

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Subjective economic insecurity and attitudes toward immigration and feminists among voters on the Right in Canada

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## Abstract

The recent success of far-right populism has led to a wave of public attention to its causes. Drawing on novel survey items from the Canadian Election Study, we investigate how economic insecurity, mediated by immigration and feminist attitudes, affects voting behavior. While economic distress has been linked to far-right voting in Europe, we find support that subjective measures of economic distress are significantly associated with voting for the Right in Canada, when interacting with immigration and feminist attitudes. However, the association only holds for men. The findings suggest that Canada, despite its comparatively weak nativist cleavage, is not immune to tensions arising from globalization and economic insecurity.

With the growing success of right-wing populist parties in many European countries, coupled with the support for Brexit and Donald Trump coming from areas in economic decline, there has been an increased interest in understanding whether and how employment insecurity affects partisan choices. Clearly, something is afoot inside global conservatism. In many systems of proportional representation, there has been a fracturing on the Right, with new radical right or far-right parties increasing their support (Golder 2016). Inside majoritarian countries, there have been ruptures inside traditional conservative parties that have led them to an increasingly populist tactic (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Hostility to immigration stemming from fears of its disruption to local labor markets is a central theme in the scholarly and public literature explaining a turn to far-right candidates and political parties (Baccini and Weymouth 2021; Ferrari 2021; Rebecchi and Rohde 2023). A central part of the argument is that in the wake of the widespread shift to more flexible labor markets, workers experience greater fear for their jobs and livelihoods. This, in turn, leads to a greater hostility to immigration as an added threat to livelihoods. However, the scholarly literature has not always found clear and compelling evidence for this thesis. Consequently, an alternative explanation is frequently developed, which is to say that the turn to the far-right or populist conservative candidates is a product of fears of immigration corroding national identity and culture. In effect, voters

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supporting far-right or populist conservative candidates are deemed to be hopelessly racist (Sides et al. 2018).

This study examines how labor market precarity, hostility to immigration, and economic anxiety intersect in voting behavior in Canada. Canada provides an interesting case study. Income inequality has been increasing faster in Canada than in most other advanced economies (Heisz 2016; Polacko 2020, p. 1325). Recent evidence also shows that demand-side populist attitudes have been prevalent in the country, despite the lack of supply-side factors (Medeiros 2021). This is likely owing to the country's majoritarian electoral system, which has restrained the growth of a far-right party. However, the relationship between economic insecurity, immigration sentiment, and voting has largely been ignored in the literature, likely due to Canada's traditionally weak class cleavage (Alford 1963) and comparatively high support for immigration (Banting and Soroka 2020).

Our analysis is guided by three primary research questions. First, is subjective economic insecurity related to voting for the Right in Canada? Second, if so, is this related to support for the Right through opposition to immigration, or a combination of opposition to immigration and a backlash against feminism? Third, are these related to support for the Right for both men and women?

To answer these questions, this study uses a new measure of precarity to examine support for the Conservative Party of Canada and the People's Party of Canada (PPC) to test specifically whether individuals' subjective perceptions of the precarity of their standing in the labor force generate support for these parties on the Right. This measure is not frequently deployed in the literature on support for the Right but carries distinct advantages. As we will document below, economic insecurity is linked to support for the Right, but only when combined with hostility to immigration and feminists. Moreover, this effect is restricted to men. This occurs even though men and women do not differ in their subjective assessments of their precarity, nor in their hostility to immigrants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is significant scholarly evidence for the case that difficult economic times drive voters to the far right (Golder 2016). For example, Dehdari (2021, p. 3) looks at the distribution of layoff notices by skill at the precinct level in Sweden and found that "for every low-skilled native-born worker receiving a layoff notice, the [radical right] SD gain on average 0.17–0.45 votes." If immigration mattered, it was due to economic competition: in precincts with large numbers of low-skilled immigrants, the effect of layoff notices was strengthened.

By contrast, Stockemer et al.'s (2018) review noted that only 30 percent of studies that tested for a linkage between the experience of unemployment and radical right voting managed to find one. Instead, that review found that variables capturing anti-immigration attitudes were more frequently correlated with support for the radical right, although the success rate was hardly resounding. Only half of the studies under review found a positive relationship between anti-immigration attitudes and voting for the radical right.

For some researchers, anti-immigration views are nevertheless driven in part by economic insecurity, such that it is essential that the economic grievances and the anti-immigration story be considered together. Golder (2016) cites several studies showing that the experience of unemployment works through anti-immigration attitudes to generate support for the right. More recently, Cohen (2018, p. 30) argues "economic insecurity and the most salient attitudinal driver of radical right support, restrictive immigration preferences, should be viewed as causally interrelated and complementary rather than as competing approaches," as the impact of precarity on right voting may be mediated by immigration preferences. In other words, economic anxiety, or labor market precarity, may lead people to oppose immigration in a bid to reduce labor market competition, and that may in turn lead to a rational vote for an anti-immigration party. Specifically, he finds that a one-standard deviation increase in economic risk produces a 1.69-percentage point increase in radical right voting (which is proportionally large given an average

radical right vote of 7.29 percent), and that roughly one third of this effect works through the immigration channel.

Precisely why hard times, labor market precarity, economic anxiety, or the experience of unemployment, might lead to opposition to immigration is also not fully clear. It might be a rational calculation that it is necessary to reduce labor market competition, as in Dehdari's (2021) study mentioned above, but it might also be a result of a more generalized status decline. Evidence for the latter position might be found in the well-documented gender gap, whereby men support the far right at much greater rates than women (Givens 2004). The opposition to immigration is often framed as cultural backlash: in the face of cultural change, White men risk losing their place in gender and racial hierarchies and react by supporting parties that claim to uphold the old order (Norris and Inglehart 2019). One would therefore expect to find similar backlash looking at race and gender questions. Certainly, the radical right parties are characterized by male politicians and voters, and their programs defend family values and oppose pro-women measures on the grounds that equality has been achieved (Dancygier 2020). In this vein, Rebecchi and Rhode's (2023) study of voting for Donald Trump found that the cultural explanator of "perceived reverse discrimination" was quantitatively more important than employment insecurity, often by a factor of two or three (see also Baccini and Weymouth 2021). Similarly, studies in Sweden (Off 2023) and Spain (Anduiza and Rico 2023) suggest that periods of strong feminist mobilization produced a backlash that boosted the radical right in subsequent elections.

Still, there are wrinkles to backlash accounts. For instance, Grimmer and Marble (2019) take issue with the narrative that Trump's victory was attributable to his appeal to anti-immigration attitudes and racial resentment among White Americans, a thesis best documented by Sides et al. (2018). The latter point out that the correlation between expressed racial resentment and the probability of voting Republican increased between 2012 and 2016. However, Grimmer and Marble point out that even so, Trump won *less* votes among the voters with the highest levels of racial resentment.

More directly to the interests of this study, these claims about cultural backlash and the emphasis on immigration and anti-feminism as major draws for populist right parties have mostly been made without emphasis on how economic insecurity might activate a sense of status threat. An exception would be Baccini and Weymouth (2021), who consider the impact of manufacturing layoffs on voting for the Republicans in the 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections. They find that manufacturing layoffs trigger status concerns among Whites (but not voters of color), which leads them to vote for candidates who defend racial hierarchy. Likewise, Carian and Sobotka (2018) argue that threats of status loss can be materially based, as unemployment fragilizes a breadwinner masculinity. In their experimental design, men receiving messages about potential job losses were more likely to desire a masculine president and ultimately support Trump. On this note, the emerging consensus in economics is that the increasing labor market precarity in Canada, usually measured as declining job tenures, is primarily concentrated among men (Brochu 2013; Deutsch-Heng et al. 2023; St-Denis and Hollister 2023).

A primary reason for these varied findings is the difficulty associated with defining and operationalizing "economic anxiety" or "hard times." How does one define economic insecurity? There is a difference between "objective" insecurity, defined with reference to things such as the conditions of labor contracts (fixed vs. indefinite; part-time vs. full-time) or occupational unemployment rates, and "subjective" insecurity, defined in terms of the expressed perceptions of individuals.

For example, unemployment is almost always measured *retrospectively* and not *prospectively*. Hence, almost no one pays attention to the possibility that voters might turn to the far right not out of a form of revenge, but out of a pre-emptive protective strategy. But if insecurity reflects "the risk of loss" (Cohen 2018), there are reasons to prefer subjective measures. There are many contextual features of an individual's situation that condition how objective features of an employment situation are translated into an individual risk assessment (Chung and Mau 2014). If our interest is how this insecurity affects policy attitudes and voting choices, there is value in having individuals express their feelings directly rather than trying to draw inferences from their employment situation. In addition, insecurity is partly prospective as it involves an assessment of future risks, and so may not be fully captured by objective definitions that are either presentist or backward looking. As Cohen (2018, p. 32) notes, many existing studies focus on "what people

have (or the lack thereof) and not on what people have to lose.” In comparing a prospective measure of economic risk with one of experienced unemployment and lost income, the prospective measure showed a much stronger effect (Cohen 2018, p. 48).

While the literature on voting behavior seems to have settled on the consensus that voters tend to engage in retrospective voting, the story is different with voters’ assessments of their own personal economic prospects. That is to say, consumers are quite good at predicting their own economic fortunes. There is substantial evidence that subjective insecurity is related to objective features of people’s employment situation, such as whether work is fixed contract, seasonal, or ongoing; the regional unemployment rate; and past individual experiences of unemployment (Green et al. 2001, p. 10). Finally, people seem to possess relatively reliable information about their unemployment risk, even if they do tend to overestimate it. Green et al. (2001, p. 14) showed that “the level of fear is positively and significantly correlated with actual unemployment experience over the subsequent year.” Similarly, Dominitz and Manski (1996) find that Americans accurately predict their short-term employment and health insurance status.

At the same time, while the experience of unemployment is one of the most frequently employed measures to assess the relationship between economic difficulty and support for the far right, it has limitations as a measure. For example, when macroeconomic conditions are good, unemployment may not bring with it serious consequences for voters, as jobs may be available, or savings may be sufficient such that the consequences of unemployment may be low.

If unemployment has its share of difficulties, so does the alternative of income. Experimentally, Harell et al. (2012) found that while a respondent’s income was not related to support or opposition to immigration, a potential immigrant’s skill level was, suggesting again that material circumstances are not absent from voters’ calculations. Elsewhere, Hacker (2019) highlights other difficulties with capturing the “hard times” or economic insecurity that is hypothesized to generate such support for the far right. He argues that the public debate about “hard times” is not incorrect, but that it is not best captured by income statistics. After all, the real median household income in the United States in 2020 was 39 percent higher than in 1967 (Shrider et al. 2021). Instead, he argues that the *increased volatility* of incomes from more flexible labor regimes is responsible for a great deal of the anxiety people experience. In short, workers may be employed, but on such unfriendly work contracts such that their incomes may fluctuate significantly, leading to a fairly unhappy existence, which can prime them to support far-right parties.

The foregoing stands as our motivation to study the intersection of economic anxiety, hostility to immigration, and support for the Right in Canada. Before presenting our analysis, however, it is worth noting that the bulk of the scholarly research in this area focuses on the far-right, radical right, or right-wing populist parties. The reason for this is that these are primarily seen as signs of an existential threat to liberal democracy. Two of the reviews we identified above specifically summarized research on far-right voting. This necessarily focuses attention on proportional electoral systems where smaller parties are viable. As Canada and the United States are majoritarian electoral systems, they have not really featured these kinds of parties. And yet, there are clear shades of similarities between the style of politics and policies exhibited by leaders of traditional conservative parties like the Republican Party under Donald Trump. This is perhaps an outlier case of a populist capturing the mainstream conservative party in a majoritarian election, but there are several reasons why it is worth considering the impact of economic precarity on voting for right parties more generally rather than far-right or radical right parties, especially in countries with majoritarian institutions. First, Spierings and Zaslove (2015, pp. 138–39) observe that voting for populist right-wing parties is simply a “more radicalized version of voting for the center-right.” To the extent that mainstream conservative parties in these systems have included some nativist and exclusionary themes in their manifestoes and campaigns, they are appealing for the votes of that electorate within the aggregative logic of a majoritarian voting system. Second, given the role that voters’ strategic calculations about the electoral viability of populist right parties play in their willingness to vote for them (Cohen 2018; Oshri et al. 2023), a party of the mainstream right embracing exclusionary themes is probably attractive to such voters.

Although Canada does not boast an electorally successful radical right party, the right wing has gone through several metamorphoses in the last 20 years to accommodate some of the cleavages that have

led to far-right parties in other countries (Jeffrey 1999). The old Progressive Conservative Party splintered in 1993, producing the more socially conservative and anti-immigration Reform Party on its right. The two merged again in 2004 in the Conservative Party. To appeal to a broader electorate, the merged party tamped down the Reform Party's concerns. It accepted the broad lines of the existing immigration policy, but with nods to tightening the immigration process that made it the most restrictive of the major parties. Under the leadership of Stephen Harper (2006–2015), the party reached out to communities of new Canadians. Yet, ahead of the 2015 election, the party cut health care funding for recent refugees and campaigned on proposals to support citizen reporting of “barbaric practices.” In 2018, a new party, the People's Party of Canada, emerged to the right of the Conservatives, which made much more explicit promises about reducing immigration rates. Although it has not yet elected a member of parliament, the PPC appears to have staying power as they increased their share of the vote from 1.6 percent in 2019 to 4.9 in 2021. Examining the post-2004 period, Banting and Soroka (2021) observe that while Conservative supporters favored immigration at the same rate as supporters of the centrist Liberals and social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2004, their support for immigration visibly lagged behind that of these parties' supporters a decade and a half later. They are unsure whether the Conservative's anti-immigration signaling helped drive the shift in their supporters' views, or if they adopted this signaling in response to their supporters' attitudes. However, there is evidence of an increasing nativist cleavage emerging (Gordon et al. 2020), whereby the working class in particular is moving toward the Conservatives over immigration (Polacko et al. 2022). One way or another, with individual survey data showing that roughly 30 percent of Canadians are hostile to immigration (Besco and Tolley 2019), there are potential benefits for a party that presents itself as the most restrictive on this question.

Canadian research also mirrors the international research that finds a significant gender gap, where men have been more likely to support right-wing parties (Giger 2009). In Canada, Gidengil et al. (2005) show that men have been particularly more likely to vote for the new right parties on the right of the old Progressive Conservative Party (e.g., the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance Party). They further find that low income was correlated with support from men, and not from women, but that social conservatism and anti-statism were more significantly correlated with support for the right-wing party among men and women. They find that “in marked contrast to the lack of support for structural and situational explanations, fundamental values and beliefs prove to be the critical factors in explaining the gender gap in support for the new right” (Gidengil et al. 2005, p. 1188). However, as noted above, the problem with these types of explanations is that they rarely have any explanation for where cultural values derive from (Kiss et al. 2017; Wildavsky 1987). As Cohen (2018) and Ferrari (2021) argue, attitudes to immigration are themselves affected by situational features such as local layoffs or family-level economic conditions. As such, rather than treating economic drivers and attitudes to immigration as competing explanators, they argue to instead consider their interaction.

## DATA AND METHODS

To examine the relationship between subjective economic insecurity and support for the Right in Canada, this study relies on the Canadian Election Study, which is the most extensive survey on public opinion and voting in Canada. We test three novel survey items included in the 2019 Canadian Election Study (Stephenson et al. 2020). The items were fielded in the online portion of the campaign period survey. We undertake linear regression throughout, and survey weights are included to reflect the national demographic distribution in terms of age, education, and gender.<sup>1</sup>

The dependent variable derives from the intended vote choice of respondents. Vote choice for either the Conservative Party or the PPC, which splintered from the Conservatives prior to the 2019 election, is

<sup>1</sup> We use the weights provided by the Canadian Election Study team.



**TABLE 1** Mean score of key independent variables by vote and gender.

Independent Variable	Men	Women	Right vote	Non-Right voters	Overall
Precarity	0.28	0.28	0.3	0.27	0.28
Consequence	0.72	0.78	0.76	0.74	0.76
Anti-immigrant sentiment	0.4	0.39	0.5	0.34	0.4
Anti-feminist sentiment	0.5	0.39	0.57	0.36	0.43

coded as 1, and all other parties are coded as 0. Due to the survey sample size ( $n = 2339$ ), it is not feasible to test the populist far-right PPC's support separately, as the survey only contains 54 PPC voters.

To measure subjective economic insecurity, we employ three subjective measures. Income volatility is measured via three different responses to a question asking how often a respondent's paycheck varies over the past 12 months. Possible answers in increasing propensity include "roughly the same," "occasionally," and "quite often." Job or business loss probability is measured via answers on a five-point scale to the question: "how do you rate the chances of you losing your job/business?" Possible answers run from "very low/serious" to "very high/serious." We combine these two measures into a *precarity* index.<sup>2</sup> Our last measure captures a different aspect of subjective insecurity, which is how people experience the ramifications of economic insecurity. The *consequence* of job or business loss variable is measured through answers on a five-point scale to the question: 'how serious would it be if you lost your job/business? Answers again range from "very low/serious" to "very high/serious." Both the independent variables are rescaled 0–1, with higher numbers attributed to greater subjective economic distress.

We rely on a range of standard demographic controls known to influence vote choice in Canada (Gidengil et al. 2012; Gidengil 2022; Johnston 2017). Due to Canada's pronounced regional cleavages, *region* is coded as a four-category variable (Atlantic, Ontario, Quebec, and West). *Age* is included as a continuous variable. Household *income* is measured in quintiles (low to high), and education is a dummy coded 1 for *degree* holders. Higher income earners and non-degree holders have been positively related to Conservative support in Canada (Kiss et al. 2023). Homeownership has also been found to be a strong predictor of Conservative support in Canada (Erl 2021; McGregor & Spicer 2016). The gender gap has increased substantially in recent years, with men more likely to support the Right (Gidengil et al. 2012). Since a key independent variable measures immigration attitudes, we also control for whether someone is an immigrant. Therefore, *homeowner*, *male*, and *native-born* dummy variables are included. We also control for *political ideology* via an 11-point left–right index, rescaled (0–1). Last, our two explanatory attitudinal variables measure *immigrant sentiment* and *feminist sentiment* via feeling thermometer questions asking respondents: "how do you feel about immigrants/feminists?" We rescale the variables from 0–100 to 0–1 (where 0 = like and 1 = dislike).

## RESULTS

### Descriptive analysis

First, we explore the relationship of each of our four independent variables with voting and gender. Table 1 displays the average percentage of our two subjective insecurity measures and both immigrant and feminist attitudes, which are disaggregated by gender and Right vote versus other party vote.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The volatility and probability *precarity* variables are weakly correlated at  $r = 0.24$ .

<sup>3</sup> See Supporting Information Appendix 1 for full control summary statistics.

There is no discernible gender difference in the *precarity* index, but there is for *consequence* of job/business loss. Men and women do not report differences in subjective levels of labor market anxiety, but women believe that the consequences of losing their job/business are greater. Furthermore, for both measures, men are slightly more likely to vote for the Right than women, ranging from 2 to 3 percentage points, although this is likely reflective of men being much more likely to vote for the Right in Canada overall. Indeed, in our sample of the 2019 election, men were 11 percentage points more likely to vote for the Right.

Surprisingly, we see little gender difference in hostility to immigration with men only slightly more anti-immigrant than women. However, this convergence in attitudes by gender does not transfer well into voting patterns, as the average Right voter is 10 percentage points more anti-immigrant than the average person and 16 percentage points more so than voters of other parties. Unsurprisingly, we see a large gender difference in *feminist sentiment*, as men are 11 percentage points more anti-feminist than women. Even more pronounced is the voting gap, as Right voters are 21 percentage points more anti-feminist than non-Right voters. Thus, preliminary evidence shows that both *immigrant sentiment* and *feminist sentiment* are much greater predictors of Right voting than either subjective insecurity measure.

## Subjective insecurity estimations

Next, we investigate subjective economic insecurity in Canada by undertaking ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with the combined *Right vote* of the Conservatives and PPC as the dependent variable. We first estimate a baseline model including our two subjective insecurity variables and two explanatory attitudinal variables, while controlling for *gender*, *age*, *degree*, *homeownership*, *income*, *native-born* status, *region*, and *political ideology*. We then undertake an interaction between each of our two attitudinal variables (*immigrant sentiment* and *feminist sentiment*) with our *precarity* measure, for both low and high subjective *consequence* of job/business loss individuals. Table 2 displays the results.<sup>4</sup>

Older, richer, lower educated, foreign-born, and males prefer the parties on the Right, but none are statistically significant. However, westerners, homeowners, and ideologically right-leaning people significantly support the Right. People with higher anti-immigrant and anti-feminist sentiment significantly prefer the Right. Most importantly, each of our two subjective insecurity measures is positively related to voting for the Right, but neither are statistically significant. Therefore, we find limited support that subjective insecurity is associated with voting for the Right in Canada.

Delving further, Models 2a/b estimate an interaction between *immigrant sentiment* and subjective *precarity*, first for low *consequence* of job/business loss individuals, followed by high *consequence* individuals. In Model 1, *precarity* is positive but engenders a very limited effect, and in Model 2a, we again see a limited effect for low *consequence* individuals. However, in Model 2b, the interaction is positive and significant at  $p < 0.01$ . To attain a better grasp of the interaction, Figure 1 plots the average marginal effect of *precarity* by *immigrant sentiment* on voting for the Right for both low (left) and high (right) *consequence* individuals. It shows that for people with subjectively low *consequence* of job/business loss, the effect is close to zero at all levels of *immigrant sentiment*. However, this differs significantly for people with subjectively high *consequence* of job/business loss. When subjective insecurity is low and people have very positive views of immigrants, the likelihood to vote for the Right is associated with roughly an 18-percentage point decrease in Right voting. However, with greater subjective insecurity and stronger anti-immigrant sentiment, the likelihood to vote for the Right increases significantly. At the greatest extent of anti-immigrant sentiment, high subjective insecurity increases the likelihood to vote for the Right by roughly 40 percentage points.

<sup>4</sup> We also undertake separate analyses relying on only Conservative voters as the dependent variable (see Supporting Information Appendix 3). The anti-immigration effect becomes stronger, but the anti-feminist effect weakens substantially, although it is still statistically significant. This impacts the interactions, as the anti-immigration interactions remain statistically significant, while the anti-feminist interactions lose significance but retain direction and much of the effect. Thus, it appears that PPC voters are driving some of the anti-feminist sentiment on the Right in Canada.

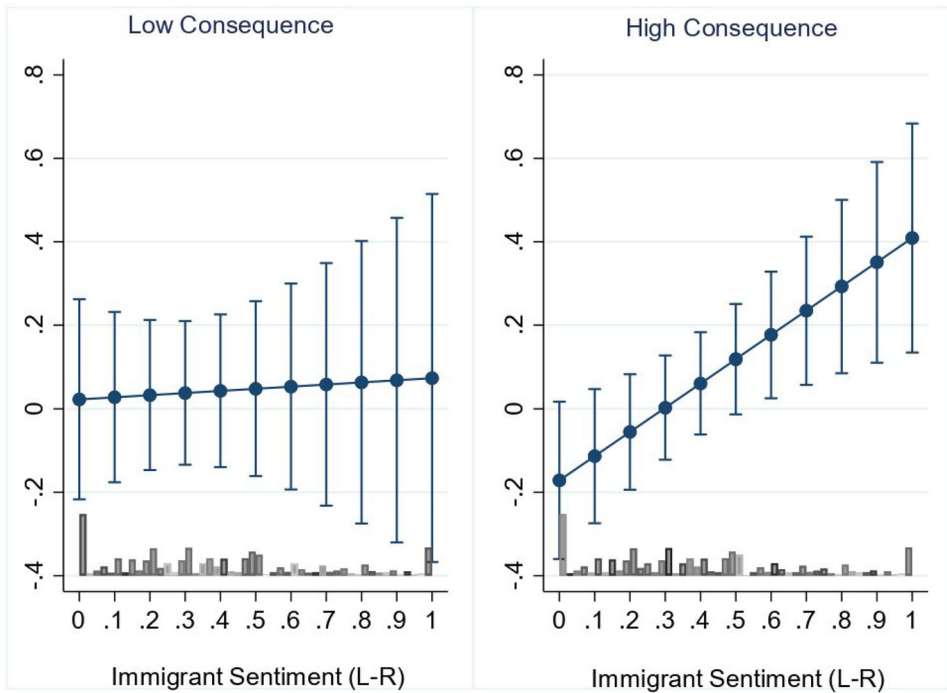
TABLE 2 OLS regression models predicting Right vote.

		(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Right vote	(1)	Low consequence		High consequence	
Precarity	0.036 (0.051)	0.023 (0.122)	0.105 (0.136)	−0.171 (0.096)	−0.121 (0.093)
Consequence	0.084 (0.051)				
East	reference	reference	reference	reference	reference
Quebec	0.001 (0.063)	0.021 (0.091)	0.019 (0.091)	−0.008 (0.082)	−0.013 (0.084)
Ontario	0.149* (0.061)	0.208* (0.088)	0.205* (0.087)	0.113 (0.079)	0.115 (0.082)
West	0.275*** (0.062)	0.226* (0.091)	0.221* (0.091)	0.291*** (0.081)	0.293*** (0.083)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Degree	−0.014 (0.028)	0.059 (0.045)	0.061 (0.045)	−0.065 (0.034)	−0.063 (0.034)
Male	0.046 (0.027)	0.045 (0.044)	0.042 (0.044)	0.054 (0.032)	0.053 (0.032)
Income	0.016 (0.012)	0.014 (0.019)	0.014 (0.019)	0.013 (0.015)	0.015 (0.015)
Homeowner	0.061* (0.030)	−0.008 (0.050)	−0.009 (0.050)	0.104** (0.036)	0.097** (0.036)
native-born	0.010 (0.038)	0.046 (0.051)	0.048 (0.051)	−0.025 (0.051)	−0.030 (0.052)
Political ideology	0.609*** (0.056)	0.589*** (0.099)	0.588*** (0.099)	0.636*** (0.066)	0.629*** (0.066)
Immigrant sentiment	0.161* (0.062)	0.217 (0.124)	0.227* (0.104)	−0.056 (0.094)	0.126 (0.075)
Feminist sentiment	0.243*** (0.061)	0.301** (0.103)	0.345** (0.120)	0.202** (0.073)	0.084 (0.086)
Precarity # Imm. Sent.		0.051 (0.291)		0.580** (0.199)	
Precarity # Fem. Sent.			−0.144 (0.289)		0.380* (0.175)
Constant	−0.545*** (0.094)	−0.597*** (0.134)	−0.620*** (0.135)	−0.313** (0.119)	−0.335** (0.121)
N	1156	400	400	767	767
R <sup>2</sup>	0.31	0.30	0.34	0.30	0.33

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

Thus, we find little evidence that *precarity* is associated with voting for the Right in Canada on its own for people who experience low *consequence* of job/business loss, but we find evidence that Right voting is substantively increased through anti-immigrant sentiment for people worried about high *consequence* of job/business loss.



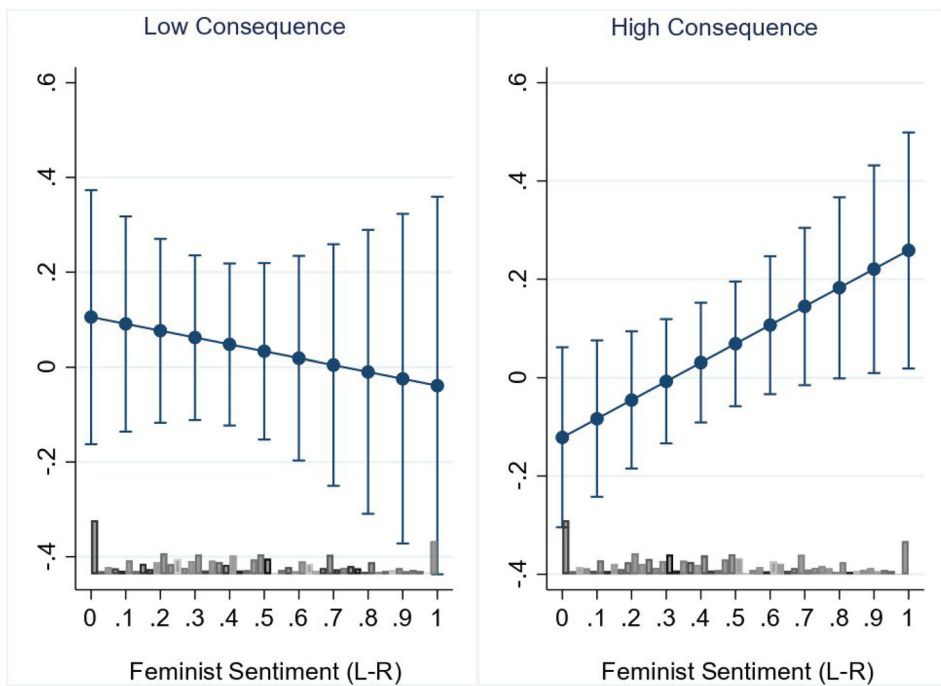


**FIGURE 1** Marginal effect (predicted probabilities) of subjective economic precarity by immigrant sentiment on Right vote by low and high consequence of job/business loss. With 95 percent confidence intervals.

Models 3a/b estimate an interaction between *feminist sentiment* and subjective *precarity* again first for low, then high *consequence* of job/business individuals. The interaction is positive and significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Figure 2 plots the average marginal effect of *precarity* by *feminist sentiment* on voting for the Right for both low (left) and high (right) *consequence* individuals. It shows a negative effect for low *consequence* individuals but a positive effect for high *consequence* individuals. Therefore, greater anti-feminist sentiment reduces the likelihood to vote for the Right for low *consequence* individuals. In contrast, for high *consequence* individuals, when they have positive views of feminists, their likelihood to vote for the Right is associated with roughly a 12-percentage point decrease in Right voting. However, the likelihood to vote for the Right increases significantly under higher anti-feminist attitudes and employment insecurity. At the greatest extent of anti-immigrant sentiment, high *precarity* increases the likelihood to vote for the Right by roughly 25 percentage points.

Similar to the *immigrant sentiment* results, we do not find any support that subjective *precarity* is associated with voting for the Right in Canada via anti-feminist sentiment for people with low subjective *consequence* of job/business loss. But we find evidence that Right voting is substantively increased through anti-feminist sentiment for people worried about a high *consequence* of job/business loss.

In interpreting these results, we should caution that only 17 percent of respondents perceived themselves as having high *precarity* (above 0.5). In contrast, 69 percent of respondents perceive potentially suffering a high *consequence* of job/business loss. Hence, a minority of Canadians experience either income volatility or probability of job/business loss, but over four times as many worry about the consequences of losing their job/business. Connecting these findings to political behavior, we find that roughly the same amount (23 percent) of Canadians hold negative views of both immigrants and feminists in our sample, but the results only really hold for men. Consequently, this provides a rather small pool of voters for parties on the Right to draw from, especially for individuals facing some form of subjective economic distress. However, given the very small margins of the last two federal elections between the Liberals and Conservatives,



**FIGURE 2** Marginal effect (predicted probabilities) of subjective economic precarity by feminist sentiment on Right vote by low and high consequence of job/business loss. With 95 percent confidence intervals.

along with a potential splinter on the right, its incumbent on parties to appeal to small groups of voters, which can have an outsized impact on election results. Moreover, Canada is experiencing a pronounced cost-of-living crisis and declining real GDP per capita, which increases the likelihood this pool of voters will expand (Statistics Canada 2023).

## Gender estimations

Table 2 shows that men and people with anti-feminist sentiment were substantially more likely to vote for the Right. Therefore, we have a good reason to explore further the gendered aspect of subjective economic insecurity and its relationship to minority attitudes and voting. We do so by replicating the models from Table 2, but we split our sample in half by performing the estimations on both a male and female subsample of individuals who perceive themselves as having high *consequence* of job/business loss. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Models 4a/b are our baseline estimates, which reveal that the results do not differ substantially for most of the variables by gender. Males with anti-immigrant sentiment are more likely to vote for the Right, but female anti-feminists are significantly more likely to. There is a null subjective *precarity* effect for men and a positive but nonsignificant effect for women. However, we see very different results when we interact the variable with attitudes toward immigrants and feminists.

Models 5a/b estimate an interaction between *immigrant sentiment* and subjective *precarity*. Despite the low sample size, the coefficient is positive and nearly doubles in size for men from Model 2a, reaching significance at  $p < 0.01$ . In contrast, we see little effect from zero for women. Figure 3 plots the average marginal effect of *precarity* by *immigrant sentiment* on voting for the Right by gender. For men, when *precarity* is low and immigrants are viewed very positively, the likelihood to vote for the Right is associated with roughly a 40-percentage point decrease in Right voting. However, with greater *precarity* and anti-immigration

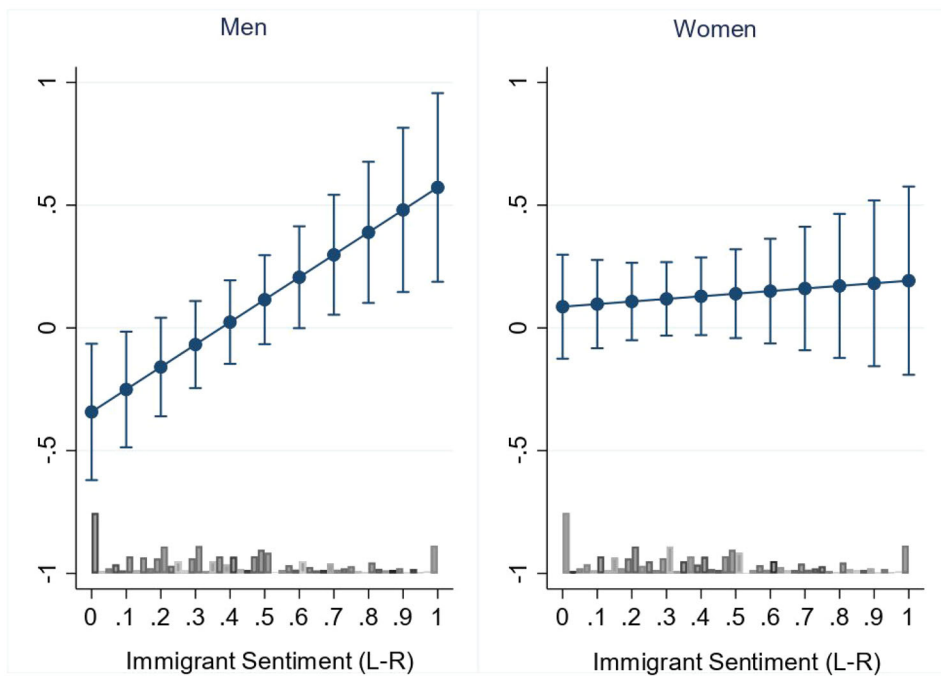
**TABLE 3** OLS regression models predicting Right vote by gender for high consequence of job/business loss individuals.

	4(a)	(5a)	(6a)	4(b)	(5b)	(6b)
Right vote	Men			Women		
Precarity	−0.001 (0.091)	−0.342* (0.141)	−0.264 (0.144)	0.128 (0.080)	0.086 (0.108)	0.045 (0.107)
East	reference	reference	reference	reference	reference	reference
Quebec	0.011 (0.131)	−0.000 (0.118)	−0.000 (0.124)	−0.022 (0.096)	−0.019 (0.097)	−0.019 (0.097)
Ontario	0.147 (0.127)	0.126 (0.113)	0.138 (0.120)	0.093 (0.094)	0.094 (0.095)	0.093 (0.095)
West	0.323* (0.131)	0.282* (0.118)	0.299* (0.125)	0.280** (0.096)	0.282** (0.097)	0.283** (0.097)
Age	−0.000 (0.002)	−0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Degree	−0.102 (0.052)	−0.096 (0.051)	−0.092 (0.052)	−0.014 (0.042)	−0.015 (0.042)	−0.014 (0.042)
Income	0.009 (0.024)	0.001 (0.022)	0.006 (0.023)	0.023 (0.018)	0.022 (0.018)	0.021 (0.018)
Homeowner	0.119* (0.057)	0.133* (0.055)	0.118* (0.057)	0.063 (0.043)	0.065 (0.043)	0.066 (0.043)
Native-born	0.003 (0.076)	0.001 (0.073)	−0.010 (0.075)	−0.080 (0.064)	−0.079 (0.064)	−0.079 (0.064)
Political ideology	0.654*** (0.097)	0.686*** (0.095)	0.689*** (0.097)	0.551*** (0.091)	0.556*** (0.091)	0.556*** (0.090)
Immigrant sentiment	0.166 (0.115)	−0.108 (0.137)	0.182 (0.113)	0.101 (0.093)	0.066 (0.119)	0.097 (0.093)
Feminist sentiment	0.133 (0.108)	0.109 (0.109)	−0.069 (0.131)	0.306*** (0.087)	0.305*** (0.087)	0.243* (0.105)
Precarity # Imm. Sent.		0.914** (0.287)			0.106 (0.256)	
Precarity # Fem. Sent.			0.539* (0.253)			0.212 (0.221)
Constant	−0.322 (0.183)	−0.173 (0.176)	−0.226 (0.181)	−0.377** (0.145)	−0.368* (0.146)	−0.357* (0.148)
<i>N</i>	340	340	340	427	427	427
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.31	0.33	0.32	0.34	0.34	0.34

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

sentiment, the likelihood to vote for the Right increases significantly, reaching roughly a 55-percentage point increased likelihood to vote for the Right at the furthest point. In contrast, for women the effect is not too far from zero at every level of *immigrant sentiment*.

Models 6a/b estimate an interaction between *feminist sentiment* and subjective *precarity*. The interaction is positive for both genders but only significant for men, and the coefficient is roughly 2.5 times higher



**FIGURE 3** Marginal effect (predicted probabilities) of subjective economic precarity by immigrant sentiment on Right vote for men versus women. High consequence of job/business loss sub-sample only. With 95 percent confidence intervals.

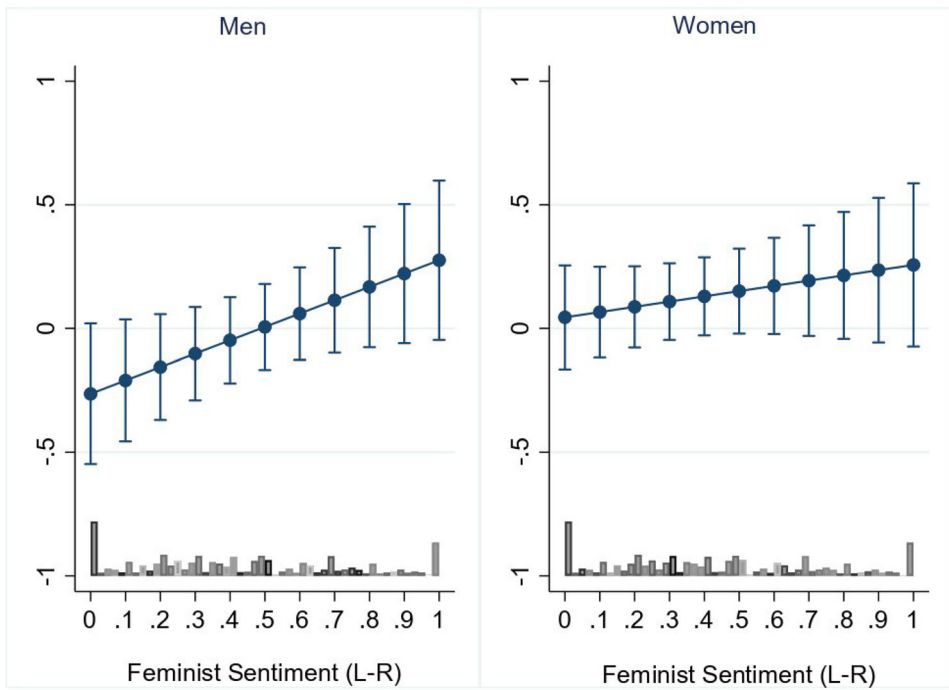
for men. Figure 4 plots the average marginal effect of the interaction on Right voting. For men, the effect is basically null at the mean level of both interacted variables, but the likelihood to vote for the Right is associated with roughly a 25-percentage point increase (decrease) at the highest (lowest) levels of each interacted variable. Contrastingly for women, greater subjective *precarity* and anti-feminist sentiment do increase likelihood to vote for the Right, but there is only a roughly a 20-percentage point difference between the lowest and highest levels of each interacted variable.

Taken together, the gendered estimations find support for the notion that subjective *precarity* for individuals with high *consequence* of job/business loss is significantly associated with voting for the Right, when combined with views on immigration and anti-feminism, but that the association only really holds for men. Therefore, subjective economic distress has a complex relationship with voting behavior. When measuring its effect on voting for the Right, the relationship is mediated by attitudes toward immigrants and feminists, and via gender.

One might posit that it is not exclusively immigration or feminist attitudes operating as the channel associated with Right voting when combined with subjective economic insecurity. Immigration and/or feminist attitudes could just be one component of someone's left-right political ideology that causes someone to vote for the Right. Hence, as a robustness check, we re-run our models with *political ideology* interacted with *precarity*. We find that both immigration and feminist attitudes do indeed operate separately from ideology, as each of the interactions, overall and by gender, are negative and not statistically significant (see full results in Supporting Information Appendix 2).

## CONCLUSION

This study employs measures of subjective insecurity to probe whether subjective economic insecurity has an impact on Right voting in Canada. Unlike many studies of the economic drivers of (radical) right-wing



**FIGURE 4** Marginal effect (predicted probabilities) of subjective economic precarity by feminist sentiment on Right vote for men versus women. High consequence of job/business loss sub-sample only. With 95 percent confidence intervals.

voting, which rely on objective and often retrospective measures (such as unemployment rates or a respondent's history of unemployment), self-reported feelings of insecurity may better capture the underlying calculation of risk and the degree of fear related to this risk.

Our point of departure was the expectation that voters with higher levels of economic insecurity would be more likely to vote for the Right, even if this expectation has been dashed more often than verified in other studies (see Stockemer et al. 2018). In applying our subjective measures of insecurity as part of the 2019 Canada Election Study, neither the descriptive results nor the OLS regression provided support for linking the insecurity measures to right-voting directly. Consistent with the tenor of the literature, immigration and anti-feminism were much more successful predictors.

Some researchers have nevertheless questioned the value of setting economic issues in conflict with attitudes toward minorities, given that economic insecurity may affect attitudes toward minorities and thereby have an impact on right-wing voting (see Cohen 2018; Ferrari 2021). By adding an interaction between our insecurity measures and attitudinal sentiments, we observe a strong and significant effect on Right voting for our measures of insecurity.

The literature is unanimous in observing that there is a gender gap in voting for the Right but divided in its explanations. For some, men react to insecurity differently, as they face a greater status loss and therefore are more likely to support parties that uphold traditional hierarchies. For others, there are psychological differences between men and women, with women being more risk averse or more likely to moderate prejudicial views. For others, objective differences in labor market positions explain the difference, and the gender gap is likely to disappear as these conditions converge.

We therefore broke down our models by gender based on the majority view in the literature that there may be different mechanisms at work for men and women in choices to vote for the Right. We indeed find a considerable contrast. In the model without interaction terms, the only one of our measures that was statistically significant was for the probability of job loss producing a higher right-wing vote for women. When we estimate models by gender, both attitudinal interactions are strong and significant for men,

but display little effect for women. In other words, economic insecurity and anti-minority sentiment work together to drive right-wing voting for men, whereas anti-minority sentiment seems to do little to condition the relationship between insecurity and Right-voting for women. One way to make sense of this is with theories of male status decline, namely that the loss of economic status produces compensatory attempts to shore up traditional and cultural authority and hierarchies.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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