

The Middle Opinion. USA 2020.

Chapter 11 (pre-election draft)1

Democracy: satisfaction? ... dissatisfaction?2

“Government of the people, by the people, for the people”3

“You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time.”4

“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those others that have been tried from time to time.”5

Overview. Does democracy deliver satisfaction? - or dissatisfaction? Over the past year [2015], dissatisfaction has been expressed with various aspects of democracy. Democratic elections raise hopes of satisfaction which cannot be fulfilled for all. The elections we have studied in previous chapters [YB15] have given the satisfaction of victory, sometimes to a majority and sometimes to just a minority but always leaving at least a sizeable minority experiencing the dissatisfaction of defeat. Moreover the following chapter will show that the percentage experiencing the

1 Gordon Burt: gordonjburt@gmail.com. Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburmathsocsci/all>.

October 20, 2020

2 Chapter 11, pp. 219- in: Burt, Gordon.

3 Boritt, Gabor. *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

4 Attributed to John Lydgate and/or Abraham Lincoln. For example: Word Press. “Famous words of Lincoln and Lydgate.” *Word Press*. Accessed September 1, 2016.

<https://scottdunlop.wordpress.com/2007/09/07/famous-word-of-lincoln-and-lydgate-you-cant-please-all-of-the-people-all-of-the-time/>.

5 Winston Churchill (1947) quoted on the cover of *The Times* on election day. Churchill, Winston. [speech, House of Commons], November 11, 1947. — *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963*, ed. Robert Rhodes James, vol. 7, 1974, 7566. Accessed September 1, 2016.

<http://www.bartleby.com/73/417.html>.

satisfaction of victory in UK elections has declined over the past seventy years.

The concept of a value space can provide useful insight into these issues. Using it, Chapter 14 will show that there are theoretical limits to the amount of satisfaction which democracy can deliver. In this chapter we look at two studies which are particularly informative. The first study asks about the amount of value of each option; it asks about many options; and the analysis applies multiple criteria in its evaluation of the options. The second study asks for a full preference ordering of the options.

With the prospect (at the time) of a coalition government a survey asked people to place a value on each of nine possible government outcomes. All nine options had a mean negative rating, with a Conservative majority government being the least negative. However this option scored poorly on polarisation and extreme dissatisfaction. People's views were approximately consistent with single-peaked value functions on a left-right continuum in value space.

After the election, dissatisfaction within society gave way to dissatisfaction within parties ...

Finally it should be noted that the same broad argument applies not just to democracy but to any system of government, and not just to systems of government but to all social arrangements.

Dissatisfaction: the 2015 UK general election

Following Lincoln, democracy can be thought of as the rule of the people, by the people for the people. It is tempting then to go to the extreme and think that democracy solves all of society's problems and that it produces satisfaction throughout society. Qualifying this is the thought that 'you cannot please all of the people all of the time'. It is tempting then to consider the opposite extreme, namely that democracy produces dissatisfaction throughout society. A more balanced view is that democracy produces a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is inevitable because people disagree. Current news headlines draw attention to dissatisfaction with democracy. This can take a variety of forms:

- dissatisfaction with the current government
- dissatisfaction with a prospective government
- dissatisfaction with the democratic outcome
- dissatisfaction with any of the offered options
- dissatisfaction with any conceivable option

dissatisfaction with the political system and process

Dissatisfaction was expressed in the UK during the 2015 general election campaign. The coalition government was criticised for its austerity strategy and the previous Labour government was blamed for the deficit. UKIP was dissatisfied with Europe, the SNP was dissatisfied with the UK, and England was dissatisfied with the SNP, challenging the legitimacy of their MPs. There was general dissatisfaction with ‘Westminster politics’:

“Dissatisfaction with the political class is endemic within the British political system. Declining support for the two main parties has been in evidence since the 1970 general election, where 89% of voters supported either the Conservative or the Labour party, by 2010 this figure had dropped to 65%. Public frustration with ‘politics as usual’ is expressed in two ways: in rejecting the political elite (67% of the public say ‘politicians don’t understand the daily lives of people like me’) and in increasing support for smaller parties (a third of voters say they will not vote Labour or Conservative in May). So do 2015 parliamentary candidates offer something different from the previous cohort; are they more representative of the British public? Is a vote for one of the smaller parties a vote for a different kind of political class?”⁶

Dissatisfaction with all conceivable options

“All possible governments have net negative ratings among voters – but a Conservative majority is considered the least bad possibility for the country.”⁷

As election day approached, forecasts based on opinion polls predicted (wrongly as it turned out) that no party would have an absolute majority in parliament. This prompted debate about what coalition or minority governments might be possible and acceptable - see the headlines in the Tables 10.5 and 10.7 in Chapter 10. Although the regular opinion polls reported people’s *preferences for different parties* they provided no

⁶ vanHeerde-Hudson, Jennifer. “2015 parliamentary candidates. Gender, race/ethnicity and age.” *PSA Media Briefing*. April 16, 2015. Accessed September 1, 2016. http://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/PSA%20Media%20Briefing%20Notes_16.04.15.pdf.

⁷ Dahlgren, Will. “Majority Conservative government the ‘least bad option’ – voters.” *YouGov*. April 24, 2015. Accessed September 1, 2016. <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/04/24/ranking-coalitions/>.

information about people's *preferences for different coalitions*. However, there were just a few surveys which did ask people about which coalitions they preferred.

In a study by YouGov, people were offered nine possible government options and asked 'how good or bad do you think they would be for the UK?': 'very good', 'fairly good', 'don't know', 'fairly bad', or 'very bad'. In their analysis of the results YouGov evaluated the government options in terms of 'net value' by taking the difference between the sum of the two good responses and the sum of the two bad responses. In my own analysis, the responses are converted into scores 100, 50, 0, -50, -100 and the mean score is taken as a measure of the value.⁸

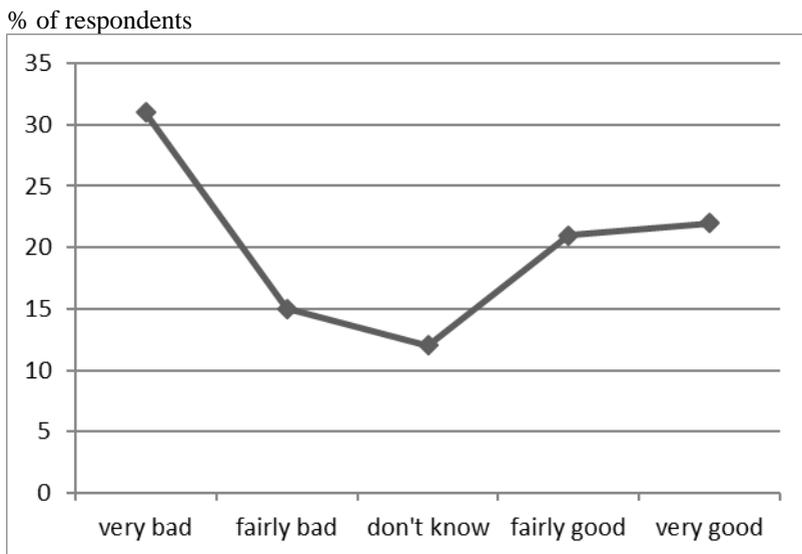
Consider first the ratings for a Conservative majority government. The mean rating is negative. Moreover, the distribution of the ratings takes a particular form. It has a polarised distribution with the 'very bad' and 'very good' being the two most frequent options. Also the percentage of 'very bad' responses is particularly high. In summary a Conservative majority government scores poorly on three different criteria: mean rating, polarisation and extreme dissatisfaction. A Conservative majority government was of course what actually happened. See Figure 11.1.

We now consider alternative governments, both single-party governments and coalition governments. We can order the options on the left-right political continuum in the following way. First the parties can be ordered left to right with the following scores: SNP (-2), Labour (-1), Liberal Democrat (0), Conservative (+1), DUP (+2), UKIP (+3). The score of a government is then taken as the mean score of its component parties. Ordered on the basis of these scores we have: SNP & Labour (-1.5), SNP & Labour & LibDem (-1), Labour (-1), Labour & LibDem (-0.5), Labour & Conservative (0), LibDem & Conservative (+0.5), Conservative (+1), LibDem & Conservative & UKIP (+1.3), LibDem & Conservative & DUP & UKIP (+1.5).

How do these possible governments compare in terms of the three criteria of mean rating, polarisation and extreme dissatisfaction? Here polarisation is measured by the product of the 'very bad' and the 'very good' proportions (scaled). Extreme dissatisfaction is simply the 'very bad' percentage. Note that positive mean rating is 'a good thing' whereas

⁸ Dahlgren, Will. "YouGov Survey results." YouGov. April 24, 2015. Accessed September 1, 2016. http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/6esxplv76z/InternalResults_150422_GE2015_coalitions_Website.pdf.

Figure 11.1 The distribution of ratings of a Conservative majority government



polarisation and extreme dissatisfaction are ‘bad things’. So for ease of comparison we take *lack* of polarisation (equal to minus polarisation) and *lack* of extreme dissatisfaction (equal to minus extreme dissatisfaction) as criteria. Taking the mean of the three criteria gives a fourth composite value criterion.

Figure 11.2 presents the profiles for the four criteria over the nine possible governments on the left-right political continuum. Note that whichever government is being judged and whichever criterion is being used the value is always negative.

The profile for the *mean rating* is double-peaked with one peak for a Labour government and another peak for a Conservative government. The mean rating for a Labour government is less than the mean rating for a Conservative government. Centrist coalitions have a lower mean rating as do coalitions to the left of Labour or to the right of Conservative.

The profile for *lack of polarisation* is double-troughed with one trough for a Labour government and another trough for a Conservative government. The trough for a Labour government is less severe than the trough for a Conservative government. Centrist coalitions are ‘best’ in terms of lack of

polarisation and coalitions to the left of Labour or to the right of Conservative are middling in terms of lack of polarisation.

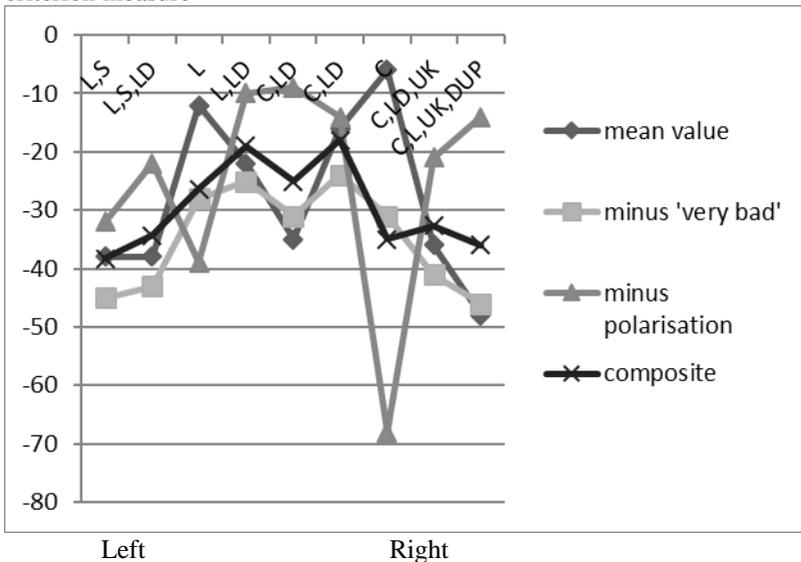
The profile for the *lack of extreme dissatisfaction* is almost single-peaked with the peak in the centre of the left-right political continuum. It is similar to the profile for the composite criterion, which follows.

The profile for the *composite criterion* is almost single-peaked with the peak in the centre of the left-right political continuum. The top three options are all coalitions in the centre of the continuum: Labour & LibDem; Labour & Conservative; and LibDem & Conservative. Although the Labour & Conservative option is the most central, it is slightly lower in value and this may be connected with the two parties not being adjacent on the continuum. All other governments, in particular a Labour government or a Conservative government are of lower value.

In conclusion, all the options have a negative value on all of the criteria. A Conservative majority government has the least negative mean rating. However, a Conservative majority government has the greatest degree of polarisation.

Figure 11.2 Criteria for judging parties/coalitions: mean value, lack of extreme dissatisfaction, lack of polarisation (x1000), a composite index

criterion measure

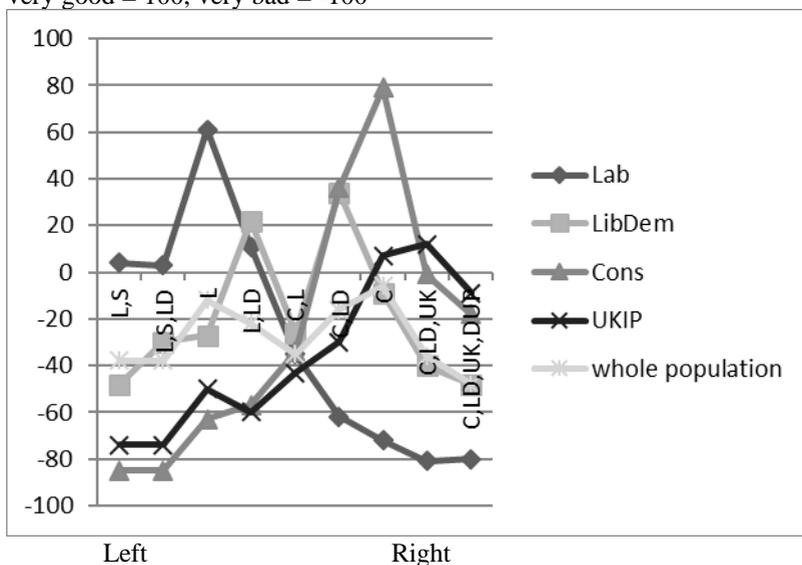


So far our analysis of the survey has focused on the overall response. We now consider the responses of different groups. People were also asked

about their voting intentions: Labour, LibDem, Conservative or UKIP. Figure 11.3 presents the value of government options for each group and for the whole population. The government options are ordered from left to right. Each of the four group profiles is approximately single-peaked. The peak value for Labour voters is very positive and is for a Labour government and the value of other governments declines sharply into negative value the more distant a government is from Labour on the left-right continuum. Similarly for the Conservatives, although a moderate positive value is placed on a coalition with the LibDems. The peak values for Lib Dem voters are moderately positive for a coalition with one or the other of the two major parties. Lib Dems have less extreme valuations and there is a dip in the middle where LibDems regard a Labour-Conservative coalition as negative. The peak value for UKIP voters occur for a coalition with the Conservatives and is barely positive.

Figure 11.3 The value of government options: the profile for each party voter group and for the whole population

very good = 100; very bad = -100

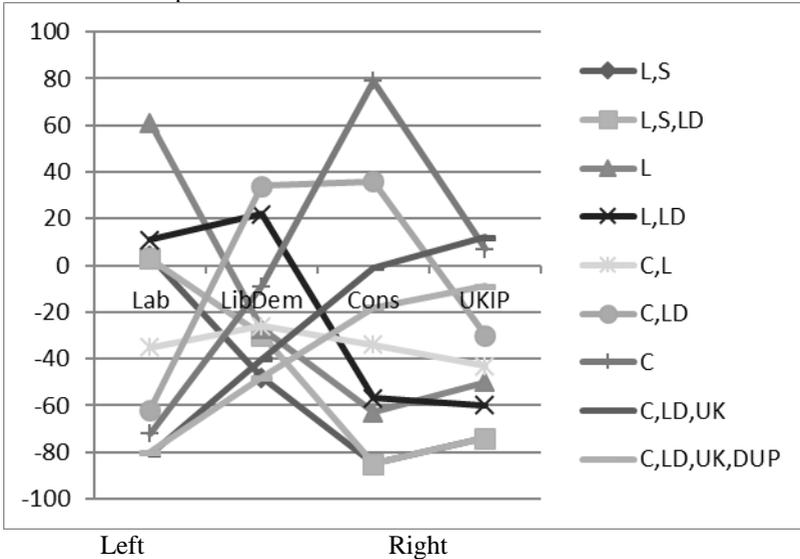


It is possible to construct a figure which is the dual figure of Figure 11.3. It is based on the same data but presents the value to the party groups of each government option. The parties are ordered from left to right. Each of

the nine government profiles is single-peaked or almost so. See Figure 11.4.

Figure 11.4 The dual figure: the value to the party voter groups, the profile for each government option

the value to the parties



Dissatisfaction within parties: the leadership

Within 24 hours of the election result being announced the leaders of the losing parties - Labour, Lib Dems and UKIP - resigned. The competition between parties during the election gave way to competition within parties. Dissatisfaction within society gave way to dissatisfaction within parties. In each party the process started to elect a new leader: candidates came forward, there was an election campaign and a new leader was elected. Just as there is dissatisfaction with government so there is dissatisfaction with party leadership:

- dissatisfaction with the current leader
- dissatisfaction with a prospective leader
- dissatisfaction with the leadership election outcome

dissatisfaction with any of the offered leadership options
dissatisfaction with any conceivable leadership option
dissatisfaction with the leadership system and process

...