

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Votes: An Account of the Determinants of Vote Choice in the 2011 Election**

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**Abstract:** The 2011 Newfoundland and Labrador election would mark a turning point in provincial politics. The exit of the extraordinarily popular former premier, Danny Williams, in the year prior to the contest guaranteed that the election would, at a minimum, diverge from the pattern set in recent years. Equally significant, Williams' successor, Kathy Dunderdale, is a historic figure: she was the first woman to lead the province and one of only eight women ever to hold the top office in a Canadian province. We give an account of the determinants of the vote decision in the 2011 election. We conclude that a fairly standard set of demographic and long-term dispositional influences were highly influential in voters' choices. At the same time, our analysis suggests that strategic considerations – especially concerning the Liberals and NDP – are critical to understanding the final outcome.

**Keywords:** Newfoundland and Labrador; 2011 election; vote choice

**Résumé:** L'élection provinciale de 2011 allait marquer un tournant dans la politique provinciale de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Le départ de Danny Williams, un premier ministre très populaire, et le fait que son successeur, Kathy Dunderdale, était la première femme à occuper ce poste à Terre-Neuve, suggéraient que cette élection se distinguerait des précédents. Nous examinons les déterminants de la décision de vote et nous concluons qu'un ensemble assez standard d'influences démographiques et dispositionnelles à long terme expliquent le choix des électeurs. Notre analyse suggère aussi que des considérations stratégiques – concernant, en particulier les Libéraux et le NPD - ont joué, elles aussi, un rôle important.

**Mots-clés:** Terre-Neuve et Labrador; l'élection de 2011; choix de vote

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The 2011 election in Newfoundland and Labrador reflected a number of firsts in the province's history. While the election led to a third straight term for the Progressive Conservative Party, it also resulted in the election of the first female premier in the province, as well as a record number of seats for the New Democratic Party. Results from Elections Newfoundland indicate that the PC Party won the election with 56.1% of the popular vote, obtaining 37 of 48 seats (6 less than it held before the writ was dropped); the Liberal Party gained two seats, obtaining a total of six seats with 19.1% of the popular vote; while the NDP secured five seats (gaining four) with 24.6% of the popular vote.

Parts of this outcome were foreseeable from the outset: while Kathy Dunderdale was not as popular as the PC Party's previous leader, Danny Williams, there was little doubt that she would form government after October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Given the substantial financial difficulties faced by the Liberal Party (CBC, 2011b), as well as the need for a quick leadership race after Yvonne Jones stepped down due to health concerns (Canadian Press, 2011b), the party was expected to struggle in the election. Polling results consistently demonstrated that the Liberals were lagging behind the others—even behind the NDP, which had historically played a very minor role in the provincial party system—and most voters were arguably aware of how the parties would do at the end of the day. As commentator Rex Murphy notes, “there was never a moment in the election during which either the Liberals, or the NDP, under stalwart Lorraine Michael, posed the slightest threat to the Conservatives” (2011).

If the partisan identity of the government following the election was a foregone conclusion, the identity of the official opposition was not. The “real race” in this election was, arguably, that between

the Liberal and NDP parties. Given the reporting of polls throughout the campaign, voters likely perceived that the NDP was gaining ground, complicating voters' traditional reckonings of the strategic landscape of provincial politics. In this uncertain environment, campaign events – particularly the leaders' debate – may have been critical sources of strategic information: a notably strong – or weak – performance by one of Lorraine Michael (NDP) or Kevin Aylward (Liberal) could have provided an important signal about the prospects of their parties. Strategic dynamics aside, the issue agenda of the campaign was always likely to find the economy front and center. Bucking the global trend of late, Newfoundland and Labrador's economic stability, given its recent oil wealth, meant that most residents were generally satisfied with the incumbent and complacent about the election in general. This may have, in one sense, diminished the importance of the economy – governments tend to be punished in bad times, rather than rewarded in good times – and, more generally, reduced the intensity of issue conflict in the election. That said, even if short-run factors like these were a minor chord in the campaign, more long-standing conflicts rooted in social group memberships, partisanship, and fundamental value differences may yet have operated. Indeed, a paucity of issues may serve to elevate the importance of judgmental shortcuts grounded in social identities.

In this paper we give an account of the determinants of the vote decision in Newfoundland and Labrador's 2011 election. We begin with a brief review of the general influences on the vote decision commonly theorized in the voting behaviour literature, before turning to an account of the contextual specifics of the 2011 campaign. We next describe our data source: an academic survey of provincial electoral

behaviour in Newfoundland and Labrador. After a discussion of important coding decisions, we give an account of campaign dynamics – specifically, of the flow of vote intentions and of attitudes toward party leaders – before turning to an explanation of vote choice at the individual level. We conclude that a fairly standard set of demographic and long-term dispositional influences loomed large in voters' choices. At the same time, the analysis suggests that strategic considerations – especially those involving the relative electoral positions of the Liberals and NDP – are critical to understanding the final outcome.

### **Background and Literature**

When voters go to the polls on Election Day, they have a lot of things to consider. Political scientists have spent years trying to determine what exactly voters are thinking about when they decide to vote for one party over another. What we know as a result of those efforts is that there are a lot of factors that influence vote choice and that different factors matter for different people at different times. From partisanship to the economy, from gender to religion, from our interpretation of poll results to our understanding of federalism and the roles of different levels of government, a number of forces come into play as we step into the ballot box. Context matters, and events that take place before and during campaigns can have an important impact on electoral outcomes.

Dating from the earliest years (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Campbell et al., 1960), scholars have noted the critical role of long-term forces: partisanship, ideological beliefs, and the socio-demographic characteristics of voters. Studies indicate that those characteristics that are fundamental to how we were socialized affect how we vote. Therefore, party loyalties affect vote choice and issue attitudes (Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al.,

2002), as do gender (Almond and Verba, 1963; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; Gidengil et al., 2003) and other socio-demographics (Bartels, 1996; Conover and Feldman, 1986). Generally speaking, long-term forces play an integral role in explaining beliefs, perceptions, issue attitudes, and vote choice.

Given that partisanship is a long-term identification (Green et al., 2002; Johnston, 2006), and considering that voters' gender and ethnic identifications do not generally change between elections, these factors cannot really explain short-term fluctuations in vote choice. Short-term forces are, therefore, also important to understanding vote choice: factors such as candidates, party leaders, and campaign issues and platforms can help to explain short-term changes (Stokes, Campbell and Miller, 1958). Miller and Shanks' (1996) seminal research supports the inclusion of short-term forces in voting models, as they argue that both long-term and short-term forces have their proper places in models of vote choice.

We suspect that both long- and short-term forces were at play in this most recent election in Newfoundland and Labrador. Factors such as gender, age, ideological views, and partisanship are likely to have influenced voters on Election Day, as they do in every election. We also argue, however, that context was important to this election. In particular, three factors seem most pertinent: a) the provincial economy, which was doing well; b) the incredible popularity of the Progressive Conservative Party's former leader, Danny Williams; and c) the groundbreaking gains made by the New Democratic Party in the federal House of Commons, including the securing of two seats in the St. John's area. These three factors came together to provide the backdrop to the election, colouring the nature of competition during the campaign. In the end, we suggest that the story of the

campaign was really about who was going to form the official opposition, and coverage of campaign events, including the debates, repeatedly highlighted this “race for second place” in the minds of voters.

*The Economy:* The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has experienced a period of economic wealth and GDP growth as a result of the success of its oil industry. A recent report indicates that, in the last two decades, real GDP growth has grown by over 50%, and over half of this growth can be attributed to the oil industry, which accounts for nearly one third of the province’s annual GDP (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2011). This increase in provincial wealth has led to an increase in government spending and a sense among residents that “times are good”. Among other things, housing prices have increased substantially over the last five to ten years (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2011), suggesting residents would have felt this economic “boom” most acutely.

As scholars of voting behaviour have repeatedly shown (e.g., Duch and Stephenson, 2008), perceptions of economic health and growth generally lead to support for incumbents, given that, in such circumstances, incumbents would seem to have shown themselves to be able managers of the economy. Government turnover is likelier in times of economic hardship, as voters opt to “throw the rascals out.” By this logic, we would expect general satisfaction with the Progressive Conservative government going into this election campaign to be relatively high, and the likelihood of an election upset to be relatively low. It is important to note also that the province has done well relative to other provinces in recent years, contributing to the sense of stability and pride in Newfoundland and Labrador among residents. RBC’s provincial outlook pegged

GDP growth in Newfoundland and Labrador at third best in the country in 2011, behind only Saskatchewan and Alberta, and the province’s move from “have not” to “have” status in the federation after years of economic hardship was quite a milestone in the province’s history (CBC, 2008). Regardless of whether or not this level of provincial wealth and growth will last forever (and research suggests that it will not [Locke, 2011]), going into the election residents generally felt positive about the state of the economy.

*The Legacy of Danny Williams:* Positive feelings about the state of the economy are likely to be partially intertwined with positive attitudes towards Danny Williams, the former leader of the PC Party. The economy took off while he was Premier, although not necessarily because of any policies instituted by him or his government. His leadership is notable, largely because of his popularity, which is seen to be unmatched in Canadian history (Corporate Research Associates, 2010). With approval rates at about 90%, even seven years after he first took office, he “[left] office as Canada’s most popular Premier and with a record of personal popularity that will be difficult to match” (Corporate Research Associates, 2010). Given his incredible popularity, and the fact that Kathy Dunderdale was handpicked by Williams to succeed him, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, for the most part, had been content to evaluate Dunderdale positively as well.

Polling data collected soon after the leadership transition indicates that voters continued to be satisfied with the performance of the PC government even under Dunderdale, with approval rates at 82% in March of 2011 (Corporate Research Associates, 2011b). Some of this approval may be due to Dunderdale’s credentials and political career, which are not insubstantial (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant, 2013), but it

may also be partially the result of Williams' continued popularity. After taking over the leadership of the party and throughout the campaign, Dunderdale made substantial efforts to differentiate herself from the previous administration, a relatively easy task considering Williams' regular (and public) insults and comments towards her and her leadership (e.g., CBC, 2011c). While he had selected Dunderdale to succeed him, a few months after he was no longer in power, Williams' perceptions of the new leader appeared to sour, and he made this change of heart public. As time passed, approval of Dunderdale's government dropped from the high experienced under Williams, with satisfaction rates of 53% in September of 2011 (Telegram 2011). This drop may be partially because of Williams' media commentary and apparent rift with Dunderdale, or it may be the result of voters' independent assessments of the government. Regardless, satisfaction rates remained fairly high, and undoubtedly were related to the Williams legacy and the strength of the economy. At the start of the campaign, it was unforeseeable that anybody other than Dunderdale would form government after October 11<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, polls conducted throughout the campaign indicate that voters consistently felt she was the best option for Premier (e.g., CBC 2011a; The Telegram, 2011).

*Riding the Orange Wave & the Battle for Opposition:* The May 2011 federal election was a landmark in Canadian electoral history. Not only did the "new" Conservative Party form a majority, but the NDP moved into the seat of the official opposition, after the "orange wave" swept over the country from east to west (Smith, 2011). Capturing a record 103 seats, including two in St. John's, the NDP's success was credited to Jack Layton and the energy that his leadership gave to the party,

its candidates, and its volunteers. Following the campaign, Layton's untimely cancer relapse and passing may have renewed NDP energy, as the desire to commemorate his passing was expressed by "turning the country orange," whether on facebook or on city streets (Toronto Star, 2011).

Given the short span of time between the May federal election and the October provincial election, much of the federal NDP's campaign organization remained in place and ready to go (a large proportion of the provincial NDP's volunteers and staff had also worked on the federal campaign). Indeed, the fixed election dates may have further helped the NDP, as all parties knew going into the federal election that they would be back knocking on doors in a few months. The fact that the NDP increased its presence in Ottawa and also doubled its Newfoundland and Labrador contingent may have given the party a boost in the provincial election, causing the Party to be taken more seriously as a contender by voters. While the party had never held more than two seats simultaneously in the province before, the likelihood that Lorraine Michael would no longer sit alone in the House of Assembly seemed high, even before the writ was dropped.

As the provincial campaign progressed, media discussion focused on the polls and the race for opposition status between the Liberal Party and the NDP. The Liberal Party, historically, had been a major player in the province. This was the party of Joey Smallwood, Newfoundland's first Premier following Confederation, who governed for the first 23 years of the province's existence within Canada. The PCs and Liberals alternated government and opposition status periodically for the next thirty years, with the PC government taking over in 2003. It was in 2007 that the Liberals were devastated in the election, winning just 3 seats, at which point the party was also

drowning in debt (CBC, 2011b). Then, when leader Yvonne Jones stepped down just weeks before the campaign in 2011, many noted the possible negative implications for the party's success in the election (e.g., Canadian Press, 2011b).

As polling numbers throughout the campaign showed the NDP edging out the Liberal Party, a first in Newfoundland and Labrador, the question became one of vote efficiency and correctly "playing the game" according to the electoral system (CBC, 2011d). Just days before the election, it was still unclear who would form the official opposition (CBC, 2011e). Indeed, in the end, the Liberal Party was better adapted to the system, winning more seats than the NDP even though it had a smaller share of the popular vote. Arguably, however, the orange wave that began in the federal election campaign earlier in the year continued to crash down on Newfoundland and Labrador during the provincial election. Both the Liberals and NDP gained seats, even unseating prominent cabinet ministers within the Progressive Conservative government. While the question of who would form government was never really at issue, the race between the opposition parties became quite heated over the campaign. It is to explaining voters' decisions that we now turn.

### **Data and Measurement**

Our analysis of the outcome in the 2011 election is based on a web-based survey of a representative sample of Newfoundland & Labrador voters. Data were collected from September 7<sup>th</sup> to October 10<sup>th</sup>. The survey was programmed and fielded by the polling firm Harris/Decima (Ottawa). In addition to a measure of vote intention – our major dependent variable – the survey instrument included indicators of all the major determinants of the vote decision canvassed in the preceding section of the paper:

demographic variables, long-term political dispositions, attitudes about specific political issues, and perceptions of party leaders and economic conditions. All analyses reported in the paper incorporate a sampling weight for age and gender.

Our measure of *vote intention* combines responses to a three-part battery, which includes a supplemental query to identify "leaners" among the initially non-responsive,<sup>i</sup> and in our analyses we combine leaners with those expressing a vote intention on the initial component of the battery. For purposes of the analysis, we reduce vote intention to a four-category variable: Liberal, PC, and NDP voters (or leaners) are distinguished from all others (that is, those supporting other parties, not intending to vote, or who are "unsure" of their vote decision). The unsure or "undecided" comprise fully 84.2 percent of this last, residual category. By this four-part measure, of those expressing a vote intention (including leaners), the PCs enjoyed a very large lead over the other parties: 48.1 percent of those respondents who had decided who to vote for backed the PCs, 36.1 percent favoured the NDP, and 15.7 percent supported the Liberals.<sup>ii</sup> Averaged over the campaign, 26.5 percent of respondents did not express a major-party vote intention (they supported other parties, were unsure or did not intend to vote).

We examine the effects of five socio-demographic variables: age, gender, religious identification, household income, and employment status.<sup>iii</sup> The analysis also includes three long-term political dispositions: party identification, ideological self-identification, and a measure of moral traditionalism.<sup>iv</sup> In addition to these measures of long-term forces, we also examine the effects of short-term forces, incorporating two measures of issue attitudes (spending on education and evaluations of the provincial economy) as

well as evaluations of party leaders.<sup>v</sup>

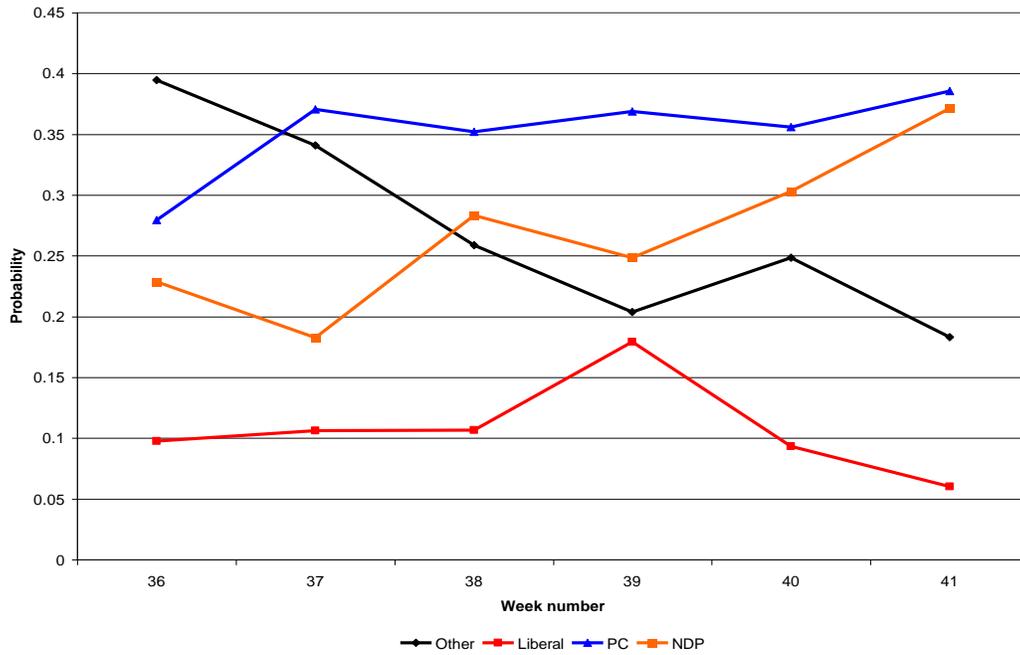
### **Campaign Dynamics**

Before turning to the analysis of the vote decision, we first attempt to depict the dynamics of the campaign, in terms of vote intention and leader ratings.<sup>vi</sup> As depicted in Figure 1, the campaign witnessed quite significant change in vote intention. Paralleling the commercial polls reported during the election, the most impressive dynamic involves the NDP and the Liberals. Support for the NDP grew from the beginning of the campaign. This may have reflected the continuing “orange wave,” established months earlier in the federal election campaign. That said, the time path of the NDP’s growing support allows an alternative reading, one that is somewhat independent of what happened at the national level.

NDP growth was inconsistent prior to week 39 (September 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>), the week which contained the campaign’s sole televised leaders’ debate, on September 29<sup>th</sup>. Thereafter, the party’s support grew steadily: by our rendering, the NDP’s share of vote intention grew by 50 percent over the final two weeks of the campaign. Simultaneously, Liberal support collapsed in this period, shrinking by two-thirds from its week 39 peak. It is quite possible, then, that the debate significantly affected the election outcome, at least on the opposition side. Side evidence from commercial pollsters provides circumstantial support for this interpretation: an MQO Research poll in the field for the two days following the debate found that just 6 percent of respondents felt the Liberal leader had won the debate, whereas 36 and 22 percent of respondents gave the nod to the PC and NDP leaders, respectively (CBC, 2011a).

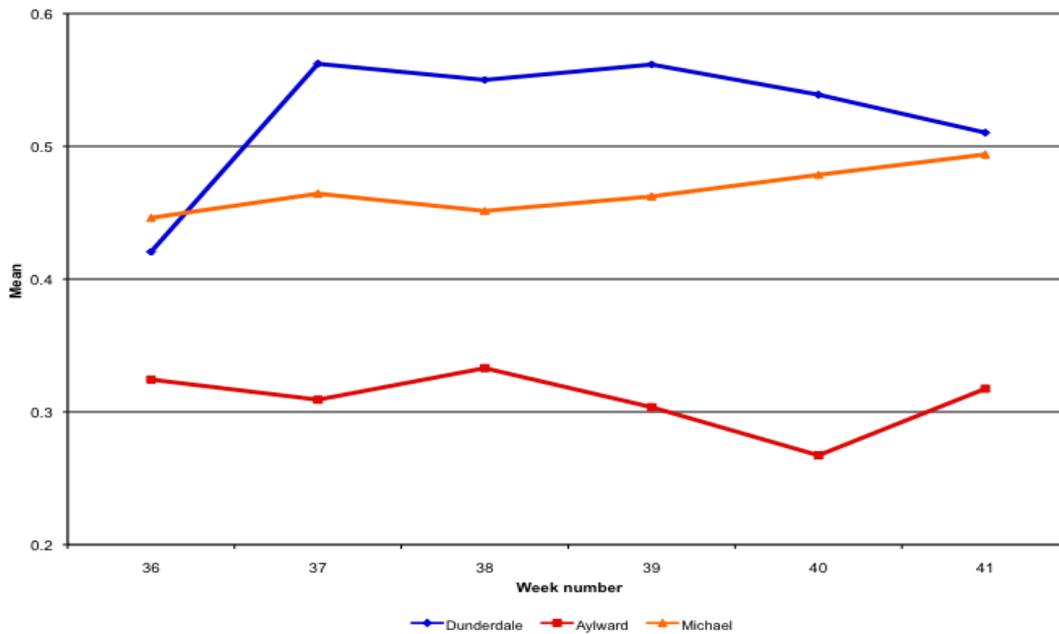
How might the debate have exerted its effect? Specifically, how might the debate have improved NDP fortunes and, simultaneously, dashed the hopes of the

Liberals? One possibility is that the dynamic reflected improving views of Michael and deteriorating views of Aylward. The estimated leader ratings plotted in Figure 2 suggest, however, that this can be only a part of the story. In contrast to the apparent spike in support for her party, views of Lorraine Michael seem to trend fairly steadily, if shallowly, upward across the whole length of the campaign. To be sure, views of Aylward decline following debate week, but they were already sliding and, further, seem to have recovered somewhat by the end of the campaign. Both of these dynamics pose a difficulty for the hypothesis that the debate’s effect on vote intention was exerted mainly through evaluations of these two leaders. An alternative interpretation is that the debate mainly imparted strategic information to voters – about the relative viability of the Liberals and New Democrats as “destinations” for those wishing to cast a vote against the PCs. While we cannot test this explanation directly, it fits with the view that an important feature of the election was the changed competitive position of the NDP as a result of the party’s federal success. However, perceptions of the party’s new status in the province seem not to have been foreordained: it took the campaign and, perhaps especially, the leaders’ debate to establish the NDP’s new place in provincial politics.



**Figure 1.** Vote Intention (adjusted) by Party by Week Number

Note: The figure plots predicted vote probabilities, by party and week, controlling for time-varying demographics (see discussion in text). Data are weighted. Weighted  $N = 694$ . “Other” includes other-party vote intention, those who are “not sure,” and intended non-voters.



**Figure 2.** Leader Ratings (adjusted) by Week Number

Note: The figure plots predicted ratings, by party and week, controlling for time-varying demographics (see discussion in text). Data are weighted. Weighted  $N = 694$ . Thermometer values re-scaled to the (0,1) interval.

Table 1. Modeling the Vote

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Other</i>					
Age	-0.00715 (0.00519)	-0.00577 (0.00691)	-0.000266 (0.00785)	0.00121 (0.00804)	5.49e-06 (0.00891)
Male	-0.435*** (0.152)	-0.366** (0.157)	-0.413** (0.181)	-0.383** (0.184)	-0.470** (0.196)
Catholic	-0.150 (0.191)	-0.213 (0.199)	-0.0830 (0.225)	-0.100 (0.228)	0.0521 (0.232)
Anglican	-0.0765 (0.219)	-0.110 (0.225)	-0.332 (0.264)	-0.347 (0.267)	-0.328 (0.285)
No religion	0.194 (0.216)	0.158 (0.225)	-0.314 (0.269)	-0.315 (0.274)	-0.246 (0.286)
> \$30k/yr.		0.467* (0.255)	0.0695 (0.293)	0.00150 (0.300)	0.168 (0.325)
\$60k to \$90k/yr.		-0.0759 (0.227)	-0.169 (0.258)	-0.156 (0.260)	-0.0855 (0.275)
\$90k to 110k/yr.		-0.196 (0.248)	-0.424 (0.283)	-0.391 (0.282)	-0.319 (0.291)
> \$110k/yr.		-0.101 (0.239)	-0.527* (0.284)	-0.460 (0.286)	-0.453 (0.299)
Unemployed		0.145 (0.286)	-0.0325 (0.302)	-0.0422 (0.300)	0.0805 (0.338)
Retired		0.0212 (0.239)	-0.0223 (0.276)	0.00761 (0.282)	0.131 (0.303)
PID: Liberal			-0.625** (0.280)	-0.597** (0.281)	-0.621** (0.305)
PID: PC			-1.943*** (0.224)	-1.876*** (0.227)	-1.563*** (0.247)
PID: NDP			0.0139 (0.326)	0.0748 (0.314)	-0.166 (0.340)
Left self-ID			0.333 (0.507)	0.223 (0.523)	-0.122 (0.592)
Moral trad.			-0.355 (0.315)	-0.387 (0.319)	-0.301 (0.340)
Education spndg.				0.327 (0.360)	0.211 (0.381)
Prov. econ. perc.				-0.612** (0.280)	-0.330 (0.289)
Rtg.: Dunderdale					-2.680*** (0.458)
Rating: Aylward					0.900** (0.437)
Rating: Michael					1.058** (0.450)
Constant	0.348 (0.283)	0.227 (0.365)	1.426*** (0.504)	1.520** (0.632)	2.248*** (0.754)

Table 1. Continued

Liberal Vote

Age	-0.00795 (0.00636)	-0.000755 (0.00838)	0.00104 (0.0121)	-0.000327 (0.0122)	-0.000860 (0.0127)
Male	-0.171 (0.177)	-0.152 (0.185)	-0.371 (0.234)	-0.405* (0.237)	-0.546** (0.254)
Catholic	0.0253 (0.227)	0.0913 (0.239)	0.463 (0.319)	0.440 (0.322)	0.612* (0.332)
Anglican	0.542** (0.238)	0.628** (0.248)	0.486 (0.335)	0.519 (0.337)	0.515 (0.356)
No religion	-0.0890 (0.277)	0.00184 (0.296)	0.0177 (0.388)	0.0678 (0.389)	0.121 (0.421)
> \$30k/yr.		-0.107 (0.279)	-0.763* (0.401)	-0.899** (0.420)	-0.781* (0.457)
\$60k to \$90k/yr.		-0.639** (0.260)	-0.724** (0.316)	-0.676** (0.321)	-0.635* (0.351)
\$90k to 110k/yr.		-0.450 (0.278)	-0.802** (0.370)	-0.732** (0.369)	-0.666* (0.385)
> \$110k/yr.		-0.995*** (0.309)	-1.755*** (0.407)	-1.678*** (0.416)	-1.653*** (0.429)
Unemployed		0.345 (0.324)	-0.331 (0.434)	-0.431 (0.439)	-0.296 (0.499)
Retired		-0.186 (0.278)	-0.109 (0.377)	-0.0115 (0.375)	0.127 (0.390)
PID: Liberal			1.965*** (0.328)	2.074*** (0.341)	1.859*** (0.364)
PID: PC			-1.539*** (0.372)	-1.448*** (0.380)	-1.198*** (0.399)
PID: NDP			0.968** (0.429)	1.004** (0.426)	0.591 (0.452)
Left self-ID			-0.166 (0.725)	-0.293 (0.776)	-0.690 (0.890)
Moral trad.			-0.938** (0.404)	-0.895** (0.403)	-0.915** (0.462)
Education spndg.				0.0938 (0.510)	-0.0487 (0.536)
Prov. econ. perc.				-0.884** (0.359)	-0.551 (0.393)
Rtg.: Dunderdale					-2.986*** (0.643)
Rating: Aylward					2.265*** (0.589)
Rating: Michael					1.112* (0.627)
Constant	-0.447 (0.346)	-0.462 (0.450)	0.309 (0.772)	0.820 (0.942)	1.333 (1.132)

Table 1. Continued

<i>NDP vote</i>					
Age	-0.0162*** (0.00527)	-0.00653 (0.00690)	0.00800 (0.00914)	0.0116 (0.00953)	0.00592 (0.0106)
Male	-0.0601 (0.152)	-0.0254 (0.158)	0.0261 (0.206)	0.0849 (0.216)	0.0378 (0.232)
Catholic	0.130 (0.193)	0.101 (0.199)	0.475* (0.262)	0.388 (0.265)	0.499* (0.275)
Anglican	0.258 (0.219)	0.211 (0.227)	0.0255 (0.298)	-0.0681 (0.310)	-0.118 (0.334)
No religion	0.388* (0.218)	0.429* (0.226)	-0.0101 (0.318)	-0.0223 (0.325)	-0.000634 (0.336)
> \$30k/yr.		-0.0893 (0.255)	-0.536 (0.334)	-0.558* (0.336)	-0.341 (0.370)
\$60k to \$90k/yr.		-0.462** (0.220)	-0.613** (0.284)	-0.617** (0.291)	-0.609* (0.318)
\$90k to 110k/yr.		-0.864*** (0.251)	-1.275*** (0.344)	-1.349*** (0.351)	-1.119*** (0.362)
> \$110k/yr.		-0.725*** (0.238)	-1.209*** (0.312)	-1.194*** (0.319)	-1.188*** (0.347)
Unemployed		0.235 (0.276)	-0.348 (0.351)	-0.365 (0.351)	-0.143 (0.415)
Retired		-0.471* (0.245)	-0.579* (0.295)	-0.533* (0.312)	-0.327 (0.346)
PID: Liberal			0.133 (0.297)	0.0514 (0.303)	0.137 (0.334)
PID: PC			-2.009*** (0.281)	-2.080*** (0.290)	-1.574*** (0.303)
PID: NDP			2.387*** (0.318)	2.439*** (0.309)	2.058*** (0.344)
Left self-ID			1.181* (0.609)	1.075* (0.631)	0.642 (0.724)
Moral trad.			-0.408 (0.374)	-0.400 (0.378)	-0.374 (0.407)
Education spndg.				1.528*** (0.454)	1.411*** (0.503)
Prov. econ. perc.				-0.0558 (0.315)	0.222 (0.340)
Rtg.: Dunderdale					-3.534*** (0.505)
Rating: Aylward					-0.0351 (0.497)
Rating: Michael					2.751*** (0.512)
Constant	0.398 (0.277)	0.419 (0.354)	-0.0838 (0.610)	-1.421* (0.763)	-0.641 (0.954)
Observations	694	666	645	641	641

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. Cell entries are multinomial probit estimates.

None of these dynamics, of course, involve the PCs. Support for the Conservative party and evaluations of its leader appear, generally, strong and stable across the campaign. There is a hint that the debate may have slightly hurt evaluations of Dunderdale. But, if this was so, there is little sign of corresponding impact on vote intention for the party, which reached its highest point in the last week of the campaign.<sup>vii</sup>

Finally, we note the steepest trend across the figures: the steady and sharp decline in the residual category of undecided, non-major-party voters, and non-voters (Fig. 1). This is no surprise, of course, as political interest and engagement almost always increases greatly during election campaigns. Over the course of the campaign, respondents became more engaged and interested in the campaign, and more certain of their vote choice.

### Explaining the Vote

We turn now to an explanation of vote choice in the 2011 election. We estimate a multinomial probit regression model of the decision, since our dependent variable is made up of four categories.<sup>viii</sup> The estimates in Table 1 are displayed by outcome – “other” (i.e., undecided, non-major-party voters, non-voters), Liberal vote intention and NDP vote intention – with PC vote intention as the excluded category. Interpreting the estimates of a multinomial probit model is relatively complicated – as compared with interpretation of, for example, OLS regression estimates – as the model includes a separate set of coefficients and a unique constant for each outcome category, save one. As a result, rather than discussing the coefficients themselves, we discuss changes in the predicted probability distribution of vote intention, given changes in the levels of the various independent variables.<sup>ix</sup>

We estimate a succession of models,

adding new variables at each step. Following Miller and Shanks (1996), we start with those variables most causally distant from the vote decision, moving closer to the dependent variable in successive models. This allows us to comment on the mediation of the effects of those variables at some remove from the vote decision through more proximal determinants. The discussion of results is organized in terms of three broad categories of explanatory factors: socio-demographics; long-term political dispositions; and issues and leader evaluations.

*Socio-demographics:* The leftmost model in Table 1 contains the most basic of demographic indicators: age, sex and religious affiliation. The effect of age is comparably modest. Evaluated from the mean age in the sample (46.5 years), the estimates for Model 1 indicate that a ten year increase in age raises the probability of intending a vote for the PCs by just over 3 points and reduces the probability of intending an NDP vote by an equal amount. Age has no notable impact on the propensity to vote Liberal or to express a non-major-party vote intention. The latter result is somewhat surprising, given the documented impact of age on non-voting (e.g., Johnston, Matthews and Bittner, 2007). We also note that the effect of age would seem mainly to reflect socio-economic considerations, as the effect of age disappears in Model 2, which adds income and employment status to the equations.

By comparison with age, the effect of sex on vote intention is large and robust. Results for the fully saturated model – Model 5 – reveal that the influence of gender is not explained away by other variables in the analysis, that is, by income, partisanship, issue attitudes, etc. Even controlling for all these other influences, men are 8.5 points less likely than women to express a non-major-party preference, and

5.5 and 5.0 points more likely to support the PCs and NDP, respectively.<sup>x</sup>

Religious affiliation also exerts significant effects. In the fully saturated model, with a host of values, issue attitudes and leader evaluations controlled, Catholics are 4.5 points less likely to express a non-major-party vote intention, 4 points more likely to support the Liberals, 4 points less likely to support the PCs and 4.5 points more likely to support the NDP. The data suggest that if it weren't for their issue attitudes and leader evaluations, Catholics as a group would be more inclined to support the Liberals and NDP.

Model 2 adds two further socio-demographics to the model: income and employment status. Income clearly exerts important effects, particularly on the propensity to support the PCs and NDP. In the fully saturated model (Model 5), for instance, compared with the reference group, those earning more than \$110,000 are 12 points more likely to support the PCs and 8 points less likely to support the NDP. As regards the other income categories, effects are generally more modest. Those in the \$60,000 to \$90,000/year category are, in Model 2, more likely to support the PCs (by 9 points) and less likely to support the NDP (by 8 points) than those in the modal category of income. However, these differences shrink by roughly one-half once other determinants are controlled in Model 5. Support for the Liberal Party is, on the whole, not greatly differentiated by income. The largest difference involves those in the highest income category, who are, according to Model 2, approximately 9 points less likely to support the Liberals than those in the reference group, a difference that is only modestly affected by the addition of controls (Model 5).<sup>xi</sup>

*Long-term political dispositions:* In Model 3 we add to the equations party identification and the indicators of ideological self-

identification and moral traditionalism. As compared with the influence of demographics, the impact of party identification on vote intention is simply massive. Relative to non-major-party identifiers, Liberal, PC and NDP partisans are, respectively, 34, 45, and almost 52 points more likely to support "their" party. Simultaneously, partisans are far less likely to support any *other* party than are non-major-party identifiers – *except* for Liberal partisans. PC partisans are, relative to the reference group, 25 and 16 points less likely to support the Liberals and NDP, respectively. NDP partisans, similarly, are 25 and 23 points less likely to support the Liberals and PCs, respectively, as compared with non-major-party identifiers. By contrast, Liberal partisans are just 8 points less likely to support the PCs and a mere 5 points less likely to support the NDP than non-major-party identifiers. The overall pattern suggests that partisan ties for Liberals were relatively weaker than for the other parties, a finding that may reflect the challenging competitive circumstances faced by the party in 2011.

The addition of issue attitudes and leader evaluations to the equations, in Model 5, partially explains the influence of party identification. This is as it should be: the influence of partisanship on issue opinions and view of party leaders is well established (Campbell et al., 1960). Even so, a powerful direct effect of party identification survives the inclusion of controls. Relative to non-major-party identifiers, the estimates for Model 5 indicate that Liberal, PC and NDP partisans are, respectively, 29, 30, and 41 points more likely to support "their" party. The final noteworthy finding regarding party identification concerns its influence on the likelihood of expressing a non-major-party vote intention: in Model 3 all partisans are, approximately, 20 points less likely to find themselves in this category than non-major-

party identifiers, a pattern that is basically unchanged by the addition of controls for issues attitudes and leader evaluations. Again, this fits a well-established pattern, inasmuch as partisanship influences not only the direction but also the intensity of political engagement, both behaviourally and cognitively.

Relative to the influence of party identification, the effects of the other long-term dispositions seem modest. The largest effect concerns ideology. According to the estimates for Model 3, left self-identifiers are, compared with right self-identifiers, 17 points more likely to support the NDP and 9 and 7 points less likely to support the PCs and Liberals, respectively. Moral traditionalism's effect is more modest: those taking the most traditional view are roughly 8 points more likely to support the PCs and 7 points less likely to support the Liberals than those expressing the least traditional orientation on this dimension. Appropriately, the influence of both these variables is compressed once issue attitudes and leader evaluations are added to the analysis (Model 5), reflecting the influence of values and ideology on more specific political attitudes (Feldman, 1988).<sup>xii</sup>

*Issues and Leader Evaluations:* The final categories of vote determinants we consider are issue attitudes and views of the party leaders. Just two issues exert significant effects in our models: education spending attitudes and retrospective perceptions of provincial economic conditions. The former of these variables exerts the larger and more robust effect. As seen in the fully saturated model, those wishing "more" education spending, as compared with those favouring less spending, are almost 15 points more likely to support the NDP and nearly 6 points less likely to support the PCs. Support for the Liberals and the likelihood of expressing a non-major party vote intention are little influenced by education

spending attitudes.

As regards economic perceptions, notable, if modest, effects are observed for all categories of the dependent variable. Relative to those who thought Newfoundland and Labrador's economy had deteriorated over the preceding year, those who thought the economy had "gotten better" are 9.5 points more likely to support the PCs, 6 points more likely to support the NDP, 6 points less likely to support the Liberals, and 9.5 points less likely to express a non-major-party vote intention. The estimates for Model 5 indicate that most of these effects are mediated by leader evaluations, particularly the positive influence of economic perceptions on PC support: with views of leaders controlled, the positive impact of economic perceptions on PC support shrinks to less than 4 points. The favourable effect of economic sentiment on incumbent support is, of course, a predictable pattern. The modest magnitude of the effect also fits results in other contexts, as the influence of economic considerations is generally greatest when economic perceptions are most sour – *unlike* the perceptions of the average Newfoundlander and Labradorian in 2011.<sup>xiii</sup>

Finally, the influence of leader evaluations – the most causally proximal determinant of vote intention – is very great indeed. This fits with recent research (Bittner, 2011) demonstrating that leaders play an important and enduring role in the minds of voters. As demonstrated in Model 5, evaluations of Kathy Dunderdale have by far the largest influence. Those with the most favourable view of the incumbent Premier are fully 49 points more likely to back the PCs than those taking the least favourable view of her. On the likelihood of supporting the NDP and the Liberals, the influence of evaluations of Dunderdale is complimentary: those with the highest rating of Dunderdale were, as compared to those

giving the lowest rating, 23 points less likely to favour the NDP and 7 points less likely to favour the Liberals. Poor evaluations of Dunderdale may also have demobilized voters in the election, as those with the poorest ratings are 19 points more likely to express a non-major-party vote intention than those with the best ratings.

The effects of evaluations of the other leaders are more modest. For Michael, the difference between those with the most and those with the least favourable evaluations is 30 points in the probability of NDP support. The counterpart figure for the impact of evaluations of Aylward on Liberal support is just 21 points. Those with the most favourable view of Michael are 24 points less likely to support the PCs than those with the least favourable view, while differences between these two groups in their likelihood of Liberal support or of expressing a non-major-party vote intention are insignificant. Those with the best – compared to those with the worst – evaluations of Aylward are 15 and 14 points less likely to support the PCs and NDP, respectively. Interestingly, positive evaluations of Aylward also increase the likelihood of expressing a non-major-party vote intention, relative to those expressing negative Aylward evaluations. In keeping with other findings, this result may reflect the diminished strategic position of the Liberals in 2011. That is, given the Liberals' flagging fortunes, some Aylward supporters may have had difficulty committing to a Liberal vote, in spite of their favourable impressions of the Liberal leader.

### **Conclusions**

Our account of the 2011 election in Newfoundland and Labrador reveals a mixture of long-term and short-term forces at work.

Demographic variables are clearly a part of the story in this election, with such basic individual characteristics as age,

religion and employment status exerting notable effects. The most important of the demographic influences arises from income. The variable is sharply implicated in support for the PCs and NDP, a dynamic that approximates the traditional pattern of class voting: the wealthiest voters tended to favour the fiscally conservative PCs, while those earning a middling income were more likely to back the social democratic NDP. A wrinkle in this “class politics” interpretation is that the income effects are not reducible to differences in political values or issue attitudes; the effects persist in the presence of controls for these factors. This suggests that the parties may have forged links with social categories that are more symbolic in nature: middle income voters, for instance, may be more likely than higher income voters to find themselves reflected in the social imagery of the NDP.

Demographics aside, the effect of partisanship in the 2011 election result was huge. Only part of this effect passes through more proximal influences on the vote. With issue attitudes and leader evaluations controlled, significant partisan effects remain. This pattern, together with the robust influence of demographic variables, fits the expectation that an election landscape largely bereft of issue conflict should lead voters to fall back on basic social identities. And, indeed, there is little evidence of specific issues driving voters' decisions. We tested the influence of nine possible issue dimensions and just two mattered: education spending and the economy. The effect of economic perceptions was highly predictable. The influence of education spending attitudes may reflect the prominence of relevant commitments in the NDP platform (Bailey, 2011b), especially as these commitments were raised during the leaders' debate.

We began this paper by noting that the election was really about who would

form Official Opposition, and we pointed to the incredible inroads made by the NDP in the 2011 election. We must end by talking about the fortunes of the Liberal Party. The relationship between the Liberal Party and its voters as seen in this election was perhaps the most interesting story to come out of the election results. Put simply, those inclined toward the Liberals by either partisanship or leader evaluations were, in relative terms, more weakly attached than those inclined toward the PCs and the NDP. The effect of Liberal party identification on vote intention was significantly weaker than that associated with PC or NDP partisanship. Likewise, positive evaluations of Aylward had a weaker effect on the vote than positive evaluations for either Dunderdale or Michael. Worse still for the Liberals, those with the most positive view of Aylward were also more likely (than those with the most negative view of Aylward) to express a non-major-party vote intention, that is, to be undecided, to support a non-major party or *to stay home*. Liking Aylward, it seems, had a slight demobilizing effect on voters. The total pattern, along with the plunge in Liberal fortunes following the debate, would seem to speak to the strategic predicament of the Liberal

Party in 2011. Put simply, many voters who might, under “normal” circumstances, have liked to back the Liberals seem to have reconsidered by Election Day.

While we lack direct evidence of these voters’ reasoning processes, we suspect that strategic considerations were prominent for voters in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2011. The party was simply not seen to be viable in the way that it had been in the past, and traditional Liberal voters were not inspired to stand behind the party. The Conservative Party was expected by all to form government, and we suspect that over the course of the campaign, the NDP became more and more viable. While the Liberal Party managed to squeeze out enough seats to form Official Opposition, the leader lost his seat, and the Party’s fortunes did not even remotely resemble the type of legislative presence they had had in the previous half century. While the PCs only lost a few seats in the 2011 election, the competitive dynamic between the parties was much changed in the province. Whether this change is lasting remains to be seen. An election is set to take place in November of 2015, and most indicators suggest the PC party does not sit in the same position of comfort as it did in 2011.

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<sup>i</sup> Complete question wordings for all variables available from the authors.

<sup>ii</sup> The more than 31 points that separated the PCs and NDP on Election Day are compressed to just 12 points in our data. Notably, the departure from Election Day vote shares is, in relative terms, visited disproportionately on the NDP, whose survey-estimated vote share is nearly one-half larger than that recorded by Elections Newfoundland. While this bias in our data confounds estimates of "levels" (of, for example, vote intention; see below), it should have no significant impact on our ability to probe the determinants of vote choice (where our concern is differences *between* groups).

<sup>iii</sup> *Age* is a scale measured in years. The variable ranges from 19 to 87, and the average respondent is aged 46.5 years. We capture respondent *sex* with an indicator for males; by design, precisely one-half of the sample is male. The survey captures twenty-two categories of *religious identification*. In the analysis, we reduce these to four: using three dummy variables we compare Catholics, Anglicans and those indicating no religious affiliations with all others. The distribution across these categories is 29.5, 19.3, 18.8 and 32.5 percent, respectively. *Household income* is divided into five levels: less than \$30,000/year; \$30,000 to less than \$60,000/year; \$60,000 to less than \$90,000/year; \$90,000 to less than \$110,000/year; and more than \$110,000/year. We capture the variable with four dummies, excluding the modal category (\$30,000 to less than \$60,000/year). Finally, we capture *employment status* with two dummy variables, distinguishing the unemployed and the retired from all others, a category which includes mostly those working full- or part-time. 10.4 and 22.2 percent of the sample falls in the unemployed and retired categories, respectively.

<sup>iv</sup> *Party identification* is measured with the standard, Michigan-derived instrumentation, and we use three dummy variables to separate Liberal, PC and NDP identifiers from all others (non-major-party identifiers and non-partisans). The variable indicates, as we would expect, that the PCs enjoy a huge advantage in long-run party affiliation: fully 38.0 percent of the sample identifies with the party. The Liberals and NDP capture 17.3 and 21.8 percent of the sample, respectively. We include an indicator of *ideological self-identification* that asks respondents to place themselves on a zero to ten scale running from “left” to “right.” The variable is scaled to vary from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates the “leftmost” ideological commitments. The mean respondent to the survey places herself just to the right of center, or at 0.48 on our rescaled indicator, and the modal respondent is dead center (0.5). Finally, we include an indicator of *moral traditionalism*, using a widely used measure that asks respondents to express agreement with this statement: “This country would have fewer problems if there was more emphasis on traditional family values.” We scale the variable to the (0,1) interval, where 1 corresponds to the most conservative or “traditional” viewpoint. The indicator is somewhat orthogonal to ideological self-identification ( $r(\text{ideology, moral traditionalism}) = -0.25$ ) and the average respondent places herself at 0.61 on the rescaled variable.

<sup>v</sup> We scale the education spending measure to the (0,1) interval. By this indicator, support for increased education expenditures is nearly consensual in Newfoundland and Labrador: the mean respondent is found at 0.83 on the variable. Our measure of provincial economic evaluations is based on the standard, retrospective item used in national-level studies throughout the world. Respondents were asked: “Over the PAST YEAR has Newfoundland and Labrador’s economy: gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?” Scaling the variable to the (0,1) interval, where 1 corresponds to “gotten better,” we find, unsurprisingly, that respondents are positive indeed about economic conditions in the province: the variable’s mean is 0.67. We measure evaluations of the party leaders using three questions that ask respondents to rate each of the major-party leaders on a zero to one-hundred scale, running from “really dislike” to “really like.” We compress responses to the (0,1) interval for the analysis. By this measure, respondents felt most warmly – although not *too* warmly – about Dunderdale, followed fairly closely by Michael, with Aylward a relatively distant third: the mean ratings were, respectively, 0.55, 0.47, and 0.31.

<sup>vi</sup> We apply statistical adjustments to our data, as the demographic composition of our sample varied in consequential ways across the campaign. Put simply, given that some demographic groups (e.g., the aged, women) were more likely to respond quickly to the survey than other

groups (e.g., youth, the employed), a failure to apply statistical corrections would conflate changes in sample composition with real aggregate movement in vote intention. Accordingly, the over-time estimates for each week of the campaign, plotted in Figures 1 and 2, are predicted values based on regression models including controls for age, gender, education, employment status, and income. Specifically, the predicted vote probabilities (Fig. 1) derive from estimates of a multinomial probit regression model including, in addition to the controls noted in the main text, indicators for each week of the campaign, save for the first week (the reference category). The predicted leader ratings (Fig. 2) derive from estimates of an OLS regression model including the same structure of controls and week indicators. Note also that week numbers refer to weeks of the year and that, as the preceding suggests, the number of respondents interviewed in a given week varies. Finally, as observed in the preceding section, our sample overstates the magnitude of NDP support somewhat. Therefore, we focus the discussion on *change* in, rather than *levels* of, vote intention.

<sup>vii</sup> Note: the spikes seen in both figures between weeks 36 and 37 should not be taken too seriously: the first reading in each series is implausibly low for the PCs/Dunderdale. This very likely reflects the fact that just 18 interviews were completed in the three days of fieldwork that took place in week 36; that is to say, our estimates for week 36 are highly imprecise.

<sup>viii</sup> Multinomial probit regression has desirable properties for our purposes, including the fact that it is robust to violations of the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumption (unlike, for example, multinomial logit [Dow and Endersby, 2004]).

<sup>ix</sup> Specifically, we predict the probability distribution of vote intention, assuming all respondents take on the same, analytically interesting level of a given variable (e.g., the variable's minimum), while levels of other variables are held at their observed values. We then repeat the procedure, this time assuming all respondents take on another analytically interesting level of the variable (e.g., its maximum). Finally, we report the difference in the means of the two distributions as the variable's marginal effect. This is sometimes called "the method of recycled predictions."

<sup>x</sup> The significant effect of sex on non-major-party vote intention suggests a participation effect. On our measure, non-major-party vote intention is a species of non-participation, at least at a cognitive level, as most of the respondents in this category are undecided and some even intend not to vote. While gender gaps in political participation and interest have narrowed over time, these results fit the historical pattern.

<sup>xi</sup> We also evaluated the effects of other demographic variables. However, none of these achieved conventional levels of statistical significance when entered into the basic demographic set-up. These variables were: education, union membership, home ownership, marital status, and parental status.

<sup>xii</sup> We also examined the effects of other long-term dispositions: egalitarianism, economic individualism and anti-racism. None of these achieved statistical significance when added to Model 3.

<sup>xiii</sup> We also examined the influence of a number of other issue attitudes, including views on corporate and personal income taxes and spending attitudes in several policy areas (health care, welfare, environment, crime and immigration). None of these achieved statistical significance at conventional levels when entered into the vote model.