

VOTER MOTIVATION

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SOMETIMES we vote on the issues. Consider a voter who detests gun control. They might, on this basis, vote Republican. Their opposition to gun control drives their vote choice. They vote Republican because they share the Republican Party's policy position. But sometimes we instead vote on performance. Consider a voter who loves the booming 1990s economy. They might, on this basis, vote for Bill Clinton. Their assessment of the incumbent's performance drives their vote. They vote for Clinton because, well, it's the economy, stupid. And, sometimes, we vote on group identities. Consider a Catholic from 1960. Perhaps they cannot stomach voting against their church. They might, on this basis, vote for John F. Kennedy. They vote for Kennedy because he is a Catholic, like them. Their group identities drive their vote. These voters differ in the basis on which they vote. They differ in the reasons they have for voting the way they do. Policy issues drive issue voters. Performance issues drive performance voters. Group identities drive group voters. But which type of voting is best for democracy? And how well do we do? And, finally, on what basis should each of us vote?

These questions concern a single topic: voter motivation. The first question plumbs how the prevalence of different kinds of voter motivations impact democratic values. Answering this tells us what would motivate voters in an ideal democracy. The second question plumbs how voters' actual motivations matter to such values. Answering this tells us how far from the ideal our real-world democracies are. The third plumbs what motivations should drive actual individual voters. The answer to this depends, in part, on how voters contribute to democratic values in their nonideal democracies. For each question, I will concern myself with intrinsic democratic values alone. These are the ways that democracy is valuable in itself, besides its causal consequences. Voter motivations no doubt matter to the instrumental value of a democracy. But democracy's intrinsic value is my focus. For the second and third questions, I will concern myself with American voters and American democracy alone. Much of what I will say applies elsewhere. But American democracy is my focus. Together, these questions plumb how voter motivations interact, both evaluatively and deontically,

with the intrinsic value of American democracy. That interaction is the topic of this paper.

These three types of voting have been the subject of sustained empirical investigation. But they have not been the subject of much normative investigation. When political scientists evaluate them, they do so in terms of instrumental values. For example, they explore which motivation will produce the best policy.¹ They ignore how these motivations matter to intrinsic democratic values. Meanwhile, political theorists have written a lot about voting but little about voter motivations. Rather, they have addressed whether citizens ought to vote in the first place. The driving problem here is that each vote has a very small chance of making a difference to an election. So, is it rational to vote at all?² Much time has been spent on this question. Little has been spent exploring what should motivate those who do vote.³ Jason Brennan has investigated a connected topic.⁴ He has examined whether those who vote ought to know about politics.⁵ The connection, as we will see later, is that voter competence and voter motivation interact in contributing to democratic values. But voter competence, on its own, tells us little about voter motivations. Voter motivations, then, have been largely neglected: I think that that neglect is unfair. Such motivations, I will argue, matter to the intrinsic value of democracy.

Here is the plan for the rest of the paper. In section 1, I will say more about the nature and prevalence of these different types of voter motivations. In section 2, I will outline two core intrinsic democratic values: equality and self-rule. In section 3, I will identify how different types of voter motivations matter to these values. My view is that issue voting is better than performance voting and performance voting is better than group voting. This is not meant to be a radical view. It seems to me to be the conventional wisdom. But the grounds of that wisdom are not well understood. This paper identifies those grounds. In section

- 1 See, for instance, the discussion of retrospective voting in Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, ch. 4.
- 2 For the problem, see Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, 274. For three different responses, see Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 73–75; Goldman, “Why Citizens Should Vote”; Guerrero, “The Paradox of Voting and the Ethics of Political Representation.”
- 3 Some working in the “public reason” tradition do discuss it. Such writers claim, or presuppose, that state action is legitimate if and only if it is supported by a justification that all reasonable people accept. Among those who think this, Rawls denies that motivation matters much to how we should vote (*Political Liberalism*, 235). Quong contends that it does matter (*Liberalism without Perfection*, 274–90). It is not clear, however, what import this discussion has for those of us who do not accept public reason presuppositions.
- 4 Brennan, *The Ethics of Voting*.
- 5 Brennan thinks so. For a reply, see Arvan, “People Do Not Have a Duty to Avoid Voting Badly.”

4, we will turn to how these types of voter motivation interact with voter competence. I will argue that voter incompetence modulates the effect of voter motivations on self-rule but leaves their effect on equality untouched. In section 5, we will see what this means for American democracy. The American voter, I will suggest, rarely votes in the ways intrinsic democratic values require. American democracy is deeply defective. Finally, in section 6, we will see what that means for how Americans should vote. The key conclusion here is that their nonideal circumstances weaken their obligations. In such conditions, they merely must avoid voting on privileged group identities.

1. TYPES OF VOTER MOTIVATION

The three kinds of voting we will focus on are voting on the issues, voting on performance, and voting on group identities. We focus on these not because they are the only possible motivations voters could have. Rather, we focus on them precisely because they have been the subject of such sustained empirical investigation. Issue voting is at the core of spatial modeling of voting behavior.⁶ Early empirical researchers took it to be an influential driver of voting.⁷ Voting on performance became a topic core to the study of voting behavior in the 1970s. A vast literature plumbs, in particular, whether and how voters respond to the economic performance of incumbents.⁸ Voting on group identities was a preoccupation of the early empirical literature on voting behavior.⁹ Recently, it has again become a prominent focus. Achen and Bartels claim that, in the political sphere, group identities form “the very basis of reasons.”¹⁰ This empirical literature allows us to assess the prevalence of each kind of voter motivation. As we will later see, that will be essential to evaluating the quality of American democracy and the duties of American citizens. But first I will say more about each kind of voting.

We will begin with issue voting. This is voting on the basis of shared policy platforms or issue positions. Consider Democrats who voted for Barack Obama because they wanted public health care. They were issue voting. Or consider Republicans who voted for Donald Trump because they wanted to build a wall.

6 Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, ch. 8.

7 Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, 112–36.

8 Kramer, “Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896–1964”; Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*.

9 Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, *Voting*, 58–87; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller, *The Voter Decides*, 88–112.

10 Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 213.

They too were issue voting. Their agreement with that candidate on the issues drove their vote. They wanted certain policies enacted. These candidates said that they would enact them. This is why they voted for the candidate. How often does issue voting happen? The preponderance of evidence indicates that it does not happen very often. There are two weighty pieces of evidence for this.¹¹ The first turns on what voters say when you ask them what they like about different candidates. They rarely mention policy issues. Fewer than 20 percent mention any issue positions at all. So issue positions seem unlikely to drive vote choice. The second is that voters themselves likely lack firm positions on most issues. Their expressed issue positions are inconstant. At one time, they will say that they are all for, for example, federally provided universal employment. At another they will say that they are all against it. Voters seem to be constructing an opinion on the fly.¹² But opinions constructed on the fly surely do not drive vote choice. This evidence suggests that issue voting is relatively rare: it happens more often in textbooks than ballot boxes.

Not everyone is convinced by this evidence. Some people think that issue voting happens quite often. They point out that voters' issue stances correlate with their vote choice. Voters vote for the party that shares their issue stances. And so these people infer that voters' issue positions drive whom they vote for.¹³ But, in turn, many find this argument unconvincing. The problem is that this evidence does not establish the direction of causality. People often take their issue position from the party that they are going to vote for. They conform their policy stance to the party line. So these correlations might be due to people's vote choice driving their policy preferences rather than their policy preferences driving their vote choice.¹⁴ And there is good evidence that this is what is going on. In some cases, one can identify exactly when people find out that they do not share their preferred candidate's issue position. Afterward, they more often change their mind on the issue than stop liking the candidate.¹⁵ So, it seems to me unlikely that issue voting happens very often.

11 The first of these pieces comes from Campbell et al., *The American Voter*. The second comes from Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics (1964)." For contemporary updates on both pieces of evidence, see Lewis-Beck et al., *The American Voter Revisited*, ch. 10; and Kinder and Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative*.

12 For further discussion, see Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.

13 For an influential example of this argument, see Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, "The Strength of Issues."

14 For this reply, see Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 41–45.

15 The direct evidence for this is from Lenz, *Follow the Leader?* chs. 3, 8. But for supporting evidence, see Cohen, "Party over Policy"; and Berinsky, *In Times of War*. Now, one explanation of these findings is that voters have firm ideologies but do not know what policies best

Now let us turn to performance voting. This is voting based on the expected performance of the candidates.¹⁶ It is voting on one's expectations about their performance at promoting widely shared goals. Think of those Democrats who voted for Clinton because they thought he would boost the economy. They were performance voting. Or consider Republicans who voted for George W. Bush because they thought he would make America safer. They too were performance voting. These people might have had no view on which policies would help with prosperity or safety. They might just have had views on which candidate would best promote such goals. Often, such views are based on assessments of prior performance in office. These are called "retrospective assessments." But they might also be based in the perceived personal qualities of candidates: their integrity, intelligence, competence, and so on. All these things can ground assessments of a candidate's expected performance.

Among political scientists, the consensus is that performance voting is extremely common. The best evidence for this involves retrospective voting on the economy. A huge number of observational studies look at such voting behavior. Incumbents suffer when the economy is diving. They flourish when it is rising.¹⁷ There are also some panel-survey studies on performance voting. These

align with those ideologies. Yet they can identify which politicians share their ideologies. Thus, they adopt the policy stances of these politicians as a quick and easy way of adopting the policy stance most congruent with their ideologies. Popkins (*The Reasoning Voter*) and Lupia and McCubbins (*The Democratic Dilemma*) make this claim. But I doubt this for two reasons. First, I doubt that voters have firm ideologies. Kinder says, "Precious few Americans make sophisticated use of political abstractions. Most are mystified by or at least indifferent to standard ideological concepts" ("Opinion and Action in the Realm of Politics," 796). The evidence for this is, *inter alia*, that many citizens are simply unable to say much about the content of different political ideologies. Here see Kinder and Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative*, 11–43. Second, there are other explanations of what is going on when voters adopts elites' policy stances. The foremost explanation puts it down to motivated reasoning: partisans are strongly driven to agree with their party. They care much less about whether they have accurate political beliefs. Lab experiments cohere better with this view than the one that rests on ideology. See, for example, Petersen, et al., "Motivated Reasoning and Political Parties"; Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook, "The Influence of Partisan Motivated Reasoning on Public Opinion." So the ideology-based explanation of these findings seems to me to be dubious. But, in any case, the key point is that these findings mean correlations between issue positions and vote choice are weak evidence that the former cause the latter.

16 For the "performance" terminology, see Lenz, *Follow the Leader?* 2. We might label this kind of voting "expected performance voting" instead of performance voting. But to retain consistency with the empirical literature I prefer to simply call it "performance voting."

17 For the seminal works on this, see Key, *The Responsible Electorate*; Kramer, "Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896–1964"; Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. For a recent discussion of this classic literature, see Achen and Bartels,

studies interview the same individuals many times. This lets researchers see whether performance assessments change before vote intentions change or vice versa. Gabriel Lenz's *Follow the Leader?* is a landmark such study.¹⁸ He shows that, when people think the economy is doing badly, they later reduce their approval of incumbent presidents. The former seems to be causing the latter. It is a short jump from this to the conclusion that economic perceptions also drive vote choice. Performance issues, or at least the issue of prosperity, have a pervasive impact on vote choice.

Let us turn to group voting. This is voting on the basis of group identities. Catholics voted for Kennedy. White southerners voted for George Wallace. Black people voted for Obama. It is standard to understand this in terms of social identities.¹⁹ Social identities start with self-categorization: we see ourselves as members of certain groups. And they add to this an emotional charge: we care about our group memberships. How does that affect voting behavior? Well, when we have such a social identity, we are driven to achieve positive distinctiveness for it. That means we are driven to raise the status of our group relative to that of other groups: we want to "maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group."²⁰ In the electoral context, getting a group member or affiliate into office is the main way to do this. Having a president who comes from your group enhances your group's status. Thus, we often vote for fellow group members or affiliates of our groups. When I talk about group voting, I mean voting so driven by social identities.

Why construe group voting like this? Because it comports well with social identity theory. This theory is rooted in experiments conducted by Henri Tajfel in the late 1960s. Tajfel set out to plumb the origins of group conflict. He assigned people to groups arbitrarily. In one such experiment, he did this by asking them which of two abstract artworks they preferred. After picking, the subjects were told they were either in the group that liked Klee or that liked Kandinsky. He then asked them to allocate money among the other subjects. They could choose to ensure either that (1) everyone got the maximum amount of money or (2) their group got more money than the other group, but less than the maximum possible. He found that subjects favored 2. They preferred their group to

Democracy for Realists, 93–98. For an overview of the later literature, see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, "Economic Voting."

18 Lenz, *Follow the Leader?*

19 See, for example, Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 228–29; and Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 1–17.

20 Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," 378.

be worse off in absolute terms but better off relative to other groups.²¹ These experiments showed, first, that it is easy to motivate people by group identities. In Tajfel's experiments, subjects never even saw members of either group. They were told only that they had similar taste in art. And they showed, second, that when driven by such identities, we do not just want our group to do well. We want it to win: we want it to be superior to other groups. These claims are at the core of social identity theory. The first makes it likely that identities are operative in political contexts. The second suggests that we should understand that operation in terms of status enhancement. Thus, this more basic psychological theory grounds our construal of group voting.

Group voting also seems to be very common. Race, religion, gender, and geography are all common bases for group voting.²² But perhaps the most common type of group voting is voting on party identification. Those who identify as Democrats vote for the Democratic party. Those who identify as Republicans vote for the Republican party. Why think of this as a kind of group voting? Because party identification behaves like a social identity. It is more like Catholicism than it is like Libertarianism.²³ People avow their party identifications in survey interviews. They talk about their party in terms of "we." They feel attacks on their party as personal insults. They get a party identification by early adulthood. They usually stick with it for the rest of their lives. Party identification looks for all the world like a social identity.²⁴ Thus, since it has a pervasive impact on vote choice, group identities have such an impact.

In sum, on the strength of this evidence, group and performance voting happen often. Issue voting is rarer. I want to end this section with two final, clarificatory points. First, I wish to stress again that these three kinds of voting do not exhaust voters' possible motivations. Perhaps voters also vote based on candidate charisma, or on their perceived self-interest. But we have less empirical traction on these issues than on the three types of voter motivation just canvassed.²⁵

21 For the striking original finding, see Tajfel et al., "Social Categorization and Intergroup Behaviour." It has been widely replicated. See, for example, Billig and Tajfel, "Social Categorization and Similarity in Intergroup Behaviour"; Locksley, Ortiz, and Hepburn, "Social Categorization and Discriminatory Behavior"; Gagnon and Bourhis, "Discrimination in the Minimal Group Paradigm."

22 Achen and Bartels lay out some case studies supporting this (*Democracy for Realists*, ch. 7).

23 The canonical source of this idea is Campbell et al., *The American Voter*.

24 For this evidence, see Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, 32–40, ch. 3.

25 In this connection, I want to make a remark about self-interest as a voter motivation. There is a large literature, stemming from Kinder and Kiewiet ("Sociotropic Politics") on whether performance voters are *pocketbook* voters or *sociotropic* voters. Pocketbook voters vote for incumbents when they think that they personally have been doing well. Sociotropic voters

And, as the evidence I have cited indicates, many of these kinds of voter motivations clearly matter. They have a big impact on how voters behave. So, they are a good place to start. They carve out important drivers of voter behavior, the prevalence of which we have some grasp on. Thus, understanding the normative significance of these kinds of voter behavior will put us in a position to answer concrete normative questions about American democracy.

Second, many voters no doubt have multiple of these motivations. They are motivated in part by the issues, in part by performance, and in part by group identities. Sometimes, these motivations may be entangled. One might, for example, have one's policy position because of one's group identity. Perhaps one opposes gun control because one identifies as a white man.²⁶ Or, to take another example, one's group identity might lead one to prioritize certain performance issues. Perhaps one thinks terrorism is the top priority because one identifies as a Republican.²⁷ Nonetheless, we can disentangle the impact of different motivations. In theory, although rarely in practice, we can see in individual voters the relative force of these factors. We can say whether they were driven more by the issues, or by performance, or by group identities. In both theory and practice we can say, for the electorate as a whole, which of these motivations has the biggest impact on vote choice. That is what the empirical work just cited attempts to do. We will return to this issue in section 3. But that is all we will need to do to answer our normative questions. Yet, before turning to that, I must say more about what makes democracy valuable.

2. DEMOCRATIC VALUES

In this section, I spell out a conception of democracy's intrinsic value. This conception will be my own, but it has deep roots in democratic theory. The con-

vote for incumbents when they think that the national economy has been doing well. This distinction is sometimes equated with that between self-interested and altruistic voting. See, e.g., Brennan, *The Ethics of Voting*, 162–63, *Against Democracy*, 49–51, and “The Ethics and Rationality of Voting.” But this is a mistake. Sociotropic voters, as argued persuasively by Kiewiet and Lewis-Beck, may be entirely self-interested (“No Man Is an Island”). They may be voting for the candidate whom they see as good for the national economy solely because *they themselves* will do well when the national economy is doing well. Indeed, this point is made clear by Kinder and Kiewiet's initial paper on this topic. Kinder and Kiewiet stress that the “distinction between pocketbook and sociotropic politics is *not* equivalent to the distinction between a self-interested and an altruistic politics” (“Sociotropic Politics,” 132). Thus, we know frustratingly little about how much voters are driven by self-interest.

26 Melzer claims that this is common (*Gun Crusaders*).

27 This is consistent with survey data. See Jones, “Republicans and Democrats Have Grown Further Apart on What the Nation's Top Priorities Should Be.”

ception concerns intrinsic democratic values alone. These contrast with instrumental values. Intrinsic values make things valuable in themselves. Instrumental values make things valuable for their causal consequences or capacities. A good friendship is intrinsically valuable. A good hammer is just instrumentally valuable. The intrinsic democratic values we will focus on are equality and self-rule. In recent years, writers such as Niko Kolodny and Daniel Viehoff have advocated for the former.²⁸ They think that democracies are egalitarian in a way that other political systems are not.²⁹ Advocacy of the latter has a long and venerable history. This is the value tapped by Rousseau when he insists that “the people, subjected to law, ought to be its author,” and the United Nations when its treaties assert that “all peoples have the right to self-determination.”³⁰ My own view is that all noninstrumental democratic values reduce to these two values. So, the impact of voting behavior on equality and self-rule just is its impacts on the intrinsic value of democracy. But to determine this impact, we need the right conception of these values.

Let us start with equality. Democracies, many think, are distinctively egalitarian. And many spell out democratic equality as a type of relational equality.³¹ In part, that consists in avoiding inegalitarian relationships. Paradigm examples of such relationships are those between a master and slave or the members of different castes. Both relationships are intrinsically bad. And both relationships are partly constituted by inequalities of power. Part of what it is to be a slave, or a member of a lower caste, is to lack relative power. What does democracy have to do with this? Well, we can more or less stipulatively define a democracy as a political system in which political power is equally distributed and the exercise of that power determines what government does.³² On such a definition, democracy is constituted by equalities of political power. Thus, democracy helps preclude inegalitarian relationships. This is what we will call the negative aspect of democratic equality. This aspect consists in the minimization of relationships of domination, subordination, and hierarchy.

28 Kolodny, “Rule Over None I”; and Viehoff, “Power and Equality.”

29 For an older source of this idea, see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 9, 14.

30 For the quotes, see Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 2.6.10; and United Nations, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” article I. For some contemporary theories with this view, see Stilz, “The Value of Self-Determination”; and Zuehl, *Collective Self-Determination*.

31 This is the view in Kolodny, “Rule Over None I”; and Viehoff, “Democratic Equality and Political Authority” and “Power and Equality.” For a different conception of equality, see Christiano, *The Rule of the Many* and *The Constitution of Equality*. Most of what I say on the relational egalitarian conception would also go for Christiano’s conception.

32 Kolodny also opts for an essentially stipulative definition of democracy (“Rule Over None II,” 197).

But that does not exhaust the egalitarian value of democracy. This is because the mere absence of inegalitarian relationships does not exhaust relational egalitarian values. There are also intrinsically good relationships. On the small scale, friendship is the paradigm example. This is an intrinsically good, egalitarian relationship. Friendship does not just amount to non-domination: you are not friends with all those who avoid subordinating you. And it is not just instrumentally useful to have friends; it is good in itself. Now there are some similarities between good friendships and relationships of non-domination. In particular, friendship in part consists in equalities of power. Good friends do not wield asymmetric power over one another. But friendship requires more than just such equalities. Friends must be committed to preventing inequalities from arising. You are not friends with someone who would lord it over you if they had the chance. And friends must care appropriately about one another's welfare. You are not friends with someone who does not care about how your life goes. Friendship, in these ways, is a thicker relationship than mere non-domination.

For democratic theory, the critical claim is that you can also have large-scale such relationships. We will call these civic friendships.³³ These consist in part in non-domination. Civic friends can look one another in the eye.³⁴ They are not subservient to one another. But, for evaluating voter motivations, two further conditions on such relationships are critical. First, citizens' commitment to avoiding inegalitarian relationships is important. Imagine someone who would, given the chance, make themselves the dictator of their fellow citizens. They are not committed to avoiding inegalitarian relationships. This diminishes the positive value of their relationships with their fellow citizens. If they are completely indifferent to the equality of those relationships, I suspect that they are not in relationships of civic friendship at all. Second, citizens' care for others' welfare is important. Imagine someone who would sacrifice very little for the benefit of their fellow citizens. They do not care much about their fellow citizens' welfare. This again diminishes the positive value of their relationship with their fellows. If they are completely indifferent to that welfare, then again they are not in relationships of civic friendship at all. But when all these conditions are met, at least to a minimal extent, we have civic friendships. Democracy consists, in part, in the equalities of power necessary to these relationships. This is the positive aspect of democratic equality. It consists in democracy facilitating relationships of civic friendship.

33 The term comes from Schwarzenbach, "On Civic Friendship." For the most extensive defense of this as a democratic value, see Viehoff, "Power and Equality." Scheffler provides the underlying positive conception of egalitarian relationships ("The Practice of Equality").

34 The eyeballing metaphor comes from Pettit, *On the People's Terms*, 47.

Let us now turn to a second democratic value: self-rule. This consists in the manifestation of the people's will in their social and political affairs. The conception of this I favor hinges on joint intentions.³⁵ A joint intention is just an intention one shares with other people. When we together intend to sing a duet, paint a house, raise a child we have a joint intention. Now suppose some citizens have a joint intention to bring about some political event. This could be an action of government or an outcome of government action. And suppose their having this intention brings about this thing. Then we can say that they are self-ruling with respect to that outcome or action. The more people are self-ruling with respect to more actions or outcomes, the more the political system realizes the value of self-rule, and the more that political events manifest our joint intentions. What does democracy have to do with this? Well, for people to be self-ruling there must be a causal connection between their will and policy. On the definition above, democracy in part consists in such influence. Thus, democracy ensures that a necessary condition for self-rule is satisfied. This is another part of its intrinsic value.

This is, right now, a controversial view. Recently, some egalitarians have said that the only democratic value is an egalitarian one.³⁶ They have thought this because it is hard to give a good explanation of why self-rule is important. And without such an explanation, so they have thought, we should not think it is important. This seems to me rash. It is very intuitive that there is a democratic value in the vicinity of self-rule. Here is an example of the intuition: suppose we got rid of government by human beings and replaced it with government by algorithm.³⁷ The algorithm we replaced it with, let us stipulate, spits out perfect legislation. It institutes far superior legislation than any human government could. Yet, in this situation, citizens have no influence over the laws that govern them. It seems to me compelling that something is lost here. If we did this, we would be sacrificing something important about democracy. But that cannot be an egalitarian loss: in this case every person has equal political power (zero). Rather, it is a loss associated with lack of influence over the laws to which you are subject. So, intuitively, self-rule is valuable.

But we would still like an explanation of why self-rule is valuable. The account I favor hinges on the value of self-authorship. Being the author of your life is attractive. It is good to be responsible for what has a big impact on your life.

35 This type of account comes from Stilz, *Liberal Loyalty*; and Zuehl, *Collective Self-Determination*. But as I say in the text, I think the underlying idea has a long history. For example, we can see it in Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.

36 Kolodny, "Rule Over None II."

37 This case is from Zuehl, *Collective Self-Determination*, 18–19.

We can see this in personal cases. Compare two people. One has a conception of the good life and pursues it. They deliberately live their lives in accord with their values. The other makes few real choices. They might have a conception of the good life. But they do not pursue it: they just go with the flow. Intuitively, there is something preferable about the first life. We want mastery, not drift. We want people to be the author of their own lives.³⁸ In the personal case, what it is to be the author of things in your life is for your intending them to bring them about. You become a pilot because you intended to be; you marry your partner because they were whom you wanted to marry. But there is also a social dimension to this notion of authorship. You can, together with others, intend to bring about certain political outcomes. When this joint intention brings about those outcomes, you are their joint author. This is valuable in much the same way that single authorship is valuable. Such things have a huge impact on you. It is valuable to be partly responsible for things with such an impact on you. Self-rule helps realize this value.

So there are two parts to what makes democracy intrinsically valuable. On the one hand, democracy advances relational equality. This advancement itself has two aspects. The negative aspect amounts to the avoidance of inegalitarian relationships. The positive aspect amounts to the facilitation of egalitarian relationships. On the other hand, democracy advances self-rule. It helps make citizens joint authors of their social and political affairs. Advocacy of each value has a long history in democratic theory. It is plausible that both make democracy intrinsically valuable. Now there might be other things that make democracy intrinsically valuable. Perhaps the very act of democratic deliberation has intrinsic value. Perhaps simply resolving disagreement democratically has intrinsic value. And perhaps neither value reduces to the value of equality or self-rule. I doubt this, but I have given no evidence against it. Yet we will go forward with a focus on equality and self-rule. If there are other democratic values, then this will give us just a partial answer to how voting behavior affects intrinsic democratic values. But it will still provide an important part of the answer. So, with this caveat in mind, we can move to my first question: How does the prevalence of certain types of voter motivations affect these intrinsic democratic values?

3. EVALUATING VOTER MOTIVATIONS

First, we look at issue voting. Suppose everyone voted on the basis of policy issues. Imagine policy stances motivated people's vote choice. How much would this facilitate democratic values? I think the answer is: a lot. Let us start by look-

38 Raz does much more to spell out the attractiveness of this thought (*The Morality of Freedom*).

ing at how it would affect self-rule. Consider the people who, in 1932, voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). Imagine they did so because they wanted unemployment relief. This is a prerequisite for their having a joint intention to enact employment relief. It is a prerequisite for that intention bringing about unemployment relief. So enactment of employment relief might manifest the joint intentions of FDR voters. So, these people may be self-ruling with respect to unemployment relief. More generally, issue voting is a prerequisite for policy manifesting joint intentions. The more widespread issue voting is, the better positioned people are to be self-ruling with respect to particular policies.

Now, widespread issue voting does not guarantee such self-rule. Issue voters might not *jointly* intend to enact any policies. To see this, suppose that Bratman's account of such intentions is right. Bratman thinks that some people have a joint intention to ϕ when (a) they each intend that they together ϕ , (b) they have jointly compatible plans for contributing to ϕ -ing, and (c) they are not coerced into ϕ -ing.³⁹ Issue voters might fail to meet these conditions. They might, for example, only think of their own contributions to policy. They might not intend that they together with others enact policy. But, in truth, these conditions are not that hard to meet. FDR voters could easily have intended to bring about unemployment relief with other FDR voters. Their individuals plans to contribute to this—voting for FDR—are jointly compatible. And nobody was coerced into voting for FDR. So widespread issue voting does not ensure that voters have the joint intentions that self-rule requires. But it puts them in a good position to have such intentions. It helps enable them to be self-ruling.

Yet there is a more important way in which issue voters might fail to achieve the value of self-rule. They might be very incompetent. Suppose that they do not know much about FDR's policies. They have an inkling that he is the one offering a New Deal to the American people. But they cannot really remember. Might it not have been, they wonder, Hoover who was banging on about a deal? But, on the basis of the inkling, they vote for FDR. Here, they are not very competent voters. If they aimed to help enact the New Deal, their actions did not very reliably contribute to this goal. They could have easily voted for the candidate who would stymie it. We will talk more about such incompetence in the next section. But, for now, I will just register the belief that when issue voters are incompetent in this way, they achieve little self-rule. Voter incompetence means policies at most match, rather than manifest, voters' joint intentions. Thus, widespread issue voting aids, without assuring, the achievement of self-rule.

Let us turn to equality. Citizens need certain attitudes to achieve the positive aspect of democratic equality. They must have some care for the welfare of their

39 Bratman, "Shared Cooperative Activity."

fellow citizens. They must be committed to avoiding inegalitarian relationships. Issue voters can fall short on these commitments. Consider people who voted for Wallace in 1968 because they liked his segregationist platform. These people were issue voters. But they do not achieve the positive aspect of democratic equality. They violate both conditions. They were not sufficiently concerned for the welfare of their fellow citizens. They were not sufficiently committed to the avoidance of inegalitarian relationships. So, for issue voters to help achieve this value, they cannot vote on the basis of odious commitments. But issue voting is compatible with such abstinence. Issue voters might well vote on issues that are not odious. So, not all issue voting is consistent with the positive egalitarian value. But there is no inherent tension between issue voting and democratic equality. Issue voting, when combined with the other attitudes, does facilitate such equality.

Second, we look at performance voting. Suppose everyone votes on the basis of expected performance in office. Expected performance motivates vote choice. How much does this facilitate democratic values? We will start with self-rule. Self-rule is a little less well achieved by widespread performance voting than by widespread issue voting. That is because it is only outcomes that can now manifest people's intentions. Suppose people voted for FDR, in 1932, because they thought he would be a better economic performer than Hoover. That is a low bar, but it paid off handsomely. FDR did not just enact unemployment relief; he helped pull America out of the Great Depression. In this case, the economic upturn might well manifest the joint intentions of FDR voters. But the actual policies that FDR implemented would not have manifested these intentions. More generally, performance voting fits with outcomes, rather than policies, manifesting voters' intentions.

Why is this worse than issue voting? Well, to explain that we have to make some more assumptions about issue voting. I assume that few people want a set of policies with total disregard for the outcomes of those policies. They think that those very policies will produce some desired outcomes. So they also have the intention to produce an outcome. So, for such issue voters, both policies and outcomes manifest their joint intentions. That is why they have a leg up on performance voters. For performance voters, only the outcomes manifest the intentions. Performance voters might well be responsible for large parts of their social environment. But issue voters—at least given certain assumptions—are responsible for larger parts. But I want to be clear on my view here: the leg up is the size of a small leg. Issue voting beats out performance voting on achieving self-rule. But the margin of victory is not large. Both seem to me respectable ways of achieving this value.

Let us turn to equality. Issue voting and performance voting are in the same position when it comes to equality. Performance voting does not guarantee the achievement of the positive aspect of democratic equality. Some people performance vote on the basis of inegalitarian commitments. Their performance voting will not aid this value. Some vote on sheer self-interest. They ask not what a candidate can do for their country, but just what the candidate can do for them. This does not help the achievement of democratic equality. But performance voters need not exhibit such misbehavior. They might vote for whom they think will produce the best outcomes for all their fellow citizens. They might vote for Clinton because they think he will make everyone better off. So widespread performance voting and issue voting are consistent with democratic equality. Neither ensure it, but both can facilitate it.

Finally, we look at group voting. Suppose everyone votes on the basis of their group identities. They vote for candidates affiliated with the groups with which they identify. And they do this to boost the relative social standing of their group. How does this affect democratic values? We start with self-rule. This type of voter motivation, were it widespread, would not be good for self-rule. When you group vote, neither the policies of government nor the outcomes of those policies manifest your intentions. You did not intend to bring about any particular policies. You did not intend to bring about any particular outcomes. You voted on the basis of group affiliation. So group voters do not enjoy self-rule with respect to policies or their outcomes. Now it is not that they enjoy nothing. When they get someone affiliated with their group into office, this can count as the manifestation of their intentions. Any ensuing change in social hierarchies can also count as manifesting their intentions. But, generally, such changes are not enormous. Obama's election did not transform race relations in the United States. So this makes voters, at best, responsible for only minor changes in status hierarchies. Yet such minor changes are less important to citizens' social and political affairs than is government policy and the huge changes to social life wrought by such policy. Thus, widespread group voting would not much help the achievement of self-rule.

Now let us consider equality. Is widespread group voting consistent with the positive aspect of democratic equality? This depends on the type of group voting. There are three types. First, there is *maintaining superiority*. Suppose one identifies with a group that holds a privileged place in a social hierarchy. One votes as one does to maintain this group's elevated place in the hierarchy. This is surely incompatible with a commitment to social equality. You cannot be both committed to social equality and motivated by maintaining the status superiority of your group. This is exactly a vote motivated by a commitment to social

inequality. In the United States, some instances of racial voting give us concrete examples of this. The United States is a racially stratified society. It is not white people who suffer from racial oppression. So consider the case of white people who vote on the basis of their racial identity. This is a case of maintaining social superiority. If such voting is widespread, then that impairs the realization for the positive egalitarian value.

Second, there is *creating superiority*. Suppose one identifies with a group that holds neither a high nor low place in the social hierarchy. One hopes one's vote will facilitate a realignment in status hierarchies. It will help this group gain status and, in particular, become superior to other groups. This again is incompatible with a commitment to social equality. Such voting behavior is part of a commitment to social inequality. The best concrete example of this is voting on the basis of party identification. In the United States, party groups hold roughly similar levels of social status. So, consider Republicans who vote for the Republican candidate to raise the social status of Republicans. They are attempting to create social superiority. This is incompatible with a commitment to social equality. So widespread group voting of this type would also impair the positive aspect of democratic equality.

Third, there is *ameliorating inferiority*. Suppose one identifies with a group that holds a low place in the social hierarchy. One votes for a group-affiliated candidate to ameliorate the status inferiority of this group. One hopes that, if the candidate wins the election, the group will gain status. The status gain will not make that group superior to other comparison groups, but rather will make it closer to their equal. This seems completely consistent with a commitment to social inequality. The driving force here is not a desire for social superiority; it is a desire for equality. In the United States, much race-based voting exemplifies this. Consider Black voters who voted for Obama. This need not have hurt the positive aspect of democratic equality. In this case, elevating one's group's status amounted to diminishing America's racial hierarchies. This is surely a motivation compatible with egalitarian commitments. So, widespread group voting of this type is quite consistent with democratic equality.

So different kinds of group voting interact differently with democratic equality. Voting in order to ameliorate the inferiority of a group is compatible with the positive aspects of equality. One can have attractive egalitarian relationships with people moved by such motivations. But voting in order to protect or produce the superiority of a group clashes with this aspect. This type of voting manifests a lack of commitment to equality. One cannot have a civic friendship with those who wholly lack such commitments and one's civic friendships are impaired with those who have only very weak such commitments. So, how group

voting impacts the positive aspects of equality depends on the type of group voting in play. Now that does not mean that group voting impacts the negative aspect of democratic equality. I doubt it does. Group voting, by itself, never puts people into relationships of subordination. But it can prevent relationships of civic friendship. It thus impairs the positive, but not the negative, aspect of democratic equality.

Let me conclude the section by returning to an issue I raised in section 1. We have been exploring the question of how the prevalence of different voter motivations impacts democratic values. But these motivations are often combined in individuals: often, single voters are moved to some extent by all three types of motivation. How does that affect our discussion? To account for this, the key thing we need to be able to do is evaluate how much each motivation matters on average. The larger the average impact of issue voting, and to a lesser extent performance voting, the better positioned a democracy is to achieve self-rule, and the more citizens' social and political affairs can manifest their joint intentions. The larger the average impact of privileged group identities, the worse positioned a democracy is to achieve the positive aspect of democratic equality, and the more civic friendships are seriously damaged. This, in effect, answers the first question of this paper. Roughly speaking, issue voting is best, followed by performance voting, followed by group voting. And that answer puts us in a better position to assess how voters' motivations affect the value of American democracy. But we are not yet in a quite good enough position. For how these motivations matter to democratic values depends on how competent voters are. So we now turn to voter competence.

4. VOTER COMPETENCE

Let us say that someone is competent with respect to a certain aim when they reliably do what promotes that aim. They do what promotes that aim in many contexts. Let us say that voters are competent insofar as they are competent with respect to the aims that underlie their vote. In this section, we will look at how voter competence modulates the contribution those aims make to democratic values. This is crucial for two reasons. First, it tightens our grip on how voter motivation and democratic values relate. It tells us when certain motivations successfully contribute to those values. Second, we need to do this to understand how voter motivation contributes to the value of American democracy. There are well-known doubts about the competence of American voters.⁴⁰ If voter motivation only contributes to democratic values when voters are sufficiently competent,

⁴⁰ See, for example, Brennan, *The Ethics of Voting*, ch. 7.

then that matters to our assessment of that contribution. So, what is required of voter competence for voter motivation to contribute to democratic values?

It depends on the value. Let us start with self-rule. Suppose voters want to vote for the candidate who would perform best, but imagine that they are utterly incompetent. They judge candidates on the basis of good looks or how well tank helmets fit on their heads.⁴¹ But head size does not predict which candidate will be the best performer. Yet suppose the lucky thing happens: a majority of voters do end up voting for the best performer. As previously noted, intuitively this means that the good performance does not manifest their joint intentions in the sense necessary for self-rule. For this type of manifestation, their vote and the good performance has to be more reliably connected. Voters, in general, have to be competent in order for the value of self-rule to be achieved. Now, that is not to say that there is a sharp cutoff at which they achieve the anointed standard of competence. Rather we should think of it in scalar terms. The more competent voters are, the more of the value of self-rule they can attain. So, when voters are quite incompetent, their issue and performance voting contribute little to self-rule.

I think this point is clear in personal cases. Imagine that you start a business. But, let us suppose, you are not a very good businessperson. You hire layabouts, invest in fads, advertise on Myspace. Left to your own devices, you would quickly run your new business into the ground. But, fortunately for you, you are a Rockefeller. And your indulgent uncle is both a very good businessman and very, very rich. He works behind the scenes to rectify your mistakes. He hires hard workers. He contacts the right politicians. He intimidates your competitors (he is a Rockefeller, too). This makes your business a moderate success. In this case, it seems to me that you are not the author of this success. That is because you were so unreliable at achieving it. You were only saved by fortuitous family connections. So, that success does not really redound to your credit. In this personal case, incompetence seems to undercut the achievement of authorship. That is evidence that, in the political case, incompetence also undercuts the achievement of authorship. When people are not competent with respect to their goals, in both cases, they are less the authors of those goals. The achievement of those goals merely matches, rather than manifests, their intentions.

Let us turn to equality. Here the key question is whether incompetent voting is incompatible with the attitudes that the positive egalitarian value requires. If you are incompetent, does that imply that you lack a commitment to equality? Does it imply that you do not care appropriately about your fellow citizens' wel-

41 Good looks do sometimes drive vote choice. For some recent evidence, see Ahler et al., "Face Value?" The import of head size turns on your take on Michael Dukakis's ill-fated presidential push.

fare? At first glance, the answer seems to be a clear no. One can have goals one is not good at achieving. Suppose you care deeply about your nephew's welfare. But your nephew lives in England and you live in the United States. You just cannot keep up with his life. The tyranny of distance defeats you. So you never get him the right Christmas presents. You get him films when he wants games, sugar candy when he wants chocolate, scarves when he wants "jumpers." You are not very good at contributing to his welfare. But that does not imply that you do not care about his welfare. You can care about things you are not very good at promoting. So, at first glance, voter competence need not matter to how voter motivations impact democratic equality.

But perhaps first glances deceive. There are cases where your incompetence does make for a lack of concern. Suppose you could easily find out what your nephew wanted. You just need to phone your sister. Then your incompetence suggests that you do not care that much about your nephew's welfare. Your unwillingness to pick up the phone in part constitutes a lack of substantial concern. Two things are going on in this case. First, it is not very costly to become competent. You just need to dial your sibling. Second, this minor cost really boosts the chances of achieving the relevant goal. Calling your sister will make you much more likely to give your nephew good presents. So, when increasing your competence is relatively easy, and would substantially improve the chances of achieving some goal, lack of competence constitutes your not putting much weight on the goal at all.

But voting meets neither condition. It is not easy to become a very competent voter. You have to spend a lot of time reading things like *Politico* and *The New York Times*. That is all time stolen from other, more valuable activities. And, more importantly, there is little chance that such competence will make a difference to the welfare of your fellow citizens. This is because there is so little chance your vote will make a difference. Rarely do individual votes decide elections. Even if you were the most competent voter in the world, that would in expectation yield a tiny benefit to your fellow citizens. So, I suspect that you can be an incompetent voter while having the attitudes that the positive egalitarian value requires. Incompetence does not constitute a failure to care enough about your fellow citizens' welfare or to be committed to equality. So self-rule is only achieved by reasonably competent voters. But the positive aspect of democratic equality imposes minimal standards of voter competence.

5. THE AMERICAN VOTER

We can now see how the motivations of the American voter contribute to democratic values. This tells us, in part, the extent to which American democracy

achieves these values. We first address self-rule. I have already suggested that issue voters are scarce. If this is true, then only performance voters can realize this value. How many of those are there? Well, when you ask voters what they like about candidates, about 40 percent mention performance issues. About 30 percent mention topics like the economy. Up to 10 percent mention candidates' personal qualities.⁴² So this seems an upper bound for the number of performance voters in the American electorate. And it is a respectable upper bound: 40 percent of voters is a lot of voters.

Yet, unfortunately, I doubt these voters enjoy much of the value of self-rule. The problem is that many voters are rather incompetent. To see this, we draw from Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels's great book, *Democracy for Realists*. They argue, persuasively, that American performance voters are "myopic" and "blind." They are myopic in the sense that they only vote retrospectively on short-term performance. They are blind in the sense that they punish incumbents for things out of their control. Fixating on short-term performance and kicking incumbents for acts of God are not, I suspect, reliable ways to pick good performers. So I suspect American performance voters are not competent performance voters. Insofar as these suspicions are accurate, American voters will not achieve much of the value of self-rule.

What is the evidence for voters' myopia and blindness? Let us start with myopia. Now everyone knows that economic performance correlates with incumbent vote share. But economic performance can be different over different time periods. It might be good over four years, but less good over the last two years. So Achen and Bartels test what period of economic performance is associated with incumbent vote share.⁴³ They find that an extra percentage of real income growth in the six months before the presidential election is associated with a large increase in incumbent popular vote margin: seven-and-a-half percentage points. Income growth at other times, they find, is not associated with any change in the incumbent's vote margin. Achen and Bartels conclude that voters are just responding to economic conditions around the time they are voting. If that is right, then voters only care about what you have done for them lately. They are myopic, in the sense that they fixate on the recent past.⁴⁴

Now turn to blindness. Again, the best piece of evidence for voter blindness

42 Lewis-Beck et al., *The American Voter Revisited*, ch. 10.

43 Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 146–76.

44 Healy and Malhotra ("Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy") and Montalvo ("Voting after the Bombings") report similar outcomes with respect to natural disasters and terrorist attacks, respectively. Healy and Lenz argue that this is a manifestation of the "end" part of peak-end effects ("Substituting the End for the Whole").

comes from Achen and Bartels.⁴⁵ They point out that the level of rainfall matters to voters' welfare. Low rainfall means drought; high rainfall means flooding. But the weather is outside of incumbents' control. Thus, they investigate how, in the United States, incumbent vote share tracks rainfall. They find very low and very high rainfall is associated with lower incumbent vote share. They conclude that voters are punishing incumbents for something over which they have no control: bad weather. This is not a reliable way to pick good performers. Thus, insofar as Achen and Bartels are correct, American performance voters are not competent. So these voters likely achieve little of the value of self-rule. American democracy, then, can attain little of this value. The American voter, at least by the lights of the evidence I have presented, pushes that value largely out of reach.⁴⁶

But what about democratic equality? In particular, does American voting behavior impair the positive aspect of democratic equality? Let us start with the impact of performance voting. Here competency matters. But the competency constraint I advanced was minimal. Indeed, I think even myopic and blind voters can meet it. After all, myopic and blind voters are not *completely* incompetent: they still managed to kick out Hoover. They just have a low level of competency. But there is a tiny chance that their vote makes a difference. So this low competency is consistent with having the attitudes that the positive egalitarian value demands. It need not mean that voters do not care appropriately about their fellow citizens or are not sufficiently committed to equality. The lack of competency evinced by American voters, then, does not much matter to democratic equality.

Let us turn to group voting. Here the outlook is much gloomier. The first problem arises from the pervasive impact of partisan identification on voting behavior. I noted above that voting on the basis of party identification involves voting in order to elevate your own social group above other social groups. It is a case of creating superiority. That is incompatible with a commitment to social equality. This is bad news for the positive value of equality in American democracy. Partisans on each side are trying to make themselves superior to those on the other. They cannot at the same time forge valuable egalitarian relationships across party lines. Substantively, that is of enormous import. Partisan identification is probably the strongest influence on voting behavior.⁴⁷ Since it severs

45 Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 116–46. The corroborating literature is now quite large. For a review, see Healy and Malhotra, “Retrospective Voting Reconsidered.”

46 I defend a similar conclusion, but on different grounds, in Lovett, “Democratic Autonomy and the Shortcomings of Citizens.”

47 For the source of this position, see Campbell et al., *The American Voter*. For recent forceful advocates, see again Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 232–66.

positively valuable egalitarian relationships, only a few such relationships can span party lines. Cross-partisan relationships cannot be civic friendships.

Yet things are worse than that. To see why, we have to look at some more empirical evidence. And we will need to turn to current affairs: we will need to turn to the 2016 election of Donald Trump. One of the most crucial points about Trump's rise is its connection to white identity. In the primaries, white voters more attached to their white identity were much more likely to vote for Trump. He won the general election with a majority of fifteen points among white voters. Again, white identifiers were most likely to vote for him. The reason is not obscure. His rhetoric was littered with both implicit and explicit racial appeals.⁴⁸ These appeals helped cement Trump as the candidate of white Americans. He swept to office on a wave of white-identity voting.⁴⁹ White-identity voting, as we noted above, is incompatible with civic friendship. You cannot stand in such an egalitarian relationship with someone while trying to cement your superiority over them.

Trump contributed to this wave, but he did not create it. Thirty percent to 40 percent of white Americans say that being white is very, or extremely, important to their identity.⁵⁰ And white-identity voting mattered well before Trump. It seems to have reduced the vote for Obama as well as for Black candidates in other elections.⁵¹ For at least a decade, then, millions of white Americans have voted on the basis of protecting their lofty place in America's racial hierarchy. And white people are probably not the only members of a privileged group to vote on the basis of group identity. For example, Trump won by twelve percentage points among men. The more sexist someone was the more likely they were to vote for him.⁵² So it seems plausible (although the evidence is less strong) that male identity also mattered to vote choice. In short, group voting in America is not the preserve of oppressed groups. Members of privileged groups often vote on the basis of their group identity.

This is even worse news for the positive aspect of democratic equality. Voting behavior rends positively valuable egalitarian relationships between partisans. And it also seems to, often, prevent them between the more and less privileged. That means those relationships cannot hold between each American citizen. Now that does not mean they cannot hold between anyone. Not every white

48 The *New York Times* keeps a list of Trump's racist comments. See Leonhardt and Philbrick, "Donald Trump's Racism."

49 The story here comes from Jardina, *White Identity Politics*, 230–47.

50 Jardina, *White Identity Politics*, 63.

51 Petrow, Transue, and Vercellotti, "Do White In-Group Processes Matter, Too?"

52 Schaffner, Macwilliams, and Nteta, "Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President."

person votes on their white identity. Not every partisan votes on party identity, and those who do not can share positively valuable egalitarian relationships. But millions of people do vote on such bases. So the American voter strikes a blow against the positive aspect of democratic equality. That leaves the negative aspect of democratic equality untouched. It does not by itself make American citizens subordinate to their fellows.⁵³ But, all the same, it is a big blow to the intrinsic value of American democracy.

6. HOW SHOULD WE VOTE?

We are now in a position to give a partial answer to the third question: How should we vote? The question here concerns how actual American citizens should vote, given the condition of American democracy. My answer will be partial. We will look at just the reasons democratic values give rise to. I think that the value of self-rule can give rise to two types of reasons with respect to voting behavior. First, it can give rise to a self-interested reason. You yourself benefit from achieving this value. But you only achieve this when your fellow citizens put you in a position to achieve it. They must have the intentions that would underpin a joint intention. And they must have formed those intentions competently. Otherwise it does not matter how you vote. The incompetence of your fellow citizens puts the value of self-rule out of reach. But neither condition is usually met in the United States. American voters, as we have seen, often lack the motivations they need to achieve the value of self-rule. They are often group voters. And those who are performance voters are rarely competent performance voters. So, in the United States, self-rule provides little self-interested reason to vote on particular motivations.

Second, the value of self-rule can give rise to an altruistic reason. Generally, we should help out our fellow citizens. If our doing something helps them achieve some good, we have reason to do the thing. One of the reasons to pay our taxes is that it helps us get good roads, parks, schools. It helps out our co-citizens. Thus, were American voters good competent issue voters, you would have reason to be such a voter yourself. This would help Americans achieve the value of self-rule. But again as we have seen, American voters are not competent issue voters. So being such a voter does not help them achieve self-rule. You can only help those who help themselves. So you lack this altruistic reason to be a competent issue voter. Thus I doubt the value of self-rule gives American voters any reason to vote in certain ways. It would in an ideal democracy. In an ideal

53 I explore a problem for the negative aspect of democratic equality in Lovett, "Must Egalitarians Condemn Representative Democracy?"

democracy it would give American voters reason to be competent issue voters. But in our deeply nonideal, real-world case, it is normatively inert.

Now one might resist this. Suppose you endorse a view like rule consequentialism. On this view, one should act in line with the rules that, were they widely accepted, would lead to the best consequences. So imagine that your college needs a million dollars to stay open. If every member of the college gave the college a thousand dollars it would stay afloat. This would be to great benefit overall. So you should give the college a thousand dollars. And you should do this even when you know you are throwing your money into the abyss; you know that your perfidious colleagues will never chip in. This sort of view says that you should be a competent issue voter despite it achieving nothing. For if everyone accepted the rule “be a competent issue voter,” then we would achieve the value of self-rule. So my position will not be congenial to people with such rule-based moral views. But I am skeptical of such views. The cases at hand are exactly those where they seem to go wrong. In these cases, following such rules seems pointless. So, the relevant cases seem like counterexamples to such views. That is not secure footing from which to resist the position I have put forward.

Let us turn to equality. This gives rise to reasons connected to the constraints on egalitarian relationships. You should not do things that sever your egalitarian relationships. Now, were America entirely devoid of egalitarian civic relationships, this too would not matter. But that is not the picture I just painted. Millions of people may vote on party identification and privileged identities. But millions also do not. You still have reason to avoid severing your egalitarian relationships with these latter people. That means you should not vote on certain group identities. Voting on party identification seems out. Voting on whiteness or masculinity is definitely out. Such voting precludes a commitment to equality. In short, you cannot be the type of group voter who votes on the basis of privileged group identities. Now that does not preclude voting on unprivileged group identities. Ninety-six percent of Black voters voted for Obama. They need not have been doing anything wrong. But it precludes much group voting all the same. So equality imposes constraints on your motivations. Does it also impose constraints on your competence? Only minimal ones. This is because acquiring competence is costly and the chances of it making a difference are low. Thus you need not hit the books to meet the requirements of democratic equality.⁵⁴ Equality mainly requires you to manage the motivations underlying your vote.

So we have shed some light on how we ought to vote. Insofar as achieving

54 Jason Brennan, of course, argues that voters have reasons to be competent that are not grounded in self-rule or equality. See Brennan, *The Ethics of Voting*, ch. 3. I have not engaged with his argument here.

democratic values is important, we have reason not to vote on certain motivations. In ideal democracies, this reason would be quite constraining. We would have reason to be competent issue voters. But the nonideal nature of American democracy makes a crucial difference. It means democratic values impose quite lax standards on voting behavior. As long as we do not vote on relatively privileged identities, we are likely doing all that such values require of us. Of course, many of us fall short of even these standards. Many voters vote on white identity. Many more are driven by party identity. But the standard is not, in principle, hard to meet.⁵⁵

7. CONCLUSION

Let me sum up. We started with three questions. The first concerned how the prevalence of different kinds of voter motivations mattered to intrinsic democratic values. I have argued that issue voting would be best, followed by performance voting, followed by group voting. The second concerned how much American voters contribute to these values. I have argued: not much. The American voter often lacks the motivations, or the competence, necessary to contribute to either equality or self-rule. The third concerned how Americans should vote. I have argued that Americans need not pretend that they live in an ideal democracy. In their nonideal democracy, they only do wrong by voting on relatively privileged identities. This covers much of the territory of how voter motivation interacts, both evaluatively and deontically, with intrinsic democratic values. It also leaves much of that territory uncovered. But it suffices to show, I think, that voter motivations matter to democracy.⁵⁶

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55 Now, as I have said, some people have a sunnier view of American voters than I think is accurate. See, for example, Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, "The Strength of Issues." They should think that American democracy is in a better position to achieve democratic values than I do. And they should also think that American voters are under more stringent obligations than I take them to be. If most voters are competent and vote on the issues, then each voter has reason to be competent and vote on the issues. Thus, empirical premises aside, the theoretical upshot of this section is that there are systematic dependencies between the quality of a democracy and how its voters have reason to vote.

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