

Profile of party supporters in the 2011 Saskatchewan provincial election: A research brief

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Saskatchewan Election Study team

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As the results came in the evening of the 2011 Saskatchewan provincial election, it was readily apparent which parts of the province and which ridings supported which party. However, what could not be determined from the electoral results was more detailed information, such as which age groups supported which party or how one party's supporters felt about the provincial economy compared to another party's supporters. To fill this gap in our knowledge and deepen our understanding of Saskatchewan politics, the Saskatchewan Election Study survey was administered to a random selection of Saskatchewan voters during the two weeks immediately following the provincial election. This is the first in a series of research briefs that will report the results of the survey to the Saskatchewan public. This research brief creates profiles of the supporters of the two major parties - the Saskatchewan Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP) - based on their demographic characteristics, feelings towards the party leaders, views on the provincial economy, and their support for parties in federal elections.

Demographic groups

The survey results estimate the vote for the Saskatchewan Party to be 65% and the vote for the NDP to be 30%, which is remarkably close to the actual election results of 64% for the Saskatchewan Party and 32% for the NDP. The Saskatchewan Election Study research team divided the voters for the two major parties in the 2011 provincial election into 30 different demographic groups. These demographic groups were then classified as strong, moderate and weak party supporters. If a demographic group supported a party by five or more percentage points above the party's estimated vote, the group is classified as strong supporters of the party. For example, 77% of rural residents stated that they voted for the Saskatchewan Party. As this number is 12 percentage points above the estimated 65% Saskatchewan Party vote, rural residents are classified as strong supporters of the Saskatchewan Party. If support of a party by a demographic group fell five percentage points or less under its estimated vote, this group is classified as weak supporters of the party. Groups who reported party support that was within four percentage points of the estimated vote are classified as moderate supporters. It should be noted that the group classifications are not meant to imply statistically significant differences between groups.

Figure 1: Saskatchewan Party supporters as a percentage of a particular demographic group of voters

Weak supporters (60% and below)	Moderate supporters (61%-69%)	Strongest supporters (70% and Above)
Working for pay (58%)	High school and under (69%)	Rural resident (77%)
Aged 18-34 (56%)	Non-union member (69%)	Self-employed (76%)
Non-profit sector worker (55%)	Private sector worker (69%)	Technical college/some university (74%)
No religion (53%)	No children in household (68%)	Other protestant ⁴ (74%)
Completed university degree (52%)	Male (68%)	Retired (72%)
Public sector worker (52%)	Children in household (67%)	Over \$100,000 household income (71%)
Union member (51%)	Aged 35-54 (67%)	Mainline protestant ⁵ (70%)
Regina resident (51%)	Catholic ² (67%)	Aged 55 and older (70%)
Northern resident ¹ (47%)	Smaller city resident ³ (64%)	
	Female (63%)	
	Saskatoon resident (63%)	
	Under \$50,000 household income (63%)	
	\$50,000 - \$100,000 household income (62%)	

Figure 1 shows the demographic profile of Saskatchewan Party voters. The most striking finding is the dominance of the Saskatchewan Party in nearly every demographic group. The Saskatchewan Party won a majority of votes in each demographic group except one: northern residents. Even union members and public sector workers, who are sometimes considered to be hostile to the Saskatchewan Party, voted in a slight majority for Brad Wall's party.

While the Saskatchewan Party's popularity in rural Saskatchewan and among self-employed and higher income voters may be expected, the party's strength among older and retired voters should also be noted. Since these groups are generally the mostly likely to vote, the ability of the Saskatchewan Party to appeal to seniors and retired voters was a key factor in their landslide victory.

The Saskatchewan Party also displayed considerable strength among all respondents who expressed a religious affiliation. While many studies of federal elections have shown that Catholics vote Liberal, the recent Saskatchewan election illustrates that Catholics in this province are firmly in the corner of the Saskatchewan Party. Further, although the Saskatchewan NDP is thought to have a traditional base of support among mainline Protestant churches such as the Baptist Church and the United Church of Canada (Tommy Douglas and Lorne Calvert were ministers of these churches), the data illustrates that voters from these mainline Protestant churches are just as likely as voters from other Protestant churches to vote for the Saskatchewan Party. Indeed, even voters who identified as belonging the United church and the Baptist church voted over 70% in favour of the Saskatchewan Party.

¹ The boundary between north and south for this study closely followed the boundary between the two northern ridings of Athabasca and Cumberland and the rest of the province.

² Includes Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox churches.

³ Includes residents of Estevan, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, Prince Albert, North Battleford and the Saskatchewan part of Lloydminster.

⁴ Includes all Protestant churches excluding the Anglican, United Church of Canada, Baptist, and Lutheran churches.

⁵ Includes all Anglican, United Church of Canada, Baptist and Lutheran churches.

Finally, it is surprising to see that low-income earners (household income under \$50,000) and less educated voters, two groups which were once thought to be among the NDP’s bedrock supporters, are classified as moderate supporters of the Saskatchewan Party. The study’s findings suggest that the NDP has no particular advantage over the Saskatchewan Party with these two demographic groups. Further analysis illustrates that, even in Saskatoon and Regina, a majority of low-income voters (54%) and voters with only a high school education (60%) prefer the Saskatchewan Party over the NDP.

Figure 2: NDP supporters as a percentage of a particular demographic group of voters

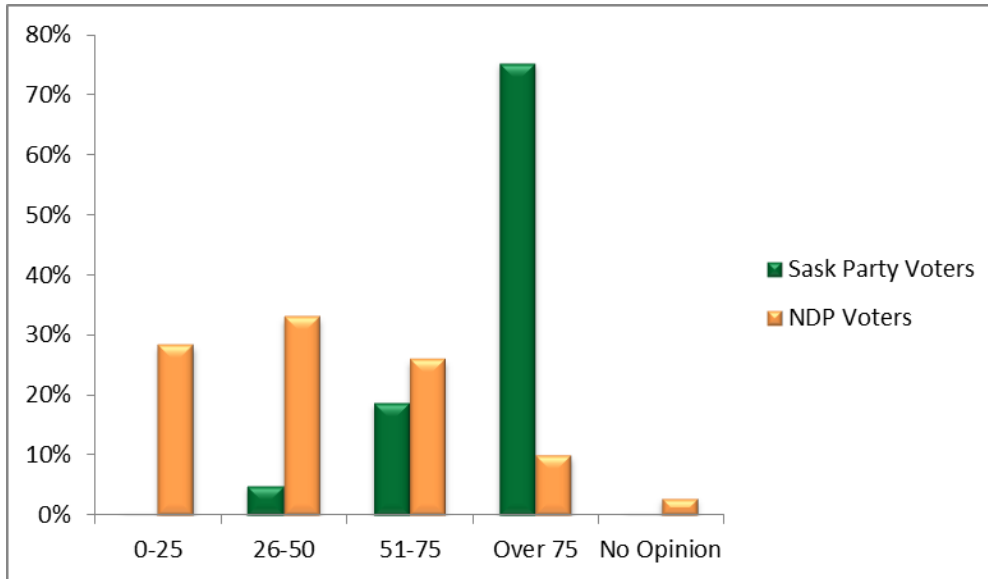
Weak supporters (25% and below)	Moderate supporters (26%-34%)	Strongest supporters (35% and above)
Non-union member (25%)	Female (33%)	Northern resident (53%)
Private sector worker (24%)	Saskatoon resident (32%)	Union member (45%)
Technical college/some university (22%)	\$50,000 - \$100,000 household income (32%)	Public sector worker (45%)
Rural resident (20%)	Under \$50,000 household income (31%)	Completed university degree (42%)
Self-employed (15%)	Smaller city resident (31%)	Regina resident (40%)
	Catholic (30%)	No religion (40%)
	Children in household (29%)	Working for pay (37%)
	Aged 55 and older (28%)	Aged 18-34 (36%)
	Mainline protestant (27%)	Non-profit sector worker (36%)
	Aged 35-54 (27%)	
	No children in household (27%)	
	Retired (26%)	
	Male (26%)	
	Over \$100,000 household income (26%)	
	High school and under (26%)	

Figure 2 shows the demographic profile of New Democratic Party voters. Reflecting the strength of Saskatchewan’s two party system, Figure 2 is the mirror opposite of Figure 1. Essentially, NDP support was strong in almost all demographic groups in which Saskatchewan Party support was weak. This may be considered good news for the NDP as there is little evidence that any of these demographic groups are looking to third parties for an alternative to the Saskatchewan Party.

The NDP’s strongest supporters were predictably union members, public sector workers and northern residents. However, even its strongest supporter groups report only limited support, and the overall tenor of the results is alarming for the party. If it hopes to form government in the future, the party must push its support from more demographic groups into 40%-50% support range. Its relative weakness compared the Saskatchewan Party among women, older voters and middle and lower income voters is particularly problematic for the party. The party’s ‘silver lining’ in the study’s findings may be that the NDP does have a potential base of support in young, non-religious, urban (particularly Regina) and educated voters. If the NDP can build on the support these groups gave the party in this election, they may have a chance to obtain better results in the future.

Leadership

Figure 3: Feelings towards Brad Wall (0 = really dislike and 100 = really like)



The popularity of Premier Brad Wall was obviously an important part of the Saskatchewan Party's victory. When it comes to evaluating leadership during elections, political scientists typically use what is called a 'feeling thermometer' where the respondent is asked to rate a political leader on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 representing 'really dislike' and 100 representing 'really like.' Figure 3 indicates that Brad Wall enjoyed considerable popularity among Saskatchewan Party voters, with none of these voters rating him under 25 and less than 5% rating him under 50. Surprisingly, the NDP voters were not overtly negative towards Brad Wall. NDP voters had a wider range of feelings than Saskatchewan Party voters, with 60% of NDP voters rating Wall between 0 and 50, 26% rating him between 51-75 and 10% rating him over 75.

Figure 4: Feelings towards Dwain Lingenfelter (0 = really dislike and 100 = really like)

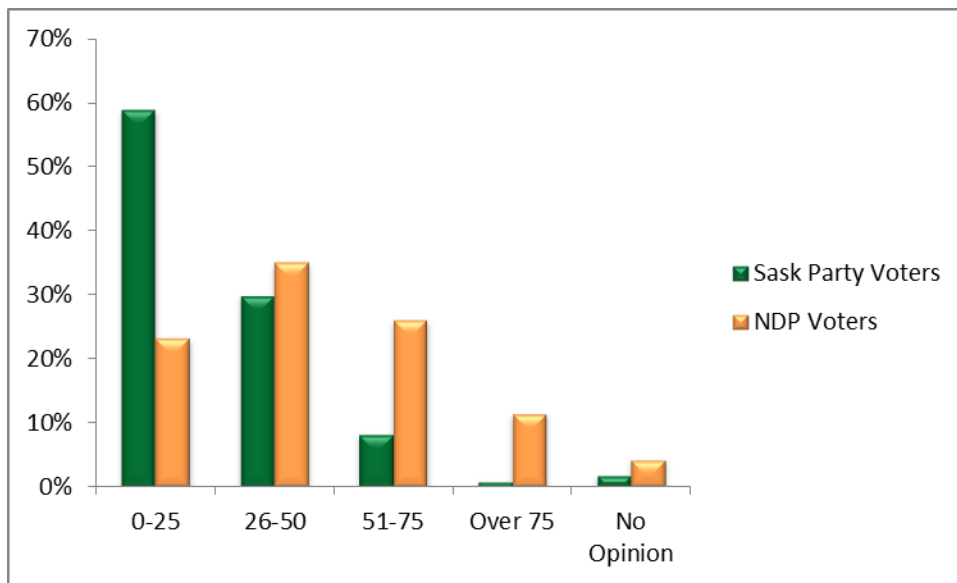


Figure 4 vividly illustrates the difficulties Dwain Lingenfelter had as leader of the NDP during the 2011 election. A full 58% of NDP voters rated Lingenfelter between 0-50, which means these voters supported the party despite their reservations about its leader. Indeed, only 11% of NDP voters rated Lingenfelter over 75. Predictably, Saskatchewan Party voters had a very negative perception of Lingenfelter with only 8% rating him between 51-75 and less than 1% rating him over 75.

Views on the Saskatchewan economy

Figure 5: Over the past year, has the Saskatchewan economy 'gotten better', 'gotten worse', or 'stayed about the same'?

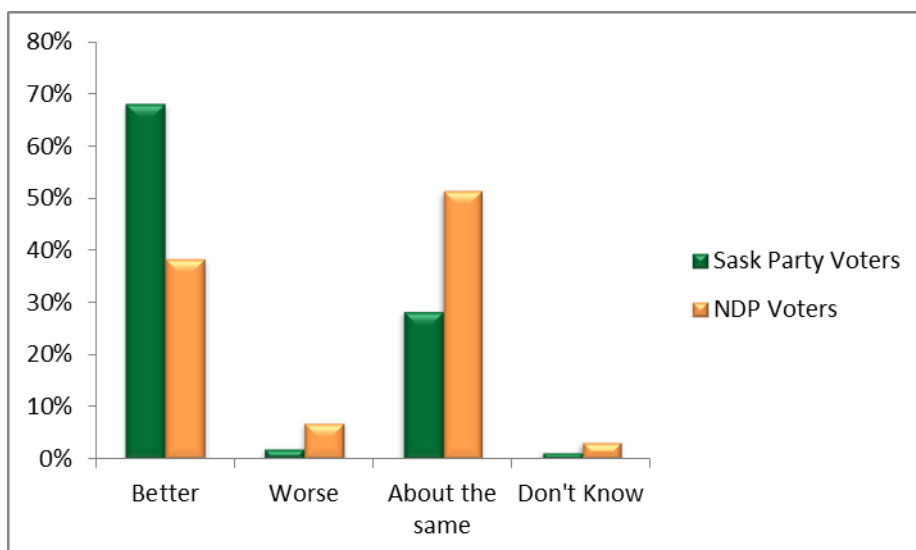
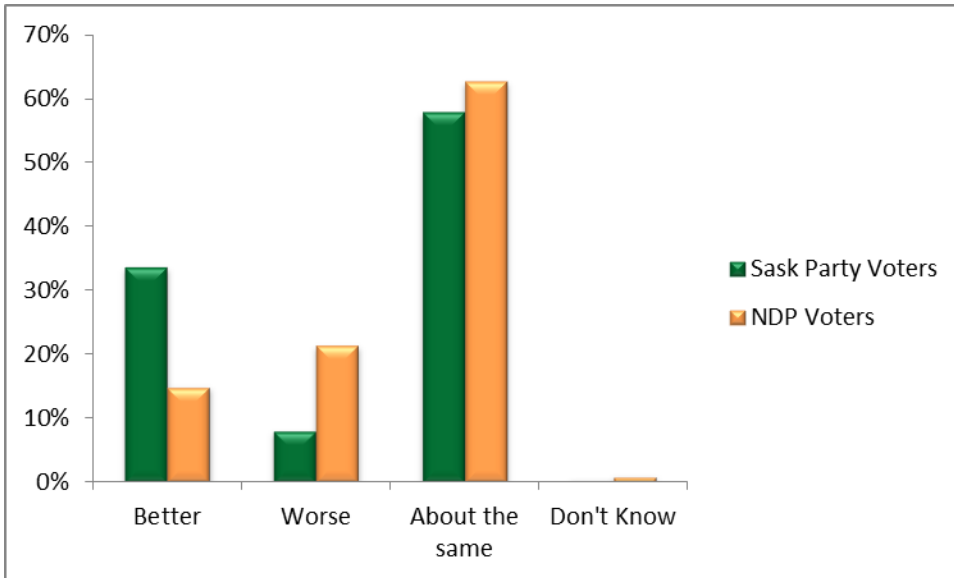


Figure 5 illustrates that Saskatchewan Party and NDP voters had different perceptions on the state of Saskatchewan's economy. Nearly 70% of Saskatchewan Party voters felt the provincial economy had 'gotten better' over the past year compared to just 28% of their voters who felt the economy had stayed the same. NDP voters, in contrast, were much

more skeptical that the province’s economy had improved during the last year. Just over 50% of NDP voters felt the economy ‘had stayed about the same’ compared to 38% of their voters who felt it had improved. Almost no voters for either party felt the economy had worsened over the last year, which captures the current sense of economic optimism in our province.

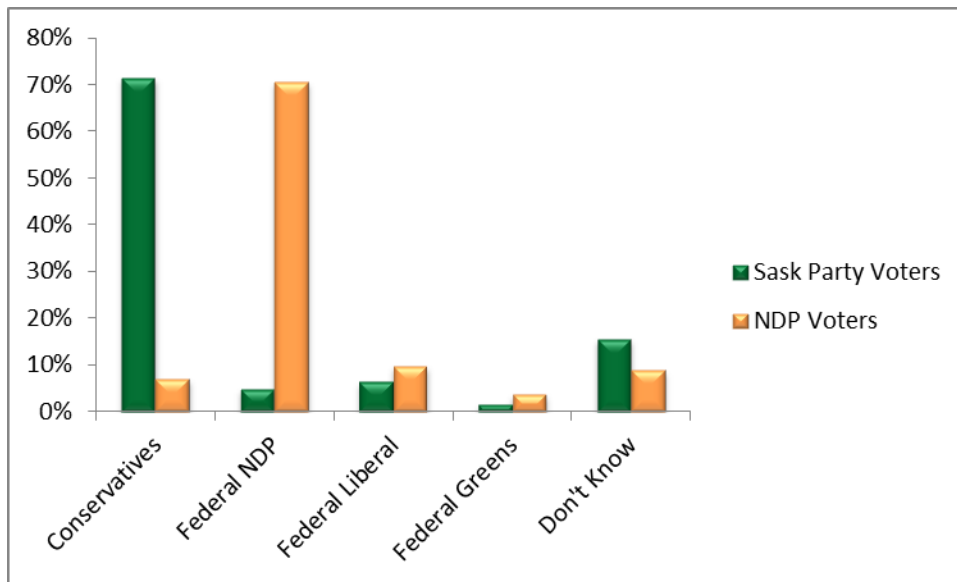
Figure 6: Financially, are you ‘better off’, ‘worse off’, or ‘about the same’ as a year ago?



While NDP and Saskatchewan Party voters may disagree on the health of the Saskatchewan economy, Figure 6 illustrates a large majority of voters from both parties feel their own personal financial situation was ‘about the same’ as a year ago. A surprisingly large number of Saskatchewan Party voters (58%) feel the economic boom of the province had not benefitted them personally.

Support for federal parties

Figure 7: If a federal election were held today, would you vote for the Conservative Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Green Party of Canada or some other party?



Do Saskatchewan voters support ideologically similar parties at the federal and provincial levels? Federal-provincial vote splitting occurs when a voter decides to vote for ideologically different parties at the federal and the provincial levels. For example, Saskatchewan voters who seemingly used to vote for John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservatives in federal elections and Tommy Douglas' Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in provincial elections. While there is no federal equivalent to the Saskatchewan Party, it can be argued that the Conservative Party and the Saskatchewan Party are, at least in some respects, ideologically similar parties. The data suggest the parties also share voters. In 2011, the federal Conservatives and the Saskatchewan Party have essentially the same electoral clientele. A similar pattern is also seen with the provincial NDP and the federal NDP. It appears Saskatchewan has become a strict two-party system at both the federal and provincial levels and there is little voter migration between these two well-defined ideological camps.

Methodology of the Saskatchewan Election Study

The 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study was the first study to use the newly-created survey lab in the Social Sciences Research Laboratories (SSRL) complex at the University of Saskatchewan. Deployed as a telephone survey using WinCATI software, 1,099 Saskatchewan residents, 18 years of age and older, were administered a 15-minute survey on political attitudes and behaviours in the province from November 8, 2011 to November 21, 2011. Results of the survey, which generated a response rate of 23.6%, are generalizable to the Saskatchewan population (18 years of age and older) +/- 2.95% at the 95% confidence interval (19 times out of 20). The Saskatchewan Election Study was funded by the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, with additional support from LEAD Saskatoon, St. Thomas More College and the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan.