

Research and Data on Finnish Elections: An Overview

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Research projects and key publications on Finnish parliamentary elections

Unlike many other countries, Finland have not yet had a systematic programme for monitoring elections and voting behaviour with national election studies. However, efforts for starting the art of collecting panel data on national elections did start already in the end of 1950ies, when Pertti Pesonen collected samples for his first research. They were heavily influenced by the questions, models, and measures of the American national election studies of that time (Pesonen 1960 and 1968).

When it comes to major national studies on Finnish parliamentary elections that try to explain the voting behaviour from various perspectives, the list is still amazingly short. After a compilation book on the 1966, 1970, and 1972 parliamentary elections (edited by Pesonen, 1972), the next major book was not published earlier than in 1993 about the 1991 elections (Pesonen & Sänkiaho & Borg 1993). This publication was soon followed by a compilation book in English, 'Finnish Voter' (ed. Borg & Sänkiaho 1995). Combined with a fresh textbook on the Finnish Political System and societal developments (Pesonen & Riihinen 2003) they provide detailed description on the Finnish Electoral system, political institutions and electoral developments in English.

The current research project on the 2003 elections is, then, the third major project that will put its focus on Finnish parliamentary elections with nationally representative post-election data. This data set includes CSES module 2.

Finnish data on elections and voting

Finnish Voter Barometer surveys have been commissioned by the major parties in the Parliament. In election years, other sponsors have also been involved. Up till 1988, the surveys were planned by [Gallup Finland](#) in co-operation with [the Department of Political Science at the University of Helsinki](#), and by the different political parties. After 1988, the planning has been in the hands of Gallup Finland and the financing parties.

From 1973 to 1990, the annual Voter Barometers were collected mainly in face-to-face interviews: structured questionnaires were filled in 1000 - 2000 interviews. Since 1991, the surveys have been made via [GallupChannel](#) (PC's installed in respondents' homes). In 1985 and 1989, Voter Barometers were not conducted.

Topics covered by these surveys include voting behaviour, concerns, opinions about the government and the parties, and attitudes towards national political issues. In addition, respondents' economic expectations and political activity have often been probed, as well as their opinions on local politics, and the significance of the party leader to a party. Background information has usually covered the social class of the respondent, social class and the source of livelihood of the head of the household, respondent's education, age, mother tongue, gender, party membership, political views, labour organisation membership, and family's annual income. In addition, the material contains regional variables. Even though the variables are not always fully compatible with each other, the dataset makes possible various temporal comparisons.

Prior to the establishment of FSD, Voter Barometers 1973-1984 were archived by the Department of Political Science at the University of Helsinki. FSD's current collection includes the documentation of these surveys.

Finland in comparative survey data sets

In terms of finding comparative country data it is also worthwhile to notice that Finland, like many other West European countries, have involved in several international survey programmes which contain at least some micro data on voting, party support and political attitudes. Data for European Values Survey / World Values Survey is available for four waves (1983, 1990, 1995, and 2000) and Finland will join the next round, too.

Standard Eurobarometers (face-to-face) and FlashEurobarometers (phone) have been collected in Finland since 1994, and Finland has been a member of the International Social Survey Programme since 2000. For some years, these data sets provide solid comparative data for many research purposes of comparative political science.

Finally, the European Social Survey (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>) provides a brand new and very important data infrastructure for researchers on political issues and political attitudes. Most current EU-countries together with some additional countries participated in the first round of data collection of this major academic programme in 2002, and the first version of the compiled international data has been made available recently by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (at <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>).

Other data sources and studies

International data libraries and election result holdings, like the web site of the IDEA, provide some central election results for Finland. More detailed information on election results, and in English, since the mid 1990s is available at the web site of Statistics Finland (http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tk/he/vaalit/index_en.html) The official election website of the Ministry of Justice contains some complementary information on election results, and on the Finnish political system and electoral arrangements. Much information is available also in English (and in Swedish ☺).

Official election statistics have also been used in analysing voting behaviour in Finland. Professor Tuomo Martikainen has analysed voting turnout in general elections 1987 and 1999 using official electoral registers giving information on those who did vote and those who did not. Combining these records with some other official registers giving information on peoples' education, occupation and some other socio-economic factors, it has been possible for Martikainen to analyse voting turnout in different socio-economic groups in Finland, based on the whole population of franchised voters (Martikainen & Yrjönen 1991, Martikainen & Wass 2002).¹

Dr. Kim Zilliacus has used official election results aggregated by municipalities and estimated transition matrices of party votes in all the general election between 1945 and 1991. The esti-

¹ A shorter version of the study on voting turnout in 1999 has been submitted to the American Political Science Review.

mated of transition matrices have been made using Søren Thomsens method of ecological inference (Zilliacus 1995).

Dr. Kimmo Grönlund has also used official electoral registers aggregated by municipalities and analysed effects of areal social pressure on voting behaviour (Grönlund 1995).

Election Study 2003: Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland

In 2002, a consortium of ten Finnish political scientists, headed by Heikki Paloheimo, joined the CSES project. Based on the CSES module 2, a post-election survey data was collected in Spring 2003. In spite of the CSES module 2, some other topics were also included in the questionnaire. The scientific object of the Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland project is to improve our knowledge on

- the functioning of the Finnish democracy,
- citizen attitudes towards democratic institutions,
- citizen opinions on the performance of the political system,
- the reasons for both political participation and non-participation.

The main objective is to present theoretically relevant empirical analyses on Finnish citizens as members of the political system. A special emphasis will also be put on the political behaviour of the Swedish speaking Finns.

Publications

Main results of the project will be published in two anthologies:

Heikki Paloheimo (ed.): Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland (to be published in Finnish language), coming out late 2004.

Lauri Karvonen (ed.): The Ethnic Vote in Finland (De svenska väljarna in I Finland), coming out late 2004.

Sub-projects

In spite of this, there are four other sub-projects in the project:

1. political participation among the young,
2. social capital and political trust,
3. economic voting in Finland,

4. changes in voting behaviour from 1975 to 2003.

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