

Iraq the Vote: Retrospective and Prospective
Foreign Policy Judgments on Candidate
Choice and Casualty Tolerance

Christopher Gelpi

Jason Reifler

Peter Feaver

Duke University

Duke University

Duke University ¹

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Abstract

In this article, we model the effect of foreign policy attitudes on both vote choice and casualty tolerance, using survey data collected during the 2004 election. We show that prospective judgments of the likelihood of success in Iraq and retrospective judgments of whether the war in Iraq was right are significant determinants of both vote choice and casualty tolerance. The prospective judgment of success is key in predicting casualty tolerance, while retrospective judgment of whether the war was right takes precedence in determining vote choice. In addition, there is an important interaction between the two variables, so the effect of one is conditional on the value of the other. We believe this is compelling evidence that foreign policy matters, and that it matters in reasonable ways.

1 Introduction

At first glance, the parallels between the 1992 and 2004 Presidential elections appear striking. Both elections featured an incumbent named George Bush who had enjoyed tremendous public support after launching a war in Iraq. Despite the high levels of support, both President Bushes soon found themselves deadlocked in the polls against surprisingly robust Democratic challengers, who were buoyed by widespread perceptions of a weak economy and skyrocketing health care costs. Yet Bush “43” eventually won reelection, while Bush “41” met defeat. What can explain this change in electoral fortunes? There are many possible and complementary explanations for why Bush 43 won despite facing a daunting electoral environment. In this article, we focus on just one which has been the subject of extensive public comment, but hitherto little scholarly analysis: the role of the ongoing Iraq war.

Pundits reconcile the different fates by stating that “Commanders-in-Chief do not lose elections in wartime.” For this law-like aphorism to hold, incumbents must actually be able to obtain their party’s nomination. Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson were so unpopular—due in large part to public disenchantment with American participation in the Korean and Vietnam wars—they abandoned their efforts to run for reelection.¹ Moreover, the

¹Truman was eligible to run but withdrew after losing in the New Hampshire primary to Estes Kefauver. Johnson announced his decision not to run for reelection after the Tet offensive in Vietnam prompted challenges from Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy.

belief that Americans will not oust incumbent President's during wartime flies in the face of the even more well-entrenched view that Americans will not tolerate casualties in war. The war in Iraq was barely a week old when observers began to worry that news of combat fatalities would cause public support to collapse (Elder and Nagourney 2003; Purdum 2003; Ricks 2003). By October of 2004, as Presidential elections loomed, more than 1100 U.S. military personnel had been killed in Iraq fighting against an insurgency that continued more or less unabated. Had most pundits foreseen this turn of events, they surely would have predicted a complete collapse of public support for the Bush Administration and for the war in Iraq. Moreover, they would have predicted a lopsided electoral defeat for the President in November. With these competing views of how the war in Iraq would play out politically, pundits and political observers had inadvertently pitted the irresistible force (public opinion in response to casualties) against the immovable object (an incumbent President during war).

The relationship between the war in Iraq, American casualties, and the Presidential election is—to say the least—somewhat conflicted. In this article we seek to make sense of these contradictory expectations by providing a more systematic and nuanced argument linking attitudes toward the war in Iraq, tolerance for U.S. military casualties, and Presidential vote choice in 2004.

We argue that the willingness of the public to pay the costs of war and to reelect incumbent Presidents during wartime are dependent on the interac-

tion of two attitudes—one retrospective and one prospective. In particular, we show that retrospective evaluations of whether President Bush “did the right thing” in attacking Iraq and prospective judgments about whether the U.S. will ultimately be successful in Iraq are two critical attitudes for understanding how foreign policy judgments affect vote choice and one’s tolerance for casualties² Further, we show that the retrospective judgments serve as a more powerful predictor for vote choice, while the prospective evaluations of mission success better predict continued support for the war in Iraq. These claims are consistent with the broader literature on how foreign policy influences voting behavior, and the literature that examines the public’s response to war and casualties. However, we also show that these retrospective and prospective judgments are interactive, and that a person’s attitude on one conditions the effect of the other. This interaction operates on “political” support (vote choice) as well as “mission” support (casualty tolerance).

To our knowledge, no other work integrates political support for the President and support for American war efforts into a single theoretical model and uses the same predictor variables to explain the separate dependent vari-

² We use the term “casualties” to refer to “deaths.” We recognize that in military parlance, casualties means dead and wounded, a much higher number than deaths alone. In popular usage, however, casualties has generally meant dead. In our own polling, we used “deaths” in all relevant question wordings, unless otherwise noted, so our claims are not contaminated by any public confusion about the terms.

able measures of vote choice and casualty tolerance. This article successfully bridges gaps in the literature by using one theoretical framework to answer two separate research questions: 1) whether and how foreign policy affects political evaluation and choice, and 2) the conditions under which American citizens will bear the financial and human cost of military missions.

Our argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 is a review of the foreign policy voting literature and the casualty tolerance literature. Section 3 demonstrates the increased importance in foreign affairs for the 2004 election. Section 4 develops the model, and Section 5 shows data and methods.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Policy and Political Behavior

Scholars have long been troubled by Americans' inability to answer survey questions "correctly." Poor performance on surveys has led observers to view the American public as an ill-informed lot with little ability to think coherently about the substance of politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964), with issues playing a small to non-existent role in shaping citizens' voting decisions. Foreign policy evaluations were viewed as among the least likely to affect political choices. When forming attitudes about the performance of the economy, citizens have their personal experience to fall back on. But foreign policy is so removed from the everyday lives of most citizens, it was argued, that it is simply unreasonable to think that what happened beyond

U.S. borders would have a large impact on Americans' political behavior. In support of this claim many studies showed, at best, weak evidence that foreign affairs affected the voting decision (e.g. Almond 1950; Stokes 1966). As Almond writes "Foreign policy attitudes among most Americans lack intellectual structure and factual content."

However, ever since the early work denigrating the capacity of the American public, a "new look" in opinion research has slowly emerged that has greatly rehabilitated the discipline's view of the average citizen and voter (Sniderman 1993). As evidence accumulates that voters make reasonable or competent decisions from limited amounts of information (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Popkin 1991), it is no longer so unreasonable to think that the distant world of foreign affairs can have a meaningful impact on public opinion.

Two reinforcing lines of research illuminate the importance of foreign policy judgments. The first line of research shows that foreign policy attitudes are well structured and that the public responds rationally and intelligently to developments in the international arena. The second line of research shows that these foreign policy judgments affect vote choice and presidential approval.

John Hurwitz and Mark Peffley (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987*a*; Peffley and Hurwitz 1993) demonstrate that citizens have reasonably structured attitudes concerning foreign policy. Attitudes of foreign policy affect political evaluations, and citizens respond in understandable ways to changing world

events.

Such evidence of a “rational public” regarding foreign affairs is widespread (Holsti 1997; Shapiro and Page 1988; Wittkopf 1990). Aggregate opinion on foreign and defense policy is remarkably stable and changes “have seldom, if ever, occurred . . . without reasonable causes, such as the actions of foreign friends or enemies or changes in the United States’ position in the world” (Shapiro and Page 1988, pp. 220-221). Wlezien (1995; 1996) shows that the public’s preferences for defense spending responded to spending levels as well as feelings toward the Soviet Union.³

Not only does the public have well-structured attitudes about foreign policy, but mounting evidence suggests that these attitudes have an impact on political behavior. It has long been known that economic evaluations have an effect on presidential approval and vote choice (e.g. Kiewiet 1983; Kinder

³ Witko (2003) offers a less sanguine explanation of the rational public by showing the changes in defense spending preferences to be a function of the way U.S. policy leaders talked about the Soviet Union, rather than specific actions taken by the former Soviet Union. In other words, citizens respond to what political leaders are saying and not the events themselves. This account is substantially in accord with Zaller’s (1992) account of mass opinion and attitude change being driven primarily by elites. Unanswered is how well policy leaders represent what is happening in the world. The fidelity of the link between elite statements about the world and the “true” state of the world is an important topic for future research.

and Kiewiet 1979; 1981). An increasing amount of evidence has emerged showing that foreign policy judgments matter as well as, and in roughly equal magnitude to, economic evaluations. In an analysis of the 1980 and 1984 Presidential elections, Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida (1989) find that foreign policy issues were just as powerful a vote determinant as domestic issues.

In a timeseries of aggregate quarterly presidential approval data, Nickelsburg and Norpht (2000) show that the President is as much “Commander-in-Chief” as “Chief Economist.” Adding major foreign policy events as predictor variables to their model, these international events matter at least as much as economic evaluations. Using individual level data from several national random sample surveys conducted from 1983 to 1987, Wilcox and Allsop (1991) find approval of Reagan’s foreign policy is consistently a good predictor of Reagan’s overall approval, though its strength relative to domestic issues does depend on the salience of economic or foreign policy issues. However, the impact of foreign policy on electoral choice does appear to wax and wane with the flow of current events. This pattern is hardly surprising. As we note below, survey responses regarding the nation’s “most important problem” suggest that the economy is nearly always salient in the minds of voters, while concern about foreign affairs varies substantially.

In sum, we would point to three well supported findings concerning foreign affairs and political behavior: 1) Citizen attitudes about foreign policy are well structured, 2) Foreign policy evaluations matter for presidential approval

and presidential vote choice, and 3) Citizen attitudes respond to changes in the international arena.

2.2 Casualty tolerance

Ever since the Vietnam War, policymakers have worried that the American public will support military operations only if the human costs of the war, as measured in combat casualties, are minimal. Building on earlier research on war and public opinion (Milstein 1974), John Mueller (1973) argued that public support for the Vietnam and Korean Wars dropped in proportion to the log of casualties. In Mueller's words: "While [the American public] did weary of the [Korean and Vietnam] wars, they generally seem to have become hardened to the wars' costs: they are sensitive to relatively small losses in the early stages, but only to large losses in later stages." Casualties drained public support, but only slowly.

This complex finding—that casualties have a more corrosive effect on public support early in the war than they do later—gradually became simplified in the conventional wisdom to the view that the public will not tolerate casualties. Edward Luttwak summarized the conventional wisdom well: "The prospect of high casualties, which can rapidly undermine domestic support for any military operations, is the key political constraint when decisions must be made on which forces to deploy in a crisis, and at what levels" (Luttwak 1996, p. 36).

In other words, Mueller argued that the public was *casualty sensitive*.

But the conventional wisdom, pushed in part by missions like Somalia, translated Mueller's claim into a conviction that the public was *casualty phobic* (Hyde 2000; Klaevas 2000; Lane 1998; Luttwak 1994; Moskos 1995; Record 2000; Sapolsky and Shapiro 1996). Casualty sensitivity recognizes the human toll as a cost of war; casualty phobia refers to a sensitivity so great that it amounts to an unwillingness to support a military operation if even very low human costs are incurred (Feaver and Gelpi 2004). We hope to revise this conventional wisdom by demonstrating that the public's willingness to pay the human costs of war and its propensity to punish its leaders electorally for using force vary depending on specific attitudes about the war.

Casualty sensitivity is, to put it crudely, one's price sensitivity to the human cost of war. As with other forms of price sensitivity, some members of the public are more sensitive to the costs than others. We see in the public a continuum of casualty sensitivity ranging from the minimally sensitive—those who view casualties as a necessary cost of war and not a determining factor in shaping support—all the way to maximally sensitive, or those who support only military missions that guarantee virtually no casualties.⁴ Over the past decade, many scholars have worked to debunk the myth of a strictly

⁴ Some members of the public might also be insensitive to casualties because they are opposed to the use of military force regardless of the number of U.S. casualties. We account for this possibility in our measurement of casualty tolerance.

casualty phobic public.

While the view that the public is casualty phobic is widely entrenched among policymakers and the elite (Destler and Kull 1999), in fact something close to the opposite consensus has emerged in academic studies of American public opinion. Bruce Jentleson (Britton and Jentleson 1998; Jentleson 1992) finds that the public is “pretty prudent,” and will support paying even costly military operations provided the mission rationale conforms to certain standards. Eric Larson (1996) argues that the public uses a rational cost-benefit model in which the public depends very heavily on elite cues; when there is an elite consensus (defined as congressional support) in favor of a military mission, casualties are not highly corrosive to support (Larson 1996). James Burk (1999) shows that public support for missions did not collapse with casualties, even in the “hard” cases of Lebanon 1983 and Somalia 1993. I.M. Destler and Steven Kull (1999) show that public casualty tolerance even in “unpopular” missions like peace operations in Bosnia is much greater than previously thought; moreover, public tolerance of casualties is particularly a function of “international elite consensus” in the form of multilateral support for the military operation.

Of course, even if the public as a whole is not casualty phobic, it still may be the case that some people are. Feaver and Gelpi (2004) argue that there is significant variation within the public regarding the use of force. They show that public attitudes toward the use of force fit a quadripartite pattern: solid hawks (roughly 30-35%) who will support virtually any military mission re-

ardless of the costs; solid doves (roughly 10-30%) who will oppose almost any mission regardless of cost; casualty-phobics (roughly 15-20%) who support a mission provided it is extremely low cost; and defeat-phobics (roughly 15-40%) who support a mission, despite mounting costs, provided that the mission is likely to succeed, but who turn on a mission if it looks like it is doomed to failure.

The quadripartite pattern allows for variation in the proportion in each category, depending on the specifics of any given mission. While many factors matter—stakes, elite consensus, type of mission, and so forth—Feaver and Gelpi (2004) give pride of place to “expectations of success.” When members of the public think victory is likely, they will support paying the human costs of war. When they think victory is not likely, even small costs will be corrosive of public support. In a comprehensive analysis of aggregate public opinion trends from 1981 through 2004, Richard Eichenberg comes to a similar conclusion: “successful military operations enjoy high support, regardless of other factors that may be present” (Eichenberg N.d., p.11).⁵

Bringing the two literatures together—the role of foreign policy and the impact of casualties on public opinion—produces the following baseline ex-

⁵ This argument about the public’s demand for victory in war is consistent with prevailing theories about the impact of democracy on the use of force and the democratic peace (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Reiter and Stam 2002).

pectation: mounting casualties should not by themselves jeopardize the political fortunes of an incumbent, but the President does not have a blank check. Instead, public support for the war and the president will depend upon specific attitudes about the war.

The public is able to reasonably incorporate information from the international arena into its judgments, and these judgments affect presidential approval and vote choice. The public demands success when its president goes to war, and it demands that the president provide a good reason for the fighting. Neither of these factors—most especially perceptions of success—are entirely under the control of policy makers, which brings us to the election of 2004.

3 Foreign Affairs as Salient Concern

Not surprisingly, foreign policy was a salient issue during the 2004 election campaign. After all, during the four years that had elapsed since the 2000 Presidential election, the U.S. experienced a startling domestic attack from a foreign enemy and the U.S. embarked on high-profile conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Looking at the Gallup poll's most important problem over the last several presidential elections, foreign affairs dramatically stands out as more salient in 2004. The Gallup survey reports that in 2004 roughly the same proportion of voters state international concerns (22%) as economic issues (26%) as the "most important problem." While 22% for foreign affairs is the

highest since 1984, the economy still trumped international concerns by a 2-to-1 margin (47% to 23%) in Reagan’s reelection. In the three presidential elections from 1992 to 2000, mentions of international affairs were 5% or less.⁶

Polling we conducted also shows that respondents report foreign affairs as an important concern in the voting decision. In six separate surveys from March 2004 to November 2004, we used a closed ended–question to ask respondents which issue (economy, foreign policy, social issues) was most important to them personally when choosing which candidate to vote for.⁷

⁶ Gallup does not have apples-to-apples data for 1988. In most years, the “most important problem” question allows respondents to mention more than one problem, i.e. the same respondent could say both “the economy” and “foreign affairs.” Because of the multiple responses, the cumulative total of the marginals exceeds 100%, sometimes by a wide margin. In 1988, Gallup used a single response format. In the single response format, 9% mention something related to foreign affairs or defense policy as the most important problem. This proportion is still more than double what was reported in the multiple response format during the 1990s.

⁷ The surveys were conducted by Knowledge Networks, which maintains a panel of respondents recruited through Random Digit Dialing (RDD), who are equipped with WebTV and complete surveys online. Detailed sampling information is available from the company website, <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com>. Studies have found that the Knowledge Networks sampling methodology yields representative samples (Couper 2000; Krosnick and Chang 2001), with results comparable to RDD telephone

Because we only polled in this election, we cannot make inferences about the importance of foreign affairs compared to other years based on this data alone. However, Table 1 shows that the proportion stating foreign policy as the most important issue doubled between the conclusion of the Democratic primary campaigns and the general election in November.

[Table 1 about here]

In the 2004 election, then, foreign policy was a salient concern. The war in Iraq was shaping up to be, in the words of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, a “long, hard slog”—with a tragically mounting human toll, making the election of 2004 an ideal place to examine the electoral politics of war.

4 The Model

We build on Fiorina’s (1981) model of retrospective voting to construct a model that uses the same antecedent attitudes as predictors of vote choice and casualty tolerance. Fiorina’s landmark work successfully synthesizes what many saw as the irreconcilable traditions of behavioralism and rational choice by creating a generalized voter’s calculus containing three distinct components: 1) political predispositions, 2) retrospective evaluations of the incumbent, and 3) prospective judgments or future expectations.

surveys.

We argue that two logically distinct attitudes—one’s willingness to continue to pay a human cost in the war in Iraq and one’s vote choice in the 2004 election—are functions of retrospective and prospective judgements, as well as one’s political predispositions (Party ID). Retrospectively, voters are judging whether the decision to invade Iraq was the right one. Prospectively, voters are judging whether the war in Iraq will turn out to be successful.

The impact of these attitudes on vote choice and casualty tolerance are strongly intuitive. If the decision to invade Iraq was wrong, then it makes sense to elect a leader who would make (or would have made) different choices. Thus we expect retrospective attitudes about whether attacking Iraq was the “right thing” to matter most in determining vote choice. Likewise, why continue to pay a human toll in pursuit of a war that is wrong? If one believes that the United States will ultimately lose in Iraq, it is hard to make a case for Bush’s reelection; and if the war is hopeless, why continue to pay a price? Thus we expect prospective attitudes about the likelihood of success to have the greatest impact on casualty tolerance.

We expound on this intuition two steps further: we argue that (1) the interaction of the retrospective and prospective judgements determines vote choice and casualty tolerance, and (2) the relative weight assigned to retrospective or prospective judgements differs, depending on whether it is vote choice or casualty tolerance that is in question.

We additionally argue that the effect of these two attitudes both on vote choice and casualty tolerance will be interactive. According to the logic

outlined above, we would expect attitudes about whether attacking Iraq was the “right thing” to have little impact on casualty tolerance for respondents who feel that success is unlikely. If victory is unlikely, the initial wisdom of the decision to use force has little impact on the expected benefits (and thus the tolerable costs) of the war. But if victory is likely, then attitudes about whether the war was the “right thing” should have a substantial impact on the expected benefits from the conflict and influence casualty tolerance.

Similarly, the likely prospects for success should have little impact on one’s judgment about the wisdom of using force if one does not believe that using force was the “right thing” in the first place. However, if one believes that the initial decision to use force was the “right thing” to do, then one’s attitude about the likelihood of success should have a significant impact on one’s judgment of the overall wisdom of U.S. policy, and thus on one’s willingness to reelect the President.

5 Data and Methods

We propose here a latent variable approach in place of an explicitly spatial model. Rather than utility functions of competing candidates, we see “Bush support” and “casualty tolerance” as underlying attitudes expressed as latent variables. Individuals possess some quantity of these underlying attitudes, which we model as

$$y_i^* = \mathbf{x}_i\beta + \epsilon_i. \tag{1}$$

We keep this compatible with Fiorina (1981) by using a vector of predictor variables consistent with his generalized voter’s calculus with separate evaluations for political predispositions (long-term past experience), political past experience (near-term experience under an incumbent), and future expectations. This yields the following equation:

$$y_i^* = PID_i + RJ_i + PJ_i + \epsilon_i. \tag{2}$$

In Equation 2, y_i^* is the quantity of attitude held, either support for George W. Bush or one’s amount of casualty tolerance. The vector of predictor variables $\mathbf{x}_i\beta$ is expressed generally as the long term political past experience (party ID or PID), political past experience under an incumbent (retrospective judgments or RJ), and future expectations (prospective judgments or PJ).

Conceptually, our dependent variables are measures of how much “Bush Support” or “Casualty Tolerance” one possesses. These measures are represented in the data by five point ordinal scales. The data we analyze come from polling we conducted immediately prior to the November 2004 election. Table 2 reports marginals for our vote choice and casualty tolerance variables. Full question wording is available in the measurement appendix.

[Table 2 about here]

Because we are using ordinal scales to represent underlying latent attitudes, ordered logit is an ideal estimation technique. We estimate the following models for both vote choice and casualty tolerance:

$$y_i^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \textit{PartyID} + \beta_2 \textit{RightThing} + \beta_3 \textit{Success} + \beta_{23} \textit{RightThing} * \textit{Success} + \epsilon_i. \quad (3)$$

$$y_i^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \textit{PartyID} + \beta_2 \textit{RightThing} + \beta_3 \textit{Success} + \beta_{23} \textit{RightThing} * \textit{Success} + \beta_4 \textit{Age} + \beta_5 \textit{Education} + \beta_6 \textit{Female} + \beta_7 \textit{Minority} + \epsilon_i. \quad (4)$$

PartyID is a standard partisan identification question, coded as Democrat (-1), Independent (0), and Republican (1). *RightThing* and *Success* are both four point Likert scales. *RightThing* asks respondents if they approve of the original decision to use military force against Iraq and is coded from “Strongly Disapprove” (0) to “Strongly Approve” (3). *Success* asks respondents if they think the U.S. is likely to succeed in Iraq, and is coded from “Not at all likely” (0) to “Very likely” (3). The independent variables are coded so that we would expect to see positive coefficients in the ordered logistic regressions. In other words, we expect a one unit increase in the independent variable to be associated a respondent possessing a greater quantity of the underlying

attitude under investigation, whether voting for Bush or casualty tolerance. Table 3 shows the estimates from Equations 3 and 4 for both dependent variables.

[Table 3 about here]

As expected *RightThing* is a significant predictor of the both vote choice and casualty tolerance dependent variables, as is *Success* (see footnote 8). Also as hypothesized, there is a significant interaction between the two attitudes: the slope of *Success* is contingent on the value of *RightThing* and vice versa.⁸

[Figure 1 about here]

Because logit coefficients are extremely difficult to interpret directly, we use predicted probability graphs to show the relationship between variables

⁸ Because the model contains an interaction one should be mindful when interpreting the substantive and statistical significance of the coefficients in the tables. The reported coefficient for a variable is its value when all other variables are equal to zero. For example, the reported coefficient for *RightThing* is for when all other variables are equal to zero. When *PartyID* equals zero, it is “Independent” and when *Success* equals zero, it is “Not at all likely.” If a constant were added or subtracted to *Success* to change the reference category, the coefficient reported for *RightThing* would change. In models 1 & 2, *Success* is significant with higher values of *RightThing*; in models 3 & 4 *RightThing* is significant with higher values of *Success*.

and the importance of the interaction term. Figures 1 and 2 show predicted probabilities of voting for George W. Bush (estimated from Model 2). Consistent with our expectations (following from Fiorina) respondents' retrospective judgments on whether attacking Iraq was the "right thing" has the greater impact on vote choice. Figure 1 shows how the predicted probability of voting for Bush changes across values of *RightThing*, and the course of this change depends on the values of *Success*. Although it can be hard to discern directly from Table 3, the graph shows that *RightThing* always matters in predicting the probability of voting for Bush. Certainly, *RightThing* matters more as one ascends through *Success* from "Not at all likely" to "Very likely."

[Figure 2 about here]

When we graph the predicted probability of voting for Bush as a function of *Success* (Figure 2), we find that this variable does not always matter. When *RightThing* is "Strongly Disapprove," *Success* has little to no effect on the predicted probability of voting for Bush (this is the graphical way to interpret the non-significant coefficient for *Success* in Table 3 in Models 1 & 2). The effect of *Success* is significant for all other values of *RightThing*. When we examine the predicted probability of voting for Bush across the values of *Success*, and see how the change is affected by different values of *RightThing*, we see much more modest differences in the change across *Success*, but much greater differences in the predicted probability at the

lowest point in the scale (“Not at all likely”).

[Figure 3 about here]

Figures 3 and 4 show a nearly identical pattern, but in reverse. Consistent with our expectations, when predicting whether one will tolerate at least 1500 casualties in Iraq, *Success* becomes more important and *RightThing* explains less of the action. When *Success* is “Not at all likely”, the probability of tolerating 1500 casualties is equally low regardless of the value of *RightThing*. (Again, this is the graphical way to interpret the non-significant coefficient for *RightThing* in Models 3 & 4.) *Success*, however, is always significant and is responsible for a big change in the predicted probability of supporting the war in Iraq, even if the U.S. suffers 1500 casualties.

[Figure 4 about here]

So what is the substantive significance of these attitudes and the interaction between them? People who hold both beliefs—that the war was right and that the U.S. will win—indicate the strongest support for continuing military action even in the face of mounting casualties and for reelecting President Bush. Likewise, people who hold the opposite view—that the war was wrong and that the U.S. will lose—have the strongest opposition both to paying any more human cost and to reelecting Bush. Think of the former as the “Bush Base” and the latter group as the “Vietnam Syndrome” crowd. The intermediate attitudes—the “Noble Failure” view that the war was right

but we will lose, and the “Pottery Barn” view (you break it, you fix it) that the war was wrong but we will win—operate in surprising ways. The Pottery Barn crowd is, on average, more likely than the Noble Failure crowd to stomach continued military action. In contrast, the Noble Failure subgroup indicates stronger support for Bush.

[Table 4 about here]

What can these results tell us about why Bush 43 was able to win reelection despite a costly and controversial war? Our data suggest that on balance the war in Iraq helped the President rather than hurt him. But it did not help him because the public reflexively refuses to oust the Commander-in-Chief during wartime. After all, a significant proportion of the public was strongly opposed to the war and sought vigorously to remove the President as a result. Instead, the war helped the President to win reelection and maintain support for the war because he was able to persuade a majority of the public of two simple points: 1) attacking Iraq was the “right thing” to do, and 2) the U.S. will ultimately succeed in Iraq. Specifically, we found that 49% of our respondent’s fell into the “Bush Base” category described above, while 15% were identified as “Pottery Barn,” 8% as “Noble Failure,” and 29% as in the “Vietnam Syndrome” category. Support from Bush Base and Noble Failure voters kept the President in office, while Bush Base and Pottery Barn respondents maintained popular support for the war (see Table 4).

Finally, as a pooling test to probe the robustness of our results, we re-run the analyses just among those who say foreign policy is the most important issue and among those who say economics is the most important issue. We find that the issue respondents report as being most important slightly changes the relative strength of our predictor variables, but that the overall causal story remains intact—*RightThing* is a better predictor of the vote, while *Success* is a better predictor of casualty tolerance.

Restricting our analysis to just those respondents who cite economic concerns almost perfectly reproduces our findings (which should be expected given their preponderance in the data-set). Goodness-of-fit statistics, such as maximum likelihood analogs to R^2 , drop. But this should also be expected; those who do not identify foreign policy as their primary concern ought to have less variance explained with measures of foreign policy attitudes.

[Table 5 about here]

Replicating the ordered logits among the subset of respondents who report foreign policy as the most important issue, we are able to explain a greater proportion of the variance. If we are making a claim about the explanatory power of foreign policy attitudes, it stands to reason that there should be extra explanatory “juice” among those who consider foreign policy the most important issue. In explaining vote choice, the Pseudo- R^2 jumps. The interaction between *RightThing* and *Success* continues to be significant when we are predicting vote choice. However, when we examine casualty

tolerance, the interaction term loses its significance. Dropping the interaction term from the model leaves both *RightThing* and *Success* as significant predictor variables, with the latter having a coefficient more than two and a half times as large as the former. While the interaction term is no longer significant, the relatively greater importance of *Success* as a predictor variable conforms with our overall story and explanation of how different attitudes affect vote choice and casualty tolerance. The more one cares about foreign policy, the more one focuses on the likelihood of success as the critical factor in deciding whether to supporting the continuation of the war.

6 Conclusion

The presidential election of 2004 was profoundly influenced by judgments about the war in Iraq. But the public did not reelect the Commander-in-Chief simply because there was a war on. Instead, the public appears to be drawing carefully reasoned and reasonable judgments both about the war and about the election. Our analysis indicates that a single theoretical model can be used to describe both American's willingness to support continued fighting and their willingness to reelect the President. Specifically, we identify two attitudes—one prospective and the other retrospective—as key factors in shaping opinion. Consistent with previous work on electoral behavior (Fiorina 1981), we find that retrospective judgments about the President's decision to use force are most influential in determining vote choice. Con-

sistent with previous work on casualty tolerance (Feaver and Gelpi 2004) we find that prospective judgments about the likelihood of success in Iraq are most important in determining support for continuing to fight in Iraq.

A Measurement Appendix

Most Important Issue: Respondents were asked “When choosing for whom to vote, which of the following issues are most important to you personally?” Answer categories were “Foreign policy issues like Iraq and the War on Terrorism,” “Economic issues like jobs and taxes,” and “Social issues like abortion and gay marriage.”

Right Thing: Respondents were asked, “We would like to know whether you think President Bush did the right thing by using military force against Iraq. Would you say that you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove or strongly disapprove of his decision?” [Strongly approve=3, Somewhat approve=2, Somewhat disapprove=1, Strongly disapprove=0]

Success: Respondents were asked, “Regardless of whether you think that the President did the right thing, would you say that the U.S. is very likely succeed in Iraq, somewhat likely to succeed, not very likely to succeed, or not at all likely to succeed?” [Very likely to succeed=3, Somewhat likely to succeed=2, Not very likely to succeed=1, Not at all likely to succeed=0]

Vote: Respondents were asked “If the general election for President were held today and the candidates were: George W. Bush, the Republican, John

Kerry, the Democrat, Ralph Nader, the Independent for whom would you vote?” If undecided, respondents were asked “Toward whom do you lean?” [Bush=4, Lean Bush=3, Undecided=2, Lean Kerry=1, Kerry=0]

Casualty Tolerance: To measure casualty tolerance, we asked respondents a series of questions, including a split sample design to assess if the number of dead and wounded affects opinion differently than just the number dead. We found no difference by including information about the number wounded in addition to those killed. In the questions that follow, the extra wording for the split sample is included in parentheses.

All respondents received the statement, “Regardless of whether you think the President made the right decision in attacking Iraq, as you know the United States is engaged in an ongoing military operation there and has suffered about 1000 military deaths (and over 7000 military wounded).”

Respondents were then asked, “Would you support continued U.S. military action in Iraq until a new Iraqi government can take over if it resulted in no additional U.S. military deaths?” [If they said no *Casualty Tolerance*=0, if they said yes they were asked] “would you support continued U.S. military action in Iraq until a new Iraqi government can take over if it resulted in up to 1,500 total U.S. military deaths (and over 10,000 military wounded)?” [If they said no *Casualty Tolerance*=1, if they said yes they were asked] “Would you support continued U.S. military action in Iraq until a new Iraqi government can take over if it resulted in up to 5,000 total U.S. military deaths (and over 30,000 military wounded)?” [If they said no *Casualty Tolerance*=2, if

they said yes they were asked] “Would you support continued U.S. military action in Iraq until a new Iraqi government can take over if it resulted in up to 50,000 total U.S. military deaths (and over 300,000 military wounded)?”

[If they said no *Casualty Tolerance*=3, if they said yes *Casualty Tolerance*=4]

Age: Seven category variable [18-24=0, 25-34=1, 35-44=2, 45-54=3, 55-64=4, 65-74=5, 75+=6]

Education: Four category variable [High school or less=0, High school diploma=1, Some college=2, Bachelors degree or higher=3]

Female: Dummy variable [Male=0, Female=1]

Minority: Dummy variable [White Non-Hispanic=0; Black, Hispanic or other=1]

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Table 1: Most Important Issue

	3/5- 3/18	3/19- 4/2	4/3- 4/16	4/17- 4/29	6/18- 6/28	10/21- 11/1
Foreign policy issues like Iraq and the War on Terrorism	16%	19%	20%	24%	26%	30%
Economic issues like jobs and taxes	72%	70%	67%	63%	61%	59%
Social issues like abortion and gay marriage	10%	9%	11%	11%	11%	10%
N	930	889	881	899	900	1125

Table 2: Dependent Variable Marginals

<i>Vote Choice</i>		<i>Casualty Tolerance</i>	
Kerry	40.5%	Oppose with 0 deaths	23.0%
Lean Kerry	6.6%	Support with 0 deaths	23.7%
Undecided	2.2%	Support with 1500 deaths	20.3%
Lean Bush	4.8%	Support with 5000 deaths	17.2%
Bush	45.9%	Support with 50000 deaths	15.9%

Table 3: Ordered Logistic Regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Party ID	1.60*** (0.12)	1.60*** (0.13)	0.33*** (0.08)	0.21* (0.08)
Iraq Right Thing	0.53** (0.19)	0.54** (0.20)	0.06 (0.13)	0.12 (0.13)
Likelihood of Success	-0.06 (0.19)	-0.03 (0.19)	0.51*** (0.13)	0.66*** (0.13)
Right Thing * Success	0.47*** (0.11)	0.46*** (0.11)	0.29*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.06)
Female		0.33 (0.17)		-0.30* (0.12)
Minority		-0.31 (0.23)		-0.60*** (0.17)
Age		0.04 (0.05)		0.11** (0.04)
Education		-0.09 (0.09)		0.28*** (0.06)
Pseudo R^2	0.43	0.43	0.18	0.19
Log-Likelihood	-645.15	-641.49	-1363.81	-1333.51
Log-Likelihood χ^2	964.72	972.05	583.68	644.28
N	1007	1007	1037	1037

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Standard errors in parentheses.
Dependent variable for Models 1 & 2 is *Vote*.
Dependent variable for Models 3 & 4 is *Casualty Tolerance*.

Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities (estimated from Model 2)

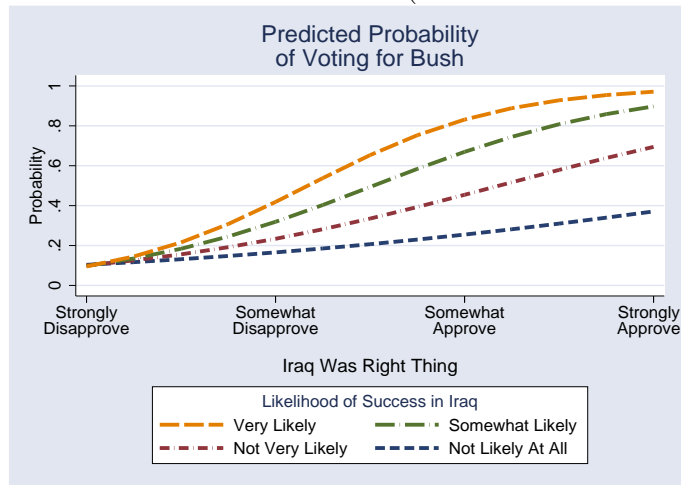


Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities (estimated from Model 2)

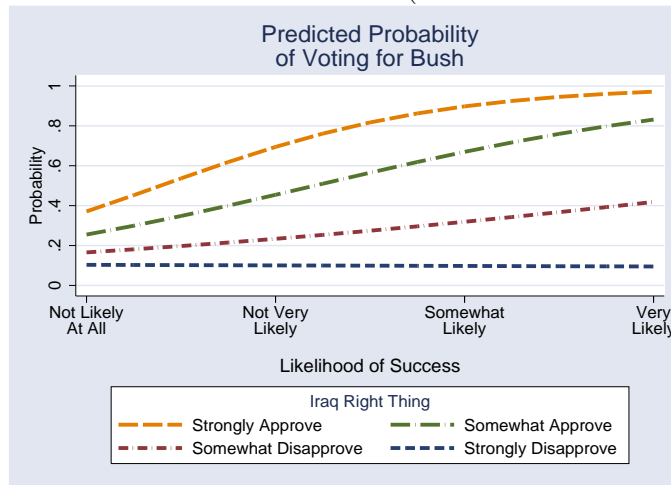


Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities (estimated from Model 4)

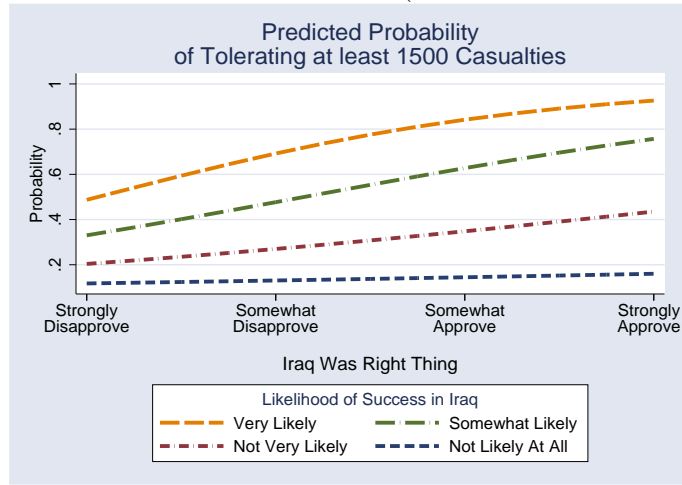


Figure 4: Predicted Probabilities (estimated from Model 4)

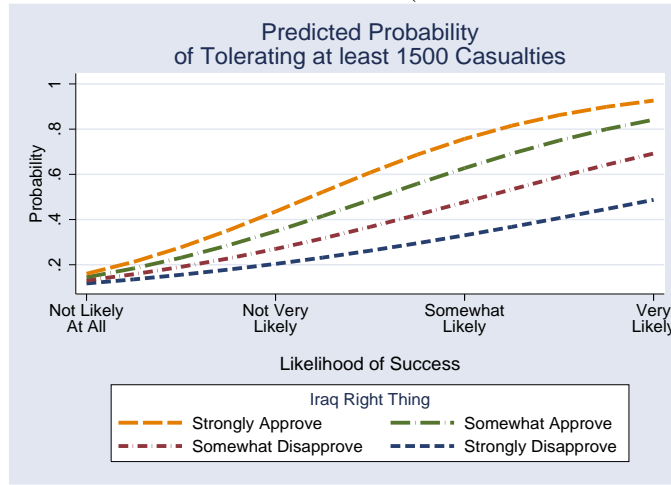


Table 4: Predicted Probabilities

	Vote Bush	Support 1500+ Casualties
Bush Base (49%)	83%	80%
Noble Failure (8%)	53%	34%
Pottery Barn (15%)	26%	40%
Vietnam Syndrome (29%)	13%	21%

Table 5: Logits Restricted to Most Important Issue

	EconOnlyVote	EconOnlyCas	ForOnlyVote	ForOnlyCas
Party ID	1.65*** (0.15)	0.19 (0.11)	1.63*** (0.35)	0.35* (0.17)
Iraq Right Thing	0.70** (0.25)	0.15 (0.17)	0.24 (0.52)	0.27 (0.27)
Likelihood of Success	0.10 (0.25)	0.61*** (0.17)	0.01 (0.43)	0.98*** (0.27)
Right Thing * Success	0.29* (0.13)	0.21* (0.09)	0.87** (0.31)	0.12 (0.12)
Female	0.27 (0.21)	-0.58*** (0.15)	0.24 (0.46)	-0.07 (0.21)
Minority	-0.13 (0.27)	-0.49* (0.21)	-0.85 (0.62)	-0.96** (0.34)
Age	0.11 (0.07)	0.18*** (0.05)	-0.25 (0.13)	-0.00 (0.06)
Education	-0.09 (0.11)	0.25** (0.08)	-0.01 (0.24)	0.19 (0.12)
Pseudo R^2	0.36	0.15	0.62	0.24
Log-Likelihood	-437.90	-788.01	-104.22	-379.70
Log-Likelihood χ^2	493.40	283.41	333.07	233.83
N	590	605	305	313

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Standard errors in parentheses.

Dependent variable for Models 1 & 2 is *Vote*.

Dependent variable for Models 3 & 4 is *Casualty Tolerance*.