

# **Political Parties, Party Identity, and Voter Mobilization**

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Despite being a crucial component of any democratic system, there remains considerable uncertainty about the elements that motivate individual citizens to vote and about the linkages between these motivations and a citizen's support for one candidate over the others. To fully apprehend voting behavior and more broadly grasp the purposes of both campaigns and elections, we must understand both aspects of the voting decision, as the two components cannot be separated. To be sure, elections play an essential role in democratic societies and aggregate votes serve a meaningful function in the selection of representatives for each constituency. At the collective level, the outcome of each race is of primary importance. Yet, it does not follow that an individual citizen is motivated to vote in an election for the same reason - that is to determine who will represent her in government. Indeed, since voting is not compulsory in most democratic states, abstaining from an election can be a rational act under many conditions. Most models of voter behavior simply assume some level of voter turnout and move on to the factors that influence how an individual will vote (Brennan and Hamlin 2000). When this is not the case, it is assumed that an individual's vote for a particular candidate is driven by an instrumental desire to get that candidate elected to office, suggesting that each citizen turns out with the intention of casting a vote that will influence the outcome of the election (Downs 1957). Thus, it is assumed that individuals participate in elections for the same reason societies hold elections, which is purely for the instrumental purpose of narrowing a field of candidates so that one politician is selected to represent each constituency. Under the logic of Downs' narrow instrumental perspective, then, it is only rational for voters to participate in an election when their vote will determine the winner.

This assumption is problematic, however, because individual voters are almost never able to determine the outcome of an election. In fact, the probability that an election would end in a

tie without an additional individual vote determining the winner is infinitesimal (Gelman, Katz and Batumi 2004; Feddersen 2004; Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Downs 1957). Thus, voting for the instrumental reason of electing a particular candidate seems irrational, suggesting that voters have other motivations to turn out. Further, if citizens are not driven to vote for the narrow instrumental reasons first identified by Downs (1957), it is also problematic to assume that their votes, once at the polls, are also driven by the same instrumental concerns, in that, a rational citizen will vote only for the candidate who maximizes her economic well-being. It seems clear that elections for most citizens serve some other purpose, beyond the purely instrumental expectation of casting the decisive vote for the winner. As will be shown, an individual's decision to vote is inseparable from the decision of who to vote for, as local electoral conditions and a citizen's support or opposition of one candidate or party drive both her decision to go the polls and her selection of the candidate who will receive her vote. To understand both of these decisions, a new decisional calculus for voters is needed: one that moves beyond a single-minded focus on narrow instrumental motivations to also include broader, more participatory motivations.

#### DOWNS'S MODEL OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

Anthony Downs (1957) is widely credited with producing the original rational choice model of voting (Riker and Ordeshook 1968), representing the first systematic attempt to examine voter behavior. Downs's model of voting was part of his larger effort to model the rationality of political behavior within a democratic system. To pursue this end, Downs made a number of assumptions regarding the operation of the political world within his model and the ends that were sought by political actors. In attempting to explain the behavior of these actors, Downs applied the economic concept of a rational actor in a market setting, *homo economicus*, to

the political realm, creating *homo politicus*, or the rational citizen. To *homo politicus*, the function of any democratic election is to select a government; hence, “rational behavior in connection with elections is behavior oriented toward this end and no other” (Downs 1957, 7). Downs’s rational citizen approaches every election with the narrow instrumental objective of ensuring the victory of the candidate who will maximize her utility, while seeking the greatest possible efficiency, so as to minimize her costs. Note that the very narrow conceptualization of a citizen’s motivations is accomplished by intentionally limiting rational behavior to the pursuit of economic self-interest. Thus, the only rational behavior for *homo politicus* as a voter are those acts that result in the election of the candidate that will provide benefits directly to the voter once in office. Under this assumption, Downs developed a model that defined the rules governing democracies and described the behavior that would be expected when humans act rationally within that system.

The rational choice model of voting produced by Downs predicts that a citizen will consider three factors when deciding whether they will vote and how they will vote. One consideration is the cost of voting incurred by the individual. Since voting is typically not compulsory and will always be costly, at least in terms of time, a rational citizen must estimate whether the benefits received from participating in the election outweigh the costs. The benefits that an individual will receive from voting are a function of both the difference in an individual’s utility in electing one candidate over the other and of the probability that the individual’s vote will be decisive in the outcome of the election. Where a citizen perceives a large difference between the platforms of the two candidates and believes her vote is needed to ensure that her preferred candidate wins, the benefit of voting for that candidate will clearly outweigh the costs associated with casting the vote.

Put in equation form, Downs's decisional calculus is:

$$u(V) = (PB) - C$$

Where:

$u(V)$  = the reward or utility that an individual voter receives from the act of voting,

$P$  = the probability that the citizen's vote will result in her preferred candidate winning the election,

$B$  = the party differential, or the differential benefit that an individual voter receives if her most preferred candidate defeats her less preferred candidate,

$C$  = the cost to the individual of the act of voting (Riker and Ordeshook 1973, 63).

Downs's model, then, seeks to explain the behavior of a citizen who is acting rationally when deciding both whether to vote, as opposed to abstain, and how to vote if voting is deemed the rational action. The reward she is likely to receive from voting,  $u(V)$ , is determined by the variables on the right-hand side of the equation. When  $u(V)$  is positive for a particular individual, meaning that the expected benefits of voting outweigh the costs of doing so, voting is considered a rational act. When  $u(V)$  has a negative value, however, the costs outweigh the benefits and abstention becomes the rational option.

Rational choice models typically assume that elections involve only two candidates, so the benefit of electing one candidate over the other,  $B$ , represents the individual's estimate of the benefits that she will receive if the citizen's preferred candidate wins. This  $B$  term is known as the *party differential* (Downs 1957). Downs assumes that all rational citizens will act in their own self-interest and prefer the candidate whose policies will provide them with the greatest benefit if elected.

Downs spends considerable time explaining the process that citizens use to gather information about the competing parties in an effort to calculate their party differential. Essentially, when a citizen believes that the platform of one candidate is very close to her own preferences and the other candidate's platform is distinctly different, the party differential is

high, reflecting the citizen's strong preference for the policies promoted by one candidate over the other. When the two candidates' platforms are perceived to be very similar, however, that citizen's party differential is low, or even zero. In this case, it makes little difference to the individual which candidate wins. The latter condition greatly *reduces* the incentive for voting.

Also on the right-hand side of the equation is P, which represents the probability that the citizen's vote will result in her preferred candidate winning the election. Downs acknowledges that in a large election, the probability of one citizen's vote being decisive "is extremely small, though not zero" (Downs 1957, 244). The value of P depends on the number of voters in a given election and the candidate those voters are likely to support. To adapt Downs's example, in an electoral district that is evenly divided between Democratic and Republican voters, there is a higher probability that one citizen's vote will determine the outcome of the race, compared to a district where one party enjoys disproportionate support. Similarly, if a citizen expects that most other citizens will abstain, the probability that her vote will be decisive is higher than in an election where all citizens are expected to turn out. In Downs's model, then, P would seem to be most influential in determining *whether* a citizen will vote, as it is the estimate of the likelihood the individual's vote will be decisive, while B is most important in determining *how* that citizen votes, as it is the estimate of the benefits received when one candidate is elected over the other. However, B is also influential in a citizen's decision to turn out, as there is little reason to vote if a citizen perceives little difference in the platforms of the two candidates.

In essence, each citizen's party differential must be discounted by the probability that her vote will be decisive. This calculation allows the citizen to estimate what Downs called the *vote value*. Represented in the model as (PB), the vote value can be understood as the utility a citizen expects to receive from the act of voting. If the value of the vote does not outweigh the costs,

there is no narrow, instrumental incentive for a rational citizen to participate in the election. The costs associated with voting,  $C$ , are deemed negative aspects of the voting process, and are two-fold. First is the time spent gathering information about each candidate in an effort to determine their policy positions and priorities. Downs notes, however, that a citizen's vote value "is infinitesimal under most circumstances," which he argues greatly reduces the incentive to gather this information prior to voting (Downs 1957, 245). Thus, the citizen effectively remains "rationally ignorant" and is likely to determine her party differential using information she accumulates throughout her daily activities (Tullock 1968). The second component to the cost of voting is the time spent registering to vote and actually going to the polls on election day. Since the rational choice models perceive time spent on any task as a cost, the  $C$  term is always negative and subtracted from the equation. If the benefits of voting do not outweigh the costs, then, there is no instrumental incentive for a rational citizen to participate in the election.

Downs's model made a significant contribution to our understanding of voting behavior because it provided generalized behavior rules that detail the conditions under which voting or abstention are rational actions. At its most fundamental level, the model explains how variation in an individual's tastes and judgment influences her voting decisions. Further, the model holds that abstention is a rational act when  $P$  is zero, perhaps because a citizen lives in a district where a large majority prefer one candidate over the other, or where  $B$  is zero because the citizen perceives little difference in expected benefits from having one candidate elected over the other.<sup>1</sup> Under either condition, the citizen's vote value is zero, and she rationally abstains because an investment in even the minimal cost of voting will not provide her with sufficient benefit to justify the costs. The citizen's welfare is maximized, then, by foregoing those costs and not voting.

The dominance of the Downsian perspective, then, has produced an electoral system with a very limited purpose. Votes are to be cast only when they will help a particular candidate win the election, and a vote cast for any other purpose is deemed irrational. This perspective shaped the evolution of American election law throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, affording a privileged status to the major party candidates who, at least theoretically, fit within the narrow instrumental perspective. The fact that citizens are willing to cast their votes for candidates who will not win provides clear indications that the Downsian perspective defines the purpose of elections too narrowly. Individual participation in elections must be about more than casting the decisive vote for the winning candidate, yet the narrow instrumental perspective and Downs's model of voting behavior are silent on these alternative motivations.

#### CRITIQUES OF THE DOWNSIAN INSTRUMENTAL MODEL

Despite the fact that Downs's analysis has provided a significant contribution to current understanding of behavior in a democratic system, the model has always suffered from the *paradox of participation* (Riker and Ordeshook 1968), which has limited its ability to explain voting behavior at the individual level. The motivational component of the model is the vote value,  $PB$ . Downs makes clear that the typically miniscule value of  $P$  will limit the incentives for citizens to expend resources to collect information about each candidate (Gelman, Katz and Batumi 2004; Feddersen 2004; Brennan and Lomasky 1993). If insufficient information leads a citizen to incorrectly vote for an inferior candidate, that mistake will not affect the outcome of the election. The realization that their vote is not decisive will lead most citizens to invest few, if any resources into gathering information about the candidates during the campaign.

While the infinitesimal probability of casting a decisive vote greatly diminishes an individual's incentive to pursue information, it also removes the incentive to vote in the first



place, which creates the paradox. The primary problem with Downs's model, and the basis of the paradox of participation, is that there seems to be no instrumental reason for a citizen to vote when their individual vote will not affect the outcome of the race. The efficacy of an individual vote declines precipitously as the size of the electorate increases. An individual's vote may, for example, have a high probability of being decisive when serving on a board with four other members, but when the individual is participating in even a local election with hundreds or thousands of other voters, the probability of a tied vote between the candidates is dramatically lower. In fact, the probability of an individual's vote being decisive in a large scale election is so low that it is effectively zero, leading many to argue that one cannot assume that this possibility is driving turnout (Aldrich 1993; Grofman 1983; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Since the probability of casting a decisive vote is effectively zero in virtually all elections, each individual's vote value is also zero. As a result, even minimal costs associated with voting will lead the utility derived from voting,  $u(V)$ , to be negative. Under this scenario, the rational decision for the voter within the Downsian perspective is to abstain, as the individual will receive no instrumental benefit from voting while still incurring the costs. The fact that many citizens do turn out to vote, even when they do not receive instrumental benefits, leads to the paradox of participation.

Other studies have offered alternative models of voter turnout that maintain Downs' narrow assumptions regarding voter motivation (Conley, Toossi and Wooders 2001; Schachar and Nalebuff 1999; Feddersen and Pesendorfer 1996; Sieg and Schulz 1995; Palfrey and Rosenthal 1985, 1983; Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974). These models are unable to establish equilibria under reasonable conditions that explain the levels of turnout found in the real world (Dhillon and Peralta 2002). Instead, each must adopt unrealistic assumptions or predict low or

zero turnout. Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974) for example, offer their “minimax regret” model as a way of salvaging the influence of instrumental motivations in voter turnout. The authors suggest that Downs’s utility-maximizing voters will go to the polls only under the very rare conditions where  $P$  is greater than zero. Under the minimax regret decision criteria, however, citizens base their turnout decision on their interest in minimizing the regret they would feel if they made the wrong turnout decision. Thus, if a citizen decides to vote and her candidate wins (or loses) by a large margin, she would only regret incurring the costs of voting in a race where her vote had no impact. If the citizen decided to abstain, however, and her candidate lost the election by a single vote, her regret would be substantially greater. Thus, in an effort to minimize the regret of making the wrong turnout decision, a significant proportion of the electorate will decide to vote. The problem with the minimax regret criteria, however, is the assumption that voters will overestimate the value of  $P$ , or be unrealistically risk-averse. Citizens must believe that there is a reasonable chance that an election will result in a tie if they are expected to be concerned about regrets they might have should they abstain and their candidate loses by a single vote. Given the scarcity of even competitive elections, much less those that end in a tie, this assumption seems questionable at best.

To date, efforts to solve the paradox of participation without incorporating motivations beyond those assumed by Downs, have been unable to overcome the infinitesimal nature of  $P$ . They are effectively trapped in the Downsian perspective’s extremely narrow assumption that the sole purpose of an election is to select representatives. Brennan and Hamlin (2000) argue that the whole rational choice school is too wedded to the assumption that citizens will behave as homogenous egoistic, utility maximizers in the political realm, identical to consumers in the market. These authors and others (Fiorina 1976; Aldrich 1993; Brennan and Lomasky 1993) call

for a mixed model approach that incorporates both instrumental and non-instrumental considerations as two distinct parts of a more complicated whole.

In essence, the rational choice models proposed to date suffer from the assumption that individuals participate in elections for the same reason that societies hold elections. Again, it is quite rational for a collective to use periodic elections to select representatives and hold those representatives accountable to the citizens. Thus, elections at the collective level are about determining who wins office. This motivation falters, however, when it is applied to individual actions, as it does not follow that each citizen's vote can or should determine the winner. As a result, only the most naïve citizen would actually go to the polls with the expectation that her vote will be pivotal. Instead, it seems clear that individuals must have other motivations to turn out on election day.

#### EXPRESSIVE VOTING

While there have been a few efforts to explain voting within the Downsian perspective, most of the subsequent literature has focused on expressive voting. While Downs maintained that voting out of a sense of social responsibility was in an individual's self-interest, Riker and Ordeshook (1968, 1973) simply dropped the requirement that all behavior be explained in economic terms and offered what seemed to be a more theoretically sound solution to the paradox. These authors were the first to suggest that the problem with the rational choice model proposed by Downs was the strict definition of rationality, which prevents consideration of benefits that do not directly maximize the utility of an individual citizen. Thus, when the rational choice model allows for only narrow instrumental motivations and requires individuals to participate only when doing so enhances their economic well-being, a citizen can actually

enhance her welfare by abstaining from an election. Abstention allows the citizen to forego the costs associated with voting, while producing the same electoral outcome.

Riker and Ordeshook (1968) suggest that the reward term,  $u(V)$ , on the left-hand side of the equation needs to be expanded to encompass additional benefits that an individual may receive from voting. The authors argue that instrumental motivations are probably less important than the non-instrumental benefits that can be gained from the act of voting itself. Thus, while instrumental motivations no doubt play a role in a citizen's voting decision, a revised model must allow for both instrumental and non-instrumental rewards to motivate citizens. Riker and Ordeshook's addition of private or consumptive benefits derived directly from the act of voting allows for a positive value of  $u(V)$ , even when the probability of an individual's vote being decisive is zero. The primary contribution of Riker and Ordeshook, then, is the addition of what they called the D term. This component represents the consumptive benefits derived from the act of voting, or negative consequences if an individual does not vote. The authors suggest a breadth of benefits that might be included in the D term, offering a brief list that includes the satisfaction of fulfilling one's civic duty to vote, affirming one's allegiance to the democratic system, pleasure derived from following politics, affirming one's ability to influence the political system, or giving voice to one's preference for a particular candidate or political party (Riker and Ordeshook 1968, 28).

Thus, the inclusion of the D term expanded Downs's model, adding a fourth component to the factors that influence a citizen's decision to vote or abstain in any particular election. PB remains the measure of the vote value, as it refers to getting the citizen's preferred candidate elected to office. But, when the vote value is zero, the D term provides additional incentives to vote, adding a positive value to the right-hand side of the equation to offset the costs involved

with the act. By simply relaxing the assumptions used by Downs, Riker and Ordeshook assert that some citizens vote solely because they receive satisfaction or other consumptive benefits from the act of voting itself. This explanation provides a partial solution to the paradox of participation by describing those consumptive benefits that accrue directly to the voter, thereby avoiding the collective action problems that arise with the original model proposed by Downs. The inclusion of D by Riker and Ordeshook, then, accounts for the non-instrumental or expressive benefits a citizen receives from voting, and does not rely on citizens sacrificing their short-term interests for the good of the collective.

Riker and Ordeshook's revised model is, then:

$$u(V) = (PB) - C + D$$

Where:

$u(V)$  = the reward or utility that an individual voter receives from the act of voting,

$P$  = the probability that the citizen's vote will result in her preferred candidate winning the election,

$B$  = the party differential, or the differential benefit that an individual voter receives if her most preferred candidate defeats her less preferred candidate,

$C$  = the cost to the individual of the act of voting,

$D$  = the private, consumptive reward an individual receives from voting that is independent of that individual's contribution to the outcome of the election (Riker and Ordeshook 1973, 63).

The key point is that the act of voting does not solely entail the costs identified by Downs, which must be subtracted from the vote value. Rather, the act of voting can also provide a positive, consumptive utility, even when that vote has no impact on the outcome of the election. The addition of this consumptive benefit can be greater than the costs involved in voting, making the expected reward from voting a positive value. In this case, it would be rational for a citizen to vote even when the probability of that vote being decisive is zero, and there is no purely instrumental value in the act.

Riker and Ordeshook went on to clarify that the inclusion of the D term in the model did not make the probability of a citizen's vote being decisive, P, and the expected benefit of having the preferred candidate win, B, irrelevant. Rather, it is likely that in many cases, as the value of B decreases, so does the consumptive value of expressing one's preference for that candidate, D. Essentially, if the platforms of the two candidates converge, an individual voter may receive fewer benefits from expressing their preference for one candidate over the other. Further, while the probability of an individual's vote being decisive, P, will almost always remain infinitesimal from one election to another, Riker and Ordeshook argued that political elites may be able to manipulate voters' estimate of P, convincing them that the race is very close and encouraging them to go to the polls with the argument that "every vote will count." This manipulation of citizens' perceptions of P may explain why turnout tends to be higher in races that are perceived to be very competitive (Blais 2000; Shachar and Nalebuff 1999). In all, the revised decisional calculus suggests that an individual's decision to vote is a blend of both instrumental and non-instrumental motivations, but Riker and Ordeshook are clear that an individual's decision relies heavily on the consumptive utility found in the D term.

Brennan and Lomasky (1993) picked up where Riker and Ordeshook left off, arguing that the instrumental models of voting decisions, particularly those from the rational choice school, incorrectly assume that voters are agents acting as they would in an economic market. This is an argument that has been made by a number of authors (Buchler 2011; Caplin 2007; Schlesinger 1984; Stigler 1972). Brennan and Lomasky (1993) argue that with a market decision, a consumer weighs the expected utility of product A versus product B and selects the item that maximizes her utility. The consumer is assumed to be an egoistic, rational utility-maximizer, which means she will act in her own self-interest and select the alternative that she expects will make her

better off, typically in terms of increasing her wealth. Market decisions are distinct from voting decisions, however, in that the consumer's choice in the market is decisive. When the consumer selects product A, she will actually receive product A and must forgo product B as a result. The decisive nature of this decision, then, provides the necessary incentives for a consumer to invest in gathering information about her alternatives, and leads to the selection of the one that will contribute the most to her welfare.

With voting, the citizen's choice is not decisive. When a voter chooses candidate A, it does not necessarily mean that candidate A will be elected. Rather, one candidate will win regardless of the choice made by any individual voter. Since voting decisions are not decisive, Brennan and Lomasky (1993) argue that the considerations that dictate market decisions cannot be assumed to operate in voting decisions. Instead, these choices are made behind what Brennan and Hamlin (2000) call a "veil of insignificance." Votes cast by individuals may not be self-interested in a purely economic sense; they may instead be expressive, where a citizen votes as a show of support for a particular candidate, not necessarily in an effort to get that candidate elected to office. When a voter is liberated from casting the decisive vote in the election, she may instead be motivated by the expressive benefits she receives from the act of voting, and not by the instrumental desire to determine the outcome. These expressive considerations are unlikely to enter a decisive market transaction, as that would amount to making a purchase to receive the consumptive benefits from the act of shopping for an item. In this irrational scenario, an individual would shop for the pleasure of shopping, but the item that she actually purchases would be chosen by someone else, and she would have no control over the item that she actually receives.

While voting and market choices may reveal the individual's preferences, they do so in distinct ways. In a decisive market transaction, a consumer selects product A over product B presumably because product A maximizes her utility, and that is the product she receives. With voting, however, the outcome of the election is determined independently of the citizen's choice, making it unlikely that the individual's vote is motivated solely by the desire to determine which candidate wins the office. Thus, the citizen must derive some intrinsic value from the act of voting, perhaps value that results from expressing a preference for candidate A over candidate B. This consumptive value of voting, expressing a preference for candidate A, exists regardless of whether the candidate wins the election. In the classic example of expressive voting, casting a vote is akin to cheering for your favorite baseball team (Brennan and Buchanan 1984; Uhlener 1989). Fans cheer because they support the team and enjoy doing so, but they should have no delusions that the act of cheering has any impact on who wins the game, particularly if the cheering is done from one's couch in front of a television. Thus, according to Brennan and Lomasky (1993), cheering for a team and voting for a candidate are purely expressive acts where the revelation of a preference is the part of the activity that provides benefits directly to the fan or to the voter.

Schuessler (2000) also addresses the inability of instrumental models to explain voter turnout and vote choice, arguing in a similar manner that the problem stems from inappropriately framing citizens as being motivated by the instrumental intent of casting the decisive vote. Like Brennan and Lomasky (1993), Schuessler suggests voters are motivated by expressive concerns. For Schuessler, however, voting is a consumptive act that allows citizens to express and reaffirm their identity, while also attaching them to groups within society. Voting, then, defines who a voter is, both to herself and to others. Reframing the voting decision as a non-instrumental



choice produces a sense of identification, or of Being as Schuessler puts it, rather than an instrumental logic of production, or of *Doing*. Under the instrumental logic of production, of *Doing*, an individual may question whether voting is a rational act given that it involves costs and the outcome will not be affected by the individual's participation. Under the expressive logic of identification, of *Being*, however, the decision to vote is reframed so that the citizen may consider the costs of participation to be quite low given the benefits that voting provides. These benefits entail the opportunity to define the individual to herself and others, and attach oneself to one or more of the groups that support a particular candidate. For Schuessler, the act of voting and the choice the voter makes are sources of that individual's social identity, creating a sort of symbolic connection between the individual's vote choice and the individual's identity. Since voting is a rational act that articulates one's identity, it is irrelevant whether an individual vote has any impact on the election, or whether the individual's preferred candidate wins.

The above works suggest that the decision to vote is driven by expressive concerns and, while challenging to design, there are empirical studies to support this conclusion (Drinkwater and Jennings 2007; Greene and Nelson 2002; Kan and Yang 2001; Fischer 1996). This does not imply, however, that the decision to vote is motivated solely by expressive considerations. A number of scholars have concluded that under certain conditions, instrumental considerations likely influence a citizen's decision to turn out. This should not be surprising, given the dominance of the Downsian perspective, in the American political culture. Studies have found that the competitiveness of the race influences turnout, as Riker and Ordeshook (1968) first suggested. Races that are perceived to be close tend to have higher turnout rates, likely because voters are led to believe that their vote has a higher probability of being influential (Blais 2000; Shachar and Nalebuff 1999). Another study found that citizens seem to condition their decision

to vote on the viability of the candidates, where a citizen is more apt to turn out when her preferred candidate is seen as having a legitimate chance of winning (Abramson, et al. 1992). Thus, as was originally noted by Riker and Ordeshook, the decision to vote is a function of both instrumental and non-instrumental motivations, where the non-instrumental motivations play the more influential role, given the typical lack of instrumental incentives.

While the previous studies offer a solution to the paradox of participation inherent in purely instrumental models of voting, these explanations are unclear about the specific motivations that induce voter turnout, and the conditions under which expressive concerns may be strongest. As Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974) put it, it is still not understood why some citizens are motivated to vote because of expressive concerns while others are not. Ferejohn and Fiorina suggest that one problem with Riker and Ordeshook's D term is that the revised model is unable to explain why some citizens vote because it provides consumptive benefits, while others abstain because they do not perceive the act as conferring those valuable rewards. If these consumptive benefits really are driving each citizen's decision to vote, voting models need only explain why some citizens perceive a consumptive benefit while others do not. There may be no need to include instrumental motivations in the model at all. Further, it is unclear whether and how individual preferences are translated into policy outputs through elections. Thus, if citizens simply cast votes as an expression of their identity, what is the linkage between each citizen's vote and the public policies that are pursued by her elected representatives? If citizens are not voting out of their instrumental self-interest, does that make them irrational actors? If yes, what does that say about using elections to translate the will of those citizens into government policy?

## A DISCONNECT BETWEEN INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE PREFERENCES?

The literature to date suggests, then, that the issue is one of understanding the influence of instrumental versus expressive concerns in motivating an individual's decision to vote, and her vote choice. The above works demonstrate the irrationality of voting for narrow, instrumental reasons, or basing a voting decision exclusively on perceptions of one's economic self-interest. In terms of voter turnout, the inability to cast a decisive vote should lead citizens to perceive little reason to participate in elections if they are only motivated by the Downsian instrumental desire to ensure that their preferred candidate wins. The same logic applies to the actual voting decision. It seems likely that many citizens approach each campaign with preconceived notions of their preferred candidates or party, which, therefore, requires them to invest the considerable resources needed to investigate each candidate's platform and find the one that best matches their economic self-interest (Buchler 2011; Caplin 2007; Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Enelow and Hinich 1982). It is more likely that each citizen relies on other cues when determining their party differential, as they should understand that there are no material consequences of mistakenly voting for the wrong candidate. Overall, given the infinitesimal probability of casting a decisive vote, it seems clear that citizens must be motivated by something other than the need to elect their preferred candidate; otherwise there would seem to be little reason to bother with politics at all.

Further, democratic theory requires that instrumental concerns drive part of a citizen's decision regarding their preferred candidate, or at least if a citizen chooses a candidate for alternative reasons, they should support policies that match that citizen's instrumental preferences. If collective voting decisions are driven solely by expressive concerns unrelated to the electorate's policy preferences, what assurances exist that the public policies produced by

elected representatives will serve the public interest? Further, is it to be assumed that voting is so detached from democratic control of government that citizens do not consider their instrumental political interests when deciding which candidate to support? If a voter's party differential,  $B$ , is always negated by an infinitesimal probability of being decisive,  $P$ , what is the point of including instrumental terms in the voting model? Or, more troubling, what is the point of voting in an effort to influence government policy? The possibility that voters are not able to use their votes to influence government policy is particularly problematic when one considers the fact that voting provides the most accessible, and for many citizens the only, linkage between the citizen and her representatives.

The problem seems to be not the concept of instrumental motivations for voting, but the very narrow definition of what it means to vote instrumentally. The Downsian perspective incorrectly assumes that voters will only act instrumentally when their vote is decisive. This narrow definition of instrumental behavior assumes that votes are akin to market transactions where a citizen selects the candidate that maximizes her utility income and then votes only if doing so will result in that candidate winning office. This exceedingly narrow definition of instrumental behavior, however, is not a realistic depiction of voting in any democratic system. This definition neglects the possibility that citizens may use their vote as a means to influence their representative by signaling their political preferences and influencing the electoral mandate that the representative receives. Thus, the theoretical confusion in the literature today is not so much a question of whether voters are motivated by expressive or instrumental concerns, but whether the consumptive benefits a voter receives from the act of voting also serve some instrumental purpose. A model is needed to capture the consumptive benefits of voting while more comprehensively explaining the instrumental motivations behind this act.

Further, the inability to develop a useful mixed model that incorporates both instrumental and expressive components, as called for by Brennan and Hamlin (1998, 2000) and Fiorina (1976), seems to stem from the lack of a distinction between instrumental motivations to turn out and the influence of instrumental concerns in an individual's vote choice. Brennan and Hamlin argue that any election will include both instrumental voters and expressive voters. Some citizens will operate within the instrumental domain, which is focused on the policy outputs of the political process. Essentially, instrumental voters are interested in the policy platforms of candidates and how those platforms will serve the voter's self-interest. Citizens operating in the expressive domain, on the other hand, are not limited by a set of policy parameters, but may express support for a host of observable candidate characteristics, including party affiliation, ideology, rhetorical skills, and even physical appearance. The confusion seems to arise from the fact that the instrumental and expressive domains relate solely to the realm of a citizen's vote choice,  $B$ , rather than an individual's motivation to turn out in the first place. Were it the latter, only the most delusional voter would participate in an election for the purely instrumental reasons assumed by Downs, given the infinitesimal probability of casting a decisive vote. Thus, whether a particular citizen operates within the instrumental or expressive domain relates to how they select their preferred candidate, which is effectively their party differential,  $B$ . It does not determine whether they will actually cast a vote.

#### A PARTICIPATORY MODEL: AN EXPANSION OF INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATIONS

The original instrumental model developed by Downs was intended to discern the generic decision rules for rational behavior in any democratic system. In this regard, the model and its modifications by subsequent scholars have been useful tools in understanding this behavior. But, these models are only effective to the extent that they serve as a guide to explain behavior in the

real world. To convert the narrow instrumental model to one that may help explain real world behavior requires two additional modifications. First, the assumptions about the function of elections must be broadened beyond the narrow view within the Downsian perspective, allowing for application to individual, as well as, collective behavior. Second, the expressive component of voting behavior, first identified by Riker and Ordeshook (1968) as the D term, needs further specification to capture the distinction between non-instrumental motivations that are driven by an obligatory sense of social responsibility, and motivations driven by an instrumental desire to exert some influence over government policy.

#### AN EXPANDED FUNCTION OF ELECTIONS

The Downsian perspective assumes actors are motivated solely by a desire to determine electoral outcomes, i.e. turning out on election day to cast the decisive vote for their preferred candidate. Yet, as has been shown within the realm of voting behavior, the fact that an individual's vote will almost never be decisive means there will rarely, if ever, be an instrumental reason to vote in Downsian terms. This problem can be resolved by revising the assumption that the sole function of elections in a democracy is to select a government, and that behavior is only rational when it is in pursuit of that end (Downs 1957, 7). To assume that an individual participates in an election for the same reason that society holds an election creates an unrealistic and unnecessarily constrained view of a voter's role in a democracy. While the primary role of elections is to allow the aggregate vote to determine the representative of a particular constituency, it need not follow that each individual will be able to dictate which candidate represents her. At the individual level, a citizen's vote need not be decisive for that vote to influence governmental policy. The objective of the individual voter does not have to be limited to electing her preferred candidate, but can be broadened to include any attempt to use

one's vote to influence government in the most efficient and effective manner available. When it is not possible to cast the decisive vote and determine who represents you, the only alternative, if one wishes to use their vote to influence the government that is being elected, is to cast a vote in a way that signals your political preferences to the winning candidate.

In this sense, the function of elections goes beyond selecting a government to also include the provision of a democratic linkage between each citizen and the policies that are produced by their representatives. When the function of elections is more broadly defined as providing an opportunity for citizens to seek to influence those in government, a citizen's influence may occur in multiple ways. When conditions are such that an individual estimates her probability of casting a decisive vote is high, that citizen will likely be motivated to vote out of a narrow instrumental desire to see her preferred candidate win the election. When a citizen estimates that the probability of her vote being decisive is low, however, she may be motivated to vote as a show of support for her preferred candidate's platform, regardless of whether that candidate is likely to win or lose. Essentially, the non-decisive vote may be used to signal the voter's policy preferences to the candidate that does win. Thus, just as the aggregation of votes to produce a plurality in favor of one candidate results in that candidate winning the seat, the proportion of votes in favor of both the winner and the loser signal the levels of support and opposition to the winning candidate's platform among the electorate. Votes against the winner in particular send a signal to that representative that not all of her constituents support her policy positions. Admittedly, casting a vote that is not decisive is a less effective method for influencing government policy, but in reality, it is typically the only way a citizen's vote can have any instrumental meaning at all.

Thus, it seems clear that individual voters can be motivated by another instrumental consideration that goes beyond the narrow desire to get their preferred candidate elected. This broader motivation, which will be called the *participatory motivation*, flows from a citizen's desire to use her vote as a relatively low cost way to express her political views to the candidate that wins the election. These two forms of instrumental motivations are no doubt hierarchical based on the amount of political influence borne by the citizen's vote. Where a citizen believes her vote will be decisive, she will be motivated in the Downsian sense to help ensure her preferred candidate is elected. Where her vote will clearly not be decisive, she may still exert some influence by using her vote to express her political views and affect the winning candidate's electoral mandate. In both cases, the citizen is motivated by an instrumental desire to influence government. It is only the way she believes she is exerting that influence that has changed.

The purpose of a citizen in a democracy is to guide governmental decision makers so they provide the policies that are preferred by that citizen. If the citizen casts a non-decisive vote for the winning candidate, she is signaling that she supports the candidate's platform and wants the candidate to pursue that platform in office. If she votes for a losing candidate, the citizen expresses her opposition to the winner's platform and her preference for alternative policies. In either case, the citizen is using her vote instrumentally, as she is exerting as much influence over future government policies as electoral conditions allow.

By way of illustration, consider votes in a proportional representation (PR) system versus those in a single member, simple plurality (SMSP) system. In a PR system where parties win seats in government based on the proportion of the vote they receive, citizens may have an instrumental motivation to turn out because each vote for their preferred party puts that party one



vote closer to winning an additional seat in government.<sup>2</sup> Under the winner-take-all rules of an SMSP system, citizens may have a participatory instrumental motivation to turn out, as each vote cast in favor of a candidate is another voice in favor of that candidate's positions. Thus, each vote for the winning candidate is a show of support for that candidate's platform. As importantly, each vote for a losing candidate is a signal that that voter opposes the positions of the candidate elected to be her representative. A vote against the winning candidate further weakens the representative's electoral mandate, providing an instrumental incentive for citizens to vote, even when they support a losing candidate. Thus, a significant number of votes against the winner may entice that representative to be more responsive to those dissenting voices once in office. The presence of votes in opposition to the winning candidate may help explain why politicians representing more competitive districts tend to have more moderate views (Burden 2004; Uslaner 1999; Calvert 1985). Similar votes in a primary election may encourage candidates to adopt more extreme positions.

In and of itself, the existence of a participatory motivation is probably not sufficient to overcome the free-rider problem, where an individual chooses to abstain, foregoing the costs of voting and letting other like-minded citizens cast votes to influence the mandate of the winning candidate. This is particularly true of those who support the likely winner, as they will receive far more policy benefits from having their preferred candidate win than those who seek to use their vote to express opposition to the winner's platform. But, this is the point at which the consumptive benefits of the act of voting enter, and rational choice models of voter turnout falter. With the notable exception of Conley et al. (2001), most rational choice models assume all citizens are alike in their propensity to vote, and each will base her turnout decision on the probability of casting a pivotal vote. Across groups of citizens in the real world, however, it is

clear that some are more politically engaged than others. Differing levels of engagement likely stem from a host of variables, but education is clearly an important factor (Verba et al. 1993). Engaged citizens are more informed about politics, lowering the cost of voting, and more interested in participating in democratic governance. Thus, it is these citizens who derive a consumptive benefit or utility from using their vote to express their political preferences within their democratic system. For engaged citizens, the free rider problem is diminished by the fact that they derive benefits from the act of voting, and need not be motivated by the pure instrumental desire to determine the outcome of the election. If we acknowledge that elections are about more than just selecting a representative for some voters, but are also a way to influence government by expressing their political views, then, it is rather simple to see why participatory instrumental considerations would motivate more engaged citizens to turn out, even when they know their vote will not be pivotal.

In short, the purpose of elections as viewed through the Downsian perspective is far too narrow to explain voting behavior in the real world, particularly in winner-take-all electoral systems. The assumption that citizens vote only because they believe their individual vote will break a tie, or even because of the regret they will feel should they abstain and their candidate loses by one vote, seem dubious. Such assumptions require an incredibly naïve electorate, or a second assumption that elections are occurring under perfectly competitive conditions that are typically found only in theoretical models. To understand voting behavior in the real world, it seems far more plausible that individuals cast their votes for a variety of reasons, including a desire to express their own political views as a way of influencing those in government. Thus, for many citizens, the purpose of an election goes far beyond the implausible ability to select the

winner, to include simply providing a mechanism for them to participate in their democracy and to make their voices heard.

#### A PARTICIPATORY MODEL OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

Recall that the voting decision model established by Downs predicted that a citizen would vote rather than abstain only when the instrumental vote value exceeds the cost. Downs acknowledges that  $P$  will typically be infinitesimal, producing an equally insignificant vote value for most citizens. When the act of voting produces no instrumental benefits, any cost should be sufficient to induce a rational citizen to abstain. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) offered their  $D$  term as a solution to the paradox of participation, in an effort to capture the consumptive benefits that an individual receives solely from the act of voting. That is, the  $D$  term is meant to encompass a variety of factors that might provide a citizen with satisfaction from voting, independent of their instrumental desire to see their preferred candidate win the election. Thus,  $D$  was proposed to justify a citizen's vote, as opposed to abstention, even when that vote would have no effect on the outcome of the election.

Riker and Ordeshook suggest that the  $D$  term could capture a multitude of benefits, offering five specific examples. First, the authors suggest that citizens have been socialized to vote as part of a democratic ethic or sense of civic duty. They might feel satisfaction from complying with this ethic and guilt if they do not. Second, a citizen might feel satisfaction when they vote as a way of affirming their allegiance to their democratic system of government. Here, it is expected that some citizens will understand that the survival of a democratic system requires citizen participation, so citizens may vote out of a desire to sustain this system, much as Downs predicted.<sup>3</sup> These first two seem to be driven by a sense of satisfaction that an individual receives from fulfilling their social responsibility as a citizen of a democratic state, and are independent of

any preference they have for one candidate over another, or any desire to influence policy makers. Thus, this motivation is driven by a sense of civic duty, regardless of their preference for a particular candidate or specific policy positions.

The remaining three motivations that are captured by the D term entail satisfaction that an individual would receive from developing and expressing her own political views. These benefits are distinct from the first two in that they reflect a desire to engage in the political process and express one's political views to those who represent them. The first on this list is the satisfaction an individual may receive from expressing their support for their preferred party or candidate. This benefit involves the satisfaction of "cheering for your team" in the political context and being counted as a supporter of that party or candidate. Also in this category is the satisfaction that is derived from being engaged in the political process and participating in political activities like gathering information about the candidates, deciding which one to support, and going to the polls. Downs assumed these activities would entail a cost to the individual; for those who are interested in politics, these activities might be viewed as pleasurable. To these citizens, what Downs viewed as a cost would actually be a benefit. Finally, there is the satisfaction derived from simply having a voice and some level of input into the political system. Democracy necessitates that the governed have influence over their representatives, and for most citizens, voting is the only easily accessible method of having that influence. Thus, by casting a vote, the citizen is able to have some measure of influence by signaling her political views to the candidate that wins.

It seems clear that the latter three benefits entail satisfaction from engaging in the political process and seeking influence by expressing one's political preferences, while the former two stem more from a sense of social responsibility to fulfill one's obligation as a citizen.

The distinction may be subtle, but it is important. Citizens may vote out of a sense of social responsibility even when their party differential is zero and they are indifferent about which candidate wins. Motivation to vote that stems from a desire to engage in the political process and express one's political preferences, however, would seem to require a citizen to prefer one candidate or party over the others, or there would be nothing for the citizen's vote to express. Thus, the ability and desire to engage in the political process provides a connection between a citizen's party differential and their vote, as the vote is cast so that the citizen can send a signal to the winning candidate, demonstrating her political views. This signal is sent regardless of whether she is voting for or against the winning candidate.

If the vote model is revised to capture these two features that were previously combined in Riker and Ordeshook's D term, D is removed from the model and replaced with E, the estimated benefits of casting a vote to express one's political views, and S, a citizen's sense of satisfaction from fulfilling her social responsibility. The engagement term, E, is then combined with the citizen's party differential, B, in a way that links the citizen's preference for electing one candidate over the other with their motivation to participate in the election as a way of signaling their political views to the candidate that wins the election.

The participatory model of voting behavior that incorporates both Downsian and participatory instrumental motivations, then, is:

$$u(V) = B(P + E) + S - C$$

Where:

B = the candidate differential, or the differential benefit a citizen receives from the election of one candidate over the others

P = the estimated probability that the citizen's vote will result in her preferred candidate winning the election

E = the engagement term, or the benefits a citizen expects to receive from casting a vote as a way of influencing the electoral mandate of the winner

S = the satisfaction an individual receives from voting to fulfill their social responsibility or civic duty

C = the cost to the individual of the act of voting in terms of obtaining information about the candidates and the actual act of voting.

Under this hybrid model, P remains the citizen's estimated probability of casting a decisive vote for her preferred candidate. However, the citizen's party differential, B, which will now be called the *candidate differential*, is expanded beyond Downs's notion of an individual's expected utility income from having one candidate in office over another.<sup>4</sup> The candidate differential, B, still represents a citizen's support for one candidate over the others, but that support may be for instrumental or expressive reasons. Here, the instrumental and expressive domains discussed by Brennan and Hamlin (1998, 2000) are clarified. Citizens who operate within the instrumental domain base their vote choice on the candidate's policy platforms. As such, they support candidates who favor policies that the citizen believes will serve her self-interest. For example, a citizen with a high income may support a candidate who favors lower taxes and the provision of fewer governmental services. Citizens operating in the expressive domain, however, may base their vote choice on a much wider range of considerations, such as a candidate's party affiliation or ideology, ethnic background, personality, or rhetorical skills. Thus, whether a citizen operates within the instrumental or expressive domains relates to how they make their vote choice, or more specifically, how they determine their candidate differential, B. In this sense, a citizen's decision regarding how to vote, B, is distinct from their motivation to turn out.

Changing the definition of an individual's candidate differential to acknowledge that a voter may support a particular candidate for reasons other than economic self-interest does not mean that voters are acting irrationally when they deviate from the ideal of *homo politicus*, a point supported by Brennan and Hamlin (2000). Indeed, elections must be viewed as far more than an opportunity to use your vote to elect the candidate who will maximize your utility

income. An individual's vote is more likely to represent an expression of her political views, without the expectation that her vote will be decisive. When the individual voter is freed from the burden of determining who will become her elected representative, she is able to use her vote to express a much broader range of preferences.

The value of an individual's candidate differential,  $B$ , is endogenous to each race, determined largely by the candidates on the ballot. For example, the value of  $B$  could be quite high in a race contested by candidates from both major parties, where each candidate offers a distinct platform. Conversely, the value of  $B$  could be quite low for a race in which one candidate is running without opposition. In the latter scenario,  $B$  could even assume a negative value if the unopposed candidate held political views that were contrary to those of the citizen.

The engagement term,  $E$ , captures a citizen's sense of political engagement, or the benefits an individual expects to receive from casting a vote as a way to express her political views in an effort to influence the political system. Given that voting is the least costly form of participation, many citizens may view their vote as the most effective way to exert influence within the political system, even when they realize their actions will not ultimately determine who represents them. Some probably do derive pleasure from following politics, deciding where they stand on issues and which candidate will provide the best opportunity to express those views. Even for those who do not pursue politics as a leisure time activity, voting is still the only low cost way to express their political positions; to stand up and be heard by their representatives within a democratic system. Thus, voting out of a participatory motivation has the instrumental intention of seeking to use the vote to influence the candidate who wins, while also providing consumptive benefits to the voter by allowing her to give voice to her political preferences. These benefits are received regardless of the outcome of the election.

The value of the engagement term,  $E$ , varies across individuals, as some citizens are more prone to engage in politics and recognize the value of using their vote as a vehicle to express their political views. The degree to which a citizen is engaged in politics is likely determined in part by the traditional demographic and political variables, like education and age, which have been found to influence political engagement. Others will likely view voting in purely instrumental terms and perceive little benefit in participating in uncompetitive or low visibility races. Thus,  $E$  is an important component of the voting decision, as it both produces consumptive benefits from the act of voting and adds an instrumental element to what might otherwise be a purely expressive act. The engagement term is tied to the candidate differential because citizens must have a way to express their preferences through their vote if they are to derive any benefit from doing so. As was noted above, the  $B$  term must be modified to reflect the fact that the model is no longer focused exclusively on the narrowly defined instrumental benefits of voting. The candidate differential,  $B$ , remains an indication of an individual's preference for a particular candidate relative to other candidates in the race. But, when a citizen is freed from the burden of casting the decisive vote, that citizen may use her vote to send a variety of signals, including casting a vote for one candidate as a way of expressing opposition to another candidate.

In fact, there are a number of reasons a citizen might support a particular candidate. The most common reason is likely because the citizen believes that the candidate holds many of the same positions that she does; thus, a vote for that candidate, even if she loses, represents an expression of support for the candidate's platform. Here, a citizen's voting calculus would include the negative effects of not voting and failing to express support for her preferred candidate. But, citizens are not limited to voting only for the candidate the individual feels best represents her views. A citizen could also support candidate  $A$  as a way of expressing opposition



to candidate B. If candidate B is the incumbent and a citizen is opposed to that politician as her representative, a vote for candidate A can signal opposition to candidate B's platform and a desire to change course. The candidate differential simply indicates the estimated benefits of supporting one candidate over the others, but when the purpose of the election is expanded beyond the narrow instrumental objective of selecting a representative, those benefits are not limited to an attempt to elect the citizen's preferred candidate. Instead, the signal sent by a particular vote will depend on the conditions found in each particular race.

The sense of social responsibility, *S*, is derived from the satisfaction a citizen may feel from voting out of an obligation to fulfill her civic duty and to do her part to help perpetuate the democratic system. This sense of satisfaction stems from an individual's political socialization. In many cases, the satisfaction one receives from voting is probably subordinate to the guilt she would feel if she did not vote. This notion of social responsibility is no doubt influenced by the realization that some citizens must participate in elections, even when there is no instrumental reason for doing so, lest the individual forego her primary means of participating in her democratic system. While a simple concept, *S* is an important component of the voting model because it can be the only factor that can overcome the costs of voting when the values of *PB* and *EB* are zero. To be clear, the engagement term, *E*, is different from *S* in that *S* is a sense of obligation to participate, while *E* involves a citizen's motivation to use her vote to express her political views in an attempt to influence those in government.

#### DOWNSIAN VERSUS PARTICIPATORY INSTRUMENTAL VOTE VALUES

The revised participatory model of voter behavior states that a citizen will be motivated to vote when her estimated benefits from voting outweigh the costs. Given the hierarchy of motivations discussed above, when a citizen's estimates of *P* and *B* have some meaningful

values, indicating that a citizen has a clear preference for one candidate over the others and believes that there is a high probability that her vote will be pivotal, E and S are unnecessary. The citizen is likely to vote in an effort to ensure her preferred candidate is elected. The product of B and P will be called the *Downsian vote value*.

Given the infinitesimal value of P in virtually all American elections, the instrumental motivation to vote in most instances will rely on the product of B and E, where P is assumed to be zero. The product of B and E represents an individual's estimated benefit of casting a vote for her preferred candidate, regardless of the outcome of the election. The product of B and E, when P equals zero, will be called the *participatory vote value*. The benefits derived from the participatory vote value stem from the individual's ability to influence the candidate that wins by expressing her political preferences, and also from the individual's sense of satisfaction from participating in the political system and having her voice heard. Again, these benefits are received regardless of whether the individual's vote is pivotal or her preferred candidate wins.

The key feature of this revised model is that both the Downsian and participatory vote values are driven by instrumental objectives, as each involves an attempt to influence government policy. With the Downsian vote value, each citizen calculates the probability of being the pivotal vote in electing her preferred candidate. When that probability is high, the expected utility of getting her preferred candidate elected is all that is needed to overcome the costs of voting. With the participatory vote value, each citizen calculates the benefits of casting a vote to express her political preferences. In casting this vote, the individual is able to signal her political preferences in an effort to influence the electoral mandate of the candidate who ultimately wins. The free rider problem is overcome by the engaged citizen's sense of satisfaction from participating in the political process and having her voice heard.

Thus, we see an expanded conceptualization of what it means for an individual to be motivated by instrumental considerations. Downs's instrumental vote value predicted that a citizen will vote for their preferred candidate because doing so will result in the candidate winning the election and enacting policies that confer direct benefits to the citizen. If this were possible, and  $P$  were to equal a meaningful number, the value of the instrumental vote would be sufficient to motivate a citizen to turn out. When  $P$  is infinitesimal and the citizen's vote will not be decisive, however, the participatory vote value provides an additional opportunity for a citizen to influence the political system. Under this condition, the citizen receives benefits not because she casts the decisive vote and elects her preferred candidate, but instead because she is able to express her political preferences to the candidate who will be her representative. Thus, an individual may vote even when her vote is not decisive because doing so provides a relatively low cost opportunity to have some influence within the political system. Thus, it is not solely the pleasure derived from cheering for one's team or identifying with some larger group, as previous work has suggested (Brennan and Buchanan 1984; Brennan and Lomasky 1993; Schuessler 2000). These are likely important components that lead each citizen to estimate their candidate differential as they do. But, it is the instrumental benefit of expressing her political preferences to the candidate that wins, i.e. the benefit of having some influence within the political system, that leads the citizen to cast a vote.

#### TESTING THE MODEL

The primary contribution of the revised utility function, then, is to demonstrate that a citizen may have a rational motivation to vote, and that vote can have an instrumental purpose, even when a citizen's vote will have no effect on the outcome of the election. Essentially, including the participatory vote value and sense of social responsibility increases the benefits

that a citizen can receive from the act of voting, which increases the likelihood that she will vote, even when her vote is not decisive. Further, the participatory vote value endogenizes the citizen's expressive vote by connecting it to her candidate differential, thus, providing an instrumental motivation to turn out.

Given the hierarchical motivations in the revised model of voter turnout, a number of variables should influence an individual's decision to vote. The remainder of this study will use legislative elections from Massachusetts and New York to explore the motivations behind voters operating in real world elections. The Massachusetts and New York legislative elections provide ideal cases to test the utility of the revised participatory model, as both states report the number of ballots that were left blank in each race. Given the availability of these data, it is possible to calculate the total ballot roll-off in each race on the ballot. For example, in a presidential election year, 150,000 votes might be cast for president in a New York state senate district, but 20,000 of those voters might choose to abstain from voting in that particular senate race. Examining the variation in these blank votes across districts in each legislative chamber and across election cycles should indicate which variables influence an individual citizen's decision to cast a vote or to abstain in a given election. Thus, the circumstances in a particular district, in a particular election, should influence the number of citizens who decide to abstain from that particular race. Given the hierarchy of motivations discussed above, more competitive races should induce higher participation rates, or lower ballot roll-off. On the participatory side, more candidate options should increase a citizen's ability to use their vote to send a message to the likely winner, thereby increasing the likelihood they will participate in that race. Election data were obtained from the Secretary of States' Offices in Massachusetts and New York (Massachusetts Secretary

of the Commonwealth 2016; New York State Board of Elections 2016), and four separate models were run, one for each legislative chamber in each state.

Specifically, it is expected that more competitive races, as measured by a lower margin of victory, will have fewer blank ballots because these more competitive races should increase the perceived value of  $P$ , or the probability that an individual's vote will be pivotal, creating the impression that every vote will count.

In the participatory realm, races that are contested by candidates from both major parties should have fewer blank votes, as the presence of two competing, viable candidates offers at least some choice to potential voters, particularly to those who oppose the platform of the likely winner. This variable is coded 0 for two-party uncontested races, and 1 when both a Republican and Democrat are on the ballot. Races with one or more minor party candidates are also expected to have fewer blank ballots, as the presence of alternative candidates increase the options that citizens have to send a message with their vote. This variable is measured as the number of minor party candidates in each race.

New York also allows fusion or cross-endorsed candidates, where a minor party can endorse an ideologically similar major party candidate on the minor party ballot line. This allows a citizen to vote for the major party candidate, but do so under the minor party label, as an expression of support for the minor party's platform. Thus, it is expected that races with cross-endorsed major party candidates will have fewer blank ballots, as cross-endorsements increase a citizen's ability to send a message with her vote. This variable is measured as the number of minor parties that cross-endorse a major party candidate in each race. Finally, within the participatory realm, races that involve an incumbent are expected to have higher participation

rates as the incumbent is likely to be better known to citizens, providing an important voting cue. This variable was coded 0 for an open seat race and 1 if the race included an incumbent.

A number of control variables were also included in each model. To control for the effect of demographics on voter turnout, variables measuring the percentage of white residents, the percentage with a four year degree or more, and the percentage below the poverty line were included for each legislative district. Data for these variables were obtained from Lilley (2008). Fixed effect year dummies were also included to capture the effect of presidential or other state wide races that might occur in any given election year.

Ordinary Least Squares regression was run on all four models. Due to redistricting, elections in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 were included for New York, but only biennial elections from 2004 through 2010 were included in Massachusetts.

## FINDINGS

As can be seen from Tables 1 and 2, the level of competition in each race did seem to influence ballot roll-off in all four chambers, as the major party MOV variable was statistically significant in each model. These relationships were all positive, indicating that more competitive races, or those with lower margins of victory, were associated with fewer blank ballots.

On the participatory side, races that were contested tended to have significantly fewer blank ballots, suggesting more voters would participate in those races with two major party options. The number of minor party candidates on the ballot was also correlated with greater participation in a race, and this association was statistically significant. Here again, a greater number of options from which citizens may choose seems to increase the number of votes cast in a particular race.

**Table 1: Determinants of Percent of Blank Votes, Massachusetts Legislative Districts, 2004-2010.**

	Massachusetts Assembly	Massachusetts Senate
Major Party MOV	0.78** (0.017)	0.07* (0.029)
# Minor Party Cands	-7.33** (0.476)	-6.26** (0.907)
OS/Incumbent	-1.02 (0.565)	-1.75* (0.841)
Two Party Contested	-12.03** (1.240)	-11.99** (2.017)
% White	-0.05** (0.015)	-0.05 (0.027)
Education	0.02 (0.023)	0.001 (0.043)
% Poverty	-6.87** (1.795)	-0.33** (0.115)
2008	1.29* (1.175)	1.73* (0.840)
2006	-1.60** (0.524)	-0.03 (0.831)
2004	3.15** (0.531)	0.71 (0.814)
n of cases	640	160
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.797	.862

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

First number represents unstandardized coefficient, second number (in parentheses) represents standard error.

In New York, the number of cross-endorsed candidates was statistically significant for lower chamber races, but not for the state senate. The results from the lower chamber indicate that a greater proportion of votes tended to be cast in those races with more cross-endorsed candidates. Results for the variable measuring the presence of an incumbent were also mixed, with statistically significant negative relationships in the Massachusetts senate and New York assembly. These findings suggest fewer ballots were left blank in races with an incumbent.

## DISCUSSION

The results reported above seem to support the participatory model of voter behavior, indicating that the competitiveness of each race and a greater number of candidate options influence the number of citizens who participate in each election. With competition, there was a

statistically significant and positive correlation between the two-party margin of victory and the number of ballots left blank in each race. This indicates that more competitive races, or those with lower margins of victory, tended to have the lowest roll-off. This result may be explained by a perception among voters that the probability of their votes being pivotal,  $P$ , is higher, inspiring more citizens to cast a ballot.

**Table 2: Determinants of Percent of Blank Votes, New York Legislative Districts, 2002-2010.**

	<b>New York Assembly</b>	<b>New York Senate</b>
Major Party MOV	0.14** (0.013)	0.13** (0.018)
# Minor Party Cands.	-2.55** (0.413)	-1.55* (0.678)
# Cross Endorsed Cands.	-0.90** (0.255)	-0.481 (0.426)
OS/Incumbent	-1.75** (0.610)	0.29 (1.021)
Two Party Contested	-9.00** (0.812)	-12.01** (1.211)
% White	-0.01 (0.011)	-0.05* (0.019)
Education^	-1.62 (1.377)	-0.64 (2.506)
% Poverty	0.022 (0.044)	-0.04 (0.08)
2008	11.41** (0.652)	10.16** (1.001)
2006	5.48** (0.648)	5.16** (1.014)
2004	10.49** (0.650)	9.27** (1.024)
2002	10.65** (0.694)	9.04** (1.052)
n of cases	750	310
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.771	.799

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

First number represents unstandardized coefficient, second number (in parentheses) represents standard error.

^Education variable transformed using log base-10 function to comply with normality assumption.

On the participatory side, there is also considerable evidence to suggest that more citizens will participate in a race that provides more options for expressing their political views. The variable indicating whether or not an election was contested by candidates from both major



parties produced strong negative correlations, indicating that fewer ballots were left blank when a citizen could cast a vote for candidates on either side of the ideological spectrum. Further, the number of minor party candidates also influenced participation, with fewer blank votes in races with minor party options. And, in New York, increasing numbers of cross-endorsed candidates also tended to increase participation in the lower chamber. Taken together, these results suggest that citizens are more likely to cast a vote in races with more candidates, which provides more options for expressing the citizen's political views. This finding supports the notion of the participatory vote value.

Overall, then, it seems that the evidence presented above supports the participatory model of voting behavior. The number of citizens participating in any given election, at least in this sample, seems to be a function of several factors contained in the model. The statistical significance of the competition variable indicates that the Downsian vote value, BP, is an important motivation for turnout. Further, the fact that turnout tended to be higher in contested races and as the number of minor party and cross-endorsed candidates increased, supports the notion of a participatory vote value, BE. As such, more candidates seem to provide more options for citizens to express their political views, creating greater incentive to participate in the election.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan and Hamlin (2000, 137) suggest that a party differential of zero when a citizen's ideal point is equidistant from both candidates will not lead to abstention. Instead, the citizen will have equal reasons for supporting either candidate and will simply choose one candidate at random. This assumption is problematic, however, as it is unclear why a citizen would incur the costs of voting if she were indifferent to the outcome of the election.

<sup>2</sup> Riker and Ordeshook (1968), however, suggest that the magnitude of difference that a single vote makes in a proportional representation system is too small to induce individuals to turn out for narrow instrumental reasons.

<sup>3</sup> The difference between Downs's explanation and that of Riker and Ordeshook is that Downs expected citizens to sacrifice their short-term self-interest for the long-term interest of the collective, which produces the obvious collective action problems discussed above. Riker and Ordeshook view votes motivated by a desire to sustain democracy as providing a sense of satisfaction to the individual for having done their part. Thus, such an act provides benefits directly to the individual and does not rely on an altruistic desire to help the collective.

<sup>4</sup> The term is changed from "party differential" to "candidate differential" to reflect the candidate-centered nature of U.S. elections. Were this model applied to other democratic systems that exhibited stronger party discipline, Downs's original term would be appropriate.

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