



BRIEFING PAPER

Number CBP 7559, 14 April 2016

Canada 2016

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Inside:

1. Government and domestic politics - background
2. The new Liberal government
3. Foreign relations
4. Basic information
5. Constitutional background
6. Map

Contents

Summary	3
1. Government and domestic politics - background	4
1.1 Government	4
1.2 Domestic politics	4
Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin	4
Stephen Harper	5
2. The new Liberal government	6
2.1 Syrian refugees	6
2.2 Economic policy and the 2016 budget	7
2.3 Economy	10
3. Foreign relations	12
Iraq and Syria	12
3.1 EU	13
The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement	13
Strategic Partnership Agreement	14
3.2 UK relations	14
F-35 aircraft	14
4. Basic information	16
4.1 Area and Population	16
4.2 Finance	16
4.3 Territorial divisions	16
5. Constitutional background	17
5.1 Quebec referendums	17
6. Map	18

Summary

Canada has recently elected a Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Polls predicted a close result but the Liberals did better than expected and gained a clear majority in the House of Commons. It seems that Canadians were keen for a change after nine years of Stephen Harper of the Conservative Party, whom many found divisive.

Trudeau has embarked on some relatively radical policies, particularly fulfilling a manifesto promise to borrow money to invest in infrastructure, but this has taken place against a backdrop of sharply reduced oil and other commodity prices. 2016's Budget foresaw borrowing three times as much as set out in the manifesto, making Canadian economic policy an interesting test case for those arguing against economic austerity in some other G7 countries.

The new Government has acted on its manifesto pledge to offer more resettlement places to Syrian refugees.

Trudeau has announced the end of the Canadian military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but will triple the size of its commitment to training Iraqi armed forces.

The EU and Canada have recently agreed a wide-ranging free-trade agreement that will build on historically close relations.

1. Government and domestic politics - background

1.1 Government

Head of State: The Queen, represented by David Johnstone, Governor General since 2010. The post of Governor General traditionally rotates between English-speaking and French-speaking holders, with each appointment lasting for five years.

Prime Minister: Justin Trudeau

Canadian House of Commons after October 2015 General Election

Party	% of votes	Seats
Liberal Party	39.5	184
Conservative Party	31.9	99
New Democratic Party	19.7	44
Bloc Québécois	4.7	10
Green Party	3.4	1
Total (incl. others)	100	338

Next election: 2019¹

1.2 Domestic politics

For a large part of the 20th century the Liberal Party was considered the natural party of government. Recent decades have been much more unstable.

Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin

After a period of centre-right government under Brian Mulroney, the Progressive Conservatives were reduced to two seats in the House of Commons at the 1993 election and the Liberals came back for another 13-year spell under Jean Chrétien and later Paul Martin. Paul Martin succeeded Jean Chrétien as Prime Minister in 2003. Persistent allegations of corruption dogged the Liberal Party.

At the 2004 election, the Liberals failed to gain a majority in the House of Commons, on a historically low turnout, and formed the first minority government in Canada since 1979. In 2005, Canada became one of the first countries to legislate for gay marriage. Also in that year, a merger of conservative parties produced the Conservative Party of Canada, with Stephen Harper as its leader.

¹ [Canada](#), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons

Stephen Harper

The Conservatives, now without the 'Progressive' label after their merger with Canadian Alliance, won a narrow victory in 2006 and formed a minority government. The election of the Conservatives in 2006 marked the end of dominance of Canadian politics by the Liberal Party. The new government introduced legislation containing stronger anti-corruption provisions. Quebec was recognised as a 'nation within Canada' although not without resistance from those who opposed its alleged endorsement of ethnic nationalism.

In 2008, Harper called an early general election to try to secure a majority. Although the Conservatives increased their seats they still fell short of a majority. Faced with a no-confidence vote that he was expected to lose, Harper dissolved Parliament for the second time. The government announced a C\$40 billion stimulus package to respond to the worldwide economic crisis. The government survived a no confidence vote in 2009 but in December of that year prorogued Parliament again, until March 2010, on the grounds that more time was needed to review the economic situation before the budget. Opponents said that the government was avoiding parliamentary scrutiny of the alleged torture of prisoners in Afghanistan.

After the government lost a confidence vote in 2011 and was declared to be in contempt of Parliament, a general election was called for May, at which the Conservatives won an overall majority. This time it was the Liberal Party's turn to be trounced, holding only 34 seats. The election saw the rise of the federal New Democratic Party (NDP) to Official Opposition status under the leadership of Jack Layton. The NDP did particularly well in Quebec, almost wiping out the Bloc Québécois, the Quebec separatist party, and showing how much the separatist movement had died out.

More attempts to reform the Senate were made and the number of seats in the House of Commons was increased for the forthcoming election in 2015. The Conservative government also reformed crime policy and continued to exert a policy of fiscal discipline. However, relations with the House of Commons were still difficult, with many questioning the government's use of 'omnibus bills' to get sometimes barely related pieces of legislation through parliament in one go, undermining their scrutiny, according to critics.²

In March 2015 Prime Minister Stephen Harper extended the tenure of the Governor General until 2017. This was to deal not only with the country's 150th anniversary but also with a possible hung parliament after the October 2015 election. The changeover would otherwise have taken place in the middle of the election.

² This section based largely on Contemporary Political History (Canada), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons.
<http://www.europaworld.com/entry/ca.is.4>

2. The new Liberal government

Against expectations the Liberals under Justin Trudeau won a clear majority after an enormous surge in support at the October 2015 general election. From 19% of votes cast and 36 seats in the outgoing Parliament, the Liberals' parliamentary party swelled by 148 seats to 184, with 39% of the votes.

Polls suggested that many Canadians found the leader appealing, despite the Conservatives campaigning on his lack of experience, while promises to spend on infrastructure and on more help for less well-off Canadians were also attractive. The Conservatives, on the other hand, failed to broaden their appeal beyond core Conservative voters. After 11 years of Stephen Harper, many voters simply wanted a change.³

The new government made a point of the diversity of its makeup. Early policy priorities were to increase taxes for the top 1% of earners and lower them for middle income Canadians. The new Prime Minister also promised internationalism, collaboration with the provinces and a return to cabinet government.⁴

On the Liberal election manifesto was a pledge to legalise and regulate marijuana. The move is proving more difficult than anticipated, however, partly because the provinces need to cooperate with the move and have not shown much inclination. But also because of the obligations implied by international treaties to which Canada is party. The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, for example, sets out that states parties shall establish as a criminal offence the cultivation of cannabis for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs.⁵

The Liberals also planned to make information about Members of Parliament's expenses more open to the public, clamp down on the use of 'omnibus bills', boost parliamentary committees, strengthen freedom of information and clean up political financing, among other things.⁶

2.1 Syrian refugees

Another significant policy change related to the Syrian conflict. The Harper Conservative government had a programme to settle 1,500 Syrians from 2013 to 2014. The Liberal campaign pledged to resettle 25,000 government-assisted Syrian refugees by the end of 2015. (The Conservatives, too, said during the campaign that they would offer more places: 10,000 would be offered to "persecuted ethnic and religious minorities," suggesting a focus on Christians and Yazidis.)⁷

³ ['Post-election polls suggest reasons behind Trudeau win'](#), *CBC Online*, 23 October 2015

⁴ ['Justin Trudeau signals new style on 1st day as Canada's 23rd prime minister'](#), *CBC Online*, 4 November 2015

⁵ [The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988](#)

⁶ [Canadian Liberal Party manifesto](#), 2015

⁷ 'Party leaders' response to Syrian refugee crisis reveals stark differences', *The Star (Canada)*, 4 September 2015.

Once in government, the Liberals' deadline was extended somewhat, but the government announced in February 2016 that a total of 25,000 refugees had arrived in Canada, including privately-sponsored refugees.⁸ Canada has now offered more official resettlement places to Syrians than any other country apart from Germany.⁹

The refugees coming to Canada are registered as refugees and are deemed as being at risk by the UN High Commission for Refugees. Canada also requested the UNHCR to select refugees who are considered a low security risk, such as women and families.¹⁰

The programme has not gone entirely smoothly, though. In January settlement officials in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver asked the Government to slow the pace down, saying that they lacked affordable housing and enough staff to cope with the flow. A common problem was the unexpectedly large families. A Conservative Party critic said:

What you are seeing today is a precursor to bigger questions. My disappointment is that there clearly hasn't been a lot of thought given to the long-term social infrastructure required to make this a success.¹¹

2.2 Economic policy and the 2016 budget

The Liberals offered in their manifesto to invest in public transport, roads, clean energy, schools and hospitals: "The basic infrastructure our economy needs to grow and we need in order to get ahead."¹² The party planned some tax rises on higher earners and to borrow about C\$10 billion (£5.4 billion) a year.

The fall in commodity prices, especially oil, and sluggish world trade have weakened Canada's economic and fiscal outlook. The Budget announced on 22 March 2016 set out a planned deficit of C\$29.4 billion, almost three times what had been promised. The much larger stimulus than planned sets the Canadian government apart from many others in developed countries, where austerity remains the theme.

Stimulus experiment?

Although other countries will be watching with interest, they will not be starting from the same point: Canada has the lowest net debt to GDP ratio of any G7 country, so is better able to take on more debt.¹³

The size of the stimulus should not be exaggerated, however. One Canadian banker described the stimulus package as "modest".¹⁴ The IMF estimates that government net borrowing for Canada will be 2.4% of GDP in 2016, with government net debt standing at 27.5% of GDP. The IMF estimates that the UK will borrow 3.2% of GDP this year, with

⁸ '[Canada welcomes 25,000 Syrian refugees](#)', Government of Canada press release, 29 February 2016

⁹ '[5 things to know about Canada's Syrian refugee program](#)', *CBC News Online*, 29 February 2016

¹⁰ Government of Canada, [Identifying Syrian refugees to come to Canada](#)

¹¹ '[Canadian cities ask for delay in refugee arrivals amid housing shortage](#)', *Globe and Mail*, 20 January 2016

¹² Liberal manifesto 2015, [A new direction for our economy](#)

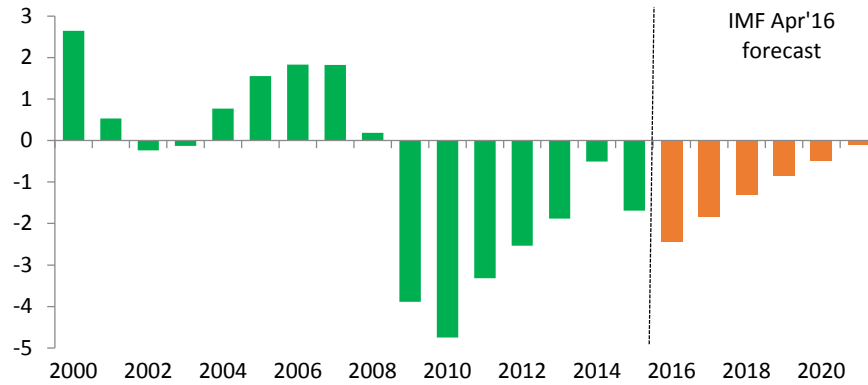
¹³ '[Trudeau unveils C\\$60bn stimulus plan for Canada](#)', *Financial Times*, 22 March 2016

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

net debt amounting to 80.6% of GDP.¹⁵ It could be argued that the UK fiscal stimulus is in fact bigger than Canada's.

UK borrowing more as a proportion of GDP

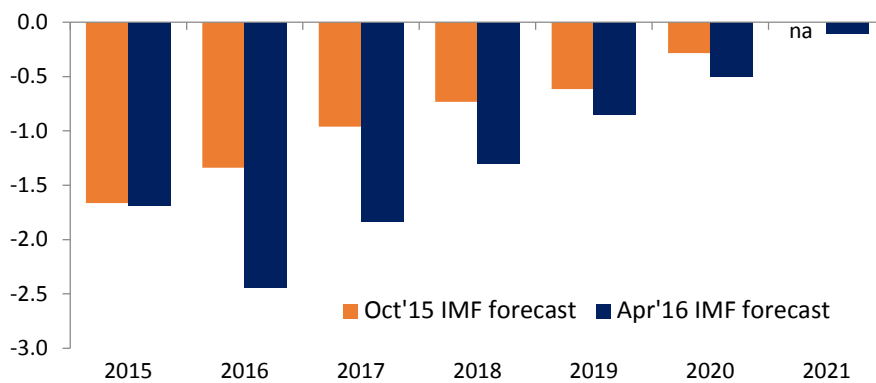
General government budget balance
% of GDP, annual



Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2016 database

The IMF's most recent forecast, made after the 2015 change of government show a marked increase in the budget deficit compared with the projections based on the Conservative government's plans

General government budget balance
% of GDP, annual



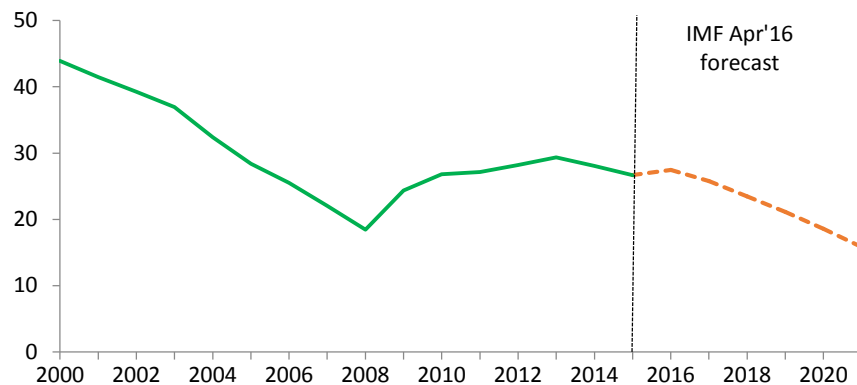
Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2016 database

However, net government debt is still forecast to decline after a modest increase in 2016, as shown in the following chart:

¹⁵ [GDP growth, General government net lending/borrowing and General government net debt – Canada and UK](#), IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2016

General government net debt

% of GDP



Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2016 database

As well as a favourable fiscal background, Trudeau has other advantages over his fellow G7 leaders: a solid parliamentary majority, and a clear mandate from Canadians, given that borrowing to execute a stimulus was a manifesto commitment.

A new tax-free child allowance will be introduced, while the early stages of the infrastructure plan focus on public transport, water and wastewater systems, affordable housing, and protecting existing infrastructure from the effects of climate change.¹⁶

For tax year 2016 the federal income tax band on middle incomes was reduced by 1.5 points, while a new band for higher earners was introduced. Taxable income over C\$200,000 is now subject to a federal income tax rate of 33%, 4 percentage points higher than the previous maximum rate.¹⁷ Provincial taxes also apply.

Canadian Conservatives criticised the Budget as a bad day for Canadian taxpayers, saying that taxes were going up by "at least C\$1.3 billion a year."¹⁸ Although the Liberal manifesto foresaw a return to fiscal balance by 2019, there was no mention of a date in the Budget.

NDP

The NDP had promised a balanced budget during the campaign, but did relatively badly at the 2015 election, losing 59 seats to end with 44 seats. Trudeau said that he believed that the Liberals would win at the moment when the NDP made that pledge; it would make clear that the Liberals represented change from the Conservatives.¹⁹ Mulcaire of the NDP admitted that the NDP campaign was too cautious and that the budget pledge was part of the problem.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, [Growth for the Middle Class](#)

¹⁷ Canada Revenue Agency, [Federal personal income tax rate changes for middle and high-income earning individuals](#)

¹⁸ 'Federal budget 2016: Liberals push deficit to spend big on families, cities', *CBC news Online*, 23 March 2016

¹⁹ 'Trudeau: NDP's Balanced Budget Pledge Was Moment I Became 'Pretty Sure' Liberals Would Win', *Huffington Post Canada*, 17 March 2016

Leader Tom Mulcaire faces a leadership vote at the party convention in Edmonton, Alberta, in April 2016. He has the support of the main unions, and a modest majority among party members.²⁰

Since the election the NDP has been described as trying to position itself to the left of the Liberals.²¹ Reacting to the Budget, the NDP criticised the government for breaking promises to the electorate despite spending so much; the Liberals had failed to find money for indigenous youth, home care and had not imposed a tax on stock options.

The two parties have collaborated in the new Parliament. For example, the Liberals voted for a motion on an NDP Opposition Day in February 2016 calling on the federal government to close gender gaps in pay, recognise gender-equal pay as a right and implement the recommendations of a 2004 task force on pay equity in the public service.²²

2.3 Economy

Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, with the 24th highest GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (the UK is 28th), according to the IMF.²³

The recession of 2008-2009 was not as severe as in many other advanced economies (GDP fell by 4.6%, compared with 6.1% in the UK).²⁴ The economy later recovered, supported by strong consumer spending and a buoyant housing market.²⁵ Economic activity picked up from 2.2% in 2013 to 2.5% in 2014,²⁶ as the US economy continued its recovery (around three-quarters of Canadian exports go to the US²⁷).

These fairly benign conditions were clouded, however, by the subsequent decline in commodity prices, to which Canada was vulnerable as a major producer. Growth fell to 1.2% in 2015 and is forecast by the IMF to be 1.5% this year.

²⁰ [‘Mulcair’s support down from pre-election high among NDP voters as he faces leadership vote’](#), *CBC News Online*, 30 March 2016

²¹ [‘Tom Mulcair slams Liberal budget ahead of contentious NDP leadership review’](#), *CBC News Online*, 25 March 2016

²² [‘NDP, Liberals pass motion on pay equity’](#), *Ipolitics*, 3 February 2016

²³ International Monetary Fund, [Gross domestic product based on purchasing-power-parity \(PPP\) per capita GDP, 2015](#), World Economic Outlook April 2016 database

²⁴ OECD, OECDstat: [Quarterly GDP data](#)

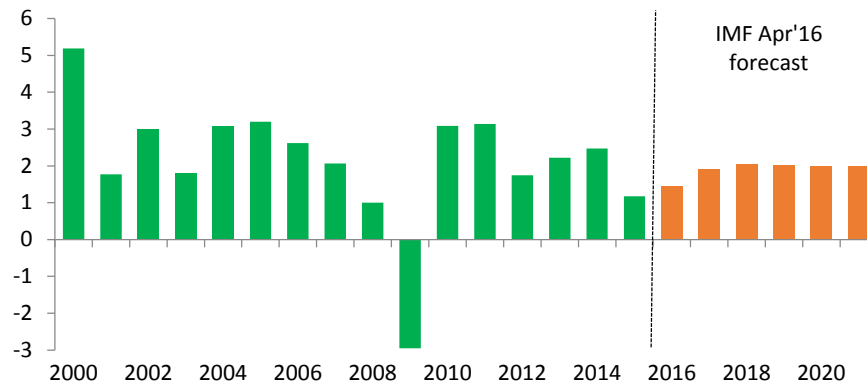
²⁵ Figures are from IMF, [World Economic Outlook database](#), October 2013 and [OECDstat](#)

²⁶ Real GDP growth, [IMF World Economic Outlook April 2016](#)

²⁷ Statistics Canada, [Imports, exports and trade balance of goods on a balance-of-payments basis, by country or country grouping](#)

GDP growth

Annual % change



Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2016 database

Canada ranks highly in international surveys of economic competitiveness. In its Global Competitiveness Report, the World Economic Forum ranks Canada 13th out of 140 countries in 2015/16.²⁸ Meanwhile, the World Bank's *Doing Business* rankings put Canada 14th out of 189 countries for "ease of doing business" in 2016, down one place compared to 2015 and 3rd in terms of starting a business.²⁹ Transparency International ranks Canada 9th out of 167 countries for perceptions of corruption in 2015, one place better than the UK.³⁰

²⁸ World Economic Forum, [The Global Competitiveness Index 2015–2016 rankings](#)

²⁹ World Bank, [Ease of Doing Business \(2016\) in Canada](#)

³⁰ Transparency International, [Corruption Perceptions Index 2015](#)

3. Foreign relations

Canada is a member of many international organisations including NATO, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) the OSCE, , the French speaking union La Francophonie, and the Organisation of American States.³¹

The Arctic Council includes Canada. The organisation aims to protect the region's environment and indigenous populations and coordinate policies with its eight members. The Arctic has become increasingly important and the government has pursued a determined policy of protecting Canada's interests, commissioning a number of ice-breaking patrol boats for the Navy, and setting up new bases near the Northwest Passage.

In December 2012, Canada became the first country to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on controlling carbon dioxide emissions, as it was clear that it would not be able to meet its commitments. At the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, Trudeau signalled that Canadian policy would be different under the new government, telling delegates: "Canada is back, my friends. Canada is back, and here to help."³²

While Canada has close relations with the US, it maintains an independent foreign policy, resisting US restrictions on dealing with Cuba, for example. Even within the trade relationship, regulated by NAFTA, there have been many disputes. The neighbours have close defence ties through NATO and NORAD – the North American Aerospace Defence Command – an agreement to cooperate on early missile warning systems. Particularly following the 9/11 attacks, there is extensive cooperation on border surveillance.

Canada participated in ISAF, the UN-backed NATO operation in Afghanistan, and in the UN-backed action in Libya in 2011. Jean Chrétien refused, however, to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Stephen Harper criticised this policy at the time, although he changed his mind later.

Iraq and Syria

Trudeau campaigned on a pledge end to the Canadian combat mission against ISIS/Daesh. Although there was a delay after the formation of the new government, Trudeau announced in February 2016 that Canadian airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria would end by the end of the month, but that the number of special forces trainers would be almost tripled and that refuelling aircraft would remain.³³

³¹ Global Affairs Canada, [International Organizations and Forums](#)

³² 'Justin Trudeau tells Paris climate summit Canada ready to do more', *CBC News Online*, 30 November 2016

³³ '[Trudeau Says Canada Will Cease Airstrikes Against ISIS In Syria And Iraq](#)', *NPR Online*, 8 February 2016

3.1 EU

The EU and Canada have a close relationship, with the 1976 Framework Agreement on Economic Agreement being the first such agreement between the EU (then the EEC) and an industrialised country. In 2004 a more ambitious Partnership Agenda was agreed.³⁴ Relations are due to become closer with the approval of two important agreements.

The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

CETA is a free trade agreement between the EU and Canada. Negotiations finished in September 2014 and it should come into force in 2016 at the earliest – it still needs to be presented to the EU Council and the European Parliament for approval.³⁵ In July 2015, the UK Government said that it expected to lay the agreement before Parliament late in 2016.³⁶ It also needs to be ratified by the European Parliament.

The EU says that eliminating customs duties on industrial goods will save EU exporters around €470 million.³⁷ The agreement will also allow EU businesses to bid for Canadian public contracts, protect patented items and traditional products and increase regulatory cooperation, according to the EU. The UK Government estimates that CETA could bring economic benefits of up to £1.3 billion to the UK.³⁸

Critics are worried about CETA's investor-state dispute settlement procedures (as they are about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US).³⁹ Some are unhappy that the treaty may be applied provisionally before parliaments have had a chance to ratify it.

Questions were also raised about ratification by a dispute over visa-free travel. Canadians are allowed to visit the EU without having a visa, but Romanians and Bulgarians do not share the same privilege when they go to Canada. The European Commission is obliged by law to debate the withdrawal of Canadian (and US) visa-free travel privileges but the step would not be taken without the requisite votes on the European Council. The prospects of Canada and the US extending visa-free travel in the near future are remote - they are in the process of tightening security requirements for those countries (including the UK) that are in the visa waiver programme. According to some press reports, the visa row may provoke representatives of certain EU countries to block the ratification of CETA.⁴⁰

³⁴ European External Action Service, [EU Relations with Canada](#)

³⁵ European Commission, Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, [Questions and answers](#)

³⁶ [HC Written question – 5063](#), 6 July 2015

³⁷ European Commission, [Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement \(CETA\)](#)

³⁸ [HC Written question - 20279](#), 7 January 2016

³⁹ For more on CETA see the Commons Briefing Paper [CETA: the EU-Canada free trade agreement](#), March 2016

⁴⁰ [‘CETA ratification hangs in doubt over visa-free travel dispute’](#), *Euractiv*, 11 April 2016

Strategic Partnership Agreement

The EU and Canada are also working on a Strategic Partnership Agreement which will deepen political cooperation between the EU and Canada in areas such as peace and security, narcotics, human rights promotion and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴¹

3.2 UK relations

In November 2013, the UK opted in to an EU-Canada deal to share passenger information for the prevention of terrorism and serious cross-border crime.⁴² The UK signed a memorandum of understanding with Canada, coming into force in 2012, on defence materiel cooperation. Canada and the UK share some diplomatic premises with Canada: in Bamako, Mali, and Rangoon, Myanmar. There are also plans to share missions in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.⁴³

Priorities for UK policy towards Canada are to:

- increase business between the two countries,
- cooperate in science, innovation, and higher education,
- work with Canada to strengthen the Commonwealth and
- co-operate to counter weapons proliferation and prevent conflict.⁴⁴

The British Army has a training facility in Alberta (BATUS). Canada is also part of the so-called 'five-eyes' group: the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand share signals intelligence very closely. Other countries participate in the group. Canadian and UK forces have worked together in NATO operations such as in Afghanistan and Libya.

F-35 aircraft

Canada needs to replace its ageing Hornet fighter fleet and the Harper government announced in 2010 its intention to buy 65 F-35s.

During the 2015 election campaign, the Liberals said that they would withdraw Canada from the F-35 programme and exclude the F-35 from the procurement for the Royal Canadian Air Force, on the grounds that it was too expensive.

The UK plans to buy 138 Lockheed Martin F-35 warplanes to equip its aircraft carriers. The UK is the only 'Tier 1' partner to the US on the project and UK companies are contributing some 15% of the value of each plane. Concerns have been raised, however, that a decision not to proceed with the order may increase the cost to the UK of its order. The Pentagon's programme manager estimated that each fighter would cost

⁴¹ Global affairs Canada, [Strategic Partnership Agreement \(SPA\)](#)

⁴² [HC Deb 20 November 2013, c54WS](#)

⁴³ [HC Deb 11 February 2013, c487W](#)

⁴⁴ UK and Canada: [priorities](#), gov.uk

0.7% to 1% more for other customers if Canada did not go ahead with its order. This would amount to about US\$ 1 million per plane.⁴⁵

\$1 million dollars
increase each

The UK Government says that it is in regular conversations with the Canadians about the F-35. More recently Canadian government spokesman have said that the F-35 would not, after all, be excluded from the competition to supply the new fighter planes.

⁴⁵ 'Pentagon expects USD1 million unit price increase if Canada leaves F-35 programme', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 23 October 2015

4. Basic information

4.1 Area and Population

Area: 8,965,121 sq km

Population (preliminary, mid-2015): 35,851,774

Population density (land area only, mid-2015): 4.0 per sq km

Life expectancy (years at birth, 2013): 81.4 (males 79.3; females 83.6)

4.2 Finance

GDP in current prices (World Bank estimates, 2013): US \$1,826,769m.
(\$51,964 per head)

Real GDP growth (2014): 2.5%

Inflation (average change in consumer prices, 2014): 2.0%⁴⁶

4.3 Territorial divisions

The ten provinces are Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. The three territories are Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon. Each province has a Lieutenant Governor and a provincial legislature. Territories have no representative of the Crown because their status depends on the Federal government and they have no sovereignty.

Each of the ten Canadian province has a single-chamber legislature with considerable powers, some backed by transfer funding from the federal government, although the provinces have the power to levy local property taxes and income taxes. The relationship between the federal government and the provinces has been controversial for some time and constitutional reform is still discussed, although the question of Quebec independence has receded.

As well as the division between French- and English speaking Canadians, there is a marked divide between the eastern provinces, traditionally more densely populated, industrialised and social democratic in outlook, and the western provinces, which tend to be more conservative and whose economies are based on resources. In such a vast and sparsely populated country, it is not surprising that life in the different regions should be quite different.

⁴⁶ [Canada](#), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons.

5. Constitutional background

Canada is a federal state composed of 10 provinces and three territories. The federal legislature consists of the Monarch, the House of Commons (338 members, elected by universal adult suffrage for single-member constituencies) and the Senate (a maximum of 112 members, nominated on a regional basis). The Governor-General, representing the Monarch, appoints the Prime Minister and federal ministers, according to the composition of the House of Commons. The maximum parliamentary term is four years.

The Dominion of Canada was established by the [British North America Act](#) of 1867 but in its original form Canada did not include all of the provinces and territories that it does now. British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon, among others, joined in 1905 and Newfoundland joined only in 1949.

The 1867 Act served as the Canadian constitution but the British Government maintained control of Canadian foreign policy and amendments to the constitution could only be made by the British Parliament. A second [British North America Act](#), passed in 1949, also allowed the Canadian Parliament to amend the constitution in matters that concerned the Federal Government.

The [Statute of Westminster](#) of 1931 gave the Dominions (including Canada) practical independence and stopped the British Parliament from legislating for these countries.

In 1982 the Westminster Parliament passed the [Canada Act 1982](#), which transferred to Canada authority over all matters contained in British law relating to Canada. This meant that the Canadian constitution could be amended without reference to Westminster.

5.1 Quebec referendums

The 'patriation' of the constitution came at a time of conflict over the distribution of power between the federal government and the provinces, particularly Quebec, which saw the growth of a sovereignty movement.

The first Quebec referendum was held in 1980 and, although defeated by a comfortable margin, underlined dissatisfaction with the constitutional arrangements of the time.⁴⁷ Prolonged negotiations failed to reach a definitive solution to the problem. After the narrow defeat of the second Quebec referendum, in 1994, the issue of Quebec separatism became less pressing.⁴⁸ The Bloc Québécois won 10 seats in the House of Commons in 2015, failing to clear the threshold for recognition as a party, while the Parti Québécois lost control of the Quebec provincial Government to the Liberals in 2014.

⁴⁷ For more on the Quebec separatists, see the Library research paper [The Quebec Referendums](#), July 2013

⁴⁸ This section based largely on Country Profile (Canada), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/ca.is.1>

6. Map



Map courtesy of [University of Texas](#)

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