

Political Research Quarterly

<http://prq.sagepub.com>

Elite Opinion Differences and Partisanship in Congressional Foreign Policy, 1975-1996

Mark Souva and David Rohde
Political Research Quarterly 2007; 60; 113
DOI: 10.1177/1065912906298630

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://prq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/60/1/113>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Western Political Science Association](#)



[The University of Utah](#)

Additional services and information for *Political Research Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://prq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://prq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 21 articles hosted on the
SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://prq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/60/1/113>

Elite Opinion Differences and Partisanship in Congressional Foreign Policy, 1975-1996

Mark Souva

Florida State University, Tallahassee

David Rohde

Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

Why are some foreign policy votes partisan and others bipartisan? The authors argue that an electoral connection drives partisanship in congressional foreign policy voting. Members of Congress depend on core supporters for mobilization and money, and primary voters are likely to follow the opinion cues of partisan elites; as a result, when Republican and Democratic opinion elites hold more distinct views on an issue, one may expect to observe more partisan behavior in Congress on both low- and high-politics foreign policy issues. An empirical analysis of elite public opinion and congressional voting on foreign policy issues for six Congresses between 1975 and 1996 supports the elite opinion cleavage argument.

Keywords: *American foreign policy; Congress; public opinion*

1. Introduction

In 1964, the House of Representatives approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to expand the United States's military involvement in Vietnam by a vote of 416 to 0. By a vote of 88 to 2, the Senate also supported the use of military force in Vietnam. In 1991, members of Congress split roughly along party lines in their votes on the Persian Gulf Resolution to authorize the use of military force against Iraq. In the House of Representatives, Democrats opposed the resolution by a margin of 180 to 86, while Republicans supported the resolution by a margin of 164 to 3. In the Senate, 45 Democrats opposed the resolution and 10 supported it, while 42 Republicans supported the resolution and only 2 opposed it.

A similar story emerges when one examines the votes on foreign aid to combat communism in Angola relative to those taken to combat communism in Nicaragua. In 1976, a majority of both Democrats and Republicans in both the House of Representatives and the Senate voted against aiding the government of Angola in its battle against communist insurgents. In 1984 and 1988, however, members of Congress split along party lines on whether to support the anticommunist Contras in Nicaragua.

Why is foreign policy voting in Congress sometimes bipartisan and other times partisan? The realist theory of international politics¹ suggests that partisanship

is a function of the issue at stake, and when it comes to using force, politics stops at the water's edge (Gowa 1998). This theoretical explanation, however, has difficulty explaining the partisan vote on the Persian Gulf Resolution. A second explanation may be labeled the Vietnam theory; it postulates that the Vietnam War shattered a foreign policy consensus and ushered in an era of foreign policy partisanship. While foreign policy in general became more partisan after 1975, this explanation cannot account for variation in foreign policy partisanship in the post-Vietnam War period. As we will discuss in greater detail below, even today foreign policy making in Congress is *not always* partisan. This leads to our research question: what explains the ebb and flow in Congressional partisanship on foreign policy?

We posit that an electoral connection drives congressional foreign policy voting, in much the same way that it affects voting on domestic issues (Mayhew 1974). For electoral reasons, members of Congress pay particular attention to the views of party elites. When key constituents of each party hold different views on an issue, partisanship in Congress increases, that is, elite opinion differences are central to explaining partisanship on foreign policy issues. Nevertheless, elite opinion cleavages do not fully explain foreign policy partisanship. Institutional factors mediate the electoral connection. Like all institutions, congressional institutions affect behavior by

structuring incentives. Institutional forces that encourage position taking, such as the use of amendments, increase partisanship, and institutional differences between the House of Representatives and Senate lead us to expect more foreign policy partisanship in the House. Where previous analyses of congressional foreign policy voting have focused on external or relatively static forces, we offer a dynamic argument anchored in elite opinion cleavages and institutional influences.

An empirical analysis of foreign policy voting in the House and Senate between 1975 and 1996 reveals that as the opinions of party elites diverge on a foreign policy issue, partisanship in Congress increases. The influence of the elite opinion cleavage applies both to low-politics foreign policy issues, such as trade and foreign aid, and to high-politics issues dealing with security and the use of force. We also find significant differences between partisan behavior in the House and in the Senate on the same issues, underscoring the influence of institutions on the electoral connection. Overall, the elite opinion cleavage argument offers a more dynamic and fuller picture of the changes and continuity in congressional foreign policy voting.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section situates our argument in the extant literature on congressional foreign policy voting. The third section of the article proposes a theoretical framework for explaining partisan voting on foreign policy issues. The theory identifies elite opinion cleavages and institutional factors as the central concepts accounting for variation in foreign policy partisanship over time. The fourth section discusses the data, research design, and empirical evaluation of our hypotheses. A final section concludes.

2. Existing Views on the Foreign Policy Consensus

For the first two decades after the end of the Second World War, a strong foreign policy consensus on the means for containing communism dampened Congressional foreign policy partisanship (Holsti 2004, 236-37).² In explaining this consensus, the conventional wisdom is a water's edge thesis. "During the Cold War [consensus] period, the overwhelming majority of Americans believed that Communist nations were dictatorial in their domestic arrangements and expansionist in foreign affairs" (Levering 1989, 385). The water's edge argument, then, is that

there was a consensus because of a threat in the form of international communism, or at least the perception of a threat, to the national security of the United States. In turn, the presence of a national security threat encouraged policy makers to rally around the flag and around the incumbent administration, thus giving a high level of bipartisanship to foreign policy voting.

To assess the conventional wisdom, it is important to ask why policy makers perceived international communism as a threat. The answer is twofold. First, the dominant foreign policy perspective, realism, encouraged the view. Second, the actions of the Soviet Union were broadly consistent with this theoretical perspective. From a realist perspective, human nature and the anarchic nature of the international system drive states to focus primarily on their security or becoming the state with the most power (see, e.g., Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001).³ Anarchy, coupled with the bipolar distribution of power after 1945, naturally led the United States to fear the Soviet Union. To support a view of communist aggression, policy makers could cite the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, the fall of the nationalist regime in China, and the Korean War, in which both the Soviet Union and China supported the North Koreans. Thus, the conventional argument is that a foreign policy consensus existed because of anarchy, bipolarity, and aggressive international communism.

The problem with the water's edge argument is that it cannot account for *why* the consensus, and the corresponding bipartisanship, disappeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From the water's edge perspective, the factor motivating foreign policy bipartisanship is the international environment, specifically anarchy, bipolarity, and the communist threat. If bipartisanship varies over time, then it must be due to a change in the international environment, yet the international environment did not significantly change in the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, one could argue that the threat from international communism became stronger during this period of time. In 1968, the Soviet Union repressed an uprising in Czechoslovakia. In 1975, North Vietnam finally conquered South Vietnam, and subsequently communism spread to other states in Southeast Asia. In this same year, Cuba and the Soviet Union began aiding the Marxist party in Angola. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Given the water's edge argument, with its emphasis on anarchy, bipolarity and international communism, we should have observed a consistently high degree of bipartisanship on foreign policy throughout the cold war.

However, the weight of the empirical research indicates both that foreign policy bipartisanship varied throughout the cold war era and that foreign policy became more partisan by the mid-1960s and especially by the end of the Vietnam War. McCormick and Wittkopf (1990), for instance, found that foreign policy partisanship existed even in the early stages of the cold war. Similarly, Meernik (1993) and Prins and Marshall (2001) examined all foreign and defense policy roll call votes and found significant variation in congressional foreign policy partisanship over the post-World War Two period. For example, "Prior to 1973, bipartisan support [on foreign policy issues] occurred on average on about 49% of roll calls and dropped to almost 22% of the votes after 1972" (Prins and Marshall 2001, 670). McCormick and Wittkopf (1992) also distinguished between different foreign policy issues and found large declines in bipartisanship in the post-Vietnam War period on foreign aid and national security votes. In brief, the water's edge thesis, with its emphasis on the external environment, does not adequately account for either the variation in foreign policy partisanship prior to the Vietnam War nor the variation in partisanship after the Vietnam War. In the next section, we offer a dynamic explanation of congressional partisanship on foreign policy anchored in electoral politics.

3. A Theory of Foreign Policy Partisanship

A. Electoral Factors

The U.S. Congress has not always been a den of partisan behavior. "Historically . . . the U.S. Congress has been characterized by weak partisanship. . . . [However,] beginning in the 1980s politics in Congress and the White House became much more partisan" (Fleisher and Bond 2000, 2). Electoral and institutional changes account for this change and, in turn, illuminate the factors that affect the ebb and flow of partisanship on foreign policy (Rohde 1991). Two changes in the electorate have increased the polarization of the Democratic and Republican parties. First, the realignment of the South contributed to the polarization of the parties by reducing the number of conservatives in the Democratic party. "Realignment in the South followed the national Democratic Party's decision to champion civil rights for African-Americans and the Republican Party's choice of Sen. Barry Goldwater, who voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as its standard bearer

that year" (Jacobson 2000, 26; see also Carmines and Stimson 1981). After passage of the Voting Rights Act, followed by the influx of African American voters into the Democratic party and the outflow of conservative southerners from the Democrats to the Republicans, the cleavage between southern and northern Democrats began to disappear. As a result of these constituency changes, the Democratic and Republican parties became more internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous, leading to increasing levels of partisanship (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 2000a, 2000b).

The second electoral change that has enhanced partisan behavior is the increased influence and polarization of party activists and opinion elites. Aldrich (1995, 192), for example, showed that as policy-oriented activists become more dominant in the political parties, ambitious politicians in the two parties reflect these views on the campaign trail and in office. More generally, we contend that candidates pay attention to partisan opinion leaders, which includes both party activists and party-identifying opinion elites. These elites matter because members of Congress depend on core supporters for mobilization and money. "For example, adopting a position closer to the center of the party may generate greater contributions from those activists, contributions that may be useful for increasing turnout of the candidates supporters on election day" (Aldrich 1983, 985). In addition, "candidates for elective office generally emerge from the ranks of party activists" (Aldrich 1983, 985). Because of the electoral importance of party elites and activists members of Congress reflect their views (see also Miller and Schofield 2003). Correspondingly, as core members of each party become increasingly polarized, Republican and Democratic members of Congress exhibit less ideological overlap. In line with this argument on party polarization, Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) found that party elites increasingly exhibit substantial ideological differences.

The polarization of partisan elite opinion has consequences for the amount of bipartisanship we are likely to observe in congressional foreign policy voting. Individuals do not treat all information the same but "respond to political arguments on the basis of partisan assessments of the trustworthiness of sources" (Zaller 1991, 1217). Therefore, opinion leaders often exercise a disproportionate influence on mass opinion, with the public turning to opinion leaders for guidance, especially on complex issues or issues on which they know little about, as is often the

case in foreign policy. On foreign policy issues, in particular, “opinion leaders serve as a critical link between policymakers and the general public—that is, the public receives its cues about politics through opinion leaders” (Holsti 2004, 99). In general, “when public discussion among elites reveals a basic consensus, public opinion is more likely to be either acquiescent (i.e. latent) or largely supportive of the policy actions taken. When public discussion among elites involves real debate and disagreement, public opinion will reflect the various points of view and public opposition to the policy may result” (Powlick and Katz 1998, 35). For these reasons, Powlick and Katz (1998, 34) concluded that “the public dialogue among foreign policy elites appears to be a pivotal factor in determining whether public opinion is likely to become activated.” Similarly, Layman and Carsey (2002) found that conflict extension has occurred because party identifiers increasingly modify their opinions to match elite opinion in their party. We extend these arguments by positing that when partisan elite opinion is divided, there is good reason to expect members of Congress to vote along party lines.

While there is increasingly robust evidence to support the argument that opinion elites are increasingly polarized and that partisan conflict has extended into multiple domestic issue areas (Layman and Carsey 2002), research has not systematically examined the influence of elite opinion on Congressional foreign policy voting. This may be due to a belief that foreign policy does not affect the electoral fortunes of members of Congress. A similar view was held regarding presidential voting until Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida (1989) found the public to be informed on foreign policy issues and that the foreign policy views of candidates affected voter choice.⁴ Uniting the arguments that party elites are more important than ever and that foreign policy influences voter choice, we contend that the views of partisan opinion elites influence how members of Congress vote on foreign policy issues. In brief, the more party elites differ in their views on a particular foreign policy issue, the more partisanship we should observe.

B. Institutions and the Electoral Connection

In addition to these electoral dynamics, institutional factors affect the degree of partisanship on a foreign policy issue. For example, the implementation of electronic, recorded voting in the early 1970s encouraged members of Congress to submit both more and more partisan amendments in an effort to

appeal to narrow constituencies. Even if something is not likely to pass, a member of Congress can claim that he or she tried to do something and thereby satisfy an important constituency. Both parties have also taken steps to strengthen party leaders. In the mid-1970s, Democratic reformers strengthened party leaders by giving the Speaker more discretion over bill referral and stronger control over the Rules Committee. When Republicans took over the House in 1994, they also implemented a number of rules changes. Instead of the party caucus, Speaker Gingrich reserved for himself the power to name new committee chairs, some of whom he chose in violation of the seniority norm. The new Republican majority also imposed a term limit on committee chairs and reduced committee staff.⁵ This strengthening of party leadership has increased the pressure on members of Congress to vote in conformity with party leaders.

Institutional differences between the House and Senate are also likely to affect the amount of partisanship on foreign and defense policy in each chamber. The House is more of a majoritarian institution; as a result, a strong majority party may be able to force its will on the minority. Institutional rules make the Senate more individualistic. For instance, the filibuster in the Senate permits an individual to block a piece of legislation favored by a majority. Similarly, the absence of a germaneness rule allows any senator to offer an amendment on any bill under consideration by the floor. Overall, the rules of the Senate weaken the power of the majority party and make it relatively more difficult for the majority to dictate outcomes. In addition, senators typically have a larger and more diverse constituency, thus encouraging them to take more moderate positions (see, e.g., Wright 1989). The longer term of a senator is also likely to make him or her less subject to interest group pressure.

We contend that the effects of these electoral and institutional influences on partisanship are not limited to the domestic realm. Rohde (1994) provided evidence connecting increased partisanship on foreign and defense policy with electoral and institutional changes. “Partisan disagreement,” for example, “was quite low in the Nixon-Ford years but increased to very high levels under Reagan and Bush” (p. 86). Equally important, he found variation in partisan activity during the period 1970 to 1990 and that not all foreign and defense policy issues are partisan. In building on this work, we agree that “conflict over defense and foreign policy is rooted in basic electoral

forces" (p. 99). Nevertheless, one of the most basic of these electoral forces has received little attention in extant research on congressional partisanship in foreign policy: the role of elite opinion cleavages.

In summary, we contend that electoral and institutional forces are important variables for understanding the ebb and flow of conflict and partisanship on foreign policy. Unlike the water's edge thesis, which emphasizes the role of external factors and the specific issue at stake, our argument contends that foreign policy is subject to variations in partisanship based on the electoral incentive of members of Congress to respond to elite public opinion and that institutional forces further affect partisan motivations. This leads to two conceptual hypotheses. First, as the views of party elites become more polarized on a given foreign policy issue, partisanship in Congress increases. Second, institutional factors that strengthen the connection between party elites and activists and members of Congress increase partisanship.

4. Evaluating the Hypotheses

To evaluate the hypotheses, we need information on both votes in Congress and *elite opinion by party* on the same foreign policy issues. This data requirement presents two problems. First, pollsters do not ask very many questions about the foreign policy issues voted on in Congress. Second, many surveys on foreign policy issues do not include a party identification variable, but this is necessary for evaluating the hypotheses. Gallup, for example, rarely identifies respondents by party. National Election Studies (NES) surveys have a party identification question but ask few foreign policy questions. Plus, neither Gallup nor the NES focuses on elite opinion. To gauge the opinion of party elites, perhaps the best source is the major party activist studies of Stone and Abramowitz.⁶ However, they also ask very few foreign policy questions.⁷ For these reasons, we draw on surveys from Holsti and Rosenau's (1999) Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP; 1976-1996). Since 1976, the FPLP has conducted "quadrennial mail surveys of elite civilian and military opinion"⁸ on a number of foreign policy issues. In addition, the FPLP surveys include a party identification variable, allowing us to compare the views of Democratic opinion elites and Republican opinion elites. Perhaps most important, the FPLP survey questions also have the advantage of conforming to Hurwitz and Peffley's (1987) hierarchical cognition model of opinion.

Hierarchical cognition theory says that general knowledge guides the processing of specific information. Similarly, the FPLP survey questions tend to be more general than the specific roll call votes. As we discuss later, this significantly reduces the likelihood that congressional voting is influencing elite opinion, for it is unlikely that a vote on a specific issue causes one's worldview, whereas it is more likely that general views influence specific views. We proceed in evaluating our hypotheses via a two-pronged strategy. First, we discuss a number of individual cases to examine the logic of the argument. Second, we conduct a multivariate analysis of all foreign policy roll call votes in six Congresses from 1975 to 1998 for which we could match the vote with a survey question on the same issue.

As a first step in explaining the variation in Congressional foreign policy partisanship, we examine elite public opinion and congressional voting on selected foreign policy issues. Congressional voting, for instance, on issues related to Vietnam in the Ninety-fourth Congress (1975) shows that only some of these votes were partisan, which we define as a majority of Democrats voting in opposition to a majority of Republicans. Of the eighteen roll call votes dealing with Vietnam, only five votes were partisan, and most of these votes were not strongly partisan, as the Democrats were about evenly split. For example, in the wake of North Vietnam's 1975 military offensive, roll call vote 102 called for waiving prohibitions on reintroducing U.S. forces into South Vietnam. While 92 percent of Republicans supported this amendment, 50.1 percent of Democrats voted against it. The general lack of partisanship suggests that Democratic and Republican elite opinion on the subject should be similar. It is. In response to a question about whether military aid is likely to draw the United States into a war, 17 percent of Republican elites agreed, as did 25 percent of Democrat elites.⁹ While the two sides did not see precisely eye-to-eye, there was significant consensus.

Military aid to Central America in the 1980s shows a strong relationship between elite opinion and voting in Congress. In 1983 and 1984, there were a number of votes on increasing military aid to Central America; most were partisan. For instance, in 1984, 78 percent of Republicans voted to support President Reagan's request for military aid to the government of El Salvador, whereas 95 percent of Democrats voted against it. This difference in voting mirrors the difference in elite opinion. When elites were asked if they supported U.S. military assistance to El Salvador,

38 percent of Republican elites strongly agreed, while only 5 percent of Democratic elites strongly agreed. Similarly, whereas only 8 percent of Republican elites agreed that revolutionary forces in the developing world are motivated by nationalism, 38 percent of Democratic respondents agreed.

By the mid-1980s, military aid was not the only foreign policy issue on which Republicans and Democrats were divided. Perhaps the most partisan foreign policy issue in the 100th Congress centered on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Of the sixteen votes related to SDI authorization in the 100th Congress, fourteen of the votes were partisan. Elite opinion was also very divided. For instance, 42 percent of Republican identifying elites strongly supported full funding for the SDI program, but only 16 percent of Democratic elites strongly supported full funding. When asked if SDI should be included in arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, 50 percent of Republican elites strongly disagreed, whereas only 8 percent of Democrats strongly disagreed.

More recent votes in Congress continue to show the absence of a foreign policy consensus and support the argument that the opinion of party activists influences politicians. The religious right, for example, is an important constituency for Republican candidates to mobilize and carry in an election. While the religious right is most often identified with domestic issues like abortion and school prayer, this constituency also has specific foreign policy ideas. The religious right, for instance, tends to oppose international organizations, supports Israel, supports NAFTA and free trade, and supports missile defense. Given its influence in the Republican Party, these positions have an effect on foreign policy. "In large measure because of opposition from the Religious Right, the United States did not contribute to the UN Population Fund in 1998" (Martin 1999, 75). Moreover, when key interest groups for each party disagree, we should expect to observe partisan conflict in Congress. House Resolution (HR) 3308 in the 104th Congress is indicative of this point. This bill aimed to amend title 10 of the United States Code governing military personnel by limiting the ability of U.S. military forces to serve under the control of the United Nations. Reflecting the opinion of their electoral bases, a vast majority of Republicans in the House voted for the bill, while a majority of Democrats voted against it.¹⁰

These examples suggest that ebbs and flows of partisanship are linked with the amount of conflict and consensus among party elites. When opinion elites in

the two parties disagree, we are likely to see partisan voting behavior in Congress. This behavior is a product of the electoral connection.

A. Multivariate Analysis

In this section, we present a more systematic analysis of the argument. Our electoral and institutional argument leads us to posit the following model of foreign policy partisanship.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bipartisanship} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Elite Opinion Cleavage} \\ & + \beta_2 \times \text{House} + \beta_3 \times \text{Amendment} \\ & + \beta_4 \times \text{High Politics} \\ & + \beta_5 \times \text{Elite Opinion-High Politics} \\ & + \beta_6 \times \text{Post-Cold War} + \beta_7 \times \text{MIDs} \\ & + \beta_8 \times \text{Presidential Position} + e. \end{aligned}$$

The unit of analysis is the roll call vote, and the empirical domain covers the 94th (1975-1976), 96th (1979-1980), 98th (1983-1984), 100th (1987-1988), 102nd (1991-1992), and 104th (1995-1996) Congresses.¹¹ As discussed earlier, the factor limiting the empirical analysis is the relative paucity of data on elite opinion on foreign policy issues. For elite opinion data we use the FPLP quadrennial surveys.

The dependent variable in these analyses is *Bipartisanship*, which equals one when a majority of Democrats vote the same way as a majority of Republicans. As the dependent variable is dichotomous, the following analyses employ logistic regression.¹²

The central theoretical variable is *Elite Opinion Cleavage*, which is the absolute value of the difference between Republican FPLP survey respondents who answered "agree strongly" and Democratic FPLP survey respondents who answered in that manner for a given question.¹³ Hurwitz and Peffley's (1987, 1104) hierarchical cognition model informs us that general knowledge guides the processing of specific information; accordingly, we matched survey questions and roll call votes by first identifying the issue for each survey question, and then determining if any roll call vote in a particular Congress covered that same issue. With this process, we identified a total of 294 votes that matched the FPLP survey questions. For example, we matched a question (from the 1980 FPLP survey) regarding one's general views on communism with a specific proposal to aid anti-communist fighters (in the Ninety-sixth Congress). Despite the lack of a precise temporal connection, the hierarchical relationship between the survey questions and the roll call votes mitigates concerns about

endogeneity, that is, views on specific issues are less likely to influence general worldviews as much as the reverse.¹⁴

The institutional portion of our argument leads us to expect different voting behavior between the two chambers of Congress. Owing to stronger party influence and shorter terms, the House is likely to exhibit less bipartisan behavior than the Senate. The variable *House*, which equals one for House votes and zero otherwise, tests this hypothesis.¹⁵

A consideration of institutional rules leads us to include a variable measuring whether or not a vote is on an amendment. Amendments are often put forward for purposes of position taking—that is, the person offering the amendment knows it is unlikely to pass but wants to put members of Congress on record. Thus, amendment votes are likely to be more partisan than other votes. The variable *Amendment* equals one if the vote is on an amendment, zero otherwise.

Next, we include a set of control variables that account for alternative explanations. Realist arguments suggest that all foreign policy issues are not the same. There are high-politics, or national security, issues and low-politics issues. While members of Congress may disagree about some aspects of foreign policy, realist arguments suggest that politics will stop at the water's edge on high-politics issues. The variable *High Politics* equals one when the roll call vote is on a national security issue, as contrasted with foreign aid or international trade. More specifically, high politics equals one for votes dealing with the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, arms control, treaties, and troop commitments.¹⁶

We also include a variable that interacts *Elite Opinion Cleavage* and *High Politics* to assess the possibility that the relationship between each and bipartisan vote is conditional on the other independent variable. Including this variable subjects our argument to a severe test. On average, high-politics issues may show greater public consensus, as realist theory expects. However, we suggest this is not due to greater deference to the president and politics stopping at the water's edge. Rather, it is a result of greater elite consensus on these issues. If our argument is accurate, then as elite opinion polarizes, even high-politics issues should become less bipartisan.

The water's edge argument also leads us to include a variable for whether the president took a position on the issue. It may be argued that members of Congress are motivated to present a united voice, and thus exhibit more bipartisan behavior on foreign policy when the president takes a position on a roll call vote.

Table 1
Foreign and Defense Policy Bipartisanship
in the House and Senate, 1975-1996
(94th, 96th, 98th, 100th, 102nd,
and 104th Congresses)

Variable	β (SE)
Elite Opinion Cleavage	-0.037** (0.011)
Amendment	-0.513** (0.200)
House	-0.737* (0.455)
High Politics	1.981** (1.209)
Elite Opinion Cleavage–High Politics	-0.126** (0.057)
Post–Cold War	-0.278 (0.670)
U.S. Militarized Dispute Involvement	-0.015 (0.092)
Presidential Position	-0.735 (0.604)
Constant	-0.057 (0.687)
<i>N</i> = 294	
Log-likelihood = -170.081	

Note: Standard errors adjusted for clustering on the session of congress.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed tests).

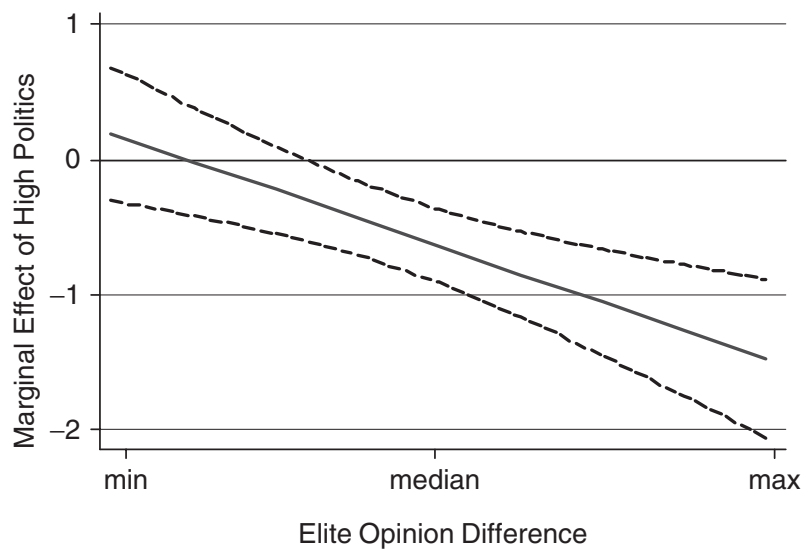
Presidential involvement, however, may also make an issue more polarizing. The variable *Presidential Position* equals one when the president takes a position, zero otherwise.

Finally, we include two indicators of international threat. During the cold war, the international military threat to the United States and its interests was perceived by many as relatively high, increasing the incentive to speak with one voice on foreign policy. With the end of the cold war, the international system could aptly be summarized as unipolar (see, e.g., Krauthammer 1990; Wohlforth 1999), and in a unipolar environment, the threat to the dominant state will be relatively lower, reducing the pressure to present a unified front on foreign policy. The variable *Post–Cold War* measures the impact of the cold war on foreign policy voting and takes on a value of one for all votes occurring after 1989. As a second indicator of the degree of international threat and one with more variation, we measure United States involvement in militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). The argument here is that as U.S. involvement in militarized disputes increases, people in the United States are more likely to view the international system as potentially hostile. The variable *MIDs* is a count of the number of disputes involving the United States, and ranges from one in 1995 to eleven in 1983.¹⁷

B. Regression Results

Table 1 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis. The results are consistent with our electoral

Figure 1
Impact of High Politics on Bipartisanship Conditional on Opinion Difference



and institutional argument. First, and perhaps most important, the regression analysis indicates the importance of elite opinion differences. As the opinions of Republican and Democratic elites polarize, foreign policy votes are less likely to be bipartisan, regardless of whether the vote is on a high-politics foreign policy issue or a low-politics issue. This finding, that partisanship increases as elite public opinion diverges, is consistent with our argument that the ebb and flow of partisanship is both dynamic and anchored in electoral politics. In the same way that a public opinion foreign policy consensus influenced foreign policy decision-making in the first two decades after the end of World War II, this study finds a strong empirical link between *the views of elite opinion leaders* and foreign policy voting after 1975. Specifically, the preferences of party elites significantly influence the preferences of members of Congress, affecting the amount of partisanship in Congress.

The regression model also shows that there are important institutional influences on foreign policy voting. Foreign policy voting in the House is statistically different from foreign policy voting in the Senate, with the House showing less bipartisan behavior. We attribute this to the effect of stronger party leadership in the House, and, on average, more homogeneous constituencies. Votes on amendments are also less likely to be bipartisan. Although this is a

common finding in studies of congressional voting behavior, it is perhaps more noteworthy here. One of the principal reasons amendments are more partisan is that members of Congress introduce them to satisfy pressure from interest groups and constituency opinion. These effects, however, should be partly accounted for in the elite opinion variable. Thus, by including a measure for elite opinion polarization, there is less variance for the amendment variable to account for. Nevertheless, votes on amendments are more partisan than final passage votes.

Furthermore, the effect of high-politics issues is more complex than realist arguments anticipate. Because of the conditional relationship between the high-politics and opinion difference variables, the effect of high politics is best conveyed by means of a graph (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006). As shown in Figure 1, when elite partisans hold similar views on a high-politics foreign policy issue (when the opinion difference is near its minimum), the roll call vote is more likely to receive bipartisan support in Congress, though this effect is not statistically significant at the .05 level.¹⁸ This is broadly consistent with realist arguments. On the other hand, Figure 1 reveals that as the opinion difference between elite partisans increases, high-politics issues are less likely to receive bipartisan support in Congress. Not only does politics not stop at the water's edge on what are perhaps the most salient foreign policy issues, politics, that is partisanship,

Table 2
Changes in Predicted Probability
of Bipartisan Vote

Scenario	Change in Predicted Probability of Bipartisan Vote
One standard deviation increase in opinion difference, low-politics issue	-28%
One standard deviation increase in opinion difference, high-politics issue	-84%
From amendment to nonamendment vote	+36%
From House to Senate	+53%
From high politics to low politics	-41%

Note: For each scenario, all other variables are held at their mean or modal value.

actually increases. Finally, we do not find any difference between the cold war and post-cold war periods, and presidential position taking is also statistically insignificant.

To illustrate the substantive impact of elite opinion differences, we calculated changes in the predicted probability of a bipartisan vote for different levels of elite opinion differences (see Table 2), holding all other variables at their mean or modal value. When a low-politics foreign policy issue is under consideration, a one standard deviation increase in the opinion difference between Republican and Democratic elites decreases the likelihood of a bipartisan vote by about 28 percent. Moreover, contrary to traditional realist arguments, the effect of elite opinion cleavages has a larger impact on high-politics issues. For instance, a one standard deviation increase in opinion difference leads to an 84 percent decrease in the likelihood of a high-politics issue being bipartisan. In sum, the connection between the opinions of party elites and voting in Congress is strong.

5. Conclusion

Observers of the U.S. Congress have noted that voting on foreign policy issues has become more partisan. However, partisan voting does not always occur. This raises a central question about legislative behavior: why are some foreign policy votes more partisan than others? In contrast to realist theories of foreign policy that emphasize the structure of the international system and the type of issue at stake, we contend that elite opinion cleavages are the primary influence on partisanship in foreign policy voting. In

particular, when Republican and Democratic opinion leaders hold more distinct views on an issue, we expect to observe more partisan behavior in Congress. Our empirical analysis supports this argument. When Democratic and Republican party elites hold vastly different opinions on a foreign policy issue, we observe more partisan voting in Congress. This applies to both high and low politics foreign policy issues. It also applies to both the House and the Senate.

The logic of our argument may also shed light on Wildavsky's (1966/1991) two presidencies finding. Wildavsky suggested that members of Congress defer to the president principally because they assume the president has more information. Members of Congress often get their information from interest groups, he noted, yet in the foreign policy domain, there are relatively few organized interest groups (p. 16). The relative lack of interest groups, coupled with the executive branch's control over the intelligence community, provides the president with more information on foreign policy. Accordingly, Wildavsky concluded that members of Congress defer to the president. In light of the argument advanced in this article, however, it may be that foreign policy votes were more bipartisan than domestic policy because of a greater elite opinion consensus in foreign policy.¹⁹ Recent research has shown less support for the two presidencies thesis (Schraufnagel and Shellman 2001; Prins and Marshal 2001), which is consistent with our argument that partisan elite opinion has diverged and is influential.

While the empirical focus of this study is on the period 1975 to 1996, the theoretical argument also illuminates more recent voting behavior in the U.S. Congress on foreign policy. For instance, a Pew Research Poll on September 23, 2003, found that 66 percent of conservative Republicans supported President Bush's \$87 billion request for more funding for Iraq, while 70 percent of liberal Democrats opposed the request.²⁰ Correspondingly, in the House of Representatives, 97 percent of Republicans voted in support of the additional funding, while only 41 percent of Democrats supported additional funding.²¹ The Senate vote was bipartisan but still reflected significant differences between Republicans and Democrats. Twenty-five percent of the Democratic senators opposed the additional funding request, whereas no Republican senators opposed it. As a representative institution with an electoral connection, this relationship between elite public opinion and congressional voting behavior is not surprising. Although not as well documented in scholarly research, this

study shows that foreign policy is also subject to an electoral connection.

In future research, we plan to tap more directly the electoral connection. One way to accomplish this is to analyze how individual members of Congress vote. With a micro-analysis, the electoral dimension may be analyzed via the underlying partisanship of a member's district. In conclusion, while the present analysis is not definitive, we believe our elite opinion cleavage argument provides a richer understanding of partisan conflict on foreign and defense policy.

Notes

1. While realism traces its lineage at least as far back as Thucydides, the seminal modern presentation of the theory is Waltz (1979). An important recent contribution to realist thought is Mearsheimer (2001).

2. On the existence of a foreign policy consensus that reduced but did not eliminate partisanship in this period, see also Meernik (1993) and Prins and Marshall (2001). While agreeing that a foreign policy consensus dampened partisanship from 1945 to 1964, McCormick and Wittkopf (1990) and Destler, Gelb, and Lake (1984) noted that foreign policy partisanship still existed in this earlier period. In particular, Democratic and Republican constituencies differed sharply in their views about the utility of the United Nations.

3. While there are differences between the realisms of Morgenthau (1948), Waltz (1979), and Mearsheimer (2001), they each underscore the importance of relative power, distrust, and international competition among the great powers.

4. The elections of 2002 and 2004 may also have been significantly influenced by what the public perceived as contrasting foreign policy views (see, e.g., Jacobson 2005; Campbell 2005; Abramson et al. 2006).

5. For a more complete discussion of these and other rules changes in the 104th Congress, see Aldrich and Rohde (2000b).

6. Codebooks and data for Stone and Abramowitz's major party activist studies are available at http://pss.iga.ucdavis.edu/stone_majorparty.html.

7. For instance, the Abramowitz and Stone 1980 and 1984 convention delegates studies each ask three foreign policy questions. Consistent with our argument, the responses to these questions show significant divergence across the parties and votes in Congress were also polarized.

8. Holsti and Rosenau (1999), ICPSR Study no. 2614 data description.

9. Holsti and Rosenau (1999), Foreign Policy Leadership Project (FPLP), 1976, question 215.

10. The vote was 218 Republicans in favor, 5 against, and 81 Democrats in favor with 104 against.

11. Given the grouping of votes by Congress, we take into account each Congress via Stata's cluster command (see, e.g., Zorn, 2001).

12. We also ran the analysis using a continuous measure of partisanship: the absolute value of the difference between the percentage of Republicans voting yea and the percentage of Democrats voting yea. With this measure of the dependent variable, the amendment variable becomes statistically insignificant.

The coefficients for all other variables retain their sign and significance level.

13. We also measured elite opinion difference using responses agree strongly and agree, instead of only agree strongly. These two measures correlate at .69. Our results are unaffected by this change in measurement.

14. If more than one question had the same issue label, we examined the text of the roll call vote to determine which question was more appropriate. For example, in the 1988 FPLP survey, there were two questions related to the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program, 116 and 276. Question 276 asks respondents if they agree with this statement: "Insisting that the Strategic Defense Initiative ('Star Wars') program cannot be included in arms control negotiations with the USSR." Question 116 asks respondents if they "support full funding and early deployment of SDI," "favor restricting the SDI project . . .," "oppose the SDI program." We did not identify any congressional votes on whether SDI should be included in negotiations with the USSR, but we did identify votes on funding of SDI; accordingly, we use responses to question 116.

15. To examine whether grouping votes from the House of Representatives with votes from the Senate is problematic, we examined whether the mean value of elite opinion divergence was significantly different in the House compared to the Senate. The difference-of-means test failed to reject null hypothesis of no difference between elite opinion difference between the two chambers. We also interacted the variable *House* with the variable *Elite Opinion Cleavage*, and find that the *Elite Opinion Cleavage* variable is statistically significant for House and Senate votes.

16. The empirical results are not very sensitive to the operationalization of high politics. We tried three other measures of high politics. First, we dropped votes on the Panama Canal treaty. Second, we included votes on the use of force. Third, we only included votes dealing with communism. Regardless of the measure of high politics, the elite opinion cleavage variable is statistically significant for both categories of political issues (high politics and low politics). The high-politics variable, however, is only significant at high levels of public opinion cleavage with each of these other measures.

17. Data on U.S. militarized dispute involvement comes from the Correlates of War project, version 3.02 (Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2004).

18. To create Figure 1, we use the Stata do program created by Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006).

19. Similarly, Oldfield and Wildavsky (1989, 55, 56) contended that the two presidencies thesis is "time and culture bound," that is, bound by "shared values" on foreign policy in the early cold war period. Instead of "shared values," we argue that the two presidencies was a function of elite opinion similarity.

20. See <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=739>.

21. House of Representatives roll call vote 523, October 17, 2003.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan, and Kyle Saunders. 1998. Ideological realignment in the U.S. electorate. *Journal of Politics* 60 (3): 634-52.
- Abramson, Paul, John Aldrich, Jill Rickhauser, and David Rohde. 2006. Fear in the voting booth: The 2006 presidential election. Paper presented at the Wartime Election of 2004 Conference, Ohio State University, Columbus.

- Aldrich, John H. 1983. A Downsian spatial model with party activism. *American Political Science Review* 77 (4): 974-90.
- . 1995. *Why parties? The origin and transformation of party politics in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aldrich, John H., and David W. Rohde. 2000a. The consequences of party organization in the House: The role of the majority and minority parties in conditional party government. In *Polarized politics: Congress and the president in a partisan era*, ed. Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, 31-72. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Aldrich, John H., and David W. Rohde. 2000b. The Republican revolution and the House Appropriations Committee. *Journal of Politics* 62:1-33.
- Aldrich, John H., John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida. 1989. Foreign affairs and issue voting: Do presidential candidates "waltz before a blind audience"? *American Political Science Review* 83:123-41.
- Brambor, Thomas, William Clark, and Matt Golder. 2006. Understanding interaction models: Improving empirical analyses. *Political Analysis* 14 (1): 63-82.
- Campbell, James E. 2005. Why Bush won the presidential election of 2004: Incumbency, ideology, terrorism, and turnout. *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (2): 219-41.
- Carmines, Edward, and James Stimson. 1981. Issue evolution, population replacement, and partisan change. *American Political Science Review* 75 (1): 107-18.
- Destler, I. M., Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake. 1984. *Our own worst enemy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fleisher, Richard, and Jon R. Bond. 2000. Polarized politics: Does it matter? In *Polarized politics: Congress and the president in a partisan era*, ed. Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, 186-200. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Ghosn, Faten, Glenn Palmer, and Stuart Bremer. 2004. The MID3 data set, 1993-2001: Procedures, coding rules, and description. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21:133-54.
- Gowa, Joanne. 1998. Politics at the water's edge: Parties, voters, and the use of force abroad. *International Organization* 52 (2): 307-24.
- Holsti, Ole R. 2004. *Public opinion and American foreign policy*. Rev. ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Holsti, Ole R., and James N. Rosenau. 1999. Foreign Policy Leadership Project, 1976-1996. ICPSR Research Study no. 2614. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.
- Hurwitz, Jon, and Mark Peffley. 1987. How are foreign policy attitudes structured? A hierarchical model. *American Political Science Review* 81 (4): 1099-1120.
- Jacobson, Gary. 2000. Party polarization in national politics: The electoral connection. In *Polarized politics: Congress and the president in a partisan era*, ed. Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher, 9-30. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- . 2005. Polarized politics and the 2004 congressional and presidential elections. *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (2): 199-218.
- Krauthammer, Charles. 1990. The unipolar moment. *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1): 23-33.
- Layman, Geoffrey, and Thomas Carsey. 2002. Party polarization and conflict extension in the American electorate. *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (4): 786-802.
- Levering, Ralph B. 1989. Public opinion, foreign policy, and American politics since the 1960s. *Diplomatic History* 13:383-93.
- Martin, William. 1999. The Christian right and American foreign policy. *Foreign Policy*, Spring, pp. 66-80.
- Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The electoral connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- McCormick, James M., and Eugene R. Wittkopf. 1990. Bipartisanship, partisanship, and ideology in congressional-executive foreign policy relations, 1947-1988. *Journal of Politics* 52 (4): 1077-1100.
- . 1992. At the water's edge: The effects of party, ideology, and issues on congressional foreign policy voting, 1947-1988. *American Politics Quarterly* 20:26-53.
- Mearsheimer, John. 2001. *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: Norton.
- Meernik, James. 1993. Presidential support in Congress: Conflict and consensus on foreign and defense policy. *Journal of Politics* 55 (3): 569-87.
- Miller, Gary, and Norman Schofield. 2003. Activists and partisan realignment in the United States. *American Political Science Review* 97 (2): 245-60.
- Morgenthau, Hans. 1948. *Politics among nations*. New York: Knopf.
- Oldfield, Duane, and Aaron Wildavsky. 1989. Reconsidering the two presidencies. *Society* 26 (July/August): 54-59.
- Powlick, Philip J., and Andrew Z. Katz. 1998. Defining the American public opinion/foreign policy nexus. *Mershon International Studies Review* 42 (1): 29-61.
- Prins, Brandon C., and Bryan W. Marshall. 2001. Congressional support of the president: A comparison of foreign, defense, and domestic policy decision-making during and after the cold war. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31 (4): 660-79.
- Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and leaders in the postreform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1994. Partisanship, leadership and congressional assertiveness in foreign and defense policy. In *The new politics of American foreign policy*, ed. David A. Deese, 76-101. New York: St. Martin's.
- Schraufnagel, Scot, and Stephen Shellman. 2001. The two presidencies, 1984-98: A replication and extension. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31 (4): 699-707.
- Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of international politics*. New York: Random House.
- Wildavsky, Aaron. 1966/1991. The two presidencies. Reprinted in *The two presidencies: A quarter century assessment*, ed. Steven A. Shull. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.
- Wohlforth, William. 1999. The stability of a unipolar world. *International Security* 24 (1): 5-41.
- Wright, Gerald C. 1989. Policy voting in the U.S. Senate: Who is represented? *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14 (4): 465-86.
- Zaller, John. 1991. Information, values, and opinion. *American Political Science Review* 85 (4): 1215-37.
- Zorn, Christopher. 2001. Estimating between- and within-cluster covariate effects, with an application to models of international disputes. *International Interactions* 27 (4): 433-45.