# UNCLEAR IDEOLOGY HEURISTICS AND VOTING 

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## THESIS APPROVAL

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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Representative democracies require that its citizens choose representatives that are in their best interest. Research shows that people have little knowledge about candidates. Scholars are now exploring heuristics as a way for citizens to be able to make reasonable decisions with little or no information about candidates. Research on heuristics thus far has only considered clear or well-defined heuristics, but heuristics are not always welldefined. This study will examine the ability of voters to employ the ideology heuristic when it is unclear. The question driving this paper is can a person vote for the candidate with the same ideology if the ideology heuristic is unclear. The results show that people are not as probable to vote for the candidate with the same ideology when the ideology heuristic is unclear.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE
ABSTRACT ..... i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... ii
LIST OF TABLES ..... iv
INTRODUCTION ..... 1
THEORY ..... 2
METHODOLOGY ..... 7
RESULTS ..... 13
CONCLUSION ..... 21
REFERENCES ..... 23
APPENDICIES
Appendix A ..... 25
Appendix B ..... 26
Appendix C ..... 33
Appendix D ..... 34
VITA ..... 35

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE ..... PAGE
Table I ..... 7
Table II. ..... 8
Table III ..... 14
Table IV ..... 15
Table V. ..... 16
Table VI ..... 18
Table VII ..... 25
Table VIII. ..... 34

## INTRODUCTION

Representative governance requires citizens to choose candidates who best reflect his or her interests if it is to live up to classic democratic ideals. Previous research demonstrates the difficulties that voters face partly because voters know very little about candidate positions. Converse (1964) shows that individuals' attitudes are unstable. Converse finds that the "mass public contains significant portions of people who... offer meaningless opinions that very randomly in direction during repeated trials over time" (p. 243). Other studies, such as Delli Carpini and Keeter (1963), show how little Americans know about politics (See also Berelson 1952). Yet according to Lau and Redlawsk (1997), people vote for the right candidate most of the time (See also Rahn, 2003).

Researchers now attempt to reconcile how voters are able to choose the right candidate with the fact that voters have little knowledge of politics (see Lau and Redlawsk, 1997 and Althaus 1998). Scholars propose that voters use heuristics or information shortcuts, such as ideology or party identification, to simplify complex decisions (Lau and Relawsk 1997, 2001, 2006; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Tversky and Kahneman 1974).

The problem is that the information used to stimulate a heuristic may not always be clear. Downs (1957) demonstrates that candidates do not have incentives to be clear or reveal their true preferences. If this is the case, then it becomes increasingly difficult for voters to encounter clear information that they can associate with a heuristic. This calls into question the ability of people to use heuristics effectively or at least as effectively as other scholar propose.

This paper addresses this problem, questioning if a person can vote for a candidate with the same ideology if the ideology heuristic is unclear. An ideology is a philosophical view on social and economic issues. The ideology heuristic is employed when "the salient characteristics of a particular politician are consistent with or representative of the prototypic [conservative or liberal]" (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006, p. 232-233). This also exemplifies what is meant by a clear heuristic, because liberals and conservatives have distinct and opposing ideologies. An unclear heuristic is one in which the characteristics of a candidate closely match some aspect of both prototypical liberals and conservatives.

In order to address this question, an experimental manipulation investigates six conditions which vary the clarity of the ideology heuristic along with partisanship. Mock elections are produced that contain a variety of ideologically traditional and nontraditional candidates. Surveys are also used in the study in order to gather information about the subjects that allow for a comparison of the subjects' vote to their ideological position. The results indicate the clarity of the ideology heuristic is important in determining a person's ability to use the heuristic. These findings provide a greater understanding of people's ability to use heuristics.

## THEORY

Lau and Redlawsk (2001) describe a cognitive heuristic as a way for people to apply a variety of information shortcuts in order to make reasonable decisions with limited cognitive effort in all aspects of life (p. 952). In other words a heuristic is an information shortcut that people use to make up for their lack of information in order to make reliable judgments. This is a kind of "low information rationality" (Popkin, 1991). As Lau and

Redlawsk (2001) note, this is based on the idea that people are "limited information processors'" (p. 952). This is the idea that people store only a little of the information to which they are exposed, largely due to the small capacity of their short term memory and its ability to keep information active. Lau and Redlawsk (1997) also note that, "As a consequence, both perception and storage of incoming information, as well as subsequent recall of that information from memory, are structured (and thus biased) by prior expectations or cognitive 'schemata' that help determine what information is noticed, where it is stored, and how likely it is to be retrieved from memory" (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997). In other words, if people are low information processors, then they have a weak ability to use the information that they are exposed to and often rely on relatively little information to make what appears to be a logical decision.

The online processing model characterizes the process by which the brain receives and reacts to information. However, there is one pivotal part of this process with which this study is concerned. According to the online processing model, people compartmentalize information (Lodge, Steenburgen, and Brau, 1995; Kuklinski and Quirk, 2000). For example, when a politician gives an anti-abortion speech, he or she is put in the conservative compartment. This process, assumes that people possess the necessary "compartments" to classify the information. When a person does not have a compartment that neatly meets the need, then a person must make some assumptions about the information and guess on a compartment. For example, many people are familiar with two ideologies in the United States, liberal and conservative, and most likely have compartments for these ideologies. However, there are variations of these ideologies, such as populists and libertarians, which people may not have compartments for. In these
cases, people may have problems compartmentalizing information and using the ideology heuristic, because information may get put in the wrong compartment.

Nonetheless, most research assumes that ideology is one-dimensional, only focusing on liberals and conservatives (examples include Levitin and Miller 1979; Luttbeg and Gant 1985). In fact, the American National Election Study survey, which is commonly used by political scientists, only asks voters to place themselves on a simple liberalconservative dimension. However, to classify a candidate as simply liberal or conservative may not be entirely accurate. Ideology is not one-dimensional, but rather two-dimensional (see Miller and Schofield, 2003). It consists of a person's beliefs about social and economic issues. Thus, for a politician to be accurately categorized as a conservative, he or she must have conservative beliefs about both economic and social issues. Likewise, to be categorized as liberal, a person must be both economically and socially liberal. However, not everyone fits perfectly under the liberal or conservative label. It is possible for a person to be economically conservative and socially liberal or vice versa. For example, David Redick, a challenger in Wisconsin for the U.S. Senate, is a libertarian according to OnTheIssues.org. This means that he tends to be socially liberal but economically conservative. If a person only has two compartments, liberal and conservative, then where would David Redick go? Thus a clear ideology heuristic is one in which the information or in the case of this study candidates fits neatly into one of the commonly understood categories of liberal or conservative. An unclear ideology heuristic is when information does not fit neatly into one of these categories.

One way that people use the ideology heuristic is to vote. People listen to or see campaign information or speeches made by candidates. Information is then classified as
either liberal or conservative. When the voters go into the polling booth, the voter would ideally know which candidate was closest to his or her own ideology.

If the heuristic is clear, then a person should be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology. However, heuristics are not always clear and in these cases it seems probable that it is more difficult to employ a heuristic that consistently results in a person voting for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her. Thus the first hypothesis is that voters are more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her when the heuristic is clear than when it is unclear.

Party identification is also another important aspect of this study. Rahn (2003) explores the importance of partisan stereotypes in information processing. One of her conclusions is that in the absence of a party label, voters can process a candidate's message. Heuristics are just an easier or less costly method when the right information is available. The question herein is how much of a difference or how important is the party heuristic in determining the ability of a person vote for the candidate with the same ideology. While party cues are not specifically given, just having an association with a party may help a person to vote for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her, even when the ideological cues may not be clear. It can be assumed that most of the voting public associates the Republican Party with conservative ideas, while the Democratic Party is most often associated with liberal ideas. The idea is that the voter is more easily able to compartmentalize a candidate with the additional information of a party label, because it either offers another compartment for the voter to classify the candidate or it helps to fill in some of the gaps of the ideology heuristic. Thus the second hypothesis is that when voters are given the candidate's party identification in addition to
the ideology cues, voters will be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her.

There is another area to consider that may affect the ability of a person to use the ideology heuristic. Different people possess differing levels of political knowledge. Increased levels of political knowledge allow a person to have more tags or compartment by which they can store information. The more tags or compartments a person has for information, the easier it is to connect those tags in order to make a decision. Thus, it should be easier for a person compare the information in order to be able to accept or reject the information. This leads to a third hypothesis. People who possess higher levels of political knowledge should be able to make better decisions, even when the ideology heuristic is not clear. Other scholars argue that the ability to use a heuristic depends on the amount of political knowledge that people possess (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Brady and Sniderman 1985; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991). This leads to a competing, alternate hypothesis for political knowledge. People with low level of political knowledge will have a more difficult time using the ideology heuristic when the ideology heuristic is unclear.

Lau and Redlawsk (2001) examine heuristics and one of their main conclusions is that most people use some kind of heuristic part of the time. They also examine some specific heuristics, including ideology and party identification. However, their study is only concerned with the how much people use these heuristics and how political knowledge impacts the likelihood of a person to use a particular heuristic. According to Lau and Redlawsk (2001) partisanship was employed $83 \%$ of the time and ideology was used $63 \%$ of the time. Likewise, ideology was found to more likely be employed by those
with greater political knowledge, while political knowledge and the use of the partisanship heuristic had no relationship. Lau and Redlawsk's study provides an important starting point for the study of cognitive heuristics. This study will fill an important gap between Lau and Redlawsk (1997) and Lau and Redlawsk (2001), by considering how the clarity of the ideology heuristic affects a person's ability to vote for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her.

## METHODOLOGY

## Data Collection

This study uses an experimental design. Subjects were pulled from political science classes at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Since the group only consists of college students, most of whom are between the age of 18 and 23, this study has limited external validity. In giving up external validity, gains have been made in internal validity and measurement validity. In total there were 229 subjects. Table I shows a demographic breakdown of the sample (Also see Appendix D). Each subject was randomly assigned to a condition by a computer program. The researcher, nor the subject, played a role in deciding which group he or she would be assigned.

| Table I: Breakdown of sample by race and sex. |  |  |  |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Race | Men | Women | Total |
| Non-White | 35 | 36 | 71 |
| White | 78 | 78 | 156 |
| Total | 113 | 114 | 227 |

Note: There were two males that did not provide information on their race, which is why the total is 227 instead of 229 . The average age of the sample is 21.3.

| Table II: Outline of Experimental Conditions |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: |
|  | No Party Label | Party Label |
| Traditional Liberal v. |  |  |
| Traditional Conservative |  |  |
| Traditional Conservative v. <br> Non-Traditional Liberal <br> (socially conservative and <br> economically liberal) |  |  |
| Traditional Liberal v. |  |  |
| Non-Traditional <br> Conservative (socially <br> conservative and <br> economically liberal) |  |  |

There are a total of six conditions ${ }^{1}$. Each condition represents a possible election between two candidates. The conservative/ liberal nature of the candidate is varied in each "election," through the use of speeches. For example, an anti-abortion speech is used for candidates who are socially conservative. The first election presents a traditional liberal and a traditional conservative candidate. The second election presents a traditional conservative and a second candidate who was socially conservative and economically liberal. The third election presents a traditional liberal against a candidate that was socially conservative and economically liberal. These same elections are repeated, but a Republican or Democrat cue are included under the candidate's name. Table II outlines the conditions.

Each subject began by filling out a questionnaire that asked for information about the subject, including age, race/ethnic identification, state of residence, gender and selfidentification on the liberal-conservative scale for both economic and social issues. It also

[^0]asked a series of political knowledge questions that were recommended by political knowledge studies (Delli Carpini and Ketter, 1993; Mondak, 2001). The survey is included in Appendix B.

The basic idea behind this experimental design comes from Lau and Redlawsk (1997; 2001; 2006). The idea behind the design is to simulate what it is like when a person is subjected to campaign information in a congressional campaign. Information is not always readily available and what information is available is only there for a limited time, thus forcing the subjects to use shortcuts of some kind in order to retain the information.

This experiment uses computers and webpages to simulate the experience. In order to give the participants some experience with the webpage so that a learning curve does not skew results, all participants began on a practice webpage. The practice page was set up similar to the experimental pages. The subject matter on the pages was sports, something that is not typically seen as political or related to campaigns and should not incite a cue or thinking about politics.

To begin the mock elections, all subjects started on the same page which randomly directs them to one of the conditions. Once on their assigned page, the subjects were asked to record a code, which tells the researcher which condition that the subject was assigned to. The codes were just random words, such as fish or pencil, which should not stimulate any type of cue or thinking about the election. Additional instructions were then provided, depending on which experimental condition the subject was assigned. The candidates for all conditions were labeled "Candidate A" and "Candidate B." This prevents the subjects from drawing any conclusions about the candidates such as gender
or race, solely based on their name. It also prevents subjects from connecting a potential candidate's name in this experiment to a real politician's name. The instructions were the same for all conditions, except the two in which only general information about the candidate was provided. In these two conditions, the subjects were simply asked to view the general information for both candidates and then vote for one of them. The instructions for the other six conditions asked the subjects to spend eight minutes getting to know each of the candidates and then at the end of the eight minutes, vote for one of them (see Appendix C). However, getting to know the candidates was tricky. On the initial pages are instructions, which are provided in the appendix. Below the instructions are the names Candidate A and Candidate B. Below each name is a link to general information about the candidate and a box that contains a list of three issues, which changes every time the subject returns to the page. The general information is always available. In the box that appears below the candidates' names there are four possible issues: Gay Marriage, Social Security, Taxes, and Abortion. Only three are available at a time and the issues available are the same for each candidate. When a subject clicks on an issue, the subject is taken to another page. On that page contains the candidate's name (Candidate A or Candidate B), the issue (Gay Marriage, Social Security, Taxes, or Abortion), and a speech that that has been made by an actual politician. The speech fits the criteria of the experimental condition at hand. The subjects were only allowed to view the speech for a short period of time before they were returned to the main page with the list of issues. The length of time that a subject was permitted to view a speech was based on the length of the speech, one second for every twenty words. Subjects were permitted to visit an issue area for a candidate more than once if they wished. However, in doing so,
there is no guarantee that the same information would be there. There may be a different speech on the same topic.

At the end of the eight minutes, the subjects were asked to vote for one of the candidates. After voting, the subjects were asked more questions such as which candidate was a Democrat and which was a Republican, how confident the subjects were in their vote and why they voted for a certain candidate. Additionally, the subjects were asked their stance on the four issues: abortion, gay marriage, social security and taxes. The questions as they appeared on the survey can be found in Appendix B. This posttreatment survey is just a way of debriefing the subjects to see what was important in their decision-making process.

## Data Analysis

There are three hypotheses that require testing. The first hypothesis is that if the ideology heuristic is clear then people should be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology. In order to determine if this is the case, a simple cross-tabulation will be used to compare those who had the clear ideology heuristic with those who had the unclear ideology heuristic. A probit model, described below, will also yield additional support for this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis is that when voters are given the candidate's party identification in addition to the ideology cues, voters will be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology. This also can be analyzed with a simple crosstabulation in order to compare the number of people who vote for the candidate with the same ideology when they only had the ideological cues versus those who also had the candidate's party identification.

The third hypothesis is concerned with the impact of political knowledge and the clarity of the ideology heuristic. In order to examine this relationship a probit model will be used. The exact equation is:

$$
\mathrm{P}(\text { vote }=1)=\mathrm{B}_{0}+\mathrm{B}_{1}(\text { clear heuristic })+\mathrm{B}_{2}(\text { party id })+\mathrm{B}_{3}(\text { political knowledge }) .
$$

Vote is a dichotomous variable in which 1 means the subject voted for the candidate with the same ideology and 0 if he or she did not. Clear heuristic is also dichotomous with 1 meaning the heuristic was clear and 0 the heuristic was not. Party id is coded 1 if the subject was provided the party identification of the candidates 0 if the subject was not told the party identification of the candidates. While $\mathrm{B}_{2}$ is not as useful in determining the relationship of the clarity of a heuristic and political knowledge, it may prove useful as an additional tool to gain a better understanding of the importance of party identification. Political knowledge is coded on a scale of 0 to 12 , with 12 meaning a high level of political knowledge and 0 meaning a low level of political knowledge.

A second model is also included that contains the multiplicative term for clear heuristic*political knowledge. This model will be used to evaluate the alternate hypothesis for political knowledge. The model is as follows:

$$
\mathrm{P}(\text { vote }=1)=\mathrm{B}_{0}+\mathrm{B}_{1}(\text { clear heuristic })+\mathrm{B}_{2}(\text { party id })+\mathrm{B}_{3}(\text { political knowledge })+\mathrm{B}_{4}
$$ (clear heuristic*political knowledge).

Two different measures of a subject voting for the candidate with the same ideology will be used and ideally there will be similar results for the two different measures. The first measure involves the perceptions of subjects. Each subject was asked where he or she stands on the liberal-conservative continuum for both economic and social issues (see Appendix B, questions 3 and 4). Intensity of the subject's ideology is part of
this measure. Ideology was code on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 for liberal 3 for in-between, and 5 for conservative. This was compared to the candidate for whom he or she voted. When both candidate's share the same view on either economic or social issues, then the issue space in which they differ was used to determine whether the subject voted for the candidate with the same ideology. If the candidates differ on both economic and social issues, then the average intensity of the subject's ideology for both economic and social issues was used to determine if the subject voted for the candidate with the same ideology. A subject who self-reported to be a liberal was expected to vote for a liberal and a subject who self-reported to be a conservative was expected to vote for the conservative candidate.

The second method of determining whether a subject voted for a candidate with the same ideology hinges on how the subjects feel about certain issues that were addressed by each candidate. In this instance a person voted for the candidate with the same ideology if he or she voted for the candidate that displays the view point on these issues that are closest to his or her own. These explanations provide another way to look at a subject's vote. A t-test is used to determine if the two different measures for the dependent variable are comparable.

## RESULTS

In total there were 229 participants. Of these, 82 participants self-reported that they were economically liberal, 53 conservatives, and 93 in-between. Socially, there were 117 liberals, 62 conservatives, and 49 in-between. One of the immediate problems with the analysis, is that it is difficult to analyze whether someone voted for the candidate with the same ideology if the subject reported that he or she was somewhere in-between a

| Table III: Comparison of Ideological Votes for Clear and Unclear Ideology Heuristic |  |  |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Vote | Clear Ideology Heuristic |  | Unclear Ideology Heuristic |  |
|  | Self-Reported <br> Ideology | Issue Measured <br> Ideology | Self-Reported <br> Ideology | Issue Measured <br> Ideology |
| Yes | $89.1 \%$ | $76.6 \%$ | $71.6 \%$ | $58.6 \%$ |
| No | $10.9 \%$ | $23.4 \%$ | $28.3 \%$ | $41.4 \%$ |

Note: Since there were a different number of participants in each condition, the figures above are presented as percentages in order to make comparisons easy. The percentages above may not equal $100 \%$ due to rounding. Vote is whether the subject voted for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her.
liberal and a conservative on the social or economic dimension. Thus, in some cases, it was not possible to determine if a subject voted for the appropriate candidate when the subject was in-between a liberal and conservative on the corresponding social or economic dimension that determined if he or she voted for the candidate with the same ideology.

For this study, there were two measures of the dependent variable, one which used the subjects' self-reported ideology on social and economic issues, and another based on the subjects' reported views on several issues. A t-test was performed to determine if the measures are the same. The null hypothesis for the $t$-test is that the means for the two measures are the same. The t-statistics of 1.82 reveals that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and the two measures used for the dependent variable are comparable. This test can also be used to determine if there is a difference when the sample is broken down between subjects who received a clear ideology and those who did not as in Table III. In this case, the t-statistic of 1.09 for those who received the clear ideology heuristic and 1.14 for those who did not receive the clear ideology heuristic shows that the samples are still comparable and the differences are not statistically significant. When the sample is broken down in Table IV into those who were given the candidates' party identification
and those who were not, the $t$-statistics of 0.532 for those who were given the candidates' party identification and 1.904 for those who were not given the candidates' party identification also shows that the differences are not statistically significant.

There is some strong support for the first hypothesis which states that a person should be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology if the ideology heuristic is clear. In Table III, one can see the difference that having a clear ideology heuristic had on the ability to vote for the appropriate candidate. When the dependent variable was based on the self-report of the subject's ideology, there is roughly an $18 \%$ difference. Thus, subjects who did not have a clear ideology heuristic that they could use to aid them in voting were substantially less likely to vote for the appropriate candidate. Similar results are shown when a when the analysis of the vote was determined by an evaluation of where the subject stood on several issues.

There is very little support for the second hypothesis, which states that a person should be more likely to vote for the candidate with the same ideology if he or she knows the candidate's party identification. Table IV shows that when an analysis of the subject's vote was determined by the subjects' self-reported ideology, there is basically no difference. When the outcome was determined by where the subjects' stand on several

| Table IV: Comparison of Ideological Votes for Party Identification |  |  |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Vote | Candidate Party ID Present |  | Candidate Party ID Not Present |  |
|  | Self-Reported <br> Ideology | Issue Measured <br> Ideology | Self-Reported <br> Ideology | Issue Measured <br> Ideology |
| Yes | $76.3 \%$ | $62.7 \%$ | $76.1 \%$ | $68.8 \%$ |
| No | $23.7 \%$ | $37.2 \%$ | $23.9 \%$ | $31.3 \%$ |

Note: Since there were a different number of participants in condition, the figures above are presented as percentages in order to make comparisons easy. The percentages above may not equal $100 \%$ due to rounding. Vote is whether the subject voted for the candidate with the same ideology as him or her.

Table V: Probit Model and First Differences for the Probability of Voting for the Candidate with the Same Ideology

|  | Self-Reported Ideology |  |  |  | Issue Measured Ideology |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Probit | FD | 95\% <br> Confidence <br> Intervals |  | Probit | FD | 95\% Confidence Intervals |  |
| Clear | 0.634 | 0.160 | 0.012 | 0.299 | 0.442 | 0.153 | -0.014 | 0.305 |
| Ideology | (0.291) | (0.072) |  |  | (0.238) | (0.081) |  |  |
| Candidate | -0.088 | -0.025 | -0.161 | 0.128 | -0.105 | -0.040 | -0.190 | 0.115 |
| Party ID | (0.263) | (0.071) |  |  | (0.209) | (0.077) |  |  |
| Political | 0.083 | 0.325 | -0.101 | 0.741 | 0.066 | 0.292 | -0.073 | 0.622 |
| Knowledge | (0.057) | (.226) |  |  | (0.042) | (0.180) |  |  |
| constant | -0.111 |  |  |  | -0.285 |  |  |  |
|  | (0.543) |  |  |  | (0.394) |  |  |  |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Clarify was used to generate the first differences $(\mathrm{FD})$ for the model $\mathrm{P}($ vote $=1)=\mathrm{B}_{0}+\mathrm{B}_{1}$ (Clear Ideology Heuristic $)+\mathrm{B}_{2}$ (Party Identification of Candidate) $+\mathrm{B}_{3}$ (Political Knowledge). The first difference for the Clear Ideology Heuristic and Party Identification of the Candidate are a change from zero to one, where zero means not present and one means present. The first difference for Political Knowledge is a change from zero to twelve or no political knowledge to very politically knowledgeable.
issues, there is a small difference of about $6 \%$. One would have thought that this would have been a greater help for the participants, but based on Table IV, it almost made no difference. One important implication of these results is that maybe people look beyond party identification when there is other information available. Another implication is that political knowledge does not determine the ability of a person to use heuristics when the heuristic is unclear, which is contrary to previous research (See Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Brady and Sniderman 1985; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991).

While simple percentages offer a starting point for understanding the relationship between the clarity of the ideology heuristic, knowing the candidates' party identification, and being able to vote for the candidate with the same ideology, Table V sheds some more
light on the situation ${ }^{2}$. The table shows the results of the probit model and the first differences (FD) for having a clear ideology heuristic, knowing the candidate's party identification, and the subject's level of political knowledge. Table V shows that having a clear ideology heuristic is an important determinant for being able to vote for the candidate with the same ideology. There are two models presented in the table. The first model is a measure of the subject's self-reported ideology. First differences have been used to interpret the probit model, which are only able to show statistical significance and the direction of the relationship. The first difference shows the probability of voting for the candidate with the same ideology given a change in the independent variable from the minimum value to the maximum value, while holding the other independent variables at their mean (see King et al, 2000; Tomz et al 2001). In this model, only having a clear ideology heuristic is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. The second model, which uses the subjects' responses to several issues to determine their ideology, shows results as predicted. However, it must be noted that the variable Clear Ideology Heuristic only has a p-value of 0.06 when ideology is measured using the subjects' response to issues. The first difference does show that on average a person who has a clear ideology heuristic to use will vote for the right candidate $16 \%$ more of the time than some one who does not have a clear ideology heuristic to employ. Combining this with other constraints that voters have on their ability to vote correctly raises some questions

[^1]| VI: Probit model with interaction terms |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: |
|  | Self-reported Ideology | Issue Measured Ideology |
| Clear Ideology Heuristic | 0.039 | 1.114 |
|  | $(1.324)$ | $(1.096)$ |
| Candidate Party ID | -0.016 | 0.236 |
|  | $(0.518)$ | $(0.405)$ |
| Political Knowledge | 0.067 | 0.082 |
| Clear Heuristic * Political | $(0.065)$ | $(0.047$ |
| Knowledge | 0.066 | -0.085 |
| Constant | $(0.138)$ | $(0.111)$ |
|  | -0.026 | -0.476 |

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable is a measure of whether the subject's ideology matched the ideology of the candidate for whom he or she voted.
about how well this democracy actually works. Political knowledge is not found to be a significant factor in being able to use the ideology heuristic as predicted in the hypothesis.

An additional model was run that includes the multiplicative terms for a clear heuristic and political knowledge. The results are presented in Table VI. The table above provides the results for independent variables when the other variables are held to zero (see Friedrich 1982; Brambor, Clark and Golder 2005). In other words, the multiplicative term Clear Heuristic*Political Knowledge is the effect of Political Knowledge when Clear Heuristic is held to zero, which is not statistically significant. However, it is possible that the relationship is significant when Clear Heuristic has a value of one. A Friedrich test reveals that the standard error for $\mathrm{B}_{1}+\mathrm{B}_{4} *$ Political Knowledge is 0.292 for the selfreported ideology model and 0.079 for the issue measured model and even in this case, the effect is not statistically significant. This reinforces that an unclear heuristic is difficult for anyone to use, no matter what their level of political knowledge. Previous research has stressed the importance of political knowledge and its relationship to the use of heuristics,
but these results refute those findings to a certain extent (See Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Brady and Sniderman 1985; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991). Previous research, which only deals with clear heuristics, finds support for the importance of political knowledge. However, once the heuristic becomes unclear, political knowledge is no longer an important factor in being able to use that heuristic as this study demonstrates.

The slight differences between the dependent variable for the two models in Table V and the differences in Table III and Table IV may be explained by the subjects' lack of an understanding of what ideology is. One of the questions on the survey asks "Would you say that one party is more conservative than the other at the national level? If so, which party is more conservative?" Many of the participants had a difficult time with this question. Fourteen percent of the participants did not know that one party is more conservative than the other at the national level. Of those that knew that one party is more conservative, about $10 \%$ thought that the Democratic Party is more conservative. These misunderstandings may offer an explanation for the slight differences between measuring the dependent variable with the participants' self-reported ideology and using the participants' responses to how they feel on several issues. This may pose as another limit of this study. It is possible that these subjects, whose average age is about 23 years, are less politically sophisticated than older citizens and have less of an understanding of ideology because of their age.

Aside from statistics, there may be some additional evidence that a clear ideology heuristic is important. The participants were asked an open ended question: "Explain in the space below and overleaf why you voted for the candidate that you did." The responses chosen for analysis are by no means a random sample, but rather these
responses have been chosen for their content. The most common response was because the candidate's views were closest to the participants, but several participants offered a more detailed explanation.

One respondent said the she voted for Candidate B because "...most of his views on issues such as gay marriage and abortion were closely related to mine." However, Candidate A and B had the same views on both gay marriage and abortion. Similarly someone else responded that she voted for Candidate A "mainly because of the state candidate A took on abortion and gay marriages." Once again, both Candidate A and B expressed the same views on these issues in their speeches. Both participants were determined to have voted for the wrong candidate. There must be some other explanation for their votes or maybe it was too difficult for them to employ the ideology heuristic.

Another participant responded that he voted for Candidate A , who is more conservative than Candidate B, because "...I think he is a democrat." This person also was also determined to have voted for a candidate that did not match his ideology as closely as the other candidate. Yet, based on a response to a different question on the survey, he understands that Republicans are more conservative than Democrats. This person was assigned to a condition in which there was not a clear ideology heuristic to use. Since he understands how ideology works at a basic level, he should be able to use it. However, it seems possible that because the heuristic was not clear, it became confusing and difficult to use effectively.

## CONCLUSION

As it stands, people vote correctly about $80 \%$ of the time, but this assumes that people have a multitude of clear heuristics to use (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997). In other words, in an ideal world for using heuristics, people will usually get it right. However, this is not an ideal world and people do not gather information in a vacuum in which heuristics are made for their use. Rather, people live with uncertainty and are confronted with information that does not always conform to their "compartments" as explained by the theory in this paper.

This study focuses on what happens when heuristics are not clear. Specifically, the focus is on the ideology heuristic. The main conclusion is that if the ideology heuristic is not clear, people have trouble using it effectively. Thus instead of people voting correctly most of the time as other research tends so show, it probably occurs less than previously thought. Much research finds some solace in the fact that people are able to supplement their lack of knowledge or their inability to gather large amounts of information about candidates with the supposition that people employ heuristics. However, if people have difficulties using heuristics when they are not clear, then how much comfort is there in people's ability to supplement their lack of knowledge with heuristics. Democratic ideals depend on people having knowledge about the choices that citizens are asked to make, yet this research shows that people may not be as prepared to make these decision as previous research has alluded.

This study has also helped to refine previous theories on the relationship between political knowledge the ability to use heuristics. While previous research has stressed that
people with a greater level of political knowledge are better positioned to use a heuristic, this study has provided evidence that this may not always be the case. Specifically, in this study, people of high levels of political knowledge had just as difficult of a time in using the ideology heuristic, when it was unclear, as those with low levels of political knowledge.

The results in this paper also have implications outside of voting behavior. Candidates can develop strategies to help increase the probability that a person votes for them. When a campaign consists of a traditional and a non-traditional liberal or conservative, then it may behoove a candidate to focus on ideological differences rather than partisan differences. Even more so, a candidate may way to stress that he or she is a liberal or conservative over a Democrat or Republican.

While a gap has been filled in the research of heuristic, there is still much work to be done. This paper has only considered one particular heuristic, the ideology heuristic. There are still many other heuristics that people employ, such as endorsement and likeability heuristics. Future research may want to explore people's ability to employ other heuristics when they are not clear.

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APPENDICIES

## APPENDIX A

Table VII: Summary of steps of the experiment

1. Subjects read a brief overview of the experiment.
2. Subject completed the first part of the survey, which asked demographic information, political knowledge questions, party identification, and self-reporting of ideology for economic and social issues.
3. Subjects learned how to work the website on a practice webpage.
4. Subjects were randomly assigned by the computer to an experimental condition.
5. Subjects were given oral instructions for the experiment.
6. Subjects were given eight minutes to get to know both candidates.
7. Subjects voted.
8. Subjects completed the remainder of the survey, which asked them question about the candidates, the subjects views on several issues and an open ended question which asked the subject to explain why he or she voted for the candidate that he or she selected.

## APPENDIX B

Questionaire:
***Do not write your name or any other personal identifiable information on this sheet except for what is asked in the questions below.

Circle the appropriate answer for each question or fill in the blank as necessary.

1. Do you consider yourself:
a. Very Strong Democrat
b. Strong Democrat
c. Weak Democrat
d. Independent
e. Weak Republican
f. Strong Republican
g. Very Strong Republican
h. Don't know
i. Other $\qquad$
2. In politics, when it comes to economic issues (e.g. taxation, social security, unemployment, government spending), do you usually think of yourself as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
3. In politics, when it comes to social issues (abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, affirmative action), do you usually think of yourself as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
4. What is your gender?
a. Male
b. Female
5. What is your race?
a. African American
b. Hispanic
c. White/ Caucasian
d. Native American
e. Other $\qquad$
6. What state are you from? (What state do you claim to be a citizen of?)
7. What is your age? $\qquad$
8. Did you vote in the last presidential election?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Not old enough
9. Have you registered to vote?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know
10. Have you voted in any city, county, state or national election?
a. Yes
b. No
c. Not old enough
11. What is the length of a U.S. Senator's term? $\qquad$
12. What job or political office does Tony Blair now hold?
13. What is the name of the governor of the state you indicated in question $6 ?$ $\qquad$
14. Who succeeded George Bush Sr. as president? $\qquad$
15. Name one country that borders Iraq. $\qquad$
16. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney? $\qquad$
17. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not...is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court? $\qquad$
18. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto? $\qquad$
19. Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the House of Representatives? $\qquad$
20. Would you say that one party is more conservative than the other at the national level?
a. If so, which party is more conservative? $\qquad$
21. Do you happen to remember if Ronald Reagan was a Democrat or Republican?
**************Stop and wait for additional Instructions************

## Congressional Ballot

*Please place an X next to the candidate who you which to vote for.
___Candidate A

Candidate B

Code: $\qquad$

The Code can be found in the bottom left hand corner of the home page.
22. Which candidate was a Democrat and which Candidate was a Republican Candidate A $\qquad$

Candidate B $\qquad$
23. On a scale of $1-10$, with 1 being the least confident and 10 being the most confident, how confident were you in your vote choice? $\qquad$
24. Which one of the following opinions below bests agrees with your view:
a. Abortion should never be permitted.
b. Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger.
c. Abortion should be permitted if, due to personal reasons, the woman would have difficulty in caring for the child.
d. Abortion should never be forbidden, since one should not require a woman to have a child she doesn't want.
25. Every year when Congress meets to set up the federal budget choices have to be made about what to do with the money. Below is a list of some ways the budget surplus could be used. Please tell me if you think each item below should be (1) one of the TOP priorities, (2) important but not a TOP priority, (3) not too important, (4) or should not be done. (you can just use the numbers)
a. Cutting taxes $\qquad$
b. Paying off the national debt more quickly $\qquad$
c. Increasing spending on domestic programs, such as health, education, and the environment. $\qquad$
d. Increasing defense spending $\qquad$
e. Helping make the Social Security program financially sound $\qquad$
f. Helping make the Medicare program financially sound $\qquad$
26. Below is a list of some ways that have been suggested to deal with the future financial problems of Social Security. For each one, please tell me if you would strongly favor (SF), favor (F), oppose (O), or strongly oppose (SO) such a proposal.
a. Increasing the amount employers and employees pay in taxes to Social Security. $\qquad$
b. Eliminating the current Social Security payroll tax cut-off that exempts income over $\$ 68,400$ a year from being taxed for Social Security. $\qquad$
c. People having individual accounts and making their own investments with a portion of their Social Security payments. $\qquad$
d. Allowing workers to take all of their Social Security taxes out of the Social Security system and invest them on their own $\qquad$
e. Gradually raising the retirement age for Social Security to age 70 over the next 20 years $\qquad$
27. Which one of the following opinions below bests agrees with your view:
a. Gay marriage should be permitted.
b. While gay marriage should not permitted, civil unions among gays and lesbians should be permitted.
c. Marriage is a state's issue and thus the issue of gay marriage or civil unions is for individual states to decide and not the federal government.
d. There needs to be an amendment to the United States Constitution to prevent gay marriages.
28. In politics, when it comes to economic issues (e.g. taxation, social security, unemployment, government spending), do you think of Candidate A as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
29. In politics, when it comes to social issues (e.g. abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, affirmative action), do you think of Candidate A as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
30. In politics, when it comes to economic issues (e.g. taxation, social security, unemployment, government spending), do you think of Candidate B as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
31. In politics, when it comes to social issues (e.g. abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, affirmative action), do you think of Candidate B as: (circle one)
liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative
32. Explain in the space below and overleaf why you voted for the candidate that you did.

## APPENDIX C

## Webpage Instructions

Instructions: As you may know, there are many campaigns going on at this time, including some Congressional campaigns. The information and questions that will be covered on the following webpages only pertains to a Congressional Election. Below you should see two scrolling text boxes. Inside each box contains a list of issues in which Candidates A and B (candidates for the upcoming Congressional race) have taken some kind of stance on. You will begin by clicking on one of the issues areas for Candidate A . You will be taken to another page, which will present some information about that candidate's position on something related to the issue area. You only have a short amount of time before you are automatically taken back to this page. You will then repeat this process for Candidate B. You may also notice that there is a link titled "General Information" which you may visit at any time. You will be given eight minutes to learn about the two candidates. You may visit an issue area more than once, but the information presented may not be the same on additional visits. Like wise, every time you return to this page, the issues available will change. Should you accidentally click on the wrong issue area, do not go back; proceed as if you intended to click on it. At the end of the eight minutes, you will be asked to vote for one of these two candidates. Do not proceed until instructed to do so.

## APENDIX D

| Table VIII: Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum, and Maximum Values for Characteristics of Subjects |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Minimum Value | Maximum Value |
| Gender | 1.50 | 0.50 | 1 (male) | 2 (female) |
| Race | 0.69 | 0.46 | 0 (other) | 1 (white) |
| Age | 21.31 | 5.28 | 18 | 57 |
| Political Knowledge | 8.55 | 2.64 | 0 (low political knowledge) | 12 (high political knowledge) |
| Ideology-Economic Issues | 2.76 | 1.19 | 1 (liberal) | 5 (conservative) |
| Ideology-Social Issues | 2.65 | 1.40 | 1 (liberal) | 5 (conservative) |
| Vote Comparison (selfreported) | 0.76 | 0.43 | 0 (different ideology) | 1 ( same ideology) |
| Vote Comparison (issue measured) | 0.65 | 0.47 | 0 (different ideology) | 1 ( same ideology) |

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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ The actual experiment had two more conditions in which the subjects only received background information about the candidates.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ Due to the difference in the number of whites and non-whites that participated in this study, another model was run that included race as a control variable. The results were almost identical and race was not statistically significant.

