

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*By the end of this chapter you should be able to*

- Define the terms *political culture*, *ideology*, and *cleavages*.
- Describe the main principles of each of the major ideologies in Canada.
- Describe the ideological orientation of the main political parties in Canada.
- Describe the major cleavages in Canadian politics.

## Introduction

Canadian politics, like politics in other societies, is a public conflict over different conceptions of the good life. Canadians agree on some important matters (e.g., Canadians are overwhelmingly committed to the rule of law, democracy, equality, individual rights, and respect for minorities) and disagree on others. That Canadians share certain values represents a substantial consensus about how the political system should work. While Canadians generally agree on the rules of the game, they disagree—sometimes very strongly—on what laws and policies the government should adopt. Should governments spend more or less? Should taxes be lower or higher? Should governments build more prisons or more hospitals? Should we build more pipelines or fight climate change?

Fortunately for students of politics, different conceptions of the good life are not random. The different views on what laws and policies are appropriate to realize the good life coalesce into a few distinct groupings of ideas known as **ideologies**. These ideologies have names that are familiar to you, such as *liberalism*, *conservatism*, and (democratic) *socialism*, which are the principal ideologies in Canadian politics. More radical ideologies, such as Marxism, communism, and fascism, are at best only marginally present in Canada.

It is quite common to map ideologies on a continuum from left to right (see Figure 2.1). Newer ideologies like feminism and environmentalism do not fit comfortably on the left–right continuum. Many feminists and environmentalists are on the left side of the spectrum, but others are on the right side. There are certainly feminists and environmentalists in all of the major political parties in Canada, including the Conservative Party of Canada. The left side of the spectrum is often referred to as *progressive*, while the right side of the scale is sometimes described as *reactionary*.

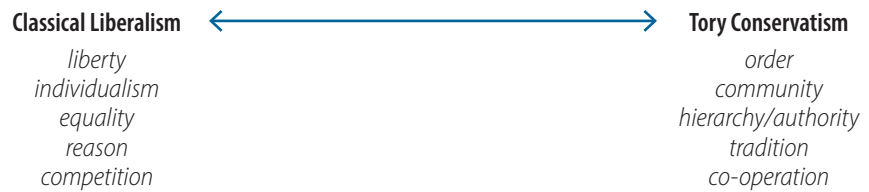
When we talk about the totality of political beliefs in Canada, we are talking about the country's **political culture**. The political culture of Canada, however, varies from region to region, and it also varies among identifiable groups of Canadians. The political culture of Quebec, for example, is very different from the rest of Canada. But, even in the rest of Canada, there are stark differences between the West, Ontario, Atlantic Canada, and the North. Urban and rural Canadians also see the world of politics in different terms; men and women exhibit different political beliefs, at least to some extent, as do Canadians of different religious and ethnic heritages; the rich and the poor clearly have different political interests; young and old Canadians also have different concerns and priorities. With all of these differences, Canadians are

**ideologies** Specific bundles of ideas about politics and the good life, such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism. Ideologies help people explain political phenomena, they allow people to evaluate good and bad, and they equip people with a program or agenda for political action.

**political culture** The sum total of political beliefs in a country. It includes the attitudes, beliefs, and values that underpin the political system.





**Figure 2.3** The Principles of Liberalism and Conservatism

ideologies, will never agree on the issue of same-sex marriage, because they are committed to different values and principles.

Some of you may not recognize the picture that has been drawn of liberals and conservatives. That's because ideologies change over time. Here we have sketched out the *old* versions of liberalism and conservatism. While many Canadians describe themselves as liberals or conservatives, few people now adhere strictly to the tenets of classical liberalism or Tory conservatism. Ideologies change over time because new information causes people to change their worldview.

### Democratic Socialism and Neo-Conservatism

Over the course of the 20th century, new ideologies emerged in Canada. During the Great Depression in the 1930s the ideas of democratic socialism took root, and in the 1970s a new form of conservatism—neo-conservatism—emerged. In very simple terms, democratic socialism and neo-conservatism can each be understood as a different synthesis of classical liberalism and Tory conservatism. Each of these ideologies, in other words, represents a different blending or combination of liberal and conservative principles. In the process, classical liberalism and Tory conservatism were modified as well. Some would describe modern Canadian liberalism as a light version of democratic socialism; similarly, Tory conservatism is now perhaps just a light version of neo-conservatism.

At the end of the 19th century, largely in response to Marxism, individuals with a concern for equality became distressed by the high levels of economic disparity in Canadian society. They feared that economic inequality would lead to social unrest and instability in the community. These individuals also reasoned that liberty was meaningless if people did not have the means to enjoy a good life. The freedom to own a house is no freedom at all unless you have the money to purchase it or at least to be in a position to borrow the money from a bank. Individuals inclined to this view therefore argued that the state ought to take positive steps to ensure that each individual had the means to realize a good life. This represented a rethinking of the theory of *noblesse oblige*: instead of relying on the nobility to provide charity to the less fortunate, these individuals argued that the state had an obligation to look after the needs of all individuals equally and to instill a spirit of co-operation in the community. In short, these new thinkers borrowed elements from liberalism and conservatism to produce a new ideological synthesis, which we can call democratic socialism (as opposed to Marxist socialism or revolutionary communism).

The ideas of democratic socialism flourished in the 1930s largely as a result of the Great Depression, when many believed that Marx's theory about the collapse of capitalism was coming true. In response, the Government of Canada established a variety of programs including unemployment insurance and old-age pensions. After World War II, these programs were accompanied by hospital insurance, medical insurance,

and a more elaborate pension plan. By the end of the 1960s, Canada had established a reasonably comprehensive social welfare state.

The development of the welfare state proved to be more expensive than anticipated, and the financial burden on the state was compounded in the 1970s when the economy took a turn for the worse. The Government of Canada was forced to borrow considerable sums of money to continue providing services to Canadians, which resulted in a large debt that still has not been paid off. In response, a new ideological synthesis emerged. Some people began to argue that the state could not afford to be an economic backstop for all members of society, and they argued that the government should seek to develop wealth by fostering competition in the marketplace, mainly by lowering taxes and reducing government regulations. These ideas were drawn from the principles of classical liberalism, but at the same time there was also a moral backlash against what was perceived as the pleasure-seeking behaviour of the 1960s. The market principles of classical liberalism were thus joined with conservative notions of tradition and respect for authority. This is the ideology of neo-conservatism (see Figure 2.4). It should be noted that a small number of people advocated a return to market principles *without* the baggage of traditional conservative values. These individuals don't care who you sleep with or what you do in your spare time (as long as you don't cause harm to anyone else). In short, they are modern adherents of classical liberalism, but rather than being called old liberals they are known as **neo-liberals** or **libertarians**.

**neo-liberals or libertarians**  
Modern adherents of classical liberalism.

Canada's debate over the future of health care demonstrates the conflict between the principles of democratic socialism and neo-conservatism. Health care in Canada is a responsibility of the provinces, although the federal government provides considerable financial support, as we will discuss in Chapter 7. In most provinces, health care now consumes almost half of the entire provincial budget, and this proportion is steadily increasing. Social democrats argue that Canadians have a right to a universal, publicly financed health care system. They argue that a public system provides better health outcomes and is less expensive than a private health care system. Neo-conservatives, on the other hand, argue that the provision of a public health care system is increasingly a burden on government finances and that these costs must be brought under control, primarily by allowing more private health care options in the marketplace. If the social democratic view of health care is to prevail, taxes will surely have to increase, perhaps substantially. If the neo-conservative position prevails, the health care system may be privatized entirely.

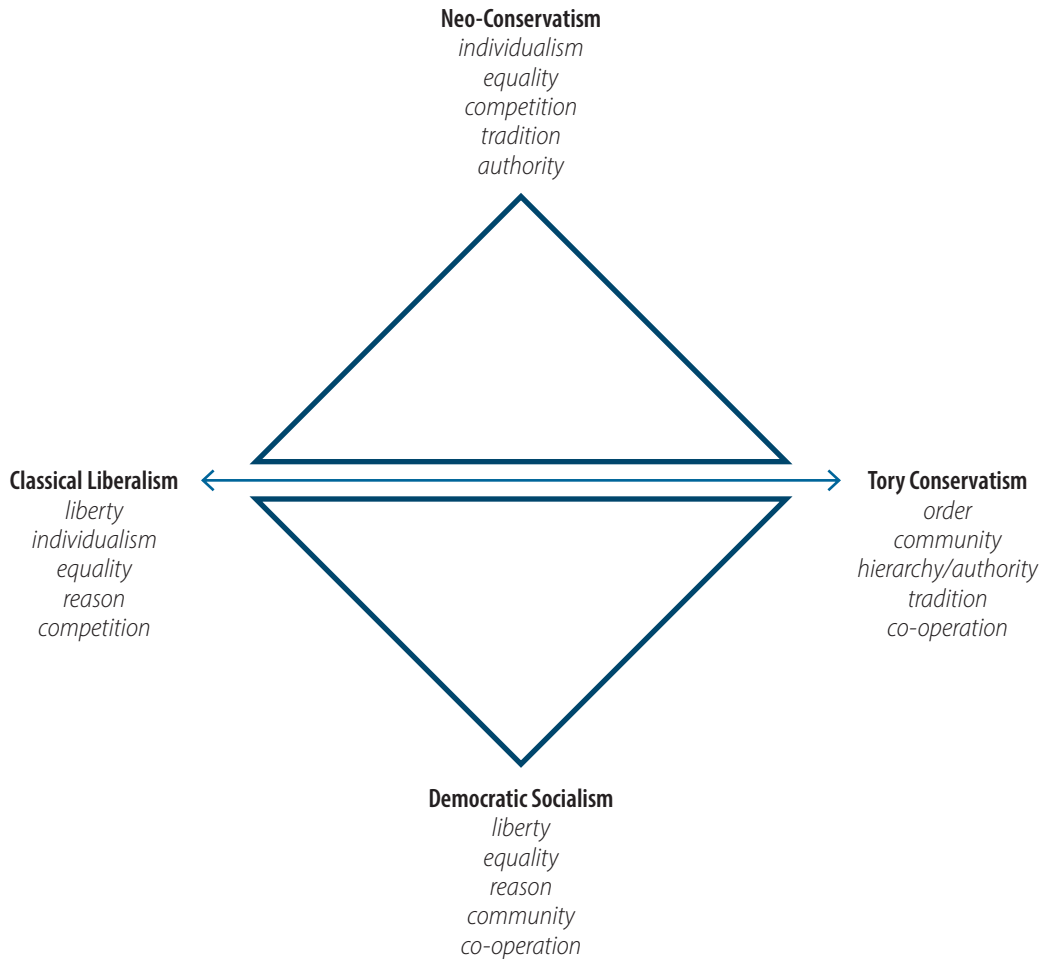


**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** Countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), including Canada, have committed to spending 2 percent of their annual budgets on the military. Canada currently spends 1.4% of its budget on the military. Do you think Canada should spend more on the military to meet its international commitments? Or should we spend more on social programs? Or should we spend less and cut taxes?

## Ideology and the Political Parties in Canada

The major ideological traditions at play in Canadian politics are represented by the main political parties, albeit imperfectly. Liberalism is, of course, represented by the Liberal Party, although the liberalism of the Liberal Party today is a cross between classical liberalism and democratic socialism. Many members of the Liberal Party

**Figure 2.4** A Synthesis of Liberalism and Conservatism Gave Rise to Neo-Conservatism in the Second Half of the 20th Century



Source: Hamish Telford, "The Reform Party/Canadian Alliance and Canada's Flirtation with Republicanism," in *Canada: The State of the Federation 2001: Canadian Political Culture(s) in Transition*, eds. Hamish Telford and Harvey Lazar (Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 2002).

lean "left" toward the principles of democratic socialism, but the Liberal Party has always had a "blue" contingent with strong ties to business. Former Prime Minister Paul Martin is a good example of a "blue" Liberal. Under Justin Trudeau the Liberal Party skews towards classical liberalism in its support of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms but its social policies skew towards democratic socialism.

The conservatism of the Conservative Party is a mixture of Tory conservatism and neo-conservatism, although it leans much more to the latter than the former. The Conservative Party slogan in the 2019 federal election—It's Time for You to Get Ahead—with the emphasis on *you* was clearly premised on the individualism of neo-conservatism rather than the communitarianism of Tory conservatism. The Conservative Party's moral traditionalism was also evident with former leader Andrew Scheer's discomfort with issues like abortion and same-sex marriage.

**ENGAGING  
ISSUES**
**Canadian Political Culture and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

When the coronavirus swept into Canada in March 2020, the federal and provincial governments closed down large sections of the economy (throwing millions of people out of work), restricted international travel, and asked Canadians to stay at home as much as possible. For the most part we willingly complied with these unprecedented restrictions on our freedom. We witnessed some scattered protests but with only a few dozen protesters. Ontario Premier Doug Ford dismissed them as a bunch of “yahoos.” By contrast, we saw large-scale protests in the United States, with many protesters brandishing large guns.

In many respects, Canada and the United States are very similar countries. We speak the same language, watch the same television shows, and enjoy the same sports. Canadians can blend almost seamlessly in the United States, just as Americans can in Canada. But the COVID pandemic revealed that there are serious differences in the political culture of the two countries. Why did almost all Canadians comply with government orders to hunker down at home, while so many Americans defied their government? Many political theorists have argued that Canada was founded on the principles of Toryism, while the United States was founded purely on liberal individualism. The American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset has argued that American liberalism emphasizes “distrust of the state, egalitarianism, and populism.” These ideas were articulated in the Declaration of Independence (adopted on July 4, 1776), which stated that all people have a right to “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Many Canadians believed that the United States seriously jeopardized the lives of American citizens by reopening its economy too quickly, but many Americans live by the motto “Live Free or Die” which is emblazoned on car licence plates in New Hampshire. By contrast, Canadian Toryism values a strong state and respect for authority. These ideas are encapsulated in the Canadian constitution, which declares that the Government of Canada may make laws for the “peace, order, and good government” of the country. While Canada is now broadly a liberal society, we saw during the pandemic that our political culture is still significantly shaped by our Tory heritage.

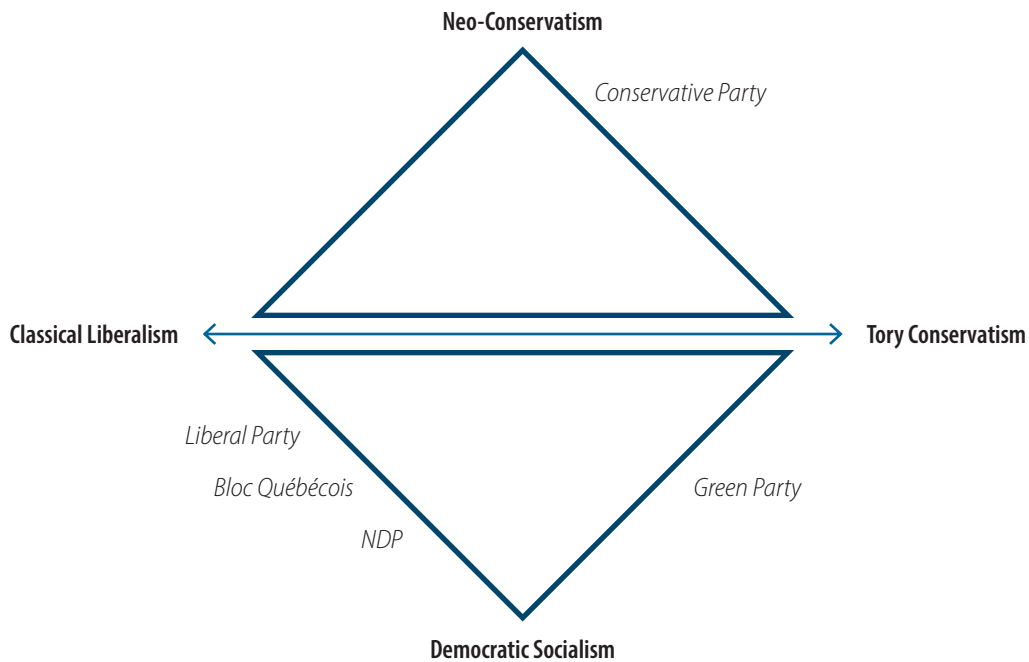
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Source: Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 2.

(Neo-liberals do not have a natural or comfortable home in Canada, unless they join the very marginal Libertarian Party. Many neo-liberals probably end up supporting the Conservative Party because of its economic policies and general belief in limited government, even if they find the social conservatism of the party distasteful.)

The New Democratic Party (the NDP) is the party of democratic socialism in Canada. Like the other parties, the NDP has its left and right wings. Those on the left side are proud to call themselves “socialists,” while those on the right side of the party are not much different from left-leaning Liberals. For the Bloc Québécois, the sovereignty of Quebec trumps ideology, although on most issues the Bloc conforms to the principles of democratic socialism, although in the 2019 federal election the Bloc’s position on immigrants and immigration was definitely not progressive. Similarly, for the Green Party the environment trumps ideology. Greens are typically described as a left-wing liberal–social democratic party along with the NDP, but it might be more accurate to view the Green Party’s ideology of environmentalism as a cross between democratic socialism and Toryism, at least under former leader Elizabeth May (see Figure 2.5).

In sum, ideologies enable people to explain and evaluate political issues, and they help people decide how to respond to these issues. In other words, they equip people

**Figure 2.5** The Ideological Orientation of the Major Political Parties in Canada

with a program of action. Finally, an ideology allows each person to orient themselves with respect to the political system and to other political actors. It is, however, often difficult to situate yourself within the largely abstract ideological spectrum, particularly if you are new to politics. Over time, after watching the news, engaging in political conversations with family and friends, and participating in a few elections, you will eventually figure out where you are situated in the political spectrum. However, you can get a pretty good sense of where you stand with the help of a computer by taking an online quiz to help determine your ideology (although you should accept the results with more than just a few grains of salt). See Box 2.1.

**cleavages** The enduring political divisions in a country, such as language, region, urban-rural, gender, race, and class, among others.

**identity politics** A political orientation that is driven by one's identification with one's language, race, religion, gender, nation, sexual orientation, or some other aspect of the group one identifies with. Identity politics is often associated with groups seeking to free themselves from discrimination by dominant groups in Canadian society.

## The Canadian Political Landscape

It is important to note that the different ideologies at play in Canadian politics do not have an equal number of adherents nor are evenly distributed across the country. Just as Canada is divided into distinct geographical regions, the Canadian political landscape is similarly divided. Political scientists refer to these political divisions as **cleavages**. There are a number of enduring cleavages in the Canadian political landscape, such as language, region, urban-rural, gender, race, and class among others. Each subgroup has a unique political culture and a particular set of concerns.

For some people, their group identity may be more important than their ideology. This gives rise to what political scientists call **identity politics**. Identity politics and social cleavages provide a variety of challenges and opportunities for political parties. Parties aiming to win an election and form the government of Canada must find a way to bridge these distinct political communities into a winning coalition. This has long been the challenge for Canada's governing parties, the Conservative Party and

### BOX 2.1 WHAT IS YOUR IDEOLOGY?

Do you know where you're situated in the political spectrum? Take the test at [www.politicalcompass.org](http://www.politicalcompass.org). Even if you know your ideology, it is fun to take the test to see if the computer gets it right. It is even more fun to take the test with family members or friends. It may explain why you agree or disagree on so many political issues!

the Liberal Party. Other parties, however, may find a niche in the Canadian political system by representing the concerns of a particular subgroup in the Canadian polity; the Bloc Québécois is the prime exemplar.

## Language

Historically, language has been the principal cleavage in Canadian politics. The division between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians predates Confederation by more than 100 years: it goes all the way back to the British conquest of New France in 1759 on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City. For some, Confederation represented a pact between English- and French-speaking peoples, who have been described as Canada's two founding nations. This theory of Confederation is more popular among Francophone Canadians, particularly in Quebec, who still tend to view the country as a union between two linguistic groups. While Anglophones recognize the linguistic duality of Canada, they generally view the country in different terms, perhaps because English-speaking Canadians have never viewed themselves as a single group. Even at Confederation in 1867, English-speaking Canadians were divided among English, Scots, and Irish, and these groups were themselves divided into Catholics and Protestants. In sociological terms, religion was a **cross-cutting cleavage** among English-speaking Canadians of different national origins. Crosscutting cleavages serve to reduce conflict between the groups. It would certainly be worse if all Francophones were Catholics and all Anglophones were Protestant—in this scenario the cleavages would be *reinforcing* and much more divisive.

For many decades after Confederation, Quebec was a deeply conservative society. French-speaking Quebecers were overwhelmingly Catholic, and the Catholic Church held sway over much of the province. In the 1960s, however, Quebec went through a profound social transformation known as *la Révolution tranquille*—the **Quiet Revolution**. While the winds of change had been sweeping through Quebec for some years, the revolution was precipitated by the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis, who led a political party called the *Union Nationale*, in 1959 and the election of a new Liberal government led by Jean Lesage in 1960. Duplessis governed Quebec with an iron fist from 1936 to 1939 and again from 1944 to his death. The Duplessis years are now known in Quebec as *la Grande Noirceur*—the great darkness. Under Jean Lesage, by contrast, Quebec flourished. In the span of less than a decade, Quebec went from being the most conservative and religious province in Canada to being the most liberal and least religious. As the Catholic Church declined in Quebec, the government became considerably more active in Quebec society. Before the Quiet Revolution, Quebec had the lowest taxes among all of the provinces, but after the Quiet Revolution, Quebec had the highest taxes in Canada. To this day, Quebec has the most generous social programs in Canada.

**crosscutting cleavages** When a second cleavage serves to create an alliance across the primary cleavage. The principal cleavage in Canada has historically been language: French and English. But the English-speaking community is further divided between Protestants and Catholics. On some issues, English-speaking Catholics may have more in common with French-speaking Catholics than they do with English-speaking Protestants and this reduces the salience of the linguistic division.

**Quiet Revolution** The transformation of Quebec from a deeply conservative society to a progressively liberal society in the 1960s.

**revenge of the cradle** A church-fostered policy known as *la revanche des berceaux*. The church encouraged women to have lots of babies to prevent the assimilation of the French by the English.

**nationalism** The passion some individuals display for their nation. It properly refers to an identifiable group of people rather than a country; love of country is properly known as *patriotism*. In Canada, many people in Quebec believe that Quebec is a separate nation.

**sovereignists** Quebecers who want Quebec to become a sovereign state, independent of Canada.

**federalists** Quebecers who are not in favour of separation. They are committed to Canada, although many of them want to see changes to the way the federation is governed.

Perhaps most conspicuously, the Quiet Revolution had a dramatic impact on families in Quebec. Prior to the Quiet Revolution, Quebec had one of the highest birth rates in the Western world. The high birth rate was caused by a church-fostered policy known as *la revanche des berceaux*—the **revenge of the cradle**. By encouraging women to have lots of babies, the church hoped to prevent the assimilation of the French by the English. And some Quebec families were very large. Jean Chrétien, for example, was the second youngest of 19 children (10 of whom did not survive past infancy). Céline Dion is the youngest of 14 children.

In 1956, the overall fertility rate in Quebec was 3.98 children per woman, but by 1971 the figure was only 1.98 children per woman—one of the lowest in the Western world.<sup>2</sup> By 1981, the figure had fallen even further to 1.62 children per woman, well below the rate of 2.1 children per woman necessary to maintain the population at current levels. With the decline of church influence and after watching what their mothers had to endure, young women in Quebec eagerly embraced the advent of the birth control pill. The government of Quebec has subsequently taken steps to increase the birth rate in the province; between 1988 and 1997, the government actually gave women cash payments for each child they produced: \$500 for her first child, \$1,000 for her second child, and \$8,000 for her third child and for each subsequent child. The program was controversial for a variety of reasons, but it succeeded in stimulating the birth rate.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the government of Quebec has introduced affordable public daycare, and in 2010 Quebec became the first jurisdiction in Canada to cover in vitro fertilization treatments under the public health system. The birth rate in Quebec is now slightly higher than the national average.

With the Quiet Revolution, many French-speaking Quebecers also developed a much stronger and more confident sense of themselves as a distinct nation in Canada. This passion for nation is known as **nationalism**. With the rise of nationalism in Quebec, many Quebecers began questioning their province's place in Canada, and some concluded that Quebec should seek to separate (or secede) from the Canadian federation. For many Quebecers, independence is the only way to protect and promote the French language and the distinct culture of the province. Those who want Quebec to form a sovereign state are known as **sovereignists**, while those who remain committed to the Canadian federation are called **federalists**. From the 1960s and until very recently the question of secession constituted the principal cleavage in Quebec politics—and it may do so again in the future. This division, however, is not as great as it seems. Many federalists in Quebec want major changes to the way the federation works, while many sovereignists want to maintain strong links to Canada after independence.

Since the very narrow failure of the referendum on sovereignty in 1995, Quebecers have seemingly been less preoccupied by *la question nationale*. For Canadians outside Quebec, as well, the linguistic cleavage in Canadian politics also seems less urgent. Quebec's proportion of the Canadian population has been declining over the decades, while other parts of Canada have been growing rapidly, especially the Greater Toronto Area, Alberta, and British Columbia. This population growth has been driven in large part by immigration, particularly from Asia. Consequently, for many Canadians, Quebec seems less relevant in the scope of Canadian politics. On the other hand, there appears to be greater acceptance of the "French fact" in Canada, although this may not be an entirely positive development. Many Canadians outside Quebec now accept "French Canadians" as just another one of the numerous "multicultural" groups in the country, much to the dismay of many Quebecers who still view Canada as a union of two nations. The politics of multiculturalism has also become a hot issue in Quebec—especially the introduction of a new law in 2019

that banned people working in the public sector from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, such as hijabs and turbans (as we will discuss further in the next chapter).



**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** What is the political significance of bilingualism in Canada?

## Region

### *Western Canada*

While the other regions of Canada are predominantly English speaking, they are also politically quite distinct. As a general rule, the older parts of the country are inclined to the older versions of liberalism and conservatism (as modified over time), and the newer parts of the country are more receptive to neo-conservatism and democratic socialism. Indeed, in Western Canada neo-conservatism and democratic socialism are the dominant ideologies, although there are important variations from province to province. In British Columbia, the principles of neo-conservatism and democratic socialism hold sway, with more people inclined to neo-conservatism although that appears to be shifting as the more progressive urban areas of the province grow and become politically more dominant. Alberta is almost wholly neo-conservative, although the major cities are more progressive than the rural areas of the province. Saskatchewan is the birthplace of democratic socialism in North America, but it has become decidedly more neo-conservative in the 21st century. Manitoba has a long history of moderate conservatism and democratic socialism. These are sweeping generalizations, of course. There are many liberals in Western Canada, mainly in the bigger cities, and there are old-fashioned Tories scattered across the region.

A fierce egalitarianism cuts across the political spectrum in Western Canada. The West was settled by waves of immigrant groups, many of which came from outside the English-French and Protestant-Catholic cultural traditions, such as Ukrainians and Mennonites. A large number of Americans also settled in Western Canada, especially Alberta. Western settlers were thus culturally and ideologically distinct from the political elite in “Eastern” Canada, and many did not feel welcome or comfortable in the “old line parties.” The West thus has a long history of creating new political parties—both on the left and the right—to challenge the elitism of the old parties, as we will discuss in Chapter 3.

Western Canadian parties have generally been premised on the theory of **populism**. That is, they are committed to the principle that party policies should be determined by the members of the party and not by the leaders. In many respects, populism is a “truer” form of democracy, and the traditional political parties have embraced many of the principles and practices of populism. However, populism can be problematic. For example, political leaders will often propose simplistic solutions to complex problems simply to enhance their popularity. In the 2019 provincial election in Alberta, the United Conservative Party campaigned vigorously to abolish the carbon tax without offering a credible alternative plan to manage climate change. And in 2017 the NDP campaigned in British Columbia to abolish the bridge tolls without explaining how the government would repay the billions of dollars that were borrowed to build the bridges in the first place. These promises were made simply because they were popular rather than good public policy. Western Canadian populism—especially in the Prairie provinces—has historically been based on the idea

**populism** A theory that extends the notion of democracy beyond the election of the government. It is the belief that major political decisions should be made by the people. Populism can be left-wing or right-wing, and it is particularly prevalent in Western Canada.

that the natural resources of the region have been exploited by political elites in Ontario and Quebec for the benefit of those regions and to the detriment of the West. This theme continues to be prevalent in Canadian politics in the debate over climate change and the development of the oil and gas industry in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Populism can be downright ugly when political leaders appeal to the prejudices of voters. Donald Trump is the quintessential populist politician of our time. In the 2016 presidential campaign, he promised to build a wall along the border with Mexico, because he said Mexicans were rapists and criminals. He also promised to impose a total ban on Muslim immigration. Trump was clearly appealing to the racist sentiments held by many American voters. While this kind of flagrant racism has not become pervasive in Canadian politics, Canada is not immune to the negative aspects of populism. In the 2015 federal election, the Conservative Party of Canada campaigned on prohibiting Muslim women wearing niqabs at their citizenship ceremonies, and the party proposed to create a “barbaric cultural practices” tip line for Canadians to call if they witnessed such practices. The Conservatives were soundly defeated in the election by Justin Trudeau who offered a very different vision of Canada. With new Canadians constituting a sizeable part of the electorate—particularly in the major urban centres of the country—the major political parties cannot afford to campaign on anti-immigrant rhetoric, as Trump did so effectively in 2016.



**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** Why is western alienation a recurring theme in Canadian politics?

### Ontario

With a population of nearly 15 million people, Ontario is the largest province in Canada and accounts for almost 40 percent of the Canadian population. It is also geographically huge with a number of distinct regions. Indeed, from time to time there are calls to partition Ontario into one or more provinces. Some people argue that northern Ontario should be a separate province, while others say that Toronto should be a province unto itself. If the Greater Toronto Area was transformed into a province, it would have a population of more than 6 million people. That would make it larger than every other province except Quebec. There are also persistent suggestions that Ottawa should be made into a separate “national capital region,” like Washington DC and Canberra, the capital cities of the United States and Australia. As such, it is difficult to speak about *the* political culture of Ontario. In general, however, Ontario is inclined toward liberalism and Tory conservatism, with solid doses of neo-conservatism and democratic socialism.

### Atlantic Canada

If it is not fair to describe Ontario as a single region in Canada, it is even more unfair to lump the four provinces of Atlantic Canada into one group. Indeed, it might not even be fair to describe the three Maritime provinces—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island—as a single region. Newfoundland and Labrador is quite clearly a composite of at least two regions. Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that politics in Atlantic Canada is dominated by old-fashioned liberals and Tory conservatives. The principles of democratic socialism do not resonate strongly in Atlantic Canada. Neo-conservatism is almost totally absent in Atlantic Canada.

**electoral districts** The geographical constituencies in which Members of Parliament are elected in Canada's single-member plurality electoral system. There are currently 338 electoral districts in Canada, each with more or less comparable populations.

**riding** Another term for electoral district or constituency in Canada's single-member plurality electoral system. The term is uniquely Canadian.

**Western alienation** The disconnection many Canadians in Western provinces feel to the rest of Canada, and the belief that the Government of Canada tends to make policies for the benefit of the majority in Central Canada to the detriment of the West.

## The North

The territories—Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut—also constitute a distinct and very diverse region of Canada. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are the only jurisdictions in Canada in which Indigenous peoples constitute a majority of the population. The territories are rich in natural resources, and they are increasingly of strategic significance in world politics. However, the combined population of the three territories is about 125,000 people—about the same as Thunder Bay, Ontario. This is also about the same size as an average **electoral district** or **riding** in Canada. Thus, by the democratic principle of representation by population, the three territories should only have one representative in Parliament, but of course it would be impossible for one person to represent an area that is geographically larger than India. Consequently, each territory elects one member to Parliament. With a total of 338 people elected to Parliament, it is clear that the territories are not major players in the Canadian political system, notwithstanding their economic, strategic, and symbolic importance to the country.

## Regional Demographics

When we are talking about regional political cultures in Canada, we must always be mindful of demography (see Table 2.1). Ontario and Quebec make up about 61 percent of the population; the West makes up about 32 percent, with Atlantic Canada constituting just under 7 percent of the population. The political culture of Canada as a whole is thus largely determined by Ontario and Quebec, and this has meant in the past that Canada is broadly a liberal country. It also means that the West is very much an outlier in Canadian politics, both geographically and in terms of political culture, since it is more inclined to ideologies that fall decidedly to the right and left of the Canadian median established by the demographic weight of Central Canada. Moreover, many Westerners believe that the Government of Canada has made decisions, at least in the past, for the benefit of the majority in Central Canada but highly detrimental to Western interests. The West is thus acutely aware of its outlier status in Canadian politics and has often felt distant from the Canadian political system. Hence, we have the very real notion of **Western alienation** in this country.

Atlantic Canada is even more numerically disadvantaged than the West, but as we have seen, the political culture of Atlantic Canada is relatively consistent with the Canadian norm, as defined by Central Canada or more particularly Ontario. Consequently, Atlantic Canadians have generally not felt alienated from the Canadian political system, with the possible exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, whose residents only voted to join Canada by a slim margin in 1949.

The regional dynamics of Canadian politics was very evident in the 2019 federal election. The Conservative Party won all the seats in Alberta and Saskatchewan, except for one seat in Edmonton won by the NDP. The Conservatives also took half the seats in Manitoba and 17 of 42 seats in British Columbia. By contrast, the Liberal Party only won 15 seats in the West—four in Winnipeg and 11 in and around Vancouver. (The Liberal Party also won the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, while the NDP won Nunavut.) But the Liberal Party won two-thirds of the seats in Ontario, primarily in Toronto and the surrounding suburbs, while the Conservative Party was confined mostly to the rural regions of southern Ontario. The Bloc Québécois made a major comeback in 2019 winning almost half the seats in Quebec, mostly in rural areas, while the Liberals took the other half, mostly in Montreal. In 2015, the Liberals swept Atlantic Canada entirely; in 2019, the Liberals took 26 of 32 seats in the region.

**Table 2.1 Population of Canada, 2019**

Region	Population of Region	Province	Population of Province	Seats in House of Commons per Province	Seats in House of Commons per Region
West	11,986,579	British Columbia	5,071,336	42	104
		Alberta	4,371,316	34	
		Saskatchewan	1,174,462	14	
		Manitoba	1,369,465	14	
Ontario	14,566,547	Ontario	14,566,547	121	121
Quebec	8,484,609	Quebec	8,484,609	78	78
Atlantic	2,426,711	New Brunswick	776,827	10	32
		Nova Scotia	971,395	11	
		Prince Edward Island	156,947	4	
		Newfoundland and Labrador	521,542	7	
North	124,460	Nunavut	40,854	1	3
		Northwest Territories	44,826	1	
		Yukon	38,780	1	
Canada	37,589,262		37,589,262	338	338

Source: Statistics Canada, "Population Estimates, Quarterly (Fall 2019)," <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>.

In short, under Justin Trudeau, western alienation has returned with a vengeance, even though the main economic problem facing the West—the fall in the global price of oil—is beyond the control of the prime minister. And the return of the Bloc Québécois is mostly related to the internal dynamics of the province, namely, a long running debate about multiculturalism and the accommodation (or not) of religious minorities in the public service. Nevertheless, the unity of the country is the primary responsibility of the prime minister, and Prime Minister Trudeau will have to address the deep divisions that have emerged in the country under his watch.

### Urban-Rural

Canada is one of the most urbanized countries in the world. Almost three-quarters of the Canadian population lives in one of 33 census metropolitan areas (defined as areas with more than 100,000 people), and the nine largest cities in Canada account for more than half the total population. Rural areas, however, are considerably over-represented in Parliament, largely as a result of Canada's history as a rural society. Urban and rural Canadians may share mutual passions for things such as hockey or country music, but they often have different values and political interests. Urban Canada is relatively liberal, while rural Canada is more conservative. The economy

of rural Canada depends largely on oil and gas, mining, forestry, agriculture, and fishing (at least in coastal areas), whereas the economy of urban Canada is based on financial and retail services, health and education, high tech, and manufacturing. The urban-rural cleavage can be seen in the debate over climate change, which frequently pits efforts to combat climate change (widely supported in urban areas) against the development of natural resources (which is the backbone of the rural economy). We also see the urban-rural cleavage play out in debates over gun control: urban voters worried about crime are generally in favour of gun control, while many rural voters own hunting rifles and don't want the government to interfere in their way of life.

With Canada becoming a more urbanized society, the major parties are focused more than ever on the large and growing regions around the major cities—the suburbs and the more distant exurbs (new residential developments beyond the suburbs but still connected to major cities). In short, the big cities are expanding into previously rural areas, with new housing subdivisions being erected alongside old farm houses. These regions are often identified by separate telephone area codes (e.g., the “905 belt” around Toronto) and they tend to be settled by young families and immigrants looking for more affordable housing. The question is, will the suburbs and exurbs adopt the liberal values of urban Canada or the conservative values of rural Canada? How this question is answered in the next decade or two may well determine the course of Canadian politics for the rest of the century. In 2011, the Conservative Party swept through many suburban ridings and displaced the Liberals in a number of urban ridings, especially in Toronto but also to some extent in Vancouver. But in 2015 and 2019, the Liberal Party swept Toronto and the surrounding 905 suburbs; the Liberals also swept Montreal. And the Liberal toehold in Western Canada is clearly in Vancouver and Winnipeg. The Conservatives' urban seats are mostly in the Prairies—Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Regina. In short, the Liberal Party seems to have established itself as the party of urban Canada, while the Conservative Party is primarily the party of rural Canada.

Curiously, the really remote rural regions of the country—what we might call the hinterlands—were almost evenly divided among the major parties in the 2019 election. The Liberal Party won seats in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Labrador. The Conservative Party took all the seats in the far north of Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as one in northern Ontario and the Peace Country in the northeast corner of British Columbia. The NDP took the Skeena Valley in northwest British Columbia, Churchill-Keewatinook Aski in northeast Manitoba, Nunavut, and Timmins-James Bay in Ontario. While the NDP only won 24 seats in the 2019 election, they won more square kilometres than any other party. And the Bloc Québécois took Abitibi-Baie-James-Nunavik-Eeyou (on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay in the North), and Manicouagan along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River below Labrador. Clearly, the hinterlands are diverse political communities with unique economic and social challenges.



**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** Can you think of other issues that divide urban and rural Canadians?

## Religion and Multiculturalism

Canadians are generally rather reserved people, and they tend to look skeptically at the overt role that religion plays in American politics. Nonetheless, religion has played an important role in Canadian politics. In the past, at least, religion has been

“the most powerful” predictor of party preferences among Canadian voters.<sup>4</sup> In short, research has revealed that Catholic voters have historically supported the Liberal Party in Canadian elections, whereas Protestants have been more likely to support the Conservative Party (although not to the same extent that Catholics favour the Liberal Party). The Catholic affinity for the Liberal Party remains a mystery,<sup>5</sup> but there is reason to believe that the Liberals have now lost this key constituency. It is possible that the Liberal support for same-sex marriage shifted some Catholic voters, although it should be noted that Catholic support for the Liberal Party remained solid after the Liberal government legalized abortion in 1968. It is thus not clear why Catholic voters have suddenly changed their political allegiance.

Jewish voters also seem to have shifted their support from the Liberal Party to the new Conservative Party, and evangelical Christians overwhelmingly support the Conservative Party. It is too soon to know if these new affinities will be sustained in the long run, but the Conservative Party appears to have very skilfully employed coded language that appeals to certain religious groups without alarming secular voters or igniting the kind of impassioned discourse seen in the United States, although some Canadians have tried to raise an alarm.<sup>6</sup> In the 2019 election, however, it seems that the Conservative Party’s close association with socially conservative evangelical voters under the leadership of Andrew Scheer prevented the party from expanding its support with more secular voters.

Muslim voters are becoming an increasingly important factor in Canadian elections. “As a community of approximately 1.5 million across Canada, there are 23 ridings (many of which are swing ridings in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]) that have a Muslim population of 10 per cent or more.”<sup>7</sup> The Conservative Party under the leadership of Stephen Harper attempted to appeal to the socially conservative views of some Muslim voters, but the party’s strong support for the state of Israel and the war on terrorism perhaps limited its appeal to Muslim voters. In 2015, some elements of the Conservative Party’s campaign were widely perceived to be targeted against Muslim religious practices. In the 2015 and 2019 elections, the Liberal Party won most of the ridings in the vote-rich suburbs of Toronto—which includes many Muslim voters.

The Liberal Party of Canada has historically been disproportionately supported by Canadians of non-European origin, especially after the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau adopted a policy of official multiculturalism in 1971. Liberal support among new Canadians appeared to waiver after the retirement of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and before Justin Trudeau assumed the leadership of the party. Many immigrants arriving in Canada now come from socially conservative societies, and many new Canadians are highly entrepreneurial individuals with a strong interest in low rates of taxation and minimal government regulation of business. Under Stephen Harper, the Conservative Party expended considerable energy courting these new voters, and these efforts seemed to pay off, at least in the short term. In the 2011 election, the Conservative Party won many seats in the highly diverse suburbs of Toronto and Vancouver, but, as mentioned, in 2015 the party lost much of this support to the Liberal Party, especially in the 905 region around Toronto. And in 2019 the Liberal Party held their support in the Toronto suburbs, although they lost some seats in suburbs around Vancouver. In short, Justin Trudeau seems to have re-established the Liberal Party as the party of multiculturalism.

## Aboriginal Peoples

From Confederation right through to the early 1960s, Aboriginal peoples were legally excluded from the political process unless they relinquished their Aboriginal status

and assimilated into the Canadian mainstream. Aboriginal peoples were finally given the right to vote in 1960, and their rights as Aboriginal peoples were recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Act 1982. But many of their rights have not been fulfilled, especially self-government. With about 1.6 million people in Canada, Aboriginal Canadians account for just under 5 percent of the population. It is also a deeply fragmented community. Aboriginal peoples include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. First Nations are further divided into more than 600 bands scattered across the country. Many Aboriginal peoples live in remote parts of the country, and many communities are desperately poor. For all of these reasons, Aboriginal peoples have had considerable difficulty placing their issues and concerns on the political agenda of the country, and many are growing impatient with the political process in Canada. As discussed above, all of the major parties won seats in the most remote regions of the country.

The rights and issues of Aboriginal peoples are likely to become more salient in the future for two reasons. First, the governments of Canada have a constitutional obligation to fulfill the rights of Aboriginal peoples, as will be discussed at some length in Chapter 10. Second, the rights of Aboriginal peoples will have to be addressed if the governments of Canada want to further develop resource industries such as oil and gas on traditional Aboriginal lands.

## Class

Class consciousness is not strong in Canada. While theoretically class cuts across some of the other cleavages we have discussed above, class consciousness in Canada has been too weak to cut through the more primordial allegiances such as language and region. Most Canadians tend to believe that they belong to the ubiquitous “middle class,” apart perhaps from some ardent unionists and the ultra-rich. But class undoubtedly exists in Canada. It is not an easy concept to define, but broadly it relates to the economic stratification of individuals in society. Canada, like most industrial democracies, is characterized by a very large middle class, an unacceptably large group of poor Canadians, and a very small group of rich and ultra-rich individuals.

The middle class can be further divided into an upper middle class made up of doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil servants, and other white-collar professionals and a lower middle class or working class consisting of blue-collar workers and service workers. The median family income was just under \$60,000 in 2017. Only 8.9 percent of Canadians earn more than \$100,000 per year, while 9.5 percent of the population falls below the poverty line.<sup>8</sup> Thus, about 80 percent of the population may be thought of as “middle class,” although obviously there is a considerable income difference between the top and bottom segments of the middle class. Upper-middle-class Canadians are not only wealthier, they typically enjoy greater job and income security, whereas lower-middle-class Canadians are more vulnerable. Lower-middle-class Canadians may experience a reduction in work hours or even a loss of work when the economy dips. Over the last 20 years, the very rich have enjoyed higher incomes while incomes for everyone else have been relatively stagnant. In other words, the rich are indeed getting richer, while the poor are staying poor.

How can political parties exploit class cleavages when most Canadians are blissfully unaware of class? It becomes even more difficult for political parties to address class issues when you realize that many Canadians become uncomfortable when they hear people talking explicitly in terms of class. Political parties in Canada thus tend to speak about class euphemistically. The NDP will talk about “ordinary Canadians,”

while the Conservative Party has attempted to identify itself with fans of Tim Hortons instead of Starbucks, or people who shop at Canadian Tire rather than at Pottery Barn. In turn, the parties will attempt to devise policy that will appeal to their core constituencies.

Democracy is a game of numbers, so by and large the parties will promote policies that appeal to the middle class in Canada, but the middle class is really too broad to be wooed as a single group. The NDP tends to stress income security programs that will appeal to the lower segment of the middle class and low-income Canadians. The Conservative Party, on the other hand, tends to focus on the upper segment of the middle class by offering tax credits to enrol children in organized sports or music classes, and they also make appeals to wealthy Canadians. The Liberal Party has historically attempted to straddle the class divide in Canada. The Liberal Party has always been a supporter of big business, but Liberal governments have also been responsible for introducing most of Canada's income security and other social programs. Justin Trudeau's government introduced the Canada Child Benefit, which amalgamated and enhanced previous child benefit programs. The CCB has increased middle-class incomes and reduced poverty. In sum, while Canadians are loath to talk about class, the major political parties all make class appeals, albeit most often with coded language.



**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** Why is class identity weak in Canada?

## Gender

While men and women are spread across the political spectrum from left to right, research has revealed that, at least to some extent, men and women view politics differently: “The sex differences are not huge, but in Canada they often rival or exceed the differences across the country's regional fault lines. And the differences in the political preferences and vote choices of women and men do not have to be dramatic to have a significant impact on the outcome of an election, especially in tight races.” As a gross generalization, women are interested in “sharing and caring” issues and men are more concerned about “money and guns.” No doubt you know many exceptions to these stereotypes, but statistics show that men and women do vote differently. The Conservative Party is disproportionately supported by men, while the New Democratic Party garners more support from women; support for the Liberal Party is divided about equally. Political scientists refer to this phenomenon as the **gender gap**.

While there is a very real gender gap at play in Canadian politics, it is important to remember a couple of points. First, the gender gap refers to the *relative* support parties receive from women and men. In terms of absolute numbers, there are more women on the right than on the left in Canada. Second, the relatively high support the NDP enjoys from women is more likely the result of men moving *away* from the NDP to more conservative parties. It is not clear why men have been moving to the right in Canada and other advanced democracies like the United States. It may reflect a cultural backlash against the feminist movement of the 1970s, or it may stem from changes in the economy, especially the decline of well-paying jobs for men in the manufacturing sector.

The main political parties are quite aware of the gender gap, and the Liberal Party and the NDP make a concerted effort to maintain support from women. The Conservative Party, to date at least, has done very little to increase its appeal to female

**gender gap** The differing support political parties receive from women and men.

voters. If parties want to improve their fortunes in future elections, they need to pick up support in areas where they are currently weak. The Conservatives would thus be well advised to pay more attention to female voters, and the NDP and the Liberals may want to think of ways of winning back male voters.



**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT** Have you ever noticed political differences between men and women?

## Age

It has often been observed that people become more conservative as they get older, and demographers have noted that Canada is an aging society. Indeed, the number of people in Canada over the age of 65 is now greater than the number of people under the age of 15. The rising population of senior citizens in Canada entails a number of policy challenges, such as ensuring economic productivity with fewer workers and financing pensions and health care. These demographic shifts and policy challenges will obviously have an impact on Canadian politics, at least to the extent that parties will have to design policies to address these fundamental issues. It is also possible that Canada's politics will become a little bit more conservative, although that proposition may not hold for the baby boomers now entering retirement. Younger voters are more open to political experimentation and supporting more radical political parties, such as the Green Party. However, younger voters are also much less likely to participate in Canadian elections, and they may become further alienated from the political process as parties increasingly talk about issues related to senior citizens.

## Summary

- Political culture refers to the sum total of political values, attitudes, and beliefs in a country.
- Ideologies are specific bundles of ideas about politics and the good life, such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism. Ideologies help people explain political phenomena, they allow people to evaluate good and bad, and they equip people with a program or agenda for political action.
- Cleavages are enduring political divisions in a country.
- Liberalism is the ideology of individual liberty; conservatism is about maintaining order and tradition in the community; democratic socialism is focused on achieving economic equality; neo-conservatism is focused on economic growth mainly by lowering taxes and government regulations coupled with moral traditionalism and reducing crime.
- The Liberal Party represents a blend of classical liberalism and democratic socialism; the NDP represents the ideology of democratic socialism with a touch of liberalism; the Conservative Party of Canada is primarily committed to the ideas of neo-conservatism with a touch of Tory conservatism.
- The principal cleavages in Canadian politics are language, region, urban-rural, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, and age.

## Notes

1. Terence Ball et al., *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, Canadian ed. (Toronto: Pearson Education, 2006), 4. The discussion in this section draws heavily on the following sources: Gad Horowitz, “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism: An Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 22, no. 2 (1966); Nelson Wiseman, “Political Parties,” in *Canadian Politics in the 1990s*, eds. Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams (Toronto: ITP Nelson, 1995); and Hamish Telford, “The Reform Party/Canadian Alliance and Canada’s Flirtation with Republicanism,” in *Canada: The State of the Federation 2001: Canadian Political Culture(s) in Transition*, eds. Hamish Telford and Harvey Lazar (Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 2002).
2. Paul-André Linteau, *Quebec since 1930* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1991), 155, 318.
3. Kevin Milligan, “Quebec’s Baby Bonus: Can Public Policy Raise Fertility?” *Backgrounder* (Toronto: CD Howe Institute, January 24, 2002).
4. Richard Johnston, “The Reproduction of the Religious Cleavage in Canadian Elections,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 1 (March 1985): 99–113.
5. André Blais, “Accounting for the Electoral Success of the Liberal Party in Canada: Presidential Address to the Canadian Political Science Association, London, Ontario, June 3, 2005,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 821–40. See also Richard Johnston, *The Canadian Party System: An Analytical History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017).
6. Marci McDonald, *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: Random House, 2010).
7. Seher Shafiq, “Don’t Underestimate the Political Power of Canada’s Muslim Community,” *Toronto Star*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/06/25/dont-underestimate-the-political-power-of-canadas-muslim-community.html>.
8. See Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey, 2017, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190226/dq190226b-eng.htm>, and Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0240-01, Distribution of Employment Income of Individuals by Sex and Work Activity, Canada, Provinces and Selected Census Metropolitan Areas, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110024001>.
9. Elisabeth Gidengil, “Beyond the Gender Gap,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (December 2007): 816.