Canadian Politics
Outline

• Executive (Crown)
• Legislative (Parliament)
• Judicial (Supreme Court)
• Elections
• Provinces (and Territories)
Executive
Crown

- Canada is a constitutional monarchy
- The Queen of Canada is the head of Canada
- These days, the Queen is largely just ceremonial
  - But the Governor General does have some real powers
Crown

• Official title is long
  – In English: Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Canada and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.
  – In French: Elizabeth Deux, par la grâce de Dieu Reine du Royaume-Uni, du Canada et de ses autres royaumes et territoires, Chef du Commonwealth, Défenseur de la Foi.
Legislative
Parliament

- Sovereign (Queen/Governor General)
- Senate (Upper House)
- House of Commons (Lower House)
Sovereign

- Represented by the Governor General
- Appoints the members of Senate
  - On recommendation of the PM
- Duties are largely ceremonial
  - However, can refuse to grant royal assent
  - Can refuse the call for an election
Senate

• 105 members

• Started as equal representation of Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime region

• But, over time...
  – Regional equality is not observed
  – Nor is representation-by-population
Senate

- 24 seats for each major region
  - Ontario, Québec
  - Maritime provinces
    - 10 for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, 4 for PEI
  - Western provinces
    - 6 for each of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba
- Newfoundland and Labrador
  - 6 seats
- NWT, Yukon, Nunavut
  - 1 seat each
Senate

Populate per Senator (2006)

- BC – 685,581
- AB – 548,391
- ON – 506,678
- QC – 314,422
- MB – 191,400
- SK – 161,359
- NS – 91,346
- NL – 84,244
- NB – 72,999
- NT – 41,464
- PE – 33,962
- YK – 30,372
- NU – 29,474
Senate

• Senate is not more powerful than the Commons
  – Although approval for bills is necessary, rarely rejects bills
  – Majority of bills originate in Commons (money bills must always originate in Commons)

• “Sober second thought”
Senate

- The monarch can appoint up to 8 additional senators (on advice of the PM)
  - The additional senators must be distributed equally with regard to region
- Has only been used once
  - By Mulroney to pass the GST legislation
  - Mackenzie tried in 1874, but Queen Victoria denied him
Senate Reform

• Big issue in Canadian history
  – In fact, it predates Confederation

• In 1965, minor changes which made 75 a mandatory retirement age (was previously until dead)

• In 1982, Senate given veto over certain constitutional amendments
Senate Reform

- There have been 28 major proposals since the 1970s, all have failed

- Triple-E Senate
  - Equal, elected, and effective
  - Equal representation for all provinces, regardless of population
  - Effective powers to counter the Commons
House of Commons

• 308 members

• Number of seats and appointment of seats to each province updated every census
  – Must be at least 282 seats, 3 reserved for the territories, the rest assigned to the provinces based on population

• Censuses are every 5 years

• Based on population changes and is roughly representation-by-population
House of Commons

Populate per MP (2001)

- BC – 108,548
- ON – 107,642
- AB – 106,243
- QC – 96,500
- NS – 82,546
- MB – 79,970
- NL – 73,276
- NB – 72,950
- SK – 69,924
- NT – 37,360
- PE – 33,824
- YK – 28,674
- NU – 26,745
Judicial
Supreme Court

• Apex of Canadian judicial system
  – Provincial/territorial courts
    • Judges appointed by provincial/territorial governments
  – Provincial/territorial superior courts
    • Judges appointed by federal government
  – Provincial/territorial courts of appeal
  – Federal courts (Tax Court, Federal Court, Federal Court of Appeal, Martial Appeal Court)
  – Supreme Court
Supreme Court

- 9 justices
  - 3 positions must be held by Québec justices
    - Québec only has 24% of the population
    - Justified on the grounds that Québec uses civil law and not common law
  - 3 from Ontario
  - 2 from the western provinces
  - 1 from Atlantic Canada (alternating between NS and NB)
- Justices sit on bench until 75
Supreme Court

• Can be asked by Governor-in-Council (cabinet) to hear references considering important questions of law
  – Constitutional interpretation
  – Interpretation of federal or provincial legislation
  – Division of powers between federal and provincial levels of government

• Justices appointed by Queen's Privy Council for Canada
Charter of Rights and Freedoms

- Passed in 1982
- Bill of rights entrenched in the Constitution
- Protects political and civil rights of people in Canada
- Expanded scope of judicial review
  - Courts have struck down unconstitutional federal and provincial statutes based on the Charter
- Notwithstanding clause
Charter of Rights and Freedoms

- 1988, struck down Canada's abortion law
- 1998, found province of Alberta's exclusion of homosexuals from protection against discrimination violated the Charter
  - Court then read the protection into law
- Purposive interpretation
  - Concentrate not on the limited scope of the original document, but rather the changing scope of what the intention is
Elections
Elections

• Members of the Commons elected by plurality of popular votes in separate ridings
  – *i.e.* first past the post (winner-takes-all)
  – Winner does not need a majority of votes, just more than anybody else

• Mandate cannot exceed 5 years
  – Except once, during World War I

• Elections are set for the third Monday in October in the fourth calendar year following an election
Campaigns

- Length of campaigns
  - Minimum length of 36 days
  - Maximum length of 12 months
- Longest campaign was 1926 election
  - 74 days
- There were 6 elections shorter than 36 days
  - Last one in 1904, long before the minimum time limit was set
Campaigns

- Generally campaigns kept as short as possible
  - Spending restrictions set by law
  - No provisions for long campaigns
  - 1997, 2000, 2004 have all been 36 days
  - 2006 was 55 days
  - 2008 was 36
Canadian Political Spectrum

U.S. Presidential Candidates & Canadian Political Parties Compared

Authoritarian
Socially Restrictive/Conservative

Economic Left
New Democratic Party
Bloc Québecois
Liberal Party
Conservative Party
Green Party (Approx)

Socially Liberal
Libertarian

Economic Right

Kucinich
Gravel
Edwards
Biden
Obama
Dodd
Richardson
Clinton

Paul
McCain
Giulani
Huckabee
Brownback
Romney
Thompson
Gingrich
Tancredo
Bush
Recent Election

• Timeline
  ● February 6, 2006 – Harper Sworn in
  ● May 3, 2007 – Bill C-16 receives Royal Assent
    – Next election scheduled for October 19, 2009
  ● August 26, 2008 – Harper indicates potential election
  ● August – September, 2008 – Harper meets with NDP, BQ, Liberals to try to find common ground
  ● September 7, 2008 – Harper requests election
  ● October 14, 2008 – Election held
Recent Election

• Strategic voting
  – VoteForEnvironment.ca
    • Offered recommendations on who to vote for to defeat the Conservatives
      – Clearly didn't work

• Voter turnout
  – Lowest in Canadian election history at 59.1%
Recent Election

- Cons – 143 seats (46.43%), 37.63% popular
- Liberal – 76 seats (24.68%), 26.24% popular
- BQ – 50 seats (16.23%), 9.97% popular
- NDP – 37 seats (12.01%), 18.20% popular
- IND – 2 seats (0.65%), 0.65% popular
- Green – 0 seats (0.00%), 6.80% popular
- Other – 0 seats (0.00%), 0.51% popular

Prime Minister

- Stephen Harper is Prime Minister once again
- Sigh....
Provinces
Political Map of Canada
Provinces

- Granted power by the Crown
  - Monarch is the head of state of each province
- Have a great deal of power relative to the federal government
- However, “transfer payments” allow federal government to influence provinces
Division of Power

• Provincial
  – Property and civil rights, local works and undertaking, healthcare, education, welfare, intra-provincial transportation, local and private matters

• Federal
  – Postal service, census, military, currency, weights and measures, etc.
Division of Power

• Some shared
  – Marriage/divorce is federal, but solemnisation provincial
  – Laws, taxes, borrowing, etc.

• Some influenced
  – Federal requirement for provincial universal health care in order to receive federal funds
Legislative Assembly

• Unicameral
  – Usually called the Legislative Assembly
  – NS and NL call it the House of Assembly
  – Québec calls it the National Assembly

• Provincial elections work basically the same as federal elections
  – Single district plurality
Provincial Parties

- Usually there are provincial counterparts to the federal parties
- Not necessarily linked to federal parties
- Current Provincial governments:
  - ON, PI, QC, NB, BC all Liberal
  - AB, NL, NS all Conservative
  - SK is Saskatchewan Party
  - MB is NDP
  - YK is Yukon Party
End
Credits

- Information from Wikipedia and the Government of Canada website
- Pictures from Wikipedia articles or found with obvious searches in Google Images