

MEASURING PARTY IDENTIFICATION: Britain, Canada, and the United States

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The article proposes an empirically based reflection on how to measure party identification cross nationally, using data from the 1997 Canadian Election Study, the 1997 British Election Study, and the 1996 American National Election Study. These studies included both traditional national questions and a new common one, which allows for an assessment of the effects of question wording on the distribution and correlates of party identification. We show that the distribution of party identification is strongly affected by question wording and that the relationship between party identification and variables such as party and leader ratings, and voting behavior does not quite conform to theoretical expectations. We point out problems in the wording of party identification questions and propose an alternative formulation.

Key words: party identification; question wording; vote.

The question we address is how best to measure party identification from a cross-national perspective. Party identification is a crucial concept in the study of electoral behavior. Yet there is no generally accepted measure of party identification. This is an important handicap to comparative research on voting behavior.

We propose a detailed examination of the way party identification is being measured in three countries: Britain, Canada, and the United States. We also look at a common set of questions designed to measure party identification cross nationally, which was incorporated in the 1996 American National Election Study (ANES), the 1997 British Election Study (BES), and the 1997 Canadian Election Study (CES).

It is impossible to assess the measurement of a concept without first clarifying

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its theoretical meaning. Following Campbell, Munro, Alford, and Campbell (1986), Converse and Pierce (1987), Green and Palmquist (1990), and Miller (1991), we assume that the concept has two central elements. The first is *identification*. Campbell et al. put it very well:

This party identification is an attachment to a party that helps the citizen locate him/herself and others on the political landscape. As thus conceived, partisans are partisan because they think they are partisan. They are not necessarily partisan because they vote like a partisan, or think like a partisan, or register like a partisan, or because someone else thinks they are a partisan. In the strict sense, they are not even partisan because they like one party more than another. Partisanship as party identification is entirely a matter of self-definition. (1986, 100)

The second element is the time horizon. From the very beginning, party identification has been conceptualized as an *enduring* underlying orientation. *The American Voter* states that “some evaluations persist through time and so do certain dispositions to evaluate the elements of politics in a given partisan way. Most Americans have an enduring partisan orientation, a sense of party identification . . .” (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960, 529). This is why the Michigan school often refers to party identification as *long-term* partisan loyalty.

We examine the wording of the various party identification questions, identify similarities and differences, and point out potential problems. We then determine how similar or different the distribution of party identification looks in the three countries depending on the type of question asked.

We also look at how the various measures of party identification are related to three variables with which, according to the standard conceptualization, they should be correlated. We examine the relationship between party identification on the one hand, and party and leader ratings, and voting behavior on the other hand. These three variables are supposed to be affected by party identification. Once an individual has formed a general positive orientation toward a party, she should be inclined to evaluate “her” party and leader more favorably. As a consequence, she should be more likely to vote for that party. We specify below the nature of the relationship that one should expect between party identification and each of these three variables and we determine to what extent the findings conform with these expectations.

For each of these three countries, we have the responses of the same people to both the country-specific traditional questions and the new common experimental set of questions. Each survey has its specificities, however. In the United States, the traditional American question was asked in the campaign survey and the new experimental one in the post-election interview. In Britain, the traditional British question was posed toward the beginning of the post-election

survey and the experimental one in the self-completion questionnaire that was filled after the interview. In Canada, the traditional Canadian question was put to all respondents in the campaign survey, and half the respondents got the same question in the post-election interview and half got the experimental one.¹

THE TRADITIONAL MEASURES

The traditional wording of the party identification questions in each of these three countries is presented in the appendix. There are three striking similarities. In each country the question asks respondents if they “think of themselves” as partisans. The assumption is that someone who identifies with a party thinks of herself as a Democrat or a Republican. This is consistent with the definition that “partisans are partisan because they think they are partisan” (Campbell et al., 1986, 102). The question also invites people to abstract themselves from the particular conjuncture of the day through the use of words like usually or generally, which is consistent with the conceptualization of party identification as a long-term enduring orientation. The third similarity lies in the use of follow-up questions that are designed to sort out “strong” and “weak” partisans and “leaning” and “non-leaning” nonpartisans.

There are some differences. The most important one concerns the “no identification” option. In the United States this corresponds to the “independent” category. In Britain the “no identification” option is not offered while in Canada, “independent” is replaced by “none of these.” In Canada alone, the question refers to federal politics, acknowledging the possibility that someone identifies with a party only in federal or only in provincial politics.

A smaller variation concerns the reference to the time horizon. In the United States this is spelled out more forcefully by the combined use of “generally speaking” and “usually.” Only the former is retained in Britain and the latter in Canada.

There are also significant differences in the follow-up questions. To those who identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans, the American question asks whether they “would call” themselves “strong” or “not very strong” Democrats or Republicans. The British question also asks identifiers whether they would call themselves strong or not very strong Conservatives, but it uses three instead of two categories: “very,” “fairly,” and “not very” strong. The Canadian question uses the same three categories but asks how strongly Liberal the respondent “feels.” In the follow-up question, the verb “think” is replaced by “call” in the United States and Britain and by “feel” in Canada.

The follow-up question for those with no identification is whether the respondent thinks of herself as a little closer to one of the parties. The American

question departs from the British and Canadian by omitting “a little” and by naming the Republican and the Democratic parties.

There are a number of observations to make about these questions. First, it seems to us that the common use of “think of yourself” in the initial question is particularly in tune with the concept of party identification. It is not clear why the follow-up question for identifiers does not stick to the same wording. From that perspective, the Canadian use of “feel” is particularly surprising.

Second, the most thorny issue concerns the presentation of the no identification option. The British approach of not offering such an option is highly problematic. Put bluntly, this is exactly the kind of question we teach our students not to ask, because the categories are not exhaustive. It may be because of the flawed wording that the concept of party identification has fallen into disrepute in Britain (see Rose and McAllister, 1990, 156; Brynjin and Sanders, 1997). The concept of “independent” may or may not be appropriate in the United States, but it undoubtedly cannot travel. There is the Canadian “none of these.” Johnston (1992) has shown that offering that particular option substantially increases the percentage of no identifiers.² This is not entirely satisfactory: “none of these” does not explicitly indicate absence of partisanship.

Third, it is important to convey to respondents that the question deals with their general orientation rather than their short-term feelings; for that reason, the American approach of spelling this out by the combined use of “generally speaking” and “usually” seems to us more satisfactory. Fourth, there does not seem to be any compelling reason for the follow-up question to party identifiers not to have three categories rather than two. The British and Canadian questions provide slightly richer information than the American one.

THE COMMON EXPERIMENTAL MEASURE

As part of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project, the 1996 American and 1997 British and Canadian election studies included, in addition to their traditional questions, a new set of common questions designed to provide a cross-national measure of party identification (see the appendix).

The initial question retains the “think of yourself” that is at the heart of the traditional wording in each of the three countries. The main difference is that the new experimental question does not name the parties. Respondents are asked whether they think of themselves not as Republican or Democrat but as being close to any party.

The main virtue of the new formulation is that nonidentification is presented as an explicit and legitimate option, which is not the case in the British and Canadian questions.³ There are disadvantages, however. The first is the reference to closeness. In the same sense that it is possible for someone to think of herself as Catholic without feeling close to the Catholic church, it is possible

to identify with a party without feeling close to it.⁴ Second, because it refers to “any particular party” without mentioning specific parties, the question may inadvertently tap general feelings toward parties. It is possible for someone to identify with a party while feeling quite negative toward parties in general (Owen and Dennis, 1996; Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau, and Nevitte, in press). Such a person may be disinclined to say that she thinks of herself as close to a party.

As in the traditional approach, there is a follow-up question to party identifiers. The question asks whether the respondent feels very, somewhat, or not very close to the party with which she identifies. There are three categories as in the traditional Canadian and British questions, and there is a shift from “think of yourself” to “feel,” as in the traditional Canadian approach. As for the follow-up to nonpartisans, it is identical to the traditional format except that “feel” is used again instead of “think of yourself.”

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Table 1 indicates the joint distribution of party identification in each of the three countries under the two sets of questions. Let us start with the Canadian case. It can be seen that the two approaches yield drastically different estimates of party identification. According to the traditional measure, 69% of Canadians identify with a party.⁵ The experimental approach suggests the percentage could be as low as 38%.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding in Table 1A is that those who were characterized as weak identifiers on the basis of the traditional question responded to the new question almost identically to those characterized as leaning nonidentifiers. Indeed two thirds of those who said in the campaign that they thought of themselves as Liberal, Conservative, Reform, NDP, or Bloc québécois but added that they felt “not very strongly” partisan responded after the election that they did not think of themselves as being close to a party.

The pattern in Britain is strikingly similar to that observed in Canada. The traditional measure suggests that 89% of British electors identify with a party; the percentage slumps to 49% with the experimental approach. As in Canada, individuals characterized as weak identifiers with the traditional question responded to the new set of questions similarly to leaning nonidentifiers. Three fourths of those who said at the beginning of the interview that they thought of themselves as Labour, Conservative, or Liberal but called themselves not very strong partisans indicated in the self-completion questionnaire that they did not think of themselves as being close to a party.

The lower panel of Table 1 shows the joint distribution of responses to the two questions in the United States. There are only four categories of identification with respect to the traditional question, because the follow-up question asks identifiers if they would call themselves strong or not very strong Democrats

TABLE 1. The Distribution of Party Identification

	Traditional Question					% of Total
	Strong Identifier %	Moderate Identifier %	Weak Identifier %	Leaning Nonidentifier %	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier %	
Experimental Question						
Strong Identifier	36	7	3	5	2	9.4
Moderate Identifier	24	35	24	25	7	24.7
Weak Identifier	3	3	7	4	2	3.6
Leaning Nonidentifier	21	30	31	32	15	25.7
Non-Leaning Nonidentifier	16	25	36	35	75	36.6
% of total	15.1	38.6	15.2	9.6	21.5	100
B. Britain						
	Traditional Question					% of Total
	Strong Identifier %	Moderate Identifier %	Weak Identifier %	Leaning Nonidentifier %	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier %	
Experimental question						
Strong Identifier	50	11	2	4	5	13.5
Moderate Identifier	34	49	17	6		31.9
Weak Identifier	1	4	5	8		3.7
Leaning Nonidentifier	10	27	44	52	20	30.4
Non-Leaning Nonidentifier	5	9	32	30	75	20.5
% of total	15.8	42.5	30.5	5.1	6.1	100

	Traditional Question					% of Total
	Strong Identifier %	Moderate Identifier %	Weak Identifier %	Leaning Nonidentifier %	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier %	
Experimental question						
Strong Identifier	39	NA	7	2	1	15.5
Moderate Identifier	47	NA	41	27	10	37.2
Weak Identifier	2	NA	9	7	5	5.9
Leaning Nonidentifier	8	NA	26	29	16	20.1
Non-Leaning Nonidentifier	5	NA	18	34	69	21.3
% of total	32.5		35.9	24.0	7.5	100

C. United States

or Republicans. The percentage of identifiers according to the traditional question is 69%, quite similar to the percentage observed in Canada (with the traditional Canadian question). What is strikingly different in the American case is that the percentage of identifiers drops only slightly, to 59%, with the experimental question.

Moreover, in contrast to Canada and Britain, a majority (57%) of Americans who are characterized as weak identifiers according to the traditional question say that they think of themselves as close to a party. There remains a strong minority (43%), however, who say no. It is not clear how this 15% of the whole sample who indicate they think of themselves as weak Democrats or Republicans but not as being close to any party should be treated.

How plausible are the distributions of identification produced by the traditional and experimental questions? The new common question suggests that there are more identifiers in the United States than in Britain and fewer still in Canada, a finding that fits with the standard understanding of electoral behavior in these countries. From that perspective, the results look credible. The same kind of comparison cannot be made with the traditional questions, which vary across countries.

The relative plausibility of the observed distributions is more difficult to assess on a country by country basis. It seems impossible for us to tell whether the true percentage of identifiers in the United States is closer to 69% or to 59%. In the case of Canada and Britain, we find the percentage of identifiers indicated by the traditional questions suspiciously high, but we find it somewhat difficult to believe that only 38% and 49% of Canadian and British electors, respectively, think of themselves as supporters of a party.

How can we tell which set of questions provides the most reliable and valid measure of party identification? Panel data would be particularly useful to assess the consistency of responses (see Schickler and Green, 1997). In the absence of panel data, we look now at how the different measures of party identification are correlated with other variables and we determine whether these empirical relationships conform with theoretical expectations.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATIONS OF PARTIES AND LEADERS

We would expect an individual who identifies with a party to give “her” party and its leader relatively high ratings. This leads us to predict a relatively strong relationship between party identification and party and leader ratings. The relationship should not be too strong, however. Party identification is supposed to be a *general* predisposition, whereas party rating is supposed to indicate how an individual evaluates a party at a specific point in time. Similarly, even though general party orientations should affect how people react to leaders,

factors such as the personal characteristics of the candidates should come into play.

Consequently, there is no clear expectation about the *strength* of the relationship between party identification and party and leader ratings, and there is no clear standard by which to assess the traditional and new measures of party identification. There is an expectation, however, about the *shape* of that relationship: the more strongly one identifies with a party, the more positive the rating of the party and of its leader. In other words, the relationship should be monotonic (see Petrocik, 1974; Keith et al., 1986).

Table 2 presents the evidence.⁶ With the experimental question, the relationship is systematically nonmonotonic: in all three countries, weak identifiers

TABLE 2. Party Identification and Party and Leader Ratings

A. Traditional question				
	Traditional Question			
Country	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier
<i>USA</i>				
Party	8.29		6.80	6.08
Leader	8.16		6.73	6.22
<i>UK</i>				
Party	8.79	7.82	6.58	6.14
Leader	8.75	7.84	6.81	6.34
<i>Canada</i>				
Party	8.13	6.70	5.40	5.74*
Leader	7.51	6.41	5.12	5.59*
B. Experimental question				
	Experimental Question			
Country	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier
<i>USA</i>				
Party	8.69	7.54	6.63	6.70
Leader	8.50	7.41	6.44	6.67
<i>UK</i>				
Party	9.12	8.01	6.16*	7.07
Leader	8.97	7.92	6.49*	7.29
<i>Canada</i>				
Party	8.64*	7.11	6.47*	6.84
Leader	8.01*	6.86	6.44*	6.56

*Fewer than 100 observations.

give lower ratings than leaning nonidentifiers. From that standpoint, the experimental question looks problematic, though we should keep in mind that the nonmonotonicity affects a very small category.

The results appear more satisfactory with the traditional question, since the relationship comes out monotonic in the United States and Britain. But in Canada,⁷ we observe the same pattern as with the experimental questions—weak identifiers giving lower ratings than leaners—and the problem is more serious because the “weak identifier” category is more numerous. And in the United States, we cannot rule out the possibility that the monotonic relationship emerges simply because we cannot distinguish moderate and weak identifiers.

These findings cast some doubt on the validity of both sets of questions, particularly the experimental one. In all cases, the problematic category is weak identifiers. This raises the question of whether those who first indicate that they are partisan but then add that they are not very strongly partisan truly identify with a party.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND THE VOTE

We also expect a relatively strong relationship between party identification and voting behavior, because party identification is supposed to affect how one evaluates the parties and the leaders, and these evaluations in turn influence vote choice. Again, the relationship should not be too strong. After all, party identification is only a general predisposition, and short-term factors such as evaluations of party leaders, presidential candidates, or economic performance may induce an individual who thinks of herself as a Democrat to vote Republican by exception at a given election.

We therefore lack a clear theoretical prediction about the strength of the relationship between party identification and the vote. This means that there is no clear standard for assessing the traditional and new measures of party identification. Here again, however, there is an expectation about the shape of that relationship: the more strongly one identifies with a party, the more inclined one should be to vote for that party. The relationship should be monotonic.⁸

What about the choice between voting for another party and nonvoting? We expect those who identify with a party to be more likely to vote but only because they are more likely to vote for that party. To the extent that party identification is a social identity (Greene, 1999), not voting should be a more appealing option for a person who identifies with a party than switching to another party. This reflects both the “us versus them” nature of social identity and the tendency for social identity to lead to an exaggerated perception of intergroup differences (Greene, 1999; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). As a consequence, the propensity to

vote for another party should decrease with party identification to a greater extent than the propensity to abstain.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 present the evidence. Consider the American case first (Table 3). With both questions, the percentage who voted for the party they identify with increases with strength of identification.⁹ In both cases also, strong identifiers emerge as having the greatest propensity to abstain rather than to vote for another party. Contrary to expectations, however, with both questions, moderate and weak identifiers exhibit a relatively greater propensity to switch to another party (rather than to abstain) than leaning nonidentifiers. The non-monotonicity is particularly striking with the experimental question.¹⁰

In Britain (Table 4), with both questions, there is again a decline in the percentage of those who voted for “their” party as identification weakens.¹¹ The pattern concerning the choice between vote switching and abstention is perplexing, however. With the traditional question, as expected, strong identi-

TABLE 3. Party Identification and the Vote in the United States

A. Traditional question

	Traditional Question				
	Strong Identifier %	Moderate Identifier %	Weak Identifier %	Leaning Nonidentifier %	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier %
Vote					
Voted for the party	80	NA	53	47	?
Voted for another party	2	NA	10	11	?
Did not vote	17	NA	37	43	65
% of total	32.9		35.2	24.2	7.7

B. Experimental question

	Experimental Question				
	Strong Identifier %	Moderate Identifier %	Weak Identifier %	Leaning Nonidentifier %	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier %
Vote					
Voted for the party	92	77	63	62	?
Voted for another party	1	8	15	6	?
Did not vote	7	16	22	32	52
% of total	16.2	37.6	5.9	18.9	21.3

TABLE 4. Party Identification and the Vote in Britain

	Traditional Question				
	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier
	%	%	%	%	%
A. Traditional question					
Vote					
Voted for the party	86	78	62	39	?
Voted for another party	3	9	11	16	?
Did not vote	11	13	27	46	58
% of total	16.0	42.4	29.3	5.4	6.9
B. Experimental question					
	Experimental Question				
	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier
	%	%	%	%	%
Vote					
Voted for the party	80	74	58	58	?
Voted for another party	10	13	21	18	?
Did not vote	10	13	21	23	35
% of total	13.4	31.6	3.8	30.6	20.7

ers express the greatest inclination to abstain rather than to cast a vote for another party. But those who indicate the greatest opposite inclination—that is to switch rather than abstain—are the moderate identifiers, not the leaners. Finally, with the experimental question, the abstention/switching ratio hardly moves from one category to the other.

The Canadian findings are intriguing (Table 5). Under both approaches, weak identifiers are less likely to vote for their party than leaners.¹² The results concerning voting for another party versus abstaining are even more perplexing. With the traditional question, strong identifiers do come out as least likely to switch, but there is very little difference in the abstention/switching ratio among the three other groups. The pattern under the experimental question is simply the opposite of what we would have predicted: strong identifiers appear to be least inclined to abstain and the leaners the least willing to switch.

What is to be made of these findings? In no case does the relationship

TABLE 5. Party Identification and the Vote in Canada

	Traditional Question				
	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier
	%	%	%	%	%
A. Traditional question					
Vote					
Voted for the party	85	63	41	48	?
Voted for another party	8	23	38	33	?
Did not vote	7	15	22	20	33
% of total	21.5	41.4	12.5	8.4	16.2
B. Experimental question					
	Experimental Question				
	Strong Identifier	Moderate Identifier	Weak Identifier	Leaning Nonidentifier	Non-Leaning Nonidentifier
	%	%	%	%	%
Vote					
Voted for the party	86	70	26	69	?
Voted for another party	8	14	38	13	?
Did not vote	6	17	36	19	42
% of total	9.4	23.9	3.5	25.2	37.9

between party identification and the vote entirely fit theoretical expectations. In the United States and Britain and with both sets of questions, there is a monotonic relationship between party identification and voting for one's party. But in no case does there emerge a monotonic relationship between party identification and the relative propensity to abstain rather than to vote for another party.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the image of voters' attachment to parties that is conveyed by election studies hinges to a good extent on how one goes about measuring people's identification (or lack thereof) with the parties. The traditional questions suggest that somewhere between two thirds (in Canada) and seven eighths (in Britain) of the electorate think of themselves as partisans. Yet, when the same people

are asked if they think of themselves as close to a party, the percentages of identifiers drop to between two and three fifths (Canada and the United States respectively). The overall average for the three countries goes from 76% to 48%.

Which set of questions is preferred? There are indications that neither is completely satisfactory. This is particularly clear when we look at the relationship between party identification and voting behavior. In Canada, with both sets of questions, the relationship between party identification and voting for the party one identifies with is not monotonic, and in each of the three countries, again with both sets of questions, party identification is not more strongly (negatively) correlated with vote switching than with abstention.

What is to be done? As indicated at the outset, the main problem with the traditional questions concerns the presentation of the “no identification” option. The British approach whereby that option is simply not offered seems to us completely unacceptable. The Canadian question includes a “none of these,” but the wording does not explicitly convey the point that this is the response to be given if the respondent does not think of herself as partisan. The American use of the word “independent” is interesting, but the word seems to tap not only the absence of identification but also general antiparty sentiment (Weisberg, 1980).

The experimental CSES set of questions addresses these problems by proceeding in three steps: first, ascertaining whether the respondent identifies with a party; second, specifying which party; third, assessing the strength of the identification. This is a logical approach: the no identification option is explicitly offered upfront. The drawback is that it may be too easy for those who distrust parties in general to say no when asked whether they think of themselves as close to any party—even when they do consider themselves as Labor or Conservative.

The solution, it seems to us, is to keep the traditional approach of naming the parties *and* to offer a clear no identification option.¹³ It is not easy to determine the best way of formulating that option. We would suggest something like: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or do you think of yourself as not having a general preference?”¹⁴

For reasons already explained, we would retain the American approach of starting with “Generally speaking, do you usually . . .,” which should help respondents focus on the long-term horizon. Bartle (1999) argues that there should be an intro, like “Many people think of themselves as being Republican or Democrat even if they don’t always support that party,” that spells out even more clearly the long-term orientation. We are not convinced that such an intro is needed. If it were, we would insist that the no identification option be also presented (“Some people think of themselves . . . others think of themselves as having no general preference”).

In the follow-up question for identifiers,¹⁵ we would stick to “think of yourself,” we would use three categories to obtain richer information, and we would repeat “generally speaking” and “usually” to keep respondents focused on the long term.¹⁶ More specifically, the question would be: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a very strong, a fairly strong, or a not a very strong Democrat?” As for the follow-up question for nonidentifiers, we would avoid the concept of closeness and use a wording that is closer to the notion of leaning, and we would again offer an explicit “no inclination” option: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as more inclined to support the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or do you usually think of yourself as not more inclined to support either?”

Whether we like it or not, we cannot do without measures of party identification in analyses of voting behavior. Many people think of themselves as Republicans or Democrats, and it is imperative to take into account the fact that voters have such long-term orientations. Whenever we wish to assess the impact of short-term factors like the economy, the leaders, or strategic considerations on the vote, there is a need to control for the effect of these general predispositions.

The implication is that we need more work on how best to measure party identification. We need rigorous experiments to assess the impact of question wording on the distribution and correlates of party identification. The CSES project must be applauded for its effort to provide a new common measure of party identification. According to our findings, that effort has not been completely successful. But, we have learned much in the process. The only way to achieve improved measures is to conduct additional experiments.

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APPENDIX

Traditional Questions by Country

UK

1. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru, Green Party, or what?
2. Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? IF YES, which party?
3. Would you call yourself very strong (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru, Green Party), fairly strong, or not very strong?

Canada

1. In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a Liberal, Conservative, N.D.P., Reform, Bloc Québécois, or none of these?
2. How strongly (Liberal, Conservative, N.D.P., Reform, Bloc Québécois) do you feel, very strongly, fairly strongly, or not very strongly?
3. Do you generally think of yourself as being a little closer to one of the federal parties than the others?
4. Which party is that?

USA

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?
2. Would you call yourself a strong (Republican, Democrat) or a not very strong (Republican, Democrat)?
3. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

Experimental Questions

1. Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?
2. Which party is that?
3. Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?
4. Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the others?
5. Which party is that?

NOTES

1. All respondents also got the experimental set of questions in the mailout questionnaire. These questions are not examined in this article.
2. A similar effect, though of smaller magnitude, has been observed in Australia (Charnock, 1996).
3. In the case of the American question, it may be that the question is slightly biased in favor of no identification, because of the positive connotation of the word "independent."
4. The same comment applies to the traditional follow-up questions to nonpartisans, which also refer to closeness.
5. In Canada, all respondents were asked the traditional question in the campaign survey and a random half got the same traditional question in the post-election survey. Because we want to look at the joint distribution of responses to the two questions, the results reported in Table 1 pertain to the random half of respondents who were asked the traditional question in the campaign and the experimental one in the post-election survey.

6. Non-leaning nonidentifiers cannot be considered because they do not express any general predisposition to support a party.
7. In this section and in the following ones, we use the post-election survey in which a random half of respondents answered the traditional question and the other half the experimental one. This permits a more rigorous comparison of the relationship between the two measures of party identification and other variables.
8. Heath and Pierce (1992) have shown that when the party identification questions are put closely after the vote questions, respondents may be encouraged to bring their party identification in line with their reported vote. In all of the surveys considered here, the two sets of questions are asked in different sections of the questionnaire. Order effects are therefore implausible.
9. The American data pertain to voting behavior in the presidential election.
10. The abstention/switching ratio drops from 7 among strong identifiers to 2 and 1.5 among moderate and weak identifiers, and jumps back to 6 among leaners.
11. There is no difference between weak identifiers and leaners with the experimental question but given the small number of weak identifiers this is not a serious anomaly.
12. Note that with the experimental question, leaners are as likely to vote for their party as moderate identifiers.
13. We recognize that naming all the parties can be awkward when there are more than six or seven of them. We believe, however, that it is necessary to name the parties in order to tap identification with a *specific* party. When there are more than seven parties, we would suggest naming the most important parties and adding "a supporter of another party" before presenting the no identification option.
14. The New Zealand question ends with "Don't you think of yourself in this way?" While this formulation seems to us more satisfactory than having no such option (as in Britain) and than the Canadian "none of these," it does not clearly refer to an absence of identification.
15. We would retain the branching approach that has been shown to improve reliability (Krosnick and Berent, 1993).
16. We thank one of the referees for insisting on this point.

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