

The American Flag and the Presidential Election of 1988: Reconsidering the
Importance of Valence Issues

BY

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Abstract

In the 1988 Presidential election George W. Bush used the issue of the American flag as a way to demonstrate his own patriotism while undermining Dukakis'. This strategy relied on valence issues, which are issues that are generally considered to be desirable by most voters. Some authors contend that these valence issues are important because they give a candidate an additional advantage that is separate from his/her other issue stances. In this thesis, I contend that valence issues are not considered in isolation, but are instead integral to how voters determine a candidate's ability to handle current and future crises. Using the 1988 National Election Study (NES) a series of regression equations were estimated which found support for this interpretation, adding to our understanding of the importance valence issues and the American flag. Additional studies are needed in order to elucidate these results, but this thesis serves as a guide for future research.

1 Introduction: The Political Use of the American Flag

A recent article in the New York Times suggests that the American flag is a “symbolic bludgeon” used by Republicans to demonstrate to voters that Democrats are somehow “out of sync with the nation’s values” (Toner 2008). One psychologist and political scientist, Drew Westen, underlines the absurdity of these types of attacks by saying, “unless you’re talking about the Manchurian candidate, the idea that someone who put their heart and soul into running for president didn’t care deeply for their country is kind of ridiculous (Westen 2008).” However, Republicans still seem to regularly use these attacks, causing historian Robert Justin Goldstein to go as far as to say that Republicans have effectively claimed a “monopoly of patriotism and a sort of divine right to the flag” (1995: 20) as a political symbol.

This study asks whether this “monopoly” is politically advantageous. And if so, why? Hershey (1989) and others (Shaw 1999a) argue that the American flag is a valence issue, which Stokes formally defines as an issue that involves “merely the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate” (1963: 373). The American flag is thought to be positively valued since it represent the “American way,” which Orton contends is “a conglomerate of ideas and feelings including (theoretically) democracy, free enterprise, hard work, competition, progress, national superiority, freedom, etc...” (1973: 1340).

One problem with this conception of valence is that it does not take into account the myriad of ways the American flag is used during the course of a political campaign. Historian Marc Leepson, is correct when he asserts that, “since the mid-nineteenth century, virtually every major party presidential candidate had used the Stars and Stripes in advertising and as a prop at campaign stops”

(2005: 248). Most candidates use the American flag to demonstrate to voters their own patriotism, while others make the American flag a campaign issue in and of itself. In both instances, candidates are attempting to be perceived as being more patriotic than their opponent, with differing levels of success depending on the campaign circumstances. Most authors (Enelow and Hinich 1982; Ansolabehere 2000) combine these different uses of the American flag into one valence constant which is separate from other issue evaluations.

This is not an appropriate way to reflect why valence issues are important in terms of voting behavior. Instead of valence issues being separate from a voter's consideration of other campaign issues, I contend that valence issues influence how people perceive other issues and the candidates themselves. Graber (1996) and others (Edelman 1964; McCleod 1999) argue that some symbols are used by candidates to demonstrate to voters that they stand for a numbers of desirable qualities. Traits such as patriotism, leadership, and integrity are all involved in the image of the American flag, causing voters to draw candidates who they perceive as being in "favor" of the flag closer to their own ideal points while pushing away candidates whom they perceive as being "against" the flag.

This argument is consistent with what Berelson et al. calls the "distortion effect." Specifically, Berelson et al. argues that "partisans manage to 'pull' their own candidate and 'push' the opposing candidate with considerable consistency," leading voters to only "see" what they want to see (1954: 269; See also Granberg 1993). In terms of the American flag this implies that voters will pull patriotic candidates closer to their own ideal points, while pushing unpatriotic candidates away. Instead of voters evaluating a candidate's patriotism as something that is separate from their issue stances, I contend that patriotism is integral to all issue evaluations. Given the interrelationship between the valence of the American

flag and other issues stances, a new approach is needed in order to define the importance of valence issues to voters.

In order to empirically test this the approach that is offered here I consider how the American flag was used during the course of the 1988 presidential campaign, which saw George H.W. Bush defeat Michael Dukakis. Many commentators claimed that Bush's success was partially due to his campaign's use of the American flag (Hershey 1989; Leepson 2005). However, in 1988, the American flag was featured prominently in the printed campaign material and television ad advertising of both Bush and Dukakis. In each instance, the flag was used in order to demonstrate each candidate's patriotism. Since voters were given ample evidence for each candidate's patriotism it is difficult to see how either candidate could gain a discernible advantage. However, by focusing on the pledge of allegiance, which Bush was able to demonstrate his own patriotism while undermining Dukakis', allowing him to gain an edge. This strategy allowed Bush to essentially "own" the flag (see Petrocik 1996), which influenced how voters saw Bush in other issues areas. According to one voter in Modesto, California, "It's the patriotism thing, the flag - you know, the Pledge of Allegiance and all that. I'm not sure he'll be able to do much about the deficit, which worries me a lot, but he's patriotic, so I'm sure that he'll try" (Leepson 2005: 250).

Instead of compounding these different uses of the American flag into one valence issues, I contend that these two uses of the flag should be evaluated separately. When this is done it becomes apparent that some campaign uses of the flag are more successful than others. Specifically, when the American flag becomes a campaign issue in and of itself, then one candidate gains a considerable advantage, since they will naturally be perceived as being more patriotic than their opponent. If voters find this to be true, then they will naturally pull the patriotic

candidate closer to their own ideal point, while pushing the unpatriotic candidate away. This suggests that valence issues, like patriotism, are not separate from the evaluation of other issues, rather they serve as an integral part in the way voters perceive a candidate's ability to handle all other issues as well. Thus, if a candidate is perceived as being more patriotic than his/her opposition, then they will gain a considerable electoral advantage.

In order to expand on the approach that is being offered here, this thesis will be structure as follows. First, in section two, the details of what is being suggested are presented in the context of the spatial voting model. In section three, the model is expanded using the 1988 Presidential campaign as a foundation. In section four, the National Election Study (NES) is used in order to estimate three regressions which empirically test several of the arguments that are offered, the results of which are discussed in section five. Finally, in section six, the democratic and political implications of these findings are considered with an eye towards future research.

2 Passive and Active Valence: Reconsidering the Spatial Valence

Model

In the spatial valence model the value of the American flag is encompassed in a constant valence that is added or subtracted from a voter's evaluation of a candidate's other issue stances (See Enelow and Hinich 1982). Let's assume there is a given voter i who is deciding between two candidates, one and two. During the course of a campaign, each candidate takes a position on the given issue, where θ_1 and θ_2 represents their respective stances. Voter i equally observes θ_1 and θ_2 as well

as a third variable, p_{ij} , which represents the patriotism of candidate j for voter i . According to Enelow and Hinich, p_{ij} represents voter i 's "evaluation of candidate one on a single nonspatial issue or dimension," or p_{ij} can represent "the sum of i 's evaluations of candidate one on several nonspatial issues or dimension" (1982: 120). In the latter case, each nonspatial issue or dimension is compounded into a single term, p_{ij} . These are nonspatial issues because they "are not things that [a candidate] can erase to compete more effectively for votes" (Enelow and Hinich 1982: 115). Said differently, they are attributes that "cannot be abandoned" and are "beyond that candidate's immediate control" (Enelow and Hinich 1982: 115). Examples of nonspatial issues are a candidate's personality, religion, or, for the purposes of this thesis, patriotism. This creates the following utility function for the desirability of candidate one's issue positions,

$$u_i(\theta_1) = p_{i1} - a(\theta_1 - x_i)^2$$

where a_i is the importance that voter i attaches to the given issue θ and x_i is his/her ideal point, or most preferred issue stance. Similarly, i 's utility function for candidate two is,

$$u_i(\theta_2) = p_{i2} - a(\theta_2 - x_i)^2$$

This implies if $u_i(\theta_1) > u_i(\theta_2)$, then voter i will most likely vote for candidate one. This also suggests that an individual's evaluation of the patriotism of candidate, p_{ij} is separate from the evaluation of the candidate's issue position. Thus voter i could still vote for candidate one even if θ_1 was further from x_i than θ_2 , as long as the degree that p_{i1} is greater than p_{i2} is larger than the degree that θ_2 is closer to x_i than θ_1 . There are two problems with this description of valence. First, the spatial valence model does not help us understand candidate behaviors that define p_{ij} in the mind of the voter. During the course of a campaign candidates use the American flag in two ways to demonstrate their own patriotism

(p_{ij}) to voters. First, the American flag can be used in printed campaign material and television commercials to passively suggest that a candidate is patriotic. For example, a candidate may produce campaign buttons or pamphlets, which show him/her standing in front of the American flag in order to suggest that he/she is patriotic. Similarly, a candidate can show the American flag during a television commercial in order to frame the topic that is being discussed. For example, a candidate could show images of the flag when he/she is discussing his/her tax cut policy in order to suggest that tax cuts are patriotic and by association he/she is patriotic. In both instances, the American flag is essentially a passive addendum to other campaign messages.

These passive uses of the American flag are mostly ineffective because both campaigns utilize these methods to such an extent that it is difficult for one candidate to gain an advantage. Gelman and King make a similar argument when they suggest that campaigns help “enlighten” voter preferences (1993), meaning that voters look to campaigns to determine each candidate’s ideology and stance on major issues. Berelson et al. (1954) argues that this results in “political reinforcement” (1954: 269), since voters will pull parts of the campaign that support their own predispositions towards their own ideal point, while pushing the parts of the campaign that are against their own predispositions away. Both of these factors cause the passive uses of the American flag to essentially cancel out, since voters will only see the flag the way they wish to “see” it¹.

¹Of course this implies that campaigns do ultimately have an effect on voting behavior (For a review see Holbrook and Hill 2005 and Iyengar 1996), which is counter to those who claim that the campaign has minimal effects (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Finkel 1993) or is primarily an assessment of the incumbent’s performance rather than a choice between candidates (Key 1966; Fiorina 1981). Even though, Petrocik (1996) agrees with those who say that structural variables, such as presidential approval, party identification, and the state of the economy are important (Abramowitz 1988, 1996; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992; Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Markus 1988; Kinder 1997; Campbell and Mann 1992; Greene 1993; Brody and Sigelman 1983; Erikson 1989; Rosenstone 1983) he still contends that issue positions have an important

In alternative strategies, candidates can help “enlighten” voter preferences by actively forcing an opponent into an unpopular issue stance. First, a candidate can label an opponent’s past decision as being against the American flag. For example, if a candidate vetoed a law that would have banned flag-burning, then the opposition could highlight that decision and suggest to voters that the candidate was somehow against the “American way.” Second, a candidate can choose to advance a flag-related issue in order to demonstrate their own patriotism. For example, a candidate could say that he/she was in favor of making it mandatory for students to say the pledge of allegiance at the beginning of each school day. In this way, the candidate offering the flag-related issue is perceived as being somehow in favor of the “American way.” In both instances, one candidate is using flag-related issues as a way to demonstrate his own patriotism and undermines his opponents ability to make similar patriotic claims. The candidate that is on the defensive from these types of active uses of the American flag is placed into a difficult situation, because he/she has to respond to his/her opponent’s active use of the flag without being perceived as being against the “American way.” Carmines and Stimson suggest that this is a difficult strategy to successfully deploy, since voters tend to seize on to the valence of the flag-related issue and ignore the policy details (1979). Hershey goes as far as to say that this causes “the nation’s most serious challenges” to get “lost amid the thicket of flags...,” since “voters respond more intensely to symbolism” of the American flag (1989: 99, 100). All of this suggests that candidates who actively use the American flag to demonstrate their own patriotism and undermine their opponents patriotism have a distinct advantage, because in the end they are more likely to be perceived as being more patriotic than their opponent.

independent effect.

If one is perceived to be more patriotic, then he/she not only seems more credible in terms of the flag-related issue, but he/she is also perceived to be better able to handle all other issues as well. This contention is supported by what we know about heuristics. First, most voters find most policy issues nearly impossible to comprehend causing them to rely on heuristics in order to make an informed decision (For a review see Granberg 1993). Often times patriotism is valuable in this regard because it serves as a surrogate for someone being in favor of the “American way.” This is useful to evaluate candidate stances on current issues and also to predict how candidates will be able to handle future crises. For example, if a voter is considering which candidate’s stance on the budget deficit is closer to his/her ideal point, it is natural for a voter to perceive the more patriotic candidate’s stance on the budget deficit as being closer to their own because to the voter that candidate is seen as having the country’s best interests in mind. Rather than wading through the mundane details of the budget deficit debate, voters rely on a candidate’s patriotism as a surrogate for the desirability of that candidate’s stance on the budget deficit, since voters trust that the patriotic candidate’s stance on the budget deficit is more in line with the “American way.” Similarly, voters can not predict all the possible scenarios that a candidate may have to handle in the future. Rather than considering the details of each of these scenarios, voters will simply assume that a patriotic candidate will act in the best interest of the United States since by definition those who are patriotic love their country (Merriam-Webster Incorporated 2004). This argument is very similar to Brady and Sniderman’s description of the likability calculus:

Our argument is that citizens can draw an impressively accurate map of politics, of who wants what politically, of who takes the same side as

whom and of who lines up on the opposing side of key issues. Citizens can accomplish this, we argue, by relying on their political affect, their likes and dislikes of politically strategic groups. We focus on the operation of an affective calculus, or, as we call it, a likability heuristic. This calculus is organized around people's feelings toward groups such as liberals and conservatives. Clearly, many in the mass public lack a firm understanding of political abstractions. All the same, many know whom they like, and, equally important, they also know whom they dislike. If coherent, these likes and dislikes can supply people with an affective calculus to figure out the issue positions of strategic groups. We suggest that in this way many in the mass public can figure out who wants what politically without necessarily knowing a lot about politics (1985: 1061-1062).

In this way, voters use patriotism as a way to organize who is for the "American way" and who is against it. Instead of wading through the mundane details of each candidate's issue stance, voters use patriotism as a heuristic for a desirable issue stance. In psychology, heuristics have been used by many to describe how voters process information (For a review see Granberg 1993). Sears argues that "peripheral/heuristic processing does parallel a piece of the symbolic or automatic processing picture in that the individual responds without thoughtful review of the detailed arguments" (1993: 142). Thus, instead of evaluating the specifics of each issue, voters use the patriotic symbol of the American flag as a cue to whether a candidate's issue stance should be preferred.

This discussion implies that voters will naturally 'pull' patriotic candidate's issue stances closer to their own ideal points, while pushing unpatriotic candidate's

issue stances away. This creates an incentive for candidates to actively use the American flag, because it forces the opposition into an unpatriotic issue stance. For example, if one candidate were to claim that Monday should be a holiday celebrating the American flag, then he/she would be perceived by voters as being more patriotic, because he/she is honoring the flag more than his/her opponent. Similarly, if one incumbent candidate vetoed legislation that would have outlawed destroying the American flag in protest, then the opposition could seize onto that issue and use it as a way to show to voters that he/she is somehow unpatriotic, because the incumbent would allow the American flag to be desecrated for protest. The symbol of the American flag is particularly useful in this regard, because voters will tend to seize onto the valence of the issue instead of the specifics of the policy, meaning that the candidate on the defense is always at a strategic disadvantage. In both instances, the candidate who is perceived to be more patriotic has a considerable electoral advantage, because voters will use that candidate's patriotism as a surrogate for the desirability of that candidate's issue stances.

To provide a formal context for the approach offered here, let's reconsider the spatial valence model (See Enelow and Hinich 1982). Recall, voter i is deciding between two candidates. The candidates each take a stance on a given issue, θ_1 and θ_2 , which the voter compares to his/her ideal point, x_i . According to Enelow and Hinich, the consideration of a candidate's patriotism (p_{ij}) is separate from the consideration of θ (1982). However, I contend that valence issues (p_{ij}) influence the way people evaluate other issues (θ). Specifically, as a candidate is perceived to be more patriotic, voters will act as though the candidate's issue stances are closer to their own ideal point. This establishes the following utility functions for candidates one and two,

$$u_i(\theta_1) = p_{i1} - a_i(\theta_1(p_{i1}) - x_i)^2 \text{(Candidate One)}$$

$$u_i(\theta_2) = p_{i2} - a_i(\theta_2(p_{i2}) - x_i)^2(\text{Candidate Two})$$

where, a_i represents the importance a voter gives to a given issue θ . Notice, the utility of θ_1 and θ_2 is a function of each candidate's patriotism. If a candidate is perceived to be patriotic, voters will naturally minimize the distance between the perceived candidate's issue stance and their own ideal point, where the inverse is true if a candidate is perceived to be unpatriotic. Said differently, if a candidate is perceived to be patriotic, he/she is considered to be better able to handle all present and future issues, since he/she is considered to be reflective of the "American way." Conversely, if a candidate is perceived to be unpatriotic, then the opposite is true, since voters believe that he/she is out of touch with the "American way."

3 Considering the Effects of the American Flag: The Presidential Election of 1988

The problem with the approach offered here is that it is difficult to estimate the effect of both passive and active valence issues since both are related to how individuals perceive a candidate's patriotism. In order to isolate the effects of these two uses of the American flag, we must consider the flag's use in the context of a given campaign. For this thesis, the 1988 presidential campaign was used, since many commentators claim that "the flag played a significant role..." (Leepson 2005: 248; See Also Hershey 1989; Goldstein 1995; Toner 2008). In this election, we saw a Republican candidate, George H.W. Bush defeat Michael Dukakis, by 315 electoral votes, carrying 53.4% of the popular vote (Leip 1993). In the campaign, Bush primarily used the American flag to demonstrate his own patriotism and to

suggest that Dukakis was out of touch with the “American way.” Historian Marc Leepson, offers one telling example of Bush’s flag strategy during a campaign rally on August 24, 1988. Standing in front of a large and prominently displayed American flag, Bush condemned Dukakis’ veto of a 1977 Massachusetts law that would have required school teachers to lead children in the pledge of allegiance, and said, “What is it about the Pledge of Allegiance that upsets him so much? It is very hard for me to imagine that the founding fathers - Samuel Adams and John Hancock and John Adams - would have object to teachers leading students in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States” (2005: 249). This use of the American flag was part of a larger campaign strategy that was supposed to “define Dukakis to the voters before he was able, or willing, to define himself. The definition would be that Dukakis was a liberal in the mold of Walter Mondale, Jimmy Carter, and George McGovern” and out of touch with mainstream America (Hershey 1989: 82).

In the 1988 presidential campaign, Bush was not the only one to use the American flag for political ends. Both candidates used the American flag in order to passively demonstrate their own patriotism. For example, by looking at selected images of each candidate’s campaign buttons, which are presented in Figure 1, one can see that both Bush and Dukakis attempted to suggest to voters that they are patriotic by superimposing their image onto the American flag. In buttons one and three, both Bush and Dukakis allow voter to define patriotism in their own terms, whereas in buttons two and four, both candidates are suggesting that the American flag is related to their integrity.

Figure 1: Campaign Buttons from the 1988 George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis Presidential Campaigns



Sources: Daniels, Chris. 2008. "Bush Sr. Campaign Buttons."
<http://www.campaignbuttons-etc.com/bush.htm> (May 4, 2008).

Daniels, Chris. 2008. "Dukakis Campaign Buttons."
<http://www.campaignbuttons-etc.com/dukakis.htm> (May 4, 2008).

The similarity between Dukakis' and Bush's buttons is no accident. In each instance, Bush and Dukakis are trying to demonstrate their own patriotism, which they know is politically advantageous. Given the political advantage of being perceived as patriotic, candidates also tie their policy proposals to patriotic images, hoping that associating those issues with the American flag will make them more appealing. For example, looking at selected images from televised political commercials, which are presented in Figures 2 and 3, one can see that both Bush and Dukakis use the flag to also suggest that their policies are patriotic. First, Bush in an add entitled, "The Mission," says, "I'm a man who sees life in terms of missions, missions defined and missions completed. I will not allow this country to be made weak again. I will keep America moving forward, always forward, for an endless enduring dream and a thousand points of light. This is my mission and I will complete it (See Figure 2)." In this ad, Bush uses images of the flag to frame his message and demonstrate the patriotism of his issue stances.

Figure 2: Storyboard of “The Mission,” Aired by the George H.W. Bush Presidential Campaign on September 7, 1988



Source: The Museum of the Moving Image. 2008. “The Mission (1988 Bush v. Dukakis).”

http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subact
(May 4, 2008).

Figure 3: Storyboard of “New Era,” Aired by the Michael Dukakis Presidential Campaign on July 21, 1988



Source: The Museum of the Moving Image. 2008. “New Era (1988 Bush v. Dukakis).”

http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subact
(May 4, 2008).

Second, Dukakis in an ad entitled, “New Era,” says, “We’re going to build the kind of America where hard work is rewarded, where American goods and American workmanship are the best in the world. That’s what this election is all

about...By working together to create opportunity and a good life for all, all of us are enriched, not just in economic terms but as citizens and as human beings (Figure 3).” Again, in this ad, Dukakis is claiming that voters should prefer his policies because they are patriotic.

Both of these passive uses of the American flag are used to suggest to voters that a given candidate is patriotic. However, most candidates tend to use the flag in this manner, making it nearly impossible for any candidate to gain a discernible advantage. Leepson is correct when he says that “virtually every major presidential candidate has used the Stars and Stripes in advertising...” (2005: 248), which makes it difficult for voters to assess who is more patriotic, making it mostly ineffective as a way to influence voting behavior.

This is not the case when the American flag becomes the issue. In this instance, one candidate can actively use the American flag in order to force the opposing candidate into an unpatriotic issue stance. For example, in the 1988 presidential campaign, Bush argued that Dukakis’ veto of the Massachusetts pledge law was unpatriotic. Dukakis suffered from this attack because of two strategic errors. First, Dukakis delayed his response for quite sometime, giving Bush time to effectively label him as being “unpatriotic,” without any suggestion from Dukakis that Bush was incorrect. Hershey goes as far as to say that at first, Dukakis had left “the field during the battle of patriotism.” (1989: 86). Second, when Dukakis did finally respond he did not choose to respond in kind, by suggesting either the Massachusetts veto law was unpatriotic or Bush’s use of the American flag was unpatriotic. Instead, Dukakis attempted to emphasize the constitutionality of his veto decision. Many commentators believe that Dukakis’ choices cost him the election (Hershey 1989; Toner 2008; Leepson 2005; Goldstein 1995), with one, former Democratic national chair Robert Strauss, going as far as to say that Dukakis had

“captured the hearts of seventeen lawyers and lost three million voters (Strauss 1988).” Dukakis’ error caused many to voters to view him as being “so far left [he had] left America (Reagan 1984 [Quote Modified for Stylistic Purposes]).”

In 1988, Bush active use of the American flag to undermine Dukakis’ patriotism, was more effective than his passive use of the flag to demonstrate his own patriotism. This is not to suggest that passively using the American flag has no effect, rather I am suggesting that in most instances passive uses of the flag are ultimately canceled out by the opposing candidate use of the flag in a similar way. In some instances, the passive use of the American flag can be effective, if the opposing candidate chooses not to use the flag in this regard. However, in the 1988 presidential campaign, this was not the case (See Figures 1, 2, and 3). What mattered the most in 1988 was Bush’s active use of the American flag to question Dukakis’ patriotism. If Dukakis would have effectively responded, then this may have not been a relevant issue, but since he delayed his response and did not respond in kind, Bush was able to successfully define him as someone who was against the “American way.” This caused voters to perceive Bush as being more patriotic, leading them to perceive his other issue stances as being closer to their own, where the opposite is true for Dukakis.

This patriotic advantage can be quantified by empirically testing two separate hypotheses. First, I contend that the American flag should have an independent effect on voting behavior in 1988. If this is found to be true, than we can confirm what Enelow and Hinich (1982) and I suggest, that the American flag does have a significant effect on how voter’s evaluate candidates. Second, I contend that this effect is due to individuals perceiving Bush as being more patriotic than Dukakis and consequently perceiving Bush’s issues stances as being closer to their own ideal points while perceiving Dukakis’ issue stances as being further away. In the

next section, each hypothesis is tested using survey data and evidence is found which supports both hypotheses.

4 Research Design

4.1 Data Source

In order to test both hypotheses the 1988 National Election Study (NES) was used. The NES was conducted by the American National Election Studies (ANES) using a pre-election and post-election survey instrument that averaged a little over 60 minutes to complete. The pre-election survey was conducted prior to November 8th, beginning on September 6, 1988, and was administered to 2,040 people. Of those people, 1,775 were administered a post-election survey between November 9, 1988 and January 24, 1989. Using this data, several variables were constructed, all of which are presented below.

4.2 Variables and Models for Multivariate Analysis

4.2.1 Operationalizing the Primary Independent and Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in the first hypothesis was simply whether an individual voted for Bush or Dukakis, with those voting for Bush being given a 1 and those voting for Dukakis being coded as 0. The primary independent variable in the first hypothesis is the perception of each candidate's patriotism. However, since there is no question in the 1988 NES, which directly assesses whether an individual thinks Bush is more patriotic than Dukakis, a proxy had to be created using the following question, "When you see the American flag flying does it make you feel

extremely good, very good, somewhat good, or not very good?" This question was used because I assume that patriotic individuals will only vote for patriotic candidates.

The dependent variable in the second hypothesis is the difference between a candidate's issue stances and the voter's own ideal point on that issue. Since the 1988 NES doesn't provide many of these types of measures, the squared difference between the candidate's perceived ideology and an individual's own ideology, will be used as a proxy measure. Again, I assume that preferred candidates will be perceived to be ideological closer to a given individual than unpreferred candidates. In terms of patriotism, I also assume that individuals who are more patriotic will perceive Bush's ideology to be closer to their own, since they perceive Bush to be more patriotic, where the inverse is true for Dukakis' ideology. Again, this is based on the assumption that patriotic individuals would not pull an unpatriotic candidate's ideology closer to their own.

With these limitations in mind, three models were estimated. Model 1 (Bush Vote Model) regresses the likelihood of voting for Bush on an individual's opinion of the American flag, controlling for each candidate's leadership, party identification, ideology, campaign interest, race, gender, and their perception of how the country is going. Models 2 (Bush Ideology Model) and 3 (Dukakis Ideology Model), linearly regresses the squared difference between an individual's ideology and the perceived ideology of Bush (Model 2) and Dukakis (Model 3) on the individual's opinion of the American flag, using the same controls as Model 1.

4.2.2 Logistic Regression Estimating the Probability of Voting for Bush (Model 1)

Using a logistic regression, the probability of voting for Bush was estimated using an individual's opinion of the American flag, while controlling for other structural variables. If P_B represents the probability of voting for Bush then Model 1 can be estimated using the following equation,

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(P_B/1 - P_B) = & \alpha + \beta_1 AMERICAN FLAG \\ & + \beta_2 BUSH LEADERSHIP \\ & + \beta_3 DUKAKIS LEADERSHIP \\ & + \beta_4 IDEOLOGY \\ & + \beta_5 REPUBLICAN \\ & + \beta_6 DEMOCRAT \\ & + \beta_7 CAMPAIGN INTEREST \\ & + \beta_8 WHITE \\ & + \beta_9 MALE \\ & + \beta_{10} RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION \end{aligned}$$

An individual's opinion of the American flag (*AMERICAN FLAG*) is a dichotomous variable, with those feeling extremely or very good when they see the flag coded as 1 (Positive Flag) and 0 (Negative Flag) otherwise. Bush's (*BUSH LEADERSHIP*) and Dukakis' (*DUKAKIS LEADERSHIP*) leadership were both added to the model in order to test whether individuals use the American flag as a proxy for a candidate's ability to handle present situations and future crises. The four-point NES scale was used for both variables, with those perceiving Bush (Dukakis) to be a strong leader being given a 3 and those seeing Bush (Dukakis) as a weak leader being given a 0.

Ideology (*IDEOLOGY*) was coded using a range from “Extremely Liberal (0)” to “Extremely Conservative (6).” For party identification, the coefficients β_5 and β_6 estimate the extent to which Republicans (*REPUBLICAN*) and Democrats (*DEMOCRAT*) are different from Independents (1 = Republican/Democrat, 0 = all others). To gauge campaign interest (*CAMPAIGN INTEREST*), those who are “not very interested” in the campaign were given a 0, while those who are “very interested” were given a 2. *WHITE* and *MALE* were coded using the standard NES questions, with males receiving a 1 and females receiving 0. Similarly, “Whites” coded as 1 while all others set to 0². An individual’s retrospective evaluation (*RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION*) of the United States was gathered from answers to the following question, “Would you say that things in the country are generally going very well, fairly well, not too well, or not well at all?” This question seemed to be most appropriate, since it assesses the general state of the country instead of focusing on one aspect, such as the economy. This variable was converted into a dichotomous variable, with those seeing the country going either very or fairly well being given a 1, and all others being set to 0.

4.2.3 OLS Regression Estimating the Perceived Ideological Distance Between an Individual and Bush (Model 2)

Using an OLS regression, the squared difference between an individual’s own ideology and Bush’s perceived ideology was estimated using an individual’s opinion of the American flag, while controlling for the same variables as Model 1, except

²I reluctantly used the standard NES question to control for race. However, with only five possible answer choices, White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Other, it is impossible to determine how Hispanics or Latinos fit into the model. This is unfortunate since both Hispanics and Latinos may have different views of the American flag, since some may claim allegiance to their native country. This suggests a future area of research and a possible addendum to later drafts of this study.

ideology. Model 2 is outlined in the following equation,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Bush Ideological Difference} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{AMERICAN FLAG} \\ & + \beta_2 \text{BUSH LEADERSHIP} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{DUKAKIS LEADERSHIP} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{REPUBLICAN} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{DEMOCRAT} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{CAMPAIGN INTEREST} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{WHITE} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{MALE} \\ & + \beta_9 \text{RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION} \\ & + \epsilon_i \text{ where } \epsilon_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2) \end{aligned}$$

Again, no additional variables were added to the right side of the equation. Given that, as “Bush Ideological Difference” decreases Bush’s ideology is perceived to be closer to an individual’s own ideology, holding all other variables constant.

4.2.4 OLS Regression Estimating the Perceived Ideological Distance Between an Individual and Dukakis (Model 3)

The squared difference between Dukakis’ perceived ideology and an individual’s own ideology is estimated in the same way, using an individual’s opinion of the American flag, while controlling for the variables outlined in Models 2. This model is specified using the following equation (Model 3),

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Dukakis Ideological Difference} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{AMERICAN FLAG} \\
& + \beta_2 \text{BUSH LEADERSHIP} \\
& + \beta_3 \text{DUKAKIS LEADERSHIP} \\
& + \beta_4 \text{REPUBLICAN} \\
& + \beta_5 \text{DEMOCRAT} \\
& + \beta_6 \text{CAMPAIGN INTEREST} \\
& + \beta_7 \text{WHITE} \\
& + \beta_8 \text{MALE} \\
& + \beta_9 \text{RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION} \\
& + \epsilon_i \text{ where } \epsilon_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2)
\end{aligned}$$

The only difference between Models 2 and 3, is that the dependent variable in Model 3 is the distance between an individual's own ideology and Dukakis' perceived ideology, where Model 2 considers Bush's ideology. Similarly, as "Dukakis Ideological Difference" decreases Dukakis' ideology is perceived to be closer to an individual's own ideology.

There are two additional problems with this Model construction that are beyond the measurement problems outlined above. First, the dependent variable in Models 2 and 3 is the combination of two scales, even though it is treated as a continuous variable. This was done because it is difficult to determine whether an ordered or multinomial regression would be appropriate in this instance. Given that, an OLS regression was used in order to provide a preliminary test of how these variables operate. Second, and perhaps more serious, is the simultaneous equation problem that exists between all three models, which suggests the need for a two stage process. Unfortunately, the dichotomous and categorical nature of the dependent variables, means that a two stage least squares can not be used. This problem requires estimating a two-stage logit or probit model which is no

trivial matter (Alvarez and Glasgow 1999; Rivers and Vuong 1988) and is worthy for future consideration. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis and I will proceed with caution.

5 Results

5.1 The American Flag Does Have an Effect on an Individual's Voting Behavior

The aim of Model 1 is to determine whether the American flag has an independent effect on whether an individual votes for Bush, controlling for candidate leadership, ideology, party identification, campaign interest, race, gender, and an individual's retrospective evaluation. If this is found to be true, then there is some evidence that the American flag played an important role in the 1988 presidential election.

According to Table 1, those who see the flag in a positive light are significantly more likely to vote for Bush, holding all other variables constant. Predicted probabilities were constructed in order to tease out this relationship. Using the Zelig R package, Model 1 was simulated 10,000 times, each time randomly drawing the model's coefficients from a multivariate normal distribution which has a mean at the parameter estimate(s) and a standard deviation equal to the standard error(s). Once this is done the simulated results are ordinally sorted and numbers are drawn from the simulated predictions at 2.5% and 97.5%, thus establishing a 95% confidence interval around each predicted probability (Imai et al. 2007a; Imai et al. 2007b). These predicted probabilities and confidence bounds are presented in Table 2.

As you can see, when all other variables are held constant, an individual's view of the American flag has a substantial effect on whether they will vote for Bush, with Model 1 predicting those having a positive view of the flag voting for Bush 63% of the time as compared to 47% for those with a negative view. Additionally, with limited overlap between the 95% confidence bounds, which appear in the parentheses below each predict probability, one can be relatively confident that the difference (16%) between the two probabilities is substantively important.

When this difference margin (16%) is considered in the context of the 1988 presidential election, it becomes even more apparent that the American flag played a significant role in the election outcome. First, Bush only won the popular vote by 7.8%, which is well below the predicted probability difference. Second, looking specifically to states where Bush had small margins of victory ($\leq 5\%$), such as, Illinois (2.09%), Pennsylvania (2.31%), Maryland (2.91%), Vermont (3.52%), California (3.57%), Missouri (3.98%), and New Mexico (4.96%), it is easy to see that a 16 point advantage could have been decisive. However, even if Dukakis would have won all of these states, Bush would still have had enough electoral votes to win the election (304). However, if you consider all the states within a 16% margin of victory (Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Texas) the story becomes more compelling that the American flag may have had substantial effect on the outcome of the 1988 presidential election (All Results from Leip 1993).

Several of the control variables were also statistically significant. First, Bush's and Dukakis' leadership was statistically significant, with those viewing Bush as a strong leader being more likely to vote for Bush, where the inverse is true for Dukakis. Second, ideology and party identification were also statistically significant, with extreme conservatives and Republicans being more likely to vote for

Table 1: A Logit Model Estimating Whether the American Flag Affects Voting Behavior in the Presidential Election of 1988

	Estimate (S.E.)
(Intercept)	-3.054* (0.668)
American Flag	0.669* (0.32)
Bush Leadership	1.788* (0.183)
Dukakis Leadership	-1.664* (0.18)
Ideology	0.426* (0.091)
Republican	1.491* (0.31)
Democrat	-1.622* (0.259)
Campaign Interest	-0.621* (0.302)
White	1.472* (0.368)
Male	0.021 (0.228)
Retrospective Evaluation	0.292 (0.249)
N	993
<i>Deviance</i>	517.55
$-2LLR(Model\chi^2)$	851.756*
<i>AIC</i>	539.55

* $p \leq 0.05$

Table 2: The Predicted Probabilities of How the American Flag Affects Whether an Individual Voted for Bush in the Presidential Election of 1988

	Predicted Probability (95% Confidence Interval)
Positive Flag (Extremely and Very Well)	.63 (.57, .69)
Negative Flag (Somewhat and Not Very Well)	.47 (.33, .62)

Bush, where the opposite is true for extreme liberals and Democrats. Third, *WHITE* and *CAMPAIGN INTEREST* were also statistically significant but in the opposite direction, meaning that individuals who self-identified as white were more likely to vote for Bush, where those who are very interested in the campaign were not.

5.2 A Candidate's Patriotism Does Effect How Voters Perceive His/Her Other Issue Stances

In order to test the second hypothesis, we must determine whether patriotism influences the way individuals perceive candidate issue stances. As a surrogate, I consider how patriotic individuals perceive both Bush's and Dukakis' ideology. If patriotic individuals tend to perceive Bush's ideology as being closer to their own, then we should find evidence that individuals tend to pull candidates they perceive to be patriotic (Bush) closer to their own ideal points, while pushing candidates who are perceived to be unpatriotic away (Dukakis). Since we are interested in how the American flag affects both the perception of Bush and Dukakis, two models were created, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

In Table 3, the American flag operated in the predicted direction for both Models 2 and 3, with those individuals seeing the flag in a positive light, perceiving Bush's ideology to be closer to their own ideology, where the inverse is true for Dukakis. This statistically significant result suggests that individuals in 1988 were pulling Bush towards their own ideal points, while pushing Dukakis away, because they perceived Bush to be more patriotic.

Further evidence of this is found when we consider the relationship between leadership and patriotism. It is suggested by some authors that patriotism may serve as a surrogate for a candidate's leadership (See Mueller 1973). Given that, if one assumes that patriotic individuals will only perceive patriotic candidates to be strong leaders, then the correlation between Bush's and Dukakis' leadership and an individual's opinion of the American flag should provide more evidence of whether one candidate is perceived to be more patriotic than another. The Pearson correlation between Bush's leadership and an individual's opinion of the American flag is .10, where the correlation between Dukakis' leadership and the flag is -.02. The different correlation signs suggest that patriotic individuals perceive Bush to be a better leader than Dukakis. This provides evidence that Bush is perceived to be more patriotic than Dukakis, since those who are patriotic think he is a strong leader, where the opposite is true for Dukakis.

A statistically significant relationship is also found between Bush's and Dukakis' leadership and their ideological difference, suggesting that individuals who perceive either candidate as a strong leader perceive that candidate's ideology to be closer to their own. If people thought that both Bush and Dukakis were equally patriotic, then we should see an individual's opinion of the American flag operating in the same way. However, this is not the case, suggesting that individuals perceive Bush to be more patriotic than Dukakis. Since an OLS model was used to

Table 3: Two OLS Regression Models Estimating Bush and Dukakis Ideological Difference with An Individual's Opinion of the American Flag in the Presidential Election of 1988

	Bush Ideology (Model2) Estimate (S.E.)	Dukakis Ideology (Model 3) Estimate (S.E.)
(Intercept)	9.625* (0.911)	3.921* (1.08)
American Flag	-1.417* (0.548)	2.263* (0.652)
Bush Leadership	-1.983* (0.244)	1.749* (0.293)
Dukakis Leadership	0.274 (0.242)	-2.376* (0.288)
Republican	-1.258* (0.475)	4.442* (0.573)
Democrat	2.098* (0.475)	-0.57 (0.564)
White	-1.072 (0.571)	0.702 (0.676)
Male	0.298 (0.368)	1.407* (0.44)
Retrospective Evaluation	-1.122* (0.42)	-1.071* (0.503)
N	1015	998
<i>RMSE</i>	5.814	6.88
<i>R</i> ²	0.221	0.285
<i>AIC</i>	6464.753	6692.721

* $p \leq 0.05$

estimate the squared difference between two categorical variables, one is reluctant to directly interpret the estimated beta coefficients. However, if one considers the absolute value of β_1 in both Models 2 and 3, we can determine whether patriotic individuals were pulling Bush closer to their own ideal points more than they were pushing Dukakis away. Since the absolute value of β_1 in Model 3 (2.263) is larger than that of Model 2 (1.417), we can be relatively certain that individuals were pushing Dukakis away from their ideal point at a faster rate than they were pulling Bush closer. Given the simultaneous equation problem, comparing the coefficients for each model may be inappropriate. However, if one compared the relative similarity of several of Model 2 and 3's coefficients (Retrospective Evaluation, Gender, Bush Leadership, and Intercept) one can find evidence that both Models are operating in a similar fashion. Given that, the difference between the coefficients for Models 2 and 3 are most likely substantively important, which implies that the American flag may be more effective to politically demonstrate your opponent's lack of patriotism, rather than your own.

The parameter estimates for the control variables were also consistent with expectations, with Republicans pulling Bush closer to their own ideal points while pushing Dukakis away, where the opposite is true for Democrats. However, there was no statistically significant relationship found between Democrats and Dukakis' ideological difference, suggesting that even Democrats were reluctant to pull Dukakis closer to their own ideal points. This is not entirely consistent with Berelson et al.'s contention that partisans tend to see what they want to "see" (1954). Also, men seemed to significantly push their perception of Dukakis' ideology further away from their own ideology, which is interesting but unrelated to the topic at hand.

The only result that was unexpected was the relationship between an individ-

ual's retrospective evaluation and their perception of Bush's and Dukakis' ideological difference. One would expect that if Bush was perceived as being more patriotic then people who believe the country is going well should draw him closer their ideal points, because he is seen as a protector of the "American way," whereas Dukakis is considered to be more of a threat to it. However, Table 3 shows that individuals who saw the country going in a positive direction tended to perceive both Bush's and Dukakis' ideology as being closer to their own. If we compare the absolute values of the coefficients, 1.122 for Bush and 1.071 for Dukakis, then there is some evidence that suggests that people who see the country as going well are pulling Bush closer to their ideal points at a faster rate than they are pulling Dukakis. However, since the difference between the absolute value of the coefficients is relatively small (.05), it is difficult to say whether this is a meaningful finding and not due to random error.

The similarity between the coefficient estimates for an individual's retrospective evaluation does suggest that the importance of patriotism may have less to do with the perception of a candidate's ability to handle current issues and more to do with the perception of how candidates will act in the future. Recall, that patriotism is an important heuristic because it allows individuals to determine whether a candidate's issue stance is desirable without considering the specifics of that stance. This was thought to effect the perception of each candidate's present issue stance, as well as the perception of each candidate's ability to handle unforeseen circumstances. If the former is more important, then we should see individuals who think the country is going well perceiving Bush's ideology as being closer to their own ideology, since Bush's patriotism serves as a surrogate for his ability to handle current issues. Since an individual's retrospective evaluation operated in a similar way for both Bush and Dukakis, evidence is found

that suggest that a candidate's patriotism may be used more as a way to gauge their ability to handle future crises as opposed to their ability to handle current situations.

This interpretation is supported by the estimated coefficients for Bush's and Dukakis' leadership. If patriotism influences an individual's perception of a candidate's ability to handle current issues, then one would think that the coefficients for a candidate's leadership and retrospective evaluation would operate in a similar manner. However, this is not the case. The signs for the estimated coefficients for Bush and Dukakis' leadership switch as one moves from Models 2 to 3. This suggests that an individual's perception of a candidate's patriotism is based more on a candidate's perceived ability to handle future situations.

The findings outlined above provide evidence that supports both hypotheses outlined above. First, Tables 1 and 2, demonstrate that the American flag did have a statistically significant independent effect on whether an individual voted for Bush in 1988. As outlined in section two, this suggests that Bush gained a patriotic advantage during the course of the campaign, which ultimately hurt Dukakis. Second, Table 3 finds some statistical support for parts of the models offered in Section two. Specifically, voters tended to pull Bush closer to their ideal points, while pushing Dukakis away. I contend this is due to Bush being perceived as being more patriotic than Dukakis, which positively influenced the way individuals saw Bush's ideology and other issue stances. These findings are discussed in more detail in section five, but for now it is apparent that we should reconsider the importance of valence issues.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Democratic and Political Implications

This study provides evidence that using the American flag was a politically advantageous symbol in the 1988 presidential campaign. Both the state by state returns and Model 1's predicted probabilities suggest that the American flag could influence election outcomes in some circumstances. Specifically, in the election of 1988 Bush's use of the American flag could have given him a considerable electoral edge, that may have been decisive in several swing states as well as the popular vote.

This study provides some support for Goldstein's contention that Republicans "owned" the flag in 1988 (1995), since those who see the flag in a positive light tended to pull Bush closer to their own ideology, while pushing Dukakis away. This finding suggests that the Republican flag advantage may influence other issues, since it seemed to cause individuals to see Bush as being more patriotic, which may be related to the perception of Bush's ability to handle future crises. However, Models 2 and 3 also suggest that the American flag may be more useful as a way to undermine your opponents patriotism, rather than demonstrating your own. However, since no comparative cases were used in this thesis, it is unclear about whether this is more a reflection of 1988, Republicans, or both.

This study also demonstrates the pervasiveness of symbolic politics. Edelman (1964) argues that political symbols cause individuals to buy into campaigns and the electoral process. McCleod contends that these symbols of "mass consumption" may seduce people into believing that a candidate is acting in their own best interests since symbols like the American flag "utilize political persuasion and political rhetoric that is based on a system of fundamental beliefs about what it

means to be an American” (McCleod 1999: 360, 362). In terms of representation this is problematic since an election is supposed to afford voters an opportunity to decide which candidate will represent them the best.

In the 1988 presidential campaign this issue of representation was particularly problematic since voters tended to focus more on the symbolism of the American flag and less on more important substantive issues. Hershey goes as far as to say that, “the nation’s most serious challenges, too, got lost in the thicket of flags...(1989:100),” permitting “both campaigners and citizens to ignore the realities of the candidate’s abilities and the nation’s needs (1989: 99).” Even though this study does not go this far, it does provide evidence that the American flag can be used as a valuable political tool, which suggests that the symbolic ideal of the flag may be somewhat lost (See Brennan and Rehnquist 1989).

However, this study goes to great lengths to suggest that context does matter, and when considering the democratic implications of these findings I can not emphasize this enough. One would think that when individuals see the American flag in the context of a presidential election they think of it in different terms than when they see it flying above a capitol building or in front of their home. Before we lose all democratic hope, future research is needed in order to determine whether the symbolic meaning of the American flag changes when it is used in different contexts. Until this is done, we can not place definitive judgment on whether using the American flag during an election is good or bad for democracy, since those terms are relative to the specific use of the flag and the election itself.

6.2 Future Research

This thesis did not directly consider the importance of the image of the American flag. Drawing from primarily from work done in political and social psychology (For a review see Iyengar 1993), Brader and others (Marcus 2000) suggest that the importance of the image of the American flag is based in the emotions people attach to it³. First, the American flag could be used to elicit an enthusiastic response about a given candidate, which Brader suggests would cause voters to associate the candidate with positive feelings about the “American way” (2005). For example, if a candidate were to speak about his war record standing in front of the American flag, he/she would entice voters to see his candidacy as being consistent with the “American way.” Conversely, the American flag can be used to elicit anxiety, which cause voters to question their previously held assumptions and consider “alternative courses of action” (Brader 2005: 390). For example, a candidate could show a television commercial which combines 9/11 images, images of his opponent, and images of the American flag, to suggest that his opponent is out to destroy the “American way.” In both instances, the American flag is similar to other symbols and images, in that it elicits an emotional response and can be added to other messages in order to cause voters to react in a particular way. All of this suggests that considering the emotional appeal of the American flag would be a wise continuation of this study and should be the aim of future research endeavors.

³The importance of emotions in political ads have been considered by many authors (Kaid and Johnston 2001; Nelson and Boyton 1997; Kern 1989; Perloff and Kinsey 1992) and have shown that emotions play an often overlooked role in human decision making (Damasio 1994; Kinder 1994).

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