

Voting Behaviour in Canada

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Edited by Cameron D. Anderson and
Laura B. Stephenson



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Preface

All modern democracies operate on the basis of representation. The act of choosing representatives through free and fair elections is fundamental to the exercise of legitimate democratic authority. For many citizens, participation through voting is the single most important (and often the only) political act that they will ever undertake. Given its importance to the practice of legitimate democratic authority, voting behaviour (how and why citizens vote) has long held a central place in the study of politics. The study of voting behaviour, from the original investigations into American elections to the multitude of theories, country studies, and elements that comprise the field today, is fascinating in its diversity. Situated within and contributing to this literature, this book seeks to illuminate the puzzle of individual vote choice by focusing on important factors that influence the electoral decisions of Canadian citizens.

The genesis of this volume is threefold. First, the origins of this book are rooted in our shared curiosity about Canadian and comparative voting behaviour. Each of us was inspired to begin our own studies in this area by an outstanding scholar of electoral behaviour – Elisabeth Gidengil of McGill University (Anderson) and John Aldrich of Duke University (Stephenson). Under the tutelage of these mentors, we individually came to realize that the study of voting behaviour can be enriched and expanded by looking beyond one's own border, incorporating new ideas, and testing boundaries of understanding. We are indebted to them for this pivotal role in our professional development.

Second, as we moved from graduate school to academic positions at the University of Western Ontario, we (individually and collectively) observed the absence of a book-length volume dedicated to voting behaviour in Canada. In particular, we recognized that there was no book

examining various aspects of the vote decision, rather than a specific election, in the existing Canadian literature. With this omission in mind, we set out to craft a project that would fill this gap.

Third, the process of developing this book was greatly facilitated by our colleagues and friends in other Canadian universities. We were (and continue to be) inspired by the excellent work on Canadian political and voting behaviour being conducted by junior scholars in Canada. In recent years, many top-notch junior scholars have emerged in this field, and we thought that this project would be a wonderful forum to showcase their research. We were delighted that many agreed to contribute to this volume, and we believe that their work represents the cutting edge of voting behaviour research in Canada.

Acknowledgments

Work on this project officially began in November 2007 at a workshop held in London, Ontario. We wish to thank the following for financial support: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Dean's Office in the Faculty of Social Science and the Office of the Vice-President-Research, both of the University of Western Ontario; and Greg Lyle of Innovative Research Group. The workshop brought together junior faculty and graduate students to discuss the papers that ultimately became chapters in this volume. Having a critical group of scholars who were familiar with each other's work, the main theories in the field, and the data that were being used was a wonderful experience. The comments, discussions, and ideas that emerged over the weekend were of the highest quality and led to significant improvements in the research. We would like to thank, in addition to the contributors to this volume, Blake Andrew, Marc-André Bodet, Fred Cutler, Cristine de Clercy, Caroline Dick, Eugenie Dostie-Goulet, Anna Esselment, Peter Ferguson, Jeffrey Parker, Joanna Quinn, Jason Roy, Daniel Rubenson, Ajay Sharma, Steve White, and Alexandra Wilton for contributing to the weekend. We also extend our gratitude to the staff in the Department of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario who, as always, supported us in this endeavour and helped to facilitate our efforts.

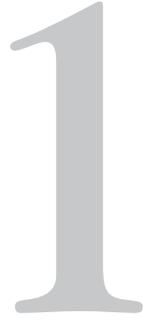
This volume would not have been published without the support of UBC Press. We thank the press for seeing merit in this project early on and throwing its support behind it. Beyond agreeing to publish this book, UBC Press has been an absolutely first-class organization to work with. Our editor, Emily Andrew, has been a model of efficiency, wisdom, patience, and good humour who has expertly guided us through the process virtually from start to finish.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not recognize those who encourage and energize us every day to pursue our academic interests: our families. Kerry and Sadie Anderson and Jason, Maddie, and Ally McCready are simply the most important people in the world to us. Thank you for your continuing love, support, and patience.

Voting Behaviour in Canada

The Puzzle of Elections and Voting in Canada

Cameron D. Anderson and Laura B. Stephenson



On 23 January 2006, the Canadian electorate voted to remove the Liberal Party from power and replace it with the newly united Conservative Party as Canada's new government. This electoral result signalled the end of over a decade of electoral success for the Liberals, who had won three majority governments and one minority government in succession. Although the defeat in 2006 marked the end of a Liberal dynasty, the result, perhaps more profoundly, conveyed the continued ability of the Canadian electorate to influence the content and character of the federal government. In this sense, the 2006 election outcome reaffirmed that elections are pivotal to the practice and success of democracy.

Beyond the details of specific elections, voting is a critical topic of study in political science because the act of choosing representatives through regular elections is fundamental to the exercise of legitimate democratic authority. For many citizens, the act of electing and/or defeating a government representative is the single most important political act that they will ever undertake. Even though there are many opportunities to get involved in politics (joining a political party, campaigning, signing a petition, and so on), the act of voting is often the only way that most citizens engage with the process and practice of politics. Given the central role, visibility, and importance of voting to democracy, understanding how and why citizens vote has long been a focus of study for many political scientists.

In this chapter, we provide a loose metaphor – that of complex puzzles – for thinking about and understanding elections and voting. Completing a puzzle inevitably involves identifying all the relevant pieces and then organizing them to present a coherent picture. To get a complete picture of voting behaviour, then, the many factors that contribute to an electoral result must be identified.

The metaphor of a puzzle can also be applied to illuminate the nature of electoral choice at the level of the individual voter. Each vote decision is a composite of several factors that explain how and why the person votes the way that he or she does. Viewing electoral choice in this way, a key intention of this book, as well as each of the chapters, is to elaborate some of the factors that can contribute to developing a comprehensive picture of vote decisions. Each chapter discusses a different piece of the puzzle (such as partisanship, economic conditions, and campaign effects) that is known to influence the vote decision among the Canadian electorate and considers how important it is to developing a coherent picture of individual vote choice.

Each of the pieces focused on in this volume has been identified from a rich and lengthy literature on voting decisions in advanced industrial democracies. These pieces form the basis of how political scientists think about and attempt to understand individual vote choice in Canada. Several of the topics engage theories that have also been pursued in other national contexts, such as in the United States or Great Britain, so there is the added interest of comparing Canadian results with those in different countries to uncover any universal or unique aspects of voting behaviour.

The bulk of this introductory chapter is designed to provide a roadmap through the terrain of voting behaviour literature, giving an overview of the theories of vote choice and an understanding of the various factors that are highlighted in each. In the following pages, we begin the journey – starting with the socio-psychological model, moving to refinements, and then embarking on a tour of rational and spatial models. Our exploration of vote models ends with a discussion of the model currently most popular in studies of Canadian voting behaviour. Providing a backdrop for the chapters to come, we then detail the collective understanding of Canadian voting behaviour and how these findings relate to established vote models. We conclude this introductory chapter with an overview of the chapters that follow, and we suggest ways of viewing each topic in light of the many broad voting models.

Approaches to the Study of Voting in Canada

The Socio-psychological Model of Voting

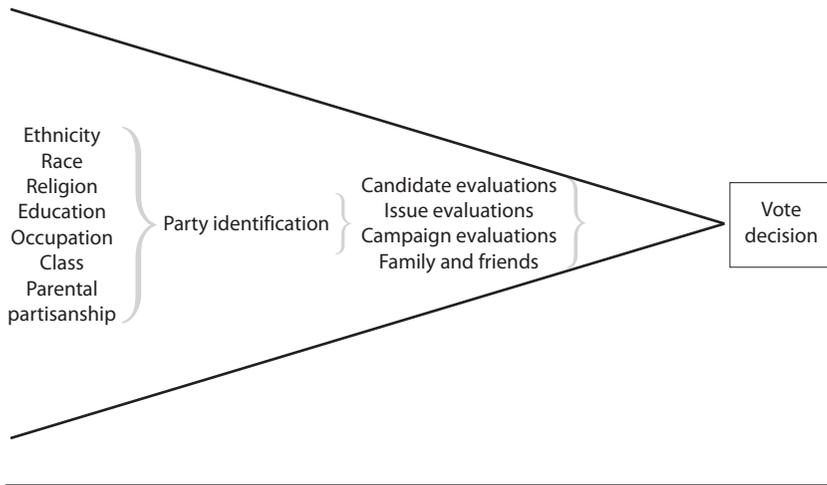
Much of the current understanding of voting behaviour in Canada has its roots in investigations into American elections. The first model of voting emerged out of work done by researchers at Columbia University

(Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Initially, the scholars pursued a “consumer preference” model, in which elections were seen as events through which consumers (voters) were inundated with advertising (campaign materials) to entice them to choose (vote for) one product (candidate) over another (Niemi and Weisberg 1993). However, after analyzing data about voters during the 1940 American election, the authors found that many vote decisions had been made *prior* to the beginning of the campaign. Thus, it was clear that the campaign was not the central mechanism by which vote choice was shaped. The researchers developed a different theory of voting behaviour that focused on social features. They argued that vote choice could be understood as the outcome of three factors: one’s socioeconomic status, one’s religion, and one’s area of residence. Looking at these factors (operationalized as education, income, class, religion, urban or rural residence), the authors put forward two volumes (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954) arguing for the need to understand one’s background in order to understand one’s vote.

However, when their model was applied to the 1948 American election by a team of researchers at the University of Michigan, it did not produce strong results. In fact, it appeared that the theory was wrong; if long-term social characteristics influenced vote choices, then how could *changes* in the vote total be explained, given that social characteristics varied little from the previous election? In response to this challenge, the Michigan scholars set out to understand the role of both long-term and short-term influences on one’s vote. Specifically, they argued that there was a “funnel of causality” that began with the social characteristics (ethnicity, race, religion, education, occupation, class, parental partisanship) that had been identified by the Columbia school, which the Michigan scholars conceptualized as influencing an individual’s personal attachment to a party (partisanship). In addition, the researchers recognized the importance of factors closer in time to the vote than partisanship: evaluation of candidates, evaluation of issues, campaign effects, and conversations with family and friends. All of these factors together were argued to influence how a voter chose to cast his or her ballot (see Figure 1.1). Although conceptually the Michigan model, as it came to be known, encompassed many variables that spanned a significant amount of time, the researchers themselves focused on partisanship, candidate evaluation, and issue positions in their famous book, *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). The authors found that partisanship and candidate evaluations

Figure 1.1

The funnel of causality



were most influential and that issues had little impact on vote choice in the elections that they studied.

Clarke et al. (2004) developed a modified version of this model in their study *Political Choice in Britain*, in which they present a valence model of voting behaviour. The valence model focuses on the voter's expectations of what the candidates will be able to accomplish in office – in other words, it goes beyond campaign promises and policy stances to consider whether or not the candidate will be able to deliver. It is based on Stokes's (1963, 1992) idea of a valence issue, an issue on which parties agree about what needs to be done. Voters cannot choose between candidates on the basis of their positions on these types of issues, but these issues are still significant in voting decisions since voters consider the ability to deliver the desired outcome in distinguishing between candidates. Clarke et al. (2004) also recognize, explicitly, that voters' opinions of future performances will be biased by their use of cognitive shortcuts, such as leader evaluations and partisanship. In using this model, they move away from the narrow application of the Michigan model found in *The American Voter* to a fuller conceptualization of the many factors that Campbell et al. (1960) included in their description of the "funnel of causality."

Several of the elements of these models have sparked particular attention from scholars. Below we discuss in greater detail two of the pieces in the sociopsychological model of voting.

Issue Voting

Campbell et al.'s (1960) finding that issues were less important than partisanship or candidate evaluations, despite their model's expectations, struck a chord with some researchers. Disagreement (or perhaps disbelief) that issue positions were not relevant for voters led scholars to develop a revisionist school of voting behaviour. This school, while generally accepting of the Michigan model's premises, addressed the limited role of issues. The revisionist project has spawned many interesting adaptations of the findings of the original model. One of the biggest refinements is that issues really can have an impact on elections. Issue voting was found to be significant by several authors, one of the earliest and most prominent being V.O. Key Jr. (1966). He argued that issue voting takes the form of voters voting for (against) a candidate with whom he or she is satisfied (dissatisfied). However, issue voting can occur only if there is a clear difference between the policy positions of the candidates and their parties – if both parties take the identical stance on an issue, then voting for one or the other will do nothing to effect change. Thus, this early finding of issue significance made a case for considering the specific context in which issues might matter. RePass (1971) and Pomper (1972) found similar support in their own research for the importance of issues.

Other scholars refined the idea of issue voting by recognizing the specific characteristics of issues. Carmines and Stimson (1980) extended the argument to take into account the difficulty of the issue. They argued that "easy" issues, ones on which most individuals can form clear opinions, are those that are long-standing, concerned more with policy ends than with means, and are more symbolic than technical. More difficult or "hard" issues, those that are obscure or complex, are less easily comprehended by voters – only a select group of sophisticated (educated) individuals would have the necessary capacity to incorporate their preferences regarding such issues into their vote decisions. Fiorina (1981) advanced the idea of issue voting by considering the past and the future. He discussed the role of retrospective and prospective voting – in one case voting on the basis of how issues were handled in the past and in the other voting on how issues will be handled in the future. In lay terms,

retrospective voting is the equivalent of “throwing the rascals out” if one determines that those currently in office are, in fact, rascals. Prospective voting demands more of a voter since he or she must sort through campaign promises and the probability of those promises being fulfilled (similar to the valence model) in order to determine the “right” way to vote on the basis of the issue.

Another extension of the idea of issue voting is issue ownership (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). Issue ownership means that a party is perceived to be the most competent on a specific issue – whether by reputation, because of past performance, or due to ideological affinity. In other words, the party has a clear reputation as being best suited to handle the issue. In keeping with a valence model of voting (see above), the theory of issue ownership posits that voters cast their ballots for the party that “owns” the issues that are salient and/or most important to them in the election (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). For parties, then, developing a reputation for issue ownership and attempting to constrain campaign issues to those already “owned” are significant campaign considerations.

Finally, the role of issues in vote choice has also been studied from the angle of economic conditions. As a subset of issue voting, the general premise of economic voting is that economic conditions act as shorthand decision criteria for evaluating the incumbent’s performance. If the economy is better (worse) today than when the incumbent came to office or over the past year, then voters will reward (punish) the incumbent with re-election (defeat). The basic formula of economic voting has been tested extensively, and widespread comparative evidence suggests that economic conditions significantly influence vote choice (see, for example, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Thus, it has come to be recognized that issues do have significance under specific circumstances but that the role of issues is complex and nuanced. The focus on partisanship, issues, and leader evaluations in the Michigan model has been justified despite early evidence to the contrary.

Campaign Effects

Less a refinement to the Michigan model than an elaboration, a significant body of work has developed that focuses on the most proximate causes of voting identified in the “funnel of causality” – campaign effects. Recall that the Michigan model did not incorporate these factors directly, although they are included in its overall conception of vote choice. Work

in this area has investigated the effects of political campaigns, with mixed results. The prevailing consensus is that campaigns have minimal effects (see the review in Brady, Johnston, and Sides 2006). Especially with the emphasis on partisanship (and thus long-standing predispositions) that emerged from early research into voting, it was generally held that campaigns did (and could) not factor strongly in a voter's evaluation of candidates if he or she decided whom to vote for prior to the campaign. However, the idea that campaigns can have only minimal effects on voter behaviour is no longer uncontested. The consensus has been challenged by a refined definition of what constitutes a campaign effect and the application of new methodologies.

Initially, the minimal effects view of campaigns was supported by evidence that little or no persuasion had occurred: that is, voters had not been swayed to prefer a candidate by the substance of the campaign. However, when researchers changed their focus to consider priming or agenda setting, their findings were significantly different. Returning to the research of the Columbia school, even then it was found that campaign information had the effect of reinforcing weak predispositions of voters, polarizing them toward one candidate over another (see the discussion in Brady, Johnston, and Sides 2006). Essentially, campaigns brought dormant (or weak) ideas and opinions to the forefront and thus contributed to the ultimate vote choice. The search for these kinds of alternative campaign effects was taken up in earnest during the 1980s. Bartels (1987, 1988), for example, found that when partisan predispositions were irrelevant (such as during American primary elections) campaigns became much more important in that events and media coverage impacted perceptions of candidate viability. Franklin (1991) and Alvarez (1997) found similar results in senatorial elections and presidential elections respectively.

The second change to the study of campaign effects deals with methodology. Most voting research has been, and continues to be, conducted with surveys. Typical surveys provide a snapshot of opinions and attitudes held at a single point in time. There are two limitations inherent in this research design. First, surveys depend on the information that a respondent provides. In the case of campaigns, this means that any analysis of campaign effects is necessarily dependent on how accurately and truthfully the respondent reports his or her exposure to campaign materials. Second, campaigns are dynamic events that occur over several days or months – thus, a snapshot of voter attitudes is limited in what it can

reveal about a phenomenon. Many national election surveys, such as the Canadian Election Study, the British Election Study, and the American National Election Study, conduct campaign-period and post-election panel surveys, which partially overcome the difficulty of a single-moment snapshot. If it is possible to conduct surveys before and after specific campaign events, such as debates, then a two-part panel survey can reveal the effects of that event. However, the difficulty of planning in advance for the important events in a campaign limits this method. A significant development in survey research methodology that addresses these concerns specifically is the rolling cross-section (RCS) survey. This methodology was first used in the 1984 American National Election Study and, since 1988, has been used for Canadian Election Studies (CES); in 2001 and 2005, it was also employed by the investigators of the British Election Study. The process involves building a data set from individuals surveyed at different points throughout the campaign (each day in the Canadian case), thus allowing researchers to observe changes in attitudes and opinions that occur over the course of the campaign. Using this methodology, significant campaign effects have been observed, such as the impact of a debate on leader evaluations and the importance of rhetoric for setting the agenda for the election (Johnston et al. 1992).

Experimental methodologies have also yielded very interesting findings about campaign effects. Experiments have the advantage of allowing researchers to control, monitor, and verify that campaign materials were in fact received by a subject. Furthermore, in an experimental setting, many other factors that might influence vote choice can be controlled. Of course, what this methodology gains in precision is lost in external validity, as it is very difficult to make an experiment taking place in a lab hold the same meaning as actually going to a voting booth. Nonetheless, this methodology has provided some interesting results. Early research into the question of turnout, for example, found that canvassing, in person and by phone, and paper advertising were able to increase voter turnout (Eldersveld 1956; Bochel and Denver 1971; Gerber and Green 2000). Other studies have analyzed how exposure to different messages and different media affects voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995). Such studies have found that negative information is more powerful than positive information (Iyengar and Simon 2000), that campaigns contribute to the information that a voter has about candidates and parties (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994), and

that voters adjust their evaluations of candidates in response to campaign materials (Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau 1995).

Research into priming, agenda setting, and framing has also shown that the messages directed at voters during a campaign can have real effects on vote choice. Priming – that is, making certain considerations more salient (and therefore more important) in one’s decision making – has been shown to be a significant influence in election campaigns in Canada and the United States (see, for example, Jenkins 2002 and Druckman 2004). Work on agenda setting has shown that the criteria on which candidates and parties are judged in an election can be influenced by the rhetoric of the campaign (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Johnston et al. 1992). Soroka (2002) demonstrates the role of the media in determining which issues are prominent on the political agenda. It has also been shown that polls, publicized as pieces of information, can have an impact on perceptions of the candidates’ chances and vote choice itself (Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2006). Finally, extensive work on framing has shown that how an issue is “packaged” for public consumption can make a real difference in the opinions that are formed by citizens. Frames can influence opinions by emphasizing specific information (Nelson and Willey 2001) and in turn making specific concerns more salient (Nelson and Oxley 1999) in decision making. In election campaigns, the frames used by the media can have significant effects (Rhee 1997; Trimble and Sampert 2004).

Researchers have also made significant headway in understanding which campaign messages are effective and when. Zaller (1992), for example, suggests that predispositions can act as a buffer between information and beliefs; those who hold opinions weakly, then, are the most apt to be affected by political communication. A person is affected by campaign materials typically through an increase in information, leading to an “enlightened” perspective on the vote choice (Gelman and King 1993). The interaction between messages and prior attitudes can lead to polarization, whereby a person’s opinion is reinforced and becomes clearer (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). It has also been found that messages that are consistent with voter expectations tend to be the most effective (Iyengar and Valentino 1999), as are messages delivered by credible sources (Druckman 2001). Finally, it has been shown that there is a “negativity bias,” such that negative information tends to be more influential than positive information (Holbrook et al. 2001), although

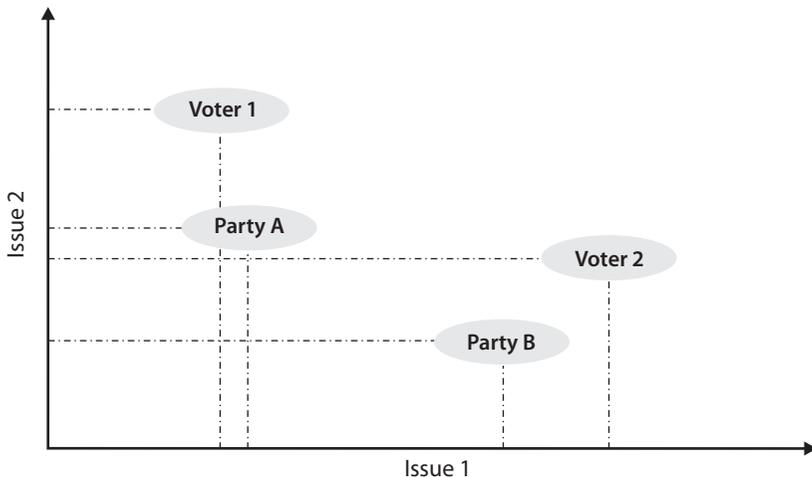
it may also have the effect of depressing turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Thus, a great deal of scholarship has demonstrated that, despite early research to the contrary, events most proximate to one's vote choice, during the campaign, can have a significant effect on voting behaviour.

Spatial and Rational Models of Vote Choice

Although the sociopsychological approach is prominent in voting studies, a second important approach to the study of vote choice is rooted in work that considers spatial competition (Hotelling 1929). The work of Downs (1957) and Black (1958) brought the idea of spatial competition into the political realm by arguing that it is possible to understand voter behaviour on the basis of preferences and spatial distances from political alternatives (candidates or parties). This strand of literature, also known as proximity voting, assumes that all actors (voters and parties/candidates) are motivated by their own self-interests to develop preferences for their political options. Specifically, the spatial model of voting assumes that a voter's policy preferences can be understood in a dimensional space – each dimension representing a different policy issue (see Figure 1.2). The voter casts a ballot for whichever candidate is located closest to his or her position in that n-dimensional space – a so-called

Figure 1.2

An example of spatial preferences: Two issues



rational vote (Enelow and Hinich 1984). Parties therefore have an incentive to ensure that their policy positions are close to the median of all policy dimensions. Thus, the idea of the median voter dictating policy was born.

The directional theory of voting incorporates ideas from theories of symbolic politics to elaborate on the basic spatial model. Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989) point out that people react to issues in terms of both the direction of the stance taken and the *intensity* of the stance. Thus, a candidate who takes a more extreme stance in a voter's preferred direction may be preferred over a candidate with a moderate stance: "The candidate who is most appealing to those on his or her side of the issue is the candidate who provides the most stimulation by being intense" (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989, 109). A candidate who takes a moderate stance on an issue is not recognized by voters for taking that stance and thus will not accrue votes on the basis of that issue. Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz (1991) found that this model was more appropriate than the simple proximity model for evaluating voter behaviour in multiparty systems.

Another strand of rational voting theory also originates in expectations expressed in Downs (1957). Downs recognizes that all party options are not equally likely – even though a party may be very close to one's ideal policy points, it might have no chance of winning either a seat or the election as a whole. In such a scenario, a voter may realize that casting a sincere ballot for his or her most preferred party is unlikely to affect the outcome of the election. A voter is left with two options: cast a strategic vote or abstain from voting altogether.

Strategic voting can be defined as voting for a candidate other than one's first preference, when the chances of one's first preference winning in the election are slight, to prevent another candidate from winning. The idea behind strategic voting is that voters would prefer that a second preference wins rather than a third or lower preference – therefore, they choose to vote strategically (that is, not for their sincere preference) in order to prevent the worst/least preferred outcome from occurring. In the Canadian case, the federal election of 2008 provides an excellent example as there was talk of environmentally conscious voters supporting either the NDP or the Liberal Party candidate, depending on which had the best chance of winning, in order to prevent the Conservative candidate from winning in a riding. This model was stated most clearly by McKelvey and Ordeshook (1972). Studying voting behaviour from this angle has

revealed that few voters actually cast strategic ballots – and this information has opened up a new avenue of research into how voters perceive their political options and how knowledgeable voters are about the realistic outcomes of electoral contests (Blais and Turgeon 2004; Abramson et al. 2005; Levine 2007; Merolla and Stephenson 2007b).

Under the scenario of a voter's preferred party having little chance of winning, the second option is not to cast a ballot at all. Downs (1957) and others after him (see Riker and Ordeshook 1968) envision the decision to vote as being about not only the benefit to be received by the voter if the preferred candidate wins but also the probability of that occurring. Downs argues that a voter will cast his or her ballot for the candidate whose expected utility (probability multiplied by benefit) is highest. If a voter is perfectly indifferent between the candidates, then he or she should abstain from voting.

Downs (1957) also theorizes that a voter with a clear preference may abstain if the expected utility is higher than the costs of voting. A voter's expected utility depends on the probability of a preferred candidate winning – but this depends not only on the voter's ballot but also on the ballot of every other voter. Thus, the real question is whether one *specific* ballot can make the difference in whether a candidate wins or loses – in ridings of 125,000 people, the rational expectation is about an 8 in 100,000 chance of casting the deciding ballot. This particular contention has been formalized as the calculus of voting, usually stated as

$$V = pB - C,$$

where V is casting a ballot,

p is the probability of the preferred candidate winning,

B is the benefit expected from the preferred candidate, and

C is the cost of voting.

This formulation of an individual's vote decision introduces one difficulty – if the costs of voting are never zero, and the chances of casting a winning ballot are infinitesimal, then it is never rational for anyone to vote. However, we know that people do vote – regularly – and therefore this has become known as the paradox of voting.

Downs (1957) reconciles this difficulty by acknowledging that there is a danger that, if all voters follow this rational calculus and abstain from voting, democracy will collapse. He argues that, because voters

value democracy, they will figure that into their benefits of voting and, as we see empirically, go to the polls. In this revised version of the calculus of voting (stated formally by Riker and Ordeshook 1968), the voting decision is $V = pB - C + D$, where D is a term that encompasses feelings of duty to preserve the democracy.

There are many critics of this theory of voting behaviour (see, for example, Green and Shapiro 1994; Blais 2000). Others have developed different rational theories of voting to overcome reliance on a voter's "duty" to explain voter turnout. Minimax theory (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974) is one of the most famous. Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974, 528) argue that "the minimax regret criterion specifies that the citizen should choose the act which minimizes his maximum regret." After significant calculation, they conclude that "a citizen following the minimax regret decision rule votes for his preferred candidate rather than abstains if the utility gain from the election of his preferred candidate exceeds four times the utility loss of the voting act" (528).¹ Thus, the spatial model of voting enriched the study of voting behaviour by shedding light on proximity voting, strategic voting, and turnout – each of which is a fascinating aspect of voting behaviour.

The Block Recursive Approach

Finally, there is another broad model of voter behaviour, which has found prominence in the study of Canadian elections especially. Each of the above theories and approaches to voting behaviour highlights a specific series of variables that can be used to explain vote choices. Although such models individually emphasize particular factors, it is often, if not always, the case that these approaches fail to explain the voting decisions of the entire electorate. Some explanatory factors might be more appropriate for some voters than others, and all factors will not or cannot account for every vote decision. In part proceeding from these observations, Miller and Shanks (1996) developed a comprehensive approach to explaining voting behaviour that they entitled the "block recursive model."

This model of vote choice incorporates many if not all of the broad theoretical innovations from the sociopsychological and rational schools of thought. As such, the model includes sociodemographic variables, values and beliefs, partisanship, issues, leadership, and campaign dynamics. Underlying the model is the central premise that some factors known to influence vote choice are closer in time to the vote decision (such as

voters' issue positions or leader evaluations), whereas other factors (such as relevant sociodemographics) are more temporally distant from the vote. Those that are distant may have both direct and indirect effects on vote choice by way of their influence on factors that come later in time (closer to the actual vote). For example, partisanship is usually developed before a campaign begins in the "funnel of causality," but it may have a significant effect on how one evaluates candidates in the race. Thus, groups (or "blocks") of factors are included in the model sequentially, so as to use statistical results to reveal the interplay between long-term predispositions and short-term and proximate variables. Largely following the funnel of causality shown in Figure 1.1, the ordering used in recent Canadian Election Study investigations² puts social background characteristics first, followed by underlying beliefs and attitudes, partisan identification, economic evaluations, issue opinions, evaluations of the incumbent's performance, leader evaluations, and finally strategic considerations. At each stage, only those variables that are statistically significant when first introduced into the model are retained. In the end, a researcher using this model is left with a very powerful model of vote choice *and* knowledge of how the various factors interact with each other.

When the block recursive model was first introduced, reviews were quick to praise the innovation as a benchmark for future studies of electoral behaviour (Shapiro 1997; Brody 1998; Kapp 1998). However, any explanatory approach as comprehensive as this one purports to be can be criticized on a number of grounds. In the first instance, the block recursive strategy has been criticized for the nature of causal ordering choices. In a review of the original Miller and Shanks model, Shapiro (1997) observes that the selection and ordering of independent variables are not done deductively. Beyond criticisms regarding the selection and ordering of variables, many criticize the inability of the model to capture and incorporate campaign and media effects (Shapiro 1997; Brody 1998). Brody argues that media effects and the actions of politicians and candidates in election campaigns often form the basis of impression, and ultimately, preference formation, but the block recursive model is largely silent on these important effects. Finally, the model can also be criticized for lacking the ability to differentiate the relative importance of different blocks of independent variables. The presumption underlying the model is that everything matters that is included in the regression, but beyond that there is little theoretical basis to predict or generate expectations regarding the relative effects of different variables in the model.

Canadian Voting Behaviour: Findings and Innovations

Having outlined the main theoretical approaches to the study of voting behaviour, we now turn our attention to how these models have been applied to elucidate the dynamics of voting in Canada. When the sociopsychological voting models were first “exported,” researchers such as John Meisel, Philip Converse, Mildred Schwartz, and Maurice Pinard took advantage of the Canadian case as a new testing ground for the theories. Their findings about the Canadian electorate laid the base for the study of voting behaviour in Canada. Based on these initial contributions, work on voting behaviour in Canada has done much to elaborate theoretical understanding of the specific issues of Canadian voting behaviour.³ Below we delve into the details of this research by considering specific categories of vote choice factors – sociodemographics, values and beliefs, partisanship, leader evaluations, issue attitudes, and campaign effects – relating to the sociopsychological models. Because the block recursive model incorporates most of these factors, all of the findings relate to that model as well. Finally, we consider the evidence for proximity voting, strategic voting, and turnout, relating to the spatial model of vote choice.

Sociodemographics

With respect to the Columbia tradition of voting studies, a great deal of early work on Canadian voting focused on, and found strong results for, social groups as vote determinants (Regenstreif 1965; Meisel 1975). However, not all social groupings had the same effect on vote choice in Canada, as in other contexts. In particular, Alford (1963) argued that Canada was a country where class voting did not occur. His findings encouraged later researchers, such as Ogmundson (1975), Kay (1977), Lambert and Hunter (1979), and Lambert et al. (1987), to investigate further. Despite the use of different theoretical approaches and methodologies, the role of class in Canadian voting was still found to be weak. Other researchers, such as Zipp and Smith (1982), Archer (1985), and Pammett (1987), found that the absence of a class cleavage had significant negative implications for the electoral fortunes of the NDP at the federal level.

The finding of the weakness of class also encouraged some researchers to examine differences across the various regions of the country. An evolutionary model of class voting was hypothesized, whereby class voting should increase as urbanization and industrialization changed

the salience of region for voters (see the discussion in Gidengil 1992). Researching the applicability of this model, Jenson (1976) found no evidence to support it – the class cleavage remained weak even in the most industrialized provinces.

In contrast to the nearly non-existent role of class in accounting for Canadians' vote decisions, region of residence has been found consistently to have prominent effects. Blake (1972) found no evidence of a decline in the importance of region to voting outcomes since 1908; thus, the regional feature of Canadian politics provided "context" for voters in which the partisan choices, electoral competitiveness, and underlying dispositions of voters differed. In a later study, Blake (1978) argued that the influence of regionalism could be boiled down to differences in context – such as the distribution of individuals, the party system, and the competitiveness of the parties in those areas. Beyond that explanation, research has also demonstrated the existence of different regional political cultures (Simeon and Elkins 1974, 1980; Henderson 2004), some evidence of which was also found by investigators of the 1974 Canadian National Election Study in terms of voting behaviour (Clarke et al. 1979). Gidengil (1989) took the influence of region on vote behaviour a step further and found that regional context had an impact on the level of class voting observed.

Region remains a relevant sociodemographic factor in Canadian voting studies today. Successive findings from recent Canadian Election Study teams, using the block recursive model, demonstrate the salience of region and regional patterns of voting in Canada (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Gidengil et al. 2006a). For example, in the 2004 Canadian federal election, Gidengil et al. (2006a) report that the probability of voting for the Conservative Party was fifteen points higher in the western provinces and more than eighteen points lower in the Atlantic provinces (compared to Ontario). In contrast, the probability of voting for the Liberal Party in 2004 was eighteen points lower in the western provinces and almost sixteen points higher in the Atlantic provinces (compared to Ontario).

Some research has been directed toward *why* regional patterns exist and persist. In this vein, Gidengil et al. (1999) explore gaps in Liberal support between Ontario, the Atlantic, and the west and gaps in Reform support between Ontario and the west in the 1997 election. Their findings suggest that these gaps in support reflect true regional differences that cannot be explained by differences in sociodemographic makeup. In particular, they find that regional gaps in voting behaviour are driven by differences

in political orientations, beliefs, and basic political priorities. Others, however, such as Clarke, Pammett, and Stewart (2001), contend that regional differences in political attitudes are overstated.

Last, in terms of the effects of region, some work has considered the role of rural, urban, and increasingly suburban residence on voting patterns. Although publications from recent CES teams do not demonstrate consistently strong findings for a rural/urban difference, evidence from the 2004 federal election suggests that the probability of rural residents voting for the Conservative Party was 11.5 points higher than that of urban residents (Gidengil et al. 2006a). In a useful reconceptualization of urban differences in voting, Walks (2005) considers variation in attitudes and voting patterns between urban and suburban residents. Using data from 1965-2000, he finds evidence of change in that urban voters have shifted to the ideological left and vote disproportionately for parties on the left, whereas suburban voters have shifted to the ideological right and tend to be more inclined to vote for parties on that end of the spectrum. Others who have studied this topic include Cutler and Jenkins (2000), Thomas (2001), and Wasko and O'Neill (2007). All find evidence of where one lives influencing attitudes, and thus voting behaviour, although some suggest that these effects can be explained by sociodemographic differences in rural and urban areas.

Outside region and class, religion has been found to be one of the strongest vote determinants in Canada (Gidengil 1992; Blais 2005). Perhaps the defining effect of religion in Canadian voting behaviour is that Catholics tend to vote disproportionately for the Liberal Party.⁴ This finding emerged early (Regenstreif 1965) and has been remarkably consistent (Blais 2005), despite the dramatic increase in secularism in the country. Irvine (1974) proposed an explanation for this cleavage (parental transfer and socialization), which was refuted by Johnston (1985). Johnston's own solution (1991) has proven more stable (Bélanger and Eagles 2006), but it does not provide a clear statement of the causal mechanisms at work in perpetuating this cleavage. It has also been shown that, despite its endurance, the religious cleavage can be overcome by the effects of media exposure (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1997). Despite the many efforts to account for the continued role of religion in Canadian voting patterns, Blais (2005) contends that we still do not know exactly why this relationship persists. In many ways, the issue of religious voting in Canada remains one of the least understood aspects of Canadian voting behaviour.

A few studies have also increased our awareness of another sociodemographic characteristic that influences voting behaviour in Canada: gender. Looking at voting patterns from 1965 to 1997, Erickson and O'Neill (2002) suggest the emergence of a "modern gender gap" (where women vote for left-wing parties and men for right-wing ones) in Canadian voting in the 1990s, in which differences in voting patterns between men and women became evident. They specify that the differences are more pronounced outside Quebec and that the gender gap is contingent on the overall variability in elections, the multiparty system, the salience of brokerage politics, and Canada/Quebec differences. In a study of electoral support for the right-wing Canadian Alliance Party in the 2000 Canadian federal election, Gidengil et al. (2005) find that structural and situational explanations of gender difference do little to account for the gap. Rather, the authors argue that gender differences in support for right-wing parties reflect underlying differences in values and beliefs between men and women (such as the appropriate role of the state and traditional moral values). Gidengil et al. (2006a) also find a gender gap in electoral support in the 2004 Canadian federal election, in which women were 3.9 points less likely to vote for the Conservative Party and 4.2 points more likely to vote for the NDP.

Finally, recent work suggests that marriage is a significant demographic influence. Wilson and Lusztig (2004) find evidence of a "marriage gap," such that married voters are more likely to prefer a conservative party (in their study, either the Reform or the Canadian Alliance Party) and tend to be morally more traditional than unwed voters. Thus, the study of sociodemographic voting factors has revealed some interesting features of the Canadian case: class matters little, region matters much, religion is an important cleavage, and significant gender and marriage gaps exist.

Values and Beliefs

Another category of vote choice factors includes the values and beliefs of voters. Most voters hold fundamental or underlying attitudes about politics that can be important factors in their vote decisions. Examples of such factors are views of the proper role of the state in society and the economy; affective orientations of voters to the political system (including cynicism, trust, and regionalism); and voters' beliefs about the best means of accommodating Quebec and Canada's political and economic integration with the United States. Blais et al. (2002a) suggest that

underlying beliefs must be taken into account in any attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of vote choice in Canada.

In their book on the 1997 Canadian federal election, Nevitte et al. (2000) highlight the role of ideological foundations of vote choice in Canada. They demonstrate the relative ideological coherence of party supporters, with Reform Party supporters (the data are from the 1997 election) closest to the economic and social "right" and NDP supporters closest to the "left." True to their brokerage histories, Nevitte et al. observe that supporters of both the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals closely mirrored one another on a number of dimensions between the poles of NDP and Reform supporters, echoing earlier findings by Scarrow (1965) that the Progressive Conservative and Liberal Parties were very similar in terms of policy. These findings are reinforced by the results of Scotto, Stephenson, and Kornberg (2004).

Blais et al. (2002a) provide some sense of the magnitude of the effects of values and beliefs in the 2000 Canadian federal election. They observe that including measures of values and beliefs, such as social conservatism, free enterprise, attitudes toward minorities, feminism, religiosity, regional alienation, and cynicism in the model of vote choice contributes 10 percentage points to the explained variance of the model for voters outside Quebec. Within Quebec, the amount of variance explained through values and beliefs jumps 40 percentage points (largely based on the impact of attitudes regarding sovereignty).

Beyond this, a number of other scholarly contributions over the past fifteen years articulate how beliefs and attitudes influence voting. One study considers the role of antiparty attitudes on vote choice (Bélanger 2004). As a type of value orientation toward the political system, Bélanger distinguishes between "specific antipartyism" (rejection of major political parties such as Liberals or Conservatives) and "generalized antiparty" sentiment (rejection of political parties *en masse*). He finds that voters who reject traditional major parties (such as the Liberals or Conservatives) are more likely to vote for a third party (such as the Bloc Québécois or the Reform Party), whereas voters who express generalized antipartyism are more likely to abstain. Building on the role of underlying values and beliefs in third-party vote choice, Bélanger and Nadeau (2005) consider the role of political trust and the effects of its decline among the Canadian electorate. This article demonstrates that, whereas increasing distrust in the Canadian electorate fostered abstention, it had a more significant impact by facilitating third-party support.

Partisanship

One of the most studied aspects of the Michigan tradition of voting research in Canada is partisanship. Early researchers found that partisanship was an important consideration for Canadian vote choice, but the nature of Canadian partisanship has been an issue of significant debate since the 1970s. In the American context, partisanship is considered to be a stable, long-standing attachment that individuals refer to when making political choices (Campbell et al. 1960). However, the institutional context differs significantly between Canada and the United States, making salient the question of whether the concept can be exported. This issue was also raised with respect to partisanship in Britain (Butler and Stokes 1974). Indeed, there are a number of reasons to expect that partisanship might not explain electoral behaviour in the Canadian case as well as it does in the American one. For example, Canada lacks institutional arrangements (such as primaries and multiple ballots) favouring the development of party identification; for decades the two main parties were similar moderate, centrist parties; and there is a lack of symmetry between many of the party systems at federal and provincial levels, which might undermine the development of a consistent attachment to a particular party (Uslaner 1989; Gidengil 1992).

Meisel (1973, 67) sparked significant debate with his observation that “the concept of Party Identification, as used by scholars associated with the Michigan Survey Research Center ... may be almost inapplicable in Canada.” Jenson (1975) and Elkins (1978), in this vein, argued that Canadian partisanship was of a different sort – more flexible, less stable, and more tied to vote choice than in the United States. In Jenson’s view, partisanship “travelled with the vote” and thus was hard to distinguish as a separate attachment. Sniderman, Forbes, and Melzer (1974) strongly disagreed with this conceptualization of Canadian partisanship and took pains to argue that Canadian and American partisanship are of the same breed. This strand of research produced one of the most interesting amendments to the Michigan model and perhaps the most significant in terms of the study of Canadian voting behaviour.

Harold Clarke, Lawrence LeDuc, Jane Jenson, and Jon Pammett were responsible for conducting the Canadian Election Studies during the 1970s and 1980. Their research produced several volumes, beginning with *Political Choice in Canada* (1979). In it, the authors argue that partisanship in Canada can best be understood as having two variants – a flexible type and a durable type. Durable partisans can be understood,

and classified, in the same way as American partisans. That is, their vote choice is strongly influenced by their partisanship, and their partisanship remains a significant identity even between elections. Flexible partisans, on the other hand, are individuals who hold their attachment much less strongly and are more likely to be swayed by the more proximate aspects of a vote decision, such as issues and candidates (the other aspects of the Michigan model). In fact, partisanship can be influenced by the same factors as vote choice; thus, for some, partisanship does indeed “travel with the vote” (Leduc et al. 1984, 478). Clarke and his colleagues used this framework to analyze the elections held between 1974 and 1993 and consistently found that flexible and durable partisans were swayed to differing degrees by vote considerations. LeDuc et al. (1984), for example, demonstrated the volatility and instability of the Canadian electorate using the panel surveys of 1974-1979-1980. These findings were replicated in a later study as well (Clarke, Kornberg, and Wearing 2000).

The finding of instability in Canadian partisanship marks a real departure from the original articulation of the Michigan model, and it is not without critics (see, for example, Schickler and Green 1997; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; and Gidengil et al. 2006b). Johnston (1992) and Blais et al. (2001a) have made the argument that the question wording used by Clarke et al. (1979) in their panel study may have been flawed. The central problem, according to Johnston (1992) and Blais et al. (2001a), is that the response categories did not allow for the option of not identifying with any of the parties. As a result of being required to choose one party in order to answer the survey question, the incidence of partisan volatility may have been inflated. Thus, Blais and his colleagues argue that the flexible and durable partisan approach to partisanship in Canada “underestimates the number of durable partisans and overstates the flexibility of Canadians’ partisan ties” (2002a, 116). Clarke, Kornberg, and Scotto (2007), however, suggest that there is experimental evidence to the contrary. Regardless of this debate, recent findings suggest the ongoing importance of partisanship as a key explanatory factor underlying the stability of Canadians’ vote choices (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Gidengil et al. 2006a). Indeed, Blais et al. (2002a) go so far as to argue that understanding the outcome of the 2000 Canadian federal election is impossible without taking into consideration the role of party identification. Thus, despite the potentially different nature of partisanship in Canada compared with that in the United States, it remains a fundamental factor in understanding Canadian voting behaviour.

Issue Opinions

A central expectation of the Michigan model of voting is that shorter-term factors, such as issues and economic evaluations, have significant effects on the vote decision. Issues can include diverse phenomena such as moral issues (such as abortion or same-sex marriage), fiscal issues (spend/tax more/less), public policy issues (such as health care or the environment), as well as election or government-specific issues (such as the sponsorship scandal). The collective wisdom suggests that issues do matter in Canadian voting (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Gidengil et al. 2006a). However, depending on the circumstances of the specific election, there might be differences in the sorts of issues that matter to voters and how much they matter. For instance, one of the defining issues in the 2000 federal election campaign was health care and the existence of some ambiguity regarding the Canadian Alliance Party's true intention for the maintenance of public health care. Blais et al. (2002a) observe that favourable views of public health care increased the probability of voting for the incumbent Liberal Party by 2.2 points in the 2000 federal election.⁵ In comparison, Gidengil et al. (2006a) observe that views of health care in the 2004 federal election increased the probability of voting for the Liberal Party by two points.⁶

Beyond differences between elections in terms of the importance and nature of issue voting, Fournier et al. (2003) find that the importance that voters place on issues can mediate their impacts on voting. According to this line of research, voters more concerned about a particular issue (for example, health care) assign more weight to their evaluation of government performance on that issue when voting. This also relates to issue ownership. Nadeau et al. (2001) show that perceptions of party competence on specific issues are important factors in one's vote decision in Canada. Bélanger and Meguid (2008) go a step further to identify, in keeping with Fournier et al. (2003), that the salience of an issue is a factor in whether or not issue ownership of that specific issue will guide voters.

Another type of issue voting refers to evaluations of the economy. A number of pieces have been published articulating the relationship between economics and vote choice in Canada. Specific accounts of the 1997, 2000, and 2004 Canadian federal elections suggest a noticeable yet limited effect on vote choice in those elections (Nadeau et al. 2000; Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Gidengil et al. 2006a). Additionally, a range of studies has continued to demonstrate the salient effects of

economic conditions (and subjective perceptions of them) on federal incumbent support (Happy 1986, 1989, 1992; Clarke and Kornberg 1992; Nadeau and Blais 1993, 1995; Gélinau and Bélanger 2005; Anderson 2008).⁷ Other studies demonstrate how federal economic voting differs by regions of the country (Godbout and Bélanger 2002) and the role of local economic conditions on federal vote choice (Cutler 2002). Further fleshing out the economic bases of party choice in Canada, Perrella (2005) suggests that short-term economic perceptions explain support for “mainstream parties” (Liberals and Conservatives), whereas long-term economic changes (such as unemployment and labour force participation rates) account for some of the support for non-mainstream parties.

A few studies have also considered the role of economic conditions on government support at the provincial level. Tellier (2006) finds that provincial economic conditions have an effect on provincial government popularity and, in particular, that unemployment shapes support for left-wing parties and that the nature of public deficits structures support for centre and right-wing governing parties. Similarly, Anderson (2008) observes that subjective evaluations of provincial economic conditions strongly shape provincial vote choice. In contrast, Gélinau and Bélanger (2005) find little support for the role of provincial economic conditions in provincial incumbent support. Rather, they report that provincial incumbent support tends to be driven by national economic conditions.

A related strand of work considers the relative importance of issues versus the economy. Election-specific findings suggest that, at least in the Canadian case, economic evaluations have a limited impact on vote choice (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Gidengil et al. 2006a). Beyond this, Blais et al. (2002b) suggest that in the 1997 federal election, issues were decisive in the vote decision for about 9 percent of voters, and the economy was decisive for about 4 percent of the electorate. Comparing Canada with the United Kingdom and the United States, the authors observed similar results: both issues and the economy influenced vote choice, but issues had a greater effect (Blais et al. 2004b).

Candidate Evaluations

The evaluation of candidates is the final major component of the Michigan model, after partisanship and issues. Views of party leaders and their leadership have proven to be an important component in the Canadian

vote calculus. Indicative of CES findings in other years, Gidengil et al. (2006a, 18) observe that “really liking the leader (in the 2004 election) increased the probability of voting for his party by 20 to 28 points.” In Clarke et al.’s (1996) assessments of voting in the 1993 election, they also found that leader evaluations were important. Considering the same time period, Brown et al. (1988) apply a schema framework to attempt to understand the organization of leader evaluations in the minds of citizens. They find that leader images are shaped more by perceptions of a prototypical leader than by specific evaluations of individual leaders. The specific characteristics of a party leader also have an effect on vote choice. Cutler (2002) finds a negative relationship between vote choice and voters’ increasing sociodemographic dissimilarity with party leaders. With respect to gender specifically, O’Neill (1998) finds that female leaders in the 1993 election attracted women to their parties. Finally, while Johnston (2002, 173) observes that evaluations of leaders’ character and competence have an influence on vote choice, he suggests that the effects are a “factor at the margins” of electoral choice. As a result, when an election is close, Johnston suggests that it may be worth focusing on leaders’ personalities.

Aside from leaders, voters have also been found to consider the candidates in their own ridings (Cunningham 1971).⁸ There is evidence of an incumbency advantage in provincial and federal elections, such that voters are more likely to prefer incumbent candidates than others (Krashinsky and Milne 1983, 1985) even when there are particularly large shifts in voter preferences during the election (Krashinsky and Milne 1986). More generally, Blais et al. (2003a) find that many Canadians form preferences about their local candidates, especially those voters who live in rural ridings and are more politically knowledgeable. These preferences were decisive considerations for 5 percent of voters in the 2000 election. Thus, the research indicates that local candidates do matter for vote choices, although in a limited way.

Campaign Effects

Last but not least, in terms of the sociopsychological model, the funnel of causality recognizes the potential influence of campaigns on vote choice. With few exceptions, the factors chronicled to this point pertain to influences outside of or prior to an election campaign. Although views of issues or leaders might be mobilized during campaigns, the

independent effects of these factors can crystallize electoral decisions for some voters prior to an actual election (as the above discussion of campaign effects makes clear). Indeed, Fournier et al. (2001) find that, in Canada, close to 50 percent of the electorate make up their minds before an election campaign gets under way. Although the relatively high degree of pre-campaign vote deciders introduces a certain degree of vote choice stability during an election campaign, it also suggests that there is a significant proportion of the electorate for whom the campaign can be pivotal in their electoral decision making. Building on the findings that challenge the minimal effects thesis, a number of recent pieces in the literature on Canada look at the effect of campaigns on vote decisions.

Following on their 2001 piece, Fournier et al. (2004) question the extent to which voters are actually influenced by campaign events and media coverage. They find that the vote intentions of campaign deciders are not randomly volatile but reflect specific campaign events and media coverage. Additionally, they confirm that pre-campaign deciders are not influenced by campaign events. These findings nicely complement the work of Johnston et al. (1992), which provides strong evidence that strategic choices by the candidates in terms of which issues to focus on can have significant effects on the outcome of the election. In their book, Johnston et al. chronicle how the choice to campaign on the free trade issue pushed consideration of the Meech Lake issue to the background and made opinions about free trade strong influences on vote choice.

Given the focus on leaders in politics generally but particularly in an election campaign, leadership debates have the potential to fundamentally shift a party's electoral fortunes.⁹ That said, evidence from recent Canadian elections suggests that such debates may not always be important. LeDuc (1994), for example, shows that the 1993 debates did little to affect the election outcome, although they did have some effect on voter perceptions of Kim Campbell and Jean Chrétien. Assessing the role of the 1997 Canadian election leaders' debate, Blais et al. (1999) find that, though the debate had a substantial impact on vote intention, this effect was temporary and ultimately negligible in the outcome of the election. In contrast, in the 2000 Canadian election, Blais et al. (2003b) observe that the leaders' debates significantly improved the electoral prospects for the Conservative Party under Joe Clark and hurt those of the Chrétien Liberals.

Proximity Voting

In regard to rational choice models of voting, work within the Canadian case has been limited. The debate over whether the proximity model performs better than the directional model has been taken up by Canadian scholars, although the block recursive and sociopsychological models have received much more attention. Contrary to the work of Macdonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz (1991) in the American context, both Johnston, Fournier, and Jenkins (2000) and Blais et al. (2001c) find that the proximity model is more appropriate than the directional model in the Canadian case, using data from the 1993 and 1997 federal elections.

Strategic Voting

Although the proximity and directional models of voting have received limited consideration in the Canadian literature, the application of strategic models of voting has been much more prominent and productive. Canada is a particularly good case study for strategic voting because of the prominence of third parties, especially the longevity of the NDP despite never having formed the government. The earliest study of strategic voting in Canada was conducted by Black (1978), who found evidence in favour of the probability component of the expected utility model (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1972) in the 1968 and 1972 election studies. Merolla and Stephenson (2007b), also using the expected utility model, found evidence of strategic voting in the 1988-2000 elections.

Advances in the study of strategic voting have also emerged from studies of Canada. Blais and Nadeau (1996) propose a two-step procedure for evaluating strategic voting that concentrates on voters who have a clear incentive to vote strategically. Blais et al. (2001b) found that perceptions of the likelihood of the local candidate winning had more influence on strategic behaviour than perceptions of which party was likely to form the government. This finding suggests the importance of local context and competition over national contests when understanding what influences the decision to vote strategically. In another paper, Blais (2002) developed an argument for why third-party supporters might not follow the strategic voting logic, using evidence from the 1988 election. Finally, Blais and Turgeon (2004) argue that strategic voting levels may be low because many voters are ill informed about the chances of the candidates in their ridings, on which their strategic voting decisions may depend.

Thus, though spatial models of voting are less prominent in the Canadian literature, there are some areas in which applying the rational voter model has been used productively.

Turnout

The spatial model of voting also has expectations about the decision to vote in the first place. All of the elaborate theory and sophisticated statistical modelling to unravel the puzzles of electoral decisions would be inconsequential if no one decided to vote. Although not a focus of early voting studies, the issue of turnout has become more prominent in Canada in recent years due to the declining rates of turnout. In the 1988 federal election, about 75 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote, and this was broadly consistent with postwar levels of turnout in Canadian federal elections.¹⁰ However, national turnout declined in each of the next four federal elections; in 2004, just over 60 percent of registered voters turned out.¹¹ Although turnout rose to 64 percent in 2006, it dropped again in 2008 to 59 percent. In part motivated by these real-world dynamics, a range of work has been published that seeks to understand, in the Canadian case, why turnout has declined. The central finding for declining turnout levels focuses on youth (in particular, those voters born after 1970) and the relatively lower likelihood of youth to turn out (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002a; Pammett and LeDuc 2003; Blais et al. 2004a). Findings from the 2000 Canadian election suggest that youth may be as much as 27 percent less likely to turn out compared with the oldest cohort of voters (Rubenson et al. 2004), although there is some evidence that youth turnout increased in 2004 (Elections Canada 2005; Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner 2007). Beyond the central observation that youth are less likely to turn out, the question of *why* has also occupied the research agenda in recent years. Blais et al. (2004a) find evidence of period and life cycle effects and argue that the decline is evidence of a cultural change toward lower levels of political interest and democratic duty. Howe (2006) focuses on the importance of political knowledge in turnout, drawing on findings from a comparison of Canadian data and data from the Netherlands. Finally, Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner (2007) argue that turnout decline can be blamed on the decline in the competitiveness of elections. To date, however, no completely satisfactory answer for why turnout has declined in Canada has been reached.

Organization of the Book

As the above review indicates, the study of voting behaviour in Canada has come a long way since the first applications of the Columbia model by Meisel and others. A great deal is known about what matters to Canadians when they decide whom to vote for – and a great deal remains to be understood. What is most obvious, however, is that no single model or explanation is able to provide a comprehensive and complete explanation of how Canadians vote. Indeed, recent work (aside from the books of the CES teams, using the block recursive model) tends to focus on understanding how one factor matters for voting, such as region or gender. In the chapters that follow, this trend is continued. This introductory chapter should be considered background for the upcoming chapters – each takes as its point of departure a theory or regularity of voting behaviour (Canadian or comparative) and examines it in terms of modern Canadian voting behaviour.

This book is divided into three sections. First, we consider the explanatory role of long-standing attachments in modern Canadian elections – those prioritized in the Columbia model of voting. The chapter by Goodyear-Grant looks at the role of gender in Canadian voting behaviour. In particular, she considers who is more likely to vote for female candidates and assesses the reasons that some people are more likely to vote for female candidates than male candidates. Drawing on theories of female political involvement, and using data from a recent election, this chapter makes a novel contribution to the study of gender and politics in Canada by evaluating the applicability of these theories for female Canadian voters.

The chapters by Bilodeau and Kanji and Stephenson address two of the long-observed regularities highlighted by Blais (2005) – that non-European immigrants and Catholics prefer the Liberal Party over all others. Bilodeau and Kanji address the issue of immigrants – specifically the “new” immigrants from non-European countries. Central questions driving their analysis include how strong are immigrants’ allegiances to the Liberal Party, and are immigrants more likely to maintain that allegiance than native-born Canadians or immigrants from European countries? Stephenson’s chapter considers the enduring bond between Catholics and the Liberal Party. Stephenson assesses the strength of this relationship by considering the impact of issue disagreements (over same-sex marriage and the sponsorship scandal) on the bond in the 2004 and 2006 Canadian federal elections.

Another long-standing attachment, specifically highlighted by the Michigan model of vote choice, is partisanship. As detailed above, the debate over the nature of partisan identification in Canada remains a significant and interesting part of the study of Canadian voting behaviour. The chapter by Bélanger and Stephenson addresses this debate by questioning whether political parties themselves have a role in determining the nature of attachments that voters develop. Specifically, since the entrance of non-brokerage parties (Reform/Alliance, Bloc Québécois) to the party system, has there been a difference in the type of allegiance that partisans hold for the various parties?

The next section of the volume considers shorter-term influences on Canadian voting behaviour, also recognized in the funnel of causality: issues and leader evaluations. Anderson's chapter looks at issue voting in the context of the economy and teases out the relative importance of different types of economic evaluations in recent elections. This is the first time that such issues have been addressed in the Canadian context since the 1980 election (Uslaner 1989). The chapter by Bélanger and Nadeau also looks at the impact of economic conditions on voting behaviour but in the sense of investigating whether prolonged economic hardship leads to an increase in voting for non-traditional, third parties. In this sense, they consider how economic conditions are related to protest voting against the Liberal and Conservative Parties. The chapter by Bittner considers the role that perceptions of a leader's character and competence play in vote considerations. She asks whether Canadians differentiate between leaders, especially leaders of the same party, and whether these evaluations are isolated or related to evaluations of the other candidates.

The final two substantive chapters of the volume consider the most proximate considerations in vote choice – those related to the campaign. Matthews's chapter looks, with surprising results, at the effect of campaign issues on how voters cast their ballots. Despite the logic of the enlightenment theory of political campaigns (Gelman and King 1993), Canadians do not seem to exhibit these effects in recent elections. Pickup's chapter considers the impact of the publication of poll results – specifically how the information provided by polls affects voters' perceptions of the election race. His findings indicate that polls do influence voters, and his demonstration of how poll results can have lasting effects is particularly relevant for understanding the relationship between polls and election outcomes in the 2004 and 2006 elections.

We believe that these chapters (and thus this volume) represent an important step forward in cataloguing what is known about the “puzzle” of Canadian voting behaviour.¹² In the conclusion, we (Anderson and Stephenson) discuss the implications of the individual chapter findings for the collective understanding of how Canadians vote. The research in this volume recognizes that all voters are not the same – and the time for one-size-fits-all voting models, as in the Columbia and Michigan days, might be nearing a close. The factors that the major voting models identify remain important – but to best understand their impacts, we need to look at voters as separate beings who may have very different calculations when they enter the voting booth.

Notes

- 1 For an in-depth discussion of turnout and rational choice models, see Aldrich (1993).
- 2 Here we are referring to the research conducted by the principal investigators of the recent Canadian Election Studies; specifically, we are referring to Nevitte et al. (2000); Blais et al. (2002a); and Gidengil et al. (2006a).
- 3 Two important review articles that chronicle the study of voting behaviour in Canada prior to the 1990s are Elkins and Blake (1975) and Gidengil (1992).
- 4 Another group that has been identified as disproportionately supporting the Liberal Party is non-European immigrants (Blais 2005). This attachment is discussed further in Chapter 3 of this volume.
- 5 Based on results reported in Appendix C and among voters outside Quebec (Blais et al. 2002a).
- 6 Based on results reported in Table 4 and among voters outside Quebec (Gidengil et al. 2006a).
- 7 Although Carmichael (1990) finds no evidence of economic effects on federal government support, Nadeau and Blais (1993) suggest that this is due to different methodological choices in the modelling of aggregate economic effects.
- 8 Irvine (1982) presents evidence to the contrary, showing that MPs do not reap the benefits of constituency activities at election time. He argues that the Canadian electoral system does little to encourage a bond between MPs and constituents.
- 9 Although not considering the effects on vote choice per se, a number of pieces examine the media coverage of leader debates and campaign coverage more generally and the nature of bias introduced in these accounts (see, for example, Gidengil and Everitt 1999, 2003a, 2003b).
- 10 From the Elections Canada website, <http://www.elections.ca/>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Many of the chapters make use of sophisticated methodologies. For a general introduction to reading statistical results, please consult “Reading Political Behaviour: A Note on Methodology,” <http://www.politicalscience.uwo.ca/faculty/stephenson>.

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