

THE SPECIFICITY OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

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Summary

This article discusses the problems of the specificity of electoral behavior. The author considers two types of electoral behavior: just part in elections or conversely so-called abstention of election. There are many different factors that affect the behavior of the electorate. These factors include: historical, cultural, economic, social, racial, ethnic, religious, legal, psychological and political. Studies on the specificity of the behavior of voters resulted in the development of concept and theoretical models.

Key words: voting behavior, part in elections, abstention of election, models of behaviors, classification of voters.

The types of electoral behavior

Voting behavior is part of the political behavior defined as any action of an entity having a character, verbal or non-verbal. Voting behavior refers to the role that a person meets in communities². These behaviors are objectively observable actions about political nature; they are due to political attitudes of individuals as an answer for stimulation coming from the environment³.

Generally speaking, there are two types of electoral behavior. First, it is just part in elections or conversely so-called abstention of election⁴.

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² See: J.J. Wiatr, *Socjologia polityki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 1999, p. 73.

³ See: W. Sokół, *Zachowania polityczne* [in:] *Encyklopedia politologii*, tome I, red. W. Sokół, M. Żmigrodzki, Wydawnictwo Zakamycze, Kraków 1999, p. 312.

⁴ See: K. Korzeniowski, *O psychospołecznych uwarunkowaniach zachowań wyborczych Polaków w latach dziewięćdziesiątych* [in:] *Prognozy i wybory. Polska demokracja '95*, red. L. Kolarska-Bobińska, R. Markowski, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa 1997, p. 95.

Whether people participate in elections or stay at home, it depends on many factors.

It should be noted at this point that electoral behavior is a specific type of behavior. It is different from the other behaviors of everyday. K. Korzeniowski indicates the following features: this is the behavior which occurs rather rarely plain and a single person has only little effect on what is sometimes the subject of choice. The impact of a single person on the outcome of the election is slight; the level of political knowledge in democratic societies is minimal; the outcome of the election in developing and stable democracies has very little effect on the daily life of the ordinary citizens⁵.

We can analyze electoral behavior at individual and aggregated level. The first case concerns conditions and motivation of individuals, which influence the decision when voting. The aggregated level analyzes the relationships at the social level⁶.

Voting behavior may be determined by the identification of a party group, the attitude towards the problems raised in the campaign, as well as the attitude towards any particular candidate⁷.

The model of behavior of voters Bruce'a Newmana is composed of five components of values:

- Functional (one votes basing on the offer which is most advantageous for them)
- Social (analysis of the candidate from the viewpoint of belonging to a particular social group or party)
- Emotional (decision are made under the influence of emotion, what evokes in us the candidate)
- Conditional (a voter is based on the value of the conditions, one decides to cast his/her vote for a political party which has not yet ruled)
- Willingness to change (a voter elects with curiosity and waiting for what will happen if a specific party wins)⁸.

Depending on the kind of the political market and relationship between parties and the electorate. R. Herbut distinguished three types of electoral

⁵ See: K. Korzeniowski, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania zachowań wyborczych* [in:] *Podstawy psychologii politycznej*, red. K. Skarżyńska, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2002, p. 237-238.

⁶ See: W. Jednaka, *Zachowania wyborcze* [in:] *Demokracje zachodnioeuropejskie. Analiza porównawcza*, red. A. Antoszewski, W. Herbut, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1997, p. 249-253.

⁷ See: M. Mazur, *Marketing polityczny. Studium porównawcze prezydenckich kampanii wyborczych w USA i w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 30.

⁸ See: W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, *Marketing polityczny, perspektywa psychologiczna*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 92.

behavior: sustainable electoral behavior, shifting of electoral support and loss of party loyalty⁹. The first category refers to the electorate who never (or very rarely) changes their electoral behavior, and elections for them are only a confirmation of party loyalty. This behavior may be due to a family tradition, that is to say, which is transferred from generation to generation. The second category is the shifting or change of support in the next elections. Such an action may be either permanent or temporary. Loss of loyalty in a party which may indicate loss of confidence in the party¹⁰.

Electoral behavior can be interpreted in two ways. First, it is the conventional form of political activity understood as active support of political continuity or change¹¹. This is therefore participation in elections or abstention¹². Second, there are specific preferences of the electorate, which decide on the outcome of the elections. Motives of these two behaviors permeate each other because human behaviors are often the result of actions of the few motives¹³. Electoral behavior is formed as a result of transformation of needs in stimuli, which motivate to message processing and as a result of continuous operation of stimuli from the ambient¹⁴.

The factors that affect the behavior of the electorate

There are many different factors that affect the behavior of the electorate. These factors include: historical, cultural, economic, social, racial, ethnic, religious, legal, psychological and political. S. Wróbel says that some of them directly impinge on forms, symptoms and ways of behavior in elections and others indirectly define patterns, scope and boundaries of electoral behavior¹⁵. In addition, electoral behavior has an effect on personal qualities of people: level of education, self-esteem and cognitive needs of the

⁹ See: A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut, *Leksykon politologii*, Wydawnictwo ATLA 2, Wrocław 1999, p. 499 and next.

¹⁰ See: M. Pabijańska, *Psychomanipulacja w polityce. Metody, techniki, przykłady*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 2007, p. 72.

¹¹ See: K. Korzeniowski, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania...*, p. 237.

¹² See: M. Buć, *Determinanty aktywności politycznej wyborców*, „Dialogi Polityczne” 2007, Number 7, p. 113.

¹³ See: L. Rudnicki, *Zachowania rynkowe nabywców. Mechanizmy i uwarunkowania*, Wydawnictwo AE w Krakowie, Kraków 2004, p. 92.

¹⁴ See: J. Blythe, *Komunikacja marketingowa*, Wydawnictwo PWE, Warszawa 2002, p. 24.

¹⁵ See: S. Wróbel, *O pojęciu i modelach zachowań wyborczych* [in:] *Polityka, przedmiot badań i formy jej przejawiania się*, red. P. Dobrowolski, M. Stolarczyk, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2000, p. 122-123.

individual. The higher the education, the more the people expecting rational and logical arguments, the less of generalizations and inaccurate uncertain data and the lower the self-esteem characterized by easier human conviction¹⁶.

When considering the electoral behavior it seems important to concentrate on the needs of voters, that is to say, their expectations, desires, opinions, attitudes, and degrees of knowledge of specific problems. W. Adamczyk argues: ‘The change of attitudes of citizens is possible if true and complete information is delivered to the citizens, based on which recipients may decide or start the action.’¹⁷ Persuasion in his opinion, lies in argumentation and promotion. Such action, it seems effective means of influencing by the political candidates the desired change behaviors and attitudes of citizens¹⁸.

In turn U. Jakubowska maintains that political preferences of people are not chaotic, irrational and accidental but have rational nature, they are governed by defined rule¹⁹. In accordance with the matrix of models of decision-making by retail customers, developed by Kotler and A. R. Andreasen, the level of complexity of ways of making decisions is a derivative of the involvement of unit and additionally depends on the experience they have with regard to the problem²⁰. According to J. P. Gunning, it is not easy to create a model of collective decision-making without a final expression of their views, whether this model is moving towards good or bad of results²¹.

The concept and theoretical models

Studies on the specificity of the behavior of voters resulted in the development of concept and theoretical models. One of these models is interactive model in which the voters are influenced by many factors which may be expressed by the candidate like effective and responsible leadership²².

¹⁶ See: M. Mazur, *Marketing polityczny...*, p. 38.

¹⁷ See: W. Adamczyk, *Media masowe w procesie budowania demokracji w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań 1999, p. 85.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ See: U. Jakubowska, *Preferencje polityczne. Psychologiczne teorie i badania*, Wydawnictwo Instytut Psychologii PAN, Warszawa 1999, p. 213.

²⁰ See: Ph. Kotler, A.R. Andreasen, *Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*, The Prentice Hall Publisher, New Jersey 1996, p. 115-116.

²¹ See: J.P. Gunning, *Zrozumieć demokrację – wprowadzenie do teorii wyboru publicznego*, Wydawnictwo Wyższa Szkoła Bankowości, Finansów i Zarządzania, Warszawa 2001, p. 166.

²² See: A. Burgiel, *Wpływy interpersonalne a racjonalność zachowań polskich konsumentów*, Wydawnictwo AE, Katowice 2005, p. 21.

Second, it should be noted that the model of rational choice, is where the electorate is guided with selfishness and rationality when choosing of candidate, who is consistent with their expectations. This is the calculation of the profit and loss. In this case the voter chooses such a candidate who is closest to them in the sense attitude to important matters and which has top rated features. A. Downs from his perspective presents the voter as a rational creature, who participates in the act of voting only when this action is effective for them. Entity functioning in the category of costs (physical effort that must be inserted in the act of voting) and profits (physical, cognitive, emotional). G. Tullock by referring to the theory, argues that influencing single voter, the outcome is small and therefore costs will be always outweigh the benefits²³.

In turn W. H. Riker i P. Ordeshook introduced to the model of rational voters the concept of "civic duty". In accordance with the concept, electorate is guided by the issue of maintaining democracy, subjectively understood of obligation, relative to the of state and nation²⁴. As rightly pointed out M. Jarosz the potential of civil society weakens social exclusion, forming one single of the most important threads of sociological analysis²⁵, which cuts off people from the social participation, in such communities as nation, society or local community²⁶.

As claimed by A. Burgiel, the boundary between rational and irrational behavior is variable and depends on the adopted criterion and many irrational behaviors may be viewed as useful and effective²⁷. In the midst of the error of the theory of rational choice scholars shall exchange: erroneous assumption to continue making by the entity of rational choices (obtaining complete information and good interpretation), disincentive to participate in voting or may make irrational decisions. Reluctantly we admit to the impact of irrational factors for our attitudes and behavior²⁸.

²³ Compare: *O nowy kształt nauk społecznych. Pisma zebrane*, A. Malewski, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 1975.

²⁴ See: K. Korzeniowski, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania...*, p. 241 and next.

²⁵ Compare: *Nierówności społeczne*, M. Jarosz, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1984; *Władza. Przywileje. Korupcja*, M. Jarosz, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2004; *Wygrani i przegrani polskiej transformacji*, M. Jarosz (red.), Oficyna Naukowa – Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2005; *Transformacja. Elity. Społeczeństwo*, M. Jarosz (red.), Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2007.

²⁶ See: M. Jarosz, *Wstęp. Polska lustrwana [in:] Naznaczeni i napiętnowani. O wykluczeniu politycznym*, red. M. Jarosz, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2008, p. 7-8.

²⁷ See: A. Burgiel, *Wpływy interpersonalne...*, p. 21.

²⁸ See: P. Pawełczyk, D. Piontek, *Socjotechnika w komunikowaniu politycznym*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytut Nauk Politycznych i Dziennikarstwa UAM, Poznań 1999, p. 63.

Equally important is the model of identification party, which assumes that, the voter is guided by party loyalty which simplifies the process of this decision. The model of identification party insists on the involvement party. Voters identify themselves with the party (influence of parents, influence of peers). Identification with a specific political option are permanent in nature²⁹.

T. Żyro indicates on the model of the dominant ideology, describing the natural advantage of the ruling party and model of electoral context, which shows electoral behavior to certain representatives of the people, where some voters are not equally treated with validly³⁰.

There are several theories, which explain the reasons of electoral behavior. P. Lazarfeld, B. Berelson, i H. Gaudet presented the sociological approach to of electoral behavior, where the voters' preferences are determined by the membership in the social communities (ethnic group, religious group, social group and occupational group)³¹. The model assumes that each social group votes for the party which serves their interests. Single decisions are not taken into consideration here. The act of voting is seen as a collective behavior. It testifies to the fact that high compatibility of preferences in families, and related reference influences decisions among friends and strong influence of leaders in the groups. As essential determinants which shape attitudes of voters listed demographic and geographic variables, such as: belonging to the class, age, gender, ancestry³².

M. S. Lewis-Beck is of the opinion that, the conditions and dynamics of the economy influences the electorate to vote for the ruling party. Otherwise growing tendency among the voters may influence them to vote for the opposition party³³. Similarly, the problems are recognized by B. Markus that this when the voters are analyzing their own financial situation, especially basing on the achievements of the ruling party . Therefore, elections are treated as a reward or a punishment for those people in power³⁴.

But we should not restrict reasons of voting to economic factors, because sometimes we base on our emotional attitudes while voting for the candidates³⁵. It is not worthy that, in many cases people vote basing on their

²⁹ See: T. Żyro, *Wstęp do politologii*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004, p. 237-239.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ See; M. Buć, *Determinanty aktywności...*, p. 120.

³² Ibidem.

³³ See: M.S. Lewis-Beck, *Comparative Economic Voting: Britain, France, Germany, Italy*, „American Journal of Political Science” 1986, Number 30, p. 15.

³⁴ See: W. Cwalina, A. Falkowski, *Marketing polityczny...*, p. 56.

³⁵ See: M. Buć, *Determinanty aktywności...*, p. 122.

hearts rather than minds or reasoning³⁶. Therefore, the human factors such as: psyche, experience and internal experiences should be taken into account. According to D. Evans, appealing to emotions is much easier to change someone's sentence than rational arguments³⁷.

According to S. E. McDonalds and G. Rabinowitz, the party which will ensure voters the maximum usefulness does not need to be nearest programmatically. In the directional conception electoral behavior are determined by weight (direction) and intensity of proposed changes. For the party is preferred consideration of socially important issues that will please the largest number of voters³⁸.

The classifications of voters

There is something that should be remembered about the different classifications of voters. Z. J. Pietraś in view of the ability of perception of political message, divides the voters into three: determined citizens, selectively reactive citizens and conscious citizens. Because of the way of reacting of voters on the forms of political communication, he mentions; "Political activists (innovators), citizens with social authority, citizens who follow the example, inactive citizens and alienated citizens".

Because of different motives political decision-making he distinguishes: rational voter, emotional voter, and cyber voter (simplifies reality by means of cognitive schemas). Because of the motives of proceedings he mentions: positive voter (his decisions are derived from sympathy and positive feelings to the candidate), negative voter (who gives his vote for any candidate, even an unpopular candidate who has least support), voter programmatic (makes decision alone on the basis of electoral programs), voter axiological (makes decision conditioned by a strong sense of their own orientation which may be ideological or worldview), voter party (guided by the party loyalty), voter group (guided by the family loyalty, professional, national), independent voter (voting in a way difficult to predict), voter alienated (not taking part in the elections because of lack of confidence in the system)³⁹.

³⁶ See: E. Aronson, T.D. Wilson, R.M. Akert, *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 1997, p. 329.

³⁷ See: D. Evans, *Emocje. Naukowo o uczuciach*, Wydawnictwo Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2002, p. 148.

³⁸ See: K. Korzeniowski, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania...*, p. 247.

³⁹ See: Z.J. Pietraś, *Decydowanie polityczne*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 1998, p. 447 and next.

B. Dobek-Ostrowska and R. Wiszniowski classify voters: the voters who are guided by “famous faces”, the voters who identify with the ethos and with symbol of solidarity, the voters politically active, the voters guided by the maintenance of political homeostasis (the principle of maintaining the balance of political forces), the voters affirming to political personalities, the voters known as integrated specialists (with strong bonds of vocational), the voters defined as a community of women, the voters designated as combatants, the voters who are conservative (voting at tested persons), and the voters voting with a sense of obligation⁴⁰.

According to M. Krzyżanowska, the electoral behavior is also affected by the risk that is noticed by candidates in the very act of voting.

- First is functional risk which is related to apprehension whether the offer will fulfill their expectations.
- Second is physical risk such as fear, that is to say, whether the benefits from the proposals will be safe.
- Third is economic risk, whether the voter will achieve profit or loss.
- Fourth is social risk like rating of decision staged by social environment in which it operates.
- Fifth is psychological danger associated with personal judgment and feelings.
- Sixth are risks associated with fear of losing time on voting (selection of offer, location of the polling station, getting to the polling station, filling of the ballot paper, returning home)⁴¹.

Electoral behavior is essential or human; in the first place it takes a decision for whom to vote or decision whether to vote at all. Therefore, we can point out three most typical situations. In the first place, before the date of election the voter knows well for whom they will vote, for example – one may always vote for the same party. In another situation, the voter can be convinced that the election will not go on, for example – in elections they did not participate in, even if for health reasons. In the third situation, the voter considers, that they will participate in elections – for example, guided by the principle, so needs to be done because other with its surroundings so too do⁴².

The voter, who analyzes for whom to vote may feel uncertain especially in circumstances where they have to deal with two candidates. It has a similar

⁴⁰ See: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski, *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego*, Wydawnictwo ASTRUM, Wrocław 2002, p. 182.

⁴¹ See: M. Krzyżanowska, *Marketing usług organizacji niekomercyjnych*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania, Warszawa 2000, p. 78.

⁴² See: K. Korzeniowski, *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania...*, p. 238.

election program and inside uncertainty when we feel identical positive or negative of emotions relative to two competitive politicians. The presence of one of these uncertainties or combinations, therefore, makes that voter experience difficulties with making the decision during election. The voter is looking for more information which may be found for example in political spots presented during the campaign. In the extreme case may come to the situation when voter not capable to cope with their own of uncertainty, withdraws with participate in elections and thereby will not give their of electoral vote.

Conclusions

The modern pace of life eaves us in no of possibilities of depth analysis of information necessary to undertake the most correct decision election. We remain, therefore, on a mechanical reconstruction some kind “way for shortcuts” or we act on the basis of the opinions of others, often of renowned authorities or mimicking of other often assessed, on the basis of the symbol, like authorities.

In view of the cited sources, electoral behavior is on one hand instrumental behavior whose purpose is achieve economies or to avoid losses, and on the other hand the very act of voting You can be read as a value in itself⁴³.

The voting behavior are different to be taken into the account the space of reality of socio – political and the degree of formalization. It seems that the most “clean psychologically” attitude is model of rational voters. According to that voters make rational choices, on the basis of the balance possible benefits and losses. The normal expectation is that such a balance presents itself positively, when we give voice, for the candidate closest to us in terms of important issues.

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⁴³ Compare: *O nowy kształt nauk społecznych. Pisma zebrane*, A. Malewski, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 1975.

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