The European Elections Studies: Objectives and Accomplishments

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APSA Short Course, Washington DC, 1st September 2009
European Parliament Election Studies as a Venue for Comparative Electoral Research

- Opportunity for comparative study of electoral mobilization and choice
  - Low profile elections minimize effects of idiosyncratic factors
  - Ostensibly similar policies at issue across diverse political contexts
  - Wide variety of contextual characteristics allowing theoretical innovations (see below)
  - Occasional concurrent national elections provide validity checks

- Opportunity to obtain funding for comparative electoral research
  - Use of Eurobarometer as locomotive for studies up to 1994
  - Infrastructure funding from the EU's DG Research in 2009
  - (But major funding problems in 1999 and 2004)
Linkages studied by the EES*

* Diagram employed by Bernhard Wessels at the '09 Candidate Study kick-off meeting, used here with thanks.
## European Election Studies 1979-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>N of countries</th>
<th>Voters study (waves)</th>
<th>Follow-up voters study (Fall EB)</th>
<th>Media study</th>
<th>Candidate study</th>
<th>Manifestoes study</th>
<th>Contextual data study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>[✓]⁺</td>
<td>[✓]⁺</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>(✓)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1979 studies not coordinated with later studies.

**Fall EB for 1994 substantially augmented to constitute virtually a 2\(^{nd}\) post-election wave.
Compatibility of 2009 with earlier studies (back to 1989)

Voter survey: 52 %
Candidate survey: 64 %
Media study: 44 %
Manifesto study: 98 %
Contextual data: new
Core concepts

Voting: Party choice & turnout
Party ID
Engagement and mobilization
Media usage
Political institutions
EU integration
Value orientations
Domestic and European issues
Representation
Identity
Demographics
Political knowledge and experience
Recruitment and nomination
Attribution of responsibility and evaluation of performance
Linkability

All data components: Parties, institutions, EU integration, value orientations & demographics

4 out of 5: engagement & mobilization, domestic & European issues, representation, identity (not contextual data)

3 out of 5: voting, media usage, attribution & evaluation (not media or manifesto study)
Major Innovations (voter study)

Propensity to vote questions
- Permit focus on "a party" instead of, as heretofore, on "party X"
- Eliminate problems of comparability between different party systems, permitting pooled analyses without data degradation
- Lower the level of analysis to the voter-X-party level, permitting simultaneous analysis of all of a voter's party evaluations, using as independent variables relating to
  - Individual voters, political parties and relations between the two
- Hugely increasing the complexity of the analysis process

Stacked datasets
- Differentiate between respondent and unit of analysis, which is unusual in political science (more customary in, e.g. social psychology)
- Require special procedures to transform independent variables appropriately (a subject for this afternoon's session)
- Raise methodological issues regarding clustering of cases
Findings (an idiosyncratic list)

Things about European Parliament elections…

- They are second-order elections (where executive power is not at stake)
- People behave differently at second-order than at first-order elections
- These differences (e.g. low turnout) do not constitute judgments on the electoral arena (e.g. Europe) but indicators of how much is seen to be at stake. The most amazing thing about EP elections is that anyone at all votes when nothing is at stake.

Things about voting behavior in general…

- There are degrees of second-order-ness. All elections (and voters themselves) vary in terms of how much is seen to be at stake.
- What seems to be at stake from a voter's perspective need not be the same as what seems to be at stake for candidates, parties, or media pundits.
- Some voters have a 'habit of voting' and turn out even when nothing is at stake
- Some of the most important influences on party choice are things about parties
Opportunities for future research on…

- Specific EU member states
- The electoral connection in EU politics
- Voters’ electoral behavior (turnout and choice)
- Media coverage and framing of EU, EP and EE
- Comparative research about effects of ‘context’
- Political representation
- Party competition
- Effects of party characteristics

We will focus on the last two in this list which have received little attention
Studying party competition

Potential support and overlap between parties in the British issue space, 1989
Effects of party characteristics

Conventional regression equations for studying party choice…

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Support for } A &= \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1} \beta_i X_i + e \\
\text{Support for } B &= \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1} \beta_i X_i + e \\
\end{align*}
\]

\{ \text{where } A \text{ and } B \text{ are different parties} \}

\{ \text{and } X_{1i} \text{ are things about voters} \}

Regression equation for studying party choice in a stacked dataset…

\[
\text{Party support} = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1} \beta_{1i} X_{1i} + \sum_{j=1} \beta_{2j} X_2 + \sum_{i,j=1} \beta_{3i,j} X_{3i,j} + e
\]

\(\text{Where } X_{1i} \text{ are things about voters, } X_{2j} \text{ are things about parties and } X_{3ij} \text{ are things about relations between the two.}\)

This is what we do studying other topics, why not in studying voting behavior?
Select bibliography

Books about European Parliament elections…


Books about electoral behavior in general…


Wouter van der Brug, Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin *The Economy and the Vote: Electoral Responses to Economic Conditions in 15 Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2007 [data from EES 1989-99]