

Virtues and vices of citizenship

Jonathan Baron¹

October 13, 2018

¹<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~baron>. Email. baron@upenn.edu. Talk at the Moral Psychology Research Group.

Why study citizenship?

Many world problems arise from poor government: non-functioning government (including world government), populism, corruption, poor policies, isolationism.

This occurs in democracies and quasi-democracies.

Thus the bad decisions of citizens hurt other people; hence this is a moral issue, like donating to charity. Not just voting, but that is an example.

Voting, unlike donating to charity, is (usually) cheap.

Three related utilitarian virtues (and social norms) of good citizens

Cosmopolitanism is a continuum, from pure self-interest voting to concern for present and future humanity. In the middle is parochialism, which is voting for an in-group, even when out-group harm exceeds in-group benefit.

Moralism is willingness to impose on others beliefs that cannot be defended in terms of their goals.

Actively open-minded thinking (AOT) includes active search for reasons why a pet idea might be wrong, and fair inference from what is found. It is required for individual thinking, for group discussion, and for evaluation of authorities.

All three social norms are partially supported, and partially opposed by other norms.

I. Cosmopolitanism

VOTING AS A RATIONAL CHOICE

WHY AND HOW PEOPLE VOTE TO IMPROVE THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS

Aaron Edlin, Andrew Gelman, and Noah Kaplan

ABSTRACT

For voters with 'social' preferences, the expected utility of voting is approximately independent of the size of the electorate, suggesting that rational voter turnouts can be substantial even in large elections. Less important elections are predicted to have lower turnout, but a feedback mechanism keeps turnout at a reasonable level under a wide range of conditions. The main contributions of this paper are: (1) to show how, for an individual with both selfish and social preferences, the social preferences will dominate and make it rational for a typical person to vote even in large elections; (2) to show that rational socially motivated voting has a feedback mechanism that stabilizes turnout at reasonable levels (e.g., 50% of the electorate); (3) to link the rational social-utility model of *voter turnout* with survey findings on socially motivated *vote choice*.

Features of political participation (in a democratic state)

- ▶ Usually much less costly than spontaneous cooperation in a social dilemma.
- ▶ Not cost-effective in advancing self-interest (Downs).
- ▶ Often more cost-effective than charity in doing good for others, especially with large numbers of affected others, where the large number outweighs the small influence of one citizen.
- ▶ Cost-effectiveness increases with number affected, hence parochial voting (parochial altruism) is more effective than self-interest voting but less effective than cosmopolitan voting.

Expected utility of voting

$$\sim \text{Effect} \cdot \frac{\text{Number considered}}{\text{Number of voters}}$$

Number considered can be:

Self: a few (usually includes family).

Group: on the order of the number of voters, or much less (unions, etc.).

Humanity: many times the number of voters, includes world and people in the future.

Voting is highly inefficient as a way of pursuing self-interest, and pretty inefficient for pursuing parochial group interest. But it is worthwhile if the voter considers humanity (Edlin et al., 2007, 2008).

Democracy is a design to amplify altruistic concerns for large number of others. A utilitarian voter would vote for what is best for all in the long run.

Orwell on nationalism

“By nationalism I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled ‘good’ or ‘bad’. But secondly — and this is much more important — I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests.” George Orwell (1945)

Parochialism: Moral judgments about non-parochial actions

“Private universities in the U.S. accept foreign students while rejecting some U.S. students who are almost as well qualified.”

What do you think of this action?

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

The duty to support nationalistic policies

Jonathan Baron, Ilana Ritov, Joshua Greene

Citizens perceive a duty to support policies that benefit their nation, even when they themselves judge that the consequences of the policies will be worse on the whole, taking outsiders into account.

When asked for reasons, many subjects felt an obligation to help their fellow citizens before others, and they also thought that they owed something to their nation, in return for what it did for them.

In an experiment with Israeli and Palestinian students, group membership affected both perceived overall consequences and duty.

Subjects still showed a greater group duty than predicted by perceived consequences.

Some cases

Repeal the free-trade agreement with Mexico (part of NAFTA).

Repeal the free-trade agreement with Canada (part of NAFTA).

Reduce by 50% the amount of U.S. oil exported to other countries.

Increase by 50% the number of guards on the U.S./Mexican border.

Require employers to ask for proof of citizenship or legal immigrant status.

Reduce the number of Chinese students allowed to enter Ph.D. programs in the U.S.

Reduce the U.S. contribution to United Nations peacekeeping by 50%.

Ratify the proposed free-trade agreement with Colombia.

Eliminate tariffs on all goods produced in Sub-Saharan African countries.

Eliminate quotas on sugar imports, allowing more foreign sugar to enter the U.S.

Eliminate tariffs on ethanol from Brazil (which is cheaper than that produced by U.S. farmers).

Reasons for duty (Expt. 2)

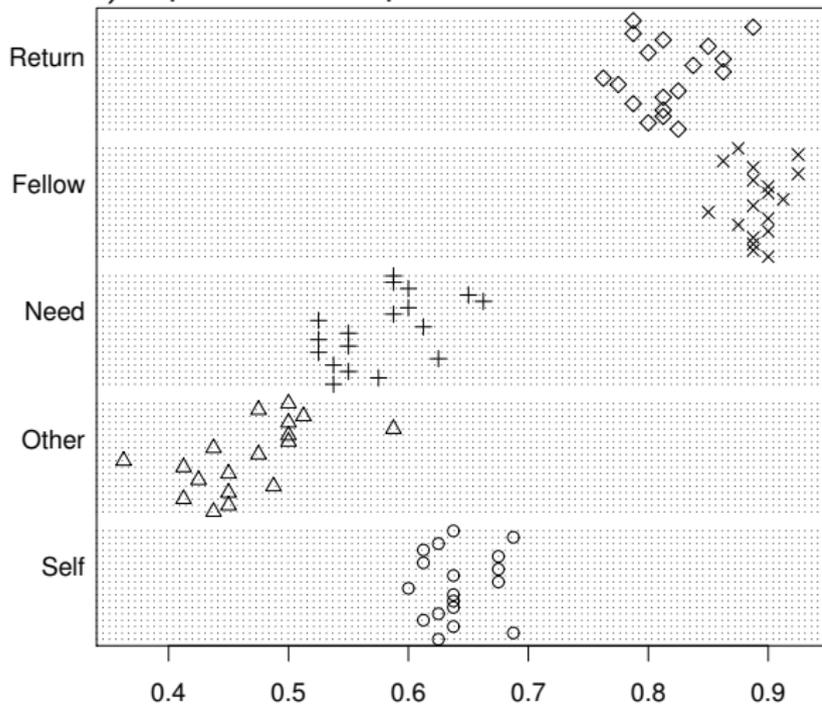
Which of the following is true about duty in this case?

- ▶ **Citizens have a duty to help their nation in return for what their nation does for them.**
- ▶ **Citizens have a duty to help their fellow citizens before helping others.**
- ▶ People have a duty to help those in need, wherever they are.
- ▶ People have a duty to help citizens of other nations when their own governments cannot or will not provide the needed help.
- ▶ A citizen has a duty to support policies that are best for him or her personally.

Main reasons are first two, in bold.

Reasons for duty, Experiment 2

Each point represents the mean response to the questions about reasons for a proposal, for a given questions. The groups (and different symbols) represent the questions:



Experiment 3: Israelis and Palestinians

Subjects classified by preferred language: 57 Hebrew (29 female, 28 male), 54 Arabic (28 female, 22 male), and 11 “other”. Proposals:

- ▶ All parts of Jerusalem will remain under Israeli control, and the Arab neighborhoods will have some municipal autonomy.
- ▶ Jerusalem will be the capital of two states: The Jewish neighborhoods will be part of Israel, the Arab neighborhoods will be part of Palestine. The old city will be governed by an international organization, and will remain open to all.
- ▶ Israel will dismantle all settlements except for the big clusters (Maale Edomim, Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Beitar-Ilit), establishing a new borderline. A free and safe passage for Palestinians will be established between the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian state will recognize the new border.
- ▶ Israel will withdraw to the 67 boarder except for a few changes resulting from agreed swaps. Palestinians will give up the right of return to the area inside Israel.
- ▶ ...

Questions

- Icons** How will this agreement affect Israel, when you take into account both the positive and the negative consequences?
- Pcons** How will this agreement affect the Palestinians, when you take into account both the positive and the negative consequences?
- Cons** What will the overall effect of this agreement be, when you take into account its effect on both Israel and the Palestinians?
- Iduty** What in your opinion is the duty of an Israeli, concerning active support for or active opposition to this agreement?
- Pduty** What in your opinion is the duty of a a Palestinian, concerning active support for or active opposition to this agreement?

Results

Subjects see a duty to support proposals on their side (and oppose proposals on the other side) even when their duty is discrepant with their own judgment of overall consequences.

For example, the duty on one's own side (Iduty or Pduty) was correlated with direction of difference between consequences on one's own side (Icons or Pcons) and overall consequences (Cons) (regression coefficient .29).

However, in additional analyses, although each side weights their own side more in judging overall consequences, each gives some weight to the other side. Optimistically, this opens the door to negotiation (at least among students at an Israeli university).

The “culture of honor” (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994) in citizens’ concept of their duty (2012)

A good-idea condition: “June thinks that the main issue in the election is a tax on carbon fuels in the U.S. June thinks that the tax is a **good idea** on the whole because of its long-term benefits in reducing global warming. But the tax would be **bad for her** because she is a heavy user of oil. . . .”

A bad-idea condition: “. . . [Betty] thinks that the tax is a **bad idea** on the whole. She thinks that its bad effects on the world and U.S. economy would slightly outweigh its long-term benefits in reducing global warming. But the tax would be **good for her** because she holds a patent on a technology that would be used for generating electricity from sunlight.”

Each example was followed by several questions, including about reasons.

% of answers about reasons for self-interest voting

“Yes” favors the side that agrees with self-interest.

Reason	Yes	No
If X does not look out for her own interests, nobody else will.	52	11
She will benefit from a reduction in global warming.	63	12
If voters vote according to their self-interest, then policies that are best for the majority are likely to be chosen.	32	20
If the pro-tax candidate wins by one vote, and she votes for that candidate, she will regret it.	38	10
If voters vote according to their view of what is best on the whole, then the best policies for all are likely to be chosen.	40	25
Citizens are given the right to vote in order to defend their own self-interest.	47	19
Citizens are given the right to vote in order to help decide what is best on the whole.	49	28

Self-interest, spending, and taxes

The introduction began: “The U.S. government has a problem about its long-term budget. This study is about various proposals that will affect the budget, and other things. Proposals to cut taxes or increase spending will increase the budget deficit. Proposals to increase taxes (including those that eliminate deductions) or reduce spending will reduce the deficit. Of course, the deficit is not the only issue.” E.g.:

Proposal: Increase U.S. government funding for research on removal of greenhouse gases (CO₂ and methane) from the atmosphere, by \$50 per citizen per year. Removal of these gases would reduce the risk from global warming.

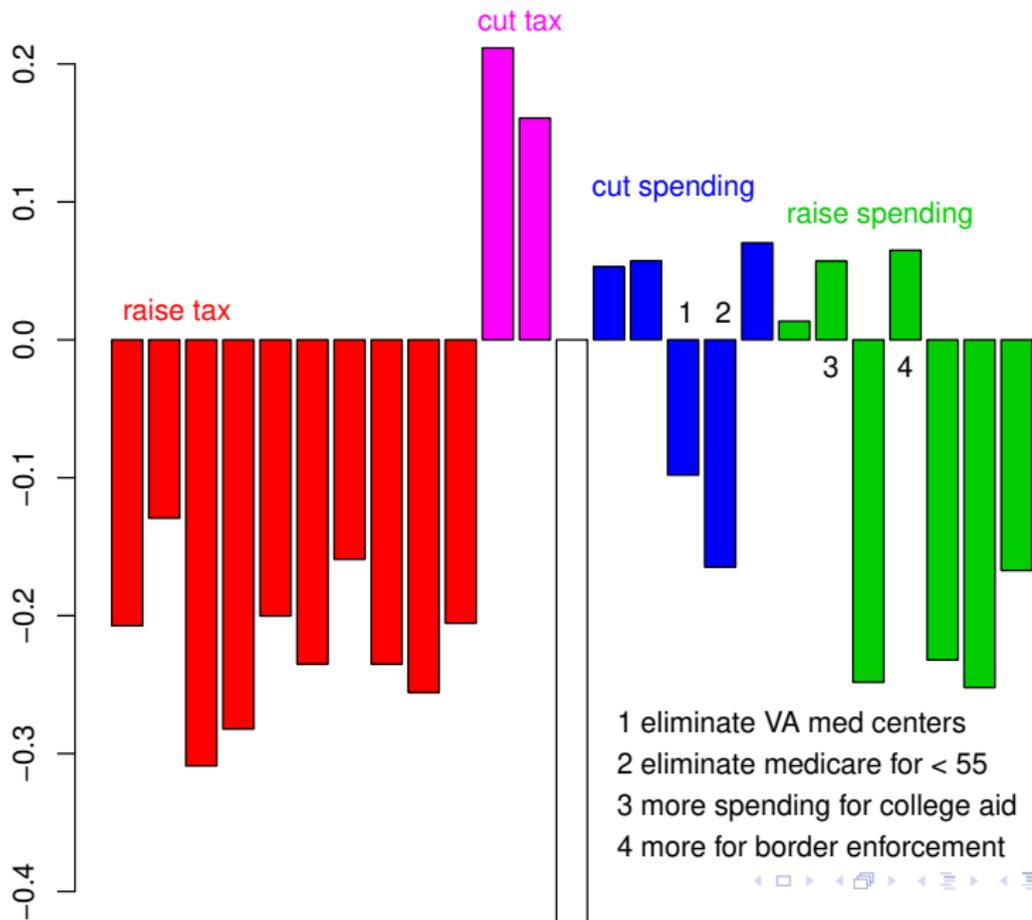
Some of the questions

How would you vote on this in a referendum? [“for” “against” “abstain or unsure”]

Concerning this proposal, what is the duty of a citizen? That is, what is the morally best way to think about how to vote?

- ▶ A voter should vote for proposals that would benefit the voter and those close to him or her, regardless of their effect on the nation.
- ▶ A voter should vote for proposals that benefit the nation as a whole, regardless of their effect on the voter.
- ▶ A voter should take both self and nation into account but make sure to defend self-interest primarily.
- ▶ A voter should take both self and nation into account but give national interest priority over self-interest.

Correlations between pro-voting and self-interest duty



Self-interest voting may be malleable

Nobody tells people what voting is about. It could be that they are easily influenced, because there is no announced theory that they are taught to believe.

The change in self-interest voting suggests that politicians themselves can influence how people think.

Some evidence suggests that, throughout the world, the number of "cosmopolitan" citizens is increasing, possibly as a result of greater mobility. More people seem to have weak loyalty to their nations.

Dale Miller (1999) on changing norms

“... consider then-candidate Ronald Reagan’s famous refrain in the 1980 U.S. presidential campaign: ‘Ask yourself, are you better off today than you were four years ago?’ This refrain reflected a message as well as a question. . . . In effect, by telling voters that a vote for him would be good for their pocketbook, Reagan was telling them that it was normative to vote on the basis of their pocketbook. It is interesting to note that the correlation between self-interest (defined by personal financial situation) and candidate preference in the 1980 U.S. presidential election was only .08 (Sears & Funk, 1991). However, it rose to a more substantial .36 by 1984 (Lau, Sears & Jessor, 1990), tempting one to speculate that the tenor of the self-interest-celebrating rhetoric of Reagan’s first term contributed to the social construction of voting behavior . . . as being something that self-interest does and should dominate.”

Reducing parochialism

1. Approval voting: If both in-group and out-group members vote to approve or disapprove each of several candidates or proposals, proposals that are best on the whole are more likely to win because they often approved by everyone. (Northern Ireland; Sri Lanka).

2. Make things more personal, to get people to think individual human beings rather than abstractions like nations: Manuel and Manuela rather than "Mexicans". Experimental manipulations have demonstrated this effect. The success of these manipulations also suggests that parochial voting is not somehow part of human nature but is the result of a cognitive abstraction.

3. Re-frame choices as acts rather than omissions, since parochialism is reduced for acts. (Hard to do.)

II. Anti-moralism

In June, 2006, then Senator Barak Obama said something like the following (from USA Today, July 10)): “To say that men and women should not inject their ‘personal morality’ into public policy debates is a practical absurdity; our law is by definition a codification of morality. ... [But d]emocracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons but seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.”

Categorization of goals (values)

	<i>Goals . . .</i>	
	<i>for your behavior or goals</i>	<i>for others' behavior or goals</i>
<i>Dependent on others' goals</i>	Altruistic	Moral
<i>Independent of others' goals</i>	Self-Interested	Moralistic

Moralistic values (Baron, 2003, U. of Pa. Law Review)

- ▶ testing a fetus for IQ genes and aborting it if its expected IQ is below average
- ▶ cloning someone with desired traits so that these may be passed on, such as an athletic champion or brilliant scientist
- ▶ modifying the genes of an embryo so that, when it is born, it will have a higher IQ
- ▶ giving a drug (with no side effects) to enhance school performance of normal children

In 22% of examples like these, subjects would ban these actions even if the consequences of allowing the actions were better on the whole than the consequences of banning them, if the subjects could imagine that the consequences might be better, and if “almost everyone in a nation thought that the behavior should be allowed.”

Values (utilities) vs. opinions in utilitarian analysis

Moralistic values are sometimes (often?, always?) opinions about what should be done rather than values assigned to outcomes (utilities)..

In principle, we should discover values by asking about states of the world, independently of what led to them (e.g., nature vs. human choices).

Very likely, the prude who opposes nudity will think that it is bad when other people go naked, whether the people who do it think it is bad or not. This is a value.

The prude will also support legislation banning the practice. The latter is an opinion about action.

In practice, this separation is difficult, at best. But we must make it when we think theoretically about these issues.

III. Actively open-minded thinking

“In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself . . . the fallacy of what was fallacious.” J. S. Mill

Properties of AOT: A theory of good thinking

- ▶ Applies to search and inference.
- ▶ Objects can be **possibilities** (options, candidate conclusions), **evidence** (arguments), or **goals** (values, criteria).
- ▶ About fairness, not just amount. Not the same as reflection/impulsivity. Does not always demand lots of thinking.
- ▶ Applied to others (authorities), as well as self. We trust others to tell us what to believe.
- ▶ Applies to confidence, not just conclusions. Confidence can be justifiably low.
- ▶ Leads to better decisions.

Current AOT scale

- ▶ Willingness to be convinced by opposing arguments is a sign of good character.
- ▶ People should take into consideration evidence that goes against conclusions they favor.
- ▶ Being undecided or unsure is the result of muddled thinking. (-)
- ▶ People should revise their conclusions in response to relevant new information.
- ▶ Changing your mind is a sign of weakness. (-)
- ▶ People should search actively for reasons why they might be wrong.
- ▶ It is OK to ignore evidence against your established beliefs. (-)
- ▶ It is important to be loyal to your beliefs even when evidence is brought to bear against them. (-)
- ▶ There is nothing wrong with being undecided about many issues.
- ▶ When faced with a puzzling question, we should try to consider more than one possible answer before reaching a conclusion.

Correlations of AOT scale (including similar scales)

- ▶ predicts judgments of others' thinking
- ▶ $-.61$ ($-.82$ corrected for attenuation) with belief in divine-command theory (Piazza & Landy, 2013).
- ▶ $\sim .3$ (corrected) with utilitarian responding in moral dilemmas (Baron et al., 2015).
- ▶ $-.27$ ($-.41$) with political conservatism in a study where CRT correlated 0 (Kahan & Corbin, 2016).
- ▶ $-.49$ with supernatural religious beliefs (Pennycook et al., 2014).
- ▶ $-.44$ with superstitious beliefs (Svedholm-Hkkinen & Lindeman (2017).
- ▶ lower negative correlations with belief in conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs.
- ▶ low with trust in makers of categorical statements (new data w Derrick High).

Note: Correlations with the CRT were always lower.

Correlation of AOT scale with judgments of political statements (with Derrick High)

Type1. It would be flat out irresponsible to oppose tuition-free access to community or technical college programs — it will create a wave of new workers prepared for the 21st century economy.

Type2. Tuition-free access to community or technical college programs will create a wave of new workers prepared for the 21st century economy. Yes, it is expensive, but it is worth the price.

How much can you trust the judgment of the person who said this?
(4-point scale)

$r=.35$ between AOT and the Type2-Type2 difference (averaging the 8 pairs of items; 100 Ss, so $p\sim.000$)

How fairly has the speaker thought about the topic? (4-point scale)
 $r=.37$ between AOT and the Type2-Type1 difference

The expanding circle (Singer, 1982)

“Beginning to reason is like stepping onto an escalator that leads upward and out of sight. Once we take the first step, the distance to be traveled is independent of our will and we cannot know in advance where we shall end.”

If Peter Singer is correct, then AOT should lead to cosmopolitanism. It might also lead to anti-moralism.