

Summary: A Constitutional Monarchy

Canada's Government

Canada is a constitutional monarchy. The Canadian government has two branches: legislative and judicial. The legislative branch handles the executive duties. The British monarch (king or queen) is Canada's head of state. He or she has little real power.

Canada's legislature is called Parliament. It is made up of the House of Commons and the Senate. Together, they determine Canadian laws and policies. Citizens elect members of the House of Commons. The leader of the political party with the most elected members becomes the head of government, or prime minister. The prime minister runs the executive branch within the legislative branch. The prime minister chooses senators from each of the ten provinces and three territories in Canada.

Canada's judicial branch has both federal and provincial courts. The highest court is the federal Supreme Court. It is made up of the chief justice of Canada and eight other judges.

Canada's government is responsible for protecting people's rights. Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau led a drive to add a Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the Canadian Constitution in 1982. The Charter guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to vote. It says that Canadians are free to live and work anywhere in Canada. The Charter guarantees equal rights regardless of a person's race, religion, gender, age, or national origin.

Many Cultures, Many Needs

Some French-speaking Canadians are separatists. They want to preserve their French culture. In 1980 and 1995, separatists voted on whether the province of Quebec should become independent. They lost. The federal government wants Quebec to remain part of Canada. Quebec is a major contributor to Canada's economy.

The government of the province of Quebec has passed laws to protect its citizens' French heritage. To satisfy the separatists, Canada's federal government passed the Multicultural Act in 1988. The Act guarantees the right of all Canadians to protect their cultural heritage.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

constitutional monarchy

noun, a government headed by a queen or king whose power is determined by the nation's constitution and laws

Parliament *noun*, Canada's legislative branch

prime minister *noun*, the head of government in a parliamentary democracy

separatist *noun*, a French-speaking Canadian who wants Quebec to become a separate country



After You Read

REVIEW Why do

Canadian separatists want an independent Quebec?

Highlight the sentence that answers the question.