T H R E E

Going without Data: Information Shortcuts

DESPITE THE many kinds of information voters acquire in daily life, there are large gaps in their knowledge about government and politics. To overcome these limitations, they use shortcuts. In this chapter I examine how voters use shortcuts to evaluate information, maintain running tallies about political parties, and assess candidates.

At the heart of gut rationality are information shortcuts—easily obtained and used forms of information that serve as "second-best" substitutes for harder-to-obtain kinds of data. Shortcuts that voters use incorporate learning from past experiences, daily life, the media, and political campaigns. Because voters use shortcuts, low-information reasoning is by no means devoid of substantive content. The three main kinds of shortcuts voters use are shortcuts in evaluating, obtaining, and storing information.

Voters rely on the opinions of others as a shortcut in evaluating the information they have, because even when they do know about an issue, they are unaware of many relations between government and their lives.[1] They may not be able to evaluate news for relevance or veracity, and they may not have appropriate standards for assessing the performance of the government. Thus, even when they do have the facts about an issue, voters turn to others for help with evaluation because they are uncertain about the meaning of the news and want to know how others have interpreted events.

Voters use running tallies about political parties as shortcuts in storing information and as shortcuts with which to assess candidates and legislation about which they have no information. They also use shortcuts to evaluate candidates, assessing them from campaign behavior, personal characteristics, and their relations with groups and people whose general positions they know.

Whether for lack of complete information about government, lack of theory with which to evaluate policies, or lack of information about the

views and reactions of others, uncertainty is pervasive when voters think about and evaluate government.[2] It follows from the pervasiveness of uncertainty that campaigns are designed to give voters new information about candidates and issues and to make new connections between specific problems and specific offices.

Interpersonal Influence as an Information Shortcut

In recent years, political campaigns have come to rely increasingly on a research tool known as the "focus group." Such a group usually consists of six to ten participants and a moderator, who uses a few general questions to steer the group into an extended discussion of the topic he or she is investigating. Whereas surveys are still heavily used to assess the state of opinion in a population at any given time, many political researchers consider focus groups, which assess the thoughts of a small number of people in depth, a better basis for predicting whether an issue will "ignite" in the larger population with exposure.[3] For example, before George Bush's 1988 campaign made an issue of Willie Horton—the murderer who was let out of a Massachusetts prison on a weekend pass, subsequently holding a couple hostage and raping the wife—the issue was tested extensively in focus groups. Indeed, tapes of two focus groups which included discussions of Dukakis's prison-furloughs program and his refusal to sign a law requiring teachers in Massachusetts public schools to lead the pledge of allegiance were shown to Bush to convince him to attack Dukakis on these issues.[4]

Of course, the fact that focus groups are more intensive than surveys is not in itself sufficient to explain why they are held in such high regard. Why hasn't the demand for more intensive research led either to very long surveys addressed to only one subject, or to long private interviews with one person at a time? The answer is that small-group discussions can do something that surveys and private interviews cannot: they can reveal inchoate attitudes that people are usually reluctant to express unless they are validated or reinforced by others.

The People's Choice, the Columbia group's first voting study, found that there were large variations in people's levels of interest in politics and political campaigns. Moreover, the concept of interest in politics was easily comprehended by everyone and had external validity. Over the course of the 1940 study, a question about political interest was asked over 5,000 times; only 1 percent of the time did respondents say they didn't know or weren't sure how interested they were in the campaign. The question "made sense to almost everyone and almost everyone had a ready an-

swer. . . . It is not surprising that people's self-rating on interest stands up well under a series of tests of consistency and validity. For being interested is a clearly recognizable experience, as anyone knows who has been unable to put down a detective story or been bored to tears at a cocktail party."[5] People who were interested in the campaign had more opinions about politics, paid more attention to campaign events, and exposed themselves to more campaign communications. On an average day of the political campaign, the researchers found that at least 10 percent more people participated in discussions about the elections—either actively or passively—than heard or read about campaign items.[6] The two-step flow of information means that many people receive their news indirectly, and that many more validate and anchor what they have heard or read only after they have worked through the material with others: ". . . Opinion leadership is an integral part of the give-and-take of everyday personal relationships. . . . All interpersonal relations are potential networks of communications."[7] This means, above all, that campaigns matter even if many voters know little about the issues or have little interest in the campaign:

> Psychologists might say that the highly involved voters "live on" their differences with the opposition; that is, the very fact of difference provides them with a psychic energy with which they continue to engage themselves politically. And, in reverse, their deeper political engagement no doubt leads them to see and feel differences with the opposition to an unusual degree.
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> But, whatever the psychological mechanisms, socially and politically the fact is that not all voters are needed to achieve a sharp polarization into two parties . . . large numbers of the latter simply "go along" with what is for them a more artificial cleavage.[8]

Uneven levels of political interest and knowledge, then, mean that an essential part of political dynamics takes place between voters. The campaign and the media only send the initial messages; until these messages have been checked with others and validated, their full effects are not felt. Focus groups, as opposed to depth interviews or surveys, capture some of this two-step flow of information. They give researchers and campaign strategists a chance to see whether discussion of an issue sparks interest in it.

Fire Alarms and Police Patrols

Downs began accepting "a priori" that people are not certain what they have learned from the media until they discuss the news with informal opinion leaders.[9] His contribution was to generalize from findings about interpersonal influence to the broader category of information shortcuts.

When a voter is unsure how to evaluate information, or doesn't have information, relying on a trusted person for validation is, in essence, a strategy for economizing on information and resolving uncertainty. Because there is a two-step flow of information, a lack of citizenship data or "textbook knowledge" understates the political impact that issues can have and understates the public's ability to make informed decisions.

There are two ways to evaluate the effects of information. One way is to ask voters directly what they know; another way is learn where voters take their cues. These two methods parallel the two approaches scholars have used to evaluate the influence of congressmen and their involvement in the affairs of government. Scholars and reporters observing the behavior of a government agency often see no congressmen observing or interfering in its affairs. If they don't detect a congressional presence they often conclude that the congressmen are not involved and are not effective. But congressmen do not patrol the entire government looking for problems to solve, like police detectives searching out criminals; they wait for constituents to set off alarms so they can race to the scene, like fire fighters.[10]

Citizens do not patrol the government looking for problems either, but they pay attention to people who do. As W. Russell Neuman, director of the Communications Research Group at MIT's Media Lab, has noted, "Most citizens don't study the details but look at the bottom line. Are we at war? Is the economy healthy? Most people entrust the rest to experts and specialists. What is important is that there are perhaps five percent who are activists and news junkies who do pay close attention. If they see that something is seriously wrong in the country, they sound the alarm and then ordinary people start paying attention."[11]

Changes in the format of television news over the last three decades also provide a two-step media flow of information. The pretelevision voting studies found that there was a two-step flow of influence in communications; the impact of the media depended on how media stories were interpreted by informal opinion leaders. There is an analogy to this two-step flow for television itself: the impact of many events and campaign activities depends not just on the viewers' interpretations of the events, but on the interpretations offered by elite opinion leaders on television. Televi-

sion news provides commentary on speeches, proposals, and crises from a variety of well-known political figures from whom voters can triangulate, just as they do with local opinion leaders. The late Claude Pepper, for example, was known to senior citizens ("At my age, I don't even buy green bananas") for his defenses of Social Security, and was always asked to comment on new Social Security Insurance proposals. No coverage of an international crisis is complete without comments from Henry Kissinger and Senator Sam Nunn. Such figures become well known over time; their comments allow voters to mediate new information and watch for "fire alarms" through the media as well as through conversation.

Richard Brody has studied the effect on viewers of elite interpretation of political events.[12] Brody studied events that gave large short-term boosts to the president's popularity. Sometimes a large gain in presidential popularity appears to defy explanation. For example, the U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba in 1961 led to an ignominious defeat at the Bay of Pigs, but President Kennedy's popularity soared after the debacle, for which he took full responsibility. Brody has shown that seemingly incongruous situations like this, when a president's popularity soars after a humiliating fiasco, can be explained by the response of elite figures to the event, as featured in the media. If there is a crisis and the elite figures rally to support the president, then the president's popularity soars, fiasco or not. If the elites are divided and critical, as after the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, the president's popularity can plummet, as it did for Lyndon Johnson.

Two kinds of campaign situations wherein television coverage after an event can determine the extent of mass reaction are similar to those Brody has analyzed: (1) situations wherein challengers present their positions on issues, and (2) situations wherein ambiguous, possibly innocuous, remarks are made. When a challenger, in an attempt to demonstrate credibility and competence, releases details of his plans for defense or the budget (for example), public response depends not on an understanding of the details but on elite reaction as reported in the media. For example, in 1972 the Democratic nominee for president, George McGovern, presented his tax and defense plans to the media in an attempt to demonstrate their feasibility. When cabinet member after cabinet member in the Nixon administration attacked the plans, and no major figures in the Democratic party—neither well-known senators nor former cabinet members—stood up to denounce the attacks as unfair or partisan, McGovern's credibility suffered. Likewise, when Ronald Reagan, campaigning for the Republican nomination in 1976, presented plans for cutting the federal budget by 10

percent, and the details were attacked by many during the primaries and defended by none, there was a similar reaction. McGovern and Reagan had not organized enough elite support to counter the many cabinet members' attacks on their proposals. They had to defend against the attacks personally, which effectively precluded them from spending their precious airtime on the offensive.[13] Of course, a president with little influence cannot mobilize his office, and a challenger with elite support can fend off the attacks. Also, if the elites are discredited, it does not matter if the challenger cannot rally prominent members of the establishment to his side.

When a candidate makes careless or poorly worded statements, the public reaction often depends on whether news reports highlight these comments as significant or pass them by. In 1976, in discussing ethnic neighborhoods in a newspaper interview in New York, presidential candidate Jimmy Carter used the curious phrase "ethnic purity." Until it was featured on television several days later, there was no reaction to the phrase from voters or opposing politicians.[14] After it was widely publicized, Carter had to spend several weeks of the campaign rebuilding his links to the black community.[15] Although some remarks are so revealing when reported in the media that no elite mediation is necessary—such as Jesse Jackson's reference in a personal conversation to New York City as "Hymietown"—many statements do not register as significant to most people unless they are aware of how others evaluate the remarks as well. When citizens sample information about government, and listen to elites and "news junkies" who sound alarms, those who are most directly affected by an issue absorb the information first; for example, senior citizens pick up news about changes in Social Security before others do.[16] If the issue is one that can effectively be connected with government action and benefits that voters want, it will percolate through the public.

Just as fire alarms alert fire fighters to fires, saving them the effort of patrolling to look for smoke, so do information shortcuts save voters the effort of constantly searching for relevant facts. Since they are uncertain about the accuracy or meaning of information anyway, it makes more sense for them to act like fire fighters rather than like police—to use the information shortcuts provided by trusted local and national commentators, endorsements, and political conventions.

Whether a problem is "my problem," "our problem," "the country's problem," or a problem at all depends on information about the concerns and preferences of others, knowledge about government, and knowledge of the positions of politicians and parties.

Party Identification

The Columbia researchers began their 1940 campaign study with a view of the voter as consumer—a person shopping for products, with price and advertising exerting an immediate effect on choices. Their first study was designed to assess the effects of the mass media on attitudes and behavior, and they expected that these effects would be sizable and obvious. They found, however, that these effects were much smaller than they had expected, in part because voters had entrenched voting habits. In 1940, there was no inkling yet that this was an important concept: in *The People's Choice*, people voting for Roosevelt were called Democrats and people voting for Willkie were called Republicans. The 1948 study was the first academic research project to ask a question that separated current vote intention from partisan habits and identifications: "Regardless of how you may vote in the coming election, how have you usually thought of yourself—as a Republican, Democrat, Socialist, or what?"[17]

This general recognition that voters had standing decisions about the political parties meant that each election did not necessarily present a new choice. "For many people, votes are not perceived as decisions to be made in each specific election. For them, voting traditions are not changed much more often than careers are chosen, religions drifted into or away from, or tastes revised."[18] Party loyalties were not easily changed. They reflected past political battles that had shaped the ways in which voters thought about politics and government. Thus:

> In 1948 some people were, in effect, voting on the internationalism issue of 1940, others on the depression issue of 1932, and some, indeed, on the slavery issues of 1860. The vote is thus a kind of "moving average" of reactions to the political past. Voters carry over to each new election remnants of issues raised in previous elections—and so there is always an overlapping of old and new decisions that give a cohesion in time to the political system.[19]

Party loyalties reduced the effects of the media. In 1940, for example, the media were overwhelmingly Republican, but Democratic voters read and listened to more of their own candidate's stories. The mechanism of selective exposure came into play; people chose the material listened to or read, and the more interested and committed they were, the more likely they were to read and listen to the material presented by their own candidate. Availability of information plus a predisposition to consider it, rather than availability alone, determined exposure.[20] There was more Republican

money and more Republican propaganda, but there were enough Democratic communications available to maintain the Democrats' commitment to their candidate.

It became clear over the course of the two studies that party identification was more than a voting habit; it was a worldview as well. There were major differences in the social composition of the groups supporting the two candidates, and the differences in their social philosophies were "even more pronounced than differences in their social composition."[21]

Downs pointed out that party identification, like reliance on informal opinion leaders, was an information shortcut to the vote decision. But this does not mean that the voter sacrifices his or her basic issue-orientations; he or she simply deals with them in a more economical way. This perspective emphasizes an attachment that depends on evaluations of past and future benefits from government. In a simplified Downsian perspective, parties are teams that attempt to gain elective positions through an appeal to the voters that is based on a platform composed of issue positions plus a political ideology.[22] Each voter, Downs assumes, has an ideology or "verbal image of the good society, and of the chief means of constructing such a society."[23]

This immediately raises questions: If voters care only about the benefits they receive from government, why do political parties devote so much effort to publicizing their ideologies? And why *should* voters care about party ideologies? The answer to both questions is that both parties and voters have found ideology valuable as a shortcut or cost-saving device.

If voters were not uncertain—if they were fully informed about government and could assess how their own benefits would be affected by a party's platform—they would pay no attention to the party's ideology. They would simply evaluate the party's actual performance and proposals in terms of their personal ideologies. As Downs put it, "When voters can expertly judge every detail of every stand taken and relate it directly to their own views of a great society, they are interested only in issues, not philosophies."[24]

Ideologies are, in effect, "samples of all the differentiating stands" between parties.[25] Parties use ideologies to highlight critical differences between themselves, and to remind voters of their past successes. They do this because voters do not perceive all the differences, cannot remember all the past performances, and cannot relate all future policies to their own benefits. Thus, Downs emphasizes uncertainty is a necessary condition for ideological differences between parties: "Party ideologies can remain different only insofar as none is demonstrably more effective than the rest."[26]

When one party convinces voters that its position is demonstrably better on some issue, the other party either adapts or fails to gain votes in the future.

Ideology is thus a mark not of sophistication and education, but of uncertainty and lack of ability to connect policies with benefits. The word *ideology* is a loaded one in America, evoking the derogatory sense of *ideologues*—people who have belief systems to which they adhere steadfastly. (As Clifford Geertz has noted, "I have a social philosophy; you have public opinions; he has an ideology.")[27] Downs, however, was equating ideology not with intellectual sophistication or moral rigidity, but with simple shortcuts and loosely integrated views about what parties stand for in the minds of voters. A party's ideology and past performance matter only when the voter cannot with certainty predict its future behavior from its platform. Parties try hard to remind voters about their views of the good society and how to achieve it, because this helps voters evaluate the implications of the party's approach. This is a "default value" view of both party identification and party ideologies: when a voter has no information about current performance, or is uncertain of what the effects of a proposal are, he or she reverts to default values.

But unavailability of data is not the only reason voters revert to default values. They do this when they are so satisfied with their past choices that they see no reason to collect any data. So long as the candidates' actions appear consistent with the generalized notion the voter attaches to a particular label, the voter can avoid the effort of keeping track of all the various activities of government. As Downs put it, sometimes voters have no data because they do not expect a fair return on their investment of effort:

> Finally, some rational men habitually vote for the same party in every election. In several preceding elections, they carefully informed themselves about all the competing parties, and all the issues of the moment; yet they always came to the same decision about how to vote. Therefore they have resolved to repeat this decision without becoming well-informed, unless some catastrophe makes them realize it no longer expresses their best interests. [This habit] keeps voters from investing in information which would not alter their behavior.[28]

Since voters have limited information and different priorities, parties that seek their votes are bound to be coalitions that coordinate voter efforts to pursue a set of collective goods. Although the coalition may exhibit stability over time, the basis of each individual's attachment to it is utilitarian:

it depends on the rewards received. Thus even when there is widespread agreement within a party on general goals, there is no reason to assume that all voters have the same priorities, or that they pay attention to the same issues. This view of political parties as coalitions has two important implications for understanding voting decisions.

First, as noted earlier, the multiplicity of group and individual interests suggests that one should not expect consensus of attitudes across issues within the party. There also is no logical inconsistency in the attitudes of a black Democrat who is both pro–civil rights and anti-labor, or even any logical reason to suppose that he or she experiences any significant cross-pressure when casting a vote for a Democrat. Furthermore, seeing the parties as coalitions makes it illogical to assume that any significant number of voters should be able to locate the party on some hypothetical "continuum" that summarizes party positions for *all* issues. Given the cost of gathering information solely for the purpose of making a vote decision, we should not expect a consensus on issues within parties. Where candidates are engaged in assembling a coalition of voters interested in only one issue, or only a few issues, people in every coalition are ignorant of the candidate's stand in many areas that are not central to their primary concerns. The implication for voting research is clear: unless voters are sorted according to the importance they attach to specific issues, one cannot expect to find high levels of interest or of information.

Second, within every coalition there are people who disagree with the candidate or the party position in some area but still support the candidate or party. In 1964, for example, it was not essential for a black Democratic voter whose primary concern was civil rights to be familiar with Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policy in order to be an issue-oriented voter. Nor would it be surprising today to find that advocates or opponents of right-to-life legislation are totally ignorant about farm price-support policy or deficit-reduction proposals. However, when there are political primaries, there are fights for control of a party between its various internal factions.

Changes in Party Identification

If party identification reflects a voter's current judgment about the political performance of the two parties, then there should be feedback from a voter's evaluations of current policies to party identification. On the other hand, if the only events that affect party identification are catastrophes on the order of the Great Depression, party identification is only a running tally of public reaction to cataclysms, and party voting is voting that is unaffected by the year-to-year turns of politics. When the authors of *The*

American Voter inferred that there were no links between party identification and normal politics, they were looking at the apparent glacial stability of party identification in America after World War II and the inheritance of partisan identification from one's parents.[29] If children inherited party identification from their parents and nothing short of a catastrophe could change it, there wasn't much political content to party voting; party voting would be merely voting based on the last catastrophe, and governments were otherwise not being held accountable at the polls for their performance.

During the 1950s, the distribution of party identification was relatively stable from survey to survey, and this was consistent with the argument that individual party identification was also stable when normal politics prevailed. However, there was one University of Michigan Survey Research Center survey in which the same respondents were interviewed in 1956, 1958, and 1960. When this "panel survey" (a study in which the same people are reinterviewed) was carefully reexamined, party identification was far less stable than had been assumed: During these four "normal" years, one of every four respondents changed positions on a Democrat–independent–Republican scale.[30]

These short-term changes in party identification (most of which are between independent and one of the two major parties) are also related to voters' evaluations of government policy performance and economic management. Morris Fiorina's analysis of data from the 1956/58/60 panel survey, and from another one covering 1972/74/76, shows that changes in the economy, domestic policy performance, and such highly publicized events as Gerald Ford's pardon of former president Nixon all affected party identification.[31] People move to and from their respective political parties in response to their evaluations of economic and political conditions and in response to their evaluations of the performance of the parties and their candidates.[32] Party identification is neither impervious to change nor devoid of political content. In other words, there is feedback from issues and performance to partisan identification. Partisanship is a running tally of current party assessment.[33]

Year-to-year changes in party identification reflect voter reaction to recent political events and have a clear and direct effect on voting. From 1956 through 1988, there is a strong correlation between changes in the distribution of the vote for Congress and changes in the distribution of party identification.[34] Changes in congressional voting prompt changes in party identification, and changes in party identification prompt changes in con-

gressional voting. There is a mutual adjustment between political evaluations, party identification, and voting.[35]

Party Voting and Issue Voting

When do voters use their party identification as a generalized guide to voting, and when do they vote because of a particular issue? The answer depends on information and the incentives to gather it, as may be illustrated by the difference in voting patterns in the classic comparison between farm managers and urban laborers.

In *The American Voter* an analysis of farmers revealed "spectacular links between simple economic pressures and partisan choice."[36] An information-centered explanation of these "spectacular links" would follow these general lines: The collective nature of the vote means that there is low incentive for an individual to collect information solely in order to cast one vote among many millions. Farmers, however, gather the information on their own businesses in great detail—not because they are better citizens, but because they are independent managers, and the information necessary for management is directly related to government policy. What to plant, when to sell, and where to borrow are all decisions that depend on government policies at least as much as they depend on the weather.

Laborers, not being economic managers and thus having no incentive to collect such information for their daily use, would be more likely to rely on past government performance, and to use a party label as an information shortcut; thus the greater sensitivity to economic fluctuations among farmers. Further, since there was much more current information about political performance among farmers than among laborers, farmers would rely less on party identification and would have weaker generalized attachments to party ideologies, since they would always have current information on performance.

The American Voter interpreted the "spectacular links" in a reverse fashion, saying that because farmers have weaker partisan identification than laborers, they are "psychologically free to march to the polls and vote the rascals out."[37] In other words, whereas a Downsian perspective emphasizes using party as an information shortcut when no other information has been obtained, the Michigan approach emphasized that no information could be used, *even if obtained*, when voters identified with a party. When information has been obtained in daily life, voters are not psychologically barred from using it.

Despite low levels of knowledge and interest in the electorate, party identification is profoundly political.[38] And when we accept the political basis of party identification, the question is no longer whether issues matter, but whether it is new or old issues that matter.

Party Images

There are two kinds of feedback from contemporary performance, in addition to actual changes in party identification. One of them affects voters' views of how well parties represent people like themselves, and the other affects views of how well parties perform different tasks of governance—such as handling national problems like unemployment, inflation, and crime. Unfortunately, preoccupation with the argument over whether party is a purely psychological identification or a political yardstick has led academics to concentrate on changes in party identification, when Republicans or Democrats became independents or identified with the other party, and when independents began to identify with one of the parties.

Changes in voters' party identification are generally slow, often even glacial; but changes in their comparative assessments of how well parties handle different problems, or what groups the parties stand for, can be rapid. These changes in how voters judge the relative abilities of the parties to represent different groups or handle different tasks are generally based on issue-party assessments. Today, these party assessments are generally measured by asking voters questions like "Which party cares more about farmers?" or "Generally speaking, which party do you think is better at 'controlling inflation'?" I call these measures "party heats," for they directly assess the comparative advantages of parties on an issue; such questions are now a staple of public opinion research.

Responses to these questions reflect feedback from political performance to a voter's conceptions of the parties which are not immediately reflected in party identification. For example, a poor performance on inflation by a Democratic president may weaken many working-class Democrats' faith in the ability of their party to deal with inflation. This may lead them to vote for Republican presidents when inflation looms, but they may not change their minds about which party's ultimate views of the good society are most compatible with their own.

Analysis of party images shows that voters reason about the relative ability of parties to deal with different issues. They do not assume that the same party is uniformly good at representing all groups or dealing with all issues.

In 1988, for example, Americans by two to one thought Democrats were better able to protect Social Security. By two to one, they also thought Republicans were better at controlling inflation and maintaining a strong defense. In general, Democrats are considered better at protecting Social Security, lowering unemployment, ensuring minority rights, and preserving the environment; Republicans are considered better at controlling inflation, maintaining a strong national defense, and fighting crime.[39]

In chapter 2, I noted the irony of *Voting*'s spectacularly inaccurate predictions about the possibility of a "woman's vote" or a "senior citizen's vote." Moreover, the views of American adults about the relative merits of the ways parties deal with women, men, and senior citizens demonstrate just how able voters are to make discriminating judgments about the parties (see table 3.1). People may be willing to give their parties the benefit of the doubt, but there are limits to this willingness. Republicans and Democrats say that the other party is better overall only when the difference between the two parties is well established, or an incumbent of their party has failed badly; it is far more common for a partisan, when asked about a perceived party weakness, to say that he or she doesn't know which party is better. The amount of "benefit of the doubt" that people give their party varies from issue to issue and reflects reasoning about past performance.

These party heats emphasize that the benefit of the doubt that people give their own party is not open-ended; they do acknowledge poor performances by their own party and strong performances by the other party. Thus, in 1986 less than half of all Republicans believed that their party cared more about senior citizens or women, and less than half of all Democrats believed that their party cared more about men. Party assessments demonstrate information about government and reasoning about the parties. Party heats are running tallies of past performance, not wishful thinking or expressions of team loyalty. As Morris Fiorina has noted for party images on inflation and unemployment, "Expectations about the party best capable of handling inflation and unemployment in the future depend on judgments about the parties' handling of inflation and unemployment in the past."[40]

In fact, it is precisely because party images do not all move together according to an underlying level of general satisfaction, but vary so widely from issue to issue, that party candidates for office try to increase the salience of issues where their party starts out with the largest advantage. Candidates addressing an issue where their party has a strong image have

TABLE 3.1
Political Identification and Response to:
"Which political party cares more about . . ."

	Rep. (%)	Dem. (%)	Ind. (%)	All (%)
SENIOR CITIZENS				
Republicans	44	12	26	26
Democrats	35	75	48	53
Both	7	2	4	5
Neither	4	2	6	4
Don't know/no answer	9	9	15	12
WOMEN				
Republicans	47	12	21	25
Democrats	24	61	39	42
Both	9	6	7	8
Neither	6	5	9	7
Don't know/no answer	13	16	25	19
MEN				
Republicans	62	25	35	39
Democrats	11	49	23	28
Both	9	7	8	9
Neither	6	2	8	5
Don't know/no answer	13	17	26	19

Source: CBS News/*New York Times* poll, April 1986.
Note: *N* = 1,601

the wind at their backs, whereas candidates addressing an issue where their party has a weak image are running into the wind.

Changing issues changes the campaign, if not the outcome, because party images vary by issue. A particularly important change is between concern with inflation and concern with unemployment. As noted in chapter 2, blue-collar workers are more sensitive about unemployment than white-collar workers and senior citizens, while white-collar workers and the elderly are more sensitive to inflation than blue-collar workers. This makes it particularly hard in times of inflation (as in the period since 1973, when rising energy prices triggered several inflationary surges) for

Democrats campaigning for president. People know the social composition of the parties and that Democrats will be less likely to cut inflation, if doing so requires raising unemployment. While Republicans are far more sensitive to inflation than to unemployment, Democrats are equally sensitive to both. This shows a group basis for the party-heat perceptions based on knowledge of partisan preferences.[41]

Party images have also been studied by analyzing responses to open-ended questions about the parties. Since the same general questions about likes and dislikes of the two parties have been asked on the quadrennial Michigan surveys since 1952, this data can be used to study changes over time in party assessments. While the use of party heats is, I believe, preferable, the other method, because of the continuity of questions since 1952, is valuable for the insights it provides about the relations between changes in party images and changes in party identification.

Using the Michigan data, the analysis of the so-called issueless 1950s provides considerable evidence of the sort of feedback from performance that affects party images, and therefore voting patterns. The traditional associations between the Republican party and the depression, and between the Democratic party and war, were not immutable in the minds of the voters. In their study of the 1956 election, Stokes, Campbell, and Miller noted, "Four years of Republican prosperity destroyed the major part of a fourteen-to-one margin the Democrats had in the partisanship of these responses. After haunting the Republicans in every election since 1932, memories of the 'Hoover Depression' had receded at least temporarily as a direct force in American politics."[42] On the other hand, they observed that the experience of the first four years of the Eisenhower administration amplified and reinforced another set of associations: "References to war and peace in 1952 were pro-Republican or anti-Democratic by a ratio of greater than seven to one. By 1956, the virtual disappearance of comments favorable to the Democrats or hostile to the Republicans had increased the ratio five times."[43]

Changes in the images voters have of the parties are related to future changes in party identification. In analyzing the changing views of the political parties from 1952 through 1976 on the SRC surveys, and relating changes in party assessments to future changes in party identification, Richard Trilling has written, "When party images reinforce past identifications, identifications are stable. When party images conflict with past identifications, identifications are likely to be altered."[44] Trilling has also shown how changing images of the parties and the changing class struc-

ture of American society have together affected relations between the political parties.[45] In 1952 more than two-thirds of all Americans were working-class; by 1976 less than half the country was working-class. Acceptance of the New Deal by Republicans made more working-class Democrats willing to vote for Republicans, and acceptance of the New Deal among middle-class Republicans made them more willing to vote for Democrats. This set of changes in society and the parties also means that campaigns matter more, for there are now fewer voters with one-sided views of the two parties.

When General Eisenhower was elected president, many upper-income and upper-status southern Democrats began to reassess their antipathy to the Republicans, and the first cracks in the "Solid South" became apparent even before the civil rights explosions of the 1960s.[46] Throughout the country, when Eisenhower made no attempt to repeal New Deal programs, Democratic antipathy to the Republican party was moderated. Further, as moderate Republican governors, particularly in the Northeast, courted unions and Catholics, the distinction between parties became less clear. When Republicans accepted the New Deal politically and socially, Democrats were willing to vote for them.[47] The overwhelming vote against Goldwater in 1964 shows just how critical acceptance of the New Deal was to the Republican party.

Evaluating Candidates

The candidates themselves have more importance in the American system than in most other political systems. The American system vests power in a single individual with no formal ties to his party. The unity of the executive branch, the separation of the executive and legislative branches, and the weakness of the American party system combine to give the American president a degree of power and independence unknown in a parliamentary system.

Voters focus on the presidential candidate because American parties have never been teams unified behind a single centralized source of control, like parties in some other countries, and the president has a large effect on his party's programs. The American federal system is characterized by widely dispersed patronage centers, local primaries, local fund-raising, and local party organizations. Presidents, therefore, have wide latitude in deciding what course to follow in office.

There has been, throughout the century, an antiparty strain of reformism in America that argues for nonpartisan elections. Party labels, it is argued, give to voters the illusion of informed choice while allowing them to ignore

important differences between the candidates on the newly emerging issues of the day. Take away party labels, the reformers argue, and voters will pay attention to the "real" differences between candidates on the issues. In reality, however, voters evaluate candidates and form their images of them by using the same types of information shortcuts they use to form their views of parties, and issue positions are by no means their only criteria in the evaluation.[48]

Voters care about the competence of the candidate, not just the candidate's issue positions, because they do not follow most government activity and because they care about what the candidate can deliver from government. They care about the policy preferences of the nominee, not just the party's platform, because parties are coalitions that exercise weak controls over presidents. And they worry about the character of the candidate, about his or her sincerity, because they cannot easily read "true" preferences and because they care about uncertain future situations.

Competence versus Issue Proximity

In an ideal, two-party, parliamentary democracy, it is assumed that voters practice "proximity voting"—voting for the candidate or party whose position is nearest to theirs. Under this assumption, however, voters consider all candidates and parties equally able to carry out their promises. In reality, voters sometimes care less about candidates' issue positions than they do about which candidate can deliver the most on these issues, and which candidate can do a better job of simply managing and running the government. In short, they care about competence.

Competence is a relevant dimension of candidate evaluation for three reasons: (1) The candidate's competence directly affects the probability of his or her being able to deliver benefits from the system once elected. (2) Much of what both the president and Congress do involves the general management of the country. Since the voter has only limited information, he or she may vote for a candidate who seems capable of managing the affairs of the country even if that candidate is not the "closest" to the voter's specific issue preferences. (3) Finally, if the candidate is elected, he or she will have to solve many problems that no one can anticipate on election day. Competence in unfamiliar areas may be inferred from the perceived competence of the candidate in other, more familiar, areas.

Competence, then, is a measure of ability to handle a job, an assessment of how effective the candidate will be in office, of whether he or she can "get things done." Many aspects of government are noticed only when something goes wrong, and in many other areas, maintaining minimal lev-

els of performance is far more important than policy change. The voter as prudent investor is right to be concerned about the competence of the candidate.

When James "Boss" Curley of Boston was reelected mayor from his prison cell, Jerome Bruner surveyed Boston voters to discover the secret of Curley's success. The voters, he found, were aware of Curley's sins, but many—including proper Bostonians who disagreed with Curley's issue positions as well—were voting for Curley because none of the candidates with more desirable issue positions and better reputations appeared capable of controlling government and getting things done.[49]

General Dwight Eisenhower's victory in 1952 was largely a result of his perceived competence to deal with the issues of the moment. At the height of cold-war tension, with the nation apparently stalemated in a war in Korea against "Red China," a man regarded as one of the most successful military leaders of World War II (and known to be considerate toward enlisted men), a man who had been head of NATO and a university president, was "perceived as a person peculiarly able to cope with the nation's international problems."[50]

In a world of complete information about the past, even with uncertainty about the future state of the world, voters could assess the competence of the candidate by assessing how well he or she had dealt with past administrative and legislative problems, and then extrapolate from that performance to how the candidate would manage the affairs of office. But most voters take information shortcuts to avoid this long and arduous process. They do not seek out detailed information about how the candidate has managed government and delivered benefits. Instead they use shortcuts to assess competence, which is itself an information shortcut. They assess the candidate's competence on the basis of data that is new and easy to process, particularly information from the party conventions and the political campaign. The convention allows voters to hear what other, more familiar, political leaders have to say on behalf of the nominee; the campaign exposes the candidate to voters in complex and fast-breaking situations. As they watch the candidate handle crowds, speeches, press conferences, reporters, and squabbles, they can obtain information with which they imagine how he or she would be likely to behave in office.

There is a natural inclination to associate information shortcuts based on campaign behavior with the television era, during which there have been several well-publicized examples of campaign events that affected candidate ratings and votes. The most dramatic example from recent campaigns was in 1972, when Senator George McGovern, the Democratic nominee,

lost considerable ground because he appeared weak and indecisive in handling the revelation that Senator Thomas Eagleton, the nominee for vice president, had received electroshock treatments. When McGovern wavered, many of his supporters concluded that he simply was not competent to be president.[51] More recently, Governor Michael Dukakis became the butt of jokes and received much ridicule for looking out-of-place and foolish in the helmet he wore when he went for a ride in one of the Army's new tanks, in an attempt to appear more familiar with defense issues.

Campaign behavior mattered to voters, however, well before television replaced radio and newspapers as the dominant medium in American national politics. During the 1948 campaign, Governor Thomas Dewey made uncomplimentary remarks about a workingman, a railroad engineer who had made a blunder with Dewey's campaign train. All knowledge of these campaign blunders came from radio and print media, and thus did not have the visual immediacy associated with television. Yet when a national survey asked respondents, "Do you think there was anything special about Dewey that made some people vote against him?" 26 percent of the respondents referred to Dewey's campaign behavior, and among respondents who actually voted, the proportion referring to Dewey's campaign behavior was 31 percent.[52]

What matters to voters when they assess competence can be expected to vary with the concerns of the moment and with how they view the office for which they are voting; thus honesty mattered more after Watergate, and military leadership experience mattered more during the Korean War. Nevertheless, voters also assess candidates' competence from past behavior and from political campaigns.

Policy Preferences and Sincerity

Voters use information shortcuts to assess candidates' policy preferences. Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, because of the problems of learning what the true preferences of candidates are in compromise situations, voters are also concerned with the integrity or "sincerity" of the candidates.

Demographic facts provide a low-information shortcut to estimating a candidate's policy preferences (though not to evaluating past public performance). Characteristics such as a candidate's race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and local ties (hereinafter, "localism") are important cues because the voter observes the relationship between these traits and real-life behavior as part of his daily experience. Where these characteristics are closely aligned with the interests of the voter, they provide a basis for reasonable,

accessible, and economical estimates of candidate behavior.[53] It has often been noted that the use of demographic cues in voting probably plays a more important role in American campaigns than it does in those of more homogeneous countries.

There is a good deal of survey data to suggest that when voters believe government is closer to them, they are more likely to believe they get their money's worth from taxes. This belief finds its voting equivalent in the "friends and neighbors" vote that is so often disparaged as irrelevant.[54] Actually, it is an example of low-information rationality: using an easy-to-obtain cue to assess a candidate's positions. Particularly on distributive issues—which neighborhood to tear up for a highway, where to put the toxic-waste dump, where to build a prison, an airport, or a park, whether to allow offshore drilling, where to disburse patronage—localism may be an effective orientation for the voter to use in trying to predict a legislator's preferences. In addition, localism is of some value in determining the capabilities of the candidate. When a candidate is in some sense a neighbor, the voter at least has a better chance of knowing whether he or she is a blatant crook or an obvious fool. Given the problems of expensive, scarce, and unreliable information about the candidates, the voter is more likely to have confidence in a neighbor with a local reputation for competence.

Further, because voters are necessarily uncertain about what a candidate will do if elected, they take into account the demographic characteristics of the candidate's supporters. Endorsements from feminists, blacks, Christian fundamentalists, Jews, unions, military veterans, and many other demographic groups make a difference. This process of inferring the candidate's policy preferences from his or her demographic characteristics is the political equivalent of screening job applicants by reading their résumés instead of by evaluating their work, which would take more time and effort. Television appearances and televised convention proceedings offer quick visual clues to the candidate's support groups, and thus make it harder for candidates to pretend to be all things to all people. "If *they* are supporting him," a voter may ask, "how can he be good for *me?*" When candidates become aware of such an attitude, they try to change it by offering low-information cues that encourage support for demographic reasons. Thus the black mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, reminded voters of his experience as a policeman; the wealthy George Bush talked of his down-home love of pork rinds and horseshoe pitching; and Michael Dukakis, the governor of Massachusetts—a state thought to be liberal and therefore soft on defense—went for a ride in an Army tank.

When voters watch a candidate perform on television, making promises and taking hard-line rhetorical positions on issues, they question if there is congruence between avowal and actual feelings—whether the candidate's support for a cause represents a genuine personal commitment or only a campaign tactic.[55] We care more about sincerity and character when we are uncertain about what someone will do. As Aristotle noted, "We believe good men more readily and fully than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided."[56] This is often the case in daily life, when we must make evaluations with limited information and no theory to guide us. How do we choose a new baby-sitter for our young children when we must make an emergency trip? How do we choose a nurse for a critically ailing parent who lives at the other end of the continent? We want to hire competent people, but without the time or resources to evaluate their past performance, we must make a judgment based largely on clues to personal character, from a conversation or from what our friends tell us; will this person do what we would like to have done? Delegation in such situations involves emotions and values and bonds between people. It involves evaluating empathy and understanding, deciding who shares one's own concerns. A voter wonders, therefore, about whether a candidate cares about people like himself or herself.

When voters estimate a candidate's preferences they take account of sincerity—whether the candidate really cares about their concerns. Because it is difficult, for example, to assess whether a compromise bill was the best that could be done, or whether a politician reneged on his commitments, they take shortcuts: they estimate public morality and character from private morality and character, assuming in the absence of better information that candidates treat their constituents like they treat their own spouses and children.

Incumbency

In 1940, the elaborate methods used to assess the effects of the media on the presidential vote produced no positive results. In that year, with Franklin D. Roosevelt running for a third term against Republican Wendell Willkie, only 8 percent of all voters changed their minds at any time during the six-month period from May through September.[57] This result is a striking demonstration of the fact that when the voter estimates competence, there is an asymmetry between candidates. For candidates who are incumbents or who have spent a long period of time in a prominent position,

voters can make judgments about competence based on observation of "actual" behavior.[58] An incumbent has dealt with "real" events; the challenger can be judged only by talk and by those events he or she "manufactures." Thus public estimates of a challenger's competence must be based on how he or she talks, looks, and campaigns—criteria that are susceptible to more varied interpretation than the incumbent's actual job performance. Not for nothing were people who challenged a king called "pretenders."

In general, incumbents deal with acts of state, and challengers deal with media events. Presidents adopt Rose Garden campaign strategies so that evaluations of them rest on their records as presidents, not on their images as campaigners.[59] When President Richard Nixon elected not to campaign against George McGovern in 1972, his decision was based on just such reasoning. Nixon's aide H. R. Haldeman told him (as recorded on the White House tapes revealed during the Watergate investigation),

> So little is known about McGovern, you'll have a better chance of changing people's minds about him. To start with, you got 40 percent of the people who will vote for you no matter what happens . . . and you got 40 percent of the people who will vote against you no matter what happens, so you have got 20 percent of the people in the middle who may vote for you or who may not and that 20 percent is what you've gotta work on. Getting one of those 20 who is an undecided type to vote for you on the basis of your positive points is much less likely than getting them to vote against McGovern by scaring them to death about McGovern; and that, that's the area we ought to be playing.[60]

Because voters do not directly observe so much of what government does, an incumbent president—no matter what his rating in the polls—can claim credit for such things as keeping the nation out of nuclear war and preserving the basic structure of government.

Incumbents are increasingly attacking their opponents as risks because increases in education and the decline of party influence make incumbency the focal point of the campaign.[61] President Ford's 1976 campaign hammered away at how little was known about Jimmy Carter, and President Carter's 1980 campaign in turn did everything it could to raise doubts about what would happen with Ronald Reagan's finger on the nuclear button. In 1988 George Bush's strategists made essentially the same arguments: as *Newsweek* explained, the vice president *"had* to go bareknuckle against Dukakis. . . . It was going to be a lot easier, a senior

strategist said, to raise the other guy's negatives than to lower his own; if Bush could not pump himself up, he could at least tear Dukakis down."[62]

The victorious general, of which Eisenhower is the only twentieth-century example, is an exception to the rule that challengers are known mainly from campaigns. Having performed notable public service in an arena where his behavior is well publicized and closely watched, he may well be better known and more carefully evaluated, and feel more familiar to the electorate, than the incumbent.

The asymmetry of incumbents and challengers holds for elections to the Senate and House of Representatives as well. Because incumbents are generally better known, the competitiveness of campaigns is more affected by challenger spending than by incumbent spending. Incumbents may, and generally do, spend more money than their challengers, but the marginal return on money spent by challengers is much higher than that on money spent by incumbents. Elections are competitive when challengers have sufficient money to convey themselves and their messages to voters.[63]

Candidates, Parties, and Issues: Divided Government

It has become a near-permanent feature of American politics that the Republicans own the White House and the Democrats own the Senate and House of Representatives. Republicans have controlled the presidency for twenty-eight of the past forty years. Since Reagan was elected in 1980, furthermore, the Republican party has achieved virtual parity with the Democrats in party identification for the first time since 1946.[64] Despite Republican control of the presidency and parity in party identification, however, Democrats own the Congress. Democrats have controlled the House of Representatives for all but four years since 1932, and the Senate for all but ten years since 1940.

Republicans argue that the popular will is most accurately expressed in presidential elections. They charge that the Democrats own Congress because congressional seniority and gerrymandering have isolated Congress from the electorate and deprived the people of the fair chance to express their will that they have in presidential elections. The Republicans look for ways to eliminate the incumbency advantage in order to gain control of the House. Democrats counter that the will of the people is most accurately expressed in congressional elections, that they have been deprived of the presidency by primaries which resulted in unattractive candidates as their nominees, and that they were outspent by Republicans who could use their money to buy the White House. Democrats look for rules changes so

their primary campaigns will produce candidates better able to capture the presidency, and for ways to nullify the Republicans' financial advantages. Partisans of each party are arguing that defeat of their pet agendas or candidates is proof of the corruption and incapacity of the system. They are arguing that elections do not work. They are wrong.

Gary Jacobson has refuted Republican arguments: incumbency is not responsible for Democratic advantages in congressional elections. In open-seat elections since 1968, the GOP has made no gains in Congress.[65] Democratic arguments are wrong as well. Democratic troubles begin with the changing nature of American society and the difficult problems of reconciling interests within the Democratic coalition. As noted above, the fact that white-collar voters are more sensitive to inflation while blue-collar voters are more sensitive to unemployment gives the Democrats a more difficult balancing act to achieve on national economic policy.

Ironically, while members of both political parties tend to explain divided government in candidate-centered terms—congressional incumbency on one hand, and poor campaigners on the other—the root cause of divided government is divided views about the political parties. People vote differently for Congress and president because they associate the two offices with different problems and issues, and they rate the GOP higher on issues with which the president deals. Recall that Republicans are seen as better in dealing with foreign policy, national defense, and inflation, and Democrats are seen as better in dealing with Social Security, domestic programs, unemployment, minority rights, and the environment. Party images are an important source of information which voters use to assess the candidates for whom they vote. Republicans win the White House because inflation, foreign policy, and national defense are all more important to voters when they vote for president than when they vote for legislators. Democrats win Senate and House races because people care more about domestic issues, Social Security, and unemployment when they elect legislators.[66]

Divided views of the party are based on voter reasoning about the differences between the job of the president and the job of the legislator, on one hand, and the images of the two parties, on the other. As John Petrocik notes, "Most voters recognize the policy strengths of the parties and respond to them."[67]

The Growing Importance of Campaigns

Divided government attests to both the limits and the importance of campaigns.

Divided government's roots in the different issue strengths of the two parties attest to the limits of voter manipulation—the limited ability of candidates in either party to use clever campaigns to obscure their historic performances with smoke and mirrors. Candidates' ability to stake out positions at variance with past party performance on long-standing issues is limited.

Information about past party performance is still important, however. The information shortcuts about party identification and party performance on different issues serve as reality tests against which campaign arguments are tested. The relative weights of party and candidate will vary both among issues and among offices. Candidates matter most where party matters least; the less well developed the party image, the more sensitive voters will be to the candidate.[68]

The roots of divided government, then, depend on reasoning about parties and candidates, which in turn depends on voters' use of information about party performance on issues and information about which issues are most relevant to different elections. Such information use and reasoning are connected to a campaign's ability to make connections between candidates, offices, and issues.

The early voting studies suggest that modern mass-media campaigns should have larger effects than the campaigns of the 1940s. At that time, a voter's strength of conviction was related to the political homogeneity of his or her associates. Most voters belonged to politically homogeneous social groups; the social gulf between the parties was so wide that a majority of voters had no close friends or associates voting differently from them.[69] A decline in the political homogeneity of primary groups should lead to weaker conviction among voters and therefore allow more latitude for the influence of the mass media. The political cleavages that exist today cut more across social groups, which means that voters are typically in less homogeneous family, church, and work settings.[70]

All voting studies have found that education is one of the prime indicators of voter ability to process information generated by campaigns and the mass media. In the 1940s, fewer than one in eight voters had been to college; today nearly half of all voters have been to college. In the 1940s, over 40 percent of the electorate had never reached high school; today this figure is 10 percent. This increase in educational level, then, gives greater potential import to political campaigns. The broadening of the electorate, discussed in chapter 2, means that voters are following more national and international issues. One striking example of this is the development of party images based on the party's ability to deal with the problems of

women and senior citizens—two groups for whom it was not expected in the 1940s that distinctive voting patterns could emerge.

The more educated the electorate, the greater is its ability to follow news about national and international politics; the more issues the electorate follows, the more varied the images of the parties will be; the more varied the images of the parties, the more the choice of issue matters.

Democrats and Republicans today are generally much more willing to consider a vote for the other party's candidate than was true in the past. Further, a larger proportion of the electorate has no party loyalty at all, and even the "standing decision" of party members to vote the party line is not as firm as it used to be. In the 1940s, fewer than 25 percent of the voters in the entire country had ever voted for more than one party's candidate for president. Today, over 60 percent have voted for both Democratic and Republican candidates for president.[71] The extent of cross-party voting emphasizes just how much more politically fluid the country has become.

Whatever their level of education, voters use information shortcuts and cost-saving devices in thinking about parties, candidates, and issues. They use shortcuts to assess ideology, platforms, individual competence, and character. This leads to an asymmetry between the challengers and the incumbents, and to the explicit assumption that the election begins centered on the incumbent and his or her present performance.

Campaigns make a difference because voters have limited information about government and uncertainty about the consequences of policies. If voters had full information and no uncertainty, they would not be open to influence from others, and hence there would be no campaigns. In reality, voters do not know much about what government is doing or is capable of doing. Thus they are open to influence by campaigners who offer them more information or better explanations of the ways in which government activities affect them.

However, the shortcuts that voters use also limit the effects of campaigns. Before public opinion studies of voting, conventional wisdom held that "rational, independent voters" gathered and absorbed information, weighed alternatives, and made up their minds just before they voted. Because voters were assumed to gather and assess information, it was expected that voting would be affected primarily by the information to which they were exposed. Therefore, it was assumed that voting was a choice easily manipulated by "propaganda." But instead of direct media effects on rational voters without memory, there is a sophisticated pattern

of transmission from past elections and interactions among and between people in the current election.

Voters also use information shortcuts when they assess candidates. They estimate a candidate's policy stands from demographic traits of both the candidate and his or her supporters. They estimate a candidate's sincerity and adherence to promises not by evaluating past behavior but by extrapolating from private morality to public morality. Voters care about the personal competence of the candidate—his or her ability to deliver benefits. They assess overall competence because they do not understand all the problems the president must deal with, and they do not make individual judgments in every case of what the president can do. When assessing competence, they also economize by judging campaign behavior, instead of researching the candidate's past governmental performance.

The focus on information shortcuts implies several assumptions about what kinds of information are easiest to obtain and process. These assumptions include: (1) It is easier to assess the real world than to make projections about the future. (2) It is easier to track a party by remembering its view of the good society than by trying to examine its past performance. (3) Current data are easier to use—and therefore are treated as more relevant—than past data. (4) Personal morality is easier to understand than institutional morality. (5) It is easier to assess an individual's competence than to assess his or her legislative performance. (6) Candidates can be understood if their demographic traits are known. And (7) candidates can be judged by who their friends and supporters are. In order to examine these assumptions and look more closely at how people process political information, chapter 4 explores the relevant findings of cognitive psychology.