

A good decision entails research of accurate, objective information and consideration of a wide array of perspectives. However, because of the nature of the polarization between American political parties today, it is very difficult to mitigate the biases that arise as a result of confirmation bias. Effective political decisions can be made if individuals have political knowledge and awareness, understand their motivations for choosing a certain party or candidate and how that information is processed, and learn how psychological motivations and tendencies play into how a citizen chooses to participate in the political process.

Citizens often receive information unsolicited, which they interpret and evaluate based on their existing political attitudes and beliefs (Taber 2003, 3). To process political information, people employ heuristics, which are cognitive shortcuts. The five categories that are most often used for political cognitive heuristics are party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, polls and candidate appearance (Lau and Redlawsk, 8). While heuristics can be useful in helping individuals process information and gain political knowledge, there are many systematic biases and stereotypes in place that can be detrimental when making policy decisions. It is not possible to completely eradicate the use of heuristics in political decision-making, but individuals must be aware of the potential problems that can arise from primarily using these when making a choice. The rationale used in making political decisions causes voters to choose a candidate who they believe is fit for office based on simple characteristics. Heuristics cannot be the simple solution to those who lack political awareness because it only reinforces the process of biases and stereotypes in making decisions, leading to uneducated choices without consideration of actual policies. However, they can be implemented into political decisions along with other objective sources of information in order to make an informed decision.

Human memory is organized in networks in order to process information, where each memory triggers other thoughts in a cognitive chain reaction (Taber 2003, 11). The human mind operates based on the idea of two systems. System 1 is a near-instantaneous process where it operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort. System 2 is the slower system that requires more attention and concentration (Kahneman, 5). In politics, individuals strive for rational decision-making. However, because of inherent biases and stereotypes that have been ingrained into peoples' minds, it becomes difficult to separate rational thinking from the constant predisposed ideologies involved in making political decisions. Understandably, it can become exhausting to constantly deliberate over choices requiring extensive reasoning. For this reason, people cannot eliminate System 1 and only use System 2 to make educated political decisions; they must be conscious of how both systems work together in helping people make choices and discourage using confirmation bias as a primary source of verifying information. Preconceived notions are often formed when individuals fail to fully understand the information a candidate provides for their platform. Models of information processing indicate that new information must be mapped onto existing knowledge from long-term memory (LTM) in order to be meaningful (Taber 2003, 11), indicating that if an individual does not have existing knowledge of certain information, then it takes more effort in order to learn it. This idea supports confirmation bias, as it can be one of the reasons why individuals are reluctant to go beyond the information that they are already familiar with in order to support their existing political ideologies. However, it is reasonable to believe that feelings towards ingroups and outgroups are the most important sources for orientation for American citizens in how they process political information (Taber 2003, 24). Group identities become more apparent under conditions of attack, where individuals find it best to stay together within their identifying group and place blame on the other side of the

spectrum. However, as Taber indicates, citizens are expected to seek out information, process what they have sought out, and form opinions about political issues as part of the public participation process. Their opinions are used to help vote on who will be in office and what policies will be implemented, so extensive consideration must be made in forming these opinions and making accurate decisions. If individuals are more aware of how their psychological processes work together to help make decisions, they can make more of a conscious effort to use both systems to make a good political decision.

In politics, there are individuals that have more access to resources and knowledge, allowing them to make more informed choices. This is why power elites and opinion elites exert disproportionate influence (Taber 2003, 5). While each citizen can vote and make individual choices, the overall aggregation of choices leads to opinions that are not truly from the people, but rather from elites with opinions that have the ability to strongly influence the political process. Additionally, there are many factors that lead to strong partisanship based on two competing views. Instrumental perspectives explain partisanship as a tally of party performance, ideological beliefs, and proximity to the party in terms of one's preferred policies that are affected by current political features. Expressive perspectives explain partisanship as an enduring identity strengthened by social affiliations to gender, religious, ethnic, or racial groups (Huddy and Bankert, 2). Both views are involved in shaping the political process and how citizens choose to identify themselves based on a political party. However, more recently with the seemingly increasing amount of polarization within American political parties, voters are more interested in winning elections and putting their party in office, rather than focusing on specific policy issues. Because of this, people seek to find ways to defend their party by continuing to justify voting for them instead of specific policy issues. This ties into social identity theory,

which involves a sense of belonging to a group and a desire to positively distinguish the group from others, therefore resulting in the development of ingroup bias (Huddy and Bankert, 4). In this case, citizens that are actively involved in the political process and strongly identify with one party are motivated to try and protect the overall reputation of that party. When partisans strongly identify with one party, they take actions to defend that party's actions in order to ensure electoral victory. This elevates an individual's own sense of victory because they identify as part of a collective group where they can share this victory. For this reason, elections can be a very contentious time because citizens of both parties are primarily interested in victory and trying to present their own party in the most positive manner in order to get the most votes. In order to mitigate the bias that comes from social and environmental factors, citizens must first acknowledge how to separate themselves from a party identity and make political decisions based on policy ideas. When people can become cognizant of their own biases, good political decisions can be made.

The prospect for individuals to make a good political decision is not impossible, but it involves careful consideration of the information that might be publicly available and how that plays into our own biases and stereotypes of politics. This involves obtaining information from unbiased sources of work, making educated choices based on accurate data points, and using research to learn how policies can be implemented most effectively. By understanding how outside factors and resources can influence opinions, citizens can use this knowledge in order to make educated political decisions. Most importantly, individuals should make their best effort to approach political issues with an open mind and commitment to learning about all sides of policy issues. Having a more informed public will allow the cultivation of thoughtful political ideas and a stronger democracy overall.