

Party Cues in Canada: Who, When and What

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Abstract

Political party labels ideally serve as important heuristic aids in the formation and expression of opinions. We investigate who uses party cues, under what circumstances, and to what effect in the Canadian context. Our data come from an experiment embedded in a 2007 internet survey. We use the data to answer two questions. First, do party labels influence citizens' responses? More specifically, is one's ability to express opinions, one's certainty in her opinion, and the content of one's opinion impacted by a cue? Second, are these effects moderated by the perceived trustworthiness of the parties? Our findings reveal that Canadian political party labels are *not* generally useful cues for opinion expression or certainty. To some extent, trust in parties helps explain these results; those with low levels of trust become less likely to respond and less certain when presented with a party cue. Canadian political party labels *do* influence opinions, but not always in the direction of the party; trust again plays a conditioning role, making one more likely to be swayed in the direction of the cue. We further find that reliance on cues varies across individuals (by trust), issues (by complexity), and parties. The implication is that attempts to carry general arguments across borders, with respect to the effectiveness of party labels as heuristics, must keep in mind that differences in party systems may yield critical differences in how well party labels fulfil the expected role.

In a world in which the average citizen possesses limited information, political party labels ideally serve as important heuristic aids in the formation and expression of opinions. Previous research has focused on the U.S., where it has been found that party labels help individuals determine and organize their own issue positions and, as well, predict the issue positions of political candidates and “correctly” select political leaders (e.g., Downs 1957; Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). This paper explores the traveling capacity of party labels with respect to opinion expression, certainty, and formation. We do so by investigating the influence of party labels on Canadian citizens’ ability (and willingness) to respond to opinion questions, their certainty over those responses, and the direction of their actual opinions. We further explore the extent to which trust in the parties conditions the influence of party labels over these three outcomes.

Our data come from a novel internet-based experiment, fielded to a near nationally-representative sample of Canadians in the summer of 2007.¹ We use the data to answer three questions. First, do Canadian party labels help individuals to express opinions with greater certainty than they might otherwise? We find that the answer, somewhat surprising given extant theoretical perspectives on heuristic reasoning, is *no*. Second, do cues from Canadian party labels influence the actual opinions expressed by voters? Here, consistent with the U.S. literature, we find that opinions do change depending on exposure to party cues. The final question we investigate is does trust in parties condition the (in)effectiveness of party labels in Canada? We present evidence suggesting that trust in parties plays an important role in moderating the effects of party cues on the three outcomes we examine.

Existing Perspectives

The average citizen has difficulty recalling basic political information, let alone developing and expressing opinions, feeling confident in such opinions, and structuring them in a coherent and consistent fashion. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) show a general deficiency of political knowledge among the U.S. public. Converse (1964) and Zaller (1991) show a lack of consistency in issue opinions across time and across question types and orderings. Some of this

¹ As we also note later, we omit Quebec from the study.

inconsistency is likely due to measurement error (Achen 1975). Nonetheless, true attitudinal ambivalence seems to exist in a pervasive form. This is, as Zaller notes, demonstrated in one form by inconsistent responses across different frames, such as responses to the Asian Disease problem in Tversky and Kahneman's classic (1982) study. The simple truth is that individuals are frequently *uncertain* in their specific responses to public opinion questions. They may be so because they find the question wording difficult, because they are ambivalent across several different possible answers, and/or because they have a limited capacity for coherent opinions. All three possibilities suggest that the average individual finds it difficult to express solid opinions in response to survey questions.

Individuals not only find it difficult to express opinions with certainty, but many also find it difficult to express *any* opinion at all. In his analysis of Converse's panel study, Achen (1975, p. 1225) notes that, for each of eight policy questions, roughly one-third of the respondents are unable to report an opinion across all three waves of the panel. Achen (1975, see Table 2) further finds that only a very small percentage of the sample *consistently* (across all three waves) gave no opinion; on the policy questions this ranges from a low of 1% (Federal Aid to Education) to a high of 7.1% (Government Intervention in Housing and Electricity). Thus, a survey respondent will provide an answer more often than not but non-response to policy questions is not a rare event. Returning to Zaller, in the 1980 ANES panel survey data he presents in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1), over 40 percent of the respondents to questions about Russia and government services, respectively, are unable to express opinions across both time periods.

A quick look at data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) indicates that non-response to survey questions varies and is not unique to the U.S. case. For example, when asked about one's satisfaction with democracy on the 1996-2001 module of the study, non-response ranged from 0 in several countries, such as Great Britain, to 0.6% in the United States, to as high as 17.1% in Thailand and 14.3% in Belarus. In the Canadian context, Fourier (2002) has shown that Canadians are unable to provide answers to many survey questions. Using a battery of 24 factual questions from the Canadian Election Study (CES) data, he found that 42.5% of citizens answered correctly, 18.1% provided an incorrect response, and as much as 40% said they did not know the answer.

In terms of registering opinions over public policies, the tendency for individuals to possess weak, inconsistent, and/or no opinions conceivably hinders the democratic process. The representation of individuals' preferences is made difficult to the degree that individuals are unsure of, or unable to form, policy opinions. In response to the general minimalist line of research (suggesting low levels of political awareness by citizens), a second line of research suggests that relatively uninformed citizens can function reasonably well within the political system through the use of 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 1991; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; but see Johnston et al. 1996 for a contrary opinion). One potential heuristic aid, universally found in competitive party systems, is the party label. In fact, starting 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 candidates. Empirical studies of the effectiveness of party labels as cues for decision-making have shown that party labels influence voting behavior (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Popkin 1991; Rahn 1993; Schaffner and Streb 2002; Squire and Smith 1988) and evaluations of candidates and their issue positions (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1989; Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Kahn 1994; Koch 2001; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993; Wright and Niemi 1983). Extant research has even shown that the presence of party cues can counter the framing effects classically identified by Kahneman and Tversky (Druckman 2001). Moreover, scholars have shown that, both in the U.S. and abroad, party labels can (but do not always) affect the formation and expression of individual political beliefs and belief systems (e.g., Kam 2005; Merolla et al. 2007; Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister forthcoming; Ray 2003; Tomz and Sniderman 2004).

It therefore seems reasonable to expect that party labels might help citizens to express opinions at greater levels and with greater certainty. It is moreover at least plausible that they would do so outside the U.S. context. Response rates and certainty measures are important dependent variables because they reflect how well-formed are citizens' political beliefs. And, yet, few studies exist that examine the influence of party labels as heuristic aids in question response and certainty and none to our knowledge examine this topic outside the confines of

the two main U.S. parties. The study of opinion persuasion is more common, but little work has focused on party labels in the Canadian case. Our research fills these gaps, reveals some counter-intuitive findings, and suggests a possible conditioning role played by trust.

The Canadian Case and General Expectations

As discussed above, it is commonly held that party labels serve useful heuristic functions. Studies have demonstrated that party labels serve as cognitive shortcuts across a wide range of decision-making processes, including helping citizens to organize their own preferences over issues. This suggests that party labels should be helpful across the general realm of opinion expression and formation and, specifically, with respect to the dependent variables we examine here: giving a response, the content of that response, and one's certainty with respect to the reported opinion. Knowing where a party stands on an issue *should* make one more likely to express an opinion and be more certain about that opinion, and may even influence the direction of one's opinion.

Extant work has tended to focus on the two major parties in the United States, with the result that the literature says little about the generalizability of party labels as heuristic aids in other parties and party systems (see Ray 2003, Hobolt 2007, Merolla et al. forthcoming, Coan et al. 2008 and Merolla et al. 2008 for recent attempts to rectify this). The little work that has been done provides reason to expect that party labels may often be used in other countries, *but* that the effectiveness of party cues varies across both parties and party systems. For example, there are some parties in the U.S. that play such minor, low profile roles that the usefulness of these labels to citizens is clearly questionable (Coan et al. 2008). In other democratic systems, where the party system is in flux and/or where attachments to parties are less deep, party labels may also not function as highly effective heuristic aids (Merolla et al. forthcoming).

Put simply, Canadian parties vary – both in comparison to the two main U.S. parties and in comparison to each other – in terms of the information content their label provides (Merolla et al. 2008). It was the norm in Canada until the 1990s for the major parties to avoid taking strong ideological stances (the focus was on national unity and brokering compromise across ethnolinguistic lines). Older parties, thus, tend to be ideological diffuse. Perhaps the

quintessential party in this regard is the Liberal Party of Canada, which has oscillated across the middle of the political spectrum over the years, taking positions both left and right of centre. The old Progressive Conservative (PC) Party showed a similar tendency.² In 2003, that party merged with a more cohesive conservative party, the Canadian Alliance Party; the merged party, the Conservative Party of Canada, thus contains elements both of a brokerage past and of ideological clarity and consistency. On the ideological left stands a party with a different history and record in terms of ideological coherence; the NDP is a long-standing minor party with socialist roots and a consistent left-wing platform. These differences, combined with institutional differences (e.g., a multi-party and parliamentary system), may lead party labels to operate somewhat differently in the Canadian case.

Experimental Design

In order to investigate the relationships between party cues and opinion expression and certainty in Canada, we fielded an experiment in the form of an internet-based survey of Canadian citizens (outside of Quebec) from June 6 to June 18, 2007. The study was conducted by Survey Sampling International (SSI), which delivers internet-based studies to a pre-selected panel of subjects who are randomly recruited into particular studies.³ The sample was drawn to be geographically representative of the national adult population outside of Quebec.⁴ The data were collected by Network and Data Services at the University of Western Ontario. The sample consists of 1,023 participants between the ages of 18 and 85. The average age is 47, 50% of whom are female, 51% of whom work full-time, and 54% of whom are married. The modal respondent has a college degree and the modal income is between \$60,000 and \$74,999. ANOVA tests revealed no significant differences across experimental conditions with respect to basic demographic and political background measures.

Participants were first asked several questions tapping preferences over politics with respect to party identification, political interest, ideology, issue opinions, and evaluations of

² Thus, earlier research found that Canadians saw little difference between the two major parties, the Liberals and Conservatives (Kay 1977; Scarrow 1965; but see Nadeau and Blais 1990).

³ For more information on SSI, see http://www.surveysampling.com/solutions_country.php?ID=4.

⁴ SSI specializes in sampling; nonetheless, the researchers made slight corrections to the original draw in order to increase the number of respondents in small population regions so as to make sure they were represented in proportion to the general population.

politicians and parties.⁵ We asked respondents to indicate their feelings toward each party on a 0-10 feeling thermometer scale, rate their familiarity with the party on a 6-pt. scale ranging from very unfamiliar to very familiar, and indicate how much they trusted the parties on a 6-pt. scale ranging from strongly distrust to strongly trust. Participants were then asked four issue questions. The survey continued with an unrelated battery of questions comprising a second experiment, not reported here, and then concluded with a series of questions tapping political awareness.⁶

To test the use of party cues, subjects were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups or a control group (n=283 in each group). In the treatment groups, each of the four issue questions was preceded by a statement that one of the parties (centrist Liberal, right-wing Conservative or left-wing NDP) supported or opposed the issue. The party was held constant within each treatment group. After the prompt, each subject was asked for her own opinion on the issue (the control group was only asked for their opinion, without any cue), and then asked to rate her level of certainty over her expressed opinion on a 6-point scale. So, for example, one of the questions looked as follows: “The Liberal Party supports the proposal that Canada meets its global climate change obligations as established in the Kyoto Accord. Would you say that you support or oppose this proposal?” After giving her response to this question, the subject was asked, “How sure are you of your response?”

In designing the study, we recognized that the usefulness of party labels may differ according to the issue being addressed. For example, with more difficult and less salient issues, citizens might rely more on labels in the formation and expression of preferences.⁷ Research has demonstrated that individuals, especially low sophisticates, rely on partisan cues when faced with novel, or “hard” issues (Kam 2005). For this reason, we selected issues that cut across party lines and varied in complexity. We asked about preferences over services and spending, the Kyoto accord, Canadian development assistance abroad, and amending the

⁵ Demographic information about each respondent was collected from SSI.

⁶ After completing the study, subjects were debriefed and given another opportunity to decline to participate, in which they could agree or disagree to have their responses included in the study.

⁷ Carmines and Stimson (1980) distinguish among easy and hard issues, and argue that different types of people behave differently with respect to these types of issues. In their case, the behavior is voting; here we examine differences with respect to cue-taking.

Aeronautics Act. We expected that the first three would be a bit easier in that all three deal with relatively straight-forward issues that have been salient on the public agenda. We selected the last issue to represent a more complex and less salient public policy item.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Using the data, we identified the easiest and hardest issue by examining the percentage of “don’t know” and uncertain responses expressed on each opinion among those in the control group. The issue questions we used are identified in Table 1, along with the party positions on the issue and the number of individuals who refused to answer or indicated uncertainty about their answer. As the data show, question D, about amending the Aeronautics Act, was clearly the most difficult. The other three questions seem to be relatively similar in terms of complexity, although when we combine non-response and indications of uncertainty into a single variable we find that issue A, about services and spending, was the easiest for participants to answer.

Do Canadian Party Cues Increase Response Rate and Certainty?

The first issue to address is whether party cues help citizens to form opinions that they are confident about. To investigate this, we look at response rates in Figure 1 and certainty levels in Figure 2 across the four issues for each experimental condition. Turning first to Figure 1, we first observe that response rates are much higher for Issues A through C compared to Issue D, as expected. However, if we turn to differences between the control and each treatment group, we do not see a general pattern in which response rates are higher in the treated groups relative to the control group. Rather, for issues A through C, receiving any of the party cues makes an individual *less* likely to respond to the issue question, and these differences are significant or borderline significant for the first two issues.⁸ Quite interestingly, only for the hard issue is the level of response higher in a treatment group, the Conservative treatment, than in the control group.⁹ Thus, it appears that receiving a Canadian party cue, which we hypothesized might provide information about an issue and help citizens to develop their own opinions, is largely ineffective at increasing the likelihood of response.

⁸ The differences are all significant below $p=0.20$, two-tailed.

⁹ The difference is not statistically significant ($p=0.40$, two-tailed); the differences between the Conservative treatment and the other two treatment response rates are statistically significant at $p\leq 0.06$, two-tailed.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Next, in Figure 2, we consider whether receiving a party cue increases an individual's certainty with respect to his/her own opinion. The pattern in this graph replicates the pattern for response rates. Not only is certainty higher in the control group for issues A through C, three of these comparisons are statistically different from the control— for the Liberal and NDP treatment groups and issue A, and for the Conservative treatment group and issue C.¹⁰ For the fourth issue, about the Aeronautics Act, those in the treatment groups did report more certainty, on average, than those in the control group, but these differences are not statistically significant. Contrary to expectations, these results indicate that Canadian party label cues do *not* lead to more opinion certainty.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Do Canadian Party Cues Influence Opinions?

Given that our results indicate that Canadian party label cues do not lead to increased response rates and certainty of opinions, it is worthwhile to consider whether party cues influence the content of one's preferences as they do in other contexts (Kam 2005; Merolla et al. 2007; Ray 2003; Tomz and Sniderman 2004). If the cues are not relied upon in Canada for the direction of one's preferences, then the results for response rates and certainty are less surprising. Previous work on the use of party labels cues for opinion formation, utilizing student data from Ontario, found limited evidence that opinions were influenced by the presence of a party cue (Merolla et al. forthcoming). The data we use here is gathered from the adult Canadian population; we can therefore test the generalizability of these previous results. If they are not generalizable, perhaps the reason we find increased non-response and uncertainty given exposure to party cues is that the party labels are simply not effective cues for the more general Canadian population.

In Figure 3 we plot the mean responses to each of the issue questions by condition. Unlike the findings for response rates and certainty, 8 of the 12 treatment group comparisons (with the control group) are significant at $p < 0.10$. The mean response in the Liberal Party treatment group is not significantly different from the control for issues B through D and the

¹⁰ These differences are significant at p-values ranging from 0.01 to 0.18, two-tailed.

NDP treatment group mean does not differ from that of the control group for issue C. Overall, individual opinions are generally swayed by exposure to a party label cue. These results suggest that Canadian party label cues are utilized by citizens when forming their opinions. This result is in line with earlier findings in Canada and in other countries and, yet, the result seems to contrast with the finding that party labels do not positively affect response and certainty levels.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

It is important to note, however, that the cues do not necessarily cause individuals to shift in line with the position of the party. The issue opinions were coded so that higher values reflect more left-leaning responses. For all but issue D, the Liberal Party is in favour of a left position, while the NDP is consistently in favour of adopting a more left position, and the Conservative Party is consistently in favour of the opposite. Of the significant differences in Figure 3, half (four) are in the direction opposite to the cue. These effects obtain for the easiest issue of services and for the NDP for the Kyoto question. In the next section, we consider a factor that may help explain these mixed results, by conditioning how a cue is received – trust in a party.

Does TRUST Condition the Effectiveness of the Party Cues?

Scholars have argued that in the sphere of political life, individuals are likely to engage in heuristic-based processing (Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), since they generally have low levels of ability and motivation to process political information (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992). When individuals engage in heuristic-based processing, they are more likely to be influenced by the source of the message, rather than the content of the arguments made for or against the message (e.g., Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Work by Lupia and McCubbins (1998) takes the focus on the source of the message a step further by arguing that only credible sources can be informative heuristics. The work of Druckman (2001) has also shown that individuals are more likely to respond to messages communicated by people they think are credible. Thus, in this section we consider whether a party's perceived trustworthiness, which we consider synonymous with credibility, influences whether a party cue is relied upon for opinion expression, certainty, and formation. We expect that an

individual is more likely to employ a party cue as his or her trust in the party increases. Thus, individuals who receive a cue from a party they trust may be more inclined to form an opinion that they are certain about in the direction of the cue. Meanwhile, those who have low levels of trust toward a given party cue may be less likely to respond to a question. Of those who do respond, those low in trust may actually come to reject the party position and move in the opposite direction.

What are the components of trust in party labels? Scholars who study the influence of cues and/or groups on one's political thinking suggest that individuals evaluate political objects based on two components: cognition and affect (e.g., Conover 1988; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994). We believe that how much trust one places in a party encompasses both one's familiarity with a party (cognition) and their own feelings toward that party (affect). In the extreme, if an individual has never heard of a party, it is highly unlikely that knowledge of that party's position will reduce her uncertainty. However, if an individual is familiar with a party, then the party label can potentially serve as a useful heuristic device, even if an individual does not identify with the party. In terms of affect, if an individual feels extremely positive toward the party, he or she is likely to be more trusting of the party, and thus will be more likely to use the party cue in forming her preference and increasing her certainty over the issue.

Before delving into the analysis of how trust moderates the effect of party labels as cues, it is worthwhile to establish whether trust in a party is, as we theorize and expect, made up of both cognitive and affective components.¹¹ Our trust variable (6 point scale with higher values more trusting) is significantly ($p < 0.001$) correlated with familiarity (6 pt. scale) and feeling thermometer ratings (0-10), but it is notable that the relationship between affect and trust is much stronger than between familiarity and trust (results not shown). This result is clarified in simple OLS regressions predicting trust (familiarity and feeling thermometers are the independent variables; see Table 2). The coefficients for the feeling thermometer variables are more substantial than those for familiarity; for the Conservative trust regression, familiarity is

¹¹ The mean values (and standard deviations) of trust for each party are as follows: Liberal, 2.905 (1.276), Conservative, 3.070 (1.329), and NDP, 3.104 (1.301). It is interesting to note that the most ideologically cohesive party, the NDP, has the highest levels of trust, followed by the Conservative and then Liberal parties.

not significant. Thus, one's affect for a party is strongly related to trust in the party (as expected), but one's familiarity also matters for two of the three parties – as we discussed above, one is unlikely to trust a party that he/she is not familiar with.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Model and Findings

To evaluate whether one's level of trust in a party conditions the effect of the party cue, we run regressions for each of our dependent variables (opinion expression, certainty, and content) for each issue. For the response dependent variable, we use logit, since the variable is dichotomous. For the other two dependent variables, we use OLS since we have ordered scales. In the models, we include dummy variables that indicate whether a respondent was exposed to a party cue (the control group is the baseline), the trust measures for each party, and interactions of the treatment dummy variables with the corresponding trust measure. If, as we have theorized, trust in a party conditions the reception of party label cues, then we should observe that the interactions influence the respondents in the expected directions – toward responding, toward being more certain of their responses, and in the direction of the party's issue stance. The results are reported in Tables 3-5.

[Insert Tables 3-5 about here]

The results in tables 3 and 5 are suggestive of an important but not consistent moderating effect between trust and the treatment measures. A t-test on an interaction term indicates support for a moderating relationship between the two variables (Kam and Franzese 2007). We use one-tailed tests for response rates and certainty, since individuals should become more likely to respond and more certain the more they trust the cue. Turning first to the models for response rates, we find a significant effect on the interaction term between trust and the Conservative treatment for Issue C, and between trust and the NDP and Liberal treatment for issue D. For the certainty models, we find a significant interaction term between trust and the Liberal treatment for Issue A, between trust and the Conservative treatment for Issue C, and for all three interaction terms for Issue D. All of these interaction terms are in the expected positive direction. Thus, there is some initial support for a moderating relationship between trust and the treatments, in particular for the hard issue. If we turn to the models for

issue position, we find that all of the interaction terms would reach statistical significance if we used two-tailed tests, with the exception of the NDP interaction with trust for Issue D. However, in many cases, the signs are opposite of expectations, meaning those high in trust are *not* more inclined to follow the cue.¹² For example, for issue 1, Services and spending, the Liberal and NDP interactions with trust influence individuals to express opinions for *lower* social spending – the opposite of the stances taken by the parties. For issues 2 and 3, the Conservative cue moves individuals who trust that party away from the conservative stance. Only with issue 4 are the two significant interaction effects in accordance with the party cues.

While the results above are suggestive of a moderating relationship, they do not tell us whether the treatment effects are significant at different values of trust. Given the presence of interaction terms, we need to separately calculate the coefficient and standard error of the treatment at each level of trust, which ranges from 1 to 6. In Appendix Table B1, we report the first difference (moving from the control to the treatment group) and standard error for each treatment at each level of trust for the four response dependent variables. To summarize those results, we find evidence that individuals lower in trust are less likely to respond to the issue question when given all three party cues for Issue A, the Conservative and NDP cues for Issue B, and the Conservative Party Cue for Issue C. These results are in line with expectations for low trust; however, in only the last case are high trusting individuals more likely to respond the issue questions.

It is only for the hard issue that we find results as expected among those low and high in trust. In Figure 4, we report the change in the probability of response moving from the control to the treatment at different levels of trust for the response rate models. Bars outlined in black indicate that the effect of the treatment is significant at $p < 0.10$ (one-tailed) for that level of trust. In terms of issue expression, Figure 4 indicates that those at low levels of trust, who received the Liberal and NDP cues, were less likely to respond to the question than the control group. At high levels of trust, however, receiving either the Liberal or the Conservative party label cue encouraged a respondent to express an opinion. Comparing the effects across the

¹² According to f-tests, we find that the inclusion of the interaction terms only improve the fit of the model for response rates and certainty for Issue D, and for all of the policy position models.

parties and issues, it appears that the Liberal party label cue has the most impact at all levels of trust.

In Appendix Table B2, we report the slope and standard error of the treatment at different levels of trust for each certainty dependent variable. The results for certainty are very similar to the results for response rates in that for the first three issues, we only find that those lower in trust become less certain upon exposure to the party cues. Among those low in trust, exposure to the Liberal and NDP cue made subjects less certain of their position on Issue A, while exposure to the Conservative cue made subjects less certain of their position on Issues B and C. As with most of the previous findings, we only find support for the high trust expectations for Issue D. We plot the slope of the treatment at each level of trust for each condition in Figure 5. Here, we see that those who express high levels of trust (5 or 6 on the 6 point scale), for the relevant party cue they were exposed to, are more certain about their issue response. The effect is particularly strong for the Liberal party cue, similar to what we found in Figure 4. At the lowest level of trust, only the NDP cue has a significant effect, and toward less certainty.

Finally, we turn to the results for individual policy positions. As before, we report the slope and standard error of the treatments at each level of trust for the four policy measures in Appendix Table B3 and in Figures 6a-d. We use one-tailed significance tests given that we expect that individuals will move in the direction of the cue as trust levels increase. Turning first to services and spending, we find only one case in which the results operate as expected, for the Conservative party. Individuals low in trust move away from the Conservative cue, while individual high in trust for the party adopt a more conservative stance.¹³ If we turn to the issue of the Kyoto protocol, we find that the interaction works as expected for both the Liberal and NDP cue, with individuals becoming more liberal at higher levels of trust with the party. Only the Conservative Party Cue works opposite of expectations for this measure.¹⁴ The effects for the Poverty dependent variable are the same as those for the Kyoto protocol. Finally, if we turn to the hardest issue, of Amending the Aeronautics Air Act, we find that the Liberal and

¹³ If two-tailed tests are used, we find that those in the Liberal and NDP cue high in trust for each party move against the cue. We are not certain why this finding obtains for the services issue.

¹⁴ It is significant if we use a two-tailed test.

Conservative cues are significant and work as expected, moving those higher in trust in a more conservative (or right-leaning) direction.

[Insert Figures 6a-6d here]

The figures again illustrate variation in effects across parties. For the services issue, the Conservative cue is the only one that works as expected and thus can be considered to be the most effective. For the Kyoto Protocol issue, the effects for the Liberal cue are slightly larger than the effects for the NDP cue (recall the Conservative cue is in the wrong direction). For the Poverty issue, it appears that the results are similar in size for the Liberal and NDP cues. Finally, for the hardest Issue, the Conservative cue has the strongest effect at the lowest level of trust and the highest three levels. The fact that the results for which party cues are most effective vary across issues is consistent with our earlier studies (Merolla et al. 2008). Explaining these dynamics is beyond the scope of this paper, but we believe that this is an avenue of research worth pursuing in future studies.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results presented above paint a complex picture of the effects of Canadian party label cues. Initially, we expected that cues should facilitate opinion expression and certainty, following from the literature that has shown party cues can help individuals to make sense of political issues. What we found, however, is that receiving a party cue did not help individuals to express an opinion, nor to be more certain of their issue positions *unless* we take into account the degree of trust that the person placed in the party. Only when a person trusts the party that is being cued is he/she more likely to express an opinion and be more certain about it. This finding, however, is not consistent and obtains primarily for the more complex issues. Furthermore, this effect seems strongest for the Liberal and NDP parties, which suggests that the Canadian party labels may differ in their utility for citizens. Across all issues, we found that those low in trust became less likely to respond and became less certain given exposure to party cues.

In terms of opinion formation, we also found that trust in a party conditions the effect of a party cue – those who trust the party whose cue is provided are more likely to express opinions in line with that cue, while those who do not trust the party are likely to react against

the cue. Again, each of the party cues did not have the same effects for individuals, and the cues that were effective varied across issues. These findings suggest that there is an important “supply” dimension to the use of party label cues that needs to be further investigated. It could be that parties develop reputations on issues such that the cue is more useful in certain issue domains relative to others.

In summary, this study has shown that Canadian party label cues *can*, but do not always, affect opinion expression, reduce individual uncertainty in the expression of policy preferences, and influence opinion formation. Some of these findings are in line with the work of other scholars that has shown party cues can be used to predict, determine, and organize policy opinion. We have also found, however, that Canadian party cues are less useful – in general – than the general literature on party cues might lead one to believe. We have further demonstrated that individuals’ trust in parties conditions the effect of a cue. As well, we found substantial variance in the usefulness of the cues across parties. That all cues were not equally useful for all individuals has important implications for the quality of representation in political systems. If political party labels are not useful aids in the formation of solid political opinions, and in lieu of “better” cues, it could be difficult for minimally-informed citizens to engage in issue-based voting behavior. To take an arguably extreme position, such a situation could have serious consequences for the quality of democracy in Canada.

Table 1. Issues Questions

Type	Issue	Liberal Position	Conservative Position	NDP Position	Non-response Mean	Uncertainty Mean	Combined Uncertainty Measure
A: Easy	Reducing government spending on social services	Opposes	Supports	Opposes	0.057 (0.231)	1.852 (0.812)	0.081 (0.274)
B:	Canada should meet its global climate change obligations as established in the Kyoto Protocol	Supports	Opposes	Supports	0.078 (0.268)	1.804 (0.863)	0.117 (0.322)
C:	Focus Canadian development assistance abroad on poverty reduction	Supports	Opposes	Supports	0.074 (0.263)	1.92 (0.883)	0.113 (0.317)
D: Hard	Amending Aeronautics Act to give new powers to Canadian orces Airworthiness Investigative Authority	Supports	Supports	Opposes	0.258 (0.438)	2.364 (1.049)	0.346 (0.477)

Table 2: OLS Regressions for Trust in a Party

	Liberal Party		Conservative Party		NDP Party	
	Coefficient	Std. Deviation	Coefficient	Std. Deviation	Coefficient	Std. Deviation
Familiarity	0.061*	0.024	0.028	0.024	0.090**	0.024
Feeling	0.347**	0.010	0.346**	0.009	0.322**	0.010
Constant	1.157**	0.116	1.375**	0.114	1.407**	0.112
N	999		998		998	
R2	0.5679		0.5893		0.5261	

*= $p < 0.10$, **= $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Table 3: Logit Regressions for Response with Trust Interactions

	Issue A Response		Issue B Response		Issue C Response		Issue D Response	
	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error
Lib T	-1.257	0.840	-0.724	0.726	-0.204	0.803	-1.135**	0.429
Con T	-0.441	0.874	-0.621	0.706	-1.392*	0.750	-0.320	0.446
NDP T	-0.989	0.874	-1.514*	0.703	0.349	0.896	-1.050*	0.461
Trust (Lib)	-0.163	0.148	0.030	0.125	-0.109	0.141	-0.157*	0.076
Trust (Con)	0.306*	0.128	0.140	0.108	0.042	0.125	0.118*	0.064
Trust (NDP)	0.225	0.146	0.048	0.124	0.233*	0.137	-0.040	0.074
Trust*Lib T	0.060	0.235	0.101	0.225	-0.038	0.237	0.340++	0.132
Trust*Con T	-0.099	0.256	0.004	0.205	0.372+	0.237	0.163	0.137
Trust*NDP T	0.005	0.250	0.247	0.211	-0.171	0.261	0.266++	0.134
Constant	2.643**	0.737	2.421**	0.603	2.547**	0.659	1.412**	0.366
N	996		996		996		996	
Pseudo-R2	0.0408		0.0219		0.0183		0.0209	

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.05 (two-tailed), +=p<.10 (one-tailed) ++=p<.05 (one-tailed)

Table 4: OLS Regressions for Certainty of Response with Trust Interactions

	Issue A Certainty		Issue B Certainty		Issue C Certainty		Issue D Certainty	
	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error		Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.
Lib T	-0.557**	0.184	-0.207	0.184	-0.011	0.180	-0.354	0.235
Con T	-0.039	0.188	-0.287	0.189	-0.398*	0.185	-0.232	0.242
NDP T	-0.210	0.201	-0.157	0.200	-0.186	0.197	-0.376	0.254
Trust (Lib)	-0.078*	0.032	-0.040	0.032	-0.011	0.031	-0.107**	0.041
Trust (Con)	-0.043	0.028	-0.055*	0.028	-0.066*	0.027	0.042	0.036
Trust (NDP)	0.047	0.031	0.017	0.031	0.017	0.030	0.002	0.040
Trust*Lib T	0.130++	0.056	0.066	0.056	-0.001	0.055	0.152++	0.071
Trust*Con T	0.007	0.054	0.069	0.054	0.091++	0.053	0.097+	0.069
Trust*NDP T	0.004	0.058	0.040	0.058	0.037	0.057	0.123++	0.073
Constant	5.313**	0.152	5.368**	0.151	5.170**	0.148	4.683**	0.193
	985		976		983		961	
	0.022		0.0086		0.0108		0.0184	

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.05 (two-tailed), +=p<.10 (one-tailed) ++=p<.05 (one-tailed)

Table 5: OLS Regressions for Issue Positions with Trust Interactions

	Issue 1 Position		Issue 2 Position		Issue 3 Position		Issue 4 Position	
	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	
Lib T	0.596**	0.221	-0.850**	0.214	-0.811**	0.196	0.304*	0.169
Con T	1.190**	0.226	-2.790**	0.222	-1.118**	0.204	0.584**	0.175
NDP T	0.584*	0.244	-0.713**	0.241	-0.841**	0.217	0.372*	0.183
Trust (Lib)	0.083*	0.038	0.022	0.037	-0.043	0.034	0.040	0.029
Trust (Con)	0.054	0.033	-0.327**	0.032	-0.090**	0.030	0.014	0.025
Trust (NDP)	0.138**	0.037	0.106**	0.036	0.093**	0.033	-0.009	0.028
Trust*Lib T	-0.286**	0.067	0.245**	0.065	0.271**	0.060	-0.097*	0.051
Trust*Con T	-0.300**	0.064	0.634**	0.063	0.266**	0.058	-0.237**	0.049
Trust*NDP T	-0.323**	0.070	0.188**	0.069	0.284**	0.063	-0.061	0.052
Constant	2.434**	0.182	4.323**	0.177	3.473**	0.162	2.443**	0.137
N	946		925		941		750	
Pseudo-R2	0.107		0.2495		0.1166		0.0698	

*=p<0.10, **=p<0.05 (two-tailed)

Figure 1: Response Rate by Condition and Issue

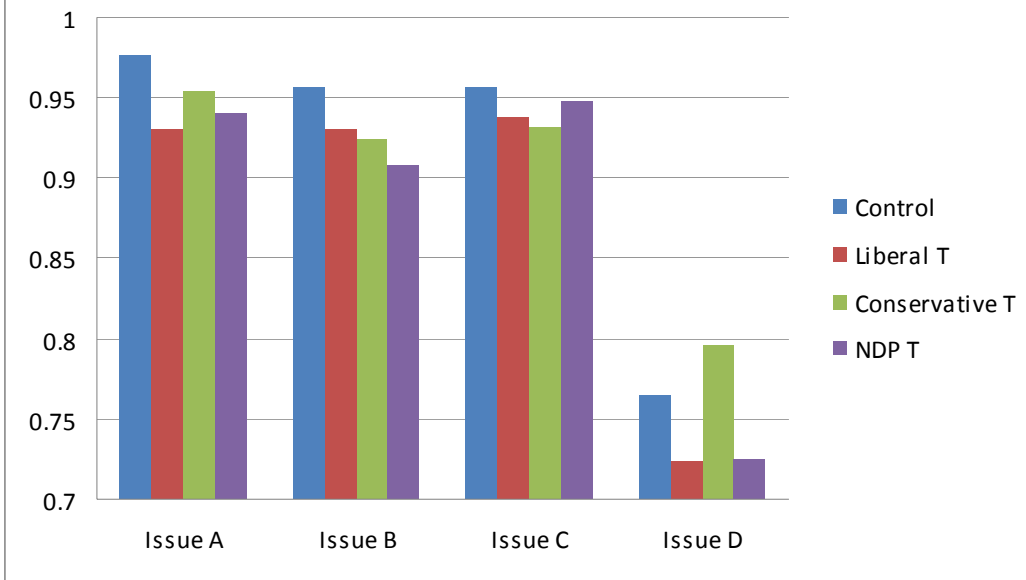


Figure 2: Certainty by Condition and Issue

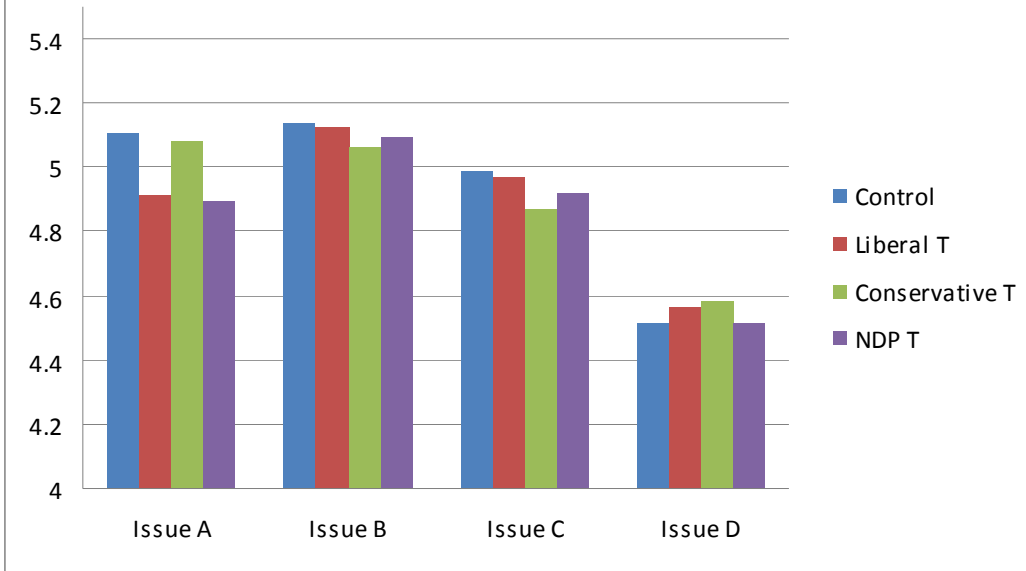
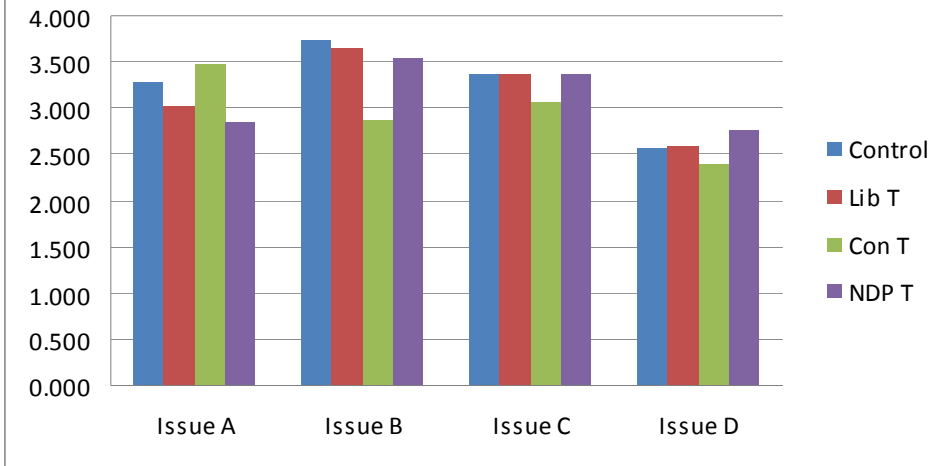
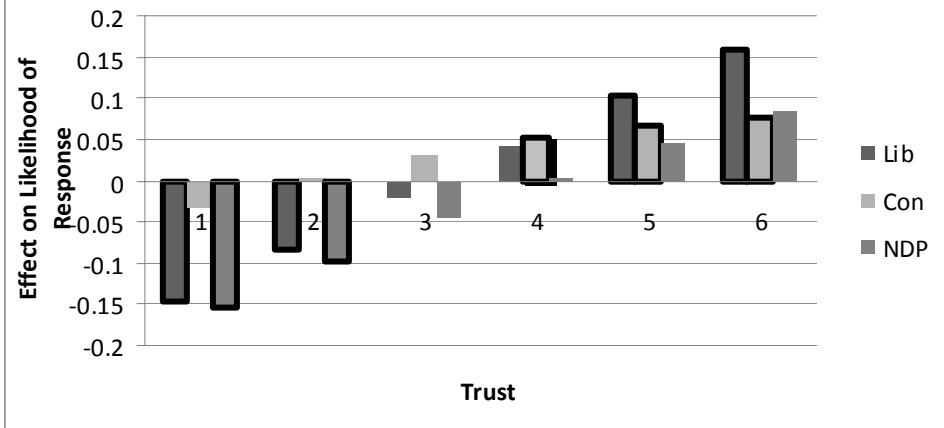


Figure 3: Issue Opinions by Condition and Issue



**Figure 4: Change in Probability of Response to Issue D,
by Level of Trust**



**Figure 5: Effect of Treatment on Certainty for Issue D,
by Level of Trust**

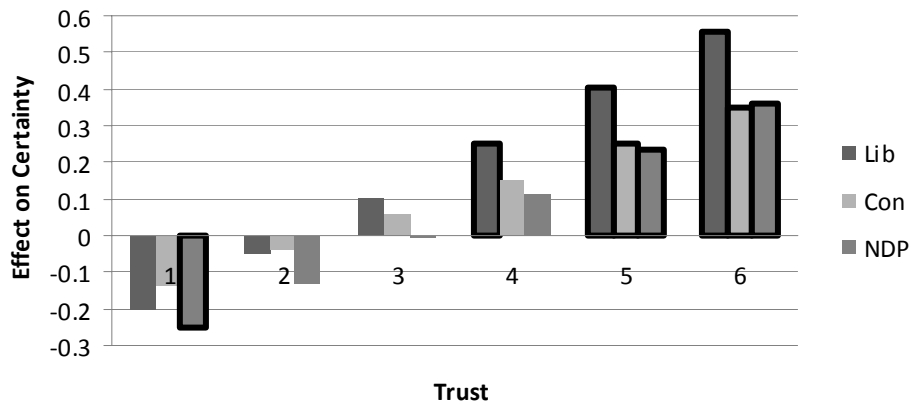


Figure 6a: Effect of Treatments on Issue A Opinion, by Level of Trust

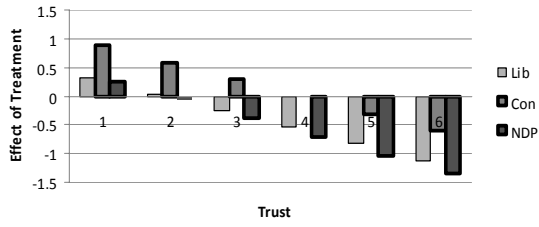


Figure 6c: Effect of Treatments on Issue C Opinion, by Level of Trust

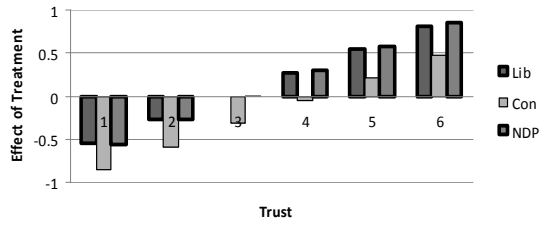


Figure 6b: Effect of Treatments on Issue B Opinion, by Level of Trust

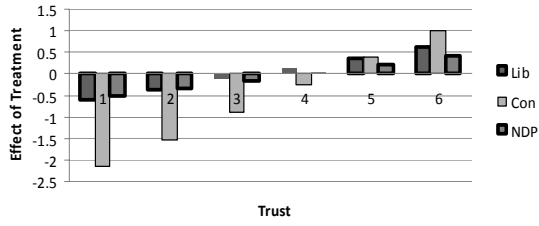
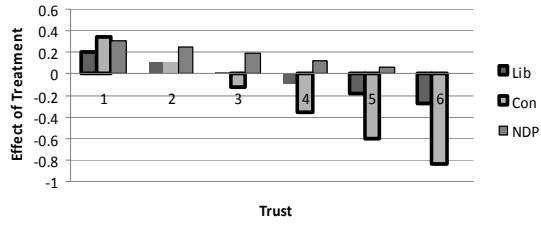


Figure 6d: Effect of Treatments on Issue D Opinion, by Level of Trust



Appendix A. Summary Statistics on Individual Reputation Measures

	Trust (1-6 scale)	Familiarity (1-6 scale)	Feeling (0-10 scale)	Certainty of Ideological Placement (1-6 scale)
Liberal	2.905 (1.276)	4.516 (1.129)	4.235 (2.752)	4.253 (1.322)
Conservative	3.070 (1.329)	4.490 (1.137)	4.524 (2.938)	4.228 (1.370)
NDP	3.104 (1.301)	4.382 (1.203)	4.031 (2.855)	4.241 (1.400)

Note: Values in cells report are means, with standard deviations in parentheses.

Appendix B. Predicted Probabilities by Trust Level

Table B.1 Change in the Probability of Response at Different Levels of Trust Moving from the Control to the Treated Group

	Trust					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Issue A</i>						
Liberal	-0.039* (0.027)	-0.039* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.019)	-0.043* (0.025)	-0.048* (0.039)	-0.054 (0.06)
Conservative	-0.029 (0.041)	-0.025 (0.024)	-0.023* (0.017)	-0.022* (0.018)	-0.021* (0.022)	-0.022 (0.027)
NDP	-0.056* (0.047)	-0.043* (0.026)	-0.034* (0.017)	-0.028* (0.019)	-0.025* (0.024)	-0.023 (0.03)
<i>Issue B</i>						
Liberal	-0.04 (0.038)	-0.029 (0.024)	-0.021 (0.021)	-0.016 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.036)	-0.01 (0.047)
Conservative	-0.045 (0.045)	-0.038* (0.028)	-0.033* (0.022)	-0.03* (0.024)	-0.028 (0.031)	-0.027 (0.039)
NDP	-0.108* (0.054)	-0.073* (0.031)	-0.047* (0.023)	-0.028 (0.026)	-0.014 (0.031)	-0.005 (0.037)
<i>Issue C</i>						
Liberal	-0.011 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.022)	-0.015 (0.021)	-0.02 (0.029)	-0.027 (0.047)	-0.037 (0.074)
Conservative	-0.076* (0.049)	-0.038* (0.027)	-0.013 (0.021)	0.004* (0.022)	0.014* (0.025)	0.022* (0.029)
NDP	0.008 (0.049)	0 (0.03)	-0.007 (0.021)	-0.014 (0.021)	-0.021 (0.028)	0.029 (0.04)
<i>Issue D</i>						
Liberal	-0.147* (0.062)	-0.083* (0.044)	-0.02 (0.039)	0.042 (0.048)	0.102* (0.064)	0.159* (0.081)
Conservative	-0.032 (0.07)	0.003 (0.047)	0.031 (0.038)	0.053* (0.041)	0.067* (0.049)	0.076* (0.056)
NDP	-0.155* (0.073)	-0.099* (0.049)	-0.045 (0.038)	0.003 (0.044)	0.046 (0.056)	0.084 (0.071)

*p<.10 (one-tailed)

Table B2: Slope and Standard Error of Treatment on Certainty at Different Levels of Trust

	Trust					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Issue A</i>						
Liberal	-0.427** (0.138)	-0.297** (0.102)	-0.166** (0.089)	-0.036 (0.109)	0.094 (0.148)	0.224 (0.195)
Conservative	-0.032 (0.143)	-0.026 (0.106)	-0.019 (0.089)	-0.012 (0.101)	0.006 (0.136)	0.001 (0.180)
NDP	-0.206* (0.152)	-0.202** (0.110)	-0.198** (0.090)	-0.194** (0.103)	-0.190* (0.141)	-0.185 (0.190)
<i>Issue B</i>						
Liberal	-0.141 (0.138)	-0.075 (0.102)	-0.009 (0.089)	0.057 (0.108)	0.124 (0.147)	0.190 (0.195)
Conservative	-0.218* (0.144)	-0.149* (0.106)	-0.081 (0.088)	-0.012 (0.100)	0.057 (0.135)	0.125 (0.179)
NDP	-0.117 (0.151)	-0.077 (0.109)	-0.037 (0.089)	0.003 (0.102)	0.043 (0.140)	0.083 (0.188)
<i>Issue C</i>						
Liberal	-0.012 (0.134)	-0.014 (0.099)	-0.015 (0.087)	-0.016 (0.106)	-0.018 (0.145)	-0.019 (0.191)
Conservative	-0.307** (0.141)	-0.217** (0.104)	-0.126* (0.087)	-0.035 (0.099)	0.055 (0.133)	0.146 (0.176)
NDP	-0.148 (0.148)	-0.112 (0.108)	-0.075 (0.087)	-0.038 (0.101)	-0.001 (0.138)	0.035 (0.185)
<i>Issue D</i>						
Liberal	-0.203 (0.176)	-0.051 (0.130)	-0.109 (0.114)	0.253** (0.139)	0.404** (0.189)	0.556** (0.250)
Conservative	-0.135 (0.183)	-0.038 (0.136)	0.058 (0.113)	0.155 (0.129)	0.252* (0.173)	0.348* (0.229)
NDP	-0.253* (0.192)	-0.131 (0.140)	-0.008 (0.114)	0.115 (0.132)	0.237* (0.180)	0.360* (0.241)

**p<.05 (one-tailed), *p<.10(one-tailed)

Table B3: Slope and Standard Error of Treatment on Certainty at Different Levels of Trust

	Trust					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Issue A</i>						
Liberal	0.310 (0.165)	0.025 (0.122)	-0.261 (0.107)	-0.547 (0.131)	-0.832 (0.178)	-1.118 (0.236)
Conservative	0.890** (0.172)	0.591** (0.127)	0.291** (0.106)	-0.008 (0.120)	-0.308** (0.161)	-0.608** (0.214)
NDP	0.261 (0.183)	-0.063 (0.133)	-0.386 (0.107)	-0.710 (0.123)	-1.033 (0.170)	-1.357 (0.228)
<i>Issue B</i>						
Liberal	-0.605** (0.161)	-0.360** (0.119)	-0.115 (0.104)	0.130 (0.126)	0.375** (0.171)	0.620** (0.226)
Conservative	-2.156 (0.168)	-1.522 (0.125)	-0.888 (0.103)	-0.255 (0.118)	0.379 (0.158)	1.013 (0.210)
NDP	-0.525** (0.181)	-0.338** (0.131)	-0.150* (0.105)	0.038 (0.121)	0.225* (0.165)	0.413** (0.223)
<i>Issue C</i>						
Liberal	-0.541** (0.147)	-0.270** (0.109)	0.000 (0.095)	0.271** (0.116)	0.541** (0.158)	0.812** (0.209)
Conservative	-0.852 (0.155)	-0.586 (0.115)	-0.320 (0.095)	-0.054 (0.108)	0.212 (0.145)	0.478 (0.192)
NDP	-0.558** (0.163)	-0.274** (0.118)	0.009 (0.096)	0.293** (0.110)	0.576** (0.152)	0.860** (0.204)
<i>Issue D</i>						
Liberal	0.207* (0.127)	0.110 (0.094)	0.012 (0.082)	-0.085 (0.100)	-0.182* (0.134)	-0.279* (0.177)
Conservative	0.348** (0.133)	0.111 (0.099)	-0.126* (0.080)	-0.362** (0.089)	-0.599** (0.119)	-0.836** (0.158)
NDP	0.311 (0.139)	0.250 (0.102)	0.188 (0.083)	0.127 (0.094)	0.066 (0.128)	0.005 (0.171)

**p<.05 (one-tailed), *p<.10(one-tailed)

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