

Manipulation of individual citizen motivations in the federalist papers



As developed from the human's historically survivalist quality, modern people tend to initially work for their own gain before considering or regarding others. People's self-interest, whether a narcissistic trait or simply inherent one, is even more recognizable in times of conflict. Working by the assumption that people prioritize their own selfish interests and want to ensure the highest possible standard of living for themselves, Madison, Hamilton and Jay appealed to the public's self-preserving nature in their famous Federalist Papers to convince citizens to ratify the Constitution.

In Federalist 10, Madison appeals to the public's common fear of losing their newly-won liberties with a warning of the detrimental dangers of factions that would surely occur if the Constitution did not get ratified. He wrote, "When the majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government... enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens" (80). In such a diverse country containing so many different groups of people with varying concerns, the creators of this publication knew that Americans would be worried that a strong national government would have be able to take away their individual rights.

However, Madison argues that without some sort of core authoritative power, a majority group would be able to overwhelm the rest of society and obtain their own desires, despite the potentially unfavorable effects to everyone else. This idea was meant to alarm citizens and push them to see the need for ratification; people would surely act in favor of a strong central government if they knew their needs may be disregarded without one. In a world in which individuals are motivated by personal gain, the writers knew it

necessary to demonstrate how people's needs may be lost in the shuffle of a quite populous new nation, should they fail to accept the Constitution.

Additionally, Madison recognized that people tend to view their own desires as more urgent and vital than those of others and used this understanding in his persuading process. He reveals this insight in his definition of a faction, which he states consists of "... a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (78). Individuals, Madison implies, work to achieve their own goals without explicitly considering anyone else. It may seem acutely egotistical, and perhaps it is, but Madison saw it as an innate feature of the human being. In a time when country was divided and Americans were confused and worried, playing on this quality seemed the best way for the Federalist authors to gain the appropriate attention from their audience members. Throughout the written work, Madison exploits this concept by continuously circling back to the idea that if the Constitution was ratified, everyone would be better off individually and as a nation.

In Federalist 1, Hamilton appealed to the public by using his status to convince people that he believed it was in the best interest of the individual readers to ratify the Constitution. He wrote "... in a matter of the utmost moment to your welfare by any impressions other than those which may result from the evidence of truth... I own to you that after having given it an attentive consideration, I am clearly of opinion it is your interest to adopt it. I am convinced that this is the safest course for your liberty, your dignity, and <https://assignbuster.com/manipulation-of-individual-citizen-motivations-in-the-federalist-papers/>

your happiness” (35-36). In this instance, Hamilton is utilizing ethos to persuade the audience by referencing the extensive thought process that went into forming the opinion that ratification is best for the individual, which can be viewed as providing expert support. Further, he is taking advantage of his highly-regarded position in American political society to demonstrate why his opinion carries any significance at all.

Furthermore, the specific diction in the publication manipulates the self-preserving nature of individuals. For example, the use of phrases such as “personal security,” “every good citizen” and “personal liberty” greatly personalizes the passages for the readers. Interest spikes when people feel the topic applies to them, they feel a sense of salience, and are much more likely to closely follow the situation. Madison, Hamilton and Jay attempt to speak directly to the individual rather than the public in the Federalist Papers in order to severely amplify those levels of salience. The specificity of word choice in political articles is always a conscious decision by the authors, especially in a persuasive piece, and the writers deliberately wanted to connect directly with the readers in order to convince them of the necessity of ratification.

Moreover, the Federalists aimed to convince citizens to ratify the Constitution because they were aware that people are often prone to error, and a stable national government would decrease the severity of these individual oversights and failures. In Federalist 10, Madison explained “As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed. As long as the connection subsists

between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have
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reciprocal influence on each other; and the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves” (78). Basically, Madison is acknowledging that people tend to do what they think is right even if it is far from it as it is usually best for them, and likely will not change their minds no matter what, since everyone usually thinks they are correct. In essence, an individual’s ignorance to keep an open mind and consider the ideas and opinions of others is derived from the attachment to opinions that form from the inclination for self-preservation. Establishing a secure and powerful federal government, the author suggests, would negate these individual transgressions and inaccuracies since a more experienced, informed and trained group would have overarching jurisdiction over policy-making and other impactful decisions.