

A conservative approach to climate change: Hand-coding the climate impact of the Conservative

Party of Canada's platforms from 2004 to 2021

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Abstract

Political party platforms are often used to examine party preferences, including on specific topics like climate change. The growing literature in this field shows that mainstream parties, particularly right-wing parties, are hesitant to strongly embrace climate policies. Canada's Conservative Party is rarely discussed in detail despite being an example of an electorally successful conservative party that has vocal reservations about climate change policies. This paper is a systematic study of the Conservative Party of Canada's electoral platforms since the party's creation in 2003. It applies a 2018 hand-coding method developed by Carter, Ladrech, Little, and Tsagkroni specifically to determine party preferences on climate change. The results show that the Conservative Party of Canada has reacted to climate change in a manner consistent with most other mainstream conservative parties. It included some pro-climate content in each of its seven platforms, but the salience varied greatly by platform. Anti-climate content was more consistent. The party appears willing to change the importance of climate policy content depending on the electoral context. These policies are not part of the party's core values and are only emphasized as needed. Meanwhile, the anti-climate content included policies that are consistently part of Canadian conservative values, including protection for the fossil fuel industries and economic growth. The two most recent platforms contained some of the highest levels of pro-climate content, providing some hope that the party is becoming increasingly comfortable with decarbonization policies.

Keywords

Climate change, electoral platforms, conservative parties, content analysis

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1. Introduction

In March 2021, delegates at the Conservative Party of Canada's (CPC) convention voted to reject adding a statement saying that "climate change is real" and that the party is "willing to act" to the party policy book.¹ This sentiment is in stark contrast to the 69% of Canadians who believe there is at least solid evidence of global warming and the 66% who believe that governments ought to do more to combat it.² The party's leadership publicly insisted that the CPC believes in climate change despite this vote among the membership and included a number of climate policy proposals in the party's 2021 electoral platform, among them an endorsement of a form of carbon pricing.

This controversy raises questions about what the CPC actually believes about climate change, how its electoral strategy has adapted to climate concerns over time, and what its policy preferences would mean for Canada's climate performance if it were to be in power. These are a crucial considerations given that the party could hold office again soon. Was the 2021 convention indicative of a step backward in the Conservatives' willingness to address climate change and was this reflected in their platform in 2021? Beyond the party's stance on some high-profile climate policy measures, such as carbon taxation, does the CPC hold policy preferences that are generally likely to exacerbate climate change? Did the Canadian electorate's rising concern about the climate lead the CPC to adopt more pro-climate policy proposals over time?

This paper begins to explore these questions by asking: How have the Conservative Party of Canada's electoral platforms changed in relation to climate change since its first election in

¹ John Paul Tasker, "Conservative Delegates Reject Adding 'climate Change Is Real' to the Policy Book | CBC News," CBC News, March 20, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-delegates-reject-climate-change-is-real-1.5957739>.

² David Coletto, "What Do Canadians Think about Climate Change and Climate Action?," Abacus Data, October 28, 2021, <https://abacusdata.ca/climate-change-cop26-canada/>.

2004? I first survey the literature on political parties, particularly conservative parties, and their responses to the climate change challenge. I provide context on Canada, applying the results of the literature to this specific case to determine what the Conservative Party of Canada's expected response is. Next, I outline the methodology and present the results of hand-coding the CPC's platforms in all of the federal elections since 2004. I use a coding scheme developed in the international literature on party politics specifically to examine party preferences on climate change. This coding scheme is unique in that it codes the entire platform for policies that may increase or decrease greenhouse-gas emissions, regardless of whether the policies are linked to climate change by the party. Policies that increase emissions are rarely linked to climate change or the environment and ignoring them gives an incomplete and one-sided picture of a party's views.

I find that the CPC does not completely reject climate change in their electoral bids. The party may only start to explicitly recognize climate change in 2011, but it promotes policies that would reduce emissions or increase GHG sinks in all seven platforms. The share of platforms devoted to pro-climate content varies significantly by election, as do the kinds of policies. The share of anti-climate policies, which are more closely linked with conservative values like economic growth and limited government intervention remain more consistent, as does the share of policies that would have a neutral or ambiguous effect on emissions. The evidence suggests that while the party has taken a weakly accommodative strategy, it emphasizes pro-climate measures only when it feels it to be electorally advantageous. Therefore, climate change has not been adopted as a core conservative value.

My paper adds to the literature on how Canada's political parties approach climate change as well as to the literature on the use of party platform (manifesto or agenda) coding

about climate change. While there is a growing body of research on political parties and climate change, they focus on the EU and the United States. Canada is rarely studied. For example, Båtstrand's comparative study on climate change and the platforms of conservative parties only included Canada's 2011 election.³ This study is the first to include the full timeline of the Conservative Party of Canada from 2004 to 2021. The Comparative Agendas Project (CMP), one of the major international platform coding projects, has had a Canadian component since 2004.⁴ However, its coverage of environmental issues is very limited and its codes are broad, only partially covering climate-related policies.⁵ Published in 2018 but only applied to European parties, the coding scheme used in this paper is designed to rectify this, focusing entirely on climate effects. It goes into greater detail with codes for 22 kinds of policies that can have an effect on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions or sinks. In sum, this paper presents a more comprehensive assessment of climate change and Conservative electoral politics in Canada than is available in the literature. I also draw on my experience to discuss how to improve the coding scheme for use by other researchers and contexts.

This paper is just one piece of the puzzle. It contributes to a greater understanding of the Conservative Party of Canada's views on climate change. Most critically, it shows that the party does not feel it can reject climate change outright when running for a federal election, even if the Party's members do reject it. The party is willing to adapt to outside pressure to include more climate content in their platforms when necessary. Future research can build on these results by

³ Sondre Båtstrand, "More than Markets: A Comparative Study of Nine Conservative Parties on Climate Change," *Politics & Policy* 43, no. 4 (August 2015): 538–61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12122>.

⁴ Jean-Philippe Gauvin and Éric Montpetit, "Canadian Agendas Project," in *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tools, Data*, ed. Frank R. Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 67, doi: 10.1093/oso/9780198835332.003.0006.

⁵ Comparative Agendas Project, "CAP Topics," Comparative Agendas Project, 2015, <https://www.comparativeagendas.net/pages/master-codebook>.

continuing to track the party's platforms on climate issues and by filling in the gaps in context needed to better understand each platform individually.

2. Literature Review, Canadian Case, and Expectations

In this paper, I use the environment as an umbrella term that includes climate change. These terms are distinct, but there is relatively little literature that focuses only on political parties and climate change. Since the two issues are closely related and face some similar challenges when it comes to substantive policies, I have included literature that focuses solely on the environment.

2.1. Political parties' response to climate change

Political parties are continuously having to adapt to new policy problems. Carter neatly sums up this phenomenon in his 2007 textbook: "Historically, party systems in industrialised liberal democracies have proved adept at incorporating new political interests and denuding them of their radicalism. Political parties have appropriated new issues or cleavages by developing their own policies to address the problems identified by an emerging interest, such as race or gender."⁶ Climate change, however, has been a particularly challenging topic for the industrialized liberal democracies' political parties to fully adopt.

Environmental protection and climate change first became an important political issue in the 1970s and 1980s, and green parties entered scene at the same time.⁷ Since then, the mainstream parties have increasingly discussed environmental protection, though this can include everything from empty rhetoric to progressive policies.⁸ One study demonstrated this using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project Database, finding a steep increase in the

⁶ Neil Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 127.

⁷ Neil Carter, "Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment," *Environmental Politics* 22, no. 1 (2013): 73, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755391>.

⁸ Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 127.

attention paid to the environment in the platforms of the governing party of 20 OECD countries from the 1960s to the 1990s. At this point, the rate of increase slowed, before picking up again in the mid 2000s.⁹ It is clear that the mainstream parties are devoting more attention to environmental issues overall but this progress has not been equal or straightforward for all.

The first choice that a party makes when confronted with a new issue is whether or not to discuss it.¹⁰ To not respond at all is a dismissive strategy.¹¹ Within the choice to respond to an issue lie two options: an accommodative strategy and an adversarial strategy. For environmental issues this means trying to “move closer to a Green or ecological party” or moving further away.¹² I would argue that within the accommodative strategy there should be a distinction between a strong accommodative approach and a weak one. The weak strategy is characterized by both limited movement towards strong climate policies and the choice to focus on priority issues without completely ignoring the environment.

The adversarial strategy has not received much uptake. Those that did take this strategy tend to be parties on the far-right,¹³ or the United States’ Republican Party.¹⁴ Most mainstream parties have instead used versions of both the dismissive and accommodative strategies.¹⁵ Few parties have pursued a strong accommodative strategy and uptake is limited to the more radical left-wing and social liberal parties. Stronger accommodative strategies have tended to take place in “countries where there is no established Green party and/or the levels of public environment

⁹ Simon Persico, “En Parler Ou Pas? La Place Des Enjeux Environnementaux Dans Les Programmes Des Grands Partis de Gouvernement,” *Revue Française de Science Politique* 65, no. 3 (2015): 418, <http://www.cairn.info/revue-francaise-de-science-politique-2015-3-page-405.htm>.

¹⁰ Persico, 406.

¹¹ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 76.

¹² Carter, 76.

¹³ David Hess and Madison Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe: Opposition to Climate Mitigation Policies,” *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 104 (April 2019): 426, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2019.01.019>.

¹⁴ Båtstrand, “More than Markets,” 552; Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 90.

¹⁵ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 74.

concern (as in Nordic countries) are relatively high.”¹⁶ A more common strategy seems to be a weak accommodative one, with occasional lapses into a dismissive strategy.¹⁷ There are two key characteristics of this weak accommodative strategy. One is a tendency to move only a little towards the more ecological parties by using the right rhetoric and even including an environmental plan, but without any of stronger policies.¹⁸ The second aspect is that of selective emphasis (*accentuation sélective*) or preference-accommodation. Essentially, the party will focus on the topics that they believe are their strengths. They might not ignore climate all together, but they will devote only a minimum of attention to it.¹⁹ Evidence for this was found in a broad study of OECD countries and in a case study on the Conservative and Labour parties in Britain.²⁰ Based on the popularity of this strategy, I expect the Conservative Party of Canada to also use a weak accommodative strategy characterized by selective emphasis resulting in at least some pro-climate policies in each platform.

There is an assumption that the environment should be a valence issue. Put simply, this is when the voters all wish to see the same outcome.²¹ In the case of the environment and climate change, it means that all voters understand that the environment ought to be protected so no party is likely to propose damaging it.²² However, there seems to be mounting evidence, particularly

¹⁶ Carter, 86.

¹⁷ Carter, 91; Persico, “En Parler Ou Pas? La Place Des Enjeux Environnementaux Dans Les Programmes Des Grands Partis de Gouvernement,” 407.

¹⁸ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 91.

¹⁹ Neil Carter, “Party Politicization Of The Environment In Britain,” *Party Politics* 12, no. 6 (November 1, 2006): 750, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068806068599>; Persico, “En Parler Ou Pas? La Place Des Enjeux Environnementaux Dans Les Programmes Des Grands Partis de Gouvernement,” 407.

²⁰ Persico, “En Parler Ou Pas? La Place Des Enjeux Environnementaux Dans Les Programmes Des Grands Partis de Gouvernement,” 425; Carter, “Party Politicization Of The Environment In Britain,” 763.

²¹ Robert Johns et al., “Valence Politics in Scotland: Towards an Explanation of the 2007 Election,” *Political Studies* 57, no. 1 (2009): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00762.x>.

²² Carter, “Party Politicization Of The Environment In Britain,” 750.

driven by the work of Neil Carter, that climate change may not be a valence issue after all.²³ Instead, it is becoming a positional one, that “has the capacity to provoke strong sceptical and partisan feelings amongst politicians and voters.”²⁴ The reluctance of the mainstream parties to fully embrace strong climate policies seems to support this understanding that climate change is complicated in the eyes of the voter. Still, few parties outside of the United States are willing to support adversarial policies with the stated goal of harming the environment. However, they may be willing to support policies with the unintentional result of environmental harm.

The level of public concern is a related factor that affects how accommodating the party response is even if environmental and climate protection is considered a valence issue. High levels of public concern can encourage parties to take on stronger accommodative strategies, as was the case in some Nordic countries.²⁵ When the British Conservatives were in opposition, they had some success with their ‘Vote Blue, Go Green’ strategy, partly because it came at a time of higher public concern for the environment.²⁶ Maintaining public concern levels, however, can be challenging as it tends to be higher during times of economic prosperity and lower during recessions.²⁷ If public concern is not constant, parties that have not fully committed to climate policies may be inconsistent in their support, even if the electorate is generally in agreement that preventing climate change is good.

There is a lot of variation in the response of parties to the environment, even if the majority are adopting some form of weak accommodation. This consensus on only a weak accommodative strategy is felt across the left-right political divide. Both the centre-left and

²³ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment”; Neil Carter and Ben Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap’: David Cameron, the Conservatives and the Environment,” *British Politics* 10, no. 2 (June 2015): 204–25, <https://doi.org/10.1057/bp.2015.16>.

²⁴ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 91.

²⁵ Carter, 86.

²⁶ Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 205.

²⁷ Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 138.

centre-right parties are generally committed to economic growth and either businesses or trade unions. Therefore, they may “also be nervous about adopting unpopular ‘green’ policies such as stringent eco-taxes or restrictions on consumerist lifestyles.”²⁸ Yet, there are some cases where the environment is not a particularly partisan issue: “In Britain, environmentalism largely transcends party lines (notwithstanding the efforts by the centrist Liberal Democrats to seize the green initiative) with the active environmental lobby remaining non-partisan.”²⁹ However, broader studies have shown that the left leaning parties tend to adopt more progressive policies than their counterparts on the right. In particular, Farstad’s 2018 study on the salience of climate change in party platforms using Comparative Manifesto Project data found that left-right ideology was the most significant factor in determining how salient climate change was in a party’s platform and that right-wing parties tend to have lower levels of salience.³⁰ There is less consensus on how big the separation between the left and the right is, though there is agreement that it can vary depending on country and time.³¹

2.2. Conservative parties’ response to climate change

Opposition to climate policies, and even climate change denial, is often linked to conservatives.³² The conservative philosopher Roger Scruton finds that both environmentalists and conservatives are guilty of the assumption that conservatism is not aligned with the environmental movement.³³

²⁸ Carter, 127.

²⁹ Carter, 140.

³⁰ Fay M. Farstad, “What Explains Variation in Parties’ Climate Change Salience?,” *Party Politics* 24, no. 6 (2018): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1177.1354068817693473>.

³¹ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 87–88; Persico, “En Parler Ou Pas? La Place Des Enjeux Environnementaux Dans Les Programmes Des Grands Partis de Gouvernement,” 419.

³² Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe,” 419; Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012); Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem: An Analysis of the Conservative Movement’s Counter-Claims,” *Social Problems* 47, no. 4 (November 1, 2000): 499–522, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3097132>; Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 209.

³³ Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet*, 7–8.

It has already been established that parties on the right are less likely to push progressive environmental policies than the parties on the left. McCright and Dunlap traced the arguments used by conservatives to sow doubt about the need to act on climate change in their analysis of conservative climate counterclaims:

First, conservatives claim that the evidentiary basis of global warming is weak, if not wrong. Second, conservatives argue that the net effect of global warming would be beneficial should it occur. Third, conservatives argue that the policies proposed to ameliorate the alleged global warming problem would do more harm than good. Briefly then, the conservative movement asserts that, while the science of global warming is becoming more uncertain, the harmful effects of climate change policy are becoming more certain.³⁴

Clearly, it is not a given that conservative parties will have the same urgency on climate change as the greener parties. However, outside of the United States Republican Party and some far-right parties there does not seem to be outright denial of climate change among mainstream conservative parties.³⁵ Some noted right-wing leaders, including France's Nicolas Sarkozy, Germany's Angela Merkel, and the UK's David Cameron, even championed environmental initiatives.³⁶ Given that few mainstream conservative parties are denying climate change outright, I expect the Canadian Conservative Party to recognize it as a policy problem, though I do not expect climate change to be a top priority for the party.

Conservative parties, even if they recognize the existence of climate change, may still be resistant to strong climate change measures because they see climate action as fundamentally opposed to some aspects of conservatism. This may include the commitment to free markets and

³⁴ McCright and Dunlap, "Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem," 517–18.

³⁵ Båtstrand, "More than Markets," 552; Hess and Renner, "Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe," 426.

³⁶ Carter, "Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment," 90.

ensuing aversion to state intervention, the commitment to maintaining the status quo or a traditional system, or the commitment to prioritizing economic growth. Scruton explains how conservatives see free market protection as antithesis to environmental protection: “For they have tended to see modern politics in terms of a simple dichotomy between individual freedom on the one hand, and state control on the other. Individual freedom means economic freedom, and this, in turn, means the freedom to exploit natural resources for financial gain.”³⁷ Related to this point is a desire to protect the existing freedom of the market and opposition to changes to the current system. This can be seen in the framework of “system justification”, in which one wishes to maintain the system partly out of a desire to protect a sense of stability and security.³⁸ Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith found “clear evidence that system justification tendencies are associated with greater denial of ecological problems and less willingness to take pro-environmental actions.”³⁹ Båtstrand talks of a similar phenomenon in conservative parties: “conservative parties share the intention of smaller changes to sustain both climate and societal structure.”⁴⁰ Finally, economic growth is prioritized by conservatives over other issues, particularly after recessions.⁴¹ This can influence how a party may perform once in office, even if they have espoused environmental rhetoric before. As the UK example showed, the need for economic growth can quickly eclipse environmental efforts.⁴² It, therefore, seems likely that the

³⁷ Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet*, 8.

³⁸ Irina Feygina, John T. Jost, and Rachel E. Goldsmith, “System Justification, the Denial of Global Warming, and the Possibility of ‘System-Sanctioned Change,’” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 3 (2009): 327, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167209351435>.

³⁹ Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith, 332.

⁴⁰ Båtstrand, “More than Markets,” 555.

⁴¹ Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 205; Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 127, 138; Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe,” 426.

⁴² Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 205.

Conservative Party of Canada will include policies in favour of economic growth and policies to protect the freedom of the market including opposition to excessive taxation and regulations.

Despite this focus on economic policy, conservatism is not necessarily incompatible with environmentalism. Scruton links it to environmental protection: “Conservatism and conservation are two aspects of a single long-term policy, which is that of husbanding resources and ensuring their renewal. These resources include the social capital embodied in laws, customs and institutions; they also include the material capital contained in the environment, and the economic capital contained in a free but law-governed economy.”⁴³ He goes on to note that conservatism is ultimately concerned with protecting the order for future generations, including the environment.⁴⁴ This same sentiment of stewardship was used by David Cameron to champion environmental policies.⁴⁵ Conservatism and ecologism do differ on one key assumption: “whereas conservatism seeks to protect the status quo, ecologism seeks the radical transformation of the economic political and social system.”⁴⁶ However, this does not mean that both ideologies cannot be concerned with strong environmental policies. Rather, they may arrive at different conclusions over which policies are most effective. The CPC may therefore feel more comfortable promoting policies that are focused on conservation and environmental protection than climate policies involving systemic change.

There is great variation within Conservative parties on the environmental protection scale. Some centre-right parties, particularly those in Europe, have made this a significantly more salient issue, while others have done the opposite. However, enthusiasm has waned after the

⁴³ Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet*, 9.

⁴⁴ Scruton, 10–11.

⁴⁵ Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 208.

⁴⁶ Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 68.

2008 economic crisis and the disappointment of the COP15 summit in Copenhagen.⁴⁷ Far-right parties are also much more likely to deny climate change and oppose a wider range of policies than centre-right parties, though all parties vary greatly by country.⁴⁸

2.2.1. Conservative climate policies

It is difficult to identify a unified “conservative climate policy.” One might expect, given the conservative emphasis on free-markets and opposition to state intervention, that conservatives would focus almost exclusively on market based policies while resisting top-down regulations. Yet this does not appear to always be the case. In Båtstrand’s study of nine conservative parties around 2012, they found that:

The preferred measures include both state regulations and carbon trading, and many measures in between the state and market ends of the dimension. Conservative parties certainly do not propose exclusive rightist measures toward climate change; they also promote some state interventions in the market economy. The traditional left/right dimension has not absorbed climate change to the extent that conservative parties support only those climate measures based on free markets, and some parties oppose carbon trading. The lack of privatization proposals and the inclusion of even prohibitions show that conservative climate policies utilize policy parts from the left as well as the right on the state/market dimension.⁴⁹

It is worth noting that Båtstrand’s study considered tax and subsidy policies, which would include carbon taxes, as state intervention policies. Whether these are classified as market driven or not, there did not seem to be much uptake on these kinds of policy. Båtstrand notes that three of the nine conservative parties studied, those of the UK, Germany, Norway, included taxes and duties as climate measures, but that none of them promoted increasing the overall taxation level as part of their climate sections.⁵⁰ The British

⁴⁷ Carter, “Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment,” 89–90.

⁴⁸ Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe.”

⁴⁹ Båtstrand, “More than Markets,” 555.

⁵⁰ Båtstrand, 553.

Conservatives eventually dropped the idea of green taxes after the 2008 recession.⁵¹ A study focused on Utah, a state commonly held by the Republican Party, found that conservatives were likely less fond of measures that encouraged polluters to pay for emissions.⁵² I draw attention to carbon taxes specifically because there is widespread agreement among economists that these are the most effective policy to reduce emissions.⁵³ Based on this, it is clearly unlikely that the Conservative Party of Canada will endorse carbon tax solutions to climate change.

More popular policies included research and technological solutions, international cooperation, and renewable energy. Research and technology solutions fit nicely with the conservative viewpoint. They could reduce emissions while maintaining the current societal and economic structure and conservatives can encourage technology development while letting the market determine which are successful.⁵⁴ Plus, these solutions do not threaten economic growth.⁵⁵ Seven out of the nine parties studied by Båtstrand, including Canada, promoted these kinds of policies.⁵⁶ International cooperation, agreements, and treaties were the most popular policies amongst EU countries studied by Båtstrand and Hess and Renner.⁵⁷ Renewable energy and energy efficiency policies were popular amongst the moderate conservatives in Europe,⁵⁸ and

⁵¹ Carter and Clements, “From ‘greenest Government Ever’ to ‘Get Rid of All the Green Crap,’” 209.

⁵² Shawn O. Hazboun et al., “The Politics of Decarbonization: Examining Conservative Partisanship and Differential Support for Climate Change Science and Renewable Energy in Utah,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 70 (2020): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101769>.

⁵³ “Economists’ Statement on Carbon Dividends Organized by the Climate Leadership Council,” Economists’ Statement on Carbon Dividends Organized by the Climate Leadership Council, accessed July 3, 2022, <https://www.econstatement.org>.

⁵⁴ Båtstrand, “More than Markets,” 553–54.

⁵⁵ Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe,” 426.

⁵⁶ Båtstrand, “More than Markets,” 553.

⁵⁷ Båtstrand, 554; Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe,” 426.

⁵⁸ Hess and Renner, “Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe,” 425.

were more palatable to conservatives in Utah despite the extremely politicized nature of climate change in the United States.⁵⁹ These policies fit within the conservative ideology because renewable energy serves as a tool for greater energy independence and energy efficiency creates cost savings, goals that are easily separated from climate change mitigation.⁶⁰ Wind power seems to receive less support than other kinds of renewable energy.⁶¹

There is one more factor that will likely be particularly relevant to the Canadian context: the importance of natural resources and fossil fuels. Countries with vast resources for oil, coal, or gas, tend to see conservative parties that encouraged technological improvements on those industries but did not directly challenge them.⁶² Conservative parties across the board have varying records on fossil fuels, but the abundance of these resources does seem to encourage weaker fossil fuel policies.⁶³

2.3. Canadian conservatism and climate change

Based on the literature review above, there are a few key elements that could be factors in the Canadian Conservative Party's approach to climate change. This is important to outline given the lack of Canadian representation in the general literature.

The Conservative Party of Canada was officially established in December of 2003. It was the result of a merger between the Progressive-Conservative and the Canadian Alliance parties under the leadership of Stephen Harper.⁶⁴ They first ran in the 2004 election where they became

⁵⁹ Hazboun et al., "The Politics of Decarbonization."

⁶⁰ Hess and Renner, "Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe," 426.

⁶¹ Hess and Renner, 427; Carter and Clements, "From 'greenest Government Ever' to 'Get Rid of All the Green Crap,'" 219.

⁶² Båtstrand, "More than Markets," 554.

⁶³ Båtstrand, 555–56; Hess and Renner, "Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe," 426.

⁶⁴ Éric Bélanger and Jean-François Godbout, "Why Do Parties Merge? The Case of the Conservative Party of Canada," *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 41–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsp041>.

the official opposition to a Liberal minority government. They won two minority governments in 2006 and 2008, before achieving a majority government in 2011. In 2015, the party once again returned to the opposition, losing to a Liberal majority. This was also the last year where Stephen Harper ran as leader. In 2019, the party was led by Andrew Scheer and the party won the popular vote but remained as official opposition to a Liberal minority. In 2021, the Conservatives under Erin O'Toole remained leaders of the opposition to a second Liberal minority and once again won the popular vote. It is clear that this party appeals to a large number of Canadian voters, so understanding its stance on a key issue like climate change is crucial.

Over the time period studied, 2004 to 2021, there have been two important challenges to the economy: the 2008 recession and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The literature indicates that economic downturns can encourage Conservative parties to prioritize growth over stricter climate measures and that public concern for the environment may be lower during these times.⁶⁵ The 2008 election took place shortly before the global financial crisis. The next election was in 2011, so there may be changes in how big of an issue the environment is in the elections prior to the 2008 and the ones directly after. The only election to take place during the pandemic was in the fall of 2021. The focus of the major parties may be more on economic recovery than the environment in this year as well.

One of the most popular policies amongst Conservative parties in the literature was international mitigation solutions through international agreements. There were two major climate agreements during the time period studied. The Kyoto Protocol was signed by Canada in 1998 and ratified in 2002 under Liberal majority governments. Canada then pulled out from the

⁶⁵ Carter and Clements, "From 'greenest Government Ever' to 'Get Rid of All the Green Crap,'" 205; Carter, *Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*, 138.

protocol in late 2011 not long after that year's election and the first Conservative majority.⁶⁶ The second major agreement was the 2015 Paris Agreement which Canada ratified in October of 2016 under a Liberal majority government.⁶⁷ The Canadian Conservative's record on international agreements does not seem to be as strong as the literature might suggest.

One of the major factors affecting Canada is the importance of the natural resource industries, specifically the oil and gas industries. Canada has large oil reserves, with about 10% of global proven reserves.⁶⁸ It is the fourth largest producer of oil, accounting for 6% of global production.⁶⁹ It is also a large producer of natural gas, ranking 5th in the world and accounting for about 5% of global production.⁷⁰ Most of the oil and gas production in Canada is located in the western provinces, particularly Alberta and Saskatchewan.⁷¹ These provinces are also where the Conservative Party wins the most seats.⁷² The literature indicates that this should influence the kinds of policies that the Conservatives are interested in, specifically disinterest in policies that would challenge the industry. If the party does recognize the need to decarbonize fossil fuels, the literature suggests that they will instead focus on technological solutions that may make the industry less emission intensive but that do not shift the economy away from fossil fuels entirely. Båtstrand's study included the Canadian Conservative Party's 2011 platform, and found that the

⁶⁶ CBC News, "Canada Pulls out of Kyoto Protocol," CBC News, December 12, 2011, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-pulls-out-of-kyoto-protocol-1.999072>.

⁶⁷ Environment and Climate Change Canada, "Paris Agreement," program descriptions; international treaties, Government of Canada, December 31, 2015, <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/paris-agreement.html>.

⁶⁸ Natural Resources Canada, "Oil Resources," Government of Canada (Natural Resources Canada, December 16, 2019), <https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/our-natural-resources/energy-sources-distribution/fossil-fuels/crude-oil/oil-resources/18085>.

⁶⁹ Natural Resources Canada, "Energy Fact Book 2021-2022," Energy Fact Book (Government of Canada, 2021), 98, https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/nrcan/files/energy/energy_fact/2021-2022/PDF/2021_Energy-factbook_december23_EN_accessible.pdf.

⁷⁰ Natural Resources Canada, 112.

⁷¹ Natural Resources Canada, 101, 117.

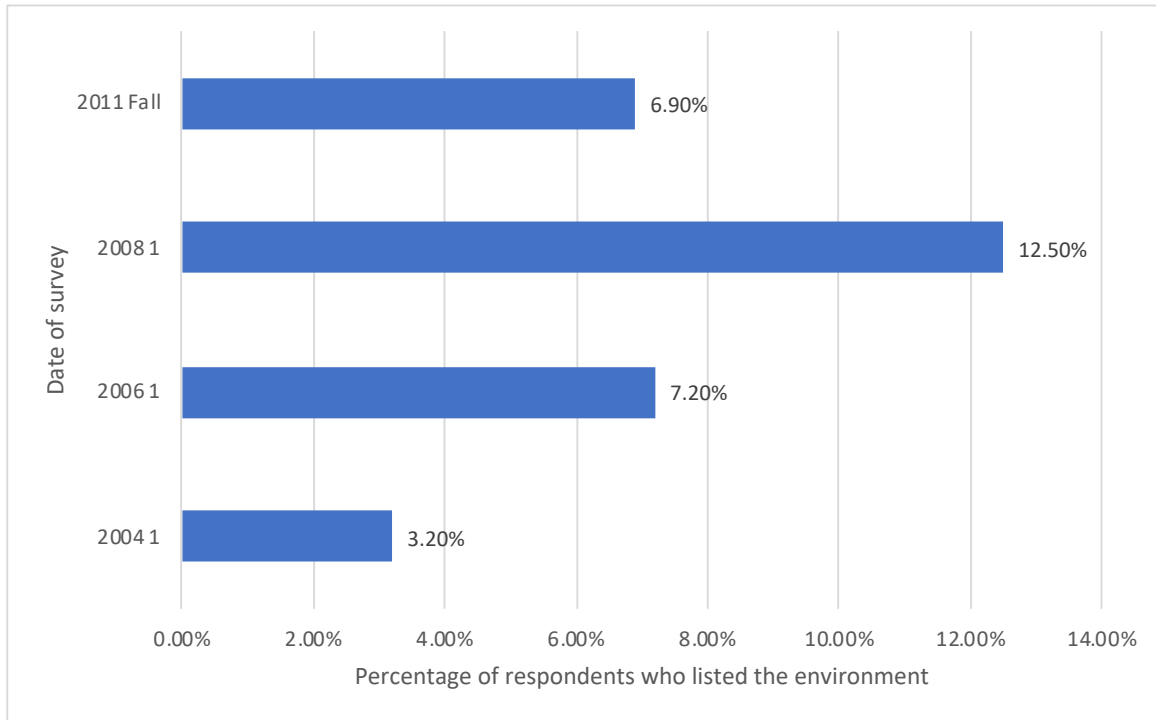
⁷² The Globe and Mail, "Canada 2021 Federal Election Result by Riding," The Globe and Mail, September 20, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/federal-election/2021-results/>.

party, despite Canada's fossil fuel reserves, was proposing measures to promote renewable energies that would eventually transition the country further away from fossil fuels. These policies were mostly linked to technological advances and regulations rather than market measures, and included topics like energy efficiency in homes, clean energy research and development, and renewables like hydroelectricity.⁷³ Renewable energy and energy efficiency policies proved to be quite popular for conservative parties in the literature, so the Canadian Conservative's use of these kinds of policies in 2011 is not surprising. It seems likely that these kinds of policies will be consistently used by the party.

The last factor to consider is the Canadian public's views on climate change. Canadians seem to be very concerned about the environment. There are no long-term, consistent polls on attitudes towards climate in Canada, making it difficult to draw conclusions over time. A series of polls by Environics asked Canadians what they thought was the most important problem facing Canadians. These polls covered the first four elections included in my study, and the results are shown in Figure 1 below. This figure shows a sizeable jump in the percentage of Canadians who found the environment to be the most important issue in the first quarter of 2008, prior to the election that fall.

⁷³ Båtstrand, "More than Markets," 548.

Figure 1: Results from the Environics survey question: “What is the most important problem facing Canadians today?”



Environics Focus Canada Surveys, available from the Canadian Opinion Research Archive <https://www.queensu.ca/cora/data-holdings>.

Polling a few months before the 2015 election conducted by Environics partnered with the David Suzuki Foundation found that 61% of Canadians believe that the science on climate change is conclusive and that climate change is caused by human action. This percentage had not changed significantly since this yearly poll started in 2007 where the result was 66%. About half of Canadians were clearly concerned about climate change in 2015. Just under half (48%) of respondents identified the government as the most important entity to take on a leadership role in the fight against climate change. This result was part of a downward trend after a peak in 2012 when 59% held this opinion.⁷⁴ A 2019 poll by Ipsos found that 76% of Canadians agreed that

⁷⁴ David Suzuki Foundation and The Environics Institute, “Focus Canada 2015 — Canadian Public Opinion about Climate Change,” David Suzuki Foundation, October 2015, <https://david Suzuki.org/science-learning-centre-article/focus-canada-2015-canadian-public-opinion-climate-change/>.

Canada should do more on climate change.⁷⁵ A poll by Abacus Data conducted a month after the 2021 election found that 69% of Canadians thought that there was solid or conclusive evidence of global warming. In addition, 66% of Canadians in 2021 thought that the government should do more to reduce emissions.⁷⁶ A majority of Canadians clearly believe the science on climate change. Since 2019, large majorities believe that government action is needed.

This polling data applied to the literature on political parties and climate change leads to some interesting possibilities for the CPC's platforms. First, the high levels of belief in climate change and support for government action could be an indication that climate change is a valence issue in Canada. However, polling from April 2021 shows that conservative voters are not aligned with voters for the other parties when it comes to climate change. Only 34% of CPC voters believed that climate change is caused by humans, while between 70% and 92% of the voters for the other federal parties agreed with that statement. Only 12% of CPC voters wanted Canada to increase its effort to meet its 2030 goals, while 56%-81% of the voters for the other parties wanted increased effort.⁷⁷ For most Canadians, climate change is an issue that is obviously real and a source of concern. However, the Conservative base disagrees, making this a positional issue in Canada since the entire voter base disagrees along political lines. This allows the party to avoid strong climate policies, though the majority of Canadians who are concerned about the environment will likely encourage the party to include some pro-climate content in order to win votes outside their base. Since, as the literature established, it is more likely that the party will emphasize climate policies in their electoral platforms in times when the population is

⁷⁵ "Ipsos Global News Year-End Poll 2019 – Canadians on Climate Change," Ipsos, December 30, 2019, 4, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/ipsos-global-news-year-end-poll-2019-canadians-climate-change>.

⁷⁶ Coletto, "What Do Canadians Think about Climate Change and Climate Action?"

⁷⁷ Philippe J. Fournier, "The Conservatives' Great Big Climate Problem: 338Canada," *Macleans*, May 16, 2021, <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/338canada-the-conservatives-great-big-climate-problem/>.

also concerned with environmental issues, I expect there to be an increase in pro-climate policies in the 2008 election based on the Environics polls, and I expect to see a relatively high number of climate policies in the 2019 and 2021 platforms due to general consensus on the need for government to act in these years.

2.4. Expectations

The literature surveyed above, and the details of the Canadian case have made it possible to determine the kind of climate relevant content that I expect to find in the CPC's platforms. This section provides a quick summary of these expectations. They fall into three main categories: general reaction to climate change over time, general presence of pro-climate policies or anti-climate policies over time, and specific policies.

First, I expect the CPC to explicitly recognize climate change. The literature strongly indicates that party will adopt a weak accommodative strategy instead of one of denial or a completely dismissive one. This seems the most likely scenario as it is the most common strategy found for mainstream parties other than the Republican Party in the United States. The implication of a weak accommodative strategy is that the party does not feel it can completely ignore climate change so some pro-climate policies are expected in all of the platforms. The amount is difficult to predict, though the principles of selective emphasis would indicate that only the bare minimum level attention will be paid to this issue on which the party is unlikely to be the frontrunner.

Next, the polling results mean that pro-climate policies are expected to be higher in the 2008 election platform than in the two prior platforms. I also expect to see relatively high levels of pro-climate policies in the 2019 and 2021 platforms due to high levels of consensus among Canadians on the need for government action on climate change. I am expecting a dip in pro-

climate policies in the 2011 and 2021 platforms due to economic hardships in the years leading up to those elections. At the same time, I am expecting an increase in policies that may have an anti-climate effect, such as policies in favour of economic growth and a freer market. These policies may consist of opposition to all taxes and regulations, including climate ones. These kinds of policies are at the heart of conservatism and so are likely to be found in all of the platforms.

Conservatism has been linked to conservation and the need to protect the system and world for future generations. It seems reasonable to expect pro-climate policies focused on conservation and environmental protection to be common in the CPC's platforms. The literature suggests that mainstream parties, particularly conservative parties, are unlikely to favour policies involving systemic change. In Canada, this will likely apply in large part to the fossil fuel industry. Natural resources are important to the Canadian economy, and these industries are electorally important for the Conservatives. Pro-fossil fuel policies are therefore expected, and policies that could challenge these industries, including polluter pays mechanisms like carbon taxes, are unlikely. However, the literature suggests that the Conservatives are likely to favour policies that use technologies, like carbon capture and storage, to make the industry less intensive. Technological solutions, renewable energy, and energy efficiency have also been popular among conservative parties in the literature, so these policies are expected to be consistently featured in the CPC's platforms.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Question

This paper addresses the question: How have Conservative Party of Canada's electoral platforms change in relation climate change since its first election in 2004? This is a broad question that

contains several sub questions. First, how has the party reacted to the issue of climate change over time? Second, has the importance of pro-climate policies and anti-climate policies changed over time? What specific pro-climate and anti-climate policies does the party most often use in each platform? In particular, does the party include, as expected by the literature, policies that support environmental conservation, the fossil fuel industry, technological solutions, renewable energy, and energy efficiency? By answering these sub-questions, I hope to shed some light on how the Conservative Party of Canada thinks about climate change beyond what they explicitly say. I will also show how this has evolved over time, under three different leaders, and while the party has been both in and out of government.

3.2. Description of Data

Research on party position on climate change can be done in many ways, including focus groups, interviews, surveys and document analysis (with or without coding). To answer my research question, I chose to conduct a thematic document analysis by hand coding the seven election platforms of the Conservative Party of Canada since the party's creation in 2003. Party platforms are used to study parties' preferences because they represent the official stance of a party, compiled into a single, comprehensive document.⁷⁸ They are meant to hold up over an extended period of time and require consensus within the party leadership beyond what individual politicians may say in statements.⁷⁹ The fact that they are a common feature of electoral competition makes them suitable for comparative research across time and borders.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Neil Carter et al., "Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties' Climate Policy Preferences," *Party Politics* 25, no. 6 (2018): 733, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354068817697630>.

⁷⁹ Båtstrand, "More than Markets," 545; Farstad, "What Explains Variation in Parties' Climate Change Salience?," 701.

⁸⁰ Frank R. Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman, "The Comparative Agendas Project: Intellectual Roots and Current Developments," in *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tools, Data*, ed. Frank R. Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, and Emiliano Grossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7, doi: 10.1093/oso/9780198835332.003.0001.

Coding such platforms (sometimes referred to as manifestos or agendas) is an established practice within the branch of political science concerned with party preferences. It is most commonly associated with two large-scale projects: the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)⁸¹ and the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP)⁸². Both projects were developed to create online shared data resources to allow for more comparative research within the field of election and party studies. The approach used in this study is closely related and partially adapted from the methods used in these large-scale projects.

I chose to code the party platforms manually because it provides a systematic method of categorizing the meaning of statements made within an official representation of the party's policy position. Unlike methods relying on keywords, hand coding allows me to focus on the meaning behind the words. My research question seeks to understand how the Conservative Party's views on climate change as a whole have changed, with particular focus on their policies. Focusing on keywords does not give a full picture and does not distinguish between general descriptions and expressions of policy intention. Elements of a keyword search are still included in the final analysis, as I will discuss the frequency of the word "climate" as it is used in a climate changed related context, but the bulk of my data is the more detailed coding results. Moreover, the systematic nature of a coding scheme helps to further remove the research from any personal beliefs. While hand coding still has elements of subjectivity, the standardized coding scheme ensures a level of balance and consistency that a simple close reading of the texts would not have provided. This is important given the polarized nature of climate change in our current political climate.

⁸¹ Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman, 4–5.

⁸² Nicolas Merz, Sven Regel, and Jirka Lewandowski, "The Manifesto Corpus: A New Resource for Research on Political Parties and Quantitative Text Analysis," *Research & Politics* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168016643346>.

The specific coding scheme I chose to follow was developed in a 2018 paper by Carter, Ladrech, Little, and Tsakgroni.⁸³ Unlike the CAP or CMP, this coding scheme was developed specifically to determine the climate policy preferences of parties, and unlike the 2015 study done by Båtstrand or the 2018 study by Farstad, the coding scheme looks at all policies that would affect climate change, even when not linked explicitly to climate change by the party. Their coding categories and sub-categories were developed based on the climate policy literature, most notably the work of Compston and Bailey (2013) on pro- and anti-climate policies, and by assigning codes to topics as they came up which were then aggregated into 22 policy areas.⁸⁴ In their 2018 study, Carter et. al. applied their coding scheme to the top left- and right-of-centre parties of six countries in Europe over a twenty-year period from the 1990s to the 2010s. However, the goal of their project was to create a coding scheme that was not limited to a single country or party and could be applied more broadly.⁸⁵

3.3. Data Collection

The data collection process involved five steps: familiarization with the coding scheme, splitting the text into quasi-sentences, coding the quasi-sentences, collecting descriptive information about each platform in a questionnaire provided by the Carter et. al. methodology, and reviewing the coding. To code the platforms, I followed the instructions provided by Carter et al. as closely as possible, including using a handbook on delineating quasi-sentences (that is also used for the CAP) and an example of a correctly coded piece of text that I obtained from Connor Little.

⁸³ Carter et al., “Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences.”

⁸⁴ Carter et al., 734; Hugh Compston and Ian Bailey, “Climate Policies and Anti-Climate Policies,” *Open Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 4 (October 2013): 146–57, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2013.34021>.

⁸⁵ Carter et al., “Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences,” 732.

The Carter et. al. methodology uses the same unit of analysis as the major international coding projects previously mentioned: the “quasi-sentence”. A quasi-sentence must encapsulate a single political argument and each quasi-sentence is coded separately, which limits the impact of writing style on the results.⁸⁶ While the real impact of coding quasi-sentences over full sentences remains debated,⁸⁷ in the interest of comparability, I also use quasi-sentences. To break documents into quasi-sentences, I followed the guidance for the CAP project created by Froio (2012).⁸⁸ Each quasi-sentence was then copied and pasted into a separate line of an Excel spreadsheet. In total, the seven platforms contained 8,503 quasi-sentences. These quasi-sentences were then categorized according to the coding scheme.

Carter et. al. published the details of their coding scheme in online appendices to their 2018 article.⁸⁹ The paper’s online appendix B details the four main climate codes. The coder must first determine if a quasi-sentence refers to a policy that is climate-relevant, i.e. whose implementation would have an impact on GHG emissions or sinks. Then, climate-relevant quasi-sentences are coded as pro-climate, anti-climate, or neutral/ambiguous. Carter et al. define pro-climate content as content that “indicates support for policies that would, if implemented, reduce GHG emissions or enhance GHG sinks.”⁹⁰ Anti-climate content would “increase GHG emissions or diminish GHG sinks.”⁹¹ Neutral/ambiguous climate content refers to policies that are relevant

⁸⁶ Caterina Froio, “UK Policy Agendas Project - French Agendas Project. Coding Party Manifestos, Version 2.0,” 2012, 4, https://www.academia.edu/2263110/Handbook_for_coding_the_British_Party_Manifestos_1983_2010_for_the_Comparative_Agendas_Project.

⁸⁷ Thomas Däubler et al., “Natural Sentences as Valid Units for Coded Political Texts,” *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 937–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23274173>.

⁸⁸ Froio, “UK Policy Agendas Project - French Agendas Project. Coding Party Manifestos, Version 2.0.”

⁸⁹ Neil Carter et al., “Supplementary Material - Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences,” *Party Politics* 24, no. 6 (March 23, 2017): A.10, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/1354068817697630>.

⁹⁰ Carter et al., “Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences,” 734.

⁹¹ Carter et al., 735.

to GHG emissions, but with an effect that would not change GHG emissions or sinks or cannot be determined. Finally, the coder assigns the pro- and anti-climate quasi-sentences to a policy area (e.g. *pro-environment* or *anti-environmental taxes*). The article's online appendix C provides a list of these policy area subcategories for pro- and anti-climate content.

Following this scheme, each quasi-sentence was assigned climate and policy areas codes. Sentences that were difficult to split into quasi-sentences were labelled as "hard split", while quasi-sentences that were difficult to assign to a climate or policy area code were labelled as "hard to code" for further review.

The coding was checked as much as possible to ensure consistency. In the Carter et. al. study, the coding was carried out by climate change experts with knowledge of each country. Codes flagged as hard to code were discussed with the authors and 69% of the platforms were double-checked by another coder.⁹² Applying this method in the context of a MRP project, without financial resources, limited my ability to maintain the same rigor. My own knowledge of climate change in Canada was sufficient for most coding decisions. Additional research, and the far more comprehensive knowledge of my supervisor was used for any policy areas in which I was unsure, particularly for the earlier platforms.

After I performed the initial coding exercise, my supervisor checked over all the quasi-sentences that I had labelled hard to code, with the exception of the 2021 platform, and offered suggestions. Based on these suggestions, we came up with rules to handle questions where the coding scheme and associated guidance did not provide an answer. These are detailed in Appendix A. I then re-checked the platforms, focusing on areas marked as hard to code or hard to split and the sections with the most climate-relevant codes.

⁹² Carter et al., 734.

I was able to test my accuracy at delineating quasi-sentences by comparing my final number of quasi-sentences against the data available on the Manifesto Corpus online (only available in English for 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2015). I found that my total number of quasi-sentences was always less than a 5% difference from the Manifesto Corpus's total. Their data was also used to check the lines marked as hard to split. I was not able to double check the entire platforms due to time constraints, but through this process of rechecking the most important codes, I hoped to limit coder error as much as possible.

Finally, the Carter et. al. methodology includes a questionnaire (located in the Carter et. al. online appendix D) to be completed for each platform coded. I filled out this questionnaire as I finished each platform. The questions collect data similar to what would be found by a general reading of the platform, such as whether the party recognized climate change or its impacts, whether the party had any general goals regarding climate change, where the section that dealt the most with climate change was located within the platform. It also included a keyword search to find out how often the words "climate" and "global warming" were used in each platform.

3.4. Justification of the method

The Carter et. al. methodology offers a few key advantages over more established coding schemes. The first advantage is how it specifically targets party thinking on climate change, without specifying a party or location. While there are other studies that focused solely on Conservatives as mine does,⁹³ the Carter et. al. method is designed with a similar function to the CMP and CAP projects: to create a method of hand-coding platforms that researchers can apply to any country, party, or time period, but targeted towards a relatively new and complex policy

⁹³ Båtstrand, "More than Markets"; Hess and Renner, "Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe."

area.⁹⁴ The easily accessible supplementary materials make it transparent enough to accomplish this goal and is a key factor for a coding scheme's reliability.⁹⁵ Therefore, by following this method, I can contribute to the literature on both conservative parties' approach to climate change and political parties preferences on climate change in general.

Next, their definition of climate policy is broader than some of the other key studies in this area. It acknowledges that many kinds of policies can affect climate change, even when they are not directly linked by the party to climate. This is a key difference from a study such as the Båtstrand study of nine conservative parties or the Farstad study of climate change salience based on CMP data, both of which included only content that was explicitly framed by the party as a climate measure.⁹⁶ The Carter et. al. definition is concerned with the effect of all policies rather than what the party defines as a climate policy. Policies that have an anti-climate effect are not usually linked to climate change by the party, particularly if most of the population agrees that climate change is real and bad. Some pro-climate policies, like energy efficiency policies, may not be linked by the party to climate change as they are instead billed as cost-saving measures. All of these are excluded in the more limited definition used by Båtstrand and Farstad. Compston and Bailey created one of the key papers defining "anti-climate policies" upon which the Carter et. al. paper based their definitions. The Compston and Bailey definition, however, is only concerned with GHG emissions and required a policy change for something to be considered an anti-climate policy.⁹⁷ The Carter et. al. method broadens this definition even

⁹⁴ Carter et al., "Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties' Climate Policy Preferences," 740.

⁹⁵ Hans-Dieter Klingemann et al., *Mapping Policy Preferences II: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments in Eastern Europe, European Union, and OECD 1990-2003* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106–7, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=415518>.

⁹⁶ Båtstrand, "More than Markets," 546.

⁹⁷ Compston and Bailey, "Climate Policies and Anti-Climate Policies," 146–47.

further by including the effect on carbon sinks and evidence of continued support for existing policies.⁹⁸

There were some challenges during the coding process. The coding scheme was developed as part of Carter et. al.'s specific study and coders had access to the authors to discuss issues as they came up. I found that some of the rules for quasi-sentence delineation and the policy area code descriptions were unclear. The set of clarifying rules detailed in Appendix A helped me maintain consistency across my own coding, but the Carter et. al. coders may not have made the same choices. This exercise led me to two conclusions. First, splitting quasi-sentences creates another set of decisions that the coder must attempt to make reliably. If the purpose of quasi-sentences is to reduce the effect of writing style on the results, I would argue that this goal could be better achieved by just assigning multiple codes to sentences in which multiple topics are discussed. This removes the challenge of splitting the quasi-sentence while still allowing all arguments in the sentence to be coded.

Second, the Carter et. al. methodology was unclear on how much of the build-up, facts, description, and argument for a policy ought to be counted as climate relevant. Their coding scheme says to include all “content that indicates support for policies that would [have an effect on] GHG emissions or [have an effect on] GHG sinks.”⁹⁹ However, a platform style may include several sentences leading up to a policy that they will support or may skip directly to the policy. How much of the “fluff” to include is important because the purpose of this coding project is to measure the salience of climate change relevant policies to the platform. Lots of build up to a policy could indicate high salience—a larger portion of the platform is being devoted to this

⁹⁸ Carter et al., “Supplementary Materials - Political Parties and Climate Policy,” A.8.

⁹⁹ Carter et al., “Political Parties and Climate Policy: A New Approach to Measuring Parties’ Climate Policy Preferences,” 735.

policy. On the other hand, this build up could be used to disguise the fact that very few actual policies are being proposed. I chose to code only the quasi-sentences that were explicitly proposing a new policy, committing to continue a climate relevant policy, or describing the details of the policy. This is a fairly strict interpretation of the climate relevant policy definition used by Carter et. al., but I believe that it most accurately reflects the intentions of the party.

4. Results

The seven platforms varied greatly in length. The shortest platform was in 2008 with 406 quasi-sentences. The longest was in 2021 with 2,524 quasi-sentences. They tended to get longer over time, with the first three platforms all below 700 quasi-sentences, and the last four all over 1,000.

4.1. Research Sub-Question 1: How has the party broadly reacted to the issue of climate change over time?

Table 1 shows, at a glance, how willing the Conservative Party of Canada has been to acknowledge climate change and how prominent climate change was in the text. In essence, this is what reading the platforms and a keyword search can reveal about the role climate change plays in the party's platforms. The table shows that climate change was not explicitly acknowledged until the 2011 platform. This does not mean that there were no policies that would reduce emissions. Rather the party was not explicitly linking these policies to climate change or acknowledging that climate change is a problem. The 2008 platform was the first to mention a specific climate goal: promising a reduction of GHG emissions by 20% below 2006 levels by 2020 and using a North American cap-and-trade system to achieve this. However, the platform did not explicitly acknowledge climate change, mentioning Canadian concerns about air and water pollution instead. The 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2021 platforms all included a general climate goal as well but they were less specific than the 2008 goal. They each referred to meeting goals

set in international agreements, including a bilateral agreement with the United States in the 2011 platform, reference to “ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2030” in preparation for the upcoming UN climate conference in Paris in the 2015 platform, and statements about meeting the Paris goals in the 2019 and 2021 platforms.

Table 1: Document description results from Carter et. al. questionnaire

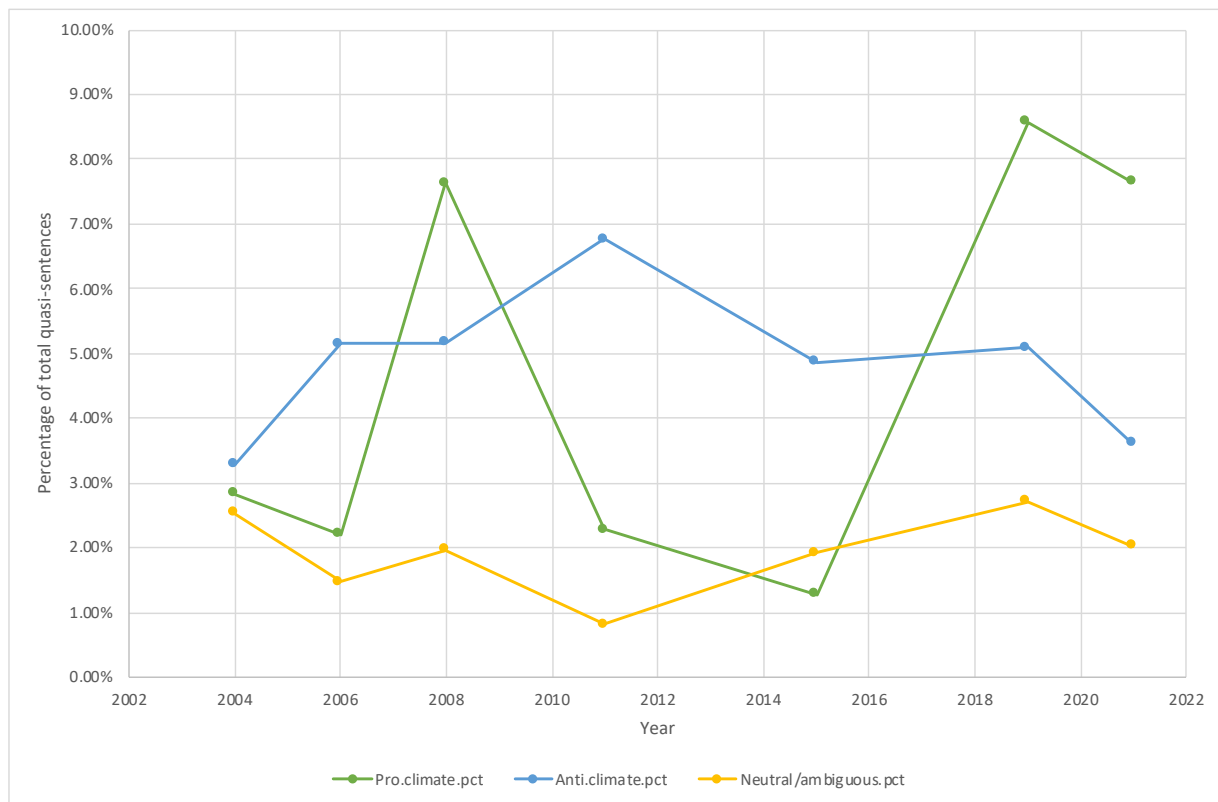
Year	Acknowledges	Goals	Section most concerned with climate prominence (location in platform)	Climate change mentioned in Front Matter	Climate mentions (out of total word count)
2004	no	no	68%	no	0.00%
2006	no	no	77%	no	0.00%
2008	no	yes	70%	no	0.00%
2011	yes	yes	60%	no	0.02%
2015	yes	yes	92%	yes	0.02%
2019	yes	yes	38%	yes	0.07%
2021	yes	yes	47%	yes	0.07%

The 2015 platform was the first to include climate change in the front matter of the document, in this case in the table of contents. Climate mentions were at the same rate as in 2011, but the section dealing the most with climate related policies was located very close to the end of the document, 92% of the way through. The 2019 and 2021 platforms both included a higher rate of climate mentions, and both were the only platforms to place their climate sections in the first half of the document.

Overall, these results show that the CPC, as expected, does recognize climate change as real. However, it has only done so in four of the seven platforms. Climate has also become a more prominent topic in the last two election platforms, both in terms of mentions and the location of the climate section. Yet, these results do not give the full picture. The pro-climate policy results in Figure 2 show that, as expected, there was some pro-climate content in all of the

platforms, despite the lack of climate mentions, explicit acknowledgement, or goals shown in Table 1 above.

Figure 2: Pro-climate, anti-climate, and neutral/ambiguous quasi-sentences as a percentage of total quasi-sentences



4.2. Research Sub-Question 2: Has the importance of pro-climate policies and anti-climate policies changed over time?

Figure 2 above shows a breakdown of the coding results by climate relevant policy type. The neutral/ambiguous content was the most consistent of the three policy content types. It ranged between 0.81% and 2.72% or a difference of about two points. The anti-climate content was also fairly steady, ranging between 3.28% and 6.76%, which is a difference of about three points. The pro-climate content, on the other hand, fluctuated a lot between platforms. It ranged between 1.28% and 8.58%, or a difference of about seven points. Despite the different ranges, the average

percentage of quasi-sentences made up of pro-climate content was 4.64%, which was just under the average anti-climate percentage of 4.85%. The neutral/ambiguous average percentage is much lower, at 1.92%. A closer look at some of the individual data points does provide some answers to the overall research question.

The spikes in pro-climate importance shown in Figure 2 above line up with higher levels of public concern found in polling data from 2008, 2019, and 2021. The literature indicated that a dip was expected in platforms that took place during economic hardships and this can be seen in the 2011 and 2021 platforms which both contained smaller percentages of pro-climate content than in the platform prior. However, the 2011 platform represented a much larger decrease (-5.36 percentage points from 2008-2011), than the 2021 platform (-0.93 points from 2019-2021). The 2011 platform did come at a time of lower public concern about climate change than the 2021 platform which may have contributed to this difference. The literature suggested that economic hardships would lead to a simultaneous refocusing of the party on economic growth and related policies. Since these policies are classified as anti-climate in the coding scheme, a corresponding spike in anti-climate policies was expected in 2011 and 2021. Figure 2 shows that there was a spike in anti-climate policies in 2011, where they reached the highest percentage of any platform at 6.76%. However there was no spike in 2021. Instead the percentage of anti-climate policies dropped by 1.48 points.

The 2015 results are unexpected. This platform included the lowest percentage of pro-climate content, and was the only one to have less pro-climate content than both anti-climate and neutral/ambiguous content. The literature did not give a clear indication of what to expect in 2015. Polling indicated that the number of Canadians who agreed with climate change science was slowly decreasing but did not change significantly in 2015. The percentage who believed

that government was the most important entity to combat climate change did drop to just under half after a slow decrease from 2012 in this year. This election was the first one that the Conservatives lost since 2006.

Table 2: Pro-climate salience of the CPC compared to the Carter et. al. and Farstad studies (%)

Measure	Conservative Party of Canada (CPC)	Carter et. al.¹⁰⁰ (right- and left-of-centre parties)	Carter et. al. (right-of- centre parties only)	Farstad¹⁰¹ (all parties)
Maximum	8.58	17.31	17.31	15
Minimum	1.28	0	0	0
Average	4.64	6.04	5.44	3.3

Table 2 shows that the pro-climate salience results are within the range expected by the literature. The results of the Carter et. al. study were expected to be higher than mine as I interpreted climate content more narrowly (as discussed in section 3.4). The Farstad study only included content that was linked to climate change by the relevant party which resulted in smaller percentages.

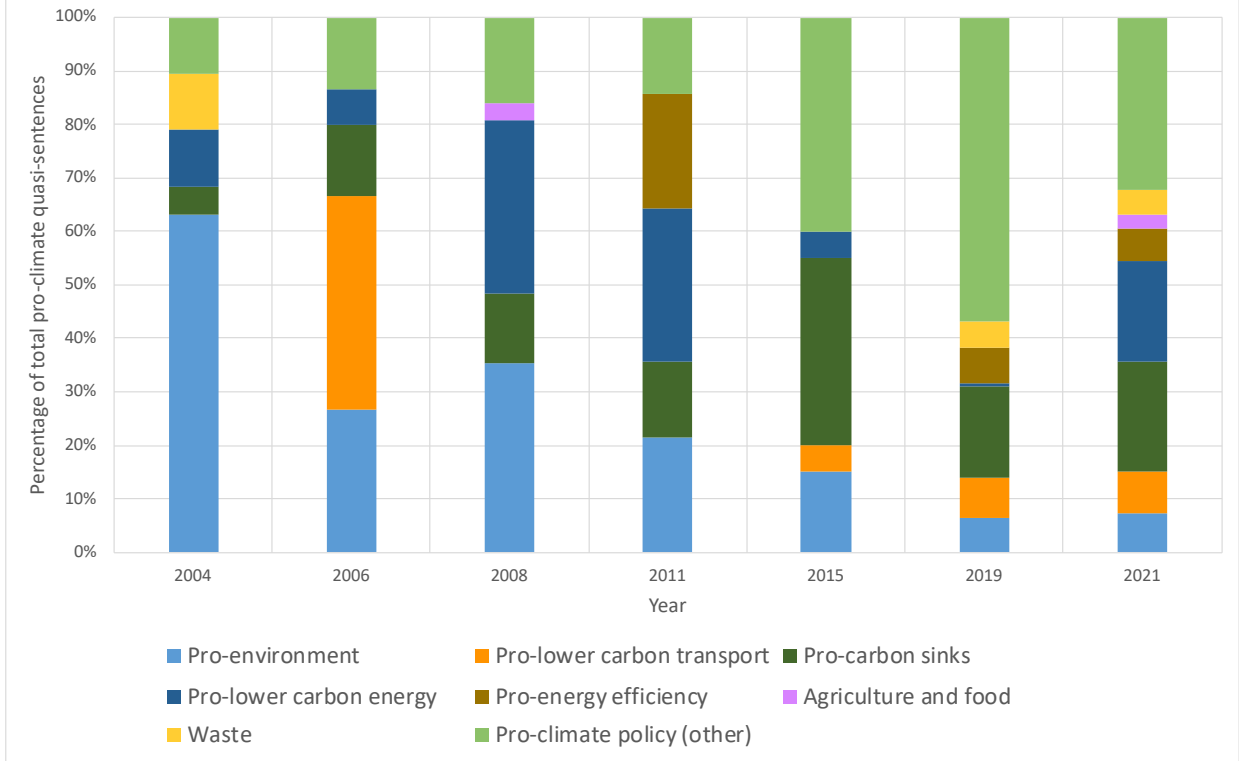
Overall, my results show that anti-climate policies remained more consistently important in each platform than the pro-climate policies. Pro-climate content fluctuated more, mostly following the pattern expected based on the polling and literature on economic recessions. The pro-climate salience variations seem large compared to the other climate relevant topics, but they stayed within the range expected by the literature, including the Carter et. al. results from European centre-right parties.

¹⁰⁰ Carter et al., “Supplementary Materials - Political Parties and Climate Policy.”

¹⁰¹ Farstad, “What Explains Variation in Parties’ Climate Change Salience?,” 702.

4.3. Research Sub-question 3: What specific pro-climate and anti-climate policies does the CPC use the most?

Figure 3: Pro-climate quasi-sentences displayed by policy area



Note that there were no quasi-sentences found for *planning* or *anti-growth* so these policy areas are not shown

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of each pro-climate policy area as a percentage of the total pro-climate quasi-sentences. A quick glance makes it clear that each platform contained a unique blend of policy areas. Some codes became less important over time, such as the *pro-environment* policy area, which includes pro-environmental policies that would also reduce emissions or support carbon sinks. In 2004, this code made up 63.16% of the pro-climate quasi-sentences, but by 2019 and 2021, it only accounted for about 7%. The literature suggested that environmental protection policies would be popular with conservative parties due to a conservative desire to protect the system, which includes the environment, for future generations. The *pro-climate policy (other)* code made up only 10.53% of the pro-climate content in 2004, but eventually included 56.91% of the content in 2019. This code has a very broad definition in the Carter et. al.

coding scheme. It includes all climate change policies are not found in the rest of the coding scheme and acknowledgements of climate change as a policy problem. This includes a range of content from climate change impacts and adaptation policies, to carbon pricing, to climate change research and technological solutions.

Pro-climate policy (other) and *pro-environment* are the only pro-climate policy areas that made up more than half of the pro-climate content in a single platform. *Pro-climate sinks* and *pro-lower carbon energy* are the only other policy areas to appear in every platform. Policies protecting sinks are often framed as conservation efforts, a topic that some conservative scholars have linked to conservatism and which I expected to be popular for the CPC. *Pro-climate sinks* made up, on average, 16.94% of each platform, though it played a much smaller role in 2004 (5.26%) and a larger role in 2015 (35%). *Pro-lower carbon energy* use by the CPC varied a lot by platform, getting as large as 32.26% in 2008 and as small as 0.81% in 2019. This policy includes renewable energy, a popular conservative climate policy according to the literature. It also incorporates policies that would make fossil fuels emit less where there is no renewable alternative, which the literature suggested would be important for countries, like Canada, that have important fossil fuel resources.

The remaining policy areas only appeared in a few platforms. *Pro-lower carbon transport* made up the largest share of the 2006 platform with 40% of the total pro-climate content, but was otherwise under 8% or non-existent in the remaining platforms. *Pro-energy efficiency* was present in only three of the platforms and was quite significant in 2011. This was a policy that the literature predicted would be popular, though it did not appear to be consistently applied by the Conservative Party of Canada. *Waste* and *agriculture and food* were both present

in only a few platforms and made up fairly small shares of those platforms, though waste did make up 10.53% of the 2004 platform.

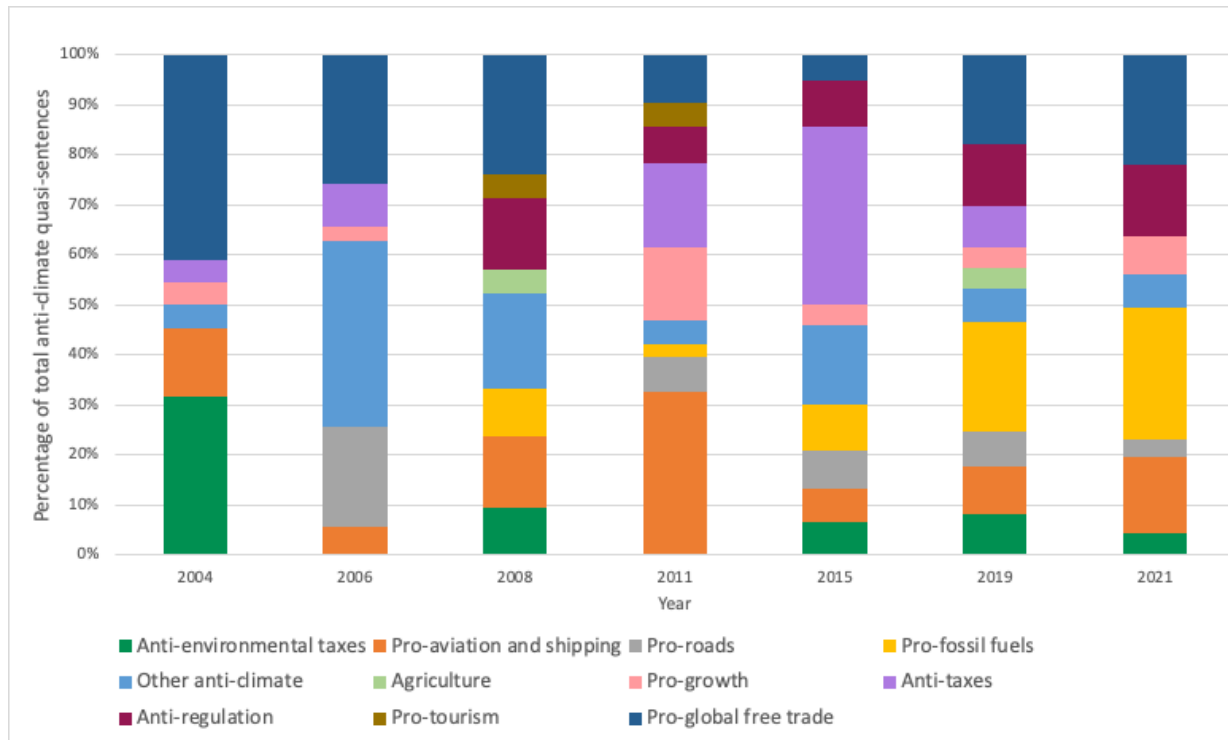
The number of policy areas per platform changed over time. There are ten pro-climate policy areas in the Carter et. al. coding scheme and two of them, *planning* and *anti-growth*, were not used in any platform. *Anti-growth* policies were not expected given that economic growth is a core element of conservative policy. *Anti-growth policies* would also likely include some systemic changes to Canada's liberal economic structures, a tactic that conservative parties are unlikely to endorse according to the literature. In the first five platforms, from 2004 to 2015, five policy areas were used in each platform. These were not always the same policy areas, but the content was split between five different policy areas in each platform. In 2019, seven policy areas were included and in 2021, all eight that were used by the Conservative Party of Canada were included.

Overall, the kinds of pro-climate policies used by the party, and how important each policy area is to each platform, varied. I expected *pro-environment* policies to be important to the party, though this was mainly the case in the earlier platforms. As the *pro-environment* content became less important, the *pro-climate policy (other)* code became more important.

Unfortunately, the broad nature of the *pro-climate policy (other)* code makes it difficult to determine exactly what policies were represented. *Pro-lower carbon energy* and *pro-sinks* policies were used consistently by the party as expected, though to varying degrees depending on the platform. *Pro-energy efficiency* was not as popular as expected as it was only used in three platforms. The 2008, 2019, and 2021 platforms contained the highest percentages of climate policies as shown in Figure 2. The 2019 and 2021 platforms included many of the same policy areas and in similar amounts. The main differences were a bigger emphasis on *pro-climate policy*

(*other*) in 2019 and more emphasis on *pro-lower carbon energy* in 2021. The 2008 platform, however had a much larger emphasis on *pro-environment* and *pro-lower carbon energy* than either the 2019 and 2021 platforms.

Figure 4: Anti-climate quasi-sentences displayed by policy area



Note that there were no quasi-sentences found for *anti-nuclear* so this policy area is not shown

There are twelve policy areas under the anti-climate code in the Carter et. al. coding scheme. All of these were represented in the platforms except for one: *anti-nuclear*. In Figure 4 above, each platform was split between more policy areas than in Figure 3. The 2004 and 2006 platforms were each split into five policy areas, the 2008 and 2021 platforms contained 8 different policy areas, the 2011 and 2015 platforms both had 9, and the 2019 platform represented the most policy areas with 10. Generally speaking, more anti-climate policy areas were represented per platform over time.

Three of the policy areas were found in all of the platforms: *pro-global free trade*, *pro-aviation and shipping*, and *other anti-climate*. *Pro-global free trade* is particularly important to

the 2004 platform where it made up 40.91% of the total. Its share of subsequent platforms was smaller, but it was present in all of them nonetheless. *Pro-aviation and shipping* was most significant in 2011 where it made up 32.53% of the total. It was much less important in the rest of the platforms. *Other anti-climate* contained policies that would increase emissions or decrease sinks that were not included in the other policy areas. I often used it for policies related to forestry and mining since there was no explicit place for non-fossil fuel related resource industries in the coding scheme. It was the most significant policy area in the 2006 platform with 37.14% of the total, but was much less important in the other platforms.

Pro-fossil fuels, one of the policies that the literature indicated would be very important given Canada's fossil fuel reserves, was found only in the five most recent platforms and was most important in 2019 and 2021, where it made up just over 20% of each. *Anti-environmental taxes*, a policy area that would include carbon taxes and fuel taxes which threaten the fossil fuel industry, was in five of the platforms, and was most important in 2004. While it was not the most important policy of that platform, it was a close second with 31.82% of the total. In 2004 and 2008, this code was generally driven by policies that would reduce taxes on fuel. In 2015, 2019, and 2021, the code was filled by opposition to the carbon tax. The other infrastructure related policy area, *pro-roads*, was fairly common, appearing in five out of seven platforms. It was most important in 2006 at 20% of the total. General infrastructure related policies were coded as neutral/ambiguous since infrastructure spending can have very different effects depending on the projects are being supported.

There are three policy areas that focus on the domestic economy by promoting economic growth and protecting the free-market. These are *pro-growth*, *anti-taxes*, and *anti-regulations*. The *anti-taxes* policy area, which includes opposition to taxes that could include a carbon tax,

was in five out of the seven platforms, though not necessarily the same platforms as *anti-environmental taxes*. It was the most significant policy of 2015, with 35.53% of the total. *Anti-regulation*, which includes opposition to regulations that could include climate regulations, was found in all of the five most recent platforms, though it tended to make up a relatively small percentage of the total for each, ranging between 7.23% and 14.29%. Lastly, *pro-growth*, which includes only explicit mentions of economic growth or general stimulus packages, was found in all but the 2008 platform. It generally represented under 8% of each platform, except for in 2011 where it made up 14.46%. This was also the first platform written after the 2008-2009 recession, when the literature expected conservative parties to refocus on economic growth at the expense of climate policies. While each of these economic policies was not applied consistently across all of the platforms, each of the platforms includes at least one of them.

None of the policy areas made up more than 41% of a platform's total, so none of the policies dominated a specific platform's anti-climate content in the same way that *pro-environment* and *pro-climate policy (other)* did for the pro-climate content. This may be a result of more anti-climate options than pro-climate options.

Taken together, it is difficult to identify clear trends in the specific policies used by the CPC. Most of the pro-climate policies expected by the literature and Canadian context were represented in the platforms, including environmental protection policies and cleaner energy solutions. Energy efficiency was not as popular as expected. The anti-climate policies were more surprising. Fossil fuels were important, but only starting in 2008. Policies to protect economic growth and the free market were also common, but the party changes which ones are more important with each platform. *Pro-global free trade* and *pro-aviation and shipping* policies were the most consistently important policies used by the party and they were not expected.

5. Discussion

It is now possible to return to my overarching research question: How has the Conservative Party of Canada's policy approach to the climate crisis changed since its first election in 2004? First, the party began to explicitly acknowledge climate change, and not just environmental protection needs, in 2011. This indicates that climate change as a specific policy issue has become something the party now feels it needs to include somewhere its platforms. Adding the coding results to this gives a strong indication that the party has adopted an accommodative strategy on the climate issue. This accommodative strategy has been relatively weak. Pro-climate policies, though present to some degree in all of the platforms, varied greatly in importance between them. The party only selectively emphasized climate policies when it felt that it was electorally important. This is confirmed by a closer look at the specific policies used in each platform. There are few patterns to distinguish the pro-climate policies. While some, like the *pro-climate policy (other)*, *pro-environment*, *pro-carbon sinks*, and *pro-lower carbon energy*, were more popular across all platforms than the others, their relative importance to each platform was not consistent. The party seems to promote whatever policies it feels were electorally significant for that year rather than focusing on a specific suite of preferred climate policies.

It is clear that mitigating climate change has not become a core element of the Conservative Party of Canada's values. The party has devoted very little space to pro-climate policies in some of their platforms, around 2% on three occasions. Some of the anti-climate policies, like fossil fuel support measures, free-market protections, and economic growth policies are core elements of conservative parties. The anti-climate policy share is much more consistent throughout all the platforms. Pro-climate policies are used by the CPC depending on electoral circumstances rather than as part of its core values.

Yet they have also given sizeable shares of their platforms, over 7% on three occasions, to pro-climate policies. This is more than they ever devote to anti-climate or neutral/ambiguous policies. In these platforms, 2008, 2019, and 2021, the percentage of pro-climate policies was larger than the percentage of anti-climate policies. This makes these platforms more pro-climate than anti-climate. This is surprising given how strongly right-wing parties are associated with limited climate acceptance in the literature. Conservatives are well-known in Canada as being opposed to carbon taxation. Several provincial conservative leaders launched court cases against the federal carbon tax imposed by the Liberal government, a policy that was eventually upheld by the Supreme Court.¹⁰² At the federal level, carbon taxes are clearly rejected in the 2015, 2019, and 2021 platforms. In 2015, this was accompanied by the lowest percentage of pro-climate policies of any platform. But in 2019 and 2021, the platforms contained some of the highest percentages. The focus on the CPC's views on carbon taxes can create an image of a party that is strongly against climate change policies as a whole. Particularly in the two most recent elections, this is not true.

The 2008 platform warrants a closer look. It was the only platform with more pro-climate policies than anti-climate policies from the Stephen Harper era. It was also the shortest platform by far, with only 406 quasi-sentences, so mentions of climate policies have a bigger effect on the percentages than longer platforms. However, this effect is marginal: the platform still had more total pro-climate quasi-sentences than 2004 and 2006, the two next shortest platforms. Polling indicated a jump in public concern for the environment in 2008 compared to the years prior and to 2011. Figure 3 shows that *pro-environment* and *pro-lower carbon energy* were the two most important policy areas in this platform. The *pro-lower carbon energy* codes were mostly found

¹⁰² Paul Tasker, "Supreme Court Rules Ottawa's Carbon Tax Is Constitutional | CBC News," CBC News, March 25, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/supreme-court-federal-carbon-tax-constitutional-case-1.5962687>.

in a section titled “Protecting our Resources and Building a Clean Energy Superpower”, which included investments in a variety of alternative energy sources including renewables and biofuels. The remainder of the pro-climate codes were found in a section titled “Ensuring Health and Environmental Well-being”. The pro-environment code was used here to capture policies that enforce or strengthen various environmental laws. In this section, the party also proposed developing a North-American cap-and-trade system to reduce Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions. The platform did not make the link between these emissions and climate change, but this is among the strongest individual climate policies proposed by the party in any of its platforms. Other than the cap-and-trade system, the other pro-climate policies were relatively weak. They did not propose new environmental laws. They supported investment in renewable energies rather than legislation to decarbonize Canada’s energy system. A cap-and-trade system was hinted at in the 2004 platform, though the policy was only to “investigate” one. There was no mention of a cap-and-trade system after 2008, and the only other carbon pricing mechanism was found in the 2021 platform in which an alternative to Canada’s current federal carbon tax system was proposed.

The pro-climate results generally followed the patterns expected by the literature and Canadian context. They dipped after economic recessions, though much more so in 2011 than in 2021. They increased in response to polling indicating higher levels of public concern for climate change and they included most of the policy areas that conservative parties were more likely to endorse. The anti-climate policies, on the other hand, were less responsive to economic downfalls than expected. While they did increase in 2011, they unexpectedly decreased in 2021. Looking at the specific policy areas in both platforms, there is little in common between the two platforms. In 2011 *pro-aviation and shipping* content was the single most important anti-climate

policy area. In 2021, it was *pro-fossil fuels*. The 2011 platform did contain the largest share of *pro-growth* content of any platform. It devoted a similar share to *anti-tax content*, and included some *anti-regulation* policies. Taken together, these economic policies made up 38.55% of the total anti-climate policies, slightly more than the *pro-aviation and shipping* content (32.53%). The 2021 platform included some *pro-growth* and *anti-regulation* content, but no *anti-taxes* content. Together, these policies accounted for 21.98% of the total, slightly less than the share of *pro-fossil fuels* (26.37%). Quasi-sentences were only coded as part of these three economic policy areas where they could increase emissions or decrease sinks. Therefore, these results do not show how important economic growth, low regulations and low taxes are to the Conservative Party of Canada overall.

In summary, the CPC has adopted a weak accommodative strategy towards climate change. It has begun to consistently recognize climate change and has always included some pro-climate content in its platforms. The share of pro-climate content changed a lot between platforms, often in line with changes in public concern or economic difficulties. This indicates that the party emphasizes these kinds of policies only when they feel it is electorally beneficial. This has two key implications. First, the party is willing to produce platforms with very few climate policies and will do so if it can. Second, it is not against the party's nature to include lots of climate policies. The two most recent platforms in particular offer hope that the party is becoming more comfortable devoting larger shares of their platforms to pro-climate policies. Climate change is clearly not a core Canadian Conservative Party value. But the party is not inherently opposed to policies that reduce emissions or protect sinks. The anti-climate policies are more consistent. The party has always devoted some of its platform to these policies, and there are no sudden dips. This implies that the party is less likely to stop including policies that

would raise emissions or reduce sinks based purely on public opinion or other external forces. Instead, the core conservative values of economic growth and the free market, as well as centralization of the CPC voter base around the fossil fuel industry, would have to change.

5.1. Limitations

My results are not as precise as they could have been had the policy area codes been more tailored to my study. This is a risk when using a coding scheme that is meant to apply to parties across the globe and political spectrum. The literature review indicated that renewable energy policies were important to conservative parties generally. If the *pro-lower carbon energy* code were divided into “Pro-non-emitting energy” and “Pro-emissions reduction technology”, I would have been able to determine whether policies supporting a non-emitting energy sources (which could include nuclear) and technological solutions were more important. Research and technology were flagged as key areas that conservative parties are willing to support on climate change. The current coding scheme does not allow me to determine if this is true in Canada, as these kinds of policies would most often fall into the large *pro-climate policy (other)* code. A “pro-carbon pricing” policy area, a similar idea to the existing *anti-environmental taxes* code, would have shown that the party is not completely against carbon pricing measures despite their vocal opposition to carbon taxes. In a similar vein, a code for “pro-climate regulations”, as an antithesis to the *anti-regulations* code, would have helped to determine if the literature showing a surprising level of support by conservative parties for climate regulations applied to Canada. Going forward, future researchers using the Carter et. al. method should consider tailoring the coding scheme to their specific case study.

Beyond the coding scheme, there are three general limitations to my study. The first is that the literature surveyed was very focused on the western liberal democracies, specifically in

Europe and the United States. Since Canada is a member of the global west, this does provide relevant context. However, the limited geographical scope of the literature means that it does not apply to political parties and conservatism globally. More research is needed to develop this larger scope.

The second is that coding does not account for quality. Every quasi-sentence about a climate relevant policy is coded and weighted equally. However, each policy may not be equally effective at reducing GHG emissions, or they may not be as effective as what the other party proposes. This is particularly important in the 2019 and 2021 platforms, where the Liberal party remained in power. The Conservative platform was thus an alternative to the status quo. Each of these platforms roundly rejected the flagship Liberal climate policy: the carbon tax. Yet neither platform proposed any policies that would be as effective as this one,¹⁰³ despite the 2021 attempt at a carbon pricing scheme. Carbon pricing is widely agreed upon by economists as the most effective policy for rapid decarbonization, and the Conservative party appears unwilling to make effective use of it. This is not reflected in the coding scheme, which counts the statements opposing the carbon tax as anti-environmental taxes. These quasi-sentences are a relatively small percentage of the total, particularly compared to many quasi-sentences outlining what the Conservatives propose to do instead. Even though implementing the Conservative plan would not reduce emissions by as much as the status quo Liberal plan, all of these other quasi-sentences can be coded as pro-climate. So, the results of my study do not tell us if the Conservatives have effective pro-climate policies—only that they have pro-climate policy statements.

¹⁰³ Christopher Ragan, “Which Party’s Imperfect Climate Plan Strikes the Best Balance?,” *Policy Options*, October 15, 2019, sec. Environment - Politics, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2019/which-partys-imperfect-climate-plan-strikes-the-best-balance/>; Mark Jaccard, “Assessing Climate Sincerity in the Canadian 2021 Election,” *Policy Options*, September 3, 2021, sec. Environment - Policy-making, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/septembe-2021/assessing-climate-sincerity-in-the-canadian-2021-election/>.

Third, the scope of my study, and of most platform coding studies, did not include a systematic discussion of how each of these platforms was implemented. In other words, it does not consider the record of the party when in government. This is a challenge that similar studies have had, including when focused on conservative parties. Both Hess and Renner and Carter and Clements found that when the conservative parties they studied were in government, economic growth and liberalization concerns pushed aside some of the pro-climate policies proposed in the platforms.¹⁰⁴

6. Conclusion

This paper shows that the Conservative Party of Canada, despite the recent vote by the party membership, recognizes the importance of devoting a portion of its platforms to climate policies. Its willingness to directly acknowledge climate change has increased over time. How much of its platform is devoted to pro-climate policies, on the other hand, varies by year. The two platforms post-Stephen Harper have some of the highest shares of pro-climate policies, making future elections of particular interest to see if a trend develops. The share of anti-climate policies is more consistent. Three of the platforms, those from 2008, 2019, and 2021, were more pro-climate than anti-climate, a result that might not be expected given the literature on Conservative parties and the CPC's electoral base's rejection of climate change. What is consistent with the literature is that the party demonstrates a weakly accommodative approach to climate change. It does not completely ignore or deny it, but it is inconsistent in its approach, and is willing to devote very little of the platform to climate in some years, including as recently as 2015. The party is still shaping its understanding of climate change. It has certainly not adopted it as a core

¹⁰⁴ Hess and Renner, "Conservative Political Parties and Energy Transitions in Europe," 427; Carter and Clements, "From 'greenest Government Ever' to 'Get Rid of All the Green Crap,'" 205,210,211.

value and it consistently promotes anti-climate policies. These include opposition to environmental taxes, promotion of international free trade, and support for the fossil fuel industry.

Hand-coding party platforms is only one measure of party preferences. Its strength is that it produces data that future researchers can make use of or add to. My paper followed the methodology laid out by Carter et. al. in their 2018 study, and suggests some improvements to the coding scheme. Future research could include applying this coding scheme to the Conservative Party platforms as they are released, as well as to the other parties. This would create a growing database that would complement the Canadian Agendas Project but with a distinctly climate focus.

Overall, the seven platforms studied, though they represent all CPC published platforms, do not demonstrate any clear trends in how the Party has viewed climate change over time. However, the results of this coding exercise give hope that while the party has not completely adopted climate change as a core value, it is willing to include pro-climate policies in certain circumstances. In other words, the party is not inherently opposed to climate change mitigation policies. The challenge will be in maintaining higher levels of support for these policies across periods of more than two elections. To do so, it is clear that high public concern for climate change and fewer distractions due to economic downturns are helpful. The next election platform may offer clues on whether the party is turning over a new leaf post-Harper or if it will revert back to low salience levels.

Future research could accompany this study to provide some of the missing context common to party platform coding projects. Possible topics include an in-depth analysis of the 2008 platform, a study focused on reading and analysing the policies contained in key platforms,

including 2008, 2019, and 2021, and a deep dive on the record of the Conservative Party on climate change during its nine years in government. A similar study to mine could be conducted for each subsequent platform released by the Conservative Party or for the other Canadian political parties. My study is intended as a starting point to building more data about Canada's climate politics. However, should a similar method be applied to other platforms in the Canadian context, researchers may wish to consider modifying some of the policy area codes to better suit the context. My own modifications, in Appendix A, provide a starting point. The Conservative Party of Canada is likely to form government again at some point, so continuing to research its views and record on climate change is crucial.

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Appendix A: Coding rules in addition to the Carter et. al. coding scheme

In this appendix, I lay out some of the clarifications, examples, and rules that I followed to ensure consistency across my own coding. It also serves as a demonstration of where the original Carter et. al. coding scheme was lacking in specificity.

Questionnaire:

- For question 1 and 2 (Problem Acknowledgement), I only considered recognition of climate change or global warming specifically. I did not count general recognition that pollution exists, or that pollutants needed to be reduced as recognizing climate change.
- For question 3 (Climate goals), I did include statements about meeting the Paris Agreement Targets or other references to meeting other climate agreements, even if there were no statements specifically laying out a target in the text.

General coding rules

- Splitting Quasi Sentences
 - Splitting lists can be challenging – does each item count as a separate political idea? In general, lists were not split up if each item in the list was serving the overarching idea of the sentence or if all items fall within one political idea. Two examples are listed below. Otherwise, if the sentence could have been formatted as a bulleted list with each item as a separate topic, it was split into individual quasi-sentences.
 - “A Conservative government led by Stephen Harper will encourage R&D through tax credits, elimination of the capital tax, a competitive intellectual property regime, and improved accessibility to private sector funds for small and medium sized enterprises.” This was not split according to the CMP – 2004 platform
 - “We must clearly articulate our core values: democracy and the rule of law, individual freedom and human rights, free markets and free trade, and compassion for the less fortunate.” This was not split in the 2004 CMP
 - Bulleted lists – In general, the sentence leading into the list and the first bullet were combined into a single quasi-sentence. The example below shows one quasi-sentence:
 - “A Conservative government will implement the commitments of Stephen Harper’s February 2004 paper, “Towards a Cleaner Canada,” including: • Legislate caps on smog causing pollutants like Nitrogen Oxide (NOx), Sulphur” 2004, CMP

- Coding the argument:
 - Quasi-sentences containing a statements of intent to enact a policy and descriptions of the policy are coded as climate relevant. General facts being used as an argument or lead in to a policy are not coded as climate relevant.
 - I coded statements about previous policies they have already enacted only when they are mentioning it because they intend to continue it or it is part of a clear statement of intent to do something else. If they are mentioning a previous policy that has already been enacted and they are not going to further support it, I did not code it as climate relevant because this policy has already its impact on emissions.
 - For example: “We've expanded the Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories sixfold.” 2015 platform. This was coded as “not sufficiently relevant” because this took place in 2007 and 2009. The statement was not part of a larger plan to increase the size of the park further.
 - Statements about the opposition party’s policies: only coding when they are part of a clear intent to remove or not enact a policy (not general statements against the opposition).
 - For example as statement like: “The Liberals are planning to raise your taxes” is coded as climate relevant because that implies that the Conservatives are planning to not raise your taxes.
- Items coded as “junk” (i.e. not included in the final results)
 - Quotes from people not from the party
 - Repeated headings
 - Introductory remarks
 - Tables and infographics

Policy area coding rules:

- Manufacturing: general support for manufacturing was coded as “neutral/ambiguous” because it could include things like electric vehicle manufacturing.
- Mining was coded as *anti-climate (other)*
- Forestry was coding as *anti-climate (other)*
 - Softwood lumber:

- This is tricky – often tied to NAFTA trade disputes. Since the free trade code is complicated, we are coding as *anti-climate (other)* because it would increase logging. Unless the sentence is more about upholding the rules of free trade, in which case it is coded as *pro-global free trade*
- Policies supporting the “substitution argument” were generally coded as neutral/ambiguous. This includes any policy where the government would support production of a good in Canada in order to export this good to places that cannot produce it as cleanly. The belief is that this will lower global emissions, but this effect is difficult to prove. Examples of this include aluminium and LNG.
- Support for clean tech were coded as *pro-climate policy (other)*.
- Support for supply management was coded as neutral/ambiguous because it is unclear if production would just move to the United States if it was removed.
- Commitments to general free trade rules, proposals for new free trade agreements (even bilateral ones), and support for existing trade agreements were all included in the *pro-global free trade* code.
- General statements in favour of cutting corporate subsidies were treated as neutral/ambiguous because these could refer to subsidies for fossil fuel companies or for pro-climate companies.