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The New Blues: Determining Significant Factors in Right-Wing Populist Support Among Young Canadians

Lara Choy

Abstract: The recent popularity of figures such as Pierre Poilievre and events such as the Ottawa “Freedom Convoy” demonstrate the rise of right-wing populism among young Canadian voters. Through a mixed-methods approach with thematic analysis, this study attempted to determine the most significant factors contributing to right-wing populist support in this demographic. The survey of 56 self-identified conservative Canadian university students and Reddit users aged 18–35 found that right-wing populist support was predicated on three factors: economic uncertainty, with unsustainably high cost of living and mismanaged fiscal policies; distrust in government, with negative perceptions of institutions, including the media; and cultural conflict, with backlash against “woke” ideas and “non-traditional” values. The themes point to disillusionment with Canada’s current economic, political, and social environment, and a desire for the alternative messaging often found in right-wing populism. The findings contain significant implications regarding current and upcoming Canadian voter behaviour and the effects of populist worldviews.

Keywords: Canadian youth, political ideology, right-wing populism, thematic analysis, voting behaviour

Context

Conventional wisdom states that young voters lean liberal, and Canada is immune to the wave of right-wing populist political leaders sweeping the globe (Budd, 2021). While there may be a kernel of truth in each assertion, neither one reveals the whole story. The 21st century has seen the rise of “radical right” political parties and leaders that often harness populist strategies to mobilize voters (Rydgren, 2007). Right-wing populism is typically defined as a political worldview that advances conservative political positions—fiscal, social, or both—by advocating for the “common person” and against the “established elite”

(Rydgren, 2007). While right-wing populism is associated with concepts such as economic protectionism, nativism, and anti-globalization, it is far from a united belief system (Spruyt et al., 2016). Instead, it most often provides an outlet for discontented voters’ grievances, with certain demographics correlating to right-wing populist support: those with lower perceived socioeconomic mobility, lower educational attainment, and higher identification with political signifiers as a core facet of identity (Spruyt et al., 2016). However, the specific factors and grievances that motivate right-wing populist beliefs vary greatly depending on voter location and demographics, and thus cannot be grouped into a single “box” (Spruyt et al., 2016). After an overview of recent political and

historical context, this paper will investigate the primary factors motivating right-wing populist belief among young Canadian voters.

Literature Review

Right-Wing Populism in Canada

While Canadians are stereotyped as more politically liberal than their peers in the United States, national research on political ideology indicates that this is only partially correct (Budd, 2021). The factor analysis models of Cochrane (2010) show greater fragmentation in the political beliefs of right-wing Canadian voters compared with a relatively unified ideological environment on the left. Traditional conservative-leaning Canadian political campaigns placed greater emphasis on fiscal beliefs, such as tax reduction and free-market capitalism, in comparison to social and cultural matters (Cochrane, 2010). Budd's explanatory case study of Doug Ford's 2018 successful campaign for premier of Ontario, under the populist slogan "For I People," demonstrates how Canadian populists have often concentrated on working-class "money matters" (2020). This form of populism emphasizes anti-elitist concerns through the language of economics, rather than ethnic or cultural identity (Budd, 2020). In Canada's single-member plurality electoral system, it becomes necessary for any "legitimate" party to attract a diverse electorate. Budd defines this phenomenon as the "populist paradox" and as another explanation as to why Canada is often perceived as immune to the effects of right-wing populism—on the campaign trail, politicians must present "extreme" policy plans in a moderate matter, even if they plan to enact them once in office (Budd, 2021). One notable exception was Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada (PPC) in the 2019 federal election, which was also investigated by Budd in a 2021 case study. While certain facets of the Conservative Party united standard right-wing policy positions (i.e., the free market) with populist strategies, the PPC took its more radical cues from anti-immigration and economic nationalist leaders in other countries (Budd, 2021). Thus, their beliefs may be connected, but not homogeneous, further supporting the idea of right-wing populism as a framework or signifier. While right-wing parties in Canada

often emphasize the "common person" in electoral campaigns, the mainstreaming of so-called "radical" populist sentiments is a relatively new development (Budd, 2021). Right-wing populism itself is often not considered a singular ideology (Erl, 2021); instead, it has been proposed to be a "thin" political worldview that can be attached to a range of more substantial "thick" policy positions in order to attract a more diverse electorate (Erl, 2021). This creates a more nuanced understanding of the "right-wing populist" label beyond a convenient grouping of recent Canadian political phenomena.

The 2019 Federal Election & COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada

Many Canadian political commentators agreed that the October 2019 federal election was marked by widespread voter apathy, resulting in a slim minority government for the incumbent Liberals (Waddell, 2022). Voters seemed neutral about Canada's short-term economic outlook, but notably pessimistic about the state of society. In early 2019, 54% of Nanos opinion poll respondents agreed that future generations of Canadians would encounter a "worse standard of living" than Canadians in the present (Nanos, 2020). The one-month-long electoral campaign was "thin" on policy matters and "thick" on more abstract battles, exemplary of Erl's thesis (2021). Events such as stalled negotiations on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement or refugees seeking asylum in Canada fuelled debate about economic anxiety and identity politics both in person and on social media (Nanos, 2020). Walsh's (2022) thematic analysis of migration discourse among Canadian Twitter users during the 2019 election campaign builds upon Nanos' findings. Although some users expressed positive sentiments about refugees as a boon to the country's diversity, the majority of collected tweets linked asylum seekers to claims of a border security crisis and the loss of a collective Canadian identity, with clear attempts to return nativism to the Canadian political landscape, reminiscent of Bernier's sentiments (Walsh, 2022). Although the ideological focus seems to contrast earlier claims about Canadian populism's more economic concerns, the social aspect seems firmly rooted in many Canadian conceptions of populism. The latter category of tweets received greater engagement than more posi-

tive posts, which could speak to negative shifts in the media landscape from which many Canadian voters get their daily news (Walsh, 2022). Moreover, the Canadian news media played a dynamic role in the 2019 federal election campaign, both in what it did and did not report. While Canadian voters' tweets focused on "kitchen-sink" matters such as taxes and healthcare, journalists' relative issue emphasis concerned "ethics" and "foreign affairs," issues that may seem more abstract to the median voter (Waddell, 2022). Thus, the gap between the concerns of "everyday people" and "elites" in the mainstream media reporting the 2019 campaign could exacerbate conditions for resentment and push citizens toward partisan, possibly unreliable sources.

Less than six months after that indifferent federal election, the COVID-19 pandemic would overturn many voters' political priorities or intensify previously held sentiments. While the body of research is evolving, some sources agree that the pandemic emphasized division, often between populist conceptions of the "people" and the "elite." An inductive content analysis of opinion columns in right-wing Canadian newspapers during the early pandemic (March to May 2020) found pervasive criticism of Trudeau's "weak" leadership united the columnists, as well as support for economic protectionism (Van den Brink & Boily, 2022). These sentiments seemed to grow more extreme as it became clear that the pandemic would cause lasting fissures. Another manifestation of far-right grievances, more in line with Bernier than the mainstream Conservative Party, was the national "trucker convoy" on Parliament Hill in early 2022. Initially formed to protest COVID-19 vaccine mandates, the protestors expanded to populist concerns such as working-class economic insecurity and viewed the state in direct opposition to their beliefs (Maclaren, 2022). While it remains to be seen whether recent events will contribute to the mainstreaming of right-wing populist sentiments in Canada, precedent demonstrates how geographic context shapes political grievances.

Novelty of Study: New Blue Wave?

Despite the growing body of research on populism in Canada, few studies have focused on the dimension of youth. While young Canadian voters may be expected to vote for the Liberal or New Democratic Party (NDP), it was younger Conservative Party voters who propelled oft-described populist Pierre Poilievre

to victory in the party's September 2022 leadership race (Routley, 2022). The youth dimension could further fragment right-wing populist sentiments, as numerous studies have found that the political views of young people are often plural and contradictory (Pollock et al., 2015). They tend to be less ideological and more motivated by their geographical context, family backgrounds, and media consumption habits (Pollock et al., 2015). In the age of social media, political rhetoric and messaging have become more important than ever. Following and posting right-wing populist sentiments on social media platforms was often motivated by "emotionalized blame attribution" (Heiss & Mathes, 2017). Polievre's social media presence, often in the form of emotionally charged and issue-specific videos, was considered a major factor in his Conservative leadership victory (Routley, 2022). Conservative student associations are present on most Canadian university campuses, which in right-wing media, are often pitched as the breeding ground for "elitists" and the "culture wars." Through semi-structured interviews with self-identified conservative American university students, Binder and Wood (2013) found that students' expression of right-wing beliefs varied significantly from campus to campus, perhaps taking a more or less populist approach depending on their environment. As demonstrated by earlier studies of right-wing populism, conservative students and young Canadian voters as a whole do not share identical motivations or approaches to promoting conservatism on campus. However, these specific motivations have not been studied in any real detail.

This investigation has led to the research question "what are the most significant factors contributing to right-wing populist political support among Canadians aged 18–35?" For better or for worse, right-wing populism is increasingly relevant in Canadian politics. Doug Ford and Pierre Poilievre may be controversial, but they dominate national news headlines and attract supporters on social media and at the polling station. As Generation Z Canadians (born approximately 1995–2010) become eligible to participate in elections and eventually comprise a plurality of the voting population, a shift toward right-wing populist sentiments and worldviews presents significant, and so far, understudied, implications for Canada's political future (Ibbitson, 2021). Thus, this paper intends to survey young Canadians who identify with right-wing

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populist beliefs as a means of gaining insight into current and upcoming Canadian voter behaviour.

Method

One of the key findings from the literature review was the pluralism of populist belief; in other words, support was not solely predicated on singular political issues or figures (Budd, 2021). In order to effectively answer the research question, the research methodology had to consider broader theoretical and worldview-based factors as well as “concrete” matters. A mixed methods approach could collect quantitative measurements and qualitative textual evidence about young Canadian voters’ sentiments while accommodating as many potential factors as possible (Palinkas et al., 2016).

“New Blues” Online Survey

Data collection was facilitated through the use of a Google Form survey, chosen for its user-friendly interface and respondent anonymity. The survey population, Canadian citizens aged 18–35 who identified with right-wing populist sentiments, was targeted through purposive sampling. This method of outreach allowed the researcher to contact specific communities in alignment with the aforementioned demographic, and conduct research efficiently and without

direct contact with the participants, preserving confidentiality (Palinkas et al., 2016). Within the demographic, two primary groups were identified for purposive sampling: post-secondary students, inspired by the findings of Binder and Wood (2013), and Reddit users. Although right-wing populist sentiments are disseminated across a range of social media platforms, Reddit was specifically chosen due to its expansive character limit, which attracts more discussion-based discourse, and “subreddit” structure, which facilitates relevant data collection (Proferes et al., 2021). After a web search of conservative campus groups at major Canadian universities, twenty such groups were emailed a link to the survey. A similar Reddit search was conducted to identify six conservative-leaning subreddits focused on Canadian political issues. Subsequently, participants could fill out the survey using a link provided in a Reddit post.

The first part of the Google Form survey consisted of 15 Likert-scaled statements that evaluated the respondent’s political attitudes and populist worldviews (Table 1). The response options ranged from “5 - I strongly agree” to “1 - I strongly disagree,” though participants could also choose not to respond. Many of the statements were based on the MYPLACE questionnaire, which was used to survey citizens of the European Union about their political participation

Table 1
Open-ended prompts for the second part of the online survey

Prompt
How do you think your political views compare with those of your family, friends, and community?
How have your political views evolved over time and what events or experiences have influenced your perspective?
What specific issues or concerns are most important to you and how do you hope politicians will address them?
How do you evaluate political candidates or parties, and what qualities do you look for in a political leader?
What is your understanding of the term “right-wing populism,” if you are previously familiar, and what political positions or figures might you associate with it?
If there is anything significant you would like to share or comment upon, this is an open space.

(Pollock, Brock & Ellison, 2015). The statements were designed to be as neutral as possible to combat perceptions of partisanship on the part of the researcher and social desirability bias on the part of the respondents (Gittelman et al., 2015).

In the second part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to the following neutrally-worded open-ended prompts:

This section allowed respondents to elaborate on previous responses and add insights into factors and aspects of political worldview not considered by the survey.

Data Analysis & Triangulation

The quantitative results from the five-point Likert-scaled questions in the first part of the survey generated descriptive statistics. A frequency distribution of descriptive statistics, namely mean response and standard deviation, visually represented statements that attracted varying levels of agreement and polarization.

To analyze the open-ended responses in the second part of the survey, a qualitative thematic analysis approach was selected. Braun and Clarke (2012) note that thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for research questions that examine the factors underpinning a specific phenomenon. Moreover, the qualitative approach was partially inspired by the work of Van den Brink and Boily's analysis of common themes among Canadian right-wing opinion columnists' coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021). Their inductive method of textual analysis, based upon broad politically focused questions as opposed to more solidified hypotheses, also made sense in the context of this research study.

To begin, following Braun and Clarke's recommended procedure, all written responses were pooled into a single document. After each response was read and illuminating words or phrases were identified, initial codes were generated. The codes were grouped into broad colour-coded themes. After re-reading and identification of emergent codes on three separate occasions, themes were deleted and revised as necessary. The common themes identified through analysis corresponded to factors, addressing the research question about most significant factors in support for right-wing populism, in the data, as well uncov-

ering as any divergent perspectives or opinions. This iterative multi-step process systematically coded the qualitative data into a set of distinctive and coherent themes that, together, told a story in response to the question, with strong evidence both paraphrased and directly quoted.

After uncovering recurrent themes, the results between the qualitative and quantitative portions of the data analysis were compared to determine how findings might support and contradict each other. This triangulation of mixed methods provided confirmation and cross-validation between two parts of the survey, reducing researcher bias (Olsen, 2004). Pure numerical or pure textual data might exclude critical findings or evidence, while combining the two allowed for deeper insight and a new understanding of the underlying factors in right-wing populist support (Olsen, 2004). The approach was fairly novel in that few other populist research studies have attempted to combine two such different approaches; though, based on model studies, frequency distributions and textual coding are both accepted methods in political science research (Spruyt, Keppens & van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Van den Brink & Boily, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

As political affiliation and beliefs can be a sensitive topic for even politically engaged citizens, respondent confidentiality was a key concern throughout the data collection process. The survey did not collect any form of contact information, though some respondents opted to include their email addresses in order to receive the research results at a later date; this had no bearing on data analysis procedures, which did not consider names or details about the respondents.

Before participating in the survey, potential respondents were required to virtually sign a consent form that outlined the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and open communication. The consent form also contained contact information that allowed the researcher to promptly respond to any questions or concerns from potential respondents. Information from the consent form was reiterated throughout emails and Reddit posts. The research design received approval from the Internal Ethics Review Board at the researcher's institution.

Findings

The survey received 56 responses, ten of which completed the scaled questions but not the open responses. This left a total of 56 response sets for quantitative analysis and 46 response sets for qualitative coding.

Table 2 depicts the frequency of scaled responses for each quantitative survey question. Also included are the mean levels of agreement and standard deviation. As not every respondent answered every question, the individual number of responses do not always equal 56.

Table 2

Frequency distribution of responses to Likert-scaled questions (rounded to two decimal places)

Statement	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Most politicians have ignored the issues that are important to me.	55	4.07	1.12	47.27%	30.91%	9.09%	9.09%	3.64%
The current political elite are out of touch with the concerns of everyday people.	56	4.41	1.05	66.07%	21.43%	3.57%	5.36%	3.57%
“Establishment” politicians should step aside in favour of political “outsiders.”	55	3.31	1.23	23.64%	16.36%	36.36%	14.55%	9.09%
The federal government has mishandled the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.	56	4.23	1.18	60.71%	19.64%	5.36%	10.71%	3.57%
“Political correctness” and “cancel culture” have negatively affected today’s society.	55	4.47	0.89	65.45%	21.82%	9.09%	1.82%	1.82%
The media is not giving a fair representation of political/social issues that matter to me.	55	4.16	1.28	58.18%	21.82%	1.82%	12.73%	5.45%
The current political system is failing to protect Canada’s traditional values and culture.	54	4.15	1.20	51.85%	29.63%	7.41%	3.7%	7.41%
Canada’s current economic, political and social systems are harming the working class.	56	4.34	0.95	55.36%	32.14%	5.36%	5.36%	1.79%
The state should have a limited role in citizen’s lives and promote individualism.	56	3.95	1.17	42.86%	25%	21.43%	5.36%	5.36%
The government should institute further restrictions on immigration.	56	4.14	1	51.79%	21.43%	17.86%	7.14%	1.79%
The government should take a tougher stance on crime and national security.	56	4.18	1.09	50.00%	26.79%	12.5%	5.36%	5.36%
The government should implement protectionist policies to benefit domestic workers.	55	3.62	1.22	29.09%	32.72%	14.55%	18.18%	5.45%
The government should prioritize native-born interests over special interest groups.	56	3.48	1.35	32.14%	23.21%	17.86%	14.29%	12.5%
There is little space for people like me in today’s political environment.	56	3.89	1.27	44.64%	26.79%	8.93%	12.5%	7.14%
The country of Canada feels like it is on the decline.	56	4.34	1.11	60.71%	26.79%	5.36%	0%	7.14%

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Table 3

Definitions of themes from open-ended responses

Theme	Definition
Economic Uncertainty	Participants expressed anxiety about the state of Canada's economy on a personal and nation-wide scale, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Codes included concerns about the cost of living, perceptions of the middle class being "squeezed out," and negative attitudes toward government intervention.
Distrust in Politics	Participants shared their perceptions of political parties and associated institutions as corrupt, untrustworthy, and compliant to the demands of the elite. Codes included skepticism of politicians' motivations, suspicion of media shaping political narratives, and calls for greater transparency.
Cultural Conflict	Participants demonstrated their opposition to socially liberal principles and policy positions. Codes included resentment toward "woke" culture, frustration with "us vs. them" mentalities, and desire for protection of "traditional values."

Table 3 reveals three primary themes found through the qualitative coding process, along with definitions, subthemes, and indicators. Collated from 46 sets of open-ended responses to the aforementioned five questions, the themes are inherently broad.

Discussion

The recurring themes, supported by triangulated quantitative and qualitative evidence, can be considered "factors" motivating young Canadians' support for right-wing populism.

Economic Uncertainty

Under the first umbrella theme, participants expressed concerns about cost of living, perceptions of a squeezed out "middle class," and skepticism about government intervention in the economy. Inflation and the rising cost of everyday expenses emerged as a prominent concern, affecting respondents' access to housing and other necessities. Respondent #7 noted that they "should not have to [cohabitate] with six other people in order to make ends [meet] as a business owner"; similarly, Respondent #16 felt that "the housing shortage is the biggest indicator of an [unsustainable] economy." Such concerns reflected a population of working-class and middle-class individuals concentrated in urban areas. Speaking to a belief that

"everyday" citizens bear a disproportionate economic burden, Respondent #8 wrote that "always the middle class will contribute more than they receive from the government." One topic where opinions notably diverged was immigration, with the statement "the government should prioritize native-born interests over special interest groups" reporting high polarization with a mean agreement of 3.48 and standard deviation of 1.35 (Table 2). This was mostly in the context of economic challenges, as a few responses expressed concern that increased immigration would increase competition for resources and job opportunities. In alignment with the findings of Budd (2020), it seems that right-wing populist supporters in Canada express less uniformly nativist sentiments compared with their international counterparts. Moreover, the textual data within this theme is linked to the widespread belief that the current economic system, or at least, the government's fiscal approach, creates divides between the "haves" and the "have-nots," which are then perpetuated by the political system in a vicious cycle. A few respondents singled out their opposition to the Liberal government's spending during the pandemic, which was perceived as overzealous and inefficient, as well as its more Keynesian economic vision. In line with traditional conservative ideologies, respondents generally expressed support for free markets and minimal government intervention. In the words of Respondent #39, "free economies are the most efficient thing we've created (everyone voting with their dollar in real time) and how a select group of suits believe

they know better astounds me,” illustrating a common sentiment that Canada’s political system contributes to inadequate economic opportunities for everyday citizens. The theme as a whole demonstrates voters’ more day-to-day opinions about how the government is not doing enough or taking the wrong approach to address their concerns, sowing the seeds of mistrust.

Distrust in Politics

In the second theme, participants generally expressed pessimism toward politicians’ character, suspicion of the media shaping political narratives, and calls for increased transparency. In the quantitative section of the survey, the statements “most politicians have ignored the issues that are important to me” and “the current political elite are out of touch with the concerns of everyday people” earned some of the highest levels of agreement, at 77.36% and 87.03%, respectively (Table 2). Later in the survey, many respondents claimed to be disillusioned former left-wing voters who found that mainstream parties were out of touch with everyday voters and were driven to seek alternatives, namely right-wing populist figures such as Poilievre or Bernier. While the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party were both cast in a negative light, overarching justifications behind respondents’ distrust differed. The former party, which has governed the country since 2015, was perceived to act complacently and perpetuate “constant buzzwords and media hegemony,” according to Respondent #45. Conversely, the more politically progressive NDP was often initially viewed as more representative of the working class, with its occasional left-wing populist approach, but ultimately falling in line with the more centre-left positions of the federal Liberals. Thus, the shift toward conservative parties seemed to be more motivated by rejection of “mainstream” Canadian politics than any particular affinity for their politicians; more right-leaning groups emerged as the “best” alternative among many “bad” options, which seemed to exacerbate cynical feelings around the political process. Respondent #2 claimed that all politicians are “liars” and “crooks” and “[they] would just vote for the [liar or crook] that represents [their] interests,” as opposed to the interests of the “elite.” At the same time, respondents expressed relative neutrality to the statement “establishment’ politicians should step

aside in favour of political ‘outsiders,’” with a mean agreement of 3.31 (Table 2); this could explain why even right-wing populist voters may be more inclined to vote for a “safer” option like Poilievre, still affiliated with the federal opposition Conservative Party, as opposed to a more “niche” figure such as Bernier. Outside of the legislative and executive branches, the news media was frequently criticized as a mouthpiece for the establishment’s political agenda. A quote such as “media in Canada is often not reporting on things that affect [everyday] people” from Respondent #17 suggests that mainstream media outlets such as CBC and CTV are seen as dishonest, or even working to cover up certain “inconvenient truths,” in the words of Respondent #26, to perpetuate the rhetoric of certain parties or politicians. This perceived bias led some respondents to seek out “alternative” media sources, which are frequent disseminators of right-wing populist positions and “emotionalized blame attribution” (Heiss & Mathes, 2017). When asked what they did want to see in a government, respondents commonly cited greater openness and transparency about political matters as important matters. Such sentiments suggest a desire for less perceived corruption, as an antidote to the dishonesty observed in many politicians’ behaviour and policies, as well as more active participation in the political process, which was often perceived by respondents as unreachable to the ordinary citizen. At the same time, respondents did not seem optimistic that this could actually occur, or that their interests would one day be properly represented in the government or media.

Cultural Conflict

The final theme of “cultural conflict” was expressed through frustration with us vs. them mentalities, resentment toward “woke” culture, and desires to protect “traditional” values. The textual data revealed frequent opposition to the perceived division in Canadian political life, in which people felt like they were forced to pick a side in certain contentious issues and stick to it without any space for growth or discourse. Expanding on this, Respondent #35 noted how “social media bubbles” insulate users from other viewpoints and “normalize more extreme positions” in an ideologically polarized environment. Such results connect back to the previous theme, distrust in

traditional media, as well as a tendency to dismiss any views that do not align with one's own. Perhaps right-wing populism seems like an appealing escape from mainstream debates; on the other hand, many other responses expressed open hostility toward liberal policies and supporters. A watershed moment in this "culture war" seemed to be the COVID-19 pandemic, as the perceived rise in "woke" politics and so-called restrictions on civil liberties, such as vaccination and mask mandates, led many respondents to look toward right-wing alternatives. On the whole, "wokeness" and political correctness were viewed as the narrative of the ruling class, used to impose a type of hierarchy on ordinary Canadians; 87.27% of respondents felt that such ideas had a negative effect on modern society, with the highest mean agreement level of any statement at 4.47 (Table 2). Some respondents felt that they had to self-censor themselves or like Respondent #18, "mask their true feelings to work in a white-collar field," for fear of ostracization from liberal colleagues and peers. Conversely, this zeitgeist emboldened certain respondents to become more open about their conservative leanings; for instance, Respondent #39 expressed that their beliefs were considered more right-wing than in reality because they "dare[d] to question the group think," yet felt a responsibility to shield others from "liberal propaganda." Moreover, while 81.48% of respondents agreed with the statement that "the current political system is failing to protect Canada's traditional values and culture," the specific values and cultural elements were not immediately clear, though clearly linked to right-wing support (Table 2). Quotes such as that of Respondent #46, which opposes the adoption of "some globalized homogenized corporate culture," allude to an undercurrent of nativism and the belief that right-wing populism can safeguard Canada against external cultural threats. Overall, these sentiments indicate that right-wing populist support is not strictly a political phenomenon, as there are strong cultural motivators that are perhaps overlooked in current research on populist belief.

Limitations

Despite clear patterns and themes in the data, certain limitations and possible confounding factors in

the research study should be considered before arriving at conclusions.

First, the sample population consisted exclusively of university students and Reddit users, which likely skewed overly educated and active online as compared with the general population. In the case of the latter group, Reddit, particularly conservative-leaning and politically focused subreddits, draws a disproportionately white, male, and middle-class audience, which aligns with the backgrounds mentioned in many open-ended responses (Proferes et al., 2021). Since the questionnaire did not collect voter intention or any demographic information, it is impossible to determine the gender, racial, socioeconomic, geographic, or ideological diversity of respondents. Thus, the findings may not provide an accurate, representative, or generalizable picture of young Canadian voters who identify with right-wing populist beliefs.

Second, there is a subjective understanding of right-wing populism, which again, is a "thin" worldview that can encompass a wide range of specific beliefs and attitudes (Erl, 2021). Participation in the research study, though targeted through purposive sampling, was based on self-identification with right-wing populist viewpoints or figures, rather than a set of criteria. Moreover, it is possible that the politically charged connotations of the term "right-wing populism" deterred potential respondents or fuelled some of the negative sentiments expressed in the responses.

Third, despite attempts to word survey questions neutrally as possible, a few comments on the Reddit posts and free-response space raised concerns about the study's potential bias and affiliation with government operations such as CSIS, Statistics Canada. While these concerns may reflect the potential participants' suspicious outlooks, it was valuable to consider such perspectives within the scope of the research study.

Conclusion

In response to the research question, this study identified three significant factors contributing to right-wing populist support among Canadians aged 18–35: economic uncertainty, distrust in politics, and cultural conflict. These findings are not meant to overgeneralize people's experiences, as right-wing

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populist support remains highly specific to one's environment and lived experience. Overall, though, these interconnected themes shed light on a growing sense of pessimism and disillusionment with Canada's existing economic, political, and social contexts. This, in turn, seems to increase young voters' receptiveness to right-wing populist messaging that promises to put ordinary people's interests first.

In the future, as younger voters make up a greater share of the electorate, Canada could see right-wing populist politicians and viewpoints rise to the mainstream. Furthermore, as many young people feel that their concerns are not being properly addressed, this opens the door for decreased, or alternative, political participation. Mixed opinions on certain issues, notably immigration, allude to complex divides within Canadian society, with the suggestion of a growing backlash against liberal or progressive social norms. Altogether, this raises questions about how inclusive and representative Canadian politics really is. Parties and politicians could use these findings to enact certain policies or capitalize off of negative sentiments about the future direction of the country.

Considering the inherent limitations of the project, further research could replicate the research methodology with a larger and more representative sample population. More specifically, the methods could be used to compare young Canadians' right-wing populist attitudes across geographic regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural groups.

The topic of right-wing populist worldviews among young Canadians opens many relevant pathways for future investigation. As social media, namely platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, remains the primary means of disseminating right-wing populist sentiments to young people, researchers should study the strategies used by such groups, specifically in Canada, to promote their ideologies. Furthermore, the effects of exposure to these messages on individuals' political attitudes is another critical topic. Left-wing populism, on the other side of the political spectrum, often addresses a variety of concerns relevant to Canadian youth; these include economic inequality, social justice, and hostility toward centrist and conservative establishment institutions. While it has not received the same attention as its right-wing counterpart, its integration of "anti-elitism" with more liberal ideologies is apparent in many left-wing party platforms.

Using similar data collection and analysis methods, future research should consider investigating the factors affecting the development of left-wing populist worldviews among young Canadian voters. Further examination into the dynamic between left- and right-wing populist movements in Canada could be key to the body of research on populism and political worldviews. The ways in which these movements take advantage of a politically charged environment, interact on social media, compete for voters, and co-opt each other's messaging could present significant implications for political discourse in the coming years.

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Appendix

Right-Wing Populism Questionnaire

Part A: Scaled Questions

To begin, you have been asked to rate your agreement with the following fifteen statements on a scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

Response Options: “strongly agree” (5), “agree” (4), “neither agree nor disagree” (3), “disagree” (2), “strongly disagree” (1), “don’t know/don’t want to respond”

Most politicians have ignored the issues that are important to me.

The current political elite are out of touch with the concerns of everyday people.

“Establishment” politicians should step aside in favour of political “outsiders.”

The federal government has mishandled the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Political correctness” and “cancel culture” have negatively affected today’s society.

The media is not giving a fair representation of the political and social issues that matter to me.

The current political system is failing to protect Canada’s traditional values and culture.

Canada’s current economic, political and social systems are harming the working class.

The state should have a limited role in citizen’s lives and promote individual responsibility.

The government should institute further restrictions on immigration.

The government should take a tougher stance on crime and national security.

The government should implement protectionist economic policies to benefit domestic industries and workers.

The government should prioritize the interests of the native-born population over those of immigrants, minorities, and special interest groups.

There is little space for people like me in today’s political environment.

The country of Canada feels like it is on the decline.

Part B: Open-Ended Questions

Next, you have been given unlimited space to respond to the following prompts. Your answers should be specific and detailed, but do not need to be in full sentences. If there is anything else you would like to contribute but have not had the opportunity to share, please include it in the final question. Thank you for your participation!

How do you think your political views compare with those of your family, friends, and community?

How have your political views evolved over time and what events or experiences have influenced your perspective?

What specific issues or concerns are most important to you and how do you hope politicians will address them?

How do you evaluate political candidates or parties, and what qualities do you look for in a political leader?

What is your understanding of the term “right-wing populism,” if you are previously familiar, and what political positions or figures might you associate with it?

If there is anything significant you would like to share or comment upon, this is an open space.