

Parochialism as a result of cognitive biases

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Abstract

I discuss several forms of bias, or fallacious thinking, that lead to parochialism, that is, a willingness to sacrifice self-interest for in-group members while neglecting or underweighing negative effects on outsiders, so that an out-group could lose more than the in-group gains from the sacrifice. In the self-interest illusion, people fallaciously think that their contribution to their group comes back to benefit them and make their sacrifice worthwhile. This illusion is larger when an outgroup is affected, and it is specific to group benefits; it is unrelated to the desire to hurt another group out of sheer competition. A second bias is the tendency to de-personalize the individuals involved and think about the groups. This is reduced when people make analogous decisions about individuals. I suggest that approval voting — at least when both groups vote — can lead people to take the out-group into account. Omission bias, the preference for harming others through omissions rather than actions, is greater for out-group members. Parochialism can be moralized: people think of it as absolute and objectively moral, they are willing to impose it moralistically on others, and they consider the support of the in-group to be their duty as citizens. I conclude with suggestions for reducing the harmful effects of parochialism.

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1 Introduction

The tendency of people to favor a group that includes them while underweighing or ignoring harm to outsiders, has been called parochialism (Schwartz-Shea & Simmons, 1991). A prime example is nationalism, a value that goes almost unquestioned in many circles, just as racism and sexism went unquestioned in the past. Nationalists are concerned with their fellow citizens, regardless of the effect on outsiders. Nationalists are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest in order to harm outsiders, e.g., in war, for the benefit of co-nationals.

Nationalism is of course one example of a whole class of phenomena that lead to ethnic and religious wars, which seem more common today than wars between nations as such. The in-group may consist of a tribe, a religious group, speakers of a common language, or, within nations, interest groups such as workers, gun owners, or farmers. Each person is typically a member of several groups that can potentially command this sort of loyalty. People often shift their loyalty, as happened in Sri Lanka, for example, where the current hostilities involve groups that became salient to people only recently.

Because parochialism can support such hostilities, it leads to violations of what might be called human rights, such as the right of non-combatants to live in peace without being killed or raped. Parochialism directly opposes a fundamental property of set of principles that constitute these rights, namely that they are human: they apply to everyone (Risse, 2008). They are not just the rights of Americans or the rights of any other group. We do not need the concept of human rights, however, to regard killing and raping of non-combatants as horrendously awful.

As I shall discuss, parochialism also exerts itself in other forms that seem mild, until we consider the duration of its effects and the number of people affected. In particular, parochialism is almost always involved in “rent seeking” by groups that lobby governments for special privileges, to the general detriment of others. It is generally not in each individual’s interest to contribute to this group effort, yet individuals end up acting against their self-interest and against the general interest in order to support their group’s lobbying efforts.

An experiment by Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994) shows a parochialism effect in laboratory games similar to social dilemmas. (In a social dilemma, each of several people is faced with a choice between an option that is in her self-interest and an option that has much benefit for the group as a whole. Examples are things like recycling.) Subjects came in groups of 6 and were assigned at random to a red group and a green group, with 3 in each group. Each subject started with 5 Israeli Shekels (IS; about \$2). If the subject contributed this endowment, each member of the subject’s group would get 3 IS (including the subject). This amounts to a net loss of 2 for the subject but a total gain of 4 for the group. However, the contribution would also cause each member of the *other* group to *lose* 3 IS. Thus, taking both groups into account, the gains for one group matched the losses to the other, except that the contributor lost the 5 IS. The effect of this 5 IS loss was simply to move goods from the other group to the subject’s group. Still the average rate of contribution was 55%, and this was

substantially higher than the rate of contribution in control conditions in which the contribution did not affect the other group (27%). Of course, the control condition was a real social dilemma in which the net benefit of the contribution was truly positive.

Similar results have been found by others (Schwartz-Shea and Simmons, 1990, 1991). Notice that the parochialism effect is found despite the fact that an overall analysis of costs and benefits would favor the opposite result. Specifically, cooperation is truly beneficial, overall, in the one-group condition, and truly harmful in the two-group condition, because the contribution is lost and there is no net gain for others.

This kind of experiment might be a model for cases of real-world conflict, in which people sacrifice their own self-interest to help their group at the expense of some other group. We see this in strikes, and in international, ethnic, and religious conflict, when people even put their lives on the line for the sake of their group, and at the expense of another group. We also see it in attempts to influence government policy in favor of one's own group at the expense of other groups, through voting and contributions of time and money. We can look at such behavior from three points of view: the individual, the group, and everyone (the world). Political action in favor of one's group is beneficial for the group but (in these cases) costly to both the individual and the world.

As I noted, parochialism underlies the concept of competing interest groups within nations, as described by Olson (1965, 1982) as well as competition among nations. In both cases, groups organize to promote their group interests against the interests of others, in a game that would be zero sum except for the effort expended in competition itself. "Public choice theory" and "rational choice theory" have incorporated the idea of interest groups to explain the function of democratic governments through the idea that people pursue their rational self-interest (Brennan and Buchanan, 1985; Green and Shapiro, 1994). Often hidden in such explanations, however, is the assumption that people go beyond their self-interest in order to act on behalf of their group (as pointed out by Brennan and Lomasky, 1993). If action on behalf of interest groups is as widespread as it seems to be, then we must explain why people are so willing to sacrifice on behalf of groups, and apparently so much less willing to sacrifice on behalf of larger, more inclusive, groups.

Parochialism also underlies some social-psychological theories of group conflict, such as realistic-conflict theory of group conflict (which grew out of the work of Sherif et al., 1961; see Sabini, 1992; other relevant work in social psychology is reviewed by Wildschut et al., 2003). According to this theory, people's own interests are mobilized when their group is in competition with another group for scarce resources. Thus, according to the theory, competitive behavior is rationally self-interested, even when it inflicts harm on the opposition. This argument assumes, however, that self-sacrifice on behalf of one's own group is in one's own self-interest. If this is an illusion, then such behavior is not, in fact, rationally self-interested.

In defining parochialism as neglect of the interests of outsiders, I do not mean to imply that group loyalty implies such neglect or that group loyalty

itself has no benefits. People have many good reasons to cooperate with in-group members, reasons that do not apply to out-group members. Group loyalty provides emotional benefits, but these do not need to come at the expense of others to such an extent that the harms exceed them.

And it is not necessarily parochial when we refuse to do something to improve things for outgroup members. Many groups (including nations) operate within a scheme of local responsibility, in which, for efficiency reasons, they are given local control. In such cases, interference with a group by outsiders, even for what appears to be the greater good, would have the negative effect of undermining local control and setting a precedent for outsiders coming in and making things worse (Baron, 1996).

Parochialism may be in part an inevitable side effect of group loyalty that exists for good reasons combined with thoughtlessness about outsiders. But some of it may result from fallacious — or “biased” — thinking, or particular ways of framing the situation. Fallacies can be corrected, and people can be encouraged to use other frames. Thus, the study of cognitive biases and framing effects can give us a way of correcting a small piece of a large problem. The problem is so large that even a small piece is worthy of our attention.

In this chapter, I present the results of several experiments, which are designed to probe how people think about parochialism. The study of people’s conscious reasons can help us understand the phenomenon, even if these reasons are not the only determinant of behavior. First, I present some new evidence concerning the role of an illusion in which people see self-sacrifice for their group as really not sacrifice at all, an “illusion of morality as self-interest.” Then I present evidence of two moderators of the effect. Parochialism is reduced when harm is seen as being caused by action rather than omission, and when people think in terms of individuals rather than the abstraction of groups (such as nations). Next I show that parochialism is sometimes very strong because it is moralistic — something that people want to impose on others whatever the consequences — and morally objective. And I argue that citizens see support of their nation as their moral duty even when this support does more harm than good.

I conclude with a discussion of implications. Arguments against parochialism might just work, and they might be most effective if they are directed at beliefs that people have been found to endorse, or ways of thinking that they follow. This is particularly true when the thinking involved can be seen as fallacious on more general grounds. I also discuss the benefits of approval voting. Although our efforts to affect parochialism may have small effects, we should note that it is always a matter of degree, and less of it is better. People are not always parochial: they do consider effects on outsiders. So we are not starting with an empty glass; it is half full.

1.1 Parochialism and the self-interest illusion

Parochialism may result from all the various mechanisms that cause people to cooperate (see Baron, 2000). These include altruism, conformity, reciprocity,

and various illusions, such as the voter's illusion (Quattrone and Tversky, 1984). In that illusion, people behave as if they thought their behavior would influence others, even though they know only that they and others are subject to common influence. Of course, this is true, in that a vote supports a social norm favoring voting, but the belief in question may go beyond that. Voters may reason, "If people on my side vote, I'll probably vote too. My voting will thus be linked with theirs. Hence, I'd better vote, because if I don't, they won't either."¹ The same reasoning could apply to any social dilemma, of course. The essential confusion here is between diagnostic and causal relationships. Their own voting is diagnostic of the overall turnout on their side, but it does not affect the turnout, except for their own vote.

A second type of illusion that causes cooperation is the "illusion of morality as self-interest" (Baron, 1997, 2001). In a social dilemma, people try to reduce the apparent self-other conflict by convincing themselves that it doesn't exist. They may do this by telling themselves that "cooperation doesn't do any good anyway, so I do not need to sacrifice my self-interest." They may also do the opposite, and convince themselves that cooperation is in their self-interest after all. They may focus on the slight self-interested benefit that accrues to them indirectly from their own cooperation and ignore the fact that this benefit is less than the cost of cooperating. (If it were not less than the cost, then we would not have a social dilemma after all.) The tendency to conflate morality and self-interest may be exacerbated by the fact that moral behavior is often self-interested too (because of effects on reputation and ties with others, for example). People tend to overgeneralize and act as though the two are correlated even when they are not.

The self-interest illusion is particularly relevant to cooperation with members of a group that is part of a larger group or one of two (or more) groups. People who sacrifice on behalf of others like themselves are more prone to the self-interest illusion, because they see the benefits as going to people who are like themselves in some salient way. They think, roughly, "My cooperation helps people who are X. I am X. Therefore it helps me." This kind of reasoning is easier to engage in when X represents a particular group than when it represents people in general.

Supporting this explanation, Baron (2001) did an experiment following the design of Bornstein and Ben-Yossef (1994) in comparing cooperation within a single group with cooperation within a group when that group's gain is another group's loss (the two-group condition). The main addition was that subjects

¹Quattrone and Tversky (1984) told subjects about a hypothetical election in a country with 4 million supporters of party A, 4 million supporters of party B, and 4 million nonaligned voters. Subjects were told that they were supporters of party A. Some subjects were told that the election depended on whether more of the supporters of party A or the supporters of party B turned out to vote. These subjects thought that party A was substantially more likely to win if they voted than if they did not vote. They were also quite willing to vote. Other subjects were told that the election depended on whether more of the nonaligned voters voted for party A or for party B. These subjects thought that the probability of A winning was not much different whether they voted or not, and they were less willing to vote than subjects in the other condition. Of course, one vote is one vote.

answer questions about their self-interest, in order to test the hypothesis that the self-interest illusion is greater in the two-group condition.

Subjects did contribute more in the two-group condition than in the one-group condition (82% vs. 73%), replicating the parochialism effect. More importantly, the parochialism effect for contributing was highly correlated across subjects with the parochialism effects for the self-interest questions, including a question about which option would make more money for the decision maker. In other words, those subjects who showed a greater parochialism effect for contributing showed a greater self-interest illusion when the gain for their group was a loss for the other group.

When subjects were forced to calculate the effects of their contribution on themselves and others, the parochialism effect was reduced. Thus, parochialism is somewhat labile. As suggested by Singer (1982), it may be possible, through reason, to understand the arbitrariness of group boundaries. The more that people think of boundaries as arbitrary, the more they can direct their non-self-interested concern at the greater good rather than the parochial interests of their group.

Of course the self-interest illusion can explain only part of the parochialism effect. Much of the rest of it may arise from a sort of limited altruism, in which people really do care about the good of the co-members more than about the good of outsiders.

More generally, parochialism can be analyzed into three components. One is limited altruism, of the sort that people extend to family members. Limited altruism beyond the family, e.g., for a nation, is arguably difficult to justify because it is arbitrary. But any altruism is better than no altruism, so we can hardly say that it is something we should discourage, if no altruism is the alternative.

The second is competition, the value we place on doing better, rather than just doing well. In games and sports, parties willingly agree to rules that allow competition. Even in a mild sport like tennis, a player may try to tire out his opponent by making him run from side to side repeatedly. In international affairs, however, Americans and Europeans cannot so easily justify hurting the Chinese out of fear that they will “beat us” by appeal to any sort of principle of consent, especially given the fact that many international trade agreements explicitly discourage such competitive behavior.

The third is the result of the self-interest illusion, which I have found to be exacerbated by the salience of an out-group.

The next section reports an experiment to examine further the role of the self-interest illusion. It asks whether this illusion is present when competition is the only available motive, as well as when in-group interest is present.

2 Experiment 1a: Self-interest illusion

The main purpose of this experiment was to ask whether the self-interest illusion applied to a motive favoring the in-group as distinct from a motive opposing the

out-group (competition). The explanation I have given implies that the illusion would be limited in this way, because it is about the benefits of helping one's group. The experiment included a pure competition condition, in which an option would hurt the out-group without helping the in-group. The reasoning that "if something helps my group then it helps me" should apply to benefits, but not to harm to the out-group. It is theoretically possible that a person could reason, "if something hurts the other group then it helps me." If this second type of reasoning occurs, then we would find that the self-interest illusion occurs in competition as well as in the standard parochialism condition. The critical test is thus whether the illusion is greater when the self is actually helped.

2.1 Method

The questionnaire, called "Policy proposals," began:

This study is about trade policies that affect the average income in different countries, and policies for allocation of U.S. government funds that affect income in different U.S. states.

In each case, suppose that the policy choice affects average income and has no other effects that matter to you. The effects on income are the same (in percent) for people with different income levels.

In some cases, a proposed policy will cause changes in incomes. In other cases, it will prevent changes, leaving incomes as they are. In these cases, defeat of the proposal will lead to the changes in question.

In each case, suppose there is a referendum that requires 50% of the registered voters, and polls suggest that the vote will be close.

In 6 of the 12 pages, the question concerned adoption of a proposal. In the other 6, it concerned prevention of the adoption of a proposal. The idea was to examine the effect of acts vs. omissions, but the wording was apparently difficult, with many subjects apparently responding in the opposite way from what was intended, so these questions are ignored henceforth. (If they are included in the data analysis, they do not change any conclusions reported here.) The 12 pages were presented in a random order chosen for each subject.

The 6 relevant pages differed in what the subjects was asked to imagine to be his or her country or state, and what the other country or state was. The pairs were: California and New York; California and Texas; California and Florida; the U.S. and Japan; the U.S. and China; the U.S. and India. Here is an example of the top of a page:

Suppose you are a citizen of the U.S.A., which is holding a referendum about a policy proposal concerning allocation of U.S. government expenditures.

The proposal will cause the following changes in average income: AN INCREASE OF 2% FOR THE U.S.A. AND AN INCREASE OF 2% FOR INDIA. What would you do about the proposal?

Allocation	Mean	Favor	Illusion
Both (2,2)	.84	.79	.31
Self (4,-4)	.63	.63	.39
Compete (0,-4)	-.30	.20	.10
Help (-1,4)	-.71	.11	.25

Table 1: Mean responses, Experiment 1.

contribute money opposing it
 oppose it without contributing
 not sure
 favor it without contributing
 contribute money favoring it

Would you personally have more money in the long run if you contribute money to your favored side?

more if I do not contribute money
 not sure
 more if I contribute money

The second question was designed to assess the self-interest illusion. Each page had four proposals, each followed by these two questions. In the other three proposals, the outcomes were, respectively: 4 for your nation (or state) and -4 for the other; 0 and -4; and -1 and 4. The order was reversed on every other page. The first pair (2,2) represented a cooperative choice. The second could be chosen either out of self-interest or competition, but the third was pure competition. The fourth was altruistic.

Eighty-two subjects completed the study, but five were eliminated because they gave the same answer to the first question every time it was asked. Of the remaining 77, 21% were male, and ages ranged from 19 to 69 (median 42).

2.2 Results

Table 1 shows the summary results as a function of the type of allocation, the four proposals on each page. The “Mean” is on a scale from -2 to 2, where 2 is “contribute money favoring” the proposal, and 0 is “not sure.” The column labeled “Favor” is the proportion of responses that favored the proposal (with or without contributing). It is apparent from the first two columns of numbers that subjects were interested in both their own group and the other group. “Both” responses exceeded “Self,” indicating willingness to sacrifice, although the low agreement with “Help” suggests that the object of the sacrifice was equality (fairness) or avoidance of harm to the other group, rather than altruism.

The third column of numbers, “Illusion,” is the proportion of “Favor” responses in which subjects thought they would “personally have more money” if

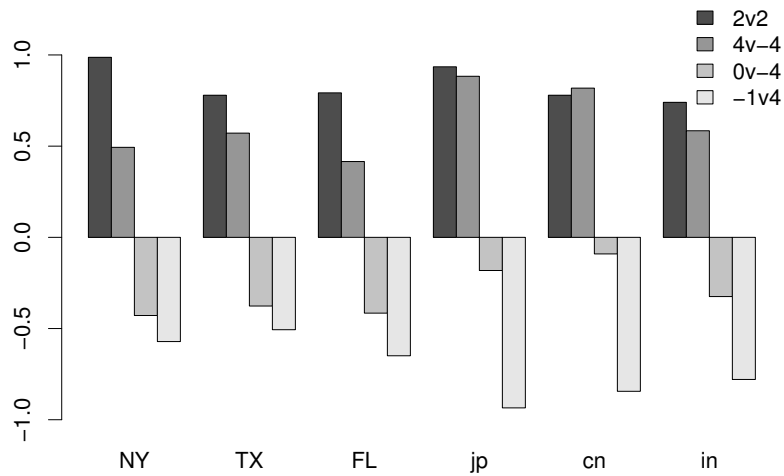


Figure 1: Means as a function of allocation and the other group.

they contributed to their side. The proportion was computed for each subject and averaged across subjects. (Hence, subjects who had no responses favoring a proposal did not contribute to these results.) Of greatest interest is the low proportion for Compete. Subjects did not often think that contributing money to hurt the other side would give them more money in the future. The Illusion measure was significantly lower for Compete than for Self ($t_{41} = 5.38$, $p = 0.0000$) and Both ($t_{40} = 4.00$, $p = 0.0003$), but not Help ($t_{13} = 1.06$), although only 14 subjects were available for the last comparison. In sum, it is clear that the self-interest illusion is present for proposals that benefit the subject's group, but it is not present in pure competition. People do not seem to think that they benefit from contributing to proposals that harm others, even though they engage in such competition.

Figure 1 shows the mean responses for the four allocation conditions (where “2v2” is “Both,” and so on) as a function of the other group. The subject's group was the U.S. for the three countries (abbreviated by their country codes on the Internet) and California for the three states. In general, subjects were more competitive and less helpful toward other countries than toward states. Most subjects were from the U.S., however, and not from California, so the country-state comparison is confounded.

2.3 Experiment 1b: More on the illusion

It is possible that the illusion results from the belief that the subject is decisive in voting. To test this possibility, I did a follow-up experiment using only the Self and Compete conditions.

Twelve pages were presented in a random order chosen for each subject. Six involved two countries, and six involved two states. The pairs were: California and New York; California and Texas; California and Florida; New York and

Texas, New York and Florida, Texas and Florida, the U.S. and Japan; the U.S. and China; the U.S. and India; Japan and China; Japan and India; and China and India. Here is an example of the top of a page:

Suppose you are a citizen of the U.S.A., which is holding a referendum about a policy proposal concerning allocation of U.S. government expenditures.

Suppose the proposal would lead to: an increase of 4% for the U.S.A. and a decrease of 4% for India.

How would you vote on the proposal?
 against it not sure (or wouldn't vote) for it

Would you be better off financially, in the long run, if the proposal passes than if it fails?
 no yes

If you vote for the proposal, would you be better off financially than if you vote against it? In other words, would your vote for it lead you to have more money in the long run?
 no yes

If you would be better off financially from voting for the proposal, is this because your vote would cause the proposal to be adopted?
 I would not be better off financially no yes

The third questions were designed to assess the self-interest illusion, and the fourth question was to assess the explanation in terms of influence on the outcome. A pure self-interest illusion is thus a yes answer to the third question and a no answer to the fourth. Items with a yes answer to the fourth question were thus eliminated from the main analysis.

Seventy-one subjects completed the study; 27% were male, and ages ranged from 21 to 72 (median 45). Five others were omitted because of very fast responses.

The mean proportion (across subjects) of uncorrected illusion responses was .60 for Self (yes answers to the third question about whether the subject would be better off from voting), and .16 for Compete. However, 89% of the uncorrected illusion responses to the Self items (yes to the third question) were associated with yes answers to the last question (and 81% of the uncorrected illusion responses to the Compete items). People thought they would (or might) affect the outcome. The pure illusion measure removed these cases with yes answers to the last question. The proportions of pure illusions for Self and Compete were, respectively, .19 and .05. This difference was significant ($t_{48} = 3.19$, $p = 0.0025$, across subjects; some subjects provided no relevant data).

In sum, although much of the illusion is associated with beliefs about an effect on the outcome, some of it is independent of these beliefs, as hypothesized by Baron(1997, 2001).

3 Experiment 1c: Another test of the self-interest illusion

Experiment 1c distinguished parochialism from competition in a different way. It compared two proposals, one favoring the in-group, the “Self” proposal, and another that was almost as good for the in-group but much better for the out-group, the “Best” proposal. It also included a third proposal that was worse than both of these (for reasons to be explained shortly). The main prediction is that the Self-interest illusion is greater in those who support the Self proposal.

The experiment also compared approval voting with standard plurality voting. Baron, Altman, and Kroll (2005) found that approval voting reduced parochialism when both groups voted. Of interest here is whether this effect could also happen when only the in-group voted. It is possible that the Best proposal could win even in this case, if some voters approved only the Best proposal. Perhaps they would do this strategically, thinking that most others would approve both Self and Best but a few would approve Self only. Such a situation might be more likely when the third proposal was much worse than Self and Best. If voters use a strategy of approving proposals that are much better than other proposals, then we, and other voters, would expect more approvals of both Self and Best, and the way would be open for strategic voters for Best only to carry the day.

The experiment also compared situations in which the out-group voted and in which only the in-group voted. The groups consisted either of nations or states of the U.S. In the in-group-only condition, Best could win only if more voters approve only Best than those who approve only Self. This is unlikely, but possible if enough voters take a utilitarian perspective that includes both groups *and* vote only for their top choice.

3.1 Method

The introduction to the study began:

This study is about trade policies that affect the average income in different countries, and policies for allocation of U.S. government funds that affect income in different U.S. states.

In each case, suppose that the policy choice affects average income and has no other effects that matter to you. The effects on income are the same (in percent) for people with different income levels.

This was followed by a short explanation of approval voting. An example of one of the 12 pages is as follow

Suppose you are a citizen of the U.S.A., which is holding a referendum about a policy proposal concerning international trade. (The citizens of China are not voting.) Consider the following proposals:

A leads to: an increase of 4% for the U.S.A. and no change for China

B leads to: an increase of 3% for the U.S.A. and an increase of 3% for China

C leads to: an increase of 2% for the U.S.A. and an increase of 4% for China

Which proposal(s) would you approve? (The proposal with the largest number of approvals will be chosen.)

A B C A and B A and C B and C

If you could vote for only one, which would you vote for?

A B C

Suppose that a voter must pay \$5 to vote by approval. She pays \$5 and approves just Proposal A. Is this decision a good bet? Is the \$5 worth paying just because of its possible effect on her income? (Choose the answer that comes closest to what you think.)

No.

Yes. Proposal A is more likely to win if she votes.

Yes. The money she pays will help the citizens of her nation, including her.

Yes, for both of the last two reasons.

Suppose now that the citizens of China were voting at the same time on the same three proposals:

A leads to: an increase of 4% for the U.S.A. and no change for China

B leads to: an increase of 3% for the U.S.A. and an increase of 3% for China

C leads to: an increase of 2% for the U.S.A. and an increase of 4% for China

(You are still a citizen of the U.S.A.)

Which proposal(s) would you approve? (The proposal with the largest number of approvals in both nations will win.)

A B C A and B A and C B and C

The 12 pages differed in the two nations or states involved, as follows, with the first member of each pair being the one the subject was to consider as his own: California/New York, California/Florida, New York/Florida, U.S./China, U.S./India, China/India. Each of these 6 pairs appeared once with each of two versions of the third option: 2%/4% (as shown in the example above) or 0%/0%. The latter was the more distant option, hypothesized to increase the approvals for A (Self) and B (Both).

The 86 subject ranged in age from 23 to 72 (median 45.5), and 26% were male.

3.2 Results

The manipulation of option C had no significant effects on any voting responses, and the nation vs. state manipulation also had no significant effects on these responses.

Condition	Self	Best	Other	Self & Best	Self & Other	Best & Other
Plurality	44	45	11			
Approval	31	27	8	24	1	8
Both vote	19	46	10	13	1	10

Table 2: Percent of votes for each proposal in each voting condition.

Table 2 shows the votes for each proposal in the three voting conditions. Consistent with the findings of Baron et al. (2005), when both groups voted, Best tended to win ($t_{85} = 5.69$, $p = 0.0000$, comparing Best and Self across subjects). Even in the Approval condition with only the in-group voting, Best did better than Self, although not significantly so, in both approval and standard plurality voting. Best did better when both groups voted ($t_{85} = 5.31$, $p = 0.0000$).

4 Experiment 2: Acts and omissions

Parochialism may interact with the act/omission distinction. Many people seem to favor harm caused by omission over harm caused by action, an omission bias (Ritov & Baron, 1990; Spranca et al., 1991; see Baron & Ritov, 2004, for a recent summary). People may be unwilling to harm outsiders by action, although they may be willing to harm them through omission, through doing nothing to prevent them from being harmed. The distinction may apply less to insiders. Indeed, Haidt and Baron (1996) found that the omission bias was reduced when a decision maker had a close relationship with the affected person, or when the decision maker was responsible for the welfare of others. People may feel this sort of closeness or responsibility toward insiders. The present experiment looks for an interaction between act/omission and ingroup/outgroup harm.

4.1 Method

The scenario involved an opportunity to help or hurt other employees of a company. The hypothesis was that harm through action would be less parochial than harm through omission. The experiment had some conditions that are not of interest here, so these are deleted from the following description. The introduction read:

Contributions and profits

Imagine that you live in the U.S. You work for a company with one other branch in the U.S., nearby and in the same state, another branch in China, and one in India. Each of the four branches has 50 employees. All salaries are equivalent to \$50,000 in purchasing power.

Sometimes the company gets opportunities to invest money in ways that will generate income immediately. When this happens, the management asks the

employees to contribute \$100 to an investment fund, and the \$200 gains from the fund are returned to the employees.

Management is experimenting with different ways of distributing the gains.

- Sometimes they go to the branch that contributes, sometimes to another branch.
- Sometimes each employee decides whether to contribute or not, and sometimes a group votes on whether everyone in the group will contribute or not.
- Sometimes management makes the decision and the question is whether to reverse it and withdraw a contribution.

In all cases, each employee must make a decision without consulting anyone else. These decisions may be repeated in the future. All employees know the rules.

Each branch has an list of employees. When the \$200 gain goes to “next person in the list,” we mean the person with the position on the list just below your position. (If you are the last, then the “next” person is the first.)

We also refer to your “counterpart.” For this purpose, each employee is paired up with another employee, in the same branch or in a different branch. Counterparts can help each other as a pair.

The rules may seem strange, but strange things happen. Aside from these rules, imagine that these are typical workplaces and the employees are typical of Chinese Indian, or U.S. employees of medium-size companies.

The main conditions of interest involved omissions and acts. In the omission case, a typical question was:

If you contribute \$100, the next person on the list in the Indian branch gains \$200. Everyone in both branches has the same choice: if everyone in your branch contributes \$100, you all gain \$200.

Would you contribute?

yes no

From a moral point of view, how should someone in your position answer the last question?

yes no

If you contribute, how would that affect the monetary outcomes for you personally in the long run?

I would be more likely to gain than to lose.

I would be more likely to lose than to gain.

I would be no more likely to gain, or lose.

The last question was about the self-interest illusion. The corresponding question in the action condition was:

In this case the contributions have already been made for everyone and the choice is whether to withdraw them. (The recipients know this.)

If you withdraw \$100, the next person on the list in the Indian branch loses \$200. ...

These questions were crossed with two other manipulations: One manipulation was the next-on-the-list versus counterpart versus voting. In the counterpart condition, “next person on the list” was replaced with “your counterpart.” An example of the voting condition was: “Everyone in your branch votes on whether to contribute \$100 or not. If a majority votes yes, then everyone in your branch contributes \$100, and everyone in the Chinese branch gains \$200. If the vote fails, then nobody contributes and nobody in the Chinese branch gains \$200. They will have the same vote: if a majority in the Chinese branch votes yes, then everyone in that branch contributes \$100, and everyone in your branch gains \$200.” A fourth condition also involved a complicated voting system, but subjects apparently did not understand it, so I do not discuss it here. I do not discuss the effect of counterpart vs. next-on-the-list and voting here. (The effect was not quite significant, and is addressed in a more sensitive experiment later.)

The other manipulation was “your branch,” “the other U.S. branch,” “the Chinese branch,” and “the Indian branch.” The main comparisons were simply U.S. vs. foreign. Parochialism is greater cooperation with U.S. than with China or India.

Seventy-three subjects did this study.

4.2 Results

The main hypothesis was supported, as shown in Table 3. Subjects were quite willing to harm foreigners through omission (29.9%) but not through acts (11.9%). The act-omission distinction was very large for foreigners but barely present for Americans. The interaction was significant ($t_{72} = 3.49, p = 0.0008$).

Notice that the same interaction is found for judgments of the morality of non-cooperation and for the extent to which this serves self-interest (both significant). On the whole, though, the self-interest illusion carried the day, and cooperation — the dominant response in all conditions — was generally seen as self-interested, even when the beneficiaries were foreign.

In sum, parochialism is reduced when people think of their behavior as harming others (as opposed to failing to help them). The next experiment looks at a different way to reduce parochialism, thinking in terms of effects on individuals.

5 Experiment 3a: One-to-one relationship

Experiment 3a was mainly to test the hypothesis that parochial competition is reduced when people see themselves as having a one-to-one relationship with

Table 3: Percent non-cooperative responses in Experiment 2 (including list, counterpart, and vote conditions).

	U.S.	Foreign
Non-cooperation:		
Act (% withdraw)	10.3	11.9
Omit (% not contribute)	13.4	29.9
Morality of non-cooperation:		
Act (% withdraw)	8.4	11.9
Omit (% not contribute)	15.0	25.3
Self-interest of non-cooperation:		
Act (% withdraw)	8.0	8.7
Omit (% not contribute)	13.2	22.8
Self-interest of cooperation:		
Act (% withdraw)	64.2	58.9
Omit (% not contribute)	69.2	52.1

someone in the other group. When people are seen as individuals rather than as members of a group, the desire to hurt them for the sake of beating them may be reduced because of greater empathy or identification. People are much more real than abstractions like “nations” and “the enemy.”² The experiment also manipulated other variables, mostly to increase the number of pages and collect more data.

5.1 Method

The questionnaire, called “Salary proposals,” began:

This study is about voting decisions that affect salaries of workers in a company that employs you, and another company that does business with your company. Your department has 10 workers, and so does the corresponding department in the other company. The other company is in another country.

²Schick (1991, p. 1) tells the following story: “Writing about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, George Orwell tells this story. He had gone out to a spot near the Fascist trenches from which he thought he might snipe at someone. He waited a long time without any luck. None of the enemy made an appearance. Then, at last, some disturbance took place, much shouting and blowing of whistles followed, and a man:

... jumped out of the trench and ran along the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him. ... I did not shoot part because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at ‘Fascists’; but a man holding up his trousers isn’t a ‘Fascist,’ he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don’t feel like shooting at him.”

All workers make enough for a basic middle-class lifestyle, but, in some cases, the average income of those in the other company is half of that in your company.

In each case, you and others vote, and the majority determines the outcome. If the vote is tied, one of the options is the default, and it goes into effect. In some cases, just one person votes (you), so you determine the outcome.

In each cases, the choice affects only the annual bonus, not the base salary, so the change is just for one year.

Each page presented four choices, each in the following form:

OPTION A (DEFAULT): NO CHANGE.

OPTION B: AN INCREASE OF 2% FOR YOUR DEPARTMENT AND AN INCREASE OF 2% FOR THE OTHER DEPARTMENT.

In the other three choices, the outcomes for Option B were, respectively: 4 for your department and -4 for the other; 0 and -4 ; and -1 and 4. The order was reversed on every other page. As in Experiment 1, the first pair (2,2) represented a cooperative choice. The second could be chosen either out of self-interest or competition, but the third was pure competition. The fourth was altruistic. Subjects were asked which they would vote for, and they were given the choice of abstaining. (There was also a test question about which option would be better in monetary terms. I shall ignore this here, except to say that it was answered correctly in 77% of the cases.)

The 16 pages of the experiment, presented in a random order chosen for each subject, varied in which option was the default (A or B). They also varied in the income of the other company. At the beginning of the page, the first statement was either “The workers in the other company’s department make the same average income as workers in your department,” or “half of the average income of.”

Of primary interest, there were four voting conditions, also explained near the beginning of the page:

- Your department and the corresponding department in the other company will vote on the following options:
- Your department (and not the other department) will vote on the following options:
- You and one person in the other department will ‘vote’ on the following options, which affect only the two of you. If you both vote for the same option, you both will get it. Otherwise you will both get the default.
- You alone will vote (decide). Your choice will affect only you and one person in the other department. If you abstain, the default will take effect.

Table 4: Mean responses, Experiment 3a.

Allocation	Mean	Favor
Both (2,2)	.81	.89
Self (4,-4)	-.08	.35
Compete (0,-4)	-.76	.07
Help (-1,4)	-.64	.12

The last two conditions involve the (hypothetical) subject and a single other person, thus making the decision more personal. Whether the other group (or a member of it) voted or not was included without any particular hypothesis about its effect, largely to increase the number of pages.

The study was completed by 96 subjects, but 6 were omitted because they gave the same (or almost the same) answer to every question. Of the 90 remaining, 19% were male, and the median age was 40 (range 21 to 67).

5.2 Results

Table 4 summarizes the responses for the different allocation conditions, averaged across the other conditions. It is analogous to Table 1 except that the response had only 3 options, so that the range of the mean is from -1 to 1 instead of from -2 to 2 . In general, competition responses were rare compared to Experiment 1a, and subjects were also less willing to hurt the other group in order to benefit in the “Self” condition.

The main results concern the responses to the competition item (0 for self, -4 for other) and the self-interest item (4, -4). Subjects voted for the competition item in very few cases, but they did so more in the group condition, 7.8%, than in the personal (one-to-one) condition, 5.3%. They also abstained slightly more often in the group condition (11.3% vs. 10.1%). Coding the responses as 1 (compete), 0 (abstain), and -1 (reject competition), the mean responses were significantly different across subjects ($-.73$ vs. $-.79$; $t_{89} = 2.32$, $p = 0.0224$). The results were similar, although not quite significant, for the self-interest item (36.9% favoring in the group condition and 32.9 in the personal condition, $-.05$ vs. $-.12$ for the mean responses; $t_{89} = 1.93$, $p = 0.0566$), although more subjects voted for this response in both group and personal conditions. (The two results together, self-interest and competition, were significant — $t_{89} = 2.50$, $p = 0.0142$ — and they did not differ significantly.) Although these results are small in magnitude, many subjects showed large effects, while other subjects behaved as if they were trying to be consistent, ignoring variables that they had decided were irrelevant. In sum, personal, one-to-one, decisions reduce the parochialism effect.

When the income of the other group was lower, self-interest responses were reduced (means of $-.13$ vs. $-.03$; $t_{89} = 3.38$, $p = 0.0011$), and helping responses, a sacrifice of 1% for a benefit of 4% increased ($-.59$ vs. $-.69$; $t_{89} = -2.90$, $p = 0.0047$). Competition was unaffected, however, suggesting that the self-

interest and helping response were influenced by fairness considerations but competition was not.

6 Experiment 3a: Group vs. personal

Experiment 3a tests the same general hypothesis in a different way, using the methods of Experiment 2.

6.1 Method

The instructions were as follows:

Imagine that you live in the U.S. You work for a small company with one other office in the U.S., nearby and in the same state, another office in China, and one in India. Each of the four offices has 10 employees. You do not know anyone in any other office. All salaries are equivalent to \$50,000 in purchasing power.

Sometimes the company gets opportunities to invest money in ways that will generate income immediately. When this happens, the management asks the employees to contribute \$100 or \$50 to an investment fund, and the gains that result from each contribution are returned to the employees.

Management is experimenting with different ways of distributing the gains:

- Sometimes they go to the office that contributes, sometimes to another office.
- Sometimes each employee decides whether to contribute or not, and sometimes a group votes on whether everyone in the group will contribute or not.
- Sometimes a contribution goes to a particular other person, and sometimes it is divided among everyone in an office.

In all cases, each employee must make a decision without consulting anyone else. These decisions may be repeated in the future. But the employees never know for sure who made the decision that caused them to gain (or not). Thus, employees cannot reciprocate directly.

The questions on each page were similar to those in Experiment 2. For example, “If you contribute \$100, another person in **the other U.S. office nearby** [the **Chinese** office] gains \$250. Each contributor is paired with a different recipient. If everyone in your office contributes, then each recipient gains \$250.” In the group condition, the wording of the parallel question was “If you contribute \$100, a total gain of \$250 is **divided equally** among those in **the other U.S. office nearby** [the **Chinese** office]. Everyone in your office can contribute.”

Two additional questions were added to make a finer assessment of willingness to cooperate. The cooperation measure was the sum of the yes responses to the three questions.³

Suppose the contribution were \$50 instead of \$100 (and the gain still \$250).
Would you contribute?

Suppose the contribution were \$50, and the gain were \$500 instead of \$250.
Would you contribute?

To assess parochialism, the contributions affected either someone in your own office, the other U.S. office, China, or India. Because some subjects found “own office” confusing, I compared the “other U.S office” to China and India, thus ignoring the “own office” condition. All items were repeated using voting instead of individual decision making as the response. The order of the 16 resulting items (4 recipients, personal vs. group, individual decision vs. vote) was randomized for each subjects. I ignore the voting conditions here.⁴

Seventy-five subjects did this study.

6.2 Results

On the three-point scale of cooperation, the means were 1.18 for the Other-U.S group condition and 0.81 for the foreign group condition, a difference of 0.37 ($t_{75} = 2.77$, $p = 0.0070$). The means were 1.37 for the Other-U.S personal condition and 1.17 for the foreign personal condition, a difference of 0.20 (n.s.). The second difference was significantly smaller than the first (i.e., the interaction was significant: $t_{75} = 2.39$, $p = 0.0195$). In sum, parochialism is again greater when people think in terms of groups, almost twice as great.

Similar results were found for the morality question and the self-interest question. The interaction was not quite significant for the morality question ($t_{75} = 1.85$, $p = 0.0676$), but it was significant for the self-interest question ($t_{75} = 2.10$, $p = 0.0387$). The interaction effect in the self-interest question was correlated with the interaction effect in the cooperation question ($r = .51$, $p = .000$). More interestingly, the interaction for the self-interest question correlated with the interaction for the morality question ($r = .47$, $p = .000$): when people think it is morally acceptable not to help foreigners as a group, they also think that this is in their self-interest, but they do not think this about failing to help individuals.

³In less than 1% of responses, subjects were inconsistent, saying that they would contribute in the first question but not in one of the others in which it contribution has less cost or more benefit. In these cases, I assumed that willingness to contribute in the first case implied willingness to contribute in the others, implying that the latter unwillingness was unintended.

⁴The voting conditions yielded non-significant results. As a result of this failure, it would be appropriate to multiply all p values by 2. On the other hand, the hypothesis is one tailed, and I report two-tailed p’s.

7 Experiment 4a: Parochialism as a moral judgment

Parochialism, especially as expressed politically in the form of nationalism, may elicit strong judgments and even emotions. In particular, it may take the form of a moralistic goal.

Moralistic goals are those that we try to exhort others to achieve, just as we do with moral goals (Baron, 2003). The distinction is that moral goals (as I define them) derive from the personal goals of people. We have reason to exhort each other to help each other achieve our respective personal goals. Moralistic goals have no such derivation, although people often try to supply it after the fact. For example, some people have moralistic goals against homosexual behavior between consenting adults. It is not clear how such behavior is bad for anyone, yet those who hold these goals often try to argue that it has bad side effects, such as “undermining the institution of marriage.”

Nationalism, and parochialism in general, may be moralistic because nationalists want their co-nationals to pursue parochial goals even when these goals cannot be justified in terms of the overall good (including the good of outsiders). Nationalists typically want others in the group to be nationalist as well. Nationalism seems to dominate political behavior. The idea that one should vote for the good of humanity as a whole, regardless of the effect on one’s own nation, would make total sense to a utilitarian (and it would require little self-sacrifice because voting has such a tiny effect on self-interest), but it is considered immoral by the nationalist.

Moralistic goals are often seen as moral absolutes. They are seen as “protected values”; they are protected from trade-offs with other values (Baron & Spranca, 1997; Baron & Leshner, 2000). They may also be seen as objective, not a matter of judgment, but true regardless of what anyone thinks (Goodwin & Darley, 2008).⁵

On the other hand, nationalism could be a social norm (Bicchieri, 2006). A social norm is seen as an obligation, which should be followed even when it requires some self-sacrifice, but it is a conditional obligation. It is a readiness to support the norm, both through one’s own behavior and one’s endorsement of the norm for others, given that others are supporting it. Thus, endorsement of the norm would depend on others’ endorsements of it. In a way, nationalism with respect to a specific nation must be a social norm, although it may not be perceived as one. Specifically, nations themselves are defined by people’s adherence to them.

The expression of a social norm cannot be moralistic exactly because it depends on the desires of others, while moralistic values do not. This is a critical distinction between the two. The social norm itself, as distinct from its expression, could be moralistic only because people could think that others must be ready to follow a norm, once it is agreed on by a sufficient number of

⁵This sort of “moral realism” has recently been challenged (by Greene, 2002), although it is widely accepted.

co-citizens.

In the present study, I asked subjects whether they saw nationalistic and other parochial policies as moral, as moralistic (i.e., to be imposed regardless of what anyone thought), as objective, and as dependent on the desires of others.

7.1 Method

Eighty-five subjects completed the study; 21% were male, and their median age was 41. One additional subject was removed because of apparent misunderstanding (a high negative correlation between the voting question and the question about morality, described below). The introduction began:

Each of 20 pages describes some action that may be controversial. We ask six questions about the action.

One question is whether the morality of the action is objective. This means that its truth or falsity does not depend on anybody's judgment. The opposite of "objective" is "subjective." Subjective judgments can differ from person to person.

Examples of objective statements are: " $2 + 2 = 4$ ", " $2 + 2 = 5$ " (which is objectively false), "the earth orbits the sun", and "a Hummer gets 28 mpg".

Examples of subjective statements are: "hot pepper tastes good", "Brigitte Bardot was the most attractive movie star of all time", "rap music is annoying", and "Woody Allen is funny".

Each page described a public action favoring citizens over non-citizens. Table 5 shows the actions. Following each action, the subject answered the following questions, with the numbers in brackets indicating the percentage of answers in each category:

What do you think of this action?

1. It is not a moral issue. [25]
2. It is morally acceptable. [10]
3. It is a moral issue, but I cannot say in general whether it is wrong or not. [12]
4. It is morally wrong, but it should be allowed. [9]
5. It is morally wrong, and it should be banned in most cases. [20]
6. It is morally wrong, and it should be banned in all cases, regardless of the benefits to the outsiders. [13]
7. . . . regardless of the benefits to the outsiders and citizens. [11]

Is the moral rightness or wrongness of this objective or subjective?

Options were: subjective [58], objective [30], not sure [12].

Suppose there were a referendum about whether to allow this action or not. This issue is the only one on the ballot, so you would have to make a special effort to vote. Allowing this action would provide a small benefit. How do

you think you would probably vote?
 Allow it [28], Ban it [53], Would not vote [19]

Suppose someone you know said s/he was not planning to vote. How would you respond?
 Express disapproval [51], Express approval [8], Say nothing either way [41]

Suppose that polls showed that only 10% planned to vote in this referendum, and 90% of the citizens did not care one way or the other about it. How would this information affect your own decision about voting?
 Less likely to vote [5], More likely [44], No effect [51]

Suppose that polls showed that 80% planned to vote to ban the action and 80% felt that other citizens should do the same in order to express the clearest possible disapproval of it. How would this information affect your own decision about voting?
 More likely to vote to allow the action. [13]
 More likely to vote to ban the action. [35]
 No more likely to vote to allow the action or to vote to ban it. [53]

7.2 Results

The percent responses are shown above in the Method section, for all the questions. It is apparent that many subjects thought that many of these issues were moral.

Table 5 shows the percent of responses indicating that the act should be banned in most or all cases (answers greater than 4 to the first question) or in all cases (greater than 5).

Answers to the moral realism question (objectivity) seemed to depend largely on the subject. Coefficient alpha for the reliability of the 15-item “test” was .92 (with three levels of response). Thirty-three percent of the subjects thought that no actions were objective, with the rest spread out roughly uniformly from 1 to 15.

Thus, subjects differed substantially. One, in a comment on a pilot study, said that she saw herself as a “citizens of the world.” Ten subjects (12%) never said that any act was morally wrong. Eleven subjects never said that any act should be banned. Parochialism in the form of nationalism is thus widespread, and moralized, but it is not universal.

One purpose of this experiment was to distinguish social norms from moralistic values. Social norms would be indicated by Disapproval of non-voting and sensitivity to the behavior of others, as indicated by the last two questions. We looked at just those cases in which the subject said the behavior should be banned in the first question (answers greater than 4) and found the average proportion of these cases, for each subject, in which the subject would be less likely to vote when few others were voting. (Only 74 subjects could be used for this analysis, as the rest had no relevant cases.) The mean across subjects was 5%, and 85% of the subjects never said they would vote less when others were

Item	Ban most	Ban all
Companies hire recent immigrants while some native citizens who are almost as qualified do not have jobs.	41	21
Companies hire foreigners, helping them immigrate, while some citizens who are almost as qualified do not have jobs.	46	31
Companies open new facilities in foreign countries rather than their own country, even though the foreign cost is only a little less.	33	21
Companies buy supplies from foreign countries rather than their own country, even though the foreign cost is only a little less.	35	18
Non-governmental disaster-relief organizations send more help in response to a foreign disaster than to a domestic one, even though the domestic need is almost as great.	39	21
Governmental disaster-relief agencies send more help in response to a foreign disaster than to a domestic one, even though the domestic need is almost as great.	56	32
Investors put their money into foreign assets rather than domestic assets with slightly lower expected returns.	24	12
Private universities in the U.S. accept foreign students while rejecting some U.S. students who are almost as well qualified.	45	26
Private universities in the U.S. give financial assistance to foreign students while denying it to some U.S. students who are almost as needy.	46	16
Consumers buy imported clothing rather than domestic clothing that is almost as good in price and quality.	20	9
Local governments provide public housing for illegal immigrants while denying it to some citizens who are almost as needy.	65	40
State universities in the U.S. (funded by state taxes) give financial assistance to foreign students while denying it to some U.S. students who are almost as needy.	64	34
Public schools (supported by local taxes) provide special education for learning-disabled children of illegal immigrants, while denying it to some citizens' children whose need is almost as great.	65	33
State universities in the U.S. (funded by state taxes) accept foreign students while rejecting some students from other U.S. states who are almost as well qualified.	53	31
The national government gives research grants to foreign scientists, while rejecting applications from domestic scientists that are almost as worthy.	38	20

Table 5: Experiment 4a actions and percent responses to ban in most or all cases or in all cases.

not voting. The corresponding mean for the effect of voters planning to vote for the action and thinking that others should do the same was 51%. We discuss this result later.

Moralistic values, on the other hand, would be indicated by willingness to vote for a ban and continued willingness (equal or increased) even when others were not interested. By the same analysis, 87% of the relevant cases were moralistic, and 68% of the subjects showed this pattern in every relevant case.

8 Experiment 4b: Further tests of social norms

Although Experiment 4 provided no support for the possibility that nationalism is a social norm, the question about voting when others were uninterested was worded in a way that could give subjects another reason to vote, specifically, they would have more voting power when fewer others were voting. We thus did another study with modified questions. The main modification was to say that the turnout would be high.

8.1 Method

The cases and the first two questions about each case (wrongness, objectivity) were the same as in Experiment 4. The questions, with percent responses, were:

What do you think of this action?

1. It is not a moral issue. [25]
2. It is morally acceptable. [10]
3. It is a moral issue, but I cannot say in general whether it is wrong or not. [13]
4. It is morally wrong, but it should be allowed. [9]
5. It is morally wrong, and it should be banned in most cases. [22]
6. It is morally wrong, and it should be banned in all cases, regardless of the benefits to the outsiders. [11]
7. ... regardless of the benefits to the outsiders and citizens. [9]

Is the moral rightness or wrongness of this objective or subjective?
subjective [32], objective [33], not sure [34]

Suppose there were a referendum about whether to allow this action or ban it. The referendum is part of a general election with high turnout. How do you think you would probably vote on this issue?
Allow it [26], Ban it [50], Would not vote [23]

How do you think good citizens should vote?
Allow it [14], Ban it [39], Whatever they think best [47]

Suppose a poll found that 80% of the voters thought that good citizens should vote to ban the action. Would this information increase your obligation to vote for a ban?

- Yes. This figure means that other citizens care, and that matters. [18]
No. It would have no effect on my obligation to vote for a ban. [78]
No. It would reduce my obligation to vote for a ban. [4]

Suppose a poll found that 80% of the voters thought that good citizens should vote to **allow** the action. Would this information **reduce** your obligation to vote **for** a ban?" + Yes. Other citizens do not care about their nation, and that matters. [6]

No. It would have no effect on my obligation to vote for a ban. [78]

No. It would **increase** my obligation to vote for a ban. [16]

Eighty-six subjects completed the study. None had completed Experiment 4. Their median age was 41, and 22% were male.

8.2 Results

The responses to the questions common to Experiments 4 and 5 were nearly identical. It is also apparent from the overall response rates that very few responses indicated that the opinions of others would matter.

Considering only the cases in which the subject would ban the action in the first question (answers greater than 4), subjects were again unresponsive to the situation in which others thought that they should oppose the ban. The mean across subjects was 3%, of thinking that this decreased the obligation to support a ban. On the other hand, the corresponding mean for the effect of others thinking that good citizens should vote for the ban was 26%.

In sum, it appears that many subjects think that their obligation is increased when others think they should support a ban, but it is not decreased by the apathy or antipathy of others. It is possible that the form of nationalism has elements of both a social norm and of a moralistic value.

9 Experiment 5: Duty

Citizens could use their votes, and other potential actions, to advance the good of all people. Instead, many citizens seem to see their *duty* as advancing the good of their nation (or some other unit) even when the harm to outsiders outweighs the good to co-nationals (insiders), according to their own perception of harm. These parochial attitudes are often moralistic, that is, values that people have for others, without regard to whether honoring these values causes conflict with the values of those affected. And they are often seen as objective, not as social norms, and as absolute (protected from trade-offs). The present experiment looks for this concept of duty.

9.1 Method

In one experiment, subjects were told:

... imagine that you are voting in a referendum on proposals for tax reductions. Each reduction is specified as a percent of taxes now paid.

The reductions are available because of a budget surplus, and they will help the economy. Assume that more tax reduction is always better. The proposals are all conservative; none will cause a deficit.

Different groups of taxpayers are taxed according to somewhat different rules. In the U.S., for example, the tax rates depend on whether you are married or single, whether you have dependents, whether you are a dependent yourself, and whether you are retired.

The concern of this study is your obligation as a voter. Thus, it will not specify WHAT your group is, because we do not want you to think about the needs of particular groups.

Assume that your group and other groups are treated fairly now.

Sometimes the vote will be close and sometimes it will not be close. Predictions about the vote depend on predictions of turnout for the groups involved.

An example of a situation, and the questions used for all cases, are as follows. Each question could be answered yes or no, except the first (about voting).

	Reduction for your group	Reduction for all others
Proposal A:	2%	4%
Proposal B:	4%	2%
Group size	1/3	2/3
Notice that:		
* Proposal A has more total benefits.		
* Proposal B is better for your group.		
How would you vote?		

Why would you vote this way? (... More than one can be "yes.") [Subjects responded yes or no to each item.]

- Because it is in my personal self-interest.
- Because it is in my group's interest.
- Because it is best on the whole.
- Because it is my duty to vote this way.
- Because it is my group's duty to vote this way.
- Because it is everyone's duty to vote this way.

What is your duty in a case like this?

- My duty is to vote what is in my personal self-interest.
- My duty is to vote what is in my group's interest.
- My duty is to vote what is best for everyone.

In a case like this, what would lead to the best overall outcome?

- If everyone voted according to his or her self-interest.
- If everyone voted according to his or her group's interest.
- If everyone voted according to his or her view of what is best for everyone.
- It doesn't matter because both proposals are equally good.

The 85 subjects ranged in age from 23 to 64 (median 41); 76% were female.

The experiment had several conditions. Inadvertently, their order was not randomized, so I focus here on overall results rather than comparisons of the conditions, which were, in any case, varied largely in order to increase the number of pages presented without repeating any. The manipulations were the size of "your group" (1/3 or 2/3), whether the election was close, the size of the payoffs, and whether the two proposals were equal in total benefits or whether proposal A was greater. I report only the 8 cases in which A had greater benefits. (Subjects were more likely to choose B when the benefits were equal.)

9.2 Results

For the most part, subjects consistently chose either the self-interested option (B) or the best option (A): 32% chose the self option every time and 11% chose the best option every time. The other subjects had some mixture of the two, but, in general subject were consistent enough so that the reliability coefficient (α) was 0.88.

I examined correlations, across subjects, of the proportion of choice of the self-interested option. The highest correlations (0.25 or higher⁶) were with SelfInt (0.40, self-interest as a reason), GrpInt (0.57, group interest as a reason), Whole (-.50, what is best on the whole as a reason, negative because this is given as a reason for voting for the best proposal), AllDuty (-0.39, everyone's duty), DutySelf (0.36, duty to vote for self-interest), DutyGrp (0.41, duty to vote for group interest), DutyAll (-.60), and BestAll (-0.39, the best outcome would result from everyone voting for what they thought was best for all). In sum, people who vote on the basis of self- or group-interest are those who think it is their duty to do so.

Figure 2 shows the proportions of endorsement of each item, broken down according to the answer to the first question, even though the main determinant of this response is the individual subject.

The main result is that the self voters (black) think that their duty is to themselves and their group (middle group of lines), yet they acknowledge that it would be best to vote for the benefit of all (bottom group). They see their duty as to support their group even when the overall outcome is worse as a result.

⁶The next highest was 0.19.

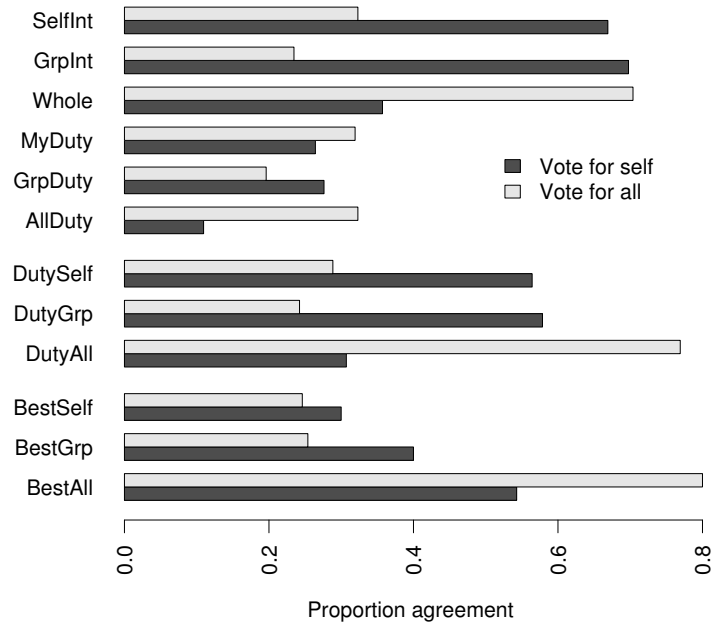


Figure 2: Responses to questions about duty as a function of responses to the first question about choice.

This result was tested statistically in several ways and was highly significant.⁷ The result held for the entire data set as well as for just the votes for self. In sum, people tend to see their duty as more parochial than what they themselves think is best overall.

9.3 Follow-up

The results of the experiment just described could arise from the coincidence of group interest and self-interest. Subjects might have voted for their group's interest because they themselves would benefit. Self-interest is almost surely an insufficient reason for voting for one's group, because of the low probability of having an effect, but the subjects might have thought otherwise. In a follow-up experiment, self-interest and group interest were separated. This did not matter:

⁷The most concise was the use of a multi-level (mixed effects) model with subject as the grouping variable and the difference between BestAll and DutyAll as the only dependent variable, which yield a t value greater than 4. But the effect held both within those subjects who made different choices and across subjects.

People see a duty to their group even when self-interest does not coincide with group interest.

Baron (in press) presents data from a follow-up study, which included cases in which the subject did not benefit at all from helping her group (because of a quirk in the law). When self-interest was aligned with group-interest (as in the last experiment), 64% of the votes favored the proposal that was best for the group. When self-interest was opposed to group-interest, the new cases, 40% favored this proposal, still a substantial number. The difference between the two indicates that some voters do think that voting is justified by self-interest, and some even think that it is their duty to vote for their own interest. Again, in these cases, subjects felt they had a duty to support their group even when they thought that this would not have the best consequences.

10 Conclusion

Parochialism is one of the big problems in the world today. It is related even to such apparently unrelated problems as climate change (Baron, 2006): the burden of reducing global warming must fall on rich nations, yet the main beneficiaries will be poor nations; and, moreover, the nearly inevitable rise in sea level will increase the demand of “foreigners” to migrate into the same rich countries (and into other poor countries less affected). What can be done about it?

10.1 Approval voting

The results I have reported, and others, suggest several approaches. First, widespread adoption of approval voting may help — possibly even across nations, as in international bodies that set rules.⁸ The results indicate that people can take the opportunity to approve proposals that are somewhat less good for their own group but better on the whole. Approval voting can thus favor compromise among competing groups. For example, workers may fear that a trade agreement would threaten their jobs, but they may also care about increased access to goods and about benefits to other workers elsewhere. If they were offered enough options, they might approve a free trade agreement if they saw it as sufficiently beneficial for all.

In the studies I have described, voting had no personal consequences. This is somewhat like the real situation, since the perception that “one vote doesn’t matter” is widespread and people tend to perceive their voting more as a matter of expression than as action with real consequences (Brennan & Lomasky, 1993).

⁸Note that approval voting is one type of alternative to simple plurality or majority voting. Another set of methods that has many of the same theoretical advantages as approval voting involves ranking. This set includes the “single transferable vote,” the Hare method, and “instant runoff.” The Borda count, in which ranks are summed, seems more subject to strategic voting than any of these other methods. The Wikipedia entry on voting provides excellent introductory material, and citations.

The experiments thus show that people are open to the kind of understanding that would lead to the reduction of parochialism.

The benefits of approval voting depend on which proposals are put to a vote. If only two proposals were available, then approval voting would have no advantage over standard voting. Addition of a second Self proposal, similar to the first, could also drive the self-interested utility of Best below the mean and reduce its rate of approval. In this case, approval voting might be just as subject to parochialism as standard voting. Approval voting could never be more sensitive to parochialism, however.

10.2 The self-interest illusion

The illusion that cooperation promotes self-interest seems to be a beneficial one. It encourages people to sacrifice their true self-interest when doing so can increase the net benefits to all. Yet, in previous work, I have found that it operates even more strongly when membership in a group is salient. Moreover, the appearance of being beneficial may itself be an illusion, since the ultimate cause may be the desire to reduce perceived conflict between morality and self-interest, and the reduction could go the other way too: people could rationalize their selfishness by convincing themselves that their self-sacrifice does not really do anyone any good.

The experiments described here suggest that the self-interest illusion is not about competition between groups. On the other hand, the perception of competition may itself increase parochial attitudes. For example, many Americans think that the U.S. is competing with China for some sort of economic dominance of the world. Arguably, economic competition between the U.S. and China can benefit both countries. Only military competition poses a danger, and, if anything, the (low) risk of that is only exacerbated by the politics of economic competition.

Efforts to reduce the self-interest illusion may lead to a general decline in political participation. Yet, if such participation is motivated by parochial concerns rather than concerns for the good of all, do we need it? Moreover, if the reduction of the self-interest illusion were brought about by a general increase in the perception of conflict between morality and self-interest, then the opposite illusion could also decrease, so that public participation would increase.

Parochialism is, in a way, an intermediate state, between commitment to the self and commitment to humanity in general. Political action in favor of a group often hurts both the actor and humanity. If people understood this, self-interest might conspire with utilitarianism to keep parochial voters at home. The utilitarians would remain. However, the moralists would also remain, as I shall discuss shortly.

10.3 Acts and omissions

As discussed by many writers (e.g., Singer, 1993), the harmful neglect of outsiders is an example of what I have called omission bias, a tendency to ignore

the harms of omission. I have shown here how omission bias is greater for out-groups. Thus, parochialism is manifest largely in failure to help, rather than in active harm. (This asymmetry is consistent with the idea that competition plays a small role, since competition, as in sports, allows active harm . . . within limits.)

It is encouraging that individual differences in omission bias are large (Baron & Ritov, 2004). It is thus possible to overcome this bias, and some people indeed find the failure to help others to be just as repugnant as active harm. The radicals of the 1960s had a slogan (attributed to Eldridge Cleaver in a 1968 speech), “If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.” Such an attitude could work to reduce parochialism, insofar as people came to see their neglect of outsiders as equivalent to harmful action. In the case of behavior of citizens, it could be especially useful, since little effort is required to *support* (or not oppose) policies that benefit outsiders. Often, simply voting for the better candidate is all that is required.

10.4 Groups vs. individuals

The distinction between groups and individuals examined here is almost a “framing effect,” an effect of two different ways of describing the same situation. When we harm groups, we harm the individuals who comprise those groups, yet many people are less willing to harm the individuals than to harm the groups. It should not be difficult to find political opponents of more lenient treatment of illegal immigrants who, at the same time, respect and help particular illegal immigrants whom they know. Arguments against parochialism, in addition to emphasizing the equivalent effects of acts and omissions, should also emphasize the humanity of out-group member. I don’t think this conclusion will surprise anyone, but we now have some experimental evidence for it.

10.5 Moralistic values and citizens’ duty

The results found here also suggest that parochialism, in the form of nationalism, is often moralistic, absolute, and seen as objectively required. It also has elements of a social norm, in that it is responsive to the opinions of others when they favor nationalism but not when they oppose it. And it is seen as part of a citizen’s duty.

Arguably, it would not make sense for nationalism to have no element of social norms. This is because a nation is defined by what its people take it to be. We see the operation of shifting national norms both in history and in modern conflicts (Yugoslavian vs. Croatian, Iraqi vs. Kurd, Sri Lankan vs. Tamil, and so on). It, however, could make sense to have a nation-relative value that was not a social norm, that is, “people should support their own nation, whatever they take it to be.” The results here suggest, however, that parochial norms of nationalism are generally seen as fixed, independent of what others think. They tend to be moralistic.

In the long run, we might be able to de-bias moralistic values. Even now, these values are locked in a political struggle with various forms of altruism, including utilitarian altruism that considers outsiders as well as co-nationals. Many moralistic values might arise partly as errors based on false beliefs about the good of others. People may think that others are more like them than they are. People's good may really differ. If people could come to see moralistic values as possible errors, they would be more open to discussion about them, and more open to evidence about the true nature of other people's good, and about how they could use their power as citizens to advance the good of others.

In the meantime, we have one protection against the imposition of moralistic values: liberty as a general political commitment, limited necessarily by consideration of externalities (including those that result from the imposition of moralistic values themselves). When people make decisions for themselves, they are unlikely to be influenced much by the moralistic goals of others. When governments remove the power to make decisions, limiting choice, they open up the possibility that groups of people with moralistic goals can influence the law, usually in the guise of paternalism, in order to protect people protected from the consequences of their own decisions. To the extent that liberty is salient as a general political issue, however, those who are afraid of such intrusions will join together to defend liberty as such, even when they might agree with some particular moralistic effort.

Finally, it would be nice if it became more fashionable to see people's duty as citizens as the result of a (very small) power they have to influence events. If they step back from questions about the origin of that power and consider how they should best use it, now that they have it, they might conclude that it is best used for the good of all, and not as an obligation to return the favor of the nation that granted it.

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