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Founded on theories of affect and agenda-setting, *Image and Emotion in Voter Decisions: The Affect Agenda* examines the media coverage of politicians’ images and their influence on voters in election campaigns. Politicians’ images are comprehensively interrogated in terms of attributes, appearance, characteristics, and personal style—and how these factors shape voters’ attitudes in evaluating political candidates. The volume is the incredible work of Renita Coleman, associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism, and Denis Wu, associate professor of communication at Boston University.

Coleman and Wu provide three key arguments why politicians’ images matter in political communications scholarship, especially when studied from affect, information processing, and agenda-setting theoretical standpoints. First, many public office seekers are assessed not on the issue stances they embrace, but on their images—self-presentation, emotional displays, and personal attributes. Second, in spite of numerous studies on the influence of mediated agendas on politics, Coleman and Wu point out that most research examine texts only—yet the news media does not deliver words only. Thus, they argue that the potential impact of visuals on people’s perceptions is too important to ignore in research. This is so because visuals make stories on television credible and interesting, resulting in what the authors refer to as “picture superiority.” Third, the influence of politicians’ images fits better with the demands of visually driven media as well as those of voters’ memory mechanisms, the authors say.

The book is based on a decade’s worth of empirical studies that explore the image presentation of political candidates and its influence at both aggregate and individual levels. The studies that provide rich data for the book cover the U.S. presidential elections of 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012, as well as the 2012 Taiwan presidential election. The data corpus was collected using public opinion surveys and content analyses.

Importantly, Coleman and Wu’s book very much resonates with *Image Bite Politics: News and the Visual Framing of Elections* by Maria Grabe and Erik Bucy, which places high premium on visual aspects of election coverage. The two volumes have important parallels, arguing for the critical role of visuals in evaluation of politicians, that visuals are a great source of political information, that visual aspects of political news remain heavily understudied, and relying on longitudinal data collection cutting across at least four presidential elections in the United States. In a nutshell, the authors of the two books strongly demonstrate that visuals (especially television ones) matter in politics because their effects can trigger attention, increase arousal, and shape public opinion.

*Image and Emotion in Voter Decisions* has 11 chapters. Chapter 2 traces the philosophical roots of ideal conceptions of the political leader in both Chinese and Greek
classics. It provides a chronological and cross-cultural synthesis of politician images and attributes, which give readers a holistic understanding of the research topics under examination. The cognitive processing theories that drive the authors’ inquiry are captured in Chapter 3. These theories include the elaboration likelihood model, the heuristic systems model, and the dual coding model. The theories describe and explain the phenomenon of media transference of salience to the public—allowing the researchers to predict outcomes.

Chapter 5 explores agenda-setting theory with an aim of understanding whether first- or second-level agenda-setting exerts a stronger influence on public opinion and voting intention. In Chapter 6, the authors compare and contrast two distinct sources of affect—verbal and visual cues. Chapter 7 examines negative and positive tone in politicians’ images. The authors demonstrate that negative and positive are not simply opposite ends of a single continuum, by reporting their findings from four U.S. presidential elections of 2000 through 2012. Chapter 8 delves deeper into theories of affect and emotion. In Chapter 9, Coleman and Wu report their findings on whether and to what extent demographic factors of citizens play a role in affect transmitting process. Chapter 10 goes international, examining the impact of affect agendas in Taiwan’s 2012 presidential election. The concluding chapter provides recommendations for voters, journalists, and public office seekers, including their campaign managers.

*Image and Emotion in Voter Decisions* makes a great contribution in political communication scholarship, specifically the role of visual communication in politics—an area that is clearly understudied. To borrow David Weaver’s words, the volume is an important addition to the agenda-setting and voting literature in many ways. It draws its strength from three key aspects: (a) the strong emphasis on the role of visual content to provide evidence for the second-level agenda-setting effects; (b) the combination of various theories of information processing and media effects models to provide a stronger evidence of the influence of politicians’ images on voters during elections; and (c) use of comprehensive data from four presidential elections in the United States and one in Taiwan—making the volume fact-laden—hence providing useful insights on the topics of inquiry. I would not hesitate to recommend this book to a researcher seeking to gain useful knowledge of literature that documents the power of visual communication in politics.


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As one volume in the *Global Crises and the Media* series, *Reporting Human Rights* focuses on the relationship between journalism and human rights. It provides an