

Why Do You Vote and Vote as You Do?

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper utilizes two unique surveys, sent to Swedish households, to shed light on the motives underlying why people choose to vote, why people vote as they do, and people's beliefs about why others vote as they do. Despite the fact that voting outcomes are essential for economic and social development, the motives for voting are still poorly understood. The conventional assumption in the rational actor analysis of voting is that people vote solely based on material self-interests. However, this assumption has been rather unsuccessful in explaining why people choose to vote, since the expected benefit from voting is small compared to the time cost and effort involved (for example, Aldrich, 1993; Green and Shapiro, 1994). Nevertheless, there is evidence that self-interested so-called pocketbook voting matters for how we vote; see, for example, Elinder et al. (2008) and Jordahl (2006) for evidence based on actual voting in Sweden. Yet, there is also a great deal of empirical evidence that we do not choose what party to vote for based solely on self-interest; see Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007), Matsusaka and Palda (1993), and Mueller (2003) for overviews.

An alternative to the rational and self-interested voter hypothesis is provided by the theory of expressive voting, suggested first by Buchanan (1954) and further developed and discussed by Tullock (1971), Brennan and Buchanan (1984), Brennan and Lomasky (1993), Brennan and Hamlin (1998, 2000), and Brennan (2008). Here people are mainly motivated by the expressive act of voting, that is, that there is a utility gain from expressing an opinion through voting. There is some empirical and experimental support for this hypothesis; see Carter and Guerette (1992), Eichenberger and Oberholzer-Gee (1998), Fischer (1996), Copeland and Laband (2002), Jones and Hudson (2000), Sobel

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and Wagner (2004), and Tyran (2004), although it is difficult to test the theory based on observed behavior.

A third explanation for voting is that people are socialized to vote, as noted already by Downs (1957). In the words of Tullock (2000, p. 181), a citizen 'will have been indoctrinated by the education process and by media hype into believing that it is important to vote in order to preserve democracy.' In other words, the social norm is that we should vote, and that it is blameworthy not to vote (Grossman and Helpman, 2001; Knack, 1992).¹ Various kinds of evidence support this hypothesis. For example, survey evidence by Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) and Blais (2000) suggests that individuals with strong feelings of civic duty are more likely to vote. Matsusaka and Palda (1999), on the other hand, find, based on a combination of survey and aggregate data, that it is difficult to explain a non-negligible part of the variation in the decision of whether or not to vote, despite having a large number of explanatory variables. They argue that this provides support for the rational voter model.

Experimental evidence by Grober and Schram (2006) suggests that voter turnout is affected by information regarding other voters' turnout decisions. Milligan et al. (2004) observed a causal relationship between education and voter turnout. One possible explanation to this is that higher education implies norm socialization. Gerber et al. (2008) provide a large-scale field experiment where people in a treatment group were informed that their voter turnout would be publicized to their neighbors. The voter turnout in the treatment group was substantially larger compared to the baseline treatment without any information to the neighbors. There is also a great deal of evidence in both psychology and economics that people like to conform to various pro-social norms, for example to contribute to a public good and to not litter, if they are aware that most other people conform to the same norms (for example, Alpizar et al., 2008; Brekke et al., 2002; Cialdini et al., 1990, 2006; Fischbacher et al., 2001; Frey and Meier, 2004).

The present paper is based on Swedish survey evidence where a representative sample was asked about their motives for why they vote and why they vote as they do, and about their beliefs regarding why others vote as they do. In addition, specific questions were asked with respect to possible social norms related to a duty to vote and to vote non-selfishly. The purpose of the paper is two-fold: (i) to contribute to our understanding of people's *perceptions* of why they vote, and of why they and others vote as they do, and (ii) to contribute to our understanding of why people *actually* vote, and why they vote as they do. Although related, these are different tasks.

1. There is also some experimental evidence of effects in the opposite direction, that is, that voting and/or the possibility to vote induces social norms in terms of cooperative behavior and tax compliance, see, for example, Alm et al. (1999), Feld and Tyran (2002) and Wahl et al. (2010).

The first aim is important since in a situation where the scientific community has not resolved the issues of why people vote, and vote as they do, it is of interest to compare the available scientific hypotheses with people's own perceptions of the motives. Moreover, since there is recent economics evidence that group identity can have a powerful effect on behavior (for example, Bernhard et al., 2006; Goette et al., 2006; and Chen and Li, 2009), it is interesting to measure the role of group identity and in-group bias when judging the voting motives of others.

When analyzing the second aim, we cannot simply assume that people's *actual* motives coincide with their *perceived* motives. For example, there is ample evidence from psychological research that people prefer to have a positive self image, and that they therefore systematically bias their own perception of themselves (for example, Taylor and Brown, 1994; Baumeister, 1998). Consequently, it is likely that people vote less for altruistic reasons than they perceive they do, and that expressed voting motives may in part be rationalizations (cf. Rahn et al., 1994).

In addition, deciding on whether and how to vote is generally cognitively demanding, suggesting that people may have difficulties explaining the actual processes underlying their behavior (cf. Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). Consistent with this, it seems that issues that we presumably are unaware of affect us to a non-negligible extent. For example, there is evidence that local or regional policy makers are more likely to be re-elected when the national or global economy is booming (Ebeid and Rodden, 2006; Leigh, 2009) and that people are more likely to vote for good-looking than for not so good-looking politicians (Berggren et al., 2010; King and Leigh, 2009). There is also, mainly survey-based, evidence that people tend to vote for candidates who are similar to themselves; see for example Campbell et al. (1960) and McDermott (2009).

Despite the fact that survey methodology often remains controversial within economics (for example Bertrand and Mullainathan 2001), we have at least three reasons to believe that it would be a mistake to disregard survey-based methods when analyzing the motives underlying voting behavior. First, we can analyze the results in light of available psychological research, including social identity theory, and hence to some extent adjust for, or at least reflect over, possible biases. Second, some of the questions are less associated with self-image. For example, we ask respondents what they think of people's perceptions of why others vote as they do. Third, alternative methods, such as relying on observed voting behavior, often have large identification problems. Still, we do not primarily see survey methodology as a substitute for other methods, but rather as a complement.²

2. The interest in using survey methodology has increased within many fields of economics in recent years. This includes happiness research (for example Di Tella et al., 2001, 2003; Luttmer, 2005),

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section II presents the surveys and descriptive statistics. Section III presents the analysis of why people vote, or why they say they vote. Most people seem to be motivated by more than one reason. Large majorities find it important to vote in order to affect the outcome, because it is a democratic obligation to vote, and because they want to express their political views. Section IV analyzes why people vote as they do and their beliefs about why others vote as they do. While most respondents say that they and others vote as they do both because of self-interest and because of conviction, people generally believe that they themselves vote less selfishly than do others. This is consistent with the hypothesis that people wish to give a good impression and wish to have a self-image of being a good person. Moreover, people tend to believe that others with similar political views as themselves vote less selfishly than do people with the opposite political views, which is consistent with social identity theory. Section V analyzes more directly the perceived strength of social norms, that is, the perception of how bad it is not to vote and to vote selfishly. The norm saying that it is bad not to vote appears to be much stronger than the norm against voting selfishly. For example, almost 80% consider it either unethical or very unethical not to vote because it takes too much effort. Women and older individuals are more affected by the norm saying that it is an obligation to vote. A majority believe it is unethical to vote for a certain party out of self-interest, although right-wing persons believe so to a lower extent. Section VI provides some concluding remarks.

II. THE SURVEYS AND DATA

The data reported in this paper comes from two different surveys administered by the authors. Survey 1 was mailed to 1,400 randomly selected individuals aged 18–75 years in Sweden in the spring of 2002; the response rate was 56%. Survey 2 was mailed to 2,450 randomly selected individuals aged 18–65 years in Sweden in the spring of 2004; the response rate was 45%. In both surveys, the political preferences of the respondents were assessed with a question about what political party they would vote for had there been an election that day. Survey 1 focused in particular on why people vote and inquired about how bad it is not to vote, while Survey 2 included specific questions on why people vote as they do.³

concerns about relative income (for example, Johansson-Stenman et al., 2002; Solnick and Hemenway, 2005), wage setting in labor economics (for example, Agell and Lundborg, 2003; Agell, 2004), trust and social capital (for example Knack and Keefer, 1997; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002), and preferences for redistribution (for example Fong, 2001; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005).

- Both surveys also included questions on other issues. In particular, Survey 1 asked about perceived trustworthiness of other people (see Johansson-Stenman, 2008), whereas Survey 2 asked about values, for example with respect to animal suffering. Moreover, the results from two voting questions from Survey 1 were briefly referred to in Johansson-Stenman and Martinsson (2005).

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Table 1

Distribution of Political Preferences for the Two Surveys.

Variable	Description	Survey 1	Opinion	Survey 2	Opinion
		n = 1092	polls 2002	n = 778	polls 2004
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
No opinion	1 if do not know	0.120		0.222	
Would not vote	1 if would not vote at all	0.046			
Blank	1 if would return a blank ballot	0.069			
Would vote for a party	1 if would vote	0.766		0.778	
Left Party	1 if would vote for Left Party	0.122	0.103	0.101	0.089
Green Party	1 if would vote for Green Party	0.056	0.042	0.056	0.051
Social democrats	1 if would vote for Social Democratic Party	0.302	0.390	0.352	0.368
Christian democrats	1 if would vote for Christian Democrats	0.061	0.101	0.078	0.056
Center Party	1 if would vote for Center Party	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.063
Liberal Party	1 if would vote for Liberal Party	0.121	0.082	0.051	0.120
Conservatives	1 if would vote for the Conservative Party	0.207	0.207	0.233	0.229
Other parties	1 if would vote for other parties	0.044	0.022	0.034	0.024
Middle parties	1 if would vote for center parties (Christian Democrats, Center Party or Liberal Party)	0.236		0.183	
Right-wing voters	1 if would vote for middle parties or the Conservative Party	0.443		0.416	
Left-wing voters	1 if would vote for Left party, Green Party or Social Democratic Party	0.481		0.509	

There are seven political parties in the Swedish Parliament, and the voting rate in Sweden is about 80% (SCB, 2007), which by international standards is high. The distributions of the political preferences for the two samples are reported in Table 1. Using data from all major opinion polls in Sweden during 2002 and 2004 (Temo, 2008), we also report the average support for each party.⁴ Note that the party level figures are conditional on voting, both for our

4. For 2002, we used 119 opinion polls and for 2004 we used 48 opinion polls. The reason why there were so many more opinion polls in 2002 is that it was an election year. The average numbers reported are simply the unweighted averages of the opinion polls. In most opinion polls, the question was about what political party they would vote for had there been an election that day.

surveys and for the opinion polls. There are two distinct groups of political parties in Sweden. One group consists of the center-right parties and include the Center Party, the Liberal party, the Christian Democrats and the Conservative Party (also known as the Moderates), where the Conservatives is the largest and most right-wing party. It is more difficult to order the Center Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats on a left-right scale. The other group comprises the left-wing parties, that is, the Social Democrats, the Left Party, and the Green Party. The Left Party is a former communist party, placing it to the left of the Social Democrats.

In both surveys, a smaller share of respondents support the Social Democratic Party compared with in the opinion polls. On the other hand, we have a larger share of respondents supporting the Left Party. This is most likely due to problems with representativity of our sample. In the econometric analysis, we group the respondents into various groups, as reported at the end of Table 1.

Table 2 gives a description of other socio-economic characteristics that we will use in the econometric analysis. Comparing the descriptive statistics of the two samples with the national statistics for the two years, we find that the shares of respondents who are women and/or who have at least three years of university education are significantly higher in our sample than in the

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the Two Surveys.

Variable	Description	Survey 1	Survey 2
		n = 1092	n = 778
		Mean	Mean
Age group < 30	1 if younger than 31	0.202	0.211
Age group 31–45	1 if age 31–45	0.277	0.305
Age group 46–60	1 if age 46–60	0.305	0.361
Age group >60	1 if older than 60	0.215	0.123
Female	1 if female respondent	0.550	0.528
Child(ren)	1 if at least one child under 18 in the household	0.357	0.338
Senior high	1 if completed senior high education	0.385	0.451
University education	1 if completed university education	0.407	0.352
Income	(Total monthly household income in 10,000 SEK)/ (number of adults + 0.5 × number of children) ^{0.75}	1.418 (std 1.172)	1.397 (std 1.466)
Religious	1 if religious	0.180	0.149
Small city	1 if living in a village with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, or in the countryside	0.319	0.320
Medium City	1 if living in a city with 15,000–120,000 inhabitants	0.412	0.413
Larger city	1 if living in a city with more than 120,000 inhabitants	0.255	0.252

population as a whole. We also have a significantly higher share of people in the oldest age group in both samples.⁵

III. WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE?

The literature presents three major competing hypotheses of why people vote: (1) An instrumental reason, that is, to affect the outcome (Black, 1948; Downs, 1957), (2) An expressive reason, that is, to be able to express one's views (Brennan and Buchanan, 1984; Brennan and Lomasky, 1993; Brennan and Hamlin, 1998, 2000), and (3) a social norm reason, that is, to conform to a norm saying that it is a democratic obligation to vote (for example Tullock, 2000). In order to discriminate among these, we asked straightforward questions about the perceived importance of different motives for voting, as shown in Table 3.

A first striking finding is that most people seem to be motivated by more than one reason, suggesting that the search for a single motive may be in vain. A large majority consider it important to vote in order to affect the outcome. This is interesting given the extremely small probability that the vote will be decisive. Quattrone and Tversky (1984) suggest the existence of a 'voter's illusion,' implying that people systematically overestimate the importance of their own vote for the outcome. However, there are other possible explanations. For example, even if people realize that their own impact on the outcome is negligible, they may still state that they vote in order to affect the outcome, perhaps because they want to express that they sympathize with the purpose of elections, that is, to affect the outcome. The democratic obligation motive, or the social norm motive, appears to be almost equally as strong. This can be compared to Brekke et al. (2002), who found that many people in Norway recycle in order to protect a positive self-image, despite no or poor financial incentives to do so; see also Brekke et al. (2007) for a potential explanation of variation in contribution to local public goods more generally based on social exclusion mechanisms. The expressive motive appears to be the least important of the three different motives. Based on pairwise Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney (WMW) tests (see Siegel and Castellan, 1988) between the motives, we can reject the hypotheses of equal distributions (p -values < 0.001). However, since more than 70% consider the expressive motive either important or very important, we can certainly not conclude that it is unimportant.

The differences between left- and right-wing voters are relatively small. Using a WMW test, we cannot reject the hypothesis of equal distributions

5. One thousand samples were bootstrapped by randomly drawing observations with replacement as many times as there are observations in the original sample. By using the percentile method and a 95% confidence interval, it can be shown whether the means significantly differ from each other at the 5% significance level.

Table 3

Self-Assessed Reasons for Voting: "There Can be Different Reasons to Vote. If You Intend to Vote in the Next Parliamentary Election, Please Answer How Important the Following Motives Are For Why You Intend to Vote."

	Completely unimportant	Unimportant	Important	Very important
	<u>All respondents (n=918)</u>			
Because I want to affect the outcome	2%	5%	28%	65%
Because I want to express my political views	7%	22%	33%	38%
Because it is a democratic obligation to vote	5%	8%	27%	60%
	<u>Right-wing voters (n=341)</u>			
Because I want to affect the outcome	1%	4%	24%	71%
Because I want to express my political views	5%	17%	35%	42%
Because it is a democratic obligation to vote	5%	7%	27%	60%
	<u>Left-wing voters (n=359)</u>			
Because I want to affect the outcome	1%	3%	28%	68%
Because I want to express my political views	8%	22%	32%	41%
Because it is a democratic obligation to vote	4%	6%	24%	67%

between these groups for any of the three questions at the 10% level. Thus, there is no indication that the reason for voting is fundamentally different between left- and right-wing voters.

To further explore the individual differences in the perceived importance of each of the three reasons for voting, we run separate regressions for each motive. Since the dependent variables are ordered categorically, it seems logical to use an ordered probit/logit model. However, a disadvantage with such an approach is that the parameters are not directly interpretable in terms of the magnitude of the effects on the dependent variable. Moreover, since the pattern in terms of parameter significance is almost the same in a simple OLS, we focus on the OLS estimates in this paper, and present the ordered probit estimates in the appendix (Table A1); marginal effects for the ordered probit regressions are available from the authors upon request. Table 4 presents the results of the OLS regressions.

There is a clear pattern with respect to age; compared to younger people, older people consider each of the motives to be more important. It also turns out that compared to men, women consider the first and the third motives to be more important. Both these results are consistent with the finding that there are positive correlations between gender and age and social preferences; see for example List (2004) and Andreoni and Vesterlund (2001). That university education has a positive influence on the importance of the instrumental reason suggests that the overall high expressed importance of this motive is not primarily due to an overestimation of the importance of a single vote. Instead, this finding may be a reflection of the previously found evidence that information about party politics has a positive causal effect on voter participation

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Table 4

OLS Regression on Self-Reported Reason For Voting; 1 = Completely Unimportant,
4 = Very Important.

	Because I want to affect the outcome		Because I want to express my political views		Because it is a democratic obligation to vote	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	3.395	0.000	3.142	0.000	3.207	0.000
Age group 31–45	0.017	0.807	0.008	0.935	0.248	0.004
Age group 46–60	0.100	0.110	0.154	0.082	0.081	0.315
Age group >60	0.197	0.009	0.325	0.003	0.209	0.028
Female	0.105	0.018	0.022	0.723	0.213	0.000
Child(ren)	– 0.026	0.652	– 0.133	0.097	– 0.132	0.068
Senior high	0.047	0.478	– 0.129	0.181	– 0.017	0.839
University	0.145	0.034	0.051	0.605	0.040	0.645
Income	– 0.011	0.568	– 0.032	0.229	0.027	0.257
Religious	0.017	0.768	0.205	0.013	– 0.055	0.452
Small city	– 0.002	0.977	– 0.077	0.300	– 0.145	0.027
Large city	– 0.095	0.080	– 0.027	0.733	– 0.086	0.215
Social democrats	0.101	0.154	– 0.066	0.512	0.233	0.010
Middle parties	– 0.029	0.703	– 0.115	0.283	0.029	0.759
Conservatives	0.199	0.010	0.031	0.774	0.069	0.486
Other parties	0.282	0.031	0.302	0.099	– 0.032	0.854
Blank vote	– 0.658	0.000	– 0.492	0.001	– 0.297	0.023
No opinion	– 0.171	0.043	– 0.509	0.000	– 0.171	0.113
Would not vote	– 0.089	0.741	– 0.996	0.008	– 0.757	0.043
R2	0.125		0.109		0.076	

(Strömberg, 2004). That older people and females to a larger extent feel it is a democratic obligation to vote is also consistent with the fact that voting rates are higher for older people and for females (SCB, 2007).

For political preferences, the reference group is supporters of the Left Party and the Green Party. Conservatives are less likely to vote in order to affect the outcome and social democrats are more likely to vote because it is a democratic obligation. Those who vote for *Other party*, that is, a party that most likely will not constitute a part of any government coalition, are more motivated by the expressive motive, which follows intuition. Otherwise, there are no large differences among the different groups. Not surprisingly, those who express that they would not vote, would vote blank, or have no opinion consider the importance of each motive to be less important than do others.⁶

6. One may of course doubt that self-reported voting intentions are accurate. However, we believe it is a reasonably good measure of voting intentions, although presumably a somewhat less good measure of actual voting turnout. There is evidence from the US of over-reporting of voting in surveys (for example, Harbaugh 1996). Yet, such over-reporting is presumably of smaller magnitude in mail-based questionnaires compared to personal or telephone interviews.

IV. WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE AS THEY DO?

Another controversial issue concerns the motives for why people vote as they do. There are mainly two competing hypotheses: (1) the self-interested (or pocketbook) voting hypothesis, suggesting that people mainly vote in their own self-interest (Downs, 1957), and (2) the sociotropic voting hypothesis, suggesting that people, out of conviction, vote in the interest of the society as a whole (for example, Sears et al., 1980, Sears and Funk 1990). It is inherently difficult to discriminate between these two motives since they tend to be correlated. However, some individual level analysis suggests that both of them do matter (see, for example, Fiorina, 1978; Markus, 1988).

People's perception of the reason why they themselves vote as they do is likely to be biased for self-signaling reasons (for example, Benabou and Tirole, 2004, 2006). That is, in a world where our self-knowledge is imperfect, and where we prefer to have a positive self-image, we may evaluate people who are similar to ourselves more positively, simply because by doing so we send positive signals to ourselves about our own characteristics. For example, if I consider people who are like me to be more trustworthy compared with others, I also implicitly signal to myself that I am more trustworthy than others; cf. Johansson-Stenman (2008). For this reason, we also asked about the respondents' beliefs regarding why others vote as they do. In order to be able to test for an in-group bias, we also asked about people's perceptions of the voting motive among others with a specific political view, as shown in Table 5. According to social identity theory, one important reason why people display in-group bias is that it enhances social identity,⁷ thereby elevating the self-esteem or self-image of group members (for example, Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Indeed, there is recent empirical evidence that group identity can have a powerful effect on behavior. For example, Goette et al. (2006) analyze the effects of group membership in a prisoner's dilemma game based on natural groups, in terms of platoons in the Swiss army, and find more cooperation with in-group than with out-group members. Chen and Li (2009) induce group identities based on the experimental subjects' art preferences, and consistently find subjects to be more altruistic toward an in-group than an out-group match.

As can be seen in Table 5, people make a clear distinction between why they themselves vote as they do and why other people vote as they do. Generally, people believe that they themselves vote less selfishly than do others; the hypothesis of equal distributions can be strongly rejected based on a WMW test (p -value < 0.001). This is consistent with the hypothesis that people wish to give

7. Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defines social identity as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.'

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Table 5

Stated Reasons Why Different Individuals Vote as They Do: Self-Interest vs. Conviction.

	Mostly self-interest	Own interest, but partly conviction	Equally much	Conviction, but partly self-interest	Mostly out of conviction
		<u>All respondents (n=762)</u>			
Why do you vote as you do?	10%	23%	27%	22%	18%
Why do other people vote as they do?	20%	39%	19%	17%	6%
Why do conservatives vote as they do?	34%	35%	16%	10%	6%
Why do social democrats vote as they do?	15%	27%	24%	23%	11%
		<u>Right-wing voters (n=249)</u>			
Why do you vote as you do?	9%	26%	26%	23%	15%
Why do other people vote as they do?	17%	42%	18%	19%	5%
Why do conservatives vote as they do?	15%	41%	22%	14%	8%
Why do social democrats vote as they do?	16%	29%	21%	20%	13%
		<u>Left-wing voters (n=306)</u>			
Why do you vote as you do?	7%	23%	25%	25%	20%
Why do other people vote as they do?	19%	39%	21%	15%	6%
Why do conservatives vote as they do?	48%	32%	10%	7%	3%
Why do social democrats vote as they do?	10%	27%	26%	26%	10%

a good impression and wish to have a self-image of being a good person; see for example Kuran (1995). Still, in both cases, most of the respondents say that they and others vote as they do both because of self-interest and because of conviction.

We also find that people on average believe that those sympathizing with the Conservatives vote more in their own self-interest than do social democrats; using a WMW test, we can reject the hypothesis of equal distributions (p -value < 0.001). Interestingly, also right-wing voters believe that this is the case, although not to the same extent as left-wing voters, which corresponds to social identity theory. In fact, there is a significant difference between left- and right-wing supporters when it comes to believing why conservatives vote as they do (p -value < 0.001). However, there is no difference when it comes to why social democrats vote as they do (p -value = 0.152). These results are broadly consistent with the evidence by Anderson et al. (2004) suggesting that group identity may affect our interpretation and understanding of the world more generally; they used survey-based panel data to investigate people's change in perception of the British economy before and after the 1997 election. Those who voted for Labour and the Liberal Democrats perceived the past state of the British economy under the Tory government more negatively than they had prior to casting their ballot in the 1997 election. Table 6 reports regression results for each of the four questions. The dependent variables range from 1 (mostly self-interest) to 5 (mostly conviction). The results of the ordered probit regressions are presented in the appendix (Table A2).

Table 6

OLS Regression on Reasons to Vote for a Certain Party: Self-Interest Versus Conviction.
1 = Mostly Self- Interest, 5 = Mostly Out of Conviction.

	Why do you vote as you do?		Why do others vote as they do?		Why do conservatives vote as they do?		Why do social democrats vote as they do?	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	3.259	0.000	2.708	0.000	1.503	0.000	2.460	0.000
Age group 31–45	0.118	0.389	0.006	0.964	0.296	0.019	0.224	0.106
Age group 46–60	0.345	0.006	0.255	0.030	0.379	0.001	0.348	0.007
Age group >60	0.633	0.000	0.400	0.011	0.336	0.032	0.558	0.001
Female	– 0.163	0.075	– 0.089	0.295	0.013	0.877	0.009	0.925
Child(ren)	– 0.183	0.099	– 0.210	0.044	– 0.099	0.335	– 0.072	0.520
Senior high	0.028	0.829	– 0.143	0.226	0.243	0.039	0.139	0.281
University	0.148	0.278	– 0.186	0.143	0.222	0.079	0.123	0.374
Income	0.002	0.950	– 0.030	0.404	0.001	0.984	– 0.032	0.321
Religious	0.302	0.021	0.193	0.114	0.003	0.981	– 0.135	0.306
Small city	– 0.029	0.785	– 0.066	0.510	– 0.064	0.520	– 0.030	0.783
Large city	0.259	0.024	0.109	0.311	– 0.079	0.455	0.135	0.247
Social democrats	– 0.340	0.022	– 0.140	0.318	– 0.033	0.812	0.288	0.058
Middle parties	– 0.419	0.014	– 0.091	0.572	0.500	0.002	0.189	0.280
Conservatives	– 0.627	0.000	– 0.091	0.549	0.802	0.000	– 0.049	0.767
Other parties	0.233	0.456	– 0.255	0.357	0.270	0.326	– 0.146	0.633
No opinion	– 0.563	0.000	– 0.118	0.417	0.266	0.066	– 0.006	0.970
R2	0.086		0.049		0.093		0.035	

If we compare the first two questions, we see that the effects of socio-economic characteristics are similar with the exception of political preferences. For example, older people to a larger extent claim that they and others vote as they do because of conviction. We also see that females are more likely to state that they vote for a particular party because of self-interest. This is somewhat surprising, in particular since we found that women are more likely to choose to vote because it is a democratic obligation. We will come back to this issue and possible explanations in Section V.

Respondents with at least one child in the household are more likely to vote as they do because of self-interest, and they believe that others are more likely to vote as they do because of self-interest as well. Compared with the reference group (Left and Green Party supporters), conservatives to a larger extent claim that they themselves vote according to self-interest. The same holds for social democrats and supporters of the middle parties, but to a lesser extent. However, there are no significant differences among voters regarding their perception of why others vote as they do.

Older people also to a larger extent than others think that both conservatives and social democrats vote as they do as a result of conviction. Not surprisingly, given social identity theory and potential self-signaling, conservatives to a

larger extent than others believe that conservatives vote as they do because of conviction, and social democrats to a larger extent than others believe that social democrats vote as they do because of conviction.

V. HOW BAD IS IT TO VOTE SELFISHLY OR NOT VOTE AT ALL?

Since we have observed that social norms affect the decision to vote, it is natural to look into the perceived strengths of these social norms for different people, and to compare the perceived strengths of different norms. In this section, we analyze two social norms. The first relates to the cost of voting, and we asked in the survey, ‘How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?’ This norm relates to the main problem with the standard rational voter model when it comes to explaining why people vote when the cost exceeds the instrumental benefit. The second norm relates to self-interest, and we asked, ‘How bad is it to vote for a party out of self-interest?’

As can be seen in Table 7, the norm saying that it is bad not to vote appears to be much stronger than the norm against voting selfishly. Indeed, a large majority, almost 80%, consider it either unethical or very unethical not to vote because it takes too much effort. More left-wing voters than right-wing voters feel it is very unethical not to vote, and the difference is significant based on a WMW test (p -value = 0.019). A majority feel it is unethical to vote for a certain party out of self-interest, although most find this less unethical than not voting at all. Right-wing persons perceive selfish voting as less unethical than do left-wing voters. We can again reject the hypothesis of equal distributions between right- and left-wing voters based on a WMW test (p -value = 0.002).

Table 8 reports regressions for both questions. The scale of the dependent variable ranges from 1 (not unethical at all) to 4 (very unethical). The results of

Table 7
Stated Views on Not Voting and Voting in Self-Interest.

	Not unethical at all	Somewhat unethical	Unethical	Very unethical
	All respondents ($n=1076$)			
How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?	8%	13%	24%	54%
How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	29%	17%	26%	28%
	Right-wing voters ($n=366$)			
How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?	7%	11%	27%	55%
How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	32%	17%	26%	26%
	Left-wing voters ($n=398$)			
How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?	6%	11%	18%	65%
How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	23%	17%	26%	34%

Table 8

OLS Regression on Stated Views on Not Voting and Voting in Self-Interest.
1 = Not Unethical at All, 4 = Very Unethical.

	How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?		How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	3.200	0.000	2.416	0.000
Age group 31–45	0.173	0.062	0.171	0.123
Age group 46–60	0.124	0.148	0.352	0.001
Age group >60	0.322	0.001	0.795	0.000
Female	0.159	0.008	0.274	0.000
Child(ren)	– 0.034	0.654	– 0.038	0.676
Senior high	0.053	0.536	– 0.061	0.549
University	– 0.101	0.258	– 0.120	0.261
Income	0.048	0.072	0.016	0.610
Religious	– 0.097	0.210	0.252	0.007
Small city	– 0.018	0.790	0.087	0.291
Large city	0.006	0.934	– 0.075	0.398
Social democrats	– 0.072	0.465	– 0.295	0.013
Middle parties	– 0.206	0.050	– 0.357	0.005
Conservatives	– 0.114	0.290	– 0.573	0.000
Other parties	– 0.262	0.148	– 0.870	0.000
Blank vote	– 0.250	0.063	– 0.251	0.119
No opinion	– 0.374	0.001	– 0.478	0.000
Would not vote	– 1.192	0.000	– 0.645	0.001
R2	0.093		0.116	

the ordered probit regressions, which are again qualitatively very similar, are presented in the appendix (Table A3).

There is a large effect of belonging to the oldest age group, suggesting that people older than 60 consider it more unethical than do younger people not to vote. This is consistent both with the fact that voting rates are higher for older people (SCB, 2007) and with experimental evidence suggesting that young men tend to be more selfish than others (List, 2004). Similarly, female respondents more than men feel it is unethical not to vote, and they too have a higher voting rate than their reference group (men) (SCB, 2007). Not surprisingly, respondents who would not vote or have no opinion consider it less unethical not to vote. Finally, there is a weak effect suggesting that respondents with higher incomes feel it is more unethical not to vote than do others. This is consistent with evidence that the voting rate increases with income (SCB, 2007).

Compared to younger people and men, older people and women also consider it more unethical to vote for a certain party for selfish reasons. The latter may appear inconsistent with the results in Table 6, which suggest that

women are more likely than are men to state that they vote for a particular party because of self-interest. One possible explanation to this may be that some women experience that they are discriminated against, and hence feel it is morally acceptable for them to vote for selfish reasons, but not in general. Compared to non-religious people, religious people (primarily Christians) also consider selfish voting more unethical. With respect to political preferences, we see a clear pattern that the more right-wing a person is, the less unethical he/she will perceive selfish voting to be (the Left Party is the base case). Those who would not vote or have no opinion consider it to be about equally unethical to vote selfishly as do voters for the Conservative party.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has analyzed people's *perceptions* regarding why they choose to vote and why they vote as they believe they do, and why they believe other people vote as they do. Our basic findings are that people perceive there are several reasons why they choose to vote. Women and older people appear to be more strongly affected than are men and younger people by social norms saying that one ought to vote and that one ought not to vote for a certain party for selfish reasons.

It is arguably difficult to analyze motives, and the survey-based method used here is certainly not without problems. Still, we argue that there are no, or at least very few, strategic reasons (except for those based on self-signaling) for respondents not to report truthfully. Thus, we argue that there is probably very little bias with respect to people's subjectively perceived motivations. However, this does not imply that those subjectively perceived motivations are necessarily good measures of people's true, and partly unconscious, underlying motives for their actual voting behavior. Indeed, we found strong evidence of self-serving bias, or self-deception, both at the individual and group levels. We observe both that people believe that they themselves more than others vote in the interest of society and less based on self-interests, and that people supporting the same political party as themselves more than others vote in the interest of society. The latter is consistent with the predictions of social identity theory as outlined by Tajfel and Turner (1986). We believe that these findings are important in their own right.

Furthermore, we believe that our findings are informative also with respect to people's *actual* voting motives, although we have less confidence regarding the magnitudes here. It seems clear that people in general tend to have more than one voting motive, and that non-negligible fractions are motivated, to a varying degree, by self-interest, social norms, and desire to express an opinion, both with respect to why they vote at all and why they vote as they do.

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APPENDIX I

Table A1

Ordered Probit on Self-Reported Reason for Voting; 1 = Completely Unimportant,
4 = Very Important.

	Because I want to affect the outcome		Because I want to express my political views		Because it is a democratic obligation to vote	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	1.921	0.000	1.745	0.000	1.399	0.000
Age group 31–45	0.021	0.871	0.024	0.838	0.300	0.016
Age group 46–60	0.200	0.098	0.189	0.082	0.110	0.338
Age group >60	0.402	0.008	0.412	0.002	0.314	0.024
Female	0.210	0.015	0.049	0.532	0.310	0.000
Child(ren)	– 0.045	0.673	– 0.174	0.074	– 0.167	0.109
Senior high	0.061	0.633	– 0.182	0.131	– 0.053	0.665
University	0.267	0.044	0.036	0.769	0.052	0.683
Income	– 0.021	0.564	– 0.040	0.207	0.041	0.258
Religious	0.082	0.483	0.258	0.013	– 0.074	0.483
Small city	0.002	0.988	– 0.093	0.308	– 0.187	0.050
Large city	– 0.156	0.141	– 0.043	0.653	– 0.083	0.418
Social democrats	0.165	0.231	– 0.096	0.441	0.360	0.007
Middle parties	– 0.073	0.615	– 0.147	0.268	0.000	0.998
Conservatives	0.444	0.004	0.036	0.792	0.125	0.383
Other parties	0.628	0.027	0.400	0.091	0.017	0.947
Blank vote	– 0.890	0.000	– 0.573	0.001	– 0.380	0.035
No opinion	– 0.320	0.040	– 0.602	0.000	– 0.245	0.106
Would not vote	0.017	0.975	– 1.197	0.008	– 0.919	0.053
Threshold param 1	0.663	0.000	0.996	0.000	0.519	0.000
Threshold param 2	1.875	0.000	1.914	0.000	1.453	0.000
Pseudo R2	0.065		0.045		0.039	

WHY DO YOU VOTE AND VOTE AS YOU DO?

Table A2

Ordered Probit on Reasons to Vote for a Certain Party: Self-Interest Versus Conviction.
1 = Mostly Self-Interest, 5 = Mostly Out of Conviction.

	Why do you vote as you do?		Why do others vote as they do?		Why do conservatives vote as they do?		Why do social democrats vote as they do?	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	1.435	0.000	1.040	0.000	-0.244	0.206	0.679	0.000
Age group 31-45	0.111	0.354	-0.021	0.861	0.237	0.052	0.194	0.100
Age group 46-60	0.308	0.005	0.230	0.036	0.328	0.004	0.294	0.007
Age group >60	0.557	0.000	0.344	0.019	0.294	0.052	0.481	0.001
Female	-0.140	0.079	-0.067	0.401	0.009	0.914	0.013	0.871
Child(ren)	-0.155	0.110	-0.202	0.038	-0.066	0.503	-0.059	0.539
Senior high	0.019	0.862	-0.109	0.327	0.264	0.022	0.124	0.261
University	0.124	0.298	-0.137	0.249	0.273	0.027	0.121	0.304
Income	0.003	0.910	-0.031	0.365	0.005	0.859	-0.029	0.306
Religious	0.271	0.018	0.183	0.107	-0.008	0.943	-0.111	0.324
Small city	-0.024	0.795	-0.055	0.553	-0.067	0.482	-0.016	0.866
Large city	0.238	0.018	0.128	0.202	-0.065	0.524	0.135	0.174
Social democrats	-0.304	0.020	-0.120	0.355	-0.043	0.754	0.246	0.056
Middle parties	-0.383	0.011	-0.063	0.675	0.555	0.000	0.160	0.281
Conservatives	-0.552	0.000	-0.098	0.491	0.767	0.000	-0.042	0.764
Other parties	0.243	0.396	-0.285	0.275	0.185	0.497	-0.165	0.535
No opinion	-0.503	0.000	-0.128	0.346	0.274	0.051	-0.012	0.928
Threshold param 1	0.883	0.000	1.077	0.000	0.963	0.000	0.855	0.000
Threshold param 2	1.604	0.000	1.635	0.000	1.518	0.000	1.473	0.000
Threshold param 3	2.305	0.000	2.506	0.000	2.106	0.000	2.293	0.000
R2	0.029		0.017		0.037		0.012	

Table A3

Ordered Probit on Stated Views on not Voting and Voting in Self-Interest.
1 = Not Unethical at all, 4 = Very Unethical.

	How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?		How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Constant	1.450	0.000	0.516	0.001
Age group 31-45	0.226	0.046	0.175	0.111
Age group 46-60	0.164	0.117	0.342	0.001
Age group >60	0.389	0.002	0.773	0.000
Female	0.197	0.008	0.273	0.000
Kids	-0.049	0.605	-0.048	0.597
Senior high	0.047	0.663	-0.076	0.449
University	-0.138	0.219	-0.124	0.238
Income	0.063	0.085	0.021	0.535
Religious	-0.121	0.207	0.243	0.008
Small city	-0.007	0.932	0.085	0.300
Large city	0.007	0.941	-0.079	0.365
Social democrats	-0.091	0.476	-0.302	0.010

Table A3. (Contd)

	How bad is it not to vote because it takes too much effort?		How bad is it to vote for a party only out of self-interest?	
	Coeff	P-value	Coeff	P-value
Middle parties	- 0.293	0.029	- 0.370	0.003
Conservatives	- 0.184	0.184	- 0.573	0.000
Other parties	- 0.324	0.155	- 0.878	0.000
Blank vote	- 0.396	0.016	- 0.276	0.080
No opinion	- 0.495	0.001	- 0.484	0.000
Would not vote	- 1.308	0.000	- 0.632	0.001
Threshold param 1	0.651	0.000	0.495	0.000
Threshold param 2	1.389	0.000	1.249	0.000
Pseudo R2		0.039		0.044

SUMMARY

The conventional rational voter model has problems explaining why people vote, since the costs typically exceed the expected benefits. This paper presents Swedish survey evidence regarding i) Why people vote, ii) Why people vote as they do and their beliefs about why others vote as they do, and iii) How bad not voting and voting selfishly are perceived to be. Large majorities find it important to vote in order to affect the outcome, because it is a democratic obligation to vote, and because they want to express their political views. While most respondents say that they and others vote as they do both because of self-interest and because of conviction, people generally believe that they themselves vote less selfishly than do others, consistent with the hypothesis that people wish to have a self-image of being a good person. Moreover, people tend to believe that others with similar political views as themselves vote less selfishly than do people with the opposite political views, which is consistent with social identity theory. The norm saying that it is bad not to vote appears to be much stronger than the norm against voting selfishly. Women and older individuals are more affected by the norm saying that it is an obligation to vote. A majority believe it is unethical to vote for a certain party out of self-interest, although right-wing persons believe so to a lower extent.