



Article

For want of a nail: Negative persuasion in a party leadership race

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Abstract

Should party leadership candidates communicate their policy positions to the party's electorate? And should they do so when their own ideal position is outside their party's mainstream? This article presents evidence from a field experiment into the communication of controversial policy positions through direct mail. Working with a front-running campaign during the race for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada, we randomly assigned a subset of convention delegates to receive a direct mail treatment featuring policy messages outside the mainstream of the party. Using a survey instrument, we measured the effects of this treatment on delegates' ratings and preference ordering of leadership candidates. The effects of the direct mail were principally negative; receiving the mail reduced the probability of the candidate being supported.

Keywords

direct mail, field experiments, leadership, leadership conventions, Liberal Party of Canada, persuasion, selecting leaders

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Introduction

Should party leadership candidates communicate their policy positions to the party's electorate? And should they do so when their own ideal position is outside their party's mainstream? We present field experimental evidence from a party leadership campaign in which a front-running candidate chose to articulate positions outside the mainstream of his party. Among other means, the campaign chose to communicate these positions through direct mail. Ultimately, this had deleterious effects and calls into question leadership strategies that necessitate direct and controversial communication with voters.

As this article presents evidence from a field experiment into the effectiveness of direct mail, or contact, in changing elite voting intentions and increasing a candidate's likeability, it is directed at two areas of literature: first, an important literature on the strategic communication of leaders and, second, a growing literature on field experimental research into the effectiveness of modern campaign techniques. The experiment we present was conducted in cooperation with the Michael Ignatieff campaign in the 2006 Liberal Party of Canada leadership race. In this experiment, we randomly assigned some delegates to a leadership convention to receive a candidate's policy platform by mail. Others did not receive it. To our knowledge, this is the first field experiment in Canadian politics and the first within the context of leadership elections. It therefore marks an extension of both geography (Canada) and, more importantly, domain (elite politics). As we discuss in more detail below, the Ignatieff campaign provides us with an interesting and unique case for testing the persuasive power of direct mail. Ignatieff was a candidate who sought to change the direction of the Liberal Party on several important and controversial issues. Other candidates who were closer to the Liberal consensus had the job of convincing delegates that they were the best persons to manage and implement that consensus. Ignatieff took on the task of not only winning over delegates to the view that he was the best person to lead the party, but also the more difficult task of persuading delegates to adopt new, non-mainstream positions on core policies. He did so boldly and unambiguously.

The findings are striking. Contrary to beliefs about the benefits of the strategy, for at least one front-running candidate there was no positive effect from communicating controversial campaign positions directly. On the contrary, there is evidence of a negative persuasion effect. These findings correspond with other recent studies demonstrating contrast (Chong and Druckman, 2007) or boomerang effects (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007). Taken together, these findings are a warning about leaders' persuasion efforts. Ineffective or weak arguments are at risk of falling on deaf ears, but also of increasing opposition to a candidate or policy among those who are initially opposed or ambivalent. While these findings do not conclusively demonstrate the disutility of direct mail or the inability of leaders to persuade, they do raise important questions about the conditions under which leaders can change the minds of elites. They also raise important questions about how leadership selection procedures characterized by broad involvement and public campaigns can change the incentives of leadership candidates to more clearly stake out their preferred positions.

Our article also addresses the question of whether direct communication with voters works. Political campaign managers certainly believe it does. For example, in nearly

every type of political campaign at every level of competition, some form of mail is used. Sometimes it serves the purpose of outlining a candidate's position, or of casting an opponent's position in an unfavourable light. At other times it is used for fundraising. It sometimes serves a mobilizing function, encouraging potential voters to participate in an election. Usually it does several of these tasks at one and the same time. Whatever its purpose, there seems little question that direct mail is a frequently used tool in politics generally. The ubiquity of direct mail is easily explained. It is a relatively cheap way in which to reach a large number of voters. Moreover, when its design incorporates individual-level data on a voter's preferences or concerns (or even their consumer habits and financial status), it promises still greater potential effectiveness. Most importantly, direct mail allows parties or candidates personally to connect with voters through potentially highly targeted messages. This combination of low cost and tailored messaging should only increase the importance of direct mail in the future. Despite this, the persuasive effects of political direct mail have not been subjected to systematic academic study. The question remains: is direct mail an effective tool for persuading voters? More precisely, is direct mail an effective tool for persuading elites to support a party leadership candidate who holds controversial views?

The article is organized as follows. We begin by situating our research in existing literature on leadership communication and on the persuasive capacities of direct communication. We then discuss the race in which the experiment occurred. Briefly, the leadership contest combined an election of delegates in each national constituency by all party members in that constituency, followed by a convention in which delegates would elect a leader. The convention allowed for as many ballots as required to identify a majority winner, with the lowest-scoring candidate removed after each ballot. In Section 4, we outline our field experiment and justify its use compared to other inferential techniques. In Section 5 we present our model and results, and, after discussing our findings, we conclude.

1. Direct contact and persuasion

Political campaigns often attempt to persuade voters and sway their opinions by communicating with them directly. The logic is that by clearly stating a position and its merits, voters can be persuaded to adopt the position and increase their evaluations of the candidate holding this position. However, there is also the possibility that arguments aimed at swaying individuals' opinions can have the effect of moving attitudes in the opposite direction to that intended by the argument. That is, receiving more information about, say, a candidate can make that candidate less attractive to certain voters. Chong and Druckman study the impact of competing 'frames', or arguments, on opinion-formation and find evidence of such contrast effects whereby 'weak frames will backfire in the face of strong competition by pushing the recipient further in the direction of the stronger frame than if he or she had been exposed only to the strong frame' (2007: 644). Similarly, the results uncovered by Peffley and Hurwitz in their study of attitudes towards the death penalty among blacks and whites in the United States are illustrative of similar reactance or boomerang effects (2007: 998). Both Chong and Druckman (2007) and Peffley and Hurwitz (2007), as well as others (e.g. Johnson et al., 2003), make

the point that such negative effects of persuasion attempts are most likely to occur among engaged, knowledgeable citizens – what Lodge and Taber refer to as motivated reasoners (2000). These people are those whom we would expect to latch on to confirmatory information while subjecting contradictory information to increased scrutiny in a manner that confirms their predispositions or increases their stock of negative considerations. We argue that delegates to a leadership convention are prime candidates for such a label. In many cases, they are long-time party members. They have probably invested significant time and money in securing their spots as delegates, and they are likely to feel strongly about the candidates involved in the election.

Given delegates' levels of sophistication and commitment, the stakes attached to communicating information become all the higher for candidates. This is even more so if the candidate happens also to be a polarizing one. While Ignatieff was considered by most to be the clear front-runner in the race, on many salient issues he adopted positions apart from the median of the activists of the Liberal Party. In his campaign material, including his direct mail, Ignatieff called for the eventual constitutional recognition of Quebec as a 'nation', for the righting of the 'fiscal imbalance' and for continued Canadian involvement in a war in Afghanistan. In addition, his support for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq was well publicized in Canada. These were all positions outside the historical and recent mainstream of the Liberal Party. For example, while Ignatieff supported the extension of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan to at least 2009, this view was shared by only 36 percent of Liberal delegates from outside Quebec. Fifty-seven percent of delegates believed Canada's involvement should either end immediately or in 2007. Similarly, only 37 percent of delegates outside of Quebec supported a parliamentary resolution to recognize Quebec as a nation within Canada. Ignatieff's position for constitutional recognition was much stronger than a simple parliamentary resolution and thus likely even less supported (Strategic Counsel, 2006).

Aside from his support for the Iraq War, the policy positions articulated by Ignatieff in the leadership race were not well known before the start of the campaign. Indeed, Ignatieff was better known for his record as an international human rights scholar and activist and an advocate of centrist social policy – positions much more in line with the Liberal Party mainstream. Thus, Ignatieff sought not merely to lead the party, but to move it in a certain direction. His candidacy needed to inform delegates of his views, but also to persuade people to change their views. Thus, clearly communicating a policy direction outside the party mainstream was a risky strategy. It is in this respect that Ignatieff's gamble provides interesting and unique insight into questions of strategic communication.

A growing theoretical literature focuses on the strategies of communication available to leaders (Aragonés and Neeman, 2000; Dewan and Myatt, 2008; Meirowitz, 2005; Shepsle, 1970, 1972; Zeckhauser, 1969). There are a number of dimensions along which such communication can be characterized. For instance, one might think of communication as varying between degrees of clarity and obfuscation. That is, a leader can deliver her message with varying levels of precision. Moreover, a leader's judgement about policies – the substance of her communication – can reflect more or less a 'sense of direction' (Dewan and Myatt, 2008: 352).

It might seem obvious that a leader is better off when she communicates clearly. However, numerous scholars have noted that ambiguity and obfuscation have strategic

advantages (e.g. Shepsle, 1970, 1972; Zeckhauser, 1969). Shepsle points out that: 'observed ambiguity often typically involves precisely those issues on which the election hinges' (1972: 555) and underlines 'the politician's advantage in speaking "half truths" and in varying his appeals with variations in audience and political climate' (1972: 559). Aragonés and Neeman (2000) provide a model in which candidates opt for ambiguity in order to remain flexible and because it allows them to broaden their appeal. Dewan and Myatt follow in this vein, arguing that 'attention-seeking leaders will intentionally obfuscate' (2008: 355).

As we have argued, Ignatieff presented a set of policies that deviated from the Liberal mainstream, and he did so with some measure of clarity. There was no mistaking where he stood on controversial issues such as Afghanistan or national unity, and, as it turned out, delegates were not convinced by his 'judgement' or 'sense of direction' (Dewan and Myatt, 2008). The theoretical literature on leadership communication and strategic ambiguity suggests that leaders such as Ignatieff ought to equivocate and obfuscate in delivering their message. Dewan and Myatt's (2008) model illustrates that when communication skills are endogenous (leaders can manipulate the clarity of their message), the relative influence among the best communicators is greater for those with lower variance in their judgement. In other words, in the case of the Liberal leadership candidates, while Ignatieff was certainly a good communicator, his appeal was circumscribed by the perception among delegates that he would take the party in the wrong direction. From this arises our empirical question: when elite voters are confronted with a controversial position via direct contact from a campaign, do they become more likely to support a candidate or less likely? That is, does direct contact persuade, or does it merely inform and lead to possibly negative effects?

Direct mail is one of the most common ways in which campaigns and candidates communicate directly with voters. As in other jurisdictions, direct mail is ubiquitous in Canadian political campaigns. Older evidence suggesting the importance of printed materials, such as that presented by Paltiel (1974), has been confirmed by recent analyses of modern campaigns. Carty and Eagles (2005), in particular, have documented the importance of printed advertising for modern local campaigns. Using data from the 2000 Canadian federal election, they observe that print advertising was the largest expense of candidates in all parties. While this material encompasses much more than just direct mail, our own conversations with local and national campaign managers suggest that direct mail makes up a large portion of this spending, and often the largest. Clearly, it is a tool frequently drawn from a campaign manager's toolbox. This trend promises to continue as parties become increasingly adept at collecting individual-level data and mining it for insights which can then be leveraged through direct contact with individual voters (see Carty et al., 2000; Gibson and Rommele, 2001; Norris, 2003; and, for a more popular account, Wells, 2006).

The importance of direct mail in general elections is probably surpassed by its importance in party leadership races. Whether conventions or direct elections, leadership races seem especially amenable to this campaign tool. These races are often paid little sustained attention by the media, especially for less competitive candidates. They tend to feature candidates who are often difficult to distinguish on ideological or policy grounds (Vavreck et al., 2002). Moreover, party leadership campaigns are increasingly

large-scaled affairs in which it is difficult for candidates to personally reach every member in the electorate through face-to-face meetings (Cross, 1996: 312). At the same time, the number of eligible voters (i.e. party members) relative to the typical budget does make it possible to reach each voter by mail, often multiple times. Mail thus allows a candidate to speak directly to each party member or delegate. In races with many candidates, persuasion becomes a principal activity as campaigns seek to build coalitions that can deliver a majority of delegates or voters over a series of ballots. Direct mail plays an important role in this persuasion. Wearing's (1988) accounts of the 1976 and 1983 Progressive Conservative and 1984 Liberal leadership convention campaigns and Flanagan's (2003) account of the 2002 Harper campaign for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance provide convincing evidence of the importance that campaign managers assigned to direct mail in these races – an importance that we think generalizes fairly easily to all leadership races and elite politics more generally. Whether direct mail actually works, however, remains unclear.

In contrast to the political science literature, marketing is one field in which direct mail has been extensively studied. As a result, a substantial and broad literature exists. Among its findings, the marketing literature includes theory and knowledge about the elements of direct mail which make for success (e.g. Elsner et al., 2004; Nash, 1984), how direct mail campaigns (especially coupons) affect purchasing (Bawa and Shoemaker, 1989; Bult and Wansbeek, 1995), how they affect incremental sales and how direct mail campaigns can be optimized based on past purchasing information (Allenby et al., 1999; Neslin et al., 1985). Moreover, much of this literature includes an experimental element. For example, Irons et al. (1983) present a meta-analysis of 60 field experiments on the effects of coupons on purchasing habits.

We can learn clear methodological lessons from this literature, particularly about the analytical power of field experiments. But, despite this, it is unclear how much we can apply the lessons of consumer behaviour to electoral politics. The decision to consume more goods or change the mix of goods that an individual consumes does not accurately reflect the nature of political choice in which a decision is forced (you have to vote at a certain time), zero sum (you have to vote for one candidate and not others) and essentially civic (in that one is likely, in making one's choice, to think about more than self-interest or the meeting of a need). In short, individuals may bring a substantially different calculus to vote choice, one that is responsive in a different way – or not at all – to direct mail efforts. What is more, direct mail may vary systematically in its design from that in the commercial world. Accordingly, we look principally to evidence within politics and political science.

Whether in general elections or leadership contests, there is a lack of systematic evidence on the effectiveness of political direct mail. Examining direct mail effects using existing data is problematic for two reasons. First, even though we can assume that party and campaign spending is measured consistently and correctly (Ansolabehere and Gerber, 1994), its accounting is often not precise enough to identify direct mail outlays specifically (see Loewen [2005] for a Canadian account). Second, even if we could observe the different types of spending, we could not easily draw strong causal inferences from these observations. While we discuss this at greater length in the next section, the basic problem is easily stated: because spending decisions and communications

strategies are not developed randomly, we cannot determine whether the effects of campaign practices are a function of the types and extent of the method or the unobserved factors which influence campaigns to choose some methods over others. This problem is far from unique to Canada or Canadian political science. Indeed, there are many examples of observational research on campaign effectiveness that are confronted with this empirical problem (for British examples, see Johnston and Pattie, 1998; Pattie et al., 1995; Whiteley and Seyd, 1994; for American examples, see Holbrook and McClurg, 2005; Vavreck et al., 2002) What is required is some form of inquiry not subject to Leamer's 'inferential monsters lurking beyond our immediate field of vision' (1983: 83). That is, some form of inquiry where we can reasonably limit the number of possible explanatory variables and focus on one in particular, that is, direct mail.

A growing line of research has sought to confront this problem of unobserved heterogeneity in campaign effects by engaging in field experiments. This research programme has been both wide and deep. It covers several different campaign methods, including direct mail, door-to-door canvassing, various telephone techniques and leafleting; and it reaches down into several types of elections, several different types of campaigns and several different locales. The most important feature of these experiments is the random assignment of a treatment of interest to a well-defined population, followed by a statistical analysis of the effects of the treatment (Green and Gerber, 2004: 11–22). These studies have allowed for strong conclusions to be drawn on the effects of direct mail, especially as it relates to mobilization. Following Green and Gerber's (2004) summary, while non-partisan direct mail seems to increase turnout, mail which expresses opposition to a candidate does not seem to have an effect. Partisan mail is effective in mobilizing partisans, but not in bringing 'swing voters' to the polls. On balance, the mobilizing effects of direct mail appear highly conditional and modest.

Less work has been undertaken on the persuasive effects of partisan direct mail. One early study examines the effects of a single candidate mailing in a weakly contested Democratic congressional primary (Miller and Robyn, 1975). It found no effect, though it was conducted over a rather small sample. Bositis et al. (1985) conducted a unique experiment on timing and order effects in a Committeeman endorsement letter. Following up an election with a survey, they found persuasion to vary across message timing and order. Gerber (2004) single-handedly expanded the field, conducting field experiments with five different campaigns during the 1999–2000 election cycle. These experiments – conducted during a mayoral race, a New Jersey state assembly election, a state legislative race in Connecticut, a Congressional primary and a Congressional general election – examined the effect of campaign mailings on vote totals, which we take to be a test of the persuasive capacities of direct mail. In some cases, post-election surveys were used to estimate effects, while in others they were measured by ward-level differences in vote totals. The results generally show that while incumbent mailings had little effect (except in primaries) challenger mailings were effective in some cases.

Taken together with the mobilization literature, it is difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion on the effectiveness of direct mail. Its utility is contingent on both the type of race and the type of candidate. As a consequence, these results do not directly inform our expectations of the persuasiveness of direct mail in a leadership race. However, they do demonstrate two things. First, we can effectively ascertain the causal properties of

campaign methods through field experiments. Second, at least some of the claims of those who advocate direct mail appear to be false. Its advocates have, at best, overestimated the mobilizing capacity of direct mail. Might it be the same for its persuasive properties?

There is certainly evidence that leadership matters for changes in party direction, that is, that beyond the external influences of electoral performance, party leaders can have an influence on party change (e.g. Harmel et al., 1995). Ignatieff was a leader who had ambitions to change the party. In such instances the strategic question is whether to communicate that ambition as part of the attempt to win the leadership or to try to move the party after becoming leader. While proponents of direct mail maintain that it serves to persuade voters to support the candidate sending the mail, there is evidence that attitudes and opinions can be resistant to such attempts under certain circumstances (Knowles and Linn, 2003). As Peffley and Hurwitz (2007) point out, this is particularly the case when it comes to contentious issues that people hold intense attitudes about. In these instances it can be difficult to move opinions, as attitudes can be resistant to attempts at persuasion. Direct communication, then, presents a gamble. A campaign or candidate may be able to persuade voters to lend support on the grounds of new information, but this same new information may decrease the attractiveness of a candidate or campaign.

After describing the race for the Liberal leadership, we turn to an examination of whether Ignatieff's gamble paid off. That is, whether direct mail had the desired effect of persuading voters or if voters in this election were resistant to the information presented in campaign mail – or worse, susceptible to reactance.

2. The race

After losing the January 2006 federal election, Prime Minister Paul Martin resigned as parliamentary leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. In the subsequent weeks the party outlined the conditions of its leadership selection process – much of which was predetermined by the party's constitution. A leadership convention was held in Montreal on 3 December 2006. Delegates to the convention were elected from among party members or selected as ex-officios by virtue of their positions in the party. Regular delegates from each federal electoral district were selected at a series of delegate selection meetings held during a 'Super Weekend' at the end of September. Only party members who were of good standing as of 1 July 2006 were allowed to vote. These regular delegates were allotted to leadership candidates according to the total preferences of all members in that electoral district. On the first ballot, non-ex-officio delegates were thus obliged to vote for the candidate to whom they were pledged. Indeed, they received marked ballots upon their arrival at the convention.

Party leadership selection procedures can be thought of as varying in the degree to which they are open with respect to popular influence on the election of leader (Kenig, 2008; LeDuc, 2001). Delegated leadership conventions where delegates are selected from among all party members – as is the case with the leadership race we study here – are part of a trend towards more open leadership selection. This trend of larger selectorates has meant larger conventions with a greater number of viable candidates. This, in turn, has led to conventions with an increased number of ballot rounds (LeDuc, 2001:

Table 1. The 2006 Liberal Party leadership election results (%)

Candidate	Pre-convention delegates	1st ballot	2nd ballot	3rd ballot	4th ballot
Ignatieff	1,377 (29.3)	1,412 (29.3)	1,481 (31.6)	1,660 (34.5)	2,084 (45.3)
Rae	943 (20.1)	977 (20.3)	1,132 (24.1)	1,375 (28.5)	
Kennedy	820 (17.5)	854 (17.7)	884 (18.8)		
Dion	754 (16.1)	856 (17.8)	974 (20.8)	1,782 (37.0)	2,521 (54.7)
Dryden	238 (5.1)	238 (4.9)	219 (4.7)		
Volpe	226 (4.8)	156 (3.2)			
Brison	181 (3.5)	192 (4.0)			
Hall Findlay	46 (1.0)	130 (2.7)			
Undeclared	112 (2.4)				
Total votes	4,697 (100.0)	4,815 (100.0)	4,690 (100.0)	4,817 (100.0)	4,605 (100.0)

334). Increased ballots and increased competition arguably heighten the number of undecided voters on any subsequent ballot. They thus increase the need for persuasion.

The race was nothing if not exciting and competitive. More than 20 names were identified as potential candidates and 11 officially entered. By the time of the delegate selection meetings, the field had narrowed to eight candidates. Michael Ignatieff was the clear front-runner, obtaining the support of about 30 percent of pledged delegates, as well as many ex-officios (see Table 1). Ignatieff, recently returned from more than 20 years outside the country as an academic and journalist, was generally seen as being on the right of the party. He was a polarizing candidate. Bob Rae, a former Premier of Ontario (as the leader of the social democratic New Democratic Party), was the clear second-place candidate. He could also be regarded as polarizing. Rounding out the top four were Gerard Kennedy, a former Ontario provincial cabinet minister, and Stéphane Dion, a former federal cabinet minister (and political scientist) known far more for intellectual battles with sovereigntist/separatist leaders in Quebec than for his political panache. The bottom four comprised Ken Dryden, Joe Volpe, Scott Brison and Martha Hall Findlay.

To the surprise of many, Dion would eventually win the leadership. Results from the pre-convention delegate selection and the four ballots at the convention are presented in Table 1. Dion finished in third place on the first ballot, just two delegates ahead of Kennedy. He would receive Kennedy's endorsement after widening his lead on the second ballot. On the strength of that hand tipping he would vault past both Ignatieff and Rae on the third ballot, thus eliminating Rae. He defeated Ignatieff on the fourth and final ballot, receiving 54.7 percent of the votes to Ignatieff's 45.3 percent. Rather than polarizing delegates, as the two front-runners had, Dion was successful in portraying himself as a safe second-choice. Whether by luck or design, he appeared a master of convention politics.

Our experiment was situated within the period between the election of delegates during the Super Weekend in September and the convention in Montreal in early December – what Wearing calls the 'second stage' of delegated conventions (1988). This period provided a crucial test of the persuasive ability of campaigns. Rather than selling memberships and encouraging supporters to stand as delegates, campaigns in this period of

the process were dedicated to ensuring delegates attended the convention, and, crucially, to persuading delegates for other candidates to select their candidate as their next choice should their preferred leadership candidate fall off the ballot or withdraw. Among many tactics, direct mail played an important role in this critical period. For example, the Dion campaign sent a DVD featuring a series of short interviews with their candidate. The Ignatieff campaign sent a 40-page bilingual policy book entitled 'Agenda for Nation Building: Liberal Leadership for the 21st Century'.¹ The book outlined in unusual detail Ignatieff's policy on the economy, the environment, the constitution, national unity and foreign affairs. The Ignatieff campaign also sent out a simple colour brochure summarizing Ignatieff's positions.² As we outlined above, Ignatieff's stand on many of these issues was in contrast to the prevailing opinion within the Liberal Party.

3. The experimental study

Our experiment consisted of two components: first, a randomized programme of direct mail from a front-running campaign conducted over a subset of elected delegates in the last week of October and first week of November, 2006; second, an academic mail-back survey of the same delegates which measured, among other things, their likeability evaluations of each candidate as well as their preferences between the various leadership candidates. We describe each in more detail below.

3.1. The experiment

Our experiment relied on a partnership with the Michael Ignatieff campaign. After the selection of delegates at the end of September, we randomly selected a subset of 800 delegates from those who had a current address on the official party list of delegates.³ In addition to restricting our sample to those delegates who had addresses, we also excluded Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia.⁴ Among these 800 delegates, we identified those who had not pledged to support Ignatieff at delegate selection meetings, reducing our sample to 567. Among these remaining delegates, we randomly assigned 100 to receive two pieces of mail from the Ignatieff campaign and 200 to receive one piece of mail.⁵ All those who received mail received a copy of Ignatieff's 40-page policy book in the last week of October. Those who were assigned to receive a second piece of mail also received a copy of a colour brochure in the first week of November. This material was developed by the campaign and was identical to that sent to all delegates not included in the experiment. By randomly assigning mail we (theoretically) ensured that the reception of mail was not a function of a respondent's personal characteristics or preferences. As with conventional random assignment in a laboratory, this affords us much analytical leverage.

3.2. The survey

One week after the second wave of mailing, we mailed each delegate within our subset an academic survey from the Department of Politics at Ryerson University. By sending the survey under the cover of the University, we concealed any connection between the

survey and the experiment. Moreover, we excluded any mention of the field experiment on our respective academic websites. The survey included a postage-paid return envelope, as well as an ethics disclaimer and short introduction. The survey obviously made no mention of the experiment, though it did include recall questions on the reception of direct mail from campaigns since the selection of delegates. Most pertinent to our study, the survey included questions about preferences for, and evaluations of, candidates, which allowed us to test the persuasive effects of direct mail.

The advantages of combining a survey and an experiment become clear when we consider the typical alternative approach to studying the impact of campaigns on individual voters, that is, a survey which may or may not include contextual information about the campaign (for leadership campaign examples, see Bartels, 1987; Perlin, 1988; Stewart, 1997; Vavreck et al., 2002). As Gerber and Green (2000) and Green and Gerber (2004) have argued, relying on a survey alone to gauge the effects of direct mail – and other campaign contacts more generally – suffers from two problems. First, individual respondents are demonstrably poor at recalling whether or not they have received mail from a campaign. For example, our survey included a recall question that asked delegates to identify from which campaigns they had received mail since the conclusion of delegate selection meetings. Because we know which delegates received mail from the Ignatieff campaign we were able to measure the level of error in delegate recall. Of those who did not receive mail from the campaign, 85 percent correctly recalled that they received no mail. However, 15 percent did report receiving mail. The case is graver with those who did receive mail, with less than two-thirds (64 percent) correctly recalling receiving mail. Moreover, based on a question-wording experiment embedded in our survey, we found that recall was not improved by giving some delegates a further prompt identifying the types of mail they may have received.⁶ Accordingly, even with a carefully designed survey we would risk serious measurement error in identifying who received direct mail from a campaign. Our study avoids this pitfall because we know to whom the campaign sent mail.⁷

Second, political campaigns are often strategic in their targeting of direct mail. Mailings are targeted and tailored to reflect a campaign's beliefs about the recipient. For example, campaigns may be more likely to send mail to those whom they believe are at least open to supporting the campaign. By merely observing the relationship between direct mail and behaviours, we cannot know whether any direct mail effect is the result of the mail itself or the individual in question being predisposed to support the party or candidate. Even with a bevy of control variables this problem cannot be easily solved statistically, if at all (Gerber et al., 2004). However, in the case of our experiment we know that the assignment of mail was random and thus uncorrelated with individual characteristics. Any observed effect of mail on leader ratings or preference orderings is likely the result of mail.

In comparison to the experiments outlined above, one caveat is in order. Those experiments typically test the effects of a treatment – direct mail for example – on a directly observable behaviour such as voting as determined by an official record. Our experiment, by contrast, still relies on estimates of an effect drawn from a survey. As we could not peer inside the ballot boxes at the party convention, we are left to ascertain the effects of direct mail through our survey questions. We are thus left open to many of

the problems associated with survey responses. However, we are not confronted with the more fundamental problems of respondent recall or the strategic allotment of a treatment. As a result, the effects we observe are 'real' to the extent that surveys capture 'real' aspects of delegates' considerations and evaluations in the run-up to the convention.

Our initial sample of 567 eligible respondents was evenly balanced between those who did receive mail (267) and those who did not (300). Balance tests suggest that treatment is unrelated to delegates' pledged support ($\chi^2 = 7.78, p = 0.35$), province of residence ($\chi^2 = 8.20, p = 0.32$) or delegate type⁸ ($\chi^2 = 3.68, p = 0.82$).

Our final sample includes 161 respondents, a response rate of 28 percent. This sample is evenly balanced between those who did receive mail (81) and those who did not (80). Treatment is unrelated to the pledged support of delegates ($\chi^2 = 7.78, p = 0.35$), province of residence ($\chi^2 = 3.73, p = 0.81$) or delegate type ($\chi^2 = 8.95, p = 0.26$). Most importantly, survey response is unrelated to our three-category treatment assignment ($\chi^2 = 0.61, p = 0.74$).

4. Results

In a leadership race such as the one we study here, direct mail has two principal aims. First, campaigns want to make their candidate more likeable while at the same time decreasing voters' positive evaluations of rival candidates. Second, and more important, in multi-ballot elections campaigns want to persuade voters to shift their support to the campaign's candidate on later ballots. In other words, the aim is to convince voters to change their preference rankings of candidates. We examine the effects of direct mail across two different measures in order to assess its effectiveness in achieving each of these aims. In each case, we compare those who did and did not receive mail using relatively simple models (Achen, 2002).⁹ Our treatment regime specified that some individuals receive two pieces and others one piece. Because of our relatively small *n*, we have collapsed these two treatments into one in the analysis. Our substantive results do not change when we consider those who received two pieces of mail separately. Rather than specifying complicated models, we rely on the power of random assignment.

We first measure whether those who received direct mail evaluate the likeability of the eight candidates differently from those who did not. The expectation of those sending direct mail – at least for the campaign in question – was that mailers would increase positive evaluations of their own candidate and reduce positive evaluations of other candidates. Table 2 reports the results of t-tests on differences in the mean rating of candidates with and without mail. We use a conventional 0–100 rating scale. Initially, we only considered one-sided hypotheses in the direction expected by the campaign. That is, Ignatieff mail should make Ignatieff more likeable and other candidates less likeable. As is clear from the results in Table 2, we find little evidence of such positive effects for direct mail. Only in the case of Ken Dryden is the test statistically significant and in the expected direction. Receiving mail from the Ignatieff campaign appears to have caused delegates to reduce their positive evaluations of Dryden. However, those who received mail did not give higher ratings to Ignatieff, on average. Moreover, some of the results are statistically significant in the opposite direction to that anticipated by the campaign. In the case of Dion, Brison and Volpe, it appears that direct mail from the Ignatieff

Table 2. Effects of Ignatieff mail on average leadership candidate ratings^a

Candidate	Mean rating with no mail (s.d.)	Mean rating with mail (s.d.)	p-value ^b	N Mail (no mail)
Ignatieff	46.3 (32.6)	47.8 (33.7)	0.38	75 (80)
Rae	61.4 (33.6)	63.6 (33.9)	0.66	75 (81)
Kennedy	73.6 (26.1)	73.9 (26.7)	0.53	74 (80)
Dion	72.6 (23.7)	77.3 (21.4)	0.90	75 (79)
Dryden	60.7 (26.0)	54.7 (26.9)	0.08	72 (79)
Volpe	15.5 (22.6)	20.8 (25.5)	0.91	70 (79)
Brisson	42.4 (27.5)	54.3 (26.1)	0.99	67 (76)
Hall Findlay	49.5 (27.0)	49.7 (27.9)	0.51	65 (78)

^aCalculations of difference rely on unpaired *t*-tests with an assumption of unequal variance.

^bFor Ignatieff ratings, the *p*-value is from the one-sided alternative hypothesis that $\Delta > 0$; for all other candidate ratings the alternative hypothesis is $\Delta < 0$.

campaign increased the likeability of these candidates. On the whole, receiving mail did not move the opinions of those who were not already pledged to support Ignatieff in the expected and desired direction.¹⁰

As a consequence of the multi-ballot nature of a competitive delegated convention, moving a candidate up in delegates' preference rankings is a principal objective for campaigns. Indeed, a particular feature of a contest such as this one is that candidates have little choice but to communicate with delegates supporting rivals in order to entice them to change their mind on later ballots, contrary to general elections where a candidate can choose not to speak to a large proportion of the electorate. Given that the final ballot pairing in this race was far from obvious, campaigns were compelled to send mail to all delegates. For a potentially polarizing candidate such as Ignatieff, this presents a dilemma. He would want to get his message out but that message may in fact be damaging to him among delegates who have an antipathy towards him.

Our results suggest that receiving direct mail from the Ignatieff campaign seems to have done little to achieve the objective of moving Ignatieff up in delegates' preference orderings. Quite the opposite, receiving mail appears to have moved Ignatieff down in the preference rankings of some delegates. Table 3 presents results from two ordered logit models, both of which take Ignatieff's position in a delegate's preference ranking as the dependent variable. We constructed the variable from three questions. The first asked delegates to identify their second choice. The second asked delegates to identify their third choice. The final question asked delegates to identify any candidates for whom they would never vote. We are thus left with four categories: Never Choose \rightarrow < Third Choice \rightarrow Third Choice \rightarrow Second Choice. The first model includes only a dummy variable indicating whether the delegate received mail from the Ignatieff campaign.¹¹ The second model adds a 0 to 10 measure of a respondent's interest in the campaign, a 0 to 10 measure of the respondent's attention paid to the campaign and dummy variables indicating whether the respondent was a youth delegate, a senior or a female delegate to improve the precision of our estimates.¹²

Table 3. Effects of Ignatieff mail on delegates' preference ordering^a

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds ratio	p-value	Odds ratio	p-value
Ignatieff mail	0.642 (0.156)	0.07	0.590 (0.160)	0.05
Attention to the race			0.843 (0.046)	0.00
Interest in the race			1.169 (0.124)	0.14
Senior			1.018 (0.262)	0.95
Youth			1.586 (0.791)	0.36
Female			1.043 (0.321)	0.89
Cut 1	-0.524 (0.157)		-0.467 (0.688)	
Cut 2	0.583 (0.143)		0.659 (0.733)	
Cut 3	1.186 (0.159)		1.275 (0.734)	
Wald	3.26		34.90	
Prob > χ^2	0.071		0.000	
N	160		160	

^aOdds ratios are from ordered logit models, clustering on province; robust standard errors in parentheses.

The results in our first model suggest a negative effect of mail on preference orderings. The odds of making Ignatieff second choice versus all the other options are 35.8 percent lower for those who received mail than for those who did not receive mail. After controlling for attention and interest paid to the race and delegate demographics, the reception of mail continues to have a strong negative effect on the vote choice: for delegates who received mail, the odds of making Ignatieff their second choice over all other options are 41 percent lower than for those who did not receive the mail. We note, in passing, that the estimated effect of attention paid to the race is negative. That is, the more delegates paid attention to the campaign, the less likely they were to move Ignatieff up in their preference ordering, controlling for having received the Ignatieff mail. While not central to our analysis, this result is generally supportive of our story of Ignatieff's non-mainstream policies leading delegates to view his candidacy negatively. Our second model provides a better fit of the data, a more accurate classification of cases and a less ambiguously significant effect for direct mail. It is an effect, however, quite contrary to the campaign's expectations.

5. Discussion

Taken together, these results lead us to a clear conclusion. In the face of crystallized preferences, receiving one or two mailings from a campaign was not enough to positively alter delegates' assessments or intentions. Rather, if it had any systematic effect it was in making delegates more negative towards Ignatieff's candidacy. This finding is consistent with recent work highlighting contrast (Chong and Druckman, 2007) or boomerang effects (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Johnson et al., 2003; Peffley and Hurwitz, 2007). These studies argue that attempts at persuasion can backfire when individuals are

motivated, engaged and hold intense prior views on issues and candidates. By merely informing voters, Ignatieff gave them more reasons to vote against him.

In the case of Ignatieff's mail, there was much on which motivated reasoners could take hold. His positions on foreign policy, the constitution and fiscal federalism were well outside the mainstream of the party he was seeking to lead. Presented with clear evidence of this, delegates who harboured prior neutral or negative dispositions about Ignatieff may have become even less disposed to his candidacy. This finding should give campaign managers pause for thought. Political direct mail is a communication of a message that can have three effects. It can increase the appeal of a candidate; it can have no effect; or it can decrease the appeal of a candidate. If direct mail clearly communicates positions or attributes which voters find objectionable, it may have such a negative effect. For a candidate as polarizing as Michael Ignatieff, this final outcome appears to have been very real.

These results also have important implications for our understanding of party leadership campaigns. First, leadership selection processes are becoming increasingly democratized (Kenig, 2008; LeDuc, 2001). They are featuring larger electorates and a larger number of candidates. Moreover, they are changing the accountability relationship between electors and candidates. These results speak to both of these facts. In the first instance, crafting convincing policy platforms may be more difficult with wider electorates, especially when they necessitate building a multi-ballot coalition in which the constellation of competitors on later ballots is unclear. In this sense, multiple candidates and ballots may reward candidates who remain vague. Second, it has been suggested that modern leadership campaigns are creating leaders who are less accountable to voters after the leadership campaign (Mair, 1997). Our results suggest that voters were able to deny the leadership to a candidate who was well outside their median position. This suggests that such races work in electing a leader who is closer to the party median when candidates clearly express their positions. The incentive for candidates, then, is clear. They should consider concealing their true positions until after they win the leadership and then confront the consequences of this inside and outside of caucus; such as the choice that was made, for example, by Iain Duncan Smith when he concealed his position in an elected House of Lords in the 2001 race for the British Conservative leadership (Alderman and Carter, 2002: 585). A similar case appears to exist when Brian Mulroney attacked John Crosbie's position in favour of free trade in the 1983 Canadian Progressive Conservative leadership race. He later adopted the very same position soon after becoming prime minister. Whether such concealment is in fact more common is worth exploring. So is the normative question of whether a system that encourages such concealment is indeed preferred.

6. Conclusions

Given the mixed evidence on the mobilizing effects of direct communication and given the lack of evidence of positive persuasion effects, why do we observe campaigns devoting substantial resources to this tool? We have three explanations. First, campaign operatives are certain that these tools work. This message is consistently delivered in trade publications such as *Campaigns and Elections* and in operative training sessions such

as the ‘universities’ which Canadian parties hold prior to elections. It only makes sense to use these tools given the received wisdom. Second, it is not difficult to talk oneself into believing that a chosen campaign tool is working despite a lack of evidence of positive effects or evidence to the contrary. In the hubbub and stress of a campaign an operative will look for any affirmation that things are on the right track. A positive comment about direct mail can quickly become enough to convince one of larger effects. Similarly, it is easy to become convinced of the importance of direct mail when one knows it is being used by other campaigns. A third possibility exists – one that is less pessimistic about the analytical abilities of campaign managers. Even if direct mail were known to have very minor effects, it may still be the most efficient use of resources. Volunteers cannot be bought, professional call centres and automated calls are demonstrably inefficient, a candidate can only work telephones or shake hands a certain number of hours each day and time cannot be stretched. The implication is that a campaign that did not spend its remaining money on direct mail may not be able to spend it at all. Moreover, direct mail can be sent at a relatively low cost and can often be easily scaled up into repeated or more substantial mailings. Indeed, once a campaign has settled on a message and obtained a list of voters, the marginal cost of mailing consists only of the cost of producing materials and postage. Knowing this, why would a campaign not spend whatever extra resources it had on printed material? Perceiving that direct mail has some effect, knowing that it is widely used in other campaigns and being able to send it economically, what campaign manager could be expected to take the risk of not sending the mail?

We think a similar logic holds when explaining why Ignatieff would communicate such controversial positions. While a post-hoc analysis suggests that his positions were controversial and costly, the campaign may not have been able to conclude this during the course of the election. Having achieved a front-runner status on the strength of his organization and the appeal of his personality, Ignatieff’s campaign may have wrongly concluded that he was capable also of moving delegates’ preferences on a core set of issues. Or, they may have misread the appeal and popularity of these issues to begin with. Either way, only a more strategically adroit candidate, faced with the possibility of remaining silent and losing, could be convinced not to communicate positions which he believed to be both correct and compelling. Like the fall of a kingdom for the want of a nail, who would risk the loss of a campaign for the want of mail? Our results would suggest that even if direct communication is the most sensible expenditure given resource and time constraints, it might be a message better left unsent.

Notes

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1. The title on the French side of the book was 'Bâtir notre nation: le leadership libéral pour le 21^e siècle'.
2. Electronic copies of the brochure and book can be found at: <http://www.politics.ryerson.ca/rubenson/downloads/english.pdf> and http://www.politics.ryerson.ca/rubenson/downloads/Ignatieff_book.pdf, respectively.
3. This represents approximately 16 percent of delegates.
4. Delegates from Quebec were excluded as they were subject to a different ad campaign by the Ignatieff campaign. Manitoba and British Columbia were excluded from the party's delegate list at the time because of incomplete delegate lists or disputes between several campaigns over the status of various delegates. We have no a priori reason to believe that these delegates differed significantly from those in other provinces. We thus think that our results generalize to these two other provinces.
5. We describe our treatment assignment procedure in more detail in Appendix A.
6. The question asked: 'Do you recall receiving any postal mail (snail mail) from any of the campaigns since the Delegate Election Meetings at the end of September?' The question wording experiment then added: 'For example, have any campaigns sent you mail soliciting support for later ballots, or telling you about events that their candidate is holding in your area?'.
7. We also know that the mail at least landed in their mailbox. We used the same addresses for the surveys as for the mail, so it is not possible that a delegate received and responded to our survey without receiving the mail. While delegates may very well be selective about what they choose to read (see Barlett et al., 1974), we can be certain that we are at least dealing with cases in which they had the opportunity to read the mail sent to their address.
8. Delegates are classified by the party according to gender, age and aboriginal status.
9. We note again that all those in treatment received the detailed policy book.
10. We have also estimated these effects with separate OLS regressions for each candidate with leader rating on the left-hand side and mail and a small number of control variables on the right-hand side. Our results do not change.
11. We present robust standard errors calculated over provincial clusters. As campaigns were organized provincially, we want to control for unobserved differences across provinces.
12. Interest and attention appear unrelated to the reception of mail. Interest: $b = -0.35$, $p = 0.20$; Attention: $b = -0.24$, $p = 0.26$.

Appendix A: Treatment assignment procedure

Our treatment assignment procedure occurred in three steps:

An official list of delegates was provided to campaigns by the Liberal Party of Canada following delegate selection meetings. We first excluded all those who did not have a proper address and then those from three provinces: Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia. Delegates from Quebec were excluded as they were subject to a different ad campaign by the Ignatieff campaign. Those in Manitoba and British Columbia were excluded because delegate lists were not finalized at the time of treatment assignment due to disputes over the eligibility of several delegates.

Using the random number generator function in Excel, we assigned each delegate a random number and then ranked delegates from largest to smallest number. The first 800 delegates were selected for the study. We originally included delegates pledged to support Ignatieff in our first sample because we expected a second campaign to participate in the experiment. We included Ignatieff delegates to allow us to test the effectiveness of the second campaign's direct mail on delegates committed to other candidates. Ultimately, the second campaign did not participate, but not before we had sent a treatment schedule to the Ignatieff campaign.

Among the 800 selected delegates, we identified and excluded all those who were not pledged to support Michael Ignatieff. The leadership selection process of the Liberal Party requires those who stand as delegate candidates to formally declare their allegiance prior to delegate selection meetings. This information is retained in the official party list. This left 567 delegates.

Among the remaining delegates, we assigned them a second random number and ranked them from largest to smallest number. The first 100 delegates were assigned to receive two pieces of mail from the Ignatieff campaign. The next 200 delegates were assigned to receive one piece of mail. The remaining delegates (267) were assigned to receive no mail for the period of the study.

In the course of receiving completed surveys we identified as many as four individuals in our control condition who may have been treated by the campaign. Because the campaign eventually mailed every delegate, those from whom we received completed surveys after 27 November may have received mail from the campaign. However, our statistical and substantive results do not change when we rerun our analyses with these individuals excluded.

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