



# FYI

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## Why Do People Vote Against Their Own Best Interests? The Influence of Partisanship and Identity

In democratic societies, elections offer citizens the opportunity to shape the future of their communities and countries by choosing leaders who align with their interests and values. However, a puzzling phenomenon often arises: many voters cast ballots that seem to go against their own best interests. In many cases, this behavior stems from a deep-seated dislike or mistrust of one political party, leading individuals to vote in ways that may harm their personal, economic, or social well-being. This article will explore the psychological, social, and political factors that drive people to vote against their own self-interest due to partisanship, with an emphasis on identity and emotional reactions to political opponents.

### **The Role of Identity and Partisan Loyalty**

At the heart of voting behavior lies partisan identity—a strong emotional attachment to a political party. For many voters, identifying with a party becomes a core part of who they are, influencing not only their political choices but also their social relationships, cultural preferences, and worldviews. This is more than just agreeing with a party's policies; it's about belonging to a group that reflects one's identity.

When voters have a strong identification with a political party, this can lead to group loyalty, where they support "their" side even when it contradicts their material interests. This is especially true when there is a profound dislike or animosity toward the opposing party. In such cases, voting becomes less about policies and more about expressing loyalty to one's party and rejecting the "enemy." Voters may prioritize defeating the other side over policies that directly benefit them.

For instance, a middle- or low-income voter might support tax cuts for the wealthy or reductions in social safety nets because their party promotes these policies, despite the fact that these changes could worsen their own economic situation. This phenomenon is frequently seen in the United States, where economic voting patterns often seem to contradict individuals' material interests, particularly when cultural or social issues are at play.

### **Emotional Reactions and Negative Partisanship**

The concept of negative partisanship—voting primarily to oppose the other party rather than to support one's own—is a growing trend in modern politics. In a polarized political environment, people may not be voting for a candidate they believe will improve their lives but rather voting to prevent a party or candidate they dislike from winning.

Research suggests that this kind of voting is often driven by emotion—particularly fear, anger, and resentment—rather than rational calculations of self-interest. Political campaigns and media coverage often stoke these emotions by emphasizing threats posed by the opposing party. Voters then become motivated by a desire to punish or defeat the other side, even if this means supporting policies that work against their best interests.

For example, a voter might oppose universal healthcare—a policy that could provide them

with better access to medical services—because they associate it with a party they dislike, seeing it as a symbol of what they oppose, such as government intervention or perceived socialism. In this case, rejecting the policy is not a rational economic decision but an emotional reaction against the perceived values of the other party.

### **The Influence of Cultural and Social Issues**

In many instances, cultural and social issues take precedence over economic self-interest in shaping voting behavior. Voters might prioritize positions on issues such as immigration, abortion, or gun rights over policies that directly affect their economic well-being. This shift is especially prevalent when voters perceive these issues as central to their identity or moral beliefs.

Political parties often capitalize on these cultural divides, creating an "us versus them" narrative that drives voters to make decisions based on their sense of belonging to a certain cultural group. For example, a voter who identifies strongly with conservative values may vote for a party that promises to protect traditional family structures or religious freedoms, even if that party's economic policies would lead to job loss or decreased public services in their community.

This focus on cultural issues helps explain why some voters in economically disadvantaged areas may consistently support parties that promote policies benefiting the wealthy. They may see these parties as champions of their cultural values, which feel more immediate or personal than abstract economic principles.

### **Media and Misinformation**

The media landscape also plays a critical role in shaping how people perceive their own interests. Echo chambers and filter bubbles, created by social media algorithms and partisan news outlets, often reinforce existing beliefs and foster intense loyalty to one party while demonizing the other. This can lead to a distorted perception of reality, where voters believe they are acting in their best interest when they are, in fact, being swayed by misinformation or biased portrayals of the opposing party.

For example, a voter might believe that a particular candidate or party is protecting their healthcare or jobs, even when the policies of that party suggest otherwise. The influence of biased news sources can make it difficult for voters to access accurate information, leading them to make decisions based on emotions rather than facts.

### **Psychological Comfort and Cognitive Dissonance**

Another factor that explains why people vote against their best interest is cognitive dissonance—the psychological discomfort that arises when a person's actions are inconsistent with their beliefs. To avoid this discomfort, voters often rationalize their decisions in ways that align with their partisan identity, even if it contradicts their interests.

For example, a voter might oppose a minimum wage increase, even though they would directly benefit from it, because their political party argues that such a policy would hurt the economy. Rather than re-evaluate their stance, the voter may embrace the party's explanation to avoid

the internal conflict that would come from admitting they are supporting something detrimental to themselves.

In addition, confirmation bias—the tendency to search for and interpret information in a way that confirms pre-existing beliefs—further cements voting behavior. Voters are more likely to believe narratives that align with their partisan identity, even if those narratives run counter to their objective interests.

### **Breaking the Cycle**

Addressing this phenomenon requires a multifaceted approach. Encouraging critical thinking, promoting civic education, and improving access to unbiased information are crucial steps in helping voters make more informed decisions. Additionally, political discourse must shift away from emotionally charged rhetoric that fosters division and instead focus on substantive debates about policy and governance.

Ultimately, voters need to recognize when emotional reactions and partisan loyalty are clouding their judgment and consider the long-term effects of policies on their personal and collective well-being. Only by looking beyond party labels and considering the broader implications of their vote can individuals make choices that truly serve their best interests.

### **PLEASE VISIT:**

<https://www.npmhulocal321.org>

### **Read Your Choice 2024**

### **Dues Increase**

Consistent with Article 9, Section 1 of the 2022 NPMHU National Agreement,

"Effective November 16, 2024 - the basic annual salary for each grade and step of Table One and Table Two shall be increased by an amount equal to 1.3% of the basic annual salary for the grade and step in effect on September 20, 2022."

Consistent with Article XIV, Section 3 of the NPMHU National Constitution, the National Office will soon be implementing a regular membership dues increase in the amount of one-dollar (\$1.00) per pay period - of which the Local Union will receive fifty cents (\$.50) per pay period.

"Each time that Mail Handlers receive a general negotiated or arbitrated wage increase subsequent to August 2022, the dues for each Local's regular members shall be increased by one dollar (\$1.00) per pay period, of which amount fifty cents (\$.50) shall be deducted by the National as increased per capita tax."

Both increases are scheduled to be effective November 16, 2023 (PP25-24) and shall be reflected in paychecks dated December 6, 2024.

*In union Solidarity*

*Tony Wilson*

NPMHU  
Local 321 President