

In the article, Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making, the authors, Richard Lau and David Redlawsk, discuss the challenges, benefits, and costs associated with cognitive heuristics in the scope of voters' decisions. Cognitive Heuristics have helped confirm that people's attention is deficient when it comes to government affairs. In some cases, it seems that the aggregate opinion of the voting public is more accurate than individuals' opinions. In most cases, however, cognitive heuristics provides a better understanding of the voting public. People make many decisions in life based on limited information, which also applies to politics. According to the authors, people not tuned into the happenings of the federal government are still capable of making rational political judgments through the use of heuristics. However, this assumption does not always prove to be true, as cognitive heuristics allow people to develop bias that infiltrates decision making. Through their research, the authors found common cognitive heuristics that are used by voters that include party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, poll results, and candidate appearance. These cognitive heuristics fill in the gap where voters lack necessary information for making a choice. The authors developed dynamic processing tracing methodology to allow them to study political information processing. Their technique mimics an election campaign. Using this technique, the authors conducted a study that found most voters used all of the cognitive heuristics to make a political decision. Furthermore, cognitive heuristics are very likely to play a role in voters' decisions when the choices are more difficult. At times, voters use cognitive heuristics in conjunction with memory when making a political decision. The authors contend that political experts use cognitive heuristics when higher quality decisions are made. However, cognitive heuristics should not be considered a panacea for political decision making.

Reading about cognitive heuristics makes me realize that I have at times had an opinion about political matters based on limited information. I might have chosen my stance on an issue based on my ideology rather than more complete information. Sometimes, I have paid more attention to political issues. Those times have included the national debt, presidential elections, national security, and taxation. I have tended to gather more information by reading, listening to, or watching the news when these issues have reached my attention. For other matters, like abortion, gun control, illegal immigration, and union negotiations, I have usually just stuck to my ideology and supported candidates who reflected my views on these matters. In other words, cognitive heuristics played a larger role in my opinions and decisions about these issues than did information available from news outlets. Cognitive heuristics have also played a role in how much I have paid attention to political and government news. When a republican was in the White House, I paid less attention to news events than when a democrat happens to be in the White House. I just assumed that the policy decisions of George W. Bush would coincide with my opinions. However, as time passed with the Bush administration, I came to realize that he governed as a big-government republican, which is closer to the Democratic Party. As I started paying more attention to what republicans in Congress did, I also understood that many of them liked big government. It made me realize that my views on issues are more aligned with the Libertarian Party. I had been using cognitive heuristics and not realized it. It made me remember that I paid more attention to the news when Bill Clinton was president. Rather than simply believing that government officials will execute and legislate according to ideology and party affiliation, I had to come to the realization that I needed to once again pay more attention to the news. Furthermore, I understand better that I need to think about national and world events rather than just reading that they happened.

References

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Retrieved February 3, 2010, from World History Collection.