

【연구논문】

Perceived Threat as a Motivator of Policy Voting: Analysis of the 2012 US Presidential Election*

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1. Perceived Threat and Policy Voting

“In a democratic society, reasonable decisions are preferable to unreasonable ones; considered thought leads to the former, emotions to the latter; therefore deliberation is preferable to visceral reaction as a basis for democratic decision making.” (Kuklinski et al.)

The concept of ‘sound political judgment’ as a result of dispassionate deliberation has dominated the studies of public opinion for a long time. As the phrase in the prologue implies, people have often considered ‘impulsive’ emotion as an antithesis of ‘reasoned’ thought. In this notion, emotional reaction, which is assumed to be

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visceral or impetuous, is incongruent with considered judgment or even detrimental to political decision. As this normative belief became widespread, citizens were expected to be thoughtful, or even cold-hearted, if they were to make decent political judgments.

However, is emotion inevitably incompatible with thoughtful decision? In contrast to the popular notion of dispassionate democratic citizens, in reality, citizens often express their instantaneous reactions to political phenomena in emotional ways. While emotional reactions might seem impulsive, it is also probable that people might become more attentive to politics through these emotions and make well-thought political decisions with higher attention to relevant information. In other words, different from the common expectation, emotions might not be always impulsive, impetuous, or unreasoned, but might be conducive to political decisions.

In regard to policy voting, which is often considered as a desirable mechanism of electoral behavior, it is often claimed that policy voting happens when citizens make vote choices that align with the policy stance of supporting candidate or political party. However, in the discussion of policy voting, emotions – such as enthusiasm, hope, anxiety, or fear – felt toward candidates or social surroundings were often considered as factors that are unrelated with policy considerations or were largely ignored in explaining the mechanism of policy voting (Brody and Page; Carmines and Stimson; Bartels; Macdonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug). Against this common notion of policy voting as a dispassionate process, this paper introduces emotion, notably perceived threat, as a potential mediator that might encourage citizens to more clearly reflect policy preference on vote decision.

With this perspective on emotions in electoral behavior, this paper contributes to the ongoing debates on the role of emotions in public opinion. In previous studies, negative emotions such as fear, threat, or anxiety have received much attention in explaining how ordinary people engage in politics. Fear has been recognized as one of the most innate and strongest motives behind human thoughts and behaviors, especially how individuals relate themselves to their society (Hobbes). Recent studies indicate that threat, fear, or anxiety perceived from political environment has significant impact on citizens' evaluation of public policies, national events, or presidential candidates (Brader; Lupia and Menning; Kim and Cameron). Moreover, especially in the American context, studies have found how racial threats significantly influence public opinion and effectiveness of electoral campaigns (Kinder and Sears; Mendelberg). Along this line of thought, this paper focuses on the presidential election period, during which the electorate's attention to politics is heightened, in order to examine the political meaning of perceived threat in the mechanism of policy voting.

Among various emotional states, this paper centers around the perceived threat¹⁾ felt toward potential terrorist attack in the United States. Since the terrorist attack of September 11th had a wide-ranging and long-lasting impact on the American society, this paper

1) Since 'perceived threat' is respondents' appraisal of their own emotional state, it might not be equated with 'threat as pure emotion,' which arises unconsciously and unexpectedly. Despite this shortcoming of the measurement, I use 'perceived threat' as the best available proxy, which can be found in the 2012 ANES study, of the 'threat as pure emotion,' while remaining the search for a better measurement of pure emotion as a future research agenda.

explores how the threat felt toward potential terrorism is reflected on electoral behavior during the 2012 US presidential election. After the incident, scholars have investigated how negative emotions regarding the terrorism, such as threat, anger, and anxiety, influenced public opinion on antiterrorism policies, trust on government, or electoral outcomes (Chanley; Lerner *et al.*; Davis and Silver; Huddy *et al.*; Abramson *et al.*; Hetherington and Suhay). This paper likewise examines the impact of the threat felt toward terrorism on how individuals reflect their policy stance on relevant issues, one of which would be the issue of defense spending, on vote choice.

Furthermore, this paper connects to the long-held concern of public opinion scholarship about ordinary people's lack of ability to make sound political decisions. Well-reasoned political judgment and decision are often considered as a result of rational calculation of expected utility or cognitive considerations of past performance and ideological distance (Downs; Fiorina; Riker and Ordeshook). Moreover, scholars often consider emotion as undesirable base of political opinion and judgment, because it leads judgments to be instable and inconsistent (Madison; Converse).

In contrast to these popular beliefs, this paper gauges the credibility of alternative viewpoint that anxiety or fear can heighten the public's interest in politics. Recent studies have highlighted that anxiety can increase interest in political information and motivate political participation among the mass public (Marcus and MacKuen; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay; Civettini and Redlawsk; Valentino *et al.*). Moreover, in neuroscience, it has been claimed that emotions, in interaction with cognition, can improve decision making by inducing

greater attention to the surrounding environment (Ledoux; Rolls). With these studies as theoretical background, this paper tests whether the perceived threat can direct citizens' interest on relevant policy in making electoral choices, rather than disrupting decision making process or deteriorating political choices to be ungrounded. In other words, this paper seeks to understand whether the perceived threat can promote policy voting by encouraging citizens to base their vote decisions on their policy appraisal about relevant issue.

In order to explore the potential of emotion in strengthening the connection between policy appraisal and vote decision, this paper focuses on the perceived threat as a potential mediator of policy voting. Under the context of the 2012 US presidential election, I examine whether the perceived threat toward potential terrorist attack in the United States leads citizens to consider defense spending policy more heavily in shaping their vote decisions. In contrast to the conventional belief, findings from this paper will imply that heightened threat perception can encourage citizens to be attentive to relevant policy in making electoral choices and can lead to vote choices that are more clearly based on policy consideration, thus improving the electoral accountability.

2. Study Design and Hypotheses: Potential Mediators of Policy Voting

Main research goal of this study is to examine whether the perceived threat can strengthen the link between policy appraisal and

vote choice. In other words, this paper seeks to reveal the potential of threat perception as a facilitator of policy voting. This perspective on the role of perceived threat in electoral choices will shed new light on the relationship between perceived threat, policy preference, and vote decision.

With this research aim, I examine how vote decision is related to policy preference under the influence of perceived threat. I analyze the 2012 ANES (American National Elections Studies) data in order to explore the impact of perceived threat on individuals' political decision making. In contrast to the previous belief that emotions make decisions to be rash or inconsiderate, I hypothesize that heightened emotional reaction can increase citizens' attention to candidates' policy platforms and can encourage voters to consider relevant policy in making vote decisions. In order to examine this possibility, the following analyses aim to test whether the impact of policy preference on vote decision is conditional to the intensity of perceived threat.

With a purpose of comparison, political knowledge, left-right ideology, and partisanship are also used as mediating variables in the model that explain vote decision through policy preference. Compared to emotions, scholars have often considered political knowledge and ideology as solid and reliable bases of political judgments, properly equipped by only a limited portion of the mass public (Converse; Carpini and Keeter; Zaller). While political sophistication, broadly denoting both political knowledge and well-structured ideology, is often expected to be a motivator behind rational consideration of policy in vote decision, I empirically test how distinct political knowledge level or ideological orientation results in different degree

of policy voting.

Moreover, in regard to the partisanship, or party identification, this stable psychological attachment to a political party powerfully shapes a wide range of political opinions of ordinary citizens, as found in earlier studies (Campbell *et al.*; Jacoby). In a relative sense, partisanship is long-lasting and involves positive emotions, while perceived threat to potential terrorism is episodic and involves negative emotions. Through the comparison of these emotional states with qualitatively different traits, I aim to further highlight the perceived threat as a meaningful factor that might encourage policy voting.

In order to deal with the research questions regarding potential motivator behind policy voting, I analyze the 2012 ANES Time-Series Election Studies that were conducted before and after the 2012 US presidential election. The results of the analyses explain how vote decisions are made through interaction between threat perception to terrorist attack and policy preference on defense spending, with comparative models that involve political knowledge, ideology, and partisanship.

Among the key variables of this study, first, perceived threat is measured by the 5-scale responses to the questionnaire on the intensity of perceived threat to potential terrorist attack.²⁾ Second, political knowledge is measured as the sum of correct answers to the five questions on political facts³⁾ in the pre-election survey. Third,

2) During the next 12 months, how likely is it that there will be a terrorist attack in the United States that kills 100 or more people? (1. Not at all likely 2. Slightly likely 3. Moderately likely 4. Very likely 5. Extremely likely).

3) #1. Do you happen to know how many times an individual can be elected President of the United States under current laws?; #2. Is the U.S. federal

ideology⁴⁾ measures individuals' ideological orientation that ranges from the most liberal to the most conservative in the 10-scale. Lastly, party identification⁵⁾ reflects how strongly an individual identifies with one of the two main political parties, either the Republican Party or the Democratic Party.

With these four types of key variables, the models presented in the following section interact these key variables with policy preference on defense spending. As the perceived threat to potential terrorism is closely related to foreign policy, I selected the defense spending as the policy sector that will be under the strongest influence of perceived threat in electoral choices. Policy preference on defense spending is measured in the 7-point scale, ranging from decreasing to increasing the governmental expenditure on defense.⁶⁾

By incorporating policy stance on defense spending as an explanatory variable in the model that explains voting behavior, I postulate that higher perceived threat would activate concern for

budget deficit – the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects – now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s?; #3. For how many years is a United States Senator elected – that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?; #4. What is Medicare?; #5. On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?

- 4) *Ideology* reflects an individual's left-right orientation, measured on a 10-point scale (0 = extremely liberal, 5 = moderate, and 10 = extremely conservative).
- 5) *Party identification* is measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strong Democratic Party, 4 = non-partisan, and 7 = strong Republican Party).
- 6) Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale? (1. Government should decrease defense spending~7. Government should increase defense spending)

relevant policy agenda in making vote decisions. In opposition to the common perception that emotions might deter reasoned decisions, I examine whether individuals who perceive much threat reflect their policy stances more clearly on their vote decisions. Conversely, citizens who feel low threat on potential terrorist attack are assumed to base their vote choices less on their evaluation on defense policy.

If the above hypotheses are affirmed, it will be shown that emotions can motivate reasoned decisions. Since Democratic Party and its presidential candidate support decreased defense spending while Republican Party and its presidential candidate support increased defense spending, it is expected that voters who perceive higher threat from terrorist attack will make vote decisions that align more closely with their candidates' policy stance on defense issue.

In summary, this paper intends to test whether emotions, especially perceived threat, can promote policy voting. If this hypothesis is to be confirmed, in comparison to individuals who perceive weaker threat, individuals who perceive stronger threat would reflect policy stance more actively on their vote decisions. In other words, high level of threat perception would trigger voters to actively reflect their policy preference on vote decisions. From these analyses, I intend to demonstrate that emotion is not always detrimental to political judgment as it was commonly believed, but rather can help and guide citizens to make electoral choices that are based on consideration for relevant policy.

3. Findings: Perceived Threat as a Motivator of Policy Voting

This section discusses how the perceived threat to potential terrorism influenced electoral choices during the 2012 US presidential election. The following analysis aims to figure out whether the perceived threat can motivate voters to base their choices on relevant policy. If policy voting is actually promoted by the heightened level of perceived threat, it will be found that individuals with stronger threat perception are more likely to vote for the candidate whose policy stance aligns with their own opinion about the issue.

The following analysis involves vote decision in relation to the policy preference of defense spending. In specific, it will be tested whether the intensity of perceived threat affects the degree of policy voting. In order to highlight the impact of perceived threat, additional models of vote decision will interact policy preference with other political traits of individuals, such as political knowledge, left-right ideology, and party identification.

Table 1 interacts defense policy stance with the perceived threat to terrorism, political knowledge, ideology, and party identification in explaining vote choices in the 2012 US presidential election, with the variable of vote choice coded as 1 for voting Obama and 0 for voting Romney. Columns 1-4 of Table 1 display the results of separate interaction models. Demographic features – including gender, age, education, income, and race – are included as control variables, but only the results of key variables are shown in Table 1 for presentational purpose.⁷⁾

Table 1. Determinants of Vote Choices:
Degree of Policy Voting by Personal Traits

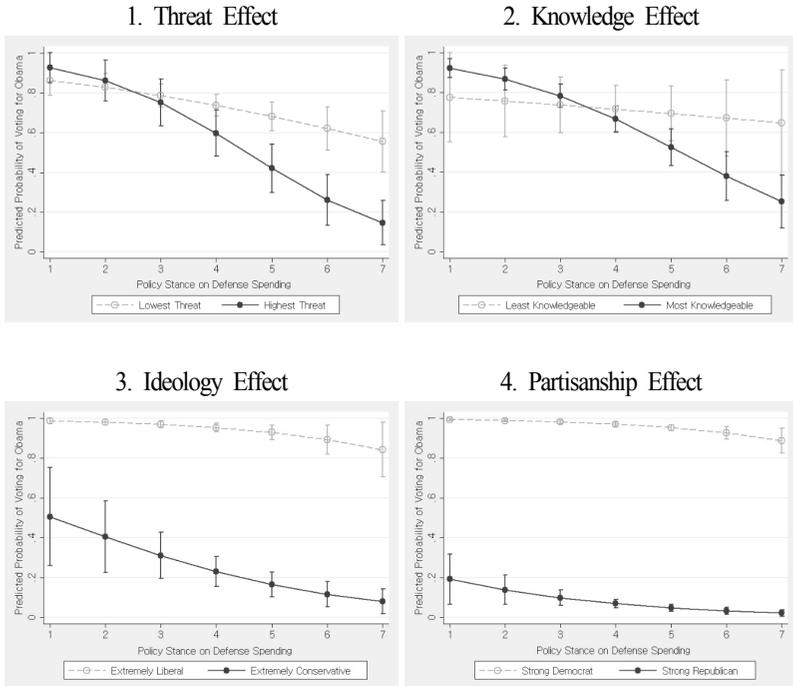
	Threat Effect	Knowledge Effect	Ideology Effect	Partisanship Effect
Defense Policy	-0.16(0,14)	-0.11(0,18)	-0.46(0,21)*	-0.49(0,14)**
Terrorism Threat	0.29(0,25)	-0.19(0,08)*	-0.20(0,08)**	-0.20(0,08)*
Political Knowledge	-0.05(0,08)	0.34(0,23)	-0.05(0,08)	-0.05(0,08)
Party Identification	-1.02(0,05)**	-1.01(0,05)**	-1.01(0,05)**	-1.07(0,15)**
Ideology	-0.71(0,07)**	-0.70(0,07)**	-0.74(0,21)**	-0.70(0,07)**
Defense Policy * Terrorism Threat	-0.11(0,05)*			
Defense Policy * Political Knowledge		-0.10(0,05)		
Defense Policy * Ideology			0.01(0,05)	
Defense Policy * Party Identification				0.01 (0,03)
War Threat ⁸⁾	-0.49(0,11)*	-0.50(0,11)**	-0.49(0,11)**	-0.49(0,11)**
China Military Threat ⁹⁾	-0.21 (0,11)	-0.19 (0,11)	-0.20(0,11)	-0.20 (0,11)
Constant	9.31(0,84)	9.05(0,97)	10.56(1,07)	10.65 (0,84)
Pseudo R ²	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.69
N	3,073	3,073	3,073	3,073

*p < 0,05; **p < 0,01 (two-tailed tests)

Note: Entries are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, with dependent variable as vote choice (1 = Obama, 0 = Romney).

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- 7) Demographic variables of gender, age, education, income, and race are controlled in the logit models, but are not reported in Table 1. In every model, coefficients of gender, age, education, and income are statistically insignificant, while those of race (Whites (0: baseline), Blacks (1), Hispanic (2)) are statistically significant.
- 8) As a result of the United States' war in Afghanistan, do you think the threat of terrorism against the United States has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same? (1. Decreased, 2. Stayed the Same, 3. Increased).
- 9) Do you think China's military is a major threat to the security of the United States, a minor threat, or not a threat? (1. Not a threat, 2. Minor threat, 3. Major threat).

The results of Table 1 support the hypothesis that the impact of policy stance on vote choice – the degree of policy voting – is conditional to the level of perceived threat. The results in the Column 1 of Table 1 shows that the way defense policy stance affects vote choices differs by the level of perceived threat. This relationship between perceived threat and policy stance is distinctive, considering the statistical insignificance of interactive terms in other models. Columns 2-4 of Table 1 reveal that political knowledge, ideology, and party identification do not significantly condition the degree of policy voting as much as the perceived threat does. Since the interpretation of interaction term is very intricate and statistical significance of independent variable does not necessarily mean a statistically significant interaction (Berry, DeMeritt, and Esarey), a better approach would be a graphical presentation as shown in Graphs 1 – 4 in Figure 1.



Note: Predicted probability of voting for Obama, with 95% confidence intervals at each point of estimation.

Figure 1. Predicted Vote Choice: Degree of Policy Voting by Personal Traits

Figure 1 illustrates the degree of policy voting depending on perceived threat, political knowledge, ideology, and partisanship. Graph 1 - 4 in Figure 1 plot expected probability of voting for Obama according to defense spending policy stance, under different conditions of perceived threat, political knowledge, party identification, and ideology. Therefore, the above graphs present predicted probability of voting for Obama in the most extreme cases of each mediating variable - the lowest versus the highest, or the strongest stances of opposite directions - of perceived threat, political

knowledge, ideology, and partisanship, with 95% confidence intervals for each point of estimation. In other words, through an interaction term analysis, predicted probability of voting for Obama is separately calculated for distinct levels of each personal trait.

Traditionally, Democratic Party has supported decreasing defense spending, while Republican Party has supported expanding defense spending. Considering this policy platform of major political parties, the prediction line is expected to have a negative slope, if people actively engage in policy voting that reflect their defense policy stance on their vote choice. In other words, if the slope is negative, the probability of voting for Obama will increase if a person more strongly supports decreasing defense spending, while the probability will decrease if a person more strongly supports increasing defense spending. The prediction line will have a negative slope if the degree of policy voting is high, so that policy preference on defense spending effectively differentiates people's vote choices.

Among the four types of interaction models, the perceived threat has the clearest conditional impact on vote choice in interaction with policy preference on defense issue, as reflected on Graph 1 of Figure 1. Among the respondents who have the lowest level of perceived threat, predicted probability of voting for Obama ranges from 0.86 to 0.56 as policy stance ranges from decrease defense spending (1) to increase defense spending (7). In contrast, respondents who have the highest level of perceived threat, predicted probability of voting for Obama ranges from 0.93 to 0.15, which reflects the stronger conditional impact of perceived threat on how policy stance influences vote choice.

In Graph 2 of Figure 1, political knowledge shows similar conditional impact on how policy stance influences vote choice, to a lesser extent than perceived threat does. The predicted probability of voting for Obama of the least knowledgeable people – illustrated as prediction line with hollow circles – are not influenced by policy stance, because the predicted probability of voting for Obama ranges from 0.76 to 0.65 and is not significantly changed by different policy stance. On the other hand, among the respondents with highest political knowledge, the expected probability of voting Obama ranges from 0.92 to 0.25 as defense spending policy stance changes from decreasing defense spending (1) to increasing defense spending (7). However, the conditional impact of political knowledge is weaker than that of perceived threat, because all the 95% confidence intervals of the most knowledgeable people overlap with those of the least knowledgeable people, while the “threat effect” model has fewer number of overlapping confidence intervals.

Graph 3 and Graph 4 in Figure 1 present the graphical illustrations of the conditional impact of policy stance on vote choice according to different traits of partisanship and ideology. The results of “partisanship effect” model and “ideology effect” model are starkly different from the conditional impact of perceived threat. While the predicted probability line with markers of hollow circles and the line with markers of filled circles represent qualitatively different groups of respondents, the slopes of these lines are not significantly different. Rather, vote choices are not swayed by policy stance, but are largely determined by one’s partisanship or ideology, because variations in policy stance does not result in a significant variation in

predicted probability of voting for Obama. In other words, strong and clear partisanship and ideology might dissuade individuals from considering policy in making vote choices.

Above analyses support the previously suggested hypothesis that the degree of policy voting – how strongly policy stance affects vote decision – depends on the intensity of perceived threat from terrorist attack. Interestingly, emotional people with high perceived threat consider most actively their policy stances in making their vote choices. Rather than blindly abiding to one's previous habits or predilections, emotions – represented as perceived threat to potential terrorism – can encourage policy voting to more actively consider relevant policy issue in vote decision.

As shown above, political knowledge similarly influences the degree of policy voting as effectively as the perceived threat does. In regard to the relationship between political knowledge and emotion, it is commonly believed that political sophisticates dispassionately make political judgment, unperturbed by emotional stimuli. With a further question on this relationship, the additional model presented in Table 2 interacts perceived threat with political knowledge in explaining the policy stance on defense spending.

Table 2 shows the interactive impact of perceived threat and political knowledge on policy stance on defense spending. From this analysis, it becomes clear that political sophisticates with more political knowledge are more strongly influenced by the intensity of perceived threat than individuals with less political knowledge. Moreover, since regression coefficient of the interaction term between perceived threat and political knowledge is statistically significant, it

is further implied that the way perceived threat shapes policy stance is conditional to the level of political knowledge.

Table 2. Determinants of Defense Spending Policy Stance: Threat and Knowledge

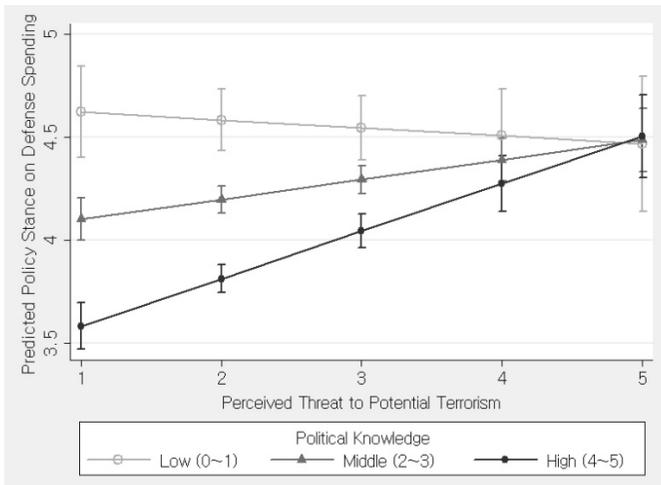
Terrorism Threat	-0,07 (0,07)
Political Knowledge	-0,33 (0,05)**
Terrorism Threat * Political Knowledge	0,07 (0,02)**
Party Identification	0,12 (0,01)**
Left-Right Ideology	0,20 (0,02)**
War Threat	0,28 (0,03)**
China Military Threat	-0,07 (0,03)
Female	0,02 (0,04)
Age	0,03 (0,01)**
Education	-0,11 (0,02)**
Income	0,00 (0,00)
Race (Baseline: Whites)	
Blacks	0,22 (0,07)**
Hispanics	0,00 (0,06)
Constant	3,18 (0,23)**
R ²	0,20
N	3,834

*p < 0,05; **p < 0,01 (two-tailed tests)

Note: Entries are unstandardized ordinary least-squares regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, Given the trait of dependent variable, ordered logistic regression can be considered as an alternative, but it results in the same set of significant factors with similar significance level and does not change substantive interpretation.

Figure 2 further contradicts the common belief on the relationship between political knowledge and emotion. First, the almost horizontal prediction line with hollow circles is predicted policy stance of individuals with the lowest political knowledge. Second, the prediction line with triangle markers is for the respondents with moderate level

of political knowledge. Lastly, the prediction line with filled circles is the steepest and presents expected policy stance of people with the highest political knowledge. Additionally, it is interesting to observe that the highest level of perceived threat leads individuals to be supportive about increasing defense spending regardless of political knowledge level. Three prediction lines converge at the highest level of perceived threat (5) to a supportive stance on the issue, which further implies the influence of perceived threat over policy stance on defense spending.



Note: Predicted policy stance on defense spending, with 95% confidence intervals at each point of estimation.

Figure 2. Predicted Policy Stance by Political Knowledge Level

According to Figure 2, which shows the conditional impact of perceived threat on policy stance according to different levels of political knowledge, it is clearly demonstrated that different

combinations of political knowledge and perceived threat can result in distinctive policy preferences. Policy stances of respondents with the high level of political knowledge – individuals who got four to five questions correct – are clearly distinguished by the intensity of perceived threat. In other words, among political sophisticates, level of threat perception effectively distinguishes individuals' policy stances: the highest threat leads to the most supportive stance on increasing defense spending, while the lowest threat leads to the least supportive of increasing defense spending. Among respondents with medium level of political knowledge, the relationship that 'high threat leads to support increasing defense spending and low threat leads to support decreasing defense spending' is sustained to a lesser extent. However, the impact of perceived threat on policy stance disappears or is reversed among the respondents with low political knowledge. Among individuals who got zero or one question correct in political knowledge, perceived threat do not effectively differentiate their policy stances.

Different from the common perception that political sophisticates are unperturbed by emotions when they assess political issues, the results show that political sophisticates with higher level of political knowledge more actively reflect their perceived threat on policy preference on defense spending. As shown in the above analyses on vote choice and policy preference, this study demonstrates that emotions such as perceived threat, rather than discouraging well-reasoned political judgment, can encourage policy voting, along with the additional insight that intense emotional reaction does not clash with political sophistication.

4. Discussion

With a focus on the potential of emotions in heightening the interest in political environment and further improving political judgment, this paper examines the relationship between perceived threat and policy voting. Through the analyses that interact perceived threat with policy preference, it is demonstrated that the level of perceived threat to potential terrorist attack effectively determines the degree of policy voting based on the relevant policy, defense spending. Following implications can be found from the findings of this study.

First, the degree of policy voting is effectively conditioned by the intensity of perceived threat. In other words, heightened emotions to potential threat can encourage the consideration of relevant policy in vote decision. As found in the preceding analyses, policy stance on defense spending does not effectively shapes vote choice of every individual, but rather has selective influence among people with high level of perceived threat.

The impact of defense policy stance on vote choice conditioned by perceived threat becomes clearer when it is compared with other models that incorporate political knowledge, ideology, and partisanship. While political knowledge has conditional impact to a weaker extent than perceived threat does, ideology and partisanship have virtually no interactive relationship with policy stance and overwhelm policy consideration in making vote choice.

Second, emotions, represented as perceived threat, are not in conflict with political sophistication in policy preference formation

and policy voting. Rather, higher perceived threat is found to encourage policy voting in the presidential election. As indicated in the additional analysis on the determinants of policy preference, higher political sophistication is not incompatible with emotional reactions to political surroundings in the formation of political preference. Different from the popular notion of cold-hearted political sophisticates, knowledgeable people reflect their perceived threat more clearly on their policy preference. In short, political sophistication is not in incompatible relationship with emotion in political judgment as it was commonly believed.

With these findings, this paper proposes an alternative viewpoint that counters the previously held common perceptions on how ordinary people shape political attitude and behavior. Previously, policy voting was considered as a process that is largely unrelated with emotional reactions to the political environment. Moreover, it was commonly believed that political sophistication is unrelated or negatively related to the emotional components of political attitude and judgment. However, in counter to these popular beliefs, this paper finds that policy voting is promoted when citizens more clearly perceive potential threat from their surrounding environment. Moreover, it further finds that political sophistication is not incompatible with intense emotions in political judgments. Rather than leading to inconsiderate political decisions, emotions are found to have the potential to promote policy voting, which coheres with the ideals of representative democracy and electoral responsibility that presidential election aims to achieve.

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Abstract

**Perceived Threat as a Motivator of Policy Voting:
Analysis of the 2012 US Presidential Election**

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This paper discusses the role of perceived threat in strengthening the link between policy preferences and vote decisions in the context of the US presidential election. While it is commonly believed that policy voting is weakly related with emotion, it is found that higher perceived threat leads individuals to more clearly reflect their policy stance on vote choices. Analysis of the 2012 ANES data reveals that perceived threat, rather than overshadowing policy consideration, makes individuals more attentive to relevant policy, such as defense spending, in making vote decisions. Moreover, influence of perceived threat on policy preferences is especially prominent among the people with higher political knowledge who are commonly expected to be dispassionate in making political judgment. Through these findings this paper highlights the potential of perceived threat as a trigger of policy voting that undergirds reasoned vote decisions; therefore, such decisions make vote choices to achieve better electoral accountability.

Key Words

Threat Perception, Emotion, Policy Voting, Terrorism, Defense Spending,
The 2012 US Presidential Election