POSC 261 Comparative Political Parties and Elections   Spring Term 2010

The Electoral Datasets Project

Overview

The purpose of this assignment is train students in the operationalization of key quantitative variables for measuring several major dimensions of political party systems, electoral rules, and mass electoral behavior. The analytical dimensions under study will refer to variables that are the focus of study in the state-of-the-art on comparative party and electoral systems across the world. Variables such as disproportionality of parliamentary seat shares, effective number of political parties, and the dispersion of voting patterns by party and geographic region within each country, are examples of quantified variables in the comparative institutions literature.

Following the study of these dimensions in the order on the syllabus, students are asked to acquire measures for a fixed set of countries during a six-week period of the term. Each student will find data for each country and report that data in two forms: (a) for a cross-sectional dataset in which countries are the unit of analysis and all data is pooled across a period of time (e.g., 1990-2006) and (b) a time-series cross-sectional analysis (TSCS) that breaks down data into records for each country-year. (Students will be trained to interpolate data arrays for certain variables with trended characteristics).

The dataset that results from this extended period of collective research will then be used in a data analysis component (see the handout on the Statistical Analysis Project).

Schedule

Week 1: Constitutional Division of Power

        Students will collect data for the country set on constitutional structure (e.g., presidential, premier-presidential, parliamentary), number of institutional veto players (Tsebelis 1995), major characteristics of chief executives (e.g., retention of decree powers, levels of proactivity, term lengths), and dynamics of presidential and legislative elections (e.g., concurrent timing or staggered elections, upper- and lower-chamber electoral and seat allocation formulas including the Gallagher index of disproportionality).

Week 2: Electoral Systems

        Students will collect data for the country set on the characteristics of the electoral laws in each case. The focus will be on electoral formulas (e.g., proportional representation, plurality, transferrable and non-transferrable vote systems and their variants), thresholds, district magnitude, ballot structures, and the Carey-Shugart ordinal scale for incentives to cultivate a personal vote).

Week 3: Party Systems – Part I (Effective Number)

Students will collect data on effective number of parties and calculate the score for each country using the Laakso-Taagepera formula. This requires a comparison of seat shares by party in several elections. Therefore, it will include a substantial amount of gathering of legislative electoral data in the country set.

Week 4: Party Systems – Party IV (Nationalization of Parties)

Students will use the Jones-Mainwaring equation to calculate the geographic dispersion of the vote per party, per election in the country set. This operation will build a subnational dimension into the *national* electoral data collected in the previous week.

Week 5: Party Systems – Part III (Cabinets and Legislative Characteristics)

Depending on the availability of the data, students will pool results from datasets on cabinet structures, legislative rules and voting behavior, to code major dimensions of cabinet and legislative characteristics in the country set.

Week 6: Mass Behavior

As a first-cut introduction to the literature on mass behavior, the students will gather data on major indicators of country-level partisanship levels, party identification, and strategic voting to be gleaned from the CSES and World Values Survey (WVS) datasets.

Data Sources

In a collaborative venture with Kristin Partlo, Social Science Librarian, Prof. Montero keeps an annotated list of data sources, including electoral sources on a single webpage: http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/find/guides/subject/?guide_id=166560

These data are to be supplemented by major new datasets that are currently available either on-line or on CD-Roms in the library or Prof. Montero's office:

Dawn Brancati's Constituency –Level Elections dataset (www.cle.wustl.edu); Daniele Caramani's Elections in Western Europe since 1815 (district-level) dataset; elections in Latin America, maintained by IADB and Dieter Nohlen; and statistical yearbooks, including the *Europa* series.

These mention only the most prominent, but students will be asked to look at several and to make a collective decision on the fewest, most complete sources, to minimize source bias.