

Political Ideologies and Parties

Like all modern nations, Canada is governed by one or more political parties. Political parties are a relatively recent invention and no party is more than a few hundred years old. Most are organized around political and social principles—an **ideology**—that guide them in everything they do. Most of Canada's political parties believe in a balance between the powers of the state and the rights of the individual. They support some form of capitalism and the kind of parliamentary democracy we currently enjoy.

Democracy: Rule by the People

Canada operates on democratic principles. In Europe, democracy, which means “rule by the people,” was first practised by the ancient Greeks. In the Greek city states, every eligible citizen participated directly by voting on all decisions that affected society. This was called **direct democracy**. In modern societies, our large populations make this much involvement by each individual impractical. Instead, citizens in **representative democracies** such as Canada allow elected representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

The main principles of democracy are equality and freedom. All citizens are equal before the law, meaning that everyone is subject to the same laws, and no one is above the law. The rights and freedoms of people living in a democracy are protected by a constitution or other written laws (see Chapter 10). Democracy refers to a very broad form of government, and most countries around the world are democratic. Under the umbrella of democracy, there are various political philosophies, as outlined below.

Socialism

Early **socialism** was a backlash against the industrial revolution and the resulting capitalist *laissez-faire* economy. Socialism developed when capitalism was causing great social harm and poverty was widespread. Socialists believe that government should control important parts of the economy and major industries. As you learned in Chapter 4, Canada's first socialist party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, was formed during the Depression when people were disillusioned with Canada's capitalist system.

Liberalism

Liberalism began as a political theory that favoured individual freedom above all else. Originally this belief was tied to the right to own property and to the conviction that government should have minimal involvement in the lives of citizens, so as not to infringe on people's liberty. This focus on property rights lost favour in the late 19th century when it became clear that the growing working class had few, if any, property rights. In the 20th century, liberalism shifted its focus from property and individual rights and evolved into a belief that the government should intervene to regulate the economy. On a social level, liberalism supports government intervention to maintain basic standards of living for all people and to protect the rights of individuals and groups.

- What are the similarities and differences among key political ideologies?

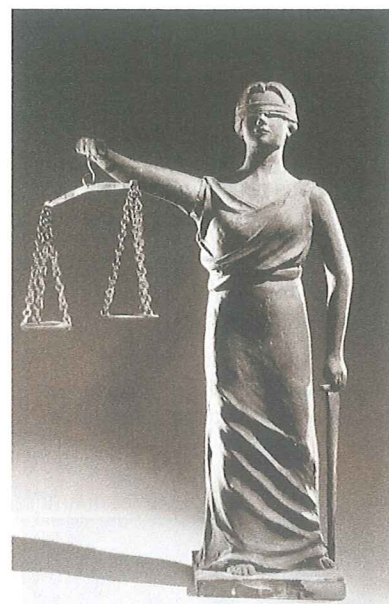


FIGURE 9-9 A statue depicting Justice

Thinking Critically Why would artists choose to portray Justice with a blindfold and scales? With a sword? As a woman?

KEY TERMS

conservatism a political philosophy supporting traditional values and institutions and opposing sudden change

fiscal pertaining to money issues

totalitarian a form of government that uses intimidation, violence, and propaganda to rule all aspects of the social and political life of its citizens

authoritarian a form of government in which one individual or small group holds all the power and directs the lives of citizens

communism a social and economic ideology that believes property, production, and distribution of goods and services should be owned by the public, and that the labour force should be organized for the benefit of all members of society

bourgeoisie the ruling or middle class

proletariat the workers or lowest class

fascism an authoritarian system of government that exercises complete power, suppresses opposition, often through use of force, and encourages nationalism and racism

political spectrum a linear visual used to illustrate political ideologies, from left to right



FIGURE 9-10 This statue represents the workers of the Soviet Union, a country that had a totalitarian government.

Thinking Critically Why would totalitarian governments use images of idealized people serving the state and other such propaganda?

Conservatism

Conservatism is less of an ideology than a stance taken against change, innovation and reform, and for maintaining established political and social institutions and values. It supports laissez-faire capitalism, or minimal government intervention in the economy. In the late 20th century, many conservatives came to believe that government has a role in encouraging traditional behaviours and they opposed same-sex marriage and abortion, for example. **Fiscal** conservatives support reductions in government spending and a balanced budget.

Totalitarianism: Total Control

Not all political ideologies are based on democratic principles. **Totalitarian** governments are **authoritarian**, as opposed to democratic, and control every aspect of life within a country—its culture, religion, government, and economy. These regimes use harsh laws and restrictions on freedom to maintain their power.

Communism

Communist ideology is based on the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, political theorists of the 19th century who believed that the ruling class should be overthrown by the working class. In *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, Marx claimed that capitalism creates a class struggle in which those who own the means of production (the ruling class or **bourgeoisie**) exploit those who work for them (the **proletariat**). Marx believed that a proletarian revolution would result in a classless society in which all property would be collectively owned. Communist governments that developed from Marx's ideology were one-party states, and maintained their power through propaganda, secret police, and government control of its citizens. Until the end of the Cold War, many countries, including the Soviet Union, had communist governments. Today, communist countries include the People's Republic of China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Fascism

Fascist ideology is about the importance of the state and the responsibility of people to serve it. Fascists believe that a country is an organic community requiring strong leadership, a collective identity, and military strength. Fascist governments emphasize nationalism and militarism; war is glorified and viewed as a means to keep the nation strong. Political opposition or individual freedom is forbidden in fascist states. **Fascism** was born after the First World War, a period of time that was particularly unstable. It originated in Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Germany under the Nazis was another fascist state (see Chapter 5).

The Political Spectrum

A **political spectrum** is a visual used to illustrate how various political ideologies relate to one another. The linear left–right spectrum is the most common (see Figure 9–11), with totalitarian ideologies at the extreme left and right. Socialism is left of centre and commonly referred to as “left wing.” Liberalism is generally considered to be slightly left of centre on the spectrum, with conservatism situated right of centre. Many political theorists believe that the traditional left–right spectrum is too simplistic and have added other axes (see Figure 9–12).



FIGURE 9-11 On the conventional left–right political spectrum, totalitarian ideologies are the extremes, and democratic ideologies are situated near the centre.

Canadian Politics and Ideology

In Canadian politics today, the major political parties cluster around the centre of the political spectrum. The lines between them are somewhat blurred. You cannot equate the Liberal Party of Canada too closely with liberalism, nor the Conservative Party of Canada with conservatism. The Liberals adopted some of the progressive social policies of the socialists, such as universal health care and other social programs, place less emphasis on the military, and provide more support for arts and culture. Conservatives, however, are more likely to support tradition and business interests, such as tax breaks for large corporations. They tend to be nationalistic and pro-military.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) supports social assistance programs and government-funded health care and education, and is against privatization of Crown corporations. Of the major political parties in Canada today, the NDP is the most socialist. The Bloc Québécois is the third-largest party in the House of Commons today. Its main objectives are to protect the

- Explain the political spectrum. What characterizes the left, centre, and right portions of the spectrum?

WEB LINK

To find your own position on the political spectrum, visit the Pearson Web site.

- How do Canada's political parties differ and where do they fit on the political spectrum?

WEB LINK

Read more about Canada's political parties on the Pearson Web site.

interests of Québec and to support **Québec sovereignty**. The Green Party of Canada is devoted to green politics, which focuses on achieving environmental goals through grassroots democracy.

If a shared ideology is a major reason for forming and maintaining a political party, how do Canada's major parties differ? The best way to understand a party's ideology is to look at its stated positions on important issues. What political parties state in their election platforms about these issues helps us to understand their ideology.



FIGURE 9-13 Party platforms are greatly publicized and debated during election campaigns, but are difficult to find once elections are over.

Thinking Critically Why do you think political parties do not keep their party platforms easily accessible between elections?

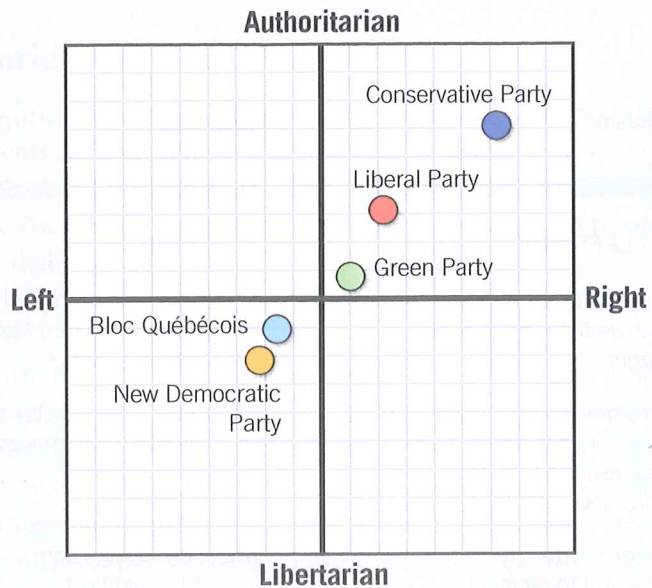


FIGURE 9-12 This political compass combines the traditional left–right spectrum with an additional dimension of government involvement, from total control (authoritarian) to maximum individual freedom (libertarian). Canadian political parties are placed on the spectrum in terms of social policy, economic policy, the environment, and other issues.

Interpreting a Graph What does the placement of the Bloc Québécois tell you about its ideology?

Party Platforms

A **party platform** is a list of priorities and a plan for governing published by a political party. This platform helps the public to understand what the party stands for and it reminds party members about goals and core beliefs. In the 2008 election campaign, the Liberals promised to encourage a green economy and reduce the number of people living below the poverty line by 30 percent. Conservatives promised to lower both the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and taxes paid by lower-income families and seniors, and to establish sovereignty over the Arctic. The New Democratic Party also promised a new green energy economy and to train and hire more doctors and nurses. On the environment, all parties promised new greenhouse gas emissions targets. Other federal political parties, such as the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, also included statements about these issues in their platforms.

Party Membership

Many people join political parties because they believe strongly in the ideology of the party and share values with members of the party. Others want to serve the public and bring about change. Still others are attracted to the power and influence that politics generates. Perhaps the real question is, But why do so few people—only about two percent of the population—join political parties? Individuals are far more likely to seek change by participating in a special interest group or a **non-governmental organization (NGO)** than by joining a party. Even so, joining a party and becoming involved in the political process is also a very effective way of gaining a voice on issues.

Party Politics and Accountability

As in all modern democracies, Canada's political parties dominate government and there is little room for independent politicians. For this reason, those interested in political life usually decide which party they want to join, and which ideology they feel comfortable with. Parties have their own power structures, with the leader at the top. The strength of a party and its leader help it win elections and form governments. But this also makes it difficult, sometimes, for party members to know whether their first loyalty lies with the party or with the people. For this reason, citizens must be vigilant. Once a party is in power, it is very difficult to keep it accountable. Strong leadership and good party discipline, the very qualities that help it win power, help the party stay in power. The prime minister or premier also has great executive power, and the advantage of the rules and procedures of parliament, that can also make the governing party less accountable.

Patronage

Patronage refers to the giving, by premiers and prime ministers particularly, of offices and rewards in return for loyalty or favours to the party. Although opposition parties always criticize patronage and promise to avoid it if they form the government, the practice continues. A large part of government is deal making, and it is very difficult to make deals with others if you have nothing to offer in return. Also, powerful party members need to be rewarded and appeased. A prime minister has a lot to offer in the way of patronage, such as Senate seats, ambassadorships, and committee chairpersonships. In some cases, patronage serves more than one purpose. For example, appointing a long-time party supporter to the Senate not only rewards the supporter but also adds to the number of senators loyal to the party, which makes implementing policies easier.

KEY TERMS

Québec sovereignty a movement advocating that Québec separate from the rest of Canada and become a country of its own

libertarianism a political ideology that supports maximum individual freedom and minimal government involvement in the lives of its citizens

party platform a list of priorities and a plan for governing published by a political party

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) local, national, or international groups that work independently of government on issues such as health, the environment, or human rights

patronage a favour, often a government position, given in return for political support

RIGHT TO PLAY DAY Jan 14 in Surrey Schools!

Here's how to get involved:

- 1 WEAR RED** to show their Olympic Spirit
- 2 BRING A TOONIE** donation for Right To Play
- OR**
- 3 BRING A \$10 DONATION** & get a **FREE** limited edition **RIGHT TO PLAY T-shirt**

Every \$50 enrolls a child from a disadvantaged country into the Right To Play program for a year.

20% of all funds raised will support afterschool programs in Surrey schools.

100% of all funds raised go to charity.

Did you know? Right To Play recently completed Olympian school visits in more than 130 schools in Surrey reaching 70,000 students.

SURREY SCHOOL DISTRICT
RIGHT TO PLAY

FIGURE 9-14 NGOs such as Right to Play, Oxfam, and World Wildlife Fund are non-profit organizations that work to change unfair laws or policies or to better people's lives.

- How do B.C.'s political parties differ and where do they fit on the political spectrum?

KEY TERMS

populism a political movement that advocates the interests of ordinary people

elite a group of people who hold power

polarize to go in opposite directions

partisan loyal to a party or cause

B.C. Politics

Politics in British Columbia has always been intense and proceedings in the legislature are very combative. **Populism**—a style of politics that pits the people against the **elite**—has always been important in B.C. Also, at least within the past 50 years, B.C. politics has been **polarized**. Two parties on opposite sides of the political spectrum, the socialist NDP and the “free enterprise” party represented first by the Social Credit Party and, later, by the B.C. Liberals, have alternated in power. The members of both parties are intensely **partisan** and there often seems to be little room for compromise. Although other parties exist, it has proved extremely difficult for them to make inroads because many people think that voting for a minor party is, in essence, throwing away a vote. Although the Green Party—the largest of the other parties—has increased its presence and fielded strong candidates, it has, at time of writing, yet to seriously contest a riding.



FIGURE 9–15 B.C. Liberal Finance Minister Carole Taylor delivers her budget, February 2008. B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell is seen on the bottom right.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. What characteristics place fascism and communism on the extreme ends of the political spectrum?
2. List Canada's main political parties. What are their main policies and priorities? State where each party is located on the political spectrum.
3. Why do political parties that are in the middle of the political spectrum do better in elections?
4. Explain the term *patronage*. Why is it controversial?
5. **Patterns and Change** Which socialist ideas of the 1930s and 1940s do all parties now consider essential social services?