

Have Cue, Will Travel?

Political Parties as Heuristics in Three Countries

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ABSTRACT

Despite the richness of extant studies on the usefulness of party cues, there is a significant limitation: since most studies focus predominantly on the two main parties in the United States, we do not know whether and to what extent other party labels are used as heuristic devices. This paper seeks to address this limitation by expanding the geographical span of our understanding of heuristic devices. Our principal focus is the degree to which different party labels, across different institutional contexts, influence how individuals form and express opinions on a range of political issues. We also investigate the moderating influence of partisanship and, further, question whether the usefulness of cues varies by issue complexity. We present a set of results from an experimental study conducted in three countries: the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Our findings show that the usefulness of party cues varies greatly when one moves beyond studying the two major parties in the United States. The results vary by party and country, there is some evidence that partisanship influences whether or not cues are used, and there is mixed evidence about the role of issue complexity in the usefulness of party cues.

It is widely agreed that party labels act as information shortcuts, or heuristic aids, for citizens. They are purportedly one of the most useful of such aids because they are very accessible and “travel so well” across different decision domains (Huckfeldt et al. 1999). Thus, in the United States at least, 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 “encyclopaedic” levels of information (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 their influence on an individual’s policy preferences. Our principal focus is on the degree to which different party labels, across different institutional contexts, influence how individuals form and express opinions on a range of political issues.

We present a set of results from an experimental study conducted in three countries: the United States, Canada, and Mexico. These three countries provide us with three distinct party system settings: the U.S. has a party system with two stable, long-existing parties; Canada has a party system that has been in flux since 1993, with four parties of differing age and reputation; and, Mexico’s party system has only recently emerged from a one-party dominant state. Our results show that the overall utility of party labels varies by country, by party, and by issue.

Research into the utility of party labels as heuristic aids for opinion expression is important because of its implications for the quality of democratic processes. In common conceptions of democratic governance, citizens elect representatives who reflect their policy preferences (e.g., Ranney 1962). For such issue mandates to be meaningful, citizens must first have opinions. Yet, a long line of scholarship has demonstrated that opinions on political issues are often inconsistent and unstable, if present at all (e.g., Converse 1964). This shortcoming

would seem to undercut the ability of citizens to send clear mandates to politicians. How can citizens overcome this deficiency? Party labels may provide an answer, if and when such cues help citizens determine their preferences on the issues of the day. Our paper is thus relevant to understanding how mandate representation might be fostered in democratic settings.

OVERVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

In an early study of the U.S. electorate, Converse found that citizens' opinions on policy items were unrelated to each other, that people failed to respond to many pressing issues of the times, and that opinions over time were inconsistent (Converse 1964). The implication of these and related findings was that the American electorate was hardly capable of making reasonable political decisions. Other research, much of it coming later in time, challenged the minimalists' claims by arguing that citizens can make reasonable choices with limited information 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). One potential heuristic aid, universally found in competitive party systems, is the party label. 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 actors.

A great deal of scholarship has investigated the utility of party labels in various domains. In terms of voting, scholars have found that people rely on partisan cues in the voting booth (Lau & Redlawsk 2001; Popkin 1991; Rahn 1993), especially in low information elections (Schaffner and Streb 2002; Squire and Smith 1988). So long as the positions of candidates are not inconsistent with those of the party, voters are likely to select the "correct" candidate if they are provided with the party of the candidate (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rahn 1993). Furthermore,

scholars have found that party cues help citizens predict the issue positions of candidates and place them on an ideological spectrum (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1981, 1989; Huckfeldt et al. 1999; Kahn 1994; Koch 2001; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993; Wright and Niemi 1983).

Other work in the U.S. on the usefulness of party cues has focused on how parties help individuals determine and organize their own political beliefs. Jacoby (1988) found that an individual's party identification influenced his or her preferences on a host of political issues. In an experimental study, Kam (forthcoming) demonstrated that party cues helped citizens determine their preferences on a novel issue. Other scholars have shown that party cues 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).

Despite the richness of these studies, there is a significant limitation in the extant literature that we address in this paper. Since most studies focus predominantly on the two main parties in the United States, we do not know whether and to what extent other party labels are used as heuristic devices (see Ray 2003 as one exception). This paper seeks to address this limitation by expanding the geographical span of our understanding of heuristic devices, specifically with respect to the formation and expression of policy preferences.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

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. Extant studies suggest that party labels should be helpful across the

general realm of opinion expression and formation. More specifically, knowing where a party stands on an issue should influence where you perceive yourself to stand on that issue.

Because extant work has tended to focus on the two major parties in the United States, the literature is mostly silent on the issue of the generalizability of the usefulness of party labels to other parties and party systems. There are reasons to expect that the influence of party cues on the expression of policy preferences will vary. For example, there are some parties in the U.S. that play such minor, low profile roles that the usefulness of their label to citizens is clearly questionable: knowing where the Reform party stands on a novel issue might not help an individual figure out where they stand on that issue. 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 be as useful to citizens. Therefore, we begin with the following expectation: the utility of party labels as heuristic aids will vary across parties and party systems (H1).

A second expectation is that one's partisanship will be a moderator of the effect of party labels. 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 forthcoming). Thus, our second expectation is that the utility of party labels will be moderated by partisanship (H2).

Finally, our last expectation is that the usefulness of party labels will 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". Following Carmines and Stimson (1980), we consider issues "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. Carmines and Stimson (1980) argue that different types of people behave differently, with respect to vote choice, when deliberating over easy and hard issues. Other research has demonstrated that individuals, especially low sophisticates, rely on partisan cues when faced with novel, or “hard” issues (Kam forthcoming). With easy issues, individuals are more likely to be able to form opinions without party labels; they 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 might rely more on labels in the formation and expression of their political preferences. Thus, we expect that party labels will have stronger effects when the issues in question are more obtuse.¹

In summary, the hypotheses to be investigated in this paper are as follows:

H1: The usefulness of party cues will vary across contexts.

H2: Partisanship will moderate the usefulness of the party cue.

H3: Individuals will be more likely to use party cues as issues become more complex.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted an experimental study in three countries: the United States, Canada, and Mexico. As noted, these countries have very different parties and party systems, giving us significant leverage in addressing the question of the traveling capacity

¹ We also are cognizant that the utility of a given party label may vary across issues, depending on the parties’ history with that issue. Specifically, in cases where the party has taken a clear, strong, and stable stance on an issue, we expect the party label will be more useful. For the sake of brevity, in this paper we do not develop nor discuss specific hypotheses for each issue and each party. Our results do indeed demonstrate that the usefulness of party labels varies across issue types and, as scholars familiar with the issues and countries will note, there is some evidence that supports the contention that the party’s stance on that issue matters. For now, we leave detailed analysis of this fact aside, though its existence will become evident in the later results section.

of party labels as heuristic devices. We conducted the study at three collegiate institutions, using students recruited from classes and common areas as our research subjects.²

In each study, we randomly assigned subjects to a treatment or control group (See Table 1). With respect to the treatments, we chose three parties in each country to use as cues. In the United States, we selected one dominant party (Republican) and two minor parties (Reform and Green). In Canada, we selected the established Liberal Party, the newly formed Conservative Party, and the left-leaning NDP. In Mexico, we selected the three main parties: the long-dominant PRI, the center-right PAN, which won the presidency in 2000, and the newer and center-left PRD.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

In terms of our decision criteria for which issues to include, we selected issues in each country that cut across party lines and that varied in terms of complexity and salience. As we noted already, citizens might rely more on labels in the formation and expression of preferences with more difficult and less salient issues. We therefore identified several issues at different levels of complexity for each country. The issue questions are identified in Table 2 for each case (along with the party positions on the issue).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The procedure was the same in each country: subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire that probed their opinions on political issues. The first part of the survey included questions about basic demographics and political predispositions. Following these questions, subjects were presented with the issue questions that lie at the core of our study.

² The studies were conducted, in the United States in the winter of 2004; in Canada in the spring of 2004; and, in Mexico in the summer of 2004.

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.³ So, for example, one of the questions in Canada 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?”

RESULTS

In this section we assess our data in light of our three hypotheses. Specifically, we test here whether those who received a party cue are persuaded in their policy preferences compared to the control group, which did not receive a cue; whether partisanship modifies the effects of the cues; and, whether the usefulness of party cues varies according to the difficulty of the issue in question.⁴ Our principal dependent variable is the respondent’s opinion (strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose) on a political issue. This five-point variable is coded such that higher values indicate a more liberal response. Since the dependent variable is an ordinal scale, we ran ordered probit on the issue preference variables for each country. In addition to dummy variables for each treatment group (the control group serves as our baseline), we include the following control variables: gender (labelled “female” as a one means the respondent was female), ideology (a seven-point scale, where higher values mean more conservative/right-wing), and partisanship.^{5,6} For each analysis, we evaluated our

³ We also asked the subjects to indicate how certain they were of their opinion; we discuss the results of analyses of this dependent variable in a separate manuscript (Merolla, Stephenson, and Zechmeister 2005).

⁴ We should note that because those in the control group read a statement that “Some politicians support” the issue, there may be some persuasive effect of that neutral prompt. It is possible that the effects of partisan cues that are in the same direction of the control group may therefore not be as substantial as the effects of cues that ran counter to the control prompt, although they should be in the correct direction.

⁵ In the U.S. and Canada, the ideology question was asked using liberal-conservative labels, while in Mexico the question referred to left and right poles. In Canada and Mexico, we use party identification dummy variables, while in the United States we use the standard 7-point party identification scale where 0 is Strong Democrat and 6 is

hypothesis about the moderating role of partisanship by including interactions between partisanship variables and the treatments.⁷ Where likelihood-ratio tests showed that these interaction terms improved the fit of the model (at $p < 0.10$), we include the terms and present this larger model; in the remaining cases, we present the more simple model without interaction terms.

Tables 3-5 present the ordered probit results for each country. The significance and direction of the treatment variables reveal that party cues vary in usefulness across the three countries, as do the effects of partisanship. We assess the direction of the treatment variables in light of Table 2, which reports the prompt given for each group and the expected direction of the coefficient for each treatment.⁸ Our expectation for the interaction terms, when included, is that we should see stronger effects for these terms than for the direct treatment effects.⁹ We also assess, for each case, whether issue difficulty matters with respect to the effectiveness of the party cues.

[Insert Tables 3-5 about here]

Strong Republican. In the United States, about half of the sample is comprised of strong and weak Democrats, about 24% are Independents, and the remainder are weak and strong Republicans. In the Canadian sample, there are 110 Liberals, 33 Conservatives, and 32 NDP supporters (out of 196 respondents). And, in the Mexican sample, there are 18 PRD supporters, 39 PRI supporters, and 58 PAN supporters (out of a total of 198).

⁶ We examined a set of basic sociodemographic variables in order to check whether our random assignment resulted in similar sub-groups. In the U.S. context, we found significant differences across the groups in the percentage of females. The other controls did not show significant differences in the U.S., but they were very close to being significant (many had a p value less than 0.20). We therefore include a dummy variable for gender, *Female*, in each of our models. We also include two additional controls to capture predispositions that likely influence issue opinions – partisanship and ideology. In the case of the U.S., we also included a control variable for race, *White*.

⁷ For the U.S. sample, we interact the 7-point PID scale with the treatment variables. In Canada and Mexico, the existence of multiple parties prevents this, so we interact each treatment with its corresponding partisanship dummy variable.

⁸ Recall that the issue variables were recoded such that higher values are more liberal. The sign of the expectation in parentheses is in accord with this recoding.

⁹ Because the inclusion of the interaction terms essentially make 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.

United States

In the U.S., the results indicate support for H1, in that the usefulness of party cues varies across parties and issues. Second, the likelihood-ratio tests show that the partisanship interaction terms improved the model in two of the four cases – the two intermediate complexity issues – which lends mixed support to H2, that the effect of the treatments will be moderated by one’s partisanship. Finally, we find mixed support for H3, that the usefulness of the cues increases as issues become more complex. We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the results.

For the abortion issue, or the easiest issue in the U.S. case, only the Republican treatment is correctly signed, though it is not significant. On the other hand, the Green treatment is significant, but in the wrong direction. If we turn to the two intermediate issues, we see that the inclusion of party interactions did enhance the models. Since we interact each treatment with the party identification scale (Democrat to Republican), the sign on the treatment dummies is the effect of the treatment among strong Democrats. The first differences by partisanship for these two models are presented in Appendix Table A2. Turning to the first of these two issues, the services issue, the Republican treatment dummy is in the expected direction: strong Democrats are resisting the Republican cue (indicated by the positive sign). However, the Green treatment dummy is in the unexpected direction, as strong Democrats are resisting that cue. Republican partisans who received the Republican and Green treatments (see Appendix Table A2) are influenced in the correct direction for the Republican treatment and the incorrect direction for the Green treatment, meaning that their partisanship did not prevent them from accepting the cue (of these, note that only the Green treatment interaction is significant). The Reform treatment is not significant for any of the partisan groups, and it appears that all groups of partisans resisted the Reform Party cue (compared to their counterparts in the control group). For the second of these

two issues, the imports question, we again find insignificant effects for the Republican treatment and its interaction. However, the Green and Reform interactions are significant, and the direction of the effect is such that all of the partisan groups, with the exception of strong Democrats, are more likely to resist the cue (again, see Appendix Table A2 for these results). Finally, for the class action lawsuit, the partisan interactions did not enhance the model. All of the treatment dummies are in the expected direction, though only the Republican treatment is border-line significant and the substantive effect is very weak (See Appendix Table A1).

In sum, we find support for H1 in that the significant effects vary by party and across issues. We find mixed support for H2. While the partisan interactions improved two of the models, the direction of the effects is not always in line with expectations. Finally, we find mixed support for H3. While the effects of the treatments become more in line with expectations as the issues become more complex, the size of the substantive effect does not increase as the issues get more complex (See Appendix Tables A1 and A2).

Canada

In Canada, the results indicate support for H1, in that the usefulness of party cues varies across parties. Second, likelihood-ratio tests show that the partisanship interaction terms improved the model in three of the four cases – those of the three more difficult issues. This lends support to H2, that the effect of the treatments will be moderated by one's partisanship. Finally, we do not find support for H3, that the usefulness of the cues increases as issues become more complex. We now discuss the results in more detail.

Table 4 reports the ordered probit model results for the four Canadian issues. In the model of the easiest issue, same-sex marriage, only the Conservative treatment is correctly signed and significant, and it has the largest substantive effect (see Appendix Table A1). All of

the cues made respondents less likely to agree with changing the federal definition of marriage to allow for same-sex unions, although this is the position of only the Conservative Party. In the models that include interactions, each treatment is interacted with a variable that indicates the corresponding partisanship. Thus, each interaction should show the reinforcing effect of partisanship on receiving a cue, and the dummy variable the effect of receiving the cue for independents. For the services issue, the substantive effects presented in Appendix Table A1 show that the NDP cue and the NDP interaction both have significant effects and in the same direction; interestingly, NDP identifiers are persuaded by the cue, but independents are even more so. The effect of the Liberal cue is also substantively significant, and more so for Liberal identifiers, although the interaction term in the model is itself insignificant (see Table 4). For the Employment Insurance issue, the Conservative and NDP interactions are significant in the model but only the NDP interaction is correctly signed. The Conservative treatment dummy variable, however, is significant and correctly signed for the direction of the cue. Interestingly, the effect of the Conservative cue on Conservative partisans is the most substantial, but it pushes opinion in a more *liberal* direction. Finally, for the hardest issue, once again, the NDP interaction is correctly signed and just significant, and the direct effect of the NDP treatment also is just significant and signed in the same direction as the interaction term. In contrast, the Conservative interaction is significant but in the unexpected direction and the Liberal interaction is correctly signed, but not significant. Substantively, the NDP cue has the most effect, and the effect increases for NDP partisans, while the Conservative cue also has a significant substantive effect, although in the incorrect direction and more so for independents.

Thus, in Canada, we find support for H1 in that there was variance in the party labels that had the expected effects on opinion expression. The NDP cue had substantive effects in

accordance with expectations for three of the issues, while the Conservative treatment worked as expected for two of the issues. Quite interestingly, in only one case is the Liberal party cue a substantively useful heuristic for the formation and expression of political opinions.

In terms of our hypothesis about the moderating role of partisanship, we see only three cases in which partisans were substantively more influenced than independents by their party's cue, albeit in the wrong direction twice. Only once did the NDP cue have a stronger effect, in the expected direction, for identifiers than for independents. In no case does a Liberal interaction term have an expected effect in an ordered probit model that is statistically significant, but the substantive effect (see Appendix Table A1) is stronger for Liberal identifiers receiving the Liberal cue once. Conservative identifiers are substantively more affected by the Conservative cue twice, but not in the correct direction.

With respect to our third hypothesis – concerning the effectiveness of cues across easier and harder issues – we do not find clear-cut support for our expectation. The NDP party label is useful for the three more complex issues, and partisanship plays a conditioning role in these three cases as well. However, the size of the substantive effect of the cue does not increase as the issues become more complex. Furthermore, the Conservative cue is useful, on its own, for both the easy issue and the hard intermediate issue (for the latter, only among non-Conservative identifiers).

Mexico

Finally, turning to the Mexican data, the results again indicate support for H1, in that the usefulness of party cues varies across parties, with the PRI cue proving most useful. Second, the results are weak for H2, in that the likelihood-ratio tests show that the partisanship interaction terms improved the model in only two of the four cases, and in only one case is the interaction in

the expected direction (the PRI interaction for the most difficult issue). Finally, we do find some support for H3, that the usefulness of the cues increases as issues become more complex.

Turning to the effects for each issue, we find that the PAN and PRI cues are not significant predictors of issue stances for the easy issue, the death penalty. The PRD cue is significant in its interaction with PRD partisanship, but the result is exactly contrary to expectations: the few PRD supporters in the sample reacted to the prompt that the PRD opposes permitting the death penalty by supporting it to a significantly greater degree than the control group. For the two intermediate issues, the partisanship interaction terms did not improve the fit of the model and are therefore not included in the reported analysis. In these two cases we see that the PRI cue is significant, and in the expected direction for the Cuba issue and the War issue. Substantively, the effect of the PRI cue is greater for the second of these two cases (see Appendix Table A1). In the same models, the PAN cue is significant, but in a direction contrary to expectations. Last, for the most difficult issue, PR, the PRI treatment, when interacted with PRI partisanship, is significant and in the expected direction. The direct effect of the PRI cue (the effect of the cue among non-PRI identifiers) is also significant, and in the opposite direction to the interaction – suggesting that non-partisans select positions contrary to the PRI prompt. This effect is seen in Appendix Table A1, where PRIistas who receive the cue are shown to be significantly less likely to fall into the most liberal category (as expected), and similarly exposed independents are significantly more likely to do so. In this final model, we also see that the PRD cue on its own is significant, and in the expected direction.

In sum, the results support H1 in that the PRI party label is the most useful cue (significant three times in the expected direction on its own (albeit once just barely), and once in the expected direction when interacted with partisanship). We find more limited support for the

moderating role of partisanship, in that only two interactions are significant, and only once in the correct direction. Finally, with respect to the question of issue difficulty, the results provide some support our third hypothesis. In the Mexican case, party labels are more useful heuristic devices the more difficult the issue: no party cue is significant in the expected direction for the easiest issue, only one party label is significant in the expected direction for the two intermediate issues, and two of the three party labels are significant in expected directions for the most difficult issue.

Summary of Results

In sum, taken as a whole, these results provide support for our first hypothesis: party labels do not work as cues uniformly across countries. The traveling capacity of party labels as heuristic devices cannot be assumed. The effects are not always in the expected direction and both the substantive and statistical significance of the results are sometimes quite modest. Nor do the effects vary in obvious ways (e.g., by age of the democracy). Importantly, we also find variation within countries as well as across them. Some party cues are more useful overall, and some party cues influence preferences on some issues, while other parties have effects on other issues.

The results are mixed in terms of whether partisanship plays a moderating role. In Canada, party interactions enhanced three of the four models, lending support to H2. In the U.S., only in the case of the two intermediate issues did partisanship moderate the relationship, and some of the effects were opposite of expectations. Finally, in Mexico, the partisan interactions only enhanced two of the models, the easiest and the hardest cue, and only the latter effects were in the expected direction.

Lastly, we have mixed support for H3, that the cues would become more useful as issues become more complex. This hypothesis received fairly good support in Mexico, mixed support in the U.S., and no support in Canada.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

One thing is abundantly clear from our results: there is great variance in the utility of party labels across parties and party systems. In this section, we review each country's results in light of contextual issues which may be unique to each situation.

United States

In the U.S. case, our findings are somewhat opposite of expectations, in that the major party (Republican) cue appears to be less influential than the minor party cues. Though the Republican Party cue is from a very well-known party, it is only significant once, though the sign of the effect is more consistent than the minor parties. It is only for the class action lawsuit that the Republican cue influences preferences in the expected direction, though the effects are modest. The only case for which the cue is opposite of expectations is for the imports issue, in which Republicans in the treatment group resisted the party cue. However, the results are not even close to being significant. One potential reason for this latter finding is that Republicans are not completely cohesive on the trade issue.

However, while we find that the minor party cues are significant more often than the Republican cue, we also find that in most of these cases subjects *act against* the cues. For example, the Green treatment is significant but in the direction opposite of expectations for the abortion issue. For the imports issue, almost all partisan groups resisted the Green and Reform party cues, with the exception of strong Democrats (and these effects are not significant). The only case in which we find some persuasion for a minor party cue is the Green treatment for the

services issue, in which Republicans were more likely to express opinions in the direction of the cue, compared to their counterparts in the control group. However, Democrats receiving the treatment were more likely to resist the cue and express opposite opinions. One potential reason for Democrats being likely to resist the Green party cue is that it is not the party they identify with. Furthermore, the Democrats in our sample may have resisted the cue for this issue because Green party is generally perceived as being further to the left than the Democrats. Thus, there does seem to be a real difference between the major and minor parties in terms of how often their cues are accepted.

Canada

The Canadian findings provide some important insight into how parties themselves may affect the use of their label as a persuasive cue. The NDP treatment was the most persuasive cue in our study. This is not too surprising, as the NDP is the party most likely to present a clear ideological program for voters. However, it does run somewhat contrary to evidence that the NDP is the least well-known party in Canadian politics (Fournier 2002). While the Liberal Party is the best known party, being the party that has held office most often, the party's success is often traced to its ability to broker compromise amongst the various regions and demands of the country – in other words, to the party's ability to shun strong ideological stances and instead produce a political compromise. Thus, that the party label is as often confusing (leading to less certainty) as it is useful may be a reflection of the party's general lack of ideology and therefore informative role.

The Conservative party is a unique case. At the time the data were collected, the party had been in existence for four months and had just completed its first leadership convention. The party did not have (and in many ways still does not have) a clear policy program to persuade

voters. It is possible that our student subjects, who were unlikely to have had any previous voting experience, were unaware of the party's pedigree and thus the likely direction of its policy stances. That being said, we recognize that the one issue on which the Conservative Party's stance is clearest is same-sex marriage, and we find in our analysis of that issue, the cue has a significant, and expected, effect. This suggests that, at least in Canada, party cues may vary in their usefulness according to the party's clarity or prominence in a particular policy issue area, but not necessarily by complexity.

Mexico

Given that Mexico's competitive party system is a mere fledgling compared to the United States and Canada, it is quite interesting to find that the parties do have the capacity to act as heuristic aids. Mexico's one-party dominant state came to an end in 2000, with the victory of the PAN's Vicente Fox in that year's presidential election. Many scholars who examine party identification in Mexico have suggested that, at least prior to this year, individuals used a simple 'PRI, not PRI' heuristic (Estrada 2004). Vote choice, for example, was considered to be first and foremost a choice between the PRI and any other party (Domínguez and McCann 1996).

Our study, conducted in 2004, finds evidence that the PRI *is* a more useful party cue when it comes to the formation and expression of political opinions. We see that the center-left PRD acts as useful heuristic aids to a much lesser degree, and the PAN cue is never significant in our study in an expected direction. The PRD is a fairly new party, which formed after the 1988 presidential elections; the PAN dates back to the late 1930s, but only made real strides on the national political scene beginning in the 1990s. If the PRI is the catch-all party of old, the PAN, a party founded by conservative, Catholic, pro-business elites, is the catch-all party of new. The PRD has also drifted toward the center during its relatively brief existence, but less so than the

PAN. It is perhaps for these reasons, then, that the PRD label is somewhat more useful as a heuristic aid than the PAN label, but again, both are less useful than the PRI label.

CONCLUSION

We began this study with the intention of investigating the traveling capacity of party labels as heuristics. We found a great deal of variance in the usefulness of labels across parties and countries. That all cues were not equally useful has important implications for the quality of representation in political systems. If political parties are not useful aids in the formation of political opinions, they cannot help citizens to engage in issue-based voting behaviour; we thus may be more likely to witness a disconnect between what government does and what is in the interest of citizens.

We were also interested in discovering whether partisanship was a moderating factor in the persuasiveness of party cues. We found that partisanship often had a moderating effect, though sometimes in ways counter to our expectations.

Finally, our third hypothesis related to variation in the usefulness of cues with respect to issue complexity. Here we found that the results were very much context-specific. In Canada, there was no clear pattern to the use of party cues as the issues became more complex, but there was evidence that if a party's stances are very salient for a particular issue than that party's cue is more influential. In the U.S., there was mixed support for the role of issue complexity in the usefulness of cues, while in Mexico there was more support.

Our results suggest that party reputation matters in terms of the usefulness of cues. The main party we examined in the United States (the Republican Party) more often produced effects in the expected direction, compared to the minor parties. In Mexico, we also find that the best-known party was the most useful. In Canada, though, it is not the best-known party that is most

effective, but parties that are more ideologically cohesive, especially the NDP. Thus, differences in party reputation – and different aspects of party reputation (e.g., familiarity versus ideological cohesiveness) – appear to matter significantly. Furthermore, parties may have different reputations with respect to different issues, as suggested (but not discussed here in detail) by some of our findings. In future work, we plan to explore in greater detail the relationship between this multi-dimensional conception of “party reputation” and the usefulness of party labels as heuristics.¹⁰

We recognize that there are limitations to our study. First, our findings may be limited and/or constrained by our student subject population. Second, the findings across parties and party systems could, in part, be related to the issues that we selected. Third, the weak findings for issue complexity could be due to the fact that we used a variety of issues. To control for possible variation in party reputation across issues, we might pick one issue and vary the level of difficulty (specificity) of the question. Finally, we have only investigated one domain of decision-making, opinion persuasion. It could be that party labels are more consistently useful in other domains. We hope to explore these issues in future research by examining the influence of party labels on the likelihood of expressing an opinion at all, and on vote choice, in the general population and across different issue domains.

¹⁰ See Merolla, Stephenson and Zechmeister (2005) for an analysis of party reputation as a conditioning factor in the usefulness of party cues, with respect to a different dependent variable (certainty of opinion).

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Table 1. Experimental Design

Country (University)	Control	Parties of Varying Reputations		
U.S. (UC-Davis)	N=73	Republican N=64	Green N=79	Reform N=73
Canada (University of Western Ontario)	N=49	Conservative N=49	Liberal N=49	NDP N=49
Mexico (ITAM)	N=50	PRI N=50	PRD N=49	PAN N=49

Table 2. Issues Questions (by type and by country) and Direction of Prompts (with expected sign in parentheses)

Type of Issue	U.S.	Canada	Mexico
Easy	Prohibit abortion in all cases Republican: Support (-) Green: Oppose (+) Reform: Oppose (+)	Amend federal definition of marriage to allow same sex marriage Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Support (+) NDP: Support (+)	Permit the death penalty for extreme cases PAN: Oppose (+) PRI: Support (-) PRD: Oppose (+)
Easy Intermediate	Decrease services and spending Republican: Support (-) Green: Oppose (+) Reform: Support (-)	Reduce spending on social services Conservative: Support (-) Liberal: Oppose (+) NDP: Oppose (+)	Condemn human rights violations in Cuba PAN: Support (+) PRI: Oppose (-) PRD: Oppose (-)
Hard Intermediate	Place more limits on imports Republican: Oppose (-) Green: Support (+) Reform: Support (+)	Change Employment Insurance Act (status for seasonal workers) Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Oppose (-) NDP: Support (+)	Diminish legal limits to prosecute crimes of war PAN: Support (+) PRI: Oppose (-) PRD: Support (+)
Hard	Limit class action law suits and move many from state to federal courts Republican: Support (-) Green: Oppose (+) Reform: Oppose (+)	Support creation of Office of Ombudsman for Older Adult Justice Conservative: Oppose (-) Liberal: Support (+) NDP: Support (+)	Eliminate proportional representation in Congress PAN: Oppose (+) PRI: Support (-) PRD: Oppose (+)

*The sign in parentheses reflects the anticipated effect once the variables are recoded such that higher values indicate more liberal responses.

Table 3. Effectiveness of Party Cues in Opinion Determination, Ordered Probit Results, United States

	Easy Issue: Abortion	Easy Intermediate Issue: Services	Hard Intermediate Issue: Imports	Hard Issue: Class Action
Republican Treatment (T)	-0.112 (0.222)	0.445 + (0.323)	0.019 (0.338)	-0.322 + (0.231)
Green Treatment	-0.426 ** (0.204)	-0.452 * (.273)	0.143 (0.277)	0.099 (0.216)
Reform Treatment	-0.095 (0.213)	0.086 (0.286)	0.037 (0.295)	0.178 (0.215)
PID	-0.104 * (0.058)	-0.277 *** (0.078)	0.175 ** (0.082)	-0.090 + (0.058)
Republican T * PID		-0.079 (0.100)	0.005 (0.103)	
Green T* PID		0.194 ** (0.093)	-0.191 ** (0.096)	
Reform T*PID		0.020 (0.093)	-0.180 * (0.096)	
Ideology	-0.170 ** (0.084)	-0.073 (.077)	0.017 (0.082)	0.108 + (0.084)
Female	-0.035 (0.152)	0.048 (0.146)	0.464 *** (0.150)	-0.230 + (0.158)
White	0.004 (0.154)	-0.251 * (0.146)	0.163 (0.151)	-0.076 (0.160)
_cut1	-2.572 (0.328)	-2.913 (0.348)	-0.808 (0.328)	-2.335 (0.386)
_cut2	-1.989 (0.315)	-1.757 (0.317)	0.316 (0.321)	-0.913 (0.306)
_cut3	-1.744 (0.312)	-1.271 (0.311)	1.299 (.330)	0.270 (0.301)
_cut4	-1.077 (0.304)	0.219 (0.304)	2.910 (0.393)	1.666 (0.324)
N	243	240	221	196
Pseudo R ²	.065	.111	.054	.021
LR chi2 (10, 11)	41.44	74.45	32.91	10.43
Prob > chi2	.000	.000	.000	.166

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

Note: Treatment/Party ID interactions are included only for those models where their inclusion improved the fit of the model (based on a log-ratio test, p<0.10).

Table 4. Effectiveness of Party Cues in Opinion Determination, Ordered Probit Results, Canada

	Easy Issue: Same-Sex	Easy Intermediate Issue: Services	Hard Intermediate Issue: EI	Hard Issue: Ombudsman
Liberal Treatment (T)	-0.240 (0.229)	0.891 *** (0.310)	0.213 (0.323)	0.211 (0.347)
Conservative Treatment	-0.873 *** (0.228)	0.068 (0.253)	-0.349 + (0.257)	-0.185 (0.272)
NDP Treatment	-0.168 (0.234)	0.961 *** (0.248)	-0.157 (0.250)	0.409 + (0.264)
Liberal PID	-0.453 + (0.288)	-0.354 (0.281)	-0.045 (0.302)	0.028 (0.303)
Cons. PID	-0.574 + (0.388)	0.528 + (0.404)	-0.811 ** (0.417)	-0.217 (0.453)
NDP PID	-0.086 (0.388)	-0.688 ** (0.345)	-0.206 (0.368)	0.206 (0.380)
Liberal T * Lib. PID	.	0.107 (0.391)	-0.101 (0.419)	0.079 (0.445)
Cons. T * Cons. PID	.	0.510 (0.482)	1.110 *** (0.493)	1.326 ** (0.535)
NDP T * NDP PID	.	1.584 *** (0.565)	2.036 *** (0.610)	1.084 + (0.679)
Ideology	0.056 (0.079)	-0.003 (0.080)	0.034 (0.082)	-0.071 (0.084)
Female	0.474 *** (0.167)	-0.345 ** (0.168)	0.098 (0.179)	0.098 (0.186)
_cut1	-1.974 (0.367)	-0.549 (0.338)	-1.791 (0.380)	-2.157 (0.421)
_cut2	-1.305 (0.357)	0.447 (0.338)	-0.697 (0.356)	-1.060 (0.373)
_cut3	-1.005 (0.355)	0.801 (0.341)	0.168 (0.352)	0.451 (0.366)
_cut4	-0.428 (0.352)	1.911 (0.358)	1.660 (0.378)	1.968 (0.400)
N	195	193	172	161
Pseudo R ²	0.06	0.11	0.05	0.05
LR chi2 (10, 11)	34.75	66.11	24.01	18.45
Prob > chi2	0.061	0.000	0.013	0.05

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

Note: Treatment/Party ID interactions are included only for those models where their inclusion improved the fit of the model (based on a log-ratio test, p<0.10).

Table 5. Effectiveness of Party Cues in Opinion Determination, Ordered Probit Results, Mexico

	Easy Issue: Death Penalty	Easy Intermediate Issue: Cuba	Hard Intermediate Issue: War	Hard Issue: PR
PAN Treatment (T)	0.063 (0.256)	-0.283 + (0.217)	-0.302 + (0.228)	0.196 (0.262)
PRI Treatment	0.188 (0.237)	-0.275 + (0.215)	-0.397 * (0.222)	0.425 * (0.239)
PRD Treatment	0.201 (0.233)	-0.133 (0.218)	-0.175 (0.223)	0.519 ** (0.236)
PAN PID	-0.819 *** (0.241)	0.408 ** (0.208)	-0.193 (0.214)	-0.018 (0.246)
PRI PID	-1.082 *** (0.252)	-0.058 (0.217)	-0.015 (0.222)	0.352 + (0.249)
PRD PID	-0.332 (0.343)	-0.183 (0.275)	0.296 (0.286)	0.256 (0.351)
PAN T * PAN PID	0.082 (0.408)	.	.	0.022 (0.423)
PRI T * PRI PID	-0.561 (0.465)	.	.	-1.183 *** (0.451)
PRD T * PRD PID	-1.573 *** (0.608)	.	.	-0.629 (0.572)
Ideology	0.016 (0.074)	0.014 (0.072)	0.010 (0.074)	-0.088 (0.076)
Female	-0.232 + (0.159)	0.106 (0.154)	0.314 ** (0.158)	0.405 ** (0.161)
_cut1	-1.451 (0.328)	-1.229 (0.315)	-1.917 (0.343)	-1.023 (0.322)
_cut2	-0.468 (0.318)	-0.532 (0.309)	-1.172 (0.322)	-0.048 (0.322)
_cut3	-0.236 (0.317)	0.106 (0.309)	-0.317 (0.317)	0.508 (0.322)
_cut4	0.481 (0.317)	1.227 (0.316)	0.735 (0.317)	1.577 (0.331)
N	196	0.02	0.02	185
Pseudo R ²	0.08	195	190	0.04
LR chi2 (11)	45.38	12.28	9.13	21.55
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.140	0.017	0.028

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

Note: Treatment/Party ID interactions are included only for those models where their inclusion improved the fit of the model (based on a log-ratio test, p<0.10).

Appendix A: Substantive Effects

Table A1. Predicted Substantive Effects (First Differences) of Cues on the Probability of Falling into the Most Liberal Category on that Issue, Given Varying Values of Partisanship

	Easy	Easy-Intermediate	Hard-Intermediate	Hard
<i>United States</i>				
Rep. Cue – for Independents	-0.043	See Table B	See Table B	-0.021
Green Cue – for Independents	-0.162	See Table B	See Table B	0.012
Reform Cue – for Independents	-0.033	See Table B	See Table B	0.018
<i>Canada</i>				
Lib. Cue – for Liberal Identifiers		0.049*	0.022	0.023
Lib. Cue – for Independents	-0.074	0.037*	0.036	0.023
Cons. – for Cons. Identifiers		0.093	0.078*	0.113*
Cons. Cue – for Independents	-0.311*	0.017	0.024*	0.163*
NDP Cue – for NDP Identifiers		0.362*	0.051*	0.365*
NDP Cue – for Independents	-0.052	0.401*	0.056*	0.286*
<i>Mexico</i>				
PAN Cue – for PAN Identifiers	0.027			0.041
PAN Cue – for Independents	0.018	-0.053	-0.102	0.028
PRI Cue – for PRI Identifiers	-0.023			-0.093*
PRI Cue – for Independents	0.062	-0.055	-0.129*	0.076*
PRD Cue – for PRD Identifiers	-0.159*			-0.014
PRD Cue – for Independents	0.067	-0.030	-0.059	0.099*

* significant at $p \leq 0.10$

Note: We used Clarify to calculate these first differences. Numbers in cells are based on the models presented in Tables 3-5. In models without interaction variables, we calculate these first differences by moving the treatment (cue) variable from its minimum (0) to maximum (1) value while holding all party identification variables constant at zero; thus, these first differences apply to those in the reference group, Independents, though the results are not significantly different if we were to examine the effects of these cues for any of the three partisan identification groups. In the models with party identification interactions, we also move the relevant interaction term from its minimum to maximum value (0 to 1) for those cases where we examine a party identifier (i.e., where that partisanship variable takes on the value of 1). In all cases, female and ideology are held constant at their maximum and mean values, respectively; in the United States models, we also hold white constant at its maximum value.

Table A2. Additional Predicted Substantive Effects of Cues on the Probability of Falling into the Most Liberal Category, with Partisanship Held at Different Values

Easy Intermediate Issue: Services			
	Republican Cue	Green Cue	Reform Cue
Strong Democrat	.154	-.119*	.027
Weak Democrat	.107	-.057	.028
Lean Democrat	.064	-.011	.026
Independent	.031	.019	.021
Lean Republican	.012	.037	.016
Weak Republican	.002	.046	.011
Strong Republican	-.002	.049*	.007
Hard Intermediate Issue: Imports			
	Republican Cue	Green Cue	Reform Cue
Strong Democrat	.003	.008	.002
Weak Democrat	.003	-.002	-.007
Lean Democrat	.004	-.014	-.018
Independent	.005	-.030*	-.033*
Lean Republican	.007	-.051*	-.053*
Weak Republican	.010	-.078*	-.080*
Strong Republican	.015	-.112*	-.113*

* significant at $p \leq 0.10$

Note: This table is an extension of Appendix Table A1. Here we show first differences, estimated using Clarify, for the three treatments (cues), given varying values of partisanship. Ideology is held constant at its mean, and female and white are held constant at their maximum values.