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Mapping the Boundaries of Elite Cues: How Elites Shape Mass Opinion across International Issues

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When and how do elite messages shape mass opinion on international issues? Do informational or partisan components of elite cues dominate? Recent survey experiments offer conflicting insights. We argue that issue context matters, and that the single-issue nature of most survey experiments masks systematic variation in how elite cues affect attitudes across international issues. These effects depend on the baseline distribution of mass opinion on the issues themselves. Two characteristics of underlying opinion prove crucial: first, the share of those not aligned with expert opinion, and second, the degree of partisan polarization. Where polarization is limited, information effects should dominate. Where issues are polarized, information intake should be limited by partisan attribution. We test these hypotheses using nine survey experiments across a range of issues, including the rise of China, climate change, international institutions, and the use of force. At one extreme, all messages—even those endorsed by generic or opposition experts—can shift opinion; at the other, only partisan-attributed messages matter. Our findings are important not only for understanding public opinion about international issues but also for those interested in mobilizing opinion in a democratic setting.

When do elite messages move public opinion? A surge of research examines the determinants of public attitudes about a wide range of international issues.[1] Foreign affairs are distant from most voters' everyday concerns and thus are especially ripe for cue-giving by elite actors, sparking intense interest in how different messages and messengers can shift opinion on international issues. But all international issues are not the same, presenting cue-givers with potentially different challenges. Voters may relate more directly to some issues (or, conversely, see others as technocratic or obscure), and the extent and nature of past public debate on an issue can range from nonexistent to highly politicized.

Yet most existing studies—especially survey experiments—study issues in isolation. An issue-by-issue structure is not well suited to capture features of the issue itself that may affect how messages affect attitudes (for an exception, see Albertson and Gadarian 2015). Moreover, the literature tends to exclude or understudy some issues, either because scholars employ research designs that ensure at least some respondents will change their attitudes or because they wish to study issues where respondents have likely already formed their views.

Variation across issue context is potentially crucial to the effectiveness of different messengers on public attitudes. Indeed, this variation may at least partially explain divergent findings in the existing literature. Despite wide agreement that elite cues matter, scholars continue to debate whether cues convey information for the benefit of the voter (see Gilens 2001; Hiscox 2006) or whether voters use the identity of cue-givers—most commonly their partisanship—as a shortcut (see Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2009). Each view finds support in specific issue areas.

Differences in issue context suggest an important real-world consequence for those hoping to shift public opinion on a given issue: there may be systematic variation across issues in the extent to which public attitudes are movable, and when particular messengers are most effective at shifting opinions. On some issues, the public may look mainly to partisan elites (a view that seems to suit the polarized times), while on others, voters may instead respond to information conveyed by a wider set of elites, including politically unaffiliated experts. If elite messages have differential effects, then efforts to mobilize public opinion in favor of a policy may sometimes prove broadly effective, but under other conditions will only exacerbate divisions within the public.

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[1]The recent surge covers a broad range of issues, but studies tend to be issue specific and remain relatively unintegrated. For example, survey experiments have allowed scholars to explore the determinants of public attitudes on trade (Herrmann, Tetlock, and Diascro 2001; Hiscox 2006; Naoi and Kume 2015; Guisinger 2016, 2017), security (Berinsky 2009; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Tomz and Weeks 2013; Kreps 2014), and transnational issues such as climate change and international organizations (Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Tingley and Tomz 2014; Bush and Prather forthcoming).

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These potentially different effects raise an important external validity concern for survey experiments that, we believe, existing literature fails to address: survey experiments may yield cuing effects that depend on the context of the issue on which they are conducted. For example, what if we observe little movement in response to an elite message? Was that because the message or messenger was ineffective, or because the public already has developed opinions on the issue and there remains little scope for further changes in attitudes? Similarly, what accounts for the contradictory results that plague the existing literature on cues and public opinion? Do they stem from differences in topic areas, question wording, samples, or other parts of the research design?

This article uses data explicitly designed to test the role of issue context. We analyze a set of nine similarly designed survey experiments across a range of international issues—including the rise of China, climate change, international institutions, and the use of military force—conducted in a single survey in the fall of 2012. This design allows us to assess when mass opinion follows the lead of experts. Notably, these issues include both economic and security topics that few studies examine in parallel.

We contend that the degree to which public attitudes are malleable, as well as the importance of partisan attribution, depends on the existing distribution of mass opinion on the issue itself. Two characteristics of baseline attitudes prove crucial: first, the share of the population not already aligned with elite opinion; and second, the degree to which the issue already exhibits partisan polarization. If polarization is limited and there is room for movement, the information in the message itself should matter more than the messenger, and many different elites can carry the message persuasively. But for more polarized issues, citizens listen only to those who share their partisan affiliation, sidelining the effectiveness of non-partisan experts as cue-givers and exacerbating existing polarization.

We use a multi-issue experimental setup that allows us to leverage the advantages of survey experiments, holding the basic experimental framework (with its internal validity) constant across issues. For each issue, we present a basic description, then vary whether an "expert view" is presented with a politically unaffiliated (or what we call "generic") expert attribution, a Republican expert attribution, or a Democratic expert attribution. We deliberately chose areas with expert agreement on at least some aspect of the issue. We use "expert view" as a shorthand for a position held by a substantial number of experts or by elites knowledgeable about the issue, with at least some, but not necessarily universal, support from both parties. Experts can be outside government (for example, economists); or they can be government insiders, such as members of Congress or public officials who have taken a long-standing interest in an issue.

We find strong support for the conditional effects of elite messages across issue context. For each issue, at least one version of the message moved opinion, but the distribution of public opinion on a given issue influenced the effectiveness of different messengers. For issues where a high proportion of the public is not aligned with elite opinion, but partisan polarization is low, all messages—including those from opposition experts—proved effective in moving opinion toward the expert view. In contrast, for issues that exhibit baseline partisan polarization, the treatments produced further polarization on the issue.

The tendency to examine cuing effects issue-by-issue thus likely masks variation in the conditions under which certain messages or messengers will—or will not—shift attitudes. Even in a highly polarized environment, generic information can be effective in shifting attitudes under some conditions. Alternatively, simply observing small or insignificant cuing effects in some cases may lead to the erroneous conclusion that cues are unimportant in all cases.

The article proceeds by first summarizing theoretical and empirical developments in public opinion research on foreign policy, bringing together research across the traditional security and economic divide. It then develops our argument and hypotheses about how the baseline distribution of attitudes affects the nature and degree of movement in the face of elite cues. We then present our experimental design across our nine issues and discuss the results. The discussion of results also reports a follow-up study that replicated one of our experiments on support for intervention in Syria, conducted during the August 2013 crisis over chemical weapons.

Information, Partisanship, and Public Opinion on Foreign Policy

The burgeoning literature on public opinion and foreign policy differs along many dimensions, but a few points of agreement are notable. After World War II, the scholarly consensus held that public opinion was fickle or incoherent (see Holsti 2004, ch. 2, for a review). Subsequent scholarship found that the public does have coherent foreign-policy attitudes (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Holsti 2004, ch. 3), even though the public remains relatively uninformed about politics in general and foreign policy in particular (Holsti 2004, 55; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 82–89). Thus, scholars have been preoccupied with understanding what drives changes in attitudes. Does the public update its views in response to new information or the flow of events, or does it respond to messages conveyed by those with whom it shares predispositions—such as fellow partisans?

In line with scholarship on American political behavior (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2009), much of the literature on public opinion and foreign policy recognizes that, on specific issues, the public takes cues from elites. Gathering political information is costly (Downs 1957), and for many citizens, elite cues serve as convenient shortcuts. Partisanship provides a particularly powerful and convenient shortcut for identifying elites from whom to take a cue. In John Zaller's (1992) seminal model, extended by Adam Berinsky (2009) in the domain of wartime attitudes for the post–World War II period, elite consensus increases public support for government policy among well-informed respondents. But when elites divide, respondents tend to follow those who share their political predispositions. Even those who see public attitudes as an independent force acknowledge the importance of elites. For example, Aldrich et al. (2006, 487) note that "elites appear to retain some leeway in shaping the expression of public opinion, but the mechanisms that give them that leeway are still little understood."

One source of debate, however, is whether the message or the messenger is more important: Do elites convey substantive information, or do they instead signal partisan positions that respondents can simply adopt without considering policy details? As John Bullock (2011, 497) notes, there are many claims about but few actual tests of the

relative strengths of these two factors. The dominant claim in the broader political behavior literature is that partisanship trumps exposure to information (see, for example, Cohen 2003), but others see voters as responsive to policy information as well (in the context of foreign policy, see Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; see Bullock 2011, 497–98, and Guardino and Hayes forthcoming, 2-4 for useful reviews). Others have found mixed results (Bullock 2011; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013).

The debate over the role of information and partisanship remains largely unresolved in the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. On the security side, scholars of public opinion and war debate the role of information about casualties. John Mueller (1973, 116–21) argued that public support for war declines with the logarithm of casualties, suggesting the public responds to information, though he also acknowledges the importance of elite debate. In an experimental setting, however, Berinsky (2009, 118–23) finds that partisan cues are important determinants of support for a hypothetical military intervention in South Korea, while information about casualties has no statistically significant effect. Others have found that the public responds both to objective factors and to partisan cues in a security context (see, for example, Trager and Vavreck 2011, 542), as well as to elite consensus (Kreps 2010; Saunders 2015).

The literature on public attitudes toward international economic issues and international organizations tends to emphasize the informational (rather than the partisan) role of elites. In studies of attitudes on trade, survey evidence suggests that demographic and skill profiles shape the public's views (see, among others, Mayda and Rodrik 2005) and provide less empirical support for the role of partisanship as a significant determinant of attitudes (Guisinger 2009, 548; Guisinger 2017, ch. 7; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Diascro 2001, 196; see also Kaltenthaler, Gelleny, and Ceccoli 2004). In an experimental setting, Hiscox (2006) finds that anti-trade rhetoric increases support for protectionism. In a subsequent experiment, he finds that an endorsement by Nobel Prize–winning economists raises support for trade overall and mitigates anti-trade framing effects (Hiscox 2006, 775–76). Yet Hiscox (2006, 776) himself notes that it remains unclear which experts or elites voters turn to as trusted sources of information, leaving room for the possibility of partisan effects. Some research on human rights has explored how information from human rights organizations, and variation in issue frames (including information-based frames), can shape opinion or mobilize attitudes around a consensus (Davis, Murdie, and Steinmetz 2012; McEntire, Leiby, and Krain 2015) but is less concerned with partisan- or messenger-based effects.

In terms of international institutions, research on public attitudes toward institutions like the World Trade Organization is rare. For example, Herrmann, Tetlock, and Diascro (2001, 193) do not include the WTO in their survey experiment on mass attitudes, on the grounds that the public was still unfamiliar with the WTO.[2] As discussed further below, omitting issues because the public may not know much about them risks selecting out issues for which expert-endorsed informational cues might be effective.

We argue that the lack of consensus about what kinds of elite cues matter stems, at least in part, from the fragmented state of the literature. Recent evidence in the broader public opinion literature suggests that both informational content and partisan cue-taking are important in shifting mass attitudes (see, for example, Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Bullock 2011; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). Some scholarship has hinted that the issue domain may be an important factor in how cues matter. As Bullock (2011, 509–10) notes, the few studies that explicitly test both informational and party cues focus on domestic policy and vary significantly in their findings, possibly because of variation in the nature of the issues involved.[3]

But research has not examined systematic variation across issues, much less across issues in an international or foreign policy context, where cue-taking is especially likely. A single-event, single-issue, or even single-policy area focus can mask important differences in the underlying distribution of public opinion.[4] Indeed, Druckman and colleagues (2013, 75) write that they "suspect citizen polarization occurs issue by issue."

The Message or the Messenger?

When can an expert message shift public opinion? Is the content of the message persuasive, suggesting that any messenger can carry it regardless of partisanship, or are some messengers, particularly those who share the respondent's partisan identity, more effective than others? We contend that the way expert messages interact with attitudes depends critically on the distribution of underlying public opinion.

The public is not a completely blank slate. At the individual level, a large literature focuses on the links between predispositions, information environments, and the malleability of opinions. Some, like Zaller (1992, 6), posit that "every opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition" (see also Zaller and Feldman 1992). Others focus on the "pretreatment environment," which can expose individuals to information about a given issue and lead some who are motivated to form strong attitudes to retain that information (Druckman and Leeper 2012). Our argument operates at a higher level of aggregation and starts from the assumption that the "control" group in a survey experiment is not a *tabula rasa*. We therefore examine the baseline distribution of mass opinion and subsequent shifts in this distribution in the face of different messengers carrying the same information.

Most elite messages convey both informational content and the identity, whether implicit or explicit, of those who carry it. The question is the extent to which the informational content is effective regardless of who endorses it, or whether it is a partisan endorsement of that same information that does more work in shifting opinion. We argue that for a given issue, whether the message or the messenger does the heavy lifting depends on two aspects of the underlying distribution of opinion on that issue: the share of the population

[2]Furthermore, McEntire, Leiby, and Krain (2015, 412) deliberately conduct their experiment on issue framing in human rights by choosing a relatively anonymous organization, the Human Rights Initiative.

[3]Bullock, however, focuses on individual-level responses rather than the aggregate distribution of opinion as we do here.

[4]Of course, there may be other sources of systematic variation in context. As discussed below, opinion on a given issue may vary over time; there may also be variation in the distribution of opinion on an issue across countries (for example, on cross-national variation in public support for war, focusing on different levels of vengefulness, see Stein 2015). This article focuses on issue context at a given moment as one source of variation.

not already in alignment with expert opinion and the degree of underlying polarization.

Thus, across issues with different baseline characteristics, we expect that a similarly attributed cue (for example, one endorsed by a non-partisan elite) might have different effects. When an elite message interacts with the baseline distribution, there will be some room for new information and some interaction with underlying predispositions or effects from prior exposure to information. If an issue is not particularly polarized and there is room for movement, we expect the informational content of the message to dominate, and any messenger can be effective. If opinion is polarized, however, only partisan endorsements of a message will result in shifts in opinion. Our theory therefore comes with the built-in expectation that we should observe differential findings for similarly attributed cues across issues.

To build this argument, our approach does not make assumptions about the sources of and influences on baseline opinion and allows for multiple factors to shape it. Following Zaller (1992) and others, we do not assume that individuals have a single attitude determining their response to a survey question on an issue, but indeed may have many and at times countervailing "considerations" (Zaller and Feldman 1992) to draw from when formulating an answer to a survey question. At the individual level, this multitude of considerations may result in response instability as respondents draw from different considerations at different times; but at the aggregate level, individual variance averages out and allows scholars to focus on society-level influences on the salience of some considerations over others.

For some issues, the number and strength of considerations may be limited simply by the nature of the issue itself. For example, on technocratic or obscure issues, few citizens may have well-defined opinions at all. On other issues, the history of debate and discourse on the issue may influence the salience of certain considerations and thus shape the distribution of attitudes on an issue at a given moment. Certain issues receive more media coverage (or have simply been around longer) and may have been more polarized in elite discourse, leading to potential aggregate "pretreatment effects" (Druckman and Leeper 2012). Indeed, Berinsky highlights the polarized nature of underlying opinion at the time of his Korean intervention experiment—June 2006, when the Iraq War was at a low point. He finds a large partisan gap in support for a hypothetical intervention in Korea in all conditions (Berinsky 2009, 121; others who highlight the baseline distribution of opinion include Gelpi 2010, 96; and in the context of immigration, Grose, Malhotra, and Van Houweling 2014, 734).

Since we chose issues on which there is at least some degree of elite agreement on both sides of the aisle, one might expect that public opinion would follow this view through the familiar cue-taking mechanism highlighted by Zaller (1992) and Berinsky (2009). Why, then, do we expect variation in movement in response to these elite cues? Even when elite views are somewhat or widely shared, the substance of the view itself is distinct from the flow of discourse about that expert view and the discourse about the issue more generally. We chose issues for which there exists elite opinion based on expert views, but this view need not be universal among elites, and thus dissenting voices are still a possibility. Note, for example, the *New York Times* headline about the incoming Trump administration's choice for administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt: "E.P.A. Chief Doubts Consensus View of Climate Change."[5] In addition, elites can vary in how strongly they feel about an expert view and their willingness to discuss it, so even on issues with a general consensus, both consensus and dissenting voices may be more or less vocal. Albertson and Gadarian (2015, 20–25) show that even when there is expert consensus (in their case within a scientific community), there can still be room for elite disagreement. They distinguish between "unframed threats," where the cause of harm is widely agreed, and "framed" threats, where the cause or extent of harm is debated, and thus more subject to elite messaging, often along partisan lines. As they note, there can be overlap within an issue: an issue like climate change "has much in common with unframed threats" because there is consensus within the scientific community that would lead one to expect an issue would be "unframed," but "climate change is experienced as a framed threat" because "the parties differ both on the nature of the problem and on policy solutions" (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, 29).

Furthermore, the composition of those who endorse or propound the expert opinion can change over time: for example, the Cap and Trade proposal for curbing climate change originated as a Republican idea with widespread support, but among political elites, Cap and Trade now has support primarily from Democrats even as it retains support among non-governmental experts (on the increasing polarization of attitudes about climate change, see McCright and Dunlap 2011, 175–78; Guber 2013). Even if elite discourse generally supports an expert opinion, characteristics of the issue itself may mean that some messages may be more difficult to convey than others (see, for example, Hiscox 2006, 774). The public may also have underlying predispositions that differ from those of elites (see, for example, Page and Bouton 2006). Thus, even issues on which experts or elites share some degree of agreement may pose different challenges to those who wish to shift opinion, depending on characteristics of the baseline distribution.

The first dimension of baseline opinion—partisan polarization—is most likely to result from the existing flow of messages. Even when an elite consensus emerges, the actual flow of elite discourse may not fully reflect the consensus. Previous opinions may still circulate, and some elites may still state alternative positions. If discourse has been particularly limited or absent on an issue, respondents may rely on analogous issue areas or predispositions and thus import partisan disagreements. These mechanisms may lead some respondents to view the issue through a partisan lens even absent our treatments.

The second dimension—non-agreement—captures the degree to which the public's aggregate views differ from the dominant expert view (which, in our experimental design, will be presented in the treatment conditions). The proportion of those not in agreement with expert opinion is not completely independent of partisan polarization. If polarization is low or nearly absent, there are two possibilities.[6] Most intuitively, if elite discourse is united behind a bipartisan elite view on an issue, then public opinion may consolidate in favor of the expert view

[5]Coral Davenport, "E.P.A. Chief Doubts Consensus View of Climate Change," *New York Times*, March 9, 2017.

[6]In extreme cases of polarization, public opinion is by definition bimodal, and some segment of public opinion will naturally fall closer to expert opinion. Thus, cases of high polarization and either a very large or very small degree of non-agreement with experts are logically excluded.

(which in this case would verge on consensus). But, as discussed, this process is not automatic.

Alternatively, in the absence of polarized discourse, public opinion may lack alignment with widely held elite positions for reasons related to the issue itself. First, the public may simply lack knowledge about the issue; in particular, some issues may be difficult to communicate effectively. Such cases might result in a high percentage of "don't know" responses, or reliance on heuristics that allow respondents to give a definite but weakly held opinion that diverges from the expert position. If the relevant heuristic is not one that readily fits into a set of liberal or conservative beliefs, then responses may not cluster along party lines. Second, for certain issues, predispositions may simply be independent of political ideology—such as trade. Such cases should result in lower percentages of "don't know" and higher percentages of opposition expressed by respondents of all types.

Since we are interested in the conditions under which information- or partisan-based cues move attitudes toward a dominant expert view, when measuring polarization and degree of non-agreement, we consider those who have no opinion (that is, a "don't know" response) and those who are opposed to the expert position as part of the same group of those not already aligned with this expert view. Especially on issues that are "cognitively complex," like foreign policy questions, many who express no opinion may be avoiding the mental costs of thinking through the issue (Berinsky 2004), but may be moved by subsequent information. Even some of those who express opposition in the baseline may not have thought much about the issue and may be receptive to further information about it.

Whether a subsequent cue moves those not in agreement with experts is likely to be a function of how polarized the issue has been thus far. For non-polarized issues, those who respond "don't know" or whose opposition to the expert view is only weakly held are likely to be moved by any cue; whereas for polarized issues, both types of respondents will tend to be moved by cues only from their own party. For purposes of defining the "non-agreement" dimension of the baseline, we treat these two types of respondents as one group of those in "non-agreement." In our empirical analysis and the discussion below, however, we take advantage of the flexibility of a multinomial logit model to independently estimate the determinants of a "don't know" and an "agree" response, to allow for the possibility that the "don't knows" may react differently to the elite cue.

We can now generate hypotheses about how an elite message containing both expert-endorsed information and an elite endorsement interacts with the two dimensions of public opinion we identify. If public opinion starts from a baseline that is not particularly polarized and already largely in line with the expert view, there is little room for movement. If initial preferences are not highly polarized but are consolidated relatively far from the expert opinion, however, then messages can potentially move attitudes. Indeed, in experiments involving attitudes about oil drilling and immigration, Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) find that when polarization is low, opinions can move in the direction of the stronger frame (that is, the stronger source of policy information). In this case, we expect that the information contained in a message will be the primary driver of attitude shifts, regardless of who carries the message. The same information, whether endorsed by non-partisan (or "generic") experts or those with a partisan affiliation, will result in attitude shifts—in the same direction—regardless of the partisan affiliation of the respondent. This argument leads to the following hypothesis:

Information Hypothesis: *For issues where non-agreement is high but baseline opinion is not strongly polarized along partisan lines, both generic and partisan endorsements of expert information will shift attitudes toward agreement with an expert view.*

In contrast, if the issue is already politically polarized, then new information, even if endorsed by experts, is unlikely to move attitudes in the absence of a specific partisan signal. Generic, non-partisan endorsements are therefore likely to be ineffective on these issues. Instead, movement comes from partisan attributions, but they only exacerbate existing polarization (as Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013 find for their high-polarization conditions; see also Darmofal 2005). If the message fits with partisan predispositions (for example, a message about Cap and Trade as a way to control climate change conforms to Democratic predispositions), then we would expect opinions for those partisans to shift toward the expert view when the cue comes from their own party and be unresponsive to out-party cues. Our second hypothesis therefore posits:

Partisan Hypothesis: *For issues where the baseline distribution exhibits partisan polarization, only partisan endorsements of expert information will shift attitudes toward an expert view, for those who share the partisanship of the endorser.*

Of course, some issues will exhibit moderate levels along both dimensions. In these cases, we expect mixed effects. Generic experts may be effective, but partisan endorsements may work most effectively on those respondents who share the partisanship of the endorser. Thus, we have a third hypothesis:

Mixed Hypothesis: *For issues where the baseline distribution shows moderate levels of polarization and non-agreement, both generic and partisan expert endorsements of information can shift attitudes toward an expert view, but partisan effects will be limited by individuals' party affiliation.*

Thus, we expect variation in the conditions under which different types of experts can use the same information to shift public attitudes. Pulling back to consider the broader implications for public opinion and foreign policy, our cross-issue approach allows us to take a more holistic view of public attitudes across issue domains. For example, studying only polarized issues or excluding issues where the public is assumed to lack knowledge of the issue (as in the case of the WTO in Herrmann, Tetlock, and Diascro 2001, 193) risks selecting out significant potential movement in attitudes from expert-endorsed information. Conversely, selecting issues to ensure that attitudes move will mask issues on which attitudes have hardened. For example, Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013, 61) note that they follow others in choosing issues where "the public's opinions on them are not crystallized and, indeed, are somewhat conflicted," because it leaves "room for movement" in the experiments. If, however, the context of opinion formation varies across issues, as Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus

(2013, 75) themselves suggest, selecting issues where movement is likely may miss important variation in how issue context matters (see also Druckman and Leeper 2012, 888–89).

Data and Baseline Distributions

To test our hypotheses, we embedded nine survey experiments in the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov/Polimetrix (Ansolabehere 2012). We combined two unique subsamples of 1,000 individuals, each drawn from the larger CCES population.[7] This relatively large combined sample size of 2,000 allows for multiple treatments as well as comparison across party affiliation.[8]

A significant strength of our approach is that it maximizes issue coverage while using the same experimental setup for all issues. Directly comparing nine similarly designed experiments conducted at the same time provides, to our knowledge, a breadth of issue context not usually explored in studies of public opinion and foreign policy. Harnessing the internal validity of each individual experiment, repeated across nine issues on the same sample, is an important first step in the assessment of issue context on the malleability of public opinion.

We chose issues that spanned a broad range of substantive topics and exhibited variation across several potentially important factors, including visibility and known polarization (for example, the issue of climate change, where we had good reason to believe the issue was polarized). We also chose a set of issues that varied across security, economic, and international institutional issues. Where possible, we tried to have "mirror" issues—for example by choosing two issues related to China, one on security and one on economics, and two on climate change, again with one framed in security and one in economic terms—so that we could assess the alternative hypothesis that public opinion would behave differently across security and economic issues. We included questions on international institutions because, as noted, they tend to be more technocratic issues that are rarely studied precisely because few in the public have opinions on them, and yet omitting this type of issue might lead to biased inferences about how, and how much, public opinion on foreign policy can be influenced by elites. We also deliberately included a question related to an obscure institution, the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), with which few respondents were likely to be familiar, as a kind of robustness check.

Respondents were asked the following nine foreign policy questions, randomly ordered to guard against spillover effects (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 17–18; Transue, Lee, and Aldrich 2009, 160):

- What do you think should be the official response by the US government [to accusations of currency manipulation by China]? ("China Currency")
- Do you support this new strategy to pivot the US military's focus to Asia? ("China Pivot")
- Should the US increase or decrease its use of the WTO [World Trade Organization] dispute mechanism? ("WTO")
- Should US citizens and corporations be subject to international court rulings from the ICSID [International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes]? ("ICSID")
- Do you think the United States should institute a system like "Cap and Trade" to limit greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change? ("Cap and Trade")
- Do you think the United States should invest in technology to reduce the military's dependence on fossil fuels? ("Climate Security")
- Do you support a US airstrike against the Iranian nuclear program? ("Iran")
- Do you support a US military intervention in Syria? ("Syria")
- Should the United States complete ratification of the ICC treaty? ("ICC")

Prior to each question, respondents were randomly assigned to one of four categories: the control group, the generic treatment group, the Democratic treatment group, or the Republican treatment group. Individuals in the control group received background details to identify the policy but no additional information prior to being asked their opinion. For example, the lead-in to the question about the ICC provided the founding date, a quotation from its mandate, and an explanation of its purpose. The lead-in for the Syria question noted the humanitarian crisis; the "China Pivot" question mentioned the rise of China.

In addition to these background details, individuals in each of the three treatment groups received additional information about expert opinion on these policies. Those in the generic treatment group received information attributed to experts but without reference to any partisan affiliation. Those in the Democratic treatment group and Republican treatment group received the same information attributed to Democratic experts and Republican experts, respectively. The information content was identical; only the attribution varied. The full question wording is available online in Supplement B.

Several aspects of the questions differed across issue areas, but as discussed below, looking across a wide variety of issues helps address concerns about these differences. For instance, using the Republican condition as an example, terms to describe experts included "Many Republican economists" for the "Cap and Trade" question; "Many Republican national security experts" for the "Iran" question; and "Many Republicans in Congress" for the "ICC" question. Each attribution was truthful, insofar as at least some on both sides of the aisle endorsed this expert view.

[7]The CCES survey consists of the common content and the group content, asked of a subsample of 1,000 individuals. We asked all experimental questions on two subsamples for a sample size of 2,000, with the exception of our question on ICSID, which was excluded from one module due to space constraints.

[8]We present and analyze the unweighted responses from the CCES. As discussed in detail in Supplement C online, the CCES itself is reasonably representative in its unweighted form, and weighting corrects mainly for an oversample on battleground congressional districts. While weighting data can lead to more representative estimates, weighting data in survey experiments can introduce imbalances across treatment assignments (Winship and Radbil 1994; Gelman 2007). In our sample, the trade-off was severe: weighting observations to adjust for geographic oversampling generated comparison groups that were less, not more, representative of the general population on other important demographic characteristics. In particular, Supplement C, Table 1, shows the negative consequence of weighting to correct for the geographic imbalance on the balance of women in our subsamples. The text of Supplement C provides additional detail concerning the trade-offs and the choice to use the unweighted data.

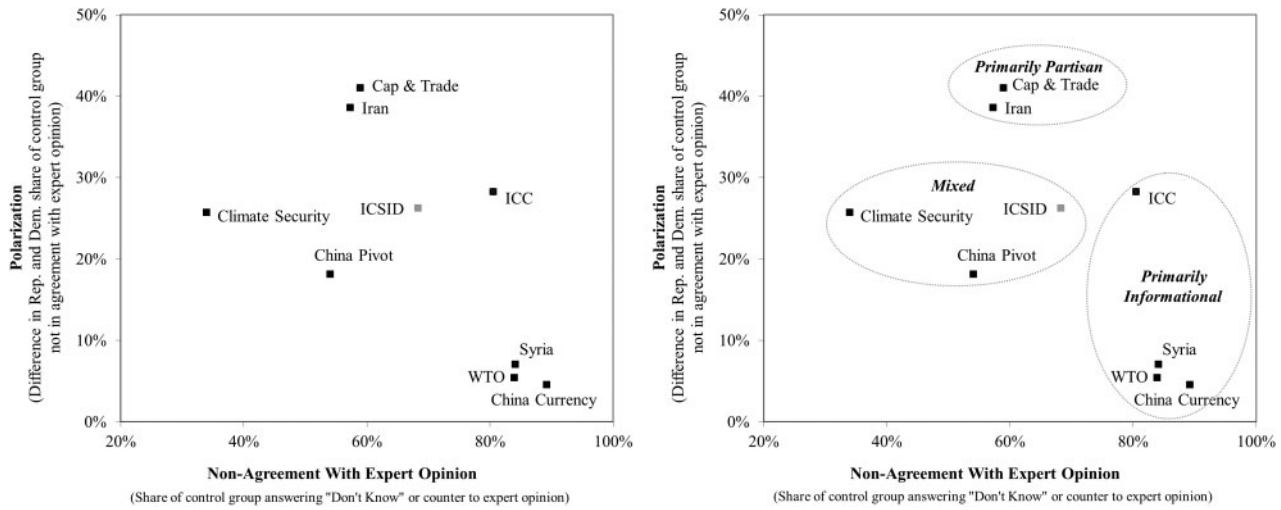

Figure 1. Distribution of issues by initial polarization and non-agreement with expert opinion (left panel) and clustering by expected message influence (right panel)

While the GOP and the Democratic Party do differ on many of these issues, in each case we were able to find partisans on either side of the issue. One might object that the cues are not purely factual and read more as opinions. But the design is closer to the type of cue voters are likely to encounter in the real world. Furthermore, even before the public outcry about "fake news" surrounding the 2016 election campaign, scholars had noted that political "facts" themselves are nearly always contested (Kuklinski et al. 1998). Partisanship can be a powerful filter, shaping perceptions even in the face of expert knowledge or basic facts, as research demonstrating partisan bias in perceptions of numerical facts like the number of casualties in the Iraq War illustrates (Berinsky 2009, 76–77; see also Darmofal 2005).

Each question had a set of appropriate response options specific to the issue. We then recoded individuals' responses—including those in the control group—on the basis of whether or not individuals matched the expert view provided in the treatment or responded "don't know." As part of the common content portion of the survey, respondents were asked how they identified themselves politically. We coded all self-identified Republicans and those Independents who lean toward the Republican Party as Republicans and all self-identified Democrats and Democratic leaners as Democrats. Since our primary concern here is partisan cuing versus expert-endorsed informational content, we exclude the approximately 250 individuals who did not identify with or lean toward either party (for a similar approach, see Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Guardino and Hayes forthcoming). Our final sample contained more than 1,750 observations for all issues besides ICSID (excluded from one subsample due to space constraints); the ICSID sample size was 884.

With our nine-issue setup, a significant question is how to classify these issues along our two dimensions—non-agreement and polarization. We use an empirical approach at the level of aggregate public opinion, drawing measures directly from the survey. This approach offers several advantages. First, it provides a snapshot of the backdrop against which the malleability of public opinion—the ultimate question in which we are interested—is measured. It is this distribution of public opinion at a given moment in time that elites hoping to shift the distribution of opinion confront. Second, the measure is self-updating, requiring no assumptions about the issues *ex ante* nor assumptions about individuals' prior exposure to messages concerning the issues. Individuals may have encountered little information, may retain outdated information, or may have been exposed to alternative messages. This potential variation in the flow of messages about expert views makes it prudent to avoid assumptions. Finally, across nine issues it would be difficult to generate an analytically comparable measure of elite discourse as it existed prior to the experiment and challenging to execute.[9]

Responses from the control group—individuals who received only a basic description of the policy issue—thus provide the baseline measure of the distribution of public opinion for each issue. Based on these data, the left panel of Figure 1 displays, for each issue, two dimensions of public opinion. The *x*-axis, labeled "Non-Agreement with Expert Opinion," measures the percentage of respondents from the control group who responded either with explicit opposition to the expert view or "don't know" (as mentioned, these two categories are disaggregated in our analysis to allow for the possibility that messages have heterogeneous effects on these two types of non-agreement). The *y*-axis, labeled "Polarization," measures the absolute difference in the percentage of Republicans whose responses are not in agreement with the expert opinion from the percentage of Democrats whose responses are not in agreement with the expert opinion.

Displayed on these two dimensions, the issues fall into three broad groupings. In the lower right corner lie a set of issues in which partisan divisions are minimal, especially relative to the extremely high proportion of respondents who are not aligned with the expert opinion. In all four cases—"Syria," "WTO," "China Currency," and "ICC"—more than 80 percent of those surveyed have opinions that are not in agreement with the elite view. The particular source of this disagreement varies. For "WTO," a large portion (69 percent) of this non-

[9]In the case of Druckman and Leeper (2012), for example, the experimental portion of the analysis covers two issues, and the analysis in which they directly measure elite framing and then conduct an exit poll experiment involves one issue. In Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013), two issues are involved.

Table 1. Baseline opinion by issue and expert view

Cluster	*Issue*	*Expert View*	*% Against Expert View*		*% Don't Know*		*% In Agreement with Expert*	
			Baseline Democrat	*Baseline Republican*	*Baseline Democrat*	*Baseline Republican*	*Baseline Democrat*	*Baseline Republican*
Primarily Informational	ICC	*Treaty requires safeguards*	66%	42%	27%	23%	7%	36%
	Syria	*Support intervention*	63%	59%	25%	21%	13%	20%
	China currency	*No retaliatory tariffs*	55%	68%	32%	24%	13%	8%
	WTO	*Increase use of dispute mechanism*	7%	26%	75%	61%	18%	13%
Mixed	Climate security	*Reduce military fuel dependence*	5%	31%	17%	17%	78%	52%
	China pivot	*Support relocation of naval force*	26%	16%	37%	28%	38%	56%
	ICSID	*ICSID benefits US*	17%	45%	40%	38%	43%	17%
Primarily Partisan	Cap & Trade	*Institute a Cap and Trade system*	11%	62%	30%	20%	59%	18%
	Iran	*Oppose airstrike*	17%	58%	23%	20%	60%	22%

agreement comes in the form of a non-opinion, but for "Syria," "China Currency," and the "ICC" the majority of individuals (from 55 percent to 62 percent) are in direct disagreement. But all four share the characteristic of high levels of disagreement regardless of the party identification of respondents. For "Syria," "WTO," and "China Currency," polarization is very low (<10 percent). Polarization is higher for the "ICC," but still less than "Iran" or "Cap and Trade."[10] These latter two issues (at the top of the panel) stand out as policy realms in which partisan division dominates. Their share of respondents who are "non-agreers" is moderate compared to other issues; in both cases, just below 60 percent of those surveyed offered responses not in agreement with the expert opinion. It is the characteristic of being highly divided along partisan lines (with a 40- and 30-percentage-point difference, respectively) that differentiates them from the other issues.[11] A third set of issues falls to the left of these two more clearly defined groups: "Climate Security" and "China Pivot." Both share moderate levels of polarization but do differ in terms of the proportion of respondents in non-agreement with the expert opinion; of all the issues, "Climate Security" received the highest proportion of baseline support for the policy also commonly supported by experts. "ICSID" (in gray, given its lower *N*) stands out as a central point in the distribution—as baseline responses show only a moderate partisan divide and moderate non-agreement with the expert policy recommendation.

Our theory suggests that for issues with strong initial polarization, message content will be viewed primarily through a partisan lens—either negatively or positively. Thus, as illustrated in the right panel of Figure 1, we treat "Iran" and "Cap and Trade" as a group of "Primarily Partisan" issues in terms of the expected elite cue influence. For issues with high levels of non-agreement but low partisanship, we predict that the informational content of the elite message will be stronger. As shown in the right panel, we thus group "WTO," "Syria," "China Currency," and the "ICC" together and label this set of issues "Primarily Informational."

Finally, our theory predicts mixed effects of messages for issues in which both non-agreement and partisan division is low to moderate. Here we group together "Climate Security," "China Pivot," and "ICSID" and label them "Mixed." While "ICSID" is centrally located in the issues, its placement suggests that neither partisan nor non-agreement dimensions predominate. On this characteristic, it is closer to "Climate Security" and "China Pivot" than to the other issues, although we would expect differences between the issues in this "Mixed" category. In this category, both partisan and informational cues should influence opinion, but information may start to weigh more heavily for "ICSID," which of all the "Mixed" issues starts out furthest from expert opinion (because non-agreement is highest for ICSID among those issues classified as "Mixed," though it is slightly more polarized). In contrast, "Climate Security," where admittedly the question wording lends itself to agreement with the expert opinion, should have smaller effects overall.[12] In fact, the initial distribution for "Climate Security" already falls so close to the expert view that there is limited room for movement. Table 1 offers a summary of each issue's classification, expert view, and (by partisan type) the baseline distribution of responses to the issue specific policy question (full text available online in Supplement B).

[10]The scale of the *y*-axis in Figure 1 highlights the notably higher levels of partisan disagreement on ICC relative to other issues classified as "Primarily Informational" and may raise concerns that ICC should instead be classified as "Mixed." Given its extremely high levels of non-agreement, however (compare, for example, the 32 percent non-agreement for the "Mixed" issue of Climate Security to the 87 percent non-agreement for ICC), ICC falls more naturally in the "Primarily Informational" group. Clustering analysis supports this classification. We note also that shifting ICC to the "Mixed" category would not overthrow the results, since its behavior would be driven by its pull toward the high non-agreement end of the spectrum.

[11]Although Syria and Iran are both cases of potential military intervention, Iran has been framed as a national security threat, whereas Syria in 2012 was discussed in primarily humanitarian terms. It is possible, as we note below, that bipartisan war-weariness accounts for the lack of polarization on a less threat-driven potential intervention, such as Syria as opposed to Iran.

[12]The information treatment in this question highlighted climate change as a potential threat to national security (see Supplement B online for full question wording). On the security implications of climate change, see Busby (2008). We sought to ask a security-framed reference to climate change. We chose not to ask a question about using force to intervene where climate change led to conflict, because views about the use of force might confound the results. Thus, we chose a more technocratic, but still security-based, question, asking respondents if they supported investment in technology to make the military more independent of fossil fuels. Since it is likely that many people would support policies that give the military more leeway, however, the proportion of those in agreement is likely to be relatively high.

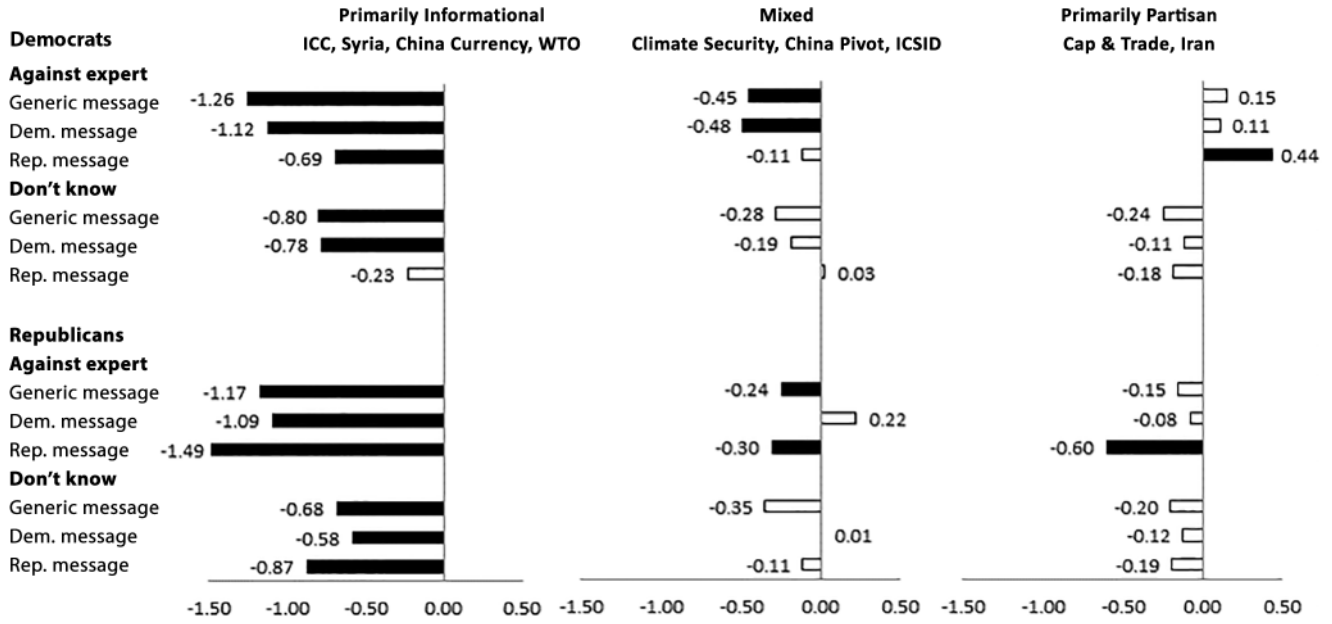

Figure 2. Multinomial analysis of survey responses by issue category (Dark bars represent significant coefficients ($p < .10$), light bars insignificant coefficients)

The grouping of issues—especially the incorporation of "ICSID" in the "Mixed" category and ICC in the "Primarily Informational" category—is further supported by the results of clustering analysis, a technique for grouping data (Kaufman and Rousseeuw 1990; Everitt et al. 2010). This technique returns the same three clusters, both with or without the inclusion of ICSID.[13] Additionally, the distribution of issues across our categories alleviates concerns about question wording, including variation in the complexity of the issue or the identity of the cue-giver. Complexity cuts across our categories: for example, Syria and Iran are relatively simple questions, but one falls into the "Primarily Partisan" category and the other in "Primarily Informational." Similarly, "China Currency," "Cap and Trade," and "ICSID" are all relatively complex but fall into three different categories. One might be concerned that cues that mention Congress might function differently than those mentioning non-political experts; but, for example, the ICC question, which mentions Congress, exhibits a similar pattern to other questions in the "Primarily Informational" category.

Analysis

We test our predictions using a multinomial logit analysis split by partisanship (alternative tests and results are described below). Splitting the sample between Democrats and Republicans allows for fully independent estimation of partisan responses to the different types of expert attribution—generic, Democratic, and Republican.

The use of the multinomial logit offers particular advantages given our theoretical setup. A multinomial logit allows the dependent variable to take three values: an opinion that matches the provided expert opinion, an opinion explicitly against that opinion, or "don't know," allowing for independent estimates of the influence of the treatments on the different responses. Barring clear theoretical expectations of ordering in the responses, the multinomial logit is the most conservative modeling choice since it imposes no assumptions about the relationship among the responses (Long 1997, 149; Williams 2006; for a similar argument in the context of foreign policy, see Fordham and Kleinberg forthcoming, 14–15; in the context of war, see also Berinsky 2009, 299; also 251–54).

Overview of Results

Before delving into the details of the results, it is useful to keep in mind the broad pattern we expect across issues. Our hypotheses predict differential effects according to issue context; for issues with high non-agreement and low polarization, we expect all information-rich messages, even those with cross-party attribution, to shift opinion in the same direction. For highly polarized issues, we expect only partisan endorsements, in line with partisan expectations, to be effective. For those issues in between, we expect information-rich messages with either generic or partisan attribution to be effective but not across partisan lines. As a first test of the importance of context on the varied efficacy of expert messages, we pool issues according to the two dimensions of non-agreement and polarization as displayed in Figure 1: "Primarily Informational" ("ICC," "Syria," "China Currency," and "WTO"), "Mixed" ("China Security," "China Pivot," and "ICSID"), and "Primarily Partisan" ("Cap and Trade" and "Iran"). The multinomial analysis of these pooled survey responses (full results online in Supplement A, Table 4) include issue-specific fixed effects and clustered standard errors.[14] Figure 2 offers an overview of the results by depicting the direction, size, and significance of the coefficients for each message type. Here the dark bars represent

[13]Due to the small sample size's vulnerability to initial seeding, we ran multiple iterations of the STATA kmedians cluster command to ensure selection of the most common outcome.

[14]It is important to note that because our categorization of the issues is empirical (that is, based on measured baseline opinion), there is an imbalance in the issue areas and thus observations in each category when the issues are pooled. The pooled results are intended to give a broad overview, but the individual results broken down by issue area in Tables 1 and 3 are the more demanding and complete test of our hypotheses. For example, the individual issue results indicate that the generic movement seen in the "Primarily Informational" category still stands when these issues are not pooled.

significant coefficients ($p < .10$), the light bars insignificant coefficients.

The results in Figure 2 yield a striking pattern. On the left side, the large black bars, all moving in the same direction, show the effectiveness of all versions of the message on opinion. For "Primarily Informational" issues, generic and partisan messages have a large and similar influence on opinion, regardless of partisan identification. In contrast, on the right-hand side, results from analysis of survey responses on "Primarily Partisan" issues suggest that only the partisan message matters and in countervailing ways for Republicans and Democrats. In the middle "Mixed" category, generic messages work as well as Democratic messages for Democrats and Republican messages for Republicans, but partisan messages no longer work across party lines to move opinion toward an expert view.[15] Note that if we analyzed these issues individually, we might miss this systematic variation in treatment effects. Lacking consideration of context, analysis of issues falling into the latter two categories might suggest that cross-party messaging is ineffective or that only partisan attribution, not the information itself, matters. Instead, we argue that the issue context sets the limits for how much generic elite cues can move attitudes.

Although pooling responses by issue category offers a convenient way to summarize the findings, analysis at the individual issue level offers the strongest test of our predictions. Table 2 reports the multinomial logit results by issue category and stacks results for Democrats on top of the results for Republicans. The base message serves as the omitted explanatory variable, and responses in agreement with the provided expert opinion serve as the omitted response category. For each issue, we examine the size and direction of treatment effects, comparing the generically-attributed message versus the partisan-attributed messages. To illustrate the effects, we use the Clarify package (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003) to estimate predicted probabilities for each condition and present the predicted shift in opinion, for both Democrats and Republicans, in Table 3 (a similar table using raw response data appears online in Supplement A, Table 3). In all cases, tests of significance use the more conservative two-tailed test. Although theoretically our expectations for the generic and same-party messages point in one direction, we allow for the possibility that respondents could move in the opposite direction of a cue. Finally, below we offer three graphical examples, one drawn from each category, to illustrate the effect of the differently attributed messages on opinion.

Although Table 2 contains a sea of coefficients, looking broadly across the categories in the table provides an overall picture of how the effect of messages varies in accordance with our predictions. On the left side of Table 2, issues in the "Primarily Informational" category show substantial and significant effects for most treatments, for both types of partisans, with all treatments moving respondents in the same direction. As we move from left to right, both the strength and consistency of treatments diminish, particularly the strength of the generic expert-attributed messages, until only partisan treatment effects remain for the "Primarily Partisan" category. For these issues, treatments move partisans in opposite directions. Note also that while message effects systematically vary across each individual issue, the message remained the same within each treatment and only attribution varied. Thus, "null" findings for some attributions are unlikely to be the result of an ineffective informational content but instead the result of the attribution itself in the context of issue type. Indeed, at least one version of the message moved attitudes for each issue. We now discuss the details of how messages operate in each category of issues.

"Primarily Informational" Issues

In the "Primarily Informational" category, the "ICC," "Syria," "China Currency," and the "WTO" shared two characteristics. First, control group responses showed that the majority were not in agreement with the expert opinion that would be offered in the survey treatments. Second, polarization was relatively low. Here, our theory predicts that both generic and partisan attributions of expert opinion will be strongly influential; and indeed, with just a few exceptions noted below, both generic and partisan treatments significantly moved individuals in the same direction, toward the provided expert opinion. The treatments either decreased the probability of a response directly counter to the expert view, decreased the probability of a "don't know" response, or both.

Consider, for example, the estimated treatment effects for "China Currency." As denoted by the negative, significant coefficients for all three treatments (generic, Democratic, and Republican), the provision of additional information, regardless of attribution, significantly decreased the probability of providing a response counter to expert opinion among both Democrats and Republicans. With one exception (Republican treatment on Democrats), treatments also decreased the probability of answering "don't know." The predicted shift from the treatments was substantial, with 12- to 23-percentage-point increases in support for the expert view that current US non-retaliatory policy should be continued (see Table 3). Notably, the generic treatment "outperformed" partisan treatments for Democrats and was on par for Republicans in terms of moving individuals to support the expert opinion. Partisan attribution added little to the shift in the distribution of responses. For example, the probability that a Republican would recommend imposing tariffs in response to China's currency manipulation was .68 among the control group. This probability dropped to .47 (a 21-percentage-point decline) among those receiving the generic expert information treatment. Predicted declines were only slightly larger among those receiving information attributed to Democratic experts (a 24-percentage-point drop) or Republican experts (a 25-percentage-point drop). To summarize, support for imposing tariffs dropped by almost a third due to information provision, regardless of attribution. Democrats were similarly moved, albeit primarily by the generic treatment, which resulted in a predicted 26-percentage-point drop compared to 15 percentage points and 21 percentage points for the Democratic-attributed and Republican-attributed messages, respectively.

Results from ICC responses follow a similar pattern. Base disagreement with the provided expert opinion (that the treaty needs safeguards for US soldiers) was high

[15]The online supplemental appendix presents a variety of alternative multinomial logit models, including a multi-level model perspective using issue groups. Supplement A provides not only results from a multi-level multinomial logit including all nine issues and three clusters (Table 6a) but also variants that exclude ICSID or the WTO (Tables 6b and 6c, respectively). Although there is some variation in particular effects, the overarching story holds across the three issue clusters (all messages effective for "Primarily Informational"; only partisan messages effective for "Primarily Partisan"; and some generic messages effective, though not consistently so, for the "Mixed").

Table 2. Issue-specific multinomial analyses of survey responses

	Primarily informational								Mixed						Primarily partisan			
Democrats	ICC		Syria		China currency		WTO		Climate security		China pivot		ICSID		Cap & Trade		Iran	
Against expert	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*
Generic message	−1.40	0.31***	−0.62	0.26**	−1.69	0.26***	−1.26	0.46***	0.02	0.39	−0.38	0.24	−1.19	0.46***	0.35	0.27	−0.02	0.25
Dem. message	−1.48	0.31***	−0.50	0.26*	−1.15	0.26***	−0.72	0.39*	−0.13	0.42	−0.51	0.25**	−0.84	0.42**	0.12	0.29	0.07	0.24
Rep. message	−0.82	0.33**	−0.07	0.28	−1.16	0.26***	−0.26	0.42	−0.50	0.46	0.04	0.23	−0.23	0.41	1.06	0.27***	−0.16	0.26
Constant	2.18	0.26***	1.60	0.20***	1.46	0.20***	−0.99	0.29***	−2.66	0.29***	−0.39	0.16**	−0.92	0.26***	−1.63	0.21***	−1.27	0.18***
Don't know																		
Generic message	−0.60	0.33*	−0.85	0.31***	−0.92	0.26***	−0.83	0.22***	−0.41	0.26	−0.25	0.21	−0.24	0.28	−0.25	0.21	−0.23	0.24
Dem. message	−0.66	0.32**	−0.29	0.30	−0.86	0.27***	−1.07	0.22***	−0.09	0.25	−0.31	0.21	−0.11	0.28	−0.02	0.21	−0.23	0.23
Rep. message	0.02	0.35	−0.19	0.32	−0.43	0.27	−0.25	0.24	−0.17	0.26	0.03	0.21	0.31	0.29	0.07	0.22	−0.42	0.24*
Constant	1.28	0.27***	0.66	0.23***	0.92	0.21***	1.40	0.17***	−1.53	0.17***	−0.03	0.15	−0.08	0.20	−0.67	0.14***	−0.96	0.16***
Obs.	*941*		*942*		*943*		*940*		*945*		*940*		*479*		*942*		*940*	
	Primarily informational								Mixed						Primarily partisan			
Republicans	ICC		Syria		China currency		WTO		Climate security		China pivot		ICSID		Cap & Trade		Iran	
Against expert	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*	*Coef.*	*s.e.*
Generic message	−1.41	0.26***	−0.16	0.27	−1.43	0.33***	−1.95	0.36***	−0.34	0.24	−0.28	0.30	−0.10	0.41	0.04	0.28	−0.34	0.26
Dem. message	−1.32	0.28***	−0.06	0.26	−1.61	0.33***	−2.01	0.37***	0.08	0.23	0.47	0.28*	0.01	0.42	0.03	0.28	−0.17	0.26
Rep. message	−1.51	0.26***	−0.51	0.26*	−1.70	0.32***	−2.93	0.42***	−0.17	0.24	−0.36	0.31	−0.62	0.40	−0.70	0.26***	−0.51	0.25*
Constant	0.15	0.17	1.10	0.19***	2.12	0.27***	0.72	0.26***	−0.52	0.16***	−1.26	0.20***	0.98	0.30***	1.26	0.20***	1.00	0.18***
Don't know																		
Generic message	−0.73	0.28***	0.10	0.32	−0.87	0.36***	−1.17	0.28***	−0.13	0.29	−0.41	0.25*	−0.47	0.43	−0.24	0.35	−0.15	0.32
Dem. message	−0.08	0.27	−0.28	0.32	−0.93	0.36***	−1.16	0.28***	0.02	0.29	0.10	0.24	−0.28	0.44	−0.03	0.34	−0.21	0.32
Rep. message	−0.66	0.27**	−0.19	0.31	−1.07	0.36***	−1.52	0.28***	0.00	0.28	−0.13	0.24	−0.40	0.40	−0.51	0.32	0.08	0.29
Constant	−0.45	0.21**	0.05	0.23	1.05	0.30***	1.54	0.23***	−1.11	0.20***	−0.68	0.16***	0.82	0.31***	0.15	0.24	−0.08	0.23
Obs.	*735*		*738*		*736*		*736*		*735*		*734*		*372*		*735*		*738*	

Omitted category "With Expert," response matches provided expert opinion. Asterisks denote the following *p*-values: *<.10, **<.05 and ***<.01. Two-tailed test of significance.

Table 3. Predicted effect of generic-, Democratic-, and Republican-attributed messages on survey responses

	Primarily informational				*Mixed*			*Primarily partisan*	
% **Against Expert**	*ICC*	*Syria*	*China currency*	*WTO*	*Climate security*	*China pivot*	*ICSID*	*Cap & Trade*	*Iran*
Base Democrat	**66**%	**62**%	**55**%	**7**%	**6**%	**26**%	**18**%	**12**%	**17**%
Δ Dem. receiving generic message	−23%***	−3%	−26%***	−3%	1%	−5%	−11%**	5%	1%
Δ Dem. receiving Democratic message	−24%***	−8%*	−15%***	0%	−1%	−6%	−9%*	1%	2%
Δ Dem. receiving Republican message	−20%***	1%	−21%***	0%	−2%	0%	−5%	15%***	−1%
Base Republican	**41**%	**59**%	**68**%	**27**%	**31**%	**16**%	**45**%	**62**%	**58**%
Δ Rep. receiving generic message	−23%***	−5%	−21%***	−16%***	−6%	−2%	5%	4%	−7%
Δ Rep. receiving Democratic message	−25%***	2%	−24%***	−16%***	1%	7%	5%	1%	−2%
Δ Rep. receiving Republican message	−25%***	−10%*	−25%***	−21%***	−4%	−4%	−8%	−11%**	−14%***
	Primarily informational				*Mixed*			*Primarily partisan*	
% **Don't know**	*ICC*	*Syria*	*China currency*	*WTO*	*Climate security*	*China pivot*	*ICSID*	*Cap & Trade*	*Iran*
Base Democrat	**27**%	**25**%	**32**%	**74**%	**17**%	**37**%	**39**%	**30**%	**23**%
Δ Dem. receiving generic message	12%***	−6%	3%	−13%***	−5%	−2%	0%	−6%	−4%
Δ Dem. receiving Democratic message	11%***	2%	−1%	−21%***	−1%	−3%	2%	−1%	−4%
Δ Dem. receiving Republican message	16%***	−2%	9%**	−3%	−2%	0%	10%	−4%	−6%
Base Republican	**23**%	**21**%	**24**%	**60**%	**17**%	**28**%	**38**%	**20**%	**20**%
Δ Rep. receiving generic message	−4%	4%	5%	−7%	0%	−6%	−9%	−4%	2%
Δ Rep. receiving Democratic message	8%*	−3%	6%	−7%	0%	0%	−7%	−1%	−1%
Δ Rep. receiving Republican message	−2%	3%	5%	−12%**	1%	−1%	0%	0%	8%*
	Primarily informational				*Mixed*			*Primarily partisan*	
% **In agreement with expert opinion**	*ICC*	*Syria*	*China currency*	*WTO*	*Climate security*	*China pivot*	*ICSID*	*Cap & Trade*	*Iran*
Base Democrat	**8**%	**13**%	**13**%	**19**%	**78**%	**38**%	**43**%	**58**%	**60**%
Δ Dem. receiving generic message	12%***	9%***	23%***	16%***	4%	7%*	11%	1%	3%
Δ Dem. receiving Democratic message	13%***	5%	16%***	20%***	2%	9%**	6%	0%	2%
Δ Dem. receiving Republican message	4%	1%	12%***	4%	4%	−1%	−4%	−11%**	7%
Base Republican	**36**%	**20**%	**8**%	**13**%	**52**%	**56**%	**17**%	**18**%	**22**%
Δ Rep. receiving generic message	27%***	1%	16%***	23%***	6%	9%*	4%	0%	5%
Δ Rep. receiving Democratic message	17%***	2%	18%***	23%***	−1%	−6%	1%	0%	3%
Δ Rep. receiving Republican message	27%***	7%	20%***	34%***	3%	5%	8%	11%**	6%

Asterisks denote the following *p*-values: *<.10, **<.05, and ***<.01. Two-tailed test of significance.

among Democrats and Republicans (66 percent and 41 percent, respectively), but all three messages—generic, Democratic, and Republican—resulted in substantial declines (ranging from –20 to –25 percentage points) in the proportions of Democrats and Republicans in disagreement with the provided expert opinion. Fewer than 8 percent of Democrats in the control group provided a response aligned with elite opinion. Both the generic- and Democratic-attributed treatment raised the percentage by 12 and 13 percentage points, respectively. Republicans were already more closely aligned with elite opinion, with 36 percent of the control group providing a response in line with the experts. Yet, again the generic- and Republican-attributed messages dramatically increased support by 27 percentage points, and even the Democrat-attributed message increased support by 17 percentage points.

In the case of the WTO, the source of non-alignment with experts was primarily from non-opinion. Only 7 percent of Democrats in the control group directly expressed opposition to increased use of the WTO mechanism, with 74 percent responding "don't know"; yet the multinomial results in Table 2 show that both the generic-attributed message and the Democratic-attributed message lowered the likelihood of responding against the provided expert opinion and the likelihood of responding "don't know." For Republicans, 27 percent of the control group expressed opposition and 60 percent responded "don't know"; the results in Table 2 show that all three treatments significantly and similarly diminished the likelihood of both types of response. The net result in terms of predicted probability was to increase support for the use of the WTO between 16 and 20 percentage points for Democrats (excluding the insignificant effect of the Republican-attributed message) and between 23 and 34 percentage points for Republicans. Public opinion on relatively obscure policies often goes unstudied. Because of the very high percentage of non-opinion holders in the control group, this experiment offers some insight into the effect of the treatments on the "don't knows." The results suggest that non-opinion does not necessarily exclude individuals from responding to generic or even out-party information, and more specifically that partisans without strong opinions may follow endorsements from not only their co-partisans but others as well.

Syria: Findings and Follow-Up

The one outlier in the "Primarily Informational" category was Syria. Treatment effects for Syria were much smaller compared to "China Currency," the "ICC," and the "WTO." However, even on the issue of intervention—an issue with a salient recent history—a generic message results in a small shift in opinion. Notably, the generic message is strongest among Democrats and leads to a significant increase (9 percentage points) in support for intervention in Syria, despite strong opposition to intervention in the control group.

It is important to note that the information treatment for Syria, which stressed the potential utility of air strikes and aid in bringing down the Assad regime and ending the humanitarian crisis, was crafted in the context of the crisis in 2012. As a matter of substantive interest and as a check on external validity, we reran the Syria question during the August 2013 crisis over the Assad regime's alleged use of chemical weapons. The follow-up experiment was run by the GfK Group between August 30 and September 4, after the chemical attack became public and when it seemed that the United States was on the verge of airstrikes. For comparability, we employed the same question wording even though the crisis was no longer framed in humanitarian terms. Comparison of the control groups shows a slight change in the baseline distribution. While this baseline was unchanged among Republicans, Democrats in 2013 expressed less direct opposition to intervention in Syria and more uncertainty than Democrats in 2012. The net result served to diminish partisan polarization to nearly zero, while retaining widespread (> 80 percent) non-alignment with the expert opinion. But while treatment effects are similar for all types of messages, they are statistically and substantively close to zero (results available online in Supplement A, Tables 2 and 3).

Given the possibility that respondents might encounter information about Syria in the real world that might contaminate the experiment (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 12), the similarity between our Syria findings in a low-salience period (fall 2012) and a high-salience period (August 2013) suggests that either respondents were not particularly influenced by news about Syria in August 2013, or that they held strong predispositions. In the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, one might expect that bipartisan war-weariness made it difficult to move attitudes about another military intervention (and that rally effects during crises are not automatic). We explore this issue further online in Supplement A, Table 5 (and accompanying discussion) and find that war-weariness was indeed a significant factor for responses concerning Iran and Syria, and affected Democrats and Republicans quite similarly in the Syria case. Thus, war-weariness may explain the lack of movement for Syria especially. Such an effect suggests that other dimensions of issue context can be important for understanding the effect of cues, although we bracket these for future research.

"Primarily Partisan" Issues

Where the "Primarily Informational" issues showed strong generic-attribution effects, the "Primarily Partisan" issues on the right side of Table 2—"Cap and Trade" and "Iran"—show only partisan-based responses, as expected. In the case of "Cap and Trade," Democrats responded strongly to the Republican-attributed expert message, but in a manner that increased, rather than decreased, disagreement with the provided expert opinion: For Democrats, the multinomial results show a positive and significant relationship (+1.06, s.e. .27) between the likelihood of providing a response against the provided expert opinion, while the same relationship is negative and significant (–0.70, s.e. .26) for Republicans. Translated into predicted probabilities, the gain in support from Republicans hearing the Republican-attributed message (an 11-percentage-point increase) is almost exactly negated by the loss in support from Democrats hearing the same Republican-attributed message (an 11-percentage-point decline). In other words, in the face of a Republican cue, Democrats are far more likely to hold an opposing opinion, despite Cap and Trade's affinity with Democratic predispositions. This out-party "backlash" effect among Democrats is stronger than expected and perhaps the result of the extreme polarization of this issue. But this result merits further exploration since it is somewhat curious to see Democrats turn against their own predispositions merely because of a Republican

endorsement of an elite view that conforms to those predispositions.[16] In the case of "Iran," responses were more tempered. With one exception, Democrats' opposition responses did not statistically change between the control group and various treatment groups, but Republican opposition to the expert position declined substantially (–0.51, s.e. .5, or a predicted drop of 14 percentage points) among the group that received Republican expert-attributed information.

"Mixed" Issues

Finally, the "Mixed" category of issues ("Climate Security," "China Pivot," and "ICSID"), characterized by medium levels of both polarization and proportion in non-agreement with experts, shows a combination of partisan effects, informational effects, and null effects. For "Climate Security," no treatment had a significant effect on the probability of providing an answer against the provided expert opinion, using the more conservative two-tailed test. For Democrats, the generic message did diminish the probability of answering "don't know," but the effect is small and only significant using a one-tailed test. "China Pivot" showed some informational effects for both Republicans and Democrats. Information attributed to a generic expert directly diminished the propensity to respond "don't know" among Republicans (–0.41, s.e. .25). More subtly, among Democrats, the combined decline—albeit slight—in non-opinion and "against expert" responses generated a significant, positive shift in support for the provided expert opinion (the omitted category in the multinomial logit analysis). In terms of predicted probabilities, the generic message resulted in a 9-percentage point-increase in Republican agreement with expert opinion and a 7-percentage-point increase among Democrats. Partisan effects were stronger, both among Democrats and Republicans. Information provided by a Democratic-attributed expert slightly diminished the likelihood of responding counter to the provided expert view among Democrats (–0.51, s.e. .25), but increased the likelihood among Republicans (+0.47, s.e. .28). That Democrats and Republicans were moved in opposing directions by the same message is another instance of an out-party "backlash" effect, although a more surprising result given that "China Pivot" (unlike "Cap and Trade") does not exhibit particularly high levels of polarization. However, Republican backlash appears negligible in terms of predicted probabilities. Most of the movement is among Democrats for whom a Democratic-attributed message results in a statistically significant 9-percentage-point increase in responses that agree with experts.

"ICSID" similarly shows a mix of partisan and informational aspects but only among Democrats. Both the generic message and the Democrat-attributed message lowered the likelihood of responses counter to expert opinion that ensuring compliance would benefit the US (–1.19, s.e. .46, and –0.84, s.e. .42, respectively), but the same message attributed to Republican experts did not shift opinion significantly. Democrats were already less likely to provide a response counter to elite opinion (only 18 percent of the control group did so). But the generic message and the Democratic-attributed message lowered the percentage even more (by 11 percentage points and 9 percentage points, respectively), leaving few Democrats in those treatments groups directly opposed to the elite position.

Summary

Pulling back to consider the results as a whole, the strength and consistency of treatment effects varied across issues, generally according to our expectation. For the "Primarily Informational" cluster, generic and partisan messages are effective at moving public opinion for both Republicans and Democrats; for the "Mixed" cluster, some generic messages move individuals but such messages are no longer consistently effective; and for the "Primarily Partisan" cluster, only partisan messages are effective (and may in fact create counter-effects). Overall, information attributed to generic experts has a role to play, but its importance diminishes in the face of already-present divides.

To illustrate visually the pattern of cuing effects across issues, Figure 3 offers a pictorial representation of the substantive differences across categories using three representative issues: "China Currency" for "Primarily Informational," "China Pivot" for "Mixed," and "Cap and Trade" for "Primarily Partisan."[17] Democratic respondents are depicted with blue squares, Republican respondents with red triangles. The arrows denote a significant change in the predicted probabilities between the base (B) and the generic (G), Democratic (D), or Republican (R) expert treatments. Shifts toward the lower left corner indicate movement in the distribution of opinion closer to the expert position: (0,0) would represent the absence of "don't knows" (*y*-axis) as well as the absence of individuals stating positions counter to the provided expert opinion (*x*-axis). For "China Currency," the arrows are long, numerous, and pointing left. In other words, each attribution treatment—generic, Democratic, or Republican—results in a significant and substantive shift toward expert opinion. In comparison, on the issue of reorienting US naval resources ("China Pivot"), our prediction was "Mixed." The generic message results in a significant, but much smaller, shift in opinion toward experts among both Democrats and Republicans. However, only Democrats are moved by Democratic-attributed information. Finally, in the case of support for "Cap and Trade," as predicted, only partisan attribution matters. The two clashing arrows represent the effect of the Republican-attributed message, which led Republicans toward expert opinion and Democrats away.

There are alternative hypotheses for how expert information and endorsements would shape attitudes across international issues. First, one might expect the pattern to fall along a security-economic axis. Perhaps security issues are more polarized and thus subject to partisan cue-taking, whereas international economic or institutional issues tend to be more cross-cutting or technocratic. Yet variation in the effects of elite cues appears to cut across security and economic issues: some issues, like Iran, exhibit far greater partisan-based effects than an issue like Syria, where there is less polarization to begin with. Similarly, "Cap and Trade" showed highly partisan effects while other economic or international institutional issues did not. Another alternative is the expectation that

[16]Interestingly, Berinsky's (2009, 123) Korea experiment found that Democratic partisan cues did not increase support among Democrats, and Republican support prompted a negative response among Democrats. Democrats' predispositions were already against intervention, whereas here Democrats are naturally more supportive of Cap and Trade.

[17]Online Supplement A, Figures 1–3, provide illustrations for each of the nine issues.

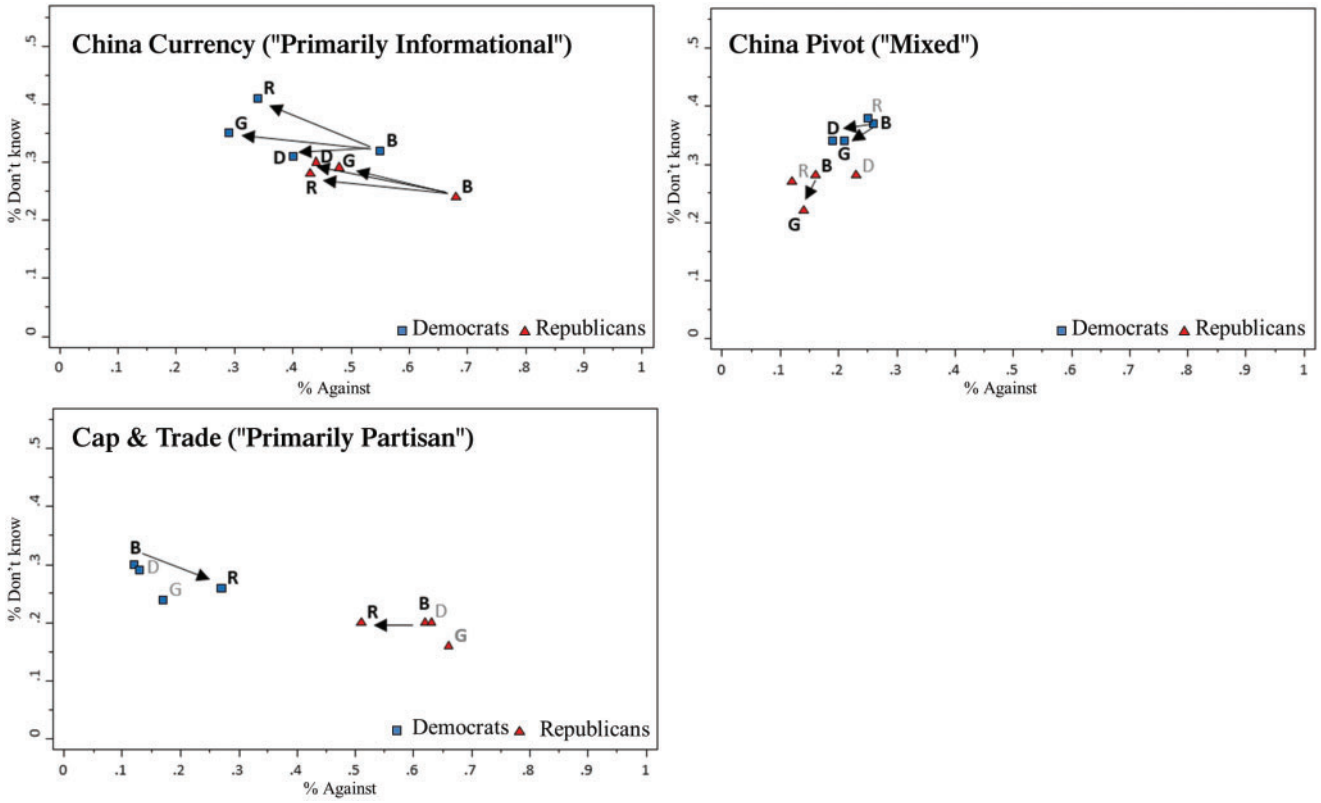

Figure 3. Movement in predicted probability of responses for China Currency ("Primarily Informational"); China Pivot ("Mixed"); and Cap and Trade ("Primarily Partisan"). Note: Bold letters represent significant difference between base control group (B) and treatment group: Generic (G), Democratic (D), or Republican (R). ■=Democrats; ▲=Republicans. For ease of comparison, figures are similarly scaled

partisanship is pervasive. But the pervasiveness of partisan-based effects is belied by the issues that showed movement in the same direction in the face of generic -and partisan-based cues.

Conclusion

Existing research on public opinion and international relations tends to focus on single issue areas. It usually treats information- and partisan-based cues as separate, or potentially rival, determinants of mass attitudes. We explored the conditions under which these different aspects of elite cues shape public opinion. The common design of our experiments, and the internal validity that each experiment provides, highlight an important concern about external validity in survey experiments: the effect of elite cues varies across issues. Any one experiment on a given issue may capture effects that are specific to that issue at a given moment. But while our approach has these advantages, we acknowledge that our analysis is only one step toward understanding how elite cues vary across issues. The breadth of issues addressed here—and the data and analytical requirements for doing so—impose limits on how far we can push the data. Furthermore, although all of our treatment conditions involve an expert attribution—a choice designed to hold the presence of experts constant in the treatments and to keep the number of conditions manageable to maximize statistical power—future research might explore the "generic" attribution and the resulting "primarily informational" movement more fully. In a "generic" expert treatment, it would be interesting to probe whether respondents might be moved by deference to an expert voice alone regardless of content, by the specific information provided, or a combination of both. Overall, future research should be attentive to issue context and can further probe the limits of elite cue-giving.

In the real world, the systematic variation in the effect of elite messages across issues helps explain why elites can sometimes use expert information to lead public opinion—but often cannot (Drezner 2017; Nichols 2017). On some issues, partisan polarization generates headwinds that dampen the effect of information and amplify the role of partisan messengers. We also find suggestive evidence for two issues—"Cap and Trade," a highly polarized issue, and "China Pivot," which does not yet exhibit such a high degree of polarization—that there may be an "out-party backlash" effect, whereby respondents react negatively to information provided by the other party, even if the information conforms to the view more generally ascribed to their own party. These effects deserve further exploration. But such effects may suggest extreme instances of partisan cue-taking.

For policymakers who aim to shift public opinion, or more concretely, to mobilize support for legislation to address policy problems, the era of highly polarized politics and concerns about "fake news" often makes it seem more challenging to use insights from an expert consensus to sway public attitudes. Yet providing information stemming from an expert view can influence mass attitudes on international issues, as long as polarization on that issue is low. Of course, raising an issue in elite discourse may increase its salience to the point that it becomes more polarized. A delicate balancing act may be required to ensure that information effects remain broadly effective across a politically diverse population. Conversely, those hoping to keep an

expert opinion from taking hold in the public consciousness would do well to polarize it (as the Cap and Trade example illustrates). But while challenging, the possibility of "educating" or moving the public is not hopeless. Both researchers and policymakers must remember, however, that messages are not communicated in a vacuum, and their effects will depend on aspects of public opinion that vary across international issues.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary Information is available at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/KI2IFR and the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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