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Expressive Voting

a pamphlet
on the easiest ways to get more out of our elections

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A Pamphlet on the Easiest Ways to Get More Out of Our Elections

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Introduction

Voting is an emotional process. My intention in this book is to explore the potential for replacing some of the negative emotions with positive ones, while discussing exactly what it is that we can expect to get out of this process.

Elections are a powerful institution, and have produced safe, just societies. Yet most of us can sense that something is wrong. Elections are more game-like than they should be, with frustrating problems. The results could probably be better too.

The persistence and success of our system notwithstanding, I propose that we reform it in the following ways.

- inoculate against the spoiler effect
- use cryptographic fraud detection
- abandon the Electoral College
- enfranchise convicted felons and young people

This book is about the United States' presidential election. These ideas, however, are widely applicable, and could bring tangible reform to many types of elections.

It's inspiring, and humbling, what our electoral institutions have achieved - and what they have prevented. Yet, I believe that they are being held back by strategic phenomena that were not intentionally imposed. The longevity of the policies impacting the US presidential election is good evidence that they work. Now we need to determine whether they can be improved.

Expressive Voting

In his book How Democratic is the American Constitution?, Robert Dahl observes that nearly all nations with plurality elections have developed two-party systems. If the election doesn't require the winner to capture at least 50% of votes, the dynamics of the system nearly always lead to a see-saw between just two options. It's quite possible that there's nothing particular about America that makes a two-party system the right choice. Rather, it's just that this type of election only lets in two candidates at a time.

Two-party elections tend to be close, which makes them predictable in many ways, enabling powerful interests to intervene. Predictability in government has important benefits, but facilitation of manipulation is a huge strike against any public policy.

Another flaw of plurality elections is the spoiler effect: when a third-party candidate detracts votes from a sympathetic front-runner. It's an enormous distraction for candidates and voters that can leave them drained and highly politicized.

As we well know, the spoiler effect makes enemies of people who should be allies -- people who are pledging to embark upon lives of service in pursuit of expanded opportunities for Americans and our fellows abroad. We shouldn't let our cultural inability to settle on just two parties turn our system into a bane against cooperation.

Fortunately, the system that can free us from the spoiler effect is arguably even simpler than a one-vote election: vote for as many candidates as you like. The one with the most votes wins.

This system, rarely practiced, is called approval voting in most political literature, but I like to call it "expressive voting", because it enables voters to express quite a lot of detail about how they think and feel. Being empowered to express the best of their wisdom motivates people to get out to the polls - and increased turnout has strong extrinsic benefits to a society like ours.

In an expressive election, there can be an unlimited number of frontrunners. This is probably the crucial benefit of the approach. For example, there could be a dozen candidates who each have 70-80% support. Since each has a real chance, you can pick the ones who fit with your best wisdom on the greatest number of high-priority issues. In an election with two front-runners, you frequently have to choose between a social policy you like and an economic policy you trust. When you do, the candidates don't know what you judged them on. Little is expressed in the vote. Communication is not taking place.

Although you may find yourself aligned with a candidate on multiple issues, a one-vote election ultimately only affords you the opportunity to express one view. Even if just two things are important to you, a one-vote election with two candidates will often force you to pick just one of those issues with your one vote. In a competitive field of dozens, though, you could select candidates with whom you agree on multiple fronts - foreign policy, tax policy, trade, defense, labor, marriage, health care and more. The candidates would be able to ascertain the collective feelings of their supporters.

A candidate who ran on public education reform and global safe sex programs, for example, could see that while 58% of voters supported him, his colleagues who also emphasized subsidy reform were polling closer to 70%. Look at how much is expressed, and how clearly! Supporting an unlimited number of candidates would let voters articulate what kinds of policy and behavior they trust in a natural, almost market-like format.

Because candidates could move up without bringing others down, feedback on how voters felt about issues, statements and behavior would be far more palpable than in a traditional, zero-sum scenario. Candidates would likely be more open and take a few more chances because they would be more able to identify which were missteps (in their own campaigns and in others). Further, they might be inclined to say nice things in support of their fellow candidates, to impress the followers thereof, rather than burning them with takedowns. Getting the true opinions of candidates, who deal with each other behind the scenes, would be an valuable source of nuance for voters to contemplate.

Ultimately, though, it doesn't matter what candidates think of each other. What matters is what voters think of them - and a one-vote system does a relatively poor job at communicating that information to anyone, despite the tremendous efforts that many dedicate to discovering it. Expressive voting may well do a better job - but it is unfamiliar and must be tested and practiced before it can serve us on the largest scale.

Right now, the most important step we can take is to find opportunities to try it out. Try it; and talk about it.

Election Auditing

The technology used in elections has not eliminated fraud. Elections around the world sometimes seem to have been rigged. It may have even happened here in the US. Whether it did or not, many believe it might have - and have no way of knowing the truth. In some other cases, it's more apparent what happened, but almost as impossible to prove.

The push for verifiable results has often focused on the production of a paper trail that, in many respects, mirrors the existing pipeline of vote aggregation and counting. Although the paper trail is subject to many of the same shortcomings as mechanical and digital systems, as well as others (starting with flammability), it is often seen as the best option.

In my view, there is a better option, and it has the advantage of not relying whatsoever on the good behavior or cooperation of election officials (or anyone). A mathematical, technology-backed audit trail allows voters to check whether their vote was counted correctly. If even a tiny fraction of one percent did so, it would be possible to detect irregularities. Correcting fraud is another issue - but merely detecting it would be real progress.

Privacy is important in the voting booth. Without it, voters could be punished, or bribed, for their choices (and even in the absence of such coercion, it is socially vital to be discreet about the vote if desired). So how does this system reveal your vote to you without revealing it to anyone else? The answer lies in a mathematical process that allows experts to compare two encrypted lists of codes and know whether any codes from one list were changed before creating the next list - without being able to know which code became which.

Essentially, the list as a whole has properties that mathematicians can use to verify whether one list was generated from another. That way, the list of vote codes can be published and everyone can make sure their vote is on it, and the data about who they are and who they voted for is protected by several layers of anonymity.

This algorithm was discovered by Andy Neff, who happens to be the older brother of my high school physics teacher. Andy brought the idea to a company called VoteHere, and published some of his code under an open source license to invite scrutiny. That company was acquired by the Datergrity Corporation, which presumably still sells products that facilitate end-to-end auditing (as it is called). I suspect that it would be possible to implement such an audit whether or not Datergrity was ultimately involved. (I have no relationship with, or knowledge about, this corporation.)

Most elections are run fairly and decided correctly, and it's important to have faith in the possibility of doing the right thing when no one's watching. It's also important to be able to accept a loss and quickly move on to cooperation with the new government. Am I being indulgent when I propose that we use auditing and not trust election officials?

I think not for two reasons. Implementing a good security system is valuable not only because it helps catch wrongdoers, but because it lessens the temptation to do wrong in the first place. No one would risk tampering with an election if they were 90% sure that they would be caught - and no one would spend their lives wondering whether a result was authentic if we had a more foolproof audit.

Secondly, there really is a crisis of integrity in our elections (in the US and elsewhere). The technology implemented in the last decade was simply not researched or designed very well. It was all done in a complete rush. Would we entrust our stewardship of our military or our economy to technologies built in a year or two and sold for a few hundred bucks? No way. Yet this is what we are doing when we let the choice of our leaders go awry - or leave it in the hands of some hacker.

Electoral College

If the nationwide popular vote decided the presidential election, it's quite possible that many more of us would vote. In safe states, millions are surely staying home since their

vote won't impact the Electoral College. They are powerless to help the candidate they favor, and consequently less likely to put much effort into learning about our nation's true situation and needs.

The Electoral College makes some voters much more influential than others; and causes candidates to overwhelmingly focus on a few states. Interested parties in each state are well aware of this imbalance of power. Yet, the winner-take-all formula that most states use to increase their impact seems unlikely to change.

More participation, a refrain commonly heard and an outcome widely desired, would lead to better results in elections both national and local.

This is partly due to the probability that more viewpoints would be represented, and partly due to the tendency for a larger number of participants to result in a smarter decision (note that this is not a mob that makes decisions communally, but a series of relatively private decisions).

Voting also leads to increased civic action (which is, essentially, another word for volunteering). Volunteering not only makes us happier and healthier, but also more employable and effective at work.

After helping a candidate get elected, a volunteer is liable to help him or her accomplish goals in office. Far though it may be from the minds of many hardworking, hard-pressed Americans, working in this selfless mode is a tried and true path to success - a path that awaits any of us diligent enough to choose it.

If we let ourselves believe that our voices matter (by changing things such that they do), we'll be less depressed and take better care of our lives. We'll be less antagonistic towards the government, the police, and each other.

And, while a single vote may never make a difference, a single blogger or volunteer can influence thousands of votes. Maybe even millions.

This debate usually stops when the logistics of amending the Constitution are considered, since 37 states would have to ratify any change. I also believe that this part of the Constitution will probably not change anytime soon - but as I learned from my professor Akhil Reed Amar, no amendment is necessary, because it is eminently possible to circumvent the Electoral College. State legislatures (with either the cooperation of their governor, or the override of a veto) are free to assign their state's electors to the winner of the nationwide popular vote (the Constitution contains no stipulations on how electors are selected - states are completely free to decide). If even one or two states did so, it would create a prize big enough to decide the election in many cases - and failing that, it would still be big enough to engage the participation of voters in states that are otherwise defunct in the electoral calculus. By generating a scenario where the popular vote winner would always win in the Electoral College, the College's typical geographic influence would be circumvented.

Eight states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation pursuant to the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which has also attained various stages of passage in many other states. This compact enforces the result of the popular vote - but does not take effect until 270 electoral votes (the minimum needed for a victory) are implicated. Therefore, this particular plan requires the cooperation of many more states (probably 10 or so).

Presumably, this waiting clause is in place to prevent a scenario where, for example, Massachusetts decided the election by giving its 10 Electoral votes to a popular vote

winner whom Massachusetts voters did not support. Leaving aside the question of whether this is a statistically plausible scenario, I wonder what would be bad about this outcome. After all, isn't the whole point of the Interstate Compact that the result of a popular vote might be different from the result of an Electoral College vote? And, the exact same thing could happen to Massachusetts even if 20 or 40 states were all giving their electors to the popular vote winner. It's not possible for the popular vote winner to lose an election as the result of states dedicating their electors to him or her (although outcomes in other states could be affected by the fact of their votes mattering).

Putting faith, and binding power, in the popular vote is asserting that voices across the country matter. But, perhaps more important than whether voices matter is the question of whether we care enough about choosing a good and impartial president to use a system that will do so.

Enfranchisement

Candidates nearly always want to serve more than one term. Their actions in office reflect their prerogative to help the groups of people whose votes they want.

Big groups that vote habitually are the most tempting. Some of the demographics that regularly muster the highest turnout are the elderly, college graduates, and the suburban upper middle class. Most people with high incomes vote.

Underprivileged communities, by contrast, exhibit weak turnout, and have little impact on campaigns. Candidates may want to help them, but suspect they will lose if they do. After they're gone, their work can be undone in a few months. Alternately, opportunities to take steps for change could span decades.

Many politicians believe that allocating help to the poor would also make life better for the other classes. Still, weak voting tendencies make it difficult to speak up about this (there may be a popular perception that allocation issues are more zero-sum than they actually are).

This lacking dialogue feeds back into lacking turnout. Even more problematic is the alienation that the underclasses feel. Getting problems addressed by a government designed by (and for) people who live a different life, and speak a different dialect, is challenging and tiring. Sometimes, it's simpler and more effective to embrace the dysfunction of the black market, and live between the lines. Having pride in the way you live is important - but sometimes it requires you to turn a blind eye on your weaknesses.

Living under the rule of another culture can be humiliating. There are bound to be misunderstandings and slights that cut deep - this has been evident throughout history. Perhaps with the right type of enlightenment, an underclass could thrive and prosper on its own. But in the modern, Western world, it's typical for most impoverished cultures - black, white, and Latino - to deal with and disguise their defeat by self-defeating. Underperformance in school, the job market, and even personal relationships can all be seen as resistance to assimilation.

The ultimate expression of this alienation is the lifelong ban from voting that states give to those convicted of felonies. Felons are also banned from many job applications and other programs and opportunities. Acquiring a conviction is a free pass to not put any effort into such endeavors. I don't suspect that anyone sets out to "acquire" a conviction - the phrase is meant to show the perversely positive impact of "graduating from" a series of discouraging institutions.

My point is that sternly telling youngsters to shape up will have mixed results - some will see the potential of living within the system, while others choose to hone their resolve and self-sufficiency by coolly resisting instruction. And, as any politician will tell you, resisting the directives of a standing power is indeed a practical and widely applicable skill - a good thing to practice (especially when backed up by other skills).

I'm taking some broad strokes at a complex situation. Truly, the questions of how to govern multiple cultures simultaneously, and when it's best for each culture to govern itself, are puzzling and emotionally provocative. They interact sharply with questions of religion, biology, morality, psychology, and reality. Without claiming that my analyses in the preceding paragraphs are indeed correct or useful, I simply want to point out that I believe we have a lot, pragmatically speaking, to gain by encouraging wider political participation in an unabashedly positive manner.

One way to take some air out of puffed up chests is to cultivate and display appreciation for the functional, positive aspects of a culture. It's hard to rebel against someone who has complimented you. The brain's tendency towards cognitive consonance makes it suspect that people who like you are smart - nearly everyone considers themselves above average.

Tough love does play an unmistakable role in growth, but I believe that there must remain a baseline of positivity. Telling people their vote is wanted, and then showing them it will count for something, is a cheap way to convey massive positivity, and long-term commitment. The reforms in the first three chapters can be leveraged to demonstrate that a vote counts for something. By ending the ban on voting by convicted felons, we can convey that all votes are wanted.

Restoring the franchise to convicts is not just a strategy, it's a philosophy. One way to interpret the ban would be to say that people who choose not to value life and liberty aren't helpful to our nuanced collective decision making process. But I think another way to interpret this dynamic is that somewhere along the way (or, likely, many times along the way), the system failed to work for these people, and their input is likely to be illustrative of how the system might be improved. Often, your students become your teachers when you realize how different their experience is from what you expected. There is no excuse for violence or careless living, but nonetheless, there is often more to a story than meets the eye. People can get into desperate, constrained situations even when their intentions are selfless, noble, and realistic.

Withholding the franchise from those who have the greatest need to have an impact on their government is also what I think is happening to the young. It's permitted to vote for those 18 and up - yet many don't solidify the habit until their late thirties. Rather than establishing a habit of voting, we establish a habit of not voting - for practically two decades.

In fact it's quite possible that despite a chorus of praise for voting, we may have devised a very efficient process for discouraging young people from taking part. We teach in the early teens about how well voting has done for us, how good it is to vote, and how much Americans have sacrificed for the privilege of voting; then at the peak of enthusiasm we tell them they aren't worthy and won't be for several years. It takes a lot of maturity to retain positivity through that dilemma. It's great that we teach maturity to teenagers - but if we are staking almost twenty years of their civic lives on it, that may be a trade we should reconsider.

I also think there's a hollowness to calls for youth voting that results from the irrelevance of votes in most states and most elections. In the same way that P. Diddy unconvincingly stated that young and urban communities should either "vote or die",

many calls to action are dramatic and incendiary, using shocks and implied threats to discourage questions of why votes really matter. These advocates may be doing the best they can in a somewhat broken system - but the young can sense their disingenuousness, which affects their proclivity to develop eager attitudes about voting. It would, after all, be perfectly feasible to teach kids that although their vote won't make a difference in the outcome, it will make a difference in their own lives and communities.

Lowering the voting age, perhaps to 16 or 14, would have a lot of consequences for our nation - legally, ethically, logistically and culturally. But I think at the least it's worth admitting that these (aforementioned) adverse consequences may be relatively direct results of our rules and policies, rather than just expecting the age restriction to work out as intended, amid good behavior. Bear in mind that a chief function of the government is planning for the distant future; perhaps the young will bring more personal investment to this discussion. Our policy is also lacking the influence of those who lack cars - a bias that has steered our real estate development in an unsustainable direction that has proven financially devastating. The voting age has been lowered before, which hasn't caused anyone any problems. When's the last time someone proposed raising the voting age back to 21, or raising it at all?

Since the repeal of the Jim Crow laws, and the amendments that granted voting rights to all segments of the citizen population, Americans have been very comfortable with the notion that there is no test to pass to earn the vote (apart from tests related to naturalization of immigrants). To the extent that is practical, voting is the province of every citizen. This makes it awkward, ironic, and troubling to enforce age restrictions. However, it is challenging to think of an alternative that would provide for both the physical and emotional safety of developing children, while exposing a legally unambiguous indication of who is enfranchised. We have a lot to gain from the uncompromised insights and narratives of our youthful populations; but a lot to lose if we let them become targeted by concerted attempts to influence their impressionable minds. Let me close with one more argument in favor of lowering the voting age.

If the voting age were 16, most Americans would have three opportunities to vote in local elections, and one to vote in a national election, before graduation from secondary school. This is a time when it would be easy to convince them to vote, particularly as most schools are utilized as polling places, and election day is always a school day. Doing something five times forms a habit, and if we could get teens more than half way there before their high school graduation, a lot would cast their fifth vote before 21.

Logistics

Welcoming a larger number of candidates into the process would have many consequences for the quality of the debate. More ideas could be considered, less energy would be focused on undermining people at the right moments, and the influence of the biggest donors (who can currently cover all bases by funding just two options) might diminish.

I believe that the logistics of informing voters would develop organically within our current information ecosystem. There are thousands of books, thousands of bands, thousands of TV programs - and a certain few rise to prominence via word of mouth, critical acclaim, and marketing. I think the same will be true for candidates - except it may be even easier to repetitively and progressively iterate over the process. Indicating support for a person can be done more quickly than watching a show, reading a book, or even listening to a song. In the couple of seconds that it takes to like something on Facebook, or send a text message, you could add a candidate to your ballot, and optionally, let friends see how serious you are about their capability. And, as you spend more time learning about a candidate, your opinion about him or her often becomes

more clear and meaningful. Expressing some of these thoughts, feelings and decisions would generate powerful reminders and clues for finding all the very best and supporting their messages.

Yet the logistics of actually voting are potentially more of a problem. How long would it take to sort through a thousand names while marking the ones you like? How could we even fit so many names on a paper ballot? And how could voters possibly remember their picks without writing them all down on lists which could be stolen and abused?

There may never be more than a handful of front-runners. But, just as an album or a book could find commercial success months after its release, a candidate could make a late charge, or slowly but steadily build a good name that could serve him or her well in the next cycle (after all, our political community is composed of thousands of people who engage in various roles for decades each). For this reason, I think that we can get the best results if we provide tools that streamline the expression of support.

To me, the obvious way to do this is with a web app that is compatible with mobile phones. Using something like that, voters could maintain running lists of whom to support, adding and dropping names as desired. The app could also provide tools for suggesting candidates to others, or finding ones who agree with given views and priorities.

In politics, you find groups of people who agree with each other. The promise that I see in expressive voting is related to the belief that these groups should not have to compete with each other, or even differentiate themselves from each other. Instead they can support each other, and explain their beliefs by reference to the others. Eventually, traits will surface that enable some to pull ahead; and there may be no need to artificially accelerate this process.

One basic tool that would make it easier for voters to gather up exhaustive lists that accurately expressed their feelings about whom to support would be to let them actually create lists that could be summarily adopted by typing a keyword into a web page or a text message - or by clicking a link. This would widely delegate the information-gathering process, and enable an issue-oriented approach. While some voters still vetted candidates on their character, connections and experience, others could opt to simply support everyone who supported X, Y, and Z but opposed A, B, and C - thereby encouraging others to consider realigning their stances. Personally I feel that the strongest, most just society will result from electing the smartest people - not from virtually delegating decisions to the voters. The opportunity to express opinions via the vote, however, would be one that shed much light on what is happening in American lives. Such information would be invaluable even to the brightest candidates.

Expressive voting works best (theoretically speaking) with votes that are all or nothing - there is no ranking or weighting. To support someone, you have to be comfortable with them winning; so it's very important to be picky. Yet as I have suggested, there may be benefits if we can help voters seriously consider a large number of choices, and narrow down their options over time. I suspect that the best way to do this would be to allow votes to be expressed as a score within a range. Having scored candidates, the voter could choose the minimum score that was necessary to earn their ultimate support.

For example, candidates could be rated on a scale from 0-500. I could choose to support everyone whom I had rated higher than 380. Then, as election day drew near, if the guys I had at 390 were ahead of my true favorites, I could raise my baseline to 425, and try to rally around some truly inspiring candidates. Later, if those failed to take the lead, but one I had rated 418 was in second place, I could lower my bar to 410 to try to help him or her overtake the leader. With realtime polling of currently projected

results, voters could gauge the emotions generated by potential outcomes to arrive at the proper score for each candidate, and the proper cutoff score for each race.

Now, perhaps this practice of rating on a scale and adjusting the baseline would introduce strategic phenomena that distracted us from the content and character of campaigns - or merely took up too much time and effort. After all, one of the main reasons I feel so comfortable with expressive voting is that the “approval voting” literature has concluded that it is a system free from strategy (meaning there is no reason to hide or deny your true beliefs and preferences - which is a trait not shared by other voting schemes). My proposal, while highly capable, might complicate things - especially if realtime polling were allowed. Still, I have high hopes for such a system to facilitate the efficient, honest expression of a huge amount of information - and a fair and rigorous competition between thousands of hopefuls. This is why I have implemented this system and made it freely available for anyone to use at expressivevoting.com.

Conclusion

Shortly after I began writing, I realized that there is no clearly established goal of what an election should accomplish. We each get to decide what we think that is, and work towards it. Personally I have often suspected that elections are intended to prevent the abuse of power - but I also believe that aggregating our decision-making facilities in the right way can result in outcomes characterized by highly intelligent diagnoses of, and realistic prescriptions for, our collective problems.

Public elections weren't part of our Constitution, but they are the natural conclusion of that sincere effort to overcome the brutal legacy of power-grabbing monarchs. Yet while they would approve in principal, our founding fathers would be horrified to see our political parties who will stop at nothing to seize seats of power, rather than thoughtfully legislating and setting an example. Please, consider the possibility that this state of affairs is not indicative of any weakness or depravity in our national character - it is merely a consequence of our election system's rules.

I have worked alone on this treatment - but I believe that we must work together if it is to ever mean something. Much experience with expressive voting is needed before we can entrust it with our future. This means that we each have an extensive ability to impact the future of expressive voting. It is suitable for any shared decision, and easy to explain with a minimum of jargon. Please, take the time to consider and advocate its implementation in all formal elections and casual votes.

Beyond that, there is much that you can contribute to the process of improving our liberty, safety, economy, health and fulfillment. Participating in the political process, flawed though it may be, is good. I hope that you will feel excited to share this book with your peers, and I hope that my efforts to make it easily available have been sufficient. If you would like to help refine this message, or perhaps translate it to a different language or medium, you should contact me via mikeymicrophone.com or expressivevoting.com, or simply get down to it. Also contact me if there is any need for free copies of this book, beyond what is available on those sites.

Thank you for reading, and good luck bringing the best of your wisdom to every one of your decisions.

Common Attitudes About Voting

As I stated at the very beginning of this book, voting is a topic that stirs strong emotions in many. This is fine with me, and I of course couldn't do anything about it anyway. Still, I'd like to address, and indeed debunk, some of the common opinions that I have heard lately.

One is the opinion that certain people don't deserve to vote. This might come up in a discussion of how much research voters have (or haven't) done, or their primary sources of information, or upon what they base their decision. Although I do prefer an intellectual approach to candidate evaluation, I dislike this sentiment for two reasons.

First, a voter's criteria are his or her own business. There is no real way to know exactly what is motivating your own decisions. There is no way to know which criteria are actually the most relevant or prescient to a given choice. And, the literature related to the wisdom of crowds has convincingly argued that the best choices often result from the conglomeration of many differing styles of decision-making.

Second, a vote is the first step towards a more intellectual life. No one should be discouraged from taking that step, or excused from the moral imperative to do so.

The other common opinion with which I take issue is the notion that if you don't vote, you should refrain from commenting about the outcome. These are two of the most important rights that our government seeks to preserve, and while they are somewhat related, putting one before the other is an irrelevant restriction that has no place in a constructive approach to civic participation in government.

Some non-voters live in districts where a vote doesn't matter, or perform responsibilities that enable others to vote (such as babysitting so parents can vote, or selling coffee so that voters can wake up early to vote). Some would vote but get overwhelmed by the logistical responsibilities at the last minute. And others have no intention to vote, and no particular excuse or rationale. In the name of embracing freedom, I think we ought to accept all of these choices without prescribing restrictions on what non-voters can or cannot sensibly do.

In the same way that a smart person can do a dumb thing, a non-voter can exhibit a wise opinion about our government. Indeed, there may be many cases where a citizen's self-exclusion from the process helps them see factors or phenomena to which others are blind. Another important possibility to consider is that a non-voter's opinion may be wiser than he or she realizes, or difficult for him or her to fully express. Since the process can benefit from sharing these opinions with other voters, please don't discourage non-voters from sharing.

In the same sense that a vote might be the first step in a life of public service, a complaint could be the first step in a journey to the booth. Don't be fooled into thinking that skipping certain opportunities to vote indicates that an individual is not, nonetheless, on that path! I believe in encouraging people to vote while forgiving any failure to do so, and frankly I don't know if I see any need to even ask whether someone has voted, or to truthfully report whether you yourself have. Clearly, one of the tenets that make elections work is the privacy of details about whether you have voted, and for whom.

Imagine one campaign volunteer who constantly asks his friends whether they plan to vote and whether they have in the past, and another who simply assumes that all of her

friends will vote. Rational minds could differ about which style would ultimately lead to better turnout. It may be worthwhile to consider the identity economics of the issue - the value one gets from their legitimate ability to claim "I vote", or alternately, the value one would lose by abandoning their identity as someone who does not vote.

Appendix B

Elections in African States

As of this writing, four African nations have recently removed dictators from power, and are forming new governments. Whether or not a given nation has any experience, recent or ancient, with democracy, it may be considered a stable and prudent choice for their new government. If this materializes, the democratic constitution is bound to be influenced by the numerous examples furnished by other nations around the world.

I wish to explicitly indicate that I consider expressive voting (letting voters choose more than one candidate) the best choice of voting systems. I think that choosing the expressive voting scheme outlined in this book would catapult a state to a functional, liberal, technocratic government in record time.

New democracies won't have the stability in philosophy, personnel, and culture that make it easier for candidates to become prominent - it's quite possible that early elections will be characterized by a large number and variety of candidates. Some will have better academic skill, and some better people skills. Some will have better language skills, and some better gravitas. It's going to be difficult to choose which skills are most relevant for the leader of the new government, and I think it's important to give the electorate the best tools for seriously considering the range of candidates. Clearly, this means expressive voting.

Appendix C

Expressive Voting in Legislative Bodies

Sometimes, a bill gets written or amended in such a way that it includes certain things which it would be better off without. A common example is allocating funds for a project in an unrelated bill that seems sure to pass.

It might be possible to use expressive voting to formulate a new way of voting on the amendments to a bill. That way, legislators could strive to promote the very best version of a bill - excluding sections that may be overzealous, or may compromise the bill's effectiveness (sabotage of this kind does happen during the amendment process).

What I have in mind is a system where each bill could be offered in multiple different versions. Legislators could vote for as many versions as they liked. The most popular one would then be put to a vote.

Laws, regulations, and official actions of a government are created in the form of bills, which are sometimes very long and complex, and may contain many details, many different sections, and may cover several different issues. Bills can be rewritten by committees and amended during debate, and often end up with "riders" that stipulate provisions for unrelated matters.

A single bill could encapsulate dozens of decisions, collectively accepted or rejected as a group. Certain laws do need to be written this way, but maybe there is a better way to amend them.

Currently, votes to amend are held entirely separately from votes on a bill, so a bill can get weakened on its way through the procedure. How this weakening happens is beyond the scope of this appendix, but it's related to the idea that if you attach funds for new retirement homes to a bill about aviation safety regulations, legislators who oppose the amendment will be subject to "he hates the grandmas!"-style slander by the press. Sometimes amendments pass, even absent any procedural or ethical funny business, that are just not good for the bill and end up hurting the people who are touched by it. The amendment process has these quirks - and sometimes the people writing the amendments probably don't know the subject matter as well as they think they do.

The other method of amending a bill is to write your own version of it. Often, two parties introduce their own versions of a bill, and then sometimes compromise on a third version of it. In theory, you could just write a new version and try to get it introduced in Congress and passed.

But, what if a form of expressive voting could be employed to compare differently-amended versions of a bill side-by-side, enabling legislators to selectively abandon the less-optimal ones based on the feasibility of success for a sensible version? What if.