

CHAPTER 1

Canadian Politics

Chapter Summary

This initial chapter serves to highlight the main qualities of Canadian democracy, noting those core institutional features and concepts that are essential to the lexicon of Canadian politics.

Three maxims (or truths) of Canadian politics are identified and elaborated on through most of the chapter. The first concerns the fact that Canadian politics has changed considerably since 1867. Second, a number of different ideas and ideologies animate Canadian politics. Third, many opportunities Canadians have to contribute to their democratic system of government.

The chapter also outlines three key elements of Canadian politics: cleavages (geography, demography, and ideology), before offering readers a succinct history of key events in Canadian political history.

Questions for discussion include: what are examples of British and American impacts on Canadian politics; how do geography, demography, and ideology intersect as cleavages; why has it taken so long for reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; and what turning points have changed the course of Canadian history.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- understand critical concepts in respect to the Canadian political system, including democracy, politics, power, left-wing, right-wing, and citizen;
- identify the main cleavages in Canadian politics, especially in regards to geography, demography, and ethnicity;
- understand how institutions are used to accommodate these cleavages; and
- discuss the major issues faced throughout Canada's political history and appreciate how the country has evolved to its current stage.

Suggested Lecture Outline

Introduction

- The relevancy of studying Canadian government and politics will be explored.
- There are three main purposes of this lecture:
 - define and clarify core concepts;
 - identify and elaborate key institutions in Canadian government and politics; and

- discuss and debate normative issues to facilitate our comprehension.

Core concepts

- The following core concepts will be identified and clarified in this first lecture because they apply throughout the course: democracy, politics, power, state, jurisdiction, government, citizen, Indigenous people, and settler colonialism.

Maxims of Canadian politics

- Canadian politics has changed considerably since 1867.
- There are many different ideas and ideologies at play in Canadian politics.
- The average citizen has many opportunities to make a difference in Canadian politics.

Normative issue

Do you think the federal government's actions to date represent an appropriate and sufficient response to launch the process of reconciliation?

Suggested Discussion Topics

- Would it be possible, or feasible, to rule Canada through only one centralized government?
- Why are those cleavages based on geography, demography, and ideology so important in Canada?
- If the provincial boundaries in Canada could be re-drawn, how should the map look?
- To what extent is the mosaic metaphor an accurate description of Canadian society? Is it a myth or reality?
- How relevant is the class cleavage in Canadian politics? What about the gender cleavage? Is there a generational cleavage?
- How have different ideologies evolved in Canada?
- For the 2019 federal election, the Green Party's slogan was "Not Left. Not Right. Forward Together" Where on the spectrum of views ranging from left to right is the Green Party?
- Is support for victims' rights right-wing?
- Is there evidence of a shift to greater centralization and more federal power in Canada?
- Is it compatible to have an appointed independent judiciary, a Senate, and a constitutional monarchy in a political system that also claims to be a representative democracy?
- Should any changes be made to the Canadian flag, or to the flag of your province or territory?

- What are the impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples?
- Should officials remove public monuments that depict leaders who were or are complicit in colonialism?

Suggested Exam Questions

- Describe the three key cleavages or fault lines of Canadian politics.

Answer: Students should refer to Subsection: *Core Cleavages*

- Give examples of the influence of British and American impacts on Canada's traditions and institutions.

Answer: Students should refer to Subsection: *Key Institutions*

- Define and contrast the left-wing and right-wing as distinct political ideologies in Canada.

Answer: Students should refer to Subsection: *Left-Wing and Right-Wing*

- Is feminism left-wing?

Answer: Students should refer to Subsection: *Left-Wing and Right-Wing*

- What does it mean when someone is described as a big-L Liberal, small-l liberal, big-C Conservative, and small-c conservative?

Answer: Students should refer to Briefing Note: *Big-L, Small-L Liberalism and Big-C, Small-C Conservatism*

- Give examples of “colonialism” in Canadian history.

Answer: Students should refer to Subsection: *Indigenous Peoples*

- Describe efforts by the federal government to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Answer: Students should refer to Inside Canadian Politics: *How Is the Federal Government Approaching Reconciliation?*

- Describe the central political issues that characterize each of the three eras of Canada's political development.

Answer: Students should refer to Table 1.1: *Three Eras of Canadian Politics (1867-present)*

- Describe the 1965 debate about a new flag for Canada, noting the lines of division.

Answer: Students should refer to *Inside Canadian Politics: How Did Canada Choose the Maple Leaf as the Country's Flag?*