

## **Report**

# **The 2016 Saskatchewan Provincial Election: The Solidification of an Uncompetitive Two-Party Leader-Focused System or Movement to a One-Party Predominant System?**

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## **Abstract**

This article closely examines campaign dynamics and voter behaviour in the 2016 Saskatchewan provincial election. Using a qualitative assessment of the events leading up to election day and data from an online vote compass gathered during the campaign period, it argues that the popularity of the incumbent Premier, Brad Wall, was the decisive factor explaining the Saskatchewan Party's success.

## **Résumé**

Ce texte examine de près les dynamiques de la campagne et le comportement des électeurs lors des élections provinciales de 2016 en Saskatchewan. On fait une évaluation qualitative des événements qui ont précédé le jour du scrutin et une analyse des données d'une boussole de vote en ligne recueillies au cours de la campagne électorale. On souligne que la popularité du premier ministre Brad Wall était le facteur décisif qui explique le succès du le Parti saskatchewanais .

**Key words:** Saskatchewan, provincial elections, Saskatchewan Party, Brad Wall, New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan, CBC Vote Compass

**Mots-clés:** Saskatchewan, élections provinciales, le Parti saskatchewanais, Brad Wall, le Nouveau parti démocratique de la saskatchewan

Writing about the 2011 Saskatchewan election, McGrane et al. observed that  
“Saskatchewan has suddenly become a remarkably uncompetitive two-party system  
dominated by a conservative, rather than a social democratic, political party” (2013, 1).

Going into the 2016 provincial election, for most pundits, the question was not *whether* the Saskatchewan Party would win the election, but by *how much*.

In this article, we outline the context and results of the 2016 election, and then use CBC Vote Compass data to make five arguments about contemporary Saskatchewan politics:

1. The election was a referendum on whether voters trusted Brad Wall, and most did;
2. While an ideological structure underlies Saskatchewan politics, leadership can trump ideology;
3. A lack of controversial issues hurt the opposition parties, as the election focused on leadership, thus playing to the Saskatchewan Party's advantage;
4. Socio-demographic cleavages played a limited role in the election; and,
5. The duopoly of Saskatchewan politics appears entrenched, with little room for third parties.

We conclude that the 2016 election could be the beginning of a shift away from the uncompetitive two-party system of the Brad Wall years to a one-party predominant system. But, this transition is far from certain. Creating a situation of one-party dominance will require the Saskatchewan Party - at some point - to continue to be victorious without Brad Wall leading it as he did for almost 14 years.

### **The Second Saskatchewan Party Mandate, 2011-2016**

The Saskatchewan Party solidified its hold on the province in the 2011 election, winning 49 of the 58 seats and securing solid representation in the north and the south and across both rural and urban constituencies. The NDP, by contrast, was reduced to just nine

seats (seven in the two major cities and two seats in the far north). To rub salt into the wound, Regina Douglas Park voters chose the Saskatchewan Party's Russ Marchuk over NDP leader Dwain Lingenfelter, who resigned shortly after the election.

This overwhelming mandate allowed the Wall government to pursue its agenda largely uncontested. The NDP opposition was easily shouted down in the legislature and distracted by internal leadership issues. The relatively tiny provincial media was under-resourced and lacked a critical mass of experienced journalists able to hold the government to account. Organized labour and other civil society on the left were placed on the defensive facing an unusually popular government.

The Saskatchewan Party's popularity was tied to the fact that the provincial economy was booming. In late 2010, the government touted outside economic forecasting that saw Saskatchewan leading the nation in economic growth in the coming year (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010). As the country's second largest producer of crude oil, Saskatchewan was benefitting from a windfall of tax revenue coming from record high oil and potash prices (US Energy Information Administration, 2012; Investment Mine, 2016). Indeed, the province was riding high on unprecedented resource revenues that were quickly turning it from a perennial 'have-not' province into a growing 'have' province.

Such windfall profits tempted the government to do two things that, while popular, came with significant risk: increase government spending in popular areas such as health and education, among others; and decrease both corporate and personal income taxes, replacing that revenue with money from resource royalties. These moves began to cause problems halfway through the government's second mandate when oil and other commodity prices softened. By 2014 Saskatchewan was deriving 24% of its spending from

resource related revenue (\$2500 per capita), which was significantly higher than Alberta at 19% (\$2200 per capita) (Kneebone, 2015, 8). The precipitous decline in oil prices that occurred in 2013/14 and the softening of potash and other commodity prices began to create fiscal headaches for the government (Kraus, 2016). Budget surpluses in 2010/11 and 2011/12 gave way to budget deficits and increased provincial debt (especially when the Crown sector is included) by 2014/15 and 2015/16. This rapid ride from the top of the economic crest downwards coloured the Saskatchewan Party's second mandate, as focus shifted from 'what to do with the boom' towards 'how to handle the bust,' and questions were asked about the government's ability to effectively manage the economy and control spending.

In the area of health, the second Wall government carried on similarly to the first: it continued to introduce 'grand plans' for 'big change' but often failed to follow through on their implementation in the way expected. During the first mandate, the Patient First Review report yielded little in terms of substantive change; in the second, focus shifted to the adoption of LEAN, an organizational theory based on the experiences of Toyota (Marchildon, 2013). Though it started with significant support from both inside and outside the health sector, there was always concern that implementing LEAN throughout the entirety of the health system was overly ambitious and failed to account for the power of some of the actors within the system. Eventually, public controversy over the use of outside contractors to guide the implementation and the open opposition of health professionals led the government to stop mentioning LEAN as the cornerstone of its health reform plans (McIntosh, 2016). Where significant changes were made was in the area of private contracting for services: the government expanded the role of private surgical

facilities within the public system as a key strategy in reducing surgical wait times, and introduced private payment for MRI scans whereby individuals who purchased a scan for themselves were obliged to also pay for a private scan for someone on the public wait list.

In the area of education, the government did little during its second mandate that could be called significant reform, with the possible exception of public-private partnerships for the building of new schools and an increase in provincial grants to some independent schools. Despite significant opposition from within the educational sector, the government pushed ahead and the first of the P3 schools were scheduled to open in 2017. The governments backed away from its other major initiative - the introduction of standardized testing - in the face of intense opposition. Budgets for education, both K-12 and postsecondary, were impacted by generalized restraint guidelines with small or no increases, but this spending restraint was consistent across policy areas and not specific to the sector.

From its first mandate, the Saskatchewan Party government had been under some pressure from inside the party to privatize the retail sale of liquor. In its second mandate, the government put a moratorium on the construction of new public liquor stores, closed a small number of the less profitable government-owned outlets, and issued a limited number of licences to private retailers to both fill the service gaps where stores closed and to compete with government stores in the major urban centres. At same time, the provincial government retained its monopoly on wholesale liquor sales and distribution. The NDP, the labour movement (government liquor store employees being members of the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union), and some civil society organizations, such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, opposed this move, arguing against it both

on economic and public policy terms (i.e. the state's interest in limiting access to alcohol by minors). However, the issue did not end up playing a big role in the 2016 election.

The issue that was more successfully championed by both the Official Opposition and the extra-parliamentary opposition to the Wall government caught pretty much all observers by surprise, and that was the removal of the tax credit for film and television production in the province. Like almost all jurisdictions in North America, the province offered generous subsidies to film and television producers for Saskatchewan-based productions. Indeed, the previous NDP government had built and operated a large soundstage in downtown Regina for precisely that purpose, its most notable success being the long-running sitcom *Corner Gas* filmed both there and in Roleau, Saskatchewan. A small, but relatively stable industry had grown up around the province, all based on producers being able to access write-offs of their production costs in exchange for money spent in the province during the production.

The government decision to cancel the film tax credit program and replace it with a much smaller and much less generous program provoked a significant backlash from those directly affected by the move and key government supporters such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. The Chamber of Commerce even released a study arguing that the economic activity (both direct and indirect) supported by the tax credit system more than covered the foregone revenue for the province. The government refused to bend in the face of widespread public criticism, suggesting credence to the assertion that the move was ideological.

Throughout the second Saskatchewan Party mandate, the opposition NDP was faced with its own troubles. With just nine members in the legislature it became difficult to create

any sustained momentum in opposing government policy. And, its struggles were further exacerbated by its need to find a new leader to rebuild the party both inside and outside the assembly. From late 2011 until early 2013 the party relied on veteran MLA and former cabinet minister John Nilson to serve as Acting Leader. Though a respected party stalwart and strong political operative, he was seen as part of the party's past more than as its future. In March 2013, the party chose MLA Cam Broten to be its new leader. Broten's challenges as leader were significant. The veterans of past NDP governments were retiring, with no obvious 'next generation' ready to step up and take over. Further, the NDP faced a government led by Canada's most popular premier, touted by many for a national leadership role.

However, the NDP did have issues to go after. From the state of the economy, to the LEAN fiasco, to the costs of P3s, the opposition tried to corner the government. But, while the NDP raised issues around government waste (including power meters improperly installed and likely to catch fire) and misadventure (questioning whether the massive investment in carbon capture and sequestration at the Boundary Dam facility would ever justify its billion dollar investment), it proved difficult to capture any momentum on any issue or set of issues and nothing seemed to dent the government's overall popularity.

What was clear heading into the 2016 election was that no single issue (or set of issues) was an obvious winner for the opposition. The state of the economy could be portrayed as not being the government's fault - it was the victim of international markets. Contracting out health care services to private providers was done in a way that flew under the public's radar and did not generate a large amount of controversy. The dubious experiment with LEAN, with its talk of *senseis* and *kaizens*, might have been a waste of

money, but do not all governments waste money? The privatization of liquor sales was not front and centre in the media and, well, the film credit will not bring back *Corner Gas*, so that ship had sailed. As one can see, the challenges for the opposition were formidable.

### **Campaign Events**

Saskatchewan's fixed election date law allows for the election date (usually fixed as the first Monday in November four calendar years after the previous election) to be postponed if the provincial election overlaps with a federal election. With a federal election set for October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the provincial vote was bumped until April 4, 2016. While this five-month delay might have proved significant (both the economic outlook and provincial finances could be worse in the spring of 2016 than they had been in fall of 2015), the government shrewdly avoided this situation by simply not having the legislature sit in the winter of 2016, promising a budget only after the election. This delay strategy successfully reduced the publicity that the opposition would have garnered during a raucous pre-election legislative sitting.

The fixed election date, absence of a budget, and no winter sitting of the legislature were important factors protecting the Saskatchewan Party's major campaign image: that of a pragmatic government that, even in the face of economic challenges, could live it up to its slogan of "keeping Saskatchewan strong". Its platform highlighted the economic successes the province had enjoyed since 2007 - successes that the government promised to continue by "keeping taxes low, controlling operational government spending and continuing to invest in much needed infrastructure projects that will strengthen our economy" (Saskatchewan Party Platform 2016, 1). The main theme of the party's platform was the contrast between the economic growth Saskatchewan had enjoyed under the Wall



government and the stagnation it claimed the province had faced under the Romanow and Calvert NDP governments. The platform promised remarkably few initiatives or changes. Most notable of these were promised investments in infrastructure, allowing for private payment for CT scans, alterations to the graduate retention program that would allow recent graduates to apply tax credits for down payment on their first home, 50% of the electrical grid being powered by renewable sources by 2030, an increase in the number of private liquor stores, and increased funding for children under six with autism. In short, it was a document that sidestepped the economic challenges facing the province on the premise that the best solution government could offer was to stay out of the way. The fundamental anchor of the party's campaign was the electorate's affection for Brad Wall, and the party positioned itself as pragmatic and almost boring - an approach that ironically put it in the driver's seat of the campaign dynamics.

Following the pattern of recent Saskatchewan elections (Leeson 2008), the NDP's campaign was left-wing but not very far from the centre of Saskatchewan politics. Promising to pursue 'Your Priorities, Your Family', the opposition promised to invest in frontline education and healthcare by cutting government waste and modestly raising taxes on high-income earners. Offering a more expansive, and expensive, set of promises than the Saskatchewan Party, prominent planks in the NDP platform included a middle class tax cut and affordable public utilities bundle, post-secondary tuition reduction, increases to the minimum wage, more childcare spaces, "responsible" pipeline development, infrastructure investment, the return of the Film Employment tax credit, a variety of green energy initiatives, continuing the government's ongoing review of the resource royalty structure, shorter ER wait times, the hiring of more teachers and nurses,

stopping privatization, and the establishment of a Ministry of First Nations and Metis Relations. In Cam Broten, the NDP had a young leader that aimed to strike many of the same cords of family values and Saskatchewan roots that defined Brad Wall. The Liberals, Greens, and Progressive Conservatives all ran reasonably visible fringe party campaigns but none attracted enough attention to build any momentum. Interestingly, the provincial Liberals were not the beneficiary of any momentum from the federal Liberals' victory only five months earlier that saw the Liberals form government nationally and have their popular vote in Saskatchewan increase from 8.5% to 24%.

The campaign itself was a relatively undramatic affair. Only three moments during the campaign created openings for a change in momentum. The first episode was a story breaking on the second day of the campaign that social workers had bought one-way tickets for two homeless men from North Battleford, Saskatchewan to Vancouver, British Columbia (Hill 2016). Opening the Saskatchewan Party up to criticism for both for cutting services to vulnerable communities and for being mean-spirited, the story offered a potential for discussions about something other than the economy. Given the whiff of controversy, the incidence also had potential overlap with questions about possible land purchase improprieties in the Global Transportation Hub industrial development outside of Regina. But, whatever momentum might have created for the NDP was erased over the next week, as a series of scandals about social media comments led three NDP candidates to withdraw from the race and another to be removed by Broten, who also removed his provincial campaign manager (CBC 2016a). Questions about the background of candidates deepened when it emerged that three Saskatchewan Party and two NDP candidates had been convicted of impaired driving at various points in the past (CBC 2016b). On balance,

the Saskatchewan Party appeared to suffer less from this episode than did the NDP. The final potential turning point of the campaign was the televised debate on March 23rd between Brad Wall and Cam Broten, the only debate of the campaign. Polling of debate viewers found that 56% of them believed Wall had won the debate and only 32% felt that Broten had won (Mainstreet March 23rd). Once again, the Saskatchewan Party did not appear to have its popularity hurt. As the campaign entered its last week, it became obvious little had happened over the last four weeks to change the dynamics of the election and public domain polling showed the Saskatchewan Party cruising towards another majority government.

### **Election Results**

As in the 2011 Saskatchewan provincial election, public domain polling predicted the outcome of the election very well. Polling reported in the news media showed that the Saskatchewan Party support hovered around the high fifties and the NDP was well back in the low thirties, with the other parties around 5%. The final results aligned with the polling done during the campaign period, suggesting that the campaign itself did little to move large numbers of voters from one party to another.

**Table 1: 2011 and 2016 Saskatchewan General Elections Results**

2011	2016
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	Votes	% of Vote	Seats	Votes	% of Votes	Seats
<b>Sask. Party</b>	258,585	64.25	49	270,776	62.36%	51
<b>NDP</b>	128,673	31.97	9	131,137	30.20%	10
<b>Greens</b>	11,560	2.87	0	7,967	1.83%	0
<b>Liberals</b>	2,237	0.56	0	15,568	3.59%	0
<b>Others</b>	1,417	0.35	0	7,582	1.74%	0

Source: Elections Saskatchewan

As Table 1 indicates, the 2011 and 2016 results are remarkably similar for the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party. The total number of seats in the Saskatchewan legislature had increased by three due to legislative changes made by the Wall government. As such, the percentage of seats held by the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party in the Legislative Assembly was virtually the same before and after the election. When it came to the fringe parties, some change may be noted. In 2011, the Liberals had ran just nine candidates in order to concentrate on winning their leader's seat, allowing the Greens to place third in the popular vote. In 2016, the Liberals ran candidates in all ridings, which accounts for the Liberals displacing the Greens as the third-place party in the election. However, neither party was competitive in any riding. The Liberals received just over 10% of the vote in their leader's riding, between 7% and 9% in two other ridings, and under 7% in 58 ridings. The Greens received only 6% of the vote in their leader's riding, between 3% and 4% in three other ridings, and under 3% in 54 ridings (they failed to find candidates for the remaining three ridings). The Progressive Conservatives, whose results are not broken out in the table above, ran candidates in 18 (primarily rural) ridings and were only able to obtain between

6% and 10% in four of those ridings. Reflecting the duopolistic nature of Saskatchewan politics, the Liberals, Greens, and Progressive Conservatives did not place second in any riding.

In terms of the geographical distribution of seats, entering the election the Saskatchewan Party held all of the southern rural ridings (those containing no communities over 5,000) and all ridings encompassing the province's eleven small cities (with populations between 5,000 and 20,000). The Saskatchewan Party held onto these seats, winning crushing majorities that ranged from 70% to 86% of the popular vote. In Saskatoon and Regina, the Saskatchewan Party remained very popular in the suburbs (outside Circle Drive and Ring Road respectively), winning majorities that were 60% or higher.

Both the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP realized that these southern rural, small city, and suburban seats would not be competitive races. As such, the election was fought in the inner parts of Saskatoon and Regina as well as Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and one of the two large far north ridings. While the Saskatchewan Party was able to sweep the four seats of Saskatchewan's medium-sized 'swing' cities of Moose Jaw and Prince Albert in 2011, in 2016, the NDP put significant resources into these seats and was able to wrestle one seat back from the Saskatchewan Party in Prince Albert. The Saskatchewan Party nominated the popular Mayor of La Ronge against the NDP incumbent in the vast far northern riding of Cumberland and spent a significant amount of money on his campaign, but the NDP still captured 62% of the vote in that riding, along with 64% of the vote in the other northern riding. A number of close races took place in the inner parts of Saskatoon

and Regina; of these 17 seats, the Saskatchewan Party took 10 and the NDP took 7.<sup>1</sup> While the boundaries had changed, most of the seats won by each party corresponded to the seats that they held in 2011, with two notable exceptions: the NDP won Regina Douglas-Park, which had been the NDP leader's seat in 2011, back from the Saskatchewan Party; and the Saskatchewan Party targeted NDP leader Cam Broten's Saskatoon Westview seat, which it won by a margin of 217 votes.

The results of the 2016 election were sobering and disappointing for the NDP, a party that was once considered the natural governing party of Saskatchewan. The results illustrated that the NDP was simply not competitive in roughly half of the province's ridings. The Saskatchewan Party appeared to be able to win these seats with a minimal effort, allowing it to focus its considerable resources on ridings that were considered NDP strongholds a decade ago and leaving the NDP to increasingly focus on fighting to retain seats as opposed to aggressively targeting large numbers of new seats.

Voter turnout data in Saskatchewan are somewhat difficult to judge. Elections Saskatchewan did a particularly poor job of registering voters in elections during the late 1990s and 2000s, which makes Saskatchewan's voter turnout prior to 2016 appear higher than it actually was. After the 2011 election, Elections Saskatchewan placed significant resources into voter registration and registered 150,000 new voters. As a result, 92.4% of eligible voters were registered for the 2016 election compared to only 76.7% for the 2011 election. Given these data issues, we will report on the infrequently used statistic of voter

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<sup>1</sup> Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood, Saskatoon Eastview, Saskatoon Fairview, Saskatoon Meewasin, Saskatoon University, Saskatoon Westview, Regina Coronation Park, Regina Pasqua, Regina Walsh Acres, and Regina University went to the Saskatchewan Party. Saskatoon Centre, Saskatoon Nutana, Saskatoon Riversdale, Regina Douglas Park, Regina Elphinstone-Centre, Regina Lakeview, and Regina Rosemont went to the NDP.

turnout based on all eligible voters (Canadian citizens over the age of 17 who may or may not be registered to vote) rather than focusing on registered voters. In 2016, 53.5% of eligible voters turned out to vote, compared to 51.1% in 2011, 55% and 60% between 1995 and 2007, and 75% and 80% between 1982 and 1991.

The Saskatchewan legislature has historically lacked diversity because of the tendency of the primary political parties to nominate white male candidates. In 2016, the NDP nominated the most diverse slate of candidates in its history: 50% women, 13% Indigenous, and 10% visible minorities, percentages roughly corresponding to population percentages. After the election, half of the NDP caucus were female and 20% were Indigenous. The Saskatchewan Party's 2016 candidates were less diverse: 21% female, 10% Indigenous, and 2% visible minorities. The Saskatchewan Party caucus after the election was 22% female and 5% Indigenous; from this caucus, four women were appointed as ministers, making up 23% of the cabinet, and one Indigenous woman was appointed to cabinet but was shuffled out in early 2017 and subsequently left politics. Overall, the percentage of women in the Legislature increased from 17% after the 2011 election to 26% after the 2016 election. Further, 2016 saw the election of Saskatchewan's first visible minority MLA, Muhammad Fiaz (Saskatchewan Party).

### **CBC Vote Compass Results**

The CBC Vote Compass for the Saskatchewan Election, administered in collaboration with Vox Pop Labs, was available online from March 7-30, 2016. The survey tool consisted of 30 questions about specific policy issues along with questions relating to the trustworthiness and competence of the four party leaders and basic socio-demographic information about the respondent. Respondents were also asked to rate the likelihood of

the Saskatchewan Party, NDP, Liberals, and Greens winning in their riding. Ultimately, 11,829 people voluntarily completed the survey.

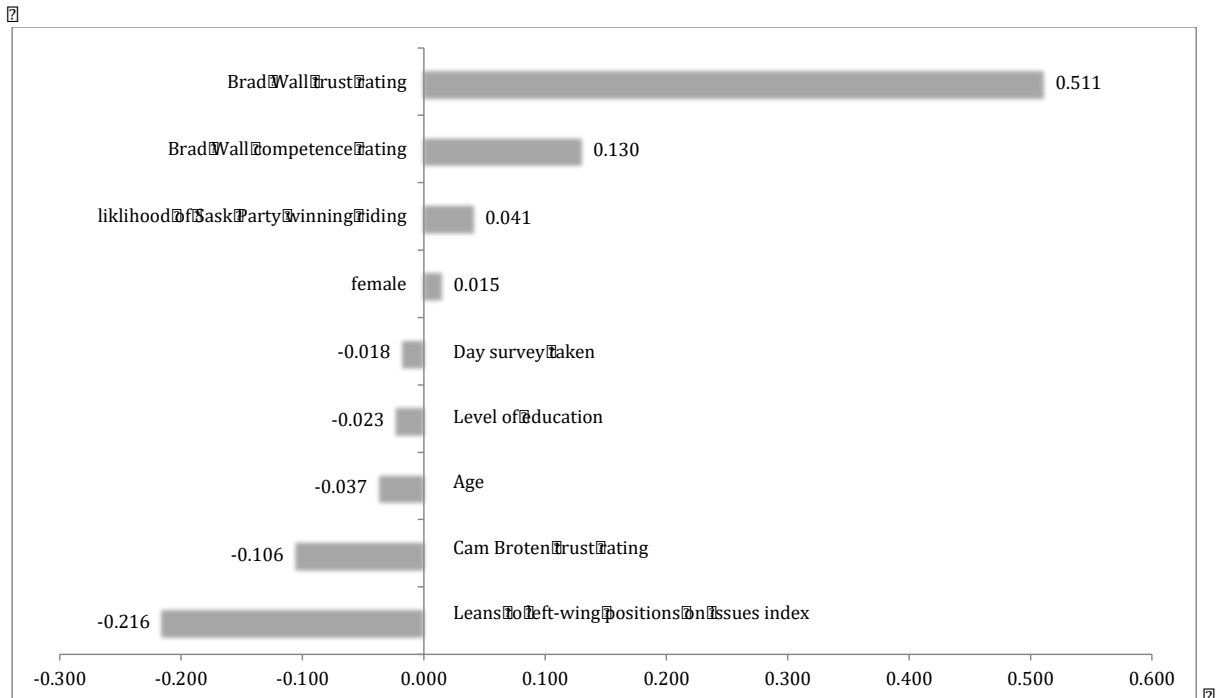
It is important to note that the CBC Vote Compass was a self-selected survey and its respondents would have been more likely to watch, listen, or surf the CBC than the general Saskatchewan population. As such, the Vote Compass sample is skewed in two very important ways. First, a study by Winn (2002) illustrates that CBC watchers are generally more left-wing than consumers of private broadcasters. Indeed, Vote Compass data shows the Saskatchewan Party were only slightly ahead of the NDP throughout the campaign- a situation not replicated in randomly selected public domain polling during the campaign nor in the election results. Second, the Vote Compass sample is generally much younger, more highly educated, less religious, and more male than the Saskatchewan population. The data in this analysis are weighted by geography, gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, and religion but the weights are quite 'heavy' given some of the imbalances in the sample. For instance, 50% of the sample is under 36 years of age. While we cannot generalize the Vote Compass results to the general Saskatchewan population, the data provide an opportunity to explore the foundations of the Saskatchewan Party's dominance of the 2016 election. Given that CBC watchers generally lean to the left, the data provides clues as to the Saskatchewan Party's strengths and weaknesses among a slice of the electorate that is usually considered to be 'NDP friendly.'

Since the Vote Compass was only available during the writ period, our analysis does not deal with vote choice, but instead focuses on likelihood to support: how likely the respondent is to vote for the Saskatchewan Party, NDP, Liberals, and Greens on scale of zero ("not at all likely") to ten ("very likely.") These variables depict the unsettled nature of



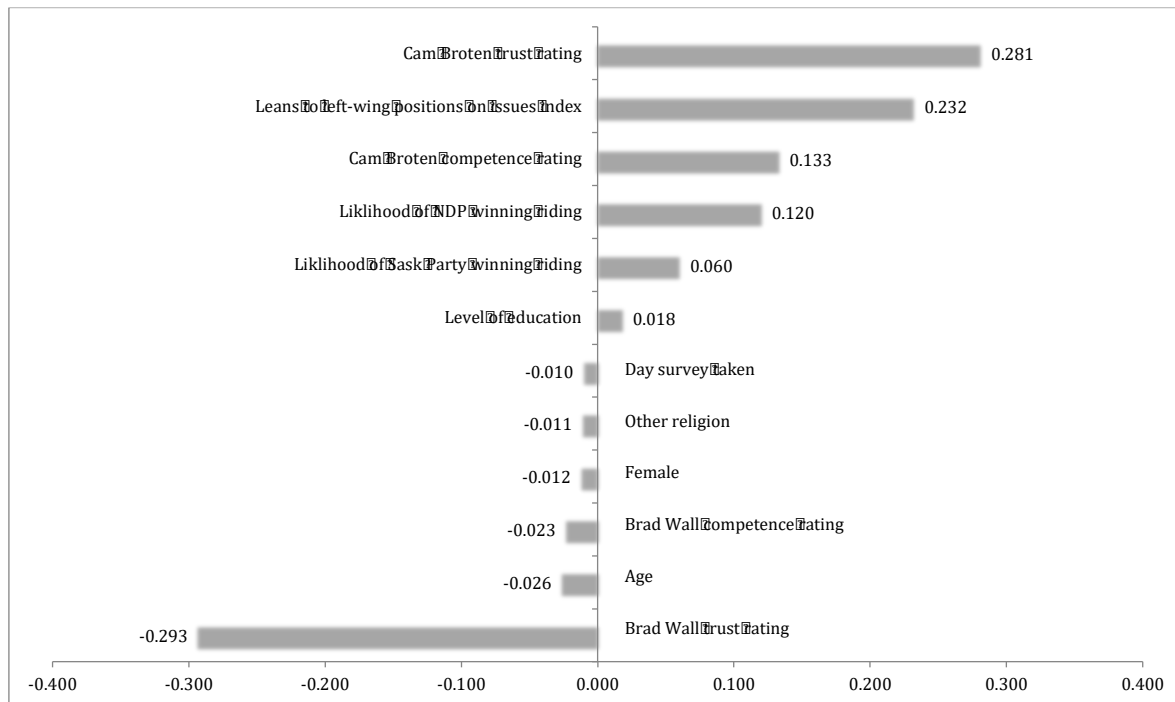
voters' opinions as they go back and forth in their minds over whom to support on Election Day.

Our dependent variables are interval variables, so an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression is an appropriate technique of analysis. Our first series of analyses uses likelihood to support the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP as our dependent variables. For independent variables, we collapsed all of the thirty policy questions into a single "issues index", ranging from 1 (most right-wing position on all questions) and 5 (most left-wing position on all questions) (Cronbach's Alpha= 0.9192). Other independent variables included Wall's trust and competence ratings, Broten's trust and competence ratings, socio-demographics (gender, age, education, income, religion, and region), perceived likelihood that the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP would win the respondent's riding, and the day on which the survey was taken. To preserve cases, the responses of "I don't know" and instances where the respondent "clicked through" the screen without answering were assigned to the midpoint of the scale, with the exception of the respondents skipping socio-demographic variables (these respondents were excluded). The final sample size for our analysis of the likelihood to support the Saskatchewan Party and NDP was 11,444 respondents. Complete OLS regression results and coding information can be found in the Appendix. To highlight important findings, our graphs report only the betas of the coefficients that were significant at or below the 0.05 level. It is notable that the regressions that produced these graphs each had a robust  $R^2$  (between 0.75 and 0.82).

**Graph 1: Probability to Support Saskatchewan Party in Upcoming 2016 Saskatchewan Provincial Election (Betas)**

The results of Graph 1 suggest that leadership and issue index variables had the greatest impact on the likelihood of Vote Compass respondents to support the Saskatchewan Party (Graph 1). Wall's trust rating had a very large positive impact on likelihood to support the Saskatchewan Party, and his competence rating was also important. Similarly, rating Broten closer to the untrustworthy end of the scale increased the likelihood of supporting the Saskatchewan Party while Broten's competence ratings had no discernable impact on support for the Saskatchewan Party. While more left-wing positions on the issues index had a predictably negative impact on likelihood to support the Saskatchewan Party, issue index scores were noticeably less important than Wall's trust rating. If the respondent felt that the Saskatchewan Party would win their riding, there was a slightly positive effect in favour of supporting the Saskatchewan Party reflecting the old

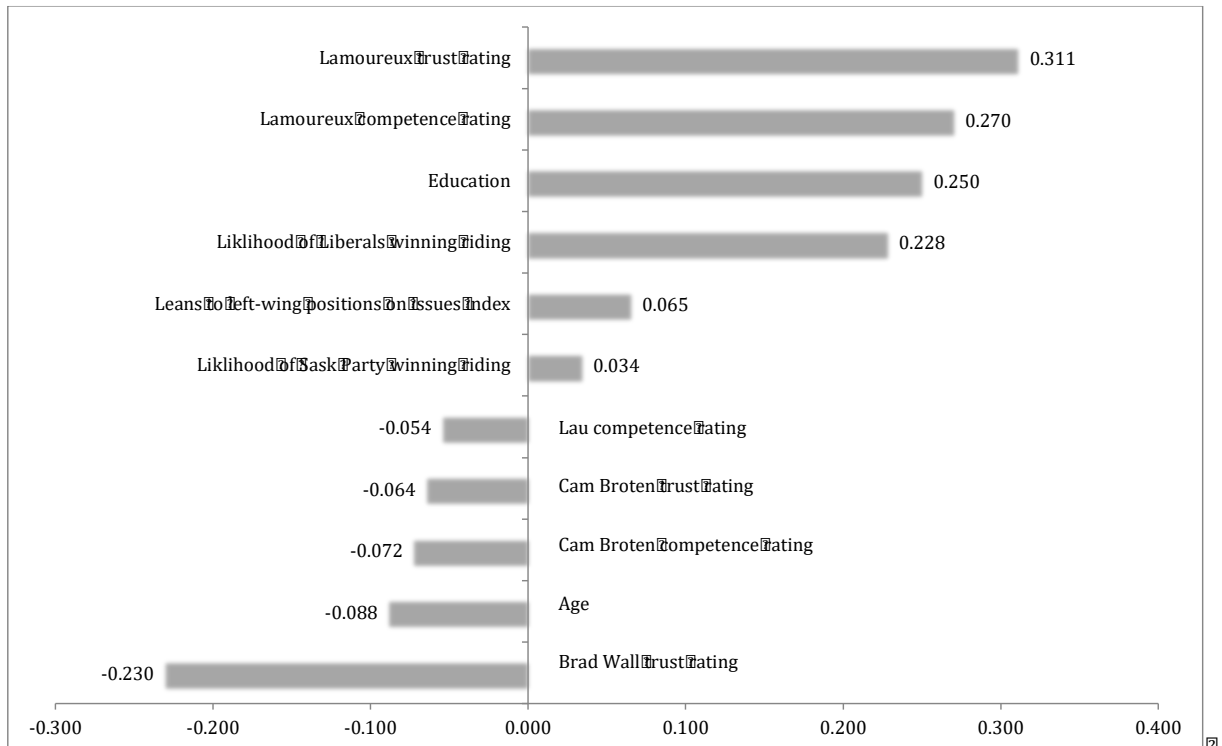
adage in politics that voters like to vote for a winner. The closer the survey was taken to Election Day, the less likely the respondent was to support the Saskatchewan Party. However, the impact of this variable was quite small and probably the result of undecided voters using the Vote Compass in the final days of the campaign. A similar effect for the day that the survey was taken was found with the OLS regressions regarding the NDP. Interestingly, socio-demographic variables were not very important to likelihood to support the Saskatchewan Party. Being female had a slightly positive effect on supporting the Saskatchewan Party, while having a high level of education and being older had slightly negative effects on supporting the Saskatchewan Party. As will be seen below, being older had a negative effect on the likelihood of supporting for all four parties. This finding suggests that younger respondents were more definitive in their opinions about who they intending to support than older respondents.

**Graph 2: Probability to Support NDP in Upcoming 2016 Saskatchewan Provincial Election (Betas)**

We repeated this analysis to consider the likelihood of Vote Compass respondents to support the NDP (Graph 2). Once again, the leaders' trust ratings pop out as very influential, with support for the NDP correlated with negative trust ratings for Wall and positive trust ratings for Broten, and the Wall and Broten competence ratings also having some impact. Unsurprisingly, left-wing positions on the issues index pushed respondents to support the NDP. Unlike the Saskatchewan Party analysis in which trust dominated over issues (Graph 1), the issue index is almost as important as the trust rating for Broten. The perceived likelihood of the NDP winning the respondent's riding had a noticeable positive effect on the likelihood to support the NDP, and at the same time perceived likelihood of the Saskatchewan Party winning the respondent's riding also had a positive effect. These two findings suggests that there was a group of respondents who were leaning towards the

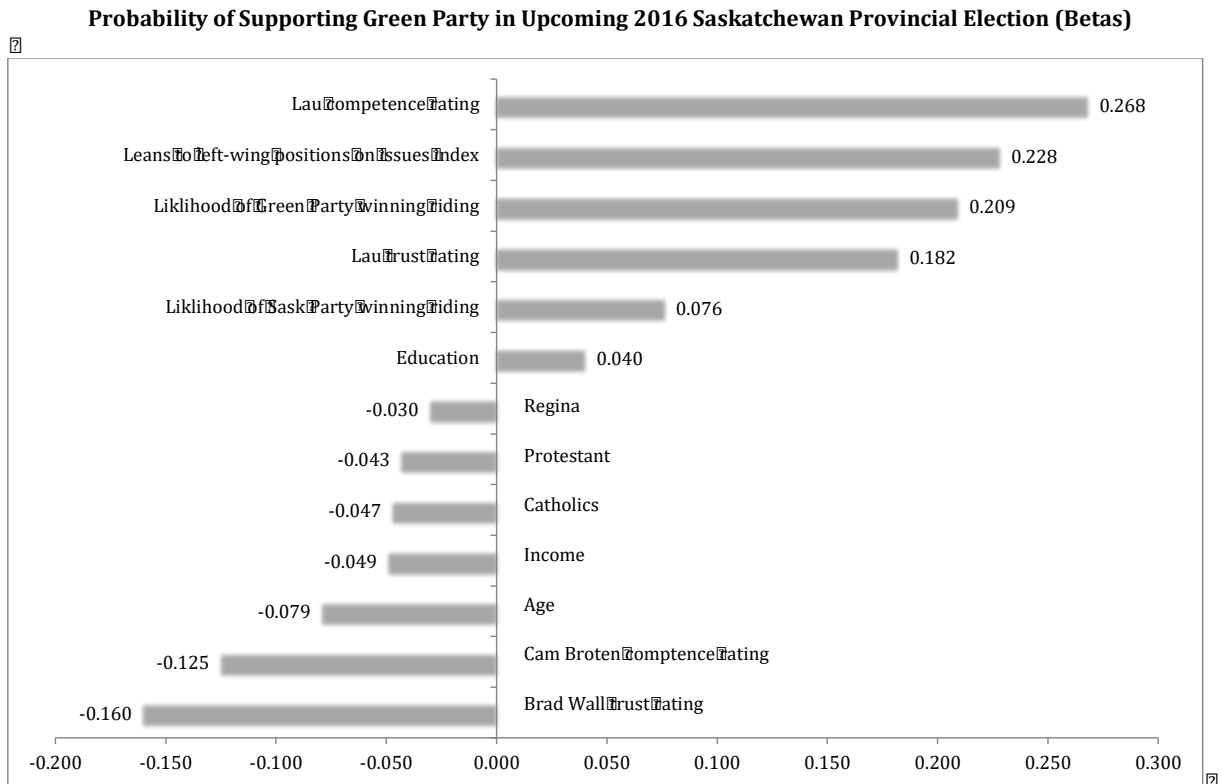
NDP, in spite of the fact that they believed that the party had little hope of winning in their riding, alongside a group of respondents who felt like the NDP could win in their riding and, therefore, supported the party. Socio-demographic variables were not very influential on the likelihood to support the NDP. Contrary to the Saskatchewan Party, those with higher educations and males were slightly more likely to support the NDP.

Since the Liberals and Green Parties are fringe parties in Saskatchewan politics, analysis of their level of support is difficult since many voters do not even have opinions about these parties and their leaders. For instance, in the CBC Vote Compass data, over one third of respondents either clicked through the screens on the Green and Liberal leaders or chose “I don’t know” when asked about the competence and trustworthiness of Green leader Victor Lau and Liberal leader Darrin Lamoureux. As such, we excluded all of the respondents that either clicked through or chose “I don’t know” on questions related to the party leaders and likelihood to support the various parties. The result was a sample of 6,166 respondents who had opinions on all four party leaders and indicated their likelihood of supporting each of the four parties in the upcoming provincial election. OLS regressions similar to the ones that formed the basis for Graphs 1 to 2 were then ran on this limited sample (see Appendix); the  $R^2$  for these analyses ranged from 0.45 to 0.53, much lower than the earlier analyses.

**Graph 3: Probability to Support Liberals in Upcoming 2016 Election Saskatchewan Provincial Election (Betas)**

Interestingly, one of the most important factors that could lead a voter to consider supporting the Liberals was a healthy distrust of Brad Wall along with some doubts about the leadership of Broten and Lau (Graph 3). Further, a high rating of the competence and trustworthiness of Lamoureux, along with the opinion that the Liberals had a chance of winning their riding, pushed respondents towards supporting the Liberals even though it was clear that Liberals had very little chance of winning any ridings from the outset of the election. The issues index had much less impact on likelihood to support the Liberals than the other parties examined. It appears that having left-wing positions on the issues index pushed respondents towards the Liberals, but not as much as having left-wing positions pushed respondents towards the NDP and the Greens or away from the Saskatchewan

Party. With the exception of having a high level of education slightly increasing the likelihood of supporting the Liberals, socio-demographic variables were not significant.



Similar to the Liberals, an important variable in increasing the likelihood of supporting the Greens was distrust of Wall (Graph 4). Distrust of Wall combined with doubts about Broten's competence and high ratings of Victor Lau's competence (and to a lesser extent trustworthiness) definitely increased the likelihood of Vote Compass respondents to supporting the Greens. Like the Liberals, another important factor in considering supporting the Greens was the perception that the Greens had the potential to win the respondent's riding. Similar to the NDP, holding left-wing positions on the issues index was an important influence on increasing the respondents' likelihood of supporting the Green Party. Like the other parties analyzed, socio-demographic variables were not

overly important to understanding the likelihood to support the Greens. Those with higher educations were slightly more likely to support the Greens, while those with higher incomes, no religion, and living within Regina were slightly less likely to support the Greens.

### **Trust and Ideology: A Discussion of Vote Compass Results**

Pulling this information together leads to a number of educated guesses about the dominance of the Saskatchewan Party in the 2016 provincial election. First, the data suggest that the election was essentially a referendum on whether voters trusted Brad Wall. Distrust of Wall was an important variable in explaining the likelihood to support the three opposition parties and trusting Wall was very influential in pushing respondents towards supporting the Saskatchewan Party. Overall, Wall was trusted by Vote Compass respondents with 62% rating him a six or higher on the trust scale compared with 33% rating him a four or lower and 5% assigning him the midpoint score of five. By comparison, Broten had 36% rating him a six or higher on the trust scale compared with 53% rating him a four or lower and 11% assigning him the midpoint score of five. This high level of trust in Wall compared to Broten, his principal opponent, gave the Saskatchewan Party a huge advantage among CBC Vote Compass respondents, and possibly among the larger Saskatchewan population.

Second, the Vote Compass data suggest that ideology is an important factor in Saskatchewan elections, but not as important as leadership. There is an underlying ideological structure to Saskatchewan politics, and holding left-wing positions on the issue index consistently pushed Vote Compass respondents away from the Saskatchewan Party and towards the NDP, Greens, and to a lesser extent the Liberals. However, there were no



instances of the ideology index being more influential than leadership variables in the analyses for each party. This finding points to the possibility that a significant portion of Saskatchewan Party supporters were less motivated by ideology and more motivated by their trust in Brad Wall. Indeed, there is some indication that even those holding left-wing issue positions trusted Wall. A quick bivariate calculation of the mean of the left-of-centre respondents intending to vote Saskatchewan Party<sup>2</sup> indicates that their trust rating for Brad Wall was 8.10 out of 10 and their trust rating for Cam Broten was 3.21 out of 10. In short, the Saskatchewan Party had an ideological appeal to those who held right and right-of-centre positions, but it also had the appeal of the trustworthiness of Brad Wall to attract the support at least some voters that held left-of-centre positions.

Third, an election campaign that centered on leadership as opposed to ideology and issues clearly benefited the Saskatchewan Party. Issues that had the potential to push voters to support the Saskatchewan Party's opponents like a price on carbon, gay-straight alliances, resource revenue sharing with First Nations, two-tiered health, and the privatization of liquor were rarely discussed in the campaign. This lack of prominent wedge issues placed opposition parties at a disadvantage as they struggled to find opportunities to highlight for voters what actually differentiated them from the government.

Fourth, in terms of the NDP, the Vote Compass data suggest that socio-demographic variables have little effect on the likelihood to support the various parties contesting the 2016 Saskatchewan provincial election. Analyses of NDP voting in federal elections have

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<sup>2</sup> These respondents indicated that they would vote for the Saskatchewan Party if the provincial election was held "today" and they also scored between 3.01 and 4 on the issues index, which meant that they agreed with left-wing issue statements.

found that the party has traditionally been strongest among young voters, atheists, low-income earners, and women (Gidengil et al, 2012; Kay and Perrella, 2012). Yet, none of these groups were more likely to support the Saskatchewan NDP according the Vote Compass data; in fact, females leaned slightly towards the Saskatchewan Party. The only small boost in favour of voting for the NDP came if the respondent was highly educated. Similar to the McGrane et al. analysis of the 2011 Saskatchewan election (2013: 7), the Vote Compass data reveal that the Saskatchewan electorate is not deeply divided along the lines of socio-demographic cleavages. The Saskatchewan Party appears to be relatively popular among all socio-demographic groups and the fact that the NDP cannot reliably count on specific socio-demographic groups to vote overwhelmingly in its favour hurt its chances of electoral success.

Finally, the CBC Vote Compass data allows us to discern some of the challenges facing Saskatchewan's perennial fringe parties - the Greens and the Liberals. These two parties were completely unable to break the Saskatchewan Party's lock on right-wing voters in the 2016 election. Even if either the Greens or Liberals created a set of policies to attract right-wing voters, they would find it difficult to persuade voters to come their way given the high trust levels that voters have when it comes to Wall. Given that a large number of Vote Compass respondents had no opinion on the trustworthiness of Lau and Lamoureux, it is difficult for these fringe party leaders to compete with the Saskatchewan Party on the question of leadership when it comes to right-wing voters.

With right-wing voters and voters who trust Wall firmly committed to the Saskatchewan Party, the two fringe parties appeared in 2016 to be fighting with the NDP for the minority of voters who do not trust Brad Wall and for the voters who lean

ideologically towards left-wing policy positions. The NDP decisively won this battle with the fringe parties. In a head to head competition with the NDP, these two fringe parties were hurt by the lack of name recognition of their leaders and the feeling of respondents that Greens and Liberals had little to chance to win in their riding. On a scale where zero was “not at all likely” to win and ten was “very likely” to win the respondent’s local riding, only 3% of the Vote Compass respondents rated the chance of Liberals winning their riding at five or above and only 2% of the Vote Compass respondents rated the chance of Greens winning their riding at five or above. If a voter distrusted Wall, held left-wing positions, knew little about Lau and Lamoureux, and felt that the Greens and Liberals had little chance of winning their local riding, it made eminent sense for them to vote for the NDP.

### **Conclusion: Moving to One-Party Dominance?**

Given the analysis above, could Saskatchewan be in a situation of one-party dominance? To answer this question, it is important to define the term “one-party dominance.” One definition that has been applied in Alberta holds that one-party dominance refers to “three interrelated things: relatively infrequent changes of government; the tendency for victorious parties to get relatively high proportions of the popular vote; and the propensity of winning parties to garner a comparatively large portion of legislative seats” (Bell, Jansen, and Young, 2007, 28).

In the 2011 and 2016 provincial elections, the Saskatchewan Party won over 60% of the vote and took approximately 84% of the seats, which is definitely a high proportion of the popular vote and a large portion of legislative seats. However, that is only the results from two elections and whether or not the results of these two elections turn into a “tendency” or “propensity” within Saskatchewan politics remains to be seen. In terms of

“infrequent changes of government”, winning a third straight majority government is not rare in Canadian provincial politics. The length that the party needs to be in power to become a “dominant party” in its jurisdiction is heavily debated in literature on the subject. If one looks at T.J. Pempel’s classic edited collection on “one party dominant regimes” in western democracies, one sees that such polities are characterized by a political party which holds power over three or four decades enabling it to carry out a “historical project, a series of interrelated and mutually supportive public policies that give particular shape to the national political agenda” (1990, 4). The dominant parties discussed in the collection, such as the LDP in Japan or SAP in Sweden, come to define an entire generation of politics in their particular countries. Other researchers have used shorter time periods of uninterrupted governance to define one party dominance. For instance, Abedi and Schneider (2010, 2011), in their research on Canadian provinces, German *Länder*, and Australian states, use the threshold of 20 years as the length of time that party needs to be power uninterrupted to be considered a “dominant party” at the subnational level in these countries. With its win in 2016, the Saskatchewan Party will most likely be in government until about 2020 stretching its time in power to approximately 13 years.

Overall, it is premature to declare that Saskatchewan is now in an era of “one-party dominance” based upon academic definitions of the term. Nonetheless, the potential exists for Saskatchewan to shift towards a one-party predominant system, especially if it wins the next provincial election expected in 2020. What could explain the shift to one-party dominance in Saskatchewan, if it does take place?

The article by Bell, Jansen, and Young referred to above does outline several possible explanations for existence of one-party dominance in Alberta throughout most of

its political history: the uniqueness of the province's political economy, the uninspiring nature of the primary opposition party, and splitting of anti-government votes among several opposition parties (Ibid., 28-30). However, for our purposes, the most intriguing explanation of Alberta's propensity for one-party dominance that is put forth by several scholars is strong leadership (Smith, 1972; McCormick, 1980; Archer, 1992; Pal, 1992; Stewart and Archer, 2000). These scholars stress that one-party dominance in Alberta was driven by voters' long-term and direct attachment to a leader as opposed to a party. To use Stewart and Archer's phrase, there is "almost total conflation of a party with its current leader" (2000, 171). These scholars depict popular Alberta premiers as being able to rise above the political fray and displaying an uncanny ability to consistently confront the issues of the day in a manner congruent with Alberta's political culture.

Following these scholars' assessment of the Alberta case, leadership could be important to understanding if one-party dominance could emerge in Saskatchewan. Similar to Alberta premiers like Ernest Manning, Peter Lougheed, or Ralph Klein, Wall has been able to cultivate a relationship of trust between himself and the voters of his province. The positions of CBC Vote Compass respondents on thirty political issues were less impactful on leaning towards supporting the Saskatchewan Party when taken altogether than just one measurement of how much the respondent trusted Wall.

Where does all of this leave Saskatchewan politics? Ideologically, Saskatchewan is a province that is now difficult to classify. Historically, it was the heartland of Canadian social democracy and the only province where the CCF-NDP could be said to be the natural governing party. More recently, the conservative Saskatchewan Party has dominated provincial politics and the Conservatives under Stephen Harper have taken roughly half of

the popular vote in federal elections since 2006. Yet, a study analyzing the results of three academic surveys done in 2011-2012 characterized Saskatchewan residents as being “very centrist in their political values, while their policy positions depict less consistency” (McGrane and Berdahl, 2015, 95). Given this conflicting evidence, Saskatchewan Party’s future success is not guaranteed because of the emergence of a deeply conservative provincial political culture in Saskatchewan.

In Alberta, the Progressive Conservative dynasty benefitted from a fragmented opposition that split the anti-government vote (Jansen, 2004). Similarly, part of the reason for the electoral dominance of the CCF in Saskatchewan during the postwar era was that the anti-CCF vote was often split three ways between the Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, and Social Credit (McGrane, 2014, 157). At present, the Saskatchewan Party does not face a fragmented opposition like the Alberta PCs or Saskatchewan CCF in their heydays. This situation may allow the NDP, who still receives one third of the popular vote and is the only opposition in the provincial legislature, to make a comeback if the desire for change arises and concentrates around it.

With Wall having exited politics post-2016, an instability has been created in Saskatchewan politics. The Saskatchewan Party has only been in existence since 1999 and it has run only one election, a losing effort in 2003, under a leader other than Wall. The potential for one-party dominance to emerge might be predicated on the ability of new leader Scott Moe to become as popular of a leader as Wall. It may also depend on the Saskatchewan Party being able to be a centrist “catch all” party that ushers in a prolonged era of consensual, as opposed to polarized, Saskatchewan politics. As Maurice Duverger notes, a party is dominant when “it is identified with an epoch, when its doctrines, ideas, methods,

its style, so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch” (1965, 308). The Saskatchewan Party could be able to maintain its electoral success if it can embody a consensus about what defines Saskatchewan provincial politics, even better what defines Saskatchewan. For their part, the opposition parties (in particular, the NDP) have to ensure their leaders can compete with the popularity of the leader of the Saskatchewan Party. Our analysis also suggests that opposition parties could also benefit if Saskatchewan politics turns towards discussing issues that have clear ideological underpinnings. Issue-based politics that bring out the ideological differences among the parties may provide more openings for the opposition. In many ways, the popularity of the party’s leaders and which issues dominate or fade into the background of provincial politics could determine whether Saskatchewan becomes a one-party predominant system or returns to a competitive two-party system.

### **Appendix**

#### *Issues Index*

The following questions were coded on a scale of 1= Many fewer; 2= Somewhat fewer; 3= About the same as now; 4= Somewhat more; 5=Many more; DK= Don’t know.

How many privately-owned liquor stores should there be in Saskatchewan?

How many government services should be outsourced to the private sector?

The following questions were coded on a scale of 1= Much more; 2= Somewhat more; 3= About the same as now; 4= Somewhat less; 5= Much less; DK= Don’t know.

How much funding should Saskatchewan contribute to schools on First Nations reserves?

How much should the Saskatchewan government invest in renewable energy?

How much should the Saskatchewan government spend on low-income housing?

How much should government do to reduce the gap between rich and poor?

How much influence should unions have in Saskatchewan?

How much government regulation should there be on business?

How much tax should corporations pay?

The following questions were coded on a scale of 1= Many lower; 2= Somewhat lower; 3= About the same as now; 4= Somewhat higher; 5=Many higher; DK= Don't know.

How high should the minimum wage be?

The following questions were coded on a scale of 1= Strongly disagree; 2= Somewhat disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Somewhat agree; 5= Strongly agree; DK= Don't know.

The provincial budget deficit should be reduced, even if it means fewer public services.

Class sizes in Saskatchewan schools should be smaller, even if it costs taxpayers more.

Private religious schools in Saskatchewan should not receive government funding.

Public schools in Saskatchewan should only be owned and operated by the government.

Saskatchewan should put a price on carbon.

Environmental regulation inevitably results in job losses.

There should be no restrictions on trade between Saskatchewan and other provinces.

The Saskatchewan government should share its resource revenues with First Nations.

Film production companies should receive special tax breaks in Saskatchewan.

People should be able to pay for faster access to medical treatment.

The government should increase access to healthcare in northern communities, even if it is cheaper to treat these patients in other areas.

In general, services provided to the elderly in long-term care homes are adequate.

All new road infrastructure in Saskatchewan should be funded by the government, not the private sector.

Public schools should start the day with a Christian prayer.

All schools in Saskatchewan should be legally required to permit gay-straight alliance groups.



Companies based in Saskatchewan should be given special preference when bidding for government contracts.

Only residents of Saskatchewan should be allowed to purchase farmland in the province.

Cutting taxes is the best way to create jobs in Saskatchewan.

Public sector workers should not be allowed to strike.

Strip clubs should be legal in Saskatchewan.

### *Leader Evaluations*

The following questions were coded on a scale of 0= Not trustworthy at all likely and 10=Very trustworthy.

How trustworthy do you find Victor Lau?

How trustworthy do you find Brad Wall?

How trustworthy do you find Darrin Lamoureux?

How trustworthy do you find Cam Broten?

The following questions were coded on a scale of 0= Not at all competent and 10=Very competent.

How competent do you find Victor Lau?

How competent do you find Brad Wall?

How competent do you find Darrin Lamoureux?

How competent do you find Cam Broten?

### *Likelihood to Support a Specific Political Party*

The following questions were coded on a scale of 0= Not at all likely and 10=Very likely.

Regardless of the party you intend to vote for in this election, in general how likely are you to support the Green Party of Saskatchewan?

Regardless of the party you intend to vote for in this election, in general how likely are you to support the Saskatchewan Party?

Regardless of the party you intend to vote for in this election, in general how likely are you to support the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan?

Regardless of the party you intend to vote for in this election, in general how likely are you to support the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan?

*Likelihood of Specific Parties Winning in the Respondent's Riding*

The following questions were coded on a scale of 0= Not at all likely and 10=Very likely.

In your opinion, how likely is it that the people in your riding will elect the Green Party of Saskatchewan?

In your opinion, how likely is it that the people in your riding will elect the Saskatchewan Party?

In your opinion, how likely is it that the people in your riding will elect the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan?

In your opinion, how likely is it that the people in your riding will elect the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan?

*Socio-Demographics*

What is your postal code?

Nominal variables coded as 1=Saskatoon, 0=not Saskatoon; 1=Regina, 0= not Regina; reference category is neither Saskatoon nor Regina.

What is your sex?

Nominal variable coded as 1=Female, 0=male.

In which year were you born?

Interval variable coded simply as the age of the person.

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Ordinal variable coded as 1= High school or below, 2= College, 3= Bachelors, 4= Masters and above

Which of the following best describes your combined household income before taxes?

Ordinal variable coded as 1= Under \$50,000, 2=\$50,000 to \$80,000, 4=\$110,000 to \$150,000, 5=above \$150,000.

What is your religion?

Nominal variables coded as 1=Catholic, 0=Not Catholic; 1=Protestant, 0=Not Protestant; 1=Other religion, 0=not other religion; reference category is no religion.

**OLS Regression for Likelihood to Support Saskatchewan Party and NDP in 2016 Saskatchewan Provincial Election (Graphs 1 and 2)**

	Support for Sask Party B (SE)	Support for NDP B (SE)
Gender	0.015*** (0.0349)	-0.012* (0.0375)
Age	-0.037*** (0.00118)	-0.026*** (0.00127)
Education	-0.023*** (0.0175)	0.018*** (0.0188)
Income	0.008 (0.0111)	-0.001 (0.0120)
Catholic	0.006 (0.0443)	-0.003 (0.0476)
Protestant	0.005 (0.0414)	-0.001 (0.0445)
Other Religion	-0.006 (0.0817)	-0.011* (0.0879)
Saskatoon	0.002 (0.0407)	-0.03 (0.0438)
Regina	-0.004 (0.0419)	-0.001 (0.0450)
Wall trust rating	0.511*** (0.0110)	-0.292*** (0.0118)
Wall competent rating	0.129*** (0.0111)	-0.023** (0.0119)
Broten trust rating	-0.106*** (0.0125)	0.281*** (0.0134)
Broten competent rating	-0.010 (0.0129)	0.133*** (0.0139)

Sask Party win likelihood	0.041*** (0.00782)	0.060*** (0.00840)
NDP win likelihood	0.003 (0.00809)	0.120*** (0.00870)
Day survey taken	-0.017*** (0.00248)	-0.009* (0.00267)
Ideology index	-0.216*** (0.0405)	0.232*** (0.0436)
Constant	6.703*** (0.181)	-1.576*** (0.194)
Observations	11,444	11,444
R-squared	0.817	0.759

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**OLS Regression for Likelihood to Support Green Party and Liberals in 2016 Saskatchewan Provincial Election (Graphs 3 and 4)**

	Support for Greens B (SE)	Support for Liberals B (SE)
Female	-0.004 (0.0612)	-0.006 (0.0589)
Age	-0.079*** (0.00204)	-0.088*** (0.00197)
Education	0.040*** (0.0296)	0.025** (0.0285)
Income	-0.049*** (0.0189)	-0.010 (0.0182)
Catholic	-0.047*** (0.0733)	-0.011 (0.0704)

Protestant	-0.043*** (0.0696)	0.0006 (0.0671)
Other Religion	0.012 (0.134)	-0.003 (0.130)
Saskatoon	-0.007 (0.0700)	0.008 (0.0673)
Regina	-0.030** (0.0699)	0.016 (0.0673)
Lau trust rating	0.182*** (0.0183)	-0.013 (0.0175)
Lau competent rating	0.268*** (0.0207)	-0.054** (0.0199)
Lamoureux trust rating	-0.013 (0.0210)	0.311*** (0.0202)
Lamoureux competent rating	-0.034 (0.0228)	0.270*** (0.0219)
Wall trust rating	-0.160*** (0.0145)	-0.228*** (0.0139)
Wall competent rating	-0.017 (0.0109)	-0.007 (0.0105)
Brotten trust rating	-0.023 (0.0220)	-0.063** (0.0211)
Brotten competent rating	-0.125*** (0.0225)	-0.072** (0.0216)
Sask Party win likelihood	0.076*** (0.0129)	0.034*** (0.0124)
NDP win likelihood	0.006 (0.0134)	-0.009 (0.0129)
Green win likelihood	0.209*** (0.0205)	0.004 (0.0198)
Liberal win likelihood	0.019	0.228***

	(0.0160)	(0.0154)
Day survey taken	-0.008	0.014
	(0.00422)	(0.00406)
Issues index	0.228***	0.065***
	(0.0674)	(0.0648)
Constant	-1.071***	1.113***
	(0.300)	(0.288)
Observations	6,163	6,166
R-squared	0.459	0.524

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

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