# W03 / The democratic embeddedness of independent agencies: Analysing responsiveness and accountability

**Topic :** Public Administration & Governance

**Chair :** Michele Scotto di Vettimo (King's College London)

**Second Chair :** Christel Koop (King's College London, University of London)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

**The democratic embeddedness of independent agencies: Analysing responsiveness and accountability**

This workshop seeks to address a number of questions related to patterns of accountability and responsiveness of independent agencies in contemporary democracies. We will explore the conditions under which we observe stronger accountability of independent agencies, including the individual and contextual determinants of the type and quality of scrutiny that parliamentarians perform. For instance, we may hypothesise that features such as the salience and 'publicness' of the agency matter, but also the background of the account holder (e.g., relevant expertise and experience), and (reputational) pressure from the agency's environment. Furthermore, in a period of growing populism and politicization of governance by independent agencies, the workshop will also explore whether and how vote-seeking representatives adapt their account-holding practices in order to attract media attention and, possibly, electoral rewards.

Then, moving to responsiveness, the workshop also seeks to shed light on the extent to which, and conditions under which, independent agencies' communicative and policy actions target or respond to wider public priorities or sensitivities, and in what ways they do that. Again, we expect features such as salience and reputational pressure to matter, with greater threats also coming from populist governments. Additionally, we aim to investigate how independent agencies combine responsiveness to specific stakeholders with their mandate-related priorities and activities.

The workshop is also open to contributions that broaden the topic of bureaucratic responsiveness or politicization of legislative oversight of independent technocratic bodies beyond the focus described above. For instance, we would welcome papers that explore the relationship between independent agencies and democratic systems – including in terms of what we should and can expect from accountability and responsiveness – from a political theoretical perspective.

By bridging insights from complementary yet so-far not so connected fields of agency accountability and policy and communicative responsiveness, the workshop will contribute to the scholarly debate about the position of governance by independent agencies in democratic systems, including reflections on the democratic embeddedness of the organizations, and how they navigate the current contestation and representational demands in contemporary democratic systems.

## ABSTRACT

This workshop examines the democratic embeddedness of independent agencies, focusing on how they remain accountable and responsive despite institutional insulation from electoral politics. While such bodies - like regulators and central banks - are designed to ensure credibility and long-term policy stability, they face growing scrutiny over their legitimacy and responsiveness in an era of politicization and populism. The workshop explores when and why accountability is stronger, how parliamentary oversight varies across contexts, and how vote-seeking representatives use accountability forums for political purposes. It also investigates how agencies respond to public expectations through communication, transparency, and reputational management. By bringing together research on accountability, responsiveness, and bureaucratic legitimacy, the workshop seeks to advance understanding of how independent agencies navigate contemporary demands for representation and trust within democratic systems.

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## Session 1Incentives, behaviour & outcomes

Monday, July 6th 10:15 to 12:15 (5136A)

### Are Lame-Duck Central Bankers More Active?

Etienne Farvaque (Université de Lille)

Davide Romelli (University of Dublin, Trinity College)

This paper examines whether central bankers approaching the end of their mandate - “lame-duck” governors - adjust monetary policy more actively in pursuit of reappointment. Building on a two-period learning model adapted from Bushman et al. (2010), we show that reappointment incentives interact with the precision of the policy-rate signal received by the government. Because this informativeness depends on inflation-gap volatility and institutional characteristics such as central bank independence or political pressure, career-concerned governors optimally choose different levels of monetary activism. The model predicts that activism rises when inflation is above target, when dismissal costs are high, and when political distance tightens the reappointment threshold, while macroeconomic noise dampens these incentives. We assemble a global dataset of 1,494 central bank governors in 152 countries over 1958–2025 and combine it with high-frequency interest-rate data. Using turnover and reappointment windows, we examine whether monetary policy becomes more volatile when governors face reappointment. The empirical evidence shows that reappointment incentives are associated with distinct patterns of policy activism, with effects that depend on the direction of recent rate movements: during episodes of loosening, reappointment is linked to higher lending-rate volatility, whereas tightening episodes display no comparable increase.

### Assessing the parliamentary accountability of independent central banks

Christel Koop (King's College London, University of London)

A key tenet of representative democracy, parliamentary scrutiny is particularly important for independent technocratic bodies as they are exempted from electoral accountability. Yet, because of information asymmetry between members of parliament (MPs) and experts, such scrutiny is difficult. This paper aims to further our understanding of parliamentary accountability of expert bodies by analysing the impact of MPs’ experience on the quality of their scrutiny of central bankers. Focusing on the Bank of England, we develop three measures of the quality of MPs’ contributions to parliamentary hearings – (i) relevance to objectives, (i) precision, and (iii) (non-)politicisation – and assess whether these can be traced back to two types of experience – relevant professional experience and experience within parliament.

### Independent Regulators and Policy Implementation: Pathways to Compliance with International Banking Rules

Paolo Stohlman (Università di Bologna)

Lorenzo Eaco (Università di Bologna)

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis served as a catalyst for closing the regulatory and supervisory loopholes left by the Basel II international banking regulatory framework. What emerged from the negotiation process was Basel III - a new regulatory framework aimed at reducing systemic risk, both domestically and internationally, by increasing capital requirements, strengthening risk-assessment processes and deepening supervisory mechanisms. A key limitation, however, was the soft-law nature of Basel III: lacking any kind of implementing powers, international banking regulation must pass through national legislative systems for ratification, and subsequently be implemented by domestic independent regulatory agencies, often central

banks and/or financial supervisory authorities. The outcome has been a globally uneven path to compliance. This paper aims to delineate the implementation trajectories and points of arrival of the twenty-five members of the Basel Committee for Banking Supervision (BCBS) in a time frame that goes from 2017, when the Basel III finalized draft was published, to 2023, the soft-law deadline for implementation. In particular, this research attempts to identify explanations for the differing implementation paths of international soft-law banking regulations at the domestic level, taking stock of a highly salient and politicized example.

Compliance with Basel III regulations occurs within a multilevel institutional environment, composed of actors with conflicting interests. Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) is employed to unpack the diverse causal paths leading to varying degrees of implementation and compliance. In line with the Comparative Political Economy (CPE) and Regulatory Governance literatures, four conditions are operationalized to explore the drivers of implementation trajectories: the de jure independence of national agencies; the de facto independence of national agencies, using a measure of accountability and responsiveness to legislative bodies; the risks of regulatory capture, proxied through a “revolving door” metric; and the classification of national economic models along varieties of financial capitalism categories.

Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of single cases, tracing legislative discourse, and public consultations from organized interest groups is conducted. Based on a sampling of the fsQCA results, the cases highlight the evolving relational structures between legislative principals, regulatory agents, and regulated industry actors. This allows for a deeper theoretical reflection on the mechanisms affecting the shifting role of national regulatory agencies, as a product of an evolving international and domestic political landscape.

This paper seeks to contribute to the debate concerning the comparative political economy of domestic regulatory agencies methodologically, empirically, and theoretically. From a methodological perspective, the paper constructs a novel dataset based on the BCBS implementation dashboard and the data collected to operationalize the four conditions. Moreover, we make use of fsQCA, a technique that is not yet widely used to outline compliance with international soft-law regulations and embraces complexity through configurational logic. Empirically, the research goes beyond past case-study contributions, delineating implementation pathways for all BCBS members. Lastly, the paper furthers reflections regarding the limitations of both institutionalist and market-based explanations by presenting a more comprehensive understanding of the principals and principles guiding regulatory agencies.

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## Session 3Political independence, control & accountability (1)

Tuesday, July 7th 09:00 to 12:15 (5136A)

### Role of Accountability Regime in Exploring the Dynamics of Accountability and Performance of Independent Regulatory Authority in a Global South Context

Mahnoor Farooq (Quaid-i-Azam University)

The advent of Independent Regulatory Authorities under the notion of Regulatory Governance in the developed countries was also diffused to the Global South countries in the early twenty-first century. Globalization and the donor institutions' impact on the developing countries paved the way for the phenomena of Agencification in Pakistan, having a fragile democratic governance system, where IRAs were established in various sectors, including energy, finance, telecommunication, and media. The broadcast sector was monitored by the Ministry of Information, but with the establishment of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority in 2002, the mandate for regulating the private electronic media shifted to the independent authority. Literature suggests that the IRA's accountability mechanism is formed on the basis of the Accountability Regime, which includes the relevant forums that can hold the authority accountable on the basis of its mandate. In this regard, a Qualitative study was conducted to explore the accountability phenomena of PEMRA, by proposing a conceptual model of the authority’s accountability regime based on the Vertical, Horizontal, Diagonal, and Downward forums. The aim was to explore the accountability dynamics of a regulator in a Global South country based on its performance, which comprises of the Product (Mandate), Procedural, and Financial aspects. In this regard, the relevant officials from the various forums, such as the Parliament, equivalents, the regulated organizations, and the relevant stakeholders, included in the accountability regime of PEMRA were interviewed. The in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion revealed interesting findings, shedding light on the gaps in the current accountability mechanism of the IRA due to the Political Interference in the form of political hiring, binding policy directives from the government, and the influence of government officials on the authority’s board. These accountability and performance-linked challenges raise questions about the independent functioning and the credibility of the regulator. The accountability gaps are linked with the Political use of authority due to its unique position as a single electronic media regulatory authority in the country, which has the capacity to influence the masses through its mandated regulatory powers in the broadcast sector. These findings are interpreted under the regulatory theory and regulatory governance framework for the cross-comparison, which can be explored with respect to IRAs in different sectors. The study highlights the accountability frameworks in the Global South context by unearthing the performance factor with the help of its accountability regime. The relevancy of this study with this workshop is established through the accountability framework, which contributes to the existing literature by presenting the unique findings from a struggling democratic system as a result of adopting the developed world model of governance through the establishment of independent regulatory authorities. The accountability underpinnings in this case study can be further explored in a cross sector and country comparison.

Keywords: Accountability, IRA, Accountability Regime, Performance, PEMRA, Pakistan

### Amending independence – when do legislators change EU agencies’ formal independence?

Eva Ruffing (Universität Osnabrück)

EU agencies’ formal mandates are regularly amended or revised. The EU has founded 39 EU agencies since 1975 and has reformed their mandate in 167 instances. In some instances, these reforms affect the formal independence of EU agencies, in other instances legislators only adapt other aspects of EU agencies’ mandates. This paper thus analyses the drivers behind EU agencies’ changes in EU agencies’ independence.

Using a dataset of all agency reforms over the last five decades, this paper explores in a first step under

which conditions EU agencies gain or lose independence in reforms. We thereby test both rationalist and isomorphic approaches against the null hypothesis of incremental path dependency in EU agency independence. In a second step, we conduct a comparative case study analysis to further probe the identified causal mechanisms by focusing only on those agencies, that experienced substantial changes in their independence. Formal independence is both an important justification for the establishment of government agencies from a functional perspective and a significant concern from an accountability perspective. Our study reveals whether the EU's political system allows agency principals to engage in re-mandating when the expectations regarding independence in the delegation process does not match with developments after the delegation.

### Why central bank reforms matter – Lessons from the past 50 years

Etienne Farvaque (Université de Lille)

Independent central banks are more successful at ensuring price stability, but the underlying economic mechanisms remain debated. Using a sample of 155 countries over more than 50 years (1972–2023), we show that reforms strengthening legal central bank independence have supported price stability by better anchoring inflation expectations, increasing monetary policy credibility, and fostering monetary discipline. We find that the effects are driven primarily by large reforms in democratic countries. Central bank reforms have the strongest impact in countries without a formal monetary policy target and in those with flexible exchange rate regimes. Reforms have also been more effective in countries with high public debt-to-GDP ratios. These findings underscore the crucial role of independence as a key element of sound monetary policy frameworks and highlight the adverse risks for price stability associated with weakening this institutional autonomy.

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## Session 4Political independence, control & accountability (2)

Tuesday, July 7th 14:00 to 17:15 (5136A)

### 'Independence' in question: The construction of a relative autonomy of nuclear organizations vis-à-vis political authorities in France

Valerie Arnhold (emlyon)

This paper examines the evolution of the organization of public oversight over the nuclear sector in France, from the creation of the first structures supervising the operation of nuclear facilities to the adoption of the Nuclear Transparency Act (Loi sur la Transparence nucléaire) establishing a formal regulatory agency (1973–2006). Drawing on archival research conducted at the Ministry of the Environment, as well as on interviews with all relevant stakeholders (N=50), the article traces the various projects—implemented or abandoned—aimed at reorganizing oversight that were undertaken in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident in 1986.

The findings show the extent to which these projects were grounded in divergent governance models and describes the competing meanings of “regulatory independence”. These meanings provide a heuristic entry point into the different conceptions of the role of politics in nuclear decision-making. Starting from a “techno-political” model characterized by strong executive control over nuclear decisions, a new model of governance gradually emerged over the period, in which political actors were increasingly kept at a distance from regulatory arenas, to the benefit of enhanced autonomy for nuclear organizations (both operators and regulatory bodies).

The article examines the conditions under which this relative autonomy became possible and discusses some of its effects, in particular on the modalities of oversight of nuclear facilities and on the executive’s capacity to challenge the established arrangements surrounding the regulation of nuclear activities.

### Populist pressures and Central Bank Independence: Evidence from Poland

Paulina Lenik (Jagiellonian University Cracow)

Central bank independence is a cornerstone of democratic governance, yet its resilience is increasingly tested under populist rule. This paper examines how the National Bank of Poland (NBP) has navigated political pressures during the tenure of Prawo i Sprawiedliwo?? (PiS), focusing exclusively on board-level dynamics and decision-making records. Institutional independence is operationalized through observable indicators, including leadership changes, and episodes of political influence or attempted overrides of monetary policy decisions. These events are coded annually and flagged as “intervention years” to capture moments of political intrusion. Using a difference?in?differences design, we compare board behaviour and decision patterns before and after intervention periods, with non?intervention years serving as controls. Analysis of official Monetary Policy Council (MPC) minutes reveal how populist pressures shape the responsiveness of monetary authorities. The findings highlight both the fragility and persistence of central bank independence under populist challenge, offering broader lessons for the democratic embeddedness of technocratic institutions in Central and Eastern Europe.

This paper fits the workshop theme by examining the democratic embeddedness of an independent agency through the case of Poland’s central bank. By analysing board minutes and decision records, examines how populist pressures challenge institutional autonomy and accountability. The findings contribute to broader debates on the resilience of technocratic institutions under populist governance in Central and Eastern Europe.

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## Session 5Independent agencies and the wider society

Wednesday, July 8th 09:00 to 12:15 (5136A)

### (Virtual) Preferences for representation and responsiveness in international bureaucracies: a survey experiment

Reinout Van der Veer (Radboud University of Nijmegen)

International bureaucracies with executive mandates play a crucial role in contemporary international organizations. They facilitate global and/or regional governance in sectors that are characterized both by high technical and increasing political complexity. As a consequence, they have the difficult task of balancing responsible governance with responsiveness to (trans)national publics that are represented via a plethora of channels. While prior research has shed some light on how these administrations navigate this challenge at the organizational level, we know little about the views from within these administrations on these matters. We remedy this by presenting results from a new pre-registered survey and vignette experiment conducted among experts and policy elites working in EU and global administrations. We theorize, map and explain these preferences in terms of their views on representation, engagement with different stakeholders, and their attitudes towards the responsiveness of their organization at large.

### Do societal priorities matter for the agendas of independent central banks?

Michele Scotto di Vettimo (King's College London)

Independent central banks are expected to choose their policy instruments without regard to the preferences of elected politicians and the electorate. Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that the policy agendas of the organisations are influenced by societal priorities. We investigate the possibility of agenda responsiveness in central banking by analysing whether the topics of the policy meetings of the Bank of England are affected by the topics of news articles about the Bank – our proxy for societal priorities. Relying on semi-supervised topic models and vector autoregression models, we find that Bank issue attention can be traced back to societal priorities in the domains most closely related to the Bank’s mandate, particularly in the period after the global financial crisis. Our results provide new insight into central banks’ engagement with society and the dynamics of agenda responsiveness in non-majoritarian governance.

### (Virtual) Emotionalizing Reputational Audiences: An Affective Dynamic Framework for Bureaucratic Reputation in the Digital Era

Moshe Maor (Reichman University)

This paper advances an affective-dynamic framework for understanding bureaucratic reputation in an era characterized by emotionalized politics, digital amplification, and fragmented information ecosystems. Traditional accounts conceptualize reputational audiences as relatively stable, institutionally grounded observers ? such as scientific bodies, media organizations, and legislative committees ? that confer legitimacy primarily through expertise and deliberation. We argue that, at times, regulatory governance is shaped by emotionally mobilized publics whose evaluations of agency actions are filtered through affective orientations rather than institutional affiliation alone, while in many routine contexts reputational judgments remain embedded in low-intensity emotions. We introduce the concept of emotionally overlapping audiences: fluid, cross-cutting publics that form under specific conditions through shared emotional orientations and periodically intersect with institutional audiences. Drawing on affective science and public policy theory, the paper develops an affective-dynamic perspective that theorizes how emotions ? ranging

from low-salience background affect to episodic high-intensity responses ? structure audience formation, circulate across public and institutional arenas, and generate reputational dynamics that may be consistent with anchoring processes. The paper advances testable hypotheses and measurement strategies, arguing that emotional dynamics among agency audiences become particularly consequential for reputational risk during periods of heightened salience, while coexisting with more routine, low-arousal reputational dynamics in everyday governance.