

Measuring Satisfaction with Democracy among Candidates: What is the effect of the Electoral Outcome?

Ioannis Andreadis
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

It is generally accepted that the evaluation of the performance of a political system is partly influenced by party preferences. Anderson and Guillory (1997) argue that "Winners are expected to discount negative information about the economy because of their status as supporters of the incumbent government. The effects of negative evaluations on satisfaction with democracy therefore should be attenuated among the winners compared to the losers". They support their argument with data from West European countries. Linde and Ekman (2003) test the argument in Central and East European countries, and they verify that satisfaction with how democracy works is different between winners and losers of the last election in the countries they study.

Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006) use elite surveys conducted between 1999 and 2002 in four countries: Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand in order to study the effect of the electoral outcome on the candidates' attitudes towards the existing electoral institutions. They argue that candidates from governing parties display more positive attitudes towards current political arrangements than candidates from opposition parties.

Bowler, Donovan and Karp argue in favour of their cross-national approach referring that using different parties in different electoral contexts, they are able to untangle the effects of values and ideology from self-interest (p. 438).

There are two main methodological virtues to this cross-national approach. First, data from multiple nations allow us to assess the effects of incumbent self-interest across different parties and different electoral contexts. Second, the multiple country approach helps to untangle the effects of values and ideology from self-interest. With elite opinion data from just one nation it would be difficult to say that opinion of members of the government reflected the fact that they were in government, or that government included right-of-center parties, or a post-materialist party.

In my opinion their methodological approach can be easily criticized because they argue that the candidates from a governing party would display lower levels of satisfaction with democracy if they had been in opposition, without observing the attitudes of the candidates when the party is in opposition (counterfactual inference).

A more convincing approach would have been to study how the candidates of the same party change their attitudes when their parties move from government to opposition and vice versa (factual instead of counterfactual inference). This would be similar to a repeated measures (before and after the treatment) experiment. Hopefully for the researchers the "treatment" (change of government) occurs often in political life and this gives the opportunity to study the impact of different electoral outcomes on candidates' attitudes towards existing political arrangements.

Greece offers the opportunity to run this "experiment" because the candidate survey was conducted in Greece twice in two years (2007 and 2009) and the outcome of each election was different. The right wing party New Democracy (ND) won the 2007 elections 2007 and the socialist party Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) won the 2009 elections.

Data indicate that there are significant differences between winners and losers: After the elections of 2009, when PASOK moved from the opposition to government the percentage of satisfied candidates raised by 3% (compared to 2007). On the other hand, when ND lost the elections and moved from the government to the opposition, the percentage of satisfied candidates dropped by 32% (compared to 2007).

The experiment gives the opportunity for additional differences between winners and losers. For instance, there are more candidates from a party which is in opposition (the losers of the election) than from a party which is in government (the winners of the election), who believe that the elections in their country do not work well in practice, i.e. the views of MPs do not accurately reflect the views of voters. Losers appear more supportive for an increased use of referendums and other forms of direct democracy. Finally, the percentage of losers who believe that individual MPs should be able to vote independent of their party's policy positions is larger than the same percentage among winners.

Data

In this study I use three datasets: The Hellenic Candidate Study 2007 (Andreadis et al 2007), the Hellenic Candidate Study 2009 (Andreadis et al 2009a) and the Hellenic Voter Study 2009 (Andreadis et al 2009b). The Hellenic Candidate Study 2007 (National Election Candidate Study for the 2007 Greek Parliamentary Election) has been conducted by the Laboratory of Applied Political Research, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The first wave of data has been collected online and the second wave used offline methods. For the online data collection we have used our own web server, properly modified open source web-survey software and a list of about 700 candidates, including their email addresses, provided by the two major political parties in Greece. About one out of ten of these email addresses was associated with some form of error. Candidates were invited to participate to the survey with an email sent by us. We have also sent them seven reminders (one reminder every 2 weeks). This effort resulted in 160 responses. The second wave included telephone interviews and it resulted to 81 completed questionnaires, i.e. the total sample consists of 241 cases. The Hellenic (Greek) Candidate Study 2009 has been conducted by the Laboratory of Applied Political Research, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The first wave of data, has been collected online and the second wave used offline methods. During the first wave candidates were invited to participate to the web survey. This effort resulted in 167 responses. The second wave included face to face interviews and it resulted to 28 completed questionnaires, i.e. the total sample consists of 195 cases. The 2009 Hellenic (Greek) National Election Voter Study was conducted with the CSES Module 3 common questionnaire using telephone interviews in the period between 10 December 2009 and 18 December 2009. The telephone interviews have been conducted by OPINION SA and the study was funded by the School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The sample was selected to be representative of the Greek population aged 18-89 years old with

voting rights, Greek nationality and to cover all regions of Greece (mainland and Greek islands). Appropriate software was used to randomly select the sample from the data base telephone list by area proportional to total population.

Satisfaction with Democratic Process

Both CSES and CCS questionnaires include the following question: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Greece?" (Q19). The possible answers offered to respondents are: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied and not at all satisfied. This offers a very good opportunity to compare candidates and voters as far as the level of satisfaction with democratic process is concerned.

The distribution of responses to this question is used as an indicator of attitudes toward the political system. Usually the sum of the percentages of very and fairly satisfied with the way democracy works in the country is used as a measure of support to the political system. Karp, Banducci, and Bowler (2003) argue that satisfaction with democracy is closely linked to evaluations of institutions. Anderson and Guillory (1997) argue that economic difficulties reduce the satisfaction of the citizens with the way democracy works in the country. This is also supported by Karp, Banducci, and Bowler (2003) who use a misery index to evaluate the influence of economy on satisfaction with democracy. They also support that satisfaction is affected by individual characteristics i.e. political knowledge and education.

It is generally accepted that the evaluation of the performance of a political system is partly influenced by party preferences. Anderson and Guillory (1997) argue that "Winners are expected to discount negative information about the economy because of their status as supporters of the incumbent government. The effects of negative evaluations on satisfaction with democracy therefore should be attenuated among the winners compared to the losers". They support their argument with data from West European countries. Linde and Ekman (2003) test the argument in Central and East European countries, and they verify that satisfaction with how democracy works is different between winners and losers of the last election in the countries they study.

Finally, Anderson and Guillory (1997) demonstrate that the gap in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers depends on the political system of the country. The satisfaction gap is larger in majoritarian political systems than in consensual political systems. According to Lijphart's index of consensual and majoritarian institutions, Greece is considered one of the most majoritarian political systems in Western Europe. As a result the satisfaction gap between winners and losers is expected to be large.

In Diagram 1 I present the distribution of replies in each of the four groups under study. As a first observation it appears that being attached to PASOK is associated with more satisfaction by the democratic process than being attached to ND. The percentage of very or fairly satisfied is 40% among PASOK voters and 25% among ND voters. Previous research has provided data from voter surveys that support the idea of satisfaction gap between winners and losers of the latest election. I argue that this gap is still valid if we move from the group of voters to the group of candidates.

Satisfaction with democracy is different between PASOK and ND candidates: Very or fairly satisfied are 53% of PASOK candidates and 37% of ND candidates. This finding my argument that the satisfaction gap between winners and losers is not observed only in the group of voters; it is also observed in the group of political elites (MP candidates). In order to verify my hypothesis I use data from the 2007 Greek candidate survey, when ND won the elections for a second consecutive time after 2004 and formed a government and PASOK was the main opposition party. The overall percentage of very or fairly satisfied candidates used to be higher in 2007 than in 2009. The overall drop of satisfaction in 2009 may be explained by the Greek economic crisis, in the sense that with the Greek economy in such a difficult situation, it is difficult for any Greek citizen (even for the candidates) to be very or even fairly satisfied with anything related to the economic situation: the government, the political system, or even the democratic process. Thus it is expected to observe a larger overall percentage of satisfied respondents in 2007 than in 2009. But what happens within each party with the roles of government and main opposition reversed? In 2007, the percentage of very or fairly satisfied respondents is 50% among PASOK candidates and 71% among ND candidates. To sum up: After the elections of 2009, when PASOK moved from the opposition to government the percentage of satisfied candidates raised by 5% (from 50% to 55%). Without the economic crisis this increment could be larger. On the other hand after ND lost the elections and moved from the government to the opposition, the percentage of satisfied candidates dropped by 34% (from 71% to 37%) as a result of both the economic crisis and the fact ND is not the government party any more.

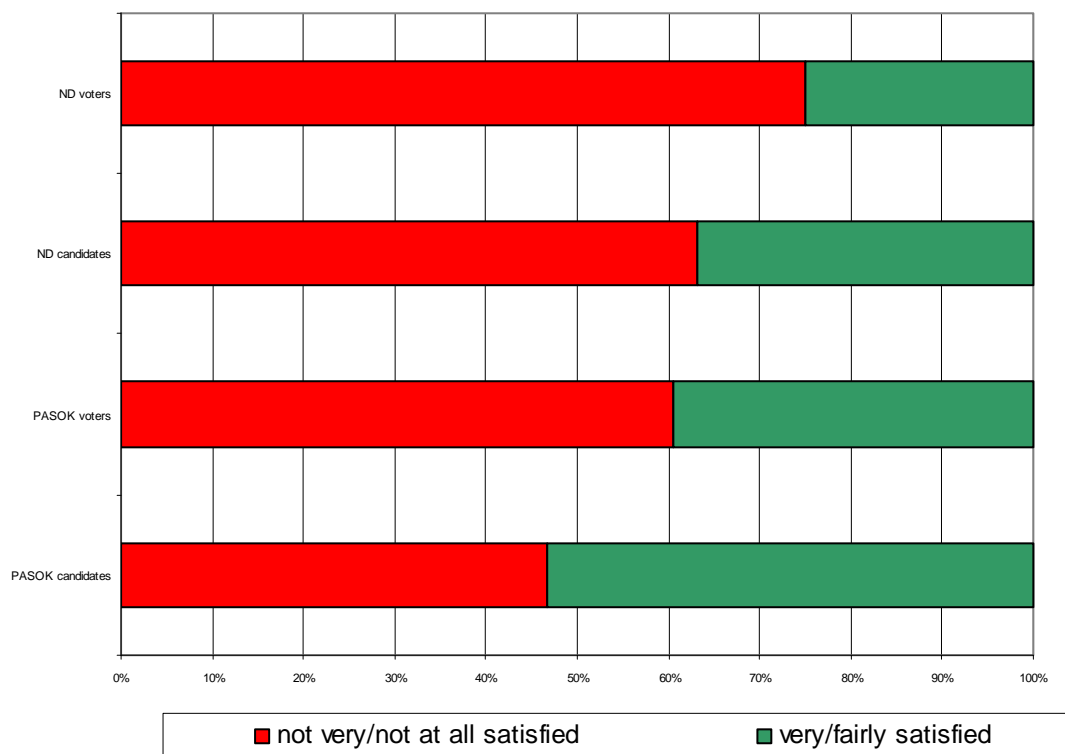


Diagram 1 Satisfaction with democratic process of PASOK and ND candidates and voters

A second observation from Diagram 1: it seems that voters are less satisfied than candidates are: The overall percentage of respondents who are very or fairly satisfied with democratic process is 45% among candidates and 34% among voters. This

difference may not seem very large but the reader should keep in mind that voter survey was conducted in the end of 2009 and candidate survey was conducted in the beginning of 2010 when there was more evidence revealing the bad situation of the Greek economy.

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