
Senate Representation : The Political Dimension

The composition of the Senate has changed considerably since Confederation. Where once the Upper House was dominated by the Conservatives, the Liberals gradually come to be in a majority. The following table gives a breakdown of political party representation in the Senate. Since the election of the Progressive Conservative Government in 1984, the Liberal majority has slowly narrowed. This is the first in a series of studies examining different aspects of Senate representation.

	1885	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990*
PC	52	44	22	55	46	49	11	24	23	26	54
Lib	22	33	61	37	47	46	77	68	62	67	52
Other								4	6	4	6
Total	74	77	83	92	93	95	88	96	91	97	112

* As of October 1, 1990.

The Senate was established by the *Constitution Act, 1867* to defend the country's regional interests and to contribute to political stability by acting as a counterweight to the House of Commons. Initially, it was composed of 72 members, 24 representing each of the three divisions, namely Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick). The number of senators has increased over the years as a result of the country's geographic expansion and the creation of new provinces and territories. Senate membership currently stands at 104 with six senators from Newfoundland, four from Prince Edward Island, ten each from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, 24 from Quebec, 24 from Ontario, 6 from the Western provinces and one from the Yukon and one from the Northwest Territories.

Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. As was the case during the early years of Confederation, senators must be at least 30 years of age

and own property with a minimum value of \$4,000 (which was a considerable sum at the time). They must also be a resident of the province they are appointed to represent and, in the case of Quebec, the *region* they represent. Up until 1965, Senators were appointed for life. Retirement is now mandatory at 75 years of age.

Since its establishment, the Senate has included among its ranks individuals with a broad range of political experience. Five of the thirteen ministers who made up the first federal cabinet were gleaned from the ranks of the Senate. Two prime ministers were also chosen from the Senate membership (Abbott who served between 1891 and 1892, and Bowell who served between 1894 and 1896). Many senators held cabinet portfolios during the early years of Confederation (1867-1896). From 1911 to 1979, there were rarely more than two senators in this category, although at one time, there were four former provincial premiers sitting in the Upper House. In

1979, the Conservative government recruited some Francophone senators for its Cabinet. The Liberal government also made several appointments between 1980 and 1984 to compensate for a lack of Western representatives in the House of Commons.

The question of appointments was considered at length by the Fathers of Confederation. After much discussion and debate they agreed upon a proposal whereby the first senators were chosen from among the members of the legislative assemblies of the provinces, that they would be named by the Crown on the recommendation of the Executive Council and that all parties, including the opposition would be entitled to representation on an equitable basis in the first Parliament. Subsequent appointments were not subject to the same constraints, in fact it became accepted that most appointments to the Upper House would be made on a partisan basis by the Prime Minister.

Senatorial Appointments by Canadian Prime Ministers Since 1867

Prime Minister	Year of nomination	Lib	PC	Con	Lib/Con	Lib Ind	Con/Ind	Nat/ Lib	Nat/ Con	Ind	Lib/ Un	Nat	Other	Total
1867		24		38	8		1	2						73*
John A. Macdonald	1868-1873	6		21	3		1							31
Alexander Mackenzie	1873-1878	13										2	1	16
John A. Macdonald	1879-1891	5		32	20	1			1	1				60
John Abbott	1892			5	1									6
John Thompson	1892-1893	1		4										5
Mackenzie Bowell	1895-1896			9	4									13
Charles Tupper	1896			1										1
Wilfrid Laurier	1896-1911	80				1								81
Robert Borden	1911-1920	3		57			1				1			62
Arthur Meighen	1921			13						1	1			15
Mackenzie King	1922-1930	42									1		1	44
Robert Bennett	1931-1935		7	25						1				33
Mackenzie King	1935-1948	58									1			59
Louis St-Laurent	1948-1957	51	1			1				2				55
John Diefenbaker	1957-1963		37											37
Lester B. Pearson	1963-1968	38				1								39
Pierre E. Trudeau	1968-1979	51	6							2			1	60
Joe Clark	1979		11											11
Pierre E. Trudeau	1980-1984	19	1							1				21
John N. Turner	1984	3												3
Brian Mulroney	1984 -		41**										1	42
TOTAL		394	104	205	36	4	3	2	1	8	4	2	4	767

* On October 23, 1867, 72 Senators were named by the Crown following a recommendation of the Executive Council. Three declined. Another Senator was named in this way on November 2, 1867.

** Includes eight additional Senators added under Section 26 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The Joint Committee on Senate Reform examined the question on appointment and made it the focus of its main recommendation: "We have concluded that the Canadian Senate should be elected directly by the people of Canada. An appointed Senate no longer meets the needs of the Canadian federation. An elected Senate is the only kind of Senate that can adequately fill what we think should be its principal role - the role of regional representation. We propose a Senate different in composition and function from the House of Commons and from the present Senate."

The 1987 proposed constitutional amendment known as the Meech Lake Accord contained a provision respecting Senate selection. It stated that persons appointed to the Senate would be chosen from among persons whose names have been submitted by the government of the province to which the vacancy relates. Prior to rejection of this amendment in June 1990 six senators had been appointed pursuant to its tentative provisions (one from Newfoundland, four from Quebec and one from Alberta).

In the case of Alberta, provincial legislation was adopted providing for the election by universal suffrage of any

Senate candidate whose name, in accordance with the temporary provision in the Meech Lake Accord, would be put forward by the province. On October 16, 1989 a province-wide election was held and Stan Waters was elected. On June 19, 1990, just before the demise of the Meech Lake Accord, Mr. Waters was formally named to the Senate where he sits as a Member of the Reform Party. In September 1990 the Prime Minister filled the remaining vacancies. He also invoked section 26 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* to add eight additional Senators.

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