Referendums on ‘National’ Self Determination: Québec, Scotland, Ukraine and Puerto Rico

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Excerpted from: The Politics of Direct Democracy
(Toronto, Broadview Press, forthcoming)
TABLE 1
A typology of the subject matter of referendums

I. **Constitutional issues**: Amendments to the constitution, changes in political institutions, forms of governance, basic laws, etc.

   **Examples**
   - Australian constitutional referendums
   - The 1992 Canadian constitutional referendum
   - The 1993 Russian constitutional referendum
   - The 1992 and 1993 New Zealand referendums on electoral reform
   - The 1993 Brazilian referendum on a presidential system of government
   - The 1991 Swiss referendum to lower the voting age

II. **Treaties and international agreements**: All agreements between nations, supranational organizations, etc. whether such referendums are constitutionally mandated or not.

   **Examples**
   - The 1986 Danish referendum on the Single European Act
   - The 1986 Spanish referendum on NATO membership
   - The 1992 French referendum on the Maastricht Treaty
   - The 1994 Austrian referendum on European Union membership
   - The 1994 Swiss referendum on participation in UN peacekeeping forces
   - The 1998 referendum on the Northern Ireland peace agreement

III. **Sovereignty**: Referendums on territorial questions, issues of ‘national’ self-determination, devolution of authority, federation, secession.

   **Examples**
   - The 1944 referendum which separated Iceland from Denmark
   - The 1948 vote in Newfoundland to join Canada
   - The 1991 Ukrainian referendum on independence
   - The 1980 and 1995 Quebec referendums on sovereignty
   - The 1997 referendums in Scotland and Wales to establish national assemblies

IV. **Public Policy**: Referendums on policy questions, including consultative votes on government proposals, abrogative votes on public laws, citizen initiatives, etc.

   **Examples**
   - Various referendums on prohibition (e.g. Norway, 1926; Iceland, 1933)
   - New Zealand referendums on conscription (1949) or liquor laws (1967)
   - The 1978 Austrian or 1980 Swedish referendums on nuclear power
   - The 1992 Uruguayan referendum on privatization of state industries
   - The 1993 Italian referendum on decriminalization of drugs
   - Swiss referendums on social insurance, tobacco and alcohol advertising, casino gambling, sales and gasoline taxes, federal holiday (1993)
TABLE 2
The 1980 and 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendums

1980 referendum question

The Government of Quebec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations;
This agreement would enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes, and establish relations abroad -- in other words, sovereignty -- and at the same time, to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency;
No change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be effected without approval by the people through another referendum;
On these terms, do you agree to give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Quebec and Canada?

Referendum result: May 20, 1980

YES: 40.4%          NO: 59.6%  Turnout = 86%

1995 referendum question

Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?

Referendum result: October 30, 1995

YES: 49.4%          NO: 50.6%  Turnout = 94%

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1 The bill in question declared that Quebec is a sovereign country, stated that an independent Quebec would continue to use the Canadian dollar and would allow its residents to retain concurrent Canadian citizenship, and authorized the Quebec government to negotiate a new association between Quebec and Canada. The bill was to come into force one year following its approval in a referendum. The “June 12 agreement” referred to in the question was reached between Premier Parizeau, BQ leader Bouchard, and Mario Dumont, leader and only elected member of the Parti Action Démocratique du Québec. The agreement stated that an offer to negotiate a formal treaty of economic and political partnership would be made to Canada following a YES vote in the referendum.
### Table 3

The 1979 and 1997 Scottish devolution referendums

**March 1, 1979**

Do you agree that the provisions of the Scotland Act 1978 should be put into effect?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of electorate</th>
<th>Percent of votes cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstentions</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**September 11, 1997**

9 I agree that there should be a Scottish parliament
9 I do not agree that there should be a Scottish parliament

9 I agree that a Scottish parliament should have tax varying powers
9 I do not agree that a Scottish parliament should have tax varying powers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of electorate</th>
<th>Percent of votes cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES:</td>
<td>Parliament 44.7%</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax powers 38.2%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO:</td>
<td>Parliament 15.5%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax powers 22.0%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstentions</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 4
Results of the 1991 referendums in Ukraine

**March 17, 1991**

1. Do you consider it necessary to preserve the USSR as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which human rights and the freedoms of all nationalities will be fully guaranteed?
   
   YES: 71.5%  NO: 28.5%

2. Do you agree that Ukraine should be part of a Union of Soviet Sovereign States on the basis of the declaration of sovereignty of Ukraine?
   
   YES: 83.5%  NO: 16.5%

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Turnout = 84%

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**December 1, 1991:** INDEPENDENCE

YES: 90.3%  NO: 9.7%

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Turnout = 84%

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TABLE 5
Results of the three Puerto Rico political status plebiscites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth¹</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free association²</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. statehood</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above²</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank/invalid</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout =</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ In the 1998 referendum, the commonwealth option was on the ballot as “free associated territorial state”. It was interpreted as affirming the status quo, but this interpretation was one of the subjects of debate in the campaign, causing the PDP, which has traditionally supported commonwealth status, to switch its support to “none of the above”.

² These options appeared only on the 1998 ballot.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Long before</th>
<th>At call</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Final week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quebec(^1)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland(^2)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France(^3)</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway(^2)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden(^2)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec(^4)</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia(^5)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland(^6)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales(^6)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada(^7)</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1  1995 Carleton ISSP Study
2  Comparative Nordic Referendums Study (Pesonen, 1998)
3  SOFRES/ Le Figaro (Franklin, van der Eijk and Marsh, 1995)
4  1980 Canadian National Election Study: Quebec referendum wave
5  1999 Australian Constitutional Referendum Study
6  1997 CREST surveys
7  1992 Carleton Referendum Study
| STABILITY | | VOLATILITY |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Social cleavages | Groups | Campaign events |
| Ideology | | Government actions |
| Core beliefs | Leaders | Media |
| Political parties | | State of the economy |
SELECTED REFERENCES


University of Geneva, Center for the Study of Direct Democracy [http://c2d.unige.ch/start.en.msqi]


LeDuc, Lawrence. 2001. “What Can Comparative Research Tell Us About the Next Quebec Referendum?”, paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Québec.


