

10 Canada in Transition, 2011-2025

Introduction

As Canada entered the second decade of the 21st century, it faced a series of challenges—war in Afghanistan, a global pandemic, and threats to democracy—that shaped its identity.

A New Political Era: The Rise and Fall of Justin Trudeau

The 2015 Liberal Victory

The 2015 federal election marked a dramatic shift in Canadian politics. After nearly a decade of Conservative rule under Stephen Harper, Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party achieved a stunning **majority government**,¹ winning 184 of 338 seats. The son of a former prime minister, Trudeau campaigned on a platform of "real change." For example, Prime Minister Harper made the difficult decision to prioritize economic growth over protecting the environment. As a result, many Canadians were upset the country wasn't doing enough to tackle the problem; also, Canada's global reputation as a steward of the environment took a hit. Trudeau promised to restore Canada's reputation in the fight against climate change while also pursuing a series of domestic policies to bring Canada into the 21st century.

For the first few months of 2015, **Prime Minister Trudeau** enjoyed considerable popularity at home. He was considered a sort of breath of fresh air compared to his older predecessor. He was viewed by many people as a positive force for change, e.g. he was the first Prime Minister to ensure the Cabinet had an equal number of men and women. When asked by reporters why he balanced the Cabinet in this way, Trudeau responded, "Because it was 2015." The problem though is despite Trudeau's promise of "sunny ways" he made a series of mistakes (some honest and some avoidable) that placed his promise for "real change" into question.

The SNC-Lavalin Affair: A Constitutional Crisis

The first serious challenge to Trudeau's leadership came in 2019 with the **SNC-Lavalin Affair**, which highlighted the crucial importance of the **separation of powers**² in Canadian democracy.

¹ **Majority Government:** a political party wins a simple majority (51%) of the total number of seats in Parliament. This usually means a government depends much less upon the support of other political parties to pass laws or pursue policies.

² **Separation of Powers:** the principle that authority must be divided among the three branches of government (e.g. the legislative, executive and judicial) to prevent any one branch from growing too powerful or abusing its power.

Politicians make promises to gain support (and votes) in elections. In 2019, in an effort to build support for the Liberal Party in Québec, Trudeau wanted to give lucrative government building contracts to a company called SNC-Lavalin. This company employed approximately 3,000 people and was responsible for hospitals, bridges, dams, etc. in the province. The problem though is the corporation was being investigated by Canada's Attorney General, **Jody Wilson-Raybould**, for corruption.

SNC-Lavalin, a global company, faced charges related to \$48 million in bribes allegedly paid to Libyan officials to secure government contracts in Libya. The Montreal-based company employed approximately 50,000 people worldwide, including 9,000 in Québec. So long as SNC-Lavalin was under investigation the Canadian government couldn't give the company any new contracts; further, if the company received a criminal conviction it wouldn't be eligible to bid on federal contracts for ten years. This, the company's executives argued, would cost thousands of jobs in Québec.

On September 17th, 2018, Trudeau set up a private meeting with Wilson-Raybould (pictured at right) to discuss giving SNC-Lavalin a fine rather than pursue criminal charges. For several months the Prime Minister and other officials pressured the Attorney General to drop the charges.



This interference violated a fundamental principle of Canadian democracy. The separation of powers exists to ensure that legal decisions remain independent of political considerations. When the executive branch (the Prime Minister's Office) attempts to influence judicial processes, it undermines the rule of law and creates opportunities for corruption. This principle protects democracy by ensuring that:

- Political leaders cannot escape legal consequences through influence
- Justice remains impartial and based on evidence, not politics
- Public trust in institutions is maintained

On February 7, 2019, the *Globe and Mail* broke the story revealing the government's pressure campaign. Wilson-Raybould resigned in protest and then the matter was investigated by Parliament. During that investigation, Wilson-Raybould testified that she experienced a consistent and sustained effort by many people in the Prime Minister's Office to seek to politically interfere with the exercise of prosecutorial discretion."

Andrew Scheer, leader of the Conservative Party, argued that Trudeau should have faced a **non-confidence vote**³; however, since the Liberal Party held a majority in the House of Commons the

³ **Non-confidence Vote:** Canada is governed under the principle that a prime minister (or government) can only rule so long as they have the support of a majority of the Members of Parliament. If an MP puts forth a motion of

leader of the Conservatives couldn't find enough support to pursue the move. The SNC-Lavalin Affair cost Trudeau significant support and contributed to his reduced to a **minority government** in the 2019 election.

Despite his early popularity, Trudeau's time in office was marred by several notable missteps beyond the SNC-Lavalin Affair. His government faced criticism for other conflict of interest and ethical questions, including the blackface scandal that damaged his public image. The COVID-19 pandemic further tested his leadership, as Canada struggled with vaccine rollouts, economic challenges, and public fatigue. Over time, many Canadians grew frustrated with what they saw as a leadership style that at times appeared out of touch. These factors contributed to Trudeau's considerable unpopularity by the early 2020s, ultimately leading to his replacement by Mark Carney in 2025 as leader of the Liberal Party. **Mark Carney**, a former Governor of the Bank of Canada and Bank of England, emerged as Liberal leader and was sworn in as Prime Minister on March 14, 2025—the first Canadian Prime Minister never to have held elected office before his appointment.

Pandemic Preparedness and Global Health Challenges (2003-2023)

Learning from SARS: Building Canada's Health Infrastructure

Canada's response to COVID-19 cannot be understood without examining the country's experience with **SARS-CoV-1** in 2003. This first SARS outbreak, which killed 44 Canadians and infected 438, exposed serious weaknesses in Canada's readiness to respond effectively to a pandemic. pandemic response. Dr. David Naylor, a highly respected medical professional based out of the University of Toronto, identified critical gaps. He wrote that "Canada was not adequately prepared for SARS and will not be prepared for the next infectious disease emergency unless significant improvements are made." Lessons learned during SARS-CoV-1 led to the creation of the **Public Health Agency of Canada**⁴ in 2004 and improved pandemic preparedness protocols.

COVID-19: The Ultimate Test

When **COVID-19** emerged in December of 2020, Canada initially struggled managing international travelers, assisting millions of Canadians to quarantine and shelter in place, and with shortages of masks and gloves used by nurses and doctors working on the front line. Despite some early challenges, Canada's pandemic response gradually improved. Key elements of Canada's response included:

- International travel restrictions implemented in March 2020
- A \$2,000 monthly payments to workers affected by lockdowns called **Canada Emergency Response Benefits (CERB)**
- Coordinated closures of non-essential businesses and schools across Canada
- Canada achieved one of the world's highest vaccination rates, with over 90% of eligible population receiving at least one dose

non-confidence and a simple majority says they don't support the leadership, the government is considered defeated and an election is called.

⁴ **Public Health Agency of Canada:** a federal agency whose responsibility it is to coordinate a unified and effective response to health challenges like Covid, H1N1, measles, and the like.

The pandemic revealed both strengths and weaknesses in Canadian federalism. Provinces were responsible for delivering healthcare services while the federal government coordinated financially supporting citizens and businesses along with the purchase of vaccines developed by other countries. Health Minister Patty Hajdu noted that "[t]his pandemic has tested every system we have, but it has also shown the resilience of Canadian institutions and the strength of federal-provincial cooperation."

Lockdowns began in March of 2020 and eased slightly by June-July; however, when things began opening up again infection rates increased compelling both federal and provincial governments to require people to return to quarantine. This pattern continued for the next year and a half. The restrictions on personal liberty, combined with the government's **vaccine mandate**⁵, pushed a sizable proportion of Canadians to actively protest what was perceived as an abuse of power.

The Freedom Convoy and Democratic Stress

The most serious domestic challenge to the federal government's authority came with the **Freedom Convoy** protests in January-February 2022. The protest began first as a truckers' protest against vaccine mandates for cross-border drivers but evolved into a broader challenge to COVID-19 restrictions and government authority. Protesters established semi-permanent encampments,



brought bouncy castles and barbecues, and created what they called a "street festival" atmosphere while demanding the resignation of the Trudeau government. The convoy originated in British Columbia on January 23, 2022, arrived in Ottawa on January 29, and occupied downtown streets until February 20. Parallel blockades occurred at border crossings in Alberta (Coutts), Manitoba (Emerson), and Ontario (Ambassador Bridge in Windsor).

The convoy was organized by a group calling itself the "Freedom Convoy 2022," led by truck drivers including **Tamara Lich, Pat King**,⁶ Chris Barber and Benjamin Dichter. The protest began as a cross-country convoy of large trucks to Ottawa but evolved into a three-week occupation of downtown Ottawa; moreover, the protest turned from a simple protest of vaccine mandates to an attempt to topple the recently re-elected Trudeau government.

⁵ **Vaccine Mandate:** a policy through which the federal and provincial governments required citizens to first be vaccinated for Covid-19 before being allowed to return to work, return to school, play for sports teams, and so on.

⁶ **Tamara Lich and Pat King:** were singled out by the Canadian government for prosecution, e.g. they were not only arrested and charged with mischief but their personal finances were also seized for months until the investigation was concluded. Some critics argued the Canadian government's treatment of Lich and King was prejudicial and that they were being made an example of to discourage any future would-be protest leaders.

The protesters attempted to use a **memorandum of understanding (MOU)**⁷ as part of their strategy to negotiate with the Canadian government. The MOU was essentially a formal document outlining their demands and conditions for ending the protest and blockades. In this context, the MOU was intended to set terms for dialogue and potential concessions, such as the removal of COVID-19 vaccine mandates and other pandemic-related restrictions.

However, some protesters pushed for much broader political changes, including calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Trudeau and a change in government, which went beyond the initial scope of public health measures. Justin Trudeau specifically condemned any attempt to use the Freedom Convoy's memorandum of understanding or protests to overturn the results of a lawful election. He stated that trying to use protests or demands to "overturn a democratic election" is unacceptable and undermines Canada's democratic institutions.

The government viewed the MOU—and some demands attached to it—as an attempt not just to negotiate but to pressure or coerce political change, which escalated tensions and made peaceful resolution more difficult. In effect, the MOU symbolized the protesters' move from simply voicing grievances to actively trying to force major political concessions, including the removal of Trudeau.

Complicating matters further was the presence of some far-right elements (even the appearance of Nazi flags and other extremist symbols) among the protestors that lead to Trudeau referring to some individuals involved in the Freedom Convoy protests as having "unacceptable views," and he specifically mentioned the presence of "racist," "anti-Semitic," and "far-right extremist" symbols and messages among some protesters. Although he did not broadly label all protesters as Nazis, he condemned hate speech and extremist elements that appeared within the movement.

The Freedom Convoy protests ultimately illustrate that while Canada robustly protects freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, these rights have clear boundaries. Citizens can voice disagreement with government policies and demand political change through democratic means, but the moment expression crosses into violence or threats of violence, it ceases to be protected speech and becomes a threat to democracy and the rule of law.

Showdown in Alberta

At the same time as the Freedom Convoy protests in Ottawa in early 2022, there were related demonstrations and blockades at several Canada–U.S. border crossings, including the Alberta border crossing at **Coutts**. During these protests at the Alberta border, tensions escalated between some protesters and the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)**. Law enforcement worked to clear blockades disrupting trade and travel.

Separately, and more seriously, Canadian authorities uncovered a plot by a small group of individuals to harm or kill RCMP officers involved in enforcing the law during these protests. In early 2022, police arrested several suspects (**Anthony Olienick** and **Chris Carbert**⁸) linked to this

⁷ **Memorandum of Understanding:** is a formal but non-binding agreement between two or more parties that outlines mutual intentions, goals, or plans for cooperation, etc. in a legislative body. This type of document lacked any meaningful authority to either remove the government or bind it to any kind of action.

⁸ **Chris Carbert** belonged to **Diagolon** (a far-right, anti-government extremist group originating in Canada). The group is known for promoting conspiracy theories, violent rhetoric, and militant anti-authoritarian views. The RCMP and CSIS have identified Diagolon as part of a broader network of far-right extremists posing security

alleged conspiracy. The arrests were part of ongoing investigations into extremist elements exploiting the protests to plan violence. This plot heightened concerns about the security risks associated with the protests and further justified the government's use of extraordinary powers to restore order and protect public safety.

In 2022 Crown prosecutors brought charges of conspiracy to commit murder against Olienick and Carbert. Although the prosecution presented evidence of the presence of weapons, ammunition, pipe bombs, and hostile attitudes, the defense argued that there was insufficient direct evidence showing an actual, concrete plan or agreement to carry out murder was followed. The jury decided there were insufficient groups to try the defendants with conspiracy to commit murder, i.e. just possessing weapons and expressing anger did not in and of themselves prove criminal intent. Nonetheless, Olienick was convicted on the charge of mischief and possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose (the pipe bomb). Carbert was also convicted of mischief and possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose.

The Emergencies Act

Trudeau initially dismissed the protesters, stating on January 26 that a "few people shouting and waving swastikas does not define who Canadians are." This response inflamed tensions as many participants felt unfairly characterized, i.e. people identifying as conservative, progressive or liberal were present at the protest. After three weeks of unsuccessful negotiations and mounting pressure from Ottawa's residents and businesses, Trudeau invoked the ***Emergencies Act***⁹ on February 14, 2022—the first use of this legislation since it replaced the *War Measures Act* in 1988. Coincidentally, the last prime minister to use the *War Measures Act* was Trudeau's father Pierre (who used it during the October Crisis, 1970).

The Trudeau government justified this extraordinary step by insisting that the "illegal blockades and occupations are seriously endangering the health, safety and security of Canadians and are undermining Canada's trade and commerce." The protests cost the City of Ottawa about 38-40 million dollars and the country itself billions of dollars in commerce for every week the protest lasted. The protest was finally over.

The Federal Court later ruled in January 2024 that the invocation of the *Emergencies Act* was unreasonable and violated *Charter* rights, with Justice Richard Mosley writing that "[t]here was no national emergency justifying the invocation and the [government] response was unreasonable." Moreover, during the protest there was some concern that protestors were receiving financial support from foreign countries. However, no foreign supporters were ever identified and after

concerns. The group rejects mainstream political processes and advocates for radical change calling for the use of violence if necessary to achieve its political aims.

⁹ The **Emergencies Act** is a law giving the federal government special powers to respond to national emergencies—situations that seriously threaten the country's security, safety, or economic stability. The act gives the government the power to regulate/restrict the movements of people, control over essential goods, or directing public institutions to maintain order; however, these powers are carefully limited by the Act to protect Canadian *Charter* rights/freedoms as much as possible.

completing its investigation into the convoy in 2022 **CSIS**¹⁰ concluded there was no evidence supporting the idea the protestors received money from foreign actors.

The protests and government response highlighted tensions between individual freedoms and collective public health responsibilities that continue to shape Canadian political discourse.

Climate Science and Political Decision-Making

Understanding the Science-Policy Relationship

Canada's approach to climate change from 2011-2025 illustrates the complex relationship between scientific evidence and political decision-making. **Climate science**¹¹ provides factual information about how the earth's climate is being shaped by human industrial activity. This scientific evidence is not inherently political—it represents the best available understanding based on years of rigorous research methods. Nevertheless, this information becomes "political" when different groups interpret what should be done about climate change.

Some people reject scientific evidence because they associate it with the proposed policy solutions, e.g. Greenhouse gas emission are warming the earth therefore we need to reduce those emissions by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. Some critics of reducing fossil fuel use suffer from **motivated reasoning**.¹² This is definitely true of some, but definitely not all critics. Others critics make valid arguments about how changing energy use would impact employment and economic growth. With that said, these criticisms don't disprove the science supporting **anthropogenic climate change**.¹³

The Ozone Layer: Evidence-Based Decision Making

The **ozone layer** is a thin but vital layer of gas in the Earth's stratosphere that absorbs the majority of the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Without it, life on Earth would be at serious risk—higher levels of UV exposure can cause skin cancer, cataracts, and widespread damage to crops and marine ecosystems.

¹⁰ **CSIS**: Canadian Security Intelligence Service is responsible for investigating activities in Canada related to the country's national interest. They don't have the power to arrest. Instead, the CSIS passes information on to the RCMP who typically make any arrests in the national interest.

¹¹ **Climate Science**: the study of Earth's climate system measured over decades, centuries and millennia. Study of climate should not be confused with the study of weather which is measured over days and weeks (seasons).

¹² **Motivated Reasoning**: When engaged in motivated reasoning, people typically search for, interpret, and recall information in ways that confirm what they already believe or want to be true. They might scrutinize evidence more carefully when it contradicts their preferred conclusion while accepting supporting evidence with less critical examination. For example, someone might dismiss negative health studies about their favorite food while readily accepting positive ones, or a sports fan might focus on questionable referee calls that hurt their team while overlooking calls that benefited them.

¹³ **Anthropogenic Climate Change**: This concept describes how human activities since the Industrial Revolution have significantly altered the composition of Earth's atmosphere, leading to changes in global temperature patterns, weather systems, and climate conditions. The primary mechanism is the enhanced greenhouse effect, where human activities increase concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, trapping more heat from the sun.

In the 1970s, scientists studying seasonal levels of ozone over Antarctica discovered a hole in the ozone. They hypothesized that **chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)**—chemicals used in refrigeration and aerosol sprays—were breaking down ozone molecules high in the atmosphere. This discovery was eventually confirmed and led to the alarming realization that human activity was rapidly depleting the ozone layer, especially over Antarctica (a similar problem was discovered over Canada's Arctic).

If the problem had been ignored, the consequences would have been catastrophic, e.g. dramatic increases in UV radiation and associated cancers, global health crises, and severe

environmental damage. Instead, the world acted on the information. In 1987, the world's industrialized nations signed the **Montreal Protocol**, a global agreement to phase out the use of ozone-depleting substances. This decision was based squarely on scientific evidence, and the action worked—the ozone layer is gradually repairing itself (expected to be fully restored by the 2050s).

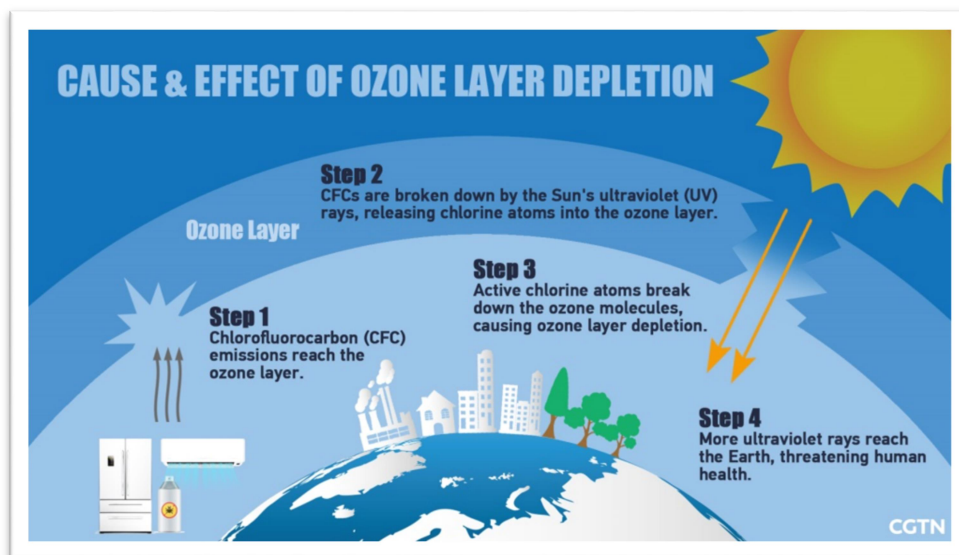
The ozone story shows the value of **evidence-based decision-making**: when policymakers trust and act on scientific findings, even large-scale environmental problems can be successfully addressed. The fact this protocol was signed in Montreal positioned Canada as a global leader and steward of environmental protection.

From Kyoto to Paris: Canada's Evolving Climate Policy

Following the success of the Montreal Protocol, which demonstrated how science-based international cooperation could solve a global environmental crisis, attention shifted toward a newer and more complex threat: anthropogenic climate change. Unlike the relatively straightforward solution of phasing out and using a safer substitute for CFCs, addressing climate change meant confronting the world's economies deep reliance on **fossil fuels**.

Fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas) are the foundation of every modern industrial economy. These sources of energy are abundant, cheap and energy rich; and when it comes to economic growth for every dollar of growth an economy needs two dollars' worth of energy. In the 1980s, when governments began discussing what to do about the problem, there was no reasonable substitute for an economy constructed upon hydrocarbons. Nuclear power was considered dangerous and expensive while solar and wind power was unreliable and inefficient.

In 1997, the countries representing the largest economies negotiated and signed into law the **Kyoto Protocol**. The treaty committed industrialized nations like Canada to legally binding carbon



emission reduction targets. Canada initially committed to lowering its emissions; however, in a pattern that's become all-too-familiar the political will to do something was eventually overcome by economic necessity. This is why **Prime Minister Stephen Harper** took Canada out of the Kyoto agreement in 2006.

Prime Minister Harper famously observed that if Canada fully met its *Kyoto Protocol* commitments, it would need to shut every machine down and thus "engineer a recession" to drastically reduce emissions. Harper argued that while reducing emissions was important, the cost of doing so was simply too great; moreover, he argued that since neither the United States or China—the world's two largest carbon emitters—didn't sign the agreement it made no sense for Canada to economically self-destruct. For the next decade governments continued doing little to address the climate emergency.

By 2015 the world was showing unmistakable signs of noticeable warming. At the Paris Climate Conference, scientists presented global leaders with information around rising global average temperatures, melting ice caps and glaciers, more frequent and intense heatwaves, shifting weather patterns, and increasing sea levels—all linked to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. These changes, scientists argued, posed serious risks to ecosystems *and* economies worldwide. The urgent need to limit global warming to no more than 2°C then became the main focus of the conference.

In 2015 Canada elected a new government under the leadership of Justin Trudeau. Trudeau signed the **Paris Agreement**. In order to meet Canada's promise to reduce carbon emissions, he introduced a highly unpopular and, ultimately, ineffective **carbon tax**.¹⁴

Climate Change Impacts

Between 2011 and 2025, Canada experienced a series of extreme weather events that brought the reality of climate change home for many Canadians. These events showed that climate change was not just a distant or abstract problem.

One of the most dramatic events was the **Fort McMurray wildfire** in May 2016. This massive wildfire burned for months across northern Alberta's oil sands region, scorching an area larger than the entire province of Prince Edward Island. The fire forced the evacuation of the entire city of Fort McMurray, home to about 88,000 people. The economic damage was staggering—nearly \$10 billion in losses—due to destroyed homes, businesses, and disrupted oil production. Tragically, two people lost their lives, and thousands more were displaced for months.

Alberta Premier Rachel Notley described it as "the largest evacuation in Alberta's history," highlighting the seriousness of the situation. This event underscored how climate-related disasters can cause widespread human suffering and enormous economic disruption. More recently, in July of 2024, the **Town of Jasper** was devastated by wildfires losing approximately 30% of its buildings in the blaze. Forest fires had always been a "thing;" however, due to climate change fires burned longer in what fire-fighters called "**zombie fires**" (fires burning even through winter months).

¹⁴ **Carbon Tax:** a tax designed to compel Canadians to change their behavior. The tax did lead to some emissions reduction, e.g. people drove less, used more fuel-efficient vehicles. However, the tax didn't fundamentally change Canada's overall greenhouse, i.e. before the tax emissions were at 730 to 740 megatons and remained unchanged while the tax was in place.

In June 2021, western Canada faced a related crisis called the **Heat Dome**. From June 25 to July 1, parts of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan experienced a prolonged heatwave with record-breaking temperatures. The village of Lytton, B.C., reached a scorching 49.6°C (121°F), breaking Canada's previous temperature record by 5°C. The heat dome was deadly, causing over 600 deaths, mostly among elderly people who lacked air conditioning (a similar event occurring in France in 2003 resulting in about 15,000 deaths).

The heat was so intense infrastructure also suffered: roads buckled under the heat (some literally melting), power grids failed, and water treatment plants shut down. The day after the record temperature, a wildfire completely destroyed the **Town of Lytton**. The burning of Lytton made it clear that climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of heatwaves, with dangerous consequences for both people and communities.



Later in 2021, from November 13 to 16, British Columbia was hit by a series of powerful **atmospheric rivers**—intense rainstorms dumping up to 200-300 millimeters of rain in just 48 hours on parts of the south coast and Fraser Valley. The heavy rains caused landslides and flooding that severed major highways like the Trans-Canada and Coquihalla for weeks. The floods cost about \$450 million in damages, disrupted supply chains across the country, and led to the evacuation of entire communities. Five people died, and thousands were stranded. These floods revealed how climate change can cause unpredictable and damaging rainfall patterns, overwhelming infrastructure and threatening public safety.

Climate change doesn't mean less rain so much as a change in patterns of precipitation. Specifically, the **Red River** in Manitoba floods normally once every 100 years. Over the past 28 years the river flooded a total of seven times. The risk of floods has pushed many towns and cities across Canada to upgrade their sewers and drainage systems to avoid catastrophe. With that said, many climate models place Canada near the top of the list for climate vulnerability, particularly in terms of rate of warming. According to both Canadian and international climate science bodies (like Environment and Climate Change Canada and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)), Canada is warming at roughly twice the global average, and the Canadian Arctic is warming even faster—nearly three times the global rate.

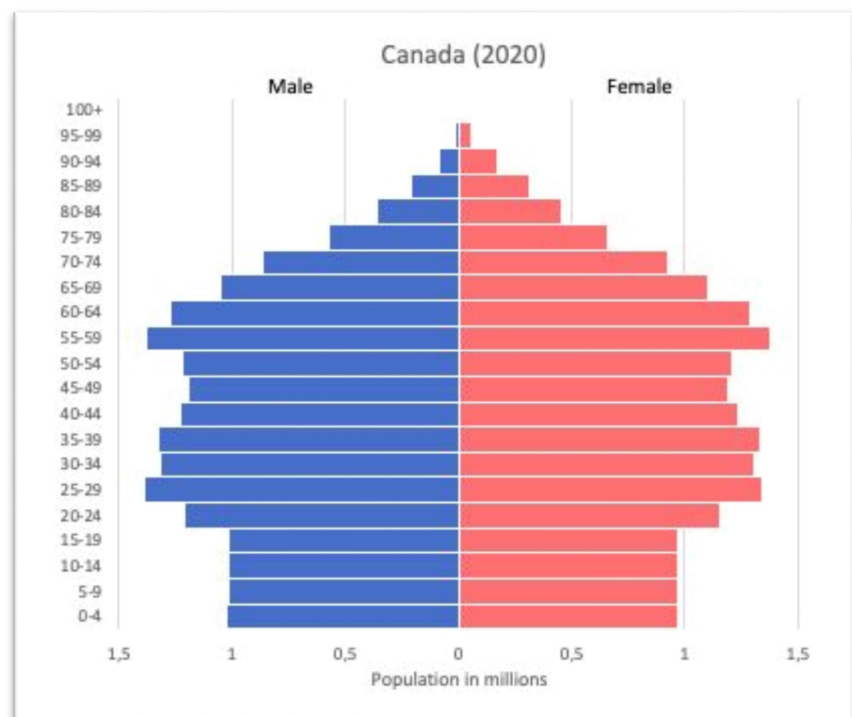
Immigration, Demographics, and the Infrastructure Challenge

The Demographic Bomb

By the middle of the 2010s, Canada found itself facing a serious and growing problem called a **“demographic bomb.”** This term describes a situation when the majority of a country's population is made up of seniors. In the case of Canada, it's not possible to support a program like universal healthcare unless the number of young people (paying taxes) far exceeds the number of older people using the service. Healthcare isn't the only program that's vulnerable, e.g. pensions work on the basis of pay-as-you-go so people currently working are funding retired workers; have more retired than currently working and the program fails.

Following the Second World War, Canada and every other country around the world saw a dramatic rise in births. This generation became known as the **baby boomers**. Beginning in the early 2000s baby boomers started retiring in large numbers. Unfortunately, the generations born in the 1970s through to the 2000s had fewer children on average. This trend means there are fewer and fewer young people to support a growing population of seniors; and there are few solutions to the problem: the first solution is for younger Canadians to start having more children again (which is unlikely to happen); the second is to cut spending on healthcare and related social programs (making retirement arguably out of reach for most Canadians); and the third, and the solution the Canadian government is actively following, is immigration.

Demographic Bomb. To understand why a demographic bomb is such a big deal, it helps to picture how populations normally grow: normally, the largest number of people in a society is the young (aged 1-30); the next largest group is ranged from 31 to 55; and the smallest population is seniors (56-RIP). But in recent decades, something changed: the pyramid is flipping and the fastest growing group is seniors.



Almost every country that experienced a baby boom after the war is now facing the same pattern: low birth rates, longer life expectancies, and a shrinking workforce. In response, many countries, like Canada, have turned to **immigration** as a way to bring in younger people who can help fill jobs, pay taxes, and support an aging population. In 2016, Canada's Immigration Minister, **John McCallum**,

put it plainly: “We need more working-age people to support our aging population and maintain our standard of living. Immigration is not just about compassion—it’s about economic necessity.”

Under McCallum and the ministers who followed him, Canada raised its immigration targets to record levels. Between 2022 and 2025, Canada admitted more than one million permanent residents—more than at any other time in Canadian history. In 2023 alone, Canada welcomed 465,000 new permanent residents, representing about 1.2% of Canada's total population. That’s a level of immigration not seen since before World War I.

The Immigration Paradox

This influx of immigrants brought many benefits: immigrants helped fill jobs, supported industries, and contributed an estimated \$25 billion per year in tax revenue. In fact, data from Statistics Canada shows that immigrants are more likely to start businesses than Canadian-born citizens, and they now account for 75% of Canada’s labor force growth. However, this rapid growth also came with challenges.

Canada’s infrastructure—its housing, healthcare, schools, and public services—was not ready for the sudden increase in population. Demand for housing rose sharply and the average cost of purchasing a home rose from about \$531,000 in 2020 to \$762,000 in 2024. Rental vacancy rates across the country dropped to 1.5% (far below the 3% threshold considered a housing supply crisis). Tent cities are appearing in cities across Canada as more people struggle to find affordable places to live. The situation is so difficult many immigrants have returned to their countries of origin.

By 2025, the federal government recognized the need to slow things down. Prime Minister Trudeau's government announced a 21% reduction in immigration targets, acknowledging that public opinion had shifted and that the housing and healthcare systems were under too much strain. The new Immigration Minister, **Marc Miller**, stated, “We must ensure that our immigration system serves all Canadians—including new Canadians who need adequate housing, healthcare, and services.”

Canada’s experience shows how deeply connected demographics, economics, and immigration policy are. As the population ages and the traditional support system begins to strain, immigration offers a solution—but only if it’s paired with thoughtful planning and real investment in public infrastructure. The demographic bomb is a long-term challenge, and solving it will require long-term thinking.

Digital Warfare and Foreign Interference

The New Face of International Conflict

In the past, war was fought with tanks, soldiers, and missiles. But in the 21st century, the nature of conflict has changed. Between 2011 and 2025, the world witnessed the rise of **digital warfare**—a form of conflict that uses the internet, computers, and online platforms to attack countries without ever firing a single bullet. This new kind of warfare poses serious threats to **national sovereignty**,¹⁵ especially for democratic countries like Canada, where open elections, free speech, and trust in public institutions are essential to political stability.

Digital warfare includes everything from hacking into government networks to spreading disinformation online to confuse or divide a population; and at the heart of it is a practice known as **foreign interference**—when foreign governments secretly try to influence the political system, elections, or public opinion in another country for their own gain.

A real-world example involves allegations from CSIS in 2023 that agents linked to the People's Republic of China attempted to interfere in Canadian federal politics by pressuring MPs—especially those of Chinese descent. According to national security sources, one Liberal MP, Han Dong, was accused in reports of having been supported by Beijing's diplomatic network during his nomination process to run for the Liberal Party. Additionally, it was alleged that Chinese officials had pressured Chinese-Canadian politicians by threatening their family members living in China, using the safety of relatives as leverage to influence votes or public statements in Canada.

A Shrinking World

Russia has become infamous for its use of online "troll farms" to spread political chaos. The **Internet Research Agency**, a Kremlin-linked organization based in St. Petersburg, was one of the first groups to turn social media into a weapon. Its staff, often working in office buildings filled with computers, created thousands of fake social media accounts pretending to be ordinary citizens. These accounts were used to stir up division, spread conspiracy theories, and weaken public trust in democratic institutions in the West.

According to **David Vigneault**, Director of CSIS, this kind of interference poses one of the most serious threats to Canada's democracy. In 2021, he warned, "Foreign interference represents one of the most significant threats to Canada's sovereignty and democratic institutions. It's happening right now, and it affects all levels of government." Given the nature of the Internet, for all intents and purposes, Canadians share an **infosphere**¹⁶ with every other country in the world (including Russia). So, when Canadians interact with people on social media that say they are Canadians, it is entirely possible that person is not who they say they are. This reality demonstrates the need to thoughtfully use social media; however, most of us don't exercise caution or care when flipping through videos and stories.

¹⁵ **National Sovereignty**: is a country's right to govern itself without outside interference; it means a nation has full control over its own laws, decisions, borders, and political system.

¹⁶ **Infosphere**: the digital environment where information is created, stored, shared, and interacted with that includes everything from the Internet, social media, and news platforms.

Russian digital campaigns against Canada focused on issues likely to provoke strong emotions, e.g. Indigenous rights (First Nations versus Canada), Québec sovereignty (French versus English), and regional divisions (East versus West). Russia wasn't trying to support one side or the other; rather, the purpose was to weaken Canadian society by deepening existing divisions. This strengthens Russia's position as a global power.

One of the reasons strategies like Russia's uses work so well is because of how **social media algorithms**¹⁷ operate. These algorithms are designed to keep users on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok for as long as possible by showing them content they're most likely to engage with. The more users click, comment, or share, the more similar content they see. Over time, this creates "**echo chambers**"—online spaces where people only hear views that match their own and rarely encounter opposing ideas. These algorithms also reflect the experimentally verified fact about human psychology that **fear and anger**¹⁸ (not happiness or community) are more likely to keep a person online using social media; thus, **dis- and misinformation** are more likely to spread online as opposed to trustworthy information.

Russia isn't the only country interfering in the internal affairs of Canada. Chinese authorities have been accused of interfering in Canada's 2019 and 2021 federal elections. This interference included using social media to influence election-related conversations Canadians were having online; China also applied pressure on Chinese-Canadian voters through **Overseas Chinese Service Centers**.¹⁹ Several Chinese-Canadian Members of Parliament (MPs) reported that their families back in China were being pressured or harassed by the Chinese government.

On June 18, 2023, **Hardeep Singh Nijjar**, a Canadian citizen and outspoken advocate for an independent Sikh state in India, was shot and killed in the parking lot of his Sikh temple in Surrey, British Columbia. The Canadian government investigated the murder discovering "credible allegations" linking the Indian government to the assassination. CSIS intercepted communications of Indian diplomats



¹⁷ **Social Media Algorithm:** a set of rules and calculations used by platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube to decide what content each user sees in their feed. The main purpose of these algorithms is to keep users engaged on the platform for as long as possible.

¹⁸ **Fear and Anger:** decades of research in cognitive psychology and behaviorism proved that fear and anger activate the brain's threat detection systems, triggering stronger emotional and psychological responses than neutral or positive content. These emotions increase attention, memory retention, and the urge to act—explaining in part why so many people appear to be so angry online for no apparent reason.

¹⁹ **Overseas Chinese Service Centers:** the Chinese government provides passport and driver's licensing services for Chinese nationals living and working in Canada. They have two offices: one in Vancouver and the other in Toronto. Providing genuine services to Chinese-Canadians was just a front: their true purpose was to track, intimidate and coerce Chinese living in Canada (focusing primarily upon critics of the Chinese Communist Party).

in Canada discussing plans for the politically motivated murder.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed India's actions in Parliament saying, “Any involvement of a foreign government in the killing of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil is an unacceptable violation of our sovereignty.” India denied any involvement. Instead, India accused Canada of providing safe haven for Sikh extremists. Similarly, intelligence services in the United States revealed that Indian agents had also plotted to assassinate a Sikh activist in New York, suggesting a broader international campaign to silence India's critics. Iran has also been implicated in attempts to assassinate its critics living in Canada and the United States.

These events have forced Canada—and many other democratic countries—to rethink what national security means in an age of global digital connectivity. Traditional ideas about sovereignty no longer fully apply when foreign actors can intimidate Canadians from exercising their free speech rights while also influencing the outcomes of elections. The Internet has made the world much smaller.

Canada-US Relations (2016 to 2025)

Donald Trump's two terms as U.S. president (2017–2021 and 2025 to present) had a profound and often destabilizing effect on Canada's politics, economy, and national identity. His presidency tested the resilience of Canada–US relations by forcing Canadians to confront the country's deep economic dependence on its southern neighbor.

Trump's First Term: From NAFTA to USMCA

Trump's rise to power in 2016 brought a new era of “America First” economic nationalism that disrupted decades of cooperation between Canada and the United States through military cooperation and **free trade**.²⁰

In 1992 the Mexican, Canadian and American governments signed an agreement called the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**. The goal of the agreement was to eliminate trade barriers between the three countries, boost investment, and strengthen economic ties. Supporters of the agreement believed it would increase economic growth, while critics feared job losses and weakened labour and environmental standards.

The agreement increased trade and investment between the Canada and the United States by reducing **tariffs**.²¹ This led to the creation of more efficient supply chains, lower costs for consumers, and greater access to each other's domestic markets. Canadian industries, such as car

²⁰ **Free Trade:** is a system of international exchange where goods and services move across borders with little to no government-imposed restrictions such as tariffs, quotas or subsidies. Free trade is, in a sense, the removal of borders and the integration of the economies of two or more participating nations.

²¹ **Tariffs:** are taxes or duties a government places on goods imported from another country making those goods more expensive. Governments use tariffs to protect industries at home. For example, the United States has imposed tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber (which means American buyers have to pay extra taxes on lumber imported from Canada). Since people prefer to pay less rather than more the assumption is American consumers would then buy/prefer lumber produced in the United States.

manufacturing, agriculture, and energy, benefitted tremendously from easier exports to the United States, while American companies benefitted by getting access to Canada's raw resources.

President Trump argued that NAFTA had gutted American manufacturing and enriched other countries, including Canada, at the expense of American workers. He explained, "NAFTA has been a terrible deal for the United States. It's been a terrible deal for our workers, and it's time to make a change." Trump's criticism had some merit: manufacturing jobs—car and clothing production—moved to Mexico as companies took advantage of cheaper labour costs there; however, his criticism didn't reflect the bigger picture, in that, NAFTA increased overall trade and economic growth, lowered prices on goods for American consumers, and helped American companies become more competitive globally. Nonetheless, Trump's strong criticism resonated with many American voters who felt frustrated and left behind by **globalization**.²²

In 2017 the United States, Canada and Mexico began negotiating a new agreement that became known as the ***United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA)***. The new agreement wasn't much different from NAFTA, in that, the only meaningful change was Canada opened up to an increase in American dairy imports. Trump, nonetheless, claimed victory and that USMCA was the "greatest trade deal" ever.

Over the course of the 20th century, various prime ministers entertained the idea of trying to diversify trade. Trump's first term in office forced Canada to return to this idea and rethink its trade dependence on the United State, e.g. Over 75% of Canadian exports go to the U.S., meaning that sudden changes in American policy can devastate Canada's economy. The reason for that trade dependence though has more to do with geography than anything, i.e. America is Canada's neighbor and trading with them is more economically affordable and beneficial for both countries.

Canada the 51st State

Trump's return to the presidency in 2025 was even more confrontational toward Canada. He referred to Canada as the "51st state" and to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "Governor of Canada." The majority of Canadians didn't respond positively to the President's comments (though several polls indicated upwards of 13% of Canadians supported the idea of being annexed by the United States). When asked if he thought Trump was joking about annexing Canada, Trudeau responded he believed the President was being serious. In January, Trump clarified his stance by repeating the "51st state" comment followed by saying he would use "economic force," not military action, to achieve it.

The 4 Nations Face Off

In February the National Hockey League (NHL) hosted an event called the **4 Nations Face Off**. Four countries were represented at the tournament: Sweden, Finland, Canada and the United States. Given the tension between the two countries, there was a lot of excitement going into Canada and America's first game in Montreal.

²² **Globalization:** means goods, services, ideas, people, resources and money, etc. move more freely across borders making the world more economically and culturally integrated.

The last time there was such excitement, and political implications for a hockey game, was during the **Summit Series**²³ against the Soviet Union in 1972. The game started with unprecedented intensity, featuring three fights within the first nine seconds. The Americans defeated Canada 3-1 in the first game. The victory was particularly sweet for the United States, playing as the "enemy" in a hostile Montreal environment before a sold-out, pro-Canada crowd. The intensity of this game, combined with the broader political tensions between the countries at the time, set the stage for an even more anticipated rematch in the championship game.



The final game of the tournament was played in Boston in front of a capacity crowd. Despite the game taking place in America, a sizable contingent of Canadian fans traveled to support the team. Prior to the game the White House made a statement: we look forward to the United States beating our soon-to-be 51st state, Canada.

Canada's Nathan MacKinnon scored first for Canada beating Connor Hellebuyck with a shot from the top of the face-off circle. The Americans scored the next two goals and went into the 3rd period with a 2-1 lead. Canada's Sam Bennett brought it back to a tie game with a "beauty of a shot" over Hellebuyck's shoulder. The game went into sudden death overtime. After a flurry of saves by Canada's Jordan Binnington early in overtime, Canada gained a faceoff in the American zone. Canada won the faceoff, Mitch Marner retrieved the puck for the Canadians along the boards, then made a sharp pass into the center to **Connor McDavid**. McDavid ripped the shot past the American goaltender for the championship clinching goal at 8:18 of overtime.

When "O Canada" was played after Canada's victory, there were no American fans left in the arena to boo, and the Canadian team stood arm in arm at the blue line wearing their championship hats. The victory restored Canada's position as the top hockey nation and set the stage for the 2026 Olympics. The tournament represented



²³ Canada's defeat of the Soviet Union in the 1972 **Summit Series** was a landmark moment during the Cold War. The two teams represented two rival ideologies: capitalism versus communism. The media claimed that whichever team won would prove the superiority of its political and economic system. In the final and deciding game in Moscow, Canada came from behind: with only 34 seconds left Canada's **Paul Henderson** scored the series-winning goal giving Canada a 6-5 victory. The dramatic finish united Canadians and symbolized national pride and resilience.

Canada's ability to defend both their country and their game, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau posting after the victory, "You can't take our country—and you can't take our game."

Trump's Tariffs

Following Canada's hockey victory, Trump made good on his campaign promises to introduce sweeping tariff policies that fundamentally reshaped North American trade relations. On February 1, 2025, Trump declared national emergencies regarding fentanyl trafficking and invoked the *International Emergency Economic Powers Act* to impose 25% tariffs on most goods from Mexico and Canada and 10% on goods from China.

Canada retaliated swiftly by implementing its own 25% retaliatory tariffs on \$155 billion worth of U.S. exports, marking the end of two decades of largely duty-free trade across North American borders. Trump's tariff regime expanded dramatically, with the average applied U.S. tariff rate rising from 2.5% to an estimated 27% by April 2025—the highest level in over a century. In July, Trump escalated pressure on Canada by threatening to increase tariffs from 25% to 35% citing Canada's continued "failure to cooperate in curbing the ongoing flood of **fentanyl**²⁴ and other illicit drugs."

The tariff war imposed significant economic costs on American consumers and businesses, with the Trump administration's trade policies functioning essentially as a tax on American households. The tariffs amounted to an average annual increase of nearly \$2,000 per US household as importers passed the additional costs directly to consumers through higher prices.

Technically speaking, the American government got this money from American consumers themselves. Specifically, when a Canadian company imports something into the United States, that company adds the American tariff to the cost of purchasing the product. The consumer (an American in this case) pays for the product *and* the tariff. Some American consumers don't understand they're the ones paying for the tariffs and celebrate how their country is "winning" the trade war. By the middle of 2025 the American government collected \$150 billion dollars in tariff revenue (approximately 30 billion from Canada alone). In terms of winning, the American financial investment bank Goldman-Sachs observed in 2025 that the tariffs lead to 100 thousand new manufacturing jobs being created in the United States but resulted in 500,000 jobs being lost from other sectors.

Trump's tone and rhetoric had another unintended effect: it shaped the central theme of Canada's 2025 federal election. Canadian voters were no longer just choosing a government—they were defending the integrity of their political system against external interference and economic coercion. The result was a surge in nationalist sentiment, cross-party consensus on protecting domestic industries, and renewed discussion about diversifying trade partnerships beyond the United States; it also resulted in the election of **Mark Carney**.

²⁴ **Fentanyl**: is a highly addictive and dangerous drug (typically used in treating pain for terminally ill patients). The United States was rightly concerned about the drug being illegally brought into the country; however, Canada is not a significant place of entry for this substance, e.g. only 40 pounds of fentanyl was seized at the American border from Canada. By contrast 21,000 pounds of it was seized at the America-Mexico border. In the great scheme of things, President Trump used fentanyl to justify enacting tariffs on Canada. Trump's move was politically motivated, in that, he could justify the inevitable economic pressure Americans businesses would feel following the introduction of tariffs as necessary to deal with the non-problem of fentanyl coming into the United States from Canada.

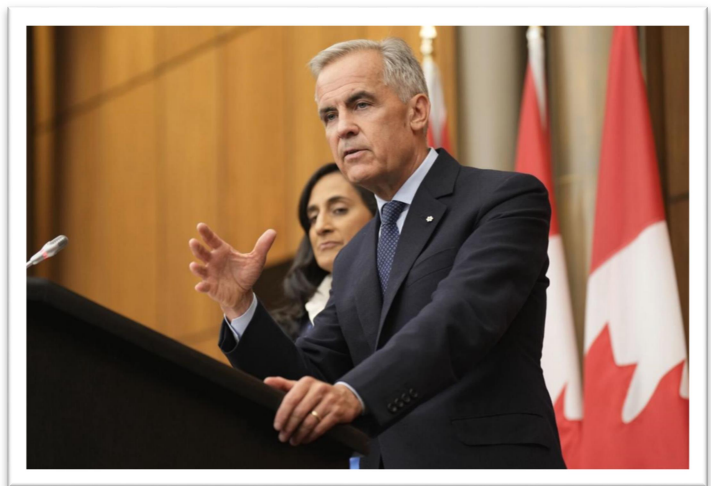
Conclusion: A Nation Transformed

The period from 2011 to 2025 fundamentally transformed Canada: institutions proved remarkably adaptable and resilient, surviving political crises, pandemic stress, and foreign interference while maintaining public trust. Canada's democratic system's ability to weather these challenges demonstrated the strength of the country's foundational structures.

The climate change debates of this period highlighted the critical importance of evidence-based decision-making while simultaneously revealing how scientific facts can become politicized in the public sphere. This tension between scientific literacy and political discourse became a defining characteristic of Canadian policy discussions. Meanwhile, foreign interference and trade disputes illustrated how global events directly impact Canadian democracy and daily life, reinforcing the reality of Canada's interconnectedness with the wider world.

Perhaps most significantly, despite immigration challenges and regional tensions, Canada maintained its commitment to multiculturalism while building a broader national unity. The country's ability to balance diversity with unity remained one of its defining strengths throughout this transformative period.

"This era has tested us," Prime Minister Mark Carney explained, "But it has also shown that Canada's greatest strength is our ability to work together, based on facts and evidence, to build a better future for all."



The years 2011 to 2025 will likely be remembered as the period when Canada fully emerged as a mature democracy capable of confronting 21st-century challenges. Unlike previous eras defined by single transformative events—Confederation, the world wars, or the Quiet Revolution—this period tested Canada across multiple dimensions simultaneously: economic sovereignty, democratic integrity, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion. The country's response revealed both vulnerabilities and strengths that will shape its trajectory for decades to come.

Most importantly, these years demonstrated that Canada's survival and prosperity depend not on isolation or dependence, but on the deliberate cultivation of resilient institutions, evidence-based governance, and a shared commitment to democratic values. In successfully navigating this complex period, Canada proved it possesses the adaptability and national character necessary to thrive in an increasingly uncertain world.