

Can Canadians Take a Hint?
The (In)Effectiveness of Party Labels as Information Shortcuts in Canada

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Abstract

This paper represents a first look at the usefulness of Canadian political parties as information shortcuts. We present results from a student experiment that tested whether knowing a party's position on an issue influenced opinion formation. We find that, contrary to the findings in other countries, Canadian political parties are not consistently useful as information cues. The Liberal Party cue is hardly useful, and the Conservative Party cue can be effective, but appears to push partisans toward a more liberal stance on selected opinions. Only the NDP cue appears to fulfill the cue-providing role that the literature expects.

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Studies of Canadian politics have begun to acknowledge a significant trend toward lower political information levels in Canada (Gidengil et al. 2004, Howe 2003, Fournier 2002). If this is so, how are Canadians determining their political preferences? In common conceptions of democratic governance, citizens elect representatives who reflect their policy preferences (e.g., Ranney 1962). Yet for electoral mandates to be meaningful, citizens must first have opinions on relevant political issues, which requires that the citizens have information. How can citizens overcome this deficiency? Or do they? Of the many suggestions that have been put forward (see Gidengil et al. 2004, ch. 4 for a review), the possibility of using party labels as information shortcuts has yet to be evaluated.

It is possible that Canadians could use party labels, and the ideological information they contain, as cues to develop their own opinions. This idea was promoted by Downs (1957) and has found significant support in the American context (Popkin 1994). Party labels are purportedly one of the most useful heuristic aids because they are very accessible and “travel so well” across different decision domains (Huckfeldt et al. 1999). In the United States, party labels help individuals to predict the issue positions of political candidates, determine and organize their own issue positions, and “correctly” select political leaders without possessing “encyclopedic” levels of information (e.g., Downs 1957; Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Popkin 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). In the Canadian context, Jenson (1976) suggested that partisan identification should be viewed through the lens of party labels as voting shortcuts, but despite musings about the possibility of such an information shortcut being utilized by voters (see Gidengil et al. 2004), there has yet to be a systematic investigation of its effectiveness. This paper addresses this gap in the literature, using data collected from an experimental study implemented in the spring of 2004 that sought to understand if and how party labels (Liberal, Conservative, NDP) are used as political cues across a range of political issues by a selected group of Canadian citizens.

Extant Theoretical Perspectives

In an early study of the United States, Converse found that citizens’ opinions on policy items were unrelated to each other, that people failed to respond to many pressing issues, and that opinions over time were inconsistent (Converse 1964). The implication of these and related findings was that the electorate was hardly capable of making reasonable political decisions. Other research, much of it coming later in time, challenged these claims by arguing that citizens could make reasonable choices with limited information if they rely on information short-cuts, or heuristics (e.g., Downs 1957; Hinich and Munger 1994; McKelvey and Ordeshook 1985, 1986; Neuman 1986; Page and Shapiro 1992; Popkin 1994; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991). One potential heuristic aid, universally found in competitive party systems, is the party label. Beginning with Downs (1957), it has been argued that one of the primary purposes of political parties is to provide an information short-cut for voters, to help them understand the issue positions and/or ideology of political actors.

The utility of party labels has been investigated in a variety of domains, primarily in the U.S. context. In terms of voting, people rely on partisan cues in the voting booth (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Popkin 1994; Rahn 1993), especially in low information elections (Schaffner and Streb 2002; Squire and Smith 1988). As long as candidates hold issue positions consistent with those of their party, voters are likely to select the “correct” candidate if they are told the party of the candidate (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993). Furthermore, party cues can help citizens to predict the issue positions of candidates and to place them on an ideological spectrum (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1989; Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Kahn 1994; Koch 2001; Lodge and

Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993; Wright and Niemi 1983), as well as assist citizens in determining and organizing their own political beliefs (Kam 2005). Party cues can also increase coherence within belief systems (Tomz and Sniderman 2004), especially as parties have become more polarized over time (Layman and Carsey 2002). Some work outside of the U.S. context has found that party positions influence opinions on EU integration, and that these effects are conditioned by the salience of the issue, party unity, and consensus in the system, as well as individual level factors (Ray 2003).

While most of the scholarship has presented an optimistic account of the ability of party cues to help citizens with limited information make reasonable choices, other work questions whether party cues are helpful in all contexts. Downs (1957), for example, suggests that party labels might not be terribly useful in two-party systems where parties have an incentive to be ambiguous with respect to most of their policy stances. Lupia and McCubbins (1998) argue that party cues are only useful to the extent that they convey information to the voter (citizens perceive the speaker as knowledgeable and trustworthy). For example, some studies have shown that if candidates take stances that diverge greatly from the party platform, citizens may be less likely to make an optimal voting decision (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993). In other words, in order for party labels to be useful, they must be meaningful – that is, party labels must convey information about the ideological and issue stances of the parties. If citizens are unfamiliar with a party's stances on many issues, the usefulness of their labels is clearly questionable.

Finally, there is the issue of whether the complexity of the decision to be made influences the usefulness of the party cue. Carmines and Stimson (1980) argue that issues are easier the more they meet the following criteria: a) long on the political agenda; b) more symbolic than technical; and c) more concerned with policy ends than means, and that different types of people behave differently, with respect to vote choice, when deliberating over easy and hard issues. With easy issues, individuals are more likely to be able to form opinions without party labels given that these issues are long-standing and/or have been around for some time and are not difficult to comprehend; with respect to easy issues, individuals should thus be more certain in their policy preferences to begin with, and therefore more difficult to influence by the introduction of a party label. However, as issues increase in complexity and decrease in salience, citizens should rely more on labels in the formation and expression of their political preferences. Extant research, focused on the U.S. case, has demonstrated that individuals, especially low sophisticates, rely on partisan cues when faced with novel, or hard, issues (Kam 2005). Arguably, then, citizens should find party cues more useful as the complexity of the decision increases.

Even when issue complexity is considered, the literature discussed above clearly suggests that the value of party cues where party systems are in flux, attachments to parties are weak, and/or electoral institutions do not create incentives for candidates to coordinate on a reliable party label may be significantly limited. In the stable American context, where the parties have well-established, clearly defined “brand names”, most of these complications do not exist for the major parties.¹ In fact, the effect of party labels was found by Tomz and Sniderman (2004) to be almost identical to using the ideological labels of “liberal” and “conservative.” Research into the Mexican context has found that party labels in that system perform at least some of the same functions as in major American parties, although there is variation among the parties (Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2007). Whether this also holds for Canadian parties as well, however, is unknown.

¹ See Coan et al. (n.d.) for a discussion of the situation for minor American parties.

What *is* known is that Canadian partisanship has long been acknowledged to differ in significant ways from American partisanship. Initial studies concluded that Canadian partisanship “traveled with the vote” (Meisel 1973; Clarke et al. 1980) – in other words, partisanship did not exhibit the “long-standing, psychological attachment” characteristic assumed of American partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960). Other work argued that Canadian partisanship is more unstable (Jenson 1975, LeDuc et al. 1984) and flexible than in other countries and that flexible partisans are influenced by election campaigns differently than durable partisans (Clarke et al. 1980, 1984, 1991, 1996). This flexibility is partially influenced by the differences in party systems at the provincial and federal levels (Stewart and Clarke 1998; Clarke and Stewart 1987; Wattenberg 1982). Interestingly, even though partisanship is by most accounts weak in Canada, Jenson (1978:439) finds that such flexibility “does not much effect... [voters’] willingness to describe themselves as strong partisans, even if they have changed their party identification in the very recent past.” Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002) also find that partisan stability was much weaker when the Canadian system underwent a period of upheaval in the 1990s.

Furthermore, there is a long line of scholarship that argues that Canadian political parties are not clearly defined ideologically. The brokerage tradition in Canada, which saw the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives (PCs) structure their political promises in order to broker the best possible coalition of electoral support, tended to sideline ideology and class issues for the more pragmatic concern of being elected (Carty 2006; Johnston et al. 1992; Stevenson 1987). Some research also reports that Canadians have historically seen little difference among their party options (Scarrow 1965; Kay 1977; but see Nadeau and Blais 1990). Of course, the recent changes to the party system, including the merging of the Alliance and PC parties in 2003, raise the question of whether the findings still hold. Only the Liberal Party can truly be called a brokerage party, as the new Conservative Party has a much clearer ideological background courtesy of its Reform and Alliance Party roots. What the Canadian literature suggests is that party cues may be significantly less useful given the uniqueness of partisanship and the party system. While other heuristic aids have been evaluated in the Canadian case (such as demographic characteristics, by Cutler 2002), this paper is the first to provide a thorough investigation of the usefulness of party cues in Canada.² In so doing, it expands the geographical span of our understanding of party labels as heuristic aids northward, specifically with respect to the formation and expression of policy preferences in Canada. It also presents a further test of the generalizability of the usefulness of party labels as heuristics, which has been demonstrated in the American context.

Hypotheses

The studies of party cues reviewed above suggest that party labels should be helpful across the general realm of opinion expression and formation. More specifically, for our purposes, if parties provide information shortcuts to citizens, then knowing where a party stands on an issue should influence where one perceives oneself to stand on that issue. The usefulness of party labels as heuristic aids for opinion formation and expression, however, may be moderated by partisanship. If partisanship matters to the reception of a party label as an information shortcut, then if an individual is a strong partisan of a particular party, he/she should be more likely to accept that cue (and thus express an opinion in that direction), while someone who is a partisan of an opposing party should be more likely to reject the direction of the cue and express a contrary opinion (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Zaller 1992; Kam 2005).

² Clarke et al. (1980) discuss the implications of information for using party cues, but they do not attempt a thorough evaluation.

Finally, research suggests that the usefulness of party labels may vary across issues according to their level of complexity. All else considered, party labels should be less useful (less needed) heuristic devices for “easy” issues and more useful for “hard” issues.

Thus, there are three hypotheses that we test in this paper:

1. Party labels influence Canadians’ opinions on political issues.
2. Partisan identifiers are more likely to report opinions in the same direction as a cue from their own party.
3. Party shortcuts will have stronger effects when the issues in question are more obtuse.

Preliminary Evidence

Before presenting our experimental data, and in order to provide context for the analyses, we wanted to gain an understanding of whether parties in Canada have anything to do with voters’ attitudes and opinions. We turned to the 2004 Canadian Election Study, which included several questions about various issues. Given that our second hypothesis is that party identifiers should hold opinions in the same direction as their party, we wanted to examine the general relationship between partisanship and various issues. We ran simple regressions on several issue opinion questions (see Table 1 for a list of questions). The questions ranged in difficulty. Because the issues were all salient to the election campaign, it is difficult to classify any as truly difficult. However, those that probed about complex issues, such as ties with the U.S., private hospitals, immigration levels, government job creation, only allowing police and military to have guns, moving to find work, and scrapping the gun registry, are certainly less obvious and might benefit more from partisan direction (consistent with H3). We included dummy variables in the models to indicate partisanship with each of the parties (the excluded category was no identification), and the control variables we used were age, gender, education, region (Ontario was the baseline) and Catholic.

As Table 1 shows, for all questions, at least two party identifications were significant predictors of opinions. For two issues, only two partisan identifications are significant – how many immigrants should be admitted, and whether or not only the police and military should be allowed to have guns. Interestingly, these are two of the more difficult. Conservative and NDP identifications were significant the most often – 14 of 15 times. In each case, the direction of the effect was as expected – the Conservatives were more conservative, and the NDP more liberal. Liberal identification was significant the least, for only 9 of 15 issues, followed closely by the BQ (10 of 15). This suggests that of the Canadian parties, the NDP and Conservative Party have the most clearly aligned supporters – that is, these partisans appear to link to their respective parties on the basis of issues. Given that the NDP and Conservative parties are the most cohesive and coherent in terms of issues, citizens should be able to best recognize the “brand” of these parties and therefore absorb and react to their labels as cues. In short, in terms of party cues, then, these results suggest that we should find that the NDP and Conservative cues might be the most effective for influencing opinions.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Experimental Design

In order to test fully the causal influence of party cues, and not just the relationship between issue stances and partisanship, we conducted an experimental study in the spring of 2004. The study participants were 196 students (45% female, average age of 21) at a large public university in Ontario, recruited using flyers posted in common areas and class advertisements. Volunteers were compensated \$10 Canadian for their participation. Potential subjects were told they were going to take part in a study about political issues. Upon arriving at

the room in which we conducted the study, subjects were randomly assigned to a control group or one of three treatment groups: Liberal, Conservative or NDP.³ With respect to the sample as a whole, the average age of the subjects was 21, 44.9% were female, 56% identified with the Liberals, 16% identified with the Conservatives, and 16% identified with the NDP. Difference of means tests conducted afterwards confirmed that subjects were evenly distributed across the four conditions according to background factors such as age, gender, and political sophistication.

The study proceeded as follows. Subjects were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The first part of the survey included questions about basic demographics and political predispositions. The last part of the survey presented the subjects with the issue questions that lie at the core of our study. In terms of our decision criteria for which issues to include in the study, we selected four issues that cut across party lines and that vary in complexity: legalizing same-sex marriage, reducing spending on social services, changing the Employment Insurance Act, and creating an Office of Ombudsman for Old Adult Justice. The issue questions are identified in Table 2 along with our ranking of the issues (from easy to hard) and with the party positions on the issue.

In order to confirm our typing of these issues, from easy to hard, we consider how many respondents answered “don’t know” to the questions. The responses match our expectations: only 1 respondent answered “don’t know” for the easiest question, 3 for the spending on services question, 24 for the Employment Insurance question, and 35 on the issue of the Office of the Ombudsman for Older Adult Justice.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Each issue question was preceded by a statement that one of the parties supported or opposed the issue (the control group received a neutral cue: “Some politicians...”). After the prompt, each subject was asked for her own opinion on the issue. So, for example, one of the questions looked as follows: “The Liberal Party supports proposed changes to the federal definition of marriage to permit same-sex marriages. Would you say that you support or oppose this proposal?” After completing the survey, subjects were debriefed and compensated.

Results

In order to evaluate our three hypotheses, we test whether those who received a party cue shift their policy preferences compared to the control group, which did not receive a cue; whether partisanship conditions the direction in which the shift occurs; and, whether the usefulness of party cues varies according to the difficulty of the issue in question. Our principal dependent variable is the respondent’s opinion (strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose) on the political issue. This five-point variable is coded such that higher values indicate a more liberal response.

Given that we have specified a model of cue-taking that calls for the inclusion of ideology, partisanship, and interactions between partisanship and the party labels, we use multiple regression analyses to analyze the effects of the party label treatments on issue stances. Ideology and partisanship are two obvious potential sources of opinion formation; their inclusion allows us to detect the effect of the party label independent of these influences. Furthermore, this allows us the opportunity to test our second hypothesis, which states that partisanship should mediate the influence of the party label as an information shortcut. Given that the dependent variable is an ordinal scale, we ran ordered probit on each of the issue preference variables. In addition to dummy variables for each treatment group (the control group serves as our baseline),

³ The breakdown by condition for these subjects was as follows: Control (n=49), Liberal (n=49), Conservative (n=49), and NDP (n=49).

we include a variable measuring the respondent's reported ideology (a seven-point scale, where higher values mean more right-wing) and dummy variables indicating the respondent's reported partisanship (the baseline category is comprised of those who do not identify with one of the three main parties).⁴ For each analysis, we evaluate our hypothesis about the moderating role of partisanship by including interactions between partisanship variables and the treatments. Likelihood-ratio tests showed that these interaction terms improved the fit of each model (at $p < 0.10$).

Table 3 presents the ordered probit results, for each issue. The direction of the coefficients for the treatment variables should be assessed in light of Table 2, which reports the expected direction for each treatment (these expectations assume that the respondent is persuaded by the cue to adopt a stance in accord with the party). Our expectation for the interaction terms is that we should see stronger effects for these terms than for the direct treatment effects, as the coefficient and standard error reported for the treatment dummies are the effects for those who do not identify with the party of the cue, while the coefficient and standard error on the interaction terms are the effects for those who identify with the party of the cue.⁵ We also assess, looking across the columns, whether issue difficulty matters with respect to the effectiveness of the party cues.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In the model of the easiest issue, same-sex marriage, only the Conservative treatment is significant, although the NDP treatment approaches statistical reliability (given a generous cut-off due to our small sample size). The Conservative interaction would be statistically significant, if it were not in the unexpected direction (which our one-tailed hypothesis test is not fit to recognize). In short, it appears that non-Conservatives who received the cue reacted in accord with the Conservatives' position (were less supportive of same-sex marriage), while Conservative partisans were persuaded in the opposite direction. For the services issue, the NDP cue and the Liberal cue have significant effects, and in each case the cue persuaded the subjects in the direction opposite to the cue. The NDP interaction would also be statistically significant if it, like the Conservative interaction, were not in the unexpected direction. In the case of the NDP, its interaction, and the Liberal cue, partisans and non-partisans alike reacted to the cues by responding to the issue question *more* conservatively than the control group, which received no cue. For the Employment Insurance issue, the NDP interaction is now significant, indicating that these partisans reacted to their party cues in the direction expected. On the other hand, again we find that Conservative partisans reacted *against* the cue, contrary to expectations. The Conservative treatment dummy variable is also borderline significant for non-Conservative identifiers. Finally, for the hardest issue, once again, the NDP interaction is signed as expected and is significant, as is the NDP treatment dummy (though both only at $p < .20$). In contrast, the Conservative interaction approaches traditional significance levels but is signed in the

⁴ The party identification question was asked as follows: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Liberal, Conservative, NDP, BQ, or what?" The ideology question was asked as follows: "People often discuss politics using terms like "liberal" and "conservative" to indicate an ideological stance. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"

⁵ Because the inclusion of the interaction terms essentially makes the direct effect applicable only for those who do not identify with the party identified in the cue, our expectations for the treatment dummy variables are uncertain. If a person holds an opposing partisan identity, he/she may resist the cue and his/her opinion may be swayed in the opposition direction. However, if the subject holds no partisan identity there are equal chances of being swayed positively and negatively.

unexpected direction. For this issue, those who received the NDP cue, partisan or not, reacted in the direction of the cue, while Conservative partisans were moved, once again, *away* from the direction of their own party's cue.

Discussion

The results of our experiment reveal that Canadian party labels vary in their influence on opinion expression, across parties and across issues. They also suggest that the theory of party labels as cues does not translate uniformly to the Canadian context, at least among our selected group of citizens. Our results do not provide strong support for our first hypothesis, in that party cues do not appear to be consistently useful information shortcuts for Canadian voters. For subjects who did not identify with the party of the cue they received, we find that the Conservative and NDP labels are significantly effective for two out of four issues, and in only one case is the Liberal Party cue significant. These results echo those that we found using the CES survey data – it appears that the Conservative and NDP parties not only present a more coherent label with respect to issues (i.e., a clear “brand”) but, likely as a consequence, are also more effective in the realm of opinion formation and expression.

We find some support for the moderating role of partisanship (Hypothesis 2), in that the coefficients on the NDP and Conservative interactions fall below standard cut-offs for statistical significance three times each. However, it is important to note that while the cues had statistically reliable effects for partisans six times, only twice were they in the expected direction (and thus significant according to our uni-directional hypothesis test), both times for the NDP. Thus, partisans did not accept the cues blindly, but seem to be discriminating in terms of what information they accept and what information they not only reject but further react against. This finding is quite interesting from the perspective of whether and to what extent party identifications influence political evaluations and behavior. While Canadian partisanship is sometimes considered weaker than in the US, its affect on the reception of the party cue suggests that this difference in intensity of partisanship, as conventionally measured, may not matter for the usefulness of party labels, but could have implications for *how* people are influenced.⁶ In other words, perhaps the variance in partisanship could be related to the willingness of Canadian partisans to react *against* their party's cue.

Finally, with respect to the question of issue difficulty, the results provide little support for Hypothesis 3. Despite the literature that suggests party labels should be useful shortcuts for opinion formation on issues that are novel, or difficult, Canadian party labels do not appear to have these effects uniformly among our subjects. Only the NDP party label works as expected: it is effective for non-identifiers for the social spending issue, and is significant for identifiers for the two most difficult issues. In contrast, the Conservative cue is significant for both the easy issue and the hard intermediate issue, but among identifiers its effect is in the wrong direction. This is exactly contrary to what we would expect if those identifying with a party are those most likely to toe that party's line. For the two most difficult issues the cue appears effective for Conservative partisans, but again in the unexpected direction. The Liberal cue is only useful once, for non-identifiers. This latter finding suggests that of all the party labels, this one was

⁶ The results may also suggest that the conventional measure of party identification does not sufficiently capture important differences among citizen sub-groups. That is, and consistent with other findings regarding Canadians' willingness to express “strong partisanship” but not act accordingly (e.g., remain flexible with that partisanship), it could be that the conventional partisanship measure is unable to distinguish among those individuals likely – for reasons that go undetected – to accept and react in line with a given party cue, those likely to fail to absorb or reject it, and those likely to reject and be repelled by it.

mostly inconsequential as a cue. This finding makes sense in that the value of a brokerage party cue is, almost by definition of brokerage politics, questionable.⁷

These results suggest that the NDP cue, for NDP identifiers, is useful for the most difficult issues. For Conservative partisans, the Conservative cue is also useful for the difficult issues, but not in the way expected. Possibly, the fact that these two parties express clearer ideological statements than the Liberals is at the root of this finding.⁸ Our findings show that some party labels do provide information for Canadian voters, but that Canadian partisans are not necessarily loyal followers. This result is in keeping with the literature presented earlier about the nature of partisanship in the Canadian context.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper provide some important insight into how parties and context may affect the usefulness of party labels as information short-cuts. We find that, of the Canadian political parties studied, the NDP treatment was the most influential in the conventional way. Despite the fact that the party is the least well-known in Canadian politics (Fournier 2002), it is the party most likely to present a clear ideological program for voters. This feature may be responsible for the effectiveness of the NDP party cue that we find here. On the other hand, while the Liberal Party is the best known party in Canadian politics, being the party that has formed the government most often, the party's success has often been traced to its ability to broker compromise amongst the various regions and demands of the country. In other words, the party's ability to shun strong ideological stances and produce a political compromise has contributed to its electoral success. Thus, that we find the Liberal party label not very effective in terms of opinion formation may be a reflection of the party's general lack of strong ideology and therefore informative role.

The results for the Conservative party cue are quite interesting. The cue was almost as effective as the NDP cue, but with the notable difference that it influenced its own partisans *away* from the party position on the issues for which we expected the cue to be most useful. This is of specific interest because, at the time the data were collected, the party had been in existence for only four months (it was the product of a merger between the long-established Progressive Conservatives (PCs) and the newer Canadian Alliance parties), had just completed its first leadership convention, and had yet to develop a clear policy program to persuade voters. Furthermore, this study was conducted in Ontario, where Conservatives supporters were more likely to come from a PC, rather than Alliance, background, and thus may have been troubled by indications that the new Conservative Party was going to be more similar to the Alliance than the PC Party (such as the election of the former Alliance leader, Stephen Harper). That being said, the one issue on which the Conservative Party's stance was clearest was same-sex marriage, and we find that the Conservative cue, for that issue, had a significant effect for non-identifiers. Taken together, these findings suggest that, at least in Canada, party cues may vary in their

⁷ This characterization of the Liberal Party is predicated on the understanding that it is the oldest brokerage party in the Canadian party system. As well, at the time the study was conducted (just after the merger of the Progressive Conservative and Alliance parties), it was unclear if there were any other brokerage parties in the system, as it was unknown exactly what type of party the new Conservative Party would be. While the Progressive Conservative Party was a brokerage party, the Alliance had maintained a clearly regional support base.

⁸ It is clear that both the NDP and Conservative party labels held more meaning for the subjects in our study. When we asked the subjects to place the parties on a seven-point scale, the variance was lowest for responses for the Conservative Party (which was placed at 5.52 on the scale). We also asked respondents how sure they were of their responses; for both the NDP and Conservative Party, the respondents were the most certain, and were least certain of their responses about the Liberal Party.

influence according to the party's clarity or prominence in a particular policy issue area, but not necessarily by complexity.

What emerges from our analysis is a recognition that the usefulness of Canadian party cues varies greatly, both across parties and issues. This raises the possibility that some Canadian parties, such as the Liberal Party, do not behave as expected by much of the literature on political parties – they have not tried to make their party label stand for something independent of the issues of the day. Again, this echoes much of the extant Canadian literature that argues that the parties are not strikingly different in terms of ideology, and that partisans are less loyal than in the United States. The NDP and Conservative party labels, however, do appear to have more meaning for Canadian voters, although they too do not seem to be as useful as the extant literature in the U.S. suggests. Theoretically, these findings point to a need to re-evaluate theories of party labels as heuristics in terms of the political context in which they are operating – the theories may be appropriate only for political parties and/or systems that exhibit specific characteristics.

Table 1. Issue Opinion Regressions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lib	0.07* (0.04)	0.13*** (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Con	-0.18*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.05)	-0.21*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.04)	0.49*** (0.05)	-0.26*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.02)
NDP	0.23*** (0.06)	0.34*** (0.06)	0.39*** (0.06)	0.30*** (0.05)	-0.28*** (0.07)	0.38*** (0.05)	-0.15*** (0.03)
BQ	0.61*** (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.17** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)	-0.08 (0.07)	0.21*** (0.05)	-0.06* (0.03)
N	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227
R2	0.35	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.18	0.09

	8	9	10	11a	11b	11c	11d	11e
Lib	0.05 (0.04)	0.07** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.09* (0.05)	0.25*** (0.06)	-0.15** (0.05)	0.04 (0.06)	0.19*** (0.06)
Con	-0.17*** (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.11** (0.04)	0.34*** (0.06)	-0.33*** (0.07)	-0.33*** (0.06)	-0.31*** (0.07)	-0.53*** (0.06)
NDP	0.27*** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.05)	-0.46*** (0.09)	0.12 (0.10)	0.37*** (0.09)	0.44*** (0.09)	0.25** (0.10)
BQ	0.18*** (0.06)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.09 (0.10)	0.17 (0.11)	0.22* (0.10)	0.36*** (0.11)	0.11 (0.11)
N	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227	4227
R2	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.11	0.12

* p<0.10 ** p<0.10 ***p<0.001

Questions

1. How much do you think should be done for Quebec? (higher=more)
2. How much do you think should be done for racial minorities? (higher=more)
3. How much do you think should be done to reduce the gap between the rich and poor in Canada? (higher=more)
4. How much do you think should be done for women? (higher=more)
5. Do you think Canada's ties with the United States should be much closer, somewhat closer, about the same as now, ore distant, or much more distant? (higher=closer)
6. Do you favour or oppose same-sex marriage, or do you have no opinion on this? (higher=favour)
7. Do you favour or oppose having some private hospitals in Canada? (higher=favour)
8. What is the best way to deal with young offenders who commit violent crime: give them tougher sentences, or spend more on rehabilitating them? (higher=rehabilitate)
9. Do you think Canada should admit more immigrants, fewer immigrants, or about the same as now? (higher=more)
10. Do you favour or oppose the death penalty for people convicted of murder? (higher=favour)
11. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strong disagree that...
 - a. The government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs. (higher=disagree)
 - b. Only the police and the military should be allowed to have guns. (higher=agree)
 - c. If people can't find work in the region where they live, they should move to be where the jobs are. (higher=disagree)
 - d. Society would be better off if more women stayed at home with their children.(higher=disagree)
 - e. The gun registry should be scrapped entirely.(higher=disagree)

Table 2. Issues and Policy Stances Used in Study

Type	Issue	Party Stances
Easy	Amend federal definition of marriage to allow same sex marriage	Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Support (+) NDP: Support (+)
Easy Intermediate	Reduce spending on social services	Conservative: Support (-) Liberal: Oppose (+) NDP: Oppose (+)
Hard Intermediate	Change Employment Insurance Act (status for seasonal workers)	Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Oppose (-) NDP: Support (+)
Hard	Support creation of Office of Ombudsman for Older Adult Justice	Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Support (+) NDP: Support (+)

*The sign in parentheses reflects the anticipated effect once the variables are recoded such that higher values indicate more liberal responses. Further, these indicated directions refer to expected differences from the control group; they reflect the situation in which those receiving the cue are persuaded to adopt stances in accord with that party's stance (as compared to those in the control group).

Table 3. Effectiveness of Party Cues in Opinion Expression, Ordered Probit Results

	Easy Issue: Same-Sex [^]	Easy Intermediate Issue: Services	Hard Intermediate Issue: EI	Hard Issue: Ombudsman
Liberal Treatment (T)	-0.006 (0.319)	-0.891 *** (0.310)	0.213 (0.323)	0.211 (0.347)
Conservative T	-1.084 *** (0.253)	-0.042 (0.257)	-0.349 + (0.257)	-0.185 (0.272)
NDP T	-0.403+ (0.249)	-0.951 *** (0.248)	-0.157 (0.250)	0.409 + (0.264)
Liberal PID	-0.405 + (0.298)	0.320 (0.287)	-0.045 (0.302)	0.028 (0.303)
Cons. PID	-0.968 ** (0.423)	-0.534 + (0.405)	-0.811 * (0.417)	-0.217 (0.453)
NDP PID	-0.437 (0.365)	0.658 * (0.349)	-0.206 (0.368)	0.206 (0.380)
Liberal T * Lib. PID	-0.449 (0.403)	-0.092 (0.392)	-0.101 (0.419)	0.079 (0.445)
Cons. T * Cons. PID	0.825 * (0.485)	-0.536 (0.484)	1.11 ** (0.493)	1.326 ** (0.535)
NDP T * NDP PID	8.56 4199580	-1.587 *** (0.566)	2.04 *** (0.610)	1.084 + (0.679)
Ideology	0.026 (0.0814)	-0.004 (0.080)	0.034 (0.082)	-0.071 (0.084)
Female	0.523 *** (0.174)	0.337 ** (0.168)	0.098 (0.179)	0.098 (0.186)
_cut1	-2.011 (0.372)	-1.950 (0.367)	-1.791 (0.380)	-2.157 (0.421)
_cut2	-1.324 (0.361)	-0.838 (0.350)	-0.697 (0.356)	-1.060 (0.373)
_cut3	-1.014 (0.359)	-0.500 (0.348)	0.168 (0.352)	0.451 (0.366)
_cut4	-0.21 (0.356)	0.503 (0.346)	1.660 (0.378)	1.968 (0.400)
N	195	192	172	161
Pseudo R ²	0.08	0.12	0.05	0.05
LR chi2 (10, 11)	45.57	65.84	24.01	18.45
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.013	0.07

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10, +p<0.20, two-tailed

[^] 6 observations completely determined.

Note: Treatment/Party ID interactions are included only for those models where their inclusion improved the fit of the model (based on a likelihood-ratio test, p<0.10). The treatment dummy variables give the effect of the treatment for those who do not identify with the party, while the interactions give the effect of the treatment for those who identify with the party.

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