

Can rational choice theory explain participation that puts one's life at stake?

Introduction

This essay shall address the issue of whether it is ever rational for an individual to take part in extreme, meaning violent or life threatening, forms of political participation. Rational choice theory shall first be defined. Then the apparent problem, that rational choice theory seems ill-suited to explaining life-threatening political participation, shall be explained. The main body of the essay will lay out the ways in which different rational choice theorists, despite this seeming inconsistency, attempt to explain this phenomenon. Both public good and private interest approaches shall be considered. Moreover, some of these will show that a rational choice explanation of extreme participation is compatible with some other theories of political participation. Criticisms of this position, or of rational choice theory's initial assumptions, shall then be raised. It shall be argued that rational choice theory can largely, but not without issues, explain extreme forms of political participation. There may be value to taking a 'thin' rationality view, as well as bringing emotions and social norms into account. These additions make the theory more realistic and theoretically convincing but, perhaps, less useful for empirical testing.

For rational choice theorists, the individual is the sole agent of political action. He or she is assumed to think and act rationally in his or her own self-interest, where "rational action involves *utility maximisation* ... [i.e.] when confronted with an array of options ... [a person] picks the one she believes best serves her objectives"¹ and "it must be possible for all of an agent's available options to be rank-ordered"². Of course, individuals are prone to error, rarely have perfect information and are at the mercy of factors outside their control, including other

1 Italics in original.

Green, Donald P.; Shapiro, Ian, "Pathologies of rational choice theory: a critique of applications in political science", New Haven, London, 1994, pp. 14

2 Ibid., pp. 14

individuals' actions. They can sometimes make mistakes or fail to reach their objectives, but nevertheless rational choice theorists agree that "each individual maximises the *expected value* of his own payoff"³.

Rational choice theory is an individualist account of political action that rejects collectivist approaches. Therefore, it seeks to "explain collective outcomes by reference to the maximizing actions of individuals"⁴. The challenge here is to explain whether "participation that puts one's life at stake", like violent resistance to an oppressive regime, should be considered as rational self-interested behaviour despite the significant risk. Although regime change brought about by risky resistance might be in the interest of almost all individuals in the oppressed society, the risk to any given individual of death or other punishment by participating in any kind of resistance is considerable. We might expect, therefore, no one to resist. Even if some (presumably irrational) minority did resist, the rational individual would 'free-ride' on their efforts i.e. hope to benefit from the potential regime change without making a contribution.

This prediction is not entirely problematic. The historical fact is that violent political participation (riots, revolutions, terrorism, war and so on) is quite rare, compared to periods of peace and less extreme political participation. When they do occur, participation as a proportion of the available population is usually relatively low. Already, then, rational choice theory can explain the vast majority of cases where individuals choose not to participate in life-risking activity. Nevertheless, throughout world history some individuals do risk their lives in political participation, whether volunteering for military service, taking up arms against occupying military forces or participating in riots. To dismiss these actions as irrational would imply that the theory of rational choice is not very useful for explaining people's actions. Therefore, more analysis must be done to explain the minority of cases.

3 Italics in original.

ibid., pp. 15

4 Ibid., pp. 16

Making a Contribution to a Public Good

One common approach to explaining why people participate in extreme ways is to say that they are contributing to the (intended, not necessarily actual) public good. By their collective action, each participating individual hopes to achieve a particular political goal that will, he believes, be of both personal and public benefit. However, there are a number of factors that need to be overcome before an individual decides to act in this fashion. Firstly, there must be a clearly understood grievance and desire for change. Secondly, he must think that there is a reasonable chance of success in the endeavour to implement the change. Thirdly, he must believe that this chance of success is positively affected by his individual contribution, for if the individual contribution had a negligible impact, it would be rational to free ride. Fourthly, the estimated level of risk must be within the individual's acceptable threshold. Each of these conditions are variables that depend on the political context and the actions of others, either known in the past or expected in the future.

It is a necessary but insufficient condition that there must be a severe grievance against the current political conditions. This is because "the more one detests the regime, the more likely one is to accept higher risk"⁵. If an individual is included within, and accorded with status by, the regime through the democratic process, it is more rational for that individual to attempt to maximise his utility through non-violent means rather than extreme methods of political participation. Additionally, if state institutions are perceived to be fair, the individual will feel less resentment and have less personal interest in the overthrow of the system. Therefore, Goodwin and Skocpol paraphrase Dawley⁶ to call "the ballot box ... the coffin of revolutionary movements"⁷. They find that even "so-called 'inclusionary' authoritarian regimes ... have so far

5 Petersen, Roger Dale, "Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe", Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 33

6 Dawley, Alan, "Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn", Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1976, p. 70

7 Goodwin, Jeff; Skocpol, Theda, "Explaining Revolutions in the Third World", *Politics and Society* 1989, Volume 17, pp.

been immune from revolutionary transformations”⁸ because it is in the interest of fewer individuals to seek radical change.

Extreme participation is to be found almost exclusively in exclusionary and repressive regimes, the overthrow of which presents benefits to many individuals and in which less extreme forms of political participation are denied. By the suppression of non-extreme forms of political participation, the regime “tend[s] to radicalise ... moderate and reformist politicians ... [who otherwise] might compete with revolutionaries for popular support”. Moreover, the frequent use of violence against dissenters “place[s] a premium on the things armed revolutionaries are best prepared to do” i.e. provide safety for political opponents⁹. This understanding is compatible with neo-institutional theory, that shows how institutions affect individuals' decision making process¹⁰.

Living under (what is perceived to be) an exclusionary, repressive and resented regime is a necessary precondition for resistance, but by no means sufficient. “It is logically incorrect to equate intensity of need with the likelihood of collective response without also considering the ability of individuals to gamble on an improvement in the status quo”¹¹ or in other words, individuals' estimation of their chance of making a difference is a crucial variable on whether at all, and how much, they will choose to resist or participate. The perceived chance of successful political action depends on a number of other factors: the strength of the regime, available resources, the participation of others and leadership.

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8 Ibid., pp. 495

9 Ibid., pp. 496-497

10 Norris, P., “Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism”, Cambridge University Press, 2002, Chapter 4

11 Popkin, Samuel L., “Peasant Movements and Collective Action” in Popkin, Samuel L. (ed), “The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam”, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979

“The mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection”^{12 13} because the most hated and repressive regimes may also be those most effective at preventing and discouraging open resistance¹⁴. The military, geographical and tactical resources available to the opposition all affect the potential success of resistance. Ideally, would-be resisters will have access to borders or territory over which the hostile regime has limited control¹⁵. For example, the apartheid regime of South Africa, had absolute military supremacy and kept tight guard over the country's borders, making violent resistance difficult, ineffective, and therefore largely irrational and hardly carried out. However, the nature of the apartheid system itself gave the coloured population safe areas to organise: in townships like Soweto, where the white regime exercised little control. These circumstances were conducive to the organisation of collective resistance, potentially life-risking although rarely armed¹⁶.

Resources are needed to undertake collective action, not least the education that collective action is a potential method to solving common problems. Indeed, Popkin and, separately, Gerrit in their studies of peasant rebellions found that effective peasant organisations did not come from the most deprived areas but where there was “the creation of awareness ... and of the possibility that united action can be undertaken” and “support from educated urban allies”¹⁷.

12 Trotsky, Leon, “The History of the Russian Revolution”, Monad Press, New York, 1969 (first published 1932)

13 Goodwin, Jeff; Skocpol, Theda, “Explaining Revolutions in the Third World”, *Politics and Society* 1989, Volume 17, pp. 490

14 Petersen, Roger Dale, “Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe”, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 36

15 Goodwin, Jeff; Skocpol, Theda, “Explaining Revolutions in the Third World”, *Politics and Society* 1989, Volume 17, pp. 497

16 Zunes, Stephen, “The role of non-violent action in the downfall of apartheid”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 1999, Volume 37 Number 1, pp. 137-169

17 Gerrit, Huizer, “Peasant Rebellion in Latin America: the origins, forms of expression, and potential of Latin American peasant unrest”, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973

Access to money, food, weapons and other resources are needed to make resistance possible. The resources available to individuals, and the political context in which they act, affect their chances of success, and therefore the rational calculus of whether or not to participate. This is compatible with the civic voluntarism theory of political participation¹⁸. Those suffering from the worst conditions, who might potentially gain the most from extreme collective action, can least afford to take risks: “one way of looking at this 'apathy' would be to say that the poor cannot afford the *luxury* of collective action”¹⁹. The most vulnerable may have neither the ability to act collectively, nor even the knowledge that such a thing is practical. Without resources, a rational individual might still resist in a “primitive”^{20 21} fashion i.e. meeting minimal standards of compliance and expressing discontent in less risky fashions, such as telling anti-regime jokes.

Individuals know that the chance of successfully implementing their desired public good depends on collective action; they cannot implement the public good working alone. Additionally, the participation of others lowers his own costs and risks: “the larger the group, the smaller his estimate of the amount that he will have to contribute to ensure the good is provided”²² and risks “the probability of any one participant's arrest and conviction for the act is decreased”²³. However, there is a “theoretical chicken-or-egg dilemma” to be solved: “in order to explain the individual's participation ... the model must presuppose that a large

18 Verba, Sidney; Scholzman, Kay; Brady, Henry E., “Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics”, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1995

19 Italics in original.

Barry, Brian, “Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy”, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978

20 Scott, J., “Beyond the war of words: cautious resistance and calculated conformity” in Amoore, L. (ed) “The Global Resistance Reader”, Routledge, London and New York, 2005

21 Scott, J., “The infrapolitics of subordinate groups” in Amoore, L. (ed) “The Global Resistance Reader”, Routledge, London and New York, 2005

22 Mason, T. D., “Individual participation in collective racial violence: A rational choice synthesis”, The American Political Science Review, 1984, pp. 1050

23 Ibid., pp. 1051

number of equally rational individuals have already chosen to participate”²⁴. Peterson solves this problem by showing that even though every individual may be acting rationally, it does not follow that they will act identically, on account of their different circumstances, thresholds of acceptable risk, and desire for the available public good. Also, the long-term effects of earlier rational actions can lead to a change of behaviour and preferences²⁵.

Individuals in different circumstances or with different resources will accept different amounts of risk and have different levels of desire for the particular conception of the public good (including rejecting it altogether). Those with vested economic interests or dependants might incur higher costs by resisting. Young people might, it is true, underestimate the danger to themselves but they are also less likely to be constrained by the responsibility of caring for a family²⁶. An individual who has experienced great harm from the object of resentment will be more willing to take risks to pursue its defeat than the individual who directly benefits from the status quo (who may, perhaps, be willing to take risks in its defence). For example, we find that during the American War of Independence, partly because “no provision was made for the families of men in service, and no pensions were paid to the dependents of those who fell”, “enlistments were largely restricted to the very young, the adventurous, the floating population, and the super-patriotic”²⁷.

If enough individuals with lower thresholds of risk participate, this may be sufficient to reach the acceptable risk threshold of others, prompting more individuals to participate. This process will rarely result in the mobilisation of all society, but it does help to explain why individuals in certain circumstances are more likely to be recruited than others.

24 Ibid., pp. 1042

25 Petersen, Roger Dale, "Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe", Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 8-9

26 Ibid., pp. 48

27 Morison, Samuel Eliot; Commager, Henry Steele; Leuchtenburg, William E., "A Concise History of the American Republic", Oxford University Press, pp. 84

A very important factor for lowering the risks associated with resistance is to reduce or eliminate the uncertainties surrounding the actions of others. Trust in or knowledge about other potential resisters is very important to the collective agreement to participate. Strong, close-knit communities with plenty of face-to-face contact lower the unknown variables and risks for the individual, potentially making collective action more likely. This is broadly compatible with the literature on social capital^{28 29}. Knowledge about other potential actors removes uncertainty: “shared community histories produce knowledge of who can be trusted, who can be persuaded ... and who must be isolated ... Most individuals are loath to engage in this type of high-risk behavior without some knowledge of the odds of success, survival, and especially, the odds of betrayal”³⁰. Knowledge of which other actors are most likely to join in collective action, or to betray such an action, is vital to the rational calculus of creating a resistance movement or coalition. Similarly, “individuals are unlikely to recruit, or be recruited by, people they have never met”³¹.

Leaders or professional revolutionaries can play an important part in further recruitment and rationalising participation. Charismatic leadership or ideology can convince individuals that collective action may be successful in achieving a public good. Furthermore, actions may speak louder than words. Past successes in providing local and clearly visible “state-like collective goods to their constituents” wins revolutionary movements “popular support” in future endeavours³². When effective, “leadership make[s] people feel they want the cause to succeed enough to contribute to it. ... This involves ... the creation of an ideology ... and the

28 Putnam, Robert D., “Bowling alone: The collapse and revivla of American community”, Simon and Schuster, London, 2000

29 Norris, P., “Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism”, Cambridge University Press, 2002, Chapter 8

30 Petersen, Roger Dale, “Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe”, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 18

31 Ibid., pp. 18

32 Goodwin, Jeff; Skocpol, Theda, “Explaining Revolutions in the Third World”, Politics and Society 1989, Volume 17, pp. 493

dissemination of the idea that the movement is near-success, so that only a short (though hard) push will be needed to produce spectacular results”³³.

Focus on local objectives can also overcome the problem of individual contribution. If an individual feels that his own contribution to the revolution, or whatever public good, is negligible, then he will realise that no public good will be gained by contributing to (violent) activity. By focusing on more immediate and manageable targets, individuals will feel their personal contribution is meaningful: “If a large overall goal can be broken into many small independent pieces, all of which are necessary, the free-rider problem can be overcome, for if each person has a monopoly on a necessary factor for the final goal, all contributions are essential”³⁴. For this reason, would-be revolutionary organisers who tried to convince Vietnamese peasants to mobilise for national or world revolution failed to have any success in recruitment whereas “only later, when peasants (and workers) were organized about smaller and more immediate goals, were larger organizational attempts successful”³⁵.

Private Interest and Selective Incentives

An alternative method of explaining why people put their lives at risk in life-threatening political acts is to look for private interest or selective incentives. This can be in addition to, or instead of, making a contribution to the public good. Selective incentives are also very important in explaining how the free-rider problem is overcome. Tullock justifies his private interest explanation of revolution by explaining that “the largest profits from revolution are apt to come to those people who are (a) most likely to end up at the head of government, and (b) most likely to be successful in overthrow of the existing government. ... Superficial examination

33 Barry, Brian, “Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy”, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, pp. 39-40

34 Popkin, Samuel L., “Peasant Movements and Collective Action” in Popkin, Samuel L. (ed), “The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam”, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, pp. 257

35 Ibid., pp. 262

of history would seem to indicate that the private good theory is upheld by this empirical data"³⁶. Most *coup d'etats*, and the famous Western revolutions, were indeed carried out by the same individuals who went on to wield power. Although he suggests that possibly "revolutions are carried out by people who hope for private gain and ... [any] public goods ... [are] a byproduct"³⁷, using selective incentives and contributions to a public good are not necessarily mutually exclusive rationalisations of life-threatening resistance.

Private interest and selective incentives can also be found at work in examples of risky participation short of a *coup d'etat*. These selective incentives can be either material or social. The incentive of wielding government power is obvious. Smaller incentives for foot-soldiers are also significant. For instance, the families of Palestinian suicide bombers or Western soldiers killed in action receive pensions and remuneration from private donations or public funds. They may have few opportunities for economic advancement for them or their dependants apart from risky political action. Peasant movements, similarly, might offer advantageous treatment on allocating land ownership or reducing future taxation under the revolutionary regime³⁸.

Individuals' own interests are often bound up in the well-being of other individuals, such as close friends and family. Acting for the preservation of these other individuals is not purely altruistic but at least partly self-serving. In other words, "gain from ... [risky behaviour] would include not only ... direct personal gain, but also any pleasure or pain ... [received] as a result of interdependence"³⁹ with other people. In this way, individuals may take risks for other individuals, even if otherwise they would not make a contribution to the public good. For example, we see that "resistance against ... Soviet rule in Lithuania ... was in large part the

36 Tullock, G. "The paradox of revolution", *Public Choice* 1971, Volume 11, pp. 98

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 99

38 Goodwin, Jeff; Skocpol, Theda, "Explaining Revolutions in the Third World", *Politics and Society* 1989, Volume 17, pp. 494

39 Tullock, G. "The paradox of revolution", *Public Choice* 1971, Volume 11, pp. 97

result of families organizing themselves to hide and protect their draft-age sons who had become partisan fighters in an effort to avoid conscription in the Red Army"⁴⁰; "if one family member becomes involved [with risky participation] ... other members of the family will probably accept far higher risk levels to help that family member even if they had little preference to engage in rebellion at the start of the conflict"⁴¹.

In 'strong' communities, there may be social status rewards and penalties for engaging or failing to engage in risky political activity. Especially if there are few opportunities for economic advancement, "the only way to become a 'big man' ... may be through some sort of courageous action. This seems especially true for young males"⁴². In order to gain the respect of their peers and elders and seek to prove their adulthood, young people may take risks. Social status according to political activity may also affect romantic or marriage opportunities.

The desire to avoid social sanctions provides a similar incentive. Even "the sense of guilt at not contributing to some altruistic organisation provides a 'selective incentive'"⁴³, if the individual acknowledges the desirability of the public good. For instance, a student working on a volunteer project whose peers had just become targets of deliberate violence, recalls a lady pressuring him at a meeting. He recalls that "She looked me in the eye and said 'Rudy, I *know* you won't deny us your talents in Canton this summer. I'm depending on you.' I knew I was trapped. No way I could turn that woman down"⁴⁴. The risk to his own life, which the student

40 Petersen, Roger Dale, "Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 54

41 Ibid., pp. 53

42 Ibid., pp. 21

43 Barry, Brian, "Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy", University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, pp. 31

44 Italics in original.

Tilly, Charles "Do Unto Others" in Giugni, Marco; Passy, Florence (eds.), "Political Altruism: Solidarity Movements in International Perspective", Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2001, pp. 38

himself calculated as two percent⁴⁵, was outweighed by his commitment to the cause and fear of shame in the eyes of the other volunteers.

Elizabeth Wood stresses the psychological, or emotional selective benefits of taking part in life-risking political participation to explain why individuals do not free ride on others' efforts⁴⁶. Individuals, by attacking the source of their resentment and oppression, feel a sense of empowerment and pride unknown to them before, which Wood calls "the assertion of agency"⁴⁷. This emotional benefit is available only to those individuals that directly participate, although the material benefits of freedom from feudal land relations are open to the whole community⁴⁸. Also possibly important are what Muller and Opp describe as "(1) affiliation rewards such as meeting new friends and feeling solidarity with a group, and (2) psychological gratification from conforming to the expectations of reference persons about how they should behave"⁴⁹.

The Thin, the Thick and the Irrational

One of the possible problems with the rational choice explanation of extreme political participation is the tension between 'thin' and 'thick' rationality models. The difference between these two concepts is that in "the 'thin-rational' account, agents are assumed to be rational only in the sense that 'they efficiently employ the means available to pursue their ends.' In 'thick-rational' accounts, by contrast, 'the analyst posits not only rationality but some

45 Ibid., pp. 27-28

46 Wood, Elizabeth Jean, "The Emotional Benefits of Insurgency in El Salvador" in Goodwin, Jeff; Jasper, James M.; Polletta, Francesca, "Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements", Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2001

47 Ibid., pp. 268

48 Ibid., pp. 271

49 Muller, Edward N.; Opp, Karl-Deiter, "Rational choice and rebellious collective action", The American Political Science Review, 1986, pp. 474

additional description of agent preferences and beliefs"^{50 51}. In other words, a theorist using a 'thick' approach makes assumptions about the individuals' information and goals and then seeks to predict his methods and actions. A 'thin' approach omits an actor's goals from analysis but still assumes that his methods to achieve those goals will be rational.

The problem with 'thick' rational models is that the theorist's assumptions of other actors goals and rational calculus may to be simplified or false. Moreover, as already discussed, when dealing with collective action problems it is not necessarily the case that all actors have the same goals. On the other hand, when dealing with 'thin' rationality it may be difficult to make useful predictions: "what is gained by avoiding controversial assumptions about human nature can come at a considerable cost from the standpoint of measurement and empirical testing of rational choice hypotheses"⁵². For example, imagine an individual participates in risky behaviour on behalf of a public good as defined by a religion. He has also been led to believe that if he is martyred, he will be rewarded in the afterlife. His methods to achieve his goals may well be rational, even though the assumptions upon which he bases his calculus are arguably irrational. His actions will, therefore, be difficult to distinguish from the actions of an irrational individual or madman.

In truth, the problem between 'thin' and 'thick' rational choice theory is merely a reflection of doubt over the *a priori* assumptions that lies at the heart of rational choice theory: that the *individual* is the only agent of political action and that he acts *rationally* to pursue his interests. For instance, Wood's work focuses on emotional selective incentives. If emotions are to be

50 Donald P. Green, Ian Shapiro, "Pathologies of rational choice theory : a critique of applications in political science", New Haven ; London : Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 17-18

51 Ferejohn, John, "Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England", Monroe, Kristen (ed.), The Economic Approach to Politics, Harper Collins, New York, 1991

52 Donald P. Green, Ian Shapiro, "Pathologies of rational choice theory : a critique of applications in political science", New Haven ; London : Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 18

counted as affecting decisions, however, the question is to what extent does the individual remain rational. It seems that a comprehensive account of human action cannot avoid the role of emotions, but emotions can sometimes cloud an individual's judgement, throwing doubt on the model of the rational individual.

Peterson is candid that rational and irrational behaviour must both be considered at face value to understand risky participation: "Rational or instrumental behavior is certainly one part of the story, but so are norms and irrational psychological mechanisms"⁵³. He lists some examples of common irrational behaviour as the "tyranny of sunk costs"⁵⁴, "the value of small victories"⁵⁵ and "wishful thinking"⁵⁶. The "tyranny of sunk costs" is an effect of path-dependence, the desire not to assess current circumstances if it involves an admission that previous efforts were wasted. For an example of "wishful thinking", he relates that some Lithuanians continued to resist, believing that the United States would soon come to their aid against the Soviet Union with atomic weapons. Better informed actors had difficulty in convincing other individuals of the opposite.

Tilly⁵⁷, Muller and Opp⁵⁸ all, in their treatments of extreme participation in rational choice terms, end by abandon rational choice premises and thinking in collectivist terms. For instance, Opp and Deiter conclude "we assume that average citizens may adopt a collectivist conception of rationality because they recognize that what is individually rational is collectively irrational ...

53 Petersen, Roger Dale, "Resistance and rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 13

54 Ibid., pp. 11

55 Ibid., pp. 76

56 Ibid., pp. 78

57 Tilly, Charles "Do Unto Others" in Giugni, Marco; Passy, Florence (eds.), "Political Altruism: Solidarity Movements in International Perspective", Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2001

58 Muller, Edward N.; Opp, Karl-Deiter, "Rational choice and rebellious collective action", The American Political Science Review, 1986

thus we reject one of the core assumptions of the private interest theory”⁵⁹. Their proposed solution to the collective action problem is that rational individuals will – collectively – all decide to simply ignore it. Not only will this in empirical terms under-predict the number of free-riders but theoretically it merely creates an infinite recursion of the collective action problem.

Conclusion

In this essay I have outlined rational choice explanations of how the collective action problem of extreme life-risking political participation may be overcome. This has involved a referral to contributions to the public good and seeking private interest. Some other theories have also been shown to be compatible with the rational choice model. Criticisms of the rational individual model and the problem of 'thick' *versus* 'thin' rational choice theory have been raised. It has been argued that rational choice theory can largely explain circumstances in which individuals may choose to act in a certain way. However it should be acknowledged that limits exist. The more variables that a model is expected to incorporate, especially when they are intangible ideas like emotion or social norms, the less understandable the model becomes for making general statements about human action, without necessarily becoming more accurate at prediction in real world situations.

59 Ibid., pp. 484

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