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Political Leaders and Democratic Elections (Comparative Politics)

Kees Aarts, Andre Blais, Hermann Schmitt

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Outcomes of legislative elections are typically reported in terms of party support: how many votes and seats were obtained by each party? But in fact voters are faced with three choices which must be folded into one. They must decide which party they prefer, but in so doing they must take account of the policies advocated by these parties and the leaders who will eventually have to enact them.

This simple fact raises question about the relative weight of these considerations, and espeically the importance granted to the leaders. This issue has been largely neglected in the vast literature on voting behaviour.The dominant traditions in the study of voting behaviour focus on political parties and party identification; and on political issues and ideology, respectively.

This volume uses election surveys over the past 50 years to systematically assesses the impact of political leaders on voting decisions in nine democracies (Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United States). It analyses issues such as the changes in political communication (particularly the rise of televized politics), and the relative importance accorded to political leaders in different types of political systems. It demonstrates how electoral systems and other political institutions have a discernible effect on the importance voters accord to actual political leaders. Contrary to popular wisdom, *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections* shows how unimportant the characteristics of political leaders, parties, and indeed the voters themselves actually are on voting patterns. The volume shows that voters tend to let themselves be guided by the leaders they like rather than being pushed away from those they dislike.

Comparative Politics is a series for students, teachers, and researchers of political science that deals with contemporary government and politics. Global in scope, books in the series are characterised by a stress on comparative analysis and strong methodological rigour. The series is published in association with the European Consortium for Political Research. For more information visit: www.ecprnet.eu. The *Comparative Politics* series is edited by Professor David M. Farrell, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Kenneth Carty, Professor of Political Science, University of British Columbia, and Professor Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Institute of Political Science, Philipps University, Marburg.

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