

# **Estimating the position of political parties: comparison between an expert survey and a candidate survey\***

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## ***Introduction***

Estimating the position of political parties is a significant task. This knowledge is important for political science scholars in order to understand the ideological space of a party system and the location of each political party in it. Voters need this knowledge in order to select the party that will represent their policy preferences better than any other party. Finally, the accurate estimation of the position of the parties on several political issues is a top priority for the designer of a voting advice application (VAA). VAAs are web applications that enable voters to compare their political views with the views of the political parties (Andreadis, 2013): if the position of the parties is not correctly estimated, the application will produce suboptimal output.

The designers of VAAs use various ways to position the parties. A usual approach is to contact the leadership of the party asking them to place their parties and provide a brief justification of this placement. The problem with this method is that while political parties do not hesitate to reveal their positions on issues they own, they are less likely to reveal their positions on controversial issues which they consider to be a threat for their electoral success. Since VAA researchers request them to answer all questions, in order to avoid the difficult questions, the parties may decide to avoid the completion of the questionnaire. As a result, in many countries the response rate is very low. According to Trechsel and Mair (2011) the pan-European Voting Advice Application EUprofiler has asked European political parties to self-position themselves on the EUprofiler issues. The overall response rate was 37.6% but its variability per country was enormous. For instance, in countries with long tradition of co-operation between parties and VAA designers (e.g. Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands) the response rate was higher than 75%, but in Greece only 3 out of 7 parties contacted have responded (42.9% response rate).

Another approach is to use expert surveys (for example, Bakker et al. 2012). An important concern is that experts may judge parties from various points of view on who they judge, what they judge, and what time period they base their judgement on (Budge 2000). Regarding who the experts judge, Budge (2010) argues that the answer could be the leaders, the activists, the voters or all three combined. Regarding what they judge and on what time frame, the answers could be current intentions, or past behaviour. Of course a carefully prepared questionnaire that includes detailed guidelines for the experts (e.g. what sources to use, on which period to focus, etc) may facilitate a common point of view by clarifying the target of the judgement. For instance, as Steenbergen and Marks (2007) report: “it is quite common to specify that the judgment should concern the position of the party leadership and not activists or voters”. In a similar way, we can take care of most of the problems reported by Budge

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(2010). But even with the best questionnaire and with the most detailed guidelines and training of the experts, they may have problems especially when they judge parties on issues that these parties do not have a clear position, e.g. when a party is internally divided, or when the issue is not salient to the party as shown by Steenbergen and Marks (2007). They have also tested the hypothesis that smaller parties and perhaps covered less by the media should be a problem for experts; the coefficient of the measure they have used (vote share) is negative (indicating that larger parties are easier for experts) but small and not statistically significant.

Another option is to extract party positions from party manifestos. This method is used by many political science scholars and VAA researchers. The most important problem with this method is that the manifesto of a party may not be helpful for some issues, because the political party has selected to avoid any references to these issues. In these cases, we may not have a complete case of non-response (as in the case when the party does not respond to the whole questionnaire), but we have cases of item non-response. Since we need to position all parties on all items, we have to use additional sources. The problem becomes bigger if the leadership of the party has carefully avoided to take any public position on an issue.

The aforementioned basic methods can either be used as the only method for the estimation of party positions or we can combine two or more of them, e.g. we can combine manifesto analysis or an expert survey with party self-positioning. Finally, there are some VAAs which ask their users to give their vote intention; in these cases, we could use position of the partisans to calibrate the position of the party they intend to vote.

In this paper my aim is to test a new approach: my idea is to use the position of the candidates as an estimate for the position of their parties. I believe that by using the candidates as experts I will have the information by the source itself (instead of asking an external expert to position the party who may not know the party's position on the less salient issues), but at the same time I will overcome the disadvantages of asking only the leadership of the party (i.e. non-response, manipulation of the position to make their party appear closer to the most popular positions, and lack of any measure of uncertainty) and the challenges of manifesto analysis (lack of information about the position of some parties on some issues).

In order to test our idea of using the candidates to estimate the position of the parties, the candidates for the Greek Parliament have been asked to position themselves on a series of issues that have been used in the Greek Voting Advice Application HelpMeVote. The main aim is to use the position of the candidates as an estimate for the position of their parties and to compare this estimate with the estimates provided by other methods. The battery of questions is attached in the Appendix.

### ***HelpMeVote***

HelpMeVote 2015 is a Greek Voting Advice Application that was completed more than 570000 times in the period from its official beginning (07/01/2015) until the Election Day (25/01/2015). Following the cleaning techniques provided by Andreadis (2012, 2014) the cleaned dataset includes 543870 cases. The number of citizens who have participated in the Greek Parliamentary Elections of January 2015

is 6330786. Thus, if we suppose that all HelpMeVote users have used it only once and that almost all of them have participated in the elections, then we can estimate that HelpMeVote users are circa 8.6% of those who participated in the Greek Parliamentary Elections of January 2015.

HelpMeVote 2015 includes 31 statements that reflect the major dimensions of electoral competition. 20 statements have been used in HelpMeVote 2012 (Andreadis, 2013), 6 statements have been translated from the Core Questionnaire of the Comparative Candidate Survey<sup>1</sup> (CCS) Module II (2013-2018) (CCS, April 2013), 3 statements have been developed within Team Populism<sup>2</sup> (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2013) and the Populismus project<sup>3</sup> (Andreadis, Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2015), and 2 statements are totally new and reflect two new issues of the political debate during the period before the elections of 25 January 2015.

The 20 statements used in HelpMeVote 2015 out of about 40 that have been used in the two versions of HelpMeVote 2012 (May and June) have been selected on the basis of two criteria: i) old issues which have lost their importance on the electoral agenda have been removed, ii) the discrimination power of each issue was re-examined against the data which have been collected by the users of HelpMeVote 2012, i.e. it was checked whether voters of different parties have significantly different positions; issues that failed to pass this test for most pairs of parties were deleted.

It should be noted that many of the statements that have been used in the previous versions of HelpMeVote were based on items included in major international political and social surveys and in the literature related with party positions, party mapping and the dimensions of political competition (Benoit and Laver, 2006; Evans, Heath and Lalljee, 1996; Heath, Evans and Martin, 1994, Andreadis, Teperoglou and Tsatsanis, 2011). In HelpMeVote 2012 we also included issues which were asked in Greek public opinion polls and which are related with the views regarding the management of the debt, and attitudes towards the memoranda and the Troika. These issues were included because the polls had revealed that these issues would play an important role in shaping the behavior of Greek voters for the 2012 elections.

The position of the parties on the issues included in HelpMeVote are the output of the following procedure: First, the parties are invited to position themselves. More specifically the leadership of the parties are asked to participate in a web survey and to express the position of their party on the issues using the following five-point scale: 1: "Strongly disagree", 2: "Disagree", 3: "Neither agree nor disagree", 4: "Agree" and 5: "Strongly agree". In addition, a number of Greek experts on political parties (university faculty and researchers from public opinion polling companies) are invited to code the position of each party on each of the issues. The median value of the responses given by the experts for each political party is used as the position of the party. If for an issue: i) there is a large variance for most of the parties or ii) it has limited party discriminating power, the corresponding issue is removed. Finally, for each of the parties that had responded to the questionnaire, the positions given by the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.comparativecandidates.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://populism.byu.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.populismus.gr/>

party is compared with the median position given for the same party by the experts. In most cases, the position resulting from the two procedures is common. In case there is a difference the position given by the experts is chosen as the final position of the party, unless the party can provide clear evidence to support their response.

### ***The political Map of HelpMeVote 2015***

For the political map of HelpMeVote 2015, the results are presented in a two-axes X-Y plot. The horizontal axis depicts the position of parties in the GAL: (Green, Alternative, Libertarian) vs TAN: (Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) dimension (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002). The axis is based on socio-cultural issues. The second (vertical) axis captures the juxtaposition of the parties regarding the management of the debt, country's commitments to its lenders and the attitudes towards the European Union. At the top of the axis we can find parties that support that staying in the Eurozone should be a top priority for Greece (pro-European); at the bottom of the axis we can find the opposite view (anti-Troika), i.e. that we should cancel the austerity measure immediately even if this means that we would risk getting out of the Eurozone (see Diagram 1).

Most of the statements used in HelpMeVote have been classified as follows: if a statement expresses a GAL position, it is classified as GAL-oriented. With the same method, other statements have been classified as TAN-oriented. For the statements that are more related to the vertical axis we have used the labels "pro-European" (used for statements expressing ideas that would be supported by parties that appear near the top of the diagram) and "anti-Troika" for statements expressing opposite ideas. However, the vertical axis also includes the statements that refer to i) economic left/right and ii) populism. The inclusion of economic left/right issues in the vertical axis was done because the analysis of HelpMeVote 2012 data has shown that the economic left/right dimension has been aligned with the pro-European/anti-Troika dimension. For similar results based on ELNES 2012 (Andreadis, Chadjipadelis, Teperoglou, 2014) see (Freire et al, 2014; Tsatsanis, Freire & Tsirbas, 2014).

The position of the parties on the diagram is determined by the following procedure: The answers are coded as follows: -1: Strongly disagree, -0.5: Disagree, 0: Neither agree nor disagree, 0.5: Agree and 1: Strongly agree. Then, to determine the position of the voter on the GAL - TAN axis, the sum of all the answers to GAL-oriented questions is subtracted by the sum of all responses to TAN-oriented questions. The result is divided by the number of all GAL or TAN oriented questions. The result is a number with values ranging from -1 (extreme GAL) to +1 (extreme TAN) and it is used as the abscissa of the point. The ordinate of the point is calculated in a similar way (using the questions related to the vertical axis).



**Diagram 1. HelpMeVote 2015 political map**

The political map displayed in Diagram 1 reflects the position of the political parties. Their position on the map is a visual summary of their position in each of the political statements included in HelpMeVote 2015. The map helps to get a general idea of what each party stands for with regard to the two most significant dimensions of the electoral competition in Greece at the beginning of 2015.

### ***The Greek Candidate Study***

The Greek Candidate Study is part of the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) which is a joint multi-national project with the goal of collecting data on candidates running for national parliamentary elections in different countries using a common core questionnaire in a post-election candidate survey conducted in each country. CCS is conducted after the elections in order to collect data at the same period that data on voters are collected as part of national election studies.

In Greece CCS is run as a mixed-mode survey and the first mode is always a web-survey (Andreadis 2010). The first time the Candidate Study was conducted in Greece was for the parliamentary elections of 2007. It has been conducted again in 2009, and 2012. The data of these studies are available from the website of the Hellenic National Election Studies (<http://www.elines.gr>) and have been used in many national and international publications (e.g. Andreadis 2012, Freire et al 2014, Teperoglou, Chadjipadelis & Andreadis 2010, Teperoglou et al 2014).

The Greek candidate survey of 2015 was conducted as a web survey from mid-February to end of July 2015 (Andreadis 2016; Andreadis & Kartsounidou, 2016; Kartsounidou & Andreadis 2015). The population of interest is the group of all

candidates running with the five following parties: SYRIZA, ND, RIVER, PASOK, ANEL. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) has never agreed to participate in the Greek Candidate Study. Golden Dawn (XA) usually replies that all candidates share the same opinion. For instance, in 2012 the leadership of Golden Dawn had agreed to answer one questionnaire centrally.

The first notifications to the candidate MPs inviting them to participate in the survey were sent on the 16th February 2015. After 3-5 reminders (the last one including a notification that the survey will not be available after the end of July 2015) the number of completed questionnaires is 520. Following the AAPOR standards we can estimate the response rate as  $520/1384=37.6\%$  if we exclude the unknown eligibility cases or as  $520/1476=35.2\%$  if all cases are included. The distribution per party is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Number of candidates per party in the sample**

Party	Frequency	Percent
SYRIZA	112	21.5
ND	102	19.6
RIVER	108	20.8
PASOK	96	18.5
ANEL	102	19.6
Total	520	100.0

### ***Findings***

We compare the measures of the central tendency of the two datasets. The most appropriate measure of central tendency is the median because outliers and extreme values do not have an impact on the median. As a measure of the distance of the two estimates we use the absolute value of the difference of the medians i.e.  $\text{Distance}=\text{Abs}(\text{Median}(\text{Candidates})-\text{Median}(\text{Experts}))$ .

Before the presentation of the findings it should be clarified that a distance up to the value 1 is not very important because such a difference would not mean that the medians of the two groups are on opposite sides. In most cases a difference up to 1 would mean that both groups have given medians on the same side, but one of the groups have given a more extreme estimate than the other. For instance, one group may have given the response: "Strongly agree" and the other group may have given the response: "Agree".

On the other hand, a difference of 2 is large because it means that the two groups have either given responses on opposite sides (e.g. Agree – Disagree) or one group has given the median response "Neither ... nor ..." and the other group has given one of the extreme responses (e.g. "Strongly agree" or "Strongly disagree"). In both cases the difference indicates that the two groups have significantly different opinions about the position of the party on the particular issue. Of course, this is true if the distance is larger than two.

Table 1 shows the distribution of absolute median differences between experts and candidates per political party. The cases where the difference is important (larger than one) are limited (11.6%). These cases are not uniformly distributed to all Greek

parties. In fact, there are only two parties where the difference is important in more than 20% of the items: the right wing pro-European party ND and the populist right-wing party ANEL. For the rest of the parties the items with a large median difference are much more limited (0% to 9.7%).

Table 1. Distribution of absolute median differences between experts and candidates per political party

Party/Difference	0	0,5	1	1,5	2
SYRIZA	45,2%	12,9%	38,7%		3,2%
ND	19,4%	6,5%	51,6%	3,2%	19,4%
RIVER	45,2%	19,4%	35,5%		
PASOK	54,8%	6,5%	29,0%		9,7%
ANEL	25,8%	3,2%	48,4%	6,5%	16,1%
Total	38,1%	9,7%	40,6%	1,9%	9,7%

This means that if we had used data from candidates to position the parties on the issues, we would have placed most the parties on most of the issues at the same position. Thus, using candidate data to position the parties on issues, may be an alternative to the methods that have been used until now.

Before we focus on the cases where we observe large differences it is interesting to see if using the candidate data would give us less or more extreme party positions. For this task, first we subtract the value the value 3 from all responses. Thus, the new values are centred around the value 0 (that now corresponds to ‘neither ... nor’) and their range is from -2 (that now corresponds to strongly disagree) to +2 (that now corresponds to strongly agree). Now, we can use the difference of the absolute values of the centred values as an indicator of extremity:

$$\text{DifExt} = \text{Abs}(\text{Median}(\text{Centered\_Experts})) - \text{Abs}(\text{Median}(\text{Centered\_Candidates}))$$

Thus, a positive DifExt value for a party - issue combination, means that the experts give a more extreme position to the party on the particular issue than the position extracted by its candidates. On the other hand, a negative value means that the median position of the party candidates is more extreme than the position estimated by the median of the responses of the experts for the particular party. Thus, if DifExt is -0.5 or -1 we can argue that median position of the party candidates is slightly more extreme than the position estimates by the median of the exert responses. If DifExt is 0.5 or 1, we can argue that the experts have placed the party on a slightly more extreme position than the median position of the candidates. Finally, if DifExt is 1.5 or 2, this means that the position extracted by the experts is significantly more extreme than the position of the candidates. Diagram 2 shows the distribution of the values of DifExt for each party. It is obvious that using the candidates we will not get

a significantly more extreme position than using the experts for any party-issue combination. On the other hand, there are some problematic party-issue combinations, where the experts give a significantly more extreme position than the candidates. Again, here the most important problems are with the two right wing parties and to a smaller degree with SYRIZA.

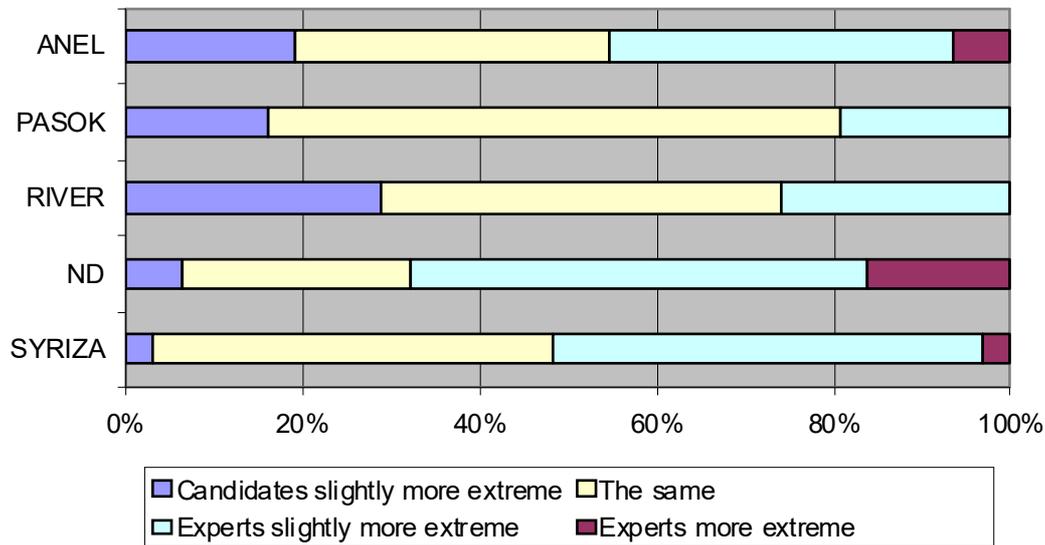


Diagram 2 Comparison of extreme answers between experts and candidates

Now we focus on the specific party-issue combinations where we have observed the most significant problems. First, we focus on the single statement where there is a significant difference for SYRIZA. The experts have coded SYRIZA on the statement: “The Memorandum has not caused the economic crisis; the economic crisis has resulted in the Memorandum” with the value 1 (Strongly disagree). On the other hand, the median position of SYRIZA candidates is 3 (Neither ... nor). This probably means that the candidates of SYRIZA in January 2015 did not have a single, clear position on this issue and this probably explains the SYRIZA split and the formation of the new political party “Popular Unity” by ex-SYRIZA member in August 2015

For ANEL there are 7 out of 31 statements where there is a large difference between the position using the experts and the position using the candidates. Most of these items are related to the relation of Greece with EU and the management of the Greek debt. The leader of ANEL was using a very strong anti-Troika discourse and this discourse has made experts think of ANEL as a party that is against all the changes provisioned in the Memoranda, determined to cancel the debt immediately without consulting anyone else even if this would mean that Greece should leave the EU and with strong positions against increasing the power of the European Parliament. But if we observe the median position of the ANEL candidates we can understand that their anti-EU anti-Troika attitudes are not so clear (q22, q31) or even they are on the other side (q20, q29).

Two other statements in Table 2 show that the experts place ANEL more to the right than the candidates on the economic left-right dimension. More specifically expert think that ANEL is in favour of the partial privatization of the national health system and of more flexible forms of work in order to combat unemployment. The experts have made this choice probably because ANEL is labelled as a right-wing party and the statements q16 and q5 are expressions of liberal economic policies. ANEL is

indeed right-wing as far as the cultural dimension is concerned. If we exclude q87 (matters of abortion), on the rest cultural issues both experts and ANEL candidates place the party on the right. But according to its candidates, ANEL is on the other side of the economic left-right dimension and they are in favour of state intervention in the economy. In fact, populism, anti-Troika positions, and statism were the three links between ANEL and SYRIZA that made it possible for these two parties to form a government coalition.

Table 2. Statements with large differences for ANEL

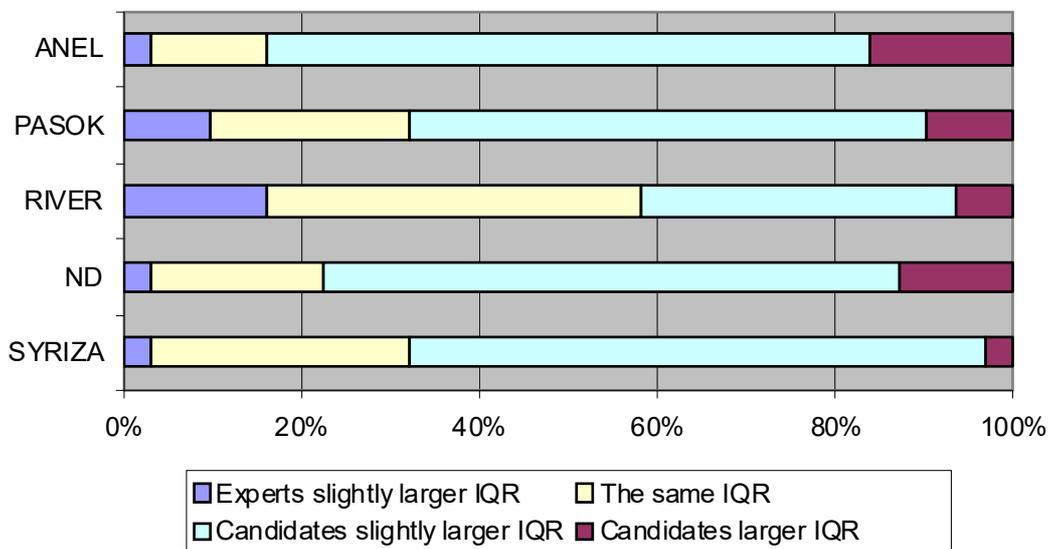
<b>Code</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Experts</b>	<b>Candidates</b>
q16	The national health system can become more efficient through partial privatization.	3.5	2
q20	It is better for Greece to be in the European Union rather than outside.	2.5	4
q22	The decision power of the European Parliament should be increased on all matters of internal and foreign policy.	1	3
q29	We ought to have done many of the changes provisioned in the Memoranda on our own long ago.	2	4
q31	We have every right to cancel the debt without consulting anyone else	5	3
q5	We should have more flexible forms of work in order to combat unemployment.	4	2
q87	Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion.	2	4

Table 3 shows the statements with large differences for ND. Most of these items are on the cultural dimension. The experts have placed ND on the cultural dimension more to the right than the median value of ND candidates. The candidates appear without a clear direction. Their median in “Neither agree, nor disagree” on the issues related to immigration (q78, q85), relations with the church (q19) and restriction of protests (q33). In addition, they are in favour of choice on matters of abortion (q87). On all these issues, the experts have coded ND as a typical Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN) party.

Table 3. Statements with large differences for ND

<b>Code</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Experts</b>	<b>Candidates</b>
q19	The church and the state should be completely separated.	1	3
q33	There should be legislation to limit protests	5	3
q77	The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.	1	3
q78	Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [country]	5	3
q83	The government should take measures to reduce income inequalities	2	4
q85	Immigrants are good for Greece’s economy.	1.5	3
q87	Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion.	2	4

In order to compare the variances of the two groups, we can use the difference of the interquartile ranges. The selection of this measure is done on the same basis of the selection of the median. i.e. to use an estimate that is robust to extreme values and outliers. The interquartile range is calculated as follows:  $IQR=Q3-Q1$ , where Q3 and Q1 are the third and first quartiles of the data. The comparison is done using the difference:  $IQR(\text{Candidates})-IQR(\text{Experts})$ . This time we do not have to use the absolute value of the difference. In fact, it is better to avoid using the absolute value because it is interesting to observe which of the two groups gives a more uncertain estimate. For instance, if the difference gives a negative value, this would mean that  $IQR(\text{Candidates})<IQR(\text{Experts})$ , i.e. the uncertainty we have about the position of the party is larger when we use the experts than when we use the candidates (Diagram 3).



**Diagram 3. Comparison of IQRs**

### ***Conclusions***

In this paper I have studied the absolute median differences between experts and candidates per political party. The cases where the difference is important are limited (11.6%). These cases are not uniformly distributed to all Greek parties. In fact, there are only two parties where the difference is important in more than 20% of the items: the right wing pro-European party ND and the populist right-wing party ANEL.

It has been shown that if we had used data from candidates to position the parties on the issues, we would have placed most of the parties on most of the issues at the same position. Thus, using candidate data to position the parties on issues, may be an alternative to the methods that have been used until now.

Expert surveys may give less extreme positions than candidates survey for new parties. For instance, the uncertainty of experts for the positions of the Greek party POTAMI/RIVER leads more often to the middle position. As a result, POTAMI

is the only party where candidates are slightly more extreme than experts in more than 20% of the questions.

Finally, using the interquartile ranges, I have shown that the variance is larger within the candidates than within the experts. While trying to explain this finding, we should keep in mind that the number of experts is much smaller than the number of candidates.

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## Appendix A

### Statements in HelpMeVote 2015

Code	Text
13	'The requirements for asylum and citizenship must be tightened.'
14	'The existence of multiculturalism in Greece is a positive phenomenon.'
15	'It must be possible to operate non-governmental, non-profit institutions of higher education.'
16	'The national health system can become more efficient through partial privatization.'
19	'The church and the state should be completely separated.'
2	'The police should use stricter enforcement measures to protect the property of citizens.'
20	'It is better for Greece to be in the European Union rather than outside.'
21	'The economy of Greece would have been better if we had our own currency instead of Euro.'
22	'The decision power of the European Parliament should be increased on all matters of internal and foreign policy.'
28	'Memoranda of Understanding with the Troika were necessary to avoid the bankruptcy of Greece.'
29	'We ought to have done many of the changes provisioned in the Memoranda on our own long ago.'
30	'With the Memoranda we accumulate debts without any visible benefits.'
31	'We have every right to cancel the debt without consulting anyone else'
33	'There should be legislation to limit protests'
39	'The probability of GRexit should not be considered as a disaster'
40	'Banks and utilities must be under public control.'
41	'We should not apply any law that we feel is unfair.'
5	'We should have more flexible forms of work in order to combat unemployment.'
7	'Defense spending should not be reduced to avoid becoming a vulnerable country.'
77	'The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.'
78	'Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [country]'
79	'Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law.'
8	'The reduction of corporate taxes would have a positive impact on the development of the economy.'
81	'Popular demands are today ignored in favour of what benefits the establishment'
82	'People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences.'
83	'The government should take measures to reduce income inequalities'
84	'People can be better represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician.'
85	'Immigrants are good for [country's] economy.'
86	'The right for temporary leaves from prison is more important than the risk of escape'
87	'Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion.'
88	'The Memorandum has not caused the economic crisis; the economic crisis has resulted in the Memorandum'.