

Absent Voting and Its Possible Correlation to the Economic Indicators (Albania Election 2000-2013)

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to describe the possible relation of the absent voting tendency during 2000-2013 in the Albanian elections with the main economic indicators (as per official data) during the same period. The analysis will try to map whether absent voting connects with one of the two main views of economy increase/decrease or if there are differences among them. From the data results, absent voting tendency relates mostly in positive direction to the economic parameters. The most probable connection best suiting to the Albanian absent voter (taking into consideration only this components) relies in the low voting chances if the voter believes that the personal micro problems will not be solved (unemployment, inflation mostly), and vice versa. It is important to emphasize that this analysis is not conclusive since the data needs further and deeper statistical assessment for each singular component correlating to each other.

Keywords: Absent voting, economic indicators, tendency correlation

1. Introduction and Theory

"The modern view of abstention is as a negative activity commenting on problems within the system. Voters who do not vote are generally viewed as being 'disenfranchised'. Disenfranchisement can mean the removal of the right to vote or more of the rights of a citizen. However, in the abstention sense, it suggests a situation where voters feel that they are removed from a political process which they cannot engage with or which they feel does not represent them. Key ascribed this to socially and economically disadvantaged groups in society lacking organization to make themselves heard, and hence becoming disenfranchised (cited in Lipset, 1959a: 227). More recent studies of low turnout in the US have also used this argument (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). In this case, the system does not consider their interests: they do not feel part of the political process which becomes distant from them. However, they may also actively shun the system as undemocratic, corrupt or somehow ineffectual and from which they wish to withhold the legitimation which voting represents or, at the extreme, delegitimize by not voting." (Evans 2004, pg.151)

In connection to the economic context there are two main hypotheses for the absentee behavior. The first one relates to the higher and better functions a country's economic prosperity (GDP, inflation, employment, etc.) meaning that individuals (voters) will be more involved in the voting process. "While Lipset (1959), stable society (which could certainly include 'economic affluence') would in its turn make people more disinterested in political matters." (Lipset 1959a, pg 227) (Evans 2004, pg.160). Higher income has small probability to be linked to voting participation, leading to increased absentee turnout.

However, there is a view opposite to the above one. If the economic level will decrease or a worse economy (GDP decreases, unemployment increases, etc.), it can affect voters to increase the turn-out in polling stations (Schlozman and Verba 1979, Lipset 1960 in Incantalupo, pg.4). Under this new context, the voters' behavior is likely to shift in the direction of individual/family problems solving, in an attempt to resolve their micro level personal crisis. There are higher chances that voters in lower welfare situation will be included in the voting process for pragmatic interests (relating also to the benefits calculating formula, Downs, 1957). Thus, this hypothesis differs from the above viewpoint in which individuals commit to the society welfare since in this case they focus only to increase the individual one. The later hypothesis might

adhere in the case of countries which are not yet fully democratically and economically developed, such as Albania, or other developing ones; in the contrary of developed ones which have shifted the welfare focus to the community rather than the individual personal interest. On the other hand, there is also another potential correlation with low rates of economy. Voters might not be involved at all in political issues. Experiencing economic problems a potential voter spends his energies in surviving the difficult situation, not to the political participation. (Rosenstone 1982; Verba 2001 pg 24-25).

As above mentioned, all assumptions remain at the level of hypothesis, given that voting behavior should be studied in all its dimensions, to present a more complete and accurate result. Moreover, there is another problem accepted by theorists: the economic aspect is only one of the aspects influencing the voting behavior and absentee under the focus of this paper. Blais admits that "there is no clear relationship between economic aspects and election turnouts" (Blais 2006. pg 117 in Weschle 2013, pg 6)

The theoretical question which arises when studying absentee voting as an antipode to the question *why voters go to the polls* is *why voters do not go to vote*? Two major theoretical perspectives explaining absentee behavior are associated with rational and ideological behavior theory. If the calculation of cost-benefit analysis of rational voters leans on the costs side, therefore lose more than gain from exercising their right to vote, the voters will probably abstain. Voters who support the party/leader if they are disappointed by the performance of the party/leader in their activity, etc., will probably choose not to vote. (Jocelyn A.J. Evans 2004; Downs, 1957, ect).

There are other situations of not exercising the right to vote due to indifference, fatigue, etc., which are expressed more in terms of apathetic voter behavior; departure on vacation the election day, forgetting to vote, not registering the voter lists, etc. Separating this type of passive absentee from the active one is not part of this paper analysis. Rather, it is important to mention that the active one is the behavior that needs scientific explanation. We will try to focus on the second type, as much as the data analysis can allow doing so.

However, this type of behavior cannot be avoided completely, as it derives or is generally associated with other types of behavior, such as fatigue from the activity of political actors are statusquo comfort with their momentum, etc. Types of voting behavior are connected with each other, neither can be analyzed on their own and become more accurate predictions for each or all together as one integrated factor (subjective-perception). Theoretically these motivations or influencing factors that are divided into micro and macro level, are crucial voting-not voting decision of the voters on Election Day.

2. Methodology

This paper is mainly focused on the possibility of absentee connection to the economics of Albanian Republic in the period 2000-2013. Theoretically, it is admitted that voting behavior is associated also to other subjective factors, socio-demographic etc. The connection with sociological factors (age, education, gender, family, civilian state, rural-urban areas, etc.) (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980) is accepted by scholars in this field, which are related to the absentee behavior, as with other types of behavior. It aims to develop a test to try to focus on possible description level analyze of the relationship on Economic components tendency with the absent voter tendency during 2000-2013 by referring to the official data of the main economic factors. This will be require to view which of the theoretical hypothetical point of views fits better in the Albanian electorate case during this period. We will be focused on the examination of the trends of absentee in elections (according to results of the Central Election Commission) and the official data levels of the main economic and democratic factors (World Bank, INSTAT, 2015) which theoretically are considered to relate to the absentee voting behavior. Are they in the same changing direction (decrease/increase) or differ from one another? Due to their tendency, can these factors be considered as a potential influence in this type of behavior? etc. Which of the above mentioned theoretical perspectives fits better to the voter abstention tendency of Albanian?

It is not pretended to be a complete analysis of all factors, only some of them. It is worth to mention the fact that Albania presents lack of studies and respective data in this regard which necessitates an in-depth analysis. Besides that, in different places and times absentee influencing factors differ in types and level of influence to the electorate, depending on the economic, social, political, etc. So depending on the conditions, individuals will interact in different ways with the environment in which they live and operate. It will be considered as a further step into contributing on the problem of voting behavior research, but not a complete analyses. In parenthesis, we will refer to "voters": an individual, a citizen of the Republic of Albania, who has reached the age of 18 and has the right to vote"

3. Data and Analysis

It should be mentioned how the Albanian electorate gains its right to exercise the vote. Unlike some other countries, such as the US or France in which voters must register in advance before going to vote, in the Republic of Albania, voter lists is extracted from the National Civil Status Register, in cooperation with the Central Election. So, voters do not need to register in advance. The only requirement for a voter to exercise the right to vote, his/her name should result in the voter list of the area in which he has a permanent official residence. Their registration as voters is not subject to their own will so they do not have obstacles in this respect, as other countries. List problems means that in the electoral year in some percent happens an artificial absentee. Problems encountered in almost all the election years are "absence of names on the list, resulting duplicate voter's names in two different electoral districts, etc." (OSCE/ODIHR 2001, 2003, 2013). Therefore artificially increases the percentage of absentee due administrative reasons related to the electoral unites, not derivate as such from the voter choice.

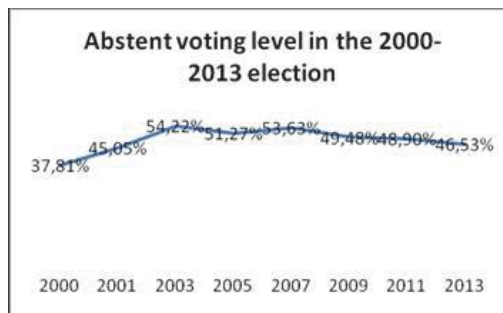
3.1 Absentee voter level in 2000-2013 elections in Albania

The following Table 1 presents the official data from the Central Election Commission (CEC) percentage of voter absentee in local and national in eight elections (2000-2013). The proportion of the absentee electorate for each year is calculated from the CEC data. The last (third) column presents calculations of the absentee level change to the previous year. Data presented with minus sign (-) shows the absentee discount level compared to the previous successive elections, and those that have positive sign (+) show increased levels of abstention in previous successive elections.

Table 1. Voting absentee level 2000-2013 in local and parliamentary elections in Albania

Electoral year	% of absentee	Absentee change
2000	37,81%	-
2001	45,05%	7,24%
2003	54,22%	9,16%
2005	51,27%	-2,95%
2007	53,63%	2,37%
2009	49,48%	-4,15%
2011	48,90%	-0,58%
2013	46,53%	-2,37%

Source: Data derived from Central Election Commission 2000-2013



Graph 1. Abstent voting level during 8 elections (2000-2013)

According to the official data of CEC, Albanian voters abstention during the period 2000-2013 has suffered fluctuations, which are considerable, from 24.7% in 2000 to -2.37% in the parliamentary elections of 2013. In 2001 and in 2003 abstention has increased at the rate of 9.16%. In previous years, the fluctuations are smaller in proportion. If we calculate the difference between abstentions in the last election (2013) by the year 2000 the abstention has increased by 8.7%. This means that in proportion to the population of each year, the non-participation in elections has increased. Element which shows an increase in these 16 years, a possible alternative of growing desire of the electorate not to be represented by the Albanian political parties or candidates. In this manner, turnout has fallen to the extent of 53.47% in

2013 from 62.19% in 2000. However, we do not consider 2000 year elections (whose were election outside the normal order), in the other years, participation in elections has fluctuated from 46% to 55% (CEC 2001-2012). So, almost half of the Albanian electorate does not participate in the elections, actively or passively. In this case, we see that the rate of abstention from year to year decreases, but in very low levels, more pronounced in the last three election years 2009, 2011 and 2013, indicating a stable reduction of absenteeism, resulting in the increscent in voter turnout. In general it is observed that the rate of abstention in the parliamentary elections (2001-2005-2009-2013) is slightly higher than local ones (2000-2003-2007), except for 2011, which is almost constant with it 2009. This phenomenon indicates a tendency of voters to go to the polls in parliamentary elections (governmental) more than local (municipal).

In today's theories is admitted that influencing the behavior of voters are macro-level factors as well as micro-level one. Below will deal with the key economic factors changes and therefore of its component absentee.

3.2 Economic variables and absent tendency relationship

Among the macro level factors are those of party system, electoral system, electoral context, socio-economic context, the level of democracy, etc. As mentioned above, this paper will analyze only one group of indicators: economic ones and its relationship to abstention.

Studies that provide much information in this context are those of developed countries, while countries such as Albania provide less data in this direction of voting behavior studies. According to Evans "The wealth of the country, represented by GNP or GDP, is seen as functioning in a similar manner: a country with a high degree of wealth is likely to have higher proportions of integrated, cognitively mobilized individuals who engage with politics and hence vote. Change in wealth, on the other hand, refers to the disruptive effects that economic decline has on political engagement (Rosenstone, 1982). Conversely, if the economy thrives, individuals should be more willing to spend time on politics than on their personal economic well-being. That said a counter-hypothesis could be that participation will increase under economic crisis, because individuals will be anxious to have their say in who attempts to drag them out of the crisis. And to return to Lipset (1959a), stable society (which could certainly include economic affluence) would in its turn make people more disinterested in political matters." (Jocelyn A.J. Evans 2004, pg. 160)

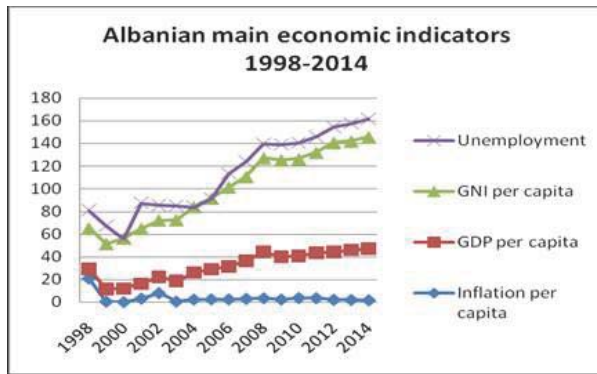
The below Table 2 presents the key economic indicators of Albania Republic, compared to the level and trend of abstention in elections period under analysis from 2000 to 2013.

Table 2. Economic Well-Being Indicator 1998-2012

Year	Inflation per capita	GDP per capita (\$)	GNI per capita (\$)	Unemployment (%)
1998	20,6	885,9	3550	16
1999	0,4	1117,7	3950	16
2000	0,1	1200,1	4380	13,5
2001	3,1	1329,4	4820	22,7
2002	7,8	1440	4980	13,4
2003	0,5	1819,4	5350	12,7
2004	2,3	2388,7	5770	12,6
2005	2,4	2666,1	6220	12,5
2006	2,4	2893,2	6980	12,4
2007	2,9	3377,2	7380	13,5
2008	3,4	4076,4	8280	13
2009	2,3	3795,7	8500	13,8
2010	3,6	3700,7	8560	14,2
2011	3,5	4029,7	8820	14
2012	2,02	4247,5	9610	13,9
2013	1,9	4411,3	9580	16
2014	1,6	4564,4	9840	16,1

Note: To representative reasons, to make possible for all the economic indicators to be included in one graph, the data of GDP and GNI in the above Table 2 are divided by 100 (for example the year 1998: 885, 9/100=8.859). The reasoning behind the calculation is that what interests us in this analysis are the fluctuations and tendency of each curve of these economic indicators in Albania.

Source: Economic Well-Being Indicators from the World Bank, INSTAT October 2015



Graph 2. Albanian economic components level 1998-2014

One of the main measures of economic welfare, which researchers have linked with absentee voting behavior, is GDP. As seen from graph 2 (also from the economic data table), this indicator has incurred low rate variation in the decreasing in 2009 and 2010, compared with the years before and after them. While in overall in the other years there is an upward trend, although at very low rates and in high levels. The highest rate has been reached in 2014 and 2008 (\$4076.4/capita and \$4,564.4/capita).

In order to make a deeper analysis, for the same years were taken three other important economic indicator factors of a country development, GNI, unemployment and inflation. It appears clearly that the first two indicators have almost the same tendency as that of GDP (Graph 1 and 2), in the same direction. Meanwhile, the inflation indicator is almost in opposite line, which to some extent can be considered as in inverse proportion to unemployment, adapting the "Phillips curve" (Library of Economics and Liberty).

Comparing the economic indicators curve trend and the level of abstention curve, it appears that these two curves do not have any connection in their changing direction. While GDP tendency is almost in its entirety an upward curve, the one of the abstention incur upwards and downwards fluctuations. During 2000-2003, the rate of abstention has increased 1.43 times, while GDP has increased by 1.5 times. In the successive period until the last parliamentary elections of 2013, generally the curve of absent decreases (except 2007: + 2.37% in terms of not voting, also this year and local election year as mentioned above for 2003), while the GDP curve is increasing, even in 2007. The low reduction rate that suffer this indicator in 2010 can be associated (probably induces) with a small reduction of absenteeism in the elections of 2011 in comparison to 2009 at a rate of -3.57%. This indicator can be obtained as reflected by the GDP, as well as other economic factors, or even social of the electorate. The same logic of connection can be supposed between GNI and abstention curves.

The relationship between these two indicators in this data set remains still at the hypothetical level, because until 2003 it best approaches the theory that if GDP (and GNI) increases the rate of abstention will increase, therefore, individuals will become less interested in electoral terms. While for the period 2003-2013, mostly it relates to the second theory of increasing the electorate interest to vote and contribution to the electoral process (reducing the percentage of absentee) with the growth of GDP and GNI. Therefore, in this situation the correlation analysis between the two curves for these factors remains problematic. Theoretically it does not coincide totally with none of the theory hypothesis. At this phase of the analysis, it also can be supposed that these variables in the best case could have an indirect relationship with absentee voters (intermediate variable) or in the worst scenario no relation at all.

In relation to the inflation curve, abstention is almost in the same trend direction variation (Graph 1 and 2). It can be assumed that this factor may be a possible influencer to absentee voting behavior of the electorate, as it is seen in the graphs 1 and 2 and tables 1 and 2. The inflation variation probably reflects changes of abstention in the upcoming/successive local/parliamentary elections, especially in the first period from 2000 to 2003. The inflation curve has almost the same shape as the one of abstention. From the data, changes in inflation appear to happen one year or a little more time before absentee change. In general, from the data the increase on inflation is accompanied by increase of abstention and vice versa. It can be assumed in this case that the impact of inflation in the vote may have to do with the consumer basket of the electorate. The higher the inflation, the higher prices and thus less products and household consumption basket will take individuals. Consequently, this may result in decrease in voter turnout, and vice versa.

An interesting detail of this data is the unemployment curve (Graph 2), which in its overall has increased by 2.6% (2000-2014), while abstaining its overall (2000-2013) has decreased (as mentioned in section 1). So, it could be supposed that with the rising unemployment more voters will use their right to vote, they will not abstain. This relationship can fit more logically with the hypothesis of the case of increased turnouts to the fact that individuals want to increase the chance of passing/solving their economic problems (personal and family circumstances), such as increasing the possibility of getting a job, etc. On the other hand, there could happen that they will go to the voting unit because of their lot free time (as being unemployed) (Charles and Stephens 2011 in Incantalupo, pg. 5). In both cases, voters have a high chance of being manipulated, mostly in the first one, because of their emergency of solving immediate micro level problems in terms of economic crisis well-being, turning this group of voters mostly into pragmatist ones, or even clientelistic voters.

For both cases of inflation and unemployment, logically in the Albanian case, due to problems in employment, not to high rates of household income, voters are more likely to have clientelistic behavior towards political actors during economic problems periods. Probably, they will go the unit polls to support/vote for the political actor which they believe will meet its pragmatic requirements (vote for the party/candidate which meets best their criteria of an individual economic problem solver) and tend not to go, in the vice versa way. Compared to developed democratic countries, this probable trend of behavior indicates an Albanian society more in pragmatist type, turned in the direction of micro level issues. Therefore, it might exist the mentality that if they support the party as a client, they will be able to get jobs and increase individual wellbeing. It should be mentioned at this point "the materialistic values profile of the Albanian electorate, which during 1998 to 2012 has a very high trend in increasing" (Kocani, 2014). This is another argument in support of this point of view.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the above analysis seems the abstention level of the Albanian electorate during 2000-2013, may be linked partially to the economic indicators, taking into consideration the fact of their curves trends and data analyses in relation to the theoretical connection. Especially connected to the factor of inflation and unemployment indicators, which are directly related to the level of economic life level. However, it cannot be considered at any moment as confirmed, because onto this data should be applied other statistical deeper analysis. In the case of not so economically stable societies, individuals which are not secured in terms of livelihoods, economic conditions, employment, health, family and themselves, are likely to create a clientele, rationale link to political actors, political parties or candidates, and support them in providing such basic elements of life. Liberal views this passing more in terms of a pragmatic behavior of individual interest was close. We suggest more in depth analysis is necessary to derive better conclusions.

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