

Should animals have voting rights?

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A new [paper](#) in *Analysis* argues that it may be time to extend voting rights to animals.

While this idea may sound ridiculous, the paper points out that this would merely be an extension of existing practices, whereby certain governments permit the enforcement of animals' [legal rights](#) through representatives. For example, animals are named plaintiffs in many US federal lawsuits.

The idea of people acting as intermediaries to protect animals' moral rights or entitlements is nothing new either. And under existing practice, people act as legal representatives on behalf of children or people with mental disabilities.

The idea of animal voting is an example of the implementation of the "all affected interests" principle: Everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government. Everyone who has interests and is affected by governmental decisions should be allowed to have a part in the political process leading to those decisions.

Historically various governments excluded many categories of people (e.g., women, slaves) from the franchise based on what seemed obvious justifications at the time. Related prejudice survives today when it comes to various racial, gender, ethnic, disabled, and economic minorities.

The author here also argues that the incompetence of animals to exercise [voting rights](#) is also not a valid reason to exclude such considerations. It is hard to find a criterion for demarcating competent from incompetent people that will be acceptable to all qualified points of view challenging current policies concerning the exclusion of children and/or the mentally disabled. Implementing whatever turns out to be the "correct" level of competence and settling on an actual test for such a thing are non-trivial matters, and there will be disagreement on that as well.

Under the system of animal voting, the author envisions that people would be appointed representatives casting [votes](#) on behalf of animals, but only in cases involving animal welfare, such as policy regarding [animal husbandry](#), meat production standards, fishing regulation, or pet care.

Animals do not worry about complex moral problems like abortion or the legalization of prostitution, so the author argues that these are not appropriate topics for animals to vote on. Of course, some controversial policies (e.g., various environmental policies) will undoubtedly impact the welfare of animals. In those cases, there would be a choice between not having animal representatives vote at all on such proposals (at least until a robust scientific consensus emerges regarding those issues) or, alternatively, the proxies voting according to their best judgment concerning what would benefit [animals](#) most.

More information: Ioan-Radu Motoarcă, Animal voting rights, *Analysis* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/analys/anad053](https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anad053)

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