The Simplest Shortcut of All: Sociodemographic Characteristics and Electoral Choice

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Voters' decision criterion of last resort is their similarity to candidates or party leaders. Most normative theories would denigrate this form of reasoning. But the recent argument that voters can make up for information shortfalls by employing heuristics seems to require that the most poorly informed respond to these characteristics if they are to make anything other than a random decision. In this article I test the hypothesis that increasing dissimilarity of sociodemographic characteristics from a political figure (e.g., party leader) decreases a voter's expected utility from the election of that person. Secondarily, I ask whether decreases in a voter's store of policy information will necessitate greater reliance—a tendency to "fall back"—on this similarity/dissimilarity criterion. I draw on survey data from two Canadian federal elections with adequate variation in party leader characteristics. A model of vote choice is estimated by conditional logit. *All voters* are found to respond negatively to increasing sociodemographic distance from party leaders, net of partisanship, economic retrospections, policy, and uncertainty. Voters equipped for policy voting do not ignore these characteristics, and voters without policy information do not respond more strongly to their similarity or dissimilarity to party leaders.

Models of voting behavior nearly always include sociodemographic variables measuring characteristics of voters. One persuasive and enduring conceptualization is that many voters think that candidates and party leaders who share a voter's characteristics are more likely to act in that person's interest when in office. Yet this form of reasoning has been denigrated from a normative point of view as an irrational last resort of the ill-informed (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). More recently, though, it has been portrayed as a "shortcut" that might compensate for a lack of information on candidates' policy positions. That is, voters who do not gather enough policy information or do not have opinions on the issues fall back on "demographic cues" (Popkin 1991, 63–4). Committed optimists might even suggest that the poorly informed could partially close the gap with the better informed if the latter ignore these simple shortcuts because they are less accurate than policy voting.

The revisionist approach maintains that citizens with different levels of sophistication or information use different raw material in their decisions or combine decision criteria in different ways. Sniderman, Glaser, and Griffin (1991), for example, show that better educated voters make comparative assessments

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of presidential candidates, while the less educated focus on the incumbent alone. An even more basic criterion for the poorly informed voter is the degree of obvious social or demographic similarity between that voter and party leaders or political candidates. The argument of the optimistic revisionists therefore requires confirmation of the hypothesis to be tested here: to the extent that voters lack the prerequisites for policy voting the voters will default to their sociodemographic similarity to candidates and leaders. If, instead, all voters use these cues equally but only the better informed use policy, the latter would appear to make political decisions that more closely conform to their preferences over outcomes (Althaus 1998; Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). This would not mean, however, that shortcuts are ineffective; only that shortcuts do not shrink the gap in the quality of political choices.

Demographic Cues, Shortcuts, and Information in Voting Decisions

The first element of the revisionist argument is borne out with respect to sociodemographic shortcuts: many analysts of survey data have found that, all else equal, persons with a given characteristic prefer candidates or leaders with that characteristic. Women are more likely than men to vote for female candidates (Bendyna and Lake 1994; Cook 1994; Dolan 1998; Huddy 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Plutzer and Zipp 1996; Tolleson Rinehart 1992). And in the United States, black candidates are more strongly supported by black voters (Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz 1995; Tate 1993; Terkildsen 1993). Most of these results, however, emerge from experiments or from extremely low-information contexts, mainly U.S. House races. Dolan even suggests that in higher information contexts "voters will rely less on heuristic cues such as gender and engage in more 'sophisticated' voting" (1998, 286). Two studies in higher information contexts, examining party leader gender in the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, have found only a weak and inconsistent preference among women for parties led by women (Banducci and Karp N.d.; O'Neill 1998). In the U.S., Lewis-Beck and Rice (1983) found a "favorite son" geographic effect in presidential voting.

Some experimental research has attempted to understand the psychological mechanisms generating the phenomenon (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Yet most often the subjects are undergraduates responding to highly stylized "descriptions" of candidates. Sigelman and her colleagues conclude one such study by urging "caution about extrapolating from these experimental findings to actual political contests, where candidates are likely to be more multidimensional, voters are likely to perceive a greater personal stake in the outcome, and [party identification] has the potential to overshadow other considerations, including racial and ethnic ones" (Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz 1995, 260–61). Moreover, most studies, both experimental and using survey research, deal with one sociodemographic attribute at a time.

A second element of the revisionist argument suggests that the use of heuristics is especially important for poorly informed voters. The most prevalent kind of shortcut documented so far is substantive cue taking from trustworthy political figures (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Smith and Squire 1990), groups (Lupia 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991), extra-political intervenors (Johnston, Blais, Nevitte, and Gidengil 1996), or "experts" (Zaller 1992). Although cue taking is simple, Lupia (1994) shows that it still requires moderate attention and cognitive resources, and does not extend all the way down the information continuum to the least informed who do not receive or remember the cue-giver's signal. A more complex possibility is the use of stereotypes to estimate ideology (McDermott 1997, 1998), but this also seems unlikely for unsophisticated citizens given their "innocence of ideology" in the first place (Kinder and Sears 1985). Those with very low levels of attention, information, and sophistication would seem to have few shortcuts available to them, except for sociodemographic similarity.[1]

Gathering information on candidates' and parties' issue-positions and coming up with an opinion of one's own is obviously a more costly activity than observing (or hearing about) the characteristics of candidates and party leaders (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991). Accordingly, knowledge about candidate characteristics is probably more evenly distributed than the notoriously skewed distribution of policy information (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Converse argued as much when commenting on John F. Kennedy's Catholicism: "Once Kennedy was nominated, this additional item of information was diffused through almost the entire population with a speed that is rare and that, we suspect, would be impossible for more complex contextual [i.e., factual or policy] information" (1966, 238).

Given the wide variation in political information and sophistication, many authors have argued that voters with different sets of facts, and different abilities to deal with them, make up their minds in different ways (Alvarez 1997; Bartels 1996; Ferejohn and Kuklinski 1990; Iyengar 1990; Krause 1997; Krosnick 1990; Lupia 1994; Rivers 1988; Sniderman, Glaser, and Griffin 1991). For this purpose, the predominant methodology is to interact each of the regressors in a vote-choice model—representing decision criteria—with a measure of political information, sophistication, or expertise. The baseline expectation is that interaction terms will be positive, indicating that a particular opinion or

[1] Some authors, including Popkin (1991; see also Rahn, Aldrich, Borgida, and Sullivan 1990) portray partisanship as a shortcut, but I ignore that literature here. In the U.S., where voters are primarily voting for *candidates*, any secondary information, such as party, can be called a shortcut to estimate that person's legislative behavior. In parliamentary systems like Canada's, voters are best depicted as choosing among parties. Party position is the *primary* information for which shortcuts, such as the leader's sociodemographic characteristics, are relevant. In a parliamentary system, partisanship is therefore a standing decision in and of itself rather than a shortcut used to estimate the positions of candidates, since the latter's links to policy outcomes come almost exclusively through their party.

evaluation is used more strongly by the better informed. Some nonpolicy shortcuts, however, might be more important for the poorly informed. In the realm of economic voting, for example, Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt conclude that studies of the impact of personal economic conditions "are generally interpreted as indicating that personal experience serves as a default source of political information, to be relied upon only in the absence of more abstract, national-level information" (1996, 254).

In order to evaluate the consequences of "the uneven social distribution of political knowledge in a population" (Althaus 1998, 545), we need to know, among other things, whether there are shortcuts used more heavily by those on the low end of this distribution. To do so, this paper proceeds in four stages. First, I argue that sociodemographic distance is a likely criterion for electoral choice and that those lacking issue opinions and knowledge of the parties' locations on the issues will be more heavily dependent on it. Next, I present a simple model of the voting decision with which it is possible to test the hypothesis; I then discuss the data and estimation. Third, the model is estimated on the full sample of voters, undifferentiated by the prerequisites for policy voting. Last, the restriction of informational homogeneity is removed. The results show that the "fall back" theory is too simple, that voters without the prerequisites for policy voting do not avoid issues entirely, they just use relatively "easy" ones (Carmines and Stimson 1980); and that better informed voters are not above responding to the sociodemographic characteristics of party leaders.

Sociodemographic Distance in Voting Decisions

It has been a staple of practical electoral politics that voters notice and respond to the most obvious characteristics of candidates for office (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983). Popkin summarizes the implicit voter psychology in a chapter titled "Going Without Data": "Demographic facts provide a low-information shortcut to estimating a candidate's policy preferences . . . Characteristics such as a candidate's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and local ties are important cues because the voter observes the relationship between these traits and real-life behavior as part of his daily experience" (1991, 63). A more precise account is provided by Johnston, Blais, Brady, and Crête, who argue that "it is entirely reasonable to ask how much like oneself the potential agent is. The more an agent resembles oneself the more he or she might be expected reflexively to understand and act on one's own interests . . . we might reasonably prefer leaders who embody our own demographic characteristics" (1992, 169). I adopt the term *sociodemographic distance* to describe the degree of similarity between two persons—in this case, a voter and a candidate or party leader.

A more sophisticated, indirect mechanism is proposed by McDermott (1997), who shows that candidate gender in U.S. House races is not a direct indicator for self-interested voters but rather is an informational cue to "estimate the

views of the candidate." She concludes that "a demographic candidate characteristic—gender—can affect the vote as a social information cue, much like party identification operates as a political information cue . . . demographic variables may function in a similar way" (281–82). Further, she found that ideological stereotyping of female candidates activates ideological voting more strongly among low-information than high-information voters.

The general psychological model of the voter's decision to be employed in this analysis is agnostic as to the relative strength of these two mechanisms; both suggest that sociodemographic characteristics *of the electoral alternatives* should influence voters over and above the usual determinants. From there, my expectations about heterogeneity begin with a strong Downsian assumption. In an ideal policy-voting world, a voter would have perfect information about her own preferences on policies, party positions, the degree to which each party or candidate would act in all possible policy areas, and the degree to which policy positions predict action in office. However, none of these conditions is likely to obtain, even in the clearest of single-issue campaigns (Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Craig 1993; Lacy and Paolino 1998; Lipset and Schneider 1987). In general, to the extent that the conditions for policy voting do not hold, voters ought to fall back on shortcuts to judgment.

Theories in political psychology also converge on the expectation that sociodemographic cues will be used more heavily by the less informed. In symbolic politics theory, the weight given to "automatic" "affective responses" to politicians' group affiliations declines with motivation and the raw material necessary to deliberate (Sears 1993; Sears, Huddy, and Schaffer 1986). The "Impression-Driven Model of Candidate Appraisal" (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989), as well as "Political Information Processing" models (Wyer and Ottati 1993), suggest that the initial evaluation of a person consists of categorization on sociodemographic characteristics. Better informed, more attentive voters will update these evaluations "on-line" with more raw material, so the initial categorization, or stereotype, should be less influential than for the less well informed (Hastie and Park 1986).

While these theories seem to provide clear expectations, studies of political memory suggest otherwise. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) and Lau (1986) discovered that better educated respondents gave a higher proportion of personal relative to policy information on open-ended like/dislike questions. McGraw and Steenbergen followed this up with an experimental study that found "non-sophisticates were more likely to recall policy information over personal information" (1995, 29). Both, however, used a more expansive definition of "personal" information (e.g., Clinton plays the saxophone) than obvious sociodemographic characteristics. Even if non-sophisticates have more personal than policy items in memory, no study has found that they have *more* policy information than non-sophisticates. The latter are still more likely to fall back on whatever personal information they have because they are relatively less prepared for policy voting.

Just as there will be variation across voters in the tendency to use sociodemographic cues, their use will vary from campaign to campaign. They are likely to be stronger influences for new, unknown personalities than for long-serving prime ministers or presidents. Campaigns will differ in the extent to which identities are politicized: they should be more powerful when there is wide variance in sociodemographic characteristics that map onto prominent electoral cleavages and when, for one reason or another, policy issues do not come to the fore.

Contrast, for example, the 1988, 1993, and 1997 Canadian elections. In 1988, the issue of free trade with the U.S. was preeminent, and the three major party leaders were all middle-aged males from central Canada (Johnston, Blais, Brady, and Crête 1992). Conversely, in 1993, issues were not as prominent, the party leaders were all fighting their first election as leader, three were male and two female, three were English and two French, one was overtly religious, and they hailed from various regions of the country. Again in 1997, government performance was as much of an issue as one could find, two English-Canadian party leaders were new, and those leaders were from very different parts of the country than their predecessors. This article, then, uses data from the latter two Canadian elections, electoral contexts where the use of sociodemographic cues is likely to be found in high relief.

Hypotheses, Data, and Measures

The first proposition to be tested here is:

Increasing dissimilarity (distance) between a voter and a party leader on easily observed sociodemographic attributes will decrease the voter's expected utility to be derived from the government formed by that party leader, all else equal.[2]

The second proposition follows on the first:

The influence of social-distance calculations increases as the prerequisites for policy voting (opinionation and party placement) decrease.

Previous work on shortcuts and heuristics has used information, or even more crudely, education, as the interactive quantity to test hypotheses about heterogeneity across voters (Alvarez 1997; Sniderman, Glaser, and Griffin 1991). The assumption is that political information is a requirement for policy-oriented voting. I simply add another necessary condition: that voters must have opinions themselves (see Butler and Stokes 1969). Thus, where others speak of

[2] For the remainder of the article I refer to party leaders because my data come from Canada. This should not be taken to restrict the theory; the discussion so far has included both "candidate" and "party leader" to emphasize that these features of voter psychology are for the most part generalizable across institutional contexts.

an "information effect" (e.g., Bartels 1996), I use the rather awkward terms "preparedness," "prerequisites," or "preconditions" for policy voting. This nomenclature sacrifices snappiness to describe the quantity in question: the voter's relative need to fall back on nonpolicy criteria.

Testing these two propositions requires a model of vote choice that can accommodate *characteristics of the choices available to the voter*—specifically, the sociodemographic characteristics of the party leaders. The conditional logit model has this property (McFadden 1974). As Alvarez and Nagler argue, "Conditional logit is 'conditional on the characteristics of the choices' . . . the spatial model *requires* conditional logit since the spatial model is based on positions of voters relative to parties" (1998, 66). The same applies to party leaders' characteristics. Following Alvarez and Nagler's notation, the model specifies that the i^{th} individual's expected utility U_{ip} from the p^{th} party (since each voter faces four parties in this study) is given by:

$$U_{ip} = \beta(|L_i - L_p|) + \theta(|C_i - C_p|) + \psi_j a_i + u_{ij}$$

where:

L_i and L_p are vectors of the Locations of the individual and the party on relevant political issues. For each individual for each party, the term in parentheses therefore resolves to the distance between the voter and a party on a given issue.

C_i and C_p are vectors containing a set of easily identifiable sociodemographic Characteristics of individual voters and party leaders. For each individual for each party, the term resolves to the distance between the voter and a party leader on a sociodemographic characteristic.

a_i is a vector of characteristics of the individual not indexable with respect to parties (e.g., partisanship, government economic performance assessments, prior behaviors, or other sociodemographic characteristics).

u_{ij} is an error term.

The parameters of the model to be estimated are β, a vector of coefficients on each issue applicable to all parties; θ, a vector of coefficients on each sociodemographic distance characteristic applicable to all parties; a matrix of J by a coefficients $(\psi_1, \psi_2, \ldots, \psi_J)$ for each of the individual-specific characteristics (a_i) where J is the number of alternatives (though most of these party-specific variables are restricted to one party). The conditional logit model specifies the u_{ij} as drawn from a type-I extreme value distribution, uncorrelated across choices and individuals (McFadden 1974).[3]

[3] Conditional logit imposes the assumption known as independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA), which estimation by multinomial probit (MNP) avoids (Alvarez and Nagler 1998). I attempted to estimate the full model with policy-voting prerequisites interactions using MNP in LIMDEP. The model failed to converge. The restricted model (analogous to the results presented in Table 1) was estimable. It produced very similar estimates of the parameters. The estimates of error

In order to test the second, the "fall-back," proposition I interact each of the distance variables L and C with voters' degree of policy-voting preparedness, giving an extra column of coefficients corresponding to a stacked column of β (issues) and θ (sociodemographic distance), representing the policy-voting preparedness effect for each of the distance variables.

This model allows for a test of both propositions. According to the first, the coefficients θ should be negative, indicating decreasing utility as sociodemographic distance increases. The second proposition entails that the interaction coefficients should be negative for issue distances and zero or positive for sociodemographic distances (given a significantly negative main effect). Negative interaction coefficients would indicate that as policy-voting preparedness goes up, the criterion is more important, while positive coefficients indicate it is cancelled out. A strong form of proposition two, necessary to conclude that the poorly prepared *make up for* their shortcomings by using criteria ignored by the better informed, requires positive interaction coefficients on the sociodemographic variables.

This study uses survey data drawn from the Canadian Election Studies (CES) of 1993 and 1997.[4] The 1993 general election in Canada presented each voter outside of Quebec with four viable parties, a relative rarity in single-member-district (non-PR) systems. In 1997, the same four parties were major players, all receiving more than 15% of the popular vote in most regions of the country. More important, in both elections, the parties had leaders with varying sociodemographic characteristics: mother tongue, place of origin, gender, and religious affiliation (see Appendix A). Because the model requires substantial variation in these characteristics, the two elections are pooled in one data set.

The analysis is restricted to voters outside of Quebec. Nearly every analysis of vote choice in Canada estimates separate models for Quebec (Clarke, Jenson, LeDuc, and Pammett 1991; Johnston, Blais, Brady, and Crête 1992). I estimated the model for Quebec alone, which revealed that electoral choice

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correlations across different specifications of the error covariance matrix gave wildly varying, substantively nonsensical, and for the most part statistically insignificant results (details available on request). The general tenor of the correlations was similar to that reported by Alvarez, Nagler, and Willette (1999), including a very high correlation between the Conservative and New Democratic parties and between the Liberal and Reform parties in some runs. The absurdity of these pairs being "lumped together" casts doubt on claims about the substantive interpretability of the error correlations.

[4] Data from the 1993 and 1997 Canadian Election Studies were provided by the Institute for Social Research, York University, Canada. The surveys were funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), grant numbers 411-92-0019, 421-92-0026, 412-96-0007. The study investigators were, in 1993, Richard Johnston, André Blais, Henry Brady, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Neil Nevitte; and in 1997, Blais, Richard Nadeau, Gidengil, and Nevitte. Neither the Institute for Social Research, the SSHRC, nor the study investigators are responsible for the analyses and interpretations presented here. Full details of the survey, including all procedures and response rates, are published in Northrup and Oram (1994) and Northrup and Oram (1998).

there was virtually unaffected by policy and sociodemographic distance. All turned on opinion on sovereignty (secession). Including Quebec in an all-Canada model did not affect the substantive inferences.[5]

The variables used to predict vote choice in these elections include party identification, economic retrospections, party uncertainty, issue distances, and sociodemographic distances.[6] The economic retrospections apply only to the choice of the governing Conservative and then Liberal parties in 1993 and 1997, respectively. They are three separate one-year retrospections of the impact of "the policies of the federal government" on the respondent's family and province and on the country as a whole.[7]

Three variables are specific to the Reform party. The first is the voter's choice in the constitutional referendum a year earlier, to control for negativity toward the three "established" parties (1993 only).[8] The second is the respondent's position on whether "society would be better off if more women stayed at home," to control for traditional values and for policy-related voting on women's issues in order that the effect on the gender distance part of the model is not exaggerated.[9] The third is the mean within the respondent's province on the question "what are the Reform party's chances of winning in your riding (electoral district)" (from 0 to 100). Because Reform was stronger in western Canada, strategic voting is likely to covary with the geographic distance from Reform's leader, who came from Alberta. This control is required to avoid an upward bias on the geographic distance coefficient.

For similar reasons, I include a variable measuring the degree of the voter's uncertainty about the policies of each party, since voters have consistently been shown to be uncertainty averse (Bartels 1986; Enelow and Hinich 1981).[10] An uncertainty measure is also necessary to avoid inflating the geographic dis-

[5] It did reduce the ratio of coefficients to standard errors significantly. This was particularly true for the sociodemographic coefficients due to the lack of variation in language, region, and gender of the leaders of the two parties (Liberal and BQ) that received the lion's share of the vote in that province.

[6] Some authors do not include PID in vote choice models outside the U.S. because it is thought to be confounded with vote choice, though it is nearly always included in Canada. I employ a dummy variable for partisans of each party, derived from only the first question asking if a respondent "thinks of" themselves as a partisan, but not the follow-up, which asks if they "feel closer" to a given party. Omitting PID predictably gives stronger results on the coefficients of interest.

[7] They are coded −2, "much worse"; through 0, "no effect"; to 2, "much better."

[8] The referendum voting question is coded 1 for a Yes vote, 0 for all others.

[9] This variable was included for all parties in an initial estimation, producing coefficients for the other parties that were statistically indistinguishable from zero. It is a Likert scale from 2, "strongly agree" to −2, "strongly disagree." Don't knows are coded as the midpoint in order to retain the respondents in the estimation sample.

[10] The variable is, for each party, the number of issues on which the voter could not place the party, from 0 to 7 (thus including other issues that did not figure prominently in the campaign and which are therefore not included in the estimation). Note that this variable measures *uncertainty about each party* and is independent of the general measure of opinionation and party placement that measures the respondent's possession of the prerequisites for policy voting.

tance effect since voters in an area where a party is strong can be expected to know more about that party.

Party-voter distances on policy issues include the most prominent policy areas in the two campaigns (Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil, and Nadeau 2000):

National Unity/The Quebec Question
1993 & 1997: how much should be done to promote the French language, or how much should be done for Quebec (split half experiment 1993, "Quebec" in 1997)

Fiscal Policy
1993: deficit reduction
1997: level of taxation—to be increased or decreased

The Goods and Services Tax (GST)
1993: position on the issue
1997: anger over the Liberals' broken promise to "kill the GST"

Party locations are defined for the fiscal policy (deficit) and French/Quebec issues as the mean placement of each party by the knowledgeable nonpartisans in the sample.[11] The usual practice is either to assign each party the average location attributed to it by the full sample or use each individual's attribution of parties' locations (Erikson and Romero 1990). But the former reduces the variance in the locations dramatically because respondents who do not know where the parties stand simply guess or use the easy response, "about the same." On the other hand, using each respondent's own estimate of party positions inflates the estimates of policy voting through assimilation and contrast effects (see Granberg 1993). In a four-party context with very uneven partisanship, the bias from assimilation and contrast may be quite severe. Any sociodemographic effect from leaders could leak into attributions of parties' policy positions, causing policy coefficients to steal some of the explanatory power from the sociodemographic cues.

The compromise position is to take responses much less contaminated by partisanship and ignorance, using the mean placement of the parties by the most knowledgeable half of nonpartisans. This places the parties in positions on each policy dimension that accord very well with media and elite discourse

[11] For parties, the deficit variable runs from 2, deficit would get much bigger; through 0, same/don't know; to −2, deficit would get much smaller. For respondents, deficit location is the sum of responses to "if you HAD TO, would you cut spending in the following areas A LOT, SOME, or NOT AT ALL? Welfare, Pensions, Health Care, Unemployment Insurance, Education, Aid to Developing Countries." On each question 2 = A lot, 1 = Some, 0 = DK/Refused, −1 = Not at all. The responses were averaged and the sign inverted to create a scale running from cut everything (−2) to cut nothing at all (1). On the party placements, I code don't knows as the neutral, status quo option because these are only used to get the party positions, and coding the don't knows as the status quo will reflect the ambiguity in party positions, pulling mean positions of the parties toward zero as don't knows increase.

during the campaigns.[12] The distance (the independent variable) is the absolute value of the difference between party and voter positions. The underlying assumption is that the issue space is symmetric and voters are indifferent to the direction of the difference between their positions and party positions.[13]

Party positions on the GST cannot be defined similarly because the questionnaires did not ask for parties' locations on a continuum. In 1993, respondents' position on the GST is a simple support/oppose dichotomy. Party positions are the PCs supporting, Reform indifferent, and the other three parties opposing it. In 1997, anger at the Liberals' promise to eliminate the GST gives the angry a positive distance from the government and no distance from the other parties.[14]

It is important to point out that the estimates presented here give only one set of coefficients for these issues applying to both elections, despite the probability that the effects of the same issues differ across elections. Estimating separate coefficients for the two elections did improve the fit of the model but only indicated that some of the issue and sociodemographic distances were somewhat more important in one election than another. This relaxation of the model also created serious multicollinearity, preventing a test of proposition 2. I present only the pooled 1993–1997 results.

The following sociodemographic distances are included in the model: gender, place of origin and/or current geographic affiliation,[15] language, and religion.[16] The locations of the party leaders on these variables are specified a priori (see Appendix A). The gender and first language of the leaders are ob-

[12] The positions are:

Party	1993 Fiscal Policy	1997 Fiscal Policy	1993 Quebec	1997 Quebec
PC	.14	−.60	.29	.51
Liberal	.45	.24	.34	.79
NDP	.88	.33	−.06	−.10
Reform	−.48	−.75	−.88	−.89

(Note that question form was not identical in the two surveys, so the numbers cannot be compared by party across elections, but the relative positions of parties can be compared across elections.)

[13] Other representations of "distance" are possible. The most commonly used is the quadratic form. That definition produced estimates statistically inferior (poorer fit) to, and substantively indistinguishable from, those presented here based on absolute values of the distances. On the assumption of symmetry see Lewis and King (1998) and Johnston, Fournier, and Jenkins (2000).

[14] This is not the typical fashion of setting up issue distances, but it is equivalent to the analyst or reader taking prior expectations to the interpretation of results on individual-specific issue opinion variables in the equation for each party in the traditional, nonconditional model for multiparty vote choice. I simply impose this expectation a priori; if it is not correct, the coefficient will be zero.

[15] In Canada, regional conflicts continue to be so salient that it is reasonable to assume that a party leader's regional affiliation is an "easily observed" characteristic. Using the only survey that asked a direct question, Schwartz (1974) reports that in 1965 only 15% of respondents said they did not know "which part of the country Mr. _____ is closest to" for the two major party leaders.

[16] Age was also available, but the variation in party leaders' ages was small.

jective measures that need no justification. For religion, Jean Chrétien (Liberal) and Jean Charest (Progressive Conservative, 1997) are Catholic; Kim Campbell (PC, 1993) is Protestant; Manning (Reform) is Protestant and coded as very religious; and McLaughlin (NDP, 1993) and McDonough (NDP, 1997) are nonreligious. Voters get a distance measure of 1 if they are not of the same denomination as the party leader. Those with no religion have a distance of 0 from the NDP, 1 from the PC and Liberals, and 2 from Reform.[17] On the geographic dimension, voter-leader distances are more finely coded, running from 0 for people living in the same sub-provincial region (city) as the leader, to 3 for those on the other side of the country (see Appendix A). While these can be questioned, they are at least explicitly specified as one variable, rather than appearing as place-of-residence dummy variables whose interpretation is inevitably ambiguous, as is the standard practice in electoral research (Alvarez and Nagler 1998; Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau, and Nevitte 1998; Miller and Shanks 1996).

To test proposition 2, the policy and sociodemographic distances are interacted with a measure of the respondent's general preparedness for policy voting. Since these conditions are both necessary, I use a multiplicative measure consisting of the number of "don't know" or "haven't thought much about it" responses to questions about where the parties stand, multiplied by the degree of "opinionation" on policy.[18] These variables are scaled to the unit interval before the interaction.[19] A person who has positions on issues but fails to place the parties on any of the issues, or a person who has no personal opinions but places the parties, would have a score of 0 (i.e., $1 * 0$ or $0 * 1$, respectively). I believe this measurement is more faithful to a theory that involves the prerequisite conditions for policy voting, and thus "falling back" on sociodemographic cues, than the more commonly used measure of general political information or policy knowledge.[20]

[17] This latter distance is a subjective specification meant to measure Reform's perceived religiousness. It must be justified within the theory as an easily observable characteristic of the party leader. Coverage of the Reform party emphasized its appeal to Protestants in the West, its "family values" rhetoric, and the leader's family heritage. While this coding decision conflates religion and religiosity, using those quantities separately would violate the assumption that the characteristic is easily observable. Manning was the only leader for whom both were obvious.

[18] The degree of opinionation is measured by summing across issues. For "how much should be done for Quebec" the coding is: "about the same" = 0, any directional opinion or refused to answer = 1, don't know = −1. For the deficit and GST questions, having any opinion, even stability, is coded 1, with don't know responses coded −1. Note that this variable is not party specific, unlike the uncertainty measure. The impact of specific non-opinionation is captured through the standard coding of don't knows on an issue as the same distance from all parties on that issue (see text).

[19] Empirically, this measurement is far superior to either component separately. Both provide results in the same direction as the specification used here, however.

[20] However, using a 10-item factual knowledge measure (which has performed very similarly to one developed from the U.S. National Election Studies; Cutler and Berinsky 1998), the results are very similar to the ones presented in Appendix B and Figure 1 (details available on request). The one difference is that the interaction on language is nonsignificant using a knowledge-only interaction.

Results

Table 1 presents the results for the test of the first proposition, without interactions from policy knowledge. The table confirms the influence of the factors expected to have driven voting in these two elections: partisanship, retrospective evaluations of government economic performance, the GST, the "Quebec question," and fiscal policy. The coefficients on the variables of interest, *gender*, *region*, *language*, and *religion*, measure the impact of sociodemographic distance from party leaders, net of policy, economics, and party identification.

The results for *gender*, *region*, and *language* are strong and precise in the expected (negative) direction. The *religion* of party leaders, a less prominent and less salient characteristic, appears to have no effect for voters. The logit coefficient in a conditional logit model translates into probabilities through the values for all other variables for all parties, so it is useful to present first differences in expected probabilities given changes in an independent variable. Table 2 does this for *gender* and *language*, for voting in the 1993 contest, with mean values for variables not mentioned.

As the coefficient and first differences indicate, Canadians were less likely to support a party whose leader was of the opposite sex. In the example in Table 2, all else equal, men are 8% more likely to support the Liberals or Reform ((54 + 22) − (48 + 20)), while women are 8% more likely to prefer the Conservatives or NDP ((21 + 11) − (16 + 8)). This effect encompasses two elections, with little correlation between a female leader and party ideology, as well as one party (PC) switching from a female to a male leader over the two elections.

Voters also appear to be employing the language cue. The Reform party may have succeeded in priming this dimension of evaluation when it suggested in 1997 that Canada should reflect on choosing "Quebec-based leaders," a euphemism for "French-speaking" or even "Québecois." The last two rows of the table indicate that the strategy may be useful outside of Quebec. If the Conservative and Liberal leaders had been, respectively, French and English rather than English and French in 1993, the Conservatives would have done significantly worse, and the Liberals even better than their landslide victory.

The geographic distance between a voter and party leader has a strong effect on electoral choice. The consequences are more strikingly illustrated in Table 3. Just as Alvarez and Nagler (1998) do for issues, I simulate outcomes when leaders come from a different part of the country than their real origin or affiliation—with all other characteristics of respondents and parties unchanged. Each respondent's geographic distance from each leader is altered to correspond to an hypothetical scenario where the PC leader is from Ontario, the Liberal leader from BC, the NDP leader from Saskatchewan, and the Reform leader from New Brunswick. Predicted vote shares are then calculated for each party, based on the coefficients in Table 1. The large differences apparent in the rightmost four columns in Table 3, especially in a positive direction in

TABLE 1

Conditional Logit Estimates Vote Choice Outside Quebec, 1993 and 1997 Canadian Elections

Independent Variables	(range of variable)	
Party-Specific Constants (vs. PC as reference category)	Liberal Constant	**0.80** (0.09)
	NDP Constant	**−1.16** (0.12)
	Reform Constant	**−0.63** (0.20)
Variables Specific to One Party (vs. no PID)	PC PID (0,1)	**2.18** (0.10)
	Liberal PID (0,1)	**1.87** (0.09)
	NDP PID (0,1)	**3.10** (0.14)
	Reform PID (0,1)	**3.10** (0.20)
Variables Specific to the Gov't (relative to all other parties)	Personal Econ. (−2 to 2)	**0.47** (0.09)
	Provincial Econ. (−2 to 2)	**0.27** (0.09)
	National Econ. (−2 to 2)	**0.43** (0.09)
Variables Specific to the Reform Party (vs. all others)	Women at Home (−2 to 2)	**0.15** (0.03)
	Charlottetown Yes (0,1)	**−0.27** (0.12)
	Local Chances (0–100)	**0.02** (0.01)
Party-Voter Issue Distances	Fiscal Policy (0 to 4)	**−0.47** (0.06)
	GST (0 to 4)	**−0.14** (0.02)
	Québec/French Canada (0 to 4)	**−0.23** (0.04)
Leader-Voter Socio-Demographic Distances	Gender (0,1)	**−0.21** (0.05)
	Region (0 to 3)	**−0.22** (0.05)
	Language (0,1)	**−0.53** (0.10)
	Religion (0 to 2)	−0.06 (0.05)
Uncertainty About Party	Party Uncertainty[a] (0 to 7)	**−0.28** (0.04)
	N	4271
	Final Log Likelihood	−3,383

Table entries are conditional logit coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses below. Bold indicates coefficient estimate is more than 1.96 times its standard error. For the last three sections (distances and uncertainty), coefficient estimate applies to all parties.

[a]Note this is *not* the policy preparedness variable. It is a party-specific measure of the respondent's ignorance about each party's policy positions.

TABLE 2

Effect of Sociodemographic Distance from Voters to Leaders (1993)
Predicted Vote Probabilities (%)

Voter Characteristics (bold indicates voter and leader share characteristic)	PC	Liberal	NDP	Reform
Gender (Protestant, Ontarian, English)				
Male	16	**54**	8	**22**
Female	**21**	48	**11**	20
Language (Catholic, Male, Manitoban)				
French	7	**74**	4	15
English	**13**	50	**8**	30
French if Liberal leader English and PC leader French	**15**	59	5	21
English if Liberal leader English and PC leader French	6	**65**	6	23

Predictions calculated from estimates in Table 1.

leaders' simulated new homes, demonstrate that Canadians are very sensitive to the geographic affiliation of party leaders. As Popkin argues, "Particularly on distributive issues—which neighbourhood to tear up for a highway, where to put the toxic-waste dump, where to build a prison, an airport, or a park, whether to allow offshore drilling, where to disburse patronage—localism may be an effective orientation for the voter to use in trying to predict a legislator's preferences" (1991, 64). Whether or not this instrumental interpretation is correct, the finding here can be viewed as a confirmation, and a generalization, of the well-trodden "friends and neighbors" or "favorite daughter or son" effect (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983).

The insignificant result on *religion* is not surprising. Religion has not been an important way of categorizing Canadian leaders for at least a half-century. The denomination of the leaders was obvious only in the case of the francophone leaders' Catholicism, and none of them were outwardly religious. In a different context, such as the 1960 U.S. presidential election or in many European party systems, religious 'distance' would likely play bigger a role in electoral choice.

"Falling Back"?

Which voters are using these cues? Is it those who lack opinions and information on criteria better suited to making a rational voting decision? Estimates are relegated to Appendix B in favor of graphs in Figure 1 of the estimated coefficients (bold lines) and standard errors (vertical bars) across the range of policy-voting preparedness. Figure 1's seven graphs correspond to three issues (panels A–C) and four party leader characteristics (panels D–G). A downward sloping line, as is evident in the top two panels (fiscal policy and GST), indi-

TABLE 3

Predicted Vote Shares by Province 1993 & 1997, Real and Simulated Leader Origins

Simulated Origins:
Progressive Conservative (PC)—Ontario; Liberal (LIB)—BC;
New Democratic Party (NDP)—Sask.; Reform (REF)—New Brunswick

	1993 Model Prediction				1993 Simulated				Difference: Simulated - Real			
Province	PC	LIB	NDP	REF	PC	LIB	NDP	REF	PC	LIB	NDP	REF
NF	22%	65%	5%	8%	20%	64%	5%	11%	−2%	−1%	+0%	+3%
PE	22%	65%	6%	7%	23%	63%	5%	10%	+1%	−2%	−1%	+3%
NS	23%	51%	15%	11%	23%	49%	14%	14%	+0%	−2%	−1%	+3%
NB	21%	55%	6%	18%	21%	51%	5%	24%	+0%	−4%	−1%	+6%
ON	24%	50%	9%	17%	24%	52%	8%	16%	+0%	+2%	−1%	−1%
MB	25%	38%	16%	21%	24%	43%	17%	17%	−1%	+5%	+1%	−4%
SK	25%	34%	17%	23%	21%	41%	20%	18%	−4%	+7%	+3%	−5%
AB	25%	26%	7%	42%	21%	41%	8%	30%	−4%	+15%	+1%	−12%
BC	24%	31%	16%	29%	14%	51%	14%	21%	−10%	+20%	−2%	−8%
Total	24%	42%	11%	23%	21%	49%	10%	19%	−3%	+7%	−1%	−4%
	1997 Model Prediction				1997 Simulated				Difference: Simulated - Real			
Province	PC	LIB	NDP	REF	PC	LIB	NDP	REF	PC	LIB	NDP	REF
NF	30%	44%	17%	10%	30%	45%	10%	15%	+0%	+1%	−7%	+5%
PE	30%	49%	14%	7%	33%	47%	9%	12%	+3%	−2%	−5%	+5%
NS	28%	42%	19%	11%	30%	40%	11%	18%	+2%	−2%	−8%	+7%
NB	33%	42%	12%	12%	34%	37%	7%	22%	+1%	−5%	−5%	+10%
ON	24%	49%	13%	14%	29%	47%	10%	14%	+5%	−2%	−3%	+0%
MB	26%	36%	17%	20%	28%	39%	17%	16%	+2%	+3%	+0%	−4%
SK	19%	35%	20%	27%	18%	39%	23%	20%	−1%	+4%	+3%	−7%
AB	21%	27%	8%	44%	21%	36%	9%	34%	+0%	+9%	+1%	−10%
BC	15%	35%	17%	34%	13%	47%	14%	25%	−2%	+12%	−3%	−9%
Total	22%	40%	14%	23%	24%	43%	12%	20%	+2%	+3%	−2%	−3%

cates that those with the prerequisites for policy voting were more strongly affected by distance from the parties on that criterion.

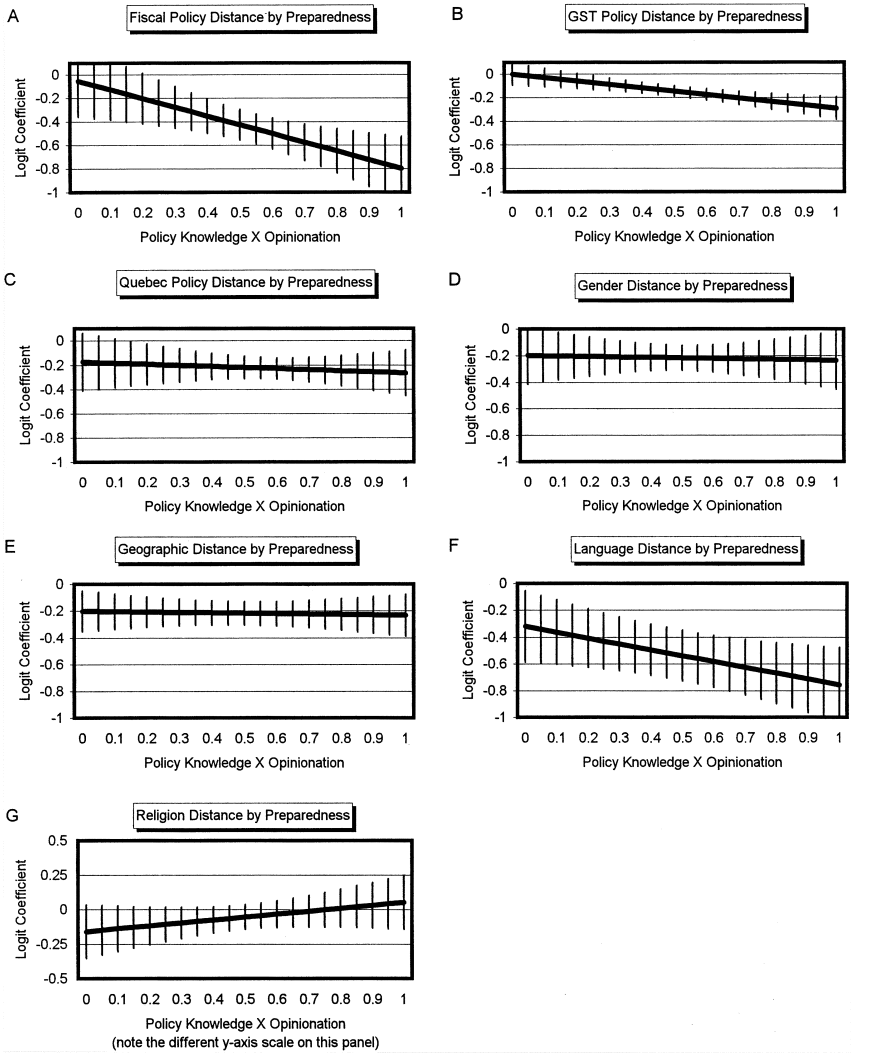
First, it is useful to ask whether there is an improvement in model fit by removing restrictions to accommodate varying decision criteria. The standard likelihood-ratio test for nested models indicates that we should reject the hypothesis that all voters use policy and sociodemographic distances equally in their voting decisions.[21]

[21] The restricted model's log-likelihood is −3382.94, while the log-likelihood in Appendix B is −3370.42, giving $\chi_{(6)}^2 = 25.04$, which would be observed randomly less than once in 2,500 trials. I also investigated the possibility of interaction between policy preparedness and partisanship or economic retrospections. Neither resulted in significant effects.

FIGURE 1

Coefficients and Standard Errors for Policy and Social Distances by Policy Preparedness

(Coefficient plotted by dark line, 95% confidence intervals as vertical bars)



The first three panels of Figure 1 (A–C) show that those who can place the parties on policies and who have opinions themselves are more strongly influenced by policy distances. Furthermore, the slope of the lines corresponds to

the complexity of the issue. Fiscal policy is a "harder" issue than the GST, so the use of the former is more strongly mediated by policy knowledge (Carmines and Stimson 1980). Even easier, "how much should be done for Quebec," unlike the economic issues, was used by even the least informed and only slightly more heavily by the best informed. In fact, the latter "issue" can be conceived not so much as an issue in this sense, but rather as a "communal orientation" (Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau, and Nevitte 1998). Overall, the results on policy provide yet more evidence on the nearly common-sense proposition that information and opinionation are necessary conditions for policy voting.

Of greater interest are panels D through G. The second, the "fall back," proposition does not fare well. On *gender* and *region* the effect is constant across levels of policy preparedness. The *language* distance exhibits a pattern opposite of that expected, the best prepared for policy voting use the leaders' language more heavily, though the effect is still strong for the least prepared. Only on *religion*, where the effect is slight and of dubious statistical significance, is the sociodemographic cue weaker among the best informed. Nonetheless, it is clear that voters unequipped to use policy criteria did attend to the characteristics of the party leaders. They did not, however, depend on them more heavily than their more sophisticated counterparts.[22,23]

Discussion

Research on specific sociodemographic characteristics has found that the most basic facts about candidates for office affect voters' judgments. This study suggests that citizens respond to these characteristics in a very simple way and generalizes it to multiple characteristics and multiple party leaders. The response is just as strong among those who use policy criteria in their calculus as it is among those voters who do not. Although it is fair to say that the latter do, in fact, fall back on these simple cues, this strategy does not compensate for an inability to engage in policy voting. Policy voters are also sociodemographic voters—they use *both* criteria. This conclusion resonates with the argument of Sniderman, Glaser, and Griffin (1991) that more sophisticated voters do not transcend the use of shortcuts such as their affective orientations to parties—they simply combine more decision criteria in a broader and deeper net than the less well informed.

[22] Thus far, the interaction has been portrayed as linear, but I estimated the model with dummy-variable interactions representing low, middle, and high policy preparedness groups. No significant nonlinearity was detected.

[23] What about the possibility that because the better informed use more criteria, more strongly, the decisions of the poorly informed are *relatively* more powerfully influenced by the sociodemographic distances? Comparison of changes in predicted probabilities for low- and high-information voters indicates that *gender* and *region* are not more influential for the uninformed (results available on request).

The findings of this article also converge with work by Johnston, Blais, Nevitte, and Gidengil (1996), Bartels (1996), Berinsky (1997), Althaus (1998), and Alvarez (1997), arguing that "low-information rationality" is not the great equalizer for the expression of preferences in democracies. It is possible, nonetheless, to put an optimistic spin on the results presented here. If the best-informed voters are as close to ideal citizens as is practical given the current state of institutions in mature democracies, then the fact that even they rely on sociodemographic cues for electoral choice suggests that there is a reasonable basis for the use of this simple criterion. Some normative theories of political representation suggest that certain interests common to a recognizable social group can only be satisfactorily represented at the elite level by members of that group—a "mirror" or "descriptive" theory of representation. Given the uncertainty faced by voters, it may be rational, even sensible, to hedge one's policy bets by going with a party whose leader has similar characteristics. Surely, though, one should not be overly optimistic about this kind of political reasoning. At least some of the effect must be due to stereotyping and even prejudice.

This study really leaves open the question of exactly what psychological mechanism is driving the use of demographic similarity as a criterion for voting. It may be a behavioral consequence of stereotyping of out-group members (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Riggle, Miller, and Shields 1997; Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz 1995). Prior to receiving any substantive or observational information about a politician, voters a priori attribute more desirable *traits* to one who is a member of the voter's sociodemographic group (Fiske 1998). Men, for example, would simply begin their evaluation of a female leader with lower estimates of her competence than a male leader. Another possibility is that voters are indeed making a rational calculation that the candidate/leader will be more likely "reflexively to understand and act on one's own *interests*" (my italics) (Johnston, Blais, Brady, and Crête 1992). Citizens likely exhibit a combination of both approaches. Assessing their relative importance seems a fertile ground for further research. It should be possible to divide the candidate/leader attributes presented to respondents in political surveys into two categories: one that depends more on stereotypes and another that captures responsiveness to the voter's needs or interests.

At the level of party strategy, this general phenomenon has been recognized and acted on for a long time. The choice of a running mate in U.S. presidential elections, regional balance in party lists in PR systems, and parties' choice of leaders atypical of their partisan base are all strategic decisions that have implicitly taken account of this feature of voters' behavior (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983). Understanding these strategies is an important part of understanding the game played by parties, yet most attention has been paid to parties' jockeying in policy space (e.g., Downs 1957; Hinich and Munger 1994; Kollman, Miller, and Page 1992).

It remains to take this element of voter psychology to the formal representation of the intra- and inter-party game where the goal is to choose the ideal

party leader or nominee, in addition to choosing the ideal point in issue space. Policy space may be the more interesting territory for formal modeling and computer simulation, but the raw stuff of voter psychology mandates attention to simple, easily observed characteristics of candidates and party leaders. Models of party and electoral behavior have just begun to accommodate the altogether simple psychological phenomenon demonstrated here.

Appendix A
Leader Geographic Distances

Leader (year & party)	Origin or Affiliation	Distance From Voter in NF	NS	PEI	NB	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	Home City
Campbell ('93 PC)	BC/Ottawa/ Vancouver	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	.5	0
Chrétien ('93 & '97 Liberal)	Quebec/Ottawa/ Shawinigan	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	0
McLaughlin ('93 NDP)	North/West/ Yukon	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	0
Manning ('93 & '97 Reform)	Alberta/ Calgary	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	.5	1	0
Charest ('97 PC)	Quebec/ Sherbrooke	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	0
McDonough ('97 NDP)	Nova Scotia/ Halifax	1	.5	1	1	2	3	3	3	3	0

Appendix B
Estimates of Unrestricted Model with Policy Preparedness Interaction

(The estimates provide the basis for the graphs in Figure 1)

Independent Variables		
Liberal Constant	**0.820**	(0.089)
NDP Constant	**−1.153**	(0.118)
Reform Constant	**−0.656**	(0.201)
PC PID	**2.189**	(0.098)
Liberal PID	**1.879**	(0.094)
NDP PID	**3.083**	(0.137)
Reform PID	**3.101**	(0.202)
Personal Econ. (federal gov't impact)	**0.446**	(0.086)
Provincial Econ. (federal gov't impact)	**0.270**	(0.093)
National Econ. (federal gov't impact)	**0.439**	(0.087)
Women@Home (Reform vs. all others)	**0.158**	(0.030)
Charlottetown Yes (Reform vs. all others)	**−0.251**	(0.125)

Appendix B *continued*

Independent Variables		
Local Chances (Reform, Provincial Mean)	**0.018**	(0.006)
Fiscal Policy	−0.051	(0.157)
Fiscal X Policy	**−0.746**	(0.267)
GST	0.002	(0.048)
GST X Policy	**−0.291**	(0.085)
Québec/French Canada	−0.173	(0.122)
Québec/French X Policy	−0.091	(0.199)
Sex	−0.197	(0.109)
Sex X Policy	−0.038	(0.198)
Region	**−0.201**	(0.078)
Region X Policy	−0.030	(0.131)
Language	**−0.318**	(0.137)
Language X Policy	**−0.438**	(0.203)
Religion	−0.161	(0.099)
Religion X Policy	0.213	(0.177)
Party Uncertainty	**−0.275**	(0.040)
Final Log Likelihood	−3370.42	
Number of Observations	4271	

Conditional logit estimates, standard errors in parentheses.
Bold indicates coefficient is at least 1.96 times the associated standard error.

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