

into pure image selling. And, of course, it may. But the search for support that emphasizes policy compatibilities . . . easily degenerates into pure position taking. . . . Position taking is just as misleading to constituents and as manipulative of their desires as image selling. It may be just as symbolic as any form of candidate advertising.¹¹

As we study campaigns, we cannot equate the divide between fluff and substance with the divide between the personal character of the candidate and the public importance of issues. When a George Wallace crowns a beauty queen who is black, or a Rockefeller eats a knish, each man is communicating important changes in his relations with and attitudes about ethnic or religious minorities. When the southern governor who promised “segregation forever” congratulates a homecoming queen who is black, does this have less significant implications for policy than posturing about gun control or drug control?

Failed missions to rescue hostages and failed attempts to eat tamales are similar: the same basic principles drawn from economics and psychology can help us understand both the concern with tamales and the campaign temptations to conduct rescue missions and covert activities.

In this book I use some basic principles of economics and psychology to reexamine most of our conventional wisdom about campaigns, and most of our academic ideas about them as well. I have tried to steer a theoretical course between the approaches of campaigners and journalists on one hand and those of political scientists and media scholars on the other. The contributions of each have been valuable, and I hope this book will encourage them to continue this dialogue.

The Reasoning Voter

THIS BOOK has two main purposes. The first is to construct a general theory of voting that incorporates academic research of recent decades into a framework built from cognitive psychology, economics, and sociology. The second is to demonstrate the utility of that theory for analyzing political campaigns with three case studies.

I use the term *reasoning voter* because my theory recognizes that voters actually do reason about parties, candidates, and issues. They have premises, and they use those premises to make inferences from their observations of the world around them. They think about who and what political parties stand for; they think about the meaning of political endorsements; they think about what government can and should do. And the performance of government, parties, and candidates affects their assessments and preferences.

The term *low-information rationality*—popularly known as “gut” reasoning—best describes the kind of practical thinking about government and politics in which people actually engage. It is a method of combining, in an economical way, learning and information from past experiences, daily life, the media, and political campaigns.

This reasoning draws on various information shortcuts and rules of thumb that voters use to obtain and evaluate information and to simplify the process of choosing between candidates. People use shortcuts which incorporate much political information; they triangulate and validate their opinions in conversations with people they trust and according to the opinions of national figures whose judgments and positions they have come to know. With these shortcuts, they learn to “read” politicians and their positions.

The better we understand voters and how they reason, the more sense campaigns make and the more we see how campaigns matter in a democracy. Academic studies of voting have begun to reveal more and more

about the substance of voting decisions and the limits to manipulation of voters. Directly and indirectly, these studies refer to campaigning. Collectively, they show that voters do learn from campaigns, and that what they learn concerns policies and character and competence. They can do this because they know how to “read” the media and the politicians—that is, because they reason about what they see and hear.

There is something rather miraculous about the fact that citizens believe that leaders selected by balloting are legitimate—that they are entitled to govern. Part of the reason for this belief is that campaigns are able to reach people and involve them in the election. It is worth remembering that the term *campaign* is derived from the French word for “open country” and brings to politics some of its original military use: in a military campaign, an army left its barracks in the capital city for operations in the field, or open country. This is an apt metaphor for politics, because campaigns bring politicians out of the capital into the open country, where they must engage their political opponents in a series of battles conducted in full view of their countrymen, who will judge each contest. To arouse public opinion and generate support for their cause, they must defend their old policies, sell new policies, and justify their rule.

These contests are commonly criticized as tawdry and pointless affairs, full of dirty politics, dirty tricks, and mudslinging, which ought to be cleaned up, if not eliminated from the system. In their use of sanitary metaphors, however, many of these critiques confuse judgments of American culture with aesthetic criticisms of American politicians. They do not look closely at how voters respond to what they learn from campaigns, and they do not look closely at the people they wish to sanitize. If campaigns are vulgar, it is because Americans are vulgar.

Not surprisingly, most suggestions for reforming the campaigns have no basis in any sustained argument about how proposed reforms would affect voters or improve the system. Voters have a limited amount of information about politics, a limited knowledge of how government works, and a limited understanding of how governmental actions are connected to consequences of immediate concern to them. Campaigns give them much of the information they reason from as they deal with their uncertainty about these matters. Somehow, candidates manage to get a large proportion of the citizenry sorted into opposing camps, each of which is convinced that the positions and interests of the other side add up to a less desirable package of benefits. Thus campaigns, to the extent that they are successful, temporarily change the basis of political involvement from citizenship to

partisanship, and in the process attract interest and votes from people who generally find politics uninteresting or remote.

Campaigns reach most people through the media. Besides attracting attention to the campaign “horse race,” the media play a critical role in shaping voters’ limited information about the world, their limited knowledge about the links between issues and offices, their limited understanding of the connections between public policy and its immediate consequences for themselves, and their views about what kind of person a president should be. The campaigns and media, in other words, influence the voter’s frame of reference, and can thereby change his or her vote.

Low-Information Rationality

My theory of how voters reason is a theory of low-information rationality which emphasizes the sources of information voters have about politics, as well as their beliefs about how government works. The theory, as I develop it, is drawn from three main sources: the voting studies done at Columbia University in the 1940s; the theoretical contributions to the economics of information made by Anthony Downs; and certain ideas from modern cognitive psychology, as exemplified in the works of Jerome Bruner, Amos Tversky, and Daniel Kahneman. I must emphasize at the outset that I am attempting to provide a theoretical basis upon which future studies can build, not to demonstrate or test every relevant proposition. Some parts of my argument have been demonstrated by others; other parts are demonstrated in this book; still other parts are theoretically grounded conjecture, not yet tested.

Social psychologists—notably Hilde Himmelweit and the coauthors of *How Voters Decide*—are beginning to emphasize that the vote is a choice, and that “the act of voting, like the purchase of goods, is . . . simply one instance of decision making, no different in kind from the process whereby other decisions are reached.”¹ The final act of voting, they argue, is a consumer choice like any other, regardless of whether the voter’s information gathering is “searching or superficial” and whether the voter’s beliefs are “accurate or misleading,” “transient or stable.”

As far back as Aristotle, analysts have used metaphors based on choice or commerce to describe voting. Aristotle wrote about citizens directly involved in political deliberations; he assumed that citizens making public choices were like consumers making vital private choices. He argued, therefore, that political oratory needed little flourish or emotional appeal: “In a political debate the man who is forming a judgment is making a deci-

sion about his own vital interests. There is no need, therefore, to prove anything except that the facts are what the supporter of a measure maintains they are."² However, the choice terminology appropriate in a mass democracy is different from that appropriate to deliberations in Athens.

Behind every voting theory there is a metaphor or an analogy, either implicit or explicit, about the process of choice. If the analogy is successful, it helps to generate hypotheses and explain voting. I propose to view the voter as an investor and the vote as a reasoned investment in collective goods, made with costly and imperfect information under conditions of uncertainty. This analogy is appropriate because the voter expends time and effort in the expectation of some later return, a return that will depend in large part on what others do. The investor analogy, as I will use it, does something the consumer analogy cannot. It draws attention to the difference between public and private goods and allows us to begin to predict several things: when information gathering will be searching and when it will be superficial; when voter beliefs will be accurate and when they will be misleading; and, to a lesser extent, when those beliefs will be transient and when they will be stable.

In fact, voting is not like buying a television set. Voters are public investors, not private consumers. They expend effort voting in the *expectation* of gaining future satisfaction. They are investors in future benefits to be derived from government, not purchasers of goods to be consumed immediately. This investment, furthermore, must be made in situations in which the likelihood of different outcomes is not easily calculated, for want of either data or theory to guide the decision-making process. Many consumer decisions involve clear alternatives and immediate results, but a decision about voting always involves uncertainty and the prospects of a long-term payoff.³

Public choices differ from private choices because the incentives to gather information are different in each instance. The resources expended to gather and process information before making personal consumption decisions have a direct effect on the quality of the outcome for the consumer, whereas time and money spent gathering information about candidates leads to a better vote, not necessarily a better outcome. The wrong economic policy or the wrong approach to arms control may in fact have a bigger effect on a voter's life than the wrong choice of home or college, but the expected gains from being an informed consumer remain higher than the gains from being an informed voter. Voters are thus not particularly well informed about the details of public policy and government activities. Everybody's business is nobody's business. If everyone

spends an additional hour evaluating the candidates, we all benefit from a better-informed electorate. If everyone but me spends the hour evaluating the candidates and I spend it choosing where to invest my savings, I will get a better return on my investment as well as a better government.

Public choices also differ from private choices because voting is a form of collective action; elections are won only when enough people vote together. Voters focus not only on their own concerns and preferences but on those of others as well. Therefore, in deciding which issues to focus on and which candidates to vote for, voters will be affected by information about what other voters are doing. Information about the preferences and votes of others will help them decide whether there are enough people with the same concerns or preferences to make a critical mass. Learning what government is doing and what government is capable of doing can also affect the issues a citizen will focus on in an election. Information will affect my perception of whether a problem is mine alone or common to many; whether a problem common to many is an individual or a collective problem; and whether a collective problem is "our" problem or our government's problem.

Public choices also differ from some private choices because they involve the provision of services. A politician is promising to deliver a future product about which the voter may have limited understanding, so the vote involves uncertainty about whether the product can be delivered, and, if so, whether it will perform as promised. Thus the voter has to assess the politician's ability to accomplish what he or she promises. Private consumers also face uncertainty in making certain decisions—such as choosing a surgeon to perform a life-threatening operation—but choosing a political leader can be even more complex. To deliver promised benefits, a politician must do more than attract enough votes; he or she must attract the support of other politicians as well. For this reason, voters consider not only the personal characteristics of their candidate, but also the other politicians with whom he or she is affiliated.

Every voting theory begins, implicitly or explicitly, from a question which voters ask as they cast their votes. I suggest that the voter behaves as if asking, "What have you done for me lately?" *What have you done?* stresses feedback from government performance and the need to specify how that performance affects attitudes and expectations. *Lately* raises the issue of time horizons—how voters can discount older information when presented with new claims. In *for me*, however, there is an inherent ambiguity, a tension that cannot be resolved. Doing some things for the voter includes doing the same things for everybody, like reducing pollution. It

includes doing things for specific groups, like feeding or housing the homeless. And it involves doing things that protect the voter against future possibilities, like improving Medicare or supporting research into a cure for AIDS. This is an unresolvable ambiguity. In 1952, campaign buttons said "I like Ike," but at rallies people said "We like Ike." The very ambiguity in the meaning of *for me*, however, stresses that political leaders seek to create political identities and to forge links between individual and group concerns.

The transformation of "What have you done for me lately?" into "What have you done for *us* lately?" is the essence of campaigning. Transforming unstructured and diverse interests into a single coalition, making a single cleavage dominant, requires the creation of new constituencies and political identities. It requires the aggregation of countless *I*'s into a few *we*'s. Behind the *we*'s, however, are people who are still reasoning about the ways in which their lives and government policies are related. The single most important lesson I have learned from campaigning is never to tell people they are selfish, and never to assume that they aren't.

Communications and Persuasion: The Columbia School

I begin with the original studies of presidential campaigns done at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research in the 1940s.⁴ The Columbia studies took the social reasoning of voters seriously and focused on the relation of the campaign to the final vote. These studies also had a relevant normative concern: the manipulative potential of the media. Today there is widespread concern about the impact of the newest medium, television, on the electoral process. People worry that television is leading to a politics of "spinmasters" and admen who manipulate voters and create "Teflon" presidents. When the first Columbia study was done, there was even more reason to be concerned about the power of radio: Hitler had used it with seeming brilliance to manipulate his countrymen.

The Columbia studies were designed to assess the communication and persuasion effects of campaigns at a time when these effects were generally much smaller than today. Today, in an environment of diminished party loyalty, campaigns and candidates exert a greater influence on voters than they did in the elections of 1940 and 1948. However, the theoretical insights of the Columbia researchers are still illuminating for the study of politics in the 1990s. Their research on party identification, misperception, and interpersonal influence, as well as their insights into campaign dynamics, are still the foundation for modern election studies.

The central insight of the Columbia voting studies is captured in one sentence: "The people vote in the same election, but not all of them vote on

it."⁵ This statement recognizes the importance of party identification, of public communication and persuasion, and of the role of issues in elections. It suggests that voters in any one election are being moved not only by new issues of which they are aware but also by old issues that have influenced their party identification. It also stresses that voters are not *tabulae rasae* when they are exposed to the media barrages of the campaigns; to the contrary, they already have some firm beliefs, so are often not moved at all by campaign propaganda. Finally, the Columbia studies also showed that the effect of the mass media on voters is not direct, but mediated by discussion with others.

In beginning with the older Columbia studies, I am presenting an alternative to the theories and standards developed at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center (SRC), which have dominated the study of voting since the 1950s. *The American Voter* developed a theoretical view of party identification and the role of issues in elections which has been central to voting studies for decades.⁶ The SRC's quadrennial national election surveys have made possible numerous important studies, but its theories about voting and party identification have not held up well.⁷

Information Shortcuts: The Contributions of Anthony Downs

The central insight of Anthony Downs's pioneering book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, is that voters will rely on information shortcuts because they do not have much incentive to gather information about politics solely in order to improve their voting choices.⁸ Downs builds on the Columbia studies' findings that voters lack knowledge about the government: "Voters are not always aware of what the government is or could be doing, and often they do not know the relationship between government actions and their own utility incomes." Given the many gaps in voters' information about government, and their lack of theory with which to make connections between government actions and their benefits, governments concerned primarily with gaining as many votes as possible have little incentive to maximize benefits to voters. "Government is motivated by voters' opinions, not their welfare, since their opinions about their welfare are what influence voting."⁹

Somehow, in a manner that I will leave to a sociologist of knowledge to explain, the word *rational*, which conjured up images of sophistication, materialism, and narrow self-interest, became a fighting word to many students of voting who had been raised on social psychology and sociology. Properly understood, however, the main emphasis of the economic approach is on choice, information, uncertainty, and the way voters link their

votes with the votes of others and with the output of their government. When elaborated, it also crosses the divide between the work of scholars following the economic approach to the study of voting and the work of scholars of a more psychological bent, and provides a synthesis which is the ideal starting place for the study of campaigns and political change.

Downs's application of the economics of information to politics complements the Columbia studies. Indeed, Downs's central insight about information shortcuts is a generalization of the Columbia findings about the roles of party identification and informal opinion leaders. Party identification, viewed from the perspective of low-information rationality, is an informational shortcut or default value, a substitute for more complete information about parties and candidates. This is a key insight for building a model of the voter that can be used to study the role of campaigns and issues in presidential elections. Party identification is a standing decision; even so, it is affected by voters' beliefs about how government works, by the information they obtain in their daily lives and connect with government policies, and by the information they absorb simply because it is interesting or entertaining.¹⁰

I elaborate Downs's ideas about information costs and uncertainty, apply them to the ways voters evaluate candidates and parties, and also take account of how voters connect the state of the world with the actions of government and the benefits they desire. Downs is an economist, but he is not assuming that voters care only about money, or only about benefits for themselves. He assumes only that they base their votes on the benefits they may receive from government action. As he puts it,

[It is] possible for a citizen to receive utility from events that are only remotely connected to his own material income. For example, some citizens would regard their utility incomes as raised if the government increased taxes upon them in order to distribute free food to starving Chinese. There can be no simple identification of "acting for one's greatest benefit" with selfishness in the narrow sense because self-denying charity is often a great source of benefits.¹¹

Extending Downs, I explore how voters' understanding of government and candidates helps determine which issues and benefits they will connect with particular offices—which benefits, in other words, are *attributable*. It is not the importance of a policy, nor even the extent to which parties or candidates differ on it, that determines when an issue will become central to voter decision making. **What make an issue central are the voters' motivations to gather information about it, the conditions under**

which they will get that information, and the beliefs by which they connect the issue to their own lives and to the office for which they are voting. Further, by stressing not just the limited information about issues but also the limited understanding voters have of the way government works, we can begin to evaluate the effects of television—the prime information medium, as well as one of the usual suspects in any investigation into the quality of the electoral process or electoral outcomes in the United States.

The notion of attributable benefits, furthermore, can lead us to a new understanding of the many ways campaigns influence voters. The Columbia studies correctly noted that a campaign can affect the salience of an issue by increasing its perceived importance to voters. It follows from my elaborations on the Columbia and Downs findings that a campaign can change the salience of an issue in two other ways: by providing better connections between an issue and an office, and by increasing the perceived difference between candidates on an issue.

My emphasis on voters' incentives for gathering information leads me to consider not only voters' demand for information but also the supply and cost of that information. Political campaigns and party conventions are particularly important sources of relevant information. In using information about candidates and their supporters, voters extrapolate from personal characteristics to policy preferences, and from campaign performance to governmental competence. They also gather information about the candidate's place in the party and the credibility of his or her platform from two other sources: the party convention, and party leaders they have learned about in the past.

Framing and Reasoning: Cognitive Psychology

Contemporary research into the psychology of cognition fills the theoretical gaps left by the original Columbia voting studies and Downs's theoretical reformulation of them. Without cognitive psychology there is no satisfactory way to answer important questions about how people assess meaning and use information. My analysis of campaigns requires an understanding of the role of symbols and stories; to understand people not as naive statisticians, but as symbol processors and naive theorists, requires cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology's findings about meaning and information usage go beyond cues and information shortcuts to describe modes of reasoning, processing aids, and calculation aids, all of which can be applied to the analysis of reasoning voters' decisions.¹²

Each of the three sources from which I draw provides crucial insights about information and political reasoning. From the Columbia studies, we

know that people do not absorb all the information to which they are exposed. From Downs, we know that this happens because people do not have incentives to acquire and absorb much of that information. From cognitive psychology, we know that people do not use all the information they have received, and—paradoxically—that people have not received from outside all the information they use. That is, people take the information they have received and use previous experience to complete the picture.

To study the cues, or informational shortcuts, that people use in voting is to study how people supply themselves with information that fills in their pictures of candidates and governments. Cues enable voters to call on beliefs about people and government from which they can generate or recall scenarios, or “scripts,” as they are called in psychology. A little information can go a long way because people have so many scenarios and ideas that they can generate from their cues. They can absorb a few cues and then complete their picture with the help of their “default values.”¹³

Downs never explicitly considered just how voters combine new and old information, or how recent events affect their ongoing assessment of parties, but his work generally leads to what can be called neo-Bayesian assumptions. In Bayesian statistical analysis, decisions are based not solely on old information or solely on new information, but on a weighted combination of the two, with the weights assigned to reflect the quantity of each type. The cognitive literature, in contrast, shows that there are instances when a small amount of new information is given more weight than a large amount of equivalent old information, as well as cases when a small amount of old information is given more weight than a large amount of equivalent new information.

One reason that people do not behave like naive statisticians is that data presented in an emotionally compelling way may be given greater consideration and more weight than data that is statistically more valid, but emotionally neutral. This is not a new insight; as Bertrand Russell noted in 1927, “popular induction depends upon the emotional interest of the instances, not upon their number.”¹⁴ The ramifications of this insight for decision making are only now being fully explored by psychologists. Campaign analysis must begin to explain what kinds of data are compelling to voters and how they combine old and new data.¹⁵ This means, in particular, learning why some forms of information are more easily used than others, and why not all information is necessarily informative:

Some kinds of information that the scientist regards as highly pertinent and logically compelling are habitually ignored by people. Other kinds of information, logically much weak-

er, trigger strong inferences and action tendencies. We can think of no more useful activity for psychologists who study information processing than to discover what information their subjects regard as information worthy of processing.¹⁶

There is another reason why people do not act like crude statisticians: they cannot easily integrate all their political information about parties or candidates into a single yardstick, or “prior,” as a statistician would call such a measure. In particular, they do not always integrate personal and political data about candidates.

The cognitive literature also leads researchers beyond information shortcuts to the calculation shortcuts people use when choosing one favorite from an array of candidates. Since people cannot easily integrate all their information, their choices are context-sensitive: “Preferences are not simply read off from some master list; they are actually constructed in the elicitation process. Furthermore, choice is contingent or context sensitive. . . . An adequate account of choice, therefore, requires a psychological analysis of the elicitation process and its effect on the observed response.”¹⁷

Plan of the Book

The next five chapters cover the essential theoretical issues that must be addressed in order to understand campaigns from the perspective of the voter.

Chapter 2 outlines the process of acquiring information—how voters become informed through daily-life experiences and their monitoring of the news. Voters obtain a good deal of information during their daily lives which they connect to government policies, whether correctly or not; meat and gas shortages change opinions about presidents as surely as “Communist gains” once did. Senior citizens whose only livelihood is Social Security pay close attention to debates on this issue—not in order to be better citizens, but because they need to know how to budget their money, and sometimes to decide whether they can afford to eat three meals a day or two. The use of this information depends upon reasoning about government, incorporates campaign information, and is not reflexive.

Chapter 3 examines the information shortcuts that voters use when they have little information about, or an incomplete understanding of, the political choices before them—an examination that involves reevaluating the concept of party identification and identifying the shortcuts voters use to assess candidates. These shortcuts include assessing a candidate’s policy stands from his demographic characteristics; using overall estimates of a

candidate's competence and of his integrity or sincerity; and judging political integrity from personal morality. These shortcuts also incorporate information from political campaigns, while at the same time limiting the extent to which campaigns can manipulate voters.

Chapter 4 describes how voters process information about candidates, and go beyond their information, when they form images of their candidates. By understanding how voters incorporate information, and by understanding how they combine new and old information, we see how campaigns can affect which information will actually be used. The chapter also describes how voters use calculation shortcuts and how they compare and choose among candidates.

Chapter 5 elaborates the concept of attributable benefits, and then shows that voters' ideas about government can affect politicians' actions and the issues they choose to emphasize in campaigns, and can also help determine which issues will matter whether the politicians mention them or not.

In chapter 6 I turn to the formation of new constituencies in presidential primaries and examine the contrast between the theories I develop here and theories about primary voting which have emphasized the role of momentum or "bandwagon" effects.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 examine three presidential primary campaigns in which hitherto unknown candidates suddenly emerged to challenge for, or even to win, their party's nomination for president: Jimmy Carter in the Democratic primaries of 1976; George Bush in the Republican primaries of 1980; and Gary Hart in the Democratic primaries of 1984. Ironically, it is by analyzing the campaigns of these once-unknown candidates that I can most effectively demonstrate the value of the theory I am developing, for the analysis enables me to show politics and political reasoning at work in precisely the place where other theories would least expect it.

I realize that, because all three case studies involve primary campaigns, some people may draw the inference that the theory I am developing is only for primaries. I emphasize that I am doing case studies of primaries because primaries are more difficult for voters and have been harder to explain for scholars. In primaries, voters face a multitude of candidates, with less prior information about candidates than they have in general elections; they also receive less exposure to campaign information, and have no party cues to guide them. Therefore, primaries place greater demands on the voters to quickly absorb information and to reason with incomplete information. I believe, to paraphrase Sinatra, that if a theory can make it there, it can make it anywhere. Most of the examples in chapters 2 through

5 are taken from general elections, which is where I have had most of my practical campaign experience.

In an age when voting is increasingly centered on candidates, political primaries are part of the process of renewing and updating party identification.¹⁸ Primary candidates create and mobilize constituencies within parties, and they respond to public beliefs about the past performance of the party and the perceived relevance of its approach to government. Thus in analyzing primaries I can demonstrate the many forms of information about their political parties that voters gather, as well as the forms of feedback from government performance that shape their ideas about parties.

The three primaries analyzed here demonstrate just how sensitive voters are to the direction their party is taking, and how their views of their party are affected by its past performance. In other words, these three primaries exhibit the kinds of feedback about parties that voters receive, and show how voters translate this feedback into preferences. These fights over the direction a party should take—including arguments about whether the party's traditional ways are adequate both to win the presidency and to deal with the future problems of the country—show just how policy-oriented party identification can be.

Indeed, these three case studies, taken together, show the tremendous changes in political thinking which have occurred in this country since the 1960s. The Democratic primary of 1976 demonstrates how conflicts over race, Vietnam, and the role of unions, among other issues, eroded the credibility of the party's Washington elite and left its best-known representatives unable to compete against outsiders like Jimmy Carter, George Wallace, and Jerry Brown. Carter's emergence, furthermore, prefigured the emergence of the religious fundamentalist movement in this country and the inability of traditional Democratic leaders to compete against Republicans for the presidency. The fights between Mondale, Hart, and Jackson in 1984 were in fact clear continuations of the same unresolved battles between black, blue-collar, and educated Democrats over the role of government and the direction the party should take.

The 1980 fights in the Republican party between Bush supporters and Reagan supporters were a continuation of the 1976 fights between Reagan and Ford supporters over the direction of the Republican party and whether it should repudiate the moderation of the Nixon years. The 1980 battles, and the Republican repudiation of the ERA that year, were part of the continuing battle over abortion policy, which was already creating a "gender gap" between parties.

Recent studies of primaries have focused on the role of momentum, and the ways in which lesser-known candidates could win primaries because of “bandwagon” effects—where people are directly influenced to vote for a candidate by that candidate’s earlier victories. By demonstrating that there are clear issue effects even when the least-known candidates first become known, I support my argument that there is a substantive basis for voting decisions.

The claim of political savants and insiders that the right commercials and the right consultants can win any election, particularly any primary, is fed by the self-serving myth that certain “magic moments” on television have turned elections around. I will show that there is no evidence at all for the supposed effects of many of these “magic moments,” and that the dramatic effects of many others occurred only because they symbolized changes of opinion that had been developing for some time and which had far more complex causes. I object to media critics who simply infer from commercials and speeches that voters were manipulated.

I also object to studies of primaries which suggest that when large numbers of voters suddenly shift their support to new candidates, they are simply jumping on a bandwagon. These jumps to new candidates are in fact attempts to change the direction of the party, or to protest against the established order, and they reflect information that voters use about the issue differences between the new and the old candidates.

I challenge the related fantasies of Democrats who believe that campaign faux pas explain the Republicans’ near-monopoly on the White House. Democrats do not lose the presidency because Republicans have better admen. They lose because they have less popular policies on the issues that voters connect to the presidency, notably inflation, national defense, and the role of government in society. Nor do Democrats lose because a controversial candidate (like Jesse Jackson) is visible in their primaries; they lose because they do not have convincing responses to such a candidate that they can give in both primary and general elections.

I also challenge the terms of the traditional assessment of voter information. It is certainly true that most citizens do not know many of the basic facts about their government, but assessing voters by civics exams misses the many things that voters *do* know, and the many ways in which they can do without the facts that the civics tradition assumes they should know. Further, the focus on voters’ lack of textbook information about many political issues underestimates just how much information they pick up during campaigns and from conventions. **This misinformation approach is**

a red herring. It focuses on what voters don’t know instead of on what they do know, who they take their cues from, and how they read candidates.

I also challenge the idea that voter self-interest is either entirely selfish or simplistic. Voters do care about their economic well-being, of course, but they also care about the welfare of others, and when they reason about economic benefits and economic performance, they do not make simplistic connections between their bank balances and the performance of the government.

By bringing the economics of information and the recent developments in cognitive science to bear on the normative agenda of the Columbia studies, I hope to prompt a rethinking of the role of democratic citizenship. I believe my theory redeems the voter from some of the blame heaped upon him or her by contemporary criticism of the electoral process. My theory also addresses “loopholes” in voter reasoning that candidates can exploit. However, I hope to show that, in the mixture of trivial and profound issues that will always be found in campaigns, there is more meaning to voting, and less manipulation of voters, than either media-centered analyses or the traditional civics-information focus would have us believe.