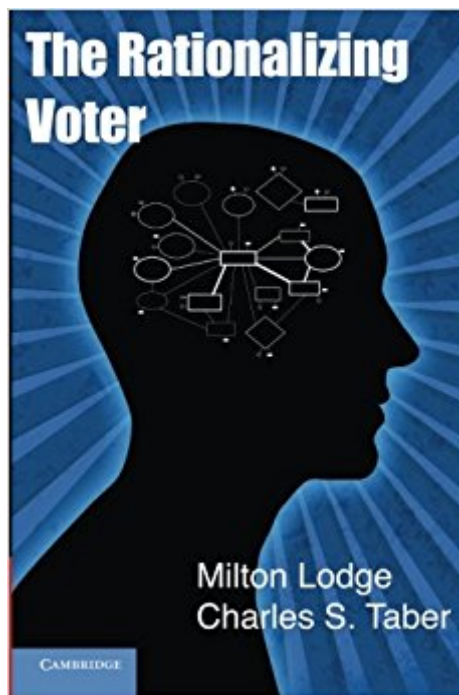




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The Rationalizing Voter (Cambridge Studies In Public Opinion And Political Psychology)



Synopsis

Political behavior is the result of innumerable unnoticed forces and conscious deliberation is often a rationalization of automatically triggered feelings and thoughts. Citizens are very sensitive to environmental contextual factors such as the title "President" preceding "Obama" in a newspaper headline, upbeat music or patriotic symbols accompanying a campaign ad, or question wording and order in a survey, all of which have their greatest influence when citizens are unaware. This book develops and tests a dual-process theory of political beliefs, attitudes, and behavior, claiming that all thinking, feeling, reasoning, and doing have an automatic component as well as a conscious deliberative component. The authors are especially interested in the impact of automatic feelings on political judgments and evaluations. This research is based on laboratory experiments, which allow the testing of five basic hypotheses: hot cognition, automaticity, affect transfer, affect contagion, and motivated reasoning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This is the most important book written on public opinion in the last quarter century, and it will drive research to come for years. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the basic foundation of democracy: public opinion." - James N. Druckman, Northwestern University

"For decades Milt Lodge and Chuck Taber have been pioneers in the effort to incorporate knowledge from psychology and neuroscience about the unconscious, affectively charged processing of information to enrich standard models of decision making in political science. This is their magnum opus, and it shows

how successful the effort has been. Every reader will learn something important from this book." John T. Jost, New York University "Lodge and Taber's *The Rationalizing Voter* makes a major contribution to the study of voter decision making. The primary argument of the book is that almost everything we do (including almost everything political we do) is guided by fast, reflexive, and unconscious information processing in the brain. If the authors are right - and I think they are - the book might be better titled 'The Illusion of Choice in Democratic Politics'. No scholar of elections and voting behavior can ignore this work." Richard R. Lau, Rutgers University

Political behavior is the result of innumerable unnoticed forces and conscious deliberation is often a rationalization of automatically triggered feelings and thoughts. This book proposes and empirically tests a theory of motivated political reasoning that predicts that when citizens think about familiar political leaders, groups, and issues, their prior feelings spontaneously bias how information is encoded, retrieved, evaluated, and acted upon.

engaging and informative. a little scary but very illuminating for a poly-sci major

Think that citizens are rational in their political decision-making? According to this book, "think again." Early, the authors state their thesis (Page xiii): "This is a book about unconscious political thinking and the subterranean forces that determine how citizens evaluate political leaders, groups, and issues. . . .It is about rationalizing, rather than rational, citizens." The book's first chapter itself begins with a quick summary of the essence of rational decision-making, emerging from the Enlightenment. Lodge and Taber disagree with this perspective. They note the extent of unconscious thinking, the use of heuristics and biases. A diagram on page 13 illustrates. Here, we see the effect of physical attractiveness and babyfacedness appearance on people's vote choice--and neither factor is "rational" in terms of the ideal. Affect is another factor that the authors focus on, Affect is triggered very early in the information processing system, coloring much of any response to follow. This is an important work for those interested in scholarly treatments of political thinking and its bases.

This is a startling book--its findings will startle you, even if you happen to be aware of the general research program that its authors have been following for some years. That research agenda is fairly famous within political science, and this book will help establish it as a classic within the voting behavior community in the academy. It will be appearing on grad reading lists. It deserves all that

attention, even if some of its conclusions are not going to be very welcome by traditionalists within that field (to which I say, so much the better). All that said, the book is also accessible enough to be picked up by the general reader--the methodology and the heavy social science feel, as it were, are not as off putting as one might fear. This is one of those few books that is both written for specialists, but open to the rest of us. Anyone interested in human decision making (especially but not only and literally voting behavior) will be pleased if they read this book.

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