

Vote Choice: Ontario 2011

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Abstract

On October 6, 2011, the 40th general election in the province of Ontario was held. Although many perceived the election campaign to be relatively dull, the outcome is interesting for how it differs from expectations that were held just months earlier. This paper provides a first look at the factors that influenced voting decisions in the election. We find that several of the “usual suspect” factors matter, such as leader evaluations, partisan loyalties and issue preferences, and that there is some interesting variation depending on the specific decision being made and the interest level of the voter. The findings suggest that voting for the right-wing party (Progressive Conservatives) as an alternative to the incumbent centre-left party (Liberals) was guided by more substantive issue concerns than choosing between the Liberals and the party of the left (NDP). Also interesting is that issues specific to the province mattered even in the face of federal considerations, which had only inconsistent influences on the vote decision.

By the end of the night on October 6, 2011, three political leaders in Ontario were claiming some sort of victory. For Dalton McGuinty, the returning premier of the province, the election outcome indicated success in that it returned an experienced Liberal government to office: "Liberalism in this great country is alive and well and living in Ontario." For Tim Hudak, the Progressive Conservative leader, voters had "put Dalton McGuinty on a much shorter leash" by decreasing the share of Liberal seats. For NDP leader Andrea Horwath, the outcome represented votes for change: "The people have said very clearly we need to move in a direction where people are at the top of the agenda."¹

That politicians would try to spin an election outcome in their own favour comes as no surprise. What is surprising, however, is how much the outcome differed from expectations widely-held just months earlier (see Figure 1). In July, Ipsos Reid polls gave the Progressive Conservatives an 11 point lead over the Liberals. On October 4, the same firm reported a ten-point lead for the Liberals and predicted a third Liberal majority result.²

Why was there such a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the parties? In the spring it appeared that the public was tired of McGuinty's Liberals, ready for change, and anxious to support Hudak. By October the refrain was very different. Clearly, over the course of the summer and throughout the official campaign many Ontarians adjusted their preferences for their next premier, deciding to stay with a known quantity rather than take a chance on a new face. But why? Jon Pammett, quoted by CBC News, noted: "This election [was] kind of low-key in terms of major issues. I think that may have meant people really didn't have a lot of interest in what was being said."³ The parties presented their platforms, the leaders made cases for why they were the best, and yet the voters were uninspired. This was reflected in the lowest ever turnout rate of 49.2%.

At the end of the day, of course, the election did produce an outcome and many voters did make up their minds and cast a vote. This paper attempts to understand the factors that contributed to those vote decisions. In this paper we will consider the relative strengths of several factors that had the potential to affect vote choice. In particular, four considerations will be examined. First, how important were sociodemographic characteristics to choosing one party over another? Second, and especially in light of the lack of dramatic campaign events, did

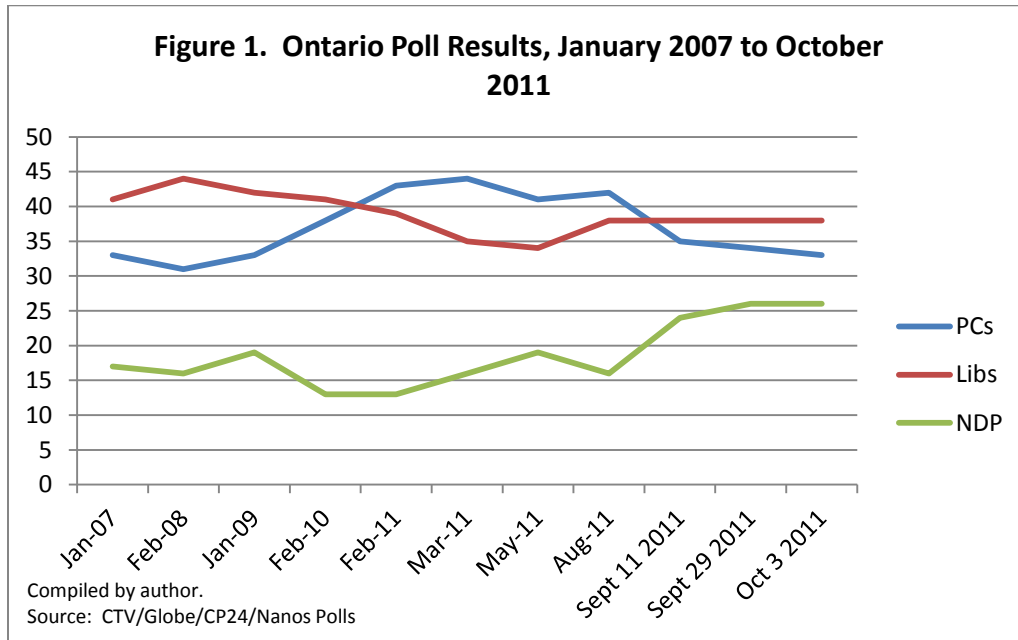
¹ Andrew Lupton, "Ontario's McGuinty re-elected, but loses majority: Voter turnout reaches a new low." *CBC News*, October 6, 2011. See also election night speeches, available at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ontariovotes2011/story/2011/10/06/ontario-election-results.html>.

² Ipsos Reid, "Ontario Liberals Poised for Historic Three-Peat Majority." Released on October 4, 2011. Available at <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=5365>.

³ CBC News, "Ontario election turnout hits record low: Democracy Watch urges changes to the system." *CBC News*, October 7, 2011. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/story/2011/10/07/ontario-election-voter-turnout.html>

partisanship play a major role in vote choice? Third, to what extent did proximate concerns, such as leaders, the economy, and issues, significantly shape the preferences of voters? Finally, to address the issues of first and second order elections, and the idea that subnational elections are less interesting, engaging and important for voters, we also ask whether federal concerns contributed to the provincial election outcome.



Understanding the Ontario Vote Decision

There are many different ways to dissect one’s vote choice. Each major model reflects the state of knowledge at the time as well a consideration of all that has gone before. One of the first major models is known as the “Columbia model” because of its origins in the work of researchers at Columbia University (Berelson et al. 1954; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). The scholars who developed this model theorized that one’s socioeconomic position had the greatest impact on voter preferences, as it shaped their position in society and largely determined their policy preferences. The Michigan model (Campbell et al. 1960) built upon the Columbia model by conceptualizing the vote decision as a “funnel of causality”, a product of multiple factors that occurred at different points in time. Primary considerations in this model are one’s long-standing partisan preference, or party identification; candidate evaluations; and issue considerations. Other models include the valence model (for example, see Clarke et al. 2004, 2009), which highlights the importance of choosing a party that can best handle the most important issues, building upon the logic offered by Stokes (1963, 1992); and the proximity model, which expects that voters will prefer whichever party is closest to them on various dimensions (Downs 1957).

Miller and Shanks (1996) propose a model that takes into account many of these different models and also recognizes the time dimension of the considerations. In their multi-stage, recursive model, influences on voter preferences are considered in blocks. Versions of this model have been used to consider Canadian election outcomes (see, for example, Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002; Gidengil et al. 2006). The benefit of this approach is that it lends itself to incrementally analyzing the factors that influence voting – starting with sociodemographic considerations, then moving to values and beliefs, then partisanship, then economic perceptions, issues, and leader evaluations. It also provides a wide scope of information about what affected voters.

How should we model voting in the Ontario 2011 election? Oftentimes, election researchers turn to previous studies to provide guidance as to the most appropriate model of voting behaviour. Unfortunately, there are few studies of voting behaviour at the provincial level in Ontario that can be used to provide general expectations (for some exceptions, see Krashinsky and Milne 1983, 1986; Cutler et al. 2004; Henderson et al. 2006; Cutler 2008). Further, all elections have peculiarities related to personalities, issues and context. Thus, we have chosen to evaluate all of the considerations included in the multi-stage model which was utilized to study voting in Canada by Gidengil et al. (2006). We believe that this is a comprehensive way of conducting an exploratory investigation into the factors that made a difference in the Ontario election.

As noted above, the election turned out quite differently than was expected earlier. Instead of a firm rejection of the governing Liberals, the PCs lost support, the NDP gained and the Liberals rebounded. Casting a wide net to understand the particular influences that led voters to vote the way they did can help make sense of the turn of events. In particular, we are interested in three specific sets of factors: sociodemographics, partisanship, and proximate considerations. Sociodemographics are important because they represent the underlying context in which voters make decisions. If traditional preferences or affinities between parties and groups influenced the election outcome, these factors will reveal them. Partisanship is relevant because it can serve as a default decision-maker, especially in times of low information (see, for example, the work of Downs 1957; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993; Schaffner and Streb 2002 and Squire and Smith 1988). If voters are uninterested in an election and spend little time understanding the campaign then a simple reflex could be to vote for their pre-established preference. Finally, proximate considerations are relevant because they include all of the election-specific factors that are highlighted during a campaign – leaders, how they will handle the economy, and policy ideas. Each of these considerations is included in our model.

However, we would be remiss if we did not recognize the multilevel governance context in which the election occurred. As a subnational election, the Ontario 2011 contest may have

been influenced by federal events and politics. There is a substantial literature that looks at the differences between elections at different levels of government (for the key statement in this literature, see Reif and Schmitt 1980). This literature began with the expectation that not all elections are equally important for voters – some governments have less power, some portfolios are less pertinent, some issues are less salient, and in turn some elections simply do not capture the attention or time investment of voters like ones at the national level.

Reif and Schmitt (1980) suggest that national elections are “first order” and that all other elections decline in importance, becoming “second order” contests.⁴ This theory of second order elections implies that because the elections themselves are less important for voters, a considerable amount of influence is wielded by considerations that originate at the first order, or national/federal level. In this way, second order elections can act as referenda on the performance of the first order government.

Although this theory creates clear expectations, it is unclear whether Ontario elections should be considered second order events. Folk wisdom suggests that Ontarians like to vote into office parties that are not in control of the federal government, creating a “split vote” situation, but Morton (1997) suggests this may be a myth. Nonetheless, Morton also claims that Ontario has an “Ottawa fixation” (p.12) and that “...Ontarians visit the sins of federal governments on their provincial parties.”(p.11-12) However, Cutler (2008) argues that Ontario elections are actually first order contests, separate from federal elections in the minds of voters, “precisely because a lot is a[t] stake.”(p.502) Given the lack of clarity on this issue, we add an additional set of considerations into the vote model to consider whether evaluations of the federal government shaped Ontario vote decisions.

Data and Methods

We have access to a unique pre- and post-election survey dataset of Ontario voters. Conducted by Harris/Decima for the Making Electoral Democracy Work project (Blais 2010), the internet survey was fielded to Harris/Decima panelists from September 25 to October 5 and October 7 to 20. In the end, 1347 qualified respondents completed the pre-election survey and 896 completed the post-election survey. The participation rate for the pre-election survey was 14% and for the post-election survey (fielded only to those who had answered the pre-election survey) it was 78%. To improve representativeness, the data are weighted to match the census distribution of the Ontario population on age, gender, education and region.⁵ Restricting the sample to voters (our population of interest) who completed both parts of the survey, there are

⁴ In their study, Reif and Schmitt (1980) discuss European Parliament elections.

⁵ We use a weight developed to improve the representativeness of the post-election sample given that we are restricting our dataset to include only those with identified votes, which is derived from the post-election survey.

717 usable cases. Table 1 shows the partisan and vote distribution of the sample, compared to the actual election outcome.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample

Party	Actual Vote*	Vote Choice in sample (weighted)	Partisanship
Liberal	37.62	33.95	13.48
PC	35.43	36.44	18.25
NDP	22.73	23.85	12.05
Green	2.93	4.43	0.94
Other	0.20	1.33	0.29
Non-partisan			54.98

*Results from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ontariovotes2011/>.

To analyze the vote decision, we operationalize variables that fit into each block of considerations in Gidengil et al.'s (2006) model. For sociodemographics, we look at age, gender, education, income (operationalized as dummy variables indicating lower quartile and upper quartile), urban residence, religion (Catholic and no religion) and immigrant status. As there are few studies of previous Ontario elections the patterns of demographic support for the parties is not well-established, but we do have some expectations: people from union families may prefer the NDP over the other parties and low income individuals will prefer the policy ideas of the NDP over the PCs.

The second set of considerations looks at values and beliefs. We operationalize ideology with a question that asks respondents to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10. The mean value in our sample of voters is 5.3. We also include a number of variables that tap into general ideological preferences over taxes, wealth redistribution, getting tough on crime, and immigration.

The third set of variables considers partisanship. In our sample, 45% reported feeling close to a particular Ontario political party. We include separate dummy variables for Liberal, PC and NDP partisanship.

Fourth, we look at economic perceptions: economic evaluations of the Ontario economy and one's personal financial situation. Anderson (2008) has shown that provincial economic conditions influence voting in provincial elections. However, in an EKOS Politics report released September 27, 2011, it was found that a majority of Ontarians thought the province was moving in the right direction (62%) and similarly the provincial government was moving in the right direction (51%).⁶ Thus, economic considerations may have had only a limited impact on

⁶ EKOS Politics, "Ontario Liberals Hold Small but Statistically Significant Lead." Released on September 27, 2011. Available at <http://www.ekospolitics.com/index.php/2011/09/ontario-liberals-hold-small-but-statistically-significant-lead-september-27-2011/>.

the vote outcome. In our sample, 46% indicated the Ontario economy has gotten worse over the last 12 months and 40% indicated they were worse off than a year ago.

Next, we consider specific issue concerns – healthcare, education, taxes, the environment, public spending/debt, transportation, crime and the economy. In this election specific issue ideas became important symbols of the parties, even if they were not major campaign points. For example, the Hudak campaign focused on McGuinty’s record of taxation, making pocketbook concerns a central point in the PC “Changebook”. They also made a big issue of a relatively small policy promise by the Liberals to create a tax credit for employers that hired skilled immigrants. Calling it an “affirmative action subsidy for foreign workers,”⁷ the PCs got a considerable amount of press on the issue, not all of it beneficial. On a more positive note, all of the campaigns discussed healthcare and balancing the budget, while Liberals in particular focused on education. Across the respondents who identified an issue in our sample, the three most important issues in the election are the economy (31%), taxes (21%) and healthcare (21%). Among voters for each party, the economy is the most important for Liberals, taxes for PC voters, and healthcare for NDP voters (see Table 2).

Table 2. Important Issues in the Election

Most important issue	All Voters	Liberal voters	PC voters	NDP voters	Green voters
Healthcare	21.17	29.27	9.50	28.53	12.34
Taxes	21.43	12.07	33.86	17.74	16.15
Education	3.38	3.11	0.87	7.20	6.43
Environment	4.30	5.95	0	4.19	26.17
Public Spending/ Debt	11.53	4.91	20.40	7.55	7.75
Transportation	2.56	5.29	1.12	1.44	0
Economy	30.58	34.94	31.66	23.90	23.83
Crime	0.85	0.66	1.38	0.50	0
Other	4.20	3.81	1.19	8.96	7.34

The sixth group of variables holds leader evaluations. Both Hudak and Horwath were fighting their first elections. McGuinty, a known quantity, had two previous terms worth of information that voters could use to evaluate him. In an Abacus Data poll fielded from September 23-25, 2011, Ontarians rated Horwath the most favourably (40% had a very or somewhat favourable impression of her), 34% said the same about Hudak and only 31% about McGuinty. Ontarians also found Horwath to be the most down to earth, friendly and inexperienced of the three leaders, while McGuinty was the most calm under pressure, intelligent and unpredictable. Hudak did not rate higher than the other leaders on any characteristic, and “none of them” was

⁷Rob Ferguson, “Tories drop ‘foreign workers’ from ad.” *Toronto Star*, September 12, 2011. Available at <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/provincialelection/article/1052338--tories-drop-foreign-workers-from-ad>.

the most frequent category for the characteristic “genuine”.⁸ In our sample, Horwath has the highest overall rating (5.7 on 0 to 10 scale), compared to 3.9 for McGuinty and 4.3 for Hudak. Finally, we address federal considerations. In addition to the second order election hypothesis it would not be surprising to find that federal concerns factored into voters’ decision – after all, the party in power in Ottawa will only be countered for Ontarians by whoever is in power at Queen’s Park. Furthermore, EKOS Politics poll results indicated that 43% of their respondents said they were less likely to vote Progressive Conservative in the provincial election due to the majority Conservative government.⁹ Evaluations of the federal government, then, may have played a big role in the election outcome.

We operationalize federal considerations in three ways. First, we create a general satisfaction variable from two separate questions. One asks respondents for their overall level of satisfaction with the performance of the federal government (46% were not satisfied at all or not very satisfied). The other asks whether the respondent is satisfied with the outcome of the May 2011 federal election (the Conservatives were awarded a majority government after two previous terms of minority power). The mean value on this 0 to 10 scale is 5.6. Each of these variables was recoded to run from 0 to 1 with four categories and then combined to create a single measure of federal satisfaction (alpha=0.8679). Second, we include an evaluation of the federal economy. In our sample, 30% reported that the Canadian economy has gotten worse over the past 12 months. Third, we include measures of federal partisanship.

To begin our analysis, we run separate multinomial logit regressions for each cluster of variables discussed above. We restrict the vote models to the three major parties as the number of Green voters in our sample is limited (25). The baseline category is a vote for the Liberals, the incumbent party. Analyzing the data in this way allows us to understand the dynamics that shaped the choice between the status quo and change. Given that the election was initially expected to be a rejection of many years of Liberal control, we believe that this is a fitting approach. After considering each set of variables separately, we combine the significant variables to consider their effects in concert.

Results

The multinomial logit coefficients, standard errors and significance for the individual block regressions are reported in Tables 3a-g. In the sociodemographic block of variables, we find

⁸ Abacus Data Poll, “Ontario Vote Intention and Leadership ratings.” Released September 26, 2011. Available at <http://abacusdata.ca/2011/09/26/ontario-election-pcs-lead-liberals-by-4-on-traditional-ballot-question-pc-37-liberal-34-ndp-23/>.

⁹ EKOS Politics, “Ontario Liberals Hold Small but Statistically Significant Lead.” Released on September 27, 2011. Available at <http://www.ekospolitics.com/index.php/2011/09/ontario-liberals-hold-small-but-statistically-significant-lead-september-27-2011/>.

few significant effects (see Table 3a). Voting for the PCs over the Liberals is more likely for Catholics and less likely for urban dwellers and those with a university education. Voting for the NDP over the Liberals is also less likely for university graduates but more likely for low income individuals.

Table 3a. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Sociodemographics

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Female	-0.407	0.242	0.474	0.263
Immigrant	-0.445	0.338	-0.394	0.410
Catholic	0.809*	0.316	0.220	0.380
No religion	-0.130	0.331	-0.003	0.326
Urban	-0.540*	0.249	0.504	0.274
Under 35	-0.396	0.360	0.068	0.353
Over 54	0.342	0.263	-0.192	0.314
Union	-0.539	0.293	0.499	0.291
University	-0.781**	0.261	-0.633*	0.301
Low Income	-0.518	0.306	1.076***	0.317
High Income	-0.460	0.286	0.030	0.351
Constant	0.896**	0.317	-1.073**	0.371
N			557	
PseudoR2			0.1054	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

In the values and beliefs block of variables (Table 3b), we see influences on voting for both parties compared to the Liberals. Ideology matters in both cases, but in opposite directions – more right-leaning individuals choose the PCs over the Liberals and the Liberals over the NDP. This result is reflected in other individual value variables as well – those who prefer reducing taxes, less wealth redistribution and being tougher on crime prefer the PCs over the Liberals. This conforms to the typical understanding of the ideological ordering of the Ontario parties – PCs on the right and Liberals on the centre-left. One interesting result is that those who prefer fewer immigrants prefer the NDP over the Liberals. Given the prominence of the Liberal plan to give a tax credit to employers who hired new immigrant Canadians, this suggests that the Liberal Party was affected by beliefs on the role of immigrants in Canadian society. The NDP countered the Liberal policy promise with a promise to subsidize new jobs for all Ontarians¹⁰, clearly a more attractive stance for those who prefer fewer immigrants.

¹⁰See <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/provincialelection/article/1051490--ndp-unveils-tax-credit-for-new-hires>.

Table 3b. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Values and Beliefs

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Reduce Taxes	0.330***	0.060	0.081	0.057
No Wealth Redistribution	0.149**	0.050	-0.097	0.056
Tough on Crime	0.164**	0.050	-0.055	0.052
Fewer Immigrants	0.058	0.050	0.142*	0.056
Ideology	0.438***	0.121	-0.176*	0.084
Constant	-6.452***	0.922	-0.195	0.394
N			601	
PseudoR2			0.2539	

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

The results for partisanship, shown in Table 3c, operate as expected for each specific decision. PC partisans are more likely to choose the PCs and Liberal partisans prefer the Liberals. Similarly, NDP partisans prefer the NDP.

Table 3c. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Partisanship

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Provincial Liberal PID	-5.519***	1.017	-1.624***	0.451
Provincial PC PID	3.531***	0.545	1.095	0.819
Provincial NDP PID	-0.933	0.743	2.494***	0.420
Constant	-0.078	0.136	-0.632***	0.164
N			657	
PseudoR2			0.2976	

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Next we turn to economic perceptions. In our data, there are no effects for personal financial evaluations but in both vote comparisons (PC vs. Liberal and NDP vs. Liberal) sociotropic evaluations of the Ontario economy influence voters. Those who think the Ontario economy has gotten better prefer the Liberals, while those think the economy has gotten worse prefer the PCs and the NDP to the Liberals. This result reflects a preference for change away from the status quo in the face of negative economic evaluations, as both other parties are affected.

Table 3d. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Economy

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Ontario Economic Evaluation	-1.395***	0.205	-0.650***	0.184
Egocentric Financial Evaluation	0.002	0.170	-0.100	0.180
Constant	-0.435**	0.152	-0.532***	0.137
N	670			
PseudoR2	0.0635			

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

We now turn to look at specific issues. We used information on what issue was considered the most important in the election (asked prior to the election) to create dummy variables. Table 3e shows some interesting results. Voting for the PCs over the Liberals is positively influenced by thinking taxes and public spending/debt are important issues, while thinking the environment is the most important issue swings voters substantially closer to the Liberals. Thinking transportation or the economy are important issues also lead voters to prefer the Liberals over the NDP. Interestingly, no issues appear to influence voters toward voting for the NDP.

Table 3e. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Issues

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Health	0.035	0.852	-0.881	0.524
Education	-0.108	1.079	-0.015	0.693
Taxes	2.191*	0.855	-0.471	0.568
Environment	-14.464***	0.867	-1.205	0.642
Public spending/debt	2.584**	0.874	-0.424	0.654
Transportation	-0.388	1.039	-2.156*	0.913
Crime	1.900	1.322	-1.130	1.348
Economy	1.061	0.835	-1.235*	0.519
Constant	-1.106	0.817	0.503	0.474
N	675			
PseudoR2	0.1043			

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The results for leader evaluations are shown in Table 3f. As mentioned above, both Hudak and Horwath were fighting their first election and McGuinty was a known quantity with baggage from his previous terms in office. In our analysis, the effects of feeling thermometers for the leaders are as expected. If a voter rated Hudak higher then he/she was more likely to vote for the PC Party. Higher evaluations of McGuinty benefited the Liberals, and higher evaluations of Horwath benefited the NDP. Interestingly, higher evaluations of Horwath also influenced

voters away from the PCs and toward the Liberals. This may reflect an appeal that Horwath held for Liberal voters.

Table 3f. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Leader Evaluations

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
McGuinty	-0.725***	0.084	-0.567***	0.076
Hudak	0.855***	0.098	-0.028	0.065
Horwath	-0.205*	0.093	0.493***	0.085
Constant	0.383	0.527	-0.331	0.597
N	587			
PseudoR2	0.5266			

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Finally, we consider whether the federal political scene influenced voters. The results indicate that in the choice between the PCs and Liberals, approval of the federal government is a significant factor. Those who are satisfied with the federal government are more likely to vote for the PCs over the Liberals. The federal economic situation is not a factor but partisanship (Conservative and Liberal) is. For the choice between the NDP and the Liberals, only partisanship matters (NDP and Liberal).

Table 3g. Individual Multinomial Logit Results, Federal Considerations

	PC		NDP	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Federal Evaluation	3.815***	0.526	-0.081	0.494
Federal Economic Evaluation	-0.248	0.189	-0.317	0.198
Federal Conservative PID	1.368***	0.342	0.397	0.504
Federal Liberal PID	-3.191***	0.740	-1.315***	0.356
Federal NDP PID	-1.115	0.810	2.590***	0.375
Constant	-2.162***	0.308	-0.879***	0.244
N	660			
PseudoR2	0.3367			

Having looked at each block of considerations separately, we have an idea of the effects of the variables on voters. However, each separate model does not control for the effects of the others, so there is no way of evaluating which influences are more prominent. This is especially important with respect to federal concerns – if the second order election hypothesis is correct then these variables may trump all other considerations. To get a fuller picture of which variables were significant independent of all others (i.e., which variables remain significant when put into a full model), we created a model that included any variable that was significant for either the PC or NDP choice in any of the individual models. Due to multicollinearity

concerns, we excluded the federal Conservative and NDP partisanship variables. We also created a scale from the five values and beliefs variables ($\alpha=0.70$) to simplify the model. The coefficients, standard errors and significance of each variable are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Multinomial Logit Results for Combined Model, Liberal baseline (standard errors below coefficients)

	PC vs. Lib		NDP vs. Lib	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Catholic	1.569**	0.606	-0.162	0.561
Urban	-1.351**	0.496	0.518	0.393
University	0.956	0.585	-0.073	0.438
Low Income	0.046	0.596	0.818	0.446
Ideology Scale	0.674**	0.244	-0.209	0.148
Provincial Liberal PID	-3.402*	1.355	0.438	0.526
Provincial PC PID	0.263	0.936	-0.025	1.009
Provincial NDP PID	1.203	1.077	2.030**	0.661
Ontario Economic Evaluation	-0.360	0.361	0.423	0.316
Transportation Issue	2.596*	1.013	-1.762*	0.798
Economy Issue	1.746**	0.658	-0.237	0.473
Taxes Issue	1.455	0.815	0.169	0.675
Environment Issue	-13.007***	1.309	0.965	0.784
Public spending/debt Issue	3.367***	0.894	0.067	0.766
McGuinty	-0.664***	0.107	-0.654***	0.094
Hudak	0.779***	0.166	0.167	0.104
Horwath	-0.361**	0.138	0.413***	0.107
Federal Evaluation	2.362	1.327	0.241	0.900
Federal Liberal PID	-0.108	1.104	-0.256	0.502
Constant	-5.496***	1.660	0.132	1.139
N			465	
Pseudo R2			0.6652	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

What is immediately evident is that there is a considerable difference in the number of considerations that are significant for choosing the PCs over the Liberals compared to the NDP over the Liberals. Catholicism, urban residence, ideology, Liberal partisanship (although not PC partisanship, curiously), the transportation, economy, environment and public spending/debt issues, and feeling thermometers (again, all three) are significant influences on a PC vote. Federal considerations are not significant in this combined model, suggesting that the effects observed earlier have been subsumed by other attitudes and considerations. In terms of marginal effects, the environment has the most substantive effect on voting PC (-0.65),

compared to the positive effect of the public spending/debt issue at 0.16 or the transportation issue at 0.17.¹¹

For an NDP vote, only NDP partisanship, the transportation issue, and feeling thermometers for McGuinty and Horwath are significant factors. The marginal effect of the transportation issue on voting NDP is -0.22, compared to NDP partisanship which has only a 0.14 effect.

What do these results mean? The decision between voting PC and Liberal was clearly made on a number of considerations. Those who voted PC did so not only because they preferred Hudak but also on ideological, sociodemographic and especially issue bases. The NDP decision was influenced by leaders, NDP partisanship, and only one issue. That Liberal partisanship did not influence voting for the Liberals over the NDP suggests that Liberal partisans may have been willing to vote NDP if they had other influences pushing them that way.

Interest

The results discussed above show that many more considerations influenced the choice between the PCs and Liberals than between the Liberals and NDP. As the PCs were initially expected to triumph over the Liberals, that voters perceived both of these parties as front-runners, and therefore took more factors into consideration when deciding between them, is not surprising. What is somewhat curious is that the NDP was not preferred for more distinct reasons.

To attempt to shed light on this, we consider the role of interest. If the Ontario election really was less engaging for voters because it was a subnational election (although federal considerations did not trump provincial ones in our analysis), then the election may have been of more interest and extracted more cognitive effort from politically interested individuals. Work by Roy (2009) suggests that politically informed individuals take into account more considerations than those with relatively less information. As those who are more interested are also likely to have more political information, this suggests that we may see similar dynamics. An analysis that takes interest into account may reveal differences in which considerations mattered for those paying closer attention.

To do this analysis, we use a variable that asks about interest in the election (a 0 to 10 scale). We then created a dichotomous variable by dividing the variable at the mean (7.59). This results in a sample of 274 low interest individuals and 443 high interest individuals. We ran the same logit model as in Table 4 separately for each group of voters.

¹¹ These marginal effects reflect the choice of the PC Party over both other options.

The results are shown in Table 5. We consider the PC vote choice first (columns 1 and 3). The same total number of factors is significant for low and high interest individuals (9), but the specific factors vary. For instance, Catholicism and urban residence matter for low interest individuals only. Provincial Liberal partisanship matters at both levels but with very different coefficient sizes, and NDP partisanship is also significant for high interest individuals. More issues are significant for high interest individuals, but fewer feeling thermometers, as Horwath ratings are significant only for less interested people.

Interestingly, when the data are subdivided by election interest some federal considerations become significant. Satisfaction with the federal government and federal Liberal partisanship are significant for high interest individuals, and federal Liberal partisanship is a positive influence on voting PC for low interest individuals. This last finding is unexpected but perhaps reflects the “separate worlds” in which Ontarians vote – federal and provincial preferences are not necessarily the same, especially as the federal and provincial Liberal parties are not the same. However, this only appears to be the case for those with less interest - the results for high interest individuals are as expected, with positive federal evaluations benefiting the PCs and federal Liberal partisanship benefiting the Liberals.

Although federal concerns factor into provincial voting they do not negate the importance of province-specific considerations. The importance of federal concerns in subnational elections, according to the second order election hypothesis, is derived from lower interest in the subnational election. It is therefore curious that we see more effects with high interest voters.

Table 5. Multinomial Logit Vote Models, by Election Interest (Liberal baseline)

	Low Interest				High Interest			
	PC v. Lib		NDP vs. Lib		PC vs. Lib		NDP vs. Lib	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Catholic	2.228*	1.017	0.270	0.803	0.882	0.971	-1.082	0.936
Urban	-2.196**	0.721	-0.458	0.665	0.260	0.885	2.779***	0.644
University	1.933	1.013	-0.511	0.706	1.084	0.956	0.841	0.592
Low Income	0.121	0.916	1.568*	0.792	1.277	1.326	0.988	0.619
Ideology Scale	0.454	0.398	-0.918**	0.309	1.003	0.526	0.441	0.225
Prov. Lib. PID	-4.838**	1.654	0.468	0.790	-16.403***	1.984	1.905*	0.927
Prov. PC PID	3.773	2.147	2.612	2.070	-0.956	1.580	-1.434	1.739
Prov. NDP PID	2.582	1.946	1.829	1.501	-16.219***	2.203	3.740***	0.767
ON Econ.	-0.254	0.598	-0.132	0.472	0.370	0.582	1.209**	0.426
Transport.	3.611	2.142	-2.147	1.208	-14.931***	1.577	-1.801	0.947
Economy	1.994*	0.926	-0.684	0.817	2.580	1.455	0.900	0.683
Taxes	0.594	1.520	-0.358	1.089	2.542	1.398	-0.111	1.235
Environment	-12.542***	1.936	2.696*	1.355	-8.257**	2.740	2.636**	0.949
Public spending/debt	2.048	1.403	-0.059	1.298	5.378**	1.712	1.464	1.004
McGuinty	-0.739***	0.172	-0.931***	0.173	-0.947**	0.315	-0.868***	0.120
Hudak	1.218***	0.312	0.551*	0.217	0.621*	0.294	0.015	0.158
Horwath	-0.770**	0.251	0.202	0.153	-0.200	0.298	0.963***	0.168
Fed. Eval.	-0.267	2.004	-1.031	1.387	6.951*	3.281	1.208	1.277
Fed. Lib. PID	2.594*	1.042	0.471	0.784	-15.083***	1.092	-2.100*	0.911
Constant	-2.679	2.200	5.502**	1.714	-9.641**	3.530	-7.271***	2.089
N		169				296		
Pseudo R2		0.6295				0.7987		

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

For NDP voting, only income, ideology, the environment issue and leader thermometers are significant for low interest individuals. Interestingly, feelings toward Horwath are not significant but feelings toward Hudak are. Among those with more interest, urban residence, Liberal and NDP partisanship, evaluations of the economy and the environment issue influence NDP voting. It is interesting that perceived economic strength does not benefit the incumbent Liberals in this two-party comparison; perhaps it reflects hesitation to vote for the NDP when times are tough, given the party's reputation for spending. More in line with expectations, positive feelings toward McGuinty push toward Liberal voting while positive feelings toward Horwath are related to NDP support. Finally, feelings about the federal government are not significant, but federal Liberal partisanship is.

These results by level of interest suggest a curious dynamic about the decision to vote NDP instead of Liberal. Clearly, those who voted for the NDP preferred that party. Among those

with more interest, however, more considerations were significant in the model suggesting that more deliberation went into the decision of which party to support; interest levels seem to matter for distinguishing between the Liberals and NDP. It is also notable that fewer considerations factored into the NDP-Liberal choice than the PC-Liberal choice at any level of interest.

Discussion and Conclusion

For an election perceived by many to be “dull”, the outcome and the dynamics of the vote models presented in this paper suggest that much was going on under the surface. Several of the “usual suspects” mattered for the October 2011 vote: preferences over the leaders had a substantial effect on the vote outcome; partisan loyalties were evident; issue preferences made a difference.

Overall, the findings of this paper provide some interesting comment on politics in Ontario. Specific to the 2011 election, issues and choosing a party to lead on those issues mattered. Not only were the “easy” heuristics of partisanship and party leader evaluations important, but specific issue concerns distinguished the parties. Those who had economic concerns were more likely to vote for the PCs, while the environment issue pushed people away from the PCs. It also appears that choosing between right-wing and centre-left options in the province is more guided by substantive issue concerns than choosing between centre-left and left parties.

This leads to an interesting question. Is the greater distinction between the two parties (centre-left and right) the cause or is it due to a perception of greater competition as viable contenders for the government? Both the Liberals and NDP in Ontario can be placed left of centre ideologically, and our results suggest that voters do not distinguish between the two parties on many issues, except perhaps transportation (see Table 4) or the environment (see Table 5). We also found that more interested individuals took more factors into consideration when deciding between the NDP and Liberals, while the same number of considerations mattered for the PC-Liberal choice at both levels of election interest. Given the number of platform differences between the NDP and Liberals, we find this to be a curious result. Future research into how voters perceive the Ontario parties may shed light on the dynamics of political competition in the province.

A second comment that arises from the results in this paper is that, as Cutler (2008) noted, Ontario elections are not typical second-order elections. Issues specific to the province matter in the face of federal considerations, and federal factors are only inconsistently influential. As Ontario is a major power in Confederation and the provinces have significant power over issues that are relevant for citizens (not the least of which are healthcare and education), this finding may be specific to Ontario. It does raise some interesting questions, however, about the

degree to which Ontarians live in “two political worlds” and are able to separate the political domains from each other. More work is needed on provincial elections to better untangle these issues.

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