



RATIONAL-INSTRUMENTAL THEORY OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

Jiyanmuratova Gulnoz Sherbutaevna

Associate Professor, Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology (PhD) of National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek Department of "Sociology"

E-mail:gul8070@yandex.ru

Tel: 93 556 55 50

Annotation

This article describes the formation and development of the rational-instrumental approach, one of the classical theories of electoral behavior in the field of electoral sociology, and analyzes studies based on this approach. The rational-instrumental approach to electoral behavior was reflected in his studies by E. Downes, M. Fiorina, S. Lipset, M. Lewis-Beck and others.

Keywords: electoral behavior, rational-instrumental approach, economic voting, retrospective voting, prospective voting, egocentric voting, sociotropic voting, "split voting", "problem voting".

Introduction

It is known that the second half of the twentieth century played an important role in the development of electoral sociology with the formation of the following three main theories of electoral behavior: sociological, socio-psychological and rational-instrumental theories. The behavior of voters is expressive in the sociological and socio-psychological approach, such as the determining factor of the first case is the social status and social affiliation of the voter and in the second case the identity with the political party. Voter's behavior has rational importance in rational-instrumental theory, in which the focus is on minimizing efforts as well as maximizing profits as a determining factor in voter choice.

Proponents of the rational-instrumental theory of electoral behavior argue that rational motives based on pragmatic calculations are the basis of electoral behavior. Rational behavioral research aims to maximize the benefits that are subjectively perceived by each voter in voting choice and to minimize action. The electorate seeks to pursue its interests from a political point of view in a maximally, highly conscious manner according to this theory.

The theory of rational choice is reflected in M. Laver's "Policy of Special Needs" [1, 33-34]. According to him the political world should consist of individuals and their goals exclusively. Individuals are always trying to improve their economic opportunities.





Researchers at the University of Rochester which led by William Reeker have tried to create models for collective decision-making based on positive political theory or rational choice theory. For that reason the theory of rational choice is first of all called "as the Rochester School".

The rational-instrumental approach was formed in the 1950s. Its emanation was the result of the application of modern methods of economic analysis in politics. An important stage in its formation is K. Arrow's book which was named "Social Choice and Personal Values" (1951). Ten years later, J.W. Byrkenen and G. Tallock established the Virginia School of Public Choice which is famous all over the world nowadays.

E. Downs made a huge contribution in theoretically and methodologically substantiating the theory of rational choice with his book "The Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957). The most prominent representatives of the theory are Anthony Downs and Maurice Fiorina.

The main principles of this theory are the followings:

- 1) All decisions made by voters and political parties are reasonable, that is, based on the satisfaction of their interests and formed on the principle of increasing the benefits of action
- 2) The democratic political system assumes an agreement that supports predictions about the consequences of decisions made by voters and political parties, i.e. their agents - voters, parties and government - are responsible for their actions, allowing them to predict the outcome of various elections;
- 3) The democratic system provides a level of uncertainty that is very important when considering different options, despite the above-mentioned coherence.

The theoretical founder of the instrumental approach is J. Schumpeter, he described its foundations in his book "Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy". He cited similarities between electoral policy and the market for goods and services. The proposal is put forward by political parties and the demand is forged ahead by rational voters who choose political programs [2].

In the economic theory of democracy E. Downs develops this theory by emphasizing that "every citizen, in his opinion, votes for a party that favors him more than others" [3, 36]. In consonance with his view the voter when making their choice takes into consideration the most general programmatic parameters reflected in the ideologies of the parties .

Conforming to the theory of rational choice, electoral political activism is an example of collective action and represents the rational interests of the individual. This is called "market democracy" by E. Downs.





M. Fiorina reconsidered E. Downs' ideas about the role of ideology in shaping electoral preferences. M. Fiorina states in her "retrospective voting theory" that there is a direct link between the country's economic situation and the election results. This does not mean that people understand economics more than politics. It simply stems from the fact that the electorate in the vote is responsible for the state of the national economy. A rational, pragmatic thinker answers "yes" in elections when living standards improve, and "no" when things get worse [4, 5]. Such behavior of a voter is not only instrumental, but also logical, as the individual minimizes his or her efforts to gather the information needed to achieve consciously designed goals, particularly in decision-making.

Voting can be in 2 forms according to the "Retrospective voting theory" based on the assessment of the economic situation:

- 1) Egocentric – in accordance to personal economic status ;
- 2)Sociotropic - based on the general state of the economy.

According to the American scientist Seymour Lipset, the activity of the electorate in a state of recession increases during the deterioration of the economy or the international situation of the country which indicates the specificity of voting for voters sociotropically that is , assessing the economic situation of the country [5, 195]. M. Lewis-Beck puts forward the theory of "economic voting" in his work "Economy and Elections: basic western democracies" in the rational-instrumental approach. In his view, electoral behavior is determined by economic factors. Based on his own and other economists 'research the author argues that whether people support or reject a particular party or association (coalition) during elections depends on economic factors. He suggests that instead of private economic indicators an individual or voter should evaluate their current and future economic opportunities. Lewis-Beck identifies three different sociological variables:

- 1) "Retrospective" (assessment of the past in comparison with the present);
- 2) "Perspective" (assessment of prospects);
- 3) "Affective" (unsupported convulsions) [6].

As stated by the author, the most important thing in evaluating government policy is "perspective", the latter "affective" and the last one is "retrospective". Rational-instrumental theorists have faced the problem of 'divided voting' leading to 'divided governance'. This problem has been studied by E. Campbell, E. Taft, J. Kramer and a number of other researchers. Divided governance means that in some cases the voter votes for one political force in the election of the executive and in the election of the legislature for the other. These forces are in opposition to each other as usual. Divided voting can be explained by the following factors:





- Number of elected institute members,
- Socio-cultural and demographic characteristics of the electorate,
- Features of the electoral system,
- Time of elections of representative institutions.

Campbell and others showed that “problem voting” in the USA was not so great in the early 1960s. However, the data indicates that voters are more likely to take into account party positions on specific issues and it is written in a book called “The Changing American Voter” which was published in 1976. Similar results have been obtained in a number of Western European countries.

Besides, analyzing the results of an empirical study of electoral behavior in seven mature democracies, Mark Franklin concludes that “if all issues important to voters were properly measured and each balanced, the growth of problem voting would partially or completely offset the decline of political divisions”. Unfortunately, some problems are not so easy to “measure” and “know the weight”, especially from a comparative point of view, due to their great diversity.

It should be noted that European researchers have also studied the dynamics of electoral goodwill. For example, R. Dinkel concluded that parties that win national elections in Germany often lose at the level of local elections [7].

K. Reif and G. Schmitt proposed to look at the dynamics of electoral goodwill through the prism of the concept of primary and secondary elections, who concluded that electoral behavior in primary elections (in other words, elections of the most important political institution) to a certain extent it differs from electoral behavior in a secondary election, i.e. in an institution with less influence. The researchers identified a number of features that distinguish primary choices from secondary options to explain this phenomenon. Firstly, repeated elections are determined by lower-level participants. Secondly, the outcome of the by-elections is not a result of problematic positions or a direct clash of party leaders, but the result of an ideological conflict between political parties. A third feature of small elections is that opposition parties often have large support while pro-government parties do not get the required number of votes. In this case, a kind of protest voice occurs when citizens who have voted for opposition parties have expressed dissatisfaction with government policies[8].

The main shortcoming of rational-instructional theory is their weakness in explaining the low turnout of voters. According to Riker and Ordeshuk's point of view, voting in this sense would not be reasonable, as the benefits would not justify the “expenses” incurred in connection with it.



On the one hand rational-instrumental theory is the most criticized theory, on the other hand, most researchers believe that's it reflects the behavior of citizens in elections in the best way.

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