

Party Identification in Canada: Resilience under Duress

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Paper prepared for presentation at the workshop on “Duty and Choice: Participation and Preferences in Democratic Elections” on the occasion of André Blais’s 65th birthday, January 20, 2012, Montreal.

Abstract

Panel data from the 2004-2006-2008 Canadian Election Study suggest that many Canadians do have a meaningful attachment to a political party. There is little evidence that party identification travels along with the vote; party identification typically remains intact, even when people vote at odds with their party. The most telling example of this is the response of Liberal partisans to a major scandal. Revelations of wrongdoing, may have swayed their vote, but it did not necessarily shake their attachment to the party. Despite the unfolding of the scandal, Liberal partisanship exhibited only a modest tendency for recent shocks to induce a drift away from the party. Several possible reasons for the resilience of Liberal partisanship are explored.

Introduction

The concept of party identification occupies a central place among scholars concerned with the dynamics of vote choice. And for that reason alone it continues to come under close scrutiny. This analysis joins that debate and does so, first, by drawing on some recent conceptual and empirical contributions and second, by exploiting recent turbulence in the Canadian electoral landscape and the availability of panel data encompassing most of that interlude. We focus in particular on adherents of the Liberal party of Canada, which has moved from being a dominant party leading a majority government to the status of a third party.

Party Identification: A Contested Concept

Few variables in the field of political behavior are as contentious as party identification. Some see party identification as an “unmoved mover.” Others conceive of party identification as a “running tally” subject to rational updating in light of performance. The debate has become unduly polarized. The so-called revisionists, after all, acknowledge that there is a stable component to party identification (Achen 2002; Fiorina 1981), just as the original proponents, who view party identification as a deeply socialized psychological attachment, emphasize that it is not impervious to change (Campbell et al. 1960).

Recent work using mixed latent Markov mover-stayer models points to the need to move beyond these debates about the stability or instability of partisan ties. Their findings highlight the existence of two types of partisans within the ranks of major parties (Clarke and McCutcheon 2009; Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto 2011). Though not immune to short-term forces, “stayers” tend to remain loyal to their party through thick and thin, while “movers” are characterized as more responsive to political events and policy shifts. The studies may disagree when it comes to the implications for the longstanding debate over the nature of party identification. Neundorf and her colleagues (2011) suggest that stayers approximate the classic Michigan-style partisan while movers are likely to be rational updaters. Clarke and McCutcheon (2009, 724), though, caution against any such “theoretical compromise.” However, these studies do agree that each party typically has a mix of durable and flexible partisans. The first and most obvious question raised by their findings is: what anchors some partisans to their party when their fellow partisans are more apt to float free? And, second, what does it take to shake stable partisans free of their moorings?

There are at least two possible directions to take in addressing the first question. The first focuses on the role of social group memberships. The more rooted party attachments are in socio-cultural and/or class identities, the more stable those attachments are likely to be. But this does not mean that they will be immune to change. A significant shift in policy (Johnston 2006) or a change in a party’s perceived social group identity (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002) might induce even the most loyal of partisans to re-consider their attachment to the party.

A second useful framework for understanding the behavior of “stayers” is the process of motivated political reasoning (Taber and Lodge 2006; Redlawsk 2002). Drawing on the notion of hot cognition, this approach highlights the importance of automatic affective responses that may bias partisans’ processing of new political information. When these automatic responses are triggered prior to conscious processing, the updating of prior performance evaluations will be influenced by unconscious biases. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this type of motivated

reasoning comes from experimental research showing that voters can actually become more supportive of a preferred candidate when confronted with negative information (Redlawsk 2002). The stronger the prior affect, the stronger are the automatic affective responses. The implication seems clear: strong partisans are less likely than those with weaker ties to re-evaluate their party in the face of negative information.

This does not mean, though, that motivated reasoners are completely insulated from the effects of such information. Redlawsk's (2010) experimental work on candidate evaluations identifies an "affective tipping point." That argument is intuitively plausible: "At some point even the most strongly held positive evaluation should flag in the face of repeated negative information" (p. 564). The theoretical underpinnings of this insight derive from work on affective intelligence that links careful processing to increased anxiety (Marcus, Newman and MacKuen 2000). Our conjecture is that the notion of an affective tipping point might also apply when staunch partisans repeatedly encounter negative information about their party.

This idea of an affective tipping point is consistent with the Michigan school's view that people's attachment to a party can come under such intense pressure that "a stable partisan identification may actually be changed" (Campbell et al. 1960, 135). Such pressure might be exerted by a significant shift in a party's platform or by a major scandal. Indeed, an analysis of partisanship in Germany over a 24-year period highlights two key shocks in inducing partisan volatility: Social Democrats' platform shift in 2003 and the Christian Democrats' donation scandal in 1999 (Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto 2011). As Johnston (2006) observes, "The nub of the issue is how big a shock is required to move identification" (p. 5).

Party Identification in Canada

The context of the three elections held between 2004 and 2008 makes Canada a particularly useful research site for exploring the dynamics of party identification. Liberal party identifiers were subject to strong pressures to re-think their traditional allegiance. The party was tarnished by a major scandal and divided over the question of same-sex marriage. The 2004 election put an end to the Liberals' record as "one of the four most successful parties in contemporary democracies" (Blais 2005, 821). The party lost its majority and barely hung on to power. Worse was to follow. In the 2006 election, the Liberals failed to muster enough support to continue in government. And in 2008, they suffered a stunning defeat.

If one had to isolate a single cause for the change in Liberal fortunes, it was likely the so-called sponsorship scandal (Gidengil et al. 2006; Gidengil et al. 2012). Following the defeat of a referendum on Quebec sovereignty by the narrowest of margins in 1995, the Liberal government launched a sponsorship programme, the goal of which was to increase the visibility of Canada and the federal government in that province. The sponsorship programme morphed into a scandal in December 2003 when a report from the Auditor General of Canada revealed massive irregularities in the spending and reporting of the funds. The scandal was fresh in many voters' minds when the 2004 election took place and the Liberal party paid the price at the polls. More damaging revelations followed during public hearings on the scandal. The commission of inquiry released its first report in late 2005. That report exonerated the party's current leader, but it detailed kickback schemes, abuses and a general "culture of entitlement". Four weeks later, an election was called following the Liberal government's defeat on a motion of no confidence. A

change of leadership in the wake of the 2006 defeat and the adoption of a bold environmental initiative did nothing to revive the party's fortunes. Indeed, the party traditionally referred to as Canada's "natural party of government" saw its support sink to a historic low in the 2008 election.

The same-sex marriage issue posed another challenge to the Liberals. Starting in 2003 a series of provincial Supreme Court rulings had made same-sex marriage legal in eight provinces and one territory. Faced with a Supreme Court of Canada ruling that same-sex marriage was constitutional, the Liberal minority government introduced the necessary legislation to amend the marriage law. That move generated much controversy, particularly within the Liberal caucus. More importantly for our purposes, the same-sex marriage legislation created potential "moral issue disagreement" with Catholics, traditionally among the party's staunchest partisans (Stephenson 2010, 97). With most Conservative MPs voting against the legislation, there was a clear alternative for unhappy partisans.

The 2004-2006-2008 CES panel makes it possible to examine party identification during this period of flux in party fortunes. The same-sex marriage issue provides an opportunity to examine what happens to party bonds when there is a policy shift that threatens the values of party loyalists. Add to this the new revelations about the sponsorship scandal that emerged in the run-up to the 2006 election as well as lacklustre leadership, and the notion of even strong partisans reaching a tipping point becomes a possibility.

The panel data also enable us to assess the nature of Canadians' partisan ties. As elsewhere, the concept of party identification has been highly contested in Canada (Gidengil 1992). Data from two early Canadian Election Studies (CES) suggested that a Michigan-style conception of party identification as an enduring psychological attachment was "almost inapplicable in Canada": party identification appeared to be "as volatile in Canada as the vote itself" (Meisel 1975, 67). Clarke and his colleagues (1996) subsequently suggested a more nuanced assessment, by drawing attention to a core of "durable partisans" in Canada. Nonetheless, those researchers concluded that "The keynote of partisanship in Canada was its flexibility" (Clarke et al. 1984, 56). Subsequent panel analyses, using data from the 1974, 1979 and 1980 elections seemed to confirm the instability of Canadians' party attachments (Leduc et al. 1984).

Some of the apparent instability in party identification in Canada may have been attributable to measurement error. Green and his colleagues (2002) have re-analyzed the 1974-79-80 panel using dynamic panel models that make it possible to differentiate between measurement unreliability and true partisan instability. They conclude that party identification was actually quite stable during the period. Even correcting for possible measurement error, though, their analyses of panel data from the 1980s and early 1990s indicated much greater volatility, reflecting the destabilizing of the postwar party system. Clarke and McCutcheon (2009) have been quite critical of their procedures, arguing that it is unlikely that responses to a straightforward question about such a salient political object as a political party could be so prone to unreliability. Their own analyses using mixed Markov latent class models indicate a good deal of movement at the latent variable level.

Arguably, though, the more serious measurement issue relates to the presence of a systematic bias. The traditional party identification question did not explicitly offer respondents the option of not identifying with *any* political party (Johnston 1992). That earlier metric may have encouraged some respondents to name the party they were voting for even though they lacked any meaningful sense of psychological attachment to that party. The effect would be to make party identification appear quite unstable. In 1988, the phrase “none of these” was added to the traditional party identification question and the proportion of non-identifiers increased. The 2004-2006-2008 panel makes it possible to assess whether the modified question wording (even without corrections for unreliability) produces more stable responses. If self-declared identification with the Liberal party withstood the new revelations about the extent of corruption that emerged in the run-up to the 2006 election, as well as controversial legislation on a morally-charged issue, the case for meaningful party attachments in Canada will be more credible.

Finally, the panel data enable us to examine the extent to which partisan dynamics in Canada are bounded. The notion of bounded partisanship rests on empirical evidence that very few party identifiers switch from one major party to another (Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto 2011; Zuckerman and Kroh 2006). Instead, the typical trajectories are from identification with one major party to non-identification and vice versa (see also Clarke and McCutcheon 2009). However, the extent to which partisan dynamics are bounded may depend on the distance between the major parties. Given the ideological ordering of the parties, we predict that the dynamics will be less bounded in Canada. Moreover, the presence of a viable third party may mean that identifiers consider a less limited choice set. Note that studies to date have treated identifiers with third parties as if they were non-identifiers

Data and Methods

The data are taken from the 2004-2006-2008 Canadian Election Study panel. Respondents were first interviewed during the 2004 campaign. They were re-interviewed after the election, during the 2006 campaign, after the 2006 election and again after the 2008 election.¹ All of the interviews were conducted by telephone. The analyses are based on those respondents who participated in all five waves of the study and answered the party identification question in every wave (N=795).² Note that the analysis excludes residents of Québec. The presence of the Bloc Québécois meant that elections unfolded very differently in the province during the period under study and there are too few panel respondents from Quebec to allow for a parallel analysis.

The party identification question reads: “In federal politics, do you usually think of yourself as a: Liberal, Conservative, NDP or none of these?”³ This formulation is similar to the traditional U.S. wording in two key respects. It asks respondents how they “think of themselves” and it encourages them to think beyond the immediate electoral context by including the modifier “usually”. The most obvious difference is the substitution of “none of these” for Independent, a category that has little meaning in the Canadian context. The Canadian question also refers explicitly to the federal level. These differences notwithstanding, the Canadian question is arguably the closest analogue to its U.S. counterpart (Blais et al. 2001; Johnston 2006).⁴

Like the American National Election Study, the CES also includes follow-up questions designed to gauge the intensity of respondents’ party identification and to differentiate “leaners”

from other non-partisans. In principle, the inclusion of these questions would allow for the creation of a seven-point scale. However, it is not at all clear how party identification can be reduced to a single dimension in a multi-party system. Clarke and McCutcheon (2009), for example, place the two main parties at opposite ends of the scale with respondents who identify with neither party being placed in the middle. But this necessarily treats those who identify with other parties—a non-trivial number—as if they lack any identification. One consequence may be to overstate the bounded nature of party identification in Canada. Neundorf and her colleagues (2011) have been critical of analyses that treat seven-point scales of party identification as interval-level measures. This practice is problematic because it implies that “the distance a person has to travel between major-party support and independence and then on to backing another major party is equal” (p. 476). Finally, Johnston has questioned the inclusion of intensity in the measure on the grounds that intensity varies more than direction: “the aggregate distribution so generated shifts back and forth with the morning and afternoon breezes; it does not signal climate change. But climate change is the point, metaphorically speaking” (p. 20). Given these concerns, we opt to treat party identification as a nominal variable that includes a separate category for non-identifiers.

We begin with the question of whether Canadians’ responses to the party identification reflect something more than their current vote intention or reported vote. The crucial test for establishing a meaningful party attachment independent of vote choice is whether partisans will maintain their party identification even when they vote at odds with their party. From this perspective, the three elections held between 2004 and 2008 provide a critical testing ground. As their party’s electoral woes deepened, Liberal identifiers might have been tempted to change their allegiance along with their vote. Once we have established the scale of defections, we go on to examine why some identifiers remain loyal to the party while other defect.

Findings

Do Canadians have Meaningful Party Attachments?

The place to start is with a review of respondents’ responses to the party identification question in the 2004 campaign survey. Figure 1 tracks the number of times each respondent repeated their response when re-interviewed after the 2004 election, during the 2006 campaign, and after both the 2006 and 2008 elections. Only 25 per cent of those who responded “none” when first interviewed during the 2004 campaign repeated their answer each time they were interviewed. That group, “hard core” non-partisans, made up 8 per cent of the panel sample. At the other extreme, 42 per cent of panel respondents identified with the same party across all five waves of the survey; these are stable partisans. This aggregate figure, however, obscures a good deal of inter-party variation. Self-identified Conservatives (72 per cent) were the most likely to remain true to their party each time they were re-interviewed. This is hardly surprising. The party was clearly on the rise, denying the Liberals a majority victory in 2004 and replacing them in government in 2006, albeit with a minority of seats. The more intriguing finding concerns the Liberal partisans. Despite their party’s electoral woes, Liberal identifiers (56 per cent) were *not* the most prone to vary their responses in subsequent waves of the survey. It turns out that it was the New Democratic Party (NDP) identifiers (48 per cent) who seemed to exhibit the least stable attachment to their party.

[Figure 1 about here]

It comes as no surprise to discover that there is a close correlation between partisan intensity and partisan stability (see Figure 2). Only 33 per cent of those who said that they did not identify very strongly with a party when first interviewed continued to identify with the same party each time they were re-interviewed. That compares with 60 percent for fairly strong identifiers and 80 per cent for very strong identifiers. But notice, once again, that there was a good deal of variation across parties. The figures for very strong identifiers varied from 92 per cent for Conservative identifiers to 71 per cent for Liberal and NDP identifiers. The most telling evidence of the impact of partisan intensity is provided by strong Liberal identifiers. Fifty-seven per cent of Liberals who expressed a very strong identification with the party when first interviewed during the 2004 campaign expressed just as strong an identification when interviewed after the 2008 election. As for the rest, the events of the intervening years may have weakened their attachment, but it did not drive them away from the party. Only 9 per cent of very strong 2004 Liberal identifiers failed to identify with the party in 2008.

[Figure 2 about here]

The more interesting question concerns the distribution, and destinations, of those who qualified as “switchers”. The notion of “bounded partisanship” suggests that relatively few partisans move from one party to another (Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto 2011; Zuckerman and Kroh 2006). Over three-quarters (77 per cent) of those who identified with a party when first interviewed for the 2004 campaign survey only ever named one party. On occasion, some of these identifiers (16 per cent) answered “none,” but they never named a different party. Only 12 per cent of 2004 identifiers switched directly to another party over the course of the panel. The data clearly support the intuition that the more strongly people identified with a party when first interviewed, the less likely they were ever to name another party: 93 per cent of very strong identifiers never named another party. That compares with some 76 per cent of fairly strong identifiers and only 55 per cent of those who did not identify very strongly or could not say. The bounded partisanship phenomenon is best exemplified, perhaps, by strong Liberal identifiers: 25 per cent of that group answered “none” on occasion but only 3 per cent ever named another party.

When Liberal partisans switched parties, they were more likely to switch to the Conservatives on their right than to the NDP on their left. Conservative partisans, meanwhile, were more likely to move to the Liberals than to the NDP.⁵ These patterns of inter-party movement are predictable, given conventional understandings about how Canada’s political parties are ordered across the ideological spectrum. However, they qualify the notion of bounded partisanship, which emphasizes that moves between major parties are very much the exception. Note, though, that those who did not identify with any party when first interviewed were by far the most important source of growth in Conservative identification.

These inter-party dynamics raise a critical question: to what extent does party identification travel along with the vote? As originally conceived by Campbell and his colleagues (Campbell et al. 1960), party identification does not determine a person’s vote: short-term attitudinal forces particular to a given election can counteract partisans’ longstanding

predisposition to support their party at the polls. And if the short-term attractions of particular personalities, issues, or party platforms are sufficiently strong, then partisans might be induced to vote for a different party. Indeed, it is necessary for some partisans to cast votes out of line with their party identification; otherwise, it would be impossible to establish the existence of party identification independently of vote choice (Miller 1983). Paradoxically, then, the acid test for empirically establishing whether party identification represents a meaningful psychological attachment relies on those instances where party identification does not faithfully predict vote choice. But the bottom line expectation is that party identification should remain intact even when partisans vote at odds with their party.

[Figure 3 about here]

The data summarized in Figure 3 demonstrate the scope and scale of that phenomenon across the three elections of interest. Specifically, Figure 3 matches panel respondents' reported vote choice in each election with their party identification as reported in the same post-election interview.⁶ The consistently close correspondence between Conservative party identification and vote choice is predictable given the nature of the short-term forces shaping these elections.⁷ Even so, enough Conservative identifiers voted for another party to establish that they too have a party attachment that operates independently of their vote choice in a given election. NDP identifiers exhibited a greater willingness to vote in ways that departed from their expressed party identification. Again, that finding is not entirely surprising given the NDP's place within the Canadian party system. The NDP was still Canada's perennial third party and some of its supporters may well have ended up voting strategically rather than "wasting" their vote. Much more revealing is the pattern for Liberal identifiers. That group was the least likely to be faithful to their party at the polls, which is exactly what we would predict, given the particular short-term forces that were at work in these elections. In 2004 and 2006, the sponsorship scandal may have discouraged many Liberal partisans from continuing to vote for their party at that time. In 2008, a weak leader and an unpopular environmental initiative may have had the same effect. These factors may have swayed their vote, but they did not necessarily shake their attachment to the party. Notice that, in 2004, almost a quarter of Liberal identifiers reported voting for another party and yet still thought of themselves as Liberals. By 2008, the figure rose to one in three. Clearly, people's responses to the party identification question are not simply a proxy for telling us how they voted.

[Figure 4 about here]

What about those voters who do switch their party allegiance? When Thomassen (1976) used panel data to study party identification and vote choice in the Netherlands in the early 1970s, he demonstrated that Dutch voters' party identification was even less stable than their vote choice. According to Thomassen's findings, between 1971 and 1972, 10 per cent of Dutch respondents voted the same way, but changed their party identification, while only 6 per cent changed their vote but maintained their party identification. Thomassen's results represented a profound challenge to the notion that party identification is a long-term component of vote choice. In the case of Canada, though, the 2004-2006-2008 CES panel data produce results that are much more in line with theoretical expectations (see Figure 4). These results hold whether we consider a short time frame or a longer time frame.

Note first the patterns of stability and change between the campaign and post-election waves. In 2004, fully three quarters of identifiers voted in line with their vote intention.⁸ When identifiers changed their vote, however, their party identification typically remained unchanged (12 percent). Significantly, instances when party identification changed along with the vote were rare (3 per cent) and it was rarer still for the vote to remain the same while party identification changed (2 per cent). The pattern is similar for the 2006 election. Certainly, there was more flux between the campaign and post-election interviews, but instances of party identification traveling with the vote remained the exception. The same holds when a longer time frame is considered. Predictably, when it comes to patterns of change *between* elections, identifiers are less likely to vote for their party in consecutive elections. The key point remains, though, that when identifiers did change their vote, their party identification typically remained intact. For example, 17 per cent of identifiers who had voted in ways that were consistent with their reported party identification in 2004 reported voting for a different party in 2006 while maintaining their party identification intact. Only 6 per cent changed their party allegiance along with their vote. That same pattern is replicated when the 2006 and 2008 elections are compared.

[Figure 5 about here]

When that analysis is repeated for Liberal identifiers, the results are particularly revealing (see Figure 5). Their party was in disarray. The pull of short-term forces is evident in the proportion who had switched their vote by election day; the longer term strains on their loyalties are apparent in the steady decline in the proportion who voted for the party in consecutive elections. The crucial point, though, is that when Liberal identifiers changed their vote, their party identification typically remained intact. Instances of party identification changing along with the vote were much less frequent. Tellingly, though, these defections steadily increased in number across the four time points. So, too, did the number of erstwhile Liberals who ceased to be identifiers. And that finding holds whether they voted for the party or not.

The Dynamics of Party Identification

These patterns raise two questions: First, why were so many Liberal identifiers able to withstand the strains on their loyalties? And second, what induced a significant number of their counterparts to desert the party? Table 1 begins to address the first question.⁹ There are two noteworthy patterns. First, older people were significantly more likely to identify with the party at the time of the 2004 campaign. The conventional expectation is that party identification will strengthen with age. Certainly, there is evidence of this in the Canadian context, though the effect appears to be quite modest: between the ages of 18 and 75, the average observed gain in intensity in the 1980s was only 0.33 on a 0 to 3 scale (Johnston 1992). To the extent that older partisans do have stronger party attachments, the fact that Liberal identifiers tended to be older might have helped to explain why defections were not more common between 2004 and 2008. But the evidence does not seem to support that interpretation. Note that, in Table 1, the effect of age weakened across the three elections. In 2004, other things being equal, the probability of identifying with the Liberal party was 10 points higher at age 50 than at age 25. By the time the 2006 election was over, the gap had shrunk to less than six points.

[Table 1 about here]

The second pattern is intriguing for different reasons. The importance of ethno-religious factors to Liberal party identification at the time of the 2004 campaign is clear. Net of other social background characteristics, the probability of identifying with the party was 11 points higher for Catholics, 28 points higher for French speakers and 30 points higher for members of a racial minority.¹⁰ In the case of both racial minorities and French speakers, these ties turned out to be relatively durable. Indeed, the probability of identifying with the Liberals was 36 points higher for minority respondents interviewed right after the 2008 election. The corresponding figure for French speakers was 24 points. However, these partisans were not necessarily immune to short-term shocks as the fluctuating effects of belonging to a racial minority indicate: their probability of identifying with the Liberal party fell as low as 20 points in the aftermath of the 2004 election. It may be appropriate, then, to characterize members of these groups as “tethered partisans” (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002, 57), the term for partisans who do not stray far from their long-term party attachment.¹¹

The pattern for Catholics is different. Through four of the five waves, Catholics remained significantly more likely than non-Catholics to identify with the Liberals. That changed between the 2006 and 2008 elections: their probability of identifying with the party dropped from over nine points to less than four points. Some Catholics, it seems, may have reached their tipping point. The tipping point for Christian fundamentalists appears to have come much earlier. Notice that between the 2004 campaign and the election itself, Christian fundamentalists became significantly less likely to identify with the party.

What factors induced erstwhile partisans to desert the party? To explore that question, we estimate a series of models using lagged values of Liberal identification (see Table 2). In each model, party identification in a given wave is regressed on identification in the previous wave. The parameter connecting party identification at time t to its own previous value at time $t-1$ captures the individual-level stability in partisanship over time. Also entered on the right-hand side are views about the two potential shocks—the sponsorship scandal and same-sex marriage—as well as evaluations of the Liberal leader and the leaders of the two competing parties, the Conservatives and the NDP.¹² This specification aims to capture the influence of leader evaluations and the two issues on changes in Liberal party identification between waves. Note that controls are included for social background characteristics as measured during the 2004 campaign.

[Table 2 about here]

The impact of the sponsorship scandal is evident in 2004. People who were angry about the scandal and dissatisfied with the way that it had been handled were significantly more likely to stop identifying with the Liberal party between the campaign and post-elections interviews. On the other hand, opposition to same-sex marriage appears not to have been a significant factor in encouraging defections, perhaps because the referral of the issue to the Supreme Court the previous summer had effectively taken the issue off the electoral agenda. Despite the fact that the Liberal leader had been the Finance Minister during the time of the sponsorship program, negative leadership evaluations were not a big source of Liberal defections nor were positive evaluations of his Conservative counterpart. Both played a role, but the impacts were modest.

The forces driving change in Liberal party identification between the 2004 post-election and 2006 campaign interviews seem to be different. Despite the new revelations of wrongdoing in the run-up to the 2006 campaign, the scandal does not seem to have been a significant source of defections. Negative evaluations of the Liberal leader, on the other hand, did have a substantial impact on Liberal partisanship, this despite the fact that the same commission of inquiry that had helped to precipitate the election had absolved him of blame for the scandal. Moreover, people's evaluations of the Liberal leader had much more of an impact than did their evaluations of his Conservative rival. Curiously, support for same-sex marriage appears to have dissuaded some erstwhile Liberals from maintaining their identification with the party. That finding might be a statistical artefact, but it may also reflect the fact that the Liberal caucus had been divided over the issue, leaving the NDP as the more steadfast defender of the 2005 change in Canada's marriage law.

Whatever the explanation, that issue had the opposite effect on defections between the campaign and post-election interviews: those who opposed same-sex marriage were significantly less likely to remain Liberals. But the scandal does not appear to have been a factor. Those who were angered by the scandal and unhappy with its handling were no more likely to have defected by the time the election was over. And negative evaluations of the party's leader had only a modest effect, just as they did when it came to explaining change between the 2004 pre-election and post-election surveys (compare columns one and three of Table 2). This is the pattern that we would expect to see if election campaigns serve to prime partisans' party loyalties. During the inter-election period, when party leaders are the most visible embodiment of their party, some partisans may be apt to stray from the fold, especially if their ties are not very strong. Party messaging during the campaign may remind them of why they identified with the party in the first place. As party identification is primed, leader evaluations will necessarily get de-primed.

This interpretation, while necessarily speculative, is bolstered when we look at the impact of leader evaluations on change between the 2006 and 2008 elections. Leader evaluations clearly played more of a role in defections between elections than they did at the time of the 2006 election. Positive evaluations of the Conservative leader, and more especially negative evaluations of the Liberal leader, both help to explain why some erstwhile identifiers stopped thinking of themselves as Liberals. There may also have been some residual fallout from the sponsorship scandal. Some Liberals who had been upset by the scandal in 2006 seem to have shed their allegiance to the party between elections. The same-sex marriage issue, though, did not have a significant effect on the propensity to defect.

[Table 3 about here]

So far the analysis has not taken into account the possibility of reciprocal effects. It is reasonable to suppose that views about the scandal or same-sex marriage may affect party identification, but it is also plausible that party identification could affect views about those issues. The same logic applies to leader evaluations. Table 3 examines reciprocal effects during the 2006 campaign. A similar analysis cannot be conducted for the 2004 campaign because of the difficulty of finding suitable variables for exogenizing party identification, issue attitudes and leader evaluations. However, the 2004 campaign and post-election waves provide a number of

exogenous variables that can be used to create instrumental variables for an analysis of reciprocal relationships in the 2006 campaign wave. The analysis proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, instrumental variables are created by regressing party identification, evaluations of the Liberal leader and the two issue attitudes, all as measured during the campaign, on a set of exogenous variables from the two previous waves.¹³ In the second stage, the predicted values derived from these analyses are used in the analysis of the 2006 campaign.

The results point to the conclusion that the sponsorship scandal did have an impact on identification with the Liberal party during the 2006 campaign. There is little of evidence of a causal link running in the opposite direction. What did affect views about the scandal was how a respondent rated the Liberal leader. Positive evaluations tempered negative reactions to the scandal and its aftermath. Evaluations of the Liberal leader also influenced party identification. The influence was reciprocal: identifying with the Liberal party encouraged more favourable evaluations of the party's leader. Finally, there seems to have been some spill over from the scandal when it came to opinion about same-sex marriage. There is no indication, though, that party identification or leader evaluations influenced views on this issue. Nor did those views have a significant effect on reactions to the scandal.

Concluding Discussion

There are two different sets of conclusions that might be drawn from these findings. The first reveals the particularities of the dynamics of Canadian partisanship in a period of electoral flux. The second shed light on broader questions concerning the boundedness of partisanship, the possibility of tipping points, and the firmness of partisan attachments under conditions of duress. When it comes to the specifics of the Canadian results, one finding is very clear: there is substantial partisan ballast, as it were, to Canadian partisanship: Across the panel, stable partisans (42 per cent) outnumber hard-core non-partisans (8 per cent) by a ratio of 5:1. Given the confluence of short-term factors (the scandal, leadership liabilities, and divisive social issues) it is not surprising that most Conservatives (73 per cent) remained true to their partisan roots for the duration of the period. More surprising, perhaps, is evidence that such a large proportion of Liberals (56 per cent) remained unwavering supporters in the face of this combination of challenges.

A second striking finding concerns the extent to which vote choice did *not* track party identification, especially in the case of the Liberals. In 2004, one Liberal in four reported voting for another party; that figure rose to one in three in 2008. And yet in the very same post-election interview, these respondents continued to think of themselves as Liberals. These findings are at odds with Dutch evidence (Thomassen 1976) indicating that party identification in the Netherlands can be more fickle than vote choice. For Canadian voters, party identification is clearly stickier: simultaneous shifts in both vote choice *and* party identification are rare (3 per cent). The ranks of Liberal voters did thin out between 2004 and 2008, but the ranks of Liberal identifiers remained more intact. The conditions of volatility prevailing in this period provide a particularly useful terrain for probing whether party identification in a non-U.S. context represents anything more than a restatement of a respondent's vote choice. The evidence on this point is clear: a substantial number of Canadians have partisan ties that are independent of their current vote.

A more intriguing question that emerges from these findings perhaps is: why in the face of such negative short-term factors as the scandal, unpopular leadership, and a divisive social issue, did the hearts of so many Liberals remain in the same place? Socio-demographic factors clearly go some distance towards “binding” partisans to their party. Catholics, French-speakers, and racial minorities were all systematically over-represented in the ranks of the Liberal party in 2004. This was no longer the case for Catholics by the final wave of the panel but it is noteworthy that it was only in 2008 that they ceased to be disproportionately Liberal. The attachment of the other groups to the party did fluctuate, but they did not head for the exit in great numbers. Indeed, even in the face of so much negative information, there was an uptick in Liberal identification on the part of racial minorities in the final wave of the panel.

The results of the lagged model estimations suggest that those Liberals who did ditch their attachment to the party did so in two stages and for two different sets of reasons. The early defectors, those who stopped identifying with the party before 2006, did so because of the scandal. The late defectors, those who left the party after 2006, were more motivated by leadership evaluations. An analysis of the interactions between leadership evaluations and views about the scandal add weight to the possibility of a tipping point in the dynamics of Liberal party identification. That tipping point seems to have been reached in 2006. There is evidence of reciprocal effects and views about the scandal and leader evaluations are mutually implicated. Views about the sponsorship scandal had an impact on identification with the Liberals during the 2006 campaign. And how people viewed the scandal was shaped by how they viewed the leader. Leader evaluations, in turn, had an impact on party identification and vice versa.

Finally, the findings have implications for the notion of bounded partisanship. On the one hand, over three-quarters of those who identified with a party when first interviewed never named another party in any of the four subsequent interviews. On the other hand, switching directly to another party may not be as rare a phenomenon as prior studies have suggested. Moreover, when partisans did switch, the most common pattern of switching was between the two major parties. It could be that switching between major parties is much rarer when one party is clearly to the right and the other is clearly to the left. When neither major party is to the left, the distance to be traveled is shorter.

Figure 1: Number of Times the 2004 Campaign Response was Repeated upon Re-interview

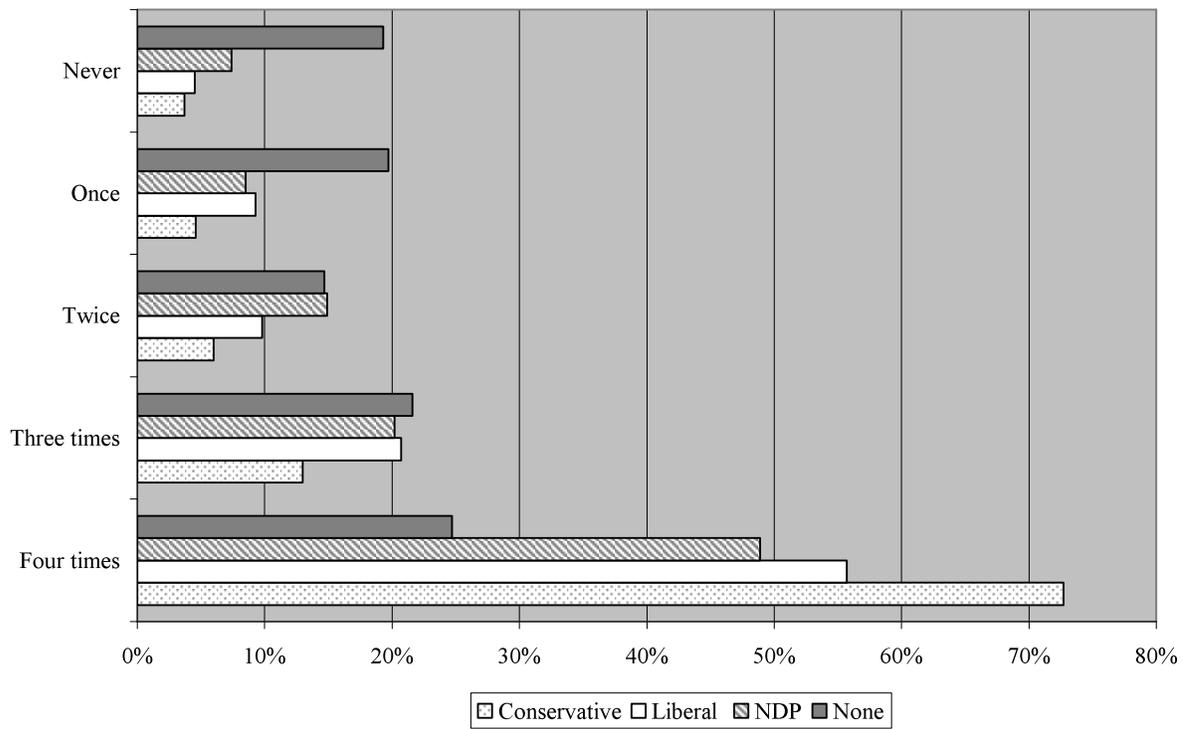


Figure 2: Number of Times the 2004 Campaign Response was Repeated
by Strength of Identification

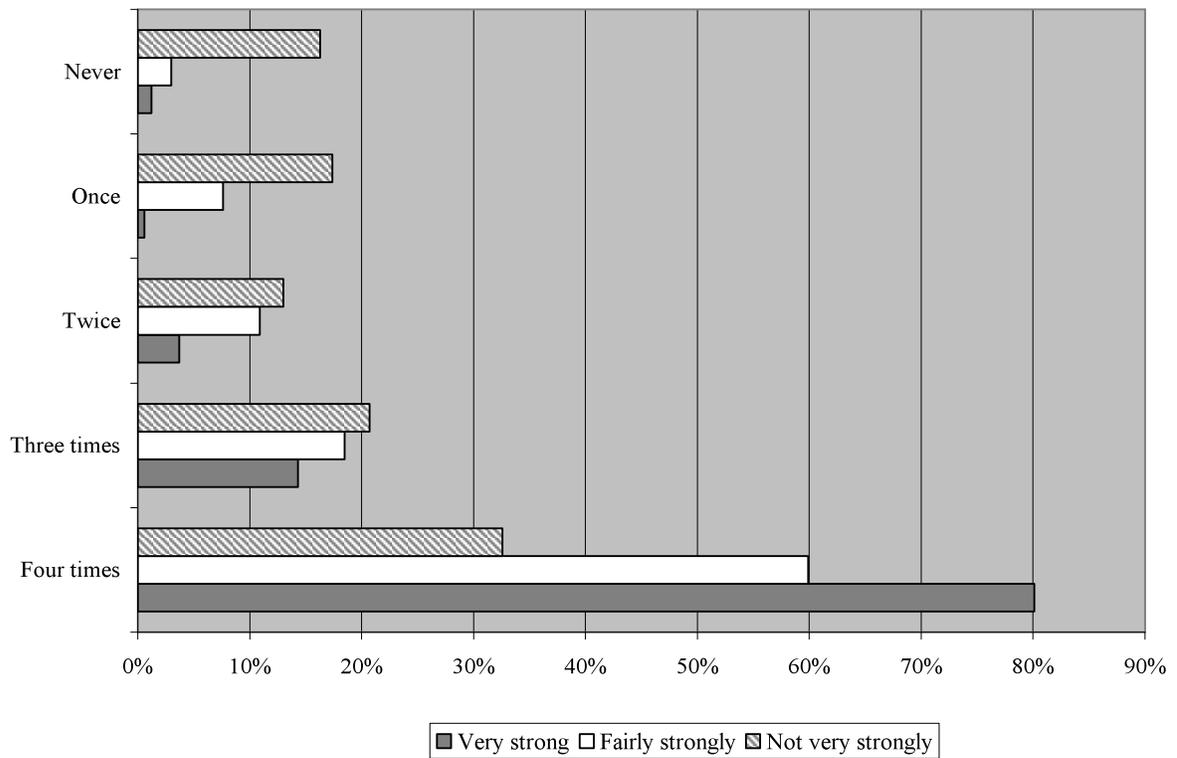


Figure 3: Consistency between Post-Election Party Identification and Reported Vote

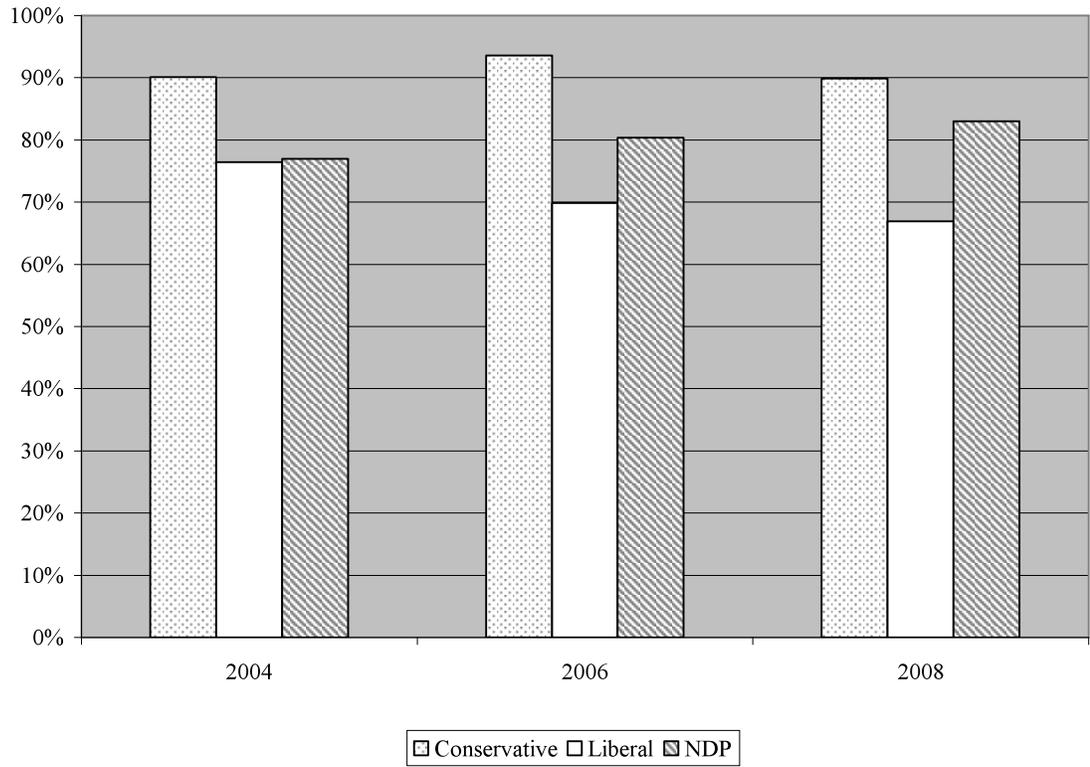


Figure 4: Change in Party identification and Change in Vote Choice Compared

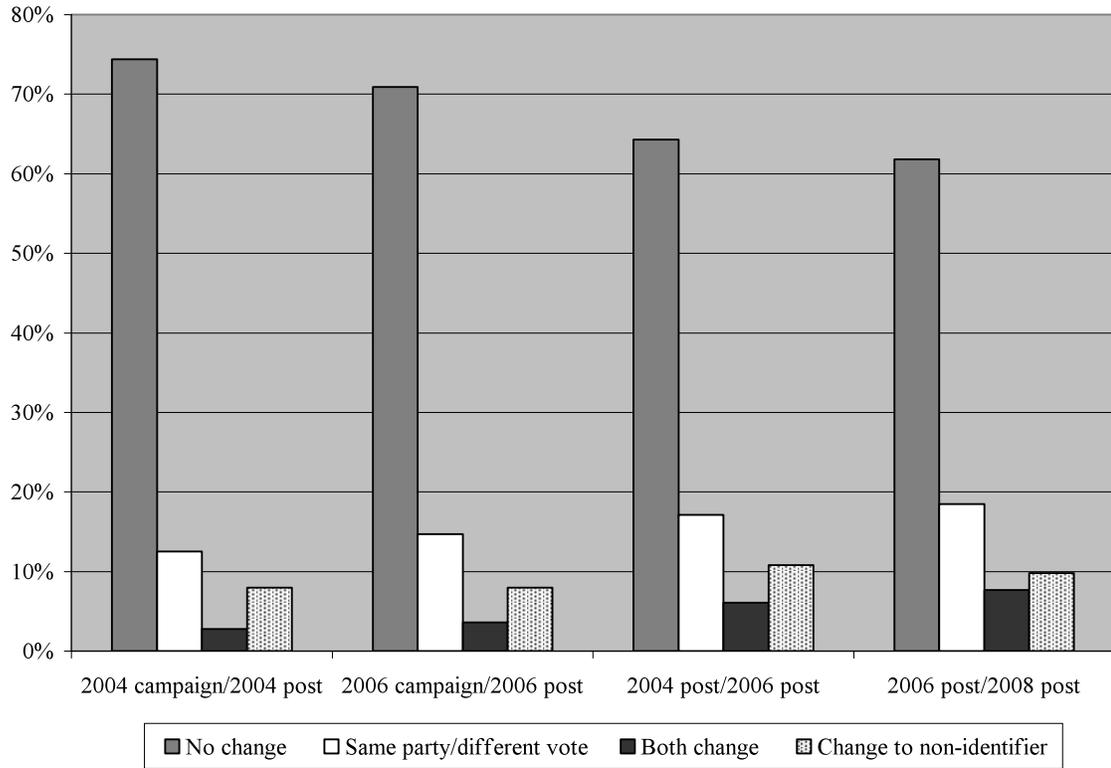


Figure 5: Change in Party identification and Change in Vote Choice Compared
(Liberal identifiers only)

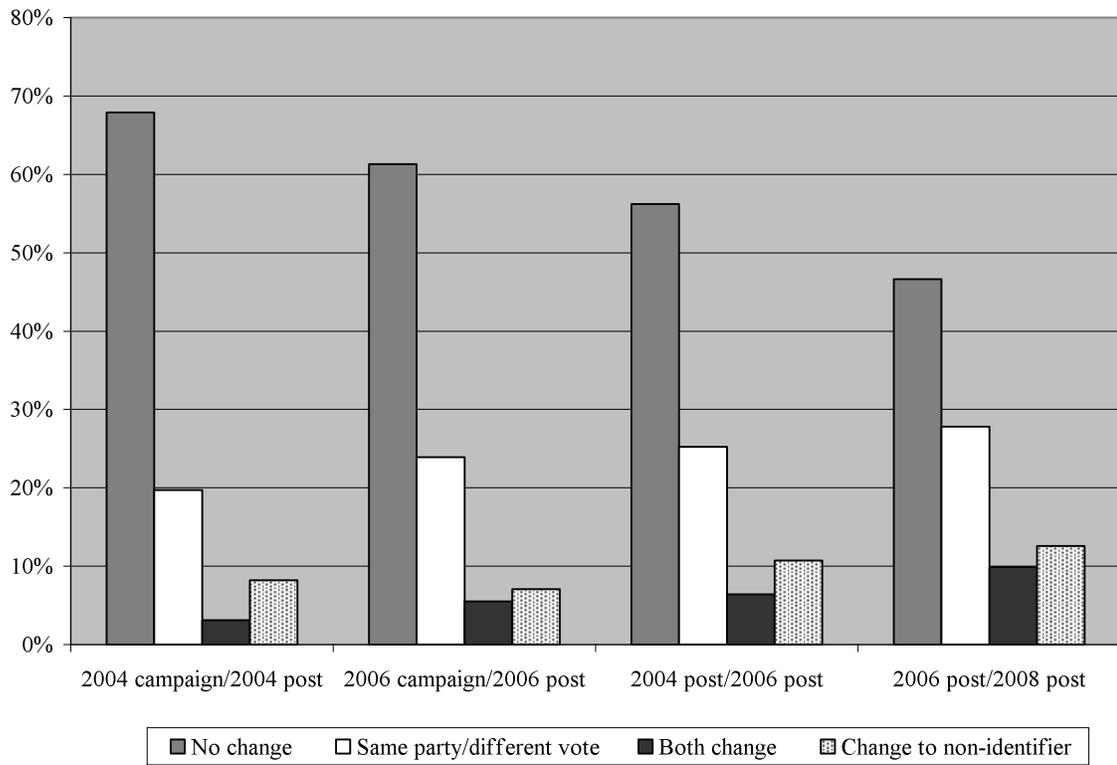


Table 1: Social Background Characteristics and Liberal Party Identification

	2004 campaign	2004 post- election	2006 campaign	2006 post- election	2008 post- election
Age	0.02 (.01) ^{***}	0.02 (.01) ^{***}	0.02 (.01) ^{**}	0.01 (.01) [*]	0.01 (.01) [*]
Western resident	-0.74 (.19) ^{***}	-0.64 (.19) ^{***}	-0.60 (.18) ^{***}	-0.88 (.19) ^{***}	-0.93 (.20) ^{***}
Catholic	0.60 (.21) ^{**}	0.49 (.20) [*]	0.36 (.21) ^a	0.47 (.21) [*]	0.20 (.22)
Christian fundamentalist	-0.19 (.21)	-0.54 (.22) [*]	-0.47 (.21) [*]	-0.62 (.23) ^{**}	-0.47 (.23) [*]
Racial minority	1.58 (.51) ^{**}	1.02 (.47) [*]	1.27 (.48) ^{**}	1.19 (.46) ^{**}	1.97 (.52) ^{***}
French first language	1.48 (.46) ^{***}	1.21 (.48) [*]	1.30 (.49) ^{**}	1.12 (.49) [*]	1.33 (.47) ^{**}
Constant	-2.10 (.36) ^{***}	-1.79 (.35) ^{***}	-1.49 (.34) ^{***}	-1.22 (.34) ^{***}	-1.39 (.35) ^{***}
Nagelkerke R-square	.14	.11	.10	.12	.14
Number of cases	795	795	795	795	795

Note: Estimation is by binary logistic regression. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. With the exception of age, all of the variables are entered as dummy variables with the name category coded one.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05 ^ap<.10

Table 2: Issues, Leader Evaluations and Liberal Defections between Surveys

	2004 post-election	2006 campaign	2006 post-election	2008 post-election
Liberal _{t-1}	3.85 (.29) ^{***}	3.48 (.29) ^{***}	3.42 (.31) ^{***}	3.00 (.27) ^{***}
Sponsorship scandal	-1.06 (.51) [*]	-0.60 (.59)	-0.46 (.53)	-0.84 (.37) [*]
Same-sex marriage	-0.14 (.19)	-0.48 (.20) [*]	0.41 (.20) [*]	-0.17 (.18)
Liberal leader	0.54 (.33) ^a	2.22 (.49) ^{***}	0.67 (.35) [*]	1.22 (.27) ^{***}
Conservative leader	-0.55 (.33) [*]	-0.99 (.28) ^{***}	-0.36 (.25)	-0.81 (.22) ^{***}
NDP leader	0.22 (.33)	-0.03 (.36)	-0.37 (.26)	-0.02 (.26)
Constant	-2.95 (.77) ^{***}	-2.11 (.56) ^{***}	-2.26 (.76) ^{**}	-2.13 (.53) ^{***}
Nagelkerke R-square	.67	.71	.65	.59
Number of cases	771	789	789	790

Note: Estimation is by binary logistic regression. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. Controls are included for age, region, Catholic, Christian fundamentalist, racial minority and French first language. The first and third columns model change between the campaign and post-election surveys; the second column models change between the 2004 post-election survey and the 2006 campaign survey; and the final column models change between the 2006 and 2008 post election surveys.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05 ^ap<.10

Table 3: The Relationships among Issues, Leader Evaluations and Liberal Party Identification during the 2006 Campaign

Instrumental variables	Liberal identification	Sponsorship scandal	Same-sex marriage	Leader evaluations
Liberal identification _i		-0.02 (.05)	0.07 (.13)	0.22 (.06) ^{***}
Sponsorship scandal _i	-0.35 (.15) [*]		-0.68 (.27) ^{**}	-1.17 (.09) ^{***}
Same-sex marriage _i	-0.01 (.03)	-0.03 (.02)		0.01 (.03)
Liberal leader _i	0.42 (.10) ^{***}	-0.58 (.04) ^{***}	0.06 (.19)	
Constant	0.32 (.09) [*]	0.19 (.06) ^{***}	1.04 (.15) [*]	0.17 (.08) [*]
R-square	.35	.41	.26	.48
Number of cases	681	681	703	681

Note: Estimation is by ordinary least squares regression. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. For details of the derivation of the instrumental variables, see endnote 10. Controls are included for age, region, Catholic, Christian fundamentalist, racial minority and French first language.

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05 ^ap<.10

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Endnotes

¹ Canadian citizens aged 18 or over were selected for the 2004 pre-election survey using random digit dialing. The response rate was 55 per cent. The 2004 and 2006 CES both included a rolling cross-section pre-election survey and a post-election survey. The uncertainty surrounding the timing of the election made it impossible to include panel respondents in the pre-election survey for the 2008 CES. The 2004 CES was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Elections Canada. The 2006 and 2008 CES were funded by Elections Canada. The field work for all three CES was conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University. The data are available from the Canadian Election Study archive:

www.queensu.ca/cora/ces/html.

² This obviously raises concerns about the possible effects of panel attrition. The preliminary analyses reported here do not correct for attrition. However, the results reported in the figures hold when the same analyses are repeated on the 1,213 respondents who participated in the first four waves of the survey and answered the party identification every time. Initial analyses using Heckman regression and/or Heckman probit indicate that sample selection corrections are unnecessary for several of the models reported here (based on the Wald test of independence of equations).

³ In 2004, one random half sample received the standard version of the question while a second random half sample received a version that substituted “another party, or no party” for “none of these”. This version explicitly offered respondents the option of not identifying with *any* political party, while also providing an option for those respondents who identified with a minor party. The change in wording did not have a significant effect on the distribution of responses.

⁴ The British and Australian questions are also similar, but crucially neither explicitly offers non-identifiers a response option.

⁵ Intriguingly, NDP partisans were only a little more likely to switch to the Liberals than to the Conservatives.

⁶ Note that the vote question was always asked near the beginning of the survey while the party identification question was posed near the end.

⁷ The correspondence between party identification and vote choice may seem suspiciously high, given that the Conservative party had only come into being in December 2003, as a result of the merger of the Progressive Conservative party and the Canadian Alliance. There could be reason to doubt that people can really form a meaningful psychological attachment to a party that is

brand new. However, if we think of people as having a psychological attachment to parties of the right, the case for such an attachment becomes much more plausible.

⁸ Note that the vote intention figures include leaners.

⁹ Note that the analysis is restricted to those respondents who participated in all five waves of the 2004-2006-2008 CES panel.

¹⁰ All of the estimated probabilities reported in the test were obtained using the margins option in Stata.

¹¹ When party identification as reported in the 2006 campaign is regressed on party identification as reported right after the 2004 election, minority respondents prove to be significantly more likely to move *to* the Liberals (results not shown). A similarly significant rebound occurred between the 2006 election and the 2008 election.

¹² Leader evaluations and opinion about same-sex marriage have been scaled to run from -1 to +1 with +1 indicating a positive response. The scandal variable is based on responses to four questions: (1) "When Jean Chretien was Prime Minister, do you think there was a lot of corruption in government, some, a little, or none?" (2) "Now some questions about the sponsorship scandal. Does it make you very angry, somewhat angry, not very angry, or not angry at all?" (3) "Since becoming Prime Minister, how good a job has Paul Martin done in dealing with the sponsorship scandal? A very good job, quite a good job, not a very good job, or not a good job at all?" (4) "If re-elected, how confident are you that Paul Martin will prevent this type of scandal from happening again? Very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, or not confident at all?" The resulting scale runs from -1 to +1 with positive values indicating negative opinions. Given the small number of items, the scale has acceptable alphas of 0.70 in 2004 and 0.63 in 2006.

¹³ The following 2004 variables were used: party identification and reported vote for 2006 Liberal party identification; leader evaluations, party identification, reported vote, and opinions about same-sex marriage and the scandal for 2006 evaluations of the Liberal leader; leader evaluations, party identification, reported vote and opinions about the scandal for 2006 opinions about the scandal; and opinion about same-sex marriage, religiosity, moral traditionalism, religious fundamentalism, and Conservative party identification for 2006 opinion about same-sex marriage. The correlations between the instrumental variables and the original variables were .76 for 2006 party identification; .72 for 2006 leader evaluations; .71 for opinion about the scandal; and .78 for opinion about same-sex marriage. Note that ordinary least-squares regression was used for the party identification estimations even though the dependent variable is binary. The analyses were re-run using binary logistic regression and the predicted probabilities proved to be very similar.