

Domestic and foreign policy issues in the 1988 presidential election

HANS RATTINGER

University of Bamberg, West Germany

Abstract. Data surveyed for the 'Americans Talk Security' project prior to the 1988 U.S. election are used to evaluate the impact of domestic and foreign policy attitudes on the presidential vote. Both kinds of issues did have significant effects on voting behavior, contributing to Dukakis' defeat. It is demonstrated, however, that prior attempts to isolate and weigh the electoral influences of these two sets of opinions are flawed, because they ignore their interrelation and their dependence on partisan sympathies. If these factors are explicitly taken into account within a causal modelling approach, the 1988 presidential vote in the aggregate is found to have been much more strongly determined by domestic concerns. Moreover, the assumption of uniform reactions within the electorate to various issue areas is proven wrong. While domestic policies were more decisive for the vote of the majority, there also was a clearly identifiable substantial minority that can be described as a foreign and defence issue voting public.

1. Introduction

There is hardly disagreement in the scholarly community that people's attitudes on political issues do have a strong impact on their voting behaviour. There also is little disagreement that over the past four decades these influences on the vote have become more important, while the impact of partisan affiliations has declined (Nie et al., 1976; Asher, 1988). On the other hand, disagreement still is considerable about which kinds of issues are most likely to have an effect on the vote. In particular, there is an on-going debate over the relative importance of domestic vs. foreign policy issues. The conventional wisdom is that of Almond (1950), whose research showed that most Americans knew little about foreign policy and devoted most of their attention to domestic issues. The reasons most frequently cited for such 'parochialism' are that foreign affairs and national security concerns are too complex to be understood by the average person, so that 'non-attitudes' would have to be frequent (Converse, 1970; Bishop et al., 1980), and that domestic policies have more obvious and direct implications for people's everyday life, especially their material well-being.

In recent years a 'revisionist' argument has emerged, and it has been pursued along two major routes: First, scholars have attempted to demonstrate that – contrary to the conventional wisdom – many Americans *do* in fact

have some knowledge of foreign affairs, and that their attitudes on these matters display a consistent and 'rational' structure (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987a, 1987b; Graham, 1988; Munton, 1988; Shapiro and Page, 1988).

Second, there have been efforts to prove that such attitudes actually *do* have a significant influence on voting behaviour. Probably the best example of this latter trend of 'revisionism' is an investigation of the 1980 and 1984 U.S. presidential elections by Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989). They point to the 'anomaly' that presidential candidates usually campaign heavily on foreign policy and national security issues. If voters were really inattentive to these matters, this would be an irrational waste of resources. From their analyses these authors conclude that the public does indeed respond to the candidates' confrontations over foreign affairs: 'The candidates are waltzing before a reasonably alert audience that appreciates their grace. And, given a choice, the public votes for the candidate who waltzes best' (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, 1989: 136).

This article will not attempt to prove that either the conventional wisdom or the 'revisionists' are wrong. It proceeds from the assumption that attitudes on foreign affairs should have *some* impact on voting behaviour. Using data for the 1988 presidential election, it will demonstrate that American voters indeed clearly distinguish between candidates in terms of how competent they judge them to be for handling domestic and foreign issues, and by the extent to which they agree with their substantive positions. Already at this stage it will become obvious that George Bush not only beat Michael Dukakis at the polls, but that first he beat him on the issues – *foreign and domestic* – and that this probably was a primary reason for his victory. The article then goes on to disagree with the 'revisionists', however, over the strength of the independent effects of foreign policy attitudes on the vote. To this author's knowledge, the study by Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida is the most elaborate attempt so far to demonstrate such effects for the U.S. It will be shown that the approach pursued by these authors (and by others) is marred by two major flaws. First, it is impossible to assess adequately the relative impact of foreign and domestic issues on the vote without taking multicollinearity between the two sets of attitudes into account. Since these correlations are quite high, the traditional multivariate regression approach will be confronted with a causal modelling procedure, simultaneously estimating the interrelations between party identification, domestic and foreign issue stands, and voting behaviour. Second, the assumption of uniformity of effects is obviously unrealistic. Why should opinions towards these two policy areas have the same electoral consequences for all citizens? It will be shown that it is more realistic to assume the overall electorate to consist of different issue publics – for some types of voters foreign affairs being more relevant, domestic issues for others.

2. Voters' judgements about the candidates' competence and issue positions

In order for political issues to have an effect on voting behaviour, voters must have attitudes on those issues. If one follows the classification of issues into valence vs. position issues (Butler and Stokes, 1969, ch. 8), voters must, for the first sort of issues, discern differences in the candidates' competence to handle them, and for the second sort of issues they have to perceive differences in the candidates' stands, they must have opinions of their own, and they must be able to evaluate with whom they agree more. Moreover, the substance of the issues has to be recognized and has to stimulate some kind of affect on the part of voters (Campbell et al., 1960: 170). Drawing on social-psychological research, Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989) summarize these conditions by stating that attitudes have to be both 'available' and 'accessible' to be able to exert an influence on the vote.

The data from the 'Americans Talk Security' project (ATS) that were analyzed here for the 1988 presidential election (see Appendix 1) show that these conditions were clearly met for domestic as well as foreign policy issues. In both ATS-surveys, an average of 80 percent and more of respondents said that they saw differences between Bush and Dukakis in their ability to handle various issues (Table 1). Almost as many perceived differences in the positions held by these candidates on a series of foreign policy and national security issues, which were particularly strongly targeted due to the focus of the ATS-project (Table 2). There are no sharp distinctions between groups of items in the extent to which such differences between the candidates' competence or positions were perceived. This is true for domestic vs. foreign policy competence as well as for the various policy positions. Moreover, on these latter positions, well in excess of 90 percent of respondents were able to state their own approval or disapproval.¹ Our findings thus strongly corroborate those of Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989) about the 'accessibility' of attitudes. Finally, the data also show that perceptions of both types of candidate differences increased visibly (by about five percentage points) during the final five to six weeks of the campaign (ATS10 was polled in the first week of October, ATS11 in the two days preceding the election).

Not only did an overwhelming majority of voters distinguish between the candidates on the issues, but they also predominantly declared them to be very or extremely important for their vote. In both surveys respondents were asked how important foreign affairs, economic problems, social, and environmental issues were 'in helping you to decide which candidate to vote for'; in ATS11 this was also asked for each of the individual items summarized in Table 1 (and listed in Appendix 2). Responses to these questions (Table 3 and first column of Table 1) demonstrate that domestic concerns were rated as somewhat more

Table 1. Judgments about the competence of Bush and Dukakis on various issues.

'Please tell me whether you feel Bush or Dukakis would do a better job of handling that issue'	Importance of the issue (scale zero to one)	% that see difference in competence			
		ATS10	G. Bush more competent	ATS11	G. Bush more competent
Relations with the Soviet Union					
and arms control issues (5 items)	0.71	81.1	68.0	87.3	71.8
Other foreign policy (7 items)	0.64	76.5	53.6	82.1	58.9
Economic issues (6 items)	0.74	82.8	52.2	88.0	56.2
Social issues (6 items)	0.69	79.4	44.1	85.2	51.1
Mean foreign policy issues	0.67	78.6	60.1	84.3	64.3
Mean domestic issues	0.71	81.3	48.6	86.4	53.3
Overall mean	0.69	79.8	55.0	85.4	58.4

Importance of single issues for the vote was only asked in ATS11. Individual items are listed in appendix 2.1.

important than foreign issues, with economic problems topping the list, and environmental ones at the bottom. Since the averages of all importance scales are at or above the score for 'very important' one should not forget, however, that respondents were not forced to make choices or produce a rank order. They could call everything very or extremely important for their vote. Thus, we can only assume that the rank order of the importance of policy areas

Table 2. Perceptions of different positions of candidates on various issues (all figures are percentages).

'Please tell me whether you strongly/somewhat approve/disapprove of that position ... Please tell me which candidate holds each position'	Respondent has own position		Different positions of candidates perceived		Own position and perception of candidate differences		Respondents holding position ascribed to G. Bush	
	ATS10	ATS11	ATS10	ATS11	ATS10	ATS11	ATS10	ATS11
Relations with Soviet Union and arms control issues (12 items)	95.5	95.4	72.2	77.1	71.9	75.2	55.5	57.1
Other foreign policy issues (4 items)	93.9	95.0	74.6	81.1	70.8	78.6	49.4	46.2
Defence and armaments issues (8 items)	92.0	91.7	79.6	82.4	75.3	78.1	47.7	51.9
Overall mean	94.4	94.0	74.5	79.6	72.7	76.7	52.7	53.7

Individual items are listed in appendix 2.2.

reported here is correct, but that a different question format would bring out the span of relative saliency much more clearly.

So far we have seen that voters regarded political issues as important for their choice, and strongly perceived differences between the two candidates – still increasingly so over the final phase of the campaign. Moreover, they also shifted in their evaluations of the two men over the course of these weeks. Across all issue areas in Table 1, confidence in the ability of George Bush is seen as growing, and for Michael Dukakis as declining. In the ATS10 survey, Dukakis still held the edge as far as his ability to cope with social issues was concerned; prior to the election Bush was leading even here, as he did – and had done before – in all other fields. While his advantage was only small for domestic problems, it was almost overwhelming in the field of foreign policy. His final lead in voters' foreign affairs positions was also clear, particularly so regarding relations with the Soviet Union and arms control. For questions pertaining to defence and armament programmes, Bush went from a minority of followers to a majority during these weeks, whereas only Dukakis' positions on other foreign policy items became somewhat more popular, and at election time still were the majority view. Parallel to this widening lead of Bush on the issues, an increase in intentions to vote for him can be observed between the two points in time (Table A-1, in Appendix 3). The ATS surveys do not represent repeated interviewing of the same sample, but independent cross-sections. Therefore, it is impossible to directly ascertain that those voters who switched their issue evaluations were also mainly the ones who changed their intended vote. However, these parallel trends can hardly be imagined to be accidental. They rather point to a significant impact of attitudes about political issues on the vote. It is to this linkage that we now turn in more detail.

Table 3. Importance of policy areas for the vote.

	Percentages					Mean scale value
	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Not sure	
Foreign policy	35.6	44.2	15.6	2.4	0.2	0.72
	32.6	45.5	16.6	3.5	1.8	0.70
Economic issues	39.7	51.2	7.1	1.0	1.0	0.77
	36.9	52.0	10.0	0.8	0.2	0.75
Social issues	39.3	45.1	13.8	1.4	0.4	0.74
	35.1	51.1	12.1	1.0	0.7	0.74
Environment	31.8	41.5	20.6	4.1	2.0	0.68
	25.7	46.8	22.3	4.0	1.2	0.65

Upper value is for ATS10, lower for ATS11. Scale in last column is 0 (for 'not important'), 0.33, 0.67 and 1 (for 'extremely important').

3. Political issues and the 1988 presidential vote

In order to assess the influence of issues on the vote in the 1980 and 1984 elections, Adrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989, Table 5) performed regression analyses of the presidential vote on party identification and on a foreign and a domestic issue scale. This approach is replicated here as a first step. Individual survey questions about political issues from ATS10 and ATS11 were combined into nine indices, seven for foreign policy and two for domestic attitudes (see Appendix 3 and Table A-1). These indices were (with equal weights) averaged into two attitude scales, one for foreign policy and one for domestic opinions. The presidential vote intention was then regressed on party identification (for the coding of the vote and party identification scales see Appendix 3) alone and on party identification plus the two attitude scales using ordinary least squares (Table 4).

The results show that both party identification and political attitudes had a strong effect on the 1988 presidential vote. In both surveys party identification alone accounts for almost half of the variance in the vote, and the two issue scales explain somewhat less than half of the residual variance, so that in total between 72 and 73 percent of the variance in voting intentions is accounted for by these three predictors. The regression coefficients indicate that attitudes in both issue areas had a significant impact on the vote, with the weight shifting toward domestic issues between the two surveys. In ATS10 the raw coefficient for the foreign scale is larger than for domestic issues, and the standardized effects of both are roughly equal. In ATS11 both standardized and unstandardized coefficients are higher for domestic concerns, but a considerable effect of foreign policy attitudes is still visible. These results can be interpreted

Table 4. Regression of the presidential vote on party identification and on domestic and foreign issues.

	ATS10	ATS11
Party identification	0.26c (0.27)	0.28c (0.25)
Domestic issues	0.52c (0.34)	0.72c (0.42)
Foreign issues	0.77c (0.36)	0.66c (0.28)
Constant	0.02	0.06c
Adjusted R ²	0.721c	0.726c
R ² party identification alone	0.478c	0.481c
Increase of R ²	0.243c	0.245c
Increase of R ² as fraction of variance unexplained by party identification	0.466	0.472
N	973	988

Values in brackets are standardized betas.

c: $p < 0.001$.

exactly the way Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida analyzed theirs, i.e., that it has been established that foreign policy opinions did in 1988 exert a strong independent influence on voting behaviour which is in a similar order of magnitude as that of domestic concerns – just as had been the case for the previous two elections that these authors investigated.

This conclusion is not so readily accepted here for the simple reason that foreign and domestic attitudes are quite strongly correlated. The correlation matrix for the four variables of the regression models of Table 4 (Table 5) shows that in the two 1988 surveys the two attitude scales correlated with 0.72 and 0.80, respectively. Thus, the regressions in Table 4 were computed in the presence of quite high multicollinearity between predictors, so that an unequivocal separation of effects can hardly have been achieved. If one wants to play the devil's advocate, one can even argue that the true correlation between foreign and domestic attitudes is underestimated in Table 5, because attenuation due to measurement error is ignored. This argument is supported by factor analyses of the nine indices that had been combined into the two attitude scales. Orthogonal exploratory factor analysis does not extract a domestic and a foreign issue factor, but rather one factor on which all competence scales load highly, and one for which this is the case for the position scales.² This goes to show that domestic vs. foreign are not the two most distinct dimensions in these data. Just the opposite is revealed by a confirmatory factor analysis, in which two factors are defined a priori. Only domestic attitude scales are allowed to load on the first factor, only foreign scales on the second, and their correlation is estimated together with the factor loadings and measurement errors.³ The result is that these two factors correlate at almost 0.95, instead of 0.8 as found for the two scales computed by averaging over indices.

If the regression analysis of Table 4 is repeated using these foreign and domestic factor scores from confirmatory factor analysis as predictors instead of the average scales (Table 6), the difficulty of decomposing and adequately weighing the effects of attitudes towards the two policy fields on the vote by

Table 5. Correlations between party identification, voting behaviour, and domestic and foreign issue judgments.

	Presidential vote	Domestic	Foreign
Party identification	0.69	0.61	0.60
	0.69	0.63	0.63
Presidential vote		0.77	0.77
		0.80	0.77
Domestic issues			0.72
			0.80

Upper values are for ATS10, lower for ATS11.

OLS regression is seen even more clearly. The model into which *both* factors are entered (third column) fits hardly better than the two models containing only one of them (first two columns). Thus, it can be claimed with equal justification that the joint explanatory power of both factors is almost exclusively due to domestic, or to foreign attitudes alone. Alternatively, one could say that both the domestic and foreign policy opinions gauged in the ATS-studies represent one single over-arching attitude dimension that in its effects on voting behavior is not clearly differentiated into a foreign vs. a domestic component. Estimation of such a model, for which one joint foreign and domestic factor was derived from confirmatory factor analysis, actually leads to the most parsimonious and best explanation of the presidential vote in terms of the variance accounted for (last column of Table 6).

The implication is that we must not ignore the high correlation between domestic and foreign attitudes if we wish to arrive at meaningful conclusions about their relative impact on the vote. However, it is not only this correlation which mandates an alternative approach, but also the strong association between party identification and both sets of attitudes (the lowest correlation for ATS11 in Table 5 is 0.63). Classical regression analysis is not the appropriate instrument when the assumption that predictors are uncorrelated is so strongly violated, and when there are clear reasons why this should be so, and obvious ideas what the causal structure underlying these high correlations might be. Party identification shapes both attitudes and the vote, and attitudes in different issue areas hang closely together. It takes a causal modelling approach with simultaneous equation estimation to take this into account.

Table 6. Regressions of the presidential vote on party identification and on domestic and foreign factors (standardized coefficients, ATS11, N = 988).

Party identification	0.26c	0.27c	0.26c	0.26c
Foreign factor	0.65c	–	0.30c	–
Domestic factor	–	0.65c	0.37c	–
Joint foreign and domestic factor	–	–	–	0.66c
Constant	0.01	0.05c	0.03a	0.03
Adjusted R ²	0.722c	0.723c	0.726c	0.727c
R ² party identification alone	0.478c	0.478c	0.478c	0.478c
Increase of R ²	0.244c	0.245c	0.248c	0.249c
Increase of R ² as fraction of variance unexplained by party	0.467	0.469	0.475	0.477

–: Not entered.

a: $p < 0.05$.

c: $p < 0.001$.

4. Structural models for the influence of party identification and political issues on the 1988 presidential vote

4.1. Comparing structural models and regression models

For the following analyses only data from ATS11 will be used. This survey was taken immediately prior to the election, and issue awareness was even higher than in ATS10, so that the most reliable estimates of issue effects on the vote can be expected. Our model here consists of one exogenous concept (i.e., party identification) and three endogenous concepts (i.e., domestic and foreign policy attitudes and voting behaviour). For domestic and foreign policy attitudes there are two and seven observed indicators, respectively (see Table A-1); for party identification and the vote there is only one observed indicator each, i.e., the theoretical concepts and the observed indicators are identical.⁴ Causal effects were specified as follows: party identification was assumed to have a direct effect on both sets of attitudes and the vote, both sets of attitudes were assumed to have a direct impact on the vote, and, finally, domestic attitudes were assumed to exert a causal influence on foreign policy attitudes. This latter assumption incorporates the multicollinearity between the two sets of attitudes into the model. Maximum likelihood estimation of this model (and simultaneously of the measurement models for domestic and foreign attitudes) was performed using the LISREL program.⁵

Table 7. Maximum-likelihood models of the effects of party identification and domestic and foreign issues on the presidential vote (ATS11).

		Full model	Model without domestic → foreign	Regression model
Direct effects	Party → domestic	0.60 (24.2)	0.58 (23.2)	
	Party → foreign	0.08 (3.5)	0.57 (23.5)	
	Party → vote	0.20 (8.3)	0.15 (4.9)	0.25 (14.9)
	Domestic → foreign	0.84 (25.8)		
	Domestic → vote	0.51 (4.5)	0.49 (16.7)	0.46 (20.8)
	Foreign → vote	0.33 (2.8)	0.45 (14.0)	0.41 (18.0)
Total effects	Party → foreign	0.58		
	Party → vote	0.69	0.69	
	Domestic → vote	0.78		
Chi ² /degrees of freedom		315/40	1081/41	2100/44
Adjusted goodness of fit index		0.902	0.778	0.617
Root mean squared residual		0.037	0.150	0.360
N		988	988	988

Values in brackets are t-statistics.

Estimation results (first column of Table 7) demonstrate a very good fit of this model to the data. They show that in 1988 domestic attitudes had a strong impact on foreign policy opinions. People heavily tend to transfer their evaluations of a candidate's positions and of his competence from the domestic to the foreign policy field, and their attitudes in both areas are greatly influenced by their partisan affiliations. Domestic attitudes are found to have a considerably stronger impact on the vote than foreign policy attitudes, but it should be noted that the smaller effect of foreign attitudes still is significantly different from zero. The total effect of domestic attitudes on voting behaviour is almost two and a half times as strong as that of foreign attitudes, roughly two-thirds being direct, and one-third indirect, through foreign policy opinions.

If this causal effect of domestic on foreign policy attitudes is ignored, the fit of the model gets considerably worse. Two versions of such 'wrong' models were estimated: one in which this effect was deleted from the full model (i.e., forced to be zero; second column of Table 7), and one in which party identification and the two sets of issues were treated as exogenous, i.e., the impact of party identification on attitudes was also ignored. This is analogous to the simple regression model (Table 4 and third column of Table 7). In this comparison the regression model performs by far the worst, but simply assuming the impact of domestic on foreign attitudes to be zero also produces a much less satisfactory fit than for the full model. Not surprisingly, however, in both 'wrong' models the influence of foreign attitudes on voting behaviour is estimated as much stronger than in the full model. Thus, it can be demonstrated that – at least in the 1988 presidential election – political attitudes are strongly influenced by party identification, and foreign policy attitudes by domestic ones. If the latter effect is ignored, the impact of foreign attitudes on the vote is overestimated. There is no obvious argument why this should have been different in earlier elections. It also deserves mentioning at this point, that these results are obtained in spite of the fact that foreign policy attitudes were gauged much more extensively in the ATS-studies than domestic ones, so that the data base is loaded in favor of finding strong effects of foreign issues.

4.2. Abandoning the assumption of uniform effects

In the introduction we have argued that earlier research on the relative impact of foreign and domestic issues on the vote is incomplete, both because it ignored multicollinearity between the two sets of attitudes, and because uniform effects across the whole electorate were assumed. We now turn to the second of these points by estimating the full model from Table 7 for several subsamples. The American electorate will be broken down, first, by the personal saliency of domestic vs. foreign policy issues, in order to assess

whether this can lead to the identification of distinct issue publics.⁶ Secondly, voters are categorized according to their ideology, because this dimension played a major role in the 1988 campaign. George Bush distanced himself vehemently from liberalism (the 'L-word'), and his campaign used foreign policy related arguments a lot more than that of Dukakis, who rather focussed on social and economic issues. This poses the question whether conservative and liberal voters indeed do exhibit different propensities to listen to these various themes. Finally, a 'mover/stayer' classification will be introduced. This will allow us to investigate the extent to which foreign vs. domestic attitudes were responsible for keeping voters loyal to their party, or for making them defect to the other party's presidential candidate.

Our first breakdown is according to self-declared importance of issue areas for individual voting behavior. The mean of the importance of economic and social issues was computed, and three groups of respondents were defined according to whether they declared foreign issues to be more or less important than these domestic problems in helping them to decide whom to vote for, or whether both had equal importance scores. Estimation results for these three groups are reported in Table 8.

They show that voters do in fact adequately declare what issues are more or less important for their vote. Those who rate the importance of foreign affairs as higher (somewhat over one quarter of the sample) are the most unique group, while the other two groups are quite similar to each other. Respondents in the first group are least influenced in their attitudes by their party identification, and they are the only ones with a strong and significant direct effect of foreign policy issues on the vote. For them, the direct effect of domestic issues on the vote is insignificant, and most of their total effect is indirect, through foreign policy attitudes. For all other respondents the influence of foreign affairs is either not or only barely significant, and both direct and total effects of domestic attitudes on voting are much stronger than for this first group. The fit of the model is roughly the same for all three subsamples. Even though the questions used to define these groups might be less than ideal, our results strongly support the reasoning that it is unwise to proceed as if all voters were equally sensitive to all issues. On the contrary, there is clear evidence for the existence of distinct issue publics that differ drastically in the extent to which they take various issue areas into account when casting their vote.

Not only will variations in the electoral impact of political issues be expected between diverse issue publics, but also if the electorate is broken down by its 'ideology', i.e., into self-defined conservatives, moderates or liberals. The prediction here is to find conservatives being more motivated by their foreign policy, and liberals more by their domestic attitudes. As can be seen in Table 9, this expectation is almost overwhelmingly confirmed by the data, and the distinctions between issue effects are even more drastic than in Table 8. The

influence of foreign policy issues on the vote declines monotonously from conservatives to liberals, and the impact of domestic attitudes rises monotonously. In fact, foreign policy attitudes *only* have a significant impact among conservative voters. For them, the direct effects of domestic issues are minimal, so that their total effect is almost exclusively indirect. For all other voters foreign issues are not significant as predictors of the vote, only domestic concerns are. It should be noted that these two classifications of the electorate, by 'ideology' and by importance of issues, covary strongly, but are far from identical.⁷ Therefore, Table 9 is not simply a repetition of Table 8, but yields important additional information: the American foreign policy issue voting public in the 1988 presidential election can *best* be described as that segment of the electorate that defines itself as conservative, while for all other voters evaluations of the candidates on these issues were of little electoral relevance. The emphasis in the two candidates' campaigns thus was suitably geared to the differential receptiveness across the ideological dimension within the electorate.

Our final analysis classifies the electorate according to whether or not the 1988 presidential vote was consonant with respondents' party identification. Naturally, the impact of political attitudes on the vote will be expected to be lower when party affiliation and the vote are consonant than when they diverge. A third group consists of those respondents for whom party affiliation and/or voting intention could not be assessed.⁸ For this group, and for those

Table 8. Maximum-likelihood models of the effects of party identification and domestic and foreign issues on the presidential vote by importance of issue areas (ATS11).

		Foreign policy more important	Domestic and foreign equally important	Domestic policy more important
Direct effects	Party → domestic	0.47 (9.1)	0.62 (15.9)	0.61 (14.5)
	Party → foreign	0.07 (1.5)	0.05 (1.6)	0.07 (1.8)
	Party → vote	0.24 (5.4)	0.24 (6.3)	0.11 (2.5)
	Domestic → foreign	0.82 (11.8)	0.90 (18.6)	0.74 (12.3)
	Domestic → vote	0.23 (1.3)	0.66 (2.0)	0.56 (3.6)
	Foreign → vote	0.59 (3.3)	0.12 (0.4)	0.37 (2.0)
Total effects	Party → foreign	0.45	0.60	0.52
	Party → vote	0.62	0.72	0.64
	Domestic → vote	0.72	0.77	0.83
Chi ² /degrees of freedom		102/40	138/40	160/40
Adjusted goodness of fit index		0.891	0.897	0.857
Root mean squared residual		0.042	0.037	0.049
N		263	382	343

Values in brackets are t-statistics.

with the vote dissonant from party identification, estimating the effects of partisan sympathies on political attitudes and on the vote is neither meaningful nor possible: for independents there is no variance in party identification, and a deviation of the vote from party identification cannot be explained by party identification. Therefore, Table 10 has to contain estimation results for two different models, the full model for respondents whose party identification and presidential vote are in agreement, and a model from which all effects of party identification are deleted for the other two groups.

Not surprisingly, for 'faithful' voters party identification emerges as by far the most important variable for shaping peoples' attitudes and their vote. Issues play only a minor role for these respondents' voting decisions: foreign policy attitudes do not have a significant impact at all, that of domestic problems is significant, but far lower in magnitude than in earlier results. Stronger issue effects are visible for the other two groups of voters, particularly for those categorized as 'all other'. Among them, both issue areas exert a significant influence on voting intentions, with domestic problems again in the lead. 'Unfaithful' voters, finally, were mainly motivated by judgements about the competence of the candidates for domestic policies, the coefficient for foreign policy attitudes being in the correct direction but below statistical significance. We thus can conclude that in the 1988 presidential election political attitudes were least relevant electorally for those who toed the party line, and most relevant for voters who defected from their party identification, did not have one to start with, or could not decide to vote for either of the candidates.

Table 9. Maximum-likelihood models of the effects of party identification and domestic and foreign issues on the presidential vote by ideology (ATS11).

		Conservatives	Moderates	Liberals
Direct effects	Party → domestic	0.47 (10.7)	0.55 (13.6)	0.58 (9.4)
	Party → foreign	0.07 (1.9)	0.07 (2.2)	0.03 (0.4)
	Party → vote	0.23 (5.5)	0.14 (3.7)	0.29 (4.1)
	Domestic → foreign	0.82 (13.8)	0.87 (17.4)	0.79 (7.0)
	Domestic → vote	0.06 (0.3)	0.65 (2.8)	0.74 (2.8)
	Foreign → vote	0.82 (3.4)	0.21 (0.8)	-0.01 (-0.0)
Total effects	Party → foreign	0.45	0.54	0.49
	Party → vote	0.62	0.61	0.72
	Domestic → vote	0.72	0.83	0.74
Chi ² /degrees of freedom		123/40	160/40	94/40
Adjusted goodness of fit index		0.902	0.877	0.825
Root mean squared residual		0.040	0.049	0.054
N		360	404	168

Values in brackets are t-statistics.

Abandoning the assumption of uniform issue effects on the vote across the electorate thus yields important and plausible findings. The concept of issue publics, that are affected unevenly by attitudes toward distinct policy arenas, receives strong empirical support. In the 1988 presidential election the conservative-liberal dimension covaried with the distinction between foreign policy vs. domestic policy issue publics, but the two classifications were far from being identical. Nevertheless, their foreign policy attitudes were by far more relevant for the voting behaviour of conservative than of liberal voters, and campaign strategies were set up and refined accordingly. Finally, our third breakdown of the electorate shows that foreign policy attitudes – even though more important than domestic ones for the vote of a minority – were not decisive for the aggregate election outcome. For loyal voters, defectors from their party identification, and independents alike the effects of domestic issues on the vote proved to be consistently and considerably stronger than those of foreign policy concerns.

5. Conclusion

Three major results emerge from the analysis presented here: First, one of the primary reasons Michael Dukakis was defeated on election day 1988 is that he failed to convince majorities of the American electorate on the issues. The topics actualized during the campaign were strongly on people's minds, but in

Table 10. Maximum-likelihood models of the effects of party identification and domestic and foreign issues on the presidential vote by party identification and voting behaviour (ATS11).

		Party ID and vote consonant	Party ID and vote dissonant	All other respondents
Direct effects	Party → domestic	0.79 (34.2)		
	Party → foreign	0.12 (2.6)		
	Party → vote	0.73 (33.1)		
	Domestic → foreign	0.78 (14.3)	0.61 (7.1)	0.77 (16.9)
	Domestic → vote	0.22 (3.5)	0.37 (3.1)	0.46 (5.5)
	Foreign → vote	0.08 (1.2)	0.14 (1.2)	0.24 (2.9)
Total effects	Party → foreign	0.73		
	Party → vote	0.96		
	Domestic → vote	0.28	0.46	0.65
Chi ² /degrees of freedom		246/40	122/35	270/35
Adjusted goodness of fit index		0.893	0.657	0.596
Root mean squared residual		0.035	0.152	0.146
N		705	86	197

Values in brackets are t-statistics.

most fields majorities agreed more with Bush than with Dukakis, and regarded the former as more competent to deal with the nation's problems. During the final weeks of the campaign Dukakis could not close the gap, but fell even further behind. Second, these findings hold true both for foreign and domestic issues. Attitudes toward both policy areas had a significant impact on the vote. However, it could be demonstrated that previous attempts to separate their effects, which ignore their interrelation, are incomplete. If the notion that attitudes in different issue areas will normally not be independent from each other, and that they all to a considerable extent will reflect partisan sympathies, is explicitly incorporated into the model, it becomes obvious that for the electorate in general the 1988 presidential vote was more heavily influenced by domestic than by foreign policy concerns.

Third, finally, the 'anomaly' pointed out by Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, that presidential candidates so strongly campaign on foreign issues, even though allegedly they are irrelevant for voters, has largely evaporated. Their assertion was that in some recent elections these issues have had about equal weight as domestic ones for the electorate. We have shown that their methodology is inadequate to support such a claim, and that, with a more adequate approach, the importance of domestic problems for the electorate in total is greater than that of foreign issues. But even then there is no anomaly. If the judges in the electoral dance contest take both the grace in the waltz and rock'n roll style into account, it makes sense for competitors to rock and roll their breath away, especially if their waltzing performance is not that outstanding. Moreover, some judges might give more weight to the waltz, others to the rock'n roll. For the 1988 presidential election we could indeed demonstrate that the electorate consists of different types of judges, a majority whose voting behaviour is much more strongly due to domestic concerns, and a minority who responds more heavily to foreign issues. In this election those voters identifying themselves as conservatives were particularly likely to belong to this latter category (maybe *because* 'their' natural candidate appeared as stronger on foreign policy problems). The final sentences of the Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida article thus should be reformulated: the candidates are dancing before a reasonably alert *but differentiated* audience, parts of which pay more attention to and are more affected in their judgments by their waltzing, others their rock'n rolling. It therefore makes abundant sense for rational candidates to try to exhibit proficiency and style in both disciplines.

These results for the 1988 U.S. presidential election have important implications and pose relevant questions for further study, for comparative analysis, and for theoretical reasoning about the electoral effects of political issues. They can be addressed only very briefly and speculatively. As to further study of the U.S. case, it would be interesting to see whether these findings can be replicated for earlier elections, and will hold up in the future. Moreover, the

foreign and domestic issue voting publics still need to be defined more precisely in terms of their social and political characteristics. In a longitudinal perspective, the individual stability of belonging to these issue publics should be investigated, as should be the underlying causes why voters wind up paying more attention to specific sets of policy problems than to others.

Another exciting task would be comparative replication, especially for nations of Western Europe. Given appropriate data, we can probably expect to detect distinct issue publics there as well, but it is rather doubtful that the foreign policy issue public will, like in the U.S., be found to be concentrated among the conservative segment of the electorate. After ten years of peace protest and activism, and the conservative response to it, it is more likely that the attention to foreign and security policy issues across the left-right dimension (that roughly corresponds to the conservative-liberal continuum in the U.S.) will rather tend to follow a U-shaped distribution. On the other hand, the conclusion that domestic policies were more important in deciding the 1988 U.S. presidential election than foreign ones can be expected to meet with much similar evidence from most Western European countries. Campaigns there also by no means do neglect foreign policy – for the same reasons cited here for resolving this alleged anomaly, i.e., even if only a minority of voters can be mobilized by foreign issues, it would be irrational not to cater to their needs, especially if the election is close. But like in the U.S. the saliency of domestic issues is usually greater for majorities, and the cases where foreign policy concerns figure so prominently that they determine the total outcome will be expected to be the exception rather than the rule.

In terms of the feedback between theory and empirical analysis, the arguments presented and the results obtained here also transcend the U.S. case. The debate between conventional wisdom and 'revisionists' has its European counterpart as well. It often appears in the form of disagreement over the thesis of a 'democratization' of foreign and security affairs. Theoretical analysis can inspire empirical investigation, but sometimes theoretical debates, hopefully, can learn from and be modified by empirical findings. The lesson to be learned here is that *both* the conventional wisdom and the revisionist school can be part right. Yes, there is a majority for whose voting foreign policy attitudes are less important than other concerns, but, yes, there also is a minority for whose voting the reverse holds. The theoretical and empirical task for (national or comparative) studies of issue voting thus cannot be to establish that all is black or all is white. The task rather is to investigate which portions of the electorate are 'black', which are 'white', which are all shades of gray, how this comes about, and what consequences flow from this assortment of hues for the overall distribution of political choices.

Notes

1. This high level of issue 'accessibility' could to some extent be due to the emergence of response sets, as in the ATS-studies long batteries of questions were used within telephone surveys. See, e.g., Frey (1983) and Lavrakas (1987) for the methodology and problems of telephone surveys.
2. Again there is the possibility that this structure of the data is exaggerated by response sets. Judgments about the candidates' competence and positions were gauged in two separate batteries of questions. Even though the individual items within these batteries were rotated, the respective starting points were not coded in the data sets, so that it is impossible to investigate this possibility empirically.
3. The PC-version (6.12) of the LISREL program was used for all confirmatory factor analyses and maximum likelihood estimations reported in this article.
4. In LISREL this means that the loading of the observed indicator on the theoretical concept is constrained at a value of 1.0, which is not modified during estimation of other parameters.
5. Jöreskog and Sörbom (1984) is the authoritative program manual for version 6; its most recent edition is Jöreskog and Sörbom (1989). For other introductions to LISREL see, e.g., Long (1983), Hayduk (1987). Due to limitations of space only direct effects of exogenous variables on endogenous ones (gamma-matrix in LISREL-terminology), interrelations among endogenous concepts (beta-matrix), and total effects (if different from direct effects) will be reported in subsequent tables together with goodness of fit statistics.
6. For an exposition of the concept of 'issue publics' in the framework of electoral research see Maggiotto and Piereson (1978).
7. 'Only' 32 percent of the conservatives, e.g., said that foreign affairs were more important for their vote choice than domestic issues, while 50 percent of liberals declared domestic problems as more important.
8. Almost 85 percent of these respondents were true independents.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Americans Talk Security studies

The Americans Talk Security (ATS) project was funded privately. From October 1987 to December 1988 twelve telephone surveys were held with nation-wide random samples of about 1000 registered voters each. On the average, interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes, and were strongly focused on foreign policy and national security issues. In studies no. 10 and 11 (fieldwork from September 30 to October 3 and November 6 to 7, 1988, respectively) respondents were also asked for their 1984 and 1988 presidential vote. The Daniel Yankelovich Group did the fieldwork for both of these surveys. ATS data sets can be purchased from the Roper Center of the University of Connecticut at Storrs. In 1990 ATS resumed its polling. Reports can be obtained from: Americans Talk Security, 83 Church Street, Suite 17, Winchester, MA 01890, U.S.A.

Appendix 2: List of domestic and foreign policy items

2.1. Judgements about the competence of Bush and Dukakis

Table 1 summarizes responses to the following individual items:

'Please tell me whether you feel Bush or Dukakis would do a better job of handling this issue ...'

Relations with the Soviet Union and arms control:**Handling relations with the USSR****Negotiating arms control****Maintaining strong defence****Guarding against Soviet aggression****Keeping us out of war****Other foreign policy issues:****Dealing with Central America****Solving the conflict in Middle East****Dealing with international terrorism****Dealing with international drug trade****Standing up to nations that practice unfair trade against the U.S.****Persuading allies to pay for more of their own defence****U.S. policies toward South Africa*****Economic issues:****Handling economic issues like inflation and unemployment****Eliminating waste and overspending in the defence budget****Making the U.S. more competitive in the world economy****Dealing with the budget deficit*****Handling military spending****Holding down taxes****Social issues:****Handling homelessness and poverty*****Handling education and health care****Dealing with crime****Requiring the pledge of allegiance to be said in all classrooms*****Eliminating unfairness like racial discrimination*****Protecting our natural environment****Ensuring that federal officials do not violate the law****Requiring the death penalty for crimes involving murder****2.2. Perceptions of different positions of the candidates****Table 2 summarizes responses to the following individual items:****'Please tell me whether you strongly/somewhat approve/disapprove of that position . . . Please tell me which candidate holds each position'.****Relations with the Soviet Union and arms control:****Negotiate with the USSR to cut nuclear arsenals in half****Cooperate with the USSR in joint economic ventures****Seek to make progress with the USSR, but proceed cautiously****Negotiate with the USSR to 'freeze' nuclear weapons****Eliminate chemical and biological weapons****Negotiate with the USSR to eliminate all nuclear weapons****Seek peace by maintaining high level of military strength****Quickly end the cold war with the USSR**

Negotiate with the USSR to reduce their conventional forces
 Negotiate with the USSR to stop testing nuclear weapons
 Modernize U.S. nuclear arsenal before considering a 'freeze'
 No economic assistance to USSR**

Other foreign policy issues:

Refuse to supply military hardware for freeing U.S. hostages*
 Give as much attention to U.S. economic as military strength
 Renew and increase contra aid*
 Refuse to negotiate with international terrorists**

Defence and armaments issues:

Limit research on SDI
 Develop and produce all new weapons the military wants
 Build up conventional forces to make up for cuts in U.S. nuclear weapons
 Do not build two aircraft carriers requested by Navy*
 Oppose mobile MX and Midgetman missiles*
 Implement full scale SDI
 Be selective on developing new weapons
 Spend more on military operations (fuel, ammunition etc.)*

*: Not asked in ATS10

**: Not asked in ATS11

Appendix 3: Index construction

Presidential vote. Respondents who were certain they were going to vote for Bush (Dukakis) were coded as 1 (-1); respondents who intended to vote for Bush (Dukakis) but were less than certain about their vote or whether they were going to vote at all, were coded as 0.5 (-0.5). All other respondents were coded with a value of zero.

Party identification. Republicans (Democrats) were coded as 1 (-1), independents leaning towards the Republicans (Democrats) were coded as 0.5 (-0.5). All others were coded as zero.

Indices for competence judgements. From the four groups of items in appendix 2.1, indices were computed as follows: First, respondents who declared Bush (Dukakis) more competent received values of 1 (-1) on the individual items; all others were coded zero. These scales were then multiplied with the importance of the individual items for the voting decision, i.e., four-point scales from zero (for 'not important') to one (for 'extremely important'). Finally, averages for the four groups of items were computed. In addition, a fifth competence scale for national security could be computed. Respondents were asked whether Bush and Dukakis, if elected president, would strengthen or weaken U.S. national security or keep it about the same. Both these questions were combined into a scale from -1 to 1, with respondents holding the most favorable judgment about Bush and the most negative about Dukakis coded at the positive extreme, and vice versa.

Indices for agreement with candidate positions. From the three groups of items in appendix 2.2, indices were computed as follows: Respondents who strongly agreed with a position ascribed to Bush (or strongly disagreed with a position ascribed to Dukakis) were given values of 1 on the

individual items, 0.5 in case of weak agreement (disagreement). Similarly, strong or weak agreement with a position attributed to Dukakis (or disagreement with Bush) were coded as -1 or -0.5, respectively. All other respondents were coded zero. Finally, averages for the three groups of items were computed. In addition, in ATS11 an index for positions towards SDI could be computed. Three questions were asked, one for general endorsement or rejection of the program, and two for its budget. Respondents with the consistently most favorable attitudes were coded at the positive extreme of a scale from -1 to 1, respondents with the consistently most negative opinions were coded at the negative extreme.

Means of the vote and party identification variables and of these nine indices are reported in Table A-1 for both ATS-studies. The variables described in this table are the basis for all maximum likelihood estimations with LISREL (Tables 6 through 10). For the regression models (Tables 4 and 5), the two domestic and seven (six for ATS10) foreign policy indices were averaged, respectively.

Table A-1. Averages of indices.

	Mean	
	ATS10	ATS11
Presidential vote	0.04	0.12a
Party identification	-0.02	0.01
Competence for economic issues	0.01	0.08b
Competence for social issues	-0.10	-0.02b
Competence for relations with USSR and arms control	0.22	0.22
Competence for national security	0.16	0.18
Competence for other foreign policy issues	0.08	0.07
Position on relations with USSR and arms control	0.08	0.10
Position on other foreign policy issues	-0.07	-0.05
Position on defense and armaments issues	-0.04	0.02b
Position on SDI	-	-0.11

—: Not asked.

All scales have a minimum of -1 and maximum of +1. Differences of means from ATS10 to ATS11 are not significant, except:

a: $p < 0.05$.

b: $p < 0.01$.

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