

The Effect of Racial Attitudes on Vote Choice in the 2019 Canadian Election*

Isaac Hale[†]

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Abstract

A large body of research shows that voters' racial attitudes, the race of candidates, and the race of party leaders have a significant effect on vote choice in elections in the United States. However, there is far less research on whether similar effects exist in Canadian national elections. I examine the effect of racial attitudes on the electoral performance of the New Democratic Party (NDP). In 2019, the NDP was led by Jagmeet Singh, the first nonwhite leader of a nationally competitive Canadian political party. My findings show that Canadian voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities were less likely to support NDP candidates in the 2019 election, even when accounting for voters' partisanship and ideology. In contrast, I find no effect of racial attitudes on party support in 2015 or for other major parties in 2019. These results suggest that racial attitudes are a salient feature in Canadian elections, and that national parties may face a real electoral penalty when selecting non-white party leaders.

Keywords: Racial attitudes, Canadian politics, Parliamentary elections, Electoral choice

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[†]Incoming Assistant Professor of Politics at Occidental College and a current postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Santa Barbara's Blum Center on Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy. Author email: ihale@ucsb.edu

Following the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, there was a surge of interest in the relationship between race and vote choice in the United States. Scholarship in the following years clearly identified that voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities were less likely to support President Obama (e.g. [Lewis-Beck, Tien & Nadeau, 2010](#); [Knuckey & Kim, 2015](#)) and Democratic congressional candidates in the Obama era (e.g. [Luttig & Motta, 2017](#); [Hale, 2019b](#)). Even after Obama left office, the high salience of race in the Trump era corresponded with a persistent relationship between racial attitudes and vote choice in US elections (e.g. [Sides, Tesler & Vavreck, 2017](#); [Schaffner, Macwilliams & Nteta, 2018](#); [Algara & Hale, 2020](#)).

Despite the outpouring of research on the role of race in US elections, much less attention has been paid to the subject in Canada. While one might point to Canada's much higher ethnic homogeneity as the cause of this relative disinterest, race is a central feature in Canadian politics. There have been major revelations in recent years about the treatment of indigenous Canadians, which Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has dubbed a "cultural genocide"¹ and anti-immigrant politics have gained new traction.²³ Nevertheless, race and racial attitudes are still largely overlooked in Canadian election scholarship. A small body of research has focused on support for minority candidates (e.g. [Besco, 2015](#); [Bird et al., 2016](#); [Black & Erickson, 2006](#)) and support for permissive immigration policy (e.g. [Soroka & Robertson, 2010](#); [Harell et al., 2012](#); [Stolle et al., 2016](#)). Even less work has attempted to assess the relationship between racial attitudes and voters' party preferences, though [Blais \(2005\)](#) and [Gravelle \(2018\)](#) are notable exceptions.

The 2019 Canadian federal election provides an ideal opportunity to address this gap in the Canadian politics literature. In this election, Jagmeet Singh was the party leader for the New Democratic Party (NDP), which has been one of Canada's most electorally popular parties since its founding in 1961. Importantly, Singh was the first non-white leader to lead a nationally competitive political party.⁴ Given the overwhelming body of US evidence that Barack Obama and down-

¹BBC News: "The schools that had cemeteries instead of playgrounds."

²The Conversation: "Maxime Bernier either doesn't know or doesn't care that immigrants have a positive impact on the economy"

³The Conversation: "COVID-19 has hardened Canadian views on immigration."

⁴Vivian Barbot briefly led the regionally competitive Bloc Quebecois in 2011.

ticket Democrats received an electoral penalty among voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities, it is worth asking whether the NDP faced a similar electoral penalty in 2019. This question is particularly salient given Singh's status as the only non-white major party leader in the recent 2021 snap election.

In order to assess whether racial attitudes affected voter support for the NDP in 2019, I provide a novel analysis of large-N data from the Canadian Election Study (CES). I find that Canadian voters with more negative attitudes towards racial minorities were less likely to support the NDP in 2019, even even after accounting for potential confounding variables such as partisanship and ideology. No such effect occurs for other parties in the 2019 or 2015 federal elections. This study provides strong preliminary evidence that the NDP paid an electoral penalty among Canadian voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities in 2019.

1 Race & Voting Behavior in US Elections

Racial attitudes affect political behavior in the US both historically and in the modern era. The 1950s heralded the beginning of a multi-decade process of “racial realignment” in American politics, with racially conservative whites increasingly affiliating with the Republican party while black voters and racially liberal whites moved to the Democratic party ([Carmines & Stimson, 1989](#)). During this period there was a substantial shift in elite rhetoric on race, as explicit appeals to “old-fashioned racism” (OFR) became less socially desirable as both parties publicly embraced the new norm of racial equality (e.g. [Mendelberg, 2001](#); [Tesler, 2013](#); [Hillygus & Shields, 2014](#)). While racial resentment against ethnic minorities (i.e., the belief that blacks don't adhere to American cultural values) continued to drive vote choice in this period ([Tesler & Sears, 2010](#)), old-fashioned racist attitudes (such as belief in black intellectual inferiority or opposition to miscegenation) were not predictive of party preferences ([Valentino & Sears, 2005](#); [Tesler, 2013](#)) until 2008. That year, the candidacy of Barack Obama, the USA's first non-white major party presidential candidate, harkened a return of OFR as a predictor of voting behavior (e.g. [Tesler, 2013](#))

The return of OFR in predicting voter behavior in 2008 coincided with a surge in the predictive power of race for voting behavior in many contexts. Racial resentment made white voters less likely to support black candidates in the 2010-2016 elections (Hale, 2019b; Petrow, Transue & Vercellotti, 2017). Negative attitudes towards racial minorities also depressed the vote shares of Democratic candidates in the 2009-2020 time period (e.g. Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Algara & Hale, 2019, 2020; Hale, 2019b), by dint of the party's association with racial liberalism and racial minorities.

An important finding of the US literature is that Obama's role as the first non-white candidate to lead a major party was the catalyst for the increased salience of racial attitudes in voting behavior. Several studies have found that Obama underperformed in 2008 (e.g. Lewis-Beck, Tien & Nadeau, 2010; Piston, 2010; Tesler, 2013) and 2012 (e.g. Jardina, 2019; Knuckey & Kim, 2015) as a result of racial prejudice. The racial backlash against Obama also "spilled over" into congressional races. As Luttig & Motta (2017) and Abrajano & Hajnal (2015) find, perceptions of the 2014 midterm congressional election as a referendum on Obama were racialized, and those perceptions mediated the link between racial attitudes and 2014 vote choice. Racial backlash against Obama also spilled over into the 2016 presidential race, where Hillary Clinton's embrace of Obama and racially inclusive policy helped Donald Trump's explicit racial appeals resonate with white voters (Sides, Tesler & Vavreck, 2017). More generally, public opinion in the US has polarized on the basis of racial attitudes in reaction to Obama's historic presidential campaigns and his presidency (e.g. Tesler, 2013; Petrow, Transue & Vercellotti, 2017; Luttig & Motta, 2017; Jardina, 2019).

2 Race & Voting Behavior in Canada

While there has been significant research examining support for minority candidates (e.g., Murakami, 2014; Black & Erickson, 2006; Black & Hicks, 2006; Besco, 2015; Bird et al., 2016) there has been much less research of on the independent effect of racial attitudes in Canadian elections (Gidengil et al., 2012; Thompson, 2008). Research by Blais (2005) finds that white voters who

favor immigration and aid to racial minorities are more likely to support the Liberals in national elections. In a more recent study, [Gravelle \(2018\)](#) finds that party identification is predictive of Canadian attitudes towards Muslims. However, these articles are exceptions to the rule: most studies of Canadian elections and party politics do not treat racial attitudes as a key factor. Indeed, the conventional wisdom is that, in the modern post-Civil Rights era, race and racial attitudes are not a significant determinant of vote choice in Canada (e.g. [LeDuc, 1984](#); [Thompson, 2008](#)).

Despite the relative paucity of scholarship on the effect of racial attitudes on Canadian elections, there is ample reason to expect that racial attitudes affect Canadian voters. As with the US, Canadian history, from its time as a British colony to the present day, is greatly defined by settler-colonial expansion and both cultural and outright genocide against indigenous peoples ([Woolford, 2015](#); [Preston, 2013](#)). Though there were fewer forms of legal discrimination in Canada than the US, Canadian politics in the mid 20th century were also heavily influenced by minority demands for expanded civil rights ([Calliste, 1995](#)). Like the US, there is currently and historically significant racial inequality in Canada in areas such as income, health, and social integration ([Reitz & Banerjee, 2007](#); [Ramraj et al., 2016](#)). While Canadian voters may not have sorted into parties on the basis of race⁵ in the way that many ethnic groups in the US have (see: [Carmines & Stimson, 1989](#); [Layman & Carsey, 2002](#); [Valentino & Sears, 2005](#)), there is still ample reason to expect that Canadian party politics, like US party politics, should be affected by voters' racial attitudes. While the two countries' demographic compositions and racial politics are clearly distinct ([Harell et al., 2012](#); [Soroka & Roberton, 2010](#)), the overwhelming evidence that racial attitudes shape voter preferences in the US raises questions about whether similar effects manifest in Canadian elections.

The overwhelming evidence that Obama's historic candidacy dramatically increased the salience of racial attitudes in US elections begs the question: would the same be true in Canada? The 2019 Canadian federal election provides an ideal test with NDP leader Jagmeet Singh making history as the first non-white national party leader of a party competitive throughout the country. Focusing on party leaders rather than the race of individual candidates for the House of Commons not only

⁵The Globe and Mail: "[Why Canada's politicians fixate on the ethnic vote](#)"

parallels research on Obama in the US, but aligns with research that finds Canadian voters tend to focus substantially more on leader's images than on those of candidates in their riding when deciding how to vote (Blais et al., 2003; Gidengil et al., 2006; Clarke et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2019).

In the sole existing published article examining the effect of Singh's leadership on the 2019 election, Bouchard (2021) finds that co-ethnic Sikh Canadians were relatively more favorable towards Singh (though other voters of color were not) and that Singh was viewed relatively unfavorably in Quebec.⁶ While Bouchard's (2021) research provides vital lessons about the role of race in leader evaluations, I seek to expand on this nascent body of work by interrogating the relationship between racial attitudes and support for NDP candidates in the 2019 Canadian federal election.

3 Theory & Hypotheses

My expectation is that opposition to the NDP in 2019 was racialized. As it was for Democratic congressional candidates during the Obama presidency, I expect that racial animus towards minorities will "spill over" from Singh and affect voting for NDP candidates, regardless of their race. I expect that such an effect was not present for the Liberal or Conservatives in 2015 or 2019. I also expect that voters' support for the NDP in 2015 will not be conditioned by racial attitudes, given that its leader in that election (Thomas Mulcair) was white.

★ H_{1A} : More negative attitudes towards racial minorities among individual voters decreased their likelihood of supporting the NDP in the 2019 election, but did not do so for the Liberals or Conservatives.

★ H_{1B} : More negative attitudes towards racial minorities among individual voters had no effect

⁶A province that notably has had substantial political battles over the issue of religious garments like those worn by Singh.

on their likelihood of supporting the NDP, Liberals, or Conservatives in the 2015 election.

Even if I uncover evidence that NDP candidates do face an electoral penalty, it is entirely possible that such a penalty is occurring only among voters who are ideologically centrist and right-wing. As [Besco \(2020\)](#) notes, negative attitudes towards minorities tend to be concentrated in right-leaning voters, and left-wing candidates may thus be insulated from pernicious racial attitudes in the broader electorate. As such, it is possible that there will be no effect of feelings towards minorities on their willingness to support the NDP in 2019 among self-identified NDP partisans and voters who are ideologically closest to the federal NDP.

If such an effect nevertheless affects voting behavior among NDP supporters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities, this would provide strong evidence for the importance of race in voting in the 2019 election. Despite the high degree of party sorting on the basis of racial attitudes in the US, Democrats and liberals with negative attitudes towards racial minorities have been less likely to support Democratic candidates since 2008 ([Algara & Hale, 2020](#)). In a similar vein, I expect that voters most likely to support the NDP (either due to party identification or ideological proximity) will be less likely to do so if they have negative attitudes towards racial minorities.

★ H_{2A} : More negative attitudes towards racial minorities decreased the likelihood of supporting the NDP in the 2019 election among individual **voters who self-identified as members of the NDP**.

★ H_{2B} : More negative attitudes towards racial minorities decreased the likelihood of supporting the NDP in the 2019 election among individual **voters who were ideologically closer to the NDP** than to the the Liberal or Conservative parties.

4 Data and Methods

For this research, I employ data from the 2015 and 2019 Canadian Election Studies. In 2019, 37,822 Canadians were part of a rolling online “campaign period survey” (CPS) conducted in the month leading up to the election. 10,340 of those respondents were re-contacted for an online “post-election survey” (PES) that introduced additional questions. In addition, 4,021 additional Canadians were surveyed by phone in 2019. These data are omitted, since respondents were not asked about their feelings towards racial minorities in the telephone survey. In 2015, 7,412 respondents participate in the online CPS. In addition. While a smaller number of respondents participated in phone and mail-back surveys, these data are omitted from this study.⁷ With these data I aim to assess whether racial attitudes affected vote choice in the 2015 and 2019 Canadian federal elections.

4.1 Measuring Vote Choice

To test my hypotheses, I require six separate dependent variables: one for each of the three major national parties (the Liberals, Conservatives, and NDP) in 2015 and one for each in 2019. Each of these is a simple dummy variable. Each variable is coded (1) if the survey respondent reported that they supported the party’s candidate in the election in their riding. The variable is coded (0) if they did not (this includes voters who were undecided or declined to state).

4.2 Measuring Racial Attitudes

The main explanatory variable in this manuscript is the respondent’s feelings towards racial minorities. In both CES surveys, respondents are asked to report their feelings towards racial minorities on a continuous 0-100 scale, with zero corresponding to “really dislike” and 100 to

⁷There is reason to believe that respondents may be more likely to under-report their negative racial attitudes in phone surveys than in online ones due to social desirability bias (Kreuter, Presser & Tourangeau, 2008). In addition, there is evidence of systematic differences in polarization and item response between web and phone CES samples in 2015 and 2019 (Johnston, 2019), so using only the web sample in 2015 as well maximizes comparability. The supplementary material includes models with 2015’s phone survey respondents included. The substantive interpretation of the effects reported in these models are identical to that reported in the body of this manuscript.

“really like.” To aid in the interpretability of this variable, it has been rescaled to range from 0-1. Respondents who decline to answer are coded as missing. Figure 1 shows the distribution of minority feeling thermometer scores pooled among all respondents and across partisans in the 2019 CES. Though responses are left-skewed for all respondents and for all partisan sub-groups, there is still considerable variation in each. Notably, the Canadian parties are not fully sorted on the basis of racial attitudes: there are substantial numbers of racially liberal Conservative voters and Liberal and NDP voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities in the electorate.

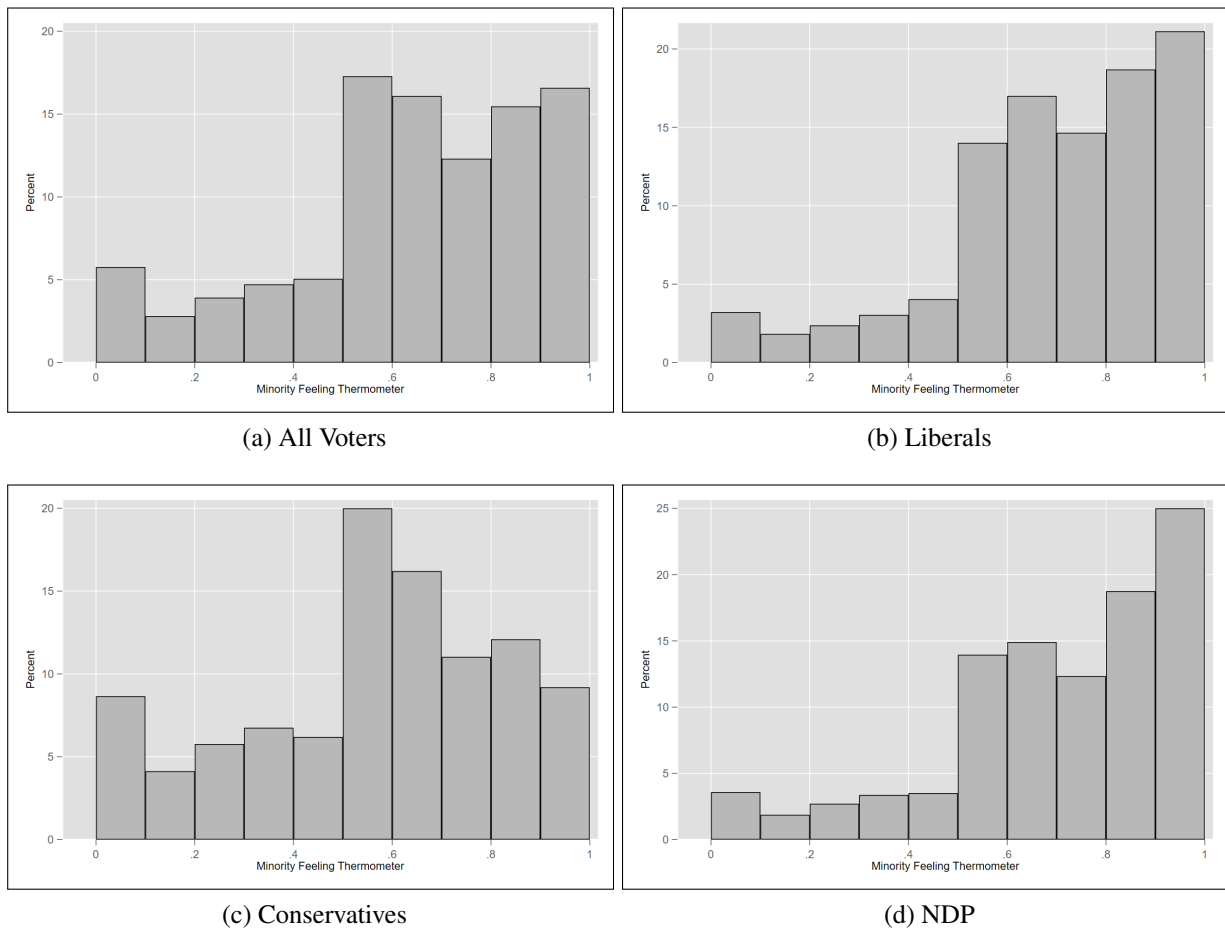
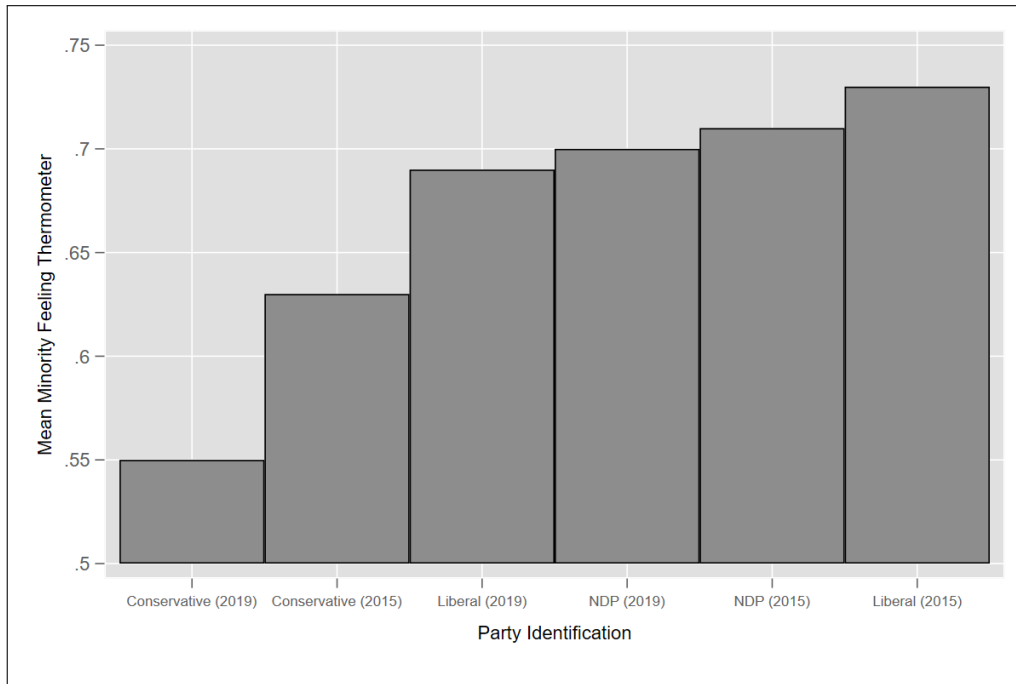


Figure 1: Distribution of minority feeling thermometer, 2019

To gain further insight, we can examine Figure 2, which reports the mean minority feeling thermometer by election year and respondent partisanship. Some trends are apparent. First, feelings towards racial minorities are somewhat more negative for each partisan group in 2019 than

in 2015. Second, Conservative voters have more negative feelings towards racial minorities than other partisan groups. As with [Figure 1](#) however, the most important takeaway is that the parties are not fully sorted on the basis of attitudes towards racial minorities.

Figure 2: Mean minority feeling thermometer, by party identification & election year



4.3 Control Variables

In addition to my primary independent variable, my regression models also include a number of control variables commonly used in models of vote choice in legislative elections. I control for voter demographics, individual-level characteristics (such as ideology), and voters' perceptions about the state of the election. Full question wording, summary statistics, and coding details are provided in the supplementary material.

In addition to feelings towards minorities, I include a 100-point feeling thermometer of feelings towards immigrants (again rescaled to be between 0-1). Research in both the US and Canada has found that attitudes towards immigrants can affect both vote choice and policy preferences (e.g., [Soroka et al., 2013, 2017](#); [Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018](#); [Wright et al., 2017](#)). By including this

variable in my analyses, any effect of racial attitudes on vote choice that I find should be more likely to underestimate rather than overestimate the effect, given the high degree of overlap between attitudes towards racial minorities and immigrants.

I include standard demographic controls in my predictive models, including education, union membership, income, and gender. Education is an ordinal scale ranging from 1-11, with 1 signifying “no schooling and 11 a professional degree. Union membership is a binary variable, with 0 for non-union members and 1 for union members. Gender is also coded as a binary variable, with 0 for men and 1 for women. Income is an ordinal variable, split into eight categories in 2019 and five categories in 2015.

I also account for individual-level characteristics identified in the vote choice literature. Retrospective economic evaluations are accounted for, with respondents reporting whether they think that, over the past year, the economy has improved (1), worsened (-1), or stayed about the same (0). A binary party ID term is included as well, coded 1 if the respondent’s party ID matches the party being evaluated in the model and 0 otherwise. An ideological proximity term is included for the 2019 election models, which represents the absolute difference between the voter’s left-right self-placement and their placement of the national party (rescaled to be between 0-1). The 2019 models also include a binary variable indicating whether the voter’s left-right placement of the party being evaluated in the vote choice model is closer to the voter’s self-placement than any other party,⁸

Finally, I also include respondent evaluations of the state of the race nationally and in their riding. Literature on strategic voting suggests that a voter’s willingness to support a party in their district is affected by their perceptions of the party’s viability in their district (e.g. [Cox, 1997](#); [Blais, 2002](#); [Hale, 2019a](#)) and nationally (e.g. [Shugart & Taagepera, 2017](#)). For 2019, I include a 0-1 scale for each party-vote model where respondents rate the likelihood of that party having the most seats following the election.⁹ For both 2015 and 2019, I include a measure whether the

⁸Ideological proximity variables are omitted in the 2015 models. Voters in 2015 are only asked to perform ideological placements in the mail-back surveys, which comprise only a small sub-set of the total number of respondents.

⁹No appropriate data exists in the 2015 CES to construct a similar variable for that election.

modeled party is perceived by the respondent to have a chance in their riding. This variable, called “No Chance” is the difference between the expected win chance of the party perceived to be most likely to win the riding and the party being modeled. To illustrate, consider in the NDP vote model a “no chance” score of “1.” This score indicates that the respondent believes the NDP candidate has 0% chance to win the riding and another party’s candidate is 100% certain to win the riding. By contrast, a “no chance” score of “0” indicates the respondent believes the NDP candidate is most likely to win the respondent’s riding.

4.4 Specifying a Model of Voting

Let us now consider my models of vote choice in the 2015 and 2019 Canadian federal elections. In total, I present six models in the body of this manuscript: one each for the Liberals, Conservatives, and NDP in 2015 and one for each of those parties in 2019. In each case, the dependent variable is a binary variable indicating whether the respondent reports that they intend to vote for that party’s candidate in their riding in the election. In each case, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is used.

$$Party\ Vote_j = \alpha + \beta_1 \times (Minority\ Feeling\ Thermometer) + \beta_i \times X_i + \varepsilon$$

where *Strategic Vote* is the predicted likelihood of a voter casting a vote for party *j* in their riding, *Minority Feeling Thermometer* is the respondent’s self-reported attitude towards racial and ethnic minorities, *X* is a set of control variables, and ε is the error term.

While some suggest using logistic regression in lieu of OLS for binary outcome variables, recent methodological scholarship encourages the use of OLS in such cases (e.g. [Battey, Cox & Jackson, 2019](#); [Gomila, 2021](#); [Hellevik, 2009](#)). OLS is easier to interpret and concerns about the violation of OLS assumptions tend to be inconsequential in practice. As in most applications, the results of instead applying logistic regression in my analyses (presented in the supplementary material) are substantively identical to the OLS regressions presented here.

5 Findings

Table 1 reports parameter estimates for my vote choice models for the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the NDP in the 2015 and 2019 Canadian elections. Each column displays the results for a given party in a given election year. All models include my independent variable, the minority feeling thermometer. In addition, each model includes a large number of control variables, including partisanship, gender, education, and whether the voter perceives the party's candidate to be viable in their riding. The 2019 models also include a measure of the voter's perceived ideological proximity to that party's candidate in their riding as well as a measure of whether they expect the party to win the most seats in the election.¹⁰ The findings across the models provide confirmation of H_1A and H_1B . The only instance where a major party faced an independent electoral penalty based on racial attitudes was the NDP in 2019 – the only instance where such a party was helmed by a non-white party leader.

¹⁰The results of the 2019 model are substantively identical if these control variables are omitted.

Table 1: Regression Estimates: Party Vote Choice, 2015 Election

	Liberals	Conservatives	NDP
Minority Thermometer	0.03 (0.07)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.06)
Immigrants Thermometer	0.12* (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.11* (0.05)
Education	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Income	0.02* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Gender (Female)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Economic Evaluation	-0.05** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Same Party ID	0.48*** (0.02)	0.60*** (0.02)	0.49*** (0.02)
“No Chance”	-0.29*** (0.04)	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.20*** (0.04)
Constant	0.06 (0.05)	0.19*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.04)
R ²	0.31	0.48	0.28
Observations	1.778	1.778	1.778

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 2: Regression Estimates: Party Vote Choice, 2019 Election

	Liberals	Conservatives	NDP
Minority Thermometer	0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Immigrants Thermometer	0.03 (0.02)	-0.04** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Education	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
Union Member	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Income	0.01** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender (Female)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0)	0.00 (0)
Economic Evaluation	0.08*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Ideological Proximity	-0.04** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Closest Party Ideologically?	0.10*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
“No Chance”	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Same Party ID	0.50*** (0.01)	0.57*** (0.01)	0.50*** (0.01)
Will Party Win Most Seats?	0.16*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Constant	0.01 (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
R ²	0.46	0.59	0.36
Observations	17.875	17.974	17.812

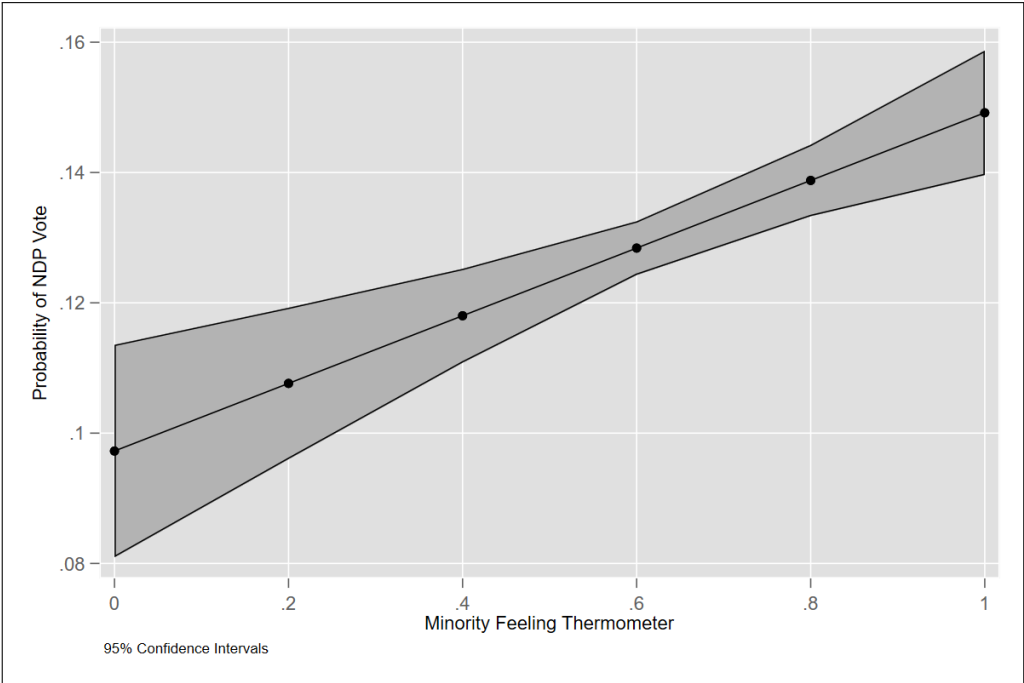
Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

As we can see in Tables 1 and 2, the NDP are the only party whose support is affected by feelings towards minorities in a statistically significant manner. However, given that the minority feeling thermometer is measured using a 100-point scale, the 0.00 coefficient point estimate presented in Table 2 does not usefully communicate the magnitude of the effect of racial attitudes on NDP support in 2019.

To get a better understanding of how racial attitudes affected vote choice for the NDP in 2019, we can examine Figure 3. Figure 3 shows the predicted probability of voter supporting the NDP candidate in their local riding. As their feelings towards minorities become more positive, their likelihood of voting for the NDP candidate increases. Even after accounting for partisanship and ideology, which likely incorporate racial attitudes already, feelings towards minorities have an independent effect on NDP support in 2019. There is a roughly 5% gap in the likelihood of NDP vote choice between voters with very positive vs. very negative feelings towards racial minorities in 2019. As we saw in Table 1 and Table 2, feelings towards minorities have no effect on Liberal or Conservative candidate support likelihood in 2019 or support for any of the three major parties in 2015. These findings provide support for H_{1A} and H_{1B} .

Figure 3: Predicted probability of NDP vote by minority feeling thermometer, 2019



It is important to note that this result is not simply a measurement artifact. Direct measures of attitudes towards minorities, AKA “old-fashioned racism” (OFR), have often been criticized as inappropriate and likely to dramatically underestimate effects in an era where such views are commonly perceived to be socially undesirable (Tesler, 2013; Mendelberg, 2001). In the USA, old-fashioned racist sentiments were unrelated to party preferences for decades before Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential run (e.g. Sears et al., 1997; Valentino & Sears, 2005).¹¹ As such, it is notable that a direct effect of OFR exists in support for NDP candidates in 2019.

To further address potential measurement concerns, I leverage the post-election survey administered by the CES in 2019. This survey contains four questions that evaluate the latent *social dominance orientation* (SDO) of the respondent. SDO is a personality trait that measures a person’s preference for social hierarchy over equality. To measure respondents’ latent SDO, the CES post-election survey asks them to agree or disagree (on a 5-point Likert scale) with the following statements: (1) “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.”; (2) “We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.”; (3) “Group equality should be our ideal.”; (4) “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.”

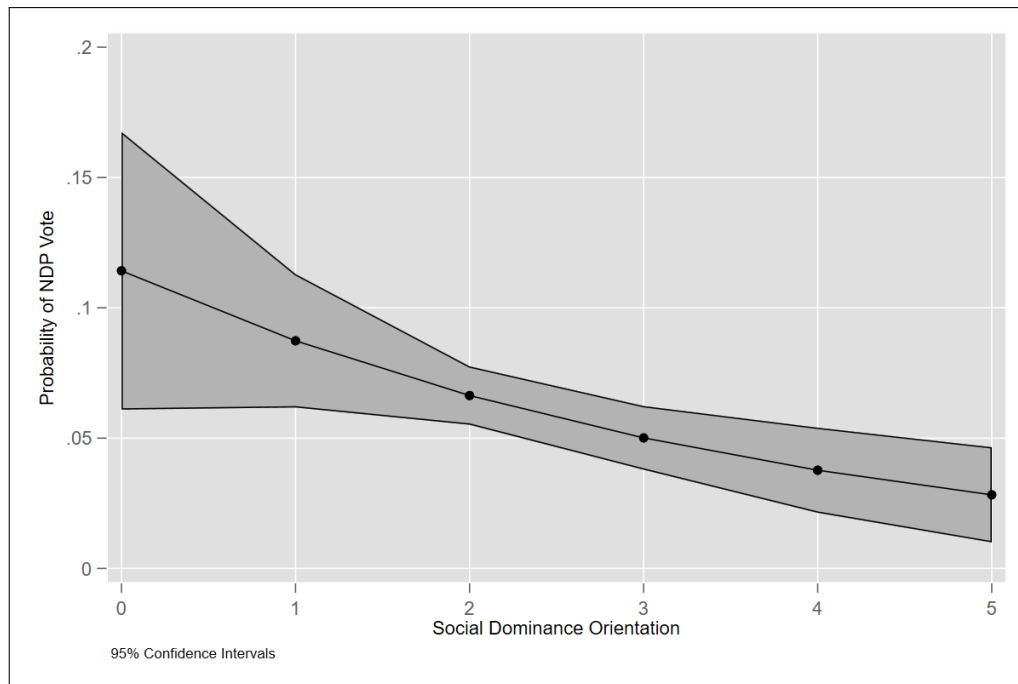
Figure 4 shows the effect of SDO on the predicted probability of a vote for the NDP vote in 2019.¹² The SDO variable is a simple mean score of respondents’ responses to the four SDO questions enumerated above. In order to ensure that higher values consistently indicate higher SDO, responses to questions 2 and 3 are recoded such that agreement with those statements are treated as low SDO. Aside from the use of SDO in lieu of the minority feeling thermometer, the control variables included to predict a vote for the NDP are specified identically and all included. As we can see in Figure 4, this alternate explanatory variable has a nearly identical effect, providing further confirmation of H_{1A} and H_{1B} .

Finally, we can turn to Figure 5 for an additional confirmation of my findings. To provide the

¹¹It is important to note that some research in Europe has found direct effects of explicit anti-immigrant sentiment on party vote choice (e.g., Sniderman, 2000)

¹²The SDO questions were introduced for the first time in the 2019 CES post-election survey, and are not available for prior election years.

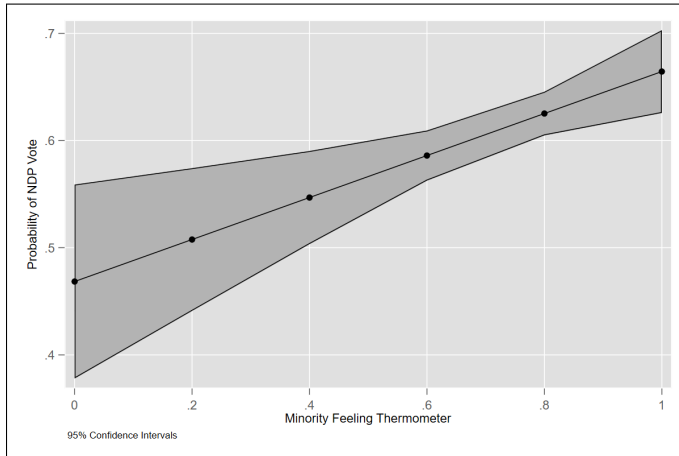
Figure 4: Predicted probability of NDP vote by SDO, 2019



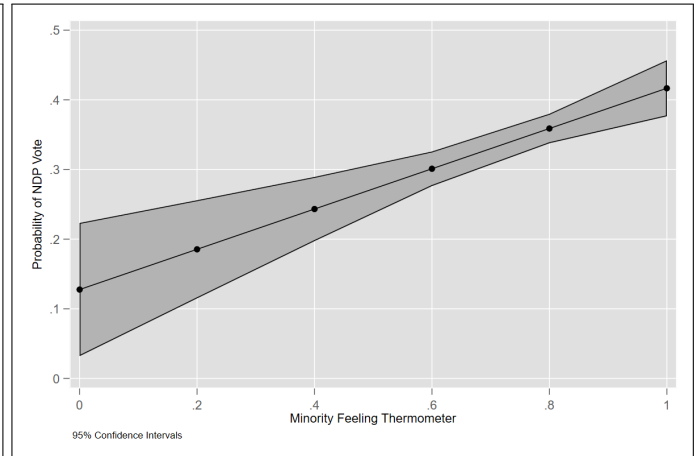
strongest possible test of whether racial attitudes independently affected support for the NDP in 2019, I examine whether such an effect manifested within self-identified NDP voters and among voters ideologically closest to the NDP.¹³ These are the voters that should be most likely to support the NDP, and are least likely to be off-put by any policy based association the NDP may historically have with racial liberalism. As we can see in panel A of Figure 5, NDP identifiers are far more likely to support the NDP (66% overall) but negative feelings towards racial minorities make them nearly 20% less likely to do so. Panel B similarly shows relatively high support for the NDP among those who are ideologically closer to it than any other party (37% overall), but that negative feelings towards minorities can swing these voters' likelihood of voting for an NDP candidate by over 30%. These shifts are substantially larger than among Liberal party identifiers (a 7% shift) and Conservative party identifiers (no statically significant shift).

The results shown in Figure 5 provide a strong confirmation of H_{2A} and H_{2B} . The effect of feelings towards racial minorities on voting behavior is actually significantly more pronounced

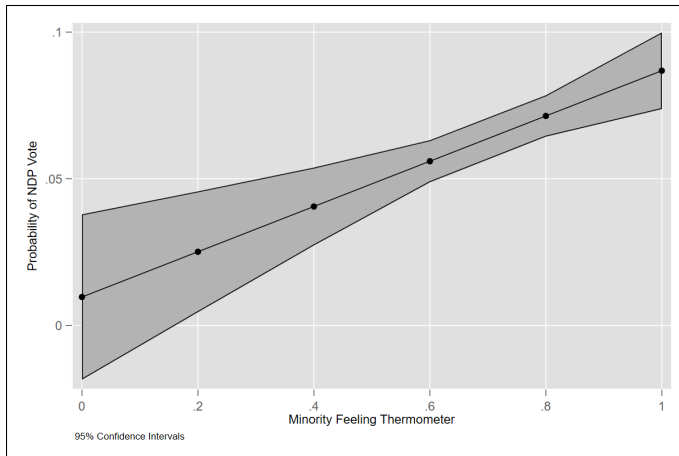
¹³Voters closest to the NDP are those with shorter ideological distance between their left-right self-placement and their left-right placement of the national NDP than their distance with any of their other party placements.



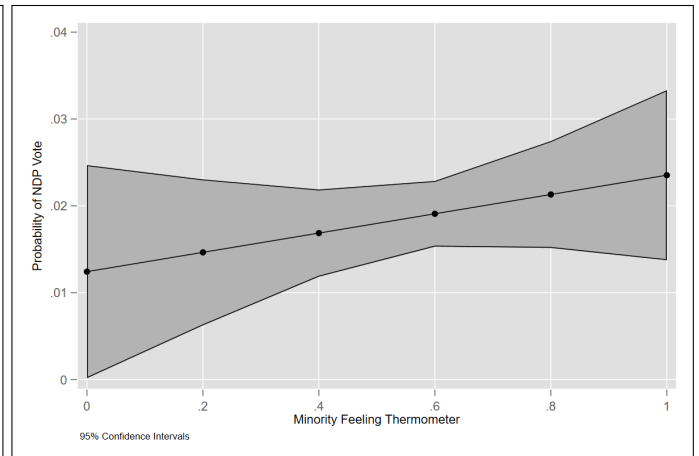
(a) NDP partisans only



(b) Closest to NDP ideologically only



(c) Liberal partisans only



(d) Conservative partisans only

Figure 5: Predicted probability of NDP vote by minority feeling thermometer, 2019

among NDP-identifiers than the general population. While going from the minimum to the maximum level on the minority feeling thermometer shifts the likelihood of NDP support by 5% in the general population (see: [Figure 3](#)), the shift is nearly 20% among NDP-identifiers. In other words, the effect of racial attitudes on NDP vote choice was not wholly driven by swing voters. NDP identifiers (and other voters close to the NDP ideologically) – the party’s electoral base – were significantly less likely to support the NDP in 2019 when they had negative feelings towards racial minorities.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I find that racial attitudes mattered in the 2019 Canadian federal election. While feelings towards racial minorities appear to have had no independent effect on Canadians' vote choice in 2015, or for support for the Liberals or Conservatives in 2019, more negative feelings towards minorities were associated with a decreased likelihood of NDP candidate support in 2019. This effect is particularly large among NDP party-identifiers and voters who are ideologically closer to the NDP than the other two major national parties.

While recent research on American politics has consistently found an independent effect of racial attitudes on vote choice, my paper is one of the first to do so in the Canadian context. The consensus in Canadian elections research has long been that racial attitudes are significantly less salient in Canadians' vote choice than in the US. The 2019 election provides a strong test of this theory, with the NDP's Jagmeet Singh standing as the first non-white leader of a nationally competitive political party. In line with research showing that the Democrats received an electoral penalty associated with Barack Obama's status as the first non-white party leader in the US, my results suggest that the NDP paid a similar electoral price in 2019.

The presence of an electoral penalty for the NDP is particularly challenging for the party given the electoral system used in Canadian elections. Under a first-past-the-post electoral system, parties have two primary paths to receiving a large share of seats. The first is to be competitive in ridings nationwide (as is the strategy for the Liberals and Conservatives). The second is to be highly regionally concentrated – as is the case for the Bloc Québécois (“BQ”). While the NDP achieved the former in the 2011, becoming the official opposition in parliament for the first time in Canadian history, it has not found a path to widespread electoral success in subsequent national elections. Despite winning more than twice the popular vote of the BQ in both 2019 and 2021, the NDP nevertheless earned fewer seats in both contests. In short, if the NDP strategy for winning seats is through nationwide competition, any electoral penalty, even a minor one, is a major obstacle.

Given the results presented here, a natural question is whether the penalty the NDP faced in 2019 persisted in the 2021 election. Despite surveys showing that Singh was perceived to be the most trustworthy and competent leader (as well as the most favorably viewed overall) in the 2021 election campaign,¹⁴ the NDP only ultimately gained a single seat. Once CES data is made available for this election, it will be possible to assess whether the penalty faced by the NDP in 2019 was more than a one-off phenomenon. If the causal mechanism is in fact Singh's status as a non-white party leader, as suggested by the results here, then I predict that such an effect manifested again in 2021.

While this paper is an important first step, more research should be done to assess additional dimensions of the effect of racial attitudes on Canadian elections. Future work and data collection is needed to determine whether the race of individual candidates in voters' ridings also distort their vote preferences. It is possible that Canadian politics are sufficiently nationalized that no such effect exists, but such an effect is certainly possible – especially given that research in the US has found that black congressional candidates in the Obama era faced an additional electoral penalty among voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities (Hale, 2019b).

The findings in this paper join an emerging body of research in showing that race is a more central feature in Canadian politics than previously believed. Recent work has found evidence that racial minorities in Canada support racial in-group candidates at higher rates (e.g. Besco, 2015) and that support for social welfare policies is affected by the racial group perceived to be benefiting from that policy (Stolle et al., 2016). This study finds evidence that these effects extend to the electoral arena as well, with troubling implications for Canadian politics. If non-white leaders present real barriers to partisan success in Canadian elections, it is perhaps unsurprising that it has taken so long for such a leader to emerge. Even though partisanship and ideology are by far the largest predictors of vote choice in Canadian national elections, this paper demonstrates that the confluence of negative racial attitudes and a non-white party leader can nevertheless cause partisans to defect and vote for other parties. While racial attitudes may not typically have an effect on

¹⁴CBC News: “Jagmeet Singh seen as most competent and trustworthy leader: Vote Compass”

Canadians' vote choice, it appears that the historic presence of a non-white national party leader was sufficient to make such views salient in 2019.

In summary, this study extends US research on the effect of racial attitudes on voting behavior to recent Canadian elections. I find that across the 2015 and 2019 elections, NDP in 2019 was the only nationally competitive party to suffer an electoral penalty among voters with negative attitudes towards racial minorities. This effect was even more pronounced among voters most predisposed to support the NDP (i.e., NDP party-identifiers and voters most ideologically proximate to the NDP). This paper thus contributes to our knowledge of the relationship between racial attitudes, descriptive representation, and voter behavior in Canada.

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7 Supplementary Material

7.1 Canadian Election Study Survey Question Wording (English Version)

7.1.1 2015 Wording

Vote Choice: “Which party do you think you will vote for?”

Minority Feeling Thermometer: “How do you feel about the following countries and groups? Slide the slider to any number from 0 to 100.) Zero means you really DISLIKE the country or group, and 100 means you really LIKE the country or group.” [Minorities]

Immigrant Feeling Thermometer: “How do you feel about the following countries and groups? Slide the slider to any number from 0 to 100.) Zero means you really DISLIKE the country or group, and 100 means you really LIKE the country or group.” [Immigrants]

Education: “What is the highest level of education that you have completed?”

Income: “What is your total household income before taxes for the year 2014? Be sure to include income FROM ALL SOURCES. Please type in your household income, in dollars, without commas.”

Gender: “Are you?” [male, female]

Retrospective Economic Evaluation: “Now the economy. Over the PAST YEAR, has CANADA’s economy:” [gotten better, gotten worse, stayed about the same, don’t know]

“No Chance”: “Please rate the chances of each party winning the seat in YOUR OWN LOCAL RIDING on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means “no chance at all” and 10 means “certain to win.”

Party Identification: “In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc Québécois, Green, or none of these?”

7.1.2 2019 Wording

Vote Choice: “Which party do you think you will vote for?”

Minority Feeling Thermometer: “How do you feel about the following groups? Set the slider to any number from 0 to 100, where 0 means you really dislike the group and 100 means you really like the group.” [Minorities]

Immigrant Feeling Thermometer: “How do you feel about the following groups? Set the slider to any number from 0 to 100, where 0 means you really dislike the group and 100 means you really like the group.” [Immigrants]

Education: “What is the highest level of education that you have completed?”

Income: “What was your total household income, before taxes, for the year 2018? Be sure to include income from all sources, to the nearest thousand dollars.”

Gender: Are you... [a man, a woman, or other]

Retrospective Economic Evaluation: “Over the past year, has Canada’s economy:” [gotten better, gotten worse, stayed about the same, don’t know]

“No Chance”: “For each of the parties below, how likely is each party to win the seat in your own local riding?”

Party Identification: “In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a:”

Union Membership: “Do you belong to a union?”

Ideological Self-Placement: “In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”

Ideological Party Placement: “In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right, where would you place each party?”

Expected Party Seat Share: “For each of the parties below, how likely is each party to win the most seats in the House of Commons?”

Social Dominance Orientation: “There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities, and political factions. How much do you agree or disagree with the following ideas about groups in general?”

1. “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.”
2. “We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.”
3. “Group equality should be our ideal.”
4. “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.”

7.2 Variable Coding Scheme

7.2.1 Variables Used in All Models

Vote Choice: Dichotomous dependent variable indicating whether the respondent plans to vote for a party in a given election (1) or not (0). There are three models (and thus three dependent variables) each for 2015 and 2019 (one for a Liberal vote, one for a conservative vote, and one for

a NDP vote).

Minority Feeling Thermometer: A 100-point interval variable, with higher values corresponding to warmer feelings towards racial minorities. Rescaled to range from 0-1

Immigrant Feeling Thermometer: A 100-point interval variable, with higher values corresponding to warmer feelings towards immigrants. Rescaled to range from 0-1

Education: Ordinal variable ranging from 1 (no schooling) to 11 (professional degree or doctorate)

Income: Ordinal variable ranging from 1 (respondent makes less than \$30,000 CAD per year) to 5 (respondent makes more than \$110,000 CAD per year).

Gender: Dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent identifies as male/a man (0) or female/ a woman (1). A third option is not provided in the 2015 CES, and less than 1% of respondents in the 2019 CES identified as neither a man or a woman.

Retrospective Economic Evaluation: Trichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent believes that over the past year Canada's economy got worse (-1), stayed about the same (0), or got better (1).

“No Chance”: A 100-point interval variable, with higher values corresponding to a greater belief that the modeled party is unlikely to win the seat in the respondent's riding. Constructed by subtracting the perceived likelihood of the modeled party winning the seat from the likelihood of victory of the party perceived by the respondent to be most likely to win the riding. The “No Chance” variable has been rescaled to range from 0-1.

Same Party Identification: Dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent self-identifies as a member of the modeled party (1) or not (0).

7.2.2 Variables Used in 2019 Model Only

Union Membership: Dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent is a union member (1) or not (0).

Ideological Proximity: A 10-point interval variable, ranging from 0-1. Larger values indicate greater absolute distance between the respondent's ideological self-placement and their ideological placement of the party whose vote choice is being modeled.

Closest Party Ideologically?: Dichotomous variable indicating whether the party being modeled is the closest ideologically to the respondent (as measured by the “Ideological Proximity” variable”).

Will Party Win Most Seats?: A 100-point interval variable, with higher values corresponding to a greater belief that the modeled party will have a plurality of seats in the House of Commons following the election. Rescaled to range from 0-1.

7.3 Summary Statistics

Table 3: Summary Statistics of All Variables: 2015

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Liberal Vote	7,412	0.20	0.40	0	1
Conservative Vote	7,412	0.12	0.33	0	1
NDP Vote	7,412	0.11	0.32	0	1
Minority Thermometer	2,043	0.68	0.24	0	1
Immigrants Thermometer	2,055	0.64	0.26	0	1
Education	6,898	7.02	2.01	1	11
Income	6,385	2.50	1.28	1	5
Gender (female)	7,346	0.52	0.50	0	1
Economic Evaluation	6,624	-0.57	0.62	-1	1
Liberal Party ID	7,412	0.22	0.41	0	1
Conservative Party ID	7,412	0.19	0.39	0	1
NDP Party ID	7,412	0.16	0.37	0	1
“No Chance” (Liberals)	7,412	0.20	0.27	0	1
“No Chance” (Conservatives)	7,412	0.25	0.31	0	1
“No Chance” (NDP)	7,412	0.19	0.27	0	1

Table 4: Summary Statistics of All Variables: 2019

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Liberal Vote	37,822	0.25	0.44	0	1
Conservative Vote	37,822	0.25	0.43	0	1
NDP Vote	37,822	0.12	0.33	0	1
Minority Thermometer	31,088	0.63	0.27	0	1
Immigrants Thermometer	31,574	0.60	0.28	0	0
Education	37,723	7.40	1.92	1	11
Income	34,925	4.05	1.63	1	8
Gender (female)	37,531	0.59	0.49	0	1
Economic Evaluation	35,863	-0.25	0.68	-1	1
Liberal Party ID	37,822	0.32	0.47	0	1
Conservative Party ID	37,822	0.26	0.44	0	1
NDP Party ID	37,822	0.13	0.34	0	1
“No Chance” (Liberals)	37,822	0.32	0.47	0	1
“No Chance” (Conservatives)	37,822	0.24	0.33	0	1
“No Chance” (NDP)	37,822	0.40	0.36	0	1
Union Member	37,225	0.20	0.40	0	1
Ideological Proximity (Liberals)	25,115	0.27	0.26	0	1
Ideological Proximity (Conservatives)	25,577	0.34	0.29	0	1
Ideological Proximity (NDP)	24,890	0.27	0.25	0	1
Closest Party (Liberals)	37,822	0.10	0.30	0	1
Closest Party (Conservatives)	37,822	0.11	0.32	0	1
Closest Party (NDP)	37,822	0.08	0.27	0	1
Will Party Win Most Seats? (Liberals)	30,479	0.61	0.24	0	1
Will Party Win Most Seats? (Conservatives)	30,014	0.61	0.22	0	1
Will Party Win Most Seats? (NDP)	30,206	0.36	0.26	0	1

7.4 Robustness Check: 2015 Model With Phone Respondents Included

Forthcoming.

7.5 Robustness Check: 2019 Model Using Only Variables Present in 2015 Model

Forthcoming.

7.6 Robustness Check: 2015 & 2019 Models Using Logistic Regression Rather Than OLS

Forthcoming.