

Supplementary Materials for

Back to the Future: Democratic Responsiveness and the Estimation of Future Public Opinion

Table A1. Ranking Factors in Policy Decisions

Rank	Input	Mean	SD
1	Compatibility with party principles and platform	3.22	2.83
2	Current positions of key stakeholder groups	5.10	2.65
3	Recommendations for economists and experts	6.05	3.63
4	Your reading of how the general public will feel about the policy after it is in place	6.05	3.24
5	Current support/opposition among the general public	6.08	3.29
6	Your reading of how your party's supporters will feel about the policy after it is in place	6.08	3.13
7	Current support/opposition among your party's supporters	6.18	2.95
8	Recommendations from civil servants	6.64	3.34
9	Your reading of how swing voters will feel about the policy after it is in place	6.76	3.22
10	Trends in media coverage	7.77	2.99
11	Current support/opposition among swing voters	7.95	2.86
12	Position of main opposition party	10.12	2.54

Vignette 1 (V1) – Fast Finish v. Jump Start (Control)

A ministry in your government is faced with creating policies to address an emerging issue. The legislative session will end soon and the ministry must introduce and pass a bill in a short time period. Here is the information you have at hand:

- There are two main policy approaches: They’ve been nicknamed “*Jump start*” and “*Fast finish*”. Maintaining current policy is much worse than either option since failing to act will cause a number of significant problems in the very near future.
- Think tanks and opinion leaders associated with your party say *Fast finish* represents the best course of action. They note the policy is most consistent with your party’s governing philosophy and leader’s brand.
- The opposition party has criticized the government for inaction and argues that no matter what the government decides, they’ve acted too late. The opposition has agreed that both policy options are viable but seem to be following the public by pushing for *Jump start*.
- Public servants in the ministry agree that both options are viable but that *Fast finish* is ultimately superior as it is more cost efficient and will save around \$90 million. They note that both approaches have been tried and succeeded in other jurisdictions.
- Since there are unexpected and significant challenges in this policy area the issue is well covered by the media at the moment. Current coverage emphasizes government inaction.
- Polls indicate a clear public preference for *Jump start*. Head to head, 68% prefer *Jump* with 15% choosing *Fast* (17% undecided). When asked about the policies in isolation, 60% oppose *Fast* and 12% oppose *Jump*.

Positive: A report on policy adoption in other jurisdictions finds that, despite often significant public resistance to *Fast finish*, support for the decision turns increasingly positive after implementation reveals the policy’s success. A trusted pollster makes a similar argument noting that this is the sort of issue people are ultimately flexible on and the government might even get credit for making a tough choice.

Negative/Low Salience: A report on policy adoption in other jurisdictions finds that, despite often significant public resistance to *Fast finish*, the issue usually falls off the media agenda and drops off voters’ radar. A trusted pollster makes a similar argument noting this is the sort of issue that soon won’t be a priority for many people, most will forget all about it.

Negative/High Salience: A report on policy adoption in other jurisdictions finds that initial public resistance to *Fast finish* tends to have legs. Even when the policy successfully deals with the original problem, voters’ opposition remains unchanged. A trusted pollster makes a similar argument noting that this is the sort of issue where moving voters is hard and is certain to be on the agenda in the coming election.

Vignette 2 (V2) – Aspire v. Secure (Control)

A ministry in your government is faced with choosing a policy to address a highly charged political issue. Here is the information you have at hand:

- There are two main policy approaches. Public servants have given each a clever acronym: ‘SECURE’ is a slight policy change that’s close to the status quo, but is expected to make some minor improvements on policy. ‘ASPIRE’ represents a more fundamental change to policy. The current status quo is not viable.
- The opposition party's main message has been criticizing the government for inaction. They have yet to take a clear position on both *Aspire* and *Secure*.
- Despite their general inclination toward incremental policy change, public servants in this case believe *Aspire* is superior to *Secure*. They agree the changes in *Secure* are a step in the right direction, but not enough to make policy sustainable. The issue would have to be revisited in the future.
- Major allied interest groups and think tanks are not strongly invested in the policy area and but generally prefer *Aspire*. Groups representing citizens most directly affected by the policy strongly support *Aspire*. But these groups represent a tiny segment of the population.
- Polls find strong opposition to *Aspire*. Currently around 72% oppose *Aspire*, while only 16% support it (12% undecided). Opposition to *Secure* is more muted with 29% against and 35% supportive.
- The issue has gotten a lot of attention recently in the press both in news coverage, op-eds, talk radio, and social media. In a recent poll, 73% of the public say they have heard about the issue, versus only 14% who have not.

Low AS (Group 2): Both a trusted pollster and retired cabinet ministers agree that public attention to this issue will fade and the issue is only a temporary priority for the public.

High AS (Group 3): Both a trusted pollster and retired cabinet ministers agree that public attention to this issue will remain high and the issue will persist as a priority for the public.

Vignette 3 (V3) – Temporary Foreign Workers (Control)

Imagine you are providing policy advice to the Minister of Immigration. You are faced with making a choice on a policy regarding temporary foreign workers. Here is the information you have at your disposal:

- There are two main policy approaches that are on the table: 1) increase the number of temporary foreign workers 2) maintain the status quo.
- Public servants in the ministry are strongly in favour of increasing the number of temporary foreign workers to deal with increasing labour shortages in some sectors.
- Opposition parties are split on the question. One party favours the increase in temporary foreign workers, and the other party opposes it.
- Interest groups are mixed in their support of the increase in temporary foreign workers. Businesses are strongly in favour, but organized labour is opposed.
- To date, the issue has not attracted any meaningful media attention.
- Polling data finds the public is ambivalent towards the foreign worker increase with 36% opposed, 25% support, and 39% undecided. The issue is not top of mind at present only 18% regard this issue as important or very important to their vote choice, while 74% say it is not very important. Only 10% say that they have read a lot about the issue, versus 90% who say they have not.

AD Opposed/AS Salient (Group 2): One of the opposition parties believes this to be an important issue for their electoral chances. They will try to frame TFW as outsiders who are taking jobs away from qualified Canadians. They have a set up a website where citizens can share stories about jobs they've lost to TFWs. Your chief pollster and other advisors expect this may be effective in gaining media attention and making the issue a priority for the public. They expect the public to turn against the policy change as more attention is brought to the topic.

AD Opposed/AS Non-salient (Group 3): One of the opposition parties believes this to be an important issue for their electoral chances. They will try to frame TFW as outsiders who are taking jobs away from qualified Canadians. Your chief pollster and other advisors expect that the public will turn against the policy change as a result. However, they expect the issue won't have much traction in the media and is very unlikely to be on the public agenda next election.

Table A2. Randomization Check, Multinomial Logit

V1	Support		Oppose/Non-Salient		Oppose/Salient	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Experience	0.04	0.30	0.22	0.30	-0.47	0.32
Ideology	0.06	0.20	-0.16	0.20	-0.06	0.22
Conservative PID	0.14	0.85	0.35	0.87	0.00	0.92
Policy Advisor	0.83	0.52	0.27	0.51	0.76	0.56
Constant	-1.04	1.50	-0.04	1.50	1.38	1.58
Pseudo R ²				0.03		
N				143		
V2	Non-Salient		Salient			
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE		
Experience	-0.01	0.26	-0.08	0.26		
Ideology	-0.17	0.18	-0.28	0.18		
Conservative PID	0.99	0.76	0.94	0.75		
Policy Advisor	0.34	0.47	0.11	0.46		
Constant	0.35	1.32	1.53	1.31		
Pseudo R ²				0.01		
N				143		
V3	Oppose/Salient		Oppose/Non-Salient			
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE		
Experience	-0.40	0.27	-0.08	0.25		
Ideology	0.03	0.18	0.02	0.17		
Conservative PID	-0.80	0.76	-0.07	0.74		
Policy Advisor	0.43	0.47	0.57	0.44		
Constant	1.24	1.31	-0.25	1.27		
Pseudo R ²				0.02		
N				143		

Note: DV for V1 assignment into the control, support, oppose/non-salient or oppose/salient conditions. DV for V2 is assignment into the control, non-salient or salient conditions. DV for V3 is assignment into the control, oppose/salient or oppose/non-salient conditions. Base outcome is the control condition.