

Stepping up my civic engagement

I live in Mount Vernon, NY. We have an election coming up. We will be electing 3 new city council members and a new city comptroller. These are important decisions given the very serious financial issues our city is experiencing. Like others in our community, I am trying to figure out who to vote for in the June Democratic primary, since that will almost certainly determine who is elected in the fall.

To help me formulate my thoughts about who to vote for, I created a decision-making framework that I call (generically) a “candidate scorecard”. You can download the scorecard, along with some of the research I’ve done to help me in my decision-making at <https://mountvernoncitizen.org/blog>

The candidate scorecard idea developed organically

- In February 2021, I decided to take a close look at our city budget. I thought my analysis might be of interest to other residents, so I secured the domain “mountvernoncitizen.org” and uploaded my analysis along with several related documents to the website.
- In mid-March 2021, around the time candidates were preparing to canvas the community for ballot signatures- *out of a concern about “ethical drift” in our government-* I developed a “Candidate Commitment Signature” page. If a candidate knocked on my door and asked me to sign their petition, I planned to ask them to first read and sign the Candidate Commitment. Signing my Candidate Commitment was necessary *but not sufficient* for me to sign a candidate’s petition. Again, I made this document available at the website.
- Between mid-March and March 31, 2021, I conceived of and designed the candidate scorecard. I then began researching each candidate, looking for evidence to help me assign a *preliminary* score to each candidate in the field according to the variables of interest to me, as expressed in the candidate scorecard. I then uploaded the following files to the website:
 1. **Candidate Scorecards March 31, 2021.** This file contained 1) my preliminary ranking of the candidates, separated into those seeking election to the city council and those seeking to be elected city comptroller, 2) a copy of the blank scorecard I used to rate each candidate, 3) my definitions for each variable on the scorecard, including how I assigned baseline scores, and 4) the scorecards that I completed for each candidate in the field, along with some notes that describe my decision-making process.
 2. **Candidate Scorecard DIY.** This is the excel file that I used to develop the scorecard. I made it available so that other voters could, if they wanted, use the candidate scorecard framework that I developed to assess candidates according to *their* beliefs, *their* values, and *their* biases. If someone wants to use the DIY scorecard but isn’t familiar with excel, I will help them.

To my surprise, the idea generated some interest in the community, which led to a public “zoom” meeting with a significant proportion of the candidates on April 16, 2021.

Going into the zoom meeting, I hoped to have more time to discuss the relative merits of a candidate scorecard, per se, as a potential decision-making framework that may be of use to members of our community as they engage in the process of selecting who to vote for. Alas, due to time constraints, the event served primarily as a platform for candidates to question me about *my* decision-making process as an individual voter, a process that entails *my* beliefs, *my* values, and *my* biases. It was not exactly what I expected, but I think it was a productive exchange expertly moderated by Rev. Dr. HB Marriott. For those candidates who made comments or asked questions, the forum gave me more insight into their communication skills, ideas, and temperament. I hope the forum gave any Mount Vernon residents who watched a little more insight regarding the candidates as well, and I hope that helps them to evaluate candidates according to *their* beliefs, *their* values, and *their* biases.

Regarding “Deductions” and “Bonuses” on the candidate scorecard

I understand that some candidates who received deductions on *my* scorecard did not like how or why I assigned these deductions. Anyone interested in using the scorecard framework for decision-making can easily remove, alter, revalue, or redefine any of the variables, including “Deductions” and “Bonuses” using the DIY scorecard that’s at the website. It is completely “open source”.

I am considering candidate feedback in my decision-making process, and I hope that any voters who were watching the event consider the candidates' comments and questions in *their* decision-making process as well.

What informs my decision-making process?

In making decisions, I try my best to attend to facts, observation, and direct experience. Reason and logic are my guides. In 1877, the early American Pragmatist CS Pierce wrote a paper titled "The Fixation of Belief". He outlined 4 general methods that people use to set in place or "fix" their beliefs about the world: 1) *the method of tenacity* (i.e., "because that's just how it's done"), 2) *the method of a priori* (i.e., "because on its face- in theory- it seems reasonable and it feels right and everyone likes believing this way"), 3) *the method of authority* (i.e., "because someone told me to believe this"), and 4) *the method of science* (i.e., "because I have consider facts and evidence, I observe the world directly and take measure of it, and then I tentatively set my beliefs but remain open to changing my beliefs as new evidence becomes available").

My approach to fixing my beliefs about the world, and in this case who to vote for, is firmly rooted in the method of science. And although I think it should go without saying, *the method of science is not a perfect or infallible approach to decision-making, and I am far from a perfect or infallible practitioner of this method.*

A tentative and incomplete list of my propositions regarding the candidate scorecard

1. I believe that decision-making based on the method of science is better than decision-making based on the method of tenacity, the method of a priori, or the method of authority.
2. I believe people should think for themselves, and make their own decisions based on whatever method or combination of methods works best for them.
3. I believe the decision-making framework that I have offered to the community was developed and released in the spirit of cooperation, optimism, and hope.
4. I believe that, although my analyses are dispassionate, I am not without passion, compassion, and commitment to the community in which I live. I believe my work on this project serves as evidence of my commitment to the well-being of our community.
5. I believe that if what I have offered- by way of a candidate scorecard- is of value to other voters as they set about making this important voting decision, I am grateful to have helped. If what I have offered is of no value to anyone other than myself, that is fine too.
6. I believe in free political expression. I will continue to freely express my political beliefs in the framework that best suits me – such as my candidate scorecard and my candidate rankings. I will continue to incorporate new information and adjust how I weight different variables in my decision-making as per my belief in the method of science.
7. I encourage fellow citizens to freely express their political beliefs in the framework that best suits them, and to be mindful of attempts to undermine their decision-making process.



Chris McDonough
17 Vernon Place
Mount Vernon, NY 10552

April 17, 2021