

# Prerequisites for accountability and political efficacy

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## **Abstract**

The literature offers two strategies for voters to apply when voting in elections: delegation and accountability. Most electoral research indicates that voters are becoming more volatile and parties more alike, which makes delegation a difficult task. But if voters are becoming more interested in the second strategy – *ex post* controls – it appears other institutional characteristics are likely to be desirable. This study looks at how the political context of elections affects voters' view of governmental responsiveness. More specifically focus is put on the two concepts “clarity of responsibility” and “clarity of available alternatives” that are likely to of importance if voters are to be able assign responsibility in an effective manner. It appears logic that voters may have a more pessimistic view of their possibilities to influence politics and the importance of voting – what is generally known as *external efficacy* – in contexts where power distribution is blurred and no obvious alternatives to take stand for are offered before the election. Results, however, indicate the opposite.

## **Introduction**

A new interest in how voters act when they cast their votes seems to have emerged in the last decade. The literature recognizes two general strategies, *ex ante* (before the fact) controls and *ex post* (after the fact) controls (Kiewet & McCubbins 1991). Traditionally a lot of attention has been put to the mandate model (*ex ante*). According to this model voters select their representatives in a prospective manner, based on their programs and delightful promises about a better tomorrow. It has been discussed in great detail if those who are elected primarily represent citizens' preferences or if they rather reflect identities or group membership (Strøm 1997). Independent on voters' motives, this strategy involves delegation of authority to *agents* (politicians) who are expected to carry out interests and incentives of the *principals* (voters).

Lately, it does; however, seem as if the view of electoral behaviour has changed course. The second strategy – assignment of accountability – rather than active delegation, have gained new interest (Przeworski, Stokes & Manin 1999; Strøm, Muller & Bergman, 2003). Among others, Strøm (1997, 60), argues that voters are shifting their attention from screening (*ex ante*) to accountability (*ex post*). This type of behaviour assumes that people care less about what politicians represent or promise, and more about what they actually deliver (ibid. 60).

## **Accountability**

But why do we assume that voters are changing tactics from mandate giving to assigning of accountability? The argumentation can be based in one of the major findings from the last generation of electoral research. Several studies have proven that social position no longer determines political positions as it did when social alignments were solidly frozen (Franklin, Mackie & Rose 1992; se Dalton 2000 for a discussion). Traditional social cleavages does no longer seem to contribute a meaningful base line for electoral choice, which have caused weakening party ties and increased volatility among voters (Schmitt & Wessels 2004, 1).

The change in voters' electoral behaviour can among other things be explained with the modernization process including increased levels of education and less emphasise on social class divisions in society. Societies are becoming more homogenous, and the existing party system has not been able to respond to the more diffuse structure of society in a successful manner. Party programs are in many ways – as the people – becoming more

homogenous, as they often are applying a more accentuated catch-all strategy at the middle of the battlefield. As a consequence, group boundaries are not just becoming more fluid, but also less politically informative which makes it more difficult for voters to effectively screen their representatives. New social divisions that are able to replace the old ones and that can be organised and politicised in a sufficient manner does not either seem to emerge.

What we seems to end up with is a more fluid citizenry with less apparent group identities or common class interests. The people are on the other hand confronted by parties that are struggling in an attempt to keep their electoral support and to be responsive to the public. The fact that the strategy of active delegation is questioned is not from this perspective hard to understand. As group membership of parties and candidates become a less reliable guide to their incentives and performance in office, *ex ante* controls get less effective. In the terms of principal-agents we can talk about *agency problems* due to *hidden information*. Delegation does not work as well when the preferences of the agents at hand are not fully known. The effectiveness of screening does in the society of today seem to be diminishing.

Thus, it seems logical for voters to lay stress on what politicians actually deliver in a milieu where the differences between the choices offered are blurred. Or, as Strøm puts it “*What matters is less who you are and what you promise, and more what you can demonstrably deliver*” (1997, 60). This is also inline with Downs (1957) view of rational behaviour. Downs argues that since voters never actually can be sure of what politicians will deliver – what alternative that will bring them the highest utility income – it makes more sense to base their decision on the past performance of parties (ibid. 40). This strategy does, however, presuppose that voters see party choice as discretionary, not as a statement of personal identity.

### **Prerequisites for accountability**

The political institutions works as a base for all political actors, laying out the ground rules for all activity at the political arena, both for parties and in voters. The discussion about how people vote can be related to the institutional debate about the best way to organize a democratic state. The choice between different types of regimes often is claimed be between the two overarching goals of *inclusiveness* and *accountability* (Anckar 2004).

Arend Lijphart has contributed greatly to this distinction in his work on different types of democracy (1977, 1984, 1999). Lijphart places different systems on a continuum from majoritarian democracies to system based on consensus, clearly showing that they represent distinctions that are gradable, rather than two from each other separable ways of organising a state. The central device of consensus democracy is that as many preferences as possible are represented in the decision-making process. Majoritarian systems, on the other hand, rather lay stress on strong governments and electoral competition. Lijphart himself argues that systems based on consensus, and therefore inclusiveness, is the best way to organise a state and not only societies that are diverse (1999). Lijphart's argument does not, however, satisfy those who argue that accountability is of great importance in a democracy (Kaiser, Lehnert, Miller & Sieberer 2002). The argument used here is that certain contextual configurations might pose a threat to democratic accountability. Elections – an instrument for voters to sanction governments – becomes a blunt weapon if all preferences are included in decision making or if there is a high degree of coalition complexity.

Accountability or *ex post* controls is supported in various fields of the democratic literature. Riker (1982) does, for example, argue that it is not possible for voters to actively instruct their representatives, and that the only real way in which voters can control officials is to sanction. It has also been put forward that what makes regimes democratic is that they contain mechanisms by which the people can select **and control** their representatives (Dahl 1971). A new focus on accountability, thus, appears to be in line with democratic ideals about effective channels for citizens' influence.

The discussion about what system that can be considered the most responsive and what responsiveness actually entails is tangling. Lijphart for example defines responsiveness as 'government accordance with the people's preferences' (1984, 1) which Kaiser et al (2000, 314) rejects. The language used in this area is fluid. Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999, 8f) have, however, made an effort to clarify some of the obscurity. They define responsiveness as "the relation between signals and policies". The overall relation between interests and outcomes (what Lijphart refers to as responsiveness) they talk about as "representation". A government is, according to Manin et al, responsive if it adopts policies that are signalled as preferred by citizens. The way in which the signals reach the government, is from this perspective of less importance.

The debate about what responsiveness actually entails appears as even more interesting in relation to the assumed development of the behaviour of voters and the

strains it might put on the working of parliamentary democracies. New questions about the function of the political system are raised. Assignment of accountability in an effective manner craves different conditions than screening. The role of parliament, in which much of the screening process used to take place, does for example, diminish. Instead, more focus is set on the government and their actions.

What it boils down to is not only **how** people vote but also, as Schmitt and Wessels (2004) put it – how people **can** vote. The problem that we are faced with is what Thomas J Rudolph prefers to call “*divided government*” (2003b, 698) and Fredrick D Weil “*unresponsive structure of opposition*” (1989, 683). Though they differ in their conceptualization and measurement of institutional context, the above studies advance a common theoretical argument: institutional context shapes individuals attribution of political responsibility that, in turn, guides their allocation of positive and negative sanctions.

For accountability to be an effective check on parties and their representatives, voters must be able to observe the performance of their representatives. It is vital that they can identify the agents that have control over policy making (Laver & Shepsle 1990; Strøm 1990; Powell 2000). This might be considered as obvious but with a closer look on how representative democracy works in practise, it becomes clear that it is not always evident for the voters who should be punished in case of dissatisfaction. System based on consensus are often faced with the problem of coalition and/or minority governments, where responsibility can be considered blurred, a fact that parties in office can make use of in manner to avoid responsibility. When partisan control over government policy is unified, it is easier for citizens to make judgments of political responsibility and to administer sanctions accordingly (Rudolph 2003a, 191).

Yet another problem in conjunction to ex post assignment of responsibility is the availability of a credible actor (or actors) that can benefit from such behaviour. If voters are to use their vote to assign blame on incumbents, there has to be other credible actors who can benefit from such behaviour (Anderson 2000). Since most democracies do not offer their voters a straight two-party choice the prospects for identifiable governments usually rest on other possibilities, such as the formation of explicit or implicit pre election coalitions between parties (Powell 2000). In cases where pre election coalitions are not formed voters are confronted with no vital alternatives, which is likely to make them less prone to assign responsibility.

The two aspects mentioned here as being of importance for voters possibilities to vote retrospective, and to put credit or blame on incumbents in an effective manner, are mainly problems facing systems with a consensus-based profile (Kaiser, Lehnert, Miller & Sieberer 2002). It can, however, not be strictly translated into the system level, but should rather be viewed as separate phenomenon, since great variations on these aspects can be found among systems with a common profile (Bengtsson 2004).

### **Political efficacy**

In the study of political behaviour the concept of “political efficacy” has played a prominent role (Fraser 1970; Hawkins, Marando & Taylor 1971; White 1968). Since the concept was introduced in the 1950s it has been continuously examined and debated. Simply put, efficacy is citizens’ perception of powerfulness in the political realm. Several scholars have noted that political efficacy appears to be made of two different dimensions, a personal sense of efficacy, commonly known as “internal efficacy”, and a system oriented sense of efficacy, known as “external efficacy” (Lane 1959; Neimi, Craig & Mattei 1991). Others have preferred to name the two dimensions “subjective competence” and “governmental responsiveness” (Converse 1972). The external efficacy – of major interest in this study – has been referred to “believes about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to citizens demands” (Niemi et al 1991, 1408). It is, thus, a measure of the belief that the authorities or regime is responsive to attempted influence (Craig 1979). Previous research has put forward that external efficacy is related to trust in government, system support and electoral participation (Iyengar 1980; Abrahamson & Aldrich 1982; Finkel 1985; Niemi et al 1991). Internal efficacy, on the other hand, is more related to education, socioeconomic status and gender (Niemi et al 1991; Kenski & Jomini 2004).

Although the concept of efficacy has been thoroughly examined, in particular the internal part of the concept, it seems like the plausible effect of institutional variation on efficacy has been more or less ignored.<sup>1</sup> Weatherford (1992) argues that studies of legitimacy (of which the concept of efficacy can be considered as a part) have put far too much weight on issues of methodology and measurement than on theory building and on the question of combining macro-level system properties with micro-level citizens’

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart et al (1992) and Power and Donovan (2002) are exceptions.

attitudes and behaviour. A scan of the existing literature on political efficacy supports Weatherford's argumentation (see for example Balch 1974; McPherson, Welch & Clark 1977; Niemi, Craig & Mattei 1991).

Considering the presumed changes in electoral behaviour described above, the importance of combining macro-level and micro-level data seems even greater. The general expectation is that the structure of political efficacy varies with the salience and the differentiation of the context within which ordinary citizens attempt to exercise political influence. According to the main goals of the two overarching kinds of democracy, it seems likely that power distribution affects voters' view of the responsiveness of the political system, i.e. external efficacy. Unified control over policymaking and clear alternatives to take stand for, offering clear choices for voters to take chose from, are likely to make the vote choice appear as more decisive, and thus, bringing about higher feelings of external efficacy.

### **Data and measures**

The analyses will be carried out with data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), a collaborative program of cross-national research among election studies. This design allows researchers to conduct cross-level, as well as cross-national, analyses addressing the effects of electoral institutions on citizens' attitudes and behaviour, the presence and nature of social and political cleavages, and the evaluation of democratic institutions across different political regimes. The second wave of CSES survey, which runs from the year 2001 to 2005, and at this date entails 15 countries, will be applied. To avoid comparing apples with pears only surveys in connection with parliamentary elections in parliamentary or semi presidential systems will be included in the analyses. Parliamentary democracy implies more direct delegation and accountability than presidentialism, as there are fewer stages of delegation from voters to policy makers, and fewer agents that are elected by the citizens (Strøm 2000, 272). The decision to exclude presidential systems or elections means that the Mexican (presidential system) and the French surveys (semi presidential system but survey in connection with the presidential election in 2002) are left out. The countries included in the analysis are, accordingly (with the survey year in brackets): Bulgaria (2001), Czech Republic (2002), Germany (2002), Hungary (2002), Ireland (2002), Israel (2003), New Zealand (2002),

Norway (2001), Poland (2001), Portugal (2002), Sweden (2002), Switzerland (2003) and Taiwan (2001).

### *External political efficacy*

The dependent variable of the study – external efficacy – is extracted from a Principal Component Analysis including six different measures.<sup>2</sup> Results indicate that there are two main factors that structure responses. Scores on these two questions are summed to create a general index of external efficacy. Attitudes toward the responsiveness of the political institutions are accordingly tapped by the two questions: *Does it make a difference who is in power?* and *Does it make a difference who people vote for?*<sup>3</sup> These two questions clearly focus on how decisive voters find the act of voting and if there is any use trying to affect the outcome of the election.

### *The political context*

When it comes to the political context that is assumed to influence how voters comprehend the responsiveness of the representative democratic system, there are mainly two mechanisms that are believed to be of importance; *clarity of responsibility* and *clarity of available alternatives*.

*Clarity of responsibility* is a concept that originates from Powell and Whitten (1993) and their ideas about the importance of responsibility distribution in different countries (and later in Whitten and Palmer [1999] responsibility distribution at the level of elections). The original concept that includes party cohesion, bicameral opposition, levels of committee representation and parliamentary support, can, however, be argued to demand too much sophistication on the part of the voters. The concept has, therefore, later been transformed to include only three different, and for voters more comprehensible, features of government status: strength, power sharing and stability (Bengtsson 2004, 751). More specifically, this means taking into account the parliamentary support of governments (majority / minority government), if power is divided between several actors

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<sup>2</sup> The questions included in the principal component analysis are: “Satisfaction with democracy”, “Who is in power can make a difference”, “Who people vote for makes a difference”, “How well are voters’ views represented in elections?”, “Is there a party that represents respondent’s views?”, “Are you close to any political party?”.

<sup>3</sup> Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the two-term external efficacy index is 0.63. For more information see appendix.

(one party / coalition government) and the period of time that governments have been in power (more or less than two years). The aspects will be used both separately as independent dummy variables and summed up to an index, working as an overarching measure of “clarity of responsibility”.

The second aspect of the political context is about viable alternatives. Powell (2000) talks about *identifiability of prospective governments* and claims that it is of major concern for mandate voting, i.e. when voters base their vote on the promises of parties.<sup>4</sup> It can, however, be argued that identifiable alternatives is of importance for voters that prefer the other strategy – assignment of accountability – as well. Anderson (2000), who prefers to talk about *clarity of available alternatives*, shows that voters are less likely to try to throw incumbents out of office if there are no credible actors who can benefit from such behaviour. It is not unlikely that citizens view the political system as less responsive in environments where there are no clear alternatives at hand when they are about to have their say. The index that is used is based on an approximation of the situation prior to the election, and ranges from zero to one. Zero implies that no clear expectation about a post election majority government was presented during the campaign and that the election was followed by negotiations.<sup>5</sup> One corresponds with clear government alternatives presented to the voters. A different way of measuring the importance of availability of alternatives – presumably with lower validity, but higher reliability – is to use the number of effective parliamentary parties (Anderson 2000; Bengtsson 2004). The argument is in this case that fragmented party systems – identified by a large number of parties – makes it more difficult for voters to identify a clear alternative to the incumbent government. This measure is included in the analysis mainly as a control.

Apart from the above mentioned variables, dummy variables for post communist countries and new democracy are included in the model to check for differences in attitudes, which can be referred to the great differences between these groups in terms of political history. Table 1 lists the countries included in the analysis and sets out relevant data on the contextual variables.

### **Table 1 here**

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<sup>4</sup> The concept originates from Strøm (1984).

<sup>5</sup> Relevant issues of Electoral studies (notes on recent elections) and European Journal of Political Research (political data yearbook) were used as sources.

### *Individual aspects*

The independent variables at the individual level that are included in the analyses can be divided into three broad categories. The first group consists of the “the usual suspects”, socio economic and demographic factors that mainly measure recourses. The variables are age, sex, education, unemployment, socio economic status and political knowledge (for operationalizations see appendix). Due to a very large number of missing values, the income level of the respondent’s household has not been included in the model.

The second category of variables accounts for political activity. Theorists such as Carole Pateman (1970) and Benjamin Barber (1984) suggests that democratic participation will engage citizens and lead them to have more positive regard for political processes and democratic practices. Almond and Verba’s study (1963) of citizen attitudes presented results inline with this argument when they showed that experience with democratic decision making in various areas was related to both electoral participation and to belief that individuals can influence government. To take the importance of activity into account, two different kind of measures are included; political activity in between elections and voting in the current election (for operationalizations see appendix).<sup>6</sup>

The final category of variables represents political attitudes. Four different aspects are here taken into account. Diffuse system support (Easton 1975) has proven to be of importance for evaluation of government responsiveness (Iyengar 1980) and is accordingly included in the model. The second aspect controls for the importance of an existing party preference. Voters who report that one of the competing parties represent their views reasonably well, are likely to have a more positive view of system responsiveness than does who respond negative to this question. It should be noted that this measure taps attitude conformity rather than party identification or closeness to a certain party. The third aspect of this category takes into account voters’ situations as winners or losers. Previous research indicates that people that voted for a governing party – either for the governing party or for one of the governing parties – are more likely to believe that the government is responsive to their needs (Anderson & Guillory 1997; Norris 1999). Citizens that reported voting for a party that formed government after the election are here considered as winners. The last part of the attitude category is ideological

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Pateman (1970) makes no claim that large-scale participation on the electoral process could produce the same effects as small settings that allow for discussion and personal interaction. Other studies have, however, shown results in this direction (Rudolph, Gangl & Stevens 2000; Bowler & Donovan 2002).

extremism. Voters with a clear ideological preference are probably more prone to care about who is in power, or to experience the vote choice as more important, than does placing themselves in the middle of the battle ground. The measure is based on the respondents reported position on the left-right scale.

## **Analyses**

### *The political context as independent variables*

The results presented are for all models ordinal logistic regression analyses (plum logit). The dependent variable consists of four categories and is coded such that higher scores are associated with a more efficacious reply.<sup>7</sup> All of the variables are coded on a scale from zero to one, estimates are thus comparable. In table 2, where five different models are presented, external efficacy is linked to several personal and contextual characteristics. The strategy is here to treat the contextual variables as independent, with the aim of finding out how they affect voters' view of government responsiveness. Later on, in table 3, a somehow different strategy is applied. Instead of including the contextual variables as independent variables an index including both aspects (clarity of responsibility and availability of alternatives) will be applied to keep the political context constant, looking at how the importance of the different individual aspects vary between the different contexts.

In the first, "socio economic and demographic" model presented in table 2, education turns out to be the most important factor determining external efficacy. Citizens with higher levels of education are more likely to have a positive attitude towards government responsiveness. Not surprisingly, and inline with the result for education, is that voters with higher objective political competence – political knowledge – are more inclined to view the government as responsive as well. Less straight forward is, however, result for social economic status. The dummy variable, controlling for white collar and self employment, indicates that these two groups have a more negative view of external efficacy than others (the group dominated by farmers and workers). Unemployment does, in line with expectations, show a negative effect. The Nagelkerke pseudo R-square of 0.01 does, however, tell us that individual characteristics of this kind are not very successful in explaining attitudes towards external efficacy.

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<sup>7</sup> The original index consists of eight values. Due to distortion in the material (far less respondents in the lower range of the scale) the index was recoded into four more balanced groups of responses.

### **Table 2 here**

The second model, controlling for activity, does not bring about surprising results. Both political activity in between elections and, in particular, voting in the current election turns out significant. It can, of course, be discussed what the causal direction is when it comes to voting. Is it people with high believes about the responsiveness of government that turn out at the polls, or does the act of voting bring about a higher feeling of political efficacy? There are, as stated above, clear theoretical arguments in favour of the later interpretation and turnout is accordingly included as an independent variable in this study. The strong relationship between voting and external efficacy becomes even more obvious in diagram 1, where reported turnout is compared to the efficacy index. The inclusion of the two variables tapping the importance of political activity does not alter the importance of the socio economic and demographical variables in any major way except for sex that turns out to be significant when controlling for activity. Looking at the over all model specifications, it stands clear that this model has slightly more to offer when it comes to explaining variation in attitudes towards government responsiveness. A pseudo R-square at 0.04 can, however, be considered as very low, even in a large sample like the CSES.

### **Diagram 1 here**

The third model, presented in table 2 (preferential), control for political attitudes. Attitudes towards democracy, parties, ideology and position as winner or loser, works rather well in explaining opinions about the responsiveness of the political system. The Nagelkerke pseudo R-square value increase to 0.1 when these variables are included in the analysis. Comparisons of the different models should, however, be handled with caution. The number of missing cases increases significantly from 6 percent in the first model, to 9 percent in the second, and in the third model to 24 percent. The major increase can in the third model be explained by inclusion of the ideological variable, measuring extreme position on the left-right scale. In total 3,367 respondents have not been able (or to a very low extent, refused) to give a substantial answer to this question. Unfortunately, a large share of the missing cases is distributed to four or five countries (Taiwan, New Zealand, Poland, Ireland and Portugal). More encouraging is, however, that there appears to be no clear pattern between these countries when it comes to the contextual variables at interest in this study, and that results do not change substantially when analyses are performed

without inclusion of this variable. Looking at diagram 2, where mean external efficacy is presented under control for position on the left-right-scale, it stands clear that inclusion of this variable in the analyses can be of great interest, even though methodological issues can be raised against it.

### **Diagram 2 here**

More specifically, the preferential model in table 1 clearly shows the importance of ideology and party preference. Voters who take on a clear ideological standpoint and who appreciate that there is a party that represents their view score significantly higher on external political efficacy. Belonging to the winning team and diffuse system support proves to be of significance as well, even though the b- and Wald-values reveals that position as a winner in the election is of less importance. Interesting to note is that the effect of age and unemployment disappears in this model and that education loses explanatory power, while the importance of social position and political knowledge prevails.

In the fourth model, contextual variables are included. The five variables measuring different aspects of the political context; government strength, government stability, government formation, identifiability of alternatives, effective number of parties and dummy variables controlling for post communist area and new democracy, does show results in a different direction than expected. Instead of promoting higher values of external efficacy, two of the measures of clarity structure turn out negative (majority government, one-party government) and one insignificant (government stability). It, thus, appears as clear power distribution makes voters more inclined to have a negative view of governmental responsiveness. The two measures tapping availability of alternatives support this interpretation. Clear alternatives score negative, and the effective number of parties score positive. Obvious alternatives to choose from in the election do, accordingly, not boost feelings of governmental responsiveness. Inclusion of the contextual variables further decreases the importance of socio economic and demographic position and leaves only education and social class with a significant effect on efficacy. The importance of activity and preferences stay about the same apart from the variable controlling for status as winner or loser that turns out insignificant. The Nagelkerke pseudo R-square stays on the same level as in the preferential model.

The final model presented in table 2, is a cleared version of the contextual model, excluding variables that in previous models have proved to be more or less unimportant. This model does not change previous interpretations in any major way. It stands clear that the contextual variables work in the opposite way than expected. Diffuse responsibility structure, less obvious government alternatives or a higher effective number of parliamentary parties are related to higher levels of external political efficacy. Citizens obviously experience governments as more responsive in these kinds of environments. Looking at the individual level variables the most important factor for voters to score high on external efficacy is the existence of a party that represents their views.

It should be noted that there some reasons to be cautious when interpreting the results presented here. First it should be noted that there are no weights attached to the version of CSES II survey that is used here. The absence of weights concerns both dataset weights that control for differences in sample size between countries, and sample weights correcting unequal selection probabilities in specific countries. The second reason to be careful is the fact that the variation in the political context not is as great as desired. There are no elections that have been taken place neither under entirely blurred prerequisites, nor under completely clear conditions. A more pronounced variation in the political context would have been favourable for interpretation of the results.

#### *The political context kept constant*

The next step is to keep the political context constant and look at how the individual level mechanisms work in different environments. Dichotomisation of the political context in respect to both aspects of interest in this study – clarity of responsibility and availability of clear alternatives – is carried in two steps. Initially the two measures, given the same weight, are added together. The elections are then divided into two categories representing clear and diffuse lines of power distribution.<sup>8</sup> As discussed above, elections included in the study neither reach the minimum index value of zero, nor the maximum index value of two. Most elections can be classified as held under semi-clear circumstances which can be considered as a disadvantage when striving to characterize environments as different in nature.

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<sup>8</sup> For specific country values see table 1. Elections with an index value of one or less are classified as diffuse political context. Elections that receive a value that exceeds one are classified as clear political context.

Results are presented in table 3 with two different models for both contexts. The first model includes variables controlling for socio economic and demographic characteristics, activity and preferences. In the second model, dummy variables representing new democracies and post communist environments are included in order to control for differences in these specific environments. Results turn out to be interesting. According to the results in table 3 socio economic and demographic traits are of greater importance in countries where the political power context can be characterized as clear. Under these circumstances – where the overall score on external efficacy is lower – the importance of being female, employed, worker or farmer (the opposite of white collar or self employed) and political knowledgeable is greater than in elections held under diffuse power distribution. Among variables that account for activity and preferences it stands clear that in particular lack of a party preference is associated with cooler feelings of external efficacy. Another factor of importance is ideological extremism that is associated with higher values of external efficacy.

### **Table 3 here**

Under diffuse political power distribution slightly different factors determine how respondents view governmental responsiveness. Among the socio economic and demographic traits only age and education turns out to have a significant effect. The importance of age, where young people score lower on external efficacy, is, moreover, marginal. Of greater significance when it comes to determining views about governmental responsiveness is ideological position and system support. Another difference from the clear context is that the position as winner in the election is associated with stronger feelings of efficacy. In the previous context this variable strangely enough, showed the opposite effect. Yet another difference between the two contexts is the effect of voting on external efficacy which turns out to be greater in blurred environments.

An overall interpretation of table 3 is not easy to provide. There is, however, some interesting tendencies worthy of discussion. Under clear political contexts, where the voters are offered more obvious alternatives and it is evident who is responsible for the political development, there are more variation among citizens feelings of how much it matters who you vote for and who is in power (lower mean, higher standard deviation). There are also greater differences between citizens with different socio economic and demographic characteristics under blurred political conditions. It seems like elections held

under clear political power constellations are more fears. Citizens that find their position in this system, with a party that appeal to them and with high personal resources, find the system responsive. Citizens who don't find a suitable party are worse off and obviously score lower on external efficacy.

### **Figure 1 here**

Obscure political conditions, where power is diverged to a higher extent and where there are less obvious alternative to take stand for, appears to work in a more equalizing way, levelling out differences between citizens with varying resources, except for education that shows a significant and relatively strong effect. Under these circumstances factors as pronounced ideological position, system support and voting and turns out to be of greater importance. For a compilation of the most important factors determining how citizens view responsiveness of governments in different environments, see figure 1.

### **Discussion**

The expectation that clear patterns of political power – where citizens easily can determine who is responsible for the political development and where there are obvious governmental alternatives to take stand for – should promote feelings of responsiveness towards governments have not been confirmed in the analyses presented above. On the contrary, all results indicate the opposite. In contexts where it citizens have a harder job identifying responsible actors and where it is less obvious what the future government looks like, the overall experience of external efficacy is higher. The results suggest that meaningful choices not are the top priority for voters when they assess if it is worth the trouble to vote or not.

Why prerequisites for accountability are not of higher priority for voters when they evaluate the governmental responsiveness can be discussed. One interpretation might be that people prefer inclusion of as many preferences as possibly in decision making, rather than strong and easily identifiable governments. This is of course an argument in line with Lijphart, and thus in favour of the consensus model of democracy. Yet another explanation might be that blurred systems, here proving to score higher on external efficacy, are associated with a greater number of parties, and thus offering voters a better selection to

choose from. A richer variety of parties are likely to boost the possibilities of finding a party that represents ones views, and accordingly influence the feeling of responsiveness.

The question is, however, if these results will last over time. If the strong trend of an increasingly volatile electorate continues and becomes even more pronounced, it seems inevitable that delegation as a voting strategy becomes ineffective. With no ties towards a certain party, or without a feeling that at least one party represent ones views, it is likely that the opinion of governmental responsiveness decrease. A logic solution for students of political science would in this case be to change tactics and start assigning accountability *ex post* instead of delegating power to agencies *ex ante*. The question is, however, if the same solution is as obvious for citizens with lower interest for political matters. Yet another question is what prerequisites parliamentary democracies – often more or less designed for delegation – offers those interested of changing tactics.

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## **Appendix**

### Dependent Variable coding / External efficacy

An additive index of two questions: “Does it matter who is in power?” (five point scale) and “Does it matter who people vote for?” (five point scale). The index is then recoded into four groups (on a scale from 0 to 1) in order to avoid problems due to the distorted distribution of answers (significantly fewer responses in the lower end of the scale).

### Independent Variables Coding

#### **Political context**

*Majority government:* 1 = Majority government, 0 = Minority government

*Government stability:* 1 = More than two years in power, 0 = Less than two years in power

*Government formation:* 1 = One party government, 0 = Coalition government

*Availability of alternatives:* 0 = no clear government alternatives, 0.33 = Loose expectations about at least one side, 0.67 = relatively clear expectations, 1 = clear alternatives presented to the voters.

*Post communist:* 1 = post communist country, 0 = other

*New democracy:* 1 = Taiwan, 0 = other

#### **Individual aspects**

##### **Social and demographic factors**

*Sex:* 1 = female, 0 = male.

*Age/100:* Age in years divided with 100.

*Education:* 0 = none, 0.14 = incomplete primary, 0.29 = primary completed, 0.43 = incomplete secondary, 0.57 = complete secondary, 0.72 = postsecondary trade/vocational school, 0.86 = university undergraduate degree incomplete, 1.00 = university undergraduate degree complete.

*Socio economic status:* 1 = white collar or self employed, 0 = other.

*Political knowledge:* Arithmetic mean of correct answers based on three questions about political matters (only standardized between countries according to the level of difficulty). 0 = no correct answer, 0.33 = one correct answer, 0.66 = two correct answers, 1.00 = correct answer to all three questions.

##### **Activity**

*Political activity:* Arithmetic mean of three questions about political activity. Over the past five years or so, have you done any of the following things to express your views about something the government should or should not be doing? A. contacted a politician or government official either in person, or in writing, or some other way? B. taken part in a protest, march or demonstration? C. worked together with people who shared the same concern? (1 = yes, 0 = no)

*Voting:* 1 = the respondent did cast a ballot in the recent election, 0 = other.

##### **Preferential**

*System support:* Democracy better than any other form of government (four point scale where zero indicates a negative response and one a positive response).

*Party representation:* “Is there a party that represents respondent’s views?” 0 = no, 1 = yes.

*Left-right extremism:* Self-placement on the left-right scale with departure at the centre (0 = centre, 1 = extreme left or right wing self-placement).

*Winner:* Did the election that the respondent reported voted for government after the election.

**Table 1.** Information on countries that are included in the analysis and their political context

Country	Election year	N	Political system*	Electoral system	Majority gov.	Stable gov.	One party gov.	Clarity of responsibility	Clarity of available alternatives	Index of political context**	ENPP#	External efficacy mean
Bulgaria	2001	1482	post-comm.	PR	1	1	0	0.67	0.33	1	2.6	0.69
Czech Republic	2002	948	post-comm.	PR	0	1	1	0.67	0	0.67	3.7	0.60
Germany	2002 <sup>α</sup>	3023	old dem./post-comm.~	MMP	1	1	0	0.67	1	1.67	3.3	0.59
Hungary	2002	1200	post-comm.	MMM	1	1	0	0.67	0.67	1.34	3.5	0.81
Ireland	2002	2367	old dem.	STV	0	1	0	0.33	0.33	0.67	3	0.68
Israel	2003	1212	old dem.	PR	1	0	0	0.33	0.33	0.67	6.1	0.79
New Zealand	2002	1741	old dem.	MMP	0	1	0	0.33	1	1.33	3.5	0.69
Norway	2001	2052	old dem.	PR	0	0	1	0.33	0.67	1	4.4	0.66
Poland	2001	1794	post-comm	PR	1	1	0	0.67	0.33	1	3	0.62
Portugal	2002	1303	old dem.	PR	0	1	1	0.67	0.67	1.33	2.6	0.66
Sweden	2002	1060	old dem.	PR	0	1	1	0.67	0.67	1.33	4.3	0.77
Switzerland	2003	1418	old dem.	PR	1	1	0	0.67	0	0.67	5.1	0.71
Taiwan	2001	2022	new dem.	MMM	0	0	1	0.33	0.67	1	2.5	0.64

\* According to Freedom House. Old Democracies have met the criteria for at least 20 years.

\*\* Summary index of clarity of responsibility and identifiability of future government alternatives.

# Effective number of Parliamentary parties (the parliament selected in the previous election) according to the Laakso and Taagepera method.

<sup>α</sup> Both surveys included in the CSES material are used (telephone and mail back)

~ The former DDR-länder and East-Berlin have been coded as post-communist contexts.

**Table 2.** The determinants of external political efficacy in the whole sample. Logistic ordinal regression (plum)

	Socio economic			Activity			Preferential			Contextual			Final		
	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
Age/100	0.51	41.80	***	0.23	8.27	**	0.01	0.01		-0.01	0.01				
Female	0.03	1.57		0.06	5.53	*	0.10	11.91	***	0.09	8.77	**	0.08	8.45	**
Education	0.61	116.86	***	0.45	60.64	***	0.30	22.23	***	0.13	3.59		0.14	4.57	*
Unemployed	-0.18	11.22	***	-0.13	5.47	*	-0.09	1.88		-0.08	1.59				
White collar/ Self empl.	-0.12	18.99	***	-0.18	41.45	***	-0.22	51.65	***	-0.11	10.38	**	-0.10	10.08	**
Political knowledge	0.25	44.86	***	0.20	27.13	***	0.19	21.66	***	0.03	0.32				
Political activity				0.50	84.27	***	0.18	9.82	**	0.22	14.21	***	0.21	13.17	***
Voted				0.74	446.89	***	0.46	114.35	***	0.52	140.04	***	0.54	176.98	***
System support							0.67	117.82	***	0.78	148.02	***	0.78	155.15	***
Party representation							0.62	373.50	***	0.63	380.16	***	0.64	386.82	***
Left-right extremism							0.84	342.84	***	0.85	340.38	***	0.86	349.14	***
Winner							0.08	7.29	**	0.05	2.63				
Majority government										-0.16	8.11	**	-0.13	9.29	**
Stable government										0.02	0.17				
One party government										-0.29	29.81	***	-0.28	35.89	***
Clear government alternatives										-0.41	54.61	***	-0.44	78.80	***
Effective number of parties										0.67	5.64	*	0.52	7.62	**
Post communist										0.04	0.92				
New democracy										0.66	50.24	***	0.63	74.89	***
Threshold .00	-0.95	254.19	***	-0.57	82.45	***	0.09	1.15		-0.03	0.03	***	-0.11	1.50	
Threshold .33	0.52	79.23	***	0.93	220.67	***	1.67	428.41	***	1.57	93.61	***	1.48	253.55	***
Threshold .67	1.87	963.83	***	2.30	1269.03	***	3.15	1427.32	***	3.05	350.03	***	2.96	973.71	***
N	20263			19743			16383			16383			16415		
Missing cases %	6.2			8.70			24.2			24.2			24.1		
Model chi-square	237		***	781		***	1548		***	1681		***	1599		***
Log likelihood	30703			40045			42328			42502			38506		
Nagelkerke R sq	0.01			0.04			0.10			0.10			0.10		

Significant \* at the .05-level, \*\*.01-level, \*\*\*.001-level. All variables are coded into a scale from 0 to 1.

Age is in years, divided by 100.

Education (seven values), Political knowledge (four values), Political activity (four values), System support (five values), Left-right extremism (six values) and Clear government alternatives (four values) are ordinal.

Unemployed, White collar/Self empl., Voted, Party representation, Winner, Majority government, Stable government, One party government, Post communist and New democracy are dummy variables

**Tabel 3.** The determinants of external political efficacy under control of the political context. Logistic ordinal regression (plum).

	clear			clear + context			diffuse			diffuse + context		
	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
Age/100	-0.09	0.40		-0.08	0.30		0.23	3.96	*	0.28	5.50	*
Female	0.22	22.83	***	0.22	23.16	***	0.01	0.03		0.01	0.13	
Education	0.21	4.83	*	0.22	5.15	*	0.38	18.26	***	0.32	12.75	***
Unemployed	-0.33	10.70	**	-0.32	10.07	**	0.08	1.03		0.09	1.13	
White collar / Self empl.	-0.52	105.43	***	-0.53	106.63	***	0.03	0.59		0.03	0.49	
Political knowledge	0.51	49.85	***	0.50	47.79	***	-0.06	1.00		-0.09	2.46	
Political activity	0.27	8.49	**	0.26	8.36	**	0.18	5.57	*	0.22	8.03	**
Voted	0.23	8.95	**	0.23	9.06	**	0.53	98.90	***	0.52	93.77	***
System support	0.49	24.93	***	0.47	22.33	***	0.83	108.70	***	0.89	119.32	***
Party representation	0.92	319.64	***	0.92	319.52	***	0.42	101.78	***	0.45	112.15	***
Left-right extremism	0.82	121.93	***	0.82	123.11	***	0.87	221.18	***	0.89	228.98	***
Winner	-0.16	12.14	***	-0.16	11.89	***	0.28	47.78	***	0.30	53.22	***
post communist				-0.06	1.48					0.03	0.39	
new democracy										0.38	30.09	***
Threshold .00	-0.18	1.93		-0.21	2.53		0.20	3.81		0.29	6.87	**
Threshold .33	1.31	99.15	***	1.28	91.43	***	1.88	322.37	***	1.97	309.59	***
Threshold .67	2.73	411.05	***	2.70	389.03	***	3.42	993.57	***	3.52	922.67	***
N	6568			6568			9815			9815		
Missing cases %	21.1			21.1			26.2			26.2		
Model chi-square	781		***	783		***	1014		***	1043		***
Log likelihood	17023			17057			25150			25197		
Nagelkerke R sq	0.12			0.12			0.11			0.11		

Significant \* at the .05-level, \*\*.01-level, \*\*\*.001-level

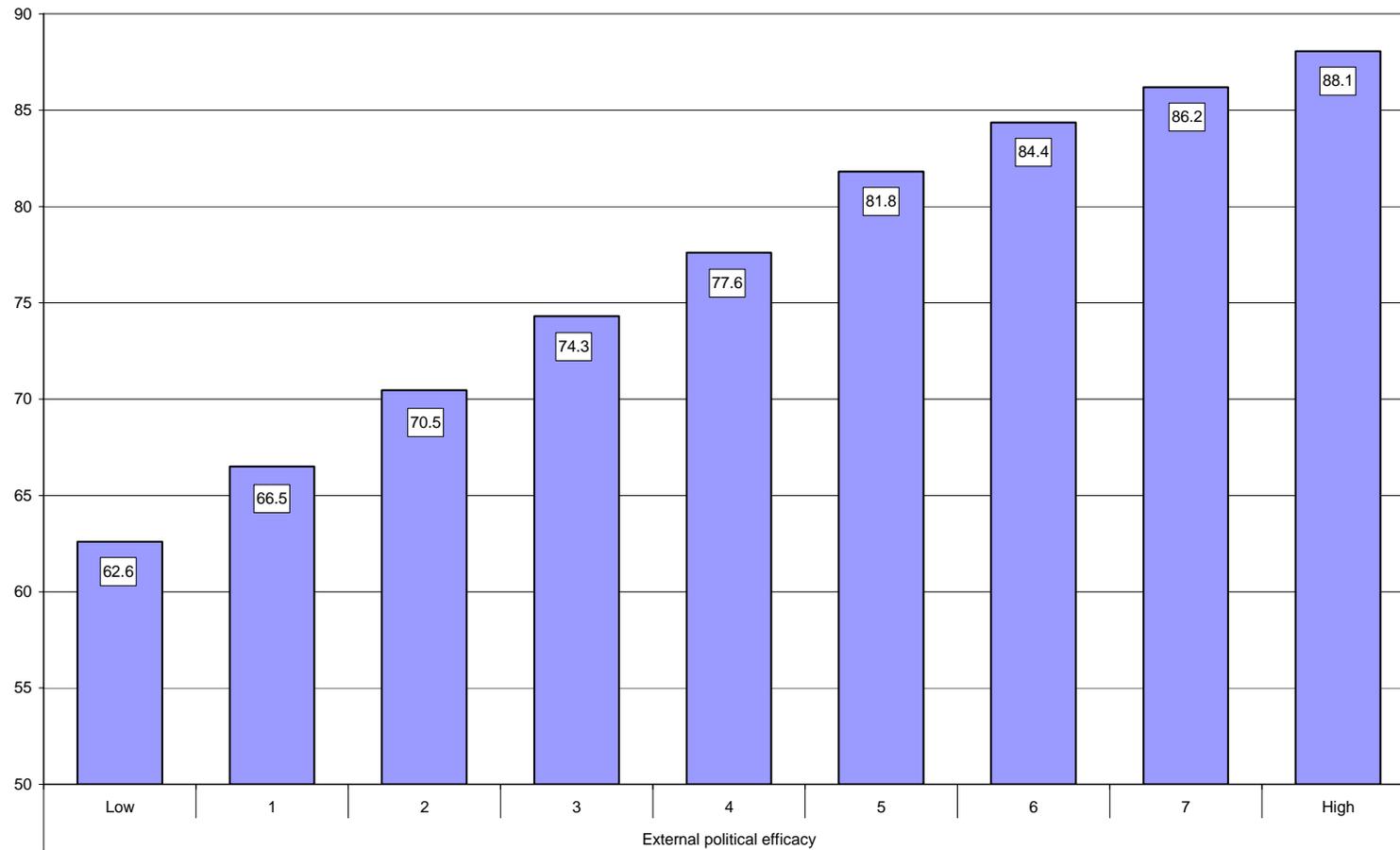
All variables are coded into a scale from 0 to 1.

Age is in years, divided by 100.

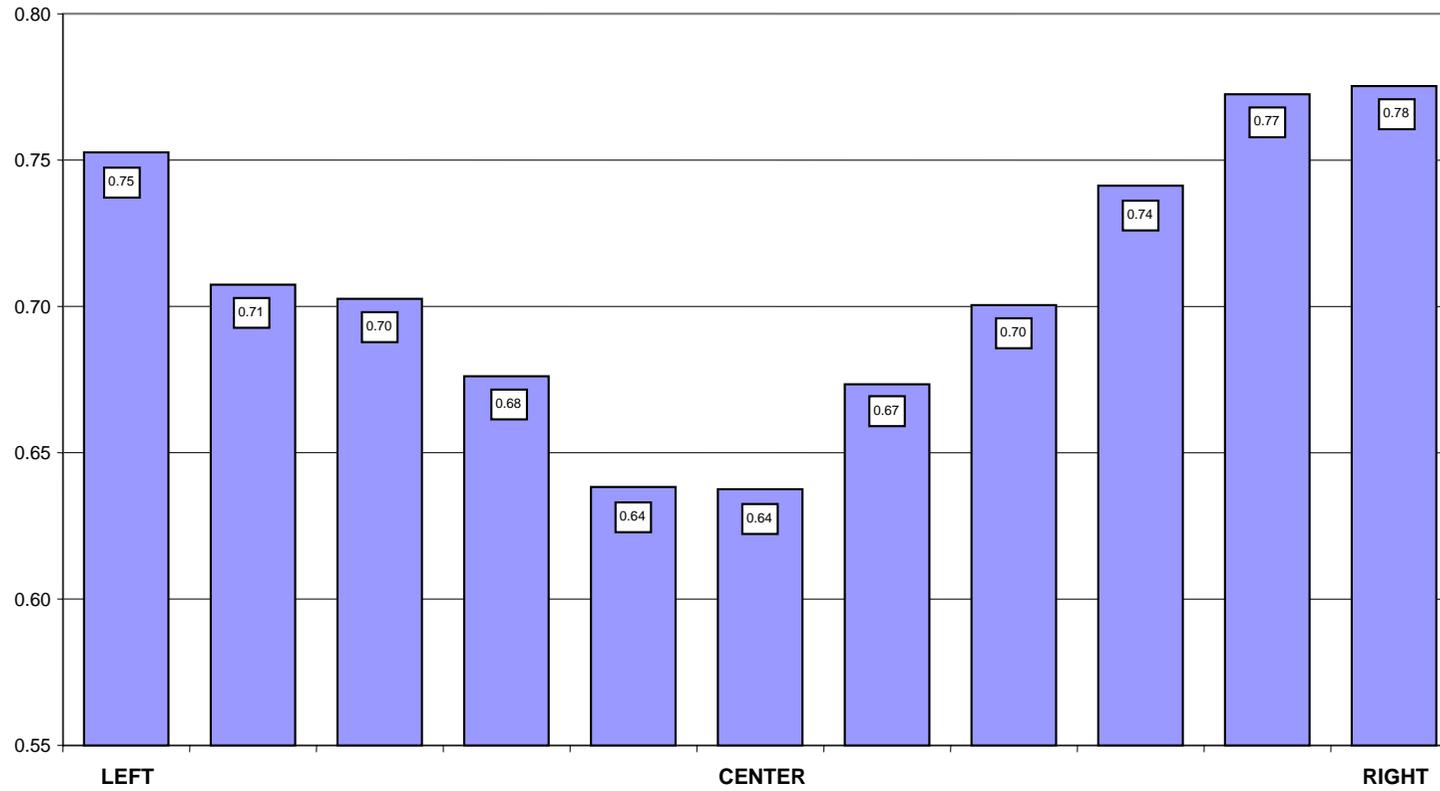
Education (seven values), Political knowledge (four values), Political activity (four values), System support (five values) and Left-right extremism (six values) are ordinal.

Unemployed, White collar/Self empl., Voted, Party representation, Winner, Post communist and New democracy are dummy variables.

**Diagram 1.** External efficacy and reported turnout (percent).



**Diagram 2.** External efficacy and ideological position (Left-Right scale)



**Figure 1.** Factors determining external efficacy

	<b>CLEAR</b>	<b>DIFFUSE</b>
<b>1</b>	PARTY REPRESENTATION	LEFT-RIGHT EXTREMISM
<b>2</b>	LEFT-RIGHT EXTR.	SYSTEM SUPPORT
<b>3</b>	SOC. EC. STATUS	VOTING
<b>4</b>	POL. KNOWLEDGE	PARTY REP.
<b>5</b>	SYSTEM SUPPORT	EDUCATION
<b>6</b>	UNEMPLOYMENT	WINNER
<b>7</b>	POL. ACTIVITY	AGE
<b>8</b>	VOTING	POL. ACTIVITY
<b>9</b>	SEX	
<b>10</b>	EDUCATION	