



2026 EDITION

FOREIGN POLICY BY CANADIANS

Participant Discussion Guide

A National Deliberative Poll

Table of Contents

Welcome

Introduction

Prosperity: How should Canada engage in the world to improve our economic prosperity?

Canada's Trade Relationship with the US	8
Canada's Trade Relationships with other Countries	9
"Buy Canadian"	11
Oil and Gas Exports	12
Immigration	13

Security: What must Canada do to increase our security?

Defence Spending	18
Pandemic Resilience	19
Buy Canadian Military Equipment	21
A Canadian Spy Agency	22
Arctic Sovereignty	23
Cyber Security and Emergency Preparedness	24

Global Cooperation: how should Canada cooperate with other countries and with international organizations?

International Institutions	28
Human Rights and International Law	29
Trade with Democratic Countries, and the Responsibilities of Canadian Companies Abroad	31
Geographic Focus	33
Climate Change	34

Development: How should Canada be thinking about its relationship with poorer countries?

Commitment to Development	38
Development and Canadian Economic Interests	40
Women and Girls	41
Global Health	42

Welcome

Dear Participants,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this remarkable experiment in Canadian democracy: Foreign Policy By Canadians. We are thrilled that you have joined us to be one of roughly 400 Canadians scientifically selected to represent the entire country on 30 May 2026. Over these two days, you will join your fellow Canadians in discussing issues on foreign policy and hear from experts in economic prosperity, security, global cooperation, and international development who will answer your questions.

We call this type of gathering a “deliberative poll.” You have already answered survey questions related to foreign policy issues. During the weekend, you will discuss your views with other Canadians who also have been randomly selected to represent the whole country.

To help prepare you to discuss the issues, we have produced this discussion guide with the help of subject-matter experts. The guide contains a background analysis and competing arguments “for” and “against” different policy proposals that suggest actions Canada could take on the international stage. Each section brings together different points of view, benefiting from the input of diverse experts with a wide range of perspectives and political views.

We recognize this is a thorough document and we have tried to make it as useful as possible. We hope you will read the competing arguments before your group discussions begin and we encourage you to use the guide during your deliberations as well. To maximize your participation, we recommend that you read the document prior to the event, and we will have briefing videos during the event as well.

Thank you for giving your time to participate in this unique dialogue. We thank you deeply for the commitment you are making to our democracy.

Robert Greenhill

Executive Chair
Global Canada

Louise Holt

Principal Consultant
Foreign Policy by Canadians

Introduction

More than ever before, your life as a Canadian is linked to how Canada protects and promotes its interests in the world. Your safety, your finances and your well-being are connected to and shaped by the world around us, on Canada's relationships with other nations, and on international peace and stability.

When we last held this Deliberative Democracy exercise in 2021, the central theme was the COVID pandemic, a global health event that changed the lives of people in Canada and around the world. It ground the economy to a halt. Schools closed, businesses went under, goods on the shelf were scarce, and worst of all, tens of thousands of families lost loved ones.

This year, Canada faces possibly an even more serious issue: our very place in an increasingly dangerous and fractured world. Our central relationship with our closest neighbour has shifted dramatically, and the United States' new "America First" policy has overturned many long-held assumptions for Canada.

This shift has also changed how other countries behave towards each other. We used to follow rules governing how countries treated each other. Many of those rules are now under strain, and with them, so are the long-established alliances Canada relied on for our economic growth, health and security. For decades, Canada shared many trade, investment, security, and other priorities with the United States, which also encouraged and benefited from this strong connection. That is no longer the case, and now Canada faces serious risks and trade-offs.

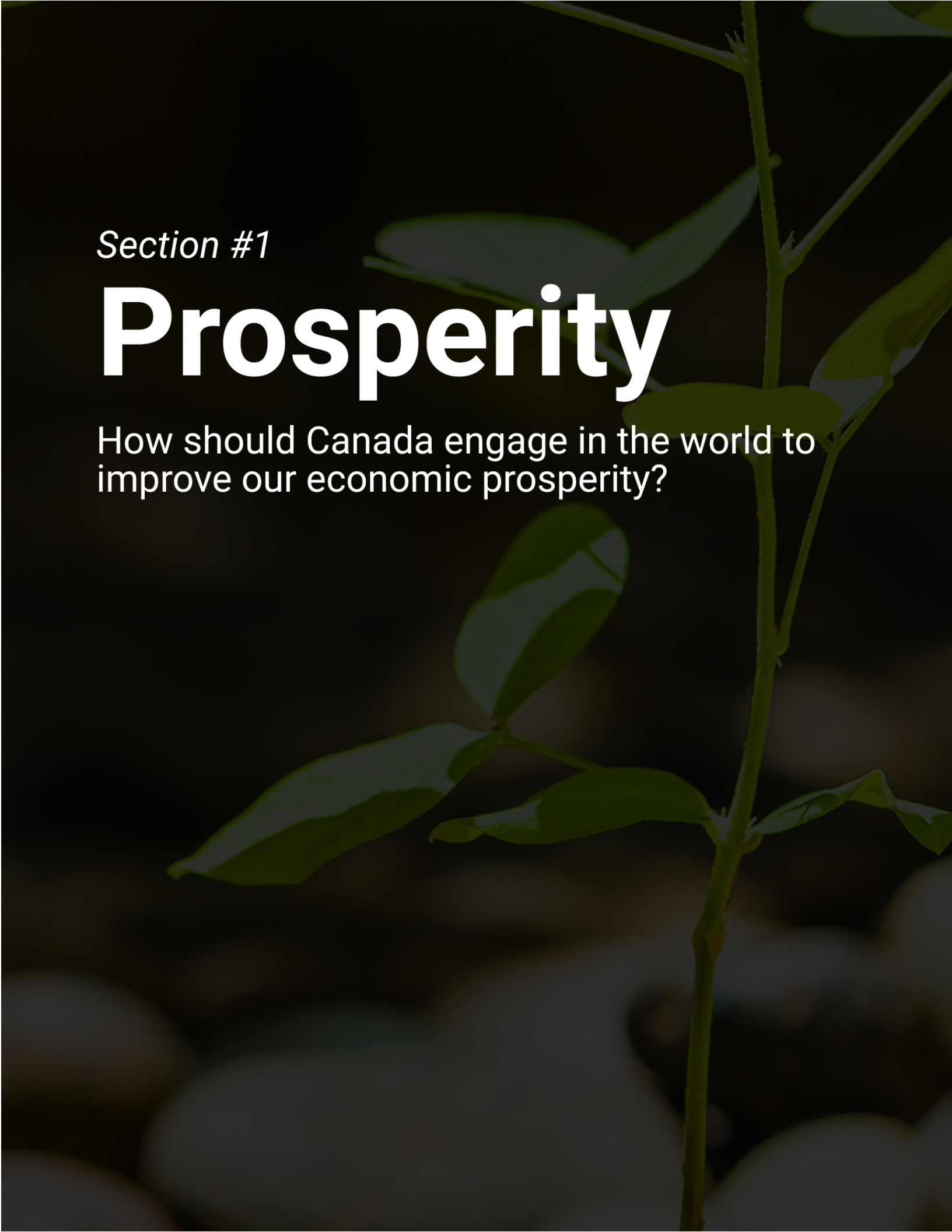
We must reconsider with whom we trade and invest abroad, how we ensure the safety of our citizens, and what compromises we're willing to make as a country. Like other countries, we also must navigate a more dangerous world. We have tools to protect and promote our interests, however. As a middle power, Canada can use these levers:

- Diplomacy, in part through Canadian embassies, to assess threats, negotiate peace and security, and build political and economic relationships
- Development and maintenance of rules that guide how countries should conduct themselves in the world
- Participation in international institutions and alliances, like the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- Economic activities, including trade and investment agreements with other countries
- Laws and regulations to govern economic and political activity in Canada and by Canadian companies abroad
- Use of our military overseas to defend our interests or protect the interests of our allies
- Intelligence activities to gather information on foreign interference and security threats
- Development assistance in low-income countries to address human suffering and promote economic and social progress

In this challenging global environment, the distinction between domestic and international policy is blurry. You, like all Canadians, have an essential role to play in ensuring sound, robust foreign policy because it has become increasingly central to protecting and upholding the interests of Canadians no matter where they live. Canada has no choice but to engage deeply in

international affairs to secure the well-being of our citizens. This exercise allows citizens to shape our nation's global engagement.

We invite you to discuss these issues with your fellow participants as Canada navigates a changing world. This guide sets out some of those options and provides background information to equip you to take part in the discussion.



Section #1

Prosperity

How should Canada engage in the world to improve our economic prosperity?

Prosperity: How should Canada engage in the world to improve our economic prosperity?

Canada's economic prosperity has always depended on our relationships with other countries. Trade (selling and buying goods from other countries) and investment (financing business in other countries and welcoming others to finance ours) are enormously important parts of the national economic picture. Those international activities add to a host of national efforts that together strengthen our economy: promotion of science and technology, research and education, manufacturing, agriculture, natural resource development, services, small businesses, and much more. Even in these areas, international connections are everywhere.

That interconnected economic ecosystem in Canada is part of a larger international arrangement that has brought predictability and stability to many countries. Starting after the Second World War, Canada, the US, and other allies began to build institutions and rules to improve the way that countries worked together to build their economies. An important part of that system is *free trade*. Free trade means getting rid of restrictions on imports or exports, eliminating barriers like tariffs (taxes on imports) and quotas (limits on quantities you can import), and aligning regulations so it's easier for companies to buy from and sell products to other countries. These free trade rules were not perfect, and they never evenly applied to everyone, but they were important because they led to years of increased trade and economic growth in many countries.

Through the 20th century, the world updated and expanded these rules. There was an emerging agreement that free trade not only secured access to new markets, but it also lowered prices for consumers, brought them new goods and services, spurred investment, and created more and better-paying jobs. Globalization was regarded as the way of the future, and Canadians looked to free trade with the US – our biggest trading partner – as the engine of our growth and prosperity. In 1994, Canada, the US and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and its impact since then has been profound. Canadian exports to the United States tripled, rising from \$185 billion in 1994 to \$590 billion in 2024.¹

Many of Canada's important economic sectors and the people who work in them depend on our trading relationships, and particularly on our long-standing relationship with the United States. Not all sectors are the same though. Some are more vulnerable to changes in trade rules, like the auto, steel, forestry, and oil and gas industries. Others are more protected because they are funded by the government or don't rely on trade very much, like healthcare and education.

However, for the last year, the relatively steady economic state Canada had enjoyed dramatically shifted with the election of the new Trump administration. The United States overturned many of the rules that most countries, including Canada, assumed underpinned our trading relationships. So how do we protect our economy when the rules that govern us and our trading partners are being broken? How do we expand markets so we can sell more to different countries? And what trade-offs are we willing to make to protect our economy?

¹ Here and elsewhere in the document, all data have been drawn from official Government of Canada sources or international sources aligned with Canadian sourcing guidelines.

Canada's Trade Relationship with the US

1. Proposal: Canada should continue to prioritize our trade relationship with the US even if that means accepting significant concessions	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
North America is our natural advantage. The US is the biggest market in the world. We will never overcome our geography. All countries trade most with their closest neighbours. Face reality. Our two economies are highly integrated, and 75% of our exports go to the US. It will take decades and a lot of pain to find new markets for our products. Canada also simply doesn't have the weight or power to force the US to do anything. Find common ground. Canada should instead find common ground with the US where we do agree. We can protect our shared auto industry together, harmonize our regulations more, or prevent the flow of illegal goods.	Don't give in to bullies! The United States is using their size to bully us. Giving into bullying only means they come back for more. Countries that have stood up for themselves have been respected. Impossible situation. It's often hard to meet US demands even if we wanted to because they change frequently. Those demands also put us in an impossible position: the US says it won't trade with us, but also is unhappy when we trade with other countries. Where does it end? If we concede every time the US makes demands, Canadian sovereignty is harmed. What requests from the US are we willing to tolerate in return for protecting our economy? What if they asked us to drop regulations that protect Canadians' health or change our laws on equal marriage?

While Canada has other important trading partners, none comes close to the size and importance of our relationship with the US. Trade with the United States is more than four times larger than the next nine trading partners combined.

In President Trump's first administration (2017-21), he began the renegotiation of NAFTA, our long-standing trade pact with the US and Mexico. After two years of drawn-out negotiations, NAFTA was replaced by CUSMA (the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement). When President Trump took office again in 2025, experts once again expected disruption to our trading relationship. However, most people did not anticipate the extent to which the trade relationship with the US would change.

As one of his first acts, the US president placed tariffs of 10-50% on more than 90 countries. The additional costs of the tariffs are usually passed along to customers, making those imported products more expensive. But tariffs can also make domestic goods more expensive if domestic producers raise prices in the absence of competition by foreign producers. Because tariffs are taxes paid to the government, they also generate new revenue for the government. President Trump believes that tariffs strengthen the US, encouraging American industry to make products in the United States, and prodding foreign companies to invest in the US to get access to the American market.

The tariffs placed on Canada have changed several times since and, depending on the product, they now average 4-6%. Most experts believe these tariffs violate our trade agreement with the United States. Tariffs have hurt our economy because they raise the price of our goods, encouraging Americans to buy fewer of them. Tariffs have slowed economic growth in Canada and led to fewer jobs in sectors like the auto and steel industries.

US tariffs have also been accompanied by other economic threats directed at Canada and other countries. In the past, the US generally avoided openly using its economic might to force other countries to act in ways the US would like. The US used to support international rules about how countries behave in relation to trade. This policy has changed under President Trump. He is using trade policy to advance US goals that don't relate to trade. For example, he has told some European countries he will increase tariffs if they do not eliminate their national laws about free speech or climate change. In Canada, President Trump made some tariffs conditional on Canada's response to the flow of the drug fentanyl across the border into the US. Even though data shows that less than 1% of the fentanyl entering the US comes from Canada, Canada took the issue seriously and created a taskforce to meet US concerns.

Some people say Canada must accommodate US demands because we can't afford to do otherwise. They argue that the US could harm our economy seriously and that the cost of fighting back is not worth the price. And in any case, they suggest, this disruption may be only temporary, and relations may return to normal within a few years. Other people say that Canada needs to say "enough," arguing that US demands aren't grounded in evidence and Canada shouldn't give in to bullying. Still other people worry that if Canada always allows the US to get its way, Canada effectively isn't even a sovereign country anymore. What compromises are we willing to make to prevent the United States from punishing us economically?

Canada's Trade Relationships with other Countries

2. Proposal: Canada should reduce our trade relationship with the US and trade more with China, India, and other countries instead	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Diversifying is not optional. The US will not go back to "normal" in the foreseeable future. We cannot predict what will happen there, so we need to urgently diversify. We cannot allow the US to hold us hostage economically. Trade helps democracy. Increasing our trade and improving relationships with countries like China encourages them to follow international rules. Canada is a small country. We are stuck between the US and China, the world's two trading superpowers. We must pick one of	The US is the safest bet. The US is still a democracy. China is not. Only a few years ago, China arrested two of our citizens without cause. Many believe it spies on us and interferes in our democracy, along with India and other countries. It threatens to take over Taiwan militarily. It is a bigger risk for Canada to rely on countries like this. National security matters. Government reports have noted concerns about X by China and India that have had negative effects on our national security.

them, and we can't afford to be left out of a trading bloc with China. There are other countries. We aren't limited to working with India and China.	We alienate the US. The US is unhappy with Canada dealing with China and other countries already. They have warned us of further consequences if we continue to get closer to China in particular. We can't risk 75% of our exports to increase what's now only 4%. It is not realistic. The US will always be our dominant trading partner. Trade with developing countries other than India and China will remain relatively small for many years to come.
---	--

In response to changes in the US relationship, Canada is urgently looking for new markets for our products. But the task is significant. For 40 years, three-quarters of our exports have gone to the United States. Until recently, China was in second place but dwarfed in comparison to the US – 4% of our exports, compared to the 75% to the US in 2024. Canada would have to quadruple its exports to all other countries to equal our current exports to the US alone.

Some experts think we should make more trade agreements with emerging markets (countries with fast growing economies like China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia) so we can then benefit over many years as both our economies grow. Other experts worry about doing more business with these countries.

They particularly worry about becoming reliant on China because it is not a democracy and people think its leaders want to use trade and economic integration to give China more power over other countries. Canada now relies on China for many basic goods and for lots of our jobs. Overall, more than 4% of our exports and 8% of our imports are with China, but much higher percentages in some sectors like our exports in food, energy, minerals, and forestry products. That economic weight gives China a lot of power to affect Canada. Some also say China does not play by the normal rules. It was only in 2021 that China released two Canadians it had held prisoner for three years. China also interferes in Canadian institutions and spies on Chinese Canadians in Canada. Critics also argue that China abuses the human rights of its people, and we should not endorse that abuse by trading more with China.

On the other hand, there are fears that Canada might be excluded from a new trade bloc led by China. If many countries pivot their trading relationships from the US towards China, China could lead a large and very important trading group. These people also say the choice isn't between a US that follows the rules and treats us well and a China that doesn't. The US no longer follows the rules or treats us well; indeed, China has been friendlier to Canada recently than the United States. They also note that the US is abusing the human rights of its own people too. They say we are facing certain economic harm and potentially economic catastrophe, so we cannot afford to turn down trade partners. China is the second largest economy in the world, and so we must increase our trade with China.

Experts also point out that there are risks associated with other emerging markets, not just China. For example, they point out that India has long interfered in Canadian democratic

institutions and has threatened Indian Canadians. In 2023, India was accused of ordering the assassination of a Canadian citizen in Vancouver. National security experts say India is a threat to Canada, and they want to balance the trade advantages with the security risks. Other experts say it is one-sided to paint India only as a threat: India is also a diverse and democratic country with thriving industries.

“Buy Canadian”

3. Proposal: The Canadian government should pay more to Buy Canadian	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Boost our economy. Buying from Canadian companies will boost our economy and create more jobs. Strong and free. When we rely less on other countries, we're less vulnerable to hostile actions or pressure by them. We are no longer sovereign. More resilient. With our own supplies and supply chains, we are more resilient against shocks, crises, and pandemics.	Too expensive. Even with limits on how much more Canada is allowed to pay for Canadian goods, it will cost us a lot more. We can't afford these costs at a time of economic stress. Poorer quality. We shouldn't buy inferior products that don't meet our exact needs just because they are Canadian. Not really Canadian. Many of our companies are foreign-owned, and it's too hard to define what counts as truly Canadian.

In response to these big economic threats, the Government of Canada has implemented measures to increase the amount of Canadian goods it buys. This commitment includes a Buy Canadian initiative for the government's own purchases, and a Defence Industrial Strategy to buy as much defence equipment for our armed forces as we can from within Canada. Under these initiatives, we will first look to buy from Canadian companies, then if there is no availability in Canada or if the goods cost more than 25% extra to buy at home, we will buy from allies. The Buy Canadian policy will apply to about \$70 billion in government spending annually, and the Defence Industrial Strategy will affect at least \$180 billion in spending over the next five years.

Supporters of this approach say it is critical to boost Canadian sovereignty and self-sufficiency. If Canada can supply our own needs, we don't need to rely on other countries. So, in times of crisis or even another pandemic, we can provide for Canadians from within our own borders. They argue we would also be less exposed to disruption caused by crises in other countries, and we would reduce the risk of being bullied by our trading partners. If we can supply products ourselves within Canada, we don't have to give in to unreasonable demands just to protect our economy. Finally, the Buy Canadian policy would boost Canadian businesses, potentially increasing jobs and helping to increase our economy by using money we would spend anyway. Some experts say we could generate up to \$10 billion in growth each year.

Opponents of the approach say that cost and effectiveness are the trade-offs. Buying from within Canada will almost certainly cost the Government more, maybe as much as \$5-12 billion

more each year. Critics also say it will affect the quality of goods we buy, especially for our military. If the best planes are made by the United States, then we should buy those planes. We cannot buy inferior military equipment just because it is Canadian. Finally, they say it's hard to tell what counts as a Canadian company. Many of our companies are part of large corporations ultimately owned by US or other foreign companies. We cannot tell where our money is going and whether it really stays in Canada.

Oil and Gas Exports

4. Proposal: Canada should export more oil and gas	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
It's the economy. We simply must put the economy first right now. We can't afford to prioritize potential future issues. Our economy is under threat now and our workers need jobs. Walk and chew gum. Our extractives industry may eventually slow down, but there is still firm demand for our oil, and we can address climate change in other ways. We can export oil and gas AND tackle climate change at the same time. Technology is already helping us reduce the environmental impact of oil and gas. Democratic oil. The other big energy producers are not democracies. Canadian oil and gas are stable and safe. The world still needs oil and gas and it's better for them to buy from Canada.	It's not either or. Pivoting responsibly means honouring natural resource workers and helping them over years to secure new, well-paid work in new industries of the future. It doesn't mean abandoning them. Canada at the forefront of climate change. It is in Canada's interests to slow down climate change. We are one of the most affected countries, and our health, safety, and livelihoods depend on addressing climate change. Being realistic. The trade-offs simply aren't worth it. There are other industries that could contribute more to our economy and don't have such a terrible impact on climate change.

Another key sector of the Canadian economy is our natural resources industry. It includes oil and gas, which is mostly focused in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and off the coasts of Atlantic Canada.

Oil and gas are significant contributors to Canada's economy. The sector makes up 28% of Newfoundland and Labrador's economy, and 26% of Alberta's gross domestic product (GDP, the total value of all goods and services produced). Oil is also produced in other countries like Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iran, but Canada is one of the few democracies that produces a significant amount of oil. Some people say that while the world still needs oil, it is better to buy it from a safe, democratic country like Canada. Buying oil from authoritarian countries only gives those regimes more money and power.

Canada exports most of its oil and gas to other countries. To increase our exports, experts argue that we need to build new infrastructure like oil pipelines and ports. Many are advocating

for new pipelines so our oil can get to our coasts or to refineries. Not everyone is in favour: British Columbia is opposed to the building of new pipelines from Alberta, in part because past oil spills have had a catastrophic impact on BC's coastline and wildlife and in part because of concern about climate change.

We know that burning fossil fuels like oil and gas produces the greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) that cause climate change and damage our environment. Alberta oil is also mixed with sand and needs to be processed before it can be exported. This processing is expensive and environmentally damaging. 30% of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions come from our oil and gas industry, and this figure is increasing. Canada already has one of the highest per capita GHG emissions in the world, making us a significant contributor to climate change. Canada has committed to halving our emissions by 2035 and reaching net zero emissions (removing as much GHG as we produce) by 2050. Canada is also highly affected by climate change: our temperatures are rising at double the global average. For example, many Canadians have been badly affected by the increasing forest fires because of climate change, and the opening of the arctic presents serious security threats as China and Russia move into the area.

Moreover, critics say since oil and gas will eventually run out, we should not invest more in an industry that may not exist in the coming years. Already, demand for oil is dropping in many countries, especially as people shift to electric vehicles. Instead, they argue, Canada should pivot our economy responsibly to new areas, like technology and renewable energy, in a way that would retrain workers and support new tech and renewable companies. Other people (including the government of Alberta) say that the oil and gas industry supports jobs today and it is too critical to the Canadian economy to wind it down. They argue that moving away from oil and gas would abandon workers and families and disregard a key sector of our economy. While people still need oil, it is better they buy it from Canada, rather than from authoritarian, non-democratic countries.

Immigration

5. Proposal: Canada should maintain high immigration levels	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
It's just math. We have an aging population drawing more out of the system and fewer working-age people paying into it. We need more immigrants. The math doesn't work otherwise. Filling job shortages. Canada needs more specialized skills. Key sectors of the Canadian economy — the ones we depend on to grow and excel — need immigrants. We are short of doctors, researchers and scientists, and construction workers. We can't meet Canadians' needs without immigrants.	Strain on services. Recent increases in immigration have put strain on housing availability, social services, health care and education. Canadians are concerned about affordability, long healthcare wait times, and a shortage of school places. Fairness first. When services are strained, we need to prioritize people who have paid into the tax system for years. It's just fair. Take a pause. We're not saying no to high immigration levels for ever. But we need to take a step back and pause

It is who we are. Welcoming people to Canada is part of who we are. Immigrants integrate, become parts of our community, and give back to Canada in many ways.	
---	--

Experts argue that another way to strengthen economies is to attract immigrants, particularly in countries like Canada with aging populations. Economists agree it is a problem when countries have growing numbers of retired people who no longer pay taxes but receive pensions and need more healthcare, at the same time there is a shrinking number of working people who pay taxes into the system. The pool of shared money is no longer balanced: more older people are taking more money out, but fewer younger people are paying money in. One clear solution is to attract more young people from other countries.

Canada has long had a policy of attracting immigrants to Canada. In 2025, 395,000 people came to live as permanent residents in Canada.

- A big proportion – about 240,000, 60% – were workers with highly sought-after skills in the trades, healthcare, and the French language. These workers not only bring needed skills, but they also contribute to the tax base. The government aimed to attract a greater number to fill the skills gap but fell short of its targets.
- Other permanent residents are families who reunite in Canada. In 2025, these were about 94,500 or 24% of the total. Bringing over family members of Canadians helps settle immigrants better, gives them a safety net, and makes them less likely to need help or money from the government.
- Canada also admits refugees and assesses their claims for asylum. These are people fleeing persecution, war or conflict. In 2025, these were 59,000 or 15% of the total. Canadians have long welcomed refugees as part of our global commitment.

Canada also admits temporary residents. This number has risen considerably since the Covid pandemic, up from 2% of our population in 2020 to 7% of our population or 673,750 people in 2025. Nearly half of temporary residents eventually settle in Canada. Temporary residents include lower-skilled workers doing jobs in fast food restaurants or in agriculture. Many businesses want these workers because they help keep costs low and make their businesses more profitable. Temporary residents also include foreign students who attend Canadian colleges and universities. They pay higher tuition fees than Canadian students, and post-secondary institutions rely on these fees to balance their budgets, effectively helping fund lower tuition for Canadian students by helping keep domestic fees lower.

Immigration is not only important to our economy, but also a key element in our relationship with other countries. Many want visa programs for their people to come to Canada. They want to connect to our universities and businesses and to create avenues for their citizens to get more education and work experience. Many immigrants maintain ties with their former countries, often contributing to their home economy through money sent back to family members. Being able to offer new ways to come to Canada could help us get more trade deals and maintain or improve our relationships with other countries.

In addition to the economic arguments, many believe that welcoming new Canadians from across the globe is part of our success as a country.

At the same time, the increased number of immigrants to Canada has led to concerns. Some people argue against the principle. They worry that people from other countries don't have the same values as Canadians. Others worry that there isn't enough housing, healthcare, school places, or jobs for Canadians as it is without adding more people. The increase in temporary residents particularly has led to tensions, as some argued that they were taking entry-level jobs from young Canadians. They also point out how the practice also exploits the workers: they can be deported any time, likely cannot settle; and often can't find good housing or jobs. These concerns led the government to cap the number of temporary residents in 2025, reducing their numbers by 40% for 2026.

Section #2

Security

What must Canada do to increase our security?



Security: What must Canada do to increase our security?

Recent years have shown Canadians that we live in a dangerous and unpredictable world.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reminded us that wars between European states are still possible. Even before Russia invaded, Vladimir Putin's regime used social media to spread false information and influence democratic elections in Europe and elsewhere, sent unidentified soldiers to seize Crimea from Ukraine, and continued to engage in all sorts of sabotage, including cyber-attacks, interference with trains, and cutting of the undersea cables we use to communicate. Some Canadians felt we were safe in North America because the Russia-Ukraine conflict was far away. Others worried that Canada hadn't increased spending on our armed forces, intelligence services, police, and disaster preparedness even after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In the last few years, China held two Canadians hostage, India was accused of killing a Canadian citizen on our soil, and both countries are suspected of interfering in our institutions, including elections. Both China and Russia are active in the Arctic, and experts worry Canada doesn't have enough ships to patrol our northern waters. Many of us have been victims of cybercrimes, including fraud carried out by people working for hostile governments. We're also subject to more disasters and threats inside our borders. Forest fires are getting worse every summer, affecting air quality and destroying homes in places like Alberta. Only a few years ago, the global COVID pandemic killed more than 7 million people worldwide.

The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States made many Canadians realize that Canada was even more vulnerable than we thought. Canada is deeply integrated with the United States, in terms of both economy and security. Trump shattered our assumption that the United States would protect us and keep our economy growing. The President has made it clear that the United States is looking out for itself, and that he's willing to use the might of the United States to make sure it gets its way. He has also threatened to annex Canada – that is, to try to buy Canada or perhaps take parts of our country by force.

The Canadian government has responded to our new reality by promising to spend a lot more on the military and on the protection of Canadian sovereignty, including in the Arctic. Canada is also trying to deal with foreign interference, strengthen our cyber security, prepare for future pandemics, and keep our essential services running if they are attacked or overwhelmed by natural disasters. All these efforts cost money – a lot of money. Some experts say we're playing catch up after decades of neglecting things that keep us safe as a country. Others say that, as a big country with a small economy, we must focus our spending. They argue we're better spending on our own people (on healthcare, education, and support for our companies to create jobs), instead of military equipment we'll likely never use.

Many experts say Canadians need to think differently about protecting ourselves, our families, and our communities. We face several trade-offs, things we will have to give up to be more safe and secure. Canada is spending billions to help Ukraine because we judge Russia to be a very big threat to our own country too. We depend on the United States for a massive amount of military capability, intelligence, and policing, yet the Trump administration is telling us that we shouldn't rely on them anymore. Worse still, the White House may use our economic and security dependence to pressure us into deals that will leave Canada worse off. Our military is

stretched already, and we also ask them to deal with problems we face here at home, including floods, fires, and pandemics like COVID.

These trade-offs are at the heart of Canada's national security debate. How much do you think we need to spend and prepare in this more uncertain and dangerous world? Should we instead increase our spending on priorities like health and education? If so, what risks do we face?

Defence Spending

6. Proposal: Canada should spend 3.5% of GDP on the military	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
We made a commitment. Increasing defence spending means we fulfill our promises to our NATO allies. They must be able to trust our word. Common sense. It makes sense. We need to strengthen our military in an increasingly dangerous world so we're prepared for whatever comes. Credibility. We must show the US that Canada is serious about the defence of North America. Reduce risk. We must make the Canadian military more self-sufficient. That means spending more so we can do more ourselves.	Overblown risk. The risks are overblown. Russia isn't invading Canada. Taiwan is very far away from us. Canada is a safe country, and buying more weapons makes us less safe in fact, since we may be seen as intent on conflict. Trade-offs not worth it. Spending more on defence means less money for other priorities, such as healthcare or paying down the national debt. No to higher taxes. Canadians may need to pay higher taxes to spend more on the military. No to borrowing more. If we don't pay higher taxes or cut other things, higher defence spending will grow our national debt, which means that our children will have less money in the future.

The current government promised to increase Canadian defence spending to 2% of GDP by the end of last year. 2% may not sound like a lot, but it adds up. This year alone, 2% of GDP means the federal government will spend more than \$80 billion on the Canadian Armed Forces (out of a total government budget of \$500 billion). That \$80 billion will come from a mix of taxes you pay and money the government borrows.

By 2035, the government has promised to fulfill its NATO commitment to spend 3.5% of GDP on core defence, nearly double what Canada spent on the military in 2024, plus another 1.5% on broader security measures. That total of 5% of GDP is a big change.

Why are we spending so much on the military? Our alliances are one reason. Canada is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance of European and North American countries that exists to defend each other. The basic principle of NATO is that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all the members: all would help the one. As a member of NATO, Canada committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence more than a decade

ago, but we didn't meet that goal until recently, a sore point with our NATO allies, including the US. President Trump has been pushing NATO members, including Canada, to do more. Canada wants to demonstrate that we are serious about our own defence, as well as the defence of North America, and that we support our NATO allies. By spending 2% this year, Canada is finally doing what it promised to do.

Another reason for the increase in spending is the state of the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine showed us that the world is far more dangerous than in the last few decades. Many experts worry that if Russia wins in Ukraine, it will move further west into Europe and could reach France or even the UK. China may also be considering an invasion of Taiwan. In addition, very recent military action in the Middle East worries many Canadians. Experts worry that we, too, could be drawn into a war.

Spending so much on the military comes with downsides, however. Some experts point out that Canada's promise to spend an extra \$80 billion a year on defence would make the Department of National Defence our single biggest government ministry, bigger than the four next departments combined. The defence spending promise means we would need to cut billions from other areas, like healthcare or paying down the national debt. And we may need to raise taxes to pay for higher defence spending, especially if we don't want to rack up too much debt. Others make the point that a growing military might demonstrate to possible rivals that we are intent on conflict rather than committed to peace.

Pandemic Resilience

7. Proposal: Canada should include pandemic preparedness in the 1.5% of GDP allocated to broader security measures in our NATO commitment	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Less dependent on others. Canada should have its own domestic PPE and vaccine capacity so we aren't forced to buy from others in an emergency. Getting prepared. We don't know when the next pandemic will hit, but we can't take the risk. It's better to be prepared, and we can't be at the back of the queue if it comes. Controlling our own decisions. If Canada doesn't need to rely on others as much, we can reduce the risk of being exploited. If we need to beg others for help, they might use that to pressure us on other issues.	Not necessary. Another pandemic may not happen any time soon and this type of spending isn't needed. Wasted money. Since we don't know if or when a pandemic could come, we could buy the wrong equipment and prepare for the wrong diseases. A lot of the money might be wasted. Bigger problems. There are bigger problems in defence and security that need this money. Pandemics just aren't a priority.

The COVID pandemic demonstrated our vulnerability to a rapidly spreading disease in an interconnected world. Very few countries were able to contain COVID just by shutting borders or limiting travel. In the end, it took a combination of social restrictions (limiting gatherings

indoors, etc.), personal protective equipment (PPE), and vaccines to allow us to gradually return to normal. We also needed trained personnel, more healthcare capacity, and better and different ways of communicating between governments and with Canadians.

At the start of the pandemic, Canada found that it lacked a lot of these essential things. We couldn't produce our own PPE, and we couldn't develop or produce our own vaccines. Our hospitals got overwhelmed quickly, and we didn't have enough or the right medical personnel. The Canadian government had to negotiate with foreign companies to get enough PPE and to purchase vaccines. We were in a queue behind wealthier or more important countries as well as countries that did make their own PPE and vaccines. Canada was very vulnerable and not prepared for a pandemic. Our lack of domestic capacity was a warning. A future pandemic might be far more deadly, and our access to PPE and vaccines might be more limited. Many companies making PPE and vaccines are in the United States. Under the current government, they possibly wouldn't share with Canada at all, or they would charge a very high price.

That said, some experts say that another global pandemic could happen at any time, and we need to have domestic capacity to respond quickly. Others argue that we cannot know what a future pandemic would look like and what we may need to combat it. Canada could end up building domestic capacity that isn't well-suited to a new pandemic. We could also spend a lot on equipment we don't end up using. At the end of the COVID pandemic, for example, Canada found itself with 40,000 surplus ventilators.

On top of spending 3.5% of GDP on the military, our NATO commitment includes allocating another 1.5% of GDP on broader security measures, such as protecting critical infrastructure, defending networks, ensuring civil preparedness and readiness, unleashing innovation, and strengthening our defence industrial base. Pandemic preparedness could be part of our 1.5% contribution. This commitment could involve building up our PPE capacity and greatly increasing our research, development, and production ability for vaccines. The challenge, however, is that we don't know when the next pandemic will hit, we can't know exactly what we might need, and the money we spend on pandemic preparedness might be better used to strengthen our security in other areas.

Buy Canadian Military Equipment

8. Proposal: Canada should pay a premium for made-in-Canada military capabilities	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Reduce risk. Buying a lot of military equipment from the United States leaves Canada vulnerable to American pressure and possible threats. Everything changed. Canada can no longer trust the United States as we once did. Put money into our own economy. Building military capacity here at home means more jobs and a greater chance to set our own terms.	Not as good. Canada does not spend anywhere near as much as the United States does on military research and development, meaning that things we build here may not be as capable as American equipment. Risk for our forces. Less capable equipment could put our military at risk when they fight enemies overseas. Costs more. Building military capacity in Canada is a lot more expensive than buying equipment off the shelf from allies.

Regardless how much we spend on the military, we are also faced with tough choices about the equipment we buy for the armed forces. Canada does not produce a lot of military equipment. Most of our defence companies maintain equipment we buy from elsewhere or produce parts and components for foreign defence companies, notably those in the United States. We do have great Canadian companies that produce airplanes, satellites, simulators, armoured vehicles, and munitions and small arms, but most of the advanced military equipment we buy comes from the United States.

Our government wants Canada to build more defence equipment ourselves. The government also wants the Canadian military to buy far more equipment from Canadian defence companies. If we can't build certain key things that our military needs right away, such as new submarines, we should buy them from allies. But the government also wants to spend fewer Canadian defence dollars on equipment from the United States. Experts worry that the United States isn't a dependable ally, and Canada shouldn't spend taxpayer money on American equipment while the White House is threatening Canada with tariffs and annexation.

The plan sounds good, but there are a few catches. One reason we have bought so much military equipment from the United States is that the Americans build the best and most advanced in the world. The United States spends large amounts on military research and development, allowing us to get the best equipment for far less than it would cost to produce on our own. Although Canada could build a lot more defence equipment, we wouldn't be able to spend as much on research and development, and we are years behind the United States in certain key areas. Our military worries that if they're forced to buy mostly from Canadian companies, they'll be more vulnerable on battlefields overseas, putting Canadian and other lives at risk.

Furthermore, building military equipment in Canada often costs more than buying equipment from another country. The reason is simple: when you buy an existing piece of equipment off the shelf from another country, you don't need to pay to set up manufacturing and production in

Canada. To give an example, the warships that we're building in Halifax for the Canadian navy will cost about 30% more than if we'd simply bought similar warships from a European ally.

A Canadian Spy Agency

9. Proposal: Canada should set up a foreign human intelligence service	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Independence is critical. Canada needs to have an independent ability to know what rival countries are up to and how they might be undermining Canada. Reduce reliance on the US. Canada needs to become less dependent on the United States for intelligence, including information about threats to Canada. Getting specific information on Canada. It is crucial that Canada is better informed about threats to our country, including political interference and spying on our companies.	Breaking the rules. Canada would do things in other countries that are illegal. Risky. Canadian spies would take big risks and could get caught, leading to imprisonment or execution. Competes with CSIS. A new spy agency could drain resources away from our domestic agency Too Expensive. A foreign human intelligence agency would be very expensive to set up and run at a time of economic uncertainty. It's just not a priority when money is tight.

Canada does not have spies in foreign countries. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has agents who do counterespionage and counterterrorism in Canada. CSIS agents can do some work in other countries, but when it does, its activities must relate to a threat here at home. The military collects intelligence when it operates overseas, including spying on the armed forces of our rivals, but only to protect our armed forces on operations. Any spying the military does must relate to a military mission or operation. Canada does have an intelligence service that spies on other states: the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). But CSE focuses on what is called "signals" intelligence, so phone calls, internet traffic, and other things that are communicated electronically. CSE does not have agents collecting information in other countries.

Many of Canada's allies have what is called a foreign human intelligence service. That means spies working secretly in other countries to collect information. Since we do not have a foreign human intelligence service, Canada is heavily dependent on what information our allies, especially the United States, are willing to share with us. In many cases, we depend on the Americans to learn about threats to Canada. That adds another layer of Canadian dependence on the United States.

When people think of spy agencies, they often imagine the CIA in the US or MI6 in the UK. These agencies spy, sabotage, recruit people in rival countries to spy for them, and try to influence events in other countries. Canadians might be uncomfortable with these kinds of things. But the CIA and MI6 are not the only type of foreign human intelligence service. Many of our other allies,

including Germany, Italy, and Australia, have foreign human intelligence services that are more focused. They are less interested in interfering in other countries or doing dangerous spying, and more concerned with finding out secrets that affect their countries, including economic espionage and finding out what hostile countries are trying to do to them.

Having a foreign human intelligence service is expensive and CSIS worries that another service would cut its budget and recruitment efforts. A foreign intelligence service also involves doing things that are illegal in other countries and your spies are thus always at risk of getting caught, being imprisoned, or even being executed. Many Canadians might worry that spying in other countries would be un-Canadian.

Arctic Sovereignty

10. Proposal: Canada should increase its military capabilities in the Arctic against threats from strategic rivals.	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Sovereignty first. Asserting sovereignty in the Arctic requires a more physical presence in the region, including military ships. Military response is needed. Adversaries may send military or spy ships into the Arctic, which should be met with a military response. Control. Having more military assets in the Arctic would help Canada make the case that the Northwest Passage is under our sovereign control. Deterrence. A greater Canadian military presence in the Arctic could deter other states, including the United States, from acting without our consent in the region.	Provide what Arctic people want. Arctic communities have many pressing needs. It is their region. Money spent on an increased military presence in the Arctic would be better spent on their priorities, like healthcare, education, and jobs. More ships aren't needed. Canada is already building new icebreakers for the Arctic. Adding more won't necessarily result in increased security. Talk it out. A diplomatic solution to the Arctic would cost less and be more effective over the long term.

The Arctic is attracting considerable interest these days. President Trump has stated that he wants the United States to acquire Greenland, Chinese research ships are sailing in the far north more often, and both China and Russia are investing in large fleets of icebreakers. Tourism in the Arctic is increasing, too, as European cruise ships are spending more time in Arctic water during summer. Canada is also investing more in the north. The navy now has six ships that can operate in the summer, allowing the military to patrol our northern waters for part of the year. The Canadian government is also building new icebreakers for the Canadian Coast Guard to navigate the Arctic year-round.

Given all this increased activity in the Arctic, there are growing concerns that Canada's control and sovereignty in the region will be challenged. These concerns focus on three main challenges.

First, foreign countries might question whether parts of the Arctic, such as the Northwest Passage, are Canadian waters. Canada has long maintained that the Northwest Passage should count as Canadian waters under international law. This interpretation gives Canada more control over who goes through the Passage. Other countries, including the United States, disagree with Canada's interpretation. They think the Northwest Passage is an international strait, which would mean that Canada has less control over who uses it.

Second, foreign states and companies that create a significant presence in the region might build relationships with Indigenous communities and gain access to resources. Chinese companies, for example, might build relationships with Inuit peoples and offer them more and better investment in their communities. This investment could create tensions between Inuit peoples and Canada, particularly if the Canadian government tried to block the Chinese from investing.

Third, if Canada cannot assert its sovereignty in the Arctic, other states might act without fear of consequence. Foreign states could send various types of ships, including warships and other vessels, to spy on North America. We saw something like that recently when the Chinese sent spy balloons into our airspace. The Chinese also deployed a warship off Australia and New Zealand last year, simply to make the point that they could. You might ask yourself: what's the big deal? What harm could a couple of ships do in the Arctic? The real danger is that the Americans might think that Canada can't handle the Arctic on our own and that they'll need to intervene. Once that happens our control of the Arctic will start slipping away.

How should Canadians address these threats to its Arctic sovereignty? Canada could spend far more on ships and Arctic infrastructure, for instance. Doing so would address some of these threats. Yet this approach comes with downsides. It could divert funds away from other investments we could make in the Arctic, including natural resource development and a cooperative approach to the region with other Arctic nations, including our Nordic allies. It could also divert funds away from communities priorities: drinking water, housing, and energy security.

Cyber Security and Emergency Preparedness

11. Proposal: The government should require companies to invest significantly to prepare for cyber and terrorist attacks that affect essential services

Arguments For	Arguments Against
---------------	-------------------

Companies won't do it if it's optional. Forcing companies and citizens to prepare for essential service attacks and disruptions leaves us better prepared. Resilience matters. We will be more resilient to attacks and disasters if we are required to prepare. It's a priority. Our essential services are too important to rely on voluntary measures.	Could be more expensive. Companies may pass on the cost of preparedness to customers. If we demand it, we must monitor it. The government will need more people and powers to keep an eye on companies to make sure they're complying with laws.
---	--

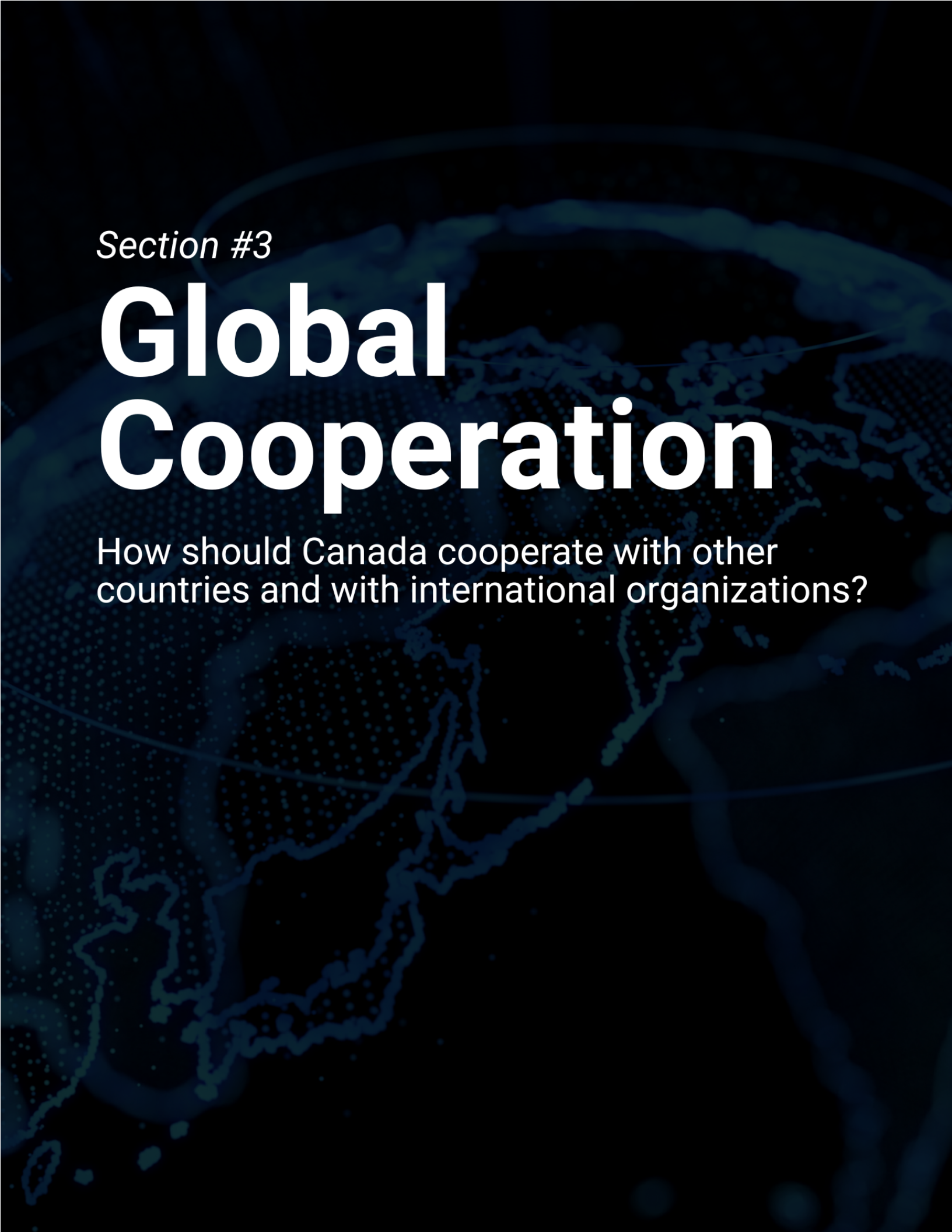
Two of Canada's greatest vulnerabilities are not military at all. They are tied to our computer networks and our essential services, both vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Think, for example, of our bank accounts. We send money via Interac and pay for things by tapping our phones. Our money moves increasingly through fibre-optic cables rather than between human hands. This move toward digital banking is convenient and easy, but it also creates a risk. If a bad actor can hack into our banking systems, they could hold us hostage or create massive disruptions.

Other essential services are vulnerable, too. Our ports, transportation, electricity, internet, and water treatment plants could all be thrown into disarray with cyber-attacks. Personal information about us on government servers could be accessed, too.

Given the growing cyber threat from states and criminal organizations, Canada needs to do far more to protect itself. Experts say that once Artificial Intelligence really takes off, it will become even easier for foreign states and criminals to launch these attacks. AI will be able to bombard our systems and cyber defences. Bad actors will also use AI to increase scams against regular people.

Beyond cyber threats, we also need to worry about national disasters and traditional sabotage activities that could take down our essential services. Ice storms cause havoc on our electrical grids, roads, and airports. Drones have caused chaos at European airports, and as noted earlier, Russia has cut the undersea cables in Europe that we use for communication.

Experts believe we need to build up our capacity to resist these threats. The government must decide how much it should get involved in the affairs of private companies. Ottawa could apply a soft touch and give guidance in the hope that companies would voluntarily protect themselves and their customers. Alternatively, Ottawa could force companies to build strong defences, particularly if these companies provide essential services. Letting companies take the lead themselves will cost them less and perhaps increase their willingness to act. Some companies may decide not to bother or not to do enough, however, especially if it costs them money. And if they don't act, important infrastructure that we all rely on could be at risk. Forcing companies to increase their defences will cost them more, and they will pass some of these costs to the consumer. Government-imposed defences will also require Ottawa to spend more time and money making sure that companies are complying.



Section #3

Global Cooperation

How should Canada cooperate with other countries and with international organizations?

Global Cooperation: How should Canada cooperate with other countries and with international organizations?

Canada has always engaged with other countries, and as the world became more connected, Canada's cooperation grew and became ever more critical. Major aspects of Canadian life are shaped by our relationships with other countries. Canada engages globally on trade, so our businesses can sell to other countries. Our armed forces coordinate with other militaries, conducting joint exercises or cooperating on the equipment we use. As a country, we discuss how to regulate the technology we use, agree on taxation rates, and tackle organized crime, to give other examples. Some of the issues we face in Canada can only be solved by working with other countries, because they are global issues that affect all countries. Climate change is a good example.

Canada engages bilaterally, one-on-one with other countries. For example, it might pursue a trade deal with Australia or a visa discussion with Nigeria. Canada also participates in small groups of countries like the G7 (which includes other wealthy countries), the G20 (which is a larger group of mixed income countries), as well as NATO. Finally, we also engage in multilateral spaces. Multilateral organizations are institutions where most of the world works together on shared issues, like the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Connected to these institutions are international laws that govern how countries behave towards each other and to their own people. For example, they include the laws that protect human rights, guarantee the sovereignty of countries, and set the rules of armed conflict.

In the last few years, global cooperation has become more difficult as an increasing number of powerful countries have been breaking some of the rules that held the system together. In Canada, we have felt the impact most from our closest neighbour, the United States. The "America First" foreign policy upends decades of US engagement in the world. Since the two World Wars, the US actively tried to be the biggest actor in the world and encouraged other countries to rely on them. This role brought the US significant influence and power. The US also got to police other countries' actions, a job that gave them further control.

The US has now made it clear that it believes that established institutions, laws, and ways of engaging do not serve their country any longer. The Trump administration has withdrawn funding, military support, and diplomatic engagement, and has argued that international law unfairly holds it back and prevents it from protecting its interests. The US has told other countries to stand on their own two feet. Experts believe the US has also recently broken international law, leading to worry that conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, could spread quickly.

So as the United States breaks away from the established institutions and laws, how should Canada respond? Should we continue to work with these institutions and uphold international law? Do we need new alliances with different countries to hedge against the US? And how can we still push for issues we believe are important as the world becomes more dangerous?

International Institutions

12. Proposal: Canada should emphasize building coalitions of countries on specific issues over working through international institutions like the United Nations and World Health Organization	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Small and nimble. Big institutions are slow and ineffective. They get bogged down in arguments. Canada is best working issue-by-issue with specific small groups of countries who want to get things done with us. Middle power influence. The big international institutions are too often controlled by the great powers such as the United States. There's no reforming that. We need our own systems that reflect our values and interests. Reality check. The old institutions are effectively gone because big countries don't agree with them anymore. We must face reality and adapt.	Reform instead. International institutions aren't perfect but they've protected everyone for 100 years. The solution isn't to throw them entirely out when the going gets tough. We should reform them instead. What else works? It's very risky to let these institutions wither without knowing what will replace them. How will we work together on pandemics or resolve conflicts without the spaces to do this? Not practical. It's too time-consuming and expensive for Canada to form multiple alliances on every issue we might want to address. The global institutions exist as the space for us to do that already.

Many of the international institutions to which Canada belongs emerged after the two world wars, when countries decided we could never again allow that scale of human suffering and destruction. So, we created venues to work together and resolve disputes, and we formalized rules governing how countries behave towards each other and to their own people. Bodies like the United Nations enforce the rules and resolve disputes peacefully, look out for everyone's interests (not just those of powerful countries), and coordinate among countries.

For the past five years, however, experts agree these institutions have been struggling. Countries are breaking the rules more often and without consequence. And wealthy, more powerful countries are breaking the rules in ways that poorer countries are not allowed to. Countries in Africa and Asia say the system is rigged towards North American and European interests, and they want their own systems that reflect their own values and needs. Most recently, the United States withdrew entirely from some of these institutions, including the World Health Organization. Once a major country like the United States takes such steps, other countries may follow their lead, weakening the system further.

In response, some experts say the solution is to reform these institutions, not break away from them. They are still important forums, there exist no better spaces to resolve our disputes, and importantly, they alone have the legitimacy to do their jobs in ways individual countries do not. We can't tackle problems like another pandemic without the World Health Organization or a major war without the United Nations. We shouldn't walk away from these institutions or let them fall into neglect. These experts argue that Canada has a strong interest in making them work and should take a leadership role in reforming them. Reform might mean giving less

powerful countries a greater say in decisions or using the funding of these institutions more effectively.

Other people say it's time to move away from these institutions. They were developed almost a hundred years ago and they're not working properly anymore. The Canadian Prime Minister made a speech this year where he said we need to finally acknowledge that institutions are failing and too many countries are breaking the rules. In response, he proposed that Canada instead set up its own smaller groups with like-minded countries. This policy would likely mean working with countries who don't have the same values as Canadians, for example, such as working with countries that abuse human rights.

Other countries may also form these types of alliances not to advance good, like we think Canada would, but to advance goals that harm Canada and others. Experts say we should be careful when we move away from an established way of working, because it makes it easier for bad actors to form alliances that harm us.

Human Rights and International Law

13. Proposal: Canada should emphasize human rights and international law in our global cooperation	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Consistency. We cannot pick and choose who must follow international law. And how do we decide? What rights do we think are optional? Which countries are important enough that we'll tolerate human rights abuses? Interests. It is in Canada's interests if the countries we trade with are safe, democratic, and open countries that respect their people's rights. It makes Canada safer when the rules apply to everyone. Balance. We can still deal with non-democratic countries. We just need to balance the relationship so it always includes discussion of human rights and laws too. Think longer term. It's not just turning a blind eye one time. What happens when we've signalled that we're willing to ignore human rights abuses? We embolden hostile countries and they'll double down on their bad behaviour.	We need flexibility. In today's tough world, we need to make tough choices, like trade deals with different countries or securing critical supplies from non-democratic countries. Upholding international law ties our hands needlessly. What about the United States? If we truly upheld international law, it would impact our relationship with the United States, given their poor record on immigrant rights and recent military actions around the world. We simply can't afford to upset the United States. Canada is not perfect. It is not Canada's place to interfere in how other countries organize themselves. We are not perfect and shouldn't lecture others. Canada shouldn't impose its own values on other countries.

Alongside international institutions, Canada and other countries also agreed to create international laws that govern how countries behave to each other and to their people. These laws protect human rights, like the right to free speech, to free and fair elections, and to own property. They also protect freedoms, like freedom from violence and from arbitrary arrest. These laws are not perfect. They are often broken, including serious violations like genocide. But the fact that they exist sets expectations and provides avenues for us to hold violators accountable.

For decades, Canada has been a supporter of international law in its foreign policy. Sometimes we had a tight focus on one issue, like spearheading a treaty to prohibit the use of landmines. At other times, Canada has pursued a broader set of values, like prosecuting crimes against humanity. Canada has consistently pushed for all states to abide by international laws because as a middle power country we rely on these laws to keep us safe too. The laws also only work when everyone agrees to them. If the powerful countries don't follow them, the rules offer little protection for smaller countries like Canada. Once we start carving out exceptions and treating some countries differently, a dangerous pattern could eventually weaken the whole system. At the same time, Canada has not always abided by these laws itself, particularly in its treatment of indigenous people. We also have not applied the laws equally to all countries, and politics has determined which states we have criticized and which we have refrained from criticizing.

Globally, the world is moving backward on human rights and more countries are violating international law without consequences. Over half the world now lives in undemocratic countries. More people face oppression based on their religion and more governments have cracked down on free speech. Experts say this rollback of rights is a major problem because open, free societies are more likely to abide by shared rules, whereas closed, oppressive countries are more likely to act dangerously and attack others. They cite Russia and Iran as evidence, but experts feel the critique also increasingly applies to the United States.

Some experts say that amid this global rollback on human rights, Canada must push harder for other countries to uphold international law. This push is in Canada's interest because it aligns with our own values as a country. It is also better for Canada if the countries we work and trade with are stable democratic countries, reducing the chance of conflict (that could also affect us) and creating the conditions for healthy economies (that help our trade and economy too).

On the other hand, critics say that we can no longer afford to push for human rights in our foreign policy. They say that the old rules don't serve us anymore because they are ignored more often than they are respected, and we need a more flexible approach depending on which country we're dealing with and the issue we're talking about. For example, we might not raise violations of international law if a country is providing a lot of military equipment that we need. They argue we need to weigh the trade-offs more carefully and avoid blanket rules. Some of these supporters also say we especially can't afford to upset the United States by criticizing its actions. Criticism will only blow back on Canada and won't make a difference to how the United States behaves anyway.

Other critics say that Canada does not have the moral high ground to lecture others on rights. We are far from perfect ourselves. For example, we abuse the human rights of indigenous people, Black Canadians still face significant discrimination, and women are not equal anywhere

in the world, including in Canada. They say Canada must get its own house in order before making demands of others.

Trade with Democratic Countries, and the Responsibilities of Canadian Companies Abroad

14. Proposal: Canada should prioritize trade and investment agreements with democratic countries	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Living our actions. If we prioritize our values, we need to show it with more than just words. We should not trade with countries that violate their citizens' rights and aren't democratic. Laws matter. We cannot violate human rights laws to secure trade deals. Canadian values. Canadians strongly support a principled foreign policy, and Canada can set a standard for other countries. It is the right thing to do. Consistency. We don't allow human rights abuses or rule breaking in Canada, even if it contributes to economic growth. We shouldn't allow it overseas either.	No moral high ground. Every country has human rights challenges, including Canada, so we don't have a moral high ground to preach to other countries. Economy above all. It would be too costly to Canadian businesses and the economy to refuse to trade with over half the world's countries. In tough times particularly, we must diversify markets and that means trading with countries who don't share the same beliefs as us. Trade helps democracy. When we bring countries into trade agreements, it gives us leverage and can help them move towards democracy too.
15. Proposal: Canadian companies operating overseas should abide by the same human rights and environmental standards as they do in Canada	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Preventing abuse. There are credible reports of human rights and environmental abuses linked to Canadian companies operating in other countries. These companies are Canadian and should have to abide by the same laws overseas as at home. Consistency. We don't allow companies to abuse human rights or damage the environment in Canada, and we shouldn't accept it outside our borders either.	Stop meddling. It's not for Canada to dictate how companies must behave overseas. Other governments can choose how they want companies in their countries to act. Economy matters. It would affect the growth and success of Canadian companies if they were constrained by new rules on how they operate overseas.

Trade with other countries has always been an important part of the Canadian economy. And as Canada tries to expand our trade with non-US countries, we are increasingly engaging with

countries that don't always respect the human rights of their people. Canadian companies are also increasingly operating in non-democracies, particularly in our mining industry operating in Africa. Over half the countries in the world are not democracies and this number is increasing. In total, experts say there are only 88 democratic countries and 91 non-democratic countries.

If Canada wants to increase its trade with countries outside the United States, we will have to engage more with non-democratic countries. On one hand, some argue, it benefits Canada when other countries have stronger economies, because evidence shows when countries get richer, their people become more educated, reducing the chances of conflict or war that could affect us. Trade also brings countries into dialogue and encourages them to follow international rules. This argument says we can use trade to move other countries towards democracy.

On the other hand, others say, Canadian trade can negatively affect human rights. For example, foreign companies can exploit women or use child labour to make products sold in Canada. The actions of Canadian companies operating in other countries can also violate the human rights of local communities, for example, polluting water sources, exploiting workers, or engaging in unethical business deals.

Canadian companies must abide by the human rights and environmental standards of the countries in which they operate abroad. Sometimes these standards are higher than they are in Canada. On the occasions when local standards are lower than Canada's, many companies voluntarily choose to respect the higher standards that apply at home. Those that do not have sometimes been implicated in controversies surrounding their actions, such as when a company is accused of environmental damage or exploitative labour practices.

Some people argue that Canada should not do deals with countries that oppress their people, and that we should ensure our companies behave ethically in these countries too. They say these trade deals are not just morally wrong, they endorse the behaviour of these countries and that makes Canada less safe. Most people agree we shouldn't do trade deals with countries like Iran or Russia. It is less clear with countries like China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Morocco, for example. Some people even say that as the United States moves away from democracy, we should reconsider our trade with them too.

Geographic Focus

16. Proposal: Canada should focus more on the Americas	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Align with the US. The US has changed its geographic focus, so it's sensible for Canada to align ourselves with the US. It's too risky to our security and economy if we're not. Protect against the US. If the US is determined to dominate the whole of the Americas, Canada must protect itself. We need to make new friends in our own region to counter the US. Pragmatic approach. Ideally, we would focus on our own priorities, but the reality is that the US has changed and we need to respond.	Stick with our plans. Canada thought carefully about our geographic priorities, and we shouldn't shift them quickly simply because the US has. Economic growth. Our best bet for economic growth lies in Europe, the Indo Pacific, and perhaps Africa. Missed opportunity. There are risks to Canada if we reduce engagement in Ukraine, with our European friends, and in the Indo Pacific.

Over the years, Canada has highlighted different areas of the world in its foreign policy. North America has obviously always been a priority, not least in deepening our trade relationship with the United States and Mexico. We have also had a long-standing interest in Haiti because it is the poorest country in the Americas, is French-speaking, and Canada has deployed its peacekeeping expertise there several times.

In the last five years, Canada decided to increase its attention in the Indo Pacific. As a Pacific nation, Canada is increasingly affected by events in the region, including migration, economic growth, and peace and security. We have also focused heavily on Ukraine, partly to support our European allies but also because we worry about our own security if Russia were to defeat Ukraine.

Canada also set out an Africa strategy to recognize the importance of one of the fastest growing population centres in the world. Africa has the largest youth bulge (when the share of youth grows faster than the share of seniors), often a signal for significant economic growth. Canada also has links to Africa through African Canadians and francophone communities.

In the last year, shifts in our relationship with the United States are causing Canada to revisit our geographic areas of focus. The US recently announced a more aggressive version of the Monroe Doctrine, a policy that dates to 1832 whereby the US seeks dominance over the Western Hemisphere — that is, North, Central and South America — to secure its own safety and put America First. It wants to prevent other countries from controlling key infrastructure, having a military presence, or launching major commercial interests in this region. Recently, the US conducted an unprecedented military operation to seize the Venezuelan President and his wife. The US gave various reasons, including the leader's suppression of democracy in Venezuela, US desire to install a leader of their choosing, as well as US interests in Venezuelan oil. The US has also threatened Mexico with possible military consequences over its drug trade, as well as its threats to annex Canada.

In response, some experts believe Canada needs to pivot its attention to its own backyard. Traditionally, we have not focused much on Central and South America (outside of Haiti), but they say the new US policy means we must. It is critical to show the US that we are taking our own hemisphere seriously and so contribute to shared foreign policy goals with the US. In this way, we stay aligned with the US and may reduce threats to our economy by the US. Others say it's critical to build new alliances in the Western Hemisphere to counter the US. That is, we need safety in numbers to push back against this new US policy.

On the other hand, Canada's greatest chances of increased trade and economic growth come from Europe and the Indo-Pacific. We also still have a significant interest in supporting Ukraine. Some experts argue we need to remain focused on our long-term priorities. We cannot be pulled off track by the US and we don't have the resources to do everything.

Climate Change

17. Proposal: Canada should prioritize climate change in its engagement with other countries	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Can't afford not to. Climate change is a major threat to Canada, including forest fires, floods, and our security in the Arctic. We must push others because our own safety and security depend on it. Climate is equally important. The world faces many pressing concerns and climate change is just as much of a concern. Canada can lead. The world needs a country willing to take the lead and still push for climate change. Canada is a big per capita emitter of greenhouse gasses. We have a responsibility to the rest of the world.	Not the time. We need to focus on immediate concerns like our economy, our relationship with the United States, and the increasing conflicts around the world. No capacity. Canada is a small country. We simply don't have the capacity to prioritize many issues at once. Too much money. We give too much money to other countries to help them with climate change. We should reduce this spending. Canada is a small contributor globally. While we are a large per capita emitter, we are a very small part of the global problem. It's not our place to lecture others.

Addressing climate change has been an important part of Canada's global engagement in the last ten years. Notably, we funded international climate efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to help other countries adapt to the impact of climate change. Our funding was more than \$5 billion for 2020-25, and included priorities like:

- Helping low- and middle-income countries shift to renewable sources of energy and reduce their carbon emissions
- Building early warning systems for climate disasters
- Adapting agricultural methods so farmers can still produce food even as the climate changes
- Protecting endangered animals and forests

Canada also worked closely with other countries to increase public and political attention to climate change and to encourage the private sector to mobilize financing for climate.

As the world has changed in the last year, many experts worry that climate has become less of a priority. It is harder to work with other countries, as some have become more hostile to discussion or have changed their own policies on climate change. These experts say that Canada needs to step up its work on climate change in response. The facts have not changed, and climate change is still a major threat to human life and the future of our shared planet. Even though it is difficult, Canada must continue to press for global action on climate change. We can deal with newer short-term concerns at the same time as tackling climate change.

Others say this focus simply isn't realistic in this new context. The world has too many pressing immediate concerns, like war and a possible recession. These must take precedence for now. Too many lives and livelihoods hang in the balance, and it's not realistic for countries to also prioritize climate change at the same time. Moreover, we aren't a big contributor to the climate problem. While Canada has one of the world's high greenhouse gas emissions per person, we are low contributors globally: only 1.4%. They also say that focus may also upset the United States, which has changed its position on climate change, and we can't afford that extra friction.

Section #4

Development

How should Canada be thinking about its relationship with poorer countries?



Development: How should Canada be thinking about its relationship with poorer countries?

Canada engages in development activities with poorer countries in a variety of ways. We give or loan money to low- and middle-income countries directly and we contribute to international organizations like the World Bank that also do that work. This kind of development assistance (also called foreign aid) helps poorer countries build hospitals and schools, set up clean water systems, build a strong legal system, set up democratic institutions and develop their economies. It also paid for most of the vaccines for poorer countries during the COVID pandemic, for example. Development spending also provides urgent humanitarian assistance, like emergency food aid during natural disasters and wars.

The goal of international assistance is to help countries become self-sufficient so that they no longer need external help. Since 1960, dozens of countries (from South Korea to China to Turkey) with a total population of over 4 billion have graduated from being major receivers of aid to becoming major donors themselves.

Canada's spending on development was US \$7 billion out of a total US \$212 billion from all donor countries in 2024. Another way of comparing donor countries' commitment is to show what portion of their national economy they allocate to development. The international goal is 0.7%, although few countries (mostly in Scandinavia) have spent that much. Canada reached 0.3% in 2025, before recent cuts were announced. Our commitment to increase military spending to reach 3.5% of GDP is ten times as large.

But development is not just about aid. Canada also uses its voice to speak out in global forums in support of developing countries and the world's most vulnerable people, for example by encouraging other countries to protect women's rights. We also cooperate with low and middle-income countries to work on areas of shared interest (such as disease prevention), provide training, or encourage trade, such as offering special trading partner status so that countries can improve their own economies.

Until last year, the United States was a central actor in development policy and spending globally. It cooperated with other countries and provided over half of the world's development assistance dollars. It encouraged others around the world to join efforts to improve economies and lives in low-income countries. The US also acted in many problematic ways, sometimes violating human rights and acting unfairly to poorer countries. However, while not perfect, its role was central and stable. The 2025 Trump administration and its "America First" agenda disrupted decades of stability and fundamentally changed the landscape for international development.

In 2025, many countries, including Canada, announced they would cut their aid significantly, partly to redirect funding to defence and security. Most drastically, the United States axed its whole development department (USAID) and cut its aid by more than half, from US \$63 billion to US \$29 billion. At the same time, other major donors like the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and France also cut their aid. In all, funding fell by a record 23% in 2025. In 2025, Canada announced cuts of \$2.7 billion spread out over the next four years.

These aid cuts have already had severe consequences in low-income countries. Some surveys show a 70% reduction in essential services like healthcare and education. Other countries lost most of their health budgets in a single month. While some experts argue that poorer countries need to do a better job at mobilizing their own resources to pay for basic social services, this will take time. Because of high national debt, poorer countries cannot replace these budgets overnight. Recent analysis found that aid cuts may lead to more than 22 million deaths globally by 2030, including more than 5.4 million children under five years old. For the first time in decades, child mortality increased in 2025. Already half a million children have died because of these cuts. That's one child every 40 seconds.

At the same time, poorer and conflict-affected countries are reviewing their relationships with richer countries. They are thinking about ways to create a new system, one that gives them more say in their own national decision-making and a stronger role in international organizations. Many experts believe it's time to review old approaches and find new ways to support poorer countries that are mutually beneficial.

In response, Canada is reconsidering its own approach. As a small country with a relatively modest budget, what role can we play? How do we continue to support others around the world while we are also struggling ourselves? And where should we focus to achieve the most impact?

Commitment to Development

18. Proposal: Canada should maintain its development assistance alongside its defence and security increases	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Morally right. Canada is a wealthy country and it's right that we help those who are less fortunate through no fault of their own. Aid and defence go together. Investment in development prevents conflict. Strategic investment. Development benefits Canada. It's an investment in building new political partnerships, preventing disease, and creating new markets for trade. We can do both. If we can increase defence spending, we can at least maintain our development budget. Spending on defence is expensive. Spending on development is relatively cheap for the benefits it brings to Canada. Development works. More and more countries are growing their way out of	Protect Canada. We need to prioritize defence spending in these dangerous times. Charity begins at home. money should be used on pressing domestic issues. Not our job. It's not Canada's responsibility to worry about what happens in other countries. They need to be responsible for caring for their own people. Not effective. Development money doesn't really work. It might help some people access a doctor, but it doesn't bring countries out of poverty. Corruption. Too much aid is wasted and goes to corrupt or non-democratic countries. Outdated. We should end aid, and move to a new, more equal world where rich countries don't use their money to push priorities on low-income countries.

poverty. Just look at China, India, and Indonesia, for example.	
---	--

Why should Canada maintain its development spending? First, argue experts, countries invest in international development because of the belief in a shared responsibility of working together to stimulate sustainable economic growth that benefits everyone, especially those most at risk of being left behind. It protects rights, provides for essential needs, and helps people live better lives. Simply put, it is the moral thing to do. Some also believe aid is a way of correcting wrongs of the past, where rich countries shaped the rules in their favour and stole resources from poorer countries. These countries are still poor in part because of our actions in the past so we have a responsibility to help them recover.

Secondly, development assistance benefits Canada too. Experts argue that it can help make other countries more stable, well-off, and educated. It improves global health security by preventing diseases that could spread and become a pandemic. It helps reduce the risk of war and conflict and so reduces migration. Many military experts support development assistance because it can address the root causes of war. It expands potential trade partnerships and opens new markets for Canada, because when people are better off, they can buy our products.

Others have a different point of view. They support cuts to aid and argue that our spending should focus mostly on Canadian domestic challenges. They say we are facing tough economic times ourselves, as well as a more dangerous world, and it's only sensible to redirect aid towards our own needs, including defence. They also say that aid is not always effective in the long run. While it can boost healthcare and education, it plays a much smaller role in lifting whole communities out of poverty. They also argue that giving countries aid may reduce incentives for their government to invest in their own public services because they can rely on wealthier countries instead. Others worry that development assistance could be wasted or subject to corruption.

Some experts in low-income countries themselves say that aid is a way that wealthy countries interfere in their countries' decision-making because aid comes with conditions. They argue that we need to end aid because it is outdated and a form of colonialism where rich countries impose their will on poorer countries.

Development and Canadian Economic Interests

19. Proposal: Canadian international development should prioritize helping Canadian companies grow overseas	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
It's the economy! In times of economic uncertainty, we must prioritize Canadian companies, and we should double down on supporting them. We must put ourselves first. If we help Canadian companies work overseas, their success could trickle down to average Canadians so we should at least try. We should refocus. It's time to move away from old models of helping poor people and start seeing companies and the economy as the way to drive economic growth.	We can do both. We already help Canadian companies with large streams of funding. We don't need to take money from poor people to help them more. We can increase support to companies if we want, but we shouldn't take that from aid. Subsidies don't work. Evidence shows subsidies don't work — in many cases, the companies take the money and pass it to shareholders. They don't create good jobs or give back to Canada. It breeds corruption. Handouts to companies is a recipe for corruption.

Others say that we should maintain aid, but we must make a big shift and tie our aid more directly to Canadian economic interests. They propose funding Canadian companies to train and hire people in other countries, doing deals that expand Canadian companies' access to other countries' markets, or making partnerships between Canadian and overseas companies to produce new products. Supporters say this switch in approach will indirectly benefit poor people abroad who could get hired by our companies and therefore lift everyone's economies. They say this treats poorer countries as equals in trade and business instead of giving them handouts.

Critics of this approach say we tried so-called "tied aid" in the 1980s and 1990s, and it was largely ineffective. In some cases, it led to scandals where governments made improper deals, like promising aid to dictators in return for contracts. They also say that evidence shows these programs don't work. The companies take the money, but they don't create new jobs, and the benefits rarely trickle down to ordinary people. Finally, they argue Canadian companies already have their own programs and funding to help them. They say that poor people and their needs should be the focus of international development, and any benefits to Canadians are nice-to-have but not the main purpose. There are already many ways Canadians benefit from international development such as preventing pandemics and the spread of disease, creating new markets for trade, and preventing conflicts that could affect us.

Women and Girls

20. Proposal: Canada should continue its focus on helping women and girls in low-income countries	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
It's the right thing to do. The situation of women and girls around the world is intolerable and Canada must play a role in improving their lives. It's effective. Evidence shows that if we want to improve lives and lift people out of poverty, we must focus on those most left behind. That's women and girls. Domestic priority. Canada is proud of our own progress at home on improving the rights of women and girls. We should advance this issue internationally too.	It's hypocritical. We shouldn't be trumpeting women's rights abroad when we haven't achieved equal outcomes for women at home. Not enough money. We can't afford to give so much money for specific priorities like this. We need to cut back everywhere, and that includes women and girls. Not our decision. It's up to other countries to decide their own priorities. It's not for Canada to dictate that they must focus on women and girls.

Through successive governments, Canada has focused its development policy on women and girls and on gender equality. Canada chose this focus because of the evidence that advancing gender equality benefits everyone, including men and boys. Many experts believe that focusing on women and girls lifts everyone up and is the best way to tackle poverty. Without a specific focus on women and girls, they do not benefit equally from efforts to improve lives and economies.

However, despite some progress, gender inequalities persist. Globally, one in three women will experience violence. Women do nearly three times the domestic chores of men, and they are paid 23% less than men in employment. Women have only 60% of the legal rights that men enjoy. In some countries, women are not allowed to own property, decide who they marry, or obtain the same employment as men.

In the 2010s, Canada focused particularly on maternal and newborn health, helping countries improve healthcare for women and babies, reduce maternal mortality, and increase infant survival. Under the last government, Canada adopted a feminist foreign policy as well as a Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), and we strengthened our work to gender equality. Under the FIAP, Canada continued to focus on maternal, newborn and child health and increased investment in areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (including access to contraceptives, protection from gender-based violence, and more), women in agriculture, supporting women to access finance and credit like men can, and removing barriers to women's leadership. We also supported women's rights movements — groups that fight for women's rights in many areas, like the rights to safe workplaces, legal rights, protection against violence, and rights to education and to own property and land.

Many experts and women in low-income countries themselves supported this focus. They saw Canada as an important friend who helped them access and protect the rights and remove barriers to health, education and sustainable livelihoods. However, critics said it was hypocritical for Canada to advance women's rights abroad when we have not fully achieved women's rights at home. Other critics said the focus on gender equality was trendy but not effective.

In recent months, the new Canadian government has moved away from feminist language in talking about its foreign policy and has not yet addressed gender equality and women and girls as a priority in its development policy.

Global Health

21. Proposal: Canada should maintain spending on global health	
Arguments For	Arguments Against
Not the time. Now is not the time for Canada to cut its global health budget. Millions of children are projected to die already, and we cannot be responsible for more deaths. Not responsible. It is irresponsible to cut the budget – compared to defence spending, it's very small and won't save us that much money anyway. Keeps us safe. If we're increasing the defence budget because the world is more dangerous, we should increase the global health budget as well to help defend us against pandemics and make the world safer. Don't waste our experience. Canada has built up 20 years of expertise. We shouldn't waste it now, when the world needs it more than ever.	Focus on the biggest threats. The world is more dangerous now and Canada needs to focus on the threats to us at home. It's right to increase our defence spending, and we should focus our energy on combatting Russia, China and Iran. In step with others. Most of our allies are cutting health spending. It's just sensible and we're only doing the same as our allies. Not our responsibility. It's not Canada's job to improve maternal health or treat tuberculosis in other countries. Other countries need to be responsible for their own health care.

Canada is known for its expertise in global health. Global health means preventing infectious diseases like HIV and tuberculosis, vaccinating children against diseases like polio, preventing pandemics, improving maternal and newborn health, and building strong health systems with sufficient equipment, medical professionals, and training to provide high quality healthcare. Over 20 years, Canada has built expertise in this area, with a particular focus on issues that affect women and children. Fewer countries fund this type of work, and Canada decided to lean into this area because it was a good way to use our smaller amount of funding to improve lives around the world. Canada's role has been especially important as countries like the United States have reduced their support for women and children's health.

In 2019, Canada announced a large commitment to global health — \$1.4 billion per year over 10 years, totalling about \$7 billion in total development spending (for a sense of scale, the federal budget is about \$500 billion a year). However, in 2025, Canada announced cuts of \$2.7 billion spread out over the next four years. The government said it particularly wants to reduce the global health portion of our spending, because it has grown faster than other areas.

That decline is seen in other countries, as well. Like the drop in overall aid funding, global health funding around the world has fallen in the last three years by an estimated 21%. It is projected to decline by half from US \$80 billion in 2021 to a projected US \$36 billion in 2030.