
DATA NOTE

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The European Government-Opposition Voters (EGOV) Data Set: Data on the government–opposition status of European voters and party identifiers

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Abstract

The paper describes a new dataset, the European Government-Opposition Voters Data Set (EGOV), which categorizes European voters and party identifiers based on their individual party preferences, dividing them into pro-government and pro-opposition groups. The dataset includes two variables that can be used to supplement the integrated data sets of the European Social Survey project, which publishes one of the most comprehensive and most widely used social scientific database covering Europe. The present data enables the recoding of (any part of) an integrated dataset containing responses from more than 420 000 respondents in 33 European countries between 2002 and 2020, covering eight data waves and 215 country-years. The EGOV Data Set facilitates research that includes the aspect of respondents' government-opposition status either as an independent or a control variable. Being a winner or a loser in a political sense strongly influences not only political opinions but also a wide set of perceptions from subjective well-being to economic performance. This way, these data could be especially helpful for research addressing polarization, institutional trust, economic perceptions and well-being.

Keywords: government, opposition, winners, losers, European Social Survey, comparative politics

1 Background & summary

Political elections are rendering every voter who participated into government or opposition groups, and they could be characterized as winners or losers. The aspect of being a winner or a loser in a political sense has received growing attention in the last decade by social scientists. More and more research focuses on the correlations and consequences of being an incumbent or an opposition partisan or voter, proving that this aspect is a crucial one in the formation of political evaluations, beliefs and trust (Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Chang et al., 2014; Craig et al., 2006; Curini et al., 2012; Dahlberg & Linde, 2015; 2016; Delgado, 2016; Howell & Justwan, 2013; Singh et al., 2012). This implies that including winner-loser positions in statistical analysis often reduces the amount of unobserved heterogeneity when political

preferences, satisfaction, well-being, ideology, values or trust are investigated, even if the winner-loser aspect is not in the main focus of the research. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this aspect remains difficult as acquiring information on winner-loser positions in a comparative context requires extensive and lengthy coding works. Our data set facilitates the inclusion of this aspect in future quantitative investigations in one of the most widely used openly available social science data sets in Europe, the European Social Survey (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020), that contributed to the production of thousands of research pieces to date.

Although recent research in the field shows that winner-loser positions have key importance in the formation of a number of evaluations and beliefs, the lack of ready-to-use data renders the inclusion of this aspect in cross-national quantitative research difficult. The main challenge is that there are no automated crosswalks that could be used to generate government/opposition preferences based on data on either party identification or party choice, that are generally queried in social science surveys. Hence, the identification of political winners and losers requires a time-consuming manual recoding process, which is further complicated by the usage of party names and abbreviations in a variety of forms in English and the original language of a given country.

This paper describes a dataset that aims to overcome this problem. The database contains two manually coded variables that supplement (any part of) the integrated data sets of the first nine data rounds of the European Social Survey (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020) project, including 215 country-years for 33 European countries. This way, it offers an opportunity to differentiate between winners and losers in any of the ESS's datasets with a fast and easy merging process. The presented data files include a data table that can be used to supplement any European Social Survey (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020) (ESS) datasets (separately downloaded from 'ESS Cumulative Data Wizard') as well as a ready-to-use set of codes written in STATA to produce that data. This latter file is annotated, that is, any unusual changes in government composition and other events that may have influenced coding decisions are reported.

These data are of value especially for researchers of comparative politics. However, as government/opposition status of respondents is connected to a wide set of social perceptions, values, preferences, and decisions, researchers from other fields of political science, sociologists and economists could also benefit from them.

2 Method

The European Government-Opposition Voters Data Set (EGOV) has been produced by using the following pieces of information coming from the (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020), Comparative Political Data Sets (Armingeon et al., 2016a) and ParlGov (Döring & Manow, 2019) data sets.

- partisan preferences, that is, respondents' vote on the last general election (164 variables, ESS) and respondents' partisan identity (167 variables, ESS)
- date of the interview (year, month, day, ESS)
- date of national elections and investitures in each country-case (CPDS and ParlGov)
- cabinet composition (CPDS and ParlGov)
- official sites on information on national elections for clarification, if necessary

As we mentioned above, we could not use automated methods in the coding process. As party names, abbreviations and language (original language or English) are not consistently reported in the ESS database, we identified the position of each party and eventual changes in that position one by one, using other high-quality datasets [CPDS (Armingeon et al., 2016a; 2016b) and ParlGov (Döring & Manow, 2019)], the documentation of the survey process (European Social Survey, n.d.), and if necessary, official electoral sites.

First we categorized parties in the ESS database as political winners and losers based on cabinet composition data and survey fieldwork data. Once government-opposition parties have been identified, we coded respondents based on (1) their party identities and last vote choice into pro-government and pro-opposition groups and (2) the exact date of the survey interview.

In order to make a clear distinction between government and opposition identifiers, we excluded the cases where the incumbent government was a technocratic one, that is, neither parties' supporters could have been identified as government supporters (Slovenia in Round 2 and the Czech Republic in Round 4). We also excluded the periods between elections and investiture of the new government, as in that periods we could not unequivocally identify government and opposition members. Our coding process took into consideration the changes in cabinet composition occurred during the fieldwork period of the interviewing process, regardless of whether they were the results of elections during the fieldwork period or only minor changes in the government during an electoral cycle. This means that all respondents are coded as government or opposition supporters based on their position according to the date of their interview, (and not for example based on the government/opposition status of their preferred party right after the investiture of a new government). Individuals are coded as 'government supporters', 'opposition supporters' and 'non-identifiers' according to their survey response. Those who refused to reveal their party preferences were excluded and assigned a with missing value.

The coding work was done by the two authors. At the end of the coding process, we carefully revised the result of coding for eventual mistakes and we reported and discussed special cases. These cases included the ones where unusual changes in parties or cabinets needed an individual decision, as well as cases when the two original databases [CPDS (Armingeon et al., 2016a; 2016b) and ParlGov (Döring & Manow, 2019)] provided differing information on the same case. The code we share here includes notes about our decisions on all these cases. All other cases were recoded until the point when the same code was provided by both of us.

3 Description of data and variables

There are two data files attached (<https://figshare.com/s/ffd32a1e9f4272dd677f>).

1. 'European Government-Opposition Voters (EGOV) Data Set' is a comma-separated values table (.csv format file) that includes three variables.
 - a) The variable 'votedforwinner' differentiates between government voters (1), opposition voters (0) and non-voters (missing values); thus it defines the government-opposition status of European voters based on their last vote on the previous election.

- b) The variable ‘closetowinner’ differentiates between government partisans (1), opposition partisans (0) and non-partisans (missing values); thus it defines the government-opposition status of European *party identifiers* based on their partisan attachment.
 - c) The variable ‘cseqno’ is a unique identification number for European Social Survey (ESS) respondents included in the integrated data sets of the ESS project.
2. ‘European Government-Opposition Voters Data Set – do file’ is a do file that can be used to reproduce the content of the above table. These codes are annotated, that is, unusual changes in government composition and overlaps of elections and fieldwork periods are indicated.

Our codes provide a tool for researchers using any part of the integrated datasets of the European Social Survey (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020) project to easily differentiate between respondents based on their political affiliation, dividing them into pro-government and pro-opposition groups. Individuals are coded as ‘government supporters’, ‘opposition supporters’ and ‘non-identifiers’ according to their survey response, while we excluded refusals. The database includes data for 422 985 respondents from eight data rounds between 2002 and 2020 from 33 European countries, organized all in all in 215 country-years.

Notes on reuse of data

Our data set provides a tool that facilitates the inclusion of the government/opposition aspect in comparative social scientific research in one of the most widely used social scientific data sets, the European Social Survey (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9, 2020). That is, it has been created with the exact purpose of fast and easy re-use. The easiest way to use our data set is to merge it with any ESS data tables with a single-line merging command in Stata, using *cseqno* (*consecutive identification number of all respondents*) as a key variable. An annotated code organized by ESS Rounds that can be used as a Stata do-file to generate the variables of interest is also available together with the data set.

The attached codebook contains the authors’ comments for the special cases which were treated differently for various reasons. Moreover, the attached codebook is not only supporting the transparency in the coding process, but also serves as a template for the expansion of the Data Set with the following ESS rounds in the future.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships which have, or could be perceived to have, influenced the work reported in this article.

Ethics Statement

The source questionnaire and data collection projects are ethically approved by the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent from respondents is obtained (European Social Survey, n.d.).

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