



European Elections in Focus

Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral
Democracy in the European Union

Introduction: The European Union and Electoral Democracy

Elections are one of the primary instruments of democracy and one of the biggest exercises in democracy occurs with elections to the European Parliament at which over 375 million citizens are eligible to participate. These elections offer an unprecedented opportunity to study the functioning of electoral democracy in general and the functioning of European democracy in particular. Scientific evaluations of electoral processes at the EU level have been hampered until now by the lack of co-ordination in the collection of empirical information on which such evaluations are based. Under the auspices of the EU funded project “Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union” (PIREDEU), it has been possible to conduct a study that has produced data of the type that is required to allow researchers to address fundamental questions about the representative, accountability and legitimacy functions of electoral processes.

The PIREDEU project has demonstrated both the technical feasibility and scientific impact of such a data collection effort. A feasibility study involving 27 countries and conducted at the time of the 2009 elections to the European Parliament, PIREDEU coordinated the collection of five empirical data sets. Data were gathered on the attitudes and behaviour of some 27,000 EU citizens, campaign strategies and issues agendas for 1,350 European Parliamentary candidates, issue priorities and positions in 200 party manifestos, campaign news coverage in 140 media outlets and contextual indicators about the political and economic systems of all 27 EU member countries.

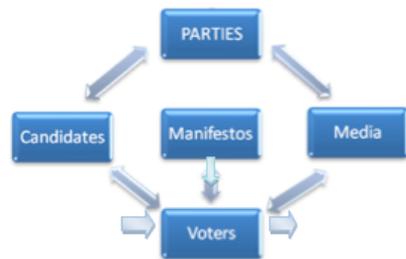
Scientific Impact – More than 1006 users have accessed the data on the PIREDEU website. There are currently 22 published papers and 54 working papers that use the PIREDEU data. In many cases, the publications and papers use more than one of the empirical data sets.

Technical Feasibility – Common coding categories for the separate study components facilitate linking the different data components of the study together.

Permanent Infrastructure – In order to ensure continued monitoring of electoral democracy in the EU, there is an urgent need for the establishment of an infrastructure for European electoral research endowed with stable funding and capable of compiling, linking, disseminating, and presenting data in a co-ordinated and professional fashion.

European Elections in Focus

Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union



*2009 European Election Study –
Data Set Linkages*

European Election Studies

The European Election Studies are about electoral participation and voting behaviour in European Parliament elections, but they are also more than that. They are also concerned with the evolution of the political community in the EU and the development of a European public sphere, with citizens' perceptions of and preferences about the EU political regime, and with their evaluations of EU political performance.

The project of European Election Study was started in 1979 by a trans-national group of electoral researchers and Europeanists some of whom are still on board. Between 1979 and 2004, six election studies were prepared and five of these studies were realized with the collection of data surrounding the period the election. The only year in which a large-scale survey was not conducted was 1985. In 2004 when national study directors - rather than the international research group - funded and conducted the study in 24 of the 25 EU member-countries. Some of the activities of the EES 2004 were supported by CONNEX, a network of excellence funded by the European Commission under the 6th framework programme. The design study PIREDEU under the 7th framework programme brought back central control for the study of the 2009 elections, but in a collaborative framework that greatly increased the number and national diversity of researchers involved.

History of the European Election Studies:

- European Election Studies have been conducted since 1979.
- EES have delivered data on public opinion attitudes and behaviour, as well as elite messages (party manifestos), campaigning and issue agendas of candidates, media news content.
- EES incorporated the most essential information required for the scrutiny and monitoring of any relevant aspects to the EU electoral process.
- EES provided the basis for creating a permanent infrastructure for conducting research into electoral democracy in the EU, becoming more than a simple data collection effort.
- All European Election Studies, except for the 1984 EES, have included a post-election voter survey. Other surveys, e.g. candidate survey, have been conducted as was found possible.
- Until 2009, European Election Studies remained ad hoc without the infrastructural support that would facilitate cross-national and over-time comparisons of the data.



2009 European Election Study & PIREDEU Project – Infrastructure for Integrated Electoral Research Data

This study aimed at designing an infrastructure for research into citizenship, political participation, and electoral democracy in the EU. The proposed infrastructure consists of a comprehensive empirical database which will endow our user community with the most essential information required to conduct a regular ‘audit’ that would monitor/ scrutinise all relevant aspects of the electoral process in the European Union. The infrastructure also constitutes an organizational network that is able to coordinate different data collection activities, so that an integrated database can be created. This database has been so designed as to be accessible not only to academic researchers but also to politicians, political parties, journalists, commercial interests, and even members of civil society.

This project brought together a large network of scholars interested in attitudes, preferences, cognitions and behaviours of the main actors involved in processes of electoral participation: voters, parties, politicians and the media. In contrast to previous studies that had been unable to produce fully integrated data from the separate research projects involved, mainly because of the lack of any formal organisational network to coordinate the

activities of the different research projects, the PIREDEU project set out to design an integrated database encompassing not only voter surveys, but also candidate surveys, media studies, and collections of public record data (including party manifestos) pertaining to the conduct and outcome of the European Parliament elections which are the primary objects of our interest and concern. For members of the academic community, the resulting prototype database has created unprecedented opportunities for cross-national research on electoral representation and behaviour, the role of the media, the emergence and transformation of party systems, and democratisation. It has enhanced the attractiveness of Europe as an object of study and as an environment for comparative social science research. It also holds the potential, for other stakeholders, of opening a window onto processes of electoral democracy that have hitherto remained academic and obscure.

The 2009 European Election study (EES) is one of the most comprehensive, rigorous and relevant data collection projects for students of public opinion, party competition and media reporting in Europe. The fact that the EES combines data on voters, parties and the media allows researchers to make inferences about the way in which the political and media context moderates the stances and behavior of voters and parties on a variety of topics, most notably European integration. What is more, the EES provides important insights into the campaign dynamics and outcomes of the most recent elections to the European Parliament.

-Professor Catherine de Vries, Oxford University



Why is an Infrastructure Needed?

Some may question why such an extensive effort at data collection, integration and harmonization is needed. Elections are crucial instruments of popular control, elite accountability, and representation; therefore, the quality of democratic governance depends to a large extent on electoral processes. At the EU level, democratic rules and procedures

are not yet so well established as in most of the EU member states, and the institutions of multi-level governance undergo frequent reforms. 'Auditing' the quality of the electoral process at the EU-level is therefore essential. The conduct of such 'audits' at national level already constitute an established practice in non-European countries such as the US, Canada and Australia, and also in some European countries such as the Netherlands, the UK, Italy, Ireland, and Norway. Their aim is to assess the processes of electoral democracy, detecting challenges to the quality of these processes.

In order to 'audit' the democratic process at European level, the relationships between the behaviour of the three main actors involved need to be investigated: the parties and their candidates for electoral office, the mass media, and the electorate. Due to the ephemeral character of human memory, relevant survey data need to be collected at the time of elections to the European Parliament. The content of news media outlets also needs to be monitored while an election is in progress or the information will be lost. Furthermore, data that is ostensibly part of the public record, relating to the programmatic promises of political parties and to the numerical outcomes of European Parliament elections at the national and regional levels, have in the past proved hard to amass once the election was over.

The data collected as part of an infrastructure of this kind needs to be compiled in such a way as to permit not only linkages between all the elements of the infrastructure but also with other data relating to electoral democracy – e.g. public records of European Parliament debates, European legislative outputs, data collected by other mass and elite surveys at the national and European levels. Procedures we developed for linking the data held in the infrastructure itself do, as far as possible, permit these additional linkages to be made and, above all, permit the infrastructure to be extended to incorporate data collected at the time of future European Parliament elections. As far as possible these procedures also permit the integration of whatever data may exist that was collected at the time of past EP elections.



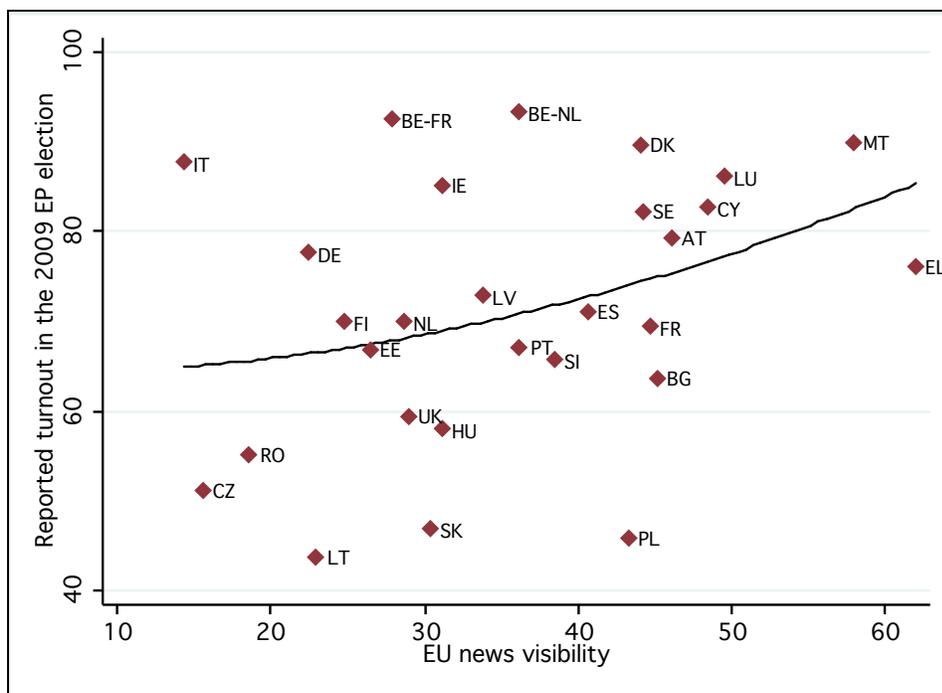
PIREDEU data offer a collection of highly-standardized measures of individual characteristics that convey a unique potential to observe cross-context variation of individual attitudes and of their effect on people's preferences. This, matched with the amount of precious information at the party, media and contextual level, offers a tremendous opportunity to investigate innovative research questions in the European context.

--Federico Vegetti, PhD Candidate, Political Science, former ELECDEM Early Stage Researcher, University of Manheim

■ Added Value of the Infrastructure

The added value of the proposed infrastructure is that it is designed to permit access to data in EP elections in an integrated fashion, thus complementing a number of existing cross-country comparative data collections, none of which is well-suited to audit the behaviour of the main actors involved in European elections. It is innovative in that it will provide an integrated database where data on attitudes and behaviour of voters are linked to data about parties and their candidates, the media stories that actors are exposed to, and the political and economic context in which all these actors operate. Linking and integrating data in this way is highly complex: no cross-country comparative study has yet created an integrated dataset of this magnitude even for a single election – much less for a series of elections.

Linking data about voters and media, for example, has a great number of implications. The figure below shows just one of them. It demonstrates the relationship between country-level visibility of news about the EU in the media and reported country-level turnout in the 2009 European Elections across the EU member-countries. It clearly shows that the turnout is higher in countries with more EU news in the media. For example, the reported turnout at the 2009 European Elections was 51% in the Czech Republic where only about 15.5% of news on main evening television newscasts and in newspapers monitored by the Media Study during the election campaign was about the EU, whereas 90% respondents reportedly vote in Malta where 58% of the news during the campaign were about the EU.



■ Adding Scientific Value to the Study of Elections

In order to create an integrated infrastructure, it was necessary to develop and implement a conceptual map that allowed comparison of key concepts of the study of electoral democracy measured across the different data components (party manifestoes, media content, voter survey and candidate survey). This conceptual map was based on a review of components of past election studies conducted since the first European Election Study in 1979 and permitted the establishment of measurement instruments in each component that would be as close as possible to those in each of the other components.

The Table below contains the core concepts that were included across as many as possible of the four data collection instruments of the 2009 European Election Study. It is not a complete list of all items included in each of the questionnaires/coding schemes, since many of these concepts were tapped in practice by multiple measurements (for example multiple survey questions).

Core Conceptual Map and Availability in Data Sets

Concept	Voter	Media	Candidate	Party Manifesto
1. Voting: Party choice & turnout	X	X	X	X
1. Party ID	X	X	X	X
1. Engagement and mobilization	X	X	X	NA
1. Media usage	X	X	X	NA
1. Institutions	X	X	X	X
1. EU integration	X	X	X	X
1. Value orientations	X	X	X	X
1. Domestic and European issues	X	X	X	X
1. Representation	X	X	X	X
1. Identity	X	X	X	X
1. Demographics	X	X	X	X
1. Knowledge and experience	X	X	X	NA
1. Recruitment and Nomination	NA	NA	X	NA
14. Attributing responsibility and evaluating performance	X	X	X	X

■ Enhancing Technical Quality of Election Data

One of the main objectives of the infrastructure was to establish common coding categories for the separate study components in order to facilitate links between those. This was ensured through the use of several different levels of linking variables across the candidate, voter, manifesto and media and data. Where appropriate we employed standardized, universal codes that are recognized across sectors and disciplines.

This approach used by the PIREDEU pilot project opened new possibilities for conducting electoral research in a user-friendly manner. The linkages across the different components of the 2009 European Election Study allow users to make use of multiple surveys with very little data processing and ‘tailor’ the data to their specific research questions and interests.

In addition, guidelines were developed concerning issues of sampling (especially for the voter and candidate surveys), tendering, questionnaire wording and instruments (e.g. measuring variables like education) and translation. These represent the state of the art in cross-cultural, multi-country survey research projects.

Examples of Data Linkages

Location - Country

The main location variable employed across studies is country for which the ISO code is used. This is a three-digit code that also formed part of the codes of other shared variables such as political parties.

Media Outlets

Media outlets are found in the candidate, voter and media study. The studies are linked by questions about media use in the voter survey and by campaign media use in the candidate survey. Common codes were provided for use in each of these studies by adding a counter to the standard country identifier.

Political Parties

Across all studies, political parties form categories for several variables. A unique seven-digit code identified political parties in the various study components. This code replaced the raw data entries, and facilitated the integration and linking of the various components. It is comprised of the country identifier, the party ideological family and a two-digit counter.

Political issues

Components of the study regarding issues are linked according to issue codes used for the most important issue questions in the Voter and Candidate Study and the topic codes in the Media Study and the Manifesto Study.

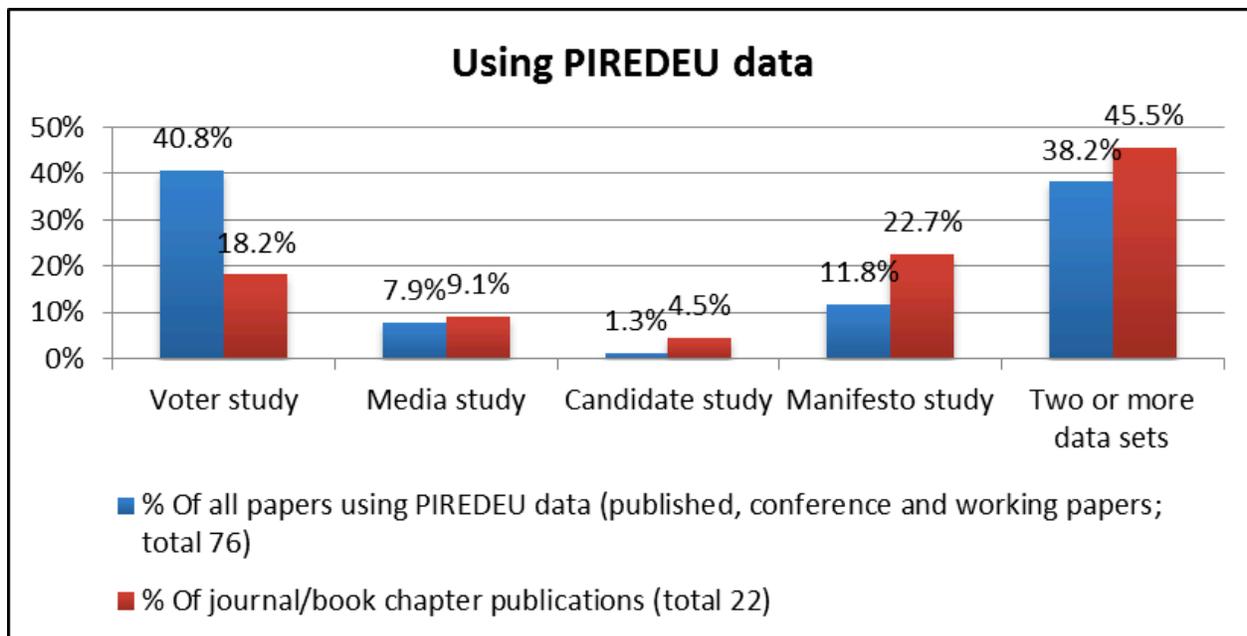
■ Realising the Added Value

The added value that was visualized at the commencement of the 2009 European Election Study was to overcome limitations in the availability, quality and utility of earlier data and at the same time provide user-friendly access to new data on EP elections. The innovations employed in this study at all stages, from the open consultation with our user communities to the thoroughness and clarity of the conceptual map and from the integration of different data collections to the facilities for adding additional databases, lie at the core of the scientific added value that this study offers not only to its users but to advancement of our understanding of electoral processes and of the quality of democracy in Europe. But even more importantly, added value is inherent in the potential new avenues for research that this study has opened.

The research papers presented at the PIREDEU User Conference in Brussels (November 18-19, 2010) demonstrate how the added value of the infrastructure was realized. More than half (58%) of the research papers explicitly linked two or more datasets. Moreover, about one in four attempted a link between three, four or five datasets, whereas a further one out of four authors experimented with linking PIREDEU to external data - either publicly available or collected by the author.

This last statistic, identifying where researchers went beyond PIREDEU data, is particularly important in pointing to the need to see an infrastructure for research on electoral democracy in the European Union as calling for more than just data about European Parliament elections. If a quarter of all papers found it necessary to go beyond the data provided by the 2009 EES, this points to a readily understandable limitation in any infrastructure that focuses only on elections to the European Parliament. Democracy in Europe is not only or even mainly about European Parliament elections. It is about all elections at whatever level. A permanent infrastructure needs to be seen as involving national as well as European Parliament elections.

Two years after the PIREDEU User Conference, these numbers have further increased. The figure below illustrates the percentages of research papers, both published and working or conference papers, using one or more PIREDEU datasets. From the 76 conference, working and published papers, nearly half uses the Voter Survey data. Furthermore, more than one in three uses two or more datasets. Among papers published in academic journals or as book chapters, virtually one half uses two or more PIREDEU datasets.

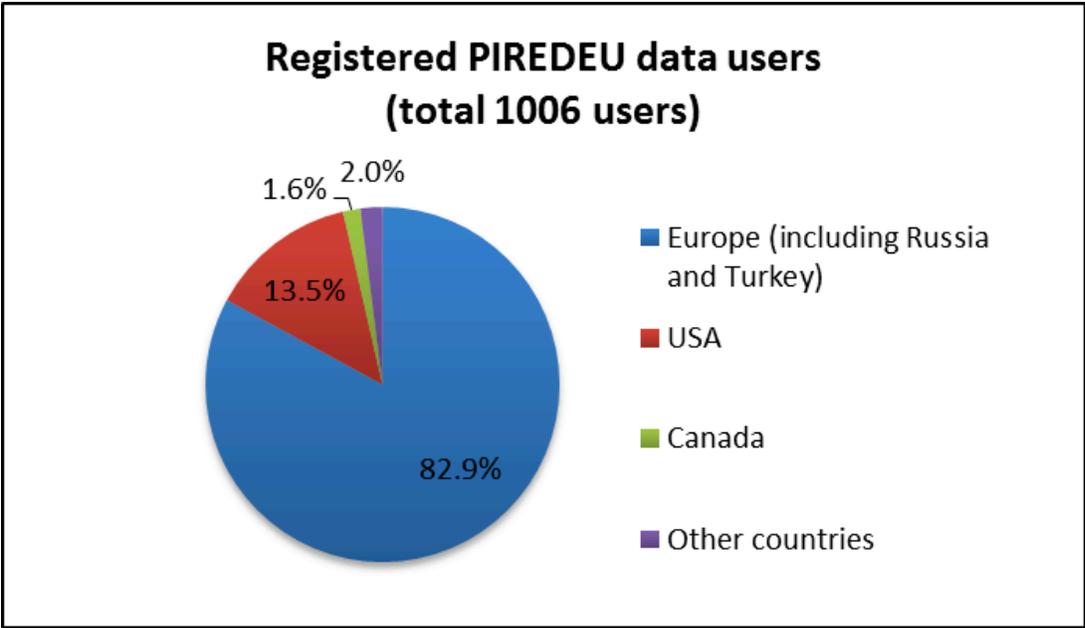


Scientific Impact of PIREDEU and the 2009 European Election Study

The new-look 2009 European Election Study is an essential database for all those interested in electoral democracy in Europe and certainly not only social scientists engaged in comparative and evaluative research on the European electoral process.

Since the launch of the 2009 European Election Study website www.piredeu.eu in early 2009, it has become a vital hub for anyone interested in the various aspects related to the 2009 European Parliament Elections. The website has over 1,000 registered users and the user community is still growing strong with new members registering regularly. For example, over 240 new members have registered their interest since January 2012.

The registered users of the 2009 European Election Study website also come from a diverse set of countries, truly highlighting the global appeal of the data collection exercise that took place. As of July 2012, the website hosted registered users from 43 different countries. Of those currently registered more than 800 users come from the European Union member-countries, 150 users come from the United States of America and almost 20 from Canada. Users also hail from Australia, Croatia, Georgia, India, Israel Japan, Norway, Russian Federation, South Korea, Turkey etc.



The scientific impact of PIREDEU and the 2009 EES data was first demonstrated at the final user conference that aimed at bringing together the scholars leading the teams comprising the PIREDEU project and the users who had been employing PIREDEU data in their research. At the same time, it was an opportunity to showcase the advances of our infrastructure platform and demonstrate (a) how we had constructively employed our user feedback to improve the quality of our data and our designs and (b) the potentials offered to researchers from different scientific user communities as well as to those interested in the audit of electoral democracy in Europe. The success of the conference lay in (a) attracting conference participants from the broader user community, some of whom had already participated in the kick-off conference in Florence three years earlier, and (b) showcasing some 40 research papers that had employed the PIREDEU data.



The major advantage of the PIREDEU survey is that it spans both the 'older' and the 'new' member states of the European Union, which allows the researchers to undertake a direct comparison of electoral behaviour and pattern of representation across established democracies of Western Europe and consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. My research results based on the PIREDEU data inform the research community and policymakers about challenges to political representation across East and West.

---Agnieszka Walczak, Associate Analyst at RAND Europe, former ELECDEM Early Stage Researcher and PhD Candidate, Political Science, University of Amsterdam.

The large body of academics and practitioners interested in the 2009 European Election Study has also led to them to take an interest in the data that the PIREDEU project collected. Since the first data files were uploaded to www.piredeu.eu in April 2010, almost 9,000 separate downloads have taken place via the website. These include over 2,500 separate data downloads. The most popular component of the 2009 European Election Study has proved to be the Voter Survey with over 1,100 downloads up-to-date, while the Media Study has been obtained over 400 times.

I have used the survey and media data from the PIREDEU project in a number of research endeavors. PIREDEU provides a clean and clear source of cross-sectional data that allows us to develop and test new models of political behavior in the European Union.

--Nicholas J. Clark, PhD 2012 Indiana University, Thesis: 'Understanding Regional and Global Politics: The Public's Political Knowledge of the European Union'



Research Findings and Scientific Impact

The scientific added value to our user communities can be evaluated in many ways. Certainly, the total of 855 downloads that our final user conference papers counted in one month (5 Nov – 9 Dec 2010) and the 907 downloads of our different datasets, questionnaires and other accompanying documentation in the same period clearly attests to the high scientific value of this research project.

One additional finding that reflects well on the broader scientific added value, was the evaluation or auditing of electoral democracy in Europe. An important percentage (65.2%) of conference papers were concerned with the main factors that have been identified in past research as lying at the roots of the problems of European electoral democracy. These papers dealt with issues of electoral engagement, information and representation.

The papers presented are accessible through: www.piredeu.eu/public/FConf2010.asp.

V.3 Research Output

The 2009 EES produced 4 linked data sets, providing new possibilities for scientific research. Prior to 2004 there had already been a long string of studies focusing on relation between voters of the EU member states and the European Parliament elections. Some of the classic foci of this research were the type of issues in the campaigns, the relation of European level elections to national issues, the profiles of the candidates, and a wider interest on participation and mobilization of the citizens of Europe. Nonetheless, key deficiencies in this research involved gaps in understanding the broader interplay among voters on one hand, and, on the other hand, candidates, party platforms and manifestos, the media as information sources on electoral issues and the contextual background in each member state.

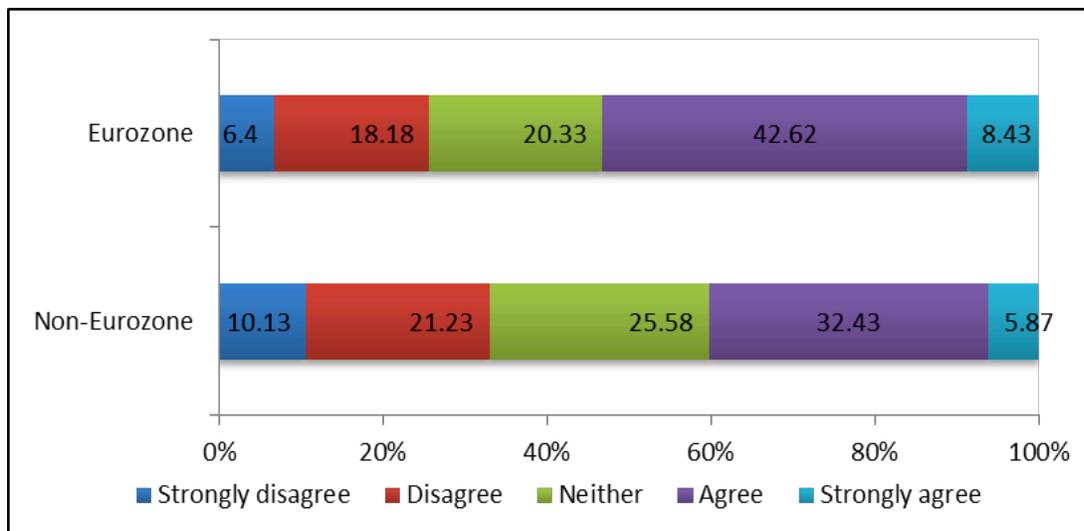
As highlighted earlier, the final PIREDEU user conference showcased high value scientific research that employed data from the 2009 EES already in 2010. Since then, research in electoral democracy that makes use of the 2009 EES has grown from strength to strength.

Being located outside Europe, access to the PIREDEU data was essential in allowing me to pursue an EU-wide dissertation without extensive additional funding. Moreover, the opportunity to present the first analyses at the PIREDEU conference introduced me to the network of scholars concerned with similar issues, while the feedback received at the conference only sharpened my overall argument.

**--Magda Giurcanu, PhD 2012 University of Florida, Thesis:
'European Union Politicization and the Democratic Deficit:
Why European Parliament Elections Matter'**



The figure below illustrates one of the many possible ways to use the Voter Survey data. It shows differences in trust to the institutions of the EU between Eurozone and non-Euro countries. The figure suggests that far more citizens of the Eurozone countries trust the EU institutions compared to the citizens in non-Eurozone countries: More than half (51.05%) of citizens of Eurozone countries say they agree or strongly agree with the statement 'You trust the institutions of the European Union' whereas only 38.27% of non-Eurozone citizens say so. Furthermore, only one in five respondents from Eurozone countries has no opinion about the trustworthiness of the EU institutions as opposed to one in four respondents in the non-Eurozone countries.



Data collected as part of the 2009 EES offer insight into the existence of a common European public sphere, but also on the impact that national and European developments have on party choices, political communication at the media level, the behaviour and attitude of national and European political elites and candidates. Finally, the refined and restructured survey questionnaires have given us much information on national versus ideological motivations of political behaviour, on mass awareness and politicization of EU processes, and on aspects of democratization in the EU decision-making processes.

Examples of the types of questions listed above are to be found in the research output prepared for a special symposium in the scientific journal *Electoral Studies*.¹ The articles in this special symposium examine in a comprehensive and rigorous fashion the state of electoral democracy in the European Union today, focusing on an in-depth analysis of the most recent 2009 elections to the European Parliament. Theoretically, the papers in the special issue critically review and contribute to existing theories of voting behaviour, second-order elections and responsible party government in multi-level systems of government. By appearing in this way in a high-profile peer-reviewed scientific journal only a year after the first preliminary data release, they demonstrate the importance to our scientific community of the data produced in the infrastructure pilot study and hence of an infrastructure if established.

¹ *Special Symposium: Electoral Democracy in the European Union* Edited by Sara B. Hobolt and Mark N. Franklin. *Electoral Studies* Volume 30, Issue 1, Pages 1-246 (March 2011).

Major Findings

Turnout in European Elections

EP elections depress turnout as they inculcate habits of non-voting, with long-term implications for political participation in EU member-countries. Voters whose first electoral experience is a European election tend to vote at lower rates in subsequent elections than those whose first experience is a national election.

Franklin, M.N., Hobolt, S.B. (2011) 'The Legacy of Lethargy: How Elections to the European Parliament Depress Turnout' *Electoral Studies* 30/1: 67-76.

News Media Coverage of European Elections

Saliency of EP elections is increasing over time but the degree of political contestation over Europe contributes to this trend through increased media coverage only when contestation develops beyond a certain point. The substantive implication of this study is that only when political parties articulate sufficiently divergent positions at opposite ends of the scale do media give those positions more prominent roles in their news stories.

Schuck, A.R.T., Xezonakis, G., Elenbass, M., Banducci, S., de Vreese, C. (2011) 'Party Contestation and Europe on the News Agenda: The 2009 European Parliament Elections' *Electoral Studies* 30/1: 41-52.

Voting behavior and political information

Where media coverage of European elections is more visible, voters are more likely to base their vote choices on European issues. The conditioning role of media context implies that actions of media and political parties may either help or obstruct EU issue voting.

de Vries, C.E., van der Brug, W., van Egmond, M.H., van der Eijk, C. (2011) 'Individual and Contextual Variation in EU Issue Voting: The Role of Political Information' *Electoral Studies* 30/1: 16-28.

Political campaigning

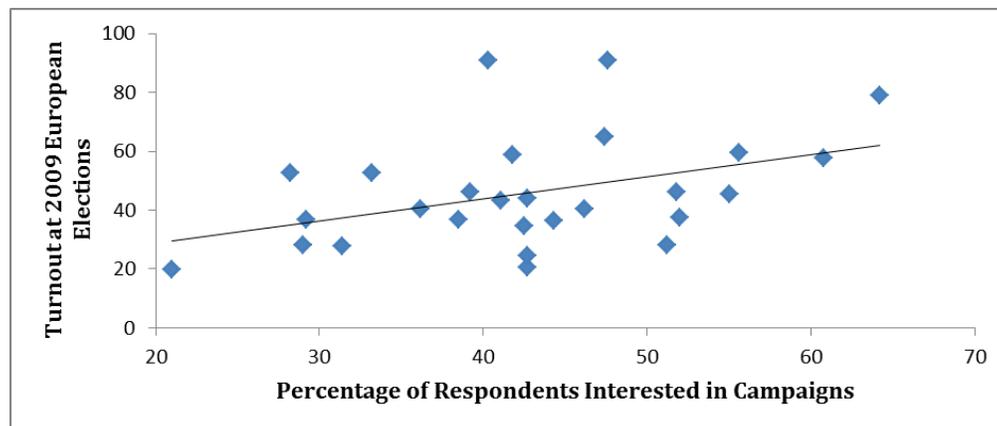
Candidates of parties that are positioned on the political right campaigned more intensely and used a wider range of post-modern campaign tools like social networking internet sites than candidates of parties on the political left.

Giebler, H., Wüst, A. (2011) 'Campaigning on an Upper Level? Individual campaigning in the 2009 European Parliament elections' *Electoral Studies* 30/1: 53-66.

V.4 Using 2009 EES Data in a Disaggregate Manner

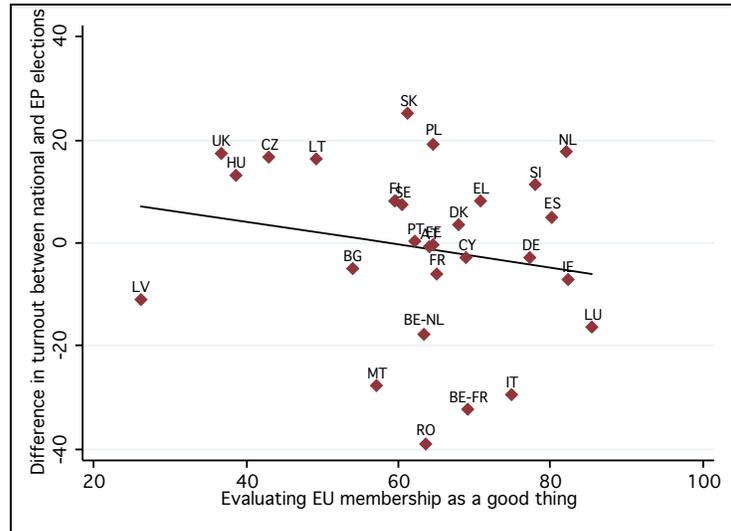
The 2009 EES data is of course not limited to studying European-level trends. All of its components include indicators to show which EU sub-unit the observations were obtained from. This allows disaggregating the data and focusing on those particular political parties, media systems, countries etc. that one is interested in. It also permits lower-level information to be used in conjunction with higher-level information (multi-level modeling).

The figure below demonstrates one potential use of the data in a multi-level manner. It compares country-level turnout figures at the 2009 European Elections with the degrees of interest shown towards electoral campaigns across the respective EU member-countries.

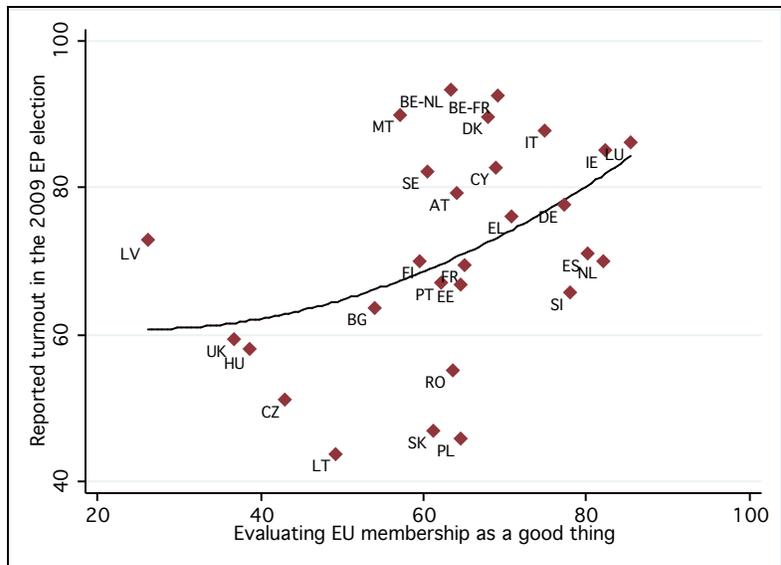


The figure clearly shows that there is a positive relationship present between the two measurements. Electorates who are more interested in the campaigns that lead up to the European Elections also tend to be more likely to show up and vote on the election days. For example, the turnout at the 2009 European Elections was only 20% in Slovakia where merely 21% of the respondents to the Voter Survey claimed to have taken interests in the campaigns prior to the election day, whereas the turnout was 79% in Malta where 64% of the respondents to the Voter Survey had taken interest in the campaigns.

The figure below shows the relationship between evaluation of the EU membership and the difference in turnout in national and European Elections. It demonstrates that in countries, where more people see EU membership as a good thing, the difference in country-level turnout between 2009 European Elections and the last national elections is lower. This suggests that when people evaluate their country's membership in the EU as a good thing, they are more likely to vote in both national and European elections.



The figure below shows the relationship between turnout at the 2009 European Elections (as reported by the respondents to the Voter Survey) and the respondents' evaluation of EU membership. It clearly shows that turnout is higher in countries where more citizens see their country's EU membership as a good thing. For example, less than 60% of Voter Survey respondents said they had voted in the 2009 European Elections in the UK where little over 36% said that UK's membership in the EU is a good thing. On the other hand, over 85% respondents said they had voted in Ireland where 82% of them said that their country's membership in the EU is a good thing.



VI. Future of European Election Study

There is an urgent need to establish an infrastructure for European electoral research endowed with stable funding and capable of compiling, linking, disseminating, and presenting data in a co-ordinated and professional fashion. Our project has designed a new infrastructure encompassing the different types of data necessary for investigating and describing the state of electoral democracy in the European Union. Its prototype already contains data on the attitudes of voters, the behaviour of political parties and their candidates, the outcomes of elections, and the contents of mass media reports. These diverse data sets have been prepared in such a way as to make it possible for them to be presented to the public in a way that is accessible not only to the academic community, but also to other stakeholders, such as journalists, policy-makers, and members of civil society.

VI.1 Recommendations for establishing a permanent infrastructure

Based on the outcome of the design study, our recommendation is to establish a permanent infrastructure for Electoral research in Europe. Such a permanent infrastructure will constitute a data repository for social scientists who will employ it to monitor national and European parliamentary elections. It will be continuously updated with data collected at the time of future European Parliament and national elections. Such a repository will fulfill long-term strategic needs of stakeholders, permitting continuing research into the nature and evolution of electoral democracy in Europe and regular ‘audits’ of the adequacy of representation processes in ensuring accountability of European policymakers, legitimating public policies, and enhancing public understanding of European democratic political processes.

There are financial imperatives for establishing this permanent infrastructure for all European elections. First, Europe is a place where funding strategies are quite complex, with traditional national sources being increasingly supplemented by a DG Research in the European Union that is providing increasing amounts of money for real research (not just networking). An infrastructure is what houses one or several large research enterprise(s), such as those involved in the conduct of a national election study in a given year. But the EU framework only considers trans-national research infrastructures that surpass a minimal critical mass (the smallest ones involve hundreds of researchers, and have budgets of at least €10 million for a five-year period). None of the national election studies comes even close to these critical mass parameters. Yet, they spend a considerable proportion of their funds on

infrastructural tasks: cleaning, harmonizing, linking, distributing and archiving the data they generate; providing, user-training, and preparing for future election studies. Indeed, in many cases even the overheads of survey research – interviewer training, sampling, questionnaire design and translation – might be eligible for infrastructure funding. But for such funding to become X these studies would have to combine under the umbrella of what the EU now calls an ERIC (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) whose members would be national governments (or their representatives, most likely national research funding agencies).

The scale of the enterprise for research on multi-level elections also necessitates a permanent infrastructure of all European elections. The fact that existing election studies in Europe, whether national or transnational in orientation, are individually unable to attract infrastructure funding provides an obvious opportunity. A permanent transnational and multi-level enterprise established to study regional, national and supra-national European elections stands the only decent chance of receiving infrastructure funding under current conditions.

Second, the present report has established clearly that such an infrastructure cannot focus on European Parliament elections alone, but needs to address the electoral process in Europe at all its different levels and facets. The idea of looking beyond European Parliament elections in order to study electoral democracy in Europe also makes sense substantively. The quality of democracy in Europe is not only a national matter, even if national elections in Europe are still the primary route by which citizens empower their governments. Quite evidently, neither is electoral democracy in Europe simply a matter of European Parliament elections. Both types of elections are closely linked, with European Parliament elections reflecting national electoral processes and, in turn, having palpable repercussions on those.

VI.2 Future Plans: A Consortium for Electoral Research in Europe (CERES)

Looking towards the future of European Election Studies, and recognising the scientific added value of the PIREDEU project for studying elections in Europe, leading scholars and institutions in the field of electoral research have collaborated in founding a Consortium of Electoral Research in Europe (CERES).

The ultimate goal of this Consortium is the establishment of a permanent infrastructure for electoral research in Europe. The PIREDEU project has established clearly that an infrastructure to study electoral democracy in Europe cannot focus on European Parliament

elections alone, but needs to address the electoral process in Europe at all its different levels and facets. With this in mind, CERES was established as the way forward to ensure that high quality data are X for the benefit of researchers and practitioners from all communities. CERES will constitute the academic foundations and an infrastructure for accessing, depositing, processing and adding value to election and public opinion data that is efficient, reliable and adheres to international standards.

With the development of an infrastructure in mind, in the post-PIREDEU era we are attempting to acquire funding to extend the scientific value of the data-base in three main directions: first, incorporating the data already provided by studies of past EP elections (1979-2004); second, linking these data to other studies (for example the study of Members of the European Parliament); and third, adding supplementary data collected at the time of future elections to the European Parliament.

VII. Concluding Notes

For more information on the European Election Studies visit: www.ees-homepage.net

For more information on the 2009 European Election Study visit: www.piredeu.eu

The final release of 2009 European Election Study data is X through GESIS.

For questions or comments please send us an email at piredeu@eui.eu.

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