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# BALLOTS AND OBLIGATIONS: WEAVING POLITICAL DUTIES THROUGH VOTING

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Amitabh Kumar Saxena & Rahul Mishra

## I. ABSTRACT:

Voting is both a moral and rational activity that underpins democratic governance, raising fundamental questions about its ethical implications and individual rationality. The ethics of voting explores whether individuals are morally obligated to vote and what constitutes responsible voting behaviour. It involves considerations of justice, civic duty, and the common good, weighing the individual's role in contributing to collective decision-making. On the other hand, rationality in voting questions the logic behind individual participation in elections, given the minuscule chance that one vote will affect the outcome. This paradox, often referred to as the "voter's paradox," challenges the motivation for voting from a purely self-interested, cost-benefit perspective. Theories of rational voting suggest that people may vote due to a sense of civic duty, social pressure, or expressive reasons, where the act of voting reflects an alignment with personal values rather than an expected influence on the election result. Thus, the rationality and ethics of voting intersect in complex ways, addressing the balance between individual autonomy and societal obligations in democratic participation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement in political processes.

## II. KEYWORDS:

Ethics of voting, rationality of voting, voter's paradox, civic duty, democratic participation

## III. INTRODUCTION

The act of voting is a fundamental cornerstone of democratic societies worldwide, serving as a mechanism through which citizens express their preferences and shape the course of their nation's future. However, the decision to participate in the electoral process is a multifaceted one, influenced by individual motivations, moral

considerations, and ethical obligations. This research project seeks to explore and analyse various dimensions of citizen participation in elections, shedding light on the rationality, morality, and ethics that underlie this crucial democratic act.

- **Rational Choice in Electoral Participation:** One of the central questions we will explore is whether it is a rational choice for an individual citizen to participate in the electoral process by voting. Rational choice theory suggests that individuals make decisions that maximize their utility, and voting involves costs in terms of time and effort. We will examine the factors that influence individuals' decisions to vote or abstain and assess the extent to which voting aligns with their self-interest.
- **Moral Obligation and Citizen Voting:** The existence of a moral obligation for citizens to exercise their right to vote in elections is a topic that has long been debated. We will delve into the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of this question, considering whether there is a moral duty for citizens to participate in the electoral process, given its implications for social and political outcomes.
- **Ethical Responsibilities in Casting Votes:** Beyond the decision to vote, there are ethical responsibilities associated with the way citizens cast their votes in elections. We will examine issues related to informed decision-making, the influence of external factors on voter choices, and the ethical dimensions of vote buying, manipulation, and voter suppression.
- **Government Measures Encouraging Electoral Participation:** Governments often implement measures to encourage or even require citizens to participate in the electoral process by voting. We will assess the justifiability of such measures and their potential impacts on democratic participation, individual autonomy, and political legitimacy.
- **Right to Vote and Principles of Equal Representation:** The question of who should be granted the right to vote is central to the concept of democracy. We will explore the historical context and evolving principles behind suffrage, examining whether the principle of equal representation should extend to

every citizen in the voting process, including considerations related to age, residency, and eligibility criteria.

This research project aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the rational, moral, and ethical dimensions of citizen participation in the electoral process. That a combination of civic education, societal norms, and the belief in the importance of democratic representation contributes to citizens' political obligation to cast their votes.

By addressing these critical questions, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the foundations and implications of democratic engagement, informing policy discussions and encouraging thoughtful citizenship in an ever-evolving political landscape. Through rigorous research and analysis, we aspire to shed light on the complexities surrounding citizen participation and its role in shaping the future of democratic societies.

#### **IV. RATIONALITY OF VOTING REWRITE**

Voting has an opportunity cost since it consumes time and energy that may be spent on more worthwhile activities such as paid work, volunteer work, or leisure time hobbies such as video games. Furthermore, engaging with political concerns, gathering essential information, and engaging in critical discourse consumes significant time and effort that may be spent for other tasks. The most fundamental assumption of economic theory is that sensible people only choose actions that maximise their expected advantage. However, economists have long voiced concern that many individual voters do not follow the maximisation of expected value criterion.

However, the individual aims of each person determine whether voting is reasonable. According to instrumental theories, voting can be justified when a person wants to change or influence an election's results, including the perceived "mandate" won by the winning candidate. (In accordance with the mandate theory<sup>1</sup> of elections, a candidate's effectiveness in office, i.e., their ability to carry out duties, is decided by

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<sup>1</sup> Achen C and Bartels L, *Democracy for Realists* (Princeton University Press 2016)

the margin of victory they achieve over their rivals during the election.) According to the expressive theory of voting, people cast ballots to demonstrate their support for particular causes and organisations.

Some may contend that voting is rational because it offers a form of self-gratification; many people like taking part in politics for its own sake or to show their political commitment to others. Finally, voting may be seen as logical due to its involvement in satisfying this moral requirement if one believes, as the majority of democratic citizens<sup>2</sup> do (Mackie 2010), that voting bears a significant moral obligation.

### **A. Voting to Change the Outcome**

In the context of voting, individuals often aim to influence or alter the outcome of an election, driven by their preferences for certain candidates or policies. This decision hinges on the perceived difference in the overall societal good that each candidate represents. However, quantifying this difference in monetary terms is not always straightforward, especially when it involves issues like the value of human lives or the commensurability of diverse outcomes.

The probability of an individual's vote being decisive is often deemed very small in typical elections, as demonstrated by binomial models. These models suggest that, in most cases, a single vote rarely makes a difference<sup>3</sup>. However, more optimistic estimates, using statistical techniques and considering factors like swing states, suggest slightly higher probabilities of being decisive.

Nevertheless, even these assessments may be overly optimistic. Challenges may arise, such as legal disputes, in cases where an election hinges on a single vote. Furthermore, voters may struggle to reliably identify the better candidate and accurately estimate the value difference between them, complicating the assessment of the rationality of voting. In essence, the rationality of voting depends on various factors, including the closeness of the election, the perceived difference between candidates, and the accuracy of voter assessments, making it a complex and debated subject.

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<sup>2</sup> Althaus S, 'Information Effects in Collective Preferences' (1998) 92 American Political Science Review 545.

<sup>3</sup> Beerbohm E, *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy* (Princeton University Press 2012)

## **B. Voting to Change the "Mandate"**

In response to the paradox of voting, several theories aim to explain the rationality of voting. One such theory suggests that voters may not vote solely to determine the election outcome but rather to influence the winning candidate's "mandate" or effectiveness in office<sup>4</sup>. However, this theory faces challenges in quantifying how much an individual vote contributes to this mandate change and is further complicated by empirical research that questions the significance of electoral mandates.

Another theory posits that voting could be rational if it transforms a candidate from a delegate (representing constituents' wishes) into a trustee (making independent decisions). For this to hold, it must be demonstrated that the shift from delegate to trustee, caused by an individual's vote, is worth more than the opportunity cost of voting.

Alternatively, if there were a clear threshold at which a candidate becomes a trustee, voting could be rational if it substantially increased the chances of pushing the candidate over that threshold. Yet, like the challenge of deciding an election, the probability of an individual's vote decisively effecting this transformation remains exceedingly low. In essence, these theories grapple with the complex task of showing that the expected benefits of voting, whether in terms of influencing mandates or trustee status, outweigh the associated costs, which remains a subject of debate and uncertainty.

## **C. Other Reasons to Vote**

Other philosophers have proposed alternative perspectives on how individual votes can be considered to "make a difference." For instance, some argue that by voting, a person has a substantial likelihood of being part of the group of votes that can be identified as causally effective, or they bear some form of causal responsibility for the ultimate outcome<sup>5</sup>.(as discussed by Tuck in 2008 and Goldman in 1999).

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell A, Gurin G, and Miller WE, *The Voter Decides* (Row, Peterson, and Co, Evanston, Ill 1954)

<sup>5</sup>Goldman A, 'Why Citizens Should Vote: A Causal Responsibility Approach' (1999) 16 *Social Philosophy and Policy* 201, 217.

According to these theories, what matters to voters is not necessarily altering the final result but rather being active agents who have played a role in bringing about specific outcomes. These causal theories of voting contend that voting is rational if the voter attaches sufficient importance to being a causal factor or being part of the collective causes that lead to an outcome. Voters participate in elections because they desire to hold a particular kind of causal accountability for results, even if their individual impact appears limited.

According to the expressive theory of voting, put forth by G. Brennan and Lomasky<sup>6</sup> in 1993, people vote primarily as a form of self-expression. This point of view sees voting more as a form of personal consumption than as an activity that advances society; it's comparable to reading a book for enjoyment rather than to gain new knowledge. While voting is a private act, according to this perspective, people consider it as a legitimate way to demonstrate and communicate their loyalty to their political party.

Voting is likened to riding the wave at a sporting event or donning a Metallica T-shirt to a concert. They engage in these behaviours to show their team loyalty, just as sports supporters who paint their faces in team colours may not always think that their individual actions will affect the result of the game. Even when they are alone themselves watching games, sports fans applaud and support their teams. Similar to how voting can be used to express one's political commitment and allegiance<sup>7</sup>.

The "expressive theory of voting"<sup>8</sup> remains unfazed by and, in fact, is partially substantiated by empirical evidence indicating that many voters possess limited knowledge about fundamental political facts. This theory also finds support in research from political psychology, which reveals that most individuals exhibit significant "intergroup bias." People tend to instinctively form groups and display irrational loyalty and animosity toward their own and other groups. In the context of voting, individuals might adopt certain ideologies not because they genuinely believe

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<sup>6</sup> Lomasky L and Brennan G, 'Is There a Duty to Vote?' (2000) 17 Social Philosophy and Policy 62.

<sup>7</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Fall 2006 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta, 'Democracy' <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2006/entries/democracy/>> accessed 10 August 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Lijphart A, 'Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma' (1997) 91 American Political Science Review.

in them but to signal their identity to themselves and others. For instance, someone like Bob might espouse hawkish military policies to signal his patriotism and toughness, even if implementing such policies would be detrimental. Since an individual vote in favour of a militaristic candidate is unlikely to sway the outcome, Bob can afford to hold irrational and misinformed beliefs about public policy and express them at the ballot box.

Another straightforward and persuasive argument is that it may be sensible to cast a ballot in order to fulfil a sense of obligation. Most citizens, according to polls, feel compelled to cast a ballot or participate in the political process<sup>9</sup>. It becomes rational for most individuals to vote if such obligations exist and carry sufficient moral weight.

## V. THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO VOTE

The majority of citizens in modern democracies express a belief in some form of moral obligation to vote, as indicated by surveys<sup>10</sup> (Mackie 2010: 8–9). Additionally, most moral and political philosophers tend to agree with this sentiment (Schwitzgebel and Rust 2010). They often argue that citizens have a duty to vote, even when they are aware that their preferred political party or candidate has minimal chances of winning (Campbell, Gurin, and Mill 1954: 195).

Moreover, the prevailing view seems to be that the duty to vote primarily entails the duty to participate in the electoral process, whether by casting a ballot for a specific candidate or by submitting a blank ballot. In this perspective, citizens have a moral duty to simply exercise their right to vote, and almost any genuine vote is considered morally acceptable.

Many of the popular arguments advocating for a duty to vote are based on the premise that individual votes carry substantial significance. For instance, some argue that there is a moral duty to vote because it aligns with duties to protect oneself, assist others, promote good governance, or similar principles. However, these arguments

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<sup>9</sup> Edlin A, Gelman A, and Kaplan N, 'Voting as a Rational Choice: Why and How People Vote to Improve the Well-Being of Others' (2007) 19 *Rationality and Society* 219.

<sup>10</sup> Mackie G, 'Why It's Rational to Vote' (2010) University of California, San Diego, unpublished manuscript.



encounter a challenge, as discussed in the previous section, because individual votes tend to have an extremely limited instrumental impact, whether positive or negative.

Voting was once thought to be a form of insurance against the collapse of democracy (Downs 1957: 257)<sup>11</sup>, according to an early theory on the subject. Consider the idea that voting is a moral duty for people to fulfil in order to help keep democracy strong. According to this theory, a democracy becomes unstable below a certain threshold and eventually falls apart. The problem is that, just as there is very little chance that any one vote will determine the outcome of the election, there is also very little chance that any one vote will decisively push the total number of votes over that crucial threshold.

As an alternative, consider the idea that as voter turnout declines, the likelihood of democracy eroding over time rises. In this case, establishing the existence of a duty to vote would require first proving that the marginal expected benefits of the *n*th vote outweigh the expected costs, which include opportunity costs, in order to reduce the risk of democratic collapse.

A compelling argument for a duty to vote should not rely on individual votes having a significant expected impact on elections or civic culture. Instead, it should acknowledge that individual votes are unlikely to sway election outcomes but then provide a rationale for why citizens should still fulfil their duty to vote<sup>12</sup>.

One early theory proposed that voting might function as a form of insurance, aiming to safeguard democracy from collapse<sup>13</sup> (Downs 1957: 257). "To explore this idea further, let's consider a hypothesis suggesting that citizens have a moral duty to vote to contribute to the prevention of democratic collapse. This hypothesis assumes that there exists a specific threshold of votes below which a democracy becomes unstable and eventually collapses. The challenge, however, is that just as there is an exceedingly low likelihood that any individual's vote would be the decisive factor in

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<sup>11</sup> Downs A, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Harper and Row, New York 1957).

<sup>12</sup> Leighley JE and Nagler J, 'Individual and Systematic Influences on Voter Turnout: 1984' (1992) 54 *Journal of Politics* 718.

<sup>13</sup> Downs A, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Harper and Row 1957).

an election, there is a similarly minuscule chance that any single vote would significantly push the total vote count above that crucial threshold”.

Alternately, suppose that the probability of democracy progressively disintegrating grows as fewer people cast ballots. If so, one must first demonstrate that the marginal expected benefits of the *n*th vote, in terms of reducing the danger of democratic collapse, surpass the expected costs, which include opportunity costs, in order to establish the existence of a duty to vote.

A compelling argument for a duty to vote should not rely on individual votes having a significant expected impact on elections or civic culture. Instead, it should acknowledge that individual votes are unlikely to sway election outcomes and then provide a rationale for why citizens should still fulfil their duty to vote.

In 2012, Beerbohm<sup>14</sup> stated that citizens had a duty to vote in order to avoid being complicit in injustice. Representatives, according to this viewpoint, operate on behalf of citizens, and individuals, even if they do not actively engage in the electoral process, are viewed as co-creators of the law. Citizens who do not vote are held responsible for tolerating wrongful behaviour by their elected officials. Failure to confront injustice is akin to endorsing or sponsoring it. As a result, this argument suggests that voters have a responsibility not just to vote rather than abstain, but also to vote for people and policies that seek to address injustice.

“Another commonly cited argument, which does not hinge on the effectiveness of individual votes, is known as the "Generalization Argument":”

“What if everyone were to stay home and not vote? The results would be disastrous! Therefore, I (you/she) should vote<sup>15</sup>.” (Lomasky and G. Brennan 2000: 75)

This argument can be parodied to highlight its weakness:

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<sup>14</sup> Beerbohm E, *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy* (Princeton University Press 2012).

<sup>15</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Winter 2013 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta, 'Social Choice Theory' <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/social-choice/>> accessed 1 September 2023.

“What if everyone were to stay home and not farm? Then we would all starve to death! Therefore, I (you/she) should each become farmers<sup>16</sup>.” (Lomasky and G. Brennan 2000: 76)

The problem with this argument, as it is now presented, is that even while it would be terrible if nobody or too few people engaged in a particular activity, it does not follow that everyone should be forced to do so. Instead, the focus should be on making sure there are enough people involved in the activity. For instance, in the case of agriculture, market incentives are typically enough to guarantee the right number of farmers.

The Generalisation Argument might be accurate, despite issues with how it is frequently presented. It's common to think that some habits demand that everyone engage or abstain. For instance, if a university places a notice that reads, "Keep off the newly planted grass," it is not as if the grass will perish if only one person walks on it. The grass would probably flourish even if I was the only one allowed to walk on it. However, if I had complete access to the grass and nobody else did, that would seem unjust. It is typically thought to be more fair to apply the prohibition against stepping on grass to all people equally.

Similar to this, the government might theoretically tax a randomly chosen minority of citizens to raise money to pay for a public good. However, it is sometimes believed to be more fair or appropriate for everyone (at least those who earn above a certain income threshold) to share in the cost of providing services like police protection through taxation.

Therefore, a crucial question arises<sup>17</sup>: Is voting more akin to the first type of activity, where it is imperative that a sufficient number of people participate, or is it more akin to the second type, where it is essential for everyone to be involved? One key distinction between these two types of activities lies in the consequences of abstention.

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<sup>16</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Fall 2013 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta, 'Public Justification' by Vallier and D'Agostino <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/justification-public/>> accessed 2 September 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Tuck, R., 2008, *Free Riding*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

If someone refrains from farming, they do not exploit or free ride on the efforts of farmers. Instead, they compensate farmers for the food they consume by purchasing it in the market. In contrast, in the second set of cases, such as enjoying police protection without contributing taxes, it appears that one is benefiting without bearing an uncompensated differential burden. Others are shouldering the unreciprocated responsibility for maintaining public goods, and it seems as if one is taking advantage of their efforts.

For example, consider the argument that citizens should vote as part of their duty to exercise civic virtue. To justify why this duty implies a specific obligation to vote rather than engaging in any of numerous other acts of civic virtue, one must provide a clear rationale. Similarly, if a citizen has a duty to contribute to the well-being of fellow citizens, there are various ways to fulfill this duty, such as volunteering, creating art, or holding a productive job that benefits society.

Additionally, if a citizen is obligated to avoid complicity in injustice, there are numerous alternative actions available, including civil disobedience, writing letters to newspapers, producing pamphlets or political theory books, making donations, conscientious abstention, participating in protests, or advocating for change through various means. It remains unclear why voting is singled out as a special or mandatory obligation in these cases.

According to one advocate of epistocracy, the skill and sincerity of political decision-makers determine whether those decisions are legitimate. This is comparable to a criminal trial, where the jury's verdict must be made competently and in good faith because it might significantly affect a person's rights and well-being. Similar to other important decisions, election choices can have a big impact on people. If widespread ignorance and irrationality among voters frequently results in poor electoral judgements, a presumption in favour of epistocracy over democracy may be warranted in order to ensure competent and lawful leadership.

“Maskivker (2019) responds<sup>18</sup> to this challenge by suggesting that it's not a matter of either-or; individuals can both vote and engage in alternative actions to fulfill their underlying duties. J. Brennan (2011a) and Freiman<sup>19</sup> (2020) similarly argue that the foundational reasons behind any duty to vote can be satisfied (and often better satisfied) through means other than voting. Maskivker's<sup>20</sup> perspective is grounded in a deontological duty of easy aid: if one can provide assistance to others at minimal cost to oneself, then one should do so. For well-informed citizens, voting is viewed as a form of easy aid that can coexist with other actions aimed at fulfilling their duties”.

- **Moral Obligations Regarding How One Votes**

Some contend that certain people have a duty to abstain from voting in specific situations, while others assert that voting is a right. For instance, Sheehy<sup>21</sup> (2002) thinks it is unfair to vote in an election when one is indifferent. He contends that if one's vote affects the result, it can disappoint the majority's position, which is now constrained by those who, in accordance with the principle, have no preference.

Another claim makes voting morally wrong because it demonstrates ineffective benevolence. According to Freiman (2020), when people fulfil their obligations to care for others, they are required to engage in effective altruistic behaviours as opposed to ineffective ones. For instance, if someone has to give a particular amount to charity each year, they are still compelled to do so regardless of their income level. Giving 10% of one's salary to a charity that had no positive impact on society or perhaps even made things worse would not be fulfilling one's humanitarian obligation.

Similarly, Freiman says that if a person votes to help others, they must be well informed in order to choose the best candidate, a requirement that few voters meet<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Westen D, *The Political Brain* (Perseus Books, New York 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Mackie G, 'Why It's Rational to Vote' (2010) University of California, San Diego, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>20</sup> Kinder DR and Kalmoe NP, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2017).

<sup>21</sup> <sup>21</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Winter 2013 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta, 'Social Choice Theory' <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/social-choice/>> accessed 5 September 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Tetlock P, 'Coping with Trade-Offs: Psychological Constraints and Political Implications' in A Lupia, MD McCubbins, and SL Popkin (eds), *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* (Cambridge University Press, New York 2000).

Voting, as well as various other forms of political engagement such as contributing to political campaigns, canvassing, volunteering, and so on, are regarded as highly inefficient forms of altruism because most voters lack the ability to determine whether they are voting for the better or worse candidates, and individual votes have limited influence. Individuals are instead compelled, according to Freiman, to engage in effective kinds of charity, such as collecting and donating to organisations such as the Against Malaria Foundation.

Many people think it is their duty to cast a ballot, even if it means leaving it blank. However, this idea does not specify whether there is a duty to vote a certain way. According to certain philosophers and political theorists, one's moral obligations are correlated with their voting behaviour. Deliberative democrats, for instance, contend that voters have both a right and a responsibility to cast their ballots in a public setting following democratic debate. Others contend that while not everyone must vote (abstention is allowed), those who do have obligations regarding their voting choices. They contend that while abstaining from voting is not unethical, voting unfavourably, as defined by one viewpoint.

It's important to make a distinction between the issue of how to vote and the issue of whether or not one should be able to vote. The state is required to allow and count a citizen's vote under the provisions of the right to vote. This does not, however, determine whether various voting procedures are immoral or whether specific voting procedures are morally essential. In a similar vein, one is free to have certain viewpoints and express certain beliefs, even if they are morally repugnant.

## **VI. THE JUSTICE OF COMPULSORY VOTING**

Many modern democracies, like the United States, which reports a voter turnout of about 60% in presidential elections and 45% in other elections, and many other nations report similarly low participation percentages, have relatively low voter turnout rates that appear to be declining with time. Concerns about this drop in voter turnout have been voiced by democratic theorists, legislators, and others, sparking arguments about the advantages of mandatory voting.

It is important to consider the demographic or representativeness argument while arguing in favour of making voting mandatory. This argument underlines how people who vote and those who choose not to vote differ in terms of demographics under voluntary voting systems. For instance, those with more money tend to vote more frequently than those with less; those who are older and male tend to vote more frequently than those who are female; and those who belong to an ethnic minority frequently vote less frequently than those who belong to an ethnic majority.

Additionally, those who have more education tend to vote more frequently than people who have less education, and married people are more likely to vote than single people. Furthermore, political partisans are more likely to cast ballots than true independents. In essence, voting on a voluntary basis results in an electorate that does not accurately reflect the entire population.

The Demographic Argument argues that because politicians frequently cater to voter preferences, they are more likely to put the interests of privileged persons who participate in voluntary voting in higher numbers first. As a result, the wants and needs of residents who are less likely to vote and are disadvantaged may not be completely represented. On the other hand, making voting mandatory would increase participation among the poor, ensuring that the interests of a wider range of people are effectively reflected in the democratic process.

According to Lisa Hill<sup>23</sup> (2006), mandatory voting could help with the "assurance problem," as it is known. This issue arises when a voter realises that their one vote is meaningless and that what matters most is that many people who identify with them participate. It can be challenging to work with other like-minded voters to make sure that everyone votes, though.

By making voting mandatory for all eligible citizens, this issue is resolved and less cooperation is required. This perspective views compulsory voting as a crucial tool for coordination in large societies when people are unable to properly communicate and align their desires, rather than as an unpleasant form of political compulsion.

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<sup>23</sup> Hill L, 'On the Reasonableness of Compelling Citizens to Vote: The Australian Case' (2002) 50 *Political Studies* 80.

The effectiveness of the Demographic Argument depends on a number of presumptions on the behaviour of voters and politicians. To begin with, political scientists typically find that voters often choose what they believe to be in the best interests of the nation rather than their own self-interest.

Second, those who are disadvantaged might not have the knowledge and skills necessary to cast ballots that support their interests, especially when it comes to figuring out which candidates or political parties are most suitable for their needs. Finally, studies show that politicians may be able to disregard the policy preferences of the majority of people even in the presence of a voting requirement.

Evidence suggests that mandatory voting has little to no effect on various areas of political activity and outcomes, in contrast to many political theorists' expectations. For instance, it does not lead to increased individual political knowledge, more political conversations or persuasion, a greater proclivity to contact politicians, better collaboration with others to address concerns, increased participation in campaign activities, a higher likelihood of being contacted by a party or politician, improved quality of representation, enhanced electoral integrity, higher proportions of female members of parliament, or greater support for pro-choice initiatives. In essence, while requiring residents to vote increases voter turnout, it does not seem to have a significant effect on these other political factors.

## **VII. WHO SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO VOTE? SHOULD EVERYONE RECEIVE EQUAL VOTING RIGHTS?**

The prevailing view in political philosophy is that representative democracy should entail "one person, one vote," with each adult having an equal say in elections within their jurisdiction. However, the question of who constitutes "the people" or the demos within a democracy poses significant challenges. Democracies often exclude certain groups, such as children, teenagers, felons, the mentally infirm, and non-citizens within their borders, while allowing citizens living abroad to vote.



Various theories attempt to address this boundary problem. The "all affected interests<sup>24</sup>" theory suggests that anyone affected by a political decision should have a say in that decision-making process. However, this theory faces issues of determining who is affected before decisions are made and can result in over-inclusiveness or under-inclusiveness.

Another theory, the coercion theory, argues that anyone subject to coercion by a political body should have a say. Still, it may also be seen as over-inclusive and fail to account for the contingent nature of coercive power.

Commonsense notions of the demos, including all adult members of a nation-state, may be difficult to defend. Some argue that what makes citizens unique is the interlinking of their interests, often due to arbitrary national borders. However, the validity of this argument is contingent on the specific circumstances and borders in place.

## **VIII. DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES TO ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE**

The principle of "One person, one vote<sup>25</sup>" is often seen to promote egalitarianism in democracy by ensuring that each citizen has an equal say. However, this equal voting rights approach doesn't always guarantee decisions that give equal consideration to everyone's interests. In some cases, many citizens may have little at stake, while others have significant interests involved. An alternative proposal suggests weighting citizens' votes based on their stakes in the decision, thus giving equal weight to everyone's interests.

There are several arguments supporting this idea. Proportional voting could enhance citizens' autonomy by allowing them greater control over issues they are more invested in, without significantly reducing their autonomy on less relevant matters.

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<sup>24</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" ed Edward N Zalta, 'Voting' <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/voting/#Aca>> accessed 8 September 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Mueller D, 'Constitutional Democracy and Social Welfare' (1973) 87 *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 61.

Additionally, this approach may help overcome certain paradoxes of democracy, such as the Condorcet Paradox<sup>26</sup>, where majority preferences can become intransitive.

However, implementing this proposal in practice poses challenges. A democratic system would need to determine the extent of each citizen's stake in a decision and then adjust their votes accordingly. Special-interest groups and others might attempt to manipulate vote weighting for their benefit, potentially leading to concerns of corruption or electoral manipulation.

## **IX. NON-DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES TO ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE**

While early proponents of democracy aimed to demonstrate its superiority over aristocracy, monarchy, and oligarchy, a new challenger to democracy has arisen in recent years: epistocracy. Epistocracy is a system in which political power is formally allocated based on knowledge or political competence. Examples of epistocratic measures include giving additional votes to university-educated citizens, requiring voter qualification exams, adjusting votes based on political knowledge while accounting for demographic factors, or granting panels of experts the authority to veto democratic legislation.

The main arguments in favour of epistocracy revolve around concerns regarding democratic incompetence. Epistocrats argue that democracy grants voting rights too broadly, as empirical research has shown that citizens generally have low levels of political knowledge. Furthermore, political knowledge significantly influences how citizens vote and what policies they support. Epistocrats believe that restricting or weighting votes can mitigate the negative effects of democratic incompetence.

According to one advocate of epistocracy, the skill and sincerity of political decision-makers determine whether those decisions are legitimate. This is comparable to a criminal trial, where the jury's verdict must be made competently and in good faith because it might significantly affect a person's rights and well-being. Similar to other

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<sup>26</sup> Mason L, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2017).

important decisions, election choices can have a big impact on people. If widespread ignorance and irrationality among voters frequently results in poor electoral judgements, a presumption in favour of epistocracy over democracy may be warranted in order to ensure competent and lawful leadership.

There is a debate over whether epistocracy would perform better than democracy in practice, even if it theoretically aims to generate better political outcomes by improving the reliability of decision-makers. Some mathematical theorems, like the Hong-Page theorem, suggest that cognitive diversity among decision-makers might contribute more to smart decisions than merely increasing their individual reliability. This theorem raises questions about whether universal suffrage is justified or if restricted suffrage might be superior in certain conditions.

Condorcet's Jury Theorem offers a related perspective, suggesting that as more voters are added to a collective decision, the probability of making the right choice approaches certainty, provided that the average voter is reliable<sup>27</sup>. However, the support or criticism of democracy based on this theorem depends on the actual reliability of voters. If voters consistently perform worse than chance, large democracies may tend to make incorrect choices.

Concerns also arise regarding certain forms of epistocracy, like systems where voters must pass an examination to earn the right to vote. Such systems may introduce bias favouring specific demographic groups since political knowledge is not evenly distributed. In the United States<sup>28</sup>, for example, whites, men, the well-off, middle-aged individuals, and those in the Northeast tend to have higher levels of basic political knowledge than their counterparts. Implementing a voter examination system could result in an electorate that is less diverse and less representative of the general population, potentially marginalizing the interests of non-whites, women, the poor, or the unemployed.

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<sup>27</sup> MacAskill W, *Doing Good Better* (Avery, New York 2015).

<sup>28</sup> "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Winter 2013 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta, 'Social Choice Theory' <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/social-choice/>> accessed 10 September 2023.

One potential form of epistocracy that could address certain objections is the "enfranchisement lottery." In this system, no one has an inherent right to vote, but rather everyone has an equal chance of being selected to become a voter through a lottery. Before the election, candidates' campaign without knowing which citizens will eventually gain the right to vote. A random but representative subset of citizens is selected by lottery before the election, and these chosen individuals must then participate in a competence-building process, such as studying party platforms or engaging in deliberative forums, to earn the right to vote.

Critics argue that this system could suffer from corruption or abuse, but proponents of epistocracy contend that democracy faces similar issues in practice. They suggest that the key question is which system, democracy or epistocracy, produces better and more just outcomes overall.

However, a significant deontological objection to epistocracy arises from its potential incompatibility with public reason liberalism<sup>29</sup>. According to this objection<sup>30</sup>, epistocracy grants greater political power to citizens based on their social scientific knowledge, but reasonable people may disagree on what constitutes expertise and who qualifies as an expert. This disagreement means that not all reasonable individuals may have conclusive grounds to endorse the distribution of political power in an epistocracy, thereby undermining its legitimacy according to public reason liberalism principles.

## X. CONCLUSION

This research has undertaken a comprehensive exploration into the multifaceted dimensions of citizen participation in the electoral process, framed under the title "The Rationality, Morality, and Ethics of Citizen Participation in the Electoral Process." As we conclude this study, we amalgamate the key findings and insights derived from our investigation into the various facets of voting in democratic societies. In contemplating the rationality of voting, we have found that individuals often

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<sup>29</sup> Noel H, 'Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't' (2010) 8(3) The Forum article 12.

<sup>30</sup> Pacuit E, 'Voting Methods' in "The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Fall 2011 Edition) ed Edward N Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/voting-methods/>> accessed 16 September 2023.

approach voting as a means to influence outcomes and mandates. This rational choice is deeply intertwined with the desire to shape policies and governance in alignment with personal preferences and values.

However, our exploration extends beyond the rational sphere. Voting also encompasses expressive and symbolic elements, reflecting a diverse array of motivations. Citizens may participate in the electoral process to signal solidarity with particular causes or as a fulfillment of their civic duty, indicating that the act of voting transcends mere pragmatic calculation.

The ethical dimension of voting is another core facet we have scrutinized. It encompasses both the moral obligation to vote and the possibility of a moral obligation not to vote in cases where individuals lack sufficient information or moral clarity. We have underscored the ethical responsibilities associated with casting votes, emphasizing the importance of informed, conscientious, and ethically responsible decision-making.

Our investigation has encompassed the debate surrounding compulsory voting measures, designed to bolster voter turnout while raising concerns about individual autonomy and freedom of choice. We have examined the question of who should be granted the right to vote and the extent to which equal representation should be extended in democratic systems. Finally, we have acknowledged democratic challenges such as gerrymandering, voter suppression, and unequal access to the electoral process, which pose formidable obstacles to the principle of "One Person, One Vote."

In synthesizing these findings, it becomes evident that voting in democratic societies is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is not solely an act of rational choice but encompasses moral, ethical, and societal dimensions. Citizens engage in voting to influence outcomes, hold representatives accountable, and fulfill a sense of duty. It is a civic duty guided by a moral imperative, underpinned by ethical considerations, and deeply entwined with the pursuit of democratic representation.

In this context, the challenges and opportunities inherent in voting continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of democratic governance worldwide. Our

research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on electoral participation, responsible citizenship, and the nurturing of robust and ethical democratic processes. The act of voting remains a cornerstone of democracy, embodying the collective will and aspirations of citizens, and its understanding and enhancement are central to the continued evolution of democratic societies.

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