

Chapter 5

VOTER-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the guiding assumptions of the REDEM project was that shifting the study of the ethics of voting to a voter-centred perspective improves our understanding of the ethical challenges and moral dilemmas facing European voters and opens new avenues of electoral institutional design to mitigate them.¹ The present chapter substantiates this assumption by pursuing the following three aims:

1. To describe ethical considerations relevant to voting choices, including reasons relevant to whether one votes as well as to how one votes;
2. To describe and illustrate how a shift of focus to a voter-centred perspective allows us to appreciate a wider range of ethical considerations;
3. To compare these to the ethical considerations that elitist or pluralist approaches to electoral democracy can account for, as well as describing and analyzing the differences between the former approaches, on the one hand, and a voter-centred perspective, on the other.

This chapter also serves two more general purposes. On the one hand, its findings provide normative input into the ethical burden that European political and electoral systems currently impose on voters. On the other hand, it provides academic input into democratic citizenship education, sensitising young and future voters to the ethical complexity of the choices they may face, and to the skills and attitudes necessary “to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life” (Kerr 2013, p. 13).

¹ “Ethical” and “moral” will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section 2 lays out the methodological approach of the present chapter. In Section 3, competitive elitist approaches to democracy – the politician-centred perspective and the party-centred perspective – are reviewed as relevant alternatives to the voter-centred perspective in the focus of this chapter. These perspectives are significant, on the one hand, as they emphasize aspects of the empirical reality of modern democracies that all political and ethical theories of voting must take account of. Competitive elitist approaches are significant, on the other hand, in their normative deficiencies, as they underestimate the moral significance of both the individual voter’s perspective and her embeddedness into various communities. In Section 4, elements of the voter-centred perspective are outlined and their respective ethical significance from the voter’s perspective is described in detail. Section 5 concludes.

Within this perspectival survey – the backbone of which is Section 4 – the following sources of ethical challenges are discussed. First, moral issues related to multiple functions and aspects of electoral representation – including accountability, selection, authorization, descriptive representation and tensions between these functions that voters need to grapple with – are surveyed. Second, different moral or morally significant grounds – including justice, the common good, and self-interest – are mapped out which provide reasons for voters to vote, or vote for a particular option, and potential sources of conflict between these as well as potential strategies to resolve them are explored. Third, the ethical significance of communities and identities for electoral choices is outlined, with a focus on the ethical challenges of multiple group membership and intersectional identities, on the one hand, and religious voting, on the other. Fourth, the special ethical challenges that arise from the existence of persistent minorities – both for their members and for other voters – are reviewed. Fifth, ethical challenges regarding sincere or strategic (tactical) voting are discussed, as well as the relationship between these approaches and instrumentalist v. expressive conceptions of the normative significance of voting. Sixth, the concept and role of political judgment in navigating the complex ethical considerations laid out earlier is described. Seventh, specific moral considerations relevant to voters’ judgment as to whether to participate in elections or abstain from them are mapped out.

2. APPROACH

The politician-centred, party-centred and voter-centred ‘perspectives’ in the focus of this chapter are *ideal types*. These perspectives neither correspond to particular philosophical ‘conceptions’ of democracy (see more on these in (Häggrot, 2023)), nor do they exactly line up with so-called ‘models’ of democracy in political theory (Held, 2006; on ‘models’ in political theory, see Johnson, 2014). This chapter integrates insights from various conceptions and models of democracy in a way which allows us to appreciate how a shift of focus from other political actors’ perspectives – notably, politicians and political parties – to the voter’s moral outlook enriches the democratic political ethics of voting. The presentation and comparison of the different perspectives collects theoretical insights and ideal typical tenets of conceptions and models of democracy which pay particular attention to the role of politicians, political parties, and voters, respectively. Thus, proponents of several (even if clearly not all) conceptions and models of democracy may rely on the insights of this chapter.

This chapter relies on the following methodological assumptions:

a) *Ideal vs. non-ideal theory*: A bulk of the work on philosophical democratic theory informing this project has been presented as a contribution to so-called “ideal theory”: the part of political philosophy which specifies ideal social and political institutions, and the rights and duties of institutional actors as well as properly motivated citizens acting within the context of such institutions.² “Non-ideal theory”, by contrast, specifies the rights and duties of institutional actors as well as citizens among circumstances that are potentially far removed from any moral or political ideal, without assuming citizens to be properly motivated. (On the distinction, see Rawls, 1971: 8-9, 142ff.; Swift, 2008; Simmons, 2010; Sen, 2011; Schmitz, 2011; Valentini, 2012; Gaus, 2016; Volacu, 2018.³) Voters in current European democracies face a variety of ethical challenges. Some of these would or could be present in ideal democracies too because they are inherent in the ideal of democracy, whereas others are specifically non-ideal challenges brought about by a morally problematic institutional or social context. Accordingly, the voter-centred perspective to electoral democracy sheds light on some elements of ideal as well as non-ideal theory.

Further, this chapter relies on the assumption that democratic ideals should also inform the design of electoral institutions in non-ideal circumstances. It is acknowledged, though, that different non-ideal circumstances allow for the joint realization of different sets of democratic values and principles. A voter-centred perspective on institutional design enriches our understanding of both ideal and non-ideal democratic theory and political ethics.

b) *Grounded political theory, ‘bottom-up’ theorizing*: A full exploration of the voter-centred perspective must rely on a mutually beneficial interaction between the normative disciplines of political philosophy, philosophical ethics and political theory, on the one hand, and comparative, empirical, descriptive political science, on the other. REDEM is guided by the methodological assumption that a more fine-grained descriptive understanding of particular political institutional environments from the voter’s perspective also provides valuable input into revising our normative theories of voting, over and above allowing for a more nuanced application of pre-determined normative principles. Additionally, the “from below” perspective assumed also allows us to explore and appreciate novel normative concerns that have been unexplored or underemphasized so far. Taking seriously the various considerations that arise for voters situated in particular institutional and social circumstances – as evidenced by empirical political science research as well as philosophical intuition – can provide more nuances to the ethics of voting as well as finer grained guidance for the design of electoral institutions. This assumption places REDEM on the map of the methodological approach recently referred to as “grounded political theory” (Ackerly et al., 2021).

² The term “citizen” is simply used as a shorthand to refer to “an individual who is or should be eligible to vote” throughout this chapter. This usage merely serves expository ease and should not be understood as restricting the *demos* or the boundaries of the political community to those who are (legally speaking) its citizens.

³ The ideal / non-ideal labels have grown to cover a number of rather different distinctions. Valentini (2012) provides a fine-grained conceptual mapping. For the purposes of this chapter, the above rough distinction suffices.

- c) *The relationship between the institutional theory and political ethics of democracy:* This chapter assumes that there are close links between normative theorizing about democratic institutions, on the one hand, and the normative political ethics of voting in a democracy. The political philosophy of democracy prescribes or at least supports certain institutional features over others. The institutional features of a particular democratic polity, in turn, play a crucial role in determining the moral situation of the voter: her reasons to participate or abstain (cf. Beerbohm, 2012; Jacob, 2015; Saunders, 2012), the particular moral dilemmas she faces as a voter, and her reasons to engage in sincere or strategic voting (cf. Geisz 2006, Mark et al. 1994, Miller 2010, Saward, 2021; Schwartz 2010, Wolff 1994).

The ethics of voting, in this sense, is dependent on and forms part of institutional democratic theory. On the one hand, the institutional arrangements justified by the latter determine, to a vast extent, the factual circumstances of the voter. For example, the extent of opportunities to engage in strategic voting may depend on the voting system a voter faces: first-past-the-post systems may be more prone to strategic voting than proportional representation systems with low electoral threshold (cf. Eggers and Vivyan, 2020; Looney and Werner, 2020; Selb, 2012).

On the other hand, the ethics of voting may, to some extent, be guided by the self-same values which guide the design of democratic institutions. For instance, if representativeness is valuable, citizens should also give due consideration to the candidates' gender when they make their electoral choice (cf. Campbell et al. 2010, Ceva and Zuolo, 2013; Dovi, 2007; Mansbridge, 1999; Mráz, 2021; Phillips 1998). Or, if public reasoning features in the justification of democracy (Richardson, 2003), we may want to require citizens to provide reasons for their electoral choices (Vandamme, 2018). Thus, the ethics of voting can benefit from a closer look at the institutional contexts in which voters' moral challenges arise, as well as from building on the normative outlooks supplied by democratic theories which primarily focus on institutional arrangements.

Second, attention to the ethical challenges of the voters specific to institutional arrangements can also guide theoretical progress in institutional democratic theory. The political theory of democratic institutions has often provided guidance to institutional choices based on highly abstract values and ideals, adopting a top-down methodology (Beitz, 1989; Christiano, 2008, cf. Wilson, 2019). This method has its limits, as it often cannot normatively guide fine-grained institutional choices - such as between presidential v. parliamentary systems, or proportional v. majority / plurality voting systems - within the set of permissible democratic arrangements. Furthermore, the merits and demerits of more fine-grained institutional choices can also be evaluated from the bottom up. The way these choices shape the moral reasons that bear on whether and how citizens should participate in the conduct of public affairs provides valuable considerations for fine-grained institutional choices. Hence, institutionally oriented democratic theory can also benefit from a closer look at the typical moral challenges that the ethics of voting attempts to make sense of, from a voter-centred perspective.

3. COMPETITIVE ELITIST APPROACHES TO DEMOCRACY

Competitive elitist approaches to democracy include politician-centred and party-centred perspectives on electoral democracy. Both perspectives are characterized by an almost exclusive attention to the normative features of the supply side of electoral competition, with very little focus on the demand side, i.e., the voter's perspective. These approaches are elitist insofar as they conceive of (if not celebrate) electoral democracy as a proper competition of qualified elites. They are technocratic insofar as this proper qualification often involves special expertise that citizens at large are not supposed to have.

3.1 Politician-Centred Perspective

The politician-centred perspective on electoral democracy puts the ethos of individual leadership at the centre stage of democratic political ethics. This perspective directs the attention of democratic theory to certain descriptive characteristics of modern democracies which may seem to warrant the displacement of the voter's perspective and the foregrounding of the politician's - candidate's, elected office holder's - perspective instead even in normative theorizing. A perfect example are Joseph Schumpeter's (1976 [1942]) widely quoted words, "democracy is the rule of the politician" (285). Democratic political ethics on a politician-centred perspective, therefore, looks at political choices and challenges as they affect the politician, and appear through his/her eyes.

The politician-centred perspective is no novelty in contemporary political theory. Early modern theories of political representation - most notably, Edmund Burke's theory of parliamentary representation (Burke, 1986 [1790]) - exemplify an obsession with individual judgment and political leadership as the primary virtues of a representative. The so-called trustee model of parliamentary representation (Pitkin, 1967: 127-131), originally rooted in Burke's theory, holds that the duty of representatives is to exercise their judgment in making the best decision for the political community as whole or for those represented, but it is not their duty to unconditionally obey instructions by their voters.

The expectation of exercising individual judgment, on this perspective, creates logical space for *ethical or moral dilemmas* to arise for elected politicians. Ethical dilemmas in political leadership are central in Max Weber's political ethics (see esp. Weber 1948 [1919]ab). Further, they are generally characteristic, central elements in the normative outlook of so-called 'realist' political theories. Such theories pay particular attention to the competitive nature of political pursuits, and to the diverse - including, emphatically, non-moral - motivations of political actors (Galston, 2010; Rossi and Sleat 2014). The politician-centred perspective is most successful in exploring and describing the nature of the ethical dilemmas that politicians routinely face.

Earlier work on ethical dilemmas in political leadership typically takes a value-pluralist and decisionist approach. It assumes that the values which bear on the politician's decisions and actions are irreducibly plural, and that there is no principled way to guide the politician's decision between them (Weber 1948 [1919]b). Value-pluralism and decisionism often give a tragic or existentialist hue to the moral situation of political leaders in the analysis of the politician-centred perspective (see Lukács, 1972 [1919], cf. Sartre 2012 [1943]). With a focus on ethical dilemmas, this perspective emphasises the immense moral burden on individual politicians as leaders, and de-emphasises the moral burdens carried by voters in a democracy.

The politician-centred perspective and its focus on ethical dilemmas also underline *prudence* (Gr. *phronesis*) or sound judgment as a crucial value in democratic political ethics (Ackerman 1991, Overeem and Bakker 2019, Philp 2007, Ruderman 1997). Prudence is a complex competence which allows the prudent person to *decide well*, especially in cases where different values in conflict bear on one's decision. Elected democratic leaders, just like political leaders more generally, may be praiseworthy on the politician-centred perspective if they exhibit this virtue.

Somewhat later work by so-called 'moralists' on ethical dilemmas in political leadership abandons the value-pluralist and decisionist approach of 'realists.' Moralism in political philosophy emphasizes the relevance of principled decision-making to the political sphere and its possibility therein (Kis, 2008). Moral dilemmas on this later approach involve values of the same sort on both sides of the scales, so to speak. They involve practically conflicting moral, deontological requirements. Related work concentrates primarily on the (im)permissibility of using certain morally prohibited means, when necessary, in pursuit of aims that are morally required to be pursued (e.g., Kis, 2008; McMahan, 2009; cf. Walzer, 1973). This approach accordingly somewhat underplays the role of individual judgment in leadership and aims to provide principled moral guidance for political decision-making in dilemmatic situations, as well as specifying duties of compensation to those harmed by such political decisions (Kis, 2008: 250-258).

The politician-centred perspective can also make sense of *accountability* practices in democracies. Elected office-holders, even for purely strategic reasons, cannot ignore that voters hold them to account for their past performance in periodic elections (Downs, 1957; Schumpeter, 1976 [1942]). Politicians and candidates compete for (re)election, which allows voters to exert a minimal control over who occupies elected offices. Thus voters' considerations cannot be entirely ignored in the politician-centred perspective. Yet this perspective instrumentalizes voters. Accountability, rather than a democratic value in and of itself, is a fact of political life on this approach - a strategic challenge that politicians need to live up to in order to gain or retain the political power necessary to realize *their own* political visions. Furthermore, together with a pessimistic outlook on how competently voters can participate in modern politics (Weber, 1948 [1919]a; Weber, 2019; Schumpeter, 1976 [1942]: 256-264; Held, 2006: 135, 144), voters are seen as not merely challenges but somewhat inconvenient obstacles to a more competent politics that politicians could pursue, were it not for the necessity to please the masses (cf. Caplan, 2008; Brennan, 2012, 2016). Voters, overall, are objects rather than subjects of democratic political life on the politician-centred perspective.

3.2 Party-Centred Perspective

Political parties - bureaucratically organized, institutionalized associations which specifically intend to bring their affiliates to power and help them keep it - did not figure in the political thought or constitutional imagination of early, 18th century parliamentary politics and republican ambition (Rosenblum, 2008). While factions - groups organized along shared political interests - were far from alien to republican politics already in the early days of the USA (in fact, they were one of Madison's chief concerns, see Madison 1999 [1787]), organized political parties which supply both ideology and organizational infrastructure are a newer - yet arguably global - phenomenon in modern mass democracies (Muirhead and Rosenblum,

2020), and are widely considered indispensable in contemporary democracies (Bryce, 1921: 134; Schattschneider, 1942: 1; Dalton, Farrell and McAllister, 2013).

As early as the first decades of the 20th century, political sociologists – most notably, Robert Michels (1962 [1915]) and Max Weber (1948 [1919]ab) – described what they saw as a new political reality of democracies. In this new reality, extending the franchise did not lead to mass participation truly formative of democratic politics. Instead, both winning elections in circumstances of mass politics and governing in a technologically increasingly complex world were seen to require increasing levels of expertise and bureaucratic organization. Political parties offered the necessary infrastructure to provide both, at the expense of the individual politician's significance. After the individual voter's perspective, the individual politician's perspective was accordingly also sidelined in both the descriptive political sociology and the normative political theory of the era, and it was taken over by a preoccupation with the role of political parties.⁴

Building on Max Weber's legacy, Joseph Schumpeter's (1976 [1942]) seminal work, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* further emphasizes the role of political parties on the political market as analogous to trade associations on the market. Parties exist to regulate (restrict) competition and provide infrastructure and resources for professional politicians (Schumpeter, 1976 [1942]: 283). Rather than facilitating deliberation on the common good, parties are manipulative and are driven by the career interests of politicians (ibid.). Unlike Weber, Schumpeter does not see these developments as compromising electoral democracy – instead, he considers them part and parcel of democratic politics.

The deprioritization of the voter's and politician's perspectives is also motivated on this approach by empirical insights into strong *party discipline*, especially in Westminster systems (Dimock, 2012; Thompson, 2015). Party discipline – the practice of coordinating, incentivizing and enforcing representatives to vote the party line on a given issue in the legislature – makes it irrelevant for voters to take into account certain moral considerations in their choice of representatives. For example, where party discipline is strong, voters' considerations regarding the character, competence or accountability, approachability of individual candidates may become practically inert or at least morally irrelevant for voters' choices. Individual elected office-holders become instruments of their political party rather than autonomous political agents who should or could be evaluated based on their individual merits or demerits.

This bleak picture of *individual* political participation – both on the demand (voter) and supply (candidate, representative) side, as it were – results in two significant tenets of the normative outlook of the party-centred perspective. First, this perspective envisions *a decline of the ethos of the individual politician*. Contrary to earlier theories of

⁴ Political theory and philosophy have recently shown a renewed interest in the normative significance of political parties, their internal organization, deliberative procedures and relations with the external political world (Rosenblum, 2008; Muirhead, 2014; Wolkenstein, 2016; Bonotti, 2017; White and Ypi, 2016). While this line of research is a crucial step for normative democratic theory, which has so far paid little attention to political parties, it should not be seen as the successor of the party-centred perspective on electoral democracy. The party-centred perspective comes with empirical and normative commitments that newer work on political parties need not and does not invariably share. Indeed, a better understanding of the normative significance of political parties, their internal procedures as well as external relations can contribute to the voter-centred perspective to be discussed below (See Section 4), and vice versa.

representation which emphasized the politician's individual judgment, prudence and virtue, as well as deliberative contributions to decisions about the common good, this perspective expects little from individual politicians, and just as little from deliberative parliamentary politics.

Second, this perspective *cannot make sense of the value and complexity of voter's party identification* and the ethical dilemmas it gives rise to. The voters' role is reduced on this perspective to accepting or rejecting a given party's ideological supply and candidate slate. Voters are mere political consumers serviced by parties. This account ignores that voters can also *identify* with a political party as a longer term commitment to their narrower community based on political ideology, or as a matter of family, class, ethnic, racial, historical, religious or other identity (Ansolabehere and Puy, 2016; Landa and Duell, 2015). Such identification implies that voters may not necessarily wish to switch political parties when they are dissatisfied with their party, but may want to reform it. Further, voters may face complex ethical dilemmas when they need to choose between *their* party and a political proposal they would prefer to that offered by their party. Finally, voters may have multiple identities, affiliating them with multiple political parties, and they may want to have that reflected in their votes.

3.3 Technocratic Rule and the Elitist Approaches

Both the politician-centred and the party-centred perspectives offer elitist and technocratic visions of democratic politics. Both the Weberian and the Schumpeterian accounts are committed to strong executive power and weak legislative representation. On the one hand, this is driven by the assumption that *legislatures*, once dominated by parties rather than autonomous individual politicians, can *no longer be loci of genuine deliberation and accountability*.⁵ On the other hand, the executive also gains dominance over the legislature on elitist approaches for a further reason: namely, the *increasing importance of bureaucratic, professionally run state apparatus* (see, e.g., Weber, 2019 [1921]). Legislatures are doubly limited in their ability to hold the executive accountable: party-based representation reduces the interest of legislative representatives to hold their fellow party-affiliates accountable, and they lack the expertise to exercise effective oversight over the complex and technical governance exercised by the executive in the modern state.

The focus on the technical aspects of government also results in the inability of these perspectives to appreciate the moral significance of *low levels of mass participation* (cf. Lijphart, 1997; Saunders, 2012). Politics is overwhelmingly about solving technical problems, as well as about the also heavily professionalized task of gaining political power. Therefore, these perspectives find little to object to in the low (and decreasing) quantity and quality of mass participation in electoral democracies seen all over Europe and North America in the past decades (see, e.g., Teixeira, 2011; Stockemer, 2017). The role of the electorate is to choose competent leaders, on the politician-centred perspective, or at least to remove manifestly incompetent leaders from office (on the party-centred perspective). This role is

⁵ In Schumpeter's (1976 [1942]) evocative formulation, "the role of the people is to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive or government" (269). It is the executive that matters, and not the legislative branch.

not affected, in Weber's and Schumpeter's view, by low levels of participation, whether in quantitative or qualitative terms.

As both the politician-centred and party-centred perspectives concentrate on the technocratic aspects of government, there is little room in these perspectives for morally more profound political and social conflict. The aims and moral constraints of politics are taken as a given; hence the focus on the technical aspects of government.⁶ Yet, without any attention to the relationship between moral and social conflicts, on the one hand, and democratic electoral politics, on the other, these perspectives are characterized by ethical short-sightedness. They eliminate voters' moral dilemmas from their descriptive and normative analysis, rather than providing guidance to solve them or adequately theorize them. Thus, their technocratic vision is one of misleadingly consensus-assuming politics.

The technocratic vision sees voters as mere instruments of political parties. Voters are not expected to play a more active role in democratic politics than to be mere loci of political pressure and manipulation. This vision is elitist insofar as it has no ethical component in its account of the electorate: voters have little responsibility in the democratic division of political labour, and only extremely weak political agency.

The politician- and party-centred perspectives see voters, as it were, from a *third-person perspective*. The voter's own first-person perspective matters little: the voter's own interpretation of political reality is seen as the mere product of successful political manipulation (Schumpeter, 1976[1944]), and her own moral phenomenology, i.e., what appear to be important moral considerations to her, is hence discounted or ignored as uninformative or outright inauthentic. Furthermore, the second-person perspective is also missing in both the politician- and the party-centred perspectives (on the second-person perspective more generally, see Darwall, 2009; for an application of the concept to democratic theory and democratic political ethics, see Beerbohm, 2015; Ceva and Ottonelli, 2022). The second-person perspective would involve politicians and / or parties morally addressing themselves to voters - in the form of making commitments or promises, accounting for past performance, or asking for forgiveness - and voters morally addressing themselves to politicians and / or parties by means of expressing their moral expectations, publicly holding them to account for breaking their promises or more generally for their past performance. The politician- and party-centred perspectives cannot make any sense of all this: they do not see these political actors as subjects of moral duties directed toward and generated by voters (cf. Cruft, 2019 on directed duties).

⁶ Some contemporary democratic theories such as Thomas Christiano's (1996) may agree that the moral aims and constraints of political action are set for the executive. However, that is because ultimately voters grapple with the moral and social conflicts in society - it is the resolution of such conflicts through deliberation and voting that yields the aims and constraints that the executive works with. By contrast, proponents of the politician-centred and party-centred perspectives expressly deny the role of voters as the ultimate suppliers of the aims and constraints of political action. The respective roles of voters and representatives in setting aims for political action are further complicated by the fact that legislatures, to a vast extent, make law by interpreting already existing law (e.g., constitutionally prescribed aims of state action, international human rights treaties etc.), rather than by exercising pure political will. For the implications of this fact for the moral powers of voters and legislative representatives to set the aims and constraints of political action, see Mráz (2022).

While the politician-centred and party-centred perspectives provide impoverished accounts of the democratic moral landscape, they offer important challenges of political sociology and economy that the ethics of voting in democracies must grapple with. The professionalization of political life, the increasing role of technology and expertise in contemporary welfare states, voters' low levels of politically relevant information and motivation to participate in democratic politics (see, e.g., Caplan, 2007), are all insights that a more voter-centred perspective may also recognize, yet with a critical edge and a call for institutional reform which mitigates these problems.

3.4 Pluralism: A Voter-Decentring Alternative to Elitist Approaches

Politician- and party-centred perspectives on electoral democracy were superseded as early as the 1950s and 1960s by so-called 'pluralist' perspectives. Pluralism can be seen as a version of elitism in so far as it shares the assumption of the party-centred perspective that it is ultimately organized groups who are the main agents of electoral democracy rather than voters. However, pluralism rejects the party-centred perspective as it underlines the plurality of the *type* of group agents who serve pivotal roles in democratic politics, including not only political parties, but also trade unions, industrial lobbies, religious or ethnic groups, women's or youth organizations, and so forth (Dahl 1956, esp. 146). Democratic politics is envisaged as an outcome of the clash of various interest groups that pressure government into accepting their agenda (ibid.). In this regard, pluralists foreshadow agonistic conceptions of democracy which also highlight the conflicting interests and group agents who play out these conflicts in politics as the central features of electoral democracy (see, e.g., Mouffe, 1999, 2000, 2016).

The pluralistic perspective provides a more nuanced account of the voter's moral situation than the competitive elitist perspectives, in at least three respects. First, pluralism expects political power to be exercised in parallel through *electoral and non-electoral channels of influence* (cf., Dahl 1956: 131). Accordingly, it acknowledges that voters may have to make choices regarding which collective agents they expect to be the more effective representative of their interests, such as political parties or trade unions, and which one(s) of these they devote their scarce time and other resources to in their efforts to get their voices heard and interests represented.

Second, voters may identify with several interest groups as well as political parties claiming to represent them. Thus, even within electoral politics, voters may need to make *compromises* given their *complex political identities*. On the one hand, not all political parties that a voter can identify with represent all the interests she wants to be represented in politics. On the other hand, some of the parties that a voter may identify with on certain grounds can have mutually conflicting agendas, and while one political party may openly strive to promote some of the interests of a given voter, it may at the same time work against some of her other interests. For example, a middle-class Roma woman voter who considers her class, ethnic background and gender all equally relevant to her political interests may often have a hard time choosing which one of these identities to prioritize as a voter (see also below, Sections 4.1.3 and 4.3.1).

Third, the pluralist perspective opens up debates about proper *representation*. Who is most qualified to represent certain interests of the voter? Whom should the voter have more reason to trust as a representative? The problem of complex political identities re-emerges

at this level too. Politicians and electoral candidates may also have complex identities, and voters may find some of these identities more important than others when selecting representatives. As these issues lead us on to the voter-centred perspective, related moral questions will be discussed in detail below, in Section 4.1.

4. THE VOTER-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE ON ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

In this section, elements of the voter-centred perspective are laid out: issues of representation, the diversity of adequate reasons for voting, the role of voters' identities in their moral outlook, the issue of persistent minorities, the intricacies of sincere vs. strategic (tactical) voting, the role of individual judgment in the ethics of voting, and dilemmas of abstention v. participation. These elements are focal points of moral thinking in the more recent literature on and relevant to the ethics of voting. While there are complex theoretical relationships between several of these elements, as will be pointed out below, each is them is discussed here as distinct and analytically independent from the other elements. Given a particular voter's specific situation, only some of these elements, or some combination of them, or potentially even all of them may be relevant to her moral outlook.

4.1 Representation

Electoral democracies today are representative democracies (Urbinati, 2006; Manin, 1997; Saward, 2010). Voters in elections do not directly vote on policy decisions, but elect candidates for offices, and see elected office-holders to represent them, better or worse (Rehfeld, 2018). Accordingly, the concept of representation (Pitkin, 1967; Mansbridge, 2011) and the normative requirements of representation (see, e.g., Dovi, 2007) are crucial elements of the voter-centred perspective. Voters ensure good representation mostly by balancing three considerations: holding representatives accountable for past performance, selecting candidates based on likely future plans and performance, and voting for candidates who share some relevant descriptive group characteristic with them. However, as shown below, these considerations may come into conflict with one another as well as with further ethical considerations, complicating the moral outlook of the voter.

4.1.1 Looking Backwards: Accountability

One of the key elements of representation, from the voter's perspective, is accountability. Elected office-holders are accountable to voters in at least two different senses. On the one hand, voters can expect elected office-holders, especially members of elected assemblies such as a parliament or municipal assembly, to account for their past political performance before the next election (Philp, 2009). In other words, voters are morally authorized to require those whom they already voted into power to explain and justify their political decisions to them before the next election. Campaigns largely serve this function, among others (Beerbohm 2012, 2015). When representatives shirk accountability in this sense, they can thereby complicate the moral perspective of voters who may thus need to make less informed choices or none.⁷

⁷ This sense of accountability may be held to apply not only to representatives vis-à-vis voters, but also to voters vis-à-vis fellow-voters. Those who argue against the secrecy of the ballot may subscribe to this conception of horizontal accountability (Brennan and Pettit, 1990; Engelen, 2013; Vandamme, 2018), while

On the other hand, incumbent elected office-holders are accountable to voters also in the more technical sense that voters can *hold them accountable* by re-electing them or by *sanctioning* them with removal from office (Schumpeter, 1976[1944], cf. Fumagalli, 2018). In electoral democracies, this sanctioning mechanism is one of the most significant ways in which voters – at least collectively – can exert control over the legislative and executive agenda, as already emphasized by the politician-centred perspective (see Section 3.1 above). Elections held periodically, at reasonable intervals, serve to retain this electoral control (Bovens, 2007) – which, in turn, is standardly seen as incentivizing good (or at least better) representation (Manin et al., 1999).

Seen from the voter’s perspective, ethical complexities arise because voters may have good moral reasons to sanction an incumbent, but at the same time, they may well have countervailing moral reasons which count against sanctioning the incumbent. The more suboptimal other candidates (contenders) seem to voters, the less willingness may voters show in sanctioning incumbents for their mistakes (i.e., for what voters see as such). The ethical complexities of holding incumbents accountable will become clearer once we take account of the several further, partly competing ways in which voting behaviour can contribute to other elements of representation.

Identifying the adequate locus of accountability is often also a challenge as seen from the voter’s perspective. In this regard, independent candidates (who have held their office as independents) represent the easiest case: they can be readily held to account for their past performance and are solely liable to voters’ related sanctioning. Indeed, independent legislative representatives are still a significant presence in several jurisdictions, including European ones, such as Ireland (Rodrigues and Breton, 2010; Weeks, 2014; Weeks, 2017; Kefford and Weeks, 2020). Nonetheless, regarding the more common case of party-affiliated incumbent candidates, voters face additional ethical challenges related to accountability, as they may well lack sufficient information even to decide whom it is reasonable to ask for justification for past performance – the individual candidate or her political party. Further, voters may – depending on the electoral system, see also (Mráz and Lever 2023a) and (Mráz and Lever 2023b) – ultimately have to use the same ballot to sanction both the individual candidate and the party affiliated with her, even if they want to sanction only one of these. Finally, identifying the appropriate locus of accountability and sanctioning the appropriate political agent for past performance is even more complicated regarding coalition-based legislative majorities and governments. In such cases, voters may have reason to be even more torn about whom they should fairly sanction with their vote: the individual candidate, her political party, or the coalition partners of her political party.

those who argue for secret ballots – the democratic *status quo* in Europe (see Aidt and Jensen, 2012; Mares, 2015) – may also do so on grounds of rejecting this expansive conception of accountability between fellow-citizens (Lever, 2007, 2015). Note that the secrecy of the ballot is not merely a European *status quo* but also an internationally recognized human rights: for example, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 25 (b) provides that “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions [...] To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage *and shall be held by secret ballot*, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors” (emphasis added).

4.1.2 Looking Forward: Selection and Authorization

Voters may exercise their right to vote with a backward-looking focus on sanctioning, yet they may also vote with a forward-looking focus. First, voters may concentrate on who would be the best party or candidate to *select* for the task of representing them (Mansbridge, 2009). While selection, just like sanctioning, revolves around evaluating candidates or parties, it is conceptually *future-oriented* and typically *comparative*. Accountability may be enforced non-comparatively: a voter may decide not to vote for a candidate or party because of their subpar performance (in the voter's eyes) regardless of who else is in the race. Selection, however, is typically comparative: the voter's main concern in exercising this function of the vote is to put the best (or least bad) candidate(s) into office - in terms of their political platform (Thompson, 2002) competence or (when it comes to individual candidates) character (Bartels, 2002; Hardy, 2014; King, 2002; cf. Saward, 2014).

Selection is not merely important because it is instrumental in ensuring good representation, together with accountability (Mansbridge, 2009). Selection also carries intrinsic moral weight because it is the process through which representative action is seen as subject to voters' *authorization* (Parkinson, 2006). The electoral support accumulated by a candidate in gaining her seat can be seen as an indication of her *normative mandate*: a sign of trust which - some argue - the stronger it is, the more clearly it authorizes the representative to freely pursue what seems best to her in pursuit of voters' welfare, instead of deferring to voters' judgments (Guerrero, 2010; cf. Grossback et al., 2007).

Both the backward-looking and forward-looking functions of the vote in electoral democracies are significant practically as well as morally (Fearon, 1999). (The forward-looking function is taken to be instrumentally more important, though, in ensuring high quality representation, see Mansbridge, 2009). Yet this functional duality of the vote generates several potential ethical dilemmas for the voter. A candidate with whose past performance the voter is dissatisfied may still be the best to select, given the alternatives (in the voter's own evaluation). Voters may struggle to eventually select someone they also have reason to sanction especially since voting for a candidate may well strengthen her mandate and be seen by the larger public as authorization for wide political discretion. This is potentially not only regrettable from the voter's perspective, but also *undue*, since the candidate she would select - the least bad among very bad alternatives - is still *morally undeserving* of her trust, given past performance.

4.1.3 Seeing One's Like in Public: Descriptive Representation

Candidates' past performance (if they are incumbents), future plans, competence and character may be far from all that voters have practical as well as moral reasons to care about in selecting candidates. Voters may have good reasons to select representatives who share with them some - typically, though not necessarily, identity-generating - descriptive feature, such as gender, racial, ethnic, national, cultural or class background, disability or even the same profession. When acting on these reasons, voters contribute to the generation of *descriptive representation* (Pitkin 1967), realizing a *politics of presence* in 'high politics' (Phillips 1997).

Voters may care about seeing their like in representatives for a number of reasons. First, such representatives may be seen as instrumentally better at representing the group-specific

interests of the voter (Mansbridge 1999, but cf. Gerken 2005; Landa and Duell, 2015, Reher, 2021). Some empirical research suggests this instrumental link is very strong at least when it comes to women's representation: descriptive representation may be particularly conducive to or necessary for substantive representation (Campbell et al., 2010), even if clearly not sufficient (Williams, 1998). Second, voters may want to contribute to a public perception of members of their own disadvantaged group as *able to rule* (Mansbridge, 1999; cf. Mráz, 2020; Mráz, 2021; Mráz, 2023).⁸ Third, there are also systemic effects of increasing descriptive representation that voters may care about, such as a better quality of deliberation or political engagement, attachment to the polity (ibid., but cf. Gay, 2001).

Especially voters belonging to disadvantaged groups and/or identity groups face several dilemmas related to descriptive representation. First, should they use their vote to ensure that their group interests are represented in and through formal political channels such as the legislature, or should they use their vote to discharge other functions (of accountability and selection), while ensuring their group interests are represented otherwise (Celis et al., 2008; cf. Saward, 2010 for ways of informal political representation)? Second, should they vote based on their group interests, or should they vote based on their other interests and conceptions of justice or the common good (cf. Agarín, 2020; (Hochschild et al., 2021; see also Section 4.2 below)?⁹ These are practical as well as ethical dilemmas, since voters belonging to disadvantaged groups and / or identity groups may be of the conviction that they *owe it* to their group, at least *pro tanto*, to use their vote with a view to promoting their group's interests.

Further, voters who do not belong to disadvantaged groups and /or identity groups may also face ethical dilemmas related to descriptive representation. This is because they may see voting for candidates who belong to such groups as itself a duty of justice or a duty to promote the common good (see also Section 4.2 below), but potentially in conflict with like duties if other candidates seem to run on a better political platform as evaluated against the voter's conception of justice or the common good as a benchmark. For example, left-leaning male voters may struggle whether to choose a more conservative woman candidate or a more progressive male candidate in a polity where there are few, if any, women in high politics.

4.2 Adequate Reasons for Electoral Choice: Justice, Common Good, Self-Interest

The voter-centred perspective explicitly problematizes what considerations should voters take into account when they decide on what or whom to vote for (or against). Voter may have a variety of reasons to choose from political alternatives and candidates who promise or can be expected to deliver on these alternatives. The literature on the ethics of voting is divided as to which kind or kinds of reasons are permissible or adequate grounds for electoral

⁸ The public perception of disadvantaged groups as able to rule may be different within the advantaged (typically but not necessarily) majority group and the concerned disadvantaged group itself. Some evidence shows that political engagement among some – racial – minorities in a US context does not increase with more descriptive representation at the legislative level (Gay, 2011), which may or may not be a sign of unaffected public perception within the disadvantaged group.

⁹ As Dovi (2007) forcefully puts it, "Some members of disadvantaged groups resent, denounce, and reject wholeheartedly any particular obligation to disadvantaged groups" (34).

choice. Four salient positions can be found. Three of these are monist in the sense that they recognize only one kind of adequate reason for electoral choice: reasons of justice, reasons related to the common good of the political community, or the voter's self-interest – respectively. The fourth view is pluralist: it recognizes all of the previous kinds or their combination as legitimate reasons for electoral choice. (The last position will be referred to as “reason-pluralism” to distinguish it from the pluralistic perspective above, see Section 3.4.)

4.2.1 Requirements of Justice

Voters, according to the first – and most restrictive – monist view on adequate reasons, may adequately vote based on their conceptions of justice (see Rawls 1971: 233–234, at least on one reasonable interpretation). This view relies on two assumptions. First, it sees voters as occupying a “public office” in the act of voting (Waldron, 1993), an appearance in the political sphere, where voters' action is either seen as state action or is governed by special norms of political morality (“an ethos of political culture”) such as “civic friendship” (Rawls, 1971: 234). Second, this view assumes either that state action should only pursue requirements of justice, or that in the political sphere, reasons (requirements) of justice are the proper grounds for action for citizens.¹⁰

Duties of justice are not necessarily owed only to or with regard to persons within the geographical or temporal limits of the political community. Duties of justice may be owed to people outside of the political community (for related debates, see Brock, 2017), and to future generations (for related debates, see Meyer, 2021). If voters' electoral choice is adequately based on requirements of justice, voters may thus need to take into consideration the rights and interests of people outside of their own political community as well.

4.2.2 The Common Good

Voters, according to the second monist view on adequate reasons, may adequately vote based on what is in the common good (e.g., Brennan, 2012, esp. p. 48, but cf. Lever, 2017). On the one hand, on a weaker conception, the common good may be thought of as the proper aggregation of the preferences of the members of the political community, or that of their shared interests, or that which is in the interest of most members, without harming or exploiting others (ibid.; Schmitz, 1996). On this understanding, the common good of the political community is nothing over and beyond what can be expressed in terms of individual citizens' preferences or interests. However, this need not imply that it is possible to interpret the outcome of the electoral procedure as the common good even if voters vote based on their respective self-interests (cf. Arrow, 1963). Further, even if it is possible to interpret the electoral outcome as the common good, voters may still not necessarily be morally permitted to pursue the common good indirectly, through the pursuit of their self-interest, rather than

¹⁰ Jason Brennan, a proponent of the common good account of adequate reasons for electoral choice (see the subsection immediately below), usefully formulates the *concept* of the common good as “a variable to be filled in by the correct theory of the ends of government” (2012: 115). While Brennan's *conception* (substantive theory) of the common good is broader than (and arguably different from) the requirements of justice (2012: 48), the justice account of adequate reasons for electoral choice could alternatively be spelled out, based on his definition, as a common good account with a particularly narrow conception of the common good. In this report, this formulation is not preferred as it would mask the ethical challenges for the voter posed by the need to prioritize between requirements of justice and (a broader conception of) the common good (see the Subsections immediately below).

directly. (Otherwise, this conception collapses into the view which sees self-interest as the adequate reason for electoral choice, see the subsection immediately below.)

On the other hand, on a stronger conception, the common good may be thought of as something distinct from and irreducible to individual preferences or interests (cf. Rousseau, 2002 [1762]). This may be the case if the pursuit of justice is regarded as constitutive of the common good (cf. Dworkin, 2002). Alternatively, a communitarian moral and political vision may underlie the stronger conception, which regards the good of the community as distinct from the good of the individuals constituting it. Such a vision may be (and has been) elaborated on multiculturalist, nationalist, or neo-Thomist grounds, for example (see Taylor, 1994; Miller, 2009; Finnis, 1998, respectively).

If voters are tasked to vote based on their conception of either justice or the common good, elections may – but need not – be conceived as a collective epistemic enterprise (cf. Cohen 1986). On such an approach, the individual voter's contribution to them, through the act of voting, may be evaluated, morally as well as epistemically, based on whether due epistemic care has been exercised in forming a conception of justice or the common good and in voting on that basis (Brennan, 2012). However, proper campaign regulation, campaign financing, a rich and diverse media system and other elements of a political deliberative system may considerably alleviate this burden on the voter even on accounts which consider requirements of justice or the pursuit of the common good to be the adequate kinds of reason for electoral choice (cf. Thompson, 2002; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Erman, 2016, Thompson, 2018).

4.2.3 Self-Interest

Voters, according to the last monist view on adequate reasons, may adequately vote based on their self-interest (Goodin and Roberts, 1975; Goldman, 1999). This conception of adequate reasons for electoral choice may be justified on a variety of grounds. First, it may be held that it is the aggregation of voters' self-interested preferences through the electoral process that constitutes the common good and that voters are able and morally permitted to pursue it indirectly, through the pursuit of their self-interest (as classical liberals think about the market, cf. Posner and Weyl, 2017). Second, voters may be seen as epistemically best placed to know or form justified beliefs about their own self-interested preferences, rather than about requirements of justice or the common good (Goldman, 1999; Schumpeter, 1976 [1942]). Hence, they may be most able to cast an informed ballot if voting on their self-interest. Third, the role of the voter may be seen as contrasted with the role of public office-holders who exercise political authority. As voting in elections is not exercising political authority (but cf. Waldron, 1993), voters may be free from acting on reasons of justice or the common good alone.¹¹ Fourth, especially on an agonistic conception of democracy (and related political realist conceptions of political ethics), voters may have no reason not to pursue their self-interest in democratic politics because the latter is seen as an amoritized sphere of life (see, e.g., Mouffe, 2000, 2016).¹²

¹¹ This is less clearly so at least in some kinds of referendums whose outcome determines policy or repeals law without the mediation of the will of legislative representatives.

¹² Public choice theory can be seen as a critique of self-interested voting. While public choice theory aims to offer a descriptively adequate and explanatory account of collective, political decision-making, including

4.2.4 Reason-Pluralism

The reason-pluralist view holds that voters may morally adequately respond to a variety of reasons in voting (Lever, 2017; cf. Wolff, 1994). On the one hand, the reason-pluralistic approach is liberating from the voter's perspective: it allows her to take into account various kinds of moral and non-moral considerations in voting. On the other hand, the reason-pluralistic view assigns more responsibility to the voter for structuring, ranking and weighing these considerations. For instance, considerations of justice may conflict with considerations of the common good. In the voter's own assessment, for example, the political community may owe it by justice to other political communities and their members to take a fair share of the burdens of mitigating climate change, but, at the same time, the voter may consider it to be in the common good of the community to develop the economy without inhibitions. Likewise, both requirements of justice and the common good may conflict with the voter's self-interest. For example, the voter may see a higher income taxation rate as both required by justice and being in the common good, but as running against her self-interest.¹³

While structuring, ranking and weighing various adequate reasons for voting is a moral burden on the voter on reason-pluralism, this approach also implies at least some normative guidance for electoral choice. It makes sense to think about more universalistic reasons as having the very function of constraining more particularistic reasons. Hence, considerations of justice often, though possibly not always, constrain the pursuit of the common good as well as that of self-interest, whereas the pursuit of the common good often, though possibly not always, constrains the pursuit of self-interest. Qualifications indicate that the voter still faces hard questions within this framework that mostly concern how much of a 'prerogative' one enjoys to pursue self-interest even when that conflicts with requirements of justice (cf. Scheffler, 1992, 1995), and likewise, how much priority the voter can attach to what members of the political community owe to one another vis-à-vis what they owe to non-members of the political community (Scheffler, 2008)

The voter's moral situation is further complicated by the fact that the very same choice may be supported by various kinds of reasons, but not all of these may be sincerely believed by the voter. For instance, while it is entirely possible to conceive of justice requiring that the state should provide free nurseries for all (e.g., as a measure enhancing equality of opportunity for women on the job market), a voter may not see it as such, or she may even see it as running *against* her own conception of (e.g., libertarian) justice, and yet could see a reason to vote for it as something clearly in her own self-interest as a young professional parent.

voting behaviour, it is deeply critical of its consequences (see, e.g., Mueller, 2003). Others question whether voting behaviour can be convincingly explained instrumentally, by reference to self-interest (See, e.g., Brennan and Lomasky, 1993; Lomasky and Brennan, 2000).

¹³ Note, further, that legislatures, to a vast extent, do not make law by merely enacting a collective political will on what is in the common good or what justice requires, or some aggregation of self-interests. In making lower order law, legislatures often engage in the interpretation of already existing, higher order law (e.g., constitutional provisions prescribing aims of state action, international human rights treaties codifying individual rights etc.). This may have implications not only for the duties of representatives but also for what count as adequate grounds for voting (see Mráz 2022).

4.3 Voting for Communities and Identities

Voters may have reasons to exercise their franchise to the benefit of their specific communities or identity groups, whether by understanding the common good narrowly, with regard to smaller communities than the entirety of the political community, or by understanding self-interest broadly, including one's non-moral interests in the wellbeing of one's smaller or larger community. Some of the intricacies of voting related to identity group membership have been discussed above, in relation to descriptive representation (see Section 4.1.3) and the common good as well as reason-pluralist accounts of adequate reasons for electoral choice (see Section 4.2). This section therefore limits discussion to the ethical challenges that arise from multiple group membership (intersectionality) and from voting as a religious person.

4.3.1 Multiple Group Membership, Intersectionality

Voters may belong to one or more identity groups, or none. Belonging to multiple identity groups may give rise to specific ethical challenges from the voter's perspective (cf. Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Philpot and Walton, 2007). On the one hand, voters may be in a situation where they have to choose between candidates and parties whose program supports, in the voters' own assessment, one of their identity groups but not another. For example, a woman living with disabilities, even if she finds both of these characteristics as identity-constitutive for herself as well as relevant to her political choices, may not find a candidate or party who would provide, in her eyes, adequate representation for both of these identities. (In fact, they may find that no-one provides adequate representation to their specifically intersectional interests; see also Section 4.4 below.) Again, in addition to forcing practical trade-offs, such situations may give rise to ethical dilemmas for the voter if s/he considers it a matter of integrity or a duty owed to both of her communities to vote for a candidate or program benefitting her identity groups.

Ethical dilemmas may be aggravated for intersectional voters if candidates or parties offering to benefit one of their identity groups are expected to be detrimental for their other identity group. For example, a voter who both identifies as a member of an ethnic minority and identifies as LGBTQIA may find that furthering the representation of her ethnic minority not only does not benefit the LGBTQIA cause but it is actually detrimental to it, or the other way round (see Young, 2000; Williams, 1998; Dovi, 2007: 35). Such cases do not merely generate conflict within an identity group - in the example: the LGBTQIA community - (Dovi, 2007: 35), but also within the voter who has intersecting identities.

4.3.2 Religious Voting

On the one hand, voters who have *religious convictions* may well find such convictions relevant to their participation in elections. Europe has a long history of Christian Democratic (Accetti, 2019) and Christian Socialist (Cort, 2020; Norman, 2002) politics, and as a multi-faith continent, voters in several polities may see their religion as naturally *bearing on what they find just or what is in the common good*. For example, religious right-wing voters may find that their religious conviction bears on how they think about the permissibility of abortion or same-sex marriage, whereas religious left-wing voters may find that their religious conviction bears on their thinking about poverty relief or environmental protection.

The literature is divided on whether voters are morally permitted to act upon their religious beliefs in their political conduct (Eberle and Cuneo, 2017), potentially including voting. Some earlier work in the political liberal tradition called for a strict separation of the political sphere from the private sphere, and argued that faith-based considerations, just like other moral considerations, that cannot be properly justified to all citizens have no place in political decision-making, potentially even inside the polling booth (this is referred to as the principle of “religious restraint”, Eberle and Cuneo, 2017; see also, e.g., Rawls, 1993: 247 n. 36, for a nuanced account).¹⁴ More recent work returns to a more nuanced liberal democratic position which recognizes the value of citizens’ faith-based normative thinking for a rich public life as well as for citizens’ ability to feel engaged with the public affairs of the political community and feel recognized as equals in self-government (Waldron, 1993; Wolterstorff, 1997; Eberle, 2002; Gaus, 2010; Cohen, 2011; cf. Freeman, 2020). Voters, on this latter approach, may rely on either any religious or moral reasons they see relevant when they decide whether and for whom to vote, or at least those that are not incompatible with the basic moral tenets of liberal democracy (cf. Rawls, 1993).

On the other hand, religion may also figure in the voter’s reasoning as an *identity-constituting* feature (Ysseldyk et al., 2010) rather than a source of normative thinking. Seen as an identity group, from the voter’s perspective, religious affiliation or church membership generates similar ethical quandaries for the voter to membership in other identity groups or communities. Considerations of descriptive representation as well as dilemmas of multi-group membership are then applicable to the religious voter’s moral outlook too (see Section 4.1.3, and Section 4.3.1 above, respectively).

4.4 Being Outvoted vs. Never Quite Winning? Persistent Minorities

While being outvoted is a recurring and morally unobjectionable experience over a lifetime in any modern democracy (Weale, 1999: 195–200), belonging to a group of voters who never have their way raises special issues in the ethics of voting. Permanent or persistent minorities are “groups that always or nearly always lose on all the issues that arise in the ultimate voting decisions” (Christiano, 2008: 226; 226–228, 288–289). Members of a persistent minority may well be alienated from and disengaged with political institutions (Christiano, 2008: 227). The group-constitutive feature of a persistent minority may vary from one political context to another: most typically, religious, national, ethnic, linguistic or political minorities may find themselves in this position (Christiano, 2008: 289).

Belonging to a persistent minority puts special pressure on affected voters to vote strategically, rather than sincerely (see the Section immediately below), making all potential compromises which allow coalition-building so as to put an end to their *de facto* exclusion or isolation from impactful political processes. However, the very reason why persistent minorities retain this status is often that their members see good enough reasons to vote based on their identity-constitutive features. Compromising on these reasons could be detrimental to the integrity of such voters. Hence, voters belonging to persistent minorities often face an ethical dilemma: either they compromise on their identity-constitutive and

¹⁴ It is of note that most of the discussion on the proper place of religion in public life revolves around the role of religion in legislation and public *deliberation*; much less is explicitly said on the role of religion in *voting*.

identity-expressive political positions, or they cannot cast an impactful, instrumental ballot. Voters who find themselves in this situation may see themselves as having strong reasons for abstention from a political process they see no gain from and which they may regard as fundamentally unjust to them, given the radically unequal or otherwise unreasonably high burdens they have to undertake with participation.

The existence of persistent minorities in a political community may at once generate ethical dilemmas for voters who do *not* belong to any such minority. Other members of the political community may see the existence of such minorities as providing sufficient reason for them to vote with due regard to the interests of the persistent minority, at the expense of compromising their own interests too (cf. Ceva and Zuolo, 2013). Further, other members of the political community may consider the existence of persistent minorities to be good enough reason to vote for candidates, parties and programs that promise institutional (potentially constitutional) change that is otherwise likely to end the political exclusion or isolation of persistent minorities. Analogously, a voter may see reasons to vote for the interests and convictions of fellow-citizens who are not enfranchised but, in her view, should be, or who are not but should be provided with adequate support that would allow them to vote (cf. Mráz, 2023). Populations such as adults living with severe mental disabilities often are a case in point (see Anderson, 2012, Barclay, 2013; Barclay, 2019; Braun, 2015; Fiala-Butora et al., 2014; Mráz, 2020; Nussbaum, 2009).

4.5 Sincere vs. Strategic (Tactical) Voting, Compromises

Regardless of what reasons are adequate grounds for electoral choice, voters very often face the dilemma whether they should vote sincerely or strategically (tactically).¹⁵ Sincere voting refers to voting for the candidate, party or program that is one's most preferred choice, whereas strategic or tactical voting refers to any other candidate, party or program than one's most preferred choice - typically in the hope that one's vote could have non-zero impact this way (Riera, 2016; Alvarez et al., 2018; Bol and Verthé, 2019).

4.5.1 Making a Difference vs. Making a Statement

Sincere or strategic voting is intimately linked, both in empirical and normative terms, with what voters wish to use their ballots for. On the one hand, voters may wish to make a difference and accordingly use their vote *instrumentally* (Lomasky and Brennan, 1993): i.e., cast a ballot which (in extreme cases) determines the outcome of an election, or increases a candidate's or party's normative mandate (see above, in Section 3.1.2), or at least that is part of a causal chain that determines that outcome of the election. On the other hand, voters may wish to use their ballot instead of these aims to *express* something (Lomasky and Brennan, 1993; Hamlin and Jennings, 2011): their dissatisfaction with 'the system' as such or the political elite (Kselman and Niou, 2011), or their political, religious, national, ethnic etc. identity (Schuessler, 2000), even if that expressive act of voting cannot be expected to make any political difference, at any rate, not through determining electoral outcomes. The voter's choice as to which of these ends she prefers to put her ballot to as a means partly determines her moral outlook on sincere vs. strategic voting.

¹⁵ "Strategic" and "tactical" voting are used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

Strategic voting behaviour is often practically necessary in a democracy to vote instrumentally, depending on the *voting system* used (Cox, 1997). Voters in majority systems may need to resort to strategic voting more often to have an impactful or instrumental vote. (For findings based on British elections, see, e.g., Heath and Evans, 1994; Mark et al., 1994; Allen and Bartle, 2018; Nicholls and Hayton, 2020). For example, in a majority system with two major parties and a minor party, if the voter's most preferred party is the third, minor one, casting a ballot in its favour is very likely to be wasted. This arguably creates a rational incentive to rather vote for one of the major parties (but cf. Behn and Vaupel, 1984; Cox, 1997: 69ff; Geisz, 2006). The same incentive may not arise in proportional representation-based (PR) voting systems with the same frequency, although lower district magnitude or parliamentary thresholds can change this. The latter may incentivize voters to cast their ballots strategically for major parties which face no risk of not meeting the threshold, or, quite on the contrary, thresholds may incentivize voters to cast their ballots strategically for a smaller party to ensure its parliamentary presence (see, e.g., Fredén, 2014).

Voters may vote with awareness of the fact that whoever they choose would compromise their own policy positions in response to coalition pressure (Duch et al., 2010). There is considerable controversy over whether voters in proportional representation-based (PR) voting systems, where coalitions are more likely to be formed, are able to make relevant predictions and hence vote strategically, and whether they need to do so at all given that fewer votes are wasted in PR voting systems (Downs, 1957; Cox and Shugart, 1996; Bargsted and Kedar, 2009; Fredén, 2014; Hobolt and Karp, 2010; Meffert and Gschwend, 2010; Irwin and Van Holsteyn, 2012; García-Viñuela et al., 2015).

Expressive voting - if it regards *individual expression* as the purpose of voting, as it is commonly understood (Brennan and Lomasky, 1993; Brennan and Hamlin, 1998; Jones and Hudson, 2000; Kan and Yang, 2001) - may ignore strategic considerations. However, if expressive voting is understood as voting with the purpose of *collective political expression*, e.g., that of disaffection and protest, it may also justify strategic voting (cf. Kselman and Niou, 2011). This is because the individual's efforts to express something to the political community at large or the political elite etc. may be lost without a joint effort. The latter may require voters to coordinate or predict other voters' expressive behaviour and act in light of such predictions, strategically.

Strategic voting as such may be seen as morally objectionable, for various reasons. If voting is considered to be a primarily epistemic collective enterprise (cf. Section 4.2.2 above), strategic voting may be seen as threatening the outcome with distortion (cf. Cohen, 1986; Miller, 1992; Waters and Hans, 2009). Strategic votes may be seen as 'polluting' the elections just like uninformed votes (cf. Brennan, 2012). Alternatively, strategic voting may be seen as an undue compromise to (or downright betrayal of) one's identity group (see also Sections 4.1.3, 4.3, and 4.4 above). Others may find strategic voting as such unobjectionable (e.g., Riker, 1982; Geisz, 2006; Wilson, 2019). Yet others, while not objecting to strategic voting itself, object to the presence of especially difficult strategic choices for all or some voters, or the unavailability or radically unequal availability of adequate information necessary for voters to make strategic choices in an informed manner (Wilson, 2019: 206, see also Selb, 2012).¹⁶

¹⁶ It is noteworthy in this regard that some evidence suggests voters in higher age groups and with better socio-economic status are more likely to vote strategically (Eggers and Vivyan, 2020). This raises

The most pressing ethical dilemmas arise in contexts where voters have strong reasons for both instrumental and expressive voting. Familiar scenarios involve voting for the 'less evil' option in what voters perceive as 'high stakes' elections. In such cases, voters may have strong reasons to express that they are extremely dissatisfied with the political elite (especially with both parties in two-party systems), but they may also have strong instrumental reasons to prevent their least preferred party from forming a parliamentary majority. Political polarization may contribute to voters seeing electoral choices in this light (see Talisse, 2020 on polarization). Yet, as seen above, voting systems can themselves also contribute to the generation of ethical dilemmas of this kind.

4.5.2 Strategic Voting in a Narrow vs. Broad Sense, Compromising

Strategic voting may be defined in a narrow or broad sense. Voting is strategic, narrowly defined as above, when a voter casts her ballot on a candidate, party or program other than her most preferred choice. This narrow understanding of strategic voting is both prevalent in the political science and political philosophy literature and raises special ethical issues as outlined above. However, voting may be strategic in a broader sense too. Even in selecting one's most preferred choice, one often faces compromises and trade-offs. Voters may have to make peace with the fact that not all of their values are represented on the democratic political spectrum in a given election, and also that some of the values they find relevant to their political choices are represented in 'package deals', i.e., only together with other values and policies that they find unappealing (unjust, not in the common good, or against their own self-interest). For example, some voters may wish to vote for a party that runs on an economically leftist-progressive agenda but a culturally right-conservative one, yet they may find that no such party exists (see Kurella and Rosset, 2018 for an analysis of this gap in the 2015 Swiss election). In this case, voters may have to vote for a party with a progressive or a conservative agenda across the board or decide not to vote at all (Kurella and Rosset, 2017). Hence, even in sincere voting (as opposed to narrowly strategic voting), ethical issues arise regarding the morally permissible or required compromises once we take into account that from the voter's perspective, voting is often strategic in the broad sense.

Compromising on political values may be seen as intrinsically valuable (Rouméas, 2021), but it may also be objectionable when such values are seen as absolute or unconditionally valuable. So-called *rotten compromises* objectionably realize trade-offs on exactly such values (Margalit, 2010). Even if compromises are not generally objectionable, voters may consider some compromises as 'rotten' or falling under absolute prohibition. On the one hand, when an electoral option is beyond the limits of what may be coherent with democratic ideals themselves (e.g., a party which aims to replace democracy itself with a totalitarian alternative, cf. Downs, 1956: 257), such a moral prohibition is justifiable in democratic elections. On the other hand, if too many options appear as absolutely prohibited from the voter's perspective, this not only aggravates ethical dilemmas for the voter but also hinders

questions as to whether the interests of these populations may be overrepresented, and whether these populations compared to others within the electorate find it less burdensome of vote strategically, or have better access to relevant information, or there is some other, non-objectionable reason for their more prevalent strategic voting behaviour.

her ability to use her vote instrumentally. This is particularly salient in the case of persistent minorities (see Section 4.4 above).

4.6 The Role of Individual Judgment

The focus on the voter's perspective also reveals that voters invariably - although given systemic features of present-day democratic institutions, all too often - face ethical dilemmas, compromises and strategically complex practical questions in voting (see the Section immediately above). This underlines the relevance of *individual judgment* and *prudence*, much emphasized in the politician-centred perspective (see Section 3.1 above), for the ethics of voting too. These political *virtues* need not and cannot replace principled reasoning about moral issues in voting. However, the significance of their cultivation must be acknowledged not only for political leaders but also for voters (Ottonelli, 2018; Cox, 1997). Whether in strategic voting; in deciding between backward-looking, forward-looking and descriptive aspects of representation; or in deciding which one of one's numerous identities to vote for, prudence is necessary to reliably make adequate and adequately timed trade-offs.

Having to make morally difficult choices or to bear burdens due to one's convictions is not necessarily a morally objectionable situation to be in (see, e.g., Scanlon, 1986: 117). Yet some choice-sets may be alienating one from the choice situation altogether (see the Section immediate below). It is conjectured that institutions of electoral democracy may be more or less conducive to such alienating choices. Mixed voting systems, open party lists, rank-choice systems offer voters' judgment more space to take a number of different considerations into account in their decision, and also to weigh these considerations more freely. Majority systems or closed party systems offer less freedom in this regard.

4.7 Participation vs. Abstention

A large body of the ethics of voting focuses on moral questions as to whether and when voters should or should not participate in electoral processes. Although the dilemma of participation vs. abstention seems prior to question regarding how or on what grounds voters should vote, taking the voter's perspective seriously can allow us to appreciate why some ethical dilemmas and compromises voters face alienate them from political participation.

Some of the literature argues for a robust *moral duty to vote*. This may be seen as a civic duty (Brennan, 2012: 40ff, cf. Blais and Galais, 2016), or a duty of fairness to other voters (Brennan, 2012: 38ff), or a duty of "common pursuit" (Maskivker, 2016; Maskivker, 2018; Maskivker, 2019). Further, the duty to vote may be grounded in a duty to avoid complicity for unjust outcomes (Beerbohm, 2012), or a duty to avoid at least disastrous outcomes, or to promote the public good (Lomasky and Brennan, 2000), or even to contribute to good outcomes (Goldman, 1999). Others, however, argue that there is nothing morally objectionable about living an apolitical life (Brennan, 2012; Freiman, 2020), and even within politics, there are other ways to live a life of civic virtue than by voting (Brennan, 2012). Although the existence of a *general* or *unconditional moral* duty to vote (see, e.g., Maskivker, 2019) is highly disputed, the existence of a conditional duty to vote can be a conciliatory and potentially not widely disputed position (Goodman, 2018). Likewise, it has also been argued that citizens have a *conditional moral duty to abstain* if they are indifferent to the outcome (Sheehy, 2002).

Whether or not citizens have a moral duty to vote, it is a separate question whether they should also have a *legal duty to vote* (Lever, 2010a), in other words, whether voting should be *compulsory* (Hughes, 1966; Brennan and Hill, 2014; Lever and Volacu, 2018; Umbers, 2020; Volacu, 2020).¹⁷ Not all moral duties should be legally enforced, and some legal duties are justified even though they do not enforce moral duties at all. Indeed, most arguments for compulsory voting do not rely on a moral duty to vote, but aim to promote some impersonal democratic, egalitarian or liberal value. Compulsory voting is seen by some as an antidote to low turnout, unequal political influence and power (Lijphart, 1997) or even to the low sociological legitimacy-levels of EU institutions (Malkopoulou, 2009), as well as more generally as a means of enhancing political, social and economic fairness (Birch, 2009), or inclusiveness (Hill, 2010; Hill, 2013). Yet others see compulsory voting as a way to protect and promote liberal values such as autonomy and equal liberty (Lacroix, 2007), or to enhance democratic values such as political participation and equality (Engelen, 2007), or ensure equal political authority of all citizens (Chapman, 2019).

Others argue against compulsory voting. Some of its critics point out that a regime of compulsory voting fails to appreciate the value of the right *not* to vote (Saunders, 2012, 2016), or that uninformed voters may harm others or otherwise diminish the quality of political decision-making (Brennan 2011; Brennan, 2012; Brennan, 2016). Empirically, compulsory voting can increase the dissatisfaction of those already seeing democracy as illegitimate, rather than facilitate their engagement or mitigate their disaffection (Singh, 2018; see also Lever, 2010ab). Further, it may be unhelpful as a means to combat low turnout and unequal participation (Lever, 2009).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Shifting to the voter-centred perspective allows for a much finer grained ethics of voting. The voter-centred perspective is no *panacea* to the ethical challenges of the voter in European democracies. Nor is it meant to be so. As the present survey has shown, taking the voter's perspective as the point of departure for the ethics of voting rules lands us with an irreducible plurality of normative considerations relevant to the ethics of voting. Contributions to the rich philosophical and ethical literature typically focus on a highly limited number of these at once. By contrast, this chapter has broken some new grounds in applying a synoptic perspective which recognizes multiple (and often conflicting) ethical considerations as relevant to decisions about whether and how to vote. This new perspective is significant not only because it takes account of the multiplicity of ethical considerations and concerns that voters in a diverse geopolitical space as Europe is bring to the voting booth. Such a perspective is also unique in allowing us to ask the hard questions about resolving conflicts between the considerations surveyed, and about the design of electoral institutions that could shape not only voters' motivations but also their moral landscape.

On the one hand, taking due account of the ethical dilemmas that arise from the several aspects of electoral representation - accountability, selection, and descriptive representation

¹⁷ Indeed, voting is compulsory (nationwide) in a number of EU Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece and Luxembourg (Sabbati et al., 2019), as well as in a number of other countries, especially in Latin America (for a comprehensive list, see International IDEA, n.d.).

- the various potential grounds for electoral choice - justice, the common good, self-interest
- the complex ethics of community-regarding voting for religious voters in general and for persistent minorities, as well as the intricacies of expressive vs. instrumental voting and sincere vs. strategic voting, lead us back to a central insight of the politician-centred perspective. Namely, that the role of judgment and prudence in navigating ethical challenges in politics is crucial. Yet the role of judgment is underappreciated in the ethics of voting, as studies on political judgment overwhelmingly focus on political leadership. In this regard, this chapter paved the way for other chapters of this collections (esp. (Fumagalli et al. 2023) and to some extent, (Mráz and Lever 2023b)) which focus on how conflicts between these elements of the voter's perspective generate ethical challenges, in general as well as in specific electoral institutions in particular, and how they could or should be resolved through the use of judgment.

On the other hand, the ethical challenges seen from the voter's perspective are not all inevitable. Some arise from failures of representation, as well as suboptimal choices of democratic institutional design. These avoidable, and often unfairly distributed, ethical burdens on European voters could be mitigated by better institutional choices that are informed both by rich normative, moral considerations laid out in this report, as well as by sound empirical findings whose relevance this report also aimed to underline. In this regard, the present report laid down the groundworks for (Mráz and Lever, 2023b), which explicitly focuses on how specific electoral institutions generate, amplify or mitigate ethical conflicts that voters face.

6. REFERENCES

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