

Do (Some) Canadian Voters Punish a Prime Minister for Calling a Snap Election?

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Are voters willing to punish a prime minister for calling an ‘unnecessary’ snap election for purely opportunistic reasons? This paper examines voters’ reactions to the Canadian prime minister’s decision to call a snap election in November 2000. The decision provoked limited resentment, and that resentment was strongest among partisans of the opposition parties and among those who follow politics closely. Those who do not keep up with politics, it seems, either did not realize that the election was precipitous or simply did not care. The paper shows that resentment about the election call was a consideration in vote choice, but it was a decisive consideration for a very small group of voters. We estimate that the electoral cost to the incumbent Liberal Party was one percentage point. Some voters are prepared to punish prime ministers for opportunistically calling a snap election, but in this case the electoral penalty was small.

In some parliamentary systems, prime ministers have the power to call an election whenever they wish, and this confers a clear strategic advantage on the incumbent party. But that power, as with any power, has limits, and one important limit may well come from voters. If a substantial minority of voters are willing to vote against a prime minister who abuses his/her power by calling an ‘unnecessary’ early election for purely opportunistic reasons, the prime minister faces real constraints when choosing the timing of the election.

Strom and Swindle (2002) have recently demonstrated that early parliamentary dissolutions are more frequent under minority governments, when the head of state plays an insignificant role, and when the parliament or cabinet is not involved. Their study is concerned with early dissolutions decided by the prime minister on his/her own, as is the case in Australia, Britain, and Canada, and more specifically in those cases where the party of the prime minister has a majority of seats (where the opposition parties have no leverage on the decision).

When, and under what conditions, would a prime minister decide to call an early election? In deciding the precise timing of an early election call, majority governments have to evaluate the ‘tradeoff between current and future election chances, the utility derived from being in power, and the opportunity costs of losing the election’ (Balke, 1990, pp. 203–4). In general, the expectation is that early election calls should occur when government popularity is high (when the

government expects to win) *and* when the prime minister expects that popularity to decline, so that the chances of being elected appear to be higher if the election is held earlier (Balke, 1990; Baron, 1998; Roper and Andrews, 2003; Smith, 1996, 2000).

Governments contemplating an early election call control a variety of policy and fiscal instruments that can be used to improve their electoral prospects (Reid, 1998). Far harder to control are the vicissitudes of voters, where uncertainties revolve around not only the general volatility of voter support, but also how voters might react to the early election call itself.

Voters might react negatively to an early election call for a variety of reasons. Smith distinguishes 'competent' and 'incompetent' governments, the former producing 'good' outcomes, those that are desired by the median voter. 'Competent' governments expect to produce 'good' outcomes, and they believe that they can be re-elected later. The implication is that only 'incompetent' governments will expect their popularity to decline and will seize the opportunity to call an election. According to Smith, voters realize this, and they interpret the decision to call an early election as a signal that the government is incompetent and then vote against the government: 'if an early election is called then the approval rating for the incumbent government drops. The act of calling the election reduces the popularity of the government' (1996, p. 102). That prediction, as Smith acknowledges, relies on a controversial assumption – 'that the electorate can use information about electoral timing to update their beliefs about the government. If, alternatively, voters are myopic they are likely to reelect a government that takes advantage of an opportunistic election' (1996, p. 105).

The problem, of course, is that voters may not be even aware that the election has been called early, or, if they are aware, they may not have thought about the reasons why the prime minister called it. After all, as Downs (1957) has shown, it is not rational for most voters to gather much information about politics and it may not be a wise investment of time to reflect about why a prime minister would call an early election and what this signifies about his/her competency. From that perspective, we might expect unaware voters not to react negatively to an early election call.

The prime minister's decision might provoke negative reactions among the most informed fraction of the electorate. Opposition parties certainly have an incentive to frame the decision to call an early election as 'unnecessary' and purely 'opportunistic'. After all, their goal is to undermine support for the governing party, and tapping the reservoirs of cynicism and public distrust of political leaders is an available tactic. A very similar message is likely to be conveyed by the media, who are keen to focus on the strategic game (Patterson, 1993) and who will decipher the 'machievellian' calculus behind the prime minister's decision.

The dominant message is thus likely to be that the early election call is a 'bad' thing, motivated by purely personal or partisan reasons. That message, however, will be of low intensity. After all, the election is about many other things, and the media are unlikely to pay close and constant attention to that particular question.

As a consequence, the expectation is that the message will not reach the less-aware fraction of the electorate (Zaller, 1992). And among the more aware, the message is more likely to be accepted by those whose general predispositions are congruent with the message (Zaller, 1992), who should be those who already distrust politicians in general, a group that has been growing considerably in the last few decades (Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001).

But no study has ever examined directly voters' reactions to early election calls.¹ This study fills that gap. We look at the Canadian prime minister's decision to call a snap election in November 2000. We analyse Canadian voters' reactions to that decision, and we investigate whether that decision undermined support for the incumbent party.

The 2000 Canadian Election

On 22 October 2000, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien called an election to be held on 27 November. The statutory requirement is that Canadian elections must be held every five years, but the norm is that they take place every four years. The norm does not apply to minority governments, which typically last one or two years.² Excluding these minority governments, the median length of time between two elections since 1945 (and before 2000) was 52 months. Eight out of the 11 elections were called after 50 months or more, and the three elections that occurred more than four years and six months after the previous one involved unpopular governments that were trying to postpone their eventual defeat (the Liberals in 1979 and 1984, and the Conservatives in 1993). Only two majority governments since 1945 had called an election less than four years after the previous one, and in these two cases the lapse of time (44 and 46 months) was closer to four years than to three. There does seem to be a norm that, except under minority governments, elections should be held every four years. By calling an election after only three years and four months, Prime Minister Chrétien was departing from that norm.³

Why, then, did Chrétien call a snap election? The general conditions correspond to theoretical expectations (Balke, 1990; Baron, 1998; Smith, 1996, 2000). Firstly, the Liberal government was doing extremely well in the polls, enjoying a huge lead over all the other parties. Secondly, there was a strategic opportunity. The main opposition party, the Canadian Alliance, had just elected a new leader, Stockwell Day, and neither the new leader nor the party was ready for a fall election. Chrétien could reason that the Liberal chances were better at a time when the Alliance was not well prepared. There were finally some idiosyncratic factors at play. Chrétien was facing pressure from within his own party for him to step down and to let Finance Minister Paul Martin replace him. By calling an early election, he foreclosed any challenge to his leadership.

Predictably, both the media and the opposition parties pronounced that the election call was motivated by opportunism. The election co-chairman of the Canadian Alliance charged Chrétien with staging an election now only to 'further his personal goals' (quoted in Hebert and Walker, 2000). The leader of the

Conservative Party opined that the election was ‘designed to serve his political ambitions and the short-term interests of the Liberal party, at the expense of the country’ (quoted in Hebert and Walker, 2000). The New Democratic Party leader attacked Chrétien for being ‘extremely arrogant and out of touch with ordinary people ... He’s locked into a narrow battle over his own self-interest’ (quoted in McCarthy and Adams, 2000). And the leader of the Bloc Québécois argued that Chrétien called ‘a hasty fall election partly because he fears the potential damage from the findings of four RCMP investigations’ (quoted in McIntosh, 2000).

The editorial pages of the two national newspapers conveyed the same message. The *Globe and Mail* wrote:

The Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, is so arrogantly confident of re-election that he has called the vote a year earlier than necessary with no reason other than the love of power, and insists on running for a third term rather than making way for a new leader. (Simpson, 2000)

The *National Post* adopted a similar tone:

Why are we going to the polls so soon? ... Mr. Chrétien has keen survival instincts and knows a snap vote would catch the opposition unprepared while heading off the threat of a coup by Mr. Martin. (Fife, 2000)

Did voters, many of whom do not follow politics very closely, ‘receive’ the message? And, if so, did they care enough about such ‘opportunistic’ behaviour to punish the prime minister in the polling booth?

The Study

We use the 2000 Canadian Election Study (CES). The study included a rolling cross-section survey with a representative sample of 3,651 respondents, as well as a post-election survey of 2,862 of the campaign respondents. The response rate for the campaign survey was 60 percent. The fieldwork was conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University and Jolicoeur & Associés.⁴

The issue is whether some voters punished the prime minister for opportunistically calling a snap election. The campaign wave of the 2000 CES survey questionnaire contains a question that was specifically designed to tap voters’ indignation with respect to the early election call: ‘Are you very angry that the federal election was called early, somewhat angry, or not angry at all?’⁵

We begin by examining the distribution of responses to this question to determine whether there was real anger about the prime minister’s decision. We look at the evolution of responses over the course of the campaign to check whether negative reactions lessened as the campaign progressed. We then analyse the characteristics of those who expressed anger. We determine whether anger was confined to the most informed and cynical segment of the electorate, and we ascertain to what extent feelings were based on traditional party loyalties. Finally, we assess whether anger about the decision had an independent impact on the vote.

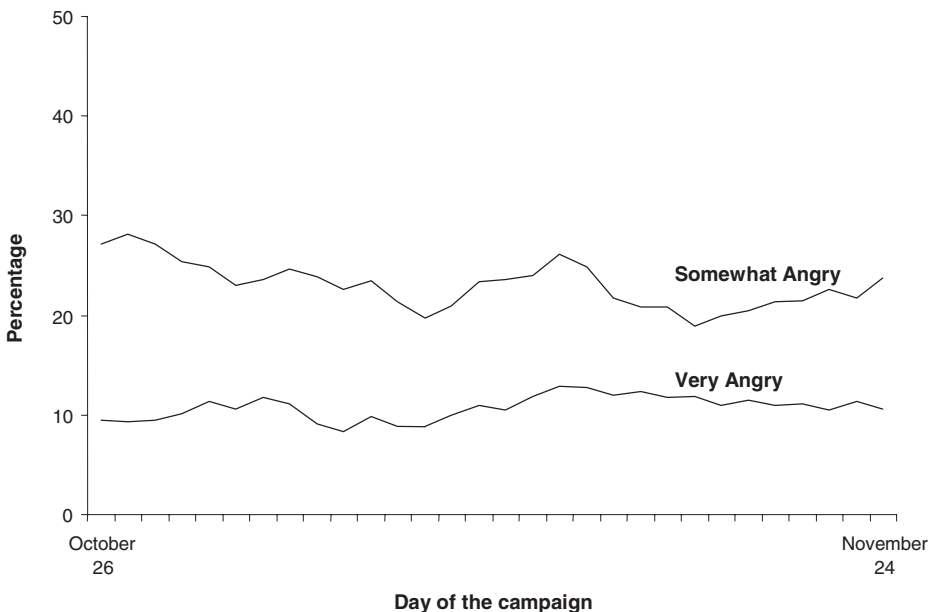
How Did Voters React?

The prime minister's decision seems to have aroused relatively little indignation. Only 10 percent indicated they were 'very angry', and only 22 percent said they were 'somewhat angry'. Most voters either did not know or appear to have accepted the fact that it is the prime minister's privilege to call an election whenever he sees fit. Still, a substantial minority did express some degree of anger, and it is important to determine whether this had any effect on their vote.

One possibility is that a number of people were initially angry at the prime minister's decision but that their anger dissipated during the course of the campaign as the parties and the media focused on the substantive issues of the campaign. But as Figure 1 shows, the percentage of 'very angry' voters was relatively modest; it hovered at around 10 percent during the entire course of the campaign. There was a slight decline among the 'somewhat angry'; the percentage approached 30 percent at the beginning of the campaign before stabilizing at slightly above 20 percent after a week or so. Although resentment about the snap election call was not widespread, it did not subside over the course of the campaign.⁶

Zaller's (1992) model predicts that only those who follow politics closely will receive the message that the early election call was an opportunistic decision, and

Figure 1: Voters' Reaction to the Early Election Call by the Canadian Prime Minister in 2000 (Five-Day Moving Average)



that, among those who do receive the message, those for whom the message is congruent with their predispositions are more likely to accept it.

A first necessary condition is political awareness. In order to get angry about the prime minister's decision, voters first needed to know that the election was indeed an early one, and that the decision was driven by opportunistic considerations. It is safe to assume that some voters might not have been aware of these 'simple' facts, and for them there would have been no reason to get angry. We constructed a political awareness index made up of four questions tapping the level of factual political information, three questions about the level of attention to election news on television, in the newspapers and on radio, and one question about the overall level of political interest (see the Appendix).⁷

Political awareness should not suffice, however. Among those who did receive the message that the snap election had been called for opportunistic reasons, some are more likely than others to resent that decision. Those who have negative predispositions towards the prime minister should be particularly prone to react strongly to the message. Firstly, those who identify with the opposition parties may interpret this as yet more proof that the leader of the incumbent party is ready to do whatever is required to remain in office. Secondly, those who distrust politicians will construe the early election call as yet another illustration of how little concern politicians have for the population at all. We thus expect interaction effects between political awareness and cynicism on the one hand and identification with an opposition party on the other hand.

The model incorporates a number of control variables. We include identification with the incumbent Liberal party, because we expect Liberal identifiers to be more indulgent to the Liberal prime minister. We also include age, education and region, each of which has been shown to affect the level of cynicism in Canada. We expect older voters to be more cognizant of the norm that elections should be held every four years. Education is a strong predictor of political awareness, and it is important to ascertain the specific impact of awareness, independent of education (see Johnston *et al.*, 1996, pp. 219–251). Region, finally, is a crucial dimension of political support in Canada (Kornberg and Clarke, 1992).

Table 1 presents the findings. They confirm that those who identified with the Liberals were less likely to resent the early election call. They also indicate that older voters, as well as those from the prime minister's home province of Quebec, were more likely to feel angry. It is possible that the early election call was given more visibility in the Quebec media. As for older voters, it appears that their longer political experience makes them more prone to resent the prime minister's decision. Finally, the results show that the effect of political awareness (see below) is not spurious, and that it is statistically significant even after controlling for education.

More importantly, Table 1 confirms the prediction, derived from Zaller's model, that the impact of cynicism and identification with an opposition party is contingent on the level of political awareness. Being cynical or identifying with an opposition party did not feed anger among the least-aware voters. Being aware was a prior necessary condition.

Table 1: Factors Affecting Voters' Resentment about the Early Election Call by the Canadian Prime Minister in 2000 (Ordered Probit Regression)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Robust standard error</i>
Political awareness	1.17***	0.18
Political cynicism	-0.26	0.24
Party Id: Liberal	-0.24***	0.07
Party Id: Opposition	-0.34	0.22
Awareness*Cynicism	1.07***	0.36
Awareness*Party Id: Opposition	0.82**	0.32
Age	0.02***	0.00
Below high school	-0.01	0.08
University graduate	0.12*	0.07
Atlantic	0.10	0.09
West	-0.18**	0.08
Quebec	0.20***	0.07
Cut (1)	1.96	0.16
Cut (2)	2.92	0.17
Pseudo R^2		0.10
Log likelihood		-2,018.39
<i>N</i>		2,634

Note: * $P < 0.10$; ** $P < 0.05$; *** $P < 0.01$.

Table 2: Predicted Probability of Being 'Very Angry' According to Awareness and Cynicism among Non-Partisans in the 2000 Canadian Election

<i>Cynicism score</i>	<i>Awareness score</i>		
	<i>0</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>1</i>
0	0.03	0.09	0.21
0.5	0.02	0.07	0.31
1	0.09	0.18	0.29

This is well illustrated in Table 2, which shows the predicted probability of being 'very angry' among those with no party identification with low, middle and high levels of awareness and cynicism. It indicates that even the most cynical were not 'very angry' if they did not follow politics very closely. To resent the prime minister's decision required both a high level of awareness and some degree of cynicism.

The bottom-line question is whether irritation at the prime minister's decision to call an early election was a sufficient motive to vote differently.⁸ The aggregate outcome of the election – the Liberals were re-elected with 41 percent of the vote, three percentage points more than in 1997 – suggests not. But the Liberals stood at about 45 percent in the polls before the election was called, and they seem to have lost some ground during the campaign. The possibility is that some of that loss might be attributable to resentment about the timing of the election.

Table 3 tests the impact of individuals' reaction to the timing of the election on vote choice. To that effect, we use a multi-stage explanatory model, similar to that developed by Miller and Shanks (1996), in which vote choice is assumed to depend on seven sets of factors: (1) socio-demographic characteristics; (2) underlying values and beliefs; (3) party identification; (4) economic perceptions; (5) issue opinions; (6) evaluations of government performance; and (7) leader evaluations.⁹ The model incorporates these seven factors, plus the variable measuring resentment about the prime minister's decision.

The dependent variable is vote choice between the incumbent Liberal Party and any of the opposition parties.¹⁰ The crucial independent variable is resentment about the early election call. The hypothesis tested is whether, controlling for other considerations, those who felt 'very angry' or 'somewhat angry' were less inclined to vote Liberal. To that effect, we created two dummy variables for 'very angry' and 'somewhat angry' ('not angry at all' being the reference category) respondents.

The findings of the logit estimation are shown in Table 3. The results confirm the important role played by party identification and leader ratings. However, even

Table 3: Logit Estimates of Liberal Vote Choice in the 2000 Canadian Election

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Socio-demographics		
Atlantic	-0.33	0.27
West	-0.76***	0.20
Quebec	-0.72**	0.35
Catholic	0.29	0.19
Non-religious	0.07	0.25
North European	-0.13	0.24
Non-European	0.85**	0.32
Male	0.15	0.16
French language	-0.17	0.30
Other language	0.83***	0.25
Age	0.01	0.01
Married	0.06	0.17
Below high school	0.08	0.22
Rural	-0.49***	0.18

Table 3: *Continued*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Values and beliefs		
Social conservatism	0.06	0.14
Free enterprise	-0.12	0.23
Racial minorities	-0.02	0.17
Feminism	-0.04	0.14
Religiosity	0.12	0.13
Regional alienation	0.00	0.19
Quebec sovereignty	-1.23***	0.30
Political cynicism	-0.18	0.22
Party identification		
Liberal	1.32***	0.17
Opposition	-1.76***	0.21
Economic perceptions		
Personal past	0.21*	0.12
Issues		
Federal powers	0.21*	0.13
Public health	0.07	0.11
Gun control	-0.13	0.10
Direct democracy	-0.02	0.12
Liberal performance		
Environment	0.36**	0.15
Health	0.31*	0.16
Taxes	0.21	0.13
Corruption	0.24*	0.14
Leader evaluations		
Chrétien	1.16***	0.19
Day	-1.16***	0.18
Clark	-0.61***	0.19
McDonough	-0.17	0.21
Duceppe	-0.10	0.36
Snap election		
Somewhat angry	-0.33*	0.18
Very angry	-0.86***	0.30
Constant	-0.69	0.35
Pseudo R^2		0.48
Log likelihood		-605.12
N		1,748

Note: * $P < 0.10$; ** $P < 0.05$; *** $P < 0.01$.

after a wide variety of other considerations are taken into account, those who were angry at the prime minister's decision were more likely to vote against the Liberals.

The logit regression results indicate that anger about the snap election call did have an independent effect on vote choice. What remains to be determined is whether that effect was substantively important. *How much* less likely to vote Liberal were those who resented the prime minister's decision? To address that question, we estimated the predicted probability of voting Liberal if everyone had been 'very angry', if everyone had been 'somewhat angry', and if everyone had been 'not angry at all', everything else being equal (keeping the effects of all the other variables unchanged). These simulations indicate that the mean probability of voting Liberal across the whole sample decreased by four points when someone was 'somewhat angry' and by nine points when someone was 'very angry' – quite a modest effect.

But perhaps the most important question is: *How many* voters voted differently because of the early election call? It is possible to determine the most likely vote choice (Liberal or other) for every respondent under a scenario in which resentment does play a role (on the basis of the logit estimate presented in Table 3) and under a scenario in which resentment is set to have no effect (where the coefficients of 'very angry' and 'somewhat angry' are set at 0 and all other coefficients are kept constant). Whenever the predicted vote choice differs under these two scenarios, resentment appears to be a decisive factor.¹¹ According to our estimates, 1 percent of the voters, and 2 percent of those who would have voted Liberal in the absence of resentment, switched to another party because they disapproved of the prime minister's decision. The simulations also suggest that as many as 35 percent of those who were predisposed to vote Liberal and who were 'very angry' with the early election call decided to vote for another party. Fortunately for the Liberals, and unfortunately for the opposition parties, very few voters found themselves in that situation.¹²

All in all, then, very few voters punished the prime minister for calling a snap election, and the Liberals suffered a very small loss of one percentage point. Punishment there was, but the penalty was quite small.

Conclusion

In some parliamentary systems, prime ministers have the prerogative to call an election whenever they see fit. That latitude confers an important advantage on the incumbent party, in that the prime minister can choose the moment that maximizes the probability of re-election. Some critics argue that this is an unfair advantage and, for that reason, propose fixed-date elections.

That advantage, however, can be constrained if calling an election at an 'inappropriate' time provokes negative reactions among voters and if some of them are willing to punish a prime minister who appears too opportunistic. No study of vote choice has demonstrated specifically whether such considerations enter the voting calculus, and this research fills that gap.

The 2000 Canadian election provides an interesting case of a snap election that was called because the time was propitious for the prime minister and his party. The 2000 CES tapped voters' reactions to Prime Minister Chrétien's decision, which makes it possible to determine how many voters were angry with his early election call and whether their resentment did hurt the Liberal government. The levels of resentment for the early election call were modest, but that resentment did have some independent effect on vote choice. In the end, the penalty paid by the Liberals, a net loss of one percentage point, was quite small.

The Canadian case indicates that some voters do react negatively when a prime minister calls an election at an 'inappropriate' time, and that such resentment can move some voters to switch to the opposition parties. But this study also suggests that the electoral cost to the incumbent party is mitigated by the reality that many voters do not follow politics; they are likely to be unaware that the election is early, and they are less likely to care. Under such circumstances, the proportion of the electorate for whom it will be a decisive consideration is likely to be a small.

Whether the pattern uncovered in the 2000 Canadian election is unique or whether it holds in other settings requires comparative evidence. Our study suggests, however, that the prerogative to call an election whenever seems best for a prime minister and his/her party is not strongly constrained by the court of public opinion. Some voters are ready to punish a prime minister for calling a snap election, but they appear to be a small group.

Appendix: Description of Variables

Dependent Variables

Resentment (Table 1): Respondents were asked: 'Are you very angry that the federal election was called early, somewhat angry, or not angry at all?'. The variable takes the value of 3 if respondents were 'very angry', 2 if they were 'somewhat angry', and 1 if they were 'not angry at all'.

Vote choice (Table 3): Respondents were asked (in the post-election wave) which party they voted for in the election. A dummy variable indicating a vote choice for the incumbent Liberal Party has been created. The reference group is those who voted for any of the opposition parties.

Independent Variables

Political awareness is an index made up of eight questions:

- four questions tapping the level of factual political information (the names of the premier of the respondent's province, the finance minister of Canada, the prime minister of Canada at the time of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, and the capital of the United States; every respondent obtained a score of correct answers),
- three questions about the level of attention to election news on television, in the newspapers and on radio (the respondents were asked to indicate on a scale

- from 0 to 10 the degree of attention they paid to the news about the election on television, in the newspapers and on radio; the scale was transformed to 0–1),
- and one question about the overall level of political interest (respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 their interest in politics generally; the scale was transformed to 0–1).

The index is the sum of all scores divided by 8.

Socio-demographics

Atlantic, West, Quebec are dummy variables that indicate the respondent's region of residence. Atlantic includes New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. West includes Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

Catholic has the value of 1 if the respondent's religion is Catholic, and 0 otherwise.

Non-religious has the value of 1 if the respondent has no religious affiliation, and 0 otherwise.

North European has the value of 1 if the respondent is of North European origin, and 0 otherwise.

Non-European has the value of 1 if the respondent is of Non-European origin, and 0 otherwise.

Male is a dummy variable that equals 1 for men, and 0 for women.

French language has the value of 1 if the respondent first learned and still understand French, and 0 otherwise.

Other language has the value of 1 if the respondent's first learned and still understood language is neither French nor English, and 0 otherwise.

Age is the respondent's age.

Married is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent is married or living with a partner, and 0 otherwise.

Below high school has the value of 1 if the highest level of education is less than completed high school, and 0 otherwise.

University graduate has the value of 1 if the highest level of education completed is a BA or higher, and 0 otherwise.

Rural has the value of 1 if the respondent's postal code is designated as a rural area, and 0 otherwise.

Party identification

Party Id: Liberal takes the value of 1 if the respondent identifies (strongly or fairly strongly) with the Liberal Party, and 0 otherwise.

Party Id: Opposition takes the value of 1 if the respondent identifies (strongly or fairly strongly) with any of the opposition parties, and 0 otherwise.

Values and beliefs

Social conservatism is an index made up of two questions. Respondents were asked whether society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children and if gays and lesbians should be allowed to get married. The responses were transformed to -1 to +1, and the index is the sum of the two scores divided by 2.

Free enterprise is an index made up of five questions. Respondents were asked how much power business and unions should have, whether they agree with the statements that the government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs and that when business makes a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor, and whether they think that people who don't go ahead should blame themselves, not the system. The responses were transformed to -1 to +1, and the index is the sum of the five scores divided by 5.

Racial minorities: Respondents were asked how much should be done for racial minorities. The scale ranges from -1 ('much less') to +1 ('much more').

Feminism: Respondents were asked about their sympathy towards feminism. The scale ranges from -1 ('not sympathetic at all') to +1 ('very sympathetic').

Religiosity: Respondents were asked about the importance of religion in their life. The scale ranges from -1 ('not important at all') to +1 ('very important').

Regional alienation has the value of 1 if respondents thought that the federal government treats their province worse than other provinces, and 0 otherwise.

Quebec sovereignty ranges from -1 for Quebeckers who are strongly opposed to Quebec sovereignty, to +1 for those who are strongly favourable. Respondents from other provinces were not asked the question and were given a score of 0.

Political cynicism is an index made up of four questions. Respondents were asked to evaluate how they feel about political parties and politicians in general, and whether they agree with the statements that government does not care much what people think and that all federal parties are basically the same. The responses were transformed to -1 to +1 and the index is the sum of the four scores divided by 4.

Economic perceptions

Personal past takes the value of -1 if the respondent's personal financial situation had got worse over the previous year, +1 if it had got better, and 0 if it had stayed the same.

Issues

Federal powers: Respondents were asked whether the federal government should have more or less power (relative to the provincial governments) than now. The scale ranges from -1 ('less power') to +1 ('more power').

Public health is an index made up of two questions. Respondents were asked whether they favour or oppose having some private hospitals and letting doctors charge a fee for each visit. Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$, and the index is the sum of the two scores divided by 2.

Gun control: Respondents were asked whether only the police and the military should be allowed to have guns. The scale ranges from -1 ('strongly disagree') to $+1$ ('strongly agree').

Direct democracy is an index made up of two questions. Respondents were asked whether they think that referendums on important [or controversial] issues should be held regularly, occasionally, rarely, or never, and whether they think it would be a good thing or a bad thing to have a referendum on abortion. Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$, and the index is the sum of the two scores divided by 2.

Liberal performance

Environment: Respondents were asked to evaluate how good a job the Liberal government has done of protecting the environment: very good, quite good, not good, or not good at all. Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$.

Health: Respondents were asked to evaluate how good a job the Liberal government has done of improving health care: very good, quite good, not good, or not good at all. Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$.

Taxes: Respondents were asked to evaluate how good a job the Liberal government has done of cutting taxes: very good, quite good, not good, or not good at all. Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$.

Corruption: Respondents were asked whether there has been a lot of corruption under the Liberal government, some, a little, or none? Responses were transformed from -1 to $+1$.

Leader evaluations

Respondents were asked to indicate how they feel about each candidate on a scale from 0 to 100. The scale was transformed to -1 to $+1$. Five variables have been created, one for each candidate.

Snap election

Respondents were asked: 'Are you very angry that the federal election was called early, somewhat angry, or not angry at all?' Two dichotomous variables were created, **Somewhat angry** and **Very angry**, which take the value of 1 for those who said they were 'somewhat angry' and 'very angry', respectively.

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Notes

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- 1 There is anecdotal evidence that Jacques Chirac's decision to call an early election in April 1997 might have backfired (Cautres, 2000, p. 62) and that the huge drop suffered by the Liberal Party in the (Canadian) province of Ontario during the course of the 1990 election might have been provoked by negative reactions to an 'unnecessary' snap election (Dyck, 1997), but there is no direct evidence that confirms or disconfirms such interpretations. Marsh and Sinnott (1990) show that, in the 1989 Irish election, a majority of voters thought that the election was unnecessary and that the popularity of Prime Minister Haughey, as well as support for his party, Fianna Fail, declined after the calling of the election. There is no direct evidence, however, of voters' feelings about the decision, nor, obviously, of how these feelings affected vote choice.
- 2 The median duration of the six minority governments that Canada has had since 1945 is 16 months, varying between 9 and 32 months.
- 3 The presence of an elite level norm is confirmed by the media's reaction to the early election call. We cannot tell whether voters adhere to that norm (or are even aware of it). We do know, however, that most Canadians think there should be set dates for elections, rather than letting the government decide when elections are held (Howe and Northrup, 2000).
- 4 The study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Elections Canada, and the Institute for Research on Public Policy. The questionnaires and the data set are available at www.fas.umontreal.ca/pol/ces-eeec.
- 5 The question is based on the assumption that the most likely motivation for voting against the prime minister because of this opportunistic decision was a feeling of anger/resentment/indignation. The question could be criticized for telling voters that the election was called early and for suggesting that they might be angry. This does not seem to be a problem, however, since relatively little anger was uncovered. Furthermore, if there was a bias, it was in favour of the 'punish' hypothesis, which was still disconfirmed.
- 6 There is no evidence, either, that anger subsided more (or less) among the less aware.
- 7 Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.72.
- 8 The early election call could also have induced some voters to abstain. We did test whether anger was related to turnout, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, party identification, political awareness, and cynicism. There was no statistically significant effect, which is not surprising, since the substantial drop in turnout that occurred in 2000 (turnout was 61 percent, compared to 67 percent in the previous election) was entirely confined to the recent generations (Blais *et al.*, 2002, p. 48), who were less resentful about the prime minister's decision. Of course, these findings must be interpreted cautiously, since the CES, like all election studies, overestimates actual turnout.
- 9 For a more detailed elaboration and justification of the model, see Blais *et al.* (2002, pp. 83–9). This set-up allows us to control for all the variables that have been shown to affect, directly or indirectly, vote choice. We do not include strategic considerations, which proved to be marginal in the 2000 election.
- 10 Reported vote in the post-election survey almost exactly matches the official outcome of the election: 40.2 percent of our voting respondents indicated they had voted Liberal, and the Liberals had 40.8 percent of the official vote.
- 11 We can determine, for each 'very angry' individual, which choice (voting Liberal or not) she is predicted to make given how she scores on all the variables incorporated into the model on the one hand, and which choice she would be predicted to make if she were not angry (and thus scored 0 on the two 'angry' variables), keeping constant her scores on all other variables. If the predicted choice is Liberal in the first instance and not Liberal in the second, the inference is that she voted

against the Liberals because of her resentment about the early election call, since she would have voted Liberal if she had not been angry. We proceed in the same way for 'somewhat angry' individuals.

- 12 It could be argued that our model is misspecified because we control for evaluations of Prime Minister Chrétien. Those who were angry with the early election call may have been prone to adjust downwards their ratings of the prime minister. We performed analyses in which ratings of the prime minister were not included. The results were only slightly different. This specification yielded an estimate of 2 percent switching to another party because of the decision, instead of 1 percent with the model that included ratings of the prime minister.

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