This mini-note examines how topical recruitments to a web panel from random population samples affect opinions related to the topic used in the recruitment. Some significant effects are found, especially in the cases of the West Sweden region and the congestion charges issue, though further studies with a stricter topical layout are needed to confirm these effects.

Background and data
There are two distinct ways in which highlighting the survey topic can influence response distributions. The first possibility is through selection-bias where those with a strong interest in the topic are more likely to answer. The second possibility is that highlighting the survey topic serves to frame or prime the issue in the mind of respondents, and thereby influences what kind of information they retrieve and use when forming their opinions and attitudes during the course of the survey.

To capture these effects of using different topical postcards in probability based recruitments, several different topical recruitments and a non-topical (general) recruitment were carried out by the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) in the fall of 2013. The aim was to see whether highlighting the topic of the sign-up survey affects who is recruited, and how recruits answer to questions related to these topics.

A total of 38,147 Swedish inhabitants received a postcard, where the main postcard featured a general layout and the other postcards used three different topics intended to raise the general recruitment rate (see appendix for the different postcards). Each thematic postcard was received by almost 5,000 potential panel members. The first topic regarded crime in society, the second topic alluded to politics in the West Sweden region (Västra Götaland) and the third topic concerned the highly controversial congestion charges in Gothenburg.

A subset of selected questions was asked to all respondents, regardless of whether they received a topical postcard or not. These questions were related to the different topics on the postcards and thus regarded the West Sweden region, personal concerns for societal problems and the congestion charges in Gothenburg. Thereby it is possible to analyze if the answers differ based on the received postcard. The main hypotheses are that the topic of the postcard affects how recruits answer to questions on each topic in the following ways:
1) The crime postcard: we expect a higher concern for crime as a societal problem and a higher fear of being personally a victim of crime.

2) The West Sweden postcard: we expect a higher interest in politics in West Sweden.

3) The congestion charges postcard: we expect a more negative opinion towards the congestion charges in Gothenburg, as this postcard design was anticipated to mainly provoke those with negative opinions.

## Results

When examining concerns for being personally affected by various problems connected to the crime postcard, no significant differences were found for worries concerning problems in the respondents’ neighborhoods, their homes, of walking/running in the wild, on public transport or for leisure activities at night. When examining the degree of concern for societal problems on the other hand, table 1 show that there were some significant differences.

### Table 1: Concern for societal problems, percent of respondents answering Very worried

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal problem</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>West Sweden</th>
<th>Congestion charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unemployment</td>
<td>26.5***</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Criminality</td>
<td>25**</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Terrorism</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financial crisis</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Environmental destruction</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>2,539-2,555</td>
<td>424-427</td>
<td>587-589</td>
<td>589-592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment:** Question wording: How worried are you currently regarding these societal problems? Answer scale: 1 Not worried at all to 5 Very worried. ***, ** variable significantly different at 99% and 95% respectively, crime postcard vs each of the other postcards.

Those receiving the crime postcard have a somewhat lower concern for unemployment than those receiving the general postcard. Interestingly, the crime postcard reveals a lower concern for criminality than those receiving the general postcard or the postcard featuring the congestion charges. This contradicts the hypothesis stating that those receiving the crime postcard are expected to show a greater concern for societal problems related to that topic.

### Table 2: Interest in politics in West Sweden, percent of respondents answering Very interested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very interested in West Sweden politics</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>West Sweden</th>
<th>Congestion charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.1*</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>14.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment:** Question wording: How interested are you in politics when it comes to: the West Swedish region? Answer scale: Very interested, Fairly interested, Not very interested, Not
interested at all. * variable significantly different at 99%, west Sweden postcard vs each of the other postcards.

Table 2 on the other hand shows that, in line with hypothesis number two, the respondents receiving the West Sweden postcard and taking the survey are more interested in politics in the West Sweden region than respondents receiving either of the other postcards, apart from the crime card. The questions regarding West Sweden and the congestion charges in Gothenburg were only asked to people living in the West Sweden region. Therefore, only a minority, around 90 people from the crime postcard recruitment, answered these questions.

Table 3: Opinions about the congestions charges in Gothenburg, in percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>West Sweden</th>
<th>Congestion charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In favor</td>
<td>33.2***</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>32.9***</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: Question wording: Are you generally in favor of or against the introduction of congestion charges in Gothenburg? Answer scale: In favor, Against, Don't know. *** variable significantly different at 99%, postcard on congestion charges vs each of the other postcards.

The respondents receiving the postcard featuring the congestion charges appear to be clearly more positive to the implementation of congestion charges in Gothenburg with a significantly higher share in favor of and a lower share against than the general postcard and the West Sweden postcard. This is against the initial hypothesis when it comes to the direction of the difference but not in that there is a significant difference, despite modest sample sizes. There are also fewer people answering that they do not know what they think about the congestion charges in the topical postcard, which indicates that they are more interested in the topic and have more clear opinions about the issue being highlighted in the survey invitation.

Conclusions

There seems to be an impact on question response distributions when using topical invitation postcards compared to when using a general invitation postcard. Along with the hypothesis the West Sweden postcard resulted in a higher interest in politics in the West Sweden region. In two cases however, the crime and the congestion charges postcards, the results go against the initial hypotheses. Respondents receiving the crime postcard have a lower concern for societal problems and respondents receiving the congestion charges postcard are more positive towards the tax. This reveals the difficulty to predict and understand how mentioning topics in survey invitations affect responses. It seems very difficult to in advance know how and in which direction answers will differ depending on the topic. Survey researchers should therefore apply great caution when using topical invitations to surveys or in panel recruitment.

As there were some layout and design differences in addition to the topical wording on the front side of the postcards it is difficult to establish precisely what causes these differences that we have observed in this study. For example, the crime and the
congestion charges postcards did not include a logo of the University of Gothenburg on the front page. The congestion charges postcard used a more humorous and provocative wording than the other postcards which also could affect both the respondents and the responses. It is thus difficult from this data to tell whether the differences in answers depend on who is recruited (selection bias), or whether the recruited respondent is affected by the topic being highlighted in a particular way (issue framing). The generalizability of these findings are therefore unclear.
Appendix

Postcard 1: General ("What do YOU think? - Your opinion is needed for democracy and opinion research")

Du har blivit utvald att delta i Medborgargpanelen!

Du har blivit slumpmässigt utvald att delta i Göteborgs universitets Medborgarpanel och därmed bidra till forskningen för människors åsikter om samhällsutvecklingen och aktuella frågor och problem.

Att delta i Medborgargpanelen innebär att du två till fyra gånger per år får en webbknapp skickad till din e-postadress med frågor om samhälle, politik, vad du tycker är viktiga problem idag mm. Varje undersökning tar ca 10 minuter att besvara. Undersökningen genomförs av forskare vid Göteborgs universitet och är en oberoende undersökning fri från ekonomiska och politiska intressen.


Anmäl dig genom att skriva in följande länk i adressfältet på din webbläsare:
www.medborgargpanelen.gu.se/vykort

Använd ditt användarnamn och lösenord för att logga in.

Användarnamn:
Lösenord:

Med vänliga hälsningar
Johan Martinsson, Fil. Dr.
johan.martinsson@lore.gu.se
031-786 68 77
Postcard 2: Crime (“Last year were 1.4 million crimes reported in Sweden – What is YOUR opinion?”)

Förra året anmäldes 1,4 miljoner brott i Sverige

Vad är DIN åsikt?

Du har blivit utvalt att delta i Medborgarpanelen!

Du har blivit slumpmässigt utvalt att delta i Göteborgs universitetets Medborgarpanelen. Genom ditt deltagande bidrar du till förståelsen för människors åsikter om samhällsutvecklingen och aktuella frågor. Denna gång fokuserar undersökningen särskilt på brottssäkerhet, trygghet-ettertrygghet, massmedias brottsspröngning, mm.

Att delta i Medborgarpanelen innebär att du två till fyra gånger per år får en webbenkät skickad till din e-postadress. Varje undersökning tar ca 10 minuter att besvara. Undersökningen genomförs av forskare vid Göteborgs universitet och är en oberoende undersökning fri från ekonomiska och politiska intressen.

Dina åsikter är lika viktiga oavsett vem du är eller hur intresserad du är av samhällsfrågor. Det är därför viktigt för oss att just du som har blivit utvalt deltar. Vi hoppas att du vill vara med!

Anmäl dig genom att skriva in följande länk i adressraden på din webbläsare:

www.medborgarpanelen.gu.se/vykort

Använd ditt användarnamn och lösenord för att logga in.

Användarnamn:
Lösenord:

Med vänliga hälsningar
Johan Martinsson, Fil. Dr.
johan.martinsson@lore.gu.se
031-786 68 77

Din åsikt behövs till forskning om demokrati och opinion

Refundering:
Statens vetenskapsråd
Göteborgs universitet
Box 405 50 Göteborg
Postcard 3: West Sweden ("What do YOU think? – Your opinion is needed for democracy and opinion research in Västra Götaland")
Postcard 4: Congestion charges ("Aren’t the congestions charges just lovely? – Or what do You think?")

Trängselskatten e la för härlig!? 

Eller vad tycker Du?

Du har blivit utvalt att delta i Medborgarpanelen!

Du har blivit slumpmässigt utvalt att delta i Göteborgs universitetets Medborgarpanel. Genom ditt deltagande bidrar du till förståelsen för människors åsikter om samhälls- utvecklingen och aktuella frågor. Denna gång vill vi särskilt höra dina åsikter om trängselskatten i Göteborg och den kommande folkomröstningen.

Att delta i Medborgarpanelen innebär att du två till fyra gånger per år får en webbknapp skickad till din e-postadress. Varje undersökning tar ca 10 minuter att besvara. Undersökningen genomförs av forskare vid Göteborgs universitet och är en oberoende undersökning fri från ekonomiska och politiska intressen.

Dina åsikter är lika viktiga oavsett om du själv påverkas av trängselskatten eller inte och hur intresserad du är av samhällsfrågor. Det är därför viktigt för oss att just du som har blivit utvalt deltar. Vi hoppas att du vill vara med!

Anmäl dig genom att skriva in följande länk i adressfältet på din webbläsare:
www.medborgarpanelen.gu.se/ykort

Använd ditt användarnamn och lösenord för att logga in.

Användarnamn:
Lösenord:

Med vänliga hälsningar
Johan Martinsson, Fil. Dr.
johan.martinsson@lore.gu.se
031-786 68 77

Din åsikt behövs till forskning om demokrati och opinion

Medborgarpanelen
GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Rutadress:
Stenveckanskapliga institutionen
Göteborgs universitet
Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg
The Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) is an academic web survey center located at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg. LORE was established in 2010 as part of an initiative to strengthen multidisciplinary research on opinion and democracy. The objective of the Laboratory of Opinion Research is to facilitate for social scientists to conduct web survey experiments, collect panel data, and to contribute to methodological development. For more information, please contact us at:

info@lore.gu.se