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Abstract

Aboriginal people, and particularly First Nations persons residing either on-reserve or off-reserve, face realities that are distinct from much of the general Canadian population. Although many services for First Nations people fall under federal jurisdiction, First Nations are also directly affected by provincial government policies and initiatives, such as natural resource development and transportation infrastructure, among other things; accordingly, provincial policies are of immediate interest to the on-reserve Aboriginal electorate. Yet despite this, Aboriginal provincial party support has yet to be fully explored in Canada. This paper will examine Aboriginal provincial party support in Manitoba by analyzing two data sources: 2007 Manitoba Election poll results supplied by Elections Manitoba and survey data from Probe Research's Indigenous Voices Survey. The paper seeks to answer two questions: what are the provincial party preferences among Aboriginal Manitobans; and how can variations (or lack thereof) in Aboriginal party preferences be explained?

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[1] Authors are listed in alphabetical order. Contact: Loleen Berdahl, Department of Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan, loleen.berdahl@usask.ca,; regarding the Indigenous Voices syndicated study, please contact Christopher Adams, Probe Research, cadams@probe-research.com.

Introduction

Despite decades of Canadian scholarship exploring the relationship between social identity and political engagement, our understanding of Aboriginal political behaviour and attitudes remains incomplete, and analyses to date tend to focus on voter turnout rather than vote choice or ideological preferences. This limited understanding of Aboriginal political engagement is problematic, as Aboriginal people are growing in significance in terms of both demographics and potential political clout. Canada's Aboriginal population is sizable, and growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population: in 2006, the Aboriginal population hit an important milestone in passing "the one-million mark." And while the non-Aboriginal population only grew by 8% between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45% over the same time period (Statistics Canada, 2008).

The high degree of variability in the regional distribution of Aboriginal peoples makes understanding Aboriginal political engagement particularly relevant for some provinces and territories. However, as the James Bay Cree have demonstrated, Aboriginal peoples can have a significant political impact even when constituting only a small percentage of the overall provincial population, as they do in Quebec (1%). In other parts of the country, Aboriginal people play leading roles in the governing of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and have played a large role in Yukon territorial politics for some time, where they make up 25% of the population. In Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Aboriginal people make up a very significant proportion of the population (15%), and Aboriginal voters already have the potential to influence which party forms the government in the provincial legislatures. Moreover, in the natural resource rich and economically important northern regions of both Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Aboriginal people make up the overwhelming majority of the population (82% and 65% respectively).

Given the size, growth and importance of the Aboriginal population, the research lacuna on Aboriginal vote choice and partisanship is particularly notable. This paper seeks to advance our understanding of Aboriginal political engagement by taking a close look at Aboriginal provincial party preferences. Using Manitoba as a case study, we answer two questions:

(1) What are the provincial party preferences among Aboriginal Manitobans?
(2) How can variations (or lack thereof) in Aboriginal party preferences be explained?

By answering these two questions, we aim to expand discussions and scholarly interest in the still nascent topic of Aboriginal – and in particular that of on-reserve First Nations peoples – political engagement in Canada.

Manitoba's Aboriginal Population

Fifteen percent of Manitobans identify themselves as being Aboriginal. Table 1 shows that of those who self-identify as Aboriginal, 58% identify as North American Indian and 41% identify as Métis. Among those who identify as North American Indian, slightly over one-half (51%) are on-reserve residents, while just under one-half (49%) are residing off-reserve (Statistic Canada, 2008). Historically, most of Manitoba's First Nations people fall into one of the following groups: Cree, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene (Brownlie, 2007: 215; McMillan, 1995: xxii).

Table 1: Manitoba Aboriginal Population – Based on Self-Identification

	Winnipeg	Manitoba
North American Indian	25,900	101,815
Métis	40,980	71,810
Inuit	350	560
Other/Multiple Identity	1,150	2,375
Total Aboriginal Identity	68,380	175,390
Total Provincial Population	694,668	1,148,401
% Identify as Aboriginal	9.8%	15.3%

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile, 2006 Census, Statistics Canada

Of Canada's 615 First Nations communities (as recognized by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada), 63 are in Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2008); these 63 First Nations communities encompass 103 reserves. In its database created from the vote tallies for the 2007 provincial election, Elections Manitoba has specifically identified 62 of these communities within fifteen ridings (the provincial legislature operates with fifty-seven seats).[2]

As Table 1 also demonstrates, a large proportion of Manitoba's Aboriginal population lives in Winnipeg, and the urban Métis population is considerably larger than the urban First Nations population. Due to their socio-economic status, many Aboriginal people residing in Winnipeg live in lower income areas of the city (Silver, 2008), specifically the downtown "core area" where both the provincial and federal NDP traditionally draws consistently high levels of support.

Aboriginal Voting and Partisanship

Canadian scholars have devoted considerable attention to variations in political behaviour and attitudes. Political differences have been found that relate to social identity groups (Bittner, 2007), such as those associated with religion (Blais et al., 2002), gender (Gidengil et al., 2005), and ethnicity (Blais et al., 2002). Research also demonstrates political differences based on geography, including regional (Blais et al.,

[2] Discrepancies in providing an official tally of First Nations in Manitoba can result from the specific time in which the count is made, and "who" is doing the counting. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, for example, lists 64 First Nations communities: <http://www.manitobachiefs.com/amc/communities.htm> Accessed January 14, 2009.

2002), urban/rural (Cutler and Jenkins, 2000), and inner city/suburb differences (Walks, 2005). Yet while their unique social identity and geographic realities provide fertile ground for political scientists, Canadian scholarship has yet to focus on Aboriginal Canadians' voting, ideology and partisanship. In short, data on Aboriginal voting behaviour in Canada are minimal (Guérin, 2003).

What is understood about Aboriginal voting behaviour? Research to date has focused primarily on voter turnout. Aboriginal turnout has been found to be lower than that of the general population (Guérin, 2003); voter turnout is lower in ridings with higher proportions of Aboriginal peoples (Eagles, 1991); and on-reserve turnout is found to be particularly low (Barsh, 1994; Barsh et al., 1997; Bedford, 2003; Bedford and Pobihushchy, 1995; Guérin, 2003; Kinnear, 2003). Harell et al. (2009) find no difference between on- and off-reserve Aboriginal turnout, but report that, among off-reserve Aboriginal peoples, turnout is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Among the possible explanations given for the low voter turnout among Aboriginal people in provincial and federal elections are high levels of mobility (especially among those who are registered to vote in one area, but have moved to another neighbourhood), conditions of poverty, and weak social networks (Guérin, 2003). It is notable that although federal and provincial turnout is low, Aboriginal turnout is found to be considerably higher for band elections. Some have argued that this may reflect the saliency of local issues, better "get out the vote" campaigns for band elections, and a heightened sense of voter efficacy (Bedford, 2003; Guérin, 2003; Dalton, 2007; Bedford and Pobihushchy, 1995). Others have argued that the electoral process is alien to Indigenous communities (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005) or, more simply, that higher participation rates in Aboriginal community elections reflect stronger political attachments to their local community than to the province or country (Poelzer, 1995).

While attention is being paid to issues regarding Aboriginal voter turnout, there is considerably less literature regarding Aboriginal voter preferences. For example, two introductory Canadian politics textbooks contain discussions regarding "ethnicity" as a factor in voter preference but no reference to Aboriginal identity (Jackson and Jackson, 2009: 454; Brooks, 2007: 303). Three excellent readers on party politics and Canadian political participation provide articles on women, farmers, immigrants, regions, urban voters, Quebec, and even online communities, yet exclude Aboriginal people as a subject of discussion (Everitt and O'Neill, 2002; Gagnon and Tanguay, 2007; Thorburn and Whitehorn, 2002). At the same time, a few focused pieces have appeared regarding specific regions of the country, and the role played by First Nations in producing specific electoral outcomes in northern regions (Adams, 2008a).

Data limitations present a significant challenge in studying Aboriginal partisanship. In a given random telephone survey sample of the general population, the number of Aboriginal respondents is typically too small to make statistically meaningful assessments, particularly when one attempts to control for variations in Aboriginal identity (First Nation, Métis, Inuit), location (on/off-reserve; region of Canada; urban/rural) and other factors. Looking beyond survey research, it is possible to explore Aboriginal voting through election return data as collected by the Chief Electoral Officer

of Elections Canada and similar provincial agencies. Vote returns data allow researchers to isolate on-reserve voting patterns. This is valuable, as on-reserve First Nations communities are not only distinct from all other Canadian communities, but they also differ from Aboriginal off-reserve communities and the urban neighbourhoods in which Aboriginal people reside. However, vote returns data cannot be used to determine First Nation voting behaviour in polls that are not exclusively on-reserve, nor is it possible to use these data to determine broader Aboriginal (including off-reserve First Nations, non-status Indian, Métis and Inuit) voting patterns. In addition, as vote returns are aggregate rather than individual data, it is difficult to examine in detail socio-economic or attitudinal determinants of voting.

While election return analyses to date have placed emphasis on voter turnout rather than partisanship (Guérin, 2003; Bedford and Pobihushchy, 1995; Bedford, 2003), three published studies do contain discussions, albeit brief discussions, regarding vote choice. Barsh et al. (1997) found that First Nation voters on three Alberta reserves were "moving to the Left relative to their neighbors." Pitsula's (2001) analysis of Saskatchewan provincial on-reserve voting demonstrated considerable volatility in vote choice between 1967 and 1995, with the NDP receiving the majority of the on-reserve vote since 1978. Kinnear's analysis (2003) of Manitoba federal and provincial voting found that First Nations support for the Progressive Conservative parties (federal and provincial) has been declining over time. None of these three analyses of on-reserve vote choice consider how on-reserve voting is similar to or distinct from the partisan preferences of those belonging to other segments of the Aboriginal population or the general electorate.

Overall, the study of Aboriginal political behaviour has been limited to date and tends to emphasize voter turnout rather than party preferences and vote choice. What voting patterns and party preferences might we expect to find in Aboriginal populations, and what theoretical approaches might help identify and understand differences or similarities between Aboriginal populations and the broader electorate? One school of thought considers social change and development as fundamental to understanding political participation. According to this approach, changes in life chances—greater participation in the wage economy versus traditional economy; increasing participation in post-secondary education; and greater differentiation in occupations and incomes — will manifest in different voting patterns within a particular group (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan, 1970). The merit of this approach has been demonstrated in many electoral studies over the past forty years. Within the general population, higher income and higher education are often shown to result in greater support for centre or right of centre political parties. Using this approach, if Aboriginal societies within Canada have paralleled, or mirrored, the changing social dynamics of the larger society, we should expect to find similar voting patterns among Aboriginal Canadians. But, does this fit well with the Aboriginal social change approach? We suggest two other theoretical lenses that may help to explain more fully on-reserve voting patterns: 1) the sociopolitical basis of contemporary Aboriginal political culture, and 2) identity politics and ethnic mobilization.

Understanding the sociopolitical basis of contemporary Aboriginal political culture is fundamental to understanding the various dimensions of Aboriginal political life today. Many Canadians, including many students of Canadian politics, do not realize how profoundly different the social and political bases of Aboriginal political communities, particularly reserve-based Aboriginal political communities, are from the larger Canadian society. The study of the sociopolitical organization of Indigenous societies—past and present—is frequently associated with anthropology. However, political scientists and other scholars of Aboriginal policy in Canada have been on the forefront of drawing out the importance of understanding the distinctiveness of Aboriginal political organization and political culture for restructuring Aboriginal relations in Canada and for understanding contemporary Aboriginal political life. Boldt and Long's "Tribal Traditions and European-Western Political Ideologies" (1984) remains a powerful analytical statement on understanding Aboriginal political organization and culture in considering self-government and broader political participation, as is Long's (1990) investigation of the resiliency and relevance of traditional Aboriginal political culture in contemporary political life among First Nations in southern Alberta. Pocklington's (1991) study of political participation among residents of Alberta's Metis settlements further supports the fruitfulness of this approach.

At its core, political scientists and students of public policy have identified that traditional Aboriginal sociopolitical structures were rooted in family and/or kin group relations with high degrees of interdependency, mutual reciprocity, and flexible membership (Beatty, 1996; Coates, 1991; Poelzer, 1996). Political decision-making tended to be consensus-based, largely based on social sanctions rather than formal authoritative mechanisms, thereby promoting social cohesion and adherence to group decisions. Furthermore, political leadership was often task-specific rather than permanently vested with one individual, and elders played a respected and influential role in the affairs of the kin-based communities.

Contemporary Aboriginal political and social organization reflects both traditional Aboriginal political culture and elements arising from the rapid social change within First Nations communities since contact with Europeans, particularly in the twentieth century with expansion of the Canadian state over the affairs of Aboriginal communities and the fundamental changes brought to Aboriginal communities by industrial capitalism, including assimilationist measures such as residential schools. Some have argued that traditional kinship, though important, has eroded and along with this, values for mutual reciprocity, interdependency, and respect for elders have declined. Others have noted the resiliency of traditional practices, particularly among northern Aboriginal peoples who are still connected to the land and traditional economic activities (Beatty, 1996). Some have pointed out that the imposition of Indian Act governments and the creation of reserves strengthened kinship ties, yet created cleavages of have and have-not families as such scarce resources as housing and jobs are perceived to be allocated along family lines (Poelzer, 1996). What is clear, however, is that family ties in on-reserve communities are far more important when compared to members of the broader Canadian society. Family ties, moreover, serve to link together different communities, thereby creating social and political networks that span beyond individual reserves both to other reserves and to

urban centres. This provides a potential for the creation of heightened levels of political solidarity and distinct communication networks, shaping distinctive perspectives about political life both within and across Aboriginal communities, as well as when compared to the general population.

If family ties and networks remain powerful factors for shaping Aboriginal political culture and political participation, we might expect vote choices and party preferences to reflect this reality. This might be seen in two ways. First, as a result of family-related political ties, Aboriginal voters may be more supportive of a particular party than is the general population, creating an Aboriginal "bloc vote" within this population. The support for this party could be expected to cut across socio-economic groups; thus, while socio-economic factors are typically determinants of vote choice and party preference amongst the general population, these factors can be expected to be less relevant in structuring party support among Aboriginal persons. Second, because kinship ties are stronger for on-reserve than off-reserve or among Métis populations, we would expect to see "bloc" support for a particular party to be even stronger among on-reserve populations compared to off-reserve or, especially, Métis populations.

Another related, but separate, theoretical approach is that which can be called an "identity politics and ethnic mobilization" approach. The focus of this approach is less on the nature of the political culture of the group in question, but rather on the interaction between groups based on collective identity markers. This approach has its roots in pioneering theorists such as Fredrik Barth and has been applied by scholars such as Cornell (1988) and Nagel (1997), particularly in the study of the politics of Native Americans. Because of shared historical experiences, racial, linguistic, religious and other markers, ethnic elites are able to mobilize members of a particular group in the pursuit of collective objectives. In the case of Manitoba party politics, Peterson (1972) identifies ethnic identity as the predominant influence in voter choice, at least until the 1960s. Therefore, when applied to our understandings of Aboriginal partisanship, political mobilization should be understood as occurring around the perspective of "us versus them" and "otherness."

The unique experiences of First Nations people, both in Manitoba and across Canada, suggest that a theoretical approach that incorporates "identity" and "otherness" could work well. At the time that Manitoba entered into Confederation, Treaty Indians who met the general qualifications for citizens of the province were able to vote in the first provincial election of 1870. However, in 1886 the Manitoba Election Act was revised to exclude any Indian who received annuity from the Crown, thereby disenfranchising First Nations Manitobans who received treaty benefits (those who relinquished treaty status could vote). This was revised in 1931 to recognize the voting rights of those who were armed forces and veterans. It was not until two decades later, in 1952, that all First Nations of voting age were provincially re-enfranchised (Elections Manitoba, 2007: 197; Friesen et al, 1996: 68). First Nations people also had common experiences of assimilationist policies such as settlement on reserves, residential schools, and the provisions of the Indian Act, among other things. Ironically, by settling First Nations people apart from the rest of society, contradictory segregationist politics

reinforced the politics of "otherness." The reaction of Aboriginal people to the 1969 Federal Government's White Paper, which was a catalyst for pan-Canadian First Nations political organization and the emergence of the Assembly of First Nations (Comeau and Santin, 1990: 141), suggests that there is some merit in considering this approach. Indeed, Soroka et al. (2007: 26) suggest that Aboriginal peoples and Quebec francophones have a weaker attachment to Canada; they write, "It is not surprising that these founding peoples, who have come to see themselves as distinct peoples or nations within a multinational state, do not exhibit as unqualified an identification or sense of belonging [to Canada] as others do."

As with the social structural thesis, the political identity and ethnic mobilization approach would lead us to believe that Aboriginal Manitobans are more likely to form a "voting bloc" of support for a particular party, and that party support cuts across socio-economic groups within the specific population under study. However, while the internal social structural approach promotes the idea that this bloc support is a result of kinship ties, those who use the political identity and ethnic mobilization approach would argue that this bloc support is due to feelings of what could be called "outsiderness." Furthermore, while those who use either the social structural or the political identity/ethnic mobilization approach would suggest that bloc party support will be stronger among those who reside on-reserve, the reasons for this are again different, with the latter approach attributing this variation to greater on-reserve segregation from mainstream societal influences. Accordingly, Aboriginal identity and feelings of otherness should cut across locations, but be strongest within on- reserve communities, and weakest among the Métis. For this reason, the bloc support for a single party should be evident in all Aboriginal groups, but slide downward in strength as we move our focus from the on-reserve, to the off-reserve First Nations population, and then to Métis.

The political identity and ethnic mobilization approach might also lead some to suggest that Aboriginal voters would emphasize Aboriginal ancestry over party platforms and labels, and thus would be more likely to support Aboriginal candidates, regardless of their party affiliation, even if the candidate is outside the single party that would be usually supported by the Aboriginal community. In other words, some would argue that Aboriginal identity trumps partisanship.

It is important to note, however, that the politics of identity within Manitoba may manifest itself into other important dimensions not related to ethnicity, but rather to place. Northerners—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike— may both experience a feeling of otherness or alienation (DeWeil, 2005), and often share political interests different from Southerners. Indeed, the northern dimension of identity politics may add complexity to our understandings of voter patterns and party support. Since Northerners (be they residing on-reserve or not, or Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) share a feeling of outsiderness, there should be greater uniform northern support for a single party. Because of this regional distinction, in other words, there should be less Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal distinction in the North, with the non-Aboriginal North lining up with the Aboriginal North.

Together, understandings arising from the internal social structural thesis and the identity politics/ethnic mobilization thesis point us towards similar directions: both approaches predict "bloc" party support for a single party, with limited sociodemographic variations. Both approaches also predict that "bloc" party support will include all Aboriginal groups, but will be strongest among on-reserve voters and weakest among the Métis. The identity politics/ethnic mobilization approach additionally points to the possibility of higher Aboriginal support for Aboriginal candidates, and to the likelihood that, in the North, non-Aboriginal residents will vote in a similar fashion to Aboriginal populations.

Vote Choice and Party Preferences

This study utilizes two data sources in order to put to the test the previously discussed theoretical perspectives. First, aggregate Elections Manitoba vote returns in the 2007 provincial election are analyzed based on data supplied by Elections Manitoba. In constructing the dataset, the research team divided data into two categories: "on-reserve polls," in which all registered voters are presumed to be members of the specified First Nation,[3] and "non-reserve polls," which include all other polls, including voting areas for which Election Manitoba notes the data "may include some off-reserve voters."[4]

The second data source includes survey data collected between March 2005 and December 2008. A total of 12,000 Manitoban adults were randomly contacted by Probe Research via telephone and asked whether or not they identify themselves as Aboriginal, and if so, would they consider themselves as "Métis", "Status Indian" (and, if so, if they resided off- or on-reserve), or something else. Because a number of First Nations communities across the North have a low prevalence of landline telephones, print and radio advertisements were used to invite on-reserve residents to call the field centre to do the survey (and for which they were compensated with $15, while quotas were put into place to ensure a representative sample). Using this combined sampling approach methodology, a total of 1,268 Aboriginal individuals were interviewed, of which 448 were self-identified "Status Indian", of whom 186 were on-reserve, and 262 were off-reserve. An additional 108 were non-status Aboriginal, and 712 identified themselves as Métis. As a final step in the process, these sub-populations were weighted in order to adjust the dataset to match the characteristics of the 2006 Census, both regarding gender and age, as well as according to each of the aforementioned Aboriginal population categories: on-reserve Status Indian, off-reserve Status Indian, non-status Aboriginal, and Métis.

[3] This also includes polls in which all of the registered voters are presumed to be members of the specified First Nation, but that only capture part of the First Nation. These consist of: Buffalo Point First Nation (Emerson, voting area 50), Gamblers First Nation (Russell, voting area 47), and Ebb & Flow First Nation (Ste. Rose, voting area 4).

[4] These consist of: Fisher River Cree Nation (Interlake voting areas 24, 25), Berens River First Nation (Rupertsland voting areas 25, 36), Bloodvein First Nation (Rupertsland voting area 29), Hollow Water First Nation (Rupertsland voting area 30), O-Cho-Chak-Ko-Sipi Fist Nation (Ste. Rose voting area 1), Chemanwawin Cree Nation (Swan River voting areas 2, 3), Skownan First Nation (Swan River voting area 53), Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation (Swan River voting area 9), and Opaskwayak Cree Nation (The Pas voting areas 15 and 16).

Created from Elections Manitoba data and previous on-reserve analysis conducted by Kinnear (2003), Table 2 clearly shows that on-reserve vote choice in Manitoba has differed from that of the general population for over three decades. While differences in support for the Liberal party are typically modest, dramatic differences are seen in support for the NDP and Progressive Conservative parties, with on-reserve voters being more supportive of the NDP and less supportive of the PCs than the general population.

Table 2: On-Reserve and General Population Vote Choice (percentage), 1969-2007

	NDP			PC			Liberal		
	On-reserve	Gen. Pop.	Diff.	On-reserve	Gen. Pop.	Diff.	On-reserve	Gen. Pop.	Diff.
1969	28.8	32.27	(3.47)	36.8	35.56	1.24	22.5	23.99	(1.49)
1973	48.1	42.31	5.79	17.7	36.73	(19.03)	13.9	19.04	(5.14)
1977	55.9	38.62	17.28	22.1	48.75	(26.65)	22	12.29	9.71
1981	79.8	47.38	32.42	9.6	43.82	(34.22)	9.7	6.7	3.0
1986	76.3	41.5	34.8	14	40.6	(26.6)	9.5	13.9	(4.4)
1988	56.5	23.6	32.9	21.7	38.4	(16.7)	21.7	35.5	(13.8)
1990	71.6	28.8	42.8	9.4	42.00	(32.6)	18.9	7.4	11.5
1995	66.4	32.66	33.74	11	42.68	(31.68)	14.9	23.62	(8.72)
1999	65.9	44.83	21.07	21.5	40.58	(19.08)	12.1	13.31	(1.21)
2003	83.1	49.39	33.71	6	36.31	(30.31)	10.9	13.15	(2.25)
2007	66.4	47.76	18.64	21.4	37.69	(16.29)	11.7	12.33	(0.63)

Sources: On-reserve 1969-2003 from Kinnear, 2003; 2007 from Elections Manitoba data, as derived by the research team. General population results are reported by Elections Manitoba, "Historical Tables" (2007).
Note: "General population" figures refer to the full population, including on-reserve First Nations voters.
Difference: On-reserve minus full population; positive means more support on-reserve than in general population; negative means more support in general population than on-reserve.

Do voting patterns vary based on region? Many of Manitoba's First Nations communities are located in the province's five Northern ridings where, it must be noted, the NDP has received comparatively high levels of support since the party won its first provincial election under Edward Schreyer in 1969. The party's breakthrough was strongly aided by the North, taking four out of five of the most northerly seats based on support from organized labour and First Nations (Adams, 2008b, 117; Adams, 2008c). Since then, Manitoba's northern Aboriginal communities have contributed significantly to the NDP's fortunes in each provincial election, which includes the sparsely populated ridings of Rupertsland, Flin Flon, Thompson, the Pas, and Swan River, where a plurality of voters have consistently supported the NDP. With 29 seats needed to win a majority in the Manitoba Legislature, winning five northern seats based largely on support from First Nations as well as other Aboriginal voters can be significant (Adams, 2008a).

As Table 3 demonstrates, on-reserve voters were more likely than other voters in South/Central Manitoba to vote for the NDP, and less likely to vote for the PCs. However, in Northern Manitoba, a long-standing NDP regional stronghold, no significant differences in vote choice are found. This may be due to the impact of organized labour and off-reserve Aboriginal populations showing similar preferences as those residing on-reserve communities, be it due to political identities, feelings of otherness, or socio-economic factors. It is also notable that on-reserve voters in South/Central ridings are

more likely than those in the North to support the NDP and the Liberals, and less likely than those in the North to support the PCs.

Table 3: Regional Variations in On-Reserve and General Population Vote Choice (percentage), 2007

	NDP			PC			Liberal		
	Reserve polls	Non-reserve polls	Reserve/ Non-reserve diff.	Reserve polls	Non-reserve polls	Reserve/ Non-reserve diff.	Reserve polls	Non-reserve polls	Reserve/ Non-reserve diff.
MB	66.36	47.37	18.99	21.42	38.03	(16.61)	11.71	12.34	(0.63)
North	63.65	65.88	(2.23)	26.97	23.37	3.6	8.77	10.13	(1.36)
South/ Central	71.84	46.55	25.29	10.17	38.68	(28.51)	17.70	12.44	(5.26)

Source: Elections Manitoba data, as derived by the research team. North Manitoba includes five constituencies: Flin Flon, Rupertsland, Swan River, The Pas and Thompson. South/Central Manitoba includes all other constituencies in the province.
Difference: (On-reserve minus non-reserve population; a positive figure means more support is occurring on reserve than in the non-reserve population; a negative figure signifies more support in the non-reserve population than on-reserve)

While the analysis demonstrates that on-reserve First Nations voters are more likely to support the NDP than other parties, we cannot infer that this is also true for either off-reserve First Nations or Métis persons. To consider patterns of party support among Aboriginal Manitobans, we turn to the Probe Research survey of Aboriginal people in Manitoba and examine reported party preferences. (Readers should, however, note the distinction between party preferences and vote choice.) The Probe Research survey finds that close to one-third (31%) of Aboriginal Manitobans are unable to report a provincial party preference.[5] Which Aboriginal Manitobans are most likely to have a party preference? Logistic regression analysis finds that only two socio-economic variables are significantly related to this variable. While controlling for all other variables, as age category increases, one is more likely to report having a party preference, and as income category increases, one is also more likely to have a party preference (Table 4). Worth noting is that specific segments within the Aboriginal population as listed in the table do not differ in their likelihood of having - or not having - a party preference. As the low model fit (Nagelkerke R^2) demonstrates, socio-economic variables are very poor predictors of whether or not Aboriginal people in Manitoba do or do not have a provincial party preference.

When it comes to the ability (or willingness) to express a party preference, how do Aboriginal people compare with the general population? The same question was asked by Probe Research among those in the general population and compiled in a separate dataset. In the general population (which includes Aboriginal respondents), only 21.4% of Manitobans do not express a party preference – almost ten percentage points lower than in the Aboriginal population. In the general population, as in the Aboriginal population, age category and income category are significantly related to having or not

[5] This includes being able to report having a party preference, or a party to which the individual might be "leaning" if there is no specific party preference.

having a preference, and as in the Aboriginal population, socioeconomic factors alone are poor predictors of the presence or absence of a party preference.

Table 4- Effects of Socio-Economic Variables on Party Preference/Non-Preference

	Estimates (logit coefficients)	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Off-reserve FN	-.208	.231	.812
Métis	-.312	.207	.732
Other Aboriginal	-.287	.254	.751
Male	.194	.131	1.214
Age category	.198***	.048	1.219
Income category	.127*	.059	1.135
High School	-.107	.186	.899
Some Post-Secondary	.259	.212	1.296
Completed Post-Secondary	-.132	.199	.877
Nagelkerke R^2	.037		

Source: Probe Research survey of Aboriginal people in Manitoba; N = 1355. "Other Aboriginal" includes non-status Indians (108), Inuit (8), and those who did not state a category (79).
***: p<.001, **: p<.01, *: p<.05

Among Aboriginal respondents who do report having a party preference (with others excluded from the analysis; see Table 5), a majority reports preferring the NDP. This majority NDP support is seen across all four of the major Aboriginal segments. While support for the NDP is rather uniform, the same cannot be said for support for the PCs and Liberals. Métis and other Aboriginal groups are more likely than off-reserve and on-reserve First Nations to prefer the PCs; conversely, on-reserve and off-reserve First Nations are more likely than Métis and other Aboriginal groups to prefer the Liberals. Comparing the Aboriginal population to the general population, it is clear that the NDP and the Liberals both enjoy higher support from the Aboriginal population than from the general population, while the PCs have considerably less support in the Aboriginal population.

Table 5- Aboriginal and General Population Provincial Party Preferences (percentage)

	NDP	PC	Liberal
General Population	46.3	35.7	13.1
Aboriginal Population	54.3	23.1	22.6
On-reserve First Nations	56.1	5.3	38.6
Off-reserve First Nations	56.3	17.5	26.3
Métis	52.9	29.5	17.6
Other Aboriginal	55.1	26.0	18.9

Sources: Probe Research Survey of Aboriginal people in Manitoba, N=929; Probe Research Survey of Manitobans (2009), N = 1000. Individuals who reported no party preference are excluded from this analysis.

What is the relationship between socioeconomic factors and party preference among the Aboriginal population? Looking first at support for the NDP, it is seen that there are no statistically significant differences when comparing the four Aboriginal segments and their preference for the NDP (Table 6). However, when controlling for other variables, women are more likely than men, as well as individuals with completed post-secondary education compared to those with less than a high school education, to report a preference for the NDP. Yet the model fit (Nagelkerke R^2) suggests that socio-

economic variables are poor determinants of NDP support. Greater variation is seen in support for the other two parties. Off-reserve First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal groups are all more likely than on-reserve First Nations to support the PCs, and are all less likely than on-reserve First Nations to support the Liberals. Support for these two parties also varies with age and education, with older residents being more likely to support the PCs and less likely to support the Liberals. Furthermore, individuals with a completed high school diploma are more likely than those without a high school diploma to support the PCs and less likely to support the Liberals. While the model fit is higher for the PC (.107) and Liberal (.078) models than for the NDP model (.027), it is clear that socio-economic variables are not very strong predictors of party preferences in the Aboriginal population.

How does the Aboriginal population compare to the general population? Table 7 presents analysis of both the Aboriginal population and a 2009 Probe Research general population survey. Looking first at the NDP, it is seen that while gender is a strong predictor of NDP support in the general population (with men being much less likely than women to support the NDP; -.617), the relationship is weaker in the Aboriginal population (-.361); additionally, age is positively related to NDP support in the general population but not amongst the Aboriginal population. While socioeconomic variables are a poor predictor of NDP support in both populations, they are particularly poor predictors for the Aboriginal population. Turning to those with PC preferences, some important differences are noted. In the general population, gender, income and education are predictors of PC support, whereas in the Aboriginal population, gender and education are not related to PC support. Instead, in the Aboriginal population PC support varies positively with age and income. Finally, the data show that socioeconomic variables are also better predictors of Liberal support in the general population than in the Aboriginal population. In the general population, Liberal support varies with age, income and education, while in the Aboriginal population it varies with age and income. Overall, while socioeconomic variables alone are relatively weak predictors of Manitoba party preferences, they are particularly weak amongst the Aboriginal population.

To summarize, the data from election returns demonstrate that First Nations voters (both on-reserve and off-reserve) are more supportive of the NDP compared to the general population, and they are far less supportive of the PCs. The Probe Research survey data indicate that this NDP support extends beyond the on-reserve communities to the broader Aboriginal community, with majority Aboriginal NDP preferences found across all Aboriginal groups. Lower support for the PCs is also seen across the Aboriginal community, but important variations are observed, with Métis and "Other Aboriginal" individuals being the most likely to prefer the PCs. Unlike the on-reserve vote return data, the survey data finds that Aboriginal Manitobans are more supportive of the Liberal party than is the general population, with support being highest on-reserve. The survey data also allow us to consider socioeconomic variations in party preferences, and it is found that socioeconomic variables alone are poor predictors of Aboriginal party preferences.

Table 6- Effects of Socio-Economic Variables on Party Preferences – Aboriginal Population

	NDP			Progressive Conservative			Liberal		
	Estimates	S.E.	Odds Ratio	Estimates	S.E.	Odds Ratio	Estimates	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Off-reserve	-.204	.248	.816	1.544 **	.509	4.681	-.615 *	.273	.541
Metis	-.291	.218	.748	2.021 ***	.475	7.548	-.911 ***	.242	.402
Other Aboriginal	-.321	.271	.725	1.871 ***	.512	6.497	-.653 *	.314	.521
Male	-.346 *	.144	.708	.301	.180	1.351	.137	.180	1.147
Age category	.053	.052	1.054	.176**	.065	1.192	-.189 **	.065	.828
Income category	-.038	.066	.963	.179	.081	1.196	-.106	.083	.900
High School	.369	.209	1.446	.017*	.264	1.017	-.528 ***	.255	.590
Some Post-Secondary	-.057	.223	.944	.169	.284	1.184	-.191	.260	.826
Completed Post-Secondary	.443 *	.223	1.557	-.331	.283	.718	-.419	.275	.658
Nagelkerke R^2	.027			.107			.078		

Estimates are logit coefficients. ***: p<.001, **: p<.01, *: p<.05
Source: Probe Research Survey of Aboriginal people in Manitoba. N=929. Individuals who reported no party preference are excluded from this analysis.

Table 7- Effects of Socio-Economic Variables on Party Preferences – Aboriginal Population and General Population

	NDP		PC		Liberal	
	Aboriginal Population Estimates	General Population Estimates	Aboriginal Population Estimates	General Population Estimates	Aboriginal Population Estimates	General Population Estimates
Male	-.361*	-.617***	.314	.520**	.154	.295
Age category	.033	.128*	.201**	.102	-.184**	-.336***
Income category	-.024	-.019	.262**	.329***	-.213**	-.387***
Some Post-Secondary	-.270	-.074	.184	-.526	.048	1.134**
Completed Post-Secondary	.195	.143	-.296	-.504*	-.182	.647*
Nagelkerke R^2	.019	.046	.052	.068	.042	.098

Estimates are logit coefficients. ***: p<.001, **: p<.01, *: p<.05
Sources: Probe Research Survey of Aboriginal people in Manitoba, N=929; Probe Research Survey of Manitobans (2009), N = 1000. Individuals who reported no party preference are excluded from this analysis.

Considering the Role of Aboriginal Candidacy

With regard to party preference, does running an Aboriginal candidate increase a party's electoral fortunes amongst on-reserve First Nations voters? The identity politics/ethnic mobilization thesis discussed in this paper suggests that Aboriginal voters should be more supportive of Aboriginal candidates, regardless of the candidates' party affiliations. Using information provided to the research team by each of the three major provincial political parties, we explore the relationship between on-reserve voter choice and the presence of Aboriginal candidates in each of the ridings with reserves.[6] In the 15 constituencies with reserves, there were a total of eleven Aboriginal candidates: four Aboriginal NDP candidates, five Aboriginal Liberal candidates, and two Aboriginal PC candidates.[7] These candidates were concentrated in seven constituencies. In one constituency (Rupertsland), all three candidates were Aboriginal; in two constituencies (The Pas and Ste. Rose), two candidates were Aboriginal; and in four constituencies (Russell, Selkirk, Swan River and Thompson), only one candidate was Aboriginal. In the remaining eight constituencies that contained reserves, there were no Aboriginal candidates running. With a caveat that only a small number of cases are included in the analysis, and acknowledging the impossibility of controlling for other variables, it is interesting to consider the results from this candidacy-related question.

Table 8: Party Support and Aboriginal Candidacy

	# Aboriginal Candidates in Riding	On-reserve polls only (%)	Non-reserve polls (%)	Difference between on-reserve polls and non-reserve polls	Difference between constituency and regional average on-reserve vote
South/Central					
Russell - Liberal	1	43.0	5.3	37.7	25.5
Selkirk – NDP	1	88.4	54.8	33.6	21.4
Ste. Rose – Liberal	2	7.6	7.6	0	(9.9)
Ste. Rose – NDP		89.0	28.7	60.3	22.1
North					
Rupertsland – Liberal	3	4.5	7.3	(2.8)	(9.0)
Rupertsland – NDP		47.9	72.6	(24.7)	(22.3)
Rupertsland - PC		47.2	19.8	27.4	32.0
Swan River – Liberal	1	7.0	3.7	3.3	(6.4)
The Pas – NDP	2	68.7	68.1	0.6	(1.6)
The Pas – PC		26.6	17.7	8.9	11.4
Thompson - Liberal	1	30.7	13.3	17.4	17.3

Source: Elections Manitoba data, as derived by authors

[6] It must be noted that information provided by each of the provincial parties did not distinguish between First Nation or Métis candidates, or whether or not they resided on- or off-reserve. Therefore, a discussion of whether or not an Aboriginal candidate's more narrowly defined identity, ancestry or residence has relevance to First Nations voting is beyond the scope of this paper.

[7] The analysis looks only at the three major parties: the NDP, Liberal and Conservative parties. Minor parties, including the Green Party and Aboriginal-specific parties, are excluded.

On-reserve regional averages: Central/South – Liberal 17.5%; NDP 67.0%; PC 15.2%; North – Liberal 13.4%; NDP – 70.2%; PC 19.7%

As Table 8 shows, of the four constituencies with only one Aboriginal candidate, in all but one instance (Swan River) the Aboriginal candidate received considerably higher support within the on-reserve compared to non-reserve polls (ranging from 17 to almost 38 percentage points). In each of these three cases, the party's on-reserve vote support in the constituency with the Aboriginal candidate exceeded the party's average on-reserve vote support in the region.

The PCs had Aboriginal candidates in two constituencies (Rupertsland and The Pas); both constituencies are located in the North, and both contests included more than one Aboriginal candidate. In each constituency, the presence of an Aboriginal candidate appears to have benefited the PC party with on-reserve voters, with the PCs receiving both greater support on-reserve than in non-reserve polls, and exceeding the party's average northern on-reserve vote support. (Facing the Aboriginal PC candidates, the NDP Aboriginal candidate in The Pas and the NDP and Liberal Aboriginal candidates in Rupertsland were unable to obtain higher levels of support among on-reserve voters.) Looking to the South/Central region, Ste Rose was the only constituency with more than one Aboriginal candidate; in this constituency, the Aboriginal NDP candidate received considerably higher support in on-reserve polls compared to non-reserve polls, and exceeded the party's average on-reserve support in the three ridings studied here in the South/Central region.

Overall, the limited data available suggest that running an Aboriginal candidate should increase a party's electoral fortunes in on-reserve polls when no other Aboriginal candidate is present. Additionally, running an Aboriginal candidate may increase the Progressive Conservative party's on-reserve support, even in the presence of other Aboriginal candidates. Clearly, the limited number of cases makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions, and further research with a larger number of cases and a greater ability to point to causal relationships should be done before more concrete generalizations can be made.

Did the presence of Aboriginal candidates promote higher on-reserve First Nations turnout in Manitoba during the 2007 provincial election? Barsh et al.'s (1997) analysis of federal voting from 1965-1993 in three Alberta First Nation communities suggests that the presence of First Nation candidates can improve on-reserve voter turnout. Provided here in Table 9 are results as they pertain to the possible relationship between voter turnout and the number of Aboriginal candidates. Looking at the province as a whole, it appears that having one Aboriginal candidate increases on-reserve voter turnout, but that turnout rates drop back down when there are two or more Aboriginal candidates.

The results are somewhat more nuanced when we look at North and South/Central constituencies separately. For the North constituencies, the presence of Aboriginal candidates is correlated with higher on-reserve voter turnout; this is particularly the case when there is only one Aboriginal candidate. For the South/Central constituencies, the

turnout increase is isolated to those cases where there is only one Aboriginal candidate. While the analysis does not allow us to control for other factors that may influence on-reserve turnout, and the low number of cases makes it impossible to draw strong conclusions, the results suggest that Aboriginal candidacy may positively influence on-reserve turnout, and that the turnout benefits may be greatest when only one Aboriginal candidate is running.

Table 9: On-Reserve Voter Turnout and the Number of Aboriginal Candidates

	Overall	0 Aboriginal candidates	1 Aboriginal candidate	2 Aboriginal candidates	3 Aboriginal candidates
All 15 constituencies	27.70	25.07	39.08	25.71	26.83
North	27.37	18.89	37.38	26.62	26.83
South/Central	28.68	27.53	42.87	22.39	-

Source: Elections Manitoba data files, with candidate identity based on personal communications with political parties
Note: North Manitoba includes five constituencies: Flin Flon, Rupertsland, Swan River, The Pas and Thompson. South/Central Manitoba includes all other constituencies in the province.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have established that on-reserve Manitobans are more likely than other Manitobans to vote for the NDP, suggesting that there is almost what could be called an on-reserve "bloc vote" for the NDP. We have also identified some important North-South/Central differences: in the North, non-reserve voters (which would include non-Aboriginal persons and Aboriginal persons living off-reserve) are as likely as on-reserve voters to support the NDP; additionally, on-reserve voters in South/Central Manitoba are more likely than those in Northern Manitoba to support the NDP (although support exceeds 60% in both regions). The analysis also suggests that on-reserve voters may be more likely to support a party that has an Aboriginal candidate, and that on-reserve turnout may increase when an Aboriginal candidate is running (however, the small number of cases precludes a definitive conclusion on these matters).

We have also established that the strong Aboriginal support for the NDP extends beyond the on-reserve populations, and that there are few socio-economic variations in Aboriginal NDP support. In short, it appears that there is considerable homogeneity in NDP support within the Aboriginal community. Variations are found, however, in support for the Liberal and Conservative parties: on-reserve and off-reserve First Nations populations prefer the Liberals to the Progressive Conservatives, while the opposite is true for Métis and non-status persons. Yet even when considering support for these two parties, socio-economic variables are relatively poor predictors of party support.

Taken together, the analysis suggests support for both the internal sociopolitical organization and the identity politics and ethnic mobilization theses. Both theses predicted greater Aboriginal support for a single party, which was found. However, the data available do not allow us to dig deeper into causal factors to determine if the bloc voting is a result of internal political culture, feelings of otherness, or a combination of

these or a number of other factors. If bloc voting is a result of internal sociopolitical organization that is distinct from mainstream Manitoban and Canadian society, it has profound implications for understanding Aboriginal political life in Canada. Aboriginal leaders have often argued that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are not merely another ethnic minority, but rather are societies that have very distinctive social foundations and distinctive world views. Our findings suggest that these assertions may well be right. The findings suggest more fruitful work could be done with regard to contemporary Aboriginal political culture and organization, as well as the relationship between kinship and political participation and its impact on participation in broader political processes.

What are the political implications of the results? The first implication is that Aboriginal voters (including on-reserve, off-reserve and Métis populations) can constitute an important voting bloc. For political parties that are successful in engaging with and appealing to Aboriginal voters, there is the potential for long-term political gains – indeed, the Manitoba NDP continues to enjoy many of the inroads made by Schreyer in 1969. This is hardly unusual, as demonstrated in the 2008 federal election when each of the political parties focused on wooing the "ethnic vote" (Martin, 2008). While the focus was on recent immigrants and second generation Canadians, the idea of being courted as a voting bloc may have policy and political advantages for Aboriginal peoples, and the potential for bloc voting support from Aboriginal Canadians remains unexplored. This may be due to low Aboriginal voter turnout as well as the fact that many Aboriginal voters tend to be located in three different population contexts: sparsely populated northern regions, low-income urban neighbourhoods, and in the southern half of the province where their preferences may be drowned out by non-Aboriginal voters.

Evidence of bloc voting, however, has other implications that could be alarming for Canadians. It suggests a potential for the two solitudes—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—to grow. By increasing the sense of "otherness" within electoral politics, especially in low income urban areas and the North, political party strategies might further erode the national political system.

A second political implication from the findings is that political parties may be able to increase Aboriginal voter support by nominating more Aboriginal candidates. The preliminary analysis suggests that, in some cases, candidacy may trump party affiliation for on-reserve voters. If these cases are sufficiently representative, and if the identity politics thesis is correct, this finding may extend beyond the on-reserve community and into the broader Aboriginal community. Therefore, in constituencies with high Aboriginal populations, it is logical that political parties should consider recruiting Aboriginal candidates.

Given the demographic, cultural and economic importance of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and particularly in the Prairie provinces and Northern territories, it is important that we build a better understanding of Aboriginal political behaviour that takes us beyond studies of voter turnout. While this analysis attempts to move this understanding forward, future work needs to be done to examine Aboriginal political engagement more broadly. This includes focused studies involving other provinces and

territories, as well as federal politics. Doing so will afford Canadians a greater appreciation of the political cultures, behaviours and values of Aboriginal peoples, and will allow political scientists to better develop theories of Aboriginal political engagement.

Thirty years ago, Aboriginal people figured minimally in the Canadian electoral process. There were only token Aboriginal candidates, minimal efforts to solicit Aboriginal votes, and few serious inter-party rivalries for Aboriginal attention. As the Manitoba situation suggests, this situation is changing. The evidence from Manitoba shows that Aboriginal participation in electoral politics is still uneven and uncertain, and closely tied to the social, cultural and political worlds of Aboriginal Canadians. In time, this reality may mean that Aboriginal communities will seek strong Aboriginal or Aboriginal-supported representation at the federal and provincial levels and could, collectively, be a major force in national and provincial politics. Political parties that fail to appreciate the nuances and complexities of Aboriginal electoral politics are unlikely to be able to mobilize support in the communities and will, as a consequence, cut themselves off from an increasingly important electoral constituency.

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