

# Local conditions and nationalist voting: Evidence from the 2011 Canadian Vote Compass\*

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## 1 Introduction

What underlies support for nationalist parties? We argue that three broad factors should drive support for these parties. Unsurprisingly, the first is nationalist sentiment among voters. Those who have stronger feelings of nationalism and who identify with their ethnicity more acutely should be more likely to plump for nationalist parties. But the story does not end there. Nationalist parties are headed by politicians who vary according to their ability and charisma. Nationalist parties may indeed have more charismatic leaders, on average, than parties of another type [Cell, 1974]; regardless, more well-liked leaders should be associated with a greater likelihood of voting for a nationalist party. Finally, nationalist parties may be supported not because of their nationalist positions or their charismatic leaders, but because they espouse economic policies which are popular with voters.

In this paper, we argue that all three of these factors underlie support for nationalist parties. However, we argue that the degree to which these factors matter depends on the context in

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\*This work is born of the 2011 federal election edition of Vote Compass Canada, a voting engagement application which is the collective effort of Loewen, Yannick Dufresne, Gregory Eady, Jennifer Hove, and most especially Clifton van der Linden, who is the Founder and Executive Director of Vote Compass Canada. More details on the project can be found at [www.votecompass.ca](http://www.votecompass.ca).

which a voter is situated. Nationalist parties have many tropes at their disposal, whether it is the threat of others, economic uncertainty, or the corruption of the ruling political class.<sup>1</sup> We should not expect them to be deployed uniformly or uniquely. We should also not expect them to have the same effects in different places. Accordingly, we argue and find that the communities in which individuals live and the economic station of those communities conditions how nationalism, leader evaluations, and policy proximity matter for nationalist party vote choice.

Studies of vote choice traditionally rely principally on an individualistic model. This is understandable for both theoretical and practical reasons. Voting is an individual act, as has been strongly argued by rational choice theory [Downs, 1957, Enelow and Hinich, 1984] and as such the principal focus ought to be on individual-level variations. Some focus on sociological determinants of voting, but even then such determinants are measured and conceptualized as characteristics of an individual [Berelson et al., 1986, Lazarsfeld et al., 1944]. This focus is abetted by practical concerns: the modal election study has a limited number of respondents (generally a few thousand) spread over hundreds of geographic units. Accordingly, estimating contextual effects at a local level is to invite problems attendant to low statistical power. Put differently, it is hard to uncover meaningful local variation in the determinants of voting when only a few respondents live in each locale.<sup>2</sup>

Our study, by contrast, considers both the individual-level correlates of nationalist party vote choice and the extent to which these variables are conditioned by local context. To do so, we rely on the 2011 Canadian Vote Compass dataset, a uniquely large survey of voters. Restricting our analysis to the province of Quebec in Canada, we still have more than twenty-five thousand respondents. Accordingly, we estimate individual-level models of nationalist party vote share which independently estimate the effects of nationalism, party proximity, and leader evaluations. We demonstrate that all three of these factors underlie nationalist vote choice. We then demonstrate how these effects vary according to local context. This is achieved using the two-step model recommended by Jusko and Shively [2005]. Our contextual effects are estimated at the level of census divisions (roughly corresponding to cities and towns). These estimates demonstrate that the comparative effects of nationalism and leader evaluations vary according to both the share of English-speakers in the local unit and the unemployment rate within the unit. By contrast, the policy proximity on non-nationalist matters does not vary by context.

In what follows, we place these findings within the larger literature on voting for nationalist parties, particularly (for now) in a Canadian context (Section 2), from which we also derive clear empirical expectations. We then review our data and modelling strategy (Section 3). We follow

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<sup>1</sup>A ruling class which we assume is more often than not dominated by members of another ethnic group.

<sup>2</sup>We do note, however, that related and very promising work in “small area estimation” [Ghitza and Gelman, 2013, Jiang and Lahiri, 2006, Park et al., 2004] is presenting an easily applied solution this problem.

this with our results (Section 4) and a discussion and conclusion (Section 5).

## 2 Determinants of Nationalist Voting

As with many countries in the world, Canada witnessed a rise in support for nationalist parties in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the election of an official separatist party in the French-speaking province of Quebec in 1976. The Parti Québécois would go on to hold referenda on secession from Canada in 1980 and again in 1995.<sup>3</sup> In the interim, Canada also saw the rise of a French-Canadian nationalist party within its federal Parliament. In 1993, the Bloc Québécois was successful in having MPs elected in two-thirds of Quebec’s constituencies. As a result, they held the status of the second largest party in the House of Commons (taking on the title of “Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition.”).

The rise of both the PQ and the BQ, and related electoral support for separatism, has been the subject of substantial academic inquiry in Canada. On the one hand, a set of work has looked to feelings of nationalism and cultural grievance. Political support for sovereignty is unsurprisingly found to translate into electoral support for the Parti Québécois [Bélanger and Nadeau, 2009]. Relatedly, feelings of affect towards Canada and towards Quebec underwrite support for nationalist options during referendums. [Pammett and LeDuc, 2001] Cultural grievances, that is, the impression that the culture of Quebec is not rightly treated by Canadians from the rest of the country, whether out of racism, assimilative practices or simply indifference, also bolster support for separatism in the province [Cuneo and Curtis, 1974, Mendelsohn, 2003]. We collect these findings under the category of *nationalist sentiments* as explanators of electoral support for nationalist parties.

Other scholars have argued that support for sovereignty is instead the product of a rational calculus on the part of Quebecers. This calculus has two components: linguistic and economic. Quebecers are thought to ask themselves what gains or losses they would experience regarding the protection of French and the vitality of their economy in the case of Quebec independence. Quebecers who expect gains in these two areas following independence are more likely to support it than other voters [Blais and Nadeau, 1992, Blais et al., 1995, Cuneo and Curtis, 1974, Howe, 1998, Mendelsohn, 2003, Nadeau and Fleury, 1995]. A logical consequence of this would be that those who feel threatened by English currently may be more supportive of a sovereign Quebec, given that it would almost certainly impose more restrictive language laws. On the economic front, it is argued that when a voter estimates that economic conditions will improve under a sovereign Quebec government, then they are more likely to vote for a sovereigntist party and more likely to support sovereignty in a referendum. In this vein, we suspect that both economic

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<sup>3</sup>They were out of office between 1985 and 1995.

evaluations and economic conditions should matter for the support of sovereigntist parties.

Research has also demonstrated that nationalist parties receive support for the same reasons that every other party does. Positive views of leaders of nationalist parties increase support for them. This is true for both the *parti Québécois* at the provincial level [Bélanger and Nadeau, 2009], for the *Bloc Québécois* at the federal level [Blais, 2002, Gidengil et al., 2012], and for the nationalist outcome in the 1980 and 1995 Quebec secession referendums [Pammett and LeDuc, 2001].

Third, ideological congruity, quite apart from nationalist sentiment, is likewise thought to increase the probability of supporting a nationalist party, regardless of level of competition [Bélanger and Nadeau, 2009, Blais, 2002, Gidengil et al., 2012]. Finally, variables of a socio-demographic nature have been found to explain support for nationalist parties and policies in Quebec. The most important variable is certainly the voter's first language, with French voters being more likely to support nationalist parties and endeavours than other voters [Bélanger and Nadeau, 2009, Blais, 2002, Gidengil et al., 2012, Pammett and LeDuc, 2001]. However, many other variables, like income, religiosity, age, gender and education have all been found to have an independent effect on support for independence and nationalist parties [O'loughlin and o Tuathail, 2009, Pammett and LeDuc, 2001, Pinard and Hamilton, 1984].

It is not clear to us the extent to which these findings amount to competing explanations. They certainly do not form the basis of causal conclusions [Holland, 1986]. What they do describe are empirical regularities, which we think can be grouped under three broad categories, each with its own empirical expectation. First, nationalist sentiments underlie support for nationalist parties, such that those who hold such sentiments more strongly will be more likely to vote for a nationalist party. Second, leader evaluations can be a basis of support for nationalist parties, such that those who evaluate a nationalist party's leader more favourably than other leaders will be more likely to plumb their vote for that party. Third, those who exhibit ideological congruence with the party will also be more likely to cast a vote for that party. We expect all three of these factors to exercise independent influence over variance in nationalist voting.

We regard these expectations as neither surprising nor controversial. The objective of our paper, however, is to uncover the possible contextual conditionality of these effects. We argue that the influence each of these factors exercises over the decision to vote for a nationalist party can vary by the context in which a voter lives. The empirical implication of this is that voters effectively hold different calculi depending on the environment in which they are situated.

Vote choice literature has not yet paid great attention to the contextual determinants of support for nationalist parties. However, there is substantial literature on how the local context can affect feelings of nationalism and ethnic tension. Central to this literature is work on the relationship between contact with other ethnic groups at the aggregate level. For example,

Pettigrew finds that while interaction with members of the other ethnic group lowers ethnic tension at the individual level, it exacerbates them at the aggregate level [Pettigrew et al., 2006]. This means that while an individual who is in contact with members of another community will be less hostile towards this group, the population in general, especially individuals who are not personally in contact with the members of the other community, will become more hostile as the size of this community grows. Tolbert et al. reach similar conclusions, observing that white voters in districts with higher proportion of non-whites are more prone to voting against positive discrimination than white voters in districts with lower proportions of non-whites [Tolbert and Grummel, 2003]. This being said, not all authors agree on the direction of this effect. For example, Kalin agrees that the proportion of members of another ethnic group matters to explain ethnic attitudes in Canada, but argues that such presence weakens ethnic conflict rather than bolstering it [Kalin and Berry, 1982].

The contextual effects of economic conditions on voting have similarly been explored. For example, individuals within high-income populations are generally more nationalist and more prone to request independence than those within poorer regions [Sorens, 2005]. This is perhaps to be expected, given that for poorer regions generally benefit from the union, while richer regions subsidize the rest of the country.

Taken together, these works lead us to a set of empirical expectations about the effects of contextual variables on the vote choice. In particular, we expect the influence of nationalist sentiments, leader evaluations and ideology to vary according to two broad local conditions: the percentage of “other” citizens, namely English speakers, and average rates of unemployment, which we take as a stand in for more general economic uncertainty. We expect that the influence of nationalist sentiments on the vote will be higher in local contexts in which there are more English speakers. We expect that it will be unaffected by the long term rate of unemployment. Feelings of threat and linguistic insecurity will be greater when individuals are exposed to more speakers of another language. This day-to-day reminder of a conflict over language should spill into politics. It should likewise be a ready trope for enterprising politicians who wish to prime feelings of nationalism and link them to vote choice.

In contrast to this, we expect issue proximity to the Bloc Québécois and leadership evaluations to exercise more influence in contexts in which the long term economic uncertainty or hardship is greater. The general policy orientation of the BQ - as a pro-labour, left-wing party - and the background of its leader - as a former trade union representative - offer much to appeal to voters who wish to see an activist economic role played by the government. Accordingly, political candidates should seek to draw out their economic policies and the suitability of their leader in contexts in which economic uncertainty and hardship is heightened.

In the sections that follow, we outline an empirical strategy which allows us to estimate the

contextual conditionality of the factors associated with voting for nationalist parties.

### 3 Data and modelling strategy

Our paper employs data collected in the 2011 Canadian federal election by Vote Compass, a voting advice application hosted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation website.<sup>4</sup> The application asks respondents thirty policy and attitudinal questions related to Canadian politics, in addition to a number of questions related to sociodemographics, voting behaviour, and evaluations of political parties and their leaders. The application received nearly two-million responses during the thirty-seven day campaign. The principal benefit of the Vote Compass data are obvious, as separate models can be estimated within precise and low levels of geography. Whereas samples from standard elections surveys range in the tens or on occasion a hundred respondents per constituency, Vote Compass data number in the hundreds or thousands.

These data should be treated with caution. Unlike person-to-person or telephone interviews, data input and respondent effort cannot be as closely monitored. Accordingly, we take some precaution with the data. We limit our set to those respondents who answered a complete schedule of sociodemographic questions. We make the assumption that while respondents may enter political positions on numerous occasions to see how their estimated political positions change, they are less likely to enter demographic information multiple times. A respondent who is clicking or ‘speeding’ through the tool will skip non-mandatory questions. Once this filter is applied, and once we limit the data to French-speaking Canadians in Quebec, we are left with approximately 30,000 respondents. These respondents are nested within 98 census divisions.<sup>5</sup> This converts into an average of 306 respondents per census division.

Our modelling strategy closely follows that of [Jusko and Shively \[2005\]](#). In this two-step strategy an individual-level model is estimated in each of some geographic unit (which in this case is a census division). The estimation of separate models implies uniquely estimated variance and covariance structures. Coefficients of interest are then captured from each of these models and regressed against variables measured at the level of the geographic unit. The second level coefficients can then be inspected to estimate how much the influence of some individual-level variable varies by the levels of some contextual factor. The advantages of this approach are clearly articulated by [Jusko and Shively \[2005\]](#), but not least among them are straightforward interpretation of results, ease of visual inspection, and no loss in statistical efficiency in comparison to more standard HLM approaches[eg [Snijders and Bosker, 1999](#)].

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<sup>4</sup>This particular application, which is just one of a class of VAAs, has also been deployed in partnership with the Wall Street Journal and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. As a matter of disclosure, Loewen has a financial and academic interest in this application.

<sup>5</sup>For purposes of comparison, we note that there are 75 federal constituencies in the province of Quebec.

Formally, we estimate the following individual-level of vote choice:

$$Y(VOTE)_{ij} = \alpha_j + Nationalism_{ij}\beta1_j + LeaderRating_{ij}\beta2_j + Ideology_{ij}\beta3_j + \varepsilon_{ij}, \quad (1)$$

where, for example,  $\beta1$  indicates the effect of a respondent  $i$ 's level of nationalism on a nationalist vote choice in census division  $j$ . As the subscripts imply, the model is estimated separately in every census division. For ease of interpretation, we estimate an ordinary least squares regression at the first level.

Following the estimate of  $n = j$  different individual-level models, we then capture the three key coefficients in each model (i.e. nationalist, leader rating, and ideology) and regress each separately on two aggregate-level characteristics in each census tract, namely the log of long-term unemployment ( $M=1.99$ ,  $sd=.46$ ) and the log of the percentage of English-speakers ( $m=0.65$ ,  $sd=1.47$ ). For example, estimates of the effect of nationalist sentiments thus takes the form:

$$\beta1_j = \alpha_j + EnglishSpeakers_j\beta1_j + Unemployment_j\beta2_j + \varepsilon_j, \quad (2)$$

Inspection of the equation tells us that by looking at the intercept, we can recover the effect of nationalism on voting for a nationalist party when the share of English speakers is 0 and the long-term unemployment rate is also 0. We can then see how the effect of nationalism on nationalist voting increases or decreases as these two contextual factors change.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Individual-level Model

The first model in our two-step procedure is an additive model of the probability to vote for the Bloc Québécois. The dependent variable is whether the respondent indicated a vote intention for the Bloc Québécois. It is a dummy variable. The independent variables in our model are Quebec nationalism, evaluations of the Bloc Québécois' leader and left-leaning or redistributive economic preferences. Quebec nationalism is an index based on the average response to three statements asked in the Vote Compass survey. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "The federal government should have a say when it comes to decisions about culture in Quebec", "Quebec should be formally recognized as a nation in the Constitution" and "Quebec should become an independent state". The items exhibit reasonable internal consistency, returning a Cronbach's  $\alpha=.70$ . The scale has a mean of

3.86 and a standard deviation of 1.01.

Our measure of evaluations of the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Gilles Duceppe, is his ranking when compared to other leaders. The Vote Compass survey asked respondents to rate each party leader based on their reliability, capability and suitability as party leaders. We computed the average of each leaders' score on these three ratings. We then coded Gilles Duceppe's position in these evaluations. This variable has a value of 1 when he is the least preferred party leader, and a value of 5 when he is the favourite party leader. It has a mean of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 1.36.

Ideology is measured as a classic, economic left-right dimension. To generate this dimension, we compiled an index composed of three categories of questions about the economy, fiscal redistribution and social spending. The index has a Cronbach's  $\alpha=.61$ . The index once again runs from one to five, with higher results indicating a left-leaning respondent. The mean of the index is 3.36, and its standard deviation is 0.56, thus indicating that ideological self-placement suffers from much less deviation than evaluation of the Bloc Québécois leader among French Quebecers.

#### **4.1.1 Individual-level Results**

Table 1 presents some overall individual-level results. The model regresses vote intention for the Bloc on age, gender, education, feelings of nationalism, rank of preference of Duceppe and ideological positioning. The model is estimated in an OLS framework. Unsurprisingly given our sample size, all variables in this model are significant at the 0.001 level, with the exception of being ideologically left-winged, which is significant at the 0.05 level, and age, which is not significant. Being male, educated, a nationalist, favouring Duceppe and being on the left all increase the likelihood of voting for the Bloc.

These results clearly accord with the picture of nationalist voting outlined at the start of our paper. Our variables point in the expected direction, and there is no statistical question of their influence. In the next section, however, we demonstrate that this influence varies by context much as we expected.

## **4.2 Contextual-level models**

To assess the effect of local context on individual-level coefficients of voting for the bloc, we regressed the coefficients separate individual-level models estimated in every census division. We then regressed these coefficients on a log of levels of unemployment and a log of percentage of Anglophones.



### 4.2.1 Contextual-level Results

Tables 2-4 present results for each of our key level one variables. The results are also presented graphically in Figures 1 and 2.

We begin with a consideration of the effects of leader rankings. Table 2 demonstrates that the effect of positive evaluations of Gilles Duceppe's leadership varies based on a contextual characteristic, in this case long run unemployment in the census division. Given how strongly and personally the Bloc leader campaigns on creating jobs, defending employment insurance and given how close he is to unions and workers, this trend is not surprising. In the constituency with the lowest unemployment rate, the likelihood of voting for the Bloc given an average rating of Duceppe, is 0.29.<sup>6</sup> In a constituency with the highest rate of longterm unemployment, the likelihood increases to .48.<sup>7</sup> This translates into an increase in the effect of leader ratings of 65%.

A larger effect emerges when we consider the effects of nationalism. As Table 3 show, the effect of nationalist opinions on vote choice increases as the percentage of Anglophones in a constituency increases. Division of the coefficient by the constant tells us that for each 1 point increase in the log of the percentage of Anglophones in a district, the effect of Quebec nationalism on voting for the Bloc Québécois increases by 5% (i.e.  $0.009/0.198$ ). Given the log of the percentage Anglophones in a district varies from -2.1 to 4.4 (as the percentage varies from 0.11 to 57), this is a sizeable effect. Indeed, an analytical inspection tells us that the likelihood that an individual with average levels of nationalism votes for the Bloc in the most French riding is .69, *ceteris paribus*.<sup>8</sup> However, an individual with an average level of nationalism living in the most English census division has markedly higher likelihood of 0.90.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the likelihood increases on the order of 30%.

Finally, while we do find contextual effects for nationalism and leadership evaluations, we fail to find one for ideology (Table 4). The effect of holding left-wing economic views on vote choice for a nationalist party does not vary according to context.

## 5 Conclusion

Taken together, our results may seem underwhelming. Indeed, we failed to find contextual effects in more cases than we did uncover them. As inspection of Figures 1 and 2 suggest why this might be the case. There is simply a terribly large amount of variance in the effects of coefficients across census divisions. It is unsurprisingly then that we would achieve so little

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<sup>6</sup> $(0.04+0.026*1.02)*3.36=.29$

<sup>7</sup> $(0.04+0.026*3.26)*3.36=.48.$

<sup>8</sup> $(0.198+0.009*-2.15)*3.86=.69.$

<sup>9</sup> $(0.198+0.009*4.04)*3.86=.90.$

leverage over these estimates with just two variables. This is an invitation to more extensive and careful analysis of contextual effects rather than a retreat from them. An inspection of the variance of these effects does not suggest anything close to a uniform model of nationalist voting across local contexts.

What we have found is important and of interest to scholars of nationalist politics. At an individual level we found that respondents who are male, educated, nationalist, left-winged and who like the Bloc leader are all more likely to vote for the Bloc. Furthermore, we have observed that nationalism plays a stronger role in explaining nationalist voting among voters who live among citizens of another group - in our case, English Quebecers. We have also shown that evaluations of the leader play more of a role in explaining voting for the Bloc Québécois when a respondent lives in a census division with higher unemployment. Given the fact that the sovereigntist movement in Quebec has long received support from unions [Güntzel, 2000, Savage, 2008], this is not surprising. However, nationalism is unaffected by unemployment, and leader evaluations are unaffected by the number of English speakers in a given census division. Likewise, ideology is unaffected by either the number of English speakers or the percentage of unemployment in a census division.

Our findings shed light on some controversies regarding inter-ethnic conflict. The literature is unresolved regarding how contact should affect such conflict. Some think that more contact means more mutual understanding and greater tolerance between groups [Kalin and Berry, 1982]. Others argue exactly the opposite, that is, a majority will feel threatened when a minority becomes too strong and will vote to limit the powers of the minority [Tolbert and Grummel, 2003]. Others adopt a more nuanced view, and claim that while individual-level contact breeds tolerance and mutual understanding, more contact yields more conflict in the aggregate [Pettigrew et al., 2006]. Our results corroborate the last theory. We have found that when they live among more members of the linguistic minority (English speakers), French Québécois are more likely to let nationalism determine their vote. In this sense, our results support the idea that contact breeds national conflict rather than mutual understanding.

Going forward, our findings suggest three extensions. First, we can consider and estimate models at different levels of geography, including neighbourhoods and towns. Second, we can consider other contextual level factors, including employment types and local political factors, for example the presence of incumbents. Third, we can consider different methods for estimating causal effects, in particular small-area estimation approaches [Ghitza and Gelman, 2013, Jiang and Lahiri, 2006, Park et al., 2004].

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## 6 Tables

Table 1: Individual Determinants of Nationalist Voting

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>(Std. Err.)</b>
Male	0.017**	(0.005)
Age	-0.001**	(0.000)
Education	0.001	(0.001)
Quebec Nationalism	0.193**	(0.003)
Leader Evaluations	0.106**	(0.002)
Left Ideology	0.011*	(0.005)
Intercept	-0.694**	(0.020)
<hr/>		
N	26003	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.395	
F (6,25996)	4405.798	
<hr/>		
Significance levels : † : 10% * : 5% ** : 1%		

Table 2: Variation of leader's evaluation

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>(Std. Err.)</b>
Percentage of Unemployment (log)	0.026*	(0.012)
Percentage of English Speakers (log)	-0.003	(0.004)
Intercept	0.060*	(0.025)
<hr/>		
N		98
R <sup>2</sup>		0.055
F (2,95)		2.757
<hr/>		
Significance levels : † : 10% * : 5% ** : 1%		

Table 3: Variation of Quebec nationalism

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>(Std. Err.)</b>
Percentage of Unemployment (log)	-0.010	(0.015)
Percentage of English Speakers (log)	0.009†	(0.005)
Intercept	0.198**	(0.030)
<hr/>		
N		98
R <sup>2</sup>		0.045
F (2,95)		2.242
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Significance levels : † : 10% * : 5% ** : 1%		

Table 4: Variation of being left-winged

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Percentage of Unemployment (log)	0.003	(0.025)
Percentage of English Speakers (log)	0.002	(0.008)
Intercept	0.040	(0.051)

N	98
R <sup>2</sup>	0.001
F (2,95)	.036

Significance levels : † : 10% \* : 5% \*\* : 1%

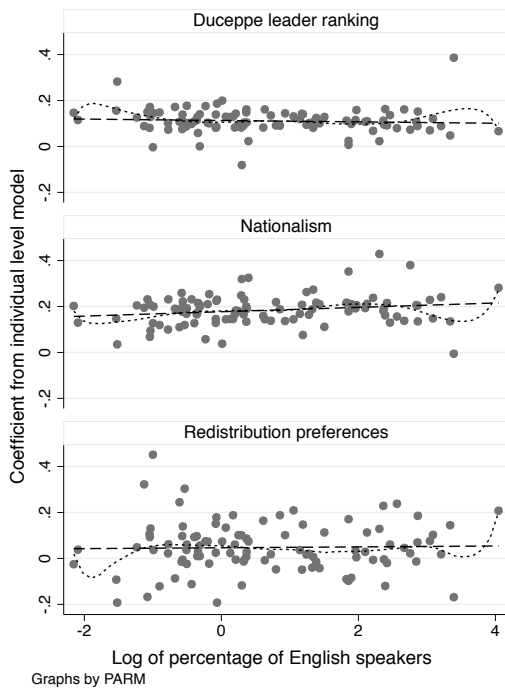


Figure 1: Effects of English speakers

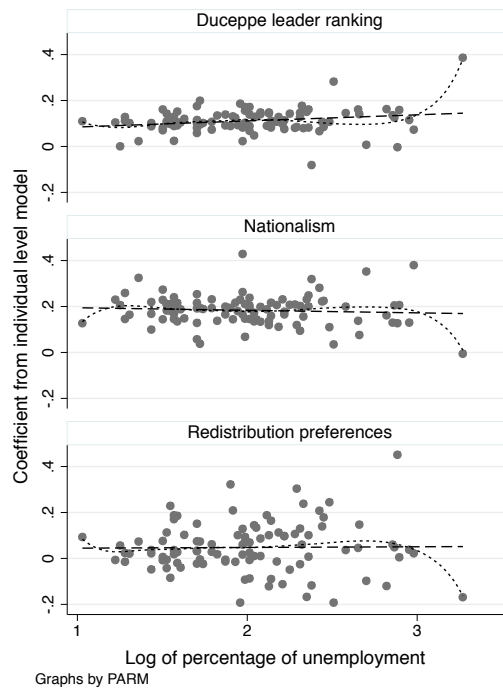


Figure 2: Effects of unemployment