DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

Research Memo #7
The Partisan Playground

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DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

The Digital Democracy Project is a joint initiative led by the Ottawa-based Public Policy Forum and the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University.

The project will study the media ecosystem in the run-up to and during Canada's Oct. 2019 federal election by monitoring digital and social media and by conducting both regular national surveys and a study of a metered sample of online consumption. The project will communicate its preliminary research findings publicly on a regular basis from August to Oct. 2019, and will work with journalists to analyze the spread and impact of misinformation. The study will culminate in a final report to be published by March 2020. Both the project's preliminary findings and final report will be publicly available.

The project director is Taylor Owen, Associate Professor and Beaverbrook Chair in Media, Ethics and Communications in the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University. The online data analysis team is led by Derek Ruths, Associate Professor in the School of Computer Science at McGill University, and the survey analysis team is led by Peter Loewen, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto.

The project is funded by The Rossy Foundation, the McConnell Foundation, and the Luminate Group and with support from the Mozilla. The project is also participating in the Digital Elections Research Challenge, a collaborative research project led by Taylor Owen and Elizabeth Dubois, Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa, and funded by a grant from Heritage Canada. The Digital Democracy Project will be sharing survey and online data with the 18 research projects funded through this collaboration and will highlight select findings from these projects in our regular briefings.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the goals of the Digital Democracy Project has been to track the digital media environment in order to identify potential threats to Canadian democracy. Our previous reports have shown that social media does not likely contribute to political polarization in Canada, and that Canadians generally trust the traditional news media, with even strong partisans more likely to engage with mainstream outlets on social media than media sites that cater to the fringes. Moreover, the more partisan and fragmented discourse found online is not necessarily reflected in the attitudes and beliefs of the mass population. Despite this positive news, our final report of this election period—which draws on data collected over the past three months—suggests that the information environment continues to have key vulnerabilities. Partisans, who are the most active citizens during election periods, tend to favour sharing and consuming content conducive to their existing worldviews and engage less with other perspectives.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Social media activity around Canadian politics has surged since the election period began. Political activity is up about 800% on Twitter and 250% on public Facebook posts.

2 As partisanship increases, so does participation in politics, with the most politically active Canadians also being the most partisan.

3 Even when exposed to news coverage from a variety of perspectives, audiences are still more likely to choose content that supports their political views.

4 Exposure to politicized messaging tends to harden political views. Canadians tend to take stronger positions on key electoral issues when they are presented with statements in line with their views, but also when they are exposed to both sides of an argument.

5 There is a strong link between political efficacy—people's feelings that they are able to take part in political life and that politicians will represent their interests—and their political participation. Those who lack this belief are more likely to be non-partisans, and less likely to share their political views or get involved in other political activities.

SURVEY AND SOCIAL MEDIA FINDINGS

We have seen a consistent, massive increase in political activity on social media in the final weeks leading up to the election, particularly after the campaign period officially began on Sept. 11. The number of tweets and retweets using Canadian political hashtags has jumped eight-fold since the beginning of August. The number of users tweeting on these hashtags has grown by a similar amount. As of Oct. 13, there were 40,000 to 80,000

tweets per day on the eight most common Canadian political hashtags (e.g. #elxn43, #cdnpoli), shared by 15,000 unique users a day. On Facebook, there has been a 250% increase in the number of posts on public Canadian politics groups and pages since Sept. 11. This increase is driven partially by partisans who were active prior to the election, but also by newer or previously less-engaged voices that began talking about the election during the writ period.

Our survey found that self-identified partisans are far more likely to engage in political activities—including sharing their political opinions—compared to their non-partisan peers. Less than half of non-partisans (48%) said they had shared their political opinions in the past year, compared to 66% of left-partisans and 61% of right-partisans. Our social media data appears to bear that out. We looked at approximately 55,000 Twitter users who followed at least five rank-and file election candidates from the main six parties (excluding party leaders) and classified them as likely partisans of the party that includes most of the candidates they followed. These users posted more than four times as often as non-partisans on Canadian political hashtags.

One recurring question about the influence of social media platforms on democratic dialogue is whether algorithms serve users more of the content that reflects their views, making it less likely that they will encounter alternative perspectives. However, our survey found that even when presented with news items from a variety of perspectives—which would theoretically counter this effect—respondents were still more likely to pick the ones that aligned with their partisan beliefs.

Our Twitter data also suggested some degree of selective news consumption by partisans. We looked at the top two media links shared by Liberal, NDP, Conservative and Bloc Québécois likely partisans from Aug. 1 to Oct. 13. While Research Memo 3 showed that partisans across the board share posts from similar media organizations, we find here that the individual stories they share from those outlets vary drastically. The most-shared stories for each party are in line with that party's positions, and each is shared by an overwhelming majority of supporters and disproportionately few political opponents. So while partisans may be consuming news from similar outlets, they could still get a different picture of political events through their social media feeds.

Further complicating matters, our survey experiment suggests that exposure to any political messaging at all serves to intensify peoples' opinions, hardens their views, and makes them increasingly likely to participate in political activity.

If partisans are drawn to information that supports their views, and exposure to information that supports their views reinforces them more strongly, it could contribute to an escalating cycle of partisanship, whereby those who consume the most political information become the least moderate and potentially less likely to consider alternative views. This provides an explanation for one of our findings from Research Memo 1: partisans select into their own facts aided by exposure to mainstream and social media news consumption.

Partisans are also more likely than non-partisans to show *political efficacy*: confidence in their ability to participate in democratic life *(internal efficacy)* and confidence that politicians are responsive to their values and interests *(external efficacy)*. Our survey found that non-partisans have notably lower levels of internal efficacy (0.45 out of 1) compared to Liberal (0.55), Conservative (0.57) and NDP partisans (0.55); they are also less externally efficacious (0.38) than Liberal (0.52), Conservative (0.42) and NDP partisans (0.43).

This matters because people who don't feel confident about taking part in politics, and don't believe politicians are working for them, are more likely to opt out of more expressive forms of democratic participation altogether. We found a robust link between political efficacy and political participation. Survey respondents with higher levels of both internal and external efficacy were more likely to have taken part in political activities over the past year. When it came to sharing political opinions, 56% of those with low external efficacy said they had done it in the past year, compared to 62% for those with high external efficacy. The difference was more stark for internal efficacy: 53% of respondents with low internal efficacy shared their political opinions, compared to 69% with high internal efficacy.

This week's findings paint a picture of a media environment where partisans are more willing to share their views and choose media that reinforces their beliefs, while less-partisan Canadians are less inclined to share their views and take part in political life. The worst-case outcome is that the online political discourse becomes dominated by committed partisans further entrenching their positions, while more moderate voices opt out.

Are there ways to make sure more voices are heard in the political conversation, and not just those with a vested interest in a certain outcome? Looking beyond this election campaign, this will be one of the important questions facing technology companies, policymakers and researchers.

METHODOLOGY

Our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,545 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the online sample provider Qualtrics. The sample was gathered from Oct. 4-13. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age to ensure it adequately represented the Canadian public. Survey respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. We present 90% confidence intervals for each of our figures below.

Since June, our online data team has been collecting data on the online political participation of Canadians across a number of platforms. On Twitter, we collected approximately 20 million tweets and retweets from Aug. 1 to Oct. 13 from four categories of users: candidates, journalists, third parties, and the public at large. We have also been collecting information on retweets, follows and mentions. On Facebook, we used CrowdTangle to track more than 2,200 public groups and pages that focus on Canadian politics, including pages for all

candidates, official news outlets, and many discussion groups and pages. While this report draws on data from Twitter and Facebook, findings from data collected on Reddit, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram and 4Chan will be shared in post-election reporting.

More details about our methodology can be found in the Appendix.

FINDINGS: ONLINE PARTICIPATION

We have seen a consistent, massive increase in political activity on social media in the final weeks leading up to the election. The largest growth has been on Twitter. Activity on Canadian political hashtags slowly built throughout the month of August, with the real growth beginning in September, coinciding with the writ period, and continuing to Oct. 13. Figure 1 shows the proportion of tweets and retweets on each of the top eight hashtags over time, illustrating how each has increased since the beginning of the campaign. Comparing the amount of activity in early October to that of early August, we see an eight-fold increase. The main hashtags associated with election activity have been #cdnpoli, #elxn43 and #polcan, although partisan-specific hashtags have also received an enormous amount of attention. We are now seeing 40,000 to 80,000 tweets per day on these eight hashtags.

FIGURE 1. Stacked density plot of eight top Canadian politics hashtags; dashed line represents beginning of writ period
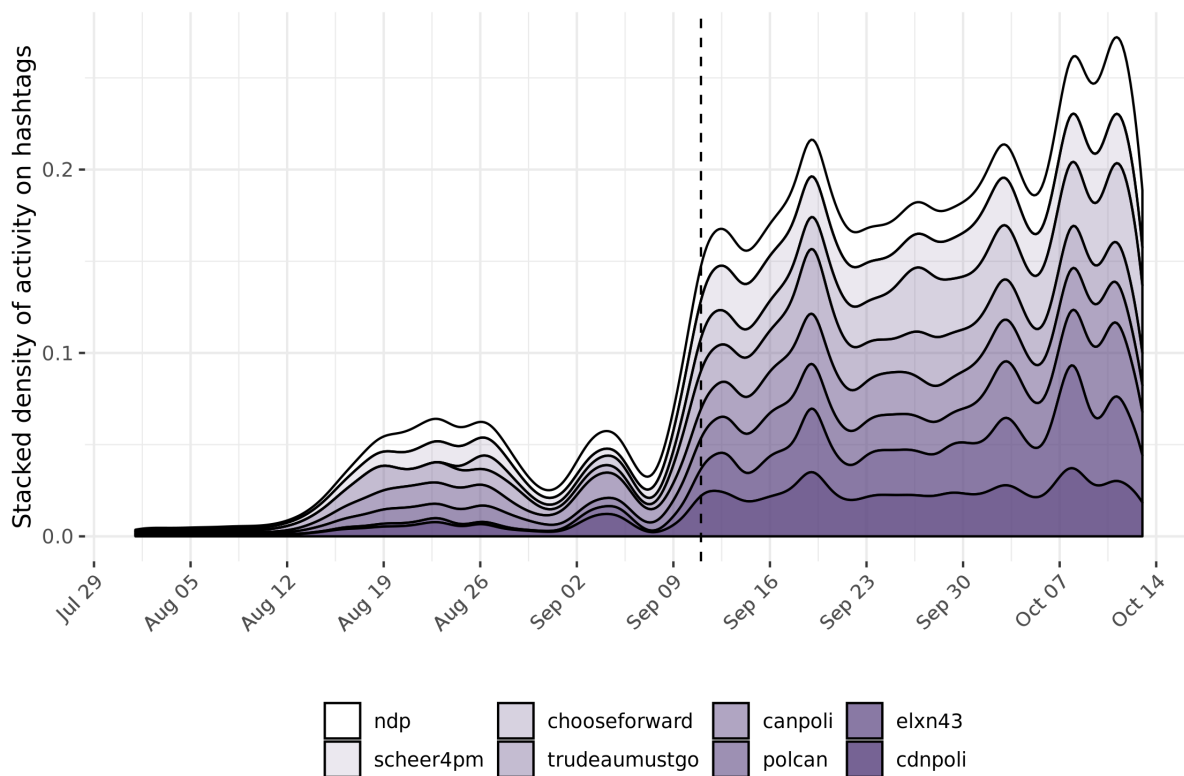
We have also seen a similar increase in the number of users tweeting regularly about Canadian politics. As of mid-October, there were around 15,000 unique Twitter users a day tweeting on one of the eight hashtags identified above. This is up from around 2,500 users active in the pre-election period — a similar eight-fold increase.

On Facebook, we see a 250% increase in the number of posts on public Canadian politics groups and pages compared to the pre-writ period. Once again, there was a real acceleration of these posts after the election period began on Sept. 11. This increase is driven partially by partisans who were active prior to the election, but also by newer or previously less-engaged voices that began talking about the election during the writ period.

FIGURE 2. Number of posts per day on tracked public Facebook groups and pages (left panel); number of users posting on popular Canadian politics hashtags each day on Twitter (right panel)
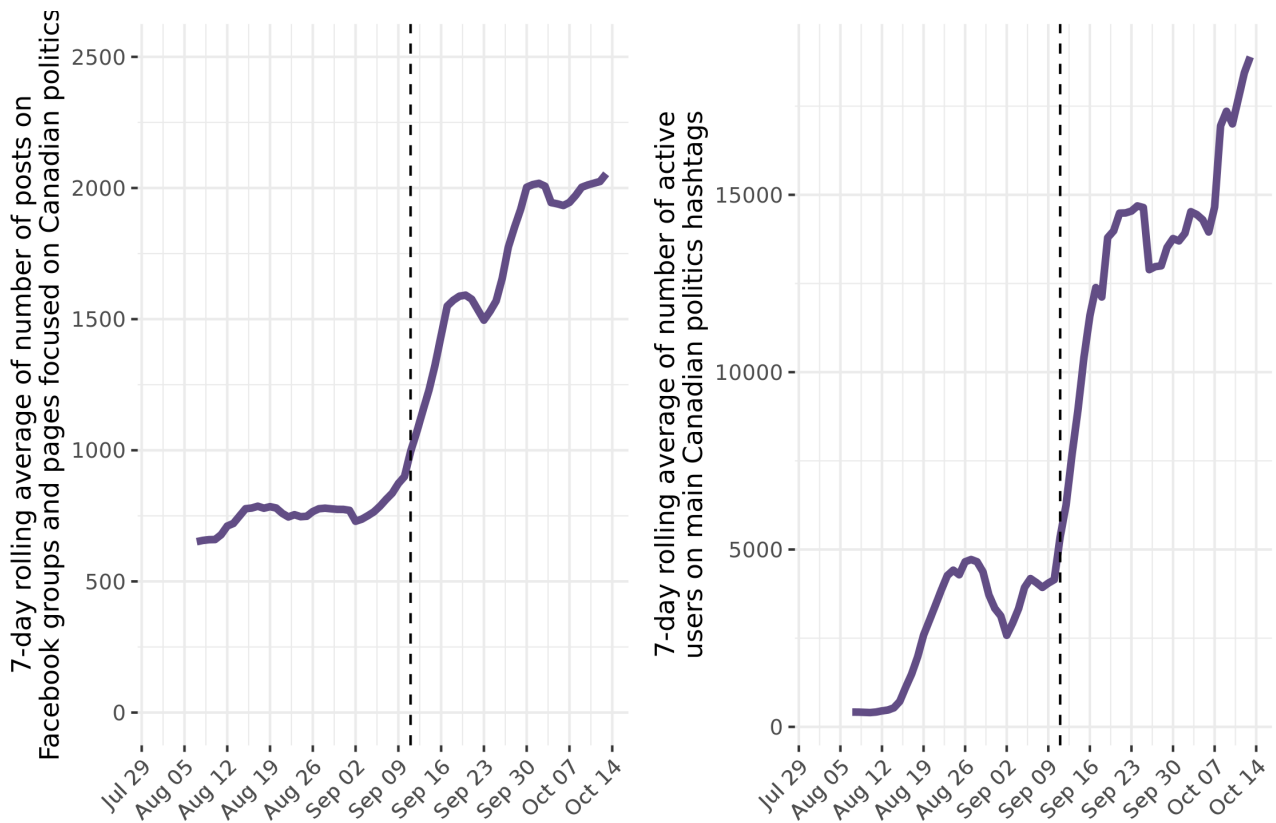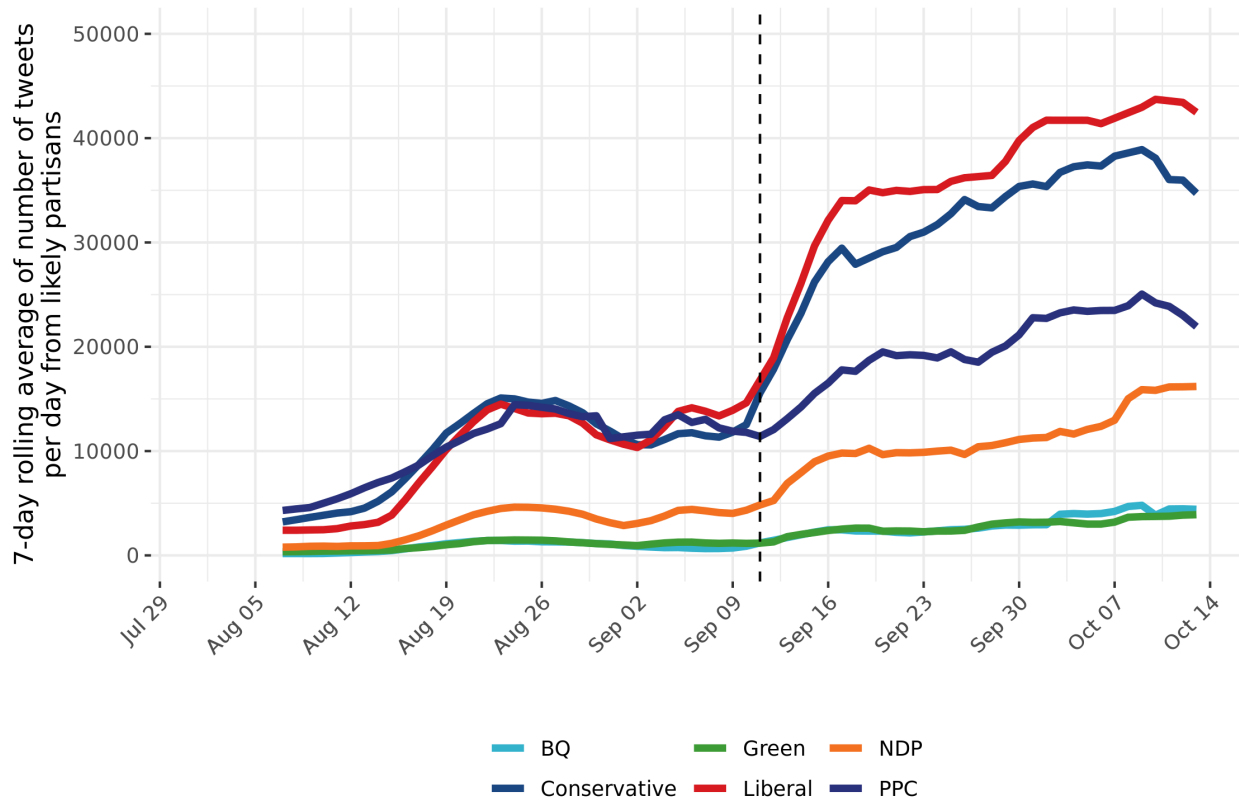
Figure 3. Average number of tweets per day by likely partisans of six major parties


TOPICS OF DISCUSSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

What is being discussed in all of this online activity? Using both survey and online data we find that, when discussing politics, left- and right-partisans tend to focus on different topics. (Here left is defined as either NDP or Liberal partisans, and right as Conservative partisans.) Using survey data, we find that those on the left have discussed the environment more during the course of the election, with nearly 90% indicating at least some discussion. Those on the right also have discussed the environment extensively, and they have focused more on immigration compared to those on the left. The differences are noticeable but small in the survey population, however, with three-quarters of respondents across the political spectrum saying they have discussed these issues during the campaign.

Another issue this campaign has been the resignation of candidates because of past controversial behaviour or comments coming to light. While more than 60% of partisans on both the left and the right report having discussed the issue, less than half of non-partisans discussed it even once.

FIGURE 4. Discussion of three issues (environment, immigration and past candidate behaviour) by partisanship
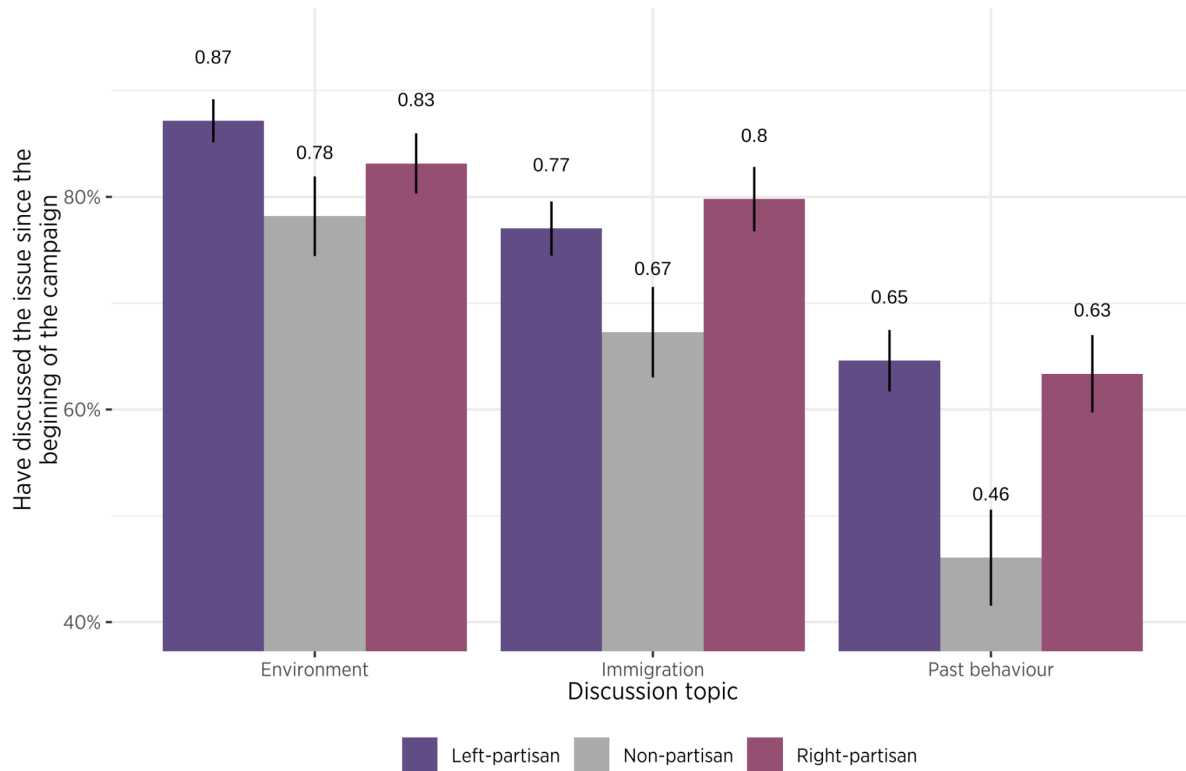
We can compare this nationally representative population to those who are politically engaged online. We identified likely partisans by looking at Twitter users who follow more than five rank-and-file candidates from major parties. We exclude the top 5% most-followed individuals from each party to account for the very high numbers of followers of some party leaders (where a follow does not meaningfully indicate partisanship). We labelled each of these 55,579 Twitter users as partisans based on the party that includes most of the candidates they followed. Using this sample, we look at the text of their tweets for mentions of the environment, immigration and terms associated with candidate resignations. We find a similar pattern, with partisans on the left preferring to focus on the environment while those on the right put somewhat more emphasis on immigration. Almost all the groups have lower emphasis on resignations with the exception of Conservative partisans, who heavily focused on the issue in the wake of the photos of Justin Trudeau in blackface and brownface, as discussed in Research Memo 5. The non-partisan Twitter public also focused more on this issue than on immigration.

FIGURE 5. Issue emphasis by Twitter activity of likely-partisans
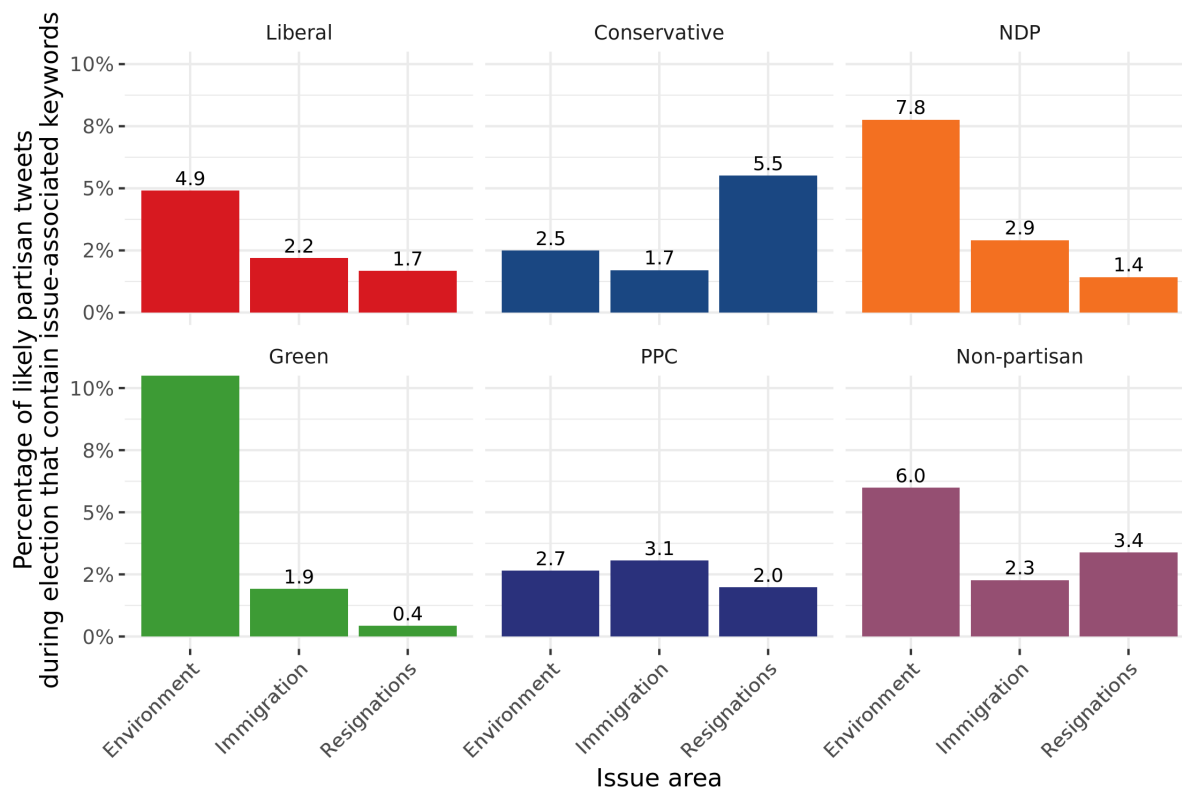
Left-partisans tend to discuss the environment while right-partisans tend to focus on immigration. The resignation of candidates due to controversial past behaviour is of far more interest to partisans and the general Twitter population than the broader Canadian public.

EXPOSURE TO POLITICIZED CONTENT

One measure of the health of an information environment is the extent to which individuals receive their information only from sources that align with their perspective. There has been some suggestion in the literature that exposure to views different than your own moderates attitudes and behaviours — or alternatively can cause a backlash.[1] We tested this in the Canadian context using an experiment focused on three important issues: immigration, the environment, and resignations of candidates who engaged in racist or other controversial behaviour in the past.

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[1] Guess, Andrew, and Alexander Coppock. n.d. "Does Counter-Attitudinal Information Cause Backlash? Results from Three Large Survey Experiments," 19. See also Bail, Christopher A., Lisa P. Argyle, Taylor W. Brown, John P. Bumpus, Haohan Chen, M. B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout, and Alexander Volfovsky. 2018. "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115 (37): 9216–21. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115.

Respondents were randomly selected into one of three groups. They either received no message, a message that aligned with their self-expressed ideology *(partisan-congenial)*, or a message that incorporated opposing views on the issue *(cross-pressured)*. For example, on the environment, those who received the cross-pressured message read the following:

> *The Canadian population is so small relative to that of India and China that any effort we make to reduce emissions won't matter at all and may hurt our economy. On the other hand, Canada has been a major global polluter for decades and we cannot push the costs of that activity on to other countries. What should we do?*

The right- and left-partisans received half of the message that echoed common arguments made by their side during this election. For those on the left, the message read:

> *Canada has been a major global polluter for decades and we cannot push the costs of that activity on to other countries. We need to show some climate leadership.*

While those on the right received the following message:

> *The Canadian population is so small relative to that of India and China that any effort we make to reduce emissions won't matter at all and may hurt our economy. We need to stop trying to fix something that we can't.*

We anticipated that respondents who received a cross-pressured message would express weaker opinions and intents to action. We measured these using three questions for each issue. For the environment, we asked respondents if they agreed with abolishing the carbon tax, if they supported subsidies for renewable energy, and how likely they would be to sign a petition calling for Canada to meet its Paris Accord commitments. (See the Appendix for the detailed prompts, questions and measures.)

FIGURE 6. Effect of exposure of messaging on environment, immigration and candidate history on strength of opinion and intent to action.
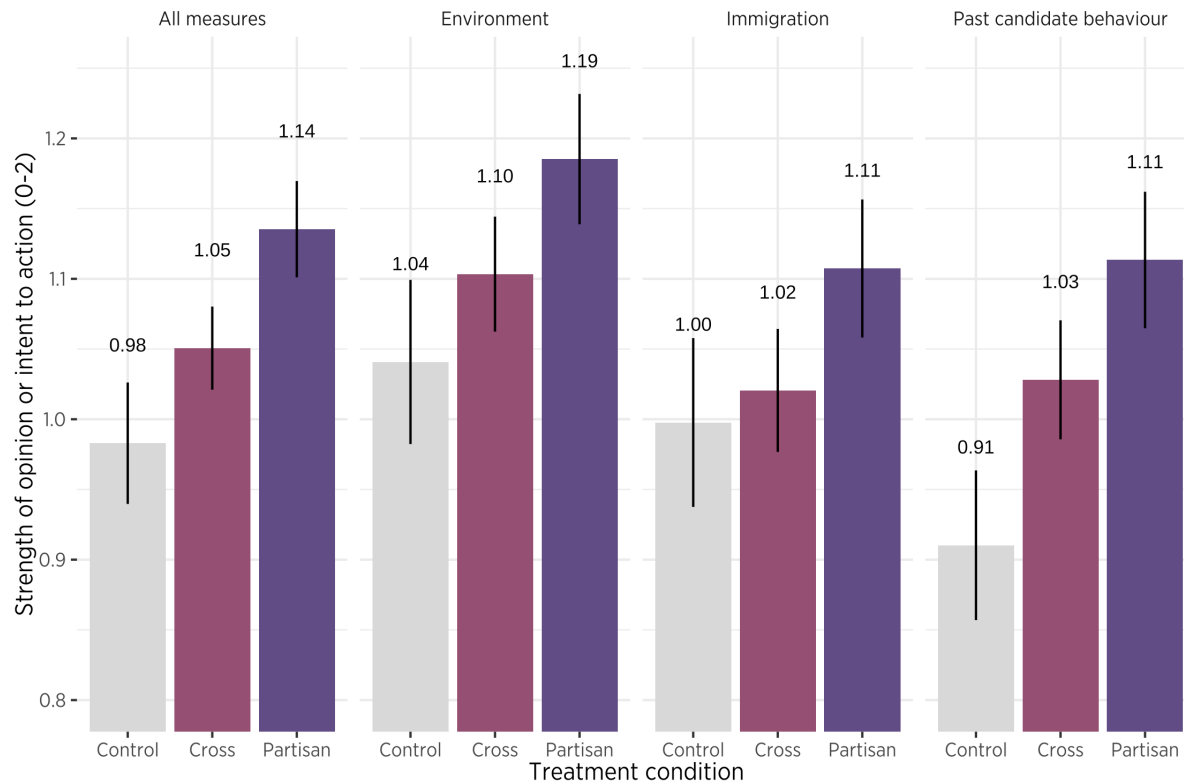
Contrary to our expectations, we find that exposure to *any* argumentative messaging on a subject strengthens respondents' opinions. The partisan-congenial messaging had the strongest effect. Being exposed to only one side of an issue produced stronger opinions in both left- and right-leaning partisans. But even those who received a cross-message expressed stronger opinions than those who received no message, albeit not as strong as those who received the partisan one.

In sum, being exposed to arguments on politicized issues increases the strength of Canadians' opinions and their intentions to act. Being exposed to arguments from both sides motivates stronger opinions, but much less so than exposure to partisan-congenial messaging.

STORY SELECTION

What draws individuals to these issues? A focus of the work of the Digital Democracy Project has been to evaluate the overall health of the digital ecosystem. We have noticed that over the course of the election, the news stories that have gained the most traction have been negative (e.g. blackface, Scheer's work history).

There is some broad evidence that individuals tend to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information and that there may be a negativity bias in news selection.[2]

To test this, we employed a survey experiment where respondents were prompted with five sets of four hypothetical headlines and asked to select the one that they found interesting, important or useful. We tested across a variety of headlines about politicized (e.g. environment) and non-politicized issues (e.g. personal health) that were categorized as positive or negative for either left- or right-partisans. For example, looking at the environment topic, respondents were given the choice between the four following headlines:

- British Columbia carbon tax successfully reduced emissions (positive left)

- Huge turnout at an anti-carbon tax rally in Toronto (positive right)

- Professor: opponents of carbon tax don't understand basic economics (negative left)

- Carbon tax revenues being invested poorly, study (negative right)

Overall, respondents chose negative headlines about 27% more often than similar but positively constructed ones. This preference holds across politicized and non-politicized content.

Using the same experiment, we also tested the extent to which Canadians limit their information intake to coverage that conforms to their views. Focusing in on the politicized content, we found large differences in the selection of headlines by partisan groups. Partisans were far more likely to select partisan-congenial headlines than those that did not reflect their worldview. For example, Liberal and NDP supporters were more likely to select "British Columbia carbon tax successfully reduced emissions," while Conservatives were more interested in "Carbon tax revenues being invested poorly, study."

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[2] Trussler, Marc, and Stuart Soroka. 2014. "Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 19 (3): 360–79. Bachleda, Sarah, Fabian Neuner, Stuart Soroka, Lauren Guggenheim, Patrick Fournier, and Elin Naurin. 2019. "Individual-Level Differences in Negativity Biases in News Selection." *Personality and Individual Differences* Forthcoming.

**FIGURE 7.** Experimental results on selection of pro-right headlines by partisan grouping
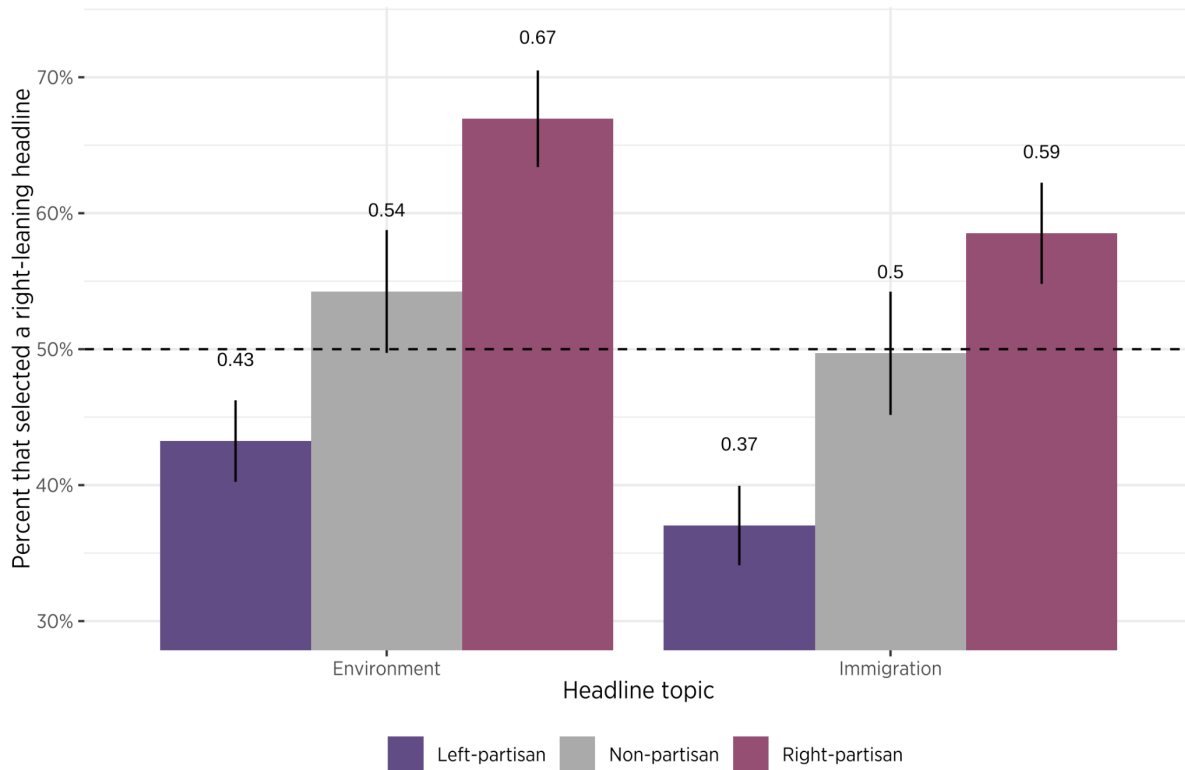
Research Memo 3 showed that partisans who use social media are more likely to be exposed to media sources that align with their worldview, often through self-selection — for example, by following candidates from predominantly one party over others. But even when they are exposed to news coverage from a variety of perspectives, they still seem to choose content that supports their political views.[3]

We test the extent to which this is true on Twitter by looking at the media links most commonly shared by Liberal, NDP, Conservative and Bloc Québécois likely partisans from Aug. 1 to Oct. 13 (top two for each party, excluding party announcements and platforms). Figure 8 shows the percentage of overall shares for each story by partisan group, after excluding non-partisans and supporters of other parties.

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[3] See Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic. 2015. "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook." Science 348 (6239): 1130–32. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa1160. Eady, Gregory, Jonathan Nagler, Andy Guess, Jan Zilinsky, and Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. "How Many People Live in Political Bubbles on Social Media? Evidence From Linked Survey and Twitter Data." SAGE Open 9 (1): 2158244019832705. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019832705. Iyengar, Shanto, and Kyu S Hahn. 2009. "Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use." Journal of Communication 59 (1): 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01402.x.

FIGURE 8. Concentration of links to top stories by partisans on Twitter
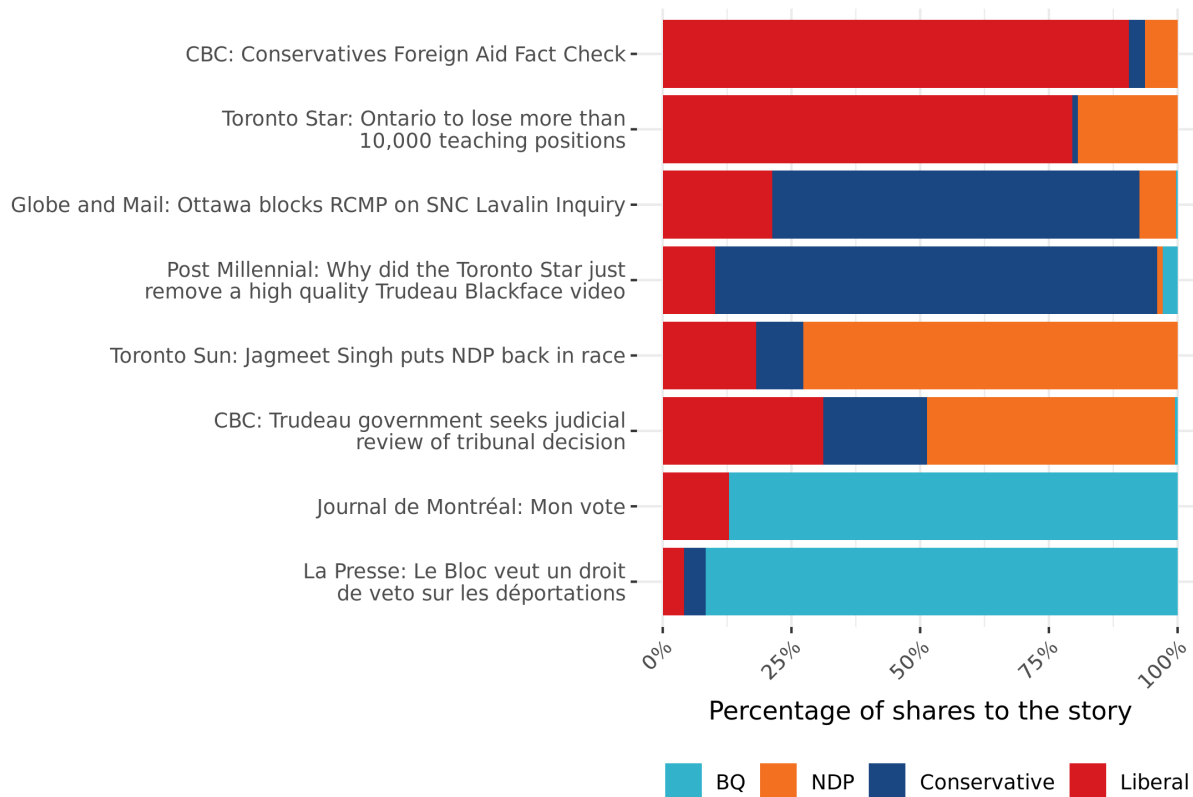
Percentage of shares to the story

BQ   NDP   Conservative   Liberal

While Research Memo 3 showed that partisans across the board share posts from similar media organizations, we find here that the individual stories they share from those outlets vary drastically. If users were sharing the stories they thought were the most important or significant for the campaign, we might expect to see a more even distribution of partisans tweeting the most-shared stories. However, as Figure 8 shows, the differences are stark. The most-shared stories are in line with each party's positions, and each is shared by an overwhelming majority of supporters and disproportionately few political opponents. Given what we know about how networks of partisans are formed, it would be almost certain that a Liberal partisan on Twitter would have seen the CBC fact check, or that a Conservative would have seen the PostMillennial story. And it would have been almost as likely that a Conservative or Liberal would not have seen the other party's most-shared story on social media. So while partisans may be consuming news from similar outlets, they could still get a different picture of political events through social media.

Canadians favour negative news stories over positive ones. Partisans express much higher interest in stories that support their existing worldview, regardless of how negative it is. This has manifested itself as certain stories being shared by primarily one partisan group on Twitter.

FINDINGS: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

We surveyed Canadians about what politics means to them and how they choose to participate. When asked whether they have been involved in politics in the past year, the vast majority of our respondents (83%) indicate that they have not. When asked in more detail, however, 77% admit to participating in at least one political act over the previous year, which suggests that many Canadians think of political involvement in narrow terms.

Partisans are far more likely to engage in a variety of political acts relative to their non-partisan peers. Partisans are more likely to have protested; purchased products for political, ethical or environmental reasons; signed a petition; volunteered; and shared their political opinions over the previous 12 months compared to their non-partisan counterparts. (See Figure 9 for details.) Liberal, Green and NDP supporters are generally more likely than Conservative and PPC supporters to participate politically, although Conservative partisans are equally likely to volunteer.

FIGURE 9. Relationship between partisanship and political participation
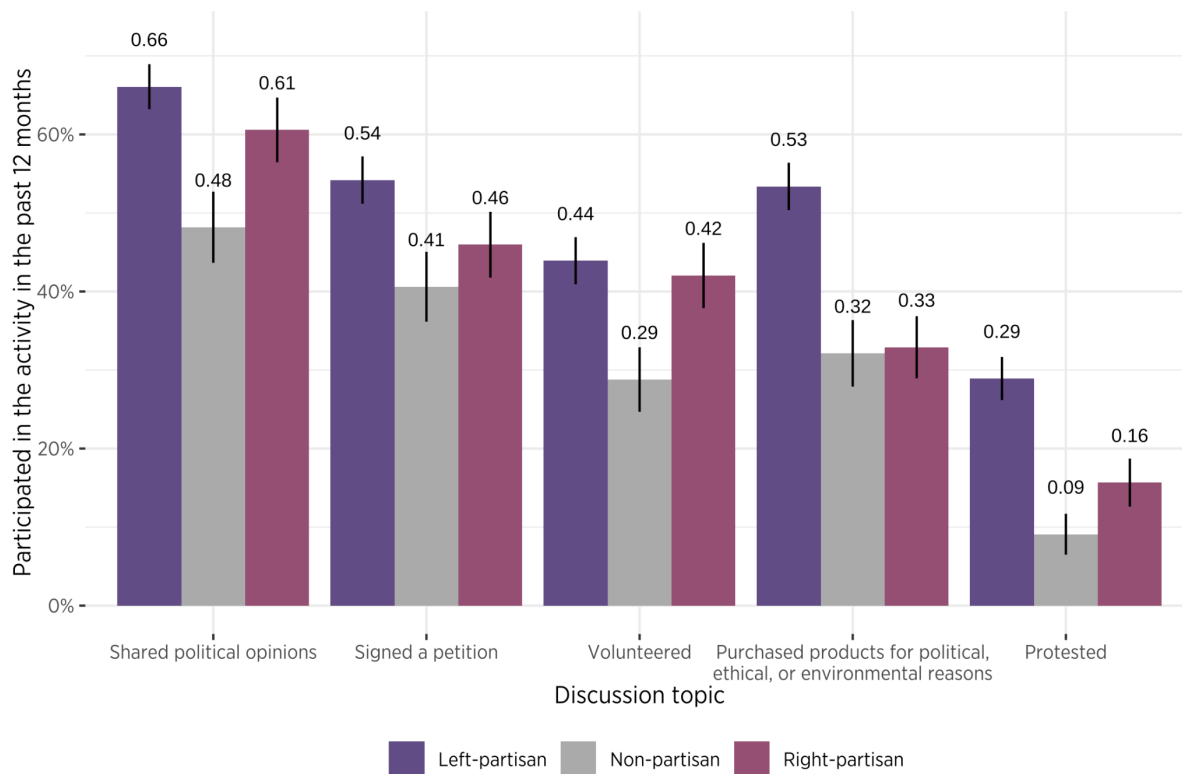
Another way of participating in politics is to engage in discussion, debate issues, or support a candidate online. We can evaluate this by looking at social media activity and the extent to which likely partisans are active on Twitter relative to their non-partisan counterparts.

Here, we compare the frequency of these likely partisans' tweets on main Canadian politics hashtags to non-partisans tweeting on these hashtags. The differences are stark, with likely partisans posting more than four times as often as non-partisans. This is true across all parties, although the Conservatives tweet the most.

FIGURE 10. Twitter partisans and their activity on major Canadian politics hashtags as compared to non-partisans
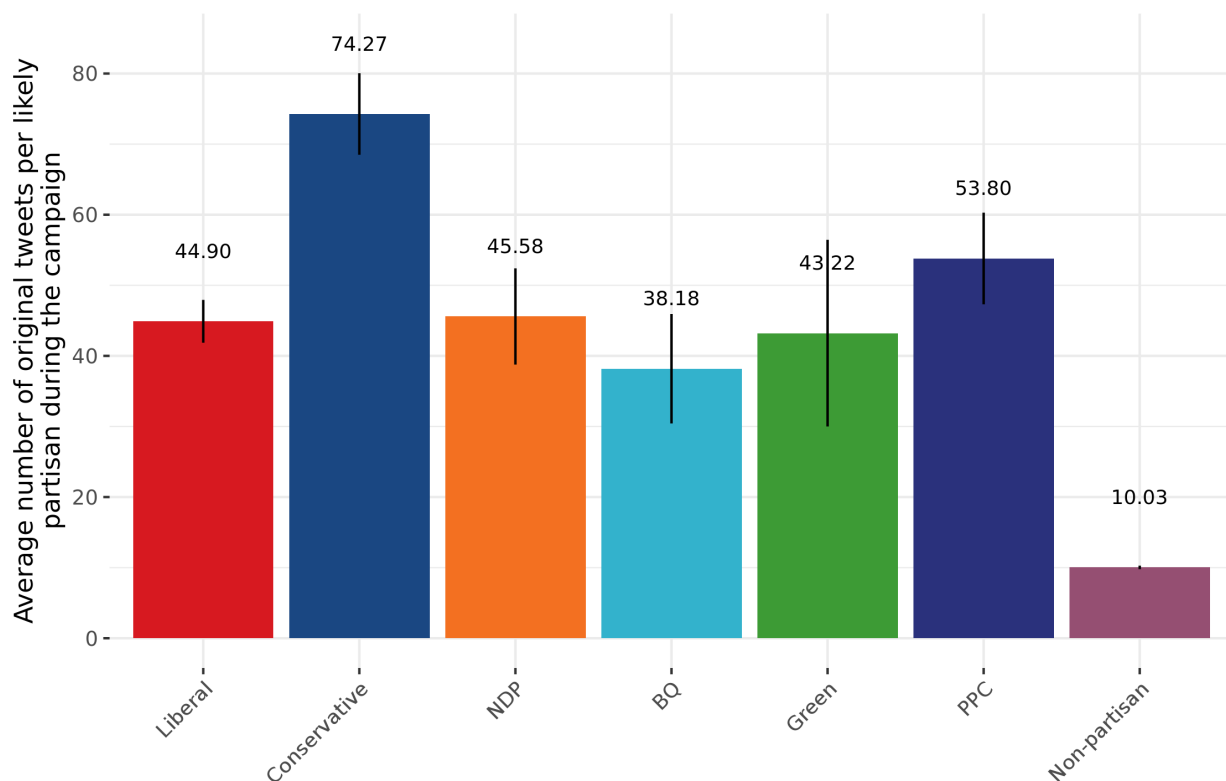
This suggests that as partisan strength increases, so does participation in politics, with the most politically active Canadians also being the most partisan.

GENERAL FINDINGS: POLITICAL EFFICACY

A healthy democracy requires citizens to actively participate in political life, but it also requires them to have confidence in their democratic system. In particular, we would hope for citizens to have *internal efficacy* – confidence in their own ability to participate in democratic life – as well as *external efficacy* – confidence that politicians are responsive to their values and interests. Efficacy can have important implications for the willingness of citizens to participate in democratic life.

We measure internal efficacy with an index constructed from a series of survey questions, which was then scaled 0-1, where 1 indicates the highest possible confidence in one's ability to participate in democratic life.[4] In Research Memo 5, we show that fact-checking by journalists can increase levels of internal efficacy among those whose pre-existing knowledge of facts is re-affirmed by fact-checks.
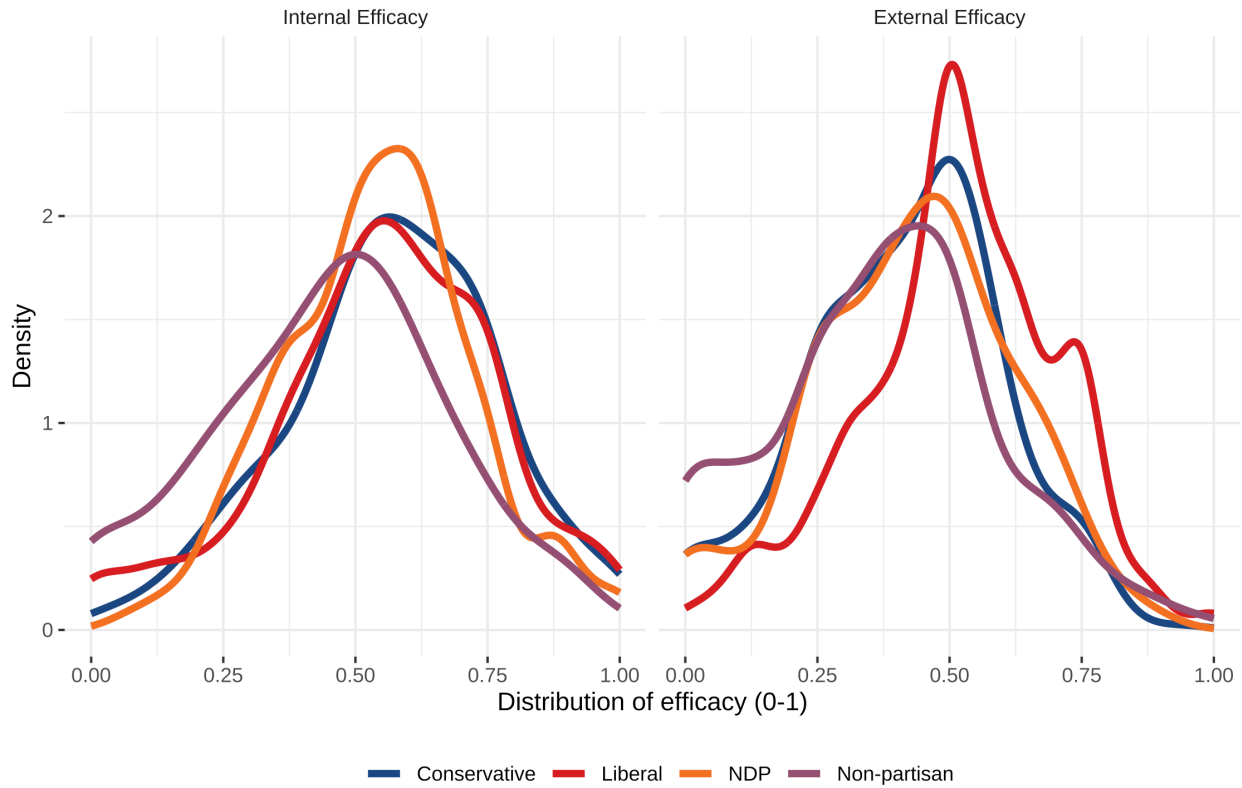
We measure external efficacy with an index constructed from a series of survey questions, which was then scaled 0-1, where 1 indicates a respondent has the highest possible confidence that politicians are responsive to their interests and values while in office.[5] In Research Memo 6, we provide some evidence that positive advertising from political parties can improve levels of external efficacy.

Canadians appear not to be particularly politically efficacious, and they are much less externally efficacious than internally efficacious (0.44 vs 0.53 on the 0-1 scales). In other words, our respondents had notably more confidence in their ability to participate in democratic life than in politicians being responsive to their interests while in office.

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[4] The questions were: 1) I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people; 2) I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics; and 3) I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing the country; 4) I feel that I could do as good a job in office as most people (Strongly agree to strongly disagree, 5-point scale).

[5] 1) Ordinary people can influence the government; 2) Public officials care what ordinary people think; 3) People like me don't have any say about what the government does; 4) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think (Strongly agree to strongly disagree, 5-point)

FIGURE 11. Distribution of internal (left) and external political efficacy (right) for partisan groups

Internal Efficacy   External Efficacy

Density

Distribution of efficacy (0-1)

Conservative   Liberal   NDP   Non-partisan

There are only modest partisan differences between respondents in their levels of efficacy. Non-partisans have notably lower levels of internal efficacy (0.45) compared to Liberal (0.55), Conservative (0.57) and NDP partisans (0.55). The distributions of internal efficacy by partisanship are shown in kernel density plots below in the left panel of Figure 11. There are stronger differences across partisanship in levels of external efficacy. Liberal partisans are more externally efficacious (0.52) compared to Conservative (0.42) and NDP partisans (0.43), and non-partisans (0.38). The distributions of external efficacy by partisanship are shown in kernel density plots below in the right panel of Figure 11.

FIGURE 12. Distribution of internal (left) and external political efficacy (right) for populists and non-populists
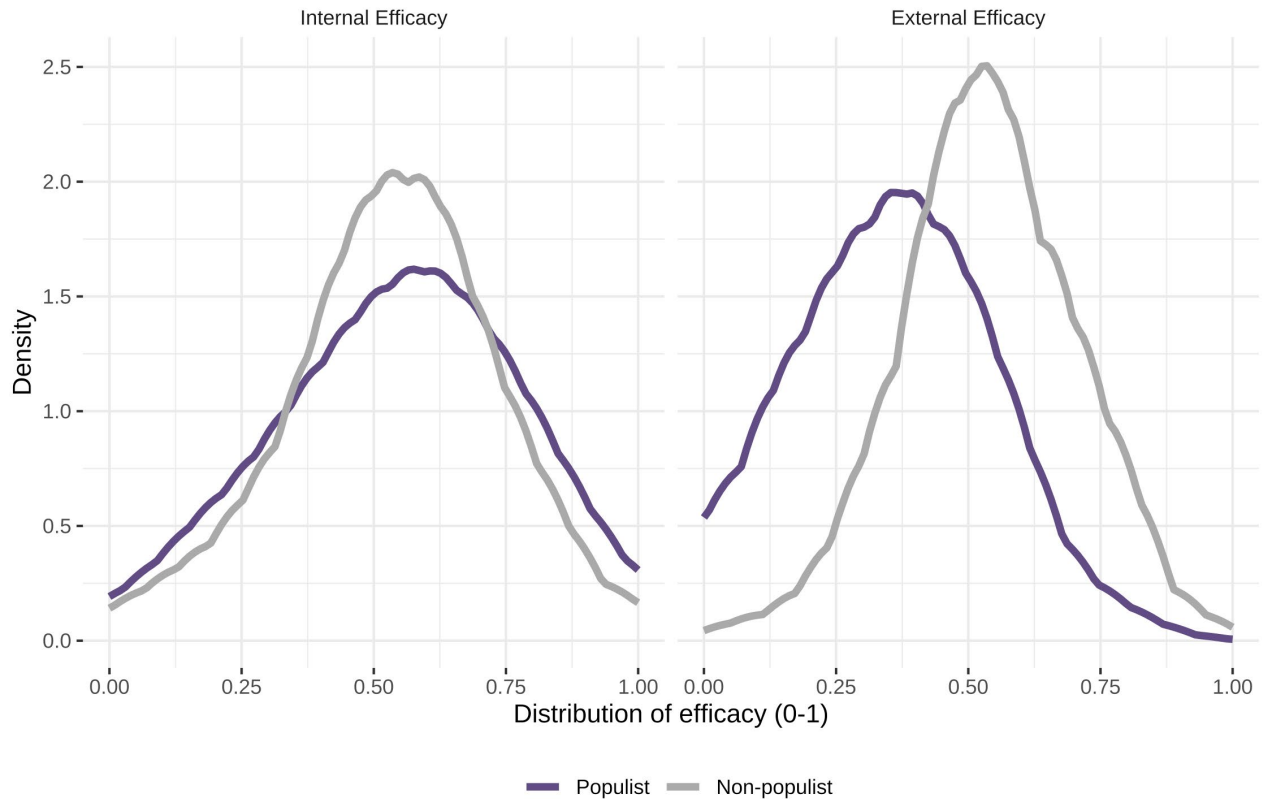
This pattern resembles our finding from Research Memo 4 that populist sentiment is stronger among NDP and Conservative partisans than among Liberals. This resemblance exists because populism is often closely tied to external efficacy. As in Research Memo 4, we asked our respondents a series of questions to gauge their level of populist sentiment, and constructed a 0-1 scale, where 1 indicates the highest possible level of populist sentiment.[6] We divided respondents at the median to create groups with lower and higher levels of populist sentiment. On average, there is virtually no difference in internal efficacy between non-populists and populists (0.54 for each). However, levels of external efficacy are sharply lower among populists (0.35) compared to

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[6] These questions were: 1) The Canadian economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful; 2) Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me; 3) Experts in this country don't understand the lives of people like me; 4) To fix Canada, we need a strong leader willing to break the rules; 5) Canada needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful; 6) Politicians should be able to say what's on their minds regardless of what anyone else thinks about their views; 7) I trust the government to do the right thing. We used the resulting first dimension identified from a principal components factor analysis.

non-populists (0.54). The distributions of internal and external efficacy by populist sentiment are shown in kernel density plots in Figure 12.
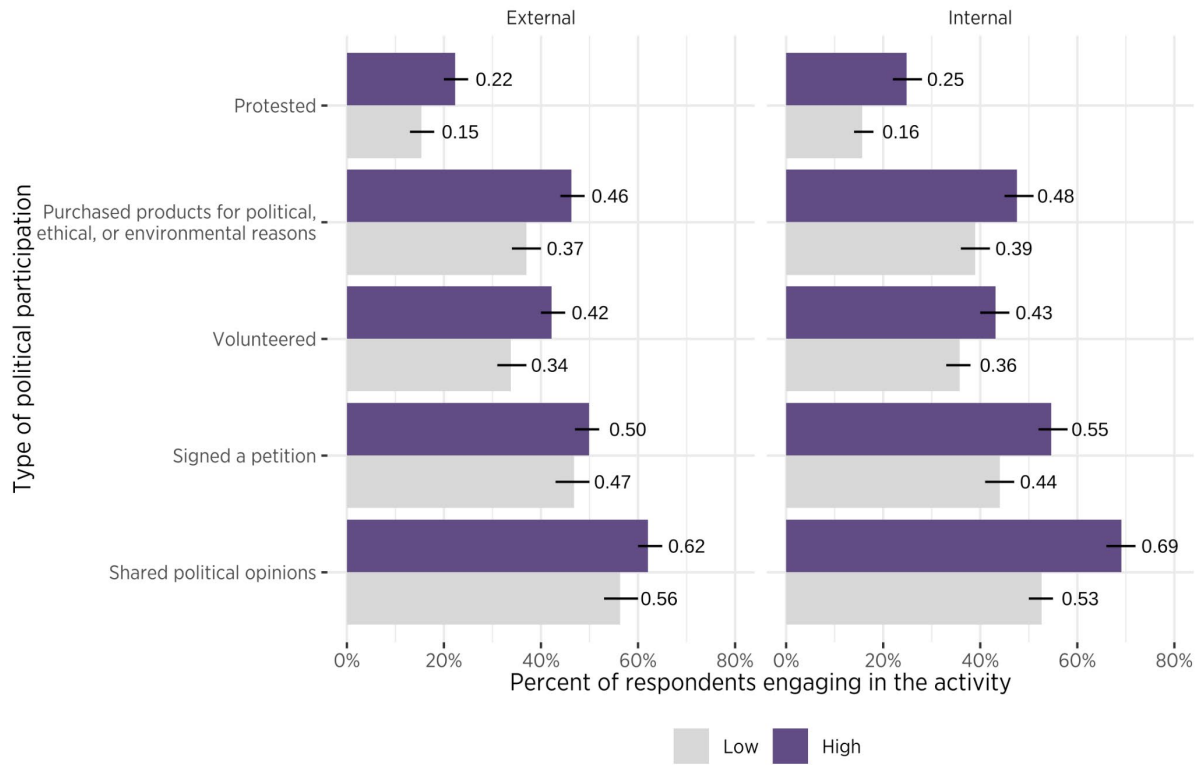
POLITICAL EFFICACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Efficacy has important implications for political participation. If you believe your interests are not being represented by elected officials, or question your ability to effectively participate in democratic politics, you are liable to avoid participating. We divided respondents at the median to create groups with lower and higher levels of efficacy. Respondents with lower levels of internal efficacy average only 1.9 political activities over the past year (i.e. sign a petition, engage in political consumerism, volunteer, protest, share political opinions), compared to 2.4 activities for those with higher levels of internal efficacy. This represents a 26% increase in their political involvement. Similarly, citizens with lower levels of external efficacy are expected to have engaged in 1.9 political activities over the past year, compared to 2.2 activities for those with higher levels of external efficacy. This is a 16% difference in their political involvement.

It is possible that the link between political efficacy and participation depends on the *type* of participation in question. For instance, some more anti-establishment forms of participation, such as protests and political consumerism, may actually be facilitated by lower levels of external efficacy: people who don't think the system responds to them may be more likely to act outside of it. We look at how likely it is for respondents with different levels of efficacy to have participated in various political activities. As seen in Figure 13, levels of participation are lower among the least efficacious, regardless of the type of efficacy and regardless of the type of participation. For example, 22% of respondents with higher levels of external efficacy participated in a protest over the past year, compared to only 15% of those with lower levels of external efficacy.

In short, there is a robust link between political efficacy and political participation. Both internal and external efficacy are associated with higher levels of all types of political participation.

Figure 13. Share of respondents engaging in political activities over the past year with high or low political efficacy

External

Internal

Type of political participation

Protested
- 0.22
- 0.15
- 0.25
- 0.16

Purchased products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons
- 0.46
- 0.37
- 0.48
- 0.39

Volunteered
- 0.42
- 0.34
- 0.43
- 0.36

Signed a petition
- 0.50
- 0.47
- 0.55
- 0.44

Shared political opinions
- 0.62
- 0.56
- 0.69
- 0.53

Percent of respondents engaging in the activity

Low   High

APPENDIX: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

Our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,545 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the sample provider Qualtrics. The sample was gathered from Oct. 4-13. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age based on data from the 2016 Canadian census. We used an iterative proportional fitting algorithm for our weighting procedure with a minimum weight of 0.56 (N=6) and a maximum weight of 1.37 (N=15).

Survey respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. They were also asked to identify their recent exposure to the news media. The median time it took respondents to complete the survey was 27 minutes. The survey instrument is available upon request. We present 90% confidence intervals for each of our figures.

EXPOSURE OF MESSAGING ON ENVIRONMENT, IMMIGRATION, AND CANDIDATE

Environment

Cross	The Canadian population is so small relative to that of India and China that any effort we make to reduce emissions won't matter at all and may hurt our economy. On the other hand, Canada has been a major global polluter for decades and we cannot push the costs of that activity on to other countries. What should we do?
Right	The Canadian population is so small relative to that of India and China that any effort we make to reduce emissions won't matter at all and may hurt our economy. We need to stop trying to fix something that we can't.
Left	Canada has been a major global polluter for decades and we cannot push the costs of that activity on to other countries. We need to show some climate leadership.

Then the following were measured:

- The Canadian government should abolish the carbon tax. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- The Canadian government should provide subsidies for renewable energy. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- How likely would you be to sign a petition calling for Canada to meet its Paris Accords? (Very unlikely to very likely)

Immigration

Cross	Canada has one of the most successful immigration policies in the world and these new immigrants generally help the economy grow which benefits us all. However, helping new immigrants at the expense of Canadians who need support seems unfair. I simply don't know if we should admit more or fewer.
Right	Canada accepts far too many immigrants. Helping new immigrants at the expense of Canadians who need support is unfair. We need to reduce the number of immigrants we accept.
Left	Canada has one of the most successful immigration policies in the world and these new immigrants help the economy grow which benefits us all. We need to increase the number of skilled immigrants.

Then the following were measured:

- The number of immigrants accepted to Canada should be decreased. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- The money available to support new immigrants to Canada should be increased. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- How likely would you be to sign a petition calling for Canada to reduce its international commitments to refugee resettlement? (Very unlikely to very likely)

Past candidate behaviour

Cross	If a candidate did something in the past that is now understood to be racist should they be able to apologize and move on? I don't know if we can judge the past from the present. On the other hand, some Canadians may feel that the candidate cannot represent them. Tricky…
Right	If a candidate did something in the past that is now understood to be racist, they should be able to sincerely apologize and move on. This is simple – judging the past from the present is dangerous.
Left	If a candidate did something in the past that is now understood to be racist then they are not fit for public office. This is simple – how can they lead for all Canadians when they discriminate against them?

Then the following were measured:

- Candidates who sincerely apologize for their actions should be able to continue to run for office. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- Focusing heavily on past behaviour of candidates distracts from issues that actually matter to Canadians. (Agree strongly to disagree strongly)

- How likely would you be to sign a petition calling for political parties to disqualify candidates who have done something in the past that is now understood to be racist? (Very unlikely to very likely)

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