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Research Announcement

Evolution & Voting: How Nature Makes us Public Spirited

John Conley
University of Illinois

Myrna H. Wooders
University of Warwick

Ali Toossi
University of Illinois

Abstract

If one assumes that voters are rational, the most plausible explanation for high voter turnouts seems to be that agents receive benefits from the act of voting itself. We show that public-spirited agents have an evolutionary advantage over those who are not as public-spirited for a range of situations. We also explore conditions under which this kind of altruistic behavior is disadvantageous to agents. The details depend on the costs of voting, the degree to which different types of agents have different preferences over public policies and the relative proportions of various preference types in the population. We conclude that evolution may often be a force that causes agents to internalize the benefits their actions confer on others.

Completed draft available on request from:

John Conley
University of Illinois
jconley@uiuc.edu

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