

History will return to haunt you:
The application of the reward-punishment model on cabinet ministers for
policy

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Introduction

During the first Karamanlis administration (2004-2007) the education minister Marieta Giannakou faced two major problems in her attempt to implement the policies of the conservative government of New Democracy (ND). These were the higher education reforms and the introduction of the new history book for the 6th grade. The minister was not re-elected in the 2007 elections despite the fact that the governing party managed to gain a narrow but sufficient victory. The governing party managed to shift the blame on these two issues mainly on the education minister, avoiding to get penalized itself for them. Both issues caused public reactions. The higher education reforms triggered student demonstrations and academics' strikes, while the new history book set off a debate on national identity and interpretation of history that engaged the whole population and several opinion forming institutions such as the Church, media, and the Athens Academy. According to greek press¹, opinion polls on government dissatisfaction were influenced by the history book introduction much more than by any other issue in that period.

This paper provides an analysis on three main questions using all available data from the greek press including news articles and opinion polls. The first question explores the issues the voters in Giannakou's district perceived as decisive in their choice. Why had the history book so much more weight on their final vote choice? The second question asks how did the New Democracy government manage to direct the public dissatisfaction on those two issues at a single cabinet minister, and finally winning the elections. The final question focuses on the reasons why an issue of national identity and history teaching techniques became so important that it caused vast public debate and overshadowed other economic issues and scandals. The role of non-government related institutions is substantial in understanding the importance of national identity issues in Greece.

¹ kathimerini 05/08/2007; eleftheros typos 31/07/2007

Issue importance

The ministry of education presented the public with three major higher education reforms one regulating the election of new member of research and teaching personnel (April 2007)² introducing private universities (April 2007)³ and the other regulating academic research and its funding (August 2007)⁴. The introduction of the first two caused huge reactions in the academia, student demonstrations and academic strikes leading to the loss of many teaching weeks. The later reform did not cause much reaction since it was strategically presented outside term time. Despite the vast reactions, these reforms affected academics, higher education students and possibly their parents and hence they did not affect immensely the opinion polls.

The history book of the sixth grade became an issue as soon as it was presented by the media in the summer 2007. It became a high ranking issue on the agenda for two reasons. Initially because it was constantly promoted by the media since in the summer there is not much other news to present; and most importantly because it is an “easy” issue (Carmines and Stimson, 1980) requiring little specialized knowledge. The history textbook covered the recent period of Hellenism in the twentieth century, including the Destruction of Smyrna at the aftermath of First World War. The way the events were presented in the book, in an attempt to reduce hatred between Greeks and Turks, caused rage among the Greek population as they felt that the book misrepresented facts making undermining Greek history. It was judged as anti-Hellenic and offensive to the Greek culture. Opinion polls at the time showed that the history book issue damaged the government’s reputation much more than any other scandals (kathimerini 05/08/2007; eleftheros typos 31/07/2007). Thus the government responded by accepting to change the book and send it back to the authors for “fixing”.

The election timing was carefully chosen by the governing party after consulting the opinion polls. The election campaign was designed to be short, and focused on the governments macro-economic achievements (Gemenis, 2008). Timing was supposed to minimize the impact of issues with negative connotations for the government such as the education reforms and the history book. The protests on the education reforms had stopped over the summer since universities were outside term time and the debate

² Eleftherotypia (18/04/2007)

³ Eleftherotypia (20/04/2007)

⁴ Eleftherotypia (12/08/2007)

on the history book was rather quiet at the time of the elections. The government did its best to satisfy public opinion by accepting its fault on the matter and accepting changes on the book that would quieten nationalistic reactions.⁵ Hence the choice of election time was opportune for the government to focus on its achievements and to downplay scandals and “difficult” issues. The unfortunate event of the fire outbreaks all over Greece a week after the announcement of the elections helped the government focus its campaign on its effectiveness in dealing with immediate problems instead of ideological issues on the education. Thus the two education issues, though not forgotten, they had a smaller impact than initially expected because of the timing of the actual elections.

The two education issues are decisively different from one another and these differences affect the issue impact on vote decisions. The education reform issue requires some knowledge of the education system, specifically on higher education both for students and academics. The vast majority of the population is unaware of these processes. The history book however is connected to a much bigger issue, that of national identity. It is thus an “easy” issue since it requires little knowledge to form an opinion (Carmines and Stimson, 1980) and also cuts across the traditional party lines promoting the issue into an ideology shaper, even for a short period of time (Adams, 1997: 719). Greece being a relatively young state, with a large proportion of refugees that came to the country in the aftermath of the First World War (Destruction of Smyrna 1922) is very connected to its past. National identity issues still form political identities. Such an emotional connection to the issue was inevitable. The history book caused anxiety to the population which increased the importance of the issue as well willingness of the population to increase their knowledge on the issue (Marcus and MacKuen, 1993: 675-77). However there was no collective response on the issue. The government was only informed on the population’s feelings through opinion polls.

Both issues fall under the jurisdiction of the education ministry. Education reforms are obviously part of education; the changes in the history book are a much more complex problem. Indeed regular surveys asking the population which they think is the most important problem the country is facing, they respond 13.9% education for

⁵ Kathimerini (05/08/2007)

the period 20/2 to 18/3 and then it drops to 6% in the period 31/05 to 17/6.⁶ The importance of the issue continues dropping after the elections (5%, 21/11 to 7/12). Thus at the time of the elections the education reforms issue was not as important as in the February-march 2007 period when the protests were at their peak. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed opinion poll data on the topic of the history book. The only indication we have of its overall importance is that at the time of its peak (June-July 2007) it had a great impact on government's popularity, bigger than any other issue during the 2004-2007 term in office.

The political party leading the protest on the education reform was the leftist coalition of Sy.Riz.A., while the history book debate was mainly capitalized by the extreme right nationalist party La.O.S. Thus, it was expected that people who felt strongly about those issues would shift their support towards these two parties. Indeed, there was great movement of votes from the two big parties to the three smaller ones. Collectively the two larger parties lost 6% points of the vote in the 2007 election and of this Sy.Riz.A. gained 2.1% points and La.O.S. gained 1.6% points. The education minister at the time, Marietta Giannakou, was a member of the Greek parliament elected in the first electoral district of Athens. This is traditionally a conservative constituency, but also one that has less traditional party ties than the rest of the country. This means that the overall vote for the smaller parties is higher in the first electoral district of Athens than anywhere else in the country. Giannakou's party, Nea Demokratia, lost 4.53% points while the two smaller parties gained respectively 2.95% and 2.26% points. The vote changes there are difficult to be attributed to one specific problem. General dissatisfaction with the two larger parties was obvious throughout the campaign (Patrikios and Karyotis, 2008). Thus in order to pinpoint the loss specifically connected to education issues it is important to look closer.

⁶ Opinion poll data from Metron analysis quarterly surveys. www.metronanalysis.gr

	Results 2007		Results 2004		Change	
	Vote %	Seats	Vote %	Seats	Vote	Seats
Nea Demokratia	40.16%	7	44.69%	9	-4.53	-2
PASOK	29.96%	5	34.97%	6	-5.01	-1
KKE	10.52%	2	7.22%	1	3.3	+1
Sy.Riz.A	9.27%	2	6.32%	1	2.95	+1
La.O.S.	5.39%	1	3.13%	0	2.26	+1

Table 1: Election Results in the First Electoral District of Athens

	Results 2007		Results 2004		Change	
	Vote %	Seats	Vote %	Seats	Vote	Seats
Nea Demokratia	41.83%	152	45.4%	165	-3.57	-13
PASOK	38.10%	102	40.5%	117	-2.4	-15
KKE	8.15%	22	5.9%	12	2.25	10
Sy.Riz.A	5.04%	14	3.3%	6	2.1	8
La.O.S.	3.80%	10	2.2%	0	1.6	10

Table 2: Election Results in the whole of Greece

The loss was not only in party level. At constituency level the changes are clearer. The education minister Giannakou was elected as one of the nine members of parliament in the district at the 2004 elections and ranked sixth in public preference. In the 2007 elections Giannakou got the tenth place of public preference and failed to gain one of the seven -this time- seats that Nea Demokratia gained in the electoral district. Greece uses a system where the voters can choose the members of parliament of their preference. In the first Athens district specifically voters had four choices for MPs. The drop in popularity of Mrs. Giannakou does not leave much space for speculation. It is clear that her personal loss in votes does not reflect the losses of the governing party meaning that she paid for her political choices in the education ministry herself, not transferring much of the blame towards the whole government. This popularity loss was enhanced by the choice of another very popular politician, Dora Bakogianni, the former Athens mayor and minister of foreign affairs, to run for office at the first Athens district. She attracted a lot of votes and a much more popular alternative to Giannakou. Right wing voters tend to be older and less educated than

the rest of the population.⁷ This fact combined with the timing of the election closer to the history book debate than the education reforms points towards the fact that the history book and the national identity debate was much more important for the average right wing voter at the time of the election. Additionally, the criticism on the history book came from many different sides, while protests on the education reforms came only from the leftist parties (Ios 23/09/2007).⁸

Allocation of Blame

Most policymakers, political parties in government as well as cabinet ministers, are largely motivated by their desire to maximize their prospects for re-election (Weaver, 1986: 371). Difficult policy choices force politician to make yet another choice, that of their attitude towards political accounts. Blame attribution feeds voters' evaluations of policy makers (Abramowitz, Lanoue, and Ramesh 1988; Feldman 1985; Iyengar 1987; Tyler 1982), even sometimes their opinions on issues (Iyengar 1989). Voters have a stronger memory for negative information than positive; they remember easier the bad policy choices than the good ones (Lau, 1985; Fiorina and Shepsle, 1986). This is a great incentive for policy makers to focus on political consequences, minimizing blame even on the cost of building potential credit. It is however difficult to determine the public opinion on an issue before taking action. The issue might pass unnoticed or it might become top ranked agenda issue depending on the promotion it gets by the media and relevant agenda setting institutions (Nelson, 1984). Therefore, at the moment of decision making on the issue, the policy maker has no or little perception of the impact this decision is going to have on the public.

At the time the new history book was introduced nobody expected it to trigger such a negative public reaction. The two main actors, the education minister Giannakou and the government through the spokesman Rousopoulos took a very different approach to the matter. Public opinion was barely divided on the issue. From the moment the issue became important public opinion was in favour of changing the history book (eleftheros typos 31/07/2007). The education minister initially tried to justify her choices, standing her grounds firmly. She chose the path of justification, meaning that she admitted responsibility but tried to explain why the history book was not

⁷ 2007 election exit poll by Metron Analysis

⁸ <http://www.iospress.gr/ios2007/ios20070923.htm>

offensive, or as offensive as her opposition tried to show.⁹ (Interview of Gianakou, to vima 17/02/2008). The minister made that choice in order to be responsible in her policy choices. Her justifications tried to shift the blame away from her by focusing on the outcome, the new history book, and claiming that, contrary to what she and the book were accused of its consequences were not that undesirable. According to McGraw (1991) this is one of the most successful blame avoidance techniques, however it did not work in this case. The public was not convinced.

The government on the other hand took a very different approach seeing the public opinion being completely against the introduction of the new book. When consensus is so strong and persistent there is no reason in trying to fight against it. The government saw that the extreme right party La.O.S. was capitalizing on the book issue by constantly pointing out that the government was not conforming to the obvious will of the people and violated their trust., which can be very damaging (Weaver, 1986: 380). In fact this is what opinion polls showed. Therefore the government chose a different path, excuses. Using Semin and Manstead's (1983: 80) definition of various types of blame avoidance, excuses are used by policy makers to responsibility for an unpopular policy choice. Excuses focus on the causal link between the policy maker and the outcome and involve a denial of responsibility. The government accepted the common perception that the book needs changes and by doing so it distanced itself from the positions of the book authors, putting the responsibility of the book on them. The government asked the Athens Academy, the highest research institution in Greece with advisory rights to the government, to make suggestions on how the history book should be changed. This very fact immediately showed to the public three things; that the government was willing to co-operate to reach an agreement, and that it was indirectly putting the blame on the authors of the book and on the education minister and that it entered the debate on the issues the history book raised (which will be discussed in the third section of the paper).

Nea Democratia government faced a difficult choice on how to diffuse responsibility and shift the blame away from the party on a topic that the vast majority of the population had a strong opinion.¹⁰ According to McGraw (1991: 1148) blame shifting is more effective when the policy makers choose either to make excuses claiming mitigating circumstances or try to justify their actions using normative principles or

⁹ For a definition of justification as blame avoidance technique see Semin and Manstead ,1983: 80

¹⁰ 90% of the population was against the history book (eleftheros typos 31/07/2007)

specific benefits. However in this case the normative principles behind the idea, not reproducing hatred with neighbouring countries and promoting friendship through the way history is taught in schools would provoke even stronger public opinion disappointment and opposition reactions. Thus the government chose three different paths; vertical diffusion of responsibility towards the education minister, accepting the faults in the history book and giving in the proposed changes and attempting to take the issue off the agenda. However the government did not manage to cut completely the causal link between its choices and the undesirable outcome of the history book. Some losses were inevitable, and they were mostly linked to the directly responsible person, the education minister.

The government tried to defuse responsibility towards the education minister Giannakou in order to avoid electoral disaster for the whole party in the planned upcoming elections. To manage that, the government made a point to minimize the amount of comments other government officials made, such as other cabinet ministers the government spokes man and the prime minister. Public opinion experts as well as the government's spokesman Rousopoulos gave advice to the education minister to help her overcome the crisis but did not step forward in the public eye to make comments or announce government decisions. The education minister was presented as the one who wanted to continue with the change of the book (to vima 05/08/2007) and the prime minister and the government's spokesman as the ones who intervened to make her accept the changes of the book, that would satisfy public opinion (eleftheros typos 31/07/2007). Thus the education minister seemed to be the only advocate of the new book in the government on the principle that the old book was outdated and a new one was needed to introduce the new views in education. Under the pressure of public opinion and the government who did not want to suffer losses because of this issue in anticipation of the coming elections the minister had to announce that she would accept the changes to the book and also circulate a literature book with it that gave a historical account of the events at the Destruction of Smyrna in 1922. Therefore the government as a whole was seen as moderate on the matter, while the education minister, who had to balance between pressures of the editorial group and the government and public opinion, was seen as taking a more hard core position in favour of the book.

Seeing the public opinion polls and the reaction from various opinion shaping institutions, such as the church and media, the government immediately realized that

the new history book should be sacrificed in order not to lose votes. Thus it tried to divert public dissatisfaction initially by accepting the mistake (kathimerini 05/08/2007) and asking the Athens Academy for opinions on how the book should be changed in order to be acceptable. This move took away the responsibility from the government on what should be changed, by giving it to someone more respectable and with accepted authority on the subject. In order to deflect even more of the accusations the government accepted the changes and asked the editorial group to incorporate them. Finally, the proposal of distributing the literature book “Matomena Chomata” (Blooded Earth) as a supplementary source of knowledge on the Destruction of Smyrna was expected to gain sympathy points in the opinion polls.

As the elections were approaching (16/09/2007) the government attempted to take the new history book issue off the electoral agenda. This was the most successful blame avoidance technique as it implied that the governing party would not be judged on this issue (Nelson, 1984). The government asked the editorial team to change the book according to the Athens Academy’s comments. The editorial team did not incorporate many of the suggestions. Thus the government discreetly decided not to touch the topic again and not to publish the book giving another reason for the opposition to capitalize on the public opinion on the matter (to vima 16/09/2007). The prime minister Karamanlis expressed his disagreement with many parts of the history book, and he committed to yet another test of the book (eleftherotypia 16/09/2007) and that was the only reference to the topic. Overall education stayed out of the electoral agenda in order to avoid vote loss (to vima 16/09/2007) and whoever tried to bring it up was accused of using the national identity as an electoral issue (to vima 16/09/2007). Removing the issue off the agenda was easier because of the fires crisis that started just two weeks before the elections.

Why did the history book become such an important issue?

The books in primary and secondary education change every now and then without causing public debate and opinion divisions of this magnitude. The history book of sixth grade caused political confrontation because it referred to the most recent historic past that still influences strongly the perception of Greek national identity. Truth is that national identity has been used several times as a political tool to attract voters from all sides of the political spectrum. It is a successful vote magnet since the Greek voter has very strong opinions about his national identity as well as very strong

emotional connection to it. Whichever party successfully connects positive images of national identity to its campaign can enjoy electoral gains. However, the connection of the history book to national identity is not self-explanatory. There are several reasons why the book was brought forward as a major issue and was so easily made into a threat of national identity. These reasons can be divided into two categories, the nature of the issue and the role of various opinion shaping institutions such as the Church and the extreme right party La.O.S.

The extreme right wing party of Greece is fairly new, founded in 2000, after its leader Georgios Karatzaferis was expelled from Nea Demokratia. The first national elections the party took part in was in 2000 when it gained 2.2% of the vote, which did not allow it to gain any seats in the parliament. Coming closer to the next elections that were expected in late 2007, La.O.S. was trying to attract voters in order to gain parliament seats. The introduction of the new history book offered a great opportunity for the party to bring itself forward in the political arena by putting an “owned” issue in the agenda. Traditionally the extreme right is more nationalistic and religious. This extreme right party specifically is based on Orthodox Christian religious ideals, nationalistic rhetoric and strong populism (the guardian 18.09.2007), even though the leader himself claim that the party is not nationalistic ("I am not far-Right." Eleftheros Typos, 27/10/2002). His electoral base consists mainly of people who are tired of the two main parties, PASOK and Nea Demokratia, are fed up with the scandals, worry a lot about national problems, such as Cyprus, Turkey and the Macedonian question, and are close to the Church.

La.O.S. had an interest in presenting the new history book as a threat to the national identity. By doing that it managed to attract the right wing voters of the centre-right Nea Demokratia as well as PASOK voters who were concerned about the erosion of Greek national identity. Indeed the exit polls of the 2007 elections show that 3% of Nea Demokratia voters and 2% of PASOK voters moved towards La.O.S.¹¹ There were losses in the opposite direction but these were mainly due to La.O.S.’s opening to homosexuals¹². Making the new history book into a threat to national identity the party managed to open a debate on major events that normally interest only historians. By doing so it continued a trend that started in the early 1990’s in the heat of the

¹¹ Metron Analysis Exit Poll National Elections 2007

¹² Press Release: The President of LAOS Mr. G. Karatzaferis accepted the presiding chairs of Greek homosexuals, 22 April 2005

Macedonian issue, when the vast majority of Greeks were protesting against the naming of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and were urging the world to “learn” history. Since then, two thousand years of history became politically relevant and were brought back to the agenda with the new book. This opened the discussion for several historical issues and allowed the La.O.S. politicians to become relevant and appear in the mass media discussing an issue that all Greeks had very strong feelings about.¹³

The question remains though why did the other political parties play along, including the governing party that kept losing popularity because of this issue, even though it was obvious that the more this issue stayed on the agenda the more relevant La.O.S. would become. The main opposition party, the social democratic PASOK was becoming desperate, as the opinion polls were constantly showing a drop in popular support.¹⁴ Therefore it was trying to capitalize from every mistake the government made. This topic in particular was very catchy because it was already on the agenda and it had an emotional aspect for the voters. The leftist parties did not (KKE and SyRiZa) did not promote the issue as much, as they were mainly focused on the other problems of education, such as the higher education reforms. The governing party on the other hand had a different kind of interest in promoting this issue. Even though the new history book was influencing the government’s popularity, it definitely kept the minds of voters from other important scandals and problems such as the question on the pensions’ reform, the scandal of the structured bonds, and the unsuccessful tacking of the summer fires all over the country.

Apart from the political parties, the Church was the other major institution that kept bringing the issue of the new history book on the political agenda. The passages in the book that provoked the Church were different. They were mainly focused on the role of the Church during the Greek struggle for independence, which the new history book undermined by not reproducing the popular myths of the across the country educational contribution of the Church with the “secret school”¹⁵ and the symbolic connection of the Church to the armed struggle (Athnasiadis, *eleftherotypia* 04/04/2007). These two issues function as a connecting link between the nation and

¹³ Ios, *eleftherotypia* 23/9/2007

¹⁴ Metron analysis trimester opinion polls

¹⁵ During the period of ottoman occupation the Greeks were not allowed to formally learn their language. The popular tradition tells us that the church organized secret schools at night for the children to learn. Historical research showed that this was only happening in isolated cases and the new history book reflected that perception.

the church before the emergence of the Greeks as a structured people. This link is very important for the church since it verifies the significance of religion and church as an institution for the very existence of the structured Greek state and the Greek national identity. Criticising and contesting those links was viewed as an attempt to erode the Church's influence on the population. The Church felt attacked by the new ideas advocated by the history book and saw it was in its vested interest to react.

The personality of the archbishop at the time (Christodoulos) was also a significant factor that escalated the crisis. He was a political personality apart from a religious one, expressed his opinion on political matters, as well as party competition matters. Using the influential power the Church gives him the archbishop condemned the new history book as unholy, against the Church and the nation (Antoniadou, *to vima* 03/06/2007). His criticisms on the book were directly connected to Sy.ri.Za. the leftist political party that according to the archbishop is fighting the Church in every way it can (Papoutsaki, *eleftherotypia* 03/06/2007). The archbishop brought the opinions of the church in the centre of political life, influencing citizens on their opinions with political parties. He was very aware of this power and used it to obtain favorable reactions and policy measures from political parties that had vested interests in Church's support. Especially in a period before the elections the two larger parties, PASOK and Nea Demokratia, did not want to risk losing any votes towards the rising extreme right that had clearly the support of the Church. The personality of the archbishop definitely escalated the crisis since he not only expressed the opinions of the Church in a bold way but he also interfered in the intra-party relationships and competitions.

The relationship between the Church and the extreme right that found political expression in the emerging political party La.O.S. was very strong for several reasons. The party used as part of its ideology the devotion to religion and the Greek Church as a strong factor forming the Greek identity and promoted nationalist ideals that used religion as a cover. This approach appeals to the general Greek public because a big part of the population has very strong feeling for the Church and how it is treated by the state. The relationship has obviously two directions. A lot of priests and bishops support the ideas of La.O.S. and have had personal relationships with its leader in the past in various other cases where the Church felt under threat (eg. New

ID cards, use of the church's lands, taxation of the Church).¹⁶ Some of them support ideas that are far beyond acceptable in Greek modern politics, supporting the monarchy or even various forms of dictatorship mainly because those forms of governance supported the church as a means to control the population. Thus, the Church backed up the extreme reactions of La.O.S. on the new history book topic and added its own voice against it, indirectly warning for political consequences if the government did not react appropriately.

The issue of the history book appealed very widely to the population. There were two main reasons for that, both relating to the nature of the issue. The connection between history and national identity is clear even for the people without much knowledge or expertise on the matter. Thus it is an easy issue that only would expect a general idea about how the new history book offends the accepted perception of national identity. Generating opinions on the topic is fairly easy as everybody has opinions about what it means to be Greek, and what threatens the national identity. On the other hand the history book is overall a non-partisan issue. National identity is not directly connected to any of the political parties and thus the voters felt free to express their own views on the topic. What is connected to partisanship is allocation of responsibility. People with strong views on the issue of the history book would want to punish the decision makers. According to Rudolph (2006) people as partisans are more often than not motivated to allocate responsibility away from the party of their conviction. In this case, however, it was clear which party was in government and thus in the position of decision making. The government's blame avoidance moves could convince the faithful voters that it the responsibility lay with the education minister, which would secure Nea Demokratia's votes for the coming elections. For partisans of lesser conviction with strong opinions on the issue there were two options, one was to vote for a party that advocated an opinion closer to theirs (eg. La.O.S.), or to allocate the blame elsewhere. The later option was not strange. Especially because it reflected the archbishops ideas that the leftist party SyRiZa was the main advocate of the ideas used on the new history book and that the editorial team was mainly following SyRiZa's convictions. The stronger the partisan bond the less likely it was for the voter to blame the whole Nea Demokratia party and to punish it at the elections that followed.

¹⁶ Antoniadou, to vima 03/06/2007

The media, especially television and the newspapers, took a very populist approach on the matter. The issue's nature offered an excellent potential to increase the time citizens watched television, since they were interested to hear the opinions of public figures on the matter. In Greece the media has adopted a way of presenting the news that involves various public figures discussing with one another about current affairs, and verbal fights are a common phenomenon. The history book issue offered a great opportunity to have interesting and passionate discussions on television and thus capture the public attention and boost their viewings. The media kept presenting opinions about the topic and thus magnifying the importance of the book. The presentation of the issue with such strong connotations and passionate opinions on television was one of the strongest factors that made the issue so important for the general public opinion.

Conclusions

The ministry of education was faced with two issues, the reforms in higher education and the introduction of a new history book for the sixth grade. Both of the issues were not welcomed by the public and caused significant damage to the government. The history book issue however was much more influential on the electoral outcome in the September 2007 elections. Evidence for this fact can be found on the voting behaviour of both the electorate of Nea Demokratia but more specifically in the educational minister's constituency. Giannakou failed to get re-elected because her voters put the blame about the history book on her. Some voters shifted towards the extreme right party to show their discontent but mainly the ex-ministers' own voters opted for a different candidate in the first Athens district. The influence of the higher education reforms was much smaller because they affected only parts of the population and the people who would use the issue as a vote choice criterion were mainly non-Nea Demokratia voters. Thus this did not affect as much the governing party's vote share. The government was faced with unfavourable opinion polls that showed the government's popularity dropping because of the history book issue more than because of anything else. Therefore there was a strong need for blame diffusion. The government tried many different tactics in order to avoid being taxed about the issue and lose the elections because of it. The education minister chose the integrity and responsibility route sticking to her opinions and trying to balance between the unfavourable opinion polls and the will of the editorial team. She presented an easy

scapegoat to the government as most of the other officials denounced the book and expressed their concerns about its potential influence on the national identity. The government put forward the education minister in order to connect the issue with her, tried to satisfy the public opinion with accepting changes suggested by an independent academic institution and finally tried to eliminate the issue from the electoral agenda. The tactic was successful as the government managed to get re-elected and the non re-election of the educational minister counted as collateral loss.

The question remains why the history book was such an important issue. The nature of the issue allowed all citizens to have an opinion on the topic using really low cost information. Also the fact that it was a non-partisan issue not connected to any political party helped to express freely any opinions. Various institutions had a vested interest in promoting the issue, such as the extreme right party (La.O.S.) and the Church. La.O.S. used the issue to promote itself in the public eye and to manage to gain a large enough vote share to go into the parliament (above the 3% threshold). The Church on the other had could not keep losing ground, as the new history book was presenting it as less important for the national identity as it was commonly accepted. The mass media used the popularity of the issue to increase their own popularity and thus the new history book dominated public debate for more than three months.

This paper tried to give an overview of why such a non-political issue in the traditional sense had a great impact on the political debate and influenced the electoral result. The analytical tools on Greek politics are very limiting as there are no official public opinion data. Therefore I had to rely on newspaper sources and commercial opinion polling results. It would have been useful to have individual level election study data to understand better the nature of vote choice in Greece. Keeping this limitation in mind the paper approached the story of a sensitive issue and followed it throughout its political life. The aftermath of the elections showed that the newly elected government decided to avoid new confrontations and abandoned the idea of a new sixth grade book.

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