



**THE PEP**

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## FOREWORD

The 2022-2023 academic year is done after a long month of research papers and final exams. As a celebration of the previous year, and to give us all a bit of a writing break, we have compiled a collection of some of the best articles of the last two semesters. The following represent some of the key themes and topics we have been able to explore in the *Gazette* this year. From debates about the place of the monarchy in Canada to post-Cold War international relations, and from the nature of Canadian federalism to current political news topics, we have been able to have a variety of discussions of important issues in political studies outside of the standard curriculum.

We look forward to publishing some interesting work throughout the summer and preparing to get back into the swing of things for the coming school year. As always, we look forward to hearing what you have to say.

*Scott Ripley MSVU PEPS Alum*

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## **R. V. PARTISANSHIP**

*Logan Oderkirk*

As children we are rightfully told that we are very lucky to live in a democratic nation. We are told this long before we are ever taught how our government works or even the concept of state. We are told that people have fought and died for the right to vote and that it is something we shouldn't take for granted. The idea of democracy is one that many in this world hold dearly and look upon fondly. But not all democracies are created equally. It's important that we understand what makes a democracy strong so we can preserve it for generations to come.

So, what makes a democracy a democracy? Well, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "**democracy**, literally [means], rule by the people." (n.d) Pretty simple but leaves some room to the imagination. Democracy, back then meant, only men could vote. Not just any men, noble men who owned land. Now a days we would not call that very democratic. So, we know the word and how it is open to interpretation but that doesn't answer the question. What makes a democracy a democracy and what makes a strong one? Democracy to me means that all people have a say in the running of their government. No matter their race, religion, creed, or sexuality, as long as you are a citizen and are of age, you deserve a say. What do I mean by a say? A vote to elect a representative or run as one yourself if you wish to. Okay that's pretty simple. But our governments are much more complex than that. We have branches of government and within those branches' different bodies. All of this adds complexity, and THIS nuance is where the strength of a democracy is determined.

In recent weeks the question of how Canada's government works have come back into the spotlight due to the recent passing of the Queen. It's no secret. To some this is the worst part of this country. To others, it's the best part of this country, to the rest, they simply don't care as it never interferes with their life. To me, a non-elected, non-partisan head of state is the reason Canada is a strong democracy. I'm not the only one who thinks that Canada is a strong democracy. Canada scores highly across a wide variety of democracy indexes alongside a disproportionate amount of other constitutional monarchies like, in no particular order, Norway, the Netherlands, The United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, and the list goes on. Constitutional monarchy is NOT the most popular flavour of democracy and while not required to have a strong democracy, one does have to note the trend of a specific type of democracy consistently rating highly. This is the core foundation of my thought process.

I ask to those who wish to break open the constitution and throw out the monarchy, why to throw away a proven reliable system of governance? Why go through the immense challenge of opening the constitution of Canada to risk breaking a system that is proven to maintain stability and uphold democratic values? We can deliver on many of the issues that come from

ties to the British monarchy through collaboration and reconciliation that don't require the theatrics of costly, performative, and dangerous constitutional amendments that install a partisan or elected head of state.

What's so wrong with an elected or partisan head of state you ask? It's a good question. At face value, it seems like the most democratic option, but in practice we see that overtime it becomes a damaging factor to democracy. Its simple, Humans act in their own best interest. When you allow a partisan figure to be head of state, they can pass laws completely on their own with no oversight and pardon their friends when they get into trouble. This is not a technicality but a reality. One very famous case was when President Donald Trump pardoned a slew of his friends. (Kelly et al, 2020) While this is possible in Canada, the role of head of state is so strictly defined by protocol and precedent that the first action of selfishness would be met by immediate dismissal and a bloodbath brought on by the Canadian people.

This does not stop the role from having significance though. The sovereign still operates as a safeguard of the constitution and we have seen this happen abroad in the United Kingdom and in the Caribbean where the sovereign as intervened in the best interest of the people, like getting rid of apartheid in South Africa for example. (Mulrone, 2020)

That particular issue reminds us that sometimes the right thing isn't the popular thing. Partisan figures are all the time caught in between a rock and a hard place because they either tow the line OR do the right thing. They risk losing their job if they don't tow the line and will usually make sacrifice the people to preserve their political life. We see it all the time. Sometimes the intent is good, but it still results in a negative outcome for the people. If the head of state isn't elected and is non-partisan, they have no line to tow but that of the people and the constitution. One could say they are sober. They are only beholden to the people not ideology or vested interests.

That previous point leads me to this more "high in the sky" point but hear me out. No matter how you slice it partisan figures are innately controversial. It's just how politics works. My list of best Prime Ministers is different than yours most likely. It's just how it is. When your head of state is non-partisan and a-political, they are someone that everyone can rally behind. They are someone everyone can be proud of to represent their nation. Our current governor general, Mary Simon is a great example. She is the first indigenous person to represent the Crown in Canada and is a kind, hardworking, diligent person that no matter your politics, no matter your outlook, you can agree that she shows a positive image for Canada. In being non-partisan the monarchy and the office of the Governor General lends itself to the values of people and not ideology and I think that's very powerful and unifying in a world of division and cold partisanship.

So, what do you say? Do we need to cut ties with the monarchy? Or do you believe that we have it pretty good here with His Royal Highness King Charles III and Her Excellency Mary Simon? I'd love to hear your thoughts in a future article for the MSVU PEPS gazette.

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## **THE QUIET WEIGHT OF THE CROWN: SOFT POWER AND THE PERPETUATION OF HEGEMONY**

*Scott Ripley*

This article is being written in the wake of the death of Canada's monarch Queen Elizabeth II. It is not, however, being published until after the official mourning period across the Commonwealth realms has ended. Often when events precipitate discussions of change those fond of the status quo will denounce such discussions as disrespectful or merely opportunistic political maneuvers seeking to capitalize off a tragedy. While I do not see it that way, I appreciate that those I am trying to convince might. However, I would ask those who do to acknowledge that issues of public concern should be openly discussed at times when the subject is in the forefront of public attention. I hope that it can be agreed that it is no longer too soon to be having this discussion.

I would also like to pre-empt a common argument for keeping the monarchy in Canada. Given the constitutional restraints placed on the sitting monarch, people often argue that there is no need to go through the hassle of replacing the monarchy. This was a position I once held. I believed that only if the monarch tried to use their position to do something against the interest of this country would their removal be warranted. What I failed to consider was that the monarchy does have power and influence over this country and others, despite constitutional restraints. As former Governor General Michaëlle Jean put it in the CBC's 2022 documentary [The Queen and Canada](#) "it's a very special position: no executive power, but a soft power". It is the presence of this soft power that warrants the removal of the monarchy in Canada.

A common refrain during CBC's extensive coverage of the death and funeral of the Queen was that she, both as sovereign and as a person, served as a sturdy and unifying figure for Canadians and those in the Commonwealth. While no one could argue that seventy years was anything short of sturdy, my issue is with the idea that she somehow united all Canadians. The foundations of the monarchy rest in two institutions that have divided rather than unified people in this country: Christianity and imperialism.

As per the [Royal Style and Titles Act](#), the Queen was titled "Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Canada and Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith" and presumably King Charles will be styled similarly. The foundational aspect of the Christian religion in the sovereign's authority is clear, and to those who follow that faith that might be reason enough to accept that authority. However, to the increasing numbers of non-religious people and members of the multitude of non-Christian

religions in this country, an appeal to the grace of one religion's specific deity is hardly justification.

A less stated but perhaps more influential foundation of the monarchy comes from the economic role imperialism and colonization had for the settler population of British colonies. As European monarchies financed expeditions to claim land in the names of their various crowns, settler colonies like what would become this country allowed for the formation of a class of white landowners whose wealth has been passed down to many white Canadians alive today. We are taught in our high school history classes about the opening of the West and how European settlers were given free land from the government. But that land came at an enormous cost to Indigenous peoples when it was stolen by the Crown. Alongside land as a source of wealth, Canadians profited from our place within the British imperial trade network. While this was beneficial to settler populations within the empire, its costs were also paid by indigenous peoples on every continent whose land and labour were exploited to provide the imperial core its wealth.

Why does this all matter? Is this not all in the past? And is not the monarchy today merely symbolic of this past rather than representing any contemporary issues?

This all matters precisely because the symbology of the monarchy perpetuates the effects of this past into the modern day. Through its soft power the monarchy legitimizes the connections between wealth, Christianity, empire, and the right to rule. To those who have benefitted from the socio-economic order established through imperialism, the Crown might look like a neutral figure for us all to accept as representative and unifying us in a common identity. What I ask is for those who see it this way to try to see the water that we are swimming in. We are all surrounded by a sea of normalized imperial hegemony, but we often fail to see how many have drowned because of it.

If we are to have any hope of actually unifying people, to have true reconciliation, and to end cycles of exploitation we need to be willing to stop venerating symbols that uphold a status quo that has harmed so many.



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## **TOWARDS PERPETUAL PEACE OR WORLD WAR**

*Sam Clancey*

The periodization of history is an easily contestable field. The variety of perspectives or points of emphasis which are valued by various relevant groups will always lead to a variety of systems to split up the various eras into a comprehensible and meaningful narrative. One method of periodization which is often used is the division of history based on the treaties or conferences ending large all-consuming wars. The end of a total war is generally marked by a new order in the norms and values of foreign relations and the redrawing of borders across the contested territories and especially the defeated powers.

In this view we are currently simultaneously in the era drafted by the victors of WWII and the Cold War. We are living in both simultaneously because while the post WWII international order was developed through various meetings and congresses held by the victorious powers, the end of the cold war was a less well-planned affair. It is certain that the borders of eastern Europe and the politics of central Europe still live in the shadow of the USSR but no thoughtful negotiations by the victorious capitalist powers were carried out in order to ensure long term regional stability. The victory in the cold war was widely believed to represent the beginning of the end of the idea of interstate conflict in general (Fukuyama, 2013). The post-Cold War order doesn't carry with it a new moral, political and economic mode of life, as the Treaties of Versailles or Westphalia did. Rather, the post-Cold War era is one defined by a victory of liberal foreign policy rather than realist foreign policy.

In this way it was expected that the future of peace between great powers would be carried out based on the principals which the United States have long promoted as an antidote to great power conflict (i.e., multilateralism, free trade, negotiated settlements) (Wilson, 2013). From 1989 to 2022 it seemed like they might even be right. Only a dense area of great powers is capable of generating a general world conflict because only such a conglomeration of powers is capable of pulling a vast number of the minor nations into total war. Europe and east Asia are the only regions containing such an environment. The liberal foreign policy order has theorized that a stable democratic nation would never launch a war of aggression (Doyle, 2013). So long as democracy is propagated in the majority of countries in those two key regions world war should be impossible, by this view. While wars were waged elsewhere these two regions had been successfully exorcised of the spirit of war for three decades now. However, history has shown us again and again that optimistic, relaxed, utopian foreign policy makers will always let their guard down, like a horror movie protagonist, and allow the monster of war to arise again and again in every cinematic sequel.

The rise of populist nationalism has not been ignored by the liberal world. It is a catastrophe for policy makers because even if the premises of Liberal foreign policy are assumed to be true it cannot be useful as a method to understand interstate conflict if a liberal society is at any moment, capable of transforming into an illiberal society. In this way liberal theory on peace and conflict only moves the target of analysis from foreign policy itself to domestic politics. The ability for successful liberal democracies to turn on their liberal values and embrace nationalism is a threat to the conceptual basis of the post-Cold War peace. One previously liberal country which has seen the meteoric rise of a militaristic, nationalistic, populism is Kyrgyzstan. The current president, Sadyr Japarov, once was exiled and then imprisoned due to his involvement in an attempted coup in 2013. He ran for president from prison on a platform of acquitting himself and building a strong Kyrgyzstan with an independent militaristic foreign policy (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2021). The model of development in the states residing in the central Asian steppes is based on the control, extraction, and taxation of their vast, accessible mineral wealth. By using a strong military state to control mines both in Kyrgyzstan and expanding their territory through military aggression, Japarov intends to make Kyrgyzstan the dominant regional power in central Asia. To accomplish this, he has built the Kyrgyz army into a formidable force and gained the public's enthusiasm through energetic nationalistic rhetoric.

So far, he has been extremely successful, he gained valuable mines and rivers from Uzbekistan through military posturing (Lillis, 2022). and is in the process of doing something similar to Tajikistan (Dzyubenko, et al., 2021). The conflict with Tajikistan escalated to the point that their militaries clashed causing hundreds of thousands of civilians to be displaced. This is a disaster for international stability because a small power demonstrating successful annexation of valuable territories through cheap military posturing will encourage more governments to adopt expansionist militarist foreign policies. This can also be seen in Azerbaijan's quick victory over Armenia which led to the annexation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in 2020 or Turkey's ongoing occupation of northern Syria.

All these conflicts amount to a danger to what realist foreign policy theorists call the "offense-defense balance". This refers to what military and foreign policy analysts perceive as the most advantageous strategy if an interstate conflict were to occur. In an environment where defense is favored security can be achieved by passively building up one's own military, economy and international relationships. This has been the situation we have found ourselves in since the invention of nuclear weapons. Today this balance is being tilted towards the side of offence by both the actions of small non-nuclear nations and new doctrines published by large nuclear armed states (DoD, 2018). A policy world tilted towards the offence side of the balance is one where the one who attacks first is likely to win. If we are put in a situation where conflict seems inevitable an offense leaning perception will strongly incentivize policy makers to strike first. This is "doubly dangerous" if defensive deterrence cannot be differentiated from offensive capabilities by all relevant actors (Jervis, 2013).

All that has been said so far has been said without mention of the Russo-Ukrainian war. It is without a doubt true that this war is the most inflammatory, the largest, the most dangerous, the closest to igniting a total war in the last four decades. However, I left it until last to emphasize that it is not occurring in a vacuum. It is likely that the rapid success of the Azerbaijani forces in 2020 contributed to Russian military planner's overconfidence. In turn, the result of this major European war will have ripple effects for dozens of possible conflicts in every nation in every region of the world. The leaders of lesser countries are reliant on the great powers in terms of both hard power (trade, military advisors) and soft power (universities, mass media), so the results of great power conflicts can drastically change how, when, and why minor power conflicts occur.

The period from the end of WWII to around 2016 or 2020 is one characterized by careful political maneuvering on the world stage fueled by a popular abhorrence of war. The period we are now living in is one which is changing rapidly. War is not seen only as a last resort today. Many governments are thinking about what foreign policy to pursue and keeping an aggressive war as a possibility. In a nuclear armed world this is an insane proposition, but it is the reality we are being confronted with. It feels like the generation who knew total war, the generation of policy makers with a direct link to the awful events of WWII are dying out. All their carefully negotiated settlements are turning into dust and floating away while a new less mature breed of policy maker is rising to the top in various societies around the world. We are like Germany in the early 1900's, passing from rule by Bismarck's Realpolitik to Wilhelm's Weltpolitik. The ambitious energy is intoxicating but an ideal and peaceful world will never be achieved by a shift in doctrine because the world is not controlled by doctrines. Only the practical and rigorous examination of each potential conflict can enable us to successfully disarm the flashpoint. The dream of a just world order dedicated to peace above all can only be achieved if we are first willing to live in the mundane world as it presently exists and resist the impulse to jump towards the most obvious solution to any given international crisis.

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## **THE AVERAGE POLITICAL LEADER: ANALYZING BREAKFAST WITH JUSTIN**

*Natalie Locke*

During Pierre Poilievre’s leadership campaign, he released “Breakfast with Justin,” in which he pretends to have a conversation with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau over breakfast in a restaurant. Poilievre’s video is serious, informative, and part of his recent campaign strategy. The video expresses Poilievre’s idea he, and the Conservatives, are different from the Liberal Party. Poilievre believes he is set apart as he represents the idea of the “average Canadian.” The average Canadian is hard-working, negatively affected by Liberal policies, and deserve better. Poilievre is suggesting “better” through him, his party, and ideology.

The one-on-one setting mimics a welcoming environment where the Liberals listen to Conservatives. However, there is no collaboration of ideas. The conversation is one-sided. Poilievre is not interested in dialogue, or he would have had a debate with Trudeau. He is interested in governing the country and framing himself in a commanding position. Additionally, the video is indented to feel like an intimate conversation between the two private parties, specifically two leaders. Yet, viewers are in place of Trudeau, indicating watchers must “listen up” as well. For Poilievre, Canadians will suffer without the implementation of his ideas, and he wants the average Canadian to understand this.

In “Breakfast with Justin,” Poilievre is trying to embody the “average Canadian.” He is more dressed down than usual, wearing a button-up shirt instead of a suit jacket (Poilievre, 2022, 00:00:14). Due to the lack of modern décor, he appears to be in a local restaurant, as opposed to a chain (Poilievre, 2022, 00:00:14). Poilievre’s image as a leader but also the average Canadian is represented through space and appearance. Dressing casually and eating in a low-scale restaurant could make him appear inadequate. However, as a future leader, he is “marked as respectable” in the space because of his current and future status (Razack, 2002, p. 10). Eating local makes him relatable, in support of local economies. The space he has chosen to film in is deliberate.

While talking with “Justin,” Poilievre pushes the narrative the average person in Canada is hardworking and therefore, does not deserve to struggle economically. In other words, everyday Canadians deserve more than a Liberal government: “The average Canadian can’t dream of going on vacation... they’re dreaming about affording food” (Poilievre, 2022, 00:49-57). One of the purposes of “Breakfast with Justin” is to hold the Liberals responsible, such is evident through Poilievre’s language. From 00:00:24-49, the future leader comments on the increased prices of coffee, bacon, milk, bread, butter, and eggs (Poilievre, 2022). His tone indicates Trudeau is unaware of these increases. How Poilievre speaks and what he says helps further the narrative Trudeau and the Liberals are out of touch. In reality, Poilievre does not

understand “taking out a loan so that you can eat” (00:01:13) in these current economic circumstances because he is not currently lower class himself. Through his video, he is claiming to be different, but he is like any other politician or Liberal. This fall, the House of Commons has not been sitting long and Poilievre already has a scandal. For years, Poilievre’s videos have had the publicly hidden hashtag “MGTOW” (The Canadian Press, 2022). MGTOW stands for Men Going Their Own Way, linked to an “anti-feminist movement” (The Canadian Press, 2022). “Breakfast with Justin” has almost half a million views. Poilievre’s narrative did speak to some Canadians but now his image is becoming clearer as the “average political leader.”

Throughout the conversation, Poilievre is speaking between bites (00:01:26). The behaviour speaks to the casual setting but also is a way to convince the audience the future leader of the Conservative party really would have breakfast with Justin. The possibility of such an interaction is key because the next election is not upcoming soon. Conservatives must be an effective opposition to help create their ideal government. Governing requires collaboration and the setting makes it seem plausible. Nevertheless, Poilievre does not appear too happy about working together. As opposition, he will hold the Liberals accountable.

Pierre Poilievre’s “Breakfast with Justin” engages in the narrative that politicians, particularly the Liberals, are untrustworthy. He is representing himself as different from the rest while simultaneously defining himself as average. Poilievre attempts to solidify his character as authentically Canadian by dressing casually, speaking one-on-one, and eating and supporting locals. However, Poilievre is focused on campaign strategy, only willing to sit down with Justin to debate if he gets to direct the conversation. He resembles the Liberals by way of scandal, furthering himself from being an average Canadian.

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## **ALUMNUS LETTER**

*William (Will) Brewer, MountAbility Program*

Dear students of MSVU,

If you have heard the fork in the road story you would know what this is, however, there is a twist to it.

A student walks through the mountains until they get to a fork in the road where there's a professor, an alumnus, and the president of the Mount.

So the student asks "How can I achieve success in my education?"

The **professor replies** "Well, with great success comes great responsibility to study and work hard."

The **president replies** "Well, if you want to achieve success, you need to learn and to familiarize yourself with the surroundings at the school so you can achieve necessary skills so you can be a part of the Mount Mystic family."

The **alumnus replies** "You see that mountain up there if you climb that mountain, you will become me, however, you will meet people along the way that could help you not just the professor or the president however the people you connect with will be along that path going up to the mountain."

The student thinks and ponders about their decision to walk the path of the professor, the president, or the alumnus.

They sit down and say "I'm gonna meditate on this if you don't mind."

While the student meditates, they meet four people in their thoughts. They are the professor, the president, and the alumnus, as well as their self as they see themselves as someone who achieved beyond their inner person and achieved all that they wanted in life while at school.

The student wakes up from their meditation and has chosen they all ask, "What have you decided?"

"I have decided the alumnus. I'm going to climb that mountain to achieve success in my own way. Thank you so much, and you're all invited."

The moral of this was the professor, the president, and the alumnus were actually themselves because that's how they achieved success is what the answer the student wanted.



Before all this the student actually got elected to be on student council then went on to be a member of a SU society while being a student and worked with everyone to achieve what the student wanted.

As alumni myself you will achieve all what you will learn I wish you all the best at your studies learn hard, get your grades up and of course Merry Christmas and have a warm and safe holiday hope to see you at the next graduation.

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## **THE FRAYING ROPE OF FEDERALISM: HOW EAST-WEST TENSIONS STRESS CANADA'S CONSTITUTIONAL FABRIC**

*Scott Ripley*

Recent legislation out of [Saskatchewan](#) and [Alberta](#) has contributed to a growing movement that seeks to increase provincial autonomy from the federal government. Similarly to [Quebec's Bill 96](#) last year, the measures coming out of the Prairies are causing constitutional worries. Although [Western Alienation](#) is by no means a new issue in Canada, these most recent manifestations of the concept are indicative of the gradual reduction of the ability of federal institutions to maintain national unity.

Any article discussing Western Alienation would be remiss not to provide a brief overview of the history of East-West relations in Canada. “Provincial twins” Alberta and Saskatchewan were created by respectively titled Acts in 1905 (Young & Berdahl, 2022). For the first quarter century of their provincehood, the federal government had jurisdiction over each province’s natural resources, an arrangement unique to the Prairie provinces. Tariffs put in place by Ottawa to protect Central Canada’s manufacturing industry did so at the expense of Western access to cheaper products from the United States. Trudeau the Elder’s 1980 [National Energy Program](#) is the quintessential example of a policy seen to be exploitative of the West for the East’s gain. In more recent years under Trudeau the Younger, oil pipelines and COVID restrictions have been the arenas of intergovernmental conflict.

Regardless of the immediate impact of these newly signed Acts, they represent the continuation of a pattern described by public administration scholar Donald Savoie in a 2000 paper. In it, Savoie details the evolution of the factors that have influenced how regionalism has affected economic development and federal-provincial relations. The thesis put forward is that, since the rise of neoliberal governance and globalization, economic forces no longer contribute to national unity. Savoie argues that this leaves only Canada’s “national political institutions” to unify the country’s regions but that they “are in a state of disrepair and are no longer in a position to promote national political integration” (p. 203). Loleen Berdahl (2021), who has studied the evolution of Western Alienation in the time since Savoie’s paper, sees the continual presence of these grievances as evidence of “its structural roots within the Canadian federation” (p. 1).

The efforts of Premiers Smith and Moe are just the most recent manifestations of this alienation; however, they are unique in the way they treat an important national political institution: the Constitution. Instead of continuing the pattern of “attempting one ‘reform’ after another” (Savoie, 2000, p. 216), the legislation “[tries] to redefine the Constitution on their own terms” (Young & Berdahl, 2022). Given the barrier that is the amending formula and the history

of failed attempts at reforming it, it is little wonder that Alberta and Saskatchewan are choosing to take independent approaches to the Constitution. By circumventing the procedures put in place to maintain interprovincial agreement on Canada's very framework, these actions are eroding the ability of the Constitution to be a unifying force. Young and Berdahl (2022) acknowledge that this represents a challenge to Canadian federalism but note that each time the country has faced a challenge like this, the federation reshapes itself in some way. With the forces that strain its unity growing more powerful, our current federal arrangement is clearly bound to change shape, though it remains to be seen if it will stretch to adapt or if it will be torn.

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## **WHO ARE POLITICAL ACTORS?**

*Natalie Locke*

I am taking a course this semester about government administration in Canada. While discussing whistle-blowers, their role, their risk, I had a small epiphany. Public administrators are political actors. I believe the regulations limiting their political activity is the government's attempt to suppress the notion they are political actors. This got me thinking, who else can be considered actors?

Last month, I wrote about family gatherings and how I'm convinced everything is politics. Perhaps we are all political actors too.

To state the obvious, voting makes someone a political actor. But what about in everyday life? How do the choices we make turn us into actors? A decision as small as which grocery store to shop from can be political. For example, Sobeys can be a bit expensive but Giant Tiger is also nearby. Giant Tiger has cheaper vegetables this week, as advertised in the flyer. We can shift our routines as a result of external forces, like inflation, wages, and the cost of living. Take work, for instance. Workplaces have political cultures. They monitor what we can and cannot discuss, who we report to, and how we report. We complain to our co-workers about having to work through lunch and about the pressure to perform. Talking about issues in the workplace is political. It is a political act because you are questioning norms, the givens, structures, and procedures around you. Activism can be in the form of resistance i.e., complaining about your boss.

I guess what I am thinking is we are all political actors. It is not something we might be one day become or engage with once every four years. By participating in society (or not) we interact with political systems and make choices based on our knowledge of those systems.

Consider your power as a political actor in all areas of life. Your voice and decisions matter at home, in the grocery store, and beyond.

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## **PETRI DISH FEDERALISM: JUSTIN TRUDEAU'S HOPES FOR DATA TRANSPARENCY IN THE HEALTHCARE CRISIS**

*Scott Ripley*

On Thursday February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had the privilege of meeting with over one hundred university students from across the Halifax region at Dalhousie's Collaborative Health Education Building in [a town hall-style event](#). In what felt eerily like a dress rehearsal for a 2024 (or thereabouts) election campaign stop, the Prime Minister announced some policy and took questions from about a half a dozen students on a range of healthcare-related topics. An excellent overview of the event can be found [here](#). What piqued my interest were Trudeau's comments concerning jurisdictional factors that hamper our ability to provide a consistent quality of services across the country. Those comments are what will be explored in this article.

In his introductory remarks, the Prime Minister outlined some of the difficulties the federal government faces in addressing the poor state of healthcare today, specifically he noted that "...the challenge is: the way our constitution is set up, the federal government isn't the boss of the provinces, we are partners in running this country..." before giving a brief summary of [Part VI](#) of the Constitution. Social services, in his understanding, "[vary] enough province to province" that they are justified in being dealt with by local provincial governments. One answer Trudeau provided was the idea of federal funding on the condition that provinces invest in "data transparency and accountability of results." The goal of this being to ensure that we can accurately compare the quality of services being provided across Canada's thirteen constituent healthcare systems. This, Trudeau puts forward, will help to promote "learning from successful innovation from one area to another."

The final audience question of the event also touched on the problems of not having a truly universal healthcare system, specifically how procedures can have drastically different wait times between provinces. In his response, the Prime Minister described our various healthcare systems as "very very siloed." He brought up the story of Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Dominic LeBlanc's diagnosis of cancer in Moncton and subsequent referral to a Montreal doctor for specialist treatment because there were no specialists available in New Brunswick and the specialist he saw could not practice outside of Quebec. The lack of a national licensing authority was suggested as a significant factor in the Minister's and the audience member's experiences of nationally inconsistent services. Trudeau brought the question back to data transparency and suggested that through usable comparative data, voters would have the necessary information to hold their provincial governments accountable for poor relative healthcare outcomes.

The genius of Canada is that we have different provinces that do things differently and that allows for a lot of flexibility and a lot of learning, a lot of appropriateness across the country. But it only really works if we can then properly realize ‘okay, let’s take the best of what works everywhere across the country.’

This was one of the final points the Prime Minister made during the event and his last point made on the subject of the effects of federalism on healthcare. With these statements we can outline the arguments Trudeau put forward regarding what to do about the jurisdictional complexities of our federal system.

It is clear Justin Trudeau recognizes that healthcare as administered by thirteen distinct entities has problems unique to a federal state. Non-standardized data collection practices and out-of-sync licensing practices are issues that he agrees cause non-equal quality of care between provinces and an inability to accurately analyze these discrepancies. However, he also believes that having healthcare as a provincial responsibility is beneficial because of the differences between provinces being great enough that each needs to be specialized in their approach. He also argues that having multiple systems, each approaching healthcare in different ways, allows for a Darwinian-type mechanism of changes being tested for viability. Beneficial changes can be implemented in other provinces and ineffective ones can be avoided he would argue. Trudeau’s two main solutions for these problems, nation-wide data collection standards and nation-wide licensing standards for doctors, are designed to make the process of innovation more effective, have doctors able to provide care anywhere in Canada, and to give voters the metrics with which to measure the competency of their provincial governments. I will argue that although these proposed solutions would be beneficial to the state of healthcare in this country, they do not mend the rifts caused by federalism.

To start, I do agree that having doctors be certified to practice across Canada and having genuinely comparable data across the country would help to lessen the disparities of service. Doctors would have more freedom to move their practices to wherever they felt they were needed, and many specialists would be able to rotate throughout the country so that people in underserved provinces are not burdened with travel. Nationally standardized data would indeed allow for proper comparisons across regions, but I do not believe they would be sufficient to boost innovation and political pressure to improve services. Each province and territory acts as a petri dish where different experiments can be done to test new practices, but the trouble comes from having those practices implemented by those running the other experiments. Institutional inertia would have to be overcome a dozen times each time some newer innovation was revealed through experimentation in order to have uniform care across Canada. Provincial governments are not necessarily going to change what they are doing because of another province’s success. It is unlikely that those same governments are going to be effectively pressured by voters to do so either. For the vast majority of people, the prospect of moving to another province for better care is not reasonably achievable and politicians would know that, so it is not as though people would be able to vote with their feet, as it were. Even at the ballot box, enough citizens would have to

coordinate as a voting bloc on the specific issue they want to push their government on. Many ridings are either not competitive or really only have two options that have a reasonable chance at taking the seat. While in theory an election can be decided by voters who want a specific change made, the amount of political effort it would take makes it unlikely that a government would feel pressured to act.

I did not have the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister a question during the town hall, but if I had the chance now, I would ask if the provinces and territories in this country are really so different from one another as to justify not having one single, universal Canadian healthcare system. After all, when discussing the needs of people across the country, Trudeau made sure to emphasize that we all deserve the same quality of care because “A Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian” no matter where they are.



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## **WHAT CHRYSTIA FREELAND'S SHOES CAN TELL US ABOUT 2023**

*Natalie Locke*

It has become tradition for the Finance Minister in Canada to buy a new pair of shoes specially for budget day. Last year, Chrystia Freeland wore blue to demonstrate the government's responsible "conservative" approach to 2022's budget. Now, her shoes are reflecting a similar message. The heels are simple, black, versatile. Her safe choice reflects the rising cost of living across the country. Families have had to prioritize groceries and shelter above all else, reducing "luxury" purchases.

The versatility of Freeland's shoes, to me, speaks to the continued financial struggles ahead. This is reflected in the budget highlights from CBC News. The section on affordability does not have a grand solution to the housing crisis or price increases at the grocery store. There are "small measures" (Zimonjic, 2023) to combat the issue. One item which has stuck out to Canadians is the increased GST payment to help with purchasing essentials (Zimonjic, 2023). However, it is not a permanent solution. Canadians will struggle for the other eleven months of the year, as the rise in GST is a "one-time hike" (Zimonjic, 2023).

The government announced a new savings account called the Tax-Free First Home Savings Account to help some buy their first home (Zimonjic, 2023). This savings account does nothing to help people currently struggling to pay their mortgage or rent. Only the lucky few will be able to put the account to use, saving thousands of dollars for a downpayment. If future first time home buyers did not have the capacity to save before, they are unlikely to this year without major policy solutions. Only those who could already afford to purchase a home stand to benefit from the savings account.

While housing and groceries are on the mind of government, Canadians are expected to "pull up their bootstraps," just as before. Don't make any frivolous purchases. Make smart ones, like a simple pair of black shoes.

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