



# 3 The Social and Economic Setting

## Chapter Outline

- Material Well-Being
- Equality
  - Regionalism and Inequality
  - Socio-Economic Mobility
  - The Canadian Elite and Socio-Economic Mobility
- The Roots of Inequality
  - Deliberate Discrimination
  - Systemic Discrimination
  - Choice
  - Politics
- Measuring Quality of Life
  - Crime, Suicide, and Drug Abuse
  - Homelessness and the Welfare Gap
- Political, Economic, and Cultural Sovereignty
  - Political Sovereignty
  - Economic Sovereignty
  - Cultural Sovereignty
- Summary

## Learning Objectives

After reading Chapter 3 in *Canadian Democracy*, you should be able to do the following:

- Place Canada among the countries of the world in terms of standard of living.
- Discuss the concept of equality/inequality and how it has affected the Canadian society over the last several decades.
- Identify those groups in Canadian society most likely to live in poverty and explain why.
- Explain what is meant by socio-economic mobility and describe its characteristics in Canada.
- List some of the indicators used to measure the quality of life (QOL) in Canada and compare the QOL in Canada to that of other states.
- Identify some of the political, economic and cultural factors that limit Canada's independence.
- Compose one or two paragraphs that use as many key concepts (listed below) as possible.

## Key Concepts

**Deliberate discrimination** The act of prejudice that one person feels toward the members of some group or groups (p. 81)

**Extreme poverty** an international standard definition of income of less than \$1 a day (p. 73)

**Glass ceiling** an invisible form of job description that excludes large numbers of women from the higher-paying and more prestigious jobs that have historically been held by men (p. 80)

**Poverty line** Statistic Canada's "Low-Income-Cut-Offs"; the threshold at which a household spends over 20 per cent of its annual income on the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, and shelter (p. 74)

**Precarious employment** Work that is insecure and unskilled, and pays wages that cannot support a household (p. 69)

**Quality of life (QOL)** Measures social and economic prosperity using a combination of objective and subjective determinants (p. 84)

**Socio-economic mobility** The ability of individuals, families, and groups to move from one social or economic position to another (p. 77)

**Sovereignty** The ability of a person or entity to act independently without outside interference (p. 87)

**Systemic discrimination** The discrimination inherent in traditions, customary practices, rules, and institutions that have the effect of favouring the members of one group over another (p. 81)

**Welfare gap** The gap that exists between the income that social assistance provides and the cost of living (p. 86)

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. What is the socio-economic well-being of Aboriginal peoples in other countries such as the United States, Australian, or New Zealand? What measures have their governments taken to address such issues?
2. How would you define poverty? Calculate the monthly budget for a single person. What annual income would ensure a decent standard of living for this person?
3. Make a list of the 15 most influential people in your town or city. Why did you select the people that you did? What is the basis for their influence? How many are men, women, or visible minorities?
4. How would you measure quality of life (aside from using some of the factors mentioned in the chapter)? Do you feel that there are other aspects of life or quality of life that were omitted in the measurement? If so, what would you add to the equation?
5. Based on your overall understanding of the different regions in Canada, why are there large gaps in the distribution of income by the different regions (as presented on page 76)? What are some of the social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to these gaps?

## Additional Resources

CBC Archives, video clips on society. <http://archives.cbc.ca/society/>

CBC Archives, video clips on economy and business [http://archives.cbc.ca/economy\\_business/](http://archives.cbc.ca/economy_business/)

CBC News (2011, July 13). Canada's income gap widens, report says. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2011/07/13/income-gap-canada-conference-board.html>

Centre for the Study of Living Standards, [www.csls.ca](http://www.csls.ca). For information on economic and social issues in Canada

National Council of Welfare, [www.ncw.gc.ca](http://www.ncw.gc.ca). For information on poverty and welfare

The Institute for Research on Public Policy, [www.irpp.org](http://www.irpp.org). For information on a range of public issues and policy responses to those issues