ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: "EASY ISSUES"
IN AMERICAN POLITICS

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My dissertation explores Carmines' and Stimson's well-known and widely cited distinction between "easy" and "hard" issues as described in "The Two Faces of Issue Voting" (1980). They argue that some issues are inherently "easy," and are understood by the public at an emotional, "gut" level, while other issues are intrinsically "hard" and require greater political sophistication and interest to process. This theory is intuitively appealing and has been widely-accepted among political science scholars and pundits; however, many questions remain unanswered about this theory. In my dissertation I examine three primary questions—whether "easy" and "hard" issues exist, what are the sources of easiness, and how malleable is issue difficulty. I argue that economic and foreign policy issues, which are often regarded as "hard" are actually performance issues, and that issues are not inherently easy but are made so through political discourse. However, the ability to frame issues is not unlimited.

"EASY ISSUES" IN AMERICAN POLITICS

by

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It takes a village to raise a child—and a PhD student. There are many, many people who have helped me along my journey and to whom I am indebted. I was lucky to have such a great university and supportive community of friends and family to help me reach my goal of completing my PhD. Without these people, this dissertation would not have been possible. I would like to thank everyone who helped me.

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much thought. Without him, I know that I would never have taken this path, but I am glad that I did.

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Professor Morris also helped to shape the way that I think about political

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progressed through the program, so too did our group. It transitioned to a dissertation support group as we all finally defended our proposals, and then to a job search support group. These two have been my first phone calls with any news, good or bad, about my GVPT life. I cannot imagine my time in graduate school without them.

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Theory of "Easy Issues"

"If they say bimetallism is good, but that we can not have it until other nations help us, we reply that, instead of having a gold standard because England has, we will restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it. If they dare to come out into the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: 'You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold' " (William Jennings Bryan, 1896).

1.1 Gold Standard Realignment

In 1896 at the Chicago Convention, William Jennings Bryan delivered the famous "Cross of Gold" speech in which he descriptively argued why the U.S. should coin silver as well as gold. Farmers and laborers, the "toilers," as Bryan called them, wanted bimetallism so that there would be more currency and they could more easily pay off their debts. After the Civil War, prices of crops and commodities steadily declined, whilst gold prices continued to rise (Sundquist 1983, 139). Farmers therefore had no money and could not pay their debts to bankers in the East (Bryan and Bryan 2003, 215-218). This dispute between bankers and the financial industry in the East, and the "toilers" of the South and West amid a burgeoning financial crisis set the stage for Bryan's dramatic convention speech. Bryan's powerful language, comparing the maintenance of the gold standard to the crucifixion of Christ, demonstrates just how emotional and dominant this issue had become. The debate over the free coinage of silver led to one of the few major partisan realignments in American history.

Obviously, though, the coinage of money is an exceptionally complex matter of economic policy. In this particular case, there were even international considerations. Republicans supported the gold standard unless other countries would move to bimetallism as well (Bryan and Bryan 2003, 113-114). Yet, people knew that they were financially struggling. They were able to make sense of this issue because of their own economic woes. "Farmers did not have to be experts on the quantity theory of money to understand that the value of money too was governed by the

law of supply and demand—a greater supply of money would depress its value and correspondingly raise the price of every good and service" (Sundquist 1983, 140). In the East, though, they knew "the value of gold *did* have to be defended at all costs, for the very reason that it *was* the monetary standard . . . if people lost confidence in the value of gold because of any sustained decline, the whole system would collapse" (Sundquist 1983, 140). Even though this was a very complicated economic issue, both sides knew their plight. "Under these circumstances, neither side could yield" (Sundquist 1983, 145).

This issue is very complicated, but yet it became emotional for people and even those with little education could feel their pocketbooks and understand this issue. How did something so hard and technical become such a polarizing issue? How could an economic issue lead to a realignment?[1] Based on the theory of "easy" and "hard" issues posited by Edward Carmines and James Stimson, as well as much American political behavior research that focuses on the limitations of the American public, the political consequences of such an issue are surprising. The gold standard is not an issue that would be considered straight-forward, or inherently one that people feel in their guts. This technical issue's profound effect on politics highlights important gaps in our understanding of public opinion and political behavior, and the theory of easy and hard issues more specifically.

In the following pages I outline the theory of easy and hard issues, and the larger question that Carmines and Stimson seek to answer—how do people partici-

[1]Sundquist (1983) provides a detailed account of the history of this and other electoral realignments in American history, tracing the rise of this issue and its political effects.

pate in politics given that they are largely unsophisticated about political matters? This question has been the subject of much attention in the past five decades. When survey data became available in the 1940's and 1950's, they revealed that voters are largely unknowledgeable about political matters and lack coherent policy attitudes. This picture of the American public fails to match our normative understanding of a good citizen. According to classical democratic theory, citizens should be informed voters, but much evidence shows the public does not meet these standards. I address this paradox of democracy by reviewing the requirements of a "good" democratic citizen and covering the research findings that Americans fail to meet these standards.

I then move to the literature which attempts to answer this question. Since the time of these findings of American inadequacy, much political behavior research has focused on determining how people make political judgements given this low level of sophistication. There are a number of different answers provided by the literature on this question. Political scientists have looked different places for the key to understanding this phenomenon, including at party identification, heuristics, core values, group-based attitudes, low information rationality, elite cues, and others. I will not cover all explanations in great detail here as it would be particularly cumbersome. I will only cover a small subset of this literature, paying special attention to those factors that are relevant to my research.

Following the larger discussion about participating in the absence of sophistication, I turn back to the use of the easy/hard issue distinction in the literature, providing examples of how it has been applied and ways in which it has been ex-

panded. This, however, points to a number of holes in the original theory, leading me to explain how my project will contribute to our understanding of easy issues narrowly and the public opinion and voting literatures more broadly. I describe the data and empirical tests I use. In the end, I argue that several domains—specifically, foreign policy and the economy—are different from other political issues, but that they are most accurately described as "performance" issues rather than "hard" issues. I also posit a theory of issue easiness that asserts that issues can be both easy and hard, depending upon the political context in which they exist. The political context is determined by focusing events and frames from political elites (such as elected, bureaucratic, and party officials).

1.2 Theory of Easy Issues

Carmines and Stimson argue that there are two types of issues: "easy" issues and "hard" issues. Some issues are inherently "easy" for people to understand and to use for political decision making, whereas other issues are intrinsically "hard" and can only be understood by more sophisticated voters. This is why people seemingly use issues to vote at some times, but do not use issues at other times.

Hard issue voting is described by Carmines and Stimson in "The Two Faces of Issue Voting" (1980) as requiring:

> "[a] conscious calculation of policy benefits for alternative electoral choices . . . [it] has its intellectual roots in the Downsian tradition (Downs, 1957). It presumes that issue voting is the final result of a sophisticated

> decision calculus; that it represents a reasoned and thoughtful attempt by voters to use policy preferences to guide their electoral decision. Citizens, after examining the policy positions represented by the candidates in a given election, vote for the candidate who is closest to them in some (probably multiple) issue space (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 78).

This concept is further defined by Carmines and Stimson in *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (1989) as the more common of the two types of issues that requires "contextual knowledge, appreciation of often subtle differences in policy options, a coherent structure of beliefs about politics, systematic reasoning to connect means to ends, and interest in and attentiveness to political life" (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 12). This type of issue voting squares with classical democratic theory's view of a good citizen, but their descriptions of hard issues indicate that people, unless they are very politically knowledgeable, will not be able to use these issues to make political decisions. The content of these issues is too complex for the average, unsophisticated and uninterested voter (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80).

Easy issues are described as those that have "become so ingrained over a long period [of time] that it structures voters' 'gut responses' to candidates and political parties" (78). The "gut responses require no conceptual sophistication" so all people, regardless of their political awareness, can vote based on these easy issues. So what makes an issue easy, and what distinguishes easy issues from hard issues, is that people can use easy issues no matter their level of political sophistication

(well-informed or less informed), their interest in politics (highly attentive or uninterested), or their zeal for voting (active or apathetic) (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80). Carmines and Stimson also articulate three requirements for an issue to be "easy": 1–the issue must be symbolic rather than technical; 2–the issue should be more likely deal with policy ends than means; 3–and be an issue long on the political agenda (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80).

Carmines and Stimson do not see easy and hard issues as merely two sides of the same coin—easy issues are not just simplified versions of hard issues, they are unique. The "distinction between them is fundamental, that they involve different decision processes, different prerequisite conditions, different voters, and different interpretation"(Carmines and Stimson 1980, 78). However, even though they draw this distinction, it remains unclear exactly what this means. They explain that hard issues are the domain of more sophisticated voters, but the decision processes and prerequisite conditions remain amorphous. That they are distinct types of issues points to something *inherent* about these issues that makes them easy and distinguishes them from others. Yet they also say the issues they use as the prototypical issues for easy and hard issues could be reversed "if the issues had evolved that way in the political system *and if voters saw them that way.* All issues have intrinsically simple and complex facets; which particular facets predominate at a given time is an empirical question" (81) (emphasis in original).

Despite this theory's relative popularity in the discipline, once it is examined more closely, it becomes apparent that this theory is unclear on several critical points. An even closer inspection reveals contradictions between it and other highly

regarded theories that explain how people vote and develop political attitudes given low levels of sophistication.

1.3 The Puzzle of American Democracy

Carmines and Stimson write in response to what may be the most widely addressed question in the field of American political behavior—how can Americans satisfy the requirements of democratic citizens? In classical democratic theory, public policy is supposed to be created through extensive, informed debate among attentive citizens (Walker 1966, Marcus 2002). People should reach political decisions as a result of careful, reasoned thought about the political issues of the day (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). There should be agreement on basic values in the public, and the public needs to be informed and active to maintain the democracy. As such, classical democratic theory places several hefty requirements on citizens. First, the democratic citizen is required to participate in politics, have interest in politics, and engage in political discussion (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, 307). Second, citizens are also required to be knowledgeable about politics. A citizen should know the alternative options being considered and the potential consequences of each. Citizens should make political decisions on the basis of "principles" which protect not only their own interests but the interests of the whole public (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, 308-09).[2]

[2]Schattschneider (1960) argues that citizens are not at fault for their limited knowledge about politics; it makes sense given the limited benefits of participating. What is wrong with our system

Yet a multitude of research has shown that the public does not actually behave in this way. One of the best-known findings in the field of American political behavior is that Americans are politically unsophisticated and do not know a lot about politics (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, Converse 1964, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Lippmann 1922, Luskin 1987, Neuman 1986, Zaller 1992). Citizens have limited information about the way the US political system works, the important issues facing the US, and the elected and appointed officials that are critical to the functioning of our government (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 65). They struggle to answer questions covering the basic rules and procedures of politics, the substance of politics, and the key people in politics. Most people also have little or no motivation to participate in politics beyond voting (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954). There are so few incentives that it would be irrational for people to participate in many cases (Downs 1957).

Building on this finding, research has also shown that people do not have real attitudes on issues. In his seminal work, Converse (1964) shows that many people do not have an ideology or meaningful attitudes on political topics. He finds that there is a very small portion of the population who are "ideologues" and the rest of the populace has little attitude constraint both across different issues and over time. People do not have any general ideological scheme to hold their varied beliefs together. This leads Converse to argue for the black-and-white model which states that there are a small number of citizens with attitudes, and the rest essentially flip

is not the citizens, but classical democratic theory itself.

a coin to answer questions, which is why they cannot respond consistently to survey questions.

Zaller (1992) also finds that people do not have stable political attitudes–they average across the "top-of-the-head" when making determinations about politics. They "make it up as they go along" because they do not have solidified, long-lasting political beliefs.[3] In the end, rather than making reasoned political decisions based on a thorough understanding of alternative policy proposals, Americans are criticized for being ill informed and "too ready to be moved by symbolic (i.e., emotional) appeals, too disinclined to listen to real policy discussion, too ready to be distracted by the drama of personality and the politics of slash and burn" (Marcus 2002, 2).

1.4 Participating in the Absence of Sophistication

The finding (and repeated confirmation) that Americans are politically unsophisticated has led to an abundance of research on how people participate in politics. We know that people do not meet the "gold standard" for political knowledge and participation, so many scholars have looked to other answers for how people make political judgements. Scholars have sought answers to this puzzle in a variety of places, including two primary sources: heuristics (or other cost-saving information

[3]There are competing theories which claim that the non-attitudes we see are really due to measurement error caused by poor survey instruments rather than a lack of preferences on behalf of respondents. (Please see Achen (1975), Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) for details). Zaller argues that instead of correcting measurement error these fixes actually correct for people's lack of attitudes.

sources) and aggregate public opinion (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000).

Heuristics are "mental shortcuts that provide reasonable but not thoughtful decisions" (Marcus 2002, 43). They are "judgemental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice" (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, 19). People use a variety of heuristics as shortcuts. Over the years, scholars have identified a number of these types of shortcuts that voters use, including political party identification (Campbell et al. 1960, Downs 1957), making inferences about the candidate's policy preferences based on information about their demographics or personal character (Popkin 1991), or the "likability heuristic" (Brady and Sniderman 1985). The "likability heuristic" brings in group-based attitudes regarding politics. It argues that people can use the likability of certain groups to make inferences about their policy positions (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991).

This group-based approach to understanding public opinion focuses on how voters use feelings toward certain groups to shape their attitudes toward policies (Gilens 2000, Nelson and Kinder 1996, Kam and Kinder 2007). Voters are most likely to do this when they are less sophisticated and do not have much information available. They substitute group affect for policy debate to form their political attitudes. For example, a person may base his/her attitudes on welfare policy in response to the groups s/he perceives as the beneficiaries of welfare and how s/he feels about those groups. Attitudes regarding gay marriage can be determined based on one's feelings toward gay men and lesbians. Feelings toward social groups can be

a means for formulating policy preferences.

Additionally, a person's core values can also be critical to her vote choices or policy preferences. Core values "reflect abstract, prescriptive beliefs about humanity, society, and public affairs" (Goren 2005, 881). Core political values are developed when people are young, and as such are relatively stable and immune to short-term political forces. As a result, core values (like equality, limited government, or moral tolerance) can influence people's attitudes on specific policies or assist in determining vote choice even though they are not inherently political. Again, there is some expectation that this connection can be made regardless of a person's level of political sophistication (Goren 2001).

The theoretical strength of these short-cuts is that people can still act "rationally" even with little information. This "low-information rationality" (Popkin 1991) emphasizes what people *do* know about politics—the sources of information that are available to voters as well as their ideas about the way government works (Popkin 1991, 9-12). In this way, rationality is redefined. Rather than people making "correct" decisions about politics that are determined based on complete political knowledge, people make decisions based on heuristics. They make decisions based on elite or campaign cues, partisan identification, feelings about groups, etc. In the end, people are able to make "correct" vote decisions even if the process they follow is not correct from a democratic theory standpoint (Lau and Redlawsk 1997).

Other scholars argue that the shortcomings we attribute to voters are really due to survey measurement error. There are several forms of this theory. The first argues survey instruments are ineffective for analyzing what is really going

on in people's heads. The questions are ambiguous, they force people to reduce their political opinions to a small subset of choices, and do not mimic political decision-making in the real world (Achen 1975). Further research over the last few years has lent credence to this argument. Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2008) find that the inconsistency in people's responses are due to poor survey measurement on individual questions. When multiple questions are considered on the same general topic (such as moral issues or government intervention in the economy) stable, structured beliefs are revealed. This stability increases as the number of survey items increases. Furthermore, once this measurement error is corrected, the issue attitudes actually have strong predictive power in vote choice models.

Similarly, other scholars argue there for a competent collective. Rather than aggregating a bunch of issues for one respondent to reveal their true beliefs, we can aggregate across people to reveal a general *public* opinion which can overcome the shortcomings of individual citizens. Even though we know individuals are unable to satisfy the requirements of classical democratic theory outlined by political philosophers, we can see that the political system as a whole is able to endure quite capably (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, 312). What classical democratic theory has neglected and "undervalued are certain collective properties that reside in the electorate as a whole" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, 312). Although we know that individual voters have unconstrained attitudes about politics, there is a sense that the population as a whole can provide meaningful opinions on policies.

More recently, research has expanded upon this notion of aggregate public

opinion. From this perspective, individual-level opinion may change wildly from one survey to the next, and although survey instruments are flawed and do not enable researchers to really get at people's preferences, as a collective, the public has opinions (Page and Shapiro 1992, Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002). The individual-level measurement errors that plague survey data cancel out when we consider collective public opinion. When individual answers are aggregated, such as computing the percentage of people who favor a particular policy, we are left with a real measure of public opinion that is stable and meaningful because the random noise from each individual cancels out. Although individuals do not have strongly fixed preferences, "at any given moment the public as a whole also has real *collective* policy preferences" (Page and Shapiro 1992, 15-17). The "macro-political system produces a more sophisticated and intelligent response than we would expect from what we know about the individual actors who compose it" (Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002, 2).

Both of these discussions are critical to building my theory. Heuristics, or other short-cuts to information about politics, may be at the heart of easy issues. If issues are not inherently easy, then they must develop easy characteristics through some means. If the world is full of hard issues, then party identification, elite cues, or other frames must be used to create easy issues. Even if issues are inherently easy, core values or group-based appeals must be part of the story. Something must make these issues inherently easy, and that is likely their relation to apolitical world views like core values. The measurement error debate relates to my project in three ways. First, the reason that we interpret some issues as easy and others as hard

for people may in part be a function of how we ask people the questions. Possibly the wording of some questions makes them easier than others. Second, elite opinion leaders can help to produce correct aggregate preferences even while individuals are unsophisticated on the subject. With the help of cues, the public may be able to develop opinions even with limited technical knowledge of the issue. Third, some past research on easy/hard issues has focused on aggregate public opinion rather than delving into the individual factors which shape how a person comes to see an issue as easy.

1.5 Normative Preference for Issue Voting

Although these theories demonstrate ways that people can participate in politics even without a thorough understanding of politics, the idea that the American public is only sophisticated in the aggregate or through the use of heuristics, still conflicts with our understanding of good democracy. First, if citizens vote/form attitudes based on information that has been synthesized by elites or some cost-saving devices, they still fall short of the high ideals of democracy. Second theories based on heuristics or collective rationality still presuppose a base-level of information. "Suggestions that the negative consequences of low levels of political information can be offset by an informed elite, collective rationality, or heuristic decision making underestimate the importance of political information to these very theories" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 43-45). These theories do not depend on citizens that are knowledgeable about specific policy alternatives, but people must know

which parties favor which policy goals, which groups are associated with specific policy preferences, etc. In the end, "the information necessary for a citizen to engage in these decision-making shortcuts is precisely the kind that many citizens lack" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 45). On surveys, people frequently do not know which party or candidate is associated with a specific policy position, so they do not have even enough information to accurately use these heuristics and cues.

As Carmines and Stimson remind us, "the study of issue voting is infused with normative consideration" (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 79). Therefore many scholars, including Carmines and Stimson, hold out hope for the potential of issue voting in some form. A large body of research has explored how issue voting might work. Early on in the study of political behavior, Campbell et al. (1960) studied the necessary conditions for citizens to issue vote, including the voter must be aware of the issue, must consider it important, and must associate his/her preference with one of the parties (Hutchings 2003, 76). V.O. Key later argued for a related criterion—that candidates must articulate their policy positions in order for people to issue vote (Key 1966).

Subsequent literature has taken up some of these early-recognized necessary conditions of issue voting and tried to understand how these criteria fit with empirical accounts of issue voting. Scholars have explored the effect of issue salience (or being part of an issue public) on issue voting (RePass 1971, Krosnick 1988, Rabinowitz, Prothro and Jacoby 1982).[4] Scholars have also sought an explanation for

[4]See Niemi and Bartels (1985) for arguments that issue salience does not matter in determining vote choice.

how people match their personal policy preferences with those articulated by the parties and candidates. This takes the form of the directional vs. proximity voting debate. Proximity voting argues that people will vote for the candidate whose position is closest to theirs (Hinich and Munger 1997, Downs 1957). Directional voting, on the other hand, is a function of compatibility and intensity of the voter's and candidate's policy preferences (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). The distinction between these two theories is that for directional voting, it does not matter if the candidate and voter are closest to one another on a policy, but rather that the candidate and voter are on the same side of an issue. Research has also studied what voters do when they are uncertain about the policy positions of the candidates (Bartels 1986) or when their party is on the opposite side of them on an issue (Carsey and Layman 2006).

Another vein of the issue voting literature, that is reminiscent of the heuristics explanations of voting in some ways, is the retrospective (Fiorina 1981) or reward-punishment theory (Key 1966) of voting. Under this theory, people vote based on how things have changed since the last election and whether things have gotten better or worse since that time. Citizens "need *not* know the precise economic or foreign policies of the incumbent administration in order to see or feel the *results* of those policies" (Fiorina 1981, 5). This is similar to the heuristics literature in that citizens are not working toward a thorough understanding of policy content; they are using short-cuts to make vote choices. Instead of using candidate likability, though, they are using the current status of the world, or the nature of the times, to make choices.

Despite criticisms of an uneducated public, evidence persists that people can issue vote given certain circumstances (an interest in the issue and a supportive political context) (Hutchings 2003, 87-88). From a number of scholars, we see evidence that issue voting might be possible. This discussion is important to understanding easy/hard issues because Carmines and Stimson write of easy issue voting, claiming that these special issues can allow even the least sophisticated citizens to issue vote.

1.6 Easy Issues: A Persistent Theory

Although the original theory of easy and hard issues was created to deal with issue voting, it has been expanded to broader political behavior debates about the stability, constraint, and general quality of Americans' issue "attitudes." It has been used across the board to describe any issues that people *seemingly* respond to effortlessly. Much recent scholarship treats it like common wisdom, applying it to a variety of topics, including: the study of presidential persuasion (Bailey and Wilcox 2003), the way elected officials make decisions (Sigelman and Walkosz 1992), and to understand public opinion on various issues such as foreign policy (Maggiotto and Wittkopf 1981), social security, physician-assisted suicide (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2002), and nuclear power (Pollock and Vittes 1993). It has also played a role in the literature on partisan change in the electorate (Bowler and Segura 2006), as well as the literatures on heuristics (Coan and Zechmeister 2008), single-issue voting (Conover and Coombs 1982), and framing (Brewer 2002). The easy/hard distinction has also been applied to an array of other topics that would take pages

to recount.[5] The important thing to notice is the wide range of topics that this theory has been used to understand, and the range of years and journals in which these publications occur.

Some borrow heavily from the theory using it as a core component of the main theoretical development of their argument, while others use it as a way to explain their findings. Across the various studies, though, the theory is generally applied uncritically. The wide utilization of the easy/hard issue distinction is probably due to its intuitive appeal. It also allows scholars wide interpretation of the sources of easy issues—stemming from either elite frames and the role of parties, or more general explanations based on core values, affect, or group-based response. This theory can, and has been, taken to mean a variety of things.

Although its broad scope shows the importance of this theory and makes it key to understanding many different literatures, it is also problematic. The original concept of easy/hard issues is vague and really provides two different possible sources for issue easiness: issue characteristics or elite cues. Carmines and Stimson are not clear about the source of this easiness. As a result, subsequent scholars have focused on different pieces of the distinction, leading to conflicting understandings of easy issues in the literature. Some have conceptualized easy issues as those which are *framed* in an easy way. Others have instead focused on the issues which appear to be *inherently* easy based on their issue content and the emotional reactions that they cause.

[5]See Browne (1983), Hurley and Hill (2003), Wittkopf and Maggiotto (1983), Hill and Moreno (2001)

Cobb and Kuklinski (1997) propose that instead of easy and hard *issues* there are easy and hard *arguments*. They use this conceptualization of easy and hard arguments to test the impact of different cues (hard-pro, hard-con, easy-pro, easy-con) on support for NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and national health care. They find that the hard arguments are actually the most persuasive for NAFTA. For health care, both the easy and hard arguments work equally well, as long as they are con arguments (Cobb and Kuklinski 1997, 114).[6]

This is similar to the position taken by Leege et al. in *The Politics of Cultural Differences* (2002) who argue that the style of politics matters more than the issue content. They argue that although "moral," "religious," or "social" issues are often credited as being easy issues, there is nothing special about such a subset of issues that makes them inherently easier for the population to use. They believe that morality politics "is less a set of issues than a style of argumentation that invokes fundamental social values and emphasizes group differences" (Leege 2002, 27-28). The policy content of social issues (abortion, gay marriage, prayer in schools) does not encapsulate the whole notion of cultural politics. Cultural politics is really the style of politics that is used.[7]

[6]An important criticism of this article is that the hard treatments are much longer than the easy treatments. Possibly, then, they work better just because the arguments against a particular policy are made clearer to respondents. There is no way to tell if the effects are due to the content of the arguments, or simply the length of the arguments.

[7]They do recognize, however, that "some issues by their very nature seem to tap into fundamental social values and lend themselves to a politics of group polarization" (Leege 2002, 29).

In contrast, another interpretation of "easy" issues in the literature argues that some issues are *inherently* easy. Joslyn and Haider-Markel (2002) argue that "one issue can be characterized as an 'easy' issue (physician-assisted suicide), where opinion is based primarily on emotive beliefs. Social security reform . . . can be classified as a 'hard' issue because of the technical information that often informs opinion." They believe that some issues have become associated with the term "easy" because they seemingly are understood by people at a "gut-level." Joslyn and Haider-Markel adopt this concept and use it to test the effect of different frames on easy and hard issues—whether frames work equally well when an issue is easy as when it is hard. It is left to reader interpretation, however, why we should assume that a policy which affects millions of people, that many people have direct, real-life, personal knowledge of, is hard when an issue that most people will never encounter and can only think about abstractly, is easy. How can we know that people really see social security as hard and physician-assisted suicide as easy?[8]

1.7 Moving Toward a Better Understanding of Issue Types

We are left with a theoretical titan that is broadly applied and interpreted, that in the end remains silent on many important questions. This theory is amorphous

[8]This core problem with their analysis may help to explain their findings—"frames on 'easy' issues may ironically have more influence on perceived opinion than frames on 'hard' issues" (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2002, 702).

and ambiguous. Therefore, my first step is to look for evidence that "easy" issues exist. Carmines and Stimson only look at two issues (desegregation and the Vietnam withdraw) during one election (1972). This is an inadequate test for us to conclude that this concept holds true. In chapter 2 I begin with the original Carmines and Stimson test (how issues relate to vote choice) but applying it to more issues such as abortion, affirmative action, immigration, taxes, and Iraq War among others, across different issue domains. I look at a number of issues over different years looking for patterns of easy issue voting. Evidence for "easy" issue voting proves to be mixed. The primary question stemming from the analysis in this chapter is, why would people vote on "hard" issues if easier ones are available?

In chapter 3, I explore some possible reasons for the counterintuitive findings with regards to issue voting by looking at item non-response rates and issue salience. These next tests are not part of Carmines' and Stimson's original conceptualization, but may help to provide more clarity on the concept. Additionally, research since the writing of their article really render them necessary. I look at the percentage of respondents who give "don't know" responses, expecting that if an issue is easy, more people should be able to give valid responses to questions about it. I find that commonly considered "easy" issues (like abortion and gay rights) do exhibit lower levels of item non-response. However, these issues are not salient.

Finding that some issues do appear to be "easier" for the public, but that these issues almost never decide elections, I turn to potential sources for issue easiness. I focus on the role of frames as potential sources for easiness as compared to the notion of inherently easy issues. In chapter 4, I show the results of a survey experi-

ment. I use non-salient, "hard" issues (limiting foreign imports, U.S. participation in the ICC, and adoption of the gold standard) and offer two frames—technical and emotional—to see how they shape public opinion on these issues. I find some support that frames can make these issues easier for the public, although the results are mixed.

In chapter 5, I look at the potential of frames designed for the opposite purpose—using frames that are designed to harden an "easy" issues such as abortion. Unfortunately, the experiments seem to indicate that abortion cannot be framed as "hard." The frames were largely unsuccessful in changing people's abortion attitudes. I discuss possible reasons the frames do not work. The limited effects of the frames could be due to the innate characteristics of abortion as an issue, or the repeated framing of this issue in terms of pro-life and pro-choice by the political parties over many years. The results are interesting in the sense that they point to potential limitations on framing. Possibly, once an issue is repeatedly framed in an emotional, two-sided way, it cannot be made hard again.

My findings lead me argue that a simple dichotomy of "easy" and "hard" issues is possibly oversimplified. While Carmines and Stimson even say that issues are not firmly set in stone as either easy or hard, they also do not include a description of how this process works—how an issue that was hard can become easy or vice-versa (assuming that it is possible for issues to change back and forth). Certainly, issues cannot all be neatly placed into this framework when the choice is *either* they are easy *or* they are hard. Where do immigration, the economy, universal healthcare, the environment, or a dozen other issues that are part of the current American

politics debate fit into this easy or hard framework? It is impossible to tell. Based on my findings in the first two chapters, I argue that another important issue type is "performance" issues. What distinguished foreign policy and economic issues from those dealing with social welfare, morality, or other issue domains is not necessarily that they are "hard," but that they are primarily "performance" issues. My findings in the second two chapters indicate that framing is important to this theory, but that the broader political context can also constrain the effects of frames.

Chapter 2

Issue Voting

2.1 "Hard" Issue Voting

Hard issues are technical, deal with policy means, and are new to the political agenda. Therefore, hard issues are the province of politically knowledgeable, attentive voters. Easy issues, however, can be used by all people to vote, regardless of their political knowledge. Through the literature, many have come to understand that the "typical hard issue areas are foreign policy, regulation, and policies relating to economic growth" (Bailey and Wilcox 2003, 50) while racial, social, or moral issues are "easy."

Many scholars consider foreign policy to be a hard issue domain as "the personal relevance of global events may seem low for many citizens, limiting motivation to attend to the details of those events" and "because foreign policy is often highly complex, the citizen's ability to evaluate specific aspects of foreign policy may be low" (Mondak 1993, 197-198). Moreover, "the public [is] almost totally dependent

upon the media and political elites for its interpretations of the state of the international scene" and "information in foreign affairs is often deliberately distorted, withheld, or classified" (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, 243). The use of Vietnam withdrawal as the foundational example of a hard issue also likely influences the labeling of foreign policy as a "hard" issue domain.

Similarly, the economy is also often regarded as a "hard" issue because of the technical nature of the topic. "Economic issues ... should be harder than racial or social ones. Economic choices are abstract, even if their consequences are concrete. They are more technical than symbolic and involve means as much as ends" (Luskin and Carmines 1989, 444). However, despite the understanding that foreign policy and economic issues are hard, there are empirical and theoretical reasons to question the general labeling of these domains as "hard" issues.

2.2 Vietnam Voting in 1972

In "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," Carmines and Stimson test their theory of "easy" and "hard" issues using the 1972 presidential election. They use desegregation as their example of an "easy" issue[1] and Vietnam troop withdrawal

[1]They call the easy issue "desegregation," but it is not actually the single-item measure in the 1972 NES that asks people whether they favor segregation or desegregation. It is a factor score of 15 race-related items, including: equal employment, school integration, public accommodations, neighborhood integration, school busing, aid for minorities, civil rights moving too fast, violence of blacks, blacks helped/hurt cause, preference for (de)segregation, preference for (de)segregated neighborhood, equivalence of intelligence, and feeling thermometers for black militants, urban

as their example of a "hard" issue. Desegregation was a symbolic issue that had been on the political agenda for a long time and had therefore found its way to the gut. Whether U.S. troops should be withdrawn from Vietnam, conversely, was a relatively new issue to politics and dealt with policy means.

They empirically support this classification by looking at the connection of each of these issues to presidential vote choice, and how this connection is conditioned based on level of political knowledge. They predict vote choice (McGovern or Nixon vote) with party identification, attitudes on Vietnam withdrawal, desegregation, government guarantee of jobs, the legalization of marijuana, rights of the accused, women's role, tax reform, government control of inflation, and attitudes toward black activists. They then create two figures—one for Vietnam withdrawal and one for desegregation—to show the percentage of McGovern vote for each of the seven levels of attitudes toward the two issues[2] by level of political knowledge. They create 3 levels of political knowledge (low, medium, and high) based on the number of correct answers respondents gave to factual political knowledge questions.[3]

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rioters, and civil rights leaders.

[2]The Vietnam withdrawal scale ranges from 1-complete withdrawal to 7-military victory, with points 2-6 unlabeled in between. The desegregation scale ranges from 1-segregation to 7-desegregation and is the result of a factor analysis.

[3]As the explain in footnote 4, the "classification is based upon the number of right answers to a series of six objective questions about American politics administered to the Form 1 subsample. The series includes some questions which are current and relevant to electoral decision making (e.g., which party controls Congress?) and some which tap background information (e.g., the number of years in a senatorial term). The requirement of objectively correct answers limits the possibility

There are two primary findings to note. First, desegregation is "easy" and Vietnam is "hard" by their measure because respondent use of Vietnam withdrawal to determine vote choice is conditioned by level of information, whereas people's attitudes on desegregation are connected to the vote regardless of their level of political knowledge. The percentage voting for McGovern when favoring desegregation is almost identical for all three levels of information. The differences in McGovern vote even for those favoring segregation is only about 20 percentage points ranging from 15% for the middle information and 35% for the lowest information groups. For Vietnam withdrawal, among those who want complete withdrawal, the difference in McGovern vote is roughly 10 percentage points ranging from 70% among the lowest sophistication and 80% among the highest. The difference in McGovern vote for those who want a military victory is even bigger—about 30 percentage points different, ranging from 5% among the highest information and 35% among the lowest. In the case of Vietnam withdrawal (the hard issue) connection to the vote is conditioned by respondent sophistication. The more highly sophisticated respondents are able to connect the Vietnam issue with their vote choice in a way that lower sophisticated respondents are not. In the case of the easy issue (desegregation), the connection to the vote is the same for all people, regardless of sophistication. This leads Carmines and Stimson to argue that desegregation is an easy issue and Vietnam withdrawal hard.

Second, the occurrence of issue voting on the Vietnam withdrawal is higher,

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of measuring more directly relevant information. Scores of 0, 1, and 2 are classified 'low,' 3 and 4 'medium,' and 5 and 6 'high' (82).

even though it is a "hard" issue. The overall effect of desegregation on voting is lower than Vietnam, likely because the Vietnam War is more salient in 1972 than desegregation. I argue that, even if attachment to the vote is conditioned by level of political knowledge, the overall effect of an issue on vote choice should not be ignored when evaluating an issue's easiness. Although on their figures the three lines for desegregation are clustered together and have the same slope regardless of high, medium, or low knowledge, the slope is relatively flat. The lines for Vietnam withdrawal are distinguished by sophistication, with the steepest slope occurring for the highest sophistication group, and a lesser slope occurring for the lowest information group. However, the slope for all of the lines for Vietnam withdrawal are steeper than the lines for desegregation. Again, referring to the percentages of people voting for McGovern moving across the Vietnam withdrawal scale from "withdrawal completely" to "military victory," the change in McGovern vote is 75 percentage points for the highest information group (from roughly 80% for those who favor complete withdrawal to 5% for people who favor a military victory), 65 percentage points for the medium information group (from around 75% of those who favor complete withdrawal to 10% of those who favor military victory), and 35 percentage points for the lowest information group (from approximately 70% of those who want complete withdrawal to 35% of those who want a military victory). This is far from a 50-50 split when voters cannot connect their issue preference to the vote. For desegregation, the change in McGovern vote percentages moving across the scale is considerably less. Going from desegregation to segregation on the scale, the differences in McGovern voting are 30 percentage points for the highest

information group, 50 percentage points for the medium information group, and 30 percentage points for the lowest information group.[4] Attitudes on desegregation were less influential than attitudes on Vietnam withdrawal in shaping people's voting preferences.

Carmines and Stimson recognize that Vietnam is the most powerful issue attitude predictor of vote choice, but emphasize that "what is intriguing about Table 1 is that racial desegregation emerges as the second best 'issue' predictor of vote choice in 1972" even though "racial desegregation was hardly mentioned by either candidate. That it was not emphasized in party platforms and not salient in the campaign but still exerted a substantial influence on the election outcome suggests something about the unusual properties of desegregation as a political issue" (82). Again, I argue that a truly "hard" issue that is all but unknown to the public should not be the most powerful predictor (behind party identification) of vote choice. Furthermore, this analysis about racial issues' lack of salience in 1972 ignores that issue salience does not wane over night. In the immediately prior presidential election of 1968, segregation was among the most talked about issues. The election discourse focused heavily on racial issues, partly due to third party candidate George Wallace's pro-segregation message.

Additionally, if an issue is "hard" we should expect that people do not un-

[4]For all three sophistication levels, people vote for McGovern around 60-65% if they favor desegregation. For the lowest sophistication group, around 35% vote McGovern if they favor segregation. For the middle information group, around 15% vote McGovern, and for the highest information group approximately 30% vote McGovern.

derstand the issue sufficiently to know how the candidates or parties come down on the issue. The details are too technical and far removed from the everyday lives of people that they have no sense of the political discourse surrounding this issue. Yet in the case of Vietnam, the overwhelming majority of the sample, roughly 87%, are able to correctly place McGovern as more supportive of immediate withdrawal than Nixon.[5] This is an especially powerful sign of the public's awareness on this issue because the candidates' stances on Vietnam in 1972 are similar, meaning that they would have to pay fairly close attention to politics in order to know how the candidates stand on this issue relative to one another. McGovern's stance is probably pretty clear to most voters—he staunchly supported an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the war pretty much from the beginning of war. At this point in the war, though, Nixon also supports de-escalation, just on a different time table. Neither of the candidates in this election really supports a "complete military victory"; both argue for a de-escalation of the military effort. While it is clear that McGovern supports an immediate end to the war, it is less clear that Nixon wants to continue the war, but most everyone is able to place the candidates correctly.[6]

Why does Vietnam withdrawal matter more than desegregation for vote choice in 1972 if Vietnam withdrawal is a "hard" issue? Is this an isolated finding and

[5] "Correct" placement means that, regardless of the absolute level of a person's placement of Nixon or McGovern, as long as McGovern was placed closer to the "immediate withdrawal" end then Nixon.

[6] Unfortunately, the NES does not ask respondents to place the candidates on the Iraq or Afghan wars in 2008, so there is no comparison available for 2008.

usually what are commonly thought of as "easy" issues matter more for the vote, or is this pattern consistent for other years as well?

2.3 "Hard" Issue Voting in the 2008 NES

If this is a "hard" issue, we should expect that the issue does not influence vote choice, at least not for less knowledgeable respondents. However, as I argue that these foreign policy issues are not "hard," I hypothesize that voters who favor a deadline for removing troops from Iraq will be more likely to support Obama as compared to those who oppose a deadline troop withdrawal, regardless of level of political knowledge. The connection of war attitudes to the vote will not be conditioned by level of political sophistication, as we would expect if troop withdrawal was a "hard" issue as presumed. I argue that these issues are not really hard because foreign policy issues like U.S. involvement in wars are actually "performance" issues. Since they are performance issues, the public can vote on them regardless of sophistication because information about the success of the wars is readily available and there is limited framing that can take place on such issues.

Following the original 1972 test of Carmines and Stimson, I estimated a probit model to predict vote choice in the 2008 presidential election. I included party identification and a number of issue attitude controls, including government guaranteed jobs, government supplied health insurance, laws preventing discrimination against homosexuals, withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, whether the economy has gotten better or worse, and support for the government bailout of companies. I addition-

ally included several standard control variables (race, sex, income, ideology, and region of residence) in the model. I also weighted the results to compensate for an over-sample of minority respondents on the 2008 NES. The findings are presented in table 2.1.

As expected, party identification and ideology are both related to vote choice. Among the issues included in the model, attitudes toward laws preventing discrimination against gay people, troop withdrawal from Iraq, and retrospective evaluations of whether the economy is better or worse all were significantly related to vote choice in 2008. Based on the key issues discussed during the election campaign, it makes sense that these issue attitudes would be related to presidential vote choice in 2008. In order to substantively evaluate the effect of each of these issues on vote choice, I computed predicted probabilities of voting for Obama. The predicted probabilities are presented in figures 2.1-2.3.

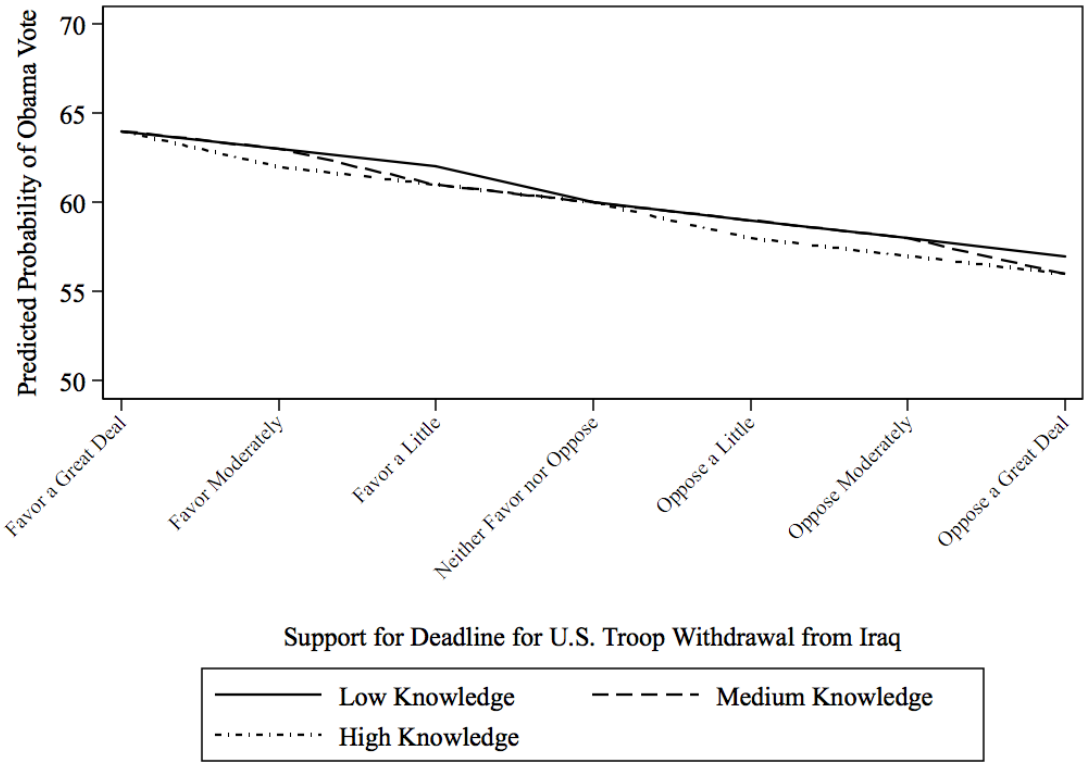
Figure 2.1 shows the change in the probability of voting for Obama when moving across the full range of attitudes on U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq, based on level of political knowledge. The first thing to note is that there is no conditioning effect of political knowledge. The low, medium, and high knowledge people all connect attitudes on troop withdrawal the same. Second, the change in the probability of voting for Obama is about 8 percentage points from those who favor a great deal a deadline for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq to those who oppose a withdrawal deadline a great deal. This is a pretty big effect. However, retrospective evaluations of the economy have a larger effect. In figure 2.2, the change in the probability of voting based on retrospective evaluations of the economy and political knowledge

Table 2.1: Probit Model for 2008 Vote Choice with Party Identification and Issues

	Obama Vote
Party Identification	-0.37***
	(0.08)
Government Guaranteed Jobs	-0.03
	(0.10)
Aid to Blacks	-0.07
	(0.08)
Government Health Insurance	-0.04
	(0.08)
Laws Preventing Gay Discrimination	-0.25*
	(0.13)
Iraq Withdrawal	-0.09*
	(0.05)
Economy Better	0.27**
	(0.13)
Bailout	0.23
	(0.24)
Political Knowledge	- 0.02
	(0.18)
White	- 0.84**
	(0.29)
Female	- 0.11
	(0.26)
Income	-0.007
	(0.02)
Ideology	- 0.39***
	(0.10)
South	-0 .35
	(0.23)
Constant	2.91***
	(0.78)
N	389
pseudo R^2	0.63

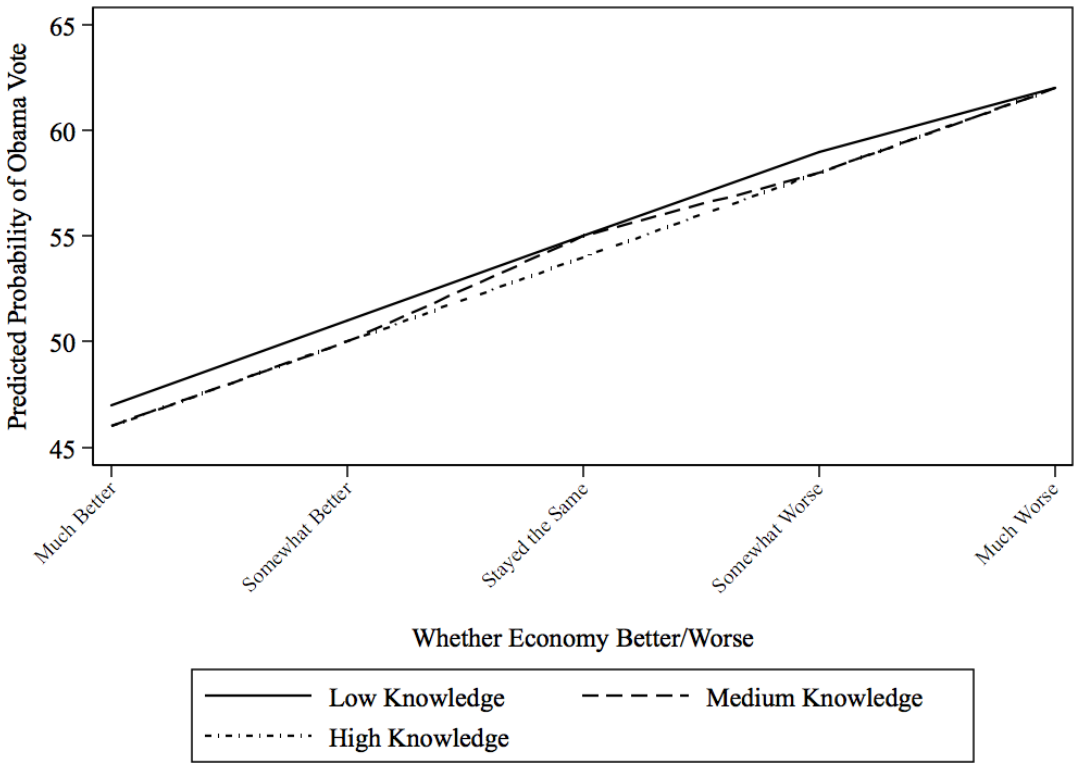
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: 2008 NES. The coefficient estimates and standard errors are computed using sample weights provided by the 2008 ANES.

Figure 2.1: Probability of Voting for Obama by Support for Iraq Troop Withdrawal



are shown. Again, political knowledge does not matter—low, medium, and high knowledge people all attach their economic evaluations to the vote in the same way. The change in the probability of voting for Obama is now 15 percentage points when moving from thinking the economy has gotten much better to thinking the economy has gotten much worse.

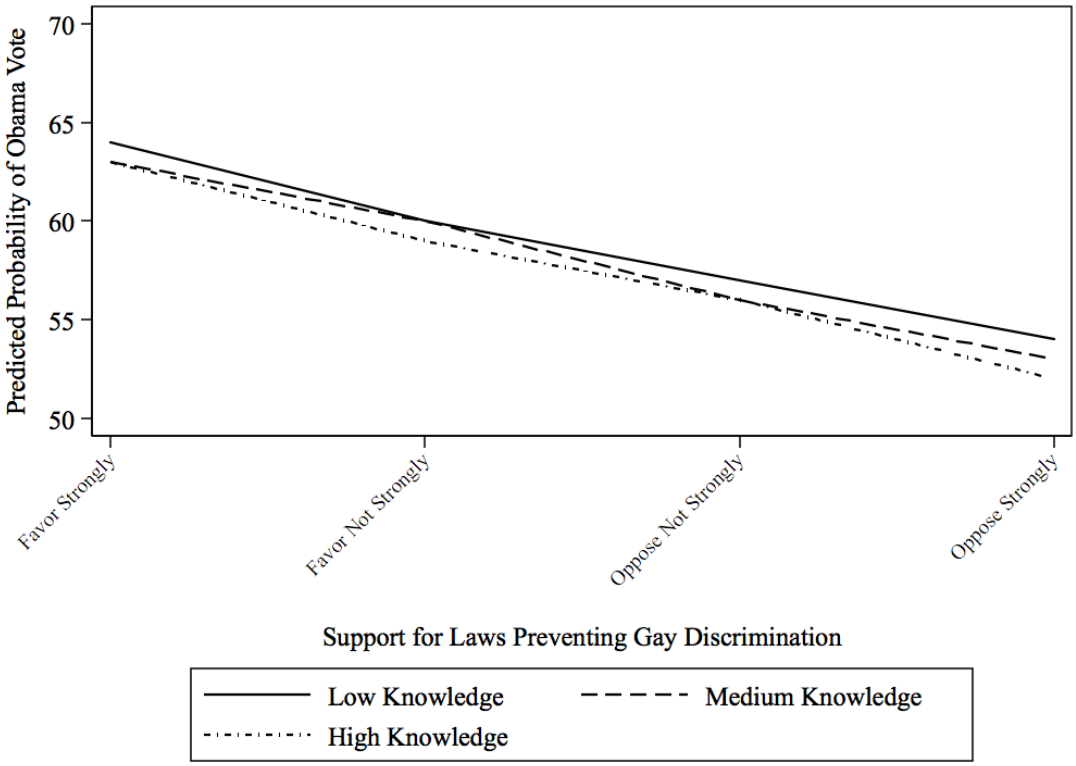
Figure 2.2: Probability of Voting for Obama by Whether Economy Better or Worse



Finally, figure 2.3 shows the probability of voting for Obama based on attitudes toward laws preventing discrimination against gay people based on political knowledge. For this issue as well, level of political knowledge is inconsequential to whether people attach their attitudes on this issue to their vote choice. The effect of attitudes toward gay discrimination laws is similar to that of attitudes toward a

troop withdrawal deadline. There is roughly a 12 percentage point change in the probability of voting for Obama when going from favor strongly laws to prevent gays from discrimination to oppose strongly laws to prevent gays from discrimination.

Figure 2.3: Probability of Voting for Obama by Attitudes toward Gay Discrimination Laws



In the case of 2008, the connection of these issues to the vote is not conditioned by level of political knowledge for any of these issues. This points to all three of these issues being "easy" by the original test. All three of these issues also exert a substantive effect on vote choice. Attitudes toward laws to prevent discrimination against gay people is important to vote choice in 2008, just as attitudes toward an Iraq troop withdrawal deadline and evaluations of the economy are. Laws regarding

gay discrimination is expected to be an "easy" issue based on the previous literature, though, whereas economic evaluations and U.S. troop levels are not. Yet, economic evaluation are the most important issue predictor of vote choice in 2008.

2.4 Understanding these Findings

Claiming that economic or foreign policy issues are important in determining election outcomes is not an original argument. The economy is arguably a critical component of the electoral decision-making process. Politics and economics are so united in voting behavior that "when you think economics, think elections; when you think elections, think economics (Tufte 1978, 65). Elections are the embodiment of economic evaluations of the incumbent president, governor, or any other executive figure. Fiorina (1981), Kiewiet (1983) and Kinder and Kiewiet (1979, 1981) all show that the American public evaluates presidents based on their economic performance. Unemployment and inflation rates shape economic evaluations, either retrospectively or prospectively, and, in turn, penalize or award the incumbent (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2000, Lewis-Beck and Tien 2008). In short, the "voters are not fools (Key 1966, 7), so they will reward a president who creates jobs, stabilizes prices, and leads the U.S. to economic prosperity.

The claim that the economy is uniquely important in determining election outcomes is further bolstered by public opinion research that recognizes the economy as a "valence" issue. There is only one constituency when it comes to the economy—the constituency for a strong economy.

> "The issues of economic well-being probably come as close as any in modern politics to being pure 'valence' issues . . . If we conceive of economic issues in dimensional terms, the electorate is not spread along a continuum of preference extending between good times and bad; its beliefs are overwhelmingly concentrated at the good times end of such a continuum" (Butler and Stokes 1969, 390).

Furthermore, models forecasting presidential election results have focused heavily on economic and foreign policy issues. This close connection between the economy and election results has been subject to many electoral forecasting tests. For example, eight out of nine forecasting models for the 2008 presidential elections used a variable related to the economy (either objectively or subjectively) to predict the election outcome (PS: Political Science and Politics, 2008). Recently, a new line of forecasting research introduced foreign policy performance as another crucial dynamic in explaining electoral outcomes. The Bread and Peace Model measures "the effects on votes for president of per capita real income growth and the cumulative number of American military fatalities in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq" (Hibbs 2008, 2-3). This forecasting model yielded better predictions for the 2008 presidential election than some economy-only forecasting models. It is clear that the American electorate is not as unsophisticated as some theoretical frameworks suggest. They do not need to know or solidify their positions on specific economic or foreign policies. However, they are very well aware whether the president is performing well or not. And, that seems sufficient to make a vote choice.

Although the importance of the economy and foreign policy in predicting election outcomes is well established, little work has been done to explore the contradictory connection between these issues and the theory of "easy" issues. Both literatures are widely read, cited, and studied, but they point to different expectations for the American electorate. Why do we see people using "hard" issues to vote when there are easier issues available?

Theoretically, I argue there are several reasons for these counterintuitive findings. Vote choice is influenced by many things in addition to issues. Voters often use "information shortcuts" (Popkin 1991) or heuristics to lessen the work required to vote. Scholars have identified many such shortcuts voters use. Two of the most important and resilient are party identification and candidate evaluations. Party identification has been shown to strongly influence voting behavior over and over again, starting with *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). Candidate likability is also important in determining vote choice (Brady and Sniderman 1985). Throughout recent presidential elections, the media has focused on whether the presidential candidates are likable and whether citizens "would like to have a beer with him." People's vote choices can be based on many things, but specific policies are often not the most compelling reason for their vote, despite the hopes of democracy proponents that people will form their attitudes based on well-reasoned policy decisions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954). These other voting determinants make it very difficult to establish which part of the vote can be attributed to the easiness of an issue.

Furthermore, even when people do engage in issue voting, it is a two-step

process. People must first develop their own opinion on an issue. Then they must calculate the relationship between their preference and the candidate or party position (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 82). This understanding of issue voting is not necessarily explicit in all discussions of issue voting, but it is certainly implicit.[7] In order for people to use issues for voting, they must first form an opinion on the issue. Only after this initial step can they work to match their preference to those of the candidates or parties in the election. So looking to voting to determine when issues are easy for people really skips the first, more basic test for issue easiness—assessing whether people hold attitudes on those issues. I will discuss this more in the next chapter.

2.5 Conclusion

When looking again at the 1972 election, we see that overall levels of issue voting are higher for Vietnam withdrawal than for desegregation. This effect of "hard" issues like foreign policy and economic issues' influence on the vote is not limited to this one election either. The importance of foreign policy and economic issues in politics is undeniable. I offer several theoretical explanations for this counterintuitive finding, including how issue salience and other factors shape vote choice,

[7]For example, the directional theory of issue voting (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989) argues that there are two steps to issue voting as well. But the first step is determining whether the person and candidate are on the same side or different side of the issue, then the second step is determining the intensity of the preference. In both steps, having an attitude to compare to the candidates' preferences is implicit. This is true of basically all spatial models of vote preference.

which I explore more in the next chapter.

Based on much of the public opinion literature that accepts inherently easy issues, these findings are somewhat surprising. Yet, there is another dialogue among scholars that does recognize the importance of economic and foreign policy issues in shaping election outcomes. Viewed in this other light, in some ways, it is surprising to think of racial issues as easy. They do elicit a gut response from many people, which fits the Carmines and Stimson description for an easy issue. Yet when public opinion is deeply divided on an issue, it is anything but easy for politicians. Politically, racial issues have always been very tricky in the U.S. since the founding. Although the founding fathers could come to many agreements through debate when writing the Constitution, they were not able to settle the issue of slavery. Knowing that they would not be able to reconcile their differences with regards to this issue, they pushed it off. Racial issues and equal rights for people with all skin colors are fights that nearly tore the country apart, and are battles our country still wages today. Possibly, it is because these issues are felt in the gut by both sides that they have been and are so hotly debated, supporting the original description of easy issues. It does seem strange to me, though, to label "easy" the issue that took 200 years before candidates on both sides of the aisle supported similar positions when it took 1/20 of that time for candidates on both sides to reach similar positions on the "hard" issue. What issue can be easier than a valence issue where nearly everyone agrees?

Chapter 3

Looking for Evidence of "Easy" Issues: Answers and Issue Salience

3.1 What "Don't Know" Responses May Tell Us about Easy Issues

Easy issues are ones that become "so ingrained over a long period that it structures voters' 'gut responses' to candidates and political parties" (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 78). People feel these issues in their guts; they have an emotional reaction to these issues. Furthermore, easy issues allow a gut response to be "elicited equally from well-informed and ill-informed, from interested and uninterested, from active and apathetic voters" (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80). All voters, regardless of their level of political sophistication, can understand and use these issues. They do so without any reference to a deep thought process that involves carefully weighing

a series of policy alternatives. Their understanding of these issues is not through a thorough, technical understanding of the details of the issue or the various policy proposals being offered. Even if the issue has technical components, as basically all issues do, when an issue is easy, "the typical voter sees in it a simple issue" (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80).

As a result of easy issues being so emotional and understood in the gut, when confronted with an issue, it should not take a lot of effort to give a response. The responses, opinions, or attitudes are readily available to express.[1] Whether this occurs because of a reaction to the groups or parties associated with an issue, or the attachment of core values to it, it is an automatic response.[2] When respondents are asked to give an opinion on easy issues, they have a gut reaction and therefore should not require much time or effort to provide an answer.

Therefore, although people do not know much about politics by ideal standards, if there are "easy" issues, people must be able to develop *relatively* stable attitudes on these issues. Without such attitude pre-consolidation, preferences about these issues would not be so readily available. As a result, we should see lower levels of non-response on questions related to these issues. In the first part of this chap-

[1]Although Carmines and Stimson are specifically discussing easy issue *voting*, it is not a far reach to say that if issues are easy and understood at a gut level for voting, then they are understood for the purposes of survey questions, which only requires giving an attitude preference and not even the second step of issue voting—the respondent attaching his/her opinion to the parties or candidates in the election.

[2]The specifics of the heuristics and cues which trigger easy issues are discussed in later chapters.

ter, I search for evidence of easy issues by examining item non-response (or "don't know" answers) on surveys. If an issue really is easy, then the first hurdle should be that people can provide a valid response when asked about the issue.

3.2 Theorizing about "Don't Know" Responses

Survey research practitioners and scholars have both focused on what problems "don't know" responses on items might cause, and what the sources of this might be. They have debated how much the quality of the data suffer as a result of non-response, as well as theorized why people fail to provide answers to some questions. Much of the literature on non-response focuses on how we should deal with it as researchers—how to craft survey questions because of it and how to deal with non-response when analyzing data (such as imputation, or other ways to fill in missing values). There is reason to expect that non-response can provide substantive information about public opinion as well. For example, Achen (1975) analyzes "don't know" responses to show that even though people may give a no opinion response in one wave of a panel survey, they might still express meaningful opinions in other waves, and so "don't know" responses do not always mean that someone does not know.

There are many reasons cited in the literature for why people say that they "don't know" the answer to survey questions, ranging from problems with the questions, to interviewer effects, to specific respondent characteristics that make "don't know" responses more likely. The reasons can be grouped into three primary causes:

the difficulty of the task involved, respondent ability, and respondent motivation (Krosnick 1991).

The difficulty of the task is "a function of the difficulty of each of the four cognitive stages" a respondent goes through to answer a given question. The four stages a person goes through to answer a survey question are: comprehension, retrieval, judgement, and response[3](Tourangeau 1984, Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988, Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000, 73). In the first stage, respondents interpret the question and determine what it is asking about—identify what information is sought. Several problems can occur at this stage, especially when an issue is unfamiliar to a respondent (i.e. it is not salient) and the person cannot determine what attitudes are relevant to the item (Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988). In the retrieval stage, respondents must search their memories for relevant information and retrieve it from memory. Again, there are several ways for complications to occur during this step, but priming is especially relevant here. Priming effects (discussed in chapter 4) will depend upon how much thought respondents give to the answer and how obvious the context is (Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988). In the judgement step, respondents must grapple with the multiple considerations brought to mind and produce a summary judgement.

It is important to recognize that a "summary judgement" does not necessarily

[3]Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski (2000) recognize that these four stages sometimes are not four separate response stages because people can completely skip components of it, carry out multiple components parallel to each other, and backtrack. Yet, they argue that this is the most common order.

mean a long-standing attitude. In reality,

> "there is a continuum corresponding to how well articulated a respondent's attitude is. At the more articulated end, the respondent has a preformed opinion just waiting to be offered to the interviewer; at the less articulated end, the respondent has no opinion whatever. Between these extremes, he or she may have a loosely related set of ideas to use in constructing an opinion or even a moderately well-formed viewpoint to draw on" (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000).

Even when an issue is relatively familiar, there are people who do not have stable views on the issue. Research has shown survey responses sometimes shift dramatically with variations in question wording or question ordering, and

> "even if respondents do have more crystallized views about an issue, these views may not lend themselves to a clear-cut answer to the question at hand. The survey item may ask about an aspect of the issue that the respondent has not thought about. For instance, an item on the GSS asks whether abortions should be permitted in the case of rape; this item may give even ardent pro-life advocates reason to stop and reflect before they answer" (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000, 13).

There are different ways people can go about this, and this step can also be affected by respondent characteristics. As a result, the judgements are temporary constructs because they are created by people to respond to a survey question (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000, 197).

Finally, respondents must take this summary judgement and map it onto the available survey response options. Sometimes people can give open-ended responses in which they get to make their own answer (e.g., "most important problem" questions), but almost all questions in political surveys are close-ended questions that require them to pick from a set of categories or choose a place on a scale (e.g., feeling thermometer ratings). The quality of survey responses can also be compromised in this step as people may experience difficulties choosing a fixed response that represents their attitude.[4] Specifically, "even when respondents have a clear answer to report, it may not be clear to them how to report it" (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000, 13).

This process can be long and take a good deal of effort. People will not always carefully perform each of these steps in the process. Whenever respondents shortcut or skip steps to avoid the substantial cognitive effort required to carefully work through all for steps of the process, Krosnick (1991), Krosnick and Alwin (1987) refers to it as "satisficing."[5] When "satisficing," respondents only try to understand the question well enough to provide a plausible answer. They do not try to understand the question completely or retrieve all relevant information regarding

[4]Zaller (1992) argues that this model, although simpler than some models for how people make decisions posited in the psychology literate, is too complex. He argues that the only important step in the process is the retrieval of considerations from memory. He also argues that there is limited ability to empirically distinguish between the steps using survey data. Therefore, he argues for the RAS model instead.

[5]The term, as Krosnick notes, was originally coined by Simon (1957).

the question. Instead, they try to do just enough work to get an answer (Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski 2000).

There are two intensities of this behavior. When a respondent is short-cutting some of the steps in the process it is called "weak satisficing." When weak satisficing occurs, the respondent is still performing all four steps, but there is "incomplete or biased information retrieval and/or information integration" (Krosnick 1991, 213). Respondents can do this by agreeing with assertions, endorsing the *status quo*, selecting the first reasonable response option, or other energy-saving behaviors. Respondents can also engage in "strong satisficing" in which they skip steps entirely and have no information retrieval or integration (Krosnick, 213). Giving a "don't know response" can be a form of strong satisficing. When respondents say that they "don't know," they do not have to retrieve any information or make a judgement. Conversely, when all four steps are performed carefully it is referred to as "optimizing."

Task difficulty can be an issue in any of these stages. Some questions are difficult to interpret because they are very long, or contain words that are uncommon, words with multiple meanings, or something else that makes understanding the question challenging. If a respondent is asked to recall information from a previous time, or if the respondent is asked to make comparative judgements across multiple objects at once, these can make answering the questions more difficult. The pace of the interview as well as distractions present can also increase the challenges a respondent faces.

Respondent ability also plays a key role in determining who is more likely to

say that they "don't know" the answer to a question. The people who respond "dont know" (DK) to survey questions have been studied for decades. Although there have been some dissenting scholars, the differences between people who respond DK and people who provide meaningful answers have been well documented. Education, race, age, type of occupation and gender have all been found to affect the number of DK responses provided by respondents during surveys. People who are more highly educated, white, younger, male and/or employed in more prestigious occupations are more likely to complete a survey in its entirety than their counterparts (Ferber 1966). There has been debate about the direct impact of some of these variables. For example, there is some evidence that the impact of age on DK responses is actually dependent upon the education level of the respondents, which accounts for all of the age effect (Gergen and Back 1966). Other scholars have noted that there are cultural differences that lead people to have a different willingness to admit a DK response (Sicinski 1970). Those with lower levels of political efficacy, who are less involved in politics and who have little influence in decision-making processes, have also been shown to have lower response rates (although arguably many of these factors are related—people with less education are usually in less prestigious professions, are less involved in politics, have less political efficacy, etc.). What is most important from all of these findings is that nonresponse is not random (Francis and Busch 1975). This leads to possible bias in survey results. Both item nonresponse and total survey nonresponse have been shown to cause bias in the survey results, although there is some debate as to how much and how potentially harmful the bias is to the estimation of parameters.

Respondent ability has three components—cognitive sophistication, amount of practice with an issue, and the degree to which a respondent has a "preconsolidated attitude" (Krosnick 1991, 223). Cognitive sophistication refers not to general intelligence, but is "best viewed as the ensemble of abilities needed to retrieve information from memory and integrate that information into verbally expressed summary judgements" (Krosnick 1991, 222). The more cognitively sophisticated a person is, the more able s/he is to be able to provide thoughtful answers on a survey. The amount of practice that a respondent has had with a particular topic also plays a role in determining the quality of her response. People who have experience with "domain-relevant thought have more relevant knowledge in memory and have more practice at executing the necessary cognitive procedures" (Krosnick 1991, 223). Finally, the extent to which a respondent already has a "preconsolidated attitude" on an issue influences her ability to give a response to a question. Sometimes people "have unambiguous evaluations" stored in memory and therefore can answer questions about these topics with little effort. When people have "preconsolidated attitudes," or crystallized attitudes, "the retrieval step in the response process should occur quickly and automatically upon the mere mention of the attitude object" (Krosnick 1991, 223). Although Krosnick never makes a connection between easy issues and respondent ability to provide valid answers, the language is reminiscent of Carmines' and Stimson's description of easy issues. The process should occur "automatically" when the issue is merely mentioned—or there should be a gut-level reaction.

Finally, respondent motivation is also critical for whether a person gives a valid response. Respondent motivation includes numerous factors, including the length of

the interview, the interviewer behavior, and the respondent's belief that s/he will be held accountable for her answers or that her answers are somehow contributing to "desirable social outcomes" (Krosnick 1991, 223-225). These factors are theoretically unimportant for the assessment of easy and hard issues. However, the need for cognition and personal importance of the issue are theoretically essential. People who have a need for cognition "enjoy thinking, get intrinsic rewards for effortful mental exercises, and prefer to confront demanding cognitive tasks instead of easy ones" (Krosnick 1991, 223).

Although there are several reasons why people might engage in satisficing, two of them are of particular theoretical importance when discussing easy and hard issues. Most of the forms of satisficing (including accepting the first reasonable response alternative, agreeing with assertions, endorsing the *status quo*, and non-differentiation) are related to respondent level of education or cognitive sophistication. People with less education are more likely to engage in a variety of satisficing behaviors, including giving "don't know" responses (Krosnick 1991).

3.3 Item Non-response as a Measure of "Easy" Issues

This, again, clearly links to the theory of easy and hard issues. Higher "don't know" response rates are expected for harder issues. There are several caveats on drawing an immediate conclusion supporting easy issues. First, Krosnick does

note that, although the perceived short-cuts such as agreeing with assertions and endorsing the *status quo* are often the result of satisficing, sometimes they can result from optimizing. This is true for all of the methods for satisficing, but for "don't know" responses in particular, because a person may really not know the answer. This poses a potential challenge to the use of item non-response as a measure for issue easiness, because if "don't know" responses are unrelated to respondent sophistication it could be due to everyone knowing the answer (the issue is easy), or sophisticated people are optimizing while less sophisticated people are satisficing on the issue at the same time, thereby washing out the effects of sophistication. However, this should not be the case if the overall item non-response is low on the issue. If overall item non-response is low, and item non-response on the issue is unrelated to sophistication, then the evidence supports the theory of easy issues.

Second, whether the question filters for non-response can also change the number of "don't know" answers in a way that is not explained by the easy/hard issue distinction. The practice of probing "don't know" responses has been the subject of some scholarly controversy. At its face value, probing respondents in order to obtain a meaningful value rather than a DK response seems to improve the quality of the data. However, there is some evidence that when respondents are pushed to provide a response, they will make up an answer. In a study by Bishop, Tuchfarber and Oldendick, when respondents were surveyed about fictitious people and places, if they were pressed by the interviewer to provide a response, they were more likely to make up an answer about something of which they had obviously never heard. Once again, less educated respondents and nonwhite respondents were more likely to

make up an answer under pressure (Bishop and Oldendick 1986). Other studies have found similar results. In a Schuman and Presser study, when interviewers repeated the question following a DK response, more pressure was placed on respondents, especially less educated respondents, to provide an answer (Schuman and Presser 1981). Such results have generated debate about whether respondents should automatically be probed for DK responses, or whether they should only be probed in some circumstances.

In the case of American National Election Studies (NES) data, some questions are consistently probed, others are never probed, and some are probed depending upon the year of the study. Even more problematic, the "don't know" responses are not always separated out from other missing codes, especially in earlier years. Sometimes, "inappropriate" (usually because the respondent was asked a different form of the survey), refused, or other missing codes are mixed together, making it impossible to isolate true "don't know" answers. This occasionally limited the questions available for me to use on the surveys as I avoided items that had such limitations. Also problematic, some questions indicate to people that it is okay to give a "don't know" response by filtering responses with a prior question for whether the respondent knows enough about an issue to have an opinion, or uses a phrase like "haven't you thought much about this." When "quasi filters" offer respondents an explicit choice for no opinion, it can increase the percentage of DK responses (Schuman and Presser 1981, 1980, 1979). As a result, when discussing the results I include information about which questions included non-response prompts.

3.4 Item Non-response in the NES by Year

In order to get a sense for what issues American's hold opinions on, I looked at the NES data for all of the presidential election years from 1972 to 2008 (except for 1992 and 2000 because of issues with the data[6]). By looking at multiple years of data, patterns in non-response are visible. In picking issues to include for each year, I tried to use some of the same issues, when available, to enable a comparison of non-response levels.[7] Obviously, though, since the NES is trying to gauge public opinion about the issues of the day, there are noticeable and telling changes in the questions that are asked from 1972 to 2008. I tried to capture issues that were important in each presidential campaign as well.

In 1972, for example, there is a whole battery of race-related questions (equal employment opportunities and access to public facilities for blacks, as well as school

[6]The NES data for 1992 are only available as part of a 1990-1991-1992 panel study. Based on previous research on item non-response, I do not think it is fair to compare non-response rates for respondents who are part of a panel study versus others. Although there are some new respondents in 1992, the sample sizes for DK responses are already very small in most cases in the other years of the NES. In 2000, the NES ran a survey experiment exploring the effect of the "haven't thought much about this" option, thereby making it unsuitable for an analysis of the percentage of respondents who replied "don't know" or "haven't thought much about this." Therefore, these two years are excluded.

[7]Sometimes there are changes in the question wording from one year to another. This can obviously lead to changes in non-response due to question wording changes. However, often changes to the questions are minimal. When a change in question wording is more meaningful to possible item non-response (such as offering a "haven't thought much about that" option), I try to note it.

integration and busing to achieve integration, segregation, and more) along with questions about the Vietnam War, China, and communism. Many questions in the 1980's focused on the economy (taxes and inflation), government spending and foreign policy issues involving U.S. relations with Russia, Iran Contra, and Central America. The 2000's see the introduction of questions about new issues that were not part of the American political landscape before, like gay rights (gays in the military, gay adoption, gay marriage, and laws preventing discrimination against gays) and illegal immigration. In the post 9/11 era, questions about terrorism appear. There are also common issues stretching across a number of years (in some form) as well, such as the environment, defense spending, spending on different social issues (food stamps, public schools, crime prevention), government supplied health insurance, the death penalty, and abortion.

Starting with the most recent election, figure 3.1 shows the percentage of item non-response on various issues in the 2008 NES.[8] Abortion has the lowest non-response rate with less than 1% saying that they "didn't know" about abortion. Social security spending, gay marriage, citizenship for illegal immigrants, and a host of other issues also had very low DK percentages. Several hot political topics, such as the U.S. government bailout of financial institutions and government supplied health insurance, had higher non-response around 10-15%. By far, the issue with the highest percentage of DK responses was limiting foreign imports—nearly 50%. This is not unique to 2008, either. Limiting foreign imports has very high non-

[8]The responses for 2008, 2004, and 1996 are all weighted. The previous years do not include appropriate weights/do not need weights.

response rates in 2004, 1996, and 1988. Based on the number of years of data, the tables for 2004, 1988, and 1976 appear in the appendix for this chapter. The non-response rates for 1996 appear in figure 3.2.

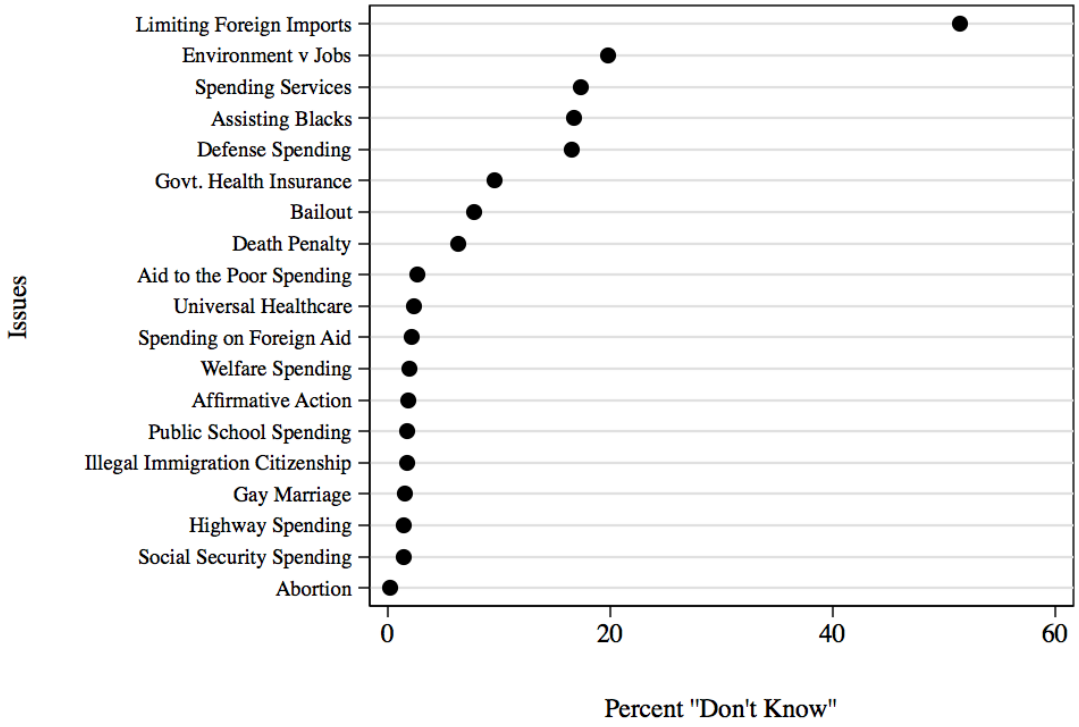


Figure 3.1: "Don't Know" Responses in the 2008 NES

Several other repeated items have relatively high non-response rates as well, although none come close to that of limiting foreign imports. The spending-services scale (whether government should provide fewer services and cut spending, or provide more services even if it requires increasing spending), the environment versus jobs scale (whether we should protect the environment even if it may cause job loss), government supplied health insurance, defense spending, and government as-

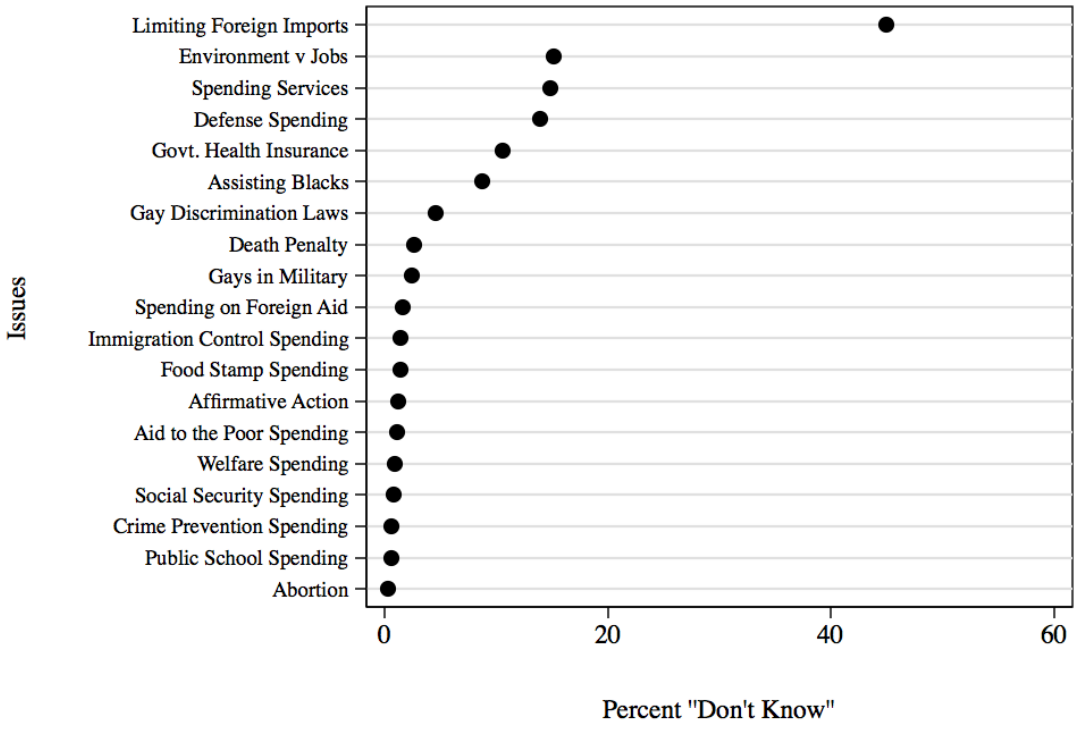


Figure 3.2: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1996 NES

sistance to blacks also have DK response rates that hover around 15-20% with few exceptions.[9] On the other hand, abortion, gay marriage, social security spending, affirmative action, public school spending, and crime prevention spending have fairly consistent low DK response rates. For the most part, these issues have a less than 1% to at the most 5% DK response rate.

Within a specific year (or two), there are a few items that approach the DK response rate of limiting foreign imports. U.S. involvement in Central American (1984) has roughly 30% non-response, and U.S. Relations with Russia (1980 and 1984) has roughly 20% non-response. These issues, with less performance oriented evaluations of foreign policy, have higher DK rates. Whether the U.S. should recognize mainland China (1972) also has higher non-response (around 20%). The DK rates for 1972, 1984, and 1980 appear in figures 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5, respectively.

The same is true for several economic issues. The appropriate tax rate for the wealthy (1972) had approximately 20% non-response. Instituting a 30% tax cut and whether the government should focus on the inflation rate or the unemployment rate (both 1980) had nearly 40% non-response. The federal bailout plan (2008) was easier by comparison; it garnered around 12% non-response.

Interestingly, many of these items are fairly specific—they ask about a more

[9]Several of these issues are the ones that additionally offer people whether they "haven't thought much about it" which could be partly the reason for higher DK rates on government health insurance, defense spending, and assistance to blacks. On the other hand, though, other questions that offer people the "haven't thought much about it" escape do not have similarly high levels of non-response, such as women's role.

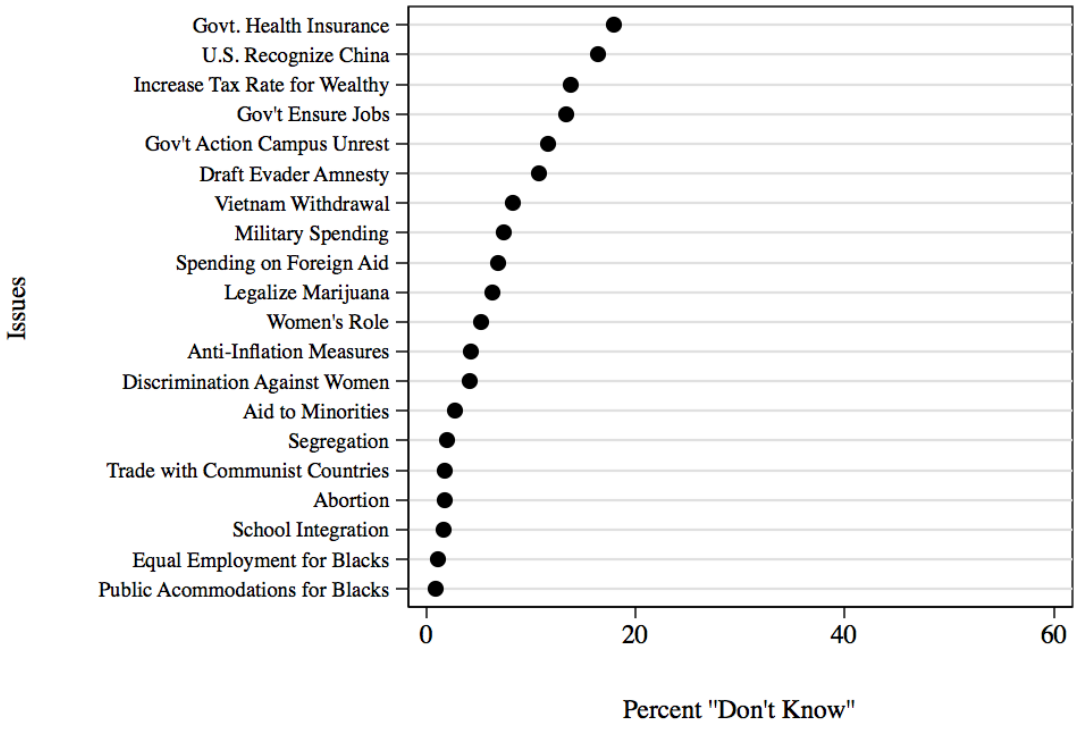


Figure 3.3: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1972 NES

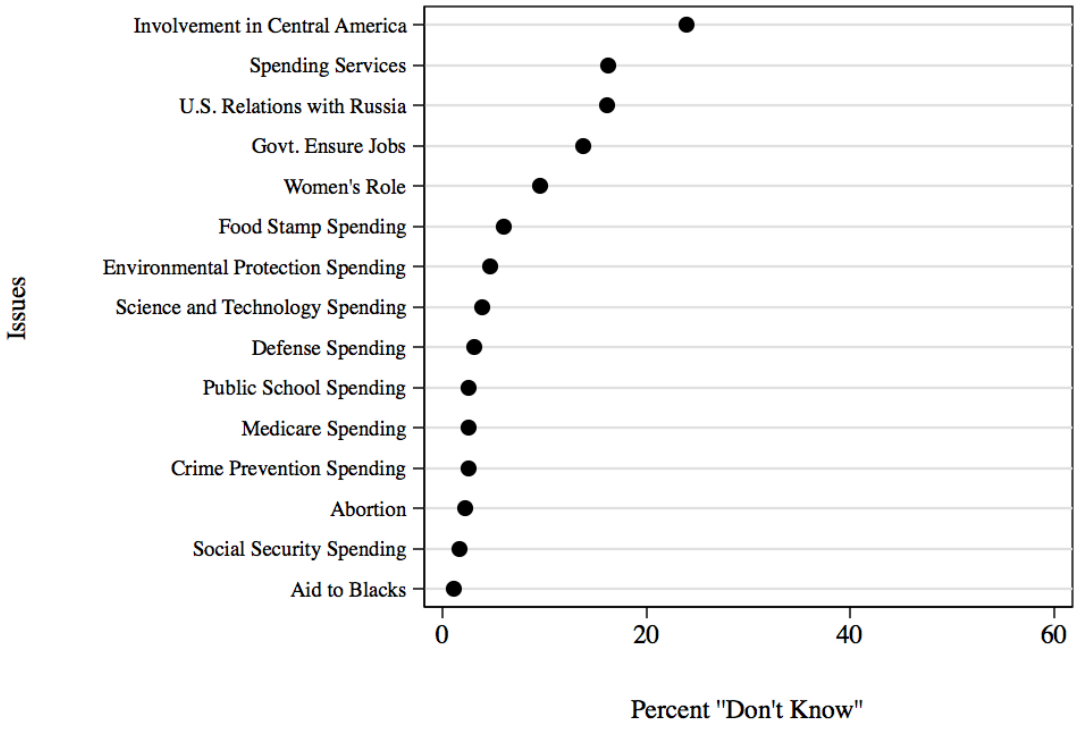


Figure 3.4: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1984 NES

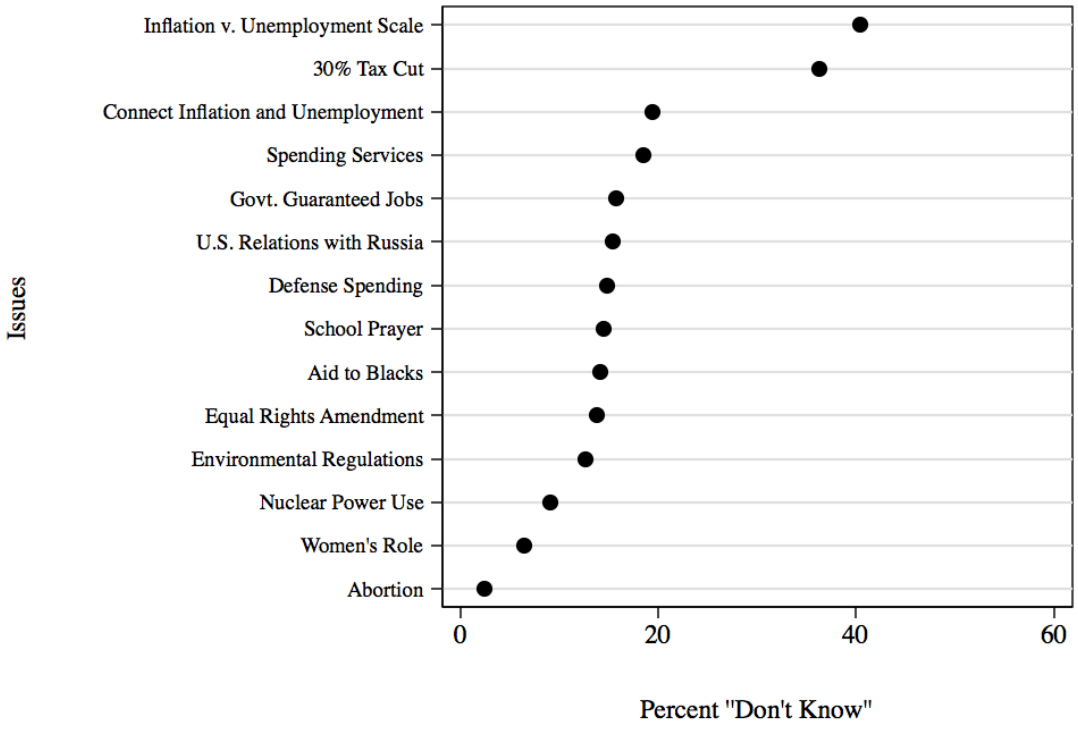


Figure 3.5: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1980 NES

concrete policy proposal like giving a 30% tax cut to everyone or whether the U.S. should recognize China. In some cases, ambiguity in the questions could lead to higher non-response rates. A question like the spending-services scale, that is about whether the government should cut abstract, unspecified programs in order to reduce spending, leaves open multiple interpretations. A question that is so abstract and vague could lead to higher non-response just because people are not sure what the question is asking about. Most of the questions with higher non-response, though, have clearer topics.

There are several notable exceptions to this pattern of non-response for economic and foreign policy issues. Whether the U.S. should try to stop the spread of communism, and whether the government should cut taxes even if it means cutting spending (both 1988) had only about 1% DK responses. Terrorism related questions in 2004 also had very low non-response. Less than 2% of respondents said they "didn't know" about whether the government should increase or decrease spending to combat terrorism and how important the foreign policy goal of combating international terrorism should be.

3.5 Examining What is on the Minds of Americans

Americans do seem to have a harder time overall answering questions about foreign policy and economic issues. Yet in a world full of non-responding, coin-

flipping, making it up as they go along respondents, we see amazing regularity and structure to what Americans consider to be important. Despite stunning gaps in knowledge and limited awareness of politics, Americans are consistently preoccupied with economic and foreign policy issues.

Again I use all presidential election years from the NES (except 2000 and 1992) to examine what people think is the most important problem facing the U.S. in each election year. The results are presented in figures 3.6-3.12. These figures show the top five responses to the "most important issue" question in each year. The most important problem responses paint a very different picture of the American electorate's minds than the non-response rates. The number one most important issue is either an economic or foreign policy issue in every single year with only one exception. In 1996, the budget deficit and crime are tied for the top spot. Overall, the top five issues of concern are dominated by foreign policy and economic issues across all the years except 1996.

In 1996, during a period of relative peace and prosperity in the U.S., and a very uncompetitive re-election campaign, crime, social welfare problems, and education were able to crack the top five most important issues. The percentage of respondents who said these were the most important issues, however, was comparatively low. Only 15% said that crime was the most important problem (the same as the budget deficit), and less than 10% said that social welfare problems or education were important. When compared to concern over terrorists in 2004, for example, these issues seem relatively unimportant. Nearly 45%, 1 in 2 people, said terrorists were the most important problem facing the country in 2004 (as shown in figure 3.7).

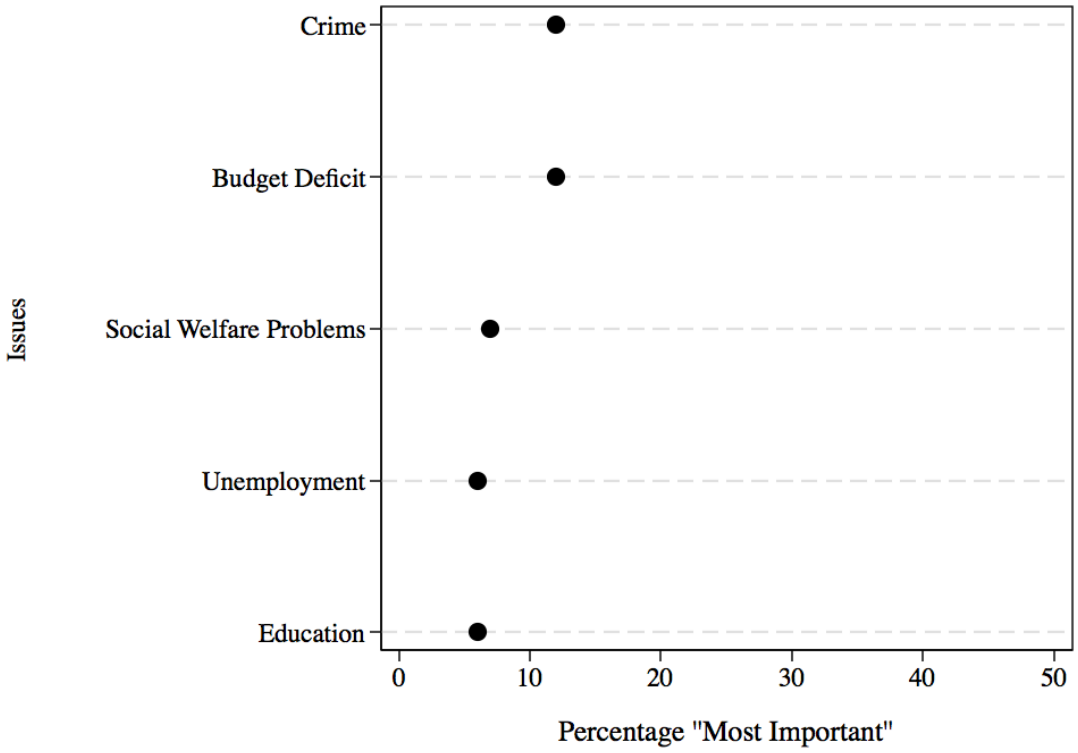


Figure 3.6: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1996 NES

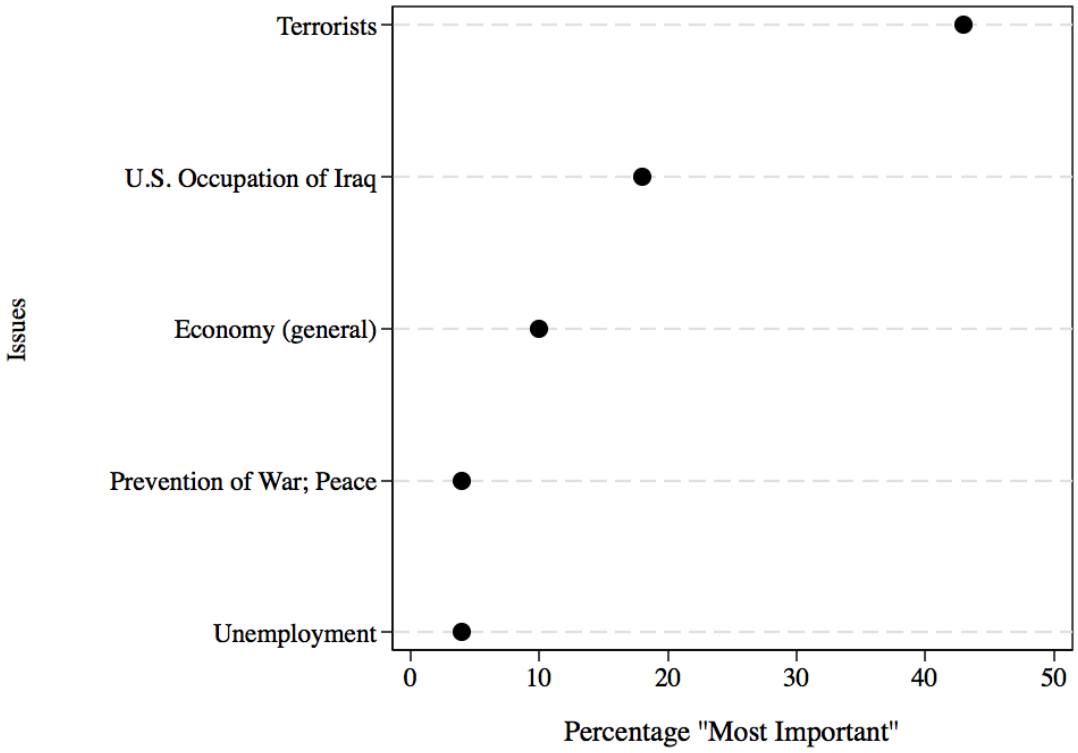


Figure 3.7: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 2004 NES

Similarly, in 1980 (figure 3.8), more than 35% of respondents said that inflation was their number one concern. An additional 15% said that either unemployment or the economy in general was the most important issue. The other two issues that made the top five in 1980—concern over disarmament and Iran/the hostage crisis—were foreign policy issues. Not one issue in the top five dealt with something other than the economy or foreign policy.

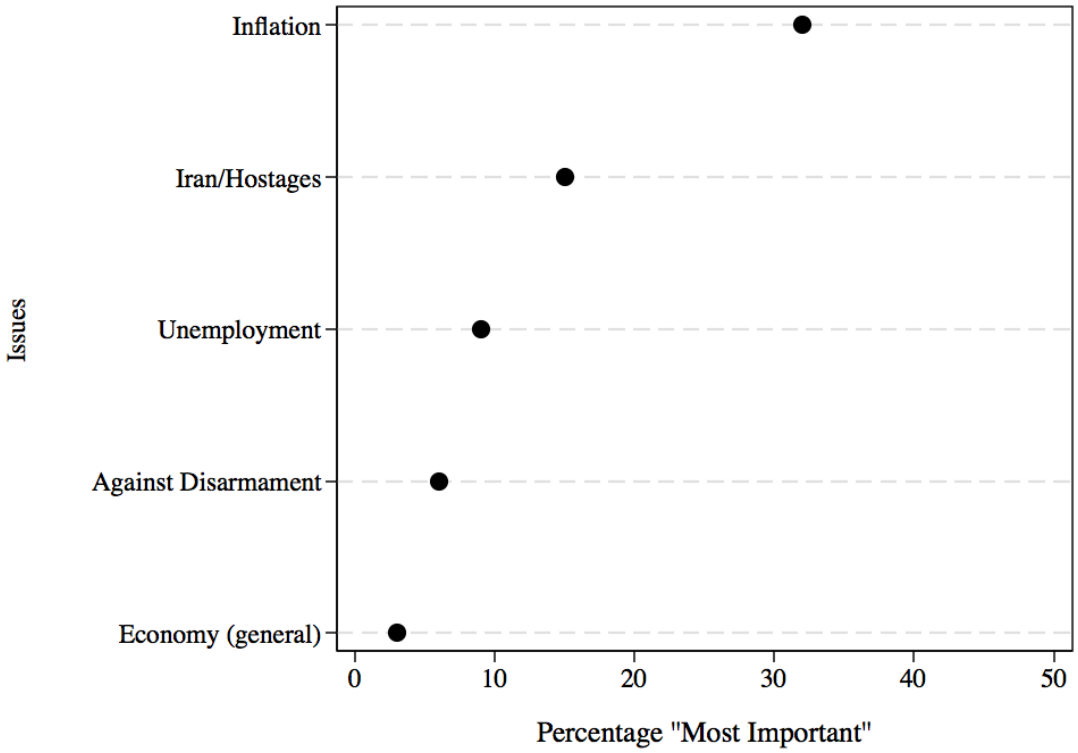


Figure 3.8: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1980 NES

The same is true for 1984. The number one most important issue was the budget deficit, while the second issue on people's minds was unemployment (figure 3.9). The third and fourth were foreign policy issues—the possibility of a nuclear

war and the establishment of peace/prevention of war. Finally, inflation, which was in the top two spots in 1972, 1976, and 1980, held on to the fifth spot.

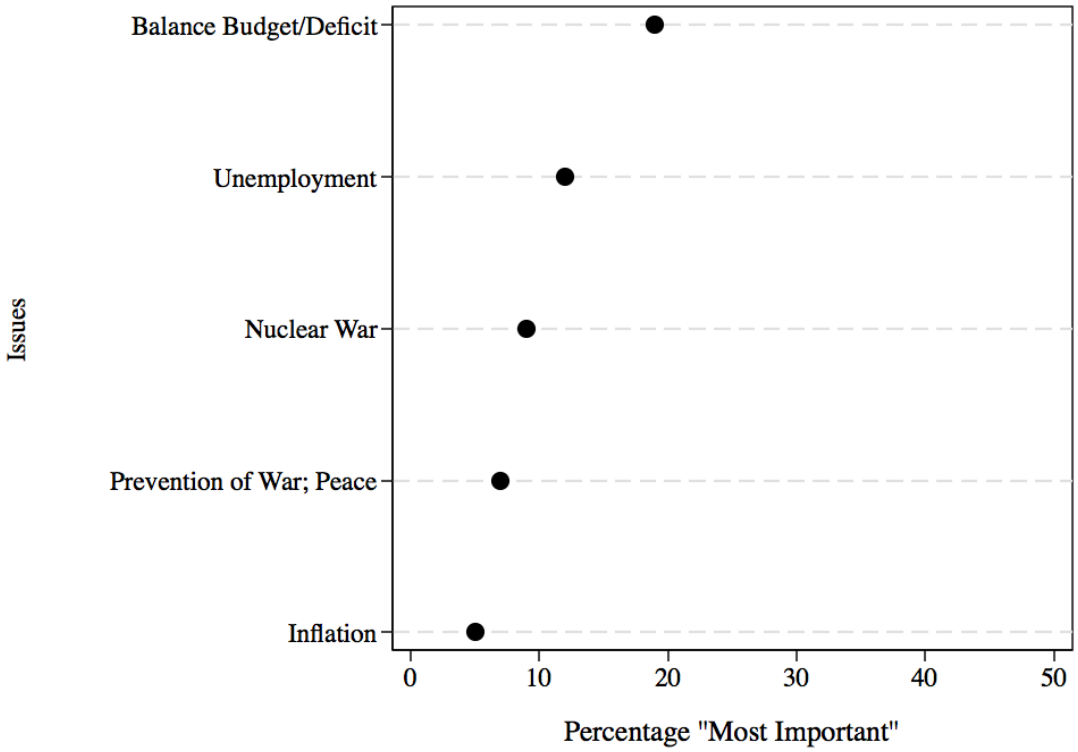


Figure 3.9: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1984 NES

In 1988, 1976, and 1972 (figures 3.10, 3.11, and 3.12, respectively), the predominate concerns are still foreign policy and economic issues (the budget deficit, unemployment, and the Vietnam War, respectively). There are several other issues that make the list, though. These include racial problems (1972), housing (1988), and drugs and crime.

Note that most widely regarded "easy" issues are conspicuously absent from these lists. Issues like abortion, gay marriage, prayer in school, and a number of

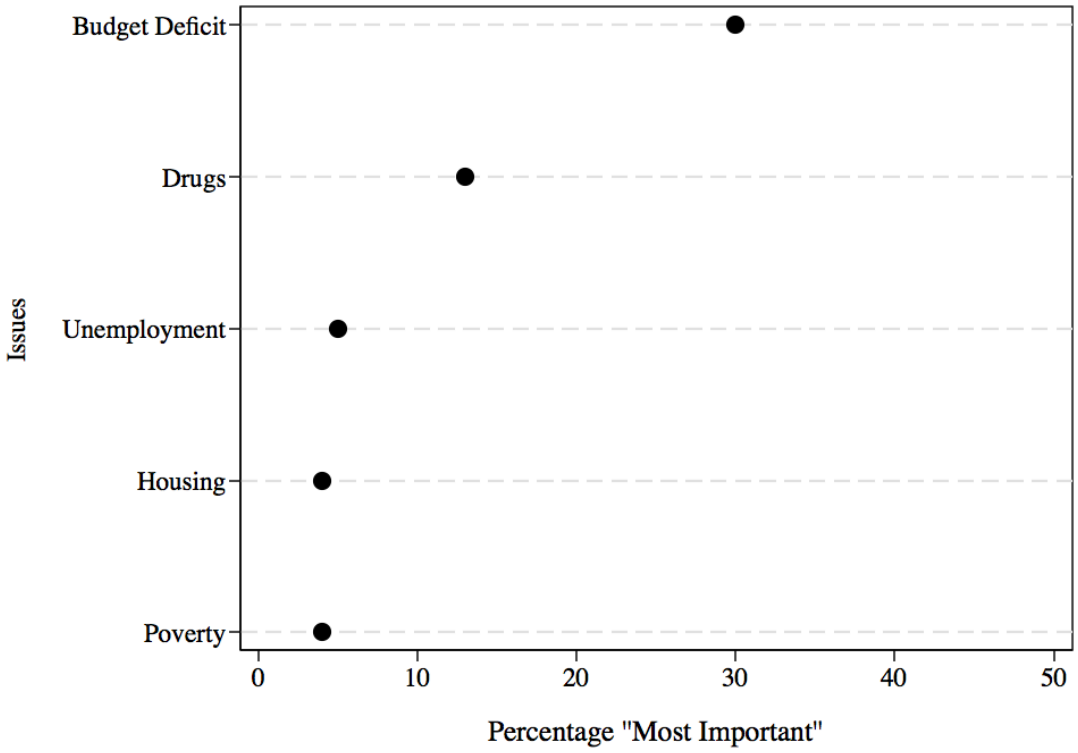


Figure 3.10: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1988 NES

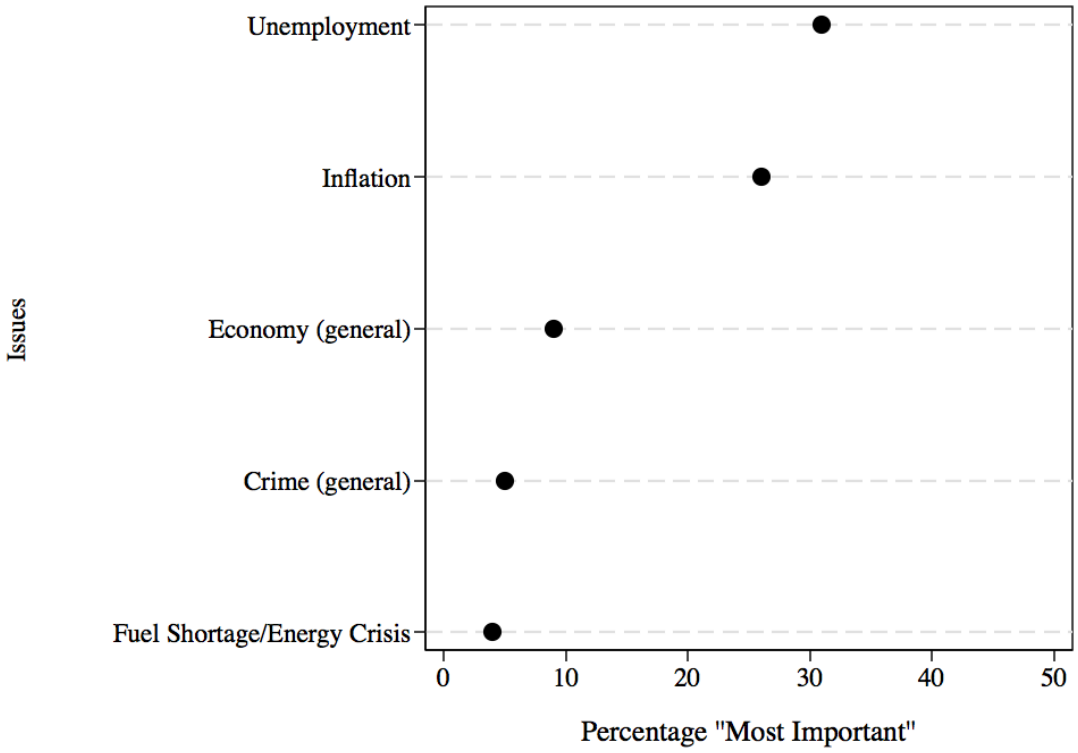


Figure 3.11: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1976 NES

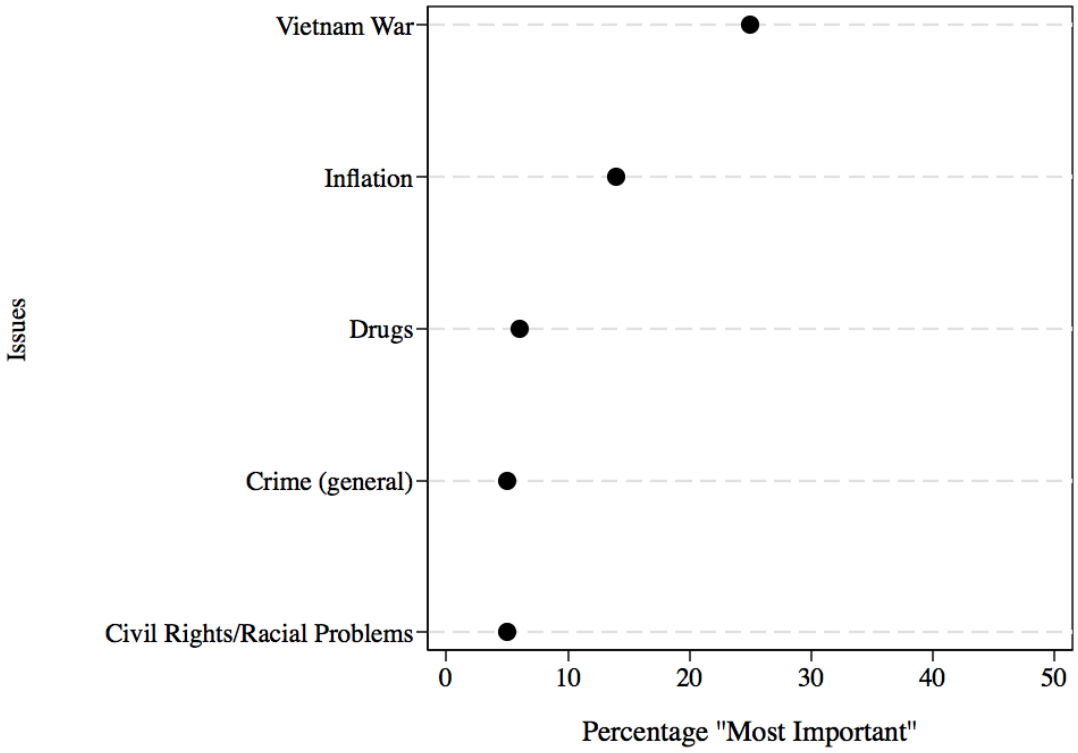


Figure 3.12: "Most Important Problem" Responses in the 1972 NES

other moral and social issues never appear on the list of the top five most important issues facing the country. For reference, only one person out of the whole sample in 2004 mentioned abortion. Only 2% said that "moral decay" was the most important issue. In 1996, abortion was listed as the most important issue by two people and moral decay was the primary concern of only 5% of the respondents. This pattern is not new. In 1972, 3% of the sample said that "moral decay" was the most important problem and 1% said that problems with young people (like drinking, sexual freedom, discipline, etc.) was their primary concern.

Critics of my analysis might claim that I coded the responses in favor of my argument and that the net for "economic" issues was cast wide while I only counted responses strictly pertaining to abortion, for example. However, I neither devised nor executed this coding scheme. The NES coded the open ended responses into the categories that I used, and I simply looked at which issues had the highest number of mentions in each election. Possibly, one could argue that the "economy" or "foreign policy" are general catch-alls and that is why the most important problem mentions are higher for those issues. Again, though, I am using the terms "economy" and "foreign policy" when writing, but the actual issues, like inflation or Vietnam troop withdrawal, are no more general than "crime" or "drugs."

3.6 Why Americans are Preoccupied with "Hard" Issues

The description of hard issues leads us to expect that the public will not be aware of a hard issue (it will not be salient to many people), that people cannot place the candidates or parties on the issue, and that the issue cannot influence vote choice—at least not for those with low political sophistication. Hard issues are technical, they are about policy means, they are new to the political agenda, and we expect that people will not know about this issue or understand the debate occurring around the issue. Even if more sophisticated and aware voters know what is going on, the least knowledgeable voters will not. However, this is not the pattern that unfolds.

Over the last two chapters a puzzle about the nature of foreign policy and economic issues has emerged. The general understanding, as posited by Carmines and Stimson, is that these issues are intrinsically "hard" because of their technical details. Therefore, less politically knowledgeable people cannot use these issues to vote, and by extension, will not be able to develop attitudes on these issues. Yet empirically, we see in chapter 2 this is not the case. Based on the understanding of easy and hard issues that has developed in the literature, it is surprising to find that foreign policy and economic issues are powerful predictors of vote choice. Why do we see that people are voting on hard, technical issues rather than ones that might be more accessible?

In this chapter, we see that on the one hand, Americans have difficulty answer-

ing questions about foreign policy and the economy when asked; there are generally higher non-response rates for these issues across years. On the other hand, these issues totally engross the minds of Americans; these two issue domains dominate the most important issue responses. Why is it that Americans know little about these issues given that they are so important? Why do they vote on these issues if they know relatively little about them? Is it because these issues truly are so complex and technical that they are inherently "hard"? Why is it that people do not find out more information about these issues if they are so important? We could easily dismiss the American public as too apathetic and uneducated to be able to do so. Even if that were true, why is it that politicians do not make these issues accessible to people through the use of frames, then?

3.7 A Third Type of Issues

Interestingly, the theory of retrospective voting generates predictions opposite to those stemming from the theory of easy and hard issues. The theory of easy issues claims that those who are most politically knowledgeable will vote based on "hard" issues like foreign policy and the economy. The theory of retrospective voting, on the other hand, argues that the connection between retrospective evaluations (e.g. the "nature of the times voters," those who ask "am I better off now than I was 4 years ago") should be highest for the least aware people. Most often, the issues people are asking themselves about are economic or foreign policy issues when they ask if they are better off now. So the theory of retrospective voting predicts that

"hard" issues, like the economy and foreign policy issues, may actually be most often used by the least sophisticated voters because they are able to make choices based on what they have observed about politics in the years leading up to an election.

> "They need *not* know the precise economic or foreign policy policies of the incumbent administration in order to see or feel the *results* of those policies. And it is not reasonable to base voting decisions on results as well as on intentions? In order to ascertain whether the incumbents have performed poorly or well, citizens need only to calculate the changes in their own welfare. If jobs have been lost in a recession, something is wrong. If sons have died in foreign rice paddies, something is wrong ..." (Fiorina 1981, 5).

I depart from Fiorina in that I do not think all issues are, or can be, evaluated retrospectively. I believe that Carmines and Stimson are right in thinking about different types of issues. There are certain issues that more naturally lend themselves to a clear voter interpretation and they do not need political sophistication to know how they feel about these issues. I argue that issues like foreign policy and the economy are performance issues and are unique from most other issues based on one of Carmines' and Stimson's original criteria. These issues are mostly viewed solely in terms of policy ends and not policy means. This, however, is not what Carmines and Stimson would predict based on the complex and technical nature of these issues. Yet they are seen this way by the majority of the public and are important to the vote (regardless of their technical content) for three reasons.

First, these issues are often highly salient. Although people may have gut reactions to issues involving race or morals, these issues are not as important to voters as issues of foreign affairs and the economy. As we saw from the "most important issue" responses, people worry about the economy and foreign policy more than they do about about any other issues. Second, the nature of these issues is important for understanding why people vote on them rather than other issues, but it is not the easiness or hardness of the issue that matters. Foreign affairs and the economy are largely performance issues, or "valence" issues, with only one constituency. There is no constituency for a lousy economy or a never-ending war we are losing. Therefore, if a candidate or his/her party is in power, and the economy or foreign affairs are bad, they are in a bad spot. They will get the blame for the problems, and there are few opportunities for them to argue that their policy is morally or intellectually superior if times are bad. This is an important extension of the existing literature. This means there is virtually no room for politicians to frame. Little or no pandering can occur on these issues because no way to frame why failure on these issues is good and we should feel good about it. The lack of framing that we see on these issues, therefore, is not because they are "hard" issues and are so complex that people cannot understand these issues even given the frames of politicians. On the contrary, the lack of framing characteristic of these issues is because framing is nearly impossible for these issues.

Finally, also characteristic of these issues are performance updates. Unlike moral issues like abortion, gay marriage, etc. that do not have a factual check-point, there is a continuous flow of information to the public about these issues, with

virtually no way to fool people into thinking things are okay if they are not. On moral or social issues, politicians work to frame these issues in terms of group-based conflict or core values because they can. There is really no way to assess what is right or wrong; the assessment of a policy's success on these issues is subjective. For foreign affairs and the economy, though, there is information available about the number of troops committed to a war, the number that have died fighting, the amount of money spent on the war, the duration of the war, the level of unemployment, inflation, and many other quantifiable ways to assess success. Many people may intuitively know how things are going in regards to these issues as well, based on their own employment status, changes in income, or number of tours their child has served in the war. People do not follow every debate on these issues because there is no need to. The performance nature of these issues limits the framing abilities of candidates and parties.

3.8 Appendix Figures

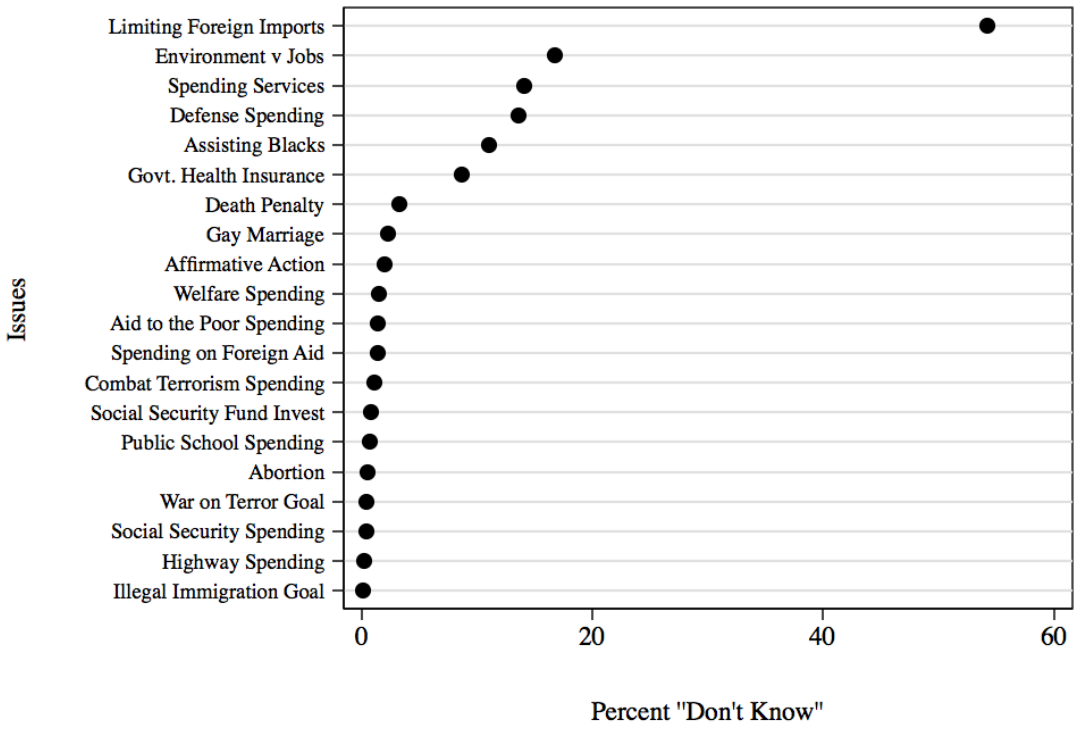


Figure 3.13: "Don't Know" Responses in the 2004 NES

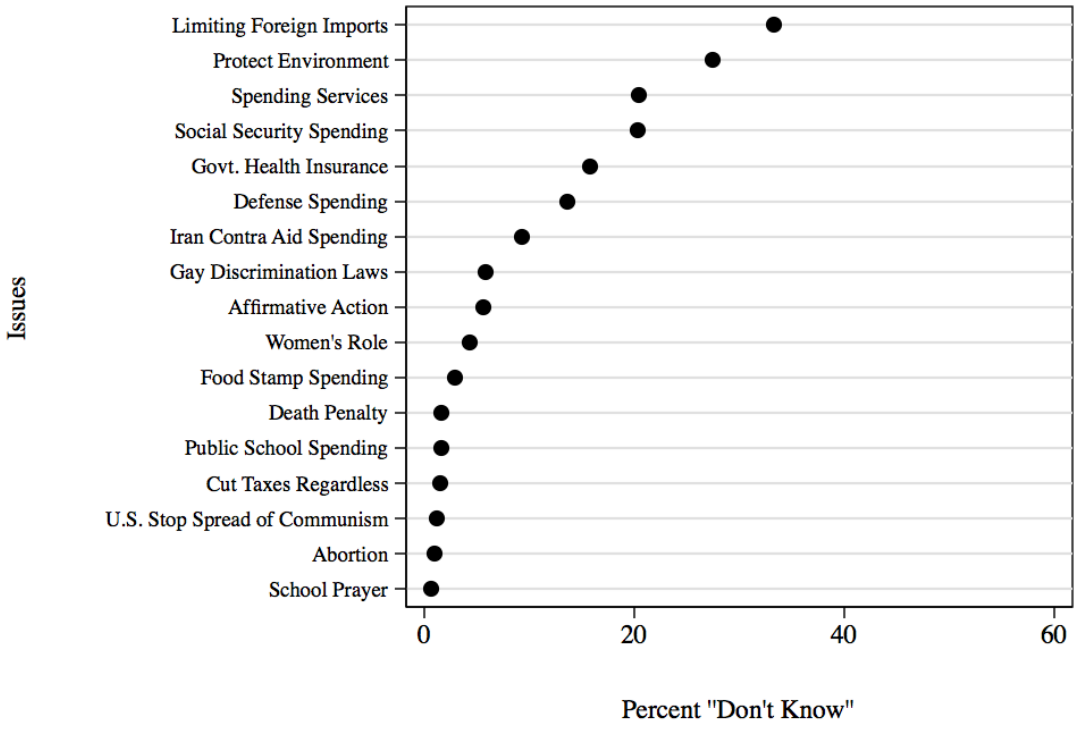


Figure 3.14: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1988 NES

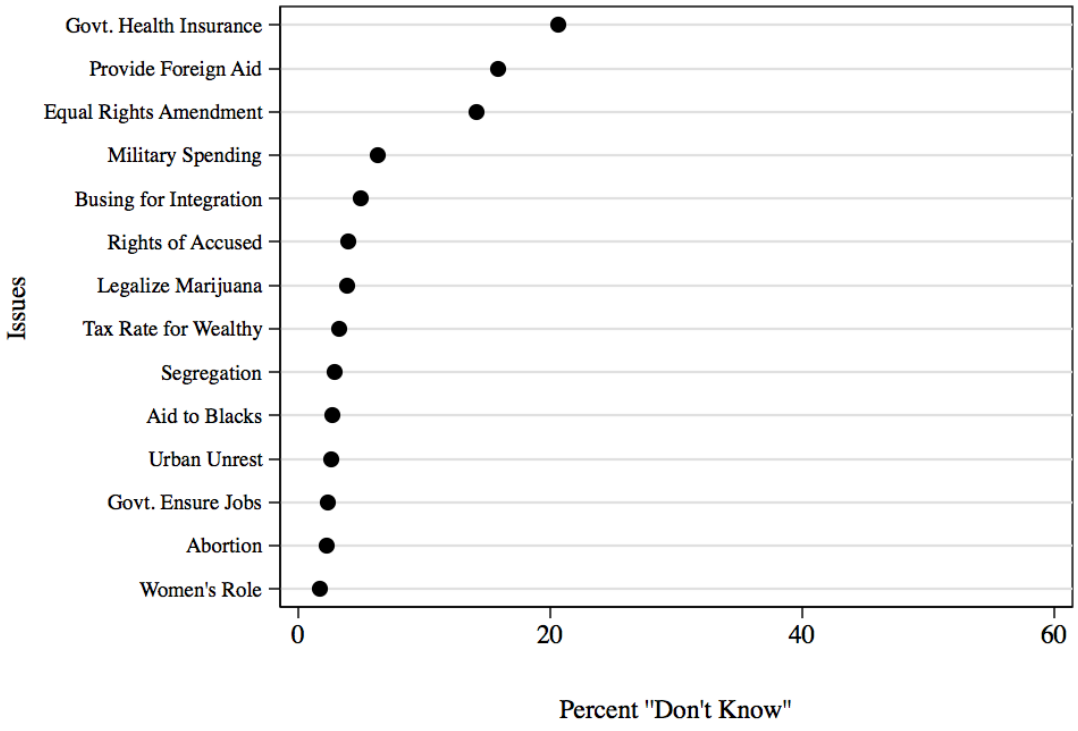


Figure 3.15: "Don't Know" Responses in the 1976 NES

Chapter 4

Framing Hard Issues as Easy?

In "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," Carmines and Stimson (1980) argue that desegregation could have been hard instead of easy, and Vietnam withdrawal could have been easy instead of hard, "if the issues had evolved that way in the political system *and if voters saw them that way.* All issues have intrinsically simple and complex facets; which particular facets predominate at a given time is an empirical question" (81) (emphasis in original). Many scholars since this time, though, have treated the easiness or hardness of an issue as a static characteristic. Issues of foreign policy or the economy have been labeled as "hard" issues because they are complex issues involving places far from home, political and economic systems with dozens of components and complicated concepts, or other problems that do not reach people in their daily lives. Issues like abortion and gay marriage, on the other hand, have been designated as "easy" issues because they involve a gut-level reaction to readily identifiable groups or disputes. However, there is reason to believe that an issue's easiness or hardness depends upon the political environment in which

it exists. In this chapter I explore the notion of malleable easiness using survey framing experiments. I find that even "hard" issues can be made easier through the use of frames, but this transformation depends upon the nature of the frames and the sophistication and values of the respondents.

The understanding that some issues are inherently, automatically "easy" is theoretically and conceptually suspect. Although it is intuitively appealing that some issues will be intrinsically easy for people because they deal with life and death, or readily identifiable groups or values, there are reasons to question the validity of this argument. First, we see that issue easiness is clearly dependent upon a society's understanding of the issue. Which issues are important at all is determined by the society's interests and focus. For example, abortion is hotly debated in the United States, but in other countries around the world, it is not really an issue. Abortions are accepted in some societies as a means of population control and it is considered a medical procedure. There are no special abortion clinics or protestors at facilities that perform abortions. Although abortion is so controversial in the U.S., it is not so emotional everywhere in the world (as is discussed in chapter 5). Second, issue easiness can change over time for an issue. As Carmines and Stimson themselves argue, the length of time on the agenda can matter for the easiness of an issue. An issue may be hard to understand when it first comes about, but it gets easier as it is discussed in political discourse and frames are developed and repeated. An issue that starts out hard does not have to remain that way forever, also casting doubt on the concept of inherent easiness. We see evidence of this in previous chapters. These characteristics of issues, though, are not readily changeable. The length of

time on the political agenda or the cultural importance of an issue cannot be altered in a short period of time (it would probably take a decade or more) and cannot be manipulated in a laboratory setting. It is not possible to get at these characteristics via experiments.

However, the way an issue is framed can have implications for whether people understand the issue, and can be manipulated in a laboratory setting, allowing a more causal analysis of the sources of easiness. Issues that are framed in an easy way can be easy for voters, even if the issues are hard by traditional standards.[1] Non-salient issues that have many additional considerations or concepts involved in them can be made easier for people when they are given an "easy" frame that emphasizes groups associated with a policy to give the abstract ideas a more concrete basis for how it effects the person's life.

4.1 The Search for Framing Effects

There is a vast literature on framing and framing effects in political science. Scholars have recognized that framing is a critical part of our system as "in a democracy, where political accomplishment so often depends on mobilizing public support, the transmission of persuasive appeals never stops" (Nelson 1999, 1040). Studies have analyzed the impact of frame sources (whether the source seems credible or not), the people most responsive to frames (politically aware or partisan individu-

[1]See Leege (2002) et al. and Cobb and Kuklinski (1997) for discussions of easy or emotional arguments

als versus others), potential limitations on framing, and the psychological process behind framing effects. In a few decades, researchers amassed a large body of literature on framing that shows "a rare degree of agreement with respect to both causal reasoning and empirical results. How citizens think about a public issue, it is now widely if not universally agreed, depends on how it is framed" (Sniderman and Theriault 2004, 135).

Framing "refers to the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality" (Entman 2004, 26). Frames help us, as a society, decide what something is even about. Through the use of framing, "communicators seek to establish a dominant definition or construction of an issue. In a way, issue framing is issue categorization: a declaration of what a policy dispute is really all about, and what it has nothing to do with" (Nelson 1999, 1059). Issue frames provide "alternative definitions, constructions, or depictions of a policy problem" (Nelson 1999, 1041).

In a traditional sense, framing effects occur when "logically equivalent (but not *transparently* equivalent) statements of a problem lead decision makers to choose different options" (Rabin 1998). An example of this when patients are given the option to have surgery and more people choose surgery when they are told that 95 out of 100 patients survive than when they are told that 5 out of 100 patients die. These are equivalent statements and provide identical information, but the way the information is presented changes the percentage of patients who choose surgery (Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Political science scholars generally are

more open in their definition of framing effects and include "when, in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker's emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions" (Druckman 2001).

The literature discusses framing effects in several ways, distinguishing cuing, priming, and persuasion. These effects are grouped in two general categories—changing overall opinions or changing the considerations that are relevant. There is a distinction between belief content and belief importance in the literature (Druckman 2001). Altering belief content is persuasion—it "takes place when a communicator effectively revises the content of one's beliefs about the attitude object, replacing or supplementing favorable thoughts with unfavorable ones, or vice versa" (Nelson 1999, 1040-1041). Framing, though, does not have to persuade to be effective. Framing also "can influence attitudes without altering the content of one's beliefs about the attitude object" (Nelson 1999, 1041) through priming certain considerations. Rather than actually changing someone's mind, certain predispositions or beliefs can be primed (brought to the "top-of-the-head," as Zaller describes it) and be made relevant for the issue at hand.

This distinction may be best illustrated by an example. The healthcare reform bill of 2010 generated much attention in the media and public discussion. Proponents and opponents of the bill both worked to move people to their side of the debate. A persuasive message would convince people who like the bill or are neutral on the bill to dislike it, possibly by telling them that it will be bad for them or their family. This brute-force persuasion seems unlikely. Instead, people who are already

inclined to dislike the bill will probably hear and repeat these cues because they agree with them. On the other hand, people could change their minds because they come to view the healthcare bill as something more than healthcare reform. Instead, if abortion is made salient (as it was), the bill is no longer about healthcare reform, but about whether government funds should be used to perform abortions. If tax policy is cued, the bill becomes about whether people want to pay taxes on their employer-supplied health insurance and the amount of taxes paid. Rather than persuading people that their opinion is wrong, these frames work through changing what the issue is about. Even if someone wants healthcare reform, they may oppose the bill because they view it as an abortion issue, for example.

My survey experiments are designed to affect attitudes through changing the relevant considerations rather than persuading people to change their minds. The frames are intended to make particular groups, emotions, or values salient by changing what the issue is about. Limits on foreign imports is about groups and jobs in the emotional frame and about tariffs and customs standards in the technical frame. The frames are two-sided and intended to bring up new considerations, rather than to persuade.

Although framing effects of multiple types have widely been recognized, not all people are equally susceptible to frames. Some scholars have found that people with low levels of political knowledge are most susceptible to frames because they have fewer opinions (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2002). Other scholars argue that framing should be more effective among more knowledgeable people because they are more likely to hear the frames and then connect them with their overall opinions (Nelson,

Clawson and Oxley 1997). For people who have more political knowledge already, they can make better use of the new information. The more sophisticated people are faster and more efficient at interpreting the information and storing it in memory (Krosnick and Brannon 1993). However, for my frames, there is no intermediate step requiring people to be attentive to politics in order to hear the frames. By virtue of answering the question people were exposed to the frames. Based on this, and my understanding of easy issues, I expect that people who are more sophisticated will be able to use both frames (emotional or technical) to shape their opinions on the "hard" issues (limiting foreign imports, U.S. participation in the ICC, and reinstitution of the gold standard), whereas those who are less sophisticated will only be able to use the emotional frames.

4.2 Creating "Easy" Arguments

As has been previously discussed in the preceding chapters, there are two interpretations of "easy" issues in the literature. Some argue for intrinsic easiness while others argue there is nothing inherent about specific issue content that leads to emotional reactions, but a style of framing or argumentation that determines how people understand issues. Some argue that it is the policy content of social issues like abortion, gay marriage, and prayer in schools that makes them visceral for the public, while others believe framing matters. Carmines and Stimson leave room for multiple interpretations. Although desegregation is easy in 1972 by their judgement, and Vietnam withdrawal hard, they allow the possibility that the easiness or hardness

of these issues could have been reversed if the issues evolved that way and people understood them that way. However, the specific process by which the easiness of these issues could have been reversed remains amorphous. Is it really possible that a switch could have flipped leading desegregation to be a hard issue? What would have to happen in order for desegregation to become hard to people? Are all issues equally subject to this fungibility? Although inherent easiness seems unlikely, the possibility that framing could make an issue like desegregation or abortion hard is also questionable.

The question then becomes, what frames turn abstract, technical, and "hard" issues into easier ones that people can express attitudes on? Based on the existing literature, I argue that three types of content can make issues easier: group-based attachments, core values, and, often stemming from these, emotion-laden arguments. All three of these are used to frame the issues for this experiment, as can be seen from the question wording in the appendix. I argue for these three based on the previous heuristics literature.

Over the years, scholars have identified many voter heuristics and shortcuts, including political party identification (Campbell et al. 1960, Downs 1957), using demographic or personal characteristics of candidates to infer their policy preferences (Popkin 1991), or the likability of certain groups to extrapolate their policy positions (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991, Brady and Sniderman 1985). Some heuristics still require a good bit of attention to politics. Inherently political heuristics (attachments that are formed specifically for politics) like party identification or ideology are only used by those who are more attentive to politics. Therefore, they

cannot be the basis for "easy" arguments or issues because they will only be used by more sophisticated voters whose attitudes are constrained by an ideology or who follow politics closely enough to hear the partisan messages. Core values, on the other hand, such as egalitarianism and patriotism, are apolitical in the sense that they are often formed and applied in other areas of people's lives. They carry meaning for people outside of political discourse. Core values "reflect abstract, prescriptive beliefs about humanity, society, and public affairs" (Goren 2005, 881). They are developed when people are young, are relatively stable and immune to short-term political forces, and can be used by all people, regardless of political sophistication (Goren 2004, 2001).

Group-based attachments also can be used by all people, even the politically unaware, since people tend to think about life in terms of "us" and "them" (Kinder and Kam 2009). This group-based approach to understanding public opinion focuses on how voters use feelings toward certain groups to shape their attitudes toward policies (Gilens 2000, Nelson and Kinder 1996, Kam and Kinder 2007). Voters are most likely to do this when they are less sophisticated and do not have much information available. They will substitute group affect for policy debate to form their political attitudes. For example, attitudes regarding the legality of gay marriage may be based on one's feelings toward homosexuals, or attitudes about welfare spending may be shaped by feelings toward welfare recipients. Feelings toward social groups can be a means for formulating policy preferences.

4.3 Selecting "Hard" Issues

I selected three "hard" issues for the experiments: limiting foreign imports, U.S. participation in the International Criminal Court, and reinstitution of the gold standard. These issues were picked for two reasons. First, these issues deal with foreign policy and the economy, the two issue domains most commonly labeled "hard." Second, none of these issues have been prominent on the political agenda recently, yet all three are potentially important political issues. This allows the frames to be particularly effective in shaping people's opinions because if the issues were being currently discussed in the media, people would already have frames in mind when hearing about the issue, and my frames might have less impact. These issues, though, could be potentially important political issues, as history shows us; the issues are not trivial or esoteric.

Limiting Foreign Imports Limiting foreign imports has received the most recent attention of the three issues. In the early 1990's the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) debate focused attention on the issues of free trade. The idea for opening trade among the North American countries began with President Reagan in the early 1980's. It was debated and shuffled around for a decade, and NAFTA was finally signed into law by President Clinton and took effect on January 1, 1994. The goal was to remove trade barriers between the United States and Canada and Mexico. Some trade tariffs were eliminated immediately and others were staggered over 15 years, with all provisions finally taking full effect in 2008. Supporters argue that removing the barriers led to a growth in the U.S. economy. According the the

government, agricultural exports to Mexico were declining in the years just before NAFTA, but after the policy was implemented, U.S. agricultural exports to our two NAFTA partners have grown considerably (USDA 2008). Labor unions and blue collar workers fought against opening free trade to Mexico and Canada, though, arguing NAFTA destroys U.S. jobs and gives them to lower paid Mexican laborers, or that NAFTA has not been that effective because jobs are leaving the U.S. for China (Ford 2008). This issue deals with complex matters of both foreign policy and the economy, but has had readily identifiable groups associated with it in the past few decades, making it a good issue for experimenting whether the right frame could make this issue seem easy. Limiting foreign imports was also selected as an issue in part because of the high levels of item non-response in the NES, as we saw in chapter 3. The non-response rate was 51 % for limiting foreign imports on the 2008 NES, much higher than any other issue.

Gold Standard From 1879-1934, the gold standard was the international monetary system (with the exception of World War I). Under this system, the value of money is tied to gold (McConnell and Brue 1990, 810). Proponents of this system argue that the gold standard leads to market stability because it prevents governments from "manufacturing" money and therefore pumping too much money into the economy (McConnell and Brue 1990, 342-343). Others argue, however, that the market is inherently volatile and the gold standard prevents the government from correcting the market and smoothing out fluctuations (McConnell and Brue 1990, 343). The U.S. no longer operates on the gold standard and instead uses the floating rates, or "managed floating exchange rates" system (McConnell and Brue

1990, 810). The transition of our monetary system over time has been the source of great debate, and the gold standard has also been an issue at several points during our nation's history.

The U.S. fell on tough economic times during the mid to late 1800's, and the government demonetized silver in 1873, by an act that was virtually unopposed (Sundquist 1983, 113). Based on continued economic struggles, though, the currency debate remained hotly contested across the country. The parties were internally divided over this issue at first. President Cleveland preferred gold but factions of the Democratic Party were silverites, and pushed the party in this direction. The issue of whether to use silver for money, although a complicated economic issue, became defined by two sides.

> "Representative Samuel W.T. Lanham of Texas saw the issue as one between 'the monetary centers, the national banks, the owners of fixed incomes, the syndicators of wealth, the possessors of gold, almost every organized association of capital,' the 'money kings,' the 'bondholders and plutocrats,' on the one side, and 'men of small means and limited transactions ... debtors ... laborers ... the varied and multiple sons of toil ... those who eat bread by the sweat of their brows,' on the other" (Sundquist 1983, 127).

Further articulated in William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold speech," he argued that the opponents of the gold standard would persevere through

> "having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world,

> supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon this cross of gold" (Boller 2004, 168).

Due to this divide between laborers and bankers, the new frontier and the south versus the east, this fiscal issue was key to the 1896 presidential election that led to a partisan realignment.[2]

International Criminal Court The idea of an international court first stemmed from the Nuremberg Tribunal. After World War II, the allied countries sought to punish leaders of Nazi Germany for war crimes through the International Military Tribunal. In 1945, the allied countries of France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, and the United States formed a tribunal to try the leaders for crimes against humanity and aggressive war (LOC N.d.).

After the Nuremberg trials concluded, several drafts for the International Criminal Court (ICC) statutes were circulated in the late 1940's and 1950's, but no consensus was reached (ICC 2009). In the late 1980's and early 1990's, work began again by the United Nations (UN) to form an international court. In 1998 it was finally established. According to the Rome Statute, the treaty providing the court with its authority, the court has "power to exercise its jurisdiction over persons for the most serious crimes of international concern" including crimes of

[2]This issue came up again during the Nixon administration when he removed the U.S. from the gold standard under which dollars were convertible for gold.

genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crimes of aggression (ICC 2002). Although more than 100 countries (including the United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland, and many other western countries) have signed the Rome Statute, the United States has not. This issue has not received widespread attention in recent years in the U.S., despite international attention to the court over the last decade.

All three of these issues are "hard" because they are not currently on the political agenda and deal with complex matters of foreign policy and the economy. On the other hand, history has shown that these issues do not necessarily have to be this way. At times, these issues can be highly symbolic and structured by group affect or core values. For these reasons, I chose them for my framing experiments. These issues are so non-salient and complex that they are an especially rigorous test of whether framing can make technical issues "easy."

4.4 Experiments in Hard Issue Framing

My framing experiments were conducted as part of the 2009 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES).[3] They were administered as part of an online survey by Polimetrix to 1,000 respondents. Respondents were asked a variety of questions about other topics as well (including health care and economic stimulus proposals), and basic demographic and political questions relating to their party identification, income, etc. For my experiments, respondents were randomly as-

[3]These experiments were conducted as part of a multi-university module with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

signed to one of three conditions[4]: the control group that received only basic information about the issue but no cues for who supported the policy or why; an emotional cue that provided the same content as the control group but additionally argued how it affects certain groups and real-world reasons for why people support or oppose it (emotional or personal approach); and a technical cue that provided the same content as the control group but argued for more abstract, technical reasons why people support or oppose the policy. The specific question wording appears in the appendix.

The base cues for all three issues say that some people favor and others oppose and ask respondents what they think, or whether they "don't know or haven't thought much about it." For limiting foreign imports, this is the only information provided in the control frame. For the ICC and gold standard questions, because respondents may never have heard of these issues, they get an additional sentence about what it means. For the ICC, they are told that "the International Criminal Court is a court established to help prosecute crimes that concern the international community" and for the gold standard they are told that "currently the value of U.S. dollars adjusts based on supply and demand." This base information is repeated for both the emotional and technical treatments as well. This background material was designed to orient the respondent to the issue in question without cuing any

[4]In order to ensure the randomization worked, I conducted Tukey Honestly Significant in Difference Tests for party identification, ideology, age, education, income, gender, and race. The control and treatment groups are not statistically significantly different from each other, so randomization is achieved.

hot-button terms like "genocide," etc. that could influence their opinions.

For the emotional frames, groups were associated with the policies. The cue indicated how hard-working Americans, small businessmen, women and children, or soldiers might be affected by the policy decision. The consequences were also made explicit in ways that were intended to resonate with the emotions or personal lives of the respondents. The policies were discussed in terms of rising prices, job losses, crimes against women and children, or U.S. soldiers being tried by foreigners. The technical frames, conversely, discussed tariff rates and customs standards, establishing a standard of global behavior, currency stability and market losses, or exchange rates. These frames emphasize the challenging aspects of establishing new guidelines on these issues. Both the technical and emotional frames are longer than the base cue; however, they were kept to approximately the same number of words to ensure that one cue was not harder simply because of respondent fatigue in reading a long question. Additionally, both the emotional and technical frames discuss what will happen as a result of the policy outcome. Carmines and Stimson argue that easier issues deal with policy ends rather than policy means. Designing frames for a laboratory setting in which one discusses policy ends and the other only mentions policy means is not possible, though, because the treatments would be wildly different. It would be comparing apples to oranges so any effects could be due to any number of differences between the two treatments, like the length, style, etc.

Throughout this chapter, there are two primary variables of interest—the experimental treatments, and sophistication. Although I use experiments to isolate the effects of issue framing, the basic idea that people's answers will differ based

on level of political knowledge is still important. Political sophistication is measured as a combination of educational attainment and factual political knowledge. Education is measured by four categories ranging from 0 to 1—high school or less, some college and 2-year degree, 4-year degree, and post-graduate education. The factual knowledge questions include whether people correctly identified which party had the majority in the House of Representatives prior to the election, which party had the majority in the Senate prior to the election, that the Democratic Party is more liberal than the Republican Party, the party affiliation of the Senators in the respondent's state, and the party affiliation of the Governor of the respondent's state. The number of correct responses were added together and the total was divided by the total number of questions to create an average knowledge measure. I took the row mean of the factual knowledge questions and education level, then computed level of sophistication by counting the lowest third of respondents as low sophistication, the middle third as medium sophistication, and the top third as high sophistication.[5]

[5]I looked at several possible measures for sophistication including just factual knowledge questions without education and different combinations of factual knowledge questions. The results are generally the same, so I used the most inclusive measure with as many variables as possible for the analyses.

4.5 Item Non-response Based on Frames

As I argue in chapter 3, one of the most basic tests for easy issues is simply whether the respondents were able to provide a valid response to the question or said that they "didn't know or hadn't thought much about it." This is a fundamental test because it indicates whether people have even enough understanding of the issue to say whether they think it is a good idea or not. If an issue really is easy, then the first hurdle should be that people can provide a valid response when asked about the issue.[6] Therefore, I expect that the emotional frame will be easier and will exhibit lower levels of item non-response as compared to the base or technical frames.

Table 4.1 shows the basic distribution of attitudes on the three issues across the three frame types. The frames are two-sided and intended to provide persuasive reasons to both support or oppose the bill. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the distribution of opinions across the three frames is mostly consistent. For limiting foreign imports, there is no real substantive differences in the distribution of favor or oppose responses. The fewest neutral responses do occur for the emotional cue, but the differences between the percentage of neutral responses between the emotional and technical cues is only 5%. For ICC participation, respondents are slightly more favorable toward U.S. participation in the ICC if they get the base cue versus either treatment. This seems to indicate that people support ICC participation in

[6]See Krosnick (1991) and chapter 3 for a discussion of the reasons why people give "don't know" responses.

the abstract, but once given information about what the costs and benefits are of participation, support decreases slightly. The effect, though, is not very big. Finally, with regards to reinstitution of the gold standard, people are slightly more opposing of the gold standard if they received the emotional cue. There is no real difference between the base and technical cues. The lowest neutral percentage occurs for the emotional cue. Overall, there are some deviations in the distribution of opinions by frame types, especially in terms of the percentage of neutral responses for the emotional cue, but the effect is not big, as expected.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Opinions on the Issues by Frame Type

		Strongly Favor	Favor	Neutral	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Total
	Base	19%	35%	23%	16%	7%	100%
Imports	Emotional	20	34	20	17	8	100
	Technical	19	34	25	14	8	100
	Base	18%	31%	17%	13%	21%	100%
ICC	Emotional	12	27	18	15	29	100
	Technical	15	25	15	14	31	100
	Base	20%	28%	26%	20%	7%	100%
Gold	Emotional	19	24	22	23	13	100
	Technical	21	30	24	18	7	100

Source: 2009 CCES.

The results of the item non-response analyses are presented in tables 4.2 and 4.3. As expected, table 4.2 shows, the lowest levels of item non-response for limiting foreign imports is for the emotional cue (16%) followed by the base cue (20%) and the highest non-response for the technical cue (29%). People have some sense of the issue and most can respond when given no information as in the base cue, but they are able to respond more when the cues prime groups and emotions for them. On the other hand, when the issue is discussed in a more technical, policy way, people are less able to respond to the issue.

Table 4.2: Percentage Item Non-response by Frame

	Base	**Emotional**	**Technical**
Imports	20%	16%	29%
ICC	33%	32%	26%
Gold	40%	41%	38%

Source: 2009 CCES.

The story is not as clear for the other two issues, however. For ICC participation and reinstitution of the gold standard, the lowest levels of non-response actually occur for the technical frame. Although the differences in "don't know" percentages across treatments are smaller for these two issues than for limiting foreign imports (there is a 13 point gap for imports between the emotional and technical cues as compared to 6 points for ICC and only 3 points for gold standard), the emotional frames do not have the expected effect. For reinstitution of the gold standard, the emotional frame actually has the highest non-response rate, and for ICC it is only

1 percentage point lower than the base cue.

In line with Carmines' and Stimson's original idea of easy and hard issues, it is important to test whether these framing effects work equally for all respondents, or whether political sophistication conditions the effects of the frames. Table 4.3 shows the percentage of "don't know" answers by treatment and sophistication level. For limiting foreign imports, for all levels of sophistication, the technical frame generates the highest non-response while the emotional frame generates the lowest non-response. The effect is most pronounced for the highest sophistication respondents, dropping 19 percentage points when receiving the emotional frame versus the technical frame. For the middle sophistication group, it is a 15 percentage point decrease in non-response, and 10 percentage points for the low sophistication group. The emotional frame is easier for all levels of sophistication, but for the lowest sophistication group, the emotional frame is not really any better than just receiving the base cue. The emotional frame provides little extra help for the low sophisticates, whereas it stimulates a much higher percentage of valid responses as sophistication increases. The technical frame is clearly the hardest by this test, with the non-response jumping for all three levels of sophistication.

Again, though, the findings do not match expectations for the ICC or gold standard questions. The level of item non-response for each group is larger overall than the non-response for limiting foreign imports, indicating that ICC is harder than imports. For ICC, though, the highest "don't know" percentages occur for the base or emotional cues; the technical frame is always the lowest. Instead of the technical frame making it harder for people to answer, it actually makes it easier

Table 4.3: Percentage Item Non-response by Frame and Sophistication

		Base	Emotional	Technical
Imports	Low	25%	24%	34%
	Medium	20	12	27
	High	14	8	27
ICC	Low	47%	45%	40%
	Medium	25	29	21
	High	20	20	15
Gold	Low	51%	48%	41%
	Medium	38	36	46
	High	27	36	26

Source: 2009 CCES.

for people, regardless of their sophistication, as compared to the base or emotional treatments. Yet although the lowest item non-response occurs for the technical frame, there is still a clear conditioning effect of sophistication. The more highly sophisticated have lower item non-response than the less sophisticated respondents, as expected.

The gold standard question has the highest non-response of the three issues for each group. More than 50% of the low sophistication people who received the base cue said that they "don't know/hadn't thought much about it." The non-response by treatment, though, is all over the map. For the low sophistication people, the base category yielded the highest non-response. For the middle group, the technical

cue created the most non-response. For the high sophistication people, the emotional cue actually generated the highest level of non-response. The emotional cue was particularly hard for the high sophistication respondents, which is unexpected. These people, who did the best for imports when receiving the emotional cue, actually are more ambivalent on whether or not to bring back the gold standard. The conditioning effect of sophistication again holds, though, with the high sophistication people better able to respond to the question under any frame than those who are less sophisticated.

Overall, the item non-response test follows expectations with regards to the imports question both in relation to the expected sophistication and frame effects—when people receive the emotional cue they are more likely to give a valid response as compared to when they receive the technical cue, and people who are more sophisticated are more likely to give a valid response regardless of frame as compared to less sophisticated people. For ICC participation, though, the technical cue has the lowest item-nonresponse, possibly indicating that the emotional cue is not that easy. Although it is impossible to test the source of the hardness of the emotional cue given these data, it may show that emotional prompts will not *always* make politics easier for people. When there are two groups on opposing sides of the issue, but both groups are supported (such as women and children versus American soldiers), it can create more ambivalence because people cannot decide against one group or the other. Who wants American soldiers to be harmed or women and children to be slaughtered? Simply associating a policy with groups and putting an emotional spin on the issue may not be enough to make it easy when there is a clear value or

group trade-off. For reinstitution of the gold standard, the issue appears to stay just too hard regardless of the cue. Even among the highest sophistication group, more than one quarter of respondents fail to give a valid response regardless of the cue. This could indicate that people have no clue what is going on when only given the base cue, and cannot reasonably respond, and that even when given the emotional cue, since popular groups are on both sides of the issues (hard-working Americans and farmers), it is not made any easier.

In order to probe this effect further, I look at whether membership in the most greatly affected group—labor unions—was driving these results. This may be important for determining who will give valid responses because this group attachment in particular may increase awareness about this issue. Labor unions have a vested interest in trade policy, and large labor unions, like the AFL-CIO, devote great attention to this issue. On their website they have a whole section regarding the global economy in which they present data and talking points on trade agreements, the U.S. trade deficit, and more. In the case of labor unions, the frames may not only be cuing feelings toward a particular group in society, but cuing people to think of their own lives.[7] To look at this relationship I used cross tabulation between union

[7]Possibly being a small business owner or CEO could be an additional group membership that would drive people to feel themselves as directly effected by this policy, but there are not enough of them in the sample to test this. There are enough labor union members, however, which is the group commonly associated with the negative effects of increasing the flow of foreign goods into the U.S. Additionally, there are no questions of group membership that are pertinent to ICC participation or reinstitution of the gold standard, so this analysis cannot be completed for those issues

membership and non-response based on frame type, and a χ^2 test of association to determine whether they are statistically significantly related to each other. The results are presented in tables 4.4-4.6.

Table 4.4: Percentage Item Non-response on Limiting Foreign Imports by Union Membership and Frame for Low Sophistication

		Non-Union	**Union Member**	
Base	Valid	71%	89%	75%
	DK	29	11	25
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = 4.54$, $p < .033$		
Emotional	Valid	75%	79%	76%
	DK	25	21	24
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .262$, $p < .609$		
Technical	Valid	63%	76%	66%
	DK	37	24	34
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = 1.36$, $p < .244$		

Source: 2009 CCES.

Union membership is only statistically significantly related to whether respondents provided a valid response for limiting foreign imports among the low sophistication group. For medium or high sophistication respondents, union membership has no statistically significant effects (although the relationship goes in the expected direction with union members providing more valid responses). For the low knowledge group, union members only had an 18% non-response rate as compared to 30% for non-union respondents. For the middle sophistication group this difference is smaller—17% for union members and 21% for non-union people. For the high sophistication group, there is little difference with union members having 14% non-response and non-union people with 18%.[8]

4.6 Looking at the Interaction of Sophistication, Frames, and Predispositions

In order to assess to what extent core values and group affect are actually being activated by the emotional cues, I ran a series of multinomial logit models.[9]

[8]I also looked as this relationship broken down by frame type. This relationship is true for the base condition (for the lowest sophistication group union membership is statistically significantly related to whether the respondents said they "don't know"), but not for the emotional or technical frames. For these other two frames, union membership is not statistically significant for any of the three levels of sophistication.

[9]I collapsed favor and strongly favor, and oppose and strongly oppose together. I ran many of the models using ordered logit with the full five-category dependent variable, and the results were basically the same. For simplicity of presenting the results, therefore, I use multinomial logit so

Table 4.5: Percentage Item Non-response on Limiting Foreign Imports by Union Membership and Frame for Medium Sophistication

		Non-Union	**Union Member**	
Base	Valid	80%	81%	80%
	DK	20	19	20
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .022$, $p < .882$		
Emotional	Valid	85%	95%	88%
	DK	15	5	12
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = 2.60$, $p < .107$		
Technical	Valid	73%	74%	73%
	DK	27	26	27
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .002$, $p < .960$		

Source: 2009 CCES.

In these models, the treatments (emotional or technical frames) are interacted with respondent level of sophistication and the relevant core value or group affect ques-

that I show three predicted probabilities.

Table 4.6: Percentage Item Non-response on Limiting Foreign Imports by Union Membership and Frame for High Sophistication

		Non-Union	Union Member	
Base	Valid	86%	86%	86%
	DK	14	14	14
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .010$, $p < .921$		
Emotional	Valid	91%	94%	92%
	DK	9	6	8
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .200$, $p < .655$		
Technical	Valid	72%	74%	72%
	DK	28	26	28
		100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = .038$, $p < .846$		

Source: 2009 CCES.

tion for each issue. This three-way interaction allows me to examine whether the frames affect people's attitudes on foreign imports, ICC participation, or the gold standard, and whether the affect of the frames is conditioned by the respondent's

level of sophistication and predispositions. I am extending the previous literature by looking at how attaching core values or predispositions to issue easiness is not homogenous with respect to frames. Low sophistication respondents will be triggered by emotional cues and use their core values to understand issues. For high sophistication people, however, they may understand which kinds of political groups support issues, and they are aware if their own predispositions, so they can rely on party identification or another "higher level" heuristic to make their determination. There is a nuance to the way that people will use predispositions—I expect that lower sophistication respondents will do better given the emotional frame, and better be able to use their values, whereas higher sophistication people may use another type of predisposition, such as party identification.

The multinomial logit results for patriotism are presented in the appendix.[10] To gauge the substantive significance of the results, I generated predicted probabilities that are presented in tables 4.7 and 4.8.[11]

As the predicted probabilities for limiting foreign imports show, for the least sophisticated group, patriotism does not really help people decide on limits on im-

[10]I do not discuss the coefficients because this is a fully interactive multinomial logit model. In the case of non-interactive ("normal") logit, only the statistical significance and sign can be interpreted anyway because the changes in the coefficients are changes in the log odds ratios. Since this model includes interaction terms, even the significance is useless (Ai and Norton 2003).

[11]The confidence intervals are not presented for the predicted probabilities because they always overlap. The confidence intervals are quite large and none of the differences are statistically significant, so they do not aid in understanding which results are significant. This is probably due to the small sample size for each category.

ports if they get the base cue.[12] For these people, there is a 50% chance of providing a neutral response and only a 49% chance of favoring limits on foreign imports, even though they are highly patriotic. Once the low sophistication respondents are given the emotional cue, however, the probability of favoring new limits on imports increases to 71%. Once the low sophistication people are given the technical cue, the probability of favoring limits further increases to 82%. Patriotism clearly relates to low sophistication respondents' attitudes on import limits when they are given frames for understanding the issue, and it does not actually matter whether the frame is specifically intended to bring about a more emotional response—either cue helps them connect their patriotism to their attitudes. For low sophisticated respondents that are not very patriotic, patriotism does not help them to form attitudes on imports, regardless of the cues provided. This result makes sense since I do not expect that a lack of patriotism (the absence of having some value) would influence attitudes on the issue.

Among the high sophistication respondents, patriotism does not seem to help them much in developing their attitudes. When a high sophistication, high patriotic person receives the base cue, they have a 52% chance of favoring limits on imports as compared to 38% of the same people who are low on patriotism. The effect of

[12]The low sophistication group is computed as the mean for the sophistication variable minus one standard deviation, and high sophistication is computed as the mean plus one standard deviation. Low and high patriotism are computed the same way—low patriotism is the mean value of the patriotism index minus one standard deviation and high patriotism is the mean value plus one standard deviation.

patriotism on attitudes on imports actually decreases for the high sophistication people when they are given the emotional or technical cues. For the emotional or technical cues, the probability of a high sophistication, highly patriotic person favoring limits on imports is only 44%. High sophistication do not attach their patriotism to their attitudes on imports, and when cued in ways that might seemingly heighten the influence of their patriotism, the cues actually dampen any real effect of patriotism. For the low sophistication people, though, patriotism matters a lot for their attitudes on imports when they are cued for it to matter.

The results for ICC show basically the opposite effect based on sophistication. For ICC participation, the highly sophisticated respondents connect their patriotism pretty clearly to their attitudes. If a person is high sophistication, low patriotism and received the base cue, they have a 72% chance of favoring ICC participation. If the same group is highly patriotic, they have an 87% chance of opposing participation in the ICC. Although the cues dampen this effect slightly (for example, if a person received the emotional cue, the probability of opposing participation if a person is high sophistication and highly patriotic drops to 78% and favoring participation if low patriotism drops to 82%), the relationship between patriotism and attitudes on ICC participation is clear and in the expected direction. It is interesting to reflect, though, that the cues do not really help the high sophistication respondents realize the connection between patriotism and ICC participation—even in the base cue the relationship is there.

Table 4.7: Predicted Probabilities for Multinomial Logit Model for Limiting Foreign Imports by Treatments, Sophistication, and Patriotism

		Low Sophistication		**High Sophistication**	
		Low Patriotism	High Patriotism	Low Patriotism	High Patriotism
Base	Favor	54%	49%	38%	52%
	Neutral	27	50	27	10
	Oppose	19	0.5	36	38
Emotional	Favor	37%	71%	46%	44%
	Neutral	39	27	21	17
	Oppose	24	2	32	38
Technical	Favor	49%	82%	37%	44%
	Neutral	36	12	17	24
	Oppose	15	7	46	32

Source: 2009 CCES.

Low sophistication is computed as one standard deviation below the mean value of sophistication. High sophistication is computed as one standard deviation above the mean value of sophistication. The same is true for patriotism–low patriotism is one standard deviation below the mean value of patriotism and high patriotism is one standard deviation about the mean value of patriotism.

Table 4.8: Predicted Probabilities for Multinomial Logit Model for ICC Participation by Treatments, Sophistication, and Patriotism

		Low Sophistication		**High Sophistication**	
		Low Patriotism	High Patriotism	Low Patriotism	High Patriotism
Base	Favor	54%	86%	72%	8%
	Neutral	31	11	10	6
	Oppose	14	3	18	87
Emotional	Favor	45%	32%	63%	14%
	Neutral	31	31	11	9
	Oppose	24	37	26	78
Technical	Favor	56%	27%	64%	12%
	Neutral	17	32	10	6
	Oppose	28	41	27	82

Source: 2009 CCES.

Low sophistication is computed as one standard deviation below the mean value of sophistication. High sophistication is computed as one standard deviation above the mean value of sophistication. The same is true for patriotism–low patriotism is one standard deviation below the mean value of patriotism and high patriotism is one standard deviation about the mean value of patriotism.

The relationship between low sophistication respondents' attitudes on ICC participation and patriotism is less clear. When low sophistication respondents receive the base cue, they have a higher probability of favoring ICC participation whether they are low or high on patriotism. Regardless of their patriotism, they want to participate in the ICC. There is some small cue movement, though, for the low sophistication group. Once they get the emotional cue, the low patriotism people favor ICC participation at 45% as compared to the high patriotism people who only have a 32% probability of favoring participation. The technical cue is even better with a 56% chance of low sophistication, low patriotism people favoring participation as compared to only 27% of highly patriotic people favoring participation. The relationship is going in the right direction, but, the effect of patriotism is not as big as for high sophistication respondents. On the other hand, the cues do help the low sophistication respondents some (even though it does not make the connection between patriotism and ICC participation attitudes anywhere near that of the high sophistication people), whereas for the high sophistication group, the cues do not matter. The high sophistication respondents know to connect their patriotism to their ICC attitudes regardless of the cues.

Table 4.9: Predicted Probabilities for Multinomial Logit Model for Limiting Foreign Imports by Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship

		Low Sophistication		**High Sophistication**	
		Strong Democrat	Strong Republican	Strong Democrat	Strong Republican
Base	Favor	55%	77%	38%	48%
	Neutral	32	5	28	42
	Oppose	14	18	34	10
Emotional	Favor	69%	69%	51%	28%
	Neutral	5	15	28	54
	Oppose	26	17	21	18
Technical	Favor	58%	61%	55%	40%
	Neutral	10	7	25	43
	Oppose	32	33	21	17

Source: 2009 CCES.

Low sophistication is computed as one standard deviation below the mean value of sophistication. High sophistication is computed as one standard deviation above the mean value of sophistication.

Table 4.10: Predicted Probabilities for Multinomial Logit Model for ICC Participation by Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship

		Low Sophistication		**High Sophistication**	
		Strong Democrat	Strong Republican	Strong Democrat	Strong Republican
Base	Favor	61%	49%	91%	3%
	Neutral	33	20	6	5
	Oppose	6	31	3	92
Emotional	Favor	48%	22%	76%	4%
	Neutral	34	18	14	3
	Oppose	18	60	9	92
Technical	Favor	41%	26%	85%	6%
	Neutral	38	12	7	6
	Oppose	21	63	9	89

Source: 2009 CCES.

Low sophistication is computed as one standard deviation below the mean value of sophistication. High sophistication is computed as one standard deviation above the mean value of sophistication.

Now, turning to partisanship, the "unmoved mover," I examine whether partisanship influences people's issue positions, even though there is nothing specifically partisan in the frame. Possibly more sophisticated respondents are able to use the partisanship to understand the issues by inferring which groups or values line up with which party. Especially because there is nothing explicitly partisan in the frames, I expect that low sophistication respondents will not use their partisanship to understand these issues, while high sophistication respondents may be able to do so. The party identification predicted probabilities are presented in tables 4.9-4.11 (the multinomial logit results are found in the appendix in tables 4.14-4.16).

In table 4.9, we see that a majority of low sophistication respondents always want to limit foreign imports, regardless of treatment or partisanship. The emotional cue, rather than dividing these people, actually makes people from both parties equal in their probability of favoring new limits on imports. Based on my understanding of how each party should feel about limits on foreign imports (Clinton excluded, but groups associated with the Democratic Party, such as labor unions), I expect that the Democrats would in fact favor new limits. The low sophistication Democrats appear to pick up on this. However, the low sophistication Republicans do not pick up on their party's cues for this issue. In fairness to the Republicans here, these cues do not explicitly cue partisanship, so they will not necessarily grab onto it based on these cues. The low sophistication Democrats, though, do. Surprisingly, though, the high sophistication Democrats do not attach their partisanship to this issue as clearly as the low sophistication Democrats. When given the emotional or technical cues, high sophistication Democrats increase their support for limits on imports.

However, their support for limits is lower than the low sophistication Democrats for each cue (55% compared to 58% for the technical cue, 51% compared to 69% for the emotional cue, and 38% compared to 55% for the base cue). This issue appears to be more partisan for Democrats, but especially for the low sophistication Democrats.

For ICC participation, as we see in table 4.10, the effect of partisanship is huge, particularly for the high sophistication respondents. Somehow, people are able to connect their partisanship to their attitudes on ICC participation intuitively, even though there are no partisan frames given explicitly and this issue has not been framed recently (if ever) by the parties. Among the high sophistication people, Democrats overwhelmingly support ICC participation and Republicans overwhelmingly oppose, regardless of treatment. For the high sophisticates, the treatment does not really matter at all. For low sophisticates, the treatments do not allow them to be as polarized as the high sophisticates, but the pattern follows the same general direction as the high sophisticates for the emotional or technical cues. It is interesting to note, though, that low sophistication Democrats seem to understand this issue best when given the base cue, and the fall off in their support for ICC participation when given either cue, whereas low sophistication Republicans are more mixed given the base cue, and then become more opposing of ICC participation under either treatment. I cannot test why this is true, but my best conjecture is that this is because of the groups and rationales associated with the frames. In the current pro-American, pro-soldier climate (hate the wars, love the soldiers), Democrats like the sound of supporting ICC participation. However, when they have to choose against American sovereignty, or against our men and women

in uniform, it becomes harder for them to be so resolute in their beliefs about ICC participation. For Republicans, although they probably do not want genocide or the murders of women and children either, they are not cross-pressured in the same way that Democrats are. These rationales are just not as salient to them in the U.S. context as supporting the troops.

Finally, in table 4.11, we see that Republican identification helps respondents understand whether the U.S. should reinstitute the gold standard, but Democrats (especially low sophistication ones) have a harder time with this issue. Highly sophisticated Democrats and Republicans are able to determine whether they favor or oppose this policy. Strong Democrats have a 53% chance of opposing reinstitution of the gold standard under the base cue while Strong Republicans have a 69% chance of favoring the gold standard. When given the emotional cue, Strong Democrats become even less supportive of the gold standard with a 62% chance of saying they oppose reinstitution of the gold standard. Strong Republicans, on the other hand, actually have their support for the gold standard dampened with a 57% chance of favoring the gold standard. Finally, highly sophisticated Republicans under the technical cue maintain a probability of supporting the gold standard of 66%. Democrats, though, are divided under the technical cue. This is even worse among the low sophistication Democrats. When given the technical cue, there is a 50% chance of a neutral response. Strong Republicans, however, even though they are low sophistication, have a 63-66% chance of favoring the gold standard, regardless of the frame.

Partisanship overall plays a big role in helping shape people's political attitudes. Although this sounds like a truly obvious statement, it is somewhat surprising in this context. These issues for the most part have not been cued by either one of the parties recently. Yet, people can still attach their party identification to these issues. This is especially surprising in the case of low sophistication respondents, who actually get the biggest boost of all for limiting foreign imports. Possibly this is because the groups or rationales associated with these policies serve as proxies for partisan cues (a la Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002)).

Table 4.11: Predicted Probabilities for Multinomial Logit Model for Reinstitution of the Gold Standard by Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship

		Low Sophistication		**High Sophistication**	
		Strong Democrat	Strong Republican	Strong Democrat	Strong Republican
Base	Favor	21%	66%	31%	69%
	Neutral	64	10	16	20
	Oppose	16	24	53	11
Emotional	Favor	36%	63%	23%	57%
	Neutral	34	25	15	14
	Oppose	31	12	62	29
Technical	Favor	32%	66%	40 %	66%
	Neutral	50	18	21	13
	Oppose	18	16	38	21

Source: 2009 CCES.

Low sophistication is computed as one standard deviation below the mean value of sophistication. High sophistication is computed as one standard deviation above the mean value of sophistication.

4.7 Easy Issues Are Easy Arguments

Throughout this chapter, I presented evidence from experiments designed to test whether "hard" issues that are not long on the political agenda or generally discussed in symbolic terms could be made easier through the use of "easy" frames. In the end, it seems that frames can move people on these issues. However, the results are not simply that all people can be moved by frames, or that group-based emotional frames will always be easier. The frames that were designed to be easy, that played on emotions, groups, and core values were not always easiest. In the case of ICC participation, the emotional cues ended up being harder for people, especially Democrats. Possibly, this is because two-sided cues that have compelling arguments on both sides can be hard, even if the content is designed to be emotional and intuitive. Simply attaching groups or values to an issue will not necessarily make the issue easier if the public supports people on both sides of the issue. In fact, this may lead to greater ambivalence among the public, which we see some evidence of here.

The emotional cues did not always help less sophisticated respondents as compared to the technical frames, either. In several cases, less sophisticated respondents were able to make use of both cues, even though the technical cue was designed to discuss the problems with a policy's implementation. In the case of limiting imports, less sophisticated respondents pretty consistently attached their values or partisanship to the issue given either the technical or emotional frame, while the highly sophisticated respondents failed to do so. Yet, the less sophisticated respondents

clearly had more trouble giving a valid answer to the questions than the highly sophisticated respondents. Possibly, less sophisticated respondents do care less and are more likely to give a response to technical issues, but when they do so, they do so with more fervor than their highly sophisticated counterparts. This may indicate that, although it is hard to engage these less sophisticated people, once they are drawn into the issue, they feel more strongly about it than more sophisticated people.

4.8 Appendix

4.8.1 Experimental Questions

Limiting Foreign Imports

- **Base:** Some people favor placing new limits on foreign imports. Other people oppose such limits. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports, or haven't you thought much about this?
- **Emotional:** Some people favor placing new limits on foreign imports because they worry that imported goods take jobs away from hard-working Americans. Other people oppose new limits because they worry that limiting free trade makes it harder for hard-working Americans to buy things at a fair price. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports, or haven't you thought much about this?
- **Technical:** Some people favor placing new limits on foreign imports because they believe there are currently problems with regulating tariff rates and customs standards. Other people oppose such limits because they believe that determining the quota and licensing for imports is difficult. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports, or haven't you thought much about this?

Participation in the ICC

- **Base:** The International Criminal Court is a court established to help prosecute crimes that concern the international community. Some people

favor U.S. cooperation with the International Criminal Court. Others oppose U.S. cooperation. Do you favor or oppose U.S. involvement, or haven't you thought much about this?

- **Emotional:** The International Criminal Court is a court established to help prosecute crimes that concern the international community. Some people favor U.S. cooperation with in the International Criminal Court because they are angry about mass murders or violent crimes against women and children. Others oppose U.S. cooperation because they are angry that American citizens and soldiers may be tried overseas by foreigners. Do you favor or oppose U.S. involvement, or haven't you thought much about this?
- **Technical:** The International Criminal Court is a court established to help prosecute crimes that concern the international community. Some people favor U.S. cooperation with the International Criminal Court because they believe stronger international courts will enforce a global standard of just behavior. Others oppose U.S. cooperation because they do not agree with the idea of the U.S. yielding its independence to an international body. Do you favor or oppose U.S. involvement, or haven't you thought much about this?

Reinstitution of the Gold Standard

- **Base:** Currently the value of U.S. dollars adjusts based on supply and demand. Some people favor returning to the gold standard where the

value of dollars is based on gold. Others oppose this switch and support the current floating currency system. Do you favor or oppose returning to the gold standard, or haven't you thought much about this?

- **Emotional:** Currently the value of U.S. dollars adjusts based on supply and demand. Some people favor returning to the gold standard where the value of dollars is based on gold because they are afraid that the current system may produce rising prices and leave hard-working Americans and small business people unable to pay their bills. Others oppose this switch and support the current floating currency system because they are afraid the switch may decrease the supply of money, leading to job losses for hard-working Americans and making it harder for farmers to get good prices for their crops. Do you favor or oppose returning to the gold standard, or haven't you thought much about this?
- **Technical:** Currently the value of U.S. dollars adjusts based on supply and demand. Some people favor returning to the gold standard where the value of dollars is based on gold because they believe that it increases currency stability and decreases market losses. Others oppose this switch and support the current floating currency system because they believe the gold standard increases the risk of exchange losses and price instability. Do you favor or oppose returning to the gold standard, or haven't you thought much about this?

Response Options

1. Strongly favor
2. Favor
3. Neutral
4. Oppose
5. Strongly oppose
7. Haven't thought much about this/don't know

4.8.2 Feeling Thermometers

We'd like to get your feelings toward some groups. Please rate the following groups on something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't care much for that group. Ratings of 50 mean that you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the group.

- Working-class people
- International governing bodies
- Farmers
- Military
- Foreigners
- Small business owners
- African-Americans

- Muslims

4.8.3 Patriotism

- How important is being American to you, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is the most important thing in your life? (Respondents answered by sliding a widget on a scale from 0 to 10.)

- How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement: "The world would be better if more people from other countries were like Americans." (Response options 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with "don't know/haven't thought much about this" offered as an answer).

- How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement: "People who do not wholeheartedly support America should live elsewhere." (Response options 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with "don't know/haven't thought much about this" offered as an answer).

4.8.4 Isolationism

- How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement: "This country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." (Response options 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with "don't know/haven't thought much about this" offered as an answer).

4.9 Appendix Tables

Table 4.12: Multinomial Logit for Treatments, Sophistication, and Patriotism on Attitudes on Limiting Foreign Imports

	Emotional vs. Base			**Technical vs. Base**		
	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose
Sophistication	-1.639	-1.065	0.574	-1.639	-1.065	0.574
	(1.342)	(1.584)	(1.501)	(1.342)	(1.584)	(1.501)
Treatment	-2.353	-3.223	-0.870	-2.449	0.00773	2.457
	(1.407)	(1.735)	(1.584)	(1.563)	(1.858)	(1.794)
Patriotism	-0.706	-5.865**	-5.159**	-0.706	-5.865**	-5.159**
	(1.410)	(2.106)	(1.962)	(1.410)	(2.106)	(1.962)
Sophistication X Treatment	4.197*	5.687*	1.490	4.109	0.523	-3.586
	(2.106)	(2.432)	(2.180)	(2.236)	(2.578)	(2.438)
Patriotism X Treatment	5.508*	7.372*	1.865	3.473	-1.211	-4.684
	(2.265)	(3.070)	(2.780)	(2.471)	(3.468)	(3.325)
Patriotism X Sophistication	3.671	9.365**	5.694*	3.671	9.365**	5.694*
	(2.257)	(3.006)	(2.731)	(2.257)	(3.006)	(2.731)
Patriotism X Treatment X Sophistication	-9.843**	-12.59**	-2.751	-6.689	-0.0622	6.626
	(3.539)	(4.381)	(3.875)	(3.770)	(4.851)	(4.484)
Constant	1.116	0.677	-0.439	1.116	0.677	-0.439
	(.917)	(1.149)	(1.068)	(1.22)	(1.149)	(1.068)
N		558			490	

Source: 2009 CCES. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4.13: Multinomial Logit for Treatments, Sophistication, and Patriotism on Attitudes on ICC Participation

	Emotional vs. Base			**Technical vs. Base**		
	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose
Sophistication	4.409*	1.589	-2.820	4.409*	1.589	-2.820
	(1.839)	(2.383)	(1.984)	(1.839)	(2.383)	(1.984)
Treatment	0.252	0.707	0.454	2.328	2.500	0.172
	(1.612)	(2.013)	(1.799)	(1.771)	(2.137)	(1.805)
Patriotism	1.762	-0.438	-2.200	1.762	-0.438	-2.200
	(1.912)	(2.484)	(2.214)	(1.912)	(2.484)	(2.214)
Sophistication X Treatment	-0.879	-0.181	0.699	-3.224	-2.237	0.987
	(2.592)	(3.154)	(2.629)	(2.691)	(3.240)	(2.597)
Patriotism X Treatment	-1.297	0.144	1.442	-4.395	-2.256	2.139
	(2.747)	(3.251)	(2.933)	(2.816)	(3.295)	(2.917)
Patriotism X Sophistication	-5.613	4.972	10.585**	-5.613	4.972	10.585**
	(3.378)	(4.099)	(3.476)	(3.378)	(4.099)	(3.476)
Patriotism X Treatment X Sophistication	2.400	-1.791	-4.191	6.267	1.551	-4.716
	(4.700)	(5.335)	(4.551)	(4.687)	(5.351)	(4.500)
Constant	-0.915	-1.649	-0.733	-0.915	-1.649	-0.733
	(1.312)	(1.530)	(1.358)	(1.312)	(1.530)	(1.358))
N		449			472	

Source: 2009 CCES. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4.14: Multinomial Logit for Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship on Attitudes on Limiting Foreign Imports

	Emotional vs. Base			**Technical vs. Base**		
	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose
Sophistication	-0.843	1.353	2.196	-0.843	1.353	2.196
	(1.039)	(1.319)	(1.229)	(1.039)	(1.319)	(1.229)
Treatment	0.221	-1.720	-1.941	-0.527	-0.802	-0.275
	(.989)	(1.508)	(1.386)	(1.037)	(1.505)	(1.385)
Partisanship	0.559	-1.704	-2.264	0.559	-1.704	-2.264
	(1.340)	(1.903)	(1.681)	(1.340)	(1.903)	(1.681)
Sophistication X Treatment	0.644	2.643	1.999	1.649	1.390	-0.260
	(1.551)	(2.101)	(1.910)	(1.653)	(2.179)	(1.962)
Partisanship X Treatment	0.499	3.771	3.272	-0.388	0.529	0.917
	(1.922)	(2.687)	(2.376)	(2.055)	(2.883)	(2.572)
Partisanship X Sophistication	1.062	3.974	2.912	1.062	3.974	2.912
	(2.108)	(2.711)	(2.336)	(2.108)	(2.711)	(2.336)
Partisanship X Treatment X Sophistication	-2.865	-5.504	-2.638	-1.439	-1.682	-0.243
	(2.994)	(3.783)	(3.290)	(3.221)	(4.129)	(3.577)
Constant	0.825	-1.304	-2.129*	0.825	-1.304	-2.129
	(0.641)	(0.898)	(0.835)	(0.641)	(0.898)	(0.835)
N		540			476	

Source: 2009 CCES. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4.15: Multinomial Logit for Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship on Attitudes on ICC Participation

	Emotional vs. Base			**Technical vs. Base**		
	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose
Sophistication	4.141**	2.016	-2.124	4.141**	2.016	-2.124
	(1.409)	(2.218)	(1.996)	(1.409)	(2.218)	(1.996)
Treatment	0.223	1.649	1.426	-0.843	1.226	2.070
	(1.096)	(1.655)	(1.554)	(1.290)	(1.777)	(1.628)
Partisanship	2.643	1.242	-1.401	2.643	1.242	-1.401
	(1.717)	(2.310)	(2.145)	(1.717)	(2.310)	(2.145)
Sophistication X Treatment	-1.440	-1.549	-1.090	0.880	-0.195	-1.076
	(1.862)	(2.680)	(2.405)	(2.181)	(2.878)	(2.492)
Partisanship X Treatment	-1.970	-0.694	1.276	0.318	0.939	0.622
	(2.537)	(2.991)	(2.771)	(2.692)	(3.118)	(2.758)
Partisanship X Sophistication	-6.962*	2.907	9.869**	-6.962*	2.907	9.869**
	(2.998)	(3.747)	(3.456)	(2.998)	(3.747)	(3.456)
Partisanship X Treatment X Sophistication	4.441	0.889	-3.553	0.383	-2.553	-2.936
	(4.280)	(4.887)	(4.439)	(4.497)	(5.032)	(4.391)
Constant	-0.790	-2.458	-1.668	-0.790	-2.458	-1.668
	(0.812)	(1.395)	(1.309)	(0.812)	(1.395)	(1.309)
N		437			463	

Source: 2009 CCES. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4.16: Multinomial Logit for Treatments, Sophistication, and Partisanship on Attitudes on Reinstitution of the Gold Standard

	Emotional vs. Base			**Technical vs. Base**		
	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose	Favor vs. Neutral	Oppose vs. Neutral	Favor vs. Oppose
Sophistication	3.592*	5.333**	1.741	3.592*	5.333**	1.741
	(1.499)	(1.572)	(1.396)	(1.499)	(1.572)	(1.396)
Treatment	2.086	2.037	-0.049	1.131	1.066	-0.065
	(1.255)	(1.369)	(1.311)	(1.263)	(1.436)	(1.398)
Partisanship	4.763*	5.188*	0.425	4.76*3	5.188**	0.425
	(1.884)	(2.108)	(1.804)	(1.884)	(2.108)	(1.804)
Sophistication X Treatment	-2.713	-2.152	0.561	-1.388	-2.033	-0.646
	(2.056)	(2.314)	(1.900)	(1.979)	(2.149)	(1.934)
Partisanship X Treatment	-3.960	-5.761*	-1.800	-2.473	-3.571	-1.098
	(2.503)	(2.836)	(2.450)	(2.387)	(2.772)	(2.415)
Partisanship X Sophistication	-5.038	-8.403**	-3.365	-5.038	-8.403**	-3.365
	(2.857)	(3.195)	(2.654)	(2.857)	(3.195)	(2.654)
Partisanship X Treatment X Sophistication	5.203	8.223	3.020	3.496	6.336	2.839
	(3.880)	(4.282)	(3.557)	(3.677)	(4.191)	(3.502)
Constant	-2.335*	-3.224**	-0.884	-2.335*	-3.224**	-0.889
	(0.940)	(1.018)	(0.989)	(0.940)	(1.018)	(0.989)
N		399			392	

Source: 2009 CCES. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Chapter 5

"Easy Issue" Experiment: The Case of Abortion

5.1 Why Abortion

Every year on the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, tens of thousands of activists descend upon Washington, D.C. to voice their opinions on abortion. People march with signs showing slogans like "she's not a choice: she's a child" and "keep your laws off my body." People from all walks of life are among the protestors. This probably includes people who know relatively little about politics and would be grouped in the low or middle knowledge categories. Yet they respond with such fervor on this issue. Abortion has become one of the most controversial issues in contemporary American politics (Alvarez and Brehm 1995). It generates intense emotional reactions from the public and garners substantial attention from government officials, activists, and interest groups (Carmines and Stimson 1989,

Carsey and Layman 2006). Abortion is a unique issue because it is so emotional and bitter, and there is no middle ground as one side sees an unborn child and the other sees a fetus. It is a polarizing issue that divides the public. As a result, abortion is often credited as being a classic "easy" issue.

Although abortion has been debated since the written record, going back to ancient Greek times, Luker (1985) argues that abortion has become so important in recent decades in the U.S. for a two reasons—the status of the fetus and the status of women have both changed. First, technology has made it possible to track the development of human life like never before. A hundred years ago, women could not confirm their pregnancies until they were months into it, and even then they could not track every development occurring inside them. "Quickening," or when the mother could feel the baby move, was often when pregnancy was confirmed. Since there was limited information about what was occurring inside a woman's body, drugs or procedures to "restore menses" were not really viewed as "abortions." Second, the status of women has also changed. Women now are part of the workforce and able to control their reproduction in previously unimaginable ways. Abortion is symbolic of broader, deeper debates about world views. It is representative of larger debates over the role of women in society, the meaning of parenthood, sexuality, and gender equality (Luker 1985, Jelen 1988, 1-9).

Abortion has become so visceral and symbolic that debates over other issues, like the federal budget and national healthcare, become about abortion for some people. In 2009, the massive healthcare overhaul bill sought by President Obama became focused on abortion. Since the vote in Congress was close, several con-

gressmen's anti-abortion beliefs took center stage in the national healthcare debate. Representative Stupak, for example, led a contingent of anti-abortion Democrats in the House of Representatives and refused to vote for the bill until he was promised that an executive order would be issued to back the ban on the use of government money to pay for abortions. Although the healthcare bill was nearly 2,000 pages long, and included provisions about pre-existing conditions, age limits for dependent coverage, yearly and lifetime payout caps, co-pays for preventative screenings, and dozens of other things, the possibility that federal money might potentially be used for abortions nearly prevented this bill from passing. Abortion is such a powerful symbol for some that virtually any issue can be overcome by abortion attitudes.

Beyond descriptive evidence about abortion, previous research has shown that people's attitudes on abortion are more stable and constrained than attitudes on many other political issues (Converse and Markus 1979, Zaller 1992). Abortion attitudes are more resilient to question ordering or other "carryover effects" (Zaller 1992, 78). Relatively speaking, since we know that most people fail to have "solidified" political beliefs, attitudes on abortion seem crystallized; since abortion is such a personal issue, it should not be surprising that we expect people's attitudes will be more stable (Adams 1997, 729). We also know that partisan differences have come to define abortion, with Democrats taking a more pro-choice stance and Republicans taking a pro-life position (Adams 1997).

Going back to chapter 3, I present further evidence that abortion is unique as an issue. The percentage of item non-response on abortion is consistently low in every year. This preliminary analysis further supports the idea that abortion is

somehow "easier" for respondents than a variety of other issues. Respondents, even those with less political sophistication or education, are able to provide an answer on abortion whereas on other issues, such as "limiting foreign imports" there is a very high percentage of item non-response.[1] This also highlights several key elements of easy issues as described by Carmines and Stimson. Abortion has been long on the agenda and mostly deals with policy ends rather than policy means. This, coupled with other research which has shown that people's abortion attitudes are more fully-formed than their attitudes on other issues, makes abortion a potentially enlightening case for the study of "easy" issues.

As I have discussed throughout the dissertation, though, there is reason to expect that issues are not inherently easy and that political context is critical in determining which issues are easy for the public. Therefore, I employ several survey experiments to examine abortion's status as an easy issue. Based on public opinion research that demonstrates people have non-crystallized beliefs on most political issues, and their attitudes are often influenced by survey artifacts like how a question is asked, I test whether or not question-wording changes influence people's abortion attitudes. I argue that if something really is "easy" for voters, the way the question is asked should have little influence on their professed opinions. More specifically, changing the style of the response options or the wording of the question should not change people's attitudes on abortion if it is truly "easy."

[1]Item non-response can also be influenced by a variety of other factors—ordering of the questions, length of the survey, available response options, etc. However, this finding holds over time in the NES and is consistent with other research on abortion attitudes.

5.2 Abortion Attitudes in the 2008 NES

The 2008 NES includes a survey experiment that allows me to test the effect of altering the way people are asked to report their abortion attitudes on their professed opinions. Approximately half of the sample received the traditional NES abortion question: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?" Respondents are then given four response options (see the appendix for the specific response option wording). The other half of the sample received a series of new questions about abortion that were asked in the General Social Survey (GSS) previously. These new questions have two important differences from the old question. First, respondents were asked about seven different scenarios under which a woman might be allowed to have an abortion (potential death of mother, other non-fatal health-risk for mother, birth defect, financial hardship, rape, incest, and baby is wrong gender) rather than being asked one question about abortion that has some of these scenarios as part of the response options. Second, the new questions were asked in a branching-format in which they were first asked whether they favor, oppose, neither favor nor oppose permitting abortion under a given scenario, and then were asked a series of follow-up questions about how much they favored/opposed (see the appendix for the full questions).

For these analyses, the old (or control) version of the abortion question was used as-is because it is one question that has four response options which encompass specific instances in which abortion might be permissible. I used factor analysis by

iterated principal factor to create a single measure from the new (or experimental) version questions to generate a measure of abortion similar to the original version. The results of the factor analysis are presented in table 5.1.[2] The factor score was ranged from 0 to 1.

Since I expect that the level of sophistication has a conditioning effect on abortion attitudes' influence on vote choice, I estimated an interactive model between level of sophistication and abortion attitudes. The sophistication measure is comprised of 9 objective knowledge questions and education.[3] I created an index score of education and factual knowledge and ranged it from 0 to 1.

[2]The abortion when baby is wrong gender question was omitted as it did not load on the same factor as the other questions. There is other evidence that the respondents view allowing abortion because the baby is the "wrong" gender to be outside of the scope of how they generally think of abortion. More than 76% of the sample strongly opposed abortion in this case, which does not look anything like the distribution of opinion on any of the other abortion questions.

[3]The knowledge items include whether the respondent knew: which party was in the House majority, which party was in the Senate majority, whether the Democratic Party or Republican Party is more conservative, whether Obama or McCain is more conservative, whether Obama or Bush is more conservative, the party affiliation of their Governor, 2 Senators, and House Representative.

Table 5.1: Factor Analysis of Experimental Abortion Questions in the 2008 NES

Favor/Oppose Abortion being legal if...	Factor Loadings
Non-Fatal Risk	.76
Fatal Risk	.60
Incest	.67
Rape	.73
Birth Defect	.72
Financial Hardship	.66
Eigenvalue	2.86 (85% of the total variance)

Notes: Factors are retained using iterated principal factors method.

Source: 2008 NES.

In accordance with the traditional Carmines and Stimson test for easy issues, I begin with a model to predict vote choice based on abortion attitudes.[4] They emphasize this model because of the normative implications. If people can issue vote on easy issues, they are fulfilling their duties as a democratic citizen, even if

[4]Carmines and Stimson (1980) do not actually predict vote choice but rather look at the percentage of people who voted for McGovern.

they fail to understand more technical, complex issues. If abortion is hard, then the connection between people's abortion attitudes and the vote should be conditioned by level of sophistication, as only more knowledgeable people can connect the issue with their vote choice. If, however, the connection to the vote is the same for everyone, then it is an easy issue.

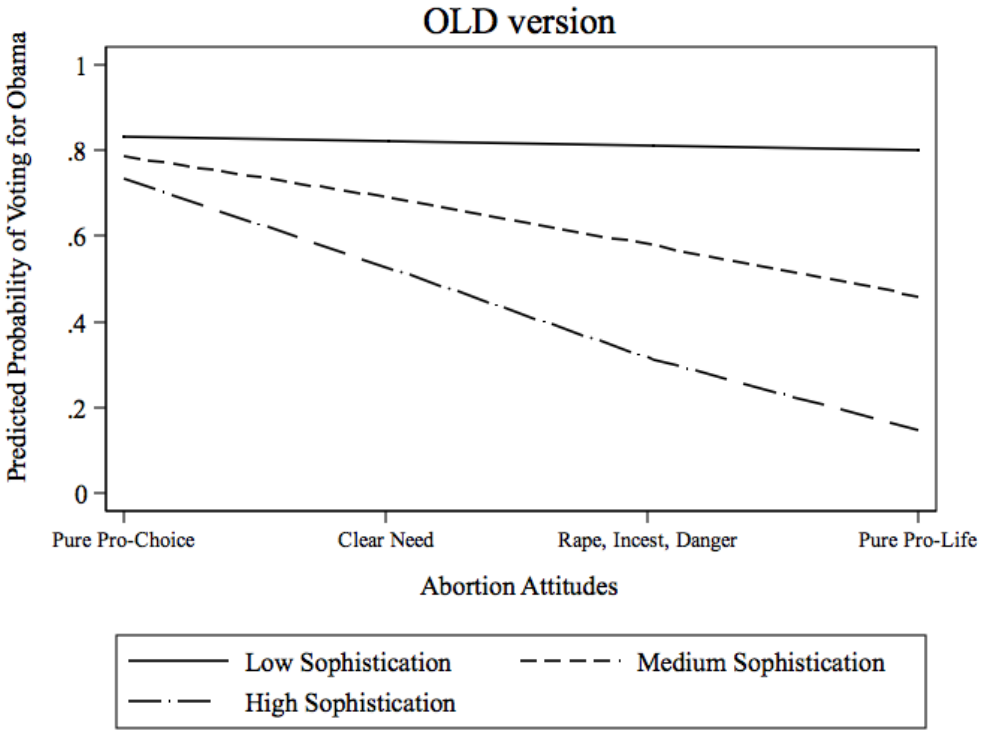
Probit models were estimated for both the control and experimental versions of the abortion question. The coefficient estimates are presented in appendix figures 5.4 and 5.5. In both the older and newer version, knowledge level and abortion attitudes themselves are not statistically significant, but the interaction term between the two is highly statistically significant.

Since it is easier and more substantive to interpret predicted probabilities, I created figures 5.1 and 5.2 that show the conditioning effect of sophistication on abortion attitudes influence on vote choice.[5] For the low sophistication group, abortion is not attached to their vote choice at all. Regardless of whether they profess to be pro-life or pro-choice, their probability of voting for Obama remains the same. The effect of abortion attitudes on vote choice for the medium sophistication group shows that there is some connection between abortion attitudes and vote choice, as they get more pro-life they become less likely to vote for Obama. Finally, the effect of abortion attitudes on vote choice is very clear for the high sophistication group. Among these respondents, the pro-choice respondents have roughly an 80% probability of voting for Obama, whereas the most pro-life respondents have roughly

[5]Low, medium, and high sophistication refer to the first, second, and third percentile of the original variable.

a 15% chance.

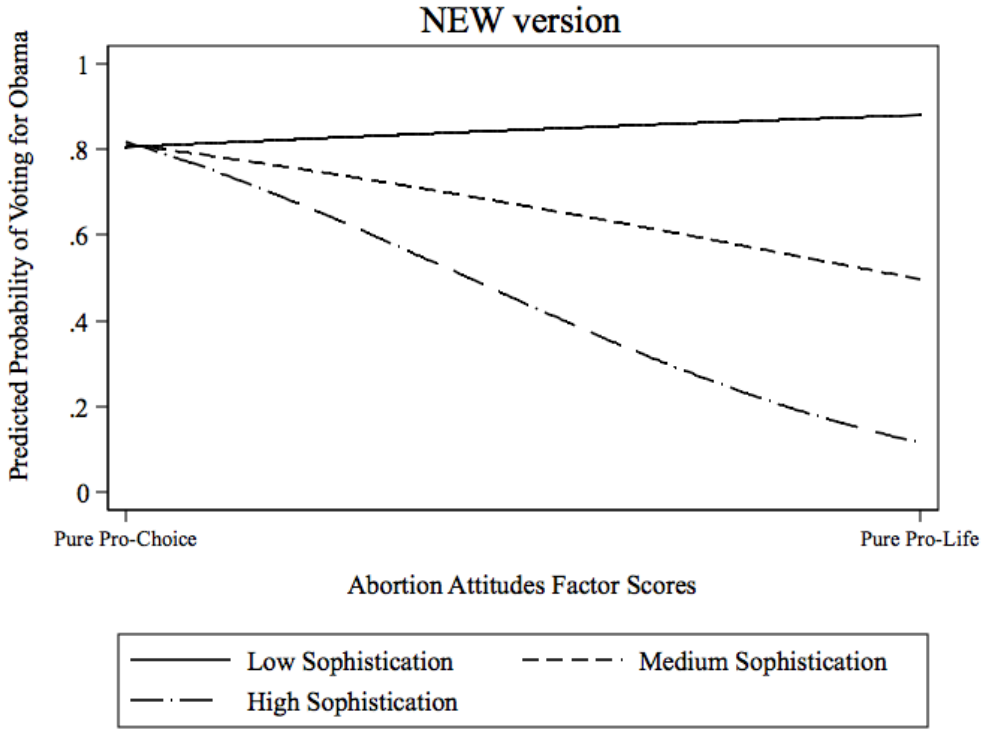
Figure 5.1: Probability of Voting for Obama by Abortion Attitudes and Sophistication, Old Version



Based on this test, abortion appears to be a hard issue, as connection to the vote is conditioned by level of sophistication like the case of the Vietnam War in Carmines and Stimson. When I replicated the same model in figure 5.2 with the new abortion questions, the relationship remains the same between the old and new versions, indicating that people are relatively stable in their abortion preferences and that it does not matter how the question is asked or whether the response options branch—connection to the vote is the same.

This begs the question why is there such a disconnect between apparently

Figure 5.2: Probability of Voting for Obama by Abortion Attitudes and Sophistication, New Version



(relatively) firm attitudes on abortion and a lack of issue voting on this issue? Two answers are plausible: either low sophistication people care less about abortion as an issue and therefore do not vote on it (salience hypothesis); or they do not know how the candidates stand on abortion and cannot match their preferences with political alternatives (candidate placement hypothesis). I test both of these hypotheses using contingency tables with chi-square tests of statistical significance.

A preliminary test of the salience hypothesis was presented in chapter 3. I found that almost no one lists abortion as the most important issue when they can pick any issue. Instead, people focus on issues like foreign policy and the economy. However, the NES does provide another way to test the role of salience. There is an abortion specific salience question that asks "How important is this issue [abortion] to you personally?" Respondents are given 5 choices ranging from "not at all important" to "extremely important." Table 5.2 shows the results of abortion salience across level of political sophistication for the old version of the abortion question.[6] There are no significant differences in the importance of abortion as an issue between the 3 levels of political sophistication; high, medium, and low sophistication respondents all give the same ratings of abortion importance. This indicates that the salience hypothesis is not supported; lower levels of abortion salience are not responsible for the disconnect between abortion attitudes and vote choice seen among lower sophistication respondents.

[6]The new abortion questions do not include a measure of importance of the issue.

Table 5.2: Relationship Between the Salience of Abortion Issue and the Level of Sophistication

	Level of Sophistication		
Importance of Abortion Issue	Low	Medium	High
Not at all important	5.85	5	3.37
Not too important	7.71	9.71	7.98
Somewhat important	32.71	30.29	37.73
Very important	34.04	37.65	33.44
Extremely important	19.68	17.35	17.48
Total	100	100	100
	χ^2(df): 7.78 (8), p $<$ .456		

Source: 2008 NES

Notes: Cell entries are column percentages.

The second hypothesis, that less sophisticated people do not know how candidates stand on abortion, is tested using the candidate placement questions. Respondents were asked to place Obama and McCain on the same abortion scales they

received. If the respondent received the old version of the abortion question, s/he was asked to determine the abortion attitudes of McCain and Obama by picking their abortion attitudes on the same scale. If the respondent received the new version of the abortion questions, s/he was asked to place McCain and Obama on the same scale for the wrong gender and non-fatal health risk questions. I used these questions to determine if the respondents knew which candidate is more pro-choice and which is more pro-life. As long as the respondents placed McCain at a position on the scale more pro-life than the one at which they placed Obama, the respondent gave a "correct" answer. Tables 5.3 (control version) and 5.4 (experimental version) show the results of the second hypothesis, and demonstrate that political sophistication matters for whether people got the candidate placement correct. For the old version, the low sophisticated respondents only placed the candidates correctly 45% of the time, whereas 66% of the middle sophistication, and 85% of the high sophistication groups correctly placed the candidates on abortion. Most of the lower knowledge respondents do not know where the candidates stand on abortion.

Table 5.3: Relationship Between Candidate Placement on Abortion Issue (Control) and Level of Sophistication

	Level of Sophistication		
Candidate Placement on Abortion	Low	Medium	High
Wrong	54.90	33.33	14.09
Correct	45.10	66.67	85.91
Total	100	100	100
	χ^2(df): 102.06 (2), p<.0001		

Notes: Cell entries are column percentages

Source: 2008 NES.

Table 5.4 shows that political sophistication matters for candidate placement for the experimental questions too. Overall, respondents across all levels of sophistication were less likely to correctly place the candidates using the new questions than the old questions, but sophistication conditions the results in the same way. Among the low sophistication group, only 16% correctly place the candidates, whereas 35% of the middle sophistication group and 65% of the high sophistication group know where the candidates stand on abortion.

Table 5.4: Relationship Between Candidate Placement on Abortion Issue (Experimental) and Level of Sophistication

	Level of Sophistication		
Candidate Placement on Abortion	Low	Medium	High
Wrong	83.18	64.81	34.65
Correct	16.82	35.19	65.35
Total	100	100	100
	χ^2(df): 58.65 (2), p<.0001		

Notes: Cell entries are column percentages

Source: 2008 NES.

5.3 Easy/Hard Frames and Abortion Attitudes

The NES experiment allowed me to test whether question format and response options made a difference in abortion attitudes and its impact on vote choice across political sophistication. Now, I further look at abortion "easiness" with an experimental data sample from the 2008 CCES in which I vary the frames for abortion to test whether people are persuaded from their opinions on abortion. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of nine treatment groups. For analysis and present-

ing the results, several of the treatment groups were collapsed together because the results were similar, and theoretically, these treatments all work in similar ways. More details are presented on this during the results write-up and in the appendix.

This experiment allows me to isolate the effect of the question wording on responses about abortion. There were no statistically significant differences across the treatment groups based on party identification, income, age, sex, region, or education, meaning that the typical controls are not needed.[7] The control group received a question without any supportive cues. It was worded as: "Some people think women should be allowed to have an abortion. Other people think abortion should be banned. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?"

From this base treatment, other cues were added to produce different treatments. These included one sided cues (providing only a pro-life rationale or a pro-choice rationale) and "neutral" cues that were designed to direct the respondents toward a more neutral perspective on abortion. The neutral cues explained that some people are in the middle on abortion and do not know what to think, that they are mixed on abortion depending upon different circumstances. The full question wording for each treatment group is presented in the appendix. For clarity in presenting the results, several of the treatment categories were collapsed to yield 4

[7]Again, in order to test whether the random assignment worked, I conducted Tukey Honestly Significant in Difference Tests for party identification, ideology, age, education, income, gender, and race. The control and treatment groups are not statistically significantly different from each other, so randomization is achieved.

treatments (please see the appendix for this). I considered many types of cues for this study, and selected these cues as a preliminary test of what cues can influence abortion attitudes. There were many different possibilities for framing abortion, but I chose this subset based on my theoretical understanding of easy issues at the time. That is, issue easiness should be related to people's gut-level reaction, so I wanted to test whether people could be shook from their gut responses on abortion. Therefore, I used one-sided cues that only provided a rationale for one side of the debate to see if people would leave their positions and join the side which was supported in the frames, and neutral cues that were designed to make abortion harder by cuing for ambivalence or neutrality.

Preliminary tests of the CCES indicate some support for abortion easiness. Abortion attitudes are correlated at .85 from the pre-election survey to the post-election survey.[8]. When the four category scale is collapsed into two categories, "pro-choice" and "pro-life," the correlation decreases to .77. This indicates two things about abortion attitudes in this sample. First, abortion attitudes are relatively highly constrained over time, despite the experimental treatments. Responses on the abortion question were fairly consistent from the first survey to the second one. Second, since the correlation decreases once the "pro-life" and "pro-choice" responses were collapsed, it further indicates that people are switching between positions two and three. That is, even among people who were not constrained over time, many of them switched between positions two (allow only in the case of

[8]Respondents on the pre-election survey were only given the standard abortion question without any experimental treatments.

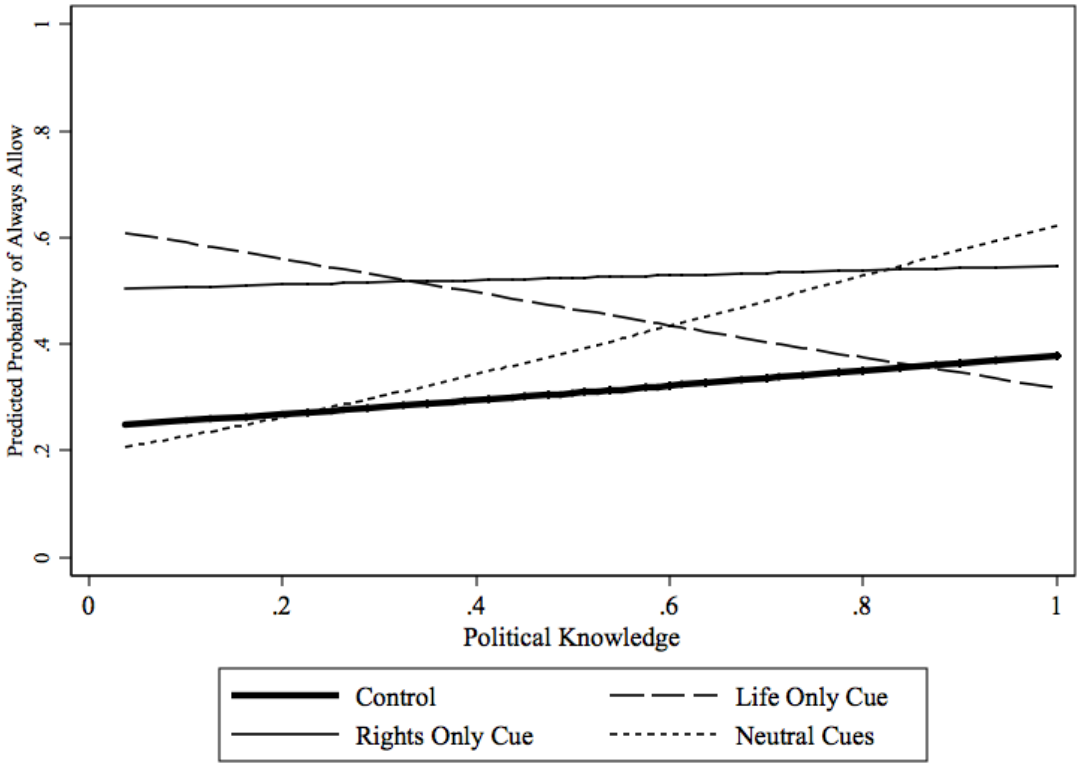
rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life) and three (allow in cases other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only when a clear need has been established). Most people are not flipping from always allow to never allow, but instead are changing between the two middle, less polarized positions.

I further analyze the CCES data by estimating an ordered logit model for abortion attitudes across the treatments and level of political knowledge. We want to assess whether abortion attitudes are malleable based on different frames respondents received on the abortion question, and whether this effect is conditioned by level of political sophistication. If abortion attitudes are the same, regardless of the framing, it supports the idea that abortion is an easy issue. If the framing effects are great, it supports the idea that abortion is a hard issue and people do not have solidified attitudes on abortion. It is especially pertinent, considering what Carmines and Stimson tell us about testing for easy issues, to see if the framing effects are stronger for lower sophistication respondents than higher ones.

The coefficient estimates are presented in the appendix in figure 3. Predicted probabilities were generated to assess the substantive significance of the treatments and their interaction with political knowledge on abortion attitudes. Figure 5 shows the predicted probability of responding "always allow" abortion across level of political sophistication by treatment.

Among respondents in the control group, those who are more knowledgeable are slightly more likely to respond "always allow" abortion than those with lower levels of knowledge. The conditioning effect, however, is minimal. Among respondents who received the rights only cue, the probability of responding "always allow"

Figure 5.3: Probability of Always Allow Abortion by Treatments and Knowledge



is much higher as compared to the control group across all levels of sophistication. The conditioning effect of sophistication is minimal—if a respondent received the rights only cue, s/he is much more likely to give a more pro-choice response regardless of sophistication. The life only cue, however, provides more puzzling results. Low sophistication respondents who received the life only cue are more likely to be pro-choice. More knowledgeable respondents who received this cue were unaffected as compared to the control group. It is unclear why a one-sided cue for preserving life would cause respondents to become more pro-choice, even if it is among low sophisticated respondents.[9] Finally, the neutral cues have no effect on abortion attitudes among the less sophisticated. Among the more sophisticated, however, it makes them more likely to respond "always allow." By looking at the control group probabilities, and the data, we see that the higher sophistication respondents are more pro-choice overall than the less knowledgeable people. It seems like the neutral cues actually heighten the responses of the more knowledgeable respondents. Rather than confusing people or leading them toward more middle responses, the neutral cues have no effect on the less sophisticated, and actually lead to entrenchment in their positions among the more sophisticated.

[9]The mean abortion rating for the sample does lean to the pro-choice side on abortion, but that does not seem like enough to explain why low sophisticated people respond in the way that they do.

5.4 Abortion Attitudes Entrenched

I test several new measures for easy issues using abortion as the case study, and find that abortion attitudes are relatively entrenched. Abortion exhibits lower item non-response than most other issues, indicating that most people are at least aware of abortion and have some attitudes on abortion. Abortion attitudes are also resilient to the question wording and response options that are provided, again supporting the idea that abortion attitudes are more crystallized. People do not get confused or dissuaded from their opinions simply because they are asked about abortion in a different way. The different frames mostly work to re-emphasize people's abortion attitudes, although there are some signs of framing effects.

I am concerned about using the term "easy" to describe abortion, however. In terms of Carmines' and Stimson's original test for easy issues (that issue effect on vote choice is not conditioned by level of political knowledge for easy issues), abortion is not easy at all. Less sophisticated voters in the 2008 NES do not connect abortion to their vote choice. In the end, although the theory of easy issues was created to save issue voting from the realization that many Americans are politically unsophisticated and therefore unlikely able to issue vote, people still are not connecting abortion to the vote, even though other tests demonstrate abortion is an easy issue.

We see that abortion attitudes are more entrenched than attitudes on other issues. Probably, "because the abortion debate draws on deep—and often unconscious—beliefs and feelings about, and experiences with, such things as children, families, sex, religion, and the basic natures of individuals—men and women—reactions to

it are profound and powerful" (Luker 1985, 10). However, this is not enough for an issue to translate into votes. Instead, the issue must also be salient and readily identifiable with the parties or candidates.

Furthermore, I am concerned about deducing that framing may not be able to change abortion attitudes based on this experiment. The abortion debate has been fairly consistent in the U.S. for the last few decades, meaning that the frames I constructed in a survey setting have little room to influence people's abortion attitudes. Framing in one survey question, on an issue that is so hot and widely-known, may not be effective simply because it does not mimic real political discourse at all. The consistent nature of this debate, however, should not lead us to believe that no new frames could ever come about, or that there is no way to make this issue more difficult for at least a substantial portion of the American public. "While the militants on both sides would have us believe that the abortion debate is actually very simple, such simplicity is both a necessity and a luxury for them. A necessity because we must believe that the things about which we are passionate are either clearly good or clearly bad. But because the belief in simplicity reduces any possibility of dialogue or learning or coming to terms with real human dilemmas, it is a luxury that neither the society nor the debate itself can afford" (Luker 1985, 13).

5.5 Appendix Figures

Figure 5.4: (Appendix) The Impact of Abortion Attitudes (CONTROL) on Vote Choice Across Sophistication in 2008 Elections

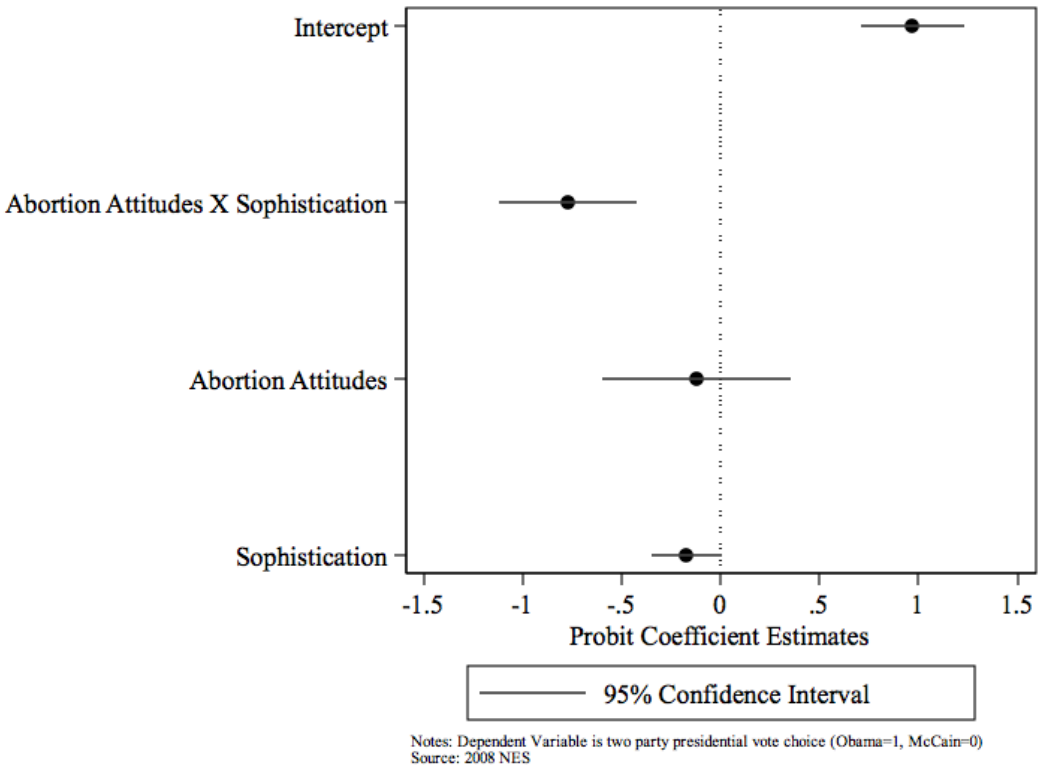


Figure 5.5: (Appendix) The Impact of Abortion Attitudes (EXPERIMENTAL) on Vote Choice Across Sophistication in 2008 Elections

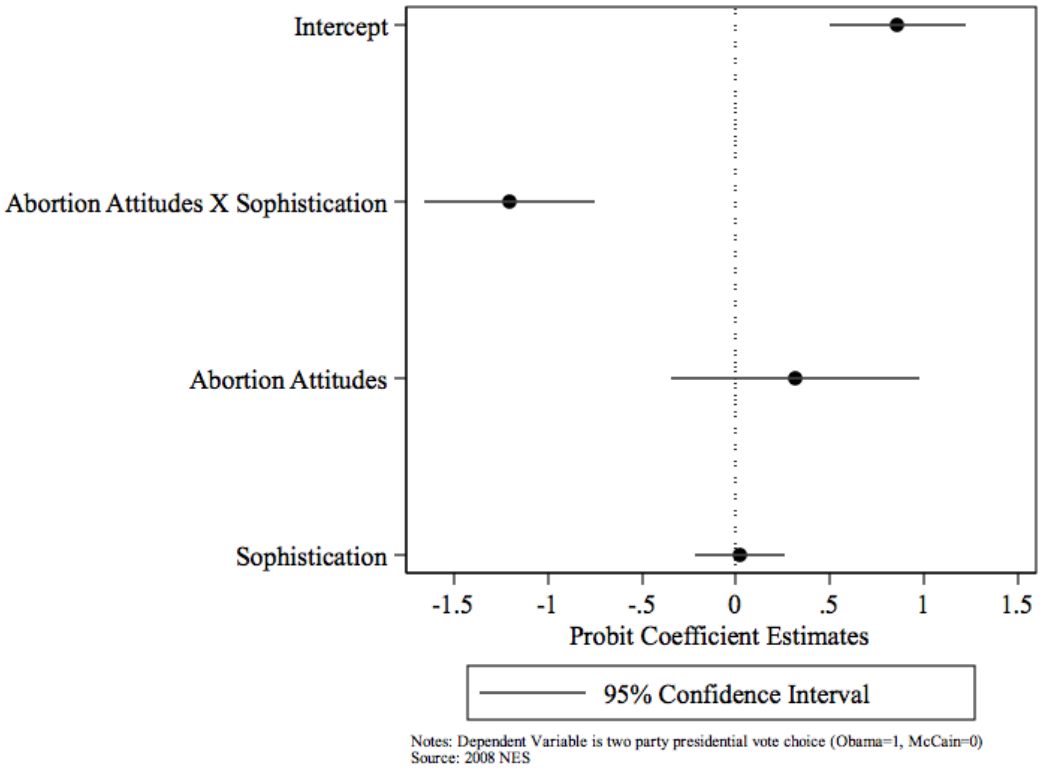
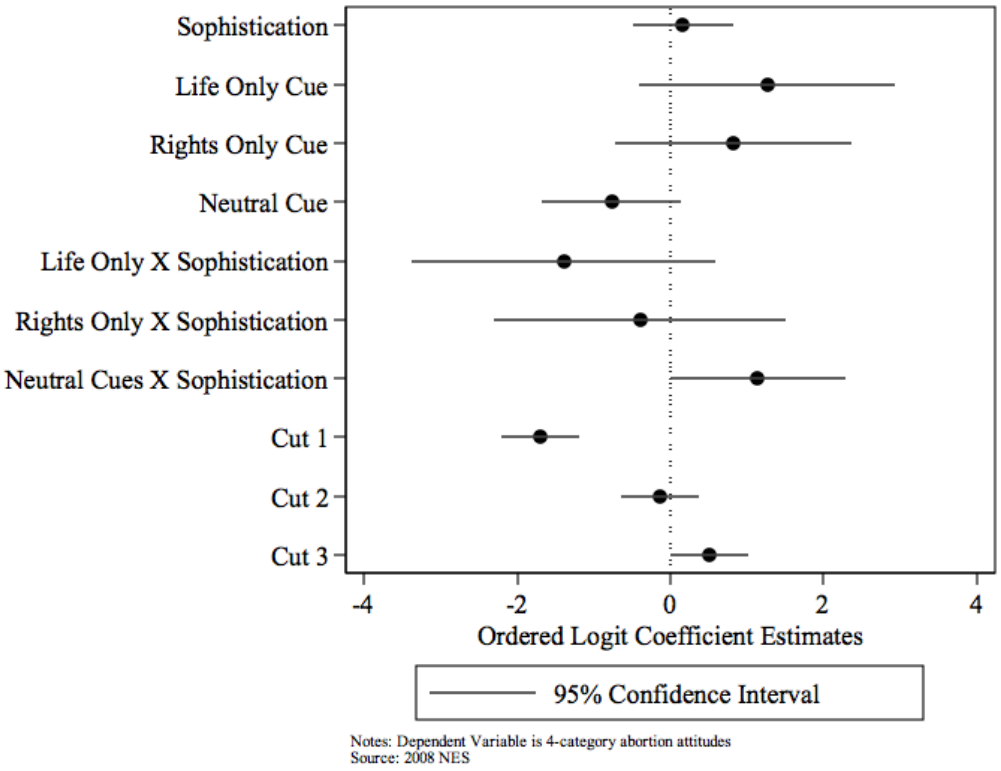


Figure 5.6: (Appendix) Easy/Hard Frames and Abortion Attitudes across Level of Sophistication



5.6 Appendix for Questions and Experimental Treatments

5.6.1 2008 NES Abortion Questions:

Old Version There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?

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.

New Version [First,/Next,] do you FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE abortion being LEGAL if:

- staying pregnant would hurt the woman's health but is very unlikely to cause her to die
- staying pregnant could cause the woman to die

- the pregnancy was caused by sex the woman chose to have with a blood relative
- the pregnancy was caused by the woman being raped
- the fetus will be born with a serious birth defect
- having the child would be extremely difficult for the woman financially
- the child will not be the sex the woman wants it to be

Based on the respondent's answer to each of these questions, s/he was then asked a follow-up question about the strength of this opinion:

Do you favor that A GREAT DEAL, MODERATELY, or A LITTLE?
Do you oppose that A GREAT DEAL, MODERATELY, or A LITTLE?
Do you LEAN TOWARD FAVORING IT, LEAN TOWARD OPPOSING IT, or do you NOT LEAN EITHER WAY?

5.6.2 2008 CCES Treatments:

Control Group: Some people think women should be allowed to have an abortion. Other people think abortion should be banned. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Life Only Cue: Some people think abortion should be banned because they believe that life begins at conception and abortion is murder. Which of the following opin-

ions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Rights Only Cue: Some people think women should be allowed to have an abortion because they believe that government should not control women's reproductive rights. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Neutral Cues: Some people think women should be allowed to have an abortion because they believe that government should not control women's reproductive rights. Other people think abortion should be banned because they believe that life begins at conception and abortion is murder. Another group of people is somewhere in between. They think abortion should be allowed in some circumstances (e.g. in the cases of rape, incest, danger to the mother's life, or severe complications with pregnancy) but there should be restrictions on abortions (e.g. none in the later stages of pregnancy, parental consent for teenagers to have abortions). Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Many Democratic leaders think women should be allowed to have an abortion because they believe that government should not control women's reproductive rights. Many Republican leaders think abortion should be banned because they believe that life begins at conception and abortion is murder. Other leaders in both parties are somewhere in between. They think abortion should be allowed in some

circumstances (e.g. in the cases of rape, incest, danger to the mother's life, or severe complications with pregnancy) but there should be restrictions on abortions (e.g. none in the later stages of pregnancy, parental consent for teenagers to have abortions). Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Republican leaders tend to think abortion should be banned, although many support allowing abortion under certain circumstances (e.g. in the cases of rape, incest, danger to the mother's life, or severe complications with pregnancy) and only in the early stages of pregnancy and only with parental consent in the case of a teenage pregnancy. Democratic leaders tend to think women should be allowed to have an abortion, but many support bans on abortion in the later stages of pregnancy, and many others support parental consent requirements for teenagers to have abortions. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Party Cues: Many Democratic leaders think women should be allowed to have an abortion. Many Republican leaders think abortion should be banned. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Many Democratic leaders think women should be allowed to have an abortion because they believe that government should not control women's reproductive rights. Many Republican leaders think abortion should be banned because they believe that

life begins at conception and abortion is murder. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

Policy Cue: Some people think women should be allowed to have an abortion because they believe that government should not control womens reproductive rights. Other people think abortion should be banned because they believe that life begins at conception and abortion is murder. Which of the following opinions comes closest to your view on abortion, or haven't you thought much about this?

5.6.3 2008 CCES Response Options for all Treatments:

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 in certain circumstances (e.g. if there are other severe complications with a pregnancy, only in the first three months of pregnancy, only if teenagers have gotten their parents' consent).

4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

9 I haven't thought much about this.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Reconsidering "Easy" Issues

When I originally set out down this path, I sought to understand why certain issues are easy, and what the source of that easiness could be. Are some issues inherently easy and others intrinsically hard? Are easy issues rendered easy through the use of frames? Are all issues subject to the same level of manipulation? In the end, I cannot completely answer these questions. The concept of easy issues proved too elusive. Defining easy issues is like grasping a handful of sand—it disappears through my fingers every time, and the harder I squeeze and try to hold on, the faster it slips away.

Throughout my dissertation, I explored the theory of "easy" and "hard" issues as established by Carmines and Stimson and adopted by a number of subsequent political science scholars. Chapter 2 showed that issue voting is a tricky test for easy and hard issues because the economy and foreign policy issues are often the ones

with the strongest connection to the vote, despite their technical content. Chapter 3 explored what issues Americans think the most about and form attitudes about. The analysis revealed that Americans do have more difficulty giving valid responses to questions about the economy and foreign policy, but at the same time, these issues are also seen as the most important. As a result of the findings from these two chapters, I argue that economic and foreign policy issues are not necessarily "hard" for people. Instead, these issues are primarily seen as "performance" issues, meaning that people do not need to grapple with the complexities of these issues because they simply want to know if the U.S. is winning or losing. Beyond this, the ability of elites to frame on these issues is limited. Little politicking occurs on these issues not because they are so technical and have no hope of being framed in a public-friendly way, but because politicians are unable to generate "winning" frames when they are losing on the issue.

Some issues, like abortion, gay marriage, and race-related issues, do seem to be "easy," though. Although these issues are not the most important issues, people still seem to have more readily available and solidified attitudes on these issues. In the second part of my dissertation, I explored the potential source of issue easiness—whether issues are inherently easy and hard or whether they are framed to be so. In chapter 4 I took several "hard" issues, such as limiting foreign imports, and attempted to make the issues easier or harder using a group-based, emotional frame and a technical, policy-based frame. The emotional cue did make imports a little easier for respondents, and more people were able to give an opinion when offered the emotional cue as compared to the technical cue. However, overall, the empirical

evidence was mixed. The frames did not consistently work to make technical issues "easy" for respondents.

In chapter 5, I made abortion, a commonly accepted "easy" issue, the focus of my framing experiments. In this case, I tried to harden the issue by providing one-sided and neutral/ambivelant cues. One of the arguments for issue easiness is that clear partisan stances lead to an easier understanding of issues. The goal was to dissuade people from their abortion attitudes by reminding them that a number of people in both parties are unsure what they think about the issue. Again, the results were mixed. Framing did not have the desired effect on respondents' abortion attitudes. Most people were resilient to the frames.

I do not think this indicates, however, that framing is unimportant in creating "easy" issues. I think there are several possible reasons my experiments did not work out as hoped. In the case of abortion, attitudes are entrenched. There have been essentially no new framing or political developments with regard to this issue in two decades. Therefore, by now essentially everyone has 1) had time to develop an attitude on this issue, 2) many people know how the parties stand in regards to this issue. Therefore, attempts to remind people that others are uncertain on this issue does not work. In hindsight, it does not seem plausible that so many people are confused on this issue given its political history. In the case of the hard issues, these issues were picked because there were few/no existing frames for these issues, meaning that the frames might be able to influence opinion more easily. However, I think these issues proved too esoteric for most respondents and even with emotional cues they could not recall an attitude (or make up an attitude) about these issues.

The cues were not one-sided, so even the emotional cue required them to process a good bit of information about a non-salient issue.

Furthermore, I think framing in a laboratory setting or on a survey is unlikely to be effective to really see how frames work to make some issues easy and others hard in politics. These sorts of frames and tests do not mimic real politics closely enough to be highly effective. Either people will already know a lot about the issue (especially CCES respondents since they are more politically knowledgeable than the average American and have access to the internet while taking the surveys), or they will know absolutely nothing about the issue because it is not salient. Either way, though, critical components of the political process are missing. There are no focusing events, public political cues from the media and political elites, counter-arguments from the opposition, etc. that are all essential elements of an issue becoming easy.

6.2 Returning to the Normative Implications

At the outset of this project in chapter 1, there is a clear recognition of the normative implications of this project. As I discussed, many scholars have gone in search of explanations for Americans' political behavior given their limited political interest and awareness. Understanding what voters are thinking about when electing a president and other public officials, and the state of public opinion on a variety of important issues, is critical to understanding our world. It is no wonder, then, so many scholars have devoted great attention to understanding these processes.

Carmines and Stimson fall into this category as well; they were writing in response to critiques that Americans are too politically unknowledgeable to meaningfully participate in politics. The theory of "easy" and "hard" issues is full of normative implications for the way that we think about our political institutions and public policy outcomes. This theory shapes our understanding of how people participate in government and touches on our understanding of what it means to be a "good" citizen.

Under classical democratic theory citizens should make careful, reasoned decisions as a result of political discourse, but we are confronted with discouraging findings about the low sophistication of voters. Carmines and Stimson provide the theory of easy issues as a way to save citizens from critiques that they are too unaware to make political choices. Certainly, less sophisticated citizens cannot understand complex, technical issues and use them to vote. However, all citizens can vote on "easy" issues that are emotional, gut-level, and deal with policy ends. My findings are not as optimistic about the potential for easy issue voting as Carmines and Stimson. I do not think there is a special class of inherently easy issues that voters can summon up and use to vote. The political context has far too much impact on what issues are salient and clearly associated with a vote choice (the candidate or party associated with a particular stance on an issue). Yet, that is not to say that I think hopes for meaningful citizen participation are dead.

People still participate through the use of issues that are framed to be easy, and performance issues. Although "easy" framing does not satisfy some critics of the American public because they see framing as manipulation of the issues by elites,

with a theoretically infinite number of possible political issues, the political context is critical for people to understand politics. I, therefore, do not condemn citizens who understand issues through the use of frames because I see it as inevitable. I also think that performance issues do allow people to issue vote and lead policy outcomes. The public does not shape specific policy prescriptions necessarily, but can shape the policy outcomes. For the system to work, "Politicians need not discern the precise policy preferences of their constituents ... large majorities prefer peace to war, high employment and stable prices to unemployment and inflation, social harmony to social tension, energy self-sufficiency to dependence on imported oil, and so forth" (Fiorina 1981, 11).

6.3 Future Research

Although the empirical evidence presented is not always consistent, I have thought extensively about this concept and do believe that I have several insights. I have been unable to empirically demonstrate most of them with the data that I have available, but, theoretically this is what I have learned about easy and hard issues through the course of my dissertation:

1. I expect that "easy" issues are primarily easy because of framing and the political environment. As the famous William Jennings Bryan speech at the introduction of my dissertation demonstrates, even something as technical and complex as the rate that silver should be coined to gold can be made a visceral issue with the right frames (see number 6 for an exception to this rule).

2. Frames come about because of strategic politicians who are trying to win.

3. Frames, although critical for the development of "easy" issues, are not boundless; they are constrained by: a) focusing events, b) previously existing party frames, c) public opinion. It is yet unclear to me what the role is—if there is one—of the issue's specific characteristics (i.e. can any issue be framed to be about anything? Just as an example, could welfare spending be framed to be about terrorism? Or, is there something inherent about welfare that prevents it from being framed about terrorism?)

4. Foreign policy and economic issues are not necessarily "hard" issues, but they are in a different class of issues. They are primarily "performance" issues that are understood in terms of success and failure. They matter the most in politics, which is implausible if they really are "hard" issues, and they are largely outside of the control of politicians because there are obvious winners and losers most of the time.

5. I believe that the U.S. (and possibly other countries as well) have a hierarchy of issues much like animals' hierarchy of needs. The economy and foreign policy are at the top of this list because they deal with self-preservation. This is followed by more indirect threats to self-preservation—attacks on identity from "others". Attacks on identity are not necessarily threats of physical harm but psychological or emotional harm some people feel. Hence why race/ethnicity (and in more modern times, immigration) is such an important issue in the U.S.

6. Therefore, if there is any such thing as an "easy" issue, it must deal with identity. I acknowledge, though, the problem is that theoretically, anything can be made about identity. While in reality there are probably limits on what issues can be framed in terms of identity, theoretically speaking, anything could be about identity.

7. The remaining issues, like morality, social welfare, etc., will primarily be salient when issues at the top of the hierarchy are more or less silent. These issues could come about at other times due to framing and focusing events, but are unlikely to matter if other issues (like the economy) are not working out well.

Although I have no empirical evidence yet for a number of these claims, I hope that my post-dissertation research will shed light on a number of these topics.

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