

What affects the impact of consumerism on the economies of Canada and the U.S.?

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION

This section explores some of the powers and limitations of consumerism to influence economic decision making.

- A comic about an economic decision-making scenario.
- A map illustrating different regional perspectives in North America about consumerism.
- Examples of how **boycotts** can empower consumers.
- Examples of how consumer behaviour, underlying values and government decisions affect quality of life for citizens in society.

What are you looking for?

As you read this section, look for:

- Examples of how income affects consumer behaviour.
- How boycotts represent one way to influence economic decision making.

boycott: a decision by consumers to stop buying a product or service as a way to bring about change



Canada and the U.S. track consumer spending closely because consumerism plays an important role in mixed and market economies. Many factors can influence consumer spending, including how much money consumers have to spend.







Why might views on consumerism differ regionally in North America?

Work through the questions below, and then answer the blue questions:

- **How does consumerism affect quality of life?** Think of both positive and negative views of consumerism you have encountered in this chapter.
- **How does prosperity affect consumerism?** The prosperity of people — how well off they are — affects how much they spend as consumers.
- **How does prosperity differ regionally?** Prosperity varies within countries and among countries. The map below presents regional differences in prosperity in North America. Because of these differences, the world considers Canada and the U.S. “developed countries” and Mexico a “developing country.”

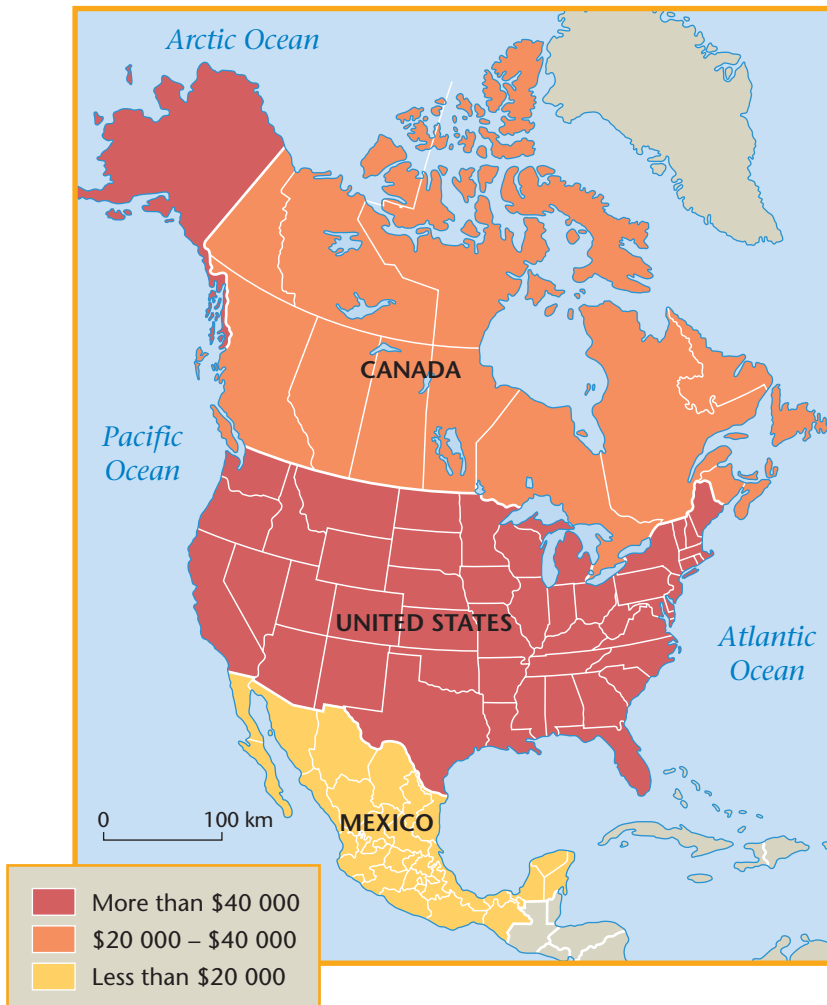


To what extent might Canada, the U.S. and Mexico have different perspectives on consumerism and quality of life?



How might these different perspectives affect the economy of their region and the other regions?

GDP Per Capita in North America, 2006



WHAT'S GDP?

The map on this page shows Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. GDP measures the amount of wealth a country's economy generates. The term *per capita* means “average per person.” So, GDP per capita is a way to estimate how well off people are in a country.

Here are the exact 2007 figures for GDP per capita, for the countries on the map:

Canada	\$33 000
Mexico	\$12 500
U.S.	\$46 000

How accurately does the map reflect these statistics?

How can consumerism empower groups?

A boycott is a decision by a group of consumers not to buy certain products. Some people boycott products as a way to respond to issues.

This page presents some examples of boycotts dating from 2007. What different perspectives on these boycotts can you identify?



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

How might boycotts affect producers? What positive and negative impacts might they have on quality of life?



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE To

what extent is it important for consumers to be informed about issues connected to boycotts?



Environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, use boycotts as one way to take action on issues that concern them. For example, in 2007, Greenpeace called for consumers to boycott some oil and gas products. The boycott aimed to pressure oil and gas companies to reduce the impacts of their economic activities on the environment — especially impacts linked to climate change. Some oil and gas companies — and consumers — consider these impacts necessary to fuel the economies of the world.

Greenpeace has many ways that it takes action on issues. In this photo, for example, Greenpeace activists dressed as giant eyeballs demonstrate during a U.N. meeting on climate change in Vienna in 2007.



SPOT AND RESPOND TO THE ISSUE

How would you state the issue at the centre of each of these boycotts?

Animal rights groups boycotted the products of some cosmetic companies in 2007, because the companies used animals to test their products. Some cosmetic companies view animal testing as the most effective way to determine the safety of the products for customers.

Human rights activists renewed calls for a boycott of companies with business links to Myanmar (Burma), including some cell phone companies. The activists hoped to pressure the companies to leave Myanmar, which would in turn pressure Myanmar's government to change its policies on human rights. The call for the boycott followed a government crackdown on democracy protestors in Myanmar in September 2007. Many companies — and consumers — believe that doing business in countries such as Myanmar is an effective way to promote change.

Boycotts in Canadian History

Les Patriotes: “No!” to British Products

Louis-Joseph Papineau organized Canadiens in Lower Canada to boycott British goods in 1837. A majority of people living in the British colony of Lower Canada at the time were Canadiens, and Papineau was the leader of Les Patriotes, a political movement. Les Patriotes wanted Britain to make the system of government in the colony more democratic, so that Canadiens had more control over their own affairs. The boycott aimed to pressure Britain to make reforms — one of many measures Canadiens took to pressure Britain, including petitions, speeches and rallies. Britain resisted reforming the government of Lower Canada, which led to the Rebellion of 1837. Britain suppressed the rebellion with military force.



This painting shows Louis-Joseph Papineau at a rally in 1837.

Boycott Stops Logging on Lubicon Land

The land rights of the Lubicon Lake Cree in Alberta were at the centre of a boycott between 1991 and 1998. The boycott targeted the products of pulp-and-paper giant Daishowa Ltd. Boycott organizers persuaded businesses and consumers to stop buying Daishowa products. For example, Woolworths, a department-store chain, stopped using paper bags manufactured by Daishowa. In all, the lost business cost Daishowa millions of dollars. The boycott pressured Daishowa to stop logging land claimed by the Lubicon, until the Lubicon and Canada’s government had come to an agreement. In 2007, the Lubicon and Canada had still not come to an agreement — and Daishowa had still not logged the land.



Members of the Lubicon Lake Cree protest for their land rights in 1987. The Lubicon faced growing pressure on their traditional lands from forestry operations, and from oil and gas development, in northern Alberta. The development was taking place without their consent, because their traditional lands were not part of a historic or modern Treaty. **Think critically: How does the protest in this photograph connect to the rights of the Lubicon Lake Cree as an Aboriginal people?**



To what extent do the boycotts on this page reflect collective identity?