Research Report: Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe

Background

The project arose originally from our common realisation that many approaches and findings regarding the relationship between democratisation and the electoral process - including the impact of electoral systems and other relevant institutions – were derived from the study of stable democratic systems. They did not always appear to fit the ‘third wave’ democracies and in particular the post-communist region. Some standard techniques, such as Taagepera’s calculation of the effective number of parties and various measures of disproportionality also appeared to need reassessment in the context of party fluidity and non-party actors in elections, notably social organisations, and in the case of disproportionality, enormous discrepancies and widely differing results. At the same time available data on post-communist elections were often inconsistent, inaccurate and partial. In particular, smaller parties were often omitted, and virtually no constituency-level results were available. The legal context was also changing rapidly, as initial decisions regarding electoral legislation proved easier to reshape than many students of institutional design had anticipated.

Aims and Objectives

Thus the project aimed to establish an on-line interactive database to provide high quality data of permanent value for eight core post-communist states, along with as much additional data as could be located for the whole corpus of post-communist elections. We sought to generate a full compendium of electorally-relevant legislation and the fullest possible results for post-communist elections. Despite some remaining gaps and the difficulties enumerated below, this aim has been largely achieved, with the effective addition of four countries. The database at http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections provides a unique resource for academics and practitioners alike. The second aim was to use the database, as well as qualitative methods, to analyse participation, representation, and accountability with particular reference to the formulae for converting votes into seats, the criteria laid down for political participation, and regulations governing elections. The research also aimed to explore the relationship between elections and democratization by testing concepts and hypotheses drawn from stable democracies to assess their validity in post-communist countries and to identify key causal factors. Although delays in obtaining data slowed the analytical dimensions of the project, a range of scholarly and user-oriented activities have taken place and are continuing. We are confident that we have made a significant contribution to the related areas of democratisation, institutional design, and comparative politics.

Results

• the Database

The Project team were able to extend the list of countries for which data are provided by fifty per cent, from our initial conception of eight countries to twelve. The Election Laws section of the database includes election laws (parliamentary and presidential election laws, country-wide regional election laws, universal electoral codes, and laws on basic guarantees) and other legislation relevant to elections (constitutional provisions, political party laws, campaign finance laws, media laws, and other relevant legislation). Laws from twelve countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine) can be searched by selecting a country, an election year and one or several of twelve area topics. Laws from other post-communist countries are also provided but not included in the search by topics. A number of laws in the original language are available in pdf format.

The Election Results section of the database includes results for parliamentary and presidential elections. There remain some gaps for the first free elections, but data for subsequent elections are available for 12 countries, including information such as the number of registered voters, turnout, votes cast, and total valid votes at national level. Constituency level results of parliamentary elections from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine can be searched by selecting a country, an election year and one or several of twelve area topics. Laws from other post-communist countries are also provided but not included in the search by topics. A number of laws in the original language are available in pdf format.

Not all countries collect candidate data. However, such data, including party, constituency, gender, age, and occupation are available for the Lithuanian elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000, Russia 1995 and 1999 (coded by Robertas Pogorelis) and for the Polish elections of 1991, 1993, and 1997, but without age for Poland 2001 (coded by Frances Millard). Candidates in the Czech Republic are also coded for party, age, gender, and occupation for 1996 and 1998 (coded by Frances Millard, with assistance from Kieran
Williams, Adam Fagin and Zdenka Mansfeldova). Dr. Mansfeldova, of Charles University, Prague, has volunteered to prepare a similar dataset for the 2002 elections. Slovak candidate data (1994 and 1998) include party, age, gender, and occupation (coded by Frances Millard with assistance from Kieran Williams). Hungary is coded (by Marina Popescu) by party, gender and element of the electoral system (other candidate data are not available). Available (incomplete) Romanian data include party (winning parties in a constituency) and gender (coded by Marina Popescu). Candidate data for Ukraine 1994 are available and partially coded (by Sarah Birch), while Ukrainian 1998 data are available but not coded.

The website also includes an extensive list of links relevant to elections, democratization and politics in general in Eastern and Central Europe. These include parliaments, governments, election commissions, NGOs, public opinion polling organisations, and general information.

- **Difficulties encountered.**

*Data collection.*

We had gained an overly optimistic picture of the ease of data collection when preparing our initial application, and much that was promised was not forthcoming, in regards to both legislation and electoral results. Official data were rarely published in full, and some appear to have been irretreivably lost, not only in countries where official results for the first free election were never published (as in Russia and Bulgaria) but also in the-then Czechoslovakia, including not only federal results but also for the Czech National Council. The lack of a permanent Electoral Commission in Romania continues to have effects: full data are available only for parties that won seats in a constituency. It became apparent quite early that we could not simply visit a country for a few days and retrieve information from official sources or through our contacts.

It proved extremely difficult to obtain even hard copies of laws from the early 1990s. We got considerable help from the IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) in Washington, D.C., where we obtained hard copy of a significant number of laws and some election results, mostly in the original language. Following an agreement with IFES and ACEEEO (Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials), local offices and members, respectively were enlisted in the process of data collection. Still the process was slower than anticipated by all partners, with some responses taking several months and others never materialising at all.

It was easier to obtain recent data, not least because of the development of electoral commission websites, and easier to obtain legislation than election results, candidate data being the most problematic. Some countries such as Hungary collect no records of candidates’ personal data for reasons of privacy. In others, the data were collected but not retained. In Romania the official results are very incomplete, making it very difficult to obtain information on non-parliamentary parties, especially in terms of constituency level and candidate data. Since there was no threshold in 1990, the results from 1990 were gathered from the printed official results in the ‘Monitorul Oficial’ and the newspapers of the time. The 1992 results could not be obtained through any official channels and were only obtained with the help of an MP through informal channels (a personal friend of the director of the Statistics Commission).

When data were obtained, they were not always available in the required format. When assured of the availability of legislation, we often found that only parts were available, or parts were only available in English translation. For example, only the sections pertaining to local elections in the Hungarian law of 1997 were available in English; similarly the Moldovan 1994 amendment on constituency delimitation that is crucial for understanding the election results and seat allocation was not available in English. A measure of translation had of course been anticipated, but we did not expect to need to translate entire laws. Moreover, despite arranging fees to borrow the scanner of the European Consortium for Political Research, in the event we had to use manual methods in the absence of effective character recognition of foreign names, terms etc., even with English translations. We did eventually buy more advanced software, but it never entirely resolved the problem of so many languages, alphabets, and diacriticals.

Election results data were even more problematic, including the use of different methods of calculating turnout and per cent valid votes, and the meaning of certain numbers/headings (especially votes cast) were not consistent over time (and even less across countries). For example, ‘votes cast’ was calculated either by the number of votes placed in the box or the number of ballots distributed or the number of voters attending the polling station. We had to decide on the use of one consistent measure and after a close scrutiny of all voting procedures we chose the number of ballots cast (ie placed in the box). The total number of votes in the 1998 Hungarian elections was calculated using the number of votes from the round declared valid (namely the one in which turnout was above 50%) but these figured aggregated or the figures calculated using these figures were not consistent with the official figures calculated separately per round. Some of the data we received were formatted in very peculiar ways and necessitated manual inputting. For example, we spent many hours seeking help to open Bulgarian
constituency results provided to us; after numerous assurances, it transpired that could not be re-opened by the originators themselves, the Institute for Mathematics, since the software they used was no longer available.

- *Creating the on-line database.*

Creating the on-line database proved extremely time consuming, as both the planning and the execution necessitated numerous hours of qualified work, as well as a lot of tedious inputting and checking. IFES provided a grant of £3000 for a database consultant, topped up by the project budget. This was also our main source of database training for the Research Officer, since the university webmasters were often less advanced in such techniques than she was. It is difficult to see how the final result could have been achieved without the help of Martin Hannavy, who ‘sold’ his services vastly below the normal market rate.

It was important to maintain the easy and logical access and navigation achieved in the first, simple version of the website, while a lot more data had to be added and continuous corrections and amendments (with many suggestions coming from our users) were also required. For the on-line database, the files had to be adapted to database structure, which implied an enormous amount of formatting. Since electoral legislation had to be searchable both by election year and by topic (among which were ‘franchise’, ‘nomination procedures’, ‘polling day regulations’, ‘seat allocation procedures’, etc.), and not only be viewed in their entirety, the laws had to be inputted into Microsoft Access tables article by article. Each election, each law and each of the 12 topics have unique identifiers, each article a unique identifier within a law and each article can be assigned to one or more topics. Constituency level election results are broken down into four tables per election or per component in mixed systems, the identifiers of each constituency and each contender in an election allowing for the results to be viewed either for one party in all constituencies, or for all parties in a certain constituency, as well as in their entirety by party or by constituency. It was difficult to ensure that the identifiers matched as needed because of the impossibility of standardising all files, especially due to the differences in the structure and numbering of the law articles/chapters/subchapters/sections in the legislative database and the differences in electoral systems in the election results databases.

We made SPSS files and Excel files with codebooks available for downloading from our site, which implied a coordinated effort to ensure consistent and accurate coding throughout all files (i.e. throughout all countries and election) and to keep missing data to a minimum. All data were checked for consistency and reliability as well as for all potential mistakes or imprecisions. Labelling (variable and value labels) is consistent across countries and elections depending on the electoral system and as long as the provisions of the electoral system were similar and remained unchanged over time. The tortuous process of coding was helped by the Department of Government, University of Essex, which provided a post-graduate Bursary for Robertas Pogorelis, including a contribution to the project. Robertas coded all the Lithuanian and Russian data for the database, as well as providing other help.

The database was designed including not only content related considerations but also accessibility and maintenance issues. Consequently we had to chose software - both for the database and for the internet interface - that does not require sophisticated technology to access on-line, since a significant part of our potential audience would be based in post-communist countries with less developed IT structures and slower internet connections. Ease of maintenance was also considered, since we continuously updated the database, with newly passed legislation and with results of recent elections, as well as with other data gathered. Moreover, the internet interface was designed to provide clear navigation options to users with different interests and internet knowledge, which implied the inclusion of comments and suggestions received from users of our site and multiple testing of the new interface. We believe that we achieved most of what we set out to achieve, and were able to add more countries than originally planned. The user response is testimony to the achievement.

Other difficulties:

In common with other political scientists conducting One Europe or Several? research, we had to contend in 2001 with the demands of Teaching Quality Review and the Research Assessment Exercise, both of which shifted the normal balance of teaching, research and administration and expectations of use of staff time. Frances Millard was Undergraduate Director, and Kieran Williams played a major role in the negotiations and subsequent integration of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies into University College London. These factors eroded research time and with the data problems, helped to push back plans for publications. Partly for these reasons but also because of the unique quality of the data, outputs from the project are expected to continue for some time.
• Research Findings

Electoral System Design. The monograph Embodying Democracy: Electoral system Design in Post-Communist Europe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, November 2002) examined the genesis and development of electoral systems in eight post-communist countries. It concluded that electoral systems during the first decade of post-communist political transformation were shaped by three embedded sets of factors: existing models delineated the range of alternatives considered, contextual factors shaped perceptions of those options by actors, and strategic bargaining in conditions of high uncertainty determined outcomes within these parameters. The process of institutional design changed after the first free elections, both in respect of the actors involved, the fora in which decision-making took place, and the nature and significance of strategic interests. In the first period actors were not narrow seat maximisers. They often prioritised other benefits, such as seeking democratic legitimacy or spreading blame for government of a country during a difficult economic transition. This explains why countries such as Romania and Czechoslovakia opted for proportional representation in 1990, when a plurality system would have been more narrowly rational for the strongest parties.

Over the course of this ten-year period politicians in the post-communist states learned a great deal about electoral systems. The learning process both enabled actors to engage in increasingly strategic behaviour and at the same time widened the range of design elements that were seriously considered. As time passed and the results of the new system became more apparent, certain parties did adopt a more quintessentially selfish strategy of favouring electoral reforms that would increase their share of the seats, but these efforts were repeatedly stymied or overturned by alliances of other parties and veto points such as constitutional courts. These findings show that political parties have different senses of self-interest, depending on other terms of competition and the overall progress of the economic and political transition. Historical traditions play only a minor role in determining outcomes.

Although many scholars postulated early ‘lock-in’ of institutions, this has not been the case with electoral systems and many reform efforts did bear fruit. The electoral systems that emerged from ten years of reform were generally more complex than those used for the first post-communist elections in these countries. And though outside agencies were certainly useful sources of information and expectations, the bulk of the learning was the result of domestic experience, with regional models playing a secondary role. Only Hungary and Russia left their systems virtually intact. Moreover, electoral reform remained on the agenda in a number of countries, and there may well be surprises in store if pro-majoritarian factions are able to buck the trend toward increasing proportional list voting. But the first ten years of post-transition electoral system change provided ample evidence of the complexity of institutional design processes and the diversity of factors that are relevant in even a relatively narrow set of similar cases. At the same time we identified a number of general patterns which characterised the interwoven process of electoral system and party system development in a post-transition context.

The Impact of Electoral Systems. The electoral systems that evolved in post-communist Europe from the early 1990s are characterised by broad similarities with their Western European counterparts. The size and shape of the party systems that have been generated by these systems are also similar overall. Yet the electoral systems of post-communist Europe are doing far more ‘work’ than their Western counterparts to reduce the size of party systems (and they are more likely to use exclusionary thresholds to achieve this end rather than the favoured Western technique of manipulating constituency size).

The impact of electoral institutions in the early stages of electoral liberalisation differs in certain key respects from their impact at later stages, but they do have systematic effects which contribute importantly to the formation of parties and the shaping of representative structures. ‘Party-enabling’ aspects of electoral laws foster the institutionalisation of policy-oriented party systems, whereas ‘politician-enabling’ rules favour the development of clientelistic parties and weakly institutionalised party systems.

In particular, mixed-parallel electoral systems fail to provide viable mechanisms for the consolidation of democracy, primarily because of their single-member element. They do not, as is often claimed, ‘provide the best of both worlds’. Though such systems do tend to dampen electoral volatility, they work against the institutionalisation of democratic politics, in that they are ‘politician-enabling’ mechanisms which encourage the multiplication of small, regionalised political support bases. This is less apparent in (small) Lithuania than in Russia and Ukraine. Generally, however, electoral institutions (such as thresholds and the size of multimember districts) do not always have their textbook effects on party competition if the constitution and statutes build in other incentives. In particular, provisions allowing candidates to stand simultaneously in single-member districts and on party lists has undermined attempts to compel parties to coalesce, and in turns keeps the legislature more fragmented than would be expected. In Russia the federal system reinforces this tendency to hamper party consolidation, by allowing regional officials with formal institutional power bases to install their clients in the single-member districts. In contrast the Hungarian mixed-linked electoral system has highly disproportional effects so far as the representative
function of elections are concerned, but the complex linkage of the three tiers proved more party-enabling that its architects expected.

Proportional list systems encourage party-system strengthening and contribute to the stabilisation of democracy. PR in Central Europe has generally avoided the shortcomings for which it has been faulted in the West, such as unstable government, the perpetuation of coalitions that lack popular support, and the disproportionate power of small parties. In many cases, however, PR has not produced all of the benefits for which it is praised in the West, such as higher turnout, better representation of groups (including women), and fewer votes wasted on parties that fail to enter the legislature. This causes us to question the power of the electoral system as a variable independently affecting the quality of post-Communist democracy.

Representation. Although many scholars dismiss the significance of the experience of elections under communism, those elections maintained stress on the role of the deputy and his/her mandate in maintaining accountability. The appeal of an individual representative (as distinct from a party delegation) remains high, and countries with mixed systems are unlikely to move to PR because of the value attached to the representatives in single-member districts. The shift from an individual to a ‘party’ concept of representation has been slow, even where PR was the electoral system used at the outset. This has meant considerable public support for majoritarian electoral systems, notably in the Czech Republic and Romania and a high value placed on open lists in Poland, where the parties themselves would prefer closed lists. (Large) parties in Romania and the Czech Republic support a shift to a majoritarian system because they believe it would lead to a two-party system, but voters support it because they believe it would enhance the quality of representation. Voters appear unaware of the huge disproportionality that results from mixed systems (there are now no ‘pure’ majoritarian systems).

Unsurprisingly the states with mixed systems show higher disproportionality than the PR systems, resulting not only from the single-member element but also from the effects of thresholds where parties struggle to develop countrywide organisational capacity and where institutional incentives encourage clientelistic relations in single-member districts (as noted above).

Candidate profiles are not dissimilar throughout the region. There are large differences, however, between candidate profiles and deputy profiles. Deputies are more highly educated and increasingly more likely to be professionals than candidates taken as a whole. There are still quite high numbers of working class candidates, but they are mostly concentrated in populist parties and extremist parties (but not in the successor parties, whether communist or social democrat). This is not the case with women candidates, where type of political party is not clearly related to the numbers of women candidates: unlike in Western Europe right-wing extremist parties are not overwhelmingly male, and nor are left-wing parties marked by higher numbers of women candidates.

However, there are some signs that this is changing in some countries. Although women’s representation fell markedly in the first semi-competitive and fully competitive elections, ‘contagion effects’ became apparent with the adoption of women’s quotas by the largest left-wing parties in Poland and Hungary (and more recently in Lithuania). The parties are the key to candidate recruitment, and without their action, electoral-system effects are limited. Mechanisms seen to benefit women’s representation in Western Europe such as high district magnitude and closed party lists do not make a difference at this stage (but will probably become important if parties address this issue). In mixed systems (though Russia differs somewhat) women are less likely to be selected for single-member districts and more women enter parliament through the list element than the single-member element.

Party survival rates are greater in Central Europe than in Eastern Europe, but representation is not effectively linked to accountability since parties are still splitting, merging, and renaming themselves and new parties continue to emerge with some frequency. However, voters readily use the capacity to defeat governing parties: Incumbency, often thought to be an advantage in Western Europe, has not proved to be of such benefit in post-communist elections— in the cases of Romania in 2000 and Poland in 2001 incumbents defending their governing records were excluded from parliament, having failed to pass the electoral thresholds.

Turnout in post-communist Europe was investigated by testing a number of models connected with the way voters experience elections and the extent to which this experience is related to the institutional structure and information flows in election campaigns. Due to the rather small number of elections/ cases in the analysis and the novelty of democratic institutions, it was expected that institutional variables would explain less in terms of turnout than in old democracies and thus in previous analyses. Yet, it was also expected that those variables theoretically most relevant to the salience or experience of elections model would be most significant, for instance the closeness of the race and the strength of the lower chamber. At the same time election ‘publicity’ (i.e. the type and amount of information available to the electorate) was expected to play a bigger role than in consolidated democracies. The only purely institutional
variable to have a statistically significant effect on turnout in post-communist elections is legislative responsibility, and it remains significant even after controlling for the age of the democracy (years since first post-communist elections). It appears that when the lower chamber elected has the capacity to hold the government responsible, thus when the chamber is relevant and has some power, turnout is higher than where parliament is weak and the president is strong. This confirms our general findings about the importance of the institutional context, including the parliamentary or presidential nature of the system, in the development of political parties and their recognition by the electorate.

Electoral Administration.

Many of the differences between East and West are a function of historical point of development. The post-communist states have adopted ‘state-of-the-art’ electoral regimes complete with all the latest aspects of design innovations current at the end of the twentieth century. In terms of electoral administrative institutions the CEE states are also generally more advanced than their Western counterparts. Firstly, in keeping with commitments to the OSCE under the 1990 Copenhagen document, they all allow international and domestic observers to be present for the main events of the voting process. Their Western neighbours are also in theory bound by these commitments, yet they often see fit to ignore them. Secondly, the post-communist states have almost all established permanent independent electoral commissions to oversee the electoral process and to ensure that it is not influenced by the interests of current power-holders. Though independent commissions of this type have come to be recognised as ‘best practice’, the majority of Western European states still allow their elections to be run by a branch of the government - typically the ministry of the interior - which is under political control. Finally, many of the CEE countries have procedures for maintaining the integrity of the electoral process - including arrangements for guaranteeing vote security and accurate tabulation – that are more rigorous than those of some Western European states.

Thus in institutional terms, the post-communist states have taken the Western European model and improved upon it. This has partly been the result of Western assistance programmes that have deemed it necessary to introduce more stringent procedures in the new democracies than they have at home, and partly the consequence of a failure on the part of many Western states to modernise their electoral practices. Though the quality of electoral administration in the newly democratised states is not in practice always as high as might be desired, the quality of electoral institution design is in most cases superior to that found in the established democracies. The CEE states will soon undoubtedly be demanding in their negotiations with various supra-national European bodies that their Western counterparts come up to the new standards established in the East.

Issues of electoral administration remained contentious primarily in Russia and Ukraine, where electoral commissions are strongly linked to the centres of presidential power. Elsewhere, many issues are effectively left to the electoral commissions because they are regarded as essential technical. This is broadly the case, for example, with redistricting.

By and large few provisions regulate redistricting in Eastern Europe, and these are often rather unclear. Nevertheless, the salience of the issue is remarkably low, suggesting more a lack of interest and of knowledge with respect to technical matters than self-interested partisan abuse of redistricting procedures. Malapportionment is quite frequent, however, and there were some instances of illegality even in the initial district delimitation for the first free elections. The most plausible explanation is simply that of bureaucratic inefficiency (incomplete voter registries, failure to comply with submission of redistricting plans within legal deadlines) or fear that lack of consensus would generate endless quarrelling in Parliament over new constituency borders.

Partisan gerrymandering did not appear to have been prominent in the period under examination. Even in Russia in 1993 where every decision regarding the election law was seen as archetypal gerrymandering and malapportionment, the fundamental moving force was less the aim of deliberately putting a certain party or bloc at an advantage than confusion and lack of coordination, as presidential decrees supplemented the original decree on the electoral system. A factor that we suspect loomed large was the uncertainty of partisan players about the geographic distribution of electoral support for the various parties. With the slow but inevitable growth in the institutionalization of East European party systems, this Rawlsian ‘veil of ignorance’ will presumably disappear and give way to the reign of elaborately calculated partisan self-interest. Given the rules and conventions that have developed so far, one would expect that in some countries only the tacit cooperation and gentlemanly behaviour of political rivals can prevent the growth of acrimonious debates over redistricting practices.
Two factors stand out as forces promoting fairer processes of redistricting. One is the background of a PR electoral system. At least in the case of the Czech and Polish senates, this factor seems to have gone hand in hand with more parliamentary oversight of as well as fairer rules about redistricting issues. Secondly, even a passing comparison of the rather progressive current Albanian rules with the authoritarian-smelling provisions in strikingly more democratic Hungary suggests that international assistance, scrutiny and pressure may well play a substantial role in the development of legal documents. Whether they have a comparable impact on the development of actual practices is a question that we cannot answer at this point in our research.

Accountability: The Role of the Judiciary. The input from constitutional courts into the electoral process in Russia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia proved considerable. In many instances the court felt bold enough to rewrite electoral legislation, not merely uphold or veto it. Key features, such as the thresholds that must be surmounted to qualify for seats and remuneration of campaign expenses, or the combination of PR with plurality voting, have been the subjects of high-court litigation and revision. Even when supporting the status quo, courts have attached extra conditions, such as insisting that thresholds be relaxed to ensure that at least two parties qualify for seats and that a majority of voters be represented. Judges are using cases concerning the electoral system to elaborate on their visions of democracy, and in most instances prioritise the stability of the system over other goods, such as representation, fairness and free competition. This bias may have long-term consequences for the perception of the courts if they come to be regarded as custodians of the emerging party cartels, rather than as enforcers of constitutional rights.

Activities

Maintaining links with non-academic users formed a central element of our dissemination strategy. The team concluded a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officers (ACEEEO) in summer 1999 regarding the establishment of a joint website and the sharing of data. Sarah Birch served as member of the Executive Committee of the resulting oversight structure to provide liaison with members of both organisations. IFES provided £3000 to fund (with £600 from the project) a consultant on the design and format of the data-base and its search engine. Marina Popescu attended the ACEEEO Conference in Bratislava in September 1999, and Frances Millard attended subsequent conferences in Warsaw in June 2000 and in Croatia in 2001. The conferences proved a better means of outreach than the User Conference we originally proposed, enabling us to develop personal links with members of both ACEEEO and IFES and to provide delegates with information about the development of the data base, including distributing CDs with the electoral legislation compiled by the Project team.

Sarah Birch organised and she and Frances Millard planned and conducted four foundation courses and four specialist workshops in the Theory and Conduct of Democratic Elections for the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Hercegovina at the University of Essex and in Sarajevo (February-November 1999). The programmes included contributions from academics and electoral administrators from the UK and Central Europe. The courses aimed to combine theoretical insight, comparative experience, and detailed knowledge of the Bosnian context to enhance the conceptual relevance of the material conveyed. The training received by course participants contributed both to capacity-building and institution-building, in as much as the course participants were key players in the emerging electoral infrastructure.

Frances Millard conducted an investigation of Romanian elections and government formation as part of the UK Government’s Department for International Development’s pilot study of ‘Good Government in Romania’ (September 1999) as a direct result of her involvement with the project.

Sarah Birch engaged in a range of consultancy activities arising directly and indirectly from the experienced gained on the Project. She was an expert adviser on electoral reform to the New Serbia Forum, organised under the auspices of the British Association for Central and Eastern Europe, Budapest, January-February 2000. She was also expert adviser to the USAID Elections and Political Processes Project in Ukraine, March, June 2001, where she also presented papers on electoral system design to both the Ukrainian Parliament and the Central Election Commission. She served as Election and Political Process Specialist for the USAID project on Political Party Assistance in Bulgaria in March-April 2002. The project was designed to assess the needs of Bulgarian political parties in advance of a four-year USAID assistance programme.

In June 2001 Frances Millard and Marina Popescu held a joint workshop organised in Bucharest with the Romanian Society for Political Science (SRSP) on the reform of the Romanian electoral system. With Gabor Toka of the Central European University they presented short papers on electoral systems, including the experience of other Central European countries. The main topics of the workshop centred on choices of electoral system and their likely implications for the Romanian party system and more
generally for the quality of democracy. The round table provided an opportunity for party representatives to exchange views among themselves as well as with academic experts in the field. All major political parties were invited, and representatives from four participated in the deliberations: the main governmental party the Romanian Party of Social Democracy (PDSR), the National Liberal Party (PNL), the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) and the National Peasant Party Christian Democratic (PNTCD). Other participants included researchers and lecturers, journalists from major newspapers, Romania Libera and Cotidianul, and from national public television.

Outputs

Publications

Books:

Articles and chapters published or accepted:

In addition to giving seminars and talks at the University of Sussex, Oxford, the LSE, the University of Essex, the University of Southampton, and the University of Leeds, members of the team presented the following papers:


Impacts

Feedback from the database has been extremely positive. We received very valuable comments and signals of appreciation for the website, in particular its quality, free availability, and the ease of navigation. Election officials within the ACEEEO, the OSCE and the Hungarian Election Commission have used the search engine for a number of studies. Academics and students from inter alia the Universities of Essex, Wisconsin, Indiana, Houston, and Washington; the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, Twente University, the Netherlands, Wisenshaft Zentrum Berlin, the Central European University, Budapest; the University of Bucharest, Babes-Bolyay University in Cluj, Romania, the University of Skopje, Macedonia, and the Polish Academy of Sciences expressed their appreciation for the quality of the data and in particular the provision of constituency-level results. Journalists and NGOs have also contacted us to praise the usefulness of the database.

Links were developed with a variety of organisations. Sarah Birch served as Co-ordinator of the Association of Election Administrators Diploma Course training manual project in Summer 2000-Autumn 2001. She directed the taught component of the Association of Electoral Administrators’ Diploma Course, a week-long residential course held at Essex for professional election administrators from across the UK, 1999-2000. She also took part in the Project on the Implementation of Electronic Voting commissioned by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association, and several other non-governmental organisations, August 2001-March 2002. Essex was part of a research consortium including De Montfort University and the BMRB social research firm assessing the feasibility of introducing remote electronic voting for public elections in Britain and advising on the conditions under which such a scheme could work effectively.

In July 2002 Sarah Birch will be part of a small expert working group organised by International IDEA [Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance] to plan their future programme strategy in the area of electoral systems. Frances Millard and Marina Popescu will participate in the new Soros-funded Bucharest Summer School in Political Science (July 2001 and July 2002), intended to introduce young Romanian scholars to fields and methods of research where there are obvious gaps at Romanian universities. Organizers and participants also have links with parties and relevant voluntary organisations concerned with civic education, giving another means of widening our outreach.

Future Research Priorities

There are clearly numerous avenues arising from this project. The circumstances of Central and Eastern Europe remain dynamic, and the project largely excluded the countries of former Yugoslavia. Huge issues centring on the quality of democracy remain to be explored. The addition of new electoral data will permit the extrapolation of trends over longer periods to permit a clearer sense of transition-related and consolidation-related factors.

Recommendations

The ESRC needs to give attention to the provision of technical advice for applicants. It also needs to consider the implications of interactive web-based data sets and the administration of these sites after the end of a project. Although they can be transferred to the Data Archive as ‘dead files’, this loses the interactive capacity, but the latter may remain of crucial importance to users.