

Data Discovery: Political behaviour

Researchers can access a wide array of social and economic data useful for researching political behaviour through research infrastructures such as national data services and archives. Data collections include data from large scale academic projects alongside outputs from smaller research teams and individual researchers. For instance, social surveys are a major source data on political behaviour and alongside ongoing cross-national surveys such as the European Values Study researchers can access data from seminal studies such as the Civic Culture and Political Action Study. These resources enable the study of electoral participation (e.g. turnout and party choice) and other modes of political action alongside political orientations, values and attitudes.

This guide maps the landscape of data for researching political behavior in Europe. It includes information about

1. Election studies
2. Major surveys of political behaviour
3. Cross-national social surveys
4. Examples of data from national data services
5. Data on context and policy outcomes

The aim is to provide a useful first step in a data search by highlighting key data sources and how to access them. It is not a catalogue of all data available for researching the topic! Equally, though effort has been made to ensure correct information, errors may occur and information will become out of data. Always defer to the respective data service or research centre, if information conflicts with details in this guide.

CESSDA

The Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA) provides large scale, integrated and sustainable data services to the social sciences. A core activity of CESSDA is to support researcher access to resources important to the European social science research agenda regardless of the location of researcher or data. Current projects include a wide-ranging plan to establish a common infrastructure for CESSDA member, which includes the building of a Products and Services Catalogue.

1. Election studies

National election studies

Large scale academically driven election studies occur in many European countries. They are typically carried out a few months post-election using probability samples and asking various questions about the election, decision to vote, vote choices and other political orientations and attitude questions along with social-demographic questions. In addition to a cross-sectional post-election survey of the population, many national election studies include other elements; for instance, many studies collect panel data by repeatedly surveying the same individuals in several waves (either spaced throughout the election campaign and/or across several elections).

Access: Most election studies are accessible from either a dedicated service or a national social science data service (many are available through the GESIS Data Archive, UK Data Service or DANS or from the ICPSR in the US). Websites and access arrangements can vary across elections (sometimes because of a change in the organizing team/institution). The list below gives a name and link for individual countries.

For information about national data services, see the CESSDA guide 'Finding and accessing data from national data services', available on the CESSDA website.

- Austria: Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) (<http://www.autnes.at/>)
- Belgium: Belgian national elections study (BNES), 1991-2014 (<http://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/ispo>) 1991-2007 accessible via [DANS](#)
- Denmark: Danish election project (<http://www.valgprojektet.dk/default.asp?l=eng>)
- Estonia: Estonian National Election Studies <http://www.enes.ee/>
- Finland: Finish National election study (<http://fsd4.uta.fi/en/>)
- France: (<https://www.enef.fr/> and <https://cdsp.sciences-po.fr/fr/>)
- Germany: German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES): (<http://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/gles/>)
- Greece: Hellenic National Election Studies (ELNES) <http://www.elines.gr/>
- Hungary: Hungarian Election Study (<http://www.valasztaskutatas.hu/>)
- Ireland: Irish National Election Study (INES) (<http://www.tcd.ie/ines/>)
- Italy: Italian National Election Study (ITANES) (<http://www.itanes.org/>)
- Lithuania: Lithuanian National Election Study (<http://www.lnes.tspmi.vu.lt/>)
- Netherlands: Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) (<http://www.dpes.nl/>)
- Norway: Norwegian Election Research Programme
- Portugal: Portuguese Election Study (<http://www.cep.ics.ul.pt/pages/en/initial-page.php> and <http://er.cies.iscte-iul.pt/>)
- Romania: Romanian Election studies (<https://resproject.wordpress.com/> and <http://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/romanianelectoraldatasurveys>)
- Spain: CIS Election studies (http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/EN/1_encuestas/TiposEncuestas/EncuestasElectorales/encuestaselectorales.jsp)
- Sweden: Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) (<http://www.valforskning.pol.gu.se/english/>)
- Switzerland: Swiss Electoral Studies (SELECTS) (<http://forscenter.ch/en/our-surveys/selects/>)
- UK: British Election Study (BES) (<http://www.britishelectionstudy.com>)

Cross-national projects

There are also projects (both completed and ongoing) producing comparative election data.

The European Voter

<http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data-analysis/survey-data/more-international-data/european-election-studies/the-european-voter-project/>

The European Voter project aimed to systematically describe and explain the electoral changes occurring in many West-European countries in the second half of the twentieth century. The project developed through the International Committee for Research into Elections and Representative Democracy (ICORE), which was founded at the end of the 1980s by study directors of established national election studies (in particular Norway, Sweden, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany). ICORE's main aim was to promote cross-national research into electoral behaviour and representative democracy. To help overcome the logistical problems of using existing data for comparative research, a core project was created to create a database of election studies available in English with comparable measures across time for key concepts. The resulting European Voter Data Base includes national and integrated datafiles of national election studies in Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden dating from 1956 – 1998.

Access: The data and documentation for The European Voter have been archived at the GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences (**GESIS Study Number ZA3911**). Data is available as category C “Data and documents are only released for academic research and teaching after the data depositor’s written authorization. For this purpose the Data Archive obtains a written permission with specification of the user and the analysis intention.”

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

<http://www.cses.org/>

Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is an ongoing collaborative program of research among election study teams from around the world. Running since 1996, the project now includes around 40 countries. Participating countries and provinces include a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies. To date, the CSES has five modules

- Module I (1996-2001) - Performance of the System
- Module II (2002-2006) - Representation and Accountability
- Module III (2006-2011) - Meaningful Choices
- Module IV (2011-2016) - Distributional Politics and Social Protection

The resulting data are deposited along with voting, demographic, district and macro/electoral system variables. The studies are then merged into a single, free, public dataset for use in comparative study and cross-level analysis.

Access: via the CSES website <http://www.cses.org/verify.htm> (registration required) or via [GESIS Data Archive](#). Datasets are also available to browse, analyse and download online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.

European Election Studies (EES)

<http://www.ees-homepage.net/>

The EES examines electoral participation and voting behavior in European Parliament elections along with the evolution of an EU political community and a European public sphere, with citizens’ perceptions of and preferences about the EU political regime and evaluations of EU political performance. Components include

- postelection surveys among representative samples of voters

- content analyses of party manifestos (“Euromanifestos”)
- elite surveys
- content analyses of media news

Until 1994 the corresponding question modules of the voter survey were part of the *European Commission’s* Eurobarometer surveys. Starting with the 1999 elections, the European Election Studies are continued under separate cover, but sustaining a large part of the established questions.

Access: via GESIS Data Archive (<http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data-analysis/survey-data/rdc-international-survey-programs/european-election-studies/>)

2. Major surveys of political behaviour

Researchers can access data from several major cross-national survey projects dedicated to understanding political behavior including data from seminal studies that pioneered comparative research into citizen political behavior.

Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy

CID was an international network of researchers from fourteen European countries, financed by the European Science Foundation (ESF) and directed by Jan van Deth. The network accepted an extensive common core questionnaire on questions concerning social and political participation, small democracy, social capital, and citizen virtues. Identical population surveys were conducted by all participating countries in the course of 2000 and 2001. The network also decided to conduct a comparative study on intermediary organisations.

Access: via GESIS Data Archive ([ZA4492: Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy](#))

The Political Action Panel Study

A follow-up survey of the Political Action Study involving a survey of three industrial countries: Germany (DE); Netherlands (NL); United States (US). Key publication: Jennings, M. Kent; Deth, Jan W. van et al.: *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1990.

Access: via GESIS Data Archive ([ZA1189: The Political Action Panel Study](#))

Political action 1973-1976: an eight nation study

Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase’s seminal cross-national study of conventional and unconventional forms of political participation. The study involved national sample surveys conducted during 1973-1976 in eight nations: Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, United States, Italy, Switzerland, and Finland. The surveys focused on various forms and combinations of political activity ranging from voting to protest actions, and individual propensities to perform these activities. Alongside demographic questions, the study asked about topics such as political interest, efficacy, ideology and political attitudes and values, satisfaction with government and views about class position

Access: via GESIS Data Archive ([ZA0765: Political Action I: An Eight Nation Study](#)) access category A (Data and documents are released for academic research and teaching).

Civic Culture

Almond and Verba’s pioneering cross national study based on surveys conducted in five countries (Germany, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States) in 1959. The survey asked questions about political attitudes and behaviours including political partisanship, political socialization and attitudes the political system.

Access: via GESIS Data Archive ([ZA0624: The Civic Culture Study](#)) access category A (Data and documents are released for academic research and teaching).

3. Cross-national social surveys

Most of the major multi-topic cross-national social surveys include questions on political behavior and some include supplementary modules focusing on aspects of political orientations and behavior.

European Social Survey (ESS)

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since its establishment in 2001 and covering surveys in over 30 nations. The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial multi-country survey covering over 30 nations. Its aim is to measure and explain trends in attitudes, beliefs and values across countries in Europe and its close neighbours. The core questionnaire includes questions on political interest, trust, electoral and other forms of participation, party allegiance, socio-political orientations. In addition to the core questionnaire, the ESS includes rotating modules on specific topics including 'Citizenship, involvement and democracy' (in Round 1 2002/03) and 'Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy' (Round 6 2012/13)

Access: via ESS website. Users need to register with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service to access ESS data.

International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)

<http://www.gesis.org/issp/home/>

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) started in 1984 with four founding members, Australia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, and has grown to about 50 member countries from all over the world. It is an annual programme of cross-national collaboration on surveys on topics important for social science research. It evolved out of pre-existing general social surveys (initially the German ALLBUS and US GSS). The ISSP surveys consist of rotated thematic modules on topics relevant to social sciences. Surveys are designed for replication and can be used for both cross-national and cross-time comparison. Questions about participation in the last election and party affiliations appear across modules as part of a demography section. Modules with more details questions on political behaviour (and orientations/attitudes) include:

- Citizenship: [2004](#), [2014](#): Extensive set of questions on various aspects of citizenship and democracy including social and political participation.
- Role of Government: [1985](#), [1990](#), [1996](#), [2006](#), 2016: focus on government spending and responsibilities but includes questions on attitudes to various forms of protest against the government, views regarding freedom of speech and political efficacy and trust alongside the demography questions (vote last election, party affiliation).
- Environment: [1993](#), [2000](#), [2010](#): wide range of questions about environmental attitudes and behaviours and includes questions about membership of environmental organizations and participation in environmental political activities.

Other modules are Social Networks, Social Inequality, Family and Changing Gender Roles, Work Orientations, Religion, National Identity, Leisure Time and Sports and Health and Health Care.

Access: via the [GESIS Data Archive](#). GESIS is responsible for harmonizing and integrating the national datasets and provides access to the data, its documentation and support for external users. GESIS has [ISSP module web pages](#) with search facilities and comprehensive information on modules, metadata and data access. Access to individual country datasets is also available via some national data services.

Eurobarometer

<http://www.gesis.org/eurobarometer-data-service/home/>

The *Eurobarometer* (EB) survey series is cross-national and cross-temporal.

Since the early seventies, Eurobarometer surveys have interviewed representative national samples in all European Union (EU) (formerly the European Community (EC)) member states in spring and autumn. The EB is designed to provide regular monitoring of public social and political attitudes in the EU through specific trend questions and supplementary surveys on special issues. More information about the series may be found on the

Access: via GESIS Data Archive, see the Eurobarometer Survey Series web pages (above). The Eurobarometer Survey Series datasets are available to browse, analyse and download online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.

European/World Values Study

<http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

The European Values Study (EVS) is a comprehensive research project on human values in Europe. The research program was initiated by the European Value System Study Group (EVSSG) in the late 1970s. It is a large-scale, cross-national, and longitudinal survey research program on how Europeans think about family, work, religion, politics and society. Repeated every nine years in an increasing number of countries, the survey provides insights into the ideas, beliefs, preferences, attitudes, values, and opinions of citizens all over Europe. From 1981 to 2008 four waves of survey were conducted in European and other countries. These surveys explore value differences, similarities, and value changes among citizens of the EVS member countries. The EVS Longitudinal data File 1981-2008 facilitates time-series analysis and can easily be combined with the World Values Surveys Longitudinal data File 1981-2014; the resulting Integrated Values Surveys 1981-2014 will cover surveys conducted in 113 countries/regions.

Access: via [GESIS Data Archive](#). Data and documentation can be downloaded free of charge. Registration is required for data downloads. European Values Survey datasets are available to browse, analyse and download online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.

The EU Neighbourhood Barometer

<http://www.gesis.org/en/services/data-analysis/survey-data/more-international-data/eu-neighbourhood-barometer/>

The EU Neighbourhood Barometer is a regional, cross-national comparative series of six regular surveys conducted between 2012 and 2014. They were commissioned by the European Commission, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and implemented by a consortium led by TNS opinion. The surveys cover 16 of the European Union's closest Eastern and Southern neighbouring countries, the 'European Neighbourhood countries and territories', plus Russia. The samples were drawn from the resident population in each country, aged 15 years and over, using a multistage probability sampling combined with quota selection in the household. In each country and for each survey approximately 1000 interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The EU Neighbourhood Barometer offers a unique source of comparative information on the perception of living conditions, political issues and political efficacy across the region. The perception of the image of and the relations with the European Union is covered by another part of the standard questionnaire. Intermittently the programme addresses special topics such as globalization, environmental issues, employment, civil society or media habits.

4. Examples of data collections from national data services

National data services provide access to extensive collections of social and economic data. This section lists examples of varied data collections relevant for research into political behaviour.

General social surveys/public opinion surveys

Many European countries have ongoing (often annual or biannual) social surveys that aim to track trends in public attitudes and behaviours. These surveys tend to include questions relating to political behaviour in their core questionnaire (especially questions about voting and political trust) and often include additional survey modules exploring aspects of political behaviour in depth.

Examples:

- Sweden: **SOM surveys** – Since 1986, SOM surveys Swedes on issues ranging from politics and media to lifestyle, health and leisure habits. Access via [SND \(Swedish National Data Service\)](#)
- UK: **British Social Attitudes** – over 30 years of data on the attitudes of the British public towards a wide range of social issues. Access via [UK Data Service](#)
- Germany: **The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS)** - collects up-to-date data on attitudes, behavior and social structure in Germany. Every two years since 1980 a representative cross section of the population is surveyed using both constant and variable questions. Access: via GESIS Data Archive <http://www.qesis.org/en/allbus/allbus-home/>
- Germany: **Politbarometer** (performed since 1977 at about monthly intervals by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (Institute for election research) for the ZDF (Second German TV network). They poll the opinions and attitudes of eligible Germans with regard to current events and issues as well as to political parties and individual politicians. Access: via GESIS Data Archive [Data Catalogue](#) and online via GESIS's [ZACAT](#) service.

See the guide **Finding and accessing data from national data services** for information about national data services and how to find and access data
Available from the CESSDA website

Longitudinal studies

By repeated observing the same subjects, longitudinal studies allow researchers to analyse change at the individual level. Europe's national data services provide access to many longitudinal studies, including panel and cohort studies.

Examples:

- Germany: **German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)** (<https://www.diw.de/soep>) began in 1984. Variables include household composition, employment, occupations, earnings, health and satisfaction indicators. (Access: via DIW (German Institute for Economic Research) for research use by the scientific community only)
- UK: **National Child Development Study (NCDS)**, a longitudinal survey that monitors the development of a group of children born during one week in 1958. (Access conditions: Available from [UK Data Service](#)).
- UK: **Understanding Society**: Following the lives of 40,000 UK households to provide valuable evidence about 21st century life
- Switzerland: **Swiss Household Panel (SHP)**: (<http://forscenter.ch/en/our-surveys/swiss-household-panel>) - Annual panel study which follows a random sample of private households in Switzerland. Access via FORS). Includes questions about political interest, membership, trust and political action

Qualitative data

Though less common than quantitative data, several European national data services/archives give access to archived qualitative data such as in-depth interview transcripts, diaries, anthropological field notes, answers to open-ended survey questions, audio-visual recordings and images (not typically translated from the original language). In some countries, qualitative and quantitative data may be available through separate organisations. This UK Data Service [webpage](#) gives some useful information about qualitative data in European data services/archives.

Examples:

- Finland: [FSD2883 Young People and Politics 2009: Essay Responses](#) in Finnish (Access via Finish Data Service – FSD)

Theme pages of national data

National data services sometimes aid data discovery through web-pages highlighting data collections relevant to research on a particular theme

Examples:

- [UK Data Service Politics theme page](#)
- FSD's [Finnish elections page](#)

5. Data on context and policy outcomes

Research on political behaviour often requires linking data on individual political behaviour with macro-level data relating to the social, political and economic context. Various datasets exist with country level information about the supply side of politics and political outcomes and policy, for example. Select examples are provided below, though note, these datasets are tend to be distributed by the data collectors and not through national data services or archives.

The supply slide

Data on the supply slide of politics include expert surveys on the positioning of national parties and the coding of political party manifestos.

Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)

<http://chesdata.eu/>

The Chapel Hill Expert Surveys estimate party positioning on European integration, ideology and policy issues for national parties in a variety of European countries. The first survey was conducted in 1999, with subsequent waves in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. The number of countries increased from 14 Western European countries in 1999 to 24 current or prospective EU members in 2006 to 31 countries in 2014. In this time, the number of national parties grew from 143 to 268. The 2014 survey includes all EU member states, plus parties in Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey. Separate surveys were conducted in the Balkan candidate countries. Questions on parties' general position on European integration, several EU policies, general left/right, economic left/right, and social left/right are common to all surveys. More recent surveys also contain questions on non-EU policy issues, such as immigration, redistribution, decentralization, and environmental policy.

Comparative Manifesto Project

<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>¹

The Manifesto Project analyses parties' election manifestos in order to study parties' policy preferences. MARPOR addresses the collection and the comparative content analysis of parties' manifestos with the support of coders from different countries. The project team coordinates the generation and the analysis of the data from 1945 until today in over 50 countries. The projects main dataset is updated twice a year. It provides access to manifesto texts and content-analytical data and gives accessible ways to easily explore and visualise the data and text corpus.

¹ For discussion on the strength and weaknesses of the CMP, see Gemenis, K. (2013), *What to Do (and Not to Do) with the Comparative Manifestos Project Data*. *Polit Stud*, 61: 3–23. doi:10.1111/1467-9248.12015

Political outcomes, policy and

ParlGov

<http://www.parlgov.org/>

ParlGov is a data infrastructure for political science and contains information about parliament and Government composition for all EU and most OECD democracies (37 countries). The database combines approximately 1500 parties, 910 elections (8400 results), and 1400 cabinets (3500 parties).

Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)

<http://www.comparativeagendas.net/>

The Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) assembles and codes information on the policy processes of governments from around the world to support investigation into trends in policy-making across time and between countries. It classifies policy activities using a common and consistent coding scheme. Policy activities include debates, speeches, (e.g. the Queen's speech in the United Kingdom), holding hearings, introducing or enacting laws (e.g. Bills and Public Laws in the United States) or issuing judicial rulings (e.g. rulings from the European Court of Justice).

OECD Social and Welfare Statistics, 1980-2015

<http://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>

The OECD Social Expenditure Database (SOCX) aims to provide reliable and internationally comparable statistics on public and mandatory and voluntary private social expenditure at programme level. SOCX provides a tool for monitoring trends in aggregate social expenditure and changes in its composition. The main social policy areas are old age, survivors, incapacity-related benefits, health, family, active labour market programmes, unemployment, housing and other social policy areas.

Eurostat

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. One of its key tasks is to provide statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions. The Eurostat database (previously known as Eurostat New Cronos) contains high quality macroeconomic and social statistics time series data from 1960 onwards for European Union (EU) Member states and in many cases EU membership candidate countries. The data are monthly, quarterly, bi-annual or annual data, depending on the variable and country selected and are organised into statistical themes.

Eurostat also provides access to microdata including the:

- European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) which collects microdata on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions.
- European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) which gives harmonised data at European level on employment and related topics.