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Spring 2003
Group Projects

Assignment summary

Working with your assigned group, answer the question posed to you. You will give a 15-minute presentation (with 5 minutes available for questions) on your work on March 6. Your group will also turn in a seven-page written report on your project on Monday, March 10. (Please submit a hard copy and then e-mail Steve and me an electronic version.) The report should be in the form of a (mini) term paper. It should describe how you measured the variables of interest to you, report where you gathered the data, and summarize your findings using the appropriate figures and tables. (The seven-page limit includes tables and figures.)

Statement about Collaboration

You are encouraged to seek and extend as much help as you can, both within and between groups.

Grading

I will assign a letter grade to each group's project. That will be the grade you receive, plus or minus an adjustment that will be determined as follows: I will ask each member of the group to indicate the relative amount of effort each person contributed to the successful completion of the project. If someone in the group stands out as being a conspicuous over- or under-contributor to the group effort, that person's letter will be adjusted upward or downward as appropriate.

Project 1: Electoral System and Quality of Representation

Group: Burrows, Chowdhury, Khilani, Nesmith

Background. Democratic countries the world over employ a wide variety of electoral systems. Citizens of democratic countries vary in how responsive they believe their leaders are to their desires. A natural question arises about whether some electoral systems are better than others in transmitting the voices of citizens to the ears of elected officials. This question is intrinsically interesting, but it has practical implications, since reformers the world over often try to change the local electoral system in order to make it more "responsive" to the people. In particular, it is commonly believed that systems that have more parties from which to choose and that employ some form of proportional representation are more responsive to citizen demands.

Question. Do citizens from countries with more political parties and that employ proportional representation in their legislative elections feel that their voices are heard more than citizens from countries with few parties and that employ plurality voting for legislatures?

Possible explanations

> *Multi-partyism.* The more parties a country has, the more they are able to populate the full array of possible issue positions. This gives voters more of a reason to believe their voices are heard in the parliament.

> *Proportional representation.* Proportional representation (PR) systems allocate seats in the legislature in proportion to the votes received throughout a geographic region, in contract to plurality systems, which allocate seats on a "winner take all" basis. Under this system, minority views are presumed to be more likely to be represented in the legislature.

> *Individual demographics.* Certain types of people may be happier with governing institutions than others, despite the electoral system. Sometimes this will be a function of local political factors. For instance, wealthy people in a country controlled by the Socialist Party may be less likely to believe the parliament is "fair" than working-class people.

Data sources

> *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.* This is a cross-national, collaborative survey that asked an identical battery of questions to citizens in several dozen countries. It is available through its own web site (http://www.umich.edu/~cses/) and the Harvard-MIT Data Center. You will also discover that there are individual reports that document the political and partisan context of each country included in the project.

Bibliographic source
> Christopher J. Anderson and Christine A. Guillory. 1997. "Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-National Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems." *American Political Science Review* 91: 66–81.

Comments
This project will involve the use of a large, unwieldy data set (the CSES), merging it with information gathered from other data sources. You thing you will want to meditate on while you do this project is whether the questions asked in the different countries actually mean the same thing, across different languages and cultures.

Project 2: Ban on Bilingual Education in Massachusetts

Group: Bronder, DeReitzes, Landino, Wargo

Background: Massachusetts voters approved an initiative petition in November 2002 (Question 2) banning bilingual education in the state. This was part of a nationwide movement, spearheaded by Ron Unz, a California entrepreneur, who has used his fortunes to bankroll these initiatives in states across the nation. This movement is important for at least two reasons. First, it is having consequences for how immigrants are taught in America's public schools. Second, it is an important indicator of the state of racial politics in the United States.

Question: What explains support for the "English-only" movement in Massachusetts, as indicated by support for Question 2 in 2002?

Possible explanations

> *Fiscal stress.* Bilingual education is presumably more expensive than the "English immersion" programs advocated by Unz and his followers. Communities that are financially distressed may be more likely to support Question 2, viewing it as a way to save money.

> *Ethnic politics.* Recent immigrants obviously have an interest in this question. It is safe to say that most recent immigrants and non-native-English-speakers favor bilingual education and oppose English immersion. However, they may not be voters. One longstanding theme of interracial politics is that proximity often breeds tension and resentment. Therefore, communities with lots of recent immigrants may be more opposed to bilingual education than those without lots of recent immigrants.

> *Ideology and partisanship.* Liberals tend to identify more with recent immigrants and non-English speakers, as do Democrats, who have historically regarded recent immigrants as a core part of their coalition. Therefore, conservative and Republican communities should have been more likely to support Question *.

Data sources

> *Massachusetts Electoral Statistics* (P.D. 43). Published every two years. It is unlikely the volume for the 2002 election will be published in time for this project, so visit...
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> Massachusetts Election Division. Part of the Secretary of State's Office.
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> Census Bureau. The Census bureau has tons of reports about economics and demographics. Some are reported at the county level, others as the "place" (i.e., town or city) level. The *County and City Data Book* is the most basic source. The Decennial Census has the most comprehensive detailed information at the local level. Roche Library has most of the census publications at MIT. Also check out the Census Bureau Web site (www.census.gov).

Bibliographic source

      Irwin L. Morris. 2000. "African American Voting on Proposition 187: Rethinking the
           Prevalence of Interminority Conflict." *Political Research Quarterly* 53(1):
           77–98.