

The Ontario Schools Question: Religion, Voting and the 2007 Ontario General Election

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Abstract

An issue central to the 2007 Ontario general election was one of the oldest questions in Canadian politics: religious education. John Tory and the Ontario Progressive Conservatives proposed the extension of public funding to non-Catholic religious schools. Such an explicit discussion of church and state is rather rare in contemporary Canadian elections. As religion is an important determinant of federal voter behaviour, this election provides an excellent opportunity to study the role of religious cleavages in Ontario politics. Using ecological analysis, this paper examines two key questions. First, is there a religious cleavage in Ontario? The evidence suggests that there is a division in voting patterns between Catholic-dominated and Protestant-dominated Liberals perform better in Catholic-dominated ridings, and Conservatives perform better in Protestant-dominated ones. Second, did the explicit religious context of the 2007 election have an impact on non-Christian religious voters? The data suggest that there is a relationship between communities with pre-existing religious school systems, which would have benefited in the short term from the proposed policy, and an increase in Conservative support in 2007.

Key words: Ontario politics, religious voting, 2007 Ontario general election.

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Problem

The last five decades have seen near mountains of evidence accumulate demonstrating the importance of the religious cleavage in shaping federal vote choice in Canada (Meisel 1956, Meisel 1975, Gidengil, 1992, Blais 2005). Repeated polling samples reveal the tendency throughout the last half-decade for Catholics outside Quebec to favour the Liberal Party, and for Protestants outside Quebec to have a similar bias toward the Conservative Party. Yet, despite this voluminous evidence, André Blais, in his 2005 presidential address to the Canadian Political Science Association, called the reason *why* this relationship exists “largely a mystery” (830).

One of the more puzzling elements to this question is that such a relationship exists in a seemingly secular political environment. The question then arises: if there is no explicit religious content in the political discourse, how can such a cleavage persist? While it is tempting to use Lipset and Rokkan’s frozen cleavage thesis (1967), it does not provide a sufficiently convincing theoretical underpinning to explain the process sustaining the religious cleavage.

The research that definitively answers this question would need to be ambitious, uncommonly insightful and expensive. This paper aspires to be none of these things. Instead of attempting to explain the *internal* workings of the religious cleavage in Canada, I will examine how the cleavage responds to explicit *external* religious cues. That is, what happens to the religious cleavage when one of the elements of the mystery – the secular political environment – is removed?

The 2007 Ontario general election provides a natural opportunity to study this situation. Both the 2003 and 2007 saw the Ontario Liberal Party win large majorities, with only small shifts in both the vote and seat count. Yet, in 2007, there was an explicit religious context, with Progressive Conservative leader John Tory centering much of his ill-fated campaign on a proposal to extend full funding to non-Catholic religious schools, a context missing in the 2003 vote.

From the evidence gathered, it appears that the religious groups responded to these external cues. That is, the religious group that would have materially benefited the most from the PC plan (the Jewish population, who already had a large education infrastructure in place) increased the support for the Tories. More accurately, ridings with large Jewish populations swung towards the Tories, a trend opposite that of most other ridings.

This paper also has a second aim. All of the above mentioned literature was set in a federal context. Do similar cleavages also exist at the provincial level? If one were to exist, it would suggest that the federal cleavage is simply not a singular, atavistic remnant of some past division, and that the process sustaining the federal divide – whatever that might be – is likely also at work at the provincial level.

I contend that such a cleavage exists in Ontario. Ridings with a plurality of Catholics have voted disproportionately for the Liberal party in (at least) the last three provincial elections; ridings with a plurality of Protestants have, by contrast, disproportionately supported the Progressive Conservatives. While the constraints of the analytical method used in this study (ecological analysis) restrain how vigorously I can make these claims, the data used herein are extremely suggestive.

Hypotheses, method and materials

This paper is grounded in two testable hypotheses. In this section, I will outline them, unpack the logic underpinning them and place them in the context of the wider literature. As hypotheses are only useful in that they may be tested empirically, I will also generate testable consequences (that is, predictions) that would be true if the hypotheses are correct.

H1. Religious affiliation shapes vote choice in Ontario. In particular, Catholics disproportionately prefer the Liberal Party and Protestants disproportionately favour the Progressive Conservative Party.

This hypothesis assumes that, much like at the federal level, a religious-based electoral cleavage exists during provincial elections in Ontario, with Catholics favouring the Liberals and Protestants favouring the Tories. The literature on the power of religious identification to shape voter choice is rich and complex. Scholars have often used religious identification as a way of measuring religious voting (see Alford 1963). It has the distinct advantage of being a simple measure of religious difference. To consider religion as a separate measure from other aspects of religion (like, for instance, religious intensity) suggests that religion has an element of identity.

A ‘religion-as-identity’ argument suggests that it is a vertical cleavage according to Dogan’s schema of political cleavages (1991: 25), which would predict that political conflict structured around religious identity often results in spirited disputes and social unrest (Ibid.). This matches Andre Siegfried’s observation that disputes about religion were among the most contentious fights in Canadian politics (1906). Indeed, in many Anglo-American nations, Christian interdenominational conflict was often quite intense (McGreevey 2003: 91-105). The comparative literature suggests that such a cleavage can persist either due to family transference (Irvine 1974, though also see Johnston 1985), the freezing of social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), due to religion acting as “a repository of predispositions and information for politics” (Kotler-Berkowitz 2001: 525), or the active role of church institutions (Wittenberg 2006).

In Canada, the empirical literature is highly supportive of the existence of a religious-based electoral cleavage at the federal level, particularly outside of Quebec. The academic focus on the importance of religion in shaping our national politics dates back at least 100 years to Siegfried’s landmark study (1906: 19-58). The first empirical and quantitative analysis appeared a half-century later when John Meisel had the data showing a rather remarkable religious cleavage: while Protestant voters in Kingston were roughly evenly split in their support for the federal Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties in the 1953 election, 83 per cent of Catholics voted Liberal (1956: 486).

Following Meisel’s study, further empirical analysis only added further support to these observations. An analysis of the 1968 federal election showed a 25 per cent gap between Catholics and Protestants in their support for the Liberal Party (Meisel 1975: 259). Religious voting was the strongest determinant of vote choice from 1965 to 1979, and remained very strong afterwards (Gidengil 1992: 227). The persistence of the cleavage’s strength is remarkable: in 1984, the gap between Catholic and non-Catholic support for the Liberal Party was 15 per cent (228), while it increased slightly to 16 per cent by 2004 (Blais 2005: 9).

While the empirical evidence for this cleavage is as convincing as any establishing a social fact in our discipline, the explanations underlying why this pattern exists are as numerous

as they are conflicting. Pammett (1971) and Irvine (1974) offered a family socialization thesis, which was disputed by Johnston (1985). Meisel's initial study found that Catholics with a higher religiosity were more likely to vote Conservative than Catholics with a lower level of religious intensity, whereas Blais disagreed (2005: 826). Blais further rejected a series of other explanations: perceived Catholicity of the Liberal party; candidate religious affiliation; leader religious affiliation; or, the existence of a Catholic community (Ibid.: 826-830).

How can this hypothesis be tested? A natural way would be to examine individual-level survey data, which could explore the religious cleavage in Ontario in much the same way as studies focused on the federal level have. Yet, such a dataset is unavailable. Given this limitation, the best approach to observe the presence religious cleavage in Ontario is ecological analysis. Ecological analysis measures the relationship between two (or more) groups at the aggregate-level. Contrast this to the individual-level, large-N surveys such as the Canada Election Studies (CES). Whereas these survey datasets allow for the examination of correlations between large numbers of individual voters, ecological analyses look for correlations between census data in the aggregate.

In an effort to test the above-stated hypothesis, the ecological analysis undertaken in this study examines the relationship between the 2003 and 2007 Ontario general election results (the dependent variable) and religion (the independent variable) at the constituency-level. Univariate analysis will be performed, showing the relationship between ridings with dominant Catholic populations and ridings with dominant Protestant populations and the result of the vote. This approach ignores the various levels of Protestant and Catholic population, and simply classifies the ridings according to their dominant religious culture. Rather than assuming that the Liberal vote will increase as the Catholic population increases, for instance, this model is set up to show that the Liberal vote might be higher in predominantly Catholic ridings. This assumes that there is a larger religious community that exists, which offer heuristic cues and can re-inforce the strength and direction of the cleavage (Kotler-Berkowitz 2001: 525).

While a multivariate model or a correlation approach might seem more initially appealing, it is not necessarily superior, because it assumes that the difference between a riding with 5% Catholics and 10% Catholics is identical to the difference between a riding with 55% Catholics and 60% Catholics. Instead, this approach is consistent with a whole strain of literature that considers the major difference caused by religion to be the result of differing religious cultures, rather than various levels of religious residents (see Weber 1905, Huntington 1996). A major difference, naturally, is that instead of looking at national religious cultures, I am examining constituency-based ones. Yet, I think the situation is sufficiently analogous to justify the model.

There are also some concerns about ecological analysis, despite it being the only appropriate tool. The most serious concern is committing the ecological fallacy, which is when individual-level observations are drawn from the aggregate-level data. More technically, the problem arises because the frequencies present in individual correlations are not necessarily bound by the summative frequencies used in ecological correlations (Robinson 1950: 354). Robinson discussed the most famous example of this error in his devastating critique of the approach. In a number of studies on the relationship between race and rates of literacy, the ecological analysis showed that African-Americans were more likely to live in areas with higher rates of literacy. Yet, the individual-level survey data revealed that African-Americans were more likely to have lower rates of literacy. The ecological fallacy, then, was committed when it was inferred from the first piece of information that African-Americans were more literate.

A second problem is that the modeling possible using ecological analysis focuses on a single model of voter choice (the sociological model), and ignores the other two major approaches (the socio-psychological approach and the rational choice approach) (for a good summary of difference between these approaches, see Kanji and Archer 2001). Attitudinal data rather obvious are not available with census data, and therefore models conforming to the socio-psychological approach cannot be tested in this way. Moreover, as rational choice theory is, by definition, an individual-level approach, the aggregate-level ecological approach has an almost immediate obvious inappropriateness.

Keeping in mind the methodological limitations imposed by the available data and the selected approach, the following testable propositions can be stated:

P1.1: Average levels of voter support for the Liberal party were greater in Catholic-dominated ridings than in Protestant dominated ones. Conversely, support for the Progressive Conservative Party was greater in Protestant-dominated ridings than in Catholic dominated ones.

P1.2: The partisan gap in support was larger in Catholic-majority ridings than in Protestant-majority ones.

P1.3: The Liberal party won more seats in Catholic-dominated ridings than in Protestant-dominated ones.

A few technical notes are necessary at this point, regarding the constituencies themselves. In the 2003 to the 2007 elections, the ridings using by the Ontario government were not the same. That is, the 2003 election used the ridings proscribed by the 1996 federal representation order, mandating 103 constituencies in the province. (Ontario aligned with the federal representation order with the passage of the Fewer Politicians Act in 1996.) The 2007 election primarily used the newer 2003 representation order, which initially mandated 106 constituencies for the province. However, in an effort to increase representation in Northern Ontario, the province retained the boundaries for the 11 northern ridings, as they existed in the 1996 order. This left Ontario with 107, rather than 106, seats. In order to ensure unit heterogeneity, analysis also looks at the redistributed vote share, as calculated by Elections Ontario, when appropriate. The second focus of this paper – the response of the religious cleavage to the change in the external conditions (namely, the introduction of an explicitly religious context in 2007 where none existed in 2003) – requires a second hypothesis.

H2. In the context of an overall heightened religious salience, the PC vote increased among non-Christian religious voters who might have benefited from the policy.

There is seemingly very little literature on religious voting in Canada for non-Christian groups. In terms of the existing literature, the Jewish vote seems to have been predominantly for the Liberal Party (Laponce 1988: 701). Blais' (2005) finding that Liberal party success was heavily tied to Canadians of non-European origin is highly suggestive that Muslim and Hindu voters (predominantly from non-European countries) might have a marked preference for the

Liberal party. However, beyond this, and popular assumptions about politics, there are little in the way of studies that deal with the empirical evidence in this regard.

How can this be studied empirically? First, the same general approach – ecological analysis – will be used, keeping in mind the provisos detailed above. Second, it must be dealt with in a different way than Catholics and Protestants. There is no way to classify ridings as predominantly Jewish, Muslim or Hindu because there is only a single riding in the province that would fall into any of these categories (Thornhill has a large Jewish population). Instead, ridings can be classified as having “significant populations” of any of these religious groups. The definition of “significant” that I will use is a riding having at least 10% of its population being one of the three religious groups under consideration. While admittedly artificial, it provides a reasonable cut-off point for ridings that have large non-Christian religious populations, and those that do not. These three religious groups were selected because they are the largest three non-Christian religious denominations in Ontario and, accordingly, they might be expected to have the largest measurable effect on the vote. The change in the average vote levels for these constituencies can then be measured.

What could be expected from this? Simply using a simple rational actor model, communities that could benefit the most from this policy should, in principle, respond the most strongly. While all three non-Christian communities might be reasonably expected to benefit from this policy, the benefits would not be equal, at least in the short term. That is, religious communities with already established schools would benefit more than those would have to build the schools, as the established communities would not need to outlay initial expenditures like the less well-established ones.

Looking at available information, it seems clear that the Ontario Jewish population has the most to gain. Why? They have the largest number of privately operated schools registered with the Ontario Ministry of Education. According to the Ministry’s website, there are currently 336 religiously focused registered private schools in Ontario. Of these, 37 were registered as Jewish schools, 25 as Muslim schools and none were registered as Hindu schools. While the numbers of Jewish and Muslim schools might not seem significantly different, when the count is adjusted for population levels, they reveal that there is 1 Muslim school for every 14,101 Muslim residents, and 1 Jewish school for every 5,156 Jewish resident. This works out to an approximate 3:1 advantage for Jewish residents. As there are no Hindu schools there is no short-term benefit for the Hindu community.

Assuming they perform some sort of cost benefit analysis, and again keeping in mind the limitations of ecological analysis, the following testable proposition can be formulated:

P2.1: In 2007, the Progressive Conservative vote in ridings with significant Jewish populations increased at a rate greater than those with significant Muslim populations, which, in turn, increased at a rate greater than those with significant Hindu populations.

A second, perhaps less immediately interesting, question also arises. One of the necessary contexts for the above proposition to be theoretically justified is that there be an increase in the social salience of religion in the public sphere. To test this, a simple series of proposition can be introduced:

P2.2: In 2007, the number of mentions of the words “religion” and “religious” in the news media was greater than the number of mentions in the corresponding campaign period in 2003.

P2.3: In both elections, the number of mentions of the words “religion” and “religious” in the news media was greater than in the corresponding time periods before and after each election.

The first proposition will test if there was an increase in the number of times a news story mentioned the word “religion” or “religious”; the second measures whether this was part of a broader trend or a phenomenon endogenous to the 2007 election campaign. If it is shown that it is endogenous, then the condition that there was an increase in the salience of religious issues in the public sphere is met.

In terms of the practical tests involved, using the ProQUEST database, I counted the number of articles in which the word “religion” or “religious” was mentioned in articles appearing in the 10 largest English-language newspapers in the province of Ontario. The data only include seven newspapers, as the ProQUEST database does not include the archives of the Toronto Sun, the London Free Press or the Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal. There does not appear to be a reasonable way to access this information otherwise. Combined, the seven newspapers being examined reach an audience of 8.9 million readers.

Observations

The first testable proposition stated that average levels of voter support for the Liberal party would be greater in Catholic-dominated ridings than in Protestant dominated ones and the reverse would be true for the Progressive Conservatives. Table 1 shows how this test performed.

Table 1: Average vote share by riding, classified by dominant religious group

Dominant group	2003			2007		
	Lib	PC	NDP	Lib	PC	NDP
Catholic	51.1	27.3	17.6	46.7	24.6	20.1
Protestant	42.6	39.5	14.2	38.0	36.2	15.3
Difference	+8.5	-12.2	+3.4	+8.7	-10.6	+4.8

This data confirm the first proposition. The Liberals received a higher average vote in Catholic ridings than they did in Protestant ones. The reverse was true for the Progressive Conservatives, who ran very close with the Liberals in both 2003 and 2007 in Protestant-dominated ridings. The New Democrats on average did better in Catholics ridings than Protestant ones. These findings are consistent with the federal cleavage.

The second proposition considered whether these numbers were affected if only ridings with either Catholic or Protestant majority populations were examined. Table 2 outlines the results.

Table 2: Average vote share by riding, classified by majority religious group

Majority group	2003			2007		
	Lib	PC	NDP	Lib	PC	NDP
Catholic	53.9	21.9	21.0	53.5	23.2	19.4
Protestant	42.0	42.5	11.9	42.2	37.7	14.8
Difference	+11.9	-20.6	+9.1	+11.3	-14.5	+4.6

The results here show an even stronger relationship between the type of riding under consideration and the average vote share. The “Catholic gap” here is about 3% higher for the Liberals, and on average six per cent higher for the Conservatives (in the opposite direction). The fact that the differences are larger as the denominational homogeneity increases suggests that the division of ridings into ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ groups is indeed helpful and that the results are not merely some statistical co-incidence.

Proposition three concentrated on the results at the riding level in terms of the number of seats won. That is, which parties won more seats in the Catholic ridings, and in the Protestant ridings? Table 3 shows the results. The results from 1999 were included to look at how the cleavage was structured in a case where the Liberals did not win the election.

Table 3: Number of seats won by party, classified by dominant religious group

Dominant group	1999			2003			2007		
	Lib	PC	NDP	Lib	PC	NDP	Lib	PC	NDP
Catholic	24 (48%)	20 (40%)	6 (12%)	43 (86%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	41 (85%)	2 (4%)	5 (10%)
Protestant	7 (15%)	38 (81%)	2 (4%)	24 (51%)	21 (45%)	2 (4%)	25 (49%)	23 (45%)	3 (5%)
Difference	+33%	-41%	+8%	+35%	-39%	+4%	+36%	-39%	+5%

The cleavage that exists with respect to the number of seats won by each party is remarkably consistent from election to election. The inter-year variation is minimal, with the Liberals winning between 33% and 36% more of the Catholic seats than of the Protestant ones, the Progressive Conservatives winning between 39% and 41% more of the Protestant seats and the New Democrats winning between 4% and 8% more of the Catholic seats.

The strength of correlation in these data makes the strength of the religious cleavage in Ontario even more apparent. For example, the Liberals won more Catholic-dominated seats in 1999 than did the Conservatives, even though they lost the election. The election loss can be accounted for in the Protestant seats, which went overwhelmingly for the Conservatives (81%). The reverse is true in 2003 and 2007. The Conservatives only narrowly lost the Protestant-heavy seats, winning 45% of them each time. Yet, they only won 6% and 4% of the Catholic-dominated seats in these two elections.

Second hypothesis

The second hypothesis dealt the change in the vote in ridings with significant religious minority communities. Tables 4 through 6 detail the changes from 2003 to 2007. A word about the year column is in order. As might be expected, the rows labeled 2003 and 2007 refer to the

average vote share in the selected ridings. However, the row labeled 2003r is the average vote share earned in 2003 with the riding boundaries redistributed to those used in 2007. When direct comparisons are made, it is this redistributed number that is used as the baseline in order to ensure fair comparison across the elections.

Table 4: Average vote share, ridings with significant Muslim populations

	Lib	PC	NDP
2003	53.8	32.0	8.6
2003r	46.9	36.9	8.9
2007	45.9	32.0	12.2
Change	-1.0	-4.9	+3.3

Table 5: Average vote share, ridings with significant Hindu populations

	Lib	PC	NDP
2003	56.6	25.3	8.7
2003r	56.6	25.3	10.2
2007	54.2	21.2	16.8
Change	-2.4	-4.1	+6.6

Table 6: Average vote share, ridings with significant Jewish populations

	Lib	PC	NDP
2003	54.5	31.1	10.5
2003r	53.2	31.8	10.4
2007	45.4	35.6	10.6
Change	-7.8	+3.8	+0.2

The patterns found here are indeed quite striking. In ridings with large Muslim and Hindu populations, the PC vote share declined to a greater extent than did the Liberal vote share. In both cases, the NDP vote increased. Yet, in the ridings with significant Jewish populations, the PC vote share actually increased by 4%, while the Liberal vote share fell, on average, by 8%. This suggests that there was some increased affinity for the Progressive Conservative Party by ridings with large Jewish communities. One apparent source for this increased affinity is the religious schools policy as promoted by John Tory. This finding is further reinforced by the fact that the single riding that changed hands from the Liberals to the Conservatives was Thornhill, which has the largest Jewish population in the province.

This is entirely consistent with the hypothesis laid out earlier. In order of the short-term benefits expected from the policy, the Jewish community had three times as many already registered private religious schools as the Muslim community. The Hindu community had none. It cannot be surprising, then, that the Jewish community seemed to respond disproportionately positively to the stimulus of a publicly funded religious school system. It is not due to any unique aspect of Jewish faith or culture. Rather, it is more of a rational calculation: the infrastructure, to a great extent, already exists to take advantage of a policy like that proposed by Tory, whereas as it existed only to a more limited extent in the Muslim community, and not at all

in the Hindu community. Unlike I proposed in P2.1, vote share for the Tories actually dropped in ridings with larger Muslim and Hindu populations. However, this is not inconsistent with the underlying hypothesis, or the evidence regarding the short-term benefit analysis.

A final condition of this argument must be discussed: the increase in religious salience during the election. Indeed, this argument loses much of its theoretical appeal if the 2007 election did not take place in a more religiously salient environment. If it did not, then the possibility of a ‘natural experiment’ that this election offers is lost. As discussed earlier, such a question can be tested using a quick content analysis of newspapers in time period of the 2003 and 2007 elections. Table 7 illustrates the results.

Table 7: Media mentions, ‘religion’ and ‘religious’, 2003 and 2007

	Pre	Election	Post	Pre	Election	Post
	8/2/03	9/2/03	10/3/03	8/10/07	9/10/07	10/11/07
	9/1/03	10/2/03	11/2/03	9/9/07	10/10/07	11/10/07
Toronto Star	138	168	144	154	268	150
The Globe & Mail	168	148	133	148	239	173
National Post	122	94	93	152	204	190
Ottawa Citizen	153	144	121	161	237	164
Hamilton Spectator	91	100	89	73	130	72
Windsor Star	62	59	31	55	116	79
The Record (K-W)	112	104	82	92	168	90
Total	846	817	693	835	1362	918

The results presented above offer compelling confirmatory evidence for both of the propositions outlined in an earlier section of this paper. There was indeed an increase in the salience of religion during the 2007 campaign. Mentions of the word “religion” or “religious” were 68% more common during the 2007 campaign period than they were during the corresponding period in 2003.

Moreover, in the three month-long periods examined in 2003, coverage of religious issues in the seven newspapers under examination actually decreased over time. The campaign period had 3% less stories than the pre-campaign period; the period following the campaign had 18% less stories than the campaign itself. This illustrates that there is no automatic campaign effect whereby religion automatically becomes more salient. By contrast, the 2007 campaign had 63% more stories than the period that preceded it, and 48% more stories than the post-campaign period. This rather firmly establishes that there was indeed an increase in religious salience during the 2007 campaign that cannot be accounted for by either the passage of time (i.e. 2007 was generally more religious than 2003) or by some campaign effect (i.e. campaigns are always more religious oriented).

Conclusion

That all propositions successfully passed their empirical tests strongly suggests that hypothesis number one, concerning the presence of a religious cleavage that exists in Ontario similar to the one at the federal level, is true. This has a number of quite important implications. First, it says

that the federal cleavage is not some statistical fluke, as it also exists at the provincial level in Ontario. Second, it reinforces the importance of studying the role of religion and voter choice in Canada. While more attention has been given to the topic in the last few years, spending more of our disciplinary resources on trying to understand the relationship between religion and voting in Canada would be a worthwhile cause. We should not treat it as, in a phrase coined by Elisabeth Gidengil, the “unwelcome dinner guest” (1992). Moreover, it indicates that more work needs to be done, particularly examining religious cleavages at the provincial level. Particularly intriguing would be studies in provinces without strong Liberal parties, like Manitoba and Saskatchewan, or even British Columbia, which only has a pseudo-Liberal party and no Conservative party. Such studies would be worthwhile to look at the relationships where the choices facing voters are different.

Additionally, if all the propositions regarding the second hypotheses seem to be consistent with the empirical evidence (as they do, with some modifications to P2.1), then this implies that the religious cleavage, long dormant, can respond to explicit religious cues. Moreover, it does suggest that, despite his party’s loss, John Tory’s strategy of highlighting religious schooling as an issue worked as well as could have been anticipated. The problem was not so much that the strategy was executed poorly; the problem was that his strategy was one of maximal risk and minimal return. Of the major non-Christian religious groups, only the Jewish community had the infrastructure already sufficiently in place to benefit in the short-term from Tory’s plan without having to make significant capital investments. And, indeed, the Tories picked up the riding with the largest Jewish population, Thornhill. Yet, the strategy had no innate appeal to Catholic voters, who already had full public funding for their schools. Moreover, without the infrastructure already in place, there was no short-term benefit for the Muslim and Hindu voters. In terms of Protestant voters, a disproportionate number of them were already supporting the Tories without this policy. Furthermore, Protestants are not an especially coherent group, and targeting them as a unified group is always an error, as Protestantism can range from Anglicanism (which is very similar to Catholicism) to evangelical denominations (which are markedly different).

In summary, this paper makes two minor contributions to the literature. First, it suggests that a religious cleavage exists in Ontario, in a similar way to the cleavage found at the federal level. An individual-level survey collecting attitudinal and behavioural measures would be helpful at improving our knowledge in this regard. Moreover, it suggests that research done at the provincial level, particularly in areas with markedly different party systems, would be illuminating. Second, it suggests that, even though we are unsure of what is going on inside the religious cleavage, it does respond to external forces, such as an increased level of religious awareness. This is important because it suggests that the religious cleavage is still an active aspect of the vote-making process.

It also suggests that Georges Polti was correct. In the nineteenth century, he wrote a book called *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* (1921) wherein he outlined the thirty-six basic plots found in literature, and how they were often repeated. Just as some of the earliest and most vicious fights in Canadian politics were waged about religious schooling, the events repeated themselves in 2007. Which one of Polti’s plots Tory’s strategy could be classified as is unknown (‘disaster’, ‘erroneous judgment’, or ‘conflict with a god’ come to mind; ‘adultery’ and ‘the necessity of sacrificing loved ones’ do not). Yet, with some careful analysis of the religious nature of the Ontario electorate could have prevented Tory from ending up on the wrong side of what is perhaps the thirty-seventh dramatic situation: an election.

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