

4th International ESS Conference

Turbulent times in Europe: Instability, insecurity and inequality

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F4. Re-examining political efficacy: Measurement and comparative research using the ESS

Political efficacy has been extensively used in political and other social sciences since the 1950s and it is a fundamental concept in democratic theory. Besides its theoretical importance, political efficacy has been very often used as a determining indicator to either predict or evaluate when individuals are politically active. Originally perceived to be a unidimensional concept, it is today generally accepted that political efficacy has two related but distinct components: internal and external. The first refers to individual subjective feelings of competence to take part in political activities, while the latter concerns how much individuals consider the political system is open to their demands. Despite its extensive use, the concept of political efficacy itself has not come under rigorous scrutiny in the last years. The big theoretical and methodological debates regarding internal and external efficacy took place probably more than thirty years ago and even though extensive country specific research has been conducted, there is an evident lack of comparative research regarding this concept.

Recent rounds of the ESS provide the perfect opportunity to revisit the concept of political efficacy as well as to further explore its drivers and consequences in comparative perspective. Following criticisms of the original efficacy measures included in Round 1, new measures of both internal and external efficacy were added to the ESS core questionnaire in Round 7 and repeated in Round 8. Furthermore, ESS Round 7 tested alternative measures and includes experimental data regarding different characteristics of the measurement instruments of both internal and external efficacy.

The main goal of this session is therefore to reexamine the concept of political efficacy using the ESS data. A particular aspect which has been under debate since the early literature is the measurement of political efficacy. Methodological papers focusing on the robustness or alternative formulations of both/either internal and external efficacy measurement models addressing the differences and similarities between internal and external political efficacy are especially welcomed. We also welcome papers which include substantive analysis of the available political efficacy measures, exploring relevant differences in the distribution or correlates of political efficacy across and within ESS countries.

Keywords:

Political Efficacy, Internal Political Efficacy, External Political Efficacy, Measurement, Comparative Analysis

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