



Political Accountability: Practicum in Reproducible Research Methods

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To register: https://www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/academic-catalogue/Course-detail?course_id=SPS-METMG-ACC-19

Second term seminar 2019–20

Tuesday 15:00-17:00, Seminar Room 2

Course site: <https://mycourses.eui.eu/d21/home/6957>

Course Description: What are sources of accountability failures in democratic polities? As an extreme example, how and why do public officials chronically engage in illegal actions while in office? If voters have other candidates they can select to replace incumbents who abuse the public trust, why are corruption and political malfeasance so persistent? Does chronic corruption pervert political representation?

This course reviews some recent literature on these questions with the aim of locating the research frontier and helping students identify potential topics for further study.

In addition to its substantive content, this course also has a practicum and skill-building component. Over the term, you will be exposed to all the steps required to complete a complex collaborative reproducible research project, from thinking up a problem worth studying to pre-registering your design to collecting and analyzing your data and writing up and posting your results. You will practice these steps using real (observational) data about accountability and political corruption collected by the instructor in Italy. The practicum component of the course will be fast paced, and require you to hand in bi-weekly assignments.

Course Prerequisites: You will only be able to do the work in this course if you are familiar with statistical methods to analyze quantitative data. Thus, students are welcome in the course if they have taken at least one prior course in statistics (covering material through multiple regression) that used either Stata or R. All other skills required this term will be taught by the instructor.

Course Objectives: At the completion of this course, you will:

1. Be familiar with some important recent studies of political corruption, electoral fraud, and vote buying.
2. Have experience working with a complex multilevel dataset collected in a European country (Italy).
3. Have practiced many steps required to complete a large-scale reproducible research project.
4. Have experience collaborating with others in a research project.
5. Have developed familiarity with tools such as L^AT_EX, Markdown, and GitHub, and be acquainted with sites such as BITSS, OSF, EGAP, Dataverse, and others.
6. Be familiar with the highest standards and practices for many aspects of reproducible research.

Course Format: The first hour of each class will be a mixture of lecture and discussion about the assigned substantive reading. The second hour will consist of the practicum. Please bring a laptop to every class.

Readings: Readings are divided between substantive and skill-building. I have assigned no more than three substantive readings a week so that you have time to review the skill-focused materials. Almost all the substantive readings are recent, in order to introduce you to the most cutting-edge research and research practices. The practicum readings are typically short, and even when they are not, they are quick reads.

You should read the substantive and practicum materials differently. The substantive readings require the standard reading methods you use in any seminar. First, skim the article to figure out the topic, question, evidence, and methods used. Then read it carefully to assess whether the evidence answers the question posed. Critically assess whether the methods are appropriate, and what else the author could have done to convince you. Finally, consider what other questions the paper raises in your mind that it does not answer.

The practicum materials require a different way of reading. You should first skim an assigned reading for the skills it covers, and then carefully study the sections that are relevant to your own work. Then you should implement the techniques that the reading discusses. If you are reading about how to structure your directories for a research project, take a look at your own directory structure for your most active research project and consider how the reading would suggest you modify it. Then go ahead and restructure

your directories for that project. The only way to learn the skills that the practicum readings cover is to implement them, thereby developing “muscle memory.” Over the course of the term, try to incorporate as many of the skills we study into your own workflow as possible. Your goal is to make them part of your standard research routines.

Statistical Software(s): You may use either Stata or RStudio to do the work in the course. RStudio is the recommended software, and for some assignments (using RMarkdown) is mandatory. For graphics, you are required to work in ggplot2, an R package. Any writing must be done in either RMarkdown or L^AT_EX.

Course Website: We will use a course site in the Brightspace Learning Environment that the EUI is in the process of adopting. All course materials will be available on this site, and you will submit your assignments there. The site is also useful for conversations with other students, or questions for me. To access the site, go to mycourses.eui.eu. All enrolled students will automatically be given accounts on the site.

Collaboration: Students will work in teams for the term. Teams will be set up during the first class meeting. Team size will depend on the number of students enrolled, but you will probably be paired with one other person. You will remain with the same team-mate for the entire term.

Requirement(s): To complete the course for a grade, each team will submit an assignment every other week. These assignments will be available on the Brightspace course site. They will be blind-graded.

Course Policies:

- **General (for auditors as well as enrolled students)**

- Students should come to class meetings each week **already having read** the assigned material.
- Students should bring written notes to class summarizing each assigned reading and be prepared to discuss every assigned reading. You may be cold called.
- If you are auditing the course, please inform me so you are given access to the course site.
- If you experience any problems accessing any of the readings, please let me or Monika know immediately.
- Students are expected to attend all class meetings except in cases of illness. Please do not attend class if you have a cold or the flu. You will not be penalized if you do not attend class due to illness. If you cannot attend class due to illness and you inform me with sufficient advance notice, I will arrange to have the class video-taped.

- **Readings**

- Readings listed on the syllabus are linked to the publication or posted site for easy access. Unpublished materials will be posted the course website.

- **Practicum**

- I will make available the dataset that you will use for all assignments. It concerns political corruption in Italy. You will use the same dataset all term.
- In the statistical analysis that you will do, you will be expected to present descriptive statistics and regressions results. Your work will need to be accurate, complete, and thoughtful.
- Written materials should be submitted in .pdf format unless otherwise specified.
- Some assignments require you to submit your computer code (in .do or .R format). Code must be a clean run and must be properly annotated.
- **If your code does not run, your assignment will be considered incomplete and you may not receive credit for it.** Please make sure to write relative directory paths so that your code will run on my computer with a single line change in the first section of the file indicating the name and location of the working directory.

- **Grades and Feedback**

- Materials are to be submitted on time to be given full credit. Please ensure that the timestamp for every submission is within ten minutes of the time due.
- In addition to awarding you course credit, I will provide feedback that offers more information about your performance in the course.
- Feedback will also be provided regarding class participation.

SYLLABUS

Week One, January 14: Theoretical Bases of Political Accountability

The substantive readings this week provide some basic theoretical grounds for thinking about accountability in contexts of democratic politics.

Substantive readings:

Ferejohn, J. (1986). Incumbent performance and electoral control. *Public Choice*, 50(1–3):5–25.

Dixit, A. and Londregan, J. (1996). The determinants of success of special interests in redistributive politics. *Journal of Politics*, 58(4):1132–55.

Recommended:

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C., and Manin, B., editors (1999). *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, ch. 1.

Practicum component:

- Picking your research question
- Forming your research team
- Setting up your SOP and lab arrangements

Practicum readings:

Lin, W., Green, D., and Coppock, A. Standard operating procedures for Don Green's lab at Columbia.

Shapiro, J. N. ESOC research production guide, v1.0.

Golden, M. A. Guidelines for authorship, awarding credit, and intellectual property rights.

First homework assignment available. It will require each team to write a collaborative agreement, set up a GitHub repo, and structure its project directories.

Week Two, January 21: Cross-National Patterns in Government Corruption, Rent-Seeking, and Malfeasance

The main determinant of corruption and other forms of political malfeasance is economic development: bad government is significantly worse at lower levels of economic development.

Substantive readings:

Fisman, R. and Golden, M. A. (2017). *Political Corruption: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press, New York, chs. 1–3 and 5.

Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M., and Brusco, V. (2013). *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics*. Cambridge University Press, New York, ch. 8.

Berenschot, W. (2018). The political economy of clientelism: A comparative study of Indonesia's patronage democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(12):1563–93.

Recommended:

Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2012). What wins votes: Why some politicians opt out of clientelism. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(3):568–83.

Practicum component:

- Overview: why reproducible research matters
- Overview of a collaborative reproducible workflow
- Setting up your project on GitHub

Practicum readings:

Gandrud, C. (2015). *Reproducible Research with R and RStudio*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2nd edition, chs. 1–2.

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, ch. 11.

Bowers, J. and Voors, M. (2016). How to improve your relationship with your future self. *Revista De Ciencia Política*, 36(3):829–48.

Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). 10 things to know about project workflow.

Familiarize yourself with:

Open Science Framework (OSF). OSF Guides (Best Practices).

First homework assignment due

Week Three, January 28: Can Voters Solve the Accountability Problem?

One possible answer to chronic malfeasance is simply to present information to voters

about it, with the expectation that they will then elect better political representatives at the next election. Is this an effective solution?

Readings:

Ferraz, C. and Finan, F. (2008). Exposing corrupt politicians: The effect of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(2):703–45.

Klašnja, M. (2017). Uninformed voters and corrupt politicians. *American Politics Research*, 45(2):256–79.

Dunning, T., Grossman, G., Humphreys, M., Hyde, S. D., and McIntosh, C. (2019). Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials. *Science Advances*, 5(7):1–10.

Practicum component:

- Designing your (pilot) study
- Setting up an operational project
- Securing funding

Practicum readings:

Gandrud, C. (2015). *Reproducible Research with R and RStudio*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2nd edition, ch. 5.

Wilson, G., Bryan, J., Cranston, K., Kitzes, J., Nederbragt, L., and Teal, T. K. (2017). Good enough practices in scientific computing. *Plos Computational Biology*.

Przeworski, A. and Soloman, F. (1995; rev. 1988). On the art of writing proposals.

Sohn, E. (2020). Secrets to writing a winning grant. *Nature*, 555:133–35.

Familiarize yourself with:

Blair, G., Cooper, J. J., Coppock, A., and Humphreys, M. (2019). Declaring and diagnosing research designs. *American Political Science Review*, 113(3):838–59.

Note: Professor Macartan Humphreys will visit the EUI to teach Declare Design to all those interested on May 29–30.

Week Four, February 4: Voter Coordination Problems in Improving Accountability

One reason voters may experience difficulties “throwing the rascals out” is because to do so requires strategic coordination among voters. This may be difficult to achieve.

Readings:

Bicchieri, C. and Xiao, E. (2009). Do the right thing: But only if others do so. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 22(2):191–208.

Chwe, M. S.-Y. (2013). *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, chs. 1–2.

Arias, E., Balán, P., Larreguy, H. A., and Marshall, J. (2019). Information provision, voter coordination, and electoral accountability: Evidence from Mexican social networks. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2):475–98.

Practicum component:

- Writing your pre-analysis plan
- Registering your pre-analysis plan at EGAP

Practicum readings:

Olken, B. A. (2015). Promises and perils of pre-analysis plans. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 29(3):61–80.

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, chs. 3–6.

Editors (2019). What science looks like. *Nature Human Behavior*, 3:763.

Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). 10 things to know about pre-analysis plans.

Recommended:

Oforu, G. and Posner, D. N. (2019). Pre-analysis plans: A stocktaking. Unpublished paper.

Second homework assignment available. It will require each team to examine the dataset provided by the instructor and write a PAP designed to answer a specified research question. You will submit your PAP to (a mock version of) the EGAP pre-registration site.

Week Five, February 11: Vote-Buying, Patronage, and Clientelism as Barriers to Accountability

Co-taught with guest instructor, Professor Lauren Young

Do governments use individual inducements to buy off voters, and thereby foil attempts at improving accountability?

Readings:

Berenschot, W. (2010). Everyday mediation: The politics of public service delivery in Gujarat, India. *Development and Change*, 41(5):883–905.

Kramon, E. (2018). *Money for Votes: The Causes and Consequences of Electoral Clientelism in Africa*. Cambridge University Press, New York, ch. 3.

Mares, I. and Young, L. E. (2016). Buying, stealing, and expropriating votes. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19:267–88.

Practicum component:

Co-taught with Luke Sonnet.

- Forecasting your results
- Setting up your forecasting instrument on Qualtrics

Practicum readings:

DellaVigna, S. and Pope, D. (2018). Predicting experimental results: Who knows what? *Journal of Political Economy*, 126(6):2410–56.

DellaVigna, S., Pope, D., and Vivaldi, E. (2019). Predict science to improve science. *Science*, 366(6464):428–29.

Second homework assignment due.

February 18, class cancelled due to instructor illness

Week Six, February 25: Institutional Barriers to Accountability

Governments sometimes subvert the operation of democratic institutions with electoral fraud, violence, or voter intimidation. In these cases, it is hardly surprising that accountability fails.

Baland, J.-M. and Robinson, J. A. (2008). Land and power: Theory and evidence from Chile. *American Economic Review*, 98(5):1737–65.

Callen, M., Long, J. D., et al. (2015). Institutional corruption and election fraud: Evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan. *The American Economic Review*, 105(1):354–81.

Practicum component:

- Ethical obligations to subjects
- Ethical obligations to staff
- Obtaining IRB approval
- Staying safe in the field

Practicum readings:

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, ch. 2.

APSA Ad-Hoc Committee on Human Subjects Research (2019). Report of the APSA ad-hoc committee on human subjects research.

European University Institute (2017). EUI policy on risk missions.

Week Seven, March 3: Political Selection as a Barrier to Accountability

If voters can freely elect their representatives, how do unrepresentative individuals win office?

Readings:

Dal Bó, E., Finan, F., Folke, O., Persson, T., and Rickne, J. (2017). Who becomes a politician? *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, pages 1877–1914.

Thompson, D. M., Feigenbaum, J. J., Hall, A. B., and Yoder, J. (2019). Who becomes a member of congress? Evidence from de-anonymized Census data. Working Paper, 26156, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

Daniele, G. (2019). Strike one to educate one hundred: Organized crime, political selection and politicians' ability. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 159:650–62.

Practicum component:

- Collecting your data
- Managing your data
- Setting up your directory and file structures
- Assembling an operational dataset

Practicum readings:

Gandrud, C. (2015). *Reproducible Research with R and RStudio*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2nd edition, chs. 4–7.

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, ch. 11.

Gentzow, M. and Shapiro, J. M. (2014). Code and data for the social sciences: A practitioner’s guide.

Week Eight, March 31: Can Partisan Competition Improve Accountability?

Meeting on Zoom 15:00-17:30 (<https://zoom.us/j/178019460>)

Readings:

Grossman, G. and Michelitch, K. (2018). Information dissemination, competitive pressure, and politician performance between elections: A field experiment in Uganda. *American Political Science Review*, 112(2):280–301.

Asquer, R., Golden, M. A., and Hamel, B. T. (2020 (forthcoming)). Corruption, party leaders, and candidate selection: Evidence from Italy. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.

Galasso, V. and Nannicini, T. (2011). Competing on good politicians. *American Political Science Review*, 105(1):79–99.

Practicum component:

- Analyzing your data
- Writing intermediate reports for the team
- Using RMarkdown
- Using graphics effectively

Practicum readings:

Gandrud, C. (2015). *Reproducible Research with R and RStudio*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2nd edition, chs. 3 and 8–10.

Schwabish, J. (2014). An economist’s guide to visualizing data. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

Rudis, B., Ross, N., and Garnier, S. The viridis color palette.

Third homework assignment available. This will require each team to analyze the dataset and write a report in RMarkdown that presents results. The report will also include

graphical presentation of data and a short codebook.

Weeks Nine and Ten, April 7: Elite Competition, Separation of Powers, and Political Accountability

Meeting on Zoom 15:00-18:00 (<https://zoom.us/j/178019460>)

Popa, M. (2015). Elites and corruption: A theory of endogenous reform and a test using British data. *World Politics*, 67(2):313–52.

Practicum component:

- Writing up results
- Writing an effective abstract
- Adhering to scientific reporting standards
- Writing your policy brief
- Preparing replication code
- Preparing a publicly accessible dataset
- Preparing a codebook

Practicum readings:

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, ch. 8.

Aczel, B. e. (2019). A consensus-based transparency checklist. *Nature Human Behavior*, Published online 2 Dec 2019.

Gandrud, C. (2015). *Reproducible Research with R and RStudio*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, 2nd edition, ch. 11.

Christensen, G., Freese, J., and Miguel, E. (2019). *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How To Do Open Science*. University of California Press, Oakland, chs. 9–10.

Third homework assignment due April 14 by 15:00.