

# Diverted from the “Correct Vote”? Foreign Policy Influence on Electoral Behavior\*

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*Objective.* We consider the influence foreign policy issues and events can have on the voting calculations of individuals; specifically, how foreign policy influences the probability of “correct voting.” *Method.* We use data from the 2004 American National Election Study along with a measure of “correct voting” from Richard Lau and David P. Redlawsk (1997, *American Political Science Review*, 91(3): 585–98) and Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008, *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(2): 395–411). *Results.* Our results indicate that salient foreign policy issues viewed to be favorably handled by the incumbent have the potential to alter voting calculations to favor the incumbent. In the 2004 presidential election, individuals who should have voted for Kerry were more likely to vote incorrectly if terrorism was a salient issue. This pattern was not observed on another foreign policy issue: Iraq. *Conclusion.* This research further clarifies the strong link foreign policy can have with the electoral behavior of individuals. It speaks to the correct voting literature in expanding upon what elements can modify voter calculations. It also speaks to researchers in foreign policy and public opinion by expanding our understanding of the conditions for when foreign policy issues and voter behavior can be fused.

Research in political behavior has been quite successful in identifying why individuals form specific policy preferences and vote the way they do (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Zaller, 1992). Research has even advanced to the point of being able to assess if individuals are making the “correct” vote based on a variety of conditions and factors about the individual and the candidates (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008). The correct voting literature has provided fascinating insights into individual-level voting calculations but much further exploration is needed. The focus of this article is to continue this exploration of correct voting by considering how salient foreign policy issues influence individual voting calculations. A wealth of literature has noted a strong link between foreign policy issues and political behavior (e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, 1989; Gartner and Segura, 1998; Gartner, 2008) but less has considered how foreign policy issues can influence the voting calculations of individuals. The literature that has engaged this idea, largely the diversionary theory and rally around the flag literature, has only explored this at the aggregate level. Our aim here is to explore this bridge between foreign policy and voting calculations in order to help clarify theories and assumptions in both the voting correctly and foreign policy and public opinion literature.

In this article, we ask the following question: How does a focus on foreign policy influence the voting calculations of individuals, and specifically, how does foreign policy

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issue salience impact correct voting? Drawing from the foreign policy literature around diversionary theory and rally effects (e.g., Derouen, 2000; Mitchell and Prins, 2004; Levy, 1989; Mueller, 1970; Baker and Oneal, 2001), we should expect that foreign policy issues may be able to alter the voting calculations to favor the incumbent. However, a lack of direct micro-level research around this theory provides our desire to explore this issue. So in effect, our research here talks to both the voting behavior literature and the foreign policy and public opinion literature. Our contribution to both sets of literature is to clarify how and under what conditions salient foreign policy issues can alter voting calculations.

The focus of this empirical analysis is on the 2004 U.S. presidential election. The 2004 presidential election provides an ideal situation to measure the electoral impact of foreign policy issues. The United States was in the midst of wars against terrorism and Iraq so foreign policy was salient to many, but not all, Americans during the election. The continued focus of these wars in the election put the issues at the forefront of the voters' minds. Furthermore, President Bush was seen much more favorably with regard to terrorism compared to Kerry (Campbell, 2005; Murphy, 2004; MSNBC, 2009), but at the same time, this favorability did not translate to the issue of Iraq. We believe these conditions provide a unique and ideal venue to test how and under what conditions foreign policy issues can influence correct voting.

In the pages that follow, we explore the role of foreign policy issues on correct voting by first providing a theoretical discussion of why foreign policy issues should impact the voting correctness of individuals. We then provide hypotheses around this theoretical relationship and the conditions necessary for this relationship. Finally, we use individual-level data from the 2004 American National Election Study (ANES) to understand how a focus on foreign policy influences the correct voting potential of individuals. Results indicate the existence of a strong link between focusing on foreign policy issues and electoral decisions of individuals.

### Correct Voting

Researchers have long debated how different political, social, and individual factors influence vote choice (a few examples include Campbell et al., 1960; Downs, 1957; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006). More recently, a strand of research has moved from why people vote the way they do to if people make the right vote choice and why. This is the concept of "correct voting" advanced by the research of Richard Lau and David P. Redlawsk (Richard and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008). Lau and Redlawsk begin with the expectation that individuals are never going to have full and complete information when making a vote choice. Knowing this, they were interested in understanding how well individuals selected the correct candidate for themselves with the limited information voters possess (in comparison to if voters had full information about candidates). If voters selected the candidate that they would have with full information, then they voted correctly. Through both experimental and survey studies Lau and Redlawsk were able to identify what factors went into the calculation for voting correctly and how well people typically did. Their measure of correct voting included a variety of categories that were of interest to voters, including voter issue stances, party identification, and candidate trait evaluations, along with the importance of these factors (for a complete description of the voting correctly calculation, see Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008). With this measure, they noted that correct voting occurred between 70 and 80 percent of the time.

Extensions of this research have been numerous. One extension has considered how applicable this theory is in a comparative perspective. For example, Lau et al. (2013) took the concept of “correct voting” and applied it to 33 democracies, such as Great Britain, Japan, Chile, and Israel. Their research noted many similarities to Lau and Redlawsk’s findings on how correct voting is linked to political sophistication, political experience, and motivation. However, they also found that varying differences at the institutional level of countries play a role in correct voting.

Beyond taking the notion of “correct voting” in a comparative direction, another important focus in the literature has been understanding the factors that influence the probability of correct voting. Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008) explored this notion and found a variety of individual-level (knowledge, motivation, and a political heuristic) and aggregate measures (complexity and intensity of the election) that influenced the overall probability of correct voting. Extensions of this research have considered additional factors in the causes and consequences of correct voting. For example, Baum and Jamison (2006) noted a link between the consumption of “soft” news and voter competence for those who are relatively politically inattentive. Lau (2012) notes that the context of primary elections makes the prospects of correct voting difficult for individuals. Sokhey and McClurg (2012) noted a link between an individual’s social network and correct voting.

### **Foreign Policy and Public Opinion**

The correct voting literature has noted a variety of variables that influence the probability of correct voting. However, one area not explored is how foreign policy issues play into these calculations. This is unfortunate because research on foreign policy and public opinion has long demonstrated a link between foreign policy events and individual attitudes. One strand of literature has argued that the public can have a strong influence on the foreign policy decisions of leaders (Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, 1989; Russett, 1990; Sobel, 2001). For example, Sobel (2001) explored the relationship between the public and the Bush Administration’s policy around the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s. Sobel’s research demonstrates how many of the actions leading up to the conflict, and even decisions during the conflict, were made with the public in mind.

A second strand considers how different contextual aspects of foreign policy events can influence individual preferences and leader evaluations (e.g., Mueller, 1970, 1973; Gartner and Segura, 1998; Gartner, 2008; Baker and Oneal, 2001; Tomz and Weeks, 2013; Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998). One of the most studied examples of this is around military casualties. This research has clarified our understanding around how casualty numbers can influence public preferences around a conflict as well as evaluations of both the president and elites (Mueller, 1970; Gartner and Segura, 1998, 2008; Gartner, 2008). Other contextual factors beyond casualties have included the types of foreign policy missions (Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998), the actors involved (Chapman and Reiter, 2004; Kull, 1995), and the target (Tomz and Weeks, 2013; Kertzer and Brutger, 2015; Johns and Davies, 2012). For example, Tomz and Weeks (2013) took an experimental approach to understanding public opinion around military action and found that the likelihood of individual support for conflict was conditioned heavily on the characteristics of the target (ally or democracy).

Overall, this research has demonstrated that foreign policy events and public opinion are linked. From a voter behavior standpoint, we should expect that foreign policy events have the potential to disrupt individual voting calculations. This possibility has been argued

extensively (but not tested at the individual level) in the diversionary and rally effect literature. Theoretically, the idea is that if the domestic situation does not look good, then the leader may try to “divert” public attention away from a bad domestic situation and focus citizens on some sort of perceived foreign threat. When focusing on a foreign threat, the people may then be more likely to “rally around the leader” (Mueller, 1970; Baker and Oneal, 2001) and this should lead to better evaluations of the leader. While we are not testing the diversionary theory arguments here, this literature helps us consider how specific issues can influence the voting calculations of individuals. Issue positions have been shown to have a substantial impact on the voting calculations of individuals (Rabinowitz and McDonald, 1989; MacDonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug, 1995). Specifically, with foreign policy, Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida (1989) found that the public does hold foreign policy issue positions and these positions are as strong, and at times stronger, at influencing vote choice when compared to domestic issue positions.

### Correct Voting and Foreign Policy Issues

What does this mean for correct voting? Following the work from Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida (1989) and the vast foreign policy and public opinion literature, we aim to see how foreign policy issues can directly influence voting calculations, specifically, the probability of correct voting. Current research on correct voting focuses on what factors lead to a higher probability of correct voting. We turn this upside-down, and are instead interested in what leads to a lower probability of correct voting, and specifically how foreign policy issues play a role.

Drawing from the rally effect and diversionary literature, we start with the basic assumption that when individuals focus on foreign policy issues, they are more likely to “rally” around the leader. This would lead to expectations that a focus on foreign policy issues should be more likely to influence individuals’ voting calculations to be more favorable toward the incumbent compared to the challenger.

However, we should not expect any foreign policy issue to alter voting calculations to the benefit of the incumbent, but only those issues favorable to the incumbent. Drawing from the issue ownership literature, we theorize that if the incumbent is able to “own” the issue relative to the opposition candidate, then the issue should aid the incumbent (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen, 2003; Petrocik, 1996; Aragonès, Castanheira, and Giani, 2015; Stubager and Slothuus, 2013). The issue ownership literature notes that voters look at different issues and assign importance to issues. At the same time, voters form expectations around which candidate would be better at managing the issue. If a candidate can convince voters that he or she can manage the issue better than the other, then voters should be more willing to vote for that candidate, as long as the issue is important to the voter. Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003:601) note: “A concern with problems that are viewed as better handled by Democrats reinforces Democratic identifiers, provokes defection among Republicans, and catalyzes a Democratic tide among independents. Concern with issues regarded as better handled by the GOP has the opposite effect.” In essence, we should expect salient foreign policy issues that are viewed favorably toward the incumbent to influence voting calculations to the benefit of the incumbent. Voters will view the incumbent as better able to manage the specific foreign policy issue, which should then shift their preference toward the incumbent.

In the 2004 election, Bush strongly pushed the terrorism issue because he was seen favorably on that issue (Campbell, 2005; Murphy, 2004; MSNBC, 2009). James Campbell

(2005) noted the Bush campaign's focus on his leadership in the war on terror as the most important issue to push in his reelection, even at the expense of a relatively respectable economy. According to Gallup (2004), Bush consistently led Kerry in voter evaluations of who would be better in fighting terrorism. In September 2004, 61 percent of voters believed Bush would be better at handling terrorism compared to 34 percent for Kerry. While the October numbers narrowed some, Bush consistently outperformed Kerry in the minds of voters when it came to terrorism. To magnify this effect, an MSNBC News article in August of 2009 noted that former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge claimed that he was pressured by members of the Bush Administration to raise the terror level prior to the 2004 election (MSNBC, 2009).

If we refine this expectation even further, we need to consider that there is already a fair number of individuals whose "correct" vote is the incumbent. For this group, we should not expect a foreign policy issue favorable to the incumbent to make as much of a difference. Possibly, those individuals may be even more likely to vote correctly for the incumbent but at the same time, the incumbent is already the correct candidate. However, for those where the challenger is the correct candidate, we should expect that focusing on a foreign policy issue favorable to the incumbent would lead to less correct voting. To apply this to the 2004 election, for individuals to whom terrorism was salient, it should have influenced less correct voting, but only for those individuals whose correct candidate was Kerry.

This leads us to our hypothesis:

- H1: Individuals that regard a foreign policy issue favorable to the incumbent as most important may be less likely to vote correctly compared to individuals who regard other issues as more important, but only if their correct candidate is the opposition candidate.

## **Data and Methods**

To explore how foreign policy issues may impact individual voting calculations, we use survey data from the 2004 ANES. We chose 2004 because this was a time when foreign policy was an important issue for many Americans. In late 2003, Gallup reported that 57 percent of Republicans and 48 percent of Democrats stated that terrorism was "extremely important." For Iraq, the percentages were 47 percent and 51 percent, respectively (Carroll, 2003). This salience did not change much as we neared the election, where 70 percent of respondents in the 2004 ANES identified some sort of foreign policy issue as the "most important" issue facing the United States in the last four years. Breaking that down further, 42 percent of respondents identified terrorism as the most important issue whereas 18 percent identified Iraq, and the remainder being made up of trade issues, national defense, and general foreign policy. This is ideal because it gives us a large enough group to compare to those who do not consider foreign policy issues as important.

We use the most important issue question in the ANES as our primary variable of interest. The question asks: "What do you think has been the most important issue facing the United States over the last four years?" The response is open ended but coded by ANES staff into specific categories including terrorism, Iraq, the economy, and so forth. Our primary variables of interest are if respondents identified terrorism or Iraq as the most important issue facing the United States in the last four years. We chose specifically terrorism over a broader measure of foreign policy issues because terrorism was exactly the message the president was trying to push in his reelection (Campbell, 2005). A broader measure that includes other foreign policy items contaminates the exact message the president was

trying to portray. In addition to terrorism, we also create a variable for if Iraq is the most important issue to compare the effect of a foreign policy focus on correct voting when the issue is not as favorable to the incumbent. With terrorism being a favorably viewed issue for Bush, we would expect Kerry voters who identified terrorism as most important to be less likely to vote correctly. However, Iraq was not seen as favorable to Bush. According to Gallup (2004), voters were more balanced in their perception of who was best at handling the situation in Iraq. In September 2004, Bush held a more favorable lead (55–41 percent), but the split was only about seven points for much of October and the final Gallup poll in October 2004 actually showed Kerry with a more favorable view of being able to handle Iraq (49–47 percent). Given this perception that is less sided toward the incumbent (Bush), the Iraq item allows us to gauge correct voting on an issue unowned by the incumbent. We create indicators for Iraq being important and terrorism being important versus all other issues (1 = Yes, 0 = No).

Our dependent variable is the measure of “voting correctly” from Richard Lau and David P. Redlawsk (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Lau and Redlawsk’s voting correctly measure uses a variety of indicators to assess which candidate was the “correct” candidate for the respondent. Through a variety of tests, both experimental and survey, Lau and Redlawsk have developed a rather robust measure of voting correctly that has been used in a variety of studies (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008; Lau et al., 2013). Lau and Redlawsk use four different criteria for assessing correct voting within the ANES. The actual calculation is too detailed and lengthy to footnote so we encourage referencing the appendix of Lau and Redlawsk (1997) and the Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008) article for an exact description. However, we summarize their calculations here. These four criteria consist of the party identification of the individual, policy stances of the individual compared to those of the candidates, linkages between the individual and different social groups, and, finally, perceptions of the candidates’ and incumbent’s job performance. These criteria are combined and scaled into a summary evaluation for each candidate to decide the candidate closest to the individual and thus which candidate was the correct candidate.<sup>2</sup> The “correct” candidate is compared to the actual reported vote choice of the individual to create a measure of whether the individual voted correctly or not. Our dependent variable, then, is Lau and Redlawsk’s variable for whether the respondent voted for the correct candidate in 2004. This variable takes the code of 1 if the respondent voted for the correct candidate and 0 otherwise.

We perform a logistic regression with robust standard errors clustered by state. We also include additional control variables. First, we include Lau and Redlawsk’s indicator of the correct candidate for the respondent (based on the calculations described earlier). This measure is dichotomous with 1 indicating Kerry was the correct candidate and 0 indicating Bush. This measure is important in that it helps us scrutinize whether all respondents were diverted from their correct candidate or only those who should have voted for a specific candidate. We also interact this measure with the issue importance measure.

Second, we control for the strength of an individual’s partisan identification. Those with stronger identifications to their party (regardless of Republican or Democrat) should be

<sup>1</sup>The data and coding for this dependent variable can be found on Richard Lau’s website at (<http://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu/lau/datasets.html>).

<sup>2</sup>For the 2004 ANES, Lau and Redlawsk use the following. (1) Issue stances include: spending versus services, defense, role of government in ensuring jobs, affirmative action, the environment versus jobs, access to guns, women’s role in the workplace, mode of U.S. interventionism (diplomacy vs. militarism), and abortion. (2) Groups consist of feeling thermometers for the poor, liberals, Jewish, blacks, Hispanics, unions, feminists, age cohorts, men, business, conservatives, fundamentalists, whites, the middle class. (3) Candidate traits include: moral, strong leader, really cares, knowledgeable, intelligent, dishonest, cannot make up mind.

more attached to their ideal candidate and less likely to be diverted. Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008) note this captures an aspect of the party heuristic and the strength of the party cue. They also note a strong connection between this strength variable and the likelihood of voting correctly. This variable is a three-point measure where the higher the value, the stronger the individual's identification with their party.

We also control for the respondent's perceived difference between the presidential candidates (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997, 2006; Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk, 2008; Rabinowitz and McDonald, 1989). If individuals are able to see distinct differences between the candidates, they should be less likely to vote for the incorrect candidate as long as they can match that candidate to their own views. Again, this variable was found to be significant in Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk's (2008) exploration of correct voting. This variable is measured as an index of perceived difference in candidates on nine separate issue positions. The index is scaled from 0 to 1 where higher values indicate a larger perceived difference.<sup>3</sup>

Political motivation is measured by a dichotomous measure asking whether the respondent cares about the election (1 = cares, 0 = does not). Similar to Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008), we include a measure of motivation because we should assume that individuals who truly care about the election should be more likely to vote for their "correct" candidate. Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008) also noted a strong positive relationship between caring about the election and voting correctly.

Finally, we include a range of standard socioeconomic and demographic measures as individual-level controls. We include a measure for race/ethnicity (0 = white; 1 = non-white), gender (0 = male; 1 = female), age (continuous measure), education (ordinal with greater values indicating more education), political knowledge (ordinal scale where greater numbers indicate greater levels of knowledge),<sup>4</sup> and political ideology (seven-point scale where larger values indicate more conservative).

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates that the influence of foreign policy issues on correct voting is significant and strong. In Model 1 (the noninteraction model), we see that in general, those individuals who believed that terrorism was the most important issue were less likely to vote correctly (the coefficient is negative and highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ )). Those individuals who do not identify terrorism as important had an 84 percent probability of selecting the "correct" candidate. However, of those identifying terrorism as the most important issue, the probability drops to 73 percent. Interestingly, many of the control variables we would expect to be significant are. Strength of partisanship is positive and significant, as is the perceived difference between the candidates. This mirrors overall results from Lau, Andersen, and Redlawsk (2008) in that voters should be able to vote more correctly when the political heuristics are stronger and when it is easier to tell the candidates apart. Surprisingly, female is negative and significant. When looking at the model fits, there is certainly room for improvement (pseudo  $R^2 = 0.11$  and proportional reduction of error is only 3 percent).

<sup>3</sup>We use nine separate issues stances to measure the perceived difference between the candidates. These issues are: spending, defense, jobs, aid to blacks, environment versus jobs, gun control, interventionism, and abortion. Individuals rated each candidate on a one to seven scale (except abortion and guns). The absolute value of the difference between candidates on each issue is then averaged to get an average difference perception for each respondent.

<sup>4</sup>The ANES asks individuals four knowledge questions (identify certain political figures). Answering the question correctly is coded 1 and with four questions we create an additive scale from 0 to 4.

TABLE 1  
Voting Correctly Based on Issue Importance

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Iraq important	–	–	–1.224 (0.864)
Terrorism important	–0.765** (0.190)	2.077* (0.939)	1.635* (0.731)
Kerry correct candidate	–	–2.595** (0.991)	–3.218** (0.742)
Iraq important*Kerry correct	–	–	1.755 (0.973)
Terrorism important*Kerry correct	–	–3.541** (1.053)	–2.952** (0.804)
Perceived difference between candidates	3.538** (0.949)	4.148** (0.913)	4.051** (0.943)
Party ID strength	0.573** (0.166)	0.198 (0.209)	0.205 (0.207)
Nonwhite	0.001 (0.309)	0.729 (0.402)	0.752* (0.381)
Female	–0.870** (0.233)	–0.825** (0.290)	–0.817** (0.290)
Age	0.004 (0.007)	0.005 (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)
Education	–0.022 (0.072)	0.013 (0.102)	0.013 (0.097)
Political knowledge	–0.057 (0.140)	–0.300* (0.130)	–0.293* (0.133)
Cares about the election	0.672 (0.499)	0.237 (0.607)	0.289 (0.619)
Ideology	–0.148 (0.084)	–0.838** (0.178)	–0.856** (0.168)
Constant	0.459 (0.859)	6.234** (2.084)	6.783** (1.884)
Pseudo $R^2$	0.11	0.340	0.349
Per. cor. pred.	79%	86%	86%
Prop. red. in error	3%	37%	37%
Observations	651	651	651

NOTES: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors clustered by state.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

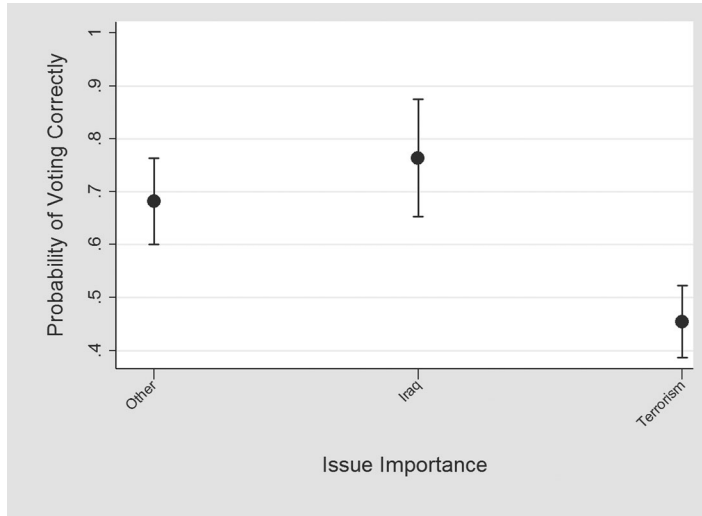
This lack of model fit is likely the result of the need to refine our model to match our expectations. As mentioned in our theory, it may not be that all individuals will be more likely to vote incorrectly, but only those who originally should have voted for the opposition party candidate. Essentially, we do not expect Bush voters to vote incorrectly, only Kerry voters when terrorism is the most important issue. Given this, we need to correctly specify the model, which is done in Model 2. We interact the terrorism importance question with the indicator variable for whether Kerry was the correct candidate for the respondent. This allows us to then measure whether it is only certain types of voters who were diverted from their correct choice.

The results from Model 2 provide a more refined understanding of who exactly is diverted from their “correct candidate.” First of all, note the improved model fit by incorporating the interaction effect. The pseudo  $R^2$  has risen to a respectable 0.34 and the proportional



FIGURE 1

Predicted Probability of Voting Correctly by Issue Importance (Kerry = Correct Candidate)

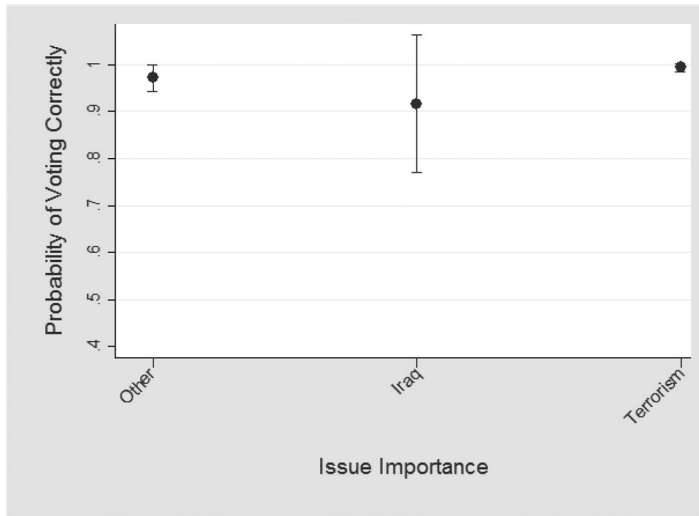


reduction in error has increased to 37 percent. In looking at the effects, we note the terrorism importance variable playing a substantial role in correct voting. To start, those who should have voted for Kerry were less likely to vote correctly in general. However, we see a negative and highly significant coefficient for the interaction variable. This indicates that those who should have voted for Kerry but focused on terrorism were even less likely to vote correctly compared to those who should have voted for Kerry but focused on other issues. If we consider the marginal effects, the probability of voting correctly when the correct candidate is Kerry and terrorism is not important is 71 percent. This probability drops to 46 percent when terrorism is important. Interestingly, those who should have voted for Bush and viewed terrorism as the most important issue are actually more likely to vote correctly. The marginal effects show a 95 percent probability of voting correctly when the respondent should vote for Bush and terrorism was not the most important issue. This probability goes up to 99 percent when terrorism is the most important issue. While there is not much room to go up from 95 percent, the increase in correct voting percentage is noteworthy and makes sense.

Finally, Model 3 replicates Model 2 but incorporates an additional interaction for whether the respondent believed Iraq was important with Kerry being the correct candidate. Again, the focus is to see how well a focus on foreign policy works on correct voting, but this time comparing foreign policy issues whose handling are perceived very differently by voters. Here we see an interesting twist. Again, we see that those who should have voted for Kerry were less likely to vote correctly. However, this mattered greatly depending on the most important issue to the respondent. If terrorism is the most important issue, then those who should have voted for Kerry are least likely to vote correctly. However, if Iraq was the most important issue, we see a reverse in the sign of the coefficient (indicating an increase in correct voting). The coefficient is only significant at the  $p < 0.10$  level but it is certainly noteworthy given the substantial sign reversal. If we consider the probability of voting correctly for those who should have voted for Kerry (see Figure 1), the baseline probability (other issues besides Iraq and terrorism are important) is 68 percent. This drops to

FIGURE 2

Predicted Probability of Voting Correctly by Issue Importance (Bush = Correct Candidate)



45 percent when terrorism is the most important issue and increases to 76 percent when Iraq is the most important issue. For those who should have voted for Bush, we show a positive and significant effect on correct voting when terrorism is the most important issue, but a negative coefficient on correct voting when Iraq is the most important issue. The variable misses the standard significance level ( $p = 0.16$ ) but is still noteworthy to mention. Similar to Model 2, the probability of voting correctly for those who should have voted for Bush is 97 percent at the baseline (other issues besides Iraq and terrorism are important) and 99 percent when terrorism is important. It does drop to 92 percent when Iraq is important, but again, the variable misses the standard significance level (see Figure 2).

To summarize, our results demonstrate that salient foreign policy issues have a potential to alter the voting calculations of individuals. However, this potential is dependent on who is perceived to be better able to handle the issue (the challenger or the incumbent). We took two issues (Iraq and terrorism) and considered how these foreign policy issues influenced voting calculations when they were salient to the respondent. Because terrorism was considered a favorable issue for Bush, we expected it to alter voting calculations in a direction favorable to Bush for those who considered terrorism as the most important issue. This is exactly what we saw. This effect was especially pronounced with voters who should have voted for Kerry, where correct voting dropped 25 points for those individuals who saw terrorism as the most salient issue. Iraq, however, was not seen as particularly advantageous to either candidate, and this was reflected in results that missed the typical significance thresholds.

## Conclusion

The voting correctly literature has provided unique insights into the actual voting calculations individuals make and what issues help or hurt these calculations. One area missing from this literature, however, is thinking about how foreign policy issues play into these individual-level calculations. This is unfortunate because the foreign policy and public

opinion literature has argued this notion for quite some time. Combining these two strands of research is necessary and provides insights applicable to both camps.

For the voting correctly literature, we expand the set of conditions that can influence voter calculations and “correct voting” along with elaborating on how foreign policy can play such a role. We showed that a salient foreign policy issue that is perceived as favorable to the incumbent can influence voting calculations to the benefit of the incumbent. Overall, Bush received an electoral advantage when individuals focused on terrorism as the most important issue. Those individuals who should have voted for Kerry were less likely to and those who should have voted for Bush were more likely to. To state it another way, focusing on terrorism is associated with those who should have voted for Kerry to vote incorrectly by much higher margins and those who should have voted for Bush to vote more correctly.

However, issue ownership appears to play a substantial role here. Bush was viewed very favorably by the public on terrorism and this appeared to be reflected in voting calculations. However, when we turn to another foreign policy issue, Iraq, the advantage for Bush disappears, and we believe this is due to the issue not being advantageous to Bush. What this means is that not every foreign policy issue will impact voting calculations but that only those salient to individuals and viewed favorably upon the incumbent. This is certainly a first cut at researching how foreign policy issues influence correct voting and future research should certainly explore this notion further, specifically with regard to additional conditions and additional historical cases.

These insights and additions to our understanding in the voting correctly literature can also provide new insights into the rally and diversionary literature. We show that, under specific conditions, when individuals focus on foreign policy, their voting calculations can be altered. Certainly, we did not consider a diversionary attempt here, but what we showed was that when individuals focused on foreign policy issues favorable to the incumbent, the voting calculations of the public were altered to advantage the incumbent. What diversionary theory argues is that an incumbent is (1) able to successfully transition the public’s focus on a foreign policy issue, and (2) that the incumbent benefits electorally, or simply in public approval, for this transition in focus. Our research helps clarify this second stage. If incumbents are successful in focusing the public on a foreign policy event, then we show quite strongly that they can benefit by confusing the electoral calculations of individuals, but only if the public sees the incumbent as much better at handling the issue. How much better? We do not know and certainly future research should further consider when and under what conditions a focus could aid the incumbent. Our results with Iraq noted that not every issue can be advantageous to an incumbent. So if incumbents were to try to use foreign policy issues to try to alter the voting calculations of the public, as diversionary theory argues, they cannot just pick any foreign policy event to attempt to gain an electoral advantage. They need to be quite strategic in the issues they consider. Future research should certainly consider this conditional relationship between issues, incumbents, and voting calculation.

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