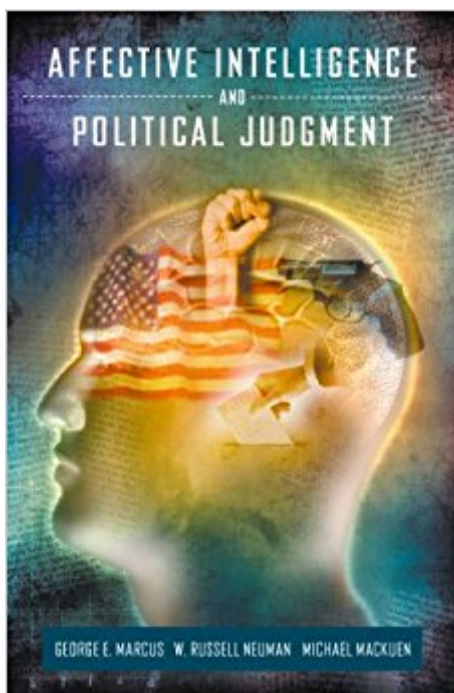


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# Affective Intelligence And Political Judgment



## Synopsis

Although the rational choice approach toward political behavior has been severely criticized, its adherents claim that competing models have failed to offer a more scientific model of political decisionmaking. This measured but provocative book offers precisely that: an alternative way of understanding political behavior based on cognitive research. The authors draw on research in neuroscience, physiology, and experimental psychology to conceptualize habit and reason as two mental states that interact in a delicate, highly functional balance controlled by emotion. Applying this approach to more than fifteen years of election results, they shed light on a wide range of political behavior, including party identification, symbolic politics, and negative campaigning. Remarkably accessible, *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* urges social scientists to move beyond the idealistic notion of the purely rational citizen to form a more complete, realistic model that includes the emotional side of human judgment.

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## Customer Reviews

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mental states that interact in a delicate, highly functional balance controlled by emotion. Applying this approach to more than fifteen years of election results, they shed light on a wide range of political behavior, including party identification, symbolic politics, and negative campaigning.

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This is an informative, thoughtful, academic presentation of a model of political judgement that may compete with the rational choice model that has dominated political science. The authors present a model whereby two domains or process facilitate decision making, a rational deliberative domain and a threat surveillance domain. Politicians must appeal to both domains when conducting a campaign. In the area of the rational deliberative domain, the politician must build enthusiasms for their leadership while reducing the enthusiasms for the leadership of their opponent. At the same time, the threat surveillance domain must be activated, creating anxiety. Thus a successful campaign must ensure that anxiety about the candidate is kept at a minimum while raising anxiety about the other candidate. This model would explain why negative campaigns work and have become a standard operating procedure in political life. The model also explains that whereas the deliberative logical rational aspect of measuring political opponents may be appropriate for a subset of our society, that other subsets in the society will not respond to political stimuli and information unless it is formulated in a way to raise anxiety. This approach would indicate that we can not divorce emotion from reason and that successful political campaigns recognize this and develop a multiple strategy approach to influence the processes of voter enthusiasm or lack thereof or of anxiety or lack thereof.

For many generations, both academia in various disciplines and journalism in the news and editorial departments have widely adhered to the idea that the ideal citizen is detached, disinterested, and well-informed. This ideal has persisted despite the generally observable phenomenon that people who are detached or disinterested very frequently lack the motivation to become well-informed. The authors of this book--two professors of political science and one professor of communications--seek to rehabilitate the reputation of those political actors who are motivated in significant part by an

emotional commitment to one vision or another of significant societal improvement. They succeed admirably. No one who reads and studies this book will look at the politically passionate the same way again."So when do we think about politics?" the authors ask. "When our emotions tell us to," they answer. "We posit that individuals monitor political affairs by responding habitually, and for the most part unthinkingly, to familiar and expected political symbols, that is, by relying on past thought, calculation, and evaluation. But the central claim of our theory is that when citizens encounter a novel or threatening actor, event or issue on the political horizon, a process of fresh evaluation and political judgment is required."The authors revise the traditional research paradigm. Political attentiveness, generally thought to be static in frequency, is seen as dynamic, along with affect, or feeling. Concepts of attitudes and party affiliation--traditionally thought of as having both thoughtful and habitual elements--are seen instead as being merely dominated by habitual behavior. Opposition between affect (feeling) and cognition is replaced by interaction between affect and cognition.The "instrumental orientation to political behavior" is replaced by a "mix of thoughtless reliance on habit and explicit calculation of interest." The "idealized notion of citizenship" is replaced by "political ideals and institutions informed by realism about psychological dynamics."Political issues, traditionally considered equivalent, are now considered a variable by issue type. Similarly, attentiveness and self-interest are no longer assumed to be considered constants but are considered variables."Our research leads us to conceptualize affect and reason as two complementary mental states in a delicate, interactive, and highly functional dynamic balance," the authors state. "We...argue that affective systems manage both our response to novelty and our reliance on established habits. More importantly, our work suggests that in addition to managing our emotional reactions to things that are novel, threatening, and familiar, affect also influences when and how we think about such things."The authors invade the field of psychology and the neurosciences to present detailed findings. They discuss the brain's limbic region, which "governs behavior by monitoring primarily positive reinforcers and establishing dispositions."These dispositions are "attached to previous experiences (which) governs people's behavioral repertoires....The disposition system relies on emotional assignment to control the execution of habits: we sustain those habits about which we feel enthusiastic and we abandon those that cause us despair."The disposition system is contrasted with the surveillance system, "which acts to scan the environment for novelty and sudden intrusion of threat. It serves to warn us when we cannot rely on past learnings to handle what now confronts us and to warn us that some things and some people are powerful and dangerous. This system uses emotion to signal the consequences of its ongoing analyses. It generates moods of calmness, on the one hand, and anxiety, on the

other...."After a detailed foray into the neurosciences to document these conclusions, the authors return to more traditional political science, analyzing in depth the detailed survey data in the 1980-1996 American National Election Studies, which focus on the attitudes of the American people towards the various Presidential candidates during this time period. They focus on the fluctuating levels of enthusiasm and anxiety towards various Presidential candidates, and find that as the level of anxiety towards a candidate that the voter would traditionally support on the basis of partisan affiliation rises, the voter searches the candidate's character and issue positions in far greater detail to see if the candidate is worthy of support. This provides a theoretical explanation for the power of negative campaigning, despite the fact that it is so very widely detested. The affective intelligence theory is contrasted with the normal vote model and the rational choice model. Under the affective intelligence theory, the attentive voters are those who are either "habitually attentive" or those who are "anxious" about a candidate they would otherwise be inclined to support. "Those for whom new information generates anxiety" are "receptive to new information." In short, the decision on who to vote for is based on "either reliance on habituated cues or reasoned considerations when unfamiliar or threatening situations preclude routine reliance on habit." These conclusions are backed by statistical data from the ANES studies. Complacent voters place a 44% reliance on partisan cues, the find, while an anxious voter places only an 8% reliance on partisan cues. An anxious voter places almost twice as a great a share on reliance on candidate qualities than a complacent voter (35% to 19%), and almost twice as a great a share on policy preferences (57% to 35%). After their research was completed, I believe President Clinton helped prove that this intense focus on candidate qualities and policy preferences can ultimately work to benefit a candidate who makes voters anxious: the Democrats broke a long historical pattern and scored net gains of Congressional seats in the aftermath of the Monica Lewinsky scandals. This book is well worth reading and intensely studying by anyone who is active in political campaigns, by any journalist covering political campaigns, or by anyone studying political survey data. The authors seem to recognize the difficulties of penetrating the jargon they employ, and deal with the problem by frequent repetitions of the points they are making. A better written book would have been clearer and shorter. But the book is neither impenetrable or of excessive length, and the time it takes to master the points the authors are making is well worth the effort. The authors deserve credit for their success in both conceptualization and research design. Integrating the neurosciences with political science and communications is a useful innovation. The combing and combining of twenty years of Presidential polling data is also a useful and rather rare accomplishment. It will be difficult to find a more substantive and profound book on the creation and monitoring of public opinion than this one.

This book is a great insight into how the heart and mind come to shape our political opinions. We have been told for far too long that using only our minds and reason were acceptable. However, this book points out in a number of positions that making decisions based on opinions works well. This is somewhat startling to most political scientists because they have always held it as gospel that emotions were a negative factor, and knowledge to be desired. This author shows how that view is very limited in nature. Anyway, it is a scholarly book, but one that reads very well. Get it and enjoy!!!

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