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Social scientists have long criticized American voters for being "unsophisticated" in the way they acquire and use political information. The low level of political sophistication leaves them vulnerable to manipulation by political "elites," whose sway over voters is deemed incontrovertible and often decisive. In this book, Peter Nardulli challenges the conventional wisdom that citizens are "manageable fools," with little capacity to exercise independent judgment in the voting booth. Rather, he argues, voters are eminently capable of playing an efficacious role in democratic politics and of routinely demonstrating the ability to evaluate competing stewards in a discriminating manner. Nardulli's book offers a cognitively based model of voting and uses a normal vote approach to analyzing local-level election returns. It examines the entire sweep of United States presidential elections in the democratic era (1828 to 2000), making it the most encompassing empirical analysis of presidential voting to date. Nardulli's analysis separates presidential elections into three categories: those that produce a major, enduring change in voting patterns, those that represent a short-term deviation from prevailing voting patterns, and those in which the dominant party receives a resounding endorsement from the electorate. These "disequilibrating" elections have been routine in American electoral history, particularly after the adoption of the Progressive-Era reforms. *Popular Efficacy in the Democratic Era* provides a dramatically different picture of mass-elite linkages than most prior studies of American democracy, and an image of voters as being neither foolish nor manageable. Moreover, it shows why party elites must take proactive steps to provide for the core political desires of voters.
