

WORLD OPINION

ACCOUNTABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

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As the world continues with the current wave of democratization, much attention is being devoted to identifying the optimum conditions under which effective and stable democracy can flourish. What sort of electoral arrangements best serve popular representation? How do the electoral choices available to voters influence their satisfaction with democracy? And what sort of systems promote effective and balanced participation from their citizens? These and a host of other questions are at the heart of the democratic experiment. Providing answers to these questions will help us to establish the legitimacy of the democratic process in the new democracies.

Since 1996, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project has existed explicitly to address these questions. The CSES is a comparative project that has been designed to enable the systematic analysis of electoral behavior under varying institutional conditions. The CSES coordinates the operation of more than 50 national election studies across the world, thereby ensuring that the information about citizens' behavior and attitudes gathered in each country is strictly comparable. The CSES also collects information about the political institutions in each participating country, again in a directly comparable format. The resulting database provides a unique snapshot—cross-nationally, and at the macro- and micro-levels—of all the potential factors that influence political behavior and beliefs.

The first round of CSES data collection (Module 1), completed in 2001 in 33 nations, focused on system performance. Specific questions that were included in the module examined the impact of constitutional and electoral systems on democratic performance and stability (e.g. Lijphart, 1999; Powell, 1982; Cox, 2002), the social cleavages underpinning party systems (e.g., Evans, 1999; Franklin, Mackie, & Valen 1992), and attitudes toward parties, political institutions, and the democratic process more generally (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Module 2, which will be completed early in 2006, is expected to include more than 50 countries, and focuses on accountability and representation, and political participation. Module 3, which is currently being planned, is

expected to examine the choices open to voters in elections. This report provides some preliminary results from the countries included in Module 2.¹

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATION

Notions of accountability and representation are the very heart of the democratic process. One major theme in democratic theory is that elections are a mechanism by which citizens can hold a government accountable for its decisions; without this essential link, the public would be unable to ensure the proper performance of the office-holders who act on their behalf. Another prominent theme in democratic theory is that the function of elections are a means to ensure that the public's views are properly represented in the democratic process. In this interpretation, the best mechanism for holding government to account is to ensure the openness of the electoral process through effective and representative electoral institutions (Powell, 2001; Przeworski, Stokes, & Manin, 1999).

These two views of how elections should function are not mutually exclusive. Elections certainly can incorporate accountability and representation functions simultaneously, although some scholars have pointed out that they are sometimes difficult to reconcile, not least because judgments about government performance must often be made retrospectively (Samuels & Shugart, 2003). One purpose of the CSES's Module 2 is to test the hypothesis that the logic behind these two views may have their origins in the institutional structure of the elections themselves, and in how they are conducted. In particular, the differing consequences of majoritarian as against proportional election systems have been emphasized, as well as the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems (Stepan & Skach, 1994).

Based on the 15 countries included in the preliminary release of Module 2, Table 1 shows, in the first two columns, considerable country variations in the proportions of voters who hold differing views of accountability. Hungarian, Swedish, and Israeli voters are most likely to believe that voting makes a difference while, at the other end of the scale, German, Czech and Polish voters are most likely to take a contrary view. This general pattern is replicated with regard to views about whoever is in power making a difference. Indeed, as we would expect, there is a strong correlation between the two items ($r = .46, p < .000$).

The remaining two columns in Table 1 examine beliefs about representation, and show the proportion of respondents who believe that elections are effective in representing voters' views, and who say that there is a major party in their country which represents their views. Once again, there are significant variations between the 15 countries. French and Swiss voters are most likely to endorse the

¹ The survey modules may be viewed and downloaded on the CSES website at <http://www.cses.org/>

TABLE I Beliefs about accountability and representation in 15 nations

	<i>Voting makes a difference (%)</i>	<i>Who is in power makes a difference (%)</i>	<i>Elections represent voters' views (%)</i>	<i>Parties represent voters (%)</i>
Bulgaria	61	65	52	46
Czech Republic	48	57	28	78
France	62	42	61	58
Germany	46	35	40	69
Hungary	81	77	52	73
Ireland	69	55	65	78
Israel	80	76	47	68
Mexico	60	54	47	48
New Zealand	68	59	55	80
Norway	66	52	na	82
Poland	49	61	49	40
Portugal	59	59	38	56
Sweden	81	76	58	78
Switzerland	70	65	59	87
Taiwan	62	57	51	37

Question wording: 'Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any difference to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a difference to what happens. Using the scale on this card, (where ONE means that voting won't make a difference to what happens and FIVE means that voting can make a difference), where would you place yourself?' 'Some people say it makes a difference who is in power. Others say that it doesn't make a difference who is in power. Using the scale on this card, (where ONE means that it makes a difference who is in power and FIVE means that it doesn't make a difference who is in power), where would you place yourself?' 'Thinking about how elections in [country] work in practice, how well do elections ensure that the views of voters are represented by majority parties: very well, quite well, not very well, or not well at all?' 'Would you say that any of the parties in [country] represents your views reasonably well?'

Source: CSES Module 2, preliminary release.

importance of elections, with Czechs notably less supportive of this view. In general, more see a major party existing that represents their views than who do not, but again, only about half of Taiwanese and Polish voters take this view, compared to their Norwegian and New Zealand counterparts, who emerge at the top of the scale.

Clearly, public beliefs about the accountability of governments and the effectiveness of electoral representation are a consequence of many things, not least the democratic experience and stability of the country in question, and its level of economic development. But one of the persistent contentions in political science is that electoral rules also matter, and that the way in which elections are conducted can shape public beliefs about accountability and representation. In particular, we would hypothesize that the degree of electoral choice afforded to voters through the electoral rules, reflected in voters' freedom to choose particular candidates, will shape public beliefs.

To test this hypothesis, the 15 countries are assigned a score based on the degree of freedom given to voters in their choice of candidate, with closed list systems such as those found in Israel and Bulgaria affording least choice, and preferential systems, such as the single transferable vote (STV) system used in Ireland, providing most choice.² Classifying the 15 countries according to the distribution of candidate choice afforded by the electoral system and the public's views of representation provides support for the hypothesis. The correlation between the two items is $r = .153$ ($p < .000$), showing a significant if modest relationship.

These results suggest that the electoral system does matter in shaping beliefs about representation. But the results also support Norris's (2004, p. 22) view that while electoral engineering is important, other things, such as 'deep-seated and habitual patterns of behavior' may matter even more. By contrast, there is no statistically significant relationship between accountability and candidate choice ($r = .010$, $p = .123$); whatever voters think about the degree of choice that is offered to them by the electoral system, it does not affect how they expect to hold a government to account.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

A second purpose of Module 2 of the CSES is to address questions of engagement and participation in politics. Extensive cross-national evidence points to decreasing turnout and campaign activity in almost all of the advanced industrial democracies, regardless of the type of electoral institutions in question or the longevity of the system (Blais, 2000; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Franklin, 2004). However, an important qualification to this view is that voters may simply be channelling their participation into other, less conventional, and more innovative ways of exerting political influence (Norris, 2002). An additional problem in the emerging democracies is the related challenge of engaging their citizens in what to them is a new and unfamiliar process (White & McAllister, 1998).

With these trends in mind, Module 2 includes a range of items measuring participation in elections, engagement in politics, and knowledge about public affairs. Combined with the wide variations that exist in the numbers of parties, the types of electoral systems, and the constitutional designs that exist between countries, the data permit a systematic analysis to be made of how institutional arrangements influence and shape citizens' participation in the democratic process.

By any standards, there are wide variations in patterns of electoral engagement across the 15 countries. Table 2 shows that the self-reported vote (which is generally over-estimated) varies from a low of 58 percent in Poland, to a reported

² The logic behind the scores is outlined in Farrell and McAllister (2005, ch. 6).

TABLE 2 Patterns of electoral engagement in 15 nations

	<i>Voted (%)</i>	<i>Engaged in campaign activity (%)</i>	<i>Persuaded others how to vote (%)</i>	<i>Contact with candidate (%)</i>
Bulgaria	79	6	7	8
Czech Republic	74	20	26	30
France	79	7	29	7
Germany	94	7	28	13
Hungary	83	10	15	8
Ireland	85	9	13	56
Israel	89	11	32	18
Mexico	72	13	9	18
New Zealand	84	7	na	22
Norway	83	7	18	15
Poland	58	4	7	6
Portugal	76	7	10	16
Sweden	88	3	13	7
Switzerland	74	7	16	18
Taiwan	82	8	16	73

Question wording: 'Here is a list of things some people do during elections. Which if any did you do during the most recent election? . . . showed your support for a particular party or candidate by, for example, attending a meeting, putting up a poster, or in some other way? . . . talked to other people to persuade them to vote for particular party or candidate?' 'During the last campaign did a candidate or anyone from a political party contact you to persuade you to vote for them?'

Source: CSES Module 2, preliminary release.

94 percent in Germany. The proportion of voters who say that they engage in some form of campaign activity during the election is generally small, though one in five voters in the Czech Republic report such activity, as do 13 percent of Mexican voters and 11 percent of Israelis. Least politically active, based on these surveys, are the Swedish (3 percent) and the Polish (4 percent).

Persuading others how to vote is generally seen as a good indicator of political engagement, and again there are wide variations across the countries.³ Almost one in three Israelis report such activity, as do 29 percent of the French and 28 percent of the German respondents. By contrast, only 7 percent each of Bulgarians and Poles said that they did this—presumably a legacy of their communist past, when political discussion was potentially dangerous and could only take place within strict limits. There are even wider variations based on who said that they had contact with an election candidate. Obviously such contact is partly a function of such factors as the size of the legislature relative to the population, and the number of competing parties. Nevertheless, the fact that 73 percent of

³ The question was not asked in New Zealand.

Taiwanese voters and 56 percent of Irish voters reported contact with an election candidate underscores the strongly personalistic nature of their political systems.

SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

The extent to which differing electoral arrangements can lead to popular satisfaction with democracy—and hence greater stability—has been widely analyzed. In his *Patterns of Democracy* (1999), Arend Lijphart provides detailed evidence, using aggregate and survey data, to argue that proportional representation systems promote citizen satisfaction with democracy. This conclusion has been supported by Anderson and Guillory (1997), using Eurobarometer data. Others, however, have questioned this conclusion. Norris (1999: 233), for example, using a wider set of cases based on World Values data, is more equivocal: If anything, ‘majoritarian institutions tended to produce greater institutional confidence than consociational arrangements’.

Again, the CSES data includes a measure of democratic satisfaction, which can be related to electoral institutions.⁴ By any standards, Table 3 reveals considerable cross-national variations in the levels of satisfaction with democracy across

TABLE 3 Satisfaction with democracy

	<i>Very satisfied</i>	<i>Fairly satisfied</i>	<i>Not very satisfied</i>	<i>Not at all satisfied</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>(N)</i>
Bulgaria	4	17	38	41	100	(1,322)
Czech Republic	2	44	44	10	100	(860)
France	7	49	32	12	100	(988)
Germany	5	46	38	11	100	(1,922)
Hungary	6	41	39	14	100	(1,177)
Ireland	11	71	15	3	100	(2,347)
Israel	16	20	29	25	100	(1,184)
Mexico	5	29	41	25	100	(1,904)
New Zealand	9	60	24	7	100	(1,572)
Norway	13	65	19	3	100	(2,017)
Poland	4	36	43	17	100	(1,593)
Portugal	6	47	32	15	100	(1,299)
Sweden	9	67	23	0	100	(1,042)
Switzerland	10	67	21	2	100	(1,395)
Taiwan	4	64	28	4	100	(1,743)

Question wording: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?’

Source: CSES Module 2, preliminary release.

⁴ This question is considered a ‘core’ measure, and is therefore replicated in each module, permitting over time as well as cross-national comparisons.

the 15 countries. In general, the most satisfied citizens are those who live in the established democracies, such as Ireland, Norway, and Sweden. Those who are least satisfied based on these data are the Bulgarians, Mexicans, and Poles. Indeed, more than four in every 10 Bulgarians report that they are 'not at all satisfied' with how democracy works in their country, and only 4 percent say that they are 'very satisfied'.

To what extent is popular satisfaction with democracy related to the type of electoral institutions that exist in the country? And more particularly, do electoral institutions remain important when we take into account the public's beliefs about accountability and representation, and their level of political participation? These hypotheses are tested in Table 4, which presents the results of two regression equations predicting satisfaction with democracy across the 15 nations. The first equation predicts satisfaction from the degree of choice that is available in the country's electoral arrangements, while the second equation controls for beliefs about accountability and representation, and patterns of political participation.

The results show that electoral arrangements remain important in both equations, and the inclusion of accountability, representation, and participation in the second equation causes only a small reduction in the magnitude of the effect. Taking the partial coefficient of $b=0.15$ for electoral institutions in the second equation, this suggests that each extra one point increase (on a scale of 0–10) in the choice afforded to voters by the electoral institutions will increase the level of democratic satisfaction by 0.15 of a point, again on a scale of 0–10, net of other things. So if we were to compare Bulgaria, which allows its voters least choice, with Ireland, which has maximum choice, then the difference in public satisfaction

TABLE 4 Satisfaction with democracy and electoral institutions

	<i>Equation 1</i>		<i>Equation 2</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>
Electoral institutions	.19*	.18*	.15*	.14*
Representation	—	—	.28*	.26*
Accountability	—	—	.05*	.06*
Electoral participation	—	—	.01	.01
Constant	4.30		2.52	
Adj <i>R</i> -squared	.03		.11	
(N)	(23,590)		(23,590)	

* statistically significant at $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Note: Ordinary least squares regression equations predicting satisfaction with democracy, coded from zero (not at all satisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). The other three measures are scored from zero to 10 and combine the items listed in the preceding tables.

Source: CSES Module 2, preliminary release.

attributed solely to the electoral system would be around 1.5 points on a 10-point scale.

In addition to electoral institutions, the results in Table 4 also show that public beliefs about representation are important—indeed, they are about twice as important as electoral institutions. So satisfaction with democracy is primarily a matter of how people feel about how well they are represented. Popular notions of accountability exert a statistically significant influence on satisfaction, although of lesser importance than either the country's electoral institutions, or beliefs about representation. The level of popular participation in politics is not a statistically significant influence on satisfaction.

Electoral institutions therefore matter in determining how citizens view the political system. In the new democracies, the influence of electoral institutions is enhanced because they are the central institutional design issue for a new polity to resolve (Taagepera, 2002). For old and new democracies alike, they are also among the most malleable of the political institutions, and easier to alter than institutions—such as presidentialism and parliamentarism—that are constitutionally embedded. As the CSES project develops, and more data become available across a wider range of countries, we will be able to find out much more about the role of electoral institutions in shaping democratic stability.

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