

**The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)
Summary of Module 4 Pretest Results**

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Please note that this is a working document intended to provide the CSES collaborator base the information that is necessary to provide feedback and make recommendations regarding the adoption of the proposed CSES Module 4 questionnaire. This document is not intended for redistribution or publication, it does not yet properly credit the many authors and contributors to the content within it, and it may not be cited or reproduced in excerpt or in full without the written permission of the CSES Secretariat (cses@umich.edu).

NOTE

Wherever CSES Module 4 question text is referenced, the questions are from the February 28, 2011 pretest version of the draft CSES Module 4 Questionnaire, which are contained in a separate document from this one. The pretest version of the questionnaire should not be used for implementation until it is finalized. Once finalized, the full operational version of the CSES Module 4 Questionnaire will be made available on the CSES website (www.cses.org).

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Introduction

We would like to provide our sincere thanks and appreciation to Patrick Fournier (Canada), Bernhard Weßels (Germany), Michael Marsh (Ireland), Rachel Meneguello (Brazil), Jack Vowles (United Kingdom), and their collaborators and election study teams for pretesting content for CSES Module 4 and providing feedback about the results.

This summary document has been compiled by David Howell from the pretest reports of the individual election study teams, and includes some additional comments of his own. The document is meant to highlight areas for special consideration, not substitute for or provide the full detail of the original reports (many of which provide distributions, analysis, and interesting discussions which could not be included in this document while keeping to a reasonable length). Representatives from the pretest teams will be present at the CSES Plenary Session to correct any unintentional errors, important omissions, or misrepresentations.

We think that no unsolvable problems in the proposed questions have been uncovered in the pretesting. However, there are some areas where minor changes could be considered to question characteristics, and where additional guidance could be provided for collaborators both in terms of implementing the questionnaire and in adapting it for local conditions. There have been three additional questions suggestion by the Germany team for the mobilization questions, and special concerns expressed by the Ireland team about the political knowledge questions.

Election Study Methods

Brazil. The Brazilian 2010 Election Study (BES) was conducted November 4-20, 2010 on a three stage stratified probability sample of 2000 Brazilian adults. It included early versions of four sets of CSES questions: government spending, prospective economic evaluation, retrospective evaluation of economy, and perception of income/job security.

Canada. The CSES questions were part of a post-election mail-back wave. The feedback provided is based on the discussions of the Canadian Election Study team members and the survey house director.

Germany. The CSES questions were tested in surveys around three state elections held during March 2011. Testing the questions in an electoral context (even if outside of a national election period) seemed useful. The surveys were conducted on online access panels with random samples intended to be representation of the Internet population. 3,169 respondents were interviewed. Post-survey correction weights were applied which down-weighted education and up-weighted older age cohorts.

Ireland. The CSES questions were included in the Irish National Election Study (INES) 2011, which included interviews with over 1,500 respondents. The INES included both a main questionnaire that was administered by an interviewer, and a follow-up mail-back questionnaire. Some CSES questions appeared in the main questionnaire, and others appeared in the mail-back.

United Kingdom. The collaborator was able to raise funds to include questions from the CSES Module 4 Pretest on a three-wave Internet survey over the UK referendum campaign – non-probability, but weighted by age, education and report vote in 2010. The collaborator notes that the panel contains few respondents that are 66 and above. The collaborator stated that they wished for some different aspects of the sample design, but that this is what their budget allowed.

Length of Survey

After removing outliers from the timing distributions, it was found that online participants in Germany required 9.5 minutes to complete questions Q1-Q23 of the Module 4 pretest questionnaire. The 9.5 minutes is a slight over-estimate as it includes three questions in the mobilization section (naming specific parties) that did not appear in the pretest questionnaire.

Translation

While some attention has already been paid to this, it might be helpful to review the questionnaire with an eye to providing translation advice throughout to maximize concept equivalence while considering cultural and language differences and local cross-time comparability. Some of this has already been addressed in the questionnaire for terms for the questions text, such as translation of the term “defense” and this seemed to work in practice ok.

Local Adaptation

It might be worth considering providing additional encouragement where appropriate in the instructions, and perhaps also some question-specific advice, about adherence to the number of scale points and code values, for comparability.

We know from past modules that when a mid-point is not available in a question (i.e. the numbers of scale points is an odd number) sometimes collaborators add an additional middle point, a neutral option. This was the case in at least one pretest. It is difficult to compare the resulting data with scales that have an even number of points, given uncertainty with what to do with the respondents who chose the middle response, and concern about what those respondents would have answered had no middle point been available.

As regards code values, additional advice might be useful as to the meaning of the answer options, and what is intended to be measured. For instance, in the prospective economic evaluation items (Q2) the Brazil study measures the degree of change (“much better than now”) whereas the CSES pretest answers express the degree of agreement (“strongly agree”). The Brazil study occurred earlier than when the CSES pretest questionnaire was available and this is the likely reason for the differences in this example. But we know from past modules that this is occasionally an issue elsewhere, outside of the pretest environment. Sometimes there are reasonable justifications for wording changes, especially when it comes to language conventions, but it might be reasonable to have these situations checked out with the project ahead of time to allow for some discussion beforehand, if at all possible.

Internal Consistency

The Canadian collaborators noticed that in the front end of the survey instrument, the format of the questions bounces around a lot. The questionnaire goes from agree/disagree at Q2, to a 10-point scale at Q4, to 5-point scale at Q5 and Q6. The collaborator suggests that this may be done for purposes of consistency with past questions (which is true), but they express that it does not facilitate things for the respondents.

Question Sequencing

The Germany pretest specifically examined sequencing effects from having the evaluation and party identification questions before the vote choice questions. They conducted a split-sample experiment where one sample received the evaluation and party identification questions first, and the other sample received the vote choice questions first. They found no significant effect of priming by evaluations and party identification on voting behavior. Neither did they find a significant difference in reported turnout.

However, to their surprise they found a significant or almost significant difference between the two samples on the party identification questions. Both samples received the evaluations before party identification. But one sample received vote choice before party identification, and the other sample received vote choice after party identification. Their conclusion is that a priming effect of vote choice may produce a difference in the party identification distributions.

Government Spending (Q1 series)

Brazil saw little variation in responses to the government spending items, for example with 81% of respondents answering “spend little” on health. While they thought some of this pattern might be the Brazilian context (in which such a response pattern is reasonable), they suspected that the response pattern might also be encouraged by the question format. They suggest that the questions could be improved by providing an introductory text to encourage more variation in the responses, perhaps something like: 'different people have different preferences about government spending; some want more in one area others more in another...'

However, in the Ireland study, despite the fact that respondents are reminded that expenditure increases may require increased taxes, the results show that most of the respondents wish to increase the spending in all the areas, except for defence. The collaborator reminds us of the local context that spending in all areas has fallen substantially in Ireland in recent times.

Improving Standard of Living/State of Economy (Q2/Q3)

The Brazilian report suggested that in Q2 and Q3 the questionnaire seemed to be “pushing” respondents towards positive answers. In Brazil, distributions on these items show a strong tendency/bias toward positive evaluations. As with Q1, it is reasonable within the Brazilian context to expect that such a distribution could be possible, so it is not possible to say with certainty that it is a feature of the question that is influencing the distribution. However, in an

attempt to correct the potential issues, they suggest a more neutral introduction to the questions along the lines of ‘People have different expectations about the future; we’d like to ask about what you think is most likely to happen...’

In Ireland, the modal response for Q2 is “agree” (my family and I have a good chance of improving our standard of living), though the distribution is slightly skewed to the left (“disagree”). A pretty high percentage of people (17.5%) say that they “do not know” which might be regarded as denoting uncertainty about the future. The Ireland study allowed comparison of this question with the respondent’s self-placement on an optimism scale, and the two questions are indeed correlated in the expected direction.

It might be useful to describe in the questionnaire whether there is flexibility in the method by which the Q3 series (state of economy) is implemented. One collaborator combined the CSES three questions (a stem question and two branched follow-up questions) into a single question. If there is not flexibility in this regard, it would be useful to provide justification in the questionnaire as to why, as it can be imagined how other election studies might proceed similarly in absence of such guidance. If the reasoning is to make a lengthy choice set easier for persons to comprehend in orally-administered questionnaires (face-to-face, phone) then perhaps in self-administered modes (mail-back, Internet) a combined question would be feasible. However, if the intent of the branching questions is to spread out the distribution of the responses, for the sake of comparability one would not want to collapse the three questions into a single one, regardless of mode.

Government Intervention in Income and Wealth Differences (Q4)

The Canadian team found the ordering of the two endpoints of the Q4 item (0 is “government should act”, 10 is “government should not act”) to be unusual and in contradiction to the ordering of the two endpoints of the Q5 and Q6 items that follow (1 is “it doesn’t/won’t make a difference” and 5 is “it makes/can make a big difference”). They thought that the end points of Q4 should be reversed and would make for a more logical flow that is more consistent with the orderings of the response choices for Q5 and Q6.

Who is in Power/Who People Vote for Makes a Big Difference (Q5/Q6)

Factor analysis for previous 2002 and 2007 surveys by the Ireland team suggest that the following questions:

1. who is in power can make a big difference;
2. who people vote for makes a big difference; and
3. my vote does not make any difference

...all seem to measure the same latent variable. For this reason, the 2011 study by the Ireland team retained only the item “my vote doesn’t make any difference” and did not include the questions Q5 and Q6.

Like-Dislike Leaders (Q8)

In the Germany study, the proportion of missing values in the Q8 series (like-dislike leaders) was quite high compared to the like-dislike questions for parties. However, the collaborator offers that this might be due to having conducted the pretest survey during state elections instead of national elections, that one might assume that the reason is the sometimes lower awareness of state-level leading candidates of parties in state elections.

Voting (Q15)

As we are familiar in many other national election studies over time, in the Ireland study there is evidence of vote over-reporting, with 90% of the respondents claiming that they have voted at the election, when we know that in the last election turnout was more on the order of 70.1% (we presume that actual turnout for 2011 is not yet available).

Mobilization (Q17-Q19)

The Canadian team expressed concern at the asymmetry between Q17a-Q17c and Q18a-Q18b, with there being three options in the first battery, and two in the latter. The team expressed that this is not ideal, and that they could not think of an obvious reason why they should be different.

The Canadian team expressed that the phrasing "the Web, or the Internet" in Q17c, Q18b and Q19 might seem to demonstrate a lack of knowledge that the Web is part of the Internet. The Canadian team suggested that the phrase "the Web" could be dropped as long as the phrase "the Internet" was retained.

For Q19, the Canadian team thought that the following wording covers the bases more exhaustively: "During the campaign, did you SIGN UP to receive online information or alerts from a party or candidate – for example, by text message, email, RSS news or blog feed, Twitter, Facebook, or other means online?"

The Ireland results showed that about 55% of the respondents report had been approached directly, but only 28% had been contacted indirectly by friends or family. The majority in both groups were contacted by person; only 35% and 20% respectively by phone or mail. Only 3% of the respondent received either a text or mail by direct or indirect contact. In a different question in the Ireland study, about 52% of the respondents claimed that a candidate called to their home, which is very close to the 55% recorded using the direct contact CSES question. About 31% of the respondents had been approached by both a candidate and a party worker, nearly 44% by one of them and only about 25% by none, which exceeds the 55% identified by the CSES question. About 96% of the Ireland respondents did not sign up to receive online information on the Internet. Additional questions were added to the Ireland study to tap the use of social media during the recent Irish general election, for example social networking sites and online blogs. About 80% of the respondents did not use these new sources of information showing that the traditional sources such as newspaper and television are still the main means of information for

the majority of the respondents. However, deeper investigation of the use of these new sources shows that the younger generation tends to make a bigger use of this means.

The Germany team added these three follow-up questions in the mobilization battery, in order to understand the bias of mobilization:

After Q17 (institutional contact):

By which party or political organization were you contacted? If contact was with a candidate, please note the party. Multiple mentions possible.

After Q18 (personal contact):

Would you say that the person who has contacted you has voted for the same party? If you have been contacted by more than one person, has the majority voted like you or not?

And:

What do you think, which party has the person or majority of persons voted for?

The Germany team suggests that these questions should be added to the CSES mobilization battery, that the bias variables help to understand vote choice, whereas mobilization variables alone do not. They further argue that the questions altogether added only 35-36 second to the interview time for the respondents to the survey in Germany, and so it seems a worthwhile and efficient addition to the mobilization battery in the CSES questionnaire.

Political Knowledge (Q20 series)

The Ireland study tested the four CSES political knowledge questions and it also included other knowledge questions.

In the Ireland survey, the CSES questions seemed to come out as two very easy questions (previous finance minister 86% correct, main opposition in the last election 83%) and two easy/medium questions (election term 63%, South Africa president post-Apartheid 64%). When relating the correct answers to the voting behavior at the election (voted/did not vote) and to the level of interest in politics (disinterested/interested), it is possible to detect that the respondents who asserted to have voted and the respondents claiming to be interested in politics display a level of correct answer of at least 15-20 points higher than the respective opposite group. An additive knowledge index was created from all the CSES questions, with the index ranging from 0 (no correct answer) to 4 (all correct answers) with a mean of 2.41. This index is very weakly correlated with both the level of education (.075) and the level of interest in politics (.252). In a Mokken scale test for the CSES political knowledge questions, the four items have a scalability coefficient above the cut point 0.30 and since $0.40 < H < 0.50$ can be seen as a medium quality Guttman scale. The Mokken test does not reveal a randomized answer pattern.

The following four political knowledge questions were added by the Ireland team:

1. Now I would like to ask you some factual questions about politics. It doesn't matter if you know the answers or not, we are just interested to see how close people are to politics in Ireland. So, first of all do you know how many seats there are currently in the Dail?

[a "1" was coded for the correct answer of 166 exactly, and a "2" was coded for a partially correct answer in the range 160-170 but not 166 exactly]

2. Who is the current Irish Commissioner to the EU? DO NOT READ OUT OR PROMPT

[a "1" was coded for the correct answer Marie Geoghegan-Quinn]

3. Who was the Minister for Health from 2004 until January this year?

[a "1" was coded for the correct answer "Mary Harney"]

4. Who is the current First Minister of Northern Ireland?

[a "1" was coded for the correct answer "Peter Robinson"]

The Ireland team that their response distributions seemed to indicate two difficult questions (number of seats 37% correct, current Irish Commissioner of EU 35% correct), one medium (First Minister of Northern Ireland 44%) and one very easy question (Minister of Health 92%). The respondents claiming to have voted and the respondents reporting an interest in politics display an average of correct answer of at least 10 points higher than the respective opposite group. The additive index for the Irish questions has a mean score is 2.10. Correlation of the index with the level of education is $r=.184$ and the level of interest in politics is $r=.322$. The results of the Mokken analysis for the Irish political knowledge questions show that the four items have a scalability coefficient well above the cut point 0.30 and since $H>0.60$, it is a strong Guttman scale. Again no randomized answer pattern is detected.

Based on these results, the Irish team noted that CSES political knowledge questions performed "quite poorly" in the Irish case regarding both their level of difficulty and their relationships with both the level of education and the level of interest in politics. However the Mokken test reveals that the answer pattern is not randomized and that the items scale.

The Ireland team also asked the interviewer to record how knowledgeable the respondent was about politics. The correlation between this interviewer observation and the CSES knowledge questions was .257, whereas the correlation between this interviewer observation and the Ireland knowledge questions was .459.

Based on these results, the Irish team has suggested that there is some room for improvement in the CSES political knowledge questions.

It is uncertain what type or magnitude of impact this might have on the comparison, but it is worth noting that the four political knowledge questions from the Ireland team appeared on the main questionnaire that was administered by an interviewer, and the four CSES questions appeared in the mail-back follow-up questionnaire. In an unmonitored self-administered questionnaire the respondent has unlimited time and external resources available in answering the questions – no one is there to limit the time they have available, nor to prevent them from seeking out other resources. It has been suggested that political knowledge questions are difficult to administer in such situations because some respondents take advantage of the additional resources and time available to them in order to be able to provide the correct answer. And there is no way in a mail-back survey to know who did this and who did not. It is conceivable that the number of correct answers for each CSES political knowledge question would have been lower (although to what extent we cannot be sure) had they appeared on the main, interviewer-administered questionnaire. Another issue is that in some cases, it may not be known with certainty that the person who filled out the mail-back questionnaire was the same person who was interviewed in the main questionnaire. While we hope that these respondent behaviors (using additional resources/time and handing off their mail-back questionnaire) are infrequent, it is possible that the comparison of the Irish and CSES political knowledge questions may be affected by this mode difference, though again we cannot know whether or exactly how.

In the United Kingdom, the four single-item political knowledge questions scale to some degree. The scale seems biased a little toward ‘easy’ but not that seriously. The collaborator has not had time to write the syntax to put the left-right scale into the picture, but their guess is that it would lower the average a bit.

Probability of Job Loss/Finding Another Job (Q21-Q22)

The Brazil noticed excessive economic optimism in the distribution of Q21, with nearly 82% of Brazilian respondents saying they are not worried about losing their job in the next six months (note that the Brazil study used an earlier version of the questionnaire which asked “in the next six months” instead of the current “in the next year”). They suggest that a neutral introduction to the question might spread the distribution out more.

The Canadian team commented that even though these questions are designed to apply to everyone, they appear tough to grasp for a usually difficult survey demographic: the retired elderly living off pensions. This group might really have trouble with these questions.

In Ireland, the questions are skewed towards the “not at all likely” and “not very likely” side. The rate of the “did not answer” is quite low. A deeper investigation of the Irish case outlines that there are no differences with respect to gender; there are small differences between age groups (such as that younger people tend to think that their job is less secure than older people); no differences regarding social class; and small differences among employment sector (such as that public employers might feel more secure than private). Regarding voting, the people who did not vote tend to be slightly more negative on their feelings.

In Ireland, on the difficulty of finding another job, responses are heavily skewed towards the “very difficult” and “fairly difficult” side and there seem not to be any differences among gender, social classes, age and area of employment. The rate of the “did not answer” is quite low.

In Ireland, even if the majority of the respondents think that it is not very likely that their job might be lost in the next year, the majority of them think that it will be very difficult to find another job if the previous one is lost.

In the United Kingdom the aspirational and job security questions seemed to perform OK, doing what they are supposed to do and having decent distributions. The team regressed these questions plus income and wealth and so on against personal left-right. The signs are all as hypothesized, with most significant (although not wealth), but the collaborator indicated the effects were pretty small.

Asset Ownership/Patrimonial Battery (Q23 series)

The Canadian team found it awkward in the Canadian context to ask whether people own a bank account (presumably because it is assumed nearly everyone in their population does).

In Ireland, an index of ownership was created to test the correlation with the income variable. The income variable correlates with the index at only 0.23. This analysis confirms that the income variables and the ownership variable measure two different aspects presumably wealth and class.

In the United Kingdom, the patrimonial items distribute reasonably well – they scale at $\text{Alpha}=0.50$.