

# Back to the Future? Making Sense of the 2004 Canadian Election outside Quebec

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## Introduction

Coming out of the 2000 federal election, Liberal dominance seemed assured. For the Liberals to lose the next election, two things had to happen: the right would have to re-unite and short-term factors would have to be strongly against the Liberals. By 2004, both conditions were in place. The Alliance and Progressive Conservative (PC) parties had merged to form the new Conservative party of Canada and the sponsorship scandal had angered many Canadians.

The Liberals came perilously close to defeat in 2004. Outside Quebec, their vote share dropped from 39.6 per cent in 2000 to 37.7 per cent, while the new Conservative party drew almost level with the Lib-

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erals, with 36.8 per cent of the vote outside Quebec. Compared with the former rivals' combined vote share (47.2%) in 2000, though, the Alliance-PC merger was less obviously a success. Instead, it was the NDP that saw its popular vote go up, from 11 per cent outside Quebec in 2000 to 19.4 per cent in 2004.

To make sense of these changes in party fortune, we focus on the outcome outside Quebec.<sup>1</sup> How much *did* the sponsorship scandal hurt the Liberals? Did the 2004 election mark the end of Liberal dominance or was it just a temporary setback? How did the support base of the new Conservative party compare with PC and Alliance support in the 2000 federal election? Did opposition to same-sex marriage help the Conservatives or was it the scandal? Is the NDP simply rebuilding its traditional support base or is it attracting a new type of voter? And, more fundamentally, did the 2004 election herald the return of a traditional brokerage-style system or is the electorate polarizing along new lines of cleavage?

### **Analytical Framework**

The analyses are based on a multi-stage, bloc-recursive model (Miller and Shanks, 1996; Blais et al., 2002). The basic idea is that some factors, like feelings about party leaders and election issues, are closer in time to the vote, while other factors, like basic values and partisanship, are more distant. Longer-term predispositions can have a direct effect on vote choice, but they can also affect voting indirectly by influencing more proximate factors (see Figure 1). A social conservative, for example, is more likely to oppose same-sex marriage; a market skeptic is more likely to oppose private health care; a Liberal partisan is more likely to like Paul Martin. Many voters, of course, will not engage in such lengthy reasoning chains, nor will they all go through each stage in exactly the same order. The model should be viewed as a heuristic device for simplifying a complex and heterogeneous process. It also allows us to address some of the most interesting questions about the factors that potentially affected the election outcome.

The first bloc of variables consists of voters' social background characteristics. According to conventional wisdom, social background characteristics are rather poor predictors of vote choice in Canada (see, for example, Clarke et al., 1991). However, it would be difficult to make sense of recent Canadian elections without considering voters' social background characteristics (Nevitte et al., 2000; Blais et al., 2002). The support of Catholics and visible minorities was one of the keys to Liberal dominance in the 1997 and 2000 elections, but was it strong enough to withstand the sponsorship scandal and same-sex marriage? In 2000, there

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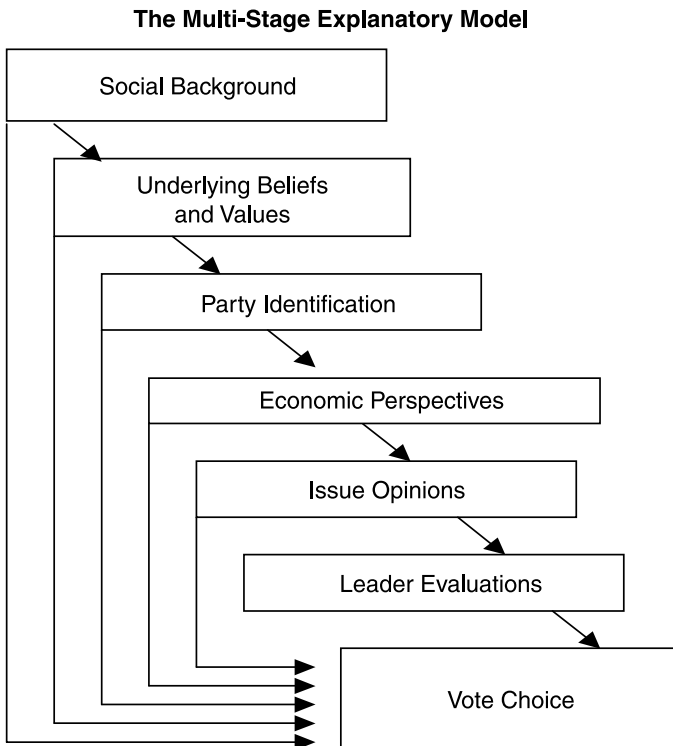
**Abstract.** This paper uses data from the 2004 Canadian Election Study to analyze the factors that motivated a vote for each party and to identify the ones that mattered most to the outcome of the 2004 federal election outside Quebec. Particular attention is given to the impact of the sponsorship scandal, the sources of support for the new Conservative party and the factors that explain the NDP's improved performance. The findings are used to address some basic questions about the 2004 election and its larger implications.

**Résumé.** L'article utilise les données de L'Étude électorale canadienne de 2004 pour identifier les principaux facteurs qui ont motivé l'appui aux différents partis et pour jauger leur impact sur le résultat de l'élection à l'extérieur du Québec. Les auteurs accordent une attention particulière aux effets du scandale des commandites, aux sources de l'appui au nouveau Parti conservateur et aux raisons sous-jacentes des gains du NPD. Les résultats permettent de répondre à un certain nombre de questions sur le sens et la portée de l'élection.

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was a striking contrast between the support bases of the Alliance and PC parties. Aside from Atlantic Canada, the PCs lacked a clearly defined social base: their appeal, such as it was, cut across social divisions (Blais et al., 2002). Alliance voting, by contrast, was clearly rooted in Canada's

FIGURE 1  
The Multi-Stage Explanatory Model



cleavage structure. The party fared best among Westerners, Protestants, rural voters, married couples, people of Northern European descent and men. Did the new Conservative party manage to broaden its appeal? Finally, we cannot understand the NDP's electoral woes in 1997 and 2000 without taking account of the loss of the traditional male union vote, first to Reform and then to the Alliance. Did the growth in the party's support in 2004 mean that these voters were moving back to the NDP?

Another striking feature of the 1997 and 2000 elections was the extent to which the votes of the NDP on the left and Reform/Alliance on the right divided along ideological lines. Voting for these parties was rooted in opposing views about the appropriate balance between the state and the market in Canadian society and in differing conceptions of gender roles and sexual mores. In 2000, Jean Chrétien had portrayed the Alliance as a threat to Canadian values. In 2004, Paul Martin characterized the new Conservative party in almost identical terms. Did basic normative orientations continue to shape vote choice in 2004 or were their effects eclipsed by the sponsorship scandal?

Canadians are often said to be "flexible partisans" (Clarke et al., 1991), but there are significant numbers of voters who have a longstanding predisposition to support a particular party and we cannot explain vote choice without taking this into account.<sup>2</sup> No analysis of the Liberal victory in 2000, for example, could ignore the fact that the Liberals began the campaign with a significant partisan advantage (Blais et al., 2002). Did they lose this head start in 2004?

Partisans tend to vote for "their" party. They are inclined to evaluate its performance positively, to favour its stances on the issues of the day and to like its leader. But in any given election, there can be factors that induce partisans to vote for another party: imagine a Liberal identifier who was really angry about the sponsorship scandal or the Liberal stance on same-sex marriage. And, of course, the votes of non-partisans may be particularly susceptible to these kinds of short-term forces. Three short-term factors might have been particularly important in 2004: the economy, the issues and the leaders.<sup>3</sup>

A large body of research has shown that economic conditions influence a government's chances of re-election (see Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000). The Canadian economy was in relatively good shape at the time of the election but not quite as good as it had been in 2000. While the rate of inflation had dropped from 2.7 per cent to 1.9 per cent, employment growth was down from 2.6 per cent in 2000 to 1.3 per cent in 2004, the unemployment rate had risen from 6.8 per cent to 7.2 per cent and real GDP growth had fallen from 5.2 per cent to 2.9 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Does lackluster economic performance explain the decline in Liberal support?

Or did issues trump the economy? Just how much issue positions influence vote choice has been a matter of debate, not least because many voters turn out to be uninformed about party positions (see Blais et al., 2004). But the scandal and same-sex marriage were novel and they were dramatic enough that even inattentive voters might have known about them.

Finally, the 2004 campaign featured three new party leaders and some very personal attacks. Party leaders have aptly been called the “superstars of Canadian politics” (Clarke et al., 1991: 89) and many people base their votes, at least partly, on how they feel about the leaders. These feelings will only affect the outcome, though, if one leader is a big winner—or a big loser—in the popularity stakes (Blais et al., 2002). In the 2000 election, no leader was markedly more—or less—popular than the others, and so leader evaluations had only a small net impact on the election outcome. Was there a clear winner in the popularity stakes in 2004?

## **Data and Methods**

To assess how much the various factors mattered, we use data from the 2004 Canadian Election Study.<sup>5</sup> By entering the blocs of variables sequentially into a regression model and estimating the model in stages, we can measure the total impact of causally prior variables, rather than just the portion that is not mediated through more proximate ones.<sup>6</sup> The estimations are based on multinomial logistic regression. Modelling the vote as a choice among the three parties captures the inter-party dynamics of support (Whitten and Palmer, 1996). Imagine a variable—say, union membership—that might encourage an NDP vote while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of voting Conservative. If the vote was modelled as a choice between the Liberals and the other two parties, these effects would cancel one another out and we would conclude—wrongly—that union membership was not a factor. This approach also allows for different variables to play into different choices. Take religion. Being Catholic is very relevant to choosing between the Conservatives and the Liberals, but not between the Conservatives and the NDP. Collapsing the choice into one between the Liberals and the other parties would mute a very real effect.

Logistic regression coefficients are difficult to interpret. They represent the predicted marginal impact of a given variable on the log-odds of choosing a given party relative to a baseline party. Their meaning depends on the values of the other variables in the model. However, they enable us to estimate each variable’s independent impact on the probability of voting for a party. Consider union membership. We can com-

pute the mean probability of voting NDP, first if everyone belonged to a union, and, second if nobody did, keeping other social background characteristics unchanged. The difference in the mean probabilities provides an estimate of the average impact of union membership on voting NDP, everything else being equal. These are the figures that are reported here.<sup>7</sup>

We also estimated each variable's impact on the parties' vote shares. An explanatory factor can strongly influence the probability of voting for a party and yet have little effect on that party's vote share. Leader evaluations are an example: conceivably, for every vote lost due to negative perceptions of its leader, a party might gain a vote from those who like the leader. In this case, the net effect will be minimal. Now the most logical counterfactual is to ask: what if a given variable had not mattered at all? What if the sponsorship scandal, say, had not hurt the Liberals? How many more votes would they have won? This can be estimated by setting the scandal coefficient to zero (leaving all other coefficients unchanged) and seeing how much the average estimated probability of voting Liberal changes. The results are reported in the text to underline some of the key findings.<sup>8</sup>

## Findings

### *Social Background*

Liberal dominance in 2000 hinged on the support of two key groups: visible minorities and Catholics. Together, the support of these two groups helped assure the Liberals a significant head start going into the 2000 election (Blais et al., 2002). In 2004, neither group was the bedrock of Liberal support that they had been in the previous election.

The Liberals had done particularly well among visible minorities in 2000, attracting almost three-quarters (72%) of their votes<sup>9</sup>; in 2004, they barely managed to get half (52%). It might be tempting to attribute this loss of support to the party's stance on same-sex marriage, given commentary in the media regarding the socially conservative views of some minority groups. However, visible minority voters were significantly less likely than other Canadians to vote for the new Conservative party, and so it was the NDP, not the Conservative party, that ended up being the major beneficiary of the Liberals' loss of support among visible minorities.

In 2000, the Liberals had secured over half of the Catholic vote; in 2004 their support dropped seven points to 47 per cent. The Liberal stance on same-sex marriage might again seem to be the obvious explanation for the loss of Catholic votes, but this does not square with the fact that the major beneficiary was the NDP, not the new Conservative party. And, despite the defections, Catholics remained a key source of Liberal sup-

port, as they have through all the changes in Canada’s electoral landscape over the past five decades. Other things being equal, the probability of voting Liberal was 10 points higher among Catholics (see Table 1).<sup>10</sup> Adherents of non-Christian religions also continued to vote heavily Liberal, though their numbers remain too small to do much to boost the Liberal vote total.

Religion was even more of a factor in the Conservative vote. Not only did the Conservatives poll as well among Protestants as the Liberals did among Catholics, but they decisively outpolled the Liberals (53% to 30%) among Christian fundamentalists, just as the Alliance did in 2000. Conservative support was particularly high among Protestant fundamentalists: almost two-thirds of Protestants who consider the Bible to be the literal word of God voted for the new party.

Indeed, the new party’s support was concentrated in many of the same groups that had voted heavily Alliance in 2000. Like the Alliance, the Conservatives depended heavily on Western support, though their share (46%) of the Western vote fell far short of the combined Alliance-PC

TABLE 1  
The Estimated Impact of Social Background  
Characteristics on Vote Choice (outside Quebec)

|                          | Conservative | Liberal | NDP   |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Catholic                 | -7.7         | +10.4   | -2.7  |
| Non-Christian            | -13.4        | +12.9   | +0.5  |
| No religion              | -5.0         | -4.4    | +9.5  |
| Christian fundamentalist | +15.6        | -6.5    | -9.0  |
| Visible minority         | -17.4        | +17.7   | -0.2  |
| French speaking          | -6.7         | +18.0   | -11.2 |
| Atlantic resident        | -18.8        | +16.4   | +2.4  |
| Western resident         | +15.2        | -18.4   | +3.3  |
| Rural resident           | +11.5        | -6.2    | -5.3  |
| Female                   | -3.9         | -0.3    | +4.2  |
| Married/partner          | +9.0         | -2.9    | -6.1  |
| 55 years or older        | +3.5         | +3.9    | -7.4  |
| Union household          | -10.3        | 0.0     | +10.3 |
| Renter                   | +0.5         | -7.7    | +7.2  |
| Mortgage                 | +1.5         | -4.3    | +2.8  |
| Low income               | -7.0         | +3.8    | +3.2  |
| High income              | -3.6         | +6.8    | -3.1  |
| Less than high school    | -11.0        | -3.0    | +14.0 |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone has a given characteristic and then assuming that nobody does, keeping the effects of the other social background characteristics unchanged. All estimations are based on multinomial logit. The social background characteristics were all entered as dummy variables with the named category coded ‘1’.

share (60%) in 2000, just as it did in Atlantic Canada. The Liberals, by contrast, managed to pick up two points in the West, increasing their share of the vote from 25 per cent in 2000 to 27 per cent in 2004, but their votes remained concentrated in Ontario and Atlantic Canada. Even controlling for a host of social background characteristics, the effects of region on voting for both the Liberal party and its main rival remained substantial. The NDP was the only party that managed to increase its share of the vote in all three regions and its support remained much less regionalized than that of the other two parties.

In 2000, rural residents were among the strongest Alliance supporters. In 2004, they voted disproportionately Conservative. Half of the rural vote (52%) went to the Conservatives. Unfortunately for the Conservatives, though, there are many more urban voters than rural voters, especially in vote-rich Ontario. If the Conservatives are going to defeat the Liberals, they are going to have to enhance their appeal to urban voters.

Like the Alliance (Wilson and Lusztig, 2004), the new Conservative party continued to do particularly well among married voters. In contrast to its appeal to rural voters, the support of married voters garnered the party a lot of votes. Indeed, our simulations suggest that the Conservative vote share might have been as much as six points lower without their support, with the NDP being the major beneficiary.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these important elements of continuity, there were two key differences between supporters of the former Alliance and the new Conservative party. Unlike the Alliance, the Conservatives did not have a particular appeal to Canadians of Northern European descent. In 2000, half of these voters had supported the Alliance and less than a third had voted Liberal. In 2004, the gap narrowed to only five points, and once region and religion were factored in, Northern European ancestry failed to have a significant impact on vote choice.

The really critical difference, though, lay in the impact of gender. Like Reform, the Alliance had much less appeal to women (Gidengil et al., 2005). The gender gap was 11 points in 2000, and lack of appeal to women was one reason why the Alliance could not defeat the Liberals (Blais et al., 2002). In 2004, by contrast, almost as many women as men voted Conservative. The almost complete disappearance of the gender gap is one of the most important indicators of the success of the PC-Alliance merger. Still, the new party had fewer votes than the Alliance and the PCs combined, among women and men alike. In other words, the gap closed, not because more women were attracted to the new party, but because the right lost more male voters than female voters to the other parties.

The narrowing of the gender gap was also an important factor for the NDP in 2004. In 2000, there had been a significant gender gap (six points) in NDP voting: as in 1997, men were less likely than women to



vote for the party. This gap also shrank in 2004. The NDP doubled its share of the male vote, while increasing its share of the female vote by only half. Still, men remained a little less likely than women to vote NDP.

The resurgence in men's support is not the only indicator of a reconstitution of the party's traditional support base. The party also won back union voters. In 2000, union membership had not been a significant factor in NDP voting. Indeed, the Alliance had outpolled the NDP by more than two to one among union households in that election. In 2004, the NDP doubled its share of the union vote, drawing almost as much support from union households (28%) as the Conservatives (30%) did. This doubling of the union vote came largely at the Conservatives' expense.

The NDP, though, was not simply rebuilding its former support base; it was also attracting a new type of voter. When it came to social background characteristics, by far the most intriguing pattern to emerge in 2004 was the striking age gradient in NDP voting. Among the under-35s, the NDP did almost as well (28%) as the Liberals (32%) and the Conservatives (32%). Voters under the age of 35 were twice as likely to vote NDP as voters aged 55 years and older. This is new. There was no hint of a similar effect in 2000. For their part, both the Liberals and the Conservatives fared best among older voters.

As in previous elections, though, there was no sign of class voting in the classic sense: as they have for the past 40 years or more (Alford, 1967; Pammett, 1987; Gidengil, 2002), manual and non-manual workers voted much the same way. Income remained a minor factor for the NDP. People with low household incomes were more likely to vote NDP than those with high incomes, but these effects were offsetting and the net impact on the NDP vote was minimal. Income actually mattered more for Liberal and Conservative voting: the Liberals received the most votes from high-income households, while the Conservatives fared best among middle-income households. Education proved to have more effect on NDP voting than income did. The party did particularly well among voters with less than a high school education, largely at the expense of the Conservatives.

However, the most consequential aspect of socio-economic status was whether a voter rented or had a mortgage.<sup>12</sup> The NDP did almost as well as the Liberals and the Conservatives among renters. But for the impact of renting or having a mortgage, the NDP vote share would have been four points lower, and the Liberal vote would have been almost five points higher.

### *Values and Beliefs*

Just as Jean Chrétien had in 2000, Paul Martin framed the 2004 election as an opportunity for Canadians to choose between competing visions of

the country. Like the Alliance before it, the new Conservative party was portrayed as a threat to Canadian values. The Liberals' first television ad had Paul Martin saying, "Look, you can have a country like Canada or you can have a country like the US." This rhetoric was clearly aimed at the Conservatives. However, views about Canada-US relations helped rather than hindered the new party. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents wanted closer ties and 58 per cent thought that "overall, free trade with the US has been good for the Canadian economy." Meanwhile, only 19 per cent wanted ties to be more distant and only 35 per cent rendered a negative judgment on Canada-US trade relations. When responses to these two items were combined with feelings about the US ( $\alpha = .56$ ), almost one third scored above  $+ .25$  on the resulting  $-1$  to  $+1$  scale, while a mere 12 per cent scored below  $-.25$ . With a plurality of voters wanting closer ties, the Liberals' attempt to play on anti-US sentiment may have ended up costing them votes: the probability of voting Conservative was almost 30 points higher for someone who viewed Canada's relationship with the US positively (see Table 2).

The Liberals also tried hard to paint the new party as too extreme on so-called "family values" questions. Social conservatism did cost the Conservatives, but the NDP benefited more than the Liberals did at the Conservatives' expense. To examine the impact of social conservatism, we combined feelings about gays and lesbians, feelings about feminism, conceptions of gender roles and views about how much should be done for women ( $\alpha = .55$ ). Twenty-seven per cent of respondents expressed negative feelings about gays and lesbians, providing a score of less than 50 on a 0 to 100 scale. Another 21 per cent either gave a neutral rating

TABLE 2  
The Estimated Impact of Values and Beliefs on Vote  
Choice (outside Quebec)

|                      | Conservative | Liberal | NDP   |
|----------------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Free enterprise      | +15.4        | +0.2    | -15.6 |
| Continentalism       | +29.9        | -16.3   | -13.7 |
| Social conservatism  | +18.3        | -7.8    | -10.5 |
| Political cynicism   | +14.7        | -26.9   | +12.1 |
| Regional alienation  | +7.5         | -3.9    | -3.6  |
| Accommodating Quebec | -8.7         | +9.0    | -0.3  |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone is neutral or ambivalent on a given dimension and then assuming that everybody attains the maximum score, keeping the effects of social background characteristics and other values and beliefs unchanged. All estimations are based on multinomial logit. The values and beliefs were all coded on a  $-1$  to  $+1$  scale.

(50) or said they did not know how they feel. Feelings about feminists were more positive: only 18 per cent provided a negative rating, while 21 per cent were neutral or did not reveal their feelings. Fifty-eight per cent thought more should be done for women, but fully 40 per cent agreed that “society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children.” On balance, socially liberal views prevailed and this hurt the Conservatives: half the sample scored less than  $-.25$  on the social conservatism scale (which ran from  $-1$  to  $+1$ ).

In the 2000 election, the most powerful value dimension (outside Quebec) was the classic left/right dimension. Class voting may be weak in Canada, but views about free enterprise and the appropriate role of the state still matter. To assess their impact in 2004, we constructed a scale ( $\alpha = .52$ ) combining responses to questions about labour mobility and job creation, business and unions, the profit system and individual responsibility. These responses reveal very mixed feelings. Many Canadians subscribe to the idea of individual responsibility, but there is also a good deal of skepticism about the way the system actually works. Sixty-one per cent of respondents, for example, agreed that “people who don’t get ahead should blame themselves, not the system,” and yet almost as many (56%) rejected the notion that “when businesses make a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor.” The majority of those interviewed (71%) believed that “if people can’t find work in the region where they live, they should move to where there are jobs,” but only a minority (38%) thought that “the government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs.” Overall, favourable views of free enterprise outweighed unfavourable ones: 26 per cent of respondents scored above  $+.25$  (on a scale that ran from  $-1$  to  $+1$ ), while only 16 per cent scored below  $-.25$ . The dominant position, though, was one of ambivalence.

These views mattered. The likelihood of voting NDP increased by 31 points if someone was very skeptical of free enterprise, while the likelihood of voting Conservative increased 15 points if someone was strongly pro-market (compared with someone who was ambivalent). Meanwhile, the Liberals fared best among those who were ambivalent. Given that deep skepticism about free enterprise was very much a minority view, though, the impact on the NDP’s share of the vote was modest. The advantage on this dimension lay with the Conservatives.

Cynicism about politics had surprisingly little impact on Liberal fortunes. True, the probability of voting Liberal dropped 27 points for people who were highly cynical about politics and politicians, but political disaffection cost the Liberals barely one and a half points.<sup>13</sup> This was partly because cynical voters were almost as likely to vote NDP as Conservative. It also reflected the fact that, despite the sponsorship scandal, cynicism was not much higher, at least among those who actually voted,

than it was in 2000. This may be one reason why the Liberals did not pay a higher price at the polls. For example, voters gave politicians in general an average rating of 45 on a 0 to 100 scale, while political parties in general received an average rating of 52. In 2000, the comparable figures were 48 and 53, respectively.

In 2000, regional alienation helped the Alliance and in 2004, it enhanced support for the Conservatives. Frustration with the workings of the federal system boosted the Conservative vote, at the expense of both the Liberals and the NDP. Clearly, the Conservatives have taken over the mantle of the regional protest party, but paradoxically this could limit the party's growth potential, especially in vote-rich Ontario. While 36 per cent of Canadians believe that the federal government treats their province worse than others, 20 per cent actually believe that their province is better treated. In Ontario, that figure rises to 35 per cent.

The Quebec question hurt Reform in the 1997 election (Nevitte et al., 1997), but it was simply not a factor in Alliance voting in 2000. In 2004, a significant minority of Canadians (41%) thought that less should be done for Quebec and they were more likely to vote Conservative. This was mostly at the expense of the Liberals, which may reflect the linking in voters' minds of the sponsorship scandal with efforts to promote the federal option in Quebec.

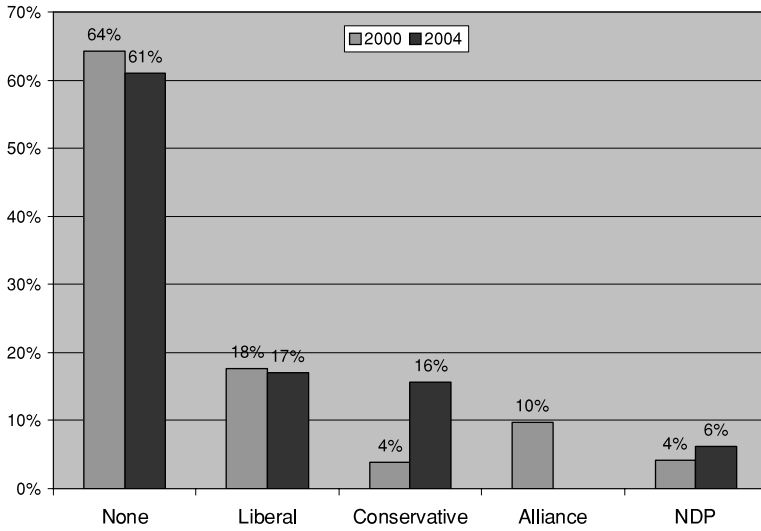
Finally, it is worth noting two value orientations that did *not* affect vote choice: views about racial minorities and religiosity. While religious affiliation in general and Christian fundamentalism, in particular, both helped to shape vote choice, self-defined religiosity *per se* did not make a difference. The non-finding for views about race is more consequential. Like Reform before it, the Alliance was hurt by the perception that it was racist and ethnocentric. The new Conservative party seems to have avoided the same label.

### *Partisan Loyalties*

In 2000, the Liberal party had as many partisans as the other three parties combined (see Figure 2): one partisan in two was a Liberal.<sup>14</sup> As long as this partisan advantage persisted, it was difficult to see how the Liberals could be defeated. All the party had to do was to mobilize its loyal partisans and do as well as the other parties among non-partisans. Two things changed in 2004. First, and most importantly, the PC-Alliance merger had the effect of erasing the Liberal head start and, second, the new party outpolled the Liberals among non-partisans by a margin of 36 per cent to 32 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

The Liberals did not lose their head start because they lost partisans: despite the sponsorship scandal, the number of Liberal partisans remained much the same as in 2000. Instead, the Liberals lost their partisan advan-

FIGURE 2  
The Distribution of Party Identification



tage because the new Conservative party had as many partisans as the former Alliance and PCs combined, if not more. As a result, in 2004, there were almost as many Conservative partisans as Liberal partisans.

The question remains, of course, as to whether these are genuine partisans: can people really have a strong psychological attachment to a new political party? If we think of these Conservative identifiers as identifying with a party of the right—and compare their number with the PC and Alliance combined in 2000—it is certainly plausible to anticipate that their tie to the new party is meaningful.

Partisans, of course, typically vote for “their” party (see Table 3). Even allowing for the effects of social background and fundamental values and beliefs, the probability of voting for “their” party was 57 points higher for Conservative partisans, 60 points higher for NDP partisans, and 55 points higher for Liberal partisans. But when Liberal partisans voted at odds with their party identification, they were almost as likely to vote Conservative as NDP, whereas NDP defectors mostly opted for the Liberal party.

*The Economy*

The simple reward-and-punish model of economic voting posits that incumbents get re-elected in good economic times and get thrown out

TABLE 3  
The Estimated Impact of Party Identification on Vote  
Choice (outside Quebec)

|                             | Conservative | Liberal | NDP   |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Conservative identification | +57.2        | -35.2   | -22.1 |
| Liberal identification      | -37.0        | +54.7   | -17.7 |
| NDP identification          | -39.3        | -21.0   | +60.3 |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that no one identifies with the given party and then assuming that everybody does, keeping the effects of causally prior variables unchanged. All estimations are based on multinomial logit.

when the economy is doing badly. But things are not so simple when the incumbent party has a new leader. One of the prerequisites for economic voting is that voters attribute responsibility for economic conditions to the incumbent (Clarke and Kornberg, 1992). Voters may be less likely to assign credit or blame when the incumbent has only recently taken over the helm (Nadeau and Lewis-Beck, 2001).

Retrospective evaluations simply did not affect vote choice in 2004. From the Liberals' perspective, this was just as well. In 2000, 41 per cent of Canadians thought that the economy had improved over the previous year while only 16 per cent believed that it had worsened. In 2004, negative perceptions (27%) outnumbered positive ones (23%). People's evaluations of their own financial situation were also less favourable: the number of people saying they were better off than they had been a year earlier was down six points, while the number saying they were worse off was up seven points. Still, the dominant perception was that economic conditions had not changed over the previous year, which may help to explain why the economy was not an issue. In any case, the implication is clear: the Liberals did not lose votes because the economy was more sluggish than it had been four years earlier.

### *The Issues*

Issues mattered more than the economy in 2004, just as they did in other recent elections (Blais et al., 2004), but in 2004 one issue trumped the others: the sponsorship scandal. The majority of respondents were either very angry about the scandal (39%) or at least somewhat angry (38%). Over a third (36%) thought that there had been a lot of corruption when Jean Chrétien was prime minister and close to half (46%) thought that there had been some corruption. Three-quarters (75%) of those inter-

viewed thought that Paul Martin knew about the scandal before becoming prime minister, and of those who thought he did not know, two-thirds (67%) thought he *should* have known. Many were unimpressed with his handling of the scandal since becoming prime minister: barely one in 20 (5%) thought that he had done a very good job and only a quarter (25%) thought that he had done quite a good job. One in two (52%) lacked confidence that he would prevent something like this happening in the future.

These are harsh judgments, and they hurt the Liberals. To assess their impact, we combined responses to the questions about anger over the scandal, corruption under Chrétien, Martin's handling of the scandal and confidence in his ability to prevent future scandals ( $\alpha = .65$ ). The probability of voting Liberal was 19 points lower for someone who had negative perceptions on all four counts (as opposed to being neutral or ambivalent), while the probability of voting Conservative was 16 points higher (see Table 4). The scandal was clearly a major factor in helping the Conservatives deny the Liberals another majority. It boosted their vote by almost six points and cost the Liberals almost six and a half points.<sup>16</sup> The NDP, by contrast, reaped little electoral benefit.

The other issues that helped the Conservatives were defence spending and the gun registry. The party had pledged a significant increase in military spending. With half our respondents (53%) wanting increased spending on defence and only 14 per cent wanting cuts, this issue helped the Conservatives, mostly at the NDP's expense. Sixty per cent of respondents wanted to scrap the gun registry, and the Conservative promise to

TABLE 4  
The Estimated Impact of Issue Attitudes on Vote  
Choice (outside Quebec)

|                              | Conservative | Liberal | NDP  |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------|------|
| Cut income tax               | +2.8         | -4.8    | +2.0 |
| Increase social spending     | -7.3         | +8.6    | -1.3 |
| Favour universal health care | -5.5         | +2.0    | +3.4 |
| Scrap gun registry           | +4.9         | -2.3    | -2.6 |
| Favour same-sex marriage     | -2.9         | -5.3    | +8.0 |
| Increase immigration         | -1.9         | -0.9    | +2.8 |
| Increase defence spending    | +3.0         | -0.7    | -2.3 |
| Anti-Iraq war                | -3.6         | +3.4    | +0.2 |
| Sponsorship scandal          | +16.1        | -19.4   | +3.3 |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone is neutral or ambivalent about a given issue and then assuming that everybody takes the same position, keeping the effects of prior causal variables and the other issue attitudes unchanged. All estimations are based on multinomial logit.

do just that netted the party votes at the expense of both the Liberals and the NDP. A desire to scrap the gun registry, though, did not necessarily entail opposition to gun control *per se*. Only 46 per cent rejected the notion that “only the police and the military should be allowed to have guns.” The objection, apparently, is to the gun registry itself.

Interestingly, the same-sex marriage issue was not a major factor in the Conservative vote. When asked whether they favoured or opposed same-sex marriage, 39 per cent were opposed, while only 28 per cent were in favour, and fully a third (33%) said they did not know. Same-sex marriage was simply not an issue for most voters: when asked to name “the most important issue to you personally in this election,” less than one per cent spontaneously mentioned same-sex marriage. To the extent that the issue mattered, it helped the NDP and hurt the Liberals: had it not mattered at all, the Liberals would have gained one point at the NDP’s expense.<sup>17</sup>

Two issues that had the potential to hurt the Conservatives were immigration and abortion. In 1997, the other parties had tried to paint Reform as anti-immigrant, if not downright racist. The tactic was repeated against the Alliance in 2000. However, views about immigration did not affect either party’s vote in those elections (Nevitte et al., 1997; Blais et al., 2002). Immigration was something of a non-issue in 2004, too. It did not figure prominently in the campaign, and it was only a minor factor in vote choice.

It was not so obvious that abortion would be a non-issue. The Liberals’ first attack ad, “Harper and the Conservatives,” included a shot of two women waiting in what seemed to be an abortion clinic, while the voice-over told viewers that the Conservative leader “won’t protect a woman’s right to choose.” The second attack ad repeated the charge: “The Harper we know” opened with the statement, “There’s the Stephen Harper who wouldn’t protect a woman’s right to choose....” The Liberal message was helped by a news story that broke on day 16 of the campaign reporting that in a newspaper article published a month earlier a Conservative candidate had likened abortion to the beheading of American hostage Nicholas Berg in Iraq. However, Stephen Harper firmly maintained his position that he would not re-open the abortion debate if his party got to form the government, and only nine people named abortion when asked which issue was “most important to you personally in this election.” When it came to voting, abortion was simply not a factor.

The two issues that did hurt the Conservatives were the war in Iraq and social spending. The first Liberal attack ad presented images of tanks and troops in desert gear with the voice-over telling viewers that the Conservative leader wanted to send Canadian soldiers to Iraq. The Chrétien government’s decision not to participate in the war against Iraq met with widespread approval. Over three-quarters (78%) of our respon-



dents endorsed the decision, and fewer than one in five (18%) deemed it a bad decision. Had the war in Iraq not been a salient issue, the Liberals would have lost two points and the Conservative vote would have been two points higher. The NDP derived barely any benefit from the anti-war sentiment.

From the beginning of the campaign, the Liberals portrayed the Conservative party as a threat to Canada's social programmes. Their first television ad featured Paul Martin telling viewers "... you can't have a country like Canada with the taxation levels of the US, not without risking the very social programs, the institutions and values that make us us." Support for increased social spending outweighed any desire for tax cuts. Only 37 per cent said that income taxes should be reduced. Meanwhile, 80 per cent wanted to see more spent on health care, 71 per cent wanted increased spending on education and 44 per cent favoured more spending on social housing, though only 22 per cent thought welfare spending should go up.

But how much did these outlooks matter? To explore that question we created a scale comprising opinions about spending on health care, education, social housing and welfare ( $\alpha = .48$ ). The results indicated that the Conservatives' fiscal conservatism cost them almost three points. This loss was not offset by the votes they picked up from people who favoured tax cuts. This position was a minority one, and it garnered the Conservatives few votes. The major beneficiary of support for increased spending was *not* the NDP, but the Liberals, who picked up almost four points. Views about spending had little impact on NDP voting. As in 2000 (Blais et al., 2002), what mattered when it came to voting NDP were more general views about the role of the state.

The most important campaign issue to voters was health. Of five issues presented to respondents, health received more than twice as many mentions (48%) as corruption in government (22%) and three times as many mentions as taxes (16%). Social welfare programmes (7%) and the environment (4%) lagged far behind. Another one in four (26%) gave health care as their next most important issue. And almost two-fifths (38%) spontaneously named health care when asked at the beginning of the survey to name the most important issue "to you personally in this campaign." This concern is not surprising. Fully half (51%) believed that hospital waiting lists had lengthened over the past year. Moreover, the Liberals had campaigned hard on the health issue, and it featured prominently in their ads; in an ad entitled "Health Care," Paul Martin states that "Canada's health care system is based on Canada's values.... Health care, not tax cuts, is our number one priority."

Surprisingly, perhaps, views about health spending had little independent effect on Liberal voting.<sup>18</sup> What mattered were views about public versus private health care. The balance of opinion still opposed a two-tier system: just over half (54%) opposed allowing private hospitals

in Canada, while only 37 per cent were in favour. And when asked whether “people who are willing to pay should be allowed to get medical treatment sooner,” 41 per cent strongly disagreed and another 16 per cent somewhat disagreed.<sup>19</sup> It was not the Liberals, though, who benefited from this sentiment, but the NDP. In the 2000 election, the NDP had campaigned hard on health to little avail (Blais et al., 2002). In 2004, by contrast, the NDP picked up votes from those who opposed any privatization of health care. Meanwhile, the issue cost the Conservatives votes.

Overall, the net winner on the issues was the Conservative party. Issue voting boosted Conservatives support by almost four points and cost the Liberals four points. Take away the sponsorship issue, though, and the advantage would have lain with the Liberals. Meanwhile, the net impact on NDP voting was negligible.

### *Party Leaders*

The Liberals’ final attack ad—“the Harper we know”—was very personal. It was designed to persuade voters that the Conservative leader was a threat to Canadian values. Close to half (47%) of those we interviewed agreed that Stephen Harper was “just too extreme,” but even more people (58%) bought the NDP line that “Paul Martin only cares about big business.” Despite the tenor of the campaign, voters’ evaluations of the leaders did not matter much to the election outcome. The reason is simple: there was no clear winner in the popularity stakes. In the final week of the campaign, among those with an opinion, Harper and Martin were tied with an average rating of 49 on a 0 to 100 scale, while Layton received a 46.

Voters’ reactions to the leaders certainly influenced their vote choice: typically, really liking the leader increased the probability of voting for his party by 20 to 28 points, other things being equal (see Table 5).<sup>20</sup> The impact was quite similar for all three leaders. And given the similarity in the leaders’ average ratings, the overall impact on vote shares was small. The leadership factor cost the NDP a little over a point, while contributing only one point to the Liberal total. The Conservatives barely gained. One reason why the impact of leader evaluations was small could have been lack of familiarity. Even in the post-election survey, one respondent in five could not name Paul Martin as leader of the Liberal party and two in five were unable to name his Conservative and NDP counterparts.

## **Discussion**

The 2004 federal election brought the Liberal party to the brink of defeat. This reversal of electoral fortunes begs the question: will the 2004 elec-

TABLE 5  
The Estimated Impact of Leader Evaluations on Vote Choice (outside Quebec)

|                | Conservative | Liberal | NDP   |
|----------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Stephen Harper | +25.2        | -7.9    | -7.3  |
| Paul Martin    | -13.7        | +28.5   | -14.9 |
| Jack Layton    | -6.8         | -12.9   | +19.7 |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone is neutral or ambivalent about the named leader and then assuming that everybody really likes the leader, keeping the effects of the other variables unchanged. All estimations are based on multinomial logit.

tion go down as marking the end of Liberal dominance? True, the Liberals lost their partisan advantage and their support slipped among two key groups: Catholics and visible minorities. Significantly, however, the Liberals suffered little net loss of partisans: their partisan core remained intact. What really cost the Liberals was anger over the sponsorship scandal. The implication is that the Liberals' prospects look quite good outside Quebec, *if* they can put the sponsorship scandal behind them.

What happens inside Quebec is likely to prove critical to Liberal fortunes in the next election. The Liberal party was the major loser in Quebec in 2004: its share of the vote dropped a massive 10 points to only 34 per cent. The 2004 election was a remarkable victory for the Bloc Québécois. With almost half of the Quebec vote (49 per cent), the Bloc did as well in 2004 as it had in its very first contest in 1993, under the leadership of the charismatic Lucien Bouchard. The sponsorship scandal was only part of the story in Quebec. Views about sovereignty continued to be a huge factor: everything else being equal, the probability of voting Bloc was 30 points higher when a voter was a strong sovereigntist. As in every federal election since 1993, what happens in Quebec provincial politics is likely to be a critical factor in determining the outcome of the next federal election in Quebec.

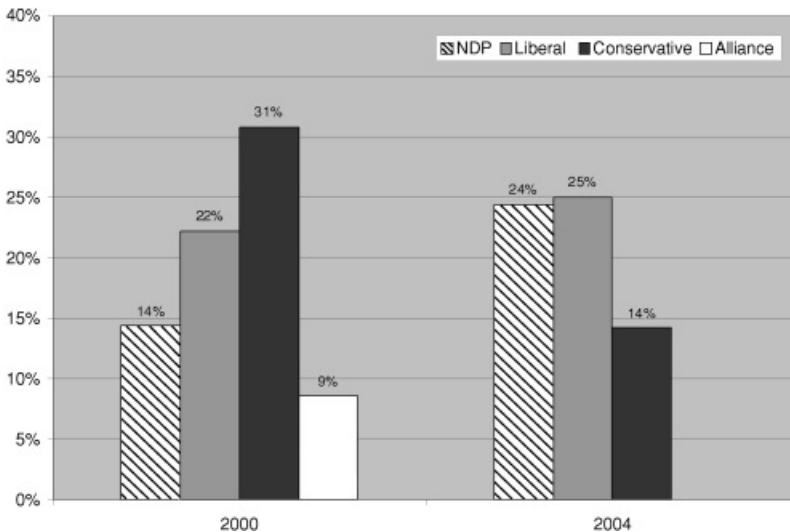
The Conservative party received only nine per cent of the Quebec vote in 2004. Its share of the seats in the next federal election will hinge on how it does outside Quebec. In 2004, its social base proved to be very similar to that of the former Alliance. Such support as the PCs enjoyed after the electoral debacle of 1993 was broadly based. Alliance support, by contrast, was concentrated within particular social groups. With two key exceptions, the new Conservative party appeals to the very same groups: Westerners, Protestants, rural residents and married couples. Unlike the Alliance, though (and before that, Reform), the Conservatives hold no particular appeal to people of Northern European ancestry. How-

ever, the really striking change is the shrinking of the gender gap. If the Alliance (or Reform) had done as well among women as they did among men, recent electoral politics in Canada could well have taken a very different course. But in 2004, there was barely any gender gap. The fact that the Conservative party attracted almost as much support from women as it did from men is one of the keys to explaining why the new party did almost as well as the Liberals outside Quebec. It also suggests that the Conservatives succeeded in projecting a more moderate image, despite the Liberals' best efforts to paint the party and its leader as too extreme.

The new party capitalized on public anger over the sponsorship scandal. In 2004, that anger was enough to offset the party's two electoral liabilities: its social and fiscal conservatism. The long-term success of any party depends on its ability to consolidate its partisan base. The Conservatives had more partisans than the former Alliance and PCs combined, and this was enough to wipe out the head start that had carried the Liberals to victory in 2000. If these Conservative partisans prove to have a genuine attachment to their party, elections outside Quebec could well remain close.

At the same time, though, there may be very real limits to the party's growth potential. This becomes clear when voters' second choices are considered (see Figure 3). In 2000, the Alliance trailed the other parties when it came to the number of voters who named the Alliance as their second choice. The same was true of the Conservatives in 2004.

FIGURE 3  
Voters' Second-Choice Party



Much depends on the NDP. There is clear evidence that the party was successful in rebuilding its traditional support base. In 1993, the NDP had suffered a massive loss of support among women and men alike. In 1997, many more women than men returned to the NDP fold, opening up a gender gap that reappeared in the 2000 election. This gender gap narrowed in 2004. The fact that the party had a male leader for the first time since 1993 might seem the obvious explanation, but Jack Layton was actually no more popular with men than Alexa McDonough had been in 2000. The defection of union voters also cost the NDP dearly in recent elections, as first Reform and then the Alliance proved much more attractive to union members. In 2004, many of these voters returned to the NDP.

Significantly, the NDP is not just rebuilding its traditional support base; it is also attracting a new type of voter. One of the most intriguing findings to emerge from this analysis is the role of young voters in boosting the NDP's vote share. The question is: will it last? The NDP's success with this age group may simply reflect the particular circumstances of the 2004 election. But younger voters actually reacted less harshly to the sponsorship scandal. And their issue priorities seemed little different than older voters' (Gidengil et al., 2005). Notably, only 7 per cent selected the environment as the most important issue to them personally from a list of five possible issues. Leadership does not seem to be the answer either: Jack Layton's average ratings were only one point higher in this age group than Alexa McDonough's had been in 2000. Where young people did differ was in their greater openness to diversity and alternative lifestyles (Gidengil et al., 2005). As such, they form a growing pool of potential voters for the NDP. With data from a single election there is no way to tell whether the NDP's new appeal to young people really is generational. But if it is, and if the other two parties fail to adjust, we could be seeing more minority governments as generational replacement takes its toll on support for the Liberal and Conservative parties.

With the Liberals reduced to minority government status and the right reunited, it might be tempting to assume that Canada has moved back to its traditional two-plus-one party system, at least outside Quebec. It would be premature, though, to interpret the 2004 election as a return to brokerage-style electoral politics. One of the defining characteristics of the 1993, 1997 and 2000 elections was the extent to which the NDP vote on the left and the Reform and Alliance vote on the right were structured along fundamental lines of ideological division. These same fault lines defined the NDP and Conservative votes in 2004. The NDP did best among secular voters who take liberal positions on issues relating to sexual mores and lifestyles, while the Conservatives fared best with moral traditionalists. Given the importance of Christian fundamentalism in Conservative voting, the 2004 election could mark, not the return of broker-

age politics but a foreshadowing of the cultural divisions that are appearing in US elections.

There are also indications that Canada could be in for some close three-way races, at least outside Quebec. On the right, the merger of the former PCs and Alliance has been a qualified success. Even with the sponsorship scandal, the new Conservative party was not able to match the combined vote total of the two former rivals on the right. And if voters' second choices are any guide, the party's growth potential may be limited. On the left, the NDP is not just regaining much of the support that it lost in 1993, but also attracting new voters. Tellingly, the party was able to do this despite gaining little electoral dividend from the sponsorship scandal. Meanwhile, the fact that the Liberals remained in power despite public anger over the sponsorship scandal is testimony to the party's core strength. It also underlines an important facet of electoral politics in Canada. For all the apparent electoral volatility, longer-term influences like social background characteristics, basic values and party loyalties remain critical to understanding vote choice and electoral outcomes.

## Notes

- 1 Space constraints preclude analysis of the Quebec vote. The presence of the Bloc Québécois and the overriding importance of views about sovereignty require a separate analysis. The Green vote (4.7% outside Quebec) translates into too few respondents for reliable analysis.
- 2 The concept of party identification has been contested in Canada (Gidengil, 1992). Early studies found party identification to be "as volatile ... as the vote itself" (Meisel, 1975: 67; see also LeDuc et al., 1984). It seems, though, that the lack of an explicit "none" option in the traditional party identification question encouraged some people to name the party they were voting for even though they lacked a psychological attachment to that party (Johnston, 1992). The inclusion of weak identifiers was also problematic (Blais et al., 2001).
- 3 Economic evaluations are entered first because they are more likely to shape positions on issues like taxes and spending than those positions are to affect evaluations of the economy. A similar logic explains why issues are entered ahead of leader evaluations.
- 4 All of the figures are taken from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Pocket Facts: Canada—Economic Indicators* at [http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/eet/pdf/Historical\\_Economic\\_Indicators\\_1992-2004\\_Web\\_June\\_2005-en.pdf](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/eet/pdf/Historical_Economic_Indicators_1992-2004_Web_June_2005-en.pdf), accessed October 9, 2005.
- 5 A representative sample of 4,323 eligible voters was surveyed during the campaign; 3,129 of these respondents participated in the post-election survey. The average campaign interview lasted 28 minutes, while the average post-election interview took 24 minutes. Both surveys were conducted by telephone. York University's Institute for Social Research conducted the field work. The campaign response rate was 53 per cent. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded the study, with support from Elections Canada. The data and questionnaires are available at: <http://www.ces-ec.umontreal.ca/>.

- 6 Explanatory factors were only retained in the model if their effects were statistically significant at the .05 level (based on robust standard errors) when first entered.
- 7 The complete regression results are available from the authors. The analysis is based on 1,772 cases. Income (183 cases), religion (51 cases), Bible fundamentalism (71 cases), visible minorities (185 cases), urban-rural (47 cases) and social conservatism (62 cases) each had a relatively large number of missing cases. Dropping the cases with missing data (that is, using list-wise deletion) can result in inefficient and biased estimates of the true relationships if the missing cases are not missing completely at random. We adopted a simple intuitive solution to address this problem. Using income as an example, a dummy variable was created that took the value of '1' if income was missing and '0' otherwise, the missing cases were assigned the value of '0' on both the low-income and high-income dummy variables, and all three dummy variables were included in the regressions. The two income dummies captured the effect of income among cases with non-missing data, while the missing income dummy indicated whether the vote of cases with missing values for income was significantly different or not. There is still a risk that this specification may not adequately control the impact of income among missing cases when calculating the influence of other independent variables that are correlated with income, but compared with list-wise deletion (which would result in the loss of some 400 cases) this is clearly the lesser of two evils. The only missing dummy variable that was statistically significant was social conservatism. When the models are run without the missing data, three variables achieve only borderline statistical significance when first entered: female ( $p = .11$ ), low income ( $p = .07$ ) and cut income tax ( $p = .07$ ).
- 8 The full results can be obtained from the authors.
- 9 The Liberals received 62 per cent of the visible minority vote in 1997.
- 10 Based on the multinomial regression model, the average probability of voting Liberal was 35 per cent if nobody was assumed to be Catholic and 45.4 per cent if everyone was assumed to be Catholic (keeping the effects of the other social background characteristics unchanged). The difference in the average probabilities—10.4 percentage points—provides an estimate of the average impact of being Catholic on voting Liberal, everything else being equal. All of the estimates in Table 1 and in the following tables were derived in an analogous manner.
- 11 According to the multinomial regression, the average probability of voting Conservative was 40.6 per cent. If the coefficient for marital status is set to zero (that is, if marital status is assumed to have had no effect) leaving all the other coefficients unchanged, the average probability drops to 34.2 per cent. The difference in the average probabilities implies that the Conservative vote might have been 6.4 points lower if marital status had not mattered.
- 12 This question was not asked in 2000, so we cannot tell if this is something new.
- 13 The cynicism scale included satisfaction with democracy, keeping promises, whether government cares, ratings of politicians and parties, whether parties differ and whether politicians lie ( $\alpha = .71$ ).
- 14 Weak identifiers and people claiming different party identifications in the campaign and post-election surveys are not considered to have a genuine attachment.
- 15 The NDP attracted 23 per cent of the vote among non-partisans.
- 16 Dropping cynicism does not change the estimated impact of the scandal on the Conservative vote and increases the estimated negative impact on the Liberal vote and the positive impact on the NDP vote by less than three-quarters of a point.
- 17 Dropping social conservatism barely changes the estimates.
- 18 Spending on health was not statistically significant when entered separately.
- 19 These two items were combined to form a scale ( $\alpha = .52$ ).



- 20 These estimates are based on campaign evaluations. “Honeymoon effects” tend to inflate post-election evaluations of the winning party’s leader. Martin’s average evaluations were four points higher after the election than they were in the campaign’s final week.

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