
Democratic Elections on the Internet: The Lijphart Elections Archive

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The Archive

The Lijphart Elections Archive, housed at the University of California, San Diego campus, is a research collection of district-level election results for twenty-seven countries. Until 1994, the collection focused on post-World War II democracies in Western Europe, but included the United States, Canada, India, Israel, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Recently, Costa Rica and the European Union were added. Future plans call for expansion of the Archive to more than 70 countries—including many new democracies from Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa.

The collection includes all national elections for the lower house (in some cases the only house) of the legislature. Where the legislature is bicameral, the upper house is included only if it is directly elected by the voters. The volumes in the collection are the detailed, district-level election results that are usually published by government statistical offices in one or more volumes for each election. In some cases, non-governmental publications are included if they are the more complete source.

The data includes the number of votes by party for each election district, including detailed lists for minor and major parties, and the number of seats or “elected candidates” by party for each election district. Complete election data was sought for those countries where there is preferential voting (e.g., Australia and Ireland), where there is a first or second ballot (e.g., France), and where there is proportional representation (e.g., where one candidate may be elected from several districts).

Until 1994, the preferred format for building this Library collection had been the original hard copy. During the last year, prompted by requests from graduate students, efforts have been made to acquire data in machine-readable form.

Historic Origins

The Lijphart Elections Archive is named for Arend Lijphart, Research Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, and the man responsible for its establishment. ² Prof. Lijphart, is a world-renowned expert on elections.

When he began researching comparative electoral systems back in 1984, no library anywhere collected all the detailed statistical data that he needed. After consulting with international colleagues as to the need for such an archive, Professor Lijphart and the University Library agreed to create such a collection at UCSD. The task of finding materials that in many cases was already out of print, proved to be difficult at times. Much of the success of the collection must be attributed to Professor Lijphart himself. Many of the volumes in the collection were acquired and donated by him. It should also be noted here, that the collection was named in his honor by the University’s librarians.

Present and Future

The establishment of the Internet and the emergence of many more democracies has infused a new energy into the Lijphart Archive. Although adding machine-readable data to the collection was always a consideration, it wasn’t until a critical mass of technology, people and funding formed, that it became a reality. New people have now joined the team. Jim Jacobs as the University Library’s Data Librarian and I, as the Political Sciences Bibliographer along with Professors Gary Cox and Matthew Shugart, of the Political Science Department, hope to enlarge both the content and the access of what we see to be a worldwide resource for scholars. Others apparently share our vision, since establishing the Lijphart Elections Archive as a permanent Internet web site has recently received funding from the National Science Foundation. One result of this initial funding has been the creation of a home page in March of 1995. ³

Additional funding will be sought from NSF and other sources. Enlarging the Archive to include pre-1994 data has received some discussion. The possibility of scanning existing paper holdings is being considered. OCR reliability, the condition of the original materials, the different languages and type fonts and lastly, cost, are some of the concerns that will need to be dealt with.

Web Site

The current home page for the Lijphart Elections Archive is still under construction and is part of UCSD's Social Sciences Data Collection. Presently, the Archive's holdings can be searched in a number of different ways: by material type (eg. paper holdings, vs. electronic holdings), by country, by electoral system and by keywords. The program can also show the library catalog entry for the item— a feature that provides information suitable for generating an interlibrary loan transaction. In addition to providing the actual data, the Lijphart home page will link users to other election information on the Internet. A current example, is Slovakia. The Lijphart Archive never collected election data on Slovakia, but since the information has been made available through EUNET, we have added a linkage for the convenience of our researchers.

Conclusion

The UCSD Social Sciences and Humanities Library is still actively acquiring election returns in hard copy. Although our plans are to expand the Archive's holdings to all the worlds' democracies, much of our success will depend on funding from outside the University. Until we are assured of the stability of the Internet site, we will probably be duplicating the data in hard copy—to maintain the integrity of the Lijphart Archive for future researchers.

Plans are underway to submit another proposal to the National Science Foundation. Simultaneously, efforts are being pursued for international agreements with other agencies for sharing both information and more important, staff and data. Creators of the home page envision it as a major resource for locating and reflecting other Internet election resources. The on line version of the Lijphart Election Archive however, will continue to have the same goal as the paper collection—to provide researchers with the actual data of elections down to the district level. We know this is an ambitious project, but we also have come to realize that promoting the results of democratic elections worldwide is a worthwhile effort for all of us.

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2 Prof. Lijphart served as President of the American Political Science Association during 1994-95 and is the author of *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Comparative Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

3 Lijphart Elections Archive URL: <<http://ssdc.ucsd.edu/lij>>