

Working Introduction: Canadian Climate Governance in a Disrupted World

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The contradiction seemed inescapable. Summer wildfires, intensified¹ by the impacts of climate change, were again raging² from British Columbia (BC) to Ontario. At the same time, Canada's new federal government, led by Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney, moved with dramatic speed in June 2025 to adopt Bill C-5 – *The One Canadian Economy Act*. The new legislation was widely seen to be intended³ to facilitate the development of additional natural resources, particularly fossil fuel, extraction and accompanying export infrastructure. Those directions had been foreshadowed by the new government's references in its first Speech from the Throne to enabling "Canada to become the world's leading energy superpower."⁴ In the result, the bill was decried as a reversal of the previous Liberal government's commitments over climate change and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples,⁵ a direction that seemed confirmed by a further series of announcements in May 2026.⁶

Bill C-5 reflected an apparent consensus among Canada's Prime Minister and Premiers to focus on the development of natural resource export infrastructure.⁷ The bill was presented as a central element of Canada's response to the challenges posed by the January 2025 arrival of the second Trump administration in the United States. As such it provides a case study in the core themes of this volume, of how governance structures, particularly federal and quasi-federal institutions, have performed in the formulation and implementation of effective strategies and policies to address climate change, decarbonize energy systems and advance sustainability⁸ in Canada and internationally in a landscape of rapid and profound political change. That change, expressed in part by the arrival of the Trump administration and right-wing populist provincial governments in Canada, has reflected new social and political movements, some deeply hostile to climate action, favouring a retreat from globalization, and a growing focus on geopolitical security, including the security of energy supply chains.

Federal systems of government are widely seen to allow for policy experimentation across wide ranges of fields, with subnational governments acting as policy laboratories, from which successful innovations in policy design and implementation may be adopted by other

provinces and states, or incorporated into national policies.⁹ Saskatchewan's initial development of a comprehensive public medical insurance system, or British Columbia's adoption of the first comprehensive carbon pricing system in North America, are well known examples of subnational initiatives that led to the development of national policies and programs. Federal structures may facilitate locally appropriate and responsive measures to problems as well. They can also provide for a degree of backstopping around long-term challenges, like climate change, where constituent jurisdictions can step in and **compensate** for failure or inaction by central governments.¹⁰

On the other hand, federal structures may complicate the development and implementation of coherent national policies. In areas such as the environment, where jurisdiction is often shared between different levels of government, significant levels of **cooperation**, when different levels of government adopt complementary policies within their respective jurisdictions, may be needed to implement coherent and effective national or supranational policies and strategies. Even more integrated and **collaborative** approaches among governments may be required. At times there can be upwards **competition** among constituent jurisdictions to adopt more innovative or stringent policies. Conversely, there can be downwards competition to implement, for example, weaker standards around the environment or labour practices in the hope of attracting additional investment. Such situations can lead to demands that national or supranational governments provide backstopping functions to prevent 'races to the bottom.'¹¹

As highlighted in Douglas Macdonald's *Carbon Province/Hydro Province*¹² different regions of a federation may have profoundly different natural resource endowments, which have created different economic structures, social and political dynamics, and cultures. As a result, they may come to perceive their interests in relation to issues like climate change, energy and decarbonization very differently.¹³ This may lead to patterns of **uncooperative** or even **conflictual** relations between different levels of government, with some constituent governments acting as 'veto states' in relation to initiatives which they see as threatening their economic interests. They may use their jurisdictional authority over such matters to block national initiatives or even pursue contradictory policy paths.

New forms of intergovernmental dynamics emerge through the case studies in the volume. Relations between different levels of government may be **instrumental** or **transactional**, with one level of government only participating in policy initiatives led by

another in anticipation of financial or other direct benefits.¹⁴ Senior levels of government may be seen to use their fiscal and legislative authorities **assertively** to encourage cooperation from subnational governments which, even with high levels of accommodation for subnational interests, can be seen as **unilateral**¹⁵ and **coercive** by those governments. In the case of the second Trump administration this has reached extreme proportions, where in what has been characterized as “**shakedown**” federalism,¹⁶ the full (and potentially beyond) range of federal authorities and tools are employed to achieve state compliance with federal policy directions. In extreme cases senior levels of government have **reached-down** to actively block subnational initiatives. At the other end of the spectrum one level of government may be seen to **concede** or **capitulate** leadership on policy formulation and implementation in an area of shared jurisdiction to another.¹⁷

Skogstad and Bakvis assess federal systems of governance in terms of their performance, defined as their consistency with the federal principle of governments recognizing the proper role and autonomy of other governments, the perceived legitimacy, on the parts of the participating governments and their publics, of the policy and decision-making processes followed, and the substantive policy outcomes achieved.¹⁸ Roberts,¹⁹ among others,²⁰ also highlights the importance of the capacity of multilevel governance systems to adapt and respond to long term challenges. The different modalities of intergovernmental relations found in the volume and their anticipated performance relative to these criteria are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Table 1.1. Typology of intergovernmental dynamics around climate and energy policy

Type of Intergovernmental Dynamics	Characteristics	Anticipated performance
Collaborative	Integration/sharing of resources and capacities towards shared policy goals.	High performance and legitimacy. Effective policy outputs expected. Good adaptive capacity.
Cooperative	Complementary policies adopted within respective jurisdictions	High performance and legitimacy. Effective policy outputs expected. Good adaptive capacity.
Competitive	Competition to adopt more (or less) stringent or innovative policies within shared jurisdiction	High performance and legitimacy (within jurisdictions). Policy outcomes can be strongly positive (upwards competition) or negative (downwards competition). Can facilitate policy innovation and adaptation.

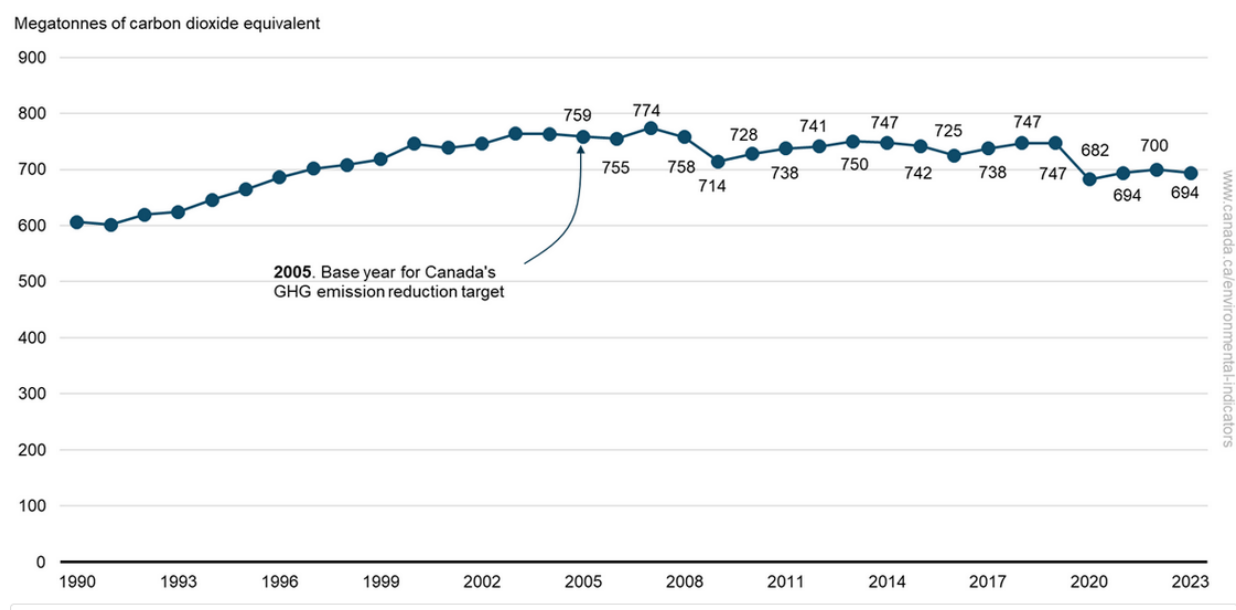
Compensatory	One level (usually subnational) acts in space where the other level has failed to act.	High performance and legitimacy (within jurisdictions); sometimes contested by senior levels of government. Policy outcomes likely mixed due to inconsistency across subnational jurisdictions. Can facilitate policy innovation and adaptation.
Instrumental/Transactional	One level of government participates in initiatives led by another only in anticipation of financial or other direct benefits	Jurisdictional boundaries acknowledged (performance). Legitimacy contested passively. Policy outcomes likely mixed due to limited commitment of subnational jurisdictions. Limited adaptive capacity.
Conflictual/uncooperative	Pursuit of different or even contradictory policy goals by different levels of government	Performance and legitimacy contested. Policy outcomes uncertain; risk of deadlock. Limited adaptive capacity.
Assertive – Unilateral - Coercive- “Shakedown” – Reach-down	Use of federal legislative and fiscal capacity to encourage or compel subnational compliance or block subnational initiatives.	Performance and legitimacy may be deeply contested. Policy outcomes uncertain. Limited adaptive capacity.
Concessionary/Capitulatory	One level voluntarily concedes policy leadership and implementation to another.	Performance and legitimacy seen as high by participating governments; may be contested by public constituencies. Policy outcomes depend on direction of lead government. Adaptive leadership depends on lead government.

In the case of climate policy in Canada, the intergovernmental dynamics have been seen to present tensions and trade-offs between advancing effective national climate policies, largely flowing from federal leadership, and maintaining the legitimacy of those policies in the eyes of provincial governments.²¹ These patterns have reflected the reality that provinces and territories have very different GHG emissions profiles and trajectories, reflecting their different economic structures and energy systems, leading them to take, at times, profoundly divergent approaches to climate policy.

Canada’s Emissions Trajectories

As seen in **Figure 1.1**, total Canadian GHG emissions moved steadily upwards from 1990 until the onset of the 2008-09 financial crisis. Emissions dipped due to the crisis but rose as the economy recovered. Significant declines in emissions again occurred between 2019 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Emissions began to rise again as the economy reopened,²² but appear to have “plateaued” from 2023 onwards at 694 megatonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, a level 8.5 per cent below 2005 levels.²³ This leaves total emissions well above Canada’s commitment under the 2015 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) Paris Agreement to reduce its annual emissions by between 40 and 45 per cent relative to 2005 by 2030. Meeting a 40 per cent reduction relative to the 2024 emission level of 694Mt of carbon dioxide equivalent would require reducing annual emissions to 443Mt.²⁴

Figure 1.1. GHG Emissions Canada – 1990-2023²⁵



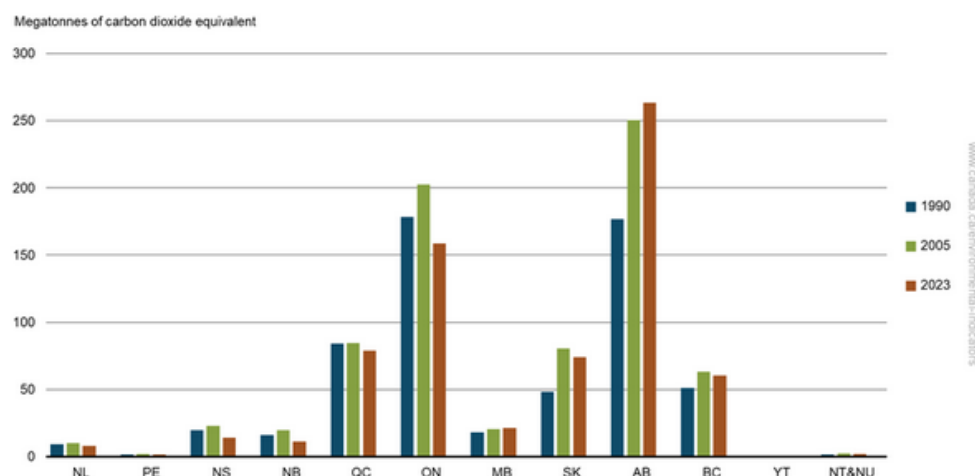
The trends for emissions from different forms of economic activity vary. In recent years there have been significant increases in the use of fossil fuels for extracting and transporting oil and gas (27 per cent of total Canadian emissions), transportation (24 per cent), and more recently buildings (13 per cent). Other sources, such as electricity (10 per cent) and heavy industry (less than 12 per cent), have declined.²⁶

Transportation emissions are spread approximately evenly across the country on a per capita basis, so all parts of the country have seen similar increases in emissions from that source. The oil and gas industry, on the other hand, operates only in some regions, notably Alberta,

Saskatchewan, BC and Newfoundland and Labrador. For that reason, emissions have been increasing in some provinces while decreasing in others in recent years. These trends are apparent in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2. Greenhouse Gas emissions by province and territory, Canada, 1990, 2005 and 2023²⁷

Greenhouse gas emissions by province and territory, Canada, 1990, 2005 and 2023



[Data table for the long description](#)

Alberta saw its GHG emissions increase 9 per cent from 2005 to 2021. Emissions from Ontario and Quebec decreased (27 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively) during the same period. In Alberta these shifts are due to the expansion of the oil and gas industry. In Ontario, a combination of economic restructuring and the elimination of coal-fired electricity generation in 2013 resulted in substantial emissions reductions. In Quebec's case, greater emission reductions might be claimed via its transnational emissions trading system with California. Alberta's overall emissions have risen 55 per cent since 1990,²⁸ despite the completion of a phase-out of coal-fired electricity in 2023.

Emissions from oil and gas activity are expected to continue to increase, in part due to anticipated increases in production from the Alberta oil sands. Oil sands emissions were estimated to be 86 million tonnes in 2023.²⁹ If all the approved oil sands projects come into production, emissions could increase to 131 million tonnes. Proposed, but unapproved, projects could increase that total to 167 million tonnes.³⁰ The continued expansion of the sector presents the largest single challenge to altering Canada's GHG emissions trajectory. The capacity of emissions mitigation technologies like carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS i.e. the

capture and (typically) underground storage of GHGs) to limit this growth remains deeply controversial.³¹ Large increases in GHG emissions are also projected due to the expansion of liquified natural gas (LNG) production in British Columbia.³² Electricity sector emissions in Ontario have risen by a factor of four as a result of increasing reliance on gas-fired generation since 2017, with further major increases anticipated in the future.³³

Climate Change Governance and Federalism

Climate change has been described as an “intrinsically multilevel”³⁴ governance problem. Climate policy experimentation has also taken place amongst local governments and non-state actors³⁵—often in a transnational orientation—creating new governance challenges for traditional federal structures. Current assessments of the capacity of Canada’s federal system to accommodate voices demanding climate action from the “bottom-up” suggest that radical institutional change may be necessary.³⁶ At the same time, the emergence of right-wing populism in Canada—a “bottom-up” movement from a different part of the political spectrum—has also come to challenge climate policy.³⁷

Even voices that have traditionally strongly supported climate action have begun to express doubt about the feasibility of meeting Canada’s emission reduction targets in the context of changing political circumstances.³⁸ Internationally a ‘climate realist’ movement has emerged in the face of the failure to significantly reduce GHG emissions globally. That movement is focussed on dealing with the geopolitical risks of a warming world, ‘clean’ technology development, and geoengineering to manage climate change impacts.³⁹ Others have highlighted that as climate change’s effects become more evident, new political and economic divisions may emerge between communities and jurisdictions in places that are heavily impacted, and those which may be less vulnerable or even see themselves benefitting.⁴⁰

The environment and more specifically climate change, provides a case study in the dynamics and the tensions between unity and division in federal systems. Federal constitutions in Canada, the US, and Australia, pre-date modern understandings of the environment as a field of public policy, and challenges like climate change. These areas have subsequently emerged as fields of ‘shared’ jurisdiction, where multiple levels of government may have authority to act.

In Canada’s case, the provinces are seen to hold primary constitutional responsibility over energy, natural resources and environmental matters. However, the Division of Powers

contained in Constitution Act (1982) grants the federal government potentially very significant powers in these areas as well. These include wide powers of taxation and expenditure (in particular the federal spending power), jurisdiction over criminal law (including the regulation of “toxic” substances, a category found under the federal *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* to encompass greenhouse gases), the regulation of goods and services in international and interprovincial trade and commerce (e. g. vehicles, appliances and fuels), the negotiation and implementation of international treaties, and a general power to legislate for the “Peace, Order and Good Government of Canada” (POGG).⁴¹ This sharing of authority has, at times, led to political and even legal conflicts over the boundaries of federal and provincial jurisdiction.⁴² It has also placed an emphasis on the importance of intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration in achieving national policy goals.

These dynamics have been particularly prevalent around climate change and the decarbonization of energy systems in Canada. Over the past decade there have been shifts from relatively high levels of intergovernmental agreement and cooperation around the 2016 Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change (the PCF), to constitutional litigation over the federal government’s national carbon pricing system. There are ongoing conflicts over federal regulatory initiatives on emissions from the electricity and oil and gas sectors, and environmental impact assessment.⁴³ At the same time, relatively high levels of federal-provincial collaboration have emerged around post-COVID-19 pandemic ‘clean’ industrial strategies, spurred on by the 2022 *US Inflation Reduction Act*, and supported with generous funding through the 2023 and 2024 federal budgets. These efforts have been focussed in areas like ‘critical’ minerals development, EV manufacturing and supply chains, hydrogen-based strategies, and small modular nuclear reactors.⁴⁴ The threats to Canada’s economy and sovereignty presented by the second Trump administration in the US have tended to reinforce the “executive” nature of Canadian federal-provincial dynamics.⁴⁵ Interactions at the first ministers level (i.e. between the Prime Minister and Premiers), have been increasingly emphasized, and the roles of Parliament, provincial and territorial legislatures, and non-government actors, marginalized. The influence of institutionally entrenched incumbents in sectors like mining, fossil fuels, nuclear energy, agribusiness and automobile manufacturing has been seen to increase at the same time.

In a Canadian context, consideration also must be given to the impact of these dynamics on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have suffered severe adverse environmental, social, cultural and health effects from energy resource development. Indigenous peoples have often found themselves in the front line of the impacts of a changing climate, and are seeking to find their own paths to decolonize energy systems.⁴⁶

Canada's experiences with these patterns are not unique. Conflicts and litigation have occurred between the US federal government and state governments over climate policy, particularly where states have sought to act more proactively than the federal government. These dynamics have intensified under the second US Trump administration,⁴⁷ with the administration becoming more aggressive in its efforts to block state-level initiatives. Similar conflicts have occurred in Australia, as the priorities of federal governments have shifted, and states and territories have had to take on stronger compensatory climate policy leadership roles as a result.⁴⁸

The European Union, in contrast, despite the potentially disparate energy interests of its member states, has been a model of relative consistency and stability on climate policy. Movement in the direction of energy system transitions has been reinforced by energy security concerns in the context of the War in Ukraine, and the second Trump administration.⁴⁹

Climate and energy policy, already the site of considerable long-term political and policy contestation, has been subject to intensifying environmental and geopolitical pressures. In Canadian and global contexts, the evidence of the impacts of a changing climate have become ever more apparent. In Canada the summer of 2023 was the worst wildfire season on record,⁵⁰ with impacts spreading beyond the evacuation and destruction of rural communities to include unprecedented episodes of smoke and smog in major southern cities. Summer 2024 saw the near destruction of the townsite in Jasper National Park by wildfire.⁵¹ The summer of 2025 brought major fires from BC to Nova Scotia. Globally, 2024 was the warmest year on record. It was also the first calendar year to exceed the 1.5°C warming threshold identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as a critical tipping point in avoiding catastrophic impacts of climate change.⁵²

At the same, time, energy markets and trade and security arrangements have been increasingly destabilized, a product of a populist backlash against neo-liberal economic models for globalization and the rise of economic nationalism since the 2008 global financial crisis.⁵³ These trends were reinforced by the 2020-2023 COVID-19 global pandemic⁵⁴ and the impacts of

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵ Populism can be of the right or left in its framing of political issues as 'the people vs. the elites.' However, new populist movements in North America, Europe and elsewhere have produced governments that are hostile to action on climate change and energy system transitions. They argue that climate action and energy transitions represent elite agendas that will impose costs on "the people."⁵⁶

Right wing populist governments are also seen to present wider 'authoritarian populist'⁵⁷ challenges to democratic values in terms of the rule of law, and the independence of the courts, media, and educational and civil society organizations. These dynamics have been seen to be present among conservative parties in the United States, EU and Australia, and in the behaviours of Canadian populist conservative provincial governments in, for example, Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan.⁵⁸ The appearance of these governments in Canada from 2018 onwards has had major impacts on the federal-provincial dynamics around climate change. Their arrival has marked a shift from relatively cooperative relationships between 2015 and 2018, to increasingly open hostility to the federal government's attempts to advance effective climate policies.⁵⁹

The arrival of the second Trump administration in the United States reinforced these trends. The new administration has launched aggressive trade actions against countries with which the US already has trade agreements, including Canada. International and domestic commitments and initiatives around climate change have been abandoned by the second Trump administration, and increasing emphasis placed on the development of fossil fuels and nuclear energy.⁶⁰ Among other things, the resulting changes in global climate politics may undermine the operationalization of carbon finance arrangements under the Paris climate agreements, particularly the so-called New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) achieved at COP29 of the UNFCCC in late 2024.⁶¹ These developments may in turn further undermine global efforts to avoid "dangerous"⁶² climate change.

Within the energy sector itself, the development and deployment of renewable energy resources has continued to accelerate globally.⁶³ Non-hydro renewables (e.g. wind and solar) have emerged as the dominant source of new electricity generation capacity being added to grids globally.⁶⁴ However, there are concerns that Canada is being left behind in these developments as populist conservative provincial governments, particularly in Ontario and Alberta, previously leaders in renewable energy development, have turned against renewables for a variety of reasons, including opposition from some rural landowners.⁶⁵ Rapid technological progress is

being made in the area of energy storage, both for mobile applications like electric vehicles and in stationary uses to support electricity grid operations with high levels of intermittent renewables.⁶⁶ At the same time, there are increasing concerns over the environmental, climate, social and cultural impacts of increased extraction of ‘critical’ minerals for use in advanced batteries.⁶⁷

Despite the growing role of renewable energy sources, the energy demands of the large-scale computing capacity needed to support artificial intelligence (AI) services is placing major strains on the capacity of existing electricity systems. AI-related electricity demand is projected to grow very rapidly,⁶⁸ potentially displacing capacity that might otherwise support the electrification and decarbonization of other economic activities.⁶⁹ The situation adds to the wider societal questions being raised by AI with regards to the future of work, governance and social relations.

In the context of these rapid changes in the areas of politics, energy, climate change and security, there are increasing concerns – both in Canada and globally- over the distributional justice impacts of energy system transitions, particularly with respect to marginalized and disadvantaged communities,⁷⁰ as well as the fate of wider sustainability concerns articulated through United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.⁷¹ Some observers have referred to the global energy transition as “troubled” as consumption of fossil fuels has continued to grow, especially in developing countries and emerging markets, along with the role of renewable energy sources. The situation has raised the possibility of an energy transition without decarbonization.⁷²

The responses of governments to these developments have varied. Among progressive governments there have been increasing efforts to link economic, COVID-19 recovery and climate change strategies through re-emergent concepts of industrial policy.⁷³ These approaches were exemplified by the US Biden administration’s October 2022 *Inflation Reduction Act*,⁷⁴ the European Union’s 2019-2024 European Green Deal,⁷⁵ and the Canadian federal government’s ‘clean’ industrial strategy embodied in its 2022-2024 budgets.⁷⁶ The US and Canadian strategies placed a strong emphasis on the subsidization of the development and adoption of ‘clean’ technologies, including renewable energy sources, and EV and battery manufacturing, but also, more controversially, carbon capture and storage, direct air capture of carbon dioxide, nuclear energy, and the development of ‘critical’ mineral resources.

Some progressive governments have shown interest in deploying “border carbon adjustments”, to protect domestic firms subject to climate mitigation policy. The best example is the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which came into effect at the beginning of 2026. While currently limited to a handful of carbon intensive industries like steel, cement and aluminum, the CBAM requires European importers to pay for the embedded emissions relative to their cost on the European Emission Trading Scheme (EU-ETS)—perhaps the most comprehensive and highest-priced carbon markets in the world. Indeed, to conform to rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) a border carbon adjustment is calibrated to a domestic carbon price that puts domestic firms at a disadvantage relative to other, non-regulated international firms, hence distinguishing a “border carbon adjustment” from “carbon tariffs”.⁷⁷ The Canadian federal government has explored such an instrument as well, while recognizing that the diversity of carbon pricing instruments across provinces introduces considerable complexity.⁷⁸ At least four bills regarding carbon tariffs have been introduced to the US Congress⁷⁹ in recent years, although their passage seems unlikely under the second Trump administration.

The January 2025 arrival of the second Trump administration in the United States, accompanied by a series of aggressive trade measures, and talk of Canada as the ‘51st state’ presaged a series of dramatic developments in Canadian politics. Mark Carney replaced Justin Trudeau as federal Liberal party leader and Prime Minister in March 2025. Although running on a platform with substantial climate policy elements,⁸⁰ Carney moved to terminate immediately the increasingly unpopular consumer federal backstop carbon pricing system, first introduced in 2019, on transportation and heating fuels.⁸¹ The industrial output-based pricing system was retained. So far, the Quebec carbon market—linked with a similar instrument in California since 2014—has not met the same fate. With carbon prices at approximately \$35 per tCO₂e at the May 2025 auction, largely due to emissions trading with California where decarbonization is relatively less expensive, the economic costs of Quebec’s carbon market are considerably lower than the \$80 federal carbon tax at the time it was rescinded.⁸²

In the meantime, the Ontario government of Premier Doug Ford won a renewed majority government through a snap election called for the end of February, arguing that it needed a renewed mandate to “Protect Ontario” from the Trump administration.⁸³ The federal election, called for April 28, 2025, was noted for a shift in focus from climate policy to the need to

respond to the increasingly hostile, but also inconsistent and unpredictable policies of the US President.⁸⁴

The federal election resulted in a Liberal government four seats short of a majority. Both the Liberals and Conservatives saw significant seat gains.⁸⁵ The NDP and Bloc Québécois, on the other hand, lost significant numbers of seats as progressive voters moved towards the Liberals to block a potential Conservative majority government.⁸⁶

In practice, the new government has been seen to adopt many of the Conservatives' policy positions.⁸⁷ The federal consumer carbon pricing system, a longstanding target of Conservative criticism, was abandoned prior to the election. Instead, the new government has emphasized the concept of making Canada the world's leading energy "superpower" in both clean and conventional energy.⁸⁸ "Conventional" energy in this context has been understood to mean fossil fuels, particularly liquified natural gas (LNG) and oil sands bitumen. Although at times ambiguous, "clean" energy seems to encompass, along with renewable energy sources, fossil fuels whose production has been "decarbonized" through CCUS and other means,⁸⁹ and nuclear energy.⁹⁰ The likely performance and economic viability of these technologies is the subject of significant debates, and they are often seen to be at odds⁹¹ with concepts of sustainability applied to energy.⁹²

In this context, there has been a strong emphasis on accelerating approvals and construction of 'nation-building' infrastructure, a direction embodied in the government's Bill C-5 (*The Building Canada Act*). The government's moves have been widely perceived to be focussed on facilitating primary resource exports, like LNG, oil sands bitumen, and 'critical' minerals.⁹³ Similar provincial legislation has been adopted in Ontario (Bill 5 – *The Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act*)⁹⁴ and British Columbia (Bill 15- *The Infrastructure Projects Act*),⁹⁵ reflecting a parallel provincial focus on accelerating approvals for natural resource development and export infrastructures. Those directions were seen to be reinforced by the Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed between Ottawa and the Alberta⁹⁶ and Ontario⁹⁷ governments towards the end of 2025 focused on facilitating the oil sands bitumen exports through new or upgraded pipeline infrastructure from Alberta to the BC coast and the development of the 'ring of fire' mineral deposits in Ontario. These directions were further reinforced by proposals regarding the further streamlining of major project approvals,⁹⁸ and the implementation of the Alberta MOU⁹⁹ in May 2026.

The directions embodied in these initiatives have been criticized in terms of their implications for Indigenous peoples and their rights in relation to extractive activities,¹⁰⁰ commitments around the environment and climate change,¹⁰¹ and the risks of reinforcing resource export dependencies in the Canadian economy at the expense of services and value-added economic activities.¹⁰² The government's natural resource commodity extraction and export focus has been seen as a return to a 'staples' model for the Canadian economy, where Canada functions as a resource hinterland to external metropolises.¹⁰³

At the same time, there have been strong pressures from the US and non-US security partners around fossil fuel and critical minerals development and export. Canada is seen by its allies as a geopolitically secure provider of these resources in an increasingly unstable world, dynamics reinforced by the War in Ukraine and March 2026 Iran-US-Israel War.¹⁰⁴ That role has been highlighted by the Prime Minister's own statements emphasizing that "Canada has what the world wants,"¹⁰⁵ referencing LNG, oil and gas and critical mineral exports.

These developments represent profound shifts in the domestic and geopolitical context for Canadian climate and energy policy relative to where they stood less than five years ago. Climate policy and carbon pricing were primary focal points of the 2021 federal election, where, as in 2015 and 2019, 60 per cent of voters were seen to support parties (Liberal, NDP, Bloc Quebecois and Green) backing stronger climate policies.¹⁰⁶ Domestic concerns over the climate issue began to be overtaken by economic concerns, particularly post-COVID inflation and rising interest rates, in the fall of 2023, despite the record wildfire season that year. The federal provincial near-consensus that had underpinned much of the federal government's climate strategy, had already begun to disintegrate with the arrival of populist provincial governments in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia from 2018 onwards.¹⁰⁷

The situation, presents an unprecedented series of governance, economic, security and environmental challenges for Canada, particularly in relation to the US. The initial responses to the arrival of the second Trump administration have reflected relatively high levels of federal-provincial consensus around the notion of 'nation-building' infrastructure projects. There has also been strong agreement on the concept of eliminating interprovincial trade barriers. The primary approach to removing these barriers has been a 'mutual recognition' model where products, services or occupational or professional requirements meeting the standards of one province or territory are deemed to be acceptable to all, even at the risk of setting standards at a

lowest common denominator level and constraining policy innovation.¹⁰⁸ Even in Quebec, where public opinion has generally been opposed to the construction of new oil and gas pipelines across the province, there have been potentially significant shifts since the return of the Trump administration.¹⁰⁹

In the longer term there is considerable potential for serious intergovernmental conflicts to emerge over interprovincial ‘nation building’ projects. Additional pipeline capacity to tidewater, which some provinces or territories may support but to which others may object strongly is an obvious potential flashpoint in this regard. The arrival of the second Trump administration has muted separatist voices in Quebec, but the question of risks to national unity over climate policy has appeared in Alberta and to a lesser extent in Saskatchewan. The climate policies adopted by the Trudeau government over fossil fuel export capacity, Clean Electricity Regulations and an oil and gas sector emissions cap have been a political flash point for Alberta’s United Conservative Party (UCP) government.¹¹⁰ Indigenous leaders and communities have threatened litigation, protests and blockades in response to the accelerated approvals processes embodied in legislation such as the federal Bill C-5¹¹¹ and Ontario’s Bill 5.¹¹²

In economic, climate and environmental terms, the pathways forward for Canada remain uncertain. The current federal-provincial consensus seems to favour a strong emphasis on commodity resource exports, whether to the US or wider markets, with potentially very significant, but largely unacknowledged, implications for Canada’s ability to meet its domestic and international GHG emissions reduction commitments. This would be particularly the case with respect to relatively carbon intensive fossil fuel exports like LNG¹¹³ and oil sands bitumen.¹¹⁴ A focus on natural resource extraction and export carries other problems as well.¹¹⁵ Global markets for commodities like critical minerals are uncertain and in deep flux.¹¹⁶ As a relatively high-cost fossil fuel¹¹⁷ producer, Canada is unlikely to be among the last standing in a decarbonizing¹¹⁸ world. Increased exposure to fluctuation global staples commodities markets also risks making Canada more vulnerable to the rapid price shifts, in response to market and geopolitical events far from Canada’s control, that characterize those markets.

There had been an emergent consensus around the concept of ‘clean’ industrial strategies, particularly in areas like electric vehicle (EV) and advanced battery manufacturing, and steel, between the federal government and some provinces, particularly, Ontario, Quebec and BC. Although the government’s first Throne Speech made reference to building “an industrial

strategy that will make Canada more globally competitive while fighting climate change,”¹¹⁹ these non-resource commodity export-focussed elements of the economy have been slower to receive strategic attention, despite (or perhaps due to) their integration and dependence on the US export market and the uncertainties that now carries. That view was reinforced in the eyes of organized labour,¹²⁰ the Canadian automobile sector,¹²¹ and Ontario Premier Ford,¹²² by the January 2026 Canada-China agreement to reduce Canadian tariffs on Chinese manufactured EVs from 100 to 6.5 per cent, and allowing the import of 49,000 Chinese EVs per year, in exchange for a significant reciprocal reduction of Chinese tariffs on Canadian canola products and some seafood, particularly lobster and carb. A federally-led sectoral strategy for the Canadian automobile industry was released in February 2026, emphasizing the reintroduction of subsidies for EV sales and charging infrastructure, and moving further away from regulatory mandates.¹²³

More meaningful industrial strategies focussed on Canada’s existing comparative advantages, innovation and value-added products - alternatives to the staples-based strategies being favoured by most provinces and the federal government - are seen to be needed.¹²⁴ These will require much deeper analysis of sectors and supply chains.¹²⁵ Others have pointed out that the narrow focus on natural resources exports¹²⁶ and large physical infrastructure megaprojects shows a lack of imagination around what ‘nation-building’ projects could be in fields like health promotion and care, public services, and technological innovation.¹²⁷ Others have suggested seeking to improve energy productivity and efficiency through improved transmission, storage and improved renewable generation and the development of distributed energy systems across the country.¹²⁸

The existing works on climate, energy and environmental policy in Canada¹²⁹ pre-date the arrival of the second Trump administration, the change in leadership of the Canadian federal government, and elections in key provinces, notably Ontario, but in Alberta, New Brunswick as well, of right-wing populist parties who have stated their preferences for, and commitment to the use of fossil fuels for transportation, electricity generation, and space heating. More general volumes on Canadian federalism and politics have incorporated chapters on climate and energy policy, but have tended to be national in perspective and limited in their coverage of subnational developments.¹³⁰ Chapters¹³¹ dealing with climate policy do exist in edited volumes on the politics and governance of individual provinces, notably Ontario,¹³² Quebec¹³³ and Alberta¹³⁴ but are being rapidly overtaken by recent events.

The current body of work on climate governance in Canada has also been limited in its incorporation of significant comparative elements that consider developments in other federal or quasi-federal systems such as the US, the European Union and Australia.

This volume approaches the governance, economic and political challenges around climate policy governance in Canada in this context. The goal is to examine the dynamics between national and supranational, and subnational (provincial, state, Indigenous) and member state governments, around climate and energy policy, in the context of rapidly changing political and geopolitical circumstances. Organized into three sections, the primary focus of the volume is on Canada, with comparative international contributions providing essential context.

The first section includes, in addition to this introduction, a chapter giving an overview of the evolution of Canadian climate policy at the federal level, and chapters addressing key cross cutting themes in Canadian climate governance, notably the concept of the climate justice, and the roles of Indigenous Peoples in the climate policy process.

The second section incorporates a series of case studies on the evolution of climate policies across the Canadian provinces and territories. Contributors were asked to address a number of key themes in these chapters:

- The evolution of understanding of climate challenge and political and policy responses, including linkages to economic structure, institutions, interests and strategy; key sectors and non-state actors.
- The development of climate change strategies, their key features as well as the combination and sequencing of policy measures like carbon pricing, regulatory initiatives, and industrial policy/subsidization; the roles of local governments and initiatives; and key successes and less successful outcomes, including policy resiliency across changes in government.
- The dynamics of the relationship with the federal government in the formulation of climate strategies including: key points of conflict vs. coordination/collaboration; the roles of federal regulatory initiatives, fiscal incentives and, ‘clean’ industrial strategies.
- The impacts of the relationships with other sub-national governments (e.g. provinces and states)
- The role and relationships with Indigenous Peoples in the formulation and implementation of climate policy.

- The consideration given in climate plans to impacts on low-income and otherwise marginalized communities.

In the third section, three chapters examine how other federal states and quasi-federal unions have dealt with the question of federalism, governance and climate change. These chapters, dealing with the European Union, the United States, and Australia place the Canadian experience within the larger international context and will offer further insight into how federalism helps or hinders efforts to mitigate the climate challenge. The EU is generally regarded as the most successful case study in effective climate policy resilience and coordination within a quasi-federal structure, incorporating a significant number of jurisdictions with differing economic structures and interests.

In the general absence of Congressional consensus on climate policy in the US, and at times administrations hostile to climate action, state governments, acting individually and collectively have emerged as key sources of policy innovation and leadership. US experience highlights both the potential and limitations of subnational action without strong national leadership. Australia, for its part, has seen dramatic shifts in direction at the federal level and more consistent compensatory action at the state and territorial levels. This is despite the obvious manifestation of climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods, and wildfires.

These chapters highlight the impact of federal and quasi-federal structures on climate policy-making; successful models for advancing a cooperative and collaborative approaches among different levels of government, particularly in the context of differing regional economic structures and interests; and the identification of models for climate policy resiliency in the context of growing regional, national and geopolitical challenges.

A final chapter on international climate finance, explores Canada's role in shaping global climate policy. The chapter will describe Canada's participation in UN climate change negotiations on international climate finance. This will offer a first of its kind description of Canada's contributions to international climate funds to assist developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. Attention will be given to Canada's limited participation in the revival of carbon markets under so-called "Article 6" of the Paris Agreement. This raises the question of whether, given Canada's emissions performance since withdrawing from Kyoto, Canada should re-engage with international carbon markets?

The concluding chapter returns to themes outlined in the introduction around the impact of federal structures on climate policy-making, highlight successful (and less successful) models for advancing cooperative and collaborative approaches to climate policy formulation and implementation among different levels of government, and the identification of models for climate policy resiliency in increasingly challenging political and geopolitical environments. The chapter will attempt to address the need to reconcile the climate imperative with the increasing emphasis on economic and geopolitical security, the importance of distributional justice, reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and wider sustainability considerations.

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