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The 2035 Initiative

Post-Election Polling Report British Columbia 2024 Provincial Election

*Professor Matto Mildenberger
Gabriel De Roche, Ph.D.*

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SUMMARY

We conducted a post-mortem assessment of the role that climate change played in the October 2024 BC provincial election, using an original survey of BC voters (n=1099). We find that issues related to the cost-of-living were top-of-mind for BC voters, and find no evidence that the issue of climate change, or the costs of climate policy, played a role in determining vote choice.

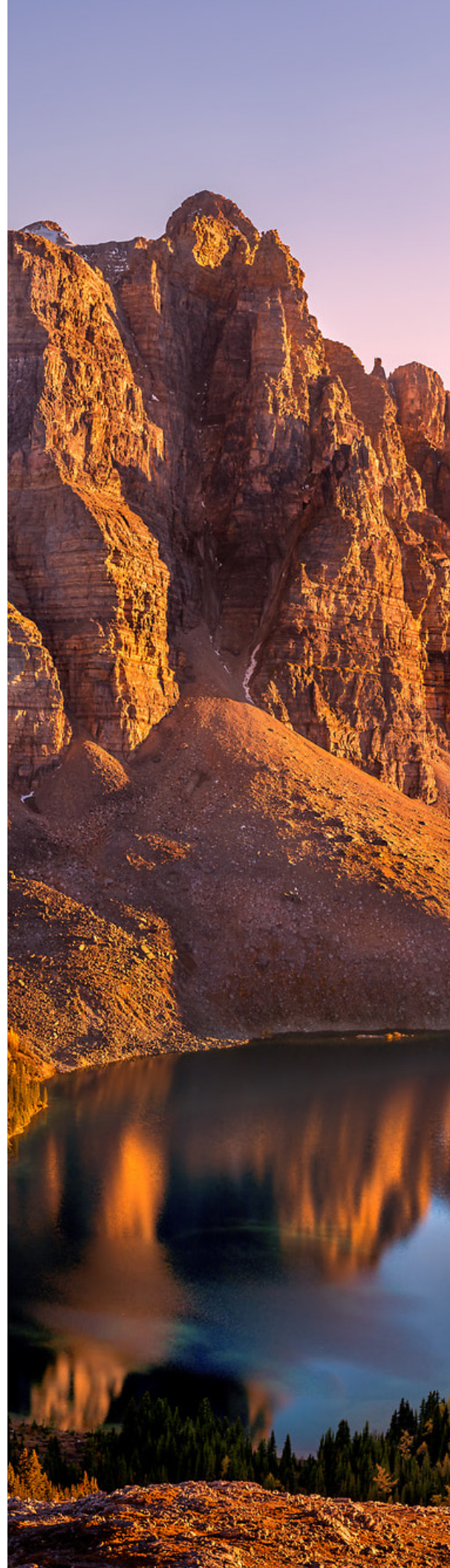
Even if climate change was not top-of-mind, we find that, all else equal, the BC public prefers parties and politicians who take climate change seriously. This is true across supporters of all parties, as well as among non-voters. A strong majority across all parties—at least 7-in-10 British Columbians—want the BC government to make addressing climate change a very high, high, or medium priority.

In other words, even if climate change did not determine the election, voters still want their government to make climate change a policy priority.

The average BC voter, including those who voted Conservative, prefers a provincial government that maintains the carbon tax on large polluters. Voters also support election commitments to boost renewable energy and expand household electrification.

We found no evidence that downplaying the seriousness of climate change paid a political dividend for the Conservatives. The position had no rallying effect on Conservative voter preferences, while it significantly repelled all other BC voters.

Our results suggest that climate action can boost support for provincial political actors without triggering backlash. The climate agenda articulated by the current government in its election platform remains more popular than the other policy alternatives advanced during the election.



RESULTS

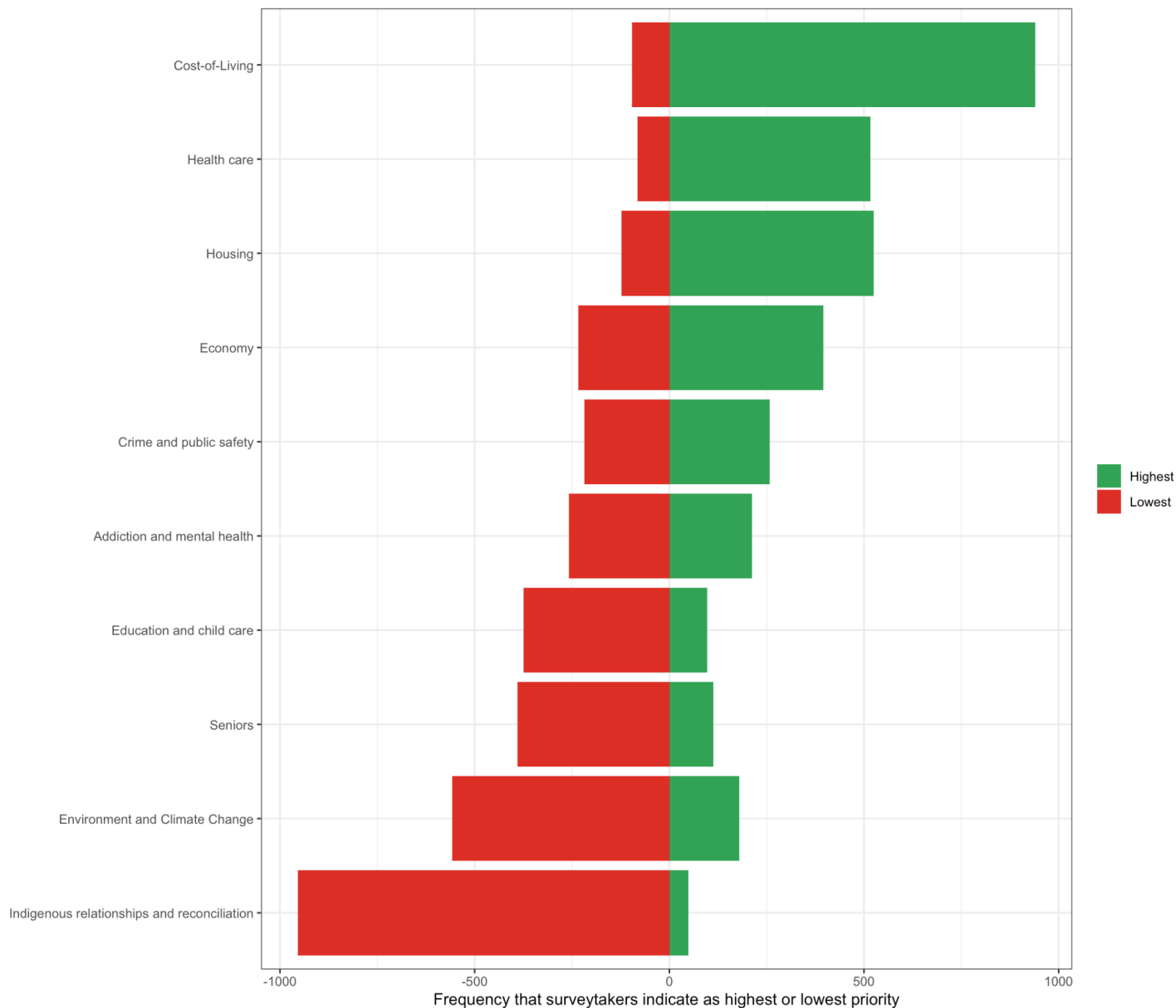
2.1. The most important issues: climate was low-salience

The 2024 provincial election was widely seen as a “cost-of-living” election, and our analysis bears this out. Affordability issues, not climate change, were front of mind for BC voters. Using a MaxDiff approach (see Methods section), we asked British Columbians to rank-order the main election issues, revealing the priority that voters assigned to each. We split our sample, asking some voters to tell us what they prioritized, and other voters to tell us what they thought the average BC voter prioritized. The results across both groups were similar and we pool our results across both question wordings in this report.

Overall, we consistently find that cost-of-living concerns were the highest priority for BC voters while concern about environment and climate change ranked only 9 out of 10 issues tested. Figure 1 visualizes the balance between how respondents ranked each issue as highest vs. lowest priority.



Figure 1: Balance of high vs. low priority issues for BC voters



Given the prominent role that cost-of-living played in the election, should we be concerned that the costs of climate policy were considered to be contributing to cost-of-living pressures?

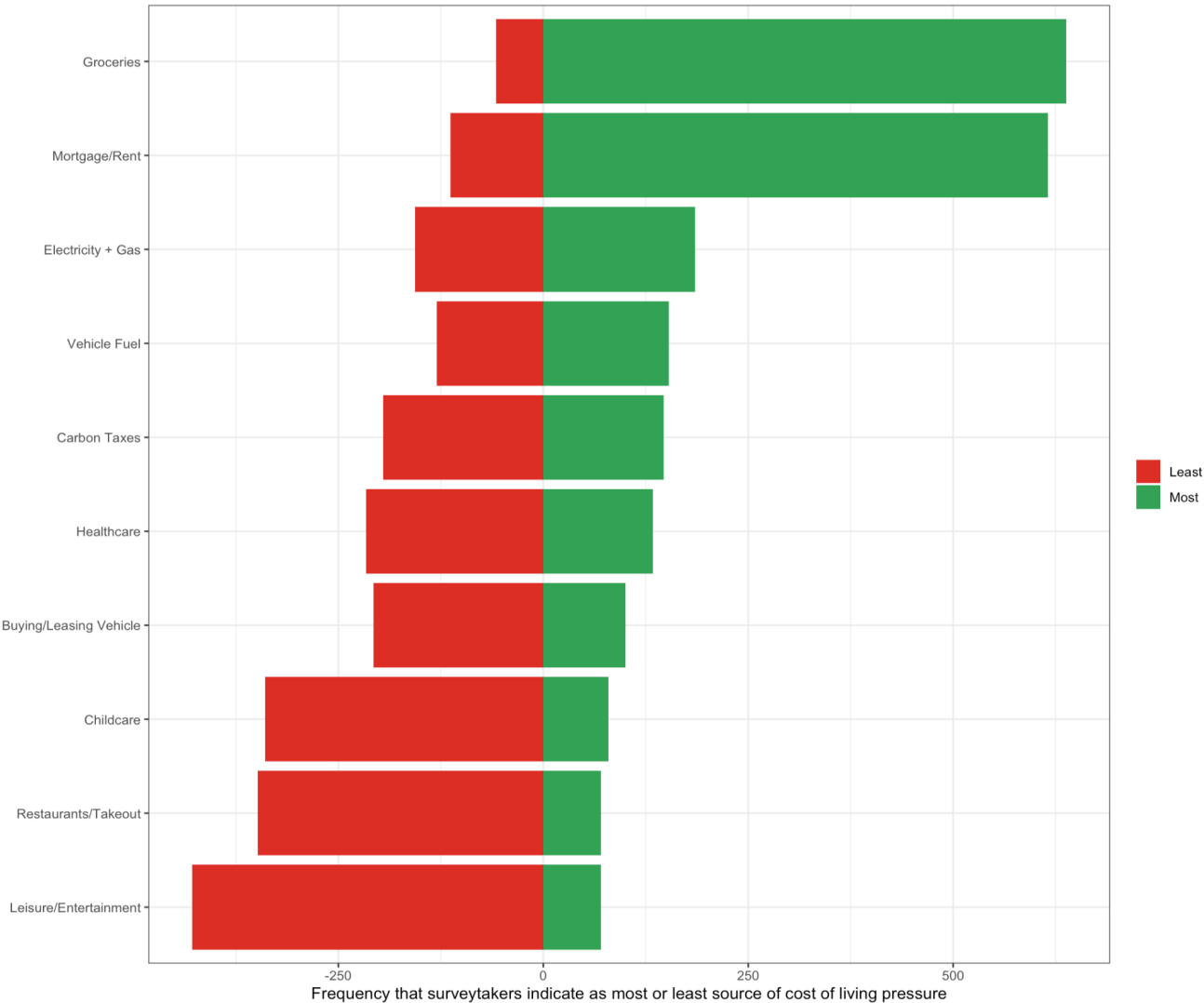
Our study investigated the factors that BC voters believed were core to the pressures they were feeling on cost-of-living. Again, we asked some respondents to reflect on their own economic situation, and asked others to reflect on the average BC voter’s economic situation; again, results were identical across both question wordings and we pool them here.

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We find that Groceries and Mortgage/Rent were, by far, the two most significant factors shaping cost-of-living concerns.

Energy costs broadly—including transportation fuel, electricity costs and the carbon tax—were instead part of only a second tier of concerns. Figure 2 visualizes this balance between items respondents reported as the “most” or “least” contributors to cost-of-living pressures.

Figure 2: Balance of most or least cost-of-living pressure among BC voters



2.2. Policy priorities: climate action remains popular

While climate change—and the costs of climate policy—played little role in determining the outcome of the election, we find that climate action is popular, and British Columbians across the political spectrum want their government to make it a priority.

We asked British Columbians “Do you think that climate change should be a low, medium, high, or very high priority for the BC Premier and the provincial legislature?”

Response	All respondents	BC NDP voters	BC Conservative voters	BC Green voters	Non-voters
Very high priority	20%	26%	9%	35%	18%
High priority	32%	35%	24%	44%	31%
Medium priority	34%	34%	40%	17%	35%
Low priority	14%	5%	28%	4%	17%

Notwithstanding the context of a cost-of-living election, a majority of British Columbians believe climate change should be a high or very high priority for their provincial government. Even among BC Conservative voters, more than 7-in-10 believe climate change should be at least a medium priority, and that number climbs to 95% of BC NDP voters.

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This may be explained, in part, by the impact British Columbians believe climate change is having and will have on their lives. A majority of British Columbians (52%) report having already experienced the impacts of climate change where they live.

Response	All respondents	BC NDP voters	BC Conservative voters	BC Green voters	Non-voters
Yes	52%	61%	39%	67%	48%
No	30%	25%	43%	15%	25%
Not Sure	18%	14%	18%	17%	27%

Looking to the future, 85% of British Columbians believe climate change is at least a somewhat serious threat, including 75% of BC Conservative voters and 92% of BC NDP voters.

We asked British Columbians “Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in British Columbia over the next 20 years?”

Response	All respondents	BC NDP voters	BC Conservative voters	BC Green voters	Non-voters
Very serious threat	43%	53%	23%	64%	39%
Somewhat serious threat	42%	39%	52%	32%	39%
Not a threat at all	10%	4%	21%	1%	10%
I don't know	6%	3%	4%	3%	13%

2.3. Mixed evidence that climate change was a source of partisan “sorting”

We also tested how well party leaders’ positions on climate change align with their supporters’ positions. A perfect alignment in which close to 100% of a party’s supporters say their party leader’s positions most closely match their own would indicate that climate policy may be driving how people sort into parties.

We do not find strong evidence that climate policies are driving this sorting, and mixed evidence that party leaders are effectively representing their supporters’ climate preferences. For example, among BC NDP voters, 24% report that their climate policy preferences are actually most closely aligned with the policies of the BC Green leader, Sonia Furstenau.

We asked British Columbians “Which of the following political leaders has climate policies that are closest to your own?”

Response	All respondents	BC NDP voters	BC Conservative voters	BC Green voters
David Eby (of the BC New Democratic Party)	35%	71%	11%	10%
John Rustad (of the BC Conservative Party)	35%	5%	78%	11%
Sonia Furstenau (of the BC Green Party)	29%	24%	10%	80%

2.4. Climate policies appeal to BC voters: role of climate energy in policy platform approval

Even though climate change does not appear to have been a major ballot box priority for BC voters, they prefer voters and party platforms which take the issue seriously. We tested how the public reacts to some of the main policy commitments made during the election using a conjoint experiment (see Methods). We find (Figure 3) that, holding all other issues constant, voters are more likely to support a party that eliminates the consumer carbon tax but maintains the large polluter carbon tax.



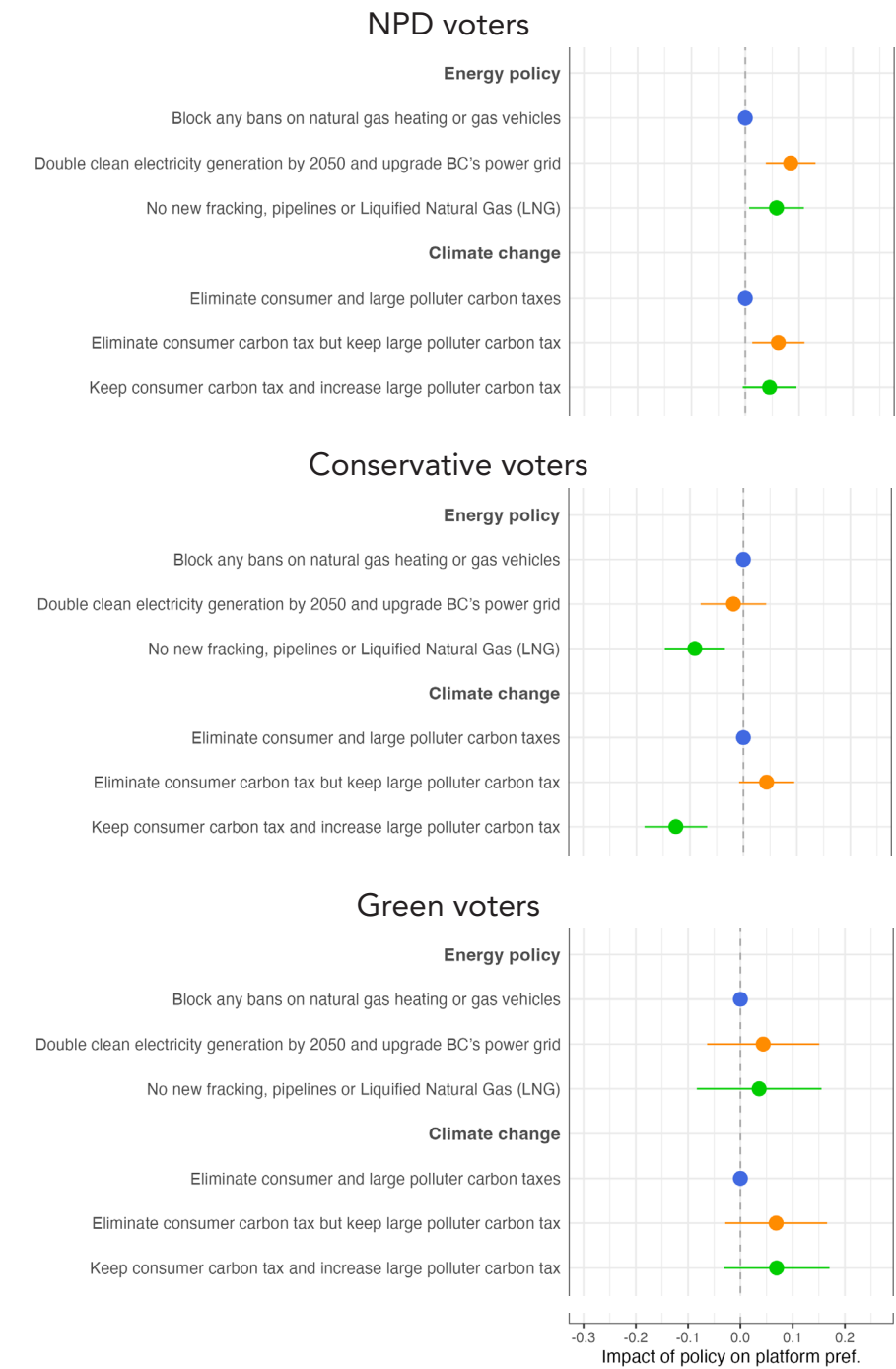
Figure 3: Impact of platform commitments on party support

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

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These effects are substantively similar across self-reported NDP, Green and Conservative voters, as we see in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Impact of climate and energy commitments among voter bases



Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

2.5. BC voters prefer parties that take climate action

We also conduct a more detailed analysis of support for the specific climate commitments contained in BC election platforms. Many of these policy promises did not receive substantial public or media attention during the election period. However, they were part of the broad policy agenda that voters were asked to choose from as part of the election.

Our analysis of these commitments can thus cast light on the alignment of BC public preferences with current provincial policy debates. It previews how publics might respond to the government's decision to implement parts of their climate policy campaign platform.

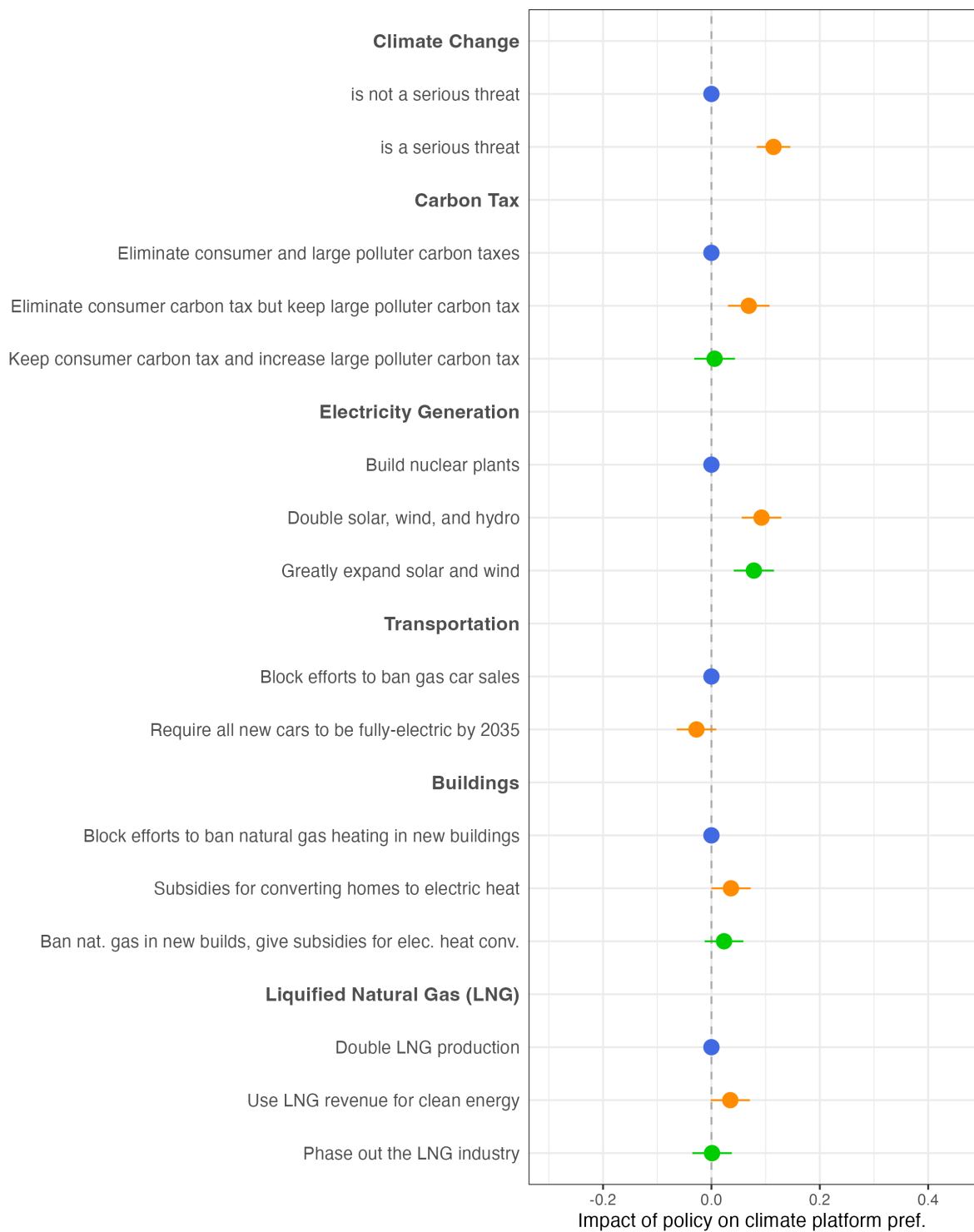
To conduct this analysis we use a second conjoint experiment that asks survey respondents to choose between hypothetical climate policy packages (see Methods section). Again, we assess—holding all else equal—how including specific climate policies in a platform boosts or reduces public support relative to the Conservative party position.

We find a substantial boost to taking climate change seriously as a threat (see Figure 5), and significant political returns for supporting large polluter carbon taxes and clean energy deployment. None of the climate commitments made by the NDP during the provincial election, holding everything else constant, reduce support for a climate policy package. This pattern includes self-reported Conservative voters (see Figure 6). For example, even self-reported Conservative voters do not respond positively to their party's decreased commitment to taking climate change seriously. Conservative voters either mildly preferred other parties' climate promises to their own party, or were indifferent.

We thus find no evidence that the Conservatives received a political dividend from opposing climate policy and/or questioning the seriousness of climate change. If anything, evidence suggests that voters react negatively against these weaker climate policy positions and positively to stronger climate policy positions. This includes NDP voters (Figure 7) and Green Party voters (Figure 8).

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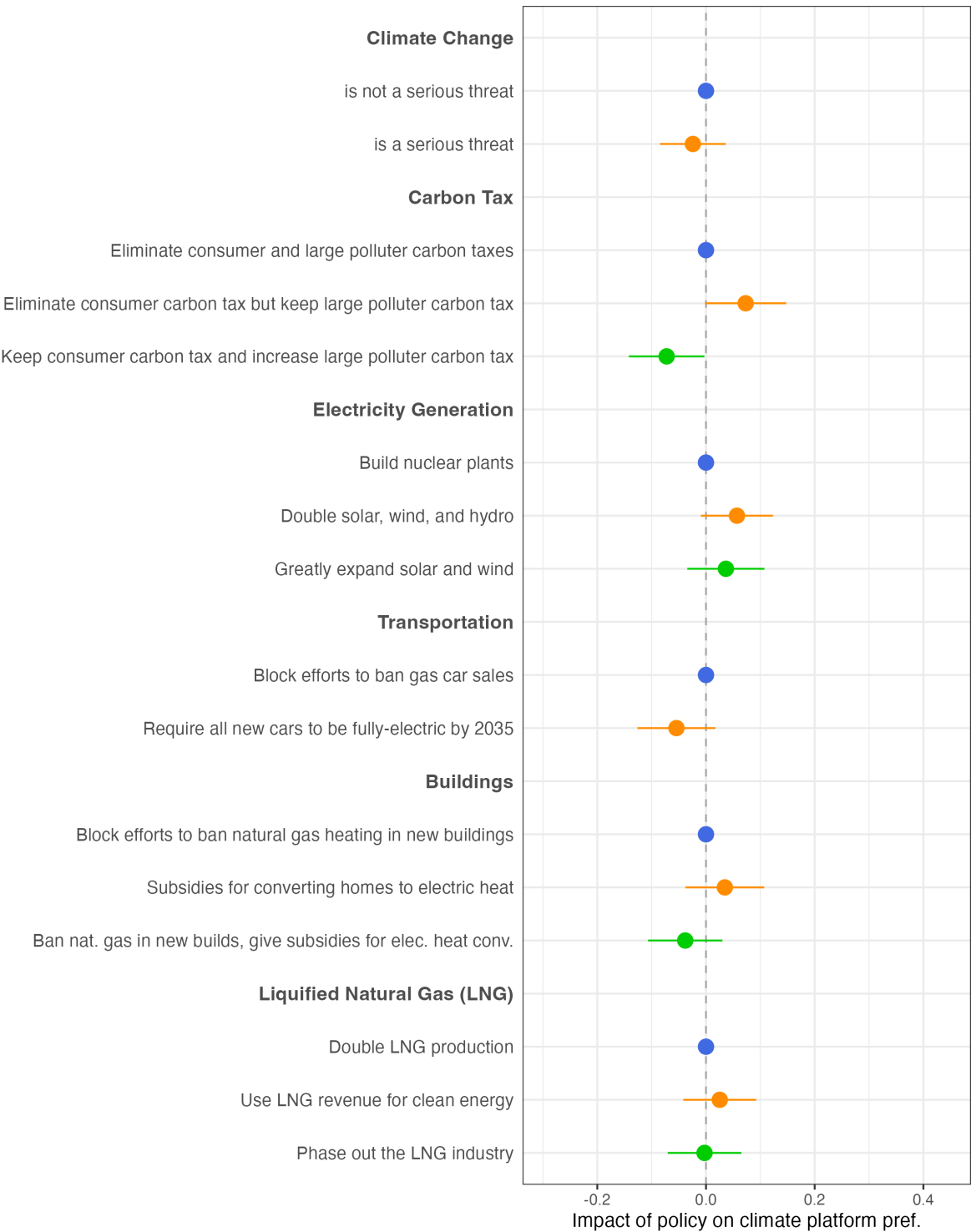
Figure 5: The impact of climate commitments on public support among all BC voters



Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

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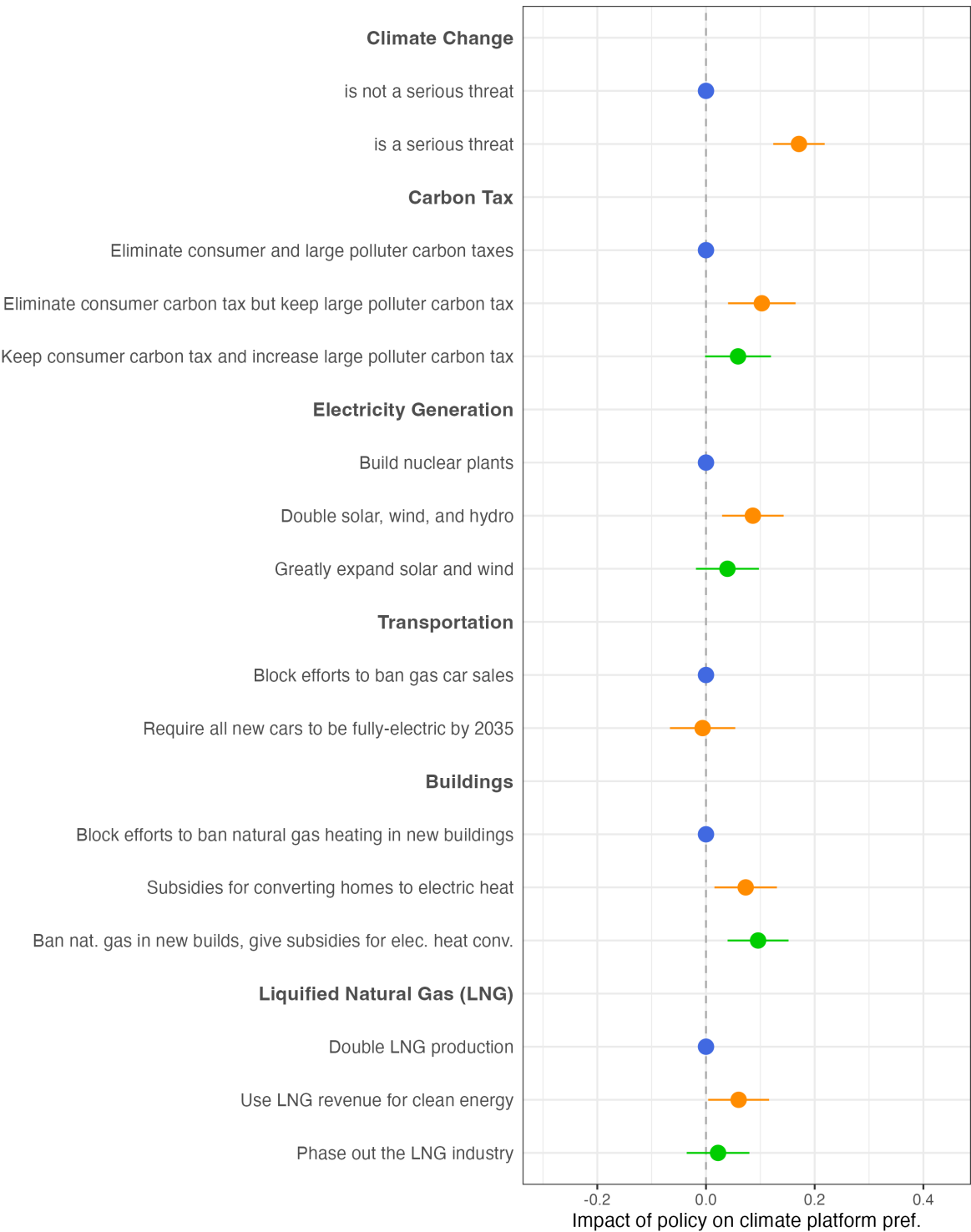
Figure 6: The impact of climate commitments on public support among all Conservative voters only



Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

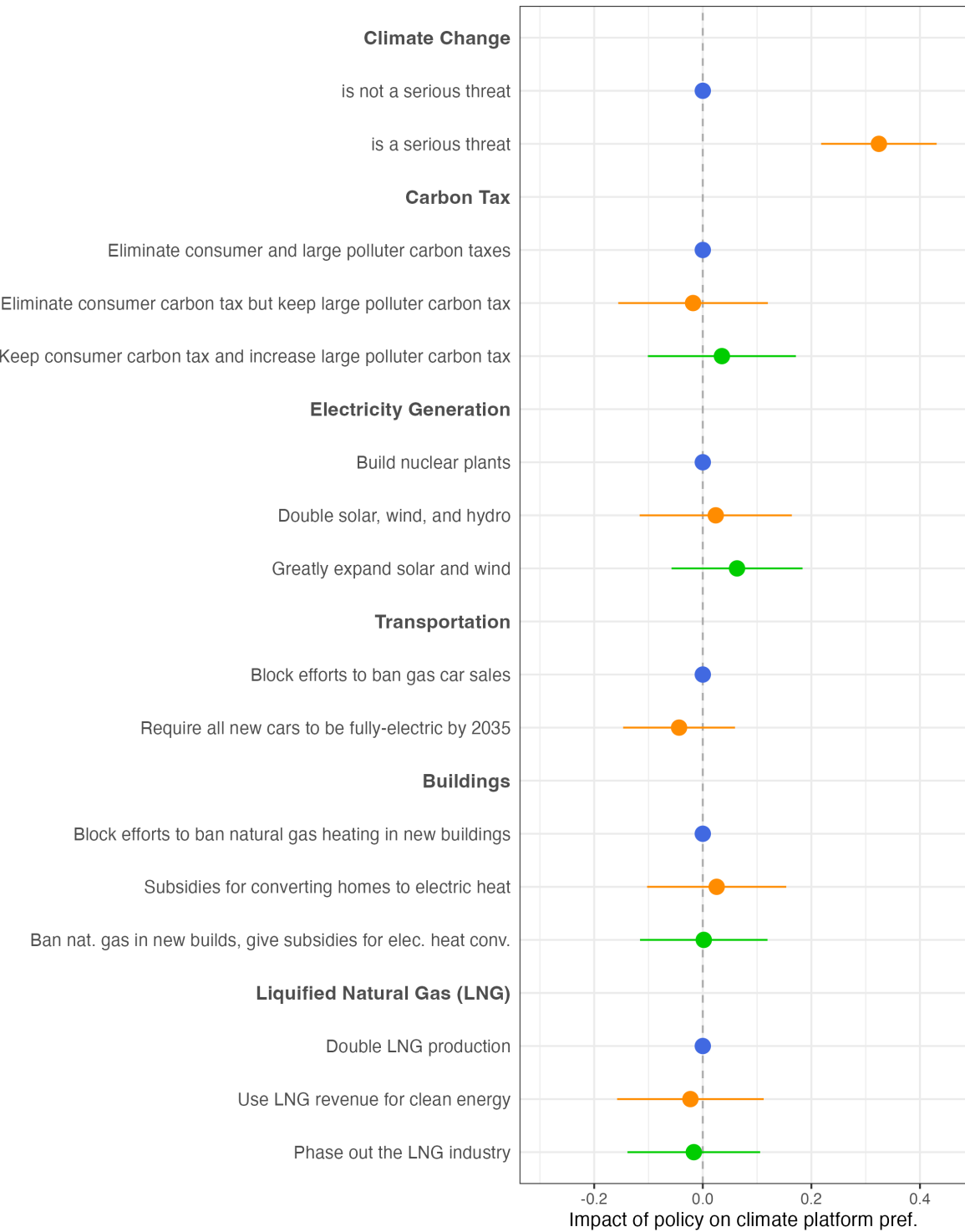
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Figure 7: The impact of climate commitments on public support among all NDP voters only



Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

Figure 8: The impact of climate commitments on public support among all Green voters only

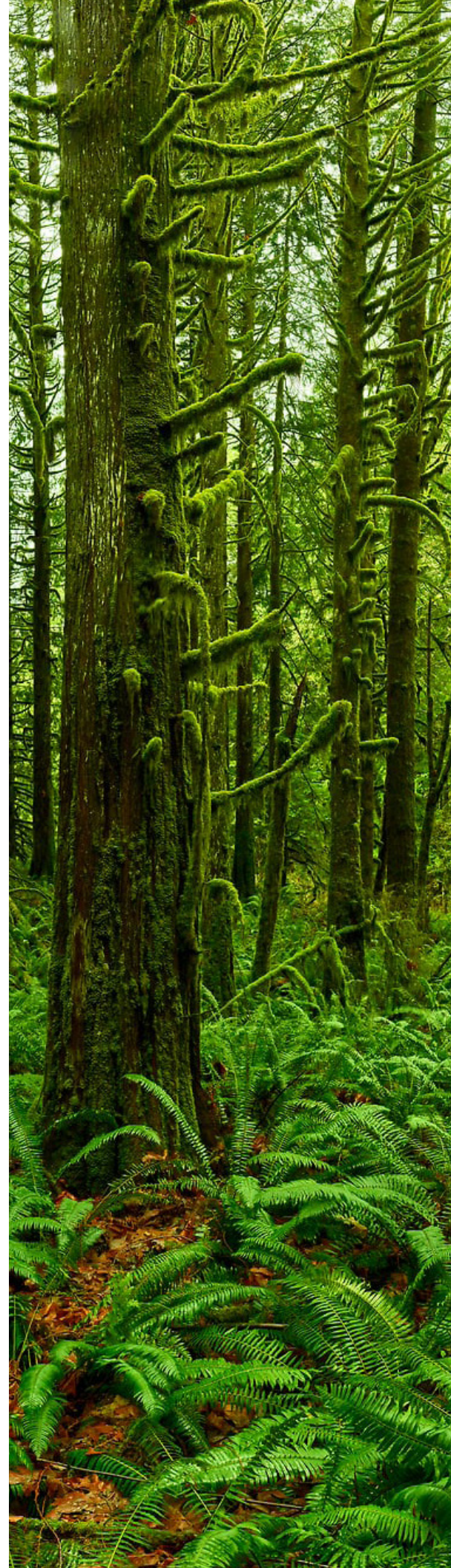


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METHODS

3.1. Survey Data

The analysis that follows is based on a survey delivered online to 1,099 adult residents of British Columbia (aged 18+). The sample was recruited through the Cint Exchange from a variety of opt-in online panels. To maximize representativeness, respondents were recruited using quota sampling, employing quotas based on age and gender. Responses were collected from January 9 – 13, 2025. Two sets of respondent-level weights were generated to correct for remaining observable sample imbalance using a technique called iterative proportional fitting (also known as raking). First, demographic weights were generated using age, gender, and education. Second, data on recalled vote in the 2024 election were incorporated to generate an additional weight such that the survey data approximately matched observed election results. These respondent-level weights are applied in the analysis where methodologically appropriate (e.g. certain experimental analyses present unweighted results to avoid inflating any possible bias arising from unobserved differences). The margin-of-error of an equally-sized probability sample for proportions reported in the analysis are +/- 3 percentage points (with 0.95 confidence).



3.2. Analytical Methodology

3.2.1. MaxDiff Analysis

We also conduct a more detailed analysis of support for the specific climate commitments contained in BC election platforms. Many of these policy promises did not receive substantial public or media attention during the election period. However, they were part of the broad policy agenda that voters were asked to choose from as part of the election.

Our analysis of these commitments can thus cast light on the alignment of BC public preferences with current provincial policy debates. It previews how publics might respond to the government's decision to implement parts of their climate policy campaign platform.

To conduct this analysis we use a second conjoint experiment that asks survey respondents to choose between hypothetical climate policy packages (see Methods section). Again, we assess—holding all else equal—how including specific climate policies in a platform boosts or reduces public support relative to the Conservative party position.

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3.2.2. Conjoint Analysis

We analyze the effect of individual policies on the popularity of a party's platform using a technique called a "conjoint experiment." This technique has long been used in market research and has been adopted by social scientists to evaluate public preferences over anything from candidate choice to legislative action to immigration policy. Conjoint experiments are especially useful in measuring voter preferences when their choices are "multi-dimensional" – meaning the real-world choice environment they are living and acting in cannot be reduced to a single dimension such as policies on taxation, or policies on healthcare. Instead, conjoint experiments replicate the real-world scenario in which voters are choosing among candidates/platforms with positions on a variety of

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issues that may or may not be particularly important to some individual voter. Our conjoint experiments present respondents with a pair of policy platforms that are randomly generated. Because of this random generation in which any policy has an equal chance of being put next to any other policy, we are able to analyze the effect of including some policy on the likelihood that a respondent will prefer that platform. In other words, all else equal, one particular tax policy increases the likelihood that a voter will choose that platform compared to some other tax policy. This is called the “Average Marginal Component Effect” of some policy, and is a causally identified quantity-of-interest.

In our analysis, we set the policies of the opposition BC Conservatives as the baseline against which we measure the effect of BC NDP and BC Green policies on whether voters prefer that platform. For each policy domain, we selected the most high profile policy pushed by each of the BC parties in their media outreach and written platform materials. Choices were validated against media tracking tools (e.g. CBC Platform Summary) and political analysts active in the province. We conducted this analysis twice: first, on platforms covering a wide variety of issues; and second, on platforms specifically focused on climate-related issues. We present results for all voters, for BC NDP voters, for BC Conservative voters, and for BC Green voters.

In the analysis in this report, we plot the effects of these policies on platform preference with 95% confidence intervals. Where these confidence intervals cross the vertical line at 0, these policies do not have a statistically significant effect on platform preference. Where these points and their confidence intervals lie to the left of the vertical line at zero, the policy has a negative effect on platform preference; where the points and their confidence intervals lie to the right of the vertical line at 0, the policy has a positive effect on platform preference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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