

THE ROLES OF REASON IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING

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Abstract

The Political decision making comes in various processes and are shaped by numerous factors, including ideological beliefs, public opinion, and institutional constraints. Cardinal to this process is the role of reason—the ability for logical, rational thought—which communicates choices and drives policy outcomes. This paper delves into the complex roles of reason in political decision making, examining how rationality influences the decision-making processes of political actors, its impact on policy outcomes, and the challenges associated with relying solely on reason in political contexts. Through an exploration of empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, it contends that while reason is pivotal in guiding political decisions, it is often susceptible to biases, emotional influences, and external pressures. Understanding this intricate interplay between reason and other factors is paramount for improving the quality and legitimacy of political decision making. The analysis underscores the importance of recognizing the complexities inherent in political decision making and the need to navigate the tensions between reason and other influences. By acknowledging the limitations of rationality and incorporating insights from behavioral economics and psychology, policymakers can adopt more informed and effective decision-making strategies. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the significance of fostering environments conducive to rational deliberation and critical thinking, thereby mitigating the impact of biases and ensuring more reasoned political outcomes. Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of the roles of reason in political decision making is essential for promoting democratic governance and addressing contemporary challenges. In summary, this paper provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted roles of reason in political decision making, highlighting its significance, limitations, and interplay with other factors. By grappling with the complexities of rationality and embracing insights from interdisciplinary perspectives, policy-makers can enhance the quality and legitimacy of their decisions, thereby advancing the public interest and promoting democratic values.

Keywords: Reason, Political Decision Making, Rationality, Policy, Biases.

Introduction

Political decision making stands as a cornerstone of governance, exerting profound influence over the policies and actions of governments at every echelon. Central to this process is the concept of reason, emblematic of the capacity for logical and rational thought. Reason assumes a pivotal role in the realm of political decision making, serving as a guiding force for policy-makers, facilitating informed choices, and furnishing a framework for the assessment of policy alternatives. However, the landscape of reason within political spheres is intricate and multi-dimensional, shaped by an array of factors including individual convictions, group dynamics, and institutional frameworks.

This paper embarks on a journey to unravel the multifaceted roles of reason within the realm of political decision making, delving into its influence on the conduct of political actors, the dynamics inherent in group decision making processes, and the resultant outcomes of policy endeavors. Through an amalgamation of theoretical underpinnings and empirical insights, the endeavor is to furnish a holistic comprehension of the challenges and prospects entwined with the utilization of reason in political domains. In particular, we scrutinize the interplay between reason and cognitive biases, emotional inclinations, and the emphasis of political exigencies, endeavoring to elucidate how these elements collectively shape the trajectory of decision outcomes.

Moreover, the paper undertakes an analysis of the ramifications of these revelations for democratic governance and policy efficacy. The recognition of the constraints that encumber reason in political decision making is imperative in the formulation of strategies aimed at alleviating biases and enhancing the quality of decisions. Additionally, we scrutinize the pivotal role assumed by deliberative democracy and public engagement in augmenting the rationality underpinning political decisions.

In summation, this article serves as a contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding the significance of reason in political decision making, proffering insights into its intricacies and ramifications for governance. By embracing the nuanced nature of rationality and its interactions with diverse influences, policymakers are empowered to cultivate more discerning and efficacious decision-making paradigms, thereby advancing the collective welfare and the tenets of democratic governance.

The landscape of political decision making is as diverse as it is complex, reflecting the myriad forces that shape the contours of governance. At its heart lies the fundamental concept of reason, a beacon guiding policymakers through the labyrinth of choices and consequences. Reason, with its emphasis on logical and rational thought processes, serves as the bedrock upon which policy decisions are crafted, evaluated, and justified. Yet, within the realm of politics, reason does not operate in isolation; it is subject to a tapestry of influences, ranging from deeply held beliefs to the exigencies of power dynamics.

This article endeavors to navigate this intricate terrain, peeling back the layers of reason in political decision making to reveal its manifold roles and implications. Through a synthesis of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of how reason intersects with the complex dynamics of political processes. From the individual deliberations of policymakers to the collective discourse of decision-

making bodies, reason weaves its thread through the fabric of governance, shaping outcomes and molding the trajectory of societies.

Central to our exploration is an interrogation of the interplay between reason and its counterparts: cognitive biases, emotional responses, and institutional pressures. How do these forces coalesce to either bolster or undermine the rationality of political decisions? What mechanisms exist to mitigate the sway of bias and foster more reasoned deliberation? These are the questions that animate our inquiry, driving us to delve deeper into the complexities of political decision making.

Furthermore, our analysis extends beyond the realm of theory to confront the practical implications of reason for democratic governance and policy effectiveness. In a world fraught with uncertainty and competing interests, the ability to harness reason as a guiding principle is paramount. By shedding light on the limitations and possibilities inherent in the use of reason, we aim to equip policymakers with the tools needed to navigate the turbulent waters of political decision making with clarity and foresight.

In conclusion, this article stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of reason in the tumultuous arena of politics. As we embark on this intellectual journey, we invite readers to join us in unpacking the complexities of political decision making, and in doing so, to chart a course toward a more rational and equitable future for all. In this paper, the meanings of these key concepts are described thus:

1. Reason: The capacity for logical, rational thought, guiding decision making.
2. Political Decision Making: The process by which political actors make choices and formulate policies.
3. Rationality: The use of logic and evidence to inform decision making.
4. Policy: A course of action or set of guidelines adopted by governments to address issues.
5. Biases: Systematic deviations from rational decision making due to cognitive or emotional factors.

Role of Reason in Individual Decision Making

At the individual level, political decision making is often influenced by a combination of rational calculation, personal beliefs, and emotional responses. According to rational choice theory, individuals seek to maximize their utility or achieve their objectives through strategic decision making (Downs, 1957). However, empirical research suggests that human decision making is rarely purely rational. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and availability bias, can lead individuals to deviate from rational decision making processes (Kahneman, 2011). Despite these challenges, reason still significantly influences individual decision making in politics. Political leaders and policymakers frequently rely on empirical evidence and logical argumentation to justify their actions and persuade others (Bardach, 2012).

Moreover, reason serves as a foundation for deliberative democracy, wherein individuals engage in reasoned discourse to reach collective decisions (Habermas, 1984). In this context, reasoned deliberation allows individuals to consider diverse perspectives and weigh competing interests, leading to more informed and legitimate outcomes (Fishkin, 1991). However, the effectiveness of reason in individual decision making can be hindered by

various factors, including ideological biases and information asymmetry (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

Despite these challenges, efforts to enhance the role of reason in individual decision making are essential for promoting democratic governance and policy effectiveness. By fostering critical thinking skills and promoting transparency in decision-making processes, policymakers can mitigate the impact of biases and improve decision quality (Sunstein, 2006). Additionally, initiatives aimed at increasing civic education and public engagement can empower individuals to make more informed and reasoned political choices (Macedo, 2005). Furthermore, understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying individual decision making is crucial for designing interventions to promote rationality and mitigate biases. Research in behavioral economics and cognitive psychology has identified various strategies to nudge individuals towards more reasoned decision making, such as providing clear information, simplifying choices, and framing decisions in ways that minimize cognitive biases (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Additionally, interventions aimed at increasing awareness of biases and fostering metacognitive skills can help individuals recognize and counteract irrational tendencies (Kahneman, 2011).

However, the influence of reason in individual decision making is not solely determined by cognitive processes; emotional responses also play a significant role in shaping behavior. Research in affective neuroscience has shown that emotions can bias decision making by influencing attention, memory, and judgment processes (Damasio, 1994). Moreover, emotions such as fear, anger, and empathy can be manipulated by political actors to influence public opinion and shape policy outcomes (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000).

Moreover, societal norms and cultural values can shape individuals' perceptions of rational behavior and influence their decision making processes. Cultural psychologists have documented how cultural differences in cognition and socialization practices can lead to divergent patterns of reasoning and decision making across different societies (Nisbett et al., 2001). Additionally, social identity theory suggests that individuals' group affiliations and social identities can influence their perceptions of rationality and shape their attitudes and behaviors (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In conclusion, the role of reason in individual decision making is complex and multifaceted, influenced by cognitive biases, personal beliefs, and societal norms. While reason serves as a fundamental tool for political actors to justify their actions and persuade others, it is not immune to biases and limitations. Nonetheless, efforts to promote rational deliberation and critical thinking are essential for advancing democratic governance and achieving better policy outcomes. By fostering a greater appreciation for reason and its limitations, policymakers can develop strategies to enhance the role of reason in informing and guiding political decisions, ultimately strengthening democratic institutions and promoting the common good.

Role of Reason in Group Decision Making

Politics, by its very nature, often necessitates collective decision-making processes wherein numerous stakeholders, each with their own array of interests and perspectives, converge to reach consensus or make decisions. In these intricate contexts, reason emerges as both a

facilitator of collaboration and a potential source of conflict. Deliberative democracy theory underscores the significance of reasoned discourse and public deliberation in political decision making, emphasizing the importance of open debate and evidence-based argumentation (Dryzek, 2000). Yet, despite the ideals espoused by deliberative democracy, group decision making is frequently beset by biases and dynamics that impede rational deliberation.

One such phenomenon is groupthink, where the desire for unanimity and cohesion within a group supersedes critical thinking and independent judgment, resulting in flawed decision making (Janis, 1982). However, amidst these challenges, reason retains the potential to play a constructive role in group decision-making processes. By fostering environments characterized by open debate, respectful disagreement, and a commitment to evidence-based reasoning, political actors can harness the collective power of reason to confront complex challenges and advance the public interest.

Moreover, reason serves as a bulwark against cognitive biases and social pressures that may distort decision outcomes. Research on group polarization suggests that exposure to diverse viewpoints and rational arguments can temper extreme positions and engender more nuanced decision outcomes (Sunstein, 2002). Additionally, procedural mechanisms such as structured deliberation and decision rules can safeguard against the undue influence of biases, ensuring that reason remains systematically integrated into group decision-making processes (Habermas, 1996).

However, the efficacy of reason in group decision making is contingent upon a myriad of contextual factors, including the composition of the group, the nature of the decision at hand, and the institutional context. Power dynamics within groups, for instance, can significantly influence the extent to which reason shapes decision outcomes (Mansbridge, 1999). Moreover, ideological polarization and partisan conflict can erode the capacity for reasoned deliberation, giving rise to gridlock and dysfunction within decision-making bodies (Mutz, 2006).

Furthermore, cultural and social norms exert a profound influence on the role of reason in group decision making. Cultural psychology research underscores the impact of cultural differences in communication styles, attitudes towards authority, and norms of conflict resolution on the manner in which groups engage in reasoned deliberation (Triandis et al., 1986). Additionally, social identity theory posits that individuals' group affiliations and social identities shape their perceptions of rationality and inform their attitudes and behaviors within group settings (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In conclusion, the role of reason in group decision making is multifaceted and contingent upon a These challenges notwithstanding, ongoing endeavors to bolster the role of reason in group decision making are imperative for addressing the complexities of governance and advancing the collective welfare. By fostering a culture of critical inquiry, political actors can mitigate the influence of biases and enhance the quality of decision outcomes. Moreover, institutional reforms aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity can foster an environment conducive to reasoned deliberation.

Additionally, fostering diversity within decision-making bodies can enrich deliberative processes by bringing forth a multiplicity of perspectives and insights. Research indicates that diverse groups tend to engage in more thorough deliberation and generate more innovative solutions (Page, 2007). Furthermore, fostering a culture of psychological safety, wherein individuals feel empowered to voice dissenting opinions without fear of reprisal, can facilitate open and constructive dialogue within groups (Edmondson, 1999).

Technological advancements also hold promise for enhancing the role of reason in group decision making. Digital platforms and online forums provide opportunities for broader participation and deliberation, enabling individuals to engage in reasoned discourse irrespective of geographical constraints (Shapiro et al., 2015). Moreover, computational tools and data analytics offer novel avenues for evidence-based decision making, enabling policymakers to leverage vast troves of data to inform their deliberations (Lazer et al., 2009). Furthermore, fostering a culture of civic education and political literacy can empower citizens to engage meaningfully in collective decision making. By equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to critically evaluate policy proposals and engage in reasoned debate, societies can strengthen the foundations of democratic governance (Macedo, 2005). Additionally, initiatives aimed at fostering intergroup dialogue and reconciliation can help bridge divides and foster a shared commitment to reason and mutual understanding (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

In conclusion, the role of reason in group decision making is pivotal for effective governance and democratic legitimacy. While challenges abound, concerted efforts to foster environments conducive to reasoned deliberation and evidence-based decision making are essential for addressing complex societal challenges and advancing the common good. By embracing the principles of deliberative democracy, promoting diversity and inclusion, harnessing technological innovations, and fostering civic education, societies can unlock the transformative potential of reason in collective decision making.

Role of Reason in Policy Outcomes

The ultimate test of reason in political decision making lies in its ability to produce effective and legitimate policy outcomes. Rational policy making involves the systematic analysis of problems, the evaluation of alternative solutions, and the selection of policies that are grounded in evidence and logic. However, the translation of reason into policy is often fraught with difficulties. Political decisions are influenced by a myriad of factors, including public opinion, interest group pressures, bureaucratic inertia, and electoral incentives, which may not always align with rational policy objectives. Nevertheless, there are numerous examples of successful policy interventions that have been guided by reason and evidence (Hood, 1986). Evidence-based policy making, which emphasizes the use of rigorous research and evaluation to inform policy decisions, has gained traction in recent years as a way to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of government interventions (Weiss, 2018). Moreover, institutions such as central banks, regulatory agencies, and advisory bodies play a crucial role in promoting rational policy making by providing independent analysis and expertise.

Despite the challenges of translating reason into policy outcomes, there are several mechanisms through which reason can influence the policy process. One such mechanism is the role of policy analysis and expertise in informing decision makers about the potential

consequences of different policy options (Bardach, 2000). By employing tools such as cost-benefit analysis, risk assessment, and program evaluation, policymakers can assess the feasibility and effectiveness of policy proposals and make more informed decisions (Weimer & Vining, 2017). Additionally, deliberative processes such as parliamentary debates, public hearings, and expert consultations provide opportunities for reasoned discourse and critical scrutiny of policy proposals (Dryzek, 2005).

Moreover, the role of reason in policy outcomes extends beyond the formulation stage to implementation and evaluation. Rational policy implementation requires careful planning, resource allocation, and monitoring to ensure that policy objectives are achieved (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). Furthermore, ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms are essential for assessing the effectiveness of policies and making adjustments as needed (Dunn, 2017). In this regard, reason serves as a guiding principle for evidence-based decision making throughout the policy cycle.

However, the influence of reason in policy outcomes is not guaranteed, and there are numerous obstacles that can impede its effectiveness. Political polarization, ideological biases, and partisan interests can undermine the role of reason in shaping policy decisions, leading to suboptimal outcomes (Moe, 1990). Moreover, the complexity and uncertainty inherent in many policy issues can complicate the application of rational decision-making frameworks (Lindblom, 1959). Additionally, the influence of vested interests and power dynamics in the policy process can distort decision making and undermine the pursuit of the public interest (Schattschneider, 1960).

In conclusion, the role of reason in policy outcomes is complex and multifaceted, influenced by a range of factors including institutional arrangements, political dynamics, and societal values. While reason provides a foundation for evidence-based decision making and rational policy analysis, its impact is contingent upon the broader political context and the willingness of decision makers to prioritize the public interest over narrow interests. Nonetheless, efforts to promote transparency, accountability, and deliberative democracy can help enhance the role of reason in shaping policy outcomes and advancing the common good.

Challenges and Limitations of Reason in Political Decision Making

Despite its importance, reason is not always a reliable guide for political decision making. Cognitive biases, emotional responses, and external pressures can distort or override rational judgment, leading to suboptimal outcomes. Moreover, the very notion of what constitutes "rational" behavior is contested and subject to interpretation, with different actors often employing competing rationalities to justify their actions. Furthermore, the pursuit of reason in politics can sometimes lead to technocratic solutions that prioritize efficiency and expertise over democratic participation and accountability. This raises questions about who gets to define what is rational, and whose interests are served by rational decision making processes. One of the primary challenges of relying on reason in political decision making is the prevalence of cognitive biases that can lead individuals and groups to deviate from rational decision-making processes. Kahneman and Tversky's work on prospect theory, for example, demonstrates how individuals' preferences can be influenced by framing effects and reference points, leading to irrational choices (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Similarly, bounded rationality theory posits that individuals have limited cognitive resources and must rely on

heuristics and simplifying strategies to make decisions, which can result in suboptimal outcomes (Simon, 1955).

Emotional responses also play a significant role in shaping political decisions, often leading individuals to prioritize short-term gains or avoid losses, rather than making decisions based on long-term consequences or objective evidence (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Research in affective forecasting has shown that individual predictions about their future emotional states are often inaccurate, leading them to make decisions that are not aligned with their long-term interests (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). Moreover, emotions such as fear, anger, and empathy can be manipulated by political actors to influence public opinion and shape policy outcomes (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000).

External pressures, including political incentives, interest group pressures, and media influence, can also undermine the role of reason in political decision making. Public officials may face electoral incentives to prioritize short-term gains or symbolic actions over evidence-based policy solutions, particularly in highly polarized or competitive political environments (Achen & Bartels, 2016). Interest groups with substantial resources and lobbying power can exert influence over decision makers, shaping policy outcomes in ways that may not be rational or in the public interest (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012). Additionally, media coverage and public discourse can distort or oversimplify complex policy issues, leading to misinformation and ideological polarization (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Moreover, the very notion of rationality in political decision making is contested and subject to interpretation. Different actors may employ competing rationalities to justify their actions, depending on their interests, values, and worldviews (March & Olsen, 1998). For example, policymakers may prioritize economic efficiency and cost-benefit analysis in their decision making, while advocacy groups may emphasize social justice and equity considerations (Stone, 1988). This raises questions about whose rationality prevails in the policy process and whose interests are marginalized or excluded.

Furthermore, the pursuit of reason in politics can sometimes lead to technocratic solutions that prioritize efficiency and expertise over democratic participation and accountability (Lindblom, 1965). Technocratic approaches to policy making, which emphasize the role of experts and professionals in crafting and implementing policies, may neglect the perspectives and preferences of affected communities, leading to legitimacy deficits and social unrest (Dahl, 1961). Moreover, the complexity and uncertainty inherent in many policy issues may render technocratic solutions ineffective or inappropriate, as they may overlook contextual factors and local knowledge (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008).

In summary, while reason is essential for informed political decisions, it is important to recognize its limitations and potential biases. To make effective and democratic decisions, we must consider the complexities of the decision making process and strive for a transparent and inclusive approach that balances reason with public participation and accountability. Cognitive biases, emotional responses, external pressures, and competing rationalities can all distort or undermine the role of reason in shaping policy outcomes. Moreover, the pursuit of reason can sometimes lead to technocratic solutions that prioritize efficiency over democratic participation and accountability. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced

understanding of the complexities of political decision making and a commitment to fostering deliberative democracy, transparency, and accountability in the policy process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reason plays a complex and multifaceted role in political decision making. While it serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance and policy formulation, it is also subject to biases, emotions, and external influences that can undermine its efficacy. Understanding the interplay between reason and other factors is essential for improving the quality and legitimacy of political decision making in diverse and dynamic societies. By recognizing the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of reason in politics, policymakers can develop strategies to enhance the role of reason in informing and guiding political decision making in diverse and dynamic societies.

Efforts to promote transparency, accountability, and deliberative democracy can help mitigate the impact of biases and ensure that decisions are based on evidence and rational analysis rather than narrow interests or ideological considerations. Moreover, fostering critical thinking skills and promoting civic education can empower individuals to make more informed and reasoned political choices, thereby strengthening the democratic process.

However, addressing the limitations of reason in political decision making requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organizations, and the public. By fostering a culture of open debate, respectful disagreement, and evidence-based argumentation, political actors can harness the collective power of reason to address complex challenges and advance the public interest.

Ultimately, the pursuit of reason in politics is an ongoing endeavor that requires vigilance, reflexivity, and a commitment to democratic values. While reason may not always provide clear-cut answers or guarantee optimal outcomes, it remains an indispensable tool for navigating the complexities of political decision making and advancing the common good. As such, fostering a greater appreciation for reason and its limitations is essential for promoting effective governance, fostering social cohesion, and addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

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