

Parliamentary Government

[2 of 3]

◀ [previous](#) [1] [2] [3] [next](#) ▶

How It Operates

The Governor General (and each provincial Lieutenant-Governor) governs through a Cabinet, headed by a Prime Minister or Premier (the two terms mean the same thing: first minister). If a national or provincial general election gives a party opposed to the Cabinet in office a clear majority (that is, more than half the seats) in the House of Commons or the legislature, the Cabinet resigns and the Governor General or Lieutenant-Governor calls on the leader of the victorious party to become Prime Minister and form a new Cabinet. The Prime Minister chooses the other Ministers, who are then formally appointed by the Governor General or, in the provinces, by the Lieutenant-Governor. If no party gets a clear majority, the Cabinet that was in office before and during the election has two choices. It can resign, in which case the Governor General or Lieutenant-Governor will call on the leader of the largest opposition party to form a Cabinet. Or the Cabinet already in office can choose to stay in office and meet the newly elected House — which, however, it must do promptly. In either case, it is the people's representatives in the newly elected House who will decide whether the "minority" government (one whose own party has fewer than half the seats) shall stay in office or be thrown out.

If a Cabinet is defeated in the House of Commons on a motion of censure or want of confidence, the Cabinet must either resign (the Governor General will then ask the Leader of the Opposition to form a new Cabinet) or ask for a dissolution of Parliament and a fresh election.

In very exceptional circumstances, the Governor General could refuse a request for a fresh election. For instance, if an election gave no party a clear majority and the Prime Minister asked for a fresh election without even allowing the new Parliament to meet, the Governor General would have to say no. This is because, if "parliamentary government" is to mean anything, a newly elected House of Commons must at least be allowed to meet and see whether it can transact public business. Also, if a minority government is defeated on a motion of want of confidence very early in the first session of a new Parliament, and there is a reasonable possibility that a government of another party can be formed and get the support of the House of Commons, then the Governor General could refuse the request for a fresh election. The same is true for the Lieutenant-Governors of the provinces.



◀ [previous](#) [1] [2] [3] [next](#) ▶

necessarily reflect those of Parliament.

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