

How Issue Ownership Shapes Campaign Effects: A Field Experiment in the 2014 UK Elections

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September 21, 2015

Short-Term Valence versus Long-Term Issue-Handling Reputations

- Can election campaigns exploit government failure on valence issues?
- UK case study: Conservative government cuts in public spending affects provision of services:
 - 1 Healthcare
 - 2 Policing
- Issue ownership theory suggests that effectiveness of attack should be conditioned by long-term issue-handling reputations of the parties (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003).
- Parties should raise the salience of issues on which they have a long-standing advantage and avoid attacking the opponent on issues on which they are not trusted.

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- Effects might be short-lived, and might be crowded out by the noise of a real-world campaign.

Experimental Design

- Randomized field experiment "embedded" in a Labour leafletting campaign during the 2014 Council and European elections in a parliamentary constituency in Exeter held on May 23rd.
- Randomly assign the issue discussed on the campaign leaflet:
 - 1 An issue owned by the Labour Party: Healthcare
 - 2 An issue owned by a rival party/not owned by Labour: Crime and Policing

Treatments

CAN YOU AFFORD 10 YEARS OF A TORY-RUN NHS?

Within 4 years in the cracks have begun to show in the NHS. It is harder to see a GP, nurse numbers have been cut and NHS waiting lists are rocketing.

"NHS waiting times are at highest for six years with 2.8 million waiting for surgery or other hospital procedures."

— Daily Mail, 18 April 2014

- Your guarantee of a GP appointment within 24 hours has been scrapped
- Thousands of nurses and NHS frontline staff have been cut

On May 23rd vote Labour.

A vote for the Labour Party is a vote to safeguard and restore the NHS.

CAN YOU AFFORD 10 YEARS OF A TORY-RUN POLICE SERVICE?

Within 4 years in the cracks have begun to show in the police services. Police numbers have been cut, 999 response times have gone by up, and action against serious crimes is being cut.

"The number of police officers in England and Wales fell by almost 3,500 last year to the lowest level in more than a decade."

— Daily Mail, 30 January 2014

- Some towns have lost their neighbourhood police altogether.
- 999 response times have gone up so people are waiting longer in an emergency

On May 23rd vote Labour.

A vote for the Labour Party is a vote to safeguard and restore the Police Service.

Sample

- 10,240 registered voters (with available landline numbers who were not on the "do not contact" list) included in the Labour Party's Contact Creator Database
- 9 electoral ward (blocks)
- 615 streets (clusters)
- Individuals are cluster (by street) and block (within wards) randomly assigned to two treatment groups and one control group (no campaign contact).

Outcome Measures

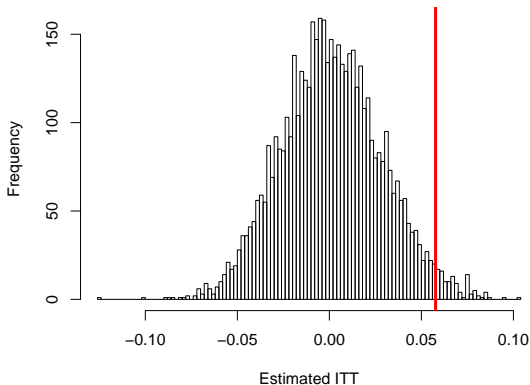
- Post-Treatment Telephone Survey (21-25 May 2014) with 5 items, conducted by the National Labour Call Centre.
 - 1 Voting Intention
 - 2 Most important issue (unprompted)
 - 3 Party best to handle NHS
 - 4 Party best to handle Crime and Policing
 - 5 Have you received a campaign leaflet from the Labour Party?
- Matching turnout data from the official voter file.

Issue Ownership: Which political party would handle the problem best?

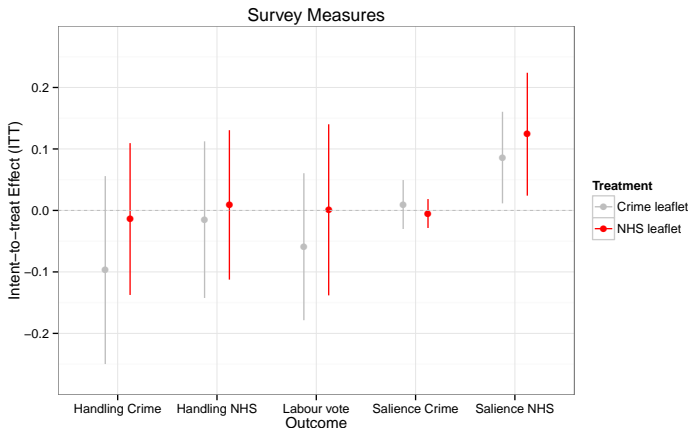
	LAB	CON	Other
	YouGov 11-12 May		
NHS	35	24	12
Law & Order	24	36	13
	NCC Exeter 20-25 May		
NHS	42	9	6
Crime & Policing	29	16	22

Manipulation Check: ITT on having received a Labour leaflet

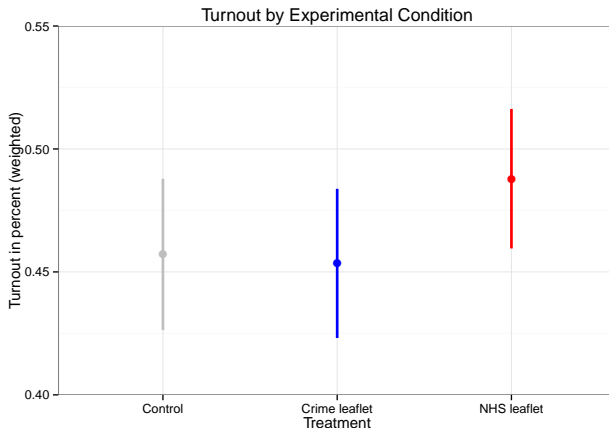
Sampling distribution of the estimated ITT



ITT on Issue Handling, Vote Intentions and Issue Salience



Turnout by Experimental Group



Differential effects on turnout, conditional on partisanship

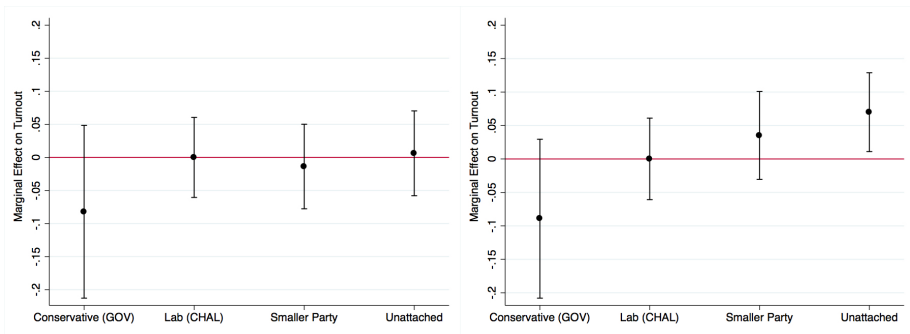


Figure: a. Crime leaflet b. NHS leaflet

Conclusion

- NHS leaflet significantly increased salience of healthcare issue to subjects.
- There was no short-term effect on issue handling.
- Playing on the 'home-turf' of the opponent was ineffective.
- Priming an issue owned by the Labour Party increased turnout and affected the composition of the electorate in favor of Labour.

Thank you for your attention.

Voting Intentions and Turnout by Experimental Group

	Labour Voting Intention	Turnout
Control	47.59	45.26
N	351	2557
Crime Leaflet	43.37	45.35
N	460	3391
NHS Leaflet	50.85	49.27
N	560	3504

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$ (based on two-tailed test of sharp null hypothesis), randomization inference-based 95%-CIs in brackets.

ITT: Labour Voting Intentions and Turnout

	Lab Voting Intention	Turnout
	Covariate-Adjusted	
Crime Leaflet vs Control	-.060 ⁺ [-.129, .008]	-.003 [-.047, .042]
N	811	5948
NHS Leaflet vs Control	-.014 [-.077, .051]	.029 ⁺ [-.013, .069]
N	911	6061
NHS vs Crime Leaflet	.044 ⁺ [-.019, .110]	.030 ⁺ [-.010, .071]
N	1020	6895

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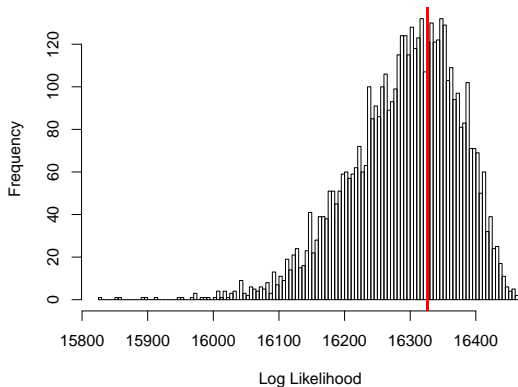
ITT: Salience and Issue Handling Perceptions

	Salience		Issue Handling	
Leaflet	NHS	Crime	NHS	Crime
Crime	.086* (.038)	.010 (.020)	-.015 (.065)	-.097 (.078)
NHS	.124* (.051)	-.005 (.012)	.009 (.062)	-.014 (.063)

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$ (based on two-tailed t-test), standard errors in parentheses. Including post-stratification inverse probability weights.

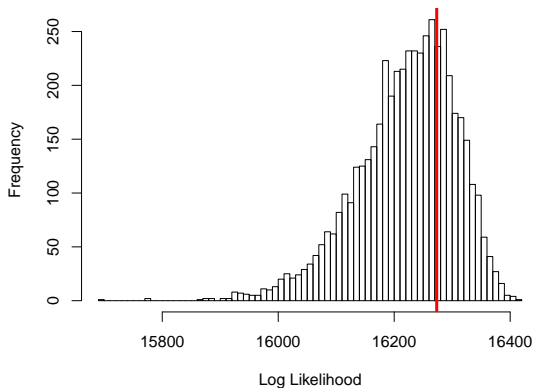
Attrition Check: Vote Intentions

Sampling distribution of simulated log likelihoods



Balance Check: Turnout

Sampling distribution of simulated log likelihoods



Balance Check: Vote Intentions

Sampling distribution of simulated log likelihoods

