

The Ideological Structure of Municipal Non-Ideology

Jack Lucas
University of Calgary
jack.lucas@ucalgary.ca

2021-03-12

Abstract

This paper explores the structure of elite disagreement about the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal politics. I propose two possible relationships between a representative's own ideology and their beliefs about the character of municipal politics: an "ends-against-the-middle" pattern, in which ideologues on the left and right embrace an ideological vision of municipal politics, while moderates insist that municipal politics is not ideological; and an "asymmetric visions" pattern, in which individuals on the left endorse an ideological view of municipal politics and those on the right oppose it. I use new survey data from more than 800 mayors and councillors in Canada to assess these possible relationships. While both are supported by the data, the asymmetric visions pattern is the stronger of the two: the non-ideological view of municipal politics is most firmly embraced by municipal politicians of the moderate right, while the ideological vision is most common among representatives on the left. This pattern, I argue, is in keeping with a century of municipal political history and should be incorporated into our theories of municipal elections, representation, and policy disagreement.

Keywords: municipal politics; ideology; political elites; municipal policy

1 Introduction

Is municipal politics ideological? Recent political science research, equipped with large and innovative new data sources, has made important advances in clarifying the ideological structure of municipal politics. But the individuals and groups who are actively involved in municipal affairs have their *own* theories about how municipal politics works – theories that often include quite passionate views about the role of ideological disagreement in municipal politics. The frequency with which municipal political elites express these views, and the passion with which they defend them, suggests that there is something important at stake in their competing theories about the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal politics.

In this paper, I describe the structure of the municipal ideology debate among municipal political elites themselves – the extent to which municipal elected representatives embrace an ideological or non-ideological vision of municipal politics and the structure of their disagreement on this issue. The persistence and passion of the debate about municipal ideology suggests, I argue, that it is linked with wider patterns of disagreement in the municipal political field; attitudes about the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal politics are not evenly or randomly distributed among those who are engaged in municipal politics. Instead, political elites’ theories about the role of ideology in municipal politics are likely to be related in some way to their own ideological positions.

To explore this possibility, I propose two relationships between individuals’ ideological positions and their beliefs about the role of ideology in municipal politics. The first, which I call the “ends-against-the-middle” thesis, posits that committed ideologues on the left and the right share an ideological vision of municipal politics, while moderates defend a non-ideological vision. The second relationship, which I call the “asymmetric visions” thesis, suggests instead that an ideological vision of municipal politics is more characteristic of municipal political actors on the left, while those on the right are more likely to deny that municipal politics is meaningfully ideological. In this asymmetric relationship, the shape of municipal politics – its ideological or non-ideological character – is a question that is itself structured by left-right disagreement.

To assess these relationships, I use new survey data from more than 800 mayors and councillors in Canada to describe the extent to which elected municipal representatives embrace a non-ideological vision of municipal politics, and then assess the ideological structure, if any, of these beliefs. I find that municipal politicians overwhelmingly endorse a non-ideological vision of municipal politics. This view, however, is by no means universal, and it is structured by *both* the ends-against-the-middle relationship (ideologues are indeed more likely to see municipal politics as ideological than their more moderate colleagues) and the asymmetric visions relationship (those on the left are more likely than those on the right to see municipal politics as ideological). Overall, I find that

the asymmetric visions relationship is more strongly supported by the data. I suggest that this pattern is in keeping with more than a century of municipal political history and should be incorporated into our theories of municipal elections, representation, and policy disagreement.

2 The Non-Ideological Vision in Municipal Politics

In politics, individuals and groups compete not only for elected positions and policy influence, but also for the opportunity to define what is at stake in the political field. By articulating the stakes of the political game – providing what Brodie and Jenson (1991) have called a “definition of politics” – political actors strive to set the terms of political disagreement on familiar and favourable terrain. This jostling to set the terms of the debate goes by many names – framing, heresthetic, institutional entrepreneurship, and so on – and operates at many scales (Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008; Riker 1986; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Whatever we choose to call it, the struggle to define the character and stakes of a particular political arena is an important dimension of political disagreement and competition.¹

In few political fields is this contention over the “definition of politics” more longstanding and explicit than in municipal politics. From twentieth-century urban reformers to twenty-first-century Black Lives Matter activists, municipal governments have long been a site of explicit debate about the character and stakes of the field itself – the kinds of policy arguments, institutions, and political action that are appropriate to municipal politics. While the institutional and policy content of these debates has evolved over time, competing public visions of municipal politics persist, ranging from those who celebrate municipal politics as a shining example of non-ideological pragmatism to those who champion municipal councils as progressive lifeboats in a stormy Trumpian sea.²

These debates are also active among political scientists, and play out in both empirical and normative registers. In one classic argument, the pressures of inter-municipal competition for businesses and residents, combined with the restrained fiscal and policy authority of municipal governments, gives municipal politics a distinctly non-ideological flavour, particularly outside very large cities (Oliver 2012; Peterson 1981). Others find clear evidence of ideological structure in local voting behaviour (Holman and Lay 2020; Lucas and McGregor 2020; Sances 2018) and in patterns of municipal representation and responsiveness (Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016; Einstein and Kogan 2016; Lucas 2020a; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014).³ In recent years, a gradual move toward a

¹See also Noël and Therien (2008), who ground their treatment of left and right in global politics in a constructivist approach akin to the idea of “definitions of politics” I cite above.

²For public-facing examples of the former, see Applebaum (2021) and Florida (2019). For examples of the latter, see Gerken et al. (2016), Milman et al. (2017), and Sisson (2016).

³Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja (2020) uncover similar patterns and then go on to explore important

more ideological view of municipal politics has led to an important call by Sarah Anzia (2021) to seriously consider what is *distinctive* about municipal politics, including the structure of municipal policy attitudes and the distinctive role of interest groups and policy jurisdiction in shaping municipal politics. In short, the ideological structure and character of municipal politics is by no means resolved among political scientists, and the implications of a more or less “ideological” local politics remains a subject of discussion among normative theorists (e.g. Barber 2013; Kohn 2016).

Because the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal politics is actively contested by individuals and groups *within* the municipal political field, these opinions are likely to be structured by other aspects of municipal political disagreement – in other words, it is unlikely that beliefs about the character of local politics are unrelated to other municipal political attitudes, including one’s own ideological position. Perhaps the most obvious structure to these beliefs would array ideologues against moderates, with ideologues embracing an ideological vision of municipal politics and moderates insisting that ideology has no place in the municipal sphere. Research in the psychology of ideology has shown that ideologues of both the left and the right view the world in simpler, more coherent, and more ideologically organized ways than do moderates (Lammers et al. 2017; Prooijen and Krouwel 2019), and one obvious consequence of this deeper ideological commitment could be a tendency to view municipal politics “ideologically” – a firm belief that the left or right positions and identities to which ideologues are deeply committed are relevant to municipal politics. If true, this relationship – which I call the *ends-against-the-middle* thesis – would align ideologues of the left and right against centrist moderates in debates about the ideological character of municipal politics.

While this ends-against-the-middle pattern is plausible, it is not the only possible ideological structure that could arise in competing “visions” of the character of municipal politics. In fact, the historical development of urban politics in Canada and elsewhere suggests a second relationship may be even more likely – a relationship that I call the *asymmetric visions* thesis. In this relationship, commitment to a non-ideological vision of municipal politics is ideologically asymmetric, with left-leaning actors advocating a more ideological view and right-leaning actors advocating a non-ideological view. Unlike the “strange bedfellows” character of the ends-against-the-middle structure, which arrays ideologues of both the left and the right against moderates, the asymmetric thesis posits that debates about the character of municipal politics are *part of* more general left-right divides in municipal politics. In other words, one of the subjects about which those on the left and right disagree is the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal politics itself.⁴

patterns of representational bias in American municipalities.

⁴Past research has uncovered other important right-left asymmetries in areas such as issue salience and issue centrality; see, for example, Cochrane (2013) and Cochrane (2015).

Evidence for the plausibility of the asymmetric thesis runs deep in urban political history. Consider figure 1, for example, which summarizes the early years of partisan political competition in four of Canada’s largest cities (Lucas et al. 2021). Using archival, newspaper, and secondary sources, I organize candidates into four party types – left-/labour parties, right/business parties, urban reform parties, and other parties – and then summarize total council vote share for each party type by city (white space in each figure represents vote share for independent candidates). In each city, we see substantial competition between left and right parties in the early twentieth century; this competition typically began with the arrival of an explicitly class-oriented labour party, such as the Dominion Labour Party (in Calgary) or the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (in Vancouver), to which local business elites and their allies then responded with a party of their own. What is notable about this history for our purposes, however, is that the conservative response to labour’s “invasion” of municipal politics was not to create an explicitly conservative competitor, but instead to create a party whose name and identity rejected the very *relevance* of ideological platforms in the municipal arena. These “alphabet” parties – such as the Civic Government Association (Calgary), the Citizens’ Committee (Winnipeg), and, in Vancouver, the especially revealingly-named Non-Partisan Association – sought to define ideology and partisanship out of municipal politics even as they advocated for recognizably conservative policies in areas ranging from the municipal franchise to social welfare spending (Bright 1998; Epp-Koop 2015; Lucas 2020b). “The C.G.A., representing citizens of all shades of politics and numbering in its membership many wage earning citizens,” declared one such party, in a characteristic statement of this view, “objects to political party rule in municipal affairs.” In the very same election, however, that same party, the C.G.A., had proposed an explicitly anti-Labour platform of fiscal restraint, reduced taxes, and a shift to work-for-welfare social relief.⁵

This historical development of party competition in Canadian cities – which has historical parallels in several American cities (Bridges 1999) – continues to resonate in municipal politics today. Left-leaning municipal election candidates often find themselves opposed by candidates whose platforms respond to progressive proposals not so much with explicitly conservative alternatives, but instead with appeals to “pragmatic” and “non-ideological” local policies (Laschinger 2016; see also Weaver 2018, 2021). These experiences suggest that debates about the ideological character of municipal politics may indeed be asymmetric not only in the distant history of urban political development but also in contemporary city politics – elected representatives on the left articulating a more ideological vision of the municipal arena, and elected representatives on the right

⁵This was the 1934 election in Calgary, though many other examples could also be given. The quotation is from Calgary *Albertan*, October 27, 1934. See also *Albertan* October 15, 1934. These clippings are available in the Calgary Public Library Local History Clippings Files (Calgary - Elections - 1930-39).

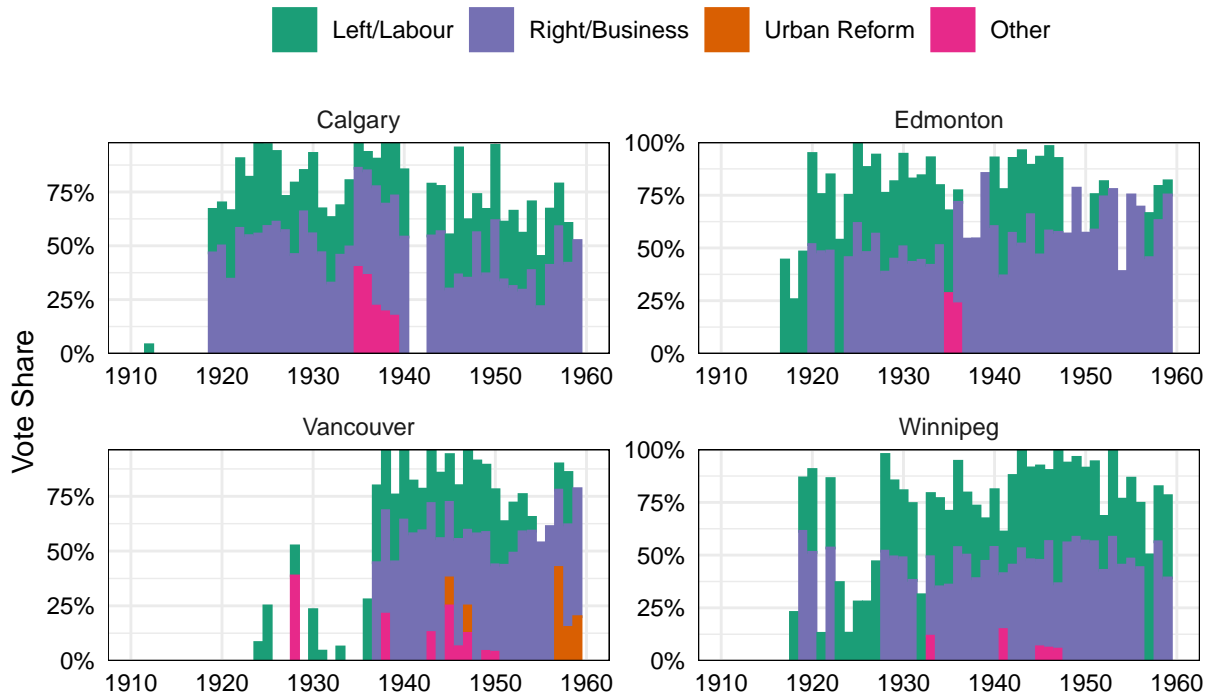


Figure 1: Municipal Party Competition in Four Large Canadian Cities, 1910-1960

insisting that ideology has no place in municipal politics.

We thus have at least two plausible relationships between elite ideology and non-ideological visions in contemporary municipal politics: the ends-against-the-middle thesis and the asymmetric visions thesis. To clarify these relationships, figure 2 uses simulated data to visualize an ideal-typical case of each. In the left panel, the ends-against-the-middle relationship is symmetrical and quadratic, with extreme ideologues at one end of the “non-ideological vision” distribution (low “non-ideology” scores, indicating a more ideological view of local politics), and moderates at the peak of the distribution (high “non-ideology” scores). In the right panel, the asymmetric visions relationship is simply linear, with those on the left embracing a more ideological vision of local politics, and those on the right endorsing the non-ideological vision. My goal in the empirical analysis below is to assess whether, and to what extent, each of these possible relationships is visible in the views of Canadian municipal elected representatives.

3 Data and Methods

My data are drawn from the Canadian Municipal Barometer (CMB), a partnership that undertakes an annual survey of elected mayors and councillors in more than 400 municipalities across Canada (every municipality above 9,000 population). In 2021, a total of 804 elected representatives completed the annual survey, for an overall response rate of 22% – comparable to high-quality surveys of political elites in other countries and at other

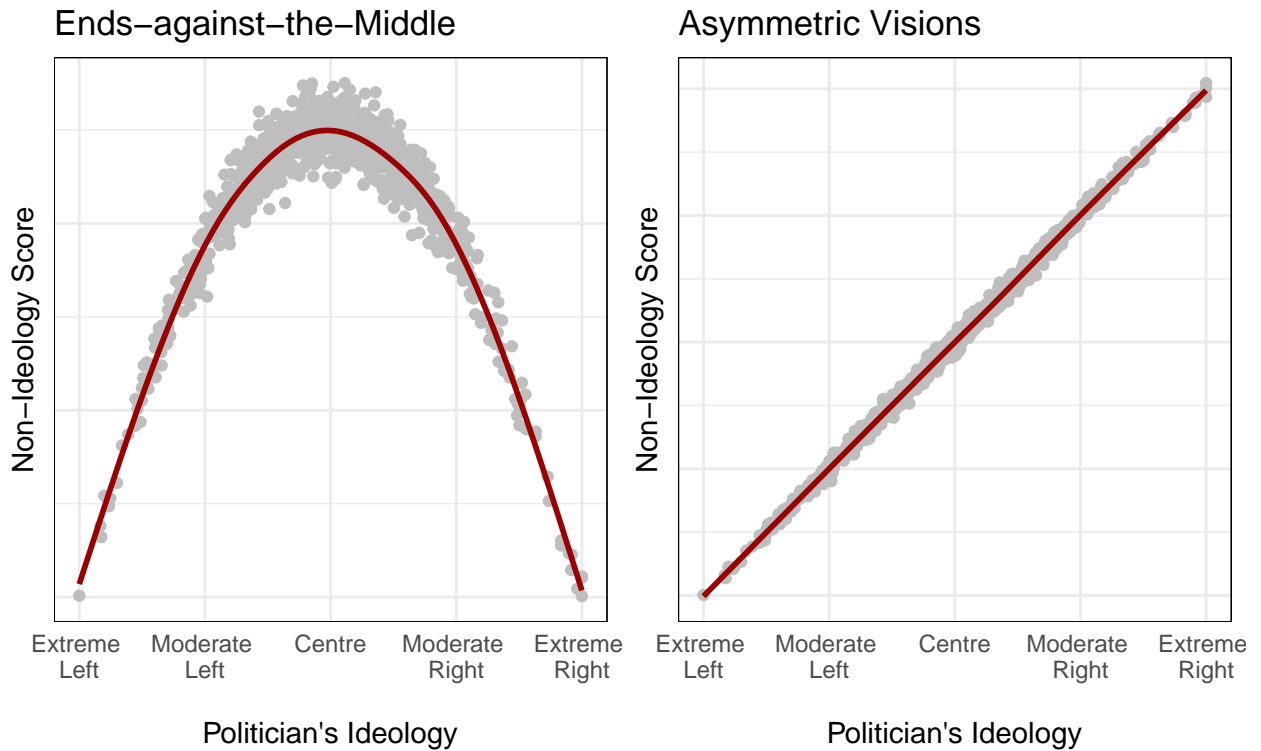


Figure 2: Relationships Between Politician Ideology and Municipal Non-Ideology Score (Simulated Data)

levels of government.⁶ The 2021 CMB survey contained three questions about the role of ideology in municipal politics, the exact wordings of which are available in Table 1 below. These questions measured respondents’ views about the role of ideology in municipal politics on three interrelated dimensions: a policy dimension, asking about the relevance of ideology to waste removal, a “bread and butter” municipal policy issue in Canada (Lucas and Smith 2019); a factual statement about the ideological or non-ideological character of municipal policy making; and a more normative statement about the appropriate role of ideology in municipal politics.

In my analyses below, I combine responses to these three questions into an overall measure of each respondent’s “non-ideological vision”, with lower values indicating *opposition* to that vision (i.e. an *ideological* vision of local politics), and higher values indicating *support* for the non-ideological vision. I recoded “don’t know” responses to a neutral position equidistant between “somewhat agree” and “somewhat disagree”, rescaled each variable with mean = 0 and standard deviation = 1, and then summed the three variables to produce an overall “non-ideological vision” measure. Responses to the three questions in this index are strongly correlated ($\alpha = 0.76$), and in the supplementary material (8.5), I show

⁶Balance tests available in the supplementary material (8.6) suggest that the sample resembles the population of Canadian municipal politicians on observable characteristics including gender, population size, and region, with the exception of slight under-representation in the Province of Quebec. I provide regional subsample analyses in the supplementary material (8.6) to confirm that my results are not sensitive to this Quebec underrepresentation.

that my results are substantively identical when “don’t know” responses are excluded from the analysis.

To explore the possible ideological structure of political elites’ scores on this “non-ideological vision” index, I measure politicians’ own ideological positions in two ways. The first is their simple left-right self-placement; this question asks respondents to place themselves on an ideological spectrum ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right). The second is a latent measure of politicians’ policy attitudes, measured from a battery of 14 municipal policy issue questions included in the 2020 and 2021 CMB annual surveys.⁷ Some of these questions are drawn directly from past studies of elites’ policy attitudes at the municipal level (Bucchianeri 2020), and others are new; they cover a wide array of local policy issues, from active transportation to policing to climate change, and all are phrased as tradeoffs to increase their realism and accuracy as measures of policy attitudes (Einstein and Glick 2018). I use a Bayesian factor analysis model to measure each respondent’s latent left-right position from these municipal policy questions. I provide the complete wording for these municipal policy items, along with more detail about my measurement model for this policy ideology measure, in the supplementary material (8.1).

In some studies, left-right self-placement questions are understood to capture a more “symbolic” or identity-oriented dimension of ideology, while latent measures from policy attitude questions capture a respondent’s operational or “policy” ideology (Jessee 2012; Stimson 2004; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2013). While this conceptual distinction is valuable, the two measures are strongly correlated in my data ($r=0.62$) and I have no theoretical reason to expect that the ends-against-the-middle or asymmetric relationships would behave differently under the two ideology measures. I thus report results from both measures throughout the analysis, using two measures rather than one to illustrate the robustness of my findings to alternative conceptualizations of political elites’ ideological positions.

3.1 Estimation and Analysis

As figure 2 suggested, the two possible theses I am exploring – ends-against-the-middle and asymmetry – imply distinct empirical relationships between a politician’s ideological position and their position on the municipal non-ideology index. To explore the presence and strength of each of these relationships in my empirical data, I thus estimate a model containing both a linear and a quadratic term:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 x_i + \beta_2 x_i^2 + \epsilon_i$$

⁷Because 380 individuals completed the municipal policy questions for both the 2020 and 2021 surveys, I am able to use the 2020 questions as well as the 2021 questions in my measure, adding more information to the latent measure and enabling a more precise estimate of each politician’s policy ideology.

In this model, x is each individual i 's ideological self-placement or policy ideology value. In some specifications, I also add a vector of control variables to the model to adjust the estimates for other factors known to be associated with ideological sophistication; however, adding these variables does nothing to alter my substantive conclusions, and I have therefore reported these models in the supplementary material (8.4).

I implement the above model in a Bayesian framework, using diffuse priors in all models, because the Bayesian setup enables easier calculations of several post-estimation quantities; as we will see below, these quantities are helpful for assessing the character of the relationship we will uncover. I implement the model in Stan (via `rstanarm`) and all models show strong evidence of convergence (see SM 8.3 for more detail). I emphasize, however, that my results are substantively identical under a variety of alternative models and specifications; I provide these alternatives, including conventional OLS models with and without controls, Bayesian models with and without controls, and multilevel models with varying municipal intercepts, in the supplementary material (SM 8.3).⁸

4 Results

Most Canadian municipal politicians embrace a non-ideological vision of municipal politics. Table 1 summarizes responses to each question in the CMB non-ideology index. At least three quarters of respondents agree with each of the statements, and in the case of the second statement – that municipal policy is about pragmatic decisions rather than ideological disagreement – the number rises to nearly 85%. Still, despite overwhelming support for the non-ideological vision, the view is not universal: about one in six disagree with the first statement, one in seven disagree with the second statement, and nearly one in four disagree with the third statement. Despite overall support for the non-ideological vision, a substantial minority of elected mayors and councillors resist the non-ideological view of municipal politics.

Figure 3 summarizes the ideological structure of these attitudes, with politicians' ideological self-placement in the left panel and policy ideology in the right panel. Each panel summarizes expected values on the municipal non-ideology index as we move through the ideological spectrum from left to right. Again, because the non-ideology index captures the strength of an individual's support for a non-ideological vision of municipal politics, higher expected values on the y-axis indicate a *less* ideological vision of municipal politics. In both panels, the black line captures point estimates and the gray shaded regions are 95% probability intervals. Coefficients for both the linear (β_1) and quadratic (β_2) terms in both models are statistically significant, and full tables are available in the

⁸The control variables are age, gender, and education, and (in the multilevel model) municipal population size.

Table 1: Overview of CMB Responses to Municipal Ideology Questions

Question	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
There is a lot of truth to the saying, “there’s no left-wing or right-wing way to pick up the garbage.”	6%	13%	32%	43%	6%
Municipal policy making is about pragmatic decisions, not about ideological disagreement.	3%	12%	33%	50%	3%
Ideological debates between 'left', 'centre', and 'right' just don't belong in municipal politics.	6%	18%	26%	48%	2%

supplementary material (SM 8.3).⁹

Across both panels of figure 3, we see a similar story – one that provides at least some support for *both* of the possible relationships described above. The curved shape of both lines, reflecting the statistically significant quadratic term in both models, suggests that those at the ideological extremes *are* more likely than their moderate colleagues to see municipal politics as ideological. The more striking curvature of the line in the left panel, capturing ideological self-placement, suggests that selecting an extreme point at either end of the ideological self-placement scale likely reflects, in part, a self-identity as a deeply committed ideologue, and hence a more ideological vision of the political world. These patterns support the ends-against-the-middle thesis.

However, the shape of the lines in both panels of figure 3 is far from symmetric, with the lowest expected values at the leftmost end of the distribution and the highest values not in the middle of the distribution, as the ends-against-the-middle thesis would suggest, but instead among those on the moderate right. In fact, the more we dig into the results in figure 3, the more support we find for the asymmetric visions thesis. In figure 4, I plot the probability that each point across the ideological spectrum represents the peak value of non-ideological vision; in other words, the figure summarizes the points along the

⁹More precisely, the coefficients are statistically significant in the alternative models in SM 8.4; in the Bayesian models, more than 99% of the posterior draws for the β_1 coefficient in both the self-placement and policy ideology models are to the right of zero, and more than 99% of the posterior draws for the β_2 coefficient in both the self-placement and policy ideology models are to the left of zero.

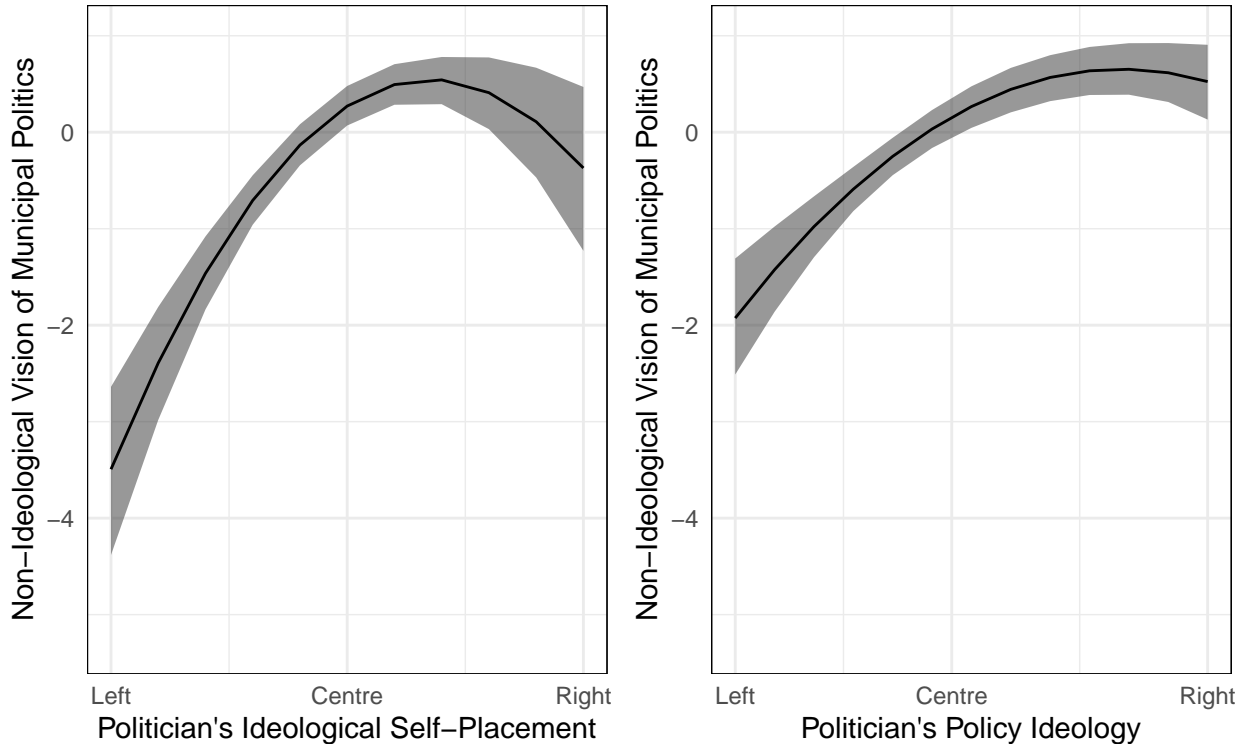


Figure 3: Politician Ideology and Municipal Non-Ideology Index Scores

ideological spectrum where commitment to a non-ideological vision of municipal politics is likely to be highest.¹⁰ In a perfectly symmetric ends-against-the-middle relationship, this peak would rest in the centre of the distribution, with probabilities declining symmetrically on each side. In fact, however, the results in both panels of figure 4 indicate that the individuals who are most committed to the non-ideological vision are moderate conservatives. This finding strongly supports the asymmetric visions thesis – with the important caveat that individuals at the extreme rightward end of the ideological spectrum *do* move back in the direction of a slightly more ideological vision of local politics, though still one that remains considerably less ideological than those on the extreme left.¹¹

5 Discussion

Municipal political elites in Canada embrace a non-ideological vision of local politics. They overwhelmingly agree that municipal politics is not and should not be structured by disagreement among “left”, “centre” and “right” positions. This view, however, is

¹⁰For the left panel, each category is a point on the 0-10 left-right self-placement scale. For the right panel, each category is one of 13 equally spaced positions on the latent policy ideology scale, running from -1.5 to 1.5 in increments of 0.25.

¹¹In the supplementary material, I provide a more formal test of the probability that the distributions in figures 3 and 4 are in fact centered at the median value of the ideology measures, as the ends-against-the-middle thesis would suggest. As is already visually apparent in the figures, the data suggest that the probability that the relationship is symmetric is less than 0.001 for both ideology measures.

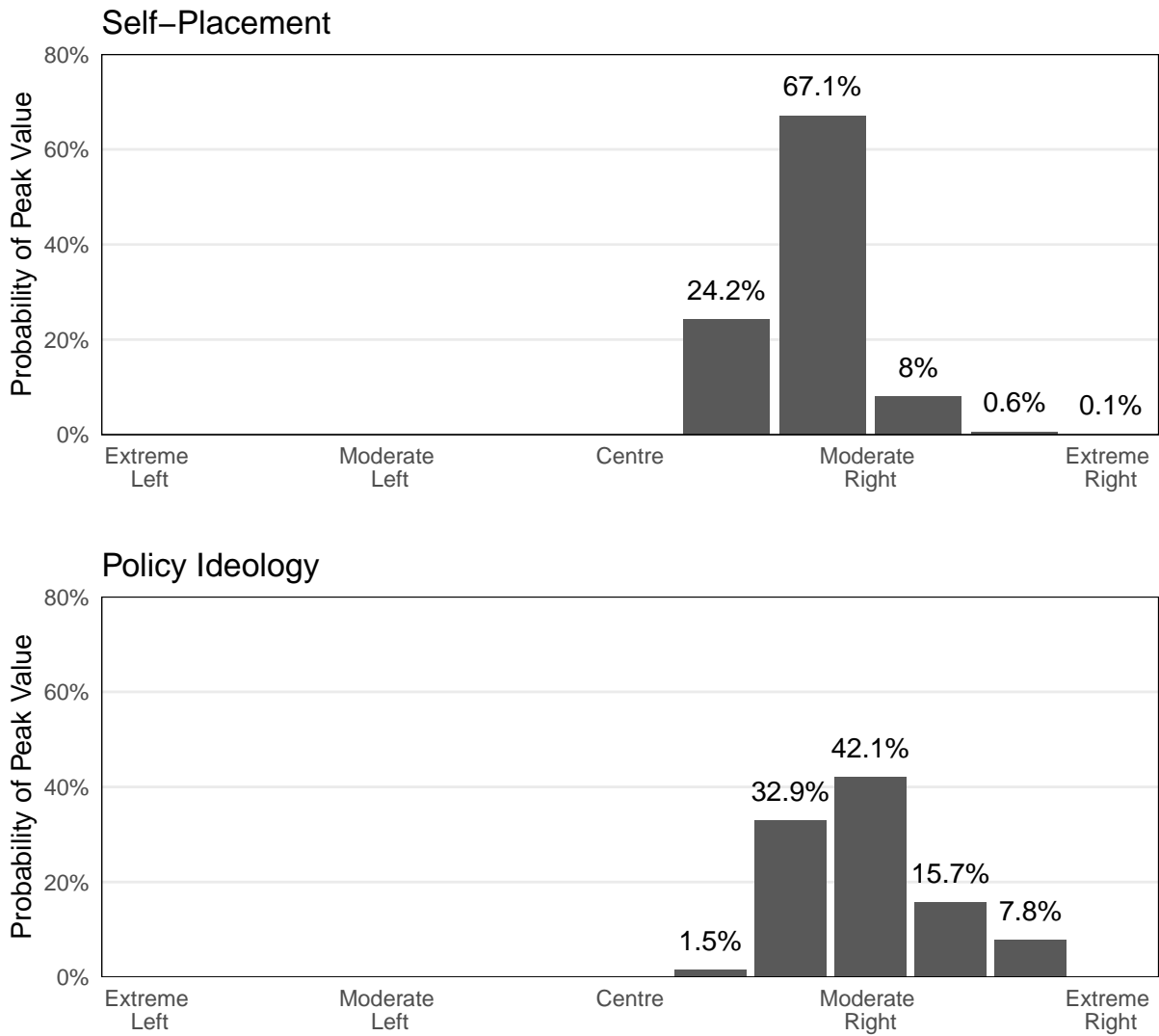


Figure 4: Probability that Ideological Position is Peak Value of Non-Ideology Index

not universal; a substantial minority of municipal representatives believes that municipal politics *is* meaningfully ideological, and an even larger minority insists that municipal policy making *should* be informed by ideological debates.

These attitudes about the ideological character of municipal politics are themselves meaningfully shaped by political elites' ideological positions. In keeping with the ends-against-the-middle thesis, individuals at the ideological extremes are more likely than more moderate representatives to endorse an ideological vision of municipal politics. However, this ends-against-the-middle pattern is much weaker than the asymmetric left-right relationship: elected representatives on the left are substantially more likely than those on the right to see municipal politics as ideological, and the most passionate torch-bearers for the non-ideological vision of municipal politics are moderate conservatives.

Both of these findings – general support for a non-ideological vision of municipal politics, as well as the asymmetric structure of attitudes about municipal ideology – have important implications for our understanding of municipal politics in Canada and else-

where. One important priority must be to understand how overwhelming support for a non-ideological vision, which I have uncovered here, align with an increasing body of evidence that municipal policy attitudes are ideologically structured, municipal politicians tend to represent the ideology of their constituents, and municipal policy outputs generally reflect the overall ideological complexion of local residents (Einstein and Kogan 2016; Lucas 2020a; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). How can it be that a group of elected representatives who embrace a non-ideological vision of local politics are also, it would appear, quite responsive to the ideological character of their constituents? While answering this question fully will require additional research, one important component of the answer will probably be the non-partisan or weakly partisan structure of many municipal councils. In her work on ideological voting in the U.S. Congress, Frances Lee (2009) found that just 40% of the bills she examined were recognizably ideological in character – the remainder concerned matters of allocation and “good government” that were unlikely to divide left and right – suggesting that a considerable proportion of what looks like ideological voting in Congress actually originates in mere partisan cohesion. Remove the political parties, Lee argues, and the ideological structure of legislative roll calls becomes considerably less apparent – a conjecture that is supported in work by Peter Bucchianeri (2020) on roll call voting in 151 American municipalities. If only a small fraction of municipal bylaws and other council votes divide councillors on ideological lines, and in the absence of strong political party apparatuses to mobilize cohesive voting for other reasons, municipal politics may appear non-ideological even as municipal councils produce policies that, in the aggregate, reflect the ideological positions of municipal politicians and the constituents who elect them.

My findings are also important for our understanding of contemporary municipal politics. This structure is likely to have visible effects across multiple domains of municipal politics. In municipal elections, we are likely to see asymmetric patterns of campaign rhetoric and mobilization, with those on the left seeking to mobilize voters on the basis of explicitly ideological appeals, while those on the right (particularly the moderate right) deny the relevance of such appeals and construct their campaigns on the basis of a non-ideological, developmental, “pragmatic” policy agenda. This is a pattern that many municipal watchers have no doubt observed in their own cities – one that often frustrates left-of-centre candidates who run explicitly progressive municipal campaigns.

Municipal policy debates are also likely to be shaped by the asymmetric structure of attitudes toward municipal non-ideology. When defending their policy proposals, we are likely to see important discursive differences between representatives on the right and left; not only will “non-ideological” arguments be more likely to come from right-leaning representatives, but those representatives will also be more likely to deny the very *relevance* of ideological arguments in municipal policy debates – to seek to define ideological arguments “out of” municipal politics. Put somewhat differently, the asymmetric structure

of non-ideology attitudes suggests that we need to more seriously consider what might be called a *behavioural* theory of city limits: representatives on the ideological right insisting that policy issues are “developmental” in character, with no ideological content, and representatives on the ideological left claiming that this “developmental” framing obscures the meaningfully ideological character of many local policy debates.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, my goal has been to begin to reconstruct municipal political elites’ implicit theories of the structure and character of municipal politics. Much work remains to be done. One valuable next step will be to extend my analysis to elected representatives across multiple levels of government. While the “non-ideological vision” may be especially prominent in municipal politics, political elites at all levels may tend to endorse a less ideological vision of politics. Comparing these responses across levels will help to clarify the mechanisms that structure the asymmetric relationship I have uncovered here; for example, if the asymmetric relationship is equally apparent among state/provincial and national representatives, this would provide us with valuable information about the sources of the “non-ideological vision” in contemporary politics and the distinctiveness of the municipal political field. Perhaps it is the case, as Noël and Therien (2008) have surmised, that those on the right are more inclined to view ideological debates as “passé”, while those on the left continue to embrace ideological politics. Multi-level comparisons of elite attitudes will allow us to clarify this possibility, and to better understand how different institutional and policy contexts shape the ways elites understand their political environments.

Extending the analysis to the general public would also be valuable. If public attitudes on municipal ideology are asymmetric, we might begin to think about the municipal non-ideology debate as simply another source of left-right disagreement in the municipal sphere, one that shapes the way politicians frame policy issues and build coalitions of electoral support. If, on the other hand, public attitudes incline more toward an ends-against-the-middle pattern – a plausible hypothesis, given the positive salience of non-partisan, “independent” thinking among the general public (Klar and Krupnikov 2016) – this too would have important effects on municipal competition and policymaking, creating a serious challenge for left-leaning representatives, who would be compelled to build a coalition of support for their candidacies and policy proposals while also minimizing their reliance on explicitly ideological appeals. Collecting data on public attitudes on this issue, perhaps in combination with more in-depth studies of municipal political rhetoric, will help to clarify the consequences of this asymmetric structure for municipal politics.

“The sociologist who defines what ‘art’ is,” writes John Levi Martin (2015), “is not

studying the field, but playing a role in it.” Much the same is true, I believe, of the study of ideology in municipal politics. Political scientists need not abandon their analyses of the role of ideology in municipal policy disagreement and behaviour – indeed, these measures have been central to my own analysis here – nor should we cease to explore the structure, ideological or otherwise, of elite and mass attitudes on municipal policy issues (Anzia 2021; Cann 2018; Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). We must also remember, however, that the ideological character of municipal politics – the extent to which municipal politics “is” ideological – is not only a matter of academic debate, but also an important source of conflict *within* the municipal political field. This has been so for more than a century. Understanding the structure and sources of this longstanding disagreement, the individuals and groups who have chosen to invest resources in advocating for particular “definitions of politics” in the municipal sphere, and the consequences of these debates for municipal institutions, policy, and representation is a vital task for students of urban political development and contemporary urban politics.

7 References

- Anzia, Sarah F. 2021. "Party and Ideology in American Local Government: An Appraisal." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (1): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102131>.
- Applebaum, Anne. 2021. "Political Polarization is Solvable." *Solvable* February (10).
- Barber, Benjamin. 2013. *If Mayors Ruled the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., Susanna De Boef, and Amber Boydstun. 2008. *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benedictis-Kessner, Justin de, and Christopher Warshaw. 2016. "Mayoral partisanship and municipal fiscal policy." *Journal of Politics* 78 (4): 1124–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/686308>.
- Bridges, Amy. 1999. *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bright, David. 1998. *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Brodie, Janine, and Jane Jenson. 1991. *Crisis, Challenge, and Change: Party and Class in Canada Revisited*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Bucchianeri, Peter. 2020. "Party Competition and Coalitional Stability: Evidence from American Local Government." *American Political Science Review* 114 (4): 1055–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000386>.
- Cann, Damon M. 2018. "The Structure of Municipal Political Ideology." *State and Local Government Review* 50 (1): 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323x18781456>.
- Cochrane, Christopher. 2013. "The asymmetrical structure of left/right disagreement: Left-wing coherence and right-wing fragmentation in comparative party policy." *Party Politics* 19 (1): 104–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811398057>.
- . 2015. *Left and Right: The Small World of Political Ideas*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine, and David M. Glick. 2018. "Mayors, partisanship, and redistribution: Evidence directly from U.S. mayors." *Urban Affairs Review* 54 (1): 74–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087416674829>.

- Einstein, Katherine Levine, and Vladimir Kogan. 2016. "Pushing the City Limits: Policy Responsiveness in Municipal Government." *Urban Affairs Review* 52 (1): 3–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087414568027>.
- Epp-Koop, Stefan. 2015. *We're Going to Run this City: Winnipeg's Political Left After the General Strike*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Fligstein, Neil, and Doug McAdam. 2012. *A Theory of Fields*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Florida, Richard. 2019. "Are Local Politics As Polarized As National? Depends on the Issue." *CityLab* April (24).
- Gerken, Heather, David Bollier, Gary Gerstle, and Gar Alperovitz. 2016. "All Resistance Is Local': A Plan of Progressive Action for the Trump Years." *The Nation* November (19).
- Holman, Mirya R., and J. Celeste Lay. 2020. "Are You Picking Up What I Am Laying Down? Ideology in Low-Information Elections." *Urban Affairs Review*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087420908933>.
- Jessee, Stephen. 2012. *Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klar, Samara, and Yanna Krupnikov. 2016. *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kohn, Margaret. 2016. *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lammers, Joris, Alex Koch, Paul Conway, and Mark J. Brandt. 2017. "The Political Domain Appears Simpler to the Politically Extreme Than to Political Moderates." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 8 (6): 612–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616678456>.
- Laschinger, John. 2016. *Campaign Confessions: Tales from the War Rooms of Politics*. Toronto: Dundurn.
- Lee, Frances E. 2009. *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lucas, Jack. 2020a. "Do 'Non-Partisan' Politicians Match the Partisanship of their Constituents?" *Urban Affairs Review*.
- . 2020b. "Reaction or Reform? Subnational Evidence on PR Adoption from Canadian Cities." *Representation* 56 (1): 89–109.

- Lucas, Jack, and R. Michael McGregor. 2020. "Conclusion." In *Big City Elections in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lucas, Jack, Reed Merrill, Kelly Blidook, Sandra Breux, Laura Conrad, Gabriel Eidelman, Royce Koop, Daniella Marciano, Zack Taylor, and Salomé Vallette. 2021. "Women's Municipal Electoral Performance: An Introduction to the Canadian Municipal Elections Database." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000842392000102X>.
- Lucas, Jack, and Alison Smith. 2019. "Which Policy Issues Matter in Canadian Municipalities? A Survey of Municipal Politicians." *SPP Research Papers* 12 (March): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.11575/sppp.v12i0.56964>.
- Martin, John Levi. 2015. "What is Ideology?" *Sociologia* 77: 1–32.
- Milman, Oliver, Joe Eskenazi, Richard Luscombe, and Tom Dart. 2017. "The fight against climate change: four cities leading the way in the Trump era." *The Guardian* June (12). <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:VdZkKXkdtkJ:https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jun/12/climate-change-trump-new-york-city-san-francisco-houston-miami+%7B/%7Dcd=1%7B/%7Dhl=en%7B/%7Dct=clnk%7B/%7Dgl=ca%7B/%7Dclient=safari>.
- Noël, Alain, and Jean-Philippe Therien. 2008. *Left and Right in Global Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oliver, J. Eric. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Prooijen, Jan Willem van, and André P. M. Krouwel. 2019. "Psychological Features of Extreme Political Ideologies." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 28 (2): 159–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418817755>.
- Riker, William H. 1986. *The Art of Political Manipulation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sances, Michael W. 2018. "Ideology and Vote Choice in U.S. Mayoral Elections: Evidence from Facebook Surveys." *Political Behavior* 40 (3): 737–62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9420-x>.
- Schaffner, Brian F., Jesse H. Rhodes, and Raymond J. La Raja. 2020. *Hometown Inequality: Race, Class, and Representation in American Local Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Sisson, Patrick. 2016. "How progressive cities can lead the climate change battle." *Curbed* December (15).
- Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tausanovitch, Chris, and Christopher Warshaw. 2013. "Measuring constituent policy preferences in congress, state legislatures, and cities." *Journal of Politics* 75 (2): 330–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000042>.
- . 2014. "Representation in Municipal Government." *American Political Science Review* 108 (03): 605–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000318>.
- Treier, Shawn, and Simon Jackman. 2008. "Democracy as a latent variable." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 201–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00308.x>.
- Weaver, Timothy P. R. 2018. "By Design or by Default: Varieties of Neoliberal Urban Development." *Urban Affairs Review* 54 (2): 234–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087416683448>.
- . 2021. "Charting Change in the City: Urban Political Orders and Urban Political Development." *Urban Affairs Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087420988608>.

8 Supplementary Material

8.1 Policy Ideology Measure

My analysis in the main text uses ideological self-placement from the Canadian Municipal Barometer along with a second variable, policy ideology, capturing each respondent's latent municipal policy ideology. Questions for the municipal policy ideology measure are drawn from the 2020 and 2021 Canadian Municipal Barometer survey and listed below (with response options strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, don't know). Note that two questions were asked in both surveys.

- Questions from 2020 survey:
 - Municipalities should provide subsidized programs to low-income residents, even if doing so comes at the expense of businesses and/or wealthy residents.
 - It is good for a neighbourhood when it experiences rising property values, even if it means that some current residents might have to move out.
 - Municipalities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources.
 - Municipalities should make their roads accessible to active transportation (walking, cycling) even if it means sacrificing driving lanes and/or parking.
 - Municipalities should encourage increased housing density in established neighbourhoods, even if some local residents object.
 - Privatizing municipal services can provide municipalities with significant cost savings, even if it reduces municipal control of service provision.
 - Municipalities should have access to more revenue tools, even if it means higher municipal taxes.
- Questions from 2021 survey:
 - Municipalities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources.
 - Municipalities should make their roads accessible to active transportation (walking, cycling) even if it means sacrificing driving lanes and/or parking.
 - Municipalities should invest in affordable housing, even if it negatively influences neighbouring property values.
 - Municipalities should require that all municipal contractors pay their employees a living wage, even if it means increased costs for the municipality.
 - Municipalities should allow residents to make their own choices about mask-wearing and other COVID-19 safety measures, even if it means some residents

may expose themselves and others to risk.

- Municipalities should prioritize keeping property taxes low, even if it means low-income residents have access to fewer social services.
- Municipalities should keep historic street names, statues, and other heritage landmarks, even if some of the historical individuals being commemorated were prejudiced or racist.

To measure each respondent’s municipal policy ideology, I use the fourteen items above to measure each politician’s latent policy ideology using the following Bayesian factor analysis model: $y_{ik} = \beta_k \xi_i + e_{ik}$. In this model, $y_{i,k}$ are the values for observation i on each of the k policy questions. The β_k are the coefficients relating the latent variable to the observed indicators, and ξ_i is each individual’s policy ideology. I implement the model in JAGS, drawing 2,000 samples for each parameter following a burn-in period of 2,000 iterations. \hat{R} values, effective sample sizes, and traceplots show good evidence of convergence. This single-dimensional measure is well-supported by the data; in a conventional factor analysis, for instance, the first factor (eigenvalue = 4) explains 28% of the variance in the policy items, and all subsequent factors have eigenvalues below one. All variables are positively correlated in the expected directions. Figure 5 summarizes each of the β_k parameters, all of which are positive. These parameters not only help to confirm that a single-dimension measure of politicians’ municipal ideology is reasonable, but also suggests that, for political elites at least, attitudes on local issues like housing and active transportation are meaningfully related to more recognizably ideological issues like climate change policy (see Anzia 2021).

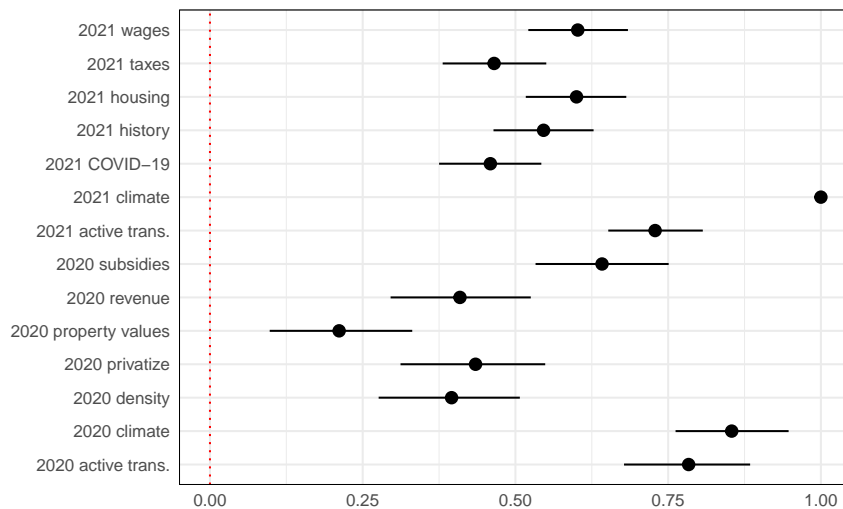


Figure 5: Beta Parameters from Latent Ideology Model

8.2 Symmetry Hypothesis: Additional Test

In the main text, I argued that the relationship between the non-ideological vision and individual ideology is more linear than quadratic. To provide an additional demonstration of this claim, I undertook an additional test of the probability that the relationship between ideology and the non-ideological vision is perfectly symmetric, indicating a pure ends-against-the-middle situation.¹² We begin with the following equation:

$$y = b_0 + b_1x + b_2x^2$$

In a perfectly symmetric relationship, the peak of this curve will be the median value of x . To identify the peak, we take the first derivative with respect to x , yielding $b_1 + 2b_2x$, and set this equal to zero. Bayesian estimation makes it simple to assess the possibility of a perfectly symmetric relationship by inspecting the posterior draws of β_1 and β_2 in my model (while setting x equal to the median value of each of the two ideology measures). In a perfectly symmetric relationship, $\beta_1 + 2\beta_2x$ will be above zero in about half of the MCMC draws, and below zero in about half of the MCMC draws, indicating a symmetric relationship centered at each ideology measure's median value. This test yields strong additional evidence against the ends-against-the-middle hypothesis: $p < 0.001$ that the relationship is indeed symmetric. Figure 6 summarizes the distribution of $\beta_1 + 2\beta_2x$ across the 2,000 MCMC draws; in both cases, it is clear from simple visual inspection that the distribution is not centered at zero.

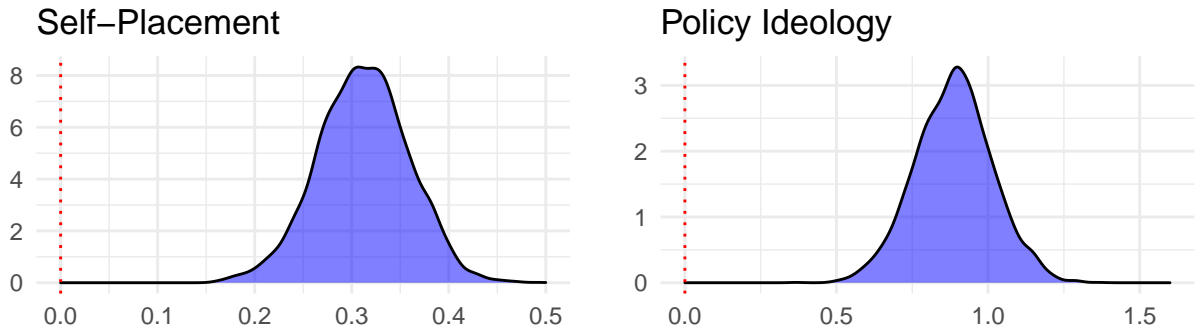


Figure 6: Symmetry Test

¹²I am grateful to Dave Armstrong and Daphne Lucas for their assistance in developing this test.

8.3 Full Tables: Main Text Results

Table 2 summarizes results for the models reported in the main text, including both the linear and quadratic terms. Columns marked “lower” and “upper” report 95% credible intervals for the estimates. $N=734$ for the self-placement model, and $N=772$ for the policy ideology model. Both models were estimated in Stan via rstanarm, using default priors of $\mathcal{N}(0, 2.5)$ for intercepts and coefficients. In each model, I draw 1,000 samples from four chains, following a warm-up period of 1,000 iterations for each chain. Both models show strong evidence of convergence, with clear mixing in traceplots and \hat{R} values of 1.0 for all parameters.

Table 2: Results: Main Estimates

Variable	Estimate	SD	Lower	Upper
Self-Placement	1.190	0.174	0.852	1.538
Self-Placement (Sq)	-0.088	0.017	-0.121	-0.055
Policy Ideology	0.817	0.118	0.581	1.056
Policy Ideology (Sq)	-0.430	0.104	-0.630	-0.226

8.4 Additional Models

Table 3 summarizes results from four additional models of the relationship between ideological self-placement and the municipal non-ideology index: a linear model containing ideological self-placement alone, a linear model containing ideological self-placement along with ideological self-placement squared, a linear model containing the two variables of interest along adjustments for age, gender, and education, and a multilevel model containing the same battery of controls along with varying intercepts by municipality. Notice that both the significance and the magnitude of both the linear and quadratic terms are consistent across columns two, three, and four and also very similar to the estimates in the first two rows of table 2 above.

Table 3: Robustness Models: Self-Placement and Non-Ideology Index

	Non-Ideology Index			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Self-Placement	0.309*** (0.048)	1.199*** (0.178)	1.130*** (0.187)	1.147*** (0.187)
Self-Placement (sq)		-0.089*** (0.017)	-0.084*** (0.018)	-0.087*** (0.018)
Woman			0.389** (0.196)	0.400** (0.195)
Age			0.036*** (0.008)	0.035*** (0.008)
Education			-0.481*** (0.185)	-0.449** (0.187)
(Log) Population				-0.067 (0.078)
Constant	-1.577*** (0.258)	-3.507*** (0.450)	-5.166*** (0.641)	-4.417*** (1.083)
Observations	734	734	668	668

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4 summarizes results from four additional models of the relationship between each individual's policy ideology and the municipal non-ideology index: a linear model containing policy ideology alone, a linear model containing policy ideology along with policy ideology squared, a linear model containing the two variables of interest along adjustments

for age, gender, and education, and a multilevel model containing the same battery of controls along with varying intercepts by municipality. Notice once again that both the significance and the magnitude of both the linear and quadratic terms are consistent across columns two, three, and four and also very similar to the estimates in the first two rows of table 2 above.

Table 4: Robustness Models: Policy Ideology and Non-Ideology Index

	Non-Ideology Index			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Policy Ideology	0.593*** (0.108)	0.813*** (0.120)	0.730*** (0.134)	0.716*** (0.137)
Policy Ideology (sq)		-0.427*** (0.106)	-0.347*** (0.111)	-0.354*** (0.112)
Woman			0.388** (0.197)	0.407** (0.196)
Age			0.038*** (0.008)	0.038*** (0.008)
Education			-0.428** (0.188)	-0.425** (0.190)
(Log) Population				-0.011 (0.079)
Constant	-0.010 (0.086)	0.263** (0.109)	-1.794*** (0.501)	-1.651* (0.985)
Observations	772	772	686	686

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Because our second independent variable, policy ideology, is a latent quantity, I also confirm that my findings are robust when propagating uncertainty in the latent measure through the subsequent non-ideology model. To do this, I use Monte Carlo integration (Treier and Jackman 2008), running separate models for each of the 2,000 posterior draws of the latent variable, sampling the β_1 and β_2 parameters from the model's posterior for each draw, and then summarizing the parameters. I find that the β_1 parameter is positive in 100% of the draws, and the β_2 parameter is negative in 98.7% of the draws, strongly supporting the interpretation in the main text. Parameter estimates are also very similar to (but, in keeping with the typical consequences of MC integration, slightly

more conservative than) those reported in table 2 above: $\beta_1=0.6$ and $\beta_2=-0.24$.

8.5 Robustness: Don't Know Responses

Table 5 demonstrates that my results are substantively identical when “don't know” responses are excluded from the analysis.

Table 5: Results Excluding Don't Know Responses

	Non-Ideology Index	
	(1)	(2)
Self-Placement	1.25*** (0.19)	
Self-Placement (sq)	-0.09*** (0.02)	
Policy Ideology		0.82*** (0.13)
Policy Ideology (sq)		-0.47*** (0.11)
Constant	-3.57*** (0.47)	0.32*** (0.12)
Observations	681	710

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

8.6 Survey Sample: Additional Detail and Robustness

Tables 6, 7, and 8 compare CMB samples to three observable characteristics of the full population of Canadian municipal elected representatives (above 9,000 population, i.e. municipalities in the CMB sampling frame). The tables suggest excellent balance on gender and population size and very good balance by province, with the exception of slight over-representation in Alberta and under-representation in Quebec. Table 9 shows that the results are consistent within each of these subsamples (Alberta and Quebec), indicating that the results are very unlikely to differ substantially from the results reported in the main text if Quebec were not slightly under-represented and/or Alberta were not slightly over-represented in the sample.

Table 6: Provincial Representativeness: Population and Sample

Province	Population	Sample	Difference
AB	0.10	0.15	0.05
BC	0.12	0.14	0.02
MB	0.03	0.02	-0.01
NB	0.03	0.02	0.00
NL	0.01	0.01	0.00
NS	0.03	0.06	0.02
NWT	0.00	0.00	0.00
ON	0.36	0.34	-0.02
PEI	0.01	0.00	0.00
QC	0.29	0.22	-0.07
SK	0.02	0.03	0.01
YT	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table 7: Gender Representativeness: Population and Sample

Gender	Population	Sample	Difference
F	0.32	0.34	0.02
M	0.68	0.66	-0.02

Table 8: Population Representativeness: Population and Sample

Pop. Cat.	Population	Sample	Difference	popcat
1	0.30	0.29	-0.01	≤15,000
2	0.21	0.19	-0.01	15,000 - 25,000
3	0.16	0.16	0.00	25,000-50,000
4	0.12	0.12	0.00	50,000-100,000
5	0.14	0.16	0.02	100,000-500,000
6	0.07	0.08	0.01	500,000 +

Table 9: Robustness Models: Self-Placement and Non-Ideology Index

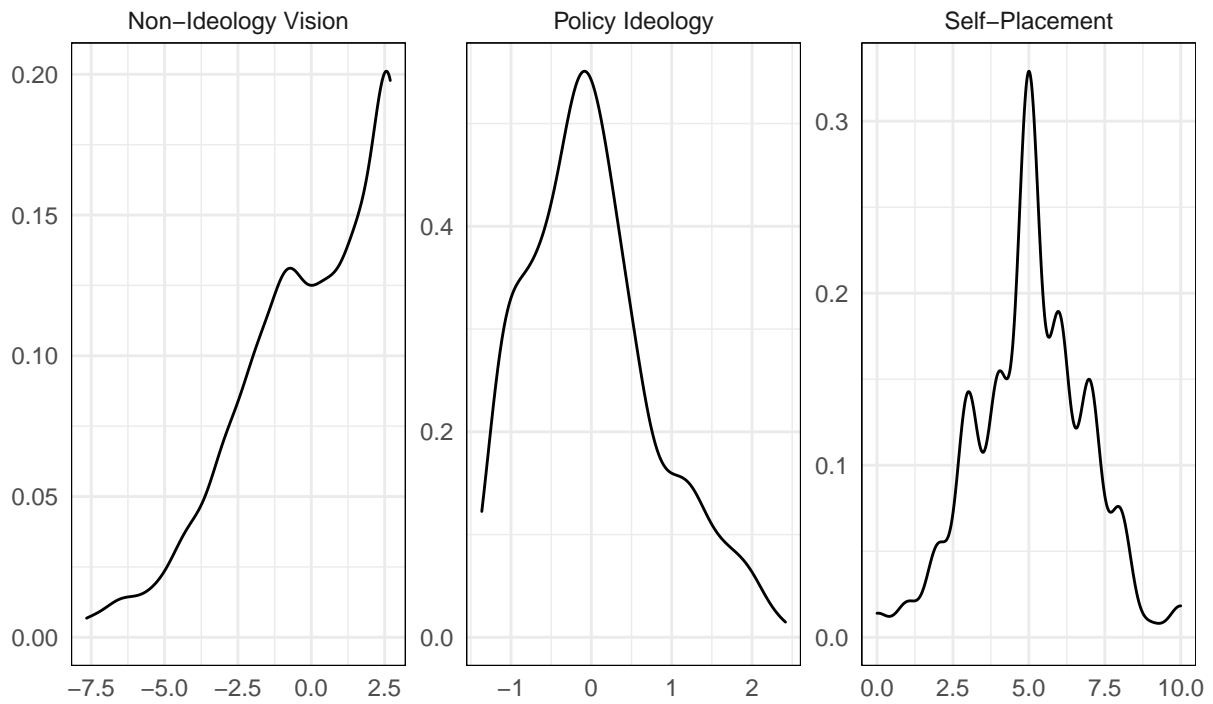
	Non-Ideology Index					
	All	Alberta	Quebec	All	Alberta	Quebec
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Self-Placement	1.199*** (0.178)	1.376** (0.539)	2.144*** (0.462)			
Self-Placement (sq)	-0.089*** (0.017)	-0.116** (0.046)	-0.156*** (0.043)			
Policy Ideology				0.813*** (0.120)	0.693** (0.342)	1.137*** (0.335)
Policy Ideology (sq)				-0.427*** (0.106)	-0.482** (0.234)	-1.056** (0.448)
Constant	-3.507*** (0.450)	-3.089** (1.528)	-7.327*** (1.194)	0.263** (0.109)	0.818*** (0.266)	-0.441* (0.227)
Observations	734	116	143	772	119	151

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

8.7 Descriptives: Distributions of Main Variables

Figure ?? summarizes the distribution of each of the three main variables in the analysis.



Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the 2021 Canadian Municipal Barometer research team for their assistance with the 2021 CMB annual survey. Thanks also to Alain Noël for feedback on an earlier draft of the manuscript.