

New Social Movements and Value Change
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**RATIONAL CHOICE PERSPECTIVES ON NEW SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS AND VALUE CHANGE**

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The papers in this volume were originally presented at a symposium of the 'Werkgemeenschap Verklarende Sociologie', a working group of sociologists in the Netherlands that tries to solve sociological problems within a rational choice perspective. Not surprisingly the larger part of the discussion was devoted to the relationship between rational choice and the theoretical and empirical considerations in the five papers; our summary of the discussion will therefore be restricted to the several objections and considerations that were raised on these issues.

Most objections were raised at a theoretical level. A first objection questioned the necessity of attributing changes in political behavior, such as the rise of new social movements or a change in voting behavior, to autonomous value change or value change as an intermitting cause. Do we really need values to account for changing political attitudes and behavior and the rise of new social movements? Can't we explain what happens, e.g., in the case of the British Labour Party (Heath), by analyzing the changing choice situation voters are facing? Does not the mere existence of a third party and the declining number of blue collar workers particularly in the southern parts of England make a vote for Labour a wasted vote? The voters may well be aware of these processes and therefore choose non-socialist at the ballot. This critique stresses the importance of specific, possibly unique, historical circumstances, making for differences in the choice situations.

A second objection to value theories of political behavior is that they disregard the collective good aspects of political processes. The "silly" theory, as it was called by Kriesi, that post-materialist values will lead to participation in protest movement does not satisfy. Post-materialist values are also collective goods in the sense that they stipulate situations to be, to the creation of which each individual can only make a negligible contribution. This implies that free rider effects will emerge. If actors are rational, and if they endorse post-materialist values, they have no reason to act accordingly and join the new social movements.

In this respect, Anthony Heath's paper was criticized by several discussants on its logic to label issue voting as rationally motivated behavior and party identification processes as non-rationally motivated behavior. Party identification voting can be reconciled with rationally motivated behavior under the assumption that party identification represents habit formation that cuts information and transaction costs. Heath replied, that felt that the specific label is of minor importance, as long as such assumptions lead to new and testable hypotheses. Such a new prediction from an information cost approach would be that the higher educated have a less stable party identification, because they have less information costs than the lower educated. Heath cited evidence to the contrary.

As a more radical version of this criticism it was forwarded that there are good arguments to label party identification voting as rationally motivated and issue voting as non-rational. The first point for rational choice theories of voting behavior to take issue with, is how to solve the problem why people vote in the first place: if they would be rational actors, they know that their vote will not matter and that it is only rational to stay at home, even if they care about the issues. If they do cast their ballot, as many indeed do, and they are still considered to be rationally motivated, other considerations must have entered their reasoning. Under rational choice assumptions, the utility function of voting must include terms that matter to actors individually, and this is not true for the relationship between individual votes and macro-political outcomes. Considerations of status (voting as an instrument to confirm status group memberships) are an obvious candidate. It was suggested that the increased social mobility of the British working class and its social decomposition could offer an explanation of the decline of the Labour Party. Heath responded that these proposals have to be evaluated in light of the new predictions they allow to derive. One might logically reconcile the theory of party identification and the theory of issue-voting, or integrate these ideas in an even more general framework, but this cannot be a goal on its own. He emphasized, that as we become too catholic, we will lose the exciting new predictions of the original ideas. New predictions which are eventually empirically corroborated remain the touchstone of social science. For example, with respect to the importance of the rise of the SDP as a situational explanation of changing electoral preference, Heath argued that an alternative between Labour and Conservatives had existed well before the rise of the SDP and a situational explanation can therefore not be satisfactory at all.

As a third objection, it was added that Inglehart's thesis about the behavioral effects of post-materialism cannot be considered to be an

explanatory theory, because it does not specify concrete preferences or constraints within which preferences have to be realized. A measurement of a general value orientation is only a summary variable of separate preferences. Especially Opp cited evidence to the effect, that if one estimates the influence of the general orientation next to those of the separate preferences, the influence of the general orientation disappears. De Graaf reported different findings: his earlier work shows that general post-materialist values are important in explaining a wide range of behavior, also outside the political realm. This work also demonstrates effects of post-materialist values on occupational careers. Other work shows influence of post-materialism on consumption patterns and leisure behavior: post-materialists consume less traditional luxury goods and spend more time on culture consumption, after controlling for income, occupation and education.

As a fourth objection to value theories of political action it was brought forward that the causal order of values and behavior will always be unclear and may very well lead from behavior to values instead of the other way round. The observed relation between values and behavior may also be brought about by response behavior and may not reflect anything real. From this point of view, Opp's paper was criticized for relying entirely on subjective data. Opp asks people, or rather he presents them a list of what they would do if a certain situation would occur, and asks them what they have done. It is questionable in what respect these subjective behavioral intentions can be used in an explanation of behavior (which is reported as well - not observed). All kind of cognitive processes might just as well account for the pattern of answers on these batteries of questions. Given the weak relationships between values and behavior, there can be doubts on its explanatory and predictive value for real life situations. The issue of cause and effect was forcefully brought to the fore with respect to Kriesi's finding of large effects of occupational categories on orientation towards the new social movements: a positive orientation is particularly prevalent among occupations in the social and cultural sector and among the unskilled. It was suggested that occupations cause certain value/action orientations. Members of the new social movements are forced to their orientations by the occupational sector they are working in: the correlation is a selection effect. Or could it be that the new middle class opts for their jobs on basis of their values acquired earlier on? The overrepresentation of the unskilled that Kriesi also observes is more puzzling, since this group usually shows a conservative value pattern. One solution would be that some hard-core members of the new social movements have made their political participation to their main occupation, while working in unskilled jobs

as a side occupation. Heath questioned the logic between participating in new social movements and having an occupation in the social-cultural sector. What is it about this sector that brings people to join the anti-nuclear peace-movement? Why would this be more important to social-cultural specialists than to persons in other occupations? Kriesi suggests an explanation in terms of life-styles (Lebenswelt). Participation in the new social movements does not only bring value confirmation, but also behavioral confirmation with respect to certain modes of living. Another explanation would be that social and cultural specialists are disproportional subjected to bureaucratic restrictions. People with a high education experience infringements upon their autonomy by bureaucratic procedures and a hierarchical organizational structure. Much of the protest of the new social movements can therefore be interpreted as resistance against bureaucracy.

As a fifth objection, several discussants sought to belittle the importance of values for the explanation of actual behavior, that is, participation in the new social movements. For example, De Graaf's results demonstrate that only a very small amount of variance in post-materialist values can be explained by traditional social background variables; its influence on consequent actions may be statistically significant, but is substantively negligible. Therefore, values have little empirical importance neither in explaining participation in new social movements, or in explaining the social background of those who actually participate in such movement. Kriesi's results show that value orientations do not bring very much either in the explanation of the action potential (which is partly measured by actual behavior) of the Dutch population. In response Kriesi and De Graaf stated that the amount of variance explained by value indicators may not be huge, but nevertheless non-negligible. De Graaf also stressed that his newer estimates of value stability, which correct for measurement error and ipsativity, suggest that value orientations are indeed very stable over the life course, such in contrast with actual behavior.

Considerable discussion was invoked by Van Deth's somewhat disappointing attempt to develop a theoretical model of response behavior. To be able to decide between theories of issue voting and party identification voting, Heath sought to connect the issue of rationality of voting behavior with the problem of stability of political attitudes. The existence of non-attitudes and random voting behavior would, to his opinion, be quite detrimental to tentative explanations of political behavior from a rational choice perspective. An interesting conditioning hypothesis about the prevalence of issue voting versus party identification would be that the higher educated decide on their

vote from an issue criterion, where the lower educated use party identification to guide their behavior. However, empirical evidence exists as to the contrary: both attitudes towards issues and party identification are more stable among the higher educated. It was suggested that Van Deth had given up too early in face of his negative results and that his theoretical ideas had not yet been formulated explicitly enough. A number of other conditional factors making for a stratification of persons in people with stable identifications and attitudes and people without these stable identities and orientations, were suggested. E.g., the direct social context of people, their personal social networks might help to account for what is happening. Yet another answer may be found in newer developments in cognitive psychology. Changes in identifications and attitudes could be the result of cognitive framing. Cognitive framing points to political knowledge, uncertainty and experience as conditions for the stability of attitudes. The research of McGuire might also be relevant: he discusses the so-called Socratic effect, meaning that people's attitudes, if people are forced to think about issues, in time can only become more stable. As a result of cognitive framing, and enhanced by mechanisms of dissonance reduction, more people will become better informed and attitudes will become more stable.

In conclusion, we quote Lindenberg, who neatly summarized the discussion in three main statements:

- a. A rational choice explanation of political behavior, be it voting or otherwise, cannot draw upon an instrumental rationality approach. Any utility argument approach has to include the influence of groups processes and face-to-face contacts.
- b. Another promising direction to specify models of value formation and political participation may be to detail the psychological mechanisms that influence the selection of utility arguments. Framing theory appears to be a promising avenue in this respect.
- c. The relation between values and behavior remains as problematic as it always was.