

Appendix

Comparative candidate survey data and methods

Annika Lindholm and Georg Lutz

Background and the aim of CCS

The Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) is a joint multinational and collaborative project with the goal of collecting data on political candidates running for national elections in various countries. Political candidates—their activities, attitudes and beliefs—have become an attractive and promising research objective, filling a research gap between the study of voters, on the one hand, and parties and parliaments and governments, on the other hand. In many countries, parties are key actors in electoral politics. They are not abstract organisations running in elections but, instead, they consist of a multitude of groups—adherents, members, activists, party elites and the party leadership in a more narrow sense (for an early categorisation along those lines, see Duverger 1951). Individual candidates who run for office and may get elected eventually are part of the party elite. Candidates running for elections are an important part of the party as they function as important intermediaries between citizens and the state.

This recognition was the guiding principle when a draft for the first CCS questionnaire was proposed in 2005 by a planning committee. The draft questionnaire was revised by national study directors at the inaugural conference of CCS, convened in 2006 in Bad Dürkheim by Hermann Schmitt from the MZES in Mannheim. The conference was attended by 26 scholars from 22 countries, forming the founding consortium for the CCS project. The rules for data quality and exchange were also defined at the conference. In addition, task forces were established among the participants to fill the remaining gaps in the questionnaire notably concerning contextual information, candidate nomination process, intra-party democracy and the adaptation of the questionnaire to the specificities of multimember electoral districts. The final version of the questionnaire was approved in February 2007. This questionnaire was then in the field mainly between 2007 and 2013, leading to a first comparative dataset (CCS, 2016) that included candidate study data from 32 elections from 24 countries.

While CCS started as an endeavour limited in time, steps to transform CCS into a long-term project were undertaken in 2012 and 2013. CCS

formed a governance structure with a steering committee and developed a process to develop a new CCS wave II questionnaire that was then in the field between 2013 and 2018. FORS – Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences – took over the task to integrate and disseminate the CCS data from the different countries and rounds. Data from the CCS wave II are available in the form of an integrated dataset (CCS, 2019), including a total of 22 elections from 18 countries. By now, CCS wave III questionnaire is in the field with a renewed questionnaire.

Using core questionnaires, the CCS is fielded across countries and political contexts, thereby enabling comparative, cross-country research using the data. The questionnaires focus on the relationship between the candidate, the party and the voter. The questionnaires cover topics such as campaigning, candidate recruitment, issues and ideology, and views on democracy and representation. In addition, relevant contextual information (such as candidate constituency and the political system of the country) and candidate sociodemographic data are collected with the questionnaires. The CCS questionnaires follow, as far as possible, the same measurement scales and coding schemes as other established surveys, notably the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, in order to facilitate combined, cross-project analyses and answer more complex research questions.

Governance

The CCS governance structure is defined in the governing principles.¹ CCS membership is given to the research teams that conduct the CCS survey in their respective countries. A general assembly of members is organised at least once every 5 years, where each member has one vote. The general assembly approves a new CCS module, elects the steering committee of CCS and the planning committee for the development of a new module that also includes an open call for modules in which the research community can contribute. The steering committee is responsible for running the daily operations of CCS, including data integration, promotion and outreach activities and organisation of CCS meetings. The steering committee is elected for a 5-year mandate period.

Data collection and geographical coverage

The CCS is conducted by one partner in each country, using a single survey with the CCS label. The data collection is conducted by the national teams in each participating country, as soon as possible after elections and by using funds that have been raised locally. In several countries, the candidate survey is an integral part of the national election study. The first candidate surveys to be included in the first comparative CCS datafile were fielded as pilot studies in 2005, and the fieldwork continued until 2013. By the end of data collection, the CCS I datafile included data from 24 countries

and 32 elections: Australia (2007, 2010), Switzerland (2007, 2011), Germany (2005, 2009), Ireland (2007), Greece (2007, 2009, 2012), Finland (2007, 2011), Belgium (2007, 2010), the Netherlands (2006), Canada (2008), Portugal (2009, 2011), Estonia (2011), Iceland (2009), Hungary (2010), Austria (2008), Sweden (2010), Denmark (2011), Romania (2012), Czech Republic (2006), Norway (2009), New Zealand (2011), Italy (2013), Malta (2013), the UK (2010) and Luxembourg (2009).

Data access

In the first years of its existence, the national CCS datasets were distributed to users as single-country files and mainly among the CCS principal investigators. In 2013, a first comparative CCS I dataset (CCS I) was produced by FORS (www.forscenter.ch) – in collaboration with the MZES Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de). A decision was also made to make the data generally available to interested researchers. The data and documentation (including country-specific field reports and a common English-language codebook) can be downloaded free of charge through the FORS archival system (<https://forsbase.unil.ch/>), although data users are required to sign a contract and adhere to strict data protection rules and scientific ethical norms of conduct in the use of the dataset. These rules include ensuring the anonymity of the respondents, and national research teams are required to pay special attention to anonymity issues before delivering the national candidate data for integration into the comparative file.

Main themes of the questionnaire

The CCS I includes the following components:

Technical variables. Country; year of election; start/duration of fieldwork; constituency; district magnitude at the constituency level; mode of survey administration; candidate elected or not; candidate for upper or lower house; type of ballot structure in country; and weighted sum of incentives to cultivate a personal vote (constructed).

Political background and activities. Party for which the respondent stood as a candidate; year in which the candidate joined this party; member of another party; which other party the candidate has previously been a member; respondent stood as a candidate/was elected in most/2nd most/3rd most/4th most/5th most/earlier than the 5th most recent national election; employed as members of parliament (MP) or the ministry in a state or federal office; employed by the party; member of association; number of years local party office/regional party office/national party office; years served as mayor; years served as member of local/regional/national government; years served as member of a local/regional assembly; years served as member of the national/European parliament; respondent lives in the constituency; for how many years; and hours devoted to party activities in an average month.

Campaign of the candidate. How long before the election did the candidate begin to organise the campaign/start campaigning full-time; contestation of the nomination; decision about the nomination (who, at what level); hours devoted to campaigning during the last month ahead of the election; importance of various campaign activities/campaign means; primary aim of campaign; campaign budget; and contribution by the party/from donations/from own private funds.

Issues and policies. Most important problem of country today; left-right scale: own views/location of party; opinion on European unification; satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU; and additional countries which should be admitted.

Democracy and representation. Satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country; how well elections ensure that the views of MPs accurately reflect the views of voters; and who should an MP represent in parliament.

Background of the candidate. Gender; year of birth; country of birth; subjective size of town; objective size of residential community; number of years respondent has been living there; level of education; discipline; current/previous employment status; current/previous occupation; frequency of church attendance; denomination; marital status; number of children in care; dependent adults in care; ethnic background; constituency number; and meaning of the terms “left” and “right”.

Representativeness of the data

The CCS country teams were required to adhere to high-level data quality standards in the data collection. These rules were agreed on by the consortium members at the inaugural meeting in 2006.²

Universe of cases. In the first round, the original recommendation was to draw representative samples of the universe of all candidates of relevant parties. However, with only very few exceptions, all of the countries decided to not draw a sample but to include all of the candidates in the survey, which became then also the rule for CCS surveys in later rounds. In a few countries, there was a full sample, but only candidates from parties that gained representation were included in the survey.

Response rates. The country teams were required to take appropriate measures to ensure a high response rate. The response rates of the country surveys were collected with the field reports and are accessible in the survey documentation of CCS I. The response rates were generally satisfactory, exceeding 30% in most countries, and even 50% in some studies. In several countries, the response rates were below expectations (<30%). In the few studies where response rates did not attain the desirable level, the field reports had to carefully document the sampling procedure, including the constraints that the research teams were facing in reaching the target population during data collection. Table A.1 represents the response rates and survey administration method in the CCS I file.

Table A.1 CCS I response rates and survey mode

Country	Year of election	Response rate (%)	Number of candidates in election	Number of survey respondents	Survey administration
Australia	2007	49.7	950	472	Mail questionnaire
Australia	2010	45.5	543	247	Mail questionnaire
Austria	2008	23.7	4,080	966	Mail questionnaire
Belgium	2007	34.1	1,493	509	Mail questionnaire
Belgium	2010	42.4	1,161	492	Mail questionnaire
Canada	2008	54.9	616	338	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Czech Republic	2006	16.2	1,042	169	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Denmark	2011	47.8	784	375	Mail and web questionnaire
Estonia	2011	31.7	789	250	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Finland	2007	36.0	1,467	528	Web questionnaire
Finland	2011	39.4	2,315	911	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Germany	2005	43.9	2,346	1,031	Mail questionnaire
Germany	2009	38.0	2,077	789	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Greece	2007	34.4	700	241	Web questionnaire and telephone interview
Greece	2009	27.0	722	195	NA
Greece	2012	31.1	1,085	337	NA
Hungary	2010	32.1	1,346	432	Mail/web questionnaire and face-to-face interview
Iceland	2009	66.7	756	504	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Ireland	2007	39.9	466	186	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Italy	2013	23.3	2,878	672	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Luxembourg	2009	28.8	452	130	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Malta	2013	NA	NA	42	NA
Netherlands	2006	34.8	489	170	Questionnaire (paper or web)
New Zealand	2011	NA	NA	172	NA
Norway	2009	51.5	1,972	1,015	Questionnaire (paper or web)
Portugal	2009	17.7	1,150	203	Mail questionnaire
Portugal	2011	16.5	1,150	190	Mail questionnaire and face-to-face interview
Romania	2012	22.6	1,802	407	Questionnaire (paper or web)

(Continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year of election</i>	<i>Response rate (%)</i>	<i>Number of candidates in election</i>	<i>Number of survey respondents</i>	<i>Survey administration</i>
Sweden	2010	42.9	4,056	1,741	Web questionnaire
Switzerland	2007	54.0	3,181	1,719	Web questionnaire
Switzerland	2011	52.7	3,547	1,871	Web questionnaire
United Kingdom	2010	36.4	4,042	1,472	Questionnaire (paper or web)

NA, not available.

Survey mode. The CCS did not apply a strict protocol concerning the method of survey administration. Different survey modes have their distinct advantages and drawbacks, and country teams were thus asked to carefully consider them and any potential legal constraints in their countries, when deciding which method(s) were the most appropriate to use in their specific survey context. By contrast, the CCS data collection rules included general recommendations on how to choose the survey mode; the data collection rules established by CCS recommended that multimode surveys were preferable to exclusively using web surveys.

As shown in Table A.1, the candidate surveys in CCS I were, in most cases, administered by postal mail or web, although written participation was, in some cases, supplemented with telephone or face-to-face interviewing. Regrettably, the field reports do not always distinguish between mail and web questionnaire administration (hence, the mention “paper or web” in Table A.1). Researchers are, therefore, advised to keep this in mind when making cross-country comparisons and reflecting on representativeness of their analytical results using CCS I data.

Challenges in using CCS I for cross-country analysis

The CCS I integrated datafile was the first systematic effort to survey political candidates cross-nationally using a standardised questionnaire. Meanwhile, it is subject to the same inherent limitations that any cross-national data collection efforts are. Some of these limitations are briefly discussed below.

Data gaps in comparative analyses. The main strength of the CCS project is how it allows for cross-country analyses of political candidates and their campaigns. This comparability may be compromised whenever the CCS questionnaire is not fielded entirely in countries, when questions or entire parts of the questionnaire are left out, or when national surveys use different measurement scales for certain questions than the CCS uses. Therefore, it was considered to be of utmost importance that countries strive to field the questionnaire entirely and use the harmonised CCS survey instrument. It is undeniable that some parts of the questionnaire, such as

campaigning, may be especially influenced by particularities in electoral systems and any country-specific political traditions. The CCS I has tried to address this heterogeneity as far as possible by including instructions on how to deal with country-specific situations in the questionnaire. In subsequent waves of CCS (CCS II and CCS III), some of these questions were labelled optional to allow countries where these questions were not applicable or where they had little interest to exclude them from their national surveys.

Validity and reliability. Data accuracy and consistency is a high priority for the CCS project. Meanwhile, whenever cross-national research is involved, idiosyncrasies in survey design or field work across countries may affect validity and reliability of the data if the necessary precautions are not taken by research teams. The extent to which survey questions actually measure the underlying construct should always be paid attention to, especially when these questions can be understood and interpreted differently across countries and cultures. Validity and reliability may be even more at stake in situations where the national surveys were using different scales and measurements than the CCS questionnaire uses. Issues around measurement equivalence may particularly concern questions on political opinions, values and candidate behaviour across countries. These differences in measurement may have implications for comparative analyses, and researchers using CCS data for these analyses are advised to be aware of its influence for their inferences. To minimise the influence of scale nonequivalence on the data, country teams were asked to cross-check the national language translation of the CCS questionnaire against other existing (voter) surveys, and carefully document any changes they made to the measurements used in the national survey. In addition, any question formulations that were found to be vague or ambiguous during CCS I data collection were adjusted for the subsequent waves of the candidate survey (CCS II (2013–2018) and CCS III (2019–)).

Outliers. In any statistical processes that involve manual insertion of data, the possibility of errors and human mistakes needs to be recalled. In addition to initial verifications made by country teams, the CCS I data were systematically cross-checked by at least two coders when producing the comparative datafile, and again any time a new release of the datafile was made. Country teams were also asked to deliver the original data and syntaxes for the purpose of consistency checks; however, these were unfortunately not delivered by all of the countries, often due to national data protection issues. Regardless, it is not possible to fully ensure that the integrated CCS I file, just as any survey data, is completely free from outliers or mistakes in the data input process. During data integration and harmonisation, FORS and MZES put in considerable effort to identify responses that seemed unlikely and checked multiple times with country teams whether certain responses and combinations were possible in their country or electoral system.

Notes

- 1 Governing Principles of the Comparative Candidate Survey, adopted in Bordeaux, France, in September 2013.
- 2 “Considerations and Rules Concerning Data Collection and Data Exchange”, 2006.

References

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