

LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DECLINE AMONG
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: POLITICAL EFFICACY AND
SUPPORT FOR NON-MAINSTREAM PARTIES

by

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I- Democratic Choices: Turnover or Rage?

Among the many different theories that seek to explain voting behaviour, perhaps the most robust findings emerge from those that link voting behaviour to economic conditions. A plethora of articles and books on economic voting has produced consistent findings that leave no doubt about the centrality of economics in democratic politics. The basic conclusion is actually quite simple: Good economic conditions encourage voters to support the incumbent, while economic hard times lead voters to turn away from the governing party. Voters and politicians are fully aware that a declining economy yields potentially negative consequences for the ruling incumbent.

Normally, a loss for the incumbent is seen as a gain for the main opposition party. Up until the 2000 election, the ruling incumbent and the main opposition in Canada were either the Liberal or Progressive Conservative parties. But over the last generation, voters have been disengaging from mainstream parties and increasingly gravitating towards those parties that voice a more radical agenda, or in any way challenge the basis of mainstream politics.

Some of the more successful political parties in recent Canadian politics have been non-mainstream parties that appear to stand for fundamental change and that appear to challenge the established principles of the Canadian model of governance. For example, the Reform party's emergence from Western provinces focused attention on the need to turn Canada's appointed Senate into something that resembles very much the American Senate: elected members with equal representation from each province and empowered with greater legislative authority.¹ This, it is believed, would rebalance the federation, which is viewed as favouring the vote-rich (and oil poor) central provinces. The Bloc Québécois emerged in 1990 after the collapse of the Meech Lake constitutional accord and has since been asserting reform to the federal system in favour of

Quebec independence. Even the not-so-recent New Democratic Party has a longstanding reputation of pushing for fundamental reforms, be it nationalization of corporations, socialization of health care, and electoral reform. And then there are the many smaller parties that appeal to more ideologically pure visions (e.g., the Marxist-Leninist party), issue-specific platforms (e.g., the Marijuana party), not to mention fringe movements (e.g., the Natural Law party) and parties that may be considered parodies (e.g., Rhinoceros party). But most, if not all, of these non-mainstream parties appear to draw support from voters who feel a need to address a sense of unfairness and imbalance regarding the Canadian configuration of power. As will be shown, voters who mobilize around such parties are not looking simply to change individual political leaders at the helm. Instead, they are pointing their criticism at the overall way that they are being governed.

However, the plurality electoral formula constrains the significance of these parties, since the system favours larger parties. At best, they can secure a regional foothold. Yet, Canadians have voted for these smaller parties for many decades, albeit not normally in large numbers. Nonetheless, support for these smaller parties has varied over time. What explains this variation? Is variation in support just random, or is it linked to something more structural? These questions cannot easily be answered by standard economic voting research. The “responsibility hypothesis” that forms the basis of economic voting models focuses on political leaders and political parties, often based on short-term evaluations of the economy. But as will be demonstrated, long-term economic deterioration is more likely to erode voters’ evaluations of not only the ruling incumbents, but also of the overall political regime, and this, in turn, leads to a greater propensity to disengage from mainstream politics.

Others point to the potential for voter discontent to evolve from negative attitudes about particular leaders and parties towards a more generalized rejection of political system (Gamson, 1968; Dennis, 1975; Miller and Listhaug, 1990). Using Eastonian terms (Easton 1975), while short-term economic changes yield implications for specific objects, such as the current political leader and the ruling incumbent party, long-term economic decline leads voters to focus attention on more diffuse political objects, such as the general principals and institutions that underlie governance. And when voters are more likely to support parties that appeal to this sort of discontent, political stability cannot be guaranteed.

Economic decline is a major source of discontent. As Lipset (1959/63) notes, one feature of a stable government system is its ability to ensure a certain level of general prosperity, which sustains the system's legitimacy. "A society divided between a large impoverished mass and a small favoured elite results either in oligarchy (dictatorial rule of the small upper stratum) or in tyranny (popular-based dictatorship)," (Lipset 1959/63: 31). Therefore, voters suffering long-term economic decline, especially if they identify with a reference group (Nagler and Niemann 1997; Nagler and Willette 1999) that can be considered as consistently disadvantaged, may re-examine their political loyalties framed as "us vs. them" and begin to regard the political system as unfair.

The economic reference group examined here is occupation. Analysis will show that voters' propensity to support non-mainstream parties is tied to the long-term economic health of their occupations. Voters employed in occupations that have suffered long-term economic decline are more likely to support non-mainstream parties. Furthermore, external political efficacy elaborates the relationship with results showing a link between the long-term economic health of a voter's occupation, attitudes about the political system's responsiveness, and

propensity to support non-mainstream parties. Voters employed in declining occupations increasingly believe the political system is playing favourites, such that some groups appear to win while other groups consistently lose. The losers in this case increasingly regard the system as non-responsive – if non-responsive means being relegated to an “out group,” then long-term economic decline would most definitely qualify for outsider status. Voters in such a category would not only register lower levels of external political efficacy, but they would also support parties that echo these sentiments of discontent, assuming they still choose to participate. But in order to understand such a phenomenon, a more long-term and broad perspective is required to connect economic changes, attitude changes, and fundamental voter shifts. This is something standard economic voting cannot adequately examine.

II- The Short-Term and Mainstream Focus of Standard Economic Voting Research

There are several limitations to standard-economic voting’s ability to account for non-mainstream voting. Standard economic-voting research focuses primarily on the short-term, which in turn cannot adequately explain voter behaviour beyond the volleying of support between mainstream parties. A common method of data gathering is to use surveys to gauge voters’ perceptions of the economy over the previous 12 months.² This approach is widely successful, able to generate accurate predictions of voter support for an incumbent (see, for example, Fiorina, 1978; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Lewis Beck, 1988).

Alternatively, analysis could rely on actual economic data instead of survey responses. But even here, economic voting studies tend to rely on short-term data. Kramer (1971, 1983) was among the first to relate voting behaviour to real-world economic data, with results validating the

responsibility hypothesis: Declines in economic conditions in the United States *one year* before an election erode support for House of Representatives candidates of the president's party.

In either case, voter behaviour in an election year is related to economic changes over a span of one year. There is a reason for keeping the time frame short. Generally, standard economic voting research is based on the voter myopia assumption, where voters' memories are assumed not to extend longer than a few quarters (Nannestad and Paldam, 1994). Economic conditions that extend past one year are seen as too distant to enter the voting calculus. However, given that non-mainstream voting occupies the margins of a party system, a long-term perspective is needed in order to detect variations over time.

Another trait of standard economic voting research is its tendency to view voters as one homogenous group, as if all voters share a similar economic experience.³ All voters are assumed to know whether the country as a whole is growing or in decline. But economic changes are not experienced the same way throughout the economy. Sectors differ according to the extent of change (some sectors grow more than others) and the direction of change (some sectors grow, others suffer). The question is: Do voters identify with their "sector?"

Within standard economic voting, some have attempted to disaggregate voters. Weatherford (1978) categorizes voters according to class. Voters are also disaggregated according to region (Cutler, 2002; Godbout and Bélanger, 2002; Mondak et al., 1996). Others stress a need to examine the link between economics and voting through a voter's "economic reference group," such as one's occupational group (Nagler and Niemann, 1997; Nagler and Willette, 1999). If a voter's economic reference group is doing well, then that voter would tend to support the incumbent.

Another constraint with standard economic voting research is its tendency to interpret voting behaviour as a zero-sum game between the incumbent and its mainstream challenger. This perspective may reflect the fact that a lot of research into economic voting has taken place in the United States, where voters have only two viable choices, the Republicans and the Democrats. But in Canada and most other countries, voters have more choices. However, the choices are not simply made on a matter of taste or preference. Some parties are clearly associated with the system, while others are more peripheral, and voters align themselves accordingly. Voters who regard the system with less legitimacy are more likely drawn by those parties that vent a similar critique against the state. As noted by Taggart (1998), these non-mainstream parties stand out by attacking the political system, by challenging the political status quo. This makes a vote for or against the ruling Liberal party something completely different than a vote for the Bloc Québécois, or a vote for the Greens, or even, simply not voting at all. Standard-economic voting, in general, has little to say about all these different choices, and this oversight weakens its interpretative leverage. As the results presented in this paper suggest, voter shifts from the incumbent to a non-mainstream alternative is a very unique expression, one that is tied to an evaluation not about the competence of the incumbent, but about the political system as a whole. Long-term economic decline is an important factor behind this evaluation. Therefore, while voters expectedly turn away from the governing party amid economic decline, their loyalties may shift to non-mainstream parties if, indeed, the decline is understood as more than just an economic bump on the road (or even the cause of government incompetence), but instead the result of a system that itself may have different loyalties.

In Canada, non-mainstream parties at the federal level can be simply defined parties other than the Liberal and PC parties.⁴ The Liberals and Conservatives dominated Canada's parliament

at the founding and for the remainder of the 19th century and are therefore seen as the two parties most connected with the overall political system. Anger against the overall political system is understood to implicate both of these parties, since no other party has formed the political executive. All other parties are considered political outsiders, never having had a hand in the political system. This makes a vote for or against the incumbent party vs. the mainstream opposition party as a unique choice that is reflective of ordinary, stable politics; a vote for any other non-mainstream party is seen as an expression for something completely different. Therefore, if voters wish to express anger against the entire political system, voters are expected to shift support away from the mainstream and towards non-mainstream alternatives.

Canadian history is dotted by the rise of non-mainstream movements that challenge the status quo.⁵ Parties such as the Progressives, Social Credit, and more recently, the Reform party and Bloc Québécois have garnered support from those who feel the entire political system is in need of fundamental reform. These parties formed outside Parliament, have never won a federal election or been part of a federal government. One of the most successful non-mainstream parties is the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the forerunner to the NDP. For certain, one cannot discount the several occasions that the NDP propped up minority Liberal governments. This traditional opposition party (Gidengil, et al., 2001) has extra-parliamentary origins and has never entered into a formal coalition; never has the federal cabinet included an NDP member of parliament. In fact, the only official coalition government in Canadian history was that of the two mainstream parties: The Unionist government of 1917-1920 which grouped together Conservative MPs and Liberal MPs who were in favour of conscription during the First World War. In any case, non-mainstream parties are political outsiders, and their outsider status is used to empathize with voters' feelings that the system has shut them out, and often put forward

radical solutions to change things. For instance, the Bloc Québécois's solution is for Quebec to leave Canada; communists want to eliminate private property.

Apart from these prominent “third” parties, the list of non-mainstream parties is much longer. Canadians have voted for more than just the more prominent parties among the non-mainstream offerings. More marginal parties have garnered votes, such as the Libertarians, the Marxists-Leninists, Christian Heritage, and so on. Regardless of the size or prominence of a non-mainstream party, Canada's plurality system and the traditional competition between the two mainstream parties have made a choice to vote against either mainstream option more cognitively charged. A voter must reflect upon the possibility that a vote for a non-mainstream party may be a waste, and a non-mainstream party may very well end up winning the election or the local seat. Even if the non-mainstream party wins the seat, or many seats, voters are well aware that such a party can do no more than sit in opposition. Given such constraints, it would come as no surprise to find such voters pondering whether it is worthwhile even to vote at all.

In either case, whether a voter chooses to abstain or to support a non-mainstream party, the basis of such a decision is connected to an overall evaluation of the functionality of the political system: Voters must be sufficiently disillusioned at “politics as usual” in order to turn their backs on parties that are implicated as having had a hand in government.

III- Data and Methods

Analysis of the link between economic conditions and voter support is analyzed by focusing on a voter's occupation. Canadian Election Study surveys and government economic statistics are combined to determine whether changes to the long-term economic condition of

respondent's occupational group explains whether such voters are more likely to disengage from mainstream politics.

Voters are categorized according to occupational groups. Statistics Canada's 1980 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system catalogues more than 400 specific occupational titles that are sorted into 15 occupational groupings. The economic indicator used to measure economic change is based on the notion of "job growth," a measure which has not yet caught the attention of standard economic voting research (see Lewis-Beck and Tien, 2004). Labour force data contained in the 1971, 1981 and the 1991 Censuses are used to measure the growth of the occupational categories over two separate 10-year periods: 1971 to 1981, and 1981 to 1991.⁶ Economic health is measured through the 10-year percentage change of each occupational group's workforce's proportion in the overall labour market. This conceptualization assumes that an occupational group that is employing fewer and fewer people is experiencing economic decline. Also, over a span of 10 years, voters would have experienced different phases of the business cycle, as well as having lived through at least two different parliamentary mandates. Table 1 reports these changes for each occupational group.

As can be seen, some groups have seen its proportion of the workforce grow, such as administrators, health professionals, and the "service" sector. A handful of other occupations have declined. For example, transportation workers accounted for a smaller proportion of the workforce in 1981 compared to 1971, with the 10-year change amounting to a 13 percent drop. But this group recovered somewhat from 1981 to 1991, with its proportion of the overall workforce showing a slight growth of two percent. Some occupational groups have even suffered two decades of decline, such as agriculture, construction and mining (i.e., other primary). In the data presented here, even occupations in manufacturing (i.e. processing) have suffered long-term

decline, probably due to industrial restructuring, which saw many factory jobs disappear to the developing world.

Table 1: Job growth for occupational groups, 1971-1991

Occupational Group	Percent of labour force			Percentage change	
	1971	1981	1991	1971-1981	1981-1991
Managerial/Admin	4.90	7.25	12.52	47.76%	72.71%
Natural Sc./Math	3.08	3.59	4.12	16.30%	14.85%
Social Science	1.04	1.68	2.28	61.21%	35.60%
Teaching	4.60	4.36	4.51	-5.37%	3.54%
Medicine/Health	4.30	4.62	5.23	7.43%	13.25%
Arts	1.06	1.47	1.77	38.92%	19.95%
Clerical	18.10	19.50	18.52	7.76%	-5.05%
Sales	10.75	10.21	9.42	-5.05%	-7.70%
Service	12.78	12.74	13.09	-0.30%	2.72%
Agriculture	7.11	4.88	3.77	-31.27%	-22.83%
Other Primary	1.67	1.40	1.06	-16.19%	-24.40%
Processing	4.41	4.20	2.96	-4.72%	-29.66%
Machining	11.53	11.02	8.31	-4.48%	-24.53%
Construction	7.49	6.85	6.07	-8.53%	-11.42%
Transportation	7.17	6.24	6.39	-13.04%	2.41%

Source: Statistics Canada (1981, 1993)

Since the focus here is to relate long-term economic decline to non-mainstream voting, the 10-year changes in occupational growth as they appear in Table 1 were multiplied by -1. This essentially converts the scores to reflect “occupational decline,” such that a high values reflect decline.

Each 10-year change is related to survey data from the Canadian Election Study. Typically, the CES tracks a respondent’s occupation, according to the Statistics Canada’s SOC scheme. This facilitates the matching of 10-year changes for any one occupational group to survey data from a particular election. Several surveys were used to find as close as possible of an overlap between the census years and election years. However, the 10-year census cycles do

not always overlap with election cycles. Ideally, the 1981 to 1991 occupational change values should have been related with the 1988 CES, since this election year was only two years away from the conditions (1990) that were reported in the 1991 census. However, external political efficacy items were not administered in the 1988 CES. Therefore, the 1988 CES was combined with the 1993 survey. Similarly, it would have been ideal to relate the 1971 to 1981 occupational decline values with the 1980 CES. Again, not all relevant items were administered in the 1980 survey. However, the 1979 and the 1980 CES are part of a panel, so the same respondents are questioned in both waves.⁷ In order to avoid a double-counting, respondents from the 1980 wave were eliminated from analysis if in the 1979 wave they had provided a valid answer on all of the variables used in the analysis. Separate election-year dummy variables are assigned to each wave.⁸ The 1984 CES was also included, with the occupational change data reflecting the 1971 to 1981 time period.⁹

The main dependent variable, vote choice, is structured as a nominal variable with the following four categories: 1- Vote for mainstream incumbent party; 2- Vote for mainstream opposition party; 3- vote for any non-mainstream parties; and 4- Abstain.¹⁰ This arrangement allows for the test of the following hypothesis:

H1: Long-term economic decline experienced at the level of occupation leads to a lower propensity to vote and a higher propensity to support non-mainstream parties.

Not only is long-term economic decline expected to explain abstention and non-mainstream voting, it is also *not* expected to explain support for the mainstream opposition compared to the incumbent.

In order to draw a contrast between mainstream and non-mainstream voting, a short-term indicator was included. For each election year, the one-year change in provincial-level unemployment rates was assigned to each respondent.¹¹ Unemployment is a widely used measure in economic voting, and short-term changes at the provincial-level has been found to explain support levels for the incumbent (Perrella, 2005). This measure is used here to test the standard responsibility thesis, stated here as follows:

H2: A short-term increase in the provincial-level unemployment rate is likely to shift voter support from the incumbent to the mainstream opposition party.

As in H1, this short-term indicator is not expected to explain non-mainstream voting or abstention. Instead, H2 is simply an attempt to replicate the responsibility thesis.

The relationship between long-term economic decline and voting behaviour is elaborated through an examination of political attitudes as a potential mediating factor. In political behaviour, one of the more commonly used indicators of such an attitude is external political efficacy. It is a measure that dates back to the 1950s, when it was part of a five-item scale¹² of “efficacy” (Campbell, et al., 1954). Later studies (Balch, 1974; Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; Lane, 1959) show a need to separate two sub-dimensions: internal efficacy, which measures the extent to which voters see themselves able to impact the system, and external efficacy, which measures the extent to which voters regard the political system as *responsive*. More recent studies add further sophistication to the concept. Craig et al. (1990), for instance, distinguishes not only internal efficacy from external efficacy, but they also identify other related concepts, such as regime-based trust and incumbent-based trust.

Despite issues related to its multidimensionality, efficacy is seen as a set of attitudes that form through socialization (Easton and Dennis, 1967; Iyengar, 1980) and is therefore durable and resistant to change (Aish and Jöreskog, 1990). It is an underlying basis of a society's political culture, and it enables us to distinguish more participant from less participant orientations (Almond and Verba, 1963), with levels of efficacy directly related to democratic modes of participation, such as vote turnout (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982).

Despite its durability, levels of efficacy can vary among different subgroups of any society. Inter-group variations can be explained by socio-economic status (Wu, 2003), and even by general economic conditions. For instance, Canadians who live in more “central” economic regions tend to measure higher levels of efficacy compared to those who live in more “peripheral” regions (Gidengil, 1990). But efficacy can change over time. It may not happen quickly, but if a regime fails to deliver positive results, and if people feel that their input is less valued, then it should come as no surprise to find more and more citizens adjust their attitudes accordingly. In particular, citizens who increasingly regard themselves as shut out of the political process are expected to withdraw support for the regime. As Madsen (1978) states: “While one should assume no exact correspondence between efficacy and support, it nonetheless is surely true that when a supposedly democratic system is seen to have *failed* in its promise of citizen efficacy, it is likely to lose the support of its disillusioned members,” (868, emphasis his).

Disparities in social and economic conditions provide voters with clues as to the success or failure of the political system. One group of voters experiences negative results and blames the incumbent government, and hopes the mainstream alternative could do better. This may explain how voters react to short-term changes, as per the responsibility hypothesis. But another group of voters experiences negative results but feels discouraged at the possibility of the

political system paying any attention to their plight. It is this second group of unhappy voters that deserves more scrutiny, because it is this group that is most likely to move towards political movements that are potentially destabilizing.

The two survey items used to measure external political efficacy are: i) “I don’t think that the government cares much what people like me think,” and ii) “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.” Agreement with these statements is assigned a lower score than disagreement, so that high scores pertain to higher levels of efficacy. Scores from the two-items were added together, then the sum was divided by two, yielding an overall range of 0 (low efficacy) to 10 (high efficacy).¹³ The following hypothesis tests the relationship between long-term occupational decline and efficacy:

H3: Long-term economic decline experienced at the level of occupations erodes an individual’s sense of external political efficacy.

When all three variables (occupational decline, external political efficacy, and voting behaviour) are combined into the same model, occupational decline is expected to lose its significance, at least as it pertains to non-mainstream voting and abstention. This would reflect the intervening role efficacy plays in explaining the relationship between economic decline and voter behaviour. This is summarized by the following hypothesis:

H4: The relationship between long-term occupational decline and non-mainstream voting and abstention disappears when external political efficacy is included as a control variable.

The model also includes other control variables, mostly socio-demographic factors. These are: region,¹⁴ unionization,¹⁵ gender,¹⁶ religion,¹⁷ language,¹⁸ age (Blais, et al., 2002). The unprecedented success of non-mainstream parties in the 1993 election may impose a bias on the results. Therefore, dummy variables were included to represent three election years, 1979, 1980, and 1988, with the 1993 election set as the reference group.

Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2 are tested with a multinomial regression model. The results in Table 2 confirm the hypotheses. The short-term indicator's effect on non-mainstream voting is null. Instead, a voter's propensity to support a non-mainstream party is connected to the long-term economic health of a respondent's occupational group. Long-term economic decline appears to yield no significant effect on vote support for the mainstream opposition, while the short-term indicator is a significant factor.

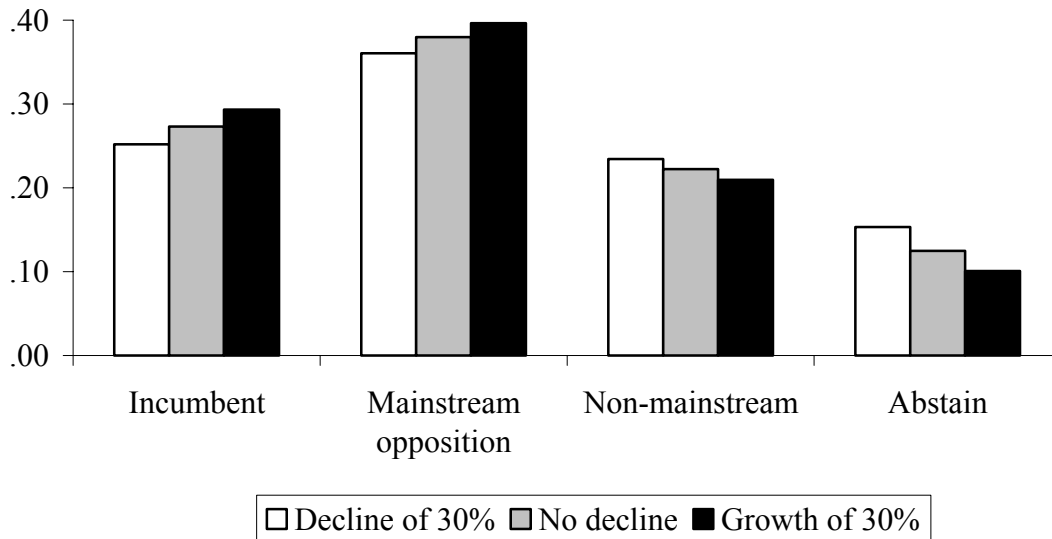
The results of Table 2 are illustrated in a simulation in Figure 1, which relates changes to long-term occupational growth rates (from Table 1) to vote probabilities. As can be seen, long-term economic decline appears to reduce voter support for *both* the incumbent and the mainstream opposition, while increasing the propensity to support for non-mainstream parties and to abstain.¹⁹

Table 2: Multinomial logit estimates of vote choice: 1979-1993 Canadian elections

	Mainstream opposition			Non-mainstream			Abstain		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.
Occupational decline	.086	.119		.431	.136	p<.01	.941	.177	p<.001
Short-term unemployment	.229	.047	p<.001	.068	.056		.156	.062	p<.05
Regional dummies									
Atlantic Provinces	-.062	.099		-.661	.135	p<.001	.191	.155	
Quebec	-.495	.105	p<.001	-.310	.124	p<.05	-.411	.174	p<.05
Western Provinces	-.026	.082		.732	.090	p<.001	.377	.132	p<.01
Language	-.248	.100	p<.05	.150	.115		.084	.158	
Religion	<i>-.134</i>	<i>.077</i>	p<.10	-.315	.089	p<.001	-.112	.123	
Age	<i>.004</i>	<i>.002</i>	p<.10	-.009	.002	p<.001	-.027	.003	p<.001
Gender	-.062	.064		-.057	.072		.035	.101	
Union	.094	.071		.513	.077	p<.001	-.092	.109	
Election years									
1979	-.931	.121	p<.001	-1.744	.134	p<.001	-1.188	.172	p<.001
1980	.031	.459		<i>-1.111</i>	<i>.574</i>	p<.10	1.011	.478	
1984	-.025	.120		-1.146	.131	p<.001			
1988	-1.370	.125	p<.001	-1.650	.133	p<.001	-1.226	.178	
Constant	1.197	.147	p<.001	1.329	.162	p<.001	1.111	.220	
Pseudo-R2	.072								
Log likelihood	-8521.5								
N	6975								

Note: The baseline category is vote for incumbent party.

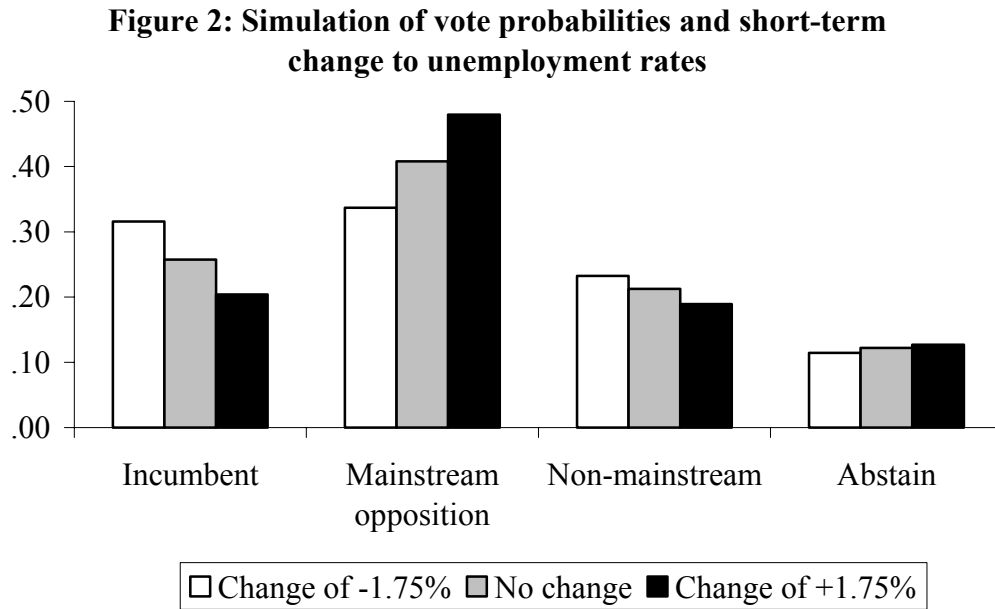
Figure 1: Simulation of vote probabilities and long-term occupational decline



The effect, though not very large, is nonetheless noticeable, and continuous. Support for non-mainstream parties and the probability of abstention steadily increases as economic circumstances worsen. The shifts may appear slight, but in an election, a few percentage points either way can make the difference between winning a majority government, winning a minority government, and losing entirely. So any small shift of support away from the mainstream parties to any of the non-mainstream parties, especially if a non-mainstream party has a prominent regional presence, can yield to a completely different electoral outcome. Also, lower levels of voter turnout raise the weight of those votes that were cast, and that, too, can significantly alter election outcomes. These results confirm the first hypothesis.

The short-term indicator in Table 2 also appears to impact the propensity to abstain, but the actual effect is small. According to the simulation of vote probabilities in Figure 2, short-term changes to unemployment yield a more visible impact on support between the incumbent

and the mainstream opposition.²⁰ These results also suggest that the choice of whether one votes at all is qualitatively different than *how* one votes.



There are other significant effects reported in Table 2, but the regional variables deserve some attention. Compared to Ontario voters, Western Canadians appear to be more prone to support non-mainstream parties. This is not surprising since Western Canada has traditionally been welcome to populist politics. The Progressives, the CCF, and Reform are three examples of parties that succeeded in the West. Between 1972 and 2000, non-mainstream parties garnered an average of 40% of the vote cast among the Western provinces.²¹

The opposite is true about the Atlantic provinces. Compared to Ontario, living in the Atlantic provinces reduces the probability of voting for a non-mainstream party. This is no surprise, given that the region is known to support mainstream parties. Between 1972 and 2000, non-mainstream parties garnered on average only 16% of the vote in the Atlantic provinces. This might at first appear curious, since living in Canada's poorest region apparently does not harm

support for the mainstream. But as Lipset (1959/1963) and Pinard (1971) point, it is *impoverishment*, and not poverty per se, that leads one to become politically volatile.

An aggregate perspective of this relationship is reported in Table 3. An average aggregate level of occupational growth rates is calculated for each of the four categories of respondent’s vote choice. The results show a clear trend. Respondents who indicated that they had voted for the incumbent belong to occupations that, on the whole, grew by 7.96 percent. Those who indicated a vote for the mainstream opposition yield a lower average aggregate growth rate, 6.5 percent. But the aggregate growth rate for the non-mainstream category is 4.57 percent, a difference of almost two points from the mainstream opposition. While the average occupational growth rate among those who abstain is 1.44 percent, a further drop of more than three points from the non-mainstream category. Furthermore, voters in the “non-mainstream” and “abstain” categories have average aggregate occupational growth rates below the dataset’s overall average of 5.56 percent, while occupational growth rates are above average for voters in the “incumbent” and “mainstream opposition” categories.

Voter category: Type of vote choice	Average occupational growth rate
Incumbent	7.96%
Mainstream opposition	6.50%
Non-mainstream	4.57%
Abstain	1.44%

The next set of results examines the link between the occupational decline and vote choice in light of external political efficacy as the mediating step. As discussed earlier, external political efficacy seems like an appropriate measure here since it theoretically taps into a sense of

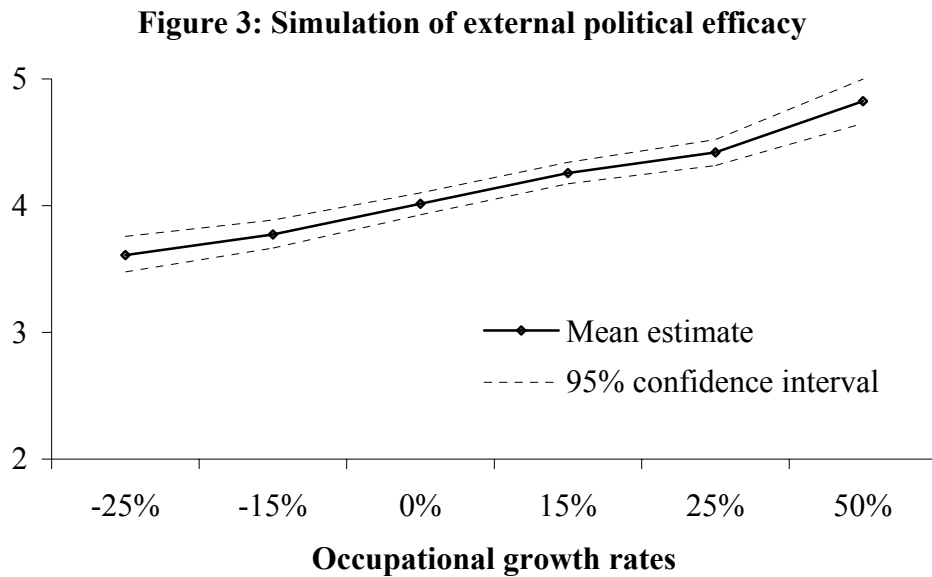
system responsiveness, or the extent to which the political system is able to respond to different political demands. Respondents in the pooled dataset cannot be said to be overly efficacious, with a mean score on the external efficacy index of 4.01. This already low level can drop further among those respondents employed in occupations suffering long-term economic decline. Of all the variables included in the OLS model in Table 4, long-term occupational decline produces one of the strongest coefficients. There are other variables that can also impact efficacy, but the results validate long-term economic decline as a key factor.

Table 4: OLS regression of political efficacy:1979- 1993 Canadian elections

Dependent variable: External Political Efficacy

	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.
Occupational decline	-1.614	.178	p<.001
Short-term unemployment	.099	.061	
Regional dummies			
Atlantic Canada	-.196	.148	
Quebec	.343	.150	p<.05
Western Provinces	-.217	.116	p<.10
Language	-.406	.138	p<.01
Catholic	-.095	.105	
Age	-.014	.003	p<.001
Male	.181	.085	p<.05
Union	.056	.095	
Election years			
1979	.784	.137	p<.001
1980	.587	.438	
1984	.273	.113	p<.05
Constant	4.405	.176	p<.001
Adj-R ²	.044		
N	3701		
Standard Error of the Estimate	2.528		

This relationship is illustrated in the simulation displayed in Figure 3. There does not appear to be much of a change in efficacy scores between very low and very high levels of occupational growth rates (from around 3.5 to 4.5), but the distribution is also very tight.²² Nonetheless, the more a voter’s occupation experiences long-term economic decline, the more a voter is likely to manifest low external political efficacy, results which confirm Hypothesis 3.



The next step is to rerun the model in Table 2 with external political efficacy as a control variable. Results in Table 5 confirm expectations. When the dependent variable is the probability of non-mainstream voting compared to mainstream, occupational decline completely loses its significance. This suggests quite strongly that the link between long-term economic conditions and vote choice is not direct but mediated through attitude. In other words, voters employed in occupational groups that have experienced long-term economic decline are more likely to acquire negative political attitudes, and it is these attitudes that guide such voters towards non-mainstream politics, as per Hypothesis 4.

Table 5: Multinomial logit estimates of vote choice: 1979-1993 Canadian elections

	Mainstream opposition			Non-mainstream			Abstain		
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Sig.
Occupational decline	.141	.200		.365	.231		.840	.305	p<.01
Short-term unemployment	.204	.072	p<.01	.203	.085	p<.05	.230	.096	p<.05
External political efficacy	.012	.018		-.062	.022	p<.01	-.157	.026	p<.001
Regional dummies									
Atlantic Canada	-.170	.155		-.726	.206	p<.001	-.057	.231	
Quebec	-.190	.157		.096	.189		.026	.229	
Western Provinces	.212	.134		.722	.151	p<.001	.503	.188	p<.01
Language	-.153	.146		.101	.175		.035	.205	
Religion	-.573	.114	p<.001	-.669	.136	p<.001	-.617	.160	p<.001
Age	.000	.003		-.011	.003	p<.01	-.032	.004	p<.001
Gender	.163	.095	p<.10	.108	.111		-.055	.131	
Union	.108	.108		.456	.121	p<.001	.123	.147	
Election years									
1979	-.936	.161	p<.001	-1.700	.182	p<.001	-.795	.232	p<.01
1980	-.183	.569		<i>-1.368</i>	.757	p<.10	1.297	.614	p<.05
1984	-.021	.145		-1.106	.157	p<.001	.091	.195	
Constant	1.199	.222	p<.001	1.749	.253	p<.001	1.676	.305	p<.001
Pseudo-R2	.072								
Log likelihood	-4093.4								
N	3453								

Note: The baseline category is vote for incumbent party.

The results are more mixed in the “abstain” category, where occupational decline remains significant. As in Table 2, respondents are less and less likely to vote as their occupational group shrinks in size relative to the overall workforce. Furthermore, external efficacy is inversely related with the probability of abstention. In all, these mixed results provide partial confirmation of Hypothesis 4.

As for the short-term variable, it remains as one of the few variables that explains voter support for the mainstream opposition. Efficacy does not elaborate the relationship between short-term economic decline and mainstream voting. However, the fact that the short-term variable *emerges* as significant in the “non-mainstream” and “abstain” categories when efficacy is entered into the model raises some questions. One possible explanation is that efficacy functions as a suppressor variable, but this was not confirmed in the OLS; Table 4 shows no relationship between efficacy and the short-term indicator. These results could also reflect the design of the dependent variable. If the dependent variable was set up so that the incumbent and mainstream opposition were combined together into a “mainstream” category, the independent variables would still behave as hypothesized.²³

Alternatively, results in Table 5 may reflect a more complex relationship among economic conditions, attitude and voting behaviour. There could very well be several suppressor variables and maybe even some interactive effects.²⁴ The potential for this more complex relationship is something that merits further attention in a later study. In any case, short-term changes to economic conditions appear to have a greater impact on how voters evaluate the governing incumbents vis-à-vis the mainstream opposition party, as per the responsibility thesis. Whereas voters employed in occupational groups that have experienced long-term economic decline develop negative political attitudes, which in turn cause them to disengage from non-

mainstream politics, which leads either to support for non-mainstream parties, or outright abstention, as per Hypothesis 5.

IV- Conclusion

The general findings validate a need to look at economic factors over the long-term, and a need to interpret voting behaviour not simply as support for or against the incumbent. Instead, a person's long-term economic experience influences attitudes about the overall political system, and those attitudes affect the propensity to vote, and among those that do, those attitudes affect the propensity to support non-mainstream parties. The focus on occupation is only one specific perspective of a voter's economic experience. This experience is far more broad; numbers do not always tell the whole story. Negative growth rates themselves are meaningless unless understood to reflect more than just unemployment and layoffs, but also threats of plant closures, limits to salary increases, labour-management tensions, anxiety, general work satisfaction, and so forth. This explains why a voter's long-term economic decline develops negative attitudes about the regime, and how this in turn is connected to a general disengagement with mainstream politics. These findings confirm both Easton's assertion (Easton, 1975; Easton and Dennis, 1967) that worsening conditions erode citizen support for more diffuse political objects, such as the regime, and Lipset's theory (Lipset, 1959/63) that economic decline leads citizens to question the legitimacy of their political institutions.

An extension to that line of reasoning leads to a conclusion that voters evaluate economic conditions at the level of an occupational reference group not merely as prosperity or lack thereof, but as a measure of fairness. If after 10 years one sees his or her occupation continue to suffer while other occupations hold their own, or even grow, one begins to question whether

higher powers have remained loyal to some social contract of equitable distribution of costs and benefits, especially given an institutional setting that is characterized by policies oriented towards providing generous welfare and income-redistribution programs and an inter-governmental equalization payment scheme, that taken as a whole, may lead citizens into believing that the state is set up to provide some measure of equality. Any deviation from such a path would lead the losers into believing that the system is beginning to fail them.

Although the data presented here does not directly validate such an argument, there is sufficient evidence to suggest something along those lines. There is a strong indication that voters in occupations that have been suffering long-term economic decline are more likely to behave as if they are clearly very upset at the political system. What is required now is to explore further these initial findings and the extent to which economic decline can drive a wedge among different groups of voters, and whether this wedge is understood as the failure of a democratic system's promise to deliver governance equitably.

But why would someone in such a situation blame the government? Why not simply attribute an occupation's demise to global economic factors, which may very well be the case? After all, the decline of demand for stagecoach makers and ferriers was not a result of any government policy so much as part of the industrialization and the development of automobiles. For the same reason, the closure of manufacturing plants is connected to a worldwide trend to outsource labour-intensive work to lesser developed countries. Why would voters adversely affected by these international trends blame the political system?

One possible answer could be that voters instantly blame the government for everything. The rise of the welfare state has expanded the role of the state in many domains to the point that citizens have increased expectations of what the government can and should address (see Pharr

and Putnam, 2000). Since the Second World War, the expanded role for the state has gotten itself involved in promoting full employment, providing adequate public housing, regulating labour standard, etc. It is logical, then, for citizens to expect the modern state to do something about economic problems. Voters could incorporate an understanding of the Canadian government as rather interventionist in the economy. Tax incentives and subsidies are structured to encourage and discourage particular types of economic activities. Often, policy is directed to particular industries or regions, which in either case indirectly affect the economic consequences of occupations predominant in a region or an industry. But the government does play a role in deciding which occupations deserve encouraging. This intervention can occur directly, through training programs or tax incentives, and indirectly through economic policies that favour the development of certain industries, which in turn drives up demand for particular occupations. Conversely, government policy can negatively impact certain industries, and that, too, can adversely affect the economic stability of certain occupations. In any case, voters who feel their particular occupation is no longer as valued begin to regard themselves as political outsiders, unable to influence government decisions in their favour. The awareness of such a reality would logically lead voters to see representative institutions as less responsive to their needs, and would logically lead such voters to withdraw from politics altogether or to support more “radical” parties. In either case, such voters see their democracy as a failure.

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Endnotes

¹ The Reform (and later Alliance) party's populist views were also prominent. They demanded more "free votes," the legislative recall, more referenda. Some of their more controversial views included opposition to official bilingualism and a general distaste for a centralized federation.

² Voters can also be seen as forward-looking, or prospective. See Erikson, et al., 2000, and MacKuen, et al., 1992.

³ Some studies take into account voter heterogeneity with respect to sophistication and knowledge (see, for instance, Krause, 1997).

⁴ This is valid for elections up until 2000, after which the PC party merged with Alliance to form the Conservative party. Whether this new Conservative party is mainstream is a matter that will not be examined here.

⁵ The concept of "third party" might also capture the same type of voting behaviour. Pinard (1973) defines a third party as a "non-traditional party which has not yet been in power," (455). Although "third party" seems generic enough, such a concept seems more apt to explain the rise of a party that is normally a regional phenomenon, and a party that, effectively, finishes in *third* place. If not third, then maybe a close fourth. The Creditistes's success in Quebec and the Reform party's emergence in Western Canada are two appropriate examples of "third parties." Also, Pinard's research on third parties places a great deal of emphasis on the role of collective action and voter mobilization, especially in rural areas (see Smelser, 1963). Whereas support for "non-mainstream" parties does not assume to rely on any form of collective action or any form of social organization conducive to voter mobilization.

⁶ Religious occupations are excluded, since this is a sector that is affected mainly by non-economic factors.

⁷ Although the efficacy items and the occupation question were not asked in 1980, this was not treated as missing; information was drawn from what panel respondents provided in the 1979 wave. Also, the 1979 CES did not specifically track occupation, but it did record each respondent's "Blisshen scores" (see Blisshen, 1987), which was converted into their corresponding 1980 SOC codes.

⁸ Data from the 1979 and 1980 Canadian Election Study were made available by ICPSR. The data were originally collected by Harold Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence Leduc, and Jon Pammett. Neither the ICPSR nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretation presented here. Data from the 1988 and 1993 Canadian Election Studies were provided by the Institute for Social Research, York University. The survey was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The 1988 CES research team included Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry E. Brady and Jean Crête; the 1993 Canadian Election

study research team included of Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry Brady, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Neil Nevitte. Neither the Institute for Social Research, the SSHRC, nor the Canadian Election Team are responsible for the analyses and interpretations presented here. It would have been ideal to include other election surveys, but this was prevented because of compatibility issues regarding occupational categories. The 1981 Census followed the 1980 Standard Occupational Classification, and documents conveniently reported comparative data for both the 1981 and the 1971 census periods. The 1991 Census also reports occupational data according to the 1980 SOC, but subsequent censuses converted to the 1991 SOC, which is not compatible with earlier versions.

⁹ Pooling all these different surveys has several advantages. First, given that few respondents support non-mainstream parties to begin with, a cross-sectional sample conducted for one election campaign would include even fewer such voters. Furthermore, many of these voters did not supply valid replies to all of the variables used in the multivariate analysis. Casewise elimination in this case shrinks the database, thereby raising the probability of failing to find significant relationships (a Type II error). The combined dataset of almost 16000 respondents is reduced to almost 3400 valid cases. For this reason, analysis of non-mainstream voting is facilitated by pooling together several CES surveys, but this often leaves analysis reliant on “thin” data. Also, a long-term analysis of voting that compares mainstream and non-mainstream parties would be appropriate to include election campaigns with a different party as the ruling incumbent. In other words, there should be some variation at all levels in order to account for particular behaviours.

¹⁰ The Liberal party was the incumbent in 1979 and 1984, and the PC was the mainstream opposition, while the reverse was true for the 1980, 1988 and 1993 elections.

¹¹ Data was obtained from Statistics Canada on-line database, CANSIM, Table 282-0002.

¹² The original survey items are: i) “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think;” ii) The way people vote is the main thing that decides how things are run in this country;” iii) Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the government runs things;” iv) People like me don’t have any say about what the government does;” and v) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.”

¹³ The index of external political efficacy yields a Cronbach’s alpha of .5942.

¹⁴ Three regional dummy variables were constructed: one for the four Atlantic provinces (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island), one for Quebec, and a third for the West (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia). Respondents who live in one of the three regions are given a score of 1 on the appropriate dummy variable, 0 otherwise. Ontario was selected as the reference group.

¹⁵ A score of 1 is assigned to a respondent who belongs to a union.

¹⁶ Male=1, female=0.

¹⁷ Catholics assigned a 1, all others, including those who are not affiliated with any other religion, a 0.

¹⁸ French=1, all others a 0.

¹⁹ Figures 1 to 3 were generated with Stata using Clarify, a macro developed by Tomz, Wittenberg and King (2003), and available at <http://gking.harvard.edu/stats.shtml>. (See also King, Tomz and Wittenberg, 2000). Its purpose is to demonstrate graphically the distribution of statistical models using simulation techniques. The charts show the relationship between occupational growth rates and a dependent variable (vote choice, external political efficacy), while setting all other variables (the control variables) to their mean values.

²⁰ Short-term changes to unemployment rates in the dataset range from a low of -1.9 to 2.1 percentage points.

²¹ Election data was obtained from the Parliamentary website: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>.

²² The 99.9 percent confidence interval for external political efficacy in the dataset (n=7187) has a lower level of 3.94 and an upper level of 4.09.

²³ As an experiment, Tables 2 and 5 were regenerated (not shown here) with the following structure to the categorical dependent variable: 1- mainstream, 2- non-mainstream, and 3- abstain. With “mainstream” set as the comparison group, long-term occupational decline is significant in explaining both non-mainstream voting and abstention. The short-term variable only reaches marginal significance ($p < .10$) for the mainstream category, but the relationship is negative: as the short-term unemployment rate *rises*, non-mainstream voting *drops*. When efficacy is entered in the model, the short-term indicator loses its significance, the long-term indicator loses its significance for the “mainstream” but not for the “abstain” category ($p < .01$), and the efficacy variable is significant at $p < .001$ in both categories.

²⁴ An interactive term was computed by multiplying the long-term and short-term economic indicators. It did not produce results that violated any of the hypothesized expectations. However the interactive term did yield a marginally significant value ($p < .10$) in the OLS model, while the short-term indicator’s significance weakened to $p < .10$.