

# What kind of Torontonian are you?

If Toronto is a divided city, on which side do you fall? A new tool on thestar.com describes the city's ideological landscape and shows readers where they fit in

JENNIFER BILL  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Toronto is a divided city. This fact has never been starker than in the aftermath of October's polarizing municipal election.

We see disunity along income lines, a persistent city-versus-suburbs mentality. We see it also in the vilifying way many residents view one another — as left- or right-wing caricatures.

During the election campaign there was much talk about the importance of healing these divides for the sake of our city's future.

But to do that we must first better understand the complex cleavages that separate us.

A new tool on thestar.com seeks to help us do just that. The Political Sentimeter is a 15-minute questionnaire that collects data

on Torontonians' ideological outlook and places each respondent into one of eight political categories: Post-materialist Left, Anti-establishment Left, Social Democratic Left, Laissez-faire Left, Faith and Family Right, Heritage Right, Libertarian Right or Steadfast Right.

The tool is based on a new scientific study of more than 3,400 Torontonians, which provides a data-driven picture of the city's ideological landscape, including the political divides that have come to characterize us.

Commissioned by the Star and conducted by Vox Pop Labs, the survey asks a number of political and values-based questions before revealing which ideological group the respondent belongs to. The more readers respond, the clearer the picture of the city's political attitudes will become.



The result, says Ali Rahnama, the Star's chief operating officer of digital media, is a science-based tool for Torontonians to learn more about their political, social and economic leanings, and see how their views fit within the ideological mosaic of the city. Ultimately, he hopes, the resulting nuanced portrait of Toronto might foster a more productive conversation about its future.

"Think about the terms that have been banded about somewhat irresponsibly and destructively, around left and right labels," says Rahnama. "The tool provides an empirically refined version of left and right, which will only become more detailed as more people take the survey..."

The initial study, which was conducted over a week in late August, used a statistical method called cluster analysis to identify the eight types of Torontonians. The results surprised the political scientists at Vox Pop Labs.

"We set out to challenge the idea of a left-right binary, which we suspected was not only artificial but harmful to meaningful dialogue," said Clifton van der Linden, founder and director of the company.

"What we discovered is that, yes, conventional understandings of left and right are

meaningful in the context of Toronto. But what's important is that Torontonians are not ideologically situated at either end of this continuum. We all occupy the shared space in between the caricatures of left and right."

The survey touches on a range of issues including radicalism, religion, feminism, multiculturalism, poverty and taxes. In the first section of the test, users are presented with a series of values statements and asked to choose among a range of reactions from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Among the statements presented:  
➤ There are more than two genders  
➤ Human beings are largely responsible for global warming  
➤ No matter what circumstances you are born into, if you work hard enough you can

be as successful as anyone else  
➤ Marriage is an outdated institution  
➤ People living on low incomes in Toronto receive enough financial support from the government

Users are then asked to rank by importance a series of competing priorities, including civil liberties, traditional values, the economy and the environment and to choose where they feel the greatest sense of belonging: family, neighbourhood, city, country or world.

Respondents provide their postal code so that, once the data is rich enough, it will be possible to see how the city's ideological divides break down by neighbourhood.

The goal is to develop the first-ever detailed scientifically devised picture of how Torontonians think about the world. "There is no political agenda here," says

Rahnama. "This tool is using software and data science to power storytelling ... and encourage debate on these issues."

Understanding the divides is the first step in healing them, says van der Linden.

"I think we have constructed these echo-chambers in which we tend to only engage with people who we agree with. And we have become increasingly vitriolic with the people we don't agree with."

"By understanding how people come from different ideological perspectives we can come up with a way to build a better city," says van der Linden.

"We don't have to agree all the time and hold hands but we should try to appreciate where others come from."

To contribute to that process, visit sentimeter.thestar.com and explore the Political Sentimeter.



## >FAITH AND FAMILY RIGHT

The Faith and Family Right take moderate positions for the most part and generally think of themselves as centrists, though their views on family values are decidedly conservative.

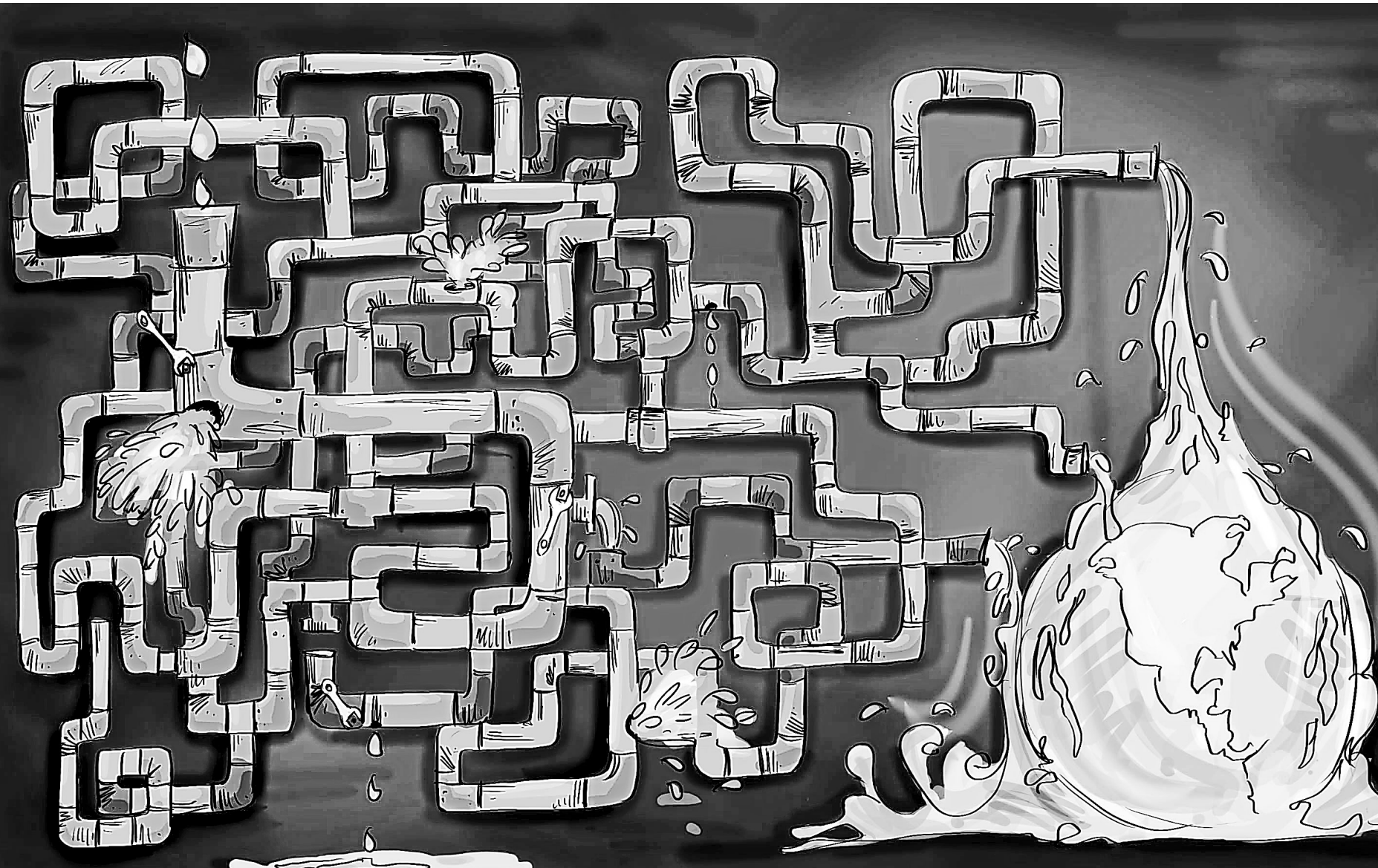
They are proponents of personal responsibility where individuals assume accountability for choices they make as well as the consequences. This is balanced with a sense of moral obligation to ensure the well-being and dignity of others, particularly the poor.

Faith and Family Right express a deeper

concern about poverty than most other groups and their views on income inequality and support for the redistribution of wealth are more aligned with their counterparts on the left than with those on the right.

While they're supportive of capitalism they are wary of its capacity to foster greed. They also support unions. Faith and Family Right are most likely to identify as being religious and their views tend to reflect the shared tenets of most mainstream religious beliefs.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY AINSLEY ASHBY-SNYDER



## >SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LEFT

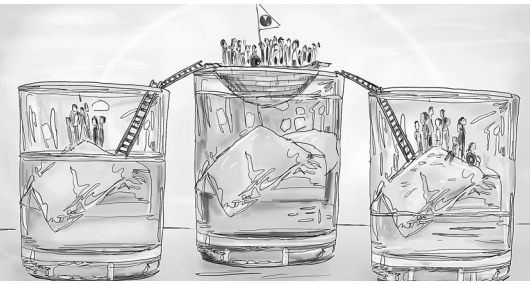
The Social Democratic Left hold consistently progressive views and almost invariably identify as left. They embrace diversity, are strong advocates for social and economic equality, and see themselves as putting the common good ahead of their individual interests.

The Social Democratic Left think globally and act locally. They feel a connection to the world community but also believe in the importance of local communities. They believe that action at the local level can have an impact and are generally supportive of grassroots initiatives. They are motivated more by collective gains than individual ones.

The Social Democratic Left attribute disparities between people to structural factors as opposed to individual agency. They believe that the hardships people face are the result of a system that harbours inequality and that privilege plays at least as much of a role as merit in determining success.

The Social Democratic Left see government as being best placed to address issues of inequality and favour government intervention over market-based approaches to bolstering social welfare. They are generally supportive of measures that would see wealth redistributed from the rich to the poor.

The Social Democratic Left are mainstream progressives in the sense that they believe that a just society can be achieved within the framework of the existing system. They believe that, if government is sufficiently empowered, it can redress persistent societal inequalities.



## >POST-MATERIALIST LEFT

The Post-materialist Left take the most progressive views of any group. They tend to prioritize the collective ahead of the individual and believe that a just society is one where benefits and burdens are equally distributed across its membership. They express the most concern of any

group about the disparities between rich and poor. They see these disparities as a result of an unjust system rather than a function of individual merit. They tend to view capitalism as perpetuating inequality and support measures that redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.

The Post-materialist Left are enthusiastic proponents of diversity and see themselves as global citizens. They tend to feel a strong sense of attachment to the world, often much more so than with their local community. They are the least likely to express a sense of nationalism, opting instead to think of Canada and

Canadians as part of a broader global collective. This group are the most politically engaged of any and the least likely to identify with a religion. Members are technophiles, tend to be younger, are racially diverse, and have lower incomes than other groups.

## >STEADFAST RIGHT

The Steadfast Right take the most conservative positions of any group and are most likely to identify as being right. They see a fair society as one in which people adhere to traditional family values and take full responsibility for their individual welfare.

The Steadfast Right are the most supportive of any group of free-market capitalism. They do not see income inequality as a problem, but rather as the outcome of a system that rewards hard work and innovation. They see government intervention and unions as structures that perpetuate cycles of dependency and inhibit individual ambition.

The Steadfast Right believe that rising tides lift all boats: individual gains increase

the overall prosperity of a society. They oppose government measures that they see as inhibiting economic growth and are most likely to feel that governments impose too many taxes and regulations.

The Steadfast Right are highly skeptical of claims about global warming and are likely to reject

environmental protections that impede economic growth.

The Steadfast Right are least likely of any group to support multiculturalism, although their rejection of the idea is

not grounded in nationalist sentiment. It is instead out of a concern about the erosion of traditional values that they perceive as being due to an increasing emphasis on diversity or pluralism.



## >ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT LEFT

The Anti-establishment Left take progressive views for the most part and are the most radical of any group. They generally believe that the current system is unable to address the most pressing social, economic and environmental issues of our time without undergoing a substantial transformation.

The Anti-establishment Left tend to be critical of capitalism, which they see as promoting greed in lieu of compassion. They are highly supportive of unions as a means to ensure an equitable standard of living for everyone. They feel that it is not only the poor who are oppressed by the current system, but also the middle class. They therefore believe that government should play a stronger role in evening out the distribution of wealth within society.

Anti-establishment Left have the strongest sense of belonging to their local community of any group, but are among the least likely to identify strongly with religious or traditional family values.

The Anti-establishment Left are tolerant of religious and cultural diversity, but believe in the strict separation of religion and state.



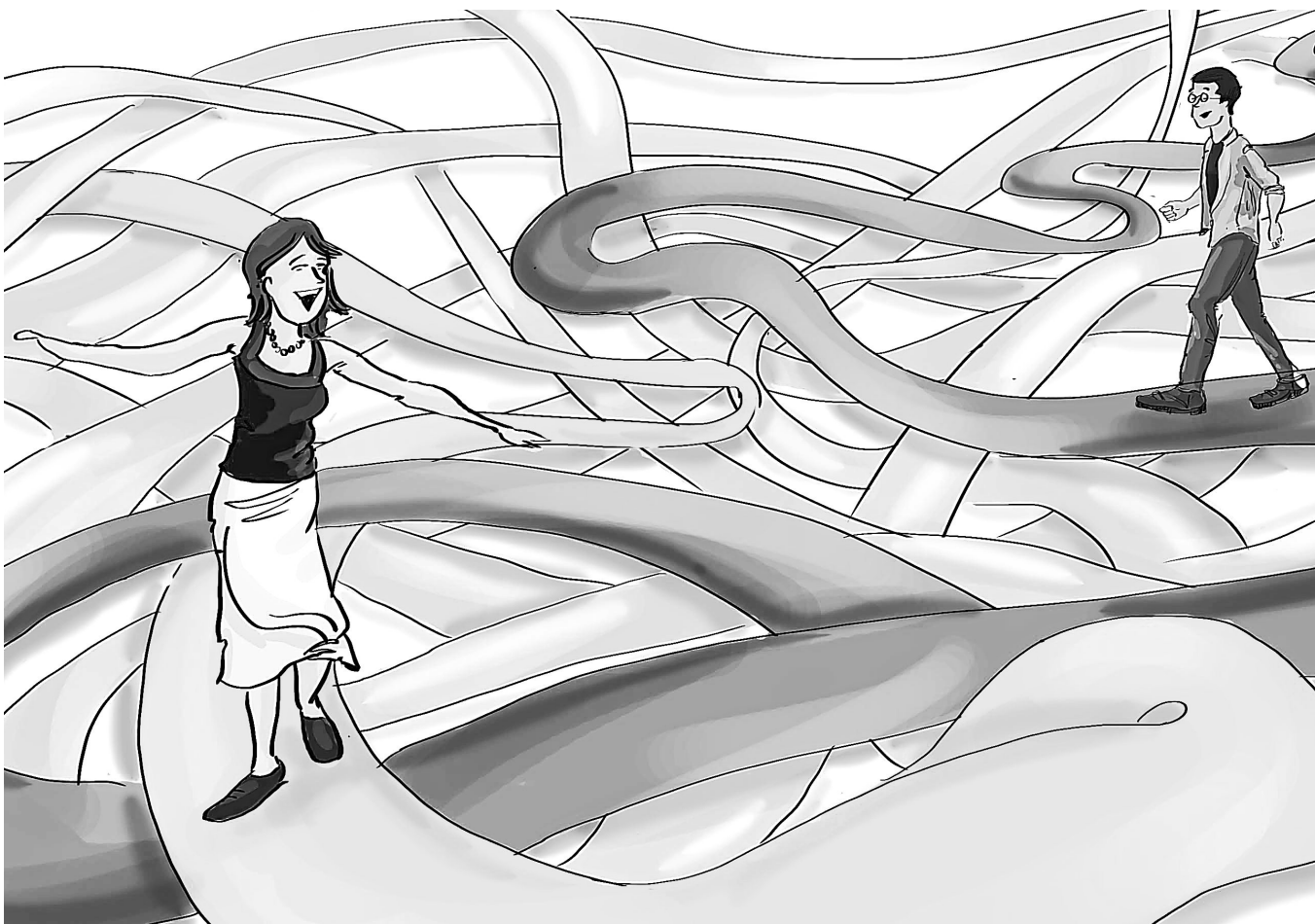
## >LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEFT

The Laissez-faire Left hold progressive views for the most part and tend to think of themselves as left of centre. They are unique among progressives, however, in that they place greater emphasis on personal responsibility and individual liberty than those on the left. This often results in taking moderate or centrist

positions on economic matters. The Laissez-faire Left are committed to fairness in that they believe everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed. But they also think that those who make full use of such opportunity should be rewarded. Recognizing that not everyone enjoys the same advantag-

es in life, they support measures that provide assistance to those less privileged, but only to ensure everyone starts off on the same footing. The Laissez-faire Left are egalitarian to the extent that they believe people should be judged solely on the basis of their merits. While they feel that every-

one is entitled to a minimum standard of living. They also take the view that those who work hard and excel deserve a bigger slice of the pie. The Laissez-faire Left are the most likely among the left to see capitalism as a system that is compatible with progressive social values.



## >LIBERTARIAN RIGHT

The Libertarian Right hold conservative views for the most part, although they tend to think of themselves as centrists because their views on most social issues are more moderate than the right. Their attitudes toward personal responsibility and economic redistribution, however, are decidedly right. To the Libertarian Right, people are the makers of their own destinies. Regardless of where they start from, the Libertarian Right generally believe that individuals have the capability to achieve their goals if they work hard enough. They are therefore skeptical of government intervention and unions, which they see as perpetuating a cycle of dependency and inhibiting self-reliance. The Libertarian Right tends to support the integration of religious and ethnic minorities as opposed to a multiculturalist approach. They believe that people should be treated as individuals, not as members of a particular subset of society. The Libertarian Right generally favour capitalism over its alternatives. People in this group are generally well-educated and non-religious. They are unlikely to be immigrants. Most do not have a strong sense of belonging to their local community and are the least likely to be active participants in civic life.



## >HERITAGE RIGHT

The Heritage Right hold conservative views and tend to think of themselves as right of centre. They respect tradition and value family, order and stability. They are more likely to accept limitations on civil liberties in return for the promise of greater security. They believe that a person's lot in life is determined mostly by their own choices and that hard work begets success. While they see a role for government in tackling social and economic problems, they are skeptical about its overall effec-

tiveness. They are more likely to donate to charity than any other group, but are among the least likely to give money to someone on the street. Although the Heritage Right are unlikely to be actively engaged in civic life, they are the most likely of any group to identify with their ethnic or religious community, while expressing a strong sense of belonging to and affinity for Canada. The Heritage Right have the highest proportion of immigrants and children of immigrants of any group.