

Beyond Economy: Determinants of Electoral Accountability in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)

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This PhD thesis analyses patterns of electoral accountability in eleven Central and Eastern European countries between 1993 and 2015. Four research questions drove it: How to conceptualize and measure electoral accountability? What are the dynamics that explain variation in the extent to which citizens in Central and Eastern Europe are able to hold politicians accountable at elections? What are the consequences of variation in the systemic characteristics for the degree to which elections generate government accountability? What is the role of electoral integrity in shaping electoral accountability in these young democracies? Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework and a review of the literature on the quality of democracy and electoral accountability, proposing a conceptualization of the dependent variable as grounded in the literature. The chapter ends presenting the research questions that guide the thesis. Chapter 2 furnishes a first attempt to study variation in electoral accountability across countries and, above all, to explain why the cost of governing in the region is so heavy in terms of electoral punishment. This preliminary analysis is conducted through the presentation of descriptive statistics and some brief descriptive case studies in the attempt to give some useful insights for the empirical analysis conducted in the following chapters. In Chapter 3 the traditional assumptions of economic voting theory and the influence of political contexts – i.e. government clarity of responsibility, party system fragmentation, nature of

the electoral system and media freedom – on electoral accountability are tested. We also test the different intensity of these effects before and after accession to the European Union and the onset of the economic crisis in 2008. Chapter 4 represents the core of the thesis where we try to bridge two field of research, i.e. electoral accountability and electoral integrity. For this reason, the consequences of electoral integrity are analysed as: the influence of election quality on economic performance voting; its direct effect on incumbent vote; the conditional effect of the contextual variables already included in Chapter 3. The statistical analysis shows that even though economy still represents the main dimension of government performance affecting electoral accountability, the quality of electoral procedures has a significant effect as well. As for economic voting, electoral integrity performance voting turns to be not at all independent by specific aspects of the political context such as government clarity, media freedom and, in addition, party system fragmentation. Finally, Chapter 5 collects and discusses possible implications of the findings in the previous chapters by inquiring to what degree and how electoral accountability works in Central and Eastern Europe and concludes with limitations of the study and suggestions for improving further research.