

# FIRST NATIONS' FINANCIAL REPORTING AND PUBLIC OPINION IN CANADA

BY CHRISTOPHER ALCANTARA & JASON ROY | JULY 2016



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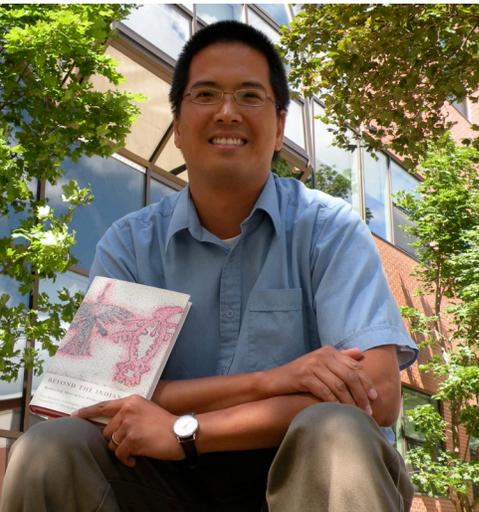
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last several decades, indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians have become increasingly interested in issues relating to financial transparency and accountability on Canadian reserves. Indigenous and non-indigenous governments have responded with various initiatives such as the Assembly of First Nations and the government of Canada's Accountability for Results,<sup>1</sup> which was a strategy for increasing and improving financial transparency and accountability in these communities. The most recent initiative was in 2013 when the federal government passed the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. This legislation required communities that were under the jurisdiction of the Indian Act to provide comprehensive financial data to the federal government for public release and consumption. Although the current federal government has promised not to enforce this legislation, most First Nations communities have abided by its requirements and may continue to do so. The primary interest of this paper is to assess what effect increased financial transparency has had on Canadian public opinion toward indigenous peoples.

To do so, we conducted an online survey experiment to measure the impact of different levels of financial disclosure on Canadian public opinion regarding First Nations' communities. As a point of comparison, we also looked at the effect of financial disclosure on public opinion about municipal governments. Our findings suggest that confidence in First Nations and municipal actors is generally unaffected by different levels of financial disclosure. We do, however, find increased (albeit weak) public support for self-determination when indigenous governments provide full financial disclosure.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 60 years, First Nations communities in Canada have gained a variety of powers and responsibilities from the federal government, mainly through a process known as administrative decentralization. Under this process, the Canadian government transfers control over the delivery of certain programs and services to First Nations' governments, rather than giving them full authority over all aspects of program design and implementation. Beginning in the 1960s and accelerating through the 1980s and 1990s, band councils were delegated administrative control over "social services, education, training, economic development, and housing services," among other things. In 1983, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, as it was then known, "directly managed close to 50 per cent of programs directed towards Aboriginal Peoples. This proportion [in 2008] is now reduced to 8 per cent."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as indigenous communities in Canada were receiving more responsibilities through administrative decentralization and other mechanisms (e.g., modern treaties and self-government agreements), public scrutiny from within and outside of these communities also increased. Some indigenous citizens and members of the broader Canadian public wondered whether band council programs were being administered fairly, impartially and efficiently. Some commentators also raised questions about the salaries and benefits that Aboriginal politicians were receiving to carry out their political responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

At least partly in response to these varied criticisms, indigenous and Canadian governments introduced a variety of new policies and structures to improve accountability and financial transparency regimes on reserves. Individual communities, for instance, experimented with assorted processes and procedures for how their governments made decisions and how they drafted and implemented budgets.<sup>4</sup> At the federal level, in 2013, the government of Canada unilaterally, and perhaps without adequate consultation,

passed the *First Nations Financial Transparency Act*, which required Canada's 581 First Nations to make public "their audited consolidated financial statements and a Schedule of Remuneration and Expenses of chief and council." Prior to this legislation, such information was only transmitted to the federal government and was unavailable to the public.

Despite the importance of these issues and developments, there have been surprisingly few studies published on the effectiveness of these efforts at combatting political corruption within indigenous communities.<sup>5</sup> As well, there has been virtually nothing written on how these new accountability and financial transparency mechanisms affected Canadian public opinion regarding indigenous communities and their governments. This latter point is especially important because positive public opinion may be a crucial and influential factor for pushing federal and provincial governments to support indigenous self-governance rather than punish people by utilizing stricter requirements and increased oversight.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, we investigate the following question: To what extent does the level of financial transparency and disclosure affect public opinion toward Aboriginal peoples and governments? To answer this question, we draw upon original data collected from an online survey experiment to assess the extent to which different levels of financial reporting (e.g., full disclosure, partial disclosure and no disclosure) affect public opinion regarding First Nations' communities. We also ask the same question about municipal governments in order to investigate whether public opinion toward accountability and transparency is different for Aboriginal and municipal governments. We choose municipal governments as the reference category because of the similarities they share with band council governments in structure, function and style. However, we also note that there are important differences between municipal and band council governments such as their legal status and the fact that band councils typically deliver programs and services such as income support and education that generally belong to the domain of provinces.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, we think municipal governments serve as a reasonable comparison to assess whether public opinion toward financial transparency varies in accordance with research on negative attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples in Canada or reflects a more general opinion toward government financial disclosure.

The structure of our paper is as follows: We provide some background information and our expectations regarding these issues before describing our research design, methods and data. We then analyze our data, ending with a discussion of how our findings might be used to inform the contemporary policy debate about accountability and transparency regimes on Canadian reserves.

## BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

Much of the media coverage surrounding indigenous issues in Canada has tended to highlight the negative<sup>8</sup> and/or reproduce colonial assumptions about these communities.<sup>9</sup> One issue in particular that has garnered frequent and significantly negative attention over the last two decades is the lack of sufficient accountability and transparency mechanisms for First Nations' governments and the resulting corruption that supposedly ensues as a consequence. Some media reports, for instance, have highlighted cases of vote buying, influence peddling and unfair hiring and promotion practices. Others have suggested that band politicians are drawing disproportionately large salaries and are using their positions to increase their individual wealth and the wealth of their family and closest friends.<sup>10</sup> These instances of misbehaviour and corruption are supposedly the result of weak accountability and transparency regimes in these communities and are not limited to any one region or community but are instead found all across Canada in urban and rural settings.<sup>11</sup>

Some academics have also criticized the *Indian Act* and First Nations' communities for lacking effective accountability and transparency mechanisms, which in turn may have encouraged the proliferation of corruption in these settings.<sup>12</sup> These criticisms have come from all sides of the political spectrum and from both indigenous and non-indigenous thinkers. Tom Flanagan, for instance, describes a number of examples from Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario where chiefs and band councillors paid themselves what some people might describe as outrageously large salaries or engaged in nepotism when filling government positions.<sup>13</sup> According to Flanagan, much of this corruption and mismanagement is a result of the way in which program devolution and Aboriginal self-government in Canada is designed and practised. Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard generally agree with Flanagan, noting that some Aboriginal

leaders have no reason to think that the distribution of "money on the basis of kinship is wrong."<sup>14</sup> Taiaiake Alfred agrees that corruption and financial mismanagement are occurring in some indigenous communities but places the blame on the Canadian state and its powerful tendency to co-opt indigenous leaders into working for Canadian society and interests.<sup>15</sup> This co-optation, according to Alfred, occurs through a diverse set of mechanisms that legitimizes local indigenous leaders, amplifies community divisions, generates dependency and incorporates these leaders into the organizational logic and structure of the country and the state.<sup>16</sup>

Much of this commentary, unfortunately, tends to be anecdotal and/or theoretical, rather than grounded in systematic and generalizable empirical data. In other words, it is unclear how widespread and pervasive these assumptions are or whether the levels of corruption and political mismanagement among these indigenous communities is more or less than what the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments of Canada experience. Nonetheless, negative publicity has likely been at least partially responsible for generating some institutional reforms among First Nations' governments from above (e.g., the federal government) and from below (e.g., from band members and their elected politicians). At the band level, some communities have voluntarily increased their efforts to improve accountability and transparency practices by reporting chief and council resolutions and decisions and employee salaries and benefits, as well as by engaging in more-frequent consultations with band members. The Sechelt First Nation, for example, hires an independent electoral officer to oversee its elections, and it makes chief and council meetings open to the public.<sup>17</sup> Westbank First Nation offers a more comprehensive set of accountability and transparency mechanisms including posting and distributing notices of council meetings, decisions and agendas, and allowing citizens to formally request that an issue be brought forward for chief and council to deliberate.

It holds frequent referenda and meetings with the general membership, the latter of which must occur at least once every three months.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these local innovations, the federal government intervened to try to improve accountability and transparency regimes on Canadian reserves. Although the federal government's *First Nations Governance Act* failed to pass in the early 2000s, it had more success in 2013 when it passed the *First Nations Financial Transparency Act* (C-27). Prior to this legislation, the federal government, as part of the terms and conditions of the contribution funding agreements that they established with First Nations communities, required these communities to report their financial activities to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (although prior to C-27, business-related activities and income were excluded). This information, however, was not publicly available, although band members could make a request to Aboriginal Affairs and the band council for it. Following a number of developments and activities, including some band members raising concerns about the salaries of their elected officials, and efforts by non-governmental organizations and members of Parliament to facilitate salary disclosure, the federal government in 2013 passed legislation that would "publish the audited consolidated financial statements for each First Nations community."<sup>19</sup> Whether the federal government passed this legislation directly in response to these developments and activities is unclear.

Public reaction to the legislation, at least as reported in the media, seemed mixed. Some commentators welcomed the legislation, arguing that increased financial transparency would help band members better hold their leaders accountable for their decisions and actions. Others criticized the legislation as paternalistic and unnecessary, questioning why Canadian citizens should have access to the salary levels and benefits of band council members.

Among other things, they were worried that the public and individual band members would focus on the exceptional cases rather than the majority of cases where more-reasonable fiscal management is the norm.<sup>20</sup>

Although there have been some studies published on the effects of these bottom-up and top-down efforts at institutional reform,<sup>21</sup> scholars have yet to empirically assess the impact of these levels of financial disclosure on public opinion toward Aboriginal communities. Generally, it seems reasonable to assume that providing more financial information should improve public opinion by fostering trust among citizens toward governments. In essence, governments that provide this information are telling their constituents and other observers that they have nothing to hide. On the other hand, providing little to no information may decrease public support by increasing suspicion that the government is hiding something. All of these effects, of course, are mitigated by the characteristics of the information itself, how it is released and who chooses to access it. Still, the *quantity* of information matters in and of itself because some individuals will use it as a shortcut when considering whether to trust or have confidence in a particular government or actor.

Some might wonder why public opinion matters in this particular situation. One might argue, for instance, that what is more important is whether the accountability and transparency measures have any effect on the behaviour of the politicians. Although this particular policy effect is important, so too is the associated level of public opinion toward First Nations' governments and their members. Many studies have shown that public opinion can have a powerful effect on the likelihood and direction of policy change across policy fields.<sup>22</sup> Summarizing 20 years of academic research on this question, Paul Burstein writes:

*Most social scientists who study public opinion and public policy in democratic countries agree that*

*(1) public opinion influences public policy; (2) the more salient an issue to the public, the stronger the relationship is likely to be; and (3) the relationship is threatened by the power of interest organizations, political parties, and economic elites.<sup>23</sup>*

These observations are likely transferable to Canada and to indigenous public policy-making in this country. In short, absent any significant interference from elite organizations and individuals, positive public opinion could encourage policy change that is less punitive and more supportive of indigenous self-determination, the latter of which we define as the scope and ability of indigenous communities to exercise autonomy within the state.

## EXPECTATIONS

There is a large and well-developed literature that establishes a link between increased levels of information and increased levels of trust and confidence.<sup>24</sup> The literature on game theory, for instance, is replete with studies that find a strong relationship between increased information and co-operative behaviour.<sup>25</sup> Other studies have shown a similar relationship between governments providing increased access to its activities and increased citizen confidence and trust in those governments. Caroline Tolbert and Karen Mossberger, for instance, have found

*a statistically significant relationship between trust and use of a local government website, as well as other positive assessments of federal and local governments .... The evidence suggests that e-government can increase process-based trust by improving interactions with citizens and perceptions of responsiveness.*<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Fay Lomax Cook, Lawrence R. Jacobs and Dukhong Kim have found that the quality and quantity of information presented to U.S. citizens has a dramatic impact on their confidence in social security programs in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

In this paper, we expect similar effects to occur even though in this case, we are interested in how public opinion varies with respect to the reputation and activities of band governments, which have no interaction with or direct authority over most Canadian citizens. If the above literature is correct that increased information boosts the confidence among citizens toward their government, then it seems reasonable to expect the same effects to occur toward the governments of other people. If we control for content, more information should lead to more confidence regardless of the government that is of interest. Less information, on balance, should likely make citizens more suspicious that the government has something to hide.

Certain cultural and individual predispositions about race and Aboriginal culture, however, may temper all of these effects.<sup>28</sup> According to the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, which involved person-to-person and telephone interviews with 2,614 individuals of First Nations, Metis and Inuit descent living in urban communities, “[M]ost urban Aboriginal peoples [about 71 per cent] think non-Aboriginal people view them in a negative light.”<sup>29</sup> Aboriginal respondents claim that non-Aboriginals think that they are lazy, unintelligent and uneducated, rely heavily on social welfare programs and have severe addiction problems.<sup>30</sup> Many respondents also report that they have been victims of “negative behaviour or unfair treatment” because of their ethnicity.<sup>31</sup>

A number of recent polls and surveys of non-Aboriginal Canadians confirms these perceptions.<sup>32</sup> An Ipsos Reid survey in early 2013 found “a strong majority of Canadians believe that most of indigenous peoples’ problems are brought upon by themselves and that reserves should not get any more federal funds until independent auditors can review their books.”<sup>33</sup> Stuart Soroka and Sarah Robertson’s review of public opinion research on Canadian attitudes toward immigration and multiculturalism revealed “that Muslims and Aboriginal Peoples are considered the most likely to face discrimination. One in three Canadians believes each of these two groups ‘often’ experiences discrimination.”<sup>34</sup> Building upon scholarly works, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H1: Increased disclosure of financial information will produce increased confidence in First Nations’ governments.

H2: Increased disclosure of financial information will produce more-positive feelings toward First Nations’ communities.

H3: Higher levels of reported financial disclosure will increase public support for First Nations’ control over their financial disclosure.

In testing these hypotheses, we include similar measures of confidence, feelings, and support for control over financial disclosure for municipal governments. Given what we found in our review of the literature on public opinion toward Aboriginal people, our expectation is that public opinion will likely favour municipal governments regardless of treatment. Including this reference group allows us to not only test this assumption, but also to assess whether treatment effects reflect changes in preference based on support for financial disclosure regardless of the governing body or if these effects and the magnitude of change are conditional upon the type of government. In this instance, we expect to observe stronger treatment effects for First Nations' governments given the increased level of public attention on First Nations' financial disclosure and the generally negative tone of these reports (see above).

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In order to assess how changes in the level of fiscal disclosure influence public opinion toward First Nations' governments, we employed an online survey experiment embedded in a national survey. To populate our study, we invited a sample of 1,600 Canadians from Survey Sampling International's proprietary panel to complete a survey on Canadian Political Opinion.<sup>35</sup> After providing consent to be part of our study, respondents were asked a set of questions pertaining to their level of satisfaction in, the amount of attention they pay to, and their level of interest in Canadian politics. We also included questions regarding how much the federal government should spend on a variety of issues, including Aboriginal issues. Participants then answered a series of questions about the 2015 Canadian federal election, which included their vote choice and the reasons for voting for their specified party. The third section of our study included our experiment. In this section, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight groups – six treatments and two control groups – designed to test our hypotheses. The six treatments provided information on the level of financial disclosure (full, partial or none) reported by either a majority of First Nations (treatments 1, 3 and 5) or municipalities (treatments 2, 4 and 6) in Canada (see Appendix 1). Following a brief statement reporting the level of financial disclosure provided by the First Nation/municipal government, we asked respondents to “[p]lease indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it should be up to band councils [municipal governments] to determine what kind of financial information should be made public.” In the two control groups (First Nations and municipalities), no information on the level of financial disclosure was provided. We included our question on First Nations/municipal control of financial disclosure with four similarly styled questions that asked for opinions on electoral reform, the powers of the Supreme Court of Canada and Parliament, infrastructure spending and representation in the Cabinet of Canada as a means of masking our primary interest and avoiding cognitive anchoring effects. After they filled out the experimental section, participants were asked

to answer a set of five factual political knowledge questions and then were given a question array assessing their level of confidence and feelings toward a variety of political institutions, countries and groups.<sup>36</sup> These institutions and groups included First Nations governments, Aboriginal band council members and Aboriginal peoples, as well as municipal governments and politicians. The survey ended with a set of sociodemographic questions.

Our experimental design allows us to assess how the level of public support for control over financial disclosure varies according to stated level of financial disclosure within and across First Nations and municipalities. If our expectations hold, we should see more-favourable opinion toward First Nations' governments and communities under conditions of full financial disclosure relative to no and partial disclosure. To operationalize favourable opinion, we compare the level of (H1) confidence respondents have in First Nations' governments, (H2) feelings toward Aboriginal band council members and Aboriginal peoples and (H3) level of agreement with the right of First Nations to determine how much financial information to disclose across treatments. For comparison, we also included measures for confidence in municipal governments, feelings toward municipal councillors and support for municipal governments to determine their level of financial disclosure.

Recall that when comparing First Nations with municipalities, we expect higher levels of favourable opinion toward municipal governments relative to First Nation governments across all treatments. To assess this expectation, we compare average opinions across groups by treatment. Finally, we assess the magnitude of change in stated opinions according to treatment. We anticipate stronger treatment effects in the case of First Nations governments and Aboriginal peoples more generally.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Our results are based on the answers of 1,224 respondents.<sup>37</sup> We provide a summary of the sociodemographic distribution of our respondents by treatment in Appendix 2.<sup>38</sup> We employ a Multinomial Logistic Regression to test for random assignment across groups as a function of age, gender, province of residence, education, income, political knowledge, political interest and attention to Aboriginal issues.<sup>39</sup> The assumption behind this test is that “[i]f treatment assignment truly is random, then all of the variables should be jointly insignificant (i.e., we should not be able to predict treatment assignment).”<sup>40</sup> Our likelihood ratio statistic ( $\chi^2$  statistic) indicates that this is the case ( $p=0.22$ ; See Appendix 3). Given the random distribution of participants across treatments, we estimate our models absent any controls.

Our first set of results show the average level of confidence in First Nations and municipal governments by treatment. As the results reported in Table 1 indicate, our treatments have limited, if any, impact on the level of confidence reported. In neither the First Nations nor the municipality treatments do we observe any significant change or pattern in the average level of confidence according to the reported level of financial disclosure.<sup>41</sup> The one finding that does come from these results reflects differences in opinion toward First Nations’ governments compared with municipal governments. As expected, the public reports greater confidence in municipal governments compared with First Nations governments, regardless of treatment. In all cases, the difference is found to be statistically significant ( $P<0.001$ , two-tailed t test), ranging from a low of a 0.46-point difference across control groups to a high of a 0.75-point difference in the partial disclosure treatments. It is also noteworthy that public opinion falls below the neutral point (2.5 on a 5-point scale) for confidence in First Nations under the partial and no disclosure treatments, although the latter is essentially neutral at a value of 2.49.

**Table 1: Level of confidence in First Nations and municipal governments by treatment**

	Confidence in First Nations	Confidence in Municipal Governments
<b>Full</b>	2.56 (.99) n=142	3.08 (.96) n=172
<b>Partial</b>	2.40 (1.05) n=142	3.15 (.96) n=158
<b>None</b>	2.49 (1.08) n=164	3.06 (.98) n=131
<b>Control</b>	2.54 (1.06) n=154	3.01 (.89) n=161

*Note: Cells report the average level of confidence on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = “No confidence at all” and 5 = “A great deal of confidence.” Standard deviations are reported in parentheses, with the number of respondents for each cell reported below the parentheses.*

What about feelings toward Aboriginal peoples more generally? Recall that our expectation is that increased disclosure of financial information will produce favourable feelings toward First Nations’ communities. To test this expectation, we asked our participants what they thought about a variety of countries and groups including Aboriginal band council members, Aboriginal peoples and municipal politicians.<sup>42</sup> We report the average rating for each in Table 2.

**Table 2: Feelings for Aboriginal band council members, Aboriginal peoples, and municipal politicians by treatment**

	Band council members	Aboriginal peoples	Municipal politicians
Full	2.99 (.93) n=142	3.46 (.96) n=142	3.04 (.93) n=172
Partial	2.90 (1.12) n=142	3.38 (1.07) n=142	3.01 (.89) n=158
None	2.92 (1.01) n=164	3.44 (1.05) n=164	2.98 (.89) n=131
Control	2.96 (1.05) n=154	3.40 (.99) n=154	3.03 (.87) n=161

Note: Cells report the average opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = "Really dislike" and 5 = "Really like." Standard deviations are reported in parentheses, with the number of respondents for each cell reported below the parentheses.

We can draw two main conclusions from the results reported in Table 2. First, feelings towards Aboriginal peoples in general are more positive than those reported for Aboriginal band council members and municipal politicians, regardless of treatment ( $p < 0.001$ , two-tailed t test). Second, our treatments had no significant effect on opinions about Aboriginal band council members, Aboriginal peoples or municipal politicians. Contrary to expectations, increased disclosure of financial information did not produce more-favourable public opinion toward First Nations' governments and communities, and it did not affect opinions about municipal politicians.

Our final hypothesis considers how the level of financial disclosure reported changes the level of support for First Nations to determine their own level of financial disclosure. Here we expected to find a positive relationship between the level of disclosure reported and support for self-determination of financial disclosure. Table 3 reports

the level of support for both First Nations and municipal governments determining what kind of financial information should be made public by treatment.

**Table 3: Level of support for First Nations and municipal governments determining what kind of financial information should be made public by treatment**

	First Nations	Municipal governments
Full	2.67 (1.28) n=142	2.55 (1.19) n=172
Partial	2.56 (1.25) n=142	2.51 (1.25) n=158
None	2.58 (1.38) n=164	2.48 (1.31) n=131
Control	2.47 (1.26) n=154	2.54 (1.05) n=161

Note: Cells report the average level of agreement with First Nations and municipal governments determining what kind of financial information should be made public on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree." Standard deviations are reported in parentheses, with the number of respondents for each cell reported below the parentheses.

First, note that the results reveal only small differences between the levels of support for First Nations to determine what kind of financial information should be made public compared with municipalities (Table 3). Unlike our findings comparing levels of confidence, support for First Nations in determining what financial information to disclose is stronger in all three treatments than that observed for municipal governments. However, given the size and non-significant difference across groups, we must be cautious not to make too much of this observation.

With regard to our expectation that increased levels of reported financial disclosure will increase support for self-determination of financial disclosure, we find only partial support for our assumption. Our results show that priming any type of financial reporting by First Nations increases the level of support for self-determination of financial disclosure relative to our control group. Furthermore, we find the strongest level of support (avg. = 2.67) within the full-disclosure treatment, as expected. However, while the results fit with our hypothesis, the increase in support for self-determination is not found to be significant between any of the treatments and only approaches statistical significance ( $p=0.16$ , two-tailed t test) when comparing the full-disclosure condition with the control group.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, our findings suggest that the level of financial disclosure provided by municipal and First Nations governments seems to have little effect on priming Canadian public opinion toward these communities. Generally, our survey respondents expressed stronger confidence in municipal governments relative to First Nations governments and more positive feelings toward Aboriginal peoples compared with Aboriginal and municipal politicians. These findings, however, are perhaps unsurprising given the existing literature on Canadian public opinion toward indigenous peoples and politicians more generally.<sup>43</sup>

The surprising finding from our study is our non-finding: Priming survey respondents with the level of financial disclosure seemed to do little to change public support for Aboriginal self-determination with respect to financial disclosure. Although support for self-determination under the full-disclosure treatment did increase by 0.20 points relative to the control group, the difference between full and no disclosure is a mere 0.09 points (see Table 3). Similarly, the level of reported financial disclosure had no effect on confidence or feelings towards First Nations' governments, Aboriginal peoples or band council members.

Do these limited findings reflect the design of our study? It may be that our efforts to embed the financial disclosure cues worked too well. Given the number of questions added as fillers between exposure to the treatment and questions pertaining to confidence in and feelings towards First Nations' governments and communities, any treatment effects may have been minimized. On the other hand, the question regarding the right to determine financial disclosure was asked in tandem with the priming cue. If any treatment effects were to emerge, they should have been revealed here. As noted, the effects were marginal at best. Another possibility reflects the stability of opinion about First Nations' communities and their right to determine what, if any, financial information to disclose. Quite simply,

our single and relatively brief cue of reported financial disclosure may have done little to shift opinion in either direction. Yet another explanation for the limited findings could be that we primed only the level of information reported, not the quality (e.g., accuracy) or nature (e.g., precise numbers) of the information that was disclosed. We acknowledge that these factors could be important for affecting public opinion toward indigenous and municipal communities, leaving these possibilities for future study and consideration.

Our results indicate that even with increased efforts to highlight the level of disclosure and transparency by which most First Nations adhere, we should expect little change in public opinion, at least in the short term. Nonetheless, the fact that we do see an increase in public support for self-determination under the full-disclosure treatment warrants consideration, even though our weak statistical results temper this finding. Overall, while some indigenous commentators and band council leaders have been highly critical of top-down efforts to impose full financial disclosure on their communities, an unintended consequence of these efforts may be to increase public support for Aboriginal self-determination.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>8</sup> Robert Harding, "Historical Representations of Aboriginal People in the Canadian News Media," *Discourse & Society* 17 (2) (2006): 205-235.
- <sup>9</sup> Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson, *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011).
- <sup>10</sup> CBC News, "Innu's IDLF execs made, spent more than allowed: review," *CBC News*, February 10, 2014. Available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/innu-s-idlp-exec-s-made-spent-more-than-allowed-review-1.2530682>; Mark Nielsen, "No jail for band executive who stole \$725,000 from B.C. First Nation to cover her gambling debts," *Prince George Citizen*, January 24, 2015; J.R. Rardon, "First Nation's chief found in breach of oath," *Campbell River Mirror*, September 3, 2015. Available online at <http://www.campbellrivermirror.com/news/324212181.html>; Steve Rennie, "Chief and council accused of stealing welfare money," *Canadian Press*, December 17, 2013; Trina Roache, "People furious over report of chiefs per diem rate: 'double dipping has to stop.'" *APTN National News*, 2015. Available online at <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/01/27/people-furious-report-chiefs-per-diem-rate-double-dipping-stop>; Don Sandberg, "Corruption infects the councils of many First Nations reserves," *The Gazette*, February 2, 2009, A 11.
- <sup>11</sup> Of course, political corruption and misbehaviour are not limited to indigenous communities and are present at all levels of government in Canada. Christopher Alcantara, Rob Leone and Zac Spicer, "Responding to Policy Change from Above: Municipal Accountability and Transparency Regimes in Ontario," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 46 (1) (2012): 112-137; John Wanna, "Insisting on Traditional Ministerial Responsibility and the Constitutional Independence of the Public Service: The Gomery Inquiry and the Canadian Sponsorship Scandal," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 65 (3) (2006): 15-21; Stephen Wild, *The Construction of Political Corruption in "The Globe and Mail" from 1990-2000*, MA Thesis, Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa, 2010.
- <sup>12</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Policies of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts*; Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).
- <sup>13</sup> Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, pp. 90-94.
- <sup>14</sup> Widdowson and Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry*, p. 117.
- <sup>15</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, pp. 99-100.
- <sup>16</sup> See also Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*.
- <sup>17</sup> Christopher Alcantara, Zac Spicer and Rob Leone, "Institutional Design and the Accountability Paradox," p. 76.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>19</sup> Tom Flanagan and Laura Johnson, "Financial Compensation of First Nations Leaders," p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Shari Narine, "Bill C-27: Draconian, or a law without teeth?" *Windspeaker* 30 (12) (2013). Available online at <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/bill-c-27-draconian-or-law-without-teeth>; Clayton Norris, "First Nations Financial Transparency Act: What Does It Mean for Your Community?" 2013. Available online at <http://www.mnp.ca/en/posts/first-nations-financial-transparency-act-what-does-it-mean-for-your-community>; Michael Woods, "First Nations financial transparency act becomes law; reserve audits, chiefs' salaries to be publicized," *National Post*, March 27, 2013. Available online at <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/first-nations-financial-transparency-act-becomes-law-reserve-audits-chiefs-salaries-to-be-publicized>.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Alcantara, Zac Spicer and Rob Leone, "Institutional Design and the Accountability Paradox"; Tom Flanagan and Laura Johnson, "Financial Compensation of First Nations Leaders."

<sup>22</sup> Paul Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy"; John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Pearson, 2010); Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy."

<sup>23</sup> Paul Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy," p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Fisman and Tarun Khanna, "Is Trust a Historical Residue? Information Flows and Trust Levels," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 38 (1999): 80.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Meirowitz and Nolan McCarty, *Political Game Theory: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Tolbert and Karen Mossberger, "The Effects of E-Government on Trust and Confidence in Government," *Public Administration Review* 66 (3) (2006): 354.

<sup>27</sup> Fay Lomax Cook, Lawrence R. Jacobs and Dukhong Kim, "Trusting What You Know: Information, Knowledge, and Confidence in Social Security," *Journal of Politics* 72 (2) (2010): 397-412.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen White, Michael Atkinson, Loleen Berdahl and David McGrane, "Public Policies toward Aboriginal Peoples: Attitudinal Obstacles and Uphill Battles," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 48 (2) (2015): 281-304.

<sup>29</sup> Environics Institute, *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: Main Report* (Toronto: Environics Institute, 2010), p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> See also White et al., "Public Policies toward Aboriginal Peoples."

<sup>33</sup> Jill Mahoney, "Canadians' attitudes hardening on aboriginal issues: new poll," *The Globe and Mail*, January 16, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Soroka and Sarah Roberton, *A Literature Review of Public Opinion Research on Canadian Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Immigration, 2006-2009* (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Available online at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/2012-por-multi-imm-eng.pdf>, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Given our study was available in English only, we excluded residents of Quebec. See <https://www.surveysampling.com/> for more information about their proprietary panel, sampling and participant incentive programs.

<sup>36</sup> The political knowledge questions asked respondents to name the British prime minister, the federal finance minister, the governor-general, identify which level of government has primary responsibility for education and health care and identify the number of seats in the House of Commons. Political institutions, countries and groups included the public school system, the Supreme Court of Canada, federal and provincial public services, unions, municipal, provincial and federal governments, big business, First Nations' governments, the media, Canada, United States, municipal, provincial and federal politicians, Aboriginal band council members, Aboriginal peoples, gays and lesbians, racial minorities, public servants, teachers and police officers. The list of political institutions, countries and groups was randomized by individual.

<sup>37</sup> We include only participants who answered each of the questions used in the analyses. To account for careless respondents, we eliminated the fastest 5 per cent of our sample, which were those participants who completed the study in two minutes or less compared with the average time of just over 11 minutes.

<sup>38</sup> Note that our summary results include "party vote." Due to the larger number of missing values on this measure, individuals were retained even if they did not indicate the party they supported in the 2015 Canadian federal election. We report this variable here for reference, and we tested random assignment with and without this measure. The results are substantively similar.

<sup>39</sup> Political knowledge is an index developed from five factual knowledge questions ( $\alpha = 0.58$ ; See footnote 36). Note that we measure level of attention paid to Aboriginal issues as part of a larger set of items that includes health care, welfare, education, environment, crime and justice, defence and immigration. Issues were listed randomly and preceded our experimental treatments. As noted above, we also tested for random assignment, controlling for 2015 Canadian federal election party vote. The results confirmed random distribution across treatments. See Matthew S. Levendusky and Michael C. Horowitz, "When Backing Down Is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs," *Journal of Politics* 74 (2) (2012): 323-338.

<sup>40</sup> Levendusky and Horowitz, "When Backing Down Is the Right Decision," p. 329.

<sup>41</sup> We can also use an ordered logistic regression specification, given our ordinal-level dependent variable, to estimate confidence in First Nations and municipal governments as a function of treatment group. The results yield the same conclusion: Treatment did not change confidence in either government. As such, we opted to report only the comparison of average ratings in the text with the result from the ordered logistic regression specification available from the authors upon request.

<sup>42</sup> This question was placed after a series of political knowledge questions, which followed the experimental section. In addition to Aboriginal band council members and Aboriginal peoples, the list of countries and groups included Canada, the United States, municipal, provincial and federal politicians, gays and lesbians, racial minorities, public servants, teachers and police officers. The list was randomized by participant.

<sup>43</sup> Environics Institute, *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*; Stuart Soroka and Sarah Robertson, *A Literature Review of Public Opinion Research*; White et al., "Public Policies toward Aboriginal Peoples."

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## APPENDIX 1: EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENTS

Treatments 1 and 2 – Full disclosure: “In a recent study, it was found that the majority of First Nations [municipalities] in Canada provide full financial disclosure, including Chief [Mayor] and councilor salaries, expenditures and band [municipal government] revenues.”

Treatments 3 and 4 – Partial disclosure: “In a recent study, it was found that the majority of First Nations [municipalities] in Canada provide partial financial disclosure, with limited information on Chief [Mayor] and councilor salaries, expenditures and band [municipal government] revenues.”

Treatments 5 and 6 – No disclosure: “In a recent study, it was found that the majority of First Nations [municipalities] in Canada provide no financial disclosure, with no information on Chief [Mayor] and councilor salaries, expenditures and band [municipal government] revenues.

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY STATISTICS

	FN Full	MN Full	FN Partial	MN Partial	FN None	MN None	FN Control	MN Control	Total
Age	45.93 (15.71)	44.09 (18.22)	44.04 (17.02)	43.18 (17.06)	45.76 (16.22)	45.11 (16.72)	45.17 (17.21)	43.57 (17.19)	44.58 (16.94)
Female	0.46 (.50)	0.47 (.50)	0.48 (.50)	0.44 (.50)	0.54 (0.5)	0.46 (.50)	0.51 (.50)	0.50 (.50)	0.48 (.50)
B.C.	0.14 (.35)	0.14 (.35)	0.11 (.32)	0.01 (.30)	0.09 (.28)	0.14 (.35)	0.15 (.36)	0.14 (.35)	0.13 (.33)
AB	0.15 (.36)	0.18 (.39)	0.22 (.41)	0.21 (.41)	0.18 (.38)	0.18 (.38)	0.21 (.41)	0.11 (.31)	0.18 (.38)
Prairies	0.08 (.28)	0.06 (.25)	0.08 (.28)	0.12 (.33)	0.10 (.31)	0.07 (.25)	0.08 (.28)	0.06 (.24)	0.08 (.28)
ON	0.45 (.50)	0.50 (.50)	0.47 (.50)	0.48 (.50)	0.51 (.50)	0.53 (.50)	0.45 (.50)	0.56 (.50)	0.49 (.50)
Maritimes	0.18 (.38)	0.11 (.32)	0.11 (.32)	0.10 (.30)	0.13 (.34)	0.09 (.29)	0.10 (.31)	0.13 (.34)	0.12 (.32)
Education	7.15 (1.76)	7.15 (1.71)	7.20 (1.78)	7.02 (1.85)	7.03 (1.88)	7.21 (1.87)	7.19 (1.86)	7.33 (1.81)	7.16 (1.81)
Income	3.46 (1.79)	3.56 (1.96)	3.48 (1.86)	3.72 (1.78)	3.69 (1.90)	3.60 (1.74)	3.59 (1.95)	3.57 (1.77)	3.59 (1.84)
Pol Knowledge	0.54 (.38)	0.58 (.31)	0.51 (.30)	0.50 (.28)	0.52 (.29)	0.59 (.29)	0.52 (.31)	0.55 (.30)	0.54 (.30)
Pol Interest	5.89 (2.59)	5.85 (2.59)	5.82 (2.62)	5.75 (2.58)	6.59 (2.57)	6.16 (2.32)	5.94 (2.57)	6.35 (2.29)	6.05 (2.53)
LIB Vote	0.37 (.48)	0.38 (0.49)	0.39 (.49)	0.36 (.48)	0.44 (.50)	0.42 (.50)	0.36 (.48)	0.37 (.49)	0.39 (.49)
CPC Vote	0.27 (.45)	0.25 (.43)	0.22 (.41)	0.19 (.39)	0.21 (.41)	0.22 (.42)	0.24 (.43)	0.23 (.42)	0.23 (.42)
NDP Vote	0.15 (.36)	0.11 (.31)	0.11 (.31)	0.20 (.40)	0.18 (.38)	0.21 (.41)	0.15 (.36)	0.19 (.39)	0.16 (.37)
GRN Vote	0.04 (.18)	0.05 (.22)	0.04 (.18)	0.03 (.16)	0.04 (.19)	0.02 (.15)	0.09 (.29)	0.04 (.20)	0.04 (.20)
N	142	172	142	158	164	131	154	161	1,224

*Note: Cells contain averages with standard deviations in parentheses. Age is the respondent's age in years. Female is dichotomous, coded 1 for female. The Prairies include Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Maritimes include Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, PEI and New Brunswick. Education is an 11-point scale ranging from no high school (0) to professional degree or doctorate (11). Income reported in 1,000s of dollars. Political knowledge is an index consisting of five factual political knowledge questions. Respondents were assigned a point for each correct answer, after which the scale was adjusted to fit between 0 and 1. Political interest is the average response reported based on a 0 (no interest) to 10 (extremely interested) scale. Party vote is a dichotomous measure that takes a value of 1 if the respondent voted for the party and 0 otherwise.*

### APPENDIX 3: MULTINOMIAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL USED TO TEST TREATMENT ASSIGNMENT

	FN Full	FN Partial	FN None	MN Partial	MN None	FN Control	MN Control
Age	0.01 (.01)	0.00(.01)	0.06 (.01)	0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (.01)
Female	-0.01 (.24)	0.12 (.24)	0.29 (.23)	-0.28 (.24)	-0.07 (.25)	0.22 (.24)	0.20 (.23)
AB	-0.23 (.42)	0.43 (.42)	0.38 (.43)	0.47 (.42)	-0.07 (.42)	0.00 (.39)	-0.66 (.43)
Prairies	0.23 (.52)	0.51 (.53)	0.93 (.52)a	1.04 (.51)*	0.09 (.56)	0.19 (.51)	-0.06 (.53)
ON	-0.13 (.35)	0.15 (.37)	0.45 (.48)	0.31 (.37)	0.00 (.36)	-0.18 (.34)	0.05 (.33)
Maritimes	0.41 (.44)	0.12 (.48)	0.46 (.48)	0.15 (.49)	-0.23 (.49)	-0.25 (.46)	0.09 (.44)
High School	-0.02 (.59)	-0.39 (.58)	-0.73 (.52)	-0.34 (.54)	-0.58 (.57)	-1.12 (.53)*	0.28 (.60)
Some University	-0.48 (.55)	-0.13 (.53)	-1.02 (.48)	-0.56 (.51)	-0.49 (.52)	-0.87 (.48)a	0.07 (.57)
University	0.25 (.58)	0.04 (.57)	-0.71 (.51)	-0.22 (.54)	-0.43 (.56)	-0.61 (.51)	0.25 (.60)
Income	-0.03 (.68)	-0.01 (.07)	0.06 (.65)	0.09 (.07)	0.01 (.07)	0.02 (.07)	-0.00 (.06)
Pol Knowledge	-0.67 (.44)	-0.92 (.43)*	-1.33 (.42)*	-1.12 (.43)*	-0.12 (.45)	-1.08 (.43)*	-0.58 (.42)
Pol Interest	0.02 (.05)	0.03 (.05)	0.16 (.51)*	0.04 (.05)	0.03 (.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.10 (.05)*
LIB Vote	0.12 (.35)	-1.75 (.33)	0.22 (.35)	-1.48 (.33)	0.50 (.37)	0.15 (.35)	0.03 (.34)
CPC Vote	0.29 (.37)	-0.34 (.37)	-0.13 (.38)	-0.39 (.37)	0.26 (.41)	0.13 (.38)	0.01 (.37)
NDP Vote	0.52 (.43)	-0.23 (.44)	0.71 (.42)a	0.62 (.40)	1.09 (.44)*	0.58 (.43)	0.74 (.41) a
GRN Vote	-0.25 (.63)	-0.66 (.62)	-0.13 (.61)	-0.80 (.66)	-0.39 (.74)	0.77 (.52)	0.05 (.58)
	-0.31 (.70)	0.08 (.69)	-0.70 (.68)	0.01 (.68)	-0.40 (.70)	0.57 (.64)	-0.51 (.71)
N = 1,221							
X2 (df = 112) = 121.11							
Pseudo R2 = 0.02							

Note: Cells report Multinomial Logistic Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The municipal full-disclosure treatment is set as the base outcome.

\*  $p < .05$  a  $p < .10$

