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Issue Salience and Party Choice*

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In recent years, leading studies of voting behavior have often concluded that specific issues are not a salient element in the electoral decision. It has been found that by and large the electorate is unfamiliar with most issues, and/or is unable to recognize differences between Republican and Democratic positions on the issues. These studies suggest that the electoral decision is based primarily on party identification, on attitudes toward candidates, and on public response to very broad issues such as war or peace, prosperity, corruption, and the like. The purpose of this study is to present new data that in some respects modify these evaluations of the electoral decision.

Previous Findings on the Importance of Issues

First, let us review briefly the leading research in voting behavior in the United States in order to examine the nature of the findings regarding issues, and to establish the context within which the present study was made. *The American Voter*, in a chapter on "Public Policy and Political Preference," indicated that voters' familiarity with issues was generally rather low, and that even when people held an opinion on a particular issue, many were unable to identify correctly the relevant policy stands of the two parties.¹ On each of the sixteen issues examined by the authors, only from 18 to 36 percent of the public (depending on the issue) expressed an opinion, perceived what the government was doing, and detected differences in policy between the parties.

Follow-up studies revealed that many of the people who had expressed an opinion in response to these issue questions were probably guessing. Using the 1956-1958-1960 panel, Philip Converse performed a reliability test and found an unusual amount of turnover in the re-

spondents' positions on these issues.² On the question of leaving "things like electric power and housing" to private business, for example, Converse calculated that about 50 percent of the sample had been responding randomly. (An additional 30 percent had not expressed an opinion on the question at all.)

Other researchers have attempted to compare the direction of opinion (pro and con) on these issues with the voter's party preference. Their findings disclose that party identifiers do tend to hold the expected positions on certain issues, particularly on matters having to do with social legislation and government intervention in the economy.³ When it comes to making an electoral choice, however, party identifiers

Table 1. Relation Between Issue Position and Party Preference: Selected Issues (from Converse and Dupeux, "Politicization of the Electorate in France and the United States")⁴

| Issue | Non-South | |
|--|-------------------|--------------|
| | Party Identifiers | Independents |
| Federal aid to education | .21 | .16 |
| Federal guarantees of employment | .19 | .03 |
| Government vs. private enterprise in power and housing | .18 | .21 |
| Federal school integration | .07 | -.06 |
| Federal FEPC | .06 | .01 |
| Deployment of U.S. forces abroad | .05 | -.02 |
| General isolation-internationalism | .03 | .04 |
| Foreign aid | .02 | -.05 |

(correlation coefficients are tau_b's)

² Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" in David E. Apter, editor, *Ideology and Discontent* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 238-245, and Philip E. Converse, "Attitudes and Non-Attitudes: Continuation of a Dialogue" (Survey Research Center, The University of Michigan, February, 1963), 27 pp. (Mimeographed.)

³ V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 445; Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 163-165.

⁴ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), p. 287.

* I am indebted to Thomas E. Patterson for his skilled and careful assistance in the preparation of these data. The data were made available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. I also want to thank Donald Stokes, Philip Converse and John Turner for their helpful commentaries on an earlier version of this article which was presented at the 26th annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

¹ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), Chapter 8.

have not exhibited a strong inclination to vote on the basis of these issue positions. The data presented in Table 1 (taken from a study by Converse) indicate that on only three issues—federal aid to education, federal guarantee of employment, and government involvement in power and housing—is there even a modest correlation between the issue position of the party identifiers and their choice of party. As for Independents, Table 1 reveals that almost no relationship exists between the opinions they hold on most issues and the party preference they express in the voting booth.

When we review these kinds of findings, we can only surmise that the electoral decision is not rich with specific issue content. As the authors of *The American Voter* conclude, there seems to be “widespread ignorance and indifference over many matters of policy.”⁵

Importance of Candidates Relative to Issues. In one of the leading analyses in the area of electoral change, Donald Stokes concluded that change stemming from attitudes toward parties was “moderate by comparison with change induced by succeeding pairs of candidates.”⁶ In his study, Stokes compared the overall importance of four party-related components and two candidate-image components in the 1952, 1956, 1960 and 1964 elections. He found some indications that certain pervasive issues (such as, for example, the Korean War and the corruption in government charge in the 1952 cam-

paign) did have a measurable effect on the outcome of elections, but even when such issues commanded widespread public attention, attitudes toward the presidential candidates had a far greater effect on net electoral change.

The Independent Voter and Issues Awareness. The Independent voter has been of special interest to many students of electoral change. Independents have been characterized as the “least admirable” voters—those who shift with the popular tide and seem “devoid of policy interests or concerns.”⁷ The authors of *The American Voter* describe them as follows:

Far from being more attentive, interested, and informed, Independents tend as a group to be somewhat less involved in politics. They have somewhat poorer knowledge of the issues, their image of the candidates is fainter, their interest in the campaign is less, their concern over the outcome is relatively slight, and their choice between competing candidates, although it is made later in the campaign, seems much less to spring from discoverable evaluations of the elements of national politics.⁸

Thus, when we consider that much of the change in electoral outcome is a result of the shifting preferences of Independents, we have even less reason to believe that the outcome of an election is dependent upon a responsible consideration of substantive issues.

Measuring Issue Salience

The findings cited in the above studies were based on data gathered by the Survey Research Center. As is true with most scientific inquiry, newly refined measures and different approaches often modify the findings of previous research. This study utilizes a new set of interview questions from the same Survey Research Center sample. By analyzing this alternate data set, it reveals new evidence concerning the role of specific issues in voting decisions.

The Survey Research Center interview questions that have been used in the past to measure the issue positions of the public have been of the closed-ended type.⁹ In this format, the

⁷ V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, p. 465.

⁸ Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, p. 143.

⁹ There are some exceptions; a few studies have used open-ended questions to analyze issues. In an effort to measure the impact of the Goldwater campaign, Kessel examined several sets of Survey Research Center open-ended questions: those which measure attitudes toward the parties and the presidential candidates as well as the “most important problems” (which provides the basis for this present study). Kessel shows the distribution of responses to these questions for interviews taken during different stages of the campaign. See John H. Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition* (Indianapolis and New York:

⁵ Campbell *et al.*, *The American Voter*, p. 186.

⁶ Donald E. Stokes, “Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency,” *American Political Science Review*, 60 (March, 1966), p. 27. It should be pointed out that the graphs in Stokes’ article do not indicate the relative importance of each component for individual voting choice; rather the graphs represent the net effect of each component on the overall outcome of each election. Stokes multiplies the beta weights—that is, the importance of each component in predicting individual voting choice—by the distance that the average attitude of the entire electorate is displaced from the neutral position on the attitudinal component. His formula is:

$$b_i(\bar{X}_i - X_i^0)$$

Thus, the relative importance of issues and candidates in individual voting decisions cannot be discerned directly from Stokes’ data since his findings are a function of both b_i and \bar{X}_i .

In his original component analysis, published in 1958, Stokes did present data showing the relative importance of each component for individual voting choice; bar graphs indicated the relative strengths of the beta weights in the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections. Donald E. Stokes *et al.*, “Components of Electoral Decision,” *American Political Science Review*, 52 (June, 1958), p. 381. However, these individual weights have not been included in the subsequent presentations of the component analysis published in *The American Voter* and in the 1966 article cited above.

interviewer reads a preformulated statement and then asks the respondent whether he agrees or disagrees. When a respondent can reply only with a simple "agree" or "disagree," it is difficult to tell whether the interview question has elicited merely a fleeting reaction to an issue that is of little or no concern to the respondent, or whether the respondent views it as being truly salient.¹⁰ The random turnover in responses to this type of question (see the reliability study of Converse cited in note 2 above) indicates that in many cases no real attitude has been measured. If we wish to know how issues affect behavior, we must first find out which issues are salient to individual voters. When we rely on the closed-ended type of question, there is no way to separate voters for whom the issue is salient from those voters who have no particular concern about the issue.

We might also observe that, in presenting a battery of issue questions, the interviewer confronts the respondent with a series of statements that have been pre-selected and pre-recorded by a political analyst. Some respondents may not recognize the issue when it is presented to them in this manner—they themselves may view the issue in entirely different terms. Even more important, many respondents may be concerned with other issues besides those that are included in the interview schedule. These neglected issues may have a strong influence on the individual's voting behavior, and yet voters' attitudes toward them will be unavailable for analysis.

In 1960, the Survey Research Center added a new set of questions to its interview schedule

—open-ended questions which sought information about the voter's issue concerns and his party preference on those issues. These questions allowed the voter to define his own issue space by naming the issues that were salient to him.

This study is based largely on these new measures. The issues that were salient to the public in 1960 and 1964 will be examined first, followed by an intensive analysis of the relative importance of issues in the 1964 election.

The Pattern of Issue Concerns, 1960 and 1964

The issues in 1960 and 1964, as the public saw them, are presented in Table 2. The table is an attempt to reduce a vast set of coded items to manageable proportions by combining similar issues and by collapsing code categories.¹¹ Even then, more than twenty-five issues were mentioned with some frequency each year. Many of these issues would escape detection by the standard battery of issue statement questions and, as pointed out earlier, this statement type of questioning would not be able to detect which issues were of real concern to the public.

In addition to noting the great variety of issues mentioned by the public, we should observe in Table 2 that no single issue attracted a very large following; in other words, each issue was mentioned by relatively small segments of the public. (These segments might be called "issue publics.")¹²

Another important phenomenon noticeable in Table 2 is the considerable change that occurred in issue concerns between 1960 and 1964. The preoccupation with foreign affairs in 1960 had dramatically shifted to domestic concerns by 1964,¹³ especially with respect to racial problems and civil rights.

¹¹ The Survey Research Center changed some code categories in 1964 from those used in 1960. Thus, these data are not exactly comparable. This is particularly true of the foreign aid and Supreme Court issues. Foreign aid responses were not distinguished from other foreign policy responses in 1960, but they were in 1964. Thus, foreign aid appears to be a new issue in 1964; it was not.

The 1964 interview question specifically asked about the Supreme Court; it had not been mentioned in the 1960 question. Thus, responses concerning the Supreme Court in 1964 may be a function of question wording rather than a sudden interest in the Court's activities. All other issues which appear for the first time in 1964 are a result of spontaneous responses, not question wording or coding.

¹² The concept of "issue public" was originally used by Converse in "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," *op. cit.*

¹³ The opposite finding regarding the importance of foreign affairs in 1964 is reported in Stokes, "Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency," *op. cit.*, p. 21. His finding, however, is based on quite a different set of questions.

The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), pp. 271–280. As we have seen, Stokes based his component analysis on the open-ended questions measuring likes and dislikes for the parties and the candidates. However, in his analysis, the impact of *specific* issues cannot be directly determined since all foreign policy items were placed in a single category, and all domestic issue responses were lumped together into three broad categories (parties as managers of government, domestic issues, and group-related attitudes). Stokes, "Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency," *op. cit.*

¹⁰ A "salient" issue may range in centrality from a readily verbalized phrase that is "on top" of the respondent's mind to an attitude which is well developed and of deep concern. When asked an open-ended question, the respondent must have some awareness of an issue and be able to verbalize this cognition. The problem with the Likert type scale is that it measures only the affective component of an attitude, if indeed it measures an attitude at all. Open-ended questions measure both affect and cognition. In using these questions, the researcher comes much closer to measuring an attitude which is on the respondent's mind (salient) at the time of the interview—an attitude which presumably was salient before the interview and will remain so afterwards.

Table 2. Most Important Problems: 1960 and 1964 Responses Compared*

| | 1960 | 1964 | | 1960 | 1964 |
|--|-------------|-------------|--|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Domestic Issues:</i> | | | <i>Foreign Affairs and Defense:</i> | | |
| Racial problems (integration, civil rights) | 6.0% | 21.3% | Cuba | 3.3 | 2.7 |
| Unemployment | 7.0 | 3.9 | Vietnam | — | 11.9 |
| Poverty program | — | 3.0 | Other trouble spots | 1.5 | 1.8 |
| Aged (social security, aid) | 2.3 | 2.7 | Foreign aid | — | 6.2 |
| Medicare (for aged) | 1.5 | 3.8 | Missile, space program | 1.0 | .6 |
| Schools, aid to education | 1.5 | 1.9 | Other (A-bomb, disarmament, U.N.) | 3.7 | 1.5 |
| Other social welfare (health, housing, etc.) | 2.3 | 2.1 | | | |
| Farm problems | 5.9 | 2.5 | Relations with Communist countries | 12.9 | 2.9 |
| Unions, labor relations | 2.2 | 1.0 | Maintain U.S. strength vis-a-vis Communists | 15.5 | 4.1 |
| Taxes | 3.0 | 2.1 | Relations with allies, more involvement | 5.0 | 1.0 |
| Inflation, fiscal policy | 2.7 | 2.3 | Isolationist position (bring boys back home) | 2.3 | 1.9 |
| States' rights | .2 | 2.2 | Aggressive policy (threaten war) | 1.9 | .1 |
| Government control of business | — | 1.2 | Vague mention of war-peace, foreign problems | 14.3 | 4.9 |
| Public disorder, crime in the streets | — | 2.1 | <i>Total foreign affairs and defense</i> | <u>61.5</u> | <u>39.6</u> |
| Other domestic issues | 3.7 | 3.5 | | | |
| Supreme Court (prayer decisions, too powerful) | — | 4.8 | Number of responses | 1707* | 1981* |
| <i>Total domestic issues</i> | <u>38.5</u> | <u>60.4</u> | | | |

Note: In 1960, 10% of the sample were unable to think of any problem; in 1964, 14% of the sample failed to mention any problem.

* Percents are based on the total number of first most important problems mentioned (not on the number of respondents). In 1964 the question was rephrased so that respondents could indicate which problems they felt the government should do something about and which problems the government should stay out of. Thus, there are more responses in 1964.

Possible Effects of Events and Campaign Themes on Issue Salience. The data on specific issues in Table 2 may be evaluated in several ways. In one respect, we might view the voters' sparse responses to foreign policy issues in 1964 as being incongruent with crisis developments in the international sphere. With a war building up in Vietnam,¹⁴ and with confrontations over Cuba and Berlin having occurred since the last election, we might expect more, rather than less, attention to foreign problems. The voters' comparative lack of interest in foreign policy matters in 1964 is more understandable if we remember that the concerns of ordinary citizens are usually focused on relatively current happenings. If past "crises" (such as Cuba and Berlin) are no longer in the news or have been resolved in some way, public attention will center upon other matters.

How much the shift in issue salience reflects the themes of presidential campaigns is difficult to say. Kennedy's desire to "get the country

¹⁴It should be noted that in 1964 a relatively large cluster of people did begin to voice concern about Vietnam.

moving again" does not seem to show up in the domestic issue area in 1960, but his expression of concern about American prestige abroad apparently was hitting a responsive chord. It is doubtful that Kennedy's speeches alone created this interest in foreign affairs; but a long series of events—the Russian sputniks, the U-2 incident, anti-American rioting abroad, and similar developments—were probably real enough to the public to cause general apprehension about the Cold War. It should be noted, however, that discussion by the candidates about particular trouble spots—Cuba by Kennedy, and the Quemoy and Matsu incidents in the Kennedy-Nixon debates—did not attract much attention. They were seldom mentioned as important problems by the public.

The shift to domestic concerns in 1964 may be partly a reflection of a campaign in which issues that had divided the parties during the New Deal surfaced once again in the contest between Johnson and Goldwater. Respondents made some remarks about states' rights and government control of business, and the mention of Medicare and social security increased.

Little else of that campaign, however, can be clearly identified in the data.¹⁵

The largest cluster of responses in 1964 is centered on racial problems. As we shall see, many of the respondents were favorable toward civil rights, possibly reflecting a positive reaction to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It should also be noted that Medicare (which was enacted soon after the election) and the poverty program were salient issues during the 1964 campaign.¹⁶ Apparently presidential support for specific legislation does not go unnoticed.

In summary, it is probably not possible to predict what issues will be salient in a particular election, but the public does seem to respond most to current and recurring news and events. A president's active support for a legislative program also appears to be of consequence to segments of the public. Although the effect of campaign issues and slogans is difficult to measure with these data, we might infer that parties have only a limited influence over what issues become real to the public.

A Comparison with Stokes' Analysis—A Methodological Observation. While the simple presentation of issue response frequencies in Table 2 cannot be directly compared with Stokes' multivariate component analysis, it is interesting that the data presented in this article indicate much more change in issue-related attitudes between 1960 and 1964 than Stokes observed.¹⁷ Perhaps one of the reasons for this difference is that Stokes based his analysis on responses to attitudinal questions which measured like and dislike for the two political parties. Hence, "parties" rather than "issues" were the objects of reference for the respondent. Many of the responses to these party questions undoubtedly expressed long-term cognitive elements of party identification rather than short-term issue concerns. Indeed, Stokes points out that during the entire period of the 1950's and early 1960's, constant references were made to the Democratic Party as being the party of the "common man." Also, "image" issues which associated parties with good or bad times were conspicu-

¹⁵ See Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition*, Chapter 9, for a more thorough analysis of the impact of the 1964 campaign.

¹⁶ A study using 1958 data reported low salience of specific items of Congressional legislation. Perhaps this was in part a result of the lack of legislative activity under Eisenhower, and in part a result of incomplete questioning of respondents. See Donald E. Stokes and Warren E. Miller, "Party Government and the Salience of Congress" in Campbell *et al.*, *Elections and the Political Order*, pp. 198-199.

¹⁷ Stokes, "Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency," *op cit.*, Figures 1 and 2.

ous throughout the period. These long-term cognitions probably reduce the variation that might have been observed if current salient issues had been measured and used in the analysis.

Perception of Issues in 1964

The Nature of the 1964 Data. The 1964 data will be used for further analysis because the basic interview question in 1964 was extended to probe additional dimensions of issue concerns. The issue questions were reworded so that respondents could indicate which problems they felt the government should do something about and which problems they felt the government should refrain from handling. In addition, the Survey Research Center introduced follow-up questions which were specifically designed to measure the degree of salience of each issue.¹⁸ Both of these dimensions proved to be valuable for analytical purposes.¹⁹

The nature of the 1964 presidential campaign, in itself, makes this an interesting

¹⁸ The exact wording of the 1964 interview questions was:

"As you well know, there are many serious problems in this country and in other parts of the world. The question is: *What should be done about them and who should do it?*"

"We want to ask you about problems you think the government in Washington *should do something about* and any problems it *should stay out of*. First, what would you personally feel are the most important problems the government should try to take care of when the new President and Congress take office in January?" (Up to three responses were coded.)

"Now, are there any problems at home or abroad that the government in Washington has gotten into that you think it *should stay out of*? This would include problems the President, the Congress or the Supreme Court have tried to handle that you think they should have stayed out of." (Up to three responses were coded.)

After each response, people were asked:

"Just how strongly would you say you feel about this: are you extremely worried about it, fairly worried, or just quite interested in it?"

"Is this problem on your mind a lot, or do you think about it mainly when you come across news about it?"

"Who do you think would be most likely to do what you want on this, the *Democrats*, the *Republicans*, or wouldn't there be any difference?"

¹⁹ The data presented in Figure 1 and in the remainder of this analysis are based on issues that the respondents felt were of high salience. That is, responses were not included unless the respondent said he was extremely worried about the issue and/or the problem was on his mind a lot. When this measure of degree of salience is not used, perception of party differences is less sharply defined. There is an increase in "no difference" and "don't know" answers or a tendency to match the inappropriate party with the issue. This mismatching or lack of knowledge is to be expected since those respondents who have not thought about an issue or who are not very worried about it will be unlikely to seek out, or pay attention to, cues indicating party positions on the issue.

election in which to assess the relative importance of issues. Studies by Stokes and Kessell indicate that the personalities of the candidates were an unusually strong factor in that election.²⁰ Also, Ellsworth demonstrates that, although broad ideological themes were present, specific issues were not prominent in the campaign oratory.²¹ Thus, we would not expect 1964 to be a very promising year for measuring the importance of specific issues in the electoral decision. If anything, we would anticipate attitudes toward candidates to be the highly dominant factor in that election.

Perception of Party Differences on Issues. In Figure 1, the party differences perceived on each issue in 1964 are arranged roughly in order from the most Democratic issue on the top to the most Republican issue on the bottom. These data indicate that, to a remarkable extent, *the public does perceive party differences on those issues that are salient to them.* On most issues, more than 60 per cent of the respondents perceived party differences. Only six of the issues listed in Figure 1 fall below this high level of party relevance.²²

²⁰ In analyzing the Survey Research Center's open-ended questions about parties and candidates in 1964, Kessell found that attitudes about candidates were "far more salient than the attitudes about parties . . . questions about candidates engendered half again as many comments as the questions about parties." See John H. Kessell, *The Goldwater Coalition*, p. 258. Also, Stokes found the candidate component to be an unusually strong factor in 1964. See "Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency," *op. cit.*

²¹ Ellsworth performed a content analysis on a sample of campaign speeches in 1964, and concluded that "the ideological spread between Johnson and Goldwater did little or nothing to produce an increase in emphasis upon issues by the candidates themselves in their [speeches]." John W. Ellsworth, "Policy and Ideology in the Campaigns of 1960 and 1964" (unpublished paper), p. 8. Polsby and Wildavsky make a similar observation about the 1964 campaign. They state that "in a campaign in which the parties were further apart on issues than they have been in our time . . . there was relatively little discussion of issues. Certainly, the existence of wide and deep policy differences did not, as has sometimes been thought, lead directly to a campaign focusing on specific issues." Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections*, second edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 205.

²² The issues on which less than 60 per cent perceived party differences were: 1) war-peace, 2) corruption in government, 3) farm problems, 4) labor relations, 5) isolation, and 6) the Supreme Court. Mentions of "war" or "peace" as well as "corruption" in 1964 had little in the way of specific referents; such comments were often unaccompanied by any further substantive remarks. These vague problems were probably mentioned by respondents who were hard pressed to say something, and it is thus not

The Democratic party was clearly preferred as the party best able to handle certain issues such as Medicare, social security, and aid for the poor. The Republicans were singled out as the party best able to handle the Communist threat and as the party most likely to take appropriate stands on foreign aid and fiscal policy. The newly revived issues of states' rights and government control of business were also strongly Republican. A pronounced party differentiation was found on the civil rights-integration issue. Apparently the Johnson-Goldwater division on this issue was quite clearly perceived.²³

Other issues, however, were not generally associated with one political party or the other. On these issues, some respondents felt that the Democratic party would serve their interests better, while about equal numbers of respondents felt that the Republican party would handle the problem more appropriately. This was especially true of defense and foreign policy issues such as the test-ban treaty, disarmament, relations with allies, and intervention in Vietnam and other trouble spots, but the domestic issues of public disorder and crime in the streets also brought forth mixed party evaluations. On some of these issues—especially in the foreign policy area—these different perceptions about the parties may have been due to ambiguous party policies or actions. It may be, too, that the lack of clearly differentiated party positions on some of these issues results from indistinct coding procedures rather than public confusion or party ambiguity.²⁴

surprising that these people were unable to recognize party differences. However, it is difficult to understand why only 52 percent of those who were concerned with farm problems and only 58 percent of those who mentioned labor relations perceived party differences on these questions. The parties have taken clear stands in these matters over the years. As for the isolationists, they have not been able to find a party which would do what they want since the late 1940's. The Supreme Court, as would be expected, was not considered in partisan political terms, at least not in 1964.

²³ When asked during the 1964 interview whether they had heard if "Congress did anything this year in the way of civil rights," 77 percent mentioned the Civil Rights Bill. Of these, 95 percent were aware that Johnson favored it and 84 percent correctly perceived Goldwater as being against it.

²⁴ On some items, the SRC codes do not indicate whether the respondent favored the issue or was against it. When both pro and con respondents are lumped into the same category, it is not surprising that both parties are mentioned as best able to handle the issue. Where provision was made for coding issue position, clearer party differences emerged. A good example of this is the strong differences perceived by those who were favorable to civil rights or integration and those who were anti-civil rights.

A Note on Spatial Models. The information presented in Figure 1 emphasizes that the public sees a diffuse and variegated picture of party activity. Some people focus on one problem, others on quite another problem. No linear, uni-dimensional model of political space could possibly fit the data we have presented here.²⁵ The wide scattering of salient issues—both position issues and valence issues—resists simple ideological structuring or ordering.

In his search for a manageable dimension upon which to locate party differences, the political analyst might find the “do something about”—“stay out of” component (suggested by the data presented in Figure 1) to be useful. This dimension is readily understood by the public and is quite appropriate, given the traditional postures of the two parties on most issues, especially in domestic affairs.

Distortion in Issue Perception due to Party Identification. A number of political behavior studies have recognized that the individual's perception of political objects is often distorted by pre-existing partisan attitudes. In order to maintain cognitive balance, party identifiers will either selectively attend or alter information pertaining to candidates, parties, or other political phenomena. Presumably, this kind of psychological distortion might underly much of the party differentials found in Figure 1. In order to test for this bias, the author examined the data used in Figure 1 more thoroughly, controlling for party identification.

The data were first analyzed to discover what kinds of issues were salient to Democrats and to Republicans; that is, which issues did these party identifiers mention most frequently? The author found a tendency for Democrats to mention pro-Democratic issues and for Republicans to select issues on which their party has been favorably evaluated. This partisan bias may be due to selective attention or to other cognitive balancing processes; or it may result from the fact that Democrats come from different life situations than Republicans do, and may therefore be concerned with quite a different set of issues. Even so, this tendency was not as strong as might be supposed. For example, more than 40 percent of those who expressed support for civil rights, for aid to education, and for poverty programs were Republicans and Independents. On the other side, half of those who were anti-civil rights were Demo-

crats. Furthermore, Democrats and Independents constituted more than a majority of those who mentioned issues on which the Republicans were favorably perceived in 1964 (inflation, Communist threat, states' rights, etc.).

This raises another question: To what extent do party identifiers tend to feel that their own party will do what they want on an issue? The well-known psychological tendency for people to believe that their party is performing in consonance with their personal viewpoints was substantiated in these data on salient issues, but a strong strain toward a correct perception of party positions was also evident. This strain toward political reality was especially apparent in policy areas where the parties have taken opposing stands over a long period of time or on issues on which the candidates have taken clearly opposing positions. For example, of those Republicans who were concerned with Medicare, social security, aid to education, unemployment, or poverty, no more than a third believed that their party would perform better in regard to these matters. On the other hand, virtually no Democrat who mentioned the issues of states' rights or government control of business thought that the Democratic party would act with restraint in these matters.²⁶ On the issue of civil rights—an issue that had become highly salient in 1964, compared with previous years—even less psychological distortion of party position was evident. Only about 19 percent of the Republicans who favored civil rights activities thought that their party would aid in this cause, and only 20 percent of the Democrats who opposed civil rights felt that their party would inhibit advances in Negro rights. As has been noted earlier, the position of the two candidates on this issue was quite widely known, and this fact undoubtedly made avoidance of political reality more difficult.

Thus, although there is distortion in the way party identifiers perceive issues, an analysis of issues that are salient to voters indicates that this distortion is less than previous research would lead us to expect. On several issues, especially those on which the parties or candidates have taken clear stands, there is a fairly accurate recognition of party positions.

²⁶ Further analysis of these data indicate that one of the ways in which party identifiers seem to resolve the psychological conflict created by being concerned about an issue on which the opposite party has the more appropriate position is to claim that there is no difference between the parties on that issue. These respondents might “know” the correct party positions on these issues, but prefer not to undergo the discomfort of saying the opposition party is better in this area.

²⁵ See Stokes' critique of Downs entitled “Spatial Models of Party Competition” for further elaboration of this point. This article is found in Campbell *et al.*, *Elections and the Political Order*, pp. 161–179.

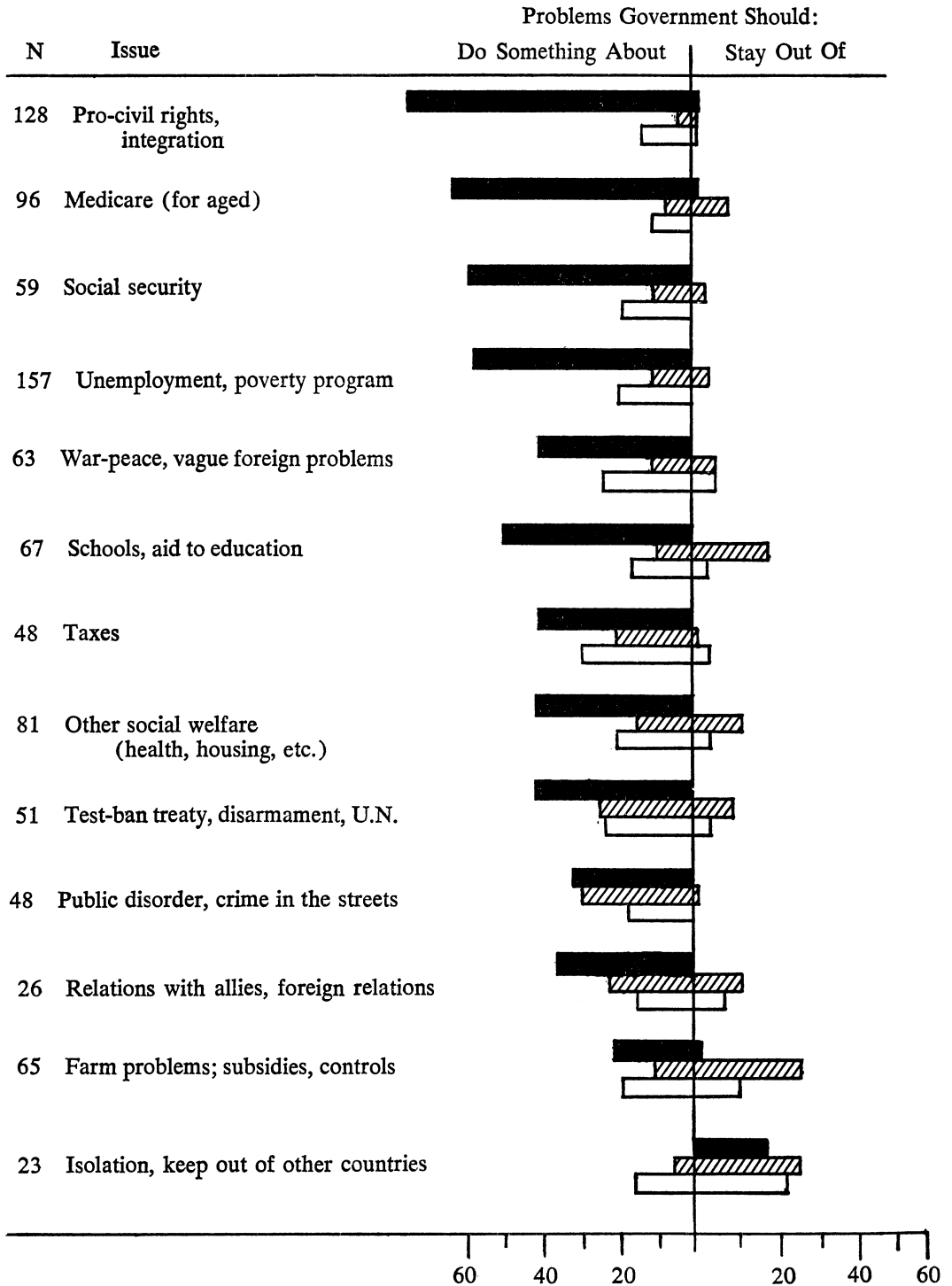
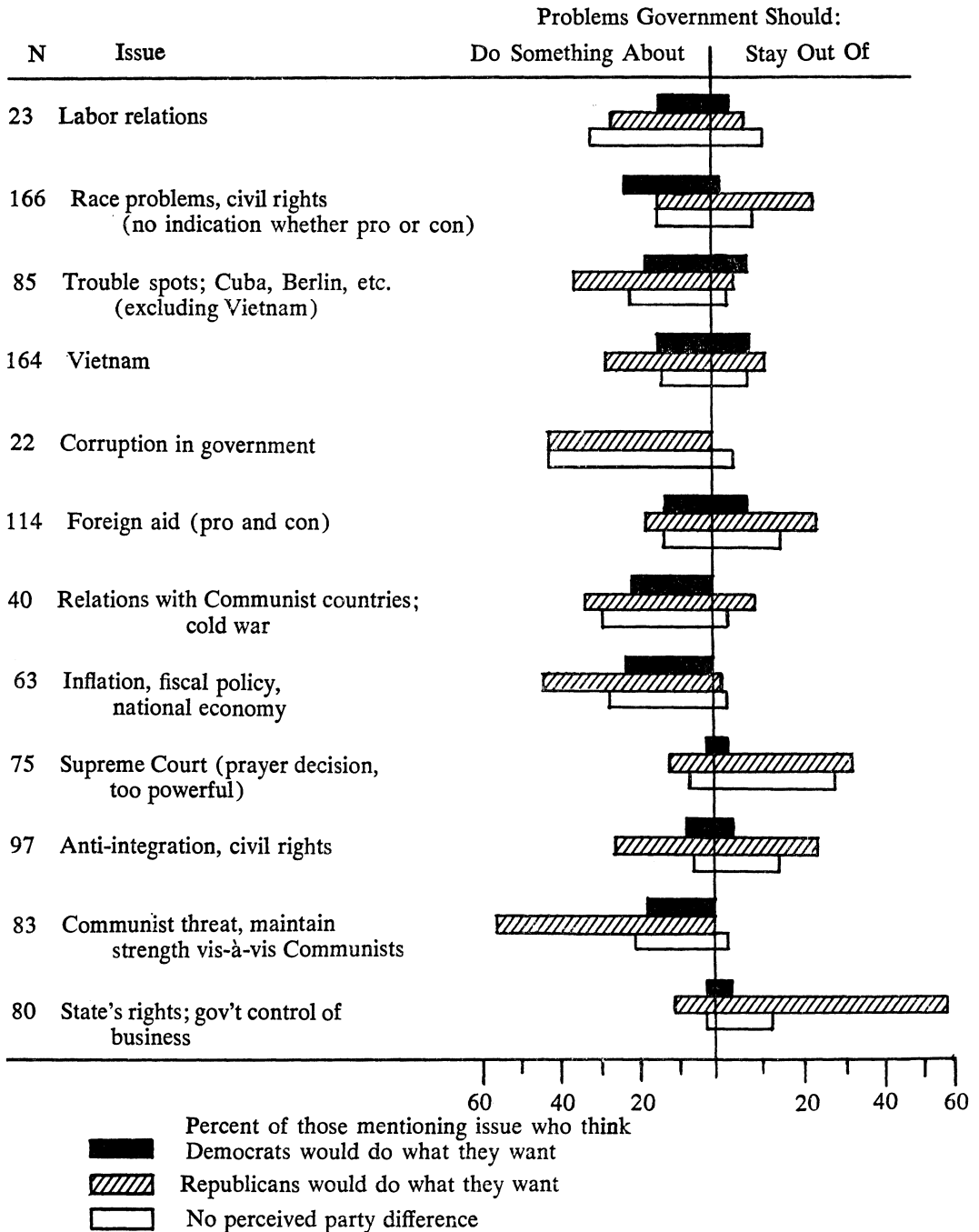


Figure 1. Perceived Party Differences on Salient Issues, 1964

Figure 1 (continued)



The total number of people who mentioned each issue and felt it was highly salient is given in the left-hand column of the figure. The bars in the figure are based on the percent of these total mentions on each issue. (Those who responded "don't know" to the party difference question are not shown in Figure 1, but they were included in calculating the percentages.)

The Role of Issues in Individual Voting Choice

The foregoing analysis of the 1960 and 1964 data has delineated the salient issues as perceived by the public. In order to determine the effect of these issues on individual voting behavior we turn now to an analysis of issue cognitions among individual voters. How many issues did the individual perceive? If he was concerned about more than one issue, was he able to sort out party differences on them in a meaningful way? What effect did issue concerns have on voting choice?

Extent of Issue Awareness. It has already been noted (Table 2) that 14 percent of the respondents in 1964 were unable to think of any problem facing their government.²⁷ On the other hand, 23 percent were aware of four or more issues. The average number of issues perceived by the electorate was 2.5.²⁸

Table 3 shows the distribution of issue awareness by party identification. Here we find new and interesting information about the Independent voter: the table shows that Independents have a relatively high degree of issue concerns. To be sure, strong Republicans are heavily armed with issues when they go to the polls, but Independents are next in order of issue cognizance, with Democrats—weak and strong identifiers alike—looking like indifferent citizens by comparison.²⁹ This relative ranking of party identifiers on issue cognitions remains the

²⁷ The author found that there is a strong tendency for those with no concept of issues to remain home on election day.

²⁸ Respondents were not encouraged by interviewers to mention more than 3 issues. Had all issues salient to the respondents been recorded, the average would have been higher.

²⁹ This is not to say that Independents are “good citizens” in all respects; the author confirmed previous findings which show that Independents are indeed less involved and participate less regularly. But

Table 3. Relation of Party Identification to Number of Issues Mentioned

| Number of Issues Mentioned | Party Identification | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------|-----------|-------------|
| | Strong Dem. | Weak Dem. | Ind. | Weak Rep. | Strong Rep. |
| Low 0 or 1 | 33% | 35% | 26% | 28% | 13% |
| 2 or 3 | 52 | 47 | 44 | 46 | 42 |
| High 4 to 6 | 15 | 18 | 30 | 26 | 45 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Index | -18 | -17 | +4 | -2 | +32 |
| (% High-% Low) | | | | | |
| N | 394 | 363 | 314 | 194 | 156 |

Table 4. Relation of Party Identification to Number of Issues Mentioned with Education Controlled

| | Party Identification | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|------|-----------|-------------|
| | Strong Dem. | Weak Dem. | Ind. | Weak Rep. | Strong Rep. |
| <i>Less than High School Education</i> | | | | | |
| Number of Issues | | | | | |
| 0 or 1 | 43% | 49% | 42% | 47% | 32% |
| 2 or 3 | 48 | 41 | 46 | 39 | 46 |
| 4 to 6 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 22 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Index | -34 | -39 | -30 | -33 | -10 |
| N | 208 | 168 | 105 | 57 | 41 |
| <i>High School Graduates</i> | | | | | |
| Number of Issues | | | | | |
| 0 or 1 | 25% | 29% | 26% | 26% | 9% |
| 2 or 3 | 56 | 51 | 45 | 48 | 49 |
| 4 to 6 | 19 | 20 | 29 | 26 | 42 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Index | -6 | -9 | +3 | 0 | +33 |
| N | 118 | 123 | 124 | 81 | 55 |
| <i>Some College or College Graduate</i> | | | | | |
| Number of Issues | | | | | |
| 0 or 1 | 15% | 11% | 7% | 10% | 3% |
| 2 or 3 | 60 | 56 | 39 | 52 | 32 |
| 4 to 6 | 25 | 33 | 54 | 38 | 65 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Index | +10 | +21 | +47 | +28 | +62 |
| N | 67 | 71 | 83 | 52 | 60 |

same regardless of level of education. (See Table 4.)

This finding is quite different from the conclusions in *The American Voter* (cited earlier) because it is based on different data. Conclusions about the Independent voter in *The American Voter* were based upon responses to the open-ended questions that measured attitudes toward parties and candidates, not toward issues. The Independent is placed at a disadvantage in answering these questions—especially the questions about parties. As we have seen, responses to these questions frequently reflect long-term cognitive elements of party

their concern over substantive issues of the day is none-the-less relatively strong.

identification. Since most Independents have received few cues about parties in their socialization process, it is understandable that their references to parties would be deficient.³⁰

The author also examined the 1964 data on attitudes toward candidates, and he found that many *strong* party identifiers did indeed have more to say about the candidates than did Independents and weak identifiers. This is also to be expected, since strong party identifiers have a powerful motivation to seek information about their candidate.

Issues and Individual Voting Change. Now that we have discussed the general level of issue awareness in the public, what can we say about the effect of these issues in initiating change in voting behavior?

First of all, when a respondent is concerned about several different issues, he has a very strong tendency to name just one party as being the best party to handle *all* of these problems. This was true of Independents as well as party identifiers. (Only 106 out of 1016 respondents

³⁰ When I analyzed the Survey Research Center questions which measured likes and dislikes for the two parties in 1964, my findings agreed with the conclusion in *The American Voter* that Independents have fewer attitudes toward parties than do party identifiers.

Table 5. Relation of Party Identification to Strength of Issue Partisanship

| Strength of Issue Partisanship | Party Identification | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------|-----------|-------------|
| | Strong Dem. | Weak Dem. | Ind. | Weak Rep. | Strong Rep. |
| High Dem | 19% | 8% | 4% | 2% | 0% |
| Med Dem | 25 | 17 | 14 | 6 | 3 |
| Low Dem | 34 | 28 | 21 | 18 | 4 |
| No Perceived Party Difference | 14 | 26 | 26 | 27 | 11 |
| Low Rep | 4 | 11 | 17 | 24 | 14 |
| Med Rep | 2 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 19 |
| High Rep | 2 | 4 | 11 | 13 | 49 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 332 | 308 | 272 | 175 | 150 |

"Strength of Issue Partisanship" is based on the number of issues mentioned by each respondent and his perception of a party difference on each issue. If no party difference was perceived on an issue, that issue did not contribute to the score. Salience of the issue was also considered in the scoring.

Respondents who perceived one party as better for handling some issues and the opposite party as better on other issues are included. (Their net partisan position was computed.)

Table 6. Direction of Vote by Strength of Issue Partisanship Controlling for Party Identification

| Strength of Issue Partisanship | Party Identification | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| | Strong Dem. | Weak Dem. | Ind. | Weak Rep. | Strong Rep. |
| High Dem | 2% (55) | 4% (22) | 9% (11) | 0% (3) | — |
| Med Dem | 1% (77) | 2% (41) | 4% (28) | 20% (10) | 40% (5) |
| Low Dem | 0% (83) | 11% (63) | 8% (40) | 18% (28) | 33% (6) |
| No Difference | 10% (37) | 21% (57) | 22% (45) | 56% (39) | 94% (16) |
| Low Rep | 20% (10) | 45% (20) | 58% (33) | 77% (31) | 83% (17) |
| Med Rep | 33% (3) | 62% (13) | 81% (16) | 93% (14) | 96% (27) |
| High Rep | 100% (5) | 89% (9) | 93% (27) | 90% (20) | 99% (71) |

The entry in each cell is the percent of the voters in the cell who voted Republican.

who mentioned more than one issue saw different parties as best able to handle the problems.)³¹ Whatever the cause, there is a strong tendency among voters toward "issue alignment," which apparently lends order and meaning to the political world for most of them.

Party identifiers do not always perceive their party as being best able to handle issues. It is among these identifiers whose current evaluations of political objects contradict their traditional party loyalties, that we can look for voting change. In Table 5, we can observe the pull of issues on party identifiers and Independents in 1964. In the deviant (lower left and upper right) cells of Table 5, we see that one-fourth of the weak Democrats and a similar proportion of weak Republicans perceived the opposite party as being best able to handle the issue or issues of concern to them. Even 7 percent of the strong identifiers in each party defected on issues. The Independents divided their party preferences about evenly between the parties.³²

Table 6 shows the powerful influence of is-

³¹ Only 32 of these 106—about 8 more than would be expected by chance—were Independents.

³² It might be noted in Table 5 that about one fourth of the Independents did not perceive party differences on any issue; however, an equal proportion of weak Democrats and weak Republicans also failed to do so.

sue partisanship (or issue alignment) on voting choice. When issue partisanship conflicted with party identification, the issues often overcame the long-term party loyalties; the stronger the issue partisanship, the greater its electoral effect.³³ The bottom and top rows of Table 6 are especially worthy of note; if several salient issues intervened, party identification had virtually no influence on voting choice.

The Relative Importance of Issues. The overall relationship between Strength of Issue Partisanship and vote for president was found to be .57 (τ_b). Contrary to what has been found in the past, there is indeed considerable party-relatedness of vote based on specific issues.³⁴ The relationship between net attitude toward candidates³⁵ and vote was only slightly higher—.60 (τ_b)—and this was in an election year noted for a strong candidate component.

A multiple regression analysis performed with these data indicates that issue partisanship (as measured here) was not as powerful in producing voting change as attitude toward candidate. The standardized regression coefficient (beta weight) for the candidate variable (controlling for issues) was .48, while the coefficient for the issue variable (controlling for candidate) was .33. We should be aware, however, that party identification is a primary underlying factor contributing to the weights of both of these predictors of voting choice. If we wish to

³³ Where conflict occurred between traditional party ties and evaluation of which party would handle the issues best, the conflict did not cause lower turnout. Apparently, the strong force of issue concerns led a high percentage of these people to the polls—many of them to vote for the opposite party.

³⁴ Of course, this correlation is based on a measure which includes all issues an individual had in mind and is thus not directly comparable to previous studies which have used agree-disagree answers to single issue statements.

³⁵ The attitude toward candidate measure was based on open-ended questions which asked what the respondent liked and disliked about each candidate. The net attitude was determined by the algebraic sum of comments for and against the respective candidates.

control or partial out the effect of party identification, we can simply add this variable to the multiple regression equation. When this was done, the weights attached to issue partisanship and attitude toward candidate were both reduced, as expected. The new weights were .39 for candidate image (controlling for issues and party identification), .23 for issue partisanship (controlling for candidate image and party identification) and .27 for party identification (controlling for the two other factors). As expected, candidate image emerges as the most important factor in individual voting choice in 1964, but issues had a strong independent effect as well. The remarkable thing that emerges from this analysis is that *salient issues had almost as much weight as party identification in predicting voting choice.*

Conclusion

What is important to observe from this study is that by and large the voting public has at least a few substantive issues in mind at the time of an election, and the voters seem to be acting more responsibly than had previously been thought.³⁶ To be sure, images of the presidential candidates are still the most important factor in the electoral decision; at least this was true in 1964. But this personal feeling about a candidate is not the only basis for choice—there are substantive concerns as well. Furthermore, when we allow voters to define their own issue space, they are able to sort out the differences between parties with a fair degree of accuracy. It would probably be going too far to say that the public has contextual knowledge upon which to base its decision. But we have shown that the public is in large measure concerned about specific issues, and that these cognitions have a considerable impact on electoral choice.

³⁶ A similar conclusion was reached by V. O. Key, Jr., in *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). However, his data and methods were completely different from those employed in this study.