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# Explaining Support for Post-Secondary Educational Funding for Indigenous Students

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A concerning post-secondary education gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals in Canada. One program designed to help address this issue, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), provides eligible First Nations students with post-secondary education funding. Although such programs are beneficial, it is unclear how much Canadians support public funding of Indigenous education and whether psychological research can help explain why some may endorse or oppose it. Thus, using the PSSSP as an example, we examined five possible psychological predictors of public support: personal prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, perceived social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism. Based on previous research, we hypothesized that all would negatively relate to support for the PSSSP. In a sample of non-Indigenous Canadian adults, we found that only higher personal prejudice, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism uniquely explained lower support for the program (or conversely, lower prejudice, group zero-sum beliefs, and political liberalism were related to higher program support). Although correlational, this study provides insight into factors that may influence Canadians' attitudes toward a program aimed at addressing a consequential societal inequality. We discuss the implications of these findings in regard to support for programs and policies targeted at marginalized groups.

## Public Significance Statement

This research provides psychological insight into factors related to non-Indigenous Canadians' attitudes toward helping disadvantaged groups, in particular, support for Indigenous post-secondary education funding. Knowing whether and why non-Indigenous Canadians may support Indigenous education funding can shed light on where we are in terms of reconciliation, and help shape a path forward.

*Keywords:* post-secondary education, Indigenous Peoples, prejudice, political beliefs, zero-sum



*Supplemental materials:* <https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000253.supp>

A post-secondary education can transform one's social class and standard of living. Across countries and time periods, higher education attainment is predictive of higher wages and lower unemployment rates (Hout, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). This education–employment relationship is increasingly important, as Western economies become more knowledge based, necessitating that individuals in the labor market obtain higher levels of education (Jenkins et al., 2003).

However, some groups have been excluded from education opportunities. For example, in Canada a large gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals in terms of secondary and post-secondary attainment. In 2011, 30.4% of Indigenous individuals from 25 to 64 years of age had a college diploma, certificate or university degree, compared to 52.7% of non-Indigenous individuals of the same age (Statistics Canada, 2011). This is also reflected at the educator level, as only 1.4% of professors are Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2017). Critically, this education gap is associated with higher rates of unemployment and dependence on social assistance in the young adult Indigenous population (Tait, 1999). Educational attainment may also be more impactful for Indigenous individuals compared to non-Indigenous individuals, as the difference in employment outcomes between Indigenous individuals with and without higher education is larger than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts (Hull, 2005).

In an effort to reduce the education disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, and increase the employability of Indigenous people, the Canadian federal government created the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). This federally financed program aims to supply eligible First Nations students with

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post-secondary education funding.<sup>1</sup> Although limited program funding precludes helping all those who apply (First Nations Post-Secondary Education Fact Sheet, 2018), it has assisted many Indigenous students who may not have otherwise pursued post-secondary education due to economic constraints (Post-Secondary Student Support Program, 2020).

Despite the overall benefits of educational funding for Indigenous individuals, and recent efforts toward reconciliation, there is reason to believe a substantial portion of the Canadian population may not agree with or support the PSSSP. For example, in a recent national poll, almost one-third of Canadians believed that Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the issues their communities face were receiving too much attention from the federal government (Angus Reid Institute, 2018). If Canadians are divided on actions by the government to help Indigenous individuals, they may also have mixed support for particular programs and policies, such as the PSSSP. However, little is known about how much Canadians' support the PSSSP or why they may endorse or oppose a program that is beneficial for Indigenous individuals. While several theories and concepts from psychology may help explain attitudes toward the program, few have been empirically tested in contexts relevant to Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Morrison et al., 2008, 2014). Such tests can provide much needed feedback on the real-world applicability of psychological concepts, and serve to inform future interpretations of social issues. Indeed, such an examination may help meet recent calls to address ongoing disparities in post-secondary education opportunities, funding, and employment (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, pp. 1–2).

Thus, the present research seeks to assess support for Indigenous post-secondary education funding (i.e., the PSSSP) in the Canadian population and examine factors underlying support. That is, we seek to test whether existing psychological concepts can provide meaningful insight into a consequential context in which it has scarcely been applied. To narrow our focus to specific factors we consider psychological theory and research relevant to this issue, including studies on social aid programs and policies. Although there are many potential variables, in the present research we explore five factors: personal prejudice toward the group receiving aid (group attitudes); perceived social mobility in society (the likelihood to change social class); meritocratic beliefs (whether hard work is rewarded); group zero-sum beliefs (amount of inter-group competition for shared resources); and political orientation (liberal-to-conservative political beliefs). Next, we outline the relevance of these psychological factors. After, we report an empirical, applied test of these ideas with a sample of non-Indigenous Canadian adults. We consider potentially relevant factors for other issues concerning Indigenous Peoples in the General Discussion.

## Personal Prejudice

Decades of research on prejudice (Allport, 1954; Duckitt, 1992; Fiske, 1998) have led to many important developments useful for informing public policy (Stangor, 2009). Prejudice was initially viewed as hostile attitudes toward an identifiable group (Allport, 1954). Although blatant expression of prejudice exists and can be assessed, more subtle measures of explicit attitudes are often employed by researchers, in part, because expression of prejudice is no longer widely acceptable (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). It is

now evident that most people hold some prejudiced attitudes, often without their awareness (Banaji, 2013). Nowadays, prejudice is viewed as an enduring systemic problem that can involve normal social judgment processes as well as individual, intergroup, and social dynamics (Dovidio, 2001; Duckitt, 1992; Fiske, 1998; Hardin & Banaji, 2013).

Like many other racialized groups, the Indigenous Peoples of Canada have historically been, and continue to be, subjected to racial prejudice and discrimination. Some glaring examples include prejudice experienced during the residential school era (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b), and more recently the Wet'suwet'en First Nation re-occupation (Bogart, 2020) and Muskrat Falls resistance (Samson, 2017), to name only a few. It is also well-documented that non-Indigenous individuals can have prejudiced attitudes toward Indigenous individuals (e.g., Morrison et al., 2008; Nesdole et al., 2015), and Indigenous individuals report high levels of experiencing the effects of prejudice (e.g., Godley, 2018; Janzen et al., 2017).

Prejudice against Indigenous people may extend to current attitudes toward relevant social programs and policies, although applied research in this domain is limited. For instance, Canadians who felt relatively less warm toward Indigenous people in general indicated less support for a social assistance program when a fictional program user was described as being Indigenous as compared to non-Indigenous (Harell et al., 2014; see also Urbiola et al., 2017). As federal funding for Indigenous education also falls within the social programs umbrella, prejudice may be a particularly relevant factor in determining program support. We therefore hypothesize that higher levels of personal prejudice toward Indigenous individuals will relate to lower support for the PSSSP.

## Perceived Social Mobility

Support for the PSSSP may also be explained by people's social mobility beliefs, or the perceived chances of people to move up or down the socioeconomic ladder in society (Day & Fiske, 2017). Although tracking objective levels of social mobility is useful for explaining some societal patterns (e.g., Corak, 2013), people's beliefs about social mobility can more proximally explain relevant attitudes and behaviour (Day & Fiske, 2019). For example, when social mobility in society is framed as relatively high (vs. low) it can lead to more tolerance of economic inequality and defense of the societal system (Day & Fiske, 2017; Shariff et al., 2016). Although research is lacking in Canadian contexts and regarding Indigenous issues, evidence indicates social mobility beliefs can affect general support for some government platforms. For instance, an induction of relatively higher social mobility beliefs in several countries led to less support for allocations of government funding toward higher education (Alesina et al., 2018). That is, when there is believed to be much existing opportunity to change social class, increases to education may be viewed as less critical. As the PSSSP is a government program that provides funding for higher education,

<sup>1</sup> The PSSSP provides post-secondary education funding to First Nations students specifically. Recently, separate federal programs have been introduced to provide post-secondary funding to Métis and Inuit students. We use the PSSSP as an example of a federal post-secondary education funding program for Indigenous students generally, as it is a major long-standing program.

we hypothesize that believing there is higher social mobility in society may relate to less program support.

### Meritocratic Beliefs

Canadians' support for the PSSSP may also be influenced by their widely held meritocratic beliefs (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012). These beliefs center on the individualistic notion that success is determined by whether people work hard and have motivation (e.g., Quinn & Crocker, 1999). Meritocratic beliefs can be used to explain various positive or negative outcomes in life, and thus they can serve to support the motivated view that the overall system is fair and legitimate (Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003). For example, rather than viewing negative outcomes experienced by Indigenous people as the result of unfair disadvantages in society, some may see these outcomes as being the result of a lack of motivation or competence (e.g., Haddock et al., 1994; Neufeld et al., 2019). Although not previously tested, PSSSP endorsement may violate meritocratic beliefs because the main eligibility requirement is First Nations status, rather than typical indicators of individual effort (e.g., academic grades). Moreover, PSSSP support may partially involve the acknowledgment of a systematic problem with the merit system (i.e., the need to rectify the unfair group situation of Indigenous Peoples in terms of access to education). We therefore hypothesize that stronger meritocratic beliefs may relate to less support for the PSSSP.

### Group Zero-Sum Beliefs

Another factor that may explain support for the PSSSP is zero-sum beliefs about shared resources. According to realistic group conflict theory, threats, such as perceived competition for economic resources, can result in negative attitudes of in-group members toward out-group members (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif et al., 1961). This pattern is partly based upon zero-sum beliefs (Esses et al., 1998). Zero-sum beliefs involve the assumption that advantages gained by some groups (e.g., jobs, power, money) lead to equal losses of other groups (rather than other possible outcomes, such as being beneficial for all). For example, the view of White Americans that decreased anti-Black bias is matched by increased anti-White bias (Norton & Sommers, 2011), or the negative views of Dutch respondents toward immigration policies when unemployment rates are relatively higher (Coenders et al., 2008; see also Esses et al., 2001).

While only limited relevant research has been conducted, the logic of group-based zero-sum beliefs may shape attitudes toward economic policies pertaining to Indigenous groups in Canada. To the extent that individuals believe that groups in Canada are in a zero-sum competition over resources, then providing subsidies to some groups, such as for Indigenous post-secondary education, may be negatively perceived. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesize that stronger group zero-sum beliefs regarding shared resources in Canada will relate to less support for the PSSSP.

### Political Orientation

The fifth factor that may explain Canadians' support for the PSSSP is political orientation. People's political position can condition how they interpret and respond to issues in society, even in the face of evidence that contradicts their views (Jost et al., 2013). It is

well established that endorsement of economic and social policies tends to vary based on political orientation (e.g., Jacoby, 1991), with liberal beliefs on one end of the spectrum and conservative beliefs on the other (Jost, 2006). Political conservatism tends to be associated with less support for progressive social and economic policies such as economic redistribution, affirmative action, and social assistance, whereas political liberalism shows the opposite pattern (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003; Sterling et al., 2019). The PSSSP has progressive elements. It relies on spending federal funds in a redistributive manner and aims to provide support for a disadvantaged group. Although the program ultimately aims to reduce system dependence (e.g., social assistance), these features may neither be readily apparent, nor are they necessarily sufficient to convince individuals generally opposed to the use of social aid programs to solve problems (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Thus, we hypothesize that stronger political conservatism will be associated with less PSSSP support.

### Present Research

To recap, we will examine how much Canadians support the PSSSP and why. Specifically, whether five conceptually relevant factors explain attitudes toward the PSSSP: personal prejudice, social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism. Based on the existing literature, we hypothesize that all of these factors will negatively relate to support for the PSSSP. Conducting this research will reveal which of these factors, if any, are useful for explaining PSSSP support, thereby clarifying the applicability of existing research to a previously untested context. Among other purposes, the present research may help indicate potential barriers in regard to public support for Indigenous education, which can be critical to influencing governmental action on this issue.

### Main Study

#### Methods

The study preregistration, data, syntax, and materials are available here: [osf.io/mb9nu/](https://osf.io/mb9nu/)

#### Participants

We recruited 212 individuals from across Canada in March 2019 using Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing service that provides psychological data of similar quality to that of other online sources (Peer et al., 2017). Through Prolific we targeted participants that were Canadian, 18 years of age or older, and fluent in English. They were compensated with approximately \$1.70 CAD. We excluded 25 participants because they either identified as Indigenous (2), failed to complete 50% of either all measures or each measure (2), had political views beyond the 7-point liberal-to-conservative political orientation scale (19), chose to have their data excluded (1), or for a combination of these reasons (1). The sample size was determined by balancing the desire to detect small-to-medium effect sizes (e.g.,  $f^2 = .02-.15$ ) with available resources. Sensitivity analysis determined that we could detect effects of  $f^2 = .07$  with 80% power for our main hypotheses. See the Supplemental File for explanations for deviations from the preregistration plan. The effective sample size was 187 (90 women, 95 men, and two chose "other," thus additional gender information is

unknown;  $M_{\text{age}} = 30.76$  (years),  $SD = 8.89$ ; 99.5% Canadian citizens; 95.7% Canadian residents). The majority of participants identified as being White (70.6%), with minority groups including: Asian (19.8%), Black (3.2%), East Indian (3.2%), Hispanic (2.1%), Middle Eastern (0.5%), and other (0.5%). All provinces were represented among those residing in Canada: Ontario (54.8%), British Columbia (12.3%), Alberta (11.2%), Quebec (6.7%), Manitoba (3.9%), Newfoundland and Labrador (3.3%), Nova Scotia (2.8%), Saskatchewan (2.2%), New Brunswick (1.7%), and Prince Edward Island (1.1%). Although eligible, no participants indicated living in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, or the Yukon. Participants' education ranged from high school to doctorate or professional degree, with around half attaining a bachelor's degree (50.8%). Household incomes ranged from the lowest (i.e., 0–\$5000) to the highest income bracket (i.e., more than \$200,001), with a median of \$60,001–\$80,000. On a 10-point subjective socioeconomic (SES) scale, participants felt they ranked slightly above average in SES ( $M = 5.98$   $SD = 1.38$ ).

## Procedure

Participants volunteered to participate in a study titled "Opinions of People and Programs in Canada." After informed consent, participants completed measures that assessed the five main predictor variables: (a) personal prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples<sup>2</sup>; (b) perceived social mobility; (c) meritocratic beliefs; (d) group zero-sum beliefs; and (e) political orientation, and the main dependent variable: support for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

To account for possible order effects, participants were randomly assigned to complete the following predictor variables in this order: (a) meritocratic beliefs; (b) personal prejudice; (c) group zero-sum beliefs; and (d) perceived social mobility, or in the opposite order (i.e., perceived social mobility completed first). The only exception was political orientation that was always completed in the demographic section.

We assessed program support after the first four predictors above. To reduce hypothesis guessing, this measure was embedded among other program and policy assessments, appearing after measures of union and pay equity support, and before a measure of income redistribution. Afterward, participants provided demographic information.

## Materials

### Personal Prejudice

We assessed attitudes toward Indigenous Peoples using a feeling thermometer (Haddock et al., 1994; Harell et al., 2014). This widely used measure provides an evaluation of the target group that is reliable over time (Correll et al., 2010; Haddock et al., 1993). While group means on this measure often reflect some warmth or neutral feelings, individual attitudes tend to vary from positive to negative. Hence it can be a useful indicator of personal prejudice (Correll et al., 2010). Similar to Haddock et al. (1994), participants were asked to imagine a thermometer, and rate how "coldly" or "warmly" they felt toward Aboriginal Peoples on a scale from 0 (*coldest*) to 100 (*warmest*), with 50 being neutral. Another minority group, East Indian Canadians, was also included as a comparison group for exploratory analyses. As prejudice can be a sensitive topic to measure,

particular care was placed on its assessment. Questions about prejudice toward six other groups were also included that ranged along the cold–warm dimension (i.e., school teachers, welfare recipients, firefighters, union members, homeless people, and insurance brokers) in an effort to promote natural responding using the feeling thermometer and to disguise the primary intended assessment of prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples (Haddock et al., 1993). The items were reverse coded such that higher numbers indicate more negative attitudes. See the Supplemental file for all study measures.

### Perceived Social Mobility

We assessed individuals' beliefs about the chances to change socioeconomic class in Canada (8 items,  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) with items based on a prior measure (Day & Fiske, 2017). The original measure has shown good internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), and positively associates with other psychological concepts as expected (e.g., political conservatism, meritocratic beliefs; Day & Fiske, 2017). Some of the items used were identical to past research, e.g., "It is not too difficult for people to change their economic position in society," and some were modified to more uniformly reflect intergenerational (as opposed to absolute) social mobility, for example, "People are likely to change their rank in society compared to their parents." Participants rated items using a 7-point agreement scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) for this and the other measures below unless indicated otherwise.

### Meritocratic Beliefs

We also assessed how much participants believed that a person's successes can be attributed to their hard work and effort (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Five of these items were identical to prior research (Day & Fiske, 2017), for example, "Anyone who is willing and able to work hard has a good chance of succeeding," and one item, "Lack of effort can be a person's greatest downfall," was created with similar face validity as prior research (Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). This measure has previously shown good internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) and convergent validity (e.g., positive associations with belief in a just world, system justification, Day & Fiske, 2017; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003).

### Group Zero-Sum Beliefs

We assessed beliefs about whether the use of shared resources by some groups of people comes at the cost of other Canadians using items adapted for this study (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ). The conceptual basis for this measure stemmed from the study of intergroup conflict and competition, in which gains for one group can be interpreted as losses for the other (Sherif et al., 1961). Group zero-sum beliefs have been further articulated by Esses et al. (1998) and specifically measured in terms of beliefs about gains and losses as compared to immigrant groups. Our items were closely based on this well-used and reliable measure (e.g.,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ; Louis et al., 2013), except that the broader notion of groups in general was substituted for

<sup>2</sup> At the time the study was conducted, the term Aboriginal was used by the Canadian government in the description of the PSSSP. Although our study materials initially included this term, we generally use the more appropriate term of Indigenous in this article to reflect societal preferences for this term, as well as a recent transition by the Canadian government.



immigrant groups specifically. Following a similar procedure, a different 4-item measure of group zero-sum beliefs has also been independently created ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ; Wilkins et al., 2015). Examples of our modified items include: “Good jobs for some groups in Canada means fewer good jobs for other Canadians,” and “Money spent on social services for some groups in Canada means less money will be spent on services for other Canadians.”

### Political Orientation

Political position was assessed along three common dimensions of political beliefs (i.e., in general, and in terms of fiscal and social policy; 3 items,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ). These items show good predictive validity (e.g., Graham et al., 2009; Skitka et al., 2002). Responses were given on a continuous scale from liberal to conservative (1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*), with options for other responses (e.g., 8 = *don't know/not political*, 9 = *libertarian*, 10 = *other*). As in prior research (Graham et al., 2009; Koleva et al., 2012), our focus was only on participants that fit along the 7-point liberal-to-conservative dimension.

### Program Support (PSSSP)

To measure support for the PSSSP, we first provided participants with a brief description of the program to familiarize them with the details of it. For example, that the PSSSP is a federally financed program that provides eligible First Nations students with funding for post-secondary education. Participants' support was assessed (5 items,  $\alpha = 0.95$ ) using items closely based on a reliable measure of general support for social programs ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ; Wakslak et al., 2007). The modified items reflected support for the PSSSP as it currently stands, as well as the extent to which participants would take action that could affect program funding. For example, “In general, I support the PSSSP,” and “I would vote for increased government funding of this program.”

### Demographics

Participants were asked to provide background information about their gender, age, ethnicity, citizenship, province of residence, employment status, perceived socioeconomic status, education (8 levels), and household income (12 levels).

## Results

First we examine variable means and correlations, followed by our main analyses. See the Supplemental file for additional details

and analyses. As seen in Table 1, the group mean for personal prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples (i.e., “warm-to-cold” evaluations) was moderately warm, consistent with prior research (e.g., Urbiola et al., 2017), although participant attitudes ranged from very positive to very negative (0–99). A similar mean was observed for prejudice toward East Indian Canadians ( $M = 34.08$ ,  $SD = 22.07$ ). Participants' level of perceived social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, and group zero-sum beliefs, tended to be around the scale midpoint, while mean political orientation was slightly liberal. Notably, support for the PSSSP fell slightly above the scale midpoint. Although we cautiously approach the interpretation of the mean of a multi-item measure, it suggests that participants were overall mildly supportive of post-secondary education funding for Indigenous Peoples.

Correlations among the five main predictor variables revealed the expected significant negative relationships with support for the PSSSP (Table 1). There were also associations among the main variables that shore up confidence in their conceptual validity. For example, consistent with prior research, personal prejudice, zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism were positively correlated (Esses et al., 2001; Wilkins et al., 2015) as were perceived social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, and political conservatism (Davidai & Gilovich, 2015; Day & Fiske, 2017).

Next, we tested our main research questions by entering the same five variables as predictors of support for the PSSSP in a linear multiple regression (see Table 2). As hypothesized, personal prejudice toward Indigenous individuals, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism significantly predicted lower support for the PSSSP ( $ps < .003$ ). Contrary to expectations, perceived social mobility and meritocratic beliefs did not uniquely predict program support ( $ps > .319$ ). The overall model accounted for around 50% of the variance of support for the PSSSP. As the main predictors generally related to each other, one concern could be that overlap among variables may have affected the pattern of results observed, however, in follow-up analyses we did not find evidence that multicollinearity was a notable concern.

In an exploratory analysis, we examined whether the same pattern of results would appear when controlling for several participant background characteristics. Thus, we conducted a two-step multiple regression, with support for the PSSSP as the main dependent variable. We included potentially relevant demographic variables in the first step (i.e., gender [0 = female, 1 = male], ethnicity [0 = minority group, 1 = majority group], age, education, household income, and subjective SES). We then added the same five predictors included in the previous regression in the second step. The results of the second regression were similar to the first (see Table 3). When all variables were included in the second step a total

**Table 1**  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Main Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Support for the PSSSP	5.30	1.42	(—)	-.55***	-.27***	-.31***	-.52***	-.59***
2. Prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples	34.86	24.95		(—)	.09	.18*	.42***	.36***
3. Perceived social mobility	4.01	0.83			(—)	.60***	.35***	.37***
4. Meritocratic beliefs	4.61	1.20				(—)	.44***	.48***
5. Group zero-sum beliefs	4.19	1.17					(—)	.48***
6. Political orientation	3.10	1.38						(—)

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .  $N = 187$ .

**Table 2**  
Regression Analysis of Primary Predictors of Support for the PSSSP

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i> 95% CI	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples	-.02	<.01	[-.03, -.01]	-.34	-5.77	<.001
Perceived social mobility	-.11	.11	[-.33, .11]	-.07	-1.00	.320
Meritocratic beliefs	.08	.08	[-.09, .24]	.07	0.94	.351
Group zero-sum beliefs	-.24	.08	[-.40, -.09]	-.20	-3.09	.002
Political orientation	-.39	.07	[-.53, -.26]	-.38	-5.88	<.001
$R^2$ (Adjusted $R^2$ )					.52	(.50)
Constant					8.31	<.001

Note. *df* (5, 181).

of 51.5% of the variance was explained. Again, personal prejudice, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism were significantly related to less support for the PSSSP ( $ps < .008$ ). Meritocratic beliefs and perceived social mobility were not. Of the background variables included, only ethnicity uniquely predicted support for the PSSSP in the second step ( $p = .001$ ). That is, being a majority group member was related to less program support (although this association did not emerge as significant in Step 1). Overall, the same psychological variables explained support for the PSSSP, even when controlling for participants' background characteristics.

In an additional exploratory analysis, we examined whether prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples explains lower support for the PSSSP, or out-group antipathy more generally, including evaluations of other minority groups. For example, personal prejudice toward East Indian Canadians was at a similar mean level as prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, and it also negatively correlated with support for the PSSSP ( $r = -.32, p < .001$ ). To explore this possibility, we conducted another multiple regression which included the five original predictor variables as well as an additional control predictor,

personal prejudice toward East Indian Canadians. Higher personal prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism were still the main factors that significantly explained lower support for the PSSSP ( $ps < .003$ ). However, prejudice to East Indian Canadians did not uniquely predict PSSSP support ( $p = .291$ ). This suggests that the relation between prejudice and program support may have some unique basis in preconceived evaluations of Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, we conducted two other exploratory robustness checks. First, we neither detected significant main effects of presentation order, nor did order significantly interact with the predictor variables to explain support for the PSSSP. While we acknowledge that a larger sample size would provide a stronger test for moderated order effects (da Silva Frost & Ledgerwood, 2020), based on prior research and theory we have little reason to expect that presentation order in this case (e.g., meritocratic beliefs followed by personal prejudice, or the reverse) would account for the pattern of findings. Second, we also examined whether the results would vary when taking into consideration the reliability of the measures used. We

**Table 3**  
Regression Including Demographics as Predictors of Support for PSSSP

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i> 95% CI	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Step 1</i>						
Gender	-.34	.22	[-.77, .09]	-.12	-1.56	.120
Ethnicity	-.29	.24	[-.75, .18]	-.09	-1.21	.229
Age (years)	-.01	.01	[-.03, .02]	-.06	-0.75	.452
Education	.04	.10	[-.15, .23]	.03	0.44	.663
Household income	-.02	.05	[-.12, .09]	-.03	0.33	.743
Subjective SES	-.04	.09	[-.21, .13]	-.04	-0.50	.618
$R^2$ (Adjusted $R^2$ )					.03	(.00)
Constant					6.10	<.001
<i>Step 2</i>						
Gender	.04	.15	[-.26, .35]	.02	0.28	.776
Ethnicity	-.56	.17	[-.90, -.23]	-.18	-3.33	.001
Age (years)	<.01	.01	[-.01, .02]	.03	0.47	.638
Education	.01	.07	[-.12, .15]	.01	0.17	.867
Household income	<.01	.04	[-.05, .05]	<.01	0.05	.961
Subjective SES	.04	.06	[-.09, .16]	.04	0.58	.564
Prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples	-.02	<.01	[-.03, -.01]	-.37	-6.10	<.001
Perceived social mobility	-.18	.12	[-.41, .04]	-.11	-1.61	.109
Meritocratic beliefs	.07	.09	[-.10, .24]	.06	0.77	.441
Group zero-sum beliefs	-.22	.08	[-.38, -.06]	-.18	-2.73	.007
Political orientation	-.39	.07	[-.52, -.25]	-.37	-5.68	<.001
$R^2$ (Adjusted $R^2$ )					.54	(.52)
Constant					8.53	<.001

Note. Ethnicity (0 = minority group, 1 = majority group); gender (0 = female, 1 = male).  
Step 1. *df* (6, 177); Step 2. *df* (11, 172),  $\Delta R^2 = .51, p < .001$ .

found the same pattern of significance for the above analyses even when adjusting for participants' estimated true scores (Furr, 2017), which suggests that the main findings are not overly limited by the internal consistency of the study measures.

### General Discussion

The main aim of the present research was to examine whether psychological concepts can provide insight into why the public may or may not support post-secondary funding for Indigenous students. Our study specifically tested which of five factors may explain non-Indigenous Canadians' mildly positive attitudes toward the PSSSP. Grounded in prior research, we hypothesized that personal prejudice, perceived social mobility, meritocratic beliefs, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism would negatively relate to support for the program. We found partial support for these hypotheses. Although all factors showed some association with PSSSP support, only stronger personal prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, group zero-sum beliefs, and political conservatism uniquely explained less program support. Put another way, less prejudice and zero-sum beliefs, and stronger liberal views were associated with more program support. This pattern remained even when accounting for relevant demographic and control variables.

These findings are partly consistent with research on factors related to support for other social policies and outcomes more generally (e.g., Esses et al., 2001; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003). However, the present research adds to our limited empirical understanding of whether the social psychological factors examined apply to topics and situations involving Indigenous Peoples (e.g., Harell et al., 2014; Urbiola et al., 2017; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009), in particular, by examining multiple variables simultaneously in a previously untested domain. Indeed such tests appear to be critical to our understanding of applied social issues, as only three of the five hypothesized factors uniquely explained non-Indigenous Canadians' support for Indigenous post-secondary education funding.

It is not entirely clear why perceived social mobility and meritocratic beliefs did not explain support for the PSSSP, considering their connection to support for other social programs and policies (e.g., Alesina et al., 2018; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003). One possibility is that the PSSSP was evaluated by respondents with a focus on Indigenous and politically-relevant content, and it simply did not evoke strong notions of social class opportunity, or merit, or at least not with direct links to program support. The results may also have been partly shaped by less knowledge of the program as compared to other topics (e.g., health care, taxes). Although we suspect that Canadians are somewhat aware of the idea of funding programs for Indigenous education, they may not have been specifically familiar with the PSSSP before participating. Therefore their support for the program may have been more superficial than that of other policies. To confirm such interpretations, future research could examine the role of general knowledge of the PSSSP program and its funding, as well as the decision-making process involved.

In exploratory analyses, we found that majority group membership was uniquely related to less support for the PSSSP (or in other words, minority group status was positively related to support). The other background variables examined did not relate to program support. From one perspective, the group status finding mirrors research on intraminority solidarity in the context of historical harms. In particular, how minority group status, through experiences

of collective victimhood, can explain support for Indigenous reparations (Starzyk et al., 2019). From another perspective, it appears to correspond with research on social dominance preferences (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In intergroup contexts, this is represented by desires for one's group to dominate over other groups and to maintain existing group hierarchies and inequalities. This orientation, which tends to be higher among majority group members, is linked to lower support for various social welfare policies (Pratto et al., 1994), including at least one social policy relevant to Indigenous Peoples in New Zealand (Sibley & Liu, 2004). Future research could verify the consistency of the group status finding and whether intraminority solidarity, social dominance orientation, or both may help account for its role in support for Indigenous education.

### Limitations and Implications

We note some potential limitations to the present research. Although we detected sizable relationships between program support and prejudice, group zero-sum beliefs, and political orientation, and we also followed several open science practices, replication of this pattern with a larger sample size could further bolster confidence in these findings. A larger sample could also facilitate tests of specific group effects, for example, to determine whether the same pattern of findings would emerge for minority and majority group members (e.g., Banfield et al., 2014). Our sample was geographically diverse, and varied in terms of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and political beliefs, but the generalizability of the present findings could also be improved by having a sample more representative of the broader population.

Though we examined several factors that explained some variance in responding, there may be other variables which provide insight into Canadians' attitudes toward the PSSSP, for instance, implicit or other forms of prejudice (Beaton et al., 2011; Morrison et al., 2014). Moreover, our research is partly limited by the measures employed, which included established measures and those closely modeled off existing measures and concepts. Although all measures showed evidence of validity (e.g., conceptually expected associations), additional tests of these measures, as well as similar findings attained with alternative measures, could strengthen this area of study.

There are also potentially important implications of the present research in terms of support for Indigenous education funding. While our study was correlational in nature, we still address some possible interpretations and meanings of the main findings for support for the PSSSP as well as for other programs and policies.

Given the body of knowledge on prejudice, its association with PSSSP attitudes is a potentially significant barrier to bolstering program support. For example, it may be difficult to identify a precise source of such prejudice (e.g., conflict over land ownership or ignorance of the PSSSP and of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada; Bogart, 2020; Godlewska et al., 2017), and also difficult to pinpoint effective strategies for reducing it. In general, prejudice, such as toward Indigenous Peoples, is believed to be systematically entrenched in many aspects of society (Dovidio, 2001; Fiske, 1998; Stangor, 2009). Thus, more research is needed to know what strategies work best in limiting prejudice toward Indigenous Peoples, which may ultimately involve addressing the setup of our institutions and environments (Hardin & Banaji, 2013). Nonetheless, awareness of the potential role of prejudice in this setting may



be useful information for advocates of change, as it may help force the acknowledgement of systematic problems that still need to be resolved.

Political orientation and zero-sum beliefs may also present challenges to changing people's degree of PSSSP support. For instance, people are often motivated to protect and maintain their political views (Crawford & Pilanski, 2014). Although difficult, it may be possible to promote aspects of the PSSSP that may be valued by individuals with conservative ideologies (e.g., self-reliance). For example, by framing dialogue based on one's relevant moral intuitions, or with a nostalgic past focus (Day et al., 2014; Lammers & Baldwin, 2018). In addition, individuals appear to have a strong capacity for zero-sum thinking in general (Meegan, 2010). However, it may be possible to increase positive attitudes toward the PSSSP and support for Indigenous education more generally by emphasizing various non-zero-sum aspects (e.g., education of Indigenous individuals as broadly beneficial for society). Future research could determine whether these are viable strategies for changing people's attitudes in this context.

As the PSSSP is an important component of addressing the educational disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, non-Indigenous Canadians' mildly positive attitudes toward this program provide some feedback of where we are in terms of reconciliation. Although the moderate program support may be partly reassuring, it also suggests that more work needs to be done. In addition, some of the factors identified (e.g., prejudice) do not seem limited to only explaining the public's support. For example, Indigenous students who have received other scholarships have reported negative reactions from their peers who believe they are receiving special treatment (Indspire, 2018). Thus, while the present research may inform our understanding of potential barriers of reducing the post-secondary education gap, clearly many barriers exist and more effort is needed to help formulate effective strategies to mitigate these negative experiences and make positive steps toward reconciliation.

Finally, we consider whether the identified predictors of public support of the PSSSP may extend to related programs for Indigenous Peoples and other disadvantaged groups. On the one hand, some factors, such as degree of personal prejudice, may help explain support for a variety of such policies and programs (Stangor, 2009). For example, support for water rights for Indigenous Peoples (Neufeld et al., 2019) or assistance for international university students (Qin et al., 2015). On the other hand, some factors may depend on the particular policy, group, or context being examined, among other considerations. For instance, prejudice, but not political orientation, has helped explain support for reparations for a hypothetical historical harm to Indigenous Peoples (Blatz & Ross, 2009), while in other research, support for reparations for other incidents has been explained by conservative political beliefs consistently among majority groups members, but only sometimes among minority group members (Banfield et al., 2014). Moreover, zero-sum beliefs appear to explain policy attitudes among political groups, but this sometimes depends on the issue, for example, immigration versus wealth redistribution (Davidai & Ongis, 2019). Thus, perhaps the most glaring observation is that additional research is needed on the psychological determinants of support for policies and programs aimed at Indigenous and other minority group members, to better estimate the reliability of potentially applicable factors. In turn, such research could help determine whether

strategies to bolster program support can also be generalized, or should be tailored to the specific program or policy of interest.

## Conclusion

Despite its limitations, the present study provides some well-warranted insights into non-Indigenous Canadians' attitudes toward government funding of Indigenous post-secondary education. Future studies could build upon these findings in order to establish a more complete understanding of what factors influence Canadian's decisions about whether to support the PSSSP, as well as to explore potential strategies to bolster support for this and similar programs targeted at marginalized groups.

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## Résumé

Il existe un fossé entre les peuples autochtones et non-autochtones au Canada en ce qui concerne l'éducation post-secondaire. Un programme conçu pour aider à régler ce problème, le Programme d'aide aux étudiants de niveau postsecondaire (PSSSP), offre aux étudiants admissibles des Premières nations du financement pour l'éducation postsecondaire. Bien que ces programmes soient bénéfiques, on ne sait pas exactement dans quelle mesure les Canadiens soutiennent le financement public de l'éducation des Autochtones et si la recherche psychologique peut aider à expliquer pourquoi certains l'approuvent ou s'y opposent. Ainsi, en utilisant le PSSSP comme exemple, nous avons examiné cinq prédicteurs psychologiques possibles du soutien public : les préjugés personnels envers les peuples autochtones, la mobilité sociale perçue, les croyances méritocratiques, les croyances de groupe à somme nulle et le conservatisme politique. Sur la base de recherches antérieures, nous avons émis l'hypothèse que tout serait lié négativement au soutien du PSSSP. Dans un échantillon d'adultes canadiens non autochtones, nous avons constaté que seuls les taux plus élevés de préjugés personnels, de croyances de groupe à somme nulle et de conservatisme politique expliquaient de manière unique une baisse de soutien du programme (ou inversement, un taux moins élevé de préjugés, de croyances de groupe à somme nulle et de libéralisme politique étaient liés à une hausse du soutien du programme). Bien que corrélative, cette étude fournit un aperçu des facteurs qui peuvent influencer les attitudes des Canadiens à l'égard d'un programme visant à s'attaquer à une inégalité sociétale conséquente. Nous discutons des implications de ces résultats en ce qui concerne le soutien aux programmes et politiques destinés aux groupes marginalisés.

*Mots-clés* : éducation postsecondaire, peuples autochtones, préjugés, croyances politiques, somme nulle

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