

Institution: University of Nottingham
Unit of Assessment: 21
Title of case study: Informing and Influencing Government Policy on Standards in Public Life
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Sustained research in the field of advanced survey design, advanced analysis of complex survey data and the study of public opinion has enabled Professor Cees van der Eijk to make a unique and vital contribution to the work of the Cabinet Office's Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). As an independent public body that advises government on ethical standards across public life in the UK, CSPL has drawn upon Van der Eijk's methodological innovation in data analysis as well as his systematic research to inform its policy recommendations to government. These recommendations have helped to shape policy on matters of public probity, voter registration, MPs' expenses and political party finance. His research for the CSPL has also influenced other independent organisations and the wider public debate on integrity in public life.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The methodological research of Cees van der Eijk (Professor of Social Science Research Methods at the University of Nottingham since 2004) in advanced survey design and the analysis of complex survey data addresses a range of interrelated problems that have traditionally hampered survey research and the study of public opinion. Traditional approaches often fail to describe adequately patterns of multiple preferences held by individuals, and have been unable to distinguish between preferences that are unlikely to change and those that can very easily shift towards another option. These problems of inadequate description and of overstating the stability of preferences reaffirm themselves when individual level information is aggregated to characterise public opinion at large. Van der Eijk therefore developed a set of interlocking new methods to address these challenges.</p> <p>These innovative methods involve new survey question formats for assessing preferences (so-called non-ipsative preference measures) (publication #1); the development of designs for the statistical analysis of such non-ipsative preferences in conjunction with traditional preference measures (so-called 'stacked analysis' designs) (#1); the development of new ways to assess the impact of macro-conditions on public opinion and aggregated preferences (#2, #3); and the development of analysis designs to assess the elasticity of preferences at individual and aggregate levels of analysis (#1, #3, #4). Although these methods were originally developed for application in the field of electoral research, they are increasingly applied in other substantive fields of research involving preferences and public opinion, and were utilised in the research conducted for the CSPL.</p> <p>Van der Eijk is also renowned for his expertise in making highly complex data-structures amenable to statistical analysis, as exemplified by his contribution to the analysis of high-dimensional so-called clickstream data (#5). This expertise made it possible to extract more insightful results from the studies conducted under the auspices of the CSPL.</p> <p>These methodological innovations have been hailed by reviewers (see, for example, <i>Perspectives on Politics</i>, 2012: 535-536) as solutions for serious deficiencies in previously existing scholarship, both in terms of description and in terms of empirical modelling. They are especially relevant to the CSPL's agenda of public opinion monitoring.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>1. 'Rethinking the dependent variable in voting behavior: On the measurement and analysis of electoral utilities', <i>Electoral Studies</i> (2006) 25, 424-447 (with Wouter van der Brug, Martin</p>

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- Kroh, Mark Franklin) [peer-reviewed journal].
2. 'The Endogenous Economy: 'Real' Economic Conditions, Subjective Economic Evaluations and Government Support', *Acta Politica* (2007) 42, 1-22 (with Mark Franklin, Froukje Demant and Wouter van der Brug) [peer-reviewed journal].
 3. *The Economy and the Vote – Effects of Economic Conditions on Voter Preferences and Election Outcomes in Fifteen Countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 (with Wouter van der Brug, and Mark Franklin) [established university press].
 4. *European Elections and Domestic Politics*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 (edited, with Wouter van der Brug) [established university press].
 5. 'Revealing the hidden rationality of user browsing behaviour', *Proceedings of the 18th Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia*, New York, ACM Press, 2007, pp. 85–94 (with Elizabeth Brown, Tim Brailsford, and Tony Fisher) [peer-reviewed publication].

All are available on request.

Grant Awards. Grant awarded to Professor Cees van der Eijk for the development of methodology and tools for data linking, awarded by the European Commission under the FP7 project (2008-2010) and which formed part of the larger PIREDEU project ('Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union') awarded to a pan-European consortium of researchers coordinated by Stefano Bartolini and Mark Franklin at the European University Institute (Florence). Value: €264,000. Two grants awarded by the CSPL to Professor Cees van der Eijk and the School of Politics and International Relations of the University of Nottingham for co-funding PhD scholarships in the area of the study of perceptions of standards in public life. Joint value: approx. £25,000.

4. Details of the impact

Professor Van der Eijk's innovative research in advanced survey design, advanced analysis of complex survey data and the study of public opinion has made a unique and vital contribution to the work of the Cabinet Office's Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), the body that advises government and informs parliamentary debate on the development of policy and regulation in relation to public probity in general, as well as on issues such as voter registration, MPs' expenses and party financing.

In recognition of his expertise and innovations in social science methodology and advanced survey and public opinion research, in 2007 the CSPL invited Van der Eijk to become a member of its Research Advisory Board (RAB), which is instrumental in shaping and implementing the research agenda of the CSPL [source 1]. This invitation was motivated by the Committee's aspiration to obtain more in-depth insights than had previously been forthcoming from its bi-annual public opinion surveys and which could be provided by the traditional approaches used by most survey research companies and applied survey analysts. As Peter Hawthorne, the Assistant Secretary to the CSPL until 2013 noted:

He [Van der Eijk] introduced new elements in the design of the survey that provided the means to look below the 'surface' of public opinion and to illuminate otherwise unseen relationships between different kinds of perceptions, attitudes and orientations of citizens. This was matched by the usage of novel ways of analysis which made it possible, in contrast to earlier surveys, to test rivaling interpretations of the dynamics of public opinion. Although some of the underlying analyses were methodologically quite complex, Professor Van der Eijk was always able to report the resulting findings in non-technical ways, thus making the implications of the data more informative to the Committee as well as to a wider audience.[3]

Driven by its aim to explore British public perceptions of standards in public life, CSPL then financed a series of large-scale surveys of British public opinion between 2008 and 2012. **These**

studies were designed using the methodologies developed by Van der Eijk, and were analysed by him and his colleagues on the Research Advisory Board, and formed the basis of three major publications by the CSPL.[4] Additional analyses and minor reports provided materials for the Committee to formulate its policy recommendations about more specific issues including voter registration, MPs' expenses and allowances, political party finance, best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life and strengthening policy and law on whistleblowing.[4]

The research conducted by Van der Eijk and his colleagues on the Research Advisory Board provided the empirical basis for the policy recommendations made by the CSPL and in turn informed government and parliament on issues concerning public probity in general as well as on more specific issues, such as party finance, MPs' expenses, and voter registration. As the Committee's Interim Chair, David Prince, notes: '**...the underlying research not only informs policy recommendations... but also contributes to Government's and Parliament's understanding of how citizens experience and evaluate public probity.**'[1]

The research conducted by Van der Eijk and other members of the Research Advisory Board on citizens' perceptions and evaluations of different procedures of voter registration informed the Government's new approach to voter's registration, by showing that a broad base of public acceptance existed for a system of individual registration to replace the system where one member of the household registers all eligible voters in the household. As Prince notes:

Without solid evidence of public acceptance of such a procedure it would have been much more difficult for the Committee to continue to lobby Government for this change... In 2012 the Government brought forward the *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill* to introduce individual voter registration.[1]

Findings on citizens' perceptions and evaluations of donations to political parties were also drawn upon for the Committee's investigation into party finance. Research findings demonstrated the widespread concern and distrust amongst the public concerning all forms of sponsorship of political parties beyond a relatively low threshold, and a broad acceptance of the principle of public co-funding of political parties if that would drive out large donations by individual, corporate, charitable or union donors. As David Prince notes, the work revealed:

...broad public support for a scheme of limited public financial contributions to political parties... [and] a ban on large donations to parties by individuals, group or organizations. **Without these findings the Committee would not have been able to confidently put forward its own recommendations for such a scheme.**[1]

With respect to the issue of MPs' expenses, Van der Eijk's research for the CSPL demonstrated the breadth and depth of public concern about the issue, and its potential effect in undermining trust in representative government and acceptance of its policies. As Prince notes, the work revealed:

...important insights about the relationship between citizens' trust in politics and the way in which scandals resulting from improper behaviour are addressed... were particularly helpful for the Committee to appreciate how regulatory principles are perceived by the wider public, and thus also for its recommendations following its investigation of the MPs' expenses scandal.[1]

In addition to its contribution to informing government and parliament, and providing empirical information for policy, the research conducted by Van der Eijk and the Research Advisory Board has also influenced public debate in the UK and the work of organisations involved therein more widely. Van der Eijk presented the research in three public seminars, organised by the CSPL in 2008 (in collaboration with the Social Research Association, the Academy of Social Sciences and the British Library), in 2012 (at its Annual Public Meeting), and in 2013 (in collaboration with the Institute for Government). Each of these events was

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attended by 55-75 participants, including invited politicians and regulators with an interest in standards issues, delegates from independent think-tanks and from the media.

As Ruth Fox, Director and Head of Research of the Hansard Society states:

...the impact of the work of Professor Van der Eijk and his colleagues is not limited to providing an evidence base for policymaking and recommendations, but extends much more widely by **making a distinct contribution to help inform and sustain the work of civil society organisations and parliamentary monitoring groups** such as the Hansard Society.[2]

This contribution to wider public debate is evidenced in a number of further ways, including blogposts [5], the use of the research in depositions of evidence to the Leveson inquiry [6], and multiple references to the CSPL's recommendations in parliament and in the media, including in the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Telegraph*, and *Economist*, and on the BBC and Channel 4 [7]. As Fox concluded:

The true value of the CSPL studies is that they explore issues and themes that are often ignored in other surveys. Importantly, they also go beyond the surface headlines of normal opinion polls and provide in-depth analysis that yield rare in-depth insights into networks of perceptions, evaluations and experiences that usually remain 'hidden' in other studies of public opinion.

She adds: **'the national debate about the quality of our democracy in Britain in recent years would be all the poorer without it'**. [2]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[1] Testimonial by David Prince CBE, chair of the CSPL until September 2013, is available on file.

[2] Testimonial by Ruth Fox, Director and Head of Research of the Hansard Society, is available on file.

[3] Testimonial by Peter Hawthorne, Cabinet Office, National Security Secretariat, formerly Assistant Secretary to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, is available on file.

[4] Reports on the biennial and ad hoc surveys conducted for the CSPL: a) *Survey of Public Attitudes towards conduct in Public Life 2008*; b) *Survey of Public Attitudes towards conduct in Public Life 2010*; c) *Survey of Public Attitudes towards conduct in Public Life 2012*; d) *Report on Party Finance*. These are all available online. The major broad-ranging reports, prepared by Research Advisory Board are at: <http://bit.ly/1ctNKkf> (2008); <http://bit.ly/1dwMmKJ> (2010); <http://bit.ly/1aLzIL2> (2012). The assorted smaller reports, prepared under supervision or direction of Research Advisory Board: <http://bit.ly/1dwMD0g> (ethical standards in public life); <http://bit.ly/1qgt005> (political party funding); <http://bit.ly/19WzAE4> (political party funding); <http://bit.ly/1ctOqij> (MPs expenses and allowances). Various CSPL Statements, responses to consultations, and annual reports which draw upon the research mentioned are listed here: <http://bit.ly/1aLB6YE>

[5] See <http://nottspolitics.org/2011/09/15/trust-in-politics-down-down-deeper-and-down/> by Cees van der Eijk (with Jonathan Rose), 15 September 2011. Also see:

<http://nottspolitics.org/2011/09/16/a-scandal-of-two-halves/> by Cees van der Eijk (with Jonathan Rose), 16 September 2011.

[6] See for example the statement by Sir Christopher Kelly to the Leveson Inquiry, September 2011, drawing upon the results of the 2010 *Survey of Public Attitudes Towards Conduct in Public Life* and on the blogpost 'A Scandal of two Halves' both of which were submitted as evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. See: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Submission-form-Committee-on-Standards-in-Public-Life1.pdf>

[7] List of debates in Parliament about CSPL research (co-)authored by Van der Eijk and on the related policy proposals and of reporting, commentary and discussion in the mass media is available on file.