

Canada Report

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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Executive Summary

The report provides an overview of Canada's governance and policymaking systems across multiple dimensions, including democratic governmental practices and institutions, governance with foresight, and various aspects of economic, social, health, and environmental sustainability. It discusses the merits and drawbacks of Canada's electoral system, political party system, access to information, media freedom, civil society, corruption prevention, judicial practices, legislative activity and capacities, and other institutions related to democratic governance.

Key economic policy areas covered include the circular economy, critical infrastructure, energy, labor markets, taxation, budgeting, and financial stability. Social and health policy domains analyzed include education, basic needs, healthcare, gender equality, families, pensions, and migration. Environmental topics include climate change, pollution and health risks, ecosystems and biodiversity, and global efforts.

The report draws on academic sources, government reports, legislation, and indicators to assess strengths and weaknesses.

In general, the report finds that Canada scores well on democratic freedoms, social programs, financial oversight, and some environmental efforts. However, it identifies shortcomings in transparency, Indigenous rights, climate action, healthcare access, and other areas. Some of these shortcomings are related to specific practices in Canada's Westminster-style government, its federal structure and conflicts over divisions of governmental powers, and its primarily resource extraction-based economy, which undermines many concerns evinced around topics like climate change and environmental protection. Climate policy lacks consistency across provinces, and heavy reliance on fossil fuel exports undermines emissions reduction efforts. Environmental and biodiversity protection is fairly robust, but more action is needed to meet conservation targets.

More specifically, Canada's electoral system is found to facilitate free and fair elections and political competition. However, party leaders control candidate nominations, limiting democratic choice, transparency, and accountability. Government transparency practices, in particular, are quite poor. Access to

information laws exist but have broad exemptions. Regarding accountability, media are free, but concentrated ownership limits diversity of perspectives in traditional print and electronic communication and reporting.

Civil society groups can advocate but have limited resources and policy influence and access compared to business interests. An independent judiciary effectively upholds individual rights and freedoms, mediates constitutional disputes, and upholds the rule of law. However, rights set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms can be limited through the notwithstanding clause, which can also be used to uphold provincial laws by removing them from judicial scrutiny.

On the other hand, fiscal prudence and oversight of financial institutions are strong. Healthcare is universal and equitable, although plagued by long wait times for procedures.

Overall, the analysis paints a nuanced picture of policymaking in Canada, with a mix of successes and challenges across the dimensions evaluated.

Key Challenges

Based on the analysis in the report, some of the greatest challenges for Canadian governments involve climate action, healthcare access, housing affordability, and information transparency. Targeted efforts and policies in these key areas could help Canadian governments make progress on some of the most pressing governance and policy challenges identified in the analysis. Yet some of the limitations are built into the foundations of Canadian governments and societies and are highly resistant to change.

On climate action, for example, provincial resistance and continued fossil fuel production and exports hinder emission reduction efforts promoted by the federal government. Greater cooperation, binding reduction targets, phasing out subsidies, and transition support for affected regions could help align climate policies across jurisdictions, but achieving this is impossible without provincial agreement, which is not forthcoming.

In healthcare, access remains a significant issue. Long wait times and uneven geographical access plague the systems, which could be improved through increased funding, better infrastructure, more healthcare workers, and delivery innovations. However, healthcare is primarily a provincial responsibility, and

funding is not forthcoming from this level. Efforts to add more private sector clinics and procedures to the system face provincial and federal limitations on qualifications for health insurance payments, as well as measures specifically designed to discourage the emergence of a “two-tiered” medical system, where one tier serves the well-off and the other serves everyone else.

Housing affordability is a pressing issue that has garnered significant attention recently due to a large influx of immigrants, the highest percentage intake since before World War I. Rapidly rising home prices have led to high household debt levels and have priced many out of the market, particularly young people and many of the immigrants moving to the country. Increasing supply through densification, social and affordable housing, speculation taxes, and assistance programs could improve accessibility. However, this relies on private sector investment and enthusiasm, as well as the removal of numerous barriers on multi-unit and other types of dwellings imposed by local governments. Efforts to create a larger market for rental housing as a quick fix to current problems also face societal resistance. Canadians, for many generations, have valued home ownership and view extended periods of renting as counterproductive to that goal.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is also an ongoing challenge. This is partly because they fall behind the general population in various socioeconomic indicators, and their quest for cultural recognition and political autonomy is increasingly prominent in contemporary Canadian society.

In terms of improving internal governmental operations and enhancing democratic practices, information transparency at all levels of Canadian governments remains poor. Broader information disclosure, more funding for access to information officials, stronger penalties for delays, and fewer exemptions would help. However, these improvements counter a system where the default for government data is secrecy, and privacy considerations are often used to offset any tendencies toward more public information disclosure.

Sustained leadership, funding commitments, stakeholder collaboration, and system-level reforms are necessary to address these public policy issues, but there should be no illusion that this will be simple or speedy.

Democratic Government

I. Vertical Accountability

Elections

Free and Fair
Political
Competition
Score: 10

Canada holds regular elections at the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels and is generally considered to have a system that allows for free and fair political competition among candidates and political parties. Citizens and political parties are generally free to express their views, organize political activities, and participate in the political process without undue interference.

Laws and regulations governing elections aim to ensure fairness and equality among political actors. Each major jurisdiction has an independent election authority responsible to the legislature and the public for overseeing elections and ensuring that they are conducted transparently and according to established rules.

Electoral boundary commissions, typically staffed by judges and academics, review census data and set the boundaries for individual (single) member plurality constituencies (Qualter 1970). The Chief Electoral Officer must be satisfied that the information in the application is accurate and that the organization is a political party and may ask for additional documents, including the party's constitution, by-laws, and program, if deemed necessary.

Several checks exist to ensure this system remains open and fair. First, Canada has a multiparty system with several political parties representing a range of ideologies and viewpoints, each monitoring compliance with election rules and regulations. A party that meets minimal administrative requirements is eligible for registration, and its registered status is granted when it nominates at least one candidate in an election. Second, the media are also open and free and monitor election conduct and results. Third, Canada has a strong tradition of protecting political freedoms, including freedom of speech, assembly, and

association; these basic freedoms are incorporated into the federal Charter of Rights.

Funding and arrangements governing campaign and party expenses are generally transparent, equitable, and well-policed. Reforms to campaign finance regulations have been implemented in many jurisdictions to reduce the influence of private, especially corporate, donations in elections. These regulations limit individual donations and often ban corporate funding, replacing it with public funds provided to political parties to offset expenses.

However, parties and party leaders control candidate nominations in their constituencies and may block individuals from running for election for any reason they choose. This power is often exercised to silence internal critics within the party. Those individuals may still run for office under other party labels but have a very small chance of winning without major party support or having lost it. Finally, independent candidates (i.e., those not affiliated with a major political party) face a strong electoral disadvantage at both the federal and provincial levels and, under most conditions, are rarely elected.

Free and Fair
Elections
Score: 9

Voting in Canada is free and fair, having been conducted with a universal adult franchise since the 1960s, with female suffrage established at the beginning of the 20th century. Election agencies operate at arm's length from the government and are deemed to be of high quality. Significant efforts are made to facilitate voting through early voting, mail-in ballots, and widespread rural polling in public buildings within small communities.

In Canada, citizens generally enjoy both de jure (legal) and de facto (practical) rights to vote. The most important de jure aspect is universal suffrage. Although earlier in its history the vote was limited to adult male literate property owners, Canada now practices universal suffrage. This means that all citizens who meet certain minimum requirements regarding age and citizenship have the right to vote in federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal elections. The legal voting age in Canada is 18 years old. Citizens who have reached this age are eligible to vote in federal, provincial, and municipal elections. Generally, only Canadian citizens are eligible to vote in federal elections. In some provinces and territories, there are also residency requirements for voting in provincial or territorial elections. Voters are usually required to be residents of the electoral district in which they wish to vote, and sometimes must have resided in a particular location for a set period of time (Blais et al. 2003).

To vote, citizens must be registered on the electoral roll. Registration processes vary by jurisdiction but are generally designed to ensure all eligible voters are included. Registration can usually be completed up to and including the day of voting.

Other de facto (or practical) aspects of the franchise exist. These include efforts to ensure that polling stations are accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities, and that accommodations are provided in terms of poll locations to facilitate voting in rural and other widespread areas. To accommodate different schedules and situations, provisions for early voting and absentee voting are typically available in some jurisdictions.

Governments and election authorities conduct voter education campaigns to inform citizens about the electoral process, registration procedures, and voting methods through traditional and extensive social media information campaigns.

At the federal level, Canada recognizes both English and French as official languages, and citizens have the right to receive election information in either language. This helps ensure that language barriers do not impede the exercise of voting rights.

While Canada makes significant efforts to ensure broad and inclusive participation, challenges or barriers may still exist and can vary by region. Some groups, such as Indigenous communities or those facing socioeconomic challenges, may encounter unique obstacles to fully exercising their voting rights, including language issues and difficulties voting in thinly populated rural areas.

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted
Party System
Score: 9

In Canada, political parties are free-forming and open to competition. There are no barriers to their creation, although creation does not imply success in electing candidates in future elections, where incumbents and party loyalties favor older, more well-established parties (Cross et al. 2022).

In the modern era in Canada, parties are not ethnically, religiously, or race-based, although some are regional. Currently, this is the case with the Bloc Québécois, a federal party that runs candidates only in the province of Quebec and supports its independence from the rest of Canada.

In general, political parties in Canada, both federal and provincial, make a determined effort to have a diverse candidate pool. This is due to the country’s significant regional and ethno-racial diversity. Parties also pay attention to the gender diversity of candidates; however, federally and provincially, legislative assemblies are currently male-dominated. For instance, in the federal House of Commons, only about 30% of the MPs are women. However, since late 2015, gender parity has been enforced within the federal ministerial cabinet.

Federal political parties are known for their “brokerage” qualities, especially as they seek to reconcile perspectives from English and French Canada. Nevertheless, there are modest programmatic differences between these parties, which can be seen in their publicly accessible manifestos.

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation
Score: 4

Parties in Canada rarely cooperate. This is inherent in the adversarial nature – government and opposition – found in Westminster-style systems. Formal cooperation is uncommon and occurs only when minority governments are elected, typically lasting only for a short period until a new election is held. This is considered normal and proper (Lindquist and Eichbaum 2016).

In a Westminster system, the government is typically formed by the party that holds the majority of seats in the lower house of Parliament (e.g., the House of Commons in the UK). This majority is achieved by winning the most seats in general elections. Party cooperation is only required when the winning party holds a minority or plurality of seats in the legislature, not a majority.

The opposition exists to hold the government accountable for its actions and decisions and is expected to challenge the government party whenever possible. In the Westminster system, the opposition often forms a “shadow cabinet” that mirrors the structure of the government cabinet. Members of the shadow cabinet are assigned specific portfolios and are responsible for critiquing and developing alternative policies to those proposed by the government. Members of the opposition scrutinize government policies, challenge decisions, and provide an alternative viewpoint on legislation and policy to the public and media.

In a parliamentary democracy, if the government loses the confidence of the majority in the lower house, it may be replaced by the opposition. This can happen through a vote of no confidence or if the government fails to pass key legislation. The opposition thus serves as a potential alternative government if the existing government fails.

The first-past-the-post electoral system undermines cross-party cooperation by creating reasonable expectations of parliamentary majorities. When these

majorities frequently occur, the governing party has no incentive to seek input from opposition parties.

Access to Official Information

Transparent
Government
Score: 4

Freedom of Information acts exist at the federal level and in most provinces in Canada. The principal act at the federal level is the Access to Information Act (ATIA), which allows individuals to request access to eligible government records. This legislation aims to promote transparency by giving citizens and residents the right to access government information, subject to certain limitations and exemptions.

However, there are many exemptions that restrict public access to government documents, including broad categories such as “affecting federal-provincial relations,” “national security,” and criminal matters. Many types of information, such as medical records, are also excluded on privacy grounds. Additionally, wait times for the fulfillment of document requests are typically well beyond guidelines, and many departments have very poor track records in this area (Roberts, 1998).

Other “Open Government” initiatives also exist. These initiatives involve making government data and information available to the public through online platforms, but the record of activity in this area varies widely by government agency and over time. Some government agencies and departments provide a great deal of information through their official websites, for example, which may be linked to internal data resources and reports (Clarke and Margetts 2014).

Canada also has national and provincial libraries and archives that preserve and provide access to historical and government records. These institutions often offer public access to a variety of materials, but typically only after very long embargo periods, such as 75 years for Cabinet documents.

II. Diagonal Accountability

Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media
Score: 10

In Canada, there are no barriers to traditional or social media reporting outside of traditional libel and slander laws, and criticism of the government is very common.

However, foreign companies are prevented from owning controlling stakes in Canadian media companies. Outside the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and its French-language counterpart, Radio Canada, traditional media ownership in Canada is concentrated in the hands of a small number of Canadian-owned and Canadian-controlled media conglomerates. There is also particularly strong media concentration in some parts of the country, such as the Irving newspapers in New Brunswick. This makes it difficult for new companies to break into Canadian media markets and limits competition (Murray 2007).

This trend accelerated following the shutdown of several dozen local newspapers, which occurred after a 2017 deal between two national newspaper corporations, Torstar and Postmedia Group, and the earlier demise of the Canwest-Global company.

The influence of mainstream newspapers has waned considerably in the last decade or so in favor of online sources of information and social media, where Canadians can find a greater diversity of opinions and political perspectives.

Pluralism of
Opinions
Score: 8

Canada is widely recognized as a country with a high degree of press freedom, often ranking prominently in global indices. For instance, the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders consistently ranks Canada among the leading nations for press freedom.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, part of the Constitution Act of 1982, guarantees freedom of the press as a fundamental right. Canada has a diverse media landscape with a mix of public and private broadcasters, newspapers, and online news outlets. This diversity contributes to a plurality of voices and perspectives.

Traditional media are expensive to establish and operate and are controlled by large communication conglomerates. This results in very limited perspectives in national media. Local media, though more competitive, still exhibit a pro-business perspective on public affairs. Moreover, Canada has recently witnessed a series of local newspaper closures and layoffs within large media corporations, negatively affecting both local and national news coverage.

A strong case can be made that a lack of competition in the media industry has led to a lack of diversity in views and positions, as mainstream media companies tend to align with existing political parties and, for example, rarely support social-democratic or regional parties. The mainstream print media generally express a centrist to center-right political orientation but some, such

as the Globe and Mail and La Presse, make an effort to bring in other perspectives to provide balanced coverage of issues. The CBC is very Central Canada-centric, and Radio Canada exists mainly for the French-language population in Quebec (Taylor and O'Hagen 2017).

Social media, on the other hand, is wide open and has no barriers to entry. Like many other countries, Canada faces challenges related to the impact of digital media on traditional journalism, including issues such as misinformation, disinformation, and the business model of online news, especially in terms of the provision and promotion of Canadian content.

The protection of journalistic sources is recognized as an important aspect of press freedom in Canada. Journalists may be protected from compelled disclosure of their sources under certain circumstances. Additional mechanisms also protect media activity, such as press councils and self-regulatory bodies like the National NewsMedia Council. These entities aim to maintain high journalistic standards and address public concerns about media practices. They operate independently of the government and the media organizations they oversee.

Civil Society

Free Civil
Society
Score: 9

Canada has a legal framework that generally supports freedom of assembly as a fundamental right. This freedom is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is part of the Constitution Act of 1982. This includes the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Freedom of assembly, like all other rights enumerated in the Charter, is not absolute. It is subject to reasonable limitations that can be justified “in a free and democratic society.” This allows governments to impose certain restrictions on the time, place, and manner of assemblies to balance individual rights with the broader public interest.

There are, however, very few barriers to assembly and protest in Canada with the exception of hate groups and banned organizations, which are very few (Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression). In many cases, local authorities may require organizers to obtain permits for certain types of assemblies, especially large gatherings or events that may impact public safety or traffic. These permit requirements are typically meant to balance the right to assembly with the need for public order.

Law enforcement agencies are responsible for managing public events and ensuring public safety. However, interventions by law enforcement must comply with the law and should not unduly restrict the right to peaceful assembly.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Capital and Labor)
Score: 6

Canada has a free associational system with very limited direct funding for interest groups and civil society organizations. This applies to both business and labor.

Overall, larger, well-resourced CSOs that prioritize policy work tend to have the most capacity. This is true of business associations and, to a lesser extent, trade union centrals. The unionization rate in Canada is currently slightly below 30%, a figure that should not obscure variations over time, between men and women, and among employment sectors. For example, “Over the last four decades, unionization rates fell by 16 percentage points among men but remained stable among women” (Statistics Canada, 2022). Moreover, the unionization rate is much higher in the public sector than in the private sector, where the labor movement is less represented now than it was 30 or 40 years ago.

The party in power can also be more or less open to CSO input in policymaking. Shutting groups out is always possible. At the federal level, pro-business governments are the norm, which has enhanced the influence of business associations while undermining the influence of trade unions. This has been true throughout Canadian history and continues to the present day.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Social Welfare)
Score: 5

As stated previously, Canada has a free associational system, but in the social welfare sector as elsewhere, interest groups and civil society organizations have access to limited public funding.

In general, civil society organizations (CSOs) in Canada working in the social welfare sector do not have direct and continuous access to government officials and policymakers for effective advocacy and input. The degree of access, however, can vary. Larger, more established CSOs often have better connections. CSOs also need knowledge and expertise on the specific policy issues they seek to influence, which some possess to varying degrees. While larger CSOs may have specialized policy staff, smaller ones often lack dedicated expertise. Participating in consultations, advocacy campaigns, and similar activities also requires time and money. Larger CSOs have more resources to devote to policy work, whereas many smaller CSOs are underfunded (Phillips and Orsini 2002).

Connections with other CSOs and academics can help amplify influence and access expertise. While some CSOs collaborate effectively with each other, others operate in silos. There are opportunities to enhance CSO capacity through funding, partnerships, and government commitment to consultation. Some CSOs receive grants to provide services, such as refugee settlement or women's shelters, and can use those funds to support their lobbying activities (Pal 1993). However, resource limitations and unequal access will persist to some degree.

Due to these constraints, the policy capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area of social policy in Canada can vary widely depending on the size, focus, and resources of each organization. "Policy capacity" refers to an organization's ability to effectively engage in policy analysis, advocacy, and influence decision-making processes. Adequate funding and resources are crucial for civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs to build and maintain policy capacity. Funding sources may include grants, donations, and partnerships. Financial stability enables organizations to invest in staff training, research initiatives, and advocacy campaigns. Larger NGOs with significant resources, staffing, and expertise may have greater policy capacity. These organizations often have dedicated policy teams, researchers, and advocacy specialists.

NGOs with strong research capacity and subject-matter expertise are better equipped to analyze policy issues, propose solutions, and engage in evidence-based advocacy than those with weaker capabilities. Some NGOs may collaborate with academic institutions or experts to enhance their research capabilities. The ability to collaborate in this way and form strategic alliances with other NGOs, civil society groups, and stakeholders can enhance an organization's policy influence. Networking allows NGOs to share resources, information, and amplify their collective voice.

NGOs with effective access to government officials, policymakers, and key decision-makers can have a greater impact on policy development than those without such access. Establishing relationships with government agencies and officials often allows NGOs to present their perspectives and recommendations directly (Brock 2020).

NGOs that effectively communicate their messages to the public and garner public support can influence policy debates and decisions. Public awareness campaigns, media outreach, and social media engagement contribute to an organization's policy advocacy efforts. Issues that resonate with the public, policymakers, or specific interest groups may attract more attention and support.

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 7

The effectiveness of an NGO's advocacy strategies – including its ability to engage in constructive dialogue, propose viable solutions, and mobilize public support – contributes to its policy capacity. NGOs that are adaptable and open to learning from their experiences are better positioned to navigate changing policy landscapes. This adaptability includes staying informed about policy developments, assessing the impact of their advocacy efforts, and adjusting strategies accordingly.

The policy capacity of non-governmental (NGO) or civil society organizations (CSOs) in any area of policymaking can vary widely depending on the size, focus, and resources of each organization. Adequate funding and resources are crucial for NGO/CSOs to build and maintain their ability to influence policy. Larger NGOs with significant resources, staffing, and expertise may have greater policy capacity. Financial stability, in particular, enables organizations to invest in staff training, research initiatives, and advocacy campaigns. Funding sources may include grants, donations, and partnerships. These organizations often have dedicated policy teams, researchers, and advocacy specialists.

CSOs with strong research capacity and subject-matter expertise are better equipped to analyze policy issues, propose solutions, and engage in evidence-based advocacy than those with weaker capabilities. Some NGOs may collaborate with academic institutions or experts to enhance their research capabilities. The ability to collaborate in this way and form strategic alliances with other NGOs, civil society groups, and stakeholders can enhance an organization's policy influence. Networking allows these organizations to share resources and information and amplify their collective voice. Issues that resonate with the public, policymakers, or specific interest groups may attract more attention and support. Public awareness campaigns, media outreach, and social media engagement are all part of such organizations' policy advocacy efforts.

In the environmental sphere, Canada has several large, influential, and effective civil society organizations, including some with a global reach. Major national environmental organizations in Canada include Greenpeace Canada, part of the global Greenpeace network founded in Vancouver after protests surrounding a U.S. nuclear test in Amchitka, Alaska, in 1971. It is one of the country's most prominent environmental advocacy groups, campaigning on issues like climate change, protecting oceans and forests, and promoting renewable energy.

Other prominent and well-resourced civil society organizations include the Sierra Club Canada, a branch of the U.S.-based Sierra Club. This organization focuses on protecting wilderness areas and ecosystems and works on issues related to national parks, endangered species, and sustainable development. Similarly, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Canada is the Canadian arm of the Swiss-based global conservation organization, concentrating on wildlife protection, sustainable food sources, and curbing threats from habitat loss and climate change.

Based in Quebec, Equiterre is another prominent organization promoting environmental and social justice issues, with campaigns around sustainable agriculture, transportation, and consumption habits. Its former director is now the federal Minister of the Environment. Smaller organizations, like the David Suzuki Foundation – named after a renowned Canadian environmentalist and TV host – have a significant media presence despite their size.

These large national groups often work with more regionally focused environmental organizations across Canada's provinces and territories. They play an important role in shaping environmental policies and raising public awareness on key ecological issues facing the country.

III. Horizontal Accountability

Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public
Auditing
Score: 10

All the provinces and the federal government have independent auditor-generals, responsible to parliaments and legislatures, not the government. These entities are well-funded and effective. In addition, it is typical for an auditor general to be appointed for a fixed term and to be removed only under specific conditions outlined in the Auditor General Act (Taft 2016).

The Auditor General of Canada plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and good governance within the Canadian federal government. The position is an independent officer of the Parliament of Canada, and the auditor general reports directly to the House of Commons rather than to the government. The auditor general submits annual and other reports to the Speaker of the House of Commons, who then tables them in Parliament. Due to this relationship with the House rather than with the government, the auditor general is expected to operate independently from the government. This

independence is crucial for maintaining the credibility and integrity of audit findings.

The role and responsibilities of the auditor general include auditing the federal government's financial statements and its entities to ensure compliance with best practices in public finance. This involves examining the financial transactions and reporting of government departments, agencies, and crown corporations.

The auditors general also conduct performance audits to assess whether government programs are managed effectively and achieve their intended objectives. These audits focus on areas such as efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance with laws and regulations. The auditor general typically evaluates whether government programs and operations provide value for money. This involves examining whether resources are used efficiently and whether the expected outcomes are achieved in a cost-effective manner.

The auditor general may also conduct special examinations of crown corporations and other entities as requested or on its own initiative. These examinations assess the entities' financial management, control systems, and compliance with laws and regulations. The auditor general also monitors and reports on the government's progress in implementing recommendations from previous audit reports. This follow-up process is intended to ensure that the government takes corrective action and is held accountable for addressing identified issues.

Effective Data
Protection
Score: 4

Most provinces and the federal government have privacy acts that protect much data. However, there is no generalized data protection office or legislation, as there is in Europe.

Canada does not have a comprehensive federal-level data protection law similar to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Instead, it has a patchwork of privacy laws and regulations that govern the protection of personal information in specific sectors and industries.

Most of this legislation applies to the public sector, but the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) extends these protections to private-sector organizations engaged in commercial activities across Canada. It sets out principles for the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information and requires organizations to obtain consent for the collection and handling of personal data. PIPEDA applies to businesses such as banks, telecommunications companies, and private-sector organizations engaged in interprovincial or international trade.

Several provinces in Canada have enacted their own privacy laws for organizations within their jurisdictions. For instance, Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec have private-sector privacy laws that apply to organizations operating within those provinces.

The absence of a federal law with broad jurisdiction has led to discussions and calls for reform to enhance privacy protections, especially in light of the evolving digital landscape and increasing concerns about data breaches and online privacy (Canada – Data Protection Overview).

This led to the introduction of Bill C-27, an act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act, the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act, and the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, also known as the Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022. The bill passed second reading in 2023 and is currently under committee review. It is not yet in effect and may not pass.

The Consumer Privacy Protection Act is Part 1 of the Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022. The act would repeal parts of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and replace them with a new legislative regime governing the collection, use and disclosure of personal information for commercial activity in Canada. This would maintain, modernize and extend existing rules and impose new rules on private sector organizations for the protection of personal information. The act would also continue and enhance the role of the Privacy Commissioner in overseeing organizations' compliance with these measures. Provisions of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act addressing electronic alternatives to paper records would be retained under the new title of the Electronic Documents Act.

Part 2 of the Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022, includes the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act. This act establishes a new administrative tribunal to hear appeals of orders issued by the Privacy Commissioner and to implement a new administrative monetary penalty regime created under the Consumer Privacy Protection Act.

Part 3 of the Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022, the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, outlines new measures to regulate international and interprovincial trade and commerce in artificial intelligence systems. It establishes common requirements for the design, development, and use of artificial intelligence systems, including measures to mitigate risks of harm and biased output. It also prohibits specific practices with data and artificial

intelligence systems that may cause serious harm to individuals or their interests.

(“Department of Justice – Statement of Potential Charter Impacts).

Rule of Law

Effective Judicial
Oversight
Score: 10

Judicial independence is a cornerstone of the Canadian legal system. Judges are expected to decide cases impartially, without interference from the government or other external pressures. This independence strengthens the judiciary’s ability to hold the government accountable.

Canada has an independent and impartial judiciary, with many steps taken to ensure it remains that way, including appointment and disciplinary procedures that are at arm’s length from the government. The judiciary plays a crucial role in holding the government accountable by ensuring that government actions and decisions comply with the law, particularly since 1982 with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Russell 1982 and 1983).

The primary mechanism through which the judiciary holds the government accountable is judicial review. Courts have the authority to review the constitutionality and legality of laws, regulations, and government actions. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all Canadians. The judiciary – particularly the Supreme Court of Canada – is responsible for interpreting and enforcing the Charter. Individuals and groups can challenge government actions they believe violate Charter rights, and the courts can strike down laws or government decisions that are inconsistent with these rights.

Canada’s nine Supreme Court justices are appointed based on the advice of a non-partisan advisory board. Although the provinces are consulted about these appointments, the final decisions remain essentially unilateral.

The judiciary reviews administrative decisions made by government agencies, boards, and tribunals. Courts scrutinize these decisions to ensure they are within the scope of the law and that the decision-making process is fair and reasonable.

The judiciary ensures that the actions of the executive and legislative branches of government do not exceed their constitutional authority. Courts can intervene if they find the government is overstepping its legal boundaries or infringing on the rights of individuals.

Universal Civil
Rights
Score: 7

The main protector of human and civil rights in Canada is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982. It is enforceable by the courts, and the judiciary plays an important role in protecting these rights. However, these rights are not absolute, and a “notwithstanding” clause allows provincial governments to opt out of Charter protections, which they do fairly often. In recent years, that clause has been invoked more frequently by provincial governments – in this case, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan – a situation that has become a key source of political controversy in Canada. The Charter also only applies to relationships between citizens and governments and does not cover other areas of life, such as links between citizens and private businesses unless those links involve government, such as regulation or licensing, for example (Heritage Canada 2017).

Individuals and groups can bring legal challenges to contest laws, policies or government actions that they believe infringe on their civil rights. Courts provide a forum for these challenges and have the authority to strike down or modify laws that are inconsistent with the Charter.

The Charter guarantees fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, assembly, association, and religion. It also includes sections on equality rights, prohibiting discrimination on various grounds, including race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Courts play a crucial role in addressing cases of discrimination and interpreting the scope of equality rights to promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

However, none of these rights are absolute, and courts may limit them in accordance with practices they deem compatible with a free and democratic society. Other exemptions, in addition to the general notwithstanding clause cited above, also exist (Library of Parliament, 2018). Courts play a key role in enforcing and protecting these freedoms, ensuring that individuals can exercise their rights without undue interference. The judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of Canada, is responsible for interpreting the Charter’s provisions. Judicial review of relevant statutes allows the courts to assess the constitutionality of laws, regulations, and government actions.

If a law or government decision is found to violate the rights and freedoms protected by the Charter, the courts have the power to declare it invalid or strike it down. Through its decisions, the court clarifies the meaning and scope of specific rights and freedoms. Remedies may include declarations of unconstitutionality, damages, or other measures aimed at rectifying the harm caused by the violation.

Effective
Corruption
Prevention
Score: 9

Most Canadian governments have conflict-of-interest rules and ethical guidelines that legislatures use to discipline their members and control behavior within the civil service. Members of government do not necessarily have to abide by these rules, except when they receive media coverage and negatively affect a government's election prospects. However, the rules enforced within the civil service are more binding and can lead to dismissal or, in rare cases, criminal charges.

Conflict-of-interest rules are designed to ensure public officials act impartially and make decisions in the best interest of the public rather than for personal gain. Specific regulations vary among federal, provincial, and municipal levels, but common principles guide conflict-of-interest standards in Canada. Commissioners or ethics officials typically conduct investigations, and penalties for violations can include fines, reprimands, or other measures.

At the federal level, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner oversees compliance with conflict-of-interest rules for members of Parliament, Senators, and certain public officeholders. Similar roles exist at the provincial and territorial levels, often under the title ethics commissioner or a similar designation.

The federal government operates under the Conflict of Interest Act, which establishes rules and guidelines for public officeholders. The act outlines prohibited activities, disclosure requirements, and measures to prevent and address conflicts of interest. Public officeholders are generally required to recuse themselves from any decision-making process where they have a private interest that could reasonably be seen to conflict with their public duties.

Public officeholders are typically required to publicly disclose their financial interests, including assets, liabilities, and other financial arrangements. This disclosure is intended to provide transparency and allow for scrutiny of potential conflicts of interest. Other rules govern the acceptance of gifts and benefits. In general, these are discouraged, and public officeholders are required to disclose gifts and benefits received in their official capacity. There are often restrictions on accepting gifts that could reasonably be seen as influencing the individual's decision-making.

To prevent potential conflicts of interest after leaving public office, post-employment restrictions are often imposed. These may include limitations on working for organizations that were subject to the individual's official responsibilities or lobbying the government for a specified period after leaving office (Parliament of Canada).

Sufficient
Legislative
Resources
Score: 7

Legislature

In British parliamentary systems of government, legislatures play a crucial oversight role over the executive branch, ensuring accountability, transparency, and responsible governance. The oversight functions of legislatures in these systems involve various mechanisms designed to better scrutinize the actions, policies, and decisions of the government (Stewart 1974).

Members of the legislature, especially those from the opposition, have the opportunity to question government ministers during question periods. These sessions provide a platform for holding the government accountable for its decisions and actions. Debates on proposed legislation, policies, and government initiatives also allow for thorough examination and scrutiny.

Federal members of Parliament each receive a budget to support their activities and hire staff, typically 4-5 per member of Parliament. Some of these staff members work in the House of Commons, while others are based in local constituency offices (House of Commons of Canada, 2021).

Committees are another essential component of parliamentary oversight. Composed of members of the legislature, committees specialize in specific policy areas or functions. They conduct inquiries, investigations, and hearings, producing reports that scrutinize government activities, propose recommendations, and hold ministers to account.

Legislatures in Canada typically have research offices that aid legislative committees in their work. Individual MPs and others also have research allowances, which allow them to hire staff to research public policy issues. However, Westminster-style government means that, barring a minority government situation, a majority government controls Parliament during its time in office. This includes key committee assignments and appointments, allowing the majority government to quash or ignore criticisms and complaints as it wishes.

The legislature also has the power to approve the government's budget, providing a significant avenue for fiscal and program oversight. Budget debates and reviews allow members to examine government spending priorities, fiscal policies, and the allocation of public funds. The legislature can question ministers on financial decisions and hold them accountable for effective financial management. Public Accounts Committees – a subset of

parliamentary committees – focus specifically on overseeing government expenditures and auditing government financial reports. These committees examine the effectiveness of government programs and ensure fiscal responsibility.

In a parliamentary system, the government must hold the confidence of the majority in the legislature to remain in office. A vote of no confidence can lead to the government’s resignation or the calling of new elections. The prospect of such votes provides a powerful mechanism for the legislature to express approval or disapproval of the government’s performance.

Legislatures also have the authority to launch investigations and inquiries into specific issues, policies, or government actions. This can involve summoning witnesses, requesting documents, and conducting hearings. Inquiries serve to uncover information, assess the government’s conduct, and recommend changes or reforms. Legislatures facilitate public engagement by providing a forum for representatives to express the concerns and interests of their constituents. Public input, inquiries, and petitions contribute to the oversight process and help ensure that government policies align with public expectations.

The legislature also reviews or confirms certain appointments made by the government, including the Speaker of the House. This process ensures scrutiny of individuals chosen for key positions, such as judges or heads of independent agencies.

Most Canadian legislatures also have independent officers, such as ombudsmen and auditors general, who report directly to the legislature. These officers conduct audits, investigations, and reviews of government operations, finances, and administrative practices, providing impartial assessments to the legislature.

Effective
Legislative
Oversight
Score: 7

In the Canadian version of Westminster government, legislative committees should play a crucial role in scrutinizing government actions, policies, and legislation. While committees were originally intended to operate independently, the government – typically formed by the majority party or coalition in the legislature – can exert influence over committees in various ways (Savoie 1999).

Committee members, particularly those from opposition parties, often strive to scrutinize government actions, policies, and legislation but may not be able to do so.

The majority party or coalition in the legislature typically maintains a dominant position in committee assignments. Members of the majority party chair committees, and their members typically outnumber those from opposition parties. This structural advantage impacts the committee's agenda and decisions. By controlling these leadership positions, the government can shape the direction and priorities of the committee's work. Governments strategically place members on committees who are more likely to support government positions.

And while committees have the authority to set their own agendas, the government may attempt to influence the topics and issues taken up by committees. This can be done through informal channels, discussions with committee leaders, or public statements expressing government priorities. Party whips play a role in ensuring party discipline and use their influence to guide committee members in line with the party's position. Members may be expected to adhere to party policy and vote in a manner consistent with the government's preferences.

Parliamentary committees have the right to receive government documents during their deliberations, and committee members frequently ask ministers and officials who give testimony to provide additional information in writing.

However, these requests may be ignored or delayed by the government. Ministers, for example, are normally expected to appear before parliamentary committees, but they too may decline a committee invitation or send a representative, even when receiving a formal summons approved through a committee motion. A deputy minister may appear instead of a minister for questions linked to departmental operations. Alternatively, a parliamentary secretary may stand in for the minister if the matter at hand is legislative in nature.

The government has the ability to influence committee proceedings by suggesting or providing witnesses for committee hearings or refusing to do so. This impacts the information presented to the committee and shapes the narrative around government policies. Additionally, the scheduling of committee meetings is influenced by the government.

In majority situations, the government controls committee and parliamentary agendas and can block any inquiries it wishes.

In Canada, parliamentary and legislative committees are dominated by the government and provide some scrutiny but rarely criticize the government.

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The government also controls access to the information, resources, and expert advice that committees may require to carry out their work effectively. Limited access to information can hinder a committee's ability to scrutinize government actions independently. While committees have the authority to set their own agendas, the government may attempt to influence the topics and issues they take up. This can be done through informal channels, discussions with committee leaders, or public statements expressing government priorities.

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Committees often produce reports with recommendations or findings. The government has the opportunity to respond to these reports – or not – and the tone and substance of the government's response influence the public, media, and legislative perception and impact of the committee's work.

Members of legislative committees enjoy parliamentary privilege, protecting them from legal consequences for statements made during committee proceedings. However, concerns about party discipline or potential

Legislative
Capacity for
Guiding Policy
Score: 7

repercussions can influence committee members' willingness to openly challenge government positions.

Committee members, particularly those from opposition parties, often strive to scrutinize government actions, policies, and legislation but may not be able to do so.

These dynamics between the government and legislative committees can be complex, but in general, committees have limited abilities to investigate governments.

Governments control parliamentary committees and do not act as an effective check on the executive (Savoie 1999). However, they do play an important role in vetting legislation (Glenn 2018).

Parliamentary committees have the right to receive government documents during their deliberations, and committee members frequently ask ministers and officials giving testimony to provide further information in writing.

However, these requests may be ignored or delayed by the government. Ministers, for example, are normally expected to appear before parliamentary committees, but they too may decline a committee invitation or send a representative in their place.

A representative, even when receiving a formal summons approved through a committee motion, may be substituted. For example, a deputy minister may appear instead of a minister for questions related to departmental operations. Alternatively, a parliamentary secretary may stand in for the minister if the matter at hand is legislative in nature.

Parliamentary committees have the right to summon any expert they choose to provide testimony, and experts are frequent contributors to the work of committees. However, committees cannot compel experts to appear.

Documents often arrive incomplete and are redacted due to confidentiality considerations, further reducing the effectiveness of committees in this role.

Governing with Foresight

I. Coordination

Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms of
the GO/PMO
Score: 9

The Canadian government features key central agencies, specifically the Privy Council Office (PCO), the Finance Department, and the Treasury Board Secretariat. These agencies are intended to coordinate political-administrative relations and ensure program coherence and overall fiscal direction for line departments. The PCO’s role in coordinating government legislation is paramount and part of its broader mandate to support the prime minister and the Cabinet in administering government affairs. While individual government departments and agencies are responsible for developing specific pieces of legislation, the PCO plays a coordinating and facilitative role to ensure a cohesive and effective legislative agenda.

The PCO plays a central role in coordinating government legislation and supporting the overall functioning of the government. As a key institution within the executive branch, it serves the prime minister and the Cabinet. Although its primary responsibilities extend beyond legislative coordination, its role in this area is substantial. The PCO facilitates policy coordination across government departments and agencies, ensuring that proposed legislation aligns with the government’s overall policy objectives and priorities. This coordination involves the development of legislative proposals and their consistency with the government’s agenda. Additionally, the PCO works with government departments to establish legislative agendas, identify key priorities, and allocate resources for the development and advancement of legislation.

The PCO also provides administrative support to the Cabinet, the central decision-making body in the Canadian system of government. Its tasks include assisting in the development of legislative initiatives, preparing Cabinet submissions, ensuring that proposed legislation receives appropriate

consideration, and managing Order-in-Council appointments. This includes coordinating legal reviews of proposed legislation to ensure compliance with legal requirements, constitutional principles, and government policy. It may work closely with the Department of Justice – responsible for legal drafting – to refine and finalize legislative texts.

From this central vantage point, the PCO promotes collaboration and communication among various government departments involved in developing legislation. This coordination is crucial for addressing interdepartmental issues, streamlining processes, and ensuring a cohesive approach to legislative matters.

The PCO also supports the government's engagement with Parliament. This includes preparing speeches from the throne, coordinating the government's legislative agenda in the House of Commons and the Senate, and assisting in responding to parliamentary inquiries.

Critical as well, the Finance Department reviews all proposals coming forward to the Cabinet from line departments, ensuring these are aligned with the fiscal framework and spending priorities. The Treasury Board Secretariat reviews the proposals to ensure program design and resourcing can deliver on intended objectives and that there is no duplication in line ministry initiatives.

The coordination continues after legislation is passed, with the PCO involved in supporting its implementation. This can include coordinating efforts to ensure that government departments and agencies are prepared to operationalize new laws and policies (Wernick 2021). The Treasury Board Secretariat continues to monitor program integrity, and the Finance Department oversees the fiscal framework. These assessments are considered when new initiatives come forward from line departments in upcoming policy cycles.

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms
within the
Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 7

Many interdepartmental committees exist to coordinate ministerial activities. Some work better than others (Canadian Heritage 2021).

Draft bills are vetted primarily by the Privy Council Office and, to a lesser extent, by Finance Canada and the Treasury Board. These central agencies are crucial for a proposal to advance to senior levels within the federal public service. Central-agency staff members typically possess the expertise needed for the regular and independent evaluation of draft bills based on the government's strategic and budgetary priorities.

Line departments and central agencies have different capacities for

coordinating policy proposals since ultimate authority lies with central agencies like the PCO and the Treasury Board. Financing of policy initiatives and program design are vetted by Finance Canada and the Treasury Board Secretariat, respectively.

Many policy proposals are coordinated by line ministries with other line ministries. In the past, cabinet committees facilitated this interdepartmental coordination. However, in the modern era, the power to resolve issues before they reach the cabinet lies with the Privy Council Office and often the Prime Minister's Office.

Department-to-department processes are generally not as effective as central agency coordination. On certain issues, a line department may be unwilling to recognize the role or expertise of other line departments, or it may have fundamental differences in perspectives on the issue. As a result, the department may fail to consult sufficiently or

Coordinate a policy proposal with others, requiring Treasury Board, PCO, or PMO intervention (French 1980).

For policy proposals advancing to the cabinet, line departments must undertake the necessary consultations to ensure the proposal has been circulated and considered by other relevant ministries. Central agencies, however, still perform a critical oversight and steering role in this process.

Deputies meet regularly to discuss issues, policies, and programs under development. Frequently, when new policies are being developed, steering committees are formed involving several departments and led by senior officials. This often precedes the interministerial consultations that the PCO requires. Additionally, there is a rotation of personnel among posts to enhance collaboration and knowledge in other mandate areas. This rotation includes not only senior officials but also mid-range managers and operational personnel.

Complementary
Informal
Coordination
Score: 8

Many informal venues exist. In some cases, these are thought to enhance formal mechanisms; in others, they undermine them. However, very little is known about them, as they escape review through lobbying and other registration systems (Sarpkaya 1988; Hogan et al. 2009).

There are numerous and frequent informal mechanisms for interministerial coordination. Senior officials, managers, and front-line operational personnel regularly engage in bilateral and multilateral meetings and coordination. These interactions are often issue-dependent and typically take place when preparing policy and program changes for Cabinet consideration, but they may also address specific programmatic challenges.

Effectively
Setting and
Monitoring
National
(Minimum)
Standards
Score: 4

Quality of Vertical Coordination

Canada is a highly decentralized federation where the provinces hold significant authority over many key economic, environmental, and social programs. In most cases, the federal government has little to no control over provincial actions in these areas, necessitating a system of “federal-provincial diplomacy” to advance its interests (Simeon 1972).

Moreover, Canada’s federal system has no formal provisions that specifically address federal-provincial coordination. Pressing federal-provincial issues and other matters requiring intergovernmental discussions are usually addressed in the annual First Ministers’ Conference, which includes the prime minister, provincial premiers, and territorial leaders, along with their officials. These meetings are called by the prime minister and have no formal schedule. Some similar informal arrangements exist in areas such as education and forestry. The lack of any requirement for these conferences to be held regularly has been a cause for concern regarding ongoing problems with federal-provincial coordination in many areas (Simeon 1985).

Due to the nature of this system, there are very few national standards for public service delivery in Canada, as provincial governments have extensive freedom to determine their policy objectives, instruments, and designs. When the federal government transfers funds to the provinces, it could have some practical leverage to establish standards but typically does not use this leverage because its exercise has proven counterproductive in the past (Simeon 1980).

National standards often face opposition from provinces – primarily Québec and Alberta in the modern era, but at various points in Canadian history, other provinces as well. This opposition results in a political struggle that the federal government might not win. In healthcare, for example, provincial governments must conform to the five principles of the 1984 Canada Health Act: care must be available to all eligible residents of Canada, comprehensive in coverage, accessible without financial or other barriers, portable within the country and during travel abroad, and publicly administered. However, funds from the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) are rarely withheld by the federal government even if these principles are violated or ignored. Similarly, the Canada Social Transfer (CST), which supports social assistance in provinces among other things, has a very low bar of conditionality.

Yet, within the context of the Canadian constitution, the federal government has exercised leadership in specific areas. For example, during the pandemic, it worked with provinces and territories on protective equipment and vaccines.

Similarly, a Common Statement of Principles on Shared Health Care Priorities was established with provinces and territories in 2017, and agreements on universal day care were signed with provinces and territories in 2021. The government of Canada is also supporting independent agencies developing national standards around long-term care.

Effective
Multilevel
Cooperation
Score: 5

Local and regional governments in Canada are created by provincial governments, meaning the federal government’s powers toward these local entities are limited. The federal government frequently tries to influence these governments through spending programs but has few mechanisms to ensure compliance (Tindal and Tindal 2000). However, some areas allow the federal government to have an indirect influence or interact with local governments, such as funding transportation or industrial infrastructure on a one-off basis.

In Canada, the powers of the federal, provincial, territorial, and local governments are distributed based on the principles of federalism. The federal government’s powers are outlined in the Constitution Act, 1867, focusing primarily on matters of national concern. Local governments derive their powers from provincial or territorial legislation, and their authority is subject to the framework established by the respective province or territory.

Federal programs and policies can have implications for local governments. For example, national housing strategies, environmental regulations, and social welfare programs may affect local communities, and local governments may be involved in their implementation. The federal government often provides financial assistance to local governments through fiscal transfer programs designed to support specific policy objectives, such as infrastructure development, housing, or social services. However, the funds are typically transferred to the provincial or territorial government, which then may or may not allocate them to local governments.

The federal government may contribute to local infrastructure projects through funding programs. While the funds are often administered at the provincial or territorial level, they can indirectly benefit local governments. Examples include investments in public transit, water infrastructure, and community facilities.

In emergencies or disasters, the federal government assists local governments, often deploying troops to help with floods, forest fires, and other natural calamities. This support may include financial aid, resources, and coordination efforts.

A more robust federal presence is necessary for engaging with local governments in areas with a significant Indigenous population or impact. Indigenous affairs remain under federal jurisdiction, but native communities often rely on provinces for highways and other services. Consultation and collaboration with local governments are part of the federal government’s efforts to address Indigenous rights and interests.

Other specific federal departments and agencies may collaborate with local governments on certain projects or initiatives. This collaboration often occurs in areas such as community development, environmental protection, and social programs.

II. Consensus-Building

Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing
Scientific
Knowledge
Effectively
Score: 9

Many opportunities exist for Canadian governments to harness expertise through their own research activities, the university system, and the private sector.

The provision of policy advice is a critical activity in the policymaking process, attracting greater attention from policy scholars as policy advisory systems have become increasingly complex. More and more actors are involved in providing policy-relevant knowledge and analysis to governments. Multiple communities of scholars and experts have developed into intricate policy ecosystems, where public servants have lost any monopoly they might once have had. They are now flanked by private sector actors, NGOs, and academics in the production of knowledge aimed at or expected to benefit decision-makers.

Within these policy advisory systems, various sets of actors have distinct roles, values, and approaches to their policy activities. They conduct different types of analysis and provide diverse forms of advice. This holds true for groups such as consultants, academics, think tanks, policy laboratories, NGOs, interest groups, and many other organizations and individuals who offer counsel on policy problems and solutions.

Determining what these groups do and how successful they are in these advisory activities is a major research agenda in the field. It was often thought in the past that the location of advisers affected both the kinds of advice they

provided and its influence. Especially in Westminster-type parliamentary systems, key “inside” actors in government – such as internal policy analysts, senior civil servants, and others – were thought to exercise disproportionate policy influence over policy decisions and content. Thinking has changed on this subject, however, as evidence has mounted concerning the increasingly key role played by outside actors – from think tanks to interest groups, NGOs, and others – in the provision of policy advice.

The relationships of influence and activity between governments and external actors (public, private, and non-governmental) in the policy process are complex. Older work often argued that academic research at best had an indirect “environmental” or “enlightenment” effect on policymakers. However, more recent work on Canada has argued that previous studies misconstrued the role of outside policy advice because they surveyed “average” levels of input and, in so doing, missed the significant impact of a small elite group of “hyper-experts” within an already small group of “super-users” interacting on a constant basis with government policymakers (Migone et al. 2022).

Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 7

These two should be separated. Business associations are often consulted by Canadian governments. Trade unions are rarely consulted, if ever, outside of policies affecting training and worker education.

Canadian business associations are highly fragmented compared to those in most other industrialized nations, although they are similar to the disaggregated landscape of the United States. Representation is divided among various general business associations covering broad sections of the economy. For example, the Business Council on National Issues and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives represent large corporations; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business represents small businesses; and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce represents a wide range of businesses organized into local chambers. In the manufacturing sector, the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association has merged into Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. At a more specific level, numerous trade associations represent other industrial sectors, individual industries, and industry sub-segments. This extensive overlap makes it difficult to determine exactly which organizations are responsible for what functions, posing a challenge for Canadian governments trying to devise a coherent industrial strategy in consultation with business interests.

Trade associations perform five main functions in policymaking: (i) monitoring political developments relevant to the association's members, including policy proposals, regulations, legislation, appointments, and the emergence of new issues; (ii) direct lobbying of proximate policymakers, involving personal contacts and representations before various government agencies at home and abroad; (iii) indirect lobbying – affecting policy indirectly by attempting to shape public opinion through media relations, advocacy advertising, public relations activities, etc.; (iv) building alliances with other groups to broaden the base of influence; and (v) research and policy analysis to provide a solid basis for advocacy.

In addition, trade associations can play an important role in policy implementation, such as administering product standards and labeling regulations. These political functions are easier to perform when an association's membership is relatively homogenous and drawn from a single industry or business segment. In this context, members' interests are more coherent and united, allowing for clear and forceful advocacy. Broader-based groups, on the other hand, must make policy compromises to accommodate a more diverse membership, which can attenuate their voices. However, broad-based groups have the advantage of representing a wider sector of the economy, making their input harder for policymakers to ignore (Stritch 2007 and 2018).

Labor today tends to intervene in the policy process at a general and political level, rather than a bureaucratic and specific one, and conducts its policy analysis activities accordingly. Between elections, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is closely engaged with the parliamentary process, producing an annual pre-budget brief to the Standing Committee on Finance and frequently appearing before parliamentary committees considering legislation or holding general policy reviews. Some affiliates also participate in these processes. Engagement with ministers and public servants is less frequent but not uncommon. The CLC usually has ongoing contact with the ministers of labor and of human resources development (now human resources and skills development) regarding issues of worker training, workplace issues (including labor issues in the federal jurisdiction), and unemployment insurance. These relations tend to wax and wane depending on personal relationships between ministers and labor leadership.

On occasion, the depth of engagement has been considerable, particularly concerning training issues. In a handful of industries – notably steel and electronic products manufacturing – extensive training and adjustment programs were developed and delivered jointly by unions and employers in the early 1990s with government financial support. Despite the general demise of

training boards, broad planning for labor needs continues today through bipartite national sector councils.

In addition, the autoworkers were heavily engaged with the government and business during the Canada – United States – Mexico free trade negotiations. However, that engagement tends to be sector specific and issue dependent.

Ultimately, labor engagement in social bargaining with employers and governments depends on the willingness of governments to promote such arrangements despite employer indifference or hostility. This willingness has rarely been forthcoming (Jackson and Baldwin 2007).

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 7

CSOs have many opportunities to present briefs to legislative committees and government agencies and are often consulted. However, the impact on government decision-making remains very unclear. In some areas, formal “Councils” exist to facilitate dialogue, but their influence on subsequent legislation is uncertain, as evidenced by the Canadian Council on Social Development, which has been wound down.

At the federal level, other activities include programs like the Social Development Partnerships Program, which funds CSOs and requires CSO-government collaboration in areas concerning families and children. Similarly, the Voluntary Sector Initiative brought together CSOs, government, and stakeholders to strengthen relationships in the non-governmental and charitable sectors.

Other venues, like the National Advisory Council on Poverty, help the government of Canada stay accountable to Canadians for lowering poverty. The Advisory Council advises the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development on poverty reduction, reports annually on the progress made toward meeting the poverty reduction targets, engages Canadians in discussions about poverty, and undertakes activities specified by the minister (Phillips and Brock 2003).

The impact of these initiatives on the content of subsequent legislation and policy, however, is not clear.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 6

Environmental groups often have a contentious relationship with governments, which they view as being influenced by big businesses, especially environmentally degrading resource companies (Wilson and Boardman 1992). While there are opportunities for presenting briefs, these interactions are frequently antagonistic and have historically resulted in matters being routinely settled in court (Elgie 1993).

Environmental interests are advocated by interest groups or “pressure groups,” which sometimes operate through “peak associations” or overarching networks of various kinds. Members of the public organize these groups to act on their behalf to influence the political agenda of governments. Strategies of pressure groups include lobbying elected political representatives, educational campaigns aimed at influencing politicians and the general public, protests, and “direct action,” where members may engage in non-sanctioned activity.

Some environmental groups focus on general objectives, while others form in response to specific issues or conditions. Some are short-term and issue-specific; others have been active for decades.

Fund-raising mechanisms differ among groups, as do leadership and procedural questions, strategies and objectives.

In the resource and environmental policy sector, environmental groups have the capacity to organize and mobilize resources outside the political arena, subsequently bringing pressure on existing political forces to work toward enhanced environmental protection. Environmental organizations have been particularly successful in their educational activities, which are a fundamental component of policy formation. Many groups form linkages with other groups to address issues with large-scale impacts.

A Canadian success story is the Pulp Pollution Campaign in Vancouver, which was mobilized in the late 1980s by the West Coast Environmental Law Foundation and other groups. It included over 50 environmental and other public interest groups, whose public education and lobbying efforts have effectively tightened pulp pollution regulations in British Columbia.

However, smaller, issue-specific groups are also adept at maneuvering in anticipation of and response to industry edicts and government proclamations. The often local or grassroots composition of environmental groups sends a political message to both politicians and project proponents.

Environmental non-government organizations (ENGOS) have several advantages in resource and environmental policymaking that are not enjoyed by more indirect means of representing the public interest.

The use of the media to expand a base of public support is one example. The strategic use of the media by groups such as Greenpeace, for instance, has been especially effective in mobilizing public support for actions such as tanker moratoriums on the West Coast.

Yet environmental organizations, while representing a means by which the public can initiate and influence the policy process, are also limited by several factors. The uncertainty of funding, the temporary and issue-specific nature of many groups, and organizational instability restrict the success of environmental groups in dealing with other established political and economic network actors. Struggles among and within ENGOs have often dissipated activists' morale and energy and diminished funding and public support.

The lack of direct power and formal access to the policy process, while providing groups with ideological enthusiasm and logistical freedom, means their activities must be self-motivated, adversarial, and often response-driven. Rather than playing a proactive role in the policy process, many public interest groups are typically reactive, responding to specific projects or problems. Furthermore, the consequences of their activity are rarely clear. While there is symbolic and educational value to their activity, the ability of groups to penetrate the corridors of political power and to have a voice in the policy formation or decision-making process remains limited (Hessing et al. 2005).

It is important to note that the government of Canada provides program funding to organizations and individuals focused on environmental goals and the protection of the environment. Under the Impact Assessment Act (S.C. 2019, c. 28, s.1, 75 (1)), there is also an obligation to fund participants in an impact assessment – or in a “possible impact assessment” or in relation to “follow-up” activities required under the act.

Openness of Government

Open
Government
Score: 7

The default in Canada is that most documents are not available to the public unless requested through freedom of information legislation – which is notably weak – or released by the government for other reasons. The Access to Information Act was intended to augment these releases and allows citizens to request specific government records. However, it is riddled with exceptions and opt-outs, and departments frequently take years to release heavily redacted documents. Information related to government contracts, including the names of suppliers and the value of contracts, is also expected to be made public under a relatively new federal Accountability Act, but reporting is uneven and not standardized.

The Canadian government has recently increased its efforts through various “Open Government” initiatives to provide more data and information to

citizens. The Open Government Portal (open.canada.ca), for example, serves as a central hub for accessing a wide range of government data, information, and publications. The portal includes datasets, reports, and other resources that empower citizens to scrutinize government actions.

Government websites, including those at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, offer a wealth of information on policies, services, and initiatives. These online platforms are key resources for citizens seeking information to hold the government accountable. Additionally, some government departments and agencies use performance dashboards to visualize and communicate key metrics related to their activities. These dashboards offer accessible and user-friendly ways for citizens to track government performance (Treasury Board of Canada).

The government regularly releases open datasets covering diverse topics, including demographics, health, the environment, and public finances. These datasets are made available to the public in machine-readable formats, facilitating analysis, research, and innovation. Some agencies have also developed interactive tools and applications that allow citizens to explore and analyze data.

This complements the extensive national system of accounting and reporting managed by Statistics Canada, which is built around the decennial census. The government also publishes detailed information about its budgets, expenditures, and financial plans, and government departments and agencies are required to report on their performance and achievements.

The government also engages in public consultations on various policy issues, allowing citizens to provide input and feedback. Information about these consultations, including discussion papers and reports, is often made publicly available to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.

While these initiatives contribute to a more transparent and accountable government, challenges exist, including concerns about data quality, accessibility, and the need for ongoing improvements in transparency practices (Clarke 2019).

III. Sensemaking

Preparedness

Capacity for
Strategic
Foresight and
Anticipatory
Innovation
Score: 7

Little strategic foresight exists in Canada, and many decisions are short-term in nature, guided by electoral cycles and imperatives. Public officials have complained about this for years (Wilner and Roy 2019).

Neither the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) nor the Privy Council Office (PCO) has an official strategic planning unit dedicated to medium- and long-term scenarios. Past efforts, such as the Science Council of Canada and the Economic Council of Canada, were abolished in the early 1990s. In 1997, Policy Horizons Canada was established under the PCO with a mandate to provide analysis and help the Federal public service anticipated emerging policy challenges and opportunities. However, its budget was small, and this initiative was more or less canceled in the mid-2000s.

In practice, however, central agencies – particularly the PCO and the Department of Finance – often have expert capacity dedicated to planning and priorities, both in policy agenda-setting and rollout, accessing these experts through the Canadian university system. Budgets typically consider five-year horizons and various medium-term scenarios in setting the fiscal framework. Planning initiatives are undertaken in the lead-up to Speeches from the Throne, and consultations with external consultants are common.

Canadian government departments and agencies tap into the expertise of academics and other experts through advisory committees and consultancies. The current Trudeau government has also used special advisory groups to provide information and consultations on a number of policy areas such as economic growth, cultural policy, and issues relating to young people. This was evident most recently in response to COVID-19, when expert councils became more prominent in the health field. A COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, for example, was created to advise on vaccine candidates and development, especially since the country lacked domestic supply. Moreover, the existing National Advisory Committee on Immunization has played a critical role throughout the pandemic.

A new chief science adviser, appointed in September 2017, continues to provide advice on issues related to science and government policies that support it.

Effective
Regulatory
Impact
Assessment
Score: 8

Analytical Competence

Studies about potential policy impacts are sometimes reduced to a few lines in cabinet briefs, but this should not obscure that longer documents are often used for major policy rollouts. Impacts are occasionally assessed through stakeholder consultations, though these may also accompany broader policy briefings on the current socioeconomic environment and the latest research on a topic.

Frequently, the federal government uses the results of special studies or commissions to inform briefings and policy decisions. The Advisory Council on Economic Growth, for example, provided recommendations that directly influenced government decision-making on superclusters. Additionally, before new policy initiatives move forward, a quick environmental scan is typically conducted to review existing research and work.

In addition, the federal government has a regulatory impact analysis system in place.

The federal Cabinet Directive on Regulation requires departments and agencies to conduct a regulatory impact analysis (RIA) for any proposed new or amended regulation that could have significant impacts. RIAs are typically comprehensive, and the underlying departmental work can be quite extensive. RIAs are often informed by scientific research that the department, if mandated, is itself conducting, such as in the case of environment and climate change.

The RIA involves identifying potential impacts of regulatory changes, quantifying costs and benefits where possible, assessing distributional impacts on different groups, comparing various options and recommending the best option.

The Treasury Board Secretariat issues detailed guidance to departments on how to properly conduct RIAs as part of the regulatory planning and approval process. Health Canada, Environment Canada, and Finance Canada have specialized units to help conduct quality RIAs across departments on regulations in their sectors.

Regulatory Impact Analyses must be finalized in draft form before republishing proposed regulations in Canada Gazette Part I, allowing for external feedback that can lead to further analysis.

The final RIAs accompany all regulations tabled in Parliament and become publicly available when the regulations are finalized in the Canada Gazette Part II (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat 2018).

Effective Sustainability Checks Score: 7

Canada has maintained a robust system of environmental assessments for many years (Mitchell et al. 1977). Although these assessments are typically project-based, they are generally high-quality and rigorous, including public hearings and other participatory mechanisms. Technically, formal RIAs are used to examine these impacts.

The Cabinet Directive on Regulation requires departments to assess the positive and negative environmental impacts of regulatory proposals as part of the RIA. Guidance from the Treasury Board directs departments to account for environmental impacts on ecosystems, carbon emissions, and pollution levels, including over the long term where feasible.

RIAs often include a section detailing the potential positive or negative impacts a regulatory change may have on the environment or environmental goals. When relevant, RIAs quantify impacts on sustainability, such as estimating changes in greenhouse gas emissions or effects on biodiversity resulting from a new regulation (Hunsberger et al. 2020).

Effective Ex Post Evaluation Score: 7

Formal ex post evaluations are very poor in Canada and, even when they are done, are often not made public (Dobell and Zussman 1981). Following a royal commission on government financial management and accountability – the Lambert Commission – in the 1970s, an older Office of the Comptroller General was given a new mandate to promote ex post policy and program evaluations across the entire federal government (Lahey 2023). However, after several mergers and reorganizations in the 1990s, by the early 2000s the office re-emerged, although largely stripped of its evaluation function (Free and Radcliffe 2009).

Most evaluations are currently conducted by individual departments, which are responsible for assessing their own programs and policies after implementation. These internal evaluations are expected to gauge effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability but are not conducted at arm’s length from commissioning departments. Central agencies, such as the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Privy Council Office, provide guidance and attempt to impose some standards for these departmental evaluation activities.

Treasury Board Secretariat has clear requirements for departments to have in place a Performance Management and Evaluation Committee, which monitors results performance and conducts regular evaluations. Evaluation may involve key programming and any programming that may be deemed to be at risk within the department's risk management framework. Each department must have a Head of Evaluation who can report directly to the deputy. Respective deputies are mandated with these responsibilities.

Parliamentary committees, such as the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, can conduct performance audits and studies on implemented policies. Occasionally, independent external evaluators are contracted to provide impartial evaluations. These evaluators can be professional services firms, academics or non-governmental bodies.

Mechanisms like online consultations, focus groups, and surveys can also provide feedback from program users and the public on an implemented policy.

Sustainable Policymaking

I. Economic Sustainability

Circular Economy

Circular
Economy Policy
Efforts and
Commitment
Score: 4

Canada is a resource-based nation, and circular thinking does not work well in the context of bulk exports of often carbon-intensive and difficult-to-recycle resources such as coal or heavy oil. The federal government would like to see a “North American” effort, believing this can be achieved through the deployment of economic policy instruments that can help “tilt the playing field” in favor of non-virgin materials and incentivize circular business models.

The policy instruments available to promote the circular economy include taxes and fees for waste disposal at both landfills and incineration facilities. These measures incentivize waste prevention and increased waste recovery. Additionally, different pricing for various materials going to landfills can be implemented, often varying prices based on the volume of waste. For example, higher prices may be set for materials that are more costly to manage or have high recycling potential.

Product taxes and fees to discourage the exclusive use of virgin materials and products such as single-use plastics are also possible, as are tax incentives on secondary and recycled materials to encourage more repair, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and recycling activities.

Government “green” procurement efforts are also expected to help drive consumer shifts and create demand for circular products and solutions. In Canada alone, CAD 200 billion is spent annually through public procurement.

The federal government argues that several models consider circular procurement criteria and eco-design requirements. These models can increase the potential for durability, resource efficiency, reuse, recyclability,

refurbishment/remanufacturing, and the potential to buy recycled. The models differ at the product, supplier, and system levels.

At the system level, they include public-private partnerships and cooperation with other organizations on sharing, as well as rent/lease, supplier take-back systems, including reuse, recycling, refurbishment, and remanufacturing. At the supplier level, in addition to take-back systems, they include designing for disassembly, reparability of standard products, external reuse/sale of products, and internal reuse of products.

At the product level, they include clearly identifying product materials, ensuring products can be disassembled after use, using recyclable materials, maximizing resource use efficiency, and pricing that reflects the total cost of ownership.

Several federal grant programs are available for companies, academics, and innovators to develop new technologies that enable circular resource flows. However, the 2022 Federal Budget contained only a few mentions of the circular economy, allocating just \$31.9 million toward plastics innovation and \$70.6 million toward standards, data, and research initiatives related to plastics waste reduction. Thus, only minor initial investments have been made.

Viable Critical Infrastructure

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Resilient
Critical
Infrastructure
Score: 7

Critical infrastructure refers to processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets, and services essential to the health, safety, security, or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government. Critical infrastructure can be stand-alone or interconnected and interdependent within and across provinces, territories, and national borders. Disruptions of critical infrastructure could result in catastrophic loss of life, adverse economic effects, and significant harm to public confidence.

The governments of Canada, in general, are committed to providing infrastructure and ensuring its protection, from highways and sewers to basic internet availability. Significant infrastructure investments through initiatives like the Investing in Canada Plan prioritize upgrading and securing critical electricity, water, transportation, and telecommunications infrastructure with billions in allocated funding.

Through the Investing in Canada Plan, launched in 2016, the government of Canada committed over \$180 billion over 12 years for infrastructure that benefits Canadians – from public transit to trading ports, broadband networks

to energy systems, and community services to natural spaces. By 2020 – 2021, the plan had invested over \$142 billion in more than 92,000 projects, 95% of which were completed or underway.

Many infrastructure programs began as part of the government's response to the 2007 – 2008 Global Financial Crisis. In 2009, the National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure was launched to strengthen the resiliency of critical infrastructure sectors. The government stated it believed the goal of the National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure was to build a safer, more secure, and more resilient Canada by making improvements among the critical infrastructure sectors. These were listed as:

- Energy and utilities
- Finance
- Food
- Transportation
- Government
- Information and communication technology
- Health
- Water
- Safety
- Manufacturing

Key areas of focus include cybersecurity, threat assessment, emergency management, and infrastructure investments. Other actors, like the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security – a part of the Canadian Security Establishment – work on cyber threats to critical systems in sectors like energy, finance, telecommunications, transportation, and government. They share threat intelligence, provide advice and guidance, and have spearheaded new cybersecurity compliance legislation.

Importantly, climate change is creating new challenges for infrastructure policy. As illustrated by the dramatic summer 2023 wildfires, insufficient resources are available to address natural catastrophes related to climate change. To implement more resilient critical infrastructure, further provisions should be made in the context of climate adaptation.

Responsibilities for critical infrastructure in Canada are shared by federal, provincial and territorial governments, local authorities, and critical infrastructure owners and operators – who bear the primary responsibility for protecting their assets and services. The National Strategy supports the principle that critical infrastructure roles and activities should be carried out at all levels of society in Canada.

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving a Decarbonized Energy System by 2050
Score: 5

Decarbonized Energy System

As a major exporter of oil, gas, and coal, Canada has made numerous statements expressing a commitment to decarbonization; however, these claims are often seen as implausible, and the country has never achieved any of its climate goals. In 2016, Canada signed the Paris Climate Agreement, committing to reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. This includes emissions from the energy sector. Nevertheless, Canada is unlikely to meet these goals. During the 2021 federal election, the Liberal Party promised to introduce a plan to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. After being re-elected, however, they have yet to unveil a definitive roadmap or set of policies to reliably reach net-zero by 2050. Most projections from the oil and gas industry indicate that fossil fuel production will continue well past 2050, suggesting the industry does not have a clear mandate from the government to fully decarbonize on that timeline.

The federal government of Canada, for example, has made commitments to reduce emissions and transition toward clean energy, but a definitive commitment to fully decarbonizing the energy system by 2050 remains ambiguous. While the federal government has incentivized the development of clean technologies, these efforts have not been tied to concrete, detailed performance metrics.

Canada has a carbon tax and has announced plans to move toward an emissions trading system, but many problems remain (Canada 2018). While the federal government has implemented policies like carbon pricing and clean fuel standards to begin driving down emissions, the current targets and policies are not enough to achieve full decarbonization by 2050, according to environmental groups. In addition, the government has invested billions in a new West Coast pipeline designed to move carbon-intensive heavy oil from Alberta to Pacific coast ports.

Adaptive Labor Markets

Policies Targeting an Adaptive Labor Market
Score: 7

There are important connections in Canada between labor adjustment policies and immigration, and between the tax system and welfare payments, such as educational tax credits and employment insurance programs, which provide income support for workers transitioning between jobs. Initiatives like increased federal infrastructure and skills training investments aim to address skills shortages and better align labor supply with demand. Provincial nominee

programs help employers recruit global talent to meet localized skills demands more efficiently. This allows individuals more latitude to receive training and education and enables job seekers to pursue better matches with labor market needs.

Economists and others argue many barriers still exist. Overly strict employment regulations around termination make employers reluctant to take risks by hiring workers they may need to lay off. Occupational licensing restrictions reduce labor market flexibility and mobility between provincially regulated occupations. Additionally, limited mid-career education and training funding makes it harder for older workers to retool for new jobs (Ghadi et al. 2023).

Policies
Targeting an
Inclusive Labor
Market
Score: 7

Canada has anti-discrimination laws and employment equity policies at all levels of government, which have helped reduce overt barriers and increase the representation of women, minorities, and other groups in the workplace. Accessibility legislation has improved workplace accommodations for people with disabilities, while immigration policies aim to facilitate the integration of new immigrants into the labor force.

Minorities and women, however, claim persistent hiring biases and wage gaps still exist against marginalized groups despite these anti-discrimination laws.

Lack of affordable childcare in most jurisdictions limits labor force participation, especially among lower-income women. Quebec is a clear exception, and recent new federal investments are likely to help improve access to affordable childcare in other provinces.

Finally, temporary foreign worker programs leave migrant workers vulnerable to abuse and workplace violations. The record number of temporary foreign workers who have moved to Canada since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a major source of public debate.

Policies
Targeting Labor
Market Risks
Score: 6

Overall, Canada has a fairly strong social safety net to mitigate labor market risks relative to many other countries, but it is in need of updating.

Several key supports for workers have existed in Canada for decades, dating back to programs first introduced during the First World War and the Depression of the 1930s. Chief among these is unemployment insurance, which helps replace wages during temporary job loss. Workplace safety standards and workers' compensation rules also help minimize injury and illness risks. Minimum wage laws aim to provide a living wage and address exploitation, while pension plans guard against poverty in retirement.

However, recent changes in the labor force have not been adequately addressed. Unemployment insurance has not adapted to trends of more frequent job transitions, and the self-employed have less access to these protections. Consequently, precarious gig economy jobs typically lack social protections or benefits. The risk of job automation is also not supported by dedicated retraining programs. Additionally, inequities in work benefits continue to exist across income levels.

Sustainable Taxation

Policies
Targeting
Adequate Tax
Revenue
Score: 8

Tax policy in Canada is sophisticated and serves many purposes. The tax code is a mammoth document with numerous additions and changes over the years, which have increased its complexity. This complexity affects measures such as equity and complicates audits and the work of tax courts (Gillespie 1979).

Canada has lowered statutory corporate tax rates in recent decades to encourage investment. Rates are now comparable to OECD averages. Individual tax brackets and earned income tax credits provide higher take-home pay for low- to middle-income levels to reward work. However, high marginal effective tax rates still exist for higher-income ranges, which serve to disincentivize work and advancement. Tax complexity related to income splitting and dividends can also discourage small business investment (PBO).

However, among G7 members, Canada has the “lowest marginal effective tax rate on new business investment” (Canada 2023, 70).

The introduction of online tax filing and automation has improved the system’s efficiency. However, continued underfunding for auditors and investigators enables slippage. An estimated \$25 billion per year is lost due to tax noncompliance. Fewer than half of tax evasion court cases result in convictions. Faulty procedures and overburdened prosecutors undermine enforcement.

Aggressive “tax schemes” often go unpenalized, which incentivizes this behavior (CBC 2015).

Policies
Targeting Tax
Equity
Score: 7

Equity is ostensibly one of the goals of the Canadian tax system. Yet large inequities exist in the treatment of salaries and wages compared with capital investment income and real estate holdings.

Canada’s tax system aims for horizontal equity, generally trying to treat those with similar income levels equally. However, provisions like capital gains exclusions and business deductions can enable higher-income groups to face lower effective tax rates than lower-wage workers.

Groups like seniors, workers with disabilities, and families with children do receive some tax incentives and credits aimed at supporting their higher costs, but pension income, for example, is fully taxed.

Vertical equity is also aimed for in the form of a “progressive” system in which higher earners pay larger shares of taxes. Canada’s progressive income tax schedule imposes higher percentage taxes on sections of income as earnings rise.

However, the concentration of savings and capital gains among higher earners leads to this income being taxed at lower rates, undermining vertical equity. Most deductions also tend to provide greater benefits to higher-income groups, reducing their effective rates.

Policies Aimed at
Minimizing
Compliance
Costs
Score: 7

The tax rules in Canada are very complex, especially for high-income earners and large companies. Although low earners and small businesses benefit from a simplified system, the complexity of Canada’s tax regulations undermines transparency and increases administrative costs for taxpayers.

Frequent changes from year to year make it difficult for average taxpayers to understand the tax implications of different behaviors and plan accordingly. Opaque technical language around deductions and income categories reduces clarity. The general lack of easily accessible summaries of rules for average taxpayers hinders transparency and drives up taxpayer costs.

As a result, large numbers of Canadian taxpayers rely on professional help, paying billions annually in fees. Many millions of hours are spent annually by individuals completing complex return forms. This complexity also drives administrative and litigation costs, as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) audits more than 350,000 files each year. Ultimately, Canada has one of the highest tax dispute rates among OECD countries due to lack of clarity in rules and audit results.

Policies Aimed at
Internalizing
Negative and
Positive
Externalities
Score: 5

There is little connection between the tax system and externalities in Canada, except for carbon taxes. Canada applies some environmental taxes and research subsidies to address minor externalities. For example, some provinces and local governments tax or charge for landfill waste disposal to cover disposal costs. Fuel taxes are expected to cover some road maintenance costs

and help capture local air pollution impacts but underestimate environmental damage per liter. Many forms of water pollution and toxic chemical releases remain untaxed.

In one major deviation from this model, the federal government of Canada has implemented carbon pricing mechanisms and successfully imposed them on the provinces, though current prices are likely below estimated climate damage costs.

Positive externalities are supported through tax credits, which aid some R&D spending by private sector companies. The government of Canada allocates approximately \$3 billion annually in generous tax credit incentives through the Scientific Research and Education Development Program.

Research grant programs from tri-council funding agencies also subsidize academic research and graduate training. The spillover benefits of training skilled workers are also not fully captured.

Sustainable Budgeting

Sustainable
Budgeting
Policies
Score: 7

Canada is a fiscally and financially prudent country. Special purpose funds, such as pensions, are carefully hedged against risk, and governments running large deficits or debt can expect to suffer at the polls (Hale 2002).

There are few legal limits on fiscal imprudence. Deficit tolerance has allowed debt-to-GDP to rise over the past 30 years, and fiscal consolidation has not occurred during periods of economic growth (Hartle 1978).

Budget reporting is reasonably transparent, with some off-book accounts, such as crown corporations, having separate budgets. However, intergenerational impacts are under-disclosed. Federal budgets typically project only 5 to 10 years ahead, lacking long-term sustainability assessments. Future obligations related to demographics and climate change are often underestimated.

There are no explicit linkages in budgeting to Canada’s SDG commitments, for example. Funding tied to development or environmental goals tends to lack multi-year allotments or performance tracking.

Canada has made significant progress in reducing the debt burden imposed by the pandemic. Notably, between Budget 2023 and the Fall Economic Statement (FES) of 2023, the government of Canada’s budgetary balance for 2022 – 2023 improved from -.0 billion (Budget 2023, Table 1: 20) to -.3

billion (FES 2023, Table 1: 10). Additionally, Canada boasts both the lowest deficit and net debt-to-GDP ratio among G7 members (FES 2023: 1, Chart 3). Nevertheless, fiscal prudence will continue to be essential, as the federal deficit is still expected to increase by \$4.7 billion by 2023 – 24.

Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

Research and
Innovation Policy
Score: 4

Very little thought is given to sustainability transitions in Canada. No overarching national strategy with binding targets guides R&D across sectors, and efforts are uneven across industries and regions. Some sector-specific plans exist (e.g., cleantech strategies) but are siloed, as inconsistent prioritization and coordination across departments and industries is the norm (Niosi 1991; 1998).

Multiple agencies and ministries fund innovation with overlapping mandates – for example, the NRC, CFI, NSERC, and SSHRC – supporting both academic and industry research without emphasizing sustainability issues. Base funding for researchers remains below that of global peers, and tax incentives for private R&D are complex and inadequate. This situation follows a series of scandals in the 1990s and 2000s involving excessively loose incentives.

Despite large public investments in innovation policy, outcomes in that area are generally unimpressive. Yet, there are at least two exceptions to this observation. Canada has improved its situation with regard to access to venture capital and investments in higher education research and development (Scharf 2022).

Some monitoring of economic trends occurs through output metrics such as patents and publications, but comparable measures of environmental and economic impact are generally lacking.

While reasonably strong supports exist for startups and venture capital funding, scaling firms still face commercialization barriers from established companies, especially in the nearby U.S. market.

Stable Global Financial System

Global Financial
Policies
Score: 8

Canada is very concerned about the stability of global financial markets, and successive Canadian governments have demonstrated a commitment to effective regulation of the international financial architecture, including membership in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Canada has recently pushed for better coordination of global fiscal stimulus and financial oversight reforms through the G20 and Financial Stability Board since the 2008 GFC and advanced these initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lindquist 2022).

Canada has also joined international tax reform initiatives aimed at curbing corporate tax avoidance and improving the exchange of banking information to prevent money laundering and fraud. However, insufficient enforcement on domestic money laundering and tax evasion continues to enable global financial crimes.

Recently, however, the federal government has permitted the buildup of high household debt levels with overly loose domestic mortgage rules, a current concern of regulators.

In some cases, while Canada advocates for global financial reforms, it struggles to fully implement best practices domestically across market stability, illicit money flows, and climate-related standards (Gnutzmann et al. 2010).

II. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Education System

Policies
Targeting Quality
Education
Score: 10

Education quality in Canada is high. Education is largely a provincial matter (for instance, there is no federal department of education) but is well funded and of high quality by all international metrics.

The country boasts several world-class universities, and the overall quality of its institutions is exceptional.

Canadian teachers are well-paid by global standards. Canadian students score well above the OECD average in reading – fourth place among 77 countries – science, sixth place, and mathematics, 10th place. Research has emphasized how these strong results have come without the existence of a federal ministry of education.

Equity in access to education in Canada is impressive. A very high proportion of the population has some post-secondary education, thanks in part to the

extensive development of community colleges. There are many educational second chances for Canadian youth. The high school completion rate is also high.

Socioeconomic background poses a much lower barrier to post-secondary education in Canada than in most other countries. Post-secondary education is also under the jurisdiction of the provinces.

Allocated resources are reasonable and generally used efficiently. The federal government contributes grant money to post-secondary students with financial need. It also offers grants for education through a Registered Education Savings Plan if parents contribute. Furthermore, there are federal and provincial loans available programs.

Despite the strengths of the Canadian education system, a major challenge is the continuing gap in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
to Education
Score: 9

K–12 schooling in Canada is public, free, and widely accessible. Although Canada’s education system promotes equitable access in certain aspects, barriers remain in delivering quality education to all groups and regions. Some private schools serve religious minorities and the wealthy, but these institutions constitute a small fraction of the overall system. Public funding ensures that tuition remains affordable at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Needs-based financial assistance supports low-income students in attending university or college.

“Standardized learning benchmarks set across most provinces drive quality.”

Inequities in school outcomes based on income level and other socioeconomic factors persist. Variation in education quality across provinces and rural/urban locations is a problem, as are insufficient support services and resources for marginalized student populations. Student debt levels can still deter post-secondary participation (Campbell 2021).

While foundational elements like public schooling and financial aid facilitate access, gaps in equitable funding allocation, teacher quality distribution, and the depth of assistance programs lead skills and attainment levels to diverge sharply by income, region, disability status, and background. Access alone does not guarantee the quality learning critical for social mobility.

Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies Targeting Equal Access to Essential Services and Basic Income Support
Score: 5

Canada created a modern welfare state gradually during the mid-twentieth century, with many major programs emerging between the early 1940s and the late 1960s. These programs provide access to income support and essential services for citizens and permanent residents in need, but gaps in coverage remained even at the height of welfare state expansion (Bella, 1979).

Canada is considered a liberal welfare state regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990) that spends less than many other advanced industrial countries on average on social programming. Moreover, even with universal coverage, vulnerable populations such as refugees, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities face specific challenges (Béland, Marchildon and Prince, 2019).

Still, Canadian governments run large programs like employment insurance, tax credits, pensions, and child benefits, allowing for wide public awareness. Provinces typically offer low social assistance payments for low-income individuals under 65 to support basic necessities, but these payments often do not prevent many recipients from living in poverty (Béland and Daigneault, 2015). Some essential services in Canada are publicly provided, such as water and electricity, and are usually available at low cost (Campbell 1989).

Application processes are available digitally, by phone, and in person. Efforts have been made to simplify forms to facilitate uptake. Bank accounts, phone and internet service, and public transit are typically accessible even to unemployed and homeless populations, although financial literacy remains a barrier to accessing income benefits and banking services.

Transitional shelters and mental health/addiction services, however, are inadequately funded. Rural and remote locations can also lack transit services and access to digital infrastructure. Furthermore, poor housing quality and affordability are issues for many despite basic welfare allotments (Bendaoud 2018).

Policies Targeting Quality of Essential Services and Basic Income Support
Score: 6

Many problems exist with basic income support measures in the Canadian welfare state. These include the fact that basic income levels may not be sufficient to fully cover market-rate housing costs in many Canadian cities. Additional subsidized housing programs are needed to meet this basic need but take years to develop (Evans et al. 2021).

Basic income supports, however, do not fully cover household energy or food costs (Men et al. 2016). Specific energy and food subsidies may exist but

differ depending on provincial policies. Public transport is heavily subsidized in major cities.

Overall, Canada scores well on international rankings for meeting basic needs. However, assessments reveal gaps in areas such as housing, food security, mental healthcare, and Indigenous communities. Water and sanitation needs are generally met through public infrastructure, not directly through income benefits. Nevertheless, higher benefits could improve affordability. Increases in basic income could also enhance internet affordability.

Sustainable Health System

Policies
Targeting Health
System
Resilience
Score: 8

Public healthcare is the most popular social program in Canada and occupies a significant portion of provincial government budgets. Health Canada’s regulatory system aims to ensure the stability of critical supply chains. Public health units coordinate disease surveillance, though fragmentation across provinces persists.

Yet, Canada’s health system is generally considered quite resilient compared to many other countries. Canada’s single-payer universal healthcare system covers necessary medical services for the entire population, providing a baseline of access and helping manage public health crises. Healthcare is largely provincially managed, allowing for regional flexibility and adaptation. The federal Canada Health Act provides broad national standards that are not always strictly enforced. There is well-developed public health technology, surveillance systems, and expertise at all levels of government. Canada has an above-average number of hospital beds and doctors per capita compared to OECD countries. This provides a buffer during surges.

There are problems, however. Universal coverage facilitates resilience, as was amply shown in the case of access to medical services and vaccines during the COVID period. Preventive health investments, however, lag behind curative spending despite potential health system savings.

Data systems and technology infrastructure remain antiquated, slowing real-time monitoring. Healthcare policy data sharing among provinces is also weak. Cost control measures, such as competitive procurement, are often underutilized, allowing price inflation.

Rural and Indigenous communities experienced acute healthcare gaps during COVID and, beyond the pandemic, people in remote areas sometimes struggle to access care because they live so far from hospitals.

Shortages of nurses and family doctors, along with an aging health workforce, are all significant issues. Additionally, waiting lists for elective surgeries can be excessively long.

Many hospitals and facilities are outdated, and the lack of isolation capacity became an issue during COVID-19.

While Canada’s public system provides a good foundation, targeted investments and policy changes could help strengthen its capacity to handle crises and unforeseen shocks. Ongoing reform and innovation are likely needed to maintain and improve resilience (Alin et al. 2022).

Policies
Targeting High-
Quality
Healthcare
Score: 7

There is an ongoing problem involving a trade-off between equity of access and the speed of services in the public system. Since the private system is actively discouraged by the provincial payment system, long wait times for certain procedures can result.

The most glaring problem with the Canadian system is timely access to care. In a 2017 study by the Commonwealth Fund, Canada ranked last for providing timely access to care among 11 high-income countries. As hospitals and healthcare units pivoted to deal with COVID-19 – redirecting resources to emergency and intensive care – these wait times and access issues became even more acute.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information reported that almost 560,000 fewer surgeries were performed between March 2020 and June 2021 compared with 2019. The Canadian Medical Association has championed the need for change, highlighting the immense challenges the Canadian healthcare system is “struggling” with and calling for an infusion of CAD 1.3 billion in funding from the federal government (Vogel 2020).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
To Healthcare
Score: 8

Canada boasts universal access to a comprehensive public health system, albeit with lengthy wait times. Healthcare administration falls under the purview of the provinces and territories, resulting in some variability in health policy implementation. Consequently, the quality and availability of healthcare services can differ across regions.

Long wait times for certain medical procedures have been a concern in Canada. While the system aims to provide equal access to care, some

individuals may face delays in receiving specific treatments, potentially affecting the overall quality of healthcare. This situation allows high-income patients to seek services in other provinces or countries, undermining the principle of equal access.

“Primary care access is crucial for preventing and managing health conditions, and securing an adequate supply of general practitioners has proven challenging for many Canadian governments.”

Factors outside the healthcare system, such as income, education and housing, also can significantly impact health outcomes. Greater efforts to address these disparities are needed to achieve health equity.

This issue is particularly pressing in Indigenous populations, which in Canada often experience severe health disparities compared to non-Indigenous populations. These disparities are partly due to their rural locations, as well as other factors mentioned above. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policies that consider the unique needs and challenges faced by Indigenous communities, and some progress has been made in this area in recent years.

Access to mental health services has been an ongoing concern. Mental health issues require comprehensive and accessible services, but improvements in this area have been slow to materialize.

The lack of universal prescription drug coverage is another area where disparities in access to healthcare can arise. Some individuals may face challenges affording necessary medications, although a new program has been promised as part of a power-sharing arrangement in Parliament between the minority Liberal government and the opposition NDP party (Martin et al. 2018).

Gender Equality

Canada has been actively working toward gender equality through various policies and initiatives. The federal government has committed to advancing gender equality and addressing issues such as pay equity, violence against women, and women’s representation in leadership roles. Responsibility for gender equality initiatives is distributed across various government departments and agencies. Status of Women Canada, a federal department, has historically played a key role. The government emphasizes collaboration and coordination across different departments to ensure a comprehensive approach (Hankivsky 2013).

One key development has been the inclusion of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in government policy assessment. GBA+ is a tool used by the Canadian government to evaluate how different groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives. It aims to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making but is often ignored or given only lip service (Cameron and Tedds 2023).

Canada also has a National Action Plan to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). This plan includes efforts to address gender-based violence and promote women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution.

The government has introduced legislation to address the gender wage gap by ensuring equal pay for work of equal value in federally regulated workplaces. It has made some progress in reducing disparities, often through significant payouts to discriminated workers.

There is also a Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) designed to help women start and grow their businesses. This strategy includes funding, support for women entrepreneurs, and initiatives to increase the number of women-owned businesses.

Canada uses various indicators to measure progress toward gender equality, including data on income, workforce participation, representation in leadership roles, and other relevant metrics. The government regularly updates and refines these indicators to improve measurement accuracy and comprehensiveness.

While Canada has made strides in promoting gender equality, challenges persist. Critics argue that progress is slow and more needs to be done to address systemic barriers and disparities. The effectiveness of policies can vary, and ongoing evaluation and adjustments are often necessary.

Strong Families

Family Policies
Score: 7

Canada has a fairly family-friendly policy and tax system. Maternity leave is offered through the employment insurance (EI) program, allowing eligible individuals to take up to 15 weeks of maternity leave with partial wage replacement. In addition to maternity leave, there is parental leave that can be shared between parents, providing an additional 35 weeks of leave. Canada also has various financial support programs for families, often run through the

tax system. These include the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), which provides tax-free monthly payments to eligible families to help with the cost of raising children. There are also additional supplements for families with children with disabilities.

In addition to maternity and parental leave, the Canadian government provides compassionate care leave under the EI program. This provision allows eligible individuals to take up to 27 weeks of leave to care for a family member who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks.

Childcare services are subpar outside of Quebec, which has a state-run pre-kindergarten daycare system at modest prices. Daycare is primarily the responsibility of provinces and territories, resulting in variations in availability and affordability. The federal government has made a \$27 billion investment over five years to support the expansion of affordable childcare in provinces and territories and has now signed Early Learning and Childhood agreements with all provinces and territories. Some provinces have implemented subsidized childcare programs. However, universal access to high-quality and affordable childcare remains an aspiration at best (Prentice 2006).

Sustainable Pension System

Policies Aimed at
Old-Age Poverty
Prevention
Score: 8

Before the creation of Canada’s modern federal public pension programs in the early 1950s and mid-1960s, elderly poverty was very high. However, since the system’s consolidation in the mid-to-late 1960s, the modern Canadian public pension system has been quite effective in reducing poverty among the elderly. For individuals over 70 years of age in the lowest quintile of the earnings distribution, the proportion of working income “replaced” by retirement income is nearly 100% (Deaton 1989).

The basic components of Canada’s public pension retirement-income system are the Old Age Security (OAS) demogrant, the income-tested Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and the contribution-fed, earnings-based Canada/Quebec Pension Plan (CPP/QPP). Benefits are capped at a percentage of the poverty rate, with the aim of preventing old-age poverty.

Other tiers of the pension system include employer pension plans (both defined-benefit and defined-contribution plans) and government incentive programs for individual saving, such as Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and Tax-Free Savings Accounts (TFSA).

Since 1995, incomes for the elderly at the bottom have been growing, although not as quickly as those for the rest of the population. Using Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cutoff (LICO) measure of poverty, an absolute definition, the poverty rate for people aged 65 and over was 4.7% in 2016, one of the lowest rates ever recorded in the history of the series. In contrast, Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Measure (LIM), a relative poverty definition, shows senior poverty rates have been on an upward trend in recent years, increasing from a low of 3.9% in 1995 to 14.2% in 2016. Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) were temporarily boosted during the pandemic. The 2021 federal budget announced a 10% increase in old-age security benefits once recipients turn 75, which is estimated to reduce poverty in this age group by 14.5%.

Even with the recent benefits and contribution expansion, the CPP/QPP is projected to replace only a third of the average wage up to a ceiling that will reach CAD 82,700 in 2025. Thus, middle- and upper-income workers without an employer pension plan or private savings may not be able to replace a sufficient proportion of their pre-retirement earnings. In the private sector, this issue affects three in four workers (Weaver 2016).

Policies
 Targeting
 Intergenerational
 Equity
 Score: 8

Intergenerational equity can be influenced by the sustainability of pension programs. Canada, like many other developed nations, faces demographic challenges, including an aging population and a relatively low birth rate. This can impact the financial sustainability of pension programs, raising questions about the burden on future generations to fund pensions for the growing elderly population.

Canada has a multi-tiered pension system that includes both public and private components, as well as federal and provincial plans. The two major public pension programs in most of the country are the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Old Age Security (OAS). Quebec opted out of CPP when it was created in the mid-1960s and has since operated its own Quebec Pension Plan, which is very similar to CPP in terms of social benefits (Simeon 1972; Banting 1982).

The CPP and QPP are contributory, earnings-related social insurance programs that provide retirement, disability, and survivor benefits. They are designed to replace a limited portion of individuals’ earnings upon retirement. The CPP and QPP operate on a contributory basis, meaning that individuals contribute a portion of their earnings throughout their working years. The benefits received in retirement are tied to those contributions and matched by employers.

Recently, both CPP and QPP contributions have been increased to grant higher pensions to people who will retire several decades from now. The CPP and

QPP are also fiscally sound for the predictable future, with stable anticipated contribution rates for decades to come (Béland and Weaver, 2019).

Old Age Security (OAS): OAS is a universal, non-contributory pension available to Canadians aged 65 and older. It provides a basic level of income support and, since it is inflation-adjusted, has taken on an increasingly significant role in the system.

Governments commonly implement reforms or adjustments to pension programs to address changing demographics and economic conditions.

Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Integration Policy
Score: 7

Migration is currently very important to Canada, which has doubled its intake of immigrants from just a few years ago (Triadafilopoulos 2013). Canada also has an official policy of multiculturalism that celebrates and supports the cultural diversity of its population. This policy aims to promote inclusivity and encourages the preservation of cultural heritage while fostering a shared Canadian identity, including among new immigrants.

Several methods exist for entry to the country. The Express Entry system is designed to attract skilled immigrants to immediately contribute to the country's economic development. It prioritizes factors such as education, work experience, and language proficiency, facilitating the integration of skilled migrants into the labor market. Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) allow provinces and territories to nominate individuals with specific skills and experiences for permanent residence, enabling regions to address their specific labor market needs. Canada also has programs for refugees and has implemented policies to support their integration.

Canadian governments invest heavily in settlement services to help newcomers adapt to life in Canada, including language training, employment support, and orientation programs to ease the transition into Canadian society. New policies have also been implemented at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels to address the ongoing affordability crisis in housing, which is especially challenging in a country with a very limited social housing sector.

Many services are available, but they are being stretched by the influx of individuals and families under the new policy. Problems include a lack of credential recognition, whereby some newcomers, especially professionals, face challenges in having their foreign credentials recognized in the Canadian labor market. Efforts have been made to address this issue, but barriers still

exist in many professions. Additionally, limited job opportunities in specific regions outside the hubs of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver cause settlement problems. Many regions face challenges in providing sufficient job opportunities for local populations, potentially affecting migrants' integration in those areas. Furthermore, other areas of the country, particularly Vancouver and Toronto, receive the largest share of immigrants. This aggravates situations where housing and other services are already expensive and difficult to access. High housing costs are a challenge for newcomers and raise concerns among local populations about the influx of non-residents.

Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of
Development
Cooperation by
Partner Country
Score: 8

Development assistance provided by the Canadian government is typically targeted toward capacity-building. Since World War II, Canada has committed a portion of its budget to Official Development Assistance, which includes funding for programs and projects aimed at poverty reduction, healthcare, education, and sustainable development in partner countries. More recently, Canada has actively participated in global health initiatives, including efforts to combat infectious diseases, improve maternal and child health, and strengthen healthcare systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, Canada currently spends less than 0.4% of its Gross National Income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (ODA), which is significantly lower than the United Nations' target of 0.7%.

Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the government department responsible for international relations and development, plays a key role in implementing Canada's international assistance policies and programs. GAC frequently collaborates with international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other countries to address global challenges. These collaborations often focus on poverty reduction, health, education, and social protection.

New developments add concerns such as gender equity to this mix. Canada now places a strong emphasis on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls as a central component of its international assistance efforts. In 2017, Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy (IAP), which aims to reduce poverty and promote gender equality in developing countries. The policy emphasizes the importance of empowering women and girls, addressing climate change, and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development are integral parts of Canada's commitment to international assistance. Canada

provides substantial humanitarian aid in response to crises and disasters, contributing to social protection and poverty alleviation in affected regions.

III. Environmental Sustainability

Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving Climate Neutrality by 2050
Score: 6

There is considerable rhetoric from Canadian governments about climate neutrality. Climate change has become a priority for the Liberal government, especially with widespread fires and flooding in Canada during 2021 – 23. Coastal regions often bear the brunt of these impacts. Moreover, Canada faces increasing risks from climate change, affecting Indigenous and Northern communities, human health, physical infrastructure, ecosystems, and fisheries.

Since taking office in 2015, the Liberal government’s environmental record has been mixed. On climate change, the government ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 and has since established a new national target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030. Additionally, it has set a legally binding target of net-zero emissions by 2050. The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change is a collaborative effort to ensure the target is met through carbon pricing, investments in energy efficiency, and renewable energy strategies.

Successive federal budgets have also provided funding for clean technologies, with clean tech becoming an important new hub for investment and innovation. More recently, Canada signed on to the Glasgow Climate Pact, reaffirming the country’s commitment to the Paris Agreement, which involves reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, more recently, to begin phasing out coal.

However, these industries and renewable energy policies are largely the responsibility of the provinces. While several provinces have made efforts to address climate change, others have not, and Alberta and Saskatchewan have actively opposed these efforts.

As a result, a recent report by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development found that emissions have continued to increase and, since 1990, have grown by 20%.

Moreover, following investor uncertainty, the government nationalized the highly controversial Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion at a cost of CAD 4.5 billion, bringing Alberta heavy oil to West Coast ports for export. This project was tied to the passage of bills C-48 – a moratorium on large oil tankers accessing ports on British Columbia’s north coast – and C-55, which establishes a network of protected marine areas and prohibits certain activities in these areas were largely seen as insincere, however, and the pipeline decision raised serious questions about the Trudeau government’s commitment to fighting climate change and protecting Indigenous rights.

Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Minimizing
Environmental
Health Risks
Score: 10

Canada has an extensive environmental protection and management regime. The overall environmental policies and strategies are shaped by various laws, regulations, and frameworks passed at the federal level, as well as some at the provincial level, since 1960. The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change is one such initiative. It outlines the country’s approach to addressing environmental challenges, including pollution. The framework emphasizes reducing greenhouse gas emissions, developing clean technology, and adopting sustainable practices.

Another key piece of federal legislation is the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). This act addresses pollution and its effects on human health and the environment. It provides the government with tools to assess and manage risks associated with chemical substances and other pollutants.

Canada has policies and regulations specifically targeting terrestrial and water quality, including the Canadian Environmental Quality Guidelines. Provincial and territorial governments also play a significant role in managing water quality within their jurisdictions. The Canadian Ambient Air Quality Standards set by the federal government, along with provincial regulations, address air quality issues. Provincial and territorial governments have their own air quality management strategies and regulations. Coordination is enhanced through a Canadian council of environmental ministers.

In addition to national and provincial/territorial laws and guidelines, there are also many ecosystem-specific action plans. These include the Great Lakes Action Plan, where Canada has initiatives to address environmental issues in the Great Lakes, focusing on water quality, habitat restoration, and pollution prevention. The St. Lawrence Action Plan aims to protect and restore the St. Lawrence River ecosystem and includes measures to address pollution,

biodiversity, and sustainable development. In the past, Arctic Environmental Strategies were implemented to address the unique environmental challenges in the Arctic, such as contaminants, climate change, and ecosystem conservation in the region.

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Preserving
Ecosystems and
Protecting
Biodiversity
Score: 10

Canada has an extensive park and wilderness system at both the federal and provincial levels, as well as many local and regional land and marine parks, some of which are very large or protect key habitats and fisheries.

In the wake of the UN Brundtland Commission in the late 1980s, the Chretien government made efforts in the early 1990s to establish and expand protected areas, national parks, and marine conservation areas to safeguard key ecosystems and habitats, aiming to meet UN goals in this area. During this time, Canada also enacted legislation such as the Species at Risk Act (SARA) to protect and recover species at risk. This includes the identification of critical habitats and the development of recovery plans (Shepherd et al. 2022).

Canada has developed biodiversity strategies and action plans, such as the 2030 National Biodiversity Strategy and the Canadian Biodiversity Action Plan (2022), to guide conservation efforts and address threats to biodiversity. Canada is also a party to many international agreements and conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and has made commitments to global biodiversity targets associated with these agreements.

Investments in scientific research and monitoring help assess the state of biodiversity, identify threats and inform evidence-based conservation policies.

The government supports stewardship programs and partnerships that engage communities, private landowners, and organizations in biodiversity conservation efforts. Many of these plans involve working with provincial and local governments; they also recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge and stewardship in many areas of the country, including the Arctic. The Canadian government collaborates with Indigenous and territorial governments to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into conservation initiatives.

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Global
Environmental
Policy
Score: 5

Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

The Canadian government supports sustainable development, but Canada is also a major exporter of dirty oil (tar sands) and forestry and other natural resources. The production, sale, and distribution of these unsustainable products are facilitated by numerous federal and provincial policies, subsidies, and programs.

Nevertheless, the Canadian government, both in principle and occasionally in practice, supports the design and advancement of various global environmental protection regimes. This includes participation in international treaties to ban ozone-depleting chemicals, protect wetlands and wildlife, and numerous bilateral treaties with the United States aims to protect migratory birds and reduce sulfur dioxide and other harmful emissions.

The Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), signed in November 2018 by Canada, the United States, and Mexico at the instigation of the Trump administration, replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). CUSMA includes a chapter on environmental cooperation with the stated aim to “promote mutually supportive trade and environmental policies and practices.” Although experts criticized CUSMA for being weak on environmental protection – particularly because it does not directly address climate change – the new agreement no longer includes NAFTA’s investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system. The ISDS system was often used to challenge Canadian environmental decision-making, which many commentators believed had a chilling effect on environmental regulation in Canada.

More recently, at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), Canada participated with Germany and Britain in releasing the Climate Finance Delivery Plan, which aims to deliver \$100 billion in finance. Canada has also committed to doubling its contribution to international climate finance to \$5.3 billion over the next five years to assist developing countries in combating climate change. However, significant results and expenditures have not yet been achieved.

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Socially Rooted Party System

HOUSE OF COMMONS PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

Edited by Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit

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