Determining Trade Policy: Do Voters Hold Politicians Accountable?

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Abstract   Models of trade policy often depend on the efficient aggregation of individual preferences. While much of the recent empirical work on trade focuses on whether domestic coalitions form along class or sectoral lines, the process of preference aggregation itself remains understudied. In democratic countries, voting is typically assumed to be an unproblematic mechanism for aggregating preferences, but such an assumption may be misleading when the salience of trade policy is low or heterogeneous throughout the electorate. Using data from a survey of 36,501 potential voters in the 2006 U.S. midterm congressional elections, this article explores the salience of trade policy for voters as a whole and for populations predicted to be most affected by changing trade patterns. The article offers an estimation of trade policy salience based on the degree to which voters held Senate incumbents accountable for their 2005 vote on the Central American Free Trade Agreement, relative to roll call votes on other issues of the day. The article finds trade policy salience to be relatively low in terms of stated importance, in voters' knowledge of their representatives' policy positions, and in its effect on voters' propensity to vote for the incumbent. The low salience of trade policy, particularly among highly affected groups, calls into question voter-driven models of trade policy.

In a survey of registered voters conducted in anticipation of the U.S. congressional vote on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA),[1] opponents outweighed supporters by 51 to 32 percent.[2] Yet in summer 2005, CAFTA passed

    1. Since the addition of the Dominican Republic to the agreement in 2004, the formal name is the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), but the agreement is still generally referred to as CAFTA.
    2. Survey by Americans for Fair Trade, Ipsos-Public Affairs, and Ayres, McHenry & Associates, 1–6 February 2005. Retrieved 21 December 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Available at ⟨http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html⟩. Accessed 17 March 2009.

by a 55 to 45 margin on the Senate floor[3] and by a 217 to 215 margin on the House floor. Members of Congress who go against the wishes of their constituents are generally assumed to face electoral punishment. If so, why is there such a large discrepancy between constituent preferences and trade policy outcomes?

The existing literature on the political economy of trade makes tacit—and untested—assumptions about voters and the voting process. In some studies, voters and the voting process simply do not matter: the relatively diffuse, unorganized interests of a frequently ill-informed mass public allow trade policy to be determined outside the voting framework. Instead, trade policy is determined by competition between vocal and deep-pocketed industrial lobbies or by state-to-state interactions.[4] In contrast, bottom-up models of trade policy assume that politicians reflect voter preferences, or that, at the very least, voters serve as a check on special interests. In what have been called "adding machine" models,[5] politicians seeking re-election vie for voters in environments characterized by different industrial geographies and electoral institutions.[6] These models agree that voters matter, but diverge on which voters matter. In majority voting models, characterizations by economic interest of the voter may differ, but once preferences and institutional rules are defined, aggregation is as simple as counting. Alternatively, influential voter models focus on variations in saliency—generally characterized by diffuse versus specific interests—which may lead some voters to care more about the issue, to be more knowledgeable, and thus to hold politicians accountable for their policy decisions.

This paper analyzes a pre- and postelection survey of 36,501 voters in the 2006 U.S. midterm elections to answer three questions: First, how do potential voters rate the importance of trade policy? Second, do voters know the trade policy decisions of their elected representatives in the House and Senate? Third, and most importantly for the aggregation process, to what extent do voters award or punish incumbents for voting in line or counter to the voters' preferences?

A finding of low salience in terms of knowledge or importance combined with low accountability of politicians on trade policy issues would suggest the need to re-evaluate voter-inclusive models of trade policy, especially those with a generic call to the voter. Similarly, low variation in salience across groups would bring into question models focusing on the role of concentrated interests in shaping trade policy when such interests groups are primarily characterized as voters. Likewise, if trade policy were found to be highly salient and voters held incumbents account-

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3. For both descriptive and analytic purposes, the paper uses the second Senate CAFTA vote, taken on 28 July 2005 for procedural reasons, which includes the supporting vote of the previously absent Senator Joe Lieberman.

4. See Schattschneider 1935; Caves 1976; and Baldwin 1989.

5. Caves 1976.

6. See, for example, Alt and Gilligan 1994; Bailey 2001; Bailey, Goldstein, and Weingast 1997; Busch and Reinhardt 1999; Gilligan 1997; Grossman and Helpman 1994; McGillivray 2004; and Mayer 1984.

able for votes on trade, then prior work would have mistakenly ignored the influence of the voting process in trade policy formation.

Results from the 2006 election suggest that in the U.S. trade policy is a low salience issue in terms of voters' stated importance, knowledge of policy outcomes, and holding politicians accountable for their decisions. In contrast to the predictions of many economic models, trade policy salience does not vary substantially across groups, even among union members and others directly affected by trade policy. This conclusion leaves one at a crossroads. While recent survey-driven, empirical research on individual preference formation has provided more information than ever about what voters want in terms of trade policy, this knowledge may reveal little about what policies voters will receive.

Testing Salience

The past decade has seen a proliferation of empirical tests of individuals' trade policy preferences using survey data, both in the United States and internationally. Much of the research is driven by attempts to close the continuing theoretical divide on whether individual preferences are determined by a Stolper-Samuelson-based factor classification or Ricardo-Viner-based sectoral (industrial) identification.[7] However, survey data has not tested the second component of individual preferences, aggregation.

The election of representatives is a commonly assumed mechanism for preference aggregation in democratic societies. Politicians with an interest in re-election are expected to enact policies in line with their constituents' preferences. Although early research on voting behavior questioned the U.S. electorate's ability and interest in holding representatives accountable for their actions in office,[8] later research has suggested that both branches of Congress respond to constituent preferences.[9] However, all policy issue areas are not necessarily equally salient to the electorate, possibly allowing congressional representatives more leeway for deviations from constituent preferences.

In the political behavior literature, the term salience is frequently used but seldom defined.[10] For the purpose of individual preference aggregation through democratic elections of representatives, salience is the extent to which a voter's utility for a candidate is affected by a candidate's position on an issue. Thus, salience embraces two concepts: knowledge of deviations of the candidate's position from the voter's preferred policy and the relative importance the voter places on this

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7. See Baker 2005; Beaulieu, Yatawara, and Wang 2005; Kaltenthaler, Gelleny, and Ceccoli 2004; Mayda and Rodrik 2005; Mayda, O'Rourke, and Sinnott 2006; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2001; and Scheve and Slaughter 2001.
8. See Stokes and Miller 1962; and Miller and Stokes 1963.
9. See Wright 1978; Erikson and Wright 1980; and Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002.
10. Wlezien 2005.

deviation. Both of these concepts are central to the multidimensional voting model developed from Downs' Median Voter Theory.[11]

In standard single-issue voting models, a voter's utility for a candidate (U_i) is a function of the proximity of the individual's position (P_i) to the candidate's position (P_c). It is generally assumed that the larger the distance between P_i and P_c, the lower the utility, U_i. In a multiple-issue voting model, a voter's utility for a candidate (U_i) is a function of the sum of the weighted distance $P_i - P_c$ across multiple issue areas (j). Formally:

$$U_i = a_0 + B \sum_{j=1}^{m} w_{ij} |P_{ij} - P_{cj}|^x + u_i \tag{1}$$

where a_0 represents a constant, B is the multiplier effect of these summed difference (assumed to be negative), x (assumed to be 1 or 2) allows for nonlinear effects of the distance, and u_i is a randomly distributed disturbance term. w_{ij} is the weight that an individual attaches to each issue (j); the sum of weights across all issue areas equal one: $\Sigma_{j=1}^{m} w_{ij} = 1$.

While it is standard for the weighting w_{ij} to be referred to as a salience weight, the weight denotes only one portion of salience: the importance of an issue.[12] The traditional model ignores the second component—knowledge—by assuming voters have full information about the proximity of the politician's position relative to the voter's own, $|P_{ij} - P_{cj}|$. However, whether the electorate is aware of the distance depends on a number of factors in addition to how important they consider the issue. Determining one's issue preference, P_{ij}, might be difficult, time consuming, or costly. Furthermore, political actors may wish to obscure their policy preference, P_{cj}. Obfuscation can be aided by omnibus bills and amendments that complicate the policy implications of any given bill making it difficult for voters to link politicians' voting behavior to politicians' preferences. Relaxing the assumption of perfect information over policy proximity requires the addition of the knowledge component (k) to the traditional multidimension model presented in equation (1):

$$U_i = a_0 + B \sum_{j=1}^{m} w_{ij} k_{ij} |P_{ij} - P_{cj}|^x + u_i \tag{2}$$

where k_{ij} ($0 \leq k_{ij} \leq 1$) represents the individual's knowledge of the distance for any given issue between that individual's policy preference and that of the candidate under consideration. $k_{ij} = 1$ corresponds to the traditional assumption of perfect information. As k_{ij} approaches 0, the relative importance of policy differences

11. Downs 1957.
12. For example, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954.

becomes muted, providing politicians greater leeway in policymaking. At $k_{ij} = 0$, all policy differences are unobserved, providing politicians complete leeway in policymaking on the specific issue.

Together, issue weighting (w_{ij}) and preference knowledge (k_{ij}) determine the degree to which an issue affects a voter's calculation of the value of voting for a candidate, or in other words, the salience of the issue. In turn, salience determines both the extent to which individual trade policy preference aggregation occurs through the voting mechanism and the extent to which certain voters' preferences may matter more than others.

Traditional Measures of Salience

The traditional measure of salience has been the "most important problem" (MIP) question on election surveys. However, Wlezien[13] notes that interpretation problems with the MIP may conflate a respondent's general sense of issue importance with the extent to which this issue is currently seen as problematic, or differs from the voter's preference. That is, a voter may support current policy and thus may not see an issue as problematic, all while still viewing the issue as important. Additionally the focus on the single most important problem serves to hide the potential effects of important but perhaps second-order issues such as trade policy.

As a practical matter, the answer to the question "Is trade salient?" using the MIP measure would be concise: no. Of the 36,501 respondents asked "What is the most important problem facing the country today?", only one offered a specifically trade-oriented answer: "Jobs lost because of free trade agreements."[14] Ultimately, the MIP measure does not provide information on how voters act at the polls and to what extent politicians value policies conforming to the preferences of their constituents.

Measuring Salience: Importance, Knowledge, and Behavior
at the Polls

This article explores salience by asking three questions about trade policy relative to other issues: How important is the issue of trade policy (weight, w_{ij})? How well does the electorate know candidate trade-related positions (knowledge, k_{ij})? To what extent does a candidate's trade-related voting record matter in determining the voter's choice? The first two questions focus on subcomponents of salience and allow for the distinction between importance and knowledge. The third question directly measures the effect of salience on voting behavior. Since only incumbents have a record of policy positions—as measured by congressio-

13. Wlezien 2005.
14. Of all respondents, 2,200 or roughly 6 percent selected "economy and jobs"; however, trade policy is only a small component of this category.

nal roll call votes—for the latter two questions, the analysis concentrates on voters' knowledge of incumbents' positions and their support of incumbents' re-election efforts.

The data comes from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey conducted by Polimetrix both before and after the 2006 U.S. midterm election.[15] Starting from a pool of more than 150,000 "opt-in" respondents, a panel of 36,501 adults was selected using proximity matching to a stratified subsample[16] drawn from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the 2004 American Community Study (ACS).[17] A smaller module posed additional questions to a randomly selected subsample of 1,000 respondents.[18]

Estimating Trade Policy Salience

CAFTA is an excellent test case for measuring trade policy salience. While many trade issues are debated outside of the public view, CAFTA received significant media coverage and was referenced in a number of electoral campaigns. The economic impact of CAFTA itself is relatively low: CAFTA countries' combined exports are only about $17 billion a year and 80 percent of the trade is already effectively duty-free. However, CAFTA was frequently associated with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), made permanent previously temporary tariff reductions, and was linked to plans for the expansion of free trade both in the Americas and more widely. CAFTA attracted a politically wide spectrum of opponents: liberal presidential candidate Ralph Nader,[19] conservative presidential candidate Pat Buchanan,[20] and the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz,[21] among others, all spoke out against CAFTA. Unlike many other bills that mix together multiple policy areas, the CAFTA legislation focused almost exclusively on trade issues, making interpretation of politicians' vote choice easier for voters. If voters do not hold politicians accountable over a recent, high-profile piece of trade legislation such as CAFTA, they are unlikely to do so for more typical bills.

15. Ansolabehere 2007.
16. There were three types of strata in the sample: Registered and Unregistered Voters, State Size, and Competitive and Uncompetitive Congressional Districts. For more information on general sample matching, see Rivers 2006.
17. Participation in the ACS is mandatory, resulting in a 93.1 percent response rate.
18. Campbell 2007.
19. The director of the Nader-founded Public Citizens' Global Trade Watch described CAFTA as "a moldering corpse that needs burial." Quoted in "Central American Trade Pact OK Sought." *Washington Times* (Internet ed.), 28 May 2005.
20. Patrick J. Buchanan. "CAFTA: Last Nail in the Coffin?" *American Conservative* (Internet ed.), 9 May 2005.
21. See interview with Joseph E. Stiglitz, broadcast on "Lou Dobbs Tonight," CNN, 27 July 2005.

TABLE 1. *"In determining whom you vote for, how important are the following issues?"*

			Percentage by category			
Issue	*Mean*	*Standard deviation*	*1 "Extremely"*	*2 "Very"*	*3 "Somewhat"*	*4 "Not"*
Social Security	1.75	0.79	44%	38%	16%	2%
Health care	1.76	0.89	50%	29%	17%	4%
Education	1.79	0.85	45%	34%	17%	3%
Taxes	1.80	0.82	43%	36%	18%	3%
Terrorism	1.83	0.94	49%	26%	19%	6%
Immigration	1.93	0.92	41%	29%	25%	4%
The environment	2.17	0.95	30%	31%	31%	8%
International trade	2.44	0.86	16%	33%	43%	9%
—Support imposing new limits (observations = 399)	2.32	0.90	22%	32%	38%	8%
—Oppose imposing new limits (observations = 251)	2.53	0.79	10%	35%	47%	8%

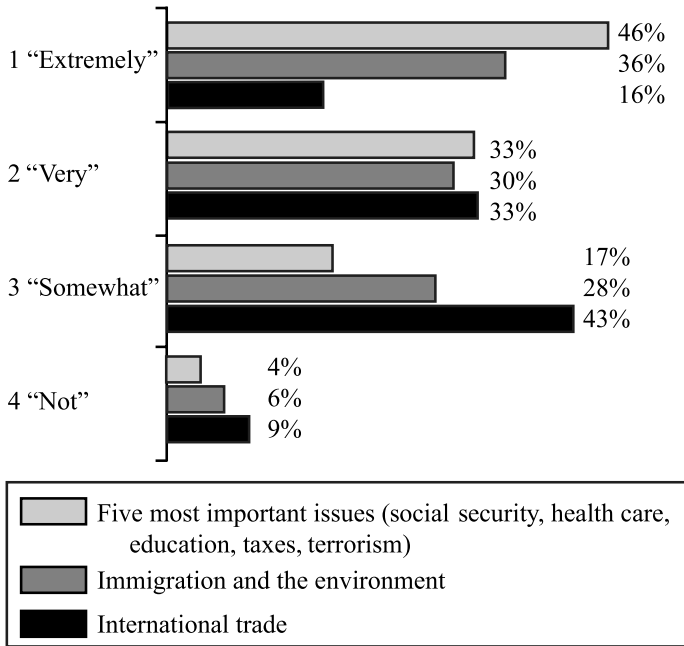*Notes:* Observations: minimum = 988; maximum = 992.

Importance

How does trade policy fare in comparison to other issues of the day? The first subcomponent of salience is the weight (w_{ij}) voters place on an issue relative to other issues. In place of the MIP question, 1,000 respondents were asked to rate in terms of importance (1 "Extremely"; 2 "Very"; 3 "Somewhat"; and 4 "Not") the following randomly ordered issues: education, the environment, health care, immigration, international trade, social security, taxes, and terrorism. With the exception of international trade, these categories are similar to those frequently raised in the MIP question.

In comparison to the other categories, international trade not only garnered the lowest average rating (2.44) but was also the only category for which the modal response was "somewhat" important (Table 1). In fact, almost 10 percent considered international trade "not" important." The bar graph presented in Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of respondents and clearly highlights international trade's relatively lowly position compared to the most salient issues (social security, health care, education, taxes, and terrorism) and the less salient issues of immigration and the environment. In contrast with all other issue areas, the majority of responses for international trade fall below the "very" important category.

Salience in terms of importance might differ across different voter types. In particular, individuals may have a heightened response to losses than to gains.[22] Recent

22. See Kahneman and Tversky 1979 and 1984.

U.S. trade policy has moved to increase free trade so respondents preferring pro-
tection might rank international trade more highly. In fact those who claim to "Sup-
port new limits on imports" do rank international trade significantly higher than
those who oppose such limits; however, the substantial difference is minimal. Even
those who favor protection, and thus can be viewed as having "lost" during previ-
ous waves of liberalization, still rank international trade well below other issues,
including the environment (Table 1). Such evidence supports neither an assump-
tion that the salience of trade is a function of the impact of trade on individuals
(or, in other words, that salience is heterogeneous) nor the assumption that trade
policy receives a high weight (w_{ij}) when individuals face multidimensional voting
decisions, as is the case when constituents cast votes for their representatives.

Notes: Observations: minimum = 988; maximum = 992.

FIGURE 1.   *"In determining whom you vote for, how important are the following issues?"*

Knowledge

Importance is only one component of salience. Trade may not rank highly, but if
at least some set of voters are well-informed, trade may still be salient on election
day. How well do voters know incumbents' positions relative to their own (k_{ij})?

To gauge voter knowledge on issues that recently came before Congress, respondents were provided background information on a spectrum of news-making proposals that arose during the last congressional session. After each proposal description, they were asked to identify first how they would have voted if given the choice ("For," "Against," and "Don't know") and second how they thought each of their representatives voted ("For," "Against," and "Don't know").[23] Respondents were surveyed on seven proposals, all of which received a roll call (recorded) vote during the 109th Congress (3 January 2005 to 3 January 2007): banning "late-term" abortion (partial birth), federal funding for stem cell research (stem cell), a timetable to withdraw from Iraq (Iraq), citizenship for illegal immigrants (immigration), increasing the federal minimum wage (minimum wage), extending capital gains tax cuts passed in 2001 (capital gains), and ratifying a new free trade agreement between the U.S. and countries in Central America (CAFTA).

Half of the respondents correctly identified their senators' positions on these issues, as measured by congressional vote records (see Table 2). Although more than a third of respondents admitted to not knowing their senators' positions, relatively few respondents—12 percent across all issues—incorrectly identified their senators' positions. However, the issue of CAFTA exhibited a clear knowledge gap for respondents. CAFTA was the only issue for which the majority (54 percent) of voters responded "Don't know" when asked their senators' positions. Only 31 percent correctly identified their senators' positions. Remarkably, more respondents (15 percent) provided an incorrect answer for CAFTA than on any other issue.[24] In each case, the difference between trade policy and all other issues was statistically significant.

TABLE 2. *Respondent identification of senator's vote record on recent roll call votes*

Answer	Partial birth	Stem cell	Iraq	Immigration	Minimum wage	Capital gains	CAFTA	Average	Standard deviation
Wrong	13%	12%	11%	15%	11%	9%	15%	12%	2%
Right	53%	54%	58%	44%	54%	53%	31%	50%	9%
N/A "Don't know"	34%	34%	32%	41%	35%	37%	54%	38%	7%

Notes: Observations: minimum = 63,115; maximum = 72,464; two observations per respondent.

23. For each proposal, survey respondents were offered single sentence descriptions, explanations of support, and explanations of opposition. When asked how they thought their representatives voted, respondents were provided with a name prompt. For the full script, see Ansolabehere 2008.

24. The smaller sample of 1,000 was also asked to identify the record of their representative on CAFTA. The results were substantially identical to the analysis using the identification of senators' votes.

As with importance, knowledge might differ across groups, with those perceiving themselves as losers being more cognizant of their representatives' policy decisions. Using the respondents' self-reported preferences, Table 3 partitions respondents into three categories—those supporting CAFTA, those against CAFTA, and those stating no opinion ("Don't know"). While those not stating an opinion on CAFTA were clearly less knowledgeable about their Senators' positions, those stating a preference "for" or "against" CAFTA differed little in their answers. Additionally, within the population of respondents offering an identification of their Senators' positions, the percentage answering correctly (66 to 67 percent) was equivalent for all three groups. Thus, contrary to the Kahneman and Tversky-based assumption that losers from international trade liberalization would pay more attention to trade policy, initial evidence supports the contention that stated preferences over the outcome of the CAFTA vote are unrelated to salience in terms of knowledge of representatives' policy positions.

TABLE 3. *Respondent's identification of senator's CAFTA vote conditional on own preference*

Answer	"For CAFTA"	"Against CAFTA"	"Don't know"	Average
Incorrect	19%	18%	5%	*15%*
Correct	39%	37%	9%	*31%*
N/A "Don't know"	43%	45%	87%	*54%*
Correct if answered	67%	67%	66%	*67%*

Notes: Observations = 71,285; two observations per respondent possible.

Simple descriptions might hide the true relationship if the underlying factors that lead some individuals and groups to be more protectionist than others also cause some individuals to have greater knowledge about their representatives' policy positions. Differences in gender, skill level, and class have all been linked to preferences over trade policy and could conceivably be linked to general policy knowledge. Additionally, organizations affected by trade policy—such as unions—are assumed to provide information to their members, especially at election time. Although in the United States unions are increasingly divided over the benefits of greater trade openness, the debate within unions should offer members additional opportunities to learn about their representatives' policies and to identify the members' own.

Regression analysis allows for the factors associated with policy knowledge to be considered simultaneously. While correct and incorrect answers to the question of how senators voted create a scale, respondents who reply "Don't know" cannot be placed neatly on the same continuum. To account for this nonlinearity, a multi-

nomial logistic regression model is used. Individual-level characteristics such as gender, skill level, and union membership are used to predict the likelihood of a respondent to provide an incorrect answer or reply "Don't know" compared to the baseline of providing the correct answer. The model is flexible and allows people answering incorrectly to differ from people replying "Don't know."[25] Since each respondent could provide two observations (one per senator), the standard errors were clustered by respondent.[26]

Two important findings emerge from the multinomial results (see Table 4). First, in contrast with the descriptive statistics, once controlling for other characteristics, the self-described anti-CAFTA respondents are significantly less likely to provide an incorrect answer and to answer "Don't know," as would be expected by conventional theory. However, the substantive effect is, to say the least, minimal: anti-CAFTA sentiments decrease the propensity to provide the wrong answer from 14.8 percent to 14.6 percent and the propensity of stating "Don't know" from 56.2 percent to 55.2 percent. In contrast, the effect of being male decreases the propensity to answer incorrectly from 16.0 percent to 13.2 percent, a full order of magnitude more than the effect of having anti-CAFTA sentiments. Those with no opinion are no more likely to be correct than incorrect in their answers, although they are more likely to state "Don't know" than to provide a correct answer. Thus, while the survey does detect statistical differences, these differences are so minimal as to strengthen the arguments that knowledge is relatively constant across trade preferences. Second and unexpectedly, given the usefulness of union organizations for information distribution, union membership increases the likelihood of not providing an answer, even after controlling for factors such as education. While the substantive effect is again small (2 percentage points), the finding runs directly counter to the frequent assertion that interest groups are powerful because of their ability to inform and organize members.[27] At least in the case of trade policy, this finding calls into question any causal mechanism dependent on interest groups leading to more informed voters. Given the direct link between increasing international trade and labor conditions in the U.S., labor unions, of all interest groups, should have served to increase the trade policy knowledge of their members.

Additionally, higher levels of education, a proxy for high-skilled workers and thus voters with theoretically predicted free-trading preferences, are linked with a higher propensity to provide an answer. However, there is not a significant difference between the likelihood of the answers being correct or incorrect. Regionally, those in the Midwest and the South are far more likely to both offer an answer and provide a correct answer. Consequences of regional differences are explored in the next section.

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25. Coefficients can then be compared using a Wald test.
26. Observations in which the current Senator did not vote–for any reason–were dropped.
27. For example, Grossman and Helpman 2001.

TABLE 4. *Multinomial logit regression on identification of senator's policy position by respondent characteristics*

Variables	Incorrect		"Don't know"	
	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error
CAFTA: AGAINST	−0.05	0.03*	−0.06	0.03**
CAFTA: NO OPINION	−0.03	0.06	1.97	0.05***
UNION MEMBER	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.02***
MALE	−0.14	0.03***	−0.57	0.03***
WHITE	−0.11	0.03***	0.02	0.03
FAMILY INCOME: $80,000–$99,999	−0.09	0.05*	−0.09	0.04**
FAMILY INCOME: $100,000–$119,999	−0.11	0.05**	−0.15	0.04***
FAMILY INCOME: $120,000–$149,999	−0.11	0.05**	−0.25	0.04***
FAMILY INCOME: $150,000 OR MORE	−0.16	0.05***	−0.29	0.04***
EDUCATION: HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE	0.10	0.09	0.07	0.08
EDUCATION: SOME COLLEGE	−0.07	0.09	−0.21	0.08***
EDUCATION: 2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE	−0.04	0.10	−0.24	0.08***
EDUCATION: 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE	−0.13	0.09	−0.41	0.08***
EDUCATION: POSTGRAD DEGREE	−0.07	0.10	−0.42	0.09***
YEARS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE	0.00	0.00***	−0.01	0.00***
REGION: MIDWEST	−0.88	0.05***	−0.39	0.04***
REGION: SOUTH	−0.87	0.04***	−0.23	0.04***
REGION: WEST	−0.28	0.04***	−0.05	0.04
Constant	0.23	0.12*	0.96	0.11***
Pseudo R-squared	0.09			
Observations	60,996			

Notes: Coefficients are multinomial logit estimates of the probability of answering incorrectly versus answering correctly and answering "Don't know" versus answering correctly, respectively. The excluded independent variable categories are CAFTA: PRO, FAMILY INCOME: < $30,000, EDUCATION: < HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE, and REGION: NORTHEAST." Standard errors are robust and are adjusted for clusters by respondent as there are two possible observations per respondent. $*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01$.

In summary, relative to other issues, trade has low salience in terms of the electorate being aware of the decisions of policymakers (k_{ij}). Furthermore, individual characteristics linked to preferences over trade policy are not linked with substantial variations in trade policy knowledge across voters. In particular, among those for whom trade is salient—as defined by the knowledge component—there is no strong protrade or antitrade bias.[28]

28. At a reviewer's request, "Importance" was added to the "Knowledge" model depicted in Table 4. The results showed a nonlinear relationship in which both high and low rankings for the importance of trade were correlated to higher predicted probabilities of both correct and incorrect answers. With one unimportant exception, the differences were not significant.

A Direct Measure of Salience: Voting Behavior and
Trade Policy

Neither subcomponent of salience—importance nor knowledge—definitively provides evidence against trade policy salience within the U.S. electorate. Despite a failure of the electorate to follow trade policy directly or deem it an important issue, trade might still be considered salient—and thus interests aggregated—if politicians feared that they could be held accountable at the polls for their trade-policy-related decisions.

One possibility is that the electorate may use other cues such as party affiliation, knowledge of nontrade-related economic policy decisions, or statements in the media to gauge a candidates' trade policy preferences.[29] Despite not "knowing" a politician's voting record directly, the electorate might vote "correctly" on the issue, allowing for their trade policy preferences to be accurately aggregated.

A second possibility is that trade is salient in electoral terms if the select few who follow trade issues are observed to significantly adjust their voting behavior according to the candidates' policy decisions and thus create a small but easily won or lost voting bloc. However, in this case, the aggregation process would be skewed toward those who are more informed about trade policy and those who rank it more highly. If one opinion predominates among the attentive electorate, then politicians may need to be responsive to this minority.[30]

A third possibility—suggested generally by Stimson and colleagues[31] and specifically in regards to trade by Bailey[32]—is that rational (forward-thinking) politicians select policy to match the majority preferences of their district, preventing rivals, the media, and political entrepreneurs from making an issue salient during an election. The process is "silent" in that the electorate need not rank trade as an important issue or be particularly well-informed. Bailey argues that such prospective positioning allows for the aggregation of the diffuse interests of skilled (pro-trade) workers, despite collective action problems. However, for such an aggregation mechanism to work, the electorate must still match their preferences to their voting, punishing or rewarding politicians accordingly. If not, politicians have little incentive to adjust policy away from their preferences.

The analysis below tests to see, first, whether voters unconsciously hold candidates accountable for trade-related policy decisions and, second, whether the few who do know their representatives' trade vote history substantially adjust their vote accordingly. The benefits of "anticipatory reaction" by politicians should be apparent in at least one if not both versions of the analysis. Voters should be observed to either unknowingly or knowingly support incumbent politicians whose prior trade-related policy decisions match the voters' preferences. The electorate's vote for

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29. See Stokes and Miller 1962; Miller and Stokes 1963; and Erikson 1971.
30. This hypothesis is tested explicitly in the section entitled "Subsample Analysis."
31. Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995.
32. Bailey 2001.

incumbents is the empirical focus for both theoretical and practical reasons. Incumbents alone have a clear vote history. Furthermore, research by Erikson and Wright[33] shows that only the positions of incumbent candidates and not those of nonincumbent candidates influence U.S. congressional electoral outcomes. Thus, in this analysis, the respondent's self-reported vote in the 2006 senatorial elections is called as a vote for (1) or against (0) the incumbent. Respondents who did not answer or did not vote in the election were excluded from the sample. To test the importance of a candidate's position relative to the voter's own for a series of issue areas, two dummy variables ("ISSUE":MATCH and "ISSUE":NO OPINION) were created to account for the three possibilities: the incumbent candidate's vote record did not match the self-reported preference of the respondent (the excluded category), the record did match the self-reported preference of the respondent ("ISSUE":MATCH = 1), and the respondent did not have a stated preference on the issue ("ISSUE":NO OPINION = 1). The issue areas included were the same as those used above: banning "late-term" abortion (PARTIAL BIRTH), federal funding for stem cell research (STEM CELL), a timetable to withdraw from Iraq (IRAQ), citizenship for illegal immigrants (IMMIGRATION), increasing the federal minimum wage (MINIMUM WAGE), extending the capital gains tax cuts (CAPITAL GAINS), and ratifying a new free trade agreement between the U.S. and countries in Central America (CAFTA). To test the importance of consciously knowing the candidate's relative position, a further set of variables were created for the same issues. First, respondents were coded as having identified their Senator's position correctly or not, "ISSUE":ANSWERED CORRECTLY. This variable was then interacted with whether the respondent's position matched with the candidates to create the variable "ISSUE":KNOW MATCH. A weak test that incumbents are rewarded for matching constituents' preferences on an issue would find a positive relationship between "ISSUE":MATCH and a vote for the incumbent; a more stringent test would require that "ISSUE":KNOW MATCH show a significant positive relationship with a vote for the incumbent.

Table 5 presents two probit regression results: a base model testing the relationship between an incumbent's position relative to the voter's, and an interactive model that includes a test of the importance of the voter "knowing" the incumbent's relative position. In each, whether the respondent's self-identified party preference matches the incumbent's serves as an important control.[34] Additional controls for gender,[35] race,[36] income, education, and years eligible to vote appear in both models.

At first glance, the base model of Table 5 presents some support for trade policy being salient in congressional elections: the coefficient for CAFTA: MATCH is positive (0.09) and significant. However, the coefficient size relative to other issues is small, roughly 25 percent of the next largest issue match (IMMIGRATION: MATCH).

33. Erikson and Wright 1980.
34. Southwell and Waguespack 1997.
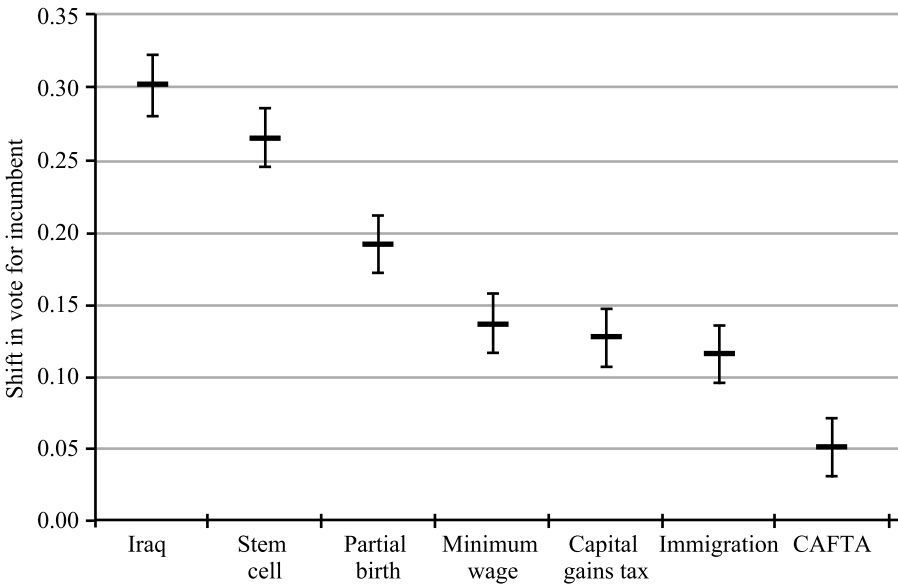35. Lake, Conway, and Whitney 2005.
36. Lublin 1997.

TABLE 5. *Probit regression on voting for the incumbent*

	Base model		Interactive model	
Variables	*Coefficient*	*Standard error*	*Coefficient*	*Standard error*
PARTY: MATCH	1.79	0.04***	1.58	0.05***
PARTY: THIRD PARTY	0.77	0.03***	0.73	0.04***
CAFTA: MATCH	0.09	0.03***	−0.11	0.05**
CAFTA: NO OPINION	0.13	0.04***	−0.02	0.05
CAFTA: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.31	0.05***
CAFTA: KNOW MATCH			0.38	0.08***
PARTIAL BIRTH: MATCH	0.58	0.03***	0.24	0.05***
PARTIAL BIRTH: NO OPINION	0.21	0.05***	0.10	0.06*
PARTIAL BIRTH: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.38	0.05***
PARTIAL BIRTH: KNOW MATCH			0.45	0.07***
STEM CELL: MATCH	0.81	0.03***	0.34	0.05***
STEM CELL: NO OPINION	0.45	0.06***	0.29	0.06***
STEM CELL: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.30	0.05***
STEM CELL: KNOW MATCH			0.63	0.07***
IRAQ: MATCH	0.75	0.03***	0.18	0.05***
IRAQ: NO OPINION	0.29	0.06***	0.13	0.07**
IRAQ: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.56	0.05***
IRAQ: KNOW MATCH			0.85	0.07***
IMMIGRATION: MATCH	0.34	0.03***	0.00	0.05
IMMIGRATION: NO OPINION	0.19	0.06***	0.10	0.07
IMMIGRATION: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.36	0.05***
IMMIGRATION: KNOW MATCH			0.73	0.07***
MINIMUM WAGE: MATCH	0.51	0.03***	0.02	0.05
MINIMUM WAGE: NO OPINION	0.27	0.08***	0.07	0.08
MINIMUM WAGE: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.36	0.06***
MINIMUM WAGE: KNOW MATCH			0.71	0.07***
CAPITAL GAINS: MATCH	0.47	0.03***	0.00	0.05
CAPITAL GAINS: NO OPINION	0.34	0.05***	0.05	0.06
CAPITAL GAINS: ANSWERED CORRECTLY			−0.47	0.05***
CAPITAL GAINS: KNOW MATCH			0.83	0.07***
MALE	−0.02	0.03	0.04	0.03
WHITE	−0.12	0.04***	−0.03	0.04
FAMILY INCOME 2Q: $30,000–$49,000	0.01	0.05	0.09	0.05*
FAMILY INCOME 3Q: $50,000–$69,000	−0.02	0.05	0.07	0.05
FAMILY INCOME 4Q: $70,000–$79,000	0.01	0.05	0.12	0.06**
FAMILY INCOME 5Q: > $80,000	0.03	0.05	0.12	0.06**
EDUCATION: HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE	−0.02	0.10	0.03	0.11
EDUCATION: SOME COLLEGE	−0.02	0.10	0.10	0.11
EDUCATION: 2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE	−0.03	0.10	0.05	0.11
EDUCATION: 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE	0.02	0.10	0.11	0.11
EDUCATION: POSTGRAD DEGREE	−0.05	0.11	0.10	0.12
YEAR ELIGIBLE TO VOTE	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Constant	−2.43	0.12***	−0.88	0.13***
Observations	14,391		14,165	
Pseudo R-squared	0.55		0.63	

Notes: Coefficients are probit estimates of the probability of voting for the incumbent. Q = quartile. *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$.

For interpretation purposes, Figure 2 illustrates the predicted shift in the probability of voting for an incumbent. Given a 60 percent baseline probability of voting for the incumbent, matching on CAFTA has only a projected 5 percent shift, less than half as much as other economic policies such as increasing minimum wage (14 percent), extending capital gains taxes (13 percent), and citizenship for illegal immigrants (12 percent). The difference is even greater between trade and more ideological debates such as "late-term" abortion (19 percent), stem cell research funding (27 percent), and a scheduled withdrawal from Iraq (30 percent). Even more surprisingly, matching on trade policy preference is smaller (albeit statistically indistinguishable) from the effect of not having a stated opinion on CAFTA (CAFTA: NO OPINION).

Note: The upper and lower bars represent the 95 percent confidence level for the estimated shift in vote for the incumbent. The baseline vote share for the incumbent is 60 percent.

FIGURE 2. *Effect of issue match on probability of voting for the incumbent*

If trade policy divided representatives clearly along party lines, the limited effect of CAFTA: MATCH could be considered a result of CAFTA: MATCH being indistinguishable to PARTY: MATCH. However, in recent years trade policy has cut across party lines. On CAFTA, more than 25 percent of Democratic senators voted for increased liberalization, while 22 percent of Republicans voted against it. However, these deviations from party lines neither gain nor lose incumbents many votes,

suggesting little need for incumbents to anticipate the reaction of the electorate on trade policy issues. This lack of change in voting behavior suggests that politicians have little incentive to clarify the costs and benefits of trade policy for their constituents. An unopinionated voter offers the same benefit as conforming to the voter's preference, whereas an opinionated voter might be turned off by the incumbent's trade policy record.

The results of the interactive model (column 2, Table 5) further bring into question the efficacy of politicians educating voters and the idea that small but knowledgeable groups of voters for whom trade is salient might bias the aggregation of voters' preferences. For each issue area in the interactive model, voters are coded on four characteristics: whether they have a preference ("ISSUE":NO OPINION), whether their preference matches the incumbent's prior policy positions ("ISSUE": MATCH); whether they can correctly identify the incumbent's prior policy position ("ISSUE":ANSWERED CORRECTLY); and finally whether they know their preferences match with the incumbent's prior policy position ("ISSUE":KNOW MATCH, an interaction term of "ISSUE":MATCH and "ISSUE":ANSWERED CORRECTLY). For each issue area other than CAFTA, KNOW MATCH has the largest, positive coefficient, suggesting that knowledgeable voters reward or punish representatives for their prior policy votes. However, the numerous interaction terms make interpretation difficult, especially in the case of CAFTA where the other CAFTA-specific terms have negative estimated coefficients.

For interpretation purposes, Table 6 offers simulated probabilities of voting for the incumbent based on four types of individuals characterized by whether their preferences match the policies of the incumbent and by whether they are aware of the fact: "Don't match and don't know," "Match and don't know," "Don't match and know," and "Match and know." For each simulated probability presented, all other factors are held at the mean. Unsurprisingly, voters who know their preferences differ from the incumbent's policy votes are the least likely to vote for the incumbent, but the difference in the probability of voting for the incumbent between voters who "Match and know" and those who "Don't match and know" is one-third the size for CAFTA (10 percent) as compared to other economic issues such as capital gains (31 percent), minimum wage (28 percent), and immigration (27 percent). The gap is just as large for salient social issues such as stem cell research funding (36 percent) and partial birth abortion (25 percent), as well as the withdrawal time table for Iraq (38 percent).

In all cases other than CAFTA, voters who know they match are far more likely to vote for the incumbent than voters who aren't aware that they do not match. In the case of CAFTA, voters who "Don't match and don't know" are actually slightly more likely to vote for the incumbent than those who "Match and know," even after controlling for party identification and agreement on a number of other issues.

In summary, voters do not appear to hold politicians accountable for their trade-related policy positions, suggesting trade issues are not salient. While the lack of accountability could be due to both lack of interest and lack of knowledge, the

analysis suggests that accountability is not higher among the relatively few who are knowledgeable about their representatives' trade policy decisions. Senators who match a voter's trade policy preference can expect to see only a minimal boost in the probability of re-election; while those who do not pay a minimal cost in votes. Thus the process does not seem to be biased toward the relatively few who follow trade policy nor does the analysis support the underpinning assumption of an "anticipatory reaction" that voters in upcoming elections will punish or reward incumbents for their policy decisions.

TABLE 6. *Probability vote for incumbent contingent on preference relative to incumbent position*

Issue position relative to incumbent	Partial birth	Stem cell	Iraq	Immigration	Minimum wage	Capital gains	CAFTA
Don't match and don't know	61%	54%	62%	62%	60%	64%	66%
Match and don't know	70%	67%	69%	62%	61%	64%	62%
Don't match and know	47%	42%	40%	48%	46%	45%	54%
Match and know	72%	78%	78%	75%	74%	76%	64%
(Match and know) − (Don't match and don't know)	11%	24%	16%	13%	14%	12%	−1%

Notes: Simulated results using *Clarify* (see Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001; and King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). All other factors kept at mean.

Subsample Analysis

The national scope of the survey, aggregating across states and individuals, arguably might bias results against the salience of trade policy by numerically swamping the small, economically-defined subsamples of the nation for whom foreign trade policy is particularly salient. As discussed above, such individuals can be defined by industry classification (as in the Ricardo-Viner model) or by factor classification (as in the Stolper-Samuelson model). Although recent empirical work finds more support for the latter,[37] for robustness subsamples across this spectrum are used.

According to the United States International Trade Commission, CAFTA most directly affects the sugar and textile industries.[38] While responses from a large sample of individuals from these groups would be ideal, survey expenses precluded such sampling. Instead, the analysis focused on a subsample of individuals in directly affected states, defined as the top four producing states in three areas—

37. Scheve and Slaughter 2001.
38. USITC 2004.

sugar cane, sugar beet, and textiles.[39] Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, not one senator from a top textile-producing state was up for re-election, so I redefined the sample of directly affected states as "sugar states." Voting results from the sugar-state Florida were deemed unusual enough to bias the finding in favor of limited saliency and were thus removed and presented separately (see Table 7).[40] Assuming a positive level of factor mobility, I defined a set of indirectly affected states—those with a high-concentration of low-skilled workers whose wages are theoretically affected by an influx of labor-intensive goods—namely Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. A second set of subsamples breaks the national results by region. Finally, assuming a high degree of factor mobility, I split the national sample according to skill set, with unskilled labor defined as individuals with less than a two-year college degree. As an alternative specification, I used the respondent's self-declared position on CAFTA.

Table 7 offers a summary by subsample of the regression output for the variable CAFTA: MATCH from the base accountability model (as originally presented in Table 5). Comparing across subsample coefficients, salience does appear to be significantly higher in directly affected states, the Midwest, and the West. However, when the effect size is measured by the shift in probability of voting for the incumbent contingent on CAFTA: MATCH, the substantive difference is again negligible. When looking at differences in the predicted vote shift, only the subsamples with lower levels of saliency (Florida and the South) are significantly different from the full-sample-predicted vote shift. Specifically, within directly affected states, the predicted vote shift contingent on matched CAFTA support is almost identical (0.053) to that of the full sample (0.050). While the analysis does identify variations across groups, these variations are remarkable for their small size, especially in comparison to the other issue areas. As in Figure 2, Figure 3 displays predicted mean shifts in voting for the incumbent (with 95 percent confidence intervals) but displays the results specifically on CAFTA: MATCH for the various subsamples. As a point of comparison, the graph also includes the predicted vote shift from matching on the highest and second to lowest ranked issue areas (effect of IRAQ: MATCH and effect of IMMIGRATION: MATCH respectively). The mean and (with a couple of exceptions) even the upper bounds of the predicted shift by CAFTA: MATCH remain below the mean predicted shift for IMMIGRATION: MATCH and well below that of IRAQ: MATCH. Thus, trade policy appears to influence voting behavior very little, even for the subsamples where the largest effects are expected.
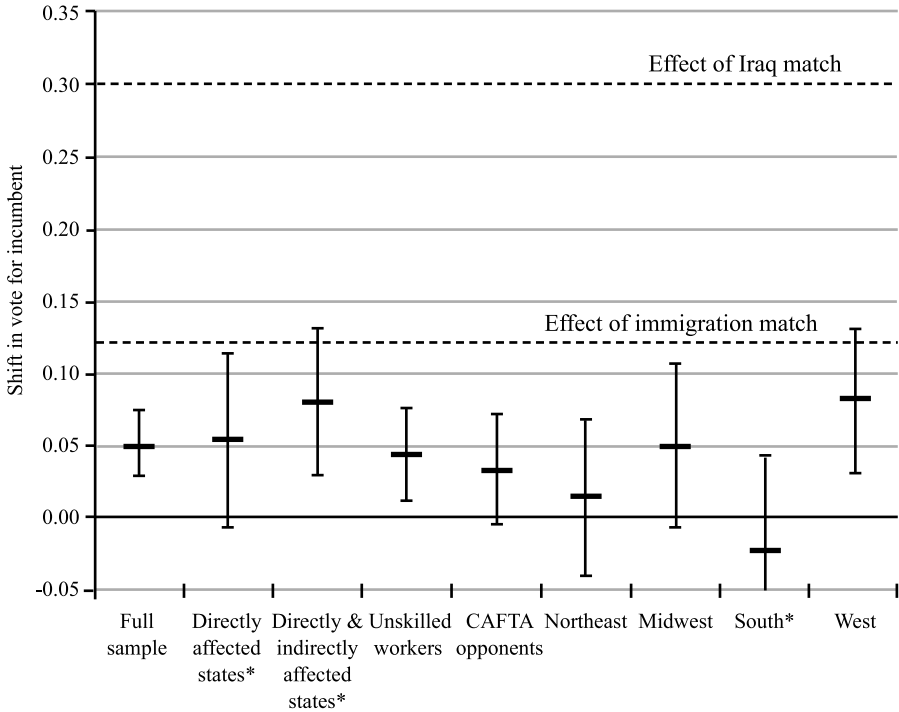
39. Textile: South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, or Alabama (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). Cane Sugar: Louisiana, Florida, and Texas, and Hawaii (USITC 2004). Beet sugar: Minnesota, North Dakota, Idaho, and Michigan (USITC 2004).

40. In the 2006 Florida U.S. Senate election, 55 percent of voters who voted for the incumbent, Democrat Bill Nelson, disagreed with his pro-CAFTA stance. However, the alternative was Republican Katherine Harris whose campaign was mired by allegations of corruption, financial difficulties, religious controversies, staff resignations, and a withdrawal of support by the Republican Party.

TABLE 7. *Comparison of coefficients and predicted probabilities by subsample*

	CAFTA: MATCH *coefficients*				*Probability of voting for incumbent contingent on CAFTA match*							
	Observations	*Coefficient*	*Standard error*	*Different*	*Baseline*	*No match*	*Standard error*	*Match*	*Standard error*	*Vote shift*	*Standard error*	*Different*
Full	14,391	0.09	0.03		0.60	0.58	0.01	0.63	0.01	0.05	0.01	
*Directly affected states**	2,815	0.15	0.08	Yes	0.66	0.64	0.02	0.69	0.02	0.05	0.03	
*Directly and indirectly affected states**	4,722	0.21	0.07		0.56	0.53	0.01	0.61	0.02	0.08	0.03	
Unskilled workers (< two years college)	8,817	0.11	0.04		0.62	0.60	0.01	0.65	0.01	0.04	0.02	
CAFTA opponents	7,511	0.09	0.05		0.63	0.62	0.01	0.65	0.02	0.03	0.02	
Northeast	2,721	0.04	0.08		0.70	0.69	0.02	0.70	0.02	0.01	0.03	
Midwest	3,285	0.12	0.08	Yes	0.60	0.58	0.02	0.63	0.02	0.05	0.03	
*South**	3,905	−0.15	0.07	Yes	0.60	0.62	0.01	0.56	0.02	−0.06	0.02	Yes
West	4,479	0.23	0.07	Yes	0.67	0.65	0.01	0.73	0.02	0.08	0.02	
Florida only	1,308	−0.42	0.14	Yes	0.72	0.77	0.02	0.62	0.04	−0.15	0.05	Yes

Notes: * Excludes Florida.

Notes: The upper and lower bars represent the 95 percent confidence level for the estimated shift in vote for the incumbent. The estimates are based on results from subsamples. *Excludes Florida.

FIGURE 3. *Effect of CAFTA match on probability of voting for the incumbent*

Conclusion

When measured in terms of the effect on voting for a candidate, trade policy lacks salience. Voters do not rate trade as an important issue. The majority of voters are unaware of their politicians' positions on trade. Other political cues do not lead voters to naively support or punish politicians who share or differ from those voters' views on trade. Even individuals within specific pro-protection groups, for whom trade would seem to be particularly salient, are unaware of their representatives' policies. Furthermore, those voters who do know a candidate's position vis-à-vis their own only slightly adjust their voting behavior given this knowledge.

These findings cut broadly across the literature on endogenous trade policy, which generally relies on previously untested assumptions about voter behavior. The critique is most obvious for models that employ the direct democracy approach proposed by Mayer, or the alternative political support function proposed by Hillman

for representative democracies.[41] In both cases, the assumption that trade policy follows the underlying distribution of trade preferences (determined by economic interest) depends on fully informed voters. For alternative models relying on the role of interest group contributions and/or political endorsements[42] in determining policy, the results offer real-world data for the typically unspecified parameters hidden in the details, such as the assumed difference in the behavior of informed and uninformed voters, and the relative importance of other issue areas. Perhaps most surprising is the finding of low salience among union members, undercutting assumptions that interest groups gain power via their ability to deliver the votes of their rank-and-file members.[43] Members of special interest groups are frequently described as having greater access to information about candidates and policy issues, but the characterization is not supported in this data. Members of special interests groups are often assumed to have higher than average turnout levels, but an increased propensity to vote does not equate with additional influence on trade policy if voters are uninformed or uninterested.

The recent explorations of the observed correlation between rapid trade liberalization in developing countries and the expansion of democratic rule illustrate the importance of assumptions about voter behavior. At the heart of a number of explanatory models[44] is the assumption that the preferences of the median voter directly affect policy: as suffrage expands, the median voter is more likely to fall into the class of unskilled workers who would theoretically benefit from increased international trade and thus demand trade liberalization. However, without evidence from a more direct test of the causal mechanism, low salience for trade policy belies the assumption that changes in voter preferences are responsible for the widespread shift toward trade liberalization in the developing world. Indeed, recent survey data suggests that unskilled workers are less likely to support free trade than skilled workers.[45] Low salience can help explain why trade protection has declined in spite of, rather than because of, expanded suffrage.

How valid is the extrapolation of U.S.-based results to developing countries or even other developed countries? Many characteristics of the U.S. electoral system suggest that the results might in fact overstate the propensity of the electorate to hold representatives accountable for trade policy. Divided government, a weak party system, and growing numbers of self-declared independent voters all help voters to hold their representatives accountable in the United States. Additionally, in contrast to the trade policymaking process for the European Union member states, the decision makers in the United States are still the directly elected representatives. On the other hand, as a large economy, the United States is theoretically less affected by the volatility that comes from increased openness to world markets or the costs

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41. Mayer 1984; Hillman 1982.
42. Grossman and Helpman 2002.
43. For discussion, see Grossman and Helpman 2002, chap. 3.
44. See Milner and Kubota 2005; and O'Rourke and Taylor 2006.
45. See Baker 2005; and Beaulieu, Yatawara, and Wang 2005.

from increased protection. To the extent that economic size dampens the salience of trade policy, the data from the U.S. elections may not serve as a good estimate for small, highly trade-dependent countries such as Singapore. However, large developed and developing countries such as Australia, Brazil, India, and Japan may exhibit similar or weaker saliency.

Even if the results are valid for the United States alone, these findings are meaningful more broadly. Before the demise of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, the U.S. was criticized by multilateralists for its strategy of focusing more on bilateral and regional trade agreements such as CAFTA rather than large-scale multilateral agreements. Now with no WTO-led trade negotiations in the foreseeable future, it is likely that subsequent treaties will be closer in scale to CAFTA. If so, the American voter poses little resistance to their ratification.

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