

Research Proposal
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Linking Political orientation and Environmentalism:

An analysis of changing environmental attitudes and subsequent party support in Canada

Introduction

In the last 20 years, Canada has experienced a volatile and inconsistent climate policy, with opinions on climate policy becoming of increasing importance in federal and provincial elections. A global resurgence in right wing populism manifested under Stephen Harper's tenure as Prime Minister with the Conservative party adopting a stream of 'Mainstream Populism', incorporating attacks on environmental taxes in its 'antitax' message whilst scaling back major environmental protections. (Lockwood, 2018). Simultaneously, the Conservative party had been pushing for the expansion of resource extraction and development, forcing the position that pro-climate policy would directly affect the economic benefits accrued from resource extraction (MacNeil, 2014). This has created an environment whereby conservative backlash politics that define Canada's interests as an 'energy superpower', both on a provincial and federal level, pose a severe threat to the development of pro-environmental policy by convincing voters, many of whom who do not fully understand climate policies such as carbon pricing, that it is entirely against their economic interests (MacNeil, 2018). Therefore, through this study I aim to understand and will try to explain why people who vary in ideological alignment and vote the way they do, possess certain environmental attitudes, and how these vary between provinces and territories in Canada. I will look at how environmental attitudes and subsequent party support have changed from the 2000s to now, through analysis of election studies over the period. Understanding these changes will be important in helping parties navigate the appropriate messages to voters about the environment, which will allow pro-climate parties to gain more votes and win more elections, both on a provincial and federal level. This is essential, as it will help parties understand the varying interests of their voters and help them adapt to the challenges of Canada's federal political system, which will ultimately help stabilize and rejuvenate Canada's climate policies. I have chosen this research statement, as I believe Canada is far behind where it should be in terms of climate policy and goals, and that the federalist system is significantly inhibiting progress on the matter of climate. Being one of the world's largest emitters by volume (11th), and per capita (3rd), I believe Canada has a huge responsibility to combat climate change and prevent irreversible effects on this planet (Ritchie, 2019).

Methodology: Process

This project can be carried out entirely online. It would require an extensive review of literature around the factors that affect environmental attitudes both provincially and nationwide. This would largely be to gauge how interests vary by province, and how this might tie in to the way that a person votes on issues concerning the environment. This literature can be accessed through the University of Toronto's access to various academic journals that contain research papers on the topic. Simultaneously, I will carry out statistical analysis on election studies data from 2015 and 2019, specifically on data from questions such as 'What do you think the main cause of climate change is?', the environment versus jobs, and cross-referencing this with various identifiers of party support, such as party feeling, party identification, and vote choice. My hope is to produce an analysis comparable with that done on election studies data from 2000-2006 (Anderson and Stevenson, 2011). This is important as it will allow us to see how the link between environmental concern and party support has changed under Conservative rule, between 2006-2015. Furthermore, a comparison between 2015 and 2019 will allow us to see changes in the link during Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's tenure, where climate policy has become a centre-stage issue. The analysis will be done using STATA, and based on my literature survey, I will employ the appropriate models including linear regression and/or logit

models to establish the links we would like to explore. The analysis would exclude data from Quebec, which due to its dynamic and unique political circumstances, is often omitted from studies on voting behaviour in Canada (Anderson and Stevenson, 2011).

Methodology: Timeline/location

In the first 3 weeks I hope to review all the literature around the topic, and from week 2-4 I would like to carry out the statistical analysis. Weeks 4-6/8 will be writing up the paper and my findings. There is no travel required but being in an academic environment may help as opposed to working from home, and therefore if possible, I would prefer to a more suitable academic environment, such as coming to campus to do my research, however this is not necessary.

Interdisciplinary/International focus

This study can be considered interdisciplinary in many ways. It tackles environmental attitudes and will likely delve into the field of environmental science. It will also consider political issues, such as the problems with federalism in Canada, and the yearning of an intergovernmental balance amongst the various provinces. It will also consider economic perspectives, and how economic interests vary from region to region, and how this influences environmental attitudes and subsequently political outcomes. Given the global imbalance between the countries that emit the most, and those that suffer the most as a result, I hope my findings can help reduce this imbalance by improving the understanding of environment-influenced voting in Canada.

Research advisor

My research advisor, Professor Lisa Kramer, PhD, will play an advisory role in the study. She will help serve as a guide for the feasibility of the project and will help ensure that I remain on track to achieve my research objectives/goals within the specific timeframe. Her expertise in behavioural sciences will be useful in informing my explanations of voter behaviour, and her experience with empirical analysis will help guide me in my statistical analyses.

Outcomes

I expect the key outcomes of my research to be the following:

- I expect to establish an updated link between environmentalism and party support in Canada, in a more recent context.
- I aim to shed light on the reasons why environmental views may differ between provinces, and how this informs environment-based party support.
- I hope to offer a useful perspective on how political parties may operate to win over sceptical voters on the issue of the environment, through an understanding of their different challenges.

(1000 words)

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