

# How to effectively control politicians who fear of losing their positions

This is an excerpt from the book

**How to make your Government do the Right Thing;**  
3 common marketing strategies that can help citizens control  
political performance

by Anastasios Syrianos

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## **2. How to effectively control politicians who fear of losing their positions**

Regarding the fear factor there are only two potential outcomes; politicians<sup>1</sup>, will either fear of losing their positions or will not. For those that do fear of losing their positions, elections are unlikely to evoke the degree of fear necessary to positively influence their political behaviour. Politicians who hold public office and decide to run again as candidates are aware of the fact that the public can be persuaded into voting for them again even when what they really deserve is to be banned for life from any further involvement in politics. With the right mix of propaganda, deception, lies and promises, all politicians in power stand a chance of winning the next elections and this can serve them even more as they develop close ties with media and journalists. Moreover, when a prime minister or president is elected for a period of four or five years, they can always take

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning those politicians who are members of government or parliament.

advantage of a gullible public's short-lived memory to remain in power. Even as they dedicate the greater part of their term exploiting and misusing political power, they may still win the elections if they allow just a fraction of this power to be used for the public good towards the final few months of their term. In case their attempt to remain in power and get re-elected is not successful at once, their second attempt may stand greater chances to be victorious as the public will have forgotten their old mistakes and their successors in power will most likely have been proven equally if not more disastrous during their term.

Hence, what I intend to stress out here is that although politicians may fear of losing their positions they will not have this fear due to elections. We cannot expect politicians to act today, right now, for the benefit of society based on an event that will follow after a few years and which event they can always manipulate to a lesser or greater extent so that it turns out

on their favour. What we, as citizens, need in order to take advantage of politicians' fear of losing their positions, and make them work for the betterment of our societies, is to make it impossible for politicians not only to get re-elected but also to remain in their positions and exhaust their term in office, if they do not perform as well as they should. Thus, if holding on to their positions is their primary concern, then in order to make politicians act responsibly in favour of citizens today, tomorrow and every day, we need to make them live constantly in the fear of losing those positions. Instead of making this fear a one time thing during the elections period, when they know it is coming and they can prepare themselves to deal with it, we should make it a daily issue. This is the only realistic way, we can rightly expect governments that consist of politicians who are attached to their positions to be forced to look out for what is the best for society in every matter, challenge or problem, and decide to take action and implement it.

However, if this is what we need to do, then how do we do it? How do we make politicians who are clung to their offices, become so feared they will lose their positions so that they produce results for the benefit of society and its citizens? To put it more bluntly, how can we set up a system that exploits their fear for society's benefit? These are questions that torture the mind not only of political thinkers, but even the minds of regular citizens who see politics, politicians and political parties as the most distrusted institutions of society. Strangely enough, the answers to these puzzling questions lay far closer than we could ever imagine.

Obviously, one way to achieve this goal would be to hold elections more frequently, let us say every two years, or even annually. But in this case again politicians would have plenty of time to exploit power for their own benefit, and make a couple of last minute decisions that would meet the public's demands and make them favourites for re-election. Well, if this is the case, then

I am afraid the only possible way to take control of the situation would be to hold elections every day. But this, apart from being practically impossible, would see political decisions on each matter repealed every day bringing chaos not only into politics, but into day to day life itself. It seems then that in order to avoid this chaos we would reluctantly have to accept a gap of several months or years between elections. This however, should not restrain us from thinking of other possible ways to put a president, minister or member of parliament in the risk of losing their position. If elections cannot make this work for us we ought to discover other means to hold politicians accountable to society.

After all, constitutions and political systems of the modern era were formed in the basis of protecting several inalienable rights of citizens against abusive politicians and governments. Protectionism is thus at the heart of our political culture. What is missing though is the right type of measures that will protect people from their

governments and the misuse of political power. The best way to make protectionism work is to formulate a set of proactive measures that will direct the exercise of political power into the right path before it becomes exploitative and abusive.

In today's politics, elections results are considered as the final verdict of voters. This verdict cannot be changed or challenged no matter the circumstances, before the expiry of the presidency or governmental period. This of course gives politicians the upper hand and puts society in a rather unpleasant position where it has to withstand and cope with their government's policies no matter how much these oppose the general will of the people. However, this should not necessarily be the case. If we want to make politicians, who are fearful of losing their offices, to work for the good of their society, elections results should no longer be seen as a conclusive result that cannot be repealed or cancelled. A president, prime minister, minister, or a member of parliament, should

never again rest assured on his/her chair, knowing that whatever decisions he makes, whatever laws he votes for, whatever policies he adheres to, his position is not at risk. Even though a prime minister or MP may be elected for four or five years, this should not secure him/her of their position for the full period of their term in office. Actually it should not secure them the position they got elected into at all.

After they get elected, all politicians should be examined for their eligibility and capacity to perform the duties that society expects them to perform. Only after they have been tried and tested should politicians be given the clearance to undertake the political duties they were voted for. When they do, politicians should then be responsible for their political actions and performance from the first day of their term. From that point onwards, all politicians should be periodically examined every several months or even weeks and give accounts for all their decisions. Even though free will, personal judgment and the



conscience of each elected official should never cease to guide political decision-making, we must make sure that these are used to serve the common good of society and the interests of the people. Hence, the way politicians use their conscience when given the opportunity to serve their country, should become the decisive factor by which all public officials are being held accountable. As long as they honour their position and serve society they should be allowed to complete their term. In any other case they should be forced out before its completion and consequently get a fair trial for the actions that caused their removal from office. Of course, putting together the right measures that will have the desired effects in improving the performance of politicians who are fearful of losing their positions in power is a challenge in itself. How are we going to check whether politicians are performing well or not? Who is going to perform these checks? How often will they take place? What should we do with those politicians who are deemed to

perform ineffectively? These are only a few of the questions that we have to deal with when considering our options in improving the way politicians and governments perform.

Now, fortunately for us the ideas discussed above are not new. Actually, we use them every day in the way we conduct our business and in the way we behave as consumers of goods and services. Consider for example how businesses operate today. Every business and employer would be justified to terminate their contract with an employee if he/she is not productive, or does substantial damage to the business, or simply does not comply with the rules of the company. In the same manner, we are justified to terminate the supply of a service we are no longer satisfied with, or simply substitute a damaged product with a proper one. However, no matter how natural this seems to us as consumers, as citizens we have been taught to consider elections as the only way to control and discipline our politicians. In a business context, this

would be the same as saying to business owners and employers that they would have to keep at their payroll a reluctant to work, disobedient, unproductive employee until the end of his/her contract which may extend to several months or several years. There is not the slightest chance that a restaurant owner would keep paying a waiter who does not know what the menu is, talks impolitely to guests or turns up with stained uniform or poor hygiene, whatever contract he/she has signed with him. Why then should we keep our politicians for the full time of their four or five-year term when they are obviously incompetent or reluctant to solve problems and find solutions to society's problems and challenges? This absurdity becomes even greater when we consider that the damage a politician can cause with one signature or vote, affects not only one person, household, company or business but the whole of society. Nonetheless, the treatment the political system reserves for politicians is as if their incompetence and

failures have no negative effects on any part of society whatsoever.

The argument of holding politicians accountable for their actions with means other than elections, from the moment of their appointment to the last day of their term, may be better understood if seen from a consumer perspective. Everything we interact with that entails choice, selection and purchase is a transaction by which we acquire a product or service. When we choose a product or service that we wish to acquire we use some type of currency to buy it. Politics, no matter how peculiar it may seem, is not any different from this kind of transaction where we choose a product and buy it. Hence, even when we vote for our governments or members of parliament we are really performing a transaction for which we use our currency of trust to buy the service of this political party instead of another or this candidate instead of another. Politicians and political parties can thus be seen as products or services that we buy with our vote of

confidence in them in order to improve our quality of life and level of well-being. As we do with any product or service before we buy it, we first examine thoroughly the available options to see which ones have the specific traits we are looking for, in the same way we examine a mobile phone's or tablet's memory space, camera quality etc. After that preliminary process we end up with a couple of choices and we compare the parties and the politicians that lead them, read through their political programmes and decide to buy the one that is more convincing in performing more effectively the service that we as citizens require.

This makes electoral processes no different than the processes consumers use to buy goods and services; elections have been commercialised to such a great extent that results seem to depend heavily on how well the political products of parties and candidates are being marketed. However, unlike our consumer-based societies, political marketing is extremely limited in

scope and is centred exclusively on the electoral process. Normal products are promoted with a mixture of marketing strategies that go well beyond just persuading consumers to buy them; businesses are also equally interested in making products and services that provide the desired results for buyers, are efficient, and ensure customer satisfaction. The political system, on the other hand, is a business which is only interested in making sales, i.e. having voters participating in general elections and buying one of the political parties-products that run for public office. This is why political parties and their leaders who run for presidents and prime ministers are restrained to persuasive communication; propaganda, advertisement and promises are the only tools they use to entice voters into buying them instead of their adversaries. As a result of its sales-making orientation, the “political system” business uses only a fraction of the marketing strategies available to promote its products. This complacency occurs not

only because it is a monopoly and there is no competitor political system to choose from, but because politics is essential to our life and citizens' participation in the political or electoral process is vital to run the country. However, although politics are far more important and influential in our lives than any product or service will ever be, the framework within it operates makes people abstain from the processes that bring into power the people who determine the quality of our lives and our future. But because politics literally rules our lives we do not have the luxury to abstain from the processes that decide how our lives will be ruled. Thus it is imperative to develop a political system that encourages citizen engagement in the process of electing governments and MP's. In order to achieve this we need to reform our political systems in Europe so that they produce political parties and politicians that provide efficient service to the citizen-consumers and ensure their satisfaction.

Another paradox that has allowed our current political system to thrive is the fact that the harsh reality of the business world does not apply to politics. Whereas any company that does not provide good service and demand for its products is falling will be soon gone from the business map, this is not the case for the political system and its supporting elements. No matter how disillusioned citizens may become with politics, politicians and political parties, the political system will never cease to exist. At worst it will just keep renewing itself by providing constant change of its central political figures, party leaders etc, in order to maintain citizens' hope that one day something maybe will change and politicians will miraculously start to care for them, serve their societies well and work for the public's general interests. Of course this day never comes, and where it does it is only a short break from "business as usual".

This lack of threat to its own survival makes the business of politics uninterested



in undergoing a deep transformation which would put politics in the service of our societies. But unlike all other businesses, the politics business is really our business and we are the only ones who can change it. This change can only happen if the people themselves awake to the political reality they are living in and start to actively demand reform of the political system so that its products (political parties and politicians) begin to fall into the laws of consumerism. And what do those laws of consumerism tell us? They tell us that we human beings, as consumers are free to choose, buy, and use the products and services we like and need for as long as we want. They also tell us that we are free to replace or throw away these products if they are no longer useful, they are not as efficient as they were, or we simply want to get rid of them. But human beings, as members of a society are not only consumers, they are also citizens. As citizens we should be even more free and powerful to choose, buy and use the

political products of our political system, and even more free and powerful to replace and get rid of these parties and politicians that do us no good at any time we want to. When we look at the guarantees that many of our electric and electronic products come with, it is a bewilderment to realise that there is no such thing as a guarantee for citizens-consumers when they buy into parties and politicians. What is at stake in politics is so much greater than the disruption that a malfunctioning vacuum cleaner or blacked-out TV screen can cause in our life. For this reason it is only natural that we should be as citizens equipped with a whole lot more power to deal with inefficient and malfunctioning politicians and governments than the one we have as consumers to deal with inefficient and malfunctioning products. It thus goes without saying that the way businesses market their products and services, making their purchase as appealing and risk-free as possible, can serve as an example to help us reconstruct our current political systems so

that they are equally if not more appealing and risk-free for citizens. If the fear of been driven out of the market causes companies to create quality products that perform the functions consumers require, then the fear politicians have of being forced out of politics should also cause them to perform in a way that provides quality service to their citizens and benefit to society. Thus, it is argued, that the next evolutionary step for our political systems would be to create the type of measures that will enable us as citizens to control those politicians who fear of losing their positions and compel them to raise the standards of their performance. What follows is an attempt to portray the practical steps we may demand to take place in order to create this refined and improved system of political accountability where the fear factor can actually improve the performance of governments and high-ranked politicians.

## 2.1 Reshaping political accountability; how 3 common marketing strategies can help us control politicians?

If we could simplify the way we act as consumers we could say that we start by examining the different choices of products or services available, we then choose to buy the one we like or think is suitable for us and we finally buy it and go on and use it. So we can condense the buying process into three steps; examine, choose and use. The same three steps are also applicable in politics; when elections are approaching, we examine the different candidates available, we choose the ones that seem most promising or suitable and we finally elect them and receive the service they have to offer us. Now, we said that a person should be more free and powerful as a citizen than he/she is as a consumer. However, as we have already demonstrated, this is not the case in the way our “democracies” work. Therefore, perhaps we should first consider how we can duplicate consumers’ power so that it is passed on to

citizens, and then examine ways to enhance this power where necessary.

a. The examination of the political product before elections; the “test drive” and “free trial” marketing strategies (dokimasia)

When looking to buy a product, any consumer is likely to undergo some sort of examination of the specific item before he buys it. The more expensive the product and the longer its intended use, the more thorough the examination will be. We give more time and attention in examining which mobile phone we are going to buy than which pair of socks. In the same way, we are even more attentive in our examination when we are looking to buy a car than when we were looking to buy a phone. This examination of a specific product before we buy it is an imperative preliminary step which allows us to ensure that we make no mistakes in our choice and that what we buy is indeed what we were intending to purchase.

A famous marketing strategy commonly used in the automobile industry in order to persuade consumers, minimize their risks, and enhance sales of their products is the test drive. The test drive is defined by one source as the “driving of an automobile to assess its drivability, or roadworthiness, and general operating state”<sup>2</sup>. This “test drive” marketing strategy, perfectly encapsulates the principle of thoroughly examining a product before buying it in order to ensure that it will perform the functions that we expect it to. This principle can and must be used also in politics in order to ensure that politicians are capable of performing in the way society expects them to. One way of doing this could be to delegate an independent, non-biased special committee of citizens with the task to perform the political “test drive” of politicians and assess their “politicability” and “voteworthiness” before the electorate is called to vote for them, in the same way that driving experts perform the test drives

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, Test drive. [online] Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Test\\_drive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Test_drive), [accessed 15/08/16].

of new car models. The results of this committee's examination could either have an impact on political candidacy or not. In case it does, it could lead to further investigations to take place or even to elimination of candidates from the electoral process. In case it does not, it could simply provide a list ranking politicians according to the findings of this examination allowing thus citizens to make more informed decisions.

In other products or services where the "test drive" option does not apply, marketing offers a different type of strategy to attract buyers. This strategy, called "free trial", allows potential consumers to actually use for free the product or service they are interested in for a certain period of time. After this period of time, they can choose if they wish to buy the product/service or not. This "free trial" period during which a product or service is used to demonstrate its capacity to perform what it promises, should also somehow be duplicated in politics. Currently, the only

thing that intercedes before the Election Day is the electoral period. However, the electoral period cannot be considered as a “free trial” period; politicians use this period prior to Election Day to deliver their promises to the electorate, not to practically demonstrate how they will actualize their promises. But if practical demonstration is necessary prior to buying any product or service, imagine how much more necessary it is in politics where the performance of politicians is putting so much at stake for the well-being of citizens and country.

Therefore, another kind of reform in the political system is necessary which would allow politicians to practically demonstrate they can deliver on their promises before getting elected and coming into power. During this preliminary stage, all candidates are examined for their potential to live up to the highest standards of political performance. This includes the current members of government and parliament who have announced their candidacy for the next elections. For them,



this examination should be easy as their performance during their term in office is the best demonstration of their eligibility to run again. Forming certain performance related criteria that would be necessary to be fulfilled, could be one of the ways that the examination of current government and parliament members takes place. For the other candidates who do not hold an official active political role, although not particularly the interest of this work, we could consider creating some sort of simulation mechanism to examine their capacity and willingness to exercise political power for the good of the people.

b. The choice of the right political service; the “pay-as-you-go” membership plan in marketing (epicheirotonia n.1)

However, even after these preliminary examination processes which all politicians should undergo, there is absolutely no certainty that only the best and most suitable political candidates will have qualified for the next stage of electing the

country's new government and parliament. There may still be political leaders who will have misguidedly been given clearance to participate in the elections, even though they are incapable of holding a position like this or do not intend to serve their country by doing anything in their power to ensure the well-being of their people. When such politicians get into positions of power after an election (as they do all the time), the existing framework of political accountability leaves citizens completely helpless and defenseless against their inefficiency or deceitful intentions. As we know in our western political systems, elections results are irrevocable and society is stuck with the choice it makes for the full period of a four or five-year governmental term even when this government is obviously violating the general will of the people. This outrageous safeguard, with which the political system protects politicians, is a huge blow to the concept of political accountability and democracy

itself, and poses a tremendous risk for the well-being of society.

It is important thus to be reminded that politicians are no superior beings who have conquered ultimate righteousness and are beyond suspicion of political corruption. Quite the contrary, politicians are human beings just like anybody else, with their strengths and weaknesses. As experience has shown, most of them are self-interested arrogant individuals, highly susceptible to succumb to pressure, bribery, or threat from various lobbies in order to perform according to third-parties' motives and agendas. As all this normally takes place at the backstage of political life, and none of the important information that could expose political leaders ever make it to the mainstream news, the only criterion by which citizens can evaluate politicians and governments is their performance. If political performance resists alignment with the general good of the people, then citizens should be allowed to take action and protect themselves from their government even

when there is no information that suggests political corruption. As we have already stressed out, political accountability works when citizens can compel their governments to perform for the benefit of society. When citizens are in no position to take action and correct things when a government fails to meet the public's demands and falls in favor of illegal and malign interests, political accountability becomes a joke.

If people acting as consumers have the freedom to change utility providers in their internet, water or electricity supply when they feel like it, why should the same people acting as citizens have no freedom at all to change a failing government? Now I can surely hear some of you shouting about how important political stability is for any society. But the “political stability” argument, which some may attempt to invoke, is simply a misguidance from the true objective of politics. All that matters in politics is ensuring a level of well-being that allows enjoyment of life for all

citizens. Besides, contrary to what the media and politicians would have us believe, political stability is threatened not by changing an inefficient government, but from keeping it in power when it is destroying citizens' well-being causing social unrest and upheaval. Hence, if a government drops the level of well-being of the people how can the political stability argument have any significance for society? Why on earth should we endure the failure and incompetency of any government when we can use its members' fear of losing their power in order to make them improve their policies and decisions?

In the same way that we value our safety on the road and we do not drive our car when its brakes and lights are broken, we should be able to stay safe from a government that is leading society through the darkness and into destruction. Instead of being completely powerless to prevent a catastrophic crash, citizens should have the power to put a stop to their government's dangerous and destructive policies, laws or

decisions. One way to grant citizens with this power is to allow them to ceaselessly hold politicians accountable for their actions as they exercise their power. Although a government is elected for four or five years, the only way for it to complete its term in office should be to remain in alignment with the general will of its people. In order to avoid this alignment from being violated, citizens should be able to regularly hold their government accountable for its performance within the four or five-year term, and also intervene to revoke the mandate given to it in previous elections and substitute it with another government. What this means is that elections in democratic political systems, although they seem necessary, they should not result in governments that can remain in power for the whole period of their term regardless of their use of political power; instead, it should become law that the completion of a government's term in office should be subject to the political performance of its members.

If we take another close look into the service-related industries that operate in our world, we can draw some very useful conclusions for our understanding of political accountability and how it can be redesigned to actually work. All businesses that market products and services need their own share in the market in order to survive. If the goods and services that a company offers are not demanded or no longer required by consumers, it will inevitably cease to exist unless of course it starts to produce what consumers require. This relentless law is true for all businesses and industries without exceptions. The consumers, by virtue of their choices, are in a position to drive a business into non-existence if it does not offer goods that are of a certain quality and meet certain demands. This freedom of choice based on certain criteria, represents the power of consumers to hold businesses accountable for the type and quality of their products. This is most evident in the service sector where customers require long term supply

of various services. If the quality of the service does not meet certain demands, customers are free to move from one provider to another and get what they want from the business that can meet that demand.

Let us imagine for a moment that we want to buy a gym membership to improve our fitness and health. A big-chain gym in the UK will usually offer potential clients two options from which one can choose: either a non-binding pay-as-you-go membership which you prepay at the beginning of every month and can leave at any time with no extra costs incurred, or a long-term contract on a fixed price that is payable every month directly from your bank account and is considerably cheaper than the first option. In the first option you are free but this freedom comes with a cost as you pay more money for your membership. In the second option you are tied up for at least a 12-month period in a lower price rate, which you are obligated to pay even if you decide you no longer wish



to continue this activity or you are not satisfied with the quality of the service. Now, perhaps neither of these options may seem ideal, but customers have the freedom to choose depending on their priorities and the degree of flexibility they would like to have when getting into an agreement like that.

In politics however, citizens do not have any options regarding the kind of agreement or contract they will get into with the politicians they elect to provide them the political service. When citizens elect their government, they are tied up with it for the next four or five years with absolutely no way out. The contract they get themselves into when they vote in elections cannot break; there are no release clauses, and the contract will terminate only after its expiry in four or five years, unless a government unilaterally decides it is necessary to hold elections earlier. In any case, citizens today have no institutional power whatsoever to control and discipline their government, when it operates outside

the realm of the common good and the general will of the people.

However this situation is not acceptable to common sense and we as free people cannot conform to it. No state aspiring to commit itself to democratic ideals can possibly operate in such a tyrannical manner, and thus it is necessary to take action and challenge this injustice against the people.

c. The use of the political product or service; the “money-back guarantee” or “refund” marketing strategy (epicheirotonia n.2)

This brings us to the final part of this discussion. How can a free people tackle the absurdity of a political system that binds them with the destructive administration of an elected government? How can citizens be institutionally armed with processes that will allow them to terminate their contract with the current provider of the political

service and switch to another government when they deem necessary?

Again, we can search for an answer by looking at the business world and particularly the marketing strategies designed to minimise risks for potential buyers by putting them in a state of “peace of mind” regarding the quality of the purchased product. A wide range of products, from computer software to electronic devices and even mattresses, increasingly come with a guarantee by the companies that market them. This satisfaction guarantee ensures that consumers will get their money back in case they are not satisfied with the product they purchased. According to one definition, “a **money-back guarantee**, also known as a **satisfaction guarantee**, is essentially a simple guarantee that, if a buyer is not satisfied with a product or service, a refund will be made”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, Money back guarantee. [online] Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money\\_back\\_guarantee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_back_guarantee) [accessed 21/09/2016].

One of the most common satisfaction guarantees that businesses are using today to give their potential customers an extra reassurance and convince them to buy their products, is the “30-day-money-back guarantee”. One company that incorporates this guarantee policy explains that “if you return your order anytime within 30 days, we will send you your money back. No questions asked. It is 100% risk-free”<sup>4</sup>. One other company selling its products online, uses a “30 day unconditional 100% money back guarantee”, further reassuring its potential buyers that “this product is risk-free”<sup>5</sup>.

The satisfaction guarantee has become one of the most popular and overused marketing strategies that businesses employ to lure consumers into buying their products. However, despite its recent bloom, the “satisfaction-or-money-back

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<sup>4</sup> Ivision, 30 day money back guarantee. [online] Available at <http://ivisionfuture.com/30-day-money-back-guarantee/> [accessed 02/10/16].

<sup>5</sup> Bincer, R. (2014). 30-Day Money-back Guarantee. [online] All About Hangouts. Available at: <http://allabouthangouts.com/30-day-money-back-guarantee/> [accessed 02/10/2016].

guarantee” is not a newly discovered strategy, as it dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood who first used it in his entire range of pottery products<sup>6</sup>. Today, according to one source, the use of the satisfaction guarantee has grown so significantly that it has become a standard practice in direct marketing across all media<sup>7</sup>.

As a result of the expansion that this particular practice has gone through, the consumers’ right to a 30-day refund has now become law in the UK. As Brian Milligan reported for BBC.co.uk, under the Consumer Rights Act that came into force in October 1, 2015, “for the first time anyone who buys faulty goods will be entitled to a full refund for up to 30 days after the purchase. Previously consumers were only entitled to refunds for a "reasonable time"”<sup>8</sup>. Hannah Maundrell, the

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<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia, Money back guarantee. [online] Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money\\_back\\_guarantee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_back_guarantee) [accessed 02/10/2016].

<sup>7</sup> Same as above [accessed 02/10/16].

<sup>8</sup> Milligan, B. (2015). Right to 30-day refund becomes law. [online] BBC.co.uk. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34403005> [accessed 0/10/2016].

editor of money.co.uk, welcomed the Act<sup>9</sup> by saying that “now, if you buy a product and discover a fault within 30 days you'll be entitled to a full refund”<sup>10</sup>.

This development is likely to have a positive effect in the economy overall by forging a safer market environment where “consumers can buy and businesses can sell to them with confidence<sup>11</sup>”. Having the legal right as a consumer to request a refund within 30 days of purchasing a faulty product, while at the same time the company that sold it to you has the legal obligation to provide this refund, is undoubtedly a major boost to consumer rights. Consumers will obviously continue to choose and buy the products they believe

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<sup>9</sup> Citizens Advice. The Consumer Rights Act 2015. [online] Available at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/citizens-advice-consumer-work/the-consumer-rights-act-2015/> [accessed on 02/10/2016].

<sup>10</sup> Gunn, E. (2015). 30 days to get your money back and protection on digital downloads: What you need to know about the Consumer Rights Act shake-up. [online] This is Money. Available at: <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-3256258/30-days-money-protection-digital-downloads-need-know-Consumer-Rights-Act-shake-up.html> [accessed 2/10/2015].

<sup>11</sup> Citizens Advice, same as above.

match their needs and wants, as they have always done, but from now on their purchase will no longer be conclusive. The actual act of purchasing goods will no longer necessarily be the final act when consumers and businesses buy and sell products. If products are discovered to be faulty, thus not providing the use they are made for, consumers have the legal right to get their money back and use them to buy products that will actually provide the intended use or function.

Inevitably, the question arises; if people, as consumers, are legally entitled to a full refund when they buy a product and discover a fault in it within 30 days, then why should the same people have no legal rights as citizens to request a “refund” of their vote for a faulty government that is proven to perform neither according to its constitutional obligations towards society nor according to its promises during the campaign period? Once citizens “buy” their new government by voting for it in elections, they are stuck with it until the end

of its legally designated term, no matter how faulty it is. The political system is so outdated that it does not acknowledge citizens' claims for a "refund" of their vote when their government performs selfishly for its own benefit or the benefit of the few and powerful or simply is not bothered to solve any of society's major problems. But a government that operates in such a way is completely useless, and uselessness should not be acceptable in politics, at least no more than it is in the marketplace when selling goods. If consumers are legally entitled to a full refund for buying faulty goods, then it is only right that citizens should also be able to officially request and get a full "refund" of their trust and confidence to their elected government and redirect it to one that they believe is more suitable. Thus, allowing citizens the political right to take back their vote of confidence to a "faulty" government, in the same way they are allowed to get their money back when they pay for damaged or non functional goods, may be the answer to



dramatically improve a government's performance.

The top ranked politicians who fear of losing their positions in power would take their political performances far more seriously, if they knew that proving themselves to be useless for the benefit of society would definitely cost them their positions. Prime ministers, presidents and all sorts of elected officials who enjoy life at the forefront of politics so much that they fear of losing their status as top politicians, would become much more cautious and considerate regarding the decisions and policies they make, the laws they propose and the laws they vote for, if they knew that doing the wrong thing would cost them their position before they even got a chance to really feel what it is like to be in that position. This takes us to the next question that we need to answer; how can we design a legal process by which citizens will have the political power to easily and democratically request and get a “refund”

of their vote whenever things go wrong with the government they elected?

The citizens' power to get a "refund" of their trust in their newly elected government and put another government into power is similar to the citizens' right to "recall" a politician that exists today in a few countries and several states in the U.S.A. According to this right, elected officials can be thrown out of office as a result of a popular vote; if more than fifty percent vote in favour of their dismissal in a referendum called by petition, then the elected official loses his position and is substituted for the remainder of the term. Nonetheless, however similar it may be, what we are discussing here is different compared to the "recall". The recall of elected officials is a political right exercised against single politicians and thus does not apply to collective authorities like a government or parliament. In addition, before the referendum can be called there must be enough signatures collected by a citizens' petition. This involves either a

percentage (i.e. 10%) or a fixed number (i.e. 100,000) of the voting population of a given country to sign a petition for a recall referendum. Such a clause in the recall process practically means that it could require several thousands or even millions of voters to sign a petition before a politician can feel his position to be at risk. This however, contradicts the idea of creating an easily applicable democratic process of controlling politicians. Collecting tens or hundreds of thousands of signatures in order to call for a recall referendum is neither easy nor democratic as it requires citizens to operate as an organized unit (demos) without being one.

Apart from that, though, the “right” to recall is very different to the “power” to recall; the former refers to a process that can be voluntarily exercised by a big number of citizens if and when they deem necessary, while the latter refers to a process that the state itself is obligated to initiate and the citizens are the ones who decide. It is the same like voting; voting is

more of a power rather than a right, as it is an obligatory process that takes place for the citizens to decide which government is most suitable to run the country on their behalf. Voting does not require a petition in order to take place; it is legally and constitutionally prescribed. The same should be with the citizens' power to recall their government, parliament or individual elected officials; a petition should not be required prior to the decision of whether a government is good enough to continue its work. Instead, the power of citizens to recall their government or politicians should become a standard political process that is repeated periodically over a number of times in the span of a four or five year governmental period. It should thus be a process that validates democracy itself, in the same way that the power of citizens to elect their own government does.

At the other end, the strength of the recall process as it exists today is that it can be exercised at any point of a politician's term in office, usually after the first six months

have gone by. Apparently this is right, as having a 30-day restriction to recall politicians once they are appointed to their office, would mock the very idea of political accountability; it would give these officials the opportunity to play it safe for a month and after this period exercise their power the way they wanted to without any fear of losing their position. Of course, in case politicians are so impatient to start misusing their political power that their decisions resulted in their recall within their first 30-day period in office, they would not only lose their office before they even got started, but the decisions or policies that caused the citizens to request their recall would necessarily be repealed and probably lead to their legal prosecution. Thus, as no politician would be so impatient or stupid to take such a risk, we ought to transfer the marketing idea of “refund” of goods into politics in an effective way that actually results in an improvement of the political performance of governments, parliaments and elected officials. Besides, allowing only

a 30-day window to making recall claims against an elected official would leave the majority of their term in office unaccounted for, thus missing the whole point of creating processes that make political accountability work. As long as government officials hold power in their hands they are eligible to commit political crimes against society, and for this reason citizens should always be able to check them and recall them if necessary during the whole period of their term, from their first to their last day. This however, demands a different approach than the one used today in the citizens' right to recall their elected officials via a petition.

As we have explained, the political act of voting to elect a government can be seen as a business-like political transaction. Just as a consumer is legally entitled to request a refund of a faulty product, so should citizens be legally entitled to request a "refund" of their vote to a faulty government. However, due to the nature of politics and its significance to our life and

well-being, getting a “refund” of our vote should not be restricted by the 30-day limitation that exists in the business world today. The power to get a “refund” or recall of vote should always be available to citizens’ from the beginning until the end of a government’s term in office. This however is not the only adjustment that needs to be made to the way the power to recall a government, the parliament or a single elected official operates. In order for the idea of political refund to function properly and control the performance of politicians it is necessary for the petition to also be removed. Instead of requiring a petition to initiate the recall process, it should be constitutionally imposed and become a standard political process just like voting is. In this case, the state would organise the procedure for some sort of a Recall Day just like it organises Election Day, however in a more frequent basis, i.e. every year, every six months or even every month during a four or five-year governmental and parliamentary term. In a

situation like this, it would be constitutionally mandatory for the State to regularly organise a Recall Day during a governmental term (i.e. once every month, or once every year), in which citizens should be asked to vote whether they would like to remove their government from office or not. This however may not necessarily have to be a voting process, at least not in all levels of governance. Instead, elected officials at the local or peripheral levels could be required to appear periodically, during their term in office, in front of an impartial judicial committee elected by lot, give account for their political actions and answer to all citizens' questions regarding their decisions, policies and proposed laws. At the end of this hearing process, the citizens gathered at this location would be asked by the judicial committee to make an officially binding decision as to whether the officials under scrutiny should be removed from office or not. This could all take place in one venue during the course of a Sunday or of a whole weekend, or it could involve



various venues and judicial committees carrying out this process. In this way we could eliminate the undemocratic preliminary stage of signature collection and create a legally binding process that could start giving true value to political accountability.

Nonetheless, even if we could do all of the above and reshape the way political accountability works, this would still not be enough to allow citizens to control and discipline politicians, as the above process would only deal strictly with those politicians who fear of losing their office, leaving out of the equation those who do not. Thus, in the next chapter we will examine how political accountability can work to discipline and control those State officials who are not afraid of losing office.

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Thank you again for reading this.

I am wishing you all the best.

Anastasios Syrianos

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anastasios Syrianos is an author and online teacher specialising in political philosophy. The utter failure of modern-day politics has made the quest for the righteous exercise of political power, the cornerstone of his writing. Through his work, Anastasios aims to help put an end to political injustice by sharing the invaluable lessons he has learnt from the political wisdom of ancient Greeks.

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