

Syllabus

Can Voters Hold Politicians Accountable?

Instructor: Martin Vinæs Larsen

January 7, 2019

A key normative justification for representative democracy is that citizens are able to constrain their representatives actions in a meaningful way. In this course we will examine to what extent and under what circumstances citizens are able to use elections as the instrument of constraint—what is conventionally called electoral accountability.

The course has three introductory session which lays out the basic theoretical framework (contract theory) and the methodological approach (design based inference) we will use to evaluate whether citizens are able to hold politicians accountable. Next, we will look at three important sets of independent variables that might affect the effectiveness of electoral accountability: (1) political institutions, (2) the availability of strong competence signals, and (3) behavioral limitations. Finally, we will have a single session on inequality in accountability.

I have four learning objectives for the course. First, you should be able to think structured about the concept of electoral accountability and evaluate whether certain psychological or organizational structures are likely to heighten or attenuate accountability. Second, you should be able to read, understand and critically assess the most advanced literature on this topic. Third, you should get a feeling for how to improve accountability in organizations that you might be a part of in the future. Fourth, you should get a feeling for how research in this area is done, so that you will be able to embark on an original research project related to electoral accountability.

Student responsibilities. Most important assignment is to read the studies carefully, think hard about them, be ready to answer questions about them, critique them, and finally consider possible follow-up studies. The reading load is light, you have few other assignments, and the exam should not take up your time during the semester. This is so that you can read carefully. To facilitate your reading, we will spend time in class preparing you for the next weeks reading, and I recommend that you form study groups. In addition to reading, you will have to prepare a solution to small ‘food for thought’ assignments that I give at the end of each class.

A Note on the Readings. Since we are interested in a fundamentally empirical question, there will be a heavy focus on the evidence presented for specific empirical facts, and how to interpret this empirical fact in light of the larger question about citizens’ ability to hold politicians accountable. This also means that we will spend quite some time discussing the studies’ methods in class. Be mindful of this when your read.

Exam. Six hour assignment set by instructor.

Prerequisites. Methods 1, 2, Microeconomics & Theories and Approaches to Political Science. Some training in statistics with a focus on causal inference is recommended.

Classes. 15 sessions from 14.15 to 16.45 on Tuesdays. No class on April 16 (Easter). There will also be a review/exam prep session a week or so before the exam.

Questions. Preferably in connection with class, but you can also write mvl@ps.au.dk.

Day 1. Introduction I: Welcome and a Methodological Brush Up

1. Achen, C. & Bartels, L. (2016). *Democracy for Realists*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-20.
2. Elster, J. On the Nature and Scope of Rational Choice Explanation. In: "Readings in the philosophy of social science", pp. 60-72.
3. Athey, S. & Imbens, G. (2017). "The state of applied econometrics: Causality and policy evaluation." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(2): 3-32.

Day 2. Introduction II: Retrospective Voting

1. Key, V.O. *The Responsible Electorate*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-8.
2. Kramer, G. H. (1971). Short-term fluctuations in US voting behavior, 1896–1964. *American political science review*, 65(1), 131-143.
3. Nadeau, R., Lewis-Beck, M. S., & Bélanger, É. (2013). Economics and elections revisited. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(5), 551-573.
4. Lenz, G. (2012) *Follow the Leader?*, Chapter 1, 2, pp. 1-53.

Day 3. Introduction III: Contract Theory

1. Achen, C. & Bartels, L. (2016). *Democracy for Realists*, Chapter 4, pp. 90-115.
2. Larsen, M. (2018) *Simple Sanctioning and Selection models*. Lecture Note, pp. 1-7.

Day 4. Institutions I: Term Limits

1. Alt, J., Bueno de Mesquita, E., & Rose, S. (2011). Disentangling accountability and competence in elections: evidence from US term limits. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 171-186
2. Ferraz, C., & Finan, F. (2011). Electoral accountability and corruption: Evidence from the audits of local governments. *American Economic Review*, 101(4), 1274-1311.
3. Fournaies, Alexander, and Andrew B. Hall. "How Do Electoral Incentives Affect Legislator Behavior?." (2018). Working paper.
Can be found at: <http://www.andrewbenjaminhall.com/>.

Day 5. Institutions II: The Media

1. Snyder Jr, J. M., & Strömberg, D. (2010). Press coverage and political accountability. *Journal of political Economy*, 118(2), 355-408.
2. Ruder, A. I. (2014). Institutional design and the attribution of presidential control: Insulating the president from blame. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 9(3), 301-335. (Nb. kan være svær at finde, søg på tidsskriftet i AU library og gå derefter hen til det korrekte år.)

Day 6. Institutions III: Centralization of Executive Power

1. Powell Jr, G. B., & Whitten, G. D. (1993). A cross-national analysis of economic voting: taking account of the political context. *American Journal of Political Science*, 391-414.
2. Hobolt, S., Tilley, J., & Banducci, S. (2013). Clarity of responsibility: How government cohesion conditions performance voting. *European journal of political research*, 52(2), 164-187.
3. Larsen, M. V. (2018). Is the Relationship Between Political Responsibility and Electoral Accountability Causal, Adaptive and Policy-Specific?. *Political Behavior*, Early View.
4. Larsen, M. V. & Asmus Olsen (2018). Clarity of Responsibility and Tax Policy. Working paper.

Day 7. Institutions IV: Open Economies

1. Hellwig, T., & Samuels, D. (2007). Voting in open economies: The electoral consequences of globalization. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(3), 283-306.
2. Kayser, M. A., & Peress, M. (2012). Benchmarking across borders: electoral accountability and the necessity of comparison. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), 661-684.
3. Arel-Bundock, V., A Blais and Dassonneville R. (2019). Do voters benchmark economic performance? *British Journal of Political Science*, Forthcoming.
Can be found at <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/pk348/>.

Day 8. Institutions V: Federalism

1. Anderson, C. D. (2006). Economic voting and multilevel governance: a comparative individual level analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), 449-463.
2. Kogan, V., Lavertu, S., & Peskowitz, Z. (2016). Performance federalism and local democracy: Theory and evidence from school tax referenda. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(2), 418-435.
3. Sances, M. W. (2017). Attribution Errors in Federalist Systems: When Voters Punish the President for Local Tax Increases. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(4), 1286-1301.

4. Berry, Christopher R., and William G. Howell. "Accountability and local elections: Rethinking retrospective voting." *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 3 (2007): 844-858.

Day 9. Signals I: Information

1. Larsen, Martin Vinæs; Asmus Leth Olsen (2018). Reducing Bias in Citizens' Perception of Crime Rates: Evidence From a Field Experiment on Burglary Prevalence. *The Journal of Politics*. 1-10
2. de Benedictis-Kessner, J. (2018). How Attribution Inhibits Accountability: Evidence from Train Delays. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4), 1-10.
3. Pande, R. (2011). Can informed voters enforce better governance? Experiments in low-income democracies. *Annu. Rev. Econ.*, 3(1), 215-237.
4. Boas, T. C., Hidalgo, F. D., & Melo, M. A. (2018). Norms versus Action: Why Voters Fail to Sanction Malfeasance in Brazil. *American Journal of Political Science*, Forthcoming.

→ Also read about Metaketa I on *egap.org*

Day 10. Signals II: Executive Action

1. Bechtel, M. M., & Hainmueller, J. (2011). How lasting is voter gratitude? An analysis of the short- and long-term electoral returns to beneficial policy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(4), 852-868.
2. Gasper, J. T., & Reeves, A. (2011). Make it rain? Retrospection and the attentive electorate in the context of natural disasters. *American Journal of Political Science*, 55(2), 340-355.

Day 11. Signals III: Local Conditions

1. Larsen, Martin Vinæs; Frederik Hjorth; Kim Sønderskov; Peter Dinesen (2018). When Do Citizens Respond Politically to the Local Economy? Evidence from Registry Data on Local Housing Markets. *The American Political Science Review*. Forthcoming
2. Simonovits, Gabor, Sean Kates, and Blanka Szeidl. "Local Economic Shocks and National Election Outcomes: Evidence from Hungarian Administrative Data." *Political Behavior* (2018): 1-12.

Day 12: Behavioral Limitations I: Biases in Retrospective Decision-making

1. Healy, A., & Lenz, G. S. (2014). Substituting the end for the whole: why voters respond primarily to the election year economy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(1), 31-47.
2. Healy, A., & Malhotra, N. (2009). Myopic voters and natural disaster policy. *American Political Science Review*, 103(3), 387-406.

3. Huber, G. A., Hill, S. J., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Sources of bias in retrospective decision making: Experimental evidence on voters' limitations in controlling incumbents. *American Political Science Review*, 106(4), 720-741.

Day 13: Behavioral Limitations II: Misattributions and Misperceptions

1. Tilley, J., & Hobolt, S. (2011). Is the government to blame? An experimental test of how partisanship shapes perceptions of performance and responsibility. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(2), 316-330.
2. Bisgaard, M. (2015). Bias will find a way: Economic perceptions, attributions of blame, and partisan-motivated reasoning during crisis. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(3), 849-860.
3. Bisgaard, M., & Slothuus, R. (2018). Partisan elites as culprits? How party cues shape partisan perceptual gaps. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(2), 456-469.

Day 14: Behavioral Limitations III: Irrelevant Events

1. Achen, C. & Bartels, L. (2016). *Democracy for Realists*, Chapter 5, pp. 116-146.
2. Fowler, A., & Hall, A. B. (2018). Do shark attacks influence presidential elections? Reassessing a prominent finding on voter competence. *The Journal of Politics*. 1-29
3. Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2018). Statistics as If Politics Mattered: A Reply to Fowler and Hall. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(4), 1438-1453.
4. Fowler, A. & Hall, A. B. (2018). "Politics as if Evidence Mattered: A Reply to Achen and Bartels." Note posted at www.andrewbenjaminhall.com.
5. Healy, A. J., Malhotra, N., & Mo, C. H. (2010). Irrelevant events affect voters' evaluations of government performance. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(29), 12804-12809.
6. Fowler, A., & Montagnes, B. P. (2015). College football, elections, and false-positive results in observational research. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(45), 13800-13804.
7. Healy, A., Malhotra, N., & Mo, C. H. (2015). Determining false-positives requires considering the totality of evidence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(48), E6591-E6591.
8. Fowler, A., & Montagnes, B. P. (2015). Reply to Healy et al.: Value of ex ante predictions and independent tests for assessing false-positive results. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(48), E6592-E6592.
9. Ashworth, S., Bueno de Mesquita, E., & Friedenberg, A. (2018). Learning about voter rationality. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(1), 37-54.
10. Busby, E. C., Druckman, J. N., & Fredendall, A. (2017). The political relevance of irrelevant events. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(1), 346-350.

11. Busby, E. C., & Druckman, J. N. (2018). Football and Public Opinion: A Partial Replication and Extension. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 5(1), 4-10.

Day 15: Inequality in Accountability

1. Sances, M. W. (2016). The Distributional Impact of Greater Responsiveness: Evidence from New York Towns. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(1), 105-119.
2. Holbein, J. (2016). Left behind? Citizen responsiveness to government performance information. *American Political Science Review*, 110(2), 353-368.
3. Hicks, T., Jacobs, A. M., & Matthews, J. S. (2016). Inequality and Electoral Accountability: Class-Biased Economic Voting in Comparative Perspective. *The Journal of Politics*, 78(4), 1076-1093.