

ELECTORAL RESEARCH IN BULGARIA

Alina Dobрева, PhD

European University Institute

ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL RESEARCH – FIRST STEPS

- First parliamentary elections in **1879**
- **1944** – all women gaining suffrage rights... and introduction of one-party elections
- June **1990** – re-introduction of free parliamentary elections; January 1992 - first direct presidential elections; 2007 - first European parliament elections (partial)
- **1990** - conducting first opinion polls and establishing first private polling companies; exit polls quick to follow

ELECTORAL RESEARCH AND ITS EXECUTORS

Sociological/polling agencies

First electoral research executors, e.g. NCIOM (1989-2013) - state owned agency under Parliamentary control

Marketing research companies

International companies (e.g. Gallup (TNS BBSS), GfK)
Local companies (e.g. Market Links, Market Test)

Research institutes/think tanks

Local agencies - blurring the boundaries between polling companies, NGOs, think tanks and political affiliations

ELECTORAL RESEARCH AND ITS CLIENTS

Media

Commissioned research, conducted in a hurry

Interested in simplified questions and numbers that make good headlines

Just before and/or during elections

Political parties

Increasing frequency

For internal use, for party and campaign strategy building (not publicly available) or often to create band-wagon effect (questionable reliability)

Sometimes regional, sometimes national level

NGOs

Conducted occasionally

Focused on topics that are special interest of the NGOs (electoral research is usually marginal)

TYPES OF ELECTORAL RESEARCH

Types of research

Major interest

If elections were today (monitoring ratings/trust in political parties, politicians, institutions, issues & policies, government performance tracking)

Media content/news and popularity contests for the politicians

Pre-electoral voting intention and voting advice applications

Probing for changes in the electoral law
 Profiling voters & creating campaign strategy
 Creating band wagon effect & media hype

Election day (exit polls & parallel vote counting)

To guarantee the democratic process and its transparency
 Creating hot news for the media

Post-electoral

Scientific interest

DIFFICULTIES FACING ELECTORAL RESEARCH

Buying votes

Introduces a covert element to the electoral dynamics

Hard to predict electoral outcomes

Hard to study as a particular phenomenon, especially based only on the standard scientific grounds

'Number 15' phenomenon

Introduction of new electoral laws and procedures very shortly before the elections – hard to study and/or predict their impact

e.g. introduction of preferential voting without educating the voters led to replicating the number of the party as a preference for a person, i.e. person N15 from party N15 gets almost all preferences

Vague campaigns and policies

Ignoring party platforms and policy positions during the campaigns makes it hard to match voters and parties

ELECTORAL RESEARCH THEMES

Minority voting

International interest: (reflected in comparative research) representation of minorities within all parties, i.e. internal plurality of representation within each party

National interest: abuse of minority voting (forced/command voting, buying votes), interference from abroad

Nationalism and extreme right

International interest: (reflected in comparative research) not reflecting specificity, such as appearing later than the other CEE countries and during economic growth (2005)

National interest:

Electoral laws, rules and procedures (Prediction and analysis of the impact of changes; Voting integrity)

Media coverage of the campaigns

Predictions of post-electoral coalition building

REPUTATION OF ELECTORAL RESEARCH IN BULGARIA

Then

Public recognition of the profession

Polling institutes as household names

Keeping reputation of providing reliable data in a professional manner (for years, but not anymore)

Early 1990s – need for guarantee against electoral fraud of the totalitarian state and therefore, introduction of parallel vote counting on the election day

Late 1990s – introduction of exit polls as a result of increased freedom of speech, trust and decreased polarisation

Now

Suspicious of political (ab)uses

Appearance of 'phantom' institutes

Reputation of being party arm/part of the political class (political affiliations of pollsters, party commissioned research (openly or not))

Serious discrepancy between predictions and electoral outcome; publishing only results that are favourable to the commissioning party or/and data misinterpretations

Frequency of party commissioned electoral research, e.g. introduction of public registry for elections 2011 revealed that almost all pollsters have been contracted by leading parties

*THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!*