Understanding political behavior: Essays in experimental political economy

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Citation for published version (APA):

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Explaining individual political behavior is one of the big challenges in the social sciences. The work contained in this thesis uses the tools of experimental economics, game theory and decision theory to shed light on political choices. Relaxing the neoclassical assumptions of self-interested preferences and full rationality, this work investigates whether group identity and altruism matter for political participation, what the role of reciprocity and normative appeals in the response to political mobilization is, and whether the costs of information influence the way it is incorporated in (political) decision-making. The methodology of experimental economics is crucial to obtain an answer to these questions. The evidence presented in this thesis shows that group identity has a mild effect on one’s decision to participate and that more altruistic people participate more in politics; it underscores the importance of normative appeals for the effectiveness of political mobilization; and it demonstrates that, contrary to the standard assumption, the cost of information influences the way it is incorporated in decisions.

Pedro Robalo (1984) studied Economics at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal, where he obtained the degrees of B.Sc. (2007) and M.Sc. (2008). In 2008 he started a Ph.D. at the Tinbergen Institute/University of Amsterdam, where he earned an M.Phil. degree in 2010. In the same year he joined the Center for Research on Experimental Economics and Political Decision Making of the University of Amsterdam, where he conducted research in the areas of Experimental Economics and Political Economy. He has taught courses in Microeconomics and Game Theory. Currently, he is a research fellow of the Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods in Bonn, Germany.
UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
This book is no. 598 of the Tinbergen Institute Research Series, established through cooperation between Thela Thesis and the Tinbergen Institute. A list of books which already appeared in the series can be found in the back.
UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
Essays in Experimental Political Economy

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op woensdag 3 December 2014, te 10:00 uur

door

Pedro Miguel Gago Guerreiro de Brito Robalo
geboren te Faro, Portugal
PROMOTIECOMMISSIE

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Faculteit Economie en Bedrijfswetenschappen
To the memory of my father
Acknowledgments

Writing a Ph.D. thesis turned out to be a much less solitary endeavor than I first thought. This thesis would not have been possible without the help and inspiration of many people.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Arthur Schram, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement. Arthur is a natural-born motivator, cheering you up when things don’t go as you hoped for and bringing you down to earth when necessary. He showed me the importance of working on your own ideas and communicating your research effectively. He was available at all times, yet never pushed me through - the most valuable lesson of the past five years was delivered in the process: in academia you owe it to yourself to keep pace. Arthur was also very understanding and supportive in all non-academic matters. Chapter 2 of this thesis is joint work with him.

I would also like to thank my other co-authors, Joep Sonnemans (also Chapter 2) and Rei Sayag (Chapter 4). Working with Joep has been a pleasure and I have benefited greatly from his encyclopaedic knowledge of the behavioral sciences. Rei is not only a co-author but also a good friend. We started working together on the first week of our Ph.D. and we haven’t stopped since. His energy and tenacity have been a continuous source of inspiration. I hope we will continue to work together in the future and, perhaps more importantly, to share a good laugh over beers.

I consider myself lucky for having been able to conduct the research in these pages at the Center for Research on Experimental Economics and Political Decision Making (CREED) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). CREED is an exceptional research group thanks to a passionate, friendly and dynamic group of people. I had the privilege of often discussing my research with Frans, who gives invaluable advise to starting Ph.D.s (he once told us that trying to contribute to long-standing research topic is like jumping on a moving train - it is easier to make an impact with something new). I learnt a great deal about teaching with Theo, who also delivers comments that are always useful and to the point. Sharing an office with Marcelo and Roel was both fun and instructive, as they were equally eager to discuss experiments and
football. Above all, I am indebted to the everyday interactions with all CREED
and UvA colleagues, who were warm and challenging in equal parts: Aaron, Adrian,
Ailko, Aljaž, Anita, Audrey, Ben, Boris, David, Francisco, Göniül, Jeroen, Jindi,
Joel, Jona, Jos, Julian, Matthijs, Matze, Max, Noemi, Thomas, Sander, Simin and
Yang. The cooperative spirit of CREED persists whenever you encounter former
CREED-ers. I won’t forget when Jens Großer sat down an entire afternoon in New
York with me to discuss a preliminary version of what is now Chapter 2. I would
also like to thank Karin Breen and Robert Helmink for making things run smoothly
at UvA.

I am also indebted to many people at the Tinbergen Institute (TI). TI is a unique
institution, combining graduate training of the highest level with a laid-back and
cooperative atmosphere. This is possible because of the utmost dedication of people
like Arianne de Jong and Judith van Kronenburg, among others. I was personally
involved in the Educational Board and the TI Magazine, which provided me with
enriching experiences. Indelible are also the memories from the Roetersstraat times,
when we graduate students would practically live at the institute. At TI or outside
of it, I’m happy to have shared good moments with Agbeko, Eva, Gosia, Guilherme,
Inez, Lerby, Marcin, Mark, Natalya, Olivier, Ona, Patrick, Philipe and Stan.

The late stages of this thesis were completed at the Max Planck Institute for
Research on Collective Goods, to where I moved in the Spring of 2014. I would
like to thank Christoph Engel for the opportunity. I would also like to leave a word
of appreciation to my colleagues at the Max Planck Institute who made me feel
at home right away. In particular, I would like to thank Franzi Tausch, the other
‘new arrival’ at Max Planck, for teaching me the ropes and for tips on typesetting
a thesis.

Amsterdam wouldn’t have been the same without the friends that made life fun
and exciting. They would often ask how I was progressing and address me the
daring questions only friends can ask. Among the many people that came and went,
I particularly miss some of those who happened to leave town before me. Alice was a
true gezelligheid-maker and someone who could always cheer you up. Chana shook
the habitual with her sharp wit and challenging ways. Liv was a ray of sunshine in
our lives and is one of the most fun persons I’ve met. The list wouldn’t be complete
without a word of appreciation to my Portuguese friends, the people I grew up with
and to whom I always feel close despite the geographic distance. Among them, I was
happy to have had Moritz and Pedro as a Portuguese presence in the Netherlands.

A big thank you goes to my ‘proxy’ Amsterdam family, Heiner and Ben. Living
with economists is an exhilarating experience, contrary to what some might have you
believe. Discussions on the fixed and variable costs of lifetime coffee consumption or how to behave strategically as a tenant were part of our everyday lives. Heiner has been a friend since the day we started our Ph.D., and I cannot thank him enough for all the good times and for also being there in the not so good ones. Ben’s reliable presence and unique sense of humor made everyday life different for the better. He’s an innate economist and I benefited from our discussions. When Ben left, Mehmet took over and was also an excellent flatmate.

At last, I would like to thank the people who are dearest to me. Jozefina’s support was very important, as was her ability to bring joy and fun to everything we do. My grandparents Ru-ru and Nibinho were always interested in how I was doing. They are the example of how hard work leads not to only to success but also accomplishment. I owe a big thank you to my sister Ana, who is someone I can always depend on. My mother has been a constant guidance in my life, and I wouldn’t have finished this Ph.D. if it was not for her generosity and unwavering support. As I finished this thesis, I had to think of the family members that were so important to me and who left during its writing. My grandmother Natália’s memory shall help me never to compromise on style and manners. My uncle Pedro showed me how to be a maverick and yet be dedicated to your close ones.

More than anyone, I am thankful to my father, whose example will go unmatched for as long as I live. He was someone with a strong character and solid principles, but also a person of rare sensibility. I thank him for bringing me up in a house with books and for always nurturing my interests. He was a cultured man and a mighty debater. We would often discuss economic issues - and disagree fiercely. I thought that one day, when I got my Ph.D., perhaps I could convince him of the virtue of my arguments. That day is approaching and I realize that I would not waste a second on that; as in many other things, I share more and more of his wise views. I miss him dearly.

Pedro
Bonn, August 2014

I acknowledge the financial support of a Doctoral Grant from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (the Portuguese National Science Foundation); all experiments have been funded or co-funded by the Research Priority Area Behavioral Economics of the University of Amsterdam, to which I am also grateful.
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