

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Experimental Political Science

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QUALITY CONTROL

*Experiments
on the Microfoundations
of Retrospective Voting*

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-35703-6 — Quality Control
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Frontmatter
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009357036
DOI: 10.1017/9781009357005

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-009-35703-6 Paperback
ISSN 2633-3368 (online)
ISSN 2633-335X (print)

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DOI: 10.1017/9781009357005
First published online: May 2023

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Abstract: Conventional models of voting behavior depict individuals who judge governments for how the world unfolds during their time in office. This phenomenon of retrospective voting requires that individuals integrate and appraise streams of performance information over time. Yet past experimental studies short-circuit this “integration-appraisal” process. In this Element, we develop a new framework for studying retrospective voting and present eleven experiments building on that framework. Notably, when we allow integration and appraisal to unfold freely, we find little support for models of “blind retrospection.” Although we observe clear recency bias, we find respondents who are quick to appraise and who make reasonable use of information cues. Critically, they regularly employ benchmarking strategies to manage complex, variable, and even confounded streams of performance information. The results highlight the importance of centering the integration-appraisal challenge in both theoretical models and experimental designs and begin to uncover the cognitive foundations of retrospective voting.

This Element also has an additional material available @
<https://www.cambridge.org/HartMatthewsSupplementaryMaterials>

Keywords: retrospective voting, voting behavior, experimental design, democratic accountability, external validity

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ISBNs: 9781009357036 (PB), 9781009357005 (OC)
ISSNs: 2633-3368 (online), 2633-335X (print)

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