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Down with the Senate? Understanding Support for the Abolition of the Senate in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Various governments have debated the question of whether the Canadian Senate should be abolished or reformed since 1980, yet a solution has still not been found. While some advocate for a substantial reform of the institution, others propose to get rid of it completely. Drawing from the 2021 Canadian Election Study, this article explores the underlying value systems that shape opinions on the abolition of the Canadian Senate. The findings suggest that support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate should be understood as part of a set of populist attitudes, the extent of political interest, political knowledge, and party identification.

KEYWORDS

Public opinion; Canadian Senate; populism; party identification; political sophistication

Context

The very existence of the Senate is not unanimous in Canada. Indeed, it struggles for legitimacy due to numerous scandals in recent years, most notably for “improper expense claims” (VandenBeukel, Cochrane, and Godbout 2021, 831). Various governments have debated the question of whether the Canadian Senate should be abolished or reformed since 1980, yet a solution has still not been found (Massicotte 2016). While some advocate for a substantial reform of the institution, others propose getting rid of it completely. An analysis of the polls between 1983 and 2013 shows that Canadians still do not have a definitive position on the question (Massicotte 2016). Moreover, the 2014 Supreme Court decision in the *Reference re Senate Reform* specifies that unanimous agreement between the provinces is required regarding any proposal for substantial reform or abolition of the Senate (*Reference re Senate Reform* 2014). Attempts of Senate reforms in Canada are indeed at the heart of a great history of federalism. The U.S.-style Triple-E (elected, effective, and equal) Senate, advocated in the 1980s by the Calgary School, is a striking example of the debates surrounding reform of the Canadian Senate. Despite the symbolic appeal of a Senate reform, Canadian provinces’ distinct political preferences are incompatible with regard to key objectives of the institution, such as the levels of representation and public spending (Lusztig 1995). Hence, as long as the issue is subject to parliamentary controversy, we might expect the status quo.

The Puzzle

This article investigates the structure and dynamics of mass attitudes toward the Senate in Canada. What factors and mechanisms drive these attitudes? As the Senate is still at the heart of many unanswered questions in the Canadian political landscape, the factors that contribute to public support for the abolition of the Senate are still misunderstood.

To deepen our understanding on the issue of public opinion toward the Senate in Canada, we explore the relationship between attitudinal and sociodemographic variables and support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. In particular, we investigate the correlation between its abolition and four key variables—party identification, political interest, political knowledge, and populism. Why is this important? Government responsiveness is an essential component of any democracy that relies on political legitimacy (Dahl 1971). Indeed, decision-makers must react to changes in citizens' attitudes and opinions (Donnelly and Lefkofridi 2014). Citizen consultation thus becomes an important exercise within a democracy (Verba 2003). In this respect, understanding public opinion toward the Senate becomes a matter of democratic legitimacy. Moreover, few scholars have investigated the attitudes of the Canadian Senate from an empirical perspective. Indeed, most inquiries are concerned with the study of the Senate reform, rather than what people think of the issue. The lack of scholarship related to attitudes toward the Senate in Canada is striking considering the attention the subject garnered in other countries, most notably the United Kingdom. Meg Russell's (2013) work on the House of Lords shows that the legitimacy of the House of Lords is also disputed and that there has been endless debates on reforming the Upper chamber over there as well. In a time when the legitimacy granted to the Senate is still ambiguous, researchers are under-equipped for understanding how citizens elaborate on attitudes toward the reform of the institution.

Thinking the Support for Senate Abolitionist Attitudes in Canada Party Identification

The positive effect of party identification on attitude formation and vote choice is well established, at least in the United States (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, and Weisberg 2008). While some studies consider party identification of Canadians to be real and stable (Sniderman, Forbes, and Melzer 1974; Gidengil et al. 2006), other research argues that it is fragile and flexible. Some even advance that it is of little use in understanding political behavior in Canada (Meisel 1975; Jenson 1975; Clarke 1984; Clarke, Kornberg, and Scotto 2009). On that note, Clarke (1984, 56) suggests that "the keystone of partisanship in Canada [is] its flexibility." In a more recent study of Canadian federal elections, Gidengil et al. (2012) also revisit the relevance of the concept. Their results show that for many voters, party identification is still an important factor in shaping their political attitudes. Other recent studies support these findings. For instance, a Conservative identification was found to positively predict support for the death penalty (Rancourt, Ouellet, and Dufresne 2020) and disbelief in climate change (Lachapelle, Borick, and Rabe 2012) in Canada.

Major Canadian political parties have taken a clear stance on the issue regarding the abolition of the Senate, as was the case in Ireland for the Seanad Abolition Referendum

(for more information on the subject, see MacCarthaigh and Martin (2015)). Since party identification is a cornerstone factor in determining voting preferences, Canadians should take cues from their political party they identify with and adopt their position on the issue. The Liberal Party of Canada opposes the abolition of the Senate, while the Bloc Québécois, the New Democratic Party, and the Green Party of Canada support the abolition. The Conservative Party of Canada prefers the reform of the Canadian Senate. The position of the People's Party of Canada is unclear.

Citizens frequently resort to cues to compensate for their lack of political knowledge (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993; Lupia 1994). Despite their lack of knowledge, these cues—or information shortcuts—help citizens reason about politics, such as parties, candidates, and issues (Popkin 1991). People resort to shortcuts in part because the limits of human cognition prevent them from acquiring the highly sophisticated political information that requires most normative democratic theories (Bartels 2002). While the literature on information shortcuts is vast, what actually qualifies as a shortcut is still ambiguous. Hinich and Munger (1996) argue that ideology and values are shortcuts because they can act both as a summary of preferences and determinants of preferences (Dufresne 2015). This “internal” perception of shortcuts is not consistent with Popkin’s (1991) conception of “external” shortcuts. Popkin (1991) argues that shortcuts are external cues that enable voters to draw conclusions about which candidate will best serve their interests in the context of an election campaign.

Given the recent findings from the Canadian literature in political behavior, and in line with the information shortcut literature (notably Hinich and Munger (1996)), we expect party identification to predict support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. Indeed, the popular lack of interest toward the Senate could mean that citizens resort to cues to make sense of all the information they receive related to this question. However, since the abolition of the Canadian Senate is not a salient issue, and questions relating to bicameralism are of little interest to voters, we can also expect citizens to ignore the position of their preferred political party on the issue. If this is the case, party identification would not be a significant predictor of attitude toward the Senate abolition.

Political Interest and Political Knowledge

Political interest and political knowledge are taken into consideration because of 1) their implication in the formation of *issue-publics*; and 2) because of their close interaction with party identification. Issue-publics, first developed by Converse (1964), refers to the group of citizens that are attentive, interested, and informed about a particular issue (Key 1961; Krosnick 1990). These groups of voters hold stable and consistent attitudes toward specific sets of issues (Iyengar et al. 2008). While the issue-public concerned with the Senate might be small, it is still possible that a segment of the electorate holds coherent attitudes toward the abolition of the institution. The issue public perspective is important to take into consideration because the salience of issues for individuals has strong implications. Indeed, the importance accorded to issues can have more effects on political behavior—such as vote choice—than other measures of political sophistication (Dufresne 2015). Thus, political interest and political knowledge can have important consequences for the way citizens reason about the Senate, and politically behave accordingly.

Second, these two concepts are closely related to party identification in the matter under study because the former conditions the latter. Indeed, politically interested citizens are more likely to be informed of their party's position on an issue, thus allowing them to be influenced more easily by cues. This echoes the first axis of Zaller (1992) notorious RAS model. The Receive-Accept-Sample model refers to the process in which citizens accept new information. The first axis, Receive, stipulates that the greater a citizen's political engagement is, the more likely they are to be exposed to political information.

We assume that party identification acts as a bridge between political interest, knowledge, and stances on issues. This assumption is aligned with the workhorse model of Michigan school's Funnel of Causality, which assumes that party identification has an indirect effect on issue orientations (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, and Weisberg 2008). It thus runs contrary to rational models of political behavior, which argue that issue positioning impacts voters' attitudes toward parties (Fiorina 1981).

Research has shown that informed and politically interested and knowledgeable voters are able to identify their political preferences and then translate them into support for a candidate or a clear stance on an issue (Carmines and Stimson 1980). This is more important for lesser-known issues. Indeed, we can expect the abolition of the Canadian Senate to be a less central issue to voters' lives than the economy or social services. These less salient issues might cause less-interested citizens to not know much about politics. Moreover, as media offers vastly more content via different mediums, politically uninterested people can more easily avoid information. Meanwhile, the interested seek out more news and learn more about politics (Prior 2005, 2007). Hence, we test the effect of political interest and political knowledge on attitudes toward the abolition of the Senate of Canada. While the direction of the effect is hard to determine, we believe that a citizen that is both politically interested and knowledgeable to have different attitudes than the median citizen toward the abolition of the Canadian Senate. The combination of the two can notably help citizens have a clear position on this issue and, because it conditions the effect of party identification (the greater people's political interest), the more aware they might be of their party's position and therefore the more likely they are to take cues from their party.

Populism

Populism can be defined as a set of ideas in which the good, virtuous people are pitted against the evil, corrupted elite (Canovan 2004; Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008; Oliver and Rahn 2016). Mudde (2004, 543) describes populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the 'volonté générale' (general will) of the people." As noted by Rousseau (1762, 2014) in *Du Contrat Social*, the general will is the basis of the institution of the people as sovereign and everyone must aim at the people's interest. This is in line with what some would call the communitarian spirit, which the authors have argued is present in Canada. Some scholars of Canadian political thought have emphasized the importance of the elite/mass dichotomy in the country (Porter 1965), while others considered a class analysis more relevant to understand the dynamics of Canadian social and political

institutions (Clement 1975). Charles Taylor has notably emphasized the failure of liberal individualism and the collectivist elements of the Canadian social and political context (Taylor 1994, 1998). This “spirit” can help explain why some Canadians would want to put the people first and would dread the participation of elites in politics. Besides their vilification of elites and glorification of the people, populists bring forth a particular understanding of political institutions (Bonikowski 2017). Populist rhetoric often delegitimizes democratic institutions. The moral mistrust of corrupt elites often extends to the institutions benefiting those elites, as evidenced by frequent references in populist discourse on rigged elections and the power of vested interests. Bonikowski (2017, 11) writes that, as “a result, populism often calls for the replacement of existing intermediate political institutions with more direct forms of participation (e.g., referenda instead of legislative action by elected representatives).” In defining populism, we follow the recommendation of Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) who advocates for a minimal definition of the concept. The advantage of Mudde’s (2004) definition is that it conceives populism as part of a larger ideational phenomenon (see also, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Although scholars interested in the question have defined and conceptualized populism in a myriad of ways, they all agree on the fact that a core characteristic of the phenomenon is the moral distinction between the people and the elite (Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). Studying attitudes on the abolition of the Senate thus allows us to grasp the way populists perceive the relationship between the mass public and elites. Keeping this in mind, we can expect citizens with populist attitudes are more likely to support the abolition of the Canadian Senate.

Measuring Senate Abolitionist Attitudes in Canada

Data Source

This study analyzes data from the 2021 Canadian Election Study (CES). Providing high-quality data, the 2021 edition of the CES contains all the conventional variables used in political behavior studies. Items about issues, such as the abolition of the Canadian Senate, party affiliations, political knowledge, political interest, and sociodemographic indicators are notably present in the dataset. A total of 20,968 Canadians took part in the 2021 edition of the CES, which allows for a fine-grained analysis. Missing values were handled with listwise deletion. When using listwise deletion, any individual in a data set is deleted from an analysis if they are missing data on any variable of interest. Missing data diagnosis shows that data are Missing At Random (MAR). This implies that unit missingness is not due to other covariates in the dataset. After removing the missing values to keep only respondents who answered all the questions in our final regression model, we were left with 6,515 respondents.

Measures

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the attitude toward the abolition of the Canadian Senate and is measured using the following straightforward statement: *The Senate should be abolished*. The answer choices are Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor

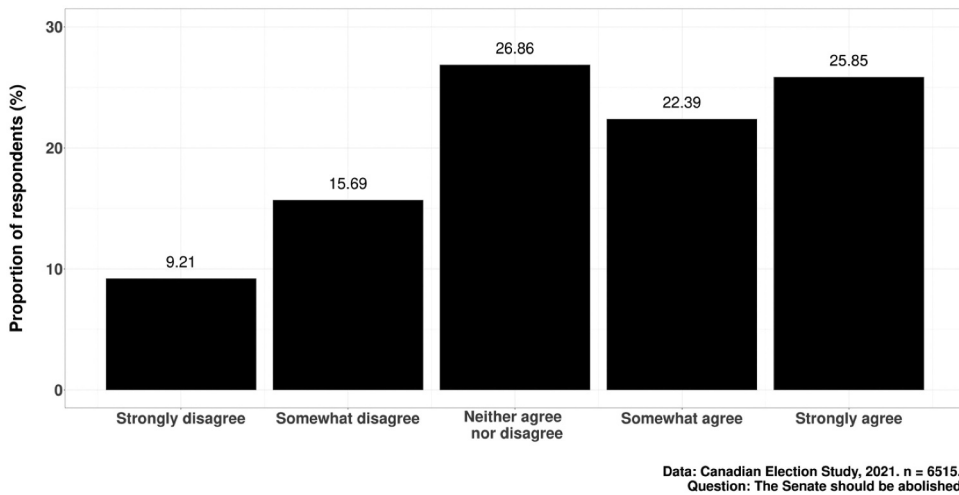


Figure 1. Responses to the prompt: *The Senate should be abolished*. Source: Canadian Election Study, 2021.

disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree, and Don't know/Prefer not to answer. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of respondents for the dependent variable. While the modal class is Neither agree nor disagree, almost half of Canadians at least somewhat agree with the abolition of the Senate of Canada.

Independent Variables

The four main independent variables are *party identification*, *political interest*, *political knowledge*, and *populism*. Party identification is measured by asking respondents which of the federal political parties they identified with the most. These results in five dichotomous variables, one for each of the main Canadian federal political parties. The political parties are the Bloc Quebecois, Conservative Party of Canada, Liberal Party of Canada, Green Party of Canada, and New Democratic Party. A respondent's answer is coded 1 when they indicate that they identify with a political party and 0 otherwise. Respondents were only allowed to identify with one Canadian federal political party. Respondents who did not identify with one of the main political parties were coded as identified as "Other party identification," while respondents who refused to answer or indicated that they did not know were coded as NA.

Political interest was measured by asking respondents in the 2021 CES edition how interested they were in politics generally. Respondents could choose a number from 0 to 10, 0 being not interested at all and 10 being very interested. Respondents who refused to answer were coded as NA. The political knowledge variable is measured with three questions. The survey asked respondents if they could identify 1) who is the Prime Minister of their own province; 2) who is the federal Minister of Finance; and 3) who is the Governor-General of Canada. Each answer is coded 0 or 1. If a respondent answered correctly, their answer was coded 1 and 0 otherwise. If a respondent said that they did not know the answer, they were coded as having answered incorrectly and were coded 0. This

creates a measure going from 0 to 3. For analytical purposes, this variable was recoded from 0 to 1 by dividing the score of a respondent by 3. Respondents who refused to answer were coded as NA.

The populism variable is measured using a multi-item scale, considering the number of questions available to us and the complexity to properly measure a latent concept using only one indicator. Some studies have shown that using issue scales composed of multiple items instead of individual indicators eliminate a large amount of measurement error (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). The scales used in this analysis are built using the factor scores for the first factor of principal component factor analyses. Prior research has shown that the use of scales composed of multiple indicators (instead of individual survey items) significantly reduces statistical error in measuring attitudes about complex phenomena (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). The multiple-survey questions of the 2021 CES allow the construction of a reliable measurement scale of populist attitudes. Various statistical techniques (e.g., factor analysis) are used to ensure the validity and reliability of the scale. More details about the reliability of the multi-items scale are presented in the [Appendix](#). The populism scale is composed of five items, each selected for their populist value in the Canadian context (see [Appendix](#)). The items are as follows: 1) What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one's principles; 2) The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions; 3) Most politicians do not care about the people; 4) Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful; 5) Most politicians are trustworthy (inverted). All responses were coded using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Respondents needed to have answered every one of the populism questions to be included in the analysis. If a respondent did not answer one or more of the questions, they were considered missing values. The composition of the scale is in line with previous research on the measurement of populist attitudes. Oliver and Rahn (2016) and Spruyt, Keppens, and Droogenbroeck (2016) use similar scales to successfully measure the complex concept of populism.

Control Variables

Considering existing empirical evidence about what factors influence citizens' attitudes toward issues, several other sociodemographic variables are included in our analysis. Age is divided into three dichotomous variables: 34 years old and younger, 35–54 years old, and 54 years old and older. Education is divided into three dichotomous variables: less than secondary education, high school degree, and university diploma. Sex is measured using a binary variable where 1 represents being a woman. Income is divided into three dichotomous variables using terciles: low income, mid-level income, and high income. Finally, considering Canada's complex cultural and political landscape, the place of residence is measured using three dichotomous variables: Quebec, Western provinces, and the rest of Canada.

Understanding Senate Abolitionist Attitudes in Canada

To answer the research question, regression analysis is used to assess the determinants of support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. More specifically, linear regression

models are estimated to evaluate the statistical significance and the impact of each of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Seven models are estimated to test the impact of each independent variable on the feelings toward the Senate in Canada. Models 1, 3, and 5 show the relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. Models 2, 4, and 6 add control variables, while Model 7 includes all the independent variables and all the control variables. This way of presenting regression results is useful when it is relevant to show the effect of adding variables on the link between the independent variables and the dependent variables (Allen 2017). The tests for the effects of partisan identification, political interest, political knowledge, and populism on Senate abolitionist attitudes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Determinants of support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate.

	Support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
PLC Party Id.	−0.10*** (0.02)	−0.11*** (0.02)					−0.06*** (0.02)
PCC Party Id.	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.03* (0.02)					−0.02 (0.02)
NDP Party Id.	−0.04* (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)					0.01 (0.02)
BQ Party Id.	0.16*** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)					0.10*** (0.02)
GPC Party Id.	−0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)					0.04 (0.03)
Interest in politics			0.03 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)			0.03 (0.05)
Political knowledge			−0.14* (0.06)	−0.13* (0.06)			−0.10 (0.07)
Interest in politics * Political knowledge			0.19*** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)			0.11** (0.04)
Populism					0.28*** (0.03)	0.35*** (0.03)	0.33*** (0.03)
Younger than 34		−0.06*** (0.01)		−0.05*** (0.01)		−0.04** (0.01)	−0.05*** (0.01)
Older than 55		0.07*** (0.01)		0.07*** (0.01)		0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Women		−0.03** (0.01)		−0.04*** (0.01)		−0.03*** (0.01)	−0.03** (0.01)
No high school diploma		0.002 (0.03)		0.01 (0.03)		−0.01 (0.03)	−0.005 (0.03)
University diploma		−0.04*** (0.01)		−0.05*** (0.01)		−0.03** (0.01)	−0.02* (0.01)
Ontario		−0.03 (0.02)		−0.04 (0.02)		−0.03 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)
Quebec		0.07*** (0.02)		0.09*** (0.02)		0.12*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)
Western provinces		−0.04 (0.02)		−0.03 (0.02)		−0.03 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)
Constant	0.63*** (0.01)	0.64*** (0.02)	0.52*** (0.03)	0.58*** (0.03)	0.43*** (0.02)	0.37*** (0.03)	0.35*** (0.04)
<i>N</i>	6,139	6,127	6,356	6,347	6,169	6,160	5,760
<i>R</i> ²	0.05	0.09	0.01	0.07	0.03	0.11	0.13
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.05	0.09	0.01	0.07	0.03	0.11	0.13

Source: Canadian Electoral Study, 2019.

Note: Linear regression. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

Table 1 shows that partisan affiliation in Canada is a statically significant determinant of Senate abolitionist attitudes for some citizens. Identifying with the Bloc Quebecois leads to an increase in support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. This is in line with the party's position, as is the results for Liberal identification. Indeed, respondents who indicated that they identified with the Liberal Party of Canada greatly oppose the abolition of the Canadian Senate. Identifying with any other major Canadian political parties does not seem to influence abolitionist attitudes in 2021. We posited that party identification would influence abolitionist attitudes. It seems that it does for political parties whose position is very clear and who have been vocal about it in the last few years. Supporters of parties for whom the issue is not very important, such as the Green Party of Canada, do not seem to have a particularly strong opinion on the matter.

Table 1 also indicates that, by itself, political interest is not a statistically significant determinant of Senate abolitionist attitudes. Indeed, changes in political interest do not seem to have an impact on attitudes toward the abolition of the Canadian Senate. By itself, political knowledge does not seem to impact much abolitionist attitudes. Furthermore, knowing more about the issue, in a vacuum, is not making Canadians more or less supportive of the abolition of the Senate. However, as we posited, there is something to be noted about the interaction between these variables.

Interestingly, the interaction between these variables is statistically significant, indicating that citizens that are both knowledgeable about and interested in politics, who we might label the political elites, clearly have a different opinion from the median Canadian on that issue. Indeed, as shown in Model 7 of **Table 1**, the political elites support the abolition of the Canadian Senate. This is somewhat in line with previous research on political interest and knowledge as many note the importance of interest and knowledge on citizens' position on issues (see notably Prior (2005, 2007) on the subject). However, in this specific case, it is unclear why political elites believe that the Canadian Senate should be abolished. More research on the subject is needed to better understand the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Table 1 also shows the results for the test of the impact of populism on support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. We posited that populist respondents would support the abolition of the institution in greater numbers than non-populist respondents. The results from Model 7 indicate that the largest portion of variance in support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate is attributable to the populism scale. The higher a respondent scores on the scale, the greater the chance they have to be in favor of abolishing the Canadian Senate. It is the independent variable that has the most predictive power, even after accounting for all other explicative and control variables. These findings corroborate what some authors on populism and public opinion previously found: people with populist attitudes favor the abolition or replacement of existing political institutions (Bonikowski 2017). However, the literature on the interaction between populism and democratic Canadian institutions, such as the Senate, is essentially nonexistent. This makes it hard to interpret these results beyond this point.

Model 7 of **Table 1** also indicates that age, gender, and province of residence greatly influence attitudes toward the Canadian Senate. The impact of education appears to be very low. Since the literature on the subject of institution abolition is quite limited, it is hard to interpret the descriptive results coming from these sociodemographic variables.

Discussion

For now, the literature on the abolition of upper houses around the world is quite small. In fact, a review of the literature on attitudes toward the Canadian Senate revealed there were only a handful of studies on the subject, and almost no quantitative ones. The support for the abolition of the Senate of Canada is striking and deserves investigation. The status quo on abolishing the Canadian Senate has lasted for years. It is rare to see an issue that is dividing the population so much not receiving more interest. As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), almost half of the respondents in the 2021 edition of the Canadian Election Study are at least somewhat agreeing with abolishing the Senate. Considering that this issue has not been really salient in Canada in the last years, the substantial support among Canadians required an explanation. We have suggested that abolitionist attitudes are driven mostly by populist attitudes and in part in terms of party identification and political interest and knowledge.

As we posited, Canadians' pro-Senate abolition attitudes can be seen as a rejection of politics and politicians. For some time now, scholars have examined mass surveys in search of items that provide a valid measure of populism. We believe that support for the abolition of the Senate is a reliable indicator to measure populist attitudes. While our inquiry focuses on Canada, more research is needed to test this new indicator in other countries possessing upper chambers in their political system. Moreover, given the absence of regular public debate on the abolition of the Canadian Senate over the last years, we expected variables related to interest in politics and party identification to make a major contribution in explaining abolitionist attitudes. [Table 1](#) shows that it is not exactly the case. Indeed, both political interest and party identification's effects on abolitionist attitudes are marginal. However, the interaction between the two is statistically significant, indicating, as we posited, that political elites, as well as Canadian populists, support the abolition of the Canadian Senate. Bloc Québécois identifiers also support the abolition of the Canada, while Liberal identifiers want to keep the institution.

This research is not immune to theoretical and methodological limitations. Indeed, some potentially relevant variables from the 2021 Canadian Election Study had too many missing values and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Another methodological limit relates to the use of single-item measurement of attitudes. While we think our measure of populism is pretty solid, the measures of party identification, political knowledge, and political interest are not without flaws, as they are self-reported assessments. This should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, this analysis contributes to the literature by distinguishing an interpretable pattern that is helpful in understanding the support for the abolition of the Canadian Senate. Furthermore, this research also offers theoretical and methodological avenues to a phenomenon that has not been studied much: attitudes toward the abolition of upper houses.

These results must be interpreted carefully, and further research needs to be done in order to complement this analysis. Investigating pro-abolitionist attitudes in a comparative setting could better explain the phenomenon. An approach using open-ended questions could also enable researchers to better understand what people think of when asked about the abolition of a chamber of Parliament. The literature has yet to address such phenomenon. Moreover, there is an important lack of research on the role of

populism and populist politicians in non-elected institutions. Attention should notably be devoted to understanding how populist attitudes and populist politicians thrive in non-institutional contexts. Furthermore, scholars should look into the consequences of the abolition or the reform of the Canadian Senate. Indeed, whether it is the complete removal of the institution, the result of a Canadian “Bundesrat” – as proposed by Peter Loughheed in the 1970s and supported by the Pepin-Robarts Commission report (Weaver 2000) – or the “Triple E” Senate, these changes would greatly impact Canadian politics. Research on the possible consequences of establishing an elected rival to the lower house in the Canadian parliamentary system would be relevant. Hopefully, this analysis will encourage continued elaboration and empirical tests on abolitionist attitudes toward the upper houses, and the Canadian Senate in general.

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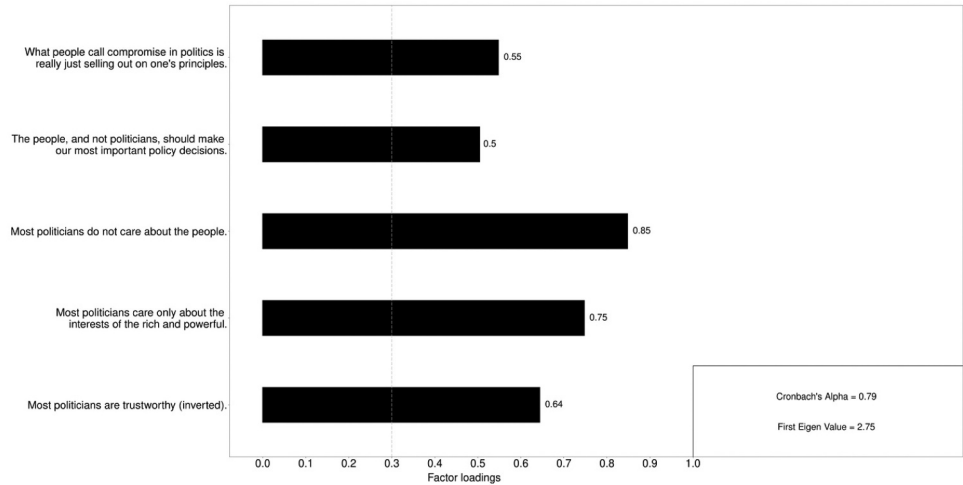
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Appendix



Note: Public opinion toward the abolition of the Canadian Senate (2021). Source: Canadian Election Study, 2021.