in each riding wins. This is referred to as a **first past the post** system. The candidate is not required to have an absolute majority (more than 50% of the votes). The candidate with the most votes in any given riding will receive a seat in the House of Commons and becomes a **Member of Parliament** (MP).

3. A **political party** is a group of individuals who together endorse candidates for election to the House of Commons. They also establish a constitution and bylaws, and elect a leader.

Each party may endorse only one **candidate** per riding. Candidates who run for election without party affiliation may be designated as independent or as having no affiliation.

A political party must register with the **chief electoral officer** in order to be able to put the

party name on the ballot under the name of the candidate it endorses.

After an election, the party with the most elected representatives becomes the **governing party**. The leader of this party becomes the Prime Minister of Canada and chooses people (usually MPs from his or her party) to head the various government departments. These department heads are referred to as **cabinet ministers**.

The party with the second largest number of MPs elected is called the **official opposition**. Their job is to hold the government accountable for the good of all Canadians and the country.

All the elected candidates have a seat in the House of Commons, where they vote on draft legislation (called **bills**) and therefore have an influence on government policy.

4. All Canadian citizens age 18 and older have the right to vote in a federal election. To register to vote, or confirm you are registered, Canadians can visit www.elections.ca.
5. Voting is a responsibility and a privilege. Wise and informed choices ultimately lead to better representation, better government and more effective leaders.

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