

Resentment and Admiration: Public Opinion Toward Teachers and Public Sector Employees in Ontario

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Abstract

Public opinion toward teachers and other public sector workers is an important factor in Ontario provincial politics. This article uses public opinion data to measure, and identify the correlates of, resentment and admiration of these groups, and to identify the relationship between these attitudes and support for political parties in Ontario. Survey data from over 4,000 Ontarians, collected at the time of the 2022 provincial election, show that

Ontarians have greater admiration for, and less resentment toward, teachers than toward other provincial government workers. The data also reveal several factors related to these attitudes, including comparative assessments of compensation and workload, and relationships with members of these groups. Finally, the data show that attitudes toward teachers, but not other public sector workers, are related to provincial vote choice, with negative attitudes toward teachers predicting PC Party support. Teachers are clearly a more salient “target” of resentment in Ontario provincial politics. These findings have implications for educational policy and the tactics of teacher unions.

Key words: teachers and public sector workers, resentment and admiration, public opinion, provincial politics, Ontario

Résumé

L’opinion publique à l’égard des enseignants et des autres travailleurs du secteur public est un facteur important dans la politique provinciale de l’Ontario. Cet article utilise des données tirées de l’opinion publique pour mesurer et identifier les corrélats du ressentiment et de l’admiration envers ces groupes, et pour identifier la relation entre ces attitudes et le soutien aux partis politiques en Ontario. Les données d’un sondage, mené auprès de plus de 4 000 électeurs ontariens lors des élections provinciales de 2022, montrent que les Ontariens ressentent une plus grande admiration et moins de ressentiment envers les enseignants qu’à l’égard des autres travailleurs du gouvernement provincial. Les données révèlent également plusieurs facteurs associés à ces attitudes — notamment des évaluations comparatives de la rémunération et de la charge de travail — et aux relations avec les membres de ces groupes. Enfin, les données montrent qu’il existe un lien entre les attitudes envers les enseignants et le choix au vote provincial, mais pas avec les autres travailleurs du secteur public, les attitudes négatives envers les enseignants prédisant le soutien du Parti PC. Manifestement, les enseignants sont une « cible » plus saillante du ressentiment dans la politique provinciale de l’Ontario. Ces résultats ont des implications pour la politique éducative et les tactiques des syndicats d’enseignants.

Mots-clés : enseignants et travailleurs du secteur public, ressentiment et admiration, opinion publique, politique provinciale, Ontario

Introduction

Resentment is an emotion with deep political potential. It is associated with feelings of insult and offence at the perceived “undeserved rewards” of others, implying that the person who is resentful has been or can be deprived of those same rewards and is more deserving of them than the current recipient (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002). It can be directed toward identifiable groups of people whom the resentful see as receiving their undue share of limited resources (prestige, pay, rewards, etc.) based on any number of personal attributes (profession, geographic location, cultural background, etc.). Resentment is not just limited to conflicts over material benefits; it can also be directed toward what is seen as excessive praise and admiration at the expense of the resentful group, such as the veneration of teachers and nurses rather than those in private-sector professions. A similar current of resentment holds that the resentful group is shown disrespect by people who do not care to understand them and their way of life (Cramer, 2016a).

Resentment has the potential to negatively impact the personal well-being and professional performance of those who are the targets of resentment-driven rhetoric and policies. If there is identifiable animosity amongst the general public toward a class of workers, the quality of work and life for those workers may suffer. Similarly, political strategies based in resentment may preclude governments from entering into fair contract negotiations or implementing policies that would benefit those against whom they campaigned. Resentment is a political tool with wide-ranging policy implications, which can impact the professions targeted.

In politics, public sector workers are a common target of resentment. Politicians may seek to harness such sentiments in the name of political gain. A prime example is former Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who pitted public-sector and private-sector workers against one another as part of what he called his “divide and conquer” strategy to generate conflict between workers, positioning “regular taxpayers” as supporting the lifestyle of overpaid and lazy government employees (Cramer, 2016a; Kaufman, 2021). Donald Trump employed a similar approach, often characterizing government employees as part of the established elite that needed to be overthrown to “Make America Great Again.” Trump enthusiastically used terms like “Drain the Swamp,” in reference to a need to rid Washington, DC of undeserving government employees (Moynihan, 2022). Both Trump and Walker painted a picture of public sector workers who are underworked,

overpaid, and undeserving of their positions. In the province of Ontario, the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party has a long history of conflict with public sector unions. Since their election in 2018, Premier Doug Ford and his PC government have continued to take this confrontational approach. This includes speaking publicly against public sector unions as a privileged and undeserving group during contract negotiations and passing legislation that limits pay and collective bargaining rights. Conflict with education unions has been particularly high profile in Ontario since 2018. Teachers staged work-to-rule events, job actions, and rotating strikes. These events not only affected teachers, but also millions of students and parents/guardians. During these conflicts, the government and the teachers made frequent public pleas in support of their positions, and in opposition to the other (CBC News, 2020). Not until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic did the two sides eventually come to an uneasy compromise (Canadian Press, 2020). More recently, the 2022 provincial election saw the PC Party re-elected by a healthy margin, winning 40.8% of the popular vote and 66.9% of the seats in the provincial legislature, setting up the potential for continued conflict.

The purpose of this article is to contemplate the role that attitudes toward public sector employees played in shaping the outcome of Ontario's 2022 provincial election. We measure levels of public resentment toward teachers and other provincial public employees. We also consider an opposing attitude toward these groups—admiration. These variables (resentment and admiration) have been found in other contexts to be important drivers of political support (Cramer 2016a; Carpenter et al., 2020). Given the state of the relationship between the governing PC Party and provincial public sector unions, we anticipate that these attitudes will also play a role in Ontario. These attitudes may then translate into policy, which has the potential to impact public sector workers and the teaching profession.

After describing the literature on political resentment, we detail why it may be particularly important in Ontario. We then use data from a survey of over 4,000 Ontarians, collected at the time of the 2022 provincial election, to answer three research questions. First, how do Ontarians feel about teachers and other Ontario public employees? Second, what are the correlates of public resentment and admiration toward these groups? Finally, how are these attitudes related to provincial vote choice? Our analysis reveals that survey respondents have greater admiration for, and less resentment toward, teachers than toward other provincial government workers. We also identify several factors related

to these attitudes, including comparative assessments of how hard teachers and public sector workers work and how much they are paid, as well as relationships with members of these groups. Finally, we show that attitudes toward teachers, but not other public sector workers, are strongly related to provincial vote choice, with negative attitudes toward teachers predicting PC Party support. Teachers, as compared to other public sector workers, are clearly a more salient “target” of resentment in Ontario provincial politics.

Resentment as a Political Tool

Resentment is a complex emotion with many potential sources. It may originate from fear and insecurity relating to a real or perceived lack of control over political and economic decision making, inability to ensure one’s own financial security, or concern over the economic stability of one’s wider community (Edelman, 2021; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Van Hootehem et al., 2021). For the purposes of our study, the origins of resentment are less relevant than the idea of resentment as an affective emotion and politically operationalizable tool.

The strategy of stoking resentment is often used as part of the wider affective politics employed by populist movements and, specifically, right-wing populist (RWP) parties. Populism is built around the concept of a valorized “people” whose will has been unjustly ignored and who are situated within and at the centre of a righteous struggle against the elite, the underclass, and nefarious outsiders (Brubaker, 2017; Mudde, 2004). In this sense, RWP parties combine populist rhetoric and a traditionalist ideology that centres free enterprise, the traditional family, and “common sense” solutions to social and economic problems. There is a history of support for RWP politics in Ontario, contemporaneously centred on the Ford family, who lead a movement based on opposition to elites, reverence for the free market, and support for reducing the size of government (Erl, 2021; Kiss et al., 2020; McGregor et al., 2021; Silver et al., 2019)

Resentment is an important emotional element of RWP politics. The focus of RWP parties—the people—are resentful of the forces against which they are destined to struggle and are mobilized by a populist leader who can “settle” that resentment (Anderson & Secor, 2022). Populist movements offer a vision of a future where offending parties, which have been given excessive and undeserved attention and rewards, will be punished and returned to their “natural” place (Elçi, 2022).

While resentment can be directed toward any group that is perceived to receive undue attention or undeserved rewards, the political science literature speaks to three main “types” of resentment: racial resentment, place-based resentment, and elite-based resentment. In each case, resentment is directed toward an outsider who may have intersecting identities that form a nexus of undesirable qualities, all of which can be the source of the resentful party’s disaffection. At the root of many discussions of resentment is the idea that a *resentful* party is kept from what they are owed by people who do not deserve their station and who look down on others.

Racial resentment is a powerful political tool with roots in the same feelings of insecurity as other resentments. As Bonikowski (2017) notes, social and economic changes create a perceived threat to the status of a group which, in some instances, believes itself to be a unique ethnic “people.” Racial resentment is not inherently racist, focusing less on biological inferiority and more on real or perceived advantages given to one racial group at the expense of another (Patenaude, 2019).

Place-based resentment is similar, with advantages that are seen through a geographic lens, though a close connection between place-based and racial-based resentment has been observed (Munis, 2020). Place-based resentment is directed toward a broadly imagined elite made up of educated urbanites who aim to impose their values on rural residents, disrespecting the rural way of life. Edelman (2021) ties this to a loss of economic status and confusion over the changing nature of the world, resulting in a resentment that has strong place-based, racial, and even gender-based elements, with rurality associated with Whiteness, masculinity, and status as a more “real” member of the national community.

Finally, resentment can be directed toward those perceived to have greater power and prestige than the resentful. This elite-based resentment situates officials in positions of specialized authority, such as teachers and government employees, as petty despots and manifestations of government waste. As Carpenter et al. (2020) observe, these public employees are characterized as both imposing an unwanted agenda on “regular” people and maintaining “a so-called job for life as an unfair and undeserved advantage” (p. 470). Cramer (2016a) discusses this as a feeling that elites, particularly when their area of jurisdiction overlaps with the livelihoods of “regular people,” stand as “outsiders” and the agents of an unwelcome agenda. Paired with this sense of imposition and disrespect is a notion “that public employees did not deserve the salaries and benefits they received,”

and that, compared to the resentful, they “did not work hard for a living” (Cramer, 2016a, p. 131). This rhetoric, imbued with a current of anti-intellectualism, has long been employed against the professional and technical class, of which public employees are considered an integral part, advancing the goals of the state in education, society, and the economy (Frank, 2004, pp. 192–193; Thomas & Tufts, 2016). This elite-based resentment, with public employees portrayed as “elites,” is a type of resentment of clear relevance to contemporary Ontario politics. We turn now to describe the history of how all of Ontario’s major parties have come into conflict with public sector unions.

The Case of Ontario

The governments of Ontario and their relationship with public sector workers from 1990 to 2018. Each of Ontario’s three main political parties, which cover a wide range of the ideological spectrum, has a complicated relationship with the province’s public sector workers, teachers central among them. Since 1990, each party has held government at least once and has faced differing crises relating to public employees.

The Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) has formal ties to organized labour, but the party has spent nearly two decades repairing a relationship damaged by former Premier Bob Rae. Elected in 1990, Rae’s government faced a deepening recession and a worsening financial situation for the provincial government. Rae’s solution was the “Social Contract,” the government’s name for policies that cut the wages of provincial employees in exchange for greater influence over workplaces and more consultation over government affairs once the recession ended. Public sector unions strongly opposed these measures and began actively campaigning against the NDP (Morton, 2007).

Ontario’s 1995 election saw Rae’s NDP defeated by the PCs under the leadership of Mike Harris, a former elementary school teacher and school board trustee. Harris moved the PC Party away from its “Red Tory” history of fiscal moderation and cautious social progress, and toward a more hard-line neo-liberal policy (Gidney, 1999; Ibbitson, 1997). Once elected, Harris’s government implemented sweeping reforms known as the “Common Sense Revolution,” which cut the size of government and curbed the power of organized labour. This resulted in a series of labour-organized protests called the “Days of Action,” which brought public and private-sector unions together in opposition to Harris’s reforms (Reshef & Rastin, 2003). This included a multi-day job action in 1997 by teachers

against the PC government's proposed Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, which would have imposed harsh bargaining terms on teachers (MacLellan, 2009).

The Ontario Liberal Party, which came to power in 2003 following the defeat of Ernie Eves (Harris's successor as PC leader and Premier), initially had some support among the province's public sector unions, with teachers credited as helping the party secure victory (Savage & Mancini, 2022). This uneasy relationship soured and, by 2012, the Liberals introduced Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, which banned teachers from striking and imposed a wage freeze. Four years later, Bill 115 would be ruled a violation of teachers' rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (McGrath, 2016). By 2018, the popularity of the Liberals, then led by another former school trustee, Kathleen Wynne, had eroded. During that year's provincial election, teachers' unions finally broke with the Liberals, with the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario formally endorsing the NDP for the first time in the union's history (Rushowy, 2018). That election would ultimately be won by Doug Ford and the PCs.

“Ford Nation” and Ontario’s teachers. Ontario Premier Doug Ford is a member of a political dynasty. The dynasty's origins began when Doug Ford nominated his father, Doug Ford Sr., as the PC candidate in the Toronto riding of Etobicoke-Humber. After serving as his father's campaign manager, Doug Ford helped his brother, Rob, seek election to Toronto City Council. Rob's abrasive, taxpayer-focused approach would eventually propel him to the office of Mayor, with Doug stepping in to fill his brother's council seat. After Rob's death and Doug's loss in the mayoral election of 2014, the latter teased another run for the Toronto mayoralty before ultimately seeking the leadership of the PC Party. Doug Ford narrowly won the leadership race and led the party to victory in the subsequent provincial election in 2018, forming a majority government.

The Ford family has crafted a political brand that blends populist rhetoric, a heavy emphasis on “customer service”-style politics, and neo-liberalism (Budd, 2020; Erl, 2021). A key element of this brand is resentment toward government employees and public sector unions. Ford discusses this resentment in his book, explaining that a formative event in his life was a strike by instructors during his first term in community college, which drove him to drop out and work full-time at the family label business (Ford & Ford, 2016). This antipathy carried through to his political life, with Ford noting that, during the time he and his brother spent on Toronto City Council, they believed local politicians seemed “obsessed with protecting union leadership and spending public money” (Ford & Ford, 2016, p. 154).

Shortly after coming to power in 2018, the Ford government announced plans to increase the average number of students in both elementary and high school classrooms. After student groups and teacher unions organized demonstrations to protest the proposal, Ford told a radio panel, “This isn’t about class sizes...this is strictly from the union thugs, as I call them, the teacher’s union, one of the most powerful unions in the entire country” (Breen, 2019). Three months later, the Ford government introduced Bill 124, also called the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act. Bill 124 intended to limit public sector wage increases to, as the legislation stated, restore “sustainability to the province’s finances” and manage the provincial debt (Bethlenfalvy, 2019). This bill was introduced as the province entered negotiations with unions representing teachers and other school support workers. As the PC government quickly moved the legislation through Ontario’s provincial parliament, they simultaneously proposed capping teacher’s wages and reiterated their plans to increase classroom sizes during contract negotiations, leading the president of the Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario to suggest Bill 124 was introduced as a scare tactic, commenting that “Bill 124 is extremely problematic and I’ll say offensive...it is interfering, I would suggest to you, in that free and open bargaining process we should be having at the table” (Jones, 2019b). Ontario’s Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, sought to restructure the narrative, instead aiming to portray public sector unions as unreasonable and pursuing strikes that would “disproportionately hurt our kids” (Jones, 2019a, 2019b).

Negotiations between the Ford government and teacher’s unions across Ontario broke down and, through the end of 2019 and in 2020, teachers staged work-to-rule events, job actions, and rotating strikes. In early February of 2020, full-page colour ads appeared in the province’s four major newspapers, attacking teacher’s unions for “risking student success” and asserting “Children are not pawns.” An investigation by the *Toronto Star* found the group responsible for the ad, called “Vaughan Working Families,” was led by a PC member who had been appointed to a provincial agency by the government in 2019. Ford and Lecce distanced themselves from the ad (Rushowy & Benzie, 2020). Over the next months, each union quickly reached agreements with the Ford government as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the province (Rocca, 2020).

Data and Methodology

The data we use to answer our research questions come from a two-wave survey of eligible voters that we fielded at the time of the 2022 Ontario provincial election (election day was June 2, 2022).¹ The survey is part of the larger Consortium on Electoral Democracy project (Anderson et al., 2022), and had a sample size of 4,006 in the pre-election wave of the survey, and 3,188 in the post-election questionnaire.² Surveys were administered online. Respondents were recruited by Leger using an existing online panel, with quotas for age, gender, and education. The dataset is similar in character to other academic election surveys, such as the Canadian Election Study and American National Election Study, in that it includes a variety of questions on political attitudes and behaviour, as well as about the personal characteristics of the respondents. Importantly, our survey includes a series of questions about attitudes toward public sector workers. A full list of all of the questions employed here is found in Appendix A.

The central variables in our analysis—indicators of resentment and admiration—are based on similar questions from research in the United States on attitudes toward public sector employees and support for Donald Trump (Carpenter et al., 2020). These measures have not yet been used in Canada, so our models include controls for urban, rural, and suburban place of residence. Given the political context in Ontario and, in particular, the long-standing position of the PC Party toward public sector workers, we expect that these measures are of particular relevance in this setting.

To measure resentment and admiration, we adapted an index from Carpenter et al. (2020), in which respondents were asked to report the extent to which six emotions described their feelings toward teachers or Ontario public sector workers (measured separately): pride, disgust, admiration, resentment, gratitude, and anger (response options were *not at all*, *a little*, *some*, and *a lot*). We measure resentment by combining responses for the disgust, resentment, and anger emotions, and we measure admiration by combining

1 The pre-election survey was fielded from May 18 to June 1, 2022, and the post-election data were collected from to June 3 to June 13.

2 The sample sizes of our analyses vary from these numbers, as we use list-wise deletion to deal with missing values.

pride, admiration, and gratitude.³ The admiration and resentment indices are negatively associated ($r = -0.53$ for teachers and $r = -0.24$ for government workers). Though the negative and positive emotion indices are related to one another, there remains a great deal of independence between them—resentment is not the mirror of admiration. We thus consider both in our analyses below.

While Carpenter et al. combine responses to questions about multiple groups into just one admiration and one resentment variable, we consider teachers and government employees separately—we included a separate battery of questions for each group, and can thus create separate resentment and admiration scores for teachers and government workers. Conflict between teachers and the PC government has been much higher-profile than conflict with other government workers, and we expect not only that views toward the two groups may be different, but also that their relationships with vote choice may vary.

In the first stage of our analysis, we consider the correlates of resentment and admiration toward teachers and government workers. Here, we consider three types of explanatory factors. The first is a set of subjective evaluations of a respondent's circumstances, as compared to those of the group members. Respondents were asked if, in their opinion, they work harder, less hard, or about as hard as teachers and public sector workers (again, we asked about each group separately). They were also asked if they are paid more, less, or about the same as teachers/government workers. We expect both factors to contribute to resentment and admiration (though are cautious in employing causal language in the study, given that it is conceivable that party preferences might conceivably also shape attitudes toward workers).

The second type of explanatory variable accounts for the personal ties that respondents have with teachers and government workers. We expect that individuals who are themselves teachers or government workers, or who have family or friends in these groups, might have different views than other Ontarians. Respondents were asked, in separate questions, about their ties to teachers and government workers.

The third and final type of explanatory variable we consider is sociodemographic characteristics. Here, we consider a series of standard characteristics: age, gender, and

3 Cronbach's alpha scores are 0.89 for resentment toward teachers, 0.94 for resentment toward government workers, 0.56 for admiration of teachers, and 0.64 for admiration of government workers. Though some of these values are less than one might normally hope to see in an index, we keep these indices in order to be consistent with the existing literature on the subject.

education, but also other factors that are relevant to either the topic of resentment (including indicators of whether respondents live in an urban, suburban, or rural area, with urban serving as the baseline category) and race (our categories are White, racialized, and Indigenous). Finally, these models include measures of income and employment status (working versus not working), as these are directly related to the subjective comparison measures (about workload and pay). All variables in our model range between zero and one, allowing for straightforward comparison of the magnitude of relationships across variables. The inclusion of these sociodemographic controls allows us to filter out the effects of these factors upon our outcome variables, isolating the relationship between the dependent variables and the theoretical variables of interest.⁴

In the second stage of our analysis, resentment and admiration become explanatory variables. Here our goal is to determine if and how attitudes toward teachers and government employees are related to vote choice in the 2022 provincial election. In light of the long-standing antagonism between the Progressive Conservative Party and public sector employees, we expect that individuals with high levels of resentment and/or low levels of admiration toward these groups will, *ceteris paribus*, be more likely to vote for the PC Party.

This stage of our analysis consists of a multinomial logistic regression model, where the vote choice categories are Progressive Conservative, NDP, Liberal, and Green.⁵ The resentment and admiration indicators serve as our theoretical variables of interest, and we include the same series of sociodemographic controls as we do in the first stage of our analysis.⁶

4 The addition of the controls does not introduce problematic multicollinearity to the models. None of the controls are related to any of the resentment, admiration, or vote choice variables with a Pearson value of higher than 0.14.

5 Together, these parties received 94.4% of the popular vote, and 100% of seats in the provincial legislature. Though there are a small number of respondents in the sample who voted for other parties, there are no significant results when this group is considered as a separate category in our model. These cases are thus dropped here.

6 These variables have long been known to be significant drivers of vote choice (Campbell et al., 1960; Blais et al., 2002).

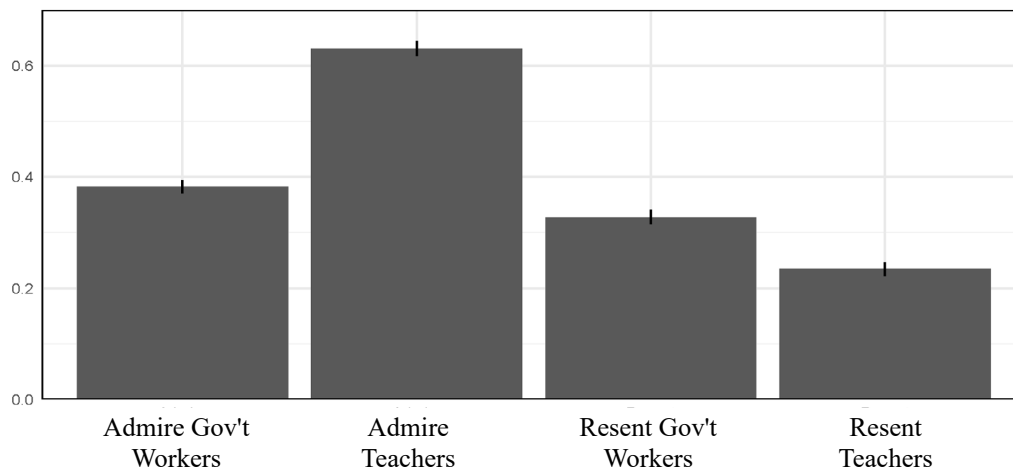
Results

How Do Ontarians View Teachers and Government Workers?

We begin with a simple description of our resentment and admiration variables. Figure 1 shows the mean estimate of the resentment and admiration indices toward teachers and government employees. As a reminder, these indices range from a minimum of zero (low) to a maximum of one (high). The height of the bars indicates the mean value for each variable, and the whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals.⁷

Figure 1

Emotions Toward Provincial Government Workers and Teachers



Note: $N = 1,918$

Figure 1 shows clearly that survey respondents have a much more positive view toward teachers than toward other provincial employees. Admiration is considerably higher for the former group, and resentment is lower. While attitudes toward the two groups are certainly related ($r = 0.47$ for admiration and 0.44 for resentment), the two are hardly identical. Admiration and resentment toward teachers and other government workers are distinct phenomena in Ontario.

⁷ There are no noteworthy differences in the standard deviations of the variables. This value is 0.30 for teacher resentment, 0.31 for teacher admiration, 0.31 for government resentment, and 0.29 for government admiration.

It is important to note that the resentment variables are not directly comparable to the admiration variable; that is, resentment, anger, and disgust are not necessarily *opposite* emotions of admiration, pride, and gratefulness. Thus, we cannot conclude from Figure 1 that levels of admiration are higher than resentment. Nevertheless, the figure does clearly reveal that teachers are viewed more positively than other public sector workers.

What Are the Correlates of Resentment and Admiration?

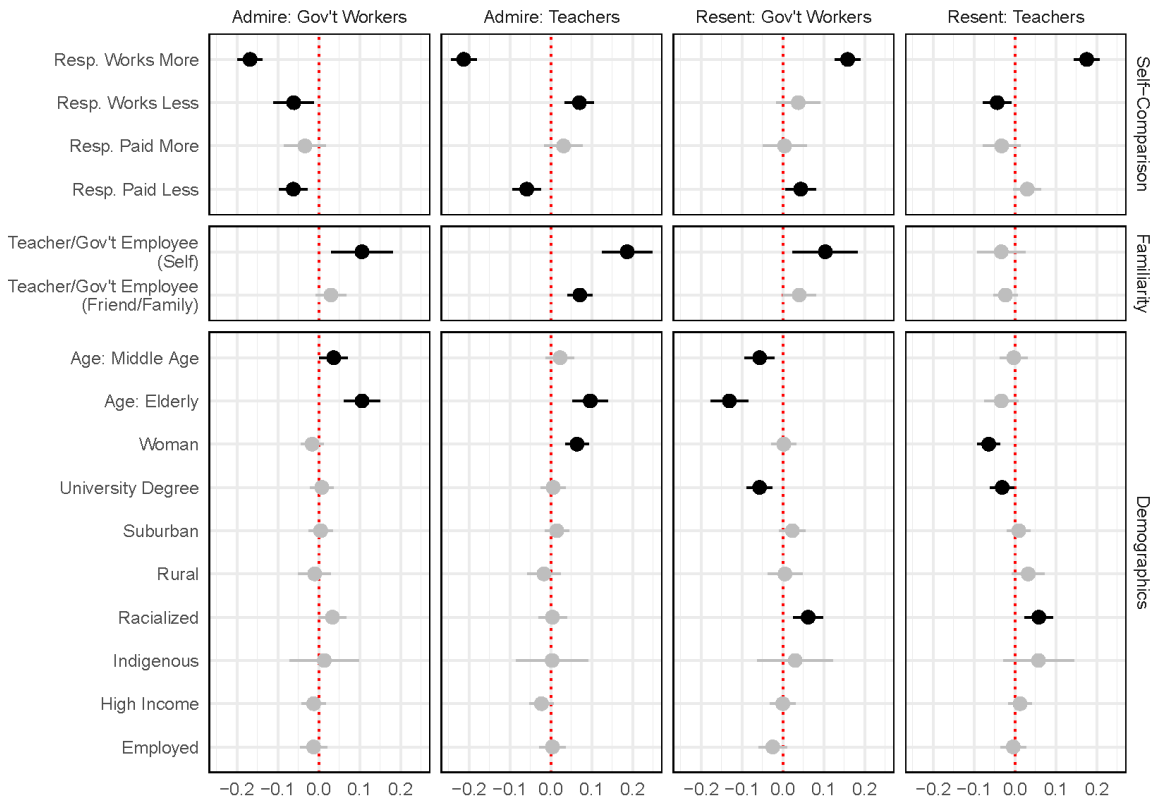
Next, we consider the sources of admiration and resentment toward our groups of interest. As we noted earlier, we consider three types of factors: assessments of comparative workload and compensation, relationships with those in the professions, and sociodemographic indicators. Our analysis consists of a series of four OLS regression models, with admiration and resentment as dependent variables. The results of these models are shown in Figure 2, which shows coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals (whiskers).⁸ Results in black are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), while those in grey are not. We provide full model results in table format in Appendix B.

Figure 2 shows that all three categories of variables (self-comparison, familiarity, and sociodemographics) are related to emotions toward our groups of interest. With respect to the self-comparison variables, our models indicate that perceptions of workload are more strongly related to attitudes than are perceptions of pay. Individuals who feel that they work more than teachers or government workers have comparably low levels of admiration, and high levels of resentment.⁹ Respondents who feel that they are paid less than these groups have low admiration and high resentment. However, the magnitudes of the “pay” relationships are lower than for the “workload” variables. Though both factors matter, perceived workload seems to be the more powerful correlate of emotions.

8 $N = 1,630$ for the government admiration model, 1,705 for teacher admiration, 1,651 for government resentment, and 1,691 for teacher resentment.

9 One result that is unexpected is the finding that individuals who work less than government workers have less admiration toward this group than do those who work the same amount. While we are hesitant to speculate as to the reason for this finding, we do think that this is a question worthy of future consideration. The “comparison” variables included in this study are novel, and our results reveal that they are politically relevant.

Figure 2
Correlates of Resentment and Admiration



Respondents' relationships with members of the two groups also have interesting relationships with reported emotions. We note here that the "teacher" models contain variables indicative of relationships to teachers, and the "government worker" models include variables that indicate relationships to government workers. Being a teacher is positively associated with admiration for teachers, as is being a government employee. However, being a government worker is also positively associated with resentment toward this group. This fascinating finding deserves further study in future work. It could suggest, for example, that government workers resent their colleagues, or government workers in other departments or with different levels of seniority. However, the fact that we do not see a similar effect for teachers is important. Unlike government workers, teachers tend not to resent other teachers.

The other category of the “familiarity” variable has less striking results. Being a family member or friend of one of these groups is only significant in one of four instances—respondents with a family member or close friend who is a teacher have a comparatively high level of admiration for teachers (though lower than teachers themselves). Being a close relation of a government employee has no effect upon either type of emotion.

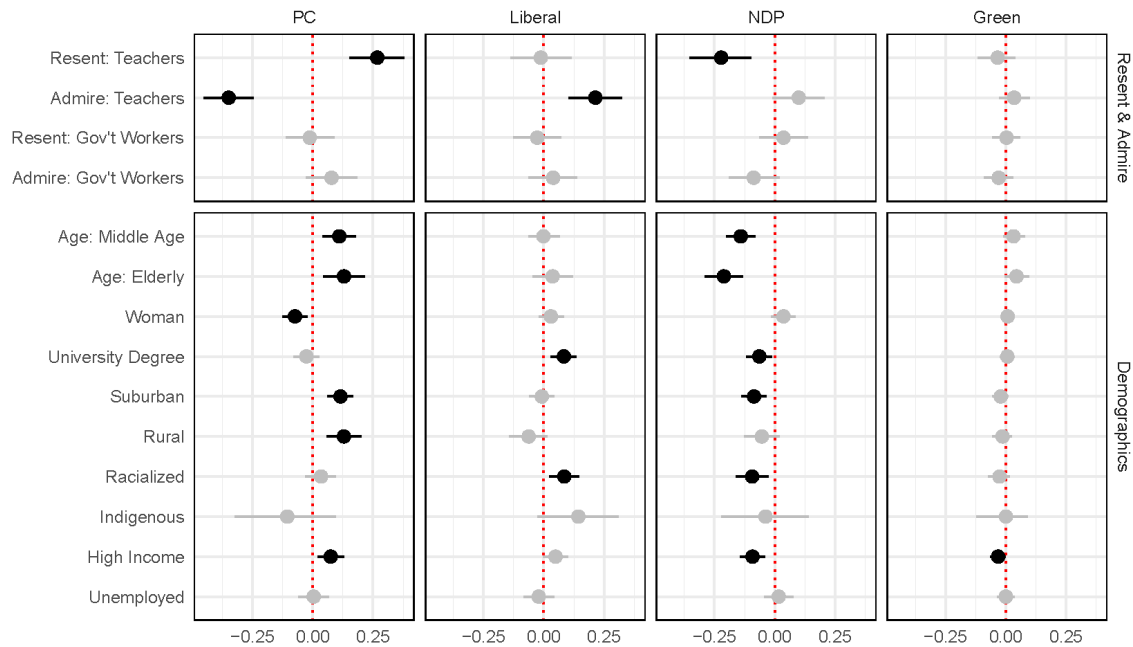
Finally, several sociodemographic indicators are significant, though there are differences between groups and type of emotion. Age is the most consistently significant factor, with older respondents having comparatively high levels of admiration, and low levels of resentment (toward government workers, but not toward teachers). Gender is associated with attitudes toward teachers (women have more admiration and less resentment), but not government workers. Finally, education and race are related to resentment, but not admiration. Individuals with a university education have comparatively low levels of resentment toward both groups, while racialized individuals have high scores on both fronts.

How Are Resentment and Admiration Related to Vote Choice?

Now that we understand some of the correlates of resentment and admiration, we turn to the role of admiration and resentment in vote choice in the 2022 Ontario election. To do so, we ran a multinomial logistic regression model (outcome options are PC vote, Liberal vote, NDP vote, and Green vote). Explanatory variables include the two sets of emotion variables, as well as the sociodemographic characteristics included in Figure 2. The results of this model are shown in Figure 3, which illustrates the marginal effects of each explanatory variable upon the likelihood of voting for each party. The figure shows marginal effects estimates and 95% confidence intervals (whiskers).¹⁰ Entries can be interpreted as the effect upon the likelihood of supporting a particular party, comparing individuals with the maximum value of each explanatory variable to those with the minimum value. Results in black are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), while those in grey are not. We provide full model results in table format in Appendix C.

¹⁰ N = 1,187.

Figure 3
Correlates of Vote Choice—Marginal Effects



The results of the model show that attitudes toward teachers are strongly related to vote choice. These attitudes are associated with the PC Party, in particular. When all other factors are held equal, individuals high in resentment toward teachers are roughly 27 percentage points more likely to vote for the PC Party than are individuals low on this variable. The effect of admiration is in the opposite direction—those high in admiration are 35 points less likely to vote PC than are those low in admiration. The magnitude of the effects of resentment and admiration are greater than those of any other variables included in the model.

Not surprisingly, then, support for the opposition parties is also related to these attitudes. Liberal support is positively associated with admiration toward teachers, and NDP support is negatively associated with resentment toward the group (both effects are just above 20 percentage points). In sum, negative assessments of teachers are associated with PC support, while voters who give the group positive assessments tend to support the

opposition parties. There are no noteworthy differences between the opposition parties¹¹; it is PC voters who are unique here with respect to teacher admiration and resentment.

The magnitude of these effects is particularly striking when compared to those of the other variables included in the model. Factors such as age, gender, education, urbanity, race, and income are all common correlates of vote choice, but, with the exception of age, none of the effects of these variables come close to the magnitude of the teacher attitudes. Not only do assessments of teachers matter for vote choice, but they matter more than any other variable included in the model, and in most instances, they matter much more.

In contrast to these sizeable and statistically significant effects, we see no evidence that emotions toward other government workers are associated with vote choice. Neither of these variables is statistically significant for any party.¹² These null findings make the significant results for the teacher variables all the more striking. We have already demonstrated, in Figure 1, that public attitudes toward teachers are different (and more positive) than those toward other government workers. Figure 3 shows that the relationships between these attitudes and vote choice are also different.

As another test of the relationship between these attitudes and party support, we ran a similar model as that shown in Figure 3, except using partisanship, rather than vote choice, as the outcome variable. Since the concept of partisanship was first introduced as a long-standing psychological attachment to a party (Campbell et al., 1960), it has been shown to be a significant factor in Canadian politics (Blais et al., 2002; Gidengil et al., 2012).¹³ We address it here because the party support associated with partisanship is thought to be longer term in nature than vote choice in a single election. According to Campbell et al. (1960), partisanship is “a psychological identification, which can persist...even without a consistent record of party support” (p. 121). If attitudes toward teachers are also related to partisanship, it could suggest that these evaluations are relevant over the longer term, rather than simply at one election. Our results (see Appendix D) are

11 None of the other parties differ from one another on any of the resentment and admiration variables at the 95% level.

12 This null finding persists even in pair-wise comparisons, between all combinations of parties.

13 We operationalize partisanship according to Blais et al. (2002), coding respondents only as partisans if they identify “very” or “fairly” strongly with a party.

consistent with those shown in Figure 3.¹⁴ Positive attitudes toward teachers are negatively associated with PC Party partisanship, and negatively correlated with support for the opposition parties. This is but further evidence of the importance of assessments of teachers in Ontario politics.¹⁵

Conclusion

Education is one of the most important functions that government performs; the financial and other societal benefits of a well-educated citizenry are enormous. At the same time, governments are constrained in that the education system in Ontario is funded entirely out of public finances (with the exception of some private schools). Teacher compensation and benefits subtract directly from the public purse, affecting other government decisions on spending and taxation, as well as overall fiscal balances. This tension, between the need for a strong education system and limiting the costs of that system, has led on many occasions to difficult negotiations and high-profile labour battles in Ontario.

All of this is complicated by the fact that the relationship between public educators and their employer (provincial governments) is very different from the analogous relationships that exist in the private sector. In a democracy, governments are ever conscious of public opinion, striving to shape it, or at the very least, respond to it. Both government and public sector unions are aware of this, so it is no surprise that both attempt to shape public opinion both during and outside times of conflict. In short, public opinion matters immeasurably more to public labour negotiations and disputes than it does in the private sector. It is therefore important to understand the role that attitudes toward public labour play in partisan politics. Governments that pursue a strategy of

14 One noteworthy finding in Appendix D (which focuses on partisanship) that necessarily differs from the vote choice model are the results for non-partisans. This group has comparatively low levels of admiration for both teachers and government workers, and low levels of resentment for teachers. These patterns do not match those observed for any of the parties, suggesting that these electors are unique. Future work on this topic should consider the unique way in which the emotions of non-partisans are related to their voting decisions.

15 Partisanship and vote choice are well known correlates of one another, with Meisel (1973) rather famously describing partisanship “as volatile in Canada as the vote itself” (p. 67), suggesting that partisanship changes to match vote preferences. We ran still another model (results not shown but available from the authors), very similar to that shown in Figure 3, where vote choice serves as the dependent variable, but control for partisanship. Even after controlling for partisanship, assessments of teachers are related in a statistically significant manner to vote choice, providing further evidence of the robustness of this relationship.

fuelling resentment toward public sector workers may impact the professional experience of those against whom they have campaigned and may signal a policy direction that can work to the detriment of the targets of their resentment.

Our results show that public opinion toward teachers—feelings of both resentment and admiration—are significant factors in Ontario provincial politics. Voters with high levels of resentment and low levels of admiration of teachers are particularly supportive of the PC Party, and they eschew the Liberals and NDP (see Figure 3). Though perhaps not a surprising finding given the RWP nature of the PC Party, the role of these attitudes has been proven and quantified here for the first time. Somewhat more surprising, however, is the finding that attitudes toward other provincial government employees have no relationship with party support. We also find that Ontarians feel more positively toward teachers than other provincial employees (Figure 1), and that the correlates of attitudes toward these two groups are somewhat different (Figure 2). The Ontario public views, and responds politically to, teachers and other public employees in a very different manner.

Our results demonstrate clearly that the public's attitudes toward teachers are more important for provincial politics than is the case for other government workers. These findings may also have relevance for education unions wishing to influence public opinion regarding vote choice. Our results indicate a clear relationship between vote choice and attitudes toward teachers—both admiration and resentment. In particular, unions may wish to consider conducting informational campaigns that seek to improve public opinion toward teachers. Given that we find that evaluations of teacher workload have a particularly strong relationship with resentment and admiration, there may be value in emphasizing the heavy workload that teachers bear. For their part, a PC government may have an interest in suggesting just the opposite. Their support is strongly associated with negative attitudes toward the teachers, and they may benefit electorally from criticizing this group.

To continue to expand our understanding of the relationship between attitudes toward teachers and provincial vote choice, a question to be considered next is why this might be the case? What is it about teachers that makes this group particularly salient in this context? Therefore, the next step in this research program is to identify the mechanisms through which attitudes toward teachers influence public opinion toward parties, while attitudes toward other government workers do not. Though our data cannot speak directly to this, we suspect that this finding might have something to do with the particu-

larly high-profile nature of the conflicts between the province and education workers. It is also worth determining whether our findings are unique to Ontario, or if they travel to other provinces. We suspect that similar dynamics might be at play elsewhere, particularly those places with a history of RWP parties and public sector labour strife, but that this might not be the case in all provinces. Another question that arises from our findings is the extent to which political parties and education unions actively seek to shape these attitudes, and then mobilize these attitudes electorally. In an era where resentment plays such a significant role in politics, it is important to understand how groups become the target of resentment, how this resentment can be utilized for electoral gain, and how targeted groups might go about defending themselves.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Resentment/admiration battery:

Please select the degree to which you feel each of the following emotions toward teachers/provincial public sector workers (asked separately)

- Pride, Disgust, Admiration, Resentment, Gratitude, Anger
- Response options are: “Not at all,” “a little,” “some,” “a lot,” “don’t know”

Subjective comparisons of workload and compensation:

Compared to teachers/provincial public sector workers (asked separately), how hard do you work in your job?

- Response options are: “I work LESS HARD than they do,” “I work ABOUT AS HARD as they do,” “I work HARDER than they do,” “don’t know”

Compared to teachers/provincial public sector workers (asked separately), how well are you financially compensated in your job?

- Response options are: “I am paid LESS than they are,” “I am paid ABOUT THE SAME as they are,” “I am paid MORE than they are,” “don’t know”

Relationships/familiarity with groups:

Are you, or is someone in your close group of family or friends a teacher/provincial public sector worker (question asked separately about both groups)? Please select all that apply.

- Response options are: “Myself,” “a family member,” “a close friend,” “none,” “don’t know”

Sociodemographic characteristics:

Age: What is your age in years?

- Response options are: ages from 18 to 99+
- Coded as a series of dummies for young (less than 40), middle age (40–65) and older (65 and above)

Gender: Are you:

- Response options are: “a man,” “a woman,” “non-binary,” “another,” and “don’t know/prefer not to say”
- Dummy compares women to men

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

- Response options are: “no schooling”; “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”; “Bachelor’s degree”; “Master’s degree”; “professional degree or doctorate”; “Don’t know/prefer not to say”
- Dummy compares those with a completed degree to those without

Urban/rural: Which of the following words do you think best describes the place where you live?

- Response option are: “urban,” “suburban,” “rural,” “don’t know/prefer not to say”
- Dummies created for rural and suburban, with urban as baseline

Race: Do you consider yourself... (please select all that apply)

- Response options are: “White,” “Indigenous,” “South Asian,” “Chinese,” “Black” “Filipino,” “Latin American,” “Arab,” “Southeast Asian,” “West Asian,” “Korean,” “Japanese,” “Other,” “Don’t know/prefer not to say”
- Dummies created for racialized and Indigenous, with White as baseline

Income: What is your total household income, before taxes, for the year 2021?

- Open-ended box
- Dummy coded at the median

Employment: What is your employment status?

- Response options are: “working for pay full-time,” “working for pay part-time,” “self-employed,” “retired,” “unemployed/looking for work,” “student,” “caring for a family,” “unable to work due to disability,” “student working for pay,” “caring for family and working for pay,” “retired and working for pay,” “don’t know/prefer not to say”
- Dummy created to compare individuals who work for pay to others

Vote choice:

Which party did you vote for?

- Response options are: “Ontario Liberal Party,” “Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario,” “Green Party of Ontario,” “Ontario New Democratic Party,” “another party,” “don’t know/prefer not to say”

Partisanship:

In provincial politics, do you usually think of yourself as a:

- Response options are: “Liberal,” “NDP,” “Progressive Conservative,” “Green,” “Another party,” “None of these”

How strongly [party name piped in from previous question] do you feel?

- Response options are: “Very strongly,” “fairly strongly,” “not very strongly”

Appendix B

OLS Regression Models—Correlates of Resentment and Admiration

	Admiration: Gov't Workers	Admiration: Teachers	Resentment: Gov't Workers	Resentment: Teachers
R. works more	-0.17 (0.02)**	-0.22 (0.02)**	0.16 (0.02)**	0.18 (0.02)**
R. works less	-0.06 (0.03)*	0.07 (0.02)**	0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.02)*
R. paid more	-0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)
R. paid less	-0.06 (0.02)**	-0.06 (0.02)**	0.04 (0.02)*	0.03 (0.02)
Member of group	0.11 (0.04)**	0.19 (0.03)**	0.10 (0.04)*	-0.03 (0.03)
Family/friend of group member	0.03 (0.02)	0.07 (0.02)**	0.04 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.01)
Age: Middle Age (40-64)	0.04 (0.02)*	0.02 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.02)**	-0.01 (0.02)
Age: Elderly (65 and older)	0.11 (0.02)*	0.10 (0.02)**	-0.13 (0.02)**	-0.03 (0.02)
Woman	-0.02 (0.01)	0.06 (0.02)**	0.00 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.01)**
University degree	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.02)**	-0.03 (0.01)*
Suburban	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Rural	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Racialized	0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.06 (0.01)**	0.06 (0.02)**
Indigenous	0.01 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)
High income	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Employed	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Constant	0.47 (0.03)**	0.62 (0.03)**	0.28 (0.03)**	0.02 (0.03)
N	1,630	1,705	1,651	1,691
Adj. R-squared	0.1224	0.2118	0.1014	0.1356

Appendix C

Correlates of Vote Choice—Marginal Effects

	Progressive Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green
Resentment of teachers	0.27 (0.06)**	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.22 (0.06)**	-0.03 (0.04)
Admiration of teachers	-0.35 (0.05)**	0.21 (0.06)**	0.10 (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)
Resentment of Gov't workers	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.00 (0.03)
Admiration of Gov't workers	0.08 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.03)
Age: middle age	0.11 (0.03)**	0.00 (0.03)	-0.14 (0.03)**	0.03 (0.02)
Age: elderly	0.13 (0.04)**	0.04 (0.04)	-0.21 (0.04)**	0.04 (0.03)
Woman	-0.07 (0.03)**	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
University Degree	-0.03 (0.03)	0.08 (0.03)**	-0.06 (0.03)*	0.01 (0.02)
Suburban	0.11 (0.03)**	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.09 (0.03)**	-0.02 (0.02)
Rural	0.13 (0.04)**	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)
Racialized	0.03 (0.03)	0.08 (0.03)**	-0.10 (0.03)*	-0.02 (0.02)
Indigenous	-0.11 (0.10)	0.14 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.01 (0.05)
High income	0.07 (0.03)**	0.05 (0.03)	-0.09 (0.03)**	-0.03 (0.02)*
Unemployed	0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)

Entries show marginal effects and standard errors (in parentheses).

* $p < 0.05$, ** < 0.01

$N = 1,187$, Pseudo $R^2 = 0.1025$

Appendix D

Correlates of Partisanship—Marginal Effects

	Progressive Conservative	Liberal	NDP	Green	Non-partisan
Resentment of teachers	0.22 (0.05)**	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.06)*
Admiration of teachers	-0.20 (0.05)**	0.14 (0.05)**	0.17 (0.05)**	0.06 (0.03)*	-0.16 (0.05)**
Resentment of Gov't workers	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.05)
Admiration of Gov't workers	0.09 (0.05)*	0.09 (0.04)*	-0.03 (0.04)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.16 (0.05)**
Age: middle age	0.06 (0.03)*	0.05 (0.03)	-0.13 (0.02)**	-0.02 (0.01)	0.04 (0.03)
Age: elderly	0.15 (0.04)**	0.04 (0.03)	-0.15 (0.03)**	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.04)
Woman	-0.07 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
University Degree	-0.03 (0.02)	0.10 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.06 (0.03)*
Suburban	0.09 (0.02)**	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)*	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)
Rural	0.10 (0.03)**	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)*	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Racialized	0.00 (0.03)	0.07 (0.03)**	-0.07 (0.03)*	-0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Indigenous	-0.07 (0.08)	0.12 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.08)
High income	0.07 (0.02)**	0.05 (0.02)*	-0.06 (0.02)*	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.05 (0.02)*
Unemployed	0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.03)

Entries show marginal effects and standard errors (in parentheses).

* $p < 0.05$, ** < 0.01

$N = 1,449$, Pseudo $R^2 = 0.0817$