



Canadian Evangelical Voting Trends by Region, 1996–2008

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When many Canadians think of evangelical Christians and voting, they often turn their worried thoughts south to the United States and the “religious right.” “Religious right” is a neat alliterative shorthand for a just decades old movement that combines religious conservatism with partisan right-of-centre politics. In the news media it has become virtually interchangeable with “American Evangelicalism,” where “Evangelicalism” stands in for “religious,” and “American” stands in for “right” – “right” in both its political and moral senses.

When Canadian news media write stories on Canadian evangelical Christians they most frequently cover political news stories. Often the Evangelicals in these political news stories are framed as “un-Canadian” – “un-Canadian” in a distinctly American way.¹ Given the news media’s presentation of Evangelicals, Canadians understandably began to suspect Canadian Evangelicals shared the same approach to public engagement as the American “religious right.” But they do not.

Canadian evangelical Christians tend to follow the pattern of their regional fellow Canadians when they vote. Between 1996 and 2008, evangelical support for all parties other than the Liberal Party of Canada increased just as it did in the general population. While evangelical voters showed a disproportionate preference for conservative parties, this paper will show that this preference was due more to Liberal Party alienation of evangelical voters than to a determined attempt on the part of Evangelicals to influence politics from the “religious right.”

Sam Reimer, in his book *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide*, states that “Evangelicals, particularly active evangelicals, in both countries [Canada and the United States] resemble each other far more than they resemble their fellow countrymen,” but he goes on to say, “the biggest and most consistent differences between evangelicals north and south of the border show up in the realm of politics.”² Analyzing 1995 data comparing Evangelicals in the two countries, Reimer concludes, “Comparatively, Canadian evangelicals show minimal differences in political conservatism from other Canadians,” and “the gap [in political conservatism] between core Canadian evangelicals and American evangelicals is even greater.”³

It would be easy to assume, because of the associations nurtured by the Canadian news media, that Evangelicalism was an inherently American movement foreign to Canada, but this is not so. Historian Michael Gauvreau has called the nineteenth century in Canada the “Evangelical Century,”⁴ and historian George Rawlyk claims that in the early part of that century roughly half of Canadian Protestants were Evangelicals.⁵ Evangelicalism is a

¹ David M. Haskell, *Through a Lens Darkly: How the News Media Perceive and Portray Evangelicals*, (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2009): 130, 135.

² Reimer, *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide: The Conservative Protestant Subculture in Canada and the United States*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003: 6 and 125.

³ Ibid, 127.

⁴ Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991.

⁵ George Rawlyk, “Introduction,” In *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk, p. xv. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997.



complex movement with many different streams; nevertheless, each country's respective evangelical movements were formed by their own contexts giving them each a unique character. Contrasting Canadian and American Evangelicals, historian George Rawlyk writes,

the Canadian variant [of Evangelicalism] did not have to carry the heavy American non-spiritual baggage of "civic humanism, republicanism, the covenant ideal and possessive individualism."⁶

In the nineteenth century the evangelical proportion of the Canadian population, particularly in English speaking Canada, was so large that Canadian politics was to a large extent evangelical politics. Canadian Evangelicals, for the most part, shared the same concerns about the American synthesis of religious enthusiasm and American nationalism as their other Canadian neighbours.

So why are contemporary scholars writing articles with titles such as "Pulpit & Politics: The Religious Right & its Growing Influence on Canadian Public Life,"⁷ and "How Scary? Stephen Harper and the Evangelical Agenda"?⁸ Have the "minimal differences" between Canadians and Canadian Evangelicals changed since the mid-1990s? Do Canadian Evangelicals form a right-leaning voting bloc?

To answer these questions this paper looks at regional federal voting intentions and voting patterns of Canadian evangelical Christians⁹ using data from five public opinion surveys spanning 1996 to 2008. Comparative reference will also be made to the voting results of the Canadian general elections that were held during this time frame. The four geographical regions examined are Western Canada (including the Territories), Ontario, Québec, and Atlantic Canada. We examine regional rather than national voting intentions because Canadian Evangelicals, like their neighbours, exhibit distinct regional voting patterns. "All politics is local,"¹⁰ and Canadian evangelical politics is no different.

Before turning attention to these questions, we need to make a few preliminary comments about the datasets¹¹ First, with the exception of the 2004 and 2006 polls, all surveys measured voting intention, not how the respondents actually voted in a general election.¹² Voting intentions may change on election day. Second, two surveys considered in this paper found large undecided populations. To help understand where this undecided voter support tended to land, we will refer to the valid voting results (the term used by Elections Canada for verified final voting results and hereafter referred to as "voting results") of the nearest following general election. Third, the 2004, 2006, and 2008 datasets identify how the respondents voted in the preceding general election in addition to how they either intended to vote or voted subsequently. These variables of current voting intentions and previous general election

⁶ Ibid, xv.

⁷ Dennis Gruending, "Pulpit & Politics: The Religious Right & its Growing Influence on Canadian Public Life." Paper presented to the conference Sacred and Secular in a Global Canada, May 2008. http://www.dennisgruending.ca/misc_files/The_Religious_Right_and_Its_Growing_Influence_Jan_2009.pdf accessed July 20, 2009.

⁸ Jonathan Malloy, "How Scary? Stephen Harper and the Evangelical Agenda," Paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association annual meetings, York University, June 2006.

⁹ Evangelical Christians are identified in these surveys by religious affiliation, which is but one way of operationalizing evangelical Christians. For a discussion on operationalizing Evangelical Christians in Canada, see Rick Hiemstra, "Counting Canadian Evangelicals," Church & Faith Trends 1:1 (October 2007). (http://files.efc-canada.net/min/rc/cft/V01101/Counting_Canadian_Evangelicals.pdf accessed July 13, 2009)

¹⁰ Quote often attributed to Thomas P. O'Neill.

¹¹ The Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism (CRCE) is grateful to Ipsos Reid and Angus Reid Strategies for supplying the datasets for this paper.

¹² See Appendix A for voting intention questions. While the questions differ slightly in emphasis, all attempt, in some way, to measure partisan support.

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voting behavior give us a measure of how votes tended to move between general elections. Fourth, the 2006 and 2008 datasets also included a question about the respondent's top priority in deciding how to vote. While a top priority is not the only priority, it offers a measure of why people decide to support one political party rather than another. Finally, by 2006 partisan political support as measured in most public opinion polls had shifted to place more emphasis on the personality of each party leader. Different questions measure different things. More recent trends may, therefore, be more a reflection of the popularity of party leaders than a reflection of party popularity.

Trends in Voting Intentions from 1996 on

In 1996, Evangelicals' voting intentions, despite being slightly more politically conservative, nevertheless closely matched those of their neighbours (see table 1). This snapshot, which forms a baseline for this paper, shows a Canada where there was a political symmetry or a consensus between the general population and their evangelical neighbours. Both this similarity and the shape of the 1996 political landscape will become more striking as we look at the changes going forward to 2008. Between 1996 and 2008 the Canadian political landscape would see major political parties come and go, changes in party leadership, scandal, large social change, and finally toward the end of 2008 the beginning of a major economic recession. All of these factors and others would radically alter Canadian voting intentions for both Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals.

Table 1. Regional voting intentions in 1996 for all regional voters and for Evangelicals, percentages

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	All (N=870)	Ev. (N=188)	All (N=1,129)	Ev. (N=155)	All (N=755)	Ev. (N=77)	All (N=246)	Ev. ^a (N=45)
PC	9	9	14	11	9	7	16	14
Ref	20	33	7	15	1	0	4	6
Lib	37	30	50	44	32	28	45	42
NDP	9	6	8	6	1	1	9	5
Bloc	–	–	–	–	22	16	–	–
Other	2	2	2	4	2	3	1	2
DK	19	15	15	18	25	34	19	19
WNV/R/ SB	5	6	4	2	10	12	6	11

Source: See Appendix A.

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois; DK = Don't Know; WNV/R/SB = Would Not Vote/Refused/Spoil Ballot.

^a Very small sample size. Use with caution.

Politics is local, but there are some wider national trends that need comment before we turn to the regions. The two major trends are the decline in Liberal evangelical voter support and the rise in Conservative evangelical voter support. We'll also briefly comment on the smaller, albeit important, growth in evangelical support for the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Green Party.



Decline in Support for the Liberal Party

While the data are not available to tell us definitively why evangelical voter support for the Liberal Party fell off rapidly, the most plausible explanation is a reaction to the party's electoral tactics. Though the Liberal Party adopted policy positions that were at odds with evangelical moral stances, the decline in support cannot be explained principally by policy change. If this were the case then we would expect to see a decline in support for the NDP, which had similar policy positions. Rather the relationship between Evangelicals and the Liberal Party began to sour as a result of the cumulative effect of Liberal attempts to marginalize Evangelicals and stifle dissent for political gain, as the following six examples will demonstrate.

First, when the Canadian Alliance was formed in 2000, it elected Stockwell Day, an evangelical Christian, as its leader. During the 2000 general election campaign, Liberal Party representative Warren Kinsella appeared on *Canada AM*, a popular national television program, with a Barney the Dinosaur doll and mocked Stockwell Day's creationist beliefs, saying, "I just want to remind Mr. Day that *The Flintstones* was not a documentary."¹³ Kinsella would go on to boast, "Of all the things I have done in politics, over many, many years, probably nothing has had the impact of those few seconds on *Canada AM*."¹⁴ While Evangelicals hold various views on Creation, most understood this as an attempt to denigrate their faith.

Second, before the 2004 general election the Liberal Party commissioned a push-poll¹⁵ that asked Ontarians, "Would you be more or less likely to vote for the Conservatives if you knew they had been taken over by evangelical Christians." Bruce Clemenger, President of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), wrote a letter of protest to then Prime Minister Paul Martin, saying:

Merely naming a group in such a political strategy creates an impression that the group is suspect. It is the first step in a process of disinformation that leads to discrimination and marginalization.¹⁶

Individual Liberal MPs including John McKay and Paul Szabo condemned the practice, but the Liberal Party leadership defended it.¹⁷ In a follow-up letter to the prime minister, Clemenger commented:

There has been no public denouncement of the tactic, an apology offered, nor has a commitment been made that this will not happen again.¹⁸

There have been no further incidents where the Liberal Party commissioned a push-poll that sought to marginalize evangelical Christians.

Third, on July 12, 2002, the Ontario Divisional Court ruled that the heterosexual definition of marriage was unconstitutional. The court gave the federal government two years to change the marriage law, touching off an emotional national debate about the nature of marriage. The Liberal government shifted its stance toward the

¹³ Warren Kinsella, *Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics*, (Toronto: Random House Publishers, 2001): 135.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ A push-poll words polling questions in such a way as to elicit a particular response rather than trying to measure a range of opinion.

¹⁶ Letter to Paul Martin from Bruce Clemenger dated April 23, 2004 re: Liberal push polling.

¹⁷ Canadian Press, "Liberal MPs shocked by party's election tactic," May 8, 2004. (http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20040508/Liberal_Election_040508?s accessed August 11, 2009)

¹⁸ Letter to Paul Martin from Bruce Clemenger dated May 18, 2004 re: Liberal Push Polling.



redefinition of marriage in 2003. Until June of that year the government was content to let the Commons Justice Committee hold cross-country hearings and make recommendations to the House of Commons on whether or not marriage should be redefined. Before the committee could report back to the government, the Ontario Court of Appeal redefined marriage in June 2003. The government chose not to appeal the decision and announced it would introduce legislation to redefine marriage. The Justice Committee ceased its deliberations, and the government became an advocate for the redefinition of marriage, contending same-sex marriage was a human rights issue and required by the *Charter*.¹⁹

Fourth, early in 2005 in the heat of the redefinition of marriage debate, Liberal Cabinet Minister Pierre Pettigrew mused to the media, “I find that the separation of church and state is one of the most beautiful inventions of modern times,” making the not-so-subtle point that churches opposed to redefining marriage to include same-sex relationships should stay out of the public debate. A Compas poll conducted shortly after Pettigrew made these comments found that 63% of Canadians perceived “Pettigrew-type comments about religious organizations” as either definitely or probably a threat to free speech.²⁰ Many Evangelicals saw it as a threat to religious freedoms as well. Clemenger felt it necessary to address the issue in his regular column in *Faith Today* magazine in order to reassure evangelical Christians that within limits they could and should participate in the debate.²¹

Fifth, during the 2006 general election campaign the prospect of revisiting the redefinition of marriage was raised. During one of the leaders’ debates, Paul Martin, to most people’s surprise, promised to amend the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to bar federal use of the notwithstanding clause should the Liberal Party be re-elected.²² This promise was very obviously made to address the calls from some quarters to invoke the notwithstanding clause as a means to reverse recent legislation legalizing same-sex marriage. The principal proponents of invoking the notwithstanding clause came from religious communities, and so the intention was clearly to stifle conservative religious dissent. Martin framed this promise as a defense of “Canadian values.” Martin’s stance was viewed as especially contradictory as he had just submitted an article to the EFC’s *Faith Today* magazine in which he said,

As Prime Minister and Canadian citizen, I am an ardent believer in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – the heartbeat of our Constitution – which recognizes the supremacy of God in the preamble and enshrines freedom of religion, among other basic freedoms, of our highest law.”²³

Many Evangelicals saw Paul Martin’s notwithstanding clause promise as a desperate attempt to win a closely contested election by characterizing those who supported a traditional view of marriage as a danger to “Canadian values.” More alarming still was Martin’s suggestion that the advocacy of a competing public policy option was so grave a threat to “Canadian values” that the unprecedented legal remedy of a constitutional amendment was warranted. Martin proposed to silence religious dissent through marginalization and with the blunt instrument of the law. The chill that went through theologically conservative Canadian religious communities was profound.

¹⁹ “Canada Debates Same-sex Marriage,” *CBC News in Review* (September 2004): 30–31. (<http://www.cbc.ca/newsinreview/sep03/PDFs/samesex.pdf> accessed August 28, 2009)

²⁰ Compas, “Same-sex: Public Embraces Gay Rights, Opposes Gay Marriage, Advocates National Referendum: Findings from a National Survey for the National Post and Global Television.” February 2, 2005. (<http://www.compas.ca/data/050202-SameSex-EPC.pdf> accessed August 11, 2009). The poll was conducted January 28–31, 2005.

²¹ Bruce Clemenger, “Why Churches Must Speak,” *Faith Today* (March/April 2005): 14.

²² CTV.ca News Staff, “Martin vows to end federal notwithstanding clause,” January 9, 2006. (http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060103/ELXN_liberals_debate_amendment_060109 accessed August 11, 2009).

²³ Paul Martin, Liberal Party of Canada contribution to “Faith and Politics: Party Leaders Respond,” *FaithToday* (January/February 2006): 19.



Sixth, the Liberals had a chance to renew their relationship with Canadian Evangelicals with the election of Stéphane Dion as leader of the party, which promised a new direction. His attempts to reach out to religious voters, however, were clumsy and came across as insincere. For example, in a pre-campaign interview on *The Michael Coren Show*, Dion made frequent mention of God. When asked by Coren why he was peppering his conversation with references to God, Dion replied, “I have been told that this is important to the people who watch this show.”²⁴ Writing in the *National Post* about the interview, Coren reports that Dion asked about the denominational composition of *The Michael Coren Show*’s viewership. Dion is reported to have explained his question, saying, “You see, the Catholics can be relied on to vote Liberal, always, but the Protestants much less so. ... It’s very difficult to get them to vote for us. I am a Catholic.”²⁵ As it turned out, one of the most important shifts in the 2008 election was the shift of Catholic voters away from the Liberals.²⁶ Observing this Catholic shift, Andrew Grenville of Angus Reid Strategies said, “[it] looks like we have a new status quo.”²⁷

The Liberal Party demonstrated again and again that for electoral gain it was willing to marginalize religious groups generally and Evangelicals specifically. The cumulative effect of these attacks was to leave Evangelicals wary of the Liberal Party. This wariness was not primarily about public policy. There is a substantial degree of homogeneity in policy between Canada’s major political parties. Even on issues such as same-sex marriage, other parties held policy positions similar to the Liberal Party’s, and over the period that the Liberals lost evangelical support, these parties gained evangelical support. Other issues such as the sponsorship scandal would erode Liberal support generally, but the incidents described above gave additional incentive for Liberal evangelical supporters to move their votes elsewhere. Each time Canadians went to the federal polls in 2004, 2006, and 2008, the Liberals only managed to hold on to roughly half of the evangelical voters they had had at the previous election. When evangelical voters left, they generally went to the Conservatives and the NDP, in a 2 to 1 ratio respectively.

Rise in Support for the Conservative Party

The growth in Conservative Party evangelical support can be traced to a number of factors, most of which apply to the general population as well as Evangelicals. The creation of the Conservative Party of Canada in 2004 brought a greater degree of clarity and coherence to Canada’s right-of-centre political options and for the first time in a decade provided Canadians with a conservative electoral option that had a reasonable chance of forming the government. Stephen Harper’s 2006 election promise to revisit the decision to redefine marriage along with his promise to address government corruption were also important factors in building evangelical support. A less obvious, but just as important, factor in evangelical support for the Conservatives was evangelical hope that the Conservatives would be more likely to prevent legislation that Evangelicals found morally objectionable, such as legislation to legalize euthanasia, from passing into law.

²⁴ Michael Coren, “Michael Coren: Stéphane Dion finds God,” <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2008/08/25/michael-coren-st-233-phane-dion-finds-god.aspx> accessed August 14, 2009.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Elisabeth Gidengil, Joanna Fournier, Patrick Neil, and Nevitte Neal, “The Anatomy of a Liberal Defeat,” Paper presented at the Annual Canadian Political Science Association Conference, May 2009.

²⁷ Kate Lunau, “Catholics flee Liberals in droves,” *Macleans Magazine* (November 24, 2008). (<http://www2.macleans.ca/2008/11/24/catholics-flee-liberals-in-droves/> accessed August 28, 2009)

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As the right-of-centre political options coalesced in 2004, the percentage of undecided Canadian voters fell to about a third of their 1996 levels. While this former undecided vote was distributed across all parties, the lion's share of former evangelical undecided voters became Conservative supporters.

In all regions of Canada “cleaning up corruption” and “moral issues like abortion and same sex marriage”²⁸ were the top two issues that mattered most to Evangelicals in deciding how to cast their votes in the 2006 election (see table 2). The ordering of these priorities for Evangelicals switched, however, depending on the relative strength of evangelical support in the region for the Liberal Party. In Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, and Québec, where the Liberals enjoyed 25%, 32%, and 31% support respectively, Evangelicals reported “moral issues” as the top priority. In the West, where Liberal support lagged at 13%, “cleaning up corruption” moved into first place. It should be noted that while Liberal evangelical support was stronger in Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, and Québec, in each of these regions the Liberals were a distant second to the Conservatives, which was not the case for the general populations. In Ontario “moral issues” was cited as the top issue in deciding how to vote by only 13% of the general population versus 25% of Evangelicals; the Atlantic numbers were similar at 11% and 25%, respectively. In Québec the spread was even greater, with the general population indicating moral issues as the top reason for deciding how to vote 6% of the time while 22% of Québec Evangelicals said the same. Although moral issues were clearly a priority for Evangelicals in deciding how to vote in 2006, three-quarters of Evangelicals cited other priorities as the most important.

Table 2. Top five responses to the question “Which one of the following issues mattered most in deciding which party’s candidate you voted for today (January 23, 2006 General Election)?” for the general population (All) and for Evangelicals (Ev.) by region, percentages

Issue	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Al (N=10,324)	Ev. (N=2,048)	All (N=13,792)	Ev. (N=2,056)	All (N=8,898)	Ev. (N=237)	All (N=2,898)	Ev. (N=502)
Cleaning up corruption	21	23	15	17	22	13	13	16
Moral issues like abortion and same sex marriage	12	21	13	25	6	22	11	25
Managing the economy	14	12	16	12	15	14	14	12
Fixing our healthcare system	14	10	16	12	13	10	14	12
Social programs like childcare, pensions	11	9	12	9	–	–	13	11
Keeping Canada together / National Unity	–	–	–	–	11	16	–	–

Source: 2006 Ipsos Reid Internet exit poll.

²⁸ The environment, foreign aid, human trafficking and the like are all moral issues; however, “moral issues” is generally used quite narrowly in Canadian public discourse to mean issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage.



It has been suggested that higher support for first the Reform Party, then the Canadian Alliance, and finally the Conservative Party could be attributed to the evangelical faith of the party's respective leaders. This is a difficult thesis to test because in the time period under consideration these parties have never had a non-evangelical leader.

Political scientist Jonathan Malloy has questioned the evangelical leader thesis, writing:

The apparent increase in evangelical enthusiasm for the Conservatives is also curious given that Conservative Leader Stephen Harper is not openly evangelical compared to his Reform Party/Canadian Alliance predecessors Preston Manning and Stockwell Day.²⁹

Writing an analysis of the 2006 general election, Malloy goes on to say,

Stephen Harper's agenda may not have much in common with explicitly evangelical agendas. ... Furthermore, Conservative evangelicals are unlikely to find much freedom to pursue their own agendas.³⁰

What the Conservatives did do, however, was signal to the evangelical community that the concerns over issues like the redefinition of marriage were heard and the party made room for Evangelicals to be part of the public debate. On the first day of the 2006 election campaign Harper promised to hold a free vote on changing the definition of marriage if he were elected prime minister.³¹ While the Conservatives were elected and a more tentative motion asking the government to introduce legislation to restore the traditional definition of marriage without affecting civil unions and respecting existing same-sex marriages was tabled, it was easily defeated 175-123.³² This defeat, coupled with a sense that the Conservatives could have more vigorously advocated for the motion, disappointed many Evangelicals. In spite of evangelical disappointment with the lack of policy gains under the Conservatives, Conservative Party engagement with Evangelicals stands in sharp contrast to Liberal attempts to exclude Evangelicals from the public debate and to marginalize them in society. The growing evangelical support for the Conservatives had more to do with the Conservatives' offering a viable alternative to the Liberals, whom many perceived as corrupt and hostile, than with any hope for potential policy gains.

Rise in Support for the NDP and the Green Party

Many Evangelicals, however, are not politically conservative. There is a long and rich history of evangelical social action which sees an important role for government, which is a view not recently associated with Canadian political conservatism. Despite recent Liberal declines it is important to remember that in 1996 evangelical support for right- and left-leaning parties was roughly evenly split with notable regional variations. At least one-third of Evangelicals who formerly supported the Liberal Party have turned to the NDP as the party that best reflects their priorities. By 2008 the NDP had overtaken the Liberals as the second choice of Evangelicals in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, and they were close to doing the same in the West. Further, evangelical support for the Green Party more than doubled between 2003 and 2008.

²⁹ Jonathan Malloy, "Evangelicals and the 2006 Canadian General Election," Paper prepared for the 3rd Biennial Symposium on Religion and Politics, Calvin College, April 2006: 9.

³⁰ Ibid, 11.

³¹ CBC News, "Harper reopens same-sex marriage debate," November 30, 2005. (<http://www.cbc.ca/story/canadavotes2006/national/2005/11/29/harper-smaesex051129.html> accessed August 25, 2009).

³² CBC News, "MPs defeat bid to reopen same-sex marriage debate," December 7, 2006. (<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/12/07/vote-samesex.html> accessed August 25, 2009).

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Western Evangelical Voting Intentions

While the West is typically thought of as politically conservative, it would be more accurate to describe it as populist. Western Canada has given Canada the United Farmers movement (which later became the Progressive Party and then merged into the Progressive Conservative [PC] Party), the Social Credit movement, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (which later became the NDP), and the Reform Party. These parties covered the political spectrum from left to right but nevertheless shared a populism that allowed members to have a more direct voice in how party policy was formed.

The Reform Party of Canada (Reform), with its populist slogan “The West wants in,” was established in 1987. By 1996 it had moved into second place in Western popular support and edged into first place among evangelical decided voters. The Liberal Party, however, had the greatest popular support in the general population, 37%, which was greater than the combined Reform and PC support, 29%. Reform and Liberal support among decided evangelical voters was within the margin of error at 33% and 30% respectively and when the combined Reform-P.C. vote among decided Evangelicals, 42%, is compared with the combined Liberal-NDP vote among decided Evangelicals, 36%, there was only a 6% spread, also within the margin of error (see table 3).

Table 3. Western Region: voting intentions for all Westerners (All) and Evangelicals (Ev.), 1996–2008, percentages

Party	1996		2003		2004		2006 (Internet Exit Poll)		2008	
	All (N=870)	Ev. (N=188)	All (N=890)	Ev. (N=141)	All (N=594)	Ev. (N=145)	All (N=10,324)	Ev. (N=2,047)	All (N=935)	Ev. (N=141)
PC	9	9	12	13	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ref	20	33	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CA	–	–	22	42	–	–	–	–	–	–
Con	–	–	–	–	45	53	49	69	42	71
Lib	37	30	31	18	23	17	23	13	12	8
NDP	9	6	15	9	18	14	22	14	18	4
Grn	–	–	6	3	6	7	6	3	10	7
Other	2	2	3	4	2	1	1	2	1	3
DK	19	15	7	7	3	4	0	0	17	8
WNV/R/ SB	5	6	4	3	3	5	0	0	0	0

Sources: See Appendix A.

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; CA = Canadian Alliance Party; Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; DK = Don't Know; WNV/R/SB = Would Not Vote/Refused/Spoil Ballot.



In 1996 Western evangelical decided voters and Western voters generally were evenly split between the political left and the political right. As we shall see, it was the more populist parties on both the left and right that would go on to grow in popular support.

In 1996 there was a large undecided vote. The voting results for the 1997 general election give some indication of how the decided vote settled for the region as a whole (see Appendix B, table 1). It was the populist NDP and Reform parties that made gains, growing 8% and 23% respectively. Liberal support fell about 9% from the decided voter support in 1996, while PC party support grew only marginally. Although these election results do not tell us anything about the religious affiliation of voters, it is reasonable to assume that Evangelicals' voting patterns slightly amplified the voting patterns and trajectories of their neighbours.

By 2000 the Reform Party had transformed itself into the Canadian Alliance (CA) Party in an effort to woo PC supporters, especially in non-Western regions of the country, into their tent. Looking at the 2003 polling results, the pool of undecided voters had shrunk significantly since 1996, and, similarly to the 1997 election, the principal beneficiaries were the NDP and the Reform Party's successor, the Canadian Alliance Party. NDP support grew by half from 1996 levels both among the general population and among Evangelicals while CA support grew more modestly. Liberal support, however, continued its decline in the West, a decline which was steeper among Evangelicals.

The CA and PC parties merged into the Conservative Party of Canada (Conservative) in 2003. In 2004, the Conservative Party drew the support of Western evangelical voters, who had supported the CA and PC parties during the 2000 general election in approximately a 2 to 1 ratio respectively. The newly formed Conservative Party also picked up one-quarter of the Western evangelical NDP supporters and one-fifth of Liberal supporters from the 2000 election. While most of the former Western evangelical PC supporters from the 2000 election threw their support to the Conservatives in 2004, about one-tenth moved to the NDP. The most dramatic shift from 2000 to 2004, however, saw evangelical Liberal support in the West fall by half.

An Ipsos Reid Internet exit poll of the January 2006 general election showed that Western Canadian Conservative support had grown to 49% among the general population and a strong 69% among Evangelicals. Western evangelical Liberal Party support again fell by more than half from 2004 levels. Western evangelical NDP support meanwhile had strengthened from 1996 to 2006, rising to 14% of decided voters. These evangelical NDP gains accompanied Liberal declines until 2008.

The 2006 Ipsos Reid Internet exit poll very closely predicted the Canadian voting results published by Elections Canada,³³ which gives us confidence that it accurately portrays how Evangelicals voted. Roughly a 20-point gap had opened up between the Conservative support in the general population, 49%, and in the evangelical community, 69%. Meanwhile Western evangelical support for left-of-centre parties was only half that of the general population (see table 3).

³³ Compare table 1 with Appendix B, table 5.



The sponsorship scandal dominated the 2006 election. The top three 2006 responses from Western Evangelicals to the question “Which one of the following issues mattered most in deciding which party’s candidate you voted for today (January 23, 2006 general election)?” were “Cleaning up corruption,” 23%; “Moral issues like abortion and same sex marriage,” 21%; and “Managing the economy,” 12% (see table 2). Evangelicals were reflecting the strong regional and populist priority of “Cleaning up corruption” by identifying it as the number one issue in deciding how to vote.

Conservative growth in Western evangelical support came at the expense of the Liberals and the NDP. While the NDP lost evangelical supporters from 2004 to the Conservatives, overall its evangelical support stayed stable from 2004 to 2006 largely because it gained support from those Evangelicals who were abandoning the Liberals. While Western evangelical Green Party support remained modest in 2006, the party drew one-quarter of its support from 2004 Conservative voters and another quarter from 2004 Liberal voters.

The 2008 Angus Reid Strategies poll was taken in the final days of the 2008 general election campaign as the storm clouds of recession were gathering. The issues of scandal and social change that had dominated the previous two elections were eclipsed by the economy and the question of which party was best suited to lead the country through a recession. Half of all Western Canadian voters, evangelical and non-evangelical alike, indicated that the economy was the most important issue facing Canada today. As in 1996 there was a large percentage of undecided Western Canadian voters just days before the 2008 election, 17%. This time, however, the decided voters did not move disproportionately to a politically conservative party as they had between the 1996 poll and the 1997 general election (see Appendix B, table 5). The Western Evangelicals, however, had a far smaller undecided vote, 8%, going into the October 14, 2008 general election, and when its members reported their voting intentions between October 8 and 10, they were overwhelmingly for the Conservative Party, 71%.

While Conservative support among decided Western evangelical voters in 2008 was high, 71%, within the margin of error it was essentially unchanged from 2006, 69%. The Liberals lost evangelical support to all other parties, retaining only a third of their 2006 voters. It appears that the Green Party continued to draw Western evangelical voters from those who had voted for the Conservative, Liberal, and NDP parties in the 2006 election, and that there was some trading of voters between the Liberals and the NDP.

Unlike in the 2006 election, there were no prominent election issues in which the sentiments of the Western general population were at odds with evangelical values. Western Canadians agreed that the economy was the most important issue. In this election, the NDP would outpoll the Liberals 21.5% to 16.4% (see Appendix B, table 5). It is possible, given the margin of error in the Angus Reid poll taken days earlier, that the NDP had done the same among Western Evangelicals.

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Ontario Evangelical Voting Intentions

While Western Canada has tended to vote for politically conservative parties, Ontario has tended to vote for more politically liberal parties. Combined decided conservative support (PC, Reform, CA or Conservative) has consistently trailed decided liberal (Liberal and NDP) support. In 1996 liberal parties (Liberal and NDP) combined for 58% of decided voter support versus 21% for conservative parties, less than half the liberal vote (see table 4). In a similar way, evangelical Ontarians gave twice as much support in 1996 to liberal parties over conservative ones.

Table 4. Ontario: voting intentions for all Ontarians (All) and Evangelicals (Ev.), 1996–2008, percentages

Party	1996		2003		2004		2006 (Internet Exit Poll)		2008	
	All (N=1,129)	Ev. (N=155)	All (N=1,137)	Ev. (N=171)	All (N=758)	Ev. (N=156)	All (N=13,792)	Ev. (N=2,054)	All (N=1,154)	Ev. (N=77)
PC	14	11	15	18	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ref	7	15	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CA	–	–	9	18	–	–	–	–	–	–
Con	–	–	–	–	31	42	35	55	30	40
Lib	50	44	48	40	35	33	40	25	24	11
NDP	8	6	12	8	19	13	19	16	20	27
Grn	–	–	4	2	6	4	5	3	11	9
Other	2	4	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	0
DK	15	18	4	5	5	2	0	0	15	14
WNV/R/ SB	4	2	6	5	3	2	0	0	0	0

Sources: See Appendix A.

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; CA = Canadian Alliance Party; Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; DK = Don't Know; WNV/R/SB = Would Not Vote/Refused/Spoil Ballot.

As in other parts of the country there was a large undecided population in 1996. The 1997 general election (see Appendix B, table 1) gave a more focused picture of the Ontario political landscape, where the Liberals continued to enjoy the support of half of provincial voters while PC and NDP support inched up slightly. The Reform Party more than doubled its 1996 support to 19.1%. If we assume that the 1996 decided evangelical vote was distributed among the parties in the 1997 general election in roughly the same way, the Reform Party would have had close to three-tenths of 1997 Ontario evangelical support. The 2000 general election returned a result very similar to the one from 1997. After this, however, things began to change.



Between 2000 and 2004 the Liberals would lose close to half of their evangelical supporters in the province, bleeding four-fifths of these to the Conservatives and most of the remainder to the NDP. This bolstering of NDP support from the Liberals was tempered as the NDP lost about as much of its 2000 election evangelical support to the Conservatives as it gained from the Liberals. More significant, however, was the general fall in Liberal support from the low 40% range, which is traditionally the level of support that will earn a majority government, to the mid-30% range, which yields only a minority government. The effect of this decline in Liberal support was amplified by the fact that Ontario is the region where the Liberals have drawn a plurality of their seats in recent decades.

In 2004, the Conservative Party drew roughly equal measures of Ontario evangelical support from those who had voted PC, CA, and Liberal in the 2000 election. The decided conservative evangelical vote grew rapidly between 2003 and 2004, from 36% to 42%, and would continue this pace of growth, reaching its apex at 55% in 2006.

In 2004 the Liberal support levels among Ontarians generally and evangelical Ontarians were roughly the same, although both were falling. Support among decided voters in the general population was falling the quickest, dropping 13 percentage points, from 48% in 2003 to 35% in 2004. The evangelical slide was less steep, dropping only 7 percentage points over the same period, from 40% to 33%. The Conservative and NDP parties appear to have picked up most of the support that the Liberals were bleeding.

Between 2003 and 2004 the NDP appears to have made a breakthrough with decided Ontario voters, moving from around 11% support to almost 19%. This new support level remained consistent through to 2008. In the same time period the NDP also grew its support among evangelical Ontarians from 8% of decided voters to 13%. Much of this new NDP evangelical support came from those who had supported the Liberal and PC parties in the 2000 general election.

In 2006 Conservative support reached its apex, for the polls considered in this paper, among both evangelical Ontarian decided voters and Ontarians generally, at 55% and 35% respectively. While Liberal support climbed slightly from 2003 levels to 40% among the Ontario population, it fell among Ontario evangelical voters to 25%, a decline of about 10 percentage points. The NDP maintained its stronger showing and edged up slightly among both the Ontario population as a whole and among Ontario Evangelicals, rising to 19% and 16% respectively. Both the NDP and the Conservatives appear to have made their gains among evangelical Ontarians largely at the expense of the Liberals. Green Party support remained essentially unchanged from 2004.

In 2008 Ontario evangelical voters started to shift their votes in some decidedly different directions than their Western cousins. In both regions Liberal support fell to about a tenth of decided voters. But in Ontario, unlike in the West, decided evangelical support for the Conservatives fell from 55% in 2006 to 40% in 2008. At the same time Ontario evangelical support for the NDP nearly doubled, rising from 16% to 27%. Half of this NDP evangelical vote came from those who had not voted in 2006, with smaller portions drawn from both the Conservatives and the Liberals. The trajectories of these evangelical changes were in step with the general Ontario population, albeit more pronounced, with one notable exception. The NDP remained stuck at 2006 levels among the general Ontario population, whereas its support grew substantially among evangelical voters.



The 2008 Angus Reid poll showed a large bloc, 15%, of undecided Ontario voters. A comparison with election results (see Appendix B, table 5) shows that the Liberals and the Conservatives had the most success in attracting voters in the final days of the election campaign. If we assume that movement of 2008 decided Ontario evangelical voters followed the general population then almost half of Ontario Evangelicals could be presumed to have supported the Conservatives, while about a fifth supported the Liberals. In this scenario, which is probably generous for the Liberals, the NDP was solidly the number two choice for decided Ontario evangelical voters. Further, Conservative evangelical support levels seem to have stalled or retreated from their 2006 highs. Green Party support among decided Ontario evangelical voters, however, appears to have doubled between 2006 and 2008.

In 2008 both Ontarians generally, at 49%, and Ontario Evangelicals, at 64%, reported that the economy was “the most important issue facing Canada today.” The results of the election, therefore, substantially reflected Ontarians’ assessment of the ability of the political parties, or their leaders, to steer the economy through a looming economic slowdown.

Québec Evangelical Voting Intentions

Evangelicals make up a smaller proportion of the population in Québec in comparison with other regions in the country. This means that polling sample sizes are smaller, forcing our analysis to be general in nature.

The presence of the Bloc Québécois (Bloc) in Québec gives the region a voting pattern that is distinct from other regions of Canada. Bloc support measured by the polls considered in this paper ranged from one-fifth to close to half of decided Québec voter support. While evangelical decided voter support for the Bloc is somewhat softer than the general population it has still been a popular evangelical option, garnering anywhere from one-tenth to two-fifths of Québec evangelical decided voter support.

The dynamics of Québec politics are not so much a contest between the left and the right, as in other regions of Canada, but between federalist and sovereignist parties. The contest between the Liberals, Conservative, NDP, and now the Green Party as well, is to determine which party will be the federalist Québec voice in Ottawa.

Québec support for the Bloc is not always an expression of support for sovereignty. “Cleaning up corruption” and “healthcare,” not sovereignty, were often identified as the most important issues by Bloc supporters. Bloc support may be for some a protest against the federal government, which has always been formed by federalist parties. In the absence of a strong federalist alternative to the ruling federalist party, the Bloc has often been chosen by federalist voters.

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Table 5. Québec: voting intentions for all Québec (All) and Evangelicals (Ev.), 1996–2008, percentages

Party	1996		2003		2004		2006 (Internet Exit Poll)		2008	
	All (N=755)	Ev. (N=77)	All (N=741)	Ev. ^a (N=42)	All (N=494)	Ev. ^a (N=33)	All (N=8,989)	Ev. (N=239)	All (N=719)	Ev. (N=17)
PC	9	7	2	0	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ref	1	0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CA	–	–	2	10	–	–	–	–	–	–
Con	–	–	–	–	9	22	25	45	16	^b
Lib	32	28	46	46	27	25	21	31	17	^b
NDP	1	1	4	2	5	0	8	6	9	^b
Grn	–	–	3	5	5	0	4	4	9	^b
Bloc	22	16	30	29	45	40	42	13	30	^b
Other	2	3	3	0	3	3	1	0	1	^b
DK	25	34	6	2	4	6	0	0	19	^b
WNV/R/ SB	10	12	4	7	2	3	0	0	0	^b

Sources: See Appendix A.

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; CA = Canadian Alliance Party; Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois; DK = Don't Know; WNV/R/SB = Would Not Vote/Refused/Spoil Ballot.

^a Very small sample size. Use with caution.

^b The margin of error is too large to include percentages in this table.

From 1996 until 2004 the Liberal Party was seemingly the natural representative of Québec federalist sentiment in the House of Commons. In 1996 the Liberals enjoyed roughly a 3 to 1 advantage over all other federalist parties combined in Québec, a ratio that held for decided evangelical voters as well.

As did other parts of the country, Québec had a large undecided population in 1996, but the province's was larger than in other regions. In addition to having the right-of-centre political spectrum divided and the relatively new Bloc Québécois, Québec was also still coming to terms with the aftermath of the October 1995 referendum on sovereignty, which left the leadership of the Bloc in flux and the future of the sovereigntist movement in question. Adding to the political uncertainty were questions about how the federalist “no” campaign had been conducted. When the dust settled in the 1997 general election, the PCs and the Bloc picked up most of the decided voter support, growing 13 and 16 percentage points respectively from 1996 decided voter support levels. Voting results from the 1997 general election favoured federalist parties over the Bloc by a ratio of 3 to 2.

In 2003 the Liberals moved into a commanding position as the federalist voice in Québec among both the general population and among Evangelicals, with roughly 45% support. The Canadian Alliance appears to have taken over the one-tenth of decided voters who had supported the PCs in 1996. This actually represented a decline in Québec



conservative fortunes because the large 1996 group of undecided voters shrank from 25% to 6% during that time frame, and we know from the 1997 general election results that many Québec undecided voters from 1996 went on to support the PCs. At the same time Bloc support grew to almost 30% in both the general population and among Evangelicals, weakening the 3 to 2 federalist-sovereignist ratio in 1997 among decided voters to 2 to 1. In 2003, Québec evangelical decided voters still supported the political parties in the same proportion as the rest of the population, deviating only in giving slightly greater support to the Canadian Alliance.

In 2004, Québec voting intentions realigned as the sponsorship scandal unfolded. Bloc support among decided voters jumped from 30% in 2003 to 45% while Liberal Party support plummeted from 46% to just 27%. The newly formed Conservative Party grew the conservative vote modestly from the combined PC and Canadian Alliance support of 3% in 2003 to 9%. The NDP and Green Party both made modest gains, but on the whole the federalist support among decided voters fell by almost 12 percentage points from 2003 to 2004, which roughly mirrored the 15 percentage-point gain made by the Bloc. The federalist-sovereignist ratio among decided voters weakened further to about 1 to 1.

It was in 2004 that Québec Evangelicals began to diverge from the wider Québec voting pattern. Like other Québécois, they reduced their decided Liberal support to about a quarter, but unlike the general population, they concentrated their remaining decided federalist vote with the Conservative Party instead of spreading it among the Conservatives, NDP, and Green parties. In keeping with their federalist preferences, Québec Evangelicals were also slightly less likely to support the Bloc once they left the Liberal fold.

From 2004 to 2006 the decided Liberal support among the general population in Québec continued the slide that would extend into 2008. This appears not to have been the case, however, among Québec Evangelicals, where Liberal support increased from roughly one-quarter of decided voters in 2004 to 31% in 2006. In fact, evangelical support for all Québec federalist parties appears to have grown in 2006; the most dramatic growth occurred in Conservative support, which rose from about one-fifth of decided voters in 2004 to 45% in 2006. In 2006 the Conservatives were seen to be a credible alternative to the Liberals, so anti-Liberal federalist votes (motivated, for example, by the sponsorship scandal) did not have to go to a separatist party.

The Conservatives' substantial 2006 evangelical gains came in roughly equal parts from those who had supported the Liberals or the Bloc in 2004. As this reconfiguration of support took place, the federalist-sovereignist ratio among decided Québec voters strengthened to 7 to 5, but among Québec Evangelicals it soared to almost 7 to 1.

The top four Québec evangelical responses to the question "Which one of the following issues mattered most in deciding which party's candidate you voted for today (January 23, 2006 General Election)?" were "Moral issues like abortion and same sex marriage," 22%; "Keeping Canada together/National Unity," 16%; "Managing the economy," 14%; and "Cleaning up corruption," 13% (see table 2). These priorities line up with national evangelical priorities ("Moral issues like abortion and same sex marriage" and "Managing the economy") and the regional concerns of federalist Québécois ("Keeping Canada together/National Unity"). "Cleaning up corruption," which was the top issue for Québécois as a whole, and one of the top two issues for Evangelicals in all the other regions of the country, came in fourth for Québec Evangelicals.

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In 1996, decided evangelical voters favoured federalist parties by a ratio of roughly 5 to 2 versus the 4 to 2 in the general population. By 2006 this evangelical federalist preference would grow to roughly 10 to 1. The 2006 sample size is large enough to let us see how Québec Evangelicals voted by language.

Table 6. Québec: 2006 vote for all Québec (All) and Evangelicals, by language, percentages

Party	All		Evangelical	
	Anglophone (N=1,685)	Francophone (N=7,304)	Anglophone (N=115)	Francophone (N=111)
Con	25	24	40	53
Lib	56	13	39	7
NDP	9	7	10	9
Grn	5	4	8	1
Bloc	4	51	3	29
Other	0	1	0	1

Source: Ipsos Reid Internet Exit Poll, 2006

Abbreviations: Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.

In 2006, francophone evangelical voters shunned the Liberals, giving them only 7% support compared with 39% support from anglophones. This Liberal support was parallel to, but weaker than, the pattern of Liberal support in the general population (see table 6). Bloc support was concentrated in the francophone population for Québec generally, 51% for francophones versus 4% for anglophones; and for Evangelicals, 29% for francophones and 3% for anglophones. Conservative support among Québec Evangelicals was roughly double that of the general population for both francophone and anglophone voters. While the 2006 evangelical federalist-sovereignist preference was 10 to 1, it was roughly 30 to 1 among anglophones and 2 to 1 among francophones.

The October 2008 voting results for Québec showed a substantially unchanged result from the 2006 general election, with minor gains for the Liberals and the Bloc and a minor setback for the Conservatives.³⁴ For evangelical voters, however, the federalist-sovereignist pendulum appears to have swung once again in favour of the Bloc. Evangelical Bloc support climbed to about a third of decided voters, and the evangelical federalist vote split in roughly three parts between the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Green Party, leaving the NDP virtually shut out. In spite of this evangelical move toward the Bloc, the evangelical federalist-sovereignist ratio stood a little stronger than 2 to 1, which was still stronger than the roughly 3 to 2 in the general population. The Green Party appears to have become a credible federalist option for Québec Evangelicals. Several factors may explain these shifts. Gilles Duceppe is a perennially strong campaigner, and in the 2008 election the Conservatives campaigned on cuts to federal arts funding and changes to the youth criminal justice act, which proved unpopular in the province. At the same time Stéphane Dion, the Liberal leader, was unable to sell himself as a federalist alternative.

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Atlantic Evangelical Voting Intentions

While Evangelicals are a larger percentage of the population in the Atlantic provinces than in Québec, the smaller Atlantic population results in smaller evangelical subsamples on national surveys, thus placing much the same restrictions on analysis as with Québec.

Unlike in Western Canada and Ontario, the PCs were the standard bearers for conservatism in Atlantic Canada before the creation of the Conservative Party of Canada. In 1996 decided conservative support favoured the PCs over the Reform Party by a ratio of about 7 to 2 in the general population and by roughly 2 to 1 among Atlantic Evangelicals. In 1996, however, Atlantic Canada was a Liberal stronghold among decided voters, with the Liberals enjoying 45% support in the general population and 42% support among Atlantic Evangelicals. The NDP held the balance of decided voter support at 9%. In 1996 Atlantic evangelical Christians distributed their support among the federal political parties in much the same way as the general regional population.

Table 7. Atlantic Region: voting intentions for all Atlantic Canadians (All) and Evangelicals (Ev.), 1996–2008, percentages

Party	1996		2003		2004		2006 (Internet Exit Poll)		2008	
	All (N=246)	Ev. ^a (N=45)	All (N=232)	Ev. ^a (N=40)	All (N=155)	Ev. (N=28)	All (N=2,898)	Ev. (N=502)	All (N=232)	Ev. (N=27)
PC	16	14	26	41	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ref	4	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CA	–	–	2	2	–	–	–	–	–	–
Con	–	–	–	–	20	^b	35	52	19	^b
Lib	45	42	43	34	38	^b	40	32	23	^b
NDP	9	5	12	7	23	^b	23	15	28	^b
Grn	–	–	1	2	6	^b	2	1	5	^b
Other	1	2	2	2	0	^b	0	1	1	^b
DK	19	19	9	7	5	^b	0	0	23	^b
WNV/R/ SB	6	11	5	6	8	^b	0	0	0	^b

Sources: See Appendix A.

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; CA = Canadian Alliance Party; Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; DK = Don't Know; WNV/R/SB = Would Not Vote/Refused/Spoil Ballot.

^a Very small sample size. Use with caution.

^b The margin of error is too large to include numbers in this table.

As in the rest of Canada's regions, there was a large pool of undecided voters in 1996. Between 1996 and the 1997 general election, decided PC voter support more than doubled from 16% to 35%. Liberal support fell from 45% to 34%, and NDP support grew from 9% to 25%. Reform Party support remained small, even though it more than doubled from 4% to 9%. It appears that the gains made between 1996 and 1997 were split between the PCs and the NDP, while the Liberals gave up ground.



Because Atlantic evangelical voting intentions in 1996 so closely mirrored the general population's, it is reasonable to assume that the 1997 Atlantic general election valid voting results are a good reflection of the 1997 Atlantic evangelical vote as well. In the 1997 election the PCs won the highest level of popular support at 35.2%, with the Liberals coming in a close second at 34.0%. The NDP gained 24.6% of the popular vote, which was likely bolstered by having Alexa McDonough, who hailed from Nova Scotia, as party leader.

The PCs had the advantage of being a long-established party in a region of the country where voting preferences were often inherited from the previous generation. Furthermore, the Canadian Alliance leader and then Opposition leader, Stephen Harper, fell out with Atlantic voters when he mused, "There [was] a dependence in the [Atlantic] region that breeds a culture of defeatism."³⁵ This misstep combined with the election of popular Nova Scotian MP Peter MacKay as PC party leader in 2003 likely contributed strongly to CA's 2003 popular support sinking slightly lower than that of its predecessor, the Reform Party.

Atlantic Evangelicals moved their support strongly to the PCs in 2003, giving them about two-fifths of evangelical decided support. While the 2003 decided voter NDP support of 12% was greater than the 1996 number of 9%, it was lower than the 25% of Atlantic votes that the party received in the 1997 general election. Among Atlantic Evangelicals, decided NDP support continued at 1996 levels, although this was in reality a weakening of support since the size of the undecided voter poll shrank substantially to roughly a third what it had been in 1996.

In 2004 the Canadian Alliance and PC parties merged to form the Conservative Party, disbanding the preferred Atlantic conservative option. Although the Atlantic evangelical sample sizes are small for 2003 and 2004, it appears that about one-third of the 2003 evangelical PC support moved to the NDP in preference to the new Conservative Party. While the 2004 dataset does not offer hard evidence for evangelical voter movement to the Green Party, the Atlantic Conservative evangelical vote was the only one to decline, suggesting that the gains by the Greens came at the expense of the Conservatives.

In 2006 Atlantic Conservative evangelical support for the period under consideration in this paper reached its apex at 52% of decided voters, 17% higher than in the general population. In 2006 the Liberal Party lost three-tenths of its Atlantic evangelical voters from 2004 to the Conservatives. What cannot be readily seen in the data is movement of NDP support that went both in and out like the tide in a roughly equal exchange, one-fifth of NDP supporters, with both the Liberals and the Conservatives. This suggests that the NDP was seen as a viable alternative to the other two major parties while at the same time signaling that their evangelical vote was vulnerable. The Green Party meanwhile picked up roughly half of its 2006 voters from those who had voted Liberal in 2004.

As in other regions in the country, "moral issues" and "corruption" were the top two issues for Evangelicals in deciding how to vote in 2006. For those Atlantic Evangelicals who voted Conservative, however, 38% indicated that moral issues were the number one reason in deciding how to vote, versus 25% for Evangelicals generally (see table 2).



In 2008 the “economy,” at 44%, and “healthcare,” at 15%, were the top two regional responses to the question, “What is the most important issue facing Canada today (October 8-10, 2008)?” While Evangelicals seemed to have reversed the priority of these two issues, the margin of error was large enough that we cannot confidently assert that this ranking is accurate. What we can say is that the “economy” and “healthcare” were broadly shared regional concerns going into the 2008 election, and that a large percentage of the population was uncertain as to which party was best qualified to address these issues.

The 2008 Angus Reid Strategies poll taken just days before the October 14, 2008 general election had a large group of undecided Atlantic voters, 23% in the general population and more than two-fifths of Evangelicals. Comparing the survey results with the 2008 election voting results shows the Conservatives gained 10 percentage points, up from 20% to 30%. The Liberals similarly were up 12 percentage points, from 23% to 35%. NDP support stayed roughly same at 26%, as did the Green Party at 6% (compare table 7 with Appendix B, table 5). The Liberals and the Conservatives appear to have made equal gains in decided voter support in the dying days of the campaign. If we assume that the undecided evangelical vote was likewise split between the Liberals and Conservatives on voting day, we would expect that the Conservatives would have had about a 10-point advantage over the Liberals among Atlantic Evangelicals, with about three-tenths of the popular support. It would appear that in 2008, as for Ontario Evangelicals, the NDP became the second choice for Atlantic Evangelicals.

National Evangelical Voting Intentions

Canadian Evangelicals have different regionally influenced voting patterns. In 1996 these voting patterns were, with the exception of Québec, a slightly more conservative reflection of their regional neighbours’ political preferences. This began to change during the past decade. Change was not so much a story of a move to the political right as it was a story of the Liberal Party of Canada alienating its evangelical base. The perception held by some scholars and some Canadian news media that there was a growing “religious right” in Canada stemmed from a misunderstanding of the changes in evangelical voting intentions over the past decade. While many Evangelicals were disenchanted with some policy opinions adopted by the Liberal Party during this time period, policy positions alone do not explain the rupture with its evangelical constituency. Other parties, such as the NDP, had very similar policy positions on issues like the redefinition of marriage, and yet they grew their evangelical constituency over the same period.

Rather, the Liberal Party repeatedly tried to marginalize Evangelicals for short-term electoral gain, mocking their beliefs and styling those beliefs as a danger to “Canadian values.” The data show that many Evangelicals who formerly supported the Liberals have found homes with the Conservatives, the NDP, the Greens, and the Bloc. In 2008 the NDP became the second choice for Evangelicals nationally, ahead of the Liberals.

Although moral issues have been important in deciding how Canadian Evangelicals vote, it is also important to remember that only a quarter of Evangelicals indicated as much in 2006, at the height of the controversy over the redefinition of marriage. In the 2008 election campaign, roughly half of Evangelicals indicated that the economy was the most important issue, which was double the importance given to moral issues in 2006. Like all Canadians, Evangelicals weigh a whole range of factors when deciding how to vote.



Evangelical Christians do not vote as a bloc. Voting patterns vary by region usually running parallel to the voting preferences of the general population. Each region has its own history and issues.

Nevertheless, moral issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage were at play in swinging evangelical Christians to a disproportionate preference for conservative options. In addition, because of how the debate over issues like same-sex marriage played out in Canada, moral issues also became issues about the place of faith in public life and about religious freedom. Evangelicals suddenly found, especially in the 2004 and 2006 elections, that not only were they advocating policy positions they believed to be biblical, but they were responding to Liberal attempts to delegitimize evangelical voices and evangelical participation in public debate.

Will the exodus of Evangelicals from the Liberal Party of Canada be permanent? Will the NDP solidify its place as the standard bearer for left-of-centre Canadian Evangelicals, or will it have to share this place with the Greens and the Liberals? Will the sojourn of some Evangelicals with the Conservative Party turn into a more permanent home, or are there already signs that they are moving on?

As of 2008 the growth in evangelical support for the Conservative Party appears to either have either reached a plateau or begun to decline. Support grew because the Conservative Party worked hard to hear and understand the concerns of Evangelicals and because it offered an alternative to the Liberals that was capable of forming a government. Conservative policy options on publicly debated moral issues of the past decade more closely reflected evangelical values than did those of other parties. While there are few examples of legislative progress on evangelical moral priorities under the Conservatives, evangelical support for the Conservatives has been as much about what Evangelicals hoped to keep off the legislative agenda as it is about what they would have liked to see put on.

The Canadian Evangelical vote is currently fluid. While the voting tracks of Canadian Evangelicals and their regional neighbours still run more or less parallel, they have moved farther apart in 2008 than they were in 1996. Issues such as the redefinition of marriage and the sponsorship scandal reshaped the Canadian political landscape generally, but it was the respective parties' response to these issues that drove changes in voting patterns among Evangelicals. The Liberal Party of Canada chose to marginalize Evangelicals for short-term electoral gain, derailing its traditionally strong evangelical support. Other parties from across the political spectrum engaged Evangelicals differently, picked up passengers, and continued on. 🍁



Appendix A. Opinion Polls

God and Society in North America, 1996

The survey was conducted between September 19 and October 10, 1996 by the Angus Reid Group along with Queen's University's George Rawlyk Research Unit on Religion and Society; Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals; Dr. John Green, University of Akron; Dr. Jim Guth, Furman University; Dr. Lyman Kellstedt, Wheaton College; and Dr. Corwin Smidt, Calvin College. The Pew Charitable Trusts funded the study. The voting question used on the survey was "Thinking of how you feel right now, which party's candidate would you be most likely to support if a federal election were held tomorrow?" The Canadian subset had a sample size of 3,000, and the margin of error is $\pm 1.8\%$, 19 times out of 20. The dataset can be found at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/QUEENS.asp> (accessed May 27, 2009).

Evangelical Beliefs and Practices, 2003

The survey was conducted by Ipsos Reid between September 12 and October 23, 2003. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Focus on the Family Canada, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and World Vision Canada sponsored the survey. The voting question used on the survey was "If a federal election were held tomorrow, which of the following parties would you be most likely to support?" The survey had a sample size of 3,000, and the margin of error is $\pm 1.8\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Evangelical Beliefs and Practices, 2004

The survey was conducted by Ipsos Reid between May 11 and 17, 2004. The voting question used on the survey was "Thinking of how you feel right now, if a FEDERAL election were held tomorrow, which of the following parties' candidates would you, yourself, be most likely to support?" The survey had a sample size of 2,000, and the margin of error is $\pm 2.2\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Election Internet Exit Poll, 2006

The survey was conducted by Ipsos Reid on January 23, 2006. CanWest News Service/Global News sponsored the survey. The voting question used on the survey was "Which candidate did you vote for today? Was it your local x candidate?" The survey had a sample size of 36,000, and the margin of error is $\pm 0.5\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Religion and the Federal Vote, 2008

The survey was conducted by Angus Reid Strategies between October 8 and 10, 2008. The Toronto Star sponsored the survey. The voting question used on the survey was "Who are you most likely to support? The Conservative Party, led by Stephen Harper; The Liberal Party, led by Stéphane Dion; The New Democratic Party (NDP), led by Jack Layton; The Bloc Québécois (BQ), led by Gilles Duceppe; The Green Party, led by Elizabeth May; or, some other party?" The survey had a sample size of 3,000, and the margin of error is $\pm 1.8\%$, 19 times out of 20.

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Appendix B: Valid Voting Results for the Thirty-sixth through Fortieth Canadian General Elections by Region

Table 1. Valid voting results of the thirty-sixth general election, June 2, 1997, by region

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support
PC	371,182	10.5	871,616	18.8	811,410	22.2	392,497	35.2
Ref	1,511,351	42.8	886,797	19.1	10,767	0.3	104,165	9.3
Lib	977,080	27.7	2,294,593	49.5	1,342,567	36.7	380,037	34.0
NDP	592,666	16.8	495,155	10.7	71,558	2.0	275,130	24.6
Bloc	–	–	–	–	1,385,821	37.9	–	–
Other	79,782	2.3	85,549	1.8	37,772	1.0	8,379	0.8
Total Valid Votes	3,532,061	100.0	4,633,710	100.0	3,659,895	100.0	1,116,208	100.0

Source: Elections Canada, “Thirty-sixth General Election 1997: Official Voting Results: Synopsis.” <http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=gen&document=synopsis06&dir=rep/dec3097&lang=e&textonly=false>, (accessed May 26, 2009)

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.

Table 2. Valid voting results of the thirty-seventh general election, November 27, 2000, by region

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support
PC	381,103	10.0	642,438	14.4	192,153	5.6	351,304	31.3
Ref	1,898,261	49.6	1,051,209	23.6	212,874	6.2	114,585	10.2
Lib	973,517	25.4	2,292,075	51.5	1,529,642	44.2	456,797	40.7
NDP	475,786	12.4	368,709	8.3	63,611	1.8	185,762	16.6
Green	43,848	1.1	39,737	0.9	19,846	0.6	971	0.1
Bloc	–	–	–	–	1,377,727	39.9	–	–
Other	53,512	1.4	58,437	1.3	61,045	1.8	12,824	1.1
Total Valid Votes	3,826,027	100.0	4,452,605	100.0	3,456,898	100.0	1,122,243	100.0

Source: Elections Canada, “Table 8/Tableau 8: Number of valid votes, by political affiliation.” http://www.elections.ca/gen/rep/37g/table8_e.html, (accessed May 28, 2009)

Abbreviations: PC = Progressive Conservative Party; Ref = Reform Party; Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.

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Table 3. Valid voting results of the thirty-eighth general election, June 28, 2004, by region

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support
Cons	1,785,350	45.3	1,607,337	31.5	301,539	8.8	325,272	30.0
Lib	1,063,453	27.0	2,278,875	44.7	1,165,645	33.9	474,247	43.8
NDP	802,865	20.4	921,240	18.1	158,427	4.6	244,871	22.6
Green	213,832	5.4	226,812	4.4	108,660	3.2	32,943	3.0
Bloc	–	–	–	–	1,680,109	48.9	–	–
Other	77,554	2.0	66,215	1.3	23,875	0.7	5,581	0.5
Total Valid Votes	3,943,054	100.0	5,100,479	100.0	3,438,255	100.0	1,082,914	100.0

Source: Elections Canada, “Table 8/Tableau 8: Number of valid votes, by political affiliation.” <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2004/default.html>, (accessed May 28, 2009)

Abbreviations: Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.

Table 4. Valid voting results of the thirty-ninth general election, January 23, 2006, by region

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support
Cons	2,070,077	48.4	1,985,242	35.1	907,972	24.6	410,780	34.5
Lib	977,717	22.9	2,260,024	39.9	766,228	20.8	475,446	39.9
NDP	942,720	22.0	1,100,366	19.4	276,401	7.5	270,110	22.7
Green	226,884	5.3	263,400	4.7	146,576	4.0	27,208	2.3
Bloc	–	–	–	–	1,553,201	42.1	–	–
Other	60,019	1.4	49,211	0.9	40,780	1.1	6,797	0.6
Total Valid Votes	4,277,417	100.0	5,658,243	100.0	3,691,158	100.0	1,190,341	100.0

Source: Elections Canada, “Number of valid votes by political affiliation.” <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2006/default.html>, (accessed May 27, 2009)

Abbreviations: Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.

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Table 5. Valid voting results of the fortieth general election, October 14, 2008, by region

Party	Western		Ontario		Québec		Atlantic	
	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support	Votes	Percent. Support
Cons	2,085,411	52.3	2,020,641	39.2	784,996	21.7	318,021	29.6
Lib	653,453	16.4	1,743,241	33.8	860,449	23.8	376,042	35.0
NDP	856,741	21.5	937,921	18.2	441,098	12.2	279,528	26.0
Green	337,593	8.5	409,936	8.0	125,805	3.5	64,279	6.0
Bloc	–	–	–	–	1,379,991	38.1	–	–
Other	52,753	1.3	42,267	0.8	29,536	0.8	35,192	3.3
Total Valid Votes	3,985,951	100.0	5,154,006	100.0	3,621,875	100.0	1,073,062	100.0

Source: Elections Canada, "Number of valid votes by political affiliation." <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2008/default.html>, (accessed May 27, 2009)
Abbreviations: Con = Conservative Party; Lib = Liberal Party; NDP = New Democratic Party; Grn = Green Party; Bloc = Bloc Québécois.