



TAMING INTUITION

How Reflection Minimizes
Partisan Reasoning and Promotes
Democratic Accountability

KEVIN ARCENEUX
RYAN J. VANDER WIELEN

"Arceneaux and Vander Wielen's book is transformative as it explores a question that has been ignored when it comes to democratic citizenship: what happens when citizens reflect? They develop an impressive theory and use state-of-the-art methods to show that reflection fundamentally alters how citizens reason and make decisions. The book not only alters common understandings of citizens' behaviors, but also sets an agenda for the future of all research on democratic citizenship."

James N. Druckman, *Payson S. Wild Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University*

"In this remarkable book, Arceneaux and Vander Wielen apply dual-process models of how people think to questions of how they reason about politics. They develop and refine a powerful conceptual model and then provide insightful, innovative empirical tests. I have long been looking for a book like this one that integrates recent insights about human cognition with long-standing questions about how voters think. This ambitious, thought-provoking research should be read by anyone who wants to understand the role of intuition and reflection in voter decision-making."

Daniel Hopkins, *Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania*

"This book takes on one of the most important political questions of our time. Its central argument, and the evidence presented in support of it, is exciting and provocative. To date, no one has figured out how to reduce the myriad information-processing biases identified by Motivated Reasoning Theory that produce the polarization and lack of compromise plaguing our current politics. Unfortunately, giving people new and credible information in particular, and even education in general, often exacerbates these biases. The more subtle answer offered by Arceneaux and Vander Wielen is that those with the ability to coolly reflect on controversial topics can avoid making these common mistakes. Now if we can only figure out how to train people to hold such a rare combination of curiosity and cool-headedness! *Taming Intuition* will, at the very least, be an important voice in an important debate."

Nicholas Valentino, *Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan*

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VANDER WIELEN

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Promotes Democratic Accountability*

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Taming Intuition

The success of democratic governance hinges on an electorate's ability to reward elected officials who act faithfully and punish those who do not. Yet there is considerable variation among voters in their ability to objectively evaluate representatives' performance. In this book the authors develop a theoretical model, the Intuitionist Model of Political Reasoning, which posits that this variation across voters is the result of individual differences in the predisposition to reflect on and to override partisan impulses. Individuals differ in partisan intuitions resulting from the strength of their attachments to parties, as well as the degree to which they are willing to engage in the cognitively taxing process of evaluating those intuitions. The balance of these forces – the strength of intuitions and the willingness to second-guess one's self – determines the extent to which individuals update their assessments of political parties and elected officials in a rational manner.

Kevin Arceneaux is Professor of Political Science, Faculty Affiliate with the Institute for Public Affairs, and Director of the Behavioral Foundations Lab at Temple University. He studies political psychology and political communication, focusing on how the interaction between political messages and people's political predispositions shapes attitudes and behavior. He is coauthor of *Changing Minds or Changing Channels* (2013), which investigates the influence of ideologically slanted news programming and received the 2014 Goldsmith Book Prize from Harvard University. His work has also been published in *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Politics*, and elsewhere.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This project began with a lighthearted discussion over dinner as a simple and relatively narrow idea about whether partisan identities lead people to respond more emotionally to politics. As we talked about it more, we decided that we had the kernel of an idea that could become a research note. With these modest ambitions, we set out to learn more about the psychology of information processing and stepped into the rich literature that lies at the intersection of neuroscience, economics, and psychology. We quickly realized a grander ambition and saw the potential to fuse two theoretical traditions that provide disparate, and often conflictual, foundations for the study of political attitudes and behavior: rational choice and social psychology. Both of these traditions give different conceptions of the role that partisan identities play in shaping political decisions and, more crucially, different conceptions of whether voters are up to the task of self-governance. The rational choice framework presupposes that citizens make decisions in line with their values and hold politicians accountable when they fail to serve as faithful delegates. In contrast, social psychological accounts suggest that citizens are incapable of getting beyond their partisan biases and hold politicians from the opposing party to a far different standard than they do politicians from their own party.

Of course, we are not the first to tackle the ambitious task of merging rational choice and social psychological approaches to study political phenomena. We are indebted to scholars, such as Cheryl Boudreau, Dennis Chong, Eric Dickson, Skip Lupia, Mathew McCubbins, Rose McDermott, Becky Morton, and Jon Woon, who have blazed the path

before us, showing the way. To the extent we offer something useful, it is because we were fortunate to build on the foundation that they created. We see our contribution as better incorporating psychological motivations into the model of how people arrive at political decisions, and in doing so, introducing a different way to think about rationality in political science. This project also builds on our previous separate streams of research. Arceneaux's previous work invokes a more rudimentary version of the Intuitionist Model of Political Reasoning than we present in this book, and his work with Martin Johnson starts with the idea that individual differences in psychological motivations have behavioral implications. Vander Wielen's previous work rests firmly on a rational choice framework to explain the strategic behavior of political elites. These models are often prefaced on the assumption that elite behavior is a reflection of a rational electorate, and as we discovered over our dinner conversation, this assumption did not always sit well with him. Together we discovered, and seek to explain in the pages that follow, that rationality can be thought of as a continuum, and where people fall on that continuum for any given issue is, at least in part, a function of their willingness to second-guess their gut reactions – that is, to be *reflective*.

No research project is done in isolation. We are indebted to many people who gave us feedback, advice, and encouragement along the way. We thank Lene Aarøe, Chris Achen, Quinn Albaugh, Chloé Bakalar, Adam Berinsky, John Bullock, Dan Butler, Chuck Cameron, Brandice Canes-Wrone, Devin Caughey, Tom Clark, Eric Crahan, Jamie Druckman, Michele Epstein, Patrick Fournier, Guy Grossman, Danny Hayes, Dan Hopkins, Corrine McConnaughy, Michael Bang Petersen, Markus Prior, Eldar Shafir, Rune Slothuus, Stuart Soroka, Rachel Stein, Alex Theodoridis, Nick Valentino, Ali Valenzuela, Lynn Vavreck, and Chris Wlezien. We would also like to thank participants at various workshops where we received valuable comments about the book: Aarhus University Department of Political Science, Behavioral Models of Politics Conference at Duke University, Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University, Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship at McGill University, George Washington University Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute for Technology Department of Political Science, University of California at Riverside Political Behavior Conference, University of Michigan Survey Research Center, and University of Texas at Austin Political Communication Lecture Series. This book was markedly improved by the trenchant comments we received from three anonymous reviewers,

who clearly devoted considerable energy to reading and reflecting on our work. We are deeply grateful to Dan Butler for granting us access to the The American Panel Survey at Washington University in St. Louis. We also thank Nick Anspach, Colin Emrich, Claire Gothreau, and Jay Jennings for research assistance. This book as it stands now is decidedly stronger as a result of the contributions of these colleagues. We could not have done it without their help. Yet to the extent that it could be better – as is most certainly the case – we hold ourselves responsible.

We also wish to thank the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University, which granted Arceneaux a year long research fellowship during his sabbatical that proved invaluable for completing this project. It also provided an intellectually stimulating environment that helped hone and sharpen our theoretical model and the book's overarching argument. Arceneaux is especially grateful to his fellow fellows, Chloé, Rachael, and Tom, who gave him needed inspiration and diversions. He is also deeply indebted to Michele Epstein for sharing her thoughts on the project from her perspective as a trained psychologist, as well as for her generosity and her administrative acumen. She made the entire year a delightful and productive one.

Finally, we thank our partners, Juliet and Samantha, for providing us with moral support, perspective, and love. It would not be an exaggeration to say that without them, we could not have written this book. Beyond engaging us in conversations that helped us think about our research in new and beneficial ways, they also ground us in ways that give us the confidence to tackle ambitious questions and the perspective needed to do so.

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