

Finding the Alternative: Neoliberalism, State Accountability & Temporary Foreign Worker Policy in Canada

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Introduction

As the current political economy, neoliberalism adopts a *laissez-faire* approach when defining the relationship between the state and the market. That is, the neoliberal perspective holds that the invisible hand of the state remains inferior to the overall significance of a self-regulating economy; thus, it is imperative for the state to remain out of matters associated with the market (Steger and Roy, 2010). Further embedded within the neoliberal globalized framework is the idea that such a process is inevitable; that the state continue to experience a weakening of power and accountability over the current global changes and restructuring (Bowels, 2008). In doing so, the position of the state is clear: there is no alternative.

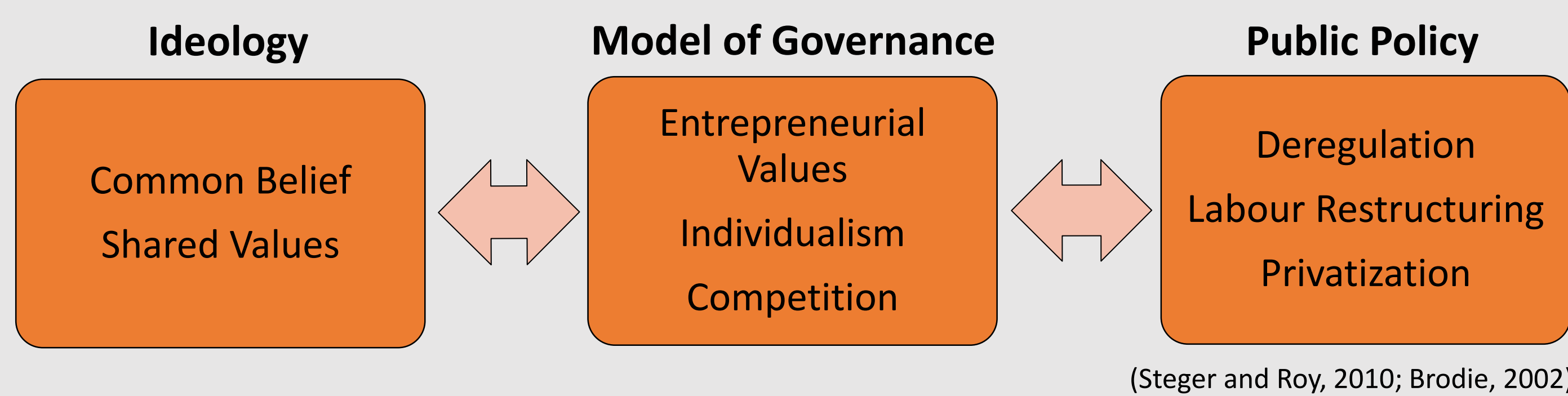
Navigating through this idea of a *weakened* state (Bowels, 2008) in today's context of a neoliberal globalized economy poses a challenge, as there continues to be a number of areas in the economy that remain influenced and controlled by the state. Canada's most recent reforms to immigration policy demonstrates this. In 2012, the federal government implemented changes to Canada's immigration policy to include: favouritism of "just-in time, ready for labour migrants"; increased number of temporary foreign worker visas and programs; and heightened emphasis on Canada's labour market needs, contributing to the growing shift away from our previous human capital approach (Fleras, 2015: 77). The apparent decreased state power in decisions regarding the market, and yet, the federal government's continued influence in policies contributing to the economy, is a contradiction that must be addressed.

Research Question

How has the state shaped temporary foreign worker policies to reflect the neoliberal ideology and values?

Conceptualizing Key Terms

How can we define *Neoliberalism*?

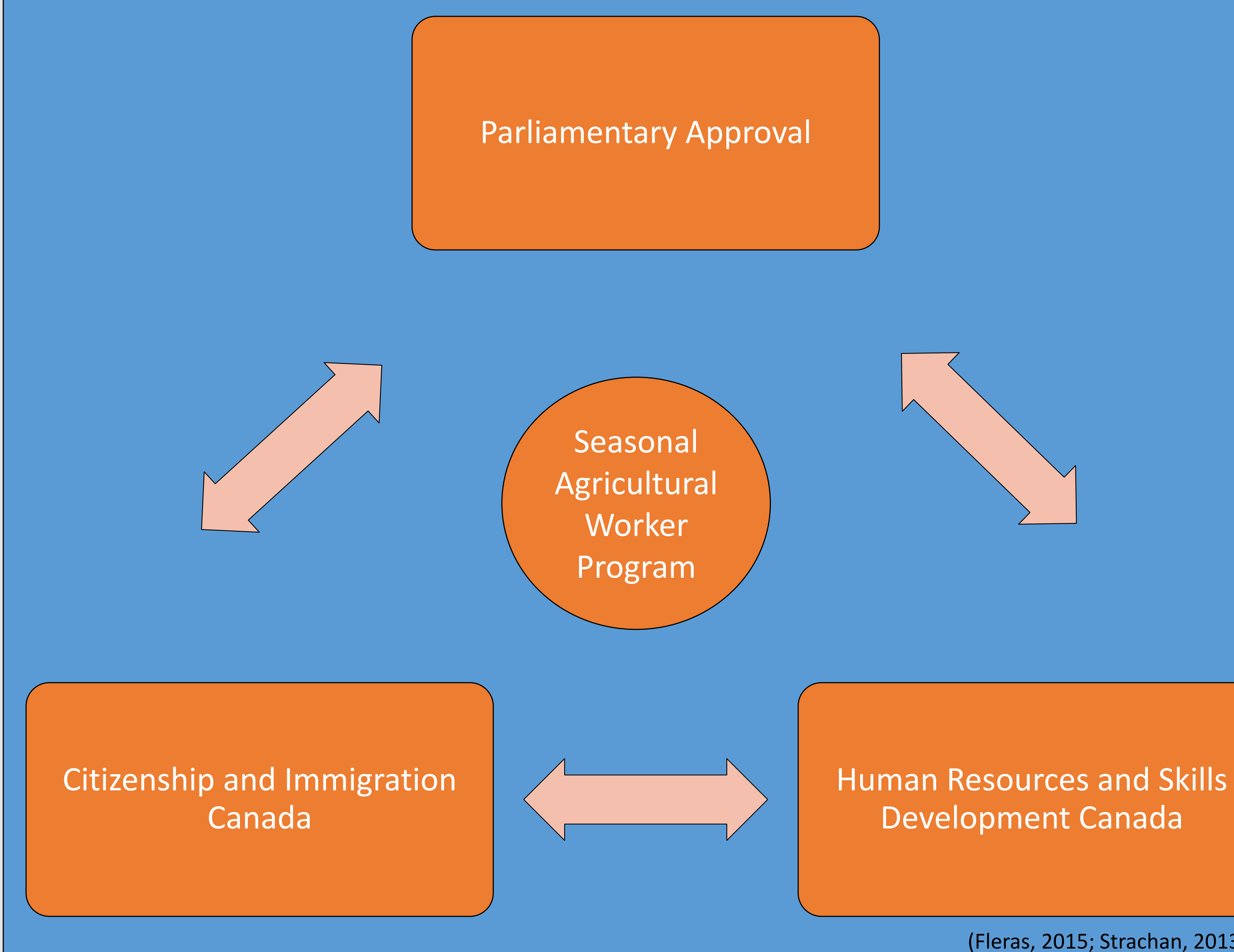


What is the *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program*?

Countries	Details of Program
<p>1966: started as a bilateral agreement between Canada and Jamaica</p> <p>2015: includes bilateral agreements with Jamaica, Mexico, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago</p> <p>(Employment and Social Services Canada, 2015; Preibisch and Hennebry, 2012; Gabriel and MacDonald, 2012)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers gain conditional access in Canada to fill low-skill labour shortages Permitted to work in Canada 8 months of the year; all visas expire December 15th Workers not allowed to travel with families Employer discretion in hiring and reemployment Demand-driven program <p>(Lenard and Straehle, 2012; Preibisch and Hennebry, 2012)</p>

Analysis: Understanding the Relationship Between State and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program

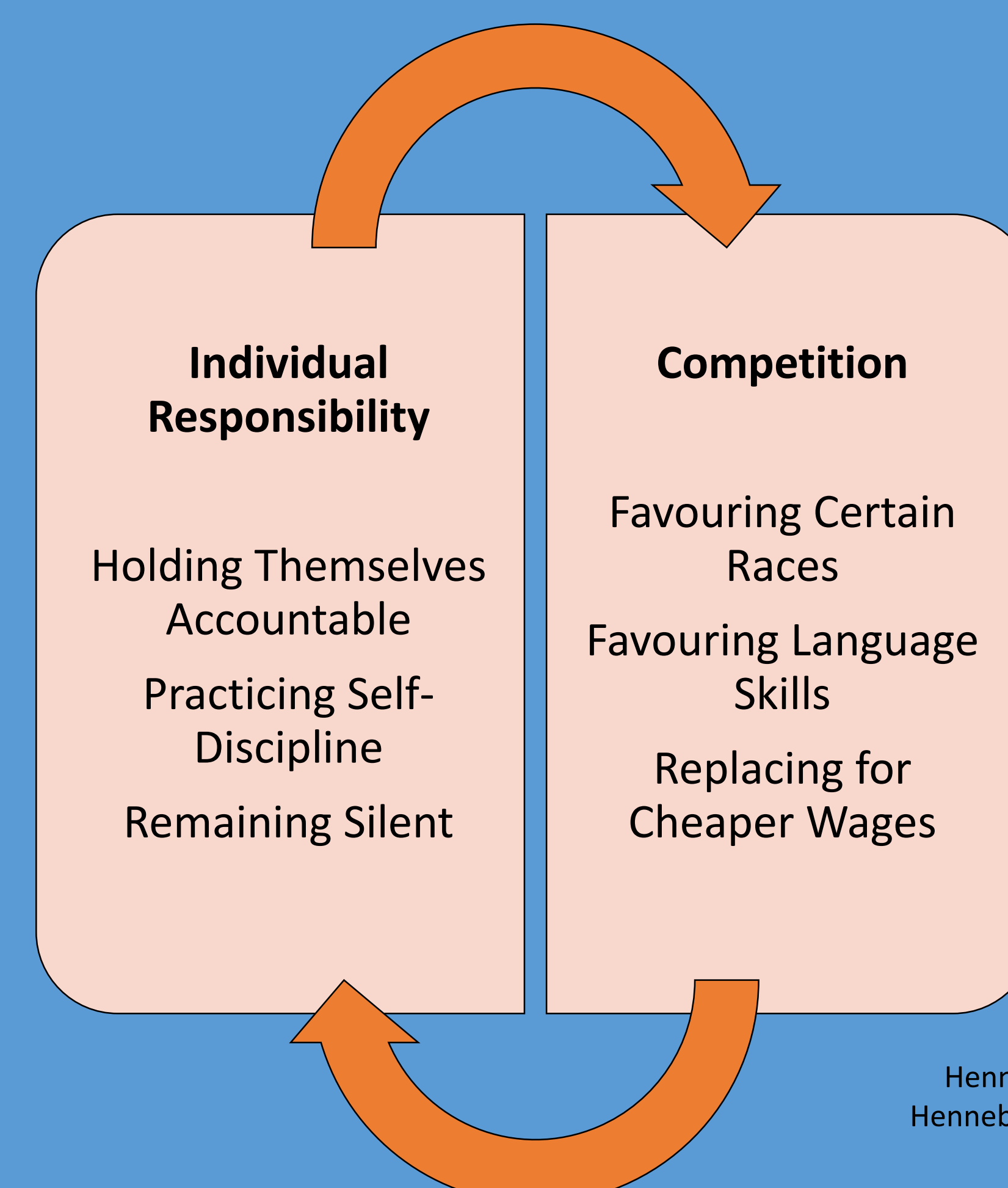
Demonstrating the Continued Role of the State



State Continues to Benefit with the Seasonal Agricultural Program

Country	Anticipated Benefits of SAWP
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers charge lower wages to temporary foreign workers Maintains export of goods during peak seasons Increases product for foreign exchange Stimulates job growth goods and services sector for workers <p>(Elgersma, 2007; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2012)</p>
Origin Country of Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic and developmental benefits in the form of remittances Assists in combating high unemployment rates <p>(Strachan, 2015)</p>

Reflection of Neoliberal Values in a Demand-Driven System



Discussion: Identifying the Next Steps

When examining the case of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), it is evident that the state continues to play a prominent role in Canada's market affairs. This is clear given the SAWP continues to be prevalent today, and provides economic benefit for Canada. Moreover, the state has structured the SAWP as a demand-driven system, whereby employers have the ultimate discretion over who can gain re-entry into Canada. Such provisions contribute to the overall reflection of neoliberal values within the SAWP, as migrant workers continue to engage in self-discipline of their actions; accept exploitative demands from employers; and, remain silent when wanting to report an illness or employer abuse (Hennebry, 2012; Preibisch and Hennebry, 2012; Preibisch, 2004).

When examined in this way, such research calls for the state to acknowledge their power and influence in policy, specifically those focused on temporary foreign workers. Moreover, the state must recognize the control they have in shaping immigration policy to move in a more fair and respectable direction. This research supports the following policy reforms:

- regulation of the demand-driven protocol and employer discretion during the hiring process in order to reduce favouritism of workers based on racial stereotypes;
- make legal assistance and medical aid more accessible to ensure workers speak up against hazardous labour demands or exploitative expectations; and,
- eliminate mobility restrictions on migrants by providing more accessible housing offsite in an effort to minimize the power imbalance between workers and their employers.

The present research contributes to scholarship addressing the proposed inevitability of the neoliberal globalized order. In using the case of Canada and the SAWP, it helps illustrate the ways in which the state remains involved in advancing the neoliberal agenda. In recognizing that the state has this power however, it can also be argued that it has the power to find an alternative, more conducive means of inclusion and social equality, specifically through policy reforms in immigration.

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