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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenous Peoples and Affinity Voting in Canada

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Abstract
Studies interested in Indigenous voting in Canada tend to focus on socio-economic, cultural and political factors that explain their lower levels of electoral participation. While highly relevant given Canada's ongoing reality as a settler-colonial state, these studies are of limited help in making sense of recent increases in electoral engagement in Indigenous communities across the country. Using data from four elections between 2006 and 2015, this study focuses instead on why some Indigenous individuals vote and how they vote. Our analysis suggests that one of many possible reasons for the recent surge in Indigenous turnout has to do with the candidates presenting themselves for elections. Higher voter turnout in Indigenous communities corresponds with a higher proportion of Indigenous candidates. This trend is consistent with the literature on affinity voting. We also find that political parties who present an Indigenous candidate receive more votes in constituencies with a high proportion of Indigenous voters.

Résumé
Les études qui portent sur le vote des Autochtones au Canada tendent à se focaliser sur l'abstention électorale et les facteurs socio-économiques, culturels et politiques qui l'expliquent. Bien que ces études soient pertinentes, notamment dans le contexte colonial de l'État canadien, elles ne permettent pas d'expliquer l'augmentation récente de la participation électorale dans certaines communautés à travers le pays. À partir de données recueillies pour les quatre élections fédérales entre 2006 et 2015, cet article s'intéresse au pourquoi et au comment du vote Autochtone. Notre étude démontre, parmi d'autres explications possibles, que le taux de participation autochtone est lié à l'identité du candidat qui se présente dans la circonscription. Ainsi, plus la proportion de candidats autochtones est grande, plus le taux de participation sera élevé. Ces résultats sont consistants avec la littérature sur le vote affinitaire. Nous démontrons également que les partis politiques qui présentent un candidat autochtone recevront plus de votes dans les circonscriptions avec une forte proportion d'électeurs Autochtones.

Long denied some of the most basic rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, Indigenous peoples still have an ambiguous relationship with the democratic institutions of the Canadian state.[1] While some see the value of engaging in

electoral politics at the federal and provincial levels to change settler institutions from within, others see participation in the electoral process as an abdication of their status as distinct nations and as an indirect recognition of settler-colonial sovereignty on their lands and communities (Bonspiel, 2015). This latter view is supported by a number of Indigenous intellectuals who see the act of voting as a form of assimilation (Alfred, 1999). Indigenous electoral participation at the federal and provincial levels in Canada reflects this ambiguity. While voting is comparable to the Canadian average in some regions of the country and in some communities, the overall pattern has historically been one of very low turnout and limited engagement in electoral politics (Bargiel, 2012). This pattern, however, appears to be changing.

The 2015 Canadian federal election saw an unprecedented mobilization in Indigenous communities to get people to vote. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the main organization representing on-reserve Indigenous peoples in Canada, openly encouraged members of First Nations to vote.[2] Without taking a specific partisan stand, the AFN was openly critical of the outgoing government and targeted 51 constituencies where it believed a mobilization of the Indigenous vote could make a difference. This was not the first time the AFN encouraged its members to vote. The Assembly has worked closely with Elections Canada to facilitate turnout in First Nations communities since 2006 (Sadik, 2009). However, the scale of the 2015 mobilization was unprecedented. More spontaneous yet highly visible efforts to encourage Indigenous youth to vote also sprang up in social media (Talaga, 2015). Political parties also made efforts to mobilize the Indigenous vote: a record 54 Indigenous candidates ran for office (Fontaine, 2015).

In the days following the elections, Indigenous leaders and organizations like the AFN adopted a celebratory tone: the governing party was defeated, replaced by a potentially much more friendly Liberal party under the leadership of Justin Trudeau. More importantly, however, they celebrated an unprecedented mobilization in Indigenous communities, where voting had skyrocketed. Media reports citing electoral officials and local Indigenous leaders suggested a surge of at least 20 per cent for on-reserve voting. In some communities, the number of ballots cast went up by more than 200 per cent compared with the previous election in 2011 (Puxley, 2015). Elections Canada confirmed that it ran out of ballots in some Indigenous communities (Talaga, 2015).

This surge in Indigenous voting raises several questions for students of Indigenous politics and electoral behavior. How can we explain this apparent shift from alienation to engagement amongst many Indigenous voters? By and large, studies interested in Indigenous voting in Canada have tended to focus on the socio-economic, cultural and political factors that explain their lack of electoral participation (Fournier and Loewen, 2011; Harell et al., 2010; Ladner and McCrossan, 2007). While highly relevant in the context of a historically low participation rate, these studies are of limited help in explaining more recent patterns of electoral engagement. Scholars have theorized some of the reasons why Indigenous peoples tend to vote less, but we know little of the voting patterns and motivations of those who actually do vote.

In this study, we explored Indigenous voting behavior in Canada by focusing on voter turnout and vote choice in Indigenous communities in recent federal

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elections. Indigenous individuals did vote in greater numbers in the 2015 federal elections, but how did they vote and what motivated their vote choice? Without dismissing the importance of the AFN's call to vote and related social media campaigns, we hypothesized that one factor motivating Indigenous individuals to vote was the slate of candidates and that higher voter turnout in a number of Indigenous communities would be linked to a higher proportion of Indigenous candidates. This idea is consistent with the literature on affinity voting (Besco, 2015; Bird et al., 2011; Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2017), which suggests that historically disadvantaged groups are more likely to vote when there is a candidate with which they can identify. Based on the affinity voting model, we also tested the hypothesis that political parties who present an Indigenous candidate would receive more votes in constituencies with a high proportion of Indigenous voters.

After discussing the impact of settler-colonial policies on Indigenous citizenship and voting patterns, we introduce the affinity voting model and the dataset with which we tested our hypotheses. In the absence of easily accessible and precise enough pan-Canadian data on Indigenous voting patterns, we tested the affinity voting hypothesis using pooled data from Elections Canada covering four elections: 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015. We created a dataset of 734 ballot boxes where at least 95 per cent of individuals in the electorate identified as Indigenous, based on census data. While this dataset was not fully representative of the entire Indigenous population in Canada, it allowed for a relatively fine-tuned analysis of voting patterns in specific areas of the country where Indigenous peoples form a significant majority of the electorate. Our analysis suggests that Indigenous voting patterns are strongly influenced by the presence of Indigenous candidates on the ballot. While this is not in itself a sufficient explanation to account for Indigenous participation in the 2015 federal elections, it nonetheless suggests that the unprecedented number of Indigenous candidates likely had an impact on voting patterns. We conclude with some remarks on the policy implications of these results and, more broadly, for our understanding of changing patterns of Indigenous citizenship in Canada.

Indigenous Peoples and the Franchise: An Ambiguous Legacy

Although there is significant regional variation (Howe and Bedford, 2016; Ladner and McCrossan, 2007), turnout levels for Indigenous individuals in Canada are comparatively lower than national averages. Voting has been especially low at the federal and provincial levels, with the federal electoral turnout on reserves estimated at an average of 44 per cent between 2004 and 2011, compared with 61 per cent for all Canadians (Bargiel, 2012).

There are many explanations for this disengagement, but colonial history figures predominantly in many of them.[3] The three formally recognized Indigenous groups in Canada (Inuit, Métis and First Nations) have distinctive historical relationships with the Canadian franchise. Members of First Nations, formally recognized as "Indians" under the *Indian Act,* were initially not entitled to vote unless they applied for "emancipation," which meant giving up the rights associated with their status, including benefits associated with treaties and the right of residency on reserve. Not surprisingly, very few status Indians chose voluntarily

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enfranchisement; it was perceived as a form of political and cultural assimilation to the dominant society (Jacobs, 2010).

The conditions for status Indians to access full voting rights were progressively lifted with time. The federal franchise was first extended to status Indians who volunteered to serve in both world wars, and, in 1950, to any status Indians who renounced their tax exemption. The federal government finally recognized full and unconditional franchise to all status Indians in 1960 (Jacobs, 2010; Milen, 1991: 4–9). Some Canadian provinces recognized the right of status Indians to vote as early as 1885 (Nova Scotia), while others delayed until the 1960s (Alberta in 1965 and Québec in 1969).

Inuit inhabiting the Arctic and subarctic regions are not considered status Indians under federal legislation. They were formally excluded from the federal franchise in 1934, only to regain their right to vote in 1950 following the federal government's desire to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic (Bonesteel, 2006). Members of the Métis nation, who trace their origins to the Red River Valley and the prairies more broadly, as well as other descendants of Indigenous individuals without federally recognized status, received the right to vote at the same time and under the same conditions as other Canadians. They did, however, face numerous obstacles to its exercise, notably in the form of discrimination, racism and lack of access to polling stations (Ladner and McCrossan, 2007: 29–30).

This history of discrimination and exclusion goes a long way in explaining the reluctance of many, especially in First Nations communities, to engage in federal and provincial electoral politics. But as Ladner and McCrossan (2007) suggest, Canadian parliamentary institutions also suffer from a deeper legitimacy deficit amongst Indigenous peoples. There is an inherent tension between the act of voting in federal and provincial elections as citizens of Canada and the notion that Indigenous peoples have a nation-to-nation relationship with the Crown, established through historic treaties and alliances. While this tension is not insurmountable (Schouls, 2009), it remains a powerful obstacle to political participation in settler colonial institutions. The Canadian federation was created without the participation of the Indigenous peoples. It progressively assumed authority over their lands and communities without their consent (Alfred, 2005; Asch, 2014; Borrows, 2017). To vote in federal elections, according to Kanien'kehaka intellectual Taiaiake Alfred, only serves to further legitimize this settler-colonial regime and ultimately contributes to perpetuate the cultural, political and economic alienation it brought about (Alfred, 1999).

This legitimacy deficit is compounded by other factors that explain lower turnout amongst Indigenous peoples. Members of First Nations communities, especially those living on reserves, are generally younger, poorer and face a higher rate of unemployment than non-Indigenous Canadians (Howe and Bedford, 2016). All of these factors are generally negatively associated with turnout (Fournier and Loewen, 2011). Also, access to voting stations in isolated communities and recent changes in voter identification requirements are sometimes cited as complicating factors with a potential impact on Indigenous electoral participation (Sadik, 2009).

A combination of historical, political and socio-demographic explanations provides a convincing account of lower Indigenous turnout in Canada. But these

analyses are of limited help in explaining recent patterns of greater electoral engagement. Nor are they useful in explaining Indigenous voters' preferences when they vote. In shifting our focus to Indigenous voting preferences, the broader literature on the electoral behavior of racialized groups and other minorities can be helpful. Importantly, Indigenous peoples have a unique relationship with the settler-state that cannot be reduced to their cultural or ethnic identity. That being said, they do share with other minority groups a sense of alienation from mainstream representation institutions (Murphy, 2009; Schouls, 2009).

Voters identifying with a minority group are more likely to vote when there is a candidate that shares their personal features. They also tend to vote predominantly for candidates from their own community or group (Bird et al., 2011). This pattern is defined as 'in-group' or 'affinity' voting (Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2017). While not as prominent for women (Dolan, 1998; Dolan, 2014), evidence of affinity voting is particularly strong for ethno-cultural groups that are victims of stigmatization (Besco, 2015; Bird et al., 2011). Debate continues regarding the motivations behind affinity voting. For some, it could be explained by the perception that a candidate from the same group increases the likelihood that the candidate "will keep his/her political promises to members of their own ethnic community and, because of the lower costs of communicating with a candidate of one's own community, more effective representation of the community's interests in the parliament will likely result" (Landa and Copeland, 1995: 436). However, recent research suggests that somewhat less instrumental factors, including the simple fact of identifying with a candidate, explains affinity voting (Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2017). The literature on affinity voting also suggests that minority groups sometimes (but not always) coalesce around certain political parties, the latter "capturing" their vote because of their strong ties with that community (Megyery, 1991: 221–47).

Again, we must be cautious when using theories developed to explain the electoral behavior of ethno-cultural minorities in the context of settler-colonial relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadian institutions. It is nonetheless worth asking whether the recent surge in Indigenous electoral participation reflects patterns of affinity voting. Without fully explaining recent increases in Indigenous participation, is it possible that the presence of more Indigenous candidates encouraged Indigenous individuals to vote and shaped how they voted?

Data and Indicators

To test the affinity voting model, we first identified and isolated the Indigenous vote. Existing data from pan-Canadian interview-based electoral studies offered too small a sample of Indigenous voters for our purpose. We therefore collected data from Elections Canada (2018) to create a dataset of predominantly Indigenous communities. To maximize accuracy, we employed the smallest unit of analysis possible to isolate the Indigenous vote: the ballot box. Ballot boxes contain the votes of a few hundred registered voters and provide two crucial types of information: voter turnout and the vote share of each candidate. Using census data, we isolated ballot boxes that matched census tracts where at least 95 per cent of the population self-identified as Indigenous. We used this method to compare voting patterns in four federal elections: 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015.[4]

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This approach has some disadvantages. Perhaps most significantly, it only focuses on voting patterns in predominantly Indigenous communities. It does not consider the increasingly important urban Indigenous population, nor regions where Indigenous peoples are more geographically dispersed. Our data sample was therefore not representative of the broad diversity of the Indigenous population. Most of the ballot boxes we identified were located on First Nations reserves, while a small number were in Inuit communities. Voting rates, especially on reserves, are also likely overestimated given that registration there is far lower than the Canadian average (and is sometimes even discouraged within the community). Another challenge was the reliability of the data over time. As Statistics Canada recognizes, census data in Indigenous communities are often incomplete and should be used carefully for comparative purposes.[5] To minimize the impact of variations in data availability, we only included ballot boxes for which census data were available for the entire period. We also eliminated ballot boxes for which the electoral boundaries or census tract boundaries shifted to maintain comparability over time.

Despite these challenges, the pairing of census and elections data at the local level offers a relatively simple way to isolate a significant proportion of the Indigenous vote from across the country and to control for a number of factors that are generally associated with variations in voter turnout, notably socio-economic conditions and education levels. In total, we collected 734 observations (ballot boxes) for which the electorate was composed of at least 95 per cent self-identified Indigenous individuals according to census data. Table 1 displays the distributions of these 734 boxes across Canada.

The distribution is unequal among provinces and is not representative of the actual distribution of Indigenous peoples across Canada. Manitoba, Quebec and Saskatchewan are overrepresented, whereas Alberta, British Columbia and especially Ontario are underrepresented. Furthermore, Yukon, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland are not represented at all. As mentioned, most ballot boxes (79%) included in this study were located on First Nations reserves, whereas only 23 per cent of self-identified Indigenous individuals live on reserves. This dataset nonetheless provides comparable data for 734 ballot boxes over the four elections we studied.

For each ballot box, our focus was on two dependent variables: (a) turnout (that is the number of registered voters who voted divided by the total number of registered voters for a given box) and (b) the vote share (in percentage) of each candidate and their affiliated party. Our main independent variable was whether the candidate identified as Indigenous. To establish this, we relied on several methods. For the 2008 election, we used autobiographies and self-identification in party websites and in the media. For 2006, we relied on a list of Indigenous candidates collected by Loretta Smith (2006). For the 2011 election, we used a list of Indigenous candidates collected by Media Indigena (2011) and for the 2015 election, we used a list created by Tim Fontaine (2015). Table 2 displays the number of ballot boxes for which we identified one or more Indigenous candidates across our 734 ballot boxes. The numbers are greater than the actual number of Indigenous candidates running for office because the unit of analysis was not the electoral district but the ballot box (that is, the same candidate is present in a number of ballot boxes). As shown,

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Table 1. Ballot Box Distribution across Canada

Province	N	Ballot Box Distribution (%)	Indigenous Population Share (%)
Alberta	102	13.9	15.8
British Columbia	77	10.5	16.6
Manitoba	177	24.1	14
New Brunswick	7	1	1.6
Nova Scotia	15	2	2.4
Ontario	86	11.7	21.5
Northwest Territories	12	1.6	1.5
Nunavut	20	2.7	2.0
Quebec	123	16.8	10.1
Saskatchewan	115	15.7	11.3
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0.2
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0	2.6
Yukon	0	0	0.6
Total	734	100	100

Sources: Authors' compilation and Statistics Canada (2011).

Table 2. Number of Ballot Boxes with Indigenous Candidates

No. of Indigenous Candidates per Ballot Box	2006	2008	2011	2015
0	127	130	88	84
1	38	32	32	91
2	0	10	48	6
3	15	0	0	17
4	0	0	10	0
Total number of ballot boxes with at least one indigenous candidate	53	47	90	114

Source: Authors' compilation from Smith (2006) and Media Indigena (2011).

Indigenous voters had many more opportunities to support Indigenous candidates in 2011 and 2015 than in previous elections.

This dataset allowed us to verify whether turnout in our targeted ballot boxes was indeed higher in 2015, as suggested in media reports immediately following the elections. We also wanted to test the affinity voting model with three hypotheses. First, Indigenous turnout should be higher where voters had the possibility of voting for at least one Indigenous candidate. We also wanted to determine whether the likelihood of voting increased with the number of Indigenous candidates. Our second hypothesis was that the greater the number of Indigenous candidates, the higher the turnout among Indigenous voters for a given ballot box. The first hypothesis was tested using a dummy variable, while the second provided for the possibility of a continuous relationship, one in which turnout increased with each subsequent candidate. Finally, we wanted to test a third hypothesis derived from the affinity voting literature, namely that political parties that present more Indigenous candidates tended to capture a higher proportion of the Indigenous vote.

Results

Our results confirm that turnout was indeed significantly higher in 2015 for our targeted ballot boxes, reaching 54 per cent. But as Figure 1 shows, the increase

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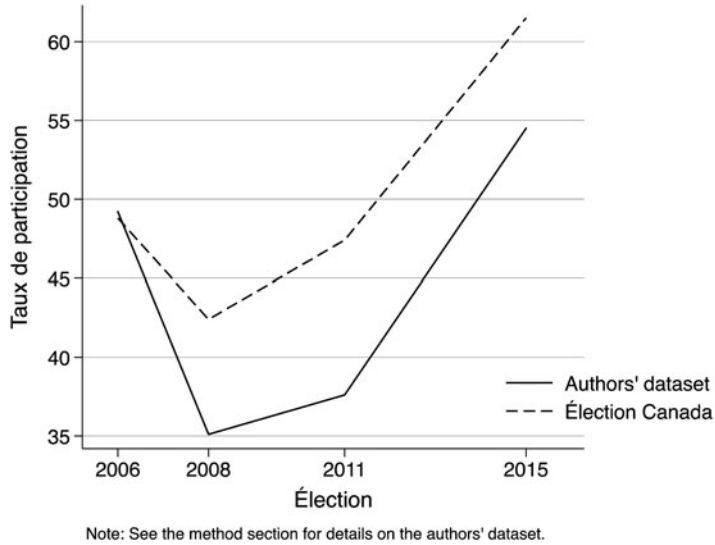

Figure 1. Indigenous Turnout.

was relative when compared over time. Turnout in the targeted Indigenous communities remained almost 10 per cent lower than the Canadian average. While Indigenous individuals voted in higher numbers in 2015, they remained less engaged in electoral politics at the federal level than other Canadians. The so-called "surge" in Indigenous voting should therefore be contextualized. That being said, turnout did increase. To what extent does this relative increase correlate with the presence of Indigenous candidates? We now turn to this question.

To test the effect of affinity voting, we ran an ordinary least-squares regression with turnout as the dependent variable. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis. Based on available census data, we included key control variables generally associated with turnout and vote choice: the proportion of the population without a high school diploma, the unemployment rate, median age and annual income. We also included as a control factor the percentage of non-indigenous individuals for corresponding ballot boxes and a variable that considers the presence (or not) of an incumbent candidate.[6]

We tested three models, and each yielded striking results. Model 1 included one dummy variable: it examined the impact of the presence or absence of an Indigenous candidate on turnout. All things being equal, the simple presence of an Indigenous candidate increased turnout by 5.58 per cent. Model 2 offered a more nuanced view by examining the relationship between the number of Indigenous candidates and turnout. The relationship was positive and strong. When there were four Indigenous candidates, turnout was 18.58 per cent higher (that is, 4.59 times four candidates, which is the maximum) than when no Indigenous candidates were present. However, we must interpret results with caution given the small number of ballot boxes that included three or more Indigenous candidates (22 in total). Perhaps the increases in turnout that accompany increases

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Table 3. The Impact of Indigenous Candidates on Turnout

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3
At least one Indigenous candidate	5.981***		
	(1.64)		
No. of candidates (linear 0–4)		4.590***	
		(0.85)	
No. of candidates (reference = 0)			
1			3.081*
			(1.81)
2			8.532***
			(3.00)
3			15.531***
			(3.86)
4			18.582***
			(5.58)
% of non-graduated	−0.139*	−0.127*	−0.115
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Unemployment rate	0.355***	0.373***	0.367***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Median age	−0.146	0.005	0.025
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Median income	−0.000***	−0.000***	−0.000***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
% of Indigenous people	−0.489	−0.816	−0.854
	(0.69)	(0.68)	(0.68)
Elections fixed effects	YES	YES	YES
Constant	41.420***	36.694***	54.514***
	(9.69)	(9.60)	(9.69)
Observations	529	529	529
R^2	0.292	0.313	0.314

Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

in the number of Indigenous candidates are more significant. The third model shows this relationship, which appears curvilinear rather than linear. Turnout increased by 3.8 per cent in the presence of one indigenous candidate, and then by another 5.5 per cent in the presence of two Indigenous candidates. Turnout increase was strongest when Indigenous candidates were on the ballot: the marginal impact on turnout went from 8.5 to 15.5 per cent.

We also tested the impact of affinity voting on individual vote preference. To do so, we examined the relationship between support for political parties and the presence of Indigenous candidates. Our hypothesis was that parties with a greater number of Indigenous candidates would receive more votes than parties without. We excluded the Bloc Québécois from the analysis because it presented candidates only in Québec and obtained very few votes in Indigenous communities. Figure 2 illustrates the vote share of federal parties in our predominantly Indigenous ballot boxes.

The Liberal party was largely dominant in 2006, with more than 60 per cent of the vote share. This margin dropped sharply in 2008 and 2011, but the party regained some of its support in 2015. More significantly, in 2011 and 2015, the Liberal party was essentially replaced by the New Democratic

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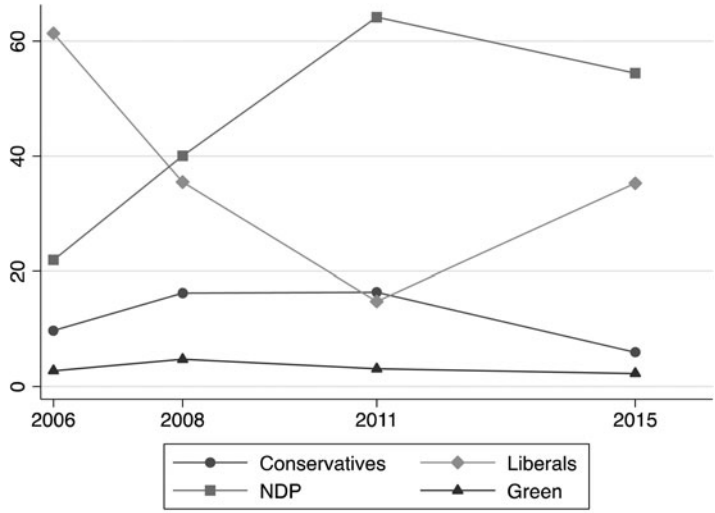

Figure 2. Support for Political Parties among Indigenous Voters (2006–2015).

party as the party of choice for Indigenous voters. Support for the Conservative party and the Green party remained relatively stable. With the exception of 2006, support for the Liberal party among Indigenous voters was more or less consistent with the support the party received in the overall population (38% in Indigenous communities versus 39% overall in 2015). However, the significantly lower support for the Conservative party compared to its support amongst Canadians (8% versus 31% overall in 2015) and the comparatively higher support for the New Democratic party (59% versus 20% in 2015), a party with a social-democratic tradition, is notable. Overall, the Indigenous vote has been disproportionally captured by the two main parties on the left of the political spectrum. Ideological inclinations are one possible explanation for party support, but we also wanted to test the impact of affinity voting on partisan preferences.

To test the impact of affinity voting on party support, we considered the significance of running Indigenous candidates on electoral support for each of the parties using a regression model that included socio-demographic control variables. Because incumbent candidates receive more votes than non-incumbents (Kendall and Rekkas, 2012), we controlled for that factor as well.[7] Each model corresponded to one party. Table 4 presents the results of these analyses.

Every model included a separate ordinary least-squares regression predicting the percentage vote share of a political party according to various scenarios. The first model tested the impact of Indigenous candidates on Liberal party support; the second tested the support for the New Democratic party, and so on. The effect was especially striking for the New Democratic party, but support for all parties increased significantly when they ran an Indigenous candidate. The magnitude of the impact outweighed that of our control variables. For instance, the Liberal

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Table 4. Indigenous Candidates and Party Support

	(1) % Liberal	(2) % NDP	(3) % Green
Indigenous Liberal candidate	5.441**	−4.470	−2.017***
	(2.60)	(2.74)	(0.41)
Indigenous NDP candidate	−8.658***	12.104***	−1.535***
	(3.04)	(3.19)	(0.48)
Indigenous Green candidate	0.086	0.006	2.775***
	(2.93)	(3.08)	(0.46)
% of non-graduated	0.010	−0.039	0.023
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.01)
Unemployment rate	−0.274***	0.169	0.019
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.02)
Median age	−1.073***	1.701***	−0.079*
	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.04)
Median income	0.000	−0.001***	0.000***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Elections fixed effects	YES	YES	YES
Constant	67.774***	6.563	2.096
	(12.03)	(12.65)	(1.90)
Observations	529	529	529
R^2	0.426	0.426	0.194

Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

party gained 5.44 per cent when it ran an Indigenous candidate. The New Democratic party obtained an additional 12.7 per cent, and the Green party added 2.77 per cent when they included Indigenous candidates on their slates. Interestingly, presenting a First Nation, Inuit or Métis candidate had a positive and independent impact on vote preferences,[8] even when other parties presented Indigenous candidates. Therefore, our study confirms the impact of affinity voting on both turnout and party preference among Indigenous voters in Canada for the 2006 to 2015 elections.

Conclusions

Most studies examining Indigenous electoral engagement in Canada have focused on the reasons for the historically low turnout amongst Indigenous peoples. Undoubtedly, colonial institutions and policies, as well as socio-economic barriers, continue to limit electoral engagement in many Indigenous communities. Considering media reports suggesting a surge in the Indigenous vote for the 2015 federal election, in this study, we nonetheless shifted the focus to those who do vote. To elucidate recent Indigenous voting patterns, we constructed a dataset using census data and electoral results for the 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015 elections. We were able to isolate 734 ballot boxes where 95 per cent of the electorate self-identified as Indigenous. This provided a significant, although not entirely representative, sample of Indigenous voters with whom to study voting patterns over time.

Our results confirm the spike in Indigenous turnout for the 2015 elections, although the increase was not as pronounced as originally suggested in media

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reports. Numerous factors can of course explain this increase, including a higher level of frustration with the outgoing government and a successful social media campaign to get the vote out in Indigenous communities. Without dismissing these important factors at the national level, we focused on one relatively simple element that contributes to Indigenous turnout at the local level and explains some of the voting patterns in the communities concerned. Higher voter turnout in Indigenous communities, we argue, correlates with a higher proportion of Indigenous candidates. This idea is consistent with the literature on affinity voting, which suggests that historically disadvantaged groups tend to turnout at higher levels when there is a candidate on the ballot with which they can identify. Our analysis suggests that turnout was higher in Indigenous communities where Indigenous candidates were on the ballot. Moreover, the greater the number of Indigenous candidates on the ballot, the greater the impact on voting behavior. Having three or four Indigenous candidates on the ballot increased turnout by more than 15 per cent, which is considerable. Political parties presenting Indigenous candidates also benefitted from affinity voting patterns. The greater the number of Indigenous candidates they presented, the higher their support in communities with a high proportion of Indigenous voters.

These results are based on a limited sample, and caution should be exercised in drawing generalizable conclusions. Most significantly, our dataset underrepresents Indigenous individuals living in urban areas, who usually display higher level of education and income. We therefore invite additional studies, based on alternative methods and more representative datasets, to confirm these results. Additional factors are certainly at play in shaping why and how Indigenous individuals vote. A more comprehensive survey-based analysis of Indigenous electors would likely reveal such factors. Our analysis reveals an important pattern with significant implications both for researchers and policy makers.

From a research standpoint, the importance of affinity voting challenges some of our assumptions about Indigenous turnout, or lack thereof. Without dismissing historical factors that have created the deep sense of alienation observed in a number of Indigenous communities, we should rethink how these factors play out in contemporary politics. A significant proportion of Indigenous individuals seems to be influenced in their choice to vote or not by the presence of Indigenous candidates. This, of course, does not mean that individuals who choose to participate in the electoral process fully accept the legitimacy of Canadian institutions, let alone Crown authority on their traditional lands and communities. It does, however, suggest a more complex and multilayered understanding of their membership in the Canadian political community than has been previously suggested (Papillon, 2018). While it is beyond the scope of this article, a more fine-tuned analysis is warranted to fully grasp the implications of this strong pattern of affinity voting.

From a policy standpoint, our results suggest a clear pathway for those who seek to increase Indigenous participation in electoral politics. Who is on the ballot seems to matter greatly in Indigenous communities. Political parties have everything to gain by running Indigenous candidates in ridings with a high proportion of Indigenous electors. Our results also provide input for those advocating for a more representative electoral system or a model of guaranteed Indigenous seats

in Parliament as partial responses to the legitimacy deficit facing Canada's democratic institutions (Flowers, 2017).

Notes

1 We thank the Research Chair in Electoral Studies (Université de Montréal) for the precious feedback received on an earlier version of this article, especially Jean-François Godbout, Ruth Dassonneville, André Blais and Patrick Fournier. A version of this article was presented at the 2016 annual conference of the Société québécoise de science politique. We thank the participants for their helpful comments.

2 First Nations are one of three groups of Indigenous peoples officially recognized in Canada, with the Inuit and the Métis. The three have historically and institutionally distinct relations with the state. We make the distinction between these groups and their status when relevant. It is also important to acknowledge that Indigenous individuals themselves tend to identify with their specific nation or community rather than with the legal categories ascribed to them by the settler state.

3 For a complete historical account of Canada's colonial policies and their ongoing legacies today, see Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015).

4 Data from the 2006 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada, 2006) were used for the 2006 and 2008 elections and data from the 2011 National Household Survey for the 2011 and 2015 elections (Statistics Canada, 2013). Elections Canada uses a similar approach in its own analyses of Indigenous voting, but it uses a 90 per cent threshold. We believe that 95 per cent is a more adequate threshold given that non-Indigenous voters were more likely to vote and will tend to be overrepresented in the ballot boxes.

5 Statistics Canada (2014) discusses the various challenges in interpreting the data it collects from Indigenous communities.

6 Notably, the census does not provide socio-economic information for every ballot box. We therefore lost 205 observations from our model. However, no systematic pattern resulted from selection bias in the withdrawal of these ballot boxes. Our results were not affected when we dropped variables with missing values.

7 There is no 'Green Incumbent' variable because no voting booth was located in a district where there was an incumbent from the Green party.

8 We also ran the analysis while clustering at the district level. The patterns remained the same. Results are available upon request.

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