

## Article

### Assessing populist rhetoric in Canada: a story of regional variation

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#### Abstract

Populist rhetoric is understood as political language used to differentiate between elites and people, calling for political power to be given back to the people. A key feature of modern Canadian populism has been its strong regional dimension, but what contemporary issues are of salience to which provincial parties has not been systematically studied. Building on Pippa Norris' international study, we unpack populist rhetoric by surveying Canadian party politics experts on their perception of provincial parties' use of rhetoric. These experts perceive that half of the provincial parties use populist rhetoric, specifically five salient policy dimensions: social and economic policies, racialized minority rights, immigration, women's rights, and environmental protection. Our findings demonstrate how populist rhetoric in Canada has a distinctly regional variation and has been driven by the center-right and the right.

#### Résumé

La rhétorique populiste est comprise comme un langage politique utilisé pour différencier les élites et le peuple, appelant à ce que le pouvoir politique soit rendu au peuple. Une caractéristique clé du populisme canadien moderne a été sa forte dimension régionale, mais les enjeux contemporains importants pour chaque parti provincial n'ont pas été étudiés systématiquement. En nous appuyant sur l'étude internationale de Pippa Norris, nous analysons la rhétorique populiste en interrogeant des experts en politique des partis canadiens sur leur perception de l'utilisation de la rhétorique par les partis provinciaux. Ces experts perçoivent que la moitié des partis provinciaux utilise une rhétorique populiste, spécifiquement sur cinq dimensions politiques importantes : les politiques sociales et économiques, les droits des minorités racialisées, l'immigration, les droits des femmes et la protection de l'environnement. Nos résultats démontrent comment la rhétorique populiste au Canada présente une variation régionale distincte et a été conduite par le centre-droit et la droite.

**Keywords:** Populism, Provincial politics, Regionalism, Rhetoric

**Mots-clés :** Populisme, politique provinciale, régionalisme, rhétorique

#### Introduction

Populist slogans, symbols, and rhetoric have been evoked by political parties across the world where politicians have pledged to return power to the people. (Hawkins et al, 2017; Kaltwasser, 2015; Barr 2009; Johnson et al, 2005) The populists' policies and slogans have also often embodied anti-immigrant sentiments, a rejection of unfettered globalization, and insular and protectionist ideas (Meyers, 2021). Often those labelled as populist do not self-identify as such and the term is almost always used by academics in a pejorative way and links populists to right-wing and xenophobic parties.

Canada has a history of populist parties, but the contemporary global rise of populism has further raised academic interest in the study of Canadian populism. The election and rise of politicians such as Rob Ford at the municipal level, Doug Ford and Danielle Smith at the provincial level, and Kellie Leitch, Maxime Bernier, and Pierre Poilievre at the federal level, have added scholarly interest to the study of populism in Canada (Budd, 2019; Budd, 2020;

Carlaw 2017; Sawyer and Laycock, 2009; Erl 2021). Poilievre won the leadership race of the Conservative Party of Canada, in September 2022, on a clear populist platform of “take back control of your life,” and supported the January 2022 Freedom Convoy in Ottawa with strong anti-elite positions (Zimonjic, 2022). At the provincial level, the resurrected Conservative Party of Québec (PCQ), led by Éric Duhaime, had also gained traction at the polls, during the October 2022 elections. The focus of the PCQ campaign had been to return individual freedoms to constituents and support populist centerpiece policies such as opposing the public health measures taken by the CAQ government during the COVID pandemic (Porter, 2022).

In the study of contemporary Canadian populism, there is an indication that many of the parties and movements that have evoked populist rhetoric have also had strong regionalist appeal and identities (Budd, 2020; Lawson, 2022; Laycock, 2005). Regionalism, which is understood as the “presence of systematic variations in regional political cultures and the existence of regional cleavages” (Bilodeau et al, 2010), has often been viewed as a key feature of Canadian politics (Simeon and Elkins, 1974; Cochrane and Perrella, 2012). This paper seeks to further unpack populist rhetoric in Canada to determine what regional variation does this populist rhetoric take and, importantly, what issues are most salient to regional parties employing higher levels of populist rhetoric. After all, from the international study of populism we know that what might be substantive wedge issues for one party employing populist rhetoric may not be the case for another.

We begin by conceptualizing populism through a theoretical framework that emphasizes populist rhetoric as a valuable tool to assess populist sentiment. We then turn to discussing the historical presence of populism in Canada and its specific association with regionalism, providing important context to this study. To determine the regional variation and the substance of populist rhetoric, we surveyed experts’ perceptions of provincial parties’ rhetoric on five salient policy issues: social and economic policies, racialized minority rights, immigration, gender rights, and environmental protection.

We found that experts perceive half of the provincial political parties use populist rhetoric in their messaging. Importantly, our analysis shows how populist rhetoric has a strong right-wing bent among many provincial parties, aligning with the rise of right-wing groups in Canada (Budd, 2020 Erl, 2021; Perry and Scrivens, 2019; Perry and Scrivens 2016; Rydgren, 2005). While we do find left-wing provincial parties using populist rhetoric (four parties in our sample versus 16 right-wing parties employing populist rhetoric), they represent only a small share of all parties. Additionally, we find regional differences in populist leanings within parties showcasing how different regional dynamics produce variations in the issues that are prioritized by parties using populist rhetoric.

### **Conceptualizing populism: A theoretical framework**

The earliest definition of populism is traced to Edward Shils (1956) but it has evolved depending on varying contexts and time periods making it tricky for academics to conceptualize. Academics’ early writings on populism have tended to shy away from defining populism because it was not always clear what populist movements have in common, either ideologically or in form; moreover, drivers of populism can be very country and context specific (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Bonikowski, 2017; Hadiz and Chrysosgelos, 2017; Stockemer, 2016; Weyland and Madrid, 2019). Hence, some leading edited texts on populism have no definition of populism provided. While there is no universal definition of populism

given that the concept is multifaceted, there are broad agreements on common characteristics of contemporary populism. Most definitions of the term highlight one key aspect: a people-versus-elites dynamic, be they social, economic, or political elites.

Paul Taggart suggests populism has six characteristics: “a hostility to representative politics, having a heartland, as lacking core values, as being a reaction to a sense of crisis, as self-limiting, and as chameleonic” (2004). Cas Mudde developed this further and noted that it is a ‘thin-ideology’ divided into ‘the pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’ (2004). While Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as both anti-elitist and anti-pluralist (2017). All of these definitions of populism logically lead to political parties and their politicians having strong anti-democratic forces. As Seymour Martin Lipset had rightly contended, populism can emerge as a political movement or party that can occupy the left, right or even centre of the ideological spectrum (1960).

As noted by several scholars, conceptualizing populism as an ideology can be problematic because it has no articulated sets of values or policies above and beyond the crude distinction between the elite and the people (Norris, 2020). Additionally, there have been populist movements across the political spectrum, despite the contemporary rise of right-wing populism. This diversity makes it difficult to isolate an ideological distinction between one type of populism versus another (Panizza, 2005: 17). Moreover, conceptualizing populism as a strategy where political leaders supply political platforms designed to dovetail with the demands of the electorate, has issues of its own (Van Der Brug et al., 2005). The analytical challenge with studying this type of populism, however, is it tells us little about the make-up of the in-group and the choice of policies proposed to the public.

Taking the theoretical framework of populism as rhetoric can provide a more useful means of understanding and assessing populism. ‘Populism as rhetoric’ is an analysis of discourse meant to be persuasive to a select audience (Laclau, 2005; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Approaching populism as rhetoric instead of treating it as a fully formed ideology better captures its flexibility, adaptability, and effectiveness in persuading and mobilizing people for political support (Aslanidis, 2016; Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018). It allows us to see populism as an adaptive mode of expression, which is used and changed by political parties depending on the sociopolitical context and to appeal to ‘the people,’ without being constrained by a fixed ideological framework (Aslanidis, 2016: 99). As mentioned above, populism can emerge as a party or movement on either side of the ideological spectrum, covering a variety of issues, making it challenging to comprehend and approach if considered solely as an ideology. Unlike ideology, which assumes consistent principles, a rhetorical approach acknowledges that populist parties and leaders often shift their message depending on changing political contexts and public sentiments, making it difficult to identify a fixed agenda. Therefore, by recognizing populism as rhetoric, we can more effectively understand its inherent flexibility and adaptive nature (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018: 456-457).

While ‘populism as ideology’ posits that the ideology to which leaders ascribe to can be known, or that the preferences of leaders and parties and their preferred outcomes can be ascertained and therefore their strategic understanding of populism is also known, the concept of ‘populism as rhetoric’ is not hemmed in by such assumptions. The measure of populism as rhetoric can be assessed through an analysis of policy statements and public speeches and does not need to be seen as having a predetermined agenda or set of policies to which it subscribes (Norris, 2020: 4). As Pippa Norris notes, ‘populism as rhetoric’ is:

...a persuasive language, making symbolic claims about the source of legitimate authority and where power should rightfully lie. The discourse rests on twin claims, namely that (i) the only legitimate authority flows directly from the “will of the people” (“the citizens of our country”), and by contrast (ii) the enemy of the people are the “establishment.” The latter are depicted as the powerful who are corrupt, out of touch, self-serving, falsely betraying the public trust, and seeking to thwart the popular will. Democratic values echo in the rhetorical claim that legitimacy lies with the “people” (“What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people”) (Norris, 2020: 6).

Populism needs only to be couched in persuasive language that uses symbols or advances claims that will resonate with the in-group. The only necessary point of convergence is a belief in the dichotomy between the people and the elite (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Populism as rhetoric has conceptual, theoretical, and empirical merit. Conceptually, it specifies populism as a type of discourse. It differentiates between the people and the elite and refers to a conflictual discourse where the will of the people should prevail. It does not necessarily follow that populist rhetoric will be right-wing rhetoric. Instead, when it is used by leaders, such rhetoric tailors itself to a given context. For example, populist rhetoric can be used to support leftist policies of economic redistribution or right-wing market policies if the beneficiary is the people, and those who seek otherwise are the elite. Theoretically, it provides clarity as to what is and is not populist rhetoric, allowing us to see its effect in action. Finally, by being clear about the nature of populism, we can better test claims of populist rhetoric and see how it is used by political parties and under what circumstances.

### **Modern Populism in Canada: A Regional Dimension**

Regional differences matter in Canada. The literature points to several reasons for this: the sources and patterns of immigration in Canada, differences in economic and social development, and political culture based on voters' interaction with the federal government. Regions do not simply vote differently across issue areas; they have entirely different political agendas. Regional differences across Canada create unique social and political landscapes. These differences lay the groundwork for unique regional identities and grievances. It is important to note here that regionalism and regional differences, although closely related, differ in that the latter refers to the context in which identities and grievances are shaped, whereas regionalism represents their manifestation into distinct patterns of political behavior, as noted above (Bilodeau et al, 2010). Hence where and how populist rhetoric dovetails with regional identities and what issues are deemed most salient, are important research questions to address and have not been studied on a pan-Canadian scale. Our study seeks to fill this research gap by exploring the interplay between regionalism and populism. By focusing on populism as rhetoric, we highlight how political actors in different regions frame appeals tailored to local contexts shaped by regional contexts. In first-past-the-post electoral systems, parties that can tap into specific regional demands are successful at getting elected. The Wild Rose party in Alberta and the Conservative Party of Quebec, for example, rose in the polls as they tapped into popular discontentment with the elite's political agenda. Dissatisfaction with the Federal government's policies that are perceived to be designed to disproportionately benefit Québec and Ontario compared to the West and

the Prairies has been an important vector of populist rhetoric and of regional grievances (Harrison and Krahn, 1995). According to David Laycock, populism in the West and the Prairies was initially propelled by workers, farmers, and immigrants who “...had difficulty accepting the imposition of ‘old party politics’ from Ontario and Québec.” (1992: 175) This created party institutions that favoured policy positions centered on regional demands and power structures, putting them regularly at odds with the Federal government centered on Central Canada (Lawson, 2022). Regionalism and the various clashing identities found in Canada are, therefore, at the roots of populism in the country.

The linkage between regionalism and populism was perhaps most salient with the 1987 establishment of the Reform Party by Preston Manning. The federal party’s mission was Western political preferences, a rejection of federal politicians and policies favouring the interests of Central Canada, with the National Energy Program of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau as a prime example of how the West’s interests were dismissed (Budd, 2019; Conway, 1978; See also Cook, 1984). This policy, among others, looked as if it was designed to support the center and not the region itself, angering many Western constituents. Manning saw populism as a way to express the interests of the population he wished to represent, and to use those interests to gain electoral votes. This in conjunction with regionalism is what gave the Reform Party its momentum (Flanagan, 2009: 23-24, 60).

Another feature of populism in Canada has been its usage by parties across the left-right political spectrum. Populism in the Prairies and the West, for example, was not solely a right of center to right wing appeal. The CCF in Saskatchewan, for example, has been referred to as “the first social-democratic government in Saskatchewan.” (Laycock, 2019) In the West, the New Democratic Party formed in 1961 and came to government for the first time in 1969, has also been described as a populist party. According to Donald Blake, the use of populist rhetoric by the NDP to gain political power is not surprising. Polls from the 1960s and 1970s showed rural and working-class voters in British Columbia to be more likely to vote for populist parties (Blake, 1996: 4-5). In fact, WAC Bennett, the former Premier of BC with the Social Credit party, once identified the situation as “[no] party of the extreme right or the extreme left can survive. We are a populist party slightly to the right of centre. The NDP is a populist party slightly to the left.” (Blake, 1996: 4-5). In Central Canada, The Parti Québécois (PQ) of the 1970s has been recognized in the literature as a left-wing populist party (Laycock, 2019). It did so in large part by turning to rural and small goods producers as its constituents against multinationals and capitalist elites (Piotte and Vaillancourt, 1978: 44-45).

## **Data and Research Design**

We use regionalism as an important starting point of our analysis of populist rhetoric and look for variances in the issues these parties emphasize to appeal to voters. Building on Pippa Norris’ Global Party Survey (GPS), an expert survey focusing on political parties and their ideological and policy positions with an overarching focus on populist rhetoric, we reached out to Canadian political scientists to survey their views.

Expert surveys provide a valuable mechanism for capturing nuanced and complex judgments on political rhetoric, because experts bring specialized knowledge that enables systematic analysis of challenging or context-specific phenomena (Norris, 2020; Maestas, 2016). This method is particularly suited to studies like ours, which examine differing expressions of populist rhetoric across different regions of Canada. Expert survey methodology, as noted by Pippa Norris (2020) also allows ‘multidimensional assessment’ of

rhetoric in that it not only captures populist but also pluralist elements in real-time without being constrained by the limited and infrequently published party documents, which may “reflect strategic behavior of large parties and be sparse or nonexistent for small parties” (Maestas, 2016, 584).

Therefore, expert survey approach allows for a flexible, standardized method to capture and compare parties’ position on a populist scale at any point in time rather than waiting for infrequent document releases. This method is also particularly well-suited and aligned with the rhetorical understanding of populism because it captures expert judgements regarding how politicians and parties use rhetoric to position themselves, often beyond what can be understood from party documents alone. Since manifestoes are often constrained by strategic concerns and electoral positioning of parties, expert surveys, on the other hand, offer a less strategic, independent perspective, capturing deeper patterns of party rhetoric and communication (Ecker et al., 2022). Additionally, by placing our empirical focus on political rhetoric, we move away from one of the common critiques of expert survey, namely how they often conflate rhetoric with actions (Cohen, Mayer, Rovny, and Lindstädt 2022, 3).

Experts’ surveys are not, however, devoid of challenges. They may have inherent biases, for example representing more the political leanings of the respondents than the actual leaning of the parties surveyed (Curini, 2010). The knowledge of the experts may be limited (Norris 2020) for example, or their answers understood as subjective (Clinton and Lewis 2008). Addressing the first concern and following the lead of Pippa Norris’ survey (2020), we have added a question on the political leaning (left-right spectrum) of our respondents. We found no statistical significance between their personal preferences and their answer to the populist-pluralist question.

Moreover, the contested nature of populism as a concept makes it difficult to build objective measures (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2004). This is particularly important for analyzing populism as rhetoric because the strategic presentation of ideas in party documents may make it difficult to reveal the underlying patterns that experts are better equipped to identify. By only accepting respondents who had demonstrable expertise in Canadian politics and populism, we reduced the risks that our data might be ill-informed. Our selection procedure aligns with the best practices in the field (Norris 2020; Meijers and Wiesehomeier, 2023).

The design of the survey was informed by this rhetorical understanding of populism with questions developed to capture expert perceptions of how provincial parties position themselves on salient issues such as social and economic policies, women’s rights, and environmental protection (Norris, 2020). In both English and French, we emailed 190 experts of Canadian political parties, the Canadian electoral system, Canadian electoral behavior, and Canadian politics. Survey recruitment was through a personalized email invitation from one of the co-authors. To spur added responses, we sent a second email to the same individuals to request their completion of the survey. This recruitment of survey respondents occurred between June and November 2021, and we used the Qualtrics survey platform.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was distributed before the convoy crisis in Ottawa in late January/February 2022 where truck drivers blockaded the downtown core to protest the regulatory measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic including the obligation for truckers bringing cargo between Canada and the United States to get vaccinated. As such, our survey demonstrates the story of populist rhetoric in Canadian provincial politics prior to the events of February 2022.

The 190 surveyed experts were selected through careful review of Canadian university websites. These universities were identified using the list presented by Universities Canada on their website. We privileged those individuals with a PhD in Political Science or History, inclusive of all academic ranks, and included post-doctoral fellows and professor emeritus listed on university websites. We did not canvas non-Canadian institutions. These are the same selection criteria used by Norris in her global survey which had excluded sociologists or geographers. To snowball our recruitment, respondents were invited to recommend colleagues who would be qualified to answer our survey as well. Thirty-seven experts completed the survey, for a completion rate of roughly twenty percent. Respondents were asked at the onset of the survey to identify the provinces they were comfortable assessing. While most experts selected one province, the highest selection rate was five provinces by one expert. The dataset, therefore, is built with responses per province, and one expert may have provided responses for more than one province. Table 1 delineates the responses per province.

**Table 1. Experts Responses by Provinces**

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Alberta                      | 11 |
| British Columbia             | 12 |
| Manitoba                     | 4  |
| New Brunswick                | 2  |
| Newfoundland and<br>Labrador | 1  |
| Nova Scotia                  | 4  |
| Ontario                      | 13 |
| Québec                       | 8  |
| Saskatchewan                 | 2  |

The survey consisted of 21 questions ranging from determining the respondent's familiarity with provincial politics to their perception of provincial parties' positioning on five salient issue areas: social and economic policies, racialized minority rights, immigration, women's rights, and environmental protection (Norris, 2020: 6). Every question was given a numerical response ranked on a 0 to 10-point Likert scale. An example of this is illustrated in Figure 1. The full survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

**Figure 1. Sample Survey Question**

**How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties on whether most politicians are honest or corrupt?**

**Where would you place each party on the following scale?**

|                        |                                                                                                         |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                                                                                                            |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                        | 0: Strongly<br>emphasizes<br>that most<br>politicians<br>are <b>honest</b><br>and<br><b>trustworthy</b> | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     | 8                     | 9                     | 10: Strongly<br>emphasizes<br>that most<br>politicians<br>are<br><b>dishonest</b><br>and<br><b>corrupt</b> | Don't<br>Know/Not<br>applicable |
| » \${e://Field/P1Name} | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                      | <input type="radio"/>           |
| » \${e://Field/P2Name} | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                      | <input type="radio"/>           |
| » \${e://Field/P3Name} | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                                                                                      | <input type="radio"/>           |

Source: Pippa Norris, "Global Party Survey Questionnaire" Final Version 17 Nov 2019.

To determine whether a provincial party is deemed populist, we first asked experts to measure how populist or pluralist a party's rhetoric is from a scale of 0 to 10. A political party is deemed to use high populist rhetoric (score of 10) when it employs "language that typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail." In contrast, high pluralist rhetoric (score of 0) is when a political party "rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining, and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power." Second, respondents were asked about the importance of populist rhetoric for each political party on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not important, and 10 is of great importance.

The survey is agnostic *a priori* to the liberal/conservative or left/right leaning of Canada's provincial parties. This allowed respondents to identify populist rhetoric across the whole range of political parties, breaking with some of the literature which tends to depict populist parties as only a right wing and/or conservative phenomenon (Norris, 2017: 8). The list of the provincial political parties we included in the survey can be found in Appendix 2. We included political parties that previously received five percent of the general vote or that had at least one elected member in Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

To understand possible regional differences in populist rhetoric, we are presenting the data separated into four regions: Western Canada (Alberta and British Columbia), Central Canada (Ontario and Québec), the Prairies (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), and the Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia) (Hodge and Robinson, 2001: 5).

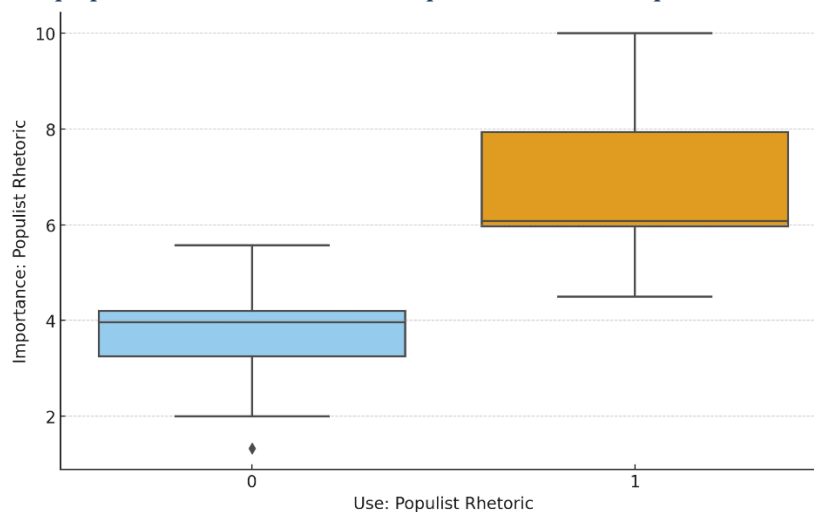
<sup>2</sup> These criteria resulted in the exclusion of the Quebec Conservative Party in our dataset.



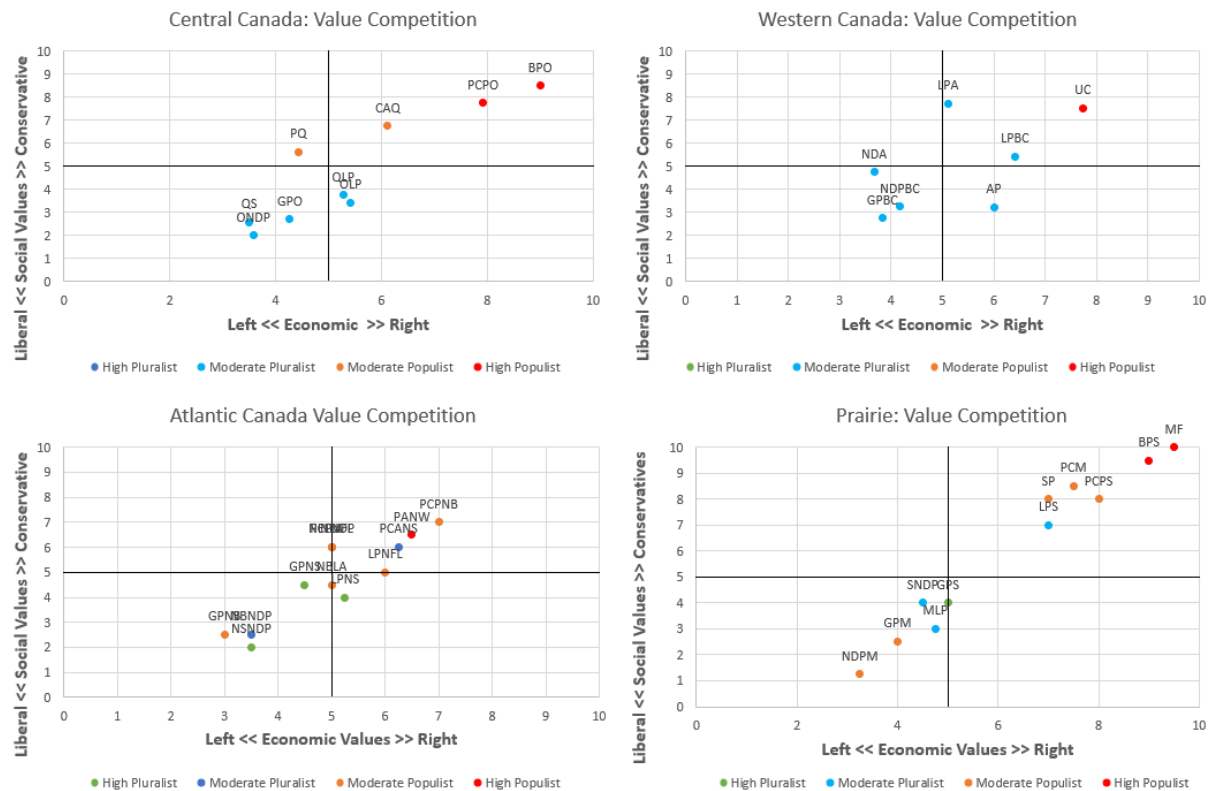
## Findings and Analysis

Our findings are presented in the following six figures and a box plot. The first figure is a box plot showing the distribution of our data between the usage of populist rhetoric, and its perceived importance by political parties. By looking at the median, the black line within the box, we see that variations in the interquartile range (IQR) suggest that those who use populist rhetoric tend to have a slightly wider range of importance perceptions compared to those who do not. Moreover, the bottom edge of the box plot represents the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of the data and the top, the 75<sup>th</sup>. When we look at the box on the right, we see that parties who use populist rhetoric never see it as unimportant given the lowest value of 5. While this sounds evident, it also points towards the use of populist rhetoric as purposeful and strategic rather than ad hoc.

**Figure 2:** Usage of populist rhetoric and its importance for the parties



The remaining five figures each represents our survey respondents' view on a salient policy issue; specifically, social and economic values, immigration, racialized minority rights, environment, and women's rights. To begin, Figure 2 is a three-dimensional representation of surveyed experts' views of provincial parties' rhetoric on social and economic values. Parties are deemed more liberal on social values when they tend to favour open borders, support personal freedoms on same-sex marriage and support broadened democratic participation. In contrast, parties are deemed to be more conservative on social values when they tend to be more insular, focused on traditional values, and support law and order. On economic values, parties on the left favour redistribution of public funds into social programs, widening access to social welfare programs, increasing progressive income taxes, and increasing public ownership of critical infrastructure. Parties on the right favour privatization, unfettered markets to create wealth, reduced size of government, and less business regulations. In Figure 2, the scatterplots read as follows: the y axis represents where provincial parties fall on social values (liberal/conservative) and the x axis represents where parties fall on the economic values (left/right). The colour of each dot represents where a provincial party falls on the third dimension of Figure 1, the pluralist-populist measure. Green represents a highly pluralist party whereas a red dot represents a highly populist party.

**Figure 3.** Socio-economic value competition of provincial parties

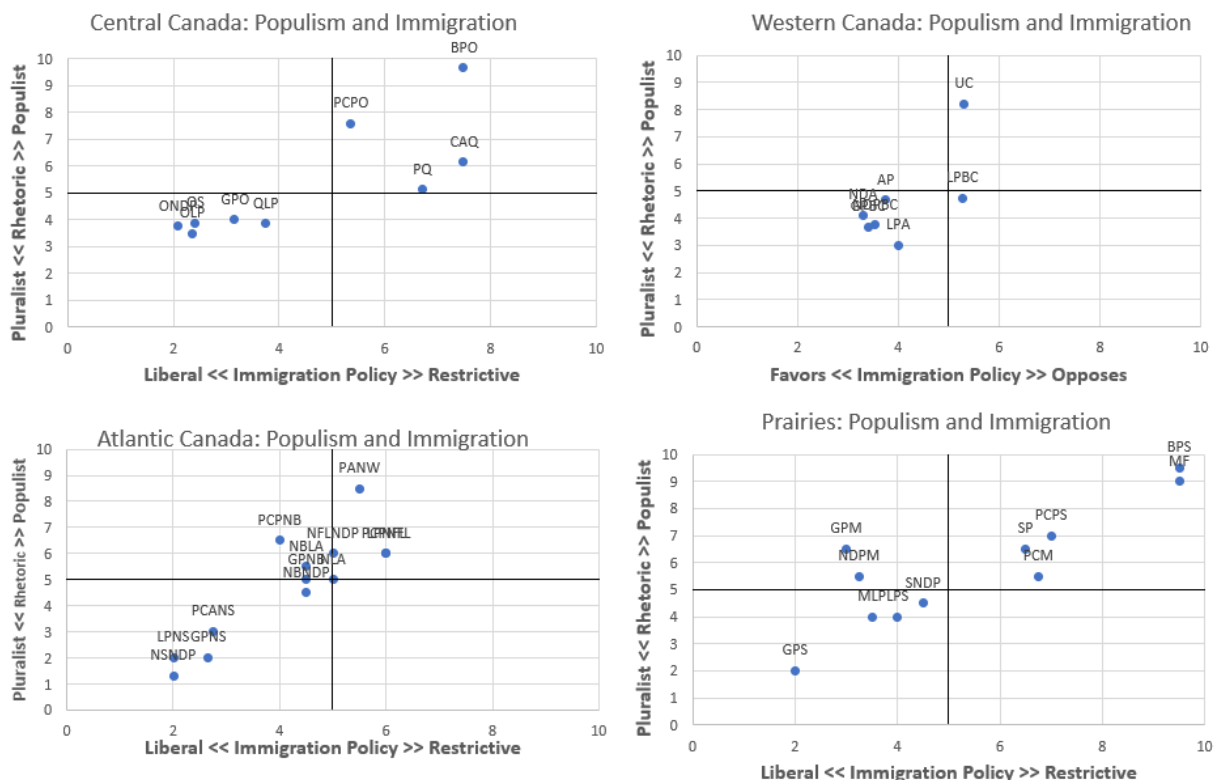
Several observations can be made from Figure 3. First, there are a lot of similarities across regions. All parties deemed highly populist by our surveyed experts are conservative on both social and economic issues. However, this is not the case for moderately populist parties which are found in every quadrant. Some interesting outliers include the New Brunswick Liberal Association [LPC(N)] which surveyed experts deem socially liberal but economically conservative (located in bottom right quadrant) and the Parti Québécois in Québec deemed socially conservative but economically liberal. Every province has parties using populist rhetoric, making it widespread and a pan-Canadian phenomenon.

Second, the data points to how Canada's main political parties' rhetoric seems to be adapted to its regional imperatives, such that the NDP party in Nova Scotia are deemed to demonstrate different rhetoric than say the NDP in British Columbia. This is interesting because while Conservative and Liberal parties have provincial counterparts that are technically distinct from national ones, the NDP claims that their provincial parties are connected to the national party. As the NDP Ontario party notes, for example, on its website: "It will, with all the resources at its command, extend the policies and program on a provincial level of the New Democratic Party (of Canada)." This is however not the case with their use of populist rhetoric, as NDP parties seemingly adapt to regional sentiments and preferences. Of interest, however, are the regional variations *across the same parties*. For example, the Liberal Party in Quebec, Ontario and Alberta are all classified as moderately pluralist. In Quebec and Ontario, the Liberal Party are found in the lower right quadrant, whereas in Alberta the party sits in the top right quadrant. In Newfoundland and New Brunswick, moreover, the Liberal party has adopted high and moderate populist rhetoric

respectively. The same occurs with the NDP across Canada. Whereas most of the parties under the NDP banner are deemed pluralist, in Manitoba the party is deemed moderately populist. With reservations, these results point at divergences across regions which might be the results of different incentives and dynamics.

Third, Figure 2 clearly shows that in recent years, most of the political parties using populist rhetoric are on the right of the political spectrum. This is in keeping with findings in the literature on the global rise of right-wing populist movements and parties. As noted in section 3, this is a departure from Canadian history when from the 1930s to the 1960s, many provincial parties that adopted populist rhetoric were left-wing and called for the better treatment of workers and rural voters. Today, most of the provincial parties using populist rhetoric are conservative or right-wing parties. There is some variance, however, as we disaggregate the survey respondents' views. Of all the populist parties in the various regions, six were identified as strongly populist, and 14 were identified as moderately populist. Notably, the Prairies had the most populist parties, followed by Central Canada and then Western Canada. Atlantic Canada had fewer parties using populist rhetoric. Of all the provincial parties noted as utilizing populist rhetoric, 25 percent of them are said to have liberal values. Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the clear prevalence of populist rhetoric on the right of the political spectrum.

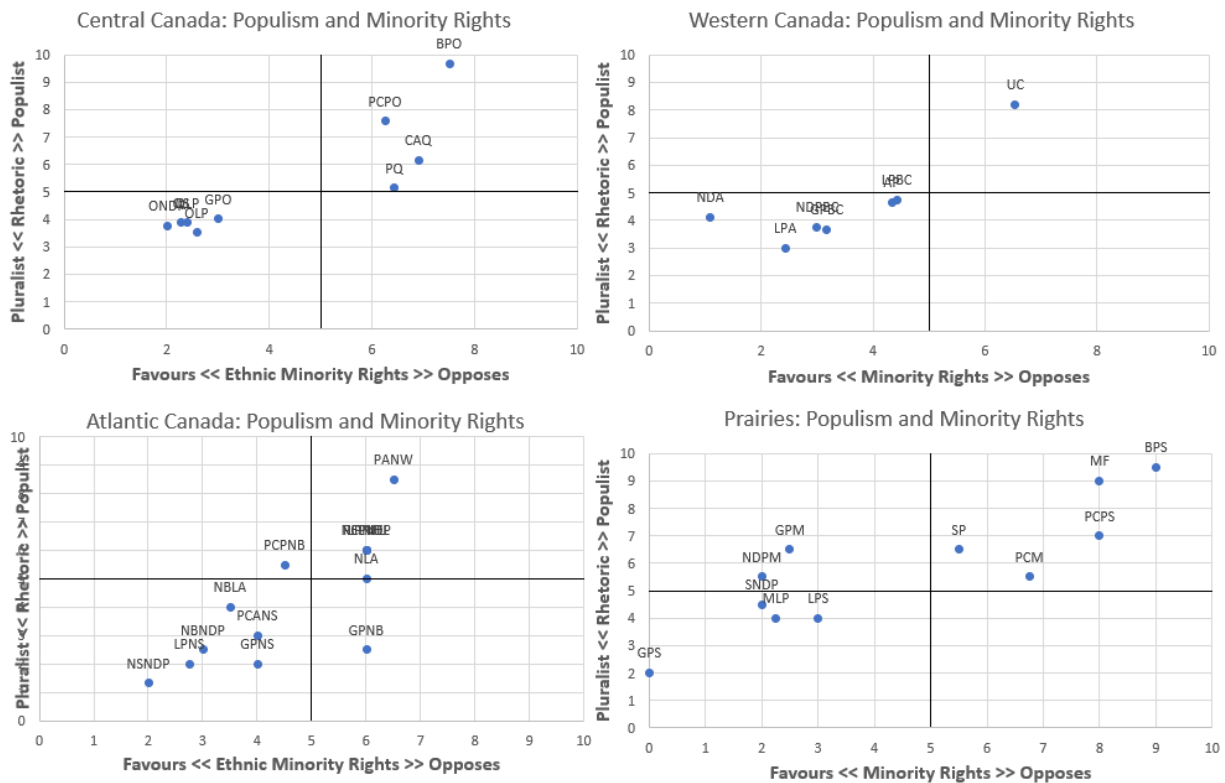
**Figure 4. Populist rhetoric and immigration**



Fourth, without overstating the point, and with the exception of the Progressive Conservative party in Ontario, none of the three main political parties' provincial counterparts use populist rhetoric according to our surveyed experts. The most populist parties in provincial politics are stand alone and not connected to federal political parties. These include the United Conservative (UC) in Alberta, BPS and MF in the Prairies, BPO and

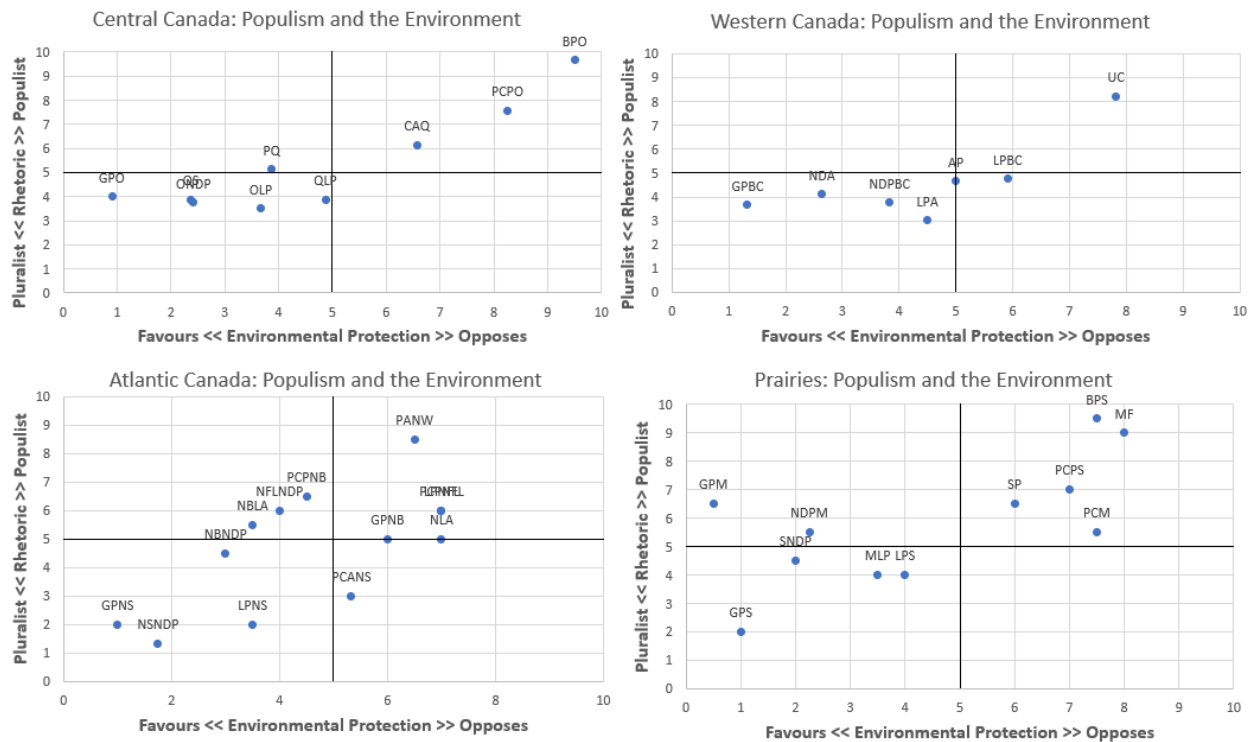
PCPO in Central Canada, and the People's Alliance in New Brunswick (PANB) in Atlantic Canada.

**Figure 5.** Populist rhetoric and minority rights



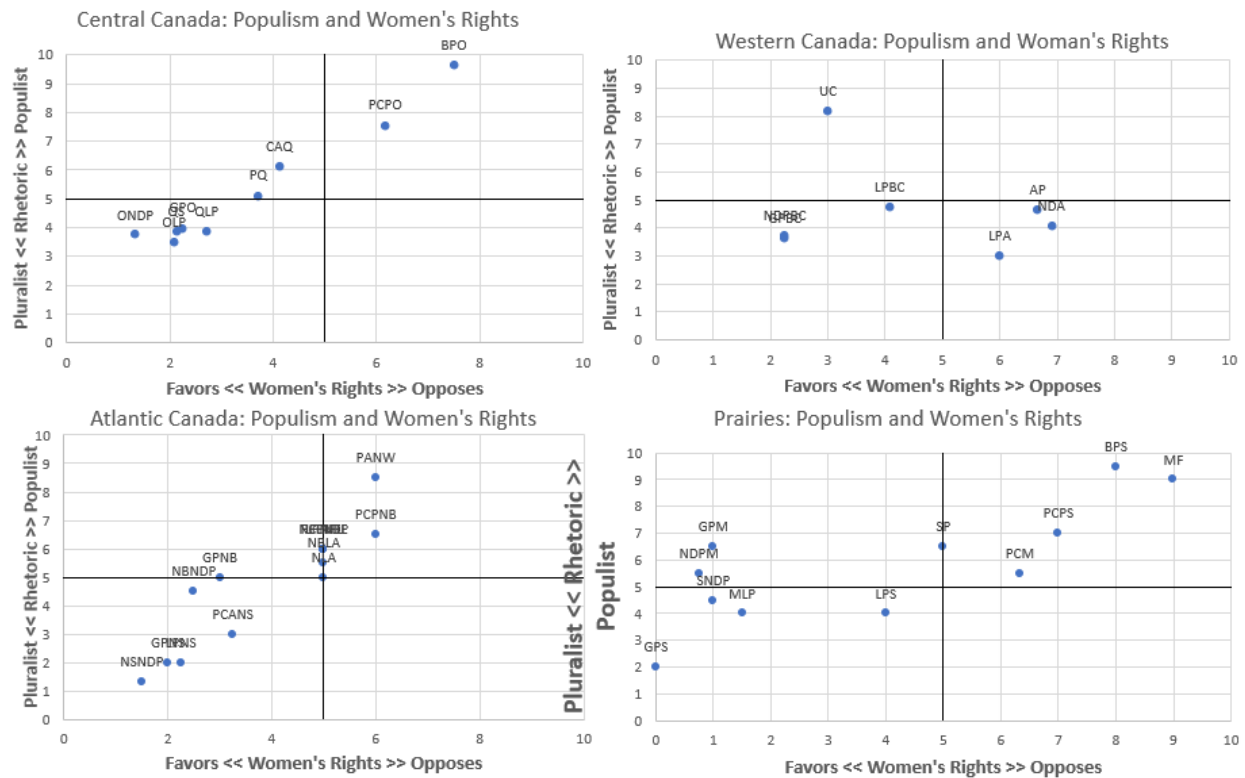
In Figure 4 and 5 respectively, we present the surveyed experts' views on the use of populist rhetoric on the issue of Immigration and on Minority Rights for racialized individuals. Common wisdom holds that populist parties are in favour of less immigration and are more supportive of the 'in-group' rather than the 'outgroup' (racialized minorities). Both figures 4 and 5 offer a more nuanced view. The y axis represents the pluralist or populist leanings of parties. The x axis represents their stance on immigration policy and minority rights, moving from more liberal on the left to more restrictive on the right.

A few findings stand out. First, there are significant regional differences in how provincial parties address the issue of immigration. Most of the highly populist parties are in favour of more restrictive immigration policies. However, moderately populist parties in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies seems to be divided on the issue. The Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick (PCPNB) and the Green Party of Manitoba (GPM), for example, are both parties deemed by our experts to be moderately populist yet more open to immigration. Others, such as NL Alliance in Atlantic Canada and the PCM and PCPS in the Prairies are all in favour of restrictive immigration policies. Moreover, experts' responses indicate that in the Prairies, immigration is a highly populist issue whereas it is less so in other parts of the country. Second, in comparing Figures 4 and 5, there is a great deal of overlap and similarities. Our surveyed experts believe that provincial parties that support restrictive immigration also tend to be less accommodating of racialized minority rights.

**Figure 6.** Populist rhetoric and environmental policies

In Figure 6 and 7 respectively, we present surveyed experts' views of provincial parties' rhetoric on the environment and women's rights. Again, the y axis presents the pluralist or populist leanings of the provincial parties, and the x axis represents their stance on environmental protection and women's rights, moving from more liberal views on the left to more restrictive views on the right. What is immediately noticeable is the similarities in the distribution of the data across all of the various figures.

The provincial parties that adopted populist rhetoric to restrict immigration were often the same parties that opposed both environmental protection and gender rights. The PQ and CAQ in Québec are outliers as both being moderately populist parties that favour restrictive immigration but being in favour of more rights for women. The PQ is also an outlier on the environment, supporting environmental protection which tends not to be the case for most other moderately populist parties identified by our surveyed experts. This is also the case for many Atlantic and Prairie provincial parties where many of the moderately populist parties are also in favour of environmental protections. One possible explanation is that preservation of natural resources is vital to the economies of the Atlantic and Prairie regions, specifically with fisheries and agriculture, and this may elicit more support among populist parties than in resource extractive economies in Western and Central Canada.

**Figure 7.** Populist rhetoric and women's rights

## Conclusion

The history of populism in Canada is longstanding with the rise of rural movements, from farmers to labour and working-class groups to regional alienation. The study of populism in Canada demonstrates varied style, content, and context. To add empirical heft to the study of populism in Canada, we seek to examine both the regional dimension of populism and the issues that are most salient to those regional parties.

The resurgence of populism in Canada is echoed by the adoption of populist rhetoric by Canadian provincial parties. In all, our experts perceive fifty percent of provincial parties to have used, either moderately or strongly, populist rhetoric in their platforms, speeches, or policies. While this paper does not speak to the level of polarization in Canada, it does show the extent to which the current wave of populism in the country has leaned toward the political right. Most parties adopting this type of rhetoric are from the center-right to the right, whereas twenty percent of parties with populist leanings are from the left.

In this paper we sought to demonstrate, with our replication of the *Global Party Survey* by Pippa Norris, the contours of populism in Canadian regions by looking at the use of populist rhetoric. Our preliminary findings make it clear that the use of populist rhetoric is already well entrenched in Canada. The appeal to the will of the people as a governing force is not exclusive to conservatives. Importantly, we have shown how populism in the country has a regional character. The three main federal parties, the Liberals, Conservatives, and the NDP, vary their use of populist rhetoric across the country, adapting to regional political preferences. The determinants of this shift, however, will require further research.

The perceived rise of populist rhetoric in Canada is troubling. Populist rhetoric has been connected to the slow collapse of social cohesion, disenfranchisement caused by the gains of populist parties, and rising racism directed towards immigrants and racialized minorities who are made to be scapegoats blamed for contemporary economic and political problems. This is met by supply-side factors such as the ways in which the electoral system is built, which allows for a supply of populist policies to be generated (Rydgren, 2007). This dynamic is exacerbated by the growing rural-urban disconnect in Canada, that mirrors trends in the United States. These trends, however, were said to be restrained and challenged by Canada's strong progressive institutions, mitigating demands for populist parties and policies (Kiss et al., 2019). Yet, the analysis presented here shows a different picture; a picture where, across regions, provincial parties are adopting populist rhetoric and has proven to be viable electorally. The current trajectory of populism raises important challenges for established Canadian institutions and their future.

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## **Appendix 1. Survey questions**

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. We start with a few general questions. First, how FAMILIAR are you with each of the following parties?

Please indicate using the following scale: 0: not very familiar, 10: very familiar, Not applicable.

2. How far are the following parties generally UNITED OR DIVIDED in their current policy positions?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: very divided, 10: very united, Don't know/ not applicable

3. In their party manifestos and election platforms, how far do the following parties present detailed plans and specific policies, or else offer more general slogans and vague promises?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0:Very detailed plans and specific policies, 10: Very general slogans and vague promises, Don't know/Not applicable.

### GENERAL PARTY CULTURE AND ETHOS

4. Parties can be classified by their current stance on ECONOMIC ISSUES such as privatization, taxes, regulation, government spending, and the welfare state.

Those on the economic LEFT want the government to play an active role in the economy. Those on the economic RIGHT favor a reduced role for government.

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Extreme economic left, 10: Extreme economic right, Don't know/Not applicable.

5. And how IMPORTANT are economic issues for each of the following parties?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: No importance, 10: Great importance, Don't know/ Not applicable.

6. Parties can also be classified by their current social values.

Those with LIBERAL values favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, on abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and democratic participation. Those with CONSERVATIVE values reject these ideas in favor of order, tradition and stability, believing that government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues.

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Very socially liberal, 10: very socially conservative, Don't know/Not applicable.

7. And how IMPORTANT are liberal/conservative social values for each of the following parties?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: No Importance, 10: Great importance, Don't know/Not applicable.

8. Parties can also be classified by their current use of POPULIST OR PLURALIST rhetoric.

POPULIST language typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail. By contrast, PLURALIST rhetoric rejects these ideas, believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power.

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors pluralist rhetoric, 10: Strongly favors populist rhetoric, Don't know/Not applicable.

9. And how IMPORTANT is populist rhetoric currently for each of the following parties?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: No Importance, 10: Great importance, Don't know/Not applicable.

#### PARTY ISSUE POSITIONS

10. Turning now to party positions on specific political issues, where do parties currently stand on IMMIGRATION?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors liberal immigration policies, 10: Strongly favors restrictive immigration policies, Don't know/Not applicable.

11. Next, where do parties currently stand on PUBLIC SPENDING versus TAXATION?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors increased public spending, 10: Strongly favors reduced taxation, Don't know/Not applicable.

12. Next, where do parties currently stand on the issue of ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors environmental protection, 10: Strongly opposes environmental protection, Don't know/Not applicable.

13. Next, where do parties currently stand on NATIONALISM VERSUS MULTILATERALISM.

Those favoring MULTILATERALISM seek to respect international treaties, engage with United Nations agencies, and collaborate with regional organizations like the EU, OAS, AU, ASEAN, and OSCE. Those favoring NATIONALISM reject these ideas.

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors nationalism, 10: Strongly favors multilateralism, Don't know/Not applicable.

14. And where do parties currently stand on WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors women's right, 10: Strongly opposes women's right, Don't know/Not applicable.

15. Next, where do parties currently stand on ETHNIC MINORITY RIGHTS?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors ethnic minority rights, 10: Strongly opposes ethnic minority rights, Don't know/Not applicable.

16. Next, where do parties currently stand on LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC principles, norms and practices?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly respects liberal democratic principles, norms and practices, 10: Strongly undermines liberal democratic principles, norms and practices, Don't know/Not applicable.

17. Next, on clientelism, where do parties currently stand on DISTRIBUTING PUBLIC GOODS, like material benefits, subsidies, construction projects, and jobs. Do they favor giving universally to all citizens or else primarily to their own supporters?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0" Strongly favors universal distribution to all citizens, 10: Strongly favors distribution mainly to their own supporters, Don't know/Not applicable.

#### PARTY RHETORIC

18. Next we seek to understand the type of rhetoric commonly used by each party, such as in their leadership speeches, rallies, press releases, party platforms, and campaign communications.

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly emphasizes that politicians should follow the will of the people, 10: Strongly emphasizes that politicians should lead public opinion, Don't know/Not applicable.

19. How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties on whether the people or leaders should decide important issues?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly emphasizes that ordinary people should decide important issues, 10: Strongly emphasizes that leaders should decide important issues, Don't know/Not applicable.

20. How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties on whether most politicians are honest or corrupt?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly emphasizes that most politicians are honest and trustworthy, 10: Strongly emphasizes that most politicians are dishonest and corrupt, Don't know/Not applicable.

21. How would you characterize the rhetoric commonly used by various parties towards checks and balances on executive power?

Where would you place each party on the following scale? 0: Strongly favors checks and balances on executive power, 10: Strongly opposes checks and balances on executive power, Don't know/Not applicable.

**Appendix 2.** Provincial parties surveyed.

| <b>Province</b>                  | <b>PARTY NAME</b>                                           |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Manitoba</b>                  | Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba                  |
| <b>Manitoba</b>                  | Manitoba New Democratic Party                               |
| <b>Manitoba</b>                  | Manitoba Liberal Party                                      |
| <b>Manitoba</b>                  | Green Party of Manitoba                                     |
| <b>Manitoba</b>                  | Manitoba First                                              |
| <b>British Columbia</b>          | British Columbia New Democratic Party                       |
| <b>British Columbia</b>          | British Columbia Liberal Party                              |
| <b>British Columbia</b>          | Green Party of British Columbia                             |
| <b>Quebec</b>                    | Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ)                               |
| <b>Quebec</b>                    | Quebec Liberal Party                                        |
| <b>Quebec</b>                    | Parti Québécois (PQ)                                        |
| <b>Quebec</b>                    | Québec Solidaire (QS)                                       |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario                   |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | Ontario New Democratic Party                                |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | Ontario Liberal Party                                       |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | Green Party of Ontario                                      |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | New Blue Party of Ontario                                   |
| <b>Alberta</b>                   | United Conservative                                         |
| <b>Alberta</b>                   | New Democratic                                              |
| <b>Alberta</b>                   | Alberta Party                                               |
| <b>Alberta</b>                   | Liberal                                                     |
| <b>Nova Scotia</b>               | Nova Scotia Liberal Party                                   |
| <b>Nova Scotia</b>               | Progressive Conservative Association of Nova Scotia         |
| <b>Nova Scotia</b>               | Nova Scotia New Democratic Party                            |
| <b>Nova Scotia</b>               | Green Party of Nova Scotia                                  |
| <b>Nova Scotia</b>               | Atlantica Party                                             |
| <b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> | Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador                  |
| <b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> | Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador |
| <b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> | Newfoundland and Labrador New Democratic Party              |
| <b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b> | NL Alliance                                                 |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Saskatchewan Party                                          |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Saskatchewan New Democratic Party                           |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Buffalo Party of Saskatchewan                               |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan              |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Green Party of Saskatchewan                                 |
| <b>Saskatchewan</b>              | Saskatchewan Liberal Party                                  |
| <b>New Brunswick</b>             | Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick             |
| <b>New Brunswick</b>             | New Brunswick Liberal Association                           |
| <b>New Brunswick</b>             | People's Alliance of New Brunswick                          |
| <b>New Brunswick</b>             | Green Party of New Brunswick                                |
| <b>New Brunswick</b>             | New Brunswick New Democratic Party                          |