

Overview of the Canadian Parliamentary System

PARLIAMENT:

- The Monarch (represented by the Governor General)
- Senators
- Members of Parliament (MPs)

GOVERNMENT:

- Executive (the Monarch and Governor General, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet)
- Federal departments (such as National Defence, Public Safety, and Citizenship and Immigration)



WORD BUILDER — *Parliament or Government*

These two words don't mean the same thing!

Parliament is the legislative (law-making) part of government, made up of the Monarch, the Senate and the House of Commons. For example, *Parliament passed a bill*.

Government has two meanings:

- Generally, *government* refers to the management (governing) of a country.
- Specifically, *the Government* consists of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the federal departments they manage.

Three branches work together to govern Canada: the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The executive branch (also called *the Government*) is the decision-making branch, made up of the **Monarch** represented by the **Governor General**, the **Prime Minister**, and the **Cabinet**. The legislative branch is the law-making branch, made up of the appointed **Senate** and the elected **House of Commons**. The judicial branch is a series of **independent** courts that interpret the **laws** passed by the other two branches.

Parliament itself is made up of the following three parts: the Monarch, the Senate and the House of Commons.

Canada is a **constitutional monarchy**, which means that we recognize the Queen or King as the **Head of State**, while the Prime Minister is the **Head of Government**.

The Three Levels of Government

Canada has three main levels of **government**.

1. **The federal level** (from the Latin *foedus*, meaning *league*).

This level of government deals with areas of law listed in the *Constitution Act, 1867* and that generally affect the whole country.

2. **The provincial level** (from the Latin *provincia*, meaning *under Roman rule*: from *pro*, to be in favour of something, and *vincere*, to conquer) **and the territorial level** (from the Latin *terra*, meaning *land*).

In each of the 10 provinces in Canada, the **provincial government** is responsible for areas listed in the *Constitution Act, 1867*, such as education, health care, some natural resources, and road regulations. Sometimes they share responsibility with the **federal government**. The three territories have their own governments, with responsibilities that are given to them by the federal government.

3. **The municipal level** (from the Latin *municipalis*, meaning *of a citizen of a free town*).

This is the level of government that is usually based in a city, town or district (a *municipality*). Municipal governments are responsible for areas such as libraries, parks, community water systems, local police, roadways and parking. They receive authority for these areas from the provincial governments.

Across the country there are also *band councils*, which govern First Nations communities. These elected councils are similar to municipal councils and make decisions that affect their local communities.

The Division of Powers

The federal level of government has powers that are different from those of provincial governments, including:

- national defence
- foreign affairs
- employment insurance
- banking
- federal taxes
- the post office
- fisheries
- shipping, railways, telephones and pipelines
- Aboriginal lands and rights
- criminal law

The federal government makes decisions that affect Canadians every day.

The federal government tries to make things fairer among the provinces. Through *equalization payments* (extra money) given to provinces that are less wealthy, the federal government tries to make sure that the standards of health, education and welfare are the same for every Canadian. In the same way that it lists the powers of the federal government, the *Constitution Act, 1867* lists the powers of the provinces, including:

- direct taxes
- hospitals
- prisons
- education
- marriage
- property and civil rights

The Act also says that the power over agriculture and immigration should be shared between the federal and provincial governments.

NOUN	ADJECTIVE	RELATED WORDS
federation	federal	confederation federalize federate federalism



WHAT ABOUT ME?

The next time you go to a park, notice which level of government is managing it: federal, provincial or municipal. You can usually tell by the signs at the entrance. Do you notice any differences between these parks? Think about their location and what services and activities they have. Look at the Parks Canada website. Why do you think these national parks were created? How about provincial parks? City parks?