

Economic Perceptions, Vote Choice, and the 2011 Saskatchewan Election

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Abstract

The 2011 Saskatchewan Election saw a landslide victory for The Saskatchewan Party. They also achieved this victory during a time in which the province was experiencing economic revitalization. Past studies have suggested that incumbents are rewarded for good economic times. As such, the 2011 Saskatchewan election provides for a good case study that aims to understand if perceptions of the economy influenced Saskatchewan residents vote choice at that time. Using data collected from the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study, this thesis has found that retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions of the economy did have a small direct role in influencing vote choice during the election. However, this thesis also found that once leadership opinions of Brad Wall were added to the statistical analysis these perceptions became insignificant. Interestingly, the same economic perceptions were found to make up a part of Wall's leadership evaluation. With leadership evaluations being the largest determinant of vote choice, this thesis found that economic perceptions did play a role in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election, albeit in a roundabout way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The province of Saskatchewan has experienced economic revitalization in recent years. With high commodity prices (Grey, 2009) and an unemployment level lower than the national average in 2011 (Saskatchewan 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011), the province is booming, and the future appears bright as economic forecasts predict an increase in the natural resource service industry to support rising natural resource development (Abma, 2011). Saskatchewan's robust economy is particularly notable when contrasted with the broader national and global economic situation: many other jurisdictions have faced economic challenges in recent years, and since the 2008 economic crisis, the global economic climate has been slow to recover.

In spite of the slow global and national recovery, Saskatchewan's economy has continued to grow (Royal Bank of Canada, 2008; CBC News, 2008). This economic improvement has been so robust that, after years of receiving federal equalization payments, Saskatchewan became one of the few Canadian provinces that do not receive financial transfer payments from the federal government to promote equal levels of public services. The difference between a "have" (non-equalization receiving) and a "have not" (equalization receiving) province is a concept that carries a lot of influence with Canadians, and Saskatchewan's provincial leaders have been quick to link the province's new 'have' status as an indication of economic success and well-being (Spears, 2010). Indeed, the Saskatchewan Party Government has been quick to tout the province's economic success (Wall, 2011a; Global News 2011), and the economy seemed to play a large part in the Saskatchewan Party's victorious 2011 election campaign.

To what extent does the 2011 Saskatchewan election result reflect the province's economic fortunes? When one considers both the recent economic strength of the province and the related government rhetoric, it seems reasonable to assume that, to some degree, voters considered their perceptions of the provincial economy when casting their vote. Stated differently; Saskatchewan's current economic climate, particularly when juxtaposed with that of the rest of the country, makes Saskatchewan a compelling economic voting case study.

Economic voting is the study of the economy and how it affects political vote choice. At the heart of economic voting theory is the belief that average voters take into account how a government handles the economy and their perceptions of the current economic condition when voting (Anderson, 2010: 140). Simply put, it is argued that voters hold the incumbent government accountable for their current economic situation (Happy, 1986: 47). Economic voting research extends back to the 1960s and includes myriad studies from the United States, Europe, and Australia. Canadian researchers have also used economic voting theory as a way to understand federal vote choice (Happy, 1986, 1989, 1992; Gelineau and Belanger, 2005; Nadeau and Blais, 1993, Nadeau et al., 2000).

While research has typically considered economic voting at the national or federal level, there has also been an interest in economic voting at the sub-state level (Stein, 1990; Svoboda, 1995; Ebeid and Rodden, 2006; Remmer and Gelineau, 2005, Anderson, 2008). In Canada, however, there has been only limited study of provincial-level economic voting (Tellier, 2006; Gelineau and Belinger, 2005, 2011; Albert, 1976; Landry, 1984), and studies to date have been

limited to aggregate data. (As will be discussed in a later section, economic voting analysis can be conducted with aggregate or individual level data.)

The minimal research on provincial economic voting is problematic, as provincial governments are key economic actors in Canada's federal system. Constitutionally, the provinces handle many economic areas. Specifically, they have control over natural resources and taxes, direct taxation, economic development, provincial transportation, and business license issuing (Hale, 2006: 224). As such, provinces have significant control over the economy within their jurisdiction. Given this, voters should be expected to hold provincial governments accountable for economic issues. Using Saskatchewan as a case study, this thesis will expand the study of provincial economic voting in Canada.

1.1: Thesis Purpose, Research Question, Importance, and Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how, if at all, individual-level perceptions of economic conditions affected provincial vote choice decisions in the 2011 Saskatchewan election. Using individual level data from the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study, the thesis examines the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice.

Past studies have indicated that governments have been rewarded for good economic times (Kramer, 1971: 140-141; Harty, 1986:53; Nadeau and Blais, 1993: 787). Further, research indicates that it is individuals' economic *perceptions* that influence vote choice, as the voters may not be taking into account truthful economic conditions when considering their vote choice. Negative impressions of the economy have been shown to hurt incumbent support when, in fact, the economy was not as bad as perceived (Nadeau et al., 2000: 87). Given

previous research, as well as the importance of economic issues to the election, it is reasonable to expect that individual-level economic perceptions are correlated with vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan election.

In order to understand the effects of the economy on vote choice in the election the research question that will be discussed in the thesis is:

To what extent did economic perceptions influence vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan election?

This question is important, as little is known about both Saskatchewan voter behaviour and how, if at all, it is affected by provincial economic voting. Examining this question will further the understanding of vote choice in Saskatchewan and economic voting at a provincial level. With this research question in mind, the hypothesis that will be considered in the data analysis used in this thesis is:

- Positive economic perceptions will increase the odds of voting for the incumbent party in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election.

In addition to understanding Saskatchewan vote choice, this thesis will advance the study of Canadian political behaviour. To date, there have only been a few studies on provincial economic voting in Canada, and none of these studies have considered Saskatchewan specifically. This thesis will fill a gap in that research. Due to the data set that will be employed, this thesis can determine whether voters' subjective economic perceptions influence their vote choice and will contribute to the nascent study of sub-state economic voting.

This thesis will also add to economic voting literature through its use of individual level data. Currently, the lion's share of economic voting research is done using aggregate data. By focusing on individual data from the Saskatchewan Election Study, this research will be the first to consider the distinctions between sociotropic and egocentric economic perceptions at the provincial level. Sociotropic perceptions measure whether an individual considers society's economic condition before their personal economic condition. Conversely, egocentric perceptions include whether an individual considers their personal economic condition before that of the greater society. The term sociotropic is used to describe an individual's focus on society as a whole. For this thesis, sociotropic economic perceptions include an individual's concern over society's economic condition. The term egocentric involves an individual focusing on their personal situation. As such, egocentric economic perceptions involve an individual's focus on their perceptions of their personal economic situation. It is important to understand that these individual-level perceptions exist concurrently and their level of importance can fluctuate over time.

As well, the variable of leadership evaluations, which will be shown in this thesis to have a large effect on vote choice in the 2011 election, has only been sparsely considered in past economic voting literature. The inclusion of this variable in the data analysis will further add another unique facet to this thesis as well as economic voting literature on the whole.

In order to answer the research question, survey data from the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study will be used. This was an original telephone survey of 1,000 adult Saskatchewan residents, conducted by University of Saskatchewan researchers after the November 7, 2011

election. The analysis utilizes logistical regression analysis to determine the relationship between the economic perceptions variables and incumbent voting. Specifically, the multivariate analysis considers how sociotropic and egocentric economic perceptions (the independent variables) influence incumbent vote choice (the dependent variable), after controlling for standard sociodemographic variables (age, income, education and gender) and leadership evaluations.

1.2: Chapters

In consideration of the research question this thesis will include a review of the literature involving economic voting. Chapter two examines the theoretical background as well as variables that have consistently been used in economic voting studies. It also highlights relevant literature regarding economic perceptions. Chapter two also discusses the importance of leadership evaluations to vote choice – a topic seldom considered in the economic voting literature.

Chapter three looks at the economic context of Saskatchewan for the two years leading up to the 2011 Saskatchewan Election. This chapter provides a comparison of Saskatchewan and Canada's economy using many of the traditional and non-traditional measures of economic health. Additionally, this chapter outlines how the Saskatchewan Party and the opposition Saskatchewan New Democratic Party (NDP) dealt with and framed economic issues during the election campaign. A review of relevant government documents and news articles establishes that the economy was an important issue for Saskatchewan residents during the 2011 Saskatchewan Election.

Chapter four presents an original analysis of the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study. This

chapter provides a detailed description of the key variables and then presents two logistic regression models to assess the relationship between the economic perception variables and vote choice. The analysis then moves to consider the additional variable of leadership evaluations to understand if economic perceptions were linked to leadership perceptions.

Chapter five concludes the thesis, reiterates the empirical findings and suggests areas of further research.

Through these chapters the effects of economic voting in the 2011 Saskatchewan election are explored and prove to be a very interesting case study on vote choice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

Economic voting theory argues that economic factors are relevant to vote choice. This method of analyzing vote choice has a vibrant history that extends to the 1960s. This chapter examines economic voting theory in detail. First, to situate economic voting theory within the larger study of vote choice, the chapter presents a brief overview of the other dominant theories of vote choice: socio-demographics, campaign effects, strategic voting, partisanship, leadership evaluations and issue voting. Second, a more expanded review of economic voting theory is presented. Finally, this chapter ends with the justification of employing economic voting theory for the 2011 Saskatchewan election.

2.2: Dominant Vote Choice Theories

The study of vote choice has evolved over time with seven dominant theories: Socio-demographics, partisanship, campaign effects, issue voting, leadership evaluations, strategic voting and economic voting. The research discussed below highlights each of these theories strengths and limitations.

2.2.1: Socio-demographics

Political scientists have looked to socio-demographic variables to understand vote choice since the 1940s. This field of study concerns itself with studying voter income, religion, education, sex and age to understand if these variables are aligned with vote choice. The idea

behind this approach was that certain combinations of socio-demographic variables would lead voters to cast ballots for particular parties.

Arguably, socio-demographic political research found its beginning with the Columbia School perspective. Using 600 respondents during the 1940s United States presidential election, Columbia University researchers surveyed each respondent up to seven times (Bartels, 2008: 2). The results of their study found that voters made their vote choice long before the election campaign began (Parrella, 2010: 223). The data suggested that political parties and the media were not as influential as others believed in swaying voters to parties (Lazersfeld et al., 1944: 121); rather, religion, socioeconomic status, and where voters lived influenced voters' vote choices (Lazersfeld et al., 1944: 25-26). Voters were also found to be unchanging in their voting preferences throughout their lives, though the researchers noted that generational change may influence a change in vote choice over time (Lazersfeld et al., 1944: 142-145). This study pointed to a lack of influence of the media and campaigns and more towards a voter's background as being an influential predictor of vote choice.

With the success of the Columbia school, researchers at the University of Michigan looked to replicate their results. The results, however, were not as strong as the original study (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 3). Researchers at Michigan found that voters can change their vote choice despite little change in their socio-demographic realities (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 3). Short term effects were discovered to play a part of vote choice (Bartels, 2008: 7). Michigan researchers noted that partisan attachments in the American electorate were strong (Campbell et al. 1964: 80-81); however, "candidate evaluation, issue evaluation,

campaign effects and conversations with family and friends” also influenced voting (Campbell et al. 1964: 24-25, 107-108,161-163). As well, researchers determined that voters’ social characteristics (ethnicity, race, religion, education, occupation, class, and parental partisanship) also affect vote choice (Campbell et al. 1964: 252-263). In order to account for causality, Campbell et al. used a “funnel of causality” to understand how a voter makes their voting decision at a specific moment in time (Campbell et al. 1964: 24). Essentially, the funnel begins with external (uncontrollable) non-political variables such as sex and age creating an attitudinal base; over time an individual evaluates a variety of events that are both non-political and political as well as external and personal and these particular situations can then influence personal and political attitude and behaviour (Campbell, 1964: 30). Stated more clearly, there is a trail of events that leads to a voting decision for an individual. The trail begins with an attitudinal base comprised of socio-economic factors; this base serves as a lens through which the individual views a variety of both political and non-political stimulus like new candidates or policy. Over time, the individual will make a political choice based on how they view the political and non-political stimuli. The researchers at Michigan summed up their findings in their acclaimed book, *The American Voter*, in which they argued that party identification and candidate evaluations played a large effect on vote choice (Campbell, 1964: 528, 543).

The Michigan model and the Columbia school both explored the idea that socio-demographics play a role when voters decide how to vote. The socio-demographic influences of ethnicity, race, region, religion, education, sex, occupation, parental partisanship, income and sex are linked to the creation of long term party identification, which in turn influences vote

choice. It is for this reason that researchers continue to include myriad socio-demographics as control variables when regression analysis is used to understand vote choice.

While early research was deemed informative, recently socio-demographics have been found to be only “a remote contributor to vote choice” (Perrella, 2010: 222). However, Canadians have shown voting trends that are tied to socio-demographic categories, namely region, ethnicity, religion and gender (Parrella, 2010:223). While socio-demographic variables only play a small part in determining vote choice, their presence is nevertheless felt. Indeed, in economic voting models, these variables are still analyzed and used as a base model for interpretation before other variables are added into the regression equation.

2.2.2: Partisanship

Partisanship is best described as a “psychological link to [a] political party” (Clarke et al., 1991: 46) and is an important determinant of vote choice. Socio-psychological theory notes that voters look for reference groups (such as political parties) that they feel reflect their personal attitudes and identity (LeDuc et al., 1982: 470); the more closely a voter feels to a particular political party, the more ‘partisan’ they are. Naturally, it stands to reason that the more partisan a voter is, the greater the likelihood that the partisanship will influence that voter’s vote choice. Partisanship has been studied for some time as a determinant of vote choice, going back to the Michigan model where it was found to be important in American elections (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 20).

There has been a certain amount of debate as to the exact nature of partisanship in Canada, as the Canadian and American political systems differ in a variety of ways (Anderson

and Stephenson, 2010: 20). For Americans, partisanship, also considered party identification, indicates a strong loyalty to a particular political party (Campbell et al., 1964: 121). However, the American concept of partisanship is influenced by a variety of institutional contexts are not present in Canada like electoral primaries and multiple ballots (Clarke et al., 1991: 47). According to Clarke et al., Canadian partisanship is based on “stability over time, intensity of feeling, and consistency of such ties between federal and provincial levels” (1991:47). Importantly, Canadians have demonstrated changes in their partisanship over short periods of time.

Initial studies on Canadian partisanship found that partisanship has been inconsistent when it comes to vote choice (LeDuc, 1982: 480, Clarke et al. 2000:51-52). One of the first studies to consider partisanship as factor in Canadian vote choice, by Clarke, Leduc, Jenson, and Pammet in 1979, found that partisanship in Canada could be “stable or variable” (Clarke et al., 1979: 161). Durable partisans simply vote for the party they favor; flexible partisans are more likely to break partisan ties due to factors such as issues or the popularity of particular candidates (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 21).

More recently, however, the idea that Canadians lack partisan stability has been refuted by some scholars who demonstrate that partisanship is an important factor in vote choice. Blais et al. and Gidengil et al. found that partisan support for the Liberals was an important factor in the 2000 and 2004 elections (Blais et al., 2002: 123; Gidengil et al., 2006: 13). Belanger and Stephenson found that, from 1993 to 2006, partisans have different levels of intensity and loyalty: Liberals and Progressive Conservative partisans had very low levels of loyalty and

intensity; NDP partisans expressed higher levels of loyalty and intensity; and the Reform, Canadian Alliance and Bloc Quebecois partisans all exhibited high degrees of intensity and loyalty (Belanger and Stephenson, 2010: 130). Partisans of the current Conservative Party of Canada have been found to demonstrate similar levels of loyalty and intensity as the partisans of its parent parties (Reform and Alliance) (Belanger and Stephenson, 2010: 130). Interestingly, in terms of partisan stability, the Conservatives and the Liberals enjoy a reliable core of stable supporters, unlike the NDP or former Progressive Conservatives (Belanger and Stephenson, 2010: 131).

2.2.3: Campaign Effects

Campaign effects can influence vote choice. Political parties use an election campaign to present their election platforms with the goal of attracting voters and gaining votes. If partisanship is flexible in Canada, as suggested by some scholars, the campaign should influence vote choice. Indeed, Fournier et al. note that, during the 1997 election, only 49 percent of voters had reached an electoral decision before the beginning of the election campaign; the rest of voters decided only within three weeks of the election date (2001: 97-98).

The research suggests that campaign effects can be relevant, but their influence varies between voters. Blais et al. note that during the 1997 election the Leaders' debate and a media advertisement about leaders from Quebec had an effect on vote intentions, but these effects were only temporary (Blais et al., 1999: 230-204). Fournier et al. contend that campaign effects only affect undecided voters, and voters who knew their voting intentions before the campaign were not affected (2004: 675). Nadeau et al. note, much like Fournier et al., that different

voters are susceptible to different kinds of information from an election campaign (2008: 242). Interestingly, they found that voters who were informed the least were influenced by paltry information about leaders, whereas midlevel informed voters responded more to information on issues (Nadeau et al, 2008: 242). Nadeau et al. concur with work done by Lupia and McCubbins that voters with high levels of information respond to complex arguments (2008: 242). Nadeau et al.'s work suggests that voters with low levels of information during a campaign are affected by campaign effects, which refutes earlier work which suggested that low information voters gained little to no information during a campaign (2008: 243).

Along with the campaign, the leader's debate has been shown to have mixed results on swaying vote choice. Parrella notes that debates generally do not have much of an effect on vote choice as partisans will favor their favorite party's leader (Parrella, 2006: 241). However, Blais et al. found that in the 2000 election the debate helped the Conservative party greatly, noting that 43% of people who watched the debate felt Joe Clark won and the debate was linked to the Conservatives holding on to their official party status (2003: 48-49). Overall, election campaigns appear to have an effect on vote choice, though some campaigns and elections have different effects depending on the context, issues and political personalities of the day.

2.2.4: Issue Voting

Linked to campaign effects is the concept of issue voting as another determinant of vote choice. Issue voting occurs when parties align themselves with particular issues that are important to voters. This could include a party's particular stance on health care, taxes or other

important issues that are politically relevant. Largely discredited as a determinant of vote choice by the Michigan school due to a lack of substantial evidence in the elections they studied, more contemporary scholars have come to understand that issue voting does have an effect on vote choice (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 3-5). Issue voting can only happen if the political parties have distinct positions on an issue; if parties are too similar, voters will disregard their issue positions (Anderson and Stephenson 2010: 5).

Issues have been shown to play a role in vote choice. Fournier et al. found that voters will evaluate the incumbent government with more scrutiny over issues that the voter considers important (Fournier et al., 2003: 63). Several issues have been found to be important in Canadian elections. The 1988 election found that free trade was an important issue with Gidengil noting that the election was “a virtual referendum on the issue” (2000b: 9). Health care and the powers of the federal government were shown to have an effect in the 2000 elections, though the impact of those issues was quite small (Blais et al., 2002a: 153). The 1997 election saw the Reform party gain support from its position on fiscal responsibility in the West whereas the Liberals gained support for job creation in the West and the East and the future of the economy in Ontario (Gidengil, 1999: 20). In 2004, the most important issue was health care, particularly ‘two tiered’ health care, and the NDP’s position on that issue was shown to benefit the party (Gidengil et al., 2006: 17-18). Also in the 2004 election, the sponsorship scandal had a significant effect on voters that were still upset with the Liberals (Gidengil et al., 2009: 7). In 2008, the Liberals were hurt by their environmental “green shift” plan, but only marginally (Gidengil et al., 2009: 7). Together, the evidence from past elections suggests that issue voting

does happen in Canada. Arguably, the more salient the issue is, the more effect it will have on a voter's electoral choice.

One interesting dimension of issue voting is ownership. Issue ownership occurs when a party tries to gain support by informing voters of issues that the party has had past success in resolving (Belanger and Meguid, 2005: 3). In Canada, Belanger notes that, over a 50 year period, issue ownership has been linked to certain parties at particular times. Notably, Belanger noticed that, after the Diefenbaker and Mulroney administrations, the Liberals experienced rises in competency rates on particular issues (2003: 554). For example, after the economic issues of the 1980s, the Liberals under Chretien were publicly perceived to be more competent than the Progressive Conservative Party at looking after the economy and unemployment, so much so that no other party could have challenged them on those issues (Belanger, 2003: 555). In regards to other parties, Belanger notes that the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois (BQ) were "issue parties" but the issues they stand for, "Canada's social conscious and Sovereignty" respectively, defined them so rigidly that they were seen as only competent with those issues and no others (2003: 555). The Reform/Canadian Alliance parties were viewed as being grounded on the issue that brought them into being: a western regional party (Belanger, 2003: 555-556). The experience of the NDP, BQ, Canadian Alliance and the Reform party's indicates that new or 'third' parties have a hard job of convincing the electorate that they are viable options to handle important issues (Belanger, 2003: 556). Overall, research suggests that issues do play a role in vote choice, with the relevance of issue voting depending on how salient the issue has become with voters.

An important question that should be addressed is whether or not economic voting, the theory which drives this thesis, is simply a derivation of issue voting. As will be detailed later in the chapter, economy voting theory looks at the economy and its effect on vote choice, and does not examine whether or not the economy is presented as a salient issue. Indeed, in some elections the economy may not be presented as an issue during an election at all. Additionally, economic voting generally looks at the economy as a whole and its combined effect on vote choice; issue voting, on the other hand, tends to be more focused. For example, issue voting during a particular election may focus strictly on the issue of employment and not other economic factors.

2.2.5 Valence Politics Model

The valence model takes a slightly different take on electoral vote choice. According to Clarke et al., issues are an important consideration in vote choice; they note that individuals tend to take into account broad policy issues like the economy or health care and evaluate which party will do the best job to provide these (2009: 12). Valence politics also discusses the importance of party leadership. Clarke et al. note that voters use the image of party leaders to guide their decision making process during an election (2009: 12). These voters understand that they may not be informed enough to understand all the issues but trust in party leaders to advance the voters' goals. The valence politics model has been found in a number of elections studied by Clarke et al. Specifically, the election of both Brian Mulroney in the 1980s and the rise of the Liberal Party in the 1990s could be contributed to the proper handling of valence politics and how the respective parties handled the image of their leaders (Clarke et al., 2009:

238). They also found evidence of valence issues playing an important role in the 2006 Canadian election, and leadership evaluations, which play an important part in the valence model, were found to hurt the Liberal Party in the early 2000s with the Sponsorship Scandal, to the subsequent benefit of the Conservative Party of Canada (Clarke et al., 2009:97). Conversely, Clarke et al. found that the Conservative Party of Canada lost its grip on valence issues, leadership and partisanship, and that this may have hurt their chances for a majority government in 2008 (Clarke et al., 2011: 448). Research has also found evidence of valence politics in American elections. Clarke et al. found that both valence issues and leadership were important to the election of Reagan in the 1980s (2009: 238) and during the 2004 Presidential election (2009: 133). As well, the handling of valence issues by the Democrats in 2006 helped lead them to decisive majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate (Clarke et al., 2009: 197). The evidence would suggest that valence politics are in play in North America and may have significant insights on how people vote.

2.2.6: Leadership Evaluations

As the valence politics model demonstrates, leadership evaluations are important and there is a body of work to suggest that they, on their own, have deciding influences on vote choice. Parrella notes that political parties are often “defined by their leaders” (2010: 240). Gidengil et al. found evidence that leaders are a strong determinant of vote choice after looking at Canadian Election Studies over a 30 year time span (2000a: 14). In her analysis of Canadian Election Study data from 1988-2006, Bittner found that the traits of leadership were a factor in vote choice as well, but not to the same extent as partisanship, and a leader’s perceived

character was more important than perceptions of competency (2010: 200). Looking at specific elections, leadership evaluations had a large effect on vote choice in the 2000 (Blais et al., 2002a: 175) and 2004 elections (Gidengil, 2006: 18). As it stands, leadership evaluations do seem to influence vote choice in Canada.

2.2.7: Strategic Voting

Strategic voting has also been considered in Canadian vote choice. Strategic voting occurs when a voter whose preferred candidate will likely lose chooses to vote for another candidate who stands a better chance of defeating the candidate they dislike the most (Parrella, 2010: 242). In order to satisfy this definition, Blais et al. notes that a voter must not want to 'waste' their vote and they must not vote for their preferred candidate (2009: 14). Canada has a history of three or more national parties competing for a majority vote and this creates the perfect conditions for strategic voting. However, research on strategic voting has shown mixed results. A look at the 1988 and 1997 elections noted that there was little evidence of strategic voting in those elections (Blais, 2002b: 450; Blais et al., 2001: 349-350). A comparison of Canadian elections from 1988-2000 and the 2005 British election found that, again, strategic voting was present but low; only between 2-5 percent of voters voted strategically (Blais et al., 2009: 22). Pursuant to this outlook on vote choice, Blais and Turgeon discovered that half of voters could identify the party least likely to win in their constituency (2003: 1). Furthermore, it was found that well informed voters were more likely to pick the losing party (Blais and Turgeon, 2003: 1). It appears that strategic voting in Canada does occur, but at a low level.

2.2.8: Summary

The research available suggests that a number of factors influence Canadians' vote choices; of course, these factors are not always active in each election. For example, during some elections issues are an important factor and for others it might be leadership evaluations. As such, finding a single theory of vote choice is problematic and presents difficulty in identifying voter behavior in multiple elections.

It should be noted that some researchers have attempted to combine the various determinants of vote choice into a single model. The 'block recursive' model employs many of the theories mentioned above including "socio-demographics, partisanship, issues, leadership and campaign dynamics" (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 13). Much like the funnel of causality, the block recursive model starts with socio-demographics as a beginning point (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14). From this point, other "blocks" are added sequentially so researchers can note statistical changes in the model and identify "long term predispositions and short term and proximate variables" (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14). As each block is entered into the model, only the blocks that are statistically significant are retained in the model and thus researchers can better understand the effect these blocks have on each other and how they influence vote choice (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14).

The block recursive model has allowed researchers to consider the interplay of various independent variables and the temporal order of these variables. While this is a very valuable tool in understanding vote choice, it does have critics. The first critique is that the variables are not derived deductively and, as Shapiro notes, " the variations in their effects across elections

must be reckoned with in any future theories that might be developed (Shapiro, 1997: 314). Second, critics have noted that the block recursive model fails to fully incorporate campaign and media effects (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14). As Brody has noted, the media and politicians' actions create impressions that voters then use to create their candidate preferences (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14). Finally, the block recursive model cannot indicate the "relative importance of different blocks of independent variables" (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14). Simply put, the model notes that all blocks in the regression, used in the block recursive model, are important but this model fails to note a theory to allow researchers to predict the effects of variables in the model (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 14).

2.3: Economic Voting Theory

Absent from the preceding discussion of vote choice research is the topic of economic voting, which will be the focus of this thesis. The following section will highlight the beginnings and evolution of the theory and applications of economic voting in Canada and other countries. Of particular importance to this thesis is the discussion of subjective economic perceptions and the role of party leadership.

Economic voting research examines the relationship between the economy and vote choice or the popularity of governments. This body of research has been evolving since the 1970s and economic voting theories have been tested in a number of countries. Over time, researchers have refined measurement and debated how economic factors influence individual attitudes and behaviours. While research continues, economic voting theory has made an important contribution to the study of political behaviour.

Economic voting theory began with Anthony Downs's seminal work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). Downs argues that voters make rational decisions when voting to determine which party will give them the most utility, with 'utility' defined as the economic and political benefits that a voter receives from voting for a party (1957: 36-37). Voters use their perceptions of utility to assess the current government; if their personal utility is perceived as high, voters will vote for the incumbent government, whereas if their personal utility is perceived as low, voters will cast a vote against the incumbent government (Downs, 1957: 38-39).

Downs also argues that rational voters will use their perceptions of current conditions, more so than their expectations for the future, to inform their vote choice (1957: 40). This is not to say that voters do not consider the future; rather, voters consider what they believe will happen in the future and use this prediction to modify their vote choice (Downs, 1957: 40). The voter will consider the current trend of government decision making and, if it appears to be positive, will continue to support them (Downs, 1957: 41). If the voter is unable to accurately determine, based on policy, which party is a better choice for their personal utility, he will make his decision based simply on which government he believes will do a better job (Downs, 1957: 41). Downs also considers the amount of information a voter will procure. He argues that voters tend to find information sources that meet their political ends and will procure only as much information as they deem necessary (Downs, 1957: 219). This information will respond to the voters' biases and mold their perspective of their vote choice (Downs, 1957: 219).

Downs' theoretical approach to voters and their economic perceptions naturally challenged other academics to test this relationship empirically. Such studies have been completed in a variety of countries, including Canada. There are two dominant approaches to the study of economic voting: objective models, which use aggregate economic indicators to examine the relationship between economic conditions and either electoral outcomes or party popularity; and subjective models, which use individual-level survey data to correlate individuals' economic perceptions with vote choice or party popularity. Research using both approaches suggests support for the general argument that the economy matters for voting.

2.4: Economic Voting Research: Objective Economic Indicators

Economic voting analyses utilizing objective economic indicators have been used for more than four decades. While many researchers before the 1970s noted a relationship between the economy and voting, their studies only used simplistic statistical examinations and utilized mostly qualitative data (Kramer, 1971: 64). However, the legacies of the first studies continue, as many of the economic variables examined are still used today. Over time, these variables have been put through more rigorous statistical analyses than found in the earlier academic work. Objective economic indicators have generally been compared to two different dependent variables: electoral outcomes (that is, reelection or defeat of the incumbent government) and public opinion data on the popularity of the incumbent party (Kramer 1971; Goodheart and Bhansali, 1971). These two approaches are referred to as 'vote functions' and 'popularity functions', respectively. Regardless of approach, the two objective economic

indicators shown to have the most consistent effect on voting are unemployment and inflation (Nannestad and Paldam, 1994: 216).

2.4.1: Vote Function Research

The vote function “explains the vote, or change in the vote, of a government at elections, by (the change in) economic and political variables” (Nannestad and Paldam, 1997: 214).¹ The dependent variable is votes for the incumbent political party, measured either through aggregate electoral returns data or individual level survey data. Key objective economic indicators that are studied include unemployment, real and nominal income, inflation, and taxes (Kramer, 1971; Goodhart and Bhansali, 1970; Muller, 1970; Happy, 1986, 1989, 1992).

Many economic voting studies focus on unemployment. The unemployment rate is a number that is easily understood by the public, frequently reported in the media, and an important objective measure of the national economic performance (Anderson, 2010: 148). Studies of the relationship between unemployment and incumbent vote choice present mixed results. Studies of American federal voting using aggregate electoral returns data as the dependent variable have found that the unemployment rate is not a statistically significant predictor of vote choice (Kramer 1971: 139; Powell and Whitten, 1993: 395; Lewis-Beck, 1986: 337); this result has also been demonstrated in Canada (Happy, 1986: 49; Happy, 1986: 389; Anderson, 2010: 149; Carmichael, 1988: 723). However, studies using individual level survey

¹ It should be noted that the definitions of the vote and popularity functions each make mention of political variables. However, as “many political variables are defined qualitatively and in an asymmetrical way” the political variables “must consequently be entered differently into these functions” (Nannestad and Paldam, 1994: 216). Stated more simply, political variables are unique to each election. For this reason, discussion of political variables is omitted in the literature summary presented here.

data, with self-reported voting as the dependent variable, offer competing results. Some studies found that unemployment has no effect in congressional elections for the United States (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979: 504, Fiorina, 1978:437-438), but other studies in Canada, the United States and Denmark have found the opposite, noting that unemployment can be a statistically significant factor in vote choice (Happy, 1992: 124; Nannestad and Paldam, 1997: 130; Fiorina, 1978:437-438). Another Canadian study found that the unemployment rate did not influence vote choice between 1974 and 1980, but was relevant for the 1984 federal election when high unemployment was attributed to the Liberal party and voters favored the Conservatives (Archer and Johnson, 1988: 583).

Inflation has also been shown to have an influence on economic voting. Like unemployment, inflation is a high profile measure of national economic performance; voters not only hear and read about inflation in the media, but also experience inflation at a personal level as prices for goods rise or fall. As such, high inflation should lead to lower voting for and popularity of an incumbent government (Gelineau and Belanger, 2005: 409). Researchers have found that inflation, like unemployment, has a varied relationship with voting behavior. Some studies using aggregate electoral returns data found that inflation influences vote choice in Canadian federal elections (Gelineau and Belanger, 2005: 414; Happy, 1992: 124) and internationally (Lewis-Beck, 1986: 376-377), while other studies find that inflation was not a statistically significant predictor of vote choice federal elections (Kramer, 1971: 141; Powell and Whitten, 1993: 397; Carmichael, 1988: 723) or provincial elections (Gelineau and Belanger, 2005: 419). Individual level studies using self-reported vote choice as the dependent variable also provide mixed results: inflation has been found to be a significant predictor of voting

behaviour in Canada (Happy, 1992: 124) and a non-significant predictor of voting behaviour in Denmark (Nannestad and Paldam, 1997: 130). American studies also present mixed results, with inflation being statistically insignificant for congressional elections in 1962 and 1972, and statistically significant in the 1972 presidential election (Fiorina, 1978:437-438).

As my thesis will examine provincial economic voting specifically, it is important to single out the only provincial economic voting study that addresses the vote function. Analysis of aggregate provincial and federal Canadian data from 1953 to 2001 found that the provincial and national unemployment rate and the inflation rate were statistically significant predictors of vote choice at a provincial level (Gelineau and Belanger, 2005); further, it was found that the federal unemployment rate was a more important influence on vote choice than was the provincial unemployment rate (Gelineau and Belanger, 2005: 418).

Currently, the only specific province in which economic voting has been studied is Quebec. Of the three studies that have been done, they all show that economic factors have been a large determinant in vote choice for several elections. Albert found that labor unrest and high unemployment was a deciding factor in the Parti Quebecois's defeat of the Parti Liberal du Quebec in the 1976 election (Albert, 1976), and studies of Quebec between 1970-1981 provincial elections indicated that Down's economic voting worked (Landry, 1984). Similarly, Belanger and Gelineau found that the Parti Liberal du Quebec's handling of the economy during the recession of 2008 seemed to convince voters to re-elect the party (2011). Though there are limited provincial studies on economic voting, economic factors do appear to

be relevant to vote choice. As such, it is reasonable to assume that economic voting does occur in Saskatchewan.

2.4.2: Popularity Function Research

Similar to the vote function, the popularity function explains how the popularity of the governing party changes with changes in economic and political conditions (Nannestad and Paldam, 1997: 214). As with vote function research, popularity function research often focuses on two objective economic indicators: unemployment and inflation.

Studies of the relationship between government popularity and the unemployment rate have had mixed results. Early studies indicated that unemployment is a significant predictor of government popularity (Mueller, 1970: 34), although Goodhart and Bhansali's research found there may be a time lag before voters attribute the unemployment rate to the government (1970: 59). Another study that examined the relationship between the unemployment rate and the popularity of various Canadian political parties between 1954 and 1979 found that unemployment was a statistically significant predictor of the New Democratic Party's popularity, but not for the popularity of the Liberal or Conservative parties (Monroe and Erikson, 1986: 633-637). More recently, a Canadian study examining the relationship between a number of objective economic indicators and the popularity of incumbent provincial governments found that unemployment was the only statistically significant economic variable (Tellier, 2006, 35).

The relationship between party popularity and inflation has also been examined. A study of Canadian political party popularity between 1954 and 1979 found that inflation is a

statistically insignificant predictor of party popularity (Monroe and Erikson, 1986: 633-637).

Similarly, Tellier's Canadian provincial study also found inflation to be statistically insignificant (2006: 35). However, inflation was shown to be influential in determining government popularity in Britain (Goodhart and Bhansali, 1970: 61).

To summarize, regardless of whether one considers the vote function or the popularity function, economic voting research has found that the unemployment rate and inflation can be important objective economic indicators, but their influence on vote choice and party popularity varies depending on the election in question.

2.5: Economic Voting Research: Subjective Economic Perceptions

In addition to studies of objective economic conditions, researchers have also considered the influence of individuals' subjective perceptions of the economy on voting behaviour. Perception is an important consideration when looking at economic voting. Indeed, the voters' perceptions of the economy may differ from economic reality. This is possible because individual perceptions of the economy may be based on a broad range of factors, rather than just traditional economic indicators such as unemployment and inflation. For example, voters may factor in non-traditional economic variables such as food bank usage rates and income inequality measures into their assessments of the economy.

Researchers distinguish between two broad types of economic perceptions, sociotropic and egocentric, and two broad timeframes, retrospective and prospective. The term sociotropic, coined by Paul E. Meehl, means to take the national or public economic interest into consideration rather than one's personal economic reality (1977: 14). Egocentric, also

described by Meehl, is the opposite; one takes into account their personal needs rather than those of society as a whole (1977: 16). These terms were first applied to economic voting by Kinder and Kiewit (1979: 523). Sociotropic and egocentric perceptions can be based on past assessments (retrospective) or future expectations (prospective). In the economic voting literature, the distinction between retrospective and prospective perceptions is important as voters will take into account how well they did economically under a current government, as well as how well they expect to do economically in the future under the same government, or another party (Nadeau et al., 2000: 79).

To clarify, then, there are four types of economic perceptions that can be considered:

- Retrospective sociotropic: Voters' assessments of how past government actions have benefited the national (or provincial) economy;
- Prospective sociotropic: Voters' expectations of how future government actions will benefit the national (or provincial) economy;
- Retrospective egocentric: Voters' assessments of how past government actions have benefited the voter's personal economic situation; and
- Prospective egocentric: Voters' assessments of how future government actions will benefit the voter's personal economic situation.

While some studies examine all four types of economic perceptions, most survey datasets include only one or two measures of economic perception, and as a result studies are often limited to a more narrow analysis.

International studies suggest that economic perceptions often matter to voting and to party popularity. A study of presidential approval in the United States from 1954-1988 found that prospective and retrospective sociotropic perceptions influenced approval ratings, whereas retrospective and prospective egocentric perceptions did not (Clarke and Stewart, 1994: 1116). A similar study of presidential, congressional and senate vote choice for the 1984 and 1988 elections, however, found mixed results: presidential voting in 1984 was influenced by retrospective sociotropic perceptions exclusively, but both retrospective sociotropic and retrospective egocentric perceptions influenced presidential voting in 1988; congressional voting in 1984 and 1988 was influenced by retrospective sociotropic perceptions (Lanoue, 1994: 198-199); and senate voting was influenced by retrospective sociotropic perceptions in 1984 but not in 1988 (Lanoue, 1994: 198-199). In all of the elections considered in that study, both prospective sociotropic and prospective egocentric perceptions failed achieve statistically significance (Lanoue, 1994: 198-199). Danish studies of national elections from 1990-1993 have found that retrospective egocentric perceptions have greater influence on vote choice than do retrospective sociotropic perceptions (Nannestad and Paldam, 1995: 57), and a similar study of Denmark voting from 1986-1992 found that retrospective egocentric perceptions are more influential on vote choice than are prospective egocentric perceptions (Nannestad and Paldam, 1997: 127). A study of Britain found that all four types of perceptions affect vote choice, with retrospective sociotropic and prospective sociotropic perceptions having greater influence (Anderson et al., 2004: 12-15).

Canadian studies have also considered economic perceptions and voting behaviour. Nadeau et al.'s study of the 1997 federal election found that all four types of perception

influence vote choice, with prospective and retrospective sociotropic voting perceptions having greater influence (Nadeau et al., 2000: 81). An analysis of federal elections from 1988-2006 found that all four types of economic perceptions influence incumbent vote choice to some degree, with sociotropic perceptions having more impact than egocentric perceptions, and prospective sociotropic perceptions being more salient than retrospective ones (Anderson, 2010: 155). To date, Canadian research has yet to consider the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice at the provincial level. This represents a large gap in provincial economic voting literature.

To summarize, research on the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice suggests that individual level perceptions of the economy do influence vote choice. Although retrospective sociotropic perceptions appear to have the greatest influence over vote choice, other types of economic perceptions have also been found to be relevant.

2.6: Leadership Evaluations and Economic Voting

As noted earlier, leadership evaluations have been found to be an important determinant of vote choice in Canada. To what extent are leadership evaluations influenced by economic perceptions? As it stands, leadership has not played a large role in past studies on subjective economic perceptions or economic voting. Still, there are some studies that have demonstrated that leadership has a role to play when discussing the economy and vote choice.

Nadeau et al. found that leadership had a significant impact on their economic voting model (Nadeau et al., 2000: 81). However, these variables did not outweigh economic perceptions and did not garner any discussion within their article (Nadeau et al., 2000: 82);

indeed, Nadeau et al. used leadership strictly as a control variable and did not consider it as a dependent variable (Nadeau et al., 2000: 81). Clarke and Kornberg also discussed the effects of economic perceptions on leadership and party evaluations during the 1988 Canadian national election. (It should be noted that they looked at Progressive Conservative party support as their dependent variable and they created a federal party identification control variable by “averaging the thermometer scores for the federal party and its leader, Prime Minister Mulroney” (Clarke and Kornberg, 1992: 47).) While they could not ascertain the specific effect of leadership in their regression equation, they did find that there was a positive relationship between federal and provincial Progressive Conservative party identification and Progressive Conservative party support (Clarke and Kornberg, 1992: 47). Their analysis suggests, albeit indirectly, that leadership factors play a part in economic voting.

There have been a few studies that have looked directly at leadership evaluations and their effect on economic perceptions. Svoboda, looking at gubernatorial elections for 1982 and 1986 in the United States, found that both Presidential and Governor evaluations help determine voter’s retrospective economic perceptions (Svoboda, 1995: 146).² Nadeau and Blais, while testing to see if Canadian incumbent federal governments are more likely re-elected while the economy is favorable found that the outcomes of elections are highly influenced by both leadership evaluations and economic conditions (Nadeau and Blais, 1995: 216). As Nadeau and Blais simply note, “economic conditions do matter, but they matter in conjunction with Canadians’ judgment about the personal qualities and defects of party leaders” (Nadeau and

² This research did not focus on the relationship between leadership evaluations and economic perceptions; instead, presidential and governor evaluations were among the control variables in a model predicting economic perceptions.

Blais, 1995: 216). Interestingly, Nadeau and Blais found that leadership evaluations and economic conditions had only a minor relation to each other and predominantly act independently (Nadeau and Blais, 1995: 216).

The information above indicates that in a few studies leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on vote choice and economic voting. However, this particular variable appears to be underrepresented in many studies discussing economic perceptions and economic voting in general; more work in this area would be a valuable expansion of economic voting theory.

2.7: Challenges to Economic Voting Theory

Economic voting theory is not without its critics. Economic voting presumes that voters vote based on personal utility, considering (at least in part) how their vote choice relates to the good of society (Green and Shapiro, 1994: 47). However, Green and Shapiro argue that the public benefit of voting is not rational since a single vote is not likely to sway election results (1994: 47). (The fact that people still vote despite this 'irrationality' is known as the paradox of voting (Anderson and Stephenson, 2010: 12).) Another critique of economic voting theory is a lack of complete information held by the voter. Economic voting theory assumes that voters acquire enough information to assess how the policy platforms of the various political parties would impact upon their personal utility, but Hauptmann notes that for voters to acquire information about political parties has a cost and there is little incentive for voters to pay these 'information costs' to keep informed (Hauptman, 1996: 30). Hauptmann also argues that the information that voters do acquire to make voting decisions may be vague as party policies may

be too similar (1996: 30). Indeed, even if voters are informed, they still may not act rationally and the information they received may be incorrect. As such, voters may not always act in the way that economic voting theory predicts (Dyck, 2008: 14).

2.8: Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the dominant theories on vote choice. Indeed, the information also presents a number of advantages to exploring economic voting theory. As the literature on economic voting has shown, economic voting theory utilizes many aspects discussed in other theories as control variables; namely campaign effects, valence issues, and socio-demographic variables. In this regard economic voting allows for these variables to be added into models so social scientists can consider their impact, making economic voting theory very versatile. Further, economic voting has a long research history with a strong theoretical foundation. While the block recursive model is promising and could be adapted to look at economic voting if needed, the lack of theory underpinning the model is a clear limitation of that approach. Additionally, more work is needed to understand the order of variables and how to operationalize variables like campaign and media effects. For this reason, economic voting is an appropriate choice for this thesis.

To summarize, economic voting is a significant and robust area of study. While there may be other ways to analyze vote choice, economic voting has shown a solid history of advancement and evolution. Yet while the literature on economic voting is vast, there are significant gaps in the study of economic voting in Canada. In particular, few studies have considered the provincial perspective. Furthermore, at this time, no studies have examined the

relationship between provincial economic perceptions and voting. These gaps present the opportunity both to expand the study of economic voting and to advance the understanding of provincial political behavior. This thesis strives to address these research gaps.

Chapter 3: Saskatchewan's Economic Context

3.1: Introduction

The 2011 Saskatchewan Election study found that many Saskatchewan residents believed that the economy had gotten better in the previous year (Atkinson et al, 2011:6). Before considering the impact of such evaluations on vote choice, it is important to assess if these opinions of the economy were indeed accurate. This chapter lays forth the contextual landscape for the 2011 Saskatchewan election. Specifically, this chapter outlines the objective economic reality of Saskatchewan for the two years prior to the 2011 election and considers how this context might have affected resident's perceptions of the economy. This chapter begins with an economic comparison of Saskatchewan and Canada's more traditional economic measures (gross domestic product, unemployment and inflation). Next, this chapter discusses many of the non-traditional economic measures that are not generally captured with traditional measures, including food bank usage, poverty, and affordable housing. Finally, the discussion turns to the political-economic context in which the 2011 Saskatchewan election was held – that is, public opinion and the economic rhetoric used by the political parties during the election campaign. The main body of literature for this chapter comes from newspaper articles and government documents that would have been readily available to the public. This chapter does not purport to suggest that such articles and documents definitively influenced economic perceptions in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study. Unfortunately there was no variable in the data set which could be used to investigate the relationship between the media and perceptions. The crux of this chapter is to understand why Saskatchewan residents might have

found the issue of the economy important and to understand if their perceptions were in fact appropriate for the province in the two years prior to the election.

3.2: Traditional Economic Measures

As chapter 2 noted, there are many different measures of the economy and these have been used in a variety of studies on economic voting and perceptions. Traditional measures of the economy typically include gross domestic product (GDP), inflation and the unemployment rate. These traditional measures are important as they are generally reported in the media and compared often with other provinces or the nation itself. They are also easy for voters to understand and evaluate. In this regard, they make good economic measures in which to understand the economic context of Saskatchewan.

In order to fully understand Saskatchewan's economic condition over the 2010 and 2011 period it is important to consider how the nation as a whole was also economically fairing. The inclusion of Canada's economic reality is important. Due to the federal nature of the country there are two sets of economic information the public must consider: the country as a whole, and the province. When Canada's economy is discussed in the media, it is often broken down into comparative provincial economic statistics. These provincial statistics are then usually compared to the national average. As such, any disparity between Canada and the province is often contrasted when the media discusses the economy. There are times when a province exceeds the national average on a variety of economy indicators and thus differentiates itself above other provinces or the nation as a whole. In this regard, the residents of a province may

take a certain amount of pride in being economically well off and this can influence their perceptions.³

The coverage of news articles and government statistics to be discussed will begin in 2010 and go to the beginning of November in 2011, the month of the Saskatchewan election. However, the 2008 economic crisis should be recognized before this discussion as this event had long term consequences for the economy. The subprime mortgage crisis in the United States had global ramifications in various financial sectors. Canada, like most countries, was affected and slipped into recession in 2008 as the national GDP growth rate fell to 0.7 percent (Beauchense, 2009: D1). At the end of 2008 the economy “shrank at an annualized rate of 3.4 percent in the fourth quarter” (McMullan and Vieira, 2009: A.1). Economic recovery would occur in Canada in 2009 with the recession ending by the third quarter (Abma, 2009: C3). Indeed, by June nearly 50 percent of Canadian residents appeared to be optimistic that the economy was going to get better (“Canadians confidence”, 2009: D3). Another poll noted that 28% of Canadians had either lost their jobs or someone in their family had in 2009; conversely, 14% of people noted they received a job in 2009 (Mayeda, 2009: B1).

Media attention on the economy was significant. The much discussed recession became the top news story of 2008 and many newspaper editors noted that the recession affected everyone in many forms (Johnson, 2009: A11). As Rob Roberts of the National Post stated, nearly every news story was viewed *vis-à-vis* the economy (Johnson, 2009: A11). For 2009, the economic mood in the press, noting the end of the recession as well as individual opinion data,

³ For a full chart of these traditional economic measures, please see Appendix A.

appeared to move from economic uncertainty to positive recovery. This turbulent economic reality is important to consider as we discuss 2010 and 2011. Without the economic turmoil of 2008 and the slow recovery of 2009, we cannot fully understand the economic reality that affected Canada and the provinces in 2010 and 2011. With this economic environment understood, the comparison of Saskatchewan and Canada can be better understood.

Canada and Saskatchewan's Comparative Economic Context

This section of the chapter will involve a comparison of traditional economic measures between Canada and Saskatchewan. The purpose of the comparison is to evaluate the economic differences between the two orders of government and confirm that Saskatchewan, compared to the country, was indeed enjoying good economic times.

3.2.1: GDP

Starting with GDP growth, 2010 saw the Canadian economy improving but it was still a long way from the pre-2008 economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expected a favorable outlook for Canada in the beginning of 2010 with an estimated growth of 2.1%, the largest in the G7 (Vieria, 2009: FP5). Interestingly, in January of 2010, the IMF raised its estimation to 2.6% growth (CBC, 2010). Further, the Conference Board of Canada reported significant improvements in individual spending habits and increased government induced stimulus but was quick to warn that the trend would not last (Covant, 2010: D1). The expected economic cooling did occur, as second quarter GDP slowed with "expansion of 2.5 per cent annualized from the booming 6.1 percent pace in the first three month of 2010" (Viera, 2010: B6). October saw worsening conditions in the United States and predictions for the Canadian

economy were lowered to 3.1 percent (Carmicheal, 2010: B4). This year would end with an annualized 3.3% increase in national GDP in the fourth quarter (Torobin and Grant, 2011).

Saskatchewan, like Canada, experienced predictions of economic turbulence in 2010. As in the case of the nation, Saskatchewan started the year off with favorable GDP predictions from the Conference Board of Canada, RBC, and the CIBC, ranging from an increase of 2.5 percent to 3.9 percent (Kyle, 2010: B4; Johnstone, 2010: A1; Leaders Post, 2010a: D1). Indeed, the CIBC noted that Saskatchewan had “considerable potential... [and was] well positioned to take advantage of [the global economic recovery],” noting expected increases from commodities and natural resources (Johnstone, 2010: A1). Saskatchewan continued to garner increased GDP projections (some of which were the highest in Canada) from the institutions mentioned above and others, until July (Kyle, 2010: B4; Leader Post, 2010: D1; Johnstone, 2010: D1; Star Phoenix, 2010: C8). By this time, heavy rain had damaged the agricultural sector and threatened growth (Hall, 2010: C1). Fortunately, potash sales saw a large increase and managed to bolster Saskatchewan’s economy and help the province post a 4 percent growth in GDP for 2010 (Chabun, 2010: A1; Enterprise Saskatchewan, 2012: 3).

Despite the slow start that was expected for the beginning of 2011, Canada started off quite strong. Goldman Sachs had high hopes for Canada at the beginning of the year as they expected GDP to increase to 3.5 percent by the third quarter, with the Canadian dollar trading above U.S. parity and lower unemployment (Madhavi, 2011: B1). However, in the middle of 2011, the IMF warned Canada to be ready to enact stimulus in the event of another global economic crisis stemming from Europe and the United States (The Canadian Press, 2011). These

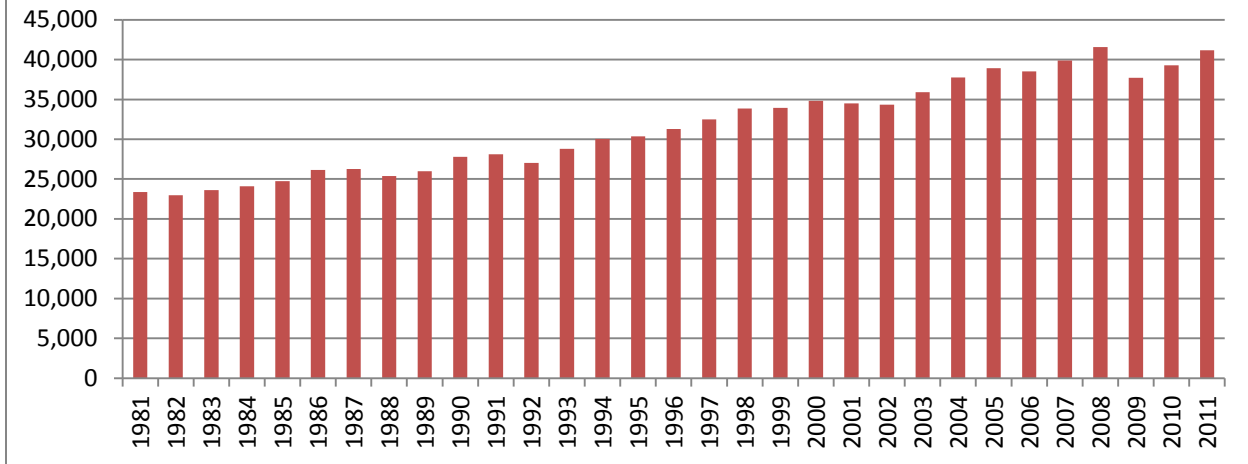
fears were of concern for federal finance minister Jim Flaherty when he noted that Canada faced several risks from the international economic climate (Curry, 2011: A5). As the year progressed, Bank of Nova Scotia analysts expected the third quarter to experience economic contraction and warned that Canada could be the first developed country to slip back into recession (Shmuel, 2011: B1). Other banks noted other downgrades were expected but seemed confident that the country would not experience a double dip recession (Shmuel, 2011: B1).

Saskatchewan stood in contrast to the national economic picture. Saskatchewan started 2011 off with high GDP expectations: the province was expected to post a 3.7 percent growth average for 2011, higher than the 2.4 national average according to a statement made by the Saskatchewan government (Johnstone, 2011: B1). BMO Capital Markets Economics estimated real GDP was expected to rise by 4.9 percent and set the economic pace for Canada as a whole (Leader Post, 2011: B1). Indeed, Scotiabank chief economist Warren Jetsin noted that Saskatchewan's good fortune was tied to the demand for nearly all of the province's commodities and that demand was high (Kyle, 2011:C5). Jetsin stated that Saskatchewan's potential could make the province a large global player (Kyle, 2011:C5). As the year progressed, GDP growth estimates would range from 3.5 percent to as high as 4.9 percent (Leader Post, 2011: B1; Star Phoenix, 2011: C8; Leader Post, 2011a: D1; Leader Post, 2011b: D1). As the election grew closer, RBC increase its projections in September to 4.3 percent due to solid commodity prices and better weather which helped agriculture (Couture, 2011: A1). These projections were backed again by the belief that Saskatchewan was set to lead the Canadian economy in 2012 (Couture, 2011: A1). BMO in October gave the Province an expected growth rate for 2012 of 2.9 percent, which was the highest of all provinces (Morrissy, 2011: C3). This

year also saw robust expected growth for Saskatchewan cities: the Conference Board of Canada's Metropolitan report forecast that Regina and Saskatoon would post some of the largest economic growth for 2011 at 3.1 percent and 4.1 percent respectively (Tonequzzi, 2011: D3).

Why might Saskatchewan's GDP growth be expected to carry significant weight in structuring public perceptions of the economy? The answer, arguably, lies in the contrast between provincial and national economic fortunes. A look at Saskatchewan's GDP growth, indicated on figure 3.1 (Canada West Foundation, 2010), shows a slow and steady pattern of growth since 1981. Interestingly, 2008 posted the highest growth the province had seen in some time, only to watch it drop during the recession. While there has been growth over the years, there have been few major increases in GDP growth; namely the mid-1990s and mid to late 2000s. This information is important to consider as, since 1981, Saskatchewan has only experienced two large instances of growth, and thus Saskatchewan residents would have noticed the significant drop in 2009.

**Figure 3.1:
SASKATCHEWAN REAL GDP (IN MILLIONS)**



At the same time, and as the information above indicates, Canada had a strong start in 2010 and managed to see a small amount of growth. The following year was more tumultuous with similar expected gains in GDP, however, 2011 also had experts expressing fear about a slip back into recession and advocating increased stimulus. Conversely, Saskatchewan saw increasing GDP expectations that were tied to natural resources. Indeed, Saskatchewan was cast in a positive light, with many financial institutions noting the province was expecting to lead the country and had the potential to become a global player with its natural resources. In this regard, the perceptions of Saskatchewan, from the media, were quite strong when considering GDP.

3.2.2: Employment and Unemployment

Levels of employment and unemployment are key economic measures. Unemployment is measured by the number of people who are unemployed but looking for work; employment is measured by the amount of people 15 years of age or over and are employed. Both of these measures are commonly discussed in the media and Statistics Canada as a measure of economic wellbeing.

The unemployment rate in Canada hovered around the 8 percent mark in the beginning of 2010 and made a slow decline as the year progressed. Indeed, the year would end with unemployment at 7.6 percent; compared to other G7 countries, this was low (Macdonald, 2010: A 27). The employment rate for 2010 began at 8.2 percent and remained close to that number till the fourth quarter, which saw a drop to 7.6 percent (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012).

Saskatchewan in 2010 saw unemployment rates substantially lower than the national average. This was due to a 1.5 percent employment increase, compared to other provinces that were losing jobs; this led Saskatchewan to have the “the countries lowest jobless growth [the previous] year” (Johnstone, 2010: A1). As the year progressed, Saskatchewan continued to have low unemployment (Leader Post, 2010: B8; Wood, 2010:B1). By November, the unemployment rate would be 5.5 percent (Scott, 2010: B1). Indeed, Saskatchewan would post the lowest unemployment numbers in the nation until November (Scott, 2010: B1). Interestingly, Saskatchewan’s employed work force increased only by 1.1 percent (Johnstone, 2011: D1). This number is misleading according to Sask Trends Monitor, however, as the apparent low

employment increase was due to the high increase in jobs from 2009 in Saskatchewan, which other provinces did not have (Johnstone, 2011: D1). Simply put, other provinces were catching up to Saskatchewan and, comparatively, Saskatchewan's job growth only appeared small. Other employment news of that year indicated that Saskatchewan also saw increases in wages, though the province was still below the national average (Star Phoenix, 2011: C12; Scott, 2010: C9). As well, there was a decrease in unemployment insurance claims, although pundits noted this may have been due to these benefits lapsing (Star Phoenix, 2010: C8). The year ended with a decrease in people receiving unemployment benefits compared to the previous year even with a small seasonally adjusted increase was reported (Scott, 2011: D1).

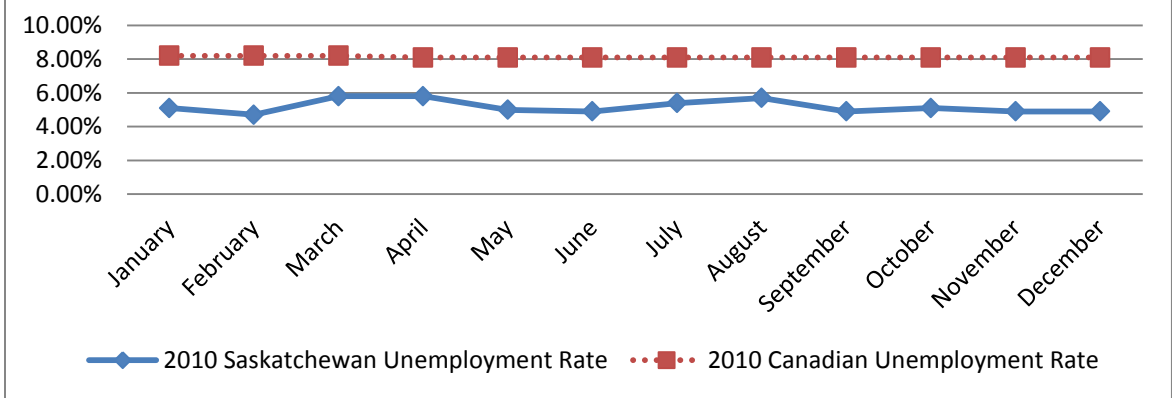
In 2011, Canada began with an unemployment rate of 7.7 percent (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012). This would steadily decrease to its lowest point of 7.2 percent, only to rise to 7.5 percent by December. In March, there was an expected gain of 30,000 jobs, however employment saw a net loss of 1,500 jobs (Blackwell and Torobin, 2011: B4). Employment rates began at 7.7 percent and dipped to a low of 7.3 percent as the year progressed (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012). By November there was a small increase to 7.5 percent (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012).

Saskatchewan started the year off with positive unemployment numbers, posting a 5.4 percent unemployment rate (Scott, 2011: C6). This number dropped to 5.0 percent in April, even though employment numbers dropped by 1,700 jobs compared 12 months previous (Scott, 2011: B1). Saskatoon and Regina had the lowest unemployment rate in the country with a 2,400 job increase from a year before (Leader Post, 2011: A1). These numbers were reflected

in the provincial average in August as Saskatchewan led the nation in the lowest unemployment rate at 4.9 percent, well below the national average of 7.2 percent (Yates, 2011: B1). September saw a new employment record for Saskatchewan at 0.9 percent or 4,900 jobs since September 2011 (Goudy, 2011: B1). (Elliot noted that this was not a good indicator as these increases were expected due to the economy growing, noting that in his opinion employment has been “pretty much level” (Goudy, 2011: B1). By the beginning of November, the unemployment level was at 3.7 percent, 0.3 lower than in September (Chabun, 2011: B1). Interestingly, at mid October there was a decrease of 1,100 full and part time jobs from September but there were 6,200 more than in October of 2010 (Chabun, 2011: B1). Additionally, employment benefits declined throughout 2011, marking the third best in Canada (Leader Post, 2011c: D1), and there was a decrease in employment benefit claimants (Leader Post, 2011c: D1). However, wages were shown to not improve during 2011. Saskatchewan had the “lowest year over year earnings growth among provinces” and the second highest job growth at the same time (Johnstone, 2011: D1).

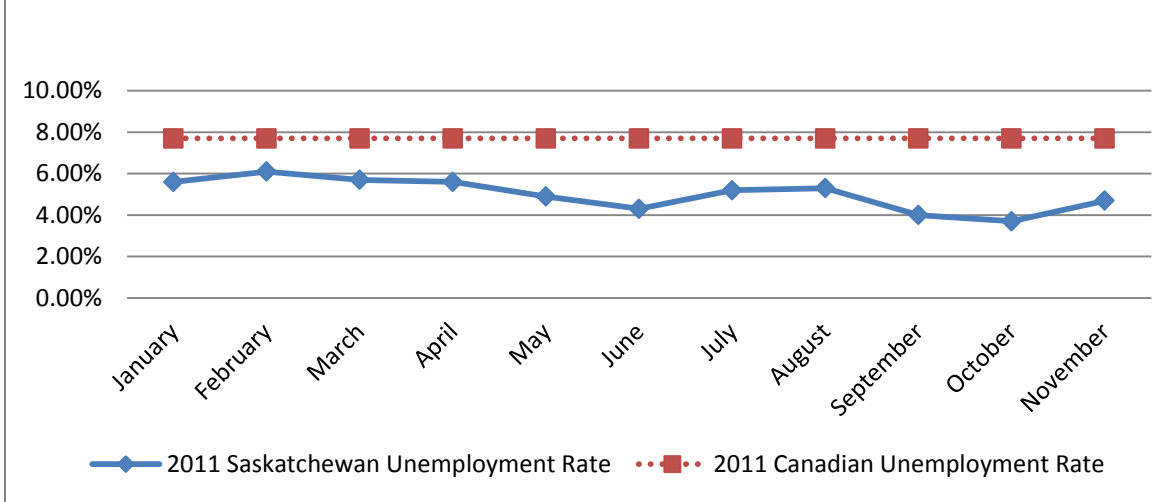
As can be understood by the information above, and as is demonstrated in Figures 3.2 and 3.3, Saskatchewan was well under the national average of unemployment; at times it even had the lowest unemployment in the country. Though the charts for Saskatchewan do indicate a great deal of fluctuation, unemployment was in no danger of going above the national average. As such, Saskatchewan was doing incredibly well in this economic measure.

**Figure 3.2:
2010 Saskatchewan/Canadian
Unemployment Rates**



(Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012; Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2011a).

**Figure 3.3:
2011 Saskatchewan/Canadian Unemployment
Rates**



(Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012; Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2011b).

3.2.3: Inflation

Canadian inflation increased in both 2010 and 2011. Although initial reports in December 2010 noted that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 2.4 percent from the previous December (Vancouver Sun, 2011: A12), in 2011 Statistics Canada noted that there was only a 1.8 annual percent increase (Statistics Canada CPI historical summary, 2012) In 2011, Canada saw a 2.9 percent increase in inflation compared to 2010; this was the largest percentage change in nearly 20 years (Statistics Canada CPI historical summary, 2012).

Compared to other Western provinces, Saskatchewan's inflation rate was relatively high holding at 1.0 percent for 2010 (Elliot, 2010: 1). By the end of 2010, Saskatchewan's inflation rate settled near the national average at 2 percent as reported by the media (Isfeld, 2010: C6). Inflation remained relatively high in Saskatchewan at the beginning of 2011 at a reported 2.2 percent (Leader Post, 2011: C1). This was the fourth highest in Canada and the highest for Saskatchewan in two years; the increase was linked to rising energy costs, food and shelter (Leader Post, 2011: C1). By September the inflation rate sat at 3.4 percent (Leader Post, 2011a: B1).

In terms of inflation, Saskatchewan did well in comparison to the national average in 2010. In 2011, however, Saskatchewan saw relatively large increases in inflation but remain close to the national average. In this regard, Saskatchewan did not vary much in terms of the national average. Compared to GDP growth and unemployment figures, Saskatchewan did not excel as well in this measure of the economy but was able to stay just below the national average.

3.2.4: Summary of Traditional Measures

The information on traditional economic measures places Saskatchewan in a very good position compared to Canada as a whole (see figure 3.4). Both GDP and unemployment were significantly better in Saskatchewan. Inflation, on the other hand, remained unchanged and close to the national average and would be the province's only shortfall when looking at traditional economic measures. Another important boost for Saskatchewan came from the international financial community in 2011. At this time, the province's credit rating of AA+ was changed from stable to positive (Saskatoon Sun, 2011: 15). Standard and Poor, who changed the rating, based its decision on strong liquidity, low and stable debt burden, economic performance through the recession, and moderate support from the federal government (Saskatoon Sun, 2011: 15). This rating was further increased when Standard and Poor bumped up Saskatchewan's credit rating to AAA in recognition of its "low and declining debt burden" (Kiladze, 2011: B3). This boost in confidence, which was a result of many of the strong traditional economic measures mentioned above, gives a very positive economic picture of Saskatchewan during 2010 and 2011. Overall, when considering traditional economic measures, Saskatchewan appeared to have positive conditions, which would likely contribute to positive economic perceptions amongst the Saskatchewan public.

3.3: Non-Traditional Economic Indicators

The economic measures mentioned in the previous section are generally considered more traditional indicators of the economy. Those measures are discussed often in the media and have been important markers for economic health. However, these measures do not fully

capture all facets of the economy. In order to understand the full impact of the economy, this thesis will consider other indicators that might not be considered in other economic voting analyses but still may have an effect on economic perceptions.

These non-traditional measures include food bank usage, affordable housing, and poverty. While the measures presented may not fully capture all non-traditional measures, as will be indicated in the next section they were discussed by the political parties during the election campaign. As such, these non-traditional measures will help provide a deeper contextual understand of the economy in Saskatchewan. It should be noted that unlike the previous section, this section will not compare Saskatchewan with Canada for most measures. Much of the available data focused solely on Saskatchewan with little national comparison. As such, an in-depth comparison with the nation is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁴

3.3.1: Food Bank Usage and Poverty

Food bank usage occurs in most major centers. These non-profit organizations provide food to residents who simply cannot afford meals on their own. Arguably, if their financial situation was more secure, individuals would not need these facilities. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the amount of food bank usage gives us an understanding of certain economic conditions that are at play in Saskatchewan's two largest cities.

At the start of 2010 Regina noted "unprecedented" food bank use with 10,000 people using the Regina Food Bank in January; 2,000 of those individuals were new users (Brownlee, 2010: A7). Steve Compton, the director of operations for the Regina Food Bank, noted that

⁴ For a full chart of these non-traditional measure, please see Appendix B.

many people who use their facilities are working but making minimum wage and/or single parents (Brownlee, 2010: A7). By March, the province saw food bank usage grow by 20 percent compared to March 2009; Regina alone saw a 30 percent increase in the same time period (Leader Post, 2010: B7). These trends persisted throughout 2010, wherein 22,600 individuals used the food banks by March, which was a 20 percent increase from March 2009 (Switzer and Hall, 2010: A4). In Saskatoon, individual use rose 25.15 percent from the previous September and the number of serviced homes grew by 27.66 percent (Switzer and Hall, 2010: A4). These numbers led Saskatchewan to have one of the largest surges in food bank usage in the country (Switzer and Hall, 2010: A4). However, By 2011, Hunger Count 2011, a report released by Food Banks Canada, noted a nearly 9 percent decrease in Food Bank usage in the province (Pegg and Marshall, 2011: 22).

In conjunction with food bank use, poverty in Saskatchewan also increased. In late 2010, Poverty Free Saskatchewan released a report that indicated that an estimated 140,000 people were affected by poverty and noted that Saskatchewan, unlike other places, did not have an anti-poverty action plan (Hall, 2010: A3). Along with this, in July 2010 the Conference Board of Canada's Centre for the North named Northern Saskatchewan the second of the five poorest regions in Canada; the regional median income for that area is \$13,600 annually (Kyle, 2010: A8). A year later, the Saskatchewan NDP presented statistics from the University of Regina's Social Policy Research Unity that noted that there were 113,000 Saskatchewan residents suffering from poverty, 33,000 of whom were children (Mandryk, 2011: A4).

3.3.2: Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is also a good indicator of economic performance. Although housing projects in Saskatchewan grew by 25 percent from 2009 (Johnstone, 2010: C5), in 2010 affordable housing availability in Saskatchewan was extremely low, making it difficult for new arrivals to the province to find homes; businesses were having the same issue with commercial space (Leader Post, 2010: B8). This was likely due to the competitive nature of the market (Star Phoenix, 2010a: C8). In January the Frontier Centre rated Regina housing as “moderately unaffordable” and Saskatoon housing as “seriously unaffordable” (Leader Post, 2010a: C1). Despite the competitive nature of the real estate market, affordable housing saw improvement in Saskatoon in June with the announcement of a 65 unit building designed for low income residents (Maclean, 2010: A 11). In 2011, the Government of Saskatchewan invested further in affordable housing with 34 million dollars for 100 communities and promised to invest 252 million over 5 years in homes for people with “modest incomes” (Warren, 2011: A1; The Canadian Press, 2011). This influx of housing would be welcome as in June as Saskatoon had the highest rate of homelessness in Canada according to a Salvation Army report, along with a vacancy rating of 1.9 percent in Saskatoon and 1.6 percent in Regina (Roth, 2010: B6). Diane Delaney, a coordinator with the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan, linked the low vacancy rate with the economic boom and its effect on housing and rental costs (Roth, 2010: B6). However, the third and fourth quarter of 2010 saw affordability improve in Saskatchewan (Couture, 2011: D1). The third quarter was helped by a “softening in home prices and lower mortgage rates which lead to a significant improvement in affordability” (Leader Post, 2010b: D1), and the fourth quarter was helped by only small

increases in price and declining mortgage rates (Couture, 2011: D1). This improvement appeared to do little, however, as in the beginning of 2011 Saskatoon had the least affordable housing in Canada (Tembath, 2011: A6). This may have led to the Government of Saskatchewan's decision to invest in affordable housing, as mentioned above.

3.3.3: Summary of Non-Traditional Measures

The non-traditional economic measures mentioned above paint a different picture of Saskatchewan's economy compared to traditional measures. Food bank usage in the province was very high compared to past years as well as high compared to the national average (although there was a drop in 2011). Additionally, levels of poverty for the province were quite high, particularly in the north, and a large number of people in poverty were children. Affordable housing was the only non-traditional measure that increased investments and funding promises from the provincial government.

3.4: Political-Economic Context

This section will consider two important political elements in describing Saskatchewan's economic context: public attitudes, including perceptions of both parties stressed particular parts of the economy before and during the election campaign. Arguably, this campaign rhetoric has the ability to influence economic perceptions of voters.

3.4.1: Saskatchewan Economic and Leadership Public Opinion

As mentioned above, compared to the national economic climate, the Saskatchewan economy was faring very well on objective economic measures. This reality was accompanied

by positive economic attitudes amongst the public.⁵ While provincial economic evaluation data are limited, at the start of 2010, 77 percent of Saskatchewan residents believed that the state of the Canadian economy was “good” and 50% of residents were positive that the national economy was going to improve in the following three months; this was significantly higher than the national average (Leaders Post, 2010c: D1). Job anxiety was also low at the beginning of 2010, with Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents reporting the lowest job anxiety in Canada (Leaders Post, 2010c: D1). By March, only 13% of the Saskatchewan population had anxiety about their jobs (Regina Sun, 2010: 26). By the end of 2010 polling data indicated that Saskatchewan residents were very confident in the provincial economy. A Sigma Analytics survey found that Saskatchewan residents were 10 times more likely to believe the provincial economy was positive; 66 percent found it strong to very strong (Hall, 2010: A1). Additionally, 55 percent of people felt their personal financial situation was strong to very strong (Hall, 2010: A1).

Saskatchewan residents started 2011 off with positive economic attitudes. RBC noted that nearly 50 percent of Manitoba and Saskatchewan residents were fairly optimistic about the Canadian economy (Leader Post, 2011d: D1), though this was a marketable drop from 2010. From April onward Saskatchewan residents continued to show strong belief in the economy with one report indicating that 82 percent felt the national economy was doing good (Kyle, 2011: C8). By April, the RBC Consumer Outlook Report found that 75 percent of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents polled were optimistic about the national economy (Leader Post, 2011b: B1; 41 Kyle, 2011: C8). Additionally, job anxiety was again quite low for Saskatchewan

⁵ For a full chart of Saskatchewan economic public opinion, please see Appendix C.

fluctuating between 15 and 11 percent (Leader post, 2011d: D1, Leader Post, 2011: C11).

Interestingly, Saskatchewan resident's optimism about their financial situation had dropped to 40 percent, compared to the previous January (Leader post, 2011d: D1). This drop in positive egocentric perceptions remained through the year, however Saskatchewan's percentage was higher than the national average (Kyle, 2011: C8). This year also saw a third of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents express concern about inflation in fuel and food costs (Leader Post, 2011a: B1).

Although Saskatchewan had particular issues in areas such as affordable housing, poverty and food bank usage during the 2010-11 period, these issues did not seem to undermine Saskatchewan resident's positive perceptions of the economy through 2010 and 2011. Indeed, attitudes towards job anxiety and faith in the economy were very high. The only issue of public concern appeared to be inflation, and when considering actual inflation rates, those concerns appear to be justified.

Leadership evaluation has also proven to be an important consideration in vote choice. In 2011 the year began with strong public assessments of Brad Wall. In March an Angus Reid Poll identified Brad Wall as the most popular premier in Canada with a 63 percent approval rating (Leader Post, 2011: A1). According to Angus Reid, this came on the heels of high approval ratings throughout the past year (Leader Post, 2011a: A1). Political commentator Murray Mandryk noted in September that, going into the 2011 election, Brad Wall was significantly more popular than Dwain Lingenfelter; a trend that had been evident for the previous two years (Mandryk, 2011: A6). Mandryk reported the results of a poll indicating that 83 percent of

people felt Brad Wall would make a better premier than Lingenfelter (Mandryk, 2011: A9).

Mandryk also noted that the growing two year discontent with Lingenfelter was making it difficult for people to vote for the NDP on the whole (Mandryk, 2011: A9). He argued that the low opinion of Lingenfelter was the New Democratic Party's biggest problem in the impending election (Mandryk, 2011: A9).

Overall, the Saskatchewan people showed strong positive assessments for 2010 and 2011 provincial economy. Indeed a large number felt that the national economy was good or was going to get better. Additionally, there was little job anxiety. The only negative opinion was inflation in 2011, which also corresponded to one of the largest rises of inflation the province or the country had seen in some time. Further, the opinion of Brad Wall is very telling when compared to Dwain Lingenfelter.

3.4.2: The Economy and the Election Campaign

Chapter 2 noted that campaign and issue effects can affect vote choice. Additionally, past economic voting studies have quantified various campaign and political effects into their work. Given this, the Saskatchewan Party and the New Democratic Party campaigns will be presented with sole focus on how they discussed and framed economic issues.

As presented in the beginning of the chapter, unemployment was low and GDP projections were high and the Saskatchewan Party government was quick to tout the province's economic success (Wall, 2011a; Global News, 2011). The economy also played a large part in the Saskatchewan Party's victorious 2011 election campaign, with Premier Brad Wall making numerous mentions of "keeping Saskatchewan moving forward" economically (Wall, 2011b).

Wall further stated that he wants Saskatchewan to “continue to be a “have” province...and an economic leader in Canada and providing leadership in the world” (Wall, 2011b). This was expressed in the Saskatchewan Party’s “Saskatchewan Advantage Growth Plan” in their platform, which noted several policies including:

- “Keeping Taxes Low and resource royalties stable.
- Reducing red tape and barriers to growth.
- Promoting trade in key export markets.
- Investing 2.2 billion in highway and transportation infrastructure.
- Upgrading Crown Utility infrastructure.
- Securing Saskatchewan’s natural resource advantage.
- Attracting investment and telling Saskatchewan’s story to the world.” (The Saskatchewan Party, 2011).

Further, under the heading ‘The Saskatchewan Party Record: A Strong Economy, a Growing Province’, the platform discussed economic proposals the party had implemented like lowering business taxes as well as the government’s record on balanced budgets and Standard and Poor’s credit rating increase (The Saskatchewan Party, 2011: 8).

The Saskatchewan NDP also noted the economy in its platform (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011), but, arguably, not to the same extent as its rivals. The New Democratic Party platform noted a variety of economic policies but not a concisely defined plan like the Saskatchewan Party. These policies included:

- “Helping small business thrive and grow by eliminating the small business tax in the first term of an NDP government.
- Creating a Northern Economic Strategy to expand opportunities in tourism, forestry, mining, aquaculture and processing.
- Changing and simplifying the tax and royalty structure for potash to make sure that Saskatchewan’s residents are getting their fair share.

- Immediately setting a fair minimum wage to bring it over the poverty line and then indexing it annually to the cost of inflation.
- Offering programs to make life more affordable, including rent control and affordable housing.”
- Resource sharing with First Nations (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011: 1, 9, 10).

Overall, the Saskatchewan Party devoted more information and direct policies over the economy than did the New Democratic Party. Indeed, its “Growth and Opportunity” section was a large part of its platform. Additionally, the Saskatchewan Party used its platform to inform the various economic changes and its record on economic issues. The NDP, on the other hand, was more concerned with the economic issues that were directly affecting society like poverty and food bank usage. While the New Democratic Party was not afforded the opportunity of discussing its economic record, the majority of its platform seemed to revolve around families, community, health care, and improving these areas (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011). In this regard, there were stark differences in how both parties chose to highlight and discuss their respective areas of the economy.

The election campaign advertisements noted the economy a great deal. The Saskatchewan Party’s commercial “Today in Saskatchewan” noted the economy was the best in Canada, unemployment was low, the budget was balanced, taxes reduced and infrastructure investment was increasing (Saskatchewan Party, 2011a). In “Today in Saskatchewan 2,” the advert again noted that the economy was growing and the population was growing and staying (Saskatchewan Party, 2011b). Leadership was also shown to be an important factor for the Saskatchewan Party as their “Leadership” ad expressed that leadership was important to maintain the economy and standing up for resources and managing them (Saskatchewan Party 2011c). Indeed, the Saskatchewan Party also discussed leadership before the election by

running attack ads that questioned Dwain Lingenfelter as a leader (The Saskatchewan Party, 2011d; The Saskatchewan Party, 2011e; The Saskatchewan Party, 2011f). It appears that the Saskatchewan Party was taking the economy and leadership into the campaign by making these two issues an important focal point to its campaign.

The NDP, on the other hand, chose to discuss the economy but through a different perspective lens. Its campaign ads tried to sway viewers to focus on other issues like housing, health care, education, highways, safety and the environment (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011a). The economy was discussed in its “A Healthy Boom,” “Fair is Fair,” and “Rent Control” advertisements but only to the extent that the NDP felt that the boom was not properly being used to support health care or average families, as well as wages not keeping up to cost of living (Saskatchewan New Democrats 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). Indeed, the only economic policy it discussed in its commercials involved increasing potash royalties, the Bright Futures fund, which would come from resource royalties, and policies for housing (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e). While these policies have economic implications, arguably they do not engage the economy head on in the same way as the Saskatchewan Party’s proposed policies.

When comparing the campaign television advertisements between the parties there are stark differences. The Saskatchewan Party was concerned with capitalizing on the perceived economic good fortune of the province and attributing it to the government’s management as well as Brad Wall’s leadership. Conversely, the New Democratic Party’s approach on the economy was discussing the various issues that were perceived as ignored by the economic boom. Additionally, it did not discuss leadership at all, save for one advertisement in which

Lingenfelter suggested that leadership was a non-issue (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2011a). With these differing attitudes on the economy and leadership, it is easy to understand where the priorities of the parties sat. The Saskatchewan Party presented itself as the party that was hoping to continue forward with the economy and management and maintain the positive benefits. Conversely, the New Democratic Party was interested in pointing out where the economic good fortune had failed certain aspects of the population. What is evident is the economy was at the crux of the majority of commercials during the campaign in one form or another. Interestingly, the issues discussed by both parties appear starkly divided between the traditional economic measures in the Saskatchewan Party commercials and non-traditional measures in the NDP commercials.

3.5: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to establish the economic context of Saskatchewan between January 2010 and November 2011. Once again, this chapter was not meant to definitively link the economic news articles and government documents presented above to the individual economic perceptions that will be described in the next chapter. Rather, the information above is meant to describe the economic situation in Saskatchewan during the lead up to the election and how the information presented an environment for positive economic perceptions. The previous sections used a variety of economic measures to determine this context. Presumably, this context can be linked to the economic perceptions of Saskatchewan residents due to the fact that these measures were discussed in the media and government documents.

With this chapter validating Saskatchewan's strong economic reality for 2010 and 2011, the focus of the thesis will turn to original data analysis using the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study. The following chapter will measure the economic perceptions of Saskatchewan and how, if at all, these perceptions informed vote choice.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1: Introduction

Determining the reasons why people vote the way they do is not a simple task. As discussed in chapter 2, there are myriad interests, factors, issues and opinions that affect how people vote. Survey data allow researchers to measure and assess many of these factors. As past studies have done, this thesis utilizes individual level data and multivariate analysis to better understand some of the reasons why Saskatchewan voters voted for the Saskatchewan Party in 2011. Specifically, it seeks to understand how, if at all, Saskatchewan residents' perceptions of the economy influenced their vote choices in the 2011 election. In doing so, one hypothesis will be tested:

1. Positive economic perceptions will increase the odds of voting for the incumbent party in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election.

In addition to testing the hypothesis, leadership evaluations will also be explored to see how, if at all, they influence the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice.

The data used for the analysis comes from the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study (SKES). The SKES was compiled by the Survey and Group Analysis Laboratory, a part of the Social Science Research Laboratories at the University of Saskatchewan. This study was conducted over two weeks immediately following the 2011 Saskatchewan election (specifically, November 8 - 21, 2011) and collected 1,099 completed surveys of residents 18 years of age and older. The survey asked questions about a variety of attitudes and opinions regarding the election, and gathered basic socio-economic and demographic information. The University of

Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board approved the SKES before its commencement. Since the SKES specifically asks about retrospective sociotropic and egocentric economic perceptions, as well as vote choice, it is apt for use in this study. The following sections will outline the dependent, independent and control variables that will be utilized in the logistic regression models.

4.2: Variables

The dependent variable for this analysis is the respondent's self-reported vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election. Specifically, this variable comes from the survey question: "Which Party did you vote for in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election?" As reported in Table 1, 43 percent of respondents who answered that question said they voted for the Saskatchewan Party and 19.6 percent said they voted for the Saskatchewan New Democrats. The responses to this question were then recoded into the Saskatchewan Party dummy variable, which was coded as 1: Saskatchewan Party and 0: All other parties. The "don't know" and "refused" categories were removed. It should be noted that most of the 'other parties' voters reported voting for the NDP; only 3.3 percent of survey respondents reported voting for a party other than the Saskatchewan Party or the NDP. Additionally, 1.2 percent responded with "don't know" and 8.8 percent refused to respond. Only respondents who reported voting in the election were asked the vote choice question, and the analysis therefore excludes non-voters.

The key independent variables are the economic perceptions of voters, specifically retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions. The retrospective sociotropic variable comes from the survey question: "Over the past year has Saskatchewan's economy gotten

better, gotten worse or stayed about the same?” The egocentric variable comes from the survey question: “Financially, are you better off, worse off or about the same as a year ago?” These measures are consistent with past studies looking at retrospective sociotropic and egocentric economic perceptions. As shown in Table 1, 55 percent believed the economy had improved in the last year (sociotropic economic perceptions), and 56 percent felt that their personal financial situation had remained the same (egocentric economic perceptions). From these frequencies it is easy to see that the majority feel that the economy is getting better; however the good economic times has not overly improved individual’s personal economic situation. Both economic perception variables were recoded to 1: Gotten Better, 0: stayed the same, -1: gotten worse. Coding the variables this way creates an ease of interpretation for the results.

As leadership has been found to influence vote choice in past studies, leadership evaluations are a third independent variable that will be added into the model. Using data from the Saskatchewan Election Study, McGrane et al. (2012) found that the leadership evaluation of Brad Wall was a significant factor in vote choice. As such, the variable that measures Brad Wall’s leadership will be added. This variable employs a 100 point feeling thermometer of Brad Wall’s leadership, with 0 indicating the respondent “really disliked” him and 100 indicating they “really liked” him. The “don’t know” and “refused” categories were removed for the purposes of analysis. As reported in Table 2, average (mean) leadership evaluation is 67.86.

It should be noted that the variable for Brad Wall’s leadership evaluation is unique in this analysis as it will be considered as an independent variable in the main model and then as a dependent variable as the analysis evolves.

Socio-demographic controls include gender, education, age, religion, region and income, as is consistent with the literature. Region includes five categories: Saskatoon census metropolitan area (CMA), Regina CMA, Smaller Cities (CAs), Rural South and Rural North. Additionally, religion has been recoded into dummy variables for individual faiths or beliefs with 1 indicating the religion and 0 indicating all other faiths, no religion, don't know, and refused. These can be compared to the "no religion" dummy variable, which was coded as 1 = no religion and 0 = all other faiths, don't know and refused.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Model Variables

<u>Dependent Variable</u>				
<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency in Modal Category</u>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Saskatchewan Party Vote Choice	727	Voted for Saskatchewan Party: 43.2%	-	-
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency in Modal Category</u>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Has the economy Gotten better, worse, stayed the same? (Sociotropic)	1059	Gotten Better: 55.1%	-	-
Financially, are you better, worse off, about the same? (Egocentric)	1084	About the Same: 56.8%	-	-
Brad Wall Leadership	1031	-	67.86	27.32
<u>Control Variables</u>				
<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Frequency in Modal Category</u>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	1078	-	1962.89	16.59795
Income	883	20,000 – less than 30,000: 7.3%	-	-
Education	1093	Bachelor’s Degree: 23.9%	-	-
Sex	1099	Female: 51.7%	-	-
Religion	1099	Catholic: 26.1%	-	-
Geographic Region	1099	Rural South: 36.7%		

*“Don’t Know” and “Refused” responses were included in this summary.

4.3: Bivariate Analysis

Before moving to multivariate analysis, it is useful to consider the bivariate relationships among the main variables. This will allow for a better understanding of the variables being used and what may be expected in the regression models that follow this section.

To what extent are the retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions correlated?

Table 2 shows a positive relationship is statistically significant, and of weak to moderate strength (Pearson’s R = .270, gamma =.443; see Table 2). This correlation is small enough to allow for the independent variables to be used together with a low risk of endogeneity.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis of Economic Perceptions

		Egocentric Economic Perception			Total
		Worse Off	About the Same	Better Off	
Sociotropic Perceptions	Gotten Worse	17.3% (26)	3.1% (19)	3.4% (10)	5.3% (55)
	About the Same	44% (66)	44.3% (268)	20.5% (60)	37.6% (394)
	Gotten Better	38.7% (58)	52.6% (318)	76% (222)	57.1% (598)
Total		100% (150)	100% (605)	100% (292)	100% (104)
Gamma: .443*	Chi square: 109.495*				

P: .000*

Bivariate analysis also suggests a weak to moderate relationship between economic perception and vote choice (Cramer’s V = 2.82 for sociotropic, .247 for ecocentric; see Table 3). Looking first at sociotropic perceptions, 77% of those who felt the Saskatchewan economy had ‘gotten better’ in the past year voted for the Saskatchewan Party, compared to 51.3% of those who felt the economy stayed the same, and only 38.5% of felt the economy had gotten worse. In other words, as retrospective sociotropic evaluations improved the percentage of respondents who reported voting for the incumbent Saskatchewan Party increased. The same pattern is seen with egocentric perceptions: 80 percent of those who felt their personal economic circumstances had ‘gotten better’ voted for the Saskatchewan Party, compared to 64.3% of those who felt their personal financial situation had stayed the same, and only 40% of

those who felt their personal financial situation had 'gotten worse'. Consistent with economic voting theory, these bivariate results suggest that there is a relationship between economic perceptions and Saskatchewan residents' vote choice.

Table 3: Bivariate Analysis of Economic Perceptions and Vote Choice

Saskatchewan Party Vote	Sociotropic			Egocentric		
	Gotten Worse	Stayed the Same	Gotten Better	Worse Off	Stayed the Same	Gotten Better
Yes	38.5% (10)	51.3% (135)	77% (324)	40.9% (38)	64.3% (278)	80% (160)
No	61.5% (16)	48.7% (128)	23% (97)	59.1% (55)	35.7% (153)	20% (40)
	Cramer's V: .282*			Cramer's V: .247*		
	Chi Square: -56.586*			Chi-Square: 43.948*		

P: .000*

4.4: Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate analysis allows us to consider if the apparent relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice holds when other variables relevant to vote choice are controlled. The following section presents two models that seek to understand the relationship between retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions on individuals' vote choices. The first model includes sociodemographic variables and economic perceptions as predictors of vote choice. The second model introduces the leadership evaluation variable to consider what impact, if any, leadership evaluations have on the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice. Both models use logistic regression analysis, which is appropriate given the categorical nature of the dependent variable.

4.4.1 Model 1: Socio-demographic and Economic Perception Variables

Economic voting theory argues that good economic times should lead to incumbent government being re-elected. Specifically, individual-level research suggests that both sociotropic and egocentric perceptions are, at times, significant factors in vote choice. Further, research suggests that sociotropic evaluations have greater influence on vote choice than do egocentric evaluations. To test these relationships in the Saskatchewan 2011 election context, the first model examines the relationship between the two economic evaluation variables and vote choice after controlling for socio-demographic factors.

The logistic regression analysis was conducted in two steps (Table 4). In the first step, only the socio-demographic variables are included. The results indicate that those with higher income were more likely to vote for the Saskatchewan Party. Additionally region also had a

positive impact on the odds for voting for the Saskatchewan Party. Conversely, the likelihood of voting for the Saskatchewan Party decreases with education. Neither age nor sex was a statistically significant predictor of vote choice. Additionally, this model only found 8.4 percent of the explained variance, as indicated by the Nagelkerke R^2 . With such a low Nagelkerke R^2 it is clear that many other factors that influence vote choice are not present in this model.

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis of Economic Perceptions and Vote Choice

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	S.E	Exp(B)	B	S.E	Exp(B)
Sex	-.226	.185	.798	-.046	.199	.955
Income	.094**	.032	1.098	.063	.035	1.065
Age	-.005	.006	.955	-.010	.006	.990
Education	-.222*	.051	.801	-.197*	.054	.821
Region	.180***	.075	1.197	.166***	.079	1.180
Catholic	-.402	.942	.669	-.401	.990	.669
Anglican	-.144	1.044	.866	-.277	1.090	.758
United Church of Canada	-.234	.955	.792	-.365	1.005	.694
Baptist	.552	1.195	1.737	.024	1.237	1.024
Lutheran	-.950	.992	.387	-1.240	1.045	.289
Other Protestant	.044	.984	1.045	-.224	1.035	.799
Other Religion	-.374	.960	.688	-.510	1.009	.601
Not Religious	-.374	.960	.403	-.954	.987	.385
Sociotropic Perceptions	-	-	-	.792*	.171	2.208
Egocentric Perceptions	-	-	-	.592*	.170	1.808
Constant	16.114	11.010	93487.875	21.641	12.626	2.504E9
	Nagelkerke R^2 : .121			Nagelkerke R^2 : .216		

P: *.000, ** .010, *** .050

With the baseline statistics found in step one, step two can begin. Step two of the model adds in the egocentric and sociotropic retrospective economic perceptions; the variables of importance for this thesis. Before discussing the model, it is important to note that an individual's perception of the economy is, most likely, a mixture of prospective, retrospective,

sociotropic and egocentric perceptions. With such an intermingling of perceptions, endogeneity between the two perceptions included in the model may exist. However, as noted earlier, the correlation between the two variables is rather modest (Pearson's $R=.270$). Thus, while there is a correlation, it is low enough for the two variables to be included in the model.

Table 4 demonstrates that the economic perception variables change the model quite a bit. Firstly, both retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions are significant at the .000 level, suggesting support for the hypothesis. Further, retrospective sociotropic economic perceptions are seen to have the largest effect in the model, increasing the odds of voting for the Saskatchewan Party by 22.1%, while egocentric economic perceptions increase in the odds of voting for the Saskatchewan Party by 18.1%. We also see a small change in our socio-demographic variables; with the addition of the economic perceptions, education and region are also significant predictors of vote choice. Finally, the Nagelkerke R^2 saw a significant increase of the explained variance in this step, moving from 8.4 percent to 21.6 percent. It is evident that, with this model, both sociotropic and egocentric economic perceptions seem to play a part in vote choice for the Saskatchewan Party.

4.4.2 Model 2: Socio-demographic, Economic Perception and Leadership Evaluation Variables

Past studies of economic voting have not fully considered the issue of leadership. As chapter 2 noted, political parties are often "defined by their leaders" (Parella, 2010: 240). As such, leadership can be an important consideration in vote choice. As Nadeau and Blais noted, "economic conditions do matter, but they matter in conjunction with Canadians' judgments about the personal qualities and defects of party leaders" (Nadeau and Blais, 1995: 216). While the importance of leadership may ebb and flow over particular elections, analysis of the 2011

Saskatchewan election demonstrates that leadership is linked to vote choice. McGrane et al., using the Saskatchewan Election Study data, found that Saskatchewan residents' opinions of Premier Brad Wall was a large predictor of vote choice in the 2011 election (2012: 24). With this factor being recognized, Brad Wall's leadership variable is added into the model.

Table 5: Multivariate Analysis of Economic Perceptions and Vote Choice (Expanded Model)

Variable	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Sex	-.205	.289	.815
Income	.068	.051	1.070
Age	.018	.009	1.018
Education	-.249**	.077	.779
Region	.189	.118	1.208
Catholic	-1.413	1.466	.243
Anglican	-.947	1.609	.388
United Church of Canada	-1.752	1.479	.173
Baptist	-.911	1.848	.402
Lutheran	-2.141	1.540	.117
Other Protestant	-2.191	1.505	.112
Other Religion	-2.208	1.495	.110
Not Religious	-1.977	1.461	.139
Sociotropic Perceptions	.420	.244	1.522
Egocentric Perceptions	.311	2.43	1.365
Wall Opinion	.104*	.010	1.109
Constant	-38.178	18.585	.000
Nagelkerke R ² : .674			

P: *.000, ** .010, *** .050

Table 5 shows that the addition of the leadership variable has a significant impact on our model. The retrospective sociotropic and egocentric variables become statistically insignificant. Indeed, only two variables achieve statistical significance: income and leadership evaluations. The leadership variable is shown to have a large impact on vote choice: with a one unit increase in the opinion of Brad Wall's leadership, the odds of for voting the Saskatchewan Party increase by 11%. The biggest indication of the effect of leadership

evaluations comes from the Nagelkerke R^2 , which sees a large increase from 19.1 percent of the explained variance to 67.4 percent. What we see clearly is that Saskatchewan residents' favorable opinions of Brad Wall seemingly outweigh their opinion of their retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions.

These results raise a new question: are Brad Wall's favorable leadership evaluations related to voters' economic perceptions? It is to that question the next section will now turn.

4.5: Leadership Evaluations and Economic Perceptions

The SKES data allows for the use OLS regression analysis to see if the retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions that were used to understand vote choice may simply be a factor in Brad Wall's leadership evaluation. Before engaging in the OLS model, a look at a bivariate analysis is important to better understand the data that will be employed in the model. As Table 6 demonstrates, residents with favorable economic perceptions also had favorable opinions of Brad Wall. For sociotropic economic perceptions the model category is "gotten better"; individuals in this category had a mean opinion score for Brad Wall of 75. The model category for egocentric perceptions was "stayed the same"; individuals in this category had a mean opinion score of 68 for Brad Wall. This chart shows that positive sociotropic perceptions are linked to high evaluations of Brad Wall. Additionally, neutral egocentric perceptions were linked with moderately high perceptions of Brad Wall.

Table 6: Comparison of Means

Brad Wall Leadership	Sociotropic			Egocentric		
	Gotten Worse	Stayed the Same	Gotten Better	Gotten Worse	Stayed the Same	Gotten Better
Mean Score	45.98	60.68	75.04	56.44	67.78	74.19

N	N=51	N= 373	N=573	N= 150	N= 583	N=285
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The OLS regression model allows us to consider the relationship between economic evaluations and leadership evaluations while controlling for other factors. OLS regression is appropriate due to the interval level nature of the dependent variable (leadership evaluations). The first model includes only socio-demographic variables; this stepwise approach will allow us to set a baseline for comparison once we add in our economic perceptions. As indicated in Table 7, age and education are negatively related and income is positively related to Brad Wall's leadership evaluations; all three of these control variables are statistically significant. Additionally, region was also statistically significant and increases the evaluation of Brad Wall by 2.01 percentage points for every one point increase. Overall, this model explains 10.5 percent of the variation in leadership evaluations.

Table 7: Multivariate Analysis of Economic Perceptions and Brad Wall Leadership Evaluation

Variable	Step 1				Step 2			
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient	Beta	t	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient	Beta	t
Constant	676.235*	115.156	-	5.872	784.701*	114.220	-	6.870
Sex	-2.652	1.853	-	-	.130	1.806	.002	.072
Income	1.570*	.309	.181	5.075	1.207*	.308	.137	3.919
Age	-.312*	.059	-	-	-.374*	.058	-	-
Education	-1.715**	.499	-	-	-1.334*	.484	-	-
Region	2.011**	.758	.091	2.652	1.771**	.730	.080	2.424
Catholic	3.961	7.944	.063	.499	7.105	8.409	.113	.845
Anglican	3.294	9.094	.22	.362	4.938	9.408	.034	.525
United Church of Canada	7.018	8.120	.089	.864	7.970	8.556	.102	.931
Baptist	11.666	10.277	.056	1.135	9.517	10.446	.047	.911
Lutheran	3.161	8.598	.027	.368	4.361	8.988	.037	.485
Other Protestant	15.854	8.374	.156	1.893	16.472	8.781	.163	1.876
Other Religion	11.015	8.118	.137	1.357	11.086	8.572	.136	1.293
Not Religious	-.778	7.942	-	-.098	2.712	8.411	.044	.322
Sociotropic Perceptions	-	-	-	-	11.491*	1.563	.246	7.354
Egocentric Perceptions	-	-	-	-	5.327*	1.484	.125	3.589
	Adjusted R ² : .105				Adjusted R ² : .197			

P: .000*, .010**, .050***

With our baseline established for comparison, the economic perceptions are added into the model. Table 7 demonstrates that economic perceptions did play a role in Saskatchewan residents' assessments of Brad Wall's leadership. Retrospective sociotropic perceptions have the largest impact as a one unit increase in those perceptions increases the opinion of Wall by 11.5 percentage points. Egocentric perceptions have a smaller impact as a one unit increase in those perceptions increase the opinion of Wall by of 5.33 percentage points. Like the previous step, age, and education were negative and statistically significant were also negative, income

was also significant and positive. Region was significant as well and indicated that for every one percentage point increase opinion of Brad Wall increased by 1.77 percentage points. Finally, this model explains 20 % of the explained variance. Compared with step 1 of the model, there is a 10 percentage point increase in the explained variance. While this adjusted R^2 obviously indicates that there is still more to explain in understanding what factors are equated with Brad Wall's leadership evaluations, it does tell us that economic perceptions are an integral part.

An OLS regression analysis was also run using the leadership opinion of Dwain Lingenfelter, the opposition party leader, as the dependent variable to understand if economic perceptions were a significant part of his leadership opinion. Only the control variables sex, income, age, and education were found to be statistically significant. All other variables, including sociotropic and egocentric variables, were statistically insignificant. Since economic perceptions were not significant in Lingenfelter's leadership opinion the tables and detailed analysis are not presented here.

4.6: Analysis

The two sets of analyses give us a deeper understanding of vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan election. The hypothesis guiding this thesis was that positive retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions influenced vote choice during the 2011 Saskatchewan election. Considering the economic strength of the province in the year prior to the 2011 Saskatchewan election, there was strong reason to expect that the good economic performance of the province contributed to the decisive victory of the Saskatchewan Party. As chapter 2 noted, the theory of economic voting backs this assertion in that governments are rewarded for good economic times. The analysis finds that while these perceptions were in

play, they did not have a direct impact on vote choice; instead, they had an impact on leadership evaluation.

The first model initially revealed that retrospective sociotropic and egocentric perceptions of the economy played a role in vote choice. When considering the theory of economic voting and perceptions, Saskatchewan was consistent with many other studies in that both perceptions had a positive effect on vote choice, with sociotropic having the largest. However, once the effect of Brad Wall's leadership was considered, those perceptions were overshadowed and became statistically insignificant. The hypothesis guiding this thesis was that economic perceptions had a direct effect on vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan election; the data, however, indicated that a direct impact on vote choice was not statistically significant.

While a direct impact on vote choice was not present, a direct relationship between economic perceptions and leadership was found. With any evaluation of a leadership role, many factors go into this kind of assessment. Public image, competence, stance on dividing issues like the economy, and many others factors entered into a leadership evaluation. The data did not allow us to consider all of these factors, but it was possible to demonstrate that economic evaluations play a role in explaining Brad Wall's strong leadership evaluations.

Overall, the analysis showed that the economic perceptions did have a role to play in vote choice in the 2011 Saskatchewan election, albeit in an indirect fashion. Leadership was the top factor pertaining to vote choice, but the analysis shows that Saskatchewan residents linked their economic perceptions to their assessment of Wall. From this information, it is evident that Saskatchewan residents believed that their economic best interests lay with Brad Wall and his leadership. When one considers the Saskatchewan Party advertising, with its promotion of Brad

Wall and the Party's economic vision for Saskatchewan, it is easy to understand how voters linked the Saskatchewan Advantage vision to the premier and subsequently took these perceptions into the voting booth.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how, if at all, individual-level perceptions of economic conditions affected provincial vote choice decisions in the 2011 Saskatchewan election. Indeed, the economy is an issue that is ever changing and constant, in some form or another, in nearly every election. Though the issue of economic vitality ebbs and flows with importance in each election, it is an issue that is in constant play. With a very large body of literature devoted to the linkages between the economy and vote choice in national governments and sub-national governments, it is of interest to political scientists to map out these relationships to better understand how the electorate thinks.

As seen in chapter 2, the vast amount of literature on economic voting has pushed this area of study into a variety of arenas. This thesis chose to look at perceptions of the economy. This was chosen as perceptions are what drives voters to make decisions using the economic information at hand. By using individual level data we can infer the attitudes and opinions of Saskatchewan residents rather than presuming a link between objective economic measures, such as GDP reports and inflation rates, like some studies involving economic voting have previously done. Saskatchewan residents' perceptions of the economy by for the two years before the election appeared to be accurate. As chapter 3 discussed, Saskatchewan was seen at many times to be one of the few provinces with strong GDP predictions in Canada, and led the country with low unemployment; both factors are very important in economic recovery. Additionally, news reports and government platforms supported the fact that the Saskatchewan economy was an important issue during the two years leading to the election and during the subsequent campaign to deem it an important issue for Saskatchewan residents.

This thesis has demonstrated that Saskatchewan's residents had good reason to be satisfied with the economy for the year prior to the 2011 Saskatchewan election. With this economic context in mind, it would appear that the theory of economic voting, in which governments who enjoy good economic times are rewarded with votes during elections, could have been a reason for the decisive electoral win for the Saskatchewan Party during the 2011 election.

The analysis from chapter four suggested a significant link between economic perceptions and vote choice, albeit in an indirect fashion. Using the data collected by the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study, the first regression model created suggested that economic perceptions were linked to voting for the Saskatchewan Party in the 2011 election. Indeed, the hypotheses that were considered were initially supported: positive economic perceptions did have a positive outcome on the incumbent vote choice and sociotropic perceptions were found to have a (somewhat) stronger influence on vote choice than egocentric perceptions. However, given that a previous study done using the same data that pointed to leadership evaluations as the highest determinant of vote choice during the 2011 election, the model was ran again while controlling for leadership. Once the variable of leadership was added to the model, all other variables, including economic perceptions, failed to reach significance.

Given these findings, the second model tested the same economic perceptions and demographic variables as predictors of leadership evaluation to understand if they had an effect on Brad Wall's leadership evaluation. Economic perceptions were shown to be statistically significant predictor's of Brad Wall's leadership evaluation. Simply put, Saskatchewan residents' opinions of Brad Wall were tied to their economic perceptions. As

such, it appears that Saskatchewan residents felt that Brad Wall was the most suitable person to improve or maintain the economic situation in Saskatchewan.

This thesis linked economic perceptions to leadership evaluations and it seems, in the 2011 Saskatchewan election, these perceptions were shown to be a significant part of Brad Wall's leadership opinion and assist the Saskatchewan Party, to a decisive victory in 2011. When considering the theory of economic voting, which argues that governments are rewarded for good economic times, it appears in this case again that the Saskatchewan Party government was rewarded, to a certain degree, for good economic times, and that the Saskatchewan Party benefited from Premier Wall's popularity and his perceived economic competence. In this regard this theory appears to be in play, though again it is due to the added variable of leadership. Indeed, it seems that the Saskatchewan Party also owes a lot of its decisive win in the 2011 election to the popularity of Brad Wall.

This thesis has laid the initial groundwork for further economic voting studies at the provincial level. While this study has looked at two different economic voting variables, retrospective sociotropic economic perceptions and retrospective egocentric perceptions, there is more work that needs to be done in this field. Due to the specific data collected in the 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study, prospective sociotropic perceptions and prospective egocentric perceptions were not measured. Additionally, the relationships between vote choice, economic evaluations and leadership evaluations should be tracked over time to see if economic perceptions have a significant impact on all elections or if these relationships strictly occur during times of economic vitality. With Saskatchewan's history of a boom and bust economy

tied to resources and agriculture, these relationships may show fluctuations and it is important to see if the same factors affect vote choice in future elections.

Appendices

Appendix A

<u>Traditional Economic Indicators</u>				
	<u>2010</u>		<u>2011</u>	
	<u>Canada</u>	<u>Saskatchewan</u>	<u>Canada</u>	<u>Saskatchewan</u>
GDP	<p>January: IMF estimates Canadian GDP growth of 2.6% (CBC, 2010).</p> <p>July: Bank of Canada forecasts 3% growth in the second quarter (Viera, 2010: B6)</p> <p>April: The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation projected a 2.5% rise in GDP in 2010 (Moore, 2010: G10).</p> <p>June: BMO Capital Markets predict growth by 3.4% (Covert, 2010: B1).</p> <p>July: IMF raises their Canadian prediction to 3.6% for 2010 (Calgary Herald, 2010: E1).</p> <p>May- August: August brought news that the second quarter would see 2.5% growth which was an unexpected drop to 2.5% annualized expansion from the 6.1% in the first quarter (Viera, 2010: B6)</p> <p>However, by October, they would lower this prediction to 3.1% due to economic conditions worsening in the United States (Carmichael, 2010: B4).</p>	<p>January: RBC predicts a 3.9% increase in GDP; CIBC predicts 3% (Leaders Post, 2010a: D1, Johnstone, 2010: A1). The Conference Board of Canada noted a more conservative 2.5% growth (Kyle, 2010: B4).</p> <p>March: CIBC and the Conference Board of Canada increases GDP growth projections to 3.5% (Leader Post, 2010: D1; Johnstone, 2010: D1). RBC posted expected GDP growth of 3.9% (Regina Sun, 2010: 26).</p> <p>June: Scotia Economics predicted GDP growth by 3.9%, the second highest growth among the Provinces, CIBC predicts 3.8% (Star Phoenix, 2010: C8, Leader Post, 2011a, D1).</p> <p>July: Stronger commodity prices increase the BMO projection to 4.2% (Covert, 2010: A 32). However, it would appear that this was overzealous as weather conditions affected agriculture and TD's forecast would drop from 3.2% to 2.1% (Hall, 2010: C1).</p> <p>September: The bad weather hurt</p>	<p>January: Goldman Sachs predicts GDP to increase by 3.5% by the third quarter (Madhavi, 2011: B1). The Bank of Canada increased their forecasts by .1% to 2.4% for 2011 (Vieira, 2011: E3). Additionally, the IMF lowered their GDP growth expectations to 2.3%, down .4% (Vieira, 2011: FP 1).</p> <p>February: The federal government lowered their economic projections for Canada by .1% to 2.4% (Routers, 2011: B1).</p> <p>February: Bank of Montreal Merrill Lynch and Royal Bank project 3% or better GDP Growth (Whitehorse Star, 2011: 15).</p> <p>At this time, reports were positive about the fourth quarter of 2010's GDP increase of 3.3% which was above the projected 3% (Madhavi Acharya, 2011: B3). This was expected to spur investment and additional economic opportunities (Madhavi Acharya, 2011: B3).</p>	<p>January: The Saskatchewan government notes that 8 major economic forecasters predict high GDP projections of 3.7% which was higher than the 2.4% national average (Johnstone, 2011: B1).</p> <p>BMO Capital Market Economics estimated a 4% rise making it the largest provincial forecast (Leader Post, 2011: D1). Both the Saskatchewan government, BMO and Scotiabank pointed to commodities being in high demand (Johnstone, 2011: B1; Leader Post, 2011: D; Kyle, 2011:C5).</p> <p>March: RBC forecasts real GDP growth of 4.9% (Leader Post, 2011: B1).</p> <p>June: BMO estimates GDP growth of 3.9% (Star Phoenix, 2011: C8). RBC would revise their projections to 3.8%, due to persistent moisture hindering agriculture (Leader Post, 2011a: D1). This reduction moved Saskatchewan to second place for best GDP growth behind Alberta</p>

	<p>February, 2011: Statistics Canada reported that the fourth quarter of 2010 saw an annualized 3.3% increase (Torobin and Grant, 2011).</p>	<p>agriculture but an increase in potash demand appeared to make up for it with RBC noting a 6.3% increase for 2010 (Chabun, 2010: A1). November: GDP growth predictions would lower to 3.3% by Scotiabank (Leader Post, 2010:C1). As it stands, in 2012 Statistics Canada indicated that, in November of 2010, Saskatchewan's GDP had achieved a 4% increase compared to the previous November (Enterprise Saskatchewan, 2012: 3).</p>	<p>March: Statistics Canada note a .5% growth in GDP for January and increased projections from BMP at 4% for the first quarter of 2011 (Morrissy, 2011:C3). Second quarter contracts and GDP drops .4% (Shmuel, 2011: B1).</p>	<p>(Leader Post, 2011a: D1). July: Scotiabank projected a 3.5% increase in GDP, as they believed that export prices would still allow agriculture to increase GDP (Leader Post, 2011b: D1). September: RBC increased their predictions, due to good commodity prices and improved weather, to 4.3% (Couture, 2011: A1). October: BMO predicted growth for the province at 2.9%, the highest of all their provincial projections (Morrissy, 2011: C3).</p>
Employment	<p>The unemployment rate in Canada hovered around the 8% mark in the beginning of the year and made a slow decline as the year progressed (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012). 2010 ended with unemployment at 7.6%. Compared to other G7 countries this was low (Macdonald, 2010: A 27). Please note, the Statistics on Chart 3.1 were gathered after the year had finished. The information above comes from news articles during 2010.</p>	<p>January: Saskatchewan sees a 1.5% increase in employment and held the lowest unemployment numbers in the country (Johnstone, 2010: A1). The Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics indicated that the unemployment rate in January was 5.1 % (Sask Statistics, 2011: 1). April: Saskatchewan continues with the lowest unemployment numbers at 4.3% (Leader Post, 2010: B8). July: Again Saskatchewan had the lowest unemployment numbers in the nation, even though unemployment increased to 5.1% (Wood, 2010:B1). November: Saskatchewan falls into</p>	<p>Canada saw 2011 begin with an unemployment rate of 7.7% (Statistics Canada Canadian Labor Force Survey, 2012). This would steadily decrease to its lowest point of 7.2%, only to rise to 7.5% by December. March: Employment sees a net loss of 1500 jobs compared to the expected gain of 30,000 jobs (Blackwell and Torobin, 2011: B4).</p>	<p>January: Saskatchewan posted an unemployment rate of 5.4% (Scott, 2011: C6). April: Statistics Canada reports Saskatchewan has a 5% unemployment rate (Scott, 2011: B1). May: Saskatoon and Regina leads the nation with the lowest unemployment rate in the country (Leader Post, 2011: A1). August: Statistics Canada reports another decrease in Saskatchewan's unemployment rate to 4.9% (Yates, 2011: B1). September: Saskatchewan sets a provincial record with a .9%, or a 4,900 job increase in compared</p>

		<p>second place for unemployment in the country at 5.5% (Scott, 2010: B1).</p> <p>December: Saskatchewan's work force increased by only 1.1% (Johnstone, 2011: D1). It has been suggested that Saskatchewan experienced such strong growth in 2009 that, comparatively, it appears that Saskatchewan had low job growth (Johnstone, 2011: D1). Simply put, compared to other provinces, Saskatchewan was ahead in job growth and other provinces were catching up (Johnstone, 2011: D1). Additionally, December would see a 4.2% increase in wages, compared to December 2009, (Star Phoenix, 2011: C12). While this was good news, wages were still below the national average holding fourth place in provincial rankings (Star Phoenix, 2011: C12).</p>		<p>to September 2010 (Goudy, 2011: B1). November: Information just before the election indicated that Saskatchewan held a 3.7% unemployment rate, a decrease of .3% since September (Chabun, 2011: B1).</p>
Inflation	<p>December 2010: Initial reports noted that the consumer price index rose by 2.4 % from the previous December (Vancouver Sun, 2011: A12). However, in 2011 Statistics Canada noted that there was a 1.8 annual % change in the Consumer Price index from 2009 to</p>	<p>July: Statistics Canada reports that the inflation rate had only increased by .4% compared to the previous July (Scott, 2010: D1). Oct: Saskatchewan shows a consistent 1% inflation rate for the year (Elliot, 2010:1) December: The end of the year would see Saskatchewan's inflation rate settle with</p>	<p>In 2011, Canada would see a 2.9% increase in inflation compared to 2010; this was the largest percentage change in nearly 20 years (Statistics Canada CPI historical summery, 2012)</p>	<p>January: Inflation increased to 2.2%, making it the fourth largest in Canada and the highest in Saskatchewan in the past two years (Leader Post, 2011: C1). April: The Government of Saskatchewan noted that inflation in April would drop to nearly 2.5% (Saskatchewan</p>

	<p>2010 (Statistics Canada CPI historical summary, 2012)</p>	<p>the national average of 2% according to the media (Isfeld, 2010: C6).</p>		<p>Bureau of Statistics. 2011. 13). May: Inflation rises to 3.5% (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics. 2011. 13). June: Inflation would drop nearly 1% to 2.6% (Isfeld, 2011: A26). July: There was a small rise of .2% to 2.8% (Abma, 2011: D3). September: There was a large increase to 3.4 percent from the previous year's September and a .7% increase from August (Leader Post, 2011a: B1).</p>
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Appendix B
Saskatchewan Non-Traditional Economic Indicators

	2010	2011
Food Bank	<p>Regina Food Bank notes 2,000 new users of the food bank in January bringing the total to 10,000 people (Brownlee, 2010: A7).</p> <p>March: Saskatchewan food banks see a 20% surge compared to the previous March; Regina saw a 30 % increase in that same time frame (Leader Post, 2010: B7). Indeed within that 12 month span, 22,600 individuals used a Saskatchewan Food Bank (Switzer and Hall, 2010: A4).</p> <p>November: Saskatoon saw individual Food Bank use rise by 25.15% from September 2009 and helped lead Saskatchewan to have one of the largest surges in Food Bank use in the country</p>	<p>In 2011, Hunger Count 2011, a report released by Food Banks Canada, noted a 9 % decrease in Food Bank usage (Food Banks Canada, 2011: 22).</p>
Poverty	<p>July: The Northern Saskatchewan Region was named the second poorest region in Canada with a mean income of \$13,600 annually (Kyle, 2010: A8).</p> <p>By late 2010, Poverty Free Saskatchewan estimated that 140,000 people were affected by poverty (Hall, 2010: A3).</p>	<p>July: Murray Mandryk discussed poverty and the NDP's plans to combat the 113,000 individuals below the poverty line; 33,000 of which are children (Statistics provided by the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of Regina) (Mandryk, 2011: A4).</p>
Affordable Housing	<p>January: The Frontier Centre rated Regina's housing as "moderately unaffordable" and Saskatoon as "seriously unaffordable" (Leader Post, 2010: C1).</p> <p>April: A Royal LePage survey noted that affordable housing was very competitive in Saskatoon with homes for sale receiving multiple offers compared to 2009 (Star Phoenix, 2010: C8).</p> <p>June: Affordable housing increased by a planned 65 units in Saskatoon for low income individuals (Maclean, 2010: A 11). This boded well as a Salvation Army report that same month placed Saskatoon with the highest rate of homelessness in Canada (Roth, 2010: B6). The same report noted that Saskatoon posted a 1.9% increase, and Regina a 1.6% increase in homelessness (Roth, 2010: B6). RBC analysts found that Saskatchewan's housing and rental costs started upwards in the second quarter of 2010 (Star Phoenix, 2010: C6). Interestingly, RBC found that housing in Saskatchewan was still below the national average and "not a major concern" (Star Phoenix, 2010: C6).</p> <p>The third and fourth quarters of 2010 appeared to see considerable improvements in affordability measures for housing. The third quarter was helped by a decline in RBC's affordability</p>	<p>January: Saskatchewan started 2011 with the least affordable housing in Canada (Tembath, 2011: A6).</p> <p>February: The Saskatchewan government announces planned investment of 34 million dollars for new affordable housing in 100 communities (The Canadian Press, 2011).</p> <p>March: The Saskatchewan government furthered their commitment to housing by adding an additional 253 million, over five years, to increasing housing for individuals with "modest incomes" (Warren, 2011: A1).</p> <p>September: Yorkton received 2.4 million for 22 one bedroom units with funds provided by the Canadian Economic Action Plan (Daily Commercial, 2011: 168). Additionally, Sask Trends Monitor noted that Saskatchewan was average when it came to issues of overall housing conditions and below the national average (Johnstone, 2011: D1).</p>

	measures (proportion of pre-tax income need to become a homeowner) (Leader Post, 2010: D1), and the fourth being helped by only small increases in price and declining mortgage rates (Couture, 2011: D1).	
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Appendix C

Saskatchewan Economic Public Opinion	
2010	2011
<p>January: RBC’s Canadian Consumer Outlook Report noted that Saskatchewan and Manitoba had the lowest job anxiety at 13% (Leaders Post, 2010: D1). Additionally, Saskatchewan residents believed the state of the economy was “good” at 77% and 50% of people polled felt that the national economy was going to get better; these percentages were significantly higher than the national average (Leaders Post, 2010c: D1).</p> <p>March: RBC’s Canadian Consumer Outlook Report found strong numbers again. Saskatchewan’s population showed only 13% of residents had job anxiety and 73% felt that the national economy was “good” (Regina Sun, 2010: 26). As well, two thirds of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents believed the national economy was going to get better within the year (Regina Sun, 2010: 26).</p> <p>July: A new Consumer Outlook Report showed relatively unchanged numbers with 78% of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents believing the national economy was doing well compared to the 60% national average (Scott, 2010a: B1).</p> <p>December: By the end of the year, a survey done by Sigma Analytics found that Saskatchewan residents were 10 times as likely to believe that the national economy was positive; 66% of respondents felt it was strong to very strong (Hall, 2010: A1). Additionally, 55% of people felt their personal financial situation was strong to very strong (Hall, 2010: A1).</p>	<p>January: 2011 started off with similar positive attitudes towards the national economy as the previous year. RBC Financial Group noted that Manitoba and Saskatchewan residents job anxiety was low at 15%, still the lowest in the country, and of these same residents 50% were optimistic about the national economy (Leader post, 2011d: D1). Interestingly, there was an 8% drop in their optimism about their individual financial situation to 40%; the drop was compared to the previous January (Leader post, 2011d: D1).</p> <p>April: 75% of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents were optimistic about the national economy (Leader post, 2011b: B1). This same report noted a small, 1%, increase in job anxiety as well as one third of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents concerned about inflation in fuel and food costs (Leader post, 2011b: B1).</p> <p>July: Increased optimism was seen in an updated RBC Consumer Outlook Report. 82% of Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents believed the national economy was “good”, and 41% believed their personal finances would improve; both numbers were significantly higher than the national average (Kyle, 2011: C8).</p> <p>October: The final RBC Consumer Outlook Report noted that job anxiety was still low at 11%, but Confidence in Canada’s economy dropped two second place, behind Alberta, at 39% (Leader Post, 2011: C11).</p>

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