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Country profiles

Canada

Esebian

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Demographics

Most Canadian Muslims are foreign-born, with a growing percentage born in Canada. There are also presumably a small number of converts to Islam, although there is no available statistical data. The majority of Canadian Muslims - like most of Canada's immigrant population - live in the province of Ontario; most have settled in the Greater Toronto Area. There are also significant Muslim populations in the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia. As of May 2001, there were 579 645 Muslims living in Canada, approximately 2% of the entire population. Muslims in Canada constitute the fastest growing population, however. The percentage of population increase from 1991 to 2001 is one of the country's most significant: a 128.9% increase (topped only by Pagans who represent only 0.1% of the population). Statistics Canada predicts that by 2017, this population will increase by approximately 160%. [\[1\]](#)

The arrival of Muslims to Canada has been influenced largely by changing Canadian immigration policies and economic and political upheaval affecting Muslims in their countries of origin. Most of this immigration is recent; over 60% of Muslims in Canada are foreign-born and have immigrated in the last 20 years.

Information about Muslims living in Canada is disseminated by province and territory and by city where notable. [\[2\]](#) Within the 254,110 Muslims in Toronto in 2001, 22,3% were born in Canada. Of the 74.7% who are foreign-born, 67.9% immigrated after 1991. [\[3\]](#)

In Montreal, the data is similar. Of the 100,185 Muslims in the city, 22.3% were born in Canada. Of the 69.7% foreign-born, 73.5% immigrated since the 1990s. [\[4\]](#)

In Vancouver, the data differs somewhat. Of its 52,590 Muslims, 20.8% were born in Canada. Of the 76.0% foreign-born population, 44.6% immigrated before 1991 and the remaining 55.4% arrived after 1991. [\[5\]](#)

The statistical information available from Statistics Canada only includes "Muslim" as a category. McDonough and Hoodfar (2005: 133, 137) suggest a growing number of Canadian Muslims are converting to Sufism and note vibrant Ismai'ili and Ahmadiyya communities. The Shi'ite Imami Ismai'ili community grew in Canada particularly in 1972, when following a Ugandan expulsion order, Aga Khan contacted then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to negotiate the acceptance of approximately 6,000 Ismai'ili refugees. An influx of Ismai'ili immigration from Kenya, Zaire, Madagascar and South Asia more generally continued throughout the 1970s, largely to Ontario. In 2001, nearly 100 Ismai'ili refugees from Turkmenistan migrated to Montreal. [\[6\]](#)

Ismai'ilis have a reputation in Canada for their social activism. In 2005, the Aga Khan Development Network began construction of the "Ismaili Imam" building along the prestigious Sussex Drive in Ottawa, Ontario. The building was initiated by the group's spiritual leader, Aga Khan and Canada's then-Governor General Adrienne Clarkson on 6 June 2005. [\[7\]](#) Aga Khan was also conferred as Companion of the Order of Canada in 2005. [\[8\]](#)

Today approximately 65,000-75,000 Ismai'ilis live in Canada, the majority in Quebec and Ontario. [\[9\]](#) There are 20, 000 Ismai'ilis living in the province of Alberta. [\[10\]](#)

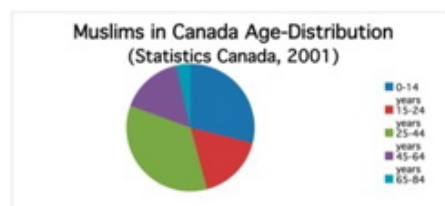
This is the break-down of Muslims living in Canada. No sectarian group statistical data enumerating the number of Shi'ites and Sunnis is currently available:

MUSLIMS IN CANADA (Statistics Canada 2001 in Beyer 2005: 240)

Province	Territory	Total Population	Non-Immigrant	Immigrant	Male	Female	
Canada (TOTAL)		579,645	137,835	415,835	303,570	276,075	
Newfoundland and Labrador		625	150	450	425	200	
Nova Scotia		3,545	450	2,765	1,905	1,650	
	Halifax	3,070	280	2,505	1,630	1,435	
Prince Edward Island		195	30	165	130	70	
New Brunswick		1,270	375	715	670	600	
Quebec		108,620	24,320	75,280	59,785	48,835	
	Montreal	100,185	22,370	69,835	54,960	45,225	
Ontario		352,530	82,535	257,375	181,935	170,595	
	Ottawa/Gatineau	41,725	11,265	28,290	21,725	19,995	
	Toronto	254,110	56,685	189,700	130,740	123,370	
	London	11,725	3,330	7,870	6,070	5,660	
	Windsor	10,745	2,470	8,000	5,720	5,025	
	Hamilton	12,880	2,970	8,910	6,760	6,120	
Manitoba		5,100	1,370	3,340	2,720	2,375	
	Winnipeg	4,805	1,195	3,225	2,595	2,210	
Saskatchewan		2,230	420	1,505	1,250	980	
Alberta		49,045	16,125	31,650	25,820	23,225	
	Edmonton	19,580	7,190	12,000	10,210	9,370	
	Calgary	25,920	7,380	17,710	13,705	12,210	
British Columbia		56,215	11,980	42,405	28,770	27,450	
	Vancouver	52,590	10,935	39,955	26,795	25,795	
	Victoria	1,230	275	905	680	550	
Yukon		60	15	45	30	25	
Northwest Territories		180	60	115	110	70	
Nunavut		25	0	20	20	10	

According to the same 2001 Census data, 85.8% of the Muslim population consider themselves a visible minority. Unlike Muslim migration to European nations, the group is quite ethnically diverse. Of this population, 36.7% are South Asian, 21.1% are Arab, 14.0% are West Asian, and 14.2% are part of other minority groups (not including the small percentage Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Korean or Japanese Muslims). 14.2% of the Canadian Muslim population do not consider themselves visible minorities. [\[11\]](#) This group could partially reflect the number of converts to the tradition.

As of 2001, the vast majority of Muslims in Canada are between 25-44 years of age: [\[12\]](#)



Canadian immigration policies in the post-war years favoured immigrants with post-secondary education and with professional skills. As McDonough and Hoodfar explain, recently-arrived Muslims tend to be from middle and upper-middle social classes (2005: 136). The 2001 Census disseminates data for education levels among Muslims in Canada. Of the total population of 579 645 surveyed in 2001, 71.0% were over 15 years old. 17.6% of the total population have less than a high school diploma equivalent; 9.6% have obtained their high school diploma; 7.6% have a college certificate or diploma; and 20.2% have obtained a university degree. Of this 20.2% of university degree holders, 12.8% have graduated with a bachelor's degree, 4.6% of the total Muslim population have a Master's degree, and 1.1% have PhDs. [\[13\]](#)

Labor Market

According to 2001 Canada Census data, there were 264,770 Muslims over 15 years old who had worked in Canada since January 2000 (2% of the entire Canadian workforce). Of these, 84% were working in Anglophone work environments, 9% Francophones and the remainder speak one of Canada's non-official languages. Again, these statistics are not disseminated according to sectarian splits within the Muslim community.

Beside the small percentage of those who adhere to the faith of the Salvation Army (their unemployment rate is 15.7%), per capita, Muslims in Canada represent the highest unemployment rate in the country at 14.4%. Hutterites, a small Anabaptist group who live communally in the Canadian prairies, have less than a 1% unemployment rate.

The majority of Canadian Muslims who are employed work in sales and service occupations (26.9%). These figures are comparable with the largest population group, Roman Catholics (in the same category at 23.9%). The other two most important types of jobs for Muslims are in business, finance and administrative occupations (16.3%; Roman Catholics at 18.4%), and management positions (11.9%; Roman Catholics at 10% of its group population). [\[14\]](#)

Religion and State

Historically inhabited by Aboriginal peoples, Canada became an official constitutional monarchy in 1867 under the religiously-inspired title of a "dominion." With a current population of 33 million, Canada initially originated with two "founding" colonial nations (and their majority religious traditions) of England and France. The country today remains mitigated by official bilingualism and a doctrine of multiculturalism alongside secularization (O'Toole 1996).

Canada's "two solitudes" (the province of Québec and the remainder of English Canada) have differing legal systems, immigration policies and political agendas. In Québec, the *Révolution Tranquille* (Quiet Revolution) from the early 1960s to the 1990s dramatically shifted the province's earlier Catholic influence to a staunchly secular one. Two political referendums in 1980 and 1995 calling for the sovereignty of Québec have also created considerable national and provincial debate. For instance, following the narrow "No" victory in 1995, then-provincial premier Jacques Parizeau, a committed sovereigntist and leader of the *Parti Québécois* (the Quebecois Provincial Party), publicly stated that the "Yes" vote had been defeated by "money and the ethnic vote," and referred to Francophones who had voted in favour of sovereignty as "*nous les Québécois*". [\[15\]](#) The rapid shift

toward secularization as well as the possibility of political sovereignty have had influenced the experiences of Muslims living in the province of Québec, largely because of their immigrant, ethnic and religious identities.

In a larger sense, in both Québec and English Canada, despite the country's increasingly secularly-based policies and an expanding non-European immigration, the country remains strongly Christian. While the percentage of Canadians who are Protestant or Catholic has dropped significantly over the 20th Century, from about 98% in 1901 to approximately 72% in 2001, the country remains influenced by its Christian heritage. [16] The majority of Canadian Christians are Roman Catholic, according to the most recent statistical information of religious demography, at 43.2% of the Canadian population. [17]

Immigration

The number of Muslim immigrants in Canada grew with shifts to the country's official immigration policy. Initially in the 1800s, immigration to Canada was largely unrestricted, although the "Chinese Head Tax" was introduced in British Columbia in 1885 to restrict Chinese immigration, and was imposed until the 1940s.

The 1871 Canadian census data recorded 13 Muslims, all Lebanese and living in the western province of Alberta. Most migrated with the intention of returning to their countries of origin and worked in sweatshops, factories and mines where language acquisition was less important (Yazbeck 1977). While today the majority of Muslims live in Ontario and Quebec, Al-Rashid, the first official mosque in North America was built in Edmonton, Alberta in 1938.

The "quota system" was abolished in 1952, signaling a shift from the standard British Protestant Subject to more family reunification-based migration policy based on the "point" system. Introduced in 1967, the "points system" judges applicants on qualifications such as language and skill. The influx of Muslim immigrants after WWII raised the number to 33 370 by 1971. The majority of migrants in this wave were highly educated, westernized professionals who came to settle in Canada to increase their economic opportunities. They were mostly from Lebanon, Syria, Indonesia, Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and the Indo-Pakistani region.

An updated act introduced in 1976 created four basic categories for landed immigrants in Canada: family sponsorship; humanitarian, including refugees, persecuted or displaced persons; independents; and assisted relatives. [18] In 1991, the Canada-Quebec Accord gave Quebec full responsibility for the selection of its economic immigrants to the province.

The most recent 2002 immigration law amendment sought to attract younger bilingual and educated workers, and introduced the common-law partner class in the family category. Today there are three larger admissible categories: family class; convention refugees and persons in need of protection; and an economic class.

262,157 immigrants migrated to Canada in 2005. Of these, 56.1% were in the Economic class; 28.5% were in the Family class; 12.8% were Refugees; and 2.6% came from "Other." The top five source countries in 2005 include, in order: China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan and the United States. [19]

According to the 2001 Census data, most of the country's majority foreign-born Muslim population have emigrated since 1991: [\[20\]](#)

Total population 2001	579, 645			
Non-immigrant population	137,830	23.80%		
Non-permanent residents	25, 970	4.50%		
Immigrant population	415, 840	71.70%		
		Arrived pre-1961	0.03%	
		1961-1970	2.30%	
		1971-1980	12.20%	
		1981-1990	18.80%	
		1991-2000	66.40%	

In his study of Muslims in the early 1990s in the Ottawa, Ontario region, the nation's capital, Ahmad F. Yousif (1993: 17) outlines the five primary factors which have drawn Muslims to the area: economic advantages; educational opportunities; political alienation from native countries; family sponsorship; and notions of a freedom of faith and expression guaranteed in Canadian law.

Political Representation

The last four prime ministers of Canada have been Roman Catholics (Kim Campbell, Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin and the current Stephen Harper), although as [religioustolerance.org](#) explains, few have followed their church's teachings in legislation matters such as abortion access and equal rights for gays and lesbians; same-sex marriage was legalized in July 2005. Unlike in the United States, the Canadian media rarely discusses the personal lives of its political leaders, including their religious beliefs.

For these reasons, it is not clear how many Muslims are currently members of the Canadian Parliament. One Muslim who has risen within the Conservative party is Rahim Jaffer, a Member of Parliament (MP) for Edmonton-Strathcona since 1997. Jaffer migrated to Canada with his parents as a Ugandan-refugee. [\[21\]](#) He is said to be of Ismaili origin. [\[22\]](#) Another prominent known Muslim is Conservative MP for Mississauga- Streetsville, Wajid Khan. Khan was born in Pakistan in 1974 where he was a fighter pilot for the Pakistani army. Prior to the beginning of his political career as elected MP for the Liberal Party in 2003, he was CEO of a successful automobile showroom in Mississauga, ON. Khan voted against the same-sex marriage bill of 2005 and "crossed the floor" to join the Conservative Party in January 2007. [\[23\]](#) Yasmin Ratansi, an Ismaeli is the only known Muslim woman elected to the Canadian parliament in Ottawa, representing the Don Valley East riding in Toronto since 2004. Born in 1951 in Tanzania, Ratansi was formerly an accountant and community activist. She currently serves as chairperson for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. [\[24\]](#) There are no known other Muslim parliamentarians.

Muslims in Canada have an important say in elections. A recent study of Canadian electors in the Greater Toronto Region examines how the high turnout of Canadian Muslims in the 2004 general elections may have had an important say in the eventual Liberal party win. According to a recent study

examining political inclusion and an exit poll conducted by the Canadian Islamic Congress, more than 80% of eligible Canadian Muslim voters cast their ballots in these elections. [25]

A recent article in the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper suggests that Canadian Muslims may vote en masse against the now-majority Conservative government following Foreign Affair Minister Peter MacKay's first Middle Eastern tour in 2007, which has been deemed pro-Israeli. [26]

Muslim Organizations

By law, Canadian federal and provincial governments leave the administration and governance of mosques to local governing committees. However, as religious institutions, these mosques must have boards of directors and a membership who elect the boards (see McDonough and Hoodfar 2005: 141). Recently there has been some controversy about the external funding of Canadian mosques, particularly by Saudi King Fahd who is said to have financed four Canadian mosques (Ain-al-Yaqeen 2002 in McDonough and Hoodfar 2005: 141).

Most Muslim community organizations in Canada are located in the Greater Toronto Area. For a complete directory of centres and mosques see: www.torontomuslims.com. The community is a large, diverse community and has more than 60 ethno-cultural groups.

The Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC, <http://www.canadianislamiccongress.com>) is a Non-Governmental Organization that claims to represent both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims; its head office is in Kitchener, Ontario but has offices across the country. Led by Dr. Mohamed Elmasry, an imam and engineering professor at the University of Waterloo, the organization is active in public policy questions (releasing press releases on its position related to Family Law Arbitration, for instance) and publishes a weekly online magazine, *The Friday Bulletin*, which it claims has 300 000 subscribers around the world.

The Muslim Association of Canada (MAC, www.macnet.ca) is based out of Ottawa, Ontario. Like many Canadian Muslim organizations, it also has an affiliated private school, the Abraar Islamic Religious School in 2000 with classes from junior kindergarten to Grade Eight.

The Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN, www.caircan.ca) is also Ottawa-based and are active in media relations, advocacy and anti-discrimination policies. They have conducted several of their own studies on Muslims in Canada (see below), and have publications available for sale like "A Journalist's Guide to Islam" and "An Employer's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices" as well as "Islamic Sensitivity" training seminars available.

Founded in 2002 by Tarek Fatah, The Muslim Canadian Congress (MCC, www.muslimcanadiancongress.org) is a more recent liberal group; its current president Farzana Hassan was extremely active during the "One School" debate on the public funding of religious schools in the province of Ontario in 2005. Unlike most Canadian Muslim Organizations, the MCC also notably stood against family law arbitration, promoting "secular Islam" in Ontario in 2004.

In 2006, the Canadian Muslim Union (CMU, <http://www.muslimunion.ca>) split from the MCC. They claim to advocate a separation of religion from politics while maintaining bridges within the Muslim community.

There are a number of larger umbrella Muslim Canadian organizations in the Greater Toronto Area. One of the largest of these is the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA, <http://www.isnacanada.com>) founded in 1981. ISNA runs its own private elementary and high schools, a masjid, the Islamic Co-operative Housing Corporation, a banquet hall, funeral services, a halal certification agency as well as hosting a variety of other community events. Housed within it, the Islamic Centre of Canada (ICC) has weekly *halaqah* meetings from young people, women and other male members of the community.

The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA, <http://www.icnacanada.ca>) established in 1971 encompasses a largely South Asian membership in Montreal and Toronto. It also runs a private Islamic school, Al-Falah, from junior kindergarten to grade eight in Oakville, Ontario.

The Islamic Foundation of Toronto (IFT, www.islamicfoundation.ca) is one of the oldest organizations in the GTA and is led by Toronto-born Sheik Yusuf Badat. Located in Scarborough it opened in 1969 and now runs a *masjid*, a complete primary and high school, drop-in "hot soup" days on Saturdays, community and funerary services and other Islamic and Arabic-language classes.

The nearby Islamic Institute of Toronto (IIT, <http://www.islam.ca>) established in 1996 is also located in Scarborough. It focuses on educational pursuits, and hopes to open an accredited Islamic university.

Ottawa-based nationally-established Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW, <http://www.ccmw.com>) was founded in 1982 and has an active national board with meetings held across the country. Student-led initiatives, particularly Muslim Student Associations on Canadian university campuses, are generally well supported and successful.

Other important organizations outside of Ontario in Quebec include: The Montreal's Muslim News Network (www.montrealmuslimnews.net), Montreal Muslims (www.montrealmuslims.ca), *Musulmans Grand Montreal* (a communication portal which lists 24 mosques in the city, <http://musulmansgrandmontreal.net>), the Muslim Council of Montreal (<http://www.muslimcouncil.org>), the *Centre Communautaire Musulman de Montréal* (The Muslim Community Center of Montreal, <http://www.ccmontreal.com>), and the *Association Musulmane Québécoise* (Quebecois Muslim Association, www.amquebec.net).

Rights and Discrimination

Islamophobia after 9/11

Negative stereotyping of Muslims or "Islamophobia" in Canada arguably became evident following the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and more recently following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States in 2001.

A number of studies from Islamic community organizations have charted this discrimination. From 2000-2004, the Canadian Islamic Congress conducted Media Research Reports examining anti-Islamic content in the country's eight largest daily newspapers, noting the widespread use of terms like "Muslim extremist" and "Islamic militant" in reporting on conflicts in Muslim-majority countries. [27] In 2002, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women sponsored a participatory research project investigating the effects of 11 September 2001 for Canadian Muslim women. Fourteen focus groups across the country revealed a sense of horror at the terrorist attacks as well as distress about unfair negative stereotyping of Muslims and difficulties in travel (McDonough and Hoodfar 2005: 148).

In 2004, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR CAN) published its own report, "Presumption of Guilt: A National Survey on Security Visitations of Canadian Muslims" which concluded that 8% of their 467 respondents were questioned by security officials following 11 September 2001 with hard copies of surveys randomly distributed in mosques, Islamic centres and Muslim community events across the country; electronic forms were also available. The writers of the report suggest the 8% figure may be underreported as 43% of their respondents knew of at least one other Canadian Muslim who had been questioned by the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) or the local police. A disproportionately high number of those who reported questioning were of Arab ethnicity and male. Their study "Canadian Muslims One Year After 9-11" similarly revealed that 56% of their respondents experienced anti-Muslim "incidents" on at least one occasion since 9/11. [\[28\]](#)

This kind of racial profiling has also come into question in the province of Quebec with the death of 25 year-old, Moroccan-born Mohamed-Anas Bennis, shot by a Montreal police officer after allegedly leaving his neighbourhood mosque in the early morning of 1 December 2005. The Montreal Police have claimed Bennis was carrying a kitchen knife and shot him in self-defence. In January 2006 4500 people participated in a demonstration calling for a public inquiry into Bennis' death. [\[29\]](#) The official report on his death to the Quebecois Ministry of Public Security has not yet been released. [\[30\]](#)

A more recent opinion study by the Environics Research group in 2007 revealed a disparity between the 57% of non-Muslim Canadians who felt that Muslims wanted to remain distinct from other Canadians, and the only 23% of Canadian Muslims who felt that way. The survey also revealed that compared to Muslims in the U.K., Germany, France and Spain who were polled on similar issues by the Pew Research Center, Canadian Muslims appear relatively more contented and moderate. The study also found that 86% of Canadian Muslims feel that banning the headscarf in public places including schools is inappropriate in multicultural Canada. [\[31\]](#)

Canadian laws protecting religious expression

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was entrenched within the Constitution of Canada in 1982 under the government of then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, following the Canadian Bill of Rights enacted in 1960. [\[32\]](#) Although the Charter is applicable in all Canadian provinces and territories, Quebec did not support the Charter largely owing to its inclusion of mobility rights, minority language education rights, and its "centrist" focus. Its mandates continue to cause controversy in Quebec. [\[33\]](#)

The Charter guarantees the freedom of religious expression, so that following section 3, "For the purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for which a pardon has been granted." [\[34\]](#) Muslim women thus have the right to wear the *hijab* in public schools and in the workplace. Human rights organizations have also assisted Muslims in Canada in a few cases of discrimination by employers (see McDonough 2003). Religious holidays and dietary *halal* restrictions are also respected.

Security and Anti-Terrorist Issues

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the Government of Canada introduced the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), Bill C-36, aimed to protect the safety, security and fundamental rights of Canadians. The act became part of the criminal code on 18 December 2001. Two clauses in particular garnered some controversy. One allows police to arrest suspects without a warrant and detain them for three days without charges if police believe a terrorist act might be committed. Another allows a judge to compel a witness to testify in secret under penalty of jail-time should the witness not comply. The Bill therefore contains a five-year sunset clause in order to later review these clauses. [\[35\]](#)

The Maher Arar Case and Inquiry

One of the most controversial and widely covered security issues in Canada has been the case of Ottawa resident and Canadian citizen, Maher Arar. Returning to Canada through JFK airport in September of 2002, Arar was detained by US customs officials and sent to Syria where he was tortured and interrogated for his alleged links to al-Qaeda. His wife, Monia Mazigh, campaigned for his release and return to Canada until October 2003. [\[36\]](#)

Following controversy and debate about the legitimacy of Arar's links to al-Qaeda, in January 2004, the Government of Canada announced it would launch an official inquiry into the actions of Canadian officials in relation to Arar. Ultimately the commission cleared Arar of all terrorist allegations: "there is no evidence to indicate that Mr. Arar has committed any offence or that his activities constitute a threat to the security of Canada." [\[37\]](#)

The Arrest of 17 Terrorist Suspects in Mississauga, ON in June 2006

On 2-3 June 2006 under the auspices of Canada's Anti-terrorism Act (instituted 18 December 2001), more than 400 police officers conducted a series of raids in the Greater Toronto Area, arresting 17 suspects, 13 men and 4 male youths. All were either born in Canada or long-time residents. Two months later an 18th suspect was also arrested. As the CBC News outlet describes, "It was a show of force rarely seen on Canadian soil." The suspects were accused of knowingly participating in a terrorist group and either providing or receiving terrorist training. [\[38\]](#)

In a statement to the press, Prime Minister Stephen Harper claimed "We are a target because of who we are and how we live, our society, our diversity and our values." While U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised the efforts of Canadian forces, New York Republican Peter King, the chairman of the House of Representatives Homeland Security committee claimed "I think it's a disproportionate number of al-Qaeda in Canada because of their very liberal immigration laws, because of how political asylum is granted so easily". [\[39\]](#)

The trial has yet to begin, although in September 2007 federal prosecutors took the unusual step of suppressing preliminary hearings to go straight to trial. Five defendants face additional charges, while charges for three of the accused were stayed. 15 males therefore still face charges. [\[40\]](#) A publication ban on the trial has been put into place to attempt to maintain an unbiased courtroom.

Political Discourse

Political discourse has differed across the country, but has been largely in the provinces of Ontario and Québec, the provinces where most Muslims live in Canada.

Ontario (Family Law Arbitration)

Recent debates in Ontario on the use of religious law in family law arbitration highlight increasingly important issues of national definition and tolerance.

In 2003, the Islamic Institute of Civil Justice (IICJ) registered as a business and announced that it would open its doors as a "*shari'a* court" in Ontario, based on the 1991 Provincial Arbitration Act. Many Muslim and non-Muslim Canadians objected to the use of Muslim legal practices, especially regarding the perceived harm that could be done to women.

In response to the debate, Former Attorney General Marion Boyd presented a 192-page report, "Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion" in December 2004. [\[41\]](#) In considering the limits of the Family Law Act, the Charter of Rights & Freedoms and the Multiculturalism Act, Boyd concluded that the Arbitration Act should stand. Despite Boyd's recommendations to allow religious arbitration, on November 15, 2005, following tremendous national and international pressure, Ontario provincial premier Dalton McGuinty announced that faith-based arbitration would be outlawed in favour of "one law for all Ontarians". The Legislature passed the Family Statute Law Amendment Act in February 2006, banning it in Ontario.

Recent public policy debate in Canada has again emerged in the province in Ontario with the October 2006 provincial elections. The then-conservative leader, John Tory, focused his platform as to whether the province should extend its funding of private Catholic schools to other religious denominations, Muslims in the GTA debated secularism and the Canadian public school system. The debate, like the "*shari'ah*" debate the year before, divided Muslim Community Organizations. Some Muslims felt that with public funding allocated for Catholic schools only, a law enshrined in the early Canadian constitution no longer reflects the province's diverse religious population. Others contended that Muslims in Canada are best protected with a shared secular school system. John Tory lost the election so the notion of publicly funding non-Catholic religious schools was dropped.

Quebec

In the province of Quebec, since the beginning of 2007, controversy has focused on the "Reasonable Accommodation Debates" led by former prominent philosopher Charles Taylor and sociologist Gérard Bouchard. These town-hall commissions were set into place by the provincial premier, Jean Charest, who felt a public commission might best address recent issues in the province dealing with increased non-European immigration and integration. Hearings have taken place in 17 communities beginning in September 2007. The commission is expected to submit a report and make recommendations to Quebec Premier Jean Charest on 31 March 2008. One of the more sensational issues took place in January 2007 when the small northern Québécois town of Hérouxville, 160 km north-east of Montreal, conducted a code of conduct for its immigrants. [\[42\]](#)

Many have said that instead the commission has examined religion and language politics and has especially focused on the question of whether women should be allowed to wear headscarves while playing sports.

Cultural integration in Quebec is perhaps more complicated than in English Canada because Québec is a linguistic minority within Canada and therefore encourages its immigrants to integrate into "Francophone" culture.

Popular Discourse

Little Mosque on the Prairie

A CBC production which debuted in October 2006, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* is a 30 minute weekly sitcom which features the lives of Muslims living in a small prairie town in Saskatchewan. The show's creator, Zarqa Nawaz who was raised in Toronto and now lives in Regina, claims the series explores the dynamics of Muslim and non-Muslim relationships with a comedic twist. The characters aim for diversity and include: Yasir, a Lebanese Canadian contractor, his wife Sarah, a blonde convert and their feminist doctor daughter Rayyan; Baber, a more conservative Pakistani-Canadian who is an economics professor and his teenage daughter Layla; Fatima, a Nigerian-Canadian and owner of "Fatima's Diner"; the town's imam, Amaar, a young Toronto lawyer who moves to the prairie town following a spiritual epiphany; and a number of non-Muslim Canadians who interact with these main characters. [43] The program has elicited much response. *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente called it "so risk-averse, so painfully correct, it makes your teeth ache". [44]

Mark Steyn of *Macleans Magazine* quipped that "Muslim is the new gay," insofar as Islam is becoming a religious tradition that only "uptight squares are uncool with," adding that the CBC program reflects how Canadians "are so boundlessly tolerant we tolerate an endless parade of dreary sitcoms and dramas about how intolerant we are." [45] The program's debut attracted 2.1 million viewers, the largest crowd for the CBC in more than a decade. [46]

Nawaz also directed a controversial documentary pointing to the growing number of partitions separating men and women in Canadian mosques in the National Film Board produced "Me and the Mosque" (2005).

Irshad Manji

Irshad Manji (born 1968)'s book *The Trouble With Islam Today* (1st ed. 2003, 2nd ed. 2005) has created some controversy within the Muslim population in Canada. In her book and in a PBS documentary about her perspective, *Faith Without Fear* (2007), Manji is an outspoken proponent of *ijtihad* and calls herself a "Muslim refusenik". She has received death threats and is currently director of the Moral Courage Project at New York University. [47]

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