

Political Utility and Electoral Behavior in Thailand: Literature Systematic Reviews

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Abstract

Elections are a crucial component of democratic governance, allowing voters to engage in political decision-

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making by choosing representatives tasked with developing public policy and managing the state. Comprehending the factors influencing voting behavior is essential for elucidating how voters make political decisions in democratic systems. This study seeks to examine the voting behavior of Thai citizens utilizing the Political Utility framework, which posits that individuals make political decisions by assessing the anticipated benefits or values associated with political alternatives. This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, incorporating documentary research and conceptual analysis to integrate pertinent literature in political science and political economy. The research amalgamates theoretical viewpoints from Utility Theory, Rational Choice Theory, Public Choice Theory, and Political Behavior Theory to construct an analytical framework elucidating how voters evaluate political options. The results indicate that voting behavior in Thailand is shaped by various aspects of political usefulness, encompassing public policies, economic advantages, social networks, and psychological elements like faith in political leaders. Electorate members generally choose politicians or political parties regarded as able to provide both concrete and abstract advantages. Elections are a process wherein voters assess the political value of rival options prior to casting their votes.

Keywords: Political Utility, Voting Behavior, Electoral Behavior, Thai Politics, Rational Choice Theory

Introduction

Elections are a fundamental mechanism of democracy, providing citizens with the opportunity to participate in shaping the political direction of the state through the selection of political representatives who are responsible for setting public policy and administering the country. Therefore, elections are not merely an institutional process of the political system, but also a crucial mechanism reflecting the needs, expectations, and decisions of the people as the owners of sovereign power (Downs, 1957; Antunes, 2010). The concept of voting behavior has thus received widespread attention in political science, as voters' decisions directly impact the legitimacy of government and the stability of the political system in a democracy (Gelman et al, 2007).

Theoretically, the study of voting behavior is often explained through several important models, such as sociological models, psychological models, and rational choice models. These models all indicate that voters' decisions arise

from evaluating information, social factors, and the expected benefits from political choices (Antunes, 2010). Furthermore, the rational choice model suggests that individuals tend to make decisions by considering the costs and benefits of each alternative. Voters choose the option that provides the greatest benefit under the constraints they face (Downs, 1957; Panagopoulos & Wang, 2025).

In the context of Thailand, electoral behavior has unique characteristics that differ from those of some Western countries due to the influence of social, cultural, and political power structures such as vote-buying networks, patronage politics, political party switching, and the role of populist policies and political communication through social media (Pongsawat, 2020). Research on elections in Thailand also indicates that many voters consider the expected benefits from a candidate or political party, such as local development, community benefits, or access to state resources (Thompson, 2016). Therefore, understanding the criteria citizens use to decide on their political representatives is a crucial issue in the study of Thai political behavior.

A key question in the study of electoral behavior is: Why do people choose to support one politician or political party

over another? Theoretically, many political scientists explain that this decision involves a process of evaluating the benefits or values that individuals expect to receive from voting (Downs, 1957; Gelman et al., 2007). In other words... Voters typically make decisions by comparing the economic, social, or symbolic benefits they will receive from each candidate or political party.

The concept of political utility elucidates this process, demonstrating how voters assess rival political options based on anticipated political, economic, and societal consequences. Political utility indicates that electoral choices are influenced by immediate financial advantages as well as views of policy responsiveness, distributive equity, leadership credibility, political trust, and expected governmental efficacy (Kenaphoom, 2018; Edlin et al, 2007). From this viewpoint, political decisions are shaped by comparative assessments of the anticipated efficacy of political actors in addressing both individual and collective issues within certain institutional and social frameworks. The notion is based on utility theory and rational choice frameworks in political science, suggesting that individuals generally choose options that optimize anticipated satisfaction amid limited information and political uncertainty (Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). Recent research on

voting behavior has broadened this perspective by demonstrating that political decision-making is not exclusively driven by limited economic self-interest. Electorate may contemplate communal welfare, social identity, emotions, and symbolic affiliations while assessing political options (Fowler, 2006; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Panagopoulos & Wang, 2025). Thus, the political utility paradigm is essential for examining the interplay of several evaluative dimensions—specifically policy advantages, social consequences, political trust, and leadership perception—in influencing voting behavior.

Within this framework, voting behavior is conceptualized as a process in which voters compare competing political alternatives by evaluating policy responsiveness, leadership competence, economic performance, and the expected distribution of political benefits (Downs, 1957; Key, 1966). Political utility therefore refers not simply to personal preference, but to the ways voters interpret and prioritize these factors under particular social and political conditions, including partisan attachment, social influence, and perceptions of government effectiveness (Campbell et al., 1960; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Hicken, 2011). This occurs after individuals perceive and interpret political information. Voters will evaluate

the value or benefits of each option before deciding to vote for the candidate or political party they believe can best meet their needs.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the voting behavior of Thai citizens through the lens of the Political Utility framework. It seeks to explain how voters in Thailand make their voting decisions as a process of evaluating the political utility of various political alternatives. This study will enhance our understanding of the mechanisms behind Thai citizens' political decision-making and contribute to the development of a framework for analyzing voting behavior within the context of Thai political society.

Research Objectives

1. To study the concept of Political Utility in political science.
2. To analyze the voting behavior of Thai citizens through the lens of Political Utility.
3. To explain the voting decisions of eligible voters in Thailand.

Research Questions

1. How can the concept of Political Utility explain voting behavior?
2. What factors contribute to the political utility of voters?
3. How does the decision of Thai people to choose a party or candidate relate to Political Utility?

Literature Review

Concept of Political Utility

This study's concept of political utility does not suggest that voters only endorse their general preferences or what is most advantageous to them in a broad context. It serves as an analytical framework for assessing how voters appraise competing political choices across several dimensions of anticipated political outcomes, including policy responsiveness, distributive advantages, leadership credibility, and perceived governmental efficacy. In this context, political utility denotes the mechanism by which voters evaluate the relative worth of political options within particular institutional and social frameworks.

This paradigm is based on Rational Choice Theory, which elucidates voting behavior as a process of cost-benefit analysis

among rival options (Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Kenaphoom, 2018). In contrast to traditional rational choice theories that focus on individual self-interest and utility maximization, the political utility perspective encompasses wider aspects of political assessment, such as social trust, symbolic attachment, collective welfare, and perceptions of political responsiveness. Research on social utility and political engagement indicates that voters may endorse political alternatives not solely for direct personal advantage, but also due to perceived societal benefits, group identity, or psychological gratification obtained from political involvement (Edlin et al, 2007; Fowler, 2006).

The political utility framework contrasts with sociological and psychological explanations of voting behavior. Sociological perspectives highlight the impact of class, religion, social networks, and community frameworks on electoral choices (Campbell et al., 1960; Lazarsfeld et al, 1948), whereas psychological perspectives concentrate on partisan affiliation, political attitudes, emotions, and attachment to leadership (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). Conversely, political utility particularly examines how voters assess political options by incorporating material factors, perceptions of policy efficacy,

social influence, and political trust into their decision-making process.

This framework is especially effective for examining electoral behavior in Thailand, as Thai elections frequently encompass intersecting aspects of political assessment, such as populist policies, patronage networks, local development anticipations, leadership-centric politics, and retrospective evaluations of governmental performance (Hicken, 2011; Phatharathananunth, 2008). Instead of addressing these elements in isolation, the notion of political utility offers a framework for comprehending how voters evaluate and integrate various considerations during election decision-making.

The analytical contribution of the political utility framework is in its capacity to integrate rational assessment, social influence, and political perception within a unified interpretive model of voting behavior. This enables the analysis of electoral decisions not solely as reflections of rigid partisan identity or limited economic self-interest, but as complex political assessments influenced by institutional framework, social dynamics, and anticipations for governance results.

Utility Theory

Utility theory is rooted in microeconomics, which proposes that members of society will choose the alternative that can create the greatest satisfaction under the constraints of available resources and information. This concept explains that humans tend to evaluate the benefits and costs of various alternatives before deciding on the alternative that yields the highest return (Downs, 1957).

When the concept of utility is applied in political science, scholars propose that voters evaluate political alternatives, such as political parties or candidates, considering the expected benefits, such as economic policies and social welfare. Or opportunities for community development (Gelman et al, 2007). Numerous studies also indicate that political participation may stem from social and psychological motivations, such as feelings of pride, social acceptance, or involvement in shaping the future of society (Gerber et al, 2016).

Therefore, utility theory helps explain that voting behavior is not merely an ideological decision, but also a process of evaluating the benefits that voters expect to receive from various political options.

Political Behavior Theory

The study of political behavior has developed several important approaches, such as Rational Choice Theory, Public Choice Theory, and Voting Behavior Theory, all of which play a significant role in explaining the political decision-making of citizens.

The Rational Choice Theory views individuals as rational decision-makers who choose the option that will maximize their own benefits or satisfaction (Downs, 1957). However, recent research has found that political decisions are not based solely on economic benefit calculations, but are also influenced by emotions, beliefs, and political identity (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993).

Furthermore, research on voting behavior indicates that voters' decisions are often influenced by social networks such as family, friends, or community, which can affect their perception of political information and voting decisions (Abrams et al, 2011).

The Public Choice Theory also explains that politics can be analyzed using economic tools, viewing voters, politicians, and interest groups as having motivations to seek maximum benefit within the constraints of the political institutional system (Mueller, 2003).

Voting Behavior in Thailand

The voting behavior in Thailand has evolved within a political framework influenced by patronage networks, local political brokerage, populist policy rivalry, and leadership-centric politics. In contrast to numerous Western democracies, where partisan affiliation and ideological alignment are frequently more institutionalized, Thai electoral politics has traditionally featured more direct interactions among voters, local intermediaries, and political actors (Hicken, 2011).

Numerous empirical studies illustrate the significance of political networks in Thai elections. Chattharakul (2010) demonstrates that candidates often depend on local canvassers (*hua khanaen*) and community leaders to galvanize electoral support and sustain ties with constituents. Callahan (2005) elucidates that patron–client relationships are a significant aspect of Thai politics, especially in rural regions where voters assess candidates based on their capacity to provide material resources, local infrastructure, welfare access, or administrative assistance to communities.

This trend became particularly evident during the political victories of the Thai Rak Thai Party in the 2001 and 2005 national elections. Research conducted by Phatharathananunth (2008)

and Hicken (2006) indicates that initiatives like the Village Fund Program and the 30-Baht Universal Healthcare Scheme markedly enhanced electoral backing from rural and lower-income constituents, as these initiatives were viewed as directly augmenting economic stability and access to governmental resources. Thompson (2016) contends that populist policy competition in Thailand has reinforced the connection between electoral support and perceived policy responsiveness.

These findings are pertinent to the political utility framework as they illustrate that voting decisions in Thailand are often influenced by people's assessments of tangible political results rather than solely by ideology. Electors evaluate rival political options based on anticipated policy advantages, distributional results, local development prospects, and the perceived ability of political parties to address community requirements. In this context, political utility denotes a comprehensive assessment process wherein voters juxtapose the anticipated political, economic, and social benefits linked to various election options, rather than merely reflecting personal preference.

Besides material factors, leadership image and political trust also affect electoral behavior in Thailand. Studies in

political psychology indicate that perceptions of competence, credibility, and emotional connection to political leaders can profoundly influence voting behavior (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). The 2023 Thai general election also demonstrated this pattern, as leadership image, communication style, and perceptions of political modernity emerged as significant variables affecting younger and urban voters.

The political utility paradigm elucidates Thai electoral behavior by incorporating many elements of political assessment, such as policy responsiveness, distributive expectations, social networks, and leadership credibility. The framework highlights the interplay of these factors, emphasizing how voters integrate and prioritize them in their election decisions within Thailand's specific political and institutional setting.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, primarily utilizing documentary research to analyze concepts, theories, and research related to voting behavior and political utility. The goal is to create an analytical framework that systematically explains the voting decisions of voters in the Thai political context.

Research Design

This research employs theoretical and conceptual analysis, aiming to synthesize knowledge from academic literature related to Political Utility, Utility Theory, and Voting Behavior. This knowledge will then be used as a framework to explain voting behavior in Thailand. Documentary research is a suitable method for studying conceptual issues because it allows for the systematic collection, analysis, and synthesis of knowledge from diverse academic sources (Bowen, 2009).

Research Sources

This research utilized a documentary methodology grounded in a systematic examination of scholarly literature about voting behavior, political utility, rational choice theory, and Thai electoral politics. The data were obtained from peer-reviewed academic articles indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, along with Google Scholar and university library databases.

A total of 52 scholarly sources were examined, comprising 38 journal articles, 8 academic books, and 6 research reports and policy papers pertinent to Thai politics and democracy. The literature review concentrated on texts pertaining to voting behavior, electoral decision-making, clientelism, political psychology, populist policies, and Thai electoral politics.

The literature review utilized keywords such as “Political Utility,” “Voting Behavior,” “Electoral Behavior,” “Rational Choice Theory,” “Political Trust,” “Clientelism,” “Populist Policies,” and “Thai Electoral Politics.” The chosen works had to fulfill at least one of the following criteria: (1) theoretical significance to political decision-making, (2) empirical examination of electoral behavior, or (3) contextual pertinence to Thai politics and elections.

The chosen papers were classified into theoretical, empirical, and contextual categories to facilitate conceptual synthesis and analytical interpretation of election behavior via the political utility framework.

Data Analysis Methodology

Data analysis employed Conceptual Content Analysis, with the following key steps:

1. Literature Classification: Literature was categorized into groups based on key concepts, including Political Utility, Utility Theory, and Political Behavior Theory. This research examines elections in Thailand.

2. Conceptual Synthesis: Analyzing the relationships between various theoretical concepts to create a conceptual framework that explains the voting behavior of voters.

3. Interpretative Analysis: Interpreting literature reviews to explain the role of political utility in determining voting decisions.

4. Conceptual Framework Development: Using the analysis results to create a conceptual framework that explains the relationship between political factors, voter perception, and voting decisions.

Analytical Framework

Based on the literature review, this study proposes an analytical framework that explains voting behavior through the process of political utility evaluation. It comprises four key steps:

1. Political Stimulus: Political stimuli such as party policies, leader image, or campaigning.

2. Political Perception: Voters' perception and interpretation of political information.

3. Political Utility Evaluation: The process of evaluating the value and benefits of political choices.

4. Voting Decision: The decision to choose a candidate or political party.

This framework helps explain that voting behavior results from the voter evaluation process. This aligns with the political utility concept, which views individuals' political decisions as

stemming from choosing the option that provides the greatest satisfaction or benefit under the constraints of information and social context (Kenaphoom, 2018).

Research Reliability

To enhance the credibility of the study, this research utilized data verification from various academic sources, including a comparison of concepts from multiple research studies, to ensure that the synthesized knowledge is accurate and comprehensively covers relevant theoretical issues (Bowen, 2009).

Research Results

1. Political Utility Analysis

The analysis of electoral behavior in this article uses the concept of Political Utility, which proposes that individuals' political decisions arise from a process of evaluating the value or expected benefits from various political alternatives (Kenaphoom, 2018). This concept can explain the decision-making behavior of voters through four theoretical dimensions: deterministic factors, psychological factors, exchange factors, and rational factors. Each of these factors plays a significant role in determining the electoral behavior of citizens in the Thai political context.

1.1 Deterministic Factors

Deterministic factors refer to social and structural factors that influence the political behavior of individuals, such as economic status, education level, occupation, and social network. This concept is rooted in the sociological study of electoral behavior, which proposes that social structure can determine the patterns of political behavior of citizens (Campbell et al., 1960).

In the context of Thai politics... Numerous studies indicate that the socioeconomic status of voters influences their voting decisions. For example, low-income earners or rural residents tend to prioritize policies related to social welfare or local development, while high-income or highly educated individuals may prioritize macroeconomic policies or political stability (Hicken, 2011).

Furthermore, social networks such as family, friends, or community leaders play a significant role in shaping voters' political attitudes and voting behavior. These networks serve as channels for exchanging political information and creating social norms that influence voters' decisions (Abrams et al, 2011).

Therefore, social factors play a crucial role in framing voters' political perceptions and evaluations, ultimately influencing their voting decisions.

1.2 Psychological Factors

Political psychological factors refer to the influence of political feelings, beliefs, and attitudes on voting behavior. This concept emphasizes the role of party identification, or the psychological attachment between voters and political parties, as one of the key factors in determining voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1960).

Political psychology research also indicates that emotional feelings, such as faith, trust, or admiration for political leaders, can significantly influence voters' decisions (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993), especially in the context of leader-centered politics.

In Thailand, the image of political leaders and trust in politicians play a significant role in voters' decisions, as many voters often use the personality, ability, or credibility of leaders as important criteria for evaluating political parties (Phatharathananunth, 2008).

Therefore, psychological factors are an important component in explaining that voters' decisions are not solely

based on economic benefits but also involve their feelings, beliefs, and political identity.

1.3 Exchange Factors

Exchange factors refer to political relationships based on the exchange of benefits between politicians and voters. This often manifests as clientelism or patronage politics.

In the context of Thai politics, patronage relationships are considered a key characteristic of the political system, where politicians often provide support or resources to people in their areas in exchange for political support (Callahan, 2005). Such relationships may take the form of community-level assistance, infrastructure development, or the provision of various resources.

Furthermore, populist policies are another important mechanism for the exchange of political benefits, as these policies aim to directly address the needs of the people, such as social welfare policies or community-level economic development projects (Thompson, 2016).

From a political utility perspective, the exchange of benefits reflects that voters often assess the benefits they or their community will receive from politicians or political parties before deciding to cast their votes.

1.4 Rational Factors

Rational factors refer to political decisions made through a rational assessment of information and benefits. Voters consider political options through a process of comparing the costs and benefits of each option (Downs, 1957).

In the context of elections, voters may consider various factors such as economic policy, government efficiency, and the ability to administer the country. Or the credibility of a political party before deciding to vote (Gelman et al, 2007).

Numerous studies also indicate that voters often use information about the past performance of the government as a key criterion in evaluating political parties, which is called retrospective voting; that is, voters will support political parties with good performance and condemn political parties with poor performance (Key, 1966).

Therefore, the decision to vote can be described as a rational process of evaluating information and benefits, which is consistent with the concept of Political Utility, which views individuals as choosing the political option that provides them with the greatest satisfaction or benefit.

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Political Utility Dimensions in Thai Electoral Behavior

Dimension of Political Utility	Core Meaning	Key Variables	Theoretical Foundation	Application to Thai Electoral Behavior	Key References
Deterministic Factors	Voting behavior is shaped by social and structural conditions that influence political perceptions and preferences.	Economic status, education, occupation, class position, social networks, community environment	Sociological model of voting behavior	In Thailand, low-income and rural voters often prioritize welfare-oriented and local development policies, while higher-income or more educated voters may emphasize macroeconomic management and political stability. Family, friends, and community leaders also influence electoral choices through social interaction and local norms.	Campbell et al. (1960); Hicken (2011); Abrams et al. (2011)
Psychological Factors	Voting decisions	Party identification	Political psychology	In Thai politics, the image,	Campbell et al.

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Dimension of Political Utility	Core Meaning	Key Variables	Theoretical Foundation	Application to Thai Electoral Behavior	Key References
	are	, trust, faith,	and	charisma, and	(1960);
	influenced	admiration,	behavioral	perceived	Marcus &
	by political	leadership	theory	credibility of	MacKuen
	feelings,	image,		political leaders	(1993);
	beliefs,	political		strongly affect	Phatharat
	attitudes,	identity		voter choices.	hananunt
	and			Many voters	h (2008)
	emotional			evaluate parties	
	attachment			through leader-	
	to parties or			centered	
	leaders.			perceptions,	
				especially where	
				confidence in	
				leadership	
				matters more	
				than ideological	
				consistency.	
Exchange Factors	Voting behavior is shaped by expected reciprocal benefits between politicians and voters.	Patronage, clientelism, vote mobilization, local benefits, populist policies, material assistance	Exchange theory; clientelism and patron–client politics	In Thailand, patronage networks and populist programs play a major role in electoral choice. Voters may support candidates or parties that are perceived as capable of	Callahan (2005); Thompson (2016); Hicken (2011)

Dimension of Political Utility	Core Meaning	Key Variables	Theoretical Foundatio n	Application to Thai Electoral Behavior	Key Referenc es
				delivering direct benefits to individuals or communities, such as welfare, infrastructure, or development resources.	
Rational Factors	Voters make decisions by comparing alternatives and selecting the option that offers the highest expected utility.	Cost-benefit calculation, policy evaluation, economic performance , government effectiveness, retrospectiv e voting	Rational Choice Theory; Utility Theory	Thai voters may evaluate political parties based on economic policy, governance performance, and past government achievements. Electoral choice is often linked to whether voters perceive a party as competent to generate future benefits or solve existing problems.	Downs (1957); Gelman et al. (2007); Key (1966)

The table above shows that Political Utility can comprehensively explain the voting behavior of Thai citizens through four main dimensions: structural factors, psychological factors, exchange-benefit factors, and rational factors. Each dimension does not function in isolation but is interrelated and overlapping in determining voters' decisions. For example, voters may choose a particular political party because they benefit from its economic policies, while simultaneously having confidence in the leader and being influenced by social networks in their community. Therefore, analyzing voting behavior in Thailand requires an integrated approach, viewing elections as a process of evaluating political utility encompassing both tangible and intangible benefits.

2. Electoral Behavior Based on Political Utility

Based on an analysis of relevant literature combined with the concept of Political Utility, this study synthesizes findings on the voting behavior of Thai citizens, concluding that voters' decisions are not based on a single factor, but rather on a process of evaluating the “political utility” that voters expect to receive from political parties, candidates, or political policies. The findings can be summarized into three key points:

2.1 The Relationship Between Voting Decisions of Thai Citizens and Political Utility

The study found that the voting decisions of Thai citizens are closely related to the concept of Political Utility. That is, voters tend to evaluate the value or benefits they expect to receive from political parties or candidates before deciding to cast their vote. This concept aligns with Kenaphoom's (2018) proposal, which states that individuals' political decisions arise from evaluating the value of political activities such as public policies, public services, or the role of politicians in social development.

According to Rational Choice Theory, voting decisions are comparison assessments where voters evaluate the anticipated results of competing political options instead of just choosing politicians based on established loyalty or ideology (Downs, 1957). This pattern was evident in Thailand during the 2001 general election, when the Thai Rak Thai Party implemented policies like the Village Fund Program and the 30-Baht Universal Healthcare Scheme, which were widely regarded as directly addressing the economic insecurities and welfare requirements of rural and lower-income demographics (Hicken,

2006; Phatharathananunth, 2008). Research on this election indicates that electoral backing for Thai Rak Thai was linked not only to partisan allegiance but also to voters' assessments of the party's perceived ability to achieve concrete policy results and enhance access to state resources (Pasuk & Baker, 2004; Hicken, 2011). This instance exemplifies how voters evaluate competing political choices via the lens of the political utility framework, focusing on policy responsiveness, distributive benefits, and anticipated enhancements in socioeconomic conditions. Consequently, electoral decision is viewed not merely as a manifestation of preference, but as a complex assessment of expected political and economic consequences.

2.2 Public Policy and Economic Benefits Have a Strong Influence on Voting Behavior

The study found that public policy and economic benefits are among the key factors influencing the voting decisions of Thai citizens, especially policies related to economic development, social welfare, and local development.

Research on Thai politics indicates that political competition in Thailand often involves policies that meet the needs of the people, such as populist policies, which can build

popularity for political parties and influence voting behavior (Thompson, 2016).

A significant case study is the 2011 general election, where the Pheu Thai Party presented several economic policies, such as the 300 baht minimum wage policy and the rice pledging scheme. These policies received support from many labor and farmer groups because voters believed that these policies could directly create economic benefits for themselves and their families.

Furthermore, the concept of retrospective voting explains that voters tend to evaluate the performance of past governments before deciding to vote. That is, if a government can manage the economy or develop the country effectively, voters are more likely to support that political party in the next election (Key, 1966).

Therefore, public policy and economic benefits are considered important components of political utility that voters use to evaluate political choices.

2.3 Social and Psychological Factors Play a Role in Determining Voting Behavior.

In addition to economic and public policy factors, the study found that social and psychological factors play a significant role in shaping the voting behavior of Thai citizens.

In terms of social factors, social networks such as family, friends, or community leaders can influence the political decisions of voters, as these networks serve as important channels for exchanging political information and opinions (Abrams et al, 2011). For example, in Thai local elections, networks of political canvassers or community leaders often play a crucial role in building confidence in candidates and can influence the decisions of voters in their areas.

In terms of psychological factors, trust and popularity of political leaders are other important factors influencing voting behavior. Research by Marcus and MacKuen (1993) indicates that political emotions such as faith, trust, or admiration can significantly influence voters' evaluation of leaders and policies.

A case study reflecting the role of psychological factors is the 2023 general election, where the image of political party leaders and the personality of candidates, such as their ability to communicate with the public, modernity, and credibility, played a significant role in attracting voters. In particular, the study found that the voting behavior of Thai citizens is a result of a combination

of economic, social, and psychological factors, all of which play a significant role in determining the political utility that voters use to evaluate political options before deciding to cast their vote.

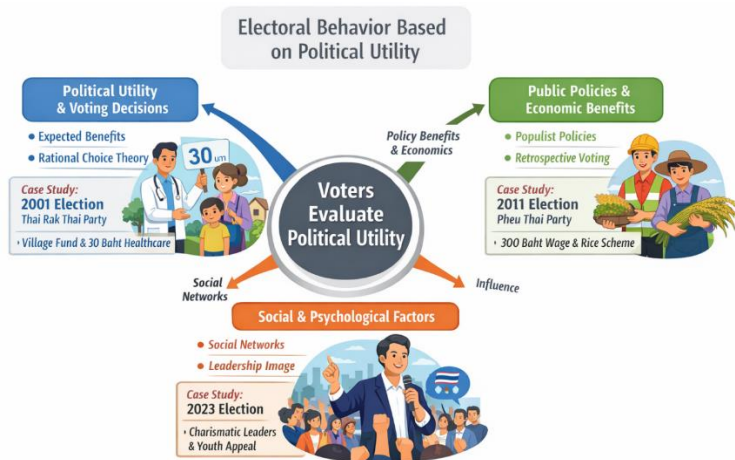


Figure 1 Voter behavior and political utility analysis
(Synthesis by using ChatGPT)

Figure 1 should not be interpreted as suggesting that voters in all Thai elections follow a consistent, unchanging pattern of "political utility." The image illustrates that the importance of several political evaluation variables differs across electoral contexts. Voter preferences fluctuated in the 2001, 2011, and 2023 elections owing to divergent economic conditions, political tensions, party frameworks, and voter anticipations in each electoral cycle.

In the 2001 election, support for the Thai Rak Thai Party was markedly associated with policy-oriented economic expectations, particularly among rural and lower-income voters who perceived initiatives such as the Village Fund and the 30-Baht Healthcare Scheme as effective solutions for economic insecurity and unequal access to governmental resources (Hicken, 2006; Phatharathananunth, 2008). In this context, voters' evaluations focused predominantly on distributive and welfare-related benefits.

Conversely, the 2011 election occurred within a context shaped by persistent political polarization following the 2006 coup and the Red Shirt insurrection. The electoral support for the Pheu Thai Party was influenced by economic initiatives, including as the rice pledging scheme and minimum wage increases, together with evaluations of previous administrations and perceptions of democratic legitimacy (Thompson, 2016). In this setting, policy usefulness is associated with political identity and conflict-driven mobilization.

The 2023 election exhibited a unique configuration of political efficacy. Young urban voters emphasized the need for institutional reform, perceptions of leadership, political modernity, and dissatisfaction with military-affiliated

governments. In this election, perceptions of leadership credibility, communication style, and democratic reform gained prominence above traditional patronage connections (Pongsawat, 2020). As a result, voters evaluated political alternatives based on factors different from those emphasized in recent elections.

Figure 1 does not intend to claim that all elections can be explained by a single factor or to selectively present evidence that conforms to the framework. The graphic demonstrates that political utility is context-dependent and has various dimensions. Diverse elections incorporate specific elements of voter assessment, including economic expectations, retroactive performance evaluations, social networks, leadership credibility, and political identity. The paradigm aims to clarify differences in voting behavior by examining how voters rank various forms of political utility within changing political and institutional frameworks, rather than assuming a universal or fixed model of voter preference.

Discussion

The study, based on the Political Utility framework, shows that the voting behavior of Thai citizens can be explained through the process of evaluating the political value or benefits that voters expect to receive from various political choices, whether it be public policies, the image of leaders, or community-level benefits. This finding is consistent with several important concepts in political science, including Rational Choice Theory, Public Choice Theory, and Political Behavior Theory, all of which emphasize the role of benefit evaluation and voter perception in determining political behavior.

1. Connection with Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory proposes that individuals tend to make political decisions using reason by comparing the costs and benefits of various choices before choosing the choice that provides the greatest benefit to themselves (Downs, 1957). The findings of this article support this concept, showing that voters often evaluate the benefits of public policies or government performance before deciding to vote.

In the context of Thai politics, for example, supporting social welfare policies or local economic development projects

reflects that voters consider political choices taking into account the benefits that they and their communities will receive. Research by Gelman et al (2007) also indicates that voting can be explained through the evaluation of benefits at both the individual and societal levels. This aligns with the concept of Political Utility, which proposes that individuals will choose the option that provides the greatest satisfaction to themselves and society.

Therefore, elections can be viewed as a process in which voters use reason to evaluate the value of political options before deciding on a political party or candidate.

2. Connection to Public Choice Theory

Public Choice Theory views politics as being explainable within an economic framework, where voters, politicians, and interest groups all have incentives to seek maximum benefit under the constraints of the political institutional system (Mueller, 2003). From this perspective, political competition is a process in which politicians present various policies or benefits to attract support from voters.

The results of this study are consistent with this concept, finding that political parties often present policies that can meet the needs of the people, such as populist policies or economic development projects, to increase their chances of

gaining votes from voters. Hicken's (2011) research also indicates that the political systems in many developing countries, including Thailand, often have characteristics of clientelism or patronage relationships. Politicians and voters have a reciprocal relationship based on benefits.

Within the framework of Political Utility, this relationship reflects that voters often assess the benefits they or their community will receive from politicians before deciding to support a political party or candidate.

3. Linkage to Political Behavior Theory

Political Behavior Theory emphasizes the role of social, psychological, and political cultural factors in determining voters' electoral behavior. Research on political behavior indicates that voting decisions are not solely based on benefit calculations, but are also influenced by the emotions, beliefs, and political identity of voters (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993).

The findings of this article support this concept, finding that social factors such as social networks, family, or community leaders can influence voters' electoral decisions. In addition, psychological factors such as trust, faith, or popularity in political leaders play a significant role in determining voters' political attitudes.

In the context of Thai politics, the image of leaders and trust in politicians are often important factors influencing voting behavior, as many voters use the personality, ability, and credibility of leaders as key criteria in evaluating political parties (Phatharathananunth, 2008).

4. Elections as a Process of Evaluating Political Utility

From the discussion of results within the three conceptual frameworks... It can be concluded that elections are a process in which voters assess political utility from various political alternatives. This assessment arises from a combination of factors, including: (1) rational evaluation of benefits from public policies and government performance; (2) consideration of economic benefits and community development; (3) the influence of social networks and political culture; and (4) feelings, beliefs, and the image of political leaders.

Therefore, the voting behavior of Thai citizens cannot be explained by any single theory alone, but must be considered through the integration of several political science concepts, all of which point to the fact that the decision to vote is a process in which voters evaluate the value or political benefits from various alternatives before deciding to cast their vote.

Conclusion

This study aims to explain the voting behavior of Thai citizens through the framework of Political Utility, using a literature review and conceptual analysis from key political science theories: Rational Choice Theory, Public Choice Theory, and Political Behavior Theory. The findings indicate that the voting decision-making process of Thai citizens involves voters evaluating the political value or benefits of various political options before casting their vote.

The analysis revealed that the voting behavior of Thai citizens is influenced by several dimensions, including economic factors such as public policy and economic benefits; social factors such as social and community networks; and psychological factors such as trust and image of political leaders. These factors all play a role in determining the political utility that voters use to evaluate political parties or candidates. Therefore, the study concludes that the concept of Political Utility can be used as an effective framework to explain voting behavior in Thailand, where voters tend to choose political parties or candidates that can best meet their needs or create benefits for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Recommendation

1. Academic Recommendations

Academically, this study demonstrates that the concept of Political Utility can be effectively used as a framework for analyzing electoral behavior in the context of developing countries. However, studies on electoral behavior in Thailand should further develop an integrated framework that combines concepts from political science, political economy, and political psychology to more comprehensively explain the political decision-making behavior of citizens.

Furthermore, academics should promote studies that link the concept of Political Utility with other important issues in political science, such as political participation, political trust, and democratic development, to expand the scope of knowledge about political behavior in the Thai social context.

2. Policy Recommendations

In terms of policy, the study results indicate that political parties and policymakers should prioritize developing public policies that truly meet the needs of the people, especially policies related to economic development, improving the quality of life, and local development.

In addition, the government should promote the development of a transparent and socially accountable political system to build public trust, as political trust is one of the key components of political utility that influences the electoral behavior of voters.

3. Practical Recommendations

In practical terms, political parties and election candidates should focus on clearly communicating public policies and national development approaches. To enable citizens to adequately assess the benefits or value they will receive from such policies,

Mechanisms for public participation in policy-making should be developed, such as organizing public hearings or using digital platforms to communicate with the public, so that the political decision-making process is more transparent and responsive to the needs of society.

4. Future Research Recommendation

For future research, the voting behavior of Thai citizens should be studied using empirical research methods, such as polling, election data analysis, or mixed methods, to test the Political Utility framework in real-world situations.

In addition, future research should study the influence of new factors that may affect voting behavior, such as the role of social media, digital political communication, and changes in social structure, which may play a significant role in citizens' voting decisions in contemporary politics.

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