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Looking Forward and Looking Backward: Prospective and Retrospective Voting in the 1980 Federal Elections in Canada

ERIC M. USLANER

Theories of voting have distinguished between prospective and retrospective evaluations of political parties. However, not only may both factors be at work in an election, but they may also be complementary. The 1980 Canadian federal elections were, according to most accounts, both a retrospective and a prospective referendum on the energy issue. However, previous examinations of this election have failed to show any mandate emerging from the contest. This re-analysis of election data from that contest, shows that both prospective and retrospective evaluations mattered, above and beyond the quality of leadership in the country. Moreover, the pattern of voting strongly suggests an elite-led pattern of issue concerns akin to that suggested by the 'two-step flow of communications'. Those with the strongest pattern of issue concerns voted prospectively, while less committed partisans cast their ballots retrospectively.

When citizens cast their ballots on the basis of government policy, do they look forward or backward? Looking forward involves comparing the policy proposals of alternative parties and estimating which party will maximize the voter's net benefits. There is at least a modicum of sophistication required of such issue, or prospective, voters. They must place the parties (as well as themselves) somewhere in an issue space and be able to make some type of calculations about future expectations. On the other hand, looking backward – or voting retrospectively – makes far fewer demands on the citizen. All one has to do is to answer the straightforward question posed by Ronald Reagan in 1980: 'Are you better off now than you were four years ago?'

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The critical distinction is that only prospective voting is posited to produce policy mandates. Citizens who are disaffected with current government performance may disagree strongly among themselves about what the ideal policies ought to be. There is considerable evidence that this distinction between prospective and retrospective evaluations has not only analytical power but also empirical referents.¹

However, before we accept this disjunction as central to our understanding about how voters behave, we need to consider the theoretical underpinnings for this dichotomy. Fiorina posits two types of evaluations that voters make and these correspond to looking forward and looking backward. The former he attributes to the spatial modelling approach of Downs, the latter to a study by Key. Yet, the frameworks of both Downs and Key contain elements of *both* retrospective and prospective evaluations.²

Downs puts forward a spatial model of elections that seems fundamentally prospective. However, because parties have incentives to make their policy stands ambiguous, voters may have few alternatives than to cast ballots on the basis of promises broken or kept. Indeed, Downs maintains that citizens who make their voting decisions on the basis of issues will find 'the records of each party... more important to their decisions than party promises about the future'.³ While Key proposes a basically retrospective way of looking at elections, the survey questions he examines for his thesis include many prospective items. In short, the authors whose work formed the basis for the forward-backward distinction apparently did not intend to make such a separation.

This bit of sociology of knowledge is important because it calls our attention to a central point: retrospective and prospective evaluations can occur at the same time. While no one has claimed that the two types of evaluations are mutually exclusive, no conceptual linkage between the two has been articulated. Retrospective voting helps to restore some modicum of rationality to an electorate that otherwise is not strongly interested in the great issues of politics. Yet, by what mechanisms are even these retrospective evaluations framed? Public opinion is not static. It must be energized, as recognized almost four decades ago in the notion of the 'two-step flow of communications'.

The 'two-step flow' framework assumes that perceptions flow from the media to opinion leaders and then to the less interested segment of the electorate. Such

¹ On spatial voting and its relationship to prospective voting, see Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); James M. Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich, *The Spatial Theory of Voting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), esp. pp. 8–9. On the distinction between retrospective and prospective voting, see Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*; and Arthur H. Miller and Martin P. Wattenberg, 'Throwing the Rascals Out: Policy and Performance Evaluations of Presidential Candidates, 1952–1980', *American Political Science Review*, 79 (1985), 359–72.

² Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*, Chap. 1; Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chaps. 3, 7, and p. 298; and V. O. Key, Jr., *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

³ Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, p. 298.

elite-led issue voting has played a prominent role in recent accounts of how realignments occur in American politics.⁴ Downs also posits a group of more informed citizens who may seek to persuade others; such people are more likely to have clearer expectations of what to expect if either party is chosen to govern the nation. These opinion leaders might also help to transmit the views of a forward-looking elite to a backward-looking mass electorate.⁵

When an election campaign focuses on a central issue that sharply divides the major parties, retrospective evaluations of the performance of the incumbent party are likely to be shaped by the prospective expectations of those voters whose opinions have crystallized. Attitudes on government policies, then, 'trickle down' from the policy-making elites to the opinion leaders to the mass public. At each stage, some specificity is lost as we move from detailed concerns about alternative policies to a more general regard for the direction of future decisions to a more diffuse referendum on the policies of the incumbent administration. When the major parties do not offer voters clear alternatives, the more traditional model of retrospective voting seems to be more appropriate, together with its disjunction between looking forward and looking backward.

THE CANADIAN ELECTION OF 1980

The 1980 federal elections in Canada appear to offer an ideal test for the presence of issue effects, both prospective and retrospective, in voting. The minority Progressive Conservative government of the Prime Minister, Joe Clark, fell in December 1979 (after less than a year in office), when the small New Democratic party withdrew its support over the government's budget and the even smaller Social Credit party also defected. This forced what became known as 'the 18-cent election', after the gasoline tax in the budget that led to the government's demise. The opposition Liberal party won a majority in the contest and eight months later put forth the National Energy Programme (NEP), a wide-ranging policy that completely reversed the movement toward world prices and a free market. Rarely in North American politics have voters been presented with such a stark contrast in policy views between two major parties.

The conventional wisdom supported the view that the 1980 contest was indeed a referendum on the energy issue. The Progressive Conservatives (PCs) were identified with a position favourable to energy producers in their quest for pricing in accord with world levels. The Liberals, on the other hand, stressed protection of consumers through 'made in Canada' prices that were substantially below world levels. The two parties also differed on which level of government should control energy resources. The PCs supported what they held was

⁴ On the two-step flow, see Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1948), pp. 151–2. The re-alignment studies are: Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, 'On the Structure and Sequence of Issue Evolution', *American Political Science Review*, 80 (1986), 901–20; and Stuart Elaine Macdonald and George Rabinowitz, 'The Dynamics of Structural Realignment', *American Political Science Review*, 81 (1987), 775–96.

⁵ Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chap. 6.

the traditional constitutional guarantee of provincial control over natural resources, while the Liberals asserted (using different sections of the often-contradictory British North America Act of 1867) the right of the federal government to regulate natural resources.

Table 1 presents summaries of opinion polls on the importance of the energy issue.⁶ Except for the Gallup survey, the energy issue ranks at least second for every poll included in the table. In the National Election Study it was cited virtually as frequently as party leadership as the reason for the vote. This is a sharp increase in the salience of the issue in just one year.⁷ It is the perverse thesis of this article that, in spite of seemingly disconfirming evidence, the 'conventional wisdom' was correct after all. Some voters were motivated by the energy issue and others followed their lead by casting (largely negative) retrospective evaluations of the PC's energy policy.

In contrast to the 'conventional wisdom', the major study of the 1980 federal election found little advantage accruing to the Liberals on energy in a voting scenario that produced an 'absent mandate'.⁸ Such results point to a key paradox in Canadian politics. On the one hand, Canadian parties are highly cohesive in Parliamentary voting. On the other hand, this intra-party unity does not indicate programmatic orientations. Rather, Canadian parties are widely perceived to be 'brokerage' institutions characterized by 'an unusually large variety of politically important cleavages'. They are ideological pot-pourris that are particularly weak at policy formation. It is even unclear whether we might expect *indirect* effects of issues on elections through retrospective evaluations. While there is strong evidence that partisan identification depends on citizens' issue preferences, the nexus among issue positions, the state of the economy, and evaluations of party performance is weak.⁹

⁶ The data in the first two columns of Table 1 are reported in Lawrence LeDuc and J. Alex Murray, 'A Resurgence of Canadian Nationalism', in Allan Kornberg and Harold D. Clarke, eds., *Political Support in Canada: The Crisis Years* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1983), pp. 270–90, at p. 289. Data in the third column are reported in William Irvine, 'Epilogue: The 1980 Election', in Howard R. Penniman, ed., *Canada at the Polls, 1979 and 1980* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), pp. 337–98, at p. 374. Data for the fourth column are reported in Gordon H. G. McDougall and Gerald Keller, *Energy: Canadians' Attitudes and Reactions (1975–1980)* (Ottawa: Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada), p. 17. Data for the final column are reported in Jon H. Pammett, 'Elections', in Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams, eds, *Canadian Politics in the 1980s*, 2nd edn (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), pp. 271–86, at p. 273.

⁷ The percentage of respondents who mentioned energy as the most important issue in 1980 rose by a factor of 3.3 from 1979. See Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon H. Pammett, *Absent Mandate: The Politics of Discontent in Canada* (Toronto: Gage, 1984), p. 81, Table 4–1.

⁸ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*.

⁹ On Canadian parties as brokerage institutions, see Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, pp. 11, 13–15; on the link between partisanship and issue preferences, see Clarke and Marianne Stewart, 'Short-Term Forces and Partisan Change in Canada: 1974–1980', *Electoral Studies*, 4 (1985), 15–35. For diverse findings on the impact of retrospective factors on party evaluations, see Harold D. Clarke and Gary Zuk, 'The Politics of Party Popularity', *Comparative Politics*, 19 (1987), 299–315; Harold D. Clark, Marianne Stewart and Gary Zuk, 'The Political Economy of Party Support in Canada, 1980–

TABLE 1 *Public Concerns on Election Issues, Various Polls, 1980*

Issue	Gallup: most important*	Total mentions	Toronto Star: most important*	Government Survey: how serious?†	Election Study: reason for vote‡
Inflation	50	83	36	95	8
Unemployment	18	65	18	82	5
Environment/pollu- tion	11	33	—	72	—
Energy	8	42	27	—	29
(Cost of energy)	—	—	—	82	—
(Energy shortage)	—	—	—	66	—
Provincial-federal relations/national unity	7	38	—	71	11
Budget	—	—	5	—	15
Leaders, leadership	—	—	—	—	30
Political parties	—	—	—	—	23
General economic issues	—	—	—	—	15

* Most important problem facing country

† Perception of problem as serious or very serious

‡ Reason for vote choice in 1980

What helps anchor voters? If not issues or party performance on the macro-economy, then perhaps party identification plays the key role. Yet, differing patterns of identification at the federal and provincial levels have historically weakened the impact of partisanship among the electorate. Nor do Canadians fit into the patterns of cleavage found in most other polities, especially those with parliamentary systems. The electorate does not generally cast ballots along most of the traditional demographic cleavages such as religion, sex, occupation or class. Instead, the dominant factor in Canadian elections, according to the most sophisticated analyses of the 1980 and previous contests, is the evaluation of party leaders. The 1980 contest pitted the former Liberal Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, against the incumbent PC leader, Joe Clark. By 1980 Clark had become an object of derision throughout the country, even in his native West.¹⁰

1984', *European Journal of Political Economy*, 2 (1986), 25-45; and Kristen Monroe and Lynda Erickson, 'The Economy and Political Support: The Canadian Case', *Journal of Politics*, 48 (1986), 616-47.

¹⁰ The simple correlation between the feeling thermometer for Clarke and a dummy variable for region was just 0.12. For studies on the effects of key variables on vote choice, see Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*; Harold D. Clarke *et al.*, *Political Choice in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); Lawrence LeDuc, 'Canada: The Politics of Stable Dealignment', in Russell J. Dalton *et al.*, eds, *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 404-24; and Jon H. Pammett, 'Class Voting and Class Consciousness in Canada', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 24 (1987), 269-90.

Other variables that are important determinants of vote choice in Canadian elections, and that reflect larger conflicts within the society, are religion (especially the Catholic-Protestant dichotomy) and language (English-French).

It is the thesis here that the conventional wisdom about Canadian politics in 1980 was indeed correct: the energy issue *mattered*, in both a prospective and a retrospective sense. Along the way to demonstrating this, a method for resolving measurement problems will be introduced. But the question of central importance – and the ultimate pay-off from such an analysis – is why the energy issue mattered. In a political system marked by two major political parties that generally do not take sharply contrasting views on policies, energy stood out as a notable exception. It encapsulated conflicts that run deep in Canadian society: West versus East, whether the federal government or the provinces should control natural resources, and, more generally, the very idea of Canadian nationality. The Liberal party espoused the view that Canada should be one nation, and this implied federal control over the society's resources. The Progressive Conservatives emphasized that Canada was a 'community of communities', with provinces forming the basic political (and social) units. The two party leaders in 1980 reflected these basic conflicts. The incumbent Prime Minister, a Westerner, strongly endorsed the provincialist view. His Liberal opponent, Trudeau, had based his entire career upon forging a single national identity, and to that end proposed both a national energy policy and the repatriation of the Constitution (with a Charter of Rights) from Great Britain.

The conflict over nationality was also reinforced by the sharp producer-consumer cleavage on energy that emerged during both the 1973 and 1979 energy crises. There was a notable lack of cross-cutting cleavages from groups such as environmentalists, farmers, etc.¹¹ The post-election conflict over the Liberals' National Energy Policy was not just a regional battle between Alberta and the federal government dominated by Central Canada (Ontario and Quebec). It was also a partisan confrontation between the two major parties, and one that had long historical roots. The Liberals had for almost three decades been shut out in Western Canada, a symbol of that region's alienation from Central Canada and the party that had governed the country for most of the years since the Second World War. Brady argued that a key condition for responsible party government is a strong correlation between constituency traits and party representation in government.¹² In 1980, the Liberals held just one of seventy-seven Western seats in the federal Parliament and only one of 259 seats in provincial Legislative Assemblies.

¹¹ Glyn R. Berry, 'The Oil Lobby and the Energy Crisis', *Canadian Public Administration*, 17 (1974), 600-35; and Glen Toner and G. Bruce Doern, 'The Two Energy Crises and Canadian Oil and Gas Interest Groups', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 19 (1986), 467-93.

¹² David W. Brady, 'Critical Elections, Congressional Parties and Clusters of Policy Change', *British Journal of Political Science*, 8 (1978), 79-100.

In order for this *potential* for party government to be realized, voters must be able to perceive clear differences between the parties *on the issue that gives rise to the partisan alignment*. If parties do not differ on issues, as Canadian parties generally do not, then the linkage Brady proposed (as he himself argues) is unlikely to be realized. In 1980, energy performed precisely this role. If the contention that the energy issue was salient in the 1980 federal elections is correct – and the data analysis below supports this interpretation – then the critical question becomes *how* policy differences between parties are translated into voting choices.

The demise of the Clark government on what was at least in part an energy issue suggests that much retrospective voting would be likely. But retrospective voting does not provide any policy mandate. It does not depend upon an electorate that is clearly polarized on an issue in partisan terms. Such a scenario is more typical of prospective or issue-based voting. In 1980 *both* types of voting behaviour took place. As we shall see, an ‘issue elite’ did vote prospectively, taking its cues from the sharp divisions between the two parties on the issue that dominated public debate. Other, less interested voters took their cues from the ‘issue elite’ in a pattern reminiscent of the ‘two-step flow of communication’ and cast retrospective ballots according to their approval or disapproval of the question that brought the government down.

CITIZENS AND ISSUE EVALUATIONS

What motivated vote choices in the 1980 federal elections? Following common practice, two measures of vote choice in 1980 will be examined. The first is a dichotomous measure of voting for the Liberals versus any other party and the second is a similar index for the PCs. To understand the role of issues in an election, it is even more useful to consider the impact of such forces on people who switched their votes between 1979 and 1980. Looking at the full sample tells us what made people vote the way they did – an interesting question in its own right. Examining switchers, however, tells us more about the role of issues (and other variables) in the Liberals’ replacement of the PCs in 1980.¹³ Fortuitously, the 1974–79–80 Canadian National Election Study was a panel, permitting valid inferences on vote switching between the latter two years.

Was the energy issue sufficiently salient to the electorate to lead to prospective voting? Given the centrality of energy to the debate over Canadian identity, it is possible that the rather stringent conditions for ‘issue voting’ might be met. Yet, since the Liberals offered no specific energy programme (much less the NEP) in the 1980 elections, voters had little specific guidance in determining the spatial location of the opposition – other than knowing it was likely to be at some distance from the PCs. In the aggregate, Clarke *et al.* find that between 1979 and

¹³ See Eric M. Uslaner and M. Margaret Conway, ‘The Responsible Congressional Electorate: Watergate, the Economy, and Vote Choice in 1974’, *American Political Science Review*, 79 (1985), 788–803.

1980 the Liberal edge over the PCs on resource issues increased by just 5 per cent and on economic issues (including the budget) it actually fell by 1 per cent. None the less, by 1980 the Liberals had a barely measurable two percentage point advantage over the PCs on resource issues.¹⁴

A model of vote choice in the 1980 elections should incorporate the key features of the campaign. The Canadian National Election Study included questions on both retrospective and prospective issue voting as well as evaluations of party leaders. The 'energy salience' variable taps prospective evaluations. It is a summary index of: (1) whether the voter considered energy to be the most important or second most important issue in the campaign; (2) how important the issue was to the voter; and (3) the partisan direction of the voter's issue preference.¹⁵ Separate measures were computed for Liberals and PCs, in keeping with the measurement of the dependent variables for vote choice.

The retrospective measure is an index of disapproval of the Progressive Conservative budget, the proposal that led to the fall of the Clark government. Citizens who disapproved of the budget are assumed to vote against the PCs. Since the retrospective evaluations should affect the governing party more than the opposition, the impact of budget disapproval should be greater for the equation for Progressive Conservative voting than for Liberal voting. There is, however, one key difficulty with this retrospective measure. Attitudes to the budget were asked of only half of the sample, leaving just 449 (weighted) cases for analysis after cases with missing values on any predictor have been deleted. While this sample size may suffice to establish some important results, comparability with other studies of the 1980 Canadian election that have reached different conclusions is limited.

A method of estimating scores for budget disapproval for those respondents who were not asked their opinions on this issue was therefore sought. This was an instrumental variable technique, estimating an equation for the observed

¹⁴ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, p. 90. Irvine, 'Epilogue', reports a *Toronto Star* poll which gave the Liberals a 3–2 advantage on energy issues.

¹⁵ The index was computed as follows. For both the most important and second most important issue in the election, a dummy variable was created for voters who cited the energy issue (coded '1') and those who did not (coded '0'). Citizens who were scored '1' were weighted by how important they said the issue was in their voting decisions (by three for those who said very important, by two for those who said somewhat important, and by one for those who said not very important). Respondents who did not give one of these responses were recoded as zero. These scores (ranging from one to three) were weighted by the party preferred on the issue. For the Liberal analysis, citizens preferring the Liberals were weighted by +1 and those preferring other parties were weighted by –1 (again with those who had no party preference re-coded to zero). A similar weighting was done for the Progressive Conservatives (+1 if the PCs were preferred, –1 if some other party was preferred). Finally, the scores for each respondent on the two most important issues were summed, producing a range of –6 to +6 for each measure. The direct summation yielded superior results to alternative weighting schemes for the two most important issues. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*, p. 70, also employs the most important issue as a measure of prospective voting. Such a measure is prospective in that voters have preferences about policy areas and can state the party with which they most agree on an issue. Such voters thus fulfil the key conditions for spatial voting, which is posited to be prospective, by Downs in *An Economic Theory*.

values of budget disapproval by a battery of mostly demographic variables. The equation for the cases for which there were observations on budget disapproval was used to estimate values for those cases with no responses to this variable (but with responses to the demographic variables). As expected, the standard errors for the estimated instrumental variable in vote choice equations are somewhat greater than those for the measured attitudes.¹⁶ The effect is that the coefficients for budget disapproval in models of vote choice will be conservatively estimated. Only energy will be considered as a possible issue effect in the 1980 elections. While Table 1 indicates that voters were concerned with inflation and unemployment as well, these issues did not constitute significant reasons for vote choice (see the final column) and no measures of voter concern for either (apart from the most important issue) appear in the survey.

The measures of partisan affiliation were based on the constructs of the dependent variable, vote choice. Liberal identification is scored from +4 to -4 with the positive values representing very strong, strong and not very strong identifiers and non-identifiers who lean to the Liberals. Negative scores represent identifiers of varying degrees of strength (and leaners) with *all other parties*; scores of zero are reserved for non-identifiers. A similar measure is constructed for PC identification.

Evaluations of party leaders are measured by the difference in scores on feeling thermometers for Trudeau and Clark. For voters who base their decisions on the party leaders, it simply makes sense to compare Trudeau and Clark. Additionally, in preliminary analyses of the data, the *difference* in thermometer ratings was consistently more strongly related to vote choice than either leader's evaluation was by itself.

Canada has a weak sense of nationhood and many citizens have stronger affect for their provinces than for the country. The conflict over the energy issue reflected the debate over issues of equity and constitutional control over resources.¹⁷ The Progressive Conservatives backed the demands of the producing provinces (primarily Alberta) to control their natural resources; the Liberals sought to assert federal control over resources as part of a larger plan to reduce

¹⁶ Technically, the problem is that instrumental variable estimators are neither unbiased nor efficient. However, they are consistent and asymptotically efficient. Thus, it is hardly surprising that there would be some difference in mean scores and that the standard errors would be larger than for the measured variables. For the 'full sample' analysed below ($N = 1,051$), the measured attitudes were employed for the first half sample and the estimated attitudes were employed for the second half sample. A critical test of the instrumental variable technique, but not the only one performed, compared the probit coefficients for the vote choice model for two half-samples (one with measured attitudes and the other with estimated attitudes on budget disapproval). For the Liberal vote choice equations, the probit coefficients estimated were 0.472 and 0.498 respectively. For the Progressive Conservative vote choice equations, the coefficients were -0.751 and -0.741 respectively. Clearly these results are more than satisfactory. The probit R^2 for the instrumental variable estimation was 0.405. For a similar approach, see John E. Jackson, 'Issues and Party Alignment', in L. Maisel and P. M. Sacks, eds, *The Future of Political Parties* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1975), pp. 101-21. A more detailed appendix on the methodology employed is available from the author.

¹⁷ See G. Bruce Doern, 'The Mega-Project Episode and the Formulation of Canadian Economic Development Policy', *Canadian Public Administration*, 26 (1983), 191-238, p. 223.

provincial power and to impose a sense of nationhood on Canada. An index of 'pro-Canada sentiments' was constructed by subtracting the feeling thermometer rating for a respondent's home province from the thermometer evaluation for Canada.

There is a strong regional pattern of voting in Canadian elections. Hence, a dummy variable for region (0 = East, 1 = West) was created.¹⁸ Similarly, because Quebec has been the Liberal stronghold throughout Canada, a dummy variable for Quebec residence was created. Western residence should be negatively related to Liberal vote choice (and positively related to voting for the PCs), while the opposite relationships should hold for Quebec citizens. Quebec's status as the heartland of the Liberal party's vote dictates that a separate dummy variable for residence in that province be included. Finally, two demographic variables have demonstrated relationships to vote choice in previous analyses: age and education. As each increases, so should the likelihood of voting for the PCs, which is in line with a more general argument that both increased age and more education are associated with greater conservatism. As noted above, religion and language are also important determinants of vote choice. However, preliminary analyses indicated that both variables had insignificant relationships to vote choice controlling for the other predictors in the analysis. Hence, these variables were omitted from the final models.¹⁹

I estimate an identical model for switchers, here coded as '1' if they switched to the Liberals from 1979 to 1980, and as '0' if they switched to the PCs. Because of the construction of this variable, the Liberal measures of party identification and energy salience are adopted in the switcher equations. Because the dependent variables (vote choice) are dichotomies, the appropriate technique for estimating the equations is probit analysis.²⁰ Probit equations will be presented below. However, probit coefficients cannot be interpreted analogously to regression coefficients. We can transform the predicted values for each case into probabilities and thus assess the marginal impact of a particular predictor by: (1) holding that variable 'constant' at its highest and lowest values while permitting the other variables to vary freely; and (2) subtracting the probability of voting Liberal (PC) at the lowest value of the predictor from the probability obtained at the highest value.²¹

¹⁸ By the West, I include all four Western provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan). Removing British Columbia from the West does not affect the results.

¹⁹ Both variables, of course, are highly correlated with the Quebec dummy (since Quebec has most of the French-speaking voters in Canada and is the most heavily Catholic province). The modest impact of Quebec residence in most of the equations to follow, however, provides further evidence that in these models of prospective and retrospective vote choice, the effects of language and religion are very modest.

²⁰ See Richard D. McKelvey and William Zavoina, 'A Statistical Analysis of Ordinal Level Dependent Variables', *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 4 (1975), 103-30.

²¹ Specifically, the predicted values for the dependent variable in a probit analysis are z (standardized) scores. Thus, each score can be placed on the cumulative normal distribution and associated with a probability value. The technique operates by assigning to the predictor in question its minimum value and estimating a mean probability for the sample from an equation in which all

THE DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the probit analyses for Liberal voters, PC voters and switchers are presented in Table 2. The models are extremely successful in predicting vote choice, whether one uses the criterion of the estimated R^2 or the percentage predicted correctly. The Liberal and PC equations have R^2 values greater than 0.80. Each predicts over 90 per cent of the 1,051 cases correctly, compared to baseline predictions from the 'null model' (in which *all* voters are posited to vote *against* the Liberals and PCs, respectively) of 54.7 per cent and 63.7 per cent. Thus, the models represent proportionate reductions in error over null models of 69 and 47 per cent respectively.

TABLE 2 *Probit Estimates of Vote Choice in 1980 Federal Elections*

	Liberal voters	PC voters	Switchers
Party identification	0.433*** (15.750)	0.359*** (11.604)	0.122* (2.194)
Thermometer difference	0.011*** (5.325)	-0.016*** (-6.760)	0.019*** (4.238)
Energy salience	0.245*** (4.124)	0.253*** (3.932)	0.159 (1.541)
Budget disapproval	0.307*** (3.332)	-0.553*** (-4.697)	0.704*** (3.424)
Pro-Canada sentiments	0.178 (0.478)	0.246 (0.591)	-0.746 (-0.922)
Region	-0.491** (-2.459)	0.389* (2.082)	-0.796*** (-2.284)
Quebec residence	0.225 (1.232)	0.028 (0.135)	-0.398 (-1.163)
Education	-0.053** (-2.449)	0.032 (1.410)	-0.059 (-1.419)
Age	-0.004 (-0.946)	0.012** (2.456)	0.299 (0.320)
Constant	-0.270 (-0.559)	0.113 (0.217)	-0.754 (-0.795)
Estimated R^2	0.823	0.832	0.692
-2 Log likelihood ratio	1034.7213	1007.1056	130.3936
% correctly predicted			
Probit	92.6	93.6	86.7
Null	54.7	63.7	59.5
N	1,051	1,051	195

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

other variables vary freely. Then the same procedure is followed for the maximum value taken by that predictor. The mean probability for the variable at its minimum is subtracted from that for the predictor's maximum to give the marginal impact of the variable. The procedure is discussed in Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), and the specific algorithm for computing the probabilities was graciously provided by Steven J. Rosenstone.

The probit results in Table 2 provide strong support for the argument that the energy issue did indeed matter in the 1980 elections. Both the energy salience measure and budget disapproval were strongly related to vote choice, reaching statistical significance at beyond the 0.001 level.²² Only the thermometer difference and, particularly, the party identification measures had greater ratios of the maximum likelihood estimates to their standard errors.²³ Region was related to Liberal and PC voting in the expected direction. Education had a significant negative coefficient in the Liberal equation and age was positively related to PC voting. On the other hand, neither Quebec residence nor pro-Canada sentiments had significant relationships to either Liberal or PC voting.

Switchers were less well predicted than either Liberal or PC voters. The estimated R^2 is 0.692, although 86.7 per cent of the 195 switchers are predicted correctly, compared to a baseline expectation that 59.5 per cent would be properly classified under a null model. The proportionate reduction in error is 46 per cent, similar to what we found for the PCs.²⁴ The lower R^2 is hardly unexpected, since these voters have fewer strong attachments to the party system, which plays a key role in structuring the vote.²⁵ Indeed, party identification is only significant for these voters at the 0.05 level. The Liberals picked up votes in Eastern and Central Canada, while the PCs gained in the West. Candidate evaluations appeared to move the switchers, confirming the analysis of Clarke *et al.*²⁶ But so did attitudes towards the budget. On the other hand, energy salience did not affect switching.

Before attempting to find an overall pattern in these results, we should assess the effects in a more directly interpretable manner. Table 3 presents the results of probability estimates for the maximum and minimum values of each predictor as well as the difference in these two probabilities: this measure of the 'marginal' impact is shown by the italicized numbers. What we notice first are the powerful effects, except for switchers, for party identification. A very strong Liberal identifier is 64 per cent more likely to cast a ballot for his/her party than a voter who strongly identifies with another party. The corresponding figure for PC voting is 69.3 per cent.

²² All tests of significance reported herein are one-tailed. The addition of these prospective and retrospective variables does make a statistically significant difference for both the Liberal and PC equations. I also estimated probit equations for these two dependent variables without either energy-related variable. To test whether the addition of these variables is statistically significant, one simply subtracts -2 Log Likelihood Ratio for the restricted model (with seven predictors) from that for the full model (with nine predictors). The resulting figure is distributed as χ^2 with two degrees of freedom. For the PC equation, the difference in -2 Log Likelihood Ratios is 50.08; for the Liberals, the figure is 32.49. The critical value of χ^2 at the 0.001 level is 13.82.

²³ In regression analysis, this is the familiar t -ratio.

²⁴ For a similar proportionate reduction in error measure, see Norman Frohlich, Joe A. Oppenheimer, Jeffrey Smith and Oran R. Young, 'A Test of Downsian Voter Rationality', *American Political Science Review*, 72 (1978), 178–97.

²⁵ For similar findings in American Congressional elections, see Uslaner and Conway, 'The Responsible Congressional Electorate'.

²⁶ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, Chap. 5.

TABLE 3 *Probability Estimates for Vote Choice Predictors**

Predictor	Liberal voters	PC voters	Switchers
Party identification	0.709/0.069/0.640	0.841/0.148/0.693	0.658/0.428/0.229
Thermometer difference	0.594/0.275/0.319	0.159/0.624/−0.465	0.920/0.169/0.750
Energy salience (adjusted)	0.578/0.256/0.322	0.576/0.258/0.318	0.666/0.466/0.200
Budget disapproval	0.507/0.400/0.107	0.257/0.456/−0.200	0.809/0.315/0.494
Energy salience (adjusted) + Budget disapproval	0.614/0.284/0.330	0.159/0.619/−0.460	0.891/0.198/0.694
Pro-Canada sentiments	0.467/0.437/0.031	0.379/0.340/0.038	0.475/0.673/−0.198
Region	0.407/0.463/−0.055	0.394/0.354/0.040	0.476/0.598/−0.173
Quebec residence	0.474/0.449/0.025	0.364/0.362/0.003	0.540/0.616/−0.077
Education	0.391/0.527/−0.136	0.397/.0324/0.073	0.438/0.683/−0.245
Age	0.430/0.446/−0.036	0.426/0.332/0.094	0.594/0.556/0.038

* Entries are estimated probabilities of voting Liberal, voting AC, and switching to the Liberals. First entries are evaluated at the maximum value of the predictor, the second at the minimum values. The third entries (which are italicized) are differences between the maximum and minimum values.

The region/provincial variables have weak effects on vote choice. Western residence leads to a decline of only 5.5 per cent in Liberal voting and an increase in PC voting of just 4 per cent. The effects for Quebec residence are much smaller than that, effectively nil. High levels of education lead to a sizeable decrease in voting for the Liberals, but a smaller increment for the PCs – reflecting findings from previous research that voters with college education are somewhat more likely to vote for the New Democrats than those with lower levels of education.²⁷ On the other hand, the PCs gain more among older voters than the Liberals lose.

What, then, can we make of the countervailing effects of party leaders versus issue effects? The results in Table 3 suggest that these impacts are complementary. The thermometer difference measure has an impact of 32 per cent on Liberal voting and 47 per cent on PC electors. The 1980 contest was clearly a leadership referendum. But there are strong effects for both prospective and retrospective energy evaluations as well. The former measure, energy salience, leads to an impact on Liberal vote choice of approximately the same magnitude as party leadership evaluations when the coefficients are evaluated at adjusted maximum and minimum values.²⁸ Prospective voting had effects of similar

²⁷ Clarke *et al.*, *Political Choice in Canada*, p. 81.

²⁸ In each case there were very few voters at the extreme (+6, −6) values for energy salience. The boundaries were thus adjusted to reflect cases with more than just one or two voters at these extremes. The relevant boundaries become (−6, 4) for the Liberals, (−4, 6) for the PCs, and (−3, 3) for switchers. For estimating the joint effects of both energy salience and budget disapproval, the boundaries (−3, 3) were employed.

magnitudes on the PCs, although leadership evaluations were even more important on PC vote choice.

The Liberals appeared to gain relatively little on the retrospective measure of budget disapproval, compared with how much the PCs lost.²⁹ Moving from strong approval to strong disapproval of the budget leads to only a gain of 10.7 per cent in Liberal support, but a loss of 20 per cent for the PCs.³⁰ The joint effects of the prospective and retrospective variables indicate that Liberals gained little from the attitudes towards the budget, above and beyond the effects of prospective evaluations. The overall correlation between budget disapproval and energy salience for the Liberals is a modest 0.236. On the other hand, the two types of issue voting did interact to the PCs' disadvantage: the combined effect of these issue variables was of approximately the same magnitude on vote choice as party leader evaluations. The zero-order correlation between the retrospective measure and the PC prospective index was somewhat higher at -0.341 .

Effects for Switchers

We find a somewhat different pattern of effects for the switchers. As noted above, the impact of party identification is approximately one-third that of voters in the full sample. On the other hand, the dominant concern for these voters, who are not as strongly anchored in the political system, was party leader evaluations, with a marginal impact of 0.75. The prospective energy concern gave an advantage to the Liberals, but of only two-thirds the magnitude of the estimated results for Liberal and PC voters. On the other hand, the retrospective budget disapproval measure had pronounced effects on switchers. The average switcher had a probability of voting Liberal of 0.595; one who strongly disapproved of the budget had such a probability of 0.809 and a vehement supporter of the budget had a probability of just 0.315. The marginal impact was thus 0.494. Voters in Eastern and Central Canada were most likely to move towards the Liberals, those in the West towards the PCs (marginal impact = -0.245). This is precisely what we would expect given the regional impact of the PC's energy budget. More educated and older voters were likely to shift to the PCs. Somewhat surprisingly, the PCs fared well among switchers in Quebec and among

²⁹ Many observers believed that the activist bent of the NEP was designed by the Liberals to attract NDP supporters. See, *inter alia*, Bruce G. Doern and Glen Toner, *The Politics of Energy* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), p. 33.

³⁰ Is the budget-disapproval measure a valid one? The National Election Study asked voters what the budget meant to them. Only 12 per cent of the 725 respondents who gave answers to this question specifically mentioned something related to energy. When more general responses about effects on prices, business and low-income people are considered, the figure rises only to 23.1 per cent. However, virtually all other answers are general comments in favour of, or opposed to, the budget. No other specific comments were made in response to this question. Thus, budget evaluations do relate largely to the anticipated effects of the 18 cent tax to the extent that they reflect anything of substance. To the extent that the responses *do not* provide specific responses, the problem may lie more with the question asked than with voters' lack of knowledge about the 18 cent tax. The question about budget meaning was particularly vague.

those who had more favourable orientations towards Canada than towards their home provinces. (Note, however, that neither variable had significant probit coefficients.) Finally, the joint effect of the two issue variables was very powerful. Voters who both disapproved of the budget *and* favoured the Liberals on energy policy were almost 70 per cent more likely to vote for that party than were citizens who liked the budget and preferred some other party on energy.

WHITHER ISSUE EFFECTS?

Once we have established that issues did matter in the 1980 Canadian federal elections, two questions remain. Firstly, how did the energy issue translate into votes against the PCs and for the Liberals? Secondly, under what conditions do issues matter? The data analysis presented above indicates that both prospective and retrospective concerns motivated the electorate. Yet these two variables affected vote choice very differently, as the analysis for switchers in comparison with all voters suggests.

The energy issue mobilized strong supporters of each party above and beyond the effects of party identification and party leader evaluations. The correlations between each party's measure of energy salience and partisan identification were approximately 0.40 for all voters, compared to 0.30 for switchers. Since correlation measures partly depend on sample size, the lower values for switchers compared to all voters are particularly interesting (since there are considerably fewer switchers). The greater impact of the prospective measure for all voters compared to switchers further suggests that it was the *more* stable voters who cast ballots on the basis of issue concerns.

All signs point to such a conclusion, including the findings of Clarke *et al.* that issues did affect vote choice if not the outcome of the election.³¹ In contrast, switchers appear to be motivated more by retrospective issue concerns. The marginal impact for budget disapproval for switchers was almost two and a half times that for PC voters and almost five times that for Liberal supporters. The correlations between budget disapproval and Liberal party identification were almost identical (about 0.39) for all voters and switchers.³²

The top elites were divided along very clear partisan/regional lines over the energy issue. It would be truly remarkable if the strongest partisans did not reflect these cleavages. And given the central role of the energy issue in the election – there would have been no contest had the 18 cent gasoline tax not been proposed – those voters who were not so strongly attached to parties took their cues from the strong partisans who acted as 'opinion leaders'. PC and Liberal partisans rallied behind their respective party leaders to reinforce predispositions toward free-market and government-directed energy policies respectively.

³¹ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, Chap. 6.

³² While the correlation was considerably stronger for PC party identification for all voters (–0.60), this is not surprising. As noted above, retrospective evaluations tend to punish the governing party more than they reward the party out of power.

Voting by Opinion Leaders

To test this idea that the energy issue 'trickled down' from opinion leaders to the mass public, an analysis was conducted on the vote choice of the 338 voters who said that they follow politics either very or fairly closely, perhaps the best available surrogate for opinion leaders.³³ For these 'opinion leaders' the equation for PC voting indicates that *both* the prospective and retrospective energy variables achieved statistical significance at the 0.05 level or better. Energy salience was more strongly related to vote choice than budget disapproval. The differences in probabilities were 0.198 and -0.137 respectively, indicating somewhat more powerful effects for the prospective measure. In the equation for Liberal voting, people who follow politics closely cast prospective but *not* retrospective votes. Budget disapproval had the wrong sign (but with a MLE/SE of just -0.180), while energy salience was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The net impacts of these two variables were -0.009 and 0.177 respectively. The elite, then, did vote more prospectively than retrospectively.

WHAT TYPE OF MANDATE?

Did the energy issue lead to the PC's defeat in 1980? Clarke *et al.* find a very small advantage for Liberals on resource issues in 1980: of the 417 respondents who cited such concerns as their most important issue, 36 per cent preferred the Liberals and 34 per cent the Progressive Conservatives.³⁴ The measures of energy salience developed here suggest an even more restrictive role for the energy issue. Overall, just 14.3 per cent of the 1,051 voters analysed had positive (pro-party) scores for the Liberals compared to 13.5 per cent who had positive scores on the PC measure. This translates into a Liberal advantage of 42 to 40 per cent among voters who considered the issue to be one of the two most important, who favoured a particular party, and who found the issue to be of some importance in their electoral choice. Switchers, furthermore, were considerably less likely than all voters to be affected by party preferences on the energy issue. None of these figures provide much comfort to analysts seeking to explain the Liberal rebound in 1980.

If prospective voting did not lead to the defeat of the incumbent administration, perhaps retrospective evaluations did. Yet the Liberals did not gain because the budget was widely perceived as unpopular. In fact, 54.4 per cent of the sample *supported* the budget. However, the effects of approval and disapproval were asymmetric.³⁵ Over 90 per cent of voters who strongly approved of the budget cast PC ballots; a similar percentage of ardent opponents voted for opposition parties. Yet, while 94 per cent of moderate opponents also supported

³³ Clarke *et al.*, *Political Choice in Canada*, esp. Chap. 7, also examine the role of political interest, but in a very different context from that employed here.

³⁴ Clarke *et al.*, *Absent Mandate*, p. 90.

³⁵ For an important statement of such results in an American context, see Samuel Kernell, 'Presidential Popularity and Negative Voting', *American Political Science Review*, 71 (1977), 44–66.

the opposition, just 55 per cent of lukewarm supporters backed the PCs. The opposition parties were more effective in mobilizing voters opposed to the government's energy policy than the PCs were with respect to supporters.³⁶

Overall, 33.8 per cent of the sample both approved of the budget and voted for the PCs, while 43.2 per cent disapproved of the budget and voted for opposition parties. These figures indicate a substantial impact for retrospective judgements on the energy issue. But the Liberals were not the sole beneficiaries of anti-budget sentiment; indeed, fewer people (31.5 per cent of the sample) opposed the budget and supported the Liberals than favoured the plan and backed the PCs. The Progressive Conservatives lost because voters who opposed the budget cast ballots *en bloc* either for the Liberals or the New Democrats. There was, then, a mandate for rejecting the PC's energy policy but not necessarily for an as yet unstated Liberal alternative programme. These data do suggest that there was a retrospective policy mandate on energy in 1980, but that the Liberals may have won the elections because of the geography of the election and the plurality electoral system that penalizes minor parties. Given this pattern of voting, it is not surprising that the policy that the new Liberal government proposed was in many ways closer to the preferred position of New Democratic socialists than to the more traditionally capitalist Liberals.³⁷

Canadian voters were given clear-cut signals. The zero-order correlations between vote choice and budget disapproval, for example, were 0.422 for the Liberals and -0.590 for the PCs. A critical condition for a follow-the-leader type of issue voting, as noted in the Introduction, is that the major parties present sharply different alternatives to the voters. Opinion leadership is enhanced by convergent patterns of partisan and constituency interests. However, that is not the entire story. For the less interested voters to be able to discern clear-cut cues it is equally important for opinion leaders to be clearly divided into opposing camps. The cues provided by the opinion leaders were readily received by the electorate. The images of party leaders reinforced rather than competed with issue concerns. And, critically, if all of these conditions are to have any consequences for electoral politics, they must be salient to the voters. In 1980, 24.7 per cent of respondents cited energy as the most important issue in the election and an additional 9.1 per cent selected it as the second most important issue.³⁸

The convergence of constituency and partisan interests clearly interacts with the structure of conflict among opinion leaders. When there is a strong correlation between partisan representation and constituency traits, the key condition for party government holds and opinion leaders will straightforwardly respond

³⁶ In contrast, both parties mobilized virtually all of their supporters on the energy salience measures.

³⁷ Doern and Toner, *The Politics of Energy*, p. 33.

³⁸ Of the total of 33.8 per cent, 0.9 per cent cited energy responses as *both* the first and second most important issues. Virtually identical percentages of the voters analysed above and of the full weighted sample of 1,770 (24.4, 9.2 per cent) cited energy as the first and second most important issue.

to majority opinion within their constituencies. When the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney displaced the Liberals in 1984, it effectively dismantled the NEP – precisely what we would expect in a system of strong partisan representation on the energy issue. If an issue is so clearly structured, citizens have an easier time fixing responsibility for policy choices, and thus a crucial condition for issue voting is met.

Retrospective voting has traditionally been viewed as an alternative to issue-based voting. When there are no clear-cut policy distinctions between two (or more) major parties, voters can cut their decision costs simply by punishing the in-party without having to calculate what the out-party might do. If the linkage between issue position and party affiliation is straightforward, then issue voting (whether prospective or retrospective) should be complementary to voting by party identification and leadership evaluations.

This ‘trickle-down’ model of issue concerns characterizes realignment politics in the United States. Furthermore, two American presidential elections from 1952 to 1980 were marked by substantial prospective policy voting and strong retrospective evaluation components.³⁹ The contests of 1964 and 1980 were also marked by very strong ideological distinctions between the candidates. When issues are joined so as to go to the heart of the constituencies of the major parties, both prospective and retrospective voting are likely to occur – although not necessarily by the same electors.

Such a perspective on how issues get translated into votes shows us why the ‘conventional wisdom’ on what drives elections is not often likely to be too far from the mark. For such ‘wisdom’ is perpetrated by the very opinion leaders who are attempting to structure the outcome of the elections. By the time such attempts become ‘conventional wisdom’, the number of opinion leaders converging on a particular issue is likely to have become large enough to have a distinct impact on political discourse across multiple levels of citizen interest. Such appears to have been the case with respect to energy in the 1980 federal elections in Canada. What is ironic is that any mandate on the energy issue that might have occurred in the 1980 elections did not come from where we would ordinarily expect to find it, from the issue voters – who largely cancelled each other out (as previous analyses also found). Rather, it came (if it did) from the very retrospective voters who have been held incapable of producing such a directive in a world where retrospective and prospective concerns are disjoint.⁴⁰

It is hardly novel to argue that politicians may perceive mandates from retrospective voting, even when the electorate does not send clear signals on what its policy preferences are. However, the 1980 federal elections in Canada suggest that retrospective evaluations can have a policy component *if they have some basis in underlying salient conflicts between the parties*. The energy issue touched a raw nerve in Canadian politics, much as the questions that engender realignments do more generally. It is not being argued that the 1980 election marked a

³⁹ Miller and Wattenberg, ‘Throwing the Rascals Out’, p. 370.

⁴⁰ Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*, pp. 5–6.

new political alignment in Canada. However, there are similarities. A single major issue energized the election. Retrospective evaluations did seem to have policy content, as ordinary citizens appeared to take cues from an 'issue elite'. They could do so because parties *mattered* in a manner that diverged from the norm in a brokerage system.