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Comparative National Elections Project

Principal Investigator: Richard Gunther

The Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) is a multi-year, multi-country examination of how citizens in democracies around the world receive information about policies, parties, candidates, and politics during the course of election campaigns.

The project began in 1990 with a series of surveys in Germany, Britain, the United States and Japan. It was expanded in 1993 to include eight more countries in South America, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and East Asia, and to include questions about support for democracy in newly emerging or re-established democratic regimes.

CNEP has recently expanded again to encompass 35 national election surveys in 21 countries including two in Africa as well as China. The surveys have also been expanded to include questions about the quality of democracy and corruption in the electoral process, the nature of identity in multi-cultural societies, and values that affect democracy or give rise to conflict. CNEP is now the third-largest international project of its kind.

Because CNEP collects so much information, its full potential could only be realized through a rigorously analytical and comparative collaboration of project participants.

The Mershon Center has made this possible by supporting a series of conferences at the University of Cape Town, South Africa; the Mateus Foundation in Vila Real, Portugal; the Yunnan Institute of Chinese Culture in Kunming, China; and, last year, in Trieste, Italy.

Participants will meet again in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008.

At the Trieste meeting, participants formed research teams to analyze data collected in areas such as:

- attitudes toward democracy and citizenship
- party identification and party ratings



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- information received through the media
- information received through personal networks
- information received through political parties
- citizen interest, involvement, knowledge and participation
- values
- demographics

Participants are now working to standardize data from all 35 surveys so they can make accurate cross-national comparisons. While these surveys asked many of the same questions, answers were often scored differently, making direct comparisons impossible.

Over the past year many of the country team leaders and the data archiving staff in South Africa have been engaged in the massive task of standardizing response categories for each of the 35 surveys, some of which include up to 600 different variables. This will greatly facilitate analysis of these data, which form the basis of the project's next book.

The 35 national surveys are all posted on the CNEP web site. Researchers can download macro reports, as well as questionnaires, SPSS data sets, and other information. These data sets are one of CNEP's biggest contributions, providing the basis not only for the CNEP project itself, but for social science research around the world.

So far CNEP has produced more than 100 book chapters and journal articles and six books. For more information, please see the CNEP web site at www.cnep.ics.ul.pt.

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