Personal responsibility and attitudes toward intergroup reconciliation

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While many proposed solutions to systemic racism require government-led structural reforms, popular discourse regularly emphasizes actions that citizens can take in their own day-to-day lives on this issue. This article investigates how these appeals to personal responsibility affect support for improving intergroup relations. A common worry is this approach may induce a backlash if individuals feel personally blamed for injustices that are beyond their control. Yet highlighting the need for individual action can also prime considerations about self-image, efficacy, duty and social norms. I investigate these competing accounts using an online survey experiment that manipulates whether Canadians feel personally responsible for addressing past injustices against Indigenous peoples. I find that appealing to a sense of personal responsibility increases support for intergroup reconciliation and encourages a more expansive view of what is required to redress past wrongdoing. There is little evidence of backlash or feeling blamed. In fact, the treatment is most effective among conservatives, who report greater feelings of blame and less personal responsibility at baseline.

INTRODUCTION

Addressing issues of systemic racism and historical wrongdoing is a complex task requiring the coordinated effort of various actors. Politicians, government institutions, civil society organizations and the media all bear a responsibility to promote justice. Many also see an important role for individuals, with members of dominant groups increasingly being called upon to "do the work" of being a good ally to outgroups. Approximately 55% of American workplaces require their employees to complete equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training programs, at least some of which are designed to help them recognize and reconsider their own personal biases (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services 2021). Bookstores now have whole shelves appealing to readers about their role in confronting racism, including titles like *How To Be An Antiracist* (Kendi 2019), *So You Want to Talk About Race* (Oluo 2018) and *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* (Saad 2020).

Politicians also regularly call upon voters to recognize their own role in addressing injustice. In 2015, while running for the Democratic presidential nomination Hilary Clinton stated that America's "problem is not all kooks and Klansman. It's also in the cruel joke that goes unchallenged. It's in the off-hand comments about not wanting 'those people' in the neighborhood" (quoted in Capehart 2015). Later in her campaign, she argued that "ending systemic racism requires contributions from all of us, especially those of us who haven't experienced it ourselves" (quoted in Revesz 2016). Echoing this message in 2019, Democrat Stacey Abrams implored Americans to "hold everyone from the very highest offices to *our own families* accountable for racist words and deeds" (emphasis added; quoted in Carney 2019).

These may be normatively good developments: individuals do have a role to play in improving intergroup relations and it is important to communicate this responsibility. But this rhetoric has not gone unchallenged. Echoing language in a September 2020 executive

order from the Trump administration, Republican legislators have proposed and passed laws in numerous states that prohibit educators and employers from providing training that "[makes] any individual feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of their race" (Minowitz 2022; Stout and Wilburn 2022). In a similar line of attack, Senator Ted Cruz used the 2022 confirmation proceedings of Ketanji Brown Jackson to rail against children's books that teach that "babies are racist" (quoted in Rogers 2022).

In this article, I investigate how appeals to personal responsibility shape attitudes toward addressing intergroup relations. A common worry is that personal appeals may induce a backlash as individuals feel personally blamed for injustices that are beyond their control (Alicke 2000; Doosje et al. 1998). Accepting responsibility is also costly, as it implies taking actions that people may prefer to avoid. More perniciously, focusing on personal responsibility could distract from larger institutional solutions, causing individuals to misunderstand the scope of the reconciliation project (Maniates 2001; Mann 2021).

Yet backlash may not be the dominant reaction. Personal responsibility appeals could instead lead individuals to feel a sense of duty or efficacy that helps them overcome the costs of accepting responsibility and translates into a greater willingness to support efforts to improve intergroup relations. And when politicians and other actors emphasize the importance of personal responsibility, they may also be signalling a social norm about acceptable attitudes and behaviours. Since people generally want to avoid being out of step with the views of their fellow ingroup members, they may choose to support the pursuit of justice for outgroups as a way to conform (Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Bicchieri 2006; Krupka and Weber 2013).

I investigate these competing predictions in Canada, a country with a long history of injustices committed against Indigenous peoples. Following other countries like Australia and South Africa, "reconciliation" has entered the public discourse in recent years as a broad term for addressing this history and improving relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Politicians, media and activists regularly stress the importance of reconciliation and the role that individual citizens have to play in achieving this goal. Public opinion data suggest that Canadians have increasingly come to accept this responsibility, although it is unclear whether this rhetoric is building support for the transformative changes that are needed to fully address historical and ongoing injustices.

To test how appeals to personal responsibility affect attitudes on this issue, I fielded an online survey experiment with nearly 1,000 Canadians in May 2023 that manipulated respondents' perceptions of their own responsibility for advancing reconciliation. Those who perceived a greater role for themselves reported roughly 0.15 standard deviations more positive and more expansive views of reconciliation. They placed greater importance on the goal of improving relations with Indigenous peoples, believed that there was still more to do and envisioned a longer time frame for the process. The personal responsibility framing also did not limit how they saw the scope of the reconciliation project, as treated respondents reported a greater preference for government-led, structural reforms.

I find little evidence of backlash. Individuals primed to think about their own personal responsibility do not report feeling any more blamed than those in the control condition. They also do not try to deflect responsibility to other actors. And the effects of the treatment are in fact most positive for conservatives, the group who expresses the most concern about feeling blamed in the control group. There is no evidence of negative reactions from other subgroups, including White Canadians and members of religious denominations accused of mistreating Indigenous peoples. Contrary to existing theories of backlash, fostering a sense of personal responsibility appears to offer an effective means to build support for improving intergroup relations, at least in the Canadian context.

This article makes several contributions. First, the results here advance debates over how to mobilize public opinion around improving intergroup relations. I show that an understudied mechanism, priming personal responsibility, can have positive effects. This finding helps unpack evidence on the positive effects of analogous interventions, like diversity training pro-

grams (Devine and Ash 2022; Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006; Lai and Lisnek 2023), which often include implicit invocations of personal responsibility. Like several of those studies, I find that the attitudinal effects of treatment are most effective among those that express worse attitudes toward outgroups at baseline (Adida et al. 2023; Chang et al. 2019). Second, this study helps connect a normative literature on responsibility and empirical studies looking at how people conceptualize their own role in redressing injustices. Political theorists have offered a compelling, if abstract, case for fostering a collective sense of responsibility for addressing injustices (Arendt 1987; Young 2010). Social and political psychologists have documented how emotional responses to injustices against an outgroup — including guilt and blame — may help or hinder efforts to reconceptualize responsibility in the real world (Alicke 2000; Branscombe and Doosje 2004; Chudy, Piston, and Shipper 2019; Malle, Guglielmo, and Monroe 2014). The present study is, to my knowledge, the first to experimentally test the effects of priming responsibility in the way normative theorists have proposed. Finally, this research microfounds the transitional justice literature's interest in "bottom-up," citizen-led approaches to reconciliation (Eriksson 2009; Lundy and McGovern 2008; Quinn 2021). Scholars advocating for these strategies argue that encouraging individuals to participate in reconciliation efforts can produce more durable peace (although see Kochanski 2020). Bottom-up methods are motivated by a desire to provide agency and voice to victims, and my results suggest that by priming individual-level responsibility, they may also be useful for building support among members of dominant groups.

Before proceeding, as a non-Indigenous scholar, it is important to acknowledge my position in this research (Kovach 2021). In what follows, I have endeavoured to follow guidance from Indigenous peoples on what reconciliation in Canada should involve, but it is unavoidable that I will have brought my own assumptions and biases to bear on these questions. I have engaged in this work to advance discussion on how best to mobilize non-Indigenous peoples in support of building and maintaining mutually respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples.

When people think of "responsibility" for some wrongdoing, they are often imagining an actor who plays a causal role in a negative outcome occurring (Feinberg 1968). When a driver fails to brake sufficiently hard before a traffic light and hits a car stopped in front of them, we say they are responsible for the accident. Iris Marion Young (2010) calls this the "liability model" of responsibility and argues that it is well-suited to situations where an actor can clearly be identified as being at fault.

Structural injustices do not fit easily into this model. In many cases, no one actor is the direct cause of their occurrence; they are more often the product of thousands or millions of people making interdependent decisions and acting according to practices that are seen as morally acceptable. Racial segregation in education, which disadvantages marginalized communities, can arise from the ostensibly non-racist motivations of White parents who choose to send their children to racially exclusive school districts because they are better funded (Hayward 2017). White parents benefit from interacting with the broader structural processes that privilege their children, but these individual parents alone cannot directly change the unjust background context. Historical injustices pose a similar problem because, while the current generation benefits from unjust structures that were created in the past, they cannot be held strictly liable for the actions of those that came before them.

On Young's view, although individual citizens may not have a causal role in perpetrating structural and historical injustices, they nevertheless share a collective duty to remedy them. Building on Hannah Arendt's (1987) concept of political responsibility, she proposes a "social connection model" to attribute responsibility in these cases. Individuals derive this responsibility not from a finding of blame, but from their membership in a group that is privileged by an unjust structural context. In contrast to the liability model, this responsibility is not backward-looking in the sense of assigning guilt or fault. It is forward-looking, creating an obligation to engage in collective action to transform inegalitarian processes (see

Richardson 1999). Young's is a call for members of privileged groups to assume a personal responsibility for injustice precisely because of the privileges they enjoy. This responsibility can be assumed through collective action, or as Allard-Tremblay (2024, 14) argues in the Canadian context, through "everyday individual conduct."

The social connection model has parallels with conceptions of responsibility and relationships that are common in Indigenous political thought (Simpson 2008; Stark 2010; Williams 2018). Principles of responsibility, respect and reciprocity figure prominently in how many Indigenous nations approached the negotiation and interpretation of treaties in the pre-colonial and colonial period. The Dish with One Spoon Treaty of 1700 between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee, for example, uses the symbol of sharing one spoon and eating from a common dish (i.e. a shared territory) (Jacobs and Lytwyn 2020; Lytwyn 1997; Simpson 2008). It is the responsibility of "all participants in the agreement ... to ensure that the dish would never be empty by taking care of the land and all of the living beings on it" (Duhamel 2018). These same principles of responsibility for maintaining good relations and stewarding the land also animate treaties between the Canadian state and Indigenous nations (Borrows and Coyle 2017; Craft 2013; Starblanket 2019). These agreements are forward-looking, creating obligations on all parties "for as long as the sun shines and the waters flow" as a way to ensure peace and prosperity for generations to come (Coyle 2017; Lyons 1992, 33). Given Canada's historic failures to live up to its treaty obligations, there is also a responsibility to pursue reparative justice for past wrongdoing as a way to move toward a more just relationship going forward (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). While treaties were agreed upon at the nation-to-nation level, their spirit and intent create obligations for individuals as well. This principle motivates recent efforts to encourage non-Indigenous Canadians to recognize and take up their responsibilities as "treaty people" (Epp 2008; Poelzer and Coates 2015).

Whether people are willing to accept this responsibility is another question. Judgments of responsibility are influenced by prior social and political attitudes, rather than objective fact-

finding discoveries (Smiley 1992). And while Young and Indigenous political traditions make a compelling case for the importance of taking up a collective responsibility for injustices, a necessary pre-condition is that members of dominant groups first acknowledge and experience their implication in the suffering of others (Schiff 2014). Hayward (2017) argues that "White ignorance," or a systematic lack of awareness of the relevant injustices, represents a significant barrier to actually realizing this in practice (see Mills 2007). Indeed, despite normative theorists' progress on conceptualizing responsibility in the abstract, there is little empirical evidence on whether appealing to individuals' sense of personal responsibility can build support for addressing injustices in practice.

The risks of an individualized responsibility

A natural concern is that stressing the responsibility of individual dominant group members to repair relationships with an outgroup could weaken support for redress. For one, emphasizing personal responsibility increases the perceived costs that must be borne by an individual to right the wrong, which has been shown to reduce commitment to finding solutions in other intergroup conflicts (e.g. Schmitt et al. 2008). When individuals are made to feel responsible, they naturally proceed to consider all of the actions that are needed to take up that responsibility: educating themselves, having uncomfortable conversations with friends and family, donating to causes, voting for policies that support outgroups. For some, these demands will exceed any expected payoffs, leading them to resist being held responsible. Results from framing experiments manipulating whether respondents feel personally responsible for climate change mitigation (Kalch et al. 2021) and reparations for slavery (Craemer 2009) lend support to this argument.

Making individuals feel personally responsible could also induce backlash. As Young (2010) worried, many people hold retrospective conceptions of responsibility that centre around guilt and fault, rather than forward-looking ideas of obligation. Dominant group members' desire to appear blameless motivates a variety of discursive "moves to innocence,"

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which Tuck and Yang (2012) argue undermine true redress. These individuals can resent feeling blamed for structural processes that are beyond their immediate control or historical events that occurred before their time. Survey research lends support to this idea, showing that when injustices are perceived as having occurred more recently, people tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards victims and register greater support for making amends (Burns and Granz 2022; Peetz, Gunn, and Wilson 2010).

In a survey I fielded in September 2022 (separate from the one I use in the analyses below), I asked White Canadians what reconciliation with Indigenous peoples meant to them (see below for details on this case). In their open-ended responses, some pushed back against feeling personally blamed. One respondent stated that "current Canadians are not responsible for what happened before," while another argued, "I'm not racist. I have done nothing for which I need to reconcile." The exact prevalence of such views is unclear. Yet these sentiments exemplify both a resistance to feelings of blame and also how an individualized responsibility can limit the scope of intergroup reconciliation. Few people consider themselves racist. If individuals believe that repairing intergroup relations simply requires that they personally not be racist, they may perceive that the problem is solved and further action is unnecessary (Trepagnier 2010).

However, many of the more substantive demands made by victimized groups concern structural processes that only institutional actors can act on effectively, like providing compensation for past wrongdoing or enacting anti-discrimination legislation. Stressing personal responsibility may shift the focus of reconciliation away from these more expansive issues of justice. Maniates (2001, 33), writing about the individualization of responsibility for environmental problems, argues that this rhetoric leaves "little room to ponder institutions, the nature and exercise of political power, or ways of collectively changing the distribution of power and influence in society − to, in other words, 'think institutionally'" (see also Mann 2021). In a similar vein, an individualized responsibility may encourage a more myopic view of intergroup reconciliation that minimizes commitment to solving the problem. Individuals

who are made to feel personally responsible may assess existing progress on reconciliation more generously and prefer to view it as a short-term project as a way to minimize their own role.

Personal responsibility as mobilizing

Emphasizing personal responsibility need not necessarily weaken support for intergroup reconciliation. Taking up a responsibility for addressing injustices is similar to other political behaviours, like voting or protesting, in that pivotality is low: most individuals' choice about whether to work towards reconciliation in their own life will have little bearing on the success of reconciliation as a whole. To understand why people nonetheless engage in this project, it is useful to consider the internal and external motivations that have been thought to explain support for similar types of collective action.

First, responsibility appeals can make altruistic values salient. People may already believe they have a personal duty to pursue intergroup reconciliation because they want to live in a more just world (Clary and Snyder 1999; Lerner 1980). Economists have conceptualized this as a "public goods" motivation for engaging in pro-social behaviour (Andreoni 1990). When people are reminded of their prior convictions by an appeal to their role in producing that public good, they redouble their commitment to the cause.

Less altruistic considerations are also relevant. When individuals are informed of their responsibility for contributing to a goal, this information defines a standard against which they can judge their own attitudes and behaviour. People want to see themselves as good and moral; failing to live up to a responsibility can undermine that self-image. Supporting reconciliation, in this view, offers a way for individuals to maintain a positive view of themselves. Knowles et al. (2014) argue that similar concerns about the esteem of one's ingroup and a desire to be seen as a group exemplar can motivate efforts toward intergroup reconciliation.

These two intrinsic explanations centre around pro-social and self-interested motivations.

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Understanding intractable intergroup injustices as having individual-level solutions may also give people a greater sense of internal efficacy (Balch 1974). When individuals feel responsible, they update positively on their own ability to affect change, which has been shown to correlate with a willingness to participate (Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Pasek et al. 2008). In the context of intergroup reconciliation, efficacy could motivate a deeper commitment to solving the problem, encouraging individuals to consider a wider array of solutions and a longer timeline for their implementation.

Beyond triggering internal motivations, personal responsibility appeals also promote a consideration of injunctive norms (Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Bicchieri 2006). When people are told that they are responsible for helping to improve intergroup relations, they may understand this to mean that supporting reconciliation is a socially desirable behaviour in the eyes of others. Previous research has shown that priming these external considerations can have strong effects on attitudes and behaviours. As discussed earlier, people pay costs for taking up a personal responsibility (i.e. time and effort). When people also perceive a social norm that prescribes their accepting responsibility, it becomes psychologically taxing to reject that responsibility. Acting against a norm can trigger feelings of shame, whereas compliance induces pride (Elster 1989; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2010; Scheff 1988; Suhay 2015). For these reasons, incentivized experiments have demonstrated that people are regularly willing to take actions that are personally costly in order to conform to social norms (Krupka and Weber 2013; Pickup, Kimbrough, and Rooij 2021). Incentives to comply can be particularly strong when a norm is perceived to be operative within one's ingroup (Abrams et al. 1990; Wood et al. 1996). In appeals to responsibility for intergroup reconciliation, group identities (e.g. as Americans, White people) are almost always salient, either implicitly or explicitly, thereby reinforcing the importance of norm compliance.

Theoretical expectations

The preceding discussion points to two conflicting sets of empirical predictions. I pre-registered hypotheses (see here) predicting that appeals to responsibility would weaken support for intergroup reconciliation. I expected that concerns over blame would lead people to take a more narrow conception of what reconciliation requires, envision a shorter timeline for achieving this goal and assess existing progress on this issue more generously. Yet, as the discussion above demonstrates, there are also strong theoretical reasons to expect that creating a sense of personal responsibility can instead mobilize individuals to support deeper, more sustained action.

CONTEXT

Indigenous peoples living in what is now Canada have suffered grave injustices since the beginning of European colonization through to the present day. Canadian settler society has stolen the land of Indigenous communities, suppressed their traditional governance systems and cultures, and infringed upon their basic human rights over successive generations (Cardinal et al. 2004; Manuel and Derrickson 2017; J. R. Miller 1989). Of these injustices, the most well-known among non-Indigenous Canadians is the "residential school system," which involved the removal of Indigenous children from their families to live in boarding schools where they were subjected to a forced assimilation program. It is estimated that 150,000 children attended these schools between the 1800s and 1990s; many suffered sexual and physical abuse and several thousand died as a result of neglect, poor living conditions and violence (Fontaine 2010; Knockwood and Thomas 1992; J. R. Miller 1996; Milloy 1999; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Sellars 2013).

The legacies of this past wrongdoing, as well as contemporary structural barriers, have limited Indigenous peoples' ability to realize self-determination and equality. Today, severe disparities persist in the economic, social and health outcomes of Indigenous peoples relative

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to non-Indigenous Canadians (Sawchuk 2020). While Canada as a whole ranked 12th globally on the United Nations' Human Development Index in 2016, Indigenous peoples living on reserves would have ranked 52nd, just ahead of Venezuela (Cooke 2019).

Numerous actors are to blame for these injustices. The federal government, which maintains jurisdictional responsibility over "Indian Affairs," built and maintained the institutional framework that has oppressed Indigenous people in Canada. The government signed and broke treaties with Indigenous nations and passed legislation to restrict their civil and political rights. Non-governmental actors have also played a role. While the federal government established and funded the residential school system, missionary Christian churches were tasked with running the school operations. Although the government has historically failed to protect the territorial rights of Indigenous nations, individual settlers and private companies have also routinely taken steps to acquire the land and resources of these communities without their consent.

Reconciliation and responsibility discourse

In recent years, "reconciliation" has become a catch-all term for repairing Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples and addressing the historical and ongoing injustices that have been perpetrated over generations. Attention to the issue of reconciliation increased significantly after several Indigenous communities announced that they had identified suspected unmarked graves at former residential school sites in 2021, an event which caused a significant, if fleeting, change in public attitudes about systemic racism (Williamson 2023).

In the context of this heightened attention to reconciliation, debates over responsibility have played out among politicians, activists and the media. Discourse around responsibility for reconciliation has largely been framed by institutional responses to the legacies of the residential school system (J. Miller 2017). In 2006, a class action lawsuit related to this history was settled by the federal government, Indigenous advocacy groups and churches involved in running the schools. As part of the settlement, a Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (TRC) was established to document the residential school history and recommend a pathway to reconciliation. In its final report from 2015, the TRC issued 94 "calls to action," which are now seen as a road map and core measure of progress on addressing this historical injustice. Most of the responsibility for these calls to action rests with the federal government (see Appendix A.1 for details), but Christian churches have also come to be seen as having a central role. In 2021, after the announcements of unmarked graves at former schools, the Catholic Church in particular was heavily criticized for its failures to contribute to reconciliation, which culminated in an official visit and apology from the Pope in 2022. While reconciliation encompasses much more than just addressing the residential school history, the decades-long debates over this specific injustice have cemented the idea that the government and churches have an overriding responsibility to lead efforts to improve Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

There has also been a distinct individualization of responsibility in the years since the TRC's report was released. Politicians regularly call upon Canadians to step up in their own lives. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in a press release marking the country's first ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, encouraged "all Canadians to take this opportunity to learn more about the history of residential schools in Canada ... and reflect on how each of us can play a part in the journey of reconciliation" (2021). In a similar statement the following year, he noted "reconciliation is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples — it is the responsibility of all Canadians ... we all have a role to play" (Trudeau 2022). That same year, former Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole (2022) noted that the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was "a reminder of our collective duty," explaining that "working towards reconciliation is a duty we all share." Cadmus Delorme, Chief of Cowessess First Nation, where 751 suspected unmarked graves were identified in 2021, explained his views on how Canadians must think past injustices in the present day as follows: "Today in this country, we inherited—*inherited*—a situation ... We didn't create the Indian Act. We didn't create residential schools. We didn't create [the] 60's scoop, but as Canadians, we

inherited that. And when you inherit something, you have a responsibility" (quoted in *The Conversation Piece* 2022). Gwawaenuk Chief Robert Joseph has also articulated a vision for reconciliation involving individual action: "The most important sorries in this country will be between Canadians, to each other, not the churches to Indigenous people and the government to Indigenous people. It will be all of the other people who now live and share this country with Indigenous people" (quoted in Kirkup 2021).

To help non-Indigenous Canadians understand their role, news media and civil society organizations frequently publish guides on how to affect reconciliation at the individual level, with titles like "Personal acts of reconciliation" (CBC News 2018), "10 actions you can take today in the spirit of reconciliation" (Shared Health 2021) and "What You Can Do as a Settler Canadian on National Truth and Reconciliation Day" (Racine and McArthur 2021). These pieces focus on actions like educating oneself about Canada's history with Indigenous peoples, donating to Indigenous charities and wearing an orange shirt to honour the victims of the residential school system.

Public opinion on responsibility for injustices

The Canadian public has internalized much of the recent individualization of responsibility rhetoric. Jody Wilson-Raybould (2022, 1-3), the first Indigenous Minister of Justice and Attorney General in Canada, now notes that the most common question she receives from non-Indigenous Canadians at speaking engagements is "what can I do to help advance reconciliation?"

Public opinion data shows this sense of personal responsibility has been building over time. In Figure 1, I track responses over the past six years to the question, "Do individual Canadians have a role to play in reconciliation?" There has been an increase in those responding affirmatively, from 63% in 2019 to 69% in 2024. The change is most apparent between the 2020 and 2021 surveys, during which time protests related to the murder of George Floyd drew attention to issues of racism in Canada. The increase does not appear to
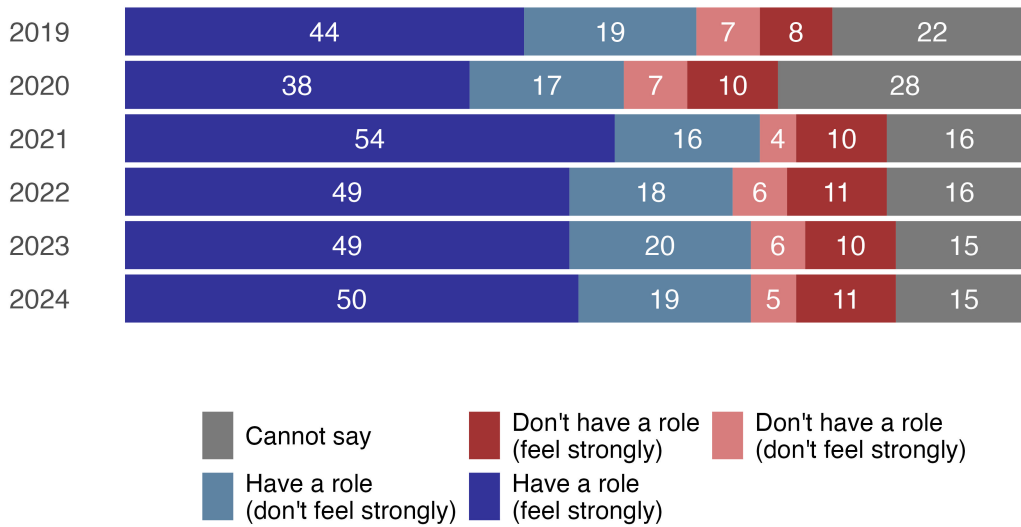
Figure 1: Public opinion on the role of individual Canadians in reconciliation

Plot tracks the proportion of respondents giving each response in online survey waves between 2019 and 2024 based on data from Environics (2024).
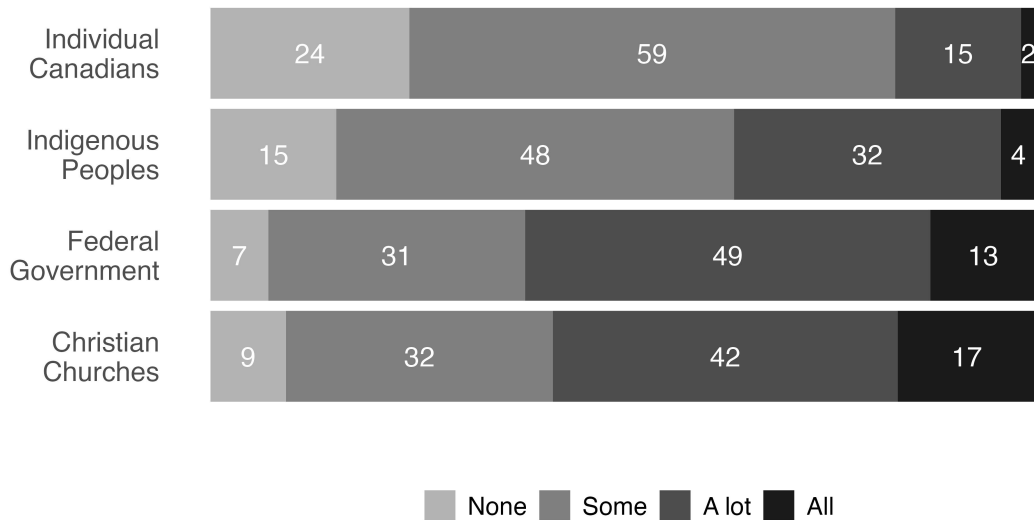

Figure 2: Responsibility attributions among the Canadian public

Plot presents the proportion of respondents assigning each category of responsibility to each actor based on control group responses.

be driven by a conversion among those who initially rejected a role for individual Canadians, since this group's size has remained relatively stable in size over time. Instead, the shift coincides with a reduction in the percentage responding that they are unsure about their role, suggesting that beliefs about responsibility are consolidating.

Interestingly, the precise wording of this question appears consequential. A 2023 survey reported that when Canadians are asked if they "feel personally responsible for past injustices" against Indigenous peoples − rather than reconciliation for those injustices − just 15% believe they do, while 78% do not and nearly 8% are unsure or prefer not to say (Association for Canadian Studies 2023). This discrepancy offers one indication that personal responsibility is more popular when it is presented as a forward-looking duty to pursue redress, rather than a backward-looking accounting for wrongdoing.

Another nuance that is not captured in Figure 2 is how individuals perceive their own responsibility vis-à-vis other actors. Using an original survey from 2023 (see details below), Figure 2 summarizes attributions of responsibility for advancing reconciliation. Canadians believe that they themselves are the least responsible for addressing this issue − even less responsible than Indigenous peoples themselves. (Note that this question did not have a "do not know" option, so the percentages in this plot do not align perfectly with those in the 2023 survey from Figure 1). The two actors deemed most responsible are those with institutional power to affect change and that have received the most attention in popular discourse about reconciliation: the federal government and the Christian churches that ran the residential schools. Each of these actors are believed to have a roughly equal role to play.

It is difficult to situate the percentages in Figure 2 in a comparative context, because there is minimal data from other countries. However, a 2021 survey in South Africa found that "you and your family and friends" were seen as holding much more responsibility for reconciliation than institutional actors like religious organizations and the national government. Over 90% of respondents said that their own participation was at least somewhat important (IJR 2021). In this sense, Canadian attitudes appear to more closely resemble those in Australia.

In that context, only 20% of respondents thought that non-Indigenous Australians should make the most effort in the reconciliation process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Reconciliation Australia 2022). (Almost 70% thought that it was the responsibility of *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to take the lead on this issue). American attitudes on this issue are less straightforward. While Americans are more likely to say that individuals, rather than governments or media, have a major role to play in improving race relations (DeJulio et al. 2015), there is also a strong preference that reparations for slavery be paid for by institutions like the government and private businesses rather than individual descendants of those engaged in the slave trade (Pew Research Center 2022).

The averages in Figures 1 and 2 obscure considerable variability in beliefs about responsibility. Which Canadians feel a greater sense of personal responsibility for reconciliation? Who feels blamed for past injustices? Figure 3 summarizes OLS models in which I regress these two sets of beliefs about reconciliation on a host of attitudinal and demographic variables. On average, older generations, men and those living in areas with a smaller percentage of Indigenous peoples all believe that individual Canadians have less of a role to play in advancing reconciliation. Non-partisans and supporters of left- and centre-left parties like the NDP, Greens and Liberals tend to adopt a roughly 0.25 standard deviations greater sense of personal responsibility than right-wing Conservative (CPC) and People's Party (PPC) and Quebec nationalist Bloc Québécois (BQ) partisans.

In the sample as a whole, feelings of blame are low, leaning toward "not at all" (37%) and "a little" (28%), rather than "somewhat" (18%) and "a lot" (17%). Figure 3 shows that a sense of blame is not related deterministically to personal responsibility within particular subgroups. For example, people living in areas with more Indigenous people tend to feel both more blamed and that they have more personal responsibility. While White people and Christians also feel around 0.25 standard deviations more blamed, they do not exhibit any comparable differences in perceptions of responsibility. Women feel a greater responsibility, but are no more likely to say they feel blamed than men. That being said, partisanship
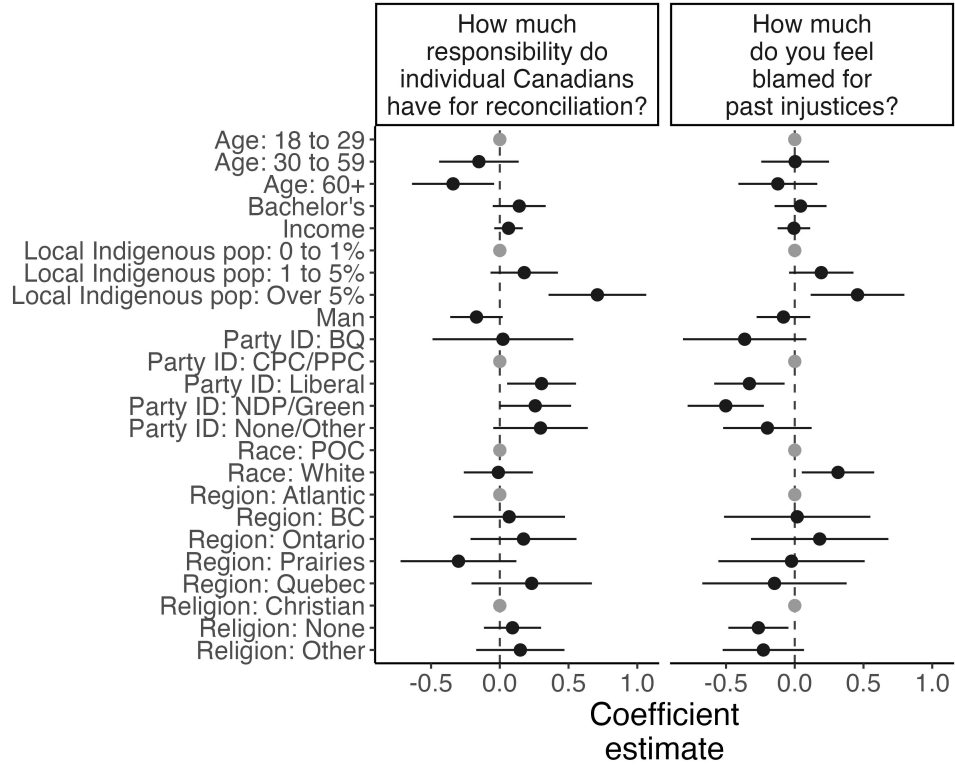
Figure 3: Correlates of personal responsibility beliefs and feelings of blame

Plot presents coefficient estimates and 95% robust confidence intervals based on two OLS models regressing the outcomes in the columns on the variables listed on the y-axis. Both outcomes are scaled in terms of standard deviation changes. Sample includes only control group responses ($n = 320, 308$).

strongly and inversely predicts both of these sets of beliefs: conservative CPC and PPC partisans feel both less responsible and more blamed than supporters of more left-leaning parties.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

As the previous section documented, around 70% of Canadians believe they have a personal role to play in improving intergroup relations. This number has been increasing in recent years, but there is still room for movement, since most assess their role as less important relative to other actors and certain subgroups perceive little personal responsibility.

How does the growing individualization of responsibility for improving intergroup relations affect support for reconciliation? To investigate this question, I conducted an online

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survey experiment with a nationally representative sample of just under 1,000 Canadians as a module in the Consortium for Electoral Democracy's Democracy Checkup in May 2023 (Harell et al. 2024). The experiment manipulated respondents' sense of personal responsibility using a subtle change to the preamble in a block of questions about reconciliation. After completing a series of pre-treatment demographic and attitudinal questions, respondents were assigned to one of three different prompts with equal probabilities (emphasis added):

1. **Control**: In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about advancing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

2. **Personal responsibility**: In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about how *individual Canadians like yourself have a responsibility* to advance reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

3. **No blame**: In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about how *individual Canadians like yourself are not to blame for injustices that happened in the past, but also have a responsibility* to advance reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The *personal responsibility* framing was used to directly manipulate how respondents thought about their own responsibility relative to the general prompt in the control condition. An appealing aspect of this treatment is that it is ambiguous as to whether "responsibility" implies blame versus obligation, paralleling some of the political discourse around reconciliation. By leaving the meaning vague, I am able to investigate how people typically interpret these types of appeals.

However, I noted a concern in my pre-registration plan that this treatment could trigger feelings of blame for many respondents, with negative downstream effects on views of reconciliation. To hedge against this possibility, I also included a *no blame* condition, which maintains the responsibility manipulation, but also explicitly informs the reader that they are not to blame for historical wrongdoing. This intervention comes closest to priming the specific, forward-looking model of political responsibility advocated for by normative theorists (Arendt 1987; Young 2010). After reading this initial text, respondents proceeded directly to a series of outcome questions.

Indigenous advocates and scholars, as well as the TRC, have articulated clear positions on what reconciliation entails (e.g. Asch, Borrows, and Tully 2018; Craft and Regan 2020; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Jewell and Mosby 2022; Manuel and Derrickson 2017): a fundamental restructuring of social, economic and political life. Land must be returned to Indigenous nations, compensation must be provided for past wrongs and structures must be put in place to allow Indigenous communities to govern themselves and have an equal voice on issues of shared concern. It is not a short-term project, but rather an ongoing process of rebuilding a relationship without a definitive end point. Despite repeated declarations of these criteria for reconciliation, public opinion data reveals significant disagreement or misunderstanding among the Canadian public (e.g. Environics 2021).

To understand whether priming a sense of personal responsibility can help move conceptions of reconciliation into alignment with these visions of reconciliation, I rely on four outcome questions (see Appendix B.1 for full text):

1. **Importance**: How important do you think reconciliation should be? (Not at all important to Extremely important)

2. **Progress**: How much has been done to achieve reconciliation? (Barely anything to Way too much)

3. **Actions**: Which of the following actions should be taken to achieve reconciliation? Select all that apply. (A list of seven possible actions, including taking no action)

4. **Timeline**: What should be the timeframe for achieving reconciliation? (It should not happen at all; short-, medium-, or long-term process)

I convert all responses to numeric values and standardize using the control group mean and standard deviation. In a deviation from my pre-analysis plan, I also aggregate the items into a mean effects index to help recover power across these multiple endpoints. Reliability analyses suggest the items scale together well (Cronbach's α=0.77; see Appendix B.2). For the actions outcome, the pre-analysis plan also discusses comparing respondents' preferences

for symbolic versus material actions. Those results, available in Appendix C.4, show that while symbolic actions are more generally more popular, the treatments did not differentially affect preferences for either type of policy. As manipulation checks, I measure (a) relative responsibility attributions using the same question from Figure 2 and (b) the extent to which respondents feel blamed for injustices that happened in the past.

Estimation

In line with my pre-analysis plan, I estimate the following OLS equation with HC2 standard errors:

$$y_i = \beta_1 \text{PersonalResp}_i + \beta_2 \text{NoBlame}_i + \mathbf{X}_i \gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

where y_i is one of the outcomes described above, PersonalResp_i and NoBlame_i are indicators for which treatment condition respondent i was assigned to (the control frame is the reference category) and $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a vector of pre-treatment covariates used to improve efficiency (see notes to Table 1 for the full list). Under random assignment, β_1 and β_2 capture the average treatment effect (ATE) of each of the two framings of responsibility relative to the control condition.

Balance checks in Appendix C.1 show that randomization was successful. There was very little outcome missingness in the data, but I explore the impacts of the small amount of differential atttrition across treatment conditions in Appendix C.2, finding that it does not affect my substantive conclusions.

In a deviation from my pre-analysis plan, I exclude a measure of "Indigenous resentment" from the set of pre-treatment covariates in $\mathbf{X}_i$. Because of an unexpected error in the cross-randomization of survey modules, over 40% of the respondents recorded missing values on this measure and, as a result, I cannot use it as either a control or moderator variable (see Appendix B.4 for details). I also pre-specified a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment for my

significance testing procedures. In hindsight, this correction was likely overly conservative given that each of the outcomes represents a conceptually distinct attitude related to reconciliation. Nonetheless, I report which estimates survive the false discovery corrections in the notes to each table below.

RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the estimated ATEs across each of the four main outcomes and summary index. All of the effects are positive, suggesting that the responsibility framings caused respondents to be more supportive of improving intergroup relations and to take a more expansive view of what that requires. Relative to the control condition, treated respondents assign greater importance to advancing reconciliation and believe that more still needs to be done. They also select more actions that need to be taken to advance reconciliation and are more willing to acknowledge that the process will take time, possibly without a definitive endpoint.

For the summary index, effects are around 0.17 and 0.12 standard deviations, respectively, for the personal responsibility and no blame framings. This is a comparatively large shift for attitudinal measures related to intergroup relations and a fairly subtle framing intervention (c.f. Beauvais and Williamson 2023; Efimoff and Starzyk 2023; Fang and White 2022; Williamson 2023). Across each outcome in Table 1, the estimates of the no blame frame — which is virtually the same as the personal responsibility wording except it explicitly absolves the respondent of blame for past injustices — are slightly smaller than the unaltered responsibility frame. However, I cannot reject the possibility that both the personal responsibility and no blame frames had the same effects on attitudes toward reconciliation (F-test p=0.51 for the index outcome).

While many of the effects on individual items are not statistically significant, the estimates are largest for the actions and timeline outcomes. The positive effect on the number of actions respondents select is also not limited to symbolic and interpersonal options — like

acknowledging or teaching about past injustices − but also include ideas for more substantive redress, like returning land and resources to Indigenous peoples (see Appendix C.4). This finding helps allay concerns that emphasizing personal responsibility shrinks the scope of what reconciliation is believed to involve. There may also be a concern that respondents envisioning a longer timeline might be a way for them to delay reconciliation into the future without actually making concrete changes. This interpretation seems unlikely, however, because I find that the treatments reduced the probability that a respondent selects "reconciliation should not happen at all" for the timeline question by 3 to 4 percentage points ($p = 0.05, 0.12$).

Table 1: Effects of responsibility framings on reconciliation attitudes

	Reconciliation index	Rec. Importance	Still more to do	Actions to be taken	Longer timeline
Personal responsibility framing	0.165*	0.130	0.125	0.153*	0.192*
	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.069)	(0.073)	(0.074)
No blame framing	0.118	0.048	0.021	0.063	0.144
	(0.072)	(0.074)	(0.075)	(0.071)	(0.075)
Observations	972	982	983	979	979
R^2	0.136	0.128	0.150	0.201	0.109
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition, with effects scaled in terms of control group standard deviations. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models control for the following pre-treatment covariates: age, region, gender, language, race, religion, university education, income, years living in Canada, turnout (2021) and party ID. All estimates are non-significant after applying a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment with an FDR of 5% and $\alpha = 95\%$, except for the personal responsibility treatment's effect on the timeline outcome. *p<0.05

Responsibility attributions

How did the invocation of personal responsibility affect perceptions of who needed to take action? Table 2 presents ATE estimates on responsibility attributions for various actors. Relative to the control condition, the no blame treatment did not change the responsibility

Table 2: Effects of framings on responsibility attributions

| | Responsibility assigned to... | | | |
	Individual Canadians	Federal government	Christian churches	Indigenous peoples
Personal responsibility framing	0.143	0.163*	0.055	0.020
	(0.079)	(0.076)	(0.075)	(0.082)
No blame framing	0.011	0.002	0.008	−0.062
	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.077)	(0.082)
Observations	980	981	979	982
R^2	0.068	0.048	0.068	0.060
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition, with effects scaled in terms of control group standard deviations. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models control for the following pre-treatment covariates: age, region, gender, language, race, religion, university education, income, years living in Canada, turnout (2021) and party ID. All estimates are non-significant after applying a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment with an FDR of 5% and $\alpha= 95\%$. *p<0.05

assigned to any actor. The personal responsibility treatment, by contrast, increased the perceived responsibility of individual Canadians by 0.14 s.d. ($p = 0.07$), providing evidence that the intervention worked as expected. The fact that the personal responsibility framing was more successful in changing perceptions of individual responsibility than the no blame framing offers one explanation for the smaller ATEs of the no blame condition on the main outcomes in Table 1.

Respondents treated with the personal responsibility frame also assigned a greater responsibility to the federal government. The change in perceived responsibility is roughly the same magnitude as the shift in perceptions of individuals' responsibility. This effect is consistent with respondents perceiving a complementarity between their own responsibilities and those of their government. If individuals believe they must take action on this issue, they may simultaneously demand their government do the same. In line with this interpretation, treated respondents report stronger support for specifically government-led actions, like returning land to Indigenous peoples, and not just individual-level solutions.

It is unlikely that treated respondents are assigning greater responsibility to the government because they want to deflect their own obligations. If that were the case, we would not observe a simultaneous positive effect on individuals' own sense of responsibility. The treatment also did not increase responsibility attributions for the other two actors − the churches and Indigenous peoples − to whom responsibility could be diverted. Instead, the symmetric increase in perceptions of individual and government responsibility suggests that the personal responsibility frame increased respondents' demands for action.

Supporting this interpretation, I also assessed whether respondents felt personally blamed for injustices that happened in the past (see Appendix C.5). Rather than increasing feelings of blame, the personal responsibility framing had essentially no effect on this intermediary variable ($\beta=-0.01$, $p=0.93$). Taken together with the main effects on attitudes toward reconciliation, the results here suggest that appeals to personal responsibility can effectively build support for individual- and government-led reconciliation, without inducing feelings of blame.

Testing for backlash

One of the main concerns with promoting an individual sense of responsibility for reconciliation is that it may induce backlash. The risk of such a negative reaction is probably most pronounced for those who already feel that they are being unfairly blamed for injustices that happened in the past. Figure 3 showed that in the Canadian context, supporters of the right-wing Conservative Party (CPC) and People's Party (PPC) were especially prone to these beliefs. If the personal responsibility framing were to have triggered backlash, it would most likely have happened among this set of respondents.

To test for this possibility, I adjust my earlier model specifications by adding an interaction between partisanship and an indicator, Responsibility$_i$, for whether a respondent was assigned to either of the two personal responsibility treatments.[1] The relevant OLS model

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1. This approach deviates from my pre-analysis plan. I had originally planned to test for differential responses to treatment among those with more and less favourable attitudes toward Indigenous peoples, but
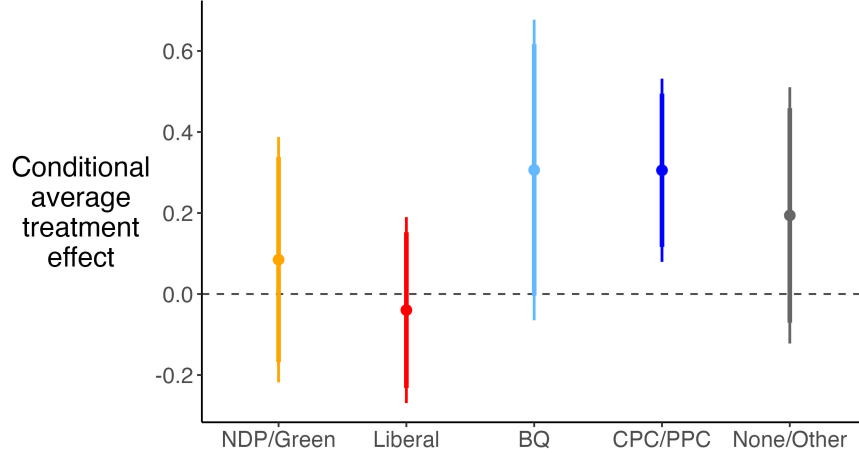
Figure 4: CATEs on support for reconciliation by partisanship

Plot reports CATE estimates and 90/95% robust confidence intervals across levels of partisan identification. Outcome is the reconciliation attitudes index, scaled by control group standard deviations. Model controls for the pre-treatment covariates listed in the notes to Table 1. ($n = 972$)

is as follows:

$$y_i = \beta_1 \text{Responsibility}_i + \beta_2 \text{PartyID}_i + \beta_3 \big(\text{Responsibility}_i \times Z_i \big) + \mathbf{X}_i \gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

where y_i is the reconciliation support index, PartyID_i is the respondent's partisan identification and $\mathbf{X}_i$ is the same vector of covariates used in the ATE estimation. The β_1 and $\beta_1 + \beta_3$ estimates capture conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) across different values of PartyID_i. Deviating slightly from my pre-analysis plan, this specification focuses on both treatment conditions versus the control, and the general reconciliation support index as an outcome, rather than each constituent measure. As Table 1 demonstrated, the two treatments had relatively similar average effects; analyzing them together and with a single summary outcome simplifies interpretation. Full CATE estimates by each treatment arm and each separate outcome are available in Appendix C.6.

Figure 4 summarizes the marginal effects of the personal responsibility framings across

this variable was compromised in the survey administration (see Appendix B.4 for details). Past research shows that partisanship is a strong predictor of anti-Indigenous attitudes, in addition to its correlation with feelings of blame in my sample (Beauvais 2021; Beauvais and Stolle 2022).

different partisan groups. Conditional treatment effects are roughly 0.3 standard deviations among right-wing CPC and PPC supporters, the largest among all partisan groups. Effects are also larger among supporters of the nationalist Bloc Québécois (BQ), who reported lower perceptions of personal responsibility at baseline, and non-partisans. Left- and centre-left New Democratic Party (NDP), Green and Liberal partisans, who perceived less personal blame and greater responsibility in the control group, saw effect sizes closer to zero. In Appendix C.6, I show that the treatment similarly did not cause conservatives to feel more blamed for past injustices. These results provide little evidence in support of a backlash hypothesis, suggesting instead that the positive effects of invoking personal responsibility were concentrated among those most opposed to reconciliation at baseline.

CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how dominant groups think about responsibility for historical injustices and systemic racism. Looking at the case of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, I document patterns of responsibility attribution and evaluate how appealing to a sense of personal responsibility impacts public support for reparative policies. While most Canadians acknowledge that they have some role to play in reconciliation, some are resistant to this idea and many see institutional actors like the government and religious organizations as having a greater responsibility to act. Yet when encouraged to think about their own personal responsibility, respondents reported greater support for the reconciliation project. They assigned greater importance to this policy issue, believed there was more to do, supported more policy actions to advance reconciliation and envisioned a longer timeline. Analyses of effect heterogeneity suggest the intervention did not cause backlash or feelings of blame. In fact, effects were larger among conservatives, who held worse attitudes toward reconciliation at baseline.

In terms of the generalizability of these findings to other contexts, several scope conditions are worth noting. First, at the time of the survey, most Canadians believed that they

held at least some degree of personal responsibility for affecting reconciliation, even if they judged other actors as having a more substantial role to play. In contexts where personal responsibility is more forcefully rejected, efforts to prime responsibility may be met with greater resistance. Similarly, the rhetoric around responsibility for past wrongdoing is not deeply politicized in Canada. Politicians on both the left and right generally acknowledge the importance of individual citizens in reconciliation and do not stoke feelings of blame and guilt. As the American examples in the introduction make clear, this pattern is not always the case; a similar intervention in that context may trigger more polarized responses.

Beyond replications in other contexts, several other extensions are possible in future research. For one, this study focused on attitudinal outcomes. A natural question is whether appeals to personal responsibility actually motivate individuals to take action in their everyday lives and what they believe that action should be. Chudy (2023) finds that positive feelings toward an outgroup are associated with willingness to undertake certain activities, like educating oneself about injustices, but not others, like voting or campaigning for outgroup candidates. Future research using behavioural or quasi-behavioural outcomes, like donations or letter-writing, to test the extent to which responsibility appeals can alter outcomes that are less prone to self-report bias (e.g. Adida, Lo, and Platas 2018; Linos, Jakli, and Carlson 2021).

It would also be worth investigating the persistence of any effects caused by priming responsibility (Paluck and Green 2009). Lai and Lisnek (2023) find that, despite positive initial effects, EDI training workshops for police officers did not durably alter behaviour several days later. Do appeals to responsibility have similarly ephemeral effects? An optimistic, but untested, view is that if priming responsibility can trigger behavioural change, such as educating oneself on the relevant historical injustices, impacts on policy preferences may be more long-lasting. In any case, responsibility appeals, even if their effects are temporary, do not appear to induce backlash, which is a major concern in the existing literature.

Finally, my results raise interesting questions about what it would mean to scale up the

experimental treatment used here. The intervention in this study is subtle and brief. How would dominant group members respond to more frequent and poignant reminders of their responsibility? Would this approach desensitize them or produce more backlash? This study has demonstrated the relevance of perceptions of responsibility to people's policy preferences around systemic racism and historical injustices. To help advance intergroup reconciliation in Canada and elsewhere, future scholarship must push further to investigate where these perceptions come from, how they can be changed, and what consequences they have for political attitudes and behaviours.

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Appendix

Contents

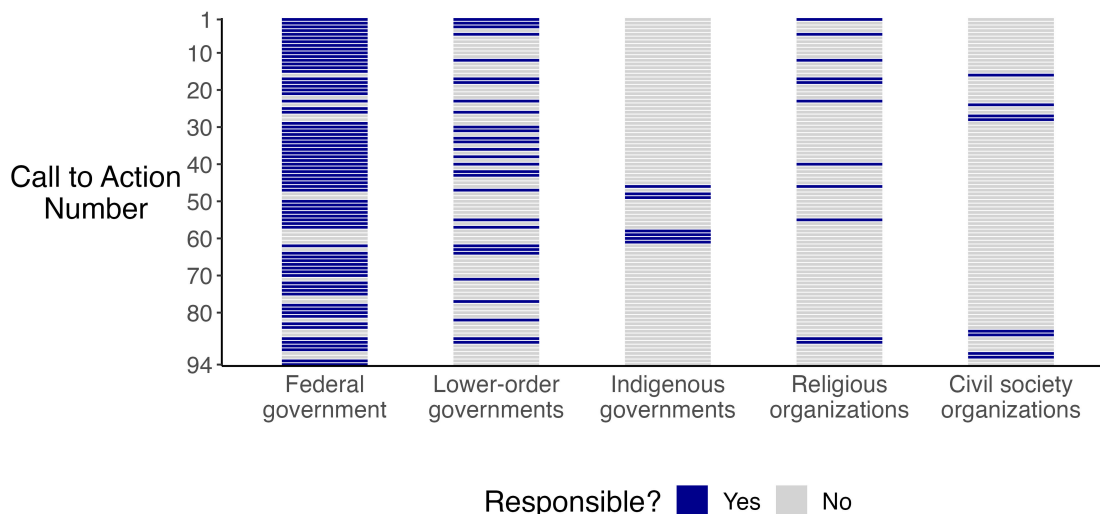## A.1 Responsibility attributions in TRC Calls to Action

Figure A1: Responsibility attributions in the TRC's Calls to Action

Plot summarizes which actor is deemed responsible by the TRC for each of the 94 Calls to Action in its final report.

A.2 Responsibility attributions by importance

Using data from the control group, Figure A2 reports the average responsibility assigned to the relevant actors according to respondents' views on the importance of reconciliation. The correlations between support for this policy goal and responsibility attributes are between 0.3 and 0.4 for each actor except for Indigenous peoples, which is essentially zero.

More positive attitudes toward reconciliation are associated with higher responsibility for all actors and lower feelings of being blamed for past wrongdoing (not shown here). The one exception is responsibility attributions for Indigenous peoples: those that oppose reconciliation place more of the burden on this group. Open-ended responses to a separate survey I fielded in the prior year help understand why. A number of respondents explained how efforts toward reconciliation should be met by forgiveness for past injustices, whereas others stressed how Indigenous peoples needed to " take responsibility for their own success" (c.f. Iyengar 1991). Why exactly opponents of reconciliation seek to deflect responsibility back onto Indigenous peoples is not the primary focus of this study, but it does present an interesting point of departure for future research.
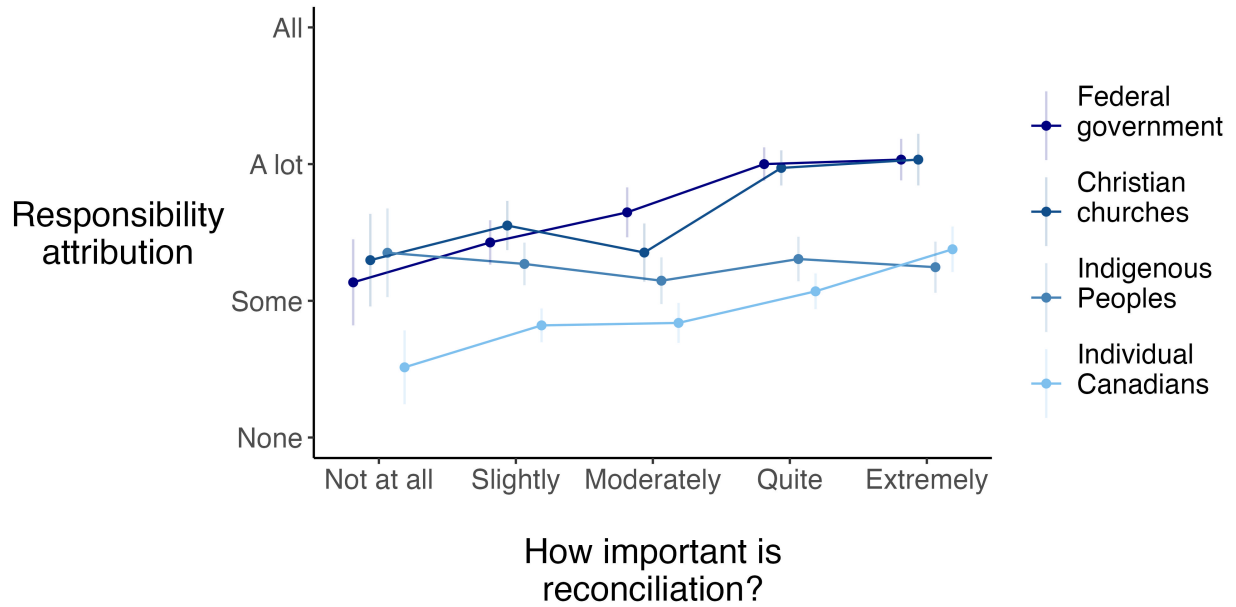
Figure A2: Average responsibility attributions by importance of reconciliation

Plot presents the average 95% confidence intervals for the mean responsibility attribution to each actor across different values of the reconciliation importance variable using respondents in the control condition ($n = 327$).

B Data processing

B.1 Outcomes

After the experimental manipulation described in the main text, respondents proceeded to the following outcome measures:

1. How important do you think reconciliation should be in Canada?

   - Not at all important
   - Slightly important
   - Moderately important
   - Quite important
   - Extremely important
   - Prefer not to say

2. How much would you say has been done to achieve reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in recent years?

   - Barely anything
   - Not enough
   - About the right amount

3

- Somewhat too much
- Way too much
- Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following actions do you believe should be taken to achieve reconciliation? (Select all that apply)

   - No actions should be taken to promote reconciliation
   - Acknowledging past injustices
   - Teaching non-Indigenous Canadians more about past injustices
   - Removing statues and place names that celebrate people who committed past injustices
   - Providing financial compensation to Indigenous people for past injustices
   - Returning control over land and resources to Indigenous people
   - Prefer not to say

4. What do you think should be the timeframe for achieving reconciliation?

   - Reconciliation should not happen at all
   - Reconciliation should happen over the short-term so the country can move on
   - Reconciliation should happen over the medium-term
   - Reconciliation should be a long-term process with no definite endpoint
   - Prefer not to say

Responses to questions (1), (2) and (4) are converted to continuous variables ranging from one to five and four, respectively. Question (3) is summarised as the total number of options selected, ranging from 0 (no actions) to five (all other actions selected). If a respondent indicates no actions should be taken *and* one of the actions appearing below it, I ignore the "no actions" selection. After these calculations, each variable is then standardized in terms of the control group's mean and standard deviation.

5. How much do you feel that people like yourself are being blamed for past injustices against Indigenous people?

   - Not at all
   - A little
   - Somewhat
   - A lot
   - Prefer not to say

6. How much responsibility would you say each of these groups has in advancing reconciliation?

- Groups (order randomized to participants): (a) the federal government, (b) individual Canadians, (c) Christian churches, (c) Indigenous people

- Scale: "no responsibility", "some responsibility", "a lot of responsibility", "all of the responsibility"

B.2   Reconciliation attitudes index

In the main text, I use an index variable to summarize attitudes toward reconciliation. The index was not pre-registered, but upon inspecting the data it became clear that the four measures I fielded on support for reconciliation tend to move together closely: those who saw reconciliation as more important also thought less progress had been made on this issue, saw a need for a greater variety of actions to be taken and envisioned a longer timeline.

The index is created by taking an average of each of the standardized constituent variables. (Standardization uses the control group mean and standard deviation). Cronbach's α for the index is 0.77 and each of the constituent items correlate with the index excluding the item in question (r is between 0.57 and 0.65 for the importance, actions and progress items, and slightly lower at 0.46 for the timeline item). The index's reliability does not improve by dropping any of the items, except for the timeline item, which improves reliability a negligible amount (0.01).

B.3   Covariate missingness

My pre-analysis plan specified a set of pre-treatment covariates to be included as control variables. In general, if only a small proportion ($< 10\%$) of respondents are missing values on these variables, I recode those values to the overall sample mean or mode. The summary of this process is described below for each covariate:

- Age: 0% missing

- Region: 0%

- Gender: 0%

- Language: 0%

- Ethnicity: 0.2% (impute: White)

- Religion: 0.7% (impute: None)

- Education: 0%

- Income: 0.8% (impute: $54,176)

- Years in Canada: 0.1% (impute: 45.4)

- Turnout: 6.1% (impute: Yes)

- Party ID: 0%

- Indigenous resentment: 41.8% (see B.4)

B.4 Indigenous resentment missingness

My pre-analysis plan describes an "Indigenous resentment" variable that was to be used as a control and moderator variable in the experiment. Due to administrative issues, the data collection for this variable was compromised. The cross-randomization of respondents to my survey module and the module containing this item were not synchronized, so 42% of my sample has missing values on this variable.

Furthermore, due to what seems to be unfortunate coincidence, treatment status is correlated with this missingness. In the first two columns of Table A1, I regress an indicator for whether a respondent is missing on this variable on their treatment assignment. Those in the two treatment conditions were around 8 to 9 percentage points more likely to not have Indigenous resentment scores. In discussions with the survey administration team, this large imbalance appears to be due to chance.

Given these two major challenges in the data, I exclude the Indigenous resentment variable from my main analysis. For completeness, in the third and fourth columns of Table A1, I report ATE estimates including this covariate as a control variable. In the first specification, for reference, I replicate my main analysis excluding resentment as a control. In the second specification, I only use observations that are non-missing on this variable and control for resentment in this sample. In the final specification, I use the formula described in my pre-analysis plan to impute missing values on the resentment variable, along with a dummy to flag missing cases.[2] Across the three specifications, the ATE estimates are similar in magnitude, but only statistically significant in the case of the personal responsibility framing when excluding resentment as a control. The attenuated estimates and larger standard errors in the remaining models are due to a smaller sample in model (4) and the unexpected correlation between treatment assignment and resentment missingness captured by the dummy variable in model (5).

---

2. My pre-analysis plan specified the following rule to apply in this case: "If more than 10% of the covariate's values are missing and the variable is continuous, include a missingness dummy as an additional covariate in the estimation procedure and recode the missing values to an arbitrary constant, 99.")

Table A1: Indigenous resentment missingness checks

	Resentment missing		Reconciliation support index		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Personal responsibility framing	0.088*	0.096*	0.165*	0.143	0.115
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.074)	(0.090)	(0.072)
No blame framing	0.080*	0.085*	0.118	0.097	0.089
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.072)	(0.086)	(0.068)
Observations	985	985	972	566	972
R^2	0.007	0.029	0.136	0.279	0.214
Controls		✓	✓	✓	✓
Resentment control strategy	−	−	Exclude	Row-wise delete	Impute + dummy

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition. Outcome in first two columns is whether a respondent's Indigenous resentment score is missing; outcome in remaining columns is the reconciliation support index based on items described in Appendix B.1. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models 2 to 4 control for the following pre-treatment covariates: age, region, gender, language, race, religion, university education, income, years living in Canada, turnout (2021) and party ID. *p<0.05

For completeness, Figure A3 also reports the CATE estimates with Indigenous resentment as a moderator among non-missing observations. The estimates are noisy given the smaller number of responses, but generally consistent with the lack of backlash among those with worse attitudes toward reconciliation and responsibility at baseline (see C.6).
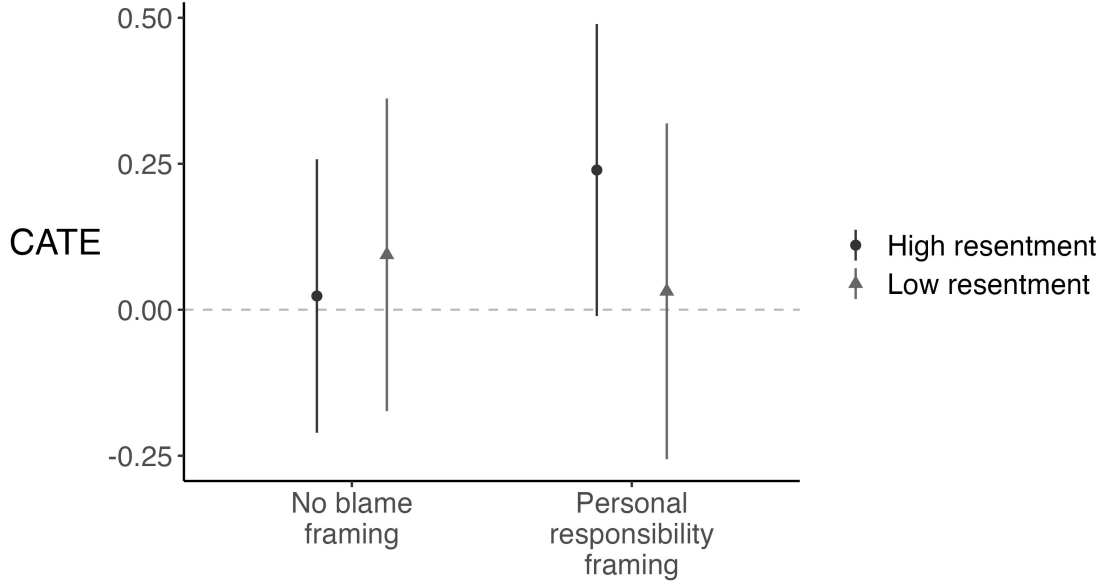
Figure A3: CATEs on reconciliation support across various pre-treatment moderators

Plot reports CATE estimates and 90/95% robust confidence intervals across levels of Indigenous resentment. Outcome is the reconciliation attitudes inex, scaled by control group standard deviations. Models control for the pre-treatment covariates listed in the notes to Table 1. ($n \approx 566$)

C Experimental design

C.1 Balance checks

Table A2 reports the averages for all pre-treatment covariates across treatment conditions. The only statistically significant difference across conditions is in the proportion of English-speakers. In line with my pre-analysis plan, I also estimate a multinomial logistic regression of the form:

$$\log \left(\frac{p_j(\mathbf{X_i})}{p_J(\mathbf{X_i})} \right) = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\mathbf{X_i}$$

where $p_j(\mathbf{X_i})$ is the probability that respondent i is assigned to treatment condition j relative to condition J, conditional on covariates $\mathbf{X_i}$.

Figure A4 summarizes the coefficient estimates from this model. Using a likelihood ratio test, I fail to reject the null hypothesis that all of the coefficients on the covariates are equal to zero in this model ($p = 0.10$), suggesting that randomization was successful.

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Table A2: Sample characteristics by treatment status

	Averages			
	Control	Responsibility	No blame	p
Man	0.51	0.44	0.49	0.193
Age	49.7	48.2	48.3	0.512
White	0.76	0.73	0.76	0.542
Indigenous	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.627
Other ethnicity	0.20	0.23	0.22	0.564
Indigenous resentment	2.39	2.25	2.28	0.275
Bachelor's degree	0.45	0.40	0.41	0.499
Household income	$80,610	$84,371	$86,703	0.330
Catholic	0.20	0.24	0.23	0.544
Other Christian	0.25	0.22	0.20	0.393
Other religion	0.15	0.19	0.17	0.367
Not religious	0.40	0.36	0.40	0.429
Years in Canada	46.9	44.8	44.4	0.243
Turnout (2021)	0.89	0.85	0.87	0.303
Region: Ontario	0.41	0.37	0.38	0.600
Region: Quebec	0.20	0.21	0.26	0.196
Region: Prairies	0.17	0.22	0.16	0.122
Region: B.C.	0.17	0.12	0.14	0.231
Region: Atlantic	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.517
English-speaker	0.72	0.68	0.62	**0.022**
French-speaker	0.20	0.20	0.26	0.115
Other language	0.08	0.12	0.12	0.127
Party ID: None/Other	0.23	0.23	0.28	0.182
Party ID: Conservative	0.27	0.29	0.25	0.434
Party ID: Liberal	0.29	0.26	0.27	0.638
Party ID: NDP/Green	0.20	0.22	0.20	0.835

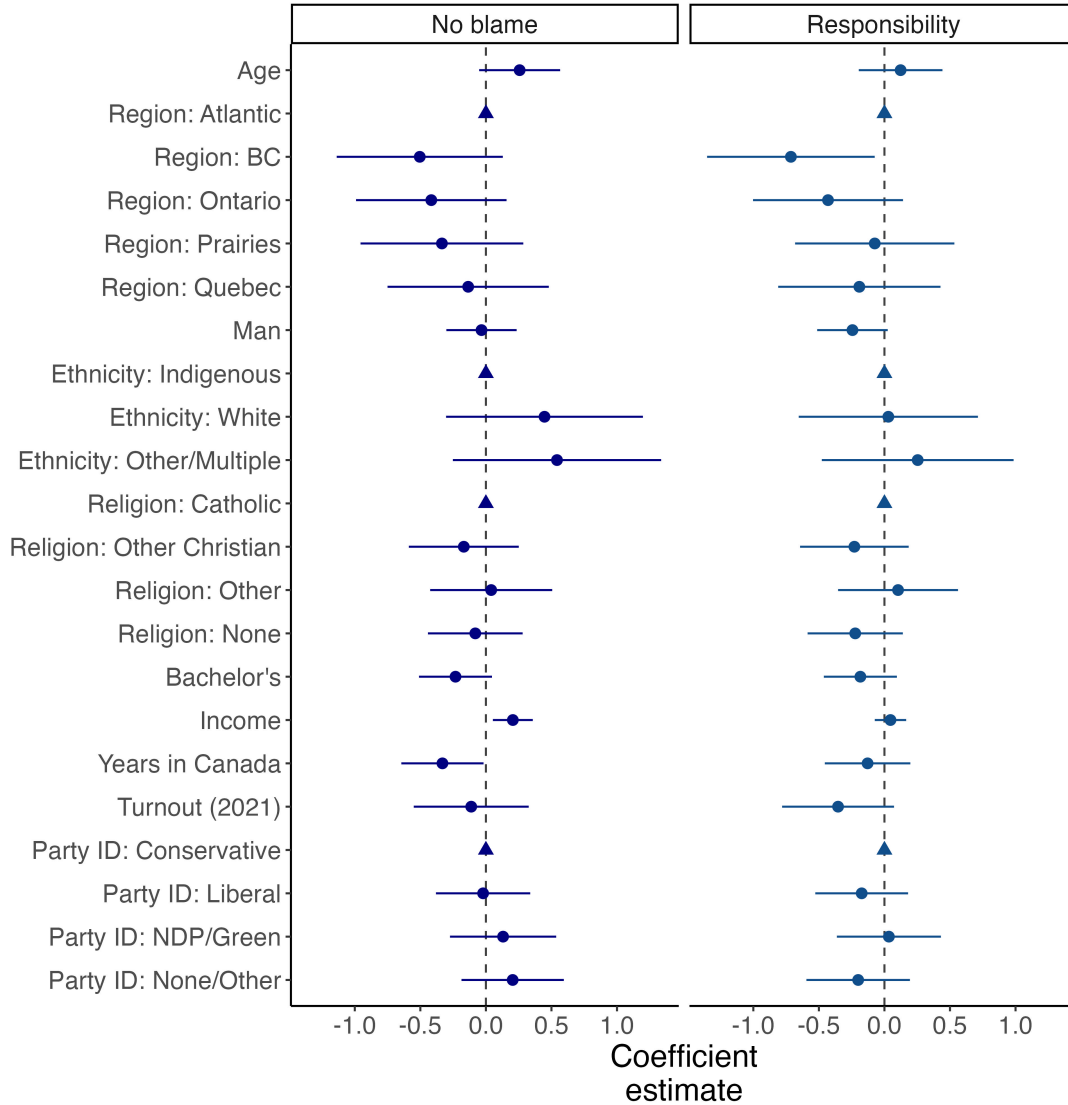Right-most column presents p-values from a one-way ANOVA.

Figure A4: Balance check estimates from multinomial logistic regression

Plot summarizes coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals from a multinomial logistic regression with treatment status as the outcome variable. ($n = 985$).

C.2 Attrition

Overall, there is very little missingness on the four outcomes of interest (between 0.3 and 2%). To test for differential attrition across treatment conditions, I code a variable M_i that indicates whether respondent i is missing on at least one of the outcomes. I then run the following model:

$$M_i = \beta_1 \text{PersonalResp}_i + \beta_2 \text{NoBlame}_i + \mathbf{X}_i\gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

The estimates (not shown here) suggest that those in the personal responsibility and no blame conditions were 1.5 and 0.1% less likely, respectively, to be missing on at least one

outcome than those in the control condition ($p = 0.07$ and 0.90). I barely fail to reject the null hypothesis that $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 0$ ($p = 0.051$).

In my pre-analysis plan, I specified that rejecting this null would trigger reporting Manski-type extreme value bounds, setting the largest (smallest) observed value among non-missing observations as the largest (smallest) observed value to those in the treated and control conditions, respectively. And attrition really is a minor problem in this study: only 13 of the 985 respondents (1.3%) were missing on at least one outcome, control respondents are only marginally more likely to be missing, and there are few strong theoretical reasons to expect that treatment induced selective non-response. For completeness, I still report the Manski-type bounds here and focus only on the outcome index for brevity.

In the main text, I estimate that the personal responsibility treatment improved attitudes on the reconciliation index by 0.16 s.d. among respondents who were not missing on this variable. The Manski-type bounds around this estimate are [0.11, 0.23]. For the no blame treatment, those same estimates are 0.12 [0.02, 0.22]. In effect, these bounds represent the treatment effect estimates if the true missingness patterns were as favourable as possible and as unfavourable as possible for my theory. For each treatment effect estimate, the intervals do not include zero, suggesting that attrition is not so large of a problem that it could be biasing my estimates toward finding a significant result (although the the standard errors around each of these bound estimates are fairly large [~ 0.08 s.d.], so caution is warranted).

C.3 Unadjusted ATE estimates

Table A3 presents the estimated average treatment effects for each of the main outcomes without adjusting for pre-treatment covariates.

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Table A3: Unadjusted effects of responsibility framings

	Reconciliation attitudes				
	Reconciliation index	Rec. Importance	Still more to do	Actions to be taken	Longer timeline
Personal responsibility framing	0.159*	0.135	0.139	0.158*	0.186*
	(0.079)	(0.078)	(0.074)	(0.080)	(0.077)
No blame framing	0.109	0.078	0.062	0.082	0.118
	(0.076)	(0.077)	(0.079)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Observations	972	982	983	979	979
R^2	0.005	0.003	0.003	0.004	0.006
	Responsibility assigned to...				
	Individual Canadians	Federal government	Christian churches	Indigenous peoples	
Personal responsibility framing	0.148	0.172*	0.057	0.005	
	(0.080)	(0.076)	(0.076)	(0.082)	
No blame framing	0.012	0.013	0.019	−0.097	
	(0.083)	(0.082)	(0.078)	(0.083)	
Observations	980	981	979	982	
R^2	0.004	0.006	0.001	0.002	

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition, with effects scaled in terms of control group standard deviations. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All estimates are non-significant after applying a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment with an FDR of 5% and α= 95%. *$p<0.05$

C.4 Support for specific reconciliation actions

In my pre-analysis plan, I hypothesized that "respondents assigned to the personal responsibility frame [would] favour affective and symbolic actions over material redress relative to those that see the control frame" and an opposite relationship for those in the "no blame" condition. In the main text, I focus on treatment effects on the number of actions selected by respondents, rather than distinguishing between these two types of policies. For completeness, Table A4 presents the ATE estimates for each action type, as well as all of the actions individually.

The results show that while symbolic actions (i.e. acknowledging and teaching about injustices, and removing place names and statues) hold higher baseline support, the treatment effects did not differentially affect support for these policies relative to material actions (i.e. providing compensation and giving land back). The estimates suggest that the personal responsibility framing increased the likelihood of supporting a symbolic action by around 5 percentage points, nearly identical to the effect on material actions (although this estimate is not statistically significant). The remaining columns investigate effects on the probability

a respondent selects a specific action. The estimates here are less precise, but the treatment appears to have affected the greatest movement in attitudes on policies at the opposite end of the symbolic-material dichotomy. The personal responsibility framing, in particular, increased support for acknowledging past injustices *and* giving land back to Indigenous communities by 8.6 and 7.3 percentage points, respectively.

Table A4: Effects of responsibility framings on specific actions

	Average support for actions		Support for specific actions (0/1)					
	All symbolic	All material	Take no action	Acknowledge injustices	Teach about injustices	Remove statues/names	Provide compensation	Give land back
Personal responsibility framing	0.053*	0.047	−0.047	0.086*	0.061	0.011	0.021	0.073*
	(0.025)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.035)
No blame framing	0.027	0.018	−0.019	0.038	0.033	0.012	0.006	0.030
	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Observations	985	985	985	985	985	985	985	985
R^2	0.154	0.158	0.080	0.072	0.105	0.129	0.110	0.132
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baseline support for action	0.49	0.28	0.16	0.66	0.52	0.28	0.27	0.28

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models control for the following pre-treatment covariates: age, region, gender, language, race, religion, university education, income, years living in Canada, turnout (2021) and party ID. All estimates are non-significant after applying a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment with an FDR of 5% and $\alpha = 95\%$.
*$p<0.05$

C.5 Mechanism check: Feeling blamed

To assess whether appeals to personal responsibility triggered feelings of blame, I asked all respondents the following question after treatment: "How much do you feel that people like yourself are being blamed for past injustices against Indigenous people?" Baseline attitudes in the control group leaned towards the "Not at all" (37%) and "A little" (28%) options, rather than "Somewhat" (18%) and "A lot" (17%).

Table A5 reports the ATE of each treatment arm on this variable. The personal responsibility framing had essentially zero effect on feelings of blame. Respondents in the no blame condition report slightly higher feelings of blame than those in the control group ($\beta = 0.12$), although this estimate is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.10$). The no blame treatment's effects are largely driven by a reduction in the percentage saying they don't feel blamed at all and an increase in the percentage providing a response in the middle of the scale. This treatment did actually reduce the proportion saying they felt blamed "a lot" for past injustices by around 2.2 p.p. Since there is no theoretical reason to expect that a framing in which respondents are explicitly told that people "like yourself are not to blame for injustices that happened in the past" would cause them to report feeling more blamed, I attribute the small positive effects in Table A5 to an incidental priming of respondents' prior considerations about blame. Nonetheless, this treatment's unintentional effects on feelings of blame may explain why the ATEs of the no blame condition on the main outcomes are marginally smaller than those for the personal responsibility frame.

Table A5: Treatment effects on feeling blamed

	Feel blamed for past injustices
Personal responsibility framing	−0.005
	(0.077)
No blame framing	0.121
	(0.074)
Observations	948
R^2	0.112

Table presents average treatment effects of the two treatment arms relative to the control condition. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models control for the following pre-treatment covariates: age, region, gender, language, race, religion, university education, income, years living in Canada, turnout (2021) and party ID. All estimates are non-significant after applying a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment with an FDR of 5% and $\alpha= 95\%$.
*p<0.05

C.6 Conditional treatment effects

This section reports several additional tests for treatment effect heterogeneity:

- Figure A5 complements the analysis presented in the main text, summarizing CATEs for each treatment arm and constituent reconciliation attitude across partisanship identification.

- Figure A6 reports CATEs across other moderators identified as relevant predictors of baseline feelings of blame and personal responsibility in Figure 3.

- Figure A7 show that neither treatment caused conservatives to feel more blamed for past injustices.
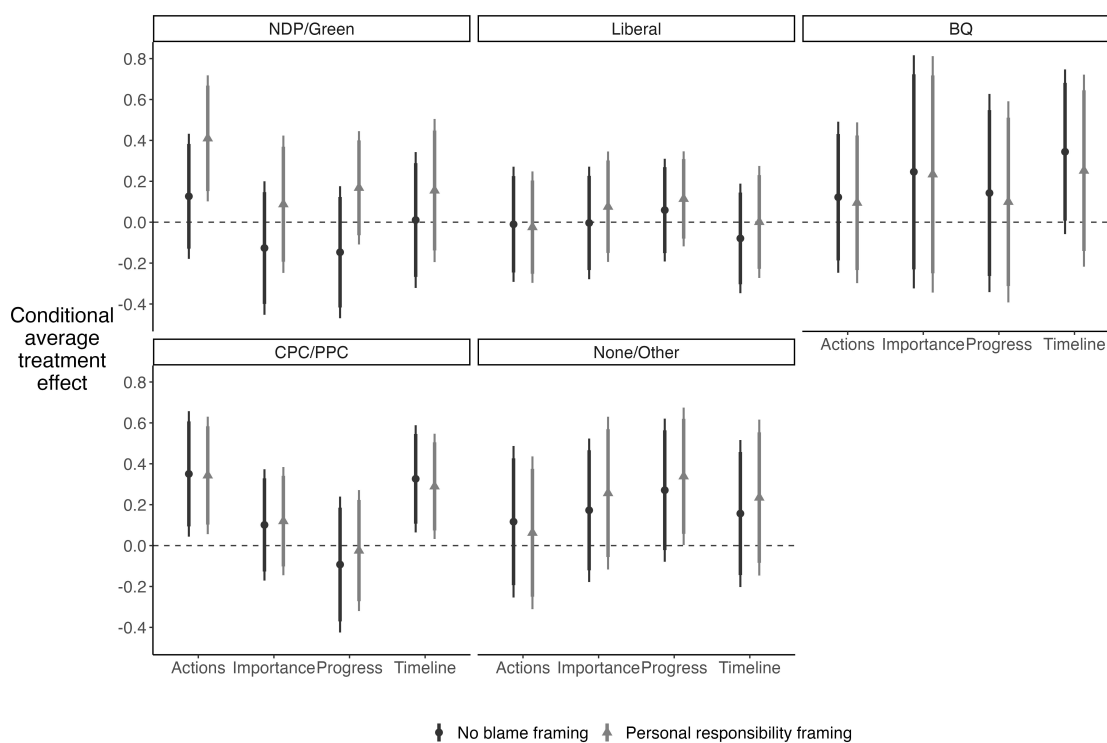

Figure A5: CATEs on reconciliation attitudes by partisanship

Plot reports CATE estimates and 90/95% robust confidence intervals across levels of partisanship. Outcomes are indicated on x-axis, scaled by control group standard deviations. Models control for the pre-treatment covariates listed in the notes to Table 1. ($n \approx 980$)
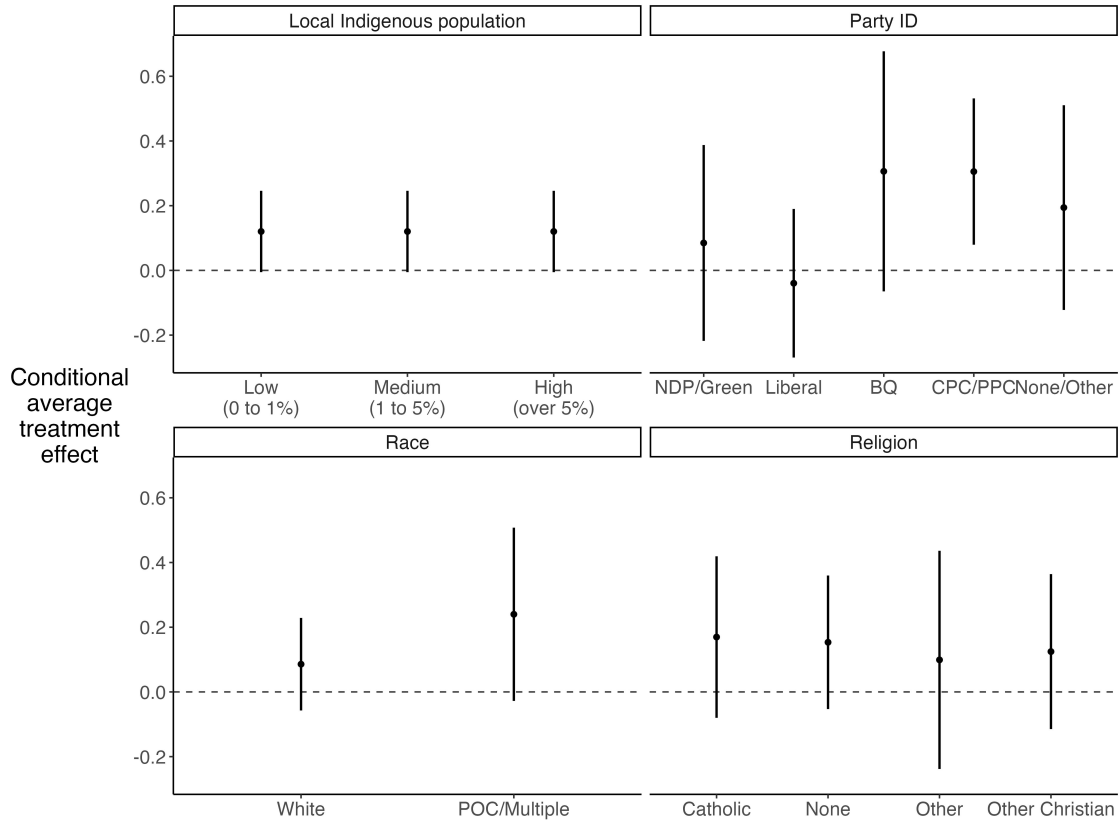
Figure A6: CATEs on reconciliation support across various pre-treatment moderators

Plot reports CATE estimates and 90/95% robust confidence intervals across levels of pre-treatment moderators listed on the x-axis. Outcome is the reconciliation attitudes inex, scaled by control group standard deviations. Models control for the pre-treatment covariates listed in the notes to Table 1. ($n \approx 970$)
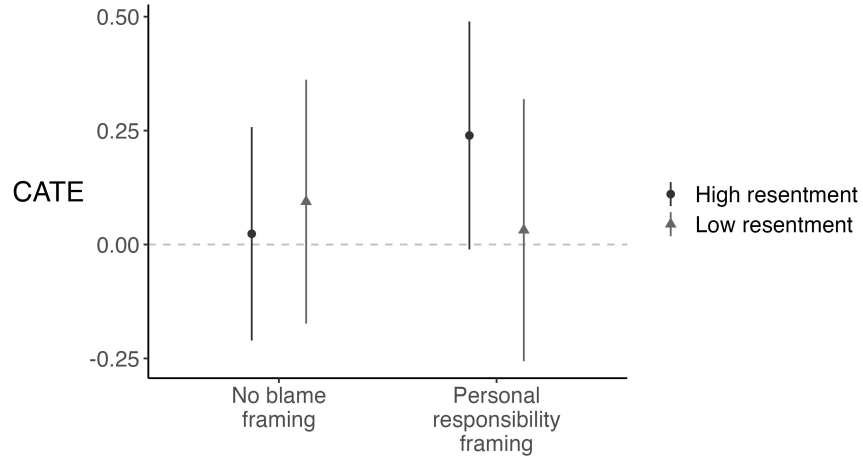
Figure A7: CATEs on feelings of blame by partisanship

Plot reports CATE estimates and 90/95% robust confidence intervals across levels of partisan identification. Outcome is the respondent's sense of feeling blame, scaled by control group standard deviations. Model controls for the pre-treatment covariates listed in the notes to Table 1. ($n = 948$)