

Reverse-nudges: A case of citizen-driven action

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Nudge theory in field research is realized when the survey tool phrases a question that could alter the way participants perceive and answer a question. This can be through subtle and unsubtle ways like **bolding**, underlining, or *italicizing* phrases in a question or text particularly when collecting data observations. Nudge theory in behavioral sciences and psychological studies is gaining ground in an uncharacteristic, but necessary way. Instead of moving "beyond the traditional tools of regulation, law and financial incentives" a reverse to this approach is seemingly gaining ground before, during, and post-election seasons. But why are citizens nudging for better health, education, and overall social services? Perhaps a lack of sufficient, sustainable legislation or policy measures, is a contributing factor. Policies aim to address social needs, foster economic stability, and effective resource utilization and distribution. Essentially, reverse-nudging is a growing form of effective policymaker engagement strategy. Citizens are asking policy actors within public sector services to prioritize and align with current issues. Reverse-nudging is an austerity measure taken by citizens or organizations of citizen social welfare to reduce inefficient government spending habits through lowering taxes, cutting recurrent expenditure. It encourages a lean approach to social welfare and development initiatives with a high return ripple effect in the midst of rising social, and economic challenges.

Expanding upon the work of [Thaler and Sunstein, 2008], who define a nudge as "any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives" (p. 6) [Moseley and Stoker, 2013] wrote on the prospects of nudging citizens. Nudging is used by governments to sway decision-making, and even by local grocery stores to promote better patron health. In politics, leaders have used nudges to sway the public to turn out and vote. In some cases, interested parties are involved in lobbying candidates to execute mandates and group interests. The outcomes of these in the past have produced mixed reactions and outcomes. In the recent 2024 US elections, Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX and Tesla, was heavily involved in nudging citizens through his X platform to greater effect. Articles from mainstream media outlets [Isidore, 2024] analyzed that perhaps this move was a policy and financially risky gamble, seeking in-coming government support for his portfolio of businesses in spacecraft missions through SpaceX, and for Tesla Motors for his electric vehicles (EVs). [Banerjee et al., 2019] work on Nudge+ (Plus) framework provides an approach

to guide effective citizen-led behavioral changes and actions needed in combating environmental concerns like climate change. Researchers [Towse, 2019] have investigated these behavioral and persuasive trends used by candidates to encourage voter turnout. As Adams points out, since 1992, Pennsylvania always voted for the Democratic Presidential party nominee. However, twice the Pennsylvania electorate was nudged to turn the colors of the state to Republican for the eventual winner being the 45th President (now 47th) of the U.S., Donald J. Trump as the candidate in both the 2016, and 2024 elections. In between the two one-term stints, status was, albeit temporarily, recovered when then U.S 46th President, Joe Biden won the state of Pennsylvania Democratic presidential nominee. n turning out in large numbers to vote for the Republican Presidential nominee.

In addition, a slowly changing dynamic with active citizen journalism means citizens are actively taking control of their social welfare, health, and consumption of mainstream media information. Examine recent political events that have so far embattled the world in post-COVID-19. The year-on-year rise in digital activism, trends have been impactful in the way organizations perform their mandate. Kenya has been in the spotlight for good and bad reasons. On one side, it is a budding hub for technocrats in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the recent June 2025 protests caught the government and the financial world by surprise. Even embattled local government leaders were scattering for their safety as enraged crowds threatened and allegedly occupied the National Assembly building, the body charged with the responsibility of protecting the social welfare of its citizenry through public bills, and laws [Schipani and Adeoye, 2024]. Uncharacteristic but charismatic trends followed into Asia, with a storm into the official residence of the sitting Bangladeshi Prime Minister, demanding the resignation of the supreme leader Sheikh Hasina, eventually leading to her resigning shortly after winning a fourth term in January 2024, as prime minister [Sudipto, 2024], seeking refuge from the irate citizens over government neglect, and outright inefficiency. Many more cases similar to these are experienced in groups or large numbers. The June 2024 protests in Kenya, seemed to provide a further unintended consequence into the operations of government lenders like IMF and World Bank, [Schipani and Adeoye, 2024] who are institutions of repute. Certainly, this is an unusual case of a forceful 'nudge' requiring laying the ground for government and non-governmental organization accountability. For the latter, it is clear to see why there is a recent 'swipe' at the government. It is no longer the usual nudge case per [Moseley and Stoker, 2013], where the government seeks policy measures to approach and sway citizens.

Protesting cliques have a rationale of public peaceful demonstration to counter the under-provision of benefits in public welfare programs and institutions. The US Federal Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, according to [GAO, 2024], for various services like Medicare, social security, and unemployment was at least \$3.8 trillion for the more than 4 million low-income households. Public action necessitates the need to address the lack of services to help people. Millions are yet to see the net positive effect, and a re-surging economy. Whether it is swaying historically farming groups like the Amish to win State elections [Adams, 2024], to

some degree, thanks to a variety of strategies used by Democrat and Republican parties' presidential nominees, nudging the right way, can be a success.

The relevance of the nudge in cultural economics and in ethical setups is necessary for available policies, in curbing lackluster efforts by money-lending multinational institutions to scrutinize and demand government public accountability, and subversion of the social welfare systems. Cultural economists [Towse, 2019] investigated the underlining the prominent role of government in reforming the challenges of social welfare, and reviving the economy. Perhaps a reverse nudge, is a driver towards reminding the government and institutions on their mandate towards public and social well-being.

Whereas policy issues are crucial for behavioral economics research, a lack of policy is hardly the biggest challenge to why societies are not progressing in the Sub-Saharan and global south, and in a case-by-case basis the developed world. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, unknowingly, encourage the blatant dissident and public outcry. Public action through demonstrations seeks to address the relaxation in public sector accountability, and government in delivering services while remaining accountable to the citizens. The goal, at least from a borrower perspective as [Reinsberg et al., 2021] have investigated, is not for subsidies and tax benefits to reduce or increase, but for de-regulation for a better outcome. In their analysis of the policy "design" of loan programs and how it affects many countries, where Kenya is one of the mentioned that has more than 10 lending programs initiated by The International Monetary Fund (IMF), over a 35-year borrower sample period. The rising cases of civil, and social unrest hint at worsening and broadening social and economic issues. Perhaps, instead of countless old and new concurrently running lending programs that rarely have a positive net return, the nudge can bring better and desirable outcomes and a much-needed structural reform from governments. Given its success in realizing political outcomes, or in health reforms encouraging healthy habits in the world of physiology, citizen-led nudging opens a new and potentially profound way of addressing chronic ails to sustainable government factored by cyclic over-reliance in external borrowing. Certainly, it provides a spark for interesting discussions in fiscal policies, and even a new role of government oversight led by the majority in helping developing nations "graduate" to greater economic status. Witnessing citizens being at the heart of government transparency, and efficiency in under-developed countries is a new breath of fresh air. The net overall effect is exciting even by imagination.

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