

# Electoral Accountability

Felix Hartmann

Email: [f.hartmann@hu-berlin.de](mailto:f.hartmann@hu-berlin.de)

Chair of Comparative Political Behaviour, Department of Social Science, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Summer Semester 2021

## General Information

Moodle: We will be distributing readings and assignments via Moodle at least one week in advance.

*Where/When* We meet weekly **Friday, 12.15-13.45**,

*Office Hours* Monday 2-3 pm:

## Overview

A central normative justification for representative democracy is that elections allow citizens to control over the actions of their representatives. In this course we will examine to what extent and under what conditions elections give citizens control over their leaders. The seminar will combine methodological sessions introducing the design-based approach to causal inference with substantive sessions where we review recent advances in the literature. Substantively, the course will cover important barriers to accountability in democratic polities: (1) access to information, (2) institutional barriers, (3) the availability of strong competence signals, and (4) behavioral constraints.

Prior knowledge of hypothesis testing and linear regression is required.

## Learning Outcomes

First, students will be introduced to the theory and central concepts on electoral accountability. The empirical evidence will be assessed using the tools of causal inference. To do so, students will understand the potential outcomes framework, and the key assumptions underlying causal inference, and will be able to choose appropriate methods for a variety of research questions posing different identification challenges.

## Assessment

The assessment consists of student presentations (40%) and a research design essay on a topic related to electoral accountability (60%), in which students will outline how they would address a causal research question of their choice using methods introduced in class. The research design should be structured like a pre-analysis plan (PAP) and include a short literature review, hypotheses, research design, and estimation.

## Prerequisites

Linear Regression, hypothesis testing

*Involvement* Participation includes coming to class; turning in assignments on time; thinking and caring about the material and expressing your thoughts respectfully and succinctly in class. As much as possible, we will be working in groups during the class meetings. This work will require that you have done the assigned reading in advance and that you are an active collaborator.

*Student Presentation* Students should prepare a 30 min presentation for a paper of your choice.

*Final Paper* The central assignment for the class is a research design paper in a form of a pre-analysis plan. The final paper should be divided into seven sections: 1) Introduction; 2) Theory and Hypothesis; 3) Identification 4) Estimand and Estimation Strategy; 5) Implications; 7) . I'll provide more information on this as we go along. Hand in research design paper by **August 31st, 2021** via moodle.

## Schedule

### **Week 1 (Apr. 16): Welcome and Overview**

Topics: Introduction

### **Week 2 (Apr. 23): Theory: Retrospective Voting**

Topics: Causal Inference, Randomized Experiment

Reading: [Healy and Malhotra \(2013\)](#)

### **Week 3 ( Apr. 30.): Theory: Contract Theory**

Topics:

Reading: [Achen and Bartels, 2017](#), Ch. 4, [Ashworth \(2012\)](#),

### **Week 4 (May 7.): Methodological Brush Up I**

Topics: Causality as counterfactuals, Potential outcomes, Identification and estimation, Causal estimands

Reading: [Keele \(2015\)](#), [Ashworth et al. \(2021\)](#)

### **Week 5 (May 14): Methodological Brush Up II**

Topics: Randomized Experiments

Reading: [Angrist and Pischke, 2014](#), p. 17-33; [Gerber and Green, 2012](#), Ch. 2.7-3: p. 39-86

### **Week 6 (May 21): Methodological Brush Up III**

Topics: Observational Studies & Matching

Reading: [Angrist and Pischke \(2014, p. 47-79\)](#); [Gelman and Hill \(2007\)](#), [Sekhon, 2009](#)

### **Week 7 (May. 28): Methodological Brush Up IV**

Topics: Panel Data, Fixed Effects, Diff-in-Diff

Reading: [Angrist and Pischke, 2014](#), Ch. 5: p. 178-204

### **Week 8 (Jun. 4): Information and Performance**

**Topics:** Does performance information influence voting behaviour?

**Reading:** [Bhandari et al. \(2019\)](#), [Dunning et al. \(2019\)](#)

### **Week 9 (June. 11) : Social Welfare Provision & Voting**

**Topics:** Do voters reward targeted social spending?

**Paper:** [De La O \(2013\)](#), [Imai et al. \(2020\)](#)

### **Week 10 (June. 18) : Executive Action**

**Topics:** What types of public policies get rewarded by voters?

**Applied:** [Bechtel and Hainmueller \(2011\)](#), [Healy and Malhotra \(2009\)](#)

### **Week 11 (June. 25): Credit Claiming & Vote Buying**

**Topics:** How can politicians influence performance voting through credit-claiming and vote buying?

**Reading:** [Cruz and Schneider \(2017\)](#), [Cruz et al. \(2018\)](#)

### **Week 12 (July. 2): Attribution & Expectations**

**Topics:** How can attributions and changed expectations influence performance voting?

**Paper:** [Harding \(2015\)](#), [De Kadt and Lieberman \(2017\)](#)

### **Week 13 (July. 9): Priorities and trade-offs**

**Topics:** social norms and collective actions, multidimensional utility functions

**Reading:** [Boas et al. \(2019\)](#), [Boas et al. \(2020\)](#)

### **Week 14 (July. 16): Behavioral Limitations & Meta-Analysis**

**Topics:** Biases and cognitive limitations

**Reading:** [Incerti \(2020\)](#), [Huber et al. \(2012\)](#)

- I REFERENCES
- Alesina, C. H. and Wacziarg, R. (2017). *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*, volume 4. Princeton University Press.
- Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2014). *Mastering metrics: The path from cause to effect*. Princeton University Press.
- Ashworth, S. (2012). Electoral accountability: recent theoretical and empirical work. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15:183–201.
- Ashworth, S., de Mesquita, E. B., and Berry, C. R. (2021). *Theory and Credibility: Integrating Theoretical and Empirical Social Science*. Princeton University Press.
- Bechtel, M. M. and 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.
- Bhandari, A., Larreguy, H., and Marshall, J. (2019). Able and mostly willing: An empirical anatomy of information’s effect on voter-driven accountability in senegal. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Boas, T., Hidalgo, F. D., and Toral, G. (2020). Competence versus priorities: Negative electoral responses to education quality in brazil.
- Boas, T. C., Hidalgo, F. D., and Melo, M. A. (2019). Norms versus action: Why voters fail to sanction malfeasance in brazil. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(2):385–400.
- Cruz, C., Keefer, P., Labonne, J., and Trebbi, F. (2018). Making policies matter: Voter responses to campaign promises. Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Cruz, C. and Schneider, C. J. (2017). Foreign aid and undeserved credit claiming. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(2):396–408.
- De Kadt, D. and Lieberman, E. S. (2017). Nuanced accountability: Voter responses to service delivery in southern africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, pages 1–31.
- De La O, A. L. (2013). Do conditional cash transfers affect electoral behavior? evidence from a randomized experiment in mexico. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(1):1–14.
- Dunning, T., Grossman, G., Humphreys, M., Hyde, S. D., McIntosh, C., Nellis, G., Adida, C. L., Arias, E., Bicalho, C., Boas, T. C., et al. (2019). Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials. *Science advances*, 5(7):eaaw2612.
- Gelman, A. and Hill, J. (2007). Causal inference using regression on the treatment variable.
- Gerber, A. S. and Green, D. P. (2012). *Field experiments: Design, analysis, and interpretation*. WW Norton.
- Harding, R. (2015). Attribution and accountability: Voting for roads in ghana. *World Pol.*, 67:656.
- Healy, A. and Malhotra, N. (2009). Myopic voters and natural disaster policy. *American Political Science Review*, pages 387–406.
- Healy, A. and Malhotra, N. (2013). Retrospective voting reconsidered. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16:285–306.
- Huber, G. A., Hill, S. J., and Lenz, G. S. (2012). Sources of bias in retrospective decision making: Experimental evidence on voters’ limitations in controlling incumbents. *American Political Science Review*, pages 720–741.
- Imai, K., King, G., and Velasco Rivera, C. (2020). Do nonpartisan programmatic policies have partisan electoral effects? evidence from two large-scale experiments. *The Journal of Politics*, 82(2):714–730.
- Incerti, T. (2020). Corruption information and vote share: A meta-analysis and lessons for experimental design. *American Political Science Review*, 114(3):761–774.
- Keele, L. (2015). The statistics of causal inference: A view from political methodology. *Political Analysis*, 23(3):313–335.

Sekhon, J. S. (2009). Opiates for the matches: Matching methods for causal inference. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12:487–508.