

Canada and the Americas

The consolidation of democracy and the growth of free markets have transformed the Western Hemisphere during the past decade. At the same time, Canada's relations with the Americas have developed in new and exciting ways.

Canada has played a strong role producing positive change in the hemisphere. It has diversified and deepened relations with its neighbours and has been changed in the process — discovering new friends, forming new partnerships, and making new commitments. Along the way, Canada has forged a new reality for itself and for its partners in the region.

Canada's history inevitably produced a legacy of engagement with Europe that was a defining feature of its foreign policy and national outlook into the 1970s. As a nation of the Pacific Rim, Canada responded in the 1980s to opportunities presented by the emergence of dynamic new economies and societies, while continuing to focus on relations with the United States, which constitute the world's largest and most complex relationship between governments. By the end of the 1980s, the sense of being a nation "in" but not "of" the Americas was replaced with a new engagement.

Canada's economic relations with countries of the hemisphere have grown faster over the past 10 years than with any other region. For example, Canada's trade with the Americas increased by more than 170 per cent during this period, compared with 60 per cent and 66 per cent with Europe and Asia, respectively.

In 2000, Canada celebrated the 10th anniversary of its full membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) by hosting the annual general assembly in Windsor, Ontario. And, together with the OAS, Canada took the lead in a high-level mission to help Peru strengthen its democracy. This process directly led to the first round of presidential elections on April 8, 2000, and demonstrated the hemisphere's solidarity — and Canada's leadership — in the defence of democratic institutions and values.

Canada's engagement with other nations of the Western Hemisphere has brought a significant new dimension and perspective to its foreign policy — a realization that all partners must confront the question of how to construct the region in which they wish to live and the legacy that they wish to leave to future generations.