



## Book Review

*Democracy in Canada: The Disintegration of Our Institutions*. McGill-Queens University Press, 2019. 504 pp, with index.

By Donald Savoie

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Donald Savoie is worried about Canada. He argues that Canadian representative democracy may appear robust when compared with other democracies but is besieged by a democratic deficit rooted in the history and creation of Canada. He sets out to prove that this path leading towards democratic failure can only be altered if we realise

that our institutions have drifted too far from fundamental democratic values and principles to reverse themselves.

Savoie proves this dispiriting argument with four arguments. First, the awkward union of parliamentary institutions and constitutional conventions with federalism have prevented the reconciliation of regional and national tensions. Canadian political institutions built by central Canadian founders serve the centre while blithely ignoring the other regions. The few vestiges of regional influence in the Senate, House of Commons, Cabinet and bureaucracy are diminishing. Second, the public sector is divided between a cadre that serves the interests of the political elite or its own interests, sacrificing principles of neutrality and objectivity in the process, and an increasingly defensive and smaller cohort attempting to serve clients. Third, citizens see the system serving economic and privileged elites with the courts and lobbyists contributing to the politics of inequality. Finally, the erosion of accountability rules and ministerial responsibility in a post-truth world of media means institutions are unchecked in their drift away from good government.

Historical institutionalism and path dependent analysis lead to these conclusions but is the argument too deterministic? Does his tendency to read the constitution through the eyes of Macdonald, Cartier and Brown, cause him to underestimate the power of Canadian democratic institutions in reconciling national and regional tensions?

Read this book to have your worst suspicions about the health of representative democracy confirmed or to assess whether his diagnosis of what ails Canada and its cure is plausible.