

What Voters Want

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The New York Times:

Imagine you're discussing the presidential election with a group of friends who live in Iowa or New Hampshire. You ask them who they intend to vote for next month.

"Oh, whoever's the tallest," one friend says. "So Jeb Bush, I guess!"

"No way — I'm voting for Bernie Sanders," another friend says. "He has a deeper voice, *and* my best friend growing up was named Bernie."

It sounds ridiculous — like dialogue from "The Twilight Zone" — but it's not too far off from the sometimes superficial shortcuts our brains use to make decisions.

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A 2005 study by the psychologist Alexander Todorov presented participants with photos of two congressional candidates, and asked them to choose which one looked more competent. More than two-thirds of the time, participants were able to pick the winner of each Congressional race just by how "competent" he or she looked. The keys to looking competent? A square jaw, an intense stare — in other words, not too far from Donald J. Trump on the cover of Time.

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Daniel Oppenheimer, a psychology professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a co-author of "Democracy Despite Itself," said there are "three I's" that unite voters: ignorance, irrationality and incompetence. He says that as voters, we don't reflect on our own core beliefs and then seek out the candidate who best matches them. Instead, it's usually quite the opposite: We decide which candidate we like based on subjective cues, then mold our beliefs to fit theirs.

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)