

**IN SEARCH OF UNIFIED FIELD THEORIES OF VOTING BEHAVIOR:
RECONCILING POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR ACCOUNTS**

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Many areas in psychology are converging on the idea that human social judgment, whether it be in the form of attitudes, impressions of other people, or decision and choices, is inherently constructive; that is, the beliefs that people hold, the preferences that they have, and the evaluations that they make cannot be understood outside the judgment or choice task itself. People do not carry around in their heads attitudes, opinions, or preferences that are simply revealed, but rather construct them on the basis of myriad task, context, and individual-difference variables (see Payne, Bettman and Johnson 1992; chapters in Martin and Tesser, eds. 1992). Political scientists are probably most familiar with this idea in the context of survey research on opinions, because of the influential thesis of John Zaller and Stanley Feldman (1992):

Most citizens, we argue, simply do not possess preformed attitudes at the level of specificity demanded in surveys. Rather, they carry around in their heads a mixture of only partially consistent ideas and considerations. When questioned, they call to mind a sample of these ideas, including an oversample of ideas made salient by the questionnaire and other recent events, and use them to choose among the options offered. But their choices do not, in most cases, reflect anything that can be described as true ideas; rather, they reflect thoughts that are most accessible in memory at the moment of response (p. 379).

The highly contingent nature of judgment suggested by recent psychological theorizing, however, is difficult to reconcile with what we know about election outcomes and the predictability of vote decision making. The constructive nature of human judgment implies potentially idiosyncratic assessments; to predict any one individual's vote we would need to know not only their values, predispositions, social location, and the like, but their entire learning history--the messages to which they were exposed, the context in which these messages were received, the format in which these messages were delivered, even the mood state of the person when they received the information (Ottati and Wyer 1993) or the structure of ballot used in the voting booth (Darcy and Marsh 1994). At the extreme, a process-oriented, or "inside the head", view of voting is, at the level of praxis, incapable of generating predictions about choices. Yet, there are many individual-level models of vote choice that can predict voting behavior with a high degree of accuracy without direct evidence about what goes on inside the "black box", to use the phrase of Lodge, Stroh and Wahlke (1990).¹

This paradox--that individual vote choices can be predicted with a very high degree of accuracy even though each voter's information processing history is potentially unique-- has become increasingly vexatious as we learn more about how people process information about

¹ Some of these models (such as Himmelweit et al. 1985; Rahn et al. 1990) are built on rather explicit assumptions about the underlying psychological processes that generate the statistical model. Other models (such as the Shanks-Miller series; Page and Jones 1979) are based on assumptions about the causal ordering of variables, but are agnostic about the psychological processes that link the various elements. Still other models (such as Fiorina 1981) combine assumptions about what elements are important with assumptions about psychological processes. And finally, some models are set up in order to test different psychological processes. For example, Markus and Converse (1979) attempt to assess projection and persuasion processes in perceptions of candidates' issues stances, Bartels (1988) tests several alternative explanations of the role of expectations in nomination preferences, and Rahn and her colleagues (1990) examine different comparison processes.

political candidates. The purpose of this paper is to raise and explore this conundrum, not resolve it. In doing so, I will survey some of the recent literature on candidate evaluation, pointing out topics that are part of the paradox or provide some resolution. In the end, of course, both the "forest" and the "trees" may co-exist and even enrich one another, and one's preferences about the utility of each vantage point may be simply a matter of taste. On the other hand, unifying political psychological and political behavior accounts of voter decision making may be like trying to reconcile classical and quantum mechanical physics. The search for the Theory of Everything necessary to bring together the messy world of inside the black box and the orderly world of survey-based models of vote choice ultimately may be quixotic if no such theory exists.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN THE STUDY OF CANDIDATE EVALUATION

1. Is political candidate evaluation on-line, memory-based, or some combination? For whom and in what contexts? What are the implications of these differences for individuals' survey responses to candidate questions?

The notion that there are two fundamentally different routes to forming impressions and evaluations has been highly influential in the study of social and political information processing. In on-line mode, people actively process information at the time it is encountered, elaborating on its meaning and abstracting from each new piece of data its evaluative implications. The original piece of evidence may be stored away to be later forgotten, but its implications have been conveniently incorporated into some summary assessment that continues to be updated by the same process. The most prominent advocate of the on-line model in political science has been Lodge and his colleagues (Lodge, McGraw and Stroh 1989; McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh 1990; Lodge and Stroh 1993; Boynton and Lodge 1994).

In memory-based mode, information is neither elaborated nor its evaluative implications extracted. Instead, it is stored away in a rather unadulterated form, perhaps to be retrieved later when some summary assessment is called for. Memory for "raw" (i.e., unelaborated) evidence information, then, determines the valence of the overall judgment. Under on-line processing, however, there is no necessary relationship between recalled information and summary assessments. Under on-line conditions, in fact, a correlation between memory and judgment is more likely to be indicative of some process other than the derivation of evaluations from memory for the raw evidence information, such as biased retrieval, or more conventionally, rationalization (Hastie and Park 1986).

Hybrid strategies are also possible. For example, a person may learn that a particular candidate supports school prayer and infer, based on the voter's own beliefs about the desirability (or undesirability) of such a position and stereotypes about religious believers, that the politician is a puppet (or champion) of the religious right. This elaborated attribution about the candidate's motives, rather than the evidentiary basis for the attribution, may serve as input into a more abstract judgment made at some later point about the candidate's trustworthiness. Hastie and Pennington (1989) refer to this intermediate situation as inference-memory-based judgment, for an earlier inference is retrieved from memory in order to make a more global judgment sometime later.

Political psychologists have made a strong case that in many situations candidate evaluations are generated on-line rather than in memory-based fashion. Evidence for the on-line mode has been primarily, but not exclusively, drawn from experimental studies (Lodge, McGraw and Stroh 1989; McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh 1990; Rahn, Aldrich and Borgida 1994; Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994). There are several features of the vote choice task that make it conducive to an on-line strategy. Hastie and Pennington (1989) suggest that foreknowledge that one has to make a particular judgment motivates an on-line processing strategy. Some voters, those that are highly interested in politics or strongly partisan, may be chronically motivated to process information on-line. The rest of the electorate is probably aware of or is reminded by political advertising, yard signs, and the news media that they must come to a series of judgments by November. Of course, foreknowledge of the deadline may also prompt some to delay processing until the very end, especially for races that are less involving. And, of course, even the most interested voters can still be "surprised" by the down-ballot judgments they have to make in the voting booth, and perforce rely on memory-based heuristics such as stereotypic gender, incumbency, or partisan inferences. Thus, the on-line model is primarily a high-information model, one that probably applies most generally in presidential elections and competitive Senate, House, and gubernatorial races, but may not be the processing strategy employed by voters in other types of choice settings. Wright (1993), for example, argues that survey-based investigations of vote choice are misspecified because some voters in subpresidential elections are more likely to be memory-based processors than on-line. Their answers to the vote choice question, therefore, are susceptible to accessibility effects, and therefore, their "reconstruction" of their vote preference leads to consistent winner biases, because news about winners is more plentiful.

Furthermore, even under on-line processing, some people may self-consciously wait to integrate into one global summary the information they have acquired and the elaborations they have performed, what we might think of as a local on-line processing strategy, until closer to election day.² Such people may remain undecided or have pre-election preferences that are unstable.³ This may be especially true if individuals' local on-line evaluations are inconsistently valenced. Here people's assessments may fluctuate chaotically, rather than stochastically (Vallacher, Nowak, and Kaufman 1994). For example, a voter may find a candidate's policies congenial, but might have some doubts about his or her leadership qualities, a position many Republicans were in during the 1988 campaign. Rather than trying to trade one dimension off for the other, something that most people find difficult (Montgomery 1983), a person may instead actively avoid reconciling these contradictory assessments for as long as possible.

Thus whether an end-of-campaign integration process rather than continual updating is a closer psychological approximation to what people do remains to be addressed empirically in the political psychology literature on on-line processing. Many models of impression formation and

² Zaller's (1992) discussion of bounded on-line processing is similar. I prefer the local vs. global distinction because it makes clear that the difference is at the integration stage of information processing rather than the encoding stage.

³ Such a process is compatible with Gelman and King's (1993) notion of progressive enlightenment. People gather information throughout the campaign, but are only compelled to integrate all of it as election day approaches.

decision making suggest that such a distinction is theoretically important, having different implications for how much early versus more recent information is weighted (see Hogarth and Einhorn 1992; Pennington and Hastie 1992; Kashima and Kerekes 1994). In the language of Hogarth and Einhorn (1992), vote choice is a task with an "end-of-sequence" response mode that can be reached either through a sequence-by-sequence or end-of-sequence process. They argue, and Lodge and Stroh (1993) assume in their on-line model, that people will employ a continual updating strategy because it is less cognitively demanding than the end-of-sequence aggregation. However, my discussion above suggests that continual updating, although objectively more efficient, especially given all the information to which people are exposed during a high-visibility race, may not be used all the time by everyone, and may depend on the congruity of one's local on-line evaluations. The process described by Zaller (1992), in which people "sample" from memory their various considerations bearing on the attitude object (in this case, the candidate) may be used by people who procrastinate on the overall integration of various aspects of their candidate impression. These sorts of deciders may be especially vulnerable to information received at the end of the campaign, for it may heighten the accessibility of particular considerations, which in turn would dominate the overall judgment.

Thus the process of voter decision making may involve aspects of all these different combinations of on-line and memory-based processing. Each person may have some kind of habitual strategy they employ, but clearly switching from memory-based and local on-line processing to full-fledged continual updating is also conceivable. We have much yet to learn about the contingencies involved in the use of these various strategies and the implications of this heterogeneity for vote choice models.

Even if motivation to do some kind of on-line processing is operative, it doesn't assure that such a strategy can be implemented. A person must also have sufficient resources to perform the elaboration and integration required in on-line processing (Bargh and Thein 1985; Mackie and Asuncion 1990). Less sophisticated voters, although perhaps equally motivated, are more likely to be hampered in their use of an on-line strategy by contextual factors that overload their capacities or distract them (Rahn, Aldrich, and Borgida 1994). Frey and Eagly (1993) argue that vivid information may actually interfere with on-line capacities in unconstrained settings (that is, situations in which people are not "forced" to process information, as they are in most experimental settings), suggesting the interesting hypothesis that in everyday settings television may actually inhibit on-line elaboration, inference, and integration.

There is some scattered evidence in political science to support the contention that television is distracting, and therefore, may prevent people from engaging in complete on-line processing. For example, Graber (1988) found in her study that processing of television information (in comparison to newspaper processing) tended to be more "basic," or perceptual, rather than schematic or conceptual. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) showed in their experiments that more vividly presented stories resulted in viewers use of more simplistic attributional strategies. Patterson (1980) found that newspaper exposure actually contributed more to the development of people's leadership images of Ford and Carter than did television. Television may inhibit on-line processing because not only does candidate advertising and television news often fail to mention the candidates' partisanship (Wattenberg 1993), but even if mentioned, the distraction the medium causes can inhibit the activation of party-image related knowledge (Rahn and Cramer 1994). Thus

the messages pass by rather unelaborated in the context of the viewers' predispositions. Television-dependent voters, therefore, may actually be less able to implement the elaboration and integration subprocesses of the on-line strategy, even controlling for the compositional characteristics of the television-dependent audience, namely lower intelligence (Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992) and lower political interest (Patterson 1980). Interestingly, Bartels (1993) found that television exposure contributed much more to change in people's impressions of Reagan and Carter than newspaper exposure. This finding may have more to do with the medium of television itself than anything about the kind of information it conveys. If television subverts on-line processing, then in order to construct candidate trait judgments, people may need to draw on, in memory-based fashion, relatively more "basic" evidence information that they were able to glean from television. We would expect, therefore, that these people's attitudes would shift more with the tone of media discourse. Taken together, these different lines of research suggest that we need to know more about the processing effects of television, especially in light of the steep declines in newspaper readership and the increasing use of television in races for even the most obscure political office.

What are the implications of these processing distinctions for vote choice models generally and the NES survey in particular? Based on the processing implications of the on-line model, serious doubts have been raised about the validity of the open-ended candidate questions as measures of the "reasons" people have for their candidate attitudes (Lodge, McGraw and Stroh 1989; Lodge 1993; Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994; see also Smith 1989). Their high correlation with vote choice, especially for people who made up their minds before the campaign started (Campbell et al. 1960, p. 79; Kelley 1983), is largely due to rationalization processes (Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994). Ironically enough, the reasons revealed in the open-ended questions are much more likely to be the determinants of voting decisions for people who decided very close to or on election day (Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994), precisely those people for whom the correlation between memory and vote choice is the weakest (see Campbell et al. 1960; Kelley 1983). This may be due to the fact that asking memory-based processors for the reasons for their attitudes can cause temporary attitude change, which reduces the attitude-behavior correlation (Wilson et al. 1989). Interestingly, Wilson and colleagues (Wilson, Kraft, and Dunn 1989; Hodges and Wilson 1993) find that for people with high levels of knowledge about an attitude object or highly accessible attitudes (which are undoubtedly correlated attributes of attitude structures), the disruptive effects of analyzing reasons for attitudes is minimized. While Wilson's paradigm is not framed in the on-line versus memory-based terminology, his results are consistent with it. Motivation to process information on-line no doubt leads to great amounts of knowledge and more organized knowledge structures. The elaboration and integration aspects of on-line processing may also work to make the candidate attitudes accessible, which in turn leads to biased processing of subsequently encountered information (Fazio and Williams 1986; Houston and Fazio 1989), which in turn would lead to an increasingly homogenous (in terms of valence) set of beliefs, attributions, and inferences about the candidate, producing a high correlation between what can be remembered and overall evaluation, but not because the remembered information is necessarily the determinant of the overall evaluation.

Although the particular open-ended questions used by NES may not serve the purposes for which they are intended, other open-ended questions might be better suited for revealing the bases for people's candidate evaluations. McGraw, Fischle and Stenner (1994) in a recent series of experiments have compared different ways of asking people about their candidate evaluations.

They find that people's responses depend to a great degree on the kinds of questions they are asked. They found, for example, that a "what comes to mind when you think about candidate X" question is better at revealing the cognitive and affective "work" people do to construct meaning from raw information; that is, this type of question tended to elicit, in comparison to other types of recall probes, the inferences and elaborations people made when they received information about a candidate. Patterson (1980) employed such a question in his panel study of the 1976 presidential election, and was able to show that people's impressions about Carter, in particular, became increasingly more abstract over the course of the campaign. Crigler and Just (1994), in their in-depth panel study of the 1992 election, found a similar development of impressions of Bush and Clinton. Interestingly, their companion content analysis of media coverage and candidate advertising suggests that the increasingly character-based nature of people's candidate knowledge cannot be attributed to shifts in how the media talked about the candidates or how the candidates talked about themselves in their advertising. Rather, this development seems to be more of a natural progression in which the particular evidence--issue positions, retrospective performance assessments, and scandals, e.g.,--gets increasingly integrated into character judgments (and likely to be "forgotten"), just as the on-line model would suggest (see also Park 1986; 1989).

The on-line model also raises the possibility that many of the other candidate-specific questions, such as the issue placements or candidate trait assessments, are products of rationalization processes rather than ingredients of overall evaluations. The survey respondent, in haste to answer the questions, may simply retrieve their on-line tally rather than searching memory for knowledge more pertinent to the specific judgment they are being asked to make. They then use the evaluation associated with their overall judgment as inference heuristic (or less cognitively, a motivated justification):⁴ I know I like (dislike) him, so he must be a strong leader (power hungry). If this is true for most people, then the development of closed-form candidate questions is not much of an improvement over the discredited open-ended questions, and models of vote choice that posit candidate trait judgments as central to vote choices (e.g., Rahn et al. 1990; Johnston et al. 1992), while perhaps correct at a theoretical level, are fundamentally misspecified at an operational level.

There are several reasons to think that the possibility of rationalization is less severe with these types of questions than with the open-ended questions. First, in high-visibility elections most voters, as I have argued, will have constructed fairly elaborate impressions of the candidates. The closed-form questions, in effect, serve as memory-retrieval cues that direct respondents to search for particular kinds of knowledge. While some voters may "stop searching" when they hit their on-line tally, many will continue to search for more specific and relevant judgment information. This is probably especially true for trait inferences, as they are more likely to be "closer" in memory to the on-line assessment than are more concrete bits of information such as issue positions (Lodge and Stroh 1993). Thus, while the possibility of projection effects is real, the more well-developed and elaborated people's impressions of the candidates are, the less need they have to resort to affective inference. Thus Kinder (1986), for example, found that overall evaluations of Mondale, at the time (summer of 1983) a not very-well known figure, were more

⁴ See Brady and Sniderman (1985) for a similar argument with respect to placement of groups on issue scales and Eagly, Mladinic, and Otto (1994) for a general critique of the use of affectively-infused measures of beliefs (such as bipolar adjective scales like the semantic differential) as determinants of overall attitudes.

cause than consequence of trait judgments, whereas trait judgments of Reagan, the incumbent, were cause, not consequence, of global evaluations.⁵

Issue perceptions get clarified with more information as well. As Berelson and colleagues (1956) found several decades ago, people's perceptions of where the candidates stood on issues became increasingly clear as the campaign progressed, thus limiting projection to issues where candidates' positions are vague (e.g., the Vietnam War, Page and Brody 1972; see also Krosnick 1990) or early in the primary season (Bartels 1988). Even here, however, recent analysis suggests that affective projection is rather limited, especially in comparison to other, arguably more serviceable heuristics such as partisan or ideological stereotypes (Conover and Feldman 1989; Kenney 1993; see also Ottati, Fishbein and Middlestadt, 1988, on the limited role of rationalization and Franklin, 1991, on the importance of party stereotypes for perceptions of Senators' issue positions).

Therefore, while Lodge, Stroh and Wahlke (1990) has criticized the use of "memory-based" questions in models of vote choice, the evidence seems to be that such fears are well-founded only in certain circumstances. And the type of process assumed in Rahn et al. (1990) or the Shanks and Miller series, that trait judgments are the result, in part, of elaborations made on the basis of policy and partisan information, is not unjustified. The alternative, specifying that "everything" in the model is reciprocally related (e.g., Markus 1982; Page and Jones 1979; Kenney and Rice 1992), seems to me to be even more unpalatable, particularly because these models often yield reciprocal coefficients that are equivalently sized, so do more to muddy the waters than to clarify the processes involved.

2. Where do trait judgments of candidates come from? How do they change?

Voters' inferences about the kinds of personality traits a candidate possesses seem to be key ingredients of their decisions. Candidate trait judgments are even showing up in spatial models of electoral decision making, dressed as "nonpolicy considerations" that interact with voters' policy-based preferences to determine the expected utility of a particular candidate. The addition of these candidate-specific factors alters the typical Downsian spatial model prediction of candidate convergence (Enelow, Endersby, and Munger 1993). Most psychological-based models of candidate evaluation and vote choice that incorporate traits as central variables (e.g., Markus 1982; Rahn et al. 1990; Shanks and Miller series; Johnston et al. 1992) model them as rooted in the substance of politics, including partisanship, ideology, issue positions, and performance assessments. These model, in other words, are strong "eye of the beholder" models; candidates that are similar to the voter are viewed as possessing more favorable attributes. While each of these models admits the possibility that the candidates' themselves and the media environment

⁵ Markus (1982) also examined the possibility of affective biases in candidate trait judgments using the 1980 panel study. He found some evidence that global evaluations did influence trait judgments, but the reverse was also true; trait judgments influenced overall evaluations. Global and local evaluations are probably so closely bound up that disentangling them empirically through the use of nonrecursive models is almost always likely to produce theoretically ambiguous results (see Fiorina 1981 and Miller and Shanks 1982 for similar reservations about the use of nonrecursive models).

contribute to voters' assessments, only Johnston et al. (1992) have data that are suited to examining *some of these influences*.

One reason for the development of strong perceiver-based models of trait inferences is that our surveys contain perceiver variables in spades; another is that analysis of the trait batteries in the NES, for example, has been election-specific instead of cross-election. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to pool all the trait questions over the years in order to test some general theory of candidate trait attribution, although such a project could be undertaken fairly easily.⁶ For example, pooling across all candidates, we could examine whether Democrats are perceived as "warmer" than Republicans and Republicans seen as "tougher," inferences that accord with partisan images, which we know from several different types of studies (experiments, surveys, and depth interviews) are powerful heuristics. Given the collection of candidates covered in the ANES over the years, we could also examine the role of other stereotypic inferences, such as incumbency, race, religion, perhaps even attractiveness, all of which political psychology experiments have shown to be important cues (see, e.g., Conover 1981; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994; Granberg, Kasmer, and Nanneman 1988; Rosenberg, McCafferty and Harris 1986).

Yet another explanation for perceiver-dominated models is that the external contributions to people's candidate judgments, namely the candidates themselves and the media's coverage of them, cannot be gauged readily within the usual survey context. In the end, of course, these contributions may not need to be ascertained in a survey because we have the end product, the voter's inference. We can "mean adjust" this inference, in Miller-Shanks fashion, for the variables further back in the causal chain, leaving the purified collective average perception to tell us something about the nature of the target's contribution to people's inferences. This residual, however, is often what is most interesting about any particular campaign, and thinking of ways to measure shared perceptions and where they come from would seem to be one way to improve on current questions and modelling efforts. How much of individuals' perceptions are due to intrinsic properties of the candidate, such as his nonverbal behavior (see Sullivan and Masters 1993), how responsible is campaign advertising, and what role do media themes play, independently of perceiver-mediated processes?

Almost all trait-centric models of candidate evaluation (e.g., Kinder 1986; Rahn et al. 1990; Johnston et al. 1992) posit that voters' impressions of candidates cohere along two broad dimensions of assessment, competence and integrity, with, perhaps, finer subdimensional discriminations (although the evidence here is not overwhelming, see Kinder 1986). Such a conceptualization has a respected pedigree, for these two dimensions reliably emerge in studies of person perception. Other models of the structure of person impressions exist; one that I find particularly appealing as an alternative to dimensional models is Park's "story" model of person concepts, a notion akin to Sam Popkin's (1991) metaphor of the candidate "narrative". Her thesis is that people's impressions of others are often more than the sum of the individual trait concepts.

⁶ Brady and Johnston (1987) use the 1984 rolling cross-section to examine at the aggregate level the stability and distinctiveness of people's impressions of the various contenders. Other imaginative uses of the entire NES collection should be encouraged. In addition, model-building efforts could be facilitated by the addition of the trait questions for House and Senate candidates. Senate races, in particular, because of their intensity and contextual variation, would be useful settings to examine candidate impression processes.

Impressions function as explanations for another's behavior. Often this explanation, or narrative, is organized around a central concept, which may be a single trait, a person type (e.g., "the extravert," "the workaholic" "the politician"--see Anderson and Sedikides 1991), or some other organizing theme. Different people may develop different models about the same target, even with identical information. But there is a limit to how many person models can be generated for the same set of information. Once selected, "additional information is interpreted in relation to the central concept so that either the new information is viewed as support for the concept or the concept is used to explain the new information" (Park, DeKay, and Kraus 1994:446). She suggests that there may be some fluidity initially in people's person concepts, so dramatic or story-discrepant information can cause the concept to be reorganized, perhaps radically, but at some point, the model becomes crystallized and therefore, hard to overturn. As Popkin (1991) suggests, narratives for unfamiliar candidates can change fairly quickly, often induced by some campaign event. At other times, however, campaign events (e.g., the grocery store scanner episode during the 1992 campaign) resonate with people precisely because they make "perfect sense," given the story. Thus new information, including the candidate's issue positions, gets integrated into the narrative over time. And, of course, candidates can use issues strategically in order to influence what kind of story people construct about them or their opponents (see Jacobs and Shapiro 1994 for evidence of Kennedy's efforts in the 1960 election).

The metaphor of voters as storytellers is quite different than the one of voters as on-line updaters. If voters are on-line, then their stories, if they exist, are not critical, for in the end, all that matters is the overall valence of the impression. Indeed, these narratives may be just post hoc, media-dominated rationalizations of underlying evaluations, a way people talk about and justify their attitudes, rather than cognitive/affective structures capable of playing a mediational role. Of course, at a cross-sectional moment, one may not be able to distinguish between these conceptions. But with creative measures and over-time designs, one may be able to test various hypotheses about the conditions under which voters might adopt a narrative strategy and the role these stories may play as intermediaries between candidate information, trait judgments, and overall evaluations.⁷ Such designs might also be oriented toward learning about the factors that might affect voters' "choices" of compelling stories, perhaps drawing on some of Gamson's (1992) pioneering work on media frames and strategies of interpretation. The nature of people's candidate stories may also affect how they and their associated trait conceptions change. Stoker (1993), for example, in her study of the downfall of Gary Hart, found that among Hart supporters with policy-oriented evaluations, Hart's infidelity actually led to a slight increase in the favorability of their overall evaluations. This suggests that Hart supporters with a policy-based narrative viewed Hart's actions very differently from supporters with alternative central concepts.⁸

⁷ Pennington and Hastie's (1992) research on juror decision making suggests that story models of information processing are most applicable when people are not evaluating information sequentially in an item-by-item manner, but instead use some kind of end-of-sequence global aggregation process. Under these latter conditions, the story can play a mediational role in decisions.

⁸ An alternative explanation for these results might be that people with policy-based evaluations were more motivated to engage in scrutiny of the "message arguments." Actions such as a marital infidelity might be considered weak arguments, and therefore result in boomerang effects because of the cognitive responses generated to counterargue what is considered weak evidence.

A story perspective on candidate trait attribution is not inconsistent with trait-based models of candidate appraisal. However, it does suggest that narratives may integrate the political information that is modelled as the basis for trait assessments, and people may retrieve these mental models when answering trait questions on surveys.

3. How do people compare candidates?

Ultimately, however, the candidates-as-ordinary-people metaphor can only go so far in understanding what voters do. Voters must choose between and among candidates, and thus all approaches to studying candidate evaluation must eventually address the question of comparison. While behavioral decision theory is replete with possible choice rules, vote choice models have typically assumed one of two different comparison processes, either that voters compare the candidates across various dimensions, such as issues, personalities, and ideology (e.g., Markus and Converse 1979, Shanks-Miller series; Rahn et al. 1990), sometimes known as an weighted additive difference, or attribute-based, model, or they assume that people construct separate evaluations of each candidate, and make a comparison only at the level of global evaluations (Kelley and Mirer 1974; Lodge and Stroh 1993; Popkin 1991), sometimes known as an additive, or alternative-based, model. Both of these strategies are compensatory; that is, they allow people to trade-off dimensions, either within-alternatives or between them. For example, in a compensatory model, people can give up a little policy proximity in order to get more competence. This distinguishes them from noncompensatory rules, in which people do not trade-off dimensions. Noncompensatory strategies are easier because people don't have to make trade-offs, but they are also theoretically inferior because people don't use all the information they have available, and therefore, can wind up picking an alternative that while superior on one dimension (e.g., supports my position on abortion), is far from the voter on other issues.

Political psychologists have recently turned their sights to investigating comparison processes (see Taber and Steenbergen 1992; Lau 1994; Rahn 1994 for applications). It may eventually prove to be the case that the additive-difference comparison process assumed in most models may not be the best representation of choice strategies for all voters in all environments. Indeed, there is a strong presumption in most of the behavioral decision theory work that people's choice strategies are highly contingent on task and context variables (see Payne, Bettman and Johnson 1992; Lau 1994). To cope with the primary season, with its blizzard of candidates, game-dominated coverage, and changing structure of alternatives, voters may adopt heuristics of various sorts that are not well-described by linear, compensatory models. On the other hand, linear, compensatory models appear to be surprisingly robust, and may function as "metarules" that are adapted to local environments, producing processes that "look" noncompensatory when viewed at the level of process-tracing data, but in the end, capture what people are doing, but at a different level of generality (see Einhorn, Kleinmuntz, Kleinmuntz 1979).

Process-level data are useful, whether or not they overturn our basic understanding of comparison processes. For example, memory organization data I have collected strongly suggests that people "reconfigure" information to make it comparative at an attribute-level (Rahn 1994). That is, people seem to want to store comparable bits of information (such as each candidate's position on defense spending) together rather than in separate candidate compartments. If this organizational strategy is one the people employ generally, then we may want to redesign questions

that are more consistent with the way people think about the candidates. Instead of asking them, for example, whether the trait concept "provides strong leadership" fits their impression of Bush, and then later asking them whether this concept fits for Clinton, perhaps we should ask them for which candidate is it a better description.

4. Is accessibility the Theory of Everything? Or, who's primed and why?

For awhile it looked as if superstring theory just might be the holy grail of physics, something capable of uniting, at last, the forces and particles of the quantum mechanical world with gravity and general relativity. The jury, however, still seems to be out on this one (see Lindley 1993). Perhaps a similar tale one day will be told for the notion of construct accessibility (and its relatives, priming and framing), surely one of the more powerful and influential ideas to emerge from the study of human information processing, and one that has been embraced by many students of political behavior. Accessibility has been applied to the study of impact of the mass media (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar 1991; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Krosnick and Brannon 1993), campaign advertising (West 1993), the role of the campaign (Johnston et al. 1992), the impact of issues on vote choice (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989; Krosnick 1988), and the study of campaign strategy (Johnston et al. 1992; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994).

The basic idea beyond priming, as used in political science applications, is that people do not consider everything they know about some stimulus object (e.g., a candidate, a president, an issue) when making judgments about it. Instead, their judgments are affected by whatever criteria are easiest to retrieve. Ease of retrieval, or accessibility, is influenced by how frequently or recently something has been activated in the past. Some sources of accessibility are chronic in nature; they are things people care about, so naturally they spring to mind more often and therefore, are more likely to weigh heavily in people's judgments of candidates (Krosnick 1988). However, most of the work in political science has focused on the external sources of accessibility, in particular, how news media coverage or campaign factors can affect the weighting of various considerations in overall judgments.

The assumption in much of the political science applications of the priming idea is that people are fairly passive in the face of it. Iyengar and Kinder (1987), for example, entitle one of their chapters, "Victims of Priming," implying that if standards of evaluation are altered (the empirical measure of priming), it is because people are rather helpless. This is marked contrast to the Columbia School and the American Voter traditions, which depicted people as more discriminating.

Interestingly, however, the results presented in Iyengar and Kinder's experiments of the priming of presidential performance standards demonstrate that the sheer amount of coverage a problem receives is not sufficient to alter the standards by which a president is judged, as a simple accessibility hypothesis would suggest. Instead, the news stories had to implicate presidential responsibility, and even here the statistical support is not strong. Furthermore, partisans appeared to be differentially affected by the types of news stories, suggesting, again, some selectivity. Viewers, it would seem, have some control over whether or not they use primed information.

Accessibility by itself, therefore, is insufficient to produce priming effects in the political domain.⁹ This more active view of priming may explain why Stoker (1993) found that publicity of Gary Hart's capers did not result in an increase in the weight accorded traditional values in Democrat's re-evaluation of him. Similarly, the analysis by Johnston et al. (1992) of the 1987 Canadian election suggests that partisans are particularly vulnerable to priming, but only if the right issue is chosen: "Parties prime, we believe, because they must provide voters with reasons for voting for them. Not just any reasons will do, however. They must be reasons with enough force that they will cause people to vote for the party" (p. 251). And Krosnick and Brannon (1993), in their analysis of the impact of the Gulf War on Bush's approval ratings, found that more attentive and interested individuals engaged in "corrective" processes, and therefore, their overall approval of Bush was not influenced by an increased weighting of his handling of the Gulf Crisis.

Priming, therefore, is not an extremely general phenomenon. Clearly we need to know more about the conditions under which people will be primed and the conditions under which they will "correct for" accessibility effects. The volume of the message, it seems, does not automatically translate into people weighing the particular consideration more heavily in their evaluations. Whether accessibility can still be the Theory of Everything once we understand more about its boundary conditions remains to be seen.

5. Does Political Sophistication Matter for Vote Choice?

If political psychologists know anything, they know that political sophistication matters. Of course, political behavior scholars have known the same thing for quite awhile too, and by now, the survey and experimental evidence of sophistication's import is overwhelming. We know that sophisticates use superior strategies of expectancy disconfirmation (Fiske, Kinder and Larier 1983), and they have more elaborate knowledge structures and more consistent attitudes (Converse 1964; Judd and Krosnick 1989). Their political candidate knowledge contains more features, and these attributes tend to be more evaluatively redundant (Lusk and Judd 1988) and more organized (McGraw, Pinney and Neumann 1991). They are more likely to process verbal information about a single candidate in on-line fashion (McGraw, Lodge, and Stroh 1990), are less likely to be "affectively-driven" in their thinking about policies (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991) and candidates (McGraw and Steenbergen 1994) and more likely to feel certain in their perceptions of where candidates stand on issues (Alvarez and Franklin 1994). Political sophistication also figures prominently in theories of attitude formation and change (Zaller 1992; Stoker 1993) and priming effects, albeit here the results have been somewhat inconsistent (cf. Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Krosnick and Brannon 1993). Sophisticated voters are also more likely to engage in post hoc rationalization of candidate attitudes (Rahn, Krosnick and Breuning 1994) and to be less vulnerable to momentum forces in primary campaigns (Bartels 1988).

Given all these structural, organizational, and strategy differences, why is it that voters in presidential elections look so much alike? Gelman and King (1993), for example, find that well-educated voters do not become "enlightened" any faster than less well-educated voters, Rahn and

⁹ Martin and Achce (1992) suggests several factors that determine whether or not accessible information will be used to make judgments or not. These include people's goals, conscious awareness of the priming stimulus, and whether the information seems appropriate to the judgment task.

her colleagues (1990) find few important sophistication-induced differences in the origins or consequences of presidential candidate trait judgments (see also Pierce 1993),¹⁰ and Miller and Shanks (1991) find underwhelming educational differences with their model is run separately for educational groups.

The information context presumably resolves this tension. Intense, balanced, redundant and completely comparative, presidential elections nullify the cognitive advantages normally accruing to the more well-versed. Experts appear to do what they do regardless; nonexperts, however, need a little help from the candidates and the mass media. Direct tests of the role of context, however, are sparse in comparison to the much more plentiful literature on sophistication as an individual difference variable.

6. Whither attitudinal consistency?

The evaluative congruency or incongruency of people's beliefs and attributions about political candidates may be a key variable in understanding differences in people's processing of political information. Conceptualizing political candidates as attitude objects on the voters' horizon is, of course, an old tradition. *The American Voter*, for example, distinguished "six dimensions of partisan feeling," two of which were the presidential candidates. Issues, groups, and the parties' performance in office were the other "elements of national politics" toward which the individual may have attitudes. Each of these attitudes could vary in terms of its partisan direction and intensity, and the set of attitudes taken together enabled a more accurate prediction of vote choice than any one attitude alone. The predictability of the vote based on these attitudes was especially high for people who made up their minds before the campaign started. The later a person's decision, the less predictable their votes were on the basis of these attitudinal dimensions, in part because decision delay was strongly associated with attitudinal conflict (see also Lazarsfeld et al. 1944).

The authors of *The American Voter* assessed voters' attitudes using responses to the parties' and candidates' open-ended questions. Recent theoretical and empirical work reviewed above has suggested that the particular open-ended questions employed in the ANES are not very good measures of people's attitudes and the reasons underlying them. More recent studies, however, relying on different NES questions or different data, confirm many of the findings about the importance of attitudinal consistency. Gopian and Hadjiharalambous (1994) have analyzed late deciding voters in the 1972-1988 elections. Their conclusions about the predictability of late deciders echo those of *The American Voter*; late deciders' decisions appear to be influenced by a smaller set of factors than the usual list of suspects in voting models, and the predictability of these choices is considerably lower than earlier deciders. These analysts part ways, however, with *The American Voter* about the mechanism. *The American Voter* attributed decision delay to attitudinal conflict, or "cross-pressures", whereas Gopian and Hadjiharalambous reject this hypothesis. However, they only analyze the extent of issue-based inconsistency rather than the conflict among all the elements of the voter's "psychological field," as was done in *The American Voter*. Had they

¹⁰ Our argument is of the "big picture" sort. There are some small differences in sophistication groups—for example, ideology is slightly more important and issues slightly less, for highly sophisticated voters, and competence matters somewhat more—that could be seen by others to be indicative of processing differences.

included conflict among partisanship and candidate trait assessments or economic performance they might have found some support for the cross-pressures idea. Indeed, they find that late deciders tend to be people who preferred candidates other than the eventual party nominees, and perhaps as a consequence, tend to defect at much higher rates than early deciders from their party identification in their choices, suggesting that conflict between candidate judgments and partisanship may be a prime motivator of decision delay.

The importance of the congruency of the partisan implications of people's attitudes is illustrated by a different type of vote choice study. In the fall of 1987, Flanigan, Rahm, and Zingale interviewed a random sample of Twin Cities voters from which a smaller set of 24 people was selected to become part of a multiple-wave panel study conducted during the 1988 presidential campaign. Based on the information obtained in the 1987 interviews, a measure of congruency was calculated based on Reagan approval ratings, partisanship and ideology. Of the people with congruent orientations, only 1 person failed to realize his predicted behavior; that is, almost everyone behaved as we would have predicted based only on attitudinal consistency measured months earlier (see Flanigan, Rahm, and Zingale 1992). Each of these elements alone was quite accurate in predicting people's final choices, even though we obtained this information over a year before the nominees were known. Indeed, our "hit" rate was even higher than that reported by *The American Voter* (p. 74, note 7), which was based on attitudes toward Eisenhower. Reagan job approval and partisanship each yielded accurate predictions in over 80% of the cases.¹¹ Interestingly, while almost all cross-pressured voters had unstable preferences, something we would expect, the majority of the congruent individuals also had unstable candidate preferences. We identified several different kinds of processes at work over the course of the campaign. Some processes facilitated the decision making of the cross-pressured by making a particular consideration salient, others hampered the congruent from settling on the decision they "should" make, and others maintained the decisions of the "overdetermined" congruents by allowing them to resist, reinterpret, ignore, or de-emphasize potentially counterattitudinal messages.

Some of these processes, such as rationalization and reinforcement, are amply documented in *The People's Choice* and other work on cognitive consistency (e.g., Kinder 1978). Others, such as the process we labeled compartmentalization, illustrate the importance of understanding the kinds of integration rules people use, or fail to use in this case. An example: One of our respondents was torn between Bush and Dukakis for most of the primary season and into the summer. A strong Republican, fan of Reagan, and a self-identified conservative, she was a moderately sophisticated "congruent" voter that followed an unstable path to her eventual vote choice, Bush. From the beginning, she knew Dukakis was a Democrat, but managed to keep this information unconnected to her overall impression of Dukakis, which was highly positive and largely based on high marks for competence, an assessment she had developed because her family had considered moving to Massachusetts in the previous year. In the interview right before the Democratic convention, she was undecided, but leaning toward Dukakis because Bush was "boring" in her view.

The Democratic convention, however, managed to forge a connection between Dukakis and

¹¹ See also Mattei and Weisberg (1994) and Shanks and Miller (1991) on the important role played by assessments of Reagan in the 1988 vote.

the party he represented, and her evaluation of him underwent an abrupt and permanent transformation:

...listening to him [Dukakis] reiterate, he talked about what the Democratic platform was, I mean, you know I still like the man, but I think I was swayed a little more thinking, oh...I may vote for the man, but there's no way I can vote for the party. No matter what, I think I'm going to have to vote Republican in the election. It [the Democratic convention] didn't strengthen my opinion of him, let's put it that way.

Notice that this process can't really be considered "enlightenment" (Gelman and King 1993), because she didn't learn anything she didn't know already. Nor is it "activation," for all her other evaluations of Democrats during the nomination campaign were negative, suggesting the party was activated for most of her impressions. Instead, compartmentalization represents a failure, willful or otherwise, to fully integrate all the information one has.¹²

So congruency of attitudes can tell us a lot about the choices people will eventually make, but isn't necessarily predictive of the process they will take to get there. Sophistication, at least in our study, wasn't helpful in distinguishing between congruent voters who followed stable or unstable paths. Some of most sophisticated were highly unstable, but so were some of the least sophisticated. Yet some of congruent voters, both the sophisticated and the unaware, didn't budge all year. In the end, however, they resembled each other in the sense that their decisions could have been predicted from party or Reagan evaluations or ideology. It seems unlikely that cross-sectional vote choice models will ever be capable of modelling the diversity of paths people take, but for understanding elections, maybe the destination is more important than the journey. But few students of political behavior can resist the lure of the journey, even those committed to the destination as the "real" behavior to explain.

It may be possible to improve on our understanding of processes by making use of recent theories of attitudes. The original view of attitudes as tripartite entities composed of cognitive, affective and behavioral components has given way to a definition of attitudes as unidimensional evaluations of some attitude object that may have cognitive, affective and behavioral correlates, but may not (see Eagly and Chaiken 1992; Olson and Zanna 1993).¹³ This reconceptualization of attitudes creates the possibility that the same "attitude" may have different bases for different people. For example, in rating Bill Clinton on a feeling thermometer, one person may think about how Bill Clinton makes her feel; indeed, the preamble to the thermometer asks her to do precisely

¹² Yankelovich (199x) uses the term compartmentalization to describe a similar process in the development of attitudes.

¹³ Cacioppo and Bernston (1994) have urged a two-dimensional view of attitudes with separate positive and negative substrates, similar to the conceptualization underlying some theories of mood and emotion (see Marcus 1988 for a political science application). Their theory can accommodate a bipolar attitude as a special, and perhaps quite frequent, case. The virtue of a bivalent conception of attitudes is that it can more easily handle distinctions among attitude ambivalence (strong, mixed feelings), indifference, and genuine neutrality, all of which may lead a survey respondent to, say, rate a candidate at 50 on the feeling thermometer, but may have very different implications for attitude stability.

that. Another person, however, may think about what she knows about Bill Clinton. Feelings and beliefs seem to be clearly separable aspects of attitudes (Esses et al. 1992), and people's candidate attitudes seem to be no exception (Abelson et al. 1982; Marcus 1988). However, there is disagreement about whether specific emotions predict global evaluations above and beyond the evaluative implications of beliefs (see Eagly, Mladinic and Otto 1994; Ottati et al. 1992). The studies that have entered both beliefs and emotions into equations predicting global evaluations (Ottati et al. 1988; Marcus 1988; Conover and Feldman 1986; Esses et al. 1992; Eagly, Mladinic and Otto 1994) have generally found that both contribute uniquely to attitudes. Less studied is heterogeneity in the basis for overall attitudes. Are some people more likely to have cognitively-based or emotion-based attitudes? Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock (1991) argue that less sophisticated voters are more likely to have policy attitudes that are based on affect, but it is not clear whether these findings generalize to all attitude objects. Perhaps some attitude objects are more likely to engender cognitively-based or affectively-based attitudes. And what are the implications of heterogeneity, either across people or across objects, if it exists? Does the basis for the attitude influence people's behavior? And what if the belief and emotional components of attitudes are incongruent?

Millar and Tesser (1992) provide a framework for thinking about these issues that has three important variables: focus, type of behavior, and cognitive-affective consistency. Focus refers to whether people concentrate on *why* they feel they way they do about an attitude object or *how* they feel. The former, they argue, makes people focus on the cognitive elements of their attitudes while the latter makes the affective basis of attitudes more salient. Their model also suggests that different types of behavior are driven by different components of one's attitudes. Behavior that is instrumental (that is, done for some reason other than the behavior itself, such as voting in order to achieve one's policy goals, ala rational choice models, or studying in order to get good grades) is more cognitively driven while behavior that is consummatory (that is, done for sake of the behavior itself, as in voting to express oneself, or studying for the joy of learning) is more affectively driven. Mismatches among types of behavior and focus lead to reduced attitude-behavior correlations, but only when there is low affective-cognitive consistency. Experience, they argue, is one variable that affects whether the affective and cognitive components of the attitude are consistent with one another.

This framework suggests several interesting avenues for exploring the processes of vote choice with the existing NES structure. One reason why the feeling thermometer and vote choice are so highly correlated is that the feeling thermometer makes the affective component of people's attitudes salient and voting is largely consummatory behavior. For other types of behavior, however, such as giving money to a campaign, the feeling thermometers may do less well as a predictor of someone's behavior. The framework also has some interesting implications when we begin to think about who is likely to have affectively-based or cognitively-based candidate attitudes and which voters are likely to have consistency in the components of their candidate attitudes. Rather than treating the elements of vote choice in an elemental fashion, as ingredients that are combined in some sort of statistical recipe, a consistency approach would treat vote decisions as configural and would employ within-subjects types of analyses. Perhaps there are different types of consistency or inconsistency that would be predictive of different processing patterns.

CONCLUSION

Over the last several years, political psychological ideas about how people process, store, and retrieve information have enriched considerably our understanding of political behavior. Some of these ideas have found their way into the instrumentation of the NES surveys, for example, the trait and affect batteries. And political psychology may still have contributions to make here as we learn more about the inside of the black box, particularly as we begin to understand better memory organization and comparison processes.

But the metamessage of political psychology is that the number of paths people can traverse on their way to some eventual decision is potentially quite large. Yet, god is rarely in the details in most political behavior models of presidential vote choice. He or she may not need to be is a frequently heard retort. And a frequently heard reply is that 1 or 2% of the variance makes all the difference in the world in an election. Neither of these positions is satisfactory. Political psychologists may need to become more interested in the stuff of elections that really does matter, such as partisanship and ideology, and political behavior scholars may need to pay more serious attention to such things as advertising, instead of letting rational candidates or aggregation do all the work for them, before we can make progress on a theory of everything.

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