

Clarifying Clarity of Responsibility

*Presentation for the
“Political Economy of Democracy” course*

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Motivation

- Cursory look at the literature shows that the concept of clarity of responsibility has been non-reflexively adapted from its original inception by Powell and Whitten (1993) and operationalization by Powell (2000).
- However, conceptualization and operationalization of the concept is not trivial.
 - Inherently multifaceted.
 - Institutional?
 - But intuitive.
- Most of the literature uses the following indicators:
 - majority status of government;
 - cabinet duration;
 - opposition influence;
 - effective number of parties.

Conceptual Clarity

Two questions to try and understand if combination of those make sense:

Are they institutional?

Depends on definitions.

- Opposition influence and cabinet duration are features of the electoral system.
- Are majority government and effective number of parties?
- What about other variables? Decentralization (de Blok and van der Brug 2022)? Presidentialism?

Are they stable (occur on the same level)?

No.

- Electoral features are stable.
- Government composition changes election to election.
- Hence, dynamic measures of clarity of responsibility (Nadeau, Niemi, and Yoshinaka 2002; Whitten and Palmer 1999).

So how should we think about it?

- Validation of the concept
 - Do the variables refer to the same latent concept?
 - How many dimensions proposed clarity of responsibility has?
- Extending the concept
 - Supply-side - institutions.
 - What other institutional features are relevant?
 - Demand-side - voter perceptions.
 - Do voter perceptions of clarity of responsibility correlate with supply-side definitions?
 - Special case - opposition influence.
 - Part of institutional design.
 - Reflection of power configuration.
 - Veto players theory to reconcile (Tsebelis, 2002).

And how should we measure it?

- Surface-level.
 - Linear indices have not been good (Tavits 2007).
 - Factor loadings? IRT? PCA?
- Levels of analysis.
 - Structural (electoral rules) vs dynamic (compositions).
 - Horizontal (different political actors) vs vertical (different government levels).
- Perception-based measure?
 - Generalizability-accuracy tradeoff, most likely.