

Секция «Политические науки»

Protest as a form of political participation

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This paper is going to concentrate on such form of political participation when people express their opinion toward certain actions of a government by organizing or joining political protest or demonstration. According to Michael Lipsky, the protest activity is a mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions, characterized by showmanship or display of an unconventional nature, and undertaken to obtain rewards from political or economic systems while working within the systems." [1] Such protest can take a form of peaceful or violent demonstration, and can also be either lawful or unlawful.

It is often argued that protest as a form of political participation is limited to those people who come from unprivileged social classes and who lack resources and channels to influence politics through other means. However, protests are also common in relatively stable democratic societies (Western Europe, for example), and therefore can be regarded as a universal "expressive political act rather than a last resort or act of desperation." [2] Such an act of protest requires more from an individual involved than other forms of political participation, for example signing a petition or writing a letter to a media resource raising an issue. These kind of actions are a lot less radical, demand less physical activity, and they allow for person to preserve some kind of anonymity, which is impossible if someone goes out on the street and holds a placate with a statement. It is reinforced with the spread of the internet and the possibility to sign a petition online, contact a person through emails and communicate with groups of people by social networking. That's why one could expect less and less people protesting the "old way". Nevertheless, as was stated before, protest actions are still very frequent in a modern political landscape. If people choose a protest over other forms of political participation, they acknowledge its particular advantages and bargaining leverage. Therefore political protest continues to be an important and popular way of expressing one's political views.

Some independent factors may have an impact on the overall composition of those who participate in protests. The age of a person, to start with, may affect it. Especially when the violence is included, there is a generally held view that young are more likely to be part of the protest. On the contrary, the older citizens are, they are less likely to be associated with political protests. It may be because younger people have not yet build up their social status and reputation, and thus risk less by participating in protest in comparison with older people. Also because young tend to zealously believe and promote their ideas, or, on the contrary, to be flexible and be fast to change their views and pick on some new and popular ones. But if the political issue that is being protested concerns an older age group or several, it can attract all sorts of people with age not being a decisive factor.

Another potential independent variable could be gender of the protesters. In general, men are considered to be more politically active than women, and the same argument could be applied for joining the protests. Men are viewed to be more likely to engage in some kind of

radical actions such as protests, with women viewed to be more peaceful and tolerant. In fact, in the event of violent demonstration involving fights, clashing with the police, damaging property etc, usually the ones behind these actions are men. Still, with women's right to vote alongside with men and with trends toward emancipation across Europe, there are fewer and fewer substantial arguments why women should not be as active politically as men. The same goes for protests. On almost every issue, women can get involved on a grounds of being a citizen first, and then a female, mother, wife, etc.

It was already mentioned above that it is sometimes believed that people with some deprivations in life would go on the streets protesting rather than those with higher standards of living. Therefore the level of income could possibly be an independent factor. But actually there are a lot of ways to access a political process without having significant financial resources, with voting, organizing in a group, signing a petition, and contacting a local representative being just a few examples. So protesting is by no means an only option. In addition, there is no clear correlation between getting wealthier and becoming more politically active.

To identify whether the variables described previously have any correlation with the composition of the political protesters, the surveys such as the ones that were discussed by Topf could be potentially examined.[3] It is rare that all or significant number of participants of the ongoing protest could be interviewed to collect the information about their gender, age, education or level of income. Thus the format of the surveys has to be either asking about potential participation in the protest activity or past experience. In the former case, people would have to indicate in which circumstances they would decide to organize or join political protest, and in the latter state whether they have actually engaged in such activities. This data, however, would be a subject to certain limitations. First, what people think hypothetically they would do in some situation may never become a reality in the absence of such situation or simply because of change of mind. It is also important that those who participated in some protest activities in the past could have been obliged to do so. It is common for trade unions or some organizations to make their members halt work or production and make them part of the protest, even if some members as individuals would not willingly participate. That is why the format and questions of the survey should reflect such possibilities and leave room for clarifications.

Protest is a substantial form of political participation which importance is not declining with societies reaching stability and is not undermined by other less radical and more accessible forms. It may be potentially influenced by such independent variables as age, gender and level of income. To find out whether this is the case, the surveys could be undertaken. To avoid the limitations of such approach, the questionnaire should be carefully prepared to avoid possible shortcomings.

Литература

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