Intention and Competence Impressions in Political Leader Evaluations

Alexander Bor

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PhD Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

I first considered pursuing a PhD seven years ago on a beautiful sunny weekend, upon confronting the lack of remorse over being trapped in a library reading a heavy tome on Russian history. I imagined the life of an academic revolving around reading fascinating books in murky libraries—plus a salary. I also imagined smacking that naïve boy in the head for daydreaming and getting me into trouble instead of studying. But that was later, during my long and twisting journey to becoming a PhD. Without going into too much detail, it took me a great many attempts to be admitted to a PhD program and even more to publish my first paper. Sometimes I wondered if it was grit and dedication or stubbornness and stupidity that kept me on this path. It is clear, however, that it was the support of many great people that kept me sane and for the most time even happy.

First and foremost, I am grateful to Michael Bang Petersen and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov for their superb supervision. I could not wish for a better team than Michael and Kim: not only did their shared competence span all topics I could possibly come up with (from evolution psychology through leadership and trust to quantitative methods), they have persistently proved their good intentions towards me. On our very first meeting, Michael suggested that I think about them as a resource I can rely on in my work, and for the past forty months, I had little concern for sustainability. I have used their energy to get started on new projects, find my way out of theoretical jungles, fight my way through analytical hurdles and to climb out of existential potholes. I owe them for some of the best parts of this dissertation and even more for weeding out the worst parts.

I am indebted to Lasse, who has been an excellent co-author, counsellor and friend. A few years ago, I was worried that my dissertation would end up too similar to Lasse's, which is ironic, because today I wish it were more like it. Lasse was an angel investor in my project, who has showed interest and support back when there was absolutely no guarantee that it would lead anywhere. More importantly, he always responded to my visit with sanguinity, even if I flew the five meters separating our offices the umpteenth time in a day.

I am thankful to Levente Littvay without whom I would never have come to Aarhus. (As my MA supervisor, he said: "Don't stay at the CEU. Get to Aarhus". I didn't even know where Aarhus fucking was. It's in Denmark). Levi has been a friend and a mentor ever since. I am grateful that I could share some of my best meals and worst fears with him as a grad student.

Preface

This report summarizes my PhD dissertation "Intention and competence impressions in political leader evaluations" written at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark. The dissertation consists of this summary and the following self-contained articles:

1. Laustsen, Lasse, & Bor, Alexander (2017). The relative weight of character traits in political candidate evaluations: Warmth is more important than competence, leadership and integrity. *Electoral Studies*, *49*, 96–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.08.001. Henceforth: *Weight paper*

2. Bor, Alexander, & Laustsen, Lasse (n.d.). Partisan motivation and candidate traits – Trustworthiness matters more for out-party than in-party candidate evaluations. *Under review*.
Henceforth: *Partisan motivation paper*

3. Bor, Alexander (n.d.). Evolutionary leadership theory and economic voting: intention and competence impressions mediate the effect of economic perceptions on vote. *Invited for "Revise and Resubmit" at The Leadership Quarterly*.
Henceforth: *Economic vote paper*

4. Bor, Alexander (2017). Spontaneous categorization along competence in partner and leader evaluations. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *38*(4), 468–473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2017.03.006.
Henceforth: *Competence categorization paper*

5. Bor, Alexander (2018). Correcting for base rates in multidimensional "Who said what?" experiments. *Evolution and Human Behavior*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2018.04.003.
Henceforth: *Who said what? methods paper*

Chapter 1: Introduction

> "Power tends to corrupt"
> Lord Acton

> "Nobody's perfect"
> *Various artists*

It is fascinating how obsessed we are with our political leaders, considering that democracy was invented explicitly to curtail the influence of any single individual (Lobo and Curtice 2015). Our nations' chief executives have limited powers, are constantly overseen by the legislature and the judiciary, can be thrown out of office by people at elections. The times of Louis XIV or George III are long gone in the West. And yet, (depending on your national identity) I would bet that you are not oblivious to the First Trump Presidency, Second May Ministry, Third Lars Løkke Cabinet or the Fourth Orbán Government. As if attaching a name to a number were the best way to define our times.

Case in point, political leaders are central figures in contemporary democracies; governments are defined by their leader; elections revolve around the horse race of the most prominent candidates; policies are often named after their sponsors etc. This wisdom is shared by politicians, citizens, the media and pundits. Political scientists do not lag behind, interest in political leaders is as old as the profession. A cardinal question is: What should a good leader be like? Plato (circa 380BC [1991]) set the bar very high in his famous discussion about philosopher kings. In his view, a good leader should be "quick to learn – noble, gracious, the friend of truth, justice, courage, temperance" and definitely not "covetous or mean, or a boaster, or a coward ... unjust or hard in his dealings ... or rude and unsociable". Few leaders in the past two millennia lived up to these standards.

This dearth of philosopher kings puts democratic citizens in a tough spot, whenever they need to appraise a political leader. Elections are perhaps the most obvious example. Each time a citizen approaches the voting booth, they need to ask themselves: which of these fallible candidates is the best person to govern or represent our city, district or nation? But elections are not the only time citizens need to evaluate their leaders. Partisans may get a say in the intra-party selection of leaders. Here, the dilemma may be even more complicated as the best person should excel both as the leader of the party and as a viable candidate in the election. Furthermore, upon assessing the legitimacy

of a policy, citizens may ask themselves, what do the virtues and vices of the leader reveal about these new rules?

What is a sour dilemma for the citizen may be a sweet research opportunity for the empirical political scientist. Numerous classic and recent studies assess how citizens evaluate political leaders in general elections (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Popkin 1994; A. King 2002; Bittner 2011; Lobo and Curtice 2015), primaries (Barker, Lawrence, and Tavits 2006) and related to issues of legitimacy and compliance (Tyler 1990, 2002). Some studies highlight (among other things) that voters judge candidates on whether they are charismatic (Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007), competent (Popkin 1994), dominant (Laustsen and Petersen 2017), formidable (Murray 2014), moral (Wojciszke and Klusek 1996), strong leader (Laustsen 2017) and warm (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

To avoid getting lost in the sea of character traits, I apply the two-dimensional framework of general impression formation to political leader evaluations. I treat leaders as if they were just another social partner people assess upon encounter. This popular and parsimonious framework proposes that most dilemmas about leaders map onto one of two dimensions. To place leaders on these two dimensions, followers should ask: (1) is she going to help or harm me? (2) Does she have the means to do so? I refer to the former dimension as *intention* and to the latter as *competence*. An empathetic, generous or trustworthy leader has good intention, whereas a corrupt, dishonest or immoral leader has bad intention. An intelligent, effective or open-minded leader is considered competent, whereas a boring, foolish or weak leader is considered incompetent.

Which one of these two traits is more important? The long-standing consensus in the political science literature appears to be that competence weighs more than intention in political leader evaluations (Popkin, Gorman, and Phillips 1976; Kinder et al. 1980; Bean and Mughan 1989; Funk 1996, 1997). Two recent reviews of the political leader evaluation literature reiterate this claim. McGraw (2011, 190) suggests that "competence appears to be most influential [trait], at least in terms of evaluations of presidential candidates". Similarly, McAllister (2016, 11) argues that "in general, traits associated with competence and leadership appear more important than character and empathy" (the latter two traits map onto intention).

It is somewhat surprising that political science research finds a comparatively small role for intention impressions, because social psychology research finds that when it comes to general impression formation, intention clearly trumps competence (Wojciszke 2005a; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007; Brambilla et al. 2012). Cues related to intention elicit a stronger emotional response than cues related to competence (Wojciszke 2005b), and they are

processed more quickly by the mind (Ybarra, Chan, and Park 2001). It is tempting to attribute these differences to the peculiarities of politics. After all, it is a very demanding task to be a political leader, isn't it? Of course, competence matters. Moreover, democratic institutions provide strong incentives for politicians to help their constituents. Citizens should not be particularly concerned about politicians' intention. However, equally appealing arguments could be made against competence or for intention. After all, leaders make controversial decisions quite often and sometimes even get entangled in corruption or malfeasance. Of course, intention matters. Moreover, democratic institutions provide strong incentives for all parties to promote their most competent members to leadership roles. Citizens should not be particularly concerned about politicians' competence. In all, it is not obvious how the particularities of politics could explain the marked differences regarding the importance of intention and competence impressions found by political scientists and social psychologists.

This puzzling discrepancy between the political science and the social psychology literatures sets the point of departure for my PhD research. Beyond grappling with the tradeoff between intention and competence in political leader evaluations in general, I investigate three issues that have received little attention in the literature so far. I ask *for whom* intention and competence matter. In particular, I seek to fill the gap in the literature regarding the interaction between partisan affiliation and the relative importance of trait impressions. Extant research has investigated in detail ideological differences in trait impressions: leftist citizens appear to value intention more than competence, while rightist voters look for more competent and dominant leaders (Hayes 2005; Laustsen 2017; Bittner 2011). Moreover, robust evidence shows that people have more favorable impressions of their own party leaders than of the competition (Bartels 2002a). However, the question whether traits are more or less important depending on whether people evaluate leaders within or across party-lines has received little attention so far. Knowing the answer to this question may aid our understanding of the role of trait impressions and of the dynamic aspects of political leader evaluations. It has practical implications regarding when and how political candidates can garner legitimacy in office and support for their policies even across party lines.

Next, I ask *where* intention and competence impressions originate. Here, I choose to focus on one of the most important cues of vote choice: economic perceptions. Economic voting refers to voters' inclination to vote for the incumbent when the economy is doing well and vote against them if it is doing poorly (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Duch and Stevenson 2008). Even though it is nearly impossible to talk about economic voting without referring to incumbents (which may be leaders or parties), to the best of my knowledge

the relationship between economic perceptions and leader evaluations has not been explored before. This is all the more remarkable if we consider the popularity of the topic: a recent review counted over 600 studies on economic voting (Lewis-Beck and Lobo 2017).

Whereas the previous two issues zoom in on politically relevant subjects (partisan motivation and economic voting), the final topic is more important from a psychological perspective. Here, I ask *how* the mind processes cues related to trait impressions. More specifically, I focus on spontaneous categorization. Spontaneous categorization refers to our mind's ability to automatically and effortlessly sort others into boxes based on some crucial characteristics (e.g. sex, age, and ethnicity). Spontaneous (social) categorization plays an important role in impression formation and behavior. It is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it helps us navigate the social interactions by detecting and storing important pieces of information (Who is in my group? Who is a cheater?); on the other hand, it contributes to normatively undesirable outcomes such as group-based prejudice. My inquiry looks at the bright side of life and investigates if similar cognitive mechanisms aid political leader evaluations. Extant literature convincingly demonstrates that the human mind spontaneously categorizes others by their intention (van Leeuwen, Park, and Penton-Voak 2012; Delton et al. 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning categorization by competence. Even though this issue has not been investigated explicitly, existing works yield the impression that our mind does not categorize by competence.

To guide me through the journey of answering these four specific questions—Which trait matters (1) and for whom? (2) Where do these trait impressions come from? (3) and How they are processed? (4)—I ask the following central research question: *What is the role of intention and competence impressions in political leader evaluations?* To answer this question, we first need to consider *why* people form intention and competence impressions in the first place. This issue forms the theoretical backbone of my research: I argue that studying the evolutionary origins of leader evaluations provides important new insights about how democratic citizens think about politicians. I bridge evolutionary psychology and political science by studying the architecture of our evolved followership psychology in the domain of candidate evaluations in contemporary democracies. Below, I highlight the main benefits of an evolutionary approach and discuss the main contributions of my dissertation.

Evolutionary psychology starts with a simple premise: to understand something we need to know its function. A hammer is just a metal blob on a stick until you realize that its function is to knock things into other things. This insight helps to make sense of the defining properties of the hammer: How

long is the stick? What is the shape and the size of the metal? A heart is a strangely shaped and tasty muscle until you realize its function is to pump blood. This insight helps to explain why the heart has valves and chambers, why it jiggles rhythmically in a living animal. The central premise of my dissertation is that psychological systems constituting our mind are not that different from a hammer or a heart: they are best understood if we know their functions. Like hearts and unlike hammers, the psychological systems involved in political leader evaluations are created by evolution by natural selection.[1] Because we know that the only reason evolution creates anything is to solve adaptive problems and we know that evolution is extremely slow, we must ask what adaptive problems our ancestors faced so we ended up having a followership psychology.

How do we know we have a followership psychology? Anthropologists find that leadership is a human universal: a social role present in all human societies studied, which is a strong sign that it has an evolutionary history (Brown 1991). Anthropologists define leaders as "individuals accorded differential influence within a group over the establishment of goals, logistics of coordination, monitoring of effort, or reward and punishment" (von Rueden et al. 2014, 539). This definition is important, not just because it is a surprisingly good job description for most modern politicians, but also because it hints that there are no leaders without followers. A leader becomes a leader because she has differential (i.e. real) influence over others in the group. These others are commonly known as followers. Because our ancestors lived in groups with leaders for millennia and because their relationships with these leaders could turn into adaptive problems (i.e. it could affect their survival and reproduction), evolution could hammer out a followership psychology (Van Vugt and Ahuja 2010; von Rueden and Van Vugt 2015).

Why is evolved followership psychology relevant for political leader evaluations? A growing body of literature testifies that introspection offers a misleading model for how our mind works (Kahneman 2011; Kurzban 2010). Even though I like to flatter myself that because I am a well-educated political scientist and a responsible citizen, my evaluation of political leaders is based on a careful assessment of new information and reflects the democratic ideals I endorse, the reality is that most of the heavy lifting is done by unconscious cognitive mechanisms that have not changed much in the past 100,000 years. Like it or not, democratic citizens rely on the minds of cavemen to navigate

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[1] This does not mean that other factors like learning, socialization, or culture have no effect on psychological systems. Nature versus nurture is a false dichotomy. Rather, we need to acknowledge that the cognitive machineries that enable learning, socialization or cultural influences are all shaped by evolution (Tooby and Cosmides 1992).

the political arena (Petersen 2016). Luckily, as this dissertation affirms, the minds of cavemen are very sophisticated when it comes to politics and leaders.

In a nutshell, I argue that democratic citizens employ their evolved followership psychology to evaluate leaders. Relying and elaborating on insights about the architecture of this followership psychology helps us to understand modern politics. I propose that intention and competence impressions are distinct adaptive tools for monitoring the costs and benefits accrued by specific leaders. A simplified answer to the question why people rely on intention and competence is thus that our ancestors who did so were more likely to survive and reproduce. Although this may seem like a superficial, perhaps even unfalsifiable answer, it has important implications concerning each of the four questions outlined above. The fitness consequences of variations in competence and intention affect *which* of the two traits matters most. Similarly, if we consider how coalitional relationships moderated the relationships between leaders and followers, we may understand *for whom* intention and competence matters more. A theoretical understanding of cues diagnostic of leaders' intention and competence yields novel hypotheses about *where* these impressions originate today and how they are processed.

These theoretical contributions are discussed in Chapter 2. First, I describe and justify in more detail the two-dimensional framework I rely on. Then I introduce evolutionary leadership theory, the overarching theoretical foundation of my work. Next, I zoom in on the four empirical papers and discuss the specific predictions in each. This dissertation advances the literature beyond its theoretical innovations. Chapter 3 on methods demonstrates that I contribute to our knowledge of political leader evaluations with original data and a rigorous analysis of newly assembled secondary datasets. Here, I also introduce my fifth paper that proposes a methodological improvement of the experimental paradigm commonly used to study spontaneous categorization. Chapter 4 reviews the main findings of my dissertation one paper at a time. These results demonstrate the quality of my theory and predictions and, more practically, reveal previously unseen patterns in political leader evaluations. In the last chapter, I ponder the implications of these patterns for research and for real-life politics.

A final note on linguistic matters. On the following pages, I will spend a good deal of time talking about leaders and followers in ancestral and modern times. To keep these discussions clear, I assume a female leader and a male follower and may refer to them with the appropriate gendered pronoun (e.g. her competence, his impressions). Importantly, this is a purely linguistic tool to aid comprehension; it should not be taken as a commentary on gender differences in leadership ancestrally or today. When it comes to modern times, I use leaders, candidates and politicians, as well as followers, voters or citizens

interchangeably. Finally, for the most part, I will narrate this summary in the first person, but I will occasionally switch to "we" to honor my collaboration with Lasse Laustsen, which produced my two co-authored papers.

Chapter 2: Theory

The first chapter outlined the importance of studying leader impressions and evaluations and identified a number of puzzles in the literature. This chapter starts our journey to resolve them. To begin with, I introduce the theoretical framework of the dissertation. The entire dissertation takes place in a universe where there are two important aspects about leaders: Whether they have good intentions and whether they are competent. My most pressing task is to make you as comfortable in this universe as possible. First, I explain what I mean by intention and competence. Then, I review the abundant empirical evidence in favor of the two-dimensional framework relying on multiple disciplines. I hope to show that intention and competence impressions offer an elegant, intuitive, empirically sound framework for studying political leader evaluation. Next, I turn to evolutionary leadership theory, the main theoretical foundation of this dissertation. If the two-dimensional framework of trait impression is the universe where this dissertation is set, evolutionary psychology is the glasses through which we inspect it. Again, a good understanding of evolutionary leadership theory is important to understand why and how its implications are relevant for political leader evaluations. Strenuous as these sections may be, they are required to set the stage for outlining the main hypotheses of the four empirical papers constituting this dissertation.

A two-dimensional framework of trait impressions

The semantic richness of the English (or any other) language for describing the qualities of others is breathtaking. Surely, everyone would want their leader to be accomplished or able, perhaps academic or even athletic, but definitely not abnormal or accursed. This makes quarrels about politics all the more exciting (“*I grant you that she is assertive, but don't you think it'd help if she were a bit more agreeable?*”) and research a bit of a nightmare.[2] My point is not that research on impression formation is hopeless without an unabridged thesaurus but that researchers face difficult decisions in narrowing down their inquiry and finding the balance between accuracy and parsimony.

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[2] In her review of the literature, Bittner (2011) identified 150 unique items used to measure leader trait impressions.

There are many ways to approach this problem. At one end of the spectrum there are historical or psychoanalytical works, which devote lengthy chapters in heavy monographs drawing psychological profiles of influential leaders (e.g. Rentoul 2001). At the other end, works may lump together several (quantitative) indicators into a single like/dislike-index (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989). Both approaches have their benefits and limitations. The former may offer a super fine-grained, very accurate description of specific leaders and events but it may fail to offer conclusions that are generalizable to other situations. Meanwhile, lumping together all character traits may help to contrast trait impressions to other factors shaping vote choice in a wide variety of cases but it falls short when it comes to discussing the relevance of some traits versus others.

This dissertation is motivated by an interest in how and why followers rely on trait impressions in evaluating their political leaders. It is concerned with the relative importance of specific traits and not with the importance of trait impressions versus other cues. This calls for a multidimensional approach to impression formation. The dissertation's focus on the psychology of leader evaluation, meanwhile, pushes us towards parsimony. Our approach needs to be sufficiently general to apply to several leaders in diverse cultural and political settings. An overly complicated framework could run into trouble if applied to fundamentally different contexts.

This discussion alludes to my belief that this is primarily a conceptual and practical problem and not an empirical one. Abstraction always leads to information loss—the larger the area we want to survey, the less detail fits on our map. The more leaders we analyze, the more idiosyncrasies need to give way to common themes. Moreover, the tools we rely on influence the objects we encounter. An unstructured interview with the proverbial median voter would surely lead to different conclusions than the analysis of their responses on a few survey items (W. E. Miller and Shanks 1996, 434). In light of this, it is unsurprising that decades of data-driven inquires on the dimensionality of leader impressions have failed to arrive at a robust conclusion with arguments all over the place from one to five dimensions.[3]

With its focus on intention and competence, this dissertation builds on a two-dimensional framework of impression formation. This approach relies on the simple intuition that two questions provide a fairly accurate description of any leader: (1) what is her intention towards me? and (2) how capable is she

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[3] That said, it is also important to test 1) whether the theory that people form impressions on multiple dimensions is accurate; 2) whether the tools employed in a study are appropriate to reveal this dimensionality. I discuss the former in the next pages and the latter in the next chapter.

achieving them? Curiously, while all studies employing this framework *define* the former dimension by referring to "intentions", "goals", or "motivations", neither of these caught on as labels. Instead it is called warmth (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007), trustworthiness (Kinder et al. 1980), morality (Wojciszke and Klusek 1996; Wojciszke 2005b), integrity (McCurley and Mondak 1995) or character (Bittner 2011). As neither of these terms perfectly captures the main point of the dimension (see below), and most of these words have (common) meanings beyond intention, I take the moral responsibility for contributing to the conceptual confusion and will consistently use *intention* here. That said, the papers that make up the dissertation follow the convention in the literature they seek to contribute to and refer to warmth, trustworthiness or intention. Luckily, there is much less confusion regarding the proper label for the dimension tapping into the ability to achieve a goal, and like the rest of the literature, I will refer to it as *competence*.

What is intention? Intention is defined by a leader's disposition to help or harm the follower, but especially the latter may seem vague. After all, citizens in modern democracies are well protected from the tyranny of a ruler; they need not fear for their safety. However, two types of cues may influence a follower's intention impressions. The first concerns the style and image of the leader, which I believe stem primarily from honoring the norms of procedural fairness (Bøggild and Petersen 2016). If a leader respects the norms of politics, she is likely to be described as honest, trustworthy, or reliable. Conversely, violating these norms leads to impressions of dishonest, unreliable, or arrogant (Funk 1999).

Although procedural and other cues of a leader's intention are highly important, one of the best sources of information about a leader's future actions remains their past behavior. Accordingly, the second type of cues come from past outcomes, i.e. cues related to distributive fairness. If a leader demonstrates concern for the well-being of a follower, either by providing benefits or by reducing costs, she is likely to be considered caring, generous or helpful. Conversely, benefitting other groups of society or imposing costs leads to impressions of discriminating, prejudiced and unhelpful. Importantly, these distributive decisions need not be material. While imposing taxes or providing welfare benefits are obvious examples, limiting abortion rights or legalizing same-sex marriage may have similar effects (Weeden and Kurzban 2017).

Although distinguishing between these two mechanisms helps to appreciate the potential causes of intention impressions, I acknowledge that the line between them may often be blurred. For example, signs of corruption may be the most common cause of bad intention impressions, but it is not clear whether they belong to the former or the latter category. Acts of corruption violate the norms of democratic politics, and in case they become known to

the public, the ensuing scandal often triggers further insincerity and arrogance. Moreover, corruption is by definition abuse of political power for personal benefits and thus imposes costs on and deprives benefits from followers (Philp and Dávid-Barrett 2014).

Importantly, I do not consider cues of likability to belong to the intention dimension. Likability taps into impressions of how pleasant, nice and easy-going a person is. Although likability is sometimes conflated with intention and they are obviously correlated, recent psychometric studies found firm evidence that the two concepts are empirically distinct (Landy, Piazza, and Goodwin 2016; Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin 2014). A recent paper argues that a similar distinction benefits political science research on political leader evaluations too (Clifford 2018).

What is competence? Competence refers to skills and abilities that influence (potential) leaders' success in achieving their (political) goals. In other words, competence is "a measure of ability to handle a job, an assessment of how effective the candidate will be in office, of whether he or she can 'get things done'" (Popkin 1994, 61). Even though competence has been heralded as the normatively important trait in leader evaluations—by definition, they actually influence outcomes (Funk 1997; Kinder et al. 1980)—little work has been done to map the skills and abilities considered relevant by citizens. Nonetheless, a careful reading of the literature reveals two types of competence cues. First, followers may investigate a candidate's track record by looking at her previous performance in various areas (Capelos 2003). Indeed, proven leadership abilities outside of politics may boost competence impressions as demonstrated by figures like Eisenhower (military), Berlusconi (media), Babiš (Czech tycoon/PM) and Trump. Second, there are "softer" but more easily accessible cues of leader competence. Candidates bathe in the public light during election campaigns for a reason. Giving speeches, interviews, attending debates *etc.* allows even less informed voters to infer their intelligence, to track how inspiring, charismatic candidates are (Popkin 1994; Grabo and Van Vugt 2016).

There are two interesting dilemmas about competence in modern politics. The first concerns whether people appreciate that competence is domain-specific (Palmer 1962). Objectively, being an expert in one domain (say economic policy) says little about a leader's skills in another domain (e.g. speechwriting or environmental policy). However, to the best of my knowledge, there is little evidence that people keep detailed track of political leaders' skills. This may sound surprising given the prominence of issue ownership theory, which argues that parties struggle to emphasize the salience of issues for which they have a reputation of high issue-handling competence (Petrocik 1996). The standard operationalization of issue-handling competence (e.g. helping the

poor is better handled by Democrats/Republicans) hints that issue competence conflates intention and competence. Studies of the relationship between issue ownership and trait ownership have found that both intention and competence impressions may feed into issue ownership (Hayes 2005). For example, Democrats own social welfare issues, and Democratic leaders rate higher on intention traits such as compassion or caring for others. I am, therefore, reluctant to take issue competence as evidence for domain-specific competence evaluations. Another reason to be skeptical about the multi-dimensionality of leader competence is that certain skills—such as intelligence or managerial qualities—contribute to the leaders' success in multiple if not all domains (Popkin, Gorman, and Phillips 1976). [4] Hence, for the present purposes, I assume that competence is one-dimensional but flag this issue as a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

The second dilemma is whether competence presumes any kind of pro-social orientation. In other words, do abilities to achieve her goals always make a leader competent, even if her goals are ill intentioned? Do people appreciate the skills of a fraud or a mass murderer? Perhaps "political competence" is a more narrow term reserved for skills that contribute to achieving the legitimate goals of a democratic leader. If so, what counts as a legitimate goal? The psychological literature on impression formation takes a strong conceptual stance in favor of the view, that competence is truly neutral and its effect on an agent's utility depends entirely on intention (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007). Indeed, there is some evidence that the emotional reactions to cues of competence depend on the relationship with the target: the incompetent acts of a disliked person elicited similarly positive emotions as the competent acts of a liked person and vice versa (Wojciszke 2005b). Meanwhile, as the discussion above reveals, political scientists find that competent politicians—at least in democratic societies—have a demonstrated *ability to deliver benefits* at least to some parts of the electorate. Accordingly, in politics, competence has a consistent positive association with global evaluations and support. I believe, however, that this is a feature of democratic politics rather than a peculiarity of leader evaluations. As many actions of democratic leaders affect all citizens of a nation, having an incompetent chief executive is always

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[4] Another argument against the domain-specificity of competence impressions comes from evolutionary anthropology. Henrich (2015) suggests that the ubiquity of causal opacity in ancestral life—people's inability to parse out specific causes contributing to a given result—may have led to rather general competence impressions, which among other things contributes to the oddities of contemporary celebrity culture. People who are successful in one domain (e.g. sports, music) are sought out for their opinion on other issues (e.g. politics).

costly, while having a competent one may have its benefits even if they do not intend to cater to our interest. An interesting implication and potential test of this argument would be to contrast national with international leader evaluations. It is plausible that whereas competence is always valued in national leader evaluations, it becomes a much more dubious asset in foreign leaders, who sometimes nurture antagonistic dispositions towards us.

Intention and competence are distinct concepts, but they parallel other popular concepts in the literature. First, both intention and competence resemble valence issues (Stokes 1963) in the sense that more is always better. Followers need to decide which candidate possesses most of the given virtue and not which candidate represents the level or form of intention or competence they most prefer. That said, classic position issues (e.g. tax policies) are more likely to feed into intention impressions. In other words, a policy position may signal good or bad intention to a follower, depending on where their own interest lies. Similarly, perceived ideological proximity may contribute to higher intention impression, but so would a score of other cues. Intention impression is therefore a richer and broader concept than ideological proximity. Intention takes the perspective of the citizen and asks what he could expect from this or that leader. It is not constrained by the peculiarities of the ideological landscape of a particular place and time.

Whereas interpretations of intention cues may differ considerably across individuals, it is much less common that a leader's actions are ambiguous in terms of their competence.[5] This is not to say that followers dispassionately appreciate the expertise of leaders executing unfavorable policies. I suspect that President Barack Obama received little credit from Republicans for introducing the Affordable Care Act even if this, objectively, required considerable skills in many areas. However, this is because conservative voters thought ObamaCare harms their interest and not because they were concerned that Obama's understanding of the healthcare system or qualities as a legislator were poor.

Another interesting parallel could be drawn between intention and competence and political economy's concepts of moral hazard and adverse selection respectively (Ferejohn 1986; Fearon 1999). Voters face a moral hazard when an elected official has no incentives to represent them—for example be-

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[5] President Donald Trump's unconventional Twitter presence comes to mind, especially in high-stakes situations such as the conflict with North Korea. While the liberal elite considers it one of the most striking examples of Trump's incompetence, at least some conservatives claim that it is part of an ingenious, novel approach to diplomacy (Adams 2017).

cause reelection is not an option. "A moral hazard [is] created by the electorate's inability to ensure that enacted policies reflect the public interest" (Canes-Wrone, Herron, and Shotts 2001, 533). It is essentially a concern that the intention of the representative may not benefit the community. It offers an important reminder that followers and institutions may shape a leader's intention. Meanwhile, adverse selection refers to the possibility that voters with limited information may elect incompetent representatives. "[An adverse] selection problem [is] created by the electorate's incomplete information about executive competence" (Canes-Wrone, Herron, and Shotts 2001, 533). Overall, it is reassuring that diverse literatures converge on the main challenges of followers. Yet, so far, I have provided no empirical evidence to support the two-dimensional framework. The next section turns to this topic.

Empirical support for the two-dimensional framework

There is very firm empirical support for this two-dimensional framework of leader trait impressions. The first political science studies suggesting that intention and competence are separate psychological constructs were conducted by Donald Kinder in the early 1980s in the United States (Kinder et al. 1980; Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske 1979). Similar results were found in Canada (Johnston 2002), Britain (Stewart and Clarke 1992) and Poland (Wojciszke and Klusek 1996). Perhaps most importantly, in an ambitious effort, Amanda Bittner (Bittner 2011) analyzed comparative data from thirty-five elections in seven countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, New Zealand, Sweden and the USA) and found that the two-dimensional structure described the data well.

Separate intention and competence dimensions characterize impression formation beyond politics. Indeed, the framework originated in social psychology in the 1960s from Rosenberg and colleagues' (1968) research. This highly parsimonious framework was found to explain "82% of the variance in perceptions of everyday social behaviors" (Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski 1998). Intention and competence were heralded as universal dimensions of social cognition that are "not merely psychometric curiosities but enduring, fundamental and (arguably) evolved aspects of social perception" (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007, 82).

Accordingly, both intention and competence impressions reliably develop and influence social judgements in children at a relatively early age. Eight-months-old babies monitor the intention of agents and prefer to play with the "Helper" puppet (and not the "Hinderer"), regardless of the actual outcome of their actions (Hamlin 2013). Competence impressions appear to develop

somewhat later in life, but three-year-old children already monitor the accuracy of informants and mistrust those who make mistakes (in naming objects they are already familiar with). Four-year-olds track the informants' relative accuracy, and by their fifth birthday most preschoolers readily ignore information from a familiar informant (teacher) who suddenly shows signs of incompetence (Pasquini et al. 2007; Corriveau and Harris 2009). Such insights from developmental psychology are valuable because they attest that it is natural for people to take into account intention and competence cues: the ability to do so develops without direct instruction or much deliberate reasoning.

It is even possible to push the argument a step further: intention and competence appear to be so fundamental that other social animals also keep track of them (Barclay 2013). More specifically, chimpanzees show signs of understanding the difference between an unwilling and an unable (human) partner (Call et al. 2004). They give up cooperating with a partner who lacks the intention to help them more quickly than with one who lacks the ability. They also keep track of the effectiveness of potential partners and prefer to collaborate with more competent conspecifics (Melis, Hare, and Tomasello 2006).

Admittedly, the two-dimensional framework is not the only game in town. Bittner (2011) identifies twenty-eight distinct typologies in the literature ranging from a single to a dozen unique dimensions. Reassuringly, most of the prominent alternative approaches are compatible with our two-dimensional framework. Kinder's (1986) four-dimensional typology slices intention up into character and empathy, and splits competence into competence and leadership. I believe the alternative frameworks are inferior for our present purposes for multiple reasons. First, it is unclear what the theoretical benefits of a more fine-grained approach are. Granted, in specific instances it may aid explanation: Clinton, a Democratic president caught in a sexual scandal, received high scores on empathy but low scores on character (Funk 1999). But when it comes to mapping the architecture of followership psychology in general—an agenda to which I seek to contribute—such things are best sacrificed on the altar of parsimony and generalizability. Furthermore, the measurement of the two dimensions already posits a methodological challenge (see the next chapter), especially within the political science tradition of preferring larger, more representative samples to larger, psychometrically validated batteries (Mutz 2011). Most public opinion data would not make it possible to investigate hypotheses assuming four or more dimensions.[6]

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[6] Having said that, I am not dogmatic about the two-dimensional framework either (especially when it comes to publishing). The *Weight paper* in this dissertation does report results both with the 2D and 4D frameworks. The reason is that the American

The two-dimensional framework is also imperfect when it comes to incorporating some of the specific leader traits, which receive a lot of attention in academic or public discourse. Most prominently, dominance—the tendency to use force or threat for achieving one's goals—does not fit easily into our framework. The essence of dominance is the insight that some individuals readily harm others to get their means (Boehm 1993; Henrich and Gil-White 2001; Kakkar and Sivanathan 2017). This puts dominance on the domain of intention. Confusingly, however, research also shows that dominant individuals are widely considered to be more able and effective leaders during inter-group conflict, which hints at the fact that dominance has competence-relevant features too (Laustsen and Petersen 2016, 2017; see also Chen, Jing, and Lee 2014).

Another trait ignored unjustly by the two-dimensional framework—and thus by this dissertation—is charisma. This is particularly unfortunate given its long intellectual history in social science research (Weber 1968), important contributions to explaining leader evaluations (Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007) and prominence in media coverage of elections (Schroedel et al. 2013). Recent research firmly places charisma in the competence domain (Grabo and Van Vugt 2016); charisma signals "a person's ability to solve a coordination challenge requiring urgent collective action from group members" (Grabo, Spisak, and van Vugt 2017, 473). Unfortunately, my studies lack appropriate measures to tap into followers' charisma impressions, so the dissertation cannot contribute to this literature either.

Evolutionary leadership theory

The previous sections introduced intention and competence and demonstrated that there is overwhelming evidence in favor of the two-dimensional framework of trait impressions. I now turn to the theoretical foundations of the dissertation, namely evolutionary leadership theory. Building on evolutionary psychology in a political science dissertation (alas) remains an unconventional move, so I devote the next few paragraphs to clarifying the main logic of evolutionary psychology to help readers understand and appreciate the insights of evolutionary leadership theory.

The central tenet of evolutionary psychology is acknowledging that our minds and consequently our psychology are the products of evolution by natural selection (Barkow, Cosmides, and Tooby 1992). Like our physiology, our psychology is a collection of adaptations designed to solve specific adaptive

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National Election Studies surveys include all of Kinder's 1986 items, which lend themselves well (and established a tradition in the literature) to the 4D framework.

problems. The main idea should be familiar to everyone with faint memories of primary school biology classes. Every living creature, from the simplest prokaryotes to intelligent, social animals, faces adaptive problems. They need to tame the forces that harm their odds of reproducing and passing on their genes.

Reproduction is error-prone, and each individual is full of tiny genetic mutations. Most go unnoticed, some are harmful and cause diseases, but every now and then, a mutation offers an incremental improvement in battling adaptive problems. Because these beneficial mutations increase the fitness of the animal, they may be more prevalent in subsequent generations and may, with some luck, spread to the entire population. Over thousands of generations through thousands of beneficial mutations, such highly improbable adaptive features could emerge as bipedal walking, revolving thumbs or followership psychology. Admittedly, studying physiological adaptations appears to be more intuitive. If the adaptive problem is not to fall down from trees, a hand with a strong grip offers obvious improvements to a paw. But so does the fear of heights, even if locating and studying the features of the "machinery responsible for gripping" is easy, whereas (directly) locating and studying the features of the "machinery responsible for fearing heights" is borderline impossible with our present understanding of neuropsychology.

The main point here is that because psychological adaptations are designed by the same mechanism as other adaptations, evolutionary theory "provides a toolkit to build hypotheses from a coherent and well-validated set of first principles" (Petersen 2015, 56). Most importantly, perhaps, evolution is a slow process, and therefore our current adaptations are responses to ancestral adaptive problems (Tooby and Cosmides 1990). Consequently, most of the theories below come in three steps: (1) understanding what the ancestral selection pressures were helps us (2) to consider the architecture of psychological adaptations and (3) speculate how these psychological adaptations affect modern political behavior.

According to a common misconception, evolutionary psychology's preoccupation with ancestral life is one of its main weaknesses: evolutionary hypotheses are often considered untestable (especially in light of apparent difficulties of time-travel). The reality is, however, that disciplines from archeology through anthropology to ecology[7] have accumulated large bodies of research, which allow us to paint a fairly accurate picture of our ancestors' life. Indeed, it is this reliance on interdisciplinary insights—exogenous to the psychological inquiry—that provide one of the major benefits of evolutionary theorizing (Buss 2012). At worse, evolutionary theories are "just so stories" (let's face it:

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[7] We could also add physics, geography, ethology, game theory etc.

not unlike other, non-evolutionary theories of human behavior). At best, however, they are ultimate theories explaining why our psychology is built the way it is.

This takes us back to leaders and followers. What do we know about leadership and followership in ancestral environments? What types of adaptive problems did having a leadership/followership psychology solve? What types of adaptive problems did they lead to? For millions of years, humans[8] lived in groups with increasingly intricate social relationships. Survival depended on successful cooperation in hunting, food-sharing, migration, inter-group conflicts etc. But with an increasingly intricate social life, humans faced increasingly severe coordination and collective action problems.

Coordination games are situations with multiple (pure strategy Nash-) equilibria. Choosing which side of the road to drive on is a classic but misleading example, as the low number of frontal collisions on the roads may give the false impression that solving coordination games is easy. If you were ever member of a group struggling to move a dozen (intelligent, sober) adults from point A to B especially on foreign terrain, you suddenly realize the gravity of the issue. Our ancestors faced similar situations on a daily basis in hunting parties or simply roaming the savanna (A. J. King, Johnson, and Van Vugt 2009). Collective action problems, wherein a public good is reaped if sufficient actors cooperate, are even trickier. The main issue is that public goods benefit all members of the group—even those who did not help acquire it. This causes a threat of excessive free-riding, which may encourage defection even among cooperators. Joining a hunting party for a large game or contributing to a war effort only pays off if others join in sufficient numbers, and individuals' share of the benefit will be larger than their costs, at least in the long run (Glowacki and von Rueden 2015).

These adaptive problems were so frequent and important that a wide range of adaptations evolved to alleviate them (Cosmides 1989; Cosmides and Tooby 2016). The one we are interested in is leadership. First, "leadership allows efficient coordination by routing coordinative decisions through a single individual mind so their mutual implications can be computationally integrated rapidly and dynamically" (Tooby, Cosmides, and Price 2006, 9). Second, leadership also helps collective action by outsourcing the task of monitoring contribution and punishing free-riders to a single individual (Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). In short, leadership may have evolved to solve the

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[8] In fact, leadership is not unique to humans, several other social animals have leaders too (Smith et al. 2016). Frans de Waal (1982) documented captive chimps orchestrating a coup d'état against a long-standing leader, which testifies of a sophisticated followership and coalitional psychology.

adaptive problems of coordination and collective action by making efficient decisions, monitoring compliance, punishing free-riders, keeping peace, etc. But uneasy lies the head that wears the crown: performing the duties of leadership is a costly role (Schaumberg and Flynn 2012). Followers had to compensate leaders for their service. Leadership comes with improved status, which translates into various fitness payoffs such as more food, more mates, better survival rates for children (von Rueden, Gurven, and Kaplan 2011).

Let us look at the same story from the followers' perspective. Spending too much time participating in disputes about where to go and what to do is a waste of energy. Similarly, failing to organize a hunt or organizing it just to see the meat eaten by free-riders may be detrimental to one's fitness. Having a leader to help with these activities is a blessing. But granting a leader status comes with considerable costs. It may involve painful sacrifices like giving up a mating opportunity or giving away a juicy bite of food. This makes the followers vulnerable in multiple ways. First, it is possible that having a leader does not come with increased benefits. Second, some of the attributes that make a good leader—physical strength and intelligence—also make them a great bully. Indeed a crucial concern for ancestral followers was preventing leaders from becoming too powerful (Boehm 1993).

Thus, leadership and followership lock both parties in a reciprocal relationship. For performing the tasks of leadership (cost), leaders get the reward of higher status and possibly more resources (benefit). For granting the leader higher status and more resources (cost), followers get the fruits of extensive cooperation, such as better access to food, shelter or protection (benefit) (Price and Van Vugt 2014). Both parties are interested in reducing their costs and increasing their benefits. Followers are motivated to grant as few privileges to leaders as possible while enjoying as many products of cooperation as possible. Leaders may influence both the costs and the benefits of each follower. They may demand (higher) contributions from an individual thus increasing their costs. They may also affect the total amount of benefits available for the group and may even influence how resources are divided. To conclude, the emergence of leaders posed new adaptive problems to followers: first monitoring leaders' propensity to inflict costs and to acquire and grant benefits, and second, motivating appropriate behavior.

Evolutionary leadership theory thus implies that monitoring leaders improves the fitness of followers. It is reasonable to assume that an important tool for monitoring others is forming trait impressions (Kressel and Uleman 2010). Thereby, leaders' intention and competence gain explicitly adaptive relevance. Intention impressions track a leader's motivation and tendency to perform their duties (and thus delivering benefits to the follower) and their

inclination to impose costs or distribute benefits fairly and unfairly. Competence impressions track a leader's effectiveness in performing their duties and thus delivering larger or more frequent benefits to the follower. Both intention and competence impressions are latent constructs that are at best crude approximations of a leader's future actions. Nevertheless, accurate leader impressions contribute to the fitness of a follower as a necessary precondition for taking appropriate action if needed (Petersen 2015). Most fundamentally, this involves promoting the leadership of individuals with better intention and higher competence and opposing the leadership of worse candidates. But it may also involve efforts to change the intention of a leader (e.g. by voicing discontent) or in extreme situations to sever the leader-follower relationship (e.g. by organizing a "coup" or by fleeing the group). The next section discusses the implications of this evolutionarily informed theory of leader evaluations for our hypotheses.

How are various traits weighed in political leader evaluations?

The most basic question concerning political leader evaluations is which trait matters the most. Interestingly, the political science literature is at best inconclusive on this matter. The majority of studies argue that competence impressions are more influential. Samuel Popkin and colleagues (1976, 794) made a convincing case for the importance of competence:

> Competence is a relevant dimension of candidate evaluation for three reasons:
> (1) The candidate's competence directly affects the probability of his being able to deliver output from the system once he is elected.
> (2) Much of what both the President and Congress do involves the general management of the country. Since the voter has only limited information he may vote for a candidate who seems capable of managing the country even if that candidate is not the "closest" to his specific issue preferences.
> (3) Finally, numerous problems will emerge during a candidate's term of office that he will have to solve but that neither he nor the voters can anticipate on election day. Competence in unfamiliar areas may be inferred from the perceived competence of the candidate in other areas.[9]

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[9] Interestingly, in a footnote Popkin et al (1976, 794) acknowledge that "Trust, a generalized sense that a candidate has your interests at heart and is concerned about people like you, clearly is a second major dimension of candidate evaluation and consideration". The authors also recommend that future research should investigate the relationship between the two traits in more detail.

This theoretical argument highlights that competence impressions tap into factors influencing the outputs of a leader. It is an argument shared by many other influential works in the literature (Kinder et al. 1980; Fiorina 1981; Funk 1996; Popkin 1994). The *competence primacy hypothesis* follows rather straightforwardly from this insight: competence impressions are the most important dimension of political leader evaluations. Numerous studies support this argument empirically. In a colorful, early analysis, Bruner and Korchin (1946, 20) propose that infamous Boston mayor James M. Curley's reelection in 1945 was due—in part—to his "apparent administrative effectiveness". Bostonians' appreciation of Curley's competence is remarkable as he operated a famously corrupt political machine and was even sentenced to prison a few months after the election. Jumping ahead thirty-odd years to the 1980 US Presidential elections, Markus (1982, 560) concludes that "the data clearly indicate that Carter's loss can be attributed to pervasive dissatisfaction with his first-term performance and doubt about his personal competence as a political leader". In an early review of the literature, Kinder and Sears (1985, 691) suggest that the "assessment of competence seem to carry greater weight in political evaluation than considerations of integrity". Analyzing Australian and UK elections, Bean and Mughan (1989, 1176) conclude that "perceived effectiveness dominates how voters respond to leaders, and few would deny that this quality is a key ingredient of successful political leadership". Funk (1997) provides experimental evidence for the primacy of competence. Ksiazkiewicz and colleagues (2018) rely on cutting-edge techniques to show that implicit candidate trait evaluations converge with these findings. Relatedly, the literature on candidate facial evaluations also finds that competence is the best predictor of vote (Olivola and Todorov 2010; Ahler et al. 2016). Finally, two recent reviews of the candidate evaluations literature conclude that competence impressions have a larger impact than intention impressions (McGraw 2011; McAllister 2016).

However, not all studies support the competence primacy hypothesis. McCurley and Mondak (1995) analyze US House elections between 1976 and 1992 and find that while intention affects vote directly, competence only affects it indirectly by discouraging strategic challengers to compete with incumbents. Wojciszke and Klusek (1996) look at a representative sample of Polish citizens and find that the president's approval ratings are best predicted by traits related to intention impressions. Perhaps most importantly, in the largest comparative analysis to date, Bittner (2011) finds that intention on average has a larger impact on vote choice than competence. Finally, some studies find inconsistent results and shy away from taking a stance in the debate. Funk (1999) emphasizes the between-election volatility of the weights assigned to trait impressions in US presidential elections. Ohr and Oscarssson (2013),

meanwhile, suggest that empathy and leadership, which tap into intention and competence, respectively, are the two most influential traits.

The political science literature's undecidedness and fondness of the competence primacy hypothesis is surprising in light of the social psychology research on impression formation. In their seminal paper, Fiske et al (2007) unequivocally vouch for the *intention primacy hypothesis*. Their argument is backed up by several studies conducted since (Brambilla et al. 2011; Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin 2014; Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto 2013; Landy, Piazza, and Goodwin 2016). These psychological analyses often make an evolutionary argument: gauging the helpful or harmful intent of our peers had larger and more direct fitness benefits than gauging competence. Imagine bumping into a stranger on a dusky evening on the savanna 100,000 years ago. Immediately asking "should I be worried?" or "will he harm me?" seems like an excellent strategy if you plan to stay out of harm's way, live a long life and raise several kids. Asking "is he strong or weak?" or "is he intelligent or dumb?" could get you killed. Our ancestors who were more likely to prioritize intention to competence were more likely to survive. Hence, all humans today are deeply concerned by others' intention.

A random encounter with a stranger is not the only situation where monitoring intention has fitness benefits. More generally, all social relationships profit from the ability to model the behavior of others. Possessing such an ability transforms our peers from mysterious automatons into purposeful, intelligent, sentient beings. Accordingly, humans' habit of attributing others' behavior to "unobservable internal states such as *intentions* and beliefs" is the most sophisticated mechanism known to date that evolved for navigating social relationships (Boyer and Barrett 2016, 163 [the emphasis is mine]; see also Dennett 1987).[10]

The primacy of intention impressions manifests itself in diverse and often deep-seated cognitive mechanisms. Both young and old adults process cues related to intention faster than cues related to competence (Ybarra, Chan, and Park 2001). If both intention and competence cues are present, people categorize others by their intention but not competence (van Leeuwen, Park, and Penton-Voak 2012). Intention cues elicit a larger emotional reaction than competence cues (Wojciszke 2005b). The preference for good intentions over high competence develops in childhood and is already present among preschoolers (Landrum, Mills, and Johnston 2013). My favorite evidence comes

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[10] Evolutionary psychologists also remind us that monitoring intention is key to discerning (intentional) cheating from honest mistakes (Cosmides and Tooby 2016). This ability is crucial for sustaining mutually beneficial social exchange relationships.

from the literature on the cognitive processing of facial expressions. The facial expression most relevant for signaling helpful intent—namely a smile—is processed very quickly, effortlessly and with great reliability (Becker and Srinivasan 2014). Indeed, a happy face may be detected outside of the range of Olympic javelin throwers (and thus outside of the range of ancestral projectile weapons) (Hager and Ekman 1979). In short, knowing whether a person in general had helpful or harmful intentions may have posited a serious adaptive problem ancestrally, and thus several adaptations are designed to deal with this issue.

Evolutionary leadership theory suggests that in this respect, leader evaluations may be very similar to general impression formation—leaders' intentions had a larger impact on followers' fitness than their competence. First, consider that it is easy to identify leadership tasks that require little competence but still require that the leader show up for the job. In simple coordination games it matters little what decision is made—going to one waterhole or another, moving to a new sleeping site today or tomorrow etc.—as long as the leader commits the whole group to that decision (Van Vugt and Kurzban 2007). It is much harder to imagine leadership tasks that can be performed unintentionally or with bad intentions and yet still benefit followers. Second, when it comes to leaders' role in distributing costs and benefits in zero-sum games (an issue belonging to the intention domain by definition), a favorable decision helps twice: when it benefits you and when it does not benefit your competitors. Conversely, an unfavorable decision hurts twice: when it harms your interest (makes you weaker, poorer or lowers your status) and when it benefits your competitors (makes them stronger, richer, or gives them higher status). Given these attributes of ancestral environments, it is plausible that cognitive mechanisms that weigh intention higher than competence became part of humans' followership psychology.

Importantly, evolutionary theory implies that even if contemporary democracies substantially change the incentives of political leaders and followers, citizens may have a limited ability to change their political cognition (Petersen 2015; Tooby and Cosmides 1990). Accordingly, even if democratic institutions incentivized pro-social behavior perfectly and throwing the rascals out prevented ill-intended thoughts even to occur to politicians (which is *not* my experience about politics), citizens may still weigh intention impressions higher than competence impressions. A mismatch between ancestral and modern environments often results in seemingly irrational behavior (Van Vugt et al. 2008). In the *Weight paper*, we investigate whether intention impressions are indeed more influential than competence impressions in shaping global evaluations and votes for political leaders. Panel A of Figure 1 offers a schematic representation of the paper.

How partisan motivation moderates leader trait evaluations?

The Weight paper proposes that political science literature may have underappreciated the relevance of intention impressions in political leader evaluations. Consulting the literature on ancestral selection pressures in leader-follower relations implies that our psychology may evolved to weigh intention impressions particularly heavily. The natural next question is for whom intention impressions matter the most. To avoid getting entangled in the multitude of potential moderators, we focus exclusively on (arguably) the single most important factor, namely partisanship. Partisanship has a large direct effect on trait impressions: in-party candidates are evaluated much more favorably than out-party candidates (Bartels 2002a, 2002b). This is unsurprising, given the well-known tendency for parties to "raise a perceptual screen" in front of partisan citizens (Campbell et al. 1960, 133) and recent findings about how severe partisan divides tend to be (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Westwood et al. 2018).

Figure 1. Schematic representations of the first three papers in this dissertation
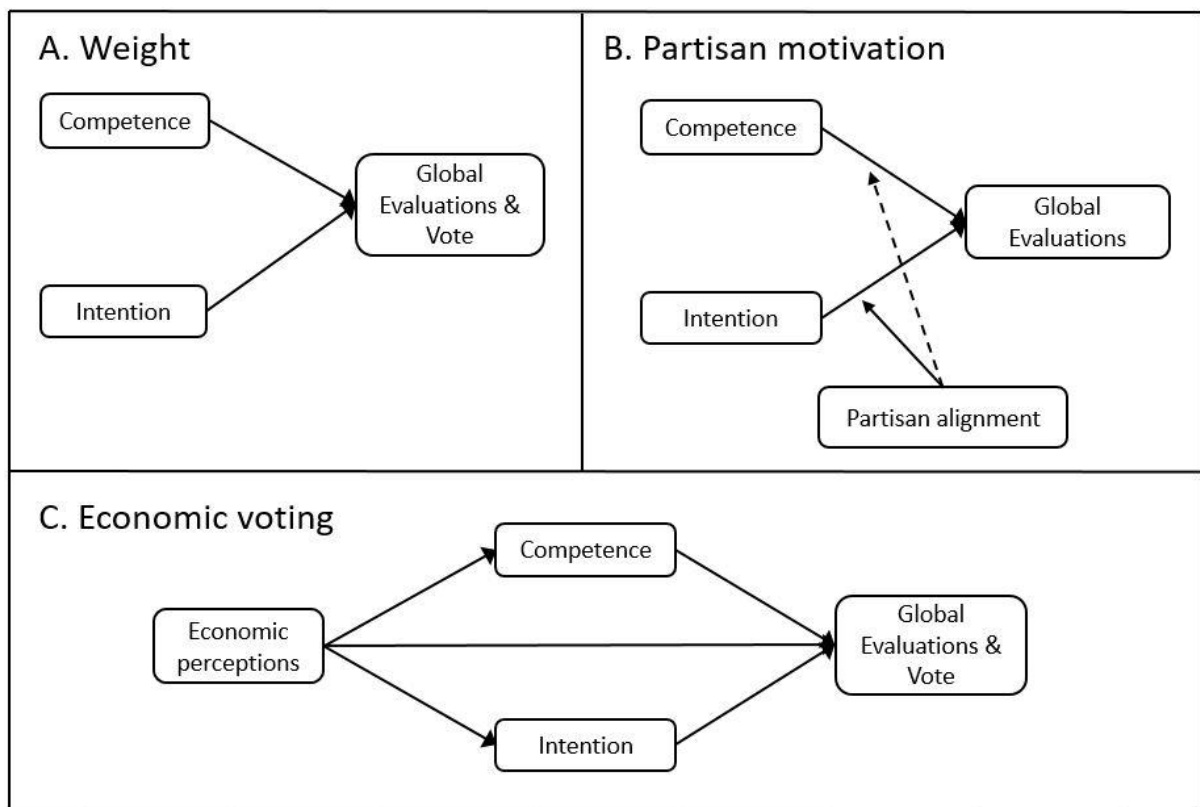
Note: The rectangles denote concepts, the arrows signal a hypothesized causal relationship. The dashed line in panel B denotes a null-hypothesis predicted

Importantly, however, "partisan motivation does more than simply, and somewhat crudely, color character impressions in a manner that is favorable to one's partisan orientation" (Goren 2007, 322). Previous research in the US have found that the two major parties differentially appeal to traits: the Democrats "own" compassion and empathy, and Republicans "own" strong leadership and also morality (Hayes 2005).[11] This result has been largely replicated in a comparative study indicating that a liberal agenda—focusing on welfare—leads to higher intention ratings, whereas a conservative issue portfolio—emphasizing trade and tax regulation or security—contributes to higher competence impressions (Bittner 2011). The flip side of this coin shows that voters who view the world as threatening (i.e. conservatives) value power related traits more than those who have a more peaceful worldview (Laustsen 2017).

My dissertation contributes to this literature, but instead of focusing on ideological divides, it builds on insights from coalitional psychology to investigate how intention and competence are weighed in evaluating in-party and out-party leaders. Research in psychology shows that coalitional affiliation is an important feature of our social representational systems. Simply put, we constantly monitor who does and who does not belong to our group (Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides 2001). This information then has a large impact on our behavior, leading most prominently to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Kunda 1990; Tajfel 1982). In fact, in-group favoritism may have evolved to facilitate reciprocal relationships among our ancestors (Efferson, Lalive, and Fehr 2008). In a nutshell, we—rightly—expect others in our group to have positive intention towards us.

The peculiarities of coalitional psychology have strong implications for political leader evaluations, because modern political parties are reinterpreted as coalitions by the human mind (Pietraszewski et al. 2015). This does not simply mean that in-party leaders have higher perceived intention than out-party leaders—although they do—but also that the relevance of intention impressions is moderated by coalitional affiliation. More specifically, intention of an out-group leader may affect a follower more than of an in-group leader (Bøggild and Laustsen 2016). Essentially, shared coalitional affiliation acts as a safeguard against the tyranny of untrustworthy or corrupt leaders. Even if a leader is prone to violate procedural norms or occasionally fails to perform her duties (i.e. has bad intention), in-group favoritism propels her not to put the costs of these actions on in-group followers. Conversely, even if an out-group

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[11] It is interesting to note that Hayes' (2005) trait ownership theory does not map onto the two-dimensional framework perfectly. Although compassion and morality both belong to the intention impressions, they are owned by different parties.

leader does not cater to the specific needs of followers from competing coalitions, her commitment to procedural norms (i.e. good intention) delivers crucial benefits (e.g. law and order) to out-group followers that are particularly valuable in hard times.[12]

These evolutionary arguments are not alien to classical political scientists either. There are both theoretical arguments and empirical evidence showing that parties and party leaders systematically benefit their own people (Dahl 1971; Hibbs 1977). Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that intention impressions are weighed more heavily upon evaluating out-party than in-party leaders. Crucially, the same logic does not apply to competence. It is difficult to come up with good arguments for why the abilities and effectiveness of a leader would matter more for the well-being of out-party followers. If anything, we would expect the reverse relationship. It is therefore reasonable to expect that competence impressions are *not* weighed more heavily upon evaluating out-party than in-party leaders. These predictions are schematically represented in Panel B, Figure 1 and tested in the *Partisan motivation paper*.

How does economic voting feed into trait impressions?

A natural objection at this point is that even if leader trait impressions feed into global evaluations and vote choice, this tells us little unless we know what makes someone think that a leader has good or bad intention and high or low competence. Evolutionary theory implies that a large number of diverse cues may feed into these trait impressions. Some of these cues may have reliably co-varied with relevant traits ancestrally. Accordingly, leaders' physical formidability (Murray 2014), facial appearance (Laustsen and Petersen 2016; Todorov et al. 2005), gender (Cassese and Holman 2017; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993), religiosity (Clifford and Gaskins 2016) and respect for procedural fairness norms (Bøggild and Petersen 2016) systematically influence their perceived traits. Other cues were probably not present ancestrally but are still

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[12] This is a slightly modified version of the theoretical account that appears in the Partisan motivation paper. Our argument there focuses more in the differential likelihood of in- and out-party leaders to deliver benefits and impose costs on followers. A slight complication stems from the fact that now I think that the *representational system* of intention impressions should be sensitive to such distributional dispositions. While it is not unlikely that the *motivational system* takes into account the distributional implications of shared coalitional affiliation over and above that of the representational system, I motivate the theory here primarily with the down-stream consequences of the procedural aspects of intention.

processed by evolved cognitive mechanisms. Most prominently perhaps, racial cues feed into our evolved coalitional psychology and shape trait impressions, even though we lack specialized cognitive mechanisms for processing race (Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides 2001; Livingston and Pearce 2009; Moskowitz and Stroh 1994). There are also distinctly political cues: leaders' ideological and issue positions spill over to trait impressions with leftist views increasing perceived intentions and rightist views increasing competence (Hayes 2005; Rapoport, Metcalf, and Hartman 1989; Bittner 2011). Political scandals have a negative effect on trait impressions (Funk 1996; Maier 2011), and mediated campaign messages affect trait impressions (Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Aaldering 2018).

Explaining the variance in trait impressions thus seems like a gargantuan challenge. Instead, I focus on how perceptions of the economy shape trait impressions. First, economic voting is one of the largest and most persistent determinants of election results globally and, accordingly, one of the most studied topics in voting behavior (Anderson 2007; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Democratic voters around the world vote for the incumbent when (they believe that) the economy is doing well, and against if (they believe) it is doing poorly (Lewis-Beck and Lobo 2017; but see Bisgaard 2015). Despite being an "incumbent-centered theory", relatively little effort has been made to bridge the economic voting and followership psychology literatures (but see Merolla and Zechmeister 2013). Even though prominent works have speculated about the causal mediating role of competence impressions, it has not been tested empirically, to the best of my knowledge. Duch and Stevenson (2008, 2) argue that "voters condition their vote on the incumbent's record of economic performance because this is the optimal way to identify and elect competent economic managers". The *Economic voting paper* conducts the first explicit test of this hypothesis.

The second reason for focusing on economic voting is that it offers a good opportunity for evolutionary leadership theory to shine. Offhand, it may seem unlikely that cues about the state of the national economy feed into our evolved followership psychology. After all, our ancestors were not bombarded with statistics about inflation and unemployment; they were oblivious to the GDP and were never forced to comprehend what purchasing power parity means. Relatedly, an evolutionarily informed approach is rather alien to the spirit of the economic voting literature. Thus, finding a link between economic perceptions and incumbent leader impressions is a hard test of the evolutionary approach.

A closer look at the economic voting and evolutionary leadership theory reveals, however, that the two areas fit surprisingly well together. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that a universal followership psychology

fuels economic voting. First, economic voting has been found to be present in diverse cultures (Wilkin, Haller, and Norpoth 1997), propelling speculations about its universality (Norpoth 1996). Second, variation in the strength of economic voting is very well explained by institutional factors, such as the clarity of responsibility (Powell and Whitten 1993; see Duch and Stevenson 2008 for an excellent review). Third, there is firm evidence that perceptions about the national economy are partly formed based on the well-being of people in our immediate environment and in-group (Ansolabehere, Meredith, and Snowberg 2014; Mutz and Mondak 1997). Despite the complexity of modern economies and the flood of information from the media, there is a link between citizens' economic perceptions and unemployment among people living in an 80-meter radius around them (Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016). Sensitivity to cues from face-to-face encounters and concern for the well-being of fellow in-group members are well-known features of evolved cognitive mechanisms (Van Vugt et al. 2008; Weeden and Kurzban 2017).

In short, economic voting is a non-trivial yet ripe opportunity to apply insights from evolutionary psychology. What does evolutionary leadership theory have to say about the link between perceptions about the economy and leader trait impressions? On the one hand, it reaffirms the prediction concerning the mediating role of competence. As our definition of competence entails that a competent leader is more effective in contributing benefits to followers, it is reasonable to assume that the well-being of group members was an important diagnostic cue of a leader's competence ancestrally. Evolution may thus have impelled followers with the instinct to update competence impressions based on cues of (economic) well-being. On the other hand, evolutionary leadership theory also yields the novel hypotheses that economic perceptions are also diagnostic of leaders' intention. Again, this follows straightforwardly from our discussion of the adaptive benefits of monitoring leader intention. A follower's well-being is affected by his leader's intention. Having a leader who is not performing her duties or who assigns costs and benefits unfairly could have harmed the well-being of the follower and his close associates. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that followers who have noted economic hardship in their immediate environment cannot help but wonder whether it has to do in part with their leader's reliability and fairness. To make the contribution to the economic voting literature explicit and to honor the fact that my dissertation focuses on the link between trait impressions and support for political leaders, both hypotheses are defined in terms of causal mediation. I hypothesize that the effect of economic perceptions on vote choice is mediated (in part) by both competence and intention impressions of the incumbent. Panel C of Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these predictions tested in the *Economic voting paper*.

Do humans categorize leaders (and peers) by competence?

Spontaneous categorization is an important cognitive tool for navigating the social world. It enables us to effortlessly and automatically sort others into functionally relevant categorizes (e.g. female, young, in-group). These categories affect how we perceive and behave towards others and may be remembered even if no other information is accessible about an individual ("it was one of the German boys, wasn't it?"). Importantly, spontaneous categorization received considerable attention from evolutionary psychologists because it testifies about the fundamental categories of the mind. In other words, finding evidence for spontaneous categorization by a given attribute (say gender) implies that this attribute had adaptive relevance ancestrally. This is relevant for my quest as categorization by intention and competence may help us better understand the mental machinery involved in leader evaluations. Evidence for categorization by both intention and competence could give credence to our evolutionary, ultimate explanations of the architecture of followership psychology.

The literature provides firm evidence that humans categorize others by their intention. Van Leeuwen et al. (2012) relied on morality cues and showed firm evidence of categorization. Delton and colleagues investigated intentionality-related cues in cheater detection (Delton et al. 2012) and social foraging (Delton and Robertson 2012) and found strong support for spontaneous categorization. None of these studies was designed explicitly to test categorization by competence, but to the extent that they allow investigation of this cognitive mechanism, they cast doubt on its existence. The Van Leeuwen et al. study varied competence and morality cues simultaneously and found no categorization by the former. Similarly, Delton's studies had cues that could partly be interpreted as relevant to competence but found no evidence for categorization either.

Nonetheless, there are good reasons to believe that humans categorize leaders and peers in general. First, as the discussion of evolutionary leadership theory above indicates, selecting competent leaders may have contributed to the fitness of our ancestors (Price and Van Vugt 2014; Van Vugt and Grabo 2015; Van Vugt and Kurzban 2007). Even more generally, the literature on biological markets (Barclay 2013) and food sharing (Gurven 2005) indicate that keeping track of other individuals' abilities and effectiveness may have yielded big rewards. The *Competence categorization paper* offers the first empirical effort to test whether humans categorize others by their competence.

Chapter 3:
Research Methods and Design

The questions and hypotheses of this dissertation concern the architecture of followership psychology. As in all research into the functioning of the mind, answering these questions and testing these hypotheses is a challenging task. This chapter addresses some of these challenges. My goal is not to convince you that my studies are without limitations. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that my studies make reasonable assumptions, and that my models offer a useful—if wrong—representation of reality. The first part of this chapter discusses internal and external validity, i.e. how accurately my studies estimate causal relationships, and to what extent their findings can be generalized to other cases. I also explicitly address the challenge of disentangling intention and competence impressions in quantitative studies of political leader evaluations. The second part zooms in on a very specific methodological issue concerning one of the experimental paradigms employed in this dissertation.

The higher the internal and external validity of an empirical study, the more valuable its insights. Internal validity concerns the strength of causal inference in a study. In this dissertation, the primary concern is whether the studies accurately estimate the effect of intention and competence impressions on global evaluations and vote intention. External validity concerns the generalizability of results to other settings, subjects and measures. Here, more specifically, how similar are leader evaluations in our studies to leader evaluations in real life? Can we reasonably expect a random person evaluating a random candidate in a random (democratic) country to conform to the patterns revealed?

Interestingly, leader evaluation research may be one of the few cases where the much discussed tradeoff between internal and external validity is a valid concern. Experiments are the golden standard when it comes to internal validity (McDermott 2002). Practical and ethical concerns, however, often prevent us from manipulating citizens' impressions of their leaders. Most people have rather strong impressions of their leaders. Manipulating such impressions can be difficult and may even backfire. Moreover, messing with people's impressions of political candidates may be perceived as an intrusion into the political arena and thus a transgression of the boundaries set for social scientists.

These concerns have lead some authors to proclaim that "the strictly experimental strategy has relatively little part to play in exploring leadership effects in real-world elections" (A. King 2002, 17). But advances in experimental

political science contributed important new insights to the leader evaluation literature (e.g. Bøggild and Laustsen 2016; Funk 1996; Merolla and Zechmeister 2013). Experiments on this subject routinely rely on fictitious candidates. Participants' encounters with fictitious candidates resemble encounters with real leaders in many respects. However, it is impossible and even undesirable to recreate the informational richness of real-life environments with repeated exposures in a single study. Fictitious candidates are the political scientists' mannequin: they allow us to display and to manipulate key features of interest and erase concerns about others. They are invaluable but, admittedly, it requires a bigger leap of faith to generalize from them to real leaders.

This means that it is very difficult for a single study to be high on both internal and external validity. Therefore, this dissertation builds on a dozen of them (see Table 1 on the next page), which allows a division of labor. First, I analyzed twenty-six national election studies—representative surveys fielded immediately after elections—from seven countries over three decades. These data encompass tens of thousands of people's impressions of real political candidates competing for their votes. They allow us to be relatively confident of the external validity of the claims made with these data. Essentially, if a pattern emerges from these thousands of respondents, dozens of elections and handful of countries, it is reasonable to assume that the next respondent, election or country will not exhibit markedly different patterns. Second, I conducted two original vignette experiments that presented information to participants in a realistic style and format (mimicking a standard newspaper article) and allowed me to control what information was presented to whom. Third, I conducted a series of "Who said what?" (WSW) experiments. WSW is a clever experimental protocol originally designed by psychologists to study spontaneous categorization. Instead of mimicking reality, WSW experiments present participants with a mental exercise in which they first see a bunch of people saying or doing things without much explanation and then are presented with a surprise recall task. The impetus for conducting WSW experiments is that involuntary behavior—specifically the errors committed in the recall phase—reveals particular attributes of the mind. The dissertation also relies on a fourth type of data, namely a computer simulation. However, this is best kept separately as the purpose of running this simulation was not to study followership psychology per se but to perfect a tool to study it. I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter.

A final note before we turn our attention to specific issues related to methods and design. Given concerns about the replicability of findings in many of the social sciences (Open Science Collaboration 2015), this dissertation endorses open science practices. All original data, information on experimental

designs and computer code generated in the analyses are publicly available in online repositories. Where I do not have right to share the data, I provide a detailed guide to acquiring the data. I believe that any number, table or figure reported in any of my papers or appendices can be reproduced with the publicly available computer codes. Moreover, any study that I designed and conducted can be rerun without any involvement by me. Living up to these standards was an arduous task. However, it provided a very strong incentive to be meticulous about doing research, and it allows anyone impressed or horrified by my research to exploit its strengths or expose its weaknesses.

Table 1. Overview of the studies constituting this dissertation

	Paper	Study	Short description	Experimental treatment	Participants (N of observations)	Data type	Time and Location	Original data?
1	Weight	Study 1	American National Election Studies (ANES) data. RQ: what is the marginal effect of various traits on global evaluations and vote?	—	Representative samples of US citizens (N = 22,123)	Publicly available public opinion surveys	USA: 1980–2008	No
2	Weight	Study 2	RQ: Does intention have a larger *causal effect* than competence on global evaluations and vote intention?	2 (high intention/low intention) x 2 (high competence/low competence) between-subjects design	Approx representative sample of English citizens (N = 824)	Original survey experiment fielded by YouGov survey company	England: 2016 December	Yes
3	Partisan motivation	Study 1	Pooled national election studies from six countries RQ1: Does intention matter more for out-party than for in-party candidate evaluation? RQ2: Does competence matter more for out-party than for in-party candidate evaluation?	—	Representative samples of citizens from Australia, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and UK (N = 96,319)	Publicly available public opinion surveys	Australia:1993-2013 Denmark: 2005-07 Germany: 2009-13 Norway: 2001 Sweden: 2002-06 UK: 2005-2010	No
4	Partisan motivation	Study 2	Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP) 2008 RQ1: Does intention matter more for out-party than for in-party candidate evaluation? RQ2: Does strong leadership matter more for out-party than for in-party candidate evaluation?	—	Representative panel survey of US citizens (N = 234,219)	Publicly available public opinion surveys	USA: 2008	No
5	Competence categorization	Study 1	RQ: Do results from a previous study finding no evidence of categorization by competence replicate?	Large/small contribution of food to common pool	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 154)	"Who said what?" experiment	USA: 2016 February	Yes
6	Competence categorization	Study 2	RQ: Do people categorize targets by their competence?	High/low competence	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 151)	"Who said what?" experiment	USA: 2016 February	Yes

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7	Competence categorization	Study 3	RQ: Is competence categorization facilitated by leadership evaluation?	High/low competence + Partner/leader evaluation between-subjects design	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 741)	"Who said what?" experiment	USA: 2016 March	Yes
8	Competence categorization	Study 4	RQ: Is competence categorization facilitated by leadership evaluation if targets also vary on a competing dimension (likability)?	High/low competence, High/low likability + Partner/leader evaluation between-subjects design	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 401)	"Who said what?" experiment	USA: 2016 May	Yes
9	Economic voting	Study 1	Pooled national election studies from three countries. RQ: Do intention and competence impressions mediate the effect of economic perceptions on vote?	—	Representative samples of citizens from Australia, Denmark and US (N = 26,112)	Publicly available public opinion surveys	Australia:1993-2013 Denmark: 2005-07 USA: 1980-2008	No
10	Economic voting	Study 2	RQ: Do intention and competence impressions causally mediate the effect of economic perceptions on vote intention?	2 (Economy struggling or booming) x 3 (no info/high competence/high intention) between-subjects design	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 1,003)	Moderation-of-process design	USA: 2018 March	Yes
11	"Who said what?" method	Study 1	A computer simulation of "Who said what?" experiments. RQ: Does applying the canonical correction method result in biased estimates in a wide range of experiments?	Parameters: Error ratio 1st and 2nd dimension, Share of correct recalls, Sample size, Number of sentences	Simulated data (N = 175,760)	Computer simulation of WSW experiments	—	Yes
12	"Who said what?" method	Study 2	Reanalysis of a pivotal "Who said what?" experiment. Does applying the canonical correction method have substantive effect on results in a real experiment?	Race: white/black, No/visual cue condition - between-subjects design	Mechanical Turk sample of people living in the US (N = 463)	"Who said what?" experiment	USA: 2014	No

Internal validity

Correlation and causation

An important task for scientific inquiries is to test causal relationships and to provide causal estimates. These typically involve contrasting the value of a dependent variable Y (say probability of voting for a candidate) between two states of the independent variable X (say intention impressions). A causal estimate thus reveals how much the probability of voting for a candidate changes (on average) if a voter's intention impressions change from poor to excellent *all else being equal*. Although it is natural to think about cause and effect, and it is fairly easy to think about counterfactuals (i.e. the two states in X), estimating causal effects is a tricky business. The root of all problems is that the counterfactuals are by definition unobservable (Holland 1986). Assume that a respondent believes that a leader has bad intentions. Ideally, we could create a parallel universe, where everything is the same except that the respondent believes the leader has good intentions and investigate if this corresponds to a change in voting. Unfortunately, creating parallel universes is not a tool available to us. Consequently, when we observe a change from one state to another in the real world, we can rarely be sure whether it is indeed a true, independent change in the independent variable, if it is due to a third variable, which may affect both X and Y, or perhaps to changes in Y having a feedback effect on X. The latter two scenarios cause problems because they lead to *bias*: our estimates of the effect of X on Y would conflate the true effect (which we are interested in) and the effect of the confounders.

Assume *Abel* (a hypothetical follower) has negative intention impressions and a low likelihood of vote for a leader, whereas *Bob*'s intention impression is good and vote intention is high. Is this correlation evidence of a causal relationship? In other words, if we could change *Abel*'s intention impressions without affecting any other beliefs or attributes, would this yield a vote intention similar to *Bob*'s? This is highly unlikely. Many other variables could confound this relationship. Confounders prompt people to select into groups with a particular level of X. The most obvious confounder in this case is partisanship. A follower from the same party as the leader is more likely to have favorable trait impressions *and* to vote for them regardless of their characteristics. Conversely, identifying with a competing party is likely to propel both negative trait impressions and a vote against the candidate. In other words, both partisanship and the perceived character of a leader influence whether people express intention impressions similar to *Abel's* or *Bob*'s. If we simply compared

the probability of vote between *Abel*'s and *Bob*'s group, we could not disentangle the extent to which this is due to intention impressions and to partisanship.

Another concern is *reverse causality.* Perhaps *Abel* and *Bob* started out with similar, high-intention impressions and a strong determination to vote for the leader. However, *Abel* had a long and uncomfortable talk with his father-in-law, who convinced him that voting for the leader would harm their good relationship. *Abel* was a bit embarrassed at first, but then he managed to convince himself that he was actually always a bit suspicious of the leader's intention. Comparing *Abel* and *Bob,* again, would lead to the false impression that intention impressions influence vote. The point is that if the causal relationship goes both ways and people update their intention impressions to rationalize changes in the vote intention, it becomes difficult to estimate the effect of trait impressions on vote.

A number of techniques are available to ameliorate these problems. The next section surveys those employed by the papers in this dissertation. It is important to acknowledge at this point, however, that most analyses relying on observational data (the *Weight paper*'s Study 1, both studies of the *Partisan motivation paper*, the *Economic voting paper*'s Study 1) do not test causal relationships—this task is left to the experiments. The observational studies do take measures to reduce bias in the estimates, but their main contribution is analyzing attitudes towards real leaders from representative samples in diverse cultures.

Experiments: Controlling with design

Experiments are powerful as they allow the researcher to make causal estimations based on relatively few assumptions. In fact, the logic of experiments corresponds closely to the logic of causality outlined above. In its simplest form, an experiment defines a control group and a treatment group, which are characterized by the two states of the independent variable *X*. By comparing the value of *Y* between these two groups, we can calculate the average treatment effect of *X*, assuming that the two groups are indeed identical in all aspects except *X*.[13] This assumption is reasonable because in an experiment the treatment is allocated randomly. Randomization is key because it is blind to the participants' attributes. By flipping a coin, we can split a sample into two groups, which on average will be identical on all measured and unmeasured

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[13] Actually, the two groups need not be identical. It is enough that the effects of the differences on Y cancel each other out, i.e. that the two groups are equally likely to be different on factors that reduce and on factors that increase the level of Y (Mutz 2011).

variables. Administering the treatment to only one of them ensures that the *all else equal* clause is satisfied on the group level.

I conducted two conventional[14] experiments: Study 2 of the *Weight paper* and Study 2 of the *Economic voting paper*. The former experiment tests whether intention impressions have a larger *causal effect* on vote intention than competence impressions.[15] It has a 2 × 2 design with intention and competence taking a low or high value. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four groups, which made it possible to observe how their trait impressions affect vote intention and global evaluations.

The second experiment utilizes a moderation-of-process design (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005), which was developed to test causal mediation hypotheses. It has a factorial design where both the independent variable (here, economic perceptions) and the causal mediators (here, intention and competence impressions) are manipulated. Importantly, there is also a control condition with no information on the mediators. This makes it possible to estimate the causal effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, allowing the mediators to take their natural levels (assuming they are affected by the IV). Meanwhile, providing direct information on the mediators hijacks the causal mechanism and thus diminishes the causal effect of the independent variable, assuming that the mediation hypothesis is correct. A crucial assumption of the moderation-of-process design is that mediators are manipulated independently. Although the observed correlation between intention and competence impressions made this a challenging task, rigorous pre-testing enabled me to come up with vignettes that affect either intention or competence impressions.

The main contribution of these experiments, again, is that they conduct a rigorous test of the claim that trait impressions have a causal effect on global evaluations and vote. By randomly assigning participants to various levels of trait impressions, experiments ensure that neither confounders nor the outcome biases the causal estimates. Experiments are thus the studies with the highest internal validity in my dissertation.

Fixed-effects estimation

Fixed-effects estimation is an alternative approach to dealing with confounders. It was developed originally for analyzing panel data, which have multiple observations from the same unit (Allison 2009). Panel data let the researcher

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[14] I discuss the "Who said what?" experiments separately below.

[15] Full disclosure: this experiment was originally designed to test the Partisan motivation paper's hypothesis but failed to reject the null. This caveat explains why the experiment's intention and competence stimuli were not perfectly balanced.

use each individual as their own control, e.g. comparing the likelihood of voting for the incumbent at a time when the respondent's economic perceptions were favorable to a time when they were gloomy. The big advantage is that doing so controls for all time-invariant confounders whether they are observed or unobserved. In other words, factors that may very well affect both economic perceptions and the likelihood of voting for the incumbent but did not change between the two waves have the same effect both times. Consequently, any change in the DV must be due to different (time variant) factors.

Importantly, fixed-effects estimation can be utilized in any data with multiple measurements per unit of observation, not just in multi-wave panels. In Study 1 of the *Warmth paper* and both studies of the *Partisan motivation paper*, we exploit the fact that once election studies include trait impression items, they do so for all major candidates of an election. Therefore, most respondents indicate their trait impressions, global evaluation and vote (intention) repeatedly in quick succession. A fixed-effects model thus controls for all confounds, which do not change in the meantime. These include, but are not limited to, demographic characteristics, perceptions about the economy or the state of the nation etc. Meanwhile, variables that also depend on the candidate at hand such as partisan alignment do vary between measurements and thus may confound our estimates of the effects of trait impressions. These are controlled for in the conventional way by including them into the model. In short, estimates from fixed-effects models provide much more statistical control for confounders than simple OLS regressions and thereby increase the internal validity of estimates. Unfortunately, fixed-effects estimation can do little about reverse causality.

Controlling for observed confounders in regressions

The final—most common and least convincing—approach to improving internal validity in observational studies is to control for observed confounding covariates in regression models. Partial regression coefficients in multiple regression models reveal the change in Y associated with a one-unit change in X_1 while keeping other independent variables in the model constant. In theory, if we could measure all confounds, these models could yield causal estimates. In practice, one can never be sure that an nth, unmeasured variable is not omitted from the model. Below I discuss in more detail two specific methods, multilevel modelling and structural equation modeling, that employ this form of control.

Multilevel modelling offers a parsimonious way to analyze hierarchical datasets (Gelman and Hill 2007). A dataset is hierarchical if observations are

organized at multiple levels. This is certainly the case in the Partisan motivation paper's pooled election studies dataset, which contains multiple evaluations per respondent, multiple respondents per survey and per country. Researchers with such datasets face a serious pooling dilemma. Analyzing the data without any pooling (i.e. running the models separately for each election) often yields incomprehensible results and overestimates the importance of effects peculiar to the relevant election. Conversely, complete pooling yields easily interpreted results but overshadows any variation between the elections. Multilevel modeling offers a good compromise. On the one hand, it estimates the average effect in the entire dataset; on the other hand, it acknowledges that some parameters of interest may vary from case to case (e.g. percentage of people voting for the incumbent, importance of intention impressions for vote choice) and makes it possible to estimate them too. More specifically, in the *Partisan motivation paper*, the correlation between trait impressions and global evaluations is estimated for in- and out-partisans. Multilevel modelling allowed me to estimate the average correlations in the entire dataset and to investigate whether these correlations change from election to election. Finally, multilevel modelling provides a more accurate estimate of the uncertainty of predictions (i.e. standard errors) than most alternative models in a hierarchical dataset.

The methods discussed so far assume—as most statistical techniques—that variables are either predictors or outcomes. Investigating causal mediation (of the form $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$), however, requires accounting for the fact that a variable (M) may be both an outcome (of X) and a predictor (of Y). For example, Study 1 of the *Economic voting paper* tests the hypothesis that the effect of economic perceptions (X) on vote (Y) is mediated by the incumbent's trait impressions (M). Structural equation modelling (SEM) provides an opportunity to estimate multiple regressions ($X \rightarrow M$; $M \rightarrow Y$) simultaneously (James, Mulaik, and Brett 2006). This is superior to sequentially estimating them as it is "both more parsimonious and will yield better results (e.g., more precise estimates, as indicated by smaller standard errors, and less bias, as each effect is estimated while partialling out the other effects)" (Iacobucci 2009, 673). SEM also makes it possible to test multiple mediation pathways, account for covariance between the mediators and to estimate standard errors with bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The latter features make it possible to test an indirect path through both intention impressions and competence impressions; moreover, the model takes into account the correlation between the two trait impressions. Importantly, several controls are added to the models—predicting both trait impressions and vote—to reduce bias in the estimates.

To conclude, I employ a number of measures to increase the internal validity of my studies. First, I rely on experiments, which are considered the golden standard for testing causal hypotheses. Second, I utilize statistical techniques with the best fit for the data and research question. Third, I am mindful of the limitations of studies and careful not to make a causal claim where is not supported by the data. Fourth, I run several robustness checks to ensure that the results hold with alternative model specifications. I believe these efforts ensure that my estimates measure properties of interest for my research questions.

External validity

Even if the internal validity of a study is high, it may be of limited interest unless its insights generalize to other cases. After all, we study the past to explain (or at least to understand) the present and the future. Demonstrating that a strange group of bored Americans (also known as MTurkers) or the Australian electorate in 1993 valued good intentions more than high competence is of little value unless we can be reasonably sure that other groups of people at other times behave similarly. Luckily, there are reasons to believe that most findings in this dissertation shed light on leader evaluations in the Western, educated, democratic world and thus generalize well to other cases (leaders or elections), respondents, settings and measures. Below I discuss these issues separately for my observational and experimental studies.

Most importantly, the dissertation builds on twenty-six national election studies from seven countries (Australia, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom and United States). The earliest election in our data is the 1980 US presidential race between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. The most recent is the 2013 Australian federal election, won by the Liberal/National coalition led by Tony Abbott. There are substantial cultural, institutional and historical differences between these countries: the US is a presidential system, the other countries are Consensual or Westminster parliamentarian systems; the US, UK and Australia have very few parties, the other countries have multiparty systems; the US and Australia are ethnically heterogeneous countries, the others are still relatively homogeneous; Australia, the US, the UK and Germany are individualistic countries, the three Scandinavian countries are much more collectivist, etc. Similarly, the dozens of candidates competing for the chief executive position at these elections constitute a diverse pool in terms of age, gender, background, ideological stance, incumbency, etc.

Moreover, election studies are collecting high-quality data from large representative samples. This ensures that the measured attitudes reflect the views

of the national populations and not just an arbitrary group of people. It is worth noting that the large majority of people are interviewed in their own homes. Although the presence of an interviewer may in theory lead to social desirability bias (the respondents trying to indicate that they are "good citizens"), election studies employ well-honed techniques to deal with these issues. Moreover, none of the questions in my studies are particularly sensitive. Finally, the fact that the specific national surveys use slightly different items to measure the same concepts (e.g. intention or competence) increases our confidence that our results do not hinge on interpretation of a specific item. To sum up, analyzing observational data from diverse countries, diverse candidates and diverse groups of citizens allows us to be confident that the findings do not reflect the peculiarities of a specific place and time but tap into the deep-seated followership psychology of democratic citizens. Meanwhile, the variation in the variables and the neutrality of the research setting also contribute to the high external validity of our results.

What about the external validity of the experimental studies? The primary concern about the experimental studies is that they treat respondents with stimuli they would otherwise never encounter. While this may be a problem when researchers ask participants to administer lethal electroshocks and then speculate about human nature (Milgram 1963), it is of less concern when participants are presented with fictitious but realistic political scenarios. Indeed, imagination appears to play a crucial role in political cognition and there is a long tradition for designing experiments that appeal to respondents' imagination (Petersen and Aarøe 2013). Study 2 of the Economic voting paper follows this tradition. Conversely, Study 2 of the Warmth paper employs highly realistic stimuli relying on vignettes that are closely modelled in format and style on newspaper reports of candidates competing for the nomination as parliamentary candidate of the constituency. It involves descriptions of two candidates and background information about the election.

The samples recruited for my experiments are relatively diverse. Study 2 of the Weight paper relies on an approximately representative sample of adult English citizens. The other experimental studies are conducted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. MTurk is an online marketplace for work "that requires human intelligence". It allows researchers to recruit Americans from all over the country to participate in their studies in exchange for a small reimbursement.[16] Importantly, MTurk samples are geographically, ethnically and politically more diverse than most student samples, and multiple studies have demonstrated that most experimental findings generalize well from MTurk to nationally representative samples (Mullinix et al. 2016; Clifford, Jewell, and

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[16] I sought to offer payments around or above the minimum hourly wage.

Waggoner 2015). A common criticism of MTurk is that workers potentially participate in hundreds of studies and therefore may become experts at guessing the aim of studies. Although there is little evidence that this claim is true (Mummolo and Peterson 2017), Study 2 of the *Economic voting paper* employed a recent innovation that makes it possible to exclude the most experienced participants from the sampling frame (Litman, Robinson, and Abberbock 2017). Finally, the experiments include multiple outcome measures. By measuring both global evaluations and vote intention, they ensure that the results are not the artefact of a single outcome variable. To sum up, the realistic stimuli, the relatively diverse samples and the multiple measures result in high external validity for the experimental studies too.

Overall, we can be confident that both the observational and the experimental studies generalize well to other cases. Indeed, the fact that both observational and experimental results support the hypotheses in the *Weight paper* and the *Economic voting paper* gives them an extra external validity boost.

Measuring and disentangling intention and competence

A central premise of this dissertation is that intention and competence are conceptually orthogonal trait dimensions that tap into qualitatively different aspects of a leader's character. I hope the previous chapters mustered enough theoretical arguments to convince you that whether a leader intends to benefit or harm a follower and whether she has the ability to do so are two separate issues. I also hope we are on the same page regarding followers' interest in both issues: followers are better off keeping track of their (potential) leaders' intention and competence. I have also demonstrated that there is overwhelming empirical evidence from political science and diverse other literatures of the existence of the two dimensions.

But can intention and competence impressions be disentangled in my data? Although there could be many reasons in general to be skeptical about separate intention and competence impressions (e.g. unsophisticated views, strong partisan motivations in polarized environments), I find it difficult to come up with reasons why these issues would be more severe in my case than in the literature in general.[17] The items my studies rely on are very well vali-

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[17] Again, many empirical studies support separate intention and competence impressions in political leader evaluations (Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske 1979; Abelson et al. 1982; Kinder et al. 1980; Stewart and Clarke 1992; McCurley and Mondak 1995; Wojciszke and Klusek 1996; Johnston 2002; Bittner 2011). Other papers find even

dated, and in the rare cases where multiple items measure the same dimension, the items within a dimension correlate more than items between dimensions (see the Online Supplementary Materials of the *Weight paper*).

Figure 2 offers an overview of all analyzed candidates' mean intention (x axis) and competence ratings (y axis). It demonstrates that although many are rated similarly on both intention and competence, there are quite a few leaders further from the diagonal. For example, the Norwegian incumbent, Jens Stoltenberg was rated highly on intentions and relatively low on competence in 2001. Interestingly, he suffered a historical defeat from opposition lead by Kjell Magne Bondevik, who is one of the most highly rated candidates in our data. On the flipside, Australian Kevin Rudd in 2013 stood out with his low intention ratings, but scored well on competence. He too lost the election, to Tony Abbott, who happened to score lower on competence, but much higher on intention. Voters on average appear to have relatively nuanced trait impressions, which could not be summed up with a simple like-dislike measure.

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more dimensions (Kinder 1986; A. H. Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Funk 1999; Clifford 2018; cf. Bartels 2002b).

Figure 2. Mean intention (x) and competence (y) impressions for all candidates in all my studies
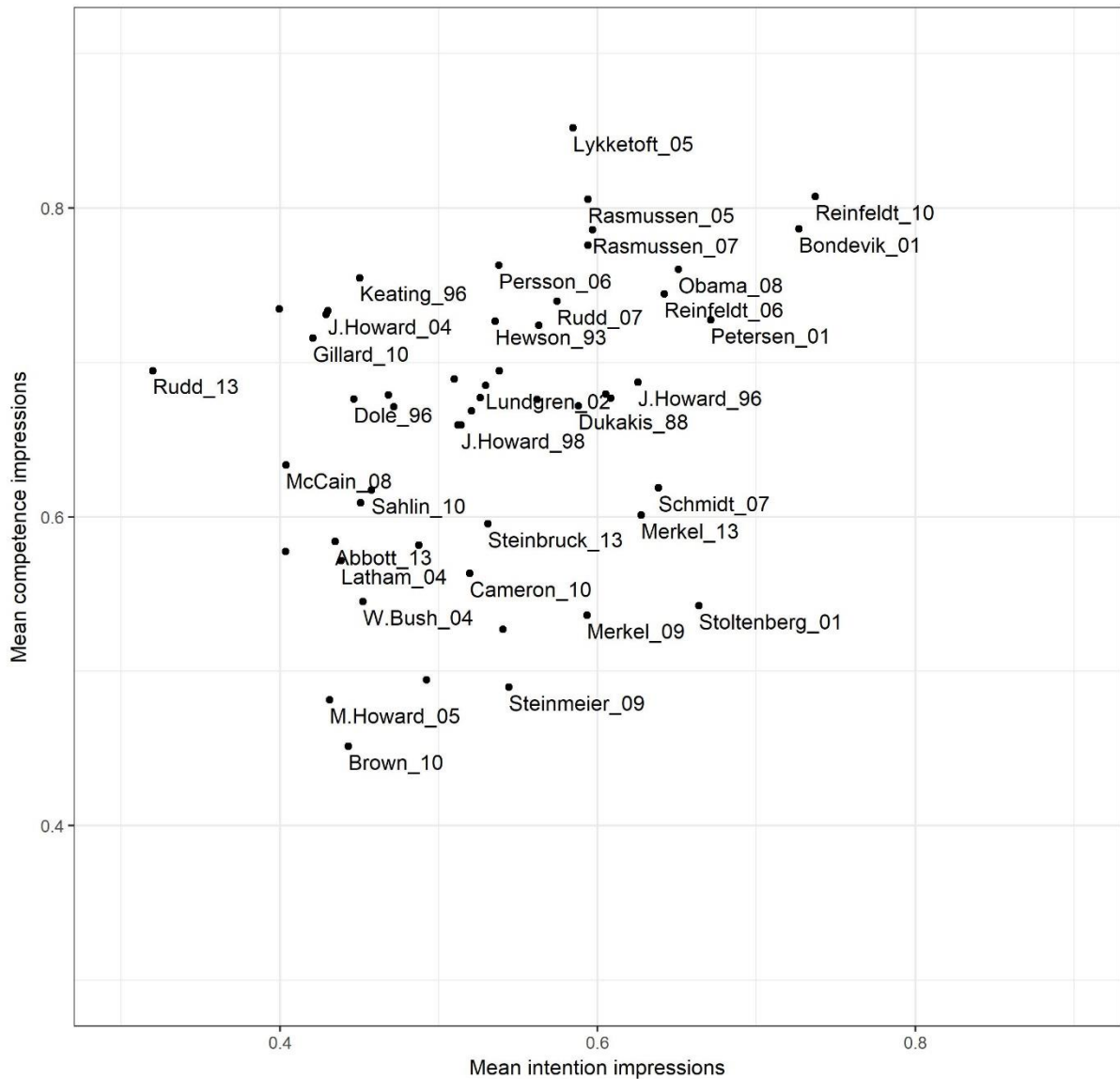
Note: The plot demonstrates that there is variance in both intention and competence impressions. Some labels are omitted to avoid overlaps.

That said, despite their conceptual independence, intention and competence impressions are not orthogonal. The correlations between the two dimensions range from r = 0.3 to r = 0.8 in Study 1 of the Partisan motivation paper, which pools 18 election studies and 39 candidates. The average correlation in the entire dataset is r = 0.56. Interestingly, the observed correlation between the two measures is similar in the experimental data of the *Weight paper* (r = 0.66) even though the two dimensions were manipulated independently. There are many reasons to expect that expressed competence and intention impressions co-vary. Some people may have vivid stereotypes about politicians to begin

with; some people are systematically exposed to more positive or negative information about candidates in the polarized news environment; some people may signal their partisan identity by giving low or high marks to politicians etc.

To conclude, leader trait impressions are, not unlike other variables in psychological research, measured with crude instruments often yielding noisy data. This makes estimation challenging, but it should not prevent us from studying imperfectly measured concepts. This dissertation relies on multiple types of data and analyzes them relying on multiple types of models to make sure that our results do not hinge on the idiosyncrasies or assumptions of a single piece of evidence.

"Who Said What?" experiments

The experiments and statistical techniques discussed above are all designed to test causal relationships ($X \rightarrow Y$). However, the last hypothesis of this dissertation posits a descriptive hypothesis: people spontaneously categorize others by their competence. Here, the main challenge is not avoiding selection bias. It is, instead, tapping into spontaneous, potentially implicit cognitive mechanisms. Simply asking people is not an option, as they may have no conscious access to these mechanisms. Moreover, social desirability or demand effects may bias their answers.

"Who said what?" (WSW) experiments overcome these challenges with an elegant solution. On the surface, a WSW experiment is a memory test. Without much introduction, participants view a series of statements from the target individuals who are engaged in a conversation or an activity. After a brief distractor, they have to recall which statement was paired with which target (picture). Importantly, either the pictures or the statements of the targets are manipulated to encode the category of interest. If we were interested in sex, half of the targets would be male and half would be female. Accordingly, each response in the recall phase can be sorted into one of three categories: a correct answer, a within-category error or a between-category error. A sentence uttered by a female target is attributed to the same woman (a correct answer), to another woman (a within-category error) or to one of the men (a between-category error).

The fundamental insight of WSW experiments is that errors are diagnostic of spontaneous categorization. It helps to think about categorization as putting people into (mental) boxes. A new person encountered quickly ends up in a number of these boxes (male, Hungarian, liberal etc.). Upon recalling who said what in the experiment, it is very likely that memory will fail our respondents—after all there are many targets and many sentences—but they may still

look for the answer in the right box. If they do so, they will make more within-category than between-category errors. In contrast, if there are no boxes for the trait under investigation, participants are not more likely to confuse targets with the same trait than targets with the opposite trait. Importantly, correct responses are ignored as it is impossible to tell whether participants relied on memory, categorization or luck to arrive at a correct answer.

The main assumption of the WSW is thus that the number of within-category errors is larger than the number of between-category errors if and only if people spontaneously categorize by the given category. However, the base-rates of the two types of errors are different and cannot be directly compared. To see this, let us return to the example above. Assume we have eight targets, four men and four women, with one statement per individual. A sentence uttered by a woman can be attributed to that woman, one of the three other women or one of the four men. If participants gave responses completely at random, they would make a between-category error half of the time (pick a man), and a within-category error in 37.5% of the cases. To overcome this issue, it is customary to *correct for base-rates* by multiplying the number of between-category errors by (n-1)/n, where n is the number of targets in a group. We have four targets in a group here, so we would multiply 50% by ¾, which yields 37.5%.

Things get more complicated if we are interested in simultaneous categorization by multiple categories. Study 4 of the *Competence categorization paper*, for example, tests if competence categorization is robust to the presence of an independent distractor trait. Other studies have used multiple categories to test competing hypotheses (e.g. Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides 2001) and to investigate categorization for subtypes (Stangor et al. 1992). The design above can be extended to a two-dimensional setting without modifying the procedure: the targets simply have to vary on two traits. If we were interested in both sex and race, we would end up with two black men, two black women, two white men and two white women.

The main issue is, however, that now each response is diagnostic of two traits, which means that the number of response types increases to five. Assuming eight targets and two independent categories, we would get one correct response, one within-within error, two within-between errors, two between-within errors and two between-between errors at random. Again, the base-rate of committing a within-within error is lower than committing the other three types of errors. Because in most cases we still want to calculate estimates for categorization by both dimensions independently, we face two tasks: base-rate correction and aggregation.

The bulk of the literature—almost 80 percent of papers published—relies on a method that first corrects for base-rates and then aggregates errors for

the two dimensions. The main contribution of the *Who said what? method paper* (Bor 2018) is to demonstrate that this approach yields statistically biased categorization estimates, whereas the alternative of first aggregating and consequently correcting for base-rates faces no such problem. Algebra, the re-analysis of published WSW experiments and a large computer simulation suggest that with the former method, categorization estimates for both dimensions are biased towards the other dimension. Besides offering a methodological contribution to the literature, this paper ensures that the estimates in the *Competence categorization paper* are unbiased.

Does finding evidence of categorization in a WSW experiment mean that people categorize by competence in real life too? I believe, at least in some cases, yes. First, it seems unlikely that a participant can manipulate the WSW experiment. Participants are not aware of the goal of the study, but even if they were, it is unlikely that they could control the errors they make. Second, because categorization is a spontaneous, deep-seated cognitive mechanism, it is reasonable to assume that they are universal among members of our species. In short, my WSW experiments demonstrate that people possess a domain-specific cognitive mechanism, designed for categorizing others by their competence. That said, the WSW can contribute little to our understanding of how and when this cognitive mechanism is triggered.

Chapter 4:
Results

With the theoretical framework discussed and the methodological issues clarified, we may now turn our attention to the findings. This chapter offers an overview of the main results of the four empirical papers constituting this dissertation. Rather than getting lost in the details and flooding the reader with many numbers, I keep the discussion focused on the main patterns, and refrain from going into much detail about the robustness of the findings.

On the weight of intentions versus competence impressions

The *Weight paper* (Laustsen and Bor 2017) addresses the relative weight of intention versus competence impressions in global evaluations and vote choice. The paper builds on two studies. Study 1 conducts a rigorous analysis of all American National Election Studies that include trait impression questions in the period 1984-2008. Not only is it the most comprehensive study of impression formation in the US to date; it is also the first analysis to utilize fixed-effects estimation in this framework. Study 2 extends the analysis in three important ways: by collecting data in England and testing the hypothesis in a comparative setting; by running an experiment and thereby addressing concerns about the internal validity of the findings; and by embedding the experiment in a (fictitious) local political context to investigate the effects of trait impressions among parliamentary rather than presidential candidates.

Both studies firmly support the intention primacy hypothesis that intention impressions outweigh competence impressions. In Study 1, items tapping the into intention dimension, such as "cares about people like you" and "compassionate", are the best predictors of global evaluations and vote choice on average and at almost every single election.[18] Moreover, when all traits are aggregated into two dimensions (corresponding to intention and competence), intention emerges as the significantly and substantially better predictor of vote. Study 2 further confirms these findings. The intention manipulation had

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[18] Interestingly, "morality", which also belongs to the intention dimension, is a relatively weak predictor on its own (to confuse things further, the paper—following the literature—refers to it as "integrity"). My speculative explanation for this unique phenomenon is that in the US, morality has a narrow meaning, often with religious overtones. See footnote 6 on dimensions beyond intention and competence in the Weight paper.

a substantially larger causal effect on both global evaluations and vote intention than the competence manipulation. It is worth noting that the latter results hold even though the competence manipulation, from an objective perspective, was more extreme in the sense of portraying a remarkably incompetent candidate (with low education, little previous political experience and confusion about specific issues). The intention manipulation referred to allegations of misconduct that would hardly make the headlines in most countries including England (being dishonest, being accused of seeking office for personal interest).

Finally, Study 1 of the *Partisan motivation paper* also speaks to the issue of trait weights. The study offers further evidence that when we pool over eighteen elections from six countries, the difference in global evaluations between those one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean is much larger for intention than for competence impressions. Although this analysis is strictly observational and relies only on global evaluations and not on vote choice, it is still reassuring that the same pattern emerges in such a broad comparative analysis. In short, this dissertation and its constituting papers join the rank of the few but righteous works in political science supporting the intention primacy prediction.

On the particular importance of intention impressions in out-party leader evaluations

The *Partisan motivation paper* (also co-authored with Lasse Laustsen) tests the hypothesis that intention impressions are particularly relevant for evaluating out-party leaders. The dataset of Study 1 pools eighteen election studies from six countries. Study 2 relies on the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP) to provide additional insights by analyzing voters evaluating candidates in US Presidential elections. Both studies apply the same analytical logic by regressing global evaluations (feeling thermometer ratings) on intention impressions and a contrast impression dimension (competence and strong leadership in Study 1 and 2, respectively) both interacted with an in-party dummy. In essence, these models estimate the difference in global evaluations between two groups: one whose trait impressions are one standard deviation below the election-specific mean and another whose trait impressions are one standard deviation above it. This difference is calculated for in-party and out-party leader evaluations for both intention and competence/strong leadership. Our theory predicts that the two-standard deviation change in intention impressions is associated with a larger shift in global evaluations of out-party candidates than of in-party candidates. This is exactly what both studies find.

It is quite remarkable how consistent the results are (displayed for Study 1 in Figure 3). The predicted interaction effect was found in fourteen of the eighteen elections in our dataset. All countries with more than a single election in the data (i.e. all countries except Norway) show at least some support for the hypothesis. Study 2 adds further evidence by showing nearly identical patterns in US Presidential elections. This contributes to our confidence that the results are robust to institutional differences. The seven countries in our two studies include parliamentarian and presidential systems; two-party and multi-party systems; directly and indirectly elected chief executives; collectivistic and individualistic cultures etc.

Figure 3. Intention impressions are consistently more strongly associated with general evaluations of out-party candidates (grey) than in-party (black) candidates, but competence is not
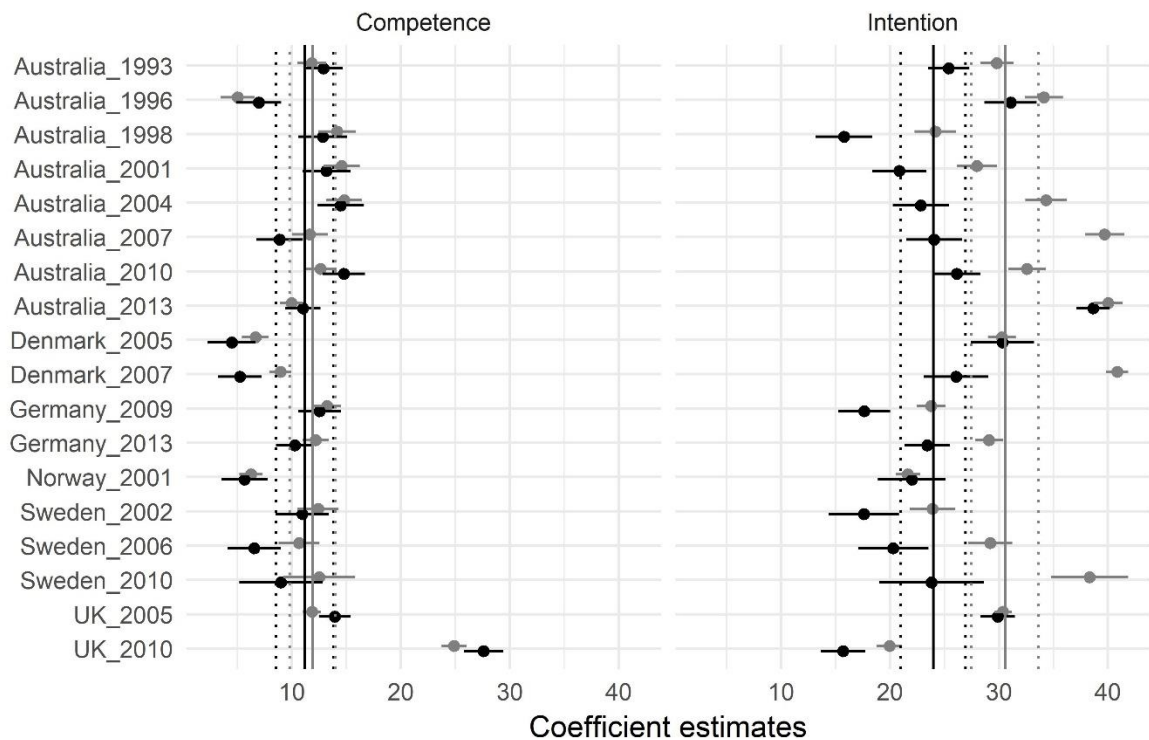
Source: Reprinted from Bor & Laustsen (n.d.).

The *Partisan motivation paper* sports an extensive set of robustness checks ensuring that the results hold up with alternative model specifications or conceptual assumptions. We performed a particularly interesting test in Study 2. We added ideological proximity to the analysis to explicitly test the claim that intention impressions and ideological proximity are distinct psychological concepts. As discussed in the theory chapter, ideological proximity is similar to intention impressions as both reflect to what extent a follower can trust a leader to act in his best interest (although I believe that intention impressions

do this better and do more). Could the increased role of intention impressions in out-party candidate evaluations be simply an artefact of the higher variance in ideological proximity in this category?

Reassuringly, our data do not support this alternative explanation. The interaction between the out-party dummy and intention impression remains essentially unchanged by adding to the model a competing interaction between the out-party dummy and ideological proximity. In other words, adding ideological proximity to our analysis does not explain away the predicted relationship between intention impressions and global evaluations. Intention and ideological proximity are conceptually and empirically distinct factors.

## On how competence and intention impressions mediate the economic vote

The *Economic voting paper* tests the hypotheses that competence and intention impressions (both) partially mediate the economic vote. More specifically, I predicted that people who consider that the economy is doing well on average would have more favorable competence and intention impressions of the incumbent chief executive and consequently would be more likely to vote for the incumbent. Conversely, when citizens are reluctant to vote for the incumbent when they believe that the economy is struggling it is partly because they consider the incumbent to be incompetent or to have bad intentions. Study 1 relies on data from seventeen elections in three countries (Australia, Denmark and USA), which differ considerably in their institutional characteristics that are relevant for economic voting. The study employs structural equation modeling to test mediation effects. Importantly, the models control for a wide range of confounders (partisanship, political interest, income, age, education and sex) and they include election fixed effects. Both competence and intention impressions emerge as statistically and substantially significant mediators in my models. The two trait impression variables explain between a third and one-half of the association between economic perceptions and vote choice.

An important limitation of observational studies testing causal mediation is their low internal validity. With multiple causal relationships, concerns about confounding and bias also multiply. Study 2, therefore, offers experimental evidence for the hypotheses. It employs a 2 (economy: struggling/ booming) × 3 (incumbent trait description: control/high competence/high intention) between subjects design. MTurkers were presented with a short, fictitious scenario about elections in a foreign country and asked to indicate their intention on a seven-point scale (rescaled to 0-1 for the analysis) to vote for

the incumbent. Importantly, the information in the description was experimentally manipulated. Every participant read about the state of the economy, which was either good or bad. Some participants had no specific information about the traits of the incumbent, and their answers could be used to estimate the baseline effect of economic voting in our experiment. Other participants received explicit information about the incumbent. The assumption here is that if people indeed inferred from the state of the economy the qualities of the incumbent, then providing direct information about the latter would disrupt the causal mechanism and thus diminish the causal effect of the economic manipulation.[19] Importantly, the cues were not directly related to the economy or to the incumbent's specific abilities to manage the national economy. Instead, they were more general remarks about the incumbent's competence ("knowledgeable in a wide range of policy areas", "thrives in public debates") or good intention ("pleasant and engaging", "shows concern for the well-being of people").

Figure 4. The main effect of the economy manipulation (distance between grey and black points) is substantially diminished by directly manipulating candidate traits
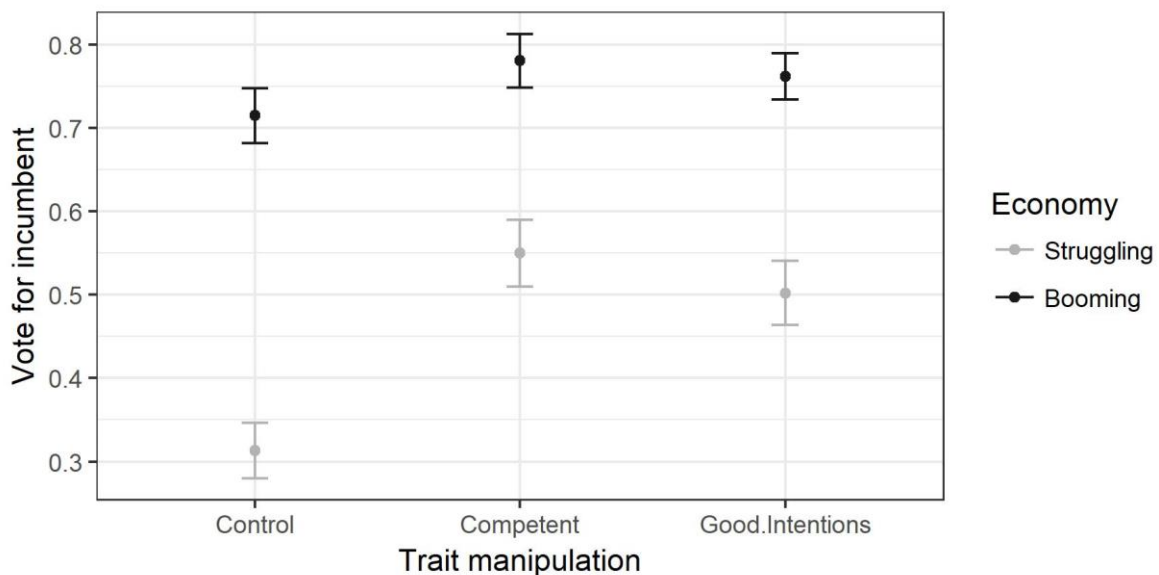
Source: Reprinted from Bor (n.d.),

As Figure 4 demonstrates, the experimental evidence backs up the findings of Study 1. Cues about both the competence and intention diminish the baseline effect of the economic manipulation (i.e. the distance between the black and

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[19] The experiment relied on positive impression manipulations to simplify the design and increase statistical power. There is little reason to believe that negative cues about the incumbent's trait would be less effective for this purpose. If anything, negative bias may amplify their effect.

grey dots). Interestingly, whereas Study 1 found a much larger mediating role for intention impressions, Study 2 indicates that the role of both trait dimensions is similar. Importantly, it is unlikely that the observed interaction is exclusively or mainly due to ceiling effects. The competence and intention cues contribute to a 0.2-0.25-point increase in vote intention in the struggling economy conditions. A similar boost to vote intention in the booming economy condition would bring those groups close but not beyond the maximum of the scale. Even if respondents shy away from the extremes of the scale, the fact that the explicit competence and intention cues contribute only to a small increase in vote intention implies that people attribute positive traits to incumbents governing at a time of economic prosperity. In line with that, the pilot study provides additional evidence that the economic manipulation had a direct causal effect on participants' trait impressions. Overall, these findings provide firm evidence for the prediction that competence *and* intention impressions mediate the economic vote.

On spontaneous categorization by competence

Last but not least, the Competence categorization paper (Bor 2017) tests in four experiments the prediction that people spontaneously categorize others by their competence. The experiments rely on the "Who said what?" memory confusion paradigm, which infers from the patterns of recall errors whether people categorized the targets by the underlying difference (see more in the previous chapter). The experiments build extensively on Delton and Robertson (2012), who investigate categorization in a fictitious scenario where a group of plane crash survivors try to find food on a deserted island. Study 1 directly replicates a study that tests whether people categorize others based on the amount of food they contribute to the group's pool at the end of each day. It successfully replicates the original findings and shows that this information does not lead to categorization. However, this should not be taken as evidence against categorization by competence as the cues did not contain any explicit competence cues; the variation in success was mainly due to luck. Therefore, Study 2 tweaked the cues by explaining the successes or failures with the target's ability and effectiveness in foraging and hunting. The results thus indicate that people spontaneously categorize others based on competence. People in the competent or incompetent category were significantly more likely to be confused with each other than people in different categories.

Study 2 investigates horizontal relationships between peers or potential cooperative partners. Study 3 investigates whether things change in a vertical relationship where participants need to observe the actions of potential lead-

ers. By manipulating the nature of the relationship in a between subjects design, Study 3 finds that the answer to this question is "not much". The strength of categorization was similar in both scenarios. Finally, Study 4 conducted an additional test of the hypotheses by investigating categorization in a more complicated environment where leaders differ on two traits. The targets' descriptions were updated such that competence cues were crossed with likability cues (i.e. being a nice person to hang out with). This experiment too found categorization by competence but revealed that the relationship between the participant and the target mattered little. Reassuringly, it is unlikely that the leadership manipulation was ineffective, because in a subsequent task where participants had to indicate which target they would prefer to have as their partner/leader, the leader frame significantly improved participants' success in selecting a competent target. In sum, the *Competence categorization paper* finds firm evidence for the prediction that the human mind is equipped with the cognitive machinery to spontaneously pick up cues of competence and categorize potential partners and leaders accordingly.

Chapter 5:
General Discussion

The previous chapter summed up the main findings of this dissertation, but it focused narrowly on the specific predictions tested. This final chapter opens up the discussion and launches a preemptive attack on the "so what?"-type questions lurking in the back of the reader's mind. First, I review the main takeaways and discuss which literatures I seek to contribute to. Second, I briefly discuss the most pressing limitations of this dissertation. Finally, I consider the broader implications of my studies for research and for politics in general.

Contributions

This dissertation offers a few—humble—contributions to multiple literatures. Most importantly, it informs students of leader evaluations. The *Weight paper* provides theoretical arguments and empirical evidence in favor of the intention primacy hypothesis. It demonstrates that intention is the most important dimension of trait impressions and thereby goes against a common belief in the literature that political leaders are evaluated primarily based on their competence. Two other papers extend this argument. First, the *Partisan motivation paper* tests a hypothesis following straightforwardly from our theory: if intention impressions tap into followers' estimate of leaders' likelihood of helping or harming them, intention impressions should be more important for vulnerable followers. We operationalized this vulnerability as conflicting partisan identification between leader and follower and found evidence for our prediction in data from nineteen elections in seven countries. This contributes to our confidence about the soundness of our theoretical arguments and adds to the growing literature mapping the dynamic elements of leader evaluations. Second, the *Economic voting paper* is—to the best of my knowledge—the first study to argue that when economic perceptions affect vote choice, it is partly because they feed into intention impressions as well and not just competence impressions. More specifically, my research suggests that people may infer from the perceived economic situation whether the incumbent leader helps or harms them (and people like them).

While the importance of intention impressions is perhaps the primary contribution of this dissertation, this does not mean that competence impressions are irrelevant. The *Economic voting paper* shows that—in line with the

theoretical assumptions of the economic voting literature—incumbents' competence is a significant mediator of the economic vote. Moreover, the *Competence categorization paper* suggests that monitoring the competence of partners and leaders may have been a sufficiently severe adaptive problem to propel selection for dedicated cognitive mechanisms. In sum, my studies share the insight that competence is an important component of leader evaluations. It just happens to be outshined by intention.

The dissertation also offers some insights for other literatures. The *Partisan motivation paper* adds to our understanding of the intricacies of motivated reasoning. While it is tempting to assume that partisans simply like their own candidates and hate the competition, our findings show that—beyond doing that—they also value some traits in out-party leaders more than in in-party leaders. The *Economic voting paper* takes the first steps to investigate the psychological mechanisms fueling economic voting. Although students of economic voting have done well without opening the black box of causality for decades, the discussion below will show that a better understanding of the cognitive machinery may yield important insights. Finally, the *Competence categorization* and *"Who said what?" method papers* also benefit the psychological literature on impression formation and categorization. The former identifies a novel fundamental social category, and the latter aids any researcher who intends to employ the popular "Who said what?" experimental paradigm.

Limitations

Alas, the research in this dissertation is subject to some limitations. Perhaps most disconcertingly, it is very difficult to assess how much differences between intention and competence impressions actually matter in real elections. In the introduction, I argued that citizens' impressions of leaders' personality are important and interesting components of democratic politics, which may affect multiple outcomes beyond elections such as intra-party struggles or legitimacy. Even though I stand by my words, I have to admit that the studies in this dissertation did not go beyond support for leaders as the primary outcome variable. This is all the more troublesome as the marginal effect of trait impressions on election outcomes is heavily debated (e.g. A. King 2002; cf. Lobo and Curtice 2015). The results in this dissertation suggest—again and again— that leaders who are perceived as having good intentions receive higher electoral support. I cannot in good conscience claim that if only candidates managed to improve their intention ratings, they would start winning elections left and right. In this respect, the lack of experimental evidence for the *Partisan motivation paper*—suggesting that citizens particularly value good intention

in out-party candidates—is all the more unfortunate, as it may reveal a mechanism to attract voters from across the party line. An important implication of my dissertation is that political leader evaluations are relevant even if the marginal effect of trait impressions on election outcomes, controlling for all other factors, is minor (more on this below). Nonetheless, the potentially limited effect of trait impressions on elections has to be acknowledged, and the role of trait impressions in other political domains has to be better researched.

It is also important to acknowledge the scope conditions of my findings. While evolutionary leadership theory strongly implies that many aspects of followership psychology could be universally shared among humans, this definitely does not mean that there should be no variation across people, countries or cultures. Even if I like to think that the diversity of the data constitutes one of the strong suits of this dissertation, it is important to realize that all data come from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) countries (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). It is fairly easy to come up with hypotheses why each of these five attributes could contribute to our findings. Just to mention a few: Perhaps *western* countries known for their highly individualistic culture mean that the intention of leaders is more suspect than in collectivistic Asian cultures (Chen et al. 2016)? Perhaps *educated* people, compared to less educated citizens, under- or overestimate abilities required for being a good leader? Perhaps voters in *rich* countries who suffer less under corruption are less concerned about the leaders' intention than people in poor countries? Perhaps the relatively stable and influential party systems in many established *democracies* diminish the importance of leader qualities (A. King 2002)? These are substantively important questions and vivid reminders that my conclusions apply primarily to WEIRD countries.

The scope of this dissertation is also limited in other ways. Particularly, it has to be acknowledged that all but one of my studies analyzed (real or fictitious) leaders competing for the chief executive office. Accordingly, they rarely score below the mid-point of the competence scale. People appear to acknowledge that making it to the candidacy in itself signals competence. Because previous research focused on the very same candidates, I think that my findings about the limited competence effects offer important lessons to the literature. However, concerns about candidates' competence could become an issue in specific situations, such as for young candidates or women (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Cassese and Holman 2017). My results are prone to overlook similar specific yet substantially relevant cases.

Finally, the dissertation is limited in its theoretical ambition. I believe building on evolutionary theory has many advantages: it brings insights from other disciplines (like anthropology, primatology or development psychol-

ogy); it may yield novel hypotheses; it provides plausible ultimate explanations (asking not just *how* our mind works but also *why* it works the way it does). But it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to test the validity of evolutionary leadership theory at large or to pit evolutionary leadership theory against competing theoretical frameworks such as rational choice theory. More specifically, even though I believe that it is notable that many of my predictions follow rather naturally from the evolutionary framework, and had not previously been formulated, my results could also be explained by other theories. Indeed, the political leader evaluation literature's focus on proximate explanations means that many of these theories are not at odds with the evolutionary framework. Most works in political science focus on how trait impressions affect support for leaders and happily ignore the why question. This dissertation *applies* evolutionary leadership theory to study leader evaluation in politics. Grappling with the implications of our evolutionary history for modern politics yields more complicated and perhaps exotic theory sections compared to the disciplinary standards. This is a tradeoff I was willing (even eager) to take. My ambition with this summary report and the papers constituting the dissertation is to demonstrate that studying the evolutionary past to understand the present is not a waste of time. I do not claim that all other approaches are inferior.

Implications and future directions

Subject to the limitations discussed above, the dissertation has a number of interesting implications. First, I believe that the dissertation, in its own humble way, speaks to the fundamental nature of politics. More specifically, the large role of intention impressions reaffirms two well-known but sometimes ignored truths. *Pro primo*, politics is about "who gets what, when [and] how" (Lasswell 1936), and since resources are scarce—and as long as they remain scarce—conflicts will be central to politics. Political leaders are at the epicenter of these conflicts. They are the protagonists of elections, which are tamed power struggles between groups with often conflicting interests. But even beyond elections and campaigns, it is impossible to govern without harming some and benefitting others. Consequently, even if many citizens (claim to) yearn for leaders who know and serve the common good of society instead of constantly quarreling with their opposition (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), having such leaders may be impossible. *Pro secundo*, humans are extremely prone to moralize social conflicts. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that this is the reason moral reasoning has evolved at all (Kurzban 2010; DeScioli and Kurzban 2009). Accordingly, humans attribute the actions of others to their dispositions. We are prone to assume that a leader helps or

harms us because she is a good or bad person (until proven otherwise). When it comes to discussing politics, few people are able to remain dispassionate debaters or cold and calculating observers. The importance of intention impressions in political leader evaluations reflects how deeply ingrained political conflicts and moralized struggles are in social life.

This need not be depressing news. My dissertation also implies that our modern democracies may hinge on our evolved psychology. We monitor our leaders, form impressions about them, support some but not others, feel intrinsic motivation to turn out to vote because ancestrally—just as today—leaders were influential in making distributive decisions, solving collective action problems, resolving conflicts etc. The *Competence categorization paper* suggests that people spontaneously, without applying particular effort and possibly even unconsciously, track the competence of potential leaders. Extant research demonstrates that we do the same for intention (van Leeuwen, Park, and Penton-Voak 2012). The *Economic voting paper* shows that people in diverse cultures condition their vote on the state of the economy at least in part because they infer from it the incumbent's intention and competence. In short, my dissertation implies that people rely on an intricate evolved followership psychology to maneuver modern politics. Perhaps human political opinion formation and behavior fall short of instrumental rationality, but it reflects an ecological rationality (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011; cf. Achen and Bartels 2016; Caplan 2008). This insight does more than cheer us up with a reminder that the glass is at least half full. It implies that the mismatches between ancestral and modern politics offer firm theoretical grounds for mapping and explaining political "biases". For example, the *Economic voting paper*'s finding that economic perceptions feed into intention impressions may help to explain why citizens reelect infamously corrupt leaders in times of economic prosperity. This is the second main implication of my dissertation.

Thirdly and relatedly, I believe my dissertation helps to explain a puzzle in the leader evaluation literature. On the one hand, there is widespread agreement that candidates and their perceived personalities play a central role at elections: politicians, campaign managers, pundits, journalists and citizens alike obsess over the traits of candidates (Lobo and Curtice 2015). On the other hand, the marginal effect of candidate trait impressions is often found to be small or even negligible (A. King 2002; Lobo and Curtice 2015; Bittner 2011). So why do people care about candidate's personalities if it has little effect on vote choice? There are a number of potential explanations that are consistent with the theory and findings of this dissertation. For one, models investigating the marginal effect of traits control for competing explanations such as economic perceptions, policy positions etc. My framework shows that it may be

more fruitful to think about trait impressions as reflecting a subjective assessment of these factors. Forming and updating trait impression may thus be an important intermediary step between processing information and making the vote choice.[20] Another potential explanation is that whereas trait impressions had a large effect on leader choice ancestrally, certain features of modern democracies diminish this effect. Most prominently, party systems in many established democracies create a stable coalitional landscape, which would have been unusual in ancestral environments. This may simplify the decision of people living in these democracies because they can simply follow their party affiliation. Parties also have strong incentives to promote very competent and well-intentioned politicians to top-candidacy positions (Cross and Blais 2012). Consequently, voters today may perceive that the main candidates possess similar traits, and therefore they need to look at other cues to decide whom to side with.

Instead of trying to reveal why the marginal effect of trait impressions is small today, a different line of reasoning may shed light on why people are preoccupied with candidate personalities, independently of their own vote choice. I mentioned above that evolutionary psychology has contributed important insights about moral reasoning. Kurzban's (2010) famous book, *Why everyone (else) is a hypocrite?*, warns us that even though it may seem that our consciousness is in charge of our decisions, it is more accurate to think of consciousness as the public relations department of the mind and not as its headquarters. More specifically, while most of our decision mechanisms are inaccessible to us, we do form conscious attitudes and post-hoc rationalizations of these decisions, to use it as an asset in social situations. Thus, an important function of having explicit trait impressions of leaders and being emotionally overcharged about them is to use them as trump cards in political debates. It may be a tough sell to convince a peer to oppose the leadership of someone, because she intends to trim our privileges. After all, why would our peers care about our privileges? However, if we described the leader as a bad—crooked, corrupt, evil—person, our story becomes relevant to other group members too. From this perspective, the endogeneity of trait impressions is not a theoretical or statistical nuisance, it is an interesting social phenomenon in its own right. There are several exciting research questions related to this

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[20] A similar argument is made by Miller and Shanks (1996), who propose a mechanism for vote choice consisting of six temporary order steps starting with stable social and economic characteristics and ending with prospective evaluations of competing candidates. Trait impressions enter their models as steps four and five (for the incumbent and her competitors) after party ID (step two) and policy preferences (step three).

agenda worth pursuing for future studies: Do people preferentially seek out information about candidate traits in the media? If so which traits are they most interested in? Do people preferentially refer to personality traits when it comes to political debates? What types of emotional reactions do various trait cues elicit?

Finally, this dissertation raises interesting questions regarding the differences between leader and partner evaluations. Both our intuition and the wisdom in political science would suggest that we want our leaders to be qualitatively different from our peers—perhaps better, nobler, more competent. According to King (2002, 8): "most voters appear to distinguish between the qualities they would like to see in their president, prime minister, or chancellor and the qualities they would like to see in the man or woman next door". Similarly, Laustsen and Petersen (2015, 286) argue that "humans are equipped with a distinct psychological system of followership that processes all of the relevant cues that have correlated with contextual leadership competence over human evolutionary history". Moreover, they demonstrate that indeed, people prefer dominant individuals as leader but not as friend at a time of inter-group conflict. In contrast, the findings of this dissertation show considerable similarity between leader and partner evaluations at least within the two-dimensional framework focusing on intention and competence. The *Weight paper* finds that just as we know from the impression formation literature, people value good intention more than competence. The *Competence categorization paper* shows that the level of spontaneous categorization is similar across partner and leader selection frames. This similarity partly owes to the fact that (often reciprocal) social exchange relationships in general had a major role in shaping the evolution of our minds (Cosmides and Tooby 2016), and leadership and followership could be conceptualized as a special reciprocal relationship where followers grant prestige for leadership services (Price and Van Vugt 2014). In other words, as the long theoretical chapter of this dissertation attests, this similarity could be predicted. And yet, it serves as a reminder that while followership may be a distinct, specialized psychological system, it may resemble other systems in important ways. More research needs to be done to better understand what makes followership different from other cognitive mechanisms. After all, research on the architecture of followership psychology is still in its infancy.

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English Summary

Political leaders are central figures in contemporary democracies; governments are defined by their leader; elections revolve around the horse race of the most prominent candidates; policies are often named after their sponsors etc. Democratic citizens often face the task of evaluating leaders: as voters at elections, as partisans at primaries, or simply as citizens upon assessing the legitimacy of a rule. Political science has devoted considerable attention to understanding how people's impressions of leaders' traits influence these evaluations. Here, I apply a two-dimensional framework of general impression formation, which argues that people's impressions map onto two questions: (1) is this leader going to help or harm me? (2) Does this leader have the means to do so? I refer to these two dimensions as intention and competence, respectively. The central research question of the dissertation is the following: What is the role of intention and competence impressions in political leader evaluations?

To answer this question, I build on insights from evolutionary psychology. I argue that in order to understand how intention and competence impressions influence political leader evaluation in contemporary societies, we first need to understand the architecture of our evolved followership psychology. Evolutionary psychology implies that humans may possess distinct, evolved psychological mechanisms for monitoring leaders' intention and competence. Whereas there is firm evidence that intention is a fundamental category of social cognition, no such evidence has been provided for competence. The first contribution of my dissertation is to apply and improve the "Who said what?" experimental paradigm to test and confirm that, indeed, the human mind spontaneously categorizes others (peers and leaders) by their competence.

Perhaps more importantly, I test three additional research questions of direct relevance for political science. First, I identify a puzzling discrepancy between the political science and social psychology literatures concerning *which* traits matter more for global evaluation and vote choice. Most political science studies conclude that competence matters more than intention; social psychological literature makes the opposite argument. Building on new data and improved methodological tools, I show support for the hypothesis predicted by an evolutionary approach: intention impressions trump competence impressions.

Second, I ask *for whom* intention and competence matters more. Here, I focus on a substantively important moderator that has received little attention in the literature so far: partisan affiliation. I predict that out-partisan followers

are particularly vulnerable to leaders' harmful intent, while a shared partisanship protects followers to a certain extent. This moderation effect was found in fifteen of the nineteen elections analyzed. Importantly, both theory and data confirm that this pattern is unique to intention impressions and does not hold for competence.

Finally, I ask *where* trait impressions originate. I zoom in on one of the most important determinants of vote choice in modern democracies: economic perceptions. I conduct the first test of the extant hypothesis that competence impressions mediate the relationship between economic perceptions and vote choice. Building on evolutionary psychology, I propose the novel prediction that intention impression is also a significant mediator. Both predictions are supported with observational and experimental data.

The dissertation contributes primarily to the literature on political leader evaluations but may be of interest for students of motivated reasoning, economic voting, and evolutionary leadership theory. It also has relevant implications for a broader audience. My findings speak to the fundamental nature of politics, reminding readers that moralized debates about the intentions of political leaders are inevitable. I also show that our evolved followership psychology plays a significant role in making us good democratic citizens who monitor our leaders and hold them accountable. Thereby, I add to a growing literature that demonstrates that our evolutionary history goes a long way in explaining when citizens live up to and when they fall short of democratic ideals.

Dansk resumé

Politiske ledere er centrale figurer i moderne demokratier; Regeringer defineres af deres leder; Valg omhandler kapløbet mellem de mest prominente kandidater; Politiske beslutninger kendes ofte på deres sponsor etc. Demokratiske borgere står ofte over for opgaven at skulle evaluere ledere: som vælgere ved valg, som partimedlemmer i primærvalg, eller helt enkelt som borgere, som vurderer et styres legitimitet. Politologisk forskning har viet megen opmærksomhed til at forstå, hvordan borgernes opfattelser af lederes egenskaber påvirker deres evalueringer. Her anvender jeg en todimensionel ramme for generel opfattelsesdannelse, som argumenterer for, at folks opfattelser omhandler to spørgsmål: (1) Vil denne leder hjælpe eller skade mig? (2) Har denne leder evnerne hertil? Jeg refererer til disse to dimensioner som henholdsvis intention og kompetence. Det centrale forskningsspørgsmål i afhandlingen er følgende: Hvilken rolle spiller intentions- og kompetenceopfattelser i evalueringer af politiske ledere?

For at besvare dette spørgsmål bygger jeg på indsigter fra evolutionspsykologi. Jeg argumenterer for, at for at forstå hvordan intensions- og kompetenceopfattelser påvirker evalueringer af politiske ledere i moderne samfund, må vi først forstå arkitekturen af vores evolutionære følgerskabspsykologi. Evolutionspsykologi foreslår, at mennesker besidder særskilte, evolutionære psykologiske mekanismer til at overvåge lederes intentioner og kompetencer. Mens der er stærkt belæg for at intention er en fundamental kategori for social kognition, er der fortsat intet belæg herfor i forhold til kompetence. Det første bidrag i min afhandling er at anvende og forbedre det eksperimentelle "Who said what?"-paradigme for at teste og bekræfte, at menneskers hjerne netop kategoriserer andre (ligemænd og ledere) spontant ud fra deres kompetence.

Måske endnu vigtigere tester jeg tre yderligere forskningsspørgsmål med direkte relevans for politologien. Først identificerer jeg en overraskende uoverensstemmelse mellem politologi og socialpsykologisk litteratur omkring hvilke egenskaber, der betyder mest for globale evalueringer og stemmeadfærd. Hvor de fleste politologiske studier konkluderer, at kompetence betyder mere end intentioner, fremlægger socialpsykologisk litteratur det modsatte argument. Ved at anvende nye data og forbedrede metodiske værktøjer viser jeg støtte til hypotesen fremsat ud fra en evolutionær tilgang: opfattelser af intentioner trumfer opfattelser af kompetence.

For det andet spørger jeg blandt hvem intentioner betyder mere end kompetence. Her fokuserer jeg på en substantielt vigtig moderator, som har fået begrænset opmærksomhed i litteraturen indtil nu: partitilhørsforhold. Jeg forventer, at følgere fra det modsatte parti er særligt sårbare over for lederes

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onde hensigter, mens et delt partitilhørsforhold beskytter følgeren i et vist omfang. Denne modererende effekt blev fundet i femten ud af nitten analyserede valg. Særligt vigtigt er, at både teori og data bekræfter, at dette mønster kun eksisterer for opfattelser af intentioner og ikke kompetence.

Til sidst spørger jeg, hvor opfattelser af egenskaber kommer fra. Jeg ser nærmere på en af de vigtigste determinanter for vælgeradfærd i moderne demokratier: opfattelser af økonomien. Jeg udfører den første test af en eksisterende hypotese om, at kompetenceopfattelser medierer forholdet mellem økonomiske opfattelser og stemmeadfærd. Med udgangspunkt i evolutionspsykologi fremsætter jeg også en ny forventning om, at intentionsopfattelser også er en signifikant mediator. Begge hypoteser understøttes med både observationelle og eksperimentelle data.

Afhandlingen bidrager primært til litteraturen om evalueringer af politiske ledere men kan også være interessant for forskere med fokus på motiveret ræsonnering, økonomisk stemmeadfærd og evolutionær lederskabsteori. Mine resultater taler til politiks fundamentale natur og minder læserne om, at moraliserende debatter om politiske lederes intentioner er uundgåelige. Jeg viser også, at vores evolutionære lederskabspsykologi spiller en vigtig rolle i at gøre os til gode demokratiske borgere, som overvåger deres ledere og holder dem ansvarlige. Jeg bidrager dermed til en voksende litteratur, som viser, at vores evolutionære historie bringer os langt i at forklare, hvornår borgerne lever op til og ikke lever op til demokratiske idealer.