Voting distills a complex decision into a deceptively simple action. The electorate faces a messy tangle of parties, leaders, and issues. How is it possible for voters to unravel it all? How do they perceive the political landscape? How, in short, do voters choose? Not only is voting a complex choice, but voters themselves also vary widely in their degree of interest, and involvement in politics. This book provides a new understanding of how voting works by focusing on how choices are made given the cognitive limitations of the human mind and the environment in which decision making takes place. Drawing on recent advances in the study of cognitive psychology, decision making, and political cognition, this book provides a careful empirical examination of the strategies voters actually use to manage the complexity of political choice. Expressly rejecting the prevailing one-size-fits-all, “what a rational voter should do” approach, it distinguishes voters based on the cognitive shortcuts, or heuristics, they use to simplify the decision-making process. Drawing on survey data from the 1990s Italian national general elections, the book identifies four types of voters, classified by how they perceive and organize the political debate—from those who capably rely on nuanced ideological categories to those who, skeptical about all-things-political, prove easy prey for television broadcasters. The typology allows us to grasp the actual differences in political sophistication among citizens and to understand which factors are most important to different types of voters. The book helps us make sense of the various ways in which citizens themselves make sense of—and make “simple”—the complex world of politics.
Chapter 5 shows that the typology of voting heuristics differentiates between groups of voters with respect to their levels of political sophistication, political participation and certain sociodemographic characteristics. Utilius and amicus are more educated, informed, and interested in politics than any other type of voter, while aliens voters have instead minimal levels of political sophistication. Similarly, utilius, and, to a lesser extent, amicus voters, tend to discuss politics with others quite frequently, are engaged in associations, are politically active, and are consistent in their voting patterns, while, in contrast, aliens voters are the least likely to actively participate to political and associational life and to engage in political conversations. Finally, the sociodemographic profile of utilius and amicus voters presents many traits of social centrality: they tend to be male, hold stable jobs, and live in the industrial areas of the North and Center-North. In contrast, aliens voters tend to live in the southern regions and are overrepresented among women, unemployed individuals, and housewives. Taken together, these factors combine to determine the type of decision-making strategy a voter adopts. In particular, the level of political sophistication and variables relating to political participation mediate the influence exerted by social and environmental factors.

Political Cognition, Sophistication, and Heuristics
Delia Baldassarri

Chapter 3 presents the key features of the political cognition approach and illustrates its contribution to the understanding of political behavior. It describes how the concept of political sophistication has changed over time and demonstrates how the political cognition approach has been able to address the problem of the limited interest and involvement of citizens in the democratic process from a novel perspective. In particular, the chapter focuses on how this new approach is more
effectively geared toward recognizing the actual evaluation and decision-making procedures that citizens use as opposed to simply asserting that voters have a limited capacity to think in terms of abstract ideological categories. In addition, the chapter discusses the problems involved in the definition and measurement of political sophistication, the heterogeneity of cognitive processes, and the use of heuristics in the field of politics.

The impact of voters' characteristics on the evaluations of party leaders
Amanda Bittner

in Platform or Personality?: The Role of Party Leaders in Elections

This chapter examines the origins of leader evaluations, seeking to determine the types of factors that influence voters' perceptions of leaders' traits. In particular, the chapter assesses the influence of voters' characteristics, including socio-demographics, partisanship, ideology, and issue attitudes. The chapter also looks at the impact of political sophistication, in order to better understand the process of evaluating leaders' character and competence. The analysis suggests that of these factors, partisanship and ideology have the greatest impact on evaluations of leaders' traits regardless of the voter's level of political sophistication.

The impact of the partisan stereotype
Amanda Bittner

This chapter explores the extent to which a characteristic possessed by leaders — namely, the party label under which they run — has an influence on how they are perceived by voters. Building on a literature that suggests that parties tend to ‘own’ issues, this chapter examines the possibility that trait ownership may exist as well. The analysis suggests that the party label does indeed act as a cue, and points to the existence of a partisan stereotype. This partisan stereotype exists
even when accounting for a voter's level of political sophistication, as voters perceive leaders of conservative parties to hold strengths in the competence dimension, while left leaders are perceived to have strengths on the character dimension. Voters of all political stripes perceive leaders' traits according to this partisan stereotype.

The Three Faces of Policy Voting
Paul Goren

This chapter integrates the historical and conceptual analyses from the previous two chapters into a theory of voter choice. The chapter argues that citizens must satisfy three conditions to policy vote: availability, centrality, and position matching. When policy attitudes reside in long-term memory, perform as central heuristics, and are matched to the positions held by the respective candidates, policy voting should ensue. The role political sophistication plays in moderating reliance on each class of attitudes is explained. The logic of the model, in conjunction with prior empirical work, leads to the following hypotheses. First, the relationship between liberal-conservative attitudes and the presidential vote should grow stronger at higher levels of sophistication. Second, issue voting should also be conditional on sophistication. Third, the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated alike should ground their votes in policy principles.

The impact of party leaders' traits in elections
Amanda Bittner

This chapter explores one of the most important questions that can be asked about the role of party leaders in elections: do evaluations of party leaders affect vote choice and the outcomes of elections? The impact of perceptions of leaders' traits is assessed in relation to the calculations and decision processes of voters across elections and the analysis incorporates voters' political sophistication. The
chapter then narrows the analysis to look more closely at the impact of leaders in American elections from 1972 to 2004 in order to assess the difference leaders made in election outcomes. The chapter presents the argument that leaders matter in elections: voters' evaluations are very important to individual vote choice. Furthermore, evaluations of leaders' character have a larger impact on vote choice than evaluations of their competence. The net impact of leaders on election outcomes is also noticeable, ranging from no effect in the 1976 election to 10 per cent of the popular vote in 1972. The data suggest that in certain circumstances, leaders can be the factor that decides an election.

Conclusions
Delia Baldassarri

in The Simple Art of Voting: The Cognitive Shortcuts of Italian Voters
Published in print: 2012 Published Online: January 2013
Item type: chapter

Chapter 8 summarizes the various findings and discusses them in relation to the debate over the measurement of political sophistication and the more general issue of the low political literacy of citizens in democratic societies. In general, the Italian population is described as divided between citizens who are highly capable of handling the political debate either through classical ideological categories—the utilius—or through an effective simplification of the political competition—the amicus—and citizens who are peripheral to politics, and do not possess the instruments necessary for making sense of it—the aliens. The strategy used to build the typology of voting heuristics is offered as a general interpretive framework for analyzing decision-making strategies in political environments characterized by a multiplicity of parties and a mixed electoral system. This approach offers new bases for estimating levels of political competence, and for measuring the political sophistication of the mass public. Finally, a number of ideas are put forward as to how experimental research might advance the study of cognitive processes.

On Voter Competence
Paul Goren

Published in print: 2012 Published Online: January 2013
Item type: book
A half century of research shows that most citizens are woefully uninformed about public affairs, liberal-conservative ideologies, and the issues of the day. This had led most scholars to conclude that policy voting lies beyond the reach of typical American voters and to condemn them as politically inept. This book breaks sharply with this view. Once attention turns away from liberal-conservative predispositions and issue preferences, there is indisputable evidence that nearly everyone holds genuine policy principles and uses these to guide their votes come Election Day. Three principles that reflect the major cleavages long dividing the Democratic and Republican parties are paramount: limited government, traditional morality, and military strength. Integrating work from social and political history, social and political psychology, and electoral behavior, the book argues that these three principles are available in the minds of nearly all citizens; function as central heuristics in their belief systems; are rooted deeply in basic human values; and guide presidential choices to a comparable degree for voters across the sophistication spectrum. Analysis of opinion data from the past six presidential elections and three new surveys yields unequivocal support for these claims. Contrary to the indictment leveled by most of the scholarly community and political pundits more generally, ordinary citizens who are neither deeply knowledgeable nor engaged with the world of public affairs prove as adept as their more sophisticated counterparts at grounding presidential votes in abstract views about public policy.

Policy Attitudes and Political Sophistication
Paul Goren

in On Voter Competence
Published in print: 2012 Published Online: January 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195396140.003.0003
Item type: chapter

The first step in developing the theory of policy voting requires explaining what is meant by policy attitudes and political sophistication, which represent the key concepts that animate the book. Scholars have identified three broad classes of policy attitudes that people may hold: liberal conservative attitudes, issue preferences, and policy principles. The chapter draws on social-psychological models of the attitude construct to conceptualize each class of policy attitudes as evaluations of some political object that endure to a greater or lesser degree. The object in question is what distinguishes policy attitudes: these include liberal-conservative labels, diverse issue controversies, and the principles of limited government, traditional morality, and military strength. After
explicating policy attitudes, the chapter defines political sophistication and assesses its distribution in the U.S. public.

Conclusion
Amanda Bittner

in Platform or Personality?: The Role of Party Leaders in Elections
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: May 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199595365.003.0008
Item type: chapter

This chapter provides the conclusion to the book. It returns to the normative concerns raised in the introduction, and argues that in a healthy and well-functioning democracy, voters' perceptions of leaders' characteristics ought to matter. Summing up the main findings of the book, including the importance of the partisan stereotype in influencing voters' perceptions of leaders' traits and the impact of leaders on both the individual vote calculus as well as the distribution of votes in an election, the chapter reiterates the important role of party leaders. The fact that voters' perceptions of leaders' character and competence have a consistent influence even among the most sophisticated segments of society suggests that evaluations of leaders are not simply a short-cut or tool to aid the least informed, but may provide all voters with important information that ought to be integrated into vote choice. Voters consider leaders' traits, and in a healthy democracy, so they should.

Systematic and Effective Voting Heuristics
Delia Baldassarri

in The Simple Art of Voting: The Cognitive Shortcuts of Italian Voters
Published in print: 2012 Published Online: January 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199828241.003.0006
Item type: chapter

Chapter 6 examines the effectiveness of the cognitive shortcuts and the consistency of their use, and shows that the judgment strategies used by utilius, amicus, and aliens are deployed not just in determining their voting behavior but also in other decision-making tasks they undertake. In particular, we show that utilius voters rely on the left-right ideological dimension even when they judge policy issues, or their future voting preferences, and that amicus voters use their simplified vision of politics in which the political competition is limited to the two major coalitions both in their judgment of political leaders and the performance of the
government. The effectiveness of these heuristics is proved by the fact that utilius and amicus voters show levels of coherence in the organization of their opinions that are higher than those of the most interested and educated individuals. On the contrary, the aliens type, who does not follow the decision-making mechanisms employed by utilius and amicus, is much less capable of using the left-right dimension to manage the organization of the parties and his issue opinions even compared to the least educated and interested voters. However, even the aliens voter is not without an organizing principle. Indeed, he is guided by a cynic realism, or pessimism, that leads to systematically negative evaluations of every party, coalition, and political leader.

Introduction
Amanda Bittner

in Platform or Personality?: The Role of Party Leaders in Elections
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: May 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199595365.003.0001
Item type: chapter

This chapter introduces the book, and begins by assessing the implications of voters' evaluations of party leaders for our understanding of representation and democracy. The chapter provides an overview of the main conclusions of the book, including the role of leader evaluation in campaigns, and introduces the possibility that assessment of traits and personality may act as an information shortcut for less informed voters (those with lower levels of political sophistication). The argument that leaders matter — and that they should matter — is introduced.

The Indictment of the American Voter
Paul Goren

in On Voter Competence
Published in print: 2012 Published Online: January 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195396140.003.0001
Item type: chapter

A rich line of research in political science and political psychology focuses on how liberal-conservative orientations and issue preferences impact the choices citizens make in U.S. presidential elections. This body of work demonstrates that those who know a lot about public affairs are capable of relating their ideological and issue preferences to their votes. Conversely, those who know and care little about public affairs
do not engage in these kinds of policy voting. This chapter raises the key question animating the book: how can voters who know little about public affairs come to evaluate presidential candidates on policy grounds. The answer is that there exists a “third face” of policy voting, one centered on core policy principles. These include limited government, traditional morality, and military strength. The chapter previews the theoretical argument and key findings to emerge from the subsequent empirical analyses.

Political Sophistication and Media Consumption as Factors of Personalization

Guillem Rico

in Personality Politics?: The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections

Published in print: 2014 Published Online: March 2015
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199660124.003.0007
Item type: chapter

This chapter addresses two of the most common beliefs about which types of voters attach more importance to leader images, namely (1) the less politically sophisticated and (2) those who are highly exposed to television as a source of political information. These beliefs are discussed in the light of classic and newer research on the heterogeneity of leadership effects in elections, which so far has provided rather mixed findings. Drawing on individual data from four Spanish general elections between 1982 and 2008, the analysis examines the extent to which voters’ level of sophistication and patterns of media consumption moderate, on the one hand, the effects of leader overall evaluations on vote choice and, on the other, the effects of perceptions of leaders’ personal traits on their overall evaluations. Results show that none of the factors examined consistently and systematically affects the weight that voters attach to their evaluations of leaders and their personalities. Further, with few exceptions, both leader assessments and trait perceptions are found to be consequential for all voters regardless their level of political sophistication and media exposure. Even when conditional relationships do emerge, the influence of the leaders remains in most cases significant and fairly strong. It is argued that these findings challenge the restrictive conception of leader images as objects made of appearance and devoid of political substance.
Leader Effects and Party Polarization

Romain Lachat

in Personality Politics?: The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections

Published in print: 2014 Published Online: March 2015
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199660124.003.0006
Item type: chapter

This chapter studies the role of both leader evaluations and ideological preferences in the voting decision process. Based on data from the 2007 Swiss federal elections, it investigates how leader voting and ideological voting are conditioned by voters’ level of political sophistication and by the degree of electoral competitiveness. Higher levels of political expertise and electoral competitiveness strengthen ideological voting. Yet, their impact on leader voting is weaker. This runs counter to the hypothesis of a tradeoff between ideological voting and leader voting. Although voting based on leader evaluations is cognitively less demanding than ideological voting, its importance does not decrease when citizens pay more attention to parties’ ideological stances.

Voter Fragmentation and the Differentiation of Vote Functions*

Jan Eric Blumenstiel

in Voters on the Move or on the Run?

Published in print: 2014 Published Online: June 2014
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199662630.003.0002
Item type: chapter

The assumption that all voters have identical voting calculi had been standard in electoral choice for a long time. However, scholars have increasingly challenged the homogeneity assumption recently. The chapter adds to this discussion by developing a more general empirical and theoretical framework to voter heterogeneity and by addressing the hitherto largely disregarded temporal dynamics of heterogeneity at both the aggregate and the individual level. It is shown that voters’ demographic and attitudinal characteristics as well as their cognitive abilities account for variance in reliance on both long- and short-term considerations. Generally, the attitude-behavior relationship is strongest for the highly sophisticated and lowest for voters holding conflicting beliefs about the parties. At the individual level, voting calculi are shown to be relatively stable over time.
Kicking Up a Fuss?
Catherine E. De Vries

in Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration

Published in print: 2018 Published Online: January 2018
Item type: chapter

Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198793380.003.0004

This chapter demonstrates that public opinion towards the EU is highly responsive to changes in real-world conditions and moves in predictable ways. The analysis in the chapter combines natural experimental evidence with uniquely designed survey experimental evidence to show that support and scepticism react both to national and European events. This underlines the importance of the benchmark theory of European public opinion that this book presents. Moreover, the findings reported in this chapter support the intuition outlined in Chapter 2 that people are able to distinguish the policies a system provides from the way the system operates. Finally, the chapter shows that the public is responsive to changes in real-world conditions regardless of the level of political sophistication that individuals exhibit.