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Chapter 2
The Political Culture of Canada

Key Points

■ Political culture refers to the sum total of political values, attitudes, and beliefs in a country.

■ Canadian political culture is characterized by a substantial consensus on the rules of the game: the rule of law, democracy, equality, individual rights, and respect for minorities.

■ Canadians frequently disagree on what laws and policies governments should adopt based on their different conceptions of the good life.

■ The different conceptions of the good life can be bundled into a few distinct groupings of ideas known as ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

■ The main ideologies in Canadian politics are represented to a greater or lesser degree by political parties.

■ The ideological landscape—and the support for the major political parties—varies from region to region across the country and among different subgroups in Canadian society, such as distinct linguistic, ethnic, or religious groups as well as groups defined by class and gender.

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?

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.

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.

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Left		Centre		Right
Communism	Democratic Socialism	Liberalism	Conservatism	Fascism

Figure 2.1

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

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 often deeply divided on major political issues. It is thus difficult for political parties to develop platforms (a set of policies) that will appeal to all Canadians, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ideologies

An ideology represents a particular conception of the good life. More precisely, an ideology is a relatively coherent and comprehensive set of ideas about the world of politics.[1] An ideology helps people *explain* political phenomena, it allows people to *evaluate* good and bad, and it equips people with a *program* or *agenda* for political action. Political phenomena are not intrinsically good or bad. Whether something is good or bad depends largely on one's prior beliefs, values, and principles. In sum, an ideology provides us with a way to understand the world and how to respond to it by elevating our gut feelings to more or less rational beliefs, thus providing us with a "worldview."

Before proceeding, three important points must be made: (1) ideologies are not perfectly logical or consistent, (2) ideologies can and do change over time, and (3) nobody adheres perfectly to a single ideology. A liberal, for example, might have some conservative beliefs and vice versa. This is especially true in Canadian politics, where the different ideologies tend to represent overlapping sets of ideas rather than radically distinct worldviews.

Liberalism and Conservatism

At the time of Confederation, liberalism and conservatism were the main political ideologies in Canada. These ideologies have evolved over the years, and they have spawned new variants, which we will discuss momentarily. For now, we will focus on the old liberalism and the old conservatism, or *classical* liberalism and *tory* conservatism as they are sometimes called. As you might guess, the essence of liberalism is *liberty*. Liberalism is about freedom—the freedom to live without interference from the government. For liberals, society is a collection of individuals, thus liberalism is the ideology of *individual freedom*. By contrast, conservatives historically focused on the *community*. Conservatism, as the name implies, is about *conservation*. More particularly, conservatives want to conserve a society's traditional way of life, and they are especially keen to maintain social *order* in the community. These differences are summarized in Figure 2.2.

Liberalism <————————————————————————————————> **Conservatism**
       liberty   *order*
       individualism   *community*

Figure 2.2 The Foundations of Liberalism and Conservatism

There is more to liberalism and conservatism, as will be explored below, but already we can begin to see the sources of political conflict. Liberals want to maximize liberty for individuals, while conservatives want to ensure order in the community. Let's take a simple issue that has been debated in many communities across Canada. A number of cities in Canada have installed video surveillance cameras in public places with the objective of reducing crime. Do you think this is a good or bad idea? Your answer depends on your prior values. Liberals argue that public surveillance cameras constitute an unacceptable infringement on individual freedom, while conservatives argue that they are a perfectly legitimate way to maintain social order in the community. Liberals argue that the essence of living in a free society means being able to move around in public without the government watching or knowing about it; conservatives stress the importance of being able to move around the community safely. There are no right answers to this question; people evaluate the scheme by using their ideology.

Liberals and conservatives value more than just individual liberty and well-ordered communities. Liberals believe in the *equality* of all individuals. Historically, conservatives believed that there was a natural social *hierarchy*, with the King at the top and peasants at the bottom. In the conservative view, the pursuit of equality would upset this "natural" hierarchy and create disorder in the community. For conservatives, it was important for everyone to know his or her place in society and not to disrupt this natural order. Modern conservatives now generally believe in the principle of equality, although they still tend to be more deferential to authority than liberals. Liberals believe that knowledge is obtained through the power of *reason*, whereas for conservatives knowledge is derived from *tradition*.

Historically, liberals believed very much in *competition*—this was the route to progress. For liberals, wealth is generated by having entrepreneurs compete in the marketplace. How will a cure for cancer be found? By scientists competing to win a Nobel Prize. Conservatives, on the other hand, historically feared that competition would upset the natural order of things. Conservatives thus historically favoured *cooperation*. While conservatives expected those of low social standing to know their place in society and not disrupt the social order, they also expected the wealthy to contribute to the well-being of the less fortunate. This was the theory of *noblesse oblige*, or the idea that privilege entails responsibility. In short, conservatives viewed society organically, with each part playing its role. Liberals, on the other hand, tend to view society as a social construct—something created by people. In the liberal view, social injustices are not natural or organic, they are human made. If society was made by humans in the first place, humans can improve society by consciously eliminating injustices (see Figure 2.3).

Liberalism <───> Conservatism

liberty	*order*
individualism	*community*
equality	*hierarchy/authority*
reason	*tradition*
competition	*cooperation*

Figure 2.3 The Principles of Liberalism and Conservatism

Now that we have a more complete picture of liberalism and conservatism, we are in a position to examine a more complex political conflict, such as same-sex marriage. When gay and lesbian couples were not permitted to marry, liberals argued that the state was not treating these individuals equally, and reason told them that no harm was done by two adult men or two adult women marrying each other. Conservatives, on the other hand, argued that marriage has traditionally been defined as a union between a man and a woman, and they feared that altering this definition of marriage would upset the natural order, which would have unknown consequences for the community. Liberals and conservatives, if they

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are being faithful to their respective ideologies, will never agree on the issue of same-sex marriage, because they are committed to different values and principles.
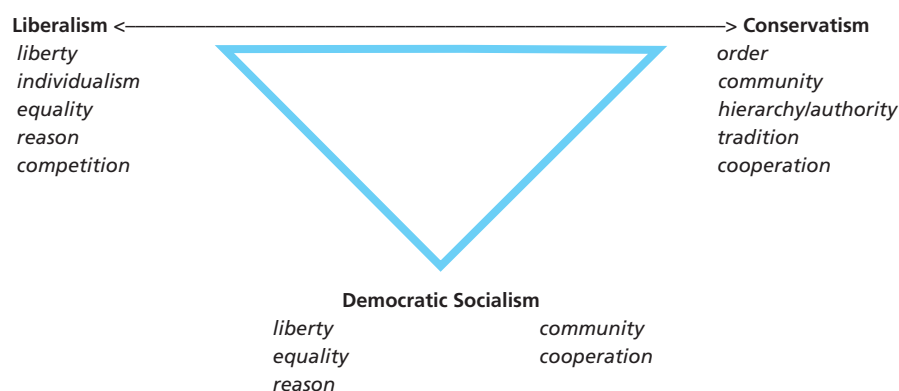
Some of you may not recognize the picture that has been drawn of liberals and conservatives. That's because ideologies change over time. Here we have sketched out the *old* versions of liberalism and conservatism. While many Canadians describe themselves as liberals or conservatives, few people now adhere 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 twentieth 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 nineteenth 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 cooperation 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; see Figure 2.4).

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

Liberalism <──> **Conservatism**
liberty   *order*
individualism   *community*
equality   *hierarchy/authority*
reason   *tradition*
competition   *cooperation*

Democratic Socialism
liberty   *community*
equality   *cooperation*
reason

Figure 2.4 A Synthesis of Liberalism and Conservatism gave rise to Democratic Socialism in the late 19th Century
Source: Nelson Wiseman, "Political Parties," in *Canadian Politics in the 1990s,* eds. Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams (Toronto, ON: ITP Nelson, 1995).

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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. 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 2.5). 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 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

Neo-Conservatism

individualism   tradition
equality   authority
competition

Liberalism <   > **Conservatism**
liberty   order
individualism   community
equality   hierarchy/authority
reason   tradition
competition   cooperation

Democratic Socialism

liberty   community
equality   cooperation
reason
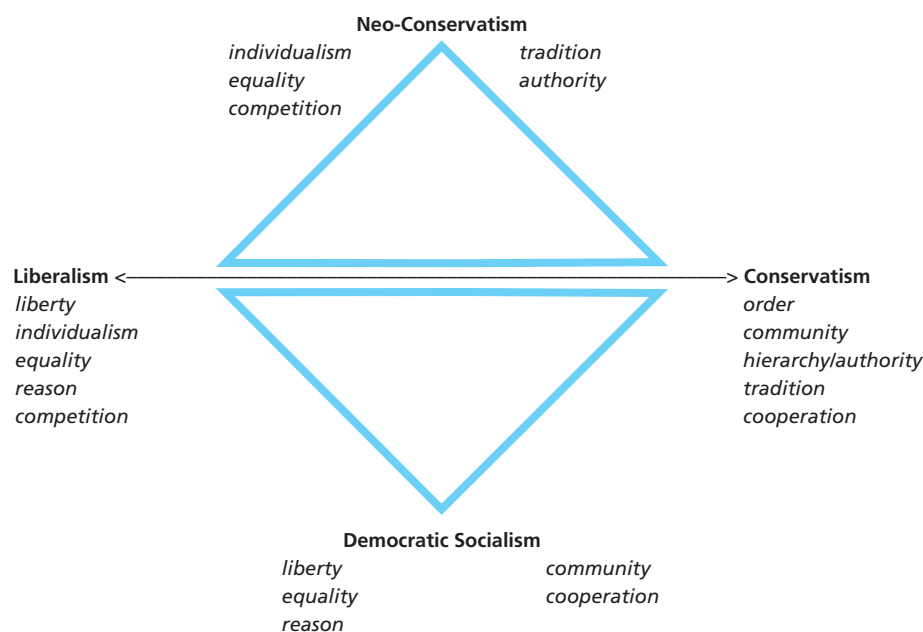
Figure 2.5 A Synthesis of Liberalism and Conservatism gave rise to Neo-Conservatism in the second half of the 20th Century
Source: Hamish Telford, "The Reform Party/Canadian Alliance and Canada's Flirtation with Republicanism," in *Canada: The State of the Federation 2001: Canadian Political Culture(s) in Transition,* eds. Hamish Telford and Harvey Lazar (Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 2002).

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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.

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 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.

The conservatism of the Conservative Party is a mixture of classical toryism and neo-conservatism, although it leans much more to the latter than the former. (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. 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 (see Figure 2.6).

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 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
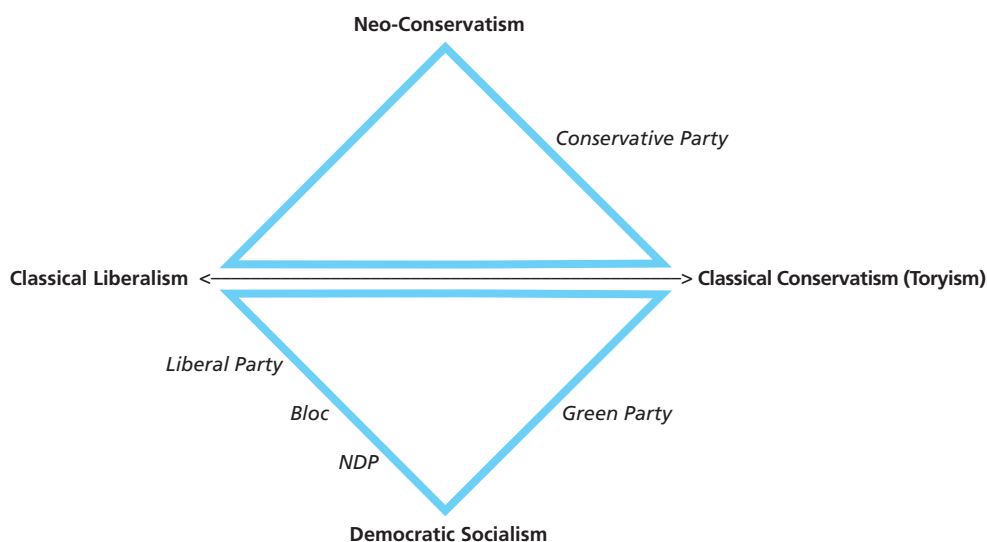
Figure 2.6 The Ideological Position of the Major Political Parties in Canada

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).

The Canadian Political Landscape

While there are three major ideologies at play in Canada, it is important to note that these ideologies are not 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, and class. 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 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, the principal cleavage in Canadian politics has been language. 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 **crosscutting cleavage** among English-speaking Canadians of different national origins.

For many decades after Confederation, Quebec was a deeply conservative society. French-speaking Quebecers were overwhelmingly Catholic, and the Catholic Church held

cleavages The main political divisions in a country. Political scientists have long been concerned with a handful of enduring schisms in the Canadian political landscape, such as language, region, 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.

crosscutting cleavages A cleavage within a cleavage and an alliance across the main 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. And on some issues, English-speaking Catholics may have more in common with French-speaking Catholics than they do with English-speaking Protestants.

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

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 *les années noires*—the dark ages. 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.

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.

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.

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.[2] 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, $1000 for her second child, and $8000 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.[3] 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.

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.

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. The question of secession now constitutes the principal cleavage in Quebec politics. 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**. 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.

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.

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

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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.

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. Alberta is almost wholly neo-conservative. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are more like British Columbia, except that democratic socialism runs deeper than neo-conservatism (although this may be changing in Saskatchewan). 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, as we will discuss in the next chapter, populism can also be problematic.

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 is particularly prevalent in Western Canada.

Ontario   With a population of about 13 million people, Ontario is the largest province in Canada and accounts for about 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 were transformed into a province, it would have a population of almost 6 million people. It would probably be bigger than the rest of Ontario, and consequently it would constitute the second-largest province in the country behind Quebec, which would become the largest province in Canada if Ontario were partitioned. 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.

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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 have not resonated strongly in Atlantic Canada, although the NDP had a breakthrough in Nova Scotia in the 2009 provincial election. But it was short lived. The NDP government in Nova Scotia was soundly defeated in the next election in 2013. Neoconservatism is almost totally absent in Atlantic Canada.

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 Aboriginal 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 100 000 people, or just slightly more than Kamloops, British Columbia. 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 308 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.

Demography   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 two-thirds of the country, with the rest divided between the West and Atlantic Canada (with the West quite a bit larger than the Atlantic region). 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.

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.

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 2011 election seemed to redefine the regional dynamics in Canadian politics. For the first time, Canadian politics was dominated by two parties rooted in Western Canadian populism: the Conservative Party led by Stephen Harper and the New Democratic Party led by the late Jack Layton, although the NDP is considerably more removed from its roots than the Conservative Party. Jack Layton was born and raised in Quebec and cut his political teeth in Toronto. In short, Ontario seemed to break with Quebec and Atlantic Canada in the 2011 election and aligned its interests with the West. It almost seemed as if the West remade Canada in its own image. As such, the notion of Western alienation began to ring a bit

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Table 2.1 Population of Canada, 2011 Census

Region	Population of Region	Province/ Territory	Population of Province/ Territory	Seats in House of Commons per Province/ Territory	Seats in House of Commons per Region
West	10 661 200	British Columbia	4 573 300	36	92
		Alberta	3 779 400	28	
		Saskatchewan	1 057 900	14	
		Manitoba	1 250 600	14	
Ontario	13 373 000	Ontario	13 373 000	106	106
Quebec	7 979 700	Quebec	7 979 700	75	75
Atlantic	2 357 400	New Brunswick	755 500	10	32
		Nova Scotia	945 400	11	
		Prince Edward Island	145 900	4	
		Newfoundland and Labrador	510 600	7	
North	111 700	Nunavut	33 300	1	3
		Northwest Territories	43 700	1	
		Yukon	34 700	1	
Canada	34 483 000		34 483 000	308	308

Source: Statistics Canada, "Population by Year, by Province and Territory," www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/demo02a-eng.htm.

hollow. With Ontario evidently aligned with the West, it is entirely possible that Atlantic Canada will feel increasingly alienated, particularly the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, which do not enjoy the luxury of natural gas revenues like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. While Quebec abandoned the separatist Bloc Québécois in the 2011 election and threw its lot in with the federalist New Democratic Party, it also appeared more isolated than ever. The country thus seems as regionally divided as ever, even if the West is presently more content with the state of Canadian politics than it has been in the past.

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 overrepresented 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 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, and manufacturing. The rural–urban cleavage can be seen in the debate over the long-gun registry, which

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was created in 1995. Urban Canadians believe that it is perfectly reasonable to insist that people register their hunting rifles, but rural Canadians tend to view it as an affront to their way of life. The long-gun registry was scrapped after the election of a Conservative majority government in 2011, much to the satisfaction of many rural Canadians and the dismay of many urban voters.

In the 2011 election, the major parties 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. The NDP also picked up a couple of inner-city seats in Toronto.

A new electoral cleavage may have emerged in 2011. Both the Conservatives and the NDP won seats in urban and rural areas, but their respective victories seemed to follow a pattern. "The true divide, the new reality of Canadian politics, is between the economic heartlands that the Conservatives now dominate throughout the country and the economic hinterlands won by the NDP."[4] Put another way, the Conservative Party did well in the parts of the country that drive the economy, while the NDP tended to prevail in areas enduring economic hardship, although this relationship is not perfect. The Conservatives did win seats in northwest Ontario, Nunavut, and Labrador, while the NDP picked up seats in Victoria as well as the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby. The Liberal Party lost many of its more affluent seats in the 2011 election, and like the NDP has become something of a hinterland party, especially in Atlantic Canada. It will be interesting to see if this cleavage persists in future elections.

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.[5] 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,[6] but there is reason to believe that the Liberals have now lost this key constituency: "In 2006, Catholics were as likely to vote Conservative as Liberal. In 2008, they clearly actually preferred the Conservatives to the Liberals."[7] 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.[8]

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The Liberal Party of Canada has also 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. Again, however, the Liberal Party appears to have lost its grip on this important constituency, especially among more recent immigrants.[9] 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. The Conservative Party has expended considerable energy courting these new voters, and these efforts seem to have paid off, especially with Chinese-Canadians in and around Vancouver. The Conservatives have also picked up some ridings with a significant number of Indo-Canadian voters, although Indo-Canadians, especially Sikhs, are politically active in all the major parties, probably as a result of the vibrant political culture of Punjab in northwest India.

While some new Canadians have clearly gravitated to the Conservative Party, there may be countervailing factors causing others to resist this lure. Some Muslim Canadians, for example, may well be suspicious of the Conservative government's enthusiasm for the "war on terrorism" and unwavering support for the state of Israel. Canada's population growth is driven largely by immigration, so the political views of new Canadians will have a strong influence on the future of Canadian politics.

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 million people in Canada, Aboriginal Canadians account for only about 4 percent of the population. It is also a deeply fragmented community. Aboriginal peoples include Status Indians (which is the official term used by the government; see Chapter 10), Inuit, and Métis. Status Indians 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.

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. Only about 4 percent of Canadians earn more than $100 000 per year, while roughly 10 percent or approximately 3 million Canadians are defined as low income (the cut off for low income depends on the cost of living where one resides). Thus, about 85 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 enroll children in organized sports or music classes, and they also make appeals to wealthy Canadians. In the 2011 election, for example, the Conservative Party promised to introduce income splitting between spouses: A spouse who earns a high income would be able to transfer a portion of his or her income to a spouse who does not otherwise work to lower his or her overall tax burden. As high-income earners tend to be married, middle-aged men,[10] the policy would increase the take-home pay for rich men and create an incentive for their wives to stay at home.

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. Of late, however, the Liberal Party has found it difficult to retain the support of both the rich and the poor. In sum, while Canadians are loath to talk about class, the major political parties all make class appeals, albeit most often with coded language.

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."[11] 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**.

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

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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 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.

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, by 2020 it is expected that there will be more people in Canada over the age of 65 than under 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

Politics is a conflict between different conceptions of the good life, but these conceptions can be bundled into a few distinct groupings of ideas known as *ideologies*. The main ideologies at play in Canadian politics—liberalism, conservatism, and democratic socialism—are clustered in the middle of the ideological spectrum. In some countries, these ideologies would represent radically distinct views of the world, but in Canada they tend to represent overlapping sets of ideas. Consequently, in Canada it is very common for a conservative to hold some liberal beliefs and vice versa. To confuse matters further, the character of the main ideologies in Canada has changed over time. Stephen Harper's conservatism at best only partially resembles the conservatism of Sir John A. Macdonald, even though they have both led the Conservative Party.

The Canadian political landscape is as varied as the country's geography. Historically, the principal cleavage in Canadian politics has been linguistic, and the political culture of Quebec and the rest of Canada—the so-called "two solitudes" of Canadian society—remain separate and distinct. But even outside Quebec the ideological dynamics of Canadian

politics vary from region to region. By and large, the older regions of Canada are inclined to the older variants of liberalism and conservatism, while the West has been more receptive to new ideologies, notably democratic socialism and neo-conservatism. The political culture of the West has also been decidedly populist, and it has quite successfully exported some of the central tenets of populism to the rest of Canada. Recently, the urban–rural cleavage has become quite salient in Canadian politics, although it may have been supplanted in the 2011 election by an emerging cleavage between the regions in the economic heartland of Canada and the economic hinterlands. The political beliefs of Canadians also vary across religion, race, class, gender, and age.

Canada, in short, is characterized by multiple political cleavages, and it is consequently not an easy country to govern. It is the job of political parties to build bridges across the main cleavages in Canada and unite Canadians in a common purpose, which is no easy task, as we will see in the next chapter.

Questions to Think About

1. Should the governments of Canada raise taxes to sustain a universal health care system, or should governments cut health care spending to balance their budgets and pay down debt?
2. Why are younger voters less likely to vote? What impact does youth disengagement have on Canadian politics?
3. Does class exist in Canada? If so, what impact does it have on Canadian politics?
4. Does religion matter in Canadian politics?
5. Why is there a gender gap in Canadian politics?
6. How can political parties overcome all of the cleavages in Canadian society and govern Canada for the benefit of everyone?

Learning Outcomes

1. Describe the main principles of each of the major ideologies in Canada.
2. Describe the ideological orientation of the main political parties in Canada.
3. Describe the major cleavages in Canadian politics.

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