

RESEARCH STATEMENT

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I am a scholar of Comparative Politics whose research focuses on the political economy of democratic representation. I approach political representation from two complementary angles: i) whether election campaigns provide credible information to voters and, ii) whether elections are effective at holding corrupt politicians accountable. My area of specialization is Western Europe. I also examine cases outside of Europe that are particularly relevant to the research questions that I analyze, particularly in Latin America. Methodologically, I employ survey experiments to analyze the consequences of elite communication, text analysis to describe political speeches, and regression discontinuity designs to estimate the effect of institutional choices on democratic accountability.

My work on election campaigns is motivated by the following question: political parties invest increasing resources in getting their message across during campaigns, and this communication is normatively supposed to inform voters about what political parties plan to do in office. Yet the competitive nature of elections generates incentives for political parties to misrepresent their intentions in order to maximize their votes. Since campaign promises are not binding, parties have incentives to endorse popular policies even if they do not intend to follow through on them. My research analyzes how voters resolve this contradiction.

I argue that voters understand that parties may have vote-seeking incentives to obfuscate about their intentions. As a result, voters do not take party messages at face value. I show this empirically in a study of political parties in seven European countries from the 1970s until 2010, published in *Comparative Political Studies*. My job market paper, *The Credibility of Party Policy Rhetoric*, builds on this finding to analyze the most important implication of the argument: If voters are aware that a party has electoral incentives to announce popular policies even if these announcements do not reflect the party's actual views, then voters should discount popular promises as not credible. I test this empirical prediction with a survey experiment fielded in the United Kingdom. The experiment exposes respondents to real statements made by the British Conservative and Labour parties on the issues of immigration and health care. The statements for each treatment condition were selected using a novel crowdsourced text analysis approach. The empirical evidence supports the theoretical argument: When a party makes a popular statement, voters perceptions about the party change less than when the party adopts an unpopular message. This paper has been invited to resubmit to the *Journal of Politics*. If

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voters discount campaign statements as not credible, however, how can a party successfully signal to voters that it has changed its ideology? Zeynep Somer-Topcu (University of Texas Austin) and I address this question and show that changing the party leader makes voters more willing to change their mind about what the party stands for. This paper is forthcoming in the *British Journal of Political Science*.

My work in this area offers a positive view of voters as consumers of campaign communication. Voters are not passive recipients of elite messages, as they consider their motivation behind campaign messages and lend more credibility to some statements than to others. As a result, party attempts to pander to voters in order to obtain their support are less likely to be successful. These findings have important consequences for two core literatures in political science: the political economy of information and spatial models of politics. Regarding information, my research suggests that the common perspective that citizens are uninterested and uninformed is incomplete. I show that, while lacking significant factual knowledge about politics and policies, voters have an intuitive understanding that campaigns are competitive and therefore political parties do not provide unbiased information about their intentions. Regarding spatial models of politics, these models identify the policy position that a political party should endorse in order to maximize its votes. My work shows that announcing that policy shift may fail to influence election results because voters discount the move as not credible.

Articles based on this line of research have been published in *Comparative Political Studies* and the *British Journal of Political Science*. Three other manuscripts are currently under review, including an article invited to resubmit to the *Journal of Politics* and an R&R invitation in *Party Politics*. Taken together, this scholarship addresses a common research theme from complementary angles. Therefore, in addition to publishing journal articles, I plan to develop a book manuscript that provides a comprehensive analysis of how political rhetoric in campaigns shapes citizens attitudes. This question is not only highly relevant for how political communication influences election outcomes, it also speaks to broader questions on the nature of democratic representation.

Having shown that the competitive nature of elections affects the credibility of campaign promises, my next project addresses the constraints that governments face in fulfilling these promises. In this project, in collaboration with Ignacio Jurado (University of York), we analyze whether globalization and economic integration undermine the credibility of economic policy promises. Economic integration has been shown to reduce the room to maneuver of domestic governments with respect to fiscal and monetary policy, yet we know little about whether this has implications for mass behavior. For that reason, we have designed a series of survey experiments that analyze whether voters have internalized the impact of globalization on policy-making. The first survey experiment tests

whether priming globalization makes respondents less willing to believe a party that promises increases in fiscal spending. To create a benchmark of comparison, we also estimate the priming effect on issues not directly affected by economic integration, like gay rights and marijuana legalization. The second survey experiment focuses on whether economic interdependence makes voters pay less attention to the country's economic situation when judging the national incumbent. Taken together, the papers in this project will help us understand how globalization impacts political representation.

My research on accountability focuses on the electoral consequences of corruption scandals. It seeks to address the paradox that incumbents accused of corruption are frequently re-elected by their constituents. Whereas voter tolerance for corruption is often attributed to a lack of credible information about incumbent wrongdoing or to generalized cynicism, my approach highlights how responses to scandals hinge on the economic externalities of corrupt decisions. I argue that dishonest officials survive in office as long as a wide segment of the electorate shares in the private benefits of corruption. In a paper published with Pablo Barberá and Gonzalo Rivero in *Political Science Research and Methods*, we show that Spanish mayors whose corrupt decisions expanded the local economy by fueling a housing boom maintained high levels of electoral support. To complement the observational evidence from Spanish municipalities, I am involved in a collaborative project with Jordi Muñoz (University of Barcelona) and Peter Esaiasson (University of Gothenburg) to field survey experiments in Sweden, Spain and Brazil. Together, these projects consider how voters rationalize corruption as they cast their ballot.

The tolerance of voters towards corrupt incumbents motivates my next project on accountability. I analyze whether institutional checks and balances are more effective at holding politicians accountable for corruption than elections. For that purpose, I am working on a paper that analyzes whether having politically insulated bureaucrats with oversight capacity limits the rent-seeking behavior of incumbents. This paper uses a regression discontinuity design that takes advantage of a population-based rule that determines the presence of politically insulated bureaucrats in Spanish municipalities. In addition, I am collaborating on a project with Ana de la O (Yale University) and Fernando Martel (Cambridge Social Science Decision Lab) that exploits a field experiment of randomized audits in Mexican municipalities. We estimate the effect of audits on incumbent malfeasance and compare the effectiveness of federal and state auditing agencies in recovering misappropriated funds. These projects will help illuminate whether horizontal accountability mechanisms are an effective instrument to fight corruption.

As a whole, my research makes a contribution to public debates that resonate beyond academia. My work on campaign rhetoric helps interpret journalistic reports about the strategies of a political

party in a campaign and predict whether such strategies are likely to affect public sentiments towards the party. My analysis of electoral accountability for corruption scandals addresses a pessimistic view, widely held by citizens and political elites in countries like Brazil, Mexico and Spain, according to which certain cultural traits explain the persistence of corruption in these countries. I highlight how the source of voter tolerance for corruption is not a national culture, but the material benefits that (some) citizens obtain from corruption. Finally, my analysis of horizontal accountability mechanisms help inform institutional reforms that reduce corruption levels and contribute to sustainable prosperity.