



# Canada

Assessment: Very Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Ottawa

Type of Government: Confederation with Parliamentary Democracy

Head of Government: Prime Minister Jean Chretien (since 4 November 1993)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Bill Graham

Population: 31,592,805

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 3

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada has a **very good** record of support for democracy abroad, as evidenced by its willingness to provide electoral assistance to fledging democracies, to support grassroots democracy programs through bilateral aid and to criticize regimes engaged in the most egregious abuses of democracy. Canada has preferred to work through multilateral fora in these efforts, in the belief that a middle-ranking power acting unilaterally would have limited influence. Within these organizations, Canada has played a leadership role in encouraging electoral reform and democratic development.

In general, Canada has sought to avoid highly confrontational approaches when responding to concerns about democracy in other countries, seeking to balance its genuine concern for democracy abroad against other national interests. On occasion, Canada has been willing to support sanctions and diplomatic isolation when other vital national interests were not at stake. This preference for the “carrot” rather than “stick” approach has been consistent with Canada’s foreign policy goals. Having accumulated a fair amount of good will abroad due to its strong peacekeeping tradition, its liberal immigration policies and reputation for fairness, Canada seeks to preserve its influence as a trusted partner in democratic development.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Canada identifies its primary foreign policy priorities as: promoting its economic interests through an open and stable global economic system; combating transnational security threats such as crime, disease, and environmental degradation; and projecting its values and culture throughout the world, including respect for democracy. As one of the world’s most stable democracies, Canada has made the promotion of democracy a key priority in its foreign policy agenda during the last decade.<sup>1</sup> From the government’s perspective, democratization is firmly linked to the complementary aims of peace-building, human rights promotion and security.

Although Canadian foreign policy increasingly has focused attention on hemispheric issues during the past decade – it entered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and became full members of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1990 – Canada has pursued an activist “internationalist” approach to democratization, particularly with members of international organizations to which Canada belongs. This approach has been consistent with Canada’s longstanding efforts to work collaboratively with a range of actors, as a way to counterbalance its close relationship with the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian government, through both its Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), has generally taken a flexible and holistic approach to democratization, recognizing that free and fair elections are but one component of effective governance. As articulated in official policy, effective governance includes a legal and institutional framework, an independent judiciary, honest and open government, respect for human rights and the subordination of military force to civilian rule.<sup>3</sup> Essential foreign policy tools have included election monitoring, technical assistance to support institutional development (e.g. media and judicial training), application of sanctions on certain entrenched dictatorships and aid for local civil society organizations.



In applying these tools, Canada's preferred approach has been multilateral, allowing it to gain greater leverage with both fellow aid-donors and recipient countries. Key multilateral institutions through which

Canada has sought to achieve its policy aims include the Commonwealth, la Francophonie, the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Working through these fora, Canada has exercised considerable leadership both in highlighting abuses of democracy and working for their eradication in countries far beyond its geographical reach.

### **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

Canada has generally condemned the overthrow of democratically-elected governments. In some cases it has cut off assistance or applied some other sanction to the new regimes particularly when other Canadian interests were not impaired by such actions.

In Africa, where Canada has less strategic interests, it has principally utilized two mechanisms in response to military coups or other overthrows of democratically elected governments: the suspension of bilateral aid programs and strong condemnation through diplomatic channels. Immediately following the 1996 military coup in Niger, for example, Canada announced a moratorium on new official Canadian aid (approximately Cdn\$6 million per year) to the government and suspended all bilateral cooperation. A similar approach was applied to Côte d'Ivoire (1999) two days after the military coup, when Canada exerted leadership within la Francophonie to demand a return to constitutional order. In both instances, the Canadian government made a conscious effort to distinguish between humanitarian support, which continued largely through non-governmental organizations, and official government assistance, which was suspended until civilian rule was restored.

Canada's strong response to unconstitutional overthrows of governments in Latin America and Asia generally has been through multilateral diplomatic channels. In response to undemocratic developments in Ecuador in late 1999 and the Paraguayan constitutional crisis in 1996, Canada worked through the Permanent Council of the OAS to advocate restoration of democracy. It also pledged support to the democratically-elected leaders of both countries. During the 1991-94 military regime in Haiti, Canada suspended bilateral aid and

subsequently worked through the United Nations to support judicial reform, police training and the development of civil society. In the case of anti-democratic developments in Pakistan (1999) and Fiji (2000), Canada worked through the Commonwealth for collective condemnation of these states and their suspension from that organization. In the case of Pakistan, Canada also suspended all official visits, declined to recognize the Musharraf regime, publicly considered cutting development aid, and suggested that international financial assistance be suspended. While it pushed the Commonwealth to impose stiffer penalties, it did not call for the reinstatement of deposed Prime Minister Sharif.

After the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, however, Canada lifted all sanctions on Pakistan, except the ban on military exports that had been imposed as a result of Pakistan's nuclear weapons tests of May 1998. It also proposed to convert approximately \$447 million in outstanding loans, that Pakistan owed to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), into development aid to be used in the social sector.<sup>4</sup> Canada justified these actions as a result of the "courageous stand that Pakistan is taking against terrorism" and claimed that it "welcomed President Musharraf's 14 August 2001 announcement of a 'Road Map for Democracy' in which he outlined a phased restoration of democracy in Pakistan culminating in national and provincial elections" in October 2002, and that it would be closely monitoring it.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, when Musharraf extended his stay in power via a much critical referendum on 1 May 2002, and subsequently postponed presidential elections, Canada failed to issue an official statement.

In the case of the coup in Fiji, Canada helped advocate Fiji's suspension from the councils of the Commonwealth pending the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. Canada's response to the short-lived coup in Venezuela in April 2002 was more muted, however, offering no official condemnation of the coup plotters except to support the OAS statements and actions. This reflected uncertainty about the success of the coup and the overall effectiveness of President Chavez's leadership.



## RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Canada has consistently condemned fraudulent elections, largely through multilateral channels. As a component of this approach, it has been especially supportive of independent election monitoring missions when manipulation of electoral processes is considered a strong possibility.

During the Zimbabwe elections in 2002, Canada supported Commonwealth electoral observers and provided Canadian expertise. Following evidence of electoral fraud and intimidation, it withdrew all funding to the Zimbabwean government and approved measures to prevent members of the Mugabe regime from visiting Canada.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the contested Peruvian election of 2000, then Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy helped broker an OAS compromise to send a high-level mission to “strengthen democratic institutions,” but with no mandate to investigate or contest the outcome of the elections themselves, thereby ratifying Fujimori’s victory. The OAS mission resulted in a 29-point agenda for democratic reform, which was subsequently accepted as a basis for discussion by the Fujimori government, the democratic opposition and civil society.<sup>7</sup> Following local Yugoslav elections in December 1996, Canada sent an elections specialist on the OSCE mission and subsequently endorsed its report calling on President Milosevic to respect the results of the election. Under the auspices of NATO and the G-8, Canada strongly advocated increased sanctions and further action against Milosevic as electoral abuses and ethnic cleansing became evident from 1998 onwards.

Canada has made efforts to forestall the manipulation of electoral processes through professional and technical support for elections and projects related to institutional capacity-building. Elections Canada, the government agency responsible for administering electoral processes domestically, has organized more than 300 international democratic development missions in approximately 80 countries since 1990.<sup>8</sup> Missions have taken place in South Africa (1993), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996), the Dominican Republic (1996), the regional election in Chiapas, Mexico (1998) and the East Timor referendum (1999).

## PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The promotion of international democracy has been an important tenet of Canadian foreign policy over the past decade. Ottawa’s activities fall

into three general categories: professional and technical assistance missions, aid to international NGOs involved in democracy promotion, and support for international protocols and institutions addressing human rights and democratic values.

Canada has been at the forefront of developed democracies in providing technical support for transitional states.<sup>9</sup> Elections Canada’s international activities are undertaken in response to requests from the Canadian Foreign Ministry and foreign aid agency, various international organizations and individual countries. International projects include advising on constitutional and election law provisions, conducting pre-election evaluations, providing professional support (such as preparing elections materials or determining district boundaries), and briefing delegations visiting Canada.<sup>10</sup> In 1996, Elections Canada and Mexico’s elections agency (Instituto Federal Electoral) signed a five-year agreement for information exchange. Similarly, Canada entered into an agreement in 1995 with the Russian Federation to strengthen its institutional capacity to administer elections. Numerous countries have been open to Canadian electoral assistance, particularly given its lack of identification as a former colonial power or as a superpower. Other facilitating factors include its bilingual character and its common and civil law traditions.

Aware of the influence of civil society in promoting democratic change, Canada has supported numerous international NGOs engaged in these efforts. It has consciously made an effort to support local initiatives and ideas on how to strengthen democracy, while ensuring that outside expertise is available to support change.<sup>11</sup> In 1988, the Canadian government established the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, which works to strengthen democratic institutions and to enhance access of civil society organizations to public policy debate and decision-making. In 1998, Canada formally joined, and provided financing to, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), which brings together both governments and NGOs to improve and consolidate electoral processes. Canada has also provided funding for domestic NGOs to support their democratization efforts abroad. In 1999, for example, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development received significant government funding to assist a coalition of non-governmental groups working together to ensure grassroots participation in the elections in Nigeria through e.g.,



education and mobilization of voters and monitoring the election process.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Canada has been a vigorous advocate of international protocols and mechanisms to support democracy building. At the OAS, Canada played the lead role in the establishment of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, which provides guidance and assistance to member states in strengthening their democratic institutions and processes.<sup>13</sup> Through the OAS, Canada also championed the establishment of a Special Fund for Strengthening Democracy, designed to assist member states faced with threats to the democratic process. In 1995, the Commonwealth heads of government accepted a Canadian initiative to put their democratic principles into action by creating the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). CMAG's mandate – created under the Millbrook Action Program – is to recommend collective Commonwealth responses to serious or persistent violations of democracy aimed at the speedy restoration of democracy and constitutional rule. Since its creation, CMAG has held numerous meetings at the ministerial level and has sent senior-level missions to the Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Canada also hosted the 1999 meeting of la Francophonie, an association of 51 French-speaking countries, including 30 African nations. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Moncton Plan of Action, which enshrined principles of democracy to which all member states pledged to adhere.

### **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**

Canada has generally pursued a nuanced policy of limited but constructive engagement with undemocratic regimes, particularly where economic and trade interests are a significant factor. In the case of China, Canada has pursued cordial diplomatic relations, including high-level trade missions and bilateral assistance aimed at the reform of legal and judicial structures (e.g. through the training of judges and the development of a legal aid system). Canada has been criticized by some democratic activists for not being sufficiently disapproving of China's lack of democratic practices. Canada has also tempered its traditional concern for the security threat posed by North Korea by helping the Kim Chong-il regime integrate into the international community, with official diplomatic recognition in 2000 preceded by a number of bilateral missions beginning in 1998. Canada's relations with Burma's military regime have been

considerably less cordial, with repeated calls for the release of members of the National League of Democracy and targeted economic sanctions against the government. In all three cases, Canada has worked both bilaterally and through the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to support constructive dialogue.

Canada's relations with Cuba illustrate the tensions inherent in its constructive engagement approach. Canada and Cuba have maintained an uninterrupted bilateral relationship since 1945, despite substantial cooling in the 1980s as a result of Cuba's military intervention in Africa. Since the mid-1990s, Canada has reopened foreign aid and worked with the Cuban government and society to encourage institutional change, bilateral trade, tourism and political opening.<sup>14</sup> The 1997 Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration identified 14 areas of cooperation, allowing the two countries to broach topics of considerable sensitivity, such as political and human rights.<sup>15</sup> In 1998, Prime Minister Chretien visited Cuba, the first Canadian leader to do so since 1976. Since then, relations have deteriorated somewhat, largely as a result of Castro's lack of commitment to political reform. In March of 1999, shortly after Chretien's celebrated visit to the island, four prominent dissidents were sentenced to prison, forcing Chretien to declare that Canada would "review the range" of bilateral relations with Cuba. Canada then postponed indefinitely a series of ministerial visits to the island. It nevertheless unsuccessfully sought to invite Cuba to the third Summit of the Americas in Quebec, a gathering that had excluded Cuba as a non-democratic regime. Castro, however, rejected Canada's suggestion that he endorse the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights before the Summit, and relations between the two deteriorated further. Canada's approach to Cuba has not been considered successful in fostering political reform in Castro's regime, although it has permitted the Canadian government to accentuate its independence from US policy towards Cuba, thereby serving domestic political ends.

In responding to other entrenched dictatorships – including Iraq, Libya and the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia – Canada has typically followed the lead of the US and the United Nations Security Council in imposing sanctions to influence regime change, largely motivated by perceived threats to international security, and not by concerns about democracy. Direct diplomatic engagement has been limited largely due to Canada's lack of either historic or strategic ties with these



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countries and their disengagement from most international fora. In the case of Yugoslavia, Canada announced the provision of \$10 million in October 2000 to support the country's transition towards democracy. A proportion of this funding supports the independent media, pro-democratic civil society groups and opposition-held municipalities working

to bring democratic change to Yugoslavia. In the case of the Middle East, Canada has generally subordinated concerns over democratic practices in a number of Arab states – such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt – to the interests of trade promotion and regional stability.



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<sup>1</sup> Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Canada in the World: Canadian Foreign Policy Review. Ottawa: 1995. Additionally, supporting human rights, democracy and good governance is one of the Canadian government's six program priorities for its official development assistance. Also available at: [www.dfaid-maeci.gc.ca/foreign\\_policy/cnd-world/chap5-en.asp](http://www.dfaid-maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/cnd-world/chap5-en.asp).

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, Andrew. Canadian Foreign Policy: Old Habits and New Directions. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1997, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade., "Canada Announces Measures to Assist Pakistan" 1 October 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Canada had first condemned the Mugabe regime in April 2000, expressing dismay at the increasing numbers of land invasions and urging the government to ensure free and fair elections. DFAIT News Release, "Canada Concerned about escalating violence in Zimbabwe" (April 18, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> For the 2001 elections, CIDA provided Cdn\$865,000 to support technical electoral expertise, electoral observation efforts, and civil society projects related to democratization, electoral awareness and education.

<sup>8</sup> Kingsley, Jean-Pierre. "Support for Democratic Development: Sharing Canada's Expertise." International Journal, 53.2 (Spring 1998): 221-32.

<sup>9</sup> Despite Canada's global and multi-faceted support for democratic development, no consolidated government statistics are available to quantify its overall support for this goal. Although the Canadian International Development Agency provides a comprehensive yearly compendium of official development assistance, support for democracy-building falls under a number of categories that render aggregation of such projects difficult. Relevant categories include disbursements to international organizations (e.g. Commonwealth, la Francophonie), bilateral "peace-building" envelopes and grants to NGOs.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Elections Canada is also a founding member of the Partnership for Electoral and Democratic Development (PEDD). PEDD was created in April 1999 and involves the following organizations: the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UN-EAD), the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE), and Elections Canada.

<sup>11</sup> The Honourable David Kilgour, Secretary of State (Latin American and Africa), Speech at the Towards a Community of Democracy Conference (June 26, 2000). See also Canadian International Development Agency, "Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance" (1996). Available at [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca).

<sup>12</sup> Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade., "Axworthy Announces Canada's Contribution in Support of Nigerian Elections." 27 Jan, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Mace, Gordon and Martin Roy. "Canadá y la OEA: Promoción de la Democracia," Sistema Interamericano y Democracia. Organización de Estados Americanos, 2000, pp. 259-89.

<sup>14</sup> Fletcher, Pascal. "Cuba, Canada Aim to Cement Growing Investment Ties." 28 April 1998. Reuters 3 October 2002 <<http://64.21.33.164/CNews/y98/apr98/28e4.htm>>.

<sup>15</sup> The 1997 Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration includes judicial cooperation, exchanges between legislators and support of non-governmental organizations. For more, see: [www.dfaid-maeci.gc.ca/english/foreignp/jd\\_w\\_cba.htm](http://www.dfaid-maeci.gc.ca/english/foreignp/jd_w_cba.htm).