

## Note

### The Social Sources of Political Knowledge\*

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There is little that survey researchers have not asked respondents about in their efforts to explain political behaviour. They have invaded people's privacy to ask about their education, work, income and other background characteristics, as well as their personality dispositions, opinions, loyalties and ideological orientations. How much people *know*, how well informed they are, and the quality of their thinking, however, have rarely been probed.<sup>1</sup> It is as if such information were not deemed relevant to how people act politically.

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1 Among the few Canadian studies in this area are Bonnie H. Erickson, "Region, Knowledge, and Class Voting in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 6 (1981), 121-44; and Jon H. Pammett and Michael S. Whittington (eds.), *Foundations of Political Culture: Political Socialization in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976). Erickson defines "Knowledge of party class positions" as "rating the NDP more working-class oriented than either main party" (127) and hypothesizes that "knowledge of class positions would be related to early training, later socialization and self-exposure, and variations in the amount of political information readily

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There are a number of reasons for this curious omission. One is undoubtedly the conviction that citizens are so poorly informed about current events that what they know or do not know must surely have little bearing on their behaviour.<sup>2</sup> A second reason is an understandable reluctance on the part of researchers to jeopardize the fragile rapport that interviewers build up with their respondents by exposing respondents' ignorance.<sup>3</sup> And, third, it is common within the social sciences to assume that it is what people subjectively *believe* that accounts for behaviour, not whether what they believe is accurate.<sup>4</sup> This agnosticism is consistent with the practice of reassuring respondents that "there is no right or wrong answer," so that one opinion is as good as another.

There is theoretical merit, in our view, in testing the knowledge base underlying people's voting behaviour and in exploring how this knowledge is disseminated. This kind of research is important because it should identify strategic intervening cognitive variables that enter into people's political choices. It needs to be said, however, that the theoretical significance of knowledge variables is not solely a matter of how many people are knowledgeable on some point or other. Any discussion of the numbers of knowledgeable voters needs to be qualified by considerations of *who* these people are, *where* they are located in the political system, and what *values* they harness to their knowledge.

Political knowledge can be thought of as an important precursor of political action, such as voting. Voting, however, is only one of the ways in which people can be politically involved. Like political efficacy, political knowledge should also be regarded as a significant form of political participation in its own right.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the overall level

available in a given environment" (141). Level of education, political interest, region and occupation proved to be significant predictors of knowledge.

In the United States, Neuman has noted that the National Election Studies series "includes over 2500 items about the personal characteristics, attitudes, and behavior of a representative sample of American citizens. Yet only ten of these items deal directly with political knowledge." See W. Russell Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 9.

2 Ibid., 14-16.

3 It was necessary in the 1984 Canadian National Election Study to ask the knowledge questions at the end of the interview. When they were placed earlier in the interview during the pre-test, a number of respondents were embarrassed by their ignorance of current political leaders. To minimize these effects, the master question was worded as follows: "We are interested in how well-known the provincial premiers are across Canada. Can you think of their names?" Few respondents were fooled by this effort to make the visibility of the premiers the issue, rather than the knowledge of the respondents.

4 This is based on the symbolic interactionist dictum that "things that are defined as real are real in their consequences."

5 See Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 64-72.

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**Abstract.** The study explored the sources of political knowledge using data from the 1984 Canadian National Election Study. Two dimensions of political knowledge were measured: factual knowledge, in which respondents were asked to name the 10 provincial premiers; and conceptual knowledge, in terms of respondents' abilities to define and use the concepts of left and right. The authors tested four explanations of people's levels of political knowledge; these dealt with education, political participation, media effects and region, with controls for income, residency in several provinces, age and sex. Education was significantly associated with both forms of knowledge, but especially with conceptual knowledge. Reading about politics in newspapers and magazines was strongly related to the two knowledge variables. The effects of reliance on television for political information, however, were much weaker. There were significant effects for region, with the patterns depending on the type of knowledge. The study concludes with some observations about the role of knowledge in political behaviour.

**Résumé.** Cette étude cherche à connaître les sources des connaissances politiques en utilisant les données d'une étude de l'élection fédérale de 1984. Deux dimensions de la politique furent mesurées : la connaissance factuelle selon laquelle les répondants devaient nommer les 10 premiers ministres provinciaux; et la connaissance conceptuelle concernant la capacité des répondants de définir et utiliser les concepts de droite et de gauche. Les auteurs ont vérifié quatre explications du niveau de connaissance politique des gens : l'éducation, la participation politique, l'effet des médias et la région en utilisant les variables de revenu, des provinces de résidence, l'âge et le sexe. L'éducation fut associée de façon significative aux deux formes de connaissance mais plus particulièrement à la forme conceptuelle. De même, la lecture d'articles politiques dans les journaux et les périodiques fut aussi fortement reliée aux deux formes de connaissance alors que la dépendance de la télévision comme source d'information politique a donné des résultats beaucoup plus faibles. Il y a eu des effets significatifs selon la région mais les modèles varient selon le type de connaissances. La participation politique est significative tout en ayant un faible effet au niveau de la connaissance. En conclusion, les auteurs émettent certaines observations concernant le rôle de la connaissance sur le comportement politique.

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and distribution of political knowledge within a population is no less revealing of the political system that generates it than is knowledge of the individual who possesses it. It is for these reasons, then, that we begin to explore the sources of political knowledge.

### Conceptualizing Political Knowledge

For present purposes, we limit the concept of knowledge to externally verifiable descriptive beliefs about what "is." So far as verification is concerned, we can check a respondent's opinion about the name of a premier against the public record, and, applying an ecological criterion, we can ask whether a respondent's use of the concepts of left and right corresponds with common usage. Since normative beliefs or opinions about what ought to prevail fall outside this conception of knowledge, much of the otherwise interesting research on ideology is tangential to our immediate concerns.<sup>6</sup>

6 See Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 209-13; Philip Converse, "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Nongovernmental Politics*, Vol. 4 of *The Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), chap. 2. It makes sense to

We may compare our approach with that of Russell Neuman in his recent study, *The Paradox of Mass Politics*,<sup>7</sup> which is probably the most sustained look at political knowledge by a North American social scientist. What Neuman calls “political sophistication” is made up of three dimensions. The first is political *salience* and is measured by questions asking how much attention respondents give to politics generally and how interested they are in any ongoing election.<sup>8</sup> The second dimension is political *knowledge* of “political figures, issues, structures, and groups.”<sup>9</sup> Political *conceptualization*, the third variable comprising political sophistication, refers to respondents’ ability to apply political concepts in a differentiated fashion to their political environments and, further, to integrate or organize political ideas.<sup>10</sup> “The three components of sophistication,” Neuman has argued, “are correlated vectors rather than independent variables. Knowledge is the central component, mediating between the salience of politics and political conceptualization.”<sup>11</sup>

We do not attach the same theoretical significance to salience as Neuman does. We agree that knowledge and conceptualization are cognitive variables and that they speak to people’s beliefs and to their intellectual mastery of the political environment. In our view, however, the items that he takes to measure salience are more properly regarded as measures of motivational states and the values that people place on things that are political compared to things that are non-political. While founded on beliefs about what is important, values do not represent cognitive achievements in the same way as beliefs. For our part, we regard attention to politics and interest in elections as indicators of people’s motivation and as antecedent to knowledge and conceptualization.

### Measuring Political Knowledge

Using data from the 1984 Canadian National Election Study,<sup>12</sup> we developed measures for what we have chosen to call factual knowledge

employ measures of constraint among normative beliefs which comprise ideology but it is more appropriate to ask about the external validity of descriptive beliefs in the senses described here.

7 Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics*.

8 *Ibid.*, 195-96.

9 *Ibid.*, 196-98.

10 *Ibid.*, 198-200.

11 *Ibid.*, 200.

12 The 1984 Canadian National Election Study was a multi-stage, stratified cluster sample of the voting population (N = 3,377), with systematic oversampling of the less populous provinces. The weighted sample (N = 3,380) was used here. See Ronald D. Lambert, Steven D. Brown, James E. Curtis, Barry J. Kay and John M. Wilson, *1984 Canadian National Election Study Codebook* (University of Waterloo, February 1986).

and conceptual knowledge, corresponding to Neuman's dimensions of political knowledge and conceptualization, respectively. *Factual knowledge* was measured in terms of the number of premiers' names respondents could correctly identify.<sup>13</sup> This index possesses a certain face validity, even if it does not capture the full range of objects favoured by Neuman.

*Conceptual knowledge* was measured in terms of two criteria: respondents' ability to define both or neither of the concepts of left and right,<sup>14</sup> and to rate the New Democratic party to the left of the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties on a seven-point scale.<sup>15</sup> The latter criterion is arguable, but it can be easily justified. On the basis of nationally representative samples studied in 1965, 1968, 1979, and most recently in 1984, it is clear that Canadians who are familiar with left/right ideas are much more likely to locate the NDP to the left of the two older parties.<sup>16</sup> A number of other indicators, including party platforms, sources of party finances, and the occupational status of elected members of parliament, also attest to the presumed leftist leanings of the NDP.<sup>17</sup> In any event, the debate in the literature concerning left/right

- 13 The names of the 10 provincial premiers at the time the interviews were conducted in late 1984 and early 1985 were as follows: Brian Peckford (Newfoundland), James Lee (Prince Edward Island), John Buchanan (Nova Scotia), Richard Hatfield (New Brunswick), René Lévesque (Quebec), William Davis (Ontario), Howard Pawley (Manitoba), Grant Devine (Saskatchewan), Peter Lougheed (Alberta) and Bill Bennett (British Columbia). None of these premiers had been in office for less than two years. In Ontario, Frank Miller was sworn in as premier on February 8, 1985 but all of the interviews were completed prior to this date. It is worth noting that 25 respondents (all of them in Ontario and Quebec) were interviewed during the first week of February, and that 21 or 83.1 per cent of them identified William Davis as the Ontario premier.
- 14 We did not judge the adequacy of respondents' definitions of left and right apart from the exclusion of definitions that: (1) were solely evaluative in nature, for example, "unprincipled," "bad"; (2) did not seem to take the task seriously, for example, associating left-wingers with a position in hockey; or (3) could not be coded. This meant the exclusion of 67 definitions of left and 88 definitions of right. (Compare Ronald D. Lambert, James E. Curtis, Steven D. Brown and Barry J. Kay, "In Search of Left/Right Beliefs in the Canadian Electorate," this JOURNAL 19 [1986], 547.) The coding of this variable produced a three-point scale, as follows: respondent defined both left and right *and* rated the NDP to the left of the Liberals and Conservatives = 3; respondent defined both left and right *or* rated the NDP on the left = 2; respondent failed to define both left and right *and* failed to rate the NDP on the left = 1.
- 15 Following Erickson, "Region, Knowledge, and Class Voting," 127.
- 16 Ronald D. Lambert, "Question Design, Response Set and the Measurement of Left/Right Thinking in Survey Research," this JOURNAL 16 (1983), 140; Lambert et al., "In Search of Left/Right Beliefs," 556.
- 17 See Rick Ogmundson, "On the Measurement of Party Class Positions: The Case of Canadian Federal Political Parties," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 12 (1975), 566-69; Neil Guppy, Sabrina Freeman and Shari Buchen, "Representing Canadians: Changes in the Economic Backgrounds of Federal

concepts has not concerned the location of the NDP along this continuum, but rather the positioning of the Liberal and Conservative parties relative to each other.<sup>18</sup> It is unnecessary to adjudicate this dispute in the construction of our index of conceptual knowledge.

Before considering the hypotheses that we tested, we will present some findings about the relationship between the two scales measuring the dependent variables, as well as the properties of the components comprising these scales. The national means for the factual and conceptual knowledge variables were 3.32 premiers' names (on a scale from 0 to 10) and 1.72 (on a scale from 1 to 3), respectively. The Pearson correlation between the two variables was .39 ( $p \leq .001$ ).<sup>19</sup>

Table 1 summarizes the percentage of respondents in each province who correctly identified each premier. We can see, first, how many respondents were able to name their own provincial premier. As we might expect, the recognition rates exceeded 90 per cent in most of the provinces. It is interesting to observe, however, that the recognition rates fell as low as 80.3 per cent for Howard Pawley in Manitoba and 84.1 per cent for William Davis in Ontario. Second, the figures in parentheses at the end of each row tell us how well the respondents in each province performed in identifying the premiers of provinces *other than their own*. On this criterion, the most knowledgeable respondents resided in Prince Edward Island (52.7%) and Nova Scotia (47.3%), while the least knowledgeable were found in Quebec (16.8%), New Brunswick (24.8%) and Newfoundland (25.5%). Third, the figures in parentheses at the bottom of each column allow us to compare premiers in terms of how well-known they were in provinces other than their own. Quebec's René Lévesque was clearly the best-known premier in Canada, correctly recognized by 71.8 per cent of Canadians outside Quebec. He was followed at some distance by Ontario's Davis with a recognition rate of 49.5 per cent. Least known were the premiers of Prince Edward Island (James Lee), Manitoba (Pawley) and Saskatchewan (Grant Devine) whose scores were in the 10 per cent range.

Politicians, 1965-1984," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24 (1987), 423-25.

- 18 See, for example, Rick Ogmundson, "On the Use of Party Image Variables to Measure the Political Distinctiveness of a Class Vote: The Canadian Case," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 1 (1975), 171.
- 19 There are four components in Neuman's knowledge dimension, of which the knowledge of political figures component corresponds most closely to our factual knowledge dimension. Likewise, his conceptualization dimension is made up of differentiation and integration components, neither of which corresponds neatly with our conceptual knowledge dimension. Over nine studies, Neuman found average correlations of .34 and .30 between knowledge of political figures, on the one hand, and his measures of conceptual differentiation and integration, on the other. See Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics*, 202.

TABLE 1

CORRECT IDENTIFICATION OF PREMIERS BY PROVINCE OF RESIDENCE (in percentages)<sup>a</sup>

|          | Provincial premiers |      |      |      |          |      |      |      |       |       |      |        |   | Mean | (N)     |
|----------|---------------------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|--------|---|------|---------|
|          | Nfld.               | PEI  | NS   | NB   | Atlantic | Que. | Ont. | Man. | Sask. | Alta. | BC   | West   |   |      |         |
| Nfld.    | 97.7                | 5.1  | 21.6 | 38.2 | [21.6]   | 61.7 | 38.7 | 4.7  | 6.6   | 28.6  | 24.2 | —      | — | 25.5 | (134)   |
| PEI      | 69.4                | 94.4 | 57.4 | 83.1 | [70.0]   | 77.2 | 57.0 | 16.0 | 20.1  | 43.0  | 51.0 | —      | — | 52.7 | (112)   |
| NS       | 64.2                | 33.3 | 90.9 | 82.2 | [59.9]   | 77.5 | 60.8 | 14.4 | 7.3   | 47.4  | 38.6 | —      | — | 47.3 | (132)   |
| NB       | 24.8                | 9.0  | 32.5 | 89.2 | [22.1]   | 73.3 | 30.4 | 4.8  | 1.7   | 23.1  | 23.3 | —      | — | 24.8 | (136)   |
| Que.     | 17.9                | 1.2  | 5.9  | 25.9 | —        | 97.9 | 47.2 | 4.2  | 2.5   | 22.4  | 23.8 | —      | — | 16.8 | (779)   |
| Ont.     | 22.6                | 2.7  | 10.9 | 35.3 | —        | 71.6 | 84.1 | 10.7 | 9.2   | 43.6  | 37.7 | —      | — | 27.1 | (967)   |
| Man.     | 21.0                | 0.6  | 8.7  | 26.8 | —        | 69.9 | 48.8 | 80.3 | 26.8  | 52.6  | 46.8 | [42.1] | — | 33.6 | (251)   |
| Sask.    | 20.7                | 2.0  | 8.1  | 40.6 | —        | 76.5 | 55.8 | 24.9 | 88.0  | 70.6  | 60.8 | [52.1] | — | 40.0 | (252)   |
| Alta.    | 25.0                | 3.9  | 13.0 | 36.4 | —        | 79.2 | 56.8 | 13.8 | 29.9  | 94.1  | 67.1 | [36.9] | — | 36.1 | (263)   |
| BC       | 19.9                | 2.2  | 7.1  | 29.4 | —        | 64.8 | 49.8 | 11.9 | 12.4  | 63.0  | 90.1 | [29.1] | — | 28.9 | (351)   |
| National | 24.3                | 3.9  | 12.9 | 35.4 | [19.1]   | 78.8 | 61.9 | 12.8 | 13.1  | 45.4  | 43.4 | [28.8] | — | —    | (3,380) |
| Mean     | 22.8                | 3.5  | 10.1 | 33.9 | —        | 71.8 | 49.5 | 9.8  | 10.1  | 40.5  | 37.3 | —      | — | —    | —       |

a Means are for rows or columns, not including the province named in the row or column; figures in square brackets are means for the remaining three Atlantic provinces or the three remaining Western provinces, not including any Atlantic or Western province named in the row. In this and the following tables, provincial weights were used within provinces and national weights for the national figures.

Table 2 reports the results of the conceptual knowledge scale. Residents of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island were least likely both to define the concepts of right and left and to perceive the New Democratic party as the most left-leaning of the three federal parties. In general, the four Atlantic provinces were lowest on each of these variables, as anticipated. At the other extreme, 47.0 per cent of British Columbians were able to offer a definition of left and right and 44.1 per cent saw the NDP on the left. These figures are not surprising, given the strength of the NDP and the heavily class-oriented politics that have prevailed in BC in recent years. On the other hand, depending on one's point of view, it might be argued that the figures for British Columbia are low in an absolute sense, even if they are high in comparison to other provinces. Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta followed British Columbia on the two components of conceptual knowledge.

TABLE 2

LEFT/RIGHT MEASURES BY PROVINCE OF RESIDENCE (in percentages)

|                      | Define both<br>left and right | Rate NDP<br>on left |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Newfoundland         | 7.6                           | 15.2                |
| Prince Edward Island | 10.6                          | 13.7                |
| Nova Scotia          | 25.2                          | 29.7                |
| New Brunswick        | 13.7                          | 18.1                |
| Quebec               | 34.6                          | 31.2                |
| Ontario              | 38.6                          | 40.5                |
| Manitoba             | 38.3                          | 38.3                |
| Saskatchewan         | 27.8                          | 31.0                |
| Alberta              | 38.9                          | 32.5                |
| British Columbia     | 47.0                          | 44.1                |
| National             | 36.2                          | 35.7                |

### Working Hypotheses on the Sources of Political Knowledge

We justified our selection of predictor and control variables on the basis of a number of working hypotheses about the origins of political knowledge. There are strong and weak versions of each of these hypotheses. A strong version argues that a source of knowledge is important to the exclusion of other sources. Weak versions anticipate that a number of factors may produce statistically significant effects, though there may be substantial differences in their relative importance.

First, in an *educational readiness hypothesis*, we expected that respondents with higher levels of education would name more provincial



premiers and would be more familiar with left/right terminology than would respondents with lower levels of education. This effect should be more pronounced for conceptual knowledge because it involves more abstract and esoteric kinds of thinking than does factual knowledge. The education hypothesis refers to formative influences in the individual's past. It presupposes the inculcation of "special skills and orientations that would work in later life," the creation of "an enduring receptivity to knowledge,"<sup>20</sup> while the alternative hypotheses allude to more contemporary factors.

Second, a *political participation hypothesis* was based on the idea that political knowledge is itself a form of participation.<sup>21</sup> We underscore the idea that knowledge is a "form" of participation because we cannot establish the temporal order and hence the causal relationship between political participation and knowledge. Some knowledge is no doubt acquired as a product of involvement in politics, some is acquired prior to political activity without any specific intent of participation, and still other knowledge is acquired prior to political activity in order to participate. What is important from the perspective of this hypothesis is that political knowledge is properly regarded as an aspect of political participation rather than something apart from it. In short, knowledge may attest less to people's intellectual prowess than it does to their accomplishments in participation. To test this hypothesis, we measured political participation in two ways: first, through whether respondents reported voting in 1984; and, second, using an index based on respondents' reports that they discussed politics with other people, attended political meetings and supported political parties with money and time.<sup>22</sup>

20 Herbert H. Hyman, Charles R. Wright and John Shelton Reed, *The Enduring Effects of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 18. For their analysis of Canadian data linking education to knowledge, see 118-22, 199-203.

21 See, for example, Leonard Beeghley, "Social Class and Political Participation: A Review and an Explanation," *Sociological Forum* 1 (1986), 499.

22 Respondents were asked the following: "Some people do quite a lot in politics while others find they haven't the time or the interest. Thinking about federal politics, how often, if at all, have you done any of the following things—often, sometimes, seldom or never? [Show card 3; read list]  
 -d. Try to convince friends to vote the same as you?  
 -e. Attend a political meeting or rally?  
 -g. Spend time working for a political party or a candidate?  
 -h. Contribute money to a political party or candidate?"

The distribution of answers for each question was skewed toward inactivity. We created an index ranging from 0 (respondent did not engage in any of the four activities "often" or "sometimes") to 4 (respondent participated "often" or "sometimes" in all four activities). It should be noted that the four items used in this index represent the three degrees of political participation identified in Milbrath's "hierarchy of political involvement," that is, "convince friends" is what he calls a spectator activity, "attend a political meeting" and "contribute money" are transitional

According to the *media effects hypothesis*, our third explanation, people who seek out information about politics will be better informed than people who do not. Such behaviour is still another form of political participation, however passive it is from an interpersonal point of view. Individuals who read about politics in newspapers and magazines and who watch political programmes on television should be more knowledgeable, both factually and conceptually, than individuals who engage in neither of these activities.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, what one reads and watches in the present should have a greater impact on one's political knowledge than the amount of past education, even allowing for the separate relationships between education and the two media usage variables. This finding should be more pronounced for factual knowledge which refers to the current premiers.

The *metropolitan-hinterland hypothesis*, the fourth hypothesis, leads to the prediction that respondents living in different regions of Canada will differ in their ability to name premiers. Respondents in Atlantic Canada, for example, probably read more about the premiers of the central provinces than respondents in the central provinces read about the premiers of the Atlantic provinces. In addition, residents of hinterland provinces have an interest in knowing something about provinces and premiers on which they are economically and politically dependent. Conversely, residents of metropolitan provinces have less of an interest, not to mention fewer opportunities, to learn about weaker provinces and their leaders. We have already seen some support for this proposition in the results presented in Tables 1 and 2.<sup>24</sup> Multivariate analyses provide important controls for variables that are associated with region and that may account for the zero-order findings. The metropolitan-hinterland hypothesis, however, should account for differences in factual knowledge, but not for differences in conceptual knowledge.

### Additional Control Variables

We also controlled for respondents' level of income, whether they had previously lived in other provinces, and their age and sex. These variables have special relevance for the different hypotheses discussed above.

activities, and "work for a party" is gladiatorial activity. See Milbrath, *Political Participation*, 18.

23 Respondents were asked about the following two activities, in the context of the question described in footnote 22, above: "How often do you read about politics in the newspapers and magazines?" "How often do you watch programs about politics on TV?"

24 We are positing the same kind of relationship between power and knowledge among the provinces that prevails between Canada and the United States.

Education can be thought of as an institution that affects people cognitively, as our first hypothesis assumes, or it may be viewed primarily as a dimension of social stratification, as assumed by students of social class.<sup>25</sup> In the latter sense, it may be argued that individuals with more education are more knowledgeable about political matters because of their superior socio-economic status. We therefore controlled for income as an important dimension of respondents' social class and hoped thereby to gain a clearer picture of education's cognitive and intellectual effects.

Respondents who have lived in a number of provinces should be more knowledgeable about the names of provincial premiers than respondents who have lived in only one province, other things being equal. Although this variable should not affect scores on conceptual knowledge, it was controlled in the analyses of both dependent variables.

We expected that older respondents would be more knowledgeable about the premiers' names than younger respondents. Having lived longer, they have had more opportunities to acquire information about their political world and are more likely to have developed a framework of experiences to assimilate and remember this information. Also, since older people tend to have lower levels of education, age effects should confound any education-knowledge patterns unless these effects are statistically controlled. This problem should not extend to the conceptual knowledge variable.

We controlled for gender because of the clear relationship between gender and various indicators of political activity, some of which were used to test our political participation and media effects hypotheses. Just how important gender is, either as a predictor variable or as a control variable depends, of course, on the amount of change that has occurred in recent years in women's orientations toward politics. Some research relating gender to political efficacy and political participation in the 1984 Canadian National Election Study suggests the persistence of these kinds of differences, thus leading us to predict that women will be less knowledgeable in both senses of the concept than men.<sup>26</sup>

### **Results of the Multivariate Analyses**

We used Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) to test the several hypotheses discussed above. Table 3 summarizes the findings for our

25 See, for example, James E. Curtis and William G. Scott (eds.), *Social Stratification: Canada* (2nd ed.; Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 1-17.

26 Ronald D. Lambert, James E. Curtis, Steven D. Brown and Barry J. Kay, "Effects of Identification with Governing Parties on Feelings of Political Efficacy and Trust," this JOURNAL 19 (1986), 718; Barry J. Kay, Ronald D. Lambert, Steven D. Brown and James E. Curtis, "Gender and Political Activity in Canada, 1965-1984," this JOURNAL 20 (1987), 851-63.

two dependent variables, factual and conceptual knowledge. The F-tests indicate which effects were significant and the magnitude of the betas reveal the relative importance of the various predictors.<sup>27</sup>

TABLE 3

## MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF FACTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

| Independent variable | Factual |      |                    | Conceptual |      |                     |
|----------------------|---------|------|--------------------|------------|------|---------------------|
|                      | Eta     | Beta | F                  | Eta        | Beta | F                   |
| Education            | .34     | .24  | 83.04 <sup>b</sup> | .42        | .32  | 128.22 <sup>b</sup> |
| Voted in 1984        | .20     | .05  | 15.52 <sup>b</sup> | .13        | .01  | 0.12                |
| Political activity   | .23     | .06  | 5.06 <sup>b</sup>  | .19        | .06  | 3.78 <sup>a</sup>   |
| Read newspapers      | .45     | .25  | 76.19 <sup>b</sup> | .36        | .20  | 40.69 <sup>b</sup>  |
| Watch television     | .34     | .08  | 7.94 <sup>b</sup>  | .24        | .06  | 4.89 <sup>a</sup>   |
| Region               | .25     | .21  | 62.46 <sup>b</sup> | .15        | .11  | 14.72 <sup>b</sup>  |
| Residence            | .27     | .12  | 34.73 <sup>b</sup> | .13        | .02  | 0.74                |
| Income               | .30     | .06  | 3.23 <sup>a</sup>  | .27        | .09  | 5.48 <sup>b</sup>   |
| Age                  | .20     | .14  | 26.76 <sup>b</sup> | .07        | .01  | 0.26                |
| Gender               | .21     | .13  | 72.29 <sup>b</sup> | .17        | .09  | 33.77 <sup>b</sup>  |
| R <sup>2</sup>       |         | .39  |                    |            | .29  |                     |

a  $p \leq .01$ .

b  $p \leq .001$ .

*Results for Factual Knowledge*

The results indicate strong support for the educational readiness hypothesis and for part of the media effects hypothesis as explanations for the acquisition of factual knowledge. Education was statistically significant and produced a beta of .24, second only to reading newspapers and magazines. The higher the level of education, other things being equal, the more premiers were correctly named.

Reading about politics was the single strongest predictor of factual knowledge (beta = .25). Viewing political programmes on television was much less effective (beta = .08) even though it was statistically

27 MCA resembles multiple regression with dummy variables. This procedure produces eta and beta coefficients which, when squared, provide rough measures of the proportion of the total variance in the dependent variable that is "explained" by each predictor variable (1) without controls (eta) and (2) with controls for the other predictors (beta). The magnitude of betas indicates the relative importance of the various predictors used in the analysis. See F. Andrews, J. Morgan, J. Sonquist and L. Klem, *Multiple Classification Analysis* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1973). A fuller version of Table 3, reporting unadjusted and adjusted means, is available from the authors on request.

significant. This is an interesting pattern considering that 40 per cent of the respondents said that television was their most important source of information about the election, while only 14 per cent said newspapers were their primary source.<sup>28</sup>

Region, with a beta of .21, followed closely behind education and the reading variable. As predicted, residents of the Atlantic provinces were the best informed about the names of premiers. At the other end, Quebec scored lowest on this variable.

Voting in 1984 and the index of political activity provided limited support for the political participation hypothesis. Although the effects for these variables were statistically significant, the betas were only .05 for voting and .06 for activity.

Considering the control variables, we note a statistically significant relationship between the number of provinces respondents had lived in and their knowledge of premiers' names (beta = .12). The effect for income was also significant, but the beta for this variable was an unimpressive .06. As expected, age (beta = .14) and gender (beta = .13) were significantly associated with factual knowledge. Respondents in the age range 18 to 29 stood out as least informed about premiers' names, and women were less so than men.

### *Results for Conceptual Knowledge*

The pattern of findings for conceptual knowledge was quite different from what we have seen for factual knowledge. This time, education was clearly the most important predictor (beta = .32), followed at some distance by reading newspapers and magazines (beta = .20). Once again, television was negligible in its impact, so that people who watched a lot of political programming on television were not much more likely to have mastered left/right terminology than respondents who did not rely on television for political information (beta = .06). Also, as expected, region was much less important for conceptual knowledge than for factual knowledge, although here too it was statistically significant (beta = .11). Residents in British Columbia scored highest and those in Atlantic Canada scored lowest on this index. This pattern of findings is consistent with what we assume to be the relative levels of class and ideological politics in these two regions of Canada. The different patterns of results for region on the two dependent variables also underscore the theoretical distinctiveness of the factual and conceptual dimensions of political belief.<sup>29</sup>

28 Another 6 per cent cited radio and television, 19 per cent television and newspapers, and 11 per cent claimed to rely on all of them equally. Only 3 per cent mentioned radio only. See also Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon H. Pammett, *Political Choice in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), 287-91.

29 In supplementary analyses, we used the parties for which respondents reported voting in 1984 (Liberal; PC; NDP; other; didn't vote) as a predictor variable in lieu of the

Among the control variables, gender and income were significant (both betas = .09) and their effects were in the expected direction. That is, men more than women, and people reporting high incomes compared to low incomes, tended to be better informed about left/right ideas. There was no evidence that respondents' age or having lived in a number of provinces was related to political sophistication once the effects of education were removed.<sup>30</sup>

### *Covariate Analyses*

We repeated the foregoing analyses for factual and conceptual knowledge, but this time using each dependent variable as a covariate of the other dependent variable. Since the two dependent variables were significantly correlated, we wondered whether the pattern of effects for each dependent variable would be significantly altered when its conceptual cousin was controlled in this fashion. We can report that the above findings for each of the independent variables remained intact, although the strength of the effects associated with the major predictors was reduced somewhat because of the covariate control.

### *Analyses within Quebec*

In considering the regional differences, we wondered whether the language barrier might account for some of the differences between Quebec and the remainder of the country. We therefore analyzed the data for respondents from that province, using language of the home (English or French) in lieu of region, but retaining the other predictor variables. Language proved to be significantly related to both dependent variables, but more noticeably to factual knowledge. In the latter case, the beta for language was .19, fourth behind education, age and reading, with betas of .30, .23 and .20, respectively. In the case of conceptual knowledge, language had a beta of .10 compared with .37 for education, .21 for reading and .14 for income. On both the factual and conceptual dimensions, though, English-speaking Quebeckers appeared more knowledgeable than French-speaking Quebeckers. When each dependent variable was used as a covariate control for the other dependent variable, the language effect remained statistically significant and substantial for factual knowledge, but it disappeared for conceptual knowledge.

dichotomous variable. The other nine variables in Table 3 were controlled. The effects of this party vote variable were significant for both factual ( $F = 4.18$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) and conceptual knowledge ( $F = 4.34$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). In both cases, New Democrats were most knowledgeable, non-voters were least knowledgeable, and supporters of the Liberals, Conservatives and "other" parties clustered around the grand means.

- 30 Examining the independent effects of political interest (Neuman's "salience" variable) showed that while its effects were statistically significant for both dependent variables, it was clearly less important than the other predictors.

## Conclusions

Although we have treated knowledge as a dependent variable throughout this study, we subscribe to the view that all political behaviour is erected upon actors' beliefs or assumptions about the behaviour and the situation within which it occurs.<sup>31</sup> These beliefs are often unstated and go unannounced, both to those who act on them and to researchers who endeavour to understand the resulting behaviour. As we observed at the outset, however, there has been little interest to date in people's descriptive political beliefs about what "is," as opposed to other forms of cognition.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, researchers have commonly used the descriptive beliefs reported by respondents as a basis for inferring the presence of variables that have little to do with beliefs. A good example is the tendency on the part of researchers to infer *feelings* of political efficacy from respondents' *beliefs* about themselves in relation to their governments.<sup>33</sup> While there is something to be said for this practice, it nevertheless underscores the reluctance of researchers to presume to pass judgment on the accuracy or appropriateness of people's beliefs.

Our analyses were designed to test four hypotheses about the determinants of political knowledge. Although none of the hypotheses was supported in its strong form, there was substantial support for the educational readiness and media effects hypotheses. The findings show clearly that respondents' education, obtained some time in the past, continues to determine cognitive achievements in the present. This is an impressive finding when one considers that the other predictor variables included in the analyses, some of them antecedent to education but most of them intervening between education and our measures of political knowledge, did not account for the effects of education. Our results support the view that education establishes a receptivity to acquire further knowledge long after formal education has terminated.<sup>34</sup>

There was also strong support for the effectiveness of the mass media, but mainly the print media. Reading newspapers and magazines appeared to be more "instructive" on both factual and conceptual knowledge than was viewing television. Although reliance upon different sources of political information is itself related to education, it should be borne in mind that the effects described here obtain even after education has been controlled. These findings acquire added

31 See Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein, *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980), chap. 6.

32 As opposed to the following: normative beliefs or opinions about what ought to prevail; evaluations of what is, in light of certain values or standards of judgment; affect or feelings of like/dislike or attraction/repulsion.

33 Lambert et al., "Effects of Identification with Governing Parties."

34 Hyman et al., *The Enduring Effects of Education*, 18.

significance because of the growth of television as the preferred source of political information among Canadians.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of the two other hypotheses, there was more support for the metropolitan-hinterland explanation than for the political participation explanation. As expected, respondents living in dependent provinces were more likely to learn about dominant provinces than vice versa. The significant effect for region on the conceptual knowledge variable contrasts with findings for factual knowledge. Residents of the Atlantic provinces, for example, were most knowledgeable about the names of provincial premiers, but least knowledgeable about the meaning and use of left/right concepts. Moreover, the higher scores for Atlantic Canadians on the factual knowledge variable were not an artifact of knowing more premiers' names in their own region. The support for the political participation hypothesis was weakest. Although the effects for political activity and voting in 1984 were generally significant, it was clear that neither kind of knowledge was especially germane to political activity.

Remembering that political knowledge is one of the ways in which people can participate meaningfully in the political system, we are impressed with the capacity of our predictor variables to explain a sizeable portion of the variance in each of the dependent variables. Our findings on this point compare favourably with previous attempts to predict voting behaviour. In the present instance, apart from the relative merits of the several hypotheses tested in this study, our set of predictors accounted for approximately one-third of the variance in each of the knowledge variables. Thus, political knowledge varies systematically, and in theoretically plausible ways as a function of the variables considered here.

35 See Frederick J. Fletcher and Daphne F. Gottlieb, "The Mass Media and the Political Process," in Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams (eds.). *Canadian Politics in the 1980s* (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), chap. 8.