

What does the legislative branch do?

The **legislative branch** includes the House of Commons, the Senate and the governor general. The legislative branch is also called Canada's parliament.

legislative branch: the part of government that makes laws

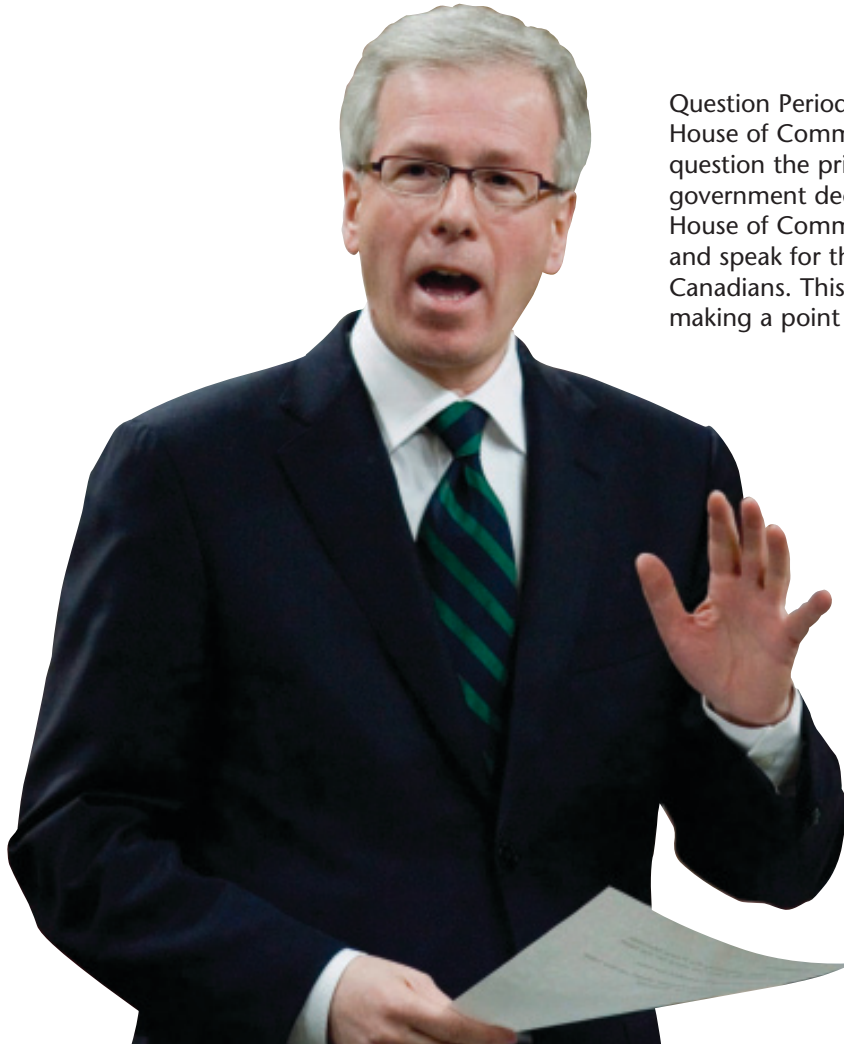
The House of Commons

- The House of Commons is the major law-making body in Canada's federal political system.
- The members of the House of Commons debate, study and vote on laws proposed for Canada, called bills.
- Members of parliament, or MPs, are the members of the House of Commons. Voters elect them.
- Each MP represents the voters of one riding, or district.
- Most MPs belong to political parties. The party with the most MPs usually forms the government. The other parties form the opposition.
- Representation in the House of Commons is by population (see the chart on page 33).
- All proceedings of the legislative branch are in Canada's two official languages: French and English.



**CRITICAL
THINKING
CHALLENGE**

Who are the leaders of political parties in Canada today?

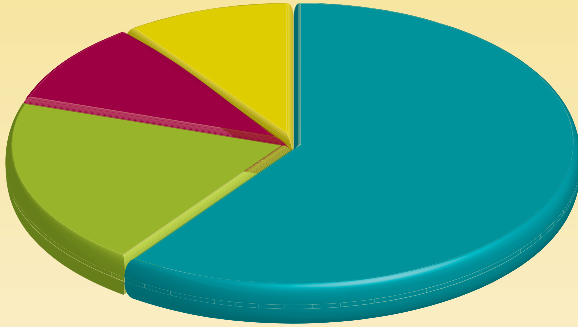


Question Period is often the liveliest part of the day in the House of Commons. Members from the opposition parties question the prime minister and cabinet ministers on government decisions. The role of the opposition in the House of Commons is to create debate, act as a watchdog, and speak for the different views and perspectives of Canadians. This photo shows Liberal leader Stéphane Dion making a point during Question Period.

WHO FORMS THE GOVERNMENT?

Each riding has a “seat” in the House of Commons — literally, a place where its MP sits.

Majority Government

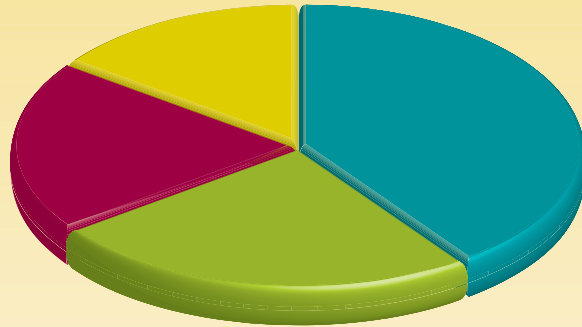


If a political party wins the majority of seats in the House of Commons, it always forms the government. Here, the blue party would form the government.



Refer to page 348 in the Skills Centre for tips on reading graphs and charts.

Minority Government



If a political party wins the most seats in the House of Commons, but not the majority of seats, it usually forms the government. Here, the blue party would still form the government. To stay in power, however, this party would need to negotiate for the support of at least one other party in the House of Commons, to ensure that more than 50 percent of MPs in the House would vote for the government’s proposals.

This is the Commons Chamber, where MPs spend most of their time debating and voting on bills. The chamber is also a place where MPs represent their constituents’ views and needs.



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

If you were prime minister, to what extent would you work with the opposition? You could use your answer, supported with facts and reasons, as a step towards completing your chapter task.



How do MPs see their role?

MPs have two key responsibilities: to represent their **constituents** and to create legislation for the peace, order and good government of all Canadians.

constituent: someone who lives in a riding and is represented by an elected official from that riding

An MP has many roles — being a legislator, being a voice for your constituents. Working on behalf of my constituents takes up most of my time. As a First Nations MP, a key responsibility is to make sure legislation addresses the issues of the Aboriginal communities out there.



Gary Merasty belongs to the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation and was elected as an MP from Saskatchewan in 2006.

The first responsibility is to the constituents who elected the MP. The MP represents them in formulating policies and by assisting them with services provided by the Government of Canada.

An MP's second responsibility is to the work of parliament. Whether you are in government or opposition, you have an important role to perform.



Deepak Obhrai was first elected as an MP from Calgary in 1997.



What evidence from the comments of these MPs shows their two key responsibilities?

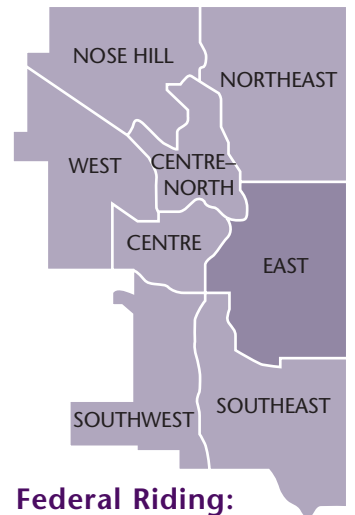
How are MPs elected?

The structure of Canada's electoral system partly determines who represents Canadians in government. Canadians have different views and perspectives on the system. Consider the example below of the election of Deepak Obhrai in 2006.

Results, 2006 Federal Election: Calgary East

To become elected, a candidate must win the most votes, but not necessarily more than 50 percent of the votes.

Candidate	Party	Votes	% of vote
Deepak Obhrai	Conservative Party	26 766	67.10
Dobie To	Liberal Party	5 410	13.56
Patrick Arnell	New Democratic Party	4 338	10.87
John Mark Taylor	Green Party	2 954	7.41
Jason Devine	Communist Party	239	0.60
Ghabzanfar Khan	Canadian Action Party	183	0.46



Federal Riding: Calgary East

Six candidates ran for the 2006 federal election in the riding of Calgary East. The voters in Calgary East all live in the part of Calgary shown on this map.



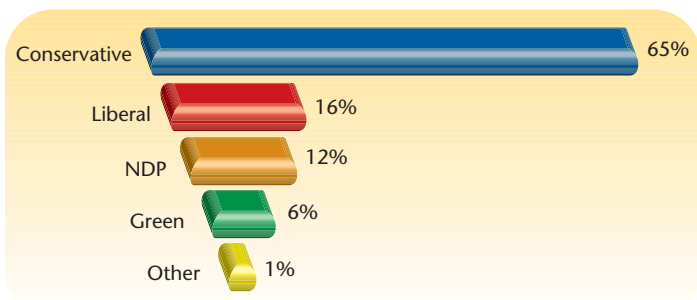
Based on this chart, to what extent do election results reflect voter choice?

What impact does the popular vote have on the results of an election?

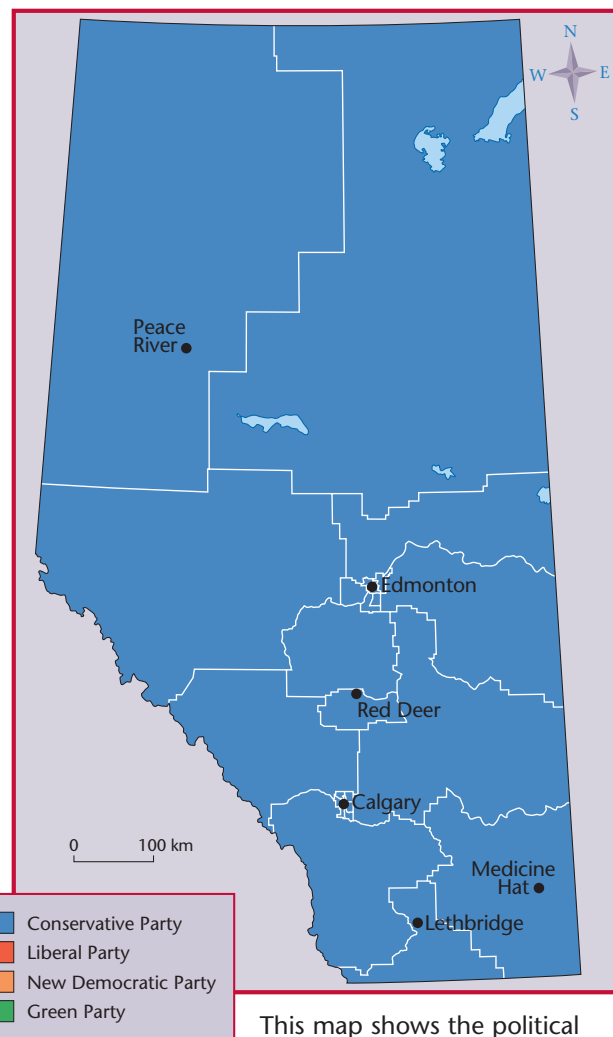
popular vote: the total votes cast in an election, as different from the total seats won in an election

Popular vote means the total support political parties win during an election, regardless of whether they win ridings. The chart and map on this page show the results of the 2006 federal election for Alberta. Compare the chart with the map. **What if the votes in the 2006 election had been counted by popular vote instead of by riding?** How would the way Albertans are represented in the House of Commons be different?

Results by Popular Vote, 2006 Federal Election: Alberta



Results by Riding, 2006 Federal Election: Alberta



DID YOU KNOW?

The number of ridings in a province is based on population. The following chart presents some examples for comparison.

Province	Federal Ridings	Population (2006)
Alberta	28	3.3 million
Saskatchewan	14	1.0 million
B.C.	36	4.1 million

SPOT AND RESPOND TO THE ISSUE

Refer to page 9, which lists criteria for identifying an issue. How can you use the criteria with the information on this page to state an issue that arises from Canada's electoral process? How does the issue connect to the citizenship and identity of Canadians?

This map shows the political parties that won Alberta's 28 federal ridings in the 2006 federal election.

The Senate

- The members of Canada's Senate are called senators.
- Senators are not elected. The prime minister appoints them. They can remain in office until age 75. Prime ministers tend to appoint people who support the PM's political party. Since only a few Senate seats become vacant at a time, however, the Senate includes people from a variety of political parties.
- Senators represent the interests and rights of Canada's regions, and especially Canada's **minorities**. Senators are appointed by "division," or region. At Confederation in 1867, the constitution identified three regions: the Maritimes, Ontario and Québec. The idea was to ensure that these regions had an equal voice in the Senate, and to ensure that Québec's Francophone population — a minority within Canada — had a strong voice within Canada. As provinces and territories joined Canada, new regions were added to the divisions for appointing senators.
- All proceedings of the Senate are in French and English.
- The Senate can propose laws, but usually only considers bills passed first by the House of Commons. The Senate gives "sober second thought" — careful reconsideration — to all legislation proposed for Canada. This means senators provide a second round of study, debate and voting on laws proposed for Canada. Because the Senate provides a voice for regions in Canada, it brings a different perspective to issues that concern everyone.
- The Senate cannot propose laws that create or spend taxes.
- A bill cannot become law until both the House of Commons and Senate pass it.
- The Senate has the power to reject bills from the House of Commons, but rarely uses this power.

minorities: groups in society who do not form the majority of the population

This is the Senate Chamber, where senators meet and conduct business. In this photo, Governor General Michaëlle Jean is giving the Speech from the Throne on April 4, 2006. The Speech from the Throne is written by the government each year and outlines the government's plans for the coming year. The governor general delivers the speech as Canada's head of state.



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

Why might the role of the Senate to represent minorities be important to governance in Canada?





Dr. Claudette Tardif is Franco-Albertan and a well-known advocate of minority language and culture rights. Prime Minister Paul Martin appointed Dr. Tardif to the Senate in 2005.

How do senators see their role?

My job is to represent my region and to protect the interests of minority groups in Canada.

The Senate makes sure that all voices are heard on the issues. We give a voice to citizens who may not have a voice. We bring a balance. We take our job very seriously.



Why might Canadians have different views and perspectives on the role of the Senate in Canada’s political system? What evidence can you find on this page?



Jean-Robert Gauthier receives the Order of Canada from Governor General Michaëlle Jean in 2007. As a senator, M. Gauthier championed Francophone rights. For example, he spearheaded the action that kept Hôpital Montfort Hospital open in Ottawa (see page 3).



My role as a senator is much different than any other senator before me. I’m the national chairman of a committee that wants to change the Senate to make it elected, with equal representation from the provinces.

Many say the Senate is illegitimate and ineffective. The changes we propose would make it highly respected and useful.

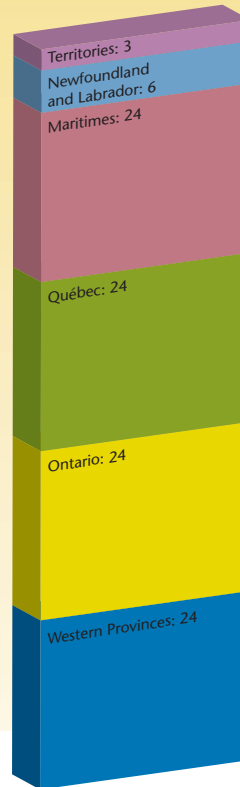
Bert Brown comes from Kathryn, Alberta, and has campaigned to change the structure of the Senate for more than twenty years. Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed him a senator in 2007, after he won an unofficial election as a senator in Alberta.

REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS VERSUS THE SENATE, 2007



House Seats: 208

Regions with higher populations have more seats in the House of Commons.



Senate Seats: 105

Canada's constitution defines "divisions" — or regions — for appointing senators (see page 31). These divisions have a guaranteed number of seats in the Senate.



How does the structure of the Senate represent Canadians in a different way than the House of Commons? How does this structure help the Senate act in the interests of regions and minority groups?

connect to the big ideas

1. In your chapter task, you are acting as prime minister. It's important for you to demonstrate how the federal political system works. Describe three ways Canada's House of Commons and Senate provide opportunities for citizens to participate.
2. With the help of your teacher, invite your MP or a senator to your classroom. Develop a list of interview questions to learn more about their role in governing Canada. **Check the Skills Centre on page 369 for tips on conducting interviews.**
3. Work with a small group to find a political cartoon or news article about a proposed or approved law. What does the information tell you about how the law affects Canadians? Is there evidence linked to how effectively Canada's political system builds a society where all Canadians belong?
4. Members of parliament and senators have a responsibility to hear many diverse points of view and perspectives on issues. When you work in a group, how do you include different perspectives and points of view? Work with a group of classmates to identify two strategies. Demonstrate these strategies to your class with a brief role-play.

skills centre

