

The Moment You Decide You Divide

– How Citizens and Politicians Assess Procedural Fairness

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Abstract

Democratic polities will perform better if government can use fair decision-making arrangements to legitimize policy decisions in the minds of those affected by them. However, policy decisions typically involve difficult trade-offs between legitimate interests. This is obvious for politicians who have experienced decision-making processes first hand. Or is it? Are politicians really better at recognizing a fair process than citizens? To learn more about differential views on policy making procedures, we study experimentally how citizens and politicians evaluate a process leading up to a policy decision. We find that outcome favorability is a strong predictor of procedural fairness assessments whether or not decision-making arrangements are up to standard, and that this self-serving bias is stronger among politicians than among citizens. We also find that personal engagement in a policy issue accounts for the group level difference between politicians and citizens.

Fair procedures are crucial for the legitimacy of democratic government. One reason for this is that fair procedural arrangements evokes the good loser norm according to which people feel obliged to accept unfavorable outcomes if the game has been played according to the rules (e.g. Dahl 1989; Haugard 1997; Klosko 2000; Sabl 2005). Because of this norm, government authorities in search of citizen acceptance for their decision have much to gain by using fair decision-making procedures (e.g. Levi, Sachs and Tyler 2009).

However, while the good loser norm is widely supported, its application in real-world politics is less than straightforward. Even if conflicting parts agree on all procedural arrangements – which is difficult enough to achieve – peoples' reactions to the decision are dependent upon their subjective assessment of how well the arrangements have been implemented. This makes the good loser norm sensitive to self-serving perceptual biases. Under the influence of psychological mechanisms like dissonance reduction (Festinger 1957; Aronson 1969; Cooper 2007) and directional motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990; Taber and Lodge 2006; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus 2013), people are tempted to reconcile support of the norm with their drive for fulfilling their substantial preferences. If self-serving perceptual biases are strong, those who are dissatisfied with the outcome of political processes will maintain that procedural arrangements have been unfair, whereas those who have it their way will seize on evidence to the contrary. As a result, the good loser norm is less helpful for fair-minded democratic governments than theory would have us believe.

For the research literature that draws on procedural fairness theory, perceptual bias is not a concern; peoples' allegiance to fairness, it would seem, is strong enough to overcome self-serving mechanisms (see MacCoun 2005, and Tyler 2006 for reviews). However, research informed by information processing theory is less sanguine about the problem. Experimental evidence suggests that people's fairness assessments are strongly colored by outcome favorability under conditions that are common for real world policy-making

(Doherty and Wolak 2012; Kernell and Mullinix 2013; Esaiasson et al. 2016). Similarly, observational research finds that citizens assess the fairness of elections procedures differently depending on whether their preferred party is winning or losing (Anderson et al. 2005: 38-41; Beaulieu 2014; Maldonado and Seligson 2014; Garcia and Ponce 2015).

This paper contributes theoretically and empirically to our understanding of how the good loser norm operates in real-world democracies. Theoretically, we develop the reasons why it is hard to be a good loser, and how the tension between support of the good loser norm and self-serving perceptual biases creates a strenuous situation for democratic authorities.

Empirically, we study not only citizens but also politicians. By comparing how citizens and politicians' assess the fairness of decision-making processes we get a reference point for level of self-serving perceptual biases. Moreover, politicians are important cue-givers to citizens (e.g. Zaller 1992; Bermeo 2003; Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen 2012), and the quality of their assessments indicates how they will guide public opinion in situations involving procedural controversies.

We report findings from parallel vignette experiments with samples of Swedish citizens and politicians. The experiments target an ideologically charged policy decision (whether a local municipality will, or will not, sell off parts of the publicly-owned housing to private stakeholders), and vary the extent to which the decision-making arrangements are up to standard (for instance whether the decision is, or is not, in line with the majority view among citizens).

In what follows we present our theoretical considerations and expected findings. Having discussed the experimental set up, we turn to empirical results. We find that both citizens and politicians are influenced by outcome favorability independent of the objective nature of arrangements, and that self-serving biases are stronger among politicians (personal

involvement appears to be mediating). A final section concludes and discusses implications for our understanding of real-world politics.

Why It Is Hard To Be a Good Loser

Upon reflection most people will agree that citizens (and politicians) who live in a reasonably well-functioning democracy are obliged to be civil about authoritative decisions they dislike.¹ Political theorist Andrew Sabl (2005: 216) puts it eloquently: “Democratic citizens must be good losers, willing to accept with good grace and no loss of commitment to the polity that the democratic game will not always go their way.” In empirical research, the idea of good losers (but not the term) is advanced by scholars in the field of social justice. Ever since the notion of procedural fairness was introduced in this line of research in the 1970s, an impressive number of studies have shown that people care a lot about the way authoritative decisions are made (see Ambrose 2002; Lind and Tyler 1988; MacCoun 2006; Tyler 2006; Tyler et al. 1997 for reviews).

The good loser norm generates the desired acceptance of decisions under three conditions: the decision-making process is up to standard; citizens (politicians) agree that it is; and citizens (politicians) ascribe importance to the fact that it is.² All conditions can be violated, but given insights from research on information processing, the second is perhaps most vulnerable. Consider that people like to have their substantial preferences fulfilled (Anderson et al. 2005; Soroka 2014); are prone to defend their prior beliefs (Kunda 1990:

¹ For justifications related to the fairness of democratic institutions, see Rawls (1971); and Shklar (1988)

² Correspondingly, the good loser norm serves as a corrective for failing democratic authorities in case decision-making procedures are not up to standard.

Taber and Lodge 2006); and seek to avoid cognitive dissonance (Aronson 1969; Festinger 1957; Cooper 2007). Because of these self-serving biases it is tempting for citizens (politicians) to match favorability of the decision with assessment of the process that produced the decision; a procedure that generated a favorable outcome is likely to be perceived as fair, whereas a procedure that produced an outcome to ones dislike is viewed upon as flawed.

All this leads to a challenging situation for democratic polities. On the one hand, there is a widely accepted norm with the potential to help fair-minded democratic authorities to gain legitimacy for their decisions and to work against authorities who fail to live up to democratic standards. On the other hand, there are subtle psychological mechanisms that may undermine the application of the norm and yet allow citizens (politicians) to remain convinced that they acknowledge it. This unfortunate situation occurs if citizens (politicians) overstate or understate procedural quality and react upon their erroneous perceptions.

To empirically examine how citizens (politicians) deal with the challenge, we need to learn about the quality of their procedural fairness assessments. A key indicator in this effort is the strength of outcome favorability effects. If procedural perceptions are strongly colored by how well the decision satisfy an individuals' outcome preference, this suggests that self-serving psychological mechanisms undermines the power of the good loser norm to generate the desired outcomes.

Cherry Picking Evaluative Standard

Self-serving perceptual biases are facilitated by the absence of an absolute evaluative standard for fair procedures. Although scholars have identified a limited number of procedural qualities (e.g. Leventhal 1980; Miller 1999), there is no universally accepted standard. The prevailing pluralism opens up a choice menu – when two reasonable standards lead to

different evaluations of procedural quality, citizens (politicians) can pick the one that best matches their personal preference.

To illustrate, one evaluative standard advanced by political theorists refers to a systemic property – that all citizens (politicians) have a reasonable chance to have some of their substantial preferences fulfilled some of the time. Thus, procedural fairness is high when a credible claim can be made for that “you win some, you lose some” (e.g. Przeworski 1991:10-37; Sabl 2005). Accordingly, when subjected to authoritative decisions that affect their well-being individuals should not look in detail on the procedure leading to specific decisions but instead focus on the long-term outcomes the system produces.

Other standards focus on arrangements for specific decisions. Prominently, researchers informed by procedural fairness theory identify three process qualities: “voice” (opportunity for affected individuals and groups to lay forward their wishes and views) (De Cremer and Tyler 2007); “consistency” (how systematically decision-making authorities apply the rules in force) (Crosby and Franco 2003); and “dignity” (authorities’ recognition of the status of affected individuals and groups) (Bies and Moag 1986).

Moreover, the standards advocated by procedural fairness researchers are best fitted to output-side decisions in which government agencies implement public policies (Long, Teung and Lind 2007; Esaiasson et al. 2016). To evaluate fairness of input side decisions regarding the selection of policy makers and the policies they make, other criteria are more relevant. Below we discuss a standard specifically adapted to policy decisions by elected representatives.

Further facilitating cherry picking of self-serving evaluative standards, many real-world procedural arrangements are fair in some respects and unfair in others. Such ambiguity arises from a lack of consistency in rule application (Crosby and Franco 2003). For instance, a policy decision can be fair in terms of voice opportunities for affected individuals but unfair

in that key decision-makers are affiliated with special interests (see Doherty and Wolak 2012). Decision-making procedures can furthermore be ambiguous in the sense that they have both likeable and unlikeable qualities. An example highlighted in procedural fairness research is court processes, which are generally appreciated by people (Tyler 2006b), but which contain subtleties that may lead to acquittal of individuals who clearly are guilty of crime (Skitka and Houston 2001).

Citizens and Politicians

So far we have focused on mechanisms that apply equally to citizens and politicians.

However, there are functional differences between the roles that may affect their levels of perceptual bias.

Personal experience of authoritative decision-making arguably makes politicians better positioned for perceptual accuracy. Whereas politicians are aware of the complications involved – they know how the sausage is made – citizens are typically ill-informed about political fundamentals and they may therefore fail to recognize procedural elements that are normal practices (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Lupia 2015).

Another factor promoting relative perceptual accuracy among politicians stems from their role as guardians of democratic values (Dahl 1989). To meet this commitment, politicians need to distinguish between fair and unfair elements in democratic societies. Implying that they do, research on democratic elitism (Fletcher 1989; Gibson and Duch 1991) documents that values such as tolerance and respect for minority rights are more firmly held among political elites than among citizens (e.g. Belchior 2008; Etzioni-Harvey 1993; Sullivan et al. 1993).

Other factors, however, pull politicians in the opposite direction, towards stronger perceptual bias. For example, politicians are strategic actors who seek to change the playing field to their own advantage (e.g. Strøm and Müller 1999). Illustratively, Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006) find that politicians who lose elections are willing to change constitutional rules of the game whereas politicians on the winning side defends status quo. Furthermore, policy engagement has been found to enhance bias in individuals' procedural fairness assessments (Doherty and Wolak 2012), and as a rule, politicians are more psychologically involved in policy decisions than citizens are.

Fairness in policy-making processes

Policy decisions are about taxes, social welfare and regulations (e.g. Lowi 1972). To derive an evaluative standard for this type of decisions, we turn to democratic theory and the requirement that elected representatives are continuously responsive to citizens between elections (Dahl 1971; 1989; Pitkin 1967). It follows that policy decisions are fairly made to the extent representatives are responsive to citizens' wishes and views when making them (Korolev 2015; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

In the literature, responsiveness is often equated with adoption of the policy that a majority of citizens prefer (Dahl 1989; Powell 2004). That is obviously correct, but considering that no representational theory obliges representatives to follow the instructions of the represented it is only part of the story. There are additional ways for representatives to demonstrate attentiveness, actions that reach out also to citizens who oppose the policy that is adopted, and that acknowledge representatives' responsibility to promote the common good independent of temporary public sentiments (Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson 2013; 2016). Specifically, representatives can act responsively by keeping themselves informed about citizens wishes and views (Butler, 2014; Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000; Öhberg and Naurin 2016),

and by explaining their own reasons for actions (Brockman and Butler 2015; Grose, Malhotra and Van Houweling 2015; Mansbridge, 2003).

From this broader understanding of responsiveness follows that a policy making process is fair to the extent representatives have reached out to citizens by adapting the policy that is preferred by the majority of citizens (*to adapt*); by learning about citizens' policy preferences (*to listen*); and/or by providing credible justifications for the decision they make (*to explain*) (Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson 2013; 2016).

Note that from a procedural perspective adaption matters because it complies with the majority principle. This is different from the instrumental concern to receive a favorable outcome. For the camp who favors the policy decision (to lower income taxes, to liberalize immigration rules or what is now at stake), procedural and instrumental concerns coincide. But for policy losers, who have their substantial policy preferences denied, the fact that politicians decided in line with majority opinion signals that the process was nevertheless a fair one.

Expectations

Considering how hard it is to be a good loser who accurately assesses the fairness of decision making procedures, we expect a high level of perceptual bias among citizens (as measured by the outcome favorability effect). In the context of a policy-decision, therefore:

H1 – Citizens' fairness assessments of a policy-decision arrangement are strongly affected by outcome favorability whether or not the arrangement is objectively up to standard.

Turning to politicians, we are uncertain of the relative strength of the factors that distinguish them from citizens. Therefore:

H2a – *In comparison to citizens, politicians are less affected by outcome favorability when they assess the fairness of a policy-decision arrangement.*

H2b – *In comparison to citizens, politicians are more affected by outcome favorability when they assess the fairness of a policy-decision arrangement.*

Two additional hypotheses are designed to model differences between citizens and politicians. First, we expect that politicians' deeper understanding of policy making processes will make them more willing than citizens to credit other responsiveness actions than adaption to the majority position:

H3 – *In comparison to citizens, politicians are more willing to recognize actions that signal that elected representatives have been listening and explaining during the policy making process.*

Second, we target a factor that enhances perceptual bias among politicians. Specifically, we expect that personal involvement in the policy decision will generate perceptual bias:

H4 – *Differences in perceptual accuracy between citizens and politicians are moderated by personal involvement in the policy decision.*

The Experiment

The study is set in Sweden. We do not expect national context to have much relevance for perceptual accuracy among citizens and politicians as the good loser norm is widely shared and as we are studying universal psychological mechanisms. However, insofar national context matter, Sweden, with high quality democratic institutions (Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2010) and a consensual political culture (Dahlström 2015), is likely a favorable case for unbiased assessments of political processes.

Proceedings

Using vignettes for treatment, we ran identical 2 x 4 between subject design web-survey experiments on samples of politicians and adult citizens. We target an ideologically charged policy issue – a proposal to privatize publicly owned housing in a low income area.

Confirming that the policy issue was understood as expected, subjects' own opinion on the issue correlates with their left-right ideological self-placement ($r = .61$, $p < .01$, citizen sample, and $r = .64$, $p < .01$, politician sample), with subjects to the right being more positive towards the proposal.

We follow a protocol that was established for a study on a morally charged policy decision (on immigration policy, see Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson 2016). Subjects were asked to imagine a situation in which the political majority in a medium-sized municipality was about to allow the municipal housing company to sell 1,000 apartments in a low income residential area to a private contractor (see Figure 1 for details). Following the introduction, subjects were asked to report (1) the likely majority view on the proposal; (2) their personal preference; and (3) how important the policy issue was to them personally. Most subjects (about 70 percent in each sample) believed that a majority of citizens would be against the proposal, and, in our sample of citizens 67 percent were indeed personally against the proposal (politicians were evenly split, 51-49 for and against the proposal). As expected, politicians ascribed more importance to the issue than did citizens (mean 6.5 versus 4.5 on a 0-10 scale).

Having stated their views on the policy proposal, subjects were randomly assigned to a treatment condition in which we manipulated the direction of the policy decision, and the extent to which policy-makers acted responsively during the decision-making process. After exposure to the manipulations, subjects assessed the fairness of the decision-making procedure (four items) and reported their willingness to accept the decision (three items).

To manipulate the direction of the decision we informed subjects either that policy-makers did not allow the sale of publicly owned housing, or that they went along with the proposal. In combination with information from the pre-manipulation questions, this allows us to construct individual level variables for *outcome favorability* (the decision was, or was not, concordant with subject's personal preference), and *adaptive responsiveness* (the decision was, or was not, in accordance with subject's view on the majority opinion).³

Although the overall frequency distribution of the respective variable is sample-dependent, both variables are randomly distributed across treatment groups. However, since subjects tended to believe that the majority opinion agreed with their own preference, outcome favorability and adaptive responsiveness are interdependent ($r = .32$, $p < .01$, citizen sample, and $r = .45$, $p < .01$, politician sample). Because the two manipulations are interdependent, their relative importance will be evaluated using a multiple framework.

The manipulation of policy-makers' responsiveness actions (other than adaptation to the majority view), were explicit. Subjects learned that policy-makers who represented the majority in the decision-making body had been carefully following an extensive public debate on the proposal (*listening*); that they had been explaining their policy positions to the public (*explaining*); that they had been carefully following the debate and explained their policy positions to the public (*listening and explaining*); or that there had been no significant public debate prior to the decision (*neither/nor*).

³ Strictly speaking, there are two kinds of winners and losers: those who favor the proposal and those who oppose it. Opponents react somewhat stronger to unfavorable outcomes than those in favor, but the underlying structure is the same. For simplicity, we only report the results for the combined group.

The no-responsiveness condition is the control (no significant public debate; and the decision was against the majority view). The design ensures that subjects in the control condition have a common understanding of the phenomenon under study (see e.g., Inouye, 2001). Table A1 in the Online Appendix lists all treatment groups and details the logic of the design.

Figure 1. Text of the Survey Experiment

We will now present a hypothetical case regarding municipal housing policy. Imagine how you would react if this were to really occur.

The situation is as follows: The political majority in a medium-sized municipality is about to allow the municipal housing company to sell 1,000 apartments in a Million Homes Program residential area to a private contractor. The purpose of the sale is to free resources for reforms.

What do you think about the current state of opinion among citizens regarding such a proposal? Would you say that most citizens:

Favor such a proposal
 Oppose such a proposal

What is your own view about the proposal to allow the municipal housing company to sell 1,000 apartments to a private contractor?

Very good Proposal	Rather good proposal	Neither good nor bad Proposal					Rather bad proposal	Very bad Proposal		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
How important is the policy issue to you personally?										
Not important at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very important
0										10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Imagine now that the following happens:

Neither/nor: Without a significant public debate, the political majority finally decides //to change and not allow // to allow // the sale of 1,000 apartments to a private contractor.

To listen: The proposal to allow the municipal housing company to sell 1,000 apartments in its housing stock to a private contractor is debated in the media and among the general public. The media also provides reports on frequent opinion polls on the issue. Before making the decision, the representatives of the political majority state that they have followed the debate closely and that the issue has been well covered from various angles. The political majority finally decides //to change and not allow // to allow // the sale of 1,000 apartments to a private contractor.

To explain: The proposal to allow the municipal housing company to sell 1,000 apartments in its housing stock to a private contractor is debated in the media and among the general public. Before making the decision, representatives of the political majority has also been active in the debate and explained why they think the way they do. [Followed by the same outcome manipulations as in “To listen”]

To listen and explain: Identical with “To listen” but with the unique sentence from “To explain” inserted before the outcome manipulations.

In sum, we provided experimental subjects with strong reasons to believe that the decision-making procedure was (or was not) up to standard. If in these circumstances outcome favorability matters for procedural assessments, it is a clear indication of self-serving perceptual bias.

Measurements and Randomization Control

Our primary measure of perceived procedural fairness runs as follows: “What do you think about the way in which the decision was taken?” [“*Vad tycker du om sättet som beslutet fattades på?*”] Responses were registered on an eleven-point scale (0-10) with designated endpoints “very bad” and “very good.” Taking into account the nuances that are lost in translation, this is similar to standard indicators in procedural fairness research (e.g., Skitka et al. 2003).

Observe that the measure requires subjects themselves to translate politician’s responsiveness actions into an overall fairness assessment; just as in real-world politics it is up to the individual to relate objective conditions to procedural fairness. A complementary measure simplifies the judgment task by targeting the three responsiveness activities that make the procedure up to standard: To what degree did politicians “find out about citizens’ wishes” (*to listen*); “explain their policy to citizens” (*to explain*) and “try to accommodate citizens’ wishes” (*to adapt*)? Each item was measured on a 0-10 point scale with designated endpoints “to a very small degree” and “to a very large degree.”⁴

For some analytical purposes we use the three items separately, but they are also combined into an additive Summary index, which we rescaled to vary between 0 and 10

⁴ For an analysis of the psychometric qualities of the measure, see Esaiasson, Kölln and Turper (2015).

(Cronbach's Alpha .87 among citizens and .61 among politicians). Strengthening belief in measurement validity, the correlation between the primary measure and the Summary index is .77 (citizen sample) and .69 (politician sample).

To pick up participants willingness to accept the decision we asked (i) how satisfactory the decision is; (ii) how important it is to comply with the decision and not try to change it; and (iii) how much trust that can be put in the politicians who made the decision. Responses were recorded on a 0-10 point scale with designated endpoints adapted to item wording.⁵

Sample Information

The citizen study was conducted between 15 October and 18 November, 2014 as part of a standing web-survey panel of Swedish citizens, which is run by Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) at University of Gothenburg (www.lore.gu.se). Questionnaires were sent to 12,184 respondents of which our study was allotted a randomly selected subsample of 3,742. With a participation rate of 63 percent, the effective sample size was 2,365 (for documentation, see Martinsson et al. 2014). The sample for our study is opt-in, with a slight overrepresentation of males, politically interested, middle aged and highly educated individuals (see Table A2 in the Online Appendix for descriptive statistics).

Data for politicians emanates from a standing web-survey panel, which is also organized by LORE. The Panel of Politicians, which has been running since 2011, includes Swedish politicians from local, regional and national levels (4 percent of panelists are national

⁵ For a justification of the measurement, see Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson (2016). For precise question wordings, see the Online Appendix.

MPs). All major parties are proportionally represented in the sample except for the anti-establishment party Sweden Democrats. Participants are recruited via invitations in large surveys like the *Comparative Candidates Survey* (www.comparativecandidates.org) and *Kommun- och landstingsfullmäktigeundersökningen* (KOLFU),⁶ as well as by direct contacting efforts through the websites of elected assemblies at local, regional and national level. Overall, the panel provides a rare opportunity for systematic studies of a diverse sample of politicians (see Öhberg and Naurin 2014).

At the time of the study, the panel had 3,900 participants who have experience of holding public office. With a response rate of 62 percent, the effective sample size was 2,407. Sample characteristics are provided in Table A2 in the Online Appendix.

The politician study was conducted in November 2013, one year prior to the citizen study. We cannot see any reason for the difference in timing to have affected the results.

A series of one-way ANOVAs confirm that the original treatment groups in both samples are balanced with regard to gender, age, education and party affiliation (see Table A3-A4 in the Online Appendix for documentation).

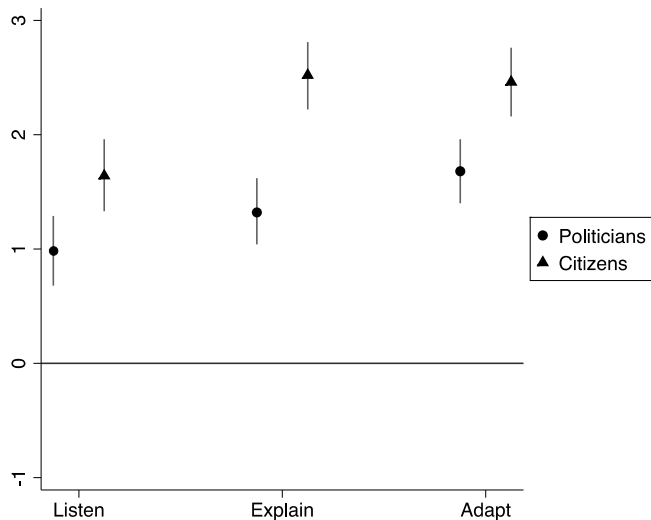
Manipulation Control

For manipulation control we focus on the match between a specific responsiveness action and subjects' assessment of the extent to which policy-makers had engaged in that action (for instance, that policy-makers "had explained their policy to citizens"). Figure 2 reports the differential score between the treated and the control group and the associated 95 percent

⁶ KOLFU is a study of all elected politicians at the local and regional level in Sweden, see Gilljam, Karlsson and Sundell (2010).

confidence intervals for “listen,” “explain,” and “adapt”.

Figure 2 Differential score between treated and non-treated per responsiveness action



Confirming that the manipulations worked as intended, subjects in the outreach conditions scored higher points for the responsiveness action than subjects in the control group.

Foreshadowing substantial findings, citizen subjects reacted stronger towards the manipulations than politicians did.

Results

We begin by establishing that our data reproduces a vital part of the good loser norm – that people who believe that the game was fairly played feel obliged to respect the outcome. In the present context, this translates into a positive relationship between procedural fairness assessments (beliefs about how the game was played) and willing acceptance of the policy decision. The relationship has been documented repeatedly in the procedural fairness literature (e.g. Ambrose 2002; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Kumlin 2004; Grimes 2006;

MacCoun 2005; De Cremer and Tyler 2010; Tyler 2010; Dai, Frank and Sun 2013; Esaiasson et al. 2016).⁷

We run OLS regressions to estimate the extent to which procedural fairness assessment (five indicators) predicts decisions acceptance (three indicators). As expected, results in Table 1 show that all indicators of procedural assessment strongly predict all indicators of decision acceptance for both citizen and politician subjects. Attesting to the robustness of the relationship, it holds also when controlling for subjects' age, education and gender (see Table A5 in the Online Appendix).

Table 1. Perceived Procedural Fairness Predicts Decision Acceptance (OLS estimates, SE in parentheses)

Indicators of perceived procedural fairness	Indicators of decision acceptance					
	Willingness to comply with the decision		Satisfaction with the decision		Trust in politicians who made the decision	
	Citizens	Politicians	Citizens	Politicians	Citizens	Politicians
Overall assessment	.43*	.38*	.59*	.61*	.85*	.75*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)
Having listened (1)	.30*	.30*	.45*	.36*	.64*	.55*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)
Having explained (2)	.29*	.31*	.33*	.36*	.60*	.58*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)
Having adapted (3)	.31*	.33*	.53*	.46*	.65*	.57*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)
Summary Index (1-3)	.38*	.40*	.55*	.50*	.80*	.72*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)

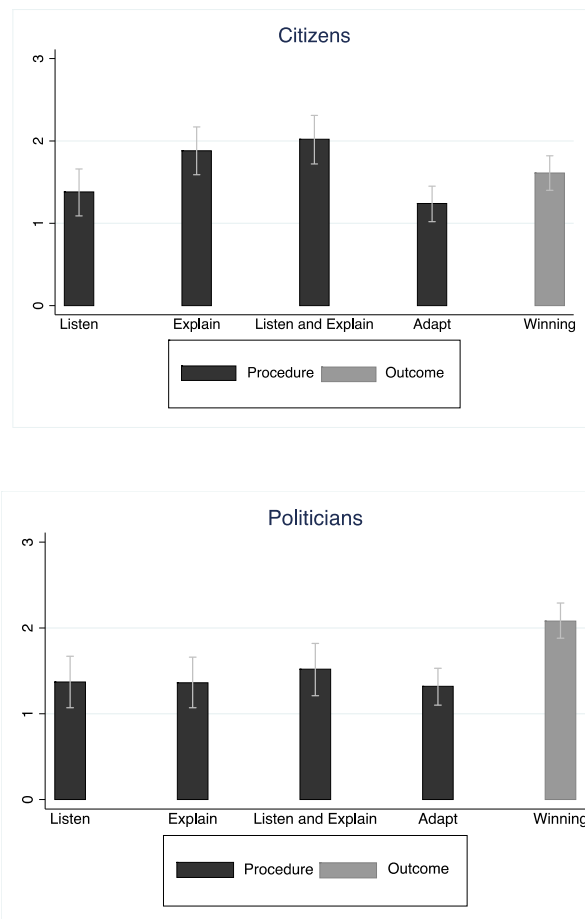
Comments: All variables range from 0-10; Minimum number of respondents: 2,244 (citizen sample); 2,261 (politician sample).
* p < .01

Having confirmed that subjects associate their assessments of the procedure with willing acceptance of the decision, we evaluate our hypotheses regarding self-serving bias in the fairness assessments (H1 and H2). Figure 3 reports the main effects of experimental

⁷ The procedural literature identifies two conditions under which, arguably, people ascribe little importance to their procedural fairness assessments: when they have strong moral convictions about the outcome (Skitka and Mullen 2008; Skitka, Bauman and Lytle 2009); and when strong group interests are at stake (Leung, Tong and Lind 2007).

treatments on overall procedural fairness assessments for citizens (top panel) and politicians (bottom panel).⁸

Figure 3. Main treatment effects on overall procedural fairness assessments



Looking first at results for citizen subjects, it is clear that responsiveness actions – our criterion for adequate decision-making arrangements – matter to a degree. Subjects who learned that politicians had been adapting, listening and explaining when deciding about owner directives to the municipal housing company scored 1.4 to 2.0 higher points for procedural fairness than did subjects in the control group (this represents a 14 to 20 percent change on our procedural fairness measure). However, it is equally clear that outcome favorability contributes substantially to fairness assessments. In support of H1, subjects who

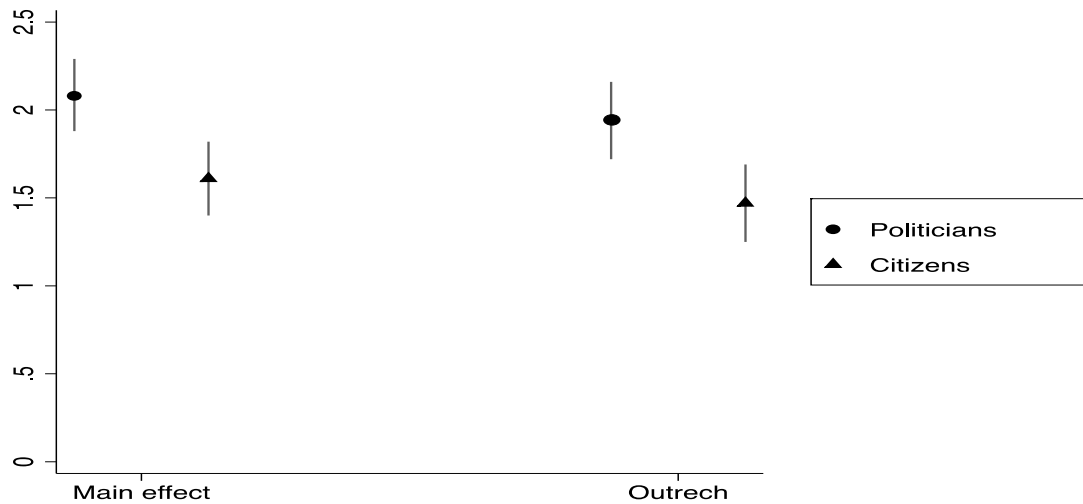
⁸ Corresponding results for the Summary index of procedural assessments is presented in Figure A1 in the Online Appendix.

avored the decision gave the process 1.6 higher fairness points whether or not the procedure was up to standard (a 16 percent change). In other words – having a favorable outcome mattered about as much as the quality of the decision-making arrangement for citizen subjects.

Results for politicians are even more striking. Each responsiveness action generates higher levels of procedural fairness assessments, but the outcome favorability-effect is significantly stronger ($p < .05$). In substantial terms, having a favorable outcome increases perceived procedural fairness by 21 percent whereas the corresponding figure for responsiveness actions is a 13 to 16 percent change. Considering that experimental treatments signal loud and clear that policy-makers had been acting responsively, the level of self-serving perceptual bias among politicians is remarkable.

Figure 4 provides a basis for a direct evaluation of H2 about the differential effect of being a politician. The left panel confirms that the main effect of outcome favorability is significantly stronger for politicians than for citizens ($p < .01$). Results in the right panel shows that the differential effect between politicians and citizens remains in the responsiveness conditions in which policy makers have adapted, listened and/or explained ($p < .01$). Consequently, there is support for H2b that politicians are more affected by outcome favorability – more self-serving – than citizens are.

Figure 4. The effect of winning among politicians and citizens (OLS estimates)



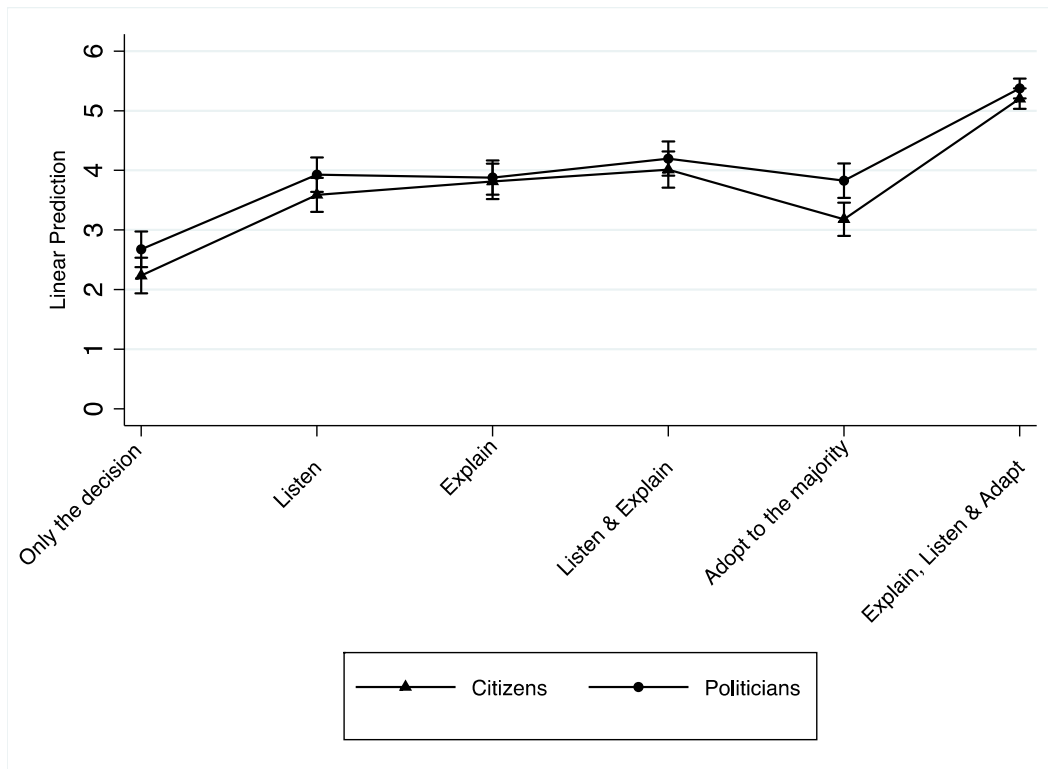
Modelling differences between politicians and citizens

Although politicians exhibit stronger perceptual bias, H3 suggests that their insights in policy decision processes make them more likely than citizens to credit other responsiveness actions than adaption to the majority position. To test this proposition, we ordered treatment conditions from low to high level of responsiveness and estimated the associated procedural fairness assessments in our respective sample.

Results in Figure 5 confirm that, in comparison to the no responsiveness (control) condition, each type of responsiveness action generates higher levels of fairness assessments, and that combining all three types of responsiveness actions is particularly effective. However, contrary to H3 citizens and politicians react similarly to each responsiveness action. The only meaningful difference ($p < .05$) is that politicians are *more* willing than citizens to credit policy-makers for deciding in line with the majority view. Surprisingly, citizen subjects are significantly less moved by adaption than by responsiveness

actions signaling that policy-makers keep themselves informed about citizen opinion (to listen), and provide justifications for the decision (to explain).

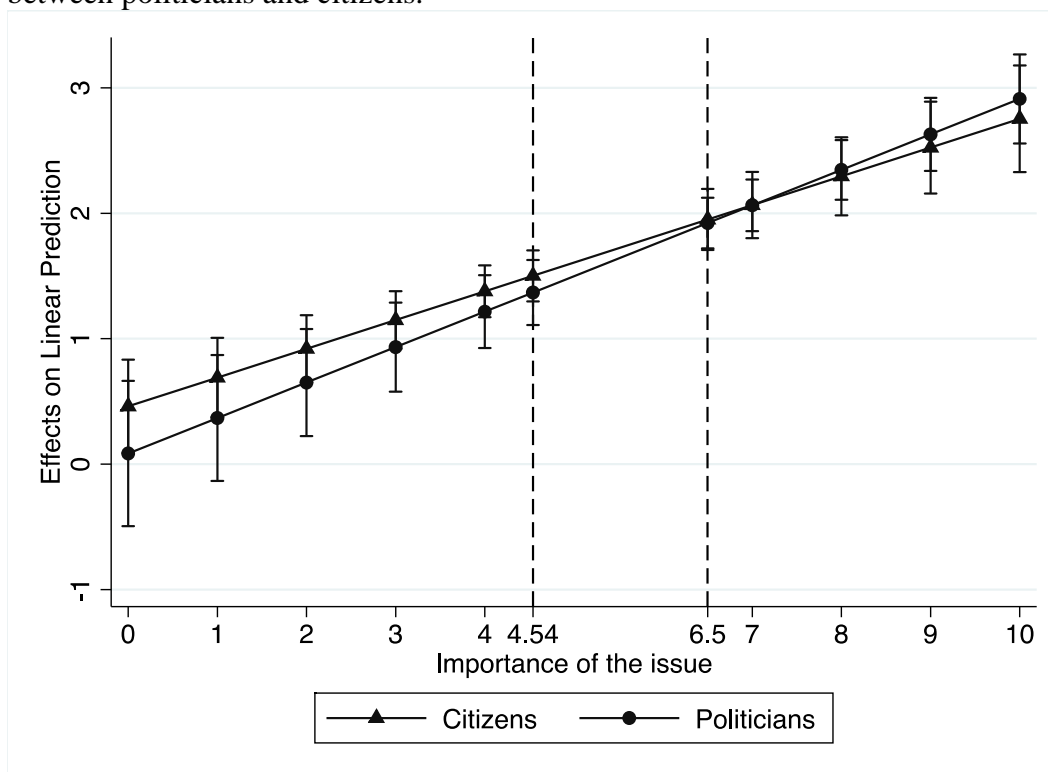
Figure 5. Predicted procedural fairness assessment by type of responsiveness action



Finally, we ask why politicians are more self-serving (more affected by outcome favorability) than citizens. Emphasizing psychology over strategic calculations, H4 suggests that individuals' policy engagement is the key mediator: Politicians as a group care more about the outcome of policy issues, and it is this difference in commitment that generates the observed difference. For empirical evaluation, we estimated a three-way interaction between subjective importance of the policy issue (as reported before treatment), outcome favorability, and subjects' status as citizen or politicians.

Figure 6 shows successful mediation of the group level difference: As indicated by the dashed lines, politicians as a group ascribes more importance to the policy issue than citizens (mean is 6.5 versus 4.5); there is a positive relationship between importance of the policy issue and the outcome favorability effect; and for each level of policy importance politicians and citizens react similarly to winning and losing. Thus, and in support of H4, when the compositional effect is accounted for, politician and citizen subjects are equally self-serving.⁹

Figure 6. by The interaction between the importance of the issue and the effect of winning between politicians and citizens.



Ecological validity

To learn about ecological validity of findings, we need information about how representative samples of citizens and politicians evaluate the fairness of decision-making processes in the

⁹ For estimates of main effects and two-way interactions, see Online Appendix Table A7.

real world. Data of this rare quality are generated by the Swedish election studies program, which regularly survey not only voters but also Members of Parliament (Holmberg 1994).

Specifically, in the 1985 post-election study voters (face to face interviews) and MPs (mail surveys) were asked to evaluate the fairness of public service TV election coverage.¹⁰ This is relevant for our purposes as public service TV was seen as crucial for election outcomes (Esaiasson 1991). Because public service TV coverage was beyond their control, MPs and party supporters were psychologically motivated to seize on evidence that their own party had been disfavored during the election campaign (e.g. Hewstone 1990). Electoral losers (Left Partyists, Agrarians, and Conservatives) needed an excuse for their poor performance. Electoral winners (Social Democrats who remained in power, and Liberals who tripled its support) wanted to believe that they had managed without help from journalist kingmakers.

We look for evidence that procedural fairness assessments are colored by how well the outcome satisfies individuals' preference, and that self-serving perceptual bias is the strongest among MPs. Using observational data, the evaluative criterion is differential evaluations of election coverage between supporters of a political party and supporters of other parties (supporters are expected to be most dissatisfied).

Results presented in Table 2 match expectations. Supporters of the targeted party and of other parties differ in the predicted way, and differences are larger among MPs than among

¹⁰ "In your view, was any one political party favored or disfavored by Public Service TV election coverage?" Respondents evaluated coverage of each party by three response alternatives: "favored; neither favored nor disfavored; disfavored."

Focusing on politicians' self-serving perceptual bias, our results shed light on research on elite support of constitutional reform. Bowler, Donovan, and Karp (2006) demonstrate that electoral losers are more willing than winners to change the electoral institutions. Similarly, Boix (1999) shows that successful challengers motivate established politicians to make electoral systems more proportional. Our findings suggest that politicians can support such self-serving reforms and yet remain subjectively committed to the good loser norm.

Clearly, we do not dismiss the importance of fair decision-making procedures. For instance, we observe that policy-makers responsiveness actions affect subjects' fairness perceptions. This finding falls in line with recent research that emphasize citizens' willingness to lend their ears to politicians who engage in sincere communication (Broockman and Butler 2015; Dobson 2015).

However, the main takeaway from our study is how challenging it is for policy-makers to convince individuals with strong policy preferences that the decision-making arrangements have been up to standard. As Tony Blair (2010) sums up his experience of ten years as British Prime Minister: "The moment you decide, you divide."

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