

The Elusive Concept of Issue Publics: Issue Salience in American Elections

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Abstract

Many voting theorists have assumed that voters give the most consideration to issues that particularly concern them, creating many issue publics to whom campaign appeals are specifically targeted. The paradox is that this conventional wisdom has proved remarkably resistant to empirical verification. As a result, most vote choice models ignore issue salience or importance, stipulating, improbably, that all voters care equally about any given issue. Some researchers have justified this decision by invoking psychological studies suggesting that people cannot reliably reconstruct the weight they gave to different considerations in their decisions. Using an open-ended measure of issue salience, we identify the issue publics for abortion and other economic, political, and social issues and estimate the substantial effects of issue salience on American presidential votes. Our data are drawn primarily from the ANES, 1992-2004.

“The party choice of cross-pressured voters tends to follow the weight assigned to the issues. Shifts in vote among such people also correspond to the weights assigned to the issues.” (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954:213)

“Beyond this audience with its focus of attention on a range of political events generally, there exists a complex population of special publics whose attentions center more or less continuously on specific governmental agencies or fields of policy. . . . The most obvious attentive publics consist of those with a direct concern in particular policies or actions.”

(Key 1961:544)

“And since it is only among ‘members’ of any given issue public that the political effects of a controversy are felt . . . , we come a step closer to reality when we recognize the fragmentation of the mass public into a plethora of narrower issue publics.”

(Converse 1964:245)

“What is important is to focus on the saliency of particular opinions to the respondent. Voting behavior is much more a function of high issue saliency than of consistency among opinions.” (Natchez and Bupp 1968:419)

“The remarkable thing that emerges from this analysis is that *salient issues had almost as much weight as party identification in predicting voting choice.*” (RePass 1971:400)

“The major reason that [in 1972] a ‘race’ turned into a ‘rout,’ however, was that McGovern was deserted by large numbers of his own issue publics.” (Popkin *et al.* 1976:799)

“This example illustrates the workings of issue salience, on the one hand, but it also illustrates how unreasonable are expectations of high relationships between single issues and the vote. If in fact there are sixteen important issues in a campaign, the electorate may be divided into so many subsets (‘issue publics’) that high bivariate relationships with the vote would be the exception rather than the rule.” (Fiorina 1981:136)

“There exist issue publics, or groups of concerned citizens who have a special awareness about and expertise in matters which affect them directly. Veterans track veterans affairs; businessmen track business regulations. The resolution to the paradox is *pluralism*.”

(Neuman 1986:4)

“The literature thus is ambiguous on the subject: salience is widely seen as having great importance in determining the influence of an issue on political decisions; yet, no evidence has been presented to show that the issues people identify as important to them have any more impact on their decisions than issues not so designated.”

(Rabinowitz, Prothro, and Jacoby 1982:42)

The preceding quotations illustrate a long-standing paradox in voting theories. Voting theorists have long acknowledged the centrality of “issue salience,” or the differing importance that subsets of voters attach to particular policies and campaign issues. Converse (1964) appears to have coined the term “issue publics” to refer to the voter groups who care intensely about particular issues. Indeed, imagining an electorate in which all voters attach the same importance to any given issue would seem absurd, as would a campaign strategy that did not target a candidate’s issue positions to selected voter groups. Yet, the implicit assumption that all voters care equally about any given issue underlies the typical regression-based model that does not weight each voter’s position on an issue by the importance that the voter attaches to that issue. If a regression-based estimate for the impact of such an issue is small, we are left to wonder: Is it because the issue was a minor consideration to all voters? Or is it because the subset for whom the issue was of major importance was small?

Empirical attempts to incorporate issue salience into voting models have only deepened the paradox. Some studies have found that incorporating issue salience improves predictions of candidate evaluations and voting decisions, including Shapiro (1969), RePass (1971), Aldrich and McKelvey (1977), Schuman and Presser (1981), Rabinowitz *et al.* (1982), Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989), Macdonald *et al.* (1991), Abramowitz (1995), and Gershkoff (2005). But many others have not, such as Hinckley *et al.* (1974), Markus and Converse (1979), Neimi and Bartels (1985), Glasgow (1999), and Price *et al.* (2006).

Glasgow analyzes survey questions in the American National Election Studies from 1968 through 1996, the 1976 Patterson panel survey (Patterson 1980), and the 1968 Comparative State Election Project (Kovenock and Prothro 1973). Glasgow concludes (p. 34), “for nearly every type of question employed in surveys, weighting issues in a spatial model of voting by the self-reported weights of survey respondents does not improve our understanding of voter behavior.” Alvarez adds (1997:11), “Other approaches have been suggested for this perplexing problem, but these attempts have involved unique data sets or complex estimation routines.”

Similarly, from a well-specified analysis of the impact of the personal importance that individuals placed on health care reform on knowledge, opinionation, and political participation regarding health care issues, Price *et al.* (2006:54) state, “personal importance failed to emerge as a significant predictor of two of the three issue-public dimensions examined. It did not predict either health care knowledge or opinionation, and indeed was negatively related to knowledge.” They conclude, “Our findings suggest that it is quite premature to adopt, in the absence of additional research, personal importance as an indicator of issue-public membership . . .” Indeed, it is striking that much of the literature on issue publics simply invokes the concept rather than measuring its effects. For example, of the statements quoted at the beginning of this article, only Natchez and Bupp, RePass, Popkin, and Rabinowitz, Prothro, and Jacoby actually measured issue salience and tested its effects.

Attempts to interpret the inconsistent empirical results have focused on both theoretical and measurement issues. As a matter of theory, as plausible as it might seem that individual voters consciously weigh the issues that matter most to them in their vote

choices, some psychological experiments suggest that, as Markus and Converse put it, (1979:1065), “people are generally quite unreliable in assessing the relative importance of factors in determining their decisions.”

As a matter of measurement, Glasgow (1999:38) observes that the ANES open-ended items asking the respondent to name the most important problems facing the country have proved to be the most successful measure of issue salience. If voters can recall the issues that concern them most without prompting, a researcher can perhaps be more confident that the measurement meets the test of “attitude accessibility” that is fundamental to theories of social cognition (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989:125). In contrast, the closed-ended measures of issue importance have proved less useful in improving predictions of voting decisions.

One reason to suspect closed-ended measures of issue salience is that they typically lead to inflated estimates of issue salience. Many more people respond in closed-ended items that an issue is “very important” or “extremely important” to them than mention the issue spontaneously in response to open-ended items. Gershkoff (2005:9) labels these inflated self-reports of issue salience “false positives.”

Even the researchers who have relied on open-ended measures of issue salience do not agree on the ideal number of responses to include. Following the lead of Slovic and Lichtenstein (1971), Glasgow (1999:37) concludes that voters underestimate “the extent to which they rely on one or a few criteria to reach a decision.” He and Rabinowitz *et al.* (1982) use only the issue that respondents mention first or rank as most important. In contrast, Abramowitz (1995) constructs issue publics using all of the coded responses to the ANES open-ended items on the candidates and parties, perceived party differences,

and important problems. Gershkoff (2005) also codes multiple mentions of the ANES open-ended items on the candidates and parties to identify issue publics, although she omits responses to the perceived party differences items.

Krosnick (1988a) (1988b) (1990), Krosnick and Telhami (1995), and Anand and Krosnick (2003) have invigorated the debate in a series of articles on “attitude importance” and “citizen passion.” Theoretically, Krosnick reviews several decades of social psychology research to show why we should expect voters to rely heavily on the issues they care deeply about in evaluating the candidates and to be able to recall and report those issue concerns in surveys.

Empirically, Krosnick (1988b) uses both the ANES spatial proximity measures and the closed-ended items on issue importance in which respondents rank issues in four response categories ranging from low to high importance. But he departs from some spatial theorists by not multiplying the respondents’ comparative issue proximity scores by some specified function of their salience rankings of each issue, which would risk adding measurement error in the salience measure to the error in the proximity scores. Instead, for each issue in sequence, he estimates his voting model separately for each of the four subgroups on the issue salience item and observes that the issue’s importance in candidate evaluations increases as issue salience increases. He also notes that the ability of voters to discern candidate differences on an issue increases with the importance they place on that issue.

In his elegantly simple analysis of abortion in the 1992 presidential election, Abramowitz (1995) shows that pro-choice and pro-life sentiments were very important predictors of vote decisions among respondents who cared about the abortion issue. Like

Krosnick, Abramowitz avoids specifying a particular form for a salience weight function. Instead, he codes the spontaneous references respondents make to abortion in a set of open-ended items on parties and candidates in the ANES 1992 election study. Then, using this salience measure as well as the accuracy of the respondent's knowledge of the positions of Clinton and Bush on abortion, Abramowitz divides respondents into three groups: 1) the "Aware and Salient" respondents, who refer to the abortion issue in the open-ended items and who accurately perceive the positions of the two major party candidates; 2) the "Aware and Not Salient" respondents, who know the candidates' positions, but who do not refer to the abortion issue in any of the open-ended items; and 3) the remaining "Unaware" respondents, who do not know the candidates' positions on abortion. As predicted, the bivariate correlation of abortion attitudes to the vote is strongly positive for the first two groups but weakly negative for the last. When he includes abortion attitudes in a multivariate probit model, abortion is second only to party identification as a predictor of the vote among the "Aware and Salient" abortion issue public. Together, Krosnick's and Abramowitz's research have revived the relevance of issue publics in voting research. Vincent Hutchins (2003) places issue salience at the heart of theory of political learning and democratic accountability.

Our analysis extends Krosnick's and Abramowitz's research in several ways. First, we construct measures of issue salience that do not require information on the voters' perceptions of the candidates' issue positions. Survey items on perceptions of candidate positions are typically available only for the spatial issue proximity items within the ANES studies. If we can avoid the requirement that we must know the perceptions of the candidates on each issue, we can measure the salience of many more

issues and include many more issue publics in our voting models. Gershkoff (2005) follows this approach as well. Second, to establish that the success of this revised measure of issue salience is not distinctive to the abortion issue, we show that three other salient issues were as important as abortion in the 1992 election among their issue publics. Third, we extend Abramowitz's analysis of abortion to the presidential elections from 1996 through 2004. Our goal is to generalize the Abramowitz approach and resolve some of the problems that have bedeviled researchers on issue salience.

Measuring Issue Salience and the Issue Public for Abortion

Abramowitz's measure of issue salience counts every pro-choice or pro-life comment coded for the following open-ended items: the five items probing positive and negative evaluations of Bush, Clinton, Perot, the Republican Party, and the Democratic Party (up to five coded responses for the positive and negative responses to each of the five items); the respondent's perception of differences between the parties (up to six responses); and the respondent's statement of the most important problems facing the country (up to 3 responses). In 1992, 29% of the major party voters mention abortion in response to at least one of these probes. Two respondents mention abortion seven times. We have replicated Abramowitz's measure and derive the same percentage of abortion responses he does.

Then, Abramowitz codes whether the respondent accurately perceived both Clinton's and Bush's stances on abortion, using the four possible responses to the standard ANES abortion item. (The item wording is in the Appendix.) He regards the perception as accurate if the respondent placed Bush as advocating either of the two pro-life statements 1 or 2 and Clinton as advocating either of the two pro-choice statements 3

or 4. The 1992 ANES election study does not probe the respondent's perception of Perot's position on abortion. Abramowitz therefore excludes Perot and other third party voters from his probit regression model. To maintain consistency with Abramowitz, we also exclude reported minor party voters in all of our tables on the 1992-2004 election studies.

Our base voting model in all tables includes four independent variables common to most voting models. Two – the individual voter's partisan and ideological self-identifications – are the primary long-term political predispositions that influence and anchor more specific policy beliefs (Campbell *et al.* 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996). The five category party identification measure ranges from Strong Republican to Strong Democrat. We classify Independents who state that they do “lean” to a party as Independents. Ideological self-identification is a seven-category measure ranging from Strong Conservative to Strong Liberal.

The other two variables measure the voter's judgments of the performance of the economy over the past year and whether his or her family's finances have improved or worsened over the past year. The former, the “sociotropic” assessment of the national economy, is important in many western democracies, and especially so in the U.S. when a president seeks re-election, as in 1992 (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Lewis-Beck 1988). These retrospective performance judgments are valence issues (Miller and Wattenberg 1985; Stokes 1963). All voters presumably share a desire for a robust economy and growing family income. In contrast, voters' preferences on policies span broad ideological poles. The literature on “issue publics” has largely focused on the subgroups of the electorate who are concerned about distinctive policy issues, and we do not isolate

issue publics for the economic performance variables in the base model. We focus instead on the issue publics for contested public policies. By including the four variables in the base model in all tables, we insure that our measures of issue publics are controlled for the important core predispositions and economic performance judgments in the base model.

We treat the standard abortion item as though it were an interval measure and assign the four abortion positions the numeric values of +1.5, +.5, -.5, and -1.5. The four independent variables in the base model are similarly coded.

We first recreate Abramowitz's typology for the abortion issue public and estimate the impact of the abortion separately for each of the three groups. We multiply a respondent's abortion attitude score by 1 if the respondent is a member of the specified salience group or by 0 if not. Table 1, Abramowitz Model 1 presents the estimated logistic regression coefficients for the three abortion groups Abramowitz identified. The impact of abortion on the voter is negligible for the "Unaware" voters. The impact is larger and statistically significant for "Aware but not Salient" voters, i.e., those who are aware of the candidates' positions on abortion, even if they do not mention abortion in the open-ended items. As just as predicted, the impact is largest among the "Aware and Salient" group, the abortion issue public.

TABLE 1 GOES ABOUT HERE

As Popkin and colleagues' (1976) investment hypothesis predicts, rational voters have an incentive to acquire information on the positions that candidates take on issues they truly matter to them. Indeed, in 1992, 87% of the voters who mentioned abortion at least once in the open-ended items correctly reported both candidates' position on

abortion and another 11% knew one of the two candidates' stands. In contrast, among those who did not mention abortion in the open-ended items, only 49% knew the positions of both candidates and 32% more knew one candidate's position.

As insightful as Abramowitz's approach is, the incorporation of knowledge of candidate position into his measures of the abortion issue public limits its generalization to other issues. The ANES surveys typically probe knowledge of specific candidate issue positions only on abortion and several seven-point spatial distance issue items. One could not build a general model of multiple issue publics using ANES surveys. So that we might apply the concept of issue salience to the majority of survey items that do not include information on perceived candidate positions, we test an alternative model that omits such perceptions and includes only the number of times a respondent refers to abortion. We label this the "Issue Salience" model.

The Issue Salience model in Table 1 is gratifyingly similar to the Abramowitz model. The impact of abortion on the vote grows as the number of mentions in the open-ended items increases. The logistic coefficients for one and for two or more mentions of abortion are almost exactly the magnitude of Abramowitz's coefficients for "Aware but Not Salient" and "Aware and Salient." Overall, the Issue Salience model predicts the vote as well as the Abramowitz model.

TABLE 2 GOES ABOUT HERE

As an interpretative aid, Table 2 displays the probability of a Clinton vote in 1992 for each abortion position at each level of issue salience, controlled for base model variables in Table 1. When we convert the logistic regression coefficients to probabilities, the magnitude of the abortion issue's impact on the vote is very large within the abortion

issue public. In both the Abramowitz and the Issue Salience models, those who favor the right to an abortion as a matter of personal choice were more than 45 to 62 percentage points more likely to vote for Clinton than those who believe that abortion should never be permitted, controlled for the four base model variables: party identification, liberal-conservative identification, and the two measures of perceived economic performance.

Figure 3 displays the influence of the abortion issue in the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections, using Issue Salience model with the same base variables as in 1992. (The full logistic regression estimates for Figure 3 are in Table A.1 in the Appendix.) Just as in Table 2, we convert the logistic regression coefficients to estimate the differences in the probability of a Democratic candidate vote between a person who believes that abortion should be solely a matter of a woman's personal choice and another person who believes that abortion should never be permitted, for each level of issue salience in each of the four presidential elections and controlled for all variables in the base voting model. Abortion continued to have a powerful effect on the vote in 1996 and 2000 among its issue public. The electoral influence of abortion declined somewhat in 2004, compared to the three previous elections, and the abortion coefficients are not statistically significant. The war in Iraq and the War on Terror made Bush's performance as president the dominant issue in 2004. From 1992 - 2000, the abortion issue was sufficiently powerful to convert any potential Democratic voter into one who was firmly committed to Republican candidate (or vice versa) among the abortion issue public.

FIGURE 3 GOES ABOUT HERE

Because of the continuing impact of abortion in American elections since *Roe v Wade*, abortion increasingly influences party identification and shapes the party system. In 1972, more pro-choice voters were Republicans than were Democrats. By 1980, this pattern changed as pro-choice voters shifted to the Democratic Party. Except for 1988, the proportion of Democrats among pro-choice voters increased with each election. By 2004, 44% of pro-choice voters were Democrats and only 23% were Republicans. Among reported voters, the Tau association of the standard ANES abortion item with a three-category measure of party identification has grown from $-.07$ in 1972 to $+.18$ in 2004.

Other Issue Publics in the 1992 Election

The codes for the open-ended items in the ANES studies are quite detailed, and we can measure the issue salience of almost all of the closed-ended position issues in the ANES studies. As a test of our revised measure of issue salience, we have constructed five issue publics from the 1992 ANES election study. The 1992 election is an ideal choice for isolating multiple issue publics because the 1992 ANES survey contains a rich variety of campaign policy items, and all 1992 interviews were conducted in face-to-face format. In contrast, the 2000 ANES election study included a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews, and item wordings and item response variances sometimes differed for the two formats (Bowers *et al.* 2005; Fogarty, Kelly, and Kilburn 2005).

From separate factor analyses of closed-ended policy items in the 1992 ANES, we construct five distinct issue dimensions: abortion, gay rights, militant internationalism, taxes/size of government, and affirmative action. The regression-based factor scores are

standardized, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. (The Appendix presents more detailed information on the variables and factor loadings.) We code all factor scores so that positive issue scores are predicted to be associated with higher probabilities of a Clinton vote in 1992. As in Table 1, we multiply the respondents' issue factor scores by 1 if they are members of a specified salience group or by 0 if not.

For the abortion, militant internationalism, and taxes/size of government issues, sufficient numbers of respondents mentioned these topics in their open-ended responses to permit us to distinguish those who mentioned the topics one time versus two or more times. For gay rights and affirmative action, fewer than 50 respondents mentioned these topics two or more times, numbers too small to provide reliable regression estimates. For these two topics, we counted anyone who mentioned them one or more times as a member of that issue public.

TABLE 4 GOES ABOUT HERE

Table 4 presents this fuller test of the Issue Salience model. Except for the affirmative action dimension, there is strong support for the model. The impact of the issues on the 1992 vote increases with the salience of the issue to the individual voter. This revised method of measuring issue salience substantiates what social psychological and rational choice theories both predict: we can determine the voters who care most about particular issues and measure the impact of their concerns on their votes.

The electoral impact of gay rights is particularly striking among its issue public. Although tolerance toward gays and lesbians increased markedly after the mid-1980s (Brewer 2003), voters remained deeply divided on the issue in 1992. Narrow majorities of the voters in the 1992 ANES favored laws "protecting homosexuals against job

discrimination” and agreed that “homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces.” But 68% disagreed that “gay and lesbian couples, in other words homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children,” and gay rights opponents were more likely to mention the issue in open-ended items than gay rights supporters.

Among the gay rights issue public, an anti-gay rights person with an issue position one standard deviation below the issue mean had predicted .23 probability of voting for Clinton in 1992. An otherwise similar pro-gay rights voter with an issue position one standard deviation above the mean had an estimated .88 probability of voting for Clinton, a striking difference of .65.

Of the five issue domains, the strongest associations with the vote in 1992 were among the issue publics for gay rights and militant internationalism. Militant internationalism refers to Wittkopf’s (1990) distinction between cooperative and militant internationalism, the latter bearing on use of military force abroad to advance U.S. interests. Abortion and taxes/size of government were next in magnitude of association of issues with the vote were

In Table 4 the estimates for affirmative action are anomalous. The issue had a positive and significant impact among those who did not mention the topic in the open-ended items, but not among those who did mention it. This absence of a strong and positive effect on the Clinton vote among the affirmative action issue public appears to be a statistical artifact. The respondents who mention affirmative action or civil rights in the open-ended items were positive on balance about both. In 1992, Clinton received 75% of the vote among those who mentioned affirmative action or civil rights, compared to 57%

among those who did not. When the affirmative action dimension is added to the base model without the other four dimensions, its estimated effect on the Clinton vote among the salient group is strong and statistically significant as predicted. The coefficient only falls toward zero when the other four issue dimensions are added to the model.

A Single Attentive Public or Many Issue Publics?

One might worry that our measure of issue salience confounds the many issue publics with one attentive public. Perhaps a single group of “cognitive generalists” (Gershkoff 2005) – well-educated, politically knowledgeable, and able to evaluate candidates, parties, and issues – repeatedly appears in many of our five issue publics. Fortunately for the issue publics hypothesis, that is not the explanation for our results. The degree of overlapping membership in our five issue publics is relatively small.

Table 4 includes the percentages of the two-party voters who mention an issue one or more times and who, by this measure, are in each of the five issue publics in 1992: taxes/size of government (65%), abortion (29%), militant internationalism (14%), affirmative action (10%), and gay rights (8%). Given the size of the taxes/size of government issue public, there is inevitably some overlap among the memberships. But among those who were in any of the five issue publics, 54% were in only one, and 30% more were in only two. If we omit the large taxes/size of Government issue public, 67% are in only one issue public, and only 33% of the voters in more than one. Leaving the issue public on taxes aside, the largest overlapping membership is between the abortion and the gay rights issue publics, but here again, only 22% of the abortion issue public is also in the gay rights issue public. Moreover, in a model not shown we also included the respondent’s years of education as a proxy for the attentive public in a variation of the

model presented in Table 4. The coefficient for education was substantively and statistically insignificant. None of the coefficients for the issue publics was reduced in significance when education was added. We can be confident, then, that our open-ended measures of specific issue interests are not being confounded with a tendency of a single articulate and knowledgeable attentive public to evaluate the parties and issues over a broad range of issue topics. The voters who comprise issue publics are largely “cognitive specialists,” who are selective in their concerns about political issues (Gershkoff 2005).

Assessing the Net Impact of the Issue Publics

An important question is whether we can use these open-ended measures of issue salience to estimate the net impact of individual issues on the election outcome. In his Six Component Model, Donald Stokes (1966) pioneered the use of open-ended items to estimate the net effects of issues and candidate qualities on the vote. Stanley Kelley (1983) adapted Stokes’s method to create measures of the “salience,” “bias,” “pull,” and “marginal impact” of issues and candidates. Asher (1988) and Boyd *et al.* (1988) have extended the Stokes and Kelley estimates to more recent presidential elections.

We begin by observing whether the members of the five issue publics in 1992 were more liberal or more conservative than those who were not in the issue publics. Voters who mentioned abortion and affirmative action/civil rights were more liberal on those issues than voters who did not. Voters who mentioned gay rights, militant internationalism, and taxes/size of government were more conservative on those issues than voters who did not. All of these differences are statistically significant, but only in the cases of affirmative action and gay rights were these differences in mean issue positions substantively important. Based on these observations alone, we might anticipate

that affirmative action would create a net benefit to Clinton in 1992 and gay rights a net benefit to Bush.

TABLE 5 GOES ABOUT HERE

In Table 5 we measure the net effects of the five issues by constructing variables indicating whether each issue was or was not salient for the voter. Taking militant internationalism as an example, voters who mentioned this topic in the open-ended items were 23 percentage points more likely to vote for Bush than those who did not mention the topic. The issue public on gay rights, a predominately anti-gay group in 1992, showed an even larger net pro-Bush impact.

In contrast, the affirmative action issue public supported the policy and voted predominately for Clinton in 1992. Even controlled for party and liberal-conservative identification, voters who mentioned affirmative action or civil rights were 20 percentage points more likely to vote for Clinton than those who did not mention these issues. Finally, the net impact of abortion and the taxes/size of government issues was essentially zero because the proponents and opponents within the issue publics largely offset each other.

In sum, the open-ended measures of issue salience not only improve our predictions of individual voter choices, they also help us estimate the aggregate importance of an issue for the election outcome.

Why Has the Concept of Issue Publics Appeared Elusive?

What are the lessons we should take from our tests of the theory of issue salience? One is that the theory itself appears sound, but that empirical tests of the theory require proper measurement and model specification. Open-ended measures of issue salience

appear superior to closed-ended measures. Also, the weights for issue salience should be estimated statistically, rather than stipulated *a priori*. We do not know enough to specify the form and magnitude of a salience weight function, and we do not know how the function might vary across issues.

Given the evidence that importance that individuals attach to issues strongly influences their vote decisions, how have existing voting models succeeded without incorporating measures of issue salience? One reason is that issue salience and issue extremity are correlated. The more salient an issue, the more extreme a voter's position on the issue is likely to be. The relationships between the number of times a voter mentions an issue and the absolute value of the standardized scores of the voter's position on the issue are positive and statistically significant for all five issues in Table 4 and reach levels of .3 for attitudes on abortion and taxes/scope of government. Thus, when our models do not incorporate the salience of issues to voters, we overestimate the importance of issue extremity and underestimate the degree to which the electorate is divided into smaller issue publics with distinctive concerns about public policies.

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Tables

Table 1: Abortion and the Vote, 1992, Two Logistic Regression Models						
Independent Variables	Abramowitz Model 1			Issue Salience Model 2		
	Log. Coeff	S.E.	Sig	Log. Coeff	S.E.	Sig
Base Model:						
Party ID	1.44	.10	.00	1.45	.10	.00
Ideological ID	.65	.08	.00	.65	.08	.00
National Economy	.56	.10	.00	.56	.10	.00
Personal Finances	.26	.09	.00	.24	.09	.01
Abortion, Abramowitz Model 1:						
Not Aware + Missing (40%)*	-.09	.11	.45			
Aware but Not Salient (34%)	.57	.15	.00			
Aware and Salient (25%)	1.01	.18	.00			
Abortion, Issue Salience Model 2:						
No Mentions + Missing (71%)				.17	.10	.08
One Mention (10%)				.62	.28	.03
Two or More Mentions (19%)				1.00	.20	.00
Constant	-0.31	.15	.04	-.30	.15	.04
Nagelkerke R Square	.69			.68		
Cox and Snell R Square	.51			.51		
-2 Log Likelihood	873.93			891.16		
Number of Cases	1,368			1,368		
Cases Correctly Predicted	85%			86%		
<p>In all tables, the numbers in parentheses are the percentages of the voters in each of the salience groups. "Log. Coeff" and "S.E." are abbreviations for logistic regression coefficients and their standard errors, respectfully. "Sig" refers to Wald test of statistical significance, the probability of a Type 1 error, two-tailed. Positive Coefficients predict a Democratic (Clinton) vote in 1992; negative coefficients, a Republican (Bush) vote. Major party voters only. Pempel (2000) explains all of the statistics, including the goodness of fit measures for the model.</p>						

Abortion Attitude, Standard ANES Item	Abramowitz Model 1			Issue Salience Model 2		
	Not Aware (40%)	Aware, Not Salient (34%)	Salient and Aware (25%)	No Mentions (71%)	One Mention (10%)	Two or More Mentions (19%)
Never Permitted	.62	.35	.22	.51	.35	.23
Rape, Incest, Danger	.60	.48	.43	.55	.50	.44
Clear Need	.58	.62	.67	.59	.65	.68
Always a Personal Choice	.56	.75	.85	.63	.77	.85
Difference: Personal Choice Minus Never Permitted	-.06	.40	.63	.12	.42	.62

The entries are the probabilities of a Clinton vote in 1992 for differing positions on abortion, controlled for all other variables in Table 1. The four variables in the base model are evaluated at their means for the conversion of the logistic coefficients for abortion attitudes to probabilities.

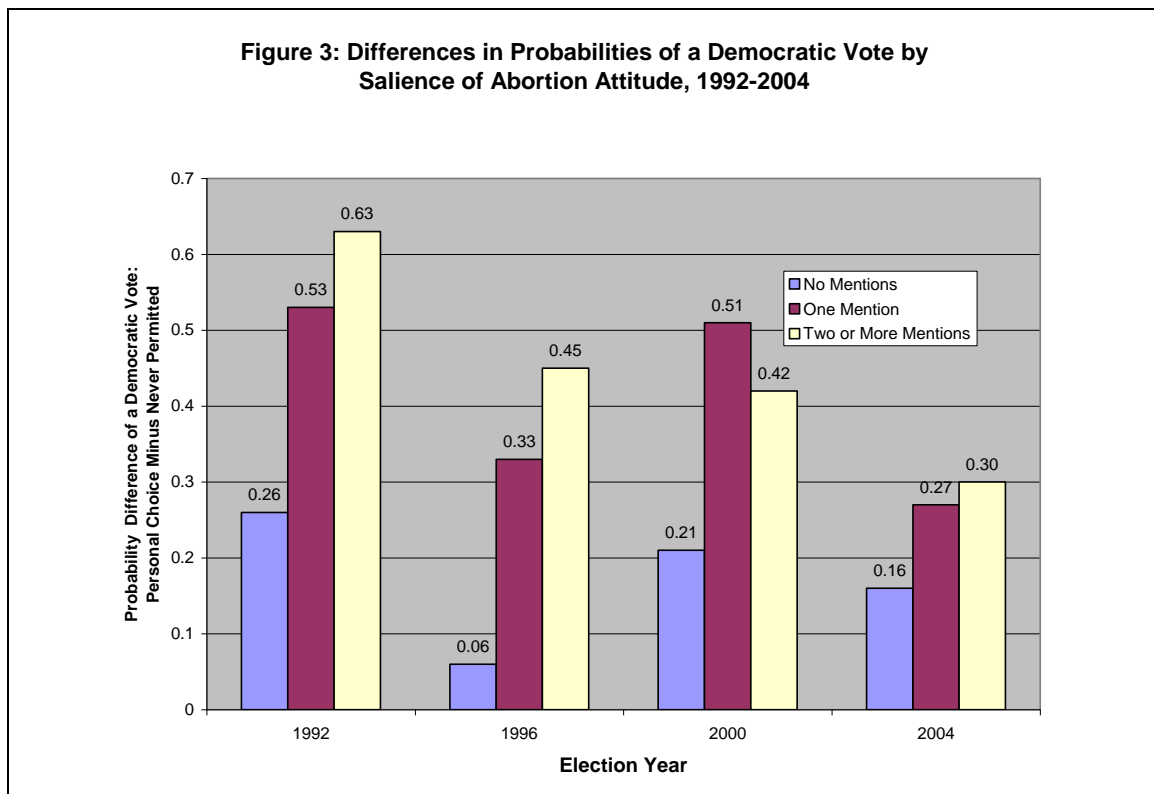


Table 4: Five Issue Publics in the 1992 Election				
	Log. Coeff	S.E.	Sig.	Probability Effect*
Base Model:				
Party ID	1.32	.10	.00	
Ideological ID	.40	.08	.00	
National Economy	.45	.11	.00	
Personal Finances	.12	.09	.21	
Five Issue Publics:				
Abortion				
No Mentions (71%)	.21	.13	.10	.10
One Mention (10%)	.54	.35	.12	.26
Two or More (19%)	.71	.24	.00	.33
Gay Rights				
No Mentions (92%)	.40	.11	.00	.20
One or More (8%)	1.58	.57	.01	.65
Militant Internationalism				
No Mentions (86%)	.46	.12	.00	.22
One Mention (10%)	.56	.32	.08	.27
Two or More (4%)	2.05	.96	.03	.76
Taxes, Size of Government				
No Mentions (35%)	.36	.19	.05	.18
One Mention (26%)	.35	.20	.09	.17
Two or More (39%)	.64	.18	.00	.30
Affirmative Action				
No Mentions (90%)	.31	.11	.01	.15
One or More (10%)	-.05	.38	.90	-.02
Constant	.08	.16	.61	
Nagelkerke R Square	.73			
Cox and Snell R Square	.54			
-2 Log Likelihood	782.11			
Number of Cases	1,368			
Cases Correctly Predicted	88%			
* Difference in the probability of a Clinton vote between a respondent who is one standard deviation below the mean factor score on a specified issue dimension compared to a respondent who is one standard deviation above the mean factor score, controlled for all other variables in the model.				

Table 5: Estimates of the Net Effects of Five Issue Publics on the Vote, 1992				
Issue	Log Coeff.	S.E.	Sig.	Probability Effect*
Base Model:				
Party ID	1.40	.10	.00	
Ideological ID	.76	.07	.00	
National Economy	.49	.10	.00	
Personal Finances	.21	.09	.02	
Salience of Five Issues:				
Abortion	-.13	.20	.53	-.03
Gay Rights	-1.31	.41	.00	-.31
Militant Internationalism	-.92	.25	.00	-.23
Taxes, Size of Government	-.00	.18	.99	.00
Affirmative Action	.89	.35	.01	.20
Constant	.15	.18	.71	
Nagelkerke R Square	.68			
Cox and Snell R Square	.51			
-2 Log Likelihood	893.87			
Number of Cases	1,368			
Cases Correctly Predicted	85%			
* Difference in the probability of a Clinton vote between respondents for whom the issue is salient compared to those for whom it is not salient. A positive probability indicates a Clinton net advantage from the issue public; a negative probability, a net Bush advantage				

Appendix

A. Wording for standard ANES abortion item, 1992-2004: “There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose.

1. By law, abortion should never be permitted.
2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest or when the woman’s life is in danger.

3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

Appendix Table A.1: Abortion and the Vote, Issue Salience Model, 1992-2004. Standard ANES Item				
Independent Variables	Log Regression Coefficients			
	1992	1996	2000	2004
Party ID	1.45 (.10)	1.51 (.11)	1.64 (.12)	1.51 (.15)
Ideological ID	.65 (.08)	.67 (.10)	.42 (.07)	.60 (.10)
National Economy	.56 (.10)	.56 (.17)	.31 (.09)	.71 (.13)
Personal Finances	.24 (.09)	.13 (.11)	-.10 (.11)	.34 (.11)
Abortion Position * Issue Salience:				
No Mentions + Missing	.17 (.10)	.07 (.12)	.28 (.11)	.22 (.13)
One Mention	.62 (.28)	.47 (.27)	.75 (.23)	.38 (.33)
Two or More Mentions	1.00 (.20)	.67 (.33)	.59 (.21)	.40 (.39)
Constant	-.30 (.15)	.573 (.14)	-.80 (.43)	-3.04 (.48)
Nagelkerke R Square	.68	.70	.69	.73
Cox and Snell R Square	.51	.52	.50	.55
-2 Log Likelihood	891.16	601.32	729.26	465.63
Number of Cases	1,368	966	1,057	786
Cases Correctly Predicted	85%	87%	84%	88%
The entries are logistic regression coefficients, with the standard errors in parentheses. All variables are coded consistently across the four elections.				

Appendix A.2 Single Factor Solutions for Five Issue Dimensions in Table 4	
Abortion Scale	
V3732 Standard ANES 4 Category Item	0.78
V3736 Favor Requiring Parental Consent for Minors	0.72
V3738 Favor Government Funding of Abortions	0.69
V3740 Favor Requiring Spousal Notification	0.76
Alpha = .72; Variance Explained = 55%	
Gay Rights Scale	
V5924 Favor Laws Protecting Gays from Job Discrimination	0.82
V5926 Favor Gays Serving in the Armed Forces	0.84
V5928 Favor Permitting Gays to Adopt Children	0.79
Alpha = .75; Variance Explained = 67%	
Militant Internationalism Scale	
V3603 Favor Maintaining Strong Military With High Defense Spending	0.71
V3604 Favor Staying Home, Isolationist	0.49
V3605 Favor Using Military Force to Solve World Problems	0.73
V3608 Right Decision to Send Troops to Persian Gulf	0.72
Alpha = .53; Variance Explained = 45%	
Affirmative Action Scale	
V3724 Government Assistance to Blacks	0.71
V3729 Increase Federal Spending for Blacks	0.73
V5929 Pace of Civil Rights Change	0.64
V5930 Change in Position of Blacks	0.51
V5932 Federal Role in School Integration	0.57
Taxes, Scope of Government	
V5936 Preferential Hiring/Promotion of Blacks	0.65
V3701 7 point scale on tax-spending tradeoff	0.68
V5938 Federal Role in Insuring Fair Treatment for Blacks	0.67
V5729 Less versus More Government	0.81
Alpha = .79; Variance Explained = 42%	
V5730 Strong Government versus Free Market	0.79
V5922 Pay More Taxes to Increase Services versus Keep Taxes the Same	0.54
Alpha = .64; Variance Explained = 51%	
<p>The entries are the factor loadings on each item extracted by principle components analysis. All dimensions are single factor solutions with only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0. Alpha is Cronbach's Alpha. Variance Explained is percentage of the total variance in the items associated with the extracted factor. A small number of missing responses to each item have been recoded to an intermediate value in order to preserve the same number of cases across all models in the 1992 ANES survey. Major party voters only. N=1,368. Factor scores are standardized, with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1.</p>	