

Motivation for including satisfaction with democracy questions in national election studies even before we have a battery of questions intended to illuminate the nature of the "critical juncture"

At a workshop organized by the Consortium for European Research with Election Studies (CERES) held at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in February 2013, a group of PIs of national election studies in Europe met to consider ways in which they could gain added value from collaborating in various ways. The most visible product of this meeting was the establishment of a Task Force charged with developing a battery of questions that would be available for inclusion in the European Election Study at the time of the 2014 EP elections and in national election studies conducted at the time of successive elections to national parliaments in Europe - questions directed at illuminating the nature of the threat to democratic practices and procedures that these PIs perceived to have been brought to a head by the economic crisis of 2010 and later years.

In furtherance of this mandate funding was obtained for a follow-up workshop held in Gothenburg in December 2013 to begin the task of designing such a question battery. In the course of this workshop a conceptual map was developed that defines the nature of the questions to be asked. At the conclusion of the workshop the Task Force was delegated the task of honing this map and starting the process of identifying actual questions to populate the map. At a meeting planned for April next year a further meeting will be held in conjunction with the final meeting of the COST "True European Voter" project at which these questions will be finalized and a proposal prepared to include them in the next module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.

The identification and development of questions that will illuminate the nature of the challenge faced by democracies in Europe is advancing about as fast as is conceivable given the number of individuals that need to coordinate their activities and find time for something additional on their busy agenda, but meanwhile the economic crisis - which we take to have created a focus for voter dissatisfaction and other manifestations of the critical juncture is proceeding. By the time we have a battery of questions in the field (in 2017 or so) it will no longer be appropriate to use this battery to identify attitudes and concerns that

are linked to the economic crisis or to distinguish these concerns from other gradually evolving concerns.

The workshop participants thus delegated Mark Franklin to prepare a proposal addressed to PIs of national and European Parliament election studies in Europe to include two questions in these studies that will permit economic circumstances to be used as independent variables in evaluations of the level of satisfaction felt by EU citizens for the way democratic decisions are being taken in their country. One question that bears on this matter is probably already present in many or most national election studies. This is the question "How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country". The proposal is to elaborate this question by replacing it with two questions that more precisely distinguish between the aspects of democracy that research has shown respondents to have in mind when they answer this question. The first is the existence of and protection for democratic norms and values while the second focuses specifically on the way in which political decisions are made, thus:

- (1) "How satisfied are you with the extent to which people's rights and liberties are protected [your country]?" ; and
- (2) "How satisfied are you with the way political decisions are reached in [your country]?"

Evidently it would be nice to have the standard question included in some studies along with its two replacements, for splicing purposes, but I am confident that will happen without encouragement from us.