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# How Canada elects the House of Commons and the Prime Minister

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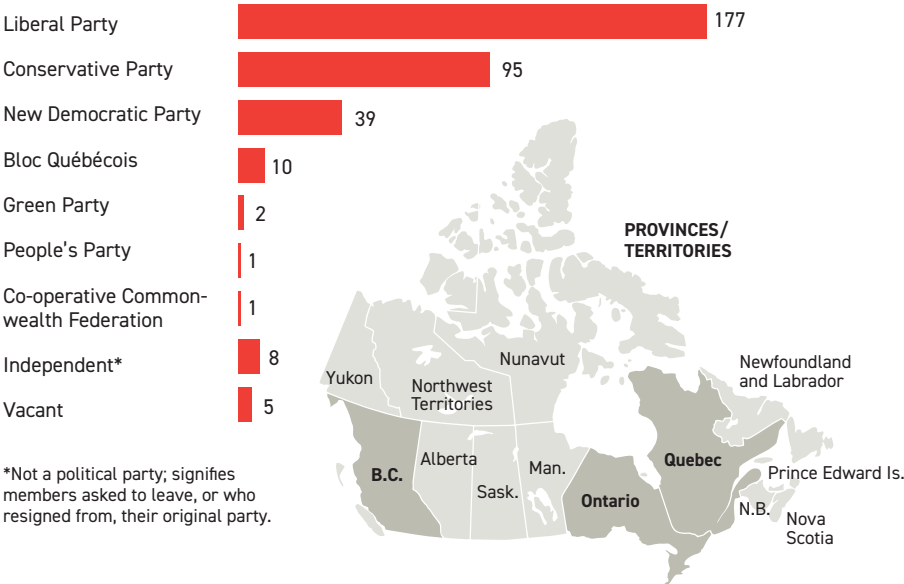
Canada embarks on its six-week national election campaign for House of Commons seats with a vote on Oct. 21. Members of the Senate, Canadian parliament's upper chamber, are appointed by prime ministers and serve until age 75.

The leader of the party winning the most House of Commons seats is sworn in as Prime Minister by the Governor General — Canada's ceremonial head of state acting on behalf of Queen Elizabeth — and can shape the country's government. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals face a tough fight in their bid for a second mandate; his main challenger at this point appears to be Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer.

After the House of Commons election, the Governor General reads a "Speech From the Throne" to the new parliament listing government priorities, similar to the State of the Union address presented to the U.S. Congress. The new parliament votes on the speech's content and if the majority votes against it, the government created by the prime minister is toppled. Opposition parties then band together to form a new government or another election takes place.

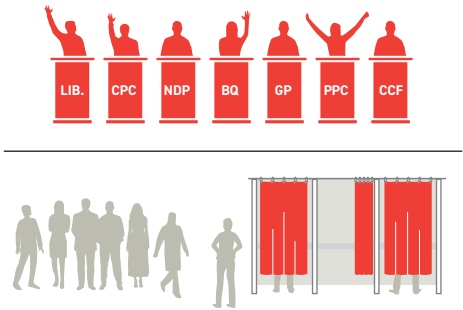
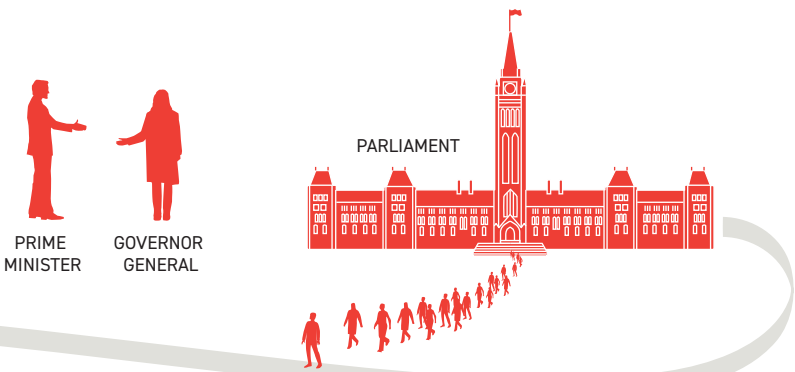
## Current composition of the House of Commons

The 338 seats in the House of Commons are held for four years, each representing an electoral district. Most are concentrated in the country's three most populous provinces of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.



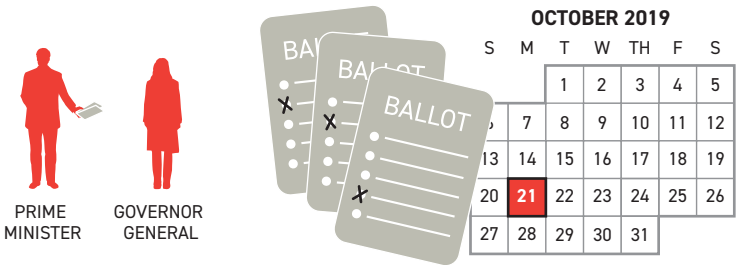
## Canada's House of Commons' election process

**1 Current Prime Minister requests that Parliament dissolve**  
The incumbent prime minister visits Queen Elizabeth's Canadian representative, Governor General Julie Payette, and asks to dissolve Parliament. With her permission, the House of Commons and Senate chambers are shut down and lawmakers head out onto the election trail.



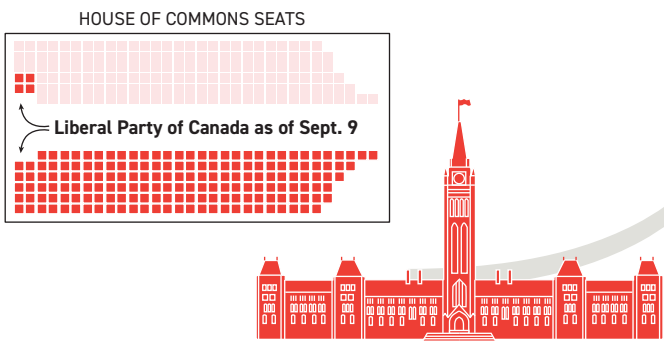
**2 Political campaigns take place, then elections on Oct. 21**  
Party leaders run national tours, dropping daily announcements capped by a full platform reveal at some point during the campaign. They also meet for televised debates at least twice during the campaign. Meanwhile, 338 separate elections happen across the country for seats in the House of Commons.

**3 New Prime Minister is officially determined**  
The party that wins the most seats tends to determine the new prime minister who forms the government — with control of the executive branch, cabinet and departments — but it's not automatic. Soon after the Oct. 21 vote, the sitting prime minister visits the Governor General to inform her of election results. The Governor General then swears in a new prime minister.



**4 Prime Minister creates a new government**  
The prime minister, now in charge of the government, hires government officials, selects cabinet members and can appoint appeals court judges, senators and the Governor General. The new cabinet is sworn in about two weeks after the election, likely in early November.

**5 Testing the new Parliament**  
If the winning party has a clear majority of seats in the Commons, it's a slam-dunk and that party should have no trouble passing bills for the next four years. Trudeau won this kind of majority in 2015. If the winning party has less than 50 percent of seats, it has two options: Find a coalition partner, or work on a case-by-case basis with other parties to pass bills. Minority governments are precarious: they can be toppled at any time, and have tended to last about two years.



Sources: POLITICO staff reports, thecanadaguide.com, Government of Canada

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