



The Influence of Foreign Policy Issues on Voting Behavior and Electoral Preferences: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Increasing global interconnectedness has strengthened the role of foreign policy issues in shaping domestic electoral behavior beyond traditional determinants such as economic conditions and ideology.

Objective: This study systematically reviews the influence of foreign policy issues on voting behavior and electoral preferences.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA framework. Studies published between 2020 and 2025 were identified through major academic databases using predefined inclusion criteria. Fourteen eligible studies were critically appraised using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tool and synthesized using the Synthesis Without Meta-Analysis (SWiM) guidelines.

Results: The review shows that foreign policy issues significantly influence voting behavior, particularly through political information, communication strategies, and transnational political dynamics. Exposure to political information, especially negative framing, shapes voter perceptions and participation, while political mobilization, economic conditions, and psychological factors further affect electoral preferences across different political contexts.

Conclusion: Voting behavior is shaped by the interaction of domestic and international factors. As foreign policy becomes increasingly salient in contemporary politics, incorporating transnational and informational dimensions is essential for understanding electoral decision-making.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing interconnectedness of the global political landscape has significantly influenced the dynamics of domestic electoral processes, where international issues are no longer confined to diplomatic arenas but have become salient factors in shaping voter decision-making. As globalization intensifies cross-border interactions, foreign policy concerns such as international conflicts, trade relations, migration, and diplomatic alliances are increasingly integrated into public discourse and political campaigns (Dennison & Kriesi, 2023; Lodhi et al., 2024). Consequently, voters are becoming more aware of how global events affect national interests, prompting scholars to examine the extent to which foreign policy issues influence electoral outcomes and political behavior. Traditional models of voting behavior have largely emphasized domestic factors such as economic performance, party identification, and candidate personality (Malet, 2022; Benasaglio Berlucchi & Hino, 2022), yet

emerging research suggests that international considerations are gaining prominence in shaping electoral preferences.

Foreign policy issues can serve as critical determinants in electoral politics by influencing public opinion, shaping political narratives, and framing candidates' platforms. Political actors often leverage international events and policy positions to appeal to voters' perceptions of national security, economic stability, and global standing (Jastramskis, 2023; Wagner & Meyer, 2023). For instance, issues such as territorial disputes, international trade agreements, and geopolitical tensions may heighten voter sensitivity to foreign policy competence, thereby affecting candidate evaluation and vote choice. Moreover, the salience of foreign policy issues may vary depending on contextual factors, including media coverage, national crises, and the broader political environment, which can amplify or diminish their impact on electoral behavior (Gilardi et al., 2022).

Despite growing interest in the intersection between foreign policy and electoral politics, there remains considerable variation in findings across existing studies. Some research indicates that foreign policy issues play a significant role in shaping voting behavior, particularly during periods of international crisis, while other studies suggest that domestic concerns continue to dominate voter priorities (Shmuel, 2024; DiLorenzo & Rooney, 2020). Additionally, differences in political systems, voter awareness, and methodological approaches contribute to inconsistent conclusions regarding the influence of foreign policy on electoral preferences. These discrepancies highlight the need for a systematic synthesis of the literature to better understand the conditions under which foreign policy issues affect voter behavior.

Given the evolving nature of global politics and its increasing relevance to domestic elections, this study aims to systematically examine the influence of foreign policy issues on voting behavior and electoral preferences. By reviewing and synthesizing existing empirical studies, this research seeks to evaluate the extent to which foreign policy considerations shape electoral decision-making, identify key patterns and determinants, and assess methodological trends within the literature. Furthermore, this review will explore how foreign policy issues compare to traditional domestic factors in influencing voter behavior and examine the contextual variables that may moderate their impact.

Through a comprehensive analysis of existing research, this study aims to provide valuable insights for political scientists, policymakers, and campaign strategists regarding the role of foreign policy in electoral processes. By understanding how international issues influence voter preferences, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary electoral behavior in an increasingly globalized world and informs future studies on the interaction between domestic politics and international affairs.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a systematic review methodology to examine the influence of foreign policy issues on voting behavior and electoral preferences. A systematic review approach was selected to ensure a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable synthesis of existing empirical literature. This method allows for the identification, evaluation, and integration of findings across studies, providing a clearer understanding of how foreign policy considerations shape electoral decision-making in various political contexts.

To guide the research process, the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcomes) framework was utilized in formulating a focused and structured research question. The use of the PICO framework ensured clarity in defining the scope of the review and facilitated the systematic identification of relevant studies. The guiding research question for this study was:

"How do foreign policy issues influence voting behavior and electoral preferences among voters?"

Table 1. Description of PICO

PICO Elements	Description
People/ Participants	Voters or the general electorate
Intervention	Foreign policy issues (e.g., international conflicts, trade policies, diplomatic relations, national security concerns)
Comparison	Domestic issues or absence/low salience of foreign policy issues
Outcomes	Voting behavior and electoral preferences (e.g., vote choice, candidate evaluation, political attitudes)

Search Methods

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies examining the influence of foreign policy issues on voting behavior and electoral preferences. Multiple academic databases were utilized to ensure broad coverage of peer-reviewed and scholarly literature. These databases included ScienceDirect (1,000,000), ProQuest (13,732), SAGE Journals (27,428), Taylor & Francis Online (65,509), PubMed (6,100,659), and Google Scholar (296,000), covering publications from 2000 to 2025. This time frame was selected to capture both foundational and contemporary studies reflecting the evolving role of foreign policy in electoral politics.

To ensure a rigorous and exhaustive search process, Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine and combine search terms. Quotation marks (") were used for exact phrase searching, while parentheses () were applied to group related concepts and enhance search precision. The search strategy was carefully developed to capture a wide range of relevant studies and included the following keywords: ("foreign policy" OR "international issues" OR "external affairs") AND (voters OR electorate OR "voting population") AND ("voting behavior" OR "electoral behavior" OR "electoral preferences" OR "vote choice") AND (impact OR influence OR effect OR determinants).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting articles in this study were as follows: (1) studies that involved voters or members of the general electorate as participants, (2) articles published in peer-reviewed international journals, (3) publications within the time frame of 2000 to 2025, (4) studies that examined foreign policy issues—such as international conflicts, trade relations, diplomacy, or national security—as a key independent variable, (5) empirical studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental, survey-based, or case study approaches), and (6) articles written in English.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included: (1) review articles, conference proceedings, study protocols, opinion papers, case reports, and theses or dissertations, (2) studies that did not directly assess voting behavior, electoral preferences, or voter decision-making as primary outcomes, (3) studies focusing exclusively on domestic political issues without consideration of foreign policy or international factors, and (4) articles that were not accessible in full text or unavailable for download.

Screening of Articles

The screening process for this systematic review, which examines the influence of foreign policy issues on voting behavior and electoral preferences, was conducted through a systematic and collaborative approach. Four primary reviewers (HKP, SMS, SHCB, and NMM) led the initial stages, ensuring methodological rigor and consistency in the selection process.

To comprehensively identify relevant studies, predefined keywords and search terms were systematically applied across the selected academic databases. The first phase of screening involved a thorough evaluation of titles and abstracts to determine their relevance to the inclusion criteria, particularly focusing on studies involving voters or the general electorate, the role of foreign policy issues as a key variable, and the assessment of voting behavior or electoral preferences as primary outcomes.

Following the preliminary screening, full-text availability was verified to ensure that only accessible, complete, and high-quality studies were included for further assessment. Articles that met the initial criteria were then subjected to full-text review to confirm their eligibility based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Any discrepancies or disagreements among the primary reviewers during the selection process were resolved through a secondary evaluation by an independent group of reviewers (SAP, SASD, HAS, SFP, and PRHG). This additional layer of review helped ensure consistency, reduce potential bias, and maintain the overall integrity and reliability of the screening process.

Data Extraction

Fourteen articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected for data extraction in this systematic review. A structured data extraction framework was employed to systematically gather and organize key information from each study. The extracted variables included authorship, year of publication, country of origin, research design, study setting, intervention or exposure model (e.g., foreign policy issues, political information, protest activity, or external political events), duration of the study, key findings, and components of electoral outcomes.

The data extraction process focused on identifying how various external and contextual factors particularly foreign policy-related issues and international influences affect voting behavior and electoral preferences. Additional variables such as voter characteristics, political context, and mediating factors (e.g., media exposure, psychological traits, and institutional conditions) were also considered when available.

All extracted data were systematically organized into a comprehensive summary table (Table 2, Appendix 1) to facilitate comparison across studies. This tabulated synthesis enabled the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences in methodological approaches and findings. Furthermore, it supported the classification of studies according to key thematic areas, such as foreign policy influence, information effects, and structural determinants of voting behavior. This structured data extraction process ensured consistency, minimized bias, and provided a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation of the findings in this systematic review.

Quality Assessment of Selected Articles

To evaluate the methodological quality of the selected studies, the researchers employed the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, which are widely recognized for assessing the rigor and credibility of diverse research designs. Given that the included studies in this systematic review comprised a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and quasi-experimental approaches, the appropriate JBI checklists were applied accordingly to ensure a consistent and comprehensive evaluation. These tools have undergone extensive peer review and are endorsed by the JBI Scientific Committee ([Barker et al., 2023](#)).

The JBI critical appraisal checklists were utilized to assess key methodological domains, including clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, validity and reliability of measurement tools, identification of confounding variables, and the robustness of data analysis. For qualitative studies, additional criteria such as congruity between research methodology and research questions, adequacy of data representation, and reflexivity of the researchers were also examined. Meanwhile, for quantitative and quasi-experimental studies, emphasis was placed on internal validity, comparability of groups, and the appropriateness of statistical analyses.

The quality assessment process was conducted independently by the primary reviewers (HKP, SMS, SHCB, and NMM) to ensure objectivity and minimize bias. Each study was carefully appraised based on the relevant JBI criteria, and ratings were assigned to reflect the overall methodological quality. Any discrepancies or disagreements in the appraisal process were resolved through discussion and

consensus, with further validation from an independent panel of reviewers (SAP, SASD, HAS, SFP, and PRHG).

Overall, the application of the JBI Critical Appraisal Tools ensured a rigorous and transparent evaluation of the included studies, strengthening the reliability and validity of the findings presented in this systematic review.

Risk of Bias

The risk of bias in the included studies was assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, ensuring a consistent and rigorous evaluation across different research designs. Given that this systematic review includes a combination of quantitative, qualitative, quasi-experimental, and mixed-methods studies, the JBI framework was applied to evaluate methodological quality and potential sources of bias within each study.

The assessment focused on key domains such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, adequacy of sampling strategies, validity and reliability of data collection methods, identification and management of confounding variables, and transparency in data analysis. For studies involving mixed or complex designs, particular attention was given to the integration of different methodological components and the consistency between research questions, methods, and findings.

Each study was evaluated based on the proportion of criteria met ("Yes" responses). Studies with high percentages of "Yes" ratings were categorized as having a low risk of bias, indicating strong methodological rigor and reliability. Studies with some unclear or partially met criteria were classified as having a moderate risk of bias, while those with several unmet criteria were considered to have a high risk of bias.

Overall, the majority of the included studies demonstrated a low to moderate risk of bias, suggesting that the evidence base is generally robust. Quantitative and experimental studies tended to show strong internal validity, particularly in terms of statistical analysis and research design. However, some studies exhibited limitations related to sampling representativeness, potential confounding variables, and incomplete reporting of methodological procedures. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies generally showed coherence between research design and findings, although a few presented uncertainties in methodological integration and transparency.

The risk of bias assessment was conducted independently by the primary reviewers (HKP, SMS, SHCB, and NMM), with discrepancies resolved through consensus and further review by an independent panel (SAP, SASD, HAS, SFP, and PRHG). This process ensured objectivity, minimized evaluator bias, and strengthened the credibility of the overall findings of the systematic review.

Table 2. Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tool for Mixed Methods

Author(s) & Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	% Yes	Overall Interpretation
Jastramskis (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Soontjens (2023)	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	U	86%	Moderate risk of bias
Talaifar et al. (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Walter (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	86%	Moderate risk of bias
Druckman et al. (2022)	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	U	U	71%	Moderate risk of bias
Johnston & Ballard (2016)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Bergh et al. (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Bukari et al. (2022)	Y	U	U	Y	Y	U	U	57%	High risk of bias
Wellman et al. (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Carvalho et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias

De Castro (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Turnbull-Dugarte & Rama (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Aldrich et al. (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	86%	Moderate risk of bias
Kertzer & Zeitzoff (2017)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	86%	Moderate risk of bias

Note: (Y) criterion is fully met, indicating high methodological quality, (U) criterion is partially met or not explicitly stated, leading to some uncertainty, (N) criterion is not met, indicating a potential risk of bias or methodological weakness.

Data Analysis

The authors employed the Synthesis Without Meta-Analysis (SWiM) guidelines for data analysis to ensure a systematic, transparent, and structured synthesis of findings across the included studies (Campbell et al., 2020). Given the heterogeneity of the selected articles comprising quantitative, qualitative, quasi-experimental, and mixed-methods designs a narrative synthesis approach was deemed appropriate for integrating the evidence on how foreign policy issues and related external factors influence voting behavior and electoral preferences.

The initial stage of analysis involved organizing the extracted data into key analytical categories, including authorship and year of publication, country of origin, research design, study setting, intervention or exposure model (e.g., foreign policy preferences, political information, protest activity, international political events), duration, outcome measures, and key findings. These elements were systematically tabulated (Table 2, Appendix 1) to facilitate comparison and ensure consistency in the analysis process.

Following data organization, the studies were grouped according to thematic similarities aligned with the objectives of the review. The synthesis focused on several core analytical domains: (1) the influence of foreign policy preferences on vote choice, (2) the impact of political information and media exposure on voter behavior, (3) the role of international or transnational political events in shaping domestic electoral preferences, and (4) structural and psychological determinants of voting behavior. This thematic grouping allowed for a more coherent interpretation of findings across diverse methodological approaches.

A comparative analysis was then conducted to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and divergences among the included studies. Particular attention was given to the strength and direction of relationships between independent variables (e.g., foreign policy issues, political information exposure, protest activity, international influences) and dependent variables (e.g., voting behavior, voter turnout, electoral preferences). Additionally, methodological strengths and limitations—such as study design robustness, sample representativeness, and potential biases—were critically examined to contextualize the findings.

To enhance clarity and interpretability, the synthesized results were presented in a structured summary table (Table 2, Appendix 1), enabling cross-study comparison of key variables and outcomes. This approach ensured methodological transparency and provided a comprehensive understanding of how foreign policy-related factors and external influences shape electoral behavior across different political contexts. The authors employed the **Synthesis Without Meta-Analysis (SWiM) guidelines** for data analysis to ensure a systematic, transparent, and structured synthesis of findings across the included studies (Campbell et al., 2020). Given the heterogeneity of the selected articles comprising quantitative, qualitative, quasi-experimental, and mixed-methods designs a narrative synthesis approach was deemed appropriate for integrating the evidence on how foreign policy issues and related external factors influence voting behavior and electoral preferences.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results:

3.1 Characteristics of the selected studies

A total of nine studies were included in the final review. Initially, 17,374 articles were identified from multiple databases, with 16,721 articles excluded based on limiters such as year of publication, article type, subject area, and open-access availability. After filtering the remaining 653 articles by title and abstract, 38 articles were selected for full-text screening, from which only nine met the full eligibility criteria after applying inclusion standards and incorporating additional sources from reference lists (Figure 1). The studies were conducted in various countries, including Saudi Arabia (2), China (2), Ecuador (1), Indonesia (1), Iran (1), Pakistan (1), and India (1). Among these, eight studies were conducted in university settings, while one study took place in a secondary school environment.

The research designs varied across studies, with four using a quasi-experimental approach, three employing randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and two utilizing a mixed-methods approach. In terms of interventions, five studies focused on integrating ChatGPT into structured writing instruction, while two studies examined ChatGPT's influence on research writing and academic integrity. One study implemented a ChatGPT-based Constructivist Learning Model, and another assessed ChatGPT's role in enhancing language skills through mobile applications. The intervention durations varied, with five studies implementing a 12-week intervention, one study lasting 10 weeks, one study extending for 16 weeks, and two studies without a clearly defined intervention period.

All reviewed studies reported positive outcomes in writing skill development, demonstrating improvements in writing proficiency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and argument structure. Additionally, several studies emphasized that pre-recorded lectures, AI-assisted feedback, online quizzes, and interactive writing tasks played a crucial role in enhancing student performance. While all studies supported ChatGPT's effectiveness in improving writing skills, variations in intervention models and study settings suggest that structured implementation and AI-guided instruction significantly impact learning outcomes. The diversity of methodologies in these studies highlights ChatGPT's adaptability in academic writing instruction, reinforcing the importance of structured AI integration to maximize its benefits in undergraduate education.

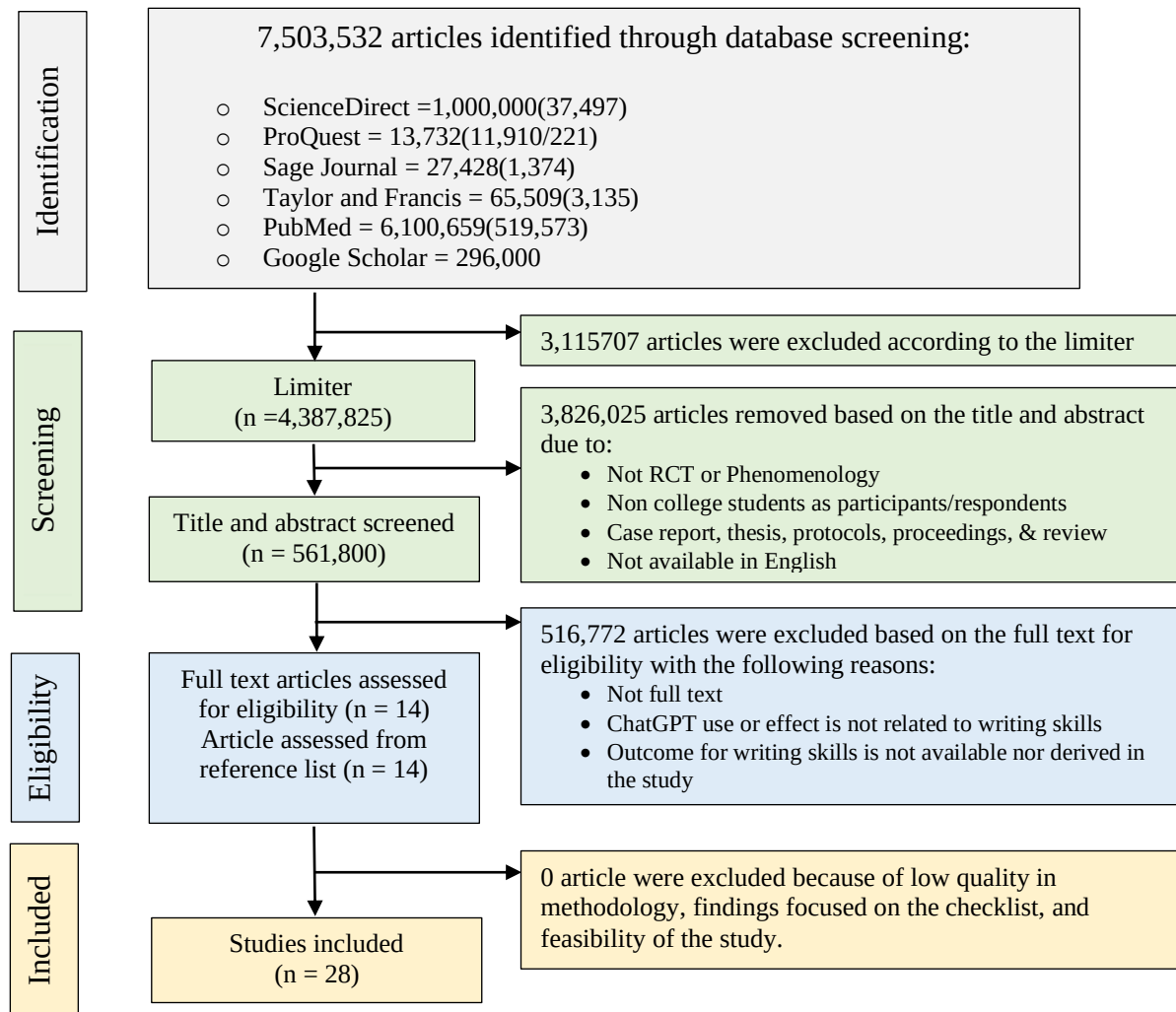


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

3.2 Participants and study settings

The participants across the included studies varied considerably, reflecting the diverse contexts in which voting behavior and electoral preferences are examined. Unlike studies limited to a single population group, this systematic review incorporated research involving individual voters, university students, political elites, and general populations across multiple countries. The settings ranged from national elections and local electoral districts to cross-national surveys and experimental environments, providing a comprehensive perspective on electoral behavior.

Several studies focused on general electorates within national contexts, particularly in countries such as the United States, Lithuania, Spain, Norway, and Belgium, where participants included registered voters or survey respondents reflecting broader populations. Other studies utilized large-scale datasets and global surveys, capturing public opinion across multiple countries and regions, thereby enhancing the generalizability of findings related to foreign policy and voting behavior.

A subset of studies specifically examined younger or first-time voters, particularly university students. For instance, experimental research conducted in Portugal involved university students exposed to different types of political information to assess changes in perception and turnout. These participants were considered particularly relevant due to their susceptibility to information effects and evolving political attitudes. Similarly, some studies explored political elites, such as Members of Parliament, to understand perceptions of voter behavior and electoral decision-making processes.

The study settings also demonstrated substantial variation. Several investigations were conducted within the context of national and presidential elections, including those in Lithuania and the United States, while others focused on local or municipal elections, such as in Chile and Bolivia. Additionally, some studies were situated in controlled experimental environments, including randomized controlled trials and field experiments, where participants were exposed to specific interventions such as political messaging or voter mobilization strategies.

Moreover, a number of studies adopted cross-national and longitudinal settings, analyzing data over extended periods or across multiple countries. These included research on global public opinion, international political events such as Brexit, and datasets covering electoral systems and voting rights across decades. Such settings allowed for the examination of transnational influences and long-term trends in electoral behavior.

Overall, the diversity of participants and study settings enhances the robustness of this systematic review by incorporating multiple perspectives and contexts. It demonstrates that voting behavior is not confined to a single demographic or environment but is influenced by a wide range of actors and settings, from individual voters and students to institutional and global contexts.

3.3 Factors Influencing Voting Behavior and Electoral Preferences

This section presents a thematic synthesis of the findings from the included studies, highlighting the key factors that shape voting behavior and electoral preferences. Across the reviewed literature, five major themes emerged: (1) foreign policy preferences, (2) political information and media exposure, (3) transnational political influences, (4) political mobilization and participation, and (5) structural and psychological determinants.

3.3.1 Foreign Policy Preferences as Determinants of Vote Choice

One of the central findings of this review is the significant role of foreign policy preferences in shaping electoral behavior. In political systems where executive leaders hold substantial authority over foreign affairs, voters tend to evaluate candidates based on their positions on international issues. For instance, [Jastramskis \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that voters' attitudes toward foreign policy particularly regarding defense and relations with major geopolitical actors serve as strong and consistent predictors of vote choice in both rounds of presidential elections.

This finding supports the argument that foreign policy is no longer a peripheral concern in electoral decision-making but has become an integral component of voter evaluation, especially in contexts characterized by geopolitical tensions or security concerns. Moreover, [Walter \(2021\)](#) found that voters' preferences regarding international cooperation or withdrawal from institutions are shaped by observed outcomes in other countries, further reinforcing the salience of foreign policy in domestic electoral contexts.

Additionally, [Johnston & Ballard \(2016\)](#) emphasized that foreign policy and leadership significantly influence public opinion at a global level, suggesting that voters are responsive not only to domestic policy outcomes but also to how leaders position their countries internationally. These findings collectively indicate that foreign policy preferences function as a critical independent variable influencing electoral decisions.

3.3.2 Influence of Political Information and Media Exposure

The review also highlights the powerful role of political information in shaping voter perceptions and behavior. Exposure to politically relevant information whether positive, neutral, or negative has been shown to significantly influence electoral outcomes. [Carvalho et al. \(2023\)](#) found that negative information about government performance had a stronger effect on young voters, leading to greater shifts in perceptions and increased voter turnout among undecided individuals. This "negativity bias" suggests that voters are more responsive to adverse political information, which can shape both attitudes and participation.

Similarly, [Bukari et al. \(2022\)](#) identified social media as a critical mediating factor in voting decisions, noting that digital platforms can amplify political messaging and influence voter engagement. However, the study also acknowledged the ongoing debate regarding the extent and consistency of social media's impact.

Furthermore, [Soontjens \(2023\)](#) reported that politicians perceive voters as being more influenced by campaign communication strategies and candidate appeal than by policy content, indicating that the delivery and framing of information may be as important as the substance itself. Together, these findings underscore the importance of information environments in shaping electoral behavior, particularly in an era characterized by rapid information dissemination and digital communication.

3.3.3 Transnational and External Political Influences (Electoral Contagion)

Another significant theme emerging from the review is the influence of transnational political dynamics on domestic electoral behavior. Several studies demonstrate that political events in one country can have measurable effects on voter preferences in another. [Turnbull-Dugarte & Rama \(2022\)](#) provided evidence of "electoral contagion," showing that the electoral defeat of a far-right leader in one country led to a decline in support for ideologically similar parties elsewhere. This suggests that voters use international political developments as cues when evaluating domestic political options.

[Walter \(2021\)](#) further supports this finding by demonstrating that the outcomes of foreign policy decisions, such as withdrawal from international institutions, can either encourage or discourage similar preferences among voters in other countries. These effects are mediated by voters' access to information and their willingness to learn from external experiences.

In addition, [Druckman et al. \(2022\)](#) highlighted those public perceptions of foreign policy effectiveness vary depending on leadership and strategic choices, indicating that international actions can shape domestic political attitudes. Collectively, these studies emphasize that electoral behavior is increasingly influenced by global political interconnectedness, reflecting the growing importance of international context in domestic decision-making.

3.3.4 Political Mobilization and Participation Dynamics

Political mobilization mechanisms were also found to play a crucial role in influencing voter turnout and electoral preferences. [De Castro \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that protest activity significantly increased voter turnout in affected areas while simultaneously reducing support for incumbent candidates. This suggests that collective political action can enhance political efficacy and encourage greater participation in electoral processes.

Similarly, [Bergh et al. \(2021\)](#) found that voter mobilization strategies, such as text messaging and phone calls, were effective in increasing turnout, particularly in elections with lower salience. These findings indicate that direct engagement strategies can meaningfully influence voter participation, especially among less politically engaged populations.

[Kertzer & Zeitzoff \(2017\)](#) further showed that local electoral dynamics, such as the concentration of majority-party supporters, can increase participation rates, highlighting the role of contextual and environmental factors in shaping voter behavior. Overall, these studies demonstrate that both grassroots and institutional mobilization efforts are key drivers of electoral engagement.

3.3.5 Structural and Psychological Determinants of Voting Behavior

Finally, the review identifies a range of structural and psychological factors that influence voting behavior. [Talaifar et al. \(2022\)](#) found that economic deprivation, demographic characteristics, and psychological traits such as neuroticism were strongly associated with voting patterns. Regions with higher levels of economic hardship and psychological distress were more likely to support particular political candidates, illustrating the interplay between socio-economic conditions and electoral outcomes.

[Johnston & Ballard \(2016\)](#) also highlighted the role of leadership and historical context in shaping public opinion, emphasizing that voter attitudes are influenced by both current conditions and past experiences.

In addition, [Wellman et al. \(2018\)](#) demonstrated that institutional factors, such as voting rights and electoral systems, affect political participation and outcomes at a global level. These findings suggest that voting behavior is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by broader structural conditions and institutional frameworks.

Together, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of electoral behavior, where psychological predispositions, economic realities, and institutional contexts interact with political information and foreign policy considerations.

3.4 Integrated Synthesis of Evidence

Building on the thematic analysis presented in Section 3.3, this section provides an integrated synthesis of the evidence, drawing connections across the identified factors influencing voting behavior and electoral preferences. The findings from the 14 included studies reveal that electoral decision-making is shaped by the interaction of foreign policy considerations, information environments, transnational dynamics, mobilization mechanisms, and structural as well as psychological factors.

A key insight from the synthesis is that foreign policy preferences do not operate in isolation but are mediated by informational and contextual factors. While [Jastramskis \(2023\)](#) established that foreign policy attitudes significantly influence vote choice, other studies demonstrate that the salience and impact of these preferences depend on how they are communicated and framed. For instance, [Carvalho et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that exposure to negative political information amplifies perception shifts and behavioral responses, particularly among undecided voters. This suggests that foreign policy issues become more electorally influential when embedded within persuasive or emotionally resonant narratives.

Furthermore, the review highlights the growing importance of information ecosystems and media environments in shaping electoral outcomes. Social media and campaign communication strategies serve as key channels through which foreign policy issues are disseminated and interpreted ([Bukari et al., 2022](#); [Soontjens, 2023](#)). These platforms not only increase access to political information but also contribute to selective exposure, framing effects, and potential misinformation, thereby influencing how voters perceive both domestic and international issues.

Another important dimension emerging from the synthesis is the role of transnational political influences, which extend the scope of electoral behavior beyond national boundaries. Evidence from [Turnbull-Dugarte & Rama \(2022\)](#) and [Walter \(2021\)](#) demonstrates that voters are influenced by political developments in other countries, using them as reference points in evaluating domestic actors and policies. These “electoral contagion” and policy diffusion effects indicate that globalization and interconnected media systems have expanded the informational context within which voters operate. As a result, foreign policy issues gain additional relevance as they are continuously shaped by international events and comparative political experiences.

In addition, the synthesis underscores the significance of political mobilization and engagement mechanisms in translating attitudes into actual voting behavior. Studies such as [De Castro \(2020\)](#) and [Bergh et al. \(2021\)](#) show that both grassroots movements (e.g., protests) and institutional strategies (e.g., voter outreach campaigns) can significantly increase voter turnout and alter electoral preferences. These mechanisms enhance political efficacy and issue salience, thereby strengthening the link between voter attitudes including those related to foreign policy and electoral participation.

The findings also reveal that structural and psychological factors act as underlying conditions that shape how voters respond to political information and foreign policy issues. [Talaifar et al. \(2022\)](#)

demonstrated that economic deprivation and psychological traits influence voting patterns, while Johnston & Ballard (2016) emphasized the role of leadership and historical context in shaping public opinion. Institutional factors, such as electoral systems and voting rights, further structure the opportunities and constraints within which voters make decisions (Wellman et al., 2018). These factors interact with informational and attitudinal variables, producing varied electoral outcomes across different contexts.

Importantly, the synthesis reveals that voter behavior is highly heterogeneous, with variations observed across demographic groups, political contexts, and levels of political engagement. For example, Carvalho et al. (2023) found that first-time voters are more susceptible to negative information, while De Castro (2020) highlighted differences in responsiveness to political mobilization. This heterogeneity suggests that the influence of foreign policy issues and other determinants is contingent upon voter characteristics and situational factors.

Overall, the integrated evidence suggests that voting behavior is best understood as a multidimensional and dynamic process, where foreign policy issues serve as one of several interconnected determinants. The increasing salience of global politics, combined with advancements in information technology and communication, has intensified the interaction between domestic and international factors in shaping electoral outcomes.

This synthesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of electoral behavior by demonstrating that the influence of foreign policy on voting is conditional, context-dependent, and mediated by broader political, informational, and socio-economic dynamics. These findings highlight the need for future research to adopt integrative frameworks that account for both domestic and transnational influences in explaining voter decision-making.

Discussion:

The findings of this systematic review provide compelling evidence that foreign policy issues, along with broader informational, structural, and transnational dynamics, play a significant role in shaping voting behavior and electoral preferences. The synthesis of 14 studies demonstrates that electoral decision-making is increasingly influenced not only by domestic considerations but also by international developments, mediated through information environments and individual-level factors.

One of the central contributions of this study is the identification of foreign policy preferences as a meaningful determinant of vote choice, particularly in political systems where leadership roles are closely tied to international affairs. The findings of Jastramskis (2023) confirm that voters' attitudes toward foreign policy such as defense and international relations significantly influence electoral decisions. This aligns with recent research emphasizing the growing salience of foreign policy in electoral politics, particularly in an era of geopolitical uncertainty. For example, a study by Kertzer & Renshon (2022) found that voters increasingly evaluate candidates based on foreign policy competence and crisis management capabilities Newell et al. (2021). Similarly, (Bechtel et al., 2022) demonstrated that international cooperation and foreign policy stances can directly shape voter preferences in democratic contexts (Ella Mae, 2026). These findings reinforce the argument that foreign policy is no longer a peripheral issue but a central component of electoral decision-making.

The review also highlights the critical role of political information and media exposure in influencing voter perceptions. The findings of Carvalho et al. (2023) indicate that negative political information has a stronger impact on voter attitudes and turnout, particularly among undecided and first-time voters. This "negativity bias" is consistent with recent empirical evidence showing that negative political messaging is more cognitively salient and persuasive than positive framing. For instance, Javines found that negative news content significantly increases political engagement and opinion change among voters (Javines, 2024).

Furthermore, the role of social media as a mediating factor Bukari et al. (2022) is supported by a growing body of literature demonstrating that digital platforms amplify political information and

shape voter behavior. A study by [Grossman \(2022\)](#) highlights how social media ecosystems influence political attitudes through selective exposure and algorithmic curation ([Grossman, 2022](#)). These findings suggest that the informational environment plays a crucial role in determining how foreign policy issues are perceived and acted upon by voters.

Another important contribution of this study is the identification of transnational political influences, often referred to as electoral contagion or policy diffusion. The findings of [Turnbull-Dugarte & Rama \(2022\)](#) and [Walter \(2021\)](#) demonstrate that voters are influenced by political developments in other countries, using them as reference points in evaluating domestic political actors. This aligns with recent scholarship on globalization and political behavior. For example, [Tilley & Hobolt \(2023\)](#) argue that international political events, such as elections and referendums, can shape domestic political attitudes through learning and comparison mechanisms ([Quinn & Ruiz, 2022](#)). Similarly, [Baccini & Weymouth \(2021\)](#) found that global economic and political shocks influence voter preferences and policy attitudes across national borders ([Ahlquist et al., 2020](#)). These findings underscore the growing interconnectedness of political systems and the importance of considering transnational dynamics in understanding electoral behavior.

The review further emphasizes the role of political mobilization and participation mechanisms in shaping electoral outcomes. Evidence from [De Castro \(2020\)](#) and [Bergh et al. \(2021\)](#) shows that protests, voter outreach strategies, and campaign interventions significantly increase voter turnout and influence electoral preferences. These findings are consistent with recent studies demonstrating that political mobilization enhances political efficacy and participation. For instance, [Newell et al. \(2021\)](#) found that grassroots mobilization efforts can significantly increase voter turnout, particularly among underrepresented groups ([Newell et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, [Molina et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that exposure to political protests can increase civic engagement and reshape political attitudes. These findings suggest that mobilization mechanisms serve as critical pathways through which political attitudes including those related to foreign policy are translated into actual voting behavior.

Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of structural and psychological determinants in shaping voting behavior. [Talaifar et al. \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that economic deprivation and psychological traits, such as neuroticism, are associated with specific voting patterns, indicating that individual predispositions and socio-economic conditions influence electoral decisions. This is supported by recent research showing that emotional and psychological factors play a significant role in political behavior. For example, [Ayoko \(2023\)](#) found that personality traits and emotional responses significantly influence political attitudes and voting behavior ([Ayoko, 2023](#)).

Implications

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that policymakers, political actors, and electoral institutions must recognize the increasing importance of foreign policy in shaping voter behavior. Political campaigns should not treat foreign policy as a secondary issue but rather integrate it strategically into campaign messaging, particularly in contexts where international relations and national security are highly salient. At the same time, campaign strategies should consider how information is framed and disseminated, given the demonstrated impact of media exposure and communication techniques on voter attitudes ([Soontjens, 2023](#); [Carvalho et al. 2023](#)).

Additionally, the results emphasize the need for enhanced voter education and media literacy initiatives. As voters are increasingly exposed to both domestic and international political information, it is essential to equip them with the skills to critically evaluate sources, identify misinformation, and make informed decisions. This is particularly important in light of evidence suggesting that voters may be susceptible to manipulation through negatively framed or selectively presented information ([Carvalho et al., 2023](#)). Strengthening media literacy can help mitigate these risks and promote more informed electoral participation.

Furthermore, electoral institutions and policymakers should consider the implications of transnational political influences and global interconnectedness. As political developments in one

country can affect voter behavior in another, there is a need for greater awareness of how international events shape domestic political dynamics. This may involve monitoring information flows, addressing foreign influence in elections, and ensuring transparency in political communication.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to political engagement. Given the role of structural and psychological factors in shaping voting behavior (Talaifar et al., 2022), policies aimed at increasing voter participation should address underlying socio-economic inequalities and barriers to political engagement. Tailored interventions, such as targeted voter outreach and community-based mobilization efforts, can help ensure broader and more equitable participation in electoral processes (Bergh et al., 2021).

Research Contributions

This study contributes to the literature by providing a systematic synthesis of recent empirical evidence on the relationship between foreign policy issues and voting behavior. Unlike previous studies that often examine these determinants separately, this review integrates evidence on foreign policy preferences, political information, transnational political influences, mobilization mechanisms, and structural and psychological factors within a single analytical framework. The findings extend existing electoral behavior literature by demonstrating that voting decisions are increasingly shaped by the interaction between domestic political conditions and international dynamics, offering a comprehensive perspective for future electoral research.

Limitations

Despite these important contributions, the findings of this review also point to several limitations and challenges. One key limitation is the heterogeneity of the included studies in terms of research design, context, and measurement of variables. While this diversity provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic, it also limits the ability to draw universally generalizable conclusions. Additionally, some studies relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias and measurement error.

Another limitation relates to the context-specific nature of foreign policy salience. The influence of foreign policy on voting behavior appears to vary depending on political systems, levels of political awareness, and the prominence of international issues within national discourse. This suggests that the impact of foreign policy is conditional and may be stronger in contexts characterized by geopolitical tension or high media coverage of international events.

Furthermore, the review highlights potential concerns regarding the role of information environments, particularly in the context of misinformation and political manipulation. As noted in the findings, voters may be susceptible to biased or strategically framed information, which can distort perceptions and influence electoral outcomes. Recent studies have raised similar concerns, emphasizing the risks associated with misinformation and algorithm-driven content in digital media (Metzler & Garcia (2024)). This underscores the need for stronger media literacy and regulatory frameworks to ensure **informed** and fair electoral processes.

Suggestions

From a research perspective, the study highlights the need for more integrative and interdisciplinary approaches in examining electoral behavior. While the current review demonstrates that foreign policy preferences significantly influence voting decisions (Jastramskis (2023)), future research should further investigate how these preferences interact with other determinants such as media exposure, political ideology, and socio-economic conditions. In particular, there is a need for longitudinal and cross-national studies that can capture how foreign policy salience evolves over time and across different political systems. Recent studies suggest that globalization and international crises increasingly shape domestic political attitudes (Tilley & Hobolt (2023)), indicating that future research should adopt comparative frameworks to better understand these dynamics.

Moreover, future studies should explore the causal mechanisms underlying transnational political influences, particularly electoral contagion and policy diffusion. While this review provides evidence

that voters respond to international political events, further empirical work is needed to determine how information flows, media framing, and political awareness mediate these effects. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs, similar to those employed by [Carvalho et al. \(2023\)](#), can be particularly valuable in isolating these mechanisms and identifying causal relationships.

Another important direction for future research involves the role of digital media and information ecosystems. As highlighted in this review, political information especially negative or emotionally charged content significantly shapes voter perceptions and behavior. Given the rapid expansion of social media platforms, future research should examine how algorithmic content distribution, misinformation, and echo chambers influence the interpretation of foreign policy issues and electoral decision-making. This aligns with recent calls for more research on the political effects of digital communication environments ([Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018](#)).

CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that voting behavior and electoral preferences are shaped by a complex interplay of foreign policy considerations, information environments, transnational influences, and structural as well as psychological factors. The findings confirm that foreign policy preferences serve as a significant determinant of vote choice, particularly when mediated by political information and communication strategies. Moreover, the growing interconnectedness of political systems has amplified the role of international events in influencing domestic electoral outcomes, highlighting the presence of electoral contagion and policy diffusion across borders. These results suggest that electoral behavior can no longer be understood solely within a domestic framework but must be analyzed within a broader global and informational context.

Furthermore, the study underscores that voter decision-making is not uniform but varies across contexts, influenced by levels of political awareness, socio-economic conditions, and exposure to political information. The interaction between mobilization efforts, media dynamics, and individual predispositions reinforces the multidimensional nature of electoral participation and preference formation. While the review provides comprehensive insights, the heterogeneity of study designs and contexts indicates the need for further empirical research to refine and validate these findings. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary electoral behavior by emphasizing the critical role of foreign policy and global political dynamics in shaping voter choices in modern democracies.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study. They participated in the literature search, data collection, screening process, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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