

Public opinion in Quebec under the Harper Conservatives

Maxime Héroux-Legault

Department of Political Science, Concordia University – Email address: maxime.heroux-legault@concordia.ca

Abstract:

An important part of Stephen Harper's early strategy to form a majority government was to appeal to Quebec voters. Open federalism, the recognition of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons, and international representation at the UNESCO were all measures aimed at increasing support for the Conservatives in the province. This article reviews Quebecers' reception to several key policy decisions taken by Stephen Harper's government in the 2006-2011 time period. It also estimates the impact of these policies on satisfaction towards the federal government, appreciation of Stephen Harper, and voting intentions towards the Conservatives in Quebec.

Keywords: Canadian Politics, Quebec, Stephen Harper, Public Opinion, voting behaviour, electoral studies

Résumé:

La stratégie initiale de Stephen Harper pour former un gouvernement majoritaire s'appuyait en partie sur l'électorat québécois. Le fédéralisme d'ouverture, la reconnaissance de la nation québécoise à la Chambre des Communes et la délégation québécoise à l'UNESCO avaient pour objectif d'augmenter l'appui aux conservateurs au Québec. Cet article étudie la réaction des Québécois suite à l'adoption de plusieurs décisions politique prises par le gouvernement de Stephen Harper de 2006 à 2011. Il analyse aussi l'impact de ces décisions sur la satisfaction envers le gouvernement fédéral, l'appréciation à l'endroit de Stephen Harper, et les intentions de vote pour les conservateurs au Québec.

Mots-clés: Politique canadienne, Québec, Stephen Harper, Opinion publique, comportement électoral, études électorales

The relationship between Quebec voters and the Harper administration has been an interesting and tumultuous one. It has garnered much attention from journalists and other political observers. During the 2005-2006 federal election, Stephen Harper made several attempts to convince Quebecers to support the Conservative Party of Canada. This strategy has been discussed at length by both independent journalists like Chantal Hébert (2011) and close advisors of the Prime Minister like Tom Flanagan (2009).

After winning the election and forming a minority government, the Conservatives continued to appeal to Quebecers. Quebec was promptly given a voice on the international stage. The agreement between the federal and Quebec governments states that the “specificity of Quebec [...] leads it to play a special role internationally” (Governments of Canada and Quebec, 2006). Quebec obtained the right to a permanent representative at the UNESCO, the UN body responsible for education, science and culture (Governments of Canada and Quebec, 2006).

Another important advancement for the Quebecois under the Harper Conservatives consisted of the recognition of their status as a nation by the House of Commons. On November 27th, 2006, the Conservative government introduced a motion stating "That this House recognizes that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada" (Choudhry, 2009). The precise wording is noteworthy, because it does not acknowledge that Quebec may form a nation on its own. Regardless, the Conservative motion was still a gain for Quebec nationalists.

Furthermore, the Conservatives pledged to limit the use of the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdictions. From the perspective of many Quebecers, the federal spending power is a way for the federal government to exert undue influence in provincial matters. Despite this criticism, previous governments used the federal power to spend in provincial jurisdictions. The Conservatives promised to reverse this trend and instead focus on traditional missions of the federal government such as national defense, security, immigration, aboriginal policy, and international affairs. Even though some may argue that this was a tactic to reduce federal transfer payments to provinces, it still led to less interference from Ottawa in provincial matters - an issue of particular importance in Quebec.

It appears then that the Conservatives have done a lot to seduce Quebec voters and respond to some longstanding demands of the province. Yet, despite their best efforts, electoral support for

the Conservatives in the province has remained low. In 2006, they received 24.6% of the vote, far behind the Bloc Québécois and only 4 percentage points ahead of the Liberals. In 2008, they received 21.7% of the vote, still far behind the Bloc and 2 percentage points behind the Liberals. In the 2011 election, the Conservative vote in Quebec slipped to 16.5%, behind the NDP and the Bloc and barely ahead of the Liberals, who only received 14.2% of the vote. Given the repeated attempts by Conservatives to appeal to Quebec voters, this is surprising. How can this downward trajectory be explained?

Observing variations in public opinion in Quebec over this time period can shed some light on the issue. The article tracks the evolution of public opinion in Quebec on key policy issues as well as satisfaction with the government. Observing these variations may help understand why the Conservatives were unable to win over the province despite their many attempts to do so. The article thus sets out to make three contributions to the study of federal politics in the province of Quebec. First, it studies the variation of public opinion regarding issues that gained new salience under the minority Conservative governments, including the gun registry, the treatment of young offenders, and the place of Quebec in the federation. Second, it studies the variation of public opinion regarding satisfaction with the federal government and its leader, Stephen Harper. Third, it explicitly tests the hypothesis that opinion on political issues affects satisfaction with the federal government, appreciation of Stephen Harper, and the probability to vote for the Conservative party by using regression analysis. It finds that public opinion on the salient issues identified in this study have a significant effect on all three of these dependent variables, even when the impact of party identification and socio-demographic characteristics are controlled for.

This article begins with a review of the literature on the political culture of Quebec. The analysis then turns its attention to variation in Quebec public opinion during the three elections that marked Stephen Harper's minority governments, that is, 2006, 2008, and 2011. After managing to win a majority in 2011 without the support of Quebec, the Conservatives relented in their attempt to seduce Quebec voters. For this reason, the analysis is limited to the 2006-2011 time period. Finally, regression models attempt to explain whether and how Quebecers' positions on public policy impacted their satisfaction with the Harper government, their perception of Stephen Harper, and their willingness to vote for the Conservative Party.

Political Culture in Quebec

The following analysis relies on the literature on regional differences, regional political culture, and policy preferences. These literatures are well established in Canadian political science, and often intersect with each other. As these works inform the present study, their arguments and findings are briefly reviewed below.

There are important reasons to believe that politics in Quebec will differ from politics in other provinces. First, like all other provinces, Quebec has its own set of institutions and laws. For this reason, it can be expected that it will have its own political dynamics (Schwartz, 1974; Simeon and Elkins, 1974; Simeon and Elkins, 1980; Ornstein, 1986; Wiseman, 2007). Furthermore, it deserves to be noted that Quebec is probably the province that is the most willing to use these institutional levers to establish its own policies. Many examples illustrate its willingness to do so, including funding a public daycare system (Clavet and Duclos, 2014) and its language laws. These policies create a particular environment which can have an effect on how Quebecers perceive federal politics.

A second reason why particular dynamics should be expected in the province of Quebec is because its political leaders frequently contest and make demands of the federal government. Examples include Maurice Duplessis' refusal of federal money for postsecondary education in the name of provincial autonomy and Jean Lesage, who wanted the federal government to recognize a distinct status for Quebec, including the creation of a provincial pension plan (McRoberts, 1997). The demands of René Lévesque led to a dead end during the 1982 constitutional negotiations, with Quebec refusing to sign the final document. No other province refused federal money for postsecondary education, requested its own pension plan, or refused to sign the 1982 Constitution. More recently, this trend also involved Jean Charest, who requested (and obtained) the creation of the Council of the Federation (Hudon, 2004). The requests made by the Bloc Québécois can also affect public opinion in the province. These many demands may have an impact on Quebecers' views of federal politicians and federal politics.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, Quebec, unlike other Canadian provinces, is home to a nation of its own (McRoberts, 2001; Gagnon and Iacovino, 2006). It is the homeland of the majority of French-Speaking Canadians (McRoberts, 1997). As mentioned in the introduction, this is now officially recognized by the House of Commons, even though the idea is certainly not

new. For this reason, debates about the French language, the place of Quebec in the federation, and federal interventions in provincial jurisdictions can all play differently in this province compared with other parts of the country.

Previous work has already studied political attitudes in a comparative manner in Canada, and identified how political attitudes in Quebec vary from attitudes in the rest of the country. Results typically find that Quebec significantly diverges from English Canada on many indicators. Ornstein et al. (1980) argued that the impact of regional differences is overstated in studies of Canadian politics. They show that regional differences are mild, and that socioeconomic differences are more important than regional differences in most of the tests they conduct. Despite their skepticism, however, they recognized that the difference between Quebec and the rest of the country is large. They write that “the average response in French Quebec is farthest from the national average in five of our eight ideological measures” (p. 258). They note that support for minorities is high in Quebec, even though support for immigration is low. They explain this apparent discrepancy by noting that Quebecers identify as a linguistic minority and that their rejection of immigration finds its source in the perception that immigration is a “threat to its continued existence as an identifiable cultural entity” (p. 258-9). In economic matters, they find that Quebecers are much more likely to favour restrictions on foreign economic control, and that they support the redistribution of income to a larger degree than other Canadians. They conclude that the impact of region “reflects to a large extent the differences in political identification and ideological orientation between French Quebecers and other Canadians, rather than differences among three, five or ten distinct regional political cultures” (p.270). This statement highlights the unique character of political attitudes in Quebec in comparison to the rest of the country.

More recently, Anderson (2010) has studied the policy preferences of Canadians and evaluated the importance of regional differences in determining these preferences. He finds that Quebecers differ significantly from the rest of Canada on four out of six measures. In the same vein as Ornstein et al. (1980), he finds that Quebecers are more likely to support redistribution towards Quebec. He also finds that Quebecers are less supportive of defence spending than other Canadians. In contrast to Ornstein et al. (1980), Anderson (2010) finds that Quebecers support immigration to a greater degree than other Canadians. He also finds that Quebecers are more

progressive on moral issues that touch on gender and sexuality, such as access to abortion and gay marriage.

Héroux-Legault (2016) offers another take on regional differences in political attitudes in Canada. He generates five indicators of political attitudes using factor analysis. These attitudinal dimensions explain more than half of the variance in political values observed in the data, they each include multiple survey items, and they boast high validity and reliability. Quebec respondents are significantly different from other Canadians on four of these five dimensions. Héroux-Legault (2016) notes that Quebecers are more egalitarian and more morally permissive compared to other Canadians. Furthermore, they exhibit lower levels of pluralism and openness to immigration. These results are generally in line with the results obtained by Ornstein et al. (1980) and Anderson (2010).

The previous studies investigate the impact of regional differences across many political attitudes. Some recent studies focus on individual issues, and confirm once again that Quebec is different from the rest of Canada. Cochrane and Perella (2012), for instance, find that “Quebecers are especially left-leaning in their economic outlooks” (p.838). They note, however, that the difference in Quebec is due to the presence of francophones in the province. Once they consider the impact of language, they find that the difference between Quebecers and the rest of the country loses its significance. They conclude that they are in presence of a language effect, rather than a regional effect. Nevertheless, the fact remains that since there are more francophones in Quebec than in the rest of the country, Quebecers are on average more left-leaning than other Canadians. Larocque (2011) also supports this conclusion. Studying strategies of poverty reduction in Quebec, she finds that the province is very effective in reducing poverty. She concludes that government interventions have reduced poverty significantly faster in Quebec than in the other provinces. Bibi and Duclos (2011) come to a similar conclusion. They study how redistributive strategies in Quebec and Canada tackle the issue of poverty. They find that Quebec’s social programs are more generous, even though this comes at the cost of heavier taxes.

Bilodeau et al. (2012) study support for immigration and racial minorities in different regions of Canada. They make a point of distinguishing these two issues. Some immigrants do not belong to racial minority groups, and some individuals who belong to racial minority groups are not

immigrants. They find that Quebecers are comfortable with maintaining a steady flow of immigrants, but that they are less receptive to racial minorities than other Canadians. They also identify a connection between French-speaking Canadians (including Quebecers) and discomfort with racial minorities. Like Ornstein et al. (1980), they explain these results by highlighting the status of the French linguistic minority. Finally, in a study of support for gay marriage in Canada, Dostie-Goulet (2006) finds once again that Quebecers are more morally permissive than other Canadians. She states that 40% of Quebecers support gay marriage while only 26% oppose it, while these proportions are inverted in the rest of the country. She writes that 39% of Canadians outside Quebec oppose gay marriage while 28% support it. These results confirm the importance, direction, and consistency of differences in public opinion between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

This literature review reveals an ample literature that details how public opinion in Quebec differs from public opinion in the rest of the country. This may explain why, despite the best efforts of the Conservative Party, it has been unable to elect a large number of representatives in *La Belle Province*. The following sections track the evolution of public opinion in Quebec regarding salient political issues as well as their satisfaction towards the federal government during the 2006-2011 time period. Subsequently, regression analyses are performed to assess how opinion on political issues impacted satisfaction with the federal government, appreciation of Stephen Harper, and the willingness to vote for the Conservative Party of Canada among Quebecers.

Research Design

The research relies on data from the 2006, 2008, and 2011 Canada Election Study (CES). The CES is a periodic study conducted during Canadian elections. Its goal is to contact and interview a representative sample of Canadians, around 3500 per election, to ask them about their views on politics and policies. The survey is especially interested in opinions related to the election campaign. The frequent minority governments of the early 2000s have been a blessing for political scientists, as they have led to an increase in the frequency of elections and thus yielded more electoral data. This has made it possible to track changes in public opinion within fairly small intervals of time.

The 2006-2011 time period was selected because it encompasses the available CES data collected when Stephen Harper's Conservatives led a minority government. During this period, the Conservatives made many attempts to convince Quebecers to vote for them in order to gain a majority. This is why the evolution of public opinion in Quebec during this time period is especially important. The starting point for this study is 2006, the year in which the Harper Conservatives were elected to government for the first time, replacing the Liberal minority government under Paul Martin. For this reason, data from this year have to be interpreted carefully. Any reference to the government, for instance, has to be interpreted as referring to Paul Martin's Liberal government.

This study focuses on two categories of variables. The first concerns Quebecers' views on specific policies during the 2006-2011 time period. Many of these views relate to longstanding debates in Canadian and Quebec politics. Those that do not are instead punctual debates made salient by the Conservatives during their time in government. The second category of variables concerns the partisan dimension of politics, namely opinions about the federal government and the Prime Minister. All variables are rescaled so that they range from 0 to 1 in an attempt to simplify interpretation and rely on uniform coding for all variables.

The design aims to track the evolution of Quebecers' opinions from 2006 to 2011. The goal is to assess whether opinions on policy and the federal government have changed under the successive Conservative minority governments, and how they have done so if that is the case. In addition to tracking all Quebecers who responded to the CES, the analysis examines two particular subgroups within the sample. The first is composed of respondents who claim that they will vote Conservative in the pre-electoral wave of the survey. These respondents are early supporters of the Conservative Party, and so there is reason to expect that their beliefs may be somewhat different than those of the general Quebec sample. The second group is based on a question which asks respondents if there is any party for which they would never vote. Respondents who claimed they would never vote for the Conservatives constitute the second subset tracked by the study. If they are so strongly opposed to the Conservatives that they are willing to reject them before the date of the election, then there is reason to believe that they may hold different views than the general Quebec sample as well.

Furthermore, the article proposes to examine how public opinion on political issues impacts satisfaction towards the federal government, appreciation towards Stephen Harper and willingness to vote for the Conservative Party. Two regression models are conducted for each dependent variable. The first only considers the impact of public opinion on issues. The second model adds party identification and sociodemographic characteristics to the analysis. These results show that opinion on political issues have an impact on each of these three dependent variables, even after controlling for party identification and sociodemographic characteristics.

Public Opinion and Public Policy

The election of the Harper government marked a shift in policy in comparison with the previous Liberal governments. Issues that were dormant or static suddenly came to the fore. This review of Quebecers' opinion on policy focuses on such issues for which there is available data: the gun registry, the punishment of young offenders who commit violent crimes, and the place of Quebec in Canada. The data on these topics can be found in Table 1 and Figures 1 to 4.

From the perspective of Quebecers, the gun registry is deeply tied with the tragic events of December 6, 1989 at École Polytechnique. On this day, Marc Lépine entered the school and killed fourteen female students. This day is commemorated annually as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Perhaps uniquely in Quebec, this event is associated with the federal gun registry, with advocates of the registry arguing that it is necessary to ensure that similar events do not happen again. Given the province's attachment to the registry, both the Bloc Québécois and the Quebec provincial governments (federalist and sovereigntist) vocally opposed the Conservatives' promises to scrap it. This issue came to prominence as early as 2006, when the Conservatives made public their desire to scrap the registry. Online archives show that the Bloc Québécois took a strong stance in favour of maintaining the registry (Bloc Quebecois, 2006). The Conservative government, however, had trouble implementing this promise because it lacked a majority in the House of Commons.

In 2009, the Conservative government submitted a bill to abolish the gun registry. The Bloc Québécois reacted by organizing a screening of the movie *Polytechnique*, which tells the story of the December 6th events. It invited members of all parliamentary caucuses to attend, stating their desire to increase awareness of the tragedy and to underline the importance of tracking firearms (Bloc Quebecois, 2009). When the Conservatives eventually managed to form a majority

government in 2011, they obtained enough votes to abolish the registry. As a response, the Quebec government asked the federal government to send them the data regarding Quebec residents, so that Quebec could create its own registry. Faced with a refusal from the Conservative government, Quebec asked the Quebec Superior Court to compel the federal government to share the data. The Quebec Superior court sided with Quebec, but the federal government sought an appeal and won in the Quebec Appeal Court. The Quebec government then sought an appeal, which brought the case in front of the Supreme Court. The Court was divided, with five justices supporting the position of the federal government, and four supporting Quebec's position (Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes, 2015). The ardour with which the Bloc Québécois championed maintaining the registry, the symbolic connection between the registry and the traumatic events that transpired at Polytechnique, and the willingness of the Quebec government to create its own registry and bring the federal government to court over this issue all illustrate the importance of this issue in Quebec.

Unfortunately, the question regarding support for the gun registry is missing from the 2008 CES. The 2006 and 2011 surveys asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with scrapping the gun registry. The data reveal interesting trends. First, the groups are situated where they would be expected to stand in relation to each other. Opponents to the Conservatives support maintaining the registry in greater numbers than the general sample, which shows greater support for the registry than Conservative supporters. However, it is noteworthy that all lines in the graph are moving in the same direction. Regardless of which group one belongs to, popular opinion in Quebec is moving in the same direction, that is, greater support for maintaining the registry. It thus seems that the Conservatives failed to convince Quebecers of the necessity of scrapping the registry during their time in office, including their own supporters. Support for the registry increased by 0.19 among Conservative opponents between 2006 and 2011, whereas it increased by 0.17 among the Quebec sample and only by 0.07 among Conservative supporters. These differences are statistically significant.

A second issue that came to the fore during the tenure of the Conservatives government concerns how young offenders who commit violent crimes are treated by the justice system. This issue was especially important in Quebec. Academic work shows that Quebecers are more lenient about punishing crimes committed by young offenders than other Canadians. Doob and Cesaroni

(2004) report that Quebecers are significantly less likely than other Canadians to think that youth court sentences are not severe enough. Trépanier (2004) provides several explanations that can account for this greater focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment in Quebec. He argues that Quebec had a tradition of rehabilitation even before similar programs were established at the federal level. Trépanier further argues that perceptions in Quebec are less Americanized than in the rest of Canada and that Quebec actors feel that changes made in this policy area are made for political and electoral reasons rather than due to an actual policy need. News coverage of this issue reflected this understanding. It frequently mentioned that harsher sentences could only be imposed as early as 16 years in Quebec, unlike in other provinces (De Grandpré, 2008a; De Grandpré, 2008b; Lévesque, 2008; Bellavance, 2010; Agence QMI, 2010). Quebec criminologists were interviewed and expressed doubts about the efficiency of harsher punishments. Trépanier argued that prison would make young prisoners tougher, which would make them a danger for society once they get out (De Grandpré, 2008a). Others pointed out that a program that sent young offenders to harsh boot camps in Ontario at the end of the 90s led to a repeated offence rate of 100% (Lévesque, 2008).

This policy was opposed by the Bloc Québécois and the Quebec government. Gilles Duceppe, leader of the BQ, argued that the Conservative plan would result in sending young offenders as “fresh meat¹” to prison, where they would be sexually abused. Stephen Harper asked for the Bloc leader to withdraw this comment, to no avail (De Grandpré, 2008b). These declarations from the Bloc leader and the conflict it spurred with the Conservative leader prompted a lot of attention in the province, which gave this issue a high salience it may not have had elsewhere in the country. The provincial government also spoke against the Conservative plan, although in much milder tones. During the 2008 electoral campaign, a spokesperson for the Justice ministry stated that the provincial government was in favour of rehabilitation and social reintegration of young offenders (De Grandpré, 2008a). In 2010, the Quebec government suggested that the Conservatives’ intentions may be found to be in breach of the Constitution by the Court (Bellavance, 2010). To summarize, public opinion in Quebec was more favourable to rehabilitation than public opinion in the rest of the country, and specialists, the Bloc Québécois,

¹ Translated from the French “Chair fraîche”.

and the Quebec government alike took a strong stance in favour of the rehabilitation of young offenders rather than harsh punishment.

When tracking the answers to the question “What is the best way to deal with young offenders who commit violent crimes?”, one could expect to witness different trajectories for supporters and opponents of the Conservatives. Yet, the trajectories are not unlike those regarding the gun registry. The lines have different starting points, but their general trajectories seem to follow a similar pattern. Opponents to the Conservatives show a higher degree of support for rehabilitation than the general sample, which shows a higher degree of support for rehabilitation than Conservative supporters. Yet, as with the gun registry, the trajectories follow a similar pattern, although in this case it appears that the Conservative government managed to convince the population of the merits of its position. From 2006 to 2011, support for rehabilitation among opponents has dropped by 0.08 points, among the general sample by 0.09, and among supporters by 0.18 points. Note that in this case the response from the Quebec government was more muted than in the case of the gun registry, which may explain why public opinion espoused the Conservative position over time.

The final topic of interest to this section of the study concerns the place of Quebec in the federation. Many observers would argue that modern nationalism in Quebec dates back to the 1960s with the Quiet Revolution (McRoberts, 1997; Wiseman, 2007). The Lesage government was not arguing in favour of sovereignty, but it requested a review of the balance of power between the federal and provincial governments. Motivating this request was Lesage’s desire to modernize Quebec and gain greater control over its culture, economy, and natural resources. The provincial government adopted the language of identity politics to justify these demands. Resistance from the federal government led to polarization and, eventually, the development of the sovereigntist movement in the province. This movement was inspired by decolonization in Africa, the Cuban Revolution, the civil rights movement in the United States, and French student protests. The fact that the economy was dominated by English interests and that French Canadians’ salaries were on average 35% lower than those of Anglophones explains why such comparisons were made by early sovereigntists (McRoberts, 1997; Rocher, 2014) and the historical collaboration between sovereignists and Labour (Savage, 2008).

The sovereigntist movement led to the creation of sovereigntist parties, which changed the face of federal politics in Quebec. During the period between 2006 and 2011, Quebec was the only province to boast a provincial federal party such as the Bloc Québécois. This is an important distinction, because this party caters to a single province and in doing so highlights issues that are specific to this province. It should also be mentioned that not all voters who support the Bloc Québécois are in favour of sovereignty. Many Quebecers are nationalist but are not in favour of sovereignty (Wiseman, 2007), and vote for the Bloc Québécois for this reason. This finding is supported in multiple studies of vote choice (Nevitte et al., 2000; Blais et al., 2002; Gidengil et al. 2012; Loewen et al., 2015). The fact that the Bloc Québécois appeals to a broad range of supporters may explain why it dominated the face of Quebec federal politics from 1993 to 2011. Many analysts argue that the success of sovereigntist parties depends in part on whether they can exploit conflicts between the province and the federal government to boost their support among separatists and nationalists alike (Dion, 1996; McRoberts, 1997; Wiseman, 2007).

The election of the Harper government represented an opportunity for Quebec nationalists. Stephen Harper had claimed multiple times to champion a vision of open federalism that should appeal to Quebecers. The first sign of this approach can be seen in the Firewall letter co-authored by Stephen Harper and addressed to Premier Ralph Klein (Harper et al., 2001). The letter encourages the Alberta provincial government to take its distance from its federal counterpart in order to increase its autonomy. It defends an approach based on a decentralized federalism that gives provinces more powers within their own spheres of jurisdiction. This approach should have resonated well with nationalist and federalist Quebecers, who promote a similar approach when defending Quebec's status in the federation.

On December 19th, 2005, Stephen Harper presented to Quebecers his vision of federalism. He pledged to respect the jurisdictions of provinces and adopt an open federalism that is more inclusive of the provinces. He also said that Quebec is the heart of Canada, and that French is part of the identity of all Canadians. This speech was followed by a marked increase in attention and reported votes in surveys for the Conservative Party. Quebecers viewed favourably the appearance of a contender for government who shared their vision of federalism (Flanagan, 2009).

During this speech, Harper promised to give Quebec a representative at the UNESCO. This promise was not original. Indeed, it had been made in 2004 as well, although the promise came from Liberal leader Paul Martin rather than from Stephen Harper. The Liberals, however, did not deliver on this promise during Martin's short-lived minority government. The agreement between the federal and Quebec governments was signed in May 2006, four months after the Conservative government was elected. This agreement showed Quebecers that the Conservatives cared about issues that were important to the province.

Another episode in which the Conservatives showed their openness to Quebec occurred during parliamentary debates on the status of Quebec as a nation. The Conservatives introduced a motion which recognized the Québécois as a nation "within a united Canada". The Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP supported the motion, while the Liberals were divided (Choudhry, 2009). This illustrates how the Conservatives have been willing to recognize Quebec's unique position in the federation.

To analyze how Quebecers responded to the Conservatives' open federalism, two questions from the CES are used. When considering these two questions, it is helpful to remember that scores in 2006 reflect opinions on how the Liberal government treated Quebec. For this reason, the variation between 2006 and 2008 is interesting, as it illustrates changes that occurred when the governing party changed from the Liberals to the Conservatives. The first question under consideration asks whether more should be done for Quebec. It is remarkable that on this question the general sample and Conservative opponents follow a very similar curve, going from 0.79 to 0.72 and 0.78 to 0.75 respectively. Conservative supporters want less done for Quebec, going from 0.74 to 0.63 from 2006 to 2011. The curvilinear shape of the relationship for all groups deserves particular attention. There is a marked drop when going from 2006 to 2008. This suggests that Quebecers from all subsets under study reacted favourably to the Conservatives' overtures to Quebec, such as a seat at the UNESCO, a formal recognition of the Quebec nation, a more open federalism, and limiting the use of the federal spending power. Nevertheless, Quebecers seemed to want more in 2011 than in 2008, even though their dissatisfaction did not rise to the levels seen under the Liberals in 2006.

The second question under consideration asks Quebecers whether their province is treated unfairly by the federal government. Once again, some similarities can be observed between the

general sample and Conservative opponents. They both felt that the province was treated unfairly by the Liberal government at the same level in 2006, with a score of 0.62. Conservative supporters obtain a score of 0.58. Differences become larger in 2008 and 2011. Conservative opponents report the same score in 2006 and in 2008, while the general sample becomes somewhat more satisfied, sliding down to 0.58. Conservative supporters, meanwhile, see their score slide down to 0.48, reflecting a greater belief that Quebec is treated fairly under the Conservatives. However, this satisfaction is short-lived, as perceptions of Quebec being treated unfairly go up among all groups between 2008 and 2011. Conservative opponents in 2011 report Quebec being treated unfairly at 0.77, while the Quebec sample does so with a score of 0.68. For these two groups, the score in 2011 is higher than the score in 2006, under Paul Martin's Liberals. Meanwhile, Conservative supporters' score on this indicator stands at 0.53, higher than in 2008 but still lower than under the Liberals in 2006.

Before moving to the next section of the analysis, there is reason to pause and try to identify patterns in the variation of support for public policy over the time period in question. The patterns of change are very similar across subsets. Even if their starting points differ, the direction of the change is generally the same for all groups. However, the magnitude of the change depends on the group in question. It also appears that Conservative opponents are much more similar to the general Quebec sample than Conservative supporters. This may explain in part the limited success of the Conservatives in the province. Finally, it deserves to be noted that even Conservative supporters are moving away from their party on several issues. In 2011, they were less happy with Quebec's place under the Conservative federal government and less supportive of scrapping the gun registry than they were in 2008.

Quebecers and the Federal Government

The second category of variables concerns Quebecers' opinions on the federal government and Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Data pertaining to this analysis can be found in Table 2 and Figures 5 to 8. The first variable under consideration focuses on satisfaction towards the federal government. Unlike in the preceding section, there are important differences across subgroups in terms of satisfaction with the federal government. In 2006, opinion on the Martin Liberal government varied between all three groups. Conservative opponents were dissatisfied, with a score of 0.41. The Quebec sample was even more dissatisfied, at 0.36. Conservative supporters

were even less satisfied, with a score of 0.29. Scores changed drastically in the 2008 CES, illustrating the fact that satisfaction towards the federal government is more likely a function of the party in control of the levers of government rather than a function of the institution itself. The satisfaction of Conservative opponents with Prime Minister Harper dropped to 0.21, while it rose drastically to 0.70 among Conservative supporters. The Quebec sample had a much more moderate reaction, climbing up to 0.41. It should also be pointed out that satisfaction in the government fell slightly from 2008 to 2011, even among Conservative supporters.

Two questions concern perceptions of the Prime Minister. The first simply asks respondent to rate how much they like him. Lines start at different points but go in the same direction for all subsets. Among Conservative opponents in Quebec, views on Stephen Harper have become worse over time, going from 0.44 in 2006 to 0.18 in 2011. Among the general Quebec sample, his rating declines from 0.57 to 0.37. Finally, views on the Prime Minister also drop among Conservative supporters, going from 0.73 to 0.69. Clearly, the decline is not as strong among his supporters as it is among the rest of the public.

A second question asks whether respondents consider Stephen Harper to be too extreme. Once again, the relationship goes in the same direction among all groups in the Quebec sample. All groups found Stephen Harper more extreme in 2011 than they did in 2006. The average score of Conservative opponents moved from 0.75 to 0.82, while the same score rose from 0.36 to 0.38 among Conservative supporters. In the general Quebec sample, the movement went from 0.59 to 0.65, the same magnitude as the change witnessed in Conservative opponents.

Another interesting question for which patterns diverge by category concerns whether respondents believe that the government cares what people like them think. In 2006, scores were remarkably similar across groups. Conservative supporters only scored 0.37 on this indicator, while the general sample scored 0.38. Even Conservative opponents scored 0.41, which indicated small variations between groups. However, the spread increased after the Conservatives formed the government. In 2011, the score for Conservative opponents slipped down to 0.3, while the score for Conservative supporters climbed to 0.47, a much larger gap. The Quebec sample did not move much, falling by 0.04 to 0.34. Thus, it seems that Quebecers do not feel as well represented under the Harper government than they did under the Martin government, although the difference is small. This being said, this perception varies depending on whether one supports

or opposes the Conservatives. Conservative supporters felt much better represented in 2011 than they did in 2006.

All things considered, public opinion about Stephen Harper follows similar trends as public opinion on public policy. The patterns of change are similar across groups, although the magnitude of change differs across groups. Once again, Conservative opponents are closer to the general Quebec sample than Conservative supporters. Furthermore, the analysis shows once again that even Conservative supporters moved away from their own party between 2008 and 2011. Given the importance of leader evaluations in Canadian politics (Clarke et al., 2009), this marks an important sign of dissatisfaction among Quebecers.

Some exceptions, however, should be mentioned. Satisfaction with the federal government and perceptions that the government cares about what Quebecers think did not follow a similar pattern across groups. This highlights the fact that such variables should be interpreted in partisan terms and not necessarily in purely institutional terms. It seems that when respondents answer such questions, their answers do not simply reflect their opinions of government as an abstract institution, but rather their view of the current government and of the party in power. This observation suggests that opinion on public policy, and on how the party in power handles policy, could have an impact on satisfaction with the federal government as well.

Explaining Satisfaction with the Federal Government and Support for the Conservatives

The previous sections detailed the evolution of public opinion in Quebec on select policy issues as well as satisfaction towards the federal government and Conservative leader Stephen Harper from 2006 to 2011. While the trends explored are interesting and informative on their own, they do not provide convincing evidence that they are related to each other. Even though there is plenty of evidence that issues matter in elections (Downs, 1957; Nevitte et al., 2000; Blais et al., 2002; Gidengil et al., 2012), it is unclear which issues matter. Issues of security, like voters' positions on the gun registry and young offenders, are rarely included in models of voter choice in Canada, which make them especially compelling independent variables for this study. In addition to monitoring the impact of issue positions on voting behaviour, the following analysis also assesses their impact on satisfaction with the government and appreciation of Stephen Harper, two topics that deserve further study. The objective is to ascertain whether issues that

were particularly important in Quebec during this time period truly had an impact on Quebecers' evaluation of their government and on their vote choice.

The analysis measures the impact of the four public policy questions studied above on satisfaction with the federal government, evaluations of Stephen Harper, and the probability to vote for the Conservatives. The independent variables are coded so that high values represent a desire that more be accomplished for Quebec, a belief that Quebec is not treated fairly by the government, a desire to maintain the registry, and a preference for rehabilitation over harsher punishment for young offenders. It is hypothesized that these variables will have negative effects on the three dependent variables. Individuals who are unhappy with the manner in which Quebec is treated and who disagree with the Conservative agenda on law and order are expected to be dissatisfied under a Conservative government, dislike Stephen Harper, and be less likely to vote for the Conservative Party of Canada.

Two models are considered for each dependent variable under examination. The first one only considers the impact of policy positions. This model provides a preliminary idea of the relationship between issue positions and the dependent variable. However, this model does not control for other variables which may explain variation in the dependent variable. For instance, individuals who identify with the Conservative Party would be expected to agree with the party's program and to evaluate positively the party's performance in government, which may bias the estimate of the impact of policy positions in the first regression model. Socio-demographic characteristics may do the same as well. Being a francophone could be correlated to satisfaction regarding how Quebec is treated in the federation, while being female could be correlated with the desire to maintain the gun registry, given the close symbolic association between the registry and violence against women in the province. For this reason, an additional model per dependent variable is conducted, adding party identification and socio-demographic variables to the analysis.

One possible issue with the analysis concerns a low sample size. Two reasons explain why the analyses that follow show a relatively small sample size. First, we are only concerned with respondents from Quebec, which means that around 75% of the respondents to the CES are excluded from the analysis because they reside in another province or territory. Second, the questions regarding opinions on the gun registry were located in the mail-back survey. This

questionnaire is administered in the third wave of the survey, and is answered by mail rather than over the phone. Consequently, there are fewer respondents to the mail-back survey than to the other two waves of the CES. These two restrictions limit our analysis to a sample of less than 300 respondents. This fact bears keeping in mind, since statistical significance is not only a function of the relationship observed in the data but also of sample size. Observing statistical significance at this restricted sample size would indicate very strong findings.

The regression models are restricted to data from the 2011 CES. There are several reasons for this. First, it makes very little sense to study support for the federal government in relation to the Harper Conservatives in 2006, as the incumbent federal government in 2006 was a Liberal government under the leadership of Paul Martin. Second, it would be impossible to measure the impact of the gun registry in 2008 since the variable was missing from the survey. Third, running these regressions separately for each year would mean conducting eighteen separate regressions, which would take considerable space to present and discuss individually. Data from 2011 are selected as they give the best picture of the mood of Quebecers after five years under the Conservative minority government.

The first regression analysis considers satisfaction with the federal government. The results can be found in Table 3. The first model identifies that three out of four variables have a significant impact on satisfaction with the federal government. They consist of whether respondents believe that Quebec is treated fairly, whether they favour the rehabilitation of young offenders, and whether they favour maintaining the gun registry. As hypothesized, all three of these variables have a negative effect on the dependent variable. The only variable that is not significant is whether the respondent wants more to be done for Quebec. Adding party identification and socio-demographic variables to the model changes the results slightly. While socio-demographic variables do not have a significant impact on the dependent variable, party identification does, with respondents who identify as Conservatives being significantly more satisfied with the government than other voters. This impacts the results, as support for maintaining the gun registry loses significance in this model. However, opinions about whether Quebec is treated fairly and support for the rehabilitation of young offenders remain highly significant.

The second analysis focuses on evaluations of Stephen Harper. The results are shown in Table 4. It demonstrates remarkably continuity with the previous results. In the first model, the same three

variables have a significant impact on evaluations of the Conservative leader: whether Quebec is treated fairly by the government; preferences regarding the best punishment for young offenders; and opinions regarding the gun registry. As expected, these three variables once again have a negative impact on the dependent variable. The second model reveals that party identification, gender, and language all have a significant impact on this variable as well. Conservative identifiers and Francophones give higher ratings to Stephen Harper, while men give him lower ratings. The three significant policy variables remain significant in this model.

The third and final analysis tackles the question of voting for the Conservative Party. The results are shown in Table 5. The first model finds that three out of four variables have a significant impact on the propensity to vote for the Conservative Party. The results are displayed as odds ratios. They show that individuals who believe that Quebec is treated unfairly by the government are 20% as likely as individuals who believe Quebec is treated fairly by the government to vote for the Conservatives. Individuals who prefer the rehabilitation of young offenders are 38% as likely as individuals who favour harsher punishment to vote for the Conservatives. Finally, individuals who strongly prefer to maintain the gun registry are only 25% as likely to vote Conservative as individuals in favour of scrapping the registry. In the second model, the only significant control variable is identification with the Conservative Party, which strongly increases the probability to vote for the Conservatives. The three policy variables remain significant after the inclusion of party identification, which shows that policy preferences in Quebec had an impact beyond that of party identification and sociodemographic characteristics in explaining the limited electoral success of the Conservatives in the province.

Discussion

This article makes three contributions to the literature on Canadian federal politics in Quebec. It tracks the evolution of public opinion on public policy as well as satisfaction with the federal government and appreciation of Stephen Harper from 2006 to 2011. It then pushes the analysis further by showing that public opinion on policy issues had an impact on voter satisfaction with the government, voter appreciation of Stephen Harper, and the propensity to vote for the Conservative Party in Quebec using linear and logistic regression analyses.

The analysis of public opinion in Quebec under the Harper Conservatives has revealed interesting patterns. Regarding opinions on public policy, patterns are similar for all groups

under examination, meaning that supporters and opponents of the Conservatives and the general sample typically moved in the same direction. This being said, their starting point on a given issue was generally different, as was the magnitude of the change over time. This finding reflects findings from Green et al. (2004) as well as Bartels (2002). Studying American politics, they also find that different groups hold different opinions, but that these opinions follow similar curves over time. This finding reveals that there is limited polarization of the public – that is, a situation in which supporters of different parties would have their opinions move in opposite directions. Support for a given policy generally moves in the same direction for all groups, even if it may do so at different paces. This is not to say that there was no polarization at all. The groups under study followed different trajectories in the case of satisfaction towards the federal government, in addition to perceptions that the government cares about what people like the respondent thinks.

The results of the regression analyses confirm that public opinion in Quebec hurt the Conservatives. Three of the four policy issues tracked in this study were found to have a significant impact on the satisfaction of Quebecers with the federal government, on their evaluation of Stephen Harper, and on their willingness to vote for the Conservative party. For each dependent variable, the same three variables had significant explanatory power: beliefs regarding whether Quebec is treated fairly by the government, opinion on the gun registry, and opinion on rehabilitation and punishment for young offenders who commit violent crimes. Notwithstanding a single exception, these variables had negative effects on all three dependent variables under study, whether considered alone or with controls added to the regression analysis. The fact that these results were obtained despite the addition of control variables and a relatively small sample size speaks to the importance of the relationship between policy positions and satisfaction with the government, appreciation of Stephen Harper, and the willingness to vote for the Conservative Party of Canada. It shows that the mismatch between the Conservative policy agenda and the political opinions of Quebecers on these issues contributes to explaining why the Conservative Party had only limited success in the province.

The analysis can explain the limited success of the Conservative Party in Quebec. While it managed to convince Quebecers to support its plan regarding young offenders, the Conservatives were otherwise on the wrong side of issues in the eyes of Quebecers. They failed to convince Quebecers that scrapping the gun registry was a good idea. Quebecers were less satisfied with

Quebec's place in the federation in 2011 than they were in 2008. While they initially reacted positively to the Conservatives' open federalism, this trend reversed between 2008 and 2011. Perceptions that Stephen Harper is too extreme increased over the time period, while appreciation of Stephen Harper decreased. Finally, the belief that the government cares about what Quebecers think decreased as well. In short, while Quebecers liked the Conservatives' open federalism, their appreciation was short-lived. It was also overshadowed by disagreement on many other issues. In the end, they did not feel well represented by the federal government, and they have grown more dissatisfied with the federal government between 2006 and 2011. These trends explain why Conservative support remained low in the province despite the Conservatives' commitment to open federalism.

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Table 1: Quebecers' Opinion on Public Policy

Year	General Sample			Supporters			Opponents		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
The gun registry should be maintained.									
2006	963	0.51	0.41	117	0.43	0.39	144	0.63	0.37
2011	854	0.68	0.37	133	0.50	0.40	280	0.82	0.30
Young offenders should be rehabilitated.									
2006	940	0.53	0.50	108	0.44	0.50	138	0.75	0.44
2008	784	0.63	0.48	120	0.40	0.49	246	0.80	0.40
2011	313	0.44	0.50	50	0.26	0.44	126	0.67	0.47
How much should be done for Quebec?									
2006	974	0.79	0.22	115	0.74	0.23	143	0.78	0.23
2008	830	0.70	0.21	127	0.62	0.21	255	0.73	0.21
2011	869	0.72	0.21	128	0.63	0.21	283	0.75	0.21
Quebec is treated unfairly by the federal government.									
2006	964	0.62	0.31	113	0.58	0.30	140	0.62	0.29
2008	809	0.58	0.29	126	0.48	0.23	248	0.62	0.30
2011	864	0.68	0.29	136	0.53	0.25	283	0.77	0.28

Table 2: Quebecers' Opinion on the Federal Government

Year	General Sample			Supporters			Opponents		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Are you satisfied with the federal government?									
2006	979	0.36	0.27	120	0.29	0.26	143	0.41	0.23
2008	853	0.41	0.28	131	0.70	0.18	290	0.21	0.23
2011	1215	0.38	0.27	179	0.66	0.19	374	0.20	0.20
Favourable Views of Stephen Harper									
2006	782	0.57	0.22	102	0.73	0.16	122	0.44	0.22
2008	823	0.44	0.29	130	0.75	0.15	284	0.24	0.22
2011	1179	0.37	0.28	177	0.69	0.21	370	0.18	0.20
Stephen Harper is too extreme									
2006	887	0.59	0.30	115	0.36	0.25	140	0.75	0.26
2008	759	0.62	0.35	116	0.33	0.28	276	0.79	0.27
2011	1169	0.65	0.31	173	0.38	0.26	367	0.82	0.23
The government cares about what people like me think									
2006	805	0.38	0.29	101	0.37	0.30	123	0.41	0.25
2008	830	0.39	0.30	127	0.41	0.29	256	0.37	0.29
2011	885	0.34	0.30	138	0.47	0.34	285	0.30	0.29

Table 3: Determinants of Satisfaction with the Federal Government

	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
More for Quebec	0.12	0.08	0.11	0.08
Quebec treated	-		-	
Fairly	0.22***	0.06	0.19***	0.06
	-		-	
Young Offender	0.14***	0.03	0.12***	0.03
Gun Registry	-0.08*	0.04	-0.05	0.04
Conservative PID	-	-	0.19***	0.04
Male	-	-	0.00	0.01
French	-	-	0.03	0.04
Intercept	0.62***	0.06	0.52***	0.07
N		281		281
Adjusted R²		0.16		0.21

Legend

a: p<0.1

*: p<0.05

**: p<0.01

***: p<0.001

Table 4: Determinants of Appreciation for Stephen Harper

	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
More for Quebec	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.09
Quebec treated				
Fairly	-0.24***	0.06	-0.20***	0.06
Young Offender	-0.12***	0.03	-0.10***	0.03
Gun Registry	-0.15***	0.05	-0.10*	0.04
Conservative PID	-	-	0.28***	0.04
Male	-	-	-0.01 ^a	0.01
French	-	-	0.08*	0.04
Intercept	0.69***	0.07	0.55***	0.08
N		274		274
Adjusted R²		0.15		0.27

Legend

a: p<0.1

*: p<0.05

**: p<0.01

***: p<0.001

Table 5: Determinants of Voting Intentions in Favour of the Conservatives

	O.R	SE	O.R	SE
More for Quebec	1.25	1.15	0.94	1.08
Quebec treated				
Fairly	0.18**	0.12	0.17*	0.14
Young Offender	0.38*	0.15	0.42 ^a	0.19
Gun Registry	0.25**	0.11	0.37 ^a	0.20
Conservative PID	-	-	21.86***	10.36
Male	-	-	0.81 ^a	0.09
French	-	-	2.28	1.30
Intercept	2.14	1.46	0.81	0.79
N		267		267
Adjusted R²		0.11		0.33

Legend

a: p<0.1

*: p<0.05

**: p<0.01

***: p<0.001

Figure 1: Quebecers' opinion on the gun registry

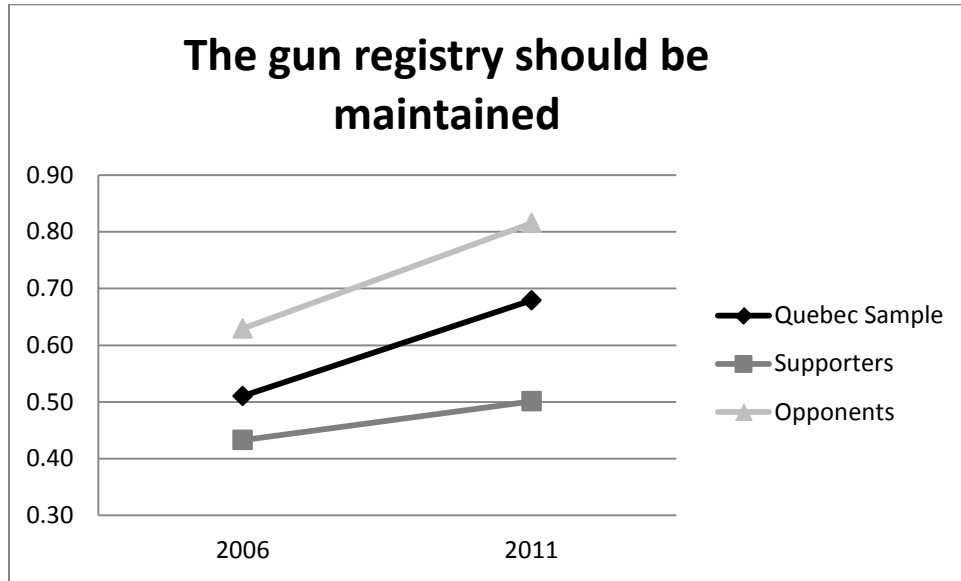


Figure 2: Quebecers' opinion on rehabilitation of young offenders

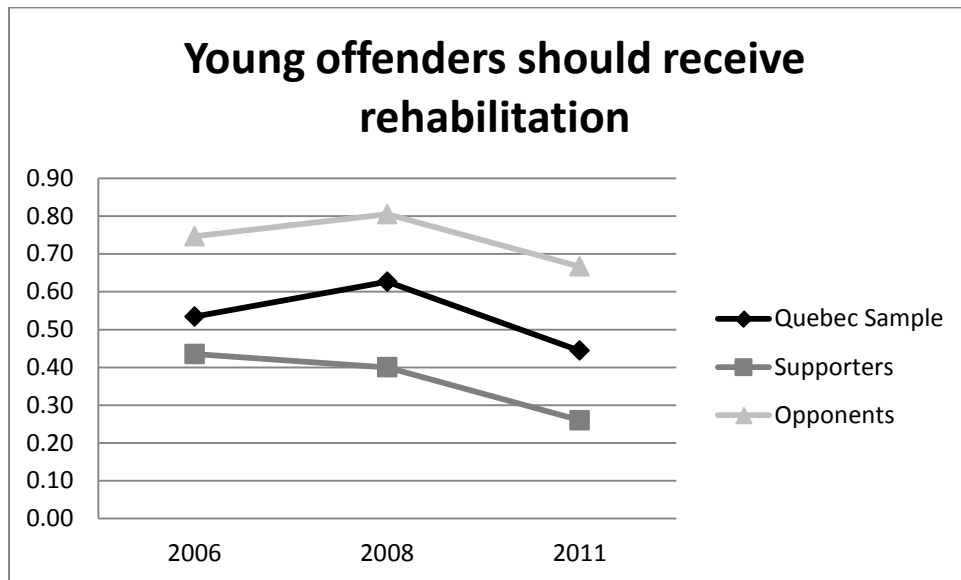


Figure 3: Quebecers' opinion on whether more should be done for Quebec

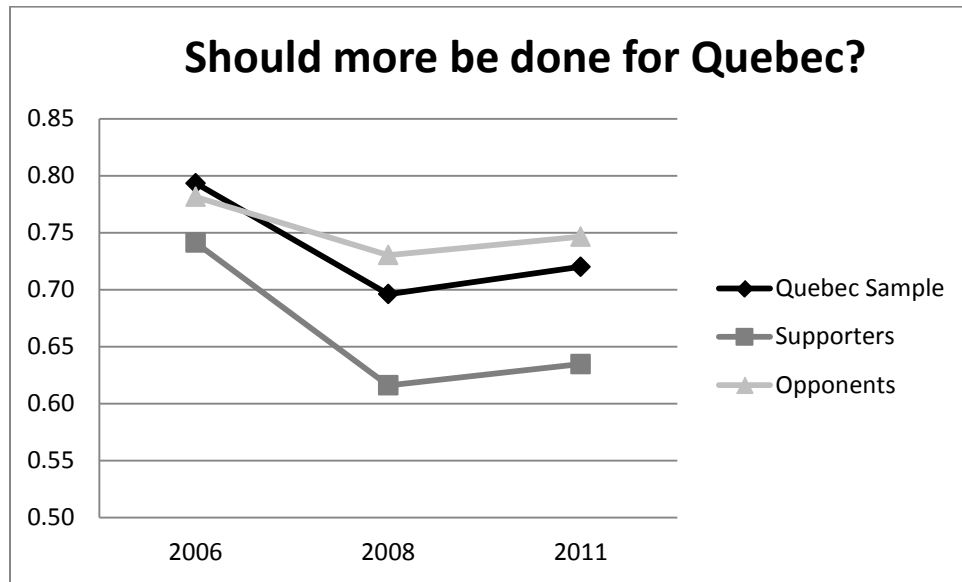


Figure 4: Quebecers' opinion on whether Quebec is treated unfairly by the government

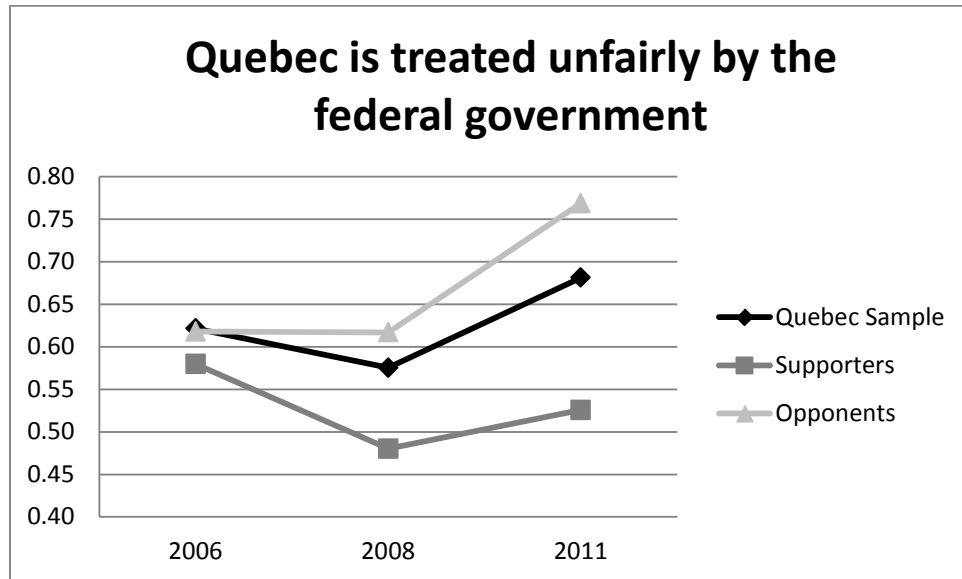


Figure 5: Quebecers' satisfaction towards the Federal Government

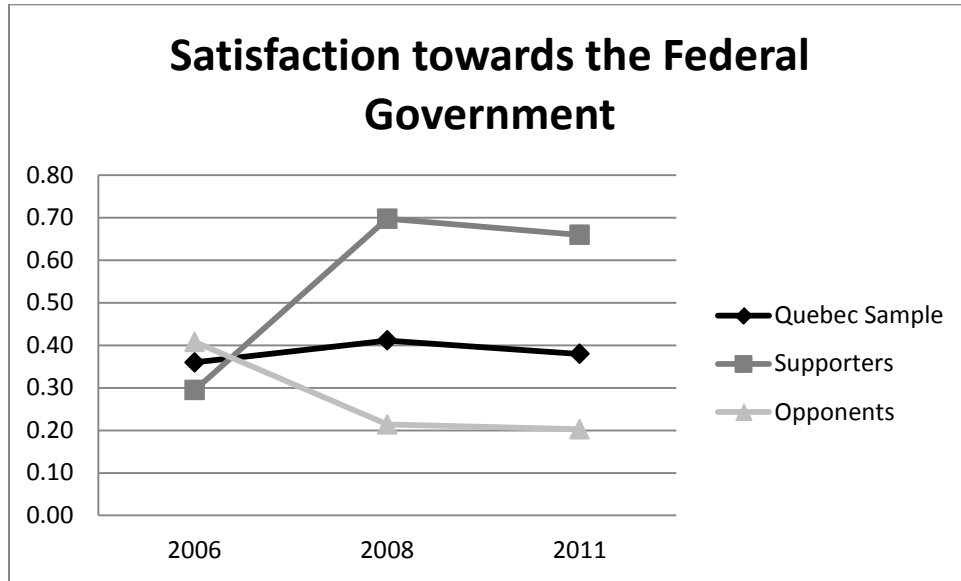


Figure 6: Quebecers' views on Stephen Harper

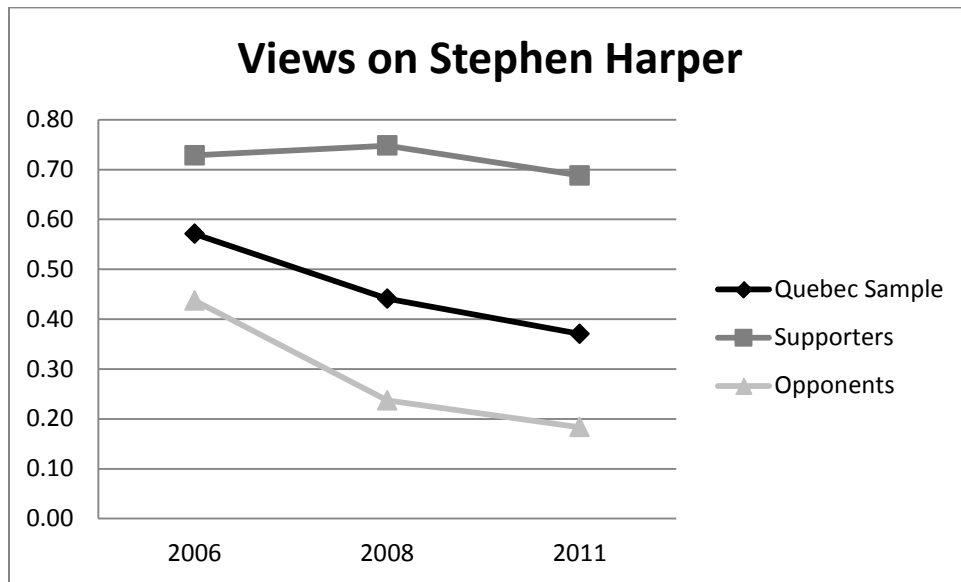


Figure 7: Quebecers' opinion on whether Stephen Harper is too extreme

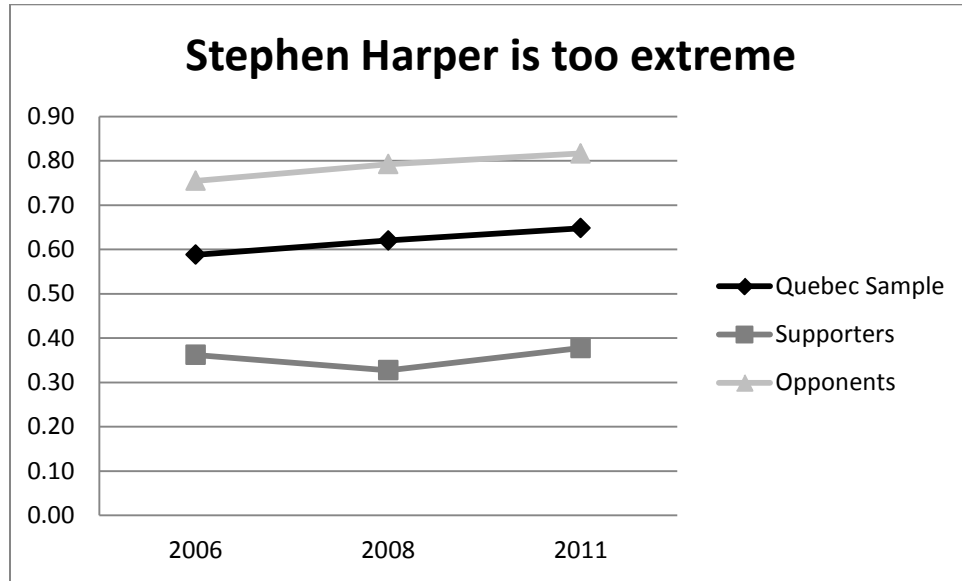


Figure 8: Quebecers' opinion on whether the government cares about they think

