

Research Note

It's Just a Little High: Testing the Effect of the Legalization of Marijuana on Voters' Behaviour in Canada

Alexis Bibeau Gagnon^a, Yannick Dufresne^b and Catherine Ouellet^c

^a University of Virginia ^b Université Laval ^c University of Toronto

Abstract

The legalization of marijuana in Canada offers a unique opportunity to investigate a fundamental question about voting behaviour: are voters leading parties by judging them on the ground of their issue stands, or instead aligning their views to match those of the party they prefer? Utilizing panel data from the 2011 and 2015 elections, this study investigates how Canadian voters' support structures for marijuana legalization and whether they align with parties that reflect their pre-existing policy preferences or if they modify their views to coincide with their party. The findings indicate a positive correlation between support for the Liberal Party of Canada and pro-legalization attitudes. Evidence suggests a two-way influence: marijuana legalization impacts support for the Liberals, and the Liberal Party influences voters' attitudes towards marijuana. This analysis underscores the significance of positional issues in voting behavior and adds to the long-standing debate on issue-based voting in Canadian politics.

Résumé

La légalisation du cannabis au Canada soulève une question centrale du comportement électoral : les électeurs influencent-ils les partis via leurs positions sur les enjeux ou alignent-ils plutôt leurs opinions à celles de leur parti ? À travers des données de panel des élections canadiennes de 2011 et 2015, cette analyse examine si les électeurs choisissent des partis conformes à leurs préférences ou ajustent plutôt leurs positions en fonction de celles de leur parti. Les résultats révèlent une corrélation positive entre le soutien au Parti libéral du Canada et une attitude favorable à la légalisation du cannabis. Ils révèlent également un effet mixte : la légalisation du cannabis influence le soutien au Parti libéral du Canada et, réciproquement, le Parti libéral a un impact sur la position des électeurs à l'égard du cannabis. Cette étude contribue au débat persistant sur l'effet des enjeux sur le vote en politique canadienne.

Keywords: Public opinion; Canadian politics; leadership; issue voting; marijuana.

Mots-clés : Opinion publique; politique canadienne; leadership; effet des enjeux; cannabis

Introduction

In late 2022, four years after the legalization of marijuana in Canada, the Liberal government headed by Justin Trudeau launched the *Cannabis Act* legislative review to investigate the impacts of the legislation on Canadians' health and consumption. Today, though experts and elected officials routinely raise concerns with the health-related consequences of cannabis, political pressure against the legislation has mostly receded and it benefits from popular support. This is unsurprising since public tolerance towards recreational drugs has generally increased in recent years in most Western countries (Friese 2017; Hathaway et al. 2007; Cloutier et al. 2022). But what was the structure of electoral support for the legalization of marijuana in the years before the 2018 legislation? Did the Liberal Party of Canada's (LPC) pledge to legalize marijuana before the 2015 federal election affect voters' attitudes towards this issue?

Contact Catherine Ouellet: catherine.ouellet@mail.utoronto.ca

The public discussion about the legalization of marijuana and the strong stand taken by Trudeau on this issue prior to the 2015 Canadian federal election provide us with the opportunity to tap into a fundamental but persistent debate about the relationship between parties and voters. From a theoretical standpoint, the nature of the dynamic connecting parties and voters constitutes a knot at the core of electoral politics. The dynamic is uncertain and notoriously endogenous: Which side of the electoral equation is actually driving the other?

In this research note, we use the legalization of marijuana in Canada as a case study of the electoral effect of a salient positional issue—that is, an issue generating disagreement among voters and dividing the electorate—to examine the way in which the party-voters nexus operates. We aim at testing the direction of causality between voters' attitudes on the issue of the legalization of marijuana and the Liberal Party of Canada's position on that same policy issue. In short, who leads whom: the party or the voters?

Our empirical strategy is twofold. First, we use large-scale survey data from 2011 and 2015 to investigate the structure of electoral support for the legalization of marijuana among Canadian voters. Then, moving deeper into the analysis, we compare voters' attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana at two different moments in time—before and after the issue has been endorsed by the LPC—using a cross-lagged model on a panel of respondents who answered the survey during both the 2011 and 2015 Canadian electoral campaigns. Since we have access to the same respondents at both moments, we can then attribute the observed change in respondents' attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana to the effect of the issue or of the party. This strategy enables us to observe a phenomenon at the core of the party-voters dynamic since we can evaluate whether voters are leading parties on issue positions, or are instead following their party preferences when they position themselves on issues.

Our main finding is that the legalization of marijuana did impact both voters' support for the LPC and attitudes towards legalization. We show that some respondents' *prior* attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana positively affected their probability of voting for the LPC *later on*, once the party had endorsed legalization. In other words, some voters came to express support for the LPC as a result of the party's commitment to legalize marijuana. On the other hand, we also provide evidence of a party effect: voters' probability of supporting the LPC *prior to the issue becoming salient* affected their probability of expressing positive attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana. Overall, our findings bolster empirical claims about the potency of issues in Canadian electoral politics (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Bélanger and Nadeau 2009), and reinforce the idea that positional issues operate heterogeneously among the Canadian electorate (Dufresne and Ouellet 2018).

Background

Popular support for the legalization or the decriminalization of recreational drugs like marijuana has broadly increased over the last 50 years in most Western countries (Cruz et al. 2016). In the Canadian political landscape, popular support for the legalization or the decriminalization of marijuana slightly shifted across time. It swerved during the 1980s and 1990s before settling on the favourable side over the 2000s and 2010s (Savas 2001). Among political parties, the discussion on marijuana radically changed when the LPC adopted a resolution to legalize the drug during its January 2012 convention. In 2013, Justin Trudeau, the newly elected leader of the Liberals, acknowledged having smoked marijuana while he was a member of Parliament. Then, that same year, Trudeau declared his intention to legalize marijuana if he were elected

prime minister. Following the Liberals victory in the 2015 Canadian election, Trudeau renewed his intention of moving forward with the legalization. While the proposed bill faced opposition in Parliament, it was finally put into law in October 2018.

There are two ways in which the Canadian context is peculiar regarding the regulation of marijuana. First, the issue is strongly associated with one party, the LPC, unlike in other contexts (Bäck et al. 2021). Second, the issue was tied with Justin Trudeau himself. Trudeau's candid recognition that he had inhaled marijuana "five or six times in [his] life" puts him at odds with the Canadian political establishment (Canadian Press 2013). Yet, Trudeau never reneged on his commitment to legalize marijuana, and the issue became something of a symbol of his style of governance during his first term in office.

Are Issues Relevant?

Scholars of elections and voting behaviour are generally doubtful of voters' capacity to express genuine preferences about issues and policies (Converse 1964; Converse 1970). Issue preferences are instead often described as manifestations of deeply rooted political inclinations including early socialization (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) and partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960; Gidengil et al. 2012). Under this conventional model, there is very little room for individuals to matter since issue preferences are reduced to epiphenomena of antecedent factors. One implication of this view is that the possibility for political parties to influence the outcome of elections, beyond mobilizing their already existing electoral bases, is greatly limited.

However, this model is frequently challenged by scholars of Canadian politics who highlight the role of positional issues in complicating the picture (Johnston et al. 1992; Jenkins 2002; Dufresne and Ouellet 2018; Bodet et al. 2019; Matthews 2019). Positional issues are considered one of the only leverage over which parties might exert some pressure to influence voters (Green 2007). Positional issues are strategically used by parties to corral electors on clear lines of divisions, in contrast to valence issues which are generally characterized by consensus among the electorate (Dufresne and Ouellet 2019). Parties have also used positional issues to attract cross-pressured partisans and to increase the salience of certain values that are electorally beneficial to them (Dumouchel et al. 2023).

One obvious challenge to the conventional model of voting behaviour posed by issue-based strategies is that these strategies assume that voters' party preferences can be altered by parties' stances on issues. The point is that positional issues are used to tap into voters' values in order to alter, bolster, or weaken their preference for a party or politician. Therefore, the debate on how much issues weigh in the balance of vote choice depicts two different pictures of electoral politics. In the first picture, issues matter. Voters learn about the different political propositions made by parties and make an enlightened decision accordingly (Dahl 1956; Pennock 2015). Elections are about policy disagreements and reflect the variety of electors' positions on issues.

But another line of scholarship challenges this model in describing elections in a way that leaves little room for issues to matter, instead conceptualizing voters as having little to no substantial issue preferences. This perspective is apparent in recent research in Canadian politics that underscores the small influence of issue positions relative to other factors such as sociodemographic characteristics and partisanship in influencing electoral outcomes (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Blais et al. 2002; Gidengil et al. 2012).

However, empirically speaking, when issue attitudes and voting behaviour are measured at the same moment in time, estimating the effect that an issue might have on vote choice is challenging. Nonetheless, one way to solve this problem of observational

equivalence is to measure voters' attitudes on an issue *prior* to it becoming prominent, and thus before voters might have changed their mind because of the issue itself (Lenz 2012, 58).

In this note, our objective is to use this empirical strategy by drawing on panel data which include attitudes about a positional issue—the legalization of marijuana¹—as well as vote choice for the same individuals at two different moments in time, in 2011 (before the issue became prominent) and 2015 (after it became prominent).

Hypotheses

We test two hypotheses based on the previous theoretical discussion. The first hypothesis, the *issue effect*, posits that voters' attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana impacted their propensity to support the LPC. This hypothesis stipulates that voters' issue preference *prior to the issue becoming salient* affected their probability of voting for the Liberals. The issue would thus have mattered enough to voters for them to change their support for the LPC.

The second hypothesis, the *party effect*, posits that the LPC's endorsement of the legalization of marijuana impacted voters' attitudes towards the issue. Voters thus conform to the position of the party *as a result of its endorsement* of the issue. This hypothesis is consistent with a voting behaviour model in which voters' party preferences² have more weight than issues in the balance of vote choice.

Data and Methods

To test these competing hypotheses, we make use of panel data from a two-wave survey conducted during the 2011 ($n = 602,183$) and 2015 Canadian elections ($n = 1,297,361$) by Vote Compass.³ Both waves of the survey include a panel composed of respondents who answered the same issue questions at two moments in time, in 2011 and 2015 ($n = 3,767$). This unique feature allows for the observation of the change in respondents' attitudes on the legalization of marijuana and on their self-expressed probability of voting for the LPC.⁴ Attitudes towards marijuana are measured using the following wording-consistent question: "Possession of marijuana should be a criminal offence."⁵ The survey also includes conventional variables used in electoral behaviour studies, e.g., sociodemographic indicators. More importantly, it includes various questions on respondents' self-expressed probability of voting for the LPC on a scale from 0 to 10.

The research design is based on time-series cross-sectional panel data that include identical units at two different moments in time. Before moving forward, there is an issue of observational equivalence that must be addressed. Since respondents' attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana and probability of supporting the LPC in the first wave are potentially correlated with those respondents' attitudes on the same variables in the second wave, our estimates of the issue and party effects might be biased.

To overcome this issue, we use cross-lagged panel models. The logic behind these models is to evaluate the issue attitude (b) in the pre-treatment ($w1$) and post-treatment setting ($w2$) for each individual (i). Essentially, cross-lagged panel models estimate the effect of the independent variable in the first wave of the survey on the dependent variable in the second wave while controlling for values of Y in the first wave. Controlling for prior values of Y enables us to account for the potential correlation between respondents' prior and later attitudes. We are thus using *prior* attitudes—on the legalization of marijuana or the probability of voting for the LPC—as the explanatory variables (X_{w1}) and *later* attitudes as the dependent variables (Y_{w2}), while controlling for

prior attitudes on the same variable (Y_{w1}).⁶ We can interpret the coefficients as the effect of either treatment on respondents (see Figure 4).

Concretely, because we measure voters' attitude about marijuana *prior* to them experiencing the priming of the issue that might have affected their attitude—that is, the LPC's promise to legalize marijuana and the subsequent intensive media coverage of the issue—we can test whether respondents bring their later support for the LPC in line with their previously stated attitude (*issue effect* hypothesis). On the contrary, the effect of the party would show a change in attitudes towards marijuana related to individuals' prior expressed probability to support the LPC, i.e., voters bending their issue preference to match their party preference (*party effect* hypothesis).

Before moving forward, it is worth noting three limitations to our design. First, the design shares features of an experimental design but does not involve control over assignment to treatments. Second, the design enables us to measure the change in respondents' attitudes while holding constant time-invariant heterogeneity across units as our panel data include the same individuals. However, the design does not account for time-varying heterogeneity which might bias estimates. We include a series of controls—including respondents' income, age, and education—to account for this. Third, the survey uses self-selected passive sampling that might induce potential sampling bias. We acknowledge this difficulty and opt to include control for respondents' gender and language to account for this potential sampling bias. Results do not vary significantly across models' specifications.

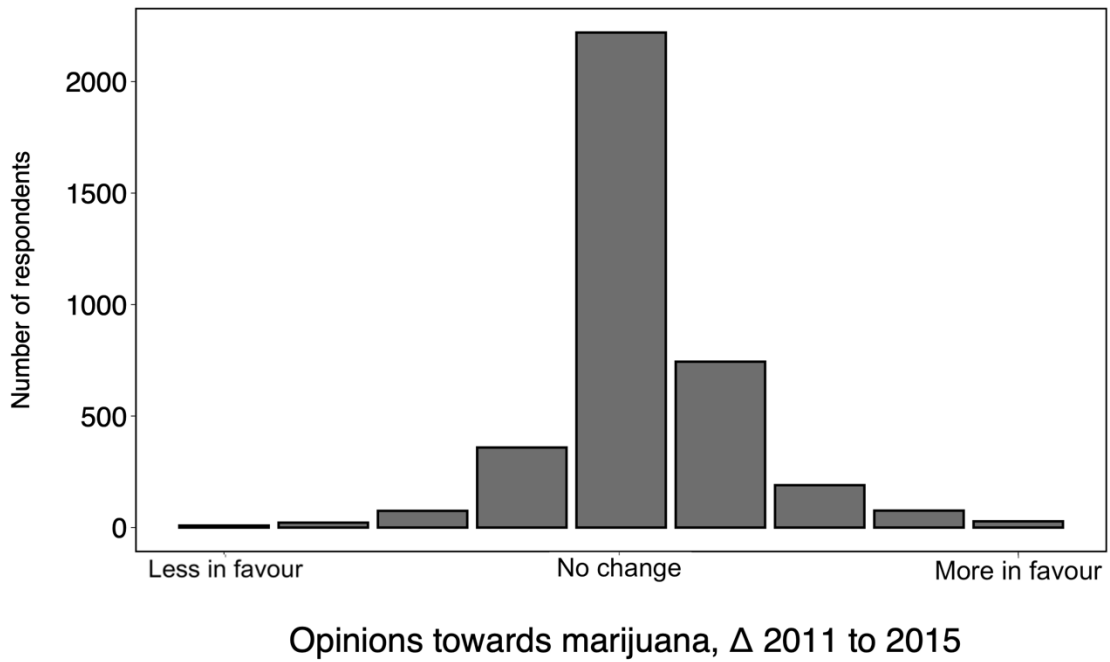
The Structure of Electoral Support for the Legalization of Marijuana

We first analyze the structure of support for the legalization of marijuana among Canadians voters. Five patterns stand out. First, Canadians are generally favourable to the legalization of marijuana. The distributions of opinions on the issue are symmetrical across various demographic groups, including Quebecers, men, women, and immigrants (see Figure 2). It is also worthwhile to note that the distribution of Liberal voters' attitudes towards marijuana is skewed in favour of legalization, even more so in 2015 compared to 2011.

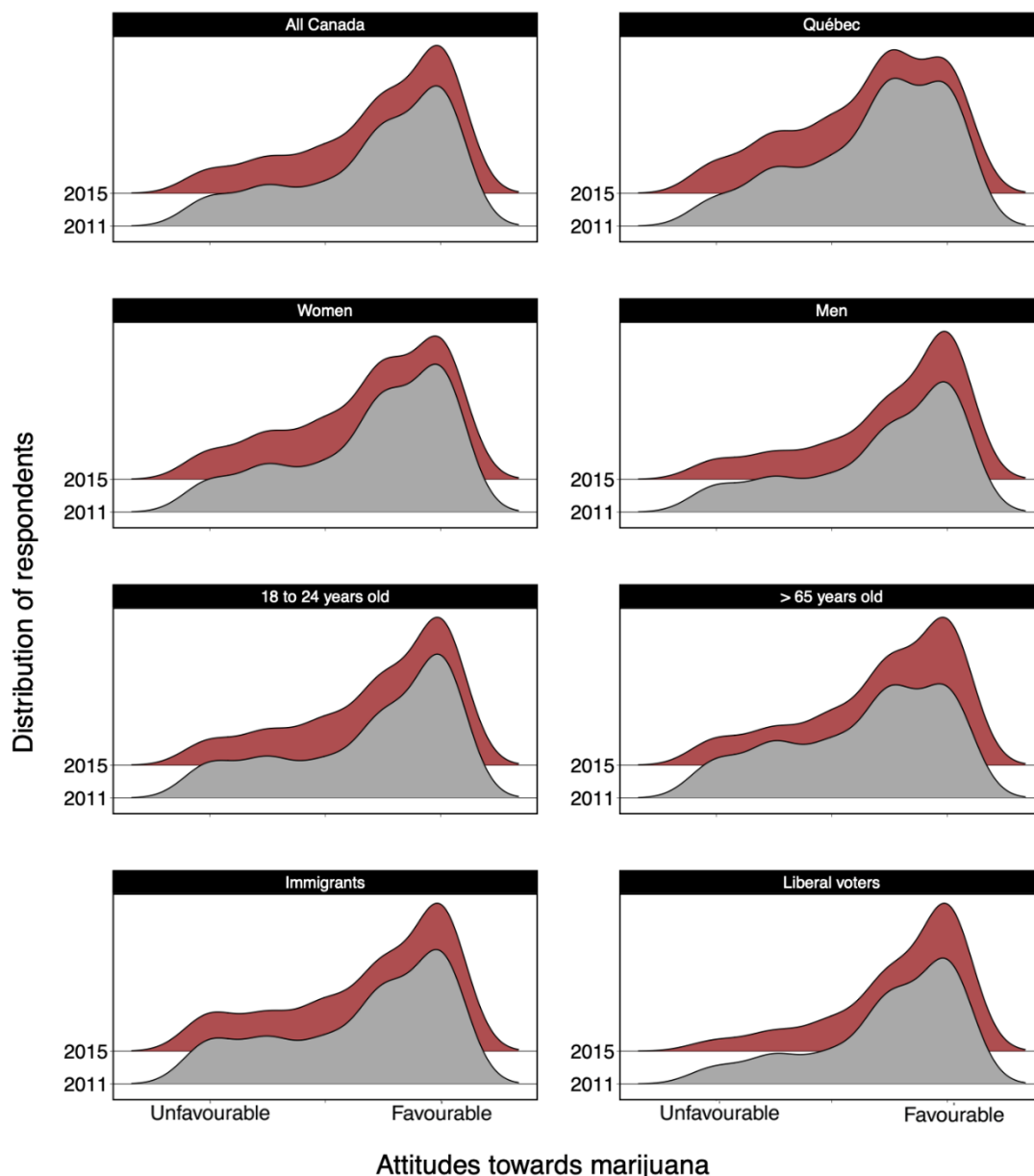
Second, analysis shows the distribution of respondents' change in attitude towards the legalization of marijuana between 2011 and 2015 (see Figure 1). Out of our entire sample of 3,767 respondents, 1,038 expressed a more favourable opinion on the legalization of marijuana in 2015 than they did in 2011, while 465 respondents expressed a less favourable view, and 2,220 did not change their mind.

Third, the issue of marijuana received a lot of media coverage in the months preceding the 2015 election, especially in September and October 2015, when survey data were collected (see Figure 3). This variation in coverage illustrates the salience of the issue in the media, lending credence to the first hypothesis. The importantly increased number of newspaper stories per month about marijuana between the moment Justin Trudeau first proposed to legalize marijuana in June 2013 and the election in October 2015 is an indicator of the salience of the legalization of marijuana in the Canadian media landscape.⁷ Moreover, following Trudeau's statement on his intention to legalize marijuana, the media began to associate the issue with the LPC. In the months prior to the 2015 Canadian election, the LPC was effectively "owning" the issue (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Bélanger and Meguid 2008).

Figure 1. Changes in Attitudes Towards Marijuana Between 2011 and 2015 Among Panel Respondents



Data: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.
 $n = 3,723$

Figure 2. Distribution of Attitudes Towards the Legalization of Marijuana

Data: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.
 $n = 602,183$ (2011) and $1,297,361$ (2015).

Next, we look at attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana as a function of respondents' vote intent using large-scale data that encompass the entire Canadian population in both 2011 and 2015. Evidence from models suggests such attitudes are differentiated among groups of voters (see Table 1). In 2011, we find a positive relationship with support for the legalization of marijuana for the LPC (0.21), NDP (0.27) and Green (0.28) voters. In 2015, patterns remained similar for all parties but we observe an increase in the positive association between vote intention for the LPC and support for the legalization of marijuana (0.25).

Looking at the inverse phenomenon, i.e., respondents' probability of voting for the LPC as a function of their attitudes towards marijuana, we observe a positive relationship

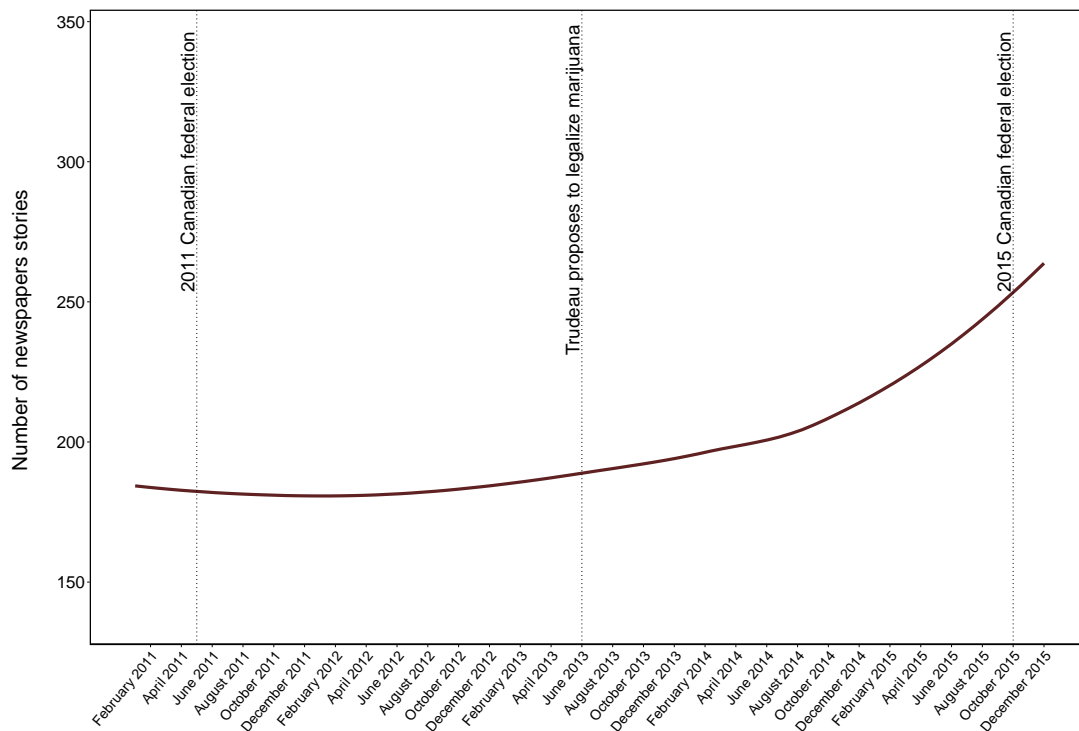
between both attitudes, and an increase of about half a point between 2011 and 2015 (see Table 2). Individuals favourable to the legalization of marijuana might thus have increasingly come to support the Liberals as the party embraced the issue of legalization between 2011 and 2015.

Did the Issue or the Party Matter?

Let’s now turn to the results about the issue and party effects. Our objective here is to assess the nature of the relationship between attitudes towards marijuana and support for the Liberals. The first test enables us to estimate whether respondents’ attitudes on the issue of the legalization of marijuana prior to the 2015 Canadian election affected their probability of voting for the LPC later on. In other words, we test whether the change in the probability to vote for the LPC between 2011 and 2015 is explained at least in part by prior attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana.

Results for the issue effect hypothesis are conclusive.⁸ Voters’ attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana prior to the issue becoming salient (in 2011) had a small but significant (0.065) effect on their expressed probability of voting for the LPC in 2015 (see Table 3). While we cannot affirm that this observed effect materialized in actual votes for the LPC in 2015, this finding nonetheless shows that the Liberals’ commitment to the legalization of marijuana had positive effects among respondents’ support for the party. The implications of this finding are, of course, tempered by the fact that our tests are restricted to one single issue which, for all the media coverage that it generated, did not shape the entire landscape of the 2015 Canadian election. But this result illuminates a phenomenon that had remained previously unobserved during the 2015 campaign.

Figure 3. Marijuana in the Canadian Media, 2011–2015

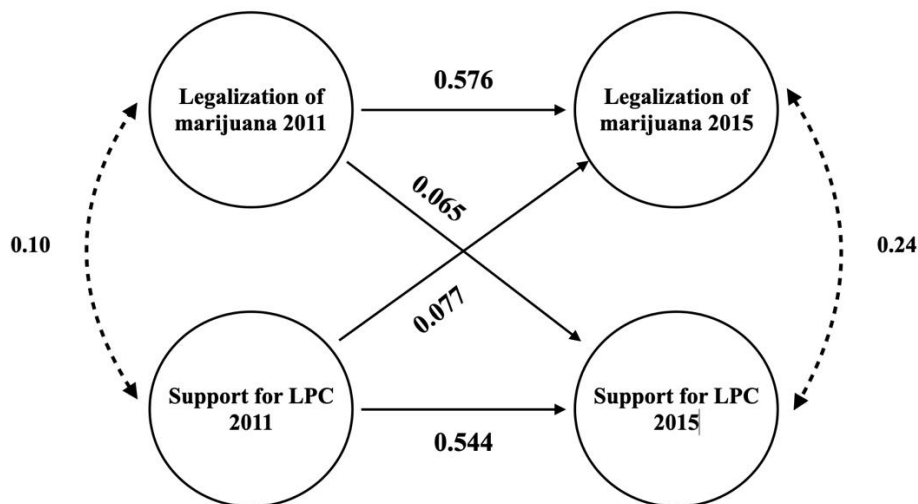


Data: Google Trends (Canada).
 Search terms: Cannabis and marijuana.

Now, let's turn to our second hypothesis, testing the party effect. Here we look at whether prior probability of supporting the LPC led some voters to change their mind about the legalization of marijuana after the issue was endorsed by the party. Put differently, we examine the possibility that voters are following their party preference by adopting the issue position of their preferred party.

Results also provide evidence (0.077) that prior probability to vote for the LPC affected the change in respondents' attitudes towards marijuana (see Table 4). This result shows that prior attitudes towards the LPC is positively correlated with respondents changing their mind to a more positive attitude towards the legalization of marijuana. A modest interpretation of this finding suggests that the LPC's endorsement of legalization had a positive effect on respondents' attitudes towards marijuana.

Figure 4. Issue and party effects, two-wave cross-lagged panel model



Data: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015

Note: Full lines represent cross-lagged regression estimates (standardized). Dotted lines represent correlations. Details about regression estimates can be found in Table 3 and 4, column 2.

Discussion

There is some strong evidence in research on Canadian politics that voters generally fail the policy test. Voters do not appear to judge parties on their issue stands. They rarely shift their votes to match parties who share their view. In fact, voters seem to follow the opposite path: they adopt a party for other reasons and then adopt its issue positions. This well-documented pattern suggests that people adopt the views of their party rather than aligning themselves with the party whose issue stances they preferred the most (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Johnston 2006; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Under this model, issues are relatively inconsequential.

Our findings suggest a slightly different story. Indeed, as our findings show, some Canadian voters did conform to the position of the LPC as a result of its endorsement of the issue. The LPC's stance on the issue increased the probability of pro-legalization voters to vote for the Liberals. But our results also provide empirical evidence for the

opposite effect. Some voters displayed more positive attitudes towards legalization because their party did.

From a theoretical standpoint, this insight into the dynamic of issue voting suggests that positional-issues effects operate in a heterogeneous manner among the Canadian electorate. When salient enough, positional issues have the potential to influence voting preferences (Dufresne and Ouellet 2018; Hillygus and Shields 2008). Saliency-based heterogeneity confers meaning to issues, lending credence to parties that seek to attract voters using issues (Plasser and Plasser 2002; Stromback 2008; Matthews 2019). In the opposite case—that is, when issues are not salient enough—voters tend to adopt a party for other reasons and conform to its positions on policy issues (Blais et al. 2002; Gidengil et al. 2012).

The Liberal Party's endorsement of the legalization of marijuana and its subsequent effects on Canadians' voting behaviour fits this story. In other words, this analysis bolsters the idea that positional issues can offer electoral gains for parties. And while our analysis does not in any way pretend to settle the debate on issue preferences and voting behaviour, it contributes to the broader literature on issue voting by providing unique evidence of the effect of a salient positional issue on voting behaviour in Canada.

Notes

- ¹ Our contention is that the legalization of marijuana represents a positional issue since it cleaves voters along values and moral dispositions.
- ² This is not to be confused with partisanship. Rather, we use respondents' probability of supporting a party on a scale from 0 to 10. While this is a less stable measure than partisanship, it directly captures respondents' support for a party.
- ³ Vote Compass surveys respondents' attitudes but also offers information about parties' policies, which might affect the survey response process. However, respondents' issue preferences and probability to support parties are measured before information about parties' policies is presented to respondents, so measurement of attitudes is not impacted by the information.
- ⁴ Panel data were made available via a unique identifier variable that allows the identification of respondents who responded in both 2011 and 2015. All information on respondents' identification is anonymized.
- ⁵ Categories of response are: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree. We reverse this measure to capture attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana. While we recognize that attitudes towards the criminalization and the legalization, i.e., decriminalization, of marijuana are not mutually exclusive, they should track each other consistently.
- ⁶ Cross-lagged panel models rest on two central assumptions. First, that measurements on the variables were made at the same time (synchronicity). In this study, the synchronicity assumption is fulfilled since variables were measured as part of the same two-wave survey. A second assumption of stationarity specifies that variables and relationships between variables are constant over time, i.e., a "lack of change over time of the strength and direction of the causes of a variable" (Kenny 1975). This assumption is harder to meet, but one way of tackling this issue is to account for time-invariant attributes that might influence political attitudes. While individual attributes influencing political attitudes (e.g., language, education, sex, income) might not be considered time-invariant, especially over the long run, we can consider that their impact on measured attitudes are relatively stable across the time period that our data cover (2011 and 2015).
- ⁷ Other measures of issue saliency could reinforce our claim, but newspaper stories remain a primary source of information in Canada. We can plausibly claim that most people have been exposed to the issue during this period, and especially during the campaign, where marijuana coverage in the media almost doubled.
- ⁸ To ensure the comparability of cross-lagged estimates, variables in the models were standardized.

About the authors

Yannick Dufresne is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Université Laval, Quebec, QC.

Alexis Bibeau is a PhD candidate in Politics at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Catherine Ouellet is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Université de Montréal, Montreal, QC.

ORCID

Catherine Ouellet: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8642-5442>

Competing interests

The author(s) declare none

References

- Bäck, H., Fredén, A., and Renström, E. A. 2021. "Legalize Cannabis? Effects of Party Cues on Attitudes to a Controversial Policy Proposal." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 1–12.
- Bélanger, E., and Meguid, B. M. 2008. "Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, and Issue-based Vote Choice." *Electoral Studies*, 27 (3): 477–491.
- Bélanger, E. and R. Nadeau. 2009. *Le comportement électoral des Québécois*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Berelson, L. Lazarsfeld, P. F. and McPhee, W. N. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Nadeau, R., and Nevitte, N.. 2002. *Anatomy of a Liberal victory: Making sense of the vote in the 2000 Canadian election*. Toronto, ON: Broadview Press.
- Bodet, M. A., Dufresne, Y., Bouchard, J., and Gélinau, F. 2019. "Follow the (ISSUE) Leader? The Leader-Led Nexus Revisited." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 83(4): 661–689.
- Budge, I., and Farlie, D. 1983. *Explaining and Predicting elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-three Democracies*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., and Stokes, D. E. 1960. *The American Voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Canadian Press. 2013. "Justin Trudeau says he smoked marijuana, makes no apologies." *Global News*, <https://globalnews.ca/news/795772/justin-trudeau-says-he-smoked-marijuana/> [retrieved on June 28, 2021].
- Cloutier, A., Tremblay-Antoine, C., Dufresne, Y., and Fréchet, N. 2022. "Highs and downs: A scoping review of public opinion about cannabis, alcohol and tobacco in Canada." *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 41(2), 396–405.
- Converse, P. E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In D. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.
- Converse, P. E. 1970. "Attitudes and Non-attitudes: Continuation of a Dialogue." In E. R. Tufté (Ed.), *The Quantitative Analysis of Social Problems*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.
- Cruz, J. M., Queirolo, R., and Boidi, M. F. 2016. "Determinants of Public Support for Marijuana Legalization in Uruguay, the United States, and El Salvador." *Journal of Drug Issues*, 46 (4): 308–325.
- Dahl, R. A. 1956. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dufresne, Y., and Ouellet, C. 2018. "Public Issues or Issue Publics? The Distribution of Genuine Political Attitudes." *Behavioural Public Policy*, 1–22.
- Dufresne, Y. and Ouellet, C. 2019. "Conceptualization, measurement and effects of positional issues in the Canadian electoral context." *Heliyon*, 5(4), e01453.

- Dumouchel, D., Ouellet, C., and Giasson, T. 2023. "Guns for Votes: Wedge Politics in the Canadian Multiparty System." *Parliamentary Affairs*, 76(1), 85–106.
- Egan, P. J. 2020. "Identity as Dependent Variable: How Americans Shift Their Identities to Align with Their Politics." *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(3): 699–716
- Friese, B. 2017. "Is Marijuana Even a Drug? A Qualitative Study of How Teens View Marijuana Use and Why They Use It." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 49 (3): 209–216.
- Gidengil, E., Blais, A., Everitt, J., Fournier, P. and Nevitte, N. 2012. *Dominance and Decline: Making Sense of Recent Canadian Elections*. University of Toronto Press.
- Green, J. 2007. "When Voters and Parties Agree: Valence Issues and Party Competition." *Political Studies*, 55(3); 629–655.
- Hathaway, A. D., Erickson, P. G., and Lucas, P. 2007. "Canadian Public Opinion on Cannabis: How Far Out of Step With It Is the Existing Law?" *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 59: 44–55
- Hillygus, S. D., and Shields, T. G. 2008. *The Persuadable Voter : Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jenkins, R. W. 2002. "How Campaigns Matter in Canada: Priming and Learning as Explanations for the Reform Party's 1993 Campaign Success." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 35(2): 383-408.
- Johnston, R. Blais A., Brady H. E., and Crête J. 1992. *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Johnston, R. 2006. "Party Identification: Unmoved Mover or Sum of Preferences?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9: 329–351.
- Kenny, D. A. 1975. "Cross-Lagged Panel Correlation: A Test for Spuriousness." *Psychological Bulletin*, 82(6): 887-903
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., and Gaudet, H. 1944. *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lenz, G. S. 2012. *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., Norpoth, H., Jacoby, W. G., and Weisberg, H. F. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Matthews, J. S. 2019. "Issue Priming Revisited: Susceptible Voters and Detectable Effects." *British Journal of Political Science*, 49(2): 513-531.
- Pennock, J. R. 2015. *Democratic Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Petrocik, J. R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, With a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(3): 825–850.
- Savas, D. 2001. "Public Opinion and Illicit Drugs: Canadian Attitudes Towards Decriminalizing the Use of Marijuana." In P. Basham (Ed.), *Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem*. Montreal: Fraser Institute.

Appendix

Table 1. Effect of Vote Intentions on Attitudes toward the Legalization of Marijuana, 2011 and 2015

	2011 (1)	2015 (2)
Vote PLC 2011	0.21*** (0.002)	
Vote PLC 2015		0.25*** (0.001)
Vote NDP 2011	0.27*** (0.003)	
Vote NDP 2015		0.25*** (0.001)
Vote GPC 2011	0.28*** (0.004)	
Vote GPC 2011		0.28*** (0.001)
Vote BQ 2011	0.29*** (0.005)	
Vote BQ 2015		0.24*** (0.002)
Woman	-0.03*** (0.002)	-0.07*** (0.001)
Age 18 to 24	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.01*** (0.001)
Age 65 and over	-0.05*** (0.002)	-0.03*** (0.001)
Low income	-0.0005 (0.002)	0.02*** (0.001)
University degree	0.03*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.001)
Francophone	-0.11*** (0.003)	-0.14*** (0.001)
Constant	0.57*** (0.002)	0.61*** (0.001)
N	115,675	865,099

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.

Method: Ordinary least squares.

Note: The dependent variables are attitudes towards the legalization of marijuana in 2011 and 2015. The reference category is the Conservative Party of Canada. Models use the entire sample of the Canadian population.

Table 2. Effect of Attitudes Towards Marijuana on Probability to Vote LPC in 2011 and 2015

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.

Method: Ordinary least squares.

Note: The dependent variable is the probability to vote for the Liberal Party of Canada in 2011 and 2015. Models include the entire sample of the Canadian population.

Table 3. Test of Issue Effect: Prior Attitudes Towards Marijuana on Later Probability to Vote LPC, 2011 and 2015

	Probability to vote LPC, 2015	
	(1)	(2)
Opinion about marijuana, 2011	0.076*** (0.013)	0.065*** (0.013)
Probability to vote LPC, 2011	0.591*** (0.013)	0.544*** (0.014)
Woman		0.024 (0.013)

	2011	2015
	(1)	(2)
Opinion about marijuana, 2011	0.15*** (0.003)	
Opinion about marijuana, 2015		0.19*** (0.001)
Woman	0.05*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.001)
Age 18 to 24	0.06*** (0.005)	0.07*** (0.001)
Age 65 and over	0.02*** (0.002)	-0.01*** (0.001)
Low income	-0.05*** (0.002)	-0.03*** (0.001)
University degree	0.11*** (0.002)	0.05*** (0.001)
Francophone	-0.13*** (0.003)	-0.13*** (0.001)
Constant	0.40*** (0.003)	0.37*** (0.001)
N	124,378	913,281

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.

Method: Cross-lagged panel models.

Note: The dependent variable is the probability to vote for the Liberal Party of Canada in 2015. Models include only those respondents included in both the 2011 and 2015 surveys. Variables are standardized to allow comparability of estimates.

Table 4. Test of Party Effect: Prior Probability to Vote LPC on Later Attitudes Towards Marijuana, 2011 and 2015

	Opinion about the legalization, 2015	
	(1)	(2)
Probability to vote LPC, 2011	0.103*** (0.013)	0.077*** (0.014)
Opinion about legalization, 2011	0.585*** (0.013)	0.576*** (0.013)
Woman		0.001 (0.013)
Age 18 to 24		0.028* (0.013)
Age 65 and older		-0.004 (0.013)
Low income		0.020 (0.013)
Below high school		-0.002 (0.013)
University degree		0.007 (0.014)
Francophone		-0.094*** (0.014)
Constant	0.003 (0.013)	0.007 (0.013)
N	3,657	3,623

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Source: Vox Pop Labs, 2011 and 2015.

Method: Cross-lagged panel models.

Note: The dependent variable is respondents' attitude towards the legalization of marijuana in 2015. Models include only those respondents included in both the 2011 and 2015 surveys. Variables are standardized to allow comparability of estimates.