



Canada — Va-PoReg Country Report

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07/01/1867 Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy: On 07/01/1867 Canada became a federated country, a self-governing polity within the British Empire.¹ Canada is classified as an electoral oligarchy from Confederation on 07/01/1867 until the implementation of the Dominion Elections Act on 12/06/1921. Throughout this period, federal voting rights were restricted through property-based qualifications that required voters to own property of a certain value, pay rent above a specified threshold, or earn a minimum annual income. These requirements ensured that approximately only half of the adult male population was eligible to vote, systematically excluding workers, tenant farmers, and those without economic resources. Women were entirely excluded from federal elections until 1918, and even after partial enfranchisement, they remained subject to the same property qualifications as men where such requirements existed. Additional racial exclusions barred Chinese Canadians from voting in several provinces, while Status Indians could vote only by renouncing their Indian status and treaty rights. In this regime period competitive multiparty executive and legislative elections were held (see also LIED). V-Dem's CEI scores what we interpret as somewhat clean elections until 1917 and as ambiguous afterwards. Following V-Dem's EF&FI elections were free and fair until 1918 and were somewhat present afterwards. LIED does not recognize political liberties, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating political liberties are absent. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

12/06/1921 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy: On 12/06/1921 the first national legislative election with (almost) universal suffrage took place.² For provincial elections, female suffrage was established between 1916 (Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan) and 1940 (Quebec). Chinese Canadians, regardless of gender, were given suffrage in 1947, while Aboriginal Canadians were not allowed to vote until 1960, regardless of gender.³ In 1876, Canada implemented the Indian Act to control and assimilate Indigenous peoples. It required Indigenous individuals to give up their Indian status through enfranchisement to vote in federal elections, often leading to cultural isolation and loss of Treaty rights. The government also forcibly revoked Indian Status in the 1920s and 1930s, advancing assimilation. Enfranchisement thus became a coercive tool for assimilating Indigenous populations.⁴ For these reasons Canada is classified as an electoral democracy until 1960. From 1921 to 1925, the government was formed by the Liberal Party under William King as prime minister. Since King's Liberal Party did not have an absolute majority in parliament, he led a minority government supported by the Progressive Party. With the 1925 elections, King could resume his minority government but had to resign in 1926 due to a corruption scandal. The Conservative Party then formed a minority government, also supported by the Progressive Party, but lost support just three months later. Elections then reinstated King as prime minister, now heading a majority government. The following governments also were majority governments, indicating stability while the regular changes in government underscore the competitive character of the national elections.⁵ For the relevant period, elections were competitive per LIED. Elections were what we interpret as clean except between 1926 and 1929 they were somewhat clean (V-Dem CEI). Elections were free and fair for the whole timeframe (V-Dem EF&FI). LIED classifies political liberties as absent until 1945 and as present from 1946 onward. V-Dem's PCLI codes political liberties as present for this period. Based on our observations,

multipart executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. From 1922 to 1930, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For 1931-1944, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the remainder of the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. On 03/31/1949, Newfoundland joined Canada in an act of self-determination, so from that date on, Canada includes the province of Newfoundland.⁶

03/31/1960 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this day, amendments were made to Section 14(2) of the Canada Elections Act, allowing status Indians to exercise their right to vote in federal elections without risking the loss of their Indian status.⁷ On 12/11/1931 the Statute of Westminster gave Canada a higher sovereignty from the United Kingdom. Canada is a strong bicameral parliamentary democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system. Elections are free and fair and constitutional rights are guaranteed, with strong independent institutions to enforce them. This regime period continues to underscore governmental stability with governing parties alternating but having an absolute majority. Governing parties in Canada were the Liberal Party, the Liberal Conservative Party, the Conservative Party, the Progressive Conservative Party and the Conservative Party of Canada, the latter being a coalition party between the Progressive Conservative Party and the Canadian Alliance.⁸ In 2022 initiatives to make voting more accessible and improving on equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. Furthermore, despite ongoing discrimination and enduring economic, social, and political challenges for Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized Canadians, the federal government has recognized these issues and implemented certain measures to address them.⁹ Political rights and civil liberties are respected in Canada, and freedoms of speech, expression and religion among others are guaranteed.¹⁰ FH classifies Canada in the whole regime period as free.¹¹ According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as present for this period. A monarch remains the ceremonial head of state, thereby making Canada a parliamentary democracy embedded in a constitutional monarchy. Justin Trudeau has served as the prime minister of Canada since 04/11/2015. Trudeau called for snap elections in 08/2021 with the subsequent vote taking place on 09/20/2021. The center-left Liberal Party upheld its minority government.¹²¹³ Based on our observations, multipart executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED has consistently characterized the election as competitive. Since 1920, V-Dem's EF&FI has consistently scored electoral freedom and fairness as present. Their CEI also consistently scores elections as free. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Canada; https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Canada_2011?lang=en

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1921_Canadian_federal_election

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

⁴ <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-chaotic-story-of-the-right-to-vote-in-canada>

⁵ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Canada_R: 1, Canada_V: 1.

⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_\(island\)#Union_with_Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_(island)#Union_with_Canada)

⁷ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-suffrage>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_of_Canada; <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Canada_R: 1, Canada_V: 1.

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2023>

¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2024>

¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2023>