

Ideology and Social Class in Canada

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Introduction

It is often assumed that persons identifying with either the right or the left on the ideological spectrum intersect with social class so that those associated with the “lower class” would be more inclined to identify with the left while those identifying as upper class would be more likely to identify with the right. Yet rarely have those relationships been measured. The Association for Canadian Studies conducted a survey with the firm Leger Marketing to test the relationship between one’s ideological identification and how they described themselves across traditional social classes. While those who associated with the lower class were somewhat more likely to identify with the left the survey results call for far more nuance in assumptions about social class designation and ideological preference.

Data on rates of poverty from the 2021 census on the basis of immigrant and visible minority status also call for more nuance when making generalizations about visible minorities in Canada relative to those persons not identifying as visible minority. In sum the survey and census data invite caution when making generalizations about the relationship between ideology and identities in Canada.

The Leger survey was conducted during the week of September 25th, 2023 for the Association for Canadian Studies via web panel with 1502 Canadians. A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparison purposes. A probability sample of 1502 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20

A narrow majority of Canadians describe themselves as middle class while some one in three say that they are lower middle or low class; Most Canadians identify with the center of the ideological spectrum, with more persons identifying to the left than the right

Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular social or economic class. Which of the following classes would you say you belong to?	Lower Class	Lower Middle Class	Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Upper Class	Don't Know
Class Identification	8%	25%	51%	12%	.5	4%

In thinking about the ideological spectrum, how would you situate yourself?	Right	Right of Centre	Centre	Left of Centre	Left	I don't know
Ideological Identification	5%	14%	32%	16%	7%	25%

Those defining as lower class more likely to be on the left of spectrum but by far most likely not to respond. Canada’s middle class most likely to situate on the left than on the right. However more than one in four that say they are upper middle class situate to the left of the spectrum

Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular social or economic class. Which of the following classes would you say you belong to?					
In thinking about the ideological spectrum, how would you situate yourself?	Lower Class	Lower Middle Class	Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Upper Class
Right	3%	7%	5%	5%	NS
Right of Centre	5%	15%	13%	30%	NS
Centre	25%	30%	36%	25%	NS
Left of Centre	17%	14%	16%	21%	NS
Left	10%	6%	7%	6%	NS
I don't know/prefer not to answer	39%	27%	23%	13%	NS
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	NS

Visible Minority identification and Immigrant Identification do not make for meaningful differences in ideological orientation and immigrants more likely than non immigrants to identify to the right

In thinking about the ideological spectrum, how would you situate yourself?	Visible Minority	Not Visible Minority	Born in Canada	Born Outside of Canada
Right	3%	6%	6%	5%
Right of Centre	16%	14%	13%	18%
Centre	36%	31%	33%	30%
Left of Centre	14%	17%	16%	17%
Left	7%	7%	8%	3%
I don't know/Prefer not to answer	24%	25%	25%	27%

Canada's immigrants most likely to define themselves as middle class otherwise class profiles are roughly similar

Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular social or economic class. Which of the following classes would you say you belong to?	Visible Minority	Not Visible Minority	Born in Canada	Born Outside of Canada
Lower class	9%	7%	8%	8%
Lower middle class	24%	25%	26%	24%
Middle class	52%	52%	50%	57%
Upper middle class	11%	12%	12%	7%
Upper class	.6%	.5%	.5%	.3%
I don't know/Prefer not to answer	4%	3%	4%	4%

Surprisingly while French and English Canadians are more likely to identify with the left than the right, third or ethnic language minorities were more likely to identify with the right than the left though most situate themselves in the center

	What is the language you first learned at home in your childhood and that you still understand?			
In thinking about the ideological spectrum, how would you situate yourself?	French	English	Other	Total
Right	4%	6%	4%	5%
Right of Centre	11%	15%	17%	14%
Centre	28%	33%	39%	32%
Left of Centre	18%	15%	9%	16%
Left	2%	9%	4%	7%
I don't know/Prefer not to answer	37%	22%	28%	26%

University degree holders tend to be split between right and left though most are at the center

In thinking about the ideological spectrum, how would you situate yourself?	What is the last year of education that you have completed?		
	High School or Vocational	College	University Bachelors
Right	5%	6%	5%
Right of Centre	9%	15%	21%
Centre	33%	33%	31%
Left of Centre	9%	17%	18%
Left	7%	6%	10%
I don't know/Prefer not to answer	38%	24%	16%

The most educated Canadians are more likely to identify as upper class

	What is the last year of education that you have completed?						
Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular social or economic class. Which of the following classes would you say you belong to?	Elementary	High School or Vocational	College	University certificates	University Bachelors	University Masters	University Doctorate
Lower class	21%	12%	8%	3%	3%	3%	5%
Lower middle class	26%	31%	28%	19%	18%	13%	5%
Middle class	42%	46%	52%	58%	57%	58%	55%
Upper middle class	NS	6%	10%	15%	19%	20%	20%
Upper class	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	3%	10%
I don't know/Prefer not to answer	5%	6%	2%	4%	3%	4%	5%

Gaps between visible minority and not visible minority narrow considerably in the second generation when it comes to poverty rates for 35-44 years of age

Individual MBM: Poverty rate (%) 35 to 44 years Canada 2020 (Census of Canada 2021)	Total - Generation status	First generation	Second generation	Third generation or more
Total -	7.5	11.1	5.4	5.7
Total visible minority population	10.9	11.8	5.4	9.1
South Asian	8.5	9.1	4.2	7.1
Chinese	13.2	15.6	4.3	6.8
Black	11.9	13	7.4	12.2
Filipino	4.9	4.9	4.7	2.6
Arab	15.8	16.6	6.4	7.4
Latin American	12.7	13.2	7.1	11.3
Southeast Asian	10.1	10.9	6.5	5.8
West Asian	15.7	16	4.4	30
Korean	19.4	21.2	5.9	0
Japanese	9.2	11.9	5.2	5.6
Not a visible minority	5.9	8.6	5.3	5.7

Similar pattern emerges when it comes to rates of poverty in the second generation for the 18-64 age group with the gap narrowing between visible minority and not visible minority

Individual MBM: Poverty rate (%) 18 to 64 years Canada 2020 (2021 census of Canada)	Total - Generation status	First generation	Second generation	Third generation or more
Total -	9	13.1	6.4	7.3
Total visible minority population	12.7	14.1	6	10.8
South Asian	12.1	13.7	4.1	9.6
Chinese	16.4	19.1	6.1	7.7
Black	12.7	14.2	7.7	13.5
Filipino	4.6	4.6	4.7	9.6
Arab	15.5	16.8	7.1	12.3
Latin American	13.4	14.3	7.4	13.7
Southeast Asian	11.9	13.6	6.5	13.3
West Asian	15.7	16.4	6.8	21.3
Korean	18.3	19.5	8.3	14.6
Japanese	11.3	16.1	7.4	6.4
Not a visible minority	7.5	9.9	6.5	7.3