Working Paper Series # 2

Voter Dealignment or Campaign Effects?: Accounting for Political Preferences in Ontario[1]

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Voter dealignment or campaign effects?:
Accounting for political preferences in Ontario[2]

Elections in Canada are rarely subject to the delays in voting counts present in the United States. For Americans, the time required to count hundreds of millions of ballots has made exit polls an attractive option to political commentators hoping to fill the void between the close of polls and the confirmation of results. Often face-to-face surveys with individuals leaving the ballot box, exit polls allow not only for a quick prediction of election results, but also allow students of voting to say something meaningful about the reasons behind ballot decisions. The speed with which election results are usually announced in Canada, and the sheer cost of mounting an exit poll for such a comparatively small voting population, has meant that exit polls are not a feature of Canadian politics. For the 2003 Ontario election, however, the Laurier Institute for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy (LISPOP), at Laurier University, mounted an exit poll in one of the 103 Ontario ridings to determine what lessons, if any, could be drawn from the experience. The LISPOP exercise was the first American-style exit poll conducted in Canada and provides unprecedented data on voter motivations only minutes after individuals cast their ballots. This article provides an analysis of the results of this poll.