



Topic proposal for integrating and opening existing national research infrastructures

1. Title.

Providing for European Research with Elections Studies (PERES)

2. Contact person.

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2.h. Are your proposal representing your own personal view or are you responding on behalf of your organisation as a whole?

- Organisation view

3. Description of the research infrastructures covered and the trans-national access and/or services provided.

Indicate the type of research infrastructures to be covered by the proposed topic, and list the research infrastructures in Member States, Associated Countries and Third Countries, that would provide trans-national access and/or services to researchers, with brief descriptions of the state-of-the-art equipment and services offered to users that make them rare or unique in Europe. Outline the specific areas of research and scientific communities normally served by the infrastructures, as well as new areas opening to users, if any. Indicate what would be the overall access modalities necessary to be developed. Text of maximum 4000 characters (including spaces).

Elections are at the core of mass democracy. They determine the quality of representative democracy. Europe is home to a large number of National Election Studies (NESs), which are important national research infrastructures with a primary focus on auditing electoral processes through post-election surveys of citizens. The scientific study of elections across all levels of government provides a crucial part of the social scientific study of democracy, government and citizen engagement with politics.

Member state infrastructures include the following national elections studies: Austrian NES, Belgian ES, British NES, Czech NES, Danish NES, Estonian NES, Finnish NES, French NES, German NES, Greek NES, Hungarian NES, Irish NES, Italian NES, Lithuanian NES, Dutch NES, Polish NES, Portuguese NES, Slovakian NES, Slovenian NES, Spanish NES, and

Swedish NES. Candidate country NES include the Croatian NES, the Icelandic NES and Turkish NES.

These infrastructures serve political science research communities, also sociology, communication science, economics and psychology. They provide users with post-election survey data, representative of national populations, about voting behaviour, political and social attitudes, and demographics, as well as with other election and campaign-related data, including media data, campaign data, and district and constituency level data. They thus permit academic communities, the media, electoral commissions and institutions involved in policy-making to conduct, not just for a once-only accounting operation following a particular election, but as an accumulating baseline of past electoral audits against which to measure improvements or degradations over time in election quality.

Yet, crucially there is no infrastructure of the ERIC type that brings together, on a European scale, these key research infrastructures for studying local, national and European elections in order to promote coordination of data collection and methodologies, higher performance instrumentation, integration of datasets, and widespread access.

A model for a pan-European infrastructure of European Parliament election studies was the collaborative PIREDEU project - "Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union" - funded by FP7 from 2008 to 2011. This design study successfully assessed the feasibility of an upgrade to the European Election Studies (EES) that has since 1979 conducted research into electoral democracy in the EU. The scientific and technical feasibility of this infrastructure was investigated by means of a pilot study of the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. The project demonstrated how crucial is a pan-European infrastructure for reaping benefits in electoral research. It also 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 across national, sub-national and European elections.

Moreover, the ISCH COST Action IS0806 *The True European Voter* has clearly identified that strengthening the study of electoral democracy in Europe requires integration of a variety of nation-specific databases on electoral behaviour and the provision of recurring training opportunities for young scholars, as well as the organisation of regular scientific exchange by scholars across Europe. In contrast to existing cross-national entities, such as the European Social Survey and the Eurobarometer, this infrastructure would focus specifically on electoral research, and unlike the international Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES), this proposal would focus on European elections at multiple levels.

A Consortium for European Research with Election Studies (CERES) was founded in 2011 to provide coordination among academic researchers in attempts to create such an ERIC-like entity. Its members are PIs of national election studies in Europe and of the EES.

4. Scientific domains served by the research infrastructures.

4.a. Select the scientific domain(s) served by the research infrastructures:

- Social Sciences and Humanities

4.b. Indicate here the main scientific domain served:

- Social Sciences and Humanities

5. Key potential partners.

Indicate a list of key potential partners. Text of maximum 3000 characters (including spaces), with 1 line per potential partner (participant organisation name, country and contact person).

University of Vienna, Austria, Prof Sylvia Kritzinger (Austrian National Election Study)
K.U. Leuven, Belgium, Prof Marc Swyngedouw (Belgian NES)
UC Louvain, Belgium, Prof Lieven De Winter (Belgian NES)
University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria, Prof Mihal Mirchev (European ES)
Cyprus College, Cyprus, Prof Charalambos Papageorgiou (European ES)
Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic, Dr Lukas Linek (Czech NES)
Aarhus University, Denmark, Dr Rune Stubager (Danish NES)
University of Tartu, Estonia, Dr Piret Ehin (Estonia NES)
European Parliament Public Opinion Monitoring Unit, EU, Jacques Nancy
University of Helsinki, Finland, Prof Mikko Mattila (Finnish NES)
CEVIPOF, France, Dr Nicolas Sauger (French NES)
University of Mannheim, Germany, Prof Hermann Schmitt (Chair, European ES; Chair, COST Action, The True European Voter)
Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Germany, Prof Bernhard Weßels (German NES)
GESIS, Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany, Dr Markus Quandt
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, Prof Elias Nikolakopoulos (Greek NES)
Central European University Institute, Hungary, Prof Gábor Tóka (Hungarian NES)
Trinity College Dublin , Ireland, Prof Michael Marsh (Irish NES)
University of Milan, Italy, Prof Paolo Segatti (Vice-Chair, The True European Voter)
University of Siena, Italy, Prof Paolo Bellucci (Italian NES)
University of Latvia, Latvia, Dr Janis Ikstens (European ES)
Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania, Prof Algis Krupavicius (European ES)
University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, Dr Patrick Dumont (Luxembourg ES)
University of Malta, Malta, Prof Dominic Fenech (European ES)
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Prof Wouter van der Brug (EuropeanES)
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Prof Claes de Vreese (European ES)
University of Twente, the Netherlands, Prof Kees Aarts (Netherlands NES)
Warsaw School of Social Psychology, Poland, Prof Radoslaw Markowski (Polish NES)
University of Lisbon, Portugal Dr Pedro Magalhães (Portugese NES; CSES)
University of Lisbon, Portugal, Dr Andre Freire (Portugese NES)
National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, Dr Aurelian Muntean
Institute for Public Affairs, Slovakia, Dr Olga Gyarfasova, (European ES)
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Prof Simona Kustec Lipicer, (European ES)
UAM, Spain, Prof José Ramón Montero (Spanish ES)
Pompeu Fabra, Spain, Prof Mariano Torcal (Spanish ES)
Göteborg University, Sweden, Prof Henrik Oskarsson (Swedish NES)
Sabanci University, Turkish, Prof Ali Carkoglu (Turkish ES)
London School of Economics, United Kingdom, Prof Sara Hobolt (Vice-Chair, European ES)
University of Manchester, UK, Prof Edward Fieldhouse (British NES)
University of Nottingham, UK, Prof Cees van der Eijk (British NES)
University of Exeter, UK, Prof Susan Banducci (European ES)

6. Scope and activities.

6.a. Describe the overall objectives of the activity. Describe the benefit that the proposal would bring about in terms of integrated provision of infrastructure related services. When appropriate, describe how the network would integrate with the relevant e-Infrastructures. Text of maximum 2000 characters (including spaces).

The primary benefits of the proposed infrastructure are:

- First, at the survey design stage, it could provide a clearing house for ideas and an inventory of “best practices”. This would also involve the coordination of survey instruments across countries and elections, which would facilitate comparative cross-European research.
- Second, relating to the data generation process, it would remove the need for replication of research into state-of-the-art survey methodology across all national units through coordination at a European level. NESs spend a considerable proportion of their funds on infrastructural tasks. The infrastructure could provide technical assistance of various kinds especially to new election studies, including cleaning, harmonizing, archiving and distributing data. A pan-European infrastructure could promote cost-effective and innovative solutions for data collection, management, sharing and deposition.
- Third, an infrastructure would ensure that all elections study data could be easily accessed in a single place, along with demographic, district and macro variables, by the widest possible number of scholars and other users. Considerable progress has been made in developing data viewing software that facilitates access to the data by those who are not social research professionals: especially politicians, journalists, commentators, and even members of civil society. Such software would bring data sources together and ensure better comparability and free, public, online access.
- Fourth, it would serve as a venue for scientific collaboration across European borders, enhancing our scientific knowledge of electoral democracy in Europe. The integration of data across countries and elections would allow for significant advancement in the study of electoral behaviour in a multi-level context.

6.b. Indicate the Networking Activities that could be foreseen to foster a culture of co-operation between the research infrastructures and scientific communities. Indicate the Joint Research Activities that could be foreseen to improve, in quality and/or quantity, the services provided by the infrastructures. Text of maximum 4000 characters (including spaces).

The proposed infrastructure would integrate data and foster cooperation between existing research infrastructures. Such activities require coordination both at the scientific and technical levels. Moreover, the aim of the networking activities would also involve greater outreach to stakeholders outside the academic communities closely involved with existing infrastructures. The Networking activities will be four-fold:

- A Scientific Steering committee consisting of members of NESs and the EES, together with other eminent scholars in the field, including members of the user community. This committee will meet regularly to ensure integration and coordination across the different ESs. It will promote both excellence and innovation in election research. To achieve these goals, the Steering Committee will also set up specific sub-committees responsible for different elements of the infrastructure, including (a) survey instrumentation, (b) data quality and integrity, (c) survey methodology and data collection (d) data integration and access, (e) outreach and consultation. This Steering Committee would promote the definition of common standards, establish protocols of data coordination and integration, spread good practice, and ensure common access to all data in online database.
- The infrastructure will involve and consult the wider academic communities and other stakeholders in its activities. The infrastructure will be built around an open procedure that allows the social science community to propose specific survey themes to be included in the infrastructure, ensuring flexibility in exploring new areas of research. It will also hold regular plenary conferences on the use and access to infrastructure data, and arrange special outreach and training activities for stakeholders not familiar with the use of election data, such as media professionals, think-tanks and policy-makers.
- The infrastructure will engage with practitioners on issues such as the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and the desirability of electoral reforms. It will work to disseminate project results beyond narrow academic communities, to make a contribution to societal debates on issues such as citizen engagement in politics, electoral reform, turnout in elections, gender equality, trust in institutions and democratic legitimacy.
- The infrastructure will provide a network for the training of early career researchers, who will be involved at all stages of the data design and data integration processes, as well as in the analysis of data and dissemination of results. Previously, two very successful training networks for early stage researchers were funded by the European Commission, the Training-Mobility-Research (TMR) project and ELECDEM. These networks were highly valuable for researchers, many of whom were successful in pursuing an academic career. An infrastructure would make it possible to organise such training of younger researchers on a more permanent basis.
- PERES will build on the activities of the Consortium for European Research with Election Studies (CERES), which exists to provide coordination among national election studies in Europe and the EES (which studies elections to the European Parliament). That association has organized a workshop on collaboration among election studies in Europe, which will be held at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in Wassenaar, the Netherlands at the end of February 2013. It is jointly funded by that institution and by the Robert Schumann Center for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute and serves as an example of the activities that would be performed by the proposed infrastructure.

7. Need for European integration.

Explain why this proposed topic would require a European (rather than a national or local) approach. Describe how resources provided by EU would be mobilised. Indicate how account is taken of other national or international activities, and any resources that would complement an EU contribution. Text of maximum 3000 characters (including spaces).

European citizens today have the opportunity to vote in elections at multiple levels of government: sub-national (local and regional), national and European. Electoral democracy in Europe thus operates at multiple levels. The field of electoral research is thus becoming increasingly focused, not on explaining election results in a single country, but on the evaluation of electoral democracy in a multi-level context of electoral competition and with a focus on political parties, voters and the media. As a consequence of these real world changes and theoretical and conceptual challenges, research has moved from a national orientation to cross-national comparative research. To examine citizen engagement in politics and electoral democracy thus requires collaboration between national election studies, and sub-national and supra-national studies, including the long tradition of the European Parliament election studies (EES). This calls for a European infrastructure to support these efforts of integrating national elections studies and ensure that Europe remains at the forefront of scientific progress in this field.

In addition to the scientific rationale for a European-level infrastructure, such coordination at the European level would also be highly cost-effective. Election studies are expensive, but greater coordination and sharing of costs related to infrastructural tasks would be more efficient. Such tasks include data cleaning, harmonizing, linking, distributing and archiving the generated data; providing user-training, and preparing for future election studies. There would be many advantages to be gained from integrating the core elements of survey research – interviewer training, sampling, questionnaire design and translation. The experience of the PIREDEU pilot infrastructure clearly demonstrated this by achieving a sharp improvement in the quality of both data and research compared with past European election studies. The next required change is to bring in national elections. A pan-European infrastructure of election studies would not, however, need to provide the bulk of funding. National funding agencies already fund national election studies, and bringing such studies under the umbrella of a Europe-wide infrastructure would be no more difficult in principle than bringing together research projects in any other field of study.

8. Expected impact.

Describe the expected impact of the proposed activities on the scientific communities, on the functioning of the research infrastructures, and on the development of the European Research Area (including balanced territorial development). Highlight the contribution to socio-economic impacts, including for promoting innovation and developing appropriate skills in Europe. Text of maximum 3000 characters (including spaces).

The proposed infrastructure will constitute a data repository for social scientists who will employ it to monitor the democratic value of sub-national, national and European parliamentary elections. It will be continuously updated with data collected at the time of future European Parliament and national elections. It will fulfil 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.

The scientific added value of the proposed infrastructure is twofold: it concerns first the facilitation of academic research on elections and voters across Europe. Yet, most importantly, it is intended to be an effective tool for the assessing the quality of democratic processes in the European Union. This impact will be achieved by bringing together scholars, practitioners and other professionals from across the world to exchange ideas and work with the integrated datasets to promote their research objectives. It will also promote training in the use of data on election among scholars and practitioners as well as innovation in the scientific study of

elections through coordination across existing infrastructures and sharing of best practices. The infrastructure will facilitate interaction not only among election scholars and data collection specialists, but also provides a platform for knowledge exchange more broadly.

The quality of democracy in the European Union is constantly being questioned, generally with very little supporting evidence. Those who would defend the functioning of democratic institutions in the EU are equally short of supporting evidence. Assessments of the way democracy works in the EU and suggestions for improvements are only possible on the basis of audits of the quality of electoral democracy in national and European elections. Such assessments have so far been conducted at a national level, and neither the research questions addressed nor the resulting data have been coordinated across European countries. An infrastructure would provide data that would allow for 'auditing' the quality of the electoral process at multiple levels of government with the objective of assessing empirically the practices of electoral democracy, detecting challenges and suggesting ways to improve to the quality of these practices.

9. Projects previously funded under FP7 and FP6.

Only for those proposed topics that correspond to the follow-up of FP7 or FP6 funded Integrating Activities, please provide specific additional information on: the project(s) previously or currently funded and the level of funding; the main results and expected achievements of the funded project(s); the progress foreseen in the activities proposed beyond FP7. Text of maximum 4000 characters (including spaces).

While the proposed topic has not received funding as an Integrating Activity, the FP7 "Capacities Programme" provided 2.4 million Euros to fund an "Infrastructure Design Study" in 2008, entitled "Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union" (PIREDEU). This study was completed in January 2011, with the design having been tested in a pilot study of the 2009 European Parliament elections.

The PIREDEU pilot study demonstrated the potential for developing a corresponding European infrastructure for the study of electoral democracy. In order to 'audit' the democratic process at European level, the relationships between the behaviour of the three main actors involved was investigated: the parties and their candidates for electoral office, the mass media, and the electorate. The PIREDEU design study improved on existing European and other national election study infrastructures in the following ways:

- Linking scientific concepts across five study components in order to assess the impact of political parties, candidates, voters, the media and the political context on the functioning of electoral democracy.
- Developing the technical means to link data systematically across five different types of data while providing the possibility of linking additional data and study components as they become available.
- Developing the means for the non-scientific user communities to access and use the data to evaluate electoral democracy.

The design of an infrastructure for studying electoral democracy in the EU was accomplished in the context of a pilot study conducted at the time of the European Parliament elections of 2009. The pilot study for the infrastructure produced a comprehensive empirical database allowing the user communities to access the most essential information required to conduct a one-off 'audit' that would monitor/ scrutinise all relevant aspects of the electoral process in the EU. In order to facilitate data collection, the infrastructure consisted also of an

organizational network that coordinated the activities for data collections. The data base was designed so as to eventually be made accessible not only to academic researchers but also to politicians, political parties, journalists, commercial interests, and even members of civil society. The data generated have been made available to the world academic community by being deposited at GESIS, the German social science data archive. In sum, PIREDEU set out to design an integrated database encompassing not only voter surveys relating to European Parliament elections, 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 were the primary objects of interest for the pilot study. For members of the academic community, the database 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 enhanced the attractiveness of Europe as an object of study and as an environment for comparative social science research. For other stakeholders it laid the foundations for a window onto processes of electoral democracy that have hitherto remained academic and obscure.

The uncontested success of the design study demonstrates the need for a more permanent infrastructure integrating not only European but also national elections.