

Online Appendix to “Political Science Seen Through Historians’ Looking Glass: The Case of Electoral System Choice”, by Patrick Emmenegger and Klaus Petersen (2011), published in *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 9(2): 33-37.

Presentation of the expert survey

The expert survey was organized in two steps. Firstly, we contacted the editors-in-chief of a total of 130 leading national, regional, and international journals within the following sub-disciplines of history: political history, contemporary history, economic (and business) history, parliamentary history, social science history, social history, labor history, and general history (only leading journals). The editors-in-chief were contacted by a standard email presenting the project and asking the editors-in-chief to appoint five or more experts to participate in the survey. The email was adapted to the specific country or region (except for the international journals). A remainder was sent out four weeks later.

We received positive answers from 42 journals covering all countries except Belgium, Ireland, and New Zealand. In order to improve country coverage as well as increase the total number of experts, we directly contacted 29 researchers and asked them to help us locate the most relevant experts (which could include themselves). We received 23 positive answers (by Klas Åmark, University of Stockholm; Neil Atkinson, Ministry of Culture & Heritage New Zealand; Rita Baeten, OSE Brussels; Christoph Conrad, University of Geneva; Robert Engelbert, University of Saskatchewan; Mark Francis, University of Canterbury; Effi Gazi, University of Peloponnese; Brian Girvin, University of Glasgow; Tore Grønlie, University of Bergen; Ana Guillen, University of Oviedo; Per Haave, University of Oslo; Kees van Kersbergen, University of Aarhus; Marc Lazar, Sciences-po, Paris; Henry Milner, Université Montréal; Makoto Murai, Tokyo University; Herbert Obinger, University of Bremen; Michel Offerlé, ENS Paris; Bruno Palier, Sciences-po, Paris; Gerhard A. Ritter, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München; Dimitri Sotiropoulos, University of Athens; Pat Thane, Institute of Historical Research London; Mariano Torcal, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona; Bart Vanhercke, OSE Brussels; Noel Whiteside, University of Warwick). Together with the suggestions made by the journal editors-in-chief, we were able to compile a list of 300 experts.

In a second step, we sent these 300 experts per email an invitation to participate in a web-based survey (created with the help of surveyXact). In addition, we sent two reminders. The first invitation was sent on January 21, 2011. The deadline for participation was March 20, 2011. Both the invitation and the web-based survey were prepared in three languages (English, French, and German). The participants were assured that we would treat their answers anonymously. The survey consisted of four blocks, containing in total 21 questions. The first block covered biographical information on scientific background, including questions on years in research, countries and periods of expertise, disciplinary training, and experience with cross-disciplinary research (history/social sciences only). The second block consisted of questions addressing general perceptions of social science research. The following questions were asked:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please rate from 1 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree).

Q7 Social scientists’ historical knowledge is generally very good.

Q8 In general, social science research pays sufficient attention to the historical dimension of political and social developments.

Q9 In general, social scientists take historians and their research seriously.

Q11 Social scientists are generally more interested in defending their theories than in analyzing actual historical developments.

Q12 Social scientists often draw facts from historically grounded accounts and then use them for timeless propositions.

The third block was introduced by a short description of the debate on electoral system choice. Subsequently, the participants were shown summaries of the three arguments (see below). The three summaries were sent to the authors for comments and approval. After minor revisions they accepted the summaries as correct and fair representations of their arguments. Finally, the participants were asked the following five questions for each of their countries of expertise (i.e. this sequences of questions was asked more than once if the participant selected more than one country of expertise):

Q12 Does the argument by Blais et al. (2005) regarding the spread of democracy and the role of previous electoral institutions explain the presence or absence of electoral system change in [selected country]? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options ranged from 1 (does not explain at all the presence or absence of electoral system change) to 10 (fully explains the presence or absence of electoral system change) with the additional option of 'I don't know'.

Q13 Does the argument by Boix (1999, 2010) regarding the 'socialist threat' to established parties explain the presence or absence of electoral system change in [selected country]? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options ranged from 1 (does not explain at all the presence or absence of electoral system change) to 10 (fully explains the presence or absence of electoral system change) with the additional option of 'I don't know'.

Q14 Does the argument by Cusack et al. (2007, 2010) regarding the level of coordination between different group interests (see below for a summary) explain the presence or absence of electoral system change in [selected country]? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options ranged from 1 (does not explain at all the presence or absence of electoral system change) to 10 (fully explains the presence or absence of electoral system change) with the additional option of 'I don't know'.

Q15 At the climax of the debate about the adoption of proportional representation in the period 1890 to 1939, did most major political actors agree on adopting/not adopting proportional representation in [selected country]? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) widespread consensus; (2) some major political actors disagreed with the majority opinion; (3) widespread conflict among the political actors; (4) I don't know.

Q16 At the climax of the debate about the adoption of proportional representation in the period 1890 to 1939, did the political left generally support the adoption of proportional representation in [selected country]? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) the political left supported the adoption of PR; (2) the political left mostly supported the adoption of PR; (3) the political left neither supported nor opposed the adoption of PR; (4) the political left mostly opposed the adoption of PR; (5) the political left opposed the adoption of PR; (6) I don't know.

In each case, the participants had the opportunity to complement their answers with written comments.

The final block of the survey consisted of five questions on how to conduct research on historical developments. As in the previous block, the participants had the opportunity to complement their answers with written comments. The five questions are as follows:

Q17 Some of the social scientists (political scientists and sociologists) contributing to the debate on electoral system change in the period 1890-1939 disagree on historical facts. Some argue that there was conflict between parties on the issue of electoral system choice in a given country, some argue that there was none. Are we in general able to give clear answers to such questions for a given country? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) always; (2) almost always; (3) sometimes yes, sometimes not; (4) almost never; (5) never.

Q18 The social scientists contributing to this debate work with approximately 20 countries in order to develop a general argument about electoral system choice. They argue that if their argument is correct for most of these 20 countries, then it should be considered a general explanation for all 20 countries. This means that even for countries for which the explanation is not correct, the argument should be considered an important part of the specific national explanation. Do you think that this is a reasonable way of studying historical developments? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) always; (2) almost always; (3) sometimes yes, sometimes not; (4) almost never; (5) never.

Q19 Some social scientists advocate a quantitative approach to historical developments. These scholars argue that researchers should not focus on countries but rather on 'variables'. In particular, they argue that social scientists should develop indicators measuring the 'spread of democracy' in the neighbouring countries (Blais et al.), the level of a 'socialist threat' to the established parties (Boix) or the level of 'coordination between different group interests' (Cusack et al.) and test whether these variables are systematically associated with the outcome of interest (here electoral system choice). Can this quantitative approach contribute to the explanation of historical developments? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) always; (2) almost always; (3) sometimes yes, sometimes not; (4) almost never; (5) never.

Q20 Does it make sense to look for explanations that can be generalized to more than one country (e.g. in the analysis of historical events or developments)? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) always; (2) almost always; (3) sometimes yes, sometimes not; (4) almost never; (5) never.

Q21 How much can we learn about our country of expertise by comparing it with other countries and the development of our outcome of interest (e.g. electoral system change) in these countries? (*only one answer possible*)

Answer options: (1) we can learn a lot; (2) we can learn quite a lot; (3) we can occasionally learn something; (4) we can rarely learn anything; (5) we can never learn anything.

We were unable to find a contact address for 20 of the 300 nominated experts, giving us a total of 280 experts with correct contact details. 146 experts did not accept our invitation to participate in the survey, giving us a response rate of 47.9 percent. The remaining 134 experts participated in the survey, but not all of them finalized the survey. We have a complete set of answers from 66 participants (23.6 percent). Due to multiple countries of expertise, we have 88 sets of answers in block 3 of our survey (evaluation of explanations). Here are the responses per country:

Nine complete sets of answers for: Finland and Great Britain.

Eight complete sets of answers for: France.

Seven complete sets of answers for: Norway and the United States of America.

Six complete sets of answers for: Germany and New Zealand.

Five complete sets of answers for: Belgium and Denmark.

Four complete sets of answers for: Netherlands

Three complete sets of answers for: Austria, Greece, Italy and Switzerland

Two complete sets of answers for: Australia, Canada, Japan and Spain

One complete set of answers for: Ireland and Sweden.

As regards incomplete sets of answers, most participants stop at the beginning of block 3 of the survey (evaluation of explanations). Judging from the written feedback that we received from those that did not finalize the survey, the main problem seems to have been that the experts did not feel qualified enough to evaluate the three explanations. In total, we consider the number of complete sets of answers (66) and the number of evaluations of explanations (88) to be high given the very specialized topic and the amount of time being used for answering the complete survey.

Summaries of the three arguments:

Argument 1 (Blais et al. 2005):

Blais et al. highlight two factors facilitating the shift to PR: (1) the spread of democratic ideas and (2) the presence of a majority run-off electoral system (in contrast to a plurality electoral system).

In the period 1865 to 1938, a period of democratization in many countries, the idea that each individual should have one vote and that each vote should count the same gained enormous ground. “From that perspective democracy and PR appeared to dovetail each other. PR came to be regarded as the fairest system” (p. 182) and the most ‘democratic’ electoral system. As a consequence, PR was adopted in many countries without much debate.

Blais et al. then ask why politicians in some countries nonetheless reacted less favourably to, or were better positioned to resist the public demand for PR. They argue that the decision to adopt PR was dependent on the existing electoral institutions. Most importantly, they maintain that “politicians’ reactions and positions were contingent on whether the choice was between a plurality system and PR or a majority system and PR” (p. 184).

Compared to plurality systems, majority systems lead to a higher number of parties. The reason for this is strategic voting. In plurality systems, all voters converge on the two biggest parties because the party that gets the most votes (the plurality of votes) wins. In contrast, in majority systems, which involve two or more rounds of voting, a majority (not just a plurality) of the votes is needed. As a consequence, voters have a weaker incentive to vote for one of the two biggest parties. In majority systems, party systems are more fragmented and this often leads to coalition governments.

The adoption of PR is more likely in majority systems because fragmented party systems, the regular occurrence of coalition governments, and the greater uncertainty as to the optimal strategies for winning elections, due to the greater number of parties. “As a consequence, governing parties in these countries offered little resistance to the widespread push for PR that was taking place at the time” (p.190).

“Although majority systems allow legislative representation for more parties than plurality systems, it is nevertheless the case that majority systems lead to a high degree of disproportionality. The minor, electorally disadvantaged, coalition parties are therefore likely to favour the adoption of PR and to make a strong case for it on grounds of fairness.” (p. 185).

Argument 2 (Boix 1999, 2010):

Until the turn of the twentieth century, parliamentary seats were using plurality or majoritarian rules everywhere. Given the strategic or coordination properties of those rules (resulting in high entry barriers to new parties), the existing parties (mainly, conservative, liberal or Christian democratic) had strong incentives to maintain them.

However, the gradual decision of trade unions to shift their support from liberal or progressive parties to strictly social democratic parties pushed electoral reform and the adoption of proportional representation (PR) to the forefront of the political agenda of non-socialist parties (and many socialist parties as well) in all countries (except those where socialist parties were small or did not exist).

Non-socialist parties favored PR if they felt that the emergence of a social democratic party threatened their electoral viability in the future. That threat was as a function of: (1) the type of electoral market (segmented versus competitive) in which the old parties competed with each other; and (2) the extent to which the old parties shared voters with the new socialist party.

In segmented electoral arenas (those where the support of a particular party is highly concentrated in a particular geographic area or social sector), the old parties favored PR if the new entrant (generally a

social democratic party) threatened their electoral hegemony: mainly urban parties. Otherwise they did not support PR.

In more competitive electoral arenas (those where several parties contend for the vote of at least some fraction of the electorate), the position of the established parties was shaped by the extent to which they were dominant in the electoral arena vis-à-vis the other old parties conditional on the entry of third parties. The party that expected to become the focal point around which non-socialist voters would eventually coordinate had little incentive to support PR. By contrast, those old parties that could not expect to become the dominant non-socialist party preferred PR.

Argument 3 (Cusack et al. 2007, 2010):

“Countries that chose proportional representation electoral systems in the early twentieth century were those [...] that had historically had relatively negotiated forms of political decision making. [...] In these societies, [...], the nineteenth-century state and policy-making systems emerged out of Ständestaat traditions. They comprised densely institutionalized local and regional economies. Within these subnational communities [...] local decision making involved consensus-based negotiation and bargaining so that different group interests (except those without possessions) could be effectively represented. This allowed the solution of collective action problems, as well as the safe creation of cospecific assets with local and regional economic networks” (2010, p. 395).

“In these countries, a majoritarian electoral system worked adequately at the national level through much of the nineteenth century. Constituencies were represented in national politics by local notables elected by plurality and often unopposed. With economic interests generally geographically defined, these provided for their more or less proportional representation” (2010, p. 395).

“By the end of the nineteenth century, however, industrialization, urbanization, and the growth of the working class had made this majoritarian system of national representation increasingly disproportional [...]. At the same time, economic networks and regulatory legislation were becoming increasingly national to reflect the accelerating growth of industrialization” (2010, p. 406).

This presented major problems for representative political parties “closely connected with organized interest groups representing important economic sectors of society” (2010, p. 397). This included confessional parties, which served as “negotiating communities” for many different economic groups. Consequently, PR was adopted in order to restore the proportional representation of all important economic interests. “Interest-carrying parties needed to preserve their identity to be able to continue to represent their interests at the national level. The transition to PR was a means to restore a negotiation-based political system in which different economic interests were effectively represented by parties. To do this, there was no obvious alternative to PR” (2010, p. 395). For the very same reasons, PR “was supported across the party spectrum” (2010, p. 395).

It is important to add that this argument pertains to the choice of electoral systems once the transition to democracy had been completed. Before then, calls for PR were often tied to calls for democracy, which were of course resisted by the political right. “[O]ur argument is about the relationship between party organization and electoral competition once reasonably democratic conditions had been met in the early 1920s” (2010, p. 397).

References

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