

WHO RELIES ON PARTY LABELS IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN MONTREAL AND QUEBEC CITY?

Cameron Anderson
University of Western Ontario

Michael M^cGregor
Ryerson University

In this study we draw upon the results of a survey experiment to determine if and how the availability of party labels affects the ability of survey respondents to report for whom they plan to vote in municipal elections. We employ data from the Canadian Municipal Election Study, and consider survey responses from over 2,200 voters in Montreal and Quebec City, the two largest cities in the Province of Quebec. We compare the effects of the availability of party labels between mayoral and council elections, and between the two cities. In addition to estimating the share of the population that relies upon party cues when formulating vote preferences, we identify several factors associated with such reliance. In particular, we find that political awareness and partisanship moderate the effect of the availability of party information upon the ability to state a vote intention. The results of this study serve to highlight the effect of parties in Canadian municipal elections, and in low information elections more generally.

Paper prepared for delivery at the CMES Conference: Montreal and Quebec in Focus,
June 19, 2018, Montreal, Qc.

A large body of work demonstrates that levels of political knowledge among democratic electorates are not particularly high (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Fournier 2002). Such low levels of information can conceivably pose problems for the quality of collective electoral decisions, at least in the absence of cues that might aid in decision making processes. This may be particularly problematic in low visibility and low information contests such as municipal elections. One way in which voters in such elections can make vote decisions, however, is through drawing on the presence of party labels, when available.

There is an extensive literature that documents the value of party cues as informational shortcuts (Rahn 1993, Huckfeldt et al. 1999, Kam 2005, Ray 2003). These cues can be particularly useful in environments where there is little information, or where that information is difficult to find, as voters seek ways to simplify decision making. Party labels provide information on the ideology and policy preferences of candidates. Of relevance to elections in Montreal and Quebec (our focus here), which have ever-changing party systems, the power of party cues in shaping vote choice has been demonstrated in many new democracies, which have relatively weak party histories (Conroy-Krutz, Moehler and Aguilar 2016; Brader and Tucker 2012). At the same time, there is research which suggests that basing vote decisions on partisan information can help voters make good decisions, even when they are relatively uninformed. Lau and Redlawsk (1997) argue that partisan cues can improve the “correctness” of vote decisions. That is, the authors suggest that reliance on party cues can increase the likelihood that voters will choose the same candidate they would if they were fully informed about the policy stances of the candidates.

The central questions we consider here are (1) to what extent do voters rely on party cues when expressing vote preferences in a partisan municipal election setting, and (2) what factors are associated with such reliance? While most municipal contests in Canada are conducted in the absence of political parties and the associated labels, the province of Quebec is one locale where political parties do operate. That is, parties run a slate of candidates for mayor, council, and any other positions being contested concurrently. While independent candidates often participate, parties dominate elections and candidate lists in the two cities considered in the present study (Montreal and Quebec City). Municipal parties in the province are general specific to each city and are independent from those which exist at the federal or provincial levels. In many instances, parties are centered on a key candidate for the position of mayor and, depending on electoral success, may be somewhat transient. For instance, in the 2017 Montreal election, a party was organized around the incumbent mayor Denis Coderre (‘Équipe Coderre’ or ‘Team Coderre’). After the incumbent was defeated, his party, which nevertheless won many seats on council, renamed themselves “Ensemble Montréal”.

Given the prevalence of local parties in Quebec, it is perhaps not surprising that Quebecers have largely embraced these organizations, at least when it comes to forming partisan attachments to them. According to data from the Canadian Municipal Election Study (CMES), the source of data we draw upon for the analysis below, the rate of municipal-level partisanship in Quebec is comparable to levels of partisanship at the other orders of government. As of the Fall of 2017, 69.1% of survey respondents in Montreal and Quebec identified with a local party. The comparable rates for the provincial and

federal levels were slightly lower, at 65.5% and 66.0% respectively.¹ While these rates of identification may reflect a recency bias to the municipal election, these numbers nevertheless indicate that a great many Quebeckers identify with local parties. We expect that these party ties parties serve similar functions as parties as other levels of government, structuring the political attitudes and behaviour of Quebeckers.

This paper explores the extent to which respondents draw on party labels to express vote preferences and make vote decisions. We consider, by way of a survey experiment, the impact of the availability of party labels when voters are prompted to state a vote preference. That is, we consider the effect of party cues upon the ability of voters to identify a candidate for whom they plan to vote, as opposed to reporting that they “don’t know” who they will vote for. We also ask *why* people rely on party labels to formulate their preferences. Specifically, we consider whether political awareness and/or partisanship influence and condition how individuals utilise party labels in decision-making.

LOCAL ELECTIONS IN QUEBEC

There are several reasons why local elections in Quebec provide an intriguing context within which to explore the impact of party labels on vote choice. The most obvious is the fact that Quebec is one of the only provinces where municipal parties exist. As stated above, partisan municipal elections are the exception, rather than the norm in Canada. On top of this, however, there are several factors which combine to make a compelling case that Quebec municipal elections can inform our understanding of the role of party cues in the municipal context, and elsewhere.

First, local elections in general tend to be relatively low information elections (Cutler and Matthews 2005), and this is particularly true for down-ballot races, such as those for city council (Moore et al. 2017). By this we mean that voters may have little information about candidates and campaign issues, as compared to elections at provincial and national levels. This is in part a function of the production of information about the election by media sources as, comparatively speaking, there is usually less media produced information about local elections. Information acquisition thus becomes increasingly costly for voters who have to expend more information than they would at other levels of government, to collect information on which to base their decisions. In a low information context, voters may be relatively likely to rely on cues such as party labels to assist in the decision making process. Existing research suggests that voters have a desire to draw upon such shortcuts at the local level. In the absence of party cues, there is evidence that other informational shortcuts, such as incumbency, gender and ethnicity become relatively important considerations (Bird et al. 2016; McGregor et al. 2017). In an information-poor environment, cues become particularly important in decision making processes.

A second reason why party cues at the local level are worthy of study stems from the nature of the responsibilities of local governments. While municipal governments provide important services at the local level, their powers are not enumerated by the Constitution, and their budgetary and jurisdictional scopes pale in comparison to provincial and federal governments in Canada. For this reason alone, municipal elections may take on a different character as having less at stake and being less important (a perception which is no doubt related to their lower profile among the media, mentioned above). All other

¹ N = 3,787

things equal, one might expect voters to expend less energy to learn about candidates, and be more likely to fall back upon party cues, in an ‘unimportant’ election.

CMES data are mixed, however, with respect to whether voters view local elections as (un)important. When asked how much impact the various orders of government had upon their lives, 68.4% of voters in Quebec and Montreal indicated that the municipal government had ‘a lot’ of impact (as opposed to some, a little or none). The comparable values for the provincial and federal governments were 71.6% and 52.8%, respectively.² So while the jurisdictional and financial stakes are arguably lower in local elections, voters nevertheless perceive local government as comparatively important. At the same time, however, there is evidence that voters are less interested in council elections than they are towards the mayoral level. When asked how much attention they paid to the two types of campaigns in their cities, the average level of attention to the mayoral campaign was 7.3, on a scale from 0 to 10. The comparable value for council elections was a mere 4.4.³ If attentiveness can be interpreted as a reflection of the importance voters assign to elections, therefore, they council races are seen as considerably less important than mayoral elections.

A third reason why the municipal level is an attractive setting for a study of the importance of party cues upon decision making is the fact that this is the only setting in the country where concurrent elections are held. At both the federal and provincial levels in Canada, voters only make one selection on their ballot (at the constituency level). By contrast, local elections provide the opportunity to voters to make electoral choices for Mayor and Council, and often some additional offices such as borough mayor, regional councillor or school board trustee. These electoral and ballot structures have the potential to require more of voters in information gathering - not only must they gather information to make an electoral choice at top of the ticket (the mayoral race) but also at the lower offices. In such a setting, it is quite common for individuals to vote in some races, but not others, and there are sociodemographic and attitudinal characteristics associated with voting in mayoral elections, but not council elections in Canada (McGregor forthcoming). It stands to reason that, if the presence of party cues simplifies decision making, particularly in down-ballot races, rates of partial abstention should decline.

The presence of parties, the low information nature of local elections, the variation in perceived importance between mayoral and council elections (at least as indicated through attentiveness), and the fact that the local level is the only one where concurrent elections are held, make local elections in Quebec the ideal setting in which to evaluate the impact of party cues upon voter decision making processes.

PARTY CUES

The literature on party cues typically commences with the observation that citizens have very limited information about politics. To overcome this shortcoming, voters often use information shortcuts to simplify decisions about complex phenomena. That is, they use an easily identifiable feature of a candidate to draw conclusions, and to inform vote decisions. Cues, of which party labels are one type, are thus pieces of information that individuals draw upon to make judgments about attitudes or decisions about which they have little information (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). If these pieces of information are

² N = 1,987

³ N = 1,987

credible, voters can employ them when making summary judgments, such as arriving at a single vote choice (Arcenaux 2008; Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

But who uses party cues to make political decisions? Previous research points to a few factors associated with the inclination to draw on such cues. In the field of social psychology, research suggests that a ‘need for cognition’ is central to the demand and use of cues in information processing (Cacioppo et al. 1996). This need is defined as “stable individual differences in people’s tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking” (Cacioppo and Petty 1981).⁴ A common finding is that those low in the need for cognition are more easily swayed by party cues than are those higher in need.

In political science, Kam considers the importance of a need for cognition for drawing upon party cues, but also evaluates the importance of a competing indicator, awareness (2005). She finds that, as political awareness (operationalized as a measure of political knowledge) increases, reliance on party cues decreases. Politically aware voters are thought to be relatively likely to process information other than shortcuts when making decisions. Her work finds no effects of the need for cognition measure on the use of party cues but does find that the less politically aware respondents are more likely to draw on party cues (2005). In a similar vein, Mondak suggests that the ‘need for cognitive efficiency’ is important in determining dependence on cues (1993). Education (which one might expect to be positively associated to political awareness) is employed as a proxy for this need for efficiency, and more educated voters are thought to rely less upon cues (Mondak 1993). Previous work has also shown that political awareness affects attention to and reception of messages (Zaller 1992), and an ability to counter-argue messages (Krosnick 1990). All things equal, therefore, political aware individuals are thought to be relatively unlikely to rely on cues in their decision making.

The variable which we expect to be most obviously related to reliance on party cues is partisanship. Party ID, or a long-standing psychological attachment to a party, is one of the oldest and most studied concepts in the field of political behaviour (beginning with Campbell et al. 1960, the list of work on this field is too vast to attempt to summarize in a few citations here). The relationship between party ID and vote choice is strong and highly endogenous; one may vote along party lines because one is a partisan, or one might be a partisan because one holds a positive opinion of multiple representatives from a party. Party cues play a particular important role in the context of concurrent elections, where contests at all levels of the ballot are structured by parties. Research on straight-ticket voting (voting for the representatives from the same party in simultaneously held elections) in the United States suggest that the phenomenon is increased by partisanship, but also the strength of partisan ties (Mulligan 2011). Clearly then, partisanship is a strong predictor of reliance upon party cues.

This previous theoretical work on political awareness and partisanship allows us to formulate a series of testable expectations about the correlates of reliance upon party cues in municipal elections in Montreal and Quebec. It is to a discussion of these expectations that we now turn.

⁴ The need for cognition concept is operationalized by varying indices most of which involve 18 to 34 items. Rarely have these sorts of indices been used in political science surveys.

EXPECTATIONS

The preceding discussion points to several testable hypotheses about the effects of party labels upon voter decision making at the local level. To begin with, we suspect strongly that the availability of party labels will have a dampening effect upon rates of ‘don’t know’ responses. With such information, voters should be able to associate current candidates with what they know about the performance of parties in the past, and for council candidates, it provides a link to mayoral contenders. Reliance upon party cues should be stronger in low information races, such as those of city council, where there is relatively little in the way of other type of information to draw upon. Media coverage on municipal elections tends overwhelmingly to focus on mayoral contests electors pay less attention to council elections than they do to the mayoral level. At the same time, in both Montreal and Quebec, it is common for parties to be candidate-centred, and named after mayoral candidates. This was the case with both incumbent mayors in 2017 (Denis Coderre led in *Équipe Coderre* in Montreal, while Régis Labeaume headed *Équipe Labeaume* in Quebec). As such, the availability of party labels should have little, if any effect upon rates of ‘don’t know’ responses to questions about vote intention (and eventually vote choice) at the mayoral level.

H1: The effect of party labels on the incidence of “don’t know” responses will be greater at council level than at the mayoral level.

Next, we expect that the effect party labels upon one’s ability to arrive at a vote decision in low information elections is driven by the political awareness of voters. As Kam shows, political awareness is an important moderator of the use of party cues – those who are politically aware use less far less often than those who are less so. We consider two forms of political awareness. Following Kam (2005), the first is a measure of general political knowledge, based upon responses to questions about all three levels of Canadian politics. The second, novel, measure is election-specific election attention – respondents were asked how much attention they paid to mayoral and council elections, respectively. We are thus able to consider the importance of both general and campaign specific awareness to the reliance on party cues in local elections. We suggest that high levels of general knowledge and election specific attentiveness will lessen reliance on party labels to express a vote preference.

H2: Political awareness (both general political knowledge and attention to the campaigns) should decrease reliance on party labels for decision-making.

Finally, we expect partisans to be more likely than their non-partisan counterparts to draw upon party cues when formulating vote choices. Regardless of whether one identifies with an incumbent or opposition party, holding a partisan identity should serve to increase the acceptance and use of party cues in decision-making. Though partisanship is almost certainly correlated with awareness, we expect it to have an independent effect here upon the likelihood of relying upon party cues.

H3: Partisanship will increase reliance on party labels for decision-making.

DATA AND METHODS

The Canadian Municipal Election Study questionnaire includes an experiment whereby respondents were randomly assigned to one of two groups, for all questions related to vote intention. As part of the pre-election survey, respondents were asked who they planned to vote for in the election, for both the council and mayoral races.⁵ Respondents in the control group were presented with the names of candidates, as well as information on party affiliation – this is the manner in which actual municipal ballots are constructed in Montreal and Quebec. The experimental group is given the same list of candidate names, but without party labels. Respondents were either provided with party info (or not) for questions on both mayoral and council vote intention questions.

In addition to a list of candidates, respondents have the option to respond that they “don’t know” for whom they will vote. It is this option which is our primary focus, as we are interested in determining if and how the availability of party information affects “don’t know” rates, as well as the question of *who* is more or less likely to report not knowing in the absence of party labels. We suggest that, for many voters, “don’t know” responses are a result of a lack of party information, and that, if this information were available, such voters would not respond as such to the survey question. We suspect that many voters in Montreal and Quebec will vote on the basis of party, rather on the merits of individual council candidates. For such voters, “don’t know” responses are considered here to be a proxy for reliance on party labels.

Given that the pre-election survey was administered as early as two weeks before election-day, we recognize that, in many cases, a “don’t know” response may reflect a genuine lack of certainty. Because of random assignment to one of two experimental groups, we suggest that these respondents should make up the same share of respondents in each group. As such, if we observe a difference in the “don’t know” response rate between experimental groups, this difference should reflect the share of the population affected by party labels.

Our analysis proceeds in two stages. First, we consider the results of the experiment upon rates of “don’t know” responses to vote intention questions, for both mayoral and council elections. This enables us to determine the extent to which labels matter for vote choice at the different types of positions, and in the two cities. Second, we turn to the question of *who* it is that is affected by the availability of labels. We do so by way of a series of logistic regression models, where the outcome variable is a binary “don’t know” response. The explanatory variables in the models include a series of sociodemographic characteristics, as well the theoretical variables outlined above (measures of general political knowledge, attention to the campaigns and local partisanship). We then determine if any of these factors has a different relationship with “don’t know” responses, depending upon the availability of party labels (by way of interacting each factor with a variable indicating experimental group). We conduct this analysis for mayoral and council elections separately and, in both instances, pool respondents from the two cities.

⁵ Respondents are asked to identify their electoral district, and the list of council candidates is customized to match that district.

RESULTS

The Effect of Party Labels Upon “Don’t Know” Responses

We begin by considering if the availability of party labels has an effect upon the ability to state for whom one plans to vote in an election. In addition to the experimental manipulation of the availability of party labels, we consider variation in two other respects. First, we consider results for Montreal and Quebec City separately, to see the availability of party labels affects voters in the two cities differently. We have no theoretical reason to expect a difference, but make this comparison nevertheless for exploratory purposes. Next, we consider both mayoral and council elections. In the municipal context, the mayoral races are without a doubt the higher profile of the contests. We expect electors to know more about these races and to be less likely to rely upon party labels when reporting their vote intention (particularly since, in some instances, parties are named after the mayoral candidate).

Prior to presenting results, we wish to mount a defence of the external validity of this analysis. Certainly, the act of responding to an online survey such as the CMES is qualitatively different than the act of marking a ballot in an election booth. Nevertheless, we suggest that a pre-election measure of vote intention is indeed an appropriate avenue for studying the effect of party labels upon vote intentions and choice. We are unable to manipulate the ballots used in actual elections (and even if we could, ballots do not have a ‘don’t know’ response option). By conducting a survey about municipal politics, in the weeks just before a municipal election, however, we are able to assess their decision making processes of voters during a period when local politics and politicians are ‘top-of-mind’, such as they would be in the voting booth. As such, we suggest strongly that our experimental manipulation is a valid tool for evaluating the importance of party labels in local elections. Though we are hesitant to make confident claims about the size of such effects in the population as a whole, we nevertheless argue that the presence and direction of effects observed in this experiment are indicative of such effects in the ‘real world’.

We look for such effects by comparing rates of ‘don’t know’ between the two experimental groups, in order to determine how many voters base their decisions upon party labels. Table 1 shows the rate of ‘don’t know’ responses for mayoral and council races in our two cities. It shows the overall rate, as well as the rates for the treatment and control groups, as well as the difference between them. Those respondents who were assigned to the ‘label shown’ group were provided with labels for both elections, while those in the ‘no labels shown’ group had labels in neither. As noted above, we suspect that the availability of party labels will have a dampening effect upon rates of ‘don’t know’ responses, and that this effect will be greater at the council level than in mayoral elections. Note that, as our theoretical interest is in the decision making processes of voters, we limit the results of Table 1 to respondents who reported voting in the post-election questionnaire (though the substantive conclusions of the table remain unchanged if non-voters are also included).

Again, we recognize that, given the timing of the survey, some respondents who claim not to know for whom they will vote will genuinely be undecided, as opposed to not being able to select an option due to a lack of party labels. Even in the control group, therefore, we expect there to be a sizable number of ‘don’t know’ responses. However, we argue that the *difference* in the rates of ‘don’t know’ responses between the experimental groups will represent the share of respondents who base their preferences upon party labels.

TABLE 1: RATES OF “DON’T KNOW” RESPONSES AND THE AVAILABILITY OF PARTY LABELS

	Total	Party Label Shown	No Party Label Shown	<i>Difference</i>
Montreal Mayoral Race	14.8%	12.7%	16.9%	4.2%†
N	957	466	491	
Quebec Mayoral Race	10.4%	10.3%	10.6%	0.03%
N	1313	673	640	
Montreal Council Race	25.7%	13.4%	36.9%	23.4%**
N	814	388	426	
Quebec Council Race	23.4%	12.9%	34.3%	21.4%**
N	1309	667	642	

*: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$, †: $p = 0.065$

Table 1 reveals several patterns worthy of discussion. The first is that, regardless of experimental treatment, voters are more likely to not know who they will vote for at the council than mayoral level. The rate of ‘don’t know’ is over 10 percentage points higher for council vote choice, in both Montreal and Quebec, than it is for the mayoral races. Such a finding is not surprising given that council elections are lower information, though the size of the difference is certainly striking.

The next finding of note is the apparent differential effect of the label treatment upon the two types of elections. In both Montreal and Quebec, the lack of availability of party labels in council elections has an effect of increasing ‘don’t know’ responses by over 20 percentage points, nearly tripling the rate of their occurrence in both instances. We interpret this data to suggest that, at the time of taking the pre-election questionnaire, at least one in five voters in both Montreal and Quebec were basing their council decision upon party label (we add the qualifier “at least” because we presume that will be some individuals in the ‘no label’ group are aware of the party affiliation of their preferred candidate). Estimates of the size of this effect aside, it is very clear that such an effect does indeed exist, and that the effect is greatest at the council level. This finding is consistent with *H1*.

Among those CMES respondents who had labels available, there was very little or no difference in the rate of don’t know responses at the two levels of elections. For voters who received party labels, the difference in rates of ‘don’t know’ responses between the mayoral and council elections in Montreal was statistically negligible. In Quebec, there is a small, but statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference, with rates of ‘don’t know’ just 2.6% higher at the council level. Such a finding suggests that the aforementioned gap between the mayoral and council elections, observed in the ‘total’ column of the table is, in fact, due primarily to the experimental manipulation (and the withholding of party information to one half of our sample). When party information is available, respondents are barely more likely to report not knowing for who they will vote for at the council level than in mayoral elections.

The final finding of note in the table is that there is suggestive evidence that the availability of party labels had the effect of dampening don’t know responses rates at the

mayoral level in Montreal (but not in Quebec). The effect of the experimental manipulation is not statistically significant at the 95% level, but it is nevertheless close ($p=0.065$). We can think of no compelling reason for such a difference between the cities. The Quebec election was contested by six candidates, five of whom had party affiliations. While Labeaume won by a healthy margin (nearly 30 points) the third place contender (Anne Guérette of *Démocratie Québec*) received a noteworthy 14.6% of the vote share. In Montreal, eight candidates were on the ballot, only three of whom were associated with parties (Jean Fortier of *Coalition Montréal* withdrew from the mayoral race, but did so after the nomination deadline and thus remained on the ballot). Valérie Plante won the election by fewer than 6 points, but did so against only one serious contender – in this election, the third place finisher (Fortier) received a mere 1.3% of the vote). Finally, the effective number of candidates (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) based upon the election result in Montreal was 2.11 while the value is 2.47 for Quebec. It may be that having fewer candidates, a more competitive race or a lower number of effective candidates (or some combination thereof) may be responsible for the observed effect of party labels in Montreal, but not in Quebec. At the same time, other factors unique to the cities are worth considering, such as party systems or the nature of the incumbent candidate.

Of the patterns revealed by Table 1, clearly the most important is that the availability of party information has a sizable and statistically significant effect upon rates of ‘don’t know’ responses at the council level in both cities. We can state with confidence that, in the absence of labels, these responses do indeed indicate a lack of knowledge of candidates (and which party they represent), as opposed to a genuine lack of knowledge about for whom one plans to vote. In the post-election CMES questionnaire, respondents were asked when they finalized their vote decisions. Interviewees in two experimental groups answered this question no differently than one another - roughly 42% of respondents reported making their council vote decision prior to the election campaign, and the experimental and control group are indistinguishable from one another in this regard. Given the observed difference in rates of ‘don’t know’ responses in Table 1, despite the fact that the two groups were equally likely to have already made their vote decisions at the time of the pre-election questionnaire (which was administered during the campaign), we can infer that the observed difference is caused by our experiment. The experiment has thus allowed us to determine the proportion of individuals who are decided and are basing their vote decision upon party label, as opposed to one group being genuinely less likely to have decided for whom they will vote.

Who is Affected by Party Labels?

We have thus far determined that roughly one-fifth of voters in both Montreal and Quebec based their council vote decision on labels, and that such labels have little or no effect at the mayoral level. We turn to the question of *who* it is that is affected by party cues. That is, we seek to determine if sociodemographic or attitudinal characteristics are associated with reliance on such a heuristic.

To this end, we consider a series of logistic regression models, where the outcome variable is a dummy indicator of not knowing for whom one will vote (1=don’t know, 0=expresses a preference). Entries report marginal effect, where the values of other variables are unchanged. Explanatory variables include standard sociodemographic factors

(gender, age, education and a dummy for Quebec City), as well as our theoretically driven attitudinal indicators.

Attitudinal variables include two measures of political awareness: an index of general political knowledge and an indicator of attentiveness to the campaign (either mayoral or council). These measures are indicative of two aspects of awareness: about politics generally and about the campaign in particular. Both variables are coded from 0 (low) to 1 (high). We also include a measure of municipal level partisanship, whereby partisans are assigned a value of 1, and non-partisans a value of 0.⁶ Recall that we expect political awareness will be associated with a decrease in reliance on party labels (*H2*) and partisanship to increase reliance on such cues (*H3*).

We present two models for each level of election (mayoral and council). The first includes the basic explanatory variables, to see if any are associated with a ‘don’t know’ response. The second set of models are where the effect of labels upon voters is tested. In these models, the ‘label’ variable is interacted with each explanatory variable. Constituent terms are to be interpreted as the effect of each variable upon the likelihood of providing a ‘don’t know’ response, among those who are not shown party labels. Interaction terms indicate whether those individuals with high values for the constituent variables are affected by the availability of party labels.

Results of the logistic regression models are shown in Table 2. Prior to presenting these results, several methodological notes are worthy of mention. First, for all models, responses from the two cities are pooled, and a dummy for city is included to control for city-level variation. Next, as with Table 1, we limit the analysis to voters (thus eliminating the noise that non-voters would introduce). We further limit the sample to those individuals who, on the basis of the post-election question on the time-of-voting-decision, were indeed decided on who to support by the time of the pre-election questionnaire (and the survey experiment). We thus focus only on respondents who reported having finalized their vote decision prior to the election campaign. The goal here is to focus upon those individuals who had made their decisions at the time of the survey, but who were unable to report it, rather than on those individuals who were genuinely undecided (the inclusion of the latter type of respondent would introduce noise). Additionally, as we recognize that each race for council is unique, we cluster the council level models by electoral district to account for district-level variation.⁷ Finally, we note that a test of balance confirms that none of the variables included in the models in Table 2 are correlated with the ‘label’ treatment.⁸ If results reveal statistically significant interaction effects, we are confident that the results are due to the experimental treatment, rather than compositional differences between the groups.

⁶ To be coded as a partisan, respondents must indicate a strong or fairly strong identification with a party. This approach to operationalizing partisanship is standard in Canada (Blais et al., 2002).

⁷ While we do not apply clustering to the mayoral models, the substantive conclusions of the models remain unchanged if we do so.

⁸ Results not shown, but available from the authors.

TABLE 2: THE DETERMINANTS OF “DON’T KNOW” RESPONSES

	Mayoral Election		Council election	
Female	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
<i>Female X label</i>		-0.01 (0.02)		0.04 (0.06)
> 50 years old	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)
<i>> 50 years X label</i>		-0.03 (0.02)		-0.05 (0.04)
University Educated	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)
<i>University X label</i>		-0.01 (0.02)		0.00 (0.06)
Quebec City	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
<i>Quebec X Label</i>		0.00 (0.02)		0.02 (0.07)
Knowledge	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.03)*	-0.18 (0.06)***	-0.23 (0.07)***
<i>Knowledge X Label</i>		0.04 (0.04)		0.27 (0.12)**
Attention	-0.04 (0.02)**	-0.04 (0.03)*	-0.06 (0.03)**	-0.10 (0.03)***
<i>Attention X label</i>		0.01 (0.04)		0.20 (0.07)***
Partisan	-0.06 (0.01)***	-0.04 (0.02)***	-0.06 (0.04)*	-0.02 (0.04)
<i>Partisan X label</i>		-0.02 (0.02)		-0.16 (0.07)**
Label shown	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.17 (0.04)***	-0.37 (0.11)***
Pseudo-R2	0.2414	0.2651	0.1396	0.1734
N	999	999	696	696

*: $p < 0.10$, **: $p < 0.05$, ***: $p < 0.01$.

Entries report marginal effects (and standard errors in parentheses). There are 64 clusters in the council models

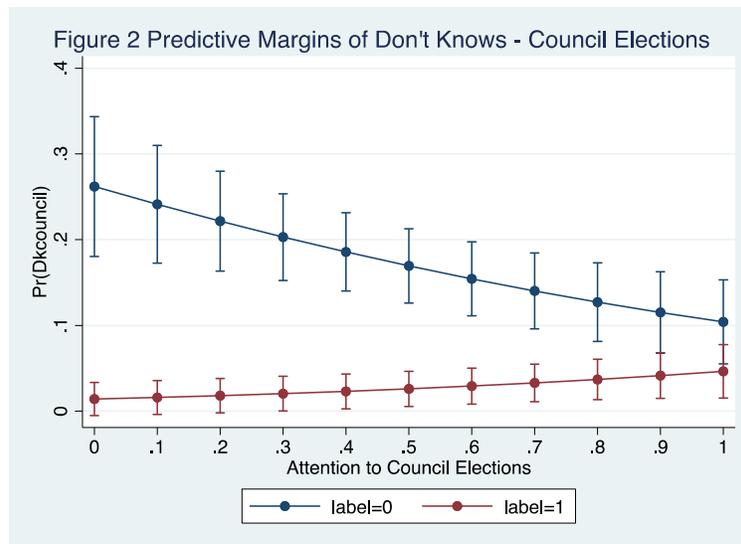
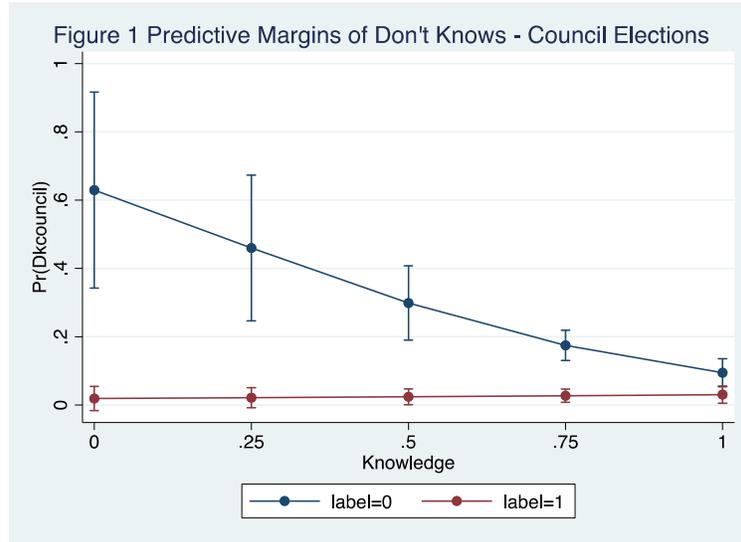
The first finding of note in Table 2 is that, in neither the mayoral nor council elections are any sociodemographic characteristics significant, in either the constituent or interactive forms. None of these factors are associated with not knowing for whom one will vote, and the relationship between these factors and ‘don’t know’ responses is not dependent upon the availability of party labels. This finding is worth highlighting because it shows that these relevant individual-level differences do not affect reliance on party labels. While gender, age and education have many important effects for political identity, attitude and behaviour, reliance on party cues to state a vote choice is not one of them.

In contrast, several of the attitudinal variables are related to ‘don’t know’ responses in the basic models. At the mayoral level, attention to the campaign and partisanship both decrease the ‘don’t know’ rate, while all three attitudinal variables (including knowledge) have such an effect upon the council level. Such results are hardly surprising given that, all other things equal, it is nearly tautological that those who are politically aware or who hold partisan attitudes will be more likely to know the names of the candidates and parties they plan to support.

The interaction terms are our primary focus here. In the mayoral models, none of the attitudinal interaction terms are significant. This suggests that there is no differential impact of the party label treatment on the incidence of Don’t Know responses in the mayoral election by increasing values of the awareness and partisanship variables.

By contrast, all three attitudinal interactions are significant in the council model. The knowledge and attention interaction terms are positive, while the partisanship interaction term is negative. To aid in the interpretation of these results, we present Figures 1-3, which display the marginal effects in graphical format. The figures show the predicted

rate of “don’t know” response for each value of knowledge, attention and partisanship, by the availability of party label information.



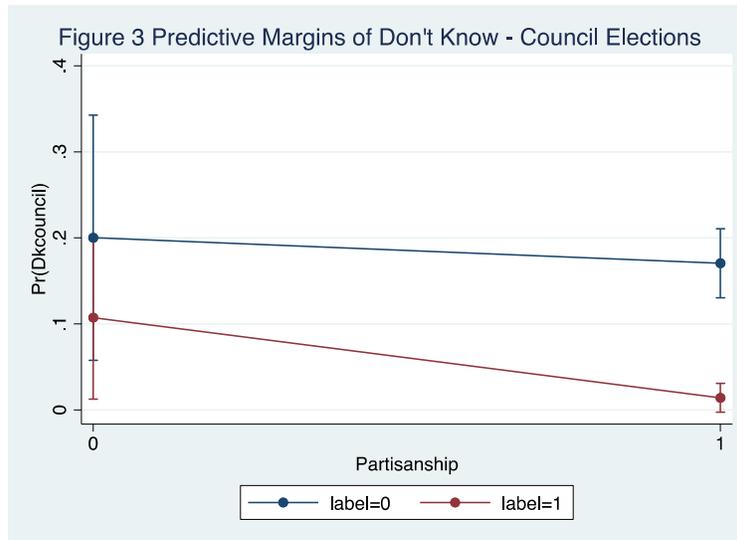


Figure 1 plots the effects of knowledge on choosing “don’t know” for those respondents who received the party label treatment and those that did not. For voters without access to labels, knowledge had a large effect in reducing the incidence of “don’t know” responses. At the point of maximum knowledge (4 out of 4 answers correct) there is no statistical difference in “don’t know” responses between those who received the party label and those who did not. This means that, in the absence of party labels, only those respondents with the highest levels of knowledge were able to make the same decisions they would if labels were available.

Figure 2 plots the interaction of attention to the council election and receiving the party label or not, and the pattern observed is the same as for knowledge. For voters who did not receive the party label, increasing levels of attention paid to the council elections greatly reduced the incidence of “don’t knows” – as with knowledge, the most highly attentive individuals are no more likely to not know for whom they will vote in the absence of party labels. Figures 1 and 2 are therefore congruent with *H2* – political awareness significantly decreases reliance on party labels for decision-making.

Figure 3 plots the marginal effects of receiving the party label for those expressing a partisan identification versus those not holding a partisan ID. Among individuals who did not express a party ID, there is no statistical difference in the incidence of choosing “don’t know” between those who received the party label and those who did not. By contrast, partisans were significantly more likely than non-partisans to draw on the party label to make a vote decision. Stated differently, partisans who received a party label were significantly less likely than non-partisans to report not knowing who they would vote for in the council election. Again, this result supports our expectations in *H3*.

While *H2* and *H3* both find support in the council models, they find none at the mayoral level. This pattern of results may be indicative of differential effects of label availability and the measures of awareness and partisanship in down-ballot council races as compared to the more prominent mayoral race. The media focus much more heavily upon mayoral races than they do on council elections, and there is much more information readily available to electors regarding the ‘top-of-the-ticket’ contests. As such, it may be that the effects of knowledge, attention and partisanship upon rates of not knowing for

whom one will vote at the mayoral level are *not* dependent upon the availability of party labels.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This goal of this paper is to identify the circumstances under which voters rely upon party labels when making their vote decisions in municipal elections in Montreal and Quebec. Though an experiment included in a pre-election survey has obvious differences from an actual election ballot, we posit that the same mechanisms underlie responses in both settings. In this study, we suggest that ‘don’t know’ responses serve as a proxy (though admittedly an imperfect one) for reliance upon party cues.

So what did we find? Most important, party labels matter (at least for down-ballot elections). People rely upon labels a great deal for council elections, and very little, or not at all, for mayoral elections. By our estimate, roughly 20% of voters rely upon party labels when making vote decisions at the council level. We also found that political awareness (in the form of either knowledge or attentiveness) decreases the rate of “don’t know” responses (and thus reliance on party cues) in the absence of party labels, but they have little or no effect if labels are present. Partisanship has a large negative effect upon “don’t know” rates when labels are present, but not when they are absent. Finally, the effects of awareness and partisanship are greater at the council than at the mayoral level.

These results are important for understanding a number of features of participation in local elections in Canada. As we know, municipal elections tend to be low information affairs – especially in down ballot contests for city, borough or regional councils, or for school board trustee. Most Canadian cities lack parties, and, in the absence of the cues that parties provide, our results suggest that voters are much less likely to be able to express a clear preference in such contexts. Such a finding may give us some sense of how and how well voters make decisions in the absence of party labels. The presence of parties and the cues they provide would likely assist in the character and quality of voters’ electoral decisions at the local level. We believe that they could assist in reducing costs in the acquisition and organizing information about local politics and arriving at sensibly consistent vote decisions. At the same time, relying on party cues to make vote decisions may reduce the role of policy and issue positions in the evaluation of candidates and vote decisions in municipal elections. As a result, the character of vote decisions may be qualitatively different and not necessarily for the better. There is no doubt value in future research that might evaluate the quality of decision in Canadian municipal elections, both in partisan and non-partisan settings.

Our findings are also of relevance for understanding rates of turnout at the local level in Canada. In general, municipal voter turnout rates are significantly lower than those observed at the provincial or federal level. While a “don’t know” response is not the same as abstaining, there may something to the idea that the absence of party labels hinders turnout – it is not much of a leap to expect some voters to simply abstain from council elections, even if they cast a ballot at the mayoral level. The relationship between the

presence (or absence) of parties at local level in Canada may therefore have important implications for turnout rates, as well as for selective abstention.

These findings therefore lead us to wonder more generally about the value of parties at the municipal level in Canada. Though staples of the federal and provincial levels, the fact that parties have thus far failed to materialize in most Canadian cities may have implications for the quality of voter decision making, voter turnout or other important features of elections. On these bases, we see great value in the further examination of the effects of parties on the Canadian municipal voter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arcenaux, Kevin. 2008. "Can Partisan Cues Diminish Democratic Accountability?" *Political Behavior* 30, 2: 139-160

Bird, K., Jackson, S., McGregor, R. M., Moore, A. & Stephenson, L. (2016). "Sex (and Ethnicity) in the City: Affinity Voting in the 2014 Toronto Mayoral election" *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 49(2): 359-383.

Blais, A., Gidengil, E., Nadeau, R., & Nevitte, N. (2002). *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory: Making Sense of the Vote in the 2000 Canadian Election*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Brader, Ted and Joshua A. Tucker. 2012. "Following the Party's Lead: Party Cues, Policy Opinion and the Power of Partisanship in Three Multiparty Systems." *Comparative Politics* 44(4): 403-420.

Cacioppo, John T., and Petty, Richard E. 1982. "The need for cognition." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42: 116–131.

Cacioppo, John T., Petty, Richard E., Feinstein, Jeffrey A., and Jarvis, W. B. G. 1996. Dispositional differences in cognitive motivation: the life and times of individuals varying in need for cognition. *Psychological Bulletin* 119: 197–253.

Campbell, A., Converse, P., Miller, W., Stokes, D., 1960. *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Conroy-Krutz, Jeffrey, Devra C. Moehler and Rosario Aguilar. 2016. "Partisan Cues and Vote Choice in New Multiparty Systems." *Comparative Political Studies* 49(1): 3-35.

Cutler, F. and S. Matthews. 2005. "The Challenge of Municipal Voting: Vancouver 2002." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 38 (2): 359–82.

Delli Carpini, M. and S. Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and why it Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Eagly, Alice. H., & Chaiken, Shelly. 1993. *The psychology of attitudes*. Orlando, FL, US: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Fournier, P. 2002. "The Uninformed Voter." In Everitt and O'Neill (eds.). *Citizen Politics*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Huckfeldt, R., J. Levine, W. Morgan, and J. Sprague. 1999. "Accessibility and the Political Utility of Partisan and Ideological Orientations." *American Journal of Political Science* 43(3): 888–911.
- Kam, C. 2005. "Who Toes the Party Line? Cues, Values and Individual Differences." *Political Behavior* 27, 2 163-82.
- Krosnick, Jon A. 1990. Expertise and political psychology. *Social Cognition* 8: 1–8.
- Laakso, M. and Taagepera, R., 1979. "Effective" number of parties: a measure with application to West Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 12(1), pp.3-27.
- Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 1997. "Voting Correctly." *American Political Science Review* 91(3): 585-598.
- Lupia, Arthur, and McCubbins, Mathew. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGregor, R. M. (Forthcoming). "Voters who Abstain: Explaining Abstention and Ballot Roll-Off in the 2014 Toronto Municipal Election." *Urban Affairs Review*.
- McGregor, R. M., Moore, A., Jackson, S., Bird, K. & Stephenson, L. (2017). "Why so Few Women and Minorities in Local Politics? Incumbency and Affinity Voting in Low Information Elections." *Representation*, 53: 135-52.
- Mondak, Jeffery J. (1993). Source cues and policy approval: the cognitive dynamics of public support for the Reagan agenda. *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 186–212.
- Moore, A., McGregor, R.M. & Stephenson, L. (2017). "Paying Attention and the Incumbency Effect: Voting Behaviour in the 2014 Toronto Municipal Election." *International Political Science Review*, 38(1): 85-98.
- Mulligan, K. (2011). Partisan Ambivalence, Split-Ticket Voting, and Divided Government. *Political Psychology*, 32(3), 505-530.
- Rahn, Wendy M. 1993. "The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing about Political Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(2): 472–496.

Ray, Leonard. 2003. "When Parties Matter: The Conditional Influence of Party Positions on Voter Opinions about European Integration." *The Journal of Politics* 65(4): 978–994.

Zaller John, R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.