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What are the consequences of snap elections on citizens' voting behavior?

Abstract

In some democracies, the ruling party can strategically call a “snap” (or “early”) election before the end of its mandate in order to maximise its chances of re-election. Little is known on the consequences of calling such an election. In this article, we contribute to this literature by analyzing whether snap elections affect citizens' voting behavior. Does being angry at the decision of the incumbent government have an impact on citizens' decision to vote or not to vote and/or their vote choice calculus? To answer these questions, we make use of two different and independently conducted surveys in Canada during a snap election. We do not find evidence that calling an early election reduces citizens' likelihood to vote. However, when they do decide to vote, citizens that resent the decision to call an early election are substantially more likely to punish the incumbent government.

Keywords: Snap election; Early election; Voting behavior; Turnout; Vote choice; Accountability.

Although an elected government in Westminster-style democracies can govern for a full mandate of five years, such as in the United Kingdom and in Canada (before 2007), the norm is for governments to last approximately four years (Blais et al. 2004; Goplerud and Schleiter 2016; White and Alcantara 2019). In practice, many factors, such as referendums and by-elections, lead citizens to exercise their democratic right more frequently and at irregular intervals. Most countries also have more than one level of governance, meaning that citizens are called to vote for all national, subnational, local and sometimes also supranational levels.¹ However, one of the main factors that mechanically increase the number of times citizens have the opportunity to vote are “snap” elections (also called “early” elections).

Snap elections occur when an election is declared by the incumbent substantially before the statutory date in order to improve its chances of re-election (Balke 1990; Smith 2003). Given the intention of the incumbent, this event is also sometimes labeled as an opportunistic election in the literature (Schleiter and Tavits 2018; Schleiter and Tavits 2016; Smith 2003). Considering that snap elections are often announced for strategic reasons and that elections are costly on citizens individually and societies in general, we have reasons to believe that not everyone may be pleased to have another opportunity to practice their democratic right. It is therefore important to study the impact of such elections on the behavior of citizens, as snap elections may affect voter turnout and people’s vote choice. Although several considerations lead us to believe that snap elections may have major consequences for citizens, only a somewhat limited body of literature has studied this type of election.

¹ For example, people from Scotland in the United Kingdom are called to vote in local (municipal), regional (Scotland), national (UK) and supranational (Europe) elections.

In this article, we examine citizens' reactions to a snap election. We assume that citizens prefer elections to be held at more or less fixed intervals and react negatively to early elections. The question is whether that negative reaction influences citizens' voting behavior, that is, whether people become more inclined to abstain and/or to punish the incumbent who called the early election. We test these two possibilities by making use of two independently conducted electoral inquiries measuring citizens' attitudes towards the decision of the premier of Quebec, a Canadian province, to call an early election in 2008. Our results show that this event did *not* affect citizens' likelihood to participate in the election. However, citizens who did resent the decision to call an early election were substantially more likely to punish the incumbent government. We conclude by discussing the implications of our results.

Citizens and snap elections

In most parliamentary democracies, the incumbent has considerable control over the timing of elections, therefore it can request the Crown to dissolve Parliament and call an election when it is favorable to its party. The government needs to measure the trade-off between its current and future odds of winning. It can time these elections to occur when the economy is doing well, when the governing party is popular in the polls, when the opposition parties are unprepared or simply to decide a pressing issue (Blais et al. 2004; Chowdhury 1993; Smith 2003; Schleiter and Tavits 2018).

Smith's (2003) work, focussing on opportunistic elections called for economic reasons, is probably the most important research on election timing and is crucial to better understand citizens' reactions to snap elections. The theory of endogenous election timing developed by the

author assumes that the incumbent has privileged information regarding the future economic context. The government is more likely to call early elections when it expects the economy to decline in the near future. Empirical evidence from the UK suggests that the economic situation indeed tends to decrease after an early election was called (as expected by the prime minister and its government). Blais et al. (2004) also study voters' reactions to snap elections, but in a context where the government declared an election earlier than anticipated at a time when the opposition was unprepared and the governing Liberals were doing exceptionally well in the polls.

Regardless of the reasons behind the motivations of the incumbent to call an election before the end of its mandate, we have reasons to believe that snap elections can affect electoral turnout. As mentioned above, early elections mechanically increase the number of times citizens are asked to vote in a specific period of time. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's (2001; 2002) notion of "stealth democracy" appears to be relevant as it leads us to suggest a potential relationship between the timing of elections and the voting behavior of citizens. The authors' results are straightforward. In a nutshell, they show that citizens do not want to be involved in the political process. In fact, a lot of people are not interested in politics or are simply conflict-averse and see politics as mostly conflictual. Given that political interest is one of the strongest, if not the strongest predictor of political participation in most voter turnout models (Blais and Daoust 2020; Verba et al. 1995), it is not surprising that more frequent elections are associated with a decrease in electoral participation. Boyd (1986) directly studies the effect of a high frequency of regular elections in a short period of time on electoral turnout. The author argues that numerous elections in a row can reduce citizens' level of political interest, as the population tires of hearing the same recurring themes and issues debated (which echoes the work of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse). Using data from

gubernatorial and presidential elections in the United States, Boyd (1986) concludes that presidential primaries and runoff primaries do depress turnout.

More recently, Kostelka and Wuttke (2017) extended these findings using data from referendums and European, federal, provincial, state and local elections in Canada and Germany. They conclude that a higher frequency of elections creates “voter fatigue” (see also Garmann 2017; Lijphart 1997), which then has a negative impact on turnout. They also note that *all* types of electoral contests contribute to this relationship. Considering that snap elections increase the frequency of elections, it is reasonable to expect that most citizens will not be happy with the governing party’s decision to hold an early election and will thus be more reluctant to go out and vote – see also Blais (2014).

For some people, anger might fuel their motivation to turn out in order to punish the government and seek change. Some research work has confirmed this relationship in situations where people who are unhappy with their economic or social situation are targeted directly by policies implemented by the incumbent (Valentino and Neuner 2017; Magni 2017; Weber 2013). However, we assume that it is easier for the majority of ordinary citizens who dislike politics and who are unhappy that an election was called to completely avoid politics and not to vote. Voting involves direct and indirect costs that include not only the time involved in the act of voting but also the time and resources required to gain information and to decide how to vote (Blais et al. 2019). As the Quebec election was held in December, we could expect these costs to be even higher, following Rallings et al. 2003’s argument that the cost of voting is greater in the winter. Abstaining is the least costly option, although in general these costs are perceived to be quite small

(Downs 1957). This is neatly encapsulated by Blais and Daoust (2020, page 4) when they mention that from a rational perspective, one should abstain “whenever there is some cost in voting, whether it is the time that it takes to go to the polling station and vote and/or the time to become informed in order to decide which party/candidate to support.”

Based on the theoretical considerations and the few empirical studies detailed above, we derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Citizens who are displeased that a snap election was called are less likely to turnout.

Not only might calling an early election generate anger among citizens and therefore affect their decision to vote or to abstain, but as outlined by Smith’s (2003) theory it could also have an impact on the vote choice calculus of citizens who decide to turn out in two different ways (Blais et al. 2004; Roy and Alcantara 2012; Schleiter and Tavits 2016; White and Alcantara 2019). On the one hand, strategic considerations might explain why some voters would react favorably. The incumbent usually calls an election early in order to maximise its chances of re-election. Therefore, supporters of the governing party might be happy with the decision to call an early election, as they would vote for their preferred party in a context where the incumbent is expected to do well or even win the election.² On the contrary, supporters of the opposition would most likely react negatively and some may perceive this decision to be undemocratic and an abuse of power (Schleiter and Tavits, 2018), which may lead citizens who feel this way to punish the incumbent party.

² As one of the most robust relationships in political science, winners are almost always more satisfied with democracy (Anderson et al. 2005).

When studying opportunistic elections called for economic reasons, Smith (2003) attempts to show that the electorate is influenced by the timing of elections. When the government declares an early election, voters punish the incumbent as they expect a decline in the economy in the future. His theory is parsimonious and insightful, but it is worth noting that the author does not test it with individual-level data and only focuses on vote choice.

In their study, Blais and al. (2004) examined voters' reactions to the call of the early Canadian federal election in November 2000. To do so, they used the Canadian Election Study (CES) and analyzed whether respondents were 'very angry, somewhat angry or not angry at all' that the federal election was called early. The authors analyzed the distribution of the response to this question over the course of the campaign using a rolling cross-sectional survey design and ascertained whether anger had an independent impact on the propensity to vote for or against the incumbent. First, their results illustrate that respondents' feelings towards the snap election barely changed throughout the campaign: 10 percent of the respondents were very angry throughout the campaign and the proportion of somewhat angry citizens declined from 30 percent at the beginning to approximately 20 percent through the rest of the campaign. Their results also suggest that partisans of the opposition as well as more politically aware citizens are more likely to be angry. Most importantly, Blais et al. (2004) show that being angry has an independent effect on citizens' vote choice, that is, feeling 'somewhat' angry reduces the probability that a citizen supports the incumbent party by 4 percentage points. The probability to vote for this party decreases by 9 points when a citizen feels 'very' angry. They estimate that, all in all, the incumbent party lost one percentage point because of the decision to call a snap election.

Schleiter and Tavits (2018) also analysed the effect of snap elections by running survey experiments during the elections of 2015 and 2017 in the United Kingdom. The authors show that citizens react negatively to opportunistic election timing and are less likely to support the incumbent party under such circumstances. However, the economic situation trumps the effects of opportunism. When the economy is doing well, voters still support the governing party. In the same vein, Schleiter and Tavits (2016) also conclude that snap elections are not always negative for the incumbent. Using aggregated-level data from 318 parliamentary elections in 27 Eastern and Western Europe, they show that strategically calling an election before a government's end of mandate has a positive effect on the incumbent's vote share because of the strategic context. Overall, they suggest that the benefits of calling an early election outweigh the costs, as on average snap elections provide an eight-percentage vote share bonus to the governing party. Another study using the Canadian case but aggregated-level indicators, showed that overall, provincial governments seem to benefit from calling an early election but lose grounds compared to the previous election (White and Alcantra 2019).

All in all, if the electorate is displeased, they may blame the incumbent and punish it by supporting another party. As mentioned above, some citizens are unhappy when snap elections are called for strategic reasons. They assume that their favourite party would have done better if the polls were held later on, as the governing party usually calls early elections when the conditions favour its chances of re-election. Beyond tactical reasons, many citizens are unhappy when opportunistic elections are called as they consider this act to be undemocratic or at least unfair. It is reasonable to expect that they would engage in retrospective voting based on the incumbent's decision. Given that voters are short-sighted (Achen and Bartels 2017) this should be a salient

issue considering that it is one of the government's last decisions before the election. Hence, we derive H₂:

Hypothesis 2: Voters who are displeased that early elections have been called are more likely to punish the incumbent government and vote for another party.

Case study

In this article, we are interested in the 2008 Quebec provincial election. As for all provinces in Canada, Quebec is a Westminster-style democracy and uses a first-past-the-post electoral system. Voters cast one vote at the district level and the candidate with the most votes in each district obtains a seat in parliament. This leads to an important degree of disproportionality in the vote/seat ratio and usually to a single-party government benefiting from a majority of the seats. However, in 2007, the incumbent Liberal government only managed to form a minority government. Hence, given the economic context that was rapidly declining in the United States, a major economic partner, the premier Jean Charest expected the province of Quebec to experience similar economic difficulties³ in the near future (Bélanger and Gélinau 2011) and — as predicted by Smith's (2003) theory — he called a snap election in November 2008. This election was clearly called earlier than usual in the province, as it occurred only 623 days after the last election, whereas on average a change of government in Quebec occurs after 1357 days. See Figure SM.1 in the Supplementary Material for an overview of the number of days elapsed between the last election

³ This happened to be true. During the fourth quarter of 2008, the Bureau of Economic Analysis estimated that the economy contracted by 6.3% in the United States, i.e. the most important economic partner of Québec. In Québec, while the unemployment rate was 7.2% in 2007, it increased to 8.6% in 2008 and took about seven years to drop back to the rate it was in 2007. In early December 2008, the Central Bank announced its lowest interest rate since 1958 and the Bank of Canada officially declared that the nation was entering a recession.

from 1871 and 2008, where it is clear that 2008 stands out. In Canada, some provincial governments have enacted laws aiming to restrict the power of the Premier to call an election when it desires. Québec only adopted this law in 2013, five years after the 2008 election. Regardless of this law, today, the Constitution guarantees that prerogative to dissolve the Québec National Assembly remains in the hands of the Crown, who generally follows the will of the head of government.⁴

The study of the 2008 provincial election in Quebec will shed new light on our understanding of voting behavior in the context of a snap election. First, this election was held at a time when citizens had been called to the voting booth more often than usual. In approximately four years, Quebeckers participated in seven elections: the 2003 provincial election, followed by the 2004 federal election, the 2005 municipal election, the 2006 federal election, the 2007 provincial election, the 2008 federal election and finally, the 2008 provincial election. This context was also extraordinary, because citizens could not have developed any expectations regarding the timing of the election. In fact, in 2008, the last minority government in Québec was elected more than a century earlier (1878-79). Second, Schleiter and Tavits (2018) point out the relevance of considering the economic situation. The 2008 Quebec election is particularly interesting as it occurred shortly after the economic crisis in the US, which significantly damaged the province's economy (Bélanger and Gélinau 2011; see also footnote 3). Although there are non-economic reasons that can drive the decision to call an early election (for example, if the opposition is in the midst of a leadership race and not well organized), it is clear that the Quebec 2008 election

⁴ This explains why, for example, Pauline Marois (the same government who implemented the law on partially fixed elections) was able to call an election eighteen months after the beginning of her mandate. She asked the Lieutenant Governor, who represents the Crown in the province, to dissolve the Quebec National Assembly and as is always the case in modern Québec politics, the Lieutenant Governor followed the Premier's demand.

focussed on the economy. The economic context described earlier made this a salient issue. The Liberal party used it in its campaign slogan (L'économie d'abord, oui!) [loosely translated by "Putting the economy first"] and citizens themselves believed that the economy was the most important issue of the campaign (Bélanger and Nadeau 2009). Third, we were able to access data from two surveys conducted by two independent teams of scholars. Luckily, they include two different questions tapping citizens' attitudes towards the decision of the incumbent to call an early election. Finally, these two studies were specifically designed for Quebec provincial elections (instead of, for example, a subsample taken from a national study). Below, we describe the surveys and indicators.

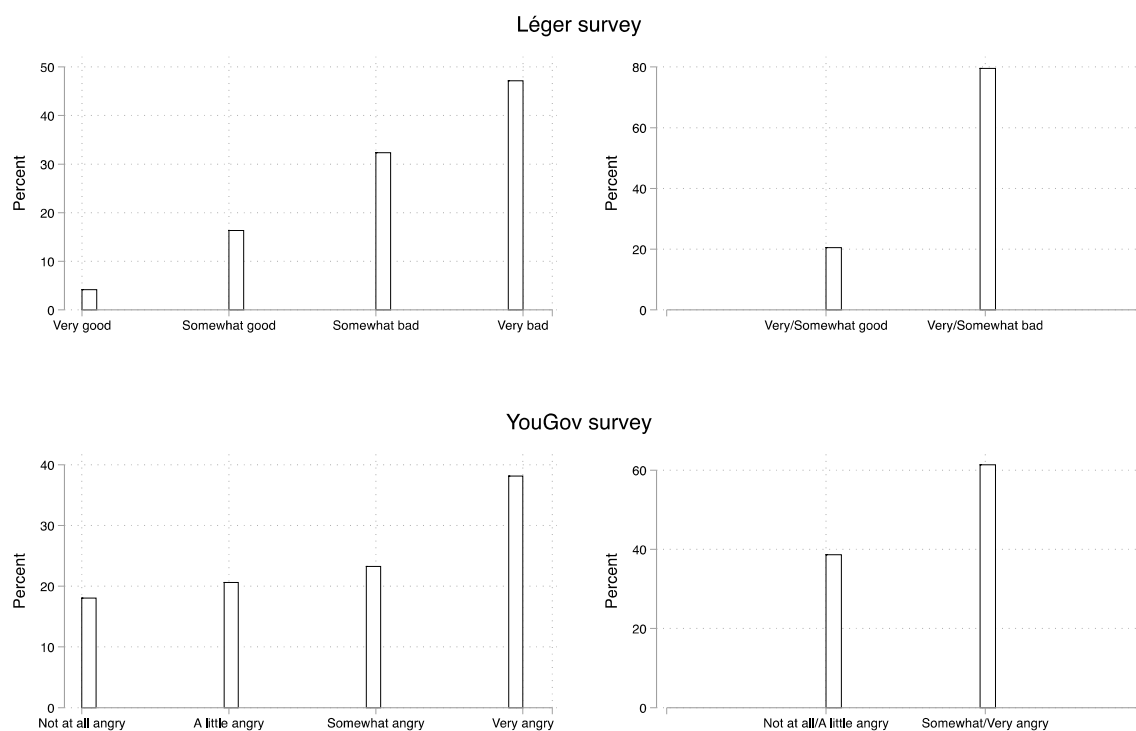
Data and indicators

The first survey was an online sample matching panel conducted by the data analytics firm YouGov. The pre-electoral survey was administered in November and December of 2008 prior to the Quebec provincial election. A total of 1479 respondents were interviewed. The second online quota-based survey was conducted by the firm Léger, immediately after the 2008 Quebec election. It includes 1151 respondents that are representative of Quebec's population according to age, gender, language and region of the latest census. For prior research using these surveys, see Bélanger and Nadeau (2009) or Blais and Labbé St-Vincent (2011), among others.

The main variable of interest measures citizens' attitude towards the decision of the Quebec government to call a snap election. The question in the survey by YouGov reads as follows: "Are you angry that an election was called at this time?", with "very angry", "somewhat angry", "a little angry" and "not angry at all" as answer choices. The question wording in the survey administered

by Léger was “Personally, how did you find the idea to hold an election in Quebec this fall?” and the answer options were “a very good idea”, “a somewhat good idea”, “a somewhat bad idea” or “a very bad idea.” Figure 1 shows the distribution of the answers to these two questions. In both cases, we show the results using a continuum (from all categories) and a dummy capturing an overall positive or negative opinion. The question used is different in the two surveys, the former being more emotion-centered and the other more satisfaction-oriented. The emotion-oriented question measures feelings of anger, whereas the satisfaction-oriented question is more general.

Figure 1. Citizens’ attitudes towards the decision to call an early election



Overall, a clear majority of citizens expressed a negative reaction to the decision to call an early election. The data from the pre-electoral survey by YouGov show that slightly more than 60% of citizens were “somewhat angry” or “very angry” that a snap election was declared in 2008.

According to data from the Léger survey, nearly 80% (20% more than in the YouGov survey) of Quebec citizens in 2008 reacted negatively to the snap election, that is that they thought that the election was a “somewhat bad” or “very bad” idea. It is not surprising that a higher percentage of respondents reacted negatively towards the call of an early election in the survey administered by Léger, as the question used by YouGov tapped stronger emotions of disapproval.

The context of the 2008 Quebec election proves to be unique in comparison to Blais et al. (2004), which finds that only 10% of citizens were “very angry” at the call of the Canadian snap election in 2000. Not only are these two elections from different levels of government, but they are also motivated by different (non-economic) incentives. In 2000, the Liberal party was leading in the polls and the main opposition party, the Canadian Alliance, had just elected a new leader and therefore was not ready for an election. Chrétien was also facing pressure to step down as leader of the Liberal Party, because the Finance Minister, Paul Martin, was expressing an interest towards replacing him (Blais et al. 2004). On the contrary, in 2008, Charest was motivated to call the snap election because of the predicted economic downfall in the province. However, we believe that the main reason why voters were less satisfied towards the timing of the election in 2008 is due to voter fatigue. As mentioned earlier, voters might have been angrier by the call of the snap election in 2008 as it was the seventh election in approximately four years.

To examine the impact of citizens’ attitudes towards the decision to call an early election on their political participation, we use two indicators: vote intention and self-reported turnout.⁵

⁵ As in any political survey, the proportion of people who claim to participate is overestimated. However, Achen and Blais (2015, 206), show that this limitation is unlikely to affect inferences regarding the correlates of turnout. Using a validated vote measure, they conclude that “researchers will rarely be grossly misled by using any of these three

First, in the YouGov pre-election survey, we rely on respondents' likelihood to vote in the upcoming provincial early election. Answer choices were "certain to vote/I have already voted", "very likely to vote", "somewhat likely to vote", "somewhat unlikely to vote", "very unlikely to vote" and "certain that will not vote." This measure is scaled from one to six (rescaled 0 to 1), where respondents who are certain not to vote are coded at one and those who are certain to vote or have already voted are coded at six. Second, in the post-electoral Léger survey, respondents were asked "Did you vote in this provincial election?". We dichotomize those who answered "yes" (coded 1) against those who answered "no" or "prefer not to answer" (coded 0).⁶

In order to estimate the effect of citizens' attitude towards the government's decision to hold an early election on vote choice, we look at the intended vote choice for the YouGov pre-electoral survey and the reported vote choice for the Léger survey. Following the dominant approach in retrospective voting and more specifically economic voting – see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007) for a general review and Daoust and Dassonneville (2017) for a study in the Canadian case –, we split respondents who supported the incumbent party and those who supported a party of the opposition.

Finally, when analyzing the effect of attitudes towards the early election on voter behavior, we minimize an omitted variable bias in our model by including covariates known to vary with both the independent and dependent variables of interest. Besides sociodemographic variables (age, sex and education), political interest is the most important control when predicting political

sources [intention to vote, reported vote or validated vote]. The same variables tend to be influential in all three cases, and their relative proportions are usually (though not universally) unchanged."

⁶ Excluding 'prefer not to answer' (1.8% of the observations) instead of coding them as abstainers does not change our results

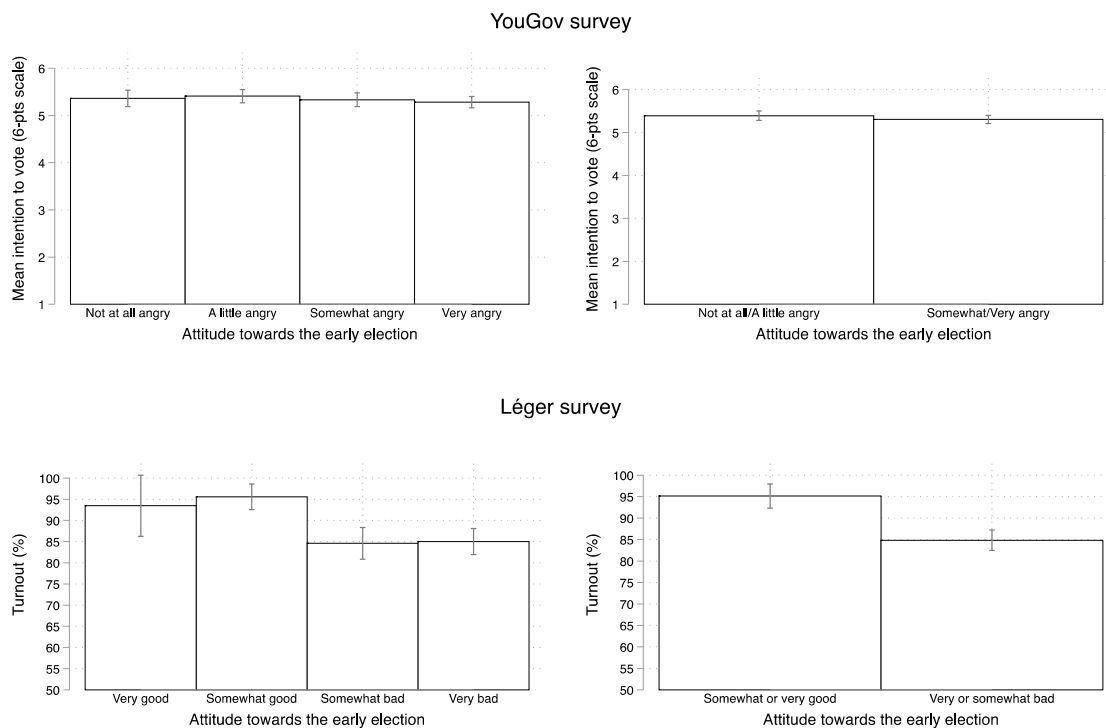
participation, thus we controlled for these variables in our models. Regarding the analyses of citizens' vote choice, we include voters' retrospective perception of the economy and also the most important determinant in Quebec politics, that is, support for Quebec's independence (Bélanger and Nadeau 2009; Daoust and Jabbour 2020; Latouche et al. 1976; Lemieux et al. 1970; Pinard and Hamilton 1977). Finally, we include party identification in our models in order to provide a more conservative approach.⁷ See the Supplementary Material for the question wording, response categories, and descriptive statistics (Table SM.1) of all the variables for both surveys.

Results

In order to test our first hypothesis, we examine the impact of voters' attitudes towards the early election on turnout by looking at the means across citizens holding different attitudes. Figure 2 shows these results for both surveys, using all categories and also dividing the variables in a dichotomous way. On the one hand, it is striking how the differences are small (and a t-test confirms the non-significance) for the YouGov pre-electoral survey (upper panel). On the other hand, the lower panel (Léger survey) of Figure 2, shows interesting variance.

⁷ It is worth noting that our main findings are not affected by the inclusion or not of party identification.

Figure 2. The impact of attitudes towards early election on political participation



When looking at the probability of turning out to vote in the Léger survey, the difference is of approximately 10 points between those who have the most positive attitude, with those who have the most negative attitude towards the election timing. This difference is not strictly driven by the extreme attitudes as the effect is very similar when we compare the two positive categories to the two negative ones. However, it is essential to confirm that this important effect of 10 percentage points is not driven by a confounding factor. One crucial predictor of turnout in the literature is political interest (among other, see Prior, 2019). It is reasonable to expect that those who are less interested in politics, would be more unhappy with the government's decision to call an early election and less likely to turnout. Table 1 tests whether the impact of attitudes toward the decision to call an early election remains when we account for political interest in the Léger inquiry

– we do not conduct this test for YouGov as there is simply no gap and thus no mediation to explain.

Table 1. The mediation effect of political interest (Léger survey)

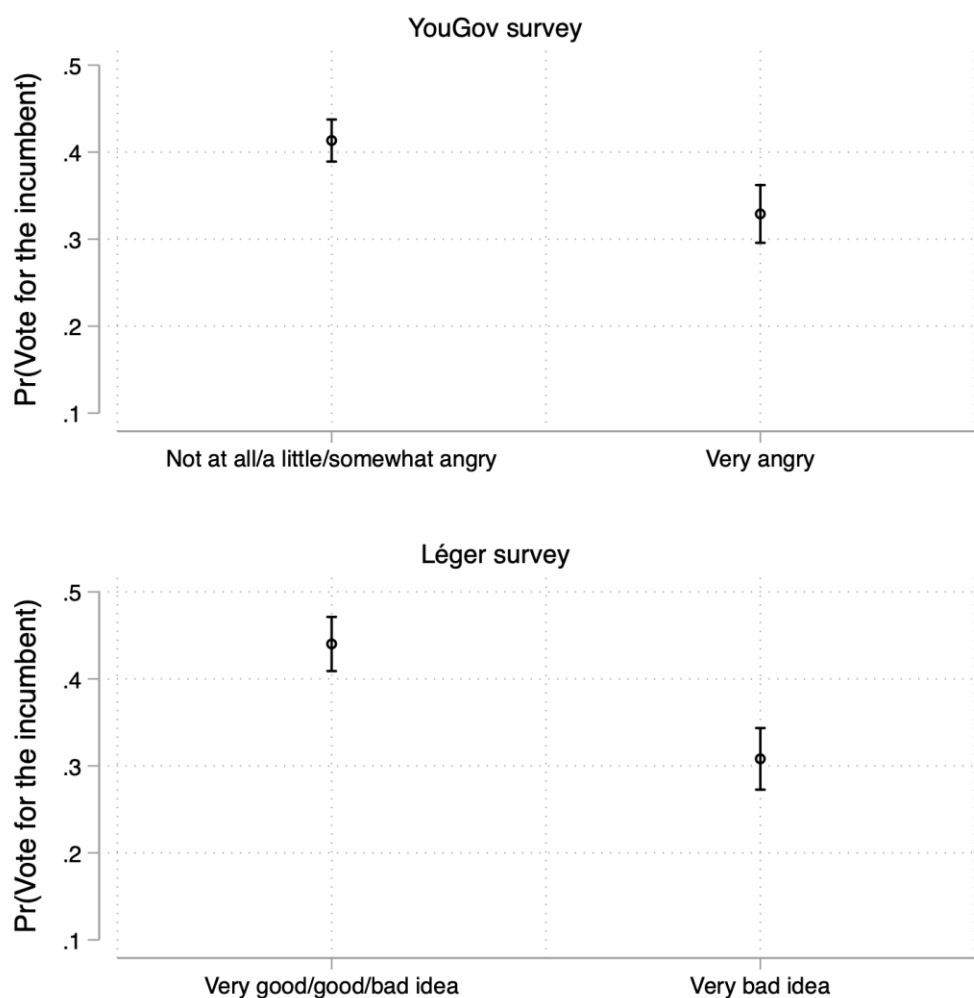
	DV = reported turnout	
	Model 1	Model 2
Bad idea (4 categories)	-0.103 (0.138)	
Bad idea (Dichotomous)		-0.546 (0.337)
Age	2.067*** (0.492)	2.015*** (0.489)
Sex (Female=1)	-0.607** (0.208)	-0.604** (0.207)
Education	1.394** (0.498)	1.386** (0.496)
Political interest	2.397*** (0.420)	2.336*** (0.404)
Constant	0.043 (0.716)	0.220 (0.557)
Observations	1072	1072
Pseudo R^2	0.132	0.135

Notes: Models show logistic regressions coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Models 1 and 2 show that when we control for sociodemographic variables and political interest, the effect of citizens' attitudes towards the call of an early election do not have an independent effect on participation. In other words, we find a participation gap among the happy and unhappy citizens' in one of the two surveys (see Figure 1), but this gap seems to be driven by political interest. Hence, we must reject H_1 , as we fail to find an independent effect of citizens' attitudes towards the decision to call an early election on electoral participation in both surveys.

Our second hypothesis stipulates that voters who react negatively towards the government's decision to call an early election will be more likely to punish the incumbent and vote for a party of the opposition. In order to test this hypothesis, we run a logistic regression, where the dependent variable is citizens' vote choice as explained in the methods section. Those who voted or intended to vote for the incumbent government are coded at 1 and those who voted or intended to vote for a party of the opposition are coded at 0. The main independent variable is the attitude towards the call of the early election. We follow Blais et al.'s (2004) design and focus on very angry citizens. Strong views about the snap election should substantially affect one's views and become a pivotal consideration. While this category corresponds to the strongest views, it is our modal category (see the detailed distribution in Figure 1). For both surveys, we dichotomized citizens that were "very angry" in the YouGov survey and those who think that the snap election was a "very bad idea" in the Léger survey from the other categories. To analyze the substantial impact of attitudes towards the early election on vote choice, we present the predicted probability of supporting the incumbent party. Following Hanmer and Kalkan (2013), we estimate the predicted probabilities using the observed-value method (instead of setting all the other variables at their mean). These effects are shown in Figure 3, whereas Table SM.2 of the Supplementary Material presents the full regression models.

Figure 3. Attitudes towards the snap election and vote choice (95% confidence intervals)



As is evident from the regression results, the impact of attitudes towards the early election on support for the incumbent is negative and statistically significant at $p < .05$ in both cases. Even after taking into account major vote choice determinants, that is covariates that could be related to both being displeased with the snap election and vote choice (economic evaluations, support for Quebec independence and party identification), the effect still holds and is relatively important. Looking at the predicted probabilities of supporting the incumbent liberal government, we see that in the YouGov dataset being very angry has a negative impact of 11 percentage points, while

thinking that the snap election is a very bad idea reduces the likelihood of voting for the incumbent by 14 percentage points in the Léger dataset. These effects are somewhat important, but it is worth recalling that they are for people who display strong views about the decision of the incumbent government. Supporting the second hypothesis, citizens that are displeased with the call of a snap election are tempted to punish the incumbent government (H₂).

Discussion and implications

Despite potentially important consequences of early elections, the literature draws somewhat little attention to this type of political event. Yet, for numerous reasons snap elections are proven to be relevant today, especially given that minority governments are more frequent (at least in the recent history of the case studied). In fact, although parliamentary democracies have adopted laws establishing partially fixed election dates in order to avoid opportunistic elections, the prime minister still has the power to dissolve parliament. These types of elections are also not limited to Westminster-style democracies. For example, Austria faced two snap elections in a short period of time. In 2017 and 2019 the government called an election earlier than planned. Among others, Israel and Spain also held snap elections in 2019.

In this study, we analysed whether citizens' attitudes towards the government's decision to call a snap election have an effect on their voting behavior. More precisely, we measured whether these attitudes influence citizens' propensity to turnout and to support the incumbent. Although our first hypothesis stipulated that those displeased with the decision to call an early election should be less likely to turnout, our results cannot confirm this hypothesis. In one out of two cases, a bivariate analysis seemed to suggest a relationship between citizens' attitudes towards snap

elections and turnout, but further analysis proved that this effect was simply driven by political interest. Less interested citizens are more likely to be displeased at the call of an early election and are less likely to participate. Our second hypothesis suggested that citizens who resent the decision of the government to declare an early election, are less likely to support the incumbent. These voters might criticize and punish the government because they consider early elections to be undemocratic or suppose that they might unfairly favour the governing party. The results of our analysis allow us to confirm this second hypothesis, which seems to be robust and quite important.

Finally, our research suggests that politicians should be cautious in calling snap elections as these events may lead to negative repercussions. Of course, many other factors are at play, which explains why Jean Charest, the incumbent and leader of the liberal party, won the Quebec provincial election in 2008, despite the fact that a large portion of the electorate did not approve of the early election. However, we hope to have shown that integrating citizens' attitudes towards the government's decision to call a snap election is important and perhaps that scholars conducting national electoral inquiries should seriously consider measuring citizens' attitudes towards snap elections when this type of election is declared.

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Supplementary Material

Question wording and coding of variables for the survey conducted by YouGov

Angry:

“Are you angry that an election was called at this time?”

- Very angry
- Somewhat angry
- A little angry
- Not angry at all

Ordinal variable coded [0-1] where 1=very angry, 0.67=somewhat angry, 0.33=a little angry, and 0=not angry at all.

Very angry:

We use the same question as the “angry” variable but we code it into a dichotomous variable.

Dichotomous variable coded [0-1] where 0=somewhat angry, a little angry, not angry at all and 1=very angry.

Vote intention:

“How likely are you to vote in this provincial election?”

- Certain to vote
- Very likely to vote
- Somewhat likely to vote
- Somewhat unlikely to vote
- Certain that will not vote

Dummy coded [0-1] where 1=Certain to vote and 0= Very likely to vote, somewhat likely to vote, somewhat unlikely to vote, and certain that will not vote.

Age:

“In what year were you born?”

Coded [0-1] where the youngest respondent is 18 and the oldest is 81.

Sex:

“Are you male or female?”

Dummy coded 0=male and 1=female

Education:

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

- Some elementary school
- Completed elementary school
- Some Secondary/High School
- Completed Secondary/High School
- Some Technical/Community College/CEGEP
- Completed Technical/Community College/CEGEP
- Some University

- Completed BA
- Completed MA or PhD

Coded [0-1] where 0=some elementary school and 1=Completed MA or PhD

Party Identification

“Generally speaking, do you feel close to one of the PROVINCIAL parties?”

- No, I do not feel close to any party
- Yes, I feel close to :
 - Liberal Party
 - Parti Québécois
 - ADQ
 - Green Party
 - Québec Solidaire
 - Other Party

Nominal variable coded [1-5] where 1=Liberal Party, 2=Parti Québécois, 3=ADQ, 4= Green Party, Québec solidaire, and Other Party, and 5=I do not feel close to any party

Political interest:

“In general, how interested are you in provincial politics? Use a 0 to 10 scale where 0 means not interested at all and 10 means extremely interested.”

Coded [0-1] where 0=Not interested at all and 1=Extremely interested

Vote choice:

“If you vote, which party do you intend to vote for (or did you already vote for)?”

- Liberal Party
- Parti Québécois
- ADQ
- Green Party
- Québec Solidaire
- Other Party
- I will not vote
- I do not know

If respondent answers “I will not vote” or “I do not know”, the answer to the following question is used:

“Which party are you inclined to vote for?”

- Liberal Party
- Parti Québécois
- ADQ
- Green Party
- Québec Solidaire
- Other Party

- I do not know

Nominal variable coded [1-4] where 1=Liberal Party, 2=Parti Québécois, 3=ADQ and 4=Green Party, Québec solidaire, and Other Party.

Quebec independence:

“What is your personal view on Quebec sovereignty, that is, Quebec is no longer part of Canada? Are you...”

- Very favourable
- Somewhat favourable
- Somewhat opposed
- Very opposed
- Skipped
- Not asked

Dummy variable coded [0-1] where 0=somewhat opposed, very opposed, skipped and not asked and 1=very favourable and somewhat favourable.

Economy:

“In your view, over the past year, has Quebec’s economy: gotten worse, gotten better or stayed about the same?”. Respondents are coded as one if they believe the economy has gotten worse, and zero if they perceive the economy to have gotten better or stayed about the same.

Coded [0-1] where 0=worse; 0.5=about the same; 1=Better

Question wording and coding of variables for the survey conducted by Léger

Bad idea:

“Personnaly, how did you find the idea to hold an election in Quebec this fall? Was it...”

- A very good idea
- A somewhat good idea
- A somewhat bad idea
- A very bad idea

Ordinal variable coded [0-1] where 0=A very good idea, 0.33=A somewhat good idea, 0.67=A somewhat bad idea and 1=A very bad idea.

Very bad idea:

We use the same question as the “bad idea” variable but we code it into a dichotomous variable.
Dummy variable coded [0-1] where 0=A very good idea, a somewhat good idea, a somewhat bad idea and 1=A very bad idea.

Voted:

“Did you vote in the last provincial election?”

Yes

No

I prefer not answering

Dummy coded [0-1] where 1=Yes and 0=No and I prefer not answering

Vote choice:

If the respondent declared having voted in the last provincial election they are asked the following question.

“Which party did you vote for?”

- Liberal Party
- Parti québécois
- ADQ (Action démocratique du Québec)
- Québec Solidaire
- Green Party (Greens)
- Another party, specify
- I did not vote/I spoiled my ballot
- None
- I don’t know
- I prefer not to answer

Nominal variable coded [1-4] where 1=Liberal Party, 2=Parti Québécois, 3=ADQ and 4=Green Party, Québec solidaire, and Other Party.

Age:

“In what year were you born?”

Coded [0-1] where the youngest respondent is 18 and the oldest is 86.

Sex:

“Are you...?”

- A man
- A woman

Dummy coded 0=man and 1=woman

Education:

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

- No schooling
- Some elementary schooling
- Completed elementary school
- Some secondary/high school
- Completed secondary/high school
- Some technical, community college, CEGEP, College classical studies
- Completed technical, community college, CEGEP, College classical studies
- Some university
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Professional degree or doctorate

Coded [0-1] where 0=No schooling and 1= Professional degree or doctorate

Political interest:

“Using a scale from zero to ten, where zero(0) means no interest at all and ten(10) means a great deal of interest, how interested were you in this provincial election?”

Coded [0-1] where 0=No interest at all and 1= A great deal of interest

Party identification:

“In provincial politics, do you usually identify yourself with...”

- The Liberal Party
- The Parti Québécois
- The ADQ
- Québec solidaire
- The Green Party
- Another party
- No party
- Don’t know
- I prefer not to answer

Nominal variable coded [1-5] where 1=Liberal Party, 2=Parti Québécois, 3=ADQ, 4= Green Party, Québec solidaire, and Other Party, and 5=I do not feel close to any party

Quebec independence:

“If a referendum were held today on the same question as that asked in 1995, that is sovereignty with an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada, would you vote YES or would you vote NO?”

- Yes

- No
- I would not vote/spoil my ballot
- I don't know
- I prefer not to answer

“Even if you haven't yet made up your mind, if a referendum were held today on this issue, would you be inclined to vote YES or to vote NO?”

- Yes
- No
- I would not vote/spoil my ballot
- I don't know
- I prefer not to answer

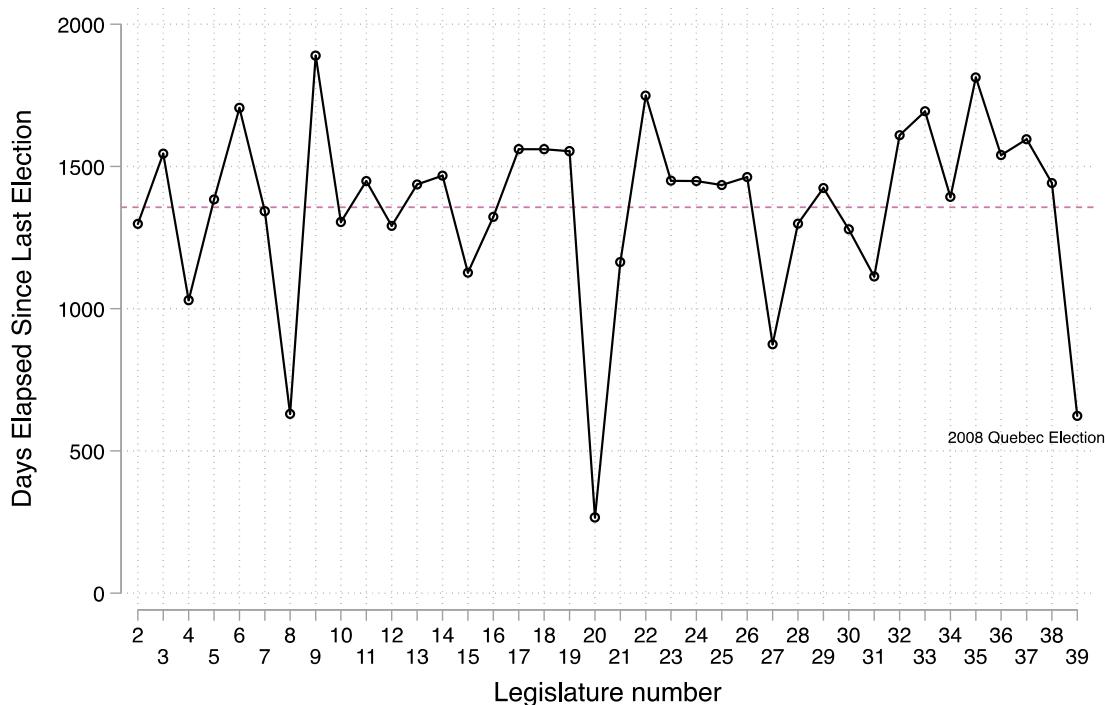
Dummy coded 0=would not vote for Quebec independence in a referendum and 1=would vote “yes” in referendum for Quebec’s independence. We use the answers to the second question for those who do not know or prefer not to answer the first question.

Economy:

“Over the past year has Québec’s economy: gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?”

Coded [0-1] where 0=worse; 0.5=about the same; 1=Better

Figure SM.1. The time gap (in days) between elections, from 1871 to 2008.



Note: the dashed red line represents the mean (1357 days).

Table SM.1: Descriptive statistics for the Léger and YouGov surveys

	YouGov/Léger	YouGov/Léger	YouGov/Léger	YouGov/Léger	YouGov/Léger
	Minimum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Maximum	<i>N</i>
Age	0/0	0.44/0.43	0.25/0.23	1/1	1260/1125
Sex (Female=1)	0/0	0.47/0.54	0.50/0.50	1/1	1479/1151
Education	0/0	0.62/0.60	0.22/0.21	1/1	1260/1141
Angry/Bad idea	0/0	0.60/0.60	0.38/0.21	1/1	1359/1103
Liberal Party	0/0	0.17/0.28	0.38/0.45	1/1	1479/1151
Parti Québécois	0/0	0.20/0.33	0.40/0.47	1/1	1479/1151
ADQ	0/0	0.06/0.12	0.24/0.33	1/1	1479/1151
Other	0/0	0.06/0.05	0.23/0.22	1/1	1479/1151
No PID	0/0	0.51/0.22	0.50/0.41	1/1	1479/1151
Quebec independence	0/0	0.38/0.45	0.49/0.50	1/1	1479/1054
Economy	0/0	0.75/0.75	0.31/0.29	1/1	1325/1110
Political interest	0/0	0.65/0.48	0.29/0.32	1/1	1187/1147
Turnout	1/0	5.34/0.86	1.34/0.35	6/1	1347/1151
Vote for incumbent	0/0	0.38/0.39	0.49/0.49	1/1	1164/998

Table SM.2. The impact of attitudes toward the early election and vote choice

	YouGov survey	Léger survey
	DV = Vote for incumbent	
Very angry	-0.978*** (0.246)	
Very bad idea		-1.411*** (0.248)
Sex (Female=1)	-0.012 (0.237)	0.090 (0.244)
Education	1.099* (0.520)	0.328 (0.588)
Age	1.454** (0.512)	0.568 (0.565)
Quebec independence	-2.328*** (0.311)	-0.999** (0.306)
Economy	-0.577 (0.360)	-0.225 (0.428)
PID (ref=no PID)		
Liberal Party	3.564*** (0.487)	2.186*** (0.327)
Parti Québécois	-3.001*** (0.750)	-2.353*** (0.384)
ADQ	-3.975*** (1.021)	-2.058*** (0.373)
Other	-2.293*** (0.638)	-1.244** (0.446)
Constant	-0.296 (0.514)	0.549 (0.630)
Observations	955	877
Pseudo R^2	0.613	0.575

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. The reference category for attitudes toward the snap election is 'very good idea' for Léger and 'not at all angry' for YouGov. The reference category for partisanship is no party attachment.
 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$