ELECTIONS AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN FINLAND

Research plan for
2004-2007
1. Abstract

1. Responsible project leader
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2. Topic of the project
Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland

3. Time table and resources
2004-2007
90 person-months of work.
Total costs 325 000 EUR

4. Institutions
Department of Political Science, University of Turku
Department of Political Science, Åbo Akademi University
Finnish Social Science Data Archive, University of Tampere
Research Institute for Social Sciences, University of Tampere
Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki
Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki

5. Objectives
Research on electoral behaviour in Finland is rare and insufficient.
The scientific objective of this research 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 Finnish political system,
• the reasons for both political participation and non-participation. Main objective is
to present theoretically relevant empirical analyses of Finnish citizens as members of
the Finnish political system. The project also aims at producing practical knowledge
on the performance of the Finnish democracy that can be used for the development
of political life.

The research is based on a survey conducted by the project group after the general
election of 2003, in combination with an extensive use of older Finnish survey data
archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD).

The intention of the research group is
• to form a standing research group on political participation in Finland,
• to make Finnish research on political participation and electoral behaviour a
permanent and regular activity,
• to encourage and instruct under-graduate and post-graduate students in studies on
political participation,
• to carry out a systematic analysis of voting behaviour in recent general elections.
2. CONTENTS

3. BACKGROUND
   - Introduction
   - Earlier research by project members
   - Post-graduate studies to be completed within the research group

4. OBJECTIVES AND METHODS
   - Objectives
   - Research questions
   - Methods
   - Timetable
   - Objectives in post-graduate training
   - Ethical questions and data security

5. PROJECT STRUCTURE
   - Main project: Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland
   - Sub-project One: The Ethnic Vote: The Swedish Population in Finland
   - Sub-project Two: Political Participation Among the Young: a Marker of a Generation
   - Sub-project Four: Social Capital and Political Trust
   - Sub-project Five: Economic Voting in Finland

6. RESEARCHERS AND RESOURCES
   - Researchers
   - Resources

7. PUBLICATIONS
   - Edited volumes
   - Monographs
   - Articles

8. REFERENCES
3. Background

Introduction

In representative democracies, elections are the key instrument through which the popular vote is converted into parliamentary seats and political practice. Voting is the most common political act a citizen undertakes in a democracy. Therefore, electoral research has a central position in modern political science. In most established democracies, electoral behaviour has been analysed for decades. In the USA, a systematic and continuous electoral research program was established as early as 1948. Following the American example, most Western European countries, including the UK and Germany, developed a similar program. In the Nordic countries, electoral research programs are especially robust in Norway and Sweden. They can offer consistent time-series of systematic survey data at the individual level. Among the West European countries, Finland has been, and still is, a backward nation in terms of electoral research. Despite a few prominent individual researchers, and occasional pieces of outstanding work (e.g. Pesonen, Sänkiaho & Borg 1993), a permanent scientific monitoring of elections has not been established.

Originally, electoral researchers concentrated mainly on analyses of political behaviour in their own country. The ethnocentric approach in survey research has somewhat hindered the development of universal theories of political behaviour. During the most recent decades, however, cross-national collaboration has increased. The most successful example of this is the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, CSES, which today covers more than 50 countries. In all participating countries, a socio-demographically representative sample of respondents is asked the same set of questions. The program is theory-driven and scientifically well organised. The first module of the CSES was collected 1996-2001 and the second module runs from 2002 to 2006. Last year, Finland joined the program through an application by Lauri Karvonen and Heikki Paloheimo, two senior members of our research team. The fieldwork of the Finnish survey, conducted in March and April 2003, was financed jointly by the Finnish Social Science Data Archive FSD, Stiftelsen för Åbo Akademi, Svenska kulturfonden, Svenska litteratursällskapet and the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Education.

Electoral turnout has declined in Finland ever since 1987. In parliamentary elections turnout has dropped from above 80 per cent to below 70 per cent. Even though the declining turnout was slightly reversed in the latest general election, the trend has been clear. The decline in turnout is even clearer in local elections, and in the latest municipal election in 2000 less than 60 per cent of enfranchised citizens cast their ballots. According to comparative data, the pattern of declining turnout is common in established democracies. In the 1970s, the arithmetic mean in turnout in old democracies was 74 per cent. In the 1990s the mean turnout in these countries was 71 per cent (Idea 2003). The overall decline is much less dramatic than in the Finnish case. Therefore, there is an urgent need to place the Finnish case in a comparative perspective and analyse the causes of the declining turnout. Even though a less active turnout might not be a democratic dilemma per se, there are other alarming signals. Especially the divergent turnout among different groups of eligible voters calls for an in-depth analysis of Finnish (non-) voters. In the general election of 1999, for instance, turnout varied widely among the age group 25 to 29
years; in the working class, turnout was 48 per cent, among upper middle class citizens 73 per cent and among farmers 80 per cent. These kinds of differences seem to be clearest among young voters. The past decade has witnessed widening gaps (Martikainen & Wass 2002b).

Parallel with the decline in turnout, confidence in the political system has weakened among the Finns. According to data from World Value Surveys, confidence in the national parliament, Eduskunta, has fallen drastically. In the early 1980s, two out of three Finns had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Finnish Eduskunta, in the late 1990s, only one out of three. Attachment to the actors of the political system, political parties, has also become weaker. In ten years, from 1990 to 2000, the share of party members dropped by more than half from some 14 to 6 per cent of adults.

The determinants of voting need to be analysed in Finland. Moreover, this analysis needs to be done in a comparative manner. Our research team consists of senior and junior electoral researchers and represents a wide range of skills necessary for comprehensive studies of political behaviour in Finland.

Earlier research by project members


Postgraduate studies to be completed within the research group

Hanna Wass, M.A., is a postgraduate student and an initial member of the project team. The project will actively seek to integrate its work with that of our respective departments. Our intention is to form a permanent Finnish Standing Group on Political Participation, and to expand our activities so as to become a post-graduate school. Additional resources needed to establish this school will be applied for later.
4. Objectives and Methods

Objectives

Main goals. As described in section 3 of this proposal, much work is in order to place Finnish research on political participation and electoral behaviour on a more permanent basis. The scientific objective of this research 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 Finnish political system,
- the reasons for both political participation and non-participation. The main objective is to present theoretically relevant empirical analyses of Finnish citizens as members of the Finnish political system. The project also aims at producing practical knowledge on the performance of the Finnish democracy that can be used for the development of political life.

The research is based on a survey conducted by the project group after the general election of 2003, in combination with an extensive use of older Finnish survey data archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD).

The intention of the research group is

- to form a standing research group on political participation in Finland,
- to make Finnish research on political participation and electoral behaviour a permanent and regular activity,
- to encourage and instruct under-graduate and post-graduate students in studies on political participation,
- to carry out a systematic analysis of voting behaviour in recent general elections.

Extensive utilisation of survey data. In January 2003, the Council of the Finnish Social Science Data Archive awarded a grant for collecting survey data on voting behaviour and attitudes towards Finnish democracy. These survey data have been collected immediately after the general election of 2003. Older survey data archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive will also be extensively used, including the new European Social Survey data. This research project will use existing survey data more extensively than any other Finnish research project hitherto.

International comparisons. In 2002, our research consortium joined the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), a cross-national research project with sub-projects in about 50 democratic nations. Membership in the CSES gives us excellent possibilities for making cross-national comparisons and for analysing what are the most international (and nationally least controllable) trends in political participation, and what are the specifically Finnish (and nationally most controllable) trends in political participation. The questionnaire used in out fresh survey is structured so as to make cross-national comparisons as easy as possible.

Focus on Swedish speaking Finns. The Swedish minority in Finland has attracted limited attention in studies of elections and voters. However, the political participation and electoral behaviour of the Swedish speaking Finns differ in many respects from those of Finnish-speakers. Comparisons between Swedes and Finns may give critical information about citizen commitment and political participation. In
ordinary opinion polls with 1000-2000 respondents there are never enough Swedish-speakers for a reliable analysis of the opinions and behaviour of the Swedish speaking Finns. As a separate part of the data collected after the general election 2003, our research consortium has constructed a special data set of the political opinions and voting activity of the Swedish Finns.

**Focus on young people.** Special attention will be paid to the political participation of young age cohorts as well as those age groups who adopted the pattern on non-voting as young adults in the 1980s and 1990s.

**Focus on underprivileged citizens.** Special attention will also be given to underprivileged groups in the Finnish society. To what extent is political alienation due to the economic crisis of the 1990s, and to what degree is it caused by changes in political life itself, such as the globalization or technocratization of politics?

**Open access to data.** The survey data collected by our research consortium will be archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD), and will be available for research purposes.

**Research questions**
Following queries will be analysed:
1. How have attitudes towards political institutions in Finland changed during recent decades?
2. In which respects have citizen views on the performance of the Finnish political system changed during recent decades?
3. To what extent can decline in voting turnout be explained with reference to changes in life styles, attitudes towards Finnish political institutions, and changes in opinions on the performance of the political system?
4. Can attitudes towards political institutions and opinions on the performance of the political system be explained with reference to what is known as social capital? Which factors explain the strength of social capital?
5. Why has voting turnout in Finland declined more than in other Nordic countries?
6. What are the reasons for the increasing cross-group differences in turnout?
7. To what extent can traditions of political participation be explained with generation effects, that is the styles of and orientations towards political participation typical of each political generation?
8. Are there features that set Swedish voters in Finland apart from the majority and cannot be explained by other factors than those connected to their role as a minority?
9. What are the main determinants of partisan support? Have these determinants changed over time? To what extent has class voting really declined and to what extent has the significance of other factors increased?

**Methods**
The empirical evidence used in analysing these questions originates mainly from survey data, and statistical techniques will primarily be used for data analysis. Standard descriptive and explanatory techniques as well as different multivariate statistical analyses will be used.
Timetable
The project will span a four-year period after which it will continue as the Finnish Standing Group on Political Participation. The survey data collected after the general election 2003 will be mainly analysed in 2004 and 2005, and a large part of the results will be published collectively in late 2004. Several articles will be written in 2005 and 2006. Hanna Wass will complete her doctoral dissertation in 2004-2007.

Objectives in post-graduate training
The research team will form a Standing Research Group on Political Participation in Finland. In addition to the doctoral dissertation by Hanna Wass, which is a direct part of this project, the Standing Group will be willing assist any post-graduate student oriented towards the study of political participation.

Ethical questions and data security
All respondents in the survey are guaranteed full anonymity. The data collected on voting behaviour in general elections 2003 will be secured for the purposes of our research project at the first stage of our work. In 2004, they will be archived for general scientific use in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive.

5. Project Structure

Main project: Elections and representative Democracy in Finland
The main product of the research project is the collectively produced anthology Vaalit ja edustuksellinen demokratia Suomessa (Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland). The structure of the book will be as follows:

1. Introduction: Main Outline of the General Election 2003
   (by Pertti Pesonen)
2. Political Participation
   (Åsa Bengtsson, Kimmo Grönlund and Hanna Wass)
3. Political Affiliation, Party Support and Principles of Party Choice
   (Mikko Mattila, Heikki Paloheimo and Risto Sänkiaho)
4. Choosing a Candidate
   (Åsa Bengtsson and Kimmo Grönlund)
5. Election Campaign: Strategies and Effects
   (Sami Borg and Tom Moring)
6. Representation: Principles and Biases
   (Kimmo Grönlund and Heikki Paloheimo)
7. Conclusion: Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland
   (Lauri Karvonen and Heikki Paloheimo)

In addition, there are five sub-projects.
Sub-project One: The Ethnic Vote: the Swedish Population in Finland

- An anthology to be published in 2005.
- Persons in charge: Professor Lauri Karvonen, Dr. Kimmo Grönlund and Dr. Åsa Bengtsson

With few exceptions (Sundberg 1985), the Swedish minority in Finland has attracted limited attention in studies of elections and voters. Yet, several theoretically relevant factors make it particularly pertinent to focus on the position and behaviour of the linguistic minority both in the context of national politics in Finland and in a cross-national perspective. Consequently, the 2003 post-election survey in Finland contains a special sample of Swedish-speaking interviewees in order to allow for analyses of these questions.

To begin with, it is interesting to examine the behaviour, beliefs and attitudes of Swedish voters as an expression of minority politics (McRae 1999). To what extent does the role of the Swedes qua minority go to explain behavioural and attitudinal patterns? Are there, in addition to the self-evident question of party choice, features that set Swedish voters in Finland apart from the majority and cannot be explained by other factors than those connected to their role as a minority? If such patterns do exist, can they be regarded as universal attributes of linguistic minorities? In other words, can similar patterns be detected among other minority populations in Western Europe? Consequently, this part of the study involves two major lines of comparison: an intra-national comparison across the linguistic divide and a cross-national study of linguistic minorities in politics.

More than two-thirds of the Swedish electorate in Finland vote for the Swedish People’s Party. In the fragmented party system of Finland, the Swedish areas represent a deviant dominant-party system (in smaller areas a de facto one-party system). How is the presence of limited party alternatives reflected in the political attitudes of the linguistic minority? Can effects of one-party dominance be documented empirically in the form of attitudinal differences as compared to the linguistic majority (Tingsten 1937)? Are there, from a cross-national perspective, similarities among the Swedish areas of Finland and countries and regions elsewhere where a particular party holds a dominant position (Ware 1997, 147-184)?

Finally, language, while an important element in the life of a minority population, is not the sole factor determining social behaviour. The Swedish population of Finland is highly diversified in terms of social, economic and regional characteristics. An urban academic professional in Helsinki and a small peasant in Ostrobothnia differ dramatically in terms of tastes, preferences and habits. Does this diversity create difficulties of minority identification that affect political behaviour as well? To what extent do Swedish voters experience cross-pressures (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944, Allardt 1956, Grönlund 1999) between, say, socio-economic interests and linguistic affinities? Are these cross-pressures clearly more common than among the linguistic majority? Can they be detected among other linguistic minorities in comparable countries?
Sub-project Two: Political Participation Among the Young
a Marker of a Generation

- Person in charge: Hanna Wass, MA

Cross-group differences in political participation have increased during recent decades. For instance, differences between age groups have become more prominent. This sub-project continues earlier studies by Hanna Wass on voting turnout (Martikainen and Wass 2002a; 2002b; Martikainen, Martikainen and Wass 2003). It will focus on the role of political generations in Finnish political participation. Political participation among the young is the prime focus. Following questions will be analysed:

- Do young age cohorts regard their orientation towards political participation as being common to whole age group, i.e., can we speak of generational consciousness when it comes to participation?
- Which kinds of role models regarding involvement in politics have young citizens adopted during their adolescence?
- Which factors in their socialization process have caused them to attach less importance to voting in elections than older people?
- Which participation channels – assuming that political engagement among the young has not disappeared entirely – have replaced the traditional electoral arena?

By highlighting these questions, the study will form a picture of a young generation of political participants. Moreover, the study examines the way young age groups differ from their elders in relation to orientation towards political participation. Any features that are characteristic of different age groups will hopefully be detected.

Nationally representative survey data from the parliamentary elections of 2003 will be used to examine these questions. The main emphasis is on younger age groups, which are divided into young (18-24-years) and young working-aged (25-34-years) citizens. Other age groups, such as the generation of baby-boomers, are used as a point of comparison. The theoretical framework is based on the research tradition of generational politics. In the Mannheimian theoretical tradition, it is believed that a generation is formed by a certain “key experience” which occurs during some particular phase of its members’ coming to age. Some controversy exists relating to that important period of life, but generally the years from late teens to mid-twenties have been considered critical (Delli Carpini 1986, 8-9). According to Virtanen (2001; see also 1999, 84), however, the divisions within one generation may be just as relevant as those between different generations. Although this idea of inner “front-lines” within a generation involves many conceptual problems (see Toivonen 1999, 234), it is also logical to a certain extent; certain common experiences might have affected the views of young age groups in relation to participation, but the same experience can demobilize one group while mobilizing another. When speaking of a political generation, it is important also to detect certain subgroups (see Wass 2003) in order to form a clearer picture of the political socialization and political engagement of young age groups.

- Monograph to be published in late 2003.
- Person in charge: Dr. Heikki Paloheimo

Voting behaviour in general elections in Finland from 1975 to 2003 is analysed. Finnish voter barometers, along with other survey data on voting behaviour archived in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, will be used extensively.

The following questions will be analysed:
- What are the most important reasons for the drop in voting turnout during the period of declining voting activity (1987-2003)?
- To what extent do the causes of non-voting differ in different socio-economic groups?
- To what extent has partisan voting declined?
- Is class-based voting on the wane? Which parties have the most class-based constituency? Which parties are least dependent on class?
- Has issue voting become more prominent over time? What are the critical issues for each party?
- To what extent are partisan voting and issue voting compatible with the Downsian notion of spatial voting?
- Have leadership effects become more prominent over time?
- To what extent do opinions on the performance of the government have an effect on electoral behaviour? Are contemporary voters more prone to punish incumbent parties for poor performance compared to voters in the 1970s and 1980s?

Sub-project Four: Social Capital and Political Trust

- Articles to be published in 2004-2006.
- Persons in charge: Dr. Mikko Mattila and professor Jan Sundberg

In the past few years the growing interest in social capital has once again brought the questions of participation in organisational activities and its relation to trust in governmental institutions and political participation to the fore in political research. This sub-project will analyse the strength of social capital in Finland. How can the degree of social capital explain citizen trust in the Finnish political system and its institutions?

The study starts by presenting the research question and outlining the theoretical framework. This part of the study also includes a general discussion of the previous empirical findings on social capital and political trust in Finland in a comparative perspective.

The first empirical task involves a presentation and discussion of the variables that can be used to measure social capital. These variables depict voters’ membership in a variety of associations, including political parties. In addition, these variables include measures of the level of activity in these associations and activity in other political domains. In the next stage the measures of social capital are related to a number of social, economic and cultural variables such as age, sex, income, socio-economic status, urban and rural residence and ethnic membership (Finns – Swedish Finns). The aim of this part of the analysis is to find profiles of groups of citizens that display varying degrees of social capital in Finland.
In the second half of the study an index of social capital is created and used to explain degree of political trust among citizens. The variables measuring political trust include beliefs in government and the overall trust in the Finnish political system and its components. If the theories of social capital are correct, a high score on the social capital index should lead to a high degree of trust in the political system. The analysis can be made more accurate by controlling for other variables such as age, sex and the like. In the concluding chapter the findings from the study will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework.

**Sub-project Five: Economic Voting in Finland**

- Articles to be published in 2004-2006.
- Person in charge: Dr. Mikko Mattila; also Åsa Bengtsson

As class-based voting has declined over the past decades other theories of citizens’ voting behaviour have gained in importance. One of these more recent theories claims that the economic context in which voters make their voting decisions has a major impact on their choices. The main proposition of the economic voting theory is that citizens are more likely to vote for the incumbent government parties if the economy has developed favourably during their period in office. If the economic conditions have deteriorated voters are more likely to switch their support to opposition parties. In this part of the 2003 election study the role of economic voting in the Finnish context is analysed.

Two strands of analysis have traditionally dominated the literature on economic voting. The first strand, popularity function analysis, relates government support expressed in continuous opinion polls to economic changes. The second strand, vote function analysis, uses actual election results as empirical evidence. Both of these approaches have been applied to Finnish data earlier. The problem with popularity and voting functions is that they operate entirely on a macro level using aggregated data sets. However, in the end it is an individual who makes the voting decision. The 2003 election survey includes questions designed to capture voters’ perceptions of economic changes both on both personal and societal levels. These questions can be used to analyse voting decisions on the micro level. Individual survey data make it possible to analyse entirely new questions within the economic voting tradition. For example, the economic voting literature assumes that a citizen whose personal economic situation has deteriorated is likely to support opposition parties. However, it is quite possible that, instead of becoming an opposition supporter, this individual turns into a non-voter. This question, which is especially important in low voting turnout countries such as Finland, has been all but neglected in the economic voting literature.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How important are economic factors in Finnish voters’ party choice?
- Is it the personal or general economic conditions that affect voting?
- Are citizens who feel that economic conditions (either personal or general) have deteriorated more likely to support opposition parties or to abstain from voting completely?

Results from this study are important for several reasons. First, economic voting has rarely been analysed in Finland with individual level data. Thus, the results improve our understanding of Finnish voting behaviour. Second, even in the international economic voting literature studies using individual level data are rather scarce. Thus, the results can be used to enrich the international body of economic voting literature.
Finally, the research design can later be extended to other countries as well (e.g., by using the European Social Survey or Eurobarometer data).

Expected output of this part of the 2003 election study: a section in the jointly written anthology Elections and Representative Democracy in Finland, and one to three articles in refereed scholarly journals.

6. Researchers and Resources

Researchers

There are eleven members in our research consortium:
Dr. Åsa Bengtsson, Åbo Akademi
Director, Docent Sami Borg, University of Tampere
Dr. Kimmo Grönlund, Åbo Akademi
Professor Lauri Karvonen, Åbo Akademi
Docent Mikko Mattila, University of Helsinki
Professor Tom Moring, University of Helsinki
Docent Heikki Paloheimo, University of Turku
Professor Pertti Pesonen
Professor Jan Sundberg, University of Helsinki
Professor Risto Sänkiaho, University of Tampere
MA Hanna Wass, University of Helsinki
7. Publications

Edited volumes


Monographs


Hanna Wass: *Political Participation Among the Young* (doctoral dissertation).

Articles

In addition to the above-mentioned anthologies and monographs, articles will be published on each of the five topics. In the following two cases, articles will be the chief format of publication:

- Mikko Mattila and Jan Sundberg: articles on social capital.
- Mikko Mattila and Åsa Bengtsson: articles on economic voting.

8. References


Martikainen, Pekka, Tuomo Martikainen & Hanna Wass (2993): “The Effect of Socioeconomic Factors on Voter Turnout in Finland: A Register Based Study of 2.9 Million Voters” (manuscript).


