

**Innovation, an answer to lack of funding:
The 2015 Hellenic National Election Voter Study**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is two-fold: i) to demonstrate an innovative way of conducting a National Election Study in a country under serious austerity and ii) to present the opportunities for innovative ways of studying elections when the collection of various electoral data is coordinated by the same (or co-operating) research teams. The Hellenic National Election Study for the Greek Parliamentary Election of 25 January 2015 was conducted in a country where getting funds for an electoral study (or any other research project in social sciences) was almost impossible. The data collection was possible by taking advantage of new technological tools, in order to overcome the challenges occurring by the lack of funds. At the same time, the produced datasets are of top quality. In addition, the co-ordination between the candidate study, the voter study, and the voting advice application offers the opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of the aforementioned election.

Keywords:

National election studies, mixed-mode surveys, innovation, austerity

Author Bio (50-100 words):

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elites using web-tools and relying on the CCS (Comparative Candidate Survey) project. She completed her bachelor studies in June 2011, and two years later she completed her Master Programme at the AUTH, focusing on Political Analysis. She has attended several national and international conferences and workshops. Her interest in research lies broadly in the area of political and electoral analysis, web surveys and survey methodology, political behaviour, political elites and the impact of economic crisis.

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Introduction

National Election Studies (NES) are post-elections studies that focus on the electoral outcomes. NES survey data enables scholars to examine how voting behaviour and democratic choice was shaped for the election under study. The published work that is based on these data is enormous. The bibliography of publications that make use of the American National Election Study includes over 6,500 citations². The aforementioned publications cover almost all concepts of voting behaviour theories: i.e. analysis of the relationship between demographic characteristics and turnout or vote choice, the psychological component of vote choice, the impact of ideology on voting behaviour, the effect of economic assessments, the feeling thermometer, issue voting, the notion of valence issues, the impact of political efficacy on turnout, and more.

The voter study of the Greek Parliamentary Elections of 2015, which is part of the Hellenic National Elections Studies³ (ELNES), was conducted in order to provide the opportunity to the Greek as well as the foreign political analysts, to study Greek voters and to compare them with the ones in other countries by using common items in the questionnaires. The comparative analysis is possible because ELNES is part of two international projects on electoral studies: The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)⁴ and the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP)⁵. More specifically, CSES is a collaborative program of research among election study teams from around the world that aims to understand the nature of political and social cleavages and alignments. On the other hand, CNEP is a partnership among scholars who have conducted election surveys across the democratic world.

² See: http://www.electionstudies.org/resources/papers/reference_library.htm

³ See: <http://elnes.gr>

⁴ See: <http://www.cses.org/>

⁵ Find more about CNEP at: <http://u.osu.edu/cnep/>

The Hellenic National Election Voter Study of 2015 is a post-election study that was conducted in a particularly turbulent political, social and economic period. After elections in January 2015, the new Greek Government had to face strong negotiations regarding a third economic adjustment programme and at the same time the Greek community had to face a referendum, with blur political and social impacts. The aforementioned situation, in parallel with the existed financial and economic crisis, led to continuous budget cuts concerning public education and consequently to the underfunding of Greek Universities. This situation has left ELNES without the necessary funds, despite the many efforts that have been made to get support from various funding sources.

The “Yes, we can” project

Under the severe underfunding of all Greek Universities due to the growing economic crisis in Greece, and after many fruitless attempts to find an external funding, the option of assigning the recruitment of the respondents to a polling company, similar to the method that was followed for ELNES 2012 (for details see: Andreadis, Chadjipadelis, & Teperoglou, 2014; Freire et al, 2014), was not feasible any more.

A representative sample of 1000 randomly selected respondents for a 45 minute questionnaire using telephone interviews would cost at least 40,000 Euros. ELNES is able to produce a dataset - of the same high quality - with a fraction of this cost, by using internal resources and by moving most of the respondents, from the more expensive telephone interview, to the less expensive self-administered web survey. For instance, ELNES reduces the time of the telephone interview from circa 45 minutes to 1-2 minutes for a large part of the sample. This is achieved by asking respondents to provide us with their email addresses in order to receive an invitation to participate in our web survey. This method was initially proposed in 2012 by David Howell, Associate Director of the Centre for Political Studies (CPS), Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan and was further developed in 2014 when the Principal Investigator (PI) of the 2015 voter study, (the first co-author of this paper and a founding member of ELNES) was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at CPS.

Although the cost was reduced significantly by following this method, the ability to meet the expenses of the ELNES 2015 remained impossible. Therefore the study was designed to be conducted under almost zero funding and only supported by internal resources of Aristotle University with the essential participation of volunteers. Thus, the study started with three telephone devices and limited long-distance calling time. The rest of the expenses would be covered by the PI of the study.

The first difficulty that the project met was the lack of personnel. This was addressed by five students willing to work voluntarily as calling operators. These students along with one Political Analysis post-graduate student (the third co-author of this paper) and a PhD student working on Web Surveys and Survey Methodology (the second co-author of this paper), constituted the team of volunteers.

In order to collect the data safely, a proper space was needed. Due to the lack of Department's offices and infrastructure, the problem was not an easy one to be solved.

A possible solution to address the problem would be the utilization of the Laboratory of Applied Political Research, but it was not possible to use it as a calling centre, due to the fact that it is being used daily by students. Consequently, the only solution was to temporarily transform the PI's personal office into a small calling centre.

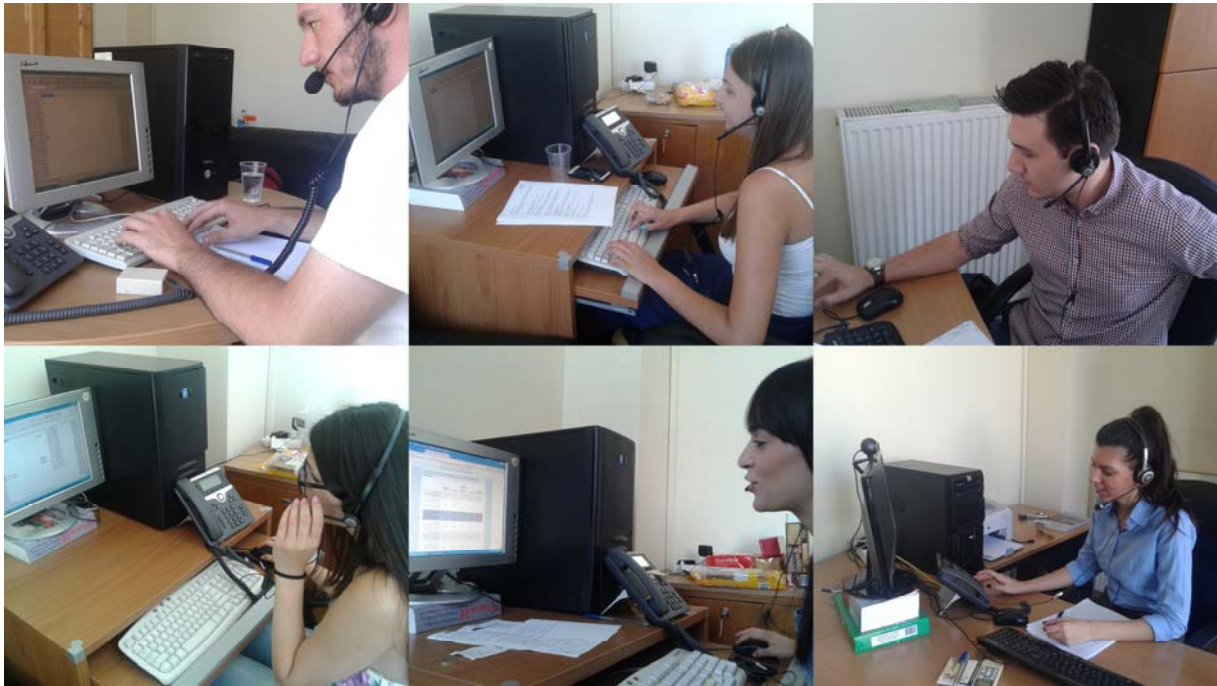


Figure 1. The team of volunteers in action

The IT Services⁶ of the Aristotle University supported the implementation of the necessary infrastructure for the connection of the telephone devices and the installation of the Ethernet cables for the new working seats. The office of the PI was occupied for the whole period of the collection process. Besides the concession of the needed space, the office was also reorganized for the purposes of the survey in a manner to accommodate each operator's needs. Thus, each operator could have his/her own equipment and at the same time to be isolated from the rest of the volunteers in order to be able to communicate with the respondents without the disturbance from other volunteers talking over the phone at the same time. (see Figure 1).

The equipment needed for the calling centre was the following: a Personal Computer (PC) connected to the Internet, a telephone device compatible to the telephone infrastructure of Aristotle University, and a compatible headset. One of the working seats was equipped with the PI's PC and personal telephone device. The other two working seats were equipped by using devices from several sources: e.g. a PC from the Laboratory of Applied Political Research, a telephone device of a member of the Faculty who was on leave, etc.

⁶ <https://it.auth.gr/en>

The cost of headsets, which would be compatible with the telephone devices, was too high, to be afforded by the PI. The PI had to transform low cost, incompatible headsets into compatible ones by reorganizing the internal cables (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. a) The first cheap headset that was “destroyed” while trying to make it compatible with the telephone device b) After finding the correct cable sequence, a more elegant method was used for the rest headsets (reorganizing of the internal cables was done inside the white boxes while keeping the cable jacks intact)

A phone survey of national scale implies important telephone communication costs. Short after the survey started, the solution was found with the support of some of the Professors of the School of Political Sciences. Each faculty member has a personal six digit code, which provides him or her with unlimited local phone calls and a specific amount of time for long distance calls. Many faculty members gave their six digit codes facilitating the implementation of the survey with minimal expenses⁷.

As mentioned above, most of the expenses of the survey were covered either by the volunteer work of the students or by using internal resources of the University either with the means of equipment and infrastructure or by the professors offering their codes for long-distance calls. Eventually, the final implementation of the study was a little easier due to the contributions of the two other founding members of ELNES and faculty members of the School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: Lecturer Eftichia Teperoglou and Professor Theodore Chadjipadelis.

Lecturer Eftichia Teperoglou managed to provide a small funding from the Institute of Lisbon University (ISCTE-IUL) which was used as a partial repayment for the volunteers’ work on the project. In addition, Dr Teperoglou offered her own telephone device and her personal code for long-distance calls and she was involved in the preparation of the questionnaire.

⁷ In some cases the estimation of the remaining long-distance units for these codes was not correct. In these cases, the PI has personally covered the expenses.

Professor Theodoros Chadjipadelis, (Chair of the School), contributed to the implementation of the project, by providing an additional working seat in his office increasing the number of working seats from three to four. He has taken care of everything related to this fourth working seat (staff, possible call expenses etc). He was also able to find funds to purchase new, better quality, compatible headsets, which came handy when the low-cost headsets proved vulnerable to the intensive daily use.

The mode of the survey

Many researchers and scholars focus their interest on mixed-mode surveys examining the advantages and disadvantages in terms of coverage, sampling, nonresponse and measurement errors (De Leeuw, Dillman & Hox, 2008). However, there is not adequate empirical evidence regarding how do modes differ in terms of cost and logistics (personnel and equipment needed) (US Bureau of the Census, 2007) and this is exactly where the uniqueness of our study lies. We present the Hellenic National Election Voter Study of 2015 which was completed as a mixed –mode survey with almost zero funding.

For the recruitment of our sample we used telephone (CATI); while for the main data collection phase we used web (CAWI) in combination with some telephone interviews (CATI). Nowadays, the growing rates of internet penetration encourage the conduction of surveys entirely based on web as it offers lower cost and faster responses. However, when the target is the general national population, web surveys can raise survey errors, since all the respondents do not have access to the Internet, especially in some rural areas, and even if they have access some of them are not able to use web tools to answer the questionnaire (De Leeuw & Hox, 2011). A mixed-mode survey design enabled us to use a low cost web survey while keeping the coverage error low with telephone interviews. In other words, a mixed-mode approach permits the researcher to combine the best of various modes while compensating for their weaknesses, at affordable cost (De Leeuw, 2005).

The recruitment of the respondents was done with a random selection of telephone numbers. National samples of telephone numbers require multistage sampling. The sample was selected using a Random Digital Dialling (RDD) method (Slep, Heyman, Williams, Van Dyke & O’Leary, 2006). RDD is a random mechanism which permits the use of all possible telephone numbers as a sampling frame for telephone surveys (Massey, O’Connor & Krotki, 1997). RDD is better than a method that uses a telephone directory, which usually suffers from a significant deficiency: incompleteness (Brick, Waksberg, Kulp, & Starer, 1995). Instead of using a telephone directory, with RDD the geographical area was sampled at the first stage, the area code was identified and the telephone numbers were completed during the second stage by random sampling. This method produces a probability sample that covers telephone numbers that could not be found in a telephone directory.

The problem with RDD is its low efficiency, because a lot of the called telephone numbers are invalid. To increase the efficiency, the RDD procedure that was used for ELNES 2015 was a variation of the Mitofsky–Waksberg method. This method is based on the fact that the telephone companies assign numbers in such a way that some area

code-prefix combinations produce a lot invalid numbers. Thus, we have used clusters of 100 telephone numbers with the same prefix; one of the 100 numbers within the cluster was randomly sampled and dialled. The first- cluster was retained in the sample only if the randomly sampled number in the cluster was valid (Brick & Tucker, 2007).

The recruitment process lasted from June 12 until July 16. There were two rotating shifts, the morning and the evening shift, from Monday to Friday, with each shift to have three operators and one supervisor.⁸ Each operator had a page with the script, one computer, one telephone device, a headset and a copy of the questionnaire in printed form as a backup in case of a system's crash or a power outage. Each operator had an Excel list with telephone numbers created by the aforementioned RDD procedure. The operator had to dial the list of numbers and follow a specific script, asking the respondents to provide their email address in case they were interested in participating in a political web survey conducted by the Laboratory of Applied Political Research of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Some people did not answer their phone during the recruitment phase or they were not able to talk at the exact moment but they were interested in participating in the survey. These people were recalled during the next shift.

At this point, it is crucial to highlight the quality of the collected data. The data collection took place in a controlled environment with no risks of distraction by a third party, ensuring at the same time the confidentiality of the whole procedure. In addition, all calling operators were post- and under-graduate Political science students who are familiar with the philosophy and the ethical rules of the academic society. All calling operators have gone through training sessions and they were continuously supervised either by the PI or the supervisor of the shift.

As mentioned above telephone was the contact mode of the survey; however, as for the mode of questionnaire completion a mixed-mode survey design was preferred combining web (CAWI) and telephone interviews (CATI). The Web was the main mode of the survey and the telephone interview was used as an auxiliary method for the respondents who do not have internet access or email account. For instance, a very limited number of Greek people in the 65+ age group use web tools and most of them have no or limited access to the Internet (Andreadis, 2013b). These people were encouraged to answer the questionnaire through a telephone interview⁹.

Every email address collected during the recruitment phase was uploaded to the epolls.gr web survey system and an e-mail with the invitation and the link to the survey was sent to the respondent. At this point it should be noted that during this phase we also sent invitations to about 400 respondents of the 2012 voter study who had indicated that they would be willing to participate in future ELNES surveys. In the following weeks after the initial invitation reminders were sent to the respondents who

⁸ The morning shift from 10:00 to 13:30 o'clock and the Evening shift, from 17:30 to 21:00 o'clock

⁹ In order to reduce possible measurement errors, the questionnaire of Hellenic Voter Study 2015 is a uni-mode questionnaire (Dillman, 2000).

had not completed the questionnaire. Maximum 6 follow-up reminders were sent through email to the respondents, in order to increase the response rate of the survey.

It should be noted that each invitation is unique and corresponds to a specific token. After the submission of the completed questionnaire the token is deactivated. This means that each respondent can participate in the survey only once. Any third party that has not been invited by the aforementioned procedure does not have any access at all to the questionnaire of the survey. The procedure ensures that the sample cannot be tampered with uninvited self-selected participants.

Value and impact of the project

Value added by using items from international projects

The ELNES voter study questionnaire of 2015 consists of the following group of questions: the CSES common core questionnaire, module IV (CSES, July 2011), questions from CNEP, questions that have been developed within the Team Populism¹⁰ and the Populismus project¹¹ and last but not least questions from the ELNES questionnaire of 2012 (ELNES, 2012). The survey questions are presented in details below.

The CSES common core questionnaire is composed of sets of questions relating to voting choice, evaluations of parties and leaders, attitudes and ideological orientations, perceptions of democratic performance as well as a set of demographic information. In addition, the present CSES questionnaire includes a module that focuses on distributional politics and social protection. The goal is to enhance knowledge of voter preferences for policies that affect income and wealth distribution, in a period of constrained growth, deficit reduction, expenditure constraint and austerity. Moreover it includes questions regarding political efficacy and political information and awareness. The impact of the CSES (and ELNES as part of it) on the development of the political science is very large. The CSES data have been used in hundreds of publications¹². The CSES has facilitated political scientist to build a much deeper knowledge about the factors both at the micro and the macro level that affect voting behaviour (Klingemann, 2009; Dalton & Anderson, 2010; Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2011; Thomassen, 2014).

The questionnaire also includes CNEP questions. At their core, the CNEP surveys focus on common questions on the following research topics: personal discussion networks, use of the mass media, campaign messages by political parties, socio-political values, attitudes towards democracy, civic participation, and the integrity of the electoral process. CNEP was founded in the late 1980s and it includes 41 surveys from 1990 to 2015 in 24 different countries on 5 continents. The impact of the CNEP is

¹⁰ See: <https://populism.byu.edu>

¹¹ See: <http://www.populismus.gr>

¹² See: http://www.cses.org/resources/results/cses_bibliography_full.htm

apparent from the large number of publications¹³ that have used CNEP data and the edited volumes of the project (Gunther et al 2015; Gunther et al 2007).

The government that came up from the elections of 25th of January was consisted of a coalition of one left-wing and one right-wing populist parties. That provided ELNES 2015 with the additional aim to measure populist attitudes among Greek voters and how these attitudes have affected their voting behaviour. In order to facilitate the analysis of the impact of populism on Greek electoral politics, ELNES 2015 includes a battery of populist attitudes items that have been already tested and validated in the literature (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2013; Andreadis, Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2015). These items have been included in questionnaires only recently and their importance will emerge by their use in future studies. However, given the increasing role of populism (especially in Europe), we believe that these items will be important for researchers trying to understand the factors for the success of populist parties.

Finally, some questions of ELNES 2012 questionnaire (Andreadis, Chadjipantelis & Teperoglou, 2014) are included also in the questionnaire of 2015. Most of these questions focus on current events, issues regarding government evaluation and blame attribution¹⁴. The same questions have been asked both to voters and candidates in Greece and in Portugal allowing for comparisons between countries and between the supply side and the demand side (Teperoglou, et al 2014; Freire et al 2014). With these items ELNES 2015 facilitates a deep understanding of the Greek voters' attitudes towards EU in a period when the economic crisis has had a significant impact on attitudes towards EU.

Value added by the co-ordination of the studies under ELNES

The project Hellenic National Election Studies (ELNES) facilitates research on the causes and consequences of voting behaviour and on the way democracy works in a country under financial crisis. By effectively taking advantage of new technology tools, ELNES provides a unique resource for scholars interested in deep and consequential questions on Greek politics. During the last years ELNES has been conducting two post-elections surveys: i) a candidate survey (Kartsounidou & Andreadis, 2015) and ii) a voter survey. The two surveys have many sets of questions in common, which gives researchers the opportunity to compare the opinions of the political elites with those of the voters, examining the level of congruence and the quality of political representation in Greece.

To the aforementioned innovative contribution of ELNES, we should also point out that both post-election studies include statements from the Voting Advice Application (VAA) "HelpMeVote¹⁵ 2015" (Andreadis, 2015a). HelpMeVote 2015 is a Greek Voting Advice

¹³ <https://u.osu.edu/cnep/publications/journal-articles/>

¹⁴ These questions are the result of a co-operation with the Portuguese research team of the project: "Elections, Leadership and Accountability: Political representation in Portugal".

¹⁵ Find more about HelpMeVote at: <http://www.helpmevote.gr/>

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).¹⁶ It includes 31 statements that reflect the major dimensions of electoral competition. 20 statements have been used in HelpMeVote 2012 (Andreadis, 2013a), 6 statements have been translated from the Core Questionnaire of the Comparative Candidate Survey¹⁷ (CCS) Module II (2013-2018) (CCS, April 2013), 3 are populist attitudes statements, 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. 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).

The fact that all three surveys: i) candidate survey, ii) ELNES voter study, and iii) HelpMeVote have many questions in common gives researchers a unique opportunity to study in depth characteristics of voting behaviour. HelpMeVote, although it does not offer a probability based sample, is able to collect data of more than 500.000 respondents. Therefore, HelpMeVote data provides additional information and details that a survey of 1.000 respondents is not able to do. For instance, in a sample of 1.000 respondents the voters of a party with a vote share of 3% will be approximately 30. This number may be adequate to draw a general conclusion about this small group but it is inadequate for an analysis of subsets of this group (e.g. the number of party voters in each age group). This is exactly where HelpMeVote data can facilitate a more detailed, fine grained analysis¹⁸.

Another benefit from the co-ordination of the questionnaires is the opportunity to compare two methods of positioning political parties on the political issues. The first method uses political parties' experts; the second method uses the candidates of these parties. In order to position the parties, VAA designers usually send invitations to a number of political parties experts and ask them to code the position of the parties on the issues. Since the same questions are sent to the Greek candidates, it is possible to compare their responses with the codes given by the experts for the same party. The comparison of the two methods can be done with regard to the location of the estimate and the uncertainty of the estimate, i.e. researchers can test i) if the estimates are different and ii) if the uncertainty of experts corresponds to larger variability of the candidates' opinions (see Andreadis, 2015b).

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.comparativecandidates.org/>

¹⁸ For instance, see the vote intention for Golden Dawn in each age-education cell <https://twitter.com/johnandsci/status/637658036031651840>

The participation of Greece in international projects via ELNES, provides the academic society and social science researchers who would like to apply quantitative methods on the analysis of Greek politics and elections with the opportunity to use a series of high-quality difficult to find, datasets that are freely available. To our knowledge, there are no other projects in Greece to offer reliable and free to everyone datasets on the electoral behaviour of the voters and the characteristics of the candidates. The datasets provided by ELNES have been used in many publications. For instance, see the special issue “Political Representation in Times of Bailout: Evidence from Greece and Portugal” (Freire, et al 2014b) and the book by Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou (2015). The dataset of the CSES part of the ELNES voter study 2015 is already available at the following link: <http://doi.org/10.3886/E51483V3> and we are sure that it will be used in many future research papers.

Discussion

As it was shown in the previous sections a significant innovation of the ELNES project is the co-ordination between the candidate study, the voter study, and the voting advice application. The existence of common items in all survey questionnaires works as an innovative umbrella which facilitates a more in-depth analysis of the Greek elections and enables interested scholars to make comparisons between political elites and voters, and to draw reliable conclusions regarding voting behaviour and voters’ characteristics, permitting inferences even about small subsets of the general population. In addition to the impact of ELNES as part of international projects, ELNES data have also been used as stand-alone datasets. Although ELNES was able to disseminate its data very recently, there is already a large list of publications which use ELNES data¹⁹.

The ELNES 2015 voter study follows the highest academic and research standards. ELNES is conducted according to the guidelines set by the CSES, producing high-quality data. The guidelines require, among other things, that the sample is probability-based, random, of adequate size, and selected according to accepted scientific principles. Despite its ambitious goals, ELNES can be a remarkably cost efficient project. This paper highlights exactly this innovation – how to conduct a fully professional national election study following the highest academic standards, as they were described above, with a low (almost no) cost design and implementation, at the same time.

The project was completely successful. Following the design presented in the previous sections almost 2245 invitations were sent and 60 respondents were interviewed via telephone. From the 2.245 email addresses, the 303 were either invalid or unavailable. After sending all reminders until September 6th we have ended up with 940 fully completed questionnaires, 336 partially completed questionnaires²⁰ and 25 refusals

¹⁹ <http://elnes.gr/node/10>

²⁰ From these 336 partially completed questionnaires, 268 are early drop-outs and have been removed from the dataset. As a result, the final dataset includes 1008 cases.

(people who informed us that they have changed their mind and they are not interested in participating).

The ELNES 2015 voter study, despite the financial crisis and the lack of funds, proved that a low cost survey can be successfully conducted. By taking advantage of new technology tools we have managed to keep expenses down. Most of the expenses were avoided: i) by using innovative approaches (web surveys), ii) by using internal resources of Aristotle University (infrastructure, IT support, professors' contribution) and iii) thanks to the remarkable effort and work by the volunteers.

The main objective of this paper is to present an innovative methodological approach to conduct voter studies. In a period, when research funds for the social sciences are decreasing - not only in Greece but also in a global level - we present this innovative low cost survey design as a pathway for other researchers willing to run a similar project with limited support or funds. We hope that the innovations presented in this paper may serve as a guideline for their projects. Of course, we understand that it may be difficult to find hard working volunteers. In this case, the methodology proposed in this paper cannot be fully replicated. Nevertheless, we hope that even in the cases where some of the steps in this paper cannot be followed, the rest of the ideas (e.g. the telephone to web approach) will still be useful to researchers with limited funds.

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