

Religion and the 2017 Conservative Party of Canada leadership race

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Abstract

This paper considers how matters of religion and social conservatism shaped the 2017 Conservative Party of Canada leadership race. In contrast to the traditional brokerage model, the post-merger Conservative Party of Canada has been described as a “coalition” of different conservative factions, including western populists, traditional Tories from Ontario and Atlantic Canada, and socially conservative ethnic communities (Flanagan 2011). Using the framework of religious contention in Canadian politics developed by Rayside, Sabin, and Thomas (2017), we conduct content analysis of candidates’ direct communications, websites, and social media to track the deployment of faith discourses within the contest. Current debates within the race include controversy over the definition of Canadian values, the place of moral traditionalism within movement conservatism, and the recognition of minority faith practices. Explanatory factors driving these controversies include anxieties regarding changing family structures, and disputes over the role of secularism and/or faith in contemporary public life.

Introduction

This paper considers the role of social conservatism and minority faith recognition shaped the 2016-17 Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) leadership race – the party’s first since the initial merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada in 2003. All political parties are coalitions of individuals who are motivated by a range of policy concerns. The CPC is now a coalition of conservatisms: libertarianism, populism, red toryism, and social conservatism. Party leadership elections provide a unique opportunity to examine which policy currents exist within a given party and how political leaders work to mobilize such groups within their party base. For example, while social conservatives or those concerned about the accommodation of religious minorities are too few to carry a general election, if mobilized in sufficient numbers, they can sway the outcome of a leadership contest. Knowing this, leadership candidates have an incentive to focus their appeals on this constituency. Indeed, from its early stages, the CPC leadership race featured sharp debates over the definition of “Canadian values,” the place of moral traditionalism within movement conservatism, and the recognition of minority faith practices. However, there are risks in pursuing this strategy. In Canadian politics, targeted appeals to social conservatives may harm efforts to broaden the political appeal of a candidate and her party. In turn, this may encourage candidates to employ more covert language in an effort to appeal to a broader constituency, while continuing their outreach to more conservative elements within the party.

Using the framework of religious contention in Canadian politics developed by Rayside, Sabin, and Thomas (2017), we a conduct content analysis of candidates’ direct communications with party members to track the deployment of faith-based and populist discourses within the leadership contest. In *Religion and Canadian Party Politics*, we argued that three axes of

religious contention have shaped in Canadian politics. The first is the denominational divide between Protestant-Catholics that heavily influenced the country's politics prior to the Second World War and continues to have some echoes today. The second is the conflict between religious conservatives and social progressives that emerged in the Post-- era as increasing secularization led to disagreements over social issues, such as reproductive choice, LGBTQ rights, and the place of religion within society. Finally, the third axis is the conflict that has emerged over the past few decades regarding the extent to which minority religious groups and their practices should be recognized and accommodated by the state and society more broadly.

This paper focuses on the second of third axes: political and policy differences over moral issues and the recognition of minority religious groups. We operationalize this framework to analyze the CPC leadership race by developing an index to capture the extent to which candidates (1) makes open appeals to social conservatives and those opposed to the accommodation of religious minorities, (2) show openness or respect to those holding these views, or (3) exhibit policy antipathy. The paper marks one of the first systematic attempts to capture the relative influence of a party faction in both internal and external campaigning, and also sheds light on the role of social and religious conservatism in Canadian politics more broadly.

This paper has four parts. We begin by discussing the relationship between faith communities and conservative parties at the federal level. We then provide an overview of the 2016-17 CPC leadership race, its candidates, and issues related to social and populist conservatism. In the third section, we outline our method for capturing messaging related to issues of faith in CPC campaign emails. We then present the results of the study, demonstrating that as the campaign wore on, leadership candidates became increasingly focused on matters of

concern to social conservatives, and increasingly adopted more overtly restrictive positions on those issues. By comparison, there was actually some softening of candidates' positions regarding minority religious accommodation, although it was still decidedly negative on the whole. Overall, our results are consistent with the results of the campaign, which saw the victory of a candidate, Andrew Scheer, widely perceived as holding social conservative values. At the same time, however, the findings also show that the CPC contains a strong current of those opposed to the accommodation of religious minorities, and that there is a strong overlap between those social conservatism and opposition to minority accommodation.

Faith, Moral Traditionalism, and the CPC

For most of the last century, denominationalism and the divide between Roman Catholics, who tended to vote Liberal, and Protestants, who tended to vote for the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, defined the relationship between faith and party politics in Canada. This dynamic began to shift in the early 2000s, as religiosity – rather than denomination – became a more consistent predictor of party affiliation. Since the creation of the CPC, the party has become the preferred choice of religious voters, a trend that peaked in 2011 when support for the Liberal Party fell to just half of what it had been among religious voters in the 2000s. This trend reversed itself somewhat in the 2015 federal election, but this may reflect the unique dynamics of that race rather than a decline in the importance of religiosity to voter behaviour (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas 2017).

As a consequence of this shift, over the past decade, the CPC has become the last remaining political home for social and religious conservatives in Canadian federal politics. The party's first elected leader, Stephen Harper, was seen to be sympathetic to socially conservative

values. The Harper government (2006-2015) regularly sent signals – or what Lydia Bean (2016) characterizes as dog whistle politics – to portray a traditionalist image of Canadian society that would be largely unrecognized by secular Canadians, but would play well with the party’s evangelical and social conservative base (12). The party introduced a range of policies favoured by those constituencies, such as a ban on support for abortion services in foreign aid spending and the introduction of tax policies supportive of traditional single-income families.

Yet over the course of his time in power, and in particular after the 2011 election, Harper became increasingly reluctant to show overt support for socially conservative positions, especially where they might detract from his more ideologically driven economic agenda. Harper publicly opposed initiatives by backbench Conservative MPs that reopened the abortion services debate within Canada, as well as those other initiatives that could harm electoral appeals to more moderate elements within his own party base and the broader electorate. Two issues, in particular, illustrate this push and pull within the party: 1) the legalization of same-sex marriage and 2) the recognition of minority faith and ethnic communities.

In the 1990s, most of the rights and protections associated with marriage were extended to gay and lesbian couples, and by the early 2000s all that remained was to broaden the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples (Rayside 2008). As provincial appeal courts ruled in 2003 and 2004 that the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage violated section 15 of the *Charter*, the federal Liberal government announced an election, one that returned a minority government. While a considerable portion of the CPC base favoured restricting the definition of marriage to one man and one woman, Harper was careful on the campaign trail to limit the appearance of a hidden socially conservative agenda. He did eventually voice his opposition to same-sex marriage and argue that it was up to Parliament, and not unelected judges, to enact

such a radical social change (Rayside 2011). Despite opposition from Harper and the vast majority of Conservative MPs, same-sex marriage was recognized by federal statute in 2005.

While occurring just months following the same-sex marriage vote in Parliament, Harper was determined to downplay the social conservatism in his party 2005-2006 election and avoid the allegations of a hidden agenda that had cost the party in 2004. However, he did promise early in the campaign to allow a free vote on a resolution to reopen the marriage debate, before promptly dropping the issue. Harper won a minority government and was faced with the dilemma of what to do about same-sex marriage. Given the precarity of his minority government, reopening the marriage debate had the potential of costing him more votes than he may win. Nonetheless, the Conservative government held the vote in 2006 and, when it was defeated, Harper argued that Parliament had spoken and the issue was closed (Malloy 2013, 193).

In the late 2000s, the CPC devoted considerable resources to attracting ethnic minority voters away from the Liberals through direct appeals to their communities, often spearheaded by Jason Kenney, a longtime immigration minister (Bricker and Ibbitson 2013). In the 2011 federal election, the CPC succeeded in attracting suburban and economically established immigrant voters (Bricker and Ibbitson 2013). Yet whether this shift reflected the CPC's commitment to faith-based issues is unclear, and may instead result from the party's association with broader "family values" and market-oriented policies. It is also debatable how entrenched this support within ethnic minority communities has become, with evidencing suggesting that the party's success relied more on a softening Liberal vote, rather than growing support for the CPC and its policies (Adams and Brown 2013), a possibility seemingly reinforced by the CPC's loss in the 2015 election. The historic attachment of ethnic minority voters to the Liberal party may have been loosened, but the CPC may not have been as successful in attracting them as they hoped.

Ironically, a significant portion of the CPC base includes voters who are concerned about what they see as high levels of immigration and particularly the growing number of religious minorities. Indeed, over the course of its majority government (2011-2015) – at the same time that Harper increased his attempts to restrict overt action on socially conservative issues – the party increasingly began to pursue policy measures aimed limiting the accommodation of religious minorities, especially Muslim Canadians. Such initiatives, which included the passage of the *Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act*, as well as a ministerial directive to ban the wearing of face veils at citizenship ceremonies, also had the added effect of singling religious minorities out as targets of public suspicion (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas, 2017). The party then went even further in this direction during 2015 election, calling for the creation of a “barbaric cultural practices” tip line for police, and musing about banning face-coverings for federal public servants.

Going into the 2016-17 leadership race, then, the Conservative party appeared to be at the cusp of a realignment in its engagement with political contention on the issue of religion, moving away from the party’s historical efforts to defend socially conservative values on issues such as abortion or sexuality and towards a new focus on restricting the recognition and accommodation of religious minorities. A similar transition has taken in other political systems, with the focus on limiting the rights of religious minorities enabling the formation of political alliances between that portion of social conservatives who wish to maintain the privileged position of Christianity and “traditional values” within western society, secularists who see the accommodation of religious minorities as potentially threatening those rights only recently secured by previously marginalized groups, such as women and the LGBT+ community, and those opposed to higher levels of immigration and cultural difference. In Canada, it can also be seen at the provincial level

in Quebec, with the Parti Québécois pursuing restrictions on minority religions not in the name of social conservatism, but rather to protect the province's secular character and values.

CPC leadership race 2016-17

The 2016-17 CPC leadership race will likely be remembered as a pivotal event in Canadian political history. While notable for being just the second time in its history that CPC members were able to cast a ballot for party leader, the race was most distinctive for the large number of candidates and the sheer breadth of the ideological and policy positions they advanced. This section puts the race in context by first examining the rules for the campaign and then the major developments pertaining to the questions of religion and social conservatism since the party's founding. It then briefly reviews the candidates in the race before exploring the major dynamics and events that shaped the race.

Campaign rules

Leadership elections within the Conservative Party of Canada operate under a set of rules that were established as part of the founding compromise that led to the merger of the CA and the PCs. Alliance members strongly believed in the one-member-one-vote system for leadership elections, and the party's previous incarnation, the Reform Party, had been one of the first to adopt that system at the federal level. By comparison, the PCs were much more agnostic, having employed a one-member-one-vote system for their leadership election in 1998, but then reverted to the more traditional delegated convention for the next race in 2003. PC members were also concerned that their influence in the new party would be overwhelmed by the larger number of CA members, most of whom were from Western Canada. To bridge this divide, the party adopted a hybrid system whereby each member votes for the party leader, but each riding is

given an equal weight in determining the overall outcome of the election, no matter how many members it has.

This electoral college system gives disproportionate influence to sparsely populated rural ridings, especially those in areas of the country where the party has traditionally fared poorly. As a result, leadership candidates cannot focus solely on how many supporters they have, but also must consider their distribution across ridings. It also means that potential candidates who lack a mass following but have pockets of potential support may still believe that they have a credible path to victory by mobilizing party members on niche issues. This belief in the possibility of victory among more fringe candidates may also be reinforced by the fact that the leadership election is conducted using ranked ballots, which allows candidates to pitch themselves to members as a second, third, or even greater choice.

In addition to the election process dictated in the party constitution, the CPC also set several rules specifically for the 2016-17 contest in order to prevent frivolous candidates, ensuring good candidate behaviour, and ensuring the integrity of membership sales (Conservative Party of Canada, 2016). To be officially registered in the race, candidates were required to have been party members for at least 6 months, at to pay both a \$50,000 fee and a refundable \$50,000 compliance deposit. They also needed the signatures of 300 members who together came from at least 30 different ridings in at least seven provinces or territories. Campaign spending was limited to \$5 million per candidate, while donations from supporters were subject to the limits outlined in the Canada Elections Act.

To be eligible to vote in the race, members needed to join the party at least 60 days prior to the vote (i.e. by March 28, 2017). The fee for membership was originally set at \$25, but was reduced to \$10 after a negative reaction from party members. Members were required to pay

their own fee (i.e. leadership campaigns or other organizations could not pay for memberships on their behalf), and to reduce the possibility for fraudulent sales all fees were required to be paid by credit card, allowing duplicate numbers to be tracked.

Lead up to the race

The leadership election was prompted by Stephen Harper's resignation as leader following the party's defeat in the 2015 federal election. To that point, Harper was the only elected leader the CPC had even known, having won the party's first leadership contest in March 2004. That race was a brief affair, coming just four months after the party was formed by the merger of the Canadian Alliance (CA) and the federal Progressive Conservative (PC) party in December 2003. It was also a small race, with just three candidates: Harper, business woman Belinda Stronach, and former Ontario provincial cabinet member Tony Clement.

Harper had come from the party's Alliance. He had served as a Reform MP for the riding of Calgary West from 1993 to 1997 before leaving politics to serve as President of the National Citizens' Coalition, a right-wing advocacy group in favour of smaller government less intervention in the economy. He then returned to the federal scene in 2002 first by winning the Alliance leadership and then the byelection necessitated by the resignation of former Reform Party leader Preston Manning. Harper's victory over Day, a former Pentecostal Minister, in the Alliance leadership had been seen as a victory for a greater focus on economic policy instead of moral issues (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas, 2017). However, within the subsequent CPC leadership race, Harper was viewed as the candidate with the greatest sympathies to social and religious conservatives by comparison to Clement and especially to Stronach.

As noted above, under Harper's leadership, the CPC initially took overt stances on several policy issues favoured by social and religious conservatives, for instance by opposing the

Liberal party's efforts to legalize same-sex marriage. As a result, this period saw the realignment of the federal party system, with the CPC emerging as the only federal party willing to welcome and give voice to the concerns of social and religious conservatives. However, such support helped to fuel concerns that the party had a hidden socially conservative agenda, and as time went on Harper increasingly sought to limit overt policy advocacy around social conservative causes, even by backbench MPs, in hopes of improving the CPC's electoral performance amongst more centrist voters (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas, 2017). Instead, the party came to focus more on economic and criminal justice issues, with its offerings to social conservatives limited to more symbolic actions such as banning support for abortion through Canada's foreign aid spending, staunch support for Israel, and the creation of the Office of Religious Freedom.

This reduction in the party's support for socially conservative policy positions, and its efforts to curtail those launched independently by backbench MPs, led to increasing discontent among many socially conservative party members and CPC parliamentarians. Indeed, the leaders of several socially conservative organizations that traditionally had endorsed the Conservative party began to openly muse about the need to replace Harper as leader (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas, 2017). At the same time, many fiscally conservative organizations that had traditionally supported the CPC, such as the Canadian Tax Payer's Federation and the Fraser Institute, were frustrated by the Harper government's decision to embrace deficit spending following the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as by its failures to allow for further private sector involvement in healthcare delivery, eliminate the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or remove the extension government regulation within the telecommunications sector.

However, while seeking to limit activism on socially conservative issues, during its last term in office, the Harper government showed increasing willingness to politicize the recognition

of minority faiths, and particularly to raise fears regarding the Muslim community – a trend that continued into the 2015 election campaign (Rayside, Sabin, Thomas, 2017). When the election was settled, the Conservatives were defeated by a Liberal party that had run on a narrative of openness and inclusion. Many analysts credited the CPC’s loss to the desire for change amongst voters, and also to the exclusionary tone evidenced by the barbaric cultural practices hotline and niqab ban proposal (see for instance Dueck, 2015). In fact, even Chris Alexander, the Conservative Minister who had announced the hotline proposal, suggested that it had cost the party support during the campaign (Payton, 2016). Consequently, the leadership race began with the social conservative and fiscal conservative branches of the party seeking the opportunity for greater influence, while those opposing the recognition of minority religions appearing to have been chastened by defeat.

Candidates

Even with the high cost of entry, the leadership election attracted 14 registered candidates as well as three others who attempted to enter the race but were unable to raise the funds required. The race did not have a defined start, with candidates instead registering at different points in time. Kellie Leitch was the first to declare her intention to run on April 6, 2016, and was followed the next day by Maxime Bernier. As shown in Table I, several others joined them throughout the summer, but it was not until a six week period beginning in late September that the majority of the candidates entered the race. The last to declare his candidacy was Kevin O’Leary, who infamously waited until the day after the final French-only debate to join the race (Elliott, 2017).

While there were no candidates who campaigned only on a single issue, there were several who focused primarily on one issue or a subset of issues. Kellie Leitch, the first candidate

Table I – Overview of leadership candidates

Name	Date declared	Background
Chris Alexander	12-Oct-16	Diplomat; former MP; former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
Maxime Bernier	7-Apr-16	Lawyer; sitting MP; former cabinet Minister; including Minister of Foreign affairs
Stephen Blaney	23-Oct-16	Engineer; sitting MP; former cabinet Minister; including Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Michael Chong	16-May-16	Business person; sitting MP; former Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
Kellie Leitch	6-Apr-16	Medical Doctor and professor; sitting MP; former Minister of Labour and Status of Women
Pierre Lemieux	22-Aug-16	Engineer, Canadian Forces Veteran; former MP
Deepak Obhrai	14-Jul-16	Business person; sitting MP
Kevin O'Leary	18-Jan-17	Business person, TV personality
Erin O'Toole	14-Oct-16	Air Force Veteran; sitting MP; former Minister of Veterans Affairs
Rick Peterson	18-Oct-16	Business person, venture capitalist
Lisa Raitt	2-Nov-16	Lawyer, administrator; sitting MP; former cabinet Minister, including Minister of Transport
Andrew Saxton	18-Oct-16	Investment manager; former MP
Andrew Scheer	28-Sep-16	Political staffer; sitting MP; former Speaker of the House of Commons
Brad Trost	16-Aug-16	Geophysicist; sitting MP

to enter the race, quickly distinguished herself for focusing on the need to screen immigrants and other visitors to for “anti-Canadian values.” However, her desire to screen immigrants was not rooted within religious terms, but rather as a way to protect values of gender equality and sexual diversity (Kingston, 2016). In contrast, Brad Trost and Pierre Lemieux both presented themselves as unabashed social conservatives, identifying as pro-life and speaking in favour of free speech and conscience rights. Indeed, Lemieux and his campaign team indicated that he joined the race to make sure that social conservatives would have a voice both in the leadership race and in the party going forward (Dickson, 2017; Ryckewaert, 2017). Trost and Lemieux were also the only leadership contenders to appear in person at the 2017 March for Life, which is organized each year by the Campaign Life Coalition, a pro-life advocacy group (Platt, 2017).

Notably, a third leadership contestant, Andrew Scheer, sent a note of greeting to the March attendees.

The only other candidate to concentrate primarily on a single issue was Deepak Obhrai. However, his campaign generally stressed the need for tolerance and inclusion, both of religious and ethnic minorities and of social groups like the LGBT community (Dickson, 2016). As will be seen in the results later on, this combination distinguished him considerably from the other candidates.

External influences

The campaign was heavily influenced by several events both within Canada and internationally. Of these, the five most important for the consideration of the role of religion within the race were the launch of a new sexual education curriculum in Ontario in February 2015, the passage in June 2016 of a new legal framework for assisted dying within Canada, Donald Trump's victory within the Republican primary and the broader US Presidential Election, the terrorist attack on the mosque in Ste. Foy in January 2017, and the debate in early 2017 on parliamentary motion M-103, which called for the condemnation of Islamophobia within Canada. While the first two events related to issues of social conservatism, the latter three pertained to the accommodation of religious minorities.

In February 2015, the government of Ontario re-launched its curriculum for health and personal education. The document had originally been put forward in early 2010, but was withdrawn for further consultation and development after a backlash from parents who alleged that it dealt with sexual activity, sexuality, and gender identity at an inappropriately young age.¹ When finally brought back, the response was little different and several parent groups, including

¹ See Rayside, Sabin, and Thomas 2017 for a full discussion of that incident and the subsequent redevelopment of the curriculum.

those from the Muslim community and other minority groups, began to mobilize against the introduction of the document. In addition to letter writing and demonstrations at the provincial legislature, several of these groups launched a coordinated campaign to keep students home from school in protest. In some areas, it is estimated that half of the students were absent during the campaign (CBC News, 2015). After the government refused to back down, a significant number of parents began to seek out options for religious schooling or homeschooling, leading to a spike in the number of private religious schools in the province (Blizzard, 2016; Ross, 2016). An organization known as Parents as First Educators (PAFE), which had formed in response to the initial introduction of the curriculum, also supported single-issue candidates to raise the issue in provincial by-elections throughout 2016.²

While education is a provincial policy issue, the curriculum was limited to one province, and the re-introduction pre-dated the CPC leadership race, the mobilization that developed against Ontario's sexual-education curriculum created networks that were activated during the CPC leadership election. This network overlap can be most clearly seen in the campaigns of Brad Trost, who included a PAFE graphic in two of his campaign emails, and Pierre Lemieux, whose daughter was the single-issue anti-sexual education candidate who ran in the provincial Ottawa-Vanier by-election (Reevelly, 2016). Both candidates were also endorsed by PAFE, which claims to have a distribution list of 80,000 supporters (Allen, 2017; Parents as First Educators, 2016). Furthermore, the Ontario curriculum incident increased the focus on the role of education, freedom of speech, private schooling, and parental rights during the CPC leadership campaign.

² The candidates officially ran as part of the "Stop the New Sex-Ed Agenda Party." However, PAFE was an active supporter of the initiative and one of PAFE's two leaders served as a by-election candidate (Parents as First Educators, 2016).

The passage of the federal Bill C-14, which created the legal framework for medical assistance in dying, also had a galvanizing effect on social and religious conservatives. While generally opposed to the law, several major religious advocacy groups including the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Campaign Life Coalition were concerned that the legislation did not provide sufficient protections for medical professionals or health care institutions that objected to the procedure on religious grounds (MacCharles, 2016). Consequently, many social and religious conservatives entered into the CPC leadership campaign seeking candidates that would protect the conscience rights.

Turning to the accommodation of religious minorities, the ascendance of Donald Trump within American politics provided a boost to those leadership candidates who sought a more restrictive approach. As noted above, following the 2015 election, many observers had argued that the negative tone of the party's campaign, and particularly its efforts to raise fears concerning religious minorities, had contributed to its defeat by a Liberal party that campaigned on a message of inclusion, including the increased acceptance of mostly-Muslim Syrian refugees. However, the victory of Trump, who campaigned in part on a plan to ban Muslims from coming to the United States, helped to re-legitimize or embolden those within the CPC who were campaigning on against the accommodation of religious minorities. Indeed, Kellie Leitch, the most vocal opponent of religious accommodation, sent out an email celebrating Trump's victory and saying they would deliver the same message to "elites" in both countries.

Two further developments then had conflicting impacts on the debate over religious accommodation. The first was the mass shooting at a mosque in Quebec City that killed six and injured over a dozen more. The shooter was a Canadian born man of Quebecois descent who was said to be an admirer of Donald Trump and French National Front leader Marine Le Pen, both of

whom had taken hard stances against Muslim immigration (McKenna, 2017). The attack led several commentators to speculate that the anti-immigrant rhetoric espoused by Trump and Kellie Leitch (see for instance MacDonald, 2017; Timson, 2017). While not naming Leitch directly, in a series of tweets leadership candidate Michael Chong argued that politicians had contributed to the attack, writing “This mosque attack is no accident... Politicians talking division, not unity, help normalize hate” (The Globe and Mail, 2017).

Yet rather than reduce the prevalence of messaging around religious accommodation within the campaign, candidates soon returned to the subject during the debate on M-103, a parliamentary motion to condemn islamophobia. M-103 was a non-binding private member’s motion that was introduced in December 2016 by Iqra Khalid, a Muslim Liberal MP from the Greater Toronto Area who was first elected in 2015. The motion called for Parliament to condemn islamophobia and all forms of religious discrimination, and also would task the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to conduct a study on how best to eliminate racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia (Khalid, 2017). It was launched as a more detailed follow-up to an e-petition against Islamophobia from earlier in 2016 (E-411) that had received over 68,000 signatures (Majzoub, 2016). The petition had prompted NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair to put forward a motion “condemning all forms of Islamophobia” in October 2016 that received unanimous consent from the House of Commons (Mulcair, 2016). However, Mulcair’s motion had not led to any further study or policy change in the manner suggested by M-103.

Yet while Mulcair’s motion had received unanimous consent from MPs, M-103 quickly became the subject of a fierce political mobilization. Many opponents claimed that it would infringe on free speech, especially since it did not define the term “Islamophobia,” potentially

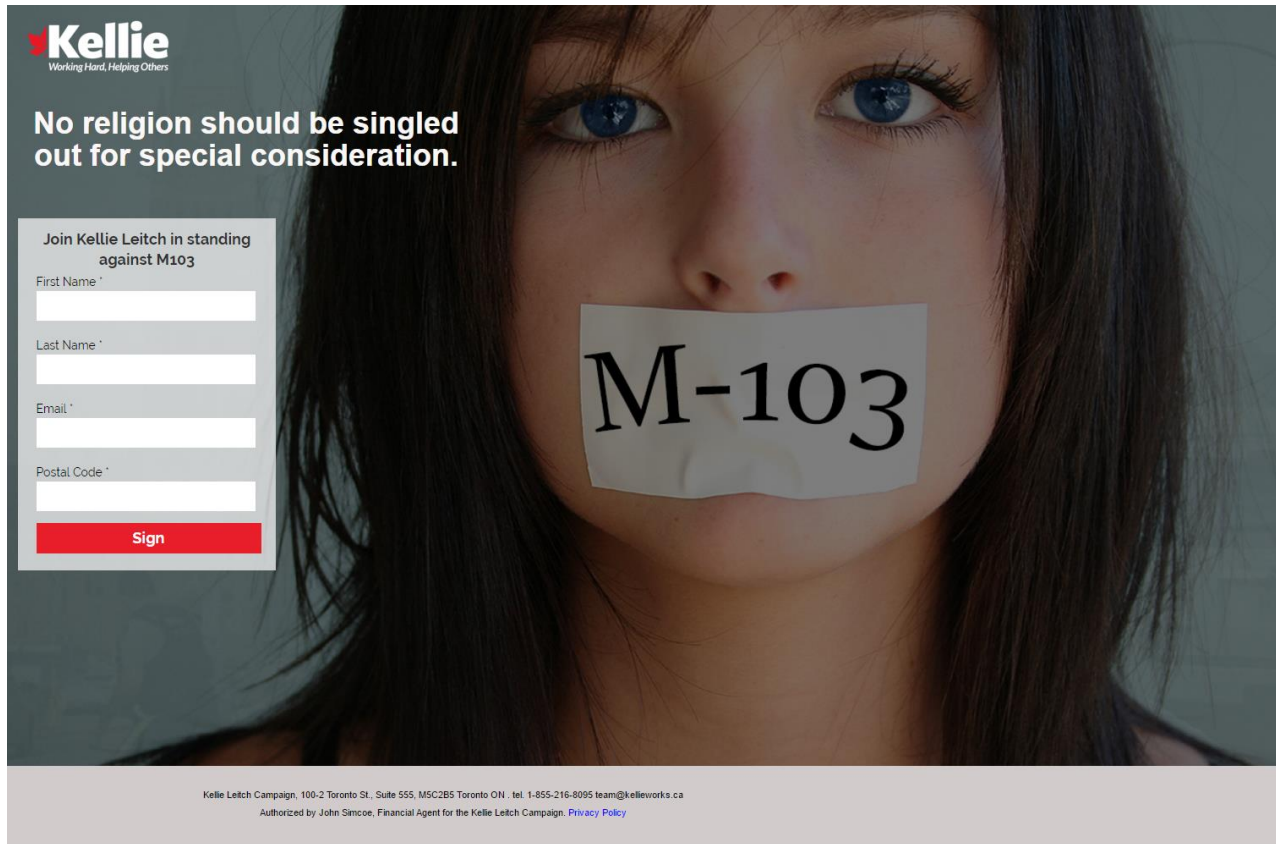
allowing any criticism of Muslims to be captured by its provisions (see for example Kay, 2017). Others argued that it was too focused on Muslims and should instead of condemn discrimination against all religions equally. More alarmingly, some critics argued that the motion was just the first step towards the imposition of sharia law in Canada (Stone, 2017). Khalid herself received hate mail and death threats, prompting police to offer her extra police protection (Parry, 2017).

All CPC leadership candidates except for Michael Chong opposed the motion, citing either the need to protect free speech, the need for a broader focus, or both. Kellie Leitch in particular sought to campaign on the issue, launching a petition housed on a dedicated website (www.stopm103.ca) to oppose the motion. As shown in Figure 1, the site contained no content except for Leitch's campaign logo and registration details, the statement "No religion should be singled out for special consideration," a picture of a white woman with tape over her mouth, and a sign-up box. Those signing the petition were then provided with a weblink to donate to Leitch's campaign. Not to be outdone, Maxime Bernier argued that he opposed the motion on the grounds that it was part of a broader campaign endorsed by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to have anti-islamophobia laws adopted in all Western countries, and to have the freedom of speech defined by the principles of Shariah Law (Bernier, 2017).

The freedom of speech issue emerged again in the form of Bill C-16. The legislation, introduced by Liberal Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybold in May 2015, adds "gender identity" and "gender expression" as protected grounds of discrimination to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and to the hate crimes provisions of the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Dating back to 2005, NDP MP Randal Garrison had introduced several similar pieces of legislation to the House of Commons, the last of which passed but died in the Senate when the Harper

government called an election in Fall 2015. The House quickly passed C-16 in November 2016, before languishing again in the Senate.

Figure 1 – Kellie Leitch’s stopm103.ca petition website



Transgender rights has become a flashpoint for social conservatives and radical feminists, each of whom see the passage of Bill C-16 as threatening both the freedoms of speech and association, but also destabilizing to current understandings of the sex/gender binary. CPC leadership candidates Trost and Scheer have been particularly vocal in their opposition to legislation, having voted against it in the House of Commons. Late the leadership campaign, frontrunner Maxime Bernier renounced his support for C-16 after speaking with University of Toronto Professor Jordan Peterson, a vocal free speech activist and opponent of the bill. Bernier (2017) linked his newfound opposition to C-16 to M-103, stating that “[w] e must protect

minority groups against hate and discrimination. But we also must ensure that we protect our most fundamental freedoms—including our freedom to speak our mind and to use common language without fearing legal consequences.”

Campaign dynamics

As noted above, those wishing to vote in the leadership race needed to have joined the party by March 28, 2017. This membership cutoff date effectively divided the campaign into two parts. In the first, candidates not only sought to canvass existing party members, but also attempted to recruit new members as well. Canadian parties have long been characterized by relatively low levels of formal party membership, with the number tending to swell during times of leadership selection or candidate nomination (Cross, 2005). Knowing this, candidates will attempt to attract new members with values similar to their own in hopes of increasing their chances of winning. Oftentimes, these efforts see candidates targeting certain religious, ethnic, or cultural groups in their campaigning. Such efforts may also be assisted by outside groups that have endorsed particular candidates. In this race, social conservative groups such as Campaign Life Coalition, Parents as First Educators, and Right Now each sought to recruit members to support socially conservative candidates (Mazereeuw, 2017; Paling, 2017). Conversely, organizations concerned about the anti-immigrant policies espoused by Kellie Leitch and others during the campaign encouraged those in the political centre to join the party in hopes of selecting a more moderate candidate. Party officials reported that 259,010 members registered by the cut-off date, slightly more than the figure for the party’s 2004 leadership election (Mazereeuw, 2017).

Once the membership cutoff date is past, the campaign enters its second phase in which candidates change their focus from recruitment to maintaining the support of those they signed

up, and attempting to reach out to those supporters recruited by other candidates. However, given the preferential ballot, the outreach attempts during the second phase of the campaign do not need to be zero-sum. Instead, candidates may simply aim to establish themselves as a voter's second (or third, fourth, fifth, etc.) choice. Overall, this desire to reach out to a broader range of voters would appear to increase the incentives for candidates to moderate their appeals in the later stages of the campaign.

Method

As noted above, party leadership campaigns provide a unique opportunity to explore the strength of different factions or ideologies among the adherents of a given political party. To explore the relative strength of social conservatives and those opposed to the accommodation of religious minorities within the CPC, we subscribed to receive emails from all candidates who were officially registered as part of the leadership race. We chose to examine candidate emails as it allows us to determine the prevalence of appeals concerning social conservatism and religious accommodation within a defined universe of cases. The more private nature of email communications, the ability of candidates to communicate at greater length, and the self-selecting nature of email subscriptions also means that candidates may outline their positions more openly and in greater detail than in their public statements or social media posts. As such, reviewing candidates emails provides an ideal way to explore their engaging with religious issues before moving to more public platforms like Twitter in future research.

Data collection began in November 2016, with new candidates added to the study as they joined the race and established an online presence. However, while signing up for candidate emails theoretically sounds like a straightforward process, a number of challenges were encountered. First, it became apparent during the study that some candidates were sending

emails only to registered party members, or were sending different messages to members and non-members. This reality was observed by comparing those messages received by the study to discussions of candidate emails on Twitter. Consequently, a second sign-up round began in February 2017 from an account belonging to a registered party member. Second, despite having the option to sign-up for emails on their websites, some candidates used the tool infrequently or not at all. In particular, the only message received by either email account from candidate Andrew Saxton was a Christmas greeting, while no messages were received from either Pierre Lemieux or Rick Peterson. The absence of messages from Lemieux, an avowed social conservative, may lead to an underestimation of the overall level of socially conservative messaging during the campaign. However, the fact that no messages were received from his campaign despite repeated attempts to sign up suggests that he focused on other mediums.

Despite beginning the data collection earlier, we chose to limit the study to the period from January 1, 2017 until April 30, 2017.³ This approach was taken both to concentrate on the period when campaigning was at its most intense and also to minimize the gap in the data caused by the decision of some campaigns to limit their messages to party members. Notably, Kevin O’Leary both launched his campaign after the study period began (18 January) and withdrew from the race before the study period closed (26 April). However, his emails are included in the analysis as O’Leary attracted considerable support (he claimed to have sold over 33,000 memberships), suggesting that his messaging appealed to those who identify as conservatives (The Canadian Press, 2017). Table II presents the total emails received from each candidate during the study period, whether messages were sent to the original non-member account, and the date on which the first message was received.

³ In future research we will include the remaining emails sent until the end of the campaign in May 2017.

Table II – Data overview

Candidate	Emails during study period	Non-member account?	Date of first message
Alexander	21	-	13 Feb 2017
Bernier	85	Y	26 Nov 2016
Blaney	89	Y	28 Nov 2016
Chong ⁴	32	-	3 Feb 2017
Leitch ⁵	46	-	2 Feb 2017
Obhrai	24	Y	15 Nov 2016
O'Leary	63	Y	23 Jan 2017
O'Toole	72	Y	2 Nov 2016
Raitt	66	Y	2 Nov 2016
Scheer	71	Y	9 Nov 2016
Trost	34	Y	1 Dec 2016

To conduct the analysis, the emails received were extracted into a dataset using webscraping software and imported into NVIVO. To identify the relevant messages, a content search was conducted using a series of key terms pertaining to social conservatism and the accommodation of religious minorities. In this exercise, social conservatism was operationalized both using terms that reflect traditional Christian religious terminology (e.g. bible, Catholic, Christian, Easter), as well those that pertain to the social issues that are the focus of social conservative advocacy, such as abortion, education, and assisted dying. Religious accommodation was similarly operationalized using the names of minority religious groups (e.g. Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh) as well as the social challenges that such groups are typically accused of creating, such as terrorism and radicalization. Given the likelihood that some candidates would employ more covert appeals, the search terms included both those that dealt directly with the relevant issues (e.g. “assisted dying” or “euthanasia”) as well as those that would signal those

⁴ The non-member account received two emails from the Chong campaign in November 2016, but none were received after that point.

⁵ After receiving 10 emails from the Leitch campaign in November 2016, the non-member account did not receive any further correspondence until March 2017.

concerned with the issues (e.g. “conscience rights”). A full list of the terms employed is included in Appendix I. Notably, a visual inspection of the email messages was also conducted as some included text within embedded images that were not accessible to the NVIVO text search.

After the target emails were identified, each was coded based on whether it dealt with one or both of the target themes, the stance taken (supportive or opposed), and the directness of the message (overt versus covert). Notably, when coding for social conservatism, the question asked was whether the message would be seen as expressing support or opposition to the adoption of socially progressive policies. Given the politicization of Christian and broader religious language within Canadian politics,⁶ references to personal Christian faith or use of religious language were generally coded as expressing opposition to such policies unless the broader content of the message explicitly negated the potential for such signaling. While references to the importance of free speech could potentially be coded as pertaining to both social conservatism and opposition to religious accommodation, the longer history of concerns with free speech among social conservatives meant that they were coded to that issue unless references to religious accommodation were also present. The coding of the messages was divided evenly between Sabin and Thomas, with one candidate separately coded by each to confirm consistency. In an attempt to account for the differences in campaign strategy before and after the membership cutoff, the results were disaggregated into the early period (pre-March 28) and the late period (post March-28), which reflects the pre and post-enrollment period of the campaign.

Results

Table III presents the breakdown of leadership emails that concern: 1) the accommodation of minority religion only, 2) support for social progressive policies only, or 3)

⁶ See for instance the debate over Stephen Harper’s use of the phrase “God bless Canada” (Albert, 2009; McDonald, 2010).

both issues. During the study period as a whole, a total of 11% of emails sent by leadership candidates discussed the accommodation of religious minorities, while a smaller proportion (5%) dealt with social issues and another set of emails dealt with both (7%). However, these summary results masks considerable variation over time. In particular, the proportion of emails dealing with both issues increased between the early (5%) and late campaigns (12%), as candidates began listing their policies positions in aggregate, rather than sending single-issue emails. We note that the proportion of emails dealing exclusively with the accommodation of religious minorities fell between the early (12%) and late campaigns (10%), while the proportion dealing with social issues increased (4% to 7%). Moreover, if one considers single issue and combined messages together, the proportion of messages touching on social conservatism nearly doubled from just 9% to 17% across the two periods, while messaging on religious minorities experienced a much smaller rise from 17% to 22%.

Table III – Overview of CPC leadership emails concerning issues of religious contention, January 1 – April 30, 2017

Issue	Early campaign	Late campaign	Total
All messages received	369	234	603
Accommodation of minority religions only	46 (12%)	23 (10%)	69 (11%)
Support for socially progressive policies only	15 (4%)	18 (7%)	33 (5%)
Both issues	17 (5%)	28 (12%)	45 (7%)
Total	78 (21%)	69 (29%)	147 (24%)

Tables IV and V present our coding of candidate emails for their support of minority religious accommodation and socially progressive policies. In each case the supportive and restrictive messages are combined to produce a summary statistic, which is then standardized as a proportion of the total emails sent by each candidate to allow comparison. This approach also helps us to overcome the challenges in subscribing to candidate emails described above.

Looking first at religious accommodation, in both phases of the campaign the messaging on the subject was overwhelmingly in support of greater restrictions. While Kellie Leitch, Andrew Scheer, and Stephen Blaney sent the greatest number of emails expressing support for restrictive policy positions, only Michael Chong was the only candidate to have permissive summary scores in both time periods. Two others, Chris Alexander and Deepak Obhrai, had restrictive scores in the first phase and permissive scores in the second, a trend that resulted primarily from the combination of their opposition to M-103 in the early campaign and more permissive messaging later on. Curiously, Kevin O’Leary sent no messages pertaining to minority religious accommodation at any point in the election, while Lisa Raitt sent just one permissive message in the first phase. Across all candidates the balance of messaging was somewhat less restrictive in the late campaign, but only marginally so.

Table IV – Coding of candidate emails concerning support for the accommodation of minority religions

Candidate	Early campaign					Late campaign				
	Total	Permissive	Restrictive	Balance	Stand.	Total	Permissive	Restrictive	Balance	Stand.
Alexander	8	1	3	-2	-25.00	13	4	1	3	23.08
Bernier	55	-	4	-4	-7.27	30	-	1	-1	-3.33
Blaney	62	-	11	-11	-17.74	27	-	6	-6	-22.22
Chong	12	3	-	3	25.00	20	5	-	5	25.00
Leitch	23	-	16	-16	-69.57	23	-	14	-14	-60.87
Obhrai	17	3	5	-2	-11.76	7	3	-	3	42.86
O’Leary	44	-	-	0	0.00	19	-	-	-	0.00
O’Toole	41	-	-	0	0.00	31	-	4	-4	-12.90
Raitt	46	1	-	1	2.17	20	-	-	0	0.00
Scheer	49	-	14	-14	-28.57	22	-	4	-4	-18.18
Trost	12	-	2	-2	-16.67	22	-	9	-9	-40.91
Total	369	8	55	-47	-12.74	234	12	39	-27	-11.54

Turning to support for socially progressive policies, there was a marked difference in the messaging between the early and late campaigns, with the latter being much more restrictive. In

the early campaign, Andrew Scheer, Maxime Bernier, and Brad Trost sent the greatest number of messages expressing socially conservative positions, while in the late campaign Trost, Bernier, and Kellie Leitch. Socially progressive messages were sent by Deepak Obrai and Lisa Raitt alone, although Michael Chong and Kevin O’Leary did not send any messages dealing with the issue in either phase.

Table V – Coding of candidate emails concerning support for socially progressive policies

Candidate	Early campaign					Late campaign				
	Total	Permissive	Restrictive	Balance	Stand.	Total	Permissive	Restrictive	Balance	Stand.
Alexander	8	-	-	0	0.00	13	-	2	-2	-15.38
Bernier	55	-	6	-6	-10.91	30	-	7	-7	-23.33
Blaney	62	-	1	-1	-1.61	27	-	1	-1	-3.70
Chong	12	-	-	0	0.00	20	-	-	0	0.00
Leitch	23	-	4	-4	-17.39	23	-	10	-10	-43.48
Obhrai	17	-	-	0	0.00	7	3	-	3	42.86
O’Leary	44	-	-	0	0.00	19	-	-	0	0.00
O’Toole	41	-	2	-2	-4.88	31	-	6	-6	-19.35
Raitt	46	2	-	2	4.35	20	-	-	0	0.00
Scheer	49	-	13	-13	-26.53	22	-	6	-6	-27.27
Trost	12	-	4	-4	-33.33	22	-	11	-11	-50.00
Total	369	2	30	-28	-7.59	234	3	43	-40	-17.09

In addition to coding candidates’ stances on minority religious accommodation and socially progressive policies, we also measured the visibility of these policy positions by coding them as overt or covert. As with the coding for policy stances, a summary statistic was produced for each candidate that was then standardized as proportion of all messages received. To examine the balance between the two sets of coding, Figures 1 and 2 plot the candidates’ policy stances versus the directness of their communication on the issue of minority religious accommodation, while Figures 3 and 4 do the same for support for socially conservative values. In each case, the figures disaggregate the results for the early and late phases of the campaign.

Support for recognition of minority religions by openness of messaging

Figure 1 – Early Campaign

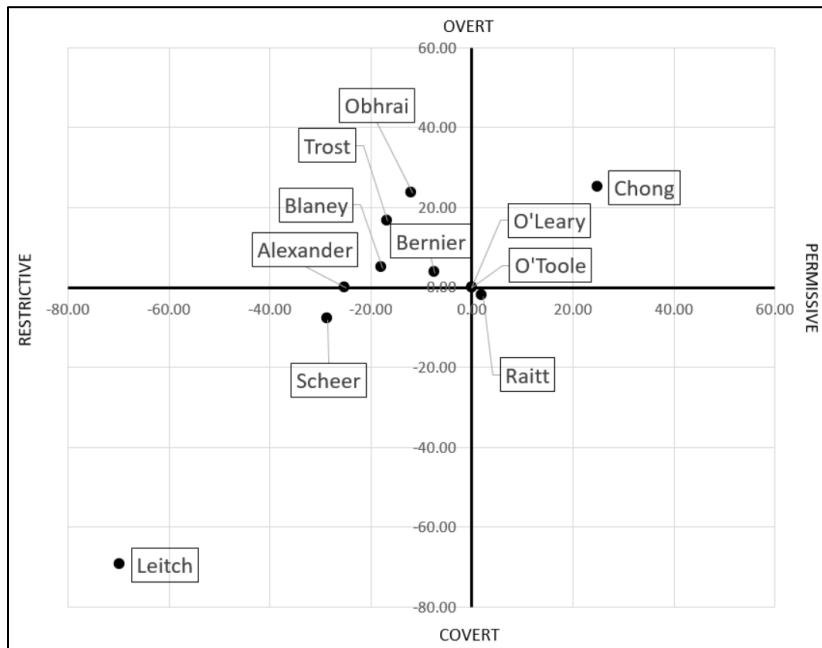
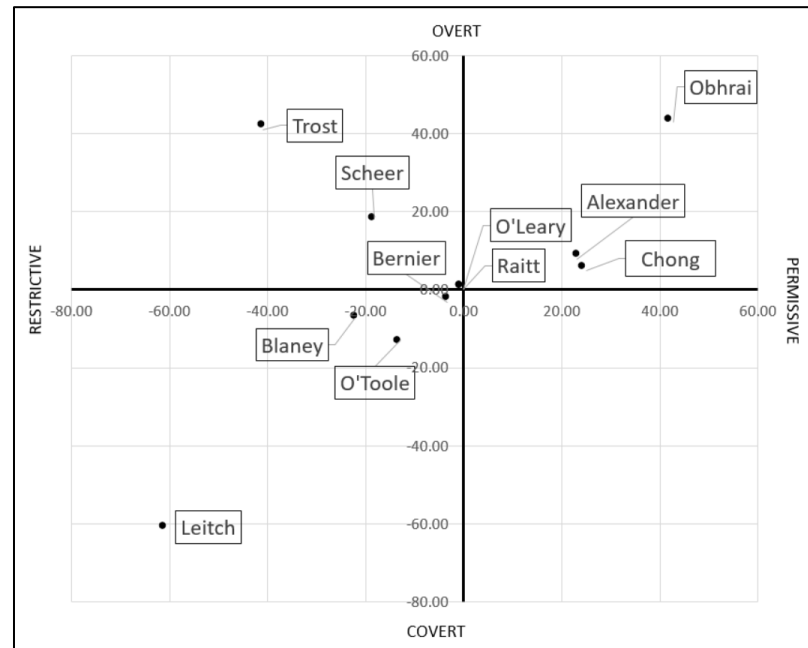


Figure 2 – Late Campaign



Support for socially progressive policy positions by openness of messaging

Figure 3 – Early Campaign

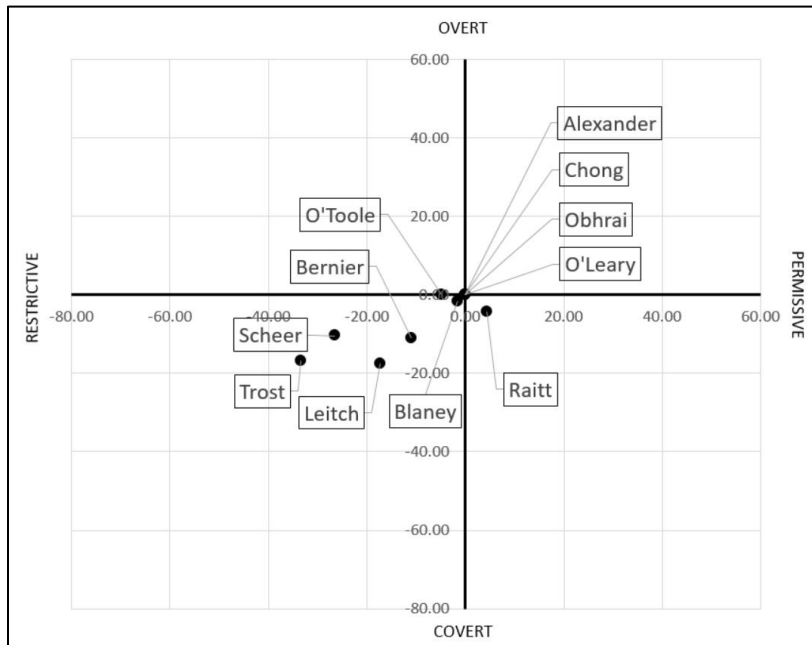
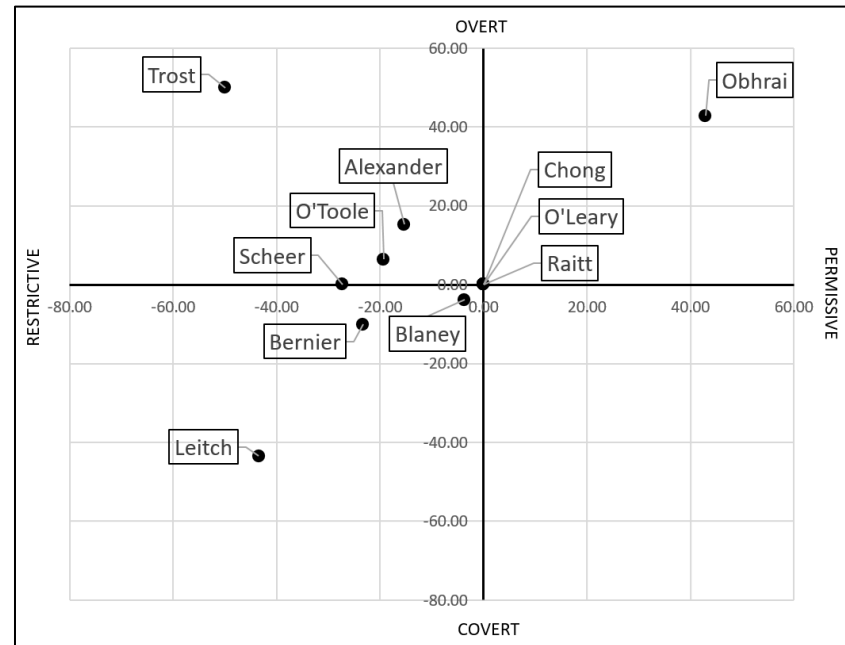


Figure 4 – Late Campaign



In terms minority religious accommodation, Figures 1 and 2 show that Kellie Leitch consistently offered messages that were restrictive of religious accommodation, but almost always did so using the coded language of values. Indeed, she appears as an outlier from the rest of the candidates for both the extent of her focus on the accommodation issue and the consistent use of covert messaging, with most others being much more closely concentrated in the centre. It is also possible to see a greater divide between the candidates in the late campaign, with more moving to the overt/permissive quadrant, while others move deeper into the over/restrictive quadrant.

Figures 3 and 4 show a similar pattern in the breakdown of the results for candidate messaging on socially progressive policies. In the early campaign, all of the candidates are fairly closely clustered, both in terms of their stance on the issue and the directness of their messaging. In the late campaign, however, the candidates become much more dispersed with Alexander, Bernier, and especially Leitch and Trost moving further in a restrictive direction. With the exception of Leitch, the candidates also became increasingly overt in their positions. On the permissive side, this included Deepak Obhrai who sent several messages calling for the party to respect LGBT rights. In contrast, several candidates including Alexander, O'Toole, Scheer, and Trost used Easter to make overt appeals based on their Christian faiths. Curiously, Lisa Raitt stands out as the only candidate to fall in the covert/permissive quadrant in any of the figures, and even then only does so in those for the early campaign.

When taken together, the results show a sharp increase in attention to social issues in the late campaign, with the vast majority of it showing support for restrictive policy positions. Moreover, many of these appeals were overt in nature. By comparison, messaging related to the accommodation of minority religions received less growth over time, and the messaging was

somewhat more mixed, if negative on the whole. Overall, these trends run counter to our expectations that candidates would face pressures to moderate their appeals and reach out using covert language during the late phase of the campaign. Instead, candidates appeared to believe that they had more to gain than to lose by making a show of their belief in restrictive policy positions on the issues of concern to social conservatives. This finding would in turn suggest that many candidates believed that socially conservative candidates and external organizations had indeed succeeded in signing up significant numbers of party members.

Conclusion

The Conservative Party of Canada held its leadership convention on the evening of May 27, 2017. Andrew Scheer, former Speaker of the House of Commons, was elected as the second leader of the CPC on the thirteenth ballot. In total, 141,362 votes were cast – the largest number cast in a leadership race in Canadian history – representing a 55% turnout of Conservative Party members. He beat Maxime Bernier with 50.95% of the vote. Although he did not directly address social conservative issues in his victory speech, many analysts were quick to argue that Scheer’s win reflects a significant victory for the social conservative wing of the party (see for instance Bryden, 2017; Grenier, 2017; Rana et al., 2017; Smith, 2017). Moreover, he did state he would withhold funding from universities that “shut down debate” and interfere with free speech on campus and referred to “radical Islamic terrorism” during the speech. In an interview with Peter Mansbridge and Rosie Barton immediately after his win, Scheer was asked about his socially conservative positions. In response, Scheer stated that he was “focusing on the common ground”, although he would defend “free speech” (CBC 2017).

In the end, social conservatives were a significant force in shaping the results of the leadership race. This was in contrast to media accounts where the issues of social conservatism

were treated as peripheral to the outcome. Indeed, pundits on the CBC were in some disbelief about the strength of the social conservative vote after the results of the first ballot were announced. In the words of Peter McKay, a former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, the party's social conservative base showed up "in force" (CBC 2017). When asked his thoughts on the strength of social conservatives within the party, candidate Chris Alexander expressed concern: "we can't afford to have any group in the movement taking control of the agenda" (CBC 2017). Alexander attributed the Harper government's success to building a broader coalition of interests, of which only one was socially conservative.

On the first ballot, socially conservative candidates received 38.81% of the vote, with Andrew Scheer (21.82%), Brad Trost (8.35%) and Pierre Lemieux (7.38%) landing in the top six candidates. In the second round (the 7th ballot), the share of support for socially conservative candidates grew to 41.87%, and to 41.99% in the third round (10th ballot). When asked why the strength of the social conservative elements were not more evident in the race during an interview with the CBC's Hannah Tibodeau, Brad Trost argued that their support was measured in memberships sold, not in fundraising numbers or endorsements. This information was not as readily available to the media. He went on to state that the support for socially conservative candidates means that they now "have a voice" in the party. Trost ended up in fourth place overall behind Bernier, Scheer, and Erin O'Toole.

Socially conservative organizations celebrated Scheer's win. Within minutes of the final results being announced, Campaign Life Coalition (CLC) sent a message to supporters stating:

The results of the race demonstrate the strength of the social conservative movement and importance of pro-life and pro-family voters. The principled, bold social conservative candidates Brad Trost and Pierre Lemieux finished fourth and seventh respectively, and Andrew Scheer, who has a pro-life voting record, won.

The release included a statement from Jeff Gunnerson, Vice-President of the CLC, putting pressure on the CPC leadership to listen to social conservative voters. He stated: “The party must acknowledge that pro-life and pro-family voters are part of the Conservative Party’s winning coalition, by promoting policies that speak to the values of many Canadians.” Whether Scheer will incorporate socially conservative policies in a way different from former Prime Minister Stephen Harper remains to be seen.

These results are consistent with what our data demonstrates. Scheer consistently courted socially conservative voters throughout the early and late campaigns and, in the end, it appears their support brought him victory in the leadership race. Moreover, the increasing prominence of restrictive messaging on social issues during the late campaign, and the failure of any candidates except Obhrai and Raitt to take permissive stances on such questions suggests that the candidates themselves knew that social conservatives were a major force within the campaign. Althia Raj, Ottawa bureau chief for Huffington Post Canada, summed up the influence of social conservatives in the race in the following way: “we are a lot stronger than you think we are, we are a lot more vocal than you think we are, and we are going to put a lot more pressure on you than you think we will” (CBC 2017).

However, this influence of social conservatism should not be seen to suggest that opposition to the accommodation of religious minorities was not a major issue as well. Indeed, there were more emails touching on minority accommodation during the campaign than there were those dealing with social issue. At the same time, it also should be noted that many of the candidates who took restrictive positions on one issue also took restrictive positions on the other. Consequently, the Conservative Party may find that focusing on policies that restrict the accommodation and recognition of religious minorities will resonate well both with social

conservatives, and with a broader spectrum of voters concerned with maintaining a certain vision of Canadian identity and values.

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Appendix I – List of search terms

Abortion	Jihad
Abortions	Jihadi
Anglican	Jihadism
Baptist	Judaism
Bathroom	Lesbian
Bisexual	LGBT
Bless	Lutheran
Blessed	M-103
Blessing	Middle East
Buddhism	Mosque
Buddhist	Mother
Catholic	motion
Christ	Muslim
Christian	PAFE
Christianity	Palestine
Christmas	Palestinian
Church	Parent
Conscience	Passover
Easter	Pentecostal
Educator	Pesach
Ethnic	Preborn
Euthanasia	Pre-born
Evangelical	Pregnancy
Faith	Presbyterian
Family	Pro-life
Father	Purim
Free speech	Radical
Freedom of speech	Radicalisation
Gay	Religion
Genocide	religions
Guru Angad Dev	religious
Hindu	School
Hinduism	Semitic
Holi	Sex
Holy	Sharia
Identity	Sikh
ISIS	Synagogue
Islam	Temple
Islamic	Terror
Israel	Terrorism
Israeli	Terrorist
Jerusalem	Transgender
Jew	Vaisakhi
Jewish	Values