



CEVIPOL



Vacancy PostDoc Researcher

ERC Project “Non-elected Politics. Cure or Curse for representative democracy?”

Vacancy notice for a postdoc researcher in Political Science

The Department of Political Science at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is hiring a postdoc researcher for the ERC-Consolidator project “Non-elected Politics. Cure or Curse for representative democracy?” The project starts in September 2018 and is financed for 5 years. The candidate recruited will be offered a 3-year contract.

Synopsis of the project

Evidences of a growing disengagement of citizens from politics are multiplying. Electoral turnout reaches historically low levels. Anti-establishment and populist parties are on the rise. Fewer and fewer Europeans declare they trust their representative institutions. In response, we have observed a multiplication of institutional reforms aimed at revitalizing representative democracy.

Two in particular stand out: the delegation of some decision-political making powers to (1) selected citizens and to (2) selected experts. But there is a paradox in attempting to cure the crisis of representative democracy by introducing such reforms. In representative democracy, control over political decision-making is vested in elected representatives. Delegating political decision-making to selected experts/citizens is at odds with this definition. It empowers the non-elected. If these reforms show that politics could work without elected officials, could we really expect that citizens’ support for representative democracy would be boosted and that citizens would re-engage with representative politics? In that sense, would it be a cure for the crisis of representative democracy, or rather a curse?

Our central hypothesis is that there is no universal and univocal healing (or harming) effect of non-elected politics on support for representative democracy. In order to verify it, we propose to collect data across Europe on three elements:

- (1) a study of the detailed preferences of Europeans on how democracy should work and on institutional reforms towards non-elected politics,
- (2) a comprehensive inventory of all actual cases of empowerment of citizens and experts implemented across Europe since 2000,
- (3) an analysis the impact of the introduction of non-elected politics on citizens’ attitudes towards representative democracy. For the first and third elements, we will rely use an innovative combination of online survey experiments and of panel surveys.

Profile

- Holder of a PhD in political science or related disciplines
- Research interest and/or expertise in democratic innovations, participatory democracy, experts' involvement in politics, opinion surveys, experimental methods
- Very good command of quantitative and survey methods for social and political sciences
- Expertise in experimental research, especially in survey experiments
- Good command of dataset management and statistical software
- Good command of data visualization tools would be an asset
- Good organizational and time management skills
- Ability to work in a team
- A good command of English, and French (or willingness to improve one's command of French during the scholarship)

Job description

This is a call for applications for a full-time PhD position for three years.

The PhD researcher will become an active member of the ERC-consolidator research project "Non-elected Politics. Cure or Curse for representative democracy?" (CureorCurse). The project is coordinated by Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet. It offers a stimulating working environment in a dynamic and international research team.

The researcher will be based at the Cevipol (ULB). He/she will have an office and relevant administrative support at ULB. She/he will have no teaching obligations. He/she will be expected to contribute to collective work on the project, and to present and publish individual or collective research outputs.

According to the experience of the candidate, the monthly net income will start from 2100 euros. Additional social benefits (public transport, hospitalization coverage, sporting facilities, day care) are provided by the University.

The Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is an equal opportunity employer.

Tasks

Within the project, the selected postdoc candidate will perform the following tasks:

- Coordinate the network of national partners in charge of the comprehensive mapping of the use of non-elected bodies (composed either of citizens or experts) at national and regional level in Europe (EU28, Iceland, Switzerland, Norway) since 2000;
- Contribute to the preparation and the fieldwork for the comparative survey of citizens' democratic preferences across 10 European countries. The survey would contain elements of survey experiments;

- Manage the administrative tasks (reporting, tenders, ...) related to the two above mentioned tasks.

STARTING DATE is September, 2018 (open to discussion).

INTERESTED?

Questions regarding the Postdoc scholarship can be addressed to Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet (jpilet@ulb.ac.be)

APPLICATIONS should include (in one single PDF document):

- a copy of the passport/ID
- a letter of motivation explaining the candidate's general interest for the project
- a full CV (including grades obtained for each study year, the title of your PhD thesis, and a list of publications, courses taken, and conference presentations)
- a short research statement presenting what line of research within the ERC project the candidate propose to conduct,
- Name, affiliation, email and phone number of two referees who can be contacted if necessary

The deadline for applications is July, 15th 2018.

A skype or face-to-face interview may be organized.

Please send the above documents electronically to Professor Jean-Benoit Pilet (jpilet@ulb.ac.be)

Longer outline of the project

a.1. Research question: Non-elected politics. Cure or curse for the crisis of representative democracy?

“Our democracy is threatened whenever we take it for granted”, Barack Obama concluded in his farewell speech after 8 years in the White House. “All of us, regardless of party, should be throwing ourselves into the task of rebuilding our democratic institutions”. President Obama is but one among many politicians acknowledging that democracies are deeply challenged. The same reflection is also central in scholarly work (Rosanvallon, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2013; Thomassen, 2016)

Red lights are flashing with growing intensity. Turnout in elections is waning and reaches historically low levels (Franklin, 2004; Delwit, 2013). Anti-establishment and populist parties are on the rise. The recent electoral successes of Donald Trump in the US, of the 5-star movement in Italy, or even the Brexit vote in the UK, are all at least partly related to a virulent critique of mainstream parties and politicians. Membership of political parties has atrophied (Van Biezen et al., 2011). Among OECD countries, the share of citizens declaring they trust their government has gone down to merely 41.8 per cent, and falls below 20 per cent in some countries (OECD, 2015: 156). Low levels of trust in democratic institutions have become a matter for growing scholarly concern (Dalton, 2004; Norris 2011; Armingeon and Guthman, 2014).

In response to these signs of citizens’ disengagement from representative politics, we have observed a multiplication of institutional reforms aimed at revitalizing representative democracy (Bedock, 2017). Two in particular stand out: the delegation of some political decision-making powers to (1) selected citizens and to (2) selected experts. The Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-14) is one prime example in which 66 randomly selected citizens proposed a number of constitutional reforms later submitted to referendum (Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). For bodies of experts, one example is the legal obligation since 2011 in France for a body of scientific experts, the *Comité national consultatif d’éthique*, to organize public debates and to provide recommendations prior to the discussion of any law related to bioethics. The European Union is probably the level of government where the role of experts is most institutionalized (Majone, 1996; Gornitzka and Sverdrup, 2008). There is a paradox in attempting to cure the crisis of representative democracy by introducing reforms that are shaking the very foundations of this model of democracy. In representative democracy, control over political decision-making is vested in representatives who are chosen through free, fair and frequent elections (Dahl, 1989; Schumpeter, 1976). Delegating some parts of political decision-making to selected experts or citizens is at odds with this definition. Vibert (2007) referred to the empowerment of experts and technocrats as “The rise of the unelected”, and Van Reybrouck (2016) entitled his defence of citizens juries “Against Elections”. In other words, elected representatives look for a cure to the crisis of representative democracy in **non-elected politics**.

If these reforms show that politics could work without elected officials, could we really expect that citizens' support for representative democracy would be boosted and that citizens would re-engage with representative politics? Do they cure the democratic malaise (Geissel & Newton, 2012; Ziemann, 2014)? Combining models of democracy based upon different premises may bring competition rather than complementarity (Peters, 2016). Therefore, it is not at all farfetched to expect that such innovations may amount to a curse, more than a cure, for representative democracy because they challenge two core principles of representative democracy: election and representation. This overlooked paradox is in urgent need of critical examination, which is exactly what this project aims for. Unless we gain a sound understanding of the implications of such reforms, their diffusion observed in many countries may be in vain, or worse, may actually erode even further political support.

a.2. Contribution of the project: Going beyond the 'one-size-fits-all'

The question about the crisis of democracy and its potential cures is not new. An oft-cited starting point is Crozier, Huntington and Watanaku's (1975) report to the Trilateral Commission. Since then, reflections have burgeoned on (1) what would be the sources of the crisis of democracy, (2) what would be the best solutions, and (3) what would be citizens' demands for reform. As explained above, politicians have been attentive to these debates and have multiplied institutional reforms. My claim is that both scholars and social and political actors miss the target for one reason: they suffer from a **'one-size-fits-all' syndrome**. They are looking for *the* one solution to the crisis of democracy. But there is no such thing as a unique and universal cure to the democratic malaise. Neither bodies of experts, nor of citizens would be received as the appropriate solution by each and every citizen, for each and every policy issue, and in each and every context. These factors have to be systematically taken into account to understand for whom, for what, and where non-elected politics will have a positive or a negative impact on support for representative democracy.

Our central hypothesis therefore is that **there is no universal and univocal healing (or harming) effect of non-elected politics on support for representative democracy**. This project innovates by rejecting generic approaches to institutional reforms as the cure for the crisis of representative democracy. Rather, I propose to collect **data at the individual-level** and examine carefully how the **three factors mediate the link between non-elected politics and political support**.

The **first mediating factor** is **citizens' views of how democracy should work, and how it should be reformed**. Recent studies have shown significant differences in citizens' democratic preferences (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Neblo et al., 2010; Webb, 2013; Ferrin and Kriesi, 2016). Some want political decision-making to remain in the hands of elected officials and dislike any move towards the empowerment of experts or of citizens. Others do call for more citizens' participation, whereas still others call for more efficiency-oriented and de-politicized politics. Some work has been done uncovering these preferences, but they have never been related to how citizens react to institutional reforms like non-elected

politics. Moreover, citizens' preferences have not been examined very precisely. Citizens have been asked to evaluate generic reforms without any indication on how such a body of experts or citizens would actually work in their country. I propose a radically different and innovative approach. This study will be the very first to collect data on citizens' preferences for institutional reforms by confronting them to tangible real-life cases of non-elected politics.

The **second mediating factor** is the **policy issue at stake**. When citizens evaluate actual cases of non-elected politics to be implemented in their country, they would not just consider who is in charge (experts, citizens) but also, and perhaps even more, what policy issues are delegated to these new political bodies. It is very likely that many citizens would hold different preferences for different policy issues. For example, someone who is, in principle, in favour of more citizen participation could be supportive of expert decision-making on highly technical and complex issues.

Finally, the **third mediating factor** is the **institutional architecture of the national political system** in which the citizen lives. how citizens react to non-elected politics, and therefore how political support is affected, has never been approached truly comparatively. Existing studies are confined to single countries (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009; Webb, 2013; Coffé and Michel, 2014; Jacquet et al., 2015; Stoker and Hay, 2016). Comparative research is crucial however. Previous studies have shown that the national political system is determinant for citizens' attitudes towards politics. The national political system (parliamentary vs. presidential, consensus vs. majoritarian, older vs. newer democracies) is key for understanding political support (Zmerli and Hooghe, 2011).

My project would be the first to date that incorporates systematically these three mediating factors. By taking seriously the complexity and the diversity of citizens' attitudes about institutional reforms, the project would lead to a radical revision of both political science and political theory approaches to the crisis of democracy. It would redefine how political scientists approach citizens' attitudes towards representative democracy and its alternatives. Recent studies have tended to group citizens into generic categories (a.o. Webb 2013). These approaches need to be refined to incorporate the idea of specific preferences depending on the policy issue and on the context of implementation. The project would further redefine how political theorists approach alternative models of representative democracy. Non-elected politics is already widely debated among political theorists (Beetham, 1994; Chambers, 2003; Held; 2006). Yet, they also suffer from the 'one-size-fits-all' syndrome. This project would directly call for renewed reflections on more hybrid models of democracy in which the logics of elected and non-elected politics are intertwined.

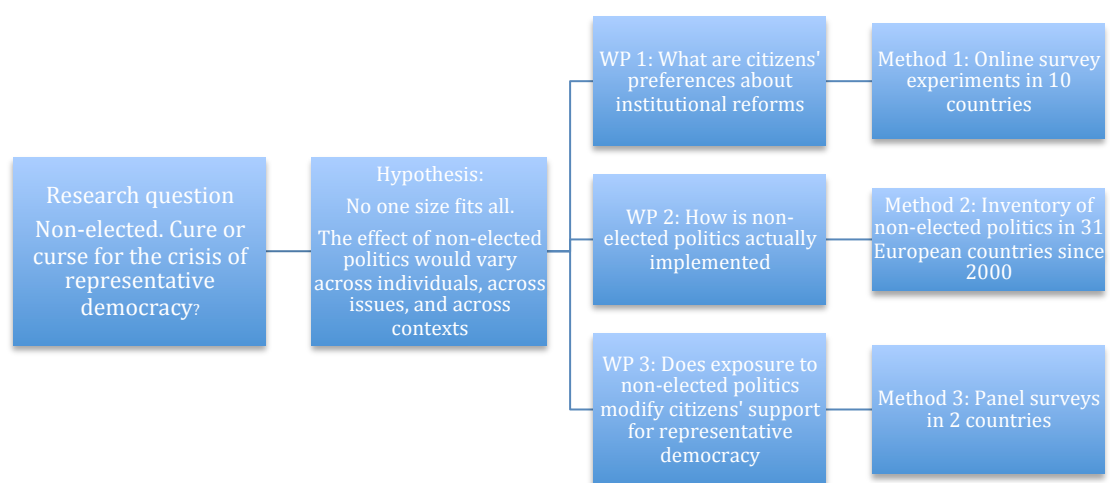
The project would also directly contribute to the social and political debates on the democratic malaise and on how to address it. Concerns about the crisis of representative democracy are high on the political agenda. Debates around new initiatives towards non-elected politics are multiplying, especially regarding citizens' assemblies. Such proposals have been or still are high on the agenda in Belgium,

France, Portugal, the UK, Romania, Estonia, and Luxembourg. It is more than urgent to understand their consequences. The ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is misleading. Such reforms would be a cure in some cases and for some citizens, but a curse in and for others. Scientific knowledge is urgently needed to enlighten reform debates and to avoid counterproductive decisions.

a.3. Structure of the project

The project addresses the question of whether non-elected politics would be a cure or a curse for representative democracy. It is structured around three work packages (WPs), each associated to another method (section a.4).

Figure 1: Structure of the project



WP1 aims at providing **the most systematic and comprehensive account of Europeans’ attitudes about how democracy should work and about institutional reforms towards non-elected politics**. In particular, what I propose is an innovative approach to these preferences based upon three elements that have never been combined before (see methodological details in section 4). First, I will compare several European countries in order to understand how national political systems affect citizens’ views on representative democracy and its reform. Second, citizens will not be asked about generic preferences for reform (e.g. Do you support more citizens’ participation?). Rather, they will be confronted to detailed accounts of real-life instances of non-elected politics (see WP2). Third, citizens’ preferences would be tested for different types of issues (complex vs. easy, and salient vs. non-salient). These three elements would provide the most comprehensive individual-level data to date on citizens’ democratic preferences.

Once we would know better what Europeans’ preferences for institutional reforms are, the next step will be to analyse whether these demands map onto the instances of non-elected politics across Europe. **WP2** aims at **inventorying all actual cases of empowerment of citizens and experts implemented across Europe**. Studies are multiplying on these two forms of institutional innovations (Vibert, 2007; Smith,

2009; Geissel and Newton, 2012)¹, but they are far from comprehensive. As they are based upon the most visible cases, they only tell us about the tip of the iceberg. Geissel (2012: 213) recently denounced that “sufficient data does not yet exist to evaluate democratic innovations. (...) What is still missing is a comprehensive dataset combining available data systematically”. We need to know where they occur, how they are used, what policy issues they address, and at what stage of the policy cycle (elaboration, decision, implementation, evaluation) they enter the process.

I propose to produce the most comprehensive inventory of non-elected politics across Europe (see details in section a.4 methods). The inventory would already in itself be a ground-breaking contribution to the study of institutional innovations towards non-elected politics. Yet, the goal is not only to collect data, but also to contribute to answering the project’s research question. This will be done in two ways. First, I will analyse the conditions under which such reforms are implemented and whether they correspond to theoretical expectations. I will test whether the empowerment of citizens indeed occurs when signals of a crisis of representative democracy are multiplying. Data from the inventory will be matched with signals of a crisis of input legitimacy (low turnout, low political trust, strength of anti-establishment parties) as well as with indicators of performance of the political system in terms of output (employment, inflation, inequalities, corruption). Theoretically, one would expect the empowerment of citizens to be linked citizens’ disengagement from representative politics, and the empowerment of experts to output deficits. What issues are delegated to bodies of experts and bodies of citizens will also be examined. The expectation is that bodies of experts would deal with more complex and technical issues than bodies of citizens. Second, I will confront the inventory of non-elected politics with citizens’ preferences regarding institutional reforms (WP1). If the two are congruent, there could be hope that the reforms that are passed would indeed be a cure for the democratic malaise. If not, the cure could turn out to be a curse. It is important at this stage to clarify that data collection for WP2 will start before WP1 (see timetable in B2 form). Examples of real-life implementations of non-elected politics collected here will be embedded in the online survey experiments that capture citizens’ preferences towards non-elected politics (see next page). However, in terms of analysis, the two WPs are directly interconnected and will be matched.

WP3 will then consist of examining **the impact of the introduction of non-elected politics on citizens’ attitudes towards representative democracy**. This question has never been addressed directly. A few scholars have looked at aggregate-level changes in political support (Ziemann, 2014; Zittel and Fuchs, 2007). Others have examined at the individual level how participants to citizens’ bodies update their political attitudes (Grönlund et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2013; Fournier et al., 2011). But what really matters and remains untested is how the general population receives such reforms. More precisely, I propose to examine in detail how political support changes directly in contexts where non-elected politics is implemented. Political support may be conceptualized along two dimensions: diffuse and specific

¹ See also civil society initiatives like Participedia.

support (Easton, 1965; Dalton, 2004; Thomassen, 2016). Diffuse support refers to support for the general norms and procedures of representative democracy (election, representation, separation of powers). Specific support refers to support for the actors of representative democracy (elected politicians, political parties, the government). As said in section 1, non-elected politics is challenging two core principles of representative democracy: election and representation. I hypothesize that implementing forms of non-elected politics would have a positive effect on specific support. It would especially be true for the initiators of the institutional innovation who would demonstrate that they are responsive to citizens' growing discontent with representative politics. On the contrary, it would have a negative effect on diffuse support, in particular on citizens' attachment to the principles of election and representation.

Yet, my core claim is that the debates around non-elected politics as a cure for the crisis of representative democracy should move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' logic. Therefore, I expect that the effect on political support of exposure to non-elected politics would vary across individuals. Two factors are central. The first is citizens' democratic preferences. Those who prefer to remain within the boundaries of representative democracy would not like any reform at odds with the principles of election and representation. Those calling for more participation would only appreciate a growing role for citizens. They would dislike the empowerment of experts. They already feel that elected representatives taking all decision is rather undemocratic, let alone unaccountable experts taking decisions far from the public eye. For citizens whose preferences go towards a growing role of experts, only this form of non-elected politics would be applauded, and could have a positive effect on political support. Empowering citizens would not have a positive effect. They already think elected representatives are unqualified to take complex decisions, let alone the general public. Second, policy congruence would also mediate the effect of exposure to non-elected politics. Congruence between the final decisions made by the newly established body and a citizen's policy preferences would be crucial (Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011). If the policy outcome of the expert body or of the citizens' jury is in line with one's policy preference, the impact on political support would be more positive than if he or she disagrees with the outcome.

a.4. Methods

In order to conduct the three above-mentioned WPs, innovative but also high-risk methods are required. Each of these methods are high-risk but are also the only way to achieve high-gains and to produce findings that radically revise current approaches to the institutional responses to the crisis of democracy. I am fully aware of the difficulty of the mix of methods I propose; but the expertise I have developed over the past years (see track-record below) makes me uniquely qualified and extremely well-equipped for this important endeavour.

Method #1 (years 2-3) is an online survey experiment of citizens' preferences about how democracy should work and about institutional reforms, with a focus on non-elected politics (details on sampling in ethics self-assessment). The surveys will be conducted in 10 European countries. In each, a representative sample of 1,000 citizens (18+) will be interviewed. Specific attention will be paid to guaranteeing the participation of the most vulnerable individuals and groups such as the lower educated, the less affluent, women and ethnic minorities (see technical annex 1-Ethics for more details on sampling). The online survey experiments will innovate in three respects. First, they will be the first large-scale comparative surveys ever on the topic. The 10 countries will be selected on basis of three criteria (1) age of democracy, (2) consensus vs. majoritarian, (3) use of non-elected politics. The first two criteria have been shown to be crucial to explain citizens' attitudes towards politics (Marien, 2011). For the third criterion, the selection will be based on the inventory of non-elected politics across Europe (see method #2). Second, the survey experiments will innovate in the level of detail at which citizens' preferences are measured. Respondents will not be asked to evaluate generic reforms. Instead, borrowing from new experimental approaches (Snidermann, 2011), respondents will be confronted with short texts presenting real-life cases of non-elected politics and asked whether they would support the same kind of reform in their country. Finally, the survey would also ask respondents to specify their preferences for reform varying the policy issue at stake (complex vs. easy, salient vs. non-salient).

Method #2 (years 1-2) is an inventory of all instances of non-elected politics at the national and regional levels (regional only in regionalized and federal countries). I will collect information across Europe (EU28, NOR, IS, CH) since 2000. The cases I will cover have to be (1) collective bodies only composed of selected experts or citizens and not open to everyone interested (2) created formally by representative institutions (parliament, government), and (3) attributed a formal political role such as the elaboration, enactment, implementation, or evaluation of public policies. A network of local scholars (1 per country) will be set up (see track record below for more info). They will be asked to collect data on: (1) the composition of the body of experts/citizens, (2) its formal prerogatives (decision capacity and stage in the policy cycle), (3) the public authority that has appointed it, (4) the policy issue under scrutiny, (5) the time during which the body was in action, (6) the outcome of deliberations, and (7) how the outcome has shaped public policy. The dataset produced will then be matched with available indicators on the functioning of national political systems (turnout, electoral volatility, performance of anti-

establishment parties, satisfaction with democracy, political trust) as well as on policy performance (inflation, unemployment, inequalities, corruption, transparency). All data will be made available via a website that will contain a dataset of all cases, short summaries of all instances of non-elected politics, and a data visualization tool that would allow users to produce charts and maps on basis of a set of criteria (countries, years, types of reform) they could select according to their interest (see ELECLAW-EUDO project)².

Method #3 (years 3-5) is a panel survey conducted in 2 countries (N=1500 per country, see technical annex 1-ethics) in which non-elected politics is to be used during the course of the project (one case empowering experts, one empowering citizens). Both would be identified via our network of national collaborators (method #2). Panel surveys are the only method that would allow capturing in two waves (when the non-elected body is installed, and when it reaches a decision) the actual evolution of political support (both diffuse and specific) for each respondent – controlling for confounding factors. However, for limiting attrition between the two waves, the panel surveys should be face-to-face. The high cost of this endeavour explains why only two cases can be selected. The panel surveys will not only capture the evolution of political support. They will also collect data for my hypotheses on the mediating role of citizens' democratic preferences and policy preferences for which I will directly build upon the results of the online surveys conducted in WP1 (method #1).

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² <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/electoral-rights/electoral-law-indicators>

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