

Unmasking the Conservative Agenda: A Critical Examination of Canada's Right-Wing Politics

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Abstract

This document provides a critical examination of the Canadian Conservative Party's policies and actions, with a particular focus on the repeal of Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and its broader implications. It explores how these policies may have contributed to various socio-economic and political shifts in Canada, including the rise of online extremism, challenges to LGBTQ+ rights, evolving stances on immigration and multiculturalism, the spread of misinformation, fiscal policies favoring certain demographics, the party's response to events like the "Freedom Convoy," and environmental deregulation. The analysis aims to scrutinize the Conservative Party's agenda and its impact on Canadian society, advocating for policies that promote inclusivity, combat hate speech, ensure accurate information, and prioritize environmental sustainability, while emphasizing the need for accountability from political leaders.

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Introduction

This work embarks on an exploration of how the Conservative Party of Canada's policies, with a particular emphasis on the repeal of Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, have intersected with the rise of online extremism, the dissemination of misinformation, and the emergence of socio-economic disparities within Canada. The Conservative Party, a significant force in Canadian federal politics, has seen its policy decisions and political rhetoric come under increasing scrutiny. [8] This examination seeks to critically analyze these aspects, providing a detailed understanding of their potential impacts on Canadian society.

The repeal of Section 13, which previously addressed hate speech communicated through telecommunications, serves as a central point of discussion. [3] Beyond this specific legislative change, the document will delve into a range of policy areas and public stances adopted by the Conservative Party. These include approaches to LGBTQ+ rights, immigration and multiculturalism, responses to public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic strategies, and environmental policies.

Furthermore, the party's engagement with and commentary on significant social movements and protests, such as the 2022 "Freedom Convoy," will be considered. [15] The overarching goal is to foster a nuanced understanding of the Conservative agenda and its multifaceted consequences for the Canadian populace. This analysis aims to contribute to a broader public discourse on the direction of Canadian politics and the responsibilities of its political actors.

Chapter 1

The Repeal of Section 13 and the Rise of Online Hate

1.1 Background of Section 13

Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) was a provision designed to address hate messages. [3] Enacted in 1977, it initially focused on hate messages disseminated through federally regulated telecommunications, primarily in response to telephone hotlines playing recorded racist messages. [1, 3] The scope of Section 13 was expanded by Parliament twice. In 1998, a penalty was added for breaches of the section, and in 2001, its application was extended to include telecommunications over the internet. [3] From 2001 until its repeal, Section 13(1) stated: "It is a discriminatory practice for a person or a group of persons acting in concert to communicate telephonically or to cause to be so communicated, repeatedly, in whole or in part by means of the facilities of a telecommunication undertaking within the legislative authority of Parliament, any matter that is likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt by reason of the fact that that person or those persons are identifiable on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination." [3] Prohibited grounds of discrimination included race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, and disability. [3, 44] Complaints under this section were brought to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC). If the Commission found sufficient evidence, the case would be heard by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT). [3]

The Supreme Court of Canada, in the 1990 case *Canada (Human Rights Commission) v. Taylor*, upheld the constitutionality of Section 13. [1, 2] This case involved John Ross Taylor and the Western Guard Party, who operated a hate promotion telephone message service. [2] The Court found that although Section 13 infringed upon the freedom of expression guaranteed by Section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it was a reasonable limit justifiable under Section 1 of the Charter. [2, 32] The Court defined hate as "unusually strong and deep-felt emotions of detestation, calumny and vilification." [1] The purpose of human rights legislation like the CHRA, including Section 13, was seen as remedial, aimed at eliminating discrimination and protecting victims, rather than punitive like criminal law. [7, 40]

1.2 Harper's Repeal

Despite the Supreme Court's affirmation of its constitutionality in the *Taylor* case, Section 13 faced ongoing debate and criticism. [2, 3] Critics argued it was an unwarranted infringement on freedom of expression, noting that intent was not a requirement for a finding of a discriminatory practice, and truth or reasonable belief in the truth was not a defence. [3] Alan Borovoy, general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, expressed that human rights commissions were not initially envisioned to be used against freedom of speech. [3]

In 2008, as a minority government, the Conservative Party under Prime Minister Stephen Harper had intervened to defend Section 13, with Harper stating that "a little bit of chilling" around the hateful fringes of public discourse was "tolerable." [1] However, the political tide turned. A 2008 independent review of Section 13 by University of Windsor constitutional law professor Richard Moon, commissioned by the CHRC, recommended the repeal of Section 13, arguing that censorship should be confined to extreme expression that threatens, advocates, or justifies violence. [1, 3, 33] Moon suggested that online hate speech should be a purely criminal matter. [3]

In 2009, in the case *Warman v. Lemire*, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that Section 13 was an unconstitutional infringement of freedom of expression, distinguishing it from the earlier version upheld in *Taylor* due to amendments that made the provision more penal in nature, particularly the addition of punitive fines. [1, 3] However, the Tribunal did not have the authority to declare sections of the CHRA invalid and declined to apply Section 13 in that specific case. [3]

By the time the Conservatives had a majority government, their stance on Section 13 had shifted. [1] A private member's bill, Bill C-304, was introduced by Conservative MP Brian Storseth to repeal Section 13. [7] The bill passed a vote in the House of Commons in 2012. [1] Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in a speech in July 2013, celebrated the repeal, stating that Section 13 "for decades stripped those accused of discriminatory speech from the most basic common law defences of truth and due process" and was "always of the most dubious constitutionality." [20] The repeal of Section 13 officially took effect in June 2014. [3] The Senate passed the bill with 49 Conservative senators voting in favour, many of whom were Harper appointees, while 32 senators, predominantly Liberal-appointed, opposed it. [7]

1.3 Consequences

The repeal of Section 13 has been a subject of considerable debate regarding its impact on online hate speech. Proponents of the repeal argued it was a victory for free speech. [29] However, critics contended that its removal left a void in civil remedies for online hate, potentially leading to an increase in such expression. [7]

Following the repeal, some observers and organizations have pointed to a rise in online hate speech. [7] It is argued that the absence of a civil provision like Section 13 made it more difficult for individuals and groups targeted by online hate to seek redress outside the criminal justice system, which has a higher burden of proof (requiring proof of intent to promote hatred) and requires the Attorney General's consent for prosecution under hate propaganda sections of the Criminal Code. [7, 32] Civil human rights legislation, like the former Section 13, focused on the discriminatory effects of harmful conduct and generally did not require subjective intent. [40]

Marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals and racial minorities, have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to online hate. [7, 40] The Saskatchewan Law Review, for instance, published an article arguing that the repeal of Section 13 "flies in the face of the Supreme Court's jurisprudence and exemplifies an unbalanced prioritization of the right to free speech over the responsibility to respect and protect the equality and dignity owed to all human beings." [7] The article further stated that the repeal "has exposed those citizens most vulnerable in Canadian society to the most threatening platform for hate speech in the twenty-first century—the internet." [7]

While every province and territory has human rights codes, only a few (Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories) have hate speech provisions within their codes, and these typically do not specifically address the dissemination of hate on the internet or telephone due to jurisdictional issues. [7] This left Section 319(2) of the Criminal Code as the primary legislative mechanism to counteract internet hate speech at the federal level after Section 13's repeal. [7]

In 2019, the Parliament of Canada Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights issued a report on online hate, which included a recommendation to reinstate Section 13 or an analogous provision. [3] Subsequently, Bill C-36 was introduced in 2021, which would have reinstated Section 13 and added a definition of hatred based on Supreme Court cases, but it did not pass before Parliament was dissolved. [3] The debate over how to effectively combat online hate speech while upholding freedom of expression continues in Canada. [40]

Chapter 2

LGBTQ+ Rights Under Conservative Scrutiny

2.1 Policy Decisions

The relationship between the Conservative Party of Canada and its provincial counterparts with LGBTQ+ rights has been multifaceted and, at times, contentious. A notable instance that drew significant attention and concern from LGBTQ+ advocates was a resolution passed by the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party in November 2018. [12, 16] During a party convention, delegates voted in favour of a non-binding resolution that proposed debating the validity of "gender identity theory," referring to it as an "unscientific 'liberal ideology'." [12, 16, 24] The resolution also called for the removal of the teaching and promotion of gender identity theory from Ontario schools and their curriculum. [16, 19, 24]

This resolution was put forward by Tanya Granic Allen, a socially conservative figure who had previously run for the party's leadership. [16, 27] While then-Premier Doug Ford stated that his government would ignore the resolution and not move forward with it, the fact that it was passed by party delegates was described as "immensely troubling" by organizations like Human Rights Watch and sparked considerable backlash from LGBTQ+ advocates and opposition parties. [12, 19] Critics argued that even debating such a resolution sent a harmful message and could contribute to the marginalization and stigmatization of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, particularly youth. [16, 19] The Ontario NDP, for instance, labelled the PC policy as "dangerous" for LGBTQ youth. [16]

This event occurred against the backdrop of broader discussions and legislative actions concerning gender identity in Canada. In July 2017, the federal Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had amended the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination (Bill C-16). [12] The federal government had also introduced gender-neutral options for official documents like passports. [12] The Ontario PC Party's resolution was seen by many as running counter to these federal moves and to a growing societal understanding and acceptance of gender diversity. [12, 19]

It is important to note that resolutions passed at party conventions are not always translated into official government policy. [16, 27] However, they can signal a direction or a set of values endorsed

by a segment of the party membership, influencing internal party discourse and potentially future policy considerations. The 2018 Ontario PC resolution highlighted ongoing tensions within conservative movements regarding social issues, including LGBTQ+ rights and education.

2.2 Impact on Trans Communities

Policies and public discourse that question or undermine the validity of gender identity can have significant negative impacts on transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The 2018 Ontario Progressive Conservative Party resolution, even though non-binding, was viewed by many within the trans community and by advocacy groups as fostering an environment conducive to heightened discrimination and marginalization. [12, 19]

Critics of the resolution emphasized that such rhetoric can contribute to the stigmatization of trans people, particularly transgender youth. [16, 19] Removing discussions of gender identity from school curricula, as the resolution proposed, could limit students' access to information that promotes understanding, acceptance, and self-awareness, potentially making schools less safe and inclusive for trans students. [12, 19] Human Rights Watch noted that in such a scenario, "children would no longer learn about factors that impact gender, sexual orientation, and understanding of self at school. And we would all be worse off for it. Children and youth who express a deeply felt gender identity that is different from their birth assigned sex would be especially vulnerable." [12]

Ottawa school trustee Lyra Evans, who is transgender, commented that the resolution's passage "really shows that there are segments of the population who do not want trans people to exist." [19] This sentiment reflects concerns that such political signaling can embolden prejudice and discrimination in broader society. When political parties or influential figures appear to question the legitimacy of trans identities, it can create an atmosphere where trans individuals feel less safe, less accepted, and more vulnerable to harassment and violence.

The debate around gender identity in schools and public policy often touches upon fundamental human rights. The addition of gender identity and expression as protected grounds under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code in 2017 was a landmark step intended to provide legal protection against discrimination for trans and gender diverse Canadians. [12, 44] Policy proposals or resolutions that appear to contradict or undermine these protections can therefore be seen as a regression and a threat to the hard-won rights and dignity of trans individuals.

The discourse surrounding such policy debates can also impact the mental health and well-being of trans people. Constant questioning of one's identity and rights can be emotionally and psychologically taxing, contributing to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges often observed within the trans community, frequently linked to experiences of discrimination and lack of acceptance. The concern is that political debates that treat gender identity as a controversial "ideology" rather than a recognized aspect of human experience can exacerbate these existing vulnerabilities.

Chapter 3

The Conservative Stance on Immigration and Multiculturalism

3.1 Historical Context

The modern Conservative Party of Canada was formed in 2003 through the merger of the Canadian Alliance (formerly the Reform Party of Canada) and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. [8] The Reform Party, which emerged in Western Canada in the late 1980s, played a significant role in shaping the right-wing political landscape in Canada and its legacy, to some extent, informs the perspectives within the contemporary Conservative Party. [11, 17]

The Reform Party's platform included distinct positions on multiculturalism and bilingualism. [11, 17] It declared its opposition to existing government-funded multiculturalism, arguing that such policies fostered a "hyphenated Canadian" identity rather than a singular, unified one. [11] The party's platform called for an end to government initiatives aimed at promoting multiculturalism. [11] Similarly, the Reform Party expressed opposition to official bilingualism as it was being implemented, suggesting that language policy should be more of a provincial matter and criticized the idea of Canada as "an equal partnership between two founding races, the English and French." [11, 18] Preston Manning, the founder and leader of the Reform Party, advocated for a "New Canada" with a new identity, critiquing the focus on a federation of founding peoples distinguished by official languages policy and government-sponsored culture. [11, 18]

These stances were controversial and often perceived, particularly in Quebec and by some minority groups, as being anti-Quebec or assimilationist. [11] The Reform Party's initial slogan, "The West Wants In," reflected its origins as a voice for Western Canadian discontent, but its policies on cultural and linguistic matters had national implications. [11, 17]

While the Progressive Conservative Party, the other partner in the 2003 merger, had historically taken different approaches to multiculturalism and bilingualism, sometimes embracing them (for example, under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in the 1980s [22]), the influence of Reform Party ideology on the merged entity has been a subject of ongoing discussion and analysis. It's noted that even the Reform Party later moderated its stance on multiculturalism as it sought broader national appeal, particularly in eastern Canada and urban centers. [22]

The Conservative Party of Canada, since its formation, has officially supported the Official Languages Act, ensuring English and French have equality of status. [8] It also calls for the

protection of Canada's history, culture, and heritage. [8] However, the historical perspectives of its predecessor parties, particularly the Reform Party's skepticism towards government-funded multiculturalism and its emphasis on a singular Canadian identity, provide a relevant backdrop when examining the modern party's approach to these complex issues.

3.2 Modern Implications

The legacy of the Reform Party's initial skepticism towards government-funded multiculturalism and its emphasis on a singular Canadian identity continues to be a point of discussion when analyzing the modern Conservative Party's policies and rhetoric concerning immigration and minority communities. While the contemporary Conservative Party officially supports the Official Languages Act and the protection of Canada's diverse heritage [8], critics sometimes argue that certain policy nuances or rhetorical framings may echo earlier Reform sentiments, potentially at the expense of robust support for multicultural initiatives or the unique concerns of immigrant and minority groups.

For instance, debates around immigration levels, settlement services, and the integration of newcomers can sometimes reveal underlying tensions about the nature of Canadian identity and the role of government in supporting diverse cultural expressions. While the Conservative Party has, at various times, emphasized the economic benefits of immigration and the need for an orderly system, the degree of emphasis on multicultural programming and support for specific cultural communities can vary and become a point of contention.

It's important to acknowledge that the Conservative Party under various leaders, including Stephen Harper, made efforts to reach out to diverse ethnic communities, and some former Reform politicians who became part of the Conservative government did moderate earlier stances on multiculturalism. [22, 26] The Harper government, for example, supported the establishment of the Global Centre for Pluralism. [22]

However, concerns can arise from policy decisions that might be perceived as prioritizing a more assimilationist approach to integration or downplaying the challenges faced by specific minority groups. For example, funding decisions for multicultural programs, approaches to addressing systemic discrimination, or rhetoric surrounding "Canadian values" can be interpreted differently by various communities.

The "political exploitation of multiculturalism," where parties are criticized for treating ethnic groups as mere voting blocs, has been a long-standing critique across the political spectrum, and it is a lens through which any party's engagement with minority communities might be viewed. [22]

Ultimately, assessing the modern implications of historical Reform Party stances requires a nuanced examination of specific Conservative policies, budgetary allocations, public statements by party leaders and members, and the lived experiences of immigrant and minority communities under Conservative governments or in response to Conservative platforms. The balance between promoting a shared Canadian identity and actively supporting and celebrating a multicultural mosaic remains a dynamic and often debated aspect of Canadian political discourse, and the Conservative Party's approach continues to be closely watched and analyzed by various stakeholders.

Chapter 4

Misinformation and the Conservative Narrative

4.1 COVID-19 Misinformation

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges globally, and the spread of misinformation became a significant complicating factor in public health responses. In Canada, as in many other countries, various forms of misinformation and disinformation circulated regarding the virus, its origins, prevention methods (like masks and vaccines), and government-imposed public health measures.

While no major political party officially endorsed COVID-19 misinformation, concerns were raised during the pandemic about the rhetoric and actions of certain individuals associated with or supportive of conservative movements, which sometimes appeared to align with or give oxygen to narratives that questioned public health guidance or downplayed the severity of the virus.

For example, during the "Freedom Convoy" protests in early 2022, which were initially framed as opposition to vaccine mandates for cross-border truckers but expanded to encompass broader anti-COVID-19 restriction sentiments, some Conservative politicians expressed support for the protesters. [15, 35] While this support was often framed in terms of defending freedoms, the protests themselves became a focal point for the dissemination of various forms of COVID-19 misinformation and anti-vaccine sentiment. [36, 41] The close association of some political figures with such movements, even if not explicitly endorsing the misinformation itself, raised concerns about the potential for legitimizing or amplifying these narratives. [35]

Polls conducted during the "Freedom Convoy" indicated that a segment of the population, including some who identified as Conservative supporters or sympathizers with the protest movement, were more likely to believe misinformation about vaccines. [41] This highlighted the challenge of political leaders navigating public sentiment while upholding evidence-based public health messaging.

It is crucial to distinguish between questioning specific government policies or the scope of public health measures—which is a legitimate part of democratic debate—and the propagation of verifiably false or misleading information that undermines public health efforts. The concern voiced by some public health officials and commentators was that when prominent figures appear to give credence to groups or movements where misinformation is rife, it can make it more

difficult to achieve broad public compliance with necessary health measures and to maintain trust in scientific institutions.

The Conservative Party of Canada, as an official opposition and a major political force, had a platform to either counter or, inadvertently or otherwise, appear to accommodate narratives that were not aligned with mainstream scientific consensus on COVID-19. The extent to which specific Conservative figures were linked to spreading false information is a matter that would require examination of individual statements and actions. However, the broader political environment during the pandemic, including the rhetoric surrounding protests and public health mandates, contributed to a complex information landscape where misinformation found space to proliferate.

4.2 Economic Misrepresentations

Political discourse often involves parties presenting economic data and interpretations that favour their own narratives and critique their opponents. Claims about a country's economic performance relative to others, such as the G7 nations, are common tools in these debates. The Conservative Party of Canada has, at various times, made assertions about Canada's economic standing that have been subject to scrutiny and fact-checking.

For instance, in February 2025, Pierre Poilievre, leader of the Conservative Party, stated that Canada has had "the worst economic growth in the G7." [10] This type of claim aims to criticize the incumbent government's economic management. However, the veracity of such broad statements often depends on the specific metrics used, the timeframes considered, and the data sources.

Economic performance can be measured in numerous ways, including GDP growth, employment rates, inflation, debt-to-GDP ratios, and productivity growth. Different metrics can paint different pictures, and focusing on a single indicator or a specific short period might not provide a complete understanding of a country's relative economic health.

During Stephen Harper's tenure as Prime Minister, his government also made claims about Canada's strong economic performance within the G7. For example, in 2015, Harper asserted that Canada had been "head and shoulders above all of our G7 partners in terms of economic growth over the long term — in terms of job creation." [14] Fact-checks at the time indicated a more nuanced reality. While Canada did perform relatively well during the 2008-2009 global recession compared to some G7 peers (e.g., its economy shrank by 2.7

The assertion by Poilievre in 2025 that Canada had the "worst economic growth in the G7" would similarly require careful examination against comprehensive G7 economic data for the relevant period. Such claims, while politically potent, can sometimes oversimplify complex economic realities or selectively use data to support a particular argument. Independent economic analysts and fact-checking organizations often play a role in evaluating these claims to provide the public with a more complete picture. The persistence of such rhetoric, even when disputed, can shape public perception and political debate.

4.3 Environmental Policies

The Conservative Party's approach to environmental issues and climate change has often been characterized by a focus on economic considerations, resource development, and skepticism

towards certain regulatory measures and international agreements aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This has led to criticism that the party's rhetoric and policies can trivialize the urgency of environmental initiatives.

One example of rhetoric seen as dismissive of environmental concerns is the mocking of smaller-scale environmental initiatives. While specific instances of mocking paper straws by prominent Conservative figures would need to be individually sourced and contextualized, this type of commentary often reflects a broader narrative that frames some environmental actions as impractical, performative, or economically detrimental without acknowledging the larger goals they might represent, such as reducing plastic pollution or raising awareness.

More substantively, the Conservative Party's platform has included commitments to repeal or significantly alter key federal environmental legislation and climate policies. For instance, the party has consistently opposed the federal carbon pricing mechanism (often referred to as the "carbon tax") and has pledged to eliminate it. [8, 30] Recent platforms indicate a plan to axe the entire carbon tax, including industrial pricing, by repealing the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act (GGPPA). [30] They also aim to scrap other regulations viewed as costly or ideological, such as the proposed oil and gas GHG emissions cap, the Clean Fuels Regulation (CFR), and the Clean Electricity Regulation (CER). [30]

Instead of broad carbon pricing, the Conservative approach often emphasizes technological solutions, carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), clean resource exports (like LNG) as a global emissions reduction strategy, and "practical conservation and pollution reduction" measures rather than taxation. [30, 42] There is also a strong focus on streamlining approval processes for resource projects and reducing "red tape," which includes repealing legislation like Bill C-69 (the Impact Assessment Act) and Bill C-48 (the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act). [30] The party's energy policy includes plans to significantly boost oil production and fast-track LNG projects. [30]

Critics argue that these policies, particularly the repeal of broad-based carbon pricing and other regulations, would make it significantly more difficult for Canada to meet its international climate commitments, such as those under the Paris Agreement. Analyses by independent organizations have suggested that a Conservative government implementing its stated environmental platform could lead to a significant increase in Canada's greenhouse gas emissions compared to current trajectories or those under alternative policy scenarios. For example, one analysis by Carbon Brief suggested that Conservative policies could make Canada an outlier among G7 nations with rising emissions, potentially adding nearly 800 million tonnes to the country's carbon footprint by 2035. [45]

The Conservative narrative often frames environmental action as a trade-off against economic prosperity, arguing that stringent regulations hinder economic growth and job creation. [30, 42] This contrasts with arguments that transitioning to a green economy can create new economic opportunities and that the costs of inaction on climate change will ultimately be far greater. The party's dismissal or downplaying of certain environmental measures can therefore be seen as part of a broader ideological stance that prioritizes immediate economic concerns, particularly in the resource sector, over more aggressive, economy-wide decarbonization efforts.

Chapter 5

Fiscal Policies Favoring the Wealthy

5.1 Tax Cuts

The Conservative Party of Canada has consistently advocated for lower taxes as a cornerstone of its economic policy, arguing that this stimulates economic growth, creates jobs, and leaves more money in the pockets of Canadians. [8, 25] Key tax reduction measures implemented during their time in government (2006-2015) and proposed in subsequent platforms have included cuts to corporate income taxes and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). [8]

Under the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, federal corporate income tax rates were significantly reduced. The general corporate income tax rate was lowered incrementally from 21

Another major tax policy was the reduction of the GST. The Harper government cut the GST twice, first from 7

More recent Conservative platforms have continued to emphasize tax reductions. For example, proposals have included further cuts to personal income tax rates, particularly for lower income brackets. [5, 31] The 2025 platform, under Pierre Poilievre, proposed cutting the lowest personal income tax rate from 15

While proponents argue these tax cuts benefit a wide range of Canadians and stimulate the economy, critics contend that many of these measures disproportionately benefit wealthier individuals and corporations. Reductions in corporate income tax, for example, are argued by some economists to primarily benefit shareholders, who tend to be higher-income individuals, rather than leading to significant increases in wages or employment. Similarly, while a GST cut is broad, higher-income individuals tend to spend more in absolute terms, and thus may receive a larger absolute benefit, though as a percentage of income, the benefit might be more evenly distributed or even regressive.

Proposals like increasing TFSA contribution limits are also often seen as favouring those with higher disposable incomes who are more likely to be able to take full advantage of the increased room. Similarly, eliminating capital gains tax on certain investments, as proposed in some Conservative plans [37], would predominantly benefit those who have capital to invest and realize gains.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), in its analysis of party platforms, often examines the distributional impact of proposed tax changes. For example, their analysis might

show how different income deciles are affected by various tax cut proposals. [37] Such analyses frequently suggest that while some Conservative tax cuts (like cuts to the lowest personal income tax bracket) provide relief to lower and middle-income earners, other measures (like corporate tax cuts or changes to capital gains taxation) tend to deliver larger benefits, both in absolute terms and sometimes as a percentage of income, to higher-income brackets. [37] The debate over who benefits most from these tax policies is central to discussions about their fairness and their impact on income inequality.

5.2 Impact on Public Services

Reductions in government revenue resulting from tax cuts, such as those to corporate income taxes and the GST, can have significant implications for the funding of public services and social programs. When a government takes in less money, it must either reduce spending, increase borrowing (run deficits), or find alternative revenue sources to maintain the same level of services.

Critics of large-scale tax cuts often argue that they can lead to underfunding and cuts to essential public services like healthcare, education, social assistance, infrastructure, and environmental protection. [37] During the period of Conservative governance under Stephen Harper, which saw significant corporate tax cuts and GST reductions [8], the government also undertook periods of spending restraint, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, to manage deficits. While the government framed these as measures to ensure fiscal responsibility and return to a balanced budget [8, 25], critics pointed to the impact on federal program spending and transfers to provinces, which are crucial for delivering many public services.

The argument is that if tax cuts, especially those benefiting corporations and higher-income individuals, do not lead to the theorized levels of economic growth and subsequent revenue increases (a concept often debated in "trickle-down economics"), then the pressure to cut spending on public goods and services mounts. This can disproportionately affect lower and middle-income Canadians who rely more heavily on these services.

For example, reductions in federal transfers for healthcare or post-secondary education can put pressure on provincial governments to either raise their own taxes, cut services, or find efficiencies, often leading to contentious debates about service quality and accessibility. Similarly, cuts to federal agencies responsible for environmental oversight, food safety, or scientific research can have long-term consequences for public well-being and safety.

The Conservative Party often counters these criticisms by arguing that a strong economy, spurred by lower taxes, ultimately generates more wealth that can support public services, and that they prioritize efficient spending and eliminating wasteful government programs. [10, 25, 42] Their platforms may also include specific spending commitments in certain areas, even while advocating for overall tax reduction and fiscal restraint. [5, 39]

However, the fundamental tension remains: significant tax cuts, particularly if they are not offset by commensurate economic growth or other revenue sources, will likely necessitate choices about the level and quality of public services the government can provide. Organizations like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives often highlight how proposed tax cuts in party platforms could impact government revenues and, by extension, the capacity to fund social programs and public infrastructure. [37] The debate over the appropriate balance between lower taxes and robust public services is a central and ongoing theme in Canadian political discourse.

Chapter 6

The “Freedom Convoy” and Conservative Endorsement

6.1 Overview

The “Freedom Convoy” was a series of protests and blockades that took place across Canada in early 2022. [15] It was initially organized to oppose the COVID-19 vaccine mandates imposed on cross-border truck drivers by both the Canadian and U.S. governments. [15] However, the movement quickly broadened its scope to include opposition to all COVID-19-related restrictions and mandates, and for some participants, it became a wider protest against the incumbent federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. [15]

Starting on January 22, 2022, convoys of trucks and other vehicles departed from various points across Canada, converging on Ottawa, the nation’s capital, on January 29. [15] Protesters established a significant presence in downtown Ottawa, particularly around Parliament Hill, occupying city streets for several weeks. [15, 35] The protests involved not only vehicle blockades but also large gatherings of pedestrian protesters. [15]

In addition to the main protest in Ottawa, related demonstrations and blockades occurred in various provincial capitals and, significantly, at several key Canada-U.S. border crossings, including the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, which is a critical trade link. [15, 36]

The protesters’ stated goals included the abolition of all federal and provincial COVID-19 mandates. [15] Some participants and organizers also called for the dissolution of the elected government or presented a “memorandum of understanding” with the Senate and Governor General to this effect, though these demands had no constitutional basis. The protests were characterized by a diverse range of participants, but also drew criticism for the presence of extremist symbols and rhetoric, including flags and symbols associated with far-right and white supremacist movements, as well as reports of harassment and intimidation of local residents and businesses in Ottawa.

The “Freedom Convoy” garnered both domestic and international attention and support, as well as significant opposition and condemnation. [15] Concerns were raised by residents, businesses, and various levels of government about public safety, economic disruptions caused by the blockades (particularly at border crossings), and the prolonged occupation of downtown Ottawa. [15, 43] The protests led to significant policing challenges and ultimately prompted the

federal government to invoke the Emergencies Act on February 14, 2022, for the first time since its enactment, granting temporary extraordinary powers to law enforcement to address the situation. [15] The protests were largely cleared by police by February 23, 2022. [15]

6.2 Conservative Support

During the "Freedom Convoy" protests in early 2022, several prominent figures within the Conservative Party of Canada expressed varying degrees of support for the protesters and their stated aims, particularly the opposition to vaccine mandates. [15, 35] This support was a point of significant political contention and public debate.

Pierre Poilievre, who was a Conservative Member of Parliament at the time and later became the party leader, was among the most vocal supporters of the convoy. [35, 41] He met with protesters, posted photos and videos with them, and made statements applauding their efforts to defend "freedom" and oppose federal COVID-19 mandates. [35] For example, a tweet by Poilievre on February 5, 2022, promising to "give back control" to Canadians and "restore freedom," which coincided with the convoy protests, gained significant traction and was seen by some as an unofficial start to his leadership campaign. [35] His support was described by some commentators as "hitching his wagon" to the convoy. [35]

Other Conservative MPs also voiced support or met with protesters. The interim leader of the Conservative Party at the time the convoy began, Candice Bergen (who replaced Erin O'Toole shortly after the convoy arrived in Ottawa), also met with some protesters, although the party's stance under her interim leadership was complex and subject to internal divisions.

This support from Conservative figures contrasted sharply with the reactions of other federal party leaders. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh condemned the convoy, citing threats to public order, the presence of hateful symbols, and the harassment of Ottawa residents. [35]

The Conservative support for the convoy was multi-faceted. Some framed it as standing up for truckers, individual liberties, and the right to protest. Others focused on the opposition to vaccine mandates, which they viewed as government overreach. However, this support also drew criticism for appearing to legitimize a movement that included elements promoting misinformation, extremist ideologies, and engaging in disruptive and, in some cases, unlawful activities like blockading critical infrastructure. [36, 41]

Polling data from the period suggested that while a majority of Canadians opposed the convoy and its methods [36, 43], there was a segment of the population, including a significant portion of Conservative voters and those who would later support Poilievre for the leadership, who approved of the protests. [36] For example, an EKOS Research Associates poll indicated that 51

The "Freedom Convoy" and the Conservative Party's response to it became a defining political moment, highlighting deep divisions within Canadian society and within the Conservative Party itself regarding public health measures, the role of government, and the nature of legitimate protest. [36] For figures like Pierre Poilievre, the embrace of the convoy's themes of "freedom" and opposition to "gatekeepers" became central to their political brand and appeal to a specific segment of the electorate. [35, 41]

Chapter 7

Environmental Deregulation and Its Consequences

7.1 Policy Rollbacks

The Conservative Party of Canada has consistently advocated for policies that it argues will reduce regulatory burdens on businesses, particularly in the natural resource sector, to promote economic growth and energy development. [30, 42] A key component of their environmental and economic platform involves repealing or significantly reforming existing and proposed federal environmental regulations.

One prominent example is the party's pledge to repeal Bill C-69, officially known as the *Impact Assessment Act*. [30, 42] Enacted by the Liberal government in 2019, Bill C-69 overhauled the federal environmental assessment process for major projects, such as pipelines, mines, and hydro-electric dams. Proponents of the Act argued it provided a more comprehensive and predictable process that considered a wider range of environmental, social, and health impacts, and included more Indigenous consultation. However, critics, including the Conservative Party and some industry groups, dubbed it the "No More Pipelines Bill," arguing that it created uncertainty, discouraged investment, and would hinder the development of resource projects. [42] The Conservative platform has consistently called for its repeal and replacement with a system they claim would be more efficient and focused on getting projects built. [30]

Another piece of legislation targeted for repeal is Bill C-48, the *Oil Tanker Moratorium Act*, which prohibits oil tankers carrying more than 12,500 metric tons of crude or persistent oils as cargo from stopping, loading, or unloading at ports or marine installations in northern British Columbia. [30] The Conservatives argue this bill unfairly targets Western Canadian oil and hinders its export, while proponents see it as a crucial measure to protect the sensitive marine ecosystems of the B.C. coast.

Beyond these specific acts, the Conservative platform also includes commitments to scrap other significant environmental regulations and climate policies. [30] This includes repealing the federal carbon pricing mechanism (the "carbon tax") in its entirety, including the industrial carbon pricing system. [30] They also plan to eliminate the proposed cap on greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector, the Clean Fuels Regulation (aimed at reducing the carbon intensity of liquid fuels), and the Clean Electricity Regulations (designed to transition Canada's electricity grid to

net-zero by 2035). [30]

The rationale provided for these rollbacks generally centers on the idea that these regulations are economically damaging, ideologically driven, and create unnecessary "red tape" that stifles investment and job creation, particularly in the energy sector. [30, 42] The party often emphasizes "technology, not taxes" as its approach to environmental issues, promoting solutions like carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), and the export of Canadian liquefied natural gas (LNG) as ways to reduce global emissions. [30]

7.2 Economic vs. Environmental Interests

The Conservative Party's proposed rollbacks of environmental regulations are often framed as a necessary step to prioritize economic interests and competitiveness, particularly for Canada's natural resource sector. [30, 42] This approach reflects a long-standing debate in public policy regarding the perceived trade-offs between economic development and environmental protection.

The Conservative argument typically posits that regulations like the **Impact Assessment Act** (Bill C-69), the federal carbon tax, the Clean Fuels Regulation, and the proposed oil and gas emissions cap impose undue costs on businesses, reduce investment, and make Canadian industries less competitive globally. [30, 42] By repealing or reforming these measures, the party aims to "unleash" economic potential, particularly in sectors like oil and gas, mining, and forestry. [30, 42] The focus is often on short-to-medium-term economic benefits, such as job creation in these industries and increased resource production and export. [30]

For example, repealing Bill C-69 is intended to fast-track the approval of major projects, which proponents argue will bring significant investment and create jobs. [30] Eliminating the carbon tax is presented as a way to lower costs for businesses and consumers, thereby stimulating economic activity. [8, 30] Promoting increased oil and LNG production is seen as a way to enhance Canada's energy security, create wealth, and contribute to global energy markets, with an argument sometimes made that Canadian resources are more "ethical" or "cleaner" than those from other jurisdictions, thus contributing to global emissions reduction if they displace higher-emitting sources. [30]

However, critics argue that this framing presents a false dichotomy and that prioritizing short-term economic gains in traditional resource sectors at the expense of robust environmental regulation can lead to significant long-term environmental and economic costs. These include:

- **Increased Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Rolling back carbon pricing, emissions caps, and clean energy regulations is highly likely to lead to higher domestic greenhouse gas emissions, making it more difficult and costly for Canada to meet its international climate targets (e.g., under the Paris Agreement). [45] This could also lead to international diplomatic and trade repercussions, such as carbon border adjustment mechanisms imposed by other countries. [38]
- **Undermining Sustainable Development:** A focus on deregulation for resource extraction without strong environmental safeguards can lead to habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, water and air pollution, and other environmental damages. These can have long-term impacts on ecosystems, human health, and industries that depend on a healthy environment, such as tourism and fisheries.

- **Missing Opportunities in the Green Economy:** Critics argue that by resisting a transition towards a lower-carbon economy, Canada risks falling behind in the rapidly growing global market for clean technologies and renewable energy. Investing in and incentivizing these sectors could create new, sustainable jobs and long-term economic prosperity.
- **Exacerbating Climate Change Impacts:** Failure to aggressively reduce emissions contributes to the escalating impacts of climate change, such as more frequent and intense extreme weather events (wildfires, floods, heatwaves), which have enormous economic costs in terms of infrastructure damage, healthcare, and lost productivity.
- **Impacts on Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation:** Many major resource projects impact Indigenous lands and rights. Weakening environmental assessment processes could undermine meaningful consultation and the protection of Indigenous traditional territories and ways of life.

Proponents of strong environmental regulation argue that it is not inherently anti-economic but rather a necessary component of sustainable economic development. They contend that well-designed regulations can drive innovation, create markets for green technologies, and ensure that economic activities do not impose unacceptable environmental and social costs that future generations will have to bear. The debate, therefore, is not simply "economy versus environment," but rather about what kind of economy is being pursued and how to integrate environmental sustainability into economic decision-making for the long term.

Chapter 8

The Myth of Conservative Fiscal Responsibility

8.1 Deficit Spending

The Conservative Party of Canada often campaigns on a platform of fiscal responsibility, balanced budgets, and prudent management of public finances, frequently criticizing opponents for excessive spending and accumulating debt. [8, 10, 25] However, an examination of historical fiscal performance and recent platform proposals suggests that Conservative governments have also incurred significant deficits, and their plans often rely on optimistic economic growth projections to achieve fiscal targets, particularly when combined with substantial tax cuts.

During the Stephen Harper Conservative government (2006-2015), while a key promise was to balance the budget, Canada experienced several years of deficit spending, particularly in response to the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. [14] The government implemented an "Economic Action Plan" which involved stimulus spending, leading to substantial deficits. While the budget was eventually balanced in the 2014-2015 fiscal year (showing a small surplus, though some analyses suggest a minor deficit [8]), this was achieved after years of deficits and significant increases in federal debt. Critics pointed out that the return to balance also involved restraint in program spending, which had its own set of consequences.

More recent Conservative Party platforms under leader Pierre Poilievre also project continued deficits, even while promising to reduce them over time compared to current government projections. For instance, the Conservative platform released around April 2025 projected a federal deficit of \$31 billion for the 2025-26 fiscal year, with cumulative shortfalls totaling around \$100 billion over the subsequent four years. [4, 5, 6, 9] The plan aimed to reduce the budgetary deficit to \$14 billion (0.4

Achieving these deficit reduction targets while also implementing significant proposed tax cuts (estimated at \$75 billion over four years in the 2025 platform) and new spending measures (\$35 billion over the same period) relies heavily on several assumptions. [4, 5] These include generating substantial additional revenue through economic growth spurred by deregulation and tax cuts (e.g., nearly \$60 billion in additional revenue through growth over four years was cited in one analysis of the 2025 platform [4]), as well as achieving significant savings from efficiencies and program reductions (e.g., \$34 billion in efficiencies and \$22 billion in program reductions). [4]

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) at the University of Ottawa, in assessing a hypothetical 2025 Conservative platform, noted that while the fiscal planning framework might be consistent with a declining debt-to-GDP ratio, there are downside risks. [4] They highlighted that the strategy to reduce the budgetary deficit during a period of potential economic weakness and high uncertainty could increase economic stability risks, and that many of the revenue increases are based on a significant increase in economic activities which may not materialize. [4]

The reliance on growth projections to offset the revenue impact of tax cuts is a common feature of supply-side economics, but its effectiveness is a subject of ongoing debate among economists. If the projected economic growth does not fully materialize, or if spending cuts and efficiencies prove more difficult to achieve than anticipated, deficits could be larger than projected.

Thus, while the rhetoric of fiscal conservatism emphasizes balanced budgets and debt reduction, the actual fiscal track record and future plans often involve periods of deficit spending. The "myth" aspect, as framed by critics, lies in the assertion of unique or superior fiscal prudence when the practice can involve similar challenges and reliance on optimistic assumptions as seen with other parties, especially when significant tax reductions are a core policy objective.

8.2 Economic Inequality

Conservative fiscal policies, particularly those centered on broad tax cuts (such as for corporations and higher earners) and restrained growth in social spending, have been criticized for potentially exacerbating economic inequality in Canada. While proponents argue these policies stimulate overall economic growth that benefits everyone, critics contend that the primary beneficiaries are often the wealthy, leading to a widening gap between the rich and the poor and a hollowing out of the middle class.

Several mechanisms through which Conservative fiscal policies might contribute to economic inequality include:

- **Regressive or Disproportionate Benefits from Tax Cuts:**

- **Corporate Tax Cuts:** Reductions in corporate income tax rates, a key policy under the Harper government [8] and often advocated by Conservatives, are argued by many economists to primarily benefit shareholders (who are typically higher-income individuals) and top executives, rather than leading to equivalent increases in wages for average workers or substantial job creation.
- **GST Cuts:** While the GST cut was broad-based [8], higher-income individuals, who spend more in absolute terms, receive a larger absolute benefit from a consumption tax cut. While it can provide some relief to lower-income individuals, its overall impact on progressivity is debated.
- **Capital Gains Tax Preferences:** Proposals to reduce or eliminate taxes on capital gains [37] disproportionately benefit wealthier individuals, as they hold the majority of such assets.
- **Changes to Income Tax Brackets/Rates:** While some Conservative proposals include cuts to lower income tax brackets [5, 31], the net effect of a package of tax changes, when combined with other measures, can still favour higher earners if benefits at

the top end are more substantial or if social programs that support lower earners are constrained.

- **Constraints on Social Spending and Public Services:**

- If tax cuts lead to reduced government revenues without being fully offset by economic growth, pressure mounts to restrain or cut spending on public services and social programs. [37] These services (e.g., affordable housing, public transit, childcare, employment insurance, social assistance) often play a crucial role in mitigating inequality by providing a safety net and opportunities for lower and middle-income Canadians.
- Reductions in federal transfers to provinces for health and education can also indirectly exacerbate inequality if provinces respond by cutting services or increasing user fees that disproportionately affect those with fewer resources.

- **Weakening Labour Protections and Collective Bargaining:** While not always a direct fiscal policy, broader policy stances that may weaken trade unions or labour protections can impact wage distribution and workers' ability to bargain for a larger share of economic gains, potentially contributing to inequality.

- **Focus on "Trickle-Down" Economics:** The underlying philosophy of some Conservative fiscal policies is that benefits provided to corporations and the wealthy will "trickle down" to the rest of the economy. Critics argue that evidence for the broad effectiveness of this approach in reducing inequality is weak, and that wealth often tends to concentrate at the top.

Data on income inequality in Canada often show that the gap between the richest and poorest Canadians has widened over recent decades, a trend influenced by various global and domestic factors, including technological change, globalization, and policy choices. The extent to which specific Conservative fiscal policies have directly caused or exacerbated this trend is a subject of economic research and debate.

However, analyses by organizations like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and Statistics Canada often highlight how the benefits of certain tax expenditures and policy changes are distributed across income deciles. [37] These analyses frequently show that policies favouring capital income over labour income, or providing broad tax relief that benefits higher earners more in absolute terms, can contribute to a less progressive tax and transfer system, thereby potentially increasing after-tax income inequality.

While Conservatives argue their policies create a stronger economy that ultimately provides opportunities for all [25], the concern from critics is that the structure of these policies often means that the "fruits" of that growth are not shared equitably, leaving lower-income Canadians with fewer resources and less support, and potentially entrenching existing economic disparities.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: Charting a Path Forward

The preceding chapters have offered a critical examination of various policies and actions undertaken by the Canadian Conservative Party, with a particular focus on the repeal of Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and its broader societal implications. This analysis suggests that certain policy directions have intersected with the rise of online extremism, challenges to LGBTQ+ rights, evolving approaches to multiculturalism, the spread of misinformation, fiscal policies with disproportionate benefits, and contentious environmental stances. Moving forward, a constructive path requires a multi-pronged approach centered on reinforcing democratic safeguards, promoting inclusive policies, and ensuring robust accountability for political leaders.

9.1 Reinstating Protections

The repeal of Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act in 2014 removed a specific civil remedy for online hate speech. [3, 7] While criminal sanctions against hate propaganda remain in the Criminal Code, these have a higher prosecutorial bar, including the need for Attorney General consent and proof of intent. [7, 32] Many, including the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in a 2019 report, have argued that this repeal left a gap in the ability to effectively combat the proliferation of hate online. [3, 40]

Therefore, a key consideration for charting a path forward is the potential reintroduction of carefully crafted legislation analogous to the former Section 13. Such legislation would need to be thoughtfully designed to address online communications that are likely to expose individuals or groups to hatred or contempt based on prohibited grounds of discrimination, while also navigating the complexities of freedom of expression. [3, 40] The aim would be to provide a more accessible, remedial (rather than purely punitive) avenue for victims of online hate to seek redress, focusing on the harmful impact of such speech. [7, 40] This could involve learning from the criticisms of the original Section 13, ensuring clarity in definitions (such as the definition of "hatred" as interpreted by the Supreme Court [1]), and establishing fair processes. The goal is to create a legal framework that effectively deters online hate speech and provides tangible recourse for those targeted, thereby fostering a safer and more inclusive online environment for all Canadians.

9.2 Inclusive Policies

To address the socio-economic disparities and marginalization discussed, a concerted effort towards implementing and strengthening inclusive policies is paramount. This involves several key areas:

- **Support for Marginalized Communities:** This includes robust, adequately funded programs and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and other groups facing systemic discrimination. For LGBTQ+ communities, this means affirming gender identity and expression in all federally regulated areas, ensuring access to gender-affirming care, and combating discrimination in employment, housing, and services. [12] For racial and ethnic minorities and immigrant communities, it involves strong multiculturalism policies that go beyond symbolic gestures to provide tangible support for settlement, integration, and the fight against racism and discrimination. [22]
- **Promoting Accurate Information and Combating Misinformation:** Governments and public institutions have a crucial role in providing clear, accurate, and evidence-based information, particularly during public health crises or on complex issues like climate change and economic policy. [35, 41] This also involves developing strategies to identify and counter the spread of deliberate misinformation and disinformation that can harm public trust and cohesion. This could include media literacy initiatives, support for independent journalism, and transparency in political advertising.
- **Prioritizing Environmental Sustainability:** A path forward must involve a firm commitment to addressing climate change and protecting the environment. This means implementing effective, evidence-based policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with Canada's international commitments, investing in renewable energy and green technologies, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring that environmental assessment processes are rigorous and consider long-term sustainability. [30, 45] This requires moving beyond a narrative that pits economic development against environmental protection and instead fosters a transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy that creates new opportunities.
- **Fair Fiscal Policies:** Tax and spending policies should be designed to reduce economic inequality and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared broadly. This includes a progressive tax system where those with the greatest ability to pay contribute their fair share, and robust investment in public services like healthcare, education, affordable housing, and social safety nets that benefit all Canadians, particularly the most vulnerable. [37]

Adopting such inclusive policies requires a proactive and sustained commitment from all levels of government, working in collaboration with civil society organizations, community groups, and the private sector.

9.3 Holding Leaders Accountable

A healthy democracy depends on the accountability of its political leaders and parties for their policies, actions, and public statements. Scrutinizing political narratives and ensuring that leaders are held responsible is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring that governance serves the public interest.

This involves several interconnected elements:

- **Vigorous Public Scrutiny:** Citizens, civil society organizations, academics, and the media all play a vital role in examining party platforms, policy decisions, and the rhetoric of political leaders. This includes fact-checking claims, analyzing the potential impacts of proposed policies on different segments of society, and questioning narratives that may be divisive or misleading. [14]
- **Transparency and Access to Information:** Governments must operate with a high degree of transparency, providing public access to information about decision-making processes, lobbying activities, and the data underpinning policy choices. This allows for informed public debate and oversight.
- **Strengthening Democratic Institutions:** Independent oversight bodies, such as Auditors General, Ethics Commissioners, Human Rights Commissions, and an independent judiciary, are essential for holding power to account. Their mandates should be protected and their resources ensured.
- **Electoral Accountability:** Ultimately, citizens hold political leaders accountable at the ballot box. An informed and engaged electorate that critically assesses the performance and promises of political parties is fundamental. This requires access to diverse sources of information and resistance to simplistic or polarizing narratives.
- **Ethical Conduct:** Political leaders have a responsibility to uphold high ethical standards, to be truthful in their communications, and to avoid rhetoric that incites hatred, division, or contempt for democratic processes and institutions. Codes of conduct for elected officials should be robust and effectively enforced.

By fostering a political culture that values and demands accountability, Canadians can help ensure that their leaders remain responsive to the needs and values of the entire populace, and that policy decisions are made in a manner that is transparent, equitable, and conducive to the long-term well-being of the country. This includes being vigilant about the potential consequences of policies that may, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to extremism, discrimination, or socio-economic hardship.

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