

# **An Examination of the Expressive Theory of Voting**

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**Abstract:** A common view in social science is that democratic voting is not instrumentally rational. The contributory theory of voting states that this view is misconceived: voting is instrumentally rational if citizens aim to contribute to the advancement of the public good. The prevailing explanation of democratic voting, however, is the expressive theory: people vote not in order to pursue instrumentally the public good, but only to express inconsequentially a preference over an outcome, like cheering a sports team. The most prominent expressive theory finds that democratic choice is in many circumstances inferior to market choice. This essay challenges the expressive theory internally, and externally from the standpoint of the contributory theory. Voting is like playing on the team, not like cheering it.

**Introduction.** An economist would be “embarrassed to be seen at the voting booth” (Dubner and Levitt 2005). Although most citizens vote, the standard view in social science is that it’s irrational to do so. It’s extremely unlikely that any one vote would break a tie, and when a single vote does not break a tie it has nothing to do with the outcome. Since voting is costly, almost any single vote would be irrational. The paradox of nonvoting was first stated by Downs (1957, 244-246), and is often formulated as follows.  $B$  is the individual’s Benefit from a winning election outcome,  $C$  is the Cost of the individual voting, and  $p$  is the Probability that an individual’s vote is pivotal in causing the winning election outcome. An individual would vote then, when  $pB - C > 0$ . The probability of being pivotal, however, is minuscule, effectively zero; for any individual, the act of voting is all cost and almost no benefit, and hence no one should vote.

The expressive theory of voting ( Brennan and Buchanan 1984, Brennan and Lomasky 1993, Brennan and Hamlin 2000, Brennan 2008, Hamlin and Jennings 2009, Hillman 2010) is probably the modally endorsed model these days. Brennan and Lomasky (1993) is the most prominent study, and is my focus.<sup>1</sup> Market and ballot choices are each composed of both instrumental and expressive elements, they say. Individuals may value expression of a preference through a market exchange or a vote, in other words, they desire to express a desire. The formula becomes  $pB - C + E > 0$ , where  $E$  is the expressive value of voting; the instrumental value is  $pB \approx 0$ , and thus an individual votes if and only if the expressive value of the act exceeds its cost. The expressive aspect of voting is “action that is undertaken for its own sake rather than to bring about particular consequences” (Brennan and Lomasky 1993, 25). The expressive theory holds that there is almost never a causal connection between an individual’s vote and the associated electoral outcome. Hence, her vote is not disciplined by opportunity cost, and is rationally suspect compared to market exchange, which is disciplined by opportunity cost. Expressive valuation can be the irrational opposite of instrumental valuation, and as a result, an aggregation of individuals’ expressive

preferences could be the opposite of what an aggregation of their rational instrumental preferences would have been, to the harm of many.

Elsewhere, I develop a contributory theory of voting (Mackie forthcoming-b). Its argument can be summarized with a simple example. Suppose, reasonably, that one likes playing basketball for the sake of winning, winning by the largest margin, and losing by the smallest margin. The paradox, however, insists that only winning counts, and thus it would be irrational to play on the team if one expected to lose or to win by more than one point. Past responses to the paradox say: It's stupid to play, or one is paid to play, or it's one's duty to play. Or one plays to satisfy a desire to express a desire for victory.

The paradox of nonvoting assumes that voters value only the winning of an election. Their utility function would look like the one in Figure 1.

#### **Figure 1. About Here**

From the diagram, it can be seen that unless one's additional vote pivotally causes the outcome, it is of no marginal value. It would be futile or redundant. If 39 voters out of 100 vote for a cause, a 40<sup>th</sup> vote for the cause changes nothing. If 51 out of 100 vote for a cause, a 52<sup>nd</sup> vote for the cause changes nothing.<sup>2</sup> The claim that voting is irrational often confounds two logically independent claims: redundancy and imperceptibility.

It's likely that many voters value both winning, and how much their cause wins or loses by, the latter termed the mandate value of voting. Their utility functions would look like the one in Figure 2.

#### **Figure 2. About Here**

Each voter's contribution is pivotal to the mandate value. None is futile or redundant. If 39 out of 100 votes for a cause, a 40<sup>th</sup> advances its mandate value. If 52 out of a 100 vote for a cause, a 53<sup>rd</sup> advances the mandate value. In mass democratic election between two major parties, for example, a large mandate for the left party in the last election would in the present term of office shift their governing policies left and assuming no change among voters shift the policies of both parties left in the next election (Fowler and Smirnov 2007). Now the

objection is that a voter's contribution is, not redundant, but imperceptible. Before addressing the imperceptibility objection, consider that empirical studies show that voters are mostly oriented to the public interest rather than to simple self-interest (see Mackie forthcoming-b and references therein) Voters are most strongly motivated by duty and by desire to influence the social outcome (see Mackie forthcoming-b and references therein).

The American Citizen Participation Study, for example, asked an instructive series of questions about citizens' motivations to vote. Prosocial motivation dominates: half the respondents said at least one particular problem motivated them to vote, and for 9% of them myself, family, or others were affected by the problem, for 46% all the community was affected, and for 45% all the nation was affected. Most intend to influence the outcome: 97% say the chance to make the community or nation a better place to live is somewhat or very important, 91% say the chance to influence public policy is somewhat or very important, 65% say that furtherance of party goals is somewhat or very important, 22% say that getting help from an official on a family problem is somewhat or very important. Most are morally motivated to vote: 96% say that my duty as a citizen is somewhat or very important, 86% that to do my share is somewhat or very important. Given that so many voters name both influence and duty, someone who says that she has a duty to vote likely means that she has the consequentialist duty to advance the public good, that is, she is instrumentally motivated. Side payments for voting are not very important: 71% say so about obtaining recognition from people I respect, 88% about not wanting to say no to someone who asked. Finally, few vote because they find it exciting to do so.

### **Table 1. About Here**

These responses are consistent with the contributory theory. Label the number of citizens  $N$ , the number of voters for one of the causes  $n$ , a voters' contribution to that cause roughly  $1/n$ , and her discounting of benefit to any other individual  $\alpha$  ( $0 < \alpha < 1$ ), and a citizen will vote when  $1/n (B_{self} + \alpha NB_{society}) - C > 0$  (adapted from Edlin, Gelman, Kaplan 2007). The term for benefit to self,  $B_{self}$ , is small compared to the term for benefit to society,  $B_{society}$ ,

and, when each is multiplied by  $1/n$  contribution, benefit to self usually goes to almost nothing, leaving benefit to society as the principal motivation for voting. If so, then, just as deliberation may operate as a filter to exclude unjustifiable preferences, voting may operate as a filter to exclude self interest and include public interest as input to collective decisions.

Is an “imperceptible” contribution to the benefit of society irrational (Olson 1971, 64), even if the benefit exceeds the cost of the contribution? Parfit (1994, 75-82) argues that it is mistaken to ignore imperceptible harms and benefits, and I do not know of reasons to reject his arguments. Suppose Fatima wants to become a champion gymnast. Her friends correctly tell her that any one day of practice only imperceptibly advances her towards that goal, but incorrectly tell her that for that reason she should skip every practice. My contribution of \$25 is imperceptible in comparison to UNICEF’s 100 million dollar budget, but its comparative smallness does not reduce its value from \$25 to \$0. Empirical studies show that actual humans do strongly contribute to low-cost continuous public goods (Pellikaan and van der Veen 2002, Frey and Meier 2004). Voting in an election is more vivid in process and result than for many other such public goods (such as taking shorter showers in order to reduce global warming over the next one hundred years), and voter turnout is high in developed democracies (the U.S. and Switzerland are exceptionally low).

The remainder of the essay goes as follows. The expressive theory understands market choice to be pivotal, instrumental, and hence disciplined by consequences; but voting choice to be almost never pivotal, almost entirely expressive, and hence undisciplined by consequences. Market choice is rational only by assumption, however. Further, in democratic collective action voters aim to contribute to the public good, and are thereby directly disciplined by consequences. Next, I scrutinize the varieties of expressive values found in the literature, and criticize a tendency to equate the intrinsic with the emotional. The expressive theory predicts that, due to expressive irrationality and to due to lack of consequences, expressive and instrumental values of an individual vote easily diverge, and in the aggregate yield collective decisions that would make all worse off. The divergence model

is implausible on several counts, however. The expressive theory is best known for likening voting to cheering and booing a football game, but I argue that voting rather is more like playing on the team. Finally, the expressive theory cannot explain strategic voting, which is instrumental.

**Comparing Market and Ballot.** Brennan and Lomasky (1993, 20) compare exchange in the market to voting in a democracy. Their analysis is intended to show that in market exchange there is a causal connection between choice and outcome, but in democratic voting there is not; that exchange is disciplined by opportunity cost but voting is not; and that market choice is primarily instrumental but voting choice is almost purely expressive. For economists, whatever an individual actually chooses is, *by definition*, rational, so long as preferences are consistently rank-ordered. An individual is assumed to have full information, to enjoy costless deliberation, to make no mistakes, to suffer from no weakness of the will, and to be free of systematically biased judgments. The economic actor is a unitary individual, or a unitary collective such as the business firm, rational by assumption. The consistent choices of such an actor in a market are rational, setting up one side of the market:ballot comparison. Public choice theory initially made its mark by analogizing voters to consumers, and by applying the tools of economics to political questions. The enterprise is fruitful to an extent, but the analogy is far from perfect. When a citizen votes for health insurance for all children, she does not choose that outcome in the same way as she chooses for herself an Orange Mocha Frappuccino Blended Coffee at Starbucks. Rather, I would say, she contributes to a collective decision.<sup>3</sup> The expressivists emphasize the disanalogy, but conceive of it differently.

The expressivists say that market choice is always pivotal, but voting choice is almost never pivotal, and this contrast grounds their judgment that voting is “pseudorational” (21). When I buy an Orange Mocha Frappuccino Blended Coffee my action is *pivotal*, I choose alternative *a* over alternative *b*. The final benefit of the choice is the net benefit of *a* (the benefit of the beverage minus its direct cost) minus the opportunity cost of *a*. The

opportunity cost of  $a$  is the net benefit of the next best-alternative  $b$  (the benefit of the next-best alternative minus its direct costs). If I fail to choose better  $a$ , and instead choose worse  $b$ , then my interests are set back. The consequence of being set back by choosing  $b$  disciplines me to choose  $a$ . If I prefer the outcome of state health insurance for all children, when I vote for that alternative, call it  $a$ , the final benefit is the net benefit of voting for it minus the net benefit of voting against it, call that  $b$ . However, my vote is not *pivotal* to either choice, except in the one in a million or worse chance that my single vote changes a loser to a winner. Whether I vote for the insurance or against it the outcome is the same, thus if I fail to choose  $a$  and instead choose  $b$ , my interests are not set back. Market exchange is disciplined by consequences, voting is not. Many people vote in elections even though they know that their vote is not pivotal, hence some other value must motivate their action. The expressivist holds that they vote almost entirely in order to *express* a preference for, say, state health insurance for all children. The expressivists also provisionally assume *homo economicus*, that both consumers and voters are instrumentally motivated by egoistic aims.

Say that an actor's choice is motivated by both instrumental value and by a narrowly defined expressive value. The consumer instrumentally values possession and consumption of the Orange Mocha Frappuccino, and also perhaps values expressing a preference for it through the act of exchange. The voter's valuation of state health insurance for all children is discounted by the minuscule chance of pivotality, say 1/1,000,000: instrumental value is nil and thus the value of *expressing* the preference for state health insurance for all children becomes supreme. Say that, for individual  $i$ ,  $R_A^i$  is the *instrumental* value of alternative  $a$ , and  $L_A^i$  is its *expressive* value. Then, in market choice, an individual chooses alternative  $a$  over alternative  $b$ , if and only if:

$$R_A^i + L_A^i \geq R_B^i + L_B^i$$

Empirically, I surmise, the value of merely expressing a desire for a market good is usually quite small. A bit of caution here: by expressive value the expressivist means only the value of expressing a desire through the act of exchange, and nothing more. The otherwise

expressive values of possessing, rhapsodizing, flaunting, reviling the good, are outside the analysis (Brennan and Lomasky 1993, 34). To fairly make a comparison with voting by secret ballot, we would add the additional assumption that it is only the value of expressing *to oneself* a desire for the market good by exchanging for it, not expressing one's desire to others by such an exchange.

And, in voting choice, when  $h$  is the minuscule chance of  $i$  being pivotal to the outcome, an individual chooses  $a$  over  $b$  if and only if:

$$hR_A^i + L_A^i \geq hR_B^i + L_B^i$$

In market choice, instrumental value generally exceeds narrow expressive value, and in voting choice narrow expressive value almost completely dominates instrumental value. It is important to understand that the broad expressive values associated with realizing a particular public good would *also* be discounted by  $h$ ; only narrow expressive value motivates the voter. This is well illustrated by the special election in Mississippi in April, 2001, solely over whether to remove the Confederate battle flag from the canton of the Mississippi state flag. Karahan and Shughart (2004) say that the case is a test of the expressive theory of voting, since the collective *outcome* of the vote is expressive rather than instrumental.<sup>4</sup> I believe they are mistaken. According to the logic of the expressive theory of voting, an individual would not be instrumentally motivated to vote for either an instrumental or an expressive collective outcome, since voting is costly and her vote would almost never be pivotal. She would only be motivated to vote by her desire to express to herself her desire for the expressive collective outcome.

An actor motivated by narrow expressive value is more emotional in her choices than an actor motivated by instrumental value, the expressivists continue, and it is possible that voters motivated by expressive interests in the aggregate would choose an outcome contrary to their instrumental interests. Thus, "preferences revealed in electoral settings do not possess the same normative authority as those revealed in the ideal market context" (Brennan and Lomasky 1993, 28). Some objections follow.

**Examination of the Market-Ballot Comparison.** The expressivists' comparison of market and ballot is flawed, I argue. Consumer rationality is assumed because of economic theory, but in fact consumers are likely as ill-informed as voters. The comparison drawn by the expressivists is not between economic action and political action, but instead between individual action and collective action. The aim of democratic voting, a great public good, differs from the aim of market exchange. Finally, if the contributory theory of voting is correct, then voting is disciplined by opportunity costs.

*Consumer Rationality is Theoretical, not Empirical.* Market choice is rational only by definitional fiat. Yet, it is certain that individuals as consumers are not well informed, that they must budget deliberative effort, that they make mistakes, that they suffer from weakness of will, that they are subject to systematic biases in their choices. The same could be said for individuals as voters. The comparative institutional question, about whether certain choices should be made by democratic decision rather than left to the market, is whether voters are somehow *more* irrational than consumers. Since Schumpeter, the economic approach to politics has offered one theory or another about how the political voter is necessarily inferior to the economic consumer. The claim seems to be supported by survey research testing voters for encyclopedic information about politics, rather than voters' competence for choosing a better alternative in circumstances of low information. Survey research also shows, however, that humans lack encyclopedic information on nearly all subjects, and a natural hypothesis is that consumers just as much lack encyclopedic information about market choices. The comparison hitherto has been theoretical, but should be empirical. In the first work of its kind, Burnett and McCubbins (2009) compare respondents' knowledge of issues of concern to voters and issues of concern to consumers. Respondents show a comparable range of knowledge and ignorance on factual questions in each realm. The economist may concede that consumers are rationally ignorant about trivial purchases, but would become fully informed when the stakes are high. The typical consumer's biggest transaction, with the most dire economic consequences, is the purchase of a home. A survey by the U.S. Federal Trade

Commission of 819 recent mortgage customers asked them to examine and compare hypothetical loan documents (Lacko and Pappalardo 2007). Half could not correctly identify the loan amount, and nine-tenths could not identify the total amount of upfront charges on the loan.<sup>5</sup>

*Market vs. Ballot, or Individual Action vs. Collective Action?* The expressivists' real contrast is not between market and ballot, but between action caused by one individual and action caused by an aggregate or group of individuals. If I choose to buy a cup of fair trade coffee on the market, I pivotally obtain caffeine and sugar, but I do not in terms of the expressive theory pivotally bring about fair trade. A boycott or a "buycott" (buying a product to promote its ethical value) is an individual consumer action that is part of a larger collective action, subject to redundancy and imperceptibility objections. A recent survey of American respondents by Zukin et al. (2006) shows that voting is the most frequent civic activity (51%), followed by deciding not to buy a product in protest (38%), next by buying a product in order to support a company (35%), then by trying to persuade others how to vote (33%). That some consumers are willing to pay more for fair-trade goods is shown in field experiments (Prasad et al, 2004; Hiscox and Smyth 2005). The expressivist would have to say that the fair-trade aspect of a coffee purchase is undisciplined by opportunity cost. That would mean that if the consumer learned that her brand of fair-trade coffee were fraudulent, she would continue to pay a higher price for it anyway, in order to continue to express herself about fair trade. The contributory theory says that her contribution advances the goal of fair trade, and that if she learned it were fraudulent she would choose her next best alternative.

*The Aim of Democratic Voting Differs from the Aim of Market Exchange.* The expressivists usually assume that both consumers and voters are egoistic, and it is assumed that the  $R^i$  and  $L^i$  of the consumer choice formula are, if not equal to then of the same magnitude as, the  $R^i$  and  $L^i$  of the voting choice formula. According to them, the difference between market choice and voting choice is that the instrumental value of voting choice is severely discounted by chance of pivotality: "the relative price effect is of the order of

several thousands, at least” (25). But the object of voting choice is a great good, the well-being of the entire community, many magnitudes larger than a voter’s private concerns. The public good is so great that, even if discounted by the size of a voter’s contribution towards advancing it ( $1/n$ ), and by a voter’s lesser valuation of the well-being of other individuals ( $\alpha N$ ), it still would for many often exceed the small cost of voting, I contend.

The expressivists do address the possibility that citizens vote because they value the public good (180-186). They construct several “voters’ dilemmas,” where the citizen instrumentally values one alternative but expressively values another, examined in detail further below. Their argument on the point at hand begins with a rather complex comparison between a voters’ dilemma based on egoism and another one based on a public good which multiplies each citizen’s expected benefit by the number of citizens in the population. I would work through this complex argument, except that the model assuming a great public good does counsel the citizen to vote for it, and the expressive value assumed for voting against the public good becomes irrelevant.

The value of  $p$  can be quite small, they say, discounting even a great good to a minuscule benefit less than the cost of the voting (if the probability that others will vote for the public good is 0.9, they say,  $p$  for an individual voter is of the order of  $1/10^{-24}$ ). It may be that the expressivists underestimate  $p$ , however (later estimates put it at the order of  $1/n$  where  $n$  is the number of voters for or against a proposition, see Edlin, Gelman, and Kaplan 2007). The contributory theory of voting, based on both winning and mandate value of voting, on other grounds, attributes roughly a  $1/n$  value for contribution to the advancement of a dynamic public good.

They also object that if a great good is at stake, and political parties respond to the demand for it, then the platforms of parties converge, and there would not be enough differential between the parties to motivate voting. First, although simple theory predicts party convergence, in reality we observe that parties don’t completely converge, perhaps to satisfy the policy aims of their members, perhaps to deter third-party entry. Second, even if

everyone agreed on outcomes (and I think there is a wider consensus than we suspect on public-good outcomes), people can differ on which policies generate those outcomes. In the United States, both Democrats and Republicans pledge fealty to the common welfare, but each has quite different theories about how to attain it. Third, the contributory theory of voting (Mackie, forthcoming-b) holds that many voters are motivated at two levels, one, to contribute to the advancement of one cause over another, and, two, to contribute to the advancement of democracy over autocracy. A voter can plausibly believe that casting a vote, even when indifferent between candidates, instrumentally advances the valuable aims of democratic accountability and stability.

*Voting is Disciplined by Consequences.* Suppose each citizen values her contribution to advancement of a great public good, whether it is a program to eliminate basic poverty, avoidance of confiscatory taxation that would make the most disadvantaged worse off, or avoidance of a foolishly self-destructive war, and suppose that voters are those citizens for whom the benefit of advancing the public good exceeds the cost of voting. Such voters are disciplined by opportunity costs. The net mandate-and-winning-value of alternative *a* exceeds that of alternative *b*. When that great public good declines due to ruinous policies then the voter is directly motivated to remedy the error by voting for better policies at the next election. The expressivists' main point is that noninstrumental voters are not disciplined by outcomes, and that democratic choice is suspect compared to market choice for that reason. The contributory theory says that the citizen directly values the public good, and is thereby disciplined by consequences.

Page and Shapiro (1992) survey the policy preferences of Americans from the 1930s to 1990. They conclude that aggregate American opinions on public policies are rational, in the sense that they are stable, coherent, and make sense in terms of underlying values and available information. Most importantly for the argument here, public opinions change in understandable and predictable ways in response to changing events, and opinion changes are sensible adjustments to new information and conditions. Wlezien's (1995; Soroka and

Wlezien 2004, 2005) thermostatic model is supported by evidence that the public responds to certain general categories of public expenditure. When the level of policy is more than the public prefers, the public favors less, and when the level of policy is less than the public prefers, the public favors more. In turn, budgetary decisions follow public preferences. Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson's (2002) sophisticated and detailed analyses argue that election results are influenced by Macropartisanship, roughly, accountability for past economic and other government performance, and by Public Mood, roughly, the public's demand for future policy change. They also argue that public opinion responds to policy (342-351), not at the individual level, but "when we turn to aggregates, the nation as a whole, the public *does* react, and react appropriately, to policy making by the national government" (351).

The absence of the discipline of opportunity cost distorts expressive preferences in three ways, say Brennan and Lomasky (1993, 39). First, it would encourage more whimsical and fanciful behavior; and the aggregation of expressive irresponsibility would be detrimental to the overall welfare of the citizens. This is a theoretical prediction, not an empirical finding, but it can be checked by a plausibility probe. The Official Monster Raving Loony Party is a joke party on the U.K. ballot, and in the 2005 general election it received 6,311 out of 27 million votes. Whimsy is trivial. Second, there is less incentive to gather information in an allegedly nonpivotal vote than in a pivotal choice. Would the typical person gather less information deciding whether or not to vote for the war candidate than she does in choosing between Colgate and Crest toothpastes? Given the informational demands of the thousands of decisions a person must make, each of those pairs of choices would be sketchily informed. But, is the war decision necessarily, or actually, less informed than the toothpaste decision? Third, community norms constrain individual behavior, yet mass voting is done in private in most places. In the expressive domain, an individual's more ideal, more benevolent, aspect may be activated. Expected instrumental costs are nil, and thus the individual is free to project a self-image. This is where altruism strongly enters the expressivist calculus, but the

expressivist emphasizes that such self-expression can take any form, not just the ethical. Further, the privacy of mass voting permits the expression of harmful preferences undisciplined by publicity and by instrumental consequence, whereas market choice is so disciplined. Is this so? The British National Party, an all-whites organization, won 7/10 of one percent of the vote in the 2005 U.K. general election. Also, race relations in the U.S. changed for the better more quickly in democratically-enacted law than in social custom.

Appealing to the contributory theory of voting and to other considerations I have argued, contrary to the expressive theory, that there is a causal connection between an individual vote and the collective outcome, that voting is disciplined by opportunity cost, and that voting is more instrumental rather than expressive in value. In the next section, I examine the theory's concept of expressive value.

**What is Expressive Value?** Much of the frequent speculation in rational-choice theory about the expressive value of voting and of other political participation is due to widespread faith in the *homo economicus* assumption: that both economic and political actors are exclusively self-interested.<sup>6</sup> Under that assumption any prosocial action *must* be explained as the result of egoistic concern for reputation or expectation of sanctions or, when all else fails, as expressive rather than instrumental in nature. Instrumental value, however, is the value that a means has in relation to bringing about a valued end. If one truly values the good of others, of a collective to which one belongs, or otherwise obtaining the right end, then the means towards advancing that end can be valued instrumentally. Such action is not expressive just because it is morally motivated.

*Varieties of Expressive Value.* If most citizens vote, and there is almost no instrumental value to voting, then they must be motivated to vote by its intrinsic value. I accept that there are intrinsic motivations to vote, but question whether they are sufficient to turn out the typical voter. Most voters say that they vote as a matter of civic duty. The literature assumes, with almost no argument or evidence, that what they mean is a deontological duty (in Mackie Forthcoming-b, I argue that they likely mean a consequentialist

duty). Someone might say that an intrinsic value of voting is exercising the right to participate in the formation of a binding collective decision.<sup>7</sup> There are other possible intrinsic values to voting. Among them are those that Brennan and Lomasky label the expressive. I am able to trace the instrumental-expressive distinction to Parsons (1951). The distinction appears almost entirely in articles rebutting Parsons' family theory and in articles by rational-choice scholars attempting to explain why people vote.

By voting in an election, in addition to any instrumental purpose, one can also mean to express to oneself the belief that one's ranking of the alternatives correctly orders what is best for all. One can also mean to express to oneself the desire that one's highest-ranked alternative be realized, if not that then one's second-ranked, and so on. Such voters' expressive rankings would be identical to their instrumental rankings. Possibly, the voter means to express to herself one or more of her experiences by the act of voting; but I cannot conceive of any instances of this. The voter may mean to express to herself certain of her feelings by the act of voting.

It is also proposed that the act of voting can express a voter's identity to himself. *Expression* and *identity* are each quite fluid concepts, and claims must be stated with care. I do believe that a person's actions can express his identity, that less often he intends an action to express his identity, and less often that only intending to express his identity is a sufficient motivation for him to act. One meaning of identity is what we used to call the self, or the personality. A person might be motivated to vote in order to express her identity as a good citizen, for example. I am a good citizen because that is part of who I am, the person I am committed to being, my essential self. Frankfurt (1971) says that people have first-order desires, and the capacity for second-order desires about their first-order desires, for example, a first-order desire to smoke and a second-order desire not to smoke. Simin has a first-order desire to work late rather than to vote, and a second-order desire to vote that rejects the first-order desire as not part of her essential self. Why does she vote? Just because she wants to express her identity as a good citizen (rather than happening to express that identity by her

action)? Or because she desires to vote, and is effectively committed to carrying out that desire? The latter description is more informative, I suggest. Alternatively, such an identity could be unreflectively absorbed from the community and lack any further content. For some voters, surely, but a general imitation explanation would find it difficult to account for either the origins or the stability of the practice, and for variation in turnout under differing conditions. Such an explanation is also difficult to square with voter motivations stated in surveys, and stated by the many movements struggling to win the right to vote over the last several hundred years.

Another meaning of identity is one's ascriptive and achieved memberships in aggregates of similarly situated persons and in groups of reciprocal expectation. Another meaning of identity hails, unfortunately, from survey research. A respondent is asked what political party he registered with, his religion, age, and so on. The person identifies to the surveyor his age, and that is recorded as his age identification. A person would report his age as 40 because he was born 40 years ago, not because he happens to identify with that number; and with respect to religion or political party to assume a psychological mechanism of identification would beg the question. Schuessler (2000) proposes that one votes for an alternative in order to identify with the set of people who vote for that same alternative. Rotemberg (2009) proposes that one votes in order to identify with people one agrees with.

The instrumental domain of politics is about the policy output of the political process, say Brennan and Lomasky (1993, 145-146), and the expressive domain could be about policy output but also could be about expression of support for any observable characteristic of a candidate or party (Brennan and Lomasky 1993, 145-146). Brennan and Hamlin (1998) propose that one votes in order to identify with parties or candidates. It is well known in political science that voters often pick parties or candidates on the basis of their character or competence, but actually this is quite instrumental. Whether selecting an agent pivotally in an individual action, or through advancing a collective action, I am interested in the outcomes of the agent's policies. Choosing a good agent saves me from the burden of

decision costs, but agents can lack goodwill and they can lack competence. Correctly assessing the agent's character and competence allows me to obtain most desired outcomes at a minimum of decision cost. I want an agent who would make the same decision as I would if I were properly motivated and fully informed. Being similar to me is one of several possible indicators of whether the agent would do so, itself valued instrumentally, not intrinsically.

Perhaps some people would not mean to express themselves in the act of voting, and some people would. Of the latter, those who are sufficiently motivated by instrumental purposes to vote also express themselves as a costless byproduct of their instrumental activity. For those who are moved to vote only by expressive purposes, expressing to themselves a) their rankings of the alternatives, or b) their feelings, or c) their identifications, must be a benefit larger than the cost of voting. If there were a cheaper way to obtain that benefit they would do so. I suggest that it would be much cheaper for a person to express such things to herself as she is brushing her teeth in the morning, rather than going to all the trouble of registering to vote, remembering the right day, finding the polling place, and getting there. Or, she could post such things on her refrigerator door, and glance at them every time she noshes, and thereby experience that considerable expressive benefit multiple times, rather than just once, and at much lower cost. I also say that for every Emily Dickinson happy to express herself to just herself, there are a hundred Walt Whitmans wanting everyone to know that of "One's-Self I sing." Voting by secret ballot in a democratic election does not express anything to anyone else. If one means to express such things to others, she would do so far more broadly and cheaply by almost any other method, such as a few bumper stickers on the car or a memorably worded t-shirt. Every majestic claim of expressive motivation to vote has to squeeze through a narrow keyhole in the back door of a peasant's hut: the claim that there are no more affordable alternatives to expressing oneself to oneself than the costly act of voting.

Generally in human life, and in politics, we observe many intrinsically valued, many expressive, many emotional, and many symbolic acts and outcomes, I do not deny that. Yes,

Martin Luther King's "We have a dream!" speech was magnificently expressive, emotional, and symbolic (and was also meant to get things done); yes, the Washington Monument inspires awe; yes, rational-choice theory does not well conceptualize the meaning of political actions. We should better understand these things. If one accepts the paradox of nonvoting, however, it applies both to elections over mostly instrumental outcomes and to elections over mostly intrinsic, expressive, emotional, or symbolic outcomes such as the Mississippi flag vote. Brennan and Hamlin (2002, 304) are not clear about this. They count as part of the "expressive critique of collective decision making" worry about what I have termed herein *broadly* expressive reasons, offered in public debate about the Australian referendum over monarchy or republic, and about the British referenda on devolution of power to Scottish and Welsh assemblies.

*Tendency to Equate Intrinsic to Emotional.* The expressivists may be misled by the multiple meanings of the term "expressive." Their idea begins from a vote as a preference for an outcome, which is fine, but next the intrinsic value of a vote indiscriminately becomes "any consideration that is expressive in nature," including, "the candidate's appearance or personality; the voter's identification with, or loyalty to, a particular party or ideology; and indeed any other *affective* consideration" (Brennan and Hamlin 2000, 33, emphasis added). Often, however, the varieties of self-expression have nothing to do with emotion, or, rather, with reason-distorting emotion, call it passion. There need be no passion associated with the preference for one state of affairs over another, no passion associated with expressing that preference, and no passion involved with the expressive value of a vote. To equate the intrinsic with the expressive, and the expressive with the emotional, is to insinuate its involuntariness, to suggest that its exemplar is an unreasoned shout of yay or boo rather than, say, the U.S. Declaration of Independence or Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Binsey Poplars." It hints at the obsolete idea that the "rational" is the opposite of the "emotional." Contributing to a collective action can be associated with passion, but so also can individual pivotal action, even though the latter is rational by assumption.

Next, we shall see, the emotionality of expression allows individuals' expressive votes to be the irrational opposite of their instrumental aims, harming all.

**Divergence of Expressive and Instrumental Value.** If actions are composed of expressive and instrumental elements, then it is possible for each element to point in the same direction, and it is possible for each element to point in a different direction. First, consider a simple consumer decision, and for the sake of a plausible story assume for that the moment that the instrumental-expressive value distinction is convincing, and that we mean broadly expressive value. Instrumentally, I prefer the purchase of a Toyota Corolla over a Hummer, it gets me from one place to the other just as well and much more cheaply per mile. Expressively, I prefer the purchase of a Corolla over a Hummer, I am not one who wishes to associate with advertising images of monster trucks mauling mountain meadows or intimidating the diffident. Thus, I buy the Corolla. It's also possible that I instrumentally value the Corolla over the Hummer, but expressively value the Hummer over the Corolla. With such divergence, actual choice would depend on net valuation: if the expressive differential exceeded the instrumental I would buy the Hummer, and if the instrumental differential exceeded the expressive I would buy the Corolla. Recall the formula for market valuation, where  $R$  is instrumental value and  $L$  is expressive value. Let the expected instrumental value of buying the Hummer,  $R_A^i$ , be 5, and the expressive value,  $L_A^i$ , be 5; and let the instrumental value of the Corolla be 9 and the expressive value 0.

$$R_A^i + L_A^i \geq R_B^i + L_B^i$$

$$5 + 5 > 9 + 0$$

Due to her expressive valuation, the consumer would buy the instrumentally inferior vehicle. Remember though that expressive value is narrowed only to the act of preference revelation (exchange of good or cast of vote), and if the comparison is to voting by secret ballot, then only to secret acts of preference revelation.

Second, consider a voter decision: again, expressive value and instrumental value could point in the same direction or in opposite directions. If the latter, then the aggregation

of voters' primarily expressive preferences could select an outcome in opposition to what the aggregation of their instrumental preferences would have been, and this may harm many.

This possibility is illustrated by various so-called voters' dilemmas, each an interpretation of a similar set of preferences. One version, the expressive altruism game, is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. About Here**

All voters have preferences, instrumental and expressive, over enactment of a program to tax everyone and help the poor. The program would cost each voter \$100 in taxes, and each altruistically values program consequences at a value equivalent to \$35. Also, each voter receives a value equivalent to \$5 from expressing support for the poor by her affirmative vote. The expected net return from voting for the program is  $V$  (Brennan and Lomasky, 46):

$$\begin{aligned} V &= (40 - 35)q + (105 - 100)(1 - q - h) + h(40 - 100) \\ &= 5(1 - h) - 60h \\ &> 0 \text{ if the probability of a tie is less than } 1/13 \end{aligned}$$

In typical mass voting, the probability of a tie will be much less than 1/13. Hence each voter will vote for the program even though for each the program is a net loss (it delivers an altruistic benefit of \$35 and an expressive benefit of \$5 at an egoistic cost of \$100). In other words, expressive voting can lead to perverse results. I argue that the voters' dilemma is not as strong as it might first seem. The incentive structure of the voters' dilemma is replicated in an envy game, where expressive populists damage the economy despite their instrumental valuations, and a belligerence game, where expressive warmongers set back the country with a foolish war despite their instrumental valuations. Many of the same objections I am about to state apply to those examples as well.

*The Model Explains Voting for One Option Over Another, But Not Voting Itself.* The addition of an expressive value for supporting the poor (or envying the rich, or expressing belligerence) motivates each to vote for an outcome negatively valued overall. But the model does not explain the original puzzle: why would anyone vote in the first place? The

expressivists would also have to argue for an *additional* value for expressing *any* preference in a vote. In the American National Election Study, 49% disagree with the statement that, “If a person doesn't care how an election comes out they shouldn't vote in it” (VCF0616). These respondents, for the sake of argument, possibly believe that you should vote even if the expressive value of the candidates is equal. How would the expressivist explain that?

*The Model's Altruism is Doubly Discounted.* The altruistic value of helping the poor (\$35) is less than the egoistic value of not doing so (\$100). That is implausible. Would I altruistically value a program that helped 35,000 deserving poor at a mere \$35 overall? Suppose that the program benefits each impoverished recipient by a value for her equivalent to \$100. True, I probably don't value benefits to others as much as benefits to myself, but would I really consider benefits to others as worth only 1/100,000 of the equivalent benefit to myself? The extremely weak altruistic benefit for helping the poor is further discounted in the model by the minuscule chance of pivotality, making it effectively zero. Only expressive value remains as a motivation, thereby delivering the perversity result.

*Voters Never Correct their Folly.* The expressivist analysis of the act of voting concludes that voters are never disciplined by the opportunity costs of their votes. An implication of that conclusion would be that, given voters' dilemmas, time after time they are misled by their \$5 expressive preferences into suffering a \$65 loss in instrumental value. When they cast their vote its expected value is minuscule  $h$  times negative \$65, next to nothing, but *they know* that after the vote is tallied they will get a bill in the mail for \$100. Is it empirically true that voters repeatedly acquiesce to outcomes that set them back? As I have said already, if, according to the contributory account, voters instrumentally value the public good, then they would not vote to set back every citizen by \$65.

*The Model Applies Only When Instrumental Cost Exceeds Instrumental Benefit.* If the altruistic benefit to me of helping the poor slightly exceeds program costs to me, then the voters' dilemma vanishes. Perhaps this could go without saying, but the alleged perversity

arises only when the instrumental cost exceeds the instrumental benefit. This can be shown by the example illustrated in Table 3.

### **Table 3. About Here**

Now, everyone benefits by voting support for the poor. The voters' dilemma is a peculiar set of circumstances. I already suggested that the weakness of its altruism is implausible. It is more peculiar in that, for it to go through, a majority of voters would have to want to vote expressively for something each instrumentally rejects.

*Summary.* The expressivists do say that "voters' expressive preferences will express their interests much of the time" (51), and "internal moral and external social forces encouraging congruence between expression and action are strong" (52). The contributory theory accepts that there may be divergence between an individual's private interest as a subject and her public interest as a citizen, that voting in a mass election would exclude private interest and include public interest, and that valuation of public interest is disciplined by consequence. The expressive theory, in contrast, allows the possibility of a divergence between an individual's instrumental interest, which is usually egoistic, and her expressive interest, which could be benevolent, but could also be envious, malicious, belligerent, narcissistic, or frivolous, because undisciplined by consequence.

The expressive theory is best known for its analogization of voting to cheering. Yet its voters' dilemmas assume that everyone would cheer for a team whom they all want to lose.

**The Cheering Analogy.** Brennan and Lomasky's main example of intrinsically valued preference revelation or expression of desire is cheering and booing of a football game. Cheering and booing declare which team the fan prefers to have win, although the fan does not cheer or boo as a means to bring about his team's success. He desires to express a desire for its victory but does not choose its victory, the expressivists say. However, spectators of a live game do believe that their cheering and booing, although neither individually pivotal towards victory nor perceptible towards advance, influences the team's

performance. Home advantage is an established phenomenon in sports science, although evidence is inconclusive that crowd support furthers it. A survey of English football fans, however, shows that *they believe* that crowd support is the most likely cause of home advantage. Moreover, 93% endorse the statement that “the more supportive the crowd, the better its team will play,” and 80% endorse the statement that “a quiet home crowd will discourage the home players” (Wolfson, Wakelin, and Lewis 2005). Such evidence, along with simple introspection, suggests that it is false that members of the audience do not intend to influence the outcome. Moreover, fans cheer not only final victory and loss, but each increment of the game’s progress; and they can cheer their losing team after it has lost (what does that have to do with expressing a desire for victory?). Fans cheer and boo a band’s musical performance, even though it has nothing to do with victory or loss in team competition. It’s somewhat an involuntary expression, effortful to suppress. We cheer and boo games on radio and television even though the players cannot hear us; the mediated response is surely parasitic on the live response, however.

Cheering a football game is not like voting, rather, it is like cheering a presidential debate or at a neighborhood election night party cheering the vote tally on the telly (doubly “expressive,” in that none of the candidates can hear our cheers, and all the votes are already cast). Voting is not like cheering a football team, rather, it is like playing on a football team. A player values the team winning the game, its losing by the smallest margin, and its winning by the largest margin. The paradox of nonvoting says it is only rational for an individual to play in a game if she will be pivotal to its victory; if the team would lose, or would win by more than one point, then participation would be futile or redundant and hence instrumentally irrational. Since people do play on teams that lose or that win by more than one point, the paradoxicalist searches for an act-contingent value of playing: one plays because he is paid to play, or because he considers it a duty to play, or, as the expressivist would have it, because he wishes by playing to satisfy a desire to express a desire for victory. There is nothing irrational, however, about wanting to contribute instrumentally to a team’s tally, short of

victory, or beyond it. Sports bookmakers take bets both on victory and on point spread, as do political prediction markets. For some, to play football is fun regardless of the score (although note that practice is usually not as fun as a real game), but I doubt that there are many who value the act of voting mostly because it's fun (Table 1 reports that few find it "exciting").

Another example of satisfying a desire to express a desire, say the expressivists, is to send a get-well card to a friend. A modern does not seriously intend that the expression bring about a cure: the expression is the sole aim of the act, they say. The evidence is otherwise: social support is reliably related to reduced morbidity and mortality (Uchino 2006). Sending a get-well card can express care and can (perceptibly or imperceptibly) advance a friend's recovery. I would say that voting is more like contributing blood after a large natural disaster: one does not fuss over whether one's contribution is redundant in supplying a drop more than exactly the right amount of blood for the victims' needs, nor does one refrain from contribution on the thought that it is imperceptible in comparison to the amount given by everyone else.

**Predictions of the Expressive Theory.** The acknowledged (Brennan and Lomasky 1993, 121-123) Achilles heel of the expressive account is that it cannot account for strategic voting or its consequence of restricting the effective number of parties in certain electoral systems (each shown by Cox 1997). Since Brennan and Lomasky wrote in 1993, the weight of evidence supports the view that many citizens vote strategically. For example, commenting directly on the issue of whether voters are merely expressing a preference or intending to influence the outcome, Alvarez, Boehmke, and Nagler (2006) claim to show that in the 1997 British general election 64% of those voters with an opportunity to vote strategically did so. This can be seen vividly in Green Party voters in the U.S. behaving strategically on the 2000 presidential vote, not only with respect to a state's plurality election but also with respect to the majority election in the Electoral College (Burden 2005). In states where a victory for either the Democratic or Republican candidate was likely, there is no gap

between the proportion of those voting Green at the polls and those expressing Green preferences in pre-election survey. Such voters are often called expressive, but the contributory account allows that they are instrumental in wanting to influence the policies of the actually winning candidate and otherwise in advancing their cause (which is bolstered further if they attain five percent in a state and thus federal matching funds in the next election). The closer the race between Democrat and Republican in a state, however, the lower is the proportion of those voting Green at the polls compared to those expressing Green preferences in pre-election survey. I would add the observation that after the 2000 fiasco of the Green-Nader vote in Florida apparently tipping the electoral-college outcome to Bush, support fell from 2,882,955 votes for Green candidate Nader in 2000, to 463,655 for non-Green candidate Nader and 119,859 for Green candidate Cobb in 2004, an 80% decline. These behaviors are exquisitely attuned to opportunity costs. I think that failure to explain strategic voting is a decisive test of the expressive theory.

Brennan (2008, 483) now argues that observations of strategic voting are consistent with the expressive theory of voting. Citizens regard voting as a serious business, he says, straying from the focus of Brennan and Lomasky (1993) on the whimsical, ignorant, malicious, destructively altruistic, envious, and belligerent potentials of expressive voting. Options are limited at the ballot box, and a voter must “choose the action that best reveals her position.” One most likes an amusing and flippant get-well card for one’s grievously ill aunt, but instead chooses a more serious one covered in roses and sentimental verse, because one believes it will appeal more to her, he writes. In the same way, in a single-vote-plurality election among three candidates, one would not vote for one’s most-favored candidate *A*, but rather for one’s choice among front-runners *B* and *C*, because that is the real issue in the election. You “register your good wishes in the way that seems most likely to convey effectively the message you want to convey.” The analogy does not go through. With the get-well card one expresses care *to the aunt*, hoping that she gets well, and trying (instrumentally, I would add) to help her feel better. The sender believes that the flippant card

would best express care if he were the recipient, but anticipates that the rosy sentimental card would better succeed *with her* at expressing care. In expressive voting, the sender and receiver are the same person, and no such considerations apply.

Brennan offers a second argument. Assume that one ranks the candidates  $A > B > C$ . One may want to cheer candidate  $A$ , and boo candidate  $C$ ; but cheering for  $B$  rather than for  $A$  may be a better way of booing  $C$ , “because  $B$  is the salient rival.” The analogy does not go through. Suppose there will be a professional wrestling match among  $A$ , The Rock;  $B$ , Stone Cold Steve Austin; and  $C$ , CM Punk, whom I favor in that order. The three stand in the ring as I contemplate their upcoming pairwise matches. As the wrestlers are introduced, I doubly cheer  $A$ , once for his contest against  $B$  and once for his contest against  $C$ . I would cheer  $B$  for his contest against  $C$ , but I would boo  $B$  for his contest against  $A$ , and thus conflicted I stay silent as Stone Cold is introduced. I doubly boo  $C$ , once for his contest against  $A$  and once for his contest against  $B$ . The Rock is the expressive winner in my tally, even though I believe it likely that Stone Cold will be the final winner of the pairwise contests. No one denies that I am serious about professional wrestling. After all, whether or not Stone Cold is the final winner has nothing to do with my cheering or booing.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, a main point of the theory is that expressive voters act in different ways than instrumental voters, in ways that have important implications, among them the possibility of instrumentally irrational outcomes. If, in reply to the strategic-voting objection, expressive theorists respond that expressive voters expressing their seriousness would act the same as would instrumental voters, then the act of voting would become quasi-instrumental: expressive voting would be observationally indistinguishable from instrumental voting. The various predictions about how expressive voters act differently from instrumental voters (not all of which are reported in this essay) would have to be withdrawn. And then we could proceed as if voting were instrumental. An expressive theorist might respond that only a few voters show such seriousness, but my reading of the evidence is that strategic voting, or threat thereof, is ubiquitous in parliaments and widespread in mass elections.

**Conclusion.** The expressive theory is the most popular explanation of voter motivation in political science, yet it has undergone little critical examination. The theory comes in several versions. Hillman's (2010) is the most extreme and implausible. For him, total utility equals self-interested material utility plus self-interested expressive utility. Expressive utility is obtained from acts and declarations that confirm an identity chosen to please self and others. The epigraph to his manifesto is the dictionary definition of the word *hypocrisy*. As we have seen, an aggregation of citizens' expressive votes can harm the instrumental interests of all. He continues, in the same spirit, that actions purporting to advance peace, justice, or beneficence are hypocritical expressions masking self-interests.

Brennan and Lomasky's *Democracy and Decision* (1993) is the strong statement of the expressive theory and remains the best argued and most influential version, and thus I have focused on that account. Later work sometimes moderates the stances of the 1993 volume. Brennan and Hamlin (1998, 149-150) affirm that expressive value and instrumental value are neither normative nor empirical substitutes, yet they also insist that the instrumental value of a vote is nil. Brennan and Hamlin (2002, 306) remain sufficiently concerned about the quality of the expressive-voting motivation to recommend that a constitutional convention should be made up of a small number of more pivotal and thus instrumentally motivated participants, and, for the same reasons, should, "as far as possible, be exempt from any significant element of popular voting -- either as a means of selecting delegates, or as a means of ratifying their decisions." Brennan (2008) says that an instrumental explanation of voting is not ruled out, although he knows of no successful one; and that he "suspects" that ballot outcomes are not normatively inferior to market outcomes. Hamlin and Jennings (2009) aspire to launch a general theory of expressive and instrumental motivations in *all of politics*. Expression has to do with the symbolism or meaning of an act, and is more important in settings where its costs are low, they say. Hamlin and Jennings reject the cheering analogy; and reject the idea that ballot choice is inferior to market choice. It should go without saying that my objections apply more strongly to more extreme versions of the theory and less

strongly to less extreme versions of it. Voter turnout is a complex question, influenced by many factors. I acknowledge that noninstrumental motivations can contribute to the decision to vote, and I welcome better theorization and measurement of them. My position on *the decision to vote* is that the *a priori* denial of instrumental motivation is conceptually mistaken, and that the hypotheses that a) instrumental motivations tend to be sufficient, and b) expressive motivations tend to be insufficient, are better supported by argument and evidence.

The homo economicus assumption was influential in social science, and overwhelming survey evidence since 1954 that voters are motivated by duty and by desire to influence the outcome was basically ignored. Although more recent publications on the subject indicate that voters are mostly oriented to the public interest, it is often believed and taught that voters are self-interested. If voters are prosocial, then that heightens the possibility that voting is instrumental. Edlin, Gelman, and Kaplan (2007) argue that the chance of pivotality has been severely underestimated and develop a pivotal-altruistic theory of voting. Mackie (forthcoming-b) offers a contributory-altruistic theory of voting, wherein mandate value renders all votes pivotal. Both theories are consistent with the observations that most citizens vote, that turnout is higher in more important than less important elections, that turnout is higher in close elections; that people vote strategically; and that a variety of evidence shows that voters are prosocially motivated. The contributory-altruistic theory also predicts that some citizens certain of losing or winning the instant election would nevertheless vote, for instrumental reasons.

If voting is instrumental, then it is disciplined by opportunity cost, and the ballot is not necessarily inferior to the market, or, rather, collective action is not necessarily inferior to individual action. To the extent that voting is intrinsic in value, that value is neither necessarily expressive nor necessarily emotional in nature, and the proposed divergence between expressive and instrumental value is implausible. The expressive theory does not explain why most voters say they intend to influence the outcome; and does not explain the prevalence of strategic voting in mass elections, a decisive disconfirmation, in my view.

Voting is not like cheering the team. Voting is like playing on the team.

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**FIGURE 1**  
**VOTING: ONLY VALUE WINNING**

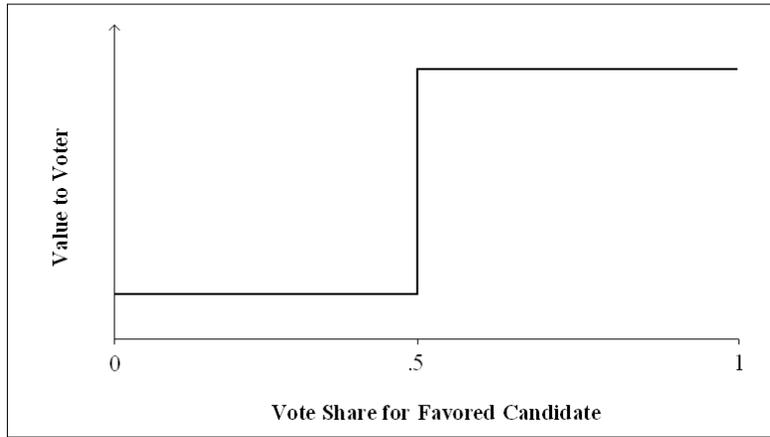


FIGURE 2  
VOTING: VALUE WINNING & MANDATE

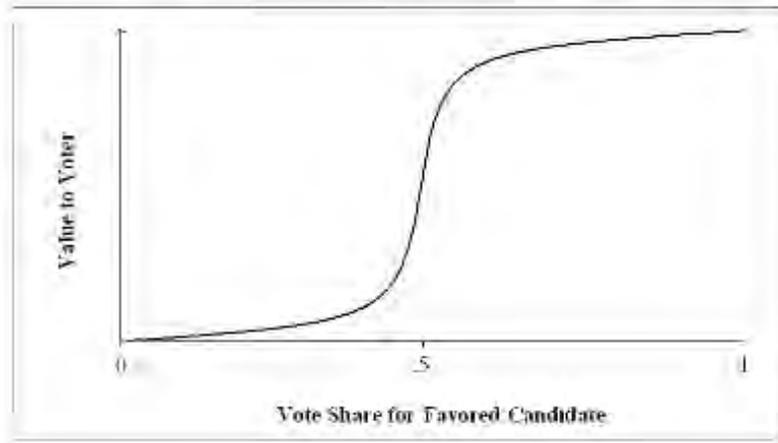


Table 1. Self-Reported Reasons to Vote

<b>Reasons People Give Us for Voting</b>	<b>% Not Very Important</b>	<b>% Somewhat Important</b>	<b>% Very Important</b>
<i>Direct Instrumental</i>			
<b>Chance to Make Community or Nation a Better Place to Live</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chance to Influence Public Policy</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Further Party Goals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Get Help from Official on Family Problem</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Moral</i>			
<b>My Duty as a Citizen</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Do My Share</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>Indirect Instrumental</i>			
<b>Recognition from People I Respect</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Didn't Want to Say No to Someone Who Asked</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Intrinsic</i>			
<b>Exciting to vote</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>

Source: Compiled by author from American Citizen Participation Study  
(ICPSR Study No. 6635, 1990)

Table 2., Expressive Altruism Game

All other voters:				
Each voter:	Vote for poor, Probability $q$	Vote agst. poor, Probability $p$	Tie, Probability $h$	Expected return
Support poor	40	105	40	$40q + 105p + 40h$
Don't support	35	100	100	$35q + 100p + 100h$

Source: Brennan and Lomasky (1993, 46)

**Table 3., Instrumental Value Dominates Expressive**

<b>All other voters:</b>				
<b>Each voter:</b>	<b>Vote for poor, Probability <math>q</math></b>	<b>Vote agst. poor, Probability <math>p</math></b>	<b>Tie, Probability <math>h</math></b>	<b>Expected return</b>
<b>Support poor</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>106</b>	<b><math>106q + 105p + 106h</math></b>
<b>Don't support</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b><math>101q + 100p + 100h</math></b>

**Source: Author's Compilation**

$$V = (106-101)q + (105 - 100)(1 - q - h) + h(106 - 100) = 5$$

$$> 0$$

**-- Endnotes --**

<sup>1</sup> Notable reviews of that volume include Estlund (1996) and a portion of Christiano (2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Tuck (2008) for a full treatment of such issues, with respect to collective action in general and voting in particular.

<sup>3</sup> An electoral alternative is a potential collective choice, not one that is chosen by the act of a single individual. By convention, the vote is a contribution to a collective decision that normally is enacted as a binding collective choice (but collective decision and choice subject to revision in an ongoing series of elections).

<sup>4</sup> The authors point out that proponents of the flag change, funded by business interests, said it would be good for economic development and even college football recruiting, instrumental purposes which proponents summarized as a “move forward.” I acknowledge that this collective outcome displays prominent noninstrumental features. However, notice that the contributory account of collective action discloses the instrumental features of the contest: a win would advance the cause of African-American civil rights, and a loss would defend the white-traditionalist cause.

<sup>5</sup> See Mackie (forthcoming-a).

<sup>6</sup> Brennan and Hamlin’s (2008) revisionist public choice theory, recognizing both interest and moral motivation, is a notable exception, although morality’s status as instrumental or expressive is unclear.

<sup>7</sup> Although if one’s vote were really without consequence, it seems to me that participation would be of little interest.

<sup>8</sup> There are further tests of expressive theories of voting. Results are inconclusive.

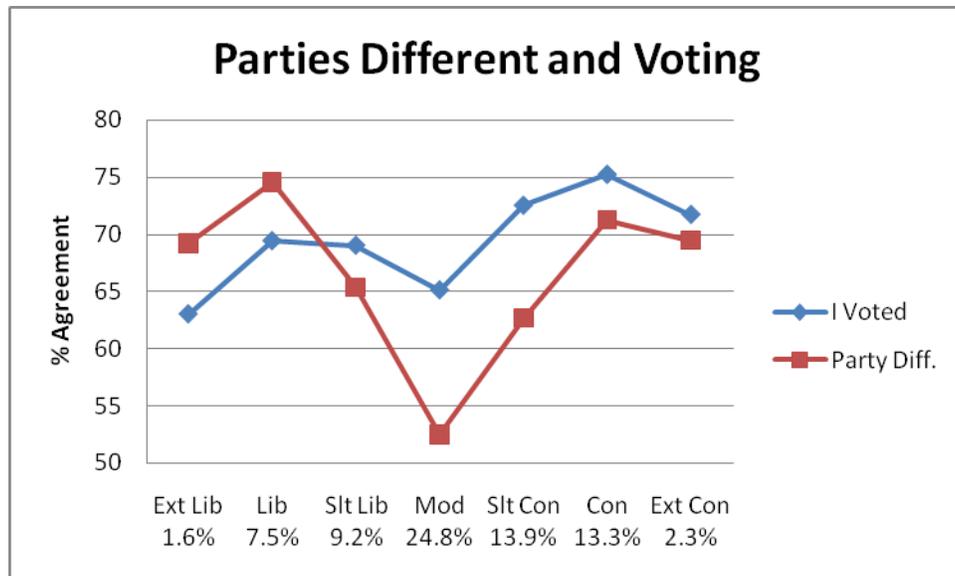
The studies are summarized in a document available from the author.

## APPENDIX

**Note, papers not yet reviewed:** Levine and Palfrey, 2007, The Paradox of Voter Participation; Duffy and Tavits, 2008, Beliefs and Voting Decisions; Farber, 2009, Rational Choice and Voter Turnout; Feddersen, Gailmard, and Sandroni, 2009, Moral Bias in Large Elections; Kamenica and Egan, 2010, Voters, Dictators, and Peons. Add Karahan and Shughart

**Empirical Tests of the Expressive Theory.** Brennan and Hamlin (2000) carefully develop the refinement that there could be both instrumental and expressive aspects to voting, based on the premise that expressive voters “identify” with candidates. Although it is not clear to me, I believe the idea is that some voting is what one might call quasi-instrumental, that some voters who *express* preferences over outcomes also actually *prefer* those outcomes in the same order. Presumably, expressive voters are those for whom expressive preferences do not track instrumental preferences. Their brilliantly elaborated model is too complex to be taken up here, but we can report its main predictions: that candidates are located towards the center of the spectrum, that instrumental nonvoters would be close to candidate positions (because instrumental voters are motivated by the difference between parties), and that expressive nonvoters would be distant from candidate positions (because expressive voters identify with candidates). If so, then most voters must be instrumental, I infer, since moderates vote less than do liberals and conservatives. True, in the example I use compiled from the American National Election Study, the 4% of the population who self-identify as extreme liberals or extreme conservatives vote less than their mainstream counterparts. But such extremists are also more likely to see no difference between the more centrally located parties. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**



Source: Author's compilation from American National Election Study. The horizontal axis states the percentage of each ideological type in the population; another 27% don't know their ideology (VCF0803). The vertical axis is percentage agreement with a statement that, Yes, I voted (VCF0702), and with a statement that, There are important differences between the parties (VCF0501).

Drinkwater and Jennings (2007) set out to test these predictions. Respondents who agree with the statement, "People should only vote if they care who wins," are classified as instrumental voters, and those who agree with the other relevant alternative, "It's everyone's duty to vote," are classified as expressive voters. They devise four measures of extremism, in three of the four extremists generally are more likely to vote, and in two of the four measures extremists who are duty voters are less likely to vote. I say though that those who *disagree* with the first statement may be not expressive but instrumental voters who believe someone indifferent between candidates should vote anyway in order to advance democratic accountability and stability. And those who agree with the second statement may be not expressive but instrumental voters who believe they have a consequentialist duty to contribute to the advancement of their candidate and of democracy.

*Supportive Studies.* Drinkwater and Jennings (2007) and Fischer (1986) at best support the view that there are some expressive voters in the population, but do not support a general theory of expressive voting. We have already considered Drinkwater and Jennings

(2007). Fischer's experiment with an undergraduate economics class found that out of 82 students, 20 were switchers who voted more altruistically (to give a prize to charity rather than keep it oneself) as their vote became less pivotal. One study supports the expressive theory of voting, or, as its authors say, that voters consume ideological stances contrary to their narrow self-interest: Sobel and Wagner (2004) find that, controlling for standard welfare variables and for population size, welfare spending is higher in states where a voter is less likely to be pivotal.

*Unsupportive Studies.* A well-designed experimental study of human subjects by Tyran (2004) finds no support for an expressive theory of voting, not even when considering only the switchers (thereby casting doubt on Fischer 1986). The study's main limitation is that it is about 220 experimental subjects rather than about mass democratic voting. He also finds no support for an egoistic-pivotal or an altruistic-pivotal theory of voter motivation. Instead, there is strong support for an ex post bandwagon hypothesis: "people seem to vote morally when they expect many others to do so" (1659). Baron (2009, Section 6.2) reports weak evidence from a human-subject study that voting decisions are more rational and less emotional than decisions made for oneself.

*Inconclusive Studies.* Some of the studies testing the expressive theory of voting are inconclusive. Greene and Nelson (2002) test the prediction that fewer extremists would vote. They found that extremists are more likely to vote, but in response Drinkwater and Jennings (2007) claim to have shown that duty voters who are extremists are less likely to vote. Calcagno and Westley (2008) also attempt to test Brennan and Hamlin's (2008) prediction that if voters expressively identify with candidates then turnout would be higher the more median are candidate positions. They study U.S. general gubernatorial elections, and how turnout in them varies according to the form of the prior primary election. In a more open (to candidates and voters) primary, the candidates selected for advancement to the general election are more median than in a more closed (only candidates and voters of a given party) primary. Thus, the more open the primary, the more median the candidates in the general

election, and the higher the turnout of expressively motivated voters in the general. The higher general-election turnout measured in states with more open primaries could, however, be due to either more median candidates or due to lower voting costs, and study design is unable to distinguish between these factors. The cost of voting is considerably lower in open primaries, because they do not exclude the sizable number of independents from voting; and since the leading two candidates from the primary election are forwarded to the general election, costs of information about the general-election candidates are comparatively quite low, both because members of all parties are exposed to the two front-runners in the primary election and because the general election is between those already-known front-runners.

Carter and Guerette (1992) report on a modest experiment carried out in economics and accounting classes. The results are inconclusive, and the authors acknowledge limitations in experimental design. Ashworth, Geys, and Heyndels (2006) offer evidence for an expressive motivation having to do with voters wanting to identify with winning parties. The setting is unusual: Belgian municipal proportional representation elections held every six years under compulsory voting. Eyeballing a diagram of variation in turnout between municipalities, 94-95% turnout is modal and 93-94% is roughly the mean. They find that turnout reaches a local maximum at about 52% for a party and reaches another maximum when a party receiving two-thirds of the vote stimulates turnout. The authors do not consider that this pattern is also compatible with contributory voters who are a mix of mandate-balancing and pure mandate voters. Mandate-balancing voters favor centrist policies and vote to advance a party somewhat beyond victory but switch to an opposing party if they suspect that the majority party would win too big a mandate. Pure mandate voters want to advance the number of their party's seats as much as possible, in the present election and beyond.

Using survey data on the 1997 British general election, Jones and Hudson (2000) proxy duty motivation by how respondents evaluate the integrity of government officials, and the expressive motivation by voters' perceptions of extent of policy differences between parties. However, instrumental voters also would be less likely to vote to the extent they

believe that officials lacking integrity won't respond to voters' interests. Their expressive variable, really a benefit variable, is not significant, which is unusual. Jones and Dawson (2007) seek to measure both a duty variable, motivating people to vote, and an expressive variable, motivating them to vote for one candidate over another. The dependent variable is self-reported vote in the 2001 British general election. The independent variables are three policy items (lower taxes and lower social benefits, the same, and higher taxes and higher social benefits), whether one says it's a duty to vote, whether one voted in the last election, and the expressive variable is party identification (not self-reported or actual, but as predicted from age, income, race, region, and urban-or-rural residence). The idea is that by controlling for policy, and for predicted party identification, pure party identification independent of policy concerns would be isolated. However, voting with a party is motivated by numerous policies, not just taxes for social benefits, and thus it is doubtful whether it has been shown that there is a motive to vote for one's party regardless of its policies.

Laband et al. (2009) claim to discover a general expressive tendency which can manifest in a political context. Households which a) publicly display candidate lawn signs, or b) publicly display the U.S. flag on American holidays, or c) publicly display tokens of support for the university football, are more likely to contain at least one member who voted in the November, 2007 election. However, a contributory-instrumental explanation is at least as plausible as an expressive explanation. Consider: either those who are more oriented to public concerns and more willing to contribute to advance them in public are also more willing to advance them in the private act of voting; or those who publicly express preferences to others are more likely to vote in order to privately express their preferences to themselves. The football-team finding is intriguing; however, the study was conducted in Auburn, Alabama, where half the population is university students, and there is likely little differentiation among city good, university good, and university-football-team good.

The contributory theory of voting (Mackie, forthcoming-b) says that the first-order value of advancing democracy (and its accountability and stability) over autocracy could

sometimes be more important than the second-order value of advancing one candidate over another. Imagine that a voter values democracy and the Moose Party at 9, democracy and the Elk Party at 7, and autocracy at 0. If we only measured the benefit of selecting Moose over Elk,  $9 - 7 = 2$ , we would miss that the actual benefit from voting to the Moose voter is  $9 - 0 = 9$ . Survey research asks respondents to rank parties by feeling thermometers, for example, a voter could rank Moose at 3 and Elk at 1. Guttman, Hilger, and Shachmurove (1994) define consumption (intrinsic) voters as those who vote for absolute benefit (Moose Party: 3), and investment voters (instrumental) as those who vote for relative benefit (Moose - Elk =  $3 - 1 = 2$ ). Their consumption variable is significant, and their investment variable is not. However, their analysis neglects that the supposed consumption voter (with respect to the choice between Moose and Elk) could instead be an investment voter (with respect to the choice between democracy and autocracy.) Toka (2009) performed a similar analysis on national survey samples in 35 countries collected between 1996 and 2001. In 22 out of 35 countries the “expressive” consumption variable was positive and significant, and in 15 out of 35 countries the “instrumental” investment variable was positive and significant. The same objection applies.

Hillman (2010) says that Ginsburgh and Noury (2008) show that voting by judges in the Eurovision song contest is expressive; but in fact the study shows that votes are largely related to quality, and to a lesser extent are related to linguistic-cultural proximity (the latter could be due to an identity-expression motivation, or, I suggest, is more plausibly due to appreciating more familiar conventions of song). Hillman also says that Potrafke (2009) showed that OECD countries with more left-wing (right-wing) governments tended to vote against (for) U.S. proposals in the U.N. General Assembly; it could be that those delegations are merely expressing their political identities, but I suggest that their primary motivation is more likely the desire to influence U.N. policies over time.

*Irrelevant Studies.* A number of the studies testing the expressive theory of voting do not adequately conceptualize the theory and thus are irrelevant. Feigenbaum, Karoly, and

Levy (1988) study voting on the Nuclear Freeze Referendum in California. Its conceptualization of instrumental and expressive variables is grossly implausible (for example, veteran status is an expressive variable predicting vote against the freeze because veterans may be “actively hostile to common ‘morality’”). It is also methodologically flawed, in that all its variables are at the county-level, committing the ecological fallacy. Copeland and Laband (2002) show that people who vote also tend, one, to wear a sticker or a button or put up a lawn sign in the months before the election; and two, make a one dollar checkoff contribution to the Federal Election Commission on her federal income tax return. The authors believe that humans are exclusively self-interested, and because of pivotality, that it is not instrumentally rational for them to engage in political participation; hence, any such participation must be expressive. Someone might have a theory that drinking fluids is an expressive and not an instrumental act: showing that people who drink water also drink milk or soda would establish nothing for or against the expressive theory of fluid consumption.

Two studies equate the expressive to the emotional. Emotion though accompanies either intrinsically- or instrumentally-valued acts, and all of the studies’ variables can be construed as instrumental under the contributory theory of voting. Cebula (2004) interprets all of the following as emotional: higher turnout in presidential elections, during the Vietnam years, in years of more progressive tax rates (for example, due to emotions of hope about lowering taxes), and lower turnout in the Watergate years, and among those who think that government officials are dishonest, untrustworthy, and wasteful of tax dollars. Kan and Yang (2001) find that there is a significant relationship between a respondent having voted and “expressive” variables concerning voters’ emotional responses to candidates (hope, pride, anger, fear), party identification, and difference in ideology between candidates and voter. It is possible that someone belongs to a political party because she endorses its goals and sees electing a candidate of that party as a way to promote them; similarly, voting for a candidate closer to one’s ideology is just what an instrumental voter would do.

Hillman (2010) says that Glazer (1992) proposed that workers' votes to strike are expressive; but Glazer did not test his proposal. Fidrmuc, Ginsburgh, and Weber (2009), according to Hillman (2010), show that voting on the official languages of the European Union is expressive; in fact, the study's authors portray the issue in instrumental terms (ease of access to information, ease of participation in EU politics) and analyze survey responses indicating that to reduce the number of official languages from the current 23 to between 5 and 12 (2 and 9) would be politically feasible among all (younger) respondents.

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