

POLLING BACKGROUNDER

Climate Change and the BC Election: a Post-Mortem Analysis

February 25, 2025

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Summary

We conducted a post-mortem assessment of the role that climate change played in the October 2024 BC provincial election, using a new survey of BC voters (n =1,099).

While we find little evidence that climate policy determined the outcome, we do find evidence that support for climate action can boost support for provincial parties without triggering backlash.

We find that all else equal - the BC public prefers parties and politicians who take climate change seriously. The average BC voter - including those who voted Conservative - preferred a provincial government that maintains the carbon tax on large polluters. Voters also support election commitments to boost renewable energy and expand household electrification.

We found no evidence that downplaying the seriousness of climate change was appealing to voters casting a ballot for any party. To the contrary, treating it as a serious threat was appealing to all voters, regardless of party.

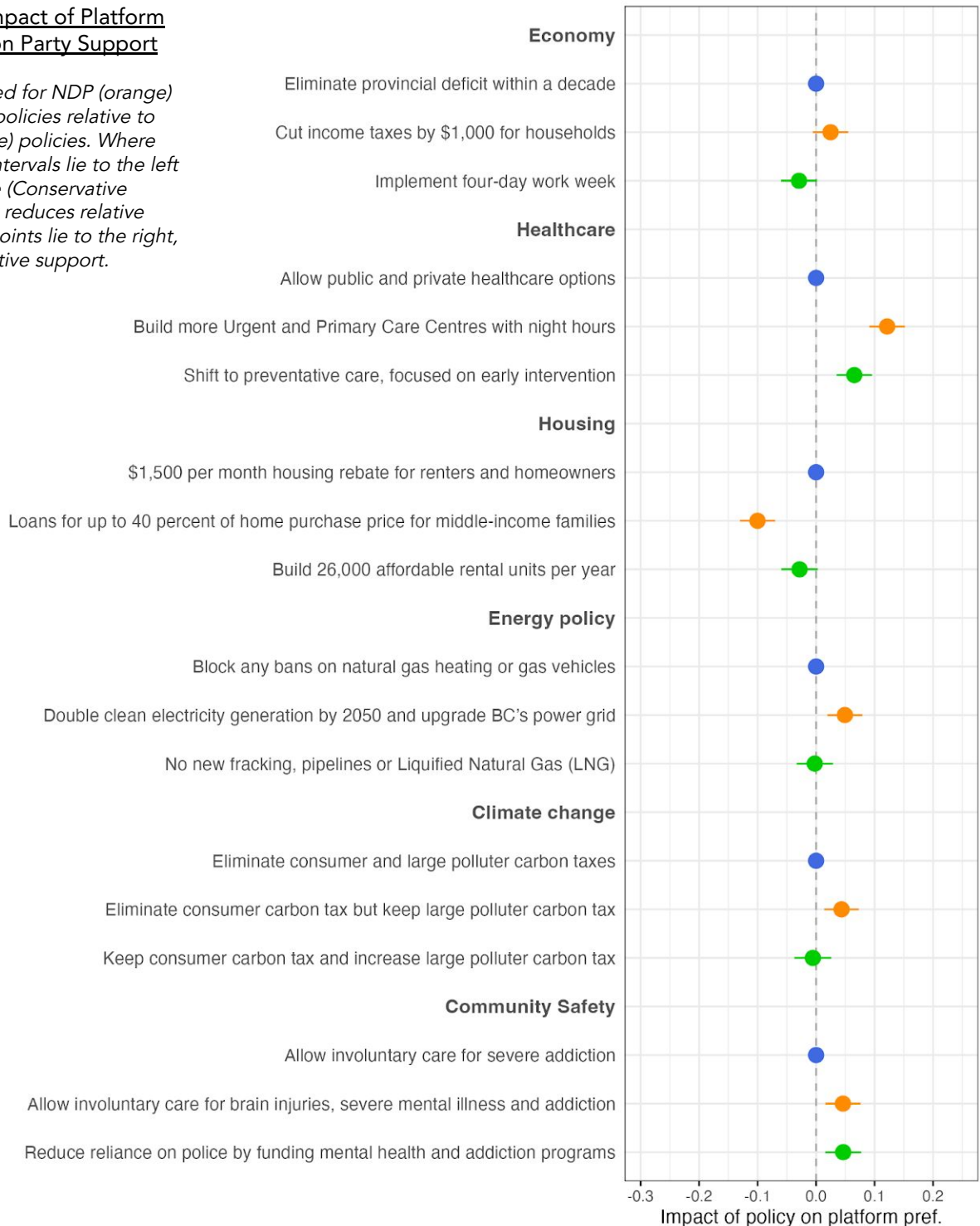
The climate agenda articulated by the current government in its election platform remains more popular than the other policy alternatives advanced during the election.

Climate policies appeal to BC voters

BC voters prefer party platforms that take the issue of climate seriously. We tested how the public reacts to some of the main policy commitments made during the election using a conjoint experiment (see *Methodology* appendix). We find (*Figure 1*) that, holding all other issues constant, voters are more likely to support a party that eliminates the consumer carbon tax but maintains the large polluter carbon tax. In addition, we find that voters support a substantial increase in BC’s clean electricity generation.

Figure 1: The Impact of Platform Commitments on Party Support

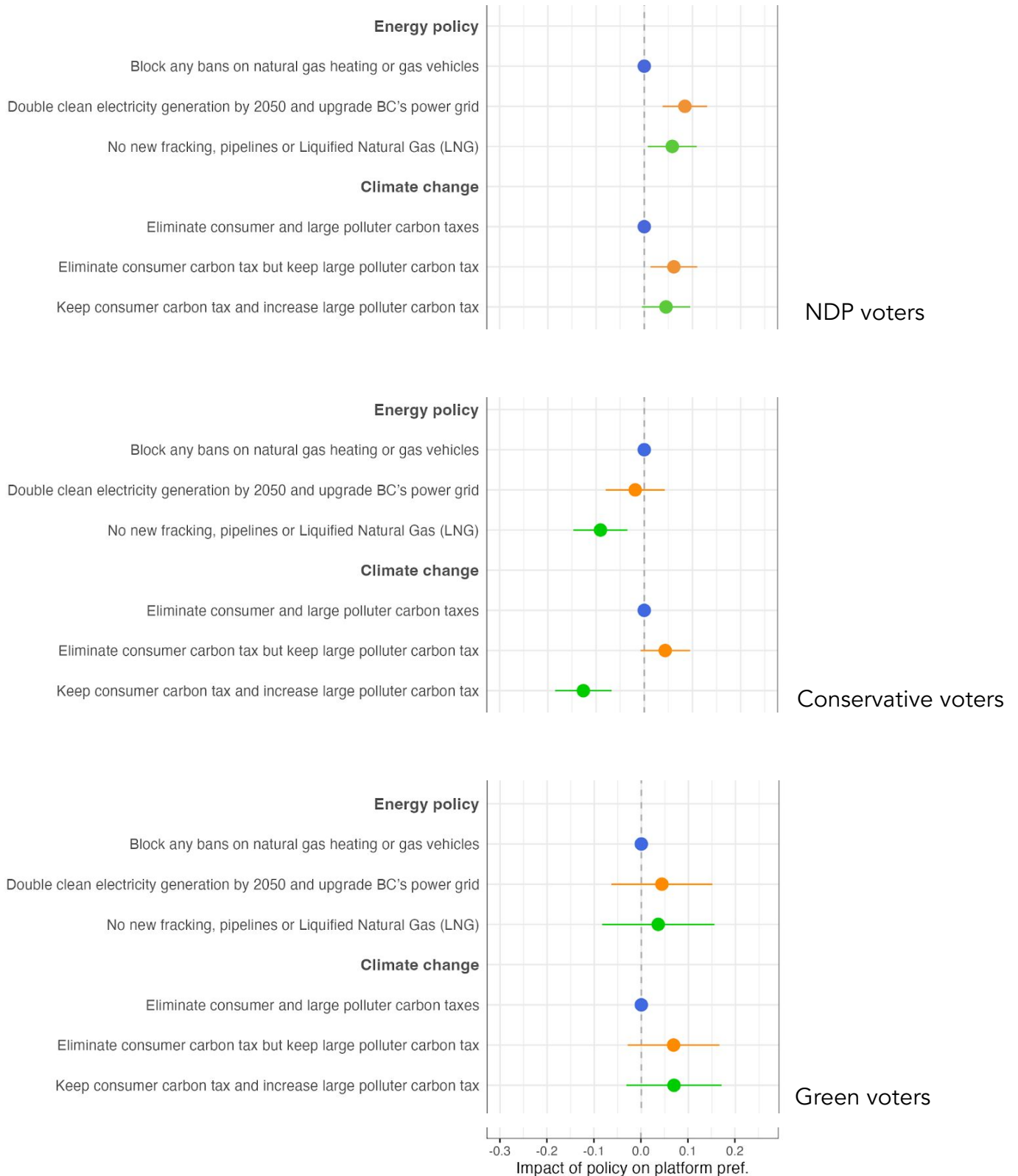
Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.



These effects are substantively similar across self-reported NDP, Green and Conservative voters, as we see in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: The Impact of Climate and Energy Commitments among Voter Bases

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.



BC voters prefer parties that take climate action

We also conducted a more detailed analysis of support for the specific climate commitments contained in BC election platforms. Many of these policy promises did not receive substantial public or media attention during the election period. However, they were part of the broad policy agenda that voters were asked to choose from as part of the election.

Our analysis of these commitments can thus cast light on the alignment of BC public preferences with current provincial policy debates. It previews how publics might respond to the government's decision to implement parts of their climate policy campaign platform.

To conduct this analysis we use a second conjoint experiment that asks survey respondents to choose between hypothetical climate policy packages (see *Methodology* index). Again, we assess - holding all else equal - how including specific climate policies in a platform boosts or reduces public support relative to the Conservative party position.

We find a substantial boost to taking climate change seriously as a threat (Figure 3, and significant political returns for supporting large polluter carbon taxes and clean energy deployment. *None* of the climate commitments made by the NDP during the provincial election, holding everything else constant, *reduce* support for a climate policy package. This pattern includes self-reported Conservative voters (Figure 4). For example, even self-reported Conservative voters do not respond positively to their party's lack of commitment to taking climate change seriously. Conservative voters either mildly preferred other parties' climate promises to their own party, or were indifferent.

We thus find no evidence that the Conservatives received a political dividend from opposing climate policy and/or questioning the seriousness of climate change. If anything, evidence suggests that voters react negatively against these weaker climate policy positions and positively to stronger climate policy positions. This includes NDP voters (Figure 5) and Green Party voters (Figure 6).

Figure 3: The Impact of Climate Commitments on Public Support among all BC Voters

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

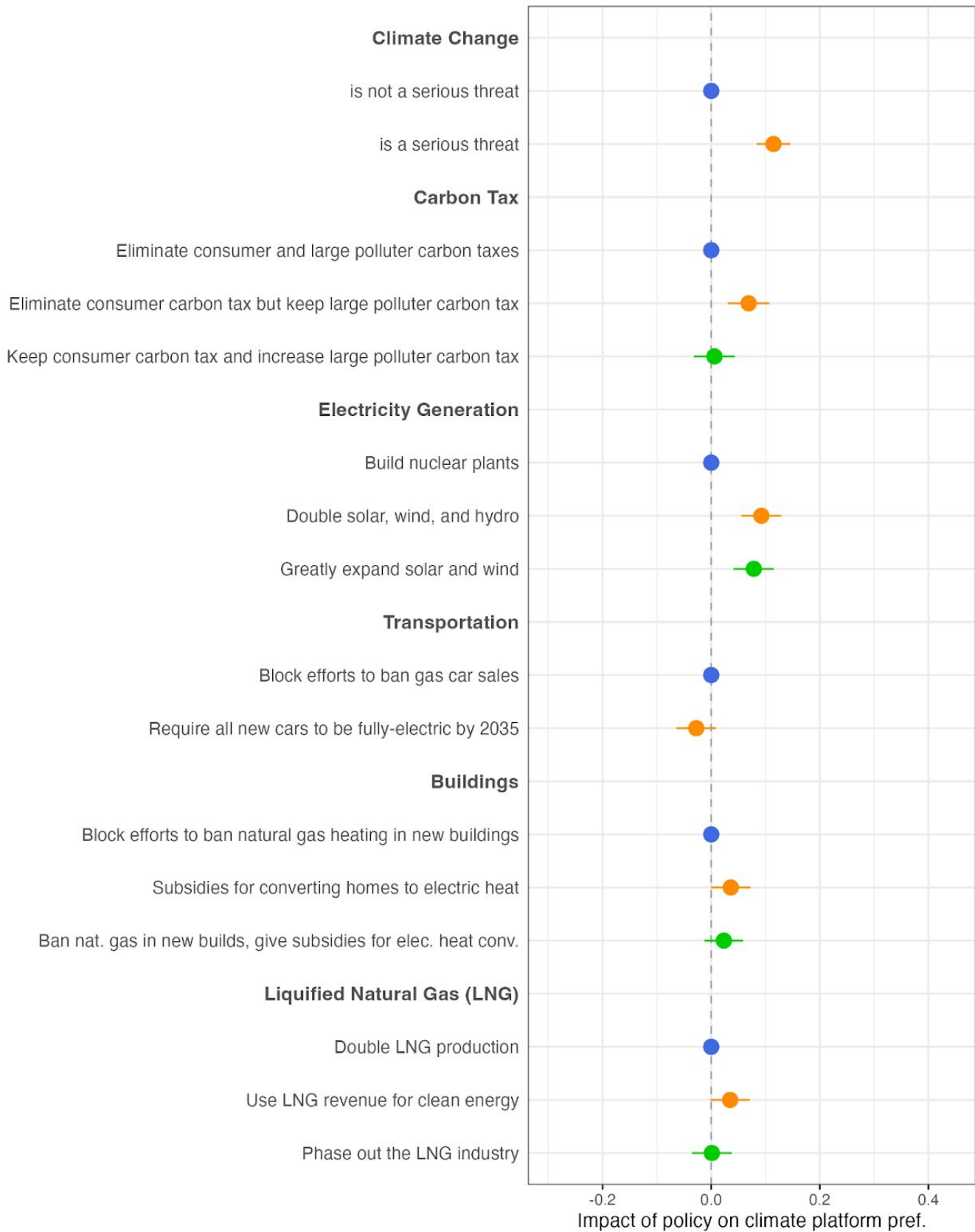


Figure 4: The Impact of Climate Commitments on Public Support among Conservative voters only

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

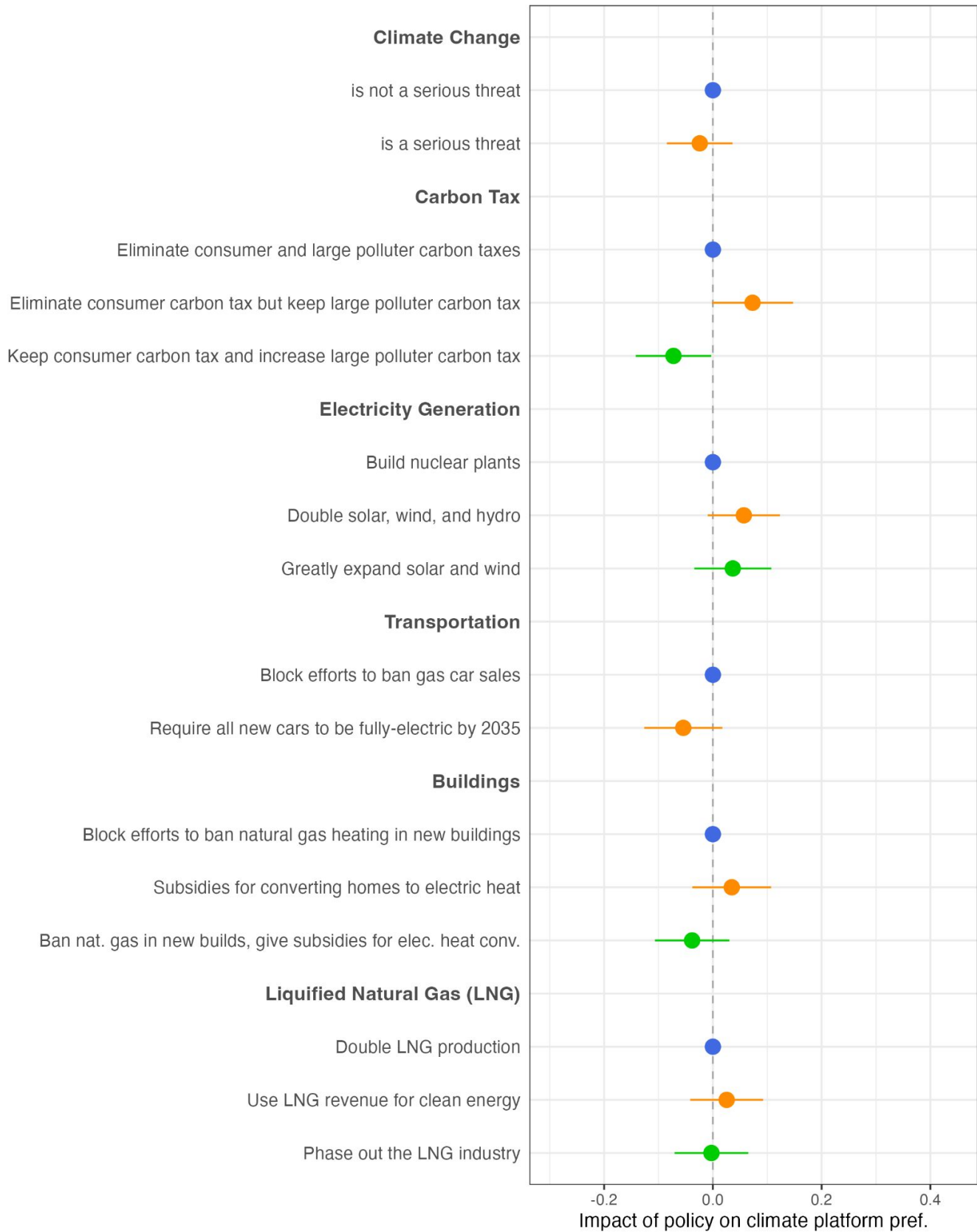


Figure 4: The Impact of Climate Commitments on Public Support among NDP voters only

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.

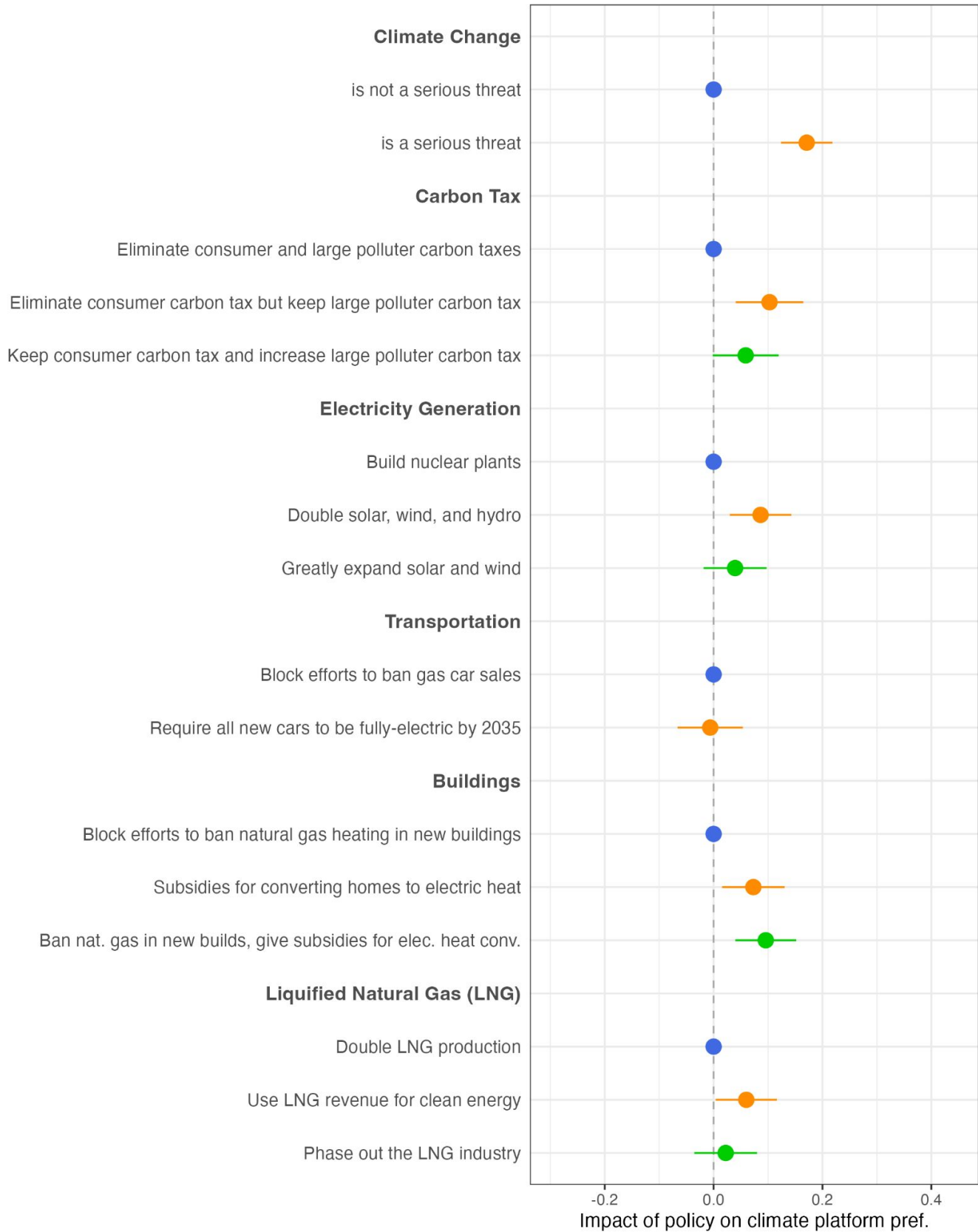
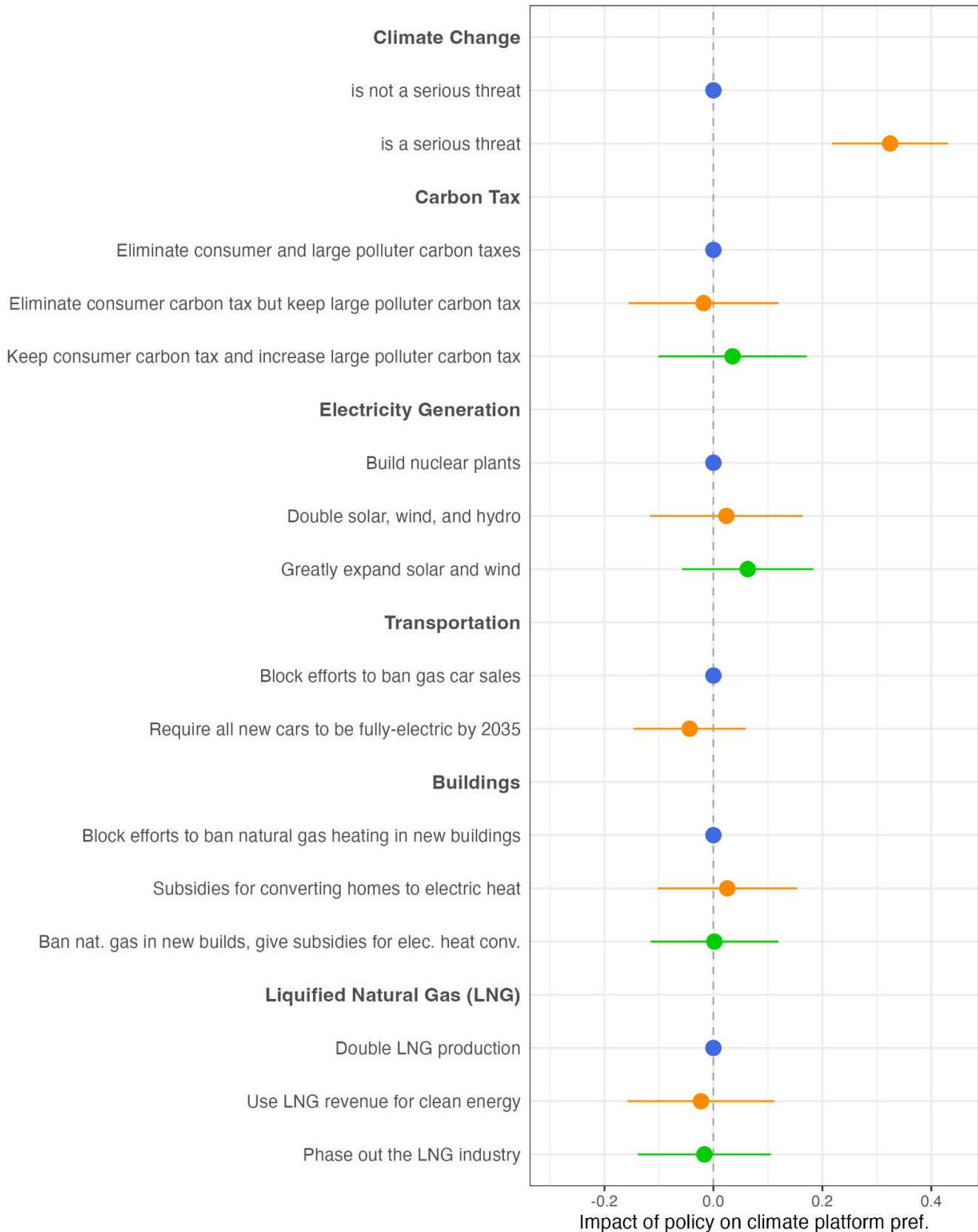


Figure 6: The Impact of Climate Commitments on Public Support among Green voters only

Impact is measured for NDP (orange) and Green party policies relative to Conservative (blue) policies. Where points and 95% intervals lie to the left of the vertical line (Conservative policy), the policy reduces relative support. Where points lie to the right, they increase relative support.



About the Researchers

Acknowledgements

Dr. Matto Mildenberger was commissioned to explore the opinions of British Columbian voters on the climate change and energy commitments from party platforms in the 2024 BC election. For questions about this report, please contact mildenberger@ucsb.edu.

Prof. Matto Mildenberger

Dr. Mildenberger is a Canadian researcher and an Associate Professor of Political Science. He is the Director of the [2035 Initiative](#) at UC Santa Barbara and specializes in comparative climate policymaking and the dynamics of climate opinion. He has conducted similar work in Canada previously, including the development of the [2018 Canadian Climate Opinion Maps](#).

Gabriel De Roche, PhD

Originally from Toronto, Gabriel holds a doctorate in political science from the University of California, San Diego. Over the course of his career, he has conducted extensive public opinion polling across Canada and the United States, as well as in more than 60 other countries. An expert in public opinion and survey research, he uses innovative sampling and measurement techniques to uncover scientifically rigorous insights. He is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara.

The 2035 Initiative, University of California - Santa Barbara

The 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara is a cutting-edge “think-and-do” tank that brings together world-leading environmental policy research labs to develop actionable roadmaps for slashing climate pollution and ushering in a more equitable, resilient future. We use empirical research, policy development, and media engagement to support transformational policy change around the world.

Methodology Appendix

Survey Data

This analysis is based on a survey delivered online to 1,099 adult residents of British Columbia (aged 18+). The sample was recruited through the Cint Exchange from a variety of opt-in online panels. To maximize representativeness, respondents were recruited using quota sampling, employing quotas based on age and gender. Responses were collected from January 9 - 13, 2025. Two sets of respondent-level weights were generated to correct for remaining observable sample imbalance using a technique called iterative proportional fitting (also known as raking). First, demographic weights were generated using age, gender, and education. Second, data on recalled vote in the 2024 election were incorporated to generate an additional weight such that the survey data approximately matched observed election results. These respondent-level weights are applied in the analysis where methodologically appropriate (e.g. certain experimental analyses present unweighted results to avoid inflating any possible bias arising from unobserved differences). The margin-of-error of an equally-sized probability sample for proportions reported in the analysis are +/- 3 percentage points (with 0.95 confidence).

Conjoint Analysis

We analyze the effect of individual policies on the popularity of a party's platform using a technique called a "conjoint experiment." This technique has long been used in market research and has been adopted by social scientists to evaluate public preferences over anything from candidate choice to legislative action to immigration policy. Conjoint experiments are especially useful in measuring voter preferences when their choices are "multi-dimensional" – meaning the real-world choice environment they are living and acting in cannot be reduced to a single dimension such as policies on taxation, or policies on healthcare. Instead, conjoint experiments replicate the real-world scenario in which voters are choosing among candidates/platforms with positions on a variety of issues that may or may not be particularly important to some individual voter. Our conjoint experiments present respondents with a pair of policy platforms that are randomly generated. Because of this random generation in which any policy has an equal chance of being put next to any other policy, we are able to analyze the *effect* of including some policy on the likelihood that a respondent will prefer that platform. In other words, all else equal, one particular tax policy increases the likelihood that a voter will choose that platform compared to some other tax policy. This is called the "Average Marginal Component Effect" of some policy, and is a causally identified quantity-of-interest.

In our analysis, we set the policies of the opposition BC Conservatives as the baseline against which we measure the effect of BC NDP and BC Green policies on whether voters prefer that platform. For each policy domain, we selected the most high profile policy pushed by each of the BC parties in their media outreach and written platform materials. Choices were validated against media tracking tools (e.g. [CBC Platform Summary](#)) and political analysts active in the province. We conducted this analysis twice: first, on platforms covering a wide variety of issues; and second, on platforms specifically focused on climate-related issues. We present results for all voters, for BC NDP voters, for BC Conservative voters, and for BC Green voters.

In the analysis below, we plot the effects of these policies on platform preference with 95% confidence intervals. Where these confidence intervals cross the vertical line at 0, these policies do not have a statistically significant effect on platform preference. Where these points and their confidence intervals lie to the left of the vertical line at zero, the policy has a negative effect on platform preference; where the points and their confidence intervals lie to the right of the vertical line at 0, the policy has a positive effect on platform preference.