



CANADA

Quick Facts

Population: 37,694,085 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 9,984,670 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Canadian 32.3%, English 18.3%, Scottish 13.9%, French 13.6%, Irish 13.4%, German 9.6%, Chinese 5.1%, Italian 4.6%, North American Indian 4.4%, East Indian 4%, other 51.6% (2016 est.)

GDP (official exchange rate): \$1.653 trillion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated September 2020)

INTRODUCTION

Canada is a free and peaceful society with a large and generally successful immigration program. Newcomers to Canada tend to learn the local language (English or French), integrate into the economy, adopt Canadian values, and develop a positive Canadian identity. Muslims are no exception, and most Muslim communities in Canada are better integrated than their European counterparts. That said, Canada has also earned an unsavory reputation as a terrorist haven. Terrorist groups flocked to Canada in the decades prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, prompting the Canadian government to belatedly enact stricter anti-terrorism laws. In the past two decades, however, Islamist and terrorist groups have hidden amid Canada's immigrant communities – including its Muslim population. Stubborn and subversive Islamist groups have penetrated the community and established terrorist cells, fundraising operations, communal organizations, mosques, and schools.

Following two attacks on members of the Canadian military in 2014, the Canadian government once again strengthened its counterterrorism response through legislation (including the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act, known as Bill C51). However, Canada's approach to combating Islamism has shifted once more under current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose government has taken an active role in assisting the repatriation of Islamic State fighters.¹

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Before the September 11th attacks in the United States, terrorist groups traditionally used Canada's immigrant communities as safe havens and, occasionally, as bases of operations. These groups included, among others, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA),² Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),³ and Sikh separatist extremists.⁴

Canada's Islamist extremists generally fall into three broad camps: (1) Salafist, including supporters of al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS), (2) Shiite, and (3) Palestinian.

In November 2018, a report by the Institute of Economics & Peace listed Canada as the 57th nation in its Global Terrorism Index. Since 2017, Canada has moved up nine places in those rankings.⁵ According to Canada's government intelligence agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS),⁶ there are three primary ways in which terrorism threatens Canadian safety and security: 1) terrorists continue to plot direct attacks against Canada and its allies, at home and abroad; 2) terrorists conduct activities in Canada to support terrorist activity globally, namely fundraising to support attacks and military groups; and 3) terrorists use social media to reach and radicalize individual Canadians, who are then convinced to travel abroad to join a terrorist army and commit attacks, or to receive training in terrorist methods.

Despite the active threat of extremism in Canada today, the Ministry of Public Safety has recently revised its 2018 Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada by removing any references to militant Shi'a or Sunni Islamist terrorism. Similar edits were also made to remove any reference to "Sikh extremism."⁷ This move should be properly understood as political in nature. It must be viewed through the lens of political correctness in Canada. The Liberal Party of sitting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau relies heavily on the support of immigrant communities, and as a result has overlooked problems within them and equated any discussion or concerns regarding homegrown radicalism with racism and xenophobia. Indeed, the only type of terrorism the Trudeau government appears willing to name and discuss is "right-wing terrorism."⁸

Al-Qaeda

One of the most prominent examples of al-Qaeda's presence in Canada relates to the Khadr family. Ahmed Said Khadr, the patriarch of the family, raised funds for al-Qaeda and was, at one point, the highest-ranking member of the group in Canada.⁹ He died in a 2003 confrontation with the Pakistani military,¹⁰ but his Islamist legacy lives on through his children. Two sons, Omar and Abdul Rahman, attended al-Qaeda training camps, fought for the Taliban and spent time in Guantanamo for terrorism. Omar killed an American medic, Spt. 1st Class Christopher J. Speer, during a gun battle in Afghanistan in July 2002. He was arrested and sent to Guantanamo Bay. In 2003, the U.S. released Abdul Rahman, who returned to Canada. In October 2010, Omar Khadr pled guilty to murder in violation of the laws of war, attempted murder in violation of the laws of war, conspiracy, two counts of providing material support for terrorism, and spying in the United States.¹¹ In exchange for his guilty plea, a military tribunal sentenced him to eight years in prison and promised to repatriate him to Canada after he had served the first year of his sentence at Guantanamo. He was put under "house arrest" in Canada in May 2015.¹² He has visited his still-radicalized family members in Toronto and has graced the front cover of Canada's cultural magazine, *Maclean's*, and was a guest on a popular Quebec talk show.¹³

Khadr filed a \$20 million (CAD) lawsuit against the Canadian government, and, in July 2017, media reported that the Trudeau government had secretly settled this lawsuit – awarding Khadr \$10.5 million (CAD) and issuing an official apology on behalf of the government.¹⁴ The court ruling, however, only stated that Khadr's rights had been violated in 2003 when he was sent to Guantanamo, and did not order the government to pay him or apologize. Public opinion in Canada has been critical of the Trudeau government for this decision.¹⁵ On March 25th, 2019, an Alberta judge ruled that Khadr's sentence expired, entitling him to total freedom – including the ability to acquire a Canadian passport and travel without seeking permission from authorities.¹⁶

In January 2013, an al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group took over 800 hostages at a gas facility in In Amenas, Algeria. During the terrorist attack, at least 38 civilians and 29 terrorists died.¹⁷ Two of the terrorists, Ali Medlej and Xristos Katsiroubas, were Canadian men and high school classmates from London South Collegiate Institute in London, Ontario. Both men were killed in the attack.¹⁸ Mauritanian authorities had previously arrested a third classmate, Aaron Yoon, who was convicted in July 2012 of having ties to al-Qaeda and of posing a danger to national security and sentenced to two years in prison.¹⁹ Yoon was transferred back to London, Canada in July 2013.²⁰

Al-Qaeda cells in Canada have graduated from planning attacks abroad to planning attacks against

Canada itself. In 2006, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested eighteen men plotting to bomb the Toronto Stock Exchange, a military base near Highway 401 between Toronto and Ottawa, and Front Street offices of CSIS, Canada's security and intelligence agency.²¹ They also intended to storm the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Canadian Parliament, take hostages, and decapitate the leaders of each party. They planned to demand that Canada withdraw troops from Afghanistan.²² Another al-Qaeda connected plot to derail a VIA Rail passenger train near Toronto was thwarted on April 22, 2013, after an eight-month investigation.²³

Of the 18 men arrested, eleven were convicted of terrorism offenses.²⁴ The ringleader, Zakaria Amara, pled guilty, received a life sentence, and was stripped of his Canadian citizenship. Since taking office, however, Justin Trudeau has overhauled the government's ability to strip citizenship from foreign-born dual citizens convicted of terrorism charges. Amara was recently regranted Canadian citizenship.²⁵

Hiva Mohammad Alizadeh, an Iranian-born Kurdish refugee to Canada is considered the ringleader of an Ottawa al-Qaeda cell. He pled guilty to a terror plot in 2014 and was sentenced to 24 years in a federal prison.²⁶ Alizadeh admitted that he spent two months in an al-Qaeda terrorist training camp in Afghanistan in 2009, where he received firearms and explosives training. He then smuggled 56 circuit boards, capable of triggering remote bombs, back to Canada.²⁷ In recent news, it was discovered that a website belonging to al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was being hosted on Canadian servers. The Toronto-area company in charge of hosting the website immediately notified the RCMP, but was forced to shut down the domain on its own accord after police failed to respond to the incident on time.²⁸

The Islamic State (IS)

IS has generated interest in Canada since its emergence in 2014. A recent government report estimated that over 190 Canadians left their homes to join extremist activities in the Middle East, 60 of whom are known to have returned.²⁹ Several were arrested before they could depart the country, while a number of others were apprehended overseas.

Since its rise to global prominence, IS has also served as the inspiration for a series of extremist attacks within Canada itself. On October 20, 2014, Canadian-born Martin Couture-Rouleau intentionally rammed his car into a pair of Canadian Forces soldiers in a shopping mall parking lot in Quebec, killing one.³⁰ Just two days later, a second attack took place on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.³¹ On August 10, 2016, twenty-five year-old Aaron Driver was shot and killed by police while riding in a taxi to Union in downtown Toronto.³² Driver had previously recorded a homemade video and strapped a homemade bomb to his body. In his video, Driver said: "I give my pledge of allegiance to (ISIS leader) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who's called for *jihād* in the lands of crusaders, and I respond to this call."³³ On June 3, 2017, Rehab Dugmush attacked Canadian Tire employees with a knife and a golf club in the name of ISIS. A year earlier, Dugmush had attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Dugmush was sentenced to seven years in a federal prison for her crimes.³⁴ And on October 1, 2017, Somali national and refugee to Canada Abdulahi Hasan Sharif drove a truck through a crowd, rammed a police officer and then stabbed him repeatedly, all while hanging an ISIS flag from his car window.³⁵

IS has also used Canada as a staging area for attacks in the U.S., most notably in 2016, when Canadian ISIS operative Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy attempted to carry out a bombing attack on Times Square in New York City. Bahnasawy pled guilty to conspiring with ISIS to bomb the city's subway system and to mass-murder civilians in the surrounding area, and was sentenced to 40 years in prison in December 2018.³⁶

Since taking power, Prime Minister Trudeau's administration appears to be taking a more conciliatory approach to returning IS fighters. In a 2017 year-end interview, Trudeau stated: "We know that actually, someone who has engaged and turned away from that hateful ideology can be an extraordinarily powerful voice for preventing radicalization."³⁷ The Prime Minister has also pledged millions in governmental funds for a "de-radicalization" program for returned ISIS terrorists.³⁸

Hezbollah

The Iranian embassy in Ottawa had a history of funding and aiding a controversial cultural center that not only had ties with Hezbollah, but also served as an outpost for espionage and subversion. The Iran embassy regularly hosted and funded conferences for Iranian Canadians and invited guests only. These events sought to recruit, persuade, and intimidate sympathetic members of the Muslim community to join the Islamic Republic's network.³⁹ In 2012, the Canadian government posted a notice on the embassy door ordering all Iranian officials to leave the country within five days. The government also closed Canada's embassy in Tehran, recalling all Canadian diplomats, cutting diplomatic ties with Iran, and officially listing Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Trudeau government, however, has softened this previous hardline stance against Iran. For instance, it lifted some Canadian sanctions against the Islamic Republic in February 2016.⁴⁰ Trudeau had pledged rapprochement with Iran during the 2015 Canadian election, though he has yet to follow through with reestablishing official diplomatic ties.⁴¹

Canada still struggles in its relationship with Iran. In January 2020, the Iranian regime shot down Ukrainian Airlines flight PS752, which was carrying 55 Canadian citizens and another 30 permanent residents.⁴² The Iranian diaspora community in Canada was both devastated and outraged, pushing the Trudeau government to launch an investigation into the massacre. Trudeau was photographed just a few weeks later with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif at a summit in Germany, drawing harsh criticism from the Iranian community in Canada and beyond.⁴³

Palestinian Islamists

Hamas, the most influential Palestinian Islamist group, has a history of using Canada as a fundraising base, even after it was formally designated as a terrorist group by the Canadian government in November 2002.⁴⁴ A May 2000 Privy Council Office memo to then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien identified the Jerusalem Fund for Human Services (Jerusalem Fund), which would later change its name to the International Relief Fund for the Afflicted and Needy, as a fundraising entity for Hamas.⁴⁵ In 2004, IFRAN was scrutinized by the Canada Revenue Agency auditors over fundraising links to Hamas, but was able to keep its charitable status by signing an agreement stating it would not fund any organization linked to Hamas. A later audit found that, between 2004 and 2009, IFRAN had "openly supported and provided funding to Hamas"⁴⁶ while also engaging in "deceptive and misleading fundraising."⁴⁷ A Charities Branch document highlights how IFRAN sent almost \$15 million to Hamas and related agencies during this period, leading to the government's decision to strip IFRAN of its charity status in 2011, and, in 2014, to add IFRAN to Canada's official list of terrorist groups.⁴⁸

Islamist community organizations

In September 2017, the Islamic Society of British Columbia was penalized by the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA) for an alleged relationship with a Qatari organization that supports *jihadi* terrorism. CRA audit documents obtained by Global News found that the Eid Foundation of Qatar "maintained some level of control or influence over the affairs" of the Islamic Society, while also having alleged ties to terrorist organizations.⁴⁹

In 2018, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) was granted taxpayer funding by the Canada Summer Jobs Program despite its known funding links to Pakistani militants. The Canada Revenue Agency ruled that the group was responsible for providing resources to armed militant Islamists to fight Indian forces.⁵⁰ The CRA believes that ISNA was using its charitable status to gain funds for political and armed efforts overseas. That status has since been suspended and the organization was ordered to pay a \$550,000 penalty.⁵¹

Islamist parties have also appeared as political actors, particularly in Ontario. In 2018, the Islamic Party of Ontario officially registered with the province's elections office.⁵² Among its platform policies,

the party stated it hopes to establish Islam as Ontario's "natural religion," ban abortion, prohibit LGBTQ identity, and ban liquor, drugs, adultery, and gambling.⁵³

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

As of 2020, Muslims numbered just over 1 million, making up a slightly more than 2.5 percent of the country's total population of 37.7 million citizens.⁵⁴ A majority lives in Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area. Quebec hosts the country's second-largest Muslim community, the vast majority of whom live in Greater Montreal – home to many immigrants from the former French colonies of Algeria and Lebanon. Sizeable Muslim populations also reside in Alberta and British Columbia.⁵⁵

Radicalism can be found in some Canadian mosques and Islamic schools. For instance, the Salaheddin Islamic Center and Al-Rahman Islamic Centre, both in Toronto, have notable connections with extremist activity; the Khadr family frequented the former, and six of the terrorists in the cell that planned to storm parliament and decapitate the Prime Minister visited the latter.⁵⁶

The annual "Al-Quds Day" rally in Toronto is the most public example of pro-Islamist and anti-Semitic activism in Canada. In June 2018, the event featured hateful signs, speeches, and music that glorified anti-Semitic violence. The extremely violent lyrics of one chant specifically targeted Jews and called for the destruction of Israel. Al-Quds rallies are held annually across the world by those who oppose Israel. Toronto police investigated the anti-Semitic music video shortly after it took place.⁵⁷

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Canada passed its first anti-terrorism legislation, the Canadian *Anti-Terrorism Act* (Bill C-36), in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Before the *Anti-Terrorism Act* received the Royal Assent on December 18, 2001, the Canadian criminal code did not even formally define "terrorist activity." The *Anti-Terrorism Act* rectified this state of affairs by providing a definition of both "terrorist activity" and "terrorist group,"⁵⁸ and authorizing the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Solicitor General, to designate an entity as a terrorist group.⁵⁹

The *Anti-Terrorism Act*'s prohibition of funding terrorist groups represented Canada's first measure aimed at curbing terrorist financing. Before the *Act*, people could legally raise money for terrorist groups in Canada and the Crown could only prosecute those directly funding a terrorist attack. However, because of the opaque manner in which terrorist groups use banks and financial markets, it proved almost impossible to connect donors to attacks.⁶⁰ The *Anti-Terrorism Act* equipped authorities with several new tools to fight terrorism, including investigative hearings, preventive arrests, and new rules concerning information disclosure and rescinding a group's charity status. The *Act* amended the *Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) Act* to provide authorities with a way to monitor suspicious financial transactions that could be tied to terrorism. The *Act* also established a mechanism for rescinding organizations' charitable status if there are reasonable grounds to believe that it has, or will fund, a terrorist group.⁶¹ Following two Islamist terrorist attacks on Canadian Forces members in October 2014, the government passed updates to the *Anti-Terrorism Act* in January 2015 that broadened the mandate of CSIS and allowed various Canadian government agencies to share information more easily.⁶²

The actions of officials and politicians surrounding Prime Minister Trudeau have raised concerns regarding the country's current counterterrorism policy – as well as its permissive attitude toward Islamist sentiments in general. Two have lobbied to re-open diplomatic ties with Iran. They hosted an invitation-only roundtable event in Toronto in November 2016 to discuss Canadian-Iranian relations that was criticized for being stacked with pro-regime voices.⁶³ When anti-regime protests broke out in early 2018, one stated on Twitter that the Islamic Republic's dictatorship was an "elected government."⁶⁴

Another example is Mississauga Liberal MP Omar Alghabra, who Trudeau appointed as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is the former president of the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF), an organization that was defunded by the Canadian government in 2009 over its participation in a conference with Hamas and Hezbollah delegates and for comparing Israelis to Nazis. In 2014, a Federal Court ruling upheld the decision, citing evidence that included a sign threatening to murder a Jewish child and a CAF-sponsored essay contest on the topic of “ethnic cleansing” in Israel.

Another member of Trudeau’s Liberal caucus also created controversy over her affiliations with hardline Islamists. Shortly after Bashar Al-Assad’s Syrian government unleashed chemical weapons against civilians, Liberal MP Iqra Khalid greeted Archbishop Atallah Hanna, an apologist and supporter of the dictator on behalf of Trudeau. Khalid introduced the Greek Orthodox clergyman to a crowd in Mississauga in 2018.⁶⁵ At the event, Khalid also gave a community award on behalf of the Prime Minister to Amin El-Maoued—a controversial figure involved with Palestine House, an organization that lost federal funding in 2012 due to “its pattern of support for extremism.” El-Maoued was also part of a controversial and anti-Semitic rally that was investigated by police.⁶⁶

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