

Personality and the Challenges of Democratic Governance

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How Unconscious Thought Influences
Political Understanding

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*To my Mom and Dad,
who never shied away from a political debate.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began several years ago with a rather simple curiosity about how unconscious thought processes influence the extent to which individuals are able to understand political processes and engage in political behavior (what I eventually began to refer to as their civic aptitude). Understanding the quality of citizens' political participation has been a driving force in my work for quite some time and this research project combines it with my more recent obsession with how the unconscious mind drives behavior. It seemed to me that much of the scholarly understanding in the area of citizen capabilities was limited to individuals' performance in laboratory experiments. While I whole-heartedly support such research, it still leaves one wondering exactly what effect these automatic brain processes have on the quality of everyday political behavior. That is, documenting framing effects in the laboratory is easy, showing how a particular frame affected voters in a particular election is not. Thus, the fascinating findings coming out of these experimental methods often inform us about the myriad of things that *could* be happening in the heads of citizens, but not what *is* happening.

Of course, I would not have been able to do any of this work without the support of the IUPUI School of Liberal Arts and the Indiana University Center for Civic Literacy, both of which provided generous grants that allowed me to administer the Political Personality Success and Failure (PPSF) survey. A special thank you is due to Sheila Kennedy, who founded the Center for Civic Literacy and brought together a wonderful cross-disciplinary group of scholars interested in and concerned with improving the quality of civic discourse in the USA. This began long

before the 2016 presidential election, which has seemingly brought civics back into vogue. However, the sad reality is that the Center has struggled to find support from the numerous grant-making institutions in this country. When it comes to civics, the universal myopia in the world of non-profits and foundations is education. While education is certainly an important component, in order to actually understand the limits of citizens' democratic participation and, therefore, the viability and robustness of democracy itself, one has to look far beyond the classroom. This kind of research, however, does not produce easy deliverables like six-week seminars, or a course pack to be added to high school classes. If we want to learn how to improve or "fix" our democracy, the answers are going to primarily fall outside of the classroom and there needs to be a lot more research in this area than there currently is. At best, there is a small smattering of scholars cobbling together research money to do this work. Yet, the problem they are working on is as important to our society as any that I can imagine.

I owe a huge thank you to my wife, Danka Rapić. She not only enriches my life daily, but also serves as an excellent copy editor. Of course, all remaining mistakes are mine. My colleague in the Department of Political Science at IUPUI and friend John McCormick deserves a special thank you for spending years encouraging me to write a book. He is certainly responsible for placing the book bug in my mind and refusing to let it die. I also want to thank a former student of mine who has gone on to bigger and better things, Mary Ankenbruck. She was a member of the political psychology class I was teaching when the proto-thoughts of this research project were generated, in no small part due to her interest in personality traits. She also diligently coded the various open ended questions in the PPSF survey, an unenviable task I am sure anyone reading this is well aware of. I should also thank the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript, particularly those at Palgrave Macmillan. The thorough reading and insightful comments I received helped improve the book in many ways. Receiving such constructive criticism is a joy.

Finally, this is the largest single research project I have worked on to date and the skills necessary to accomplish it did not naturally occur due to some special genetic code within me. They are the result of many hours of pushing, prodding, and hammering by my mentors and teachers at George Washington University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Michigan. A special thank you is due to Sarah Binder who chaired my dissertation and, therefore, was forced to endure numerous

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