



**AN
ECONOMIC
THEORY
OF
DEMOCRACY**

Anthony Downs

An Economic Theory of Democracy

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Democracy

ANTHONY DOWNS

HARPER & ROW PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

To
My Mother and Father

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 57-10571

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The Causes and Effects of Rational Abstention

Introduction

CITIZENS who are eligible to vote in democratic elections often fail to do so. In fact, some citizens never vote, and in some elections abstainers outnumber voters. In this chapter we examine the conditions under which abstention is rational and attempt to appraise its impact upon the distribution of political power.

Throughout this analysis, we assume that every rational man decides whether to vote just as he makes all other decisions: if the returns outweigh the costs, he votes; if not, he abstains.

Objectives

In this chapter we attempt to prove the following propositions:

1. When voting is costless, every citizen who is indifferent abstains and every citizen who has any preference whatsoever votes.
2. If voting is costly, it is rational for some indifferent citizens to vote and for some citizens with preferences to abstain.
3. When voting costs exist, small changes in their size may radically affect the distribution of political power.

4. The cost of information acts in effect to disenfranchise low-income groups relative to high-income groups when voting is costly.
5. Voting costs may also disenfranchise low-income citizens relative to wealthier citizens.
6. It is sometimes rational for a citizen to vote even when his short-run costs exceed his short-run returns, because social responsibility produces a long-run return.

I. PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS WHEN VOTING IS COSTLESS

When the cost of voting is zero, any return whatsoever, no matter how small, makes it rational to vote and irrational to abstain. Therefore, whether abstention is rational depends entirely on the nature of the returns from voting.

A. WHY ONLY THOSE CITIZENS WHO ARE INDIFFERENT ABSTAIN

In the last chapter we pointed out that a citizen's reward for voting correctly consists of his vote value, i.e., his party differential discounted to allow for the influence of other voters upon the election's outcome. If the citizen is indifferent among parties, his party differential is zero, so his vote value must also be zero. It appears that he obtains no return from voting unless he prefers one party over the others; hence indifferent citizens always abstain.

However, this conclusion is false, because the return from voting *per se* is not the same thing as the return from voting correctly. The alternative to voting *per se* is abstaining; whereas the alternative to voting correctly is voting incorrectly—at least so we have viewed it in our analysis. But an incorrect vote is still a vote; so if there is any gain from voting *per se*, a man who votes incorrectly procures it, though a man who abstains does not.

The advantage of voting *per se* is that it makes democracy possible. If no one votes, then the system collapses because no government is chosen. We assume that the citizens of a democracy subscribe to its principles and therefore derive benefits from its continuance; hence

they do not want it to collapse.¹ For this reason they attach value to the act of voting *per se* and receive a return from it.

Paradoxically, the size of this return depends upon the cost of voting. When voting costs are zero, the return from voting *per se* is also zero, but when voting is costly, the return from voting *per se* is positive. The second of these assertions we discuss later; now let us examine the first one.²

Democracy cannot operate rationally if everyone is indifferent about who wins each election. Of course, not everyone has to have a party preference, but someone must if the election is to be a meaningful act of choice. Therefore we assume throughout this chapter that (1) at least one citizen is not indifferent, (2) no tie votes occur, and (3) indifference does not reflect equal disgust with the candidates but rather equal satisfaction with them.³

When the cost of voting is zero, everyone who is not indifferent votes, because his return from doing so, though small, is larger than zero. Therefore citizens who are indifferent know that the election will work and democracy will continue to function even if they abstain. This conclusion holds even when the vast majority of the electorate is indifferent; in fact, only one man need vote. The parties running still must cater to the interests of the whole electorate, because (1) they do not know in advance who will be indifferent and (2) once elected, they know that the citizens who were indifferent may vote in the future. Thus parties compete with each other to attract the potential votes of men who previously abstained as well as the actual votes of those who voted.

As a result, men who are indifferent about who wins have nothing to gain from voting, so they abstain. Hence when the cost of voting is zero, every citizen who is perfectly indifferent abstains. However,

¹ This assumption does not mean that all citizens receive the same benefits from democracy, nor does it preclude their opposing the majority on any or all issues. Rather it implies that (1) every citizen receives some benefits and therefore (2) the loss he sustains when the majority cause something he dislikes to be done is partly offset by the benefit he receives from operation of majority rule *per se*.

² Since voting costs in reality are never zero, this discussion is merely a preliminary to our later analysis.

³ The third assumption is discussed in detail later.

the above reasoning does not apply when voting is costly, as we shall see later.

B. THE NATURE OF INDIFFERENCE

In our model, indifferent voters never influence the outcome of elections.⁴ Yet their interests are still catered to by each party, because competition forces parties to seek potential as well as actual votes. This fact raises the question of whether indifference has any political significance at all.

Indifferent voters are those who cannot see any net difference in the utility incomes they expect from each party if it is elected. Therefore it seems reasonable *a priori* that they should have no influence on who wins. However, this conclusion can be questioned on two counts.

First, are indifferent voters equally pleased by all parties or equally repelled by them? When a large portion of the electorate is indifferent—as often seems to be the case in reality—the rationality of elections as government-selectors depends upon the answer to this question. If indifference reflects equal disgust with all candidates and a strong preference for some noncandidate, the election is bound to produce a government repugnant to many citizens. On the other hand, if indifference indicates high but equal satisfaction with those running, only the citizens who vote against the winner will be displeased by the outcome.

Essentially, this argument raises an issue with which we dealt briefly in Chapter 8: How are the candidates for each election chosen? To avoid discussing it further here, we assume that every political viewpoint which has a significant number of supporters is represented by some party running in the election. Thus indifference in our model is not caused by equal loathing for all the candidates but reflects ambivalence of a less pejorative nature.

The second question raised by indifference is whether indifferent

⁴This conclusion holds even though some indifferent voters cast ballots when voting is costly, since they do so at random and their ballots therefore cancel each other. See Section II of this chapter.

voters really have zero party differentials or merely lack information. In the last chapter we saw that most voters do not acquire enough information to discover their true preferences, since each knows his vote is of small significance. Perhaps a great many voters who are not indifferent would cease to be so if they found out their true views. However, the cost of information makes further research irrational. Since this cost is harder to bear for low-income citizens than for high-income ones, the incidence of falsely indifferent voters may be higher among the former than among the latter. If so, uncertainty imposes a bias on the distribution of political power. It causes a disproportionate number of low-income citizens to refrain from influencing election outcomes.

The validity of this argument rests upon the following proposition: the more information a citizen receives about the policies of each party, the less likely he is to be indifferent. Unless this proposition is true, there is no reason to believe that men who know their true preferences are less likely to be indifferent than those who do not.

In our opinion, the proposition is false. The amount of information a man has necessarily affects the confidence with which he holds his decisions, but it does not necessarily affect their nature. If everyone had 100 percent information, some citizens might still be indifferent.⁵ Therefore indifference is not merely an illusion caused by lack of data; so we cannot argue *a priori* that increases in data will tend to eliminate it. However, more information does raise the confidence of each citizen in his decision, *ceteris paribus*, because it moves him closer to being 100 percent informed. For this reason, the more data a man has, the less he must discount his estimated return from voting correctly.

⁵ It is conceivable that indifference might not exist in a perfectly informed world, but only if preferences are discontinuous. Therefore most economists assume indifference is a real state of mind, even though it cannot easily be detected in behavior. To show the reasoning behind this view, let us assume that a rational consumer faces three bundles of goods: A, B, and C. He prefers A to B and B to C. Now assume that bundle A is continuously varied in composition so that it gradually comes to resemble bundle C, though in such a way that it is never identical to B. Since the consumer prefers it to B at the start and B to it at the end, somewhere between, he must be precisely indifferent between it and B: so runs the argument. We accept it.

When the cost of voting is zero, it makes no difference how much each citizen discounts his estimated party differential as long as the rate is less than 100 percent, since even a tiny net return causes him to vote. Thus information costs do not increase abstention among low-income groups relative to high-income groups. But when voting is costly, the fact that poorer citizens cannot afford as much information as their wealthier neighbors does create a bias. For example, assume that the distribution of voting costs and of real voting returns is the same for both groups.⁶ Because less affluent citizens discount their returns more, fewer of them will vote. Thus lower confidence among low-income groups has no political repercussions when voting is costless but becomes quite important when voting costs are introduced into the model.

II. PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS WHEN VOTING IS COSTLY

A. VOTING COSTS AND THEIR BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS

Heretofore we have assumed that voting is a costless act, but this assumption is self-contradictory because every act takes time. In fact, time is the principal cost of voting: time to register, to discover what parties are running, to deliberate, to go to the polls, and to mark the ballot. Since time is a scarce resource, voting is inherently costly.

This fact alters our previous conclusion that everyone votes if he has any party preference at all. When there are costs to voting, they may outweigh the returns thereof; hence rational abstention becomes possible even for citizens who want a particular party to win. In fact, since the returns from voting are often miniscule, even low voting costs may cause many partisan citizens to abstain.

The importance of their abstention depends on the effects it has upon the distribution of political power. Such effects can stem from two sources: (1) biases in the distribution of ability to bear the costs

⁶ By *real* returns, we mean those which each citizen would perceive in a perfectly informed world.

of voting, and (2) biases in the distribution of high returns from voting.

The only direct money costs connected with registering to vote and voting are any poll taxes extant and the cost of transportation. Ability to bear these costs varies inversely with income, so upper-income citizens have an advantage. Where poll taxes do not exist, the principal cost of voting is usually the utility income lost by devoting time to it rather than something else. If the time must be taken out of working hours, this cost can be quite high, in which case high-income groups again have an advantage. But if the time comes during leisure hours, there is no reason to suppose any such income-correlated disparity exists.

At first glance, all of these costs may appear trivial, and biases in ability to bear them seem irrelevant. However, the returns from voting are usually so low that tiny variations in its cost may have tremendous effects on the distribution of political power. This fact explains why such simple practices as holding elections on holidays, keeping polls open late, repealing small poll taxes, and providing free rides to the polls may strikingly affect election results.

B. THE NATURE, SIZE, AND IMPACT OF THE RETURNS FROM VOTING

The return a citizen receives from voting is compounded of several factors. The first is the strength of his desire to see one party win instead of the others, i.e., the size of his party differential. As we pointed out in Chapter 3, party policies determine this factor. A second factor is the degree to which he discounts his party differential to allow for the influence of other voters. In the last chapter we showed that this depends upon how close he thinks the election will be. These two factors together constitute his vote value.

The third factor is independent of the other two; it is the value of voting *per se*. Although we discussed it briefly earlier in the chapter, we must examine it more carefully here because of the vital role it plays when voting is costly.

We assume that everyone in our model world derives utility from living in a democracy, as stated previously. When the cost of voting is zero, receipt of this utility is not jeopardized by abstention, be-

cause only those who are indifferent abstain. But positive voting costs alter this situation by causing some men who have definite preferences to abstain also. In fact, since each citizen's vote value is usually quite small, any cost at all may threaten the political system with collapse through lack of participation.

Further analysis is complicated by an oligopoly problem similar to that described in Chapter 9. If each partisan voter expects many others to vote, his own vote value is tiny; hence it is outweighed by a very small cost of voting. The more voters there are who feel this way, the smaller is the total vote. But a small total vote raises the probability that any one ballot will be decisive; hence the vote value of each citizen may rise to a point where it outweighs the cost of voting. Therefore citizens who think others expect many to vote will themselves expect few to vote, and they will want to be among those few.

Each citizen is thus trapped in a maze of conjectural variation. The importance of his own vote depends upon how important other people think their votes are, which in turn depends on how important he thinks his vote is. He can conclude either that (1) since so many others are going to vote, his ballot is not worth casting or (2) since most others reason this way, they will abstain and therefore he should vote. If everyone arrives at the first conclusion, no one votes; whereas if everyone arrives at the second conclusion, every citizen votes unless he is indifferent.

Both these outcomes are self-defeating. When no one votes, democracy collapses. Yet if everyone who is not indifferent votes, in the next election each will abstain, since his ballot had so little effect previously (i.e., when everyone voted). Thus if we assume all men think alike, democracy seems unable to function rationally. What rule can we posit within the framework of our model to show how rational men can arrive at different conclusions though viewing the same situation?

The answer consists of two parts:

1. Rational men in a democracy are motivated to some extent by a sense of social responsibility relatively independent of their own short-run gains and losses.

2. If we view such responsibility as one part of the return from voting, it is possible that the cost of voting is outweighed by its returns for some but not all rational men.

Let us examine these propositions in order.

One thing that all citizens in our model have in common is the desire to see democracy work. Yet if voting costs exist, pursuit of short-run rationality can conceivably cause democracy to break down. However improbable this outcome may seem, it is so disastrous that every citizen is willing to bear at least some cost in order to insure himself against it. The more probable it appears, the more cost he is willing to bear.

Since voting is one form of insurance against this catastrophe, every rational citizen receives some return from voting *per se* when voting is costly. Its magnitude (1) is never zero, (2) varies directly with the benefits he gains from democracy, and (3) varies inversely with the number of others he expects to vote. The last of these factors depends upon the cost of voting and the returns he thinks others get from it. Thus we have not completely eliminated the oligopoly problem, but we have introduced another factor which tends to offset its importance.

To show how this factor works, let us approach it from another angle. Implicit throughout our study is the following assumption: rational men accept limitations on their ability to make short-run gains in order to procure greater gains in the long run. This assumption appears in many of the provisions of the constitution stated in Chapter 1, and also in the solution to the indivisibility problem stated in Chapter 10. The limitations men accept are usually "rules of the game" without which no game can be played. Each individual knows he can gain at some moments by violating the rules of the game, but he also knows that consistent violation by many citizens will destroy the game and introduce social chaos. Since he himself would be a loser if chaos prevailed, he resists the momentary temptation to let short-run individual rationality triumph over long-run individual rationality. Surely, such resistance is rational.

However, it is not uniform for three reasons: (1) the connection between a particular violation of the rules and eventual chaos is

not equally obvious in all cases, (2) some violations lead to disorders worse than those caused by other violations, and (3) the immediate gains from violation are not always the same. For example, the deleterious effects of universal failure to vote are both clearer and worse than those of universal failure to become well-informed before voting. Similarly, the cost avoided by not paying income tax is much larger than that avoided by not voting. For these reasons, men can rely on each other to abide by the rules voluntarily to different degrees for different rules. In some cases, they have to back up the rules with force in order to insure observance.

Participation in elections is one of the rules of the game in a democracy, because without it democracy cannot work. Since the consequences of universal failure to vote are both obvious and disastrous, and since the cost of voting is small, at least some men can rationally be motivated to vote even when their personal gains in the short run are outweighed by their personal costs. However, this conclusion raises two problems.

The first is the arbitrary nature of assuming that such motivation operates in regard to voting but not in regard to other political actions. Why, for instance, are rational men not willing to find their true preferences before voting, since they will benefit in the long run from doing so? We can only answer by pointing to the factors mentioned previously: (1) the potential ill effects of not voting are worse than those of not becoming informed, (2) the connection between failure to vote and its ill effects is much clearer than that between failure to become informed and its ill effects, and (3) the cost of voting is lower than the cost of becoming informed.⁷ Some or all of these arguments apply to all other cases of indivisible benefits where we have assumed short-run rationality dominant (e.g., paying taxes).

A second difficulty is explaining why some men vote and some abstain even though all favor democracy and benefit from its continuance. Solving this problem requires the second proposition men-

⁷ In this case, another fact is relevant: voting is a discrete and clearly identifiable act; whereas "being well-informed" is a vague state of mind which even the individual himself has a hard time recognizing.

tioned earlier: the returns in fact outweigh the costs for some but not for all.

Although the benefits each citizen derives from living in a democracy actually accrue to him continuously over time, he can view them as a capital sum which pays interest at each election. This procedure is rational because voting is a necessary prerequisite for democracy; hence democracy is in one sense a reward for voting. We call the part of this reward the citizen receives at each election his *long-run participation value*.

Of course, he will actually get this reward even if he himself does not vote as long as a sufficient number of other citizens do. But we have already shown that he is willing to bear certain short-run costs he could avoid in order to do his share in providing long-run benefits. The maximum cost he will bear for this reason in any given election is that which just offsets his long-run participation value.

Thus the total return which a rational citizen receives from voting in a given election consists of his long-run participation value plus his vote value. In other words, the reward a man obtains for voting depends upon (1) how much he values living in a democracy, (2) how much he cares which party wins, (3) how close he thinks the election will be, and (4) how many other citizens he thinks will vote.⁸ These four variables insure a relatively wide range of possible returns from voting for different individuals. The range of possible costs is also wide, as we saw before. Therefore a matching of returns and costs can easily result in a mixed outcome—i.e., a large number of voters whose returns exceed their costs and a large number of abstainers whose costs exceed their returns.

Without abandoning our assumption that all men are rational, we can thus explain the following phenomena by means of our model:

1. Some men abstain all the time, others abstain sometimes, and others never abstain.
2. The percentage of the electorate abstaining varies from election to election.

⁸ This list shows clearly the reason why the motive for voting is stronger than the motive for becoming well informed. The former encompasses all four factors mentioned, while the latter is comprised of only factors (2) and (3).

3. Many men who vote do not become well-informed before voting.
4. Only a few men who become well-informed do not vote.

Furthermore, our analysis has isolated several factors upon which the incidence of rational abstention depends. Hence it may be useful in designing methods of predicting how many voters will abstain in a given election.⁹

C. A REVISED SUMMARY OF HOW RATIONAL CITIZENS DECIDE HOW TO VOTE

The introduction of voting costs into our model forces us to revise again the behavior rule first formulated in Chapter 3. In an uncertain world, each rational citizen makes his voting decision in the following manner:

1. He makes preliminary estimates of his expected party differential, the cost of voting, his long-run participation value, and the number of other citizens he believes will vote.
2. If his party differential is zero because all party policies and platforms appear identical to him, he weighs his long-run participation value plus the expected value of "change" as opposed to "no change" (or vice versa) against the cost of voting.¹⁰
 - a. If returns outweigh costs and he favors "change," he votes for the opposition party. (In a multiparty system, he chooses one of the opposition parties at random and votes for it.)
 - b. If returns outweigh costs and he favors "no change," he votes for the incumbent party. (If a coalition is in power, he votes for one of the parties in it chosen at random.)
 - c. If costs outweigh returns, he abstains.
3. If his party differential is zero because he expects identical utility incomes from all parties even though their policies and platforms differ, he weighs only his long-run participation value against the cost of voting.

⁹ Needless to say, other authors have pointed out the same factors. For a summary analysis of their views and findings, see V. O. Key Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1953), Chapter Nineteen.

¹⁰ For an explanation of why he considers "change" as opposed to "no change" in this instance, see Chapter 3, part II, c.

- a. If returns outweigh costs, he votes for a party chosen at random.
 - b. If costs outweigh returns, he abstains.
4. If his party differential is not zero, he estimates how close the election will be and discounts his party differential accordingly. (In a multiparty system he also must decide whether his favorite party is hopeless, as described in Chapter 3.)
- a. If the discounted party differential plus the long-run participation value exceed the cost of voting, he votes for his favorite party (or some other party in certain cases—see Chapter 3).
 - b. If the sum of these quantities is smaller than the cost of voting, he abstains.
5. Throughout the above processes he procures more information about all the entities involved whenever its expected pay-off exceeds its cost. Since this information may alter his estimate of any entity, he may shift from one category to another in the midst of his deliberations. He votes according to the rules applicable to the category he is in on election day.¹¹

D. THE RELATION BETWEEN VOTING BEHAVIOR AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

If we translate the results of the above deliberations into possible types of behavior, we discover that citizens in our model can react to an election by doing the following things:

1. Voting for their favorite party.
2. Voting for some other party chosen for strategic reasons because their favorite party is hopeless.
3. Voting for a party chosen at random.
4. Abstaining.

¹¹ This exceedingly complicated method of deciding how to vote seems to bear little resemblance to how men act in the real world. However, except for one step, the entire process is necessarily implicit in the behavior of any rational voter, even if casual observation fails to confirm this fact. The one step which is not necessary is the use of a random mechanism to "break ties" by citizens who are indifferent but wish to vote, as in 2a, 2b, and 3a above. The implications of this step are discussed in the Appendix to this chapter.

These four types of action do not result in equal influence for the citizens who carry them out. Seen as a group, the citizens who vote by preference determine the immediate outcome of the election and have a strong effect on the long-run development of party policies. Citizens who vote randomly exercise only the latter effect, since their votes cancel in so far as the immediate outcome is concerned. Citizens who abstain also have no influence on who wins the election. Thus voting behavior is a crucial determinant of the distribution of political power.

There are two reasons to suspect that the proportion of low-income citizens who abstain is usually higher than the proportion of high-income citizens who do so. First, the cost of voting is harder for low-income citizens to bear; therefore, even if returns among high- and low-income groups are the same, fewer of the latter vote. Second, the cost of information is harder for low-income citizens to bear; hence more of them are likely to be uncertain because they lack information. Since uncertainty reduces the returns from voting, a lower proportion of low-income groups would vote even if voting costs were equally difficult for everyone to bear.

Because citizens who abstain exercise less influence than those who vote, low-income groups in society are likely to have less political power than their numbers warrant, and high-income groups more. Once again we see that the necessity of bearing economic costs in order to act politically biases the distribution of power against citizens with low incomes. However, we cannot tell *a priori* just how significant this bias really is.

III. SUMMARY

When voting is costless, any return whatsoever makes abstention irrational, so everyone who has even a slight party preference votes. On the other hand, abstention does not harm those who are indifferent because (1) democracy works even if they do not vote and (2) parties still cater to their interests so as to get their votes next time. Thus there is no return from voting *per se*, and all indifferent citizens abstain.

When voting is costly, its costs may outweigh its returns, so abstention can be rational even for citizens with party preferences. In fact, the returns from voting are usually so low that even small costs may cause many voters to abstain; hence tiny variations in cost can sharply redistribute political power.

One of the returns from voting stems from each citizen's realization that democracy cannot function unless many people vote. This return is independent of his short-run gains and losses, but it is not very large because the benefits of democracy are indivisible. Nevertheless, it helps solve the oligopoly problem voters face, thereby preventing universal abstention from paralyzing democracy.

The total return each citizen receives from voting depends upon (1) the benefits he gets from democracy, (2) how much he wants a particular party to win, (3) how close he thinks the election will be, and (4) how many other citizens he thinks will vote. These variables insure a relatively wide range of possible returns similar to the range of voting costs. Thus when citizens balance their costs and returns, some vote and others abstain.

However, the abstention rate is higher among low-income citizens than among high-income citizens for two reasons. Since the former have a harder time paying the cost of voting, it takes higher returns to get them to vote. And since they can less easily bear the cost of information, they have fewer data and are more uncertain; therefore they discount the returns from voting more heavily.

Appendix: The Possible Existence of Irrationality in the Model

Throughout this study, we have avoided making arbitrary assumptions without presenting at least some reasons why they are plausible. Therefore we offer this appendix as an *apologia* for an assumption made in this chapter which is arbitrary, but for which we have so far given no explanation.

The postulate we are referring to is the following: every citizen who wishes to vote but is indifferent about who wins chooses a party at random and votes for it. From the point of view of the individual, there is no reason why random selection is preferable to certain other

methods of choice. Since he cannot distinguish between the parties on the basis of their policies, he might as well use any other basis which pleases him. For instance, he might vote for the party whose leader has the most charming personality, or the one whose historic heroes appeal to him most, or the one his father voted for. Thus a rational man may employ politically irrational mechanisms to decide for whom to vote.

Though use of such devices is individually rational, it is socially irrational. If indifferent voters do not make voting choices randomly, their votes fail to cancel each other; hence men who are indifferent about who wins affect the outcome of each election. Not only is this arrangement inefficient *per se*, but also it may have drastic effects on party behavior. If the number of indifferent voters is large, parties will plan their actions and statements to influence the nonrational mechanisms they think these voters are using. As a result, parties will cease devoting all their energies to carrying out their social function, which is formulating policies relevant to citizens' political desires.

Obviously, we have made the assumption of random selection in order to avoid this outcome. However, we believe that irrationality would not occur to a significant extent in the model even if this assumption were dropped. In our opinion, those citizens who are interested enough in politics to vote at all almost always have some party preference. If this is true, so small a number of rational voters are in a position to be influenced by politically irrational factors that parties do not exert much energy wooing them. Admittedly, this view is merely an opinion.

There are other parts of the analysis where irrational factors might conceivably exercise influence, though none are as unequivocal as the above. For example, if we count the time it takes to go to the polls as a cost of voting, why not count the social prestige received for voting as a return? Clearly, society bestows this prestige upon men in order to get them to vote; is it not therefore rational for men to seek this reward? ¹¹

¹¹ Actually, the social prestige connected with voting in the real world is analogous to the long-run participation value in our model. We may reasonably assume that citizens of the real world are not as calculating as those in the model. Therefore the leaders of society arrange to have them perceive social responsibility

As we pointed out in Chapter 1, the difficulty with such arguments is that they rationalize everything. If it is rational to vote for prestige, why is it not rational to vote so as to please one's employer or one's sweetheart? Soon all behavior whatsoever becomes rational because every act is a means to some end the actor values. To avoid this sterile conclusion, we have regarded only actions leading to strictly political or economic ends as rational.

in the form of guilt feelings for wrong actions (e.g., not voting) and reward feelings for right actions (e.g., voting). These feelings function on an unconscious level to achieve the same end that the return for voting *per se* achieves consciously in our model. In a certain sense, therefore, we have already accounted for the operation of social prestige in the structure of the model.