

Who Supports the NDP?

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Introduction:

When Buzz Hargrove clad then-Prime Minister Paul Martin in a Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) jacket at a January rally during the 2006 federal election, many in both the public and the media were shocked by this apparent political about-face (Whittington, 2006). After all, the New Democratic Party (NDP) has long been considered the party of organized labour in Canada; the CAW even had a formal relationship and declaration of support for the party. Because of this, Hargrove's plea for strategic voting in ridings in which the NDP was not competitive seemed like a sizeable departure from the politics of the CAW specifically and the Canadian labour movement generally. However, even though many unions and their leaders have continued to support the NDP for years, the political behaviour of the union membership has been something else entirely. Many studies, including Archer's 1985 examination "The Failure of the New Democratic Party", have demonstrated that while union members are more likely to vote for the NDP than non-unionized citizens, the NDP is not even the choice of a plurality of these individuals.¹ From this viewpoint, Hargrove's actions seem less like a stunning departure and more like recognition of the electoral behaviour of his constituents.

Perhaps due to the realization that its traditional constituency, including organized labour, has yielded only limited success and influence in the federal Parliament, recent electoral platforms of the NDP indicate that the party has begun to actively court new constituencies in the 21st century, such as environmentalists and young voters. Since the 1997 election, the NDP has increasingly turned to new electronic media and communication tools such as the internet and email in order to "get connected" with younger voters (Whitehorn 2001, 125). The current NDP leader, Jack Layton, has also increased efforts to broaden the party's base of support by putting a renewed focus on issues such as education and the environment, which resonate with the target constituencies of youth and environmentalists (Gindin and Panitch 2003).

This paper addresses two aspects of this change. First, why would the NDP seek to alter their policies and strategies in this fashion? It appears that the NDP is attempting to broaden its appeal by attracting untapped constituencies and changing its political strategy from concentrating on traditional labour issues to appealing to new groups. This paper provides a framework for understanding the changes in the NDP's focus, structuring the occurrence in terms of post-materialist issues and New Politics. Second, what effect has this had on the electorate? Has there been an increase in the proportion of electoral support the NDP receives from young voters and those concerned with the environment? Has the altered focus of the party led to a decrease in support from its traditional union constituency? This paper examines the relationship between the NDP and young people, those who prioritize issues pertaining to the environment, and union members to see if the changes at the party level are reflected in the electorate. Using data from the Canadian Election Studies between 1988 and 2006, we examine support for the NDP (both in terms of voting preferences and party identification) in order to identify whether or not the support base of the NDP has changed since the party has broadened its electoral focus..

The Labour Origins of the NDP

Recent indications that the NDP has loosened its focus on labour-friendly issues represent a clear difference from the party's origins. The NDP was formed in 1961 as a compact between traditional supporters of the CCF and organized labour, represented by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The CCF wanted to expand its appeal outside of its western roots, while the

¹ See, for example, Blais et al. (2002: 94).

CLC was seeking a political vehicle for the labour movement in Canada, something neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives would provide. The involvement of labour unions and their membership in the party was at its peak during this time – 14.6 percent of all unions were affiliated with the party in 1963, a number which declined steadily in later decades (Whitehorn 1996, 330). Morton (1974) contends that many believed that the NDP would have a profound influence on both federal and provincial politics.

Studies of the voting preferences of union members during the NDP's formative years clarify the strength of the bond between labour and the party. Gagne and Regenstreif (1967) examined support for the NDP in 1965, focusing on economic and social factors including religion and union membership. They confirmed that not only were union members more likely to vote for the NDP than non-members, but that a plurality of union members surveyed supported the NDP. These findings reflect the initial promise that the party held for union members and labour leaders, as do the string of minority governments at the federal level that followed the entrance of the party into electoral competition. From the creation of the NDP in 1961, four of the next five federal elections produced minority governments (1962, 1963, 1965 and 1972) with the NDP holding the balance of power and achieving significant influence (such as in the reforms of social programs like medical insurance). In its early years, the NDP was able to gain greater influence than the CCF had ever enjoyed.

The strong electoral bond between the NDP and union members appears to have been short-lived, however. As previously mentioned, later studies regarding the NDP and the political behaviour of union members demonstrated that the party did not maintain the strong support of union members in later years. In addition, the NDP has not been able to claim privilege as the party of the working class to gain electoral strength. Scholars have found that the level of class voting is low in Canada (Alford 1963, Ogmundson 1975, Lambert and Hunter 1979, Kay 1977, Lambert et al. 1987) and that the absence of this traditional cleavage has had negative effects on the NDP's electoral fortunes (Zipp and Smith 1982, Pammett 1987).

During the 1980s, Archer (1985) examined several facets of the relationship between unions and the NDP as well as the political behaviour of their members. His findings departed from the earlier results of Gagne and Regenstreif, in that his results indicated that the NDP no longer commanded a plurality of the labour vote. Even among unions which directly affiliated themselves with the NDP, more union members reported their intention to vote for the Liberal party than the NDP. In a later study, Archer (1990) found that the NDP continued to be strongly associated with organized labour, relying upon the CLC and its affiliated bodies for both funds and political activists. Furthermore, his earlier findings were confirmed, as he found that the membership of these organizations had moved away from the NDP, supporting parties not as strictly committed to the cause of organized labour.

Archer's work on the relationship between the NDP, unions and citizens' political behaviour is a key contribution to our knowledge of the issue. Recent studies of Canadian elections have supported his results. The Canadian Election Study of 1997 found that voters belonging to typically-unionized professions, such as manual labourers and the public service, were not more likely to support the NDP than other parties (Nevitte et al, 2000), although they did find that union membership contributed to the likelihood of casting an NDP vote (p.147). Furthermore, in their analysis of the 2000 federal election, Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau and Nevitte (2002), found that the weak relationship that Archer observed between union membership and support for the NDP was "no longer the case (p. 94)." In fact, union members were much more

likely to support ideologically conservative parties such as the Canadian Alliance. In the 2004 election, however, union membership was again a significant indicator of an NDP vote (Gidengil et al. 2006). Thus, the recent evidence about union support for the NDP indicates that the relationship between union membership and support for the NDP has weakened from its 1960s levels, although it is still a factor to consider. This decline coincides with the decrease in union density in Canada; between 1975 and 1992 union density was fairly stable between 34 and 36%, but by 2007 it had declined to 25.5% (Johnson 2002; Strategic Policy, Analysis, and Workplace Information Directorate 2007). While labour may have the reputation of being the constituency of the NDP, vote evidence suggests that the relationship is far looser than popularly envisioned.

It is not clear whether this decline in support for the NDP is linked to changing economic conditions. Perrella (2005) found that non-mainstream parties, such as the NDP, appear to see an increase in support during long-term periods of economic decline. This may be even more likely in groups that experience economic volatility or have a common bond, such as those belonging to a union (p. 336-337). However, examining the NDP specifically, Erickson (1988) found that the relationship between economic conditions and support for that party was not strong. Even as unemployment peaked during periods in the 1980s, a coincidental rise in support for the party was not observed, as might be expected.

Given the weakness in electoral support from the NDP's traditional constituency, it should be of little surprise that questions were raised about the party's policies and strategy. After the highpoint of NDP electoral success in the 1988 federal election and the disastrous showing of 1993, in which the party lost official status for the first time since its inception, there were calls for change from numerous party stakeholders. The CLC commenced a formal review of its relationship with the NDP, while the party itself went through a series of "broadly-based renewal conferences" in 1994, as well as the election of a new leader in 1995 following the resignation of Audrey McLaughlin (Whitehorn 1997, 91-92). The early 1990s was a period of much reflection and concern for the NDP, as it seemed that a change in tactics and focus was required.² This was further demonstrated in 2001 when the New Politics Initiative was founded by a group of NDP MPs and left wing activists in an attempt to broaden the party's appeal and push it further to the left (Whitehorn 2005). They advocated reaching out to youth, environmentalists and other "progressive activists" and even attempted (unsuccessfully) to have the NDP disband to form a new party along these principals in an effort to attract more support (New Politics Initiative, 2001).

Shifting Priorities? An Analysis of Election Platforms

That self-reflection altered the party is evident in how the party has contested recent elections, in comparison to those in the late 1980s and 1990s. An examination of NDP election platforms from 1988 through 2006 reveals a shift in electoral priorities. Campaign platforms from 1988 – 1997 proposed numerous pro-labour policies and gave these prominent emphasis within their respective documents.³ All three platforms pledged to pursue a policy of full

² The NDP was also challenged by the rise of the Reform party in the 1993 election, causing the NDP to lose most of its seats in Western Canada, some of which had been held for several elections. The loss of support from rural Canada helped to encourage change within the party from the traditional CCF (rural Western Canada) – organized labour coalition.

³ It is worth pointing out that while there was an emphasis on policies favourable to organized labour in the three elections (1988, 1993 and 1997), this focus was weakest in 1988, in which the NDP's platform also prominently featured issues such as tax reform for families, equality for women, Aboriginals and other minority groups as well as

employment with all the economic resources of the federal government and argued that providing jobs was the best way to solve financial problems such as the federal budget deficit (NDP 1988, 1993, 1997). Another common labour theme in these three platforms was the criticism of free trade agreements (both the FTA and NAFTA) and a stated desire to ensure domestic control of the economy. Both the 1993 and 1997 platforms featured explicit promises to support the development and influence of unions, and in both cases, labour and employment policies comprised both the first and largest sections of the platforms⁴.

In contrast to this, the platforms of 2000, 2004 and 2006 place less emphasis on labour issues, with this dynamic increasing over time. According to the 2000 election platform, jobs were still the “first economic priority”, but employment policies appeared as only the third heading (of ten in total) within the document (NDP 2000, 8-10). These issues were given slightly more treatment than others in the platform (by a single page), but this represents a much smaller policy emphasis than in the past. The NDP platforms of 2004 and 2006 continued this trend of decreased focus on labour issues. In both platforms, criticism of free trade and NAFTA was toned down in comparison to earlier policies, focusing on concerns with specific sections (such as Chapter 11) rather than pledging to abrogate the agreement entirely. In 2004, labour-friendly policies such as ensuring domestic control of the economy, increasing EI benefits and creating jobs were scattered throughout the document and given brief treatment (only a page in each case) (NDP 2004, 45, 50-51, 58). Likewise, in 2006, protecting and creating jobs makes a brief appearance in the final omnibus chapter which also addressed diverse issues such as child care, security, immigration and seniors. This likely reflects the fact that unemployment was low at the time – 6.8% in 2005, far lower than it had been in the 1990s. However, this does not account for why the first job creation policies listed are maintaining a balanced budget and a competitive tax regime as opposed to supporting unions and direct federal involvement in the economy, as had been promised in past platforms.

The opposite trend can be seen when one examines the emphasis placed on policies pertaining to education and the environment. Though both issues are common to all NDP platforms between 1988 and 2006, there is a clear difference in focus. Before 2000, education and environmental policies were given a much lower profile than those concerning employment and the economy. In the 1993 platform, mentions of education and the environment were framed exclusively within the context of job creation. In 1997, environmental policies appeared on page 32 (of 39 total), while education policies shared a small section in the chapter with the NDP’s pledge of a national childcare program.

As with the trend for policies that appeal to organized labour, the focus of these platforms began to shift in 2000, with a more obvious change emerging in 2004 and 2006. In the 2000 platform, environmental issues were termed a “priority” and the platform also promised to make post-secondary education more affordable. Education is the third issue presented in the 2004 platform (following measures to strengthen communities and assist low-income individuals) while environmental policy comprises the majority of an entire chapter (9 out of 12 pages in the chapter, 62 total in the platform) in the official document (NDP 2004, 20-35). Likewise, in the

more funding for education. This is in contrast to the election platforms of 1993 and 1997 in which issues of employment, employee benefits and other labour-supported policies were by far the most prominent.

⁴ In 1993, the entire campaign platform concerned the strategy for and various benefits of the NDP’s full employment proposal, while in 1997, thirteen (of 53) pages were devoted to employment and labour policies (the next longest single-issue treatment was the tax and financial section, which was eight pages long).

NDP's 2006 platform, education and the environment make up entire chapters and several pages are devoted to discussing relevant policies pertaining to these issues. Furthermore, Jack Layton's introduction to the platform makes a specific appeal to young people, highlighting this demographic as a priority: "The NDP will create opportunities for young people... we've got common-sense proposals to increase the accessibility of post-secondary education and training" (NDP 2006, ii).

This examination of the NDP's electoral platforms from 1988 – 2006 reveals a clear shift in emphasis from policies concerned primarily with attracting the support of organized labour to a broader agenda that emphasized other issues such as education and the environment. This, however, does not provide any explanation for this change in strategy, nor why these particular constituencies were targeted, questions that are addressed below.

Finding New Constituencies: The NDP, Youth and the Environment

As previously mentioned, the NDP's poor record of electoral performance in the elections of 1993, 1997 and 2000 prompted a great deal of self-reflection within the party and its supporters. The shift in policy emphasis seems to indicate that the NDP's self-reflection led to a desire to broaden the party's base of support by attracting new groups and untapped constituencies. At the same time, in order to be successful electorally, the NDP would want to maintain the support base it already had. To understand how these dynamics led to the change that the party underwent, two points must be considered. First, what was the party's existing support and issue base? Second, how can we understand the NDP's decision to target young people and those who prioritize environmental issues?

Ideologically, the NDP's position is clearly to the left, both in terms of the party's positions and its supporters. According to Nevitte et al. (2000), supporters of the NDP were much less likely to support either "moral traditionalism" or free enterprise than any of the major parties.⁵ This tendency towards the left is supported when examining the position of NDP supporters on specific issues. Blais et al. (2002) examined nine key issues in Canadian politics, attempting to discern where party supporters fell on a left-right continuum.⁶ NDP supporters were found to be the most left-leaning on all nine of these issues, including expressing the most support for unions, social programs and women's rights, as well as the most scepticism towards corporations.

The findings on issue ownership are consistent with the NDP's ideological position as the left wing party on these various issues. Examining the federal election in 1997, Nadeau et al. (2001), found that the NDP was deemed to be the most competent in maintaining social programs (41% of responses), although only 13 percent of voters (outside Quebec) actually supported the party. The authors identify this gap as unique amongst the issue areas considered as this strong identification of issue ownership did not translate into votes (as was the case with other issues such as national unity) (p. 417). Similarly, Belanger (2003) argued that the "NDP is positively viewed as parliament's 'social conscience'" (p. 546), as the party scored highest for addressing unemployment and social programs, although its perceived competence on these issues was hindered by the low popularity of the party.

⁵ The elections included in the analysis were 1993 and 1997 and thus included the Liberal, Progressive Conservative, Bloc Quebecois, Reform and New Democratic parties.

⁶ The nine issue areas included were: business, unions, social programs, US and international trade, traditionalism, women, crime, immigrants and Quebec.

Thus, the NDP has a firmly established reputation on the left of the ideological spectrum, with issues of unemployment and social programs being particularly important. To broaden its support base, the party needed to maintain these supporters while attracting new, untapped constituencies. How could this be facilitated? One obvious answer is for the party to position itself favourably on a different dimension, to take advantage of new or emerging cleavages, while maintaining its existing position on the ideological spectrum. Evidence exists that Canadian voting behaviour fits with a proximity model of voting (Johnston et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2001); thus, if the NDP was able to position itself on a new voting dimension, it might be able to gather support from individuals who hold similar issue stances. While the traditional left-wing and labour issue stances remain a part of the NDP's policy, election platforms suggest that the party has targeted two groups in particular for growth: voters concerned with the environment and young people.

One relatively new cleavage in Canadian politics, available for the NDP to exploit, is rooted in post-materialist values. Nevitte (1996) has identified that Canadian values are changing (as is the case in most advanced industrial societies) in that more people are beginning to adopt a post-materialist worldview. Post-materialists are more likely to exhibit weaker connections to traditional political institutions, such as parties, exhibit a greater potential for protest and seek non-traditional avenues of participation (Nevitte and Kanji, 2002). Moreover, individuals who share these characteristics are more likely to be concerned with issues such as equality rights, globalization and the environment. These issues correspond with the priorities espoused by the NPI, Jack Layton and recent NDP election platforms.

By emphasizing the environment specifically as an issue area, the NDP is appealing to voters who possess post-materialist values. Blake (2002) argued that in Canada, post-materialism was a "key determinant" of concern for environmental issues. He found that a majority of individuals who exhibited post-materialist values supported protecting the environment over job creation. Thus, by give more prominence to its environmental policies, the NDP is attempting to broaden its support by leveraging this post-materialist value into new votes and supporters.

A similar explanation can be made for the NDP's efforts to attract young people. Young people continue to vote at much lower rates than the rest of the population (Pammett and LeDuc, 2004). However, young people are more likely to engage in non-traditional participation methods such as protest (Nevitte 1996). They are also much more likely to subscribe to post-materialist values than previous generations. It should not be surprising, then, that the NPI's website called for greater youth involvement and referenced the large anti-globalization protests (such as those against the G8) of the past few years. The NDP's new appeals to youth, as well as the broadening of its policy position to include a focus on education, an issue of great concern to young voters, can be seen as an attempt to tap into this immobilized (electorally) but potentially significant demographic.

This shift toward New Politics issues by the NDP in order to attract new supporters is not unique for a left-wing party. Examining political parties in Western Europe, Rohrschneider (1993) argues that some traditional left wing parties have been successful at absorbing New Politics, limiting the appeal of new parties that concentrate on issues such as the environment. This theory also suggests that the changes undertaken by the New Democrats might limit the potential of the Green Party to expand its support base.

It is important to note that this change in priorities was facilitated by three elements. The emergence of the New Politics Initiative (NPI) and the election of Jack Layton as party leader injected new ideas into the party, and changes to the funding of political parties loosened the bond between organized labour and the NDP. First, the NPI, founded in June 2001 by social activist Judy Rebick and MP Svend Robinson, emerged with calls to replace the NDP with a party that prioritized New Politics issues. The NPI called for this new party to be based upon grass-roots and participatory principles and network with other social movements and groups in order to form a new left-wing network in Canada (NPI 2001). This new movement gave priority to environmental policies in particular, as well as raising concerns about globalization and poverty. These issues echo those identified by Nevitte (1996) as post-materialist values, which suggests that they were appealing to many NDP members prior to any formal change in party policy. These ideas were put to the test during the NDP's 2001 convention, when the NPI's proposal of forming a new party was put to a vote. Although it was ultimately unsuccessful, 40% of the delegates supported this new direction, indicating that these New Politics ideas were fairly influential within the party (Foss 2001). Despite this setback, the NPI continued to participate within the NDP until they disbanded in 2004 (Whitehorn 2004).

Jack Layton's leadership can also be recognized as a facilitating element for the change in the policy focus of the NDP. After three elections (1993-2000) alternated from catastrophe (9 seats and 6.88% of the popular vote in 1993) to barely acceptable (21 seats and 11.05% in 1997) in the eyes of NDP members, the party entered the 2003 leadership convention seeking a new direction for the party. Both Audrey McLaughlin and Alexa McDonough had attempted to replicate the successes of Ed Broadbent and his predecessors by adopting established strategies, but these proved inadequate (Whitehorn 1994). Layton campaigned on a platform of reorienting the NDP to appeal to more Canadians by focusing on local issues such as affordable housing and public transportation, while still maintaining the party's role as an advocate of the left (Gindin and Panitch 2003). This included an increased emphasis on recruiting youth to the party by appointing the NDP's first-ever youth coordinator, increasing interaction between the party's central bureaucracy with clubs on campuses, and encouraging "youth activist camps" (Gindin and Panitch 2003). Layton also proposed an increased focus on environmental issues such as global warming. Despite competition from long-standing MPs, such as Bill Blaikie, Lorne Nystrom and Joe Comartin, who had stronger connections to the party's usual base of supporters (including organized labour), Layton handily won a majority of the votes on the first ballot.

Layton's new focus for the party is evident in his biography on the party's website. He lists priorities such as the environment, caring for seniors, increasing affordable housing, and improving opportunities for young people (NDP 2007). He recognizes the importance of "creating jobs", his fourth priority, but this is immediately supplemented by the caveat "... while transforming a polluting economy to a sustainable one" (NDP 2007). Unlike past pledges to develop Canadian industries (common throughout the 1988 and 1993 elections) or to introduce worker protection legislation, there is little specific appeal to union members, which is further evidence that the election of Layton corresponds with changing priorities.

Finally, the changes to electoral financing laws that came into force in 2004 also had an effect on the NDP's shift in priorities. As one of his final acts as Prime Minister, Jean Chretien introduced Bill C-24, a set of amendments that created annual limits to union and corporate donations of \$1000. The bill was specifically crafted so as to not allow different locals of the same union to be considered as separate entities (Jansen and Young 2005). This had the

potential to significantly affect the NDP, as the changes brought public funding to the party which had long depended upon organized labour as a source of funding. As Jansen and Young (2005, 8) explain:

If organized labour has been relatively unsuccessful in delivering votes to the party, it has been an important, though not the dominant, source of financing for the party... In the period from 1975 to 2002, unions contributed an average of 1.9 million dollars annually (18.4% of the NDP's revenues). In election years, the average is \$3.7 million (28.1% of revenue); in non-election years, it is \$1.5 million (or 15.2% of total revenue).

With such a drastic loss of influence and involvement in the party's finances, both union leaders and members might see their involvement and support of the NDP differently. Whitehorn (2005) confirms that during the 2004 election, labour interests had less involvement in the campaign than ever before as not only were they limited in funding, but they could also no longer donate paid volunteers to assist with the campaign. Furthermore, without the carrot of union funding, the NDP may have been less inclined to maintain a strong focus on issues important to organized labour, as opposed to other causes of the left, such as the environment. While many union members may also deem the environment to be an important political issue, there is nothing about the issue that specifically relates to labour interests. Indeed, certain environmental issues and policies may even run contrary to the interests of organized labour. Recently, the environmental policies of the federal government, including those proposed by the NDP, have come under fire from CAW leader Buzz Hargrove who claimed the auto industry would be devastated by trying to meet the Kyoto Accord's benchmarks by the original deadline. This is clearly in opposition to NDP policy that supports the Kyoto Accord and strict regulation of greenhouse gasses amongst industry.⁷

Given the shifts that have occurred with respect to the platform and priorities of the NDP, and the explanation put forth for these changes, an obvious question to ask is whether the party has seen a similar shift in its support base. Has there been an "invisible realignment", as Rohrschneider (1993) documented in some European countries? In the next section we investigate this question by looking at the support of union members, young voters and environmentalists for the NDP between 1988 and 2006.

Shifting Support? An Analysis of Voting Behaviour

The Canadian Election Studies from 1988-2006 include questions that probe environmental attitudes, age, union membership and party preferences, both in terms of voting and partisanship. We can utilize the data from these studies to see whether, or how, the electorate has responded to the changes in the NDP's policy focus. The first issue to investigate is whether the party has seen a transformation of its constituency. Given the recent change in priorities, toward young and environmentally-concerned voters, has the party seen an increase in support from these two groups? Similarly, has there been a decrease in support from individuals in union households, given the weaker ties between the party and unions? Table 1 shows the

⁷ See "Green 'insanity' blasted; Union boss warns trend could cost 150,000 jobs," *The Province*, April 15, 2007, A38.

percentage of youth voters (18-25)⁸, environmentalists, and union household members who supported the party (through vote intention or partisanship⁹) in the years 1988-2006.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In terms of union support, there is no visible decline in the percentage of NDP supporters that are members of union household since 1988. In fact, there was an increase in 2004 and 2006 (in which union members represented over 70% of the NDP vote). Especially recently, when the CAW came out in support of the Liberals and election financing laws loosened the bond between the unions and the NDP, these results are surprising. They also serve as an indication that despite changes in focus and priorities, the NDP maintains a strong union constituency.

Turning to the issue of youth support, has the NDP seen young voters increase as a percentage of its support base? A pattern is immediately obvious in Table 1. Despite the focus on youth in the past two elections, the percentage of youths who supported the party has actually declined since 1988. Even more striking, there was a drop in youth support between 2000 and 2004. Given that 2004 was the first election in which the party actively courted young voters (and in which Layton was leader) these results suggest that the party was unsuccessful in its efforts to attract these voters to its support base. Furthermore, the size of the young voter contingent in the NDP's support base remains minor, hovering around 10% of NDP voters and partisans.

In assessing the support of environmentalists, we are limited by the availability of survey questions. Between 1988 and 2004, CES respondents were asked whether they agreed that protecting the environment was more important than creating jobs in the mailback portion of the survey. In 1988, 75% of voters who intended to vote NDP agreed, while 73% of NDP partisans agreed. These proportions fell in 1993 but then rebounded to 55% and 59%, respectively, in 2000. In 2004, 48% of voters and 50% of partisans indicated environmental concern, an interesting decline given that the party's platform was more focused on the environment as an issue in that election. Thus, these statistics indicate that the environment was a significant concern of NDP supporters even before the party began heavily to increase its focus on the environment.

Unfortunately, this question was not repeated in 2006, which would have allowed us to compare over our entire time series. In both the 2004 and 2006 elections, however, CES respondents were asked whether spending on the environment should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. In 2004, 69% of voters and 72% of partisans said more spending was appropriate; these numbers rose slightly to 72% and 72% in 2006. Thus, there does not appear to have been a marked increase in the size of the environmentally conscious NDP partisan support base since 2004, but the number of environmentally-conscious voters has increased slightly. However, the consistent proportion of NDP support from environmentally conscious Canadians between 1988 and 2006 suggests that the NDP's reorganization of its priorities has not led to a radical change in its constituency base; the party seems to have shifted the focus of its message and maintained the support that it already had.

⁸ We chose to use this age group (18-25) because their interests are most clearly being represented by the NDP's focus on education. Young voters aged 25-35 have many other concerns, such as new families or full-time employment, and thus the issues the NDP has focused on may have little resonance.

⁹ For partisanship, we coded those who indicated they were a very strong or fairly strong identifier as being a partisan, following the strategy of Blais et al. 2002.

In addition to investigating the support base of the party, another indication that the NDP's policy shift has had an impact in the electorate is whether the NDP has become identified as the party best able to handle environmental issues. (No questions were asked that would allow us to probe issue ownership of youth-oriented issues.) In 2000, CES respondents were asked which party would be best at protecting the environment; in that year, 20% indicated the NDP, while 35% did not know. In 2004 and 2006, respondents were asked to indicate the party best able to handle the issue they felt was most important in the election. Of those indicating the environment was the most important, 25% and 28%, respectively, named the NDP as the party best able to handle the issue (see Table 2). There appears to have been a small increase in the perception of NDP competence on the environment, although it should be noted that the Green Party garnered the support of 24% and 32% in 2004 and 2006, respectively. It is also notable that the percentage of voters answering they did not know which party could best deal with the environment fell dramatically between 2004 and 2006, from 28% to 11%. Thus, the environment has emerged as a clear issue in Canadian politics, one on which the NDP is seen as competent, although perhaps not the most competent given the presence of the Green Party.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The above data suggest that the NDP has seen the proportion of its supporters that are young voters decline and the proportion that are environmentally-concerned citizens remain fairly consistent since 1988. These results are contrary to what the NDP's shift in priorities would suggest – that environmentalists and young voters have become more important to the party's success. Aside from the proportion of NDP supporters drawn from each group, it is also possible that the new focus of the NDP may be reflected in its appeal to specific groups. That is, perhaps citizens are more likely to become NDP partisans or voters if they are either young or environmentally-concerned. Thus, the next step in understanding whether or how the NDP's shift in priorities has affected the electorate is to consider the relative influence of youth and environmentalism, in comparison to union membership, on support for the party over time.

To investigate whether the NDP's appeal to these groups has shifted along with its own campaign platforms, we ran logistic regressions. First, we analyzed NDP partisanship for each year. We included youth (18-25) and union membership as key independent (dummy) variables. We also included the environmentalism variable for that year. For controls, we included dummy variables for Catholicism, residence in a western province, and having French as a mother language. Because of the difference in environment questions between 2004 and 2006, we ran one model for 1988-2004 and another for 2004 and 2006, using the environmental spending question.

Odds ratios for these analyses are reported in Table 3a and 3b. Consider first the influence of youth. Only in 1988 (Table 3a) and 2004 (Table 3b) is one's youth a significant predictor of NDP partisanship.¹⁰ Environmental concern is significant in 2000, when it indicates a preference for protecting the environment over creating jobs, and in both 2004 and 2006, when it indicates a preference for increased spending on the issue. Overall, it does not seem that the NDP has increased its appeal to young voters, although its appeal with environmentally-conscious Canadians seems to be strong, at least in 2004 and 2006. However, it is important to note that in Table 3a (which it indicates a preference for protecting the environment over

¹⁰ This result differs from the results reported by Gidengil et al. (2006) about the 2004 election. They find that support for the NDP increased among voters under 35 in that election. The differences in our results likely reflect the differences in models and our specification of the age variable (18-25).

creating jobs) environmental concern is not a significant predictor of partisanship in 2004, despite the party's increased focus on the issue in that campaign.

In contrast to the weakness of these findings, being a union member or living in a union household was a significant predictor of support in all but one election we consider (2000). Furthermore, Table 3b indicates that the effect magnitude increased in strength in 2006. In that year, the odds of an individual who was concerned about the environment voting for the NDP 2.4 times was almost twice as great as the odds for someone who was not. It should also be noted that the pseudo-R² values for these models are very fairly low. Thus, although we have accounted for key demographic characteristics thought to influence NDP support, the models account for very little variation in NDP partisanship.

[INSERT TABLES 3a AND 3b ABOUT HERE]

It is also possible that the NDP's recent campaign priorities have increased the party's appeal to undecided voters or those who may not identify with the NDP. Tables 4a and 4b shows the results for the same model analyzed above, but with NDP vote intention as the dependent variable. In these models, we included a partisanship variable to control for any appeal that may have translated into a stronger attachment to the party.

Now that identifying with the NDP is controlled for, the results in Tables 4a and 4b reveal that the influence of the socio-demographic variables of interest is sporadic at best. No clear trends emerge from the data. Of the NDP's recent priorities, environmentalism was a predictor of NDP voting in 1988 (Table 4a) but not in any of the later years, and being a youth is never a significant influence. That both of these variables were not significant in both the 2004 and 2006 elections suggests that the party's appeal to these groups was not that strong once partisanship is accounted for. Also interesting in the results is that only in 1988, 1997 and 2006 was union membership (self or household) significant in the model. The magnitude of the variable fluctuates across Table 4a, from an odds ratio of 1.43 in 1988 to 1.83 in 1997, suggesting a greater influence in 1997. In 2006, the odds of a union member voting for the NDP, even controlling for partisanship, was twice as high as for a non-union member. Considering the strength of the PID variable, our key independent variables in the models account for very little of NDP vote choice. Overall, our results indicate that the NDP's 21st century electoral strategy has had the most impact on its partisan base, and that belonging to any of the three groups that the NDP has targeted has had very little additional, direct influence on voting for the NDP.

[INSERT TABLES 4a AND 4b ABOUT HERE]

Conclusion

In the 21st century, the NDP, the traditional party of labour in Canada, has flirted with a new image – that of a youth-oriented, environmentally concerned party. This change can be seen as part of a strategy of the party to position itself on a new issue cleavage and gather new support. Has the shift generated a complimentary change in the composition of the party's support base? The results presented above suggest that the answer is no. Only for environmentalists does the party seem to have become slightly more attractive. It is unclear, however, due to data limitations, whether the environmental support is contemporaneous with the priority shifts within the party; there are indications that the party has always attracted those who were concerned about the environment. The data from 1988, long before the marked change in the NDP's campaign platforms, indicate that environmentalists were attracted to the party even then. Nonetheless, environmentally concerned citizens do constitute a significant proportion of the NDP's electoral base. However, the youth vote, the other target of the party

especially since Layton became leader, seems to remain elusive. Young people do support the party, but the constituency has not seen a dramatic shift in demographics. Indeed, despite recent election funding changes and the changes in the party's focus, it seems that labour continues to see the party as a sympathetic electoral vehicle and constitute a strong proportion of its support base. The continued support of union households suggests that the changes in the NDP have yet to fully trickle down to the voters – or, perhaps, that voters are ignoring the changes in favour of perceiving the party as it traditionally has been. Of course, the effects of the changes may not emerge for several years, as the party's shift becomes more ingrained and public perception shifts. Only time will provide the complete picture of the effect of the NDP's priority shift toward New Politics issues.

Table 1. Percentage of NDP supporters (intended voters or partisans) by characteristics

		1988	1993	1997	2000	2004	2006
Union Members	Vote	49%	56%	58%	44%	66%	72%
	Partisanship	50%	60%	60%	43%	76%	72%
Young Voters	Vote	21%	18%	12%	12%	10%	11%
	Partisanship	23%	11%	7%	13%	10%	8%
Environment	Vote	75%	40%	48%	55%	48%	
	Partisanship	73%	43%	47%	59%	50%	
Environmental Spending	Vote					69%	72%
	Partisanship					72%	72%

*Sample is restricted to those who answered all three waves of the CES for union, age and environment questions, as the environment question was asked in the mailback survey in 1988-2004. The environmental spending question data in 2004 and 2006 is restricted to individuals who answered the pre- and post-election surveys.

Table 2: Party Best at Dealing with the Environment, 2000-2006.

	2000	2004	2006
Liberal	17%	9%	14%
Conservative	6%	4%	5%
NDP	20%	25%	28%
Alliance	10%		5%
Bloc	4%	2%	
Green		24%	32%
Don't Know	35%	28%	11%
N	3651	185	274

Data are taken from the campaign period survey (in which question was asked).

Table 3a: NDP Partisanship Models, 1988-2004

NDP PID	1988	1993	1997	2000	2004
Youth (18-25)	1.799* (0.473)	0.801 (0.449)	0.546 (0.220)	1.476 (0.621)	0.293 (0.231)
Union	1.924** (0.381)	2.842** (0.904)	2.784*** (0.631)	1.494 (0.409)	2.407* (0.874)
Environment	1.312 (0.277)	1.334 (0.416)	1.296 (0.304)	1.945* (0.541)	1.487 (0.460)
Catholic	0.641* (0.149)	0.923 (0.388)	1.050 (0.301)	0.758 (0.311)	0.989 (0.362)
Western	2.053*** (0.391)	3.339*** (1.114)	2.013** (0.495)	1.149 (0.326)	1.383 (0.510)
Male	0.791 (0.150)	1.317 (0.401)	0.527** (0.130)	0.626* (0.170)	0.520* (0.167)
French	0.522* (0.172)	0.566 (0.413)	0.425* (0.182)	0.239* (0.159)	0.196* (0.142)
N	1956	1189	1820	1498	733
Pseudo R2	0.0671	0.0909	0.0781	0.0586	0.0790

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.01, ***=p<0.001

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Sample is restricted to individuals who answered all waves of the survey for union, age and environment questions, as the environment question was asked in that wave in 1988-2004.

Table 3b: NDP Partisanship Models, 2004-2006

NDP PID	2004	2006
Youth (18-25)	0.269* (0.142)	1.355 (0.615)
Union	1.960** (0.480)	2.579*** (0.560)
Environmental Spending	1.928* (0.515)	2.022** (0.463)
Catholic	0.692 (0.186)	0.484** (0.121)
Western	1.567* (0.404)	1.519* (0.317)
Male	0.640* (0.149)	0.901 (0.183)
French	0.296** (0.136)	0.377** (0.127)
N	1478	1539
Pseudo R2	0.0775	0.0868

Sample restricted to individuals who took part in the pre- and post-election surveys (the environmental spending question was asked in the latter).

Table 4a: NDP Vote Intention Models, 1988-2004

NDP Vote	1988	1993	1997	2000	2004
Youth (18-25)	1.253 (0.409)	1.054 (0.259)	1.165 (0.478)	1.345 (0.704)	1.226 (0.783)
Union	1.433* (0.276)	1.171 (0.172)	1.833* (0.521)	1.484 (0.498)	1.094 (0.371)
Environment	1.439* (0.314)	0.862 (0.129)	1.305 (0.362)	1.050 (0.351)	1.607 (0.553)
Catholic	0.915 (0.223)	0.772 (0.130)	1.453 (0.420)	0.551 (0.252)	0.461 (0.219)
Western	1.22 (0.237)	1.364* (0.212)	0.721 (0.198)	1.186 (0.425)	1.237 (0.461)
Male	0.933 (0.175)	0.550*** (0.079)	0.490* (0.137)	0.885 (0.295)	1.588 (0.581)
French	1.062 (0.315)	1.948** (0.384)	0.130*** (0.066)	1.111 (0.561)	0.536 (0.320)
Partisanship	37.426*** (10.386)	11.257*** (4.634)	66.816*** (20.007)	104.343*** (37.344)	93.988*** (48.170)
N	1808	1189	1791	1474	697
Pseudo R2	0.2803	0.0656	0.4042	0.4292	0.3581

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.01, ***=p<0.001

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Sample is restricted to mailback wave of survey for union, age and environment questions, as the environment question was asked in that wave in 1988-2004.

Table 4b: NDP Vote Intention Models, 2004-2006

NDP Vote	2004	2006
Youth (18-25)	1.803 (0.686)	1.215 (0.708)
Union	1.478 (0.374)	2.012** (0.458)
Environmental Spending	1.490 (0.384)	1.478 (0.370)
Catholic	0.809 (0.257)	1.074 (0.290)
Western	1.469 (0.376)	1.504 (0.373)
Male	1.934* (0.497)	0.731 (0.161)
French	0.681 (0.267)	0.887 (0.285)
Partisanship	56.123*** (18.495)	29.967*** (7.685)
N	1353	1539
Pseudo R2	0.3190	0.2938

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.01, ***=p<0.001

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

Sample restricted to individuals who took part in post-election survey (where environmental spending question was asked).

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