



The Two Faces of Issue Voting

Edward G. Carmines; James A. Stimson

The American Political Science Review, Vol. 74, No. 1. (Mar., 1980), pp. 78-91.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0554%28198003%2974%3A1%3C78%3ATTFOIV%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>

The American Political Science Review is currently published by American Political Science Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/apsa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Two Faces of Issue Voting

EDWARD G. CARMINES
Indiana University

JAMES A. STIMSON
Florida State University

Both implicit democratic norms and the reconstructions provided by theorists of rational choice suggest that issue voters are more sophisticated—educated, informed, and active in politics—than other voters. But some issues are clearly more difficult than others, and the voters who respond to “hard” and “easy” issues, respectively, are assumed to differ in kind. We propose the hypothesis that “easy-issue” voters are no more sophisticated than non-issue voters, and this is found to be the case. The findings suggest a reevaluation of the import of rising and falling levels of issue voting and suggest a prominent role for “easy” issues in electoral realignments.

“To speak with precision about public opinion,” V. O. Key once observed, “is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost” (1961, p. 8). A similar observation could be made about issue voting, because for all of the recent attention devoted to this political phenomenon, its character has remained as elusive as ever. This is not to say that no progress has been made in untangling the web of uncertainty and ignorance that surrounds our understanding of policy-oriented voting. On the contrary, recent research focusing on elections and voting behavior has pointed to various social, political, and psychological conditions that facilitate the translation of policy preferences into votes. Thus, according to some research, issue voting occurs most frequently during periods of social and economic turmoil, when the policy options provided by the political parties tend to be relatively distinct (Nie et al., 1976, pp. 156–93). And certain individual cognitive and psychological characteristics are similarly thought to be necessary for policy-conscious

voting decisions (Broh, 1973; Miller et al., 1973).

But our understanding of issue voting is not likely to be clear, precise, or comprehensive until we know much more about the core “issue” in issue voting, the decision calculus used by voters to link their policy concerns to voting choices. As a first step toward that comprehensive understanding, we need to question whether “issue voting” is a single phenomenon. Our argument is that it is not, that there are two theoretically different and empirically identifiable types.

Issue voting of the first type involves conscious calculation of policy benefits for alternative electoral choices. This “hard-issue” voting 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 candidates in a given election, vote for that candidate who is closest to them in some (probably multiple) issue space (Davis et al., 1970; Brody and Page, 1972; Frohlich et al., 1978). Hard-issue voting should be best exemplified, at least in degree, among those who have the conceptual skills to do it well.

The second type of issue voting (which we shall denote “easy”) occurs when a particular issue becomes so ingrained over a long period that it structures voters’ “gut responses” to candidates and political parties. Because gut responses require no conceptual sophistication, they should be distributed reasonably evenly in the voting population. It can be argued of course that this second type of issue voting is merely a simplified version of the first. But we shall argue that the distinction between them is

Apologies to Bachrach and Baratz for borrowing part of their title. The data used in this article were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data were originally collected by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. For helpful commentary along the way we thank Russel Dalton, James Kuklinski, John McIver, Leroy Rieselbach, Ann Shaw, Ronald Weber, and some kind anonymous readers for the *Review*. The authors would like to thank the National Science Foundation for its support of this research under grant SOC-7907543.

fundamental, that they involve different decision processes, different prerequisite conditions, different voters, and different interpretation.

The Noncontroversy About Issue Voting

Before we examine in detail these two kinds of issue voting, it will be helpful to put that discussion into perspective by highlighting an assumption upon which all who study the topic seem to agree, that "issue voting" is not a neutral term. On the contrary, the study of issue voting is infused with normative considerations. The common—indeed, universal—view has been that voting choices based on policy concerns are superior to decisions based on party loyalty or candidate image. Only the former represent clearly sophisticated behavior. Indeed, the policy-oriented vote is a defining characteristic of that mythical specimen, the classic democratic citizen. The spatial modeling approach to voting behavior, moreover, is quite explicit in linking issue voting to rationality, an assumption that leads to the conclusion that voting on the basis of other considerations must be nonrational, or at best, less rational.

While scholars have disagreed vehemently about most aspects of issue voting—how it can be measured, whether it can be distinguished from candidate and party effects and, most recently, whether it has increased in frequency during recent elections—they have never questioned its inherent "goodness." (For a sampling of this literature, see Boyd, 1972; Pomper, 1972; Nie et al., 1976; Repass, 1971; Miller et al., 1976; Margolis, 1977; for a fairly complete bibliography through 1972 see Kessel, 1972.) The issue voter has been universally praised. This assumption has been, in fact, so noncontroversial and such an integral aspect of issue voting that those focusing on the topic have felt no need to justify it. Indeed, it is rarely mentioned at all except for the occasional phrase coupling issue voting with the average citizen having been seen in a more favorable light. Thus, when Key (1966, pp. 7, xiii) announced in the opening chapter of his final, posthumously published work that "the perverse and unorthodox argument of this little book is that voters are not fools," no one should have been surprised that the bulk of the supporting evidence focused on "the parallelism of policy preferences and the direction of the vote." For it is precisely such evidence that would support the notion that "the electorate behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect, given the clarity of the alternatives presented to it and the character of

the information available to it" (Key, 1966, p. 7).

This uniformly favorable characterization of the issue voter would be of little consequence except that it has led us to treat all issue-based voting as evidence of voter sophistication. Our inferences about the level of issue voting are not in question here; "easy" issues are still "issues." It is the inferences we draw from the level of issue voting that we are going to call in question.¹

The idea that all issue voting does not indicate voter sophistication was suggested, perhaps inadvertently, by Survey Research Center (SRC) analysts in their study of the 1968 presidential election (Converse et al., 1969). Stressing the issue distinctiveness of Wallace's supporters, as compared to Humphrey's and Nixon's, they noted that "among the whites who voted for one of the major candidates, only 10% favored continued segregation rather than desegregation or 'something in between'; among Wallace voters, all of whom were white, almost 40% wanted segregation" (Converse et al., 1969, p. 1097). Combining the issue distinctiveness of Wallace voters on a variety of issues with the finding that among the general public favorable and unfavorable evaluations of Wallace had a strong issue coloration led to the conclusion that "the Wallace candidacy was reacted to by the public as an *issue* candidacy" (Converse et al., 1969, p. 1097). While the Wallace voters may have been motivated largely by issue considerations, Converse et al. do not argue (and we have no reason to assume) that they were any more sophisticated—according to any criteria—than Humphrey or Nixon voters. Thus, the SRC analysis of the Wallace candidacy of 1968 represents an initial effort to drive a wedge between issue voting and voter sophistication. But, ultimately, to discover the primary motivation of a candidate's supporters is not likely to reveal much about issue voting for the simple reason that in a strict sense there is no such thing as an "issue candidacy." For any candidate with a modicum of public support will attract voters for all sorts of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with his or her issue positions. Thus, one must agree with Brody and Page (1972, p. 455) that "there is no way to avoid modeling the individual voting decision and still estimate policy voting," a topic to which we shall turn shortly.

¹Our discussion of the distinction between issue voting and voter sophistication parallels the differences between issue voting and rational voting discussed by Converse (1975, pp. 97–100).

The Attributes of Easy Issues

Most of what is written about "issues" is descriptive of what we have called "hard" issues. We focus here, in counterpoint, on the attributes of the easy issue.

If we ask the question, "what makes an issue easy?" we would be asking what makes possible a gut response elicited equally from well-informed and ill-informed, from interested and uninterested, from active and apathetic voters. Three such requisites are these:

1. The easy issue would be symbolic rather than technical.
2. It would more likely deal with policy ends than means.
3. It would be an issue long on the political agenda.

Each of the requisites has a simple rationale. Symbolic conflicts are readily communicated to mass publics. Technical issues are not. As prescriptions for public problems, technical policies require knowledge of important factual assumptions to be appreciated. Symbolic issues may be presented *and understood* simplistically.

Easy issues must almost inevitably concern the ends of public policy rather than the means. In part, this is simply the first requisite restated; the means of public policy are usually more technical than symbolic. In part, it is because preferences about policy ends can arise from the common prejudices of the mass culture. Normative premises are not by definition informed; neither do they need to be articulated.

The easy issue, finally, is likely to be an unresolved conflict long in the public eye. Even if the first requisites were met, a new issue would not be likely to find its way to the "gut" of those paying least attention to politics. Simplicity alone is not enough, but with time and simplicity an issue can permeate the electorate.

A last, more speculative, attribute of the easy issue is not a requisite, but a consequence. The availability of the easy issue for electoral choice we take to be a system-determined attribute. Simply put, sometimes easy issues are offered to the electorate and sometimes they are not. Whether a given easy issue was employed by a given voter in an election depends more crucially upon whether the choice was offered than upon the ability of the voter to make such a choice (Prewitt and Nie, 1971). Hard issues we posit to be always available; the degree to which they are employed is voter-de-

pendent. More interested, more informed, and more involved citizens are more likely to discriminate by hard issues than their less interested, less informed, and less involved counterparts.

This last attribute could form an important link in the solution of the unresolved problem of explaining over time variation in issue voting. But it must remain only an informed speculation here. We turn now to two real-world issues that exemplify the easy/hard distinction.

Desegregation and Vietnam: Easy and Hard.

Racial desegregation is a prototypically easy issue—in fact, the issue that led us to think about the consequences of easy-issue voting. Although the policy conflicts involved in desegregation can be detailed in great complexity, we think it reasonable to assume that the typical voter sees in it a simple issue. Some support for that assumption can be found in our operational indicator of desegregation attitudes (a factor score derived from a variety of racial materials), which is most clearly defined by items which ask simply for respondent preferences for more or less segregation in American society. Desegregation is symbolic (Sears et al., 1979); there are virtually no technical or pragmatic issues in it. And it has been around a very long time now. The least-informed segments of both black and white communities respond meaningfully to the question of desegregation; it is that easy.

It is an issue, finally, on which parties and candidates have staked out relatively unambiguous positions—most notably in the 1964 presidential election. The clarity of positions on desegregation during that electoral contest can be seen in a simple statistic: the Survey Research Center did not discover a single black Goldwater supporter in its nationwide election survey (cited in Greenstein, 1970, p. 26). The 1964 presidential election, we believe, had a powerful and lasting effect on mass perceptions of the parties' stands on racial desegregation—perceptions that led to a slow but permanent reshaping of underlying party loyalties (Stimson and Carmines, 1977).

The Vietnam War was quite a different issue. The issue was badly muddled in 1968 when the country was deeply divided about the war (Verba and Brody, 1970) but Nixon and Humphrey took similar positions (Page and Brody, 1972). War and peace are simple enough ends, but the candidates did not offer that choice. Instead, the electorate was presented with alternative plans (one of them "secret") to end the war (Page, 1978). The issue had been

changed but not particularly clarified by 1972 (Steeper and Teeter, 1976), when one candidate promised to end the war by immediate withdrawal and the other claimed already to have resolved it by his harder-line approach. While antiwar activists may have seen a wide gulf separating the candidates' position, we believe most voters saw the issue in far more narrow terms, focusing mainly on the speed and conditions of withdrawal. The confusion was heightened, finally, by the fact that Democratic presidents had initiated and vigorously prosecuted the war while the Republican incumbent had sharply reduced the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam. With strong sentiment for ending the war running in the electorate, moreover, the alternative candidate scenarios increasingly focused debate on the return of prisoners of war, American postwar prestige, and the like. The relative efficacy of the not terribly different candidate strategies was the issue.

The pace of withdrawal from Vietnam (the "choice" offered in the 1972 presidential election) was clearly a hard issue by our criteria. The issue, as presented, was pragmatic, not symbolic. It dealt with the best means of ending the war, but with nearly universal agreement on the ultimate end. And it was an issue of relatively brief duration, lasting at most the length of American involvement in the war, but probably a good deal less than that, since the nature of the issue changed as the war evolved.

Our classification of desegregation and Vietnam into theoretical categories rests, in the end, on empirical knowledge. Racial desegregation could be complex and Vietnam simple 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. We have no doubt that desegregation was (and is) seen as a simple issue. For evidence that Vietnam was not at all simple in 1972, see Steeper and Teeter (1976).

Desegregation and Vietnam
in the 1972 Election

The 1972 presidential election proves to be a useful case study for examining easy- and hard-issue voting. The election is widely described as issue-oriented, perhaps more than any other. It falls in the electoral period of enhanced issue consciousness, a phenomenon yet to be fully explained. And it is particularly convenient for this research because, as we shall soon see, it is dominated by two issues, Vietnam and desegregation, each an exemplification of hard and easy issues, respectively.

Before we can proceed with further analysis, we need (for later purposes) to demonstrate that our two issues had a non-trivial and non-spurious impact on the 1972 contest. This we have accomplished with the multivariate probit analysis of voting choice of Table 1.² Along with party identification, it includes as

²Our choice of the probit model over regression is based most crucially on our assumption that the S-shaped cumulative propensity function assumed by probit is a more accurate representation of the impact of issues on vote choice than the alternative linear regression model. It is also important for our yet to be discussed classification procedure that all individual vote choice predictions be bounded by the (0,1) limits

Table 1. 1972 Vote, Party, and Issues

	Standardized Maximum Likelihood Estimate	Z
Party identification	-1.733	-15.9
Vietnam withdrawal	-.932	-9.5
Desegregation	.616	6.3
Guarantee of jobs	-.544	-5.7
Attitude toward black activists	.410	4.2
Legalization of marijuana	-.218	-2.2
Rights of accused	-.177	-1.8
Women's role	.113	1.2
Tax reform	-.045	-.5
Control of inflation	.003	.0

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

-2(Log Likelihood Ratio) 832.0
Significance: P < .001

independent variables all the (non-racial) CPS seven-point scales administered to both Form 1 and Form 2 respondents and the two racial-attitude factors.

Table 1 presents standardized maximum-likelihood estimates (MLEs, analogous to the standardized slope coefficients of regression) along with "z" tests for the null hypotheses that the true MLEs are zero, all for the full sample of issues. Vote choice is dichotomous, the seven-point issue scales are the familiar respondent self-placements (not proximity measures) and the two racial scales are factor scores derived from a variety of racial attitude materials (see Appendix A). The first taps attitudes toward desegregation, both in general and in the traditional battlegrounds of schools, jobs, housing, and so forth. The second racial factor, more diffuse and affective, taps attitudes oriented more toward racial protest (and protesters) than the substance of racial policy.

The evidence of Table 1 is clear. Both the Vietnam War and desegregation are shown to have influenced the 1972 vote in the face of controls for party identification and a reasonable sample of other possible issues. What is intriguing about Table 1 is that racial desegregation emerges as the second best "issue" predictor of voting choice in 1972. For unlike Vietnam, which was a dominant theme in the campaign, 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.

We have talked of issue voting and the distinction between hard and easy issues in largely intuitive and indirect terms, to this point. A more systematic approach is now in order.

Classifying Issue Difficulty

We conceive of issue voting as a two-part multiplicative process requiring at minimum that each voter (1) assess his or her own issue preference and (2) calculate relative positioning of parties and candidates. The second dimension, the spatial mapping process, we believe,

distinguishes hard from easy issues. Hard issues are more accurately mapped by the well-informed. Easy issues are accurately mapped by all.

How can we tell empirically whether a particular issue is easy or hard? Our theory suggests simply enough that the relationship between *hard* issues and vote should be *conditional* on level of political information possessed by voters. Issue position should exert a considerably stronger causal influence on the votes of the well-informed because they, more than the ill-informed, accurately map party and candidate issue stances. The ill-informed should show a tendency to mix "correct" responses with "incorrect" ones in the aggregate, and therefore display an apparently weaker³ relationship between issue and vote. No such distinction should hold if the issue is easy. That the ill-informed can respond appropriately is a defining characteristic of the easy issue.

Figures 1 and 2 array vote by issue position on Vietnam withdrawal and desegregation, respectively, with voters classified by political information level.⁴ Figure 1 shows the Vietnam withdrawal scale as a prototypical hard issue. Well-informed voters as a group appear extremely sensitive to the issue; the pro-withdrawal segment is sharply pro-McGovern, the "military victory" group almost unanimous in support of Nixon. Those with medium information levels show a still strong but flatter response in their votes; they are less inclined to vote for McGovern if they favor withdrawal, less inclined to vote for Nixon if they advocate

³We use the vague strong/weak terminology here because we expect the relationships between issue position and vote to be cumulative propensity functions—S shapes. If linear regression were appropriate, the argument would be simpler: hard issues would show steeper slopes for the well informed, an interaction effect. Employing a method discussed by Wright (1976), we made such a test, which supports the interpretation presented here. The Vietnam/Vote relationship has a statistically significant information interaction; the Desegregation/Vote relationship does not.

⁴Our 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 of measuring more directly relevant information. Scores of 0, 1, and 2 are classified "low," 3 and 4 "medium" and 5 and 6 "high."

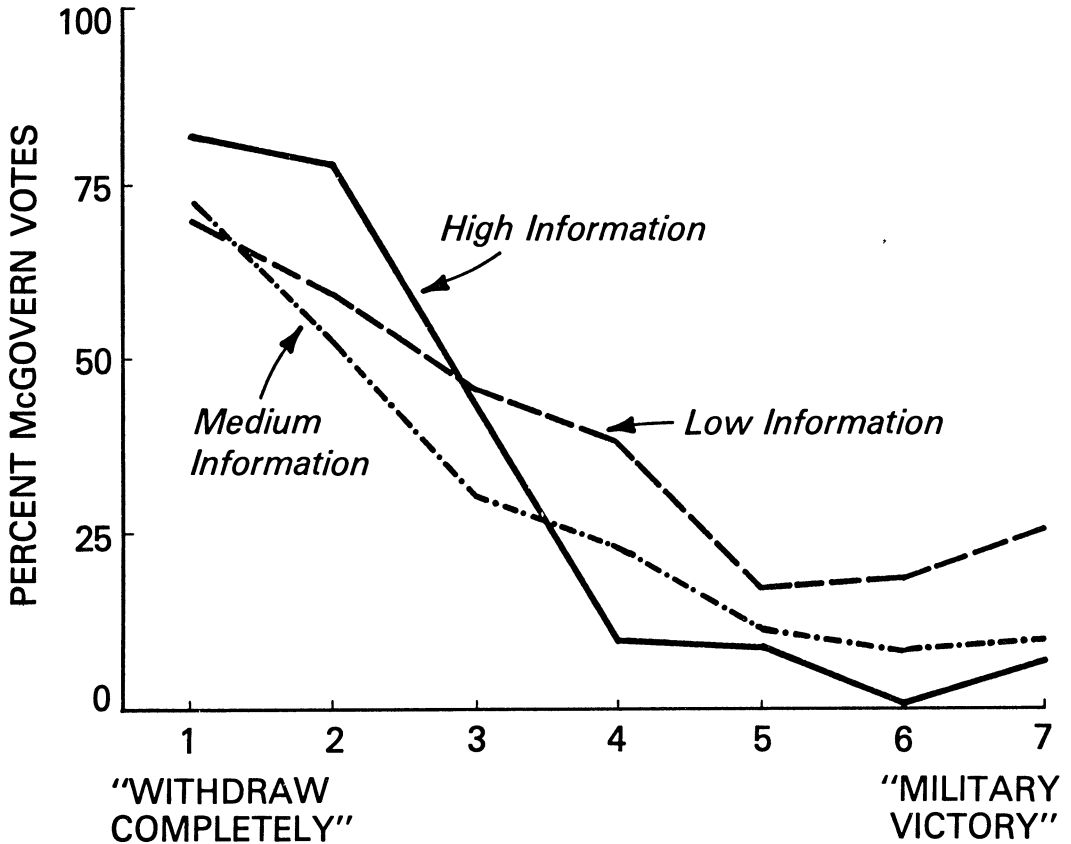
of probability. That is the case for probit and is not for linear regression. On these points see Aldrich and Cnudde (1975) and McKelvey and Zavonia (1975). For a very brief discussion of the probit model see Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978).

the military solution. The least-informed complete the pattern; similar to the medium information group if they favor withdrawal, they are considerably more likely to report a McGovern vote if they take the hard-line position other voters associate with Nixon. The Eta-squared statistic from analysis of variance is a rough summary of the (nonlinear) relationship between issue and vote. For low, medium, and high information groups, respectively, it progresses from .15 to .22 to .46. Voter information makes a difference.

Figure 2 demonstrates that the issue/information interaction does not apply to all issues. At the pro-desegregation end of the scale, voters are undifferentiated by information level. Differentiation increases with segregationist sentiment, but it is mixed and intransitive, with the best-informed between the low and medium

categories in voting response to pro-segregation attitudes. The Eta squared is similarly intransitive, rising from .06 for the least-informed to .17 for the medium group, and then falling off to .11 for the best-informed. This unpredictability is what we expect of the easy issue; information doesn't structure the relationship between issue preference and vote.

The statistical evidence thus indicates that Vietnam was a hard issue and desegregation an easy one. It may seem paradoxical that the issue which dominated campaign rhetoric was hard and the one undiscussed easy. But we think that is probably normally the case. Easy issues do not require discussion, whereas complicated policy disputes (i.e., hard issues) are not likely to be reflected in electoral response at all unless they are extensively discussed.



Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

Figure 1. Vote and Vietnam Withdrawal by Political Information Level

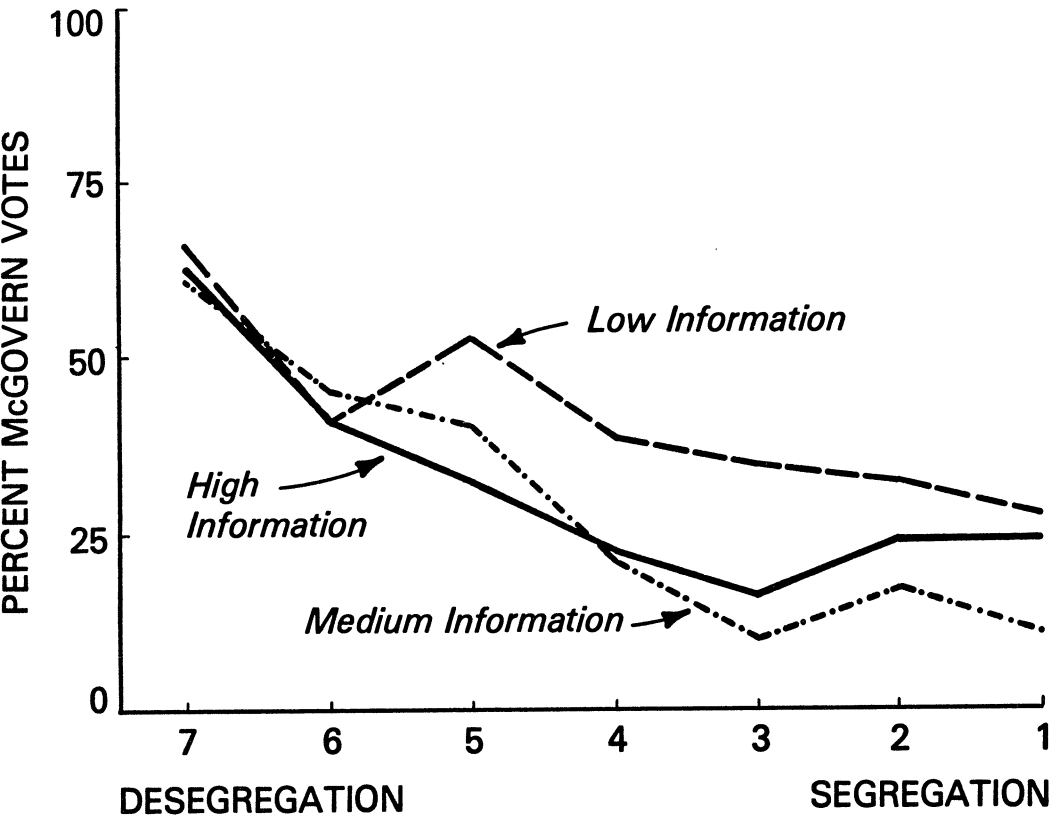
Measuring Policy Voting

Although the literature on voting behavior is richly suggestive of where we should look for issue voting—to the well-educated, well-informed, concerned and active segment of the electorate—it has little to offer as a guide to measuring it directly. The presumed causes of issue voting (education, access to information, etc.) are particularly ill-suited as surrogate indicators of it in this research, where it is hypothesized that they are not common to all types of policy voting. This research requires a pure measure of the phenomenon, a yardstick that will allow the categorization of individuals without reference to the presumed antecedents of issue-voting behavior.

To separate issue voting from its antecedents and consequences in order that both may be open to empirical investigation, we define it as voting which is predictable from knowledge

about individual policy preferences. That simple definition skirts some theoretical difficulties and is far from easy to render operational, but it does allow for classification at the individual level.

The principal theoretical problem with our simple definition is specifying the proper role of partisanship. Party identification may be conceived as policy-irrelevant loyalty, as a cue to issue preferences, or as an amalgam of the two. It no doubt serves all of those purposes for different subsets of the electorate. It may even of course be the causal result of policy preferences. In the analysis to follow we treat party identification as antecedent to both policy preferences and voting choice. For each individual policy, party identification is used as a predictive baseline against which the presumed influence of issues is judged. Each voter is judged an issue voter if knowledge of the individual's issue position improves our ability



Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

Figure 2. Vote and Desegregation by Political Information Level

to predict his or her vote beyond the level of predictability already achieved by party identification.

The procedure for classifying individuals into issue-voter categories is a good deal less simple than our simple definition; measuring predictability is not as easy as talking about it. The procedure outlined here (and in more detail in Appendix B) is as follows:

1. The best-fitting probit function relating party identification and Vietnam and desegregation attitudes to vote is derived for all voters collectively.
2. Three separate probit predictions are then generated for each of the 1,515 voters. One drops out the two policy attitude variables (by setting them to their mean values for everybody), leaving party identification as the only predictor variable. One drops out desegregation and predicts from party and Vietnam. And one drops out Vietnam and predicts from party and desegregation.
3. Each of the three predictions is transformed into probability of voting for McGovern.
4. The three probability calculations are compared with reported vote to classify each individual voter into one of four mutually exclusive categories:
 - A. Non-issue Voters: Neither "party + Vietnam" nor "party + desegregation" models have smaller predictive error than "party only," 15 percent of all voters.
 - B. Easy-Issue Voters: "Party + desegregation" is a better predictor than "party only," but "party + Vietnam" is not, 19 percent of all voters.
 - C. Hard-Issue Voters: "Party + Vietnam" is a better predictor than "party only," but "party + desegregation" is not, 24 percent of all voters.
 - D. Constrained⁵-Issue Voters: Both "party + desegregation" and "party + Vietnam" improve upon the "party only" prediction, 42 percent of all voters.

Our typology is a means to an end; it allows examination of our basic hypothesis, that easy-

and hard-issue voting are fundamentally different.

The Attributes of Issue Voters

We have argued thus far that easy issues are different in kind from hard issues. Although we have already presented some evidence for the argument, the most important evidence is to be found in the argument's implication that easy-issue voters are also different from hard-issue voters. We hypothesize that they are. The hypothesis, more specifically, is that hard-issue voters have the characteristics universally attributed in the literature to "issue voters" and that easy-issue voters are no more informed, educated, or active in politics than those who are not influenced by issue considerations at all. The easy-issue voters are genuinely issue voters, but we hypothesize that they share none of the personal attributes traditionally associated with issue voting.

The distinguishing characteristic of the easy issue is that it requires almost nothing of the voter. Those who employ only easy issues would not therefore be expected to be more sophisticated—by any number of criteria—than voters who use such easy alternatives as party loyalty or candidate affect. Similarly, those who employ both hard and easy issues would not be expected to be more sophisticated than those who use hard issues only; the only critical distinction is between using and not using hard issues.

We have chosen three indicators of voter sophistication, "education," "political information," and "political activity," because they are commonly believed to differentiate the issue voter from the non-issue voter. They are central to Berelson's "democratic citizen" (1954, pp. 305–23) and, unlike such other alleged issue-voter attributes as rationality, they can be measured in an unambiguous manner. We take them up one at a time.

Education. The democratic citizen/issue voter is usually considered to be well informed about political choices. We can reasonably assume that formal education contributes to that state of affairs. Table 2 displays the levels of education of our four voter types. Of particular note is that the easy-issue voters are far and away the least-educated segment of the voting sample—being even less educated than the non-issue voters, with about 10 percent more who have not completed high school and 15 percent fewer who have attended college.

The constrained-issue voters, also in line with their predicted position, are slightly less

⁵Use of the term "constrained" has the limited connotation that voters seem to use both issues in their voting decision and that both run in the same direction. No other term is a suitable expression of that notion. Whether these voters are "constrained" by other criteria is a question beyond the scope of this effort; we do not wish to imply that they are.

Table 2. Education and Issue Voting (Percent)

Education	Non-Issue Voters	Easy-Issue Voters	Hard-Issue Voters	Constrained- Issue Voters
Less than high school	32.1	41.4	22.6	29.0
High school or equivalent	28.5	34.4	38.0	31.2
Some college or more	39.4	24.2	39.4	39.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9
N =	(221)	(285)	(371)	(637)

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

well educated than the hard-issue voters (indeed, barely different from non-issue voters), with about 6 percent more reporting less than a high school education. We have predicted that easy voters are *not more* sophisticated than non-issue voters (and constrained-issue voters *not more* sophisticated than hard-issue voters). The outcome with respect to education is stronger than the prediction: those who use race, our easy issue, to aid their decision making appear *less* sophisticated than their counterparts who do not, although the magnitude of difference is small.

Political Information. Knowing “facts” about politics is a second requirement for being well informed. Such factual knowledge can be measured with the political information scale we have already employed. Levels of such political information for our four voter groups are shown in Table 3. Easy-issue voters are slightly (but not significantly) better informed by this criterion than non-issue voters, although interpretation is clouded by the presence of fewer easy-issue voters in both lowest and highest information groups. Both easy-issue and non-issue voters are less well informed than voters in the other two groups, which are in turn similar to one another.

Political Activism. Political activism is not so much a measure of sophistication as a presumed cause of it. Those who take an active role in politics should develop a more sophisticated understanding of the choices they confront than those whose involvement in politics extends only to the voting booth. To the degree that activism is not a correlate of education, it may well be a substitute for it, an alternative way to learn about the political world.

We measure activism for this analysis with a summary count of respondent reports of engaging in influencing others’ votes, attending political meetings, working for a party or candidate, wearing a campaign button or displaying a sticker, giving money, writing to a public official, or writing a letter to a newspaper about politics.

The activism/issue voting relationship is as predicted, as seen in Table 4. Non-issue and easy-issue voters look substantially the same on this scale, as do hard-issue and constrained-issue voters. Easy-issue voters, on the other hand, are substantially less active than hard-issue voters, with almost half of them reporting no participation beyond voting; this is the case among less than a third of the hard-issue voters. In sum, all differences are in the predicted direction.

Our analysis to this point has shown but one

Table 3. Political Information and Issue Voting (Percent)

Political Information	Non-Issue Voters	Easy-Issue Voters	Hard-Issue Voters	Constrained- Issue Voters
Low	41.7	31.7	21.1	23.5
Medium	40.9	54.2	44.3	47.4
High	17.4	14.1	34.6	29.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N =	(115)	(142)	(185)	(344)

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

Table 4. Political Activity and Issue Voting (Percent)

Number of Participatory Acts	Non-Issue Voters	Easy-Issue Voters	Hard-Issue Voters	Constrained-Issue Voters
0	46.1	47.9	31.3	32.9
1	23.3	26.2	27.2	27.6
2	17.8	14.7	20.8	18.6
3 or more	12.8	11.2	20.8	20.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N =	(219)	(286)	(371)	(633)

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

deviation from the predicted pattern, and that one was statistically insignificant. We turn now to a slight reconceptualization for a summary look at our findings.

The fourfold typology of issue voting can be easily broken down into the two dichotomous variables from which it was created.⁶ We decompose it here for a summary analysis of the correlates of using easy issues (variable name "easy"), hard issues ("hard") or both. We do this to present the separable effects individually and to take advantage of the interval scales of two of the criterion variables. The third criterion, education, is recoded to the dichotomy, "high school or less" and "some college or more."

The quality of measurement shows its effect in the low correlations of Table 5, but the

individual coefficients still tell a clear story. The correlations of variable "easy" with the three criteria are in all cases trivial, and in two cases go in a negative direction. Whether or not voters are predictable from a hard-issue position, on the other hand, is positively related to our sophistication criteria. To be predictable from a hard issue is to be somewhat better educated, better informed, and more active in politics than the average voter.

Partial correlations are displayed on the right side of Table 5. They speak to the question of which type of issue voting is associated with sophistication criteria for that large number of voters who are predictable from both hard and easy issues. The first-order partials are virtually identical to the zero-order correlations, an outcome that could have been predicted from the near-zero correlations of the "easy" dichotomy with the criterion variables.

In sum, not all "issue voting" indicates sophistication by these criteria; hard-issue voting does, easy-issue voting does not.

Table 5. Some Correlates of Easy- and Hard-Issue Voting

	Zero-Order Correlations		Partial Correlations	
	Voter Dichotomies		"Easy" Controlling for "Hard"	"Hard" Controlling for "Easy"
	"Easy"	"Hard"		
Education (attended college)	-.045	.086*	-.051	.089*
Information (number of correct responses)	-.013	.207**	-.028	.209**
Activism (number of participatory acts)	.010	.153**	.000	.153**

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$

Political Inferences and the Easy-Issue Voter

Political analysts observe issue voting and infer sophistication. That inference is clearly problematic in view of our finding that there is a second type of issue voting that is not sophisticated at all. Indeed, as we have seen, easy-issue voting is found most frequently in the least-sophisticated portion of the electorate. Thus it is clear that issue voting, as it has been traditionally conceptualized and measured, overestimates the amount of sophisticated policy calculation going on in the electorate. This is the most direct implication of our findings. But the question of "how much" issue voting is only part of a larger theoretical quandary that begins with the questions "who?" "where?" and "when?" and ends with "what does it all mean?"

We have seen that some traditionally postulated correlates of issue voting are uncorrelated with easy-issue voting. When the easy-issue voters are included as issue voters, these relationships are weaker than they would be if only hard-issue voters were counted. This suggests that these indicators predict not issue voting per se, but sophisticated calculation (i.e., hard-issue voting). Other theoretically crucial correlates of issue voting would be expected to behave the same way.

Some of the meaning of issue voting can be found from studying *where* it occurs. A regional analysis of several recent elections would, for example, point to the South as the homeland of issue voting, an anomaly for current conceptions. The South, with its prevailing low educational levels and politics of one-party factionalism, is hardly the place to search for unusual sophistication in voting behavior. And indeed the South is not unusually sophisticated, because while it contains disproportionate numbers of issue voters, it has disproportionately few hard-issue voters. The difference, of course, lies in the large number of voters—at both ends of the spectrum—who respond only to our easy issue, race.

These findings also shed some light on the debate over whether the lack of issue voting observed in some times and places derives from inherent limitations of the citizen/voter or from inadequacies of choice offered by the political system. It may well be that the two conflicting theories each account for a different kind of issue voting. Sophisticated calculation requires both cognitive ability and attention to political life, neither of which is likely to vary much from year to year. We would expect a gently

upward trend in sophisticated calculation over time from the upward trend in mean education level of the electorate. Easy-issue voting, on the other hand, requires neither cognitive ability nor attention to politics, and is free to vary with the availability of easy issues. When easy issues are present, as seems certainly to have been the case for the New Deal era and to a lesser extent, the post-1960 period, increases in issue voting are observed. When easy issues are absent, as in the 1950s, issue voting is considerably more modest because it is concentrated among hard issues.

This suggests that easy-issue voting may occur in waves or surges, as a response to the relatively rare occasions when parties engage in the hazardous behavior of staking out opposing positions on a deeply felt issue. The surge of easy-issue voting is not an encouraging phenomenon for those who would hinge the viability of democracy on the ability of citizens to choose rationally between alternative issue positions of parties and candidates. The surge in issue voting seems likely to occur on a large scale only when choices are simplistic. In light of this account, one should not be surprised that the authors of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) did not discover high levels of issue voting for the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections. By that time the easy issues associated with the New Deal had declined in salience but had not yet been replaced by the emerging issue of race.⁷ Nor are we surprised by the higher levels of issue voting that researchers have discovered in the post-1960 presidential elections. But the lion's share of this increase, we believe, is owing to the easy issue of race, not to hard issues. Increased issue voting therefore says little about the political sophistication of the American electorate.

Isolating the easy issue and the unsophisticated easy-issue voter is useful, finally, as a bridge between historical accounts of electoral realignment and the modern voting studies. The historical accounts specify a prominent role for the lowest common denominator of the mass electorate in the issue-based overthrow of old party systems. But association of issue voting with voter sophistication in the voting studies would predict that the unsophisticated would be the last to adjust their electoral behavior to an issue cleavage cutting across the party

⁷That all the early voting researchers had been exposed to the easy-issue politics of the New Deal period may well account for their shock at discovering such a limited role for issues in the post-New Deal period.

system. The emergence of the easy issue is a plausible resolution of this apparent dilemma. The crystallizing factor that precipitates realignments must, we believe, revolve around easy—not hard—issues. For only easy issues are salient enough over a long enough period to encourage parties to provide relatively clear and simple choices. And these are the only kinds of choices that provide parties the opportunity to change

their minority or majority status, to become beneficiaries (or victims) of the unfolding realignment process. Hard issues, on the other hand, are too complicated and too subtle to provide a basis for a *major* reshuffling of party supporters. While their effects on the party system may be dramatic in the short term—as Vietnam was in 1972—their long-term impact is likely to be inconsequential.

Appendix A. The Dimensions of Racial Attitudes: A Principal Factor Analysis (with Varimax Rotation)*

	Factor 1: Segregation/ Integration	Factor 2: Attitude toward Black Activists
Equal employment for blacks	.480	-.244
School integration	.535	-.268
Public accommodations	.577	-.137
Neighborhood integration	-.594	.037
School busing	.385	-.344
Aid for minorities	.459	-.391
Civil rights too fast	-.504	.335
Violence of blacks	-.478	.167
Blacks helped/hurt cause	.461	-.228
Preference for (de)segregation	.615	-.141
Preference for (de)segregated neighborhood	.460	-.211
Equivalence of intelligence	.399	-.098
Feeling thermometers		
Black militants	-.151	.791
Urban rioters	-.120	.776
Civil rights leaders	-.490	.528
Eigenvalue	5.16	1.42
(Percent explained variance)	(34.4)	(9.5)

Source: Computed from data collected in the 1972 Center for Political Studies election study, University of Michigan.

*The sample consists of 2191 respondents who were interviewed in both pre- and post-election waves.

Appendix B. The Issue-Voter Classification Procedure

The PROBIT function derived for all voters—the unstandardized equivalent of Table 1, but with “other” issues excluded, is:

$$Z_i = -.44752 - .41236P_i - .28587V_i + .03949R_i$$

where Z_i is the voting prediction for respondent i in standard form,

P_i is party identification,

V_i is Vietnam withdrawal attitude, and

R_i is racial desegregation attitude.

Three alternative predictions are then generated for each respondent by setting combinations of variable values to sample means to eliminate their contributions to prediction:

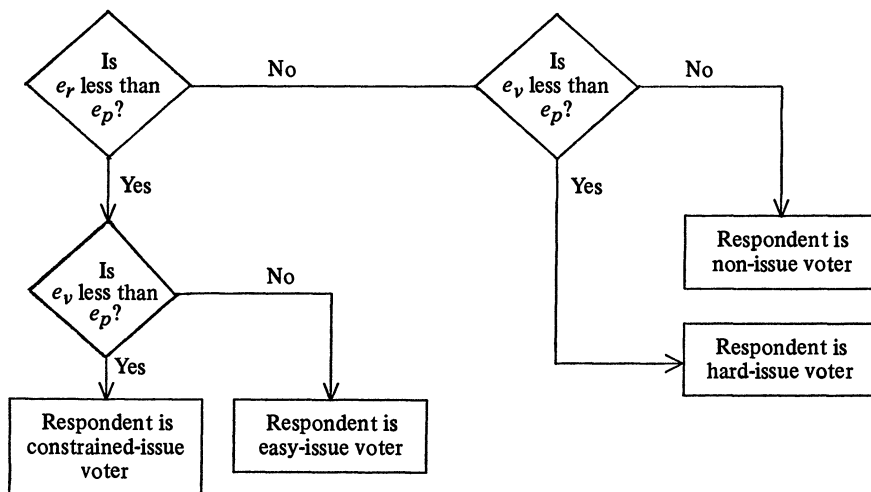
1. “Party Only” $Z_i = -.44752 - .41236P_i - .28587\bar{V} + .03949\bar{R}$.
2. “Party + Vietnam” $Z_i = -.44752 - .41236P_i - .28587V_i + .03949\bar{R}$.
3. “Party + Desegregation” $Z_i = -.44752 - .41236P_i - .28587\bar{V} + .03949R_i$.

The three predictions for each respondent are transformed into predictions of "probability of voting for McGovern" by a sub-routine that functions in a fashion analogous to examining "area to the left of z " in a table of areas under the normal curve. The resulting probabilities lie in the interval (0, 1) and, when aggregated, take on the characteristic "S" shape of cumulative probability density functions, but with an asymmetry that reflects the electorate's modal preference for Nixon.

Defining error as the absolute value of each of the three probabilities minus actual vote, we can then classify by whether or not specific issues contribute to error reduction. Error based on each of the three models can be represented as follows:

e_p is error from the "Party Only" model,
 e_v is error from the "Party + Vietnam" model, and
 e_r is error from the "Party + Desegregation" model.

The sequence of steps used to classify respondents into the four issue-voter types can then be depicted by the following flowchart:



References

- Aldrich, John, and Charles Cnudde (1975). "Probing the Bounds of Conventional Wisdom: A Comparison of Regression, Probit, and Discriminant Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 19: 571-608.
- Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee (1954). *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Election*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boyd, Richard W. (1972). "Popular Control of Public Policy: A Normal Vote Analysis of the 1968 Election." *American Political Science Review* 66: 429-49.
- Brody, Richard A., and Benjamin I. Page (1972). "Comment: The Assessment of Policy Voting." *American Political Science Review* 66: 450-58.
- Broh, C. Anthony (1973). *Toward a Theory of Issue Voting*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes (1960). *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Converse, Philip E. (1975). "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior." In Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 4. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- , Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur G. Wolfe (1969). "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election." *American Political Science Review* 63: 1083-1105.
- Davis, Otto A., Melvin J. Hinich and Peter Ordeshook (1970). "An Expository Development of a Mathematical Model of the Electoral Process." *American Political Science Review* 64: 426-48.
- Downs, Anthony (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Frohlich, Norman, Joe A. Oppenheimer, Jeffrey Smith and Oran R. Young (1978). "A Test of Downsian Voter Rationality: 1964 Presidential Voting." *American Political Science Review* 72: 178-97.
- Greenstein, Fred I. (1970). *The American Party System and the American People*, 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Kessel, John H. (1972). "Comment: The Issues in

- Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 66: 459-65.
- Key, V. O., Jr. (1961). *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopf.
- (1966). *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Margolis, Michael (1977). "From Confusion to Confusion: Issues and the American Voter (1956-1972)." *American Political Science Review* 71: 31-43.
- McKelvey, Richard D., and William Zavoina (1975). "A Statistical Model for the Analysis of Ordinal Dependent Variables." *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 4: 103-20.
- Miller, Arthur H., Warren E. Miller, Alden S. Raine, and Thad H. Brown (1973). "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans.
- (1976). "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election." *American Political Science Review* 70: 753-78.
- Nie, Norman, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik (1976). *The Changing American Voter*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Page, Benjamin I. (1978). *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections: Rational Man and Electoral Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , and Richard A. Brody (1972). "Policy Voting and the Electoral Process: The Vietnam Issue." *American Political Science Review* 66: 979-88.
- Pomper, Gerald (1972). "From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956-1968." *American Political Science Review* 66: 415-28.
- Prewitt, Kenneth, and Norman H. Nie (1971). "Election Studies of the Survey Research Center." *British Journal of Political Science* 1: 479-502.
- Repass, David E. (1971). "Issue Salience and Party Choice." *American Political Science Review* 65: 389-400.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and Raymond Wolfinger (1978). "The Effect of Registration Laws on Voting Turnout." *American Political Science Review* 72: 22-45.
- Sears, David O., Carl P. Hensler, and Leslie K. Spear (1979). "Whites' Opposition to 'Busing': Self-Interest or Symbolic Politics?" *American Political Science Review* 73: 369-84.
- Steeper, Frederick T., and Robert M. Teeter (1976). "Comment on 'A Majority Party in Disarray.'" *American Political Science Review* 70: 806-13.
- Stimson, James A., and Edward G. Carmines (1977). "The Continuing Issue in American Politics." Presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, New Orleans.
- Verba, Sidney, and Richard A. Brody (1970). "Participation, Policy Preferences, and the War in Vietnam." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34: 325-32.
- Wright, Gerald C. (1976). "Linear Models for Evaluating Conditional Relationships." *American Journal of Political Science* 20: 349-73.