

Party Cue Inference Experiment

January 10, 2017

Research Question and Objective

Our overarching goal for the project is to answer the question: when and how do political parties influence public opinion? One part of our answer to that question has been the idea that citizens might infer more from a party endorsement than merely the affective attachment they have to that party. That is to say, citizens may use prior knowledge that they have about political parties to draw inferences about a policy's content and implications. This argument is relatively widely believed but has never been substantiated. In this experiment we therefore aim to examine what kinds of inferences citizens draw about policy proposals when they are endorsed by particular political parties. We thus answer the question: what do citizens infer about policies from partisan endorsements?

Design

The design is straightforward. We will expose citizens to policies that vary in their specificity (high versus low) and in the partisan sponsor of the policy (party or no party).

In response to a very brief policy description, respondents will be asked for their qualitative, open-ended thoughts about a policy. This will be repeated for three different policies (fully randomized). Our intention is to compare several outcomes across conditions:

1. Response times to the thought listing
2. The length of the thought listing
3. Coded cognitive complexity of the thought listing
4. The qualitative content of inferences

We expect more thoughts about specific policies, longer response times, and greater complexity. We also expect that the qualitative content of thoughts will vary significantly across partisan sponsors, with more specific inferences about particular reputational features (issue ownership, issue positions, values, groups, etc.) in the partisan than non-partisan conditions. We suspect there may be partisan differences between Democratic and Republican (and independent) respondents in terms of their schema about the parties (e.g., focusing on ideology versus groups), but we do not have explicit predictions about what those differences will be.

The design will be piloted in the United States using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Thus we will focus on two parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. We will then implement a more or less identical study in Denmark using all political parties. The (US) design is a 2x3 factorial as follows; noting that in the "partisan" conditions respondents will receive a mix of Democratic- and Republican-sponsored policies and the specific/abstract factor is completely between-subjects:

	No partisan sponsor	Partisan sponsor condition	
		Democratic sponsor	Republican sponsor
Specific policy	1	2	3
Abstract policy	4	5	6

The Danish design will have the same rows, but one column per party. We need to decide on the precise list of Danish parties given the complexity of the party system. In the nonpartisan condition, we explicitly do not ask respondents to guess the party source for fear that this might color their subsequent responses to the open-ended questions (i.e., leading them to see policies in a partisan light and to believe that party is the focus of the study).

It is hard to assess the necessary sample size for this design given that the outcome is primarily qualitative. As such we will aim for approximately $n=100$ per cell for a total of $n=600$ respondents and 1800 respondent-issue data points. We will quota sample on MTurk to ensure partisan balance (1/3 Republicans, 1/3 Democrats, 1/3 Independents). We assume approximately 25% of respondents will say little or nothing in responses to the open-ended prompts, leaving us with approximately 70-80 respondent-policy data points (per partisan respondent group) per cell.

Some possible follow-ups to this design include:

- Manipulation of partisan versus accuracy motivation prior to exposure to policies, with the expectation that the kind and amount of inferences are affected by motivations.
- Manipulation of party reputations by priming particular reputational features prior to exposure to cues, with the expectation that the content of inferences will qualitatively vary according to the salience of particular reputational features.
- Single party cue versus competing party cues, with the expectation that contrasting (polarized) or aligned party cues may enable citizens to use their understanding of the lines of political conflict within a party system to draw further inferences about the content and implications of a policy.

Questionnaire

[ADD TIMERS TO EVERY PAGE/QUESTION]

[IN QUALTRICS FLOW: ADD EMBEDDED DATA FIELD “workerId”]

[BEGIN]

Today we ask you to participate in a short study in which you will be asked some questions about yourself, asked to write some of your thoughts about various materials we present, and finally answer some additional questions.

Please confirm your Amazon Mechanical Turk WorkerID below:

[FREERESPONSE BOX PREPOPULATED WITH workerId FROM EMBEDDED DATA FIELD]

[ADD QUALTRICS META/BROWSER INFORMATION ITEM TO FIRST PAGE]

[PAGE BREAK]

[DEMOGRAPHICS]

What is your age in years?

[TEXT BOX; VALIDATE AS NUMBER 0 to 120]

[PAGE BREAK]

Are you male or female?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to answer

[PAGE BREAK]

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school degree

High school degree (Grade 12 or GED)

Technical, trade, or vocational school after high school

Some college

Four-year college degree

Advanced degree (MA, PhD, MD, JD, etc.)

[PAGE BREAK]

Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Independent, or Republican?

Strong Democrat

Weak Democrat
Independent leans Democrat
Independent
Independent leans Republican
Weak Republican
Strong Republican

[PAGE BREAK]

[BRANCH BASED ON PRIOR ANSWER]

How important is being a [Democrat | Republican | Independent] to you?
Extremely important
Very important
Moderately important
Not very important
Not at all important

[PAGE BREAK]

To what extent do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements?

[GRID]

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

[ONE STATEMENT PER ROW]

I would prefer complex to simple problems
I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally
I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems
I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve
I find satisfaction deliberating long and hard for hours

[PAGE BREAK]

[RANDOMLY ASSIGN TO ONE VERSION OF EACH OF THE THREE ISSUES; IN RANDOM ORDER; RESPONDENTS MUST BE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO EITHER A NON-PARTISAN CONDITION OR A PARTISAN CONDITION WITH RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EXPOSURE TO CUES FROM EITHER PARTY]

[ISSUE 1]
[ABSTRACT]

Imagine that an economic policy has been proposed [by the Democratic Party |by the Republican Party|-].

[SPECIFIC]

Imagine that an economic stimulus policy has been proposed [by the Democratic Party |by the Republican Party|-] to create a substantial number of new jobs over the next two years.

[ISSUE 2]

[ABSTRACT]

Imagine that a change to welfare policy has been proposed [by the Democratic Party |by the Republican Party|-].

[SPECIFIC]

Imagine that a change to welfare policy has been proposed by [by the Democratic Party |by the Republican Party|-] that would provide more generous benefits to single parents with multiple children.

[ISSUE 3]

[ABSTRACT]

Imagine that a tax policy has been proposed [by the Democratic Party | by the Republican Party|-].

[SPECIFIC]

Imagine that a tax policy has been proposed [by the Democratic Party | by the Republican Party|-] that replaces the tax code with a flat income tax where everyone pays the same tax rate regardless of their income.

[ALL, AFTER EACH STATEMENT]

Given this information, please write all the thoughts that come to mind about this policy. List as many thoughts as you have about what the policy might involve and what consequences the policy might have.

Please be as detailed as you can, and take as much time as you need.

[PARAGRAPH TEXT BOX]

[PAGE BREAK]

To what extent do you oppose or support this policy?

Strongly oppose

Moderately oppose

Somewhat oppose

Neither support nor oppose

Somewhat support

Moderately support

Strongly support

[AFTER LAST ISSUE]

We would like to hear more of your thoughts about this final policy.

Please again imagine that [INSERT LAST POLICY STATEMENT]

What groups in society do you think will benefit from this policy?
[PARAGRAPH TEXT BOX]

What groups in society do you think will be harmed by this policy?
[PARAGRAPH TEXT BOX]

[ADD NUDGE TO WRITE TEXT IF SUBMITTING BLANK ANSWER]

[PAGE BREAK]

As a final question, we would like to hear just a few more thoughts about this policy.

Please again imagine that [INSERT LAST POLICY STATEMENT]

What political values or principles do you think this policy would advance?
[PARAGRAPH TEXT BOX]

[ADD NUDGE TO WRITE TEXT IF SUBMITTING BLANK ANSWER]

[PAGE BREAK]

[IN NONPARTISAN CONDITION ONLY]

For each of the three policies you thought about earlier, do you think each policy is likely to be sponsored by the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

[GRID]

[SHOW ALL THREE POLICIES]

Democratic Party
Republican Party
Not sure

[PAGE BREAK]

To what extent do you oppose or support each of the following policies?

[GRID]

[INSERT THREE POLICY STATEMENTS, ONE PER ROW]

Strongly oppose
Moderately oppose
Somewhat oppose

Neither support nor oppose
Somewhat support
Moderately support
Strongly support

[PAGE BREAK]

[POST-TREATMENT MEASURES]

Which point on this scale best describes your political views?

Very liberal
Moderately liberal
Slightly liberal
Moderate
Slightly conservative
Moderately conservative
Very conservative

[PAGE BREAK]

In general, how interested are you in politics and public affairs?

Very interested
Moderately interested
Somewhat interested
Slightly interested
Not at all interested

[PAGE BREAK]

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not – is it the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?

President
Congress
Supreme Court
Don't know

[PAGE BREAK]

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?

They cannot override
1/3
1/2
2/3
3/4
Don't know

[PAGE BREAK]

Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington prior to the 2016 elections?

Democrats

Republicans

They were tied

Don't know

[PAGE BREAK]

Would you say that one of the major parties is more conservative than the other at the national level? If so, which party is more conservative?

Democrats

Republicans

Neither

Don't know

[PAGE BREAK]

How many members of the U.S. Supreme Court are there? Write your answer in the space provided below.

[TEXT BOX; VALIDATE AS NUMBER]

[PAGE BREAK]

Some people have opinions about almost everything; other people have opinions about just some things; and still other people have very few opinions. What about you? Would you say you have opinions about very few things, some things, many things, or almost everything?

Very few things

Some things

Many things

Almost everything

[PAGE BREAK]

Compared to the average person, do you have far fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, somewhat fewer opinions, about the same number of opinions, somewhat more opinions, or far more opinions?

Far fewer opinions

Somewhat fewer opinions

About the same

Somewhat more opinions

Far more opinions

[PAGE BREAK]

Some people say it is important to have firm opinions about lots of things, while other people think it is better to remain neutral on most issues. What about you? Do you think it is better to remain neutral on most issues or to have firm opinions about lots of things?

Remain neutral

Firm opinions

[PAGE BREAK]

[DEBRIEFING]

Thank you very much for your participation in the survey. Please note that the materials you read in today's studies were created by the researchers and do not necessarily reflect current policies or positions on those issues.

Please feel free to share any thoughts about the survey in the space below.

[TEXT BOX]

Please click >> below to submit the survey and receive your confirmation code.

[REDIRECT TO CUSTOM REDIRECT; DISPLAY RANDOM CHARACTER STRING]