

CEU Department of Political Science  
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## Winning Football Games and Votes

# The Hungarian National Football Teams Performance as an Irrelevant Event Affecting Government Evaluation

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## Abstract

How well do voters perform in holding elected representatives accountable, when confronted with event outcomes that are outside of the direct control of elected representatives? This paper analyses how Hungarian voters condition their evaluation of the government as a function of information on the national football team. The results of the research show that voters react to short information about how the national team is faring - with more positive (negative) news about the national football team leading to higher (worse) evaluation of their government. According to the study responsibility attribution is conditioned on party preference. Opposition supporters attribute responsibility to the government significantly more than incumbent supporters when confronted with negative information about the government. When confronted with positive news it is the incumbents, who attribute responsibility to the government to a significantly higher extent than opposition voters do. The paper also builds a strong case that besides explicit responsibility attribution voter also misattributes their general mood to the government. When confronted with positive news about football voters reported a significant increase in their mood level and a ~6 percentage point increase in their government approval. The paper deployed three waves of experimental surveys with slightly different designs around the same concept. The three waves together incorporate answers from more than 3500 respondents. The experimental logic involved a stratified random selection method to assign respondents to control and treatment groups, which received positive, negative, or no short information about how the Hungarian national team fared recently. Understanding how explicit attribution of responsibility and misattribution of general mood for outcomes of politically (ir)relevant event could help us further develop our institutions governing public accountability and representation.

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# Introduction

Football occupies an important role in European politics despite being a seemingly irrelevant subfield of society, which arguably could function without any involvement of the government. Football's conception of winning and losing resonates so strongly with political struggle, that the two are in some ways banded together throughout the continent. From Catalonia, across Italy to Hungary; football is a symbol used by politicians and movements to explain their politics to the masses and to demonstrate national pride (Azzoni 2017, Semino and Masci 1996, Szabó 2019). In Germany it creates and reassures social identities and brings social fractions to the surface (Metzger and Özvatan 2020). In Poland being a fan is almost analogous to being a right-wing voter (Scalia 2009, Woziak et al. 2020). The matches in the stadiums are so captivating, partly because they embody the true reality of social competition.

The Hungarian national football team qualified for the UEFA European Championship in 2016 after thirty years of unsuccessful attempts to take part in a major international tournament. Watching the qualifier's decisive game, I remember someone from the audience loudly commented after the victory: "let's vote for Orban (then prime minister of Hungary) for another term in government!". It was not Orban who scored the winning goal nor Fidesz (party of Orban) who played, but some spectators felt that the government and especially Orban had a major role in the success as a genius behind the improvement of Hungarian football. Furthermore, the loudly commenting spectator's sentence indicates that such a role in advancing football should be considered during the upcoming elections.

On the one hand a strong case can be made that football results should not serve as a basis for government approval and evaluation of political parties. The fact that brief achievements of sport teams; a well-played match or positive result in a season are outside of the direct control of elected

representatives, hence these events should be regarded as politically irrelevant (Healy et al. 2010) and ought not to interfere with democratic election outcomes. On the other hand, the loud spectator might be right that football is highly relevant in Hungarian and European political context, because (1) it is a historically highly politicized subsystem of society (Szabó 2019) and (2) the government has made football a measure of its own success by thematizing public discourse about their involvement in football and by advertising unity of all Hungarians through the sport (Molnar and Whigham 2019).

The goal of this project is to assess whether voters condition their evaluation of the government as a function of information on the national football team. Specifically, I predict that voters will react to information about how the national team is faring - with more positive (negative) information about the national football team leading to higher (worse) approval of their government.

Multiple mechanisms are plausible in explaining the casual relationship behind the above-mentioned association between received information about football and government approval of voters. These mechanisms originated from two distinct branches of theoretical approaches. The first claims the political irrelevance of football and perceives such effect of football on government approval as a mistake made by the voter (Achen and Bartels 2004, Healy and Malhotra 2013). This literature identifies two possible explanations for these mistakes; voters surrender their reason and settle for folk-story like logic, during government evaluation and/or they misattribute their general mood to the government (Bower 1981, Schwartz and Clore 1983). The second branch of the theoretical approaches claims that football is highly relevant in politics and comprehends the effect of football news on government approval as an extended variant of retrospective voting, in which voters evaluate the government based on all the joys and happiness they acquired during its term of office. (see: Miller 2012).



One of the main arguments of this research is that in practice the two lines of thoughts work parallel to each other. In the Hungarian example a quarter of observed voters had thought that the government had no role in successes (failures) of the national football team, meanwhile the fifth of the voters attributed great responsibility for the government. The paper's results show that attribution of responsibility for successes and failures of the national team is conditioned on party preference of voters; opposition voters tend to attribute responsibility to the government for successes to a lesser extent than do incumbent supporters. The reverse is true for failures; incumbent supporters are less likely than opposition supporters to attribute responsibility for the government for the failures of the national team.

The paper builds a strong case for the existence of the mechanism of mood misattribution. Observed voters confronted with positive information about how the football team fared experienced a significant increase in their mood and reported a ~ 6 percentage point higher government approval compared to voters who received no information on football. As the study implies such effects are substantial, since a 6 percentage point increase in government evaluation may influence election outcomes or policy decisions. However, the results of the studies also suggest that effects are supposedly temporary and other politicized topics can override them.

I deployed three waves of surveys, all three waves with an experimental design content to research how change in government approval conditioned on the type of information about football unfolds. The three waves are different in their treatments and measurement strategies; however, the core concepts are very similar. The first wave samples respondents into four treatment groups, it contains a between subject design and research primarily responsibility attribution. The second wave attempted to increase precision of measurement without introducing extra bias, by introducing a within-subject design and reducing the treatment groups to two. The last wave of the research's

primary aim was to uncover the mood misattribution mechanism by a between-subject design and assigning respondent to one treatment and a control group. All together more than 3500 respondents have filled the surveys.

In the following chapter I am going to present the concepts of the study and the two branches of theoretical approaches to the phenomena in focus. Theories of accountability and irrelevant events are going to be discussed. Later I turned to the outline of the research design. I explain the logic of the experiment and the three waves of surveys. Also, I present the four hypotheses of the research. After I outline the analysis of the responses from the survey. In this chapter the four hypotheses are going to be tested. Lastly, I conclude with discussion, further research options, limitations of the research and some ending remarks.

# Chapter 1 - Concepts and Relevant Literature

Do citizens hold elected representatives accountable? And if they do, how well do they perform in doing so? These questions occupy one of the focal points of interest of the democratic theory literature. Democratic tradition claims that elections are adequate tools to hold elected officials accountable. However, recent developments in empirical research show that in some cases voters tend to make mistakes during evaluating past governmental performance. Voters overweight recent events in their evaluation, struggle to find benchmarks for comparisons of performance and are influenced by irrelevant events (Healy and Malhotra 2013). Over and above these mistakes voters tend to attribute positive events to the political power, they support and attribute negative events to others they oppose (Rudolph 2006). Conceptualization of influence of irrelevant events on voters is arguably the most problematic from the above-mentioned mistakes voters make. After all, how can an event be politically irrelevant, if it influences citizens' voting decisions?

Healy et al. (2010) defined (politically) irrelevant events as events outside of the direct control of elected representatives. Meanwhile definition of irrelevant events is quite straightforward, observational literature in the field is characterized as a “mess” by Graham et al. (2020). Studies claim that natural disasters, sporting events and lottery results influence election outcomes (Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010; Busby, Druckman, and Fredendall 2017). Others find no such effect (Fowler and Montagnes 2015; Fowler and Hall 2018). Most interestingly Healy and Malhotra (2010) show that such effects exist and not interpret results as irrelevant events, but as legitimate electoral acts of holding representatives accountable.

In theory it is possible to establish a set of criteria by which governments ought to be evaluated. These criteria should adhere to normative considerations, which should also be linked to the political system itself. Different systems ought to be evaluated by different standards. What events are politically

relevant is different in liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes. However, in practice it is often up to the voter to decide whether the government is responsible for a given event. Hence most events are attributed to the government's responsibility by a part of the electorate and not attributed to the government by others. Arguably sporting events are not in the direct control of representatives, but funding and long-term development of sports may very well be. Politicians have no control on where a tornado hits, but proper preparations, harm prevention and aiding victims is the responsibility of the government. The co-occurrence of different responsibilities during a given event makes it challenging to disentangle politically irrelevant events from politically relevant ones. The case of Football in Hungary constitutes a rich field of research into government accountability, due to the abundance of responsibilities associated with it and the plentiful approaches toward its political relevance.

In my perception a liberal democratic arrangement should exclude subsystems like sporting branches from the political arena. Government control over clubs and national teams should restrict itself to monitor legality of operations of such institutions. It is also understandable that football is played by 22 players at a time and their skills, techniques, teamwork, and luck brings about failure or success of the team. These failures and successes are outside of the direct control of elected representatives. Therefore, soccer results should not serve as a basis for government accountability. On the other hand a case can, be made that football and its results are utterly relevant in Hungarian politics. Firstly, since football existed the sport has been highly politicized by different regimes throughout the history of the country (see; Szabó 2019). Secondly, the Hungarian government has made football a measure of its own value, by thematizing the Hungarian public discourse of their own involvement in Hungarian soccer clubs and results of the national team. Therefore, it is a very lucid and legitimate approach of the Hungarian voters to evaluate their governments based on successes and failures of the national football team.

So how can success (failure) of the national football team legitimize (delegitimize) governments and raise (lower) approval for the government? The literature suggests two branches of thought that should provide the foundations of a theory behind such causal claims. On the other hand, arguably people make mistakes by attributing responsibility for certain outcomes to officials, even though officials have no direct control over the outcome. (Healy et al. 2010) In these cases the literature suggests that voters make mistakes during the process of evaluation. On the other hand, one can conceptualize the success of the national football team as a legitimate basis for government evaluation. In these cases, successes (failures) may add to (take from) the total utility of the people.

## 1.1 How should accountability work?

Accountability of elected representatives is the cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy. Electoral accountability works between two policy making terms. In the first term the representative has been elected and made policy decisions. The electorate evaluates the results of these policy decisions. If voters are satisfied by the decisions of the representative, they vote her into office again. If they are unsatisfied, they vote her out. (Ashworth 2012). Public accountability provides incentives for representatives to work in the best interest of the public to be reelected and filters incapable representatives out of office. This conception of public accountability corresponds to the retrospective voting theory of voting behavior.

Retrospective voting theory claims that people vote based on past experiences of a representative's or party's performance. It can be conceptualized as a four-step action. In the first step the voter recognizes events of the world (earthquakes, high inflation, low security, very sunny summer, low unemployment, or peaceful years). The second step is for the voter to attribute these events into the domain of responsibility of any elected officials, (she may regard it as a politically irrelevant event). In step four the voter updates her preferences of who to vote for. Finally, the votes feed back into the

loop in forms of events that resulted in new policies from changing preferences of voters. (Healy and Malhotra 2013)

Perhaps the most widely acknowledged retrospective voting theory is economic voting theory. Among many retrospective voting theories, the economic voting theory of political behavior promotes the idea that citizens base their evaluation of the government on its performance regarding the economic condition of the country. Citizens conceive governance mainly focusing on economic outputs of a country and they make decisions about the government ex-post the decisions were made. They may punish the government for undesired performance of the economy or give credit for maintaining growth or ramping up tepid economic outputs. (Healy and Malhotra 2013)

Studies support the claims of economic voting theory. By analyzing election results Roberts (2008) argued that western established democracies show strong electoral accountability. Tepid economic performances of the countries are usually punished by the voters. Governing parties lose voters if the economic situation deteriorates. Simonovits (2015) introduced an experimental approach to study economic voting. In a survey experiment the author assigned respondents randomly to different treatment groups. Respondents of the survey received different expert opinions on the performance of the economy. After reading the opinions carefully, respondents were asked to evaluate the government. Those who received better expert opinions about the state of the economy were more likely to give better evaluation of the government and vice-versa: worse expert opinions resulted in worse evaluation of the government. The experiment is an interesting example of how citizens hold the government accountable. They do care about expert opinion about the economy when it comes to government evaluation, and they also tend to listen to these experts. However, they (we) have little preliminary knowledge about economic performance.

## 1.2 Heuristics and Biases: Noise in Accountability

Accountability doesn't always work as well as it is outlined above. In the next section I will give three examples of systematic "errors" of electoral accountability. These three "errors" are not mistakes made by the voters. They represent the very essence of how accountability works. Firstly, voters tend to attribute favorable events to their ingroups and are less likely to attribute unfavorable events to their ingroups. The opposite is true for voters' outgroups. Secondly, voters tend to overweight recent events when deciding reelection or sacking of an elected representative. Thirdly, voters struggle to find useful benchmarks, useful data to evaluate representatives on the basis of them, hence they use intellectual shortcuts that are available.

## 1.3 Group-serving biases

Every human tends to blame others for unsavory events and rewards himself for positive outcomes. Group serving biases were first formulated by Taylor and Doria (1981), who claimed that people tend to attribute positive events into the responsibility of the internal groups and attribute negative events to the out-groups. The argument holds for politics as well. It has been shown that responsibility attribution is preconditioned on party cues. Rudolph (2006) orchestrated an experiment in which he asked voters about their thoughts on who to blame in a scenario of budgetary deficit of the state. When respondents were only supplied by the description of the scenario, democrat and republican respondents scored similarly on a scale from 1 to 10, where the larger number means higher responsibility attributed to the governor. Democrat respondents gave 5.82 points on average, republicans 5.48 points. After party cues were presented to the respondent and the governor was identified as a democrat, democrat respondents softened up and gave a score of 5.35 on average, republicans got stricter and gave a score of 6.4. Another suggestive data in favor of the existence of group-serving biases is the fact that the affiliates of the incumbent party among the respondents of

American National Election Study's questionnaire have been - 1980 to 2012 - more positive on the trends of the economy than respondents "in opposition" (Healy and Malhotra, 2013). In my view this correlational claim is weaker than the experimental design of Rudolph (2006), because favored social classes of the current economic policies may vary in each presidential term, which could bring about systematic differences in perceptions, however the correlation remains an interesting phenomenon.

## 1.4 Heuristics

However, there are other explanations as to how football might be relevant to politics in relation to government evaluation. It is rational to claim that citizens have limited time (or will) to familiarize themselves with political issues. In "*Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*" Kahneman and Tversky's (1974) summarized their groundbreaking work in the field of decision theory. The authors introduced heuristics and biases as a part of the decision-making process of decision situations, where information is incomplete or very costly to acquire. Their work gained political relevance. Citizens are to make decisions about their future during elections. In this case they turn to heuristics; intellectual shortcuts that can reduce complex social phenomena to simpler problems. Looking at residential natural gas prices to evaluate the performance of the government in relation to inflation and economics may constitute one case of these heuristics.

Finding the right data to evaluate upon can be problematic for voters. In some cases, voters are struggling to find sources based on which they are able to decide on the evaluation of a governmental term. As Healy and Lenz (2013) argues it has been a long-standing empirical observation that election year economics is more important in reelection than cumulative economic growth. The author explained phenomena by arguing that since cumulative growth measures usually aren't available for voters, they substitute complex problems with accessible comparisons. The evaluation of economic policy of a Presidential term reduces to the evaluation of the most recent year's GDP growth. However,



people often decide on what is available for them. Most recent data is only significant since it is the most accessible. Todorov et al. (2005) have shown that faces of candidates are weighted in the electoral decision during election of senators in the US. After a one-second exposure to candidates' faces people are able predict election outcomes better than chance. One explanation for the phenomena is that voters make their real election decision by small information, and it could be as unreflective as the appearance of the candidate.

## 1.5 Irrelevant events: When Voters Spoil Accountability?

In the chapters above I have presented how voters hold their elected representatives accountable. Scholarly research also presents that besides noise in electoral accountability, voters also spoil the concept of accountability, when evaluating the government. I frame the following phenomena as electoral ill-treatment of accountability since they are particularly hard to correct. I turn to this late. Blind retrospection and mood misattribution are ways for the electorate to spoil accountability. The phrase coined by Achen and Bartels *blind retrospection* stands for electoral confusions in responsibility attribution. It is an empirical observation that claims that voters link responsibility for (positive or negative) events through folk-story-like explanations. Mood misattribution is a psychological observation claiming that the inner mood of a person is extrapolated to anything the person needs to make a judgement on.

### 1.5.1 Blind retrospection

As Achen and Bartels (2016) argues citizens may reward incumbents by voting for them and punish them for bad performance by voting them out. In metaphorical imagery the authors claimed that; “*Ordinary citizens are allowed to drive the automobile of state simply by looking in the rearview mirror.*” (Achen and Bartels 2016, p:271). Achen and Bartels pointed out a phenomenon that is old as humankind;

voters attribute responsibility for seeming irrelevant events to the government because they believe that any negative event signaled the incompetence of the incumbent officials.

Sometimes voters attribute responsibility to a political actor for an event by making a logical connection between the event and the actor, even though the connection might not be plausible in any rational sense. The electorate often puts aside reason and relies on folk-stories like explanations of the political realm in hard times. Achen and Bartels (2004, 6) cites Money Penny and Buckle (1929), who cite former prime minister Benjamin Disraeli's letter to Lord Lytton from 1879:

Although we have entered 'the sixth year of our reign,' our parliamentary majority, instead of diminishing, has increased. The only danger and difficulty which the present Ministry has to encounter are natural. After four bad harvests in this country, we are apparently about to meet a fifth dearth.

For a long time, politicians are always aware that the electorate attributes their hardships to them without any plausible and rational connection; like droughts and other natural disasters. The sufferer doesn't look at reason, they are longing for a change. Blind retrospection is one explanation of how irrelevant events may affect political outcomes.

### 1.5.2 Mood Misattribution

The electorate also spoils accountability by attributing its mood on the elected representatives. Voters tend to extrapolate their current emotional state to the incumbents, and in these situations, incumbents are rewarded (punished) in case the voter is in a good (bad) mood regardless of the performance of the incumbent. Two underlying mechanisms can explain such situations. The first one is that the current emotional state of a person is included in the judgment about how satisfied he or she is with life in general. People in a bad mood are more likely to seek additional information to explain their state of satisfaction than people in good moods. (Schwarz and Clore 1983). Therefore, this theory suggests that voters in good mood find their lives in general satisfying and are unwilling to seek additional information. This general positive feeling could translate into favorable evaluation of

the representative. The other explanation for mood misattribution puts the focus on selective memories of individuals. In positive (negative) mood voters tend to remember the positive (negative) memories (Bower 1981). Therefore, in a positive (negative) mood the electorate reminds itself of the likeable (unpleasing) actions of politicians. Through these misattributions of mood can an irrelevant event affect political outcomes.

In my understanding the key difference between factors that generate noise during the accountability process (group-serving biases, heuristics) and irrelevant events is that biases and heuristics are the part of healthy public accountability, since they stem from the active participation of the electorate. Voters looking for solutions to complex problems might surrender to heuristics, but this is the way of how we, humans make sense of the world. However, on the other hand the effect of irrelevant events is manifested through a chain of sloppiness of the individual. A desert of reason or unwillingness to change a satisfactory mood for selfish gains.

### 1.5.3 Examples of Empirical Finding: Irrelevant Events and Government Evaluation

There are several examples in scholarly literature when seemingly irrelevant events have an effect on political outcome. The following literature review mentions a handful of them. In their classical example, Achen and Bartels (2004) have shown that shark attacks influenced the US Presidential Election in 1916. Looking at cross section data of shark attacks in New Jersey counties the authors were able to show that the more attacks happened in a country the less votes did the incumbent Woodrow Wilson received.

Busby, et al. (2017) used a natural experimental design to measure sporting events effects on presidential evaluation. The author arranged the experiment during a college basketball game between Ohio State University and Oregon University. Participants of the experiment were fans of the basketball teams. They were asked to fill a questionnaire before, shortly after and two weeks after the

game. The author measured the mood of the participants as well. The fans of the winning team reported a better mood after the game than before and provided more favorable government evaluations in the framework of a difference in differences design. However, the effect was only temporary and was insignificant two weeks after the game. Busby and Druckman (2018) repeated the experiment. The authors were able to show a decline in mood and worse presidential evaluation of the losing team, but positive effects were insignificant for the fans of the winners.

Healy, et al. (2010) applied a quasi-experimental design to check whether local (American) football matches affect elections. The authors compared matches by betting market and selected unlikely wins and losses, based on the order of odds (the smallest odds is the most unlikely win). The authors found that a win ten days before election gained an extra 1.61 percentage points of the vote in Senate, gubernatorial, and presidential elections for the incumbent.

Müller and Kneafsey (2021) analyzed the historical election result of Ireland and have shown that local and national election results were not correlated with losses and wins of local Hurling and Gaelic football clubs. They suggested that political information is more available for voters in Ireland compared to the USA and hence truly irrelevant events don't contribute to election results. They called for "further comparative exploration of the contexts and conditions [] may help unpack the conflicting findings in the irrelevant events literature" (Müller and Kneafsey 2021, 27)

## **1.6 Conclusions of Concepts**

Accountability literature and irrelevant event literature are especially important for the purpose of this research. The purpose of this research is to assess whether voters condition their evaluation of the government as a function of information on the national football team. If such phenomena exist it may occur due to two distinct underlying reasons, which both are likely to happen at the same time. Firstly, part of the electorate might perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation.

It has every reason to do so, because football was politicized during Hungarian history, it is a main source of national pride, and the government has situated it as a measure of its values. Therefore, conditioning the evaluation of the government on information about football is a case for retrospective accountability. However, other part of the electorate might not perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation, but football induces mood changes of the electorate that are misattributed to the governments. The misattribution of mood affects government evaluation and therefore it is a case for irrelevant events affecting political outcomes.

## Chapter 2 - Normative Aspects of Voters Spoiling Accountability

So, what about democracy and its prospects if voters surrendering to intellectual shortcuts are a given? If irrelevant events affect political outcomes through a chain of sloppiness of individuals and the deserting of reason and unwillingness to change? What can be said about the future of representative democracies if voters often spoil accountability?

Governing modern societies is a complicated task. Our democratic ideals require that while complex societal undertakings are well managed, the people's prospect to govern themselves remains assured. Competitive elections create formal accountability relations between the rulers and the ruled (Ashworth 2012). The conception of how to achieve such a system can ideally be explicated as follows: citizens elect officials in competitive elections (of the people) among themselves (by the people). These representatives are elected to represent their constituencies in pursuit of greater public welfare (for the people). Representatives are held accountable by the people. This accountability feeds back the opinions of the people and allows for the will of the people to be embodied; by either selecting well-performing officials and voting out others, or by incentivizing officials to seek policies that promote public welfare.

However, this principal-agent relation holds multiple risks. Representative democracy expects representatives to gather information on the desires and political position of citizens and aggregate them. They are also expected to become experts of technical details of political resolutions. Hence representatives ought to become more knowledgeable in political issues than the average citizens. This division of political labor between representatives and citizens enables democracies to bring about well-informed, professional solutions to the problems of the community. However, the knowledge-gap between the rulers and ruled could hinder accountability. Firstly, the knowledge-gap in accountability

may incentivize representatives to act in bad faith by surrendering their original position for the preferences of the masses, even when the advancement of their constituency would require not to. Meanwhile representatives ought to advance the public welfare of their constituency even when this holds against the preferences of their constituency (Pitkin 1967, 210). A claim that directly follows from the logic of the division of political labor. Secondly, the knowledge-gap may hinder citizens to hold representatives accountable who have pursued their individual preferences in opposition to the public welfare during highly technical and complex decision-making scenarios.

While taking account of the terms of public officials, voters make mistakes. Voters often (1) attribute politically irrelevant events to elected officials by blind-retrospection (Achen and Bartels 2004) or mood misattribution (Bower 1981, Schwartz and Clore 1983). Voters (2) surrender to heuristics; intellectual shortcuts when facing complex problems (Kahneman and Tversky 1974) and (3) they tend to attribute positive events into the responsibility of the internal groups and attribute negative events to the out-group. (Taylor and Doria 1981, Rudolph 2006, Healy and Malhotra 2013). These mistakes can lead to anomalies in policy outcomes. Healy and Lenz (2013) have applied an experimental design to show that voters are inclined to overweight the last year's economic output of the presidential term when evaluating the performance of the president. Wolfers (2009) find that voters in oil-producing states tend to evaluate public officials based on the world price of oil. Many of these residents fail to find good benchmarks for evaluating the net effect of their officials. As previously argued some voters misattribute some politically irrelevant event to their elected official's responsibility (Busby et al 2017, Healy and Malhotra 2010). A suggestive empirical example of the connection between voters' mistake and its effect on public welfare is presented by Healy and Malhotra (2009). The authors have shown that natural disaster reliefs significantly elevate vote shares of incumbents in upcoming elections: an extra 10 percent if relief funds raise vote share by 0.045 percentage points.

However, disaster preparedness efforts don't have such an effect, which may be a reason why politicians devote insufficient public funds for disaster prevention and preparedness.

What can be said in defense of democracy in the light of these examples where accountability reduces public welfare, and how to proceed in finding the right institutions that ought to regulate accountability to promote public welfare? In the following section I will present arguments against and for extensive public accountability and present principles that should ease the tensions of the principal-agent relation of citizens and representatives.

## 2.1 The Ignorant Voters

There is an ongoing debate on good citizenship. From Schumpeter (Mackie 2009) to contemporary political scientists; elitist democrats claim that it is important to give the people the opportunity every couple of years to change their political elite, but it is the elite's job to lead the country and make decisions. The number of political theorists however who doubt that citizens have the capacity to govern themselves and hold their representatives accountable are surprisingly large. I will present a couple of examples.

In his lecture Brennan (2016) raises the problem of unknowing citizens. Three of Brennan's own examples draw a grim picture of the average voter; voters are unable to recall the unemployment rate; they are often mistaken by more than 5 percent in either direction. Voters are unable to recall trends in crime rate. Often, they recall the opposite trend than the actual. Brennan also gives an example that in 1980 a survey predicted that 47 percent of the US voters thought that the Soviet Union was part of NATO. Brennan (2016) argues this is not because voters are clueless, but because acquiring political knowledge doesn't pay off for voters. Democracy incentivizes voters to be ignorant. In the lecturer's formulation democracy empowers the collective to rule itself, but the individual. The individuals hence act accordingly and distance themselves from politics.



Somin (2010) formulates a critique of deliberative democracy claiming that deliberation requires high levels of factual knowledge and a substantial degree of understanding moral arguments. These two elements needed for deliberation place a burden on the voter that they reject immersing in social affairs, and they have the right to do so. Somin claims it is rational to be ignorant toward issues that touch upon the complex and enormous issues of the modern state, because the output simply doesn't match up to the resources a voter needs to invest in learning. Somin (2010) also claims that voters are irrational and consume in a very biased fashion. However, this irrational behavior has a strong rational side in seeking to reaffirm pre-existing views, due to the high individual costs of opening toward different views. Somin comes to the conclusion that education and well-structured deliberation cannot solve these underlying reasons of citizens irrationality and ignorance, therefore the most effective instrument of mitigating the negative effects of unknowing citizens is to limit the role of government.

The Brexit vote has been one of the most impactful controversial manifestations of the will of the people in 2010s. Disproportionate number of workers of the fishing industry of the UK have voted out of the EU. These people were fed lies about how the industry will be the big winner of the upcoming Brexit deal. The truth turned out to be different: fishermen with ambitions of selling fresh seafood lost their continental markets and many of them have been struggling to sell their products on the domestic market (Smith 2021). I would not blame UK fishermen for bad macro-economic decisions; however the example vividly shows how individuals find it troublesome to make sense of the economic system around them even in the small subfield of their interest.

## **2.2 From Individual to Collective Political Knowledge**

In his lecture Brennan (2016) argued that democracy does not empower the individual, but the collective. I am not intending to open the intrinsic value debates of democracy, however I am going to present arguments in favor of democracy as a superior form of government compared to other

regimes. In case we accept Brennan's position of democracy, it is still among our assignments to defend the democratic arrangement as a form of government that produces decision outcomes that increases public welfare and by a larger extent compared to other types of governments. To put it simply; If the collective of people is empowered to govern themselves within the democratic framework, so, can they?

In her book the *Democratic Reason* Helene Landemore (2012) argues that the superiority of democracy stems from the collective intelligence of people, which cannot be defined as the "sum" or "average" knowledge of the individuals living in the same democratic system. Hence if we want to understand how democracy works, Landemore urges us to move beyond individual knowledge research and explore the epistemic value of collective intelligence. Democratic reason places emphasis on three models of synergy among individuals. Condorcet's jury theorem (JCT), the "miracle of aggregation theorem" and Hong and Page's cognitive diversity model. These building blocks of collective intelligence take the "right" answer as the objective of the knowledge cumulation. Other empirical claims prove that collective knowledge also performs well in predicting outcomes of uncertain events.

The Condorcet's jury theorem claims that a group of decision makers outperform smaller groups of decision makers in finding the "correct" answer in a decision scenario, where the correct answer exists. For example, judicial proceedings are this kind: guilty or not? The theorem holds true if everyone makes their decision independently from each other and they all have a probability of finding the "correct" answer larger than 50 percent. In cases where simple majority vote aggregates the individual "guesses" each extra individual increases the probability to make the "correct" decision. (Austen-Smith and Banks 1996)

The theorem suggests two important conditions for governments. On the one hand the CJT implies that the more people are involved in certain types of decision-making processes the higher the chance to come to the correct conclusion. On the other hand, it signifies the strength of simple majority decision making procedures, which entails the majority decision, but gives little room for (in some cases) faulty minorities to veto decisions.

Another interesting empirical law that shapes modern probability theory is the law of large numbers. This law implies that the average outcome of repeated trials is going to approximate the expected value of the trial as the number of repetition increases (Dekking 2005). This property of aggregating information based on their means offers interesting consequences for social and political life. As the famous example holds: to approximate the weight of a cow only by looking at it the best way to come closest to the real weight is by asking many independent individuals to guess the cow's weight and then calculate the average of the guesses. The intuition behind such empirical phenomena is that the errors (to high guesses and too low guesses) cancel each other out and their average will be close to the real weight of the cow. This phenomenon tells us something about collective intelligence in which the collective is able to come up with the right conclusion about the weight of a cow than some very sophisticated individual, who might have been trained and worked around a dairy farm. Landemore (2012, 146) argues that aggregation can turn imperfect individual guesses into accurate ones on the level of the collective.

In their work *Problem Solving by Heterogeneous Agents* Hong and Page (2001) modelled how groups make decisions about complex problems. The authors investigated what could be the marginal product of labor in problem solving complex activities within the workforce. The author used a model for the human thought process in two steps. In the first step humans look at a given problem and represent it in a way (encoding). In the second step they apply a thumb rule (algorithm) to arrive at a solution to

the problem. Recall the economic voting theories. Voters used heuristics to decide whether the president did a good job in managing the economy. Voters tended to overweight the last year of the term. These voters represented the problem as a comparison of numbers and used the thumb rule: if the last year showed growth compared to other years, then the president did a good job managing the economy. Hong and Page (2001) were able to model problem solving skills of agents and arrived at interesting results. The additional gains from increasing the number of problem solvers arbitrarily affected the problem-solving ability of the group. It was context dependent: the variegation of representations and the diversity of thumbs rules increased problem solving ability of the groups. The results indicate that many problems are solved working in teams and the diversity of the team makes it more capable of solving problems. Open-source software development has been built on this idea. The explosive growth of the sector - as Thakker, et al. (2017) has framed it - isn't scientific proof of such gains in diverse actor problem solving, but an appealing positive case for such phenomena.

These arguments are encouraging about the instrumental values of democracy. The findings of Condorcet, Hong and Page suggest that decisions based on collective intelligence outperform those based on one individual's assessment of a given problem. Collective intelligence seems to perform well in predicting outcomes as well. A famous example for this is the presidential predictor of US stock exchanges. The term was dubbed by Sam Stoval and predictor work like this; If the S&P 500 increases from August until the election in election years, then the incumbent party will be reelected to the White House if it falls, then opposition will form government, the predictor failed only once in 1956 and never since (Wieczner 2020). Landemore (2012) also argues that the tendency for voters to only believe in information that fit their preconceptions of the political arena may be a mistaken strategy for voters as individuals, but it encourages the collective to think about the extreme sides of the problem and that raises collective knowledge.

Therefore, if we have reason to believe that information and knowledge is stored in the collective of people and interaction among those people than there is a reason to believe that the collective of the people has the capacity to govern themselves even when we observe empirically that the “ordinary” or “median” voter is uninformed and misguided.

## 2.3 Towards a Good Representation and Useful Accountability

I have argued above that citizens are able to govern themselves by making better decisions than any other type of government; a government of experts or a benevolent dictator would make. This is a hard defense of the democratic arrangement stems from the works of Condorcet, Hong and Page and many others, summarized, and presented by Helene Landmore (2012). In the center of this reasoning stands the collective intelligence of citizens, which takes the focus off individual shortsightedness and ignorance of the voters. As Landmore (2012) argues to enhance collective intelligence we must cherish diversity and appreciate institutions that help broaden the perspective of the collective. The freedom and development of education, free media, and well-funded cultural institutions: museums, theatres, historical archives should be secured to improve our democracy. However, collective intelligence doesn't mean that citizens cannot fail as a community. Citizens sometimes fail to hold their representatives accountable, and their preferences might not align with their best interest (but it aligns more than the preferences of a benevolent dictator or a committee of experts would). In cases accountability to the citizens is proven to decrease public welfare (Healy and Malhotra, 2013). What can be done of the concept of representation to mitigate such destructive effects of public accountability?

In her book *The Concept of Representation* Hanna Pitkin (1967) presents the paradoxical nature of representation in modern democracies, which is coined by the term *mandate-independence* controversy. This refers to a disagreement about what representation truly means; whether there is a responsibility

of the representative to advance her constituency according to what she perceives to be the best interest of the constituency (independent) or be bound to interpret her constituency's preferences (mandate) (p:41). In Pitkin's conception the balance between the autonomy of the represented and the autonomy of the representative must be maintained, but we should not go to either of the extremes of the *mandate-independence* axis. Representatives are best held accountable if there is a common understanding between the represented and the representative what this nexus means to them.

Maskin and Tirole (2004) have modelled decision making based on econometric principles. The authors assumed that each representative has two objectives. Firstly, they want to hold on to their offices, because it adds to their utility (they have salary and high social esteem) and they are willing to leave a legacy, because they want to be remembered for great things. The paper offers interesting insights in the context-dependence of the optimal form of decision making. However, I am restraining myself from going into detail and only going to use Maskin and Tirole's (2004) basic rationalist utility-based model of representatives. In some decision cases the representative and her constituency prefers the same outcome, these situations are not particularly interesting. The first problem in any decisions where the constituency and the representative have different preferences and the office holding motivation of representatives exceeds the motivation for legacy building public accountability will decrease public welfare. The second problem arises when the representatives are non-congruent with the public welfare. I.e., they don't know what is good for the public or just want something else. If in this case a representative's legacy building motive exceeds the motive for holding office, public accountability should be increased not restricted.

My suggestion is two-pieced. On the one hand communities should decrease the motivation of representatives for holding onto their offices, while they should promote representatives' congruence to public welfare. Reducing motivation for representatives to hold onto their offices is dangerous

terrain. Representatives wish to hold onto their offices for monetary gains and social appreciation. If a community radically decreases either of the two (salary or appreciation) the talented - *ceteris paribus* - may disregard carrier options in the governmental sphere and look for jobs in the market for higher salaries and more appreciation. This creates a vicious cycle in which the talented citizens surrender public offices inducing further social depreciation of holding public offices will follow. Leaving the collective to rely on public officials unsuitable for the job of managing the common interest of the public. Given that we accept that carriers in government and in the market require similar skills and talents. What I propose it not to decrease the motivation to obtain a public office i.e., win an election, but to lower the anti-motivation to lose that public office. Broadening public officials' pensions; an annual entitlement that is a high portion of their salaries as officers could urge public officials to exit politics when they feel that their only motive is to hold onto office for monetary reasons. Fighting corruption is also needed for "useful" accountability. Higher accountability should mean lower corruption, but the causality is also reversed: lower corruption means smaller motivation for public officials to hold onto offices therefore they may be less influenced by what is popular instead of what is right.

My second suggestion would be to increase congruence among officials. I argue that increasing descriptive representation increases congruence of representatives which is crucial in enhancing useful accountability. As Saltzstein (1979) cited Kingsley (1944):

“...the essence of responsibility is psychological. It is to be sought in an identity of aim and point of view, a common background of social prejudice, which leads agents to act as if he were the principal...” (Saltzstein 1979, 467)

According to this conception the composition of public bureaucracy should resemble the composition of society in relation to major social groups. Pitkin (1968) is against descriptive representation, since it weakens evaluation of representatives, because it takes the focus away from

how well they advance the interests of their congruency and focuses on how representatives are similar to whom they represent. However, I argue that descriptive representation is a useful tool in citizens' hands in relation to useful accountability. The question is what normative benchmarks are devised by the public. Of course, how representatives are similar in their outlook to the represented i.e. "how they look like" isn't a strong normative benchmark along which social distinctions are justly made. However, further normative research may provide answers to which social properties should the composition of the representatives resemble from those existing in society; be it class, gender, nationality, first language, territorial demarcations etc.



## Chapter 3 – Political Relevance of Football

Miller (2012) has taken an all-encompassing approach and extended the economic voting theory. Miller argues that voters think about the economy as a system serving their wellbeing. Therefore, when voters think of the economy, they think about more than national or individual income. When voters evaluate the economy, they evaluate whether their individual living conditions have improved or deteriorated. Hence, the utility function of a citizen is not maximized when the national economic output is the greatest. Other factors need to be considered: (in)equality, cleanness, general pride of the citizens and happiness. This complex utility is the basis of voters' evaluation of the government. Miller (2012) names it the Prosperity Model for retrospective voting, in which “voters vote for the government, when they feel happy” Miller, 2012, p:3). The Prosperity model is one way to explain findings of Miller (2012) that claims successes of local sport impact governors' reelection chances in the US.

The focal point of this study is whether success (failure) of the national football team legitimizes (delegitimizes) governments and raises (lowers) approval for the government can be conceptualized as an economic voting phenomenon, with the extension of the Prosperity Model of Miller (2012). In this frame football successes are important for politics since it raises overall satisfaction, overall prosperity of the citizens through national pride, or elevated mood, more “happiness”. In the following chapter I am going to outline, how football became relevant in the Hungarian political life, to what extent do people feel football and sports as a source of national pride and how Orban and Fidesz (incumbents of Hungary) have associated themselves with Hungarian Football, making it a measurement for their own value.

### 3.1 Football as a Politically Relevant Sphere of Hungarian Society

The political and social aspects of Hungarian football make it a prominently fruitful area for scientific research. Firstly, in a historical context we can detect high varying in the international success of the national team accompanied by a rather steady and high level of politicization in almost all regimes of Hungary since the political consolidation of between Austria and Hungary often referred to as the Compromise in 1867. Secondly, in contemporary Hungary high politicization means football itself takes a large share of the public discourse compared to the interest of the public to watch, follow, or attend football matches of the national team or clubs from Hungary. Thirdly, in my view, there is a large partisan divide in the assessment of the efficiency of public resources spent on football, the success of the national team and the rationale of these expenditures. Fourthly, in my view there is a normative divide in Hungarian society about the thematization power of football: for some football attracts too much attention from the public discourse, hence it is harmful for democracy. Others see football as a purpose, an end in itself that constitutes part of the national identity of a strong democratic society. In the following section I am going to present related literature to these political aspects of Hungarian football and present the framework in which conceptualization of such phenomena could be beneficial for further research.

#### 3.1.1 Football in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Hungary

Since its emergence football has played an important part of the political sphere in Hungary and in Europe as well. As Hadas (2000) has paraphrased with football “masses of people became indirectly involved in a symbolic fight for possession of a collective space.” (Hadas 2000, 43). In the author's argument fans not only respect and admire the individual genius of football players and collective skills of the teams, but they identify with them. Therefore, a match between two teams becomes a symbol of a struggle between two social meanings and vice versa becomes a symbol of a struggle of those social groups the teams putatively belong to. Hadas (2000) states that football stadiums are social

spaces where definition and redefinition of group identities can manifest, and it allows connotations and meaning emerge that would be intolerable in other institutions. Szabó (2019) points out that football was never associated with social classes which makes football a symbol of social mobility, where rich and poor both participate.

Before turning to the historical overview of the relationship of Hungarian football and politics, let me present the relevance of football in the political sphere through contemporary examples from around Europe. As Metzger and Özvatan (2020) put it” international *football is a field for national identity performances in which narratives of national belonging are articulated.*” Meshut Özil and Nuri Sahni are two football players born in Germany with Turkish ancestry, the former represents the German national football team, meanwhile the latter played for the Turkish team. Analyzing their cases the authors found that the public discourse rejected the possibility of trans-nationalism with regards to football by frequently demanding the players to express emotional attachment to either of the two countries: Germany or Turkey.

Language of football is spoken by many. Semino and Masci (1996) have pointed out that the usage of football metaphors constituted an important part of populist speeches of Silvio Berlusconi. In his speech on why he entered politics Berlusconi wanted to strengthen his position in the middle by stating:

“So I felt that the match was becoming dangerous, that it was all being played in the penalty areas and that the midfield was sadly empty...we said to one another that we could not leave that vast space free...” (Semino and Masci 1996, 248)

F.C.Barcelona is a treasure of Catalanian culture. Fans of F.C. Barcelona, who agree with secessionist efforts often chant “In! In-de! In-de-pen-den-ci-a” during games at 17minutes 14 seconds referring to the Siege of Barcelona by the Spanish in 1714 (Azzoni 2017).

Since football can define a collective meaning of the nation, it is usually connected to identity and national belonging. These topics are expressive in right-wing politics; hence fans are often banded with the right. Scalia (2009) argues that Italian clubs are the paradise of right-wing culture. Woziak et al. (2020) claims that left-wing culture in Poland clubs are nonexistent.

### 3.1.2 Dualistic Era and Interwar Period

Szabó (2019) claims that in the dualistic era (1867-1918) football has fallen in the boxing-ring of Hungarian-Austrian rivalry. The two nations (along with many more) shared a country in relative peace, but the memories of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 remained as a social tension. Szabó (2019) analyzed contemporary magazine articles of the dualistic era and found that journalists have connected successes of football with national identity and were commenting on them using military terms: bravely fighting boys, hussar attack and combat actions. Victories were framed as the consequence of the national genius. In this era two important clubs were formed: MTK formed by downtown Jews of Budapest and FTC, which was linked to the lower middle-class workers of German and Hungarian origin (Hadas, 2000). At the dawn of Hungarian club football in the 1890's social tensions were already rooted in the rivalry of the two earliest (and strongest) teams.

During the interwar era football transformed but kept its political relevance. As Szabó (2019) showed, the Trianon peace treaty forbade developments of the army and militarization of Hungarian society. As a response, sport education and professional sport - with special attention to football - became the unofficial military preparation of Hungarian youth for future revisionist plans. In 1922 a defeat against the Austrian team by one goal was framed as a catastrophe by the contemporary press (Szabó 2019, 133). Italy won the 1934 and 1938 football world cup, in the latter Hungary came second. These results were often exploited to promote the superiority of fascism by then extreme right-wing prime minister Gyula Gömbös (Szabó 2019, 134).

### 3.1.3 Legitimizing power of Football in the Communist Era

Mátyás Rákosi, the totalitarian leader of Hungary between 1947 and 1956 used football to legitimize his de facto power and present that the achievements of socialism outgrew those of the democratic west. The Golden Team (the Mighty Magyars) dominated international football between 1950 and 1956. The successes of the national team put it to the front of communist propaganda. After defeating the English team twice in 1953 for 3:6 and 7:1 respectively the whole communist block celebrated the team. As Szabó (2019, 140 ) put it:

“ In Hungary and within the socialist bloc the event was accepted as the victory of the Soviet system.”

However, relying on international football successes as a legitimizer was supposedly dangerous for the communist party. Szabó (2019, 140-141) notes that:

“...after losing the World Championship in 1954 [...] fans turned against the political power. The three day long public disturbance was the first mass demonstration against the Rakosi regime. At first the authorities did not dare to intervene openly, but then the police acted ruthlessly. It was believed that the ‘soccer revolution’ was a prelude to 1956...”

However, domestic football - just like other subsystems of the society - was grossly penetrated by the communist system and ideology. Clubs were stripped from their identity: their colors and symbols were altered, their leadership was changed to party cadres, their finances were taken away and they were subordinated to certain ministries or trade unions. (Hadas and Karády 1995). By then the most right-wing club was considered to be FTC. Being a fan meant a silent residence against the communist rule (Szabó, 2019).

After the 1956 revolution János Kádár slowly built a new form of communist rule: a soft dictatorship, in which football’s legitimizing force became obsolete. Kádár also made gestures to clubs. Their identity was restored and pressure on putative right-wing teams shrunk. FTC won the championship in 1963, which generated a saying in the fans “*bajnok lett a Ferencváros, fasza gyerek Kádár*

*János*”, which means: FTC is the champion, Janos Kadar is a cool guy” (Hadas and Karády 1995, 104).

As outlined above football carried huge political charges from the beginning of its existence in Hungary. Now we may turn to the contemporary relevance of football in the political sphere.

### 3.1.4 After the Regime Change

Sports (and among them football) are important for contemporary Hungarian society. Örkény (2005) directed research under the umbrella of the International Social Survey Program and found that football was a main source of national pride for Hungarians in 1995 and 2003. In both rounds more than 1000 respondents were asked “how proud are you of your country about [...]” Scientific advancements and the way Hungary's democracy works for example came later in the list after football. The table below represents sources of national pride in Hungary and its change from 1995 to 2003.

	1995	2003
Way democracy works	20	37
International political infl.	18	33
Economic achievements	9	39
Social security system	7	19
Scientific achievements	78	89
Achievements in sports	87	94
Arts	89	94
Army	28	28
History	72	82
Fair and equal treatment	44	44

Table 1. Sources of National Pride, Source: Örkény (2005, 34)

During the year of the regime change football was not on the top priorities of the political agenda, and as Enyedi and Tóka (2007) have noted new parties lacked agents to be seated in different positions. However, as the authors have pointed out after FIDESZ first took power in 1998 party soldiers were delegated to non-partisan posts including the leadership of football clubs.

Since Orban's party FIDESZ has won supermajority in parliament at the 2010 general elections by receiving 52 percent of the total votes, right wing policies gained momentum in Hungary. New policies emerged that exploit football as a tool for reinventing the Hungarian national identity. The new identity should resemble that of the interwar period of ethno-nationalism and irredentism: a common identity of Christianity, a common understanding of the Hungarian past as the first defense line of Europe against the Ottoman Empire and a common perception of togetherness of all Magyars in or outside Hungary. Football is particularly useful in case of the latter. The Orban government hence spends a significant number of public resources on professional football abroad, where Hungarian minorities live. (Martin and Hernandez 2021)

By analyzing the content of a large corpus of text published in Academic journals and in the Hungarian media Molnar and Whigham (2019) found that Orbán reinvents Hungarian national identity through the institutions of Football, that has the capacity to reach over current borders of Hungary to Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries. Football was used as a vehicle during Orban's first term in government between 1998 and 2002, but after 2010 this exploitation of football became more intense in the effort to connect minorities and the "mother-country". As the authors put it:

"Orbán envisions the Hungarian nation in its pre-Trianon form with all the lost territories (re)attached. He adopts an irredentist stance on the matter to re-connect Magyars inside and outside of Hungary and football, in particular, has become an institute through which all Magyars may be (re)united." (Molnar and Whigham 2019, 142)

According to Csaba Molnár (2017), a Hungarian opposition MP of the European Parliament €540 million public funding was poured into football between 2011 and 2017.

Oroszi and Sipos (2018) investigative journalists traced public spending and estimated that Orban’s government spent €74 million on sport facilities outside of Hungarian borders between 2013 and 2018. The table below from Martin and Hernandez (2021) represent state-aided clubs in neighboring countries to Hungary, where a significant Hungarian minority lived in 2018.

Country	Hungarian Population	Club	Town	Owner	Funding (USD) (2018)
Romania	6.5 %	Sepesi OSK	Sfantu Gheroge	László Diószegi	6.24 million
Romania	6.5 %	FK Miercurea	Miercurea Ciuc	Zoltán Szondy	5.95 million
Serbia	3.9 %	TSK Backa Topola	Backa Topola	Szabolcs Palágyi	14 million
Slovakia	8.5 %	FC DAC	Dunajska Streda	Tibor Végh	6.55 million
Slovakia	8.5 %	KFC Komarno	Komarno	Juraj Baráth	6 million
Slovakia	8.5 %	MSK Rimivska S.	Rimavska Sobota	Stefán Szántó	4.68 million
Ukraine	0.3 %	FK Munkacs	Munkachevo	NA	8.3 million
Croatia	0.3 %	NS Osijek	Osijek	Lőrinc Mészáros	6.24 million
Slovenia	0.3%	Nafta 1903	Lendava	Dejan Doncic	4.1 million

Table 2: Football teams of Hungarian minorities in the ancient territory of greater Hungary.

Source: Martin and Hernandez (2021, 336)

As the historical overview suggests football was - and still is - a highly politicized sphere of public life in Hungary. Governments used its results and institutions as tools to legitimize their power and to modulate the national identity and sense of national belonging and togetherness. As the relevant



literature suggests; success (failure) of the national football team legitimizes (delegitimizes) governments and raises (lowers) approval for the government.

# Chapter 4 - Assumption, Mechanism and Methods

The goal of this project is to assess whether voters condition their evaluation of the government as a function of information on the national football team. Specifically, I predict that voters will react to news about how the national team is faring - with more positive (negative) news about the national football team leading to higher (worse) evaluation of their government. I also analyze the possible mechanism. What could drive such conditioning of government approval?

Existing literature suggests that

- part of the electorate might perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation. Therefore, conditioning the evaluation of the government on information is about holding the government accountable retrospectively.
- Other parts of the electorate do not perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation, but football induces mood changes of the electorate that are misattributed to the governments.

The picture is also blurred by

- the fact that voters (2) surrender to heuristics; intellectual shortcuts when facing complex problems (Kahneman and Tversky 1974),
- and that voters tend to attribute positive events into the responsibility of the internal groups and attribute negative events to the out-group. (Taylor and Doria 1981, Rudolph 2006, Healy and Malhotra 2013).

## 4.1 Mechanisms

### 4.1.1 Mechanism: responsibility attribution

H1: In case of positive (negative) information about football voters attribute responsibility to the government for the positive (negative) information, hence government approval will rise (decrease).

#### 4.1.2 Mechanism: group serving biases

H2: Incumbent party supporters attribute responsibility for the government more (less) when confronted with positive (negative) information about football compared to opposition party affiliates, hence their government approval will rise more (decrease less) than opposition party affiliates’.

#### 4.1.3 Mechanism: Use of Heuristics Approximated by Political knowledge (signal of competence)

H3: Politically sophisticated (measured by education and interest in politics) attribute responsibility for the government less when confronted with positive or negative information about football compared to the less sophisticated, hence their government approval will vary less.

#### 4.1.4 Mechanism: Mood change

H4: In case of positive information about football voters will experience an elevation in their mood, which is misattributed to the government and hence raises government approval.

## 4.2 Logic of Survey Experiment

John Stuart Mill the well-known 19th century philosopher offered some guidelines to detect causal relationships between two phenomena. Among many associations only some are causal, but as Mill suggested a causal relationship exists if three circumstances hold. Firstly, the suspected cause should precede the suspected outcome. have argued to decide something is in a causal relationship. Secondly, the outcome must be related to the effect. And thirdly, we must rule out alternative explanations of the variation in the outcome. As Shadish (2002) has argued, experiments are designed for the same reasons; to link a recurring effect to an outcome and rule out alternative explanations for change in the outcome.

$$\tau = E[Y_1 - Y_0 | T = 1] + E[Y_0 | T = 1] - E[Y_0 | T = 0]$$

The formula above is the formal expression of contrafactual analysis, where  $\tau = E[Y_1 - Y_0 | T = 1]$  represents the average treatment effect. The average difference in the expected value of the treated and not treated when the treatment is present. And  $E[Y_0 | T = 1] - E[Y_0 | T = 0]$  is the difference between treated and control in the absence of treatment, the selection bias. We need a comparison such that  $E[Y(0) | T = 1] - E[Y(0) | T = 0] = 0$  holds. We achieve that by assigning units of observations to the treatment and control groups by the same probability from a given sample. Most recently Simonovits et. al. (2021) have presented a strong case for eliminating selection bias, through assigning unit of observations to treatment and control groups. The authors have analyzed discrimination of Hungarian municipalities against Roma minorities. In their experiment municipalities were contacted in a randomized fashion by Roma and non-Roma avatars created by the authors.

### 4.3 Data Collection

The collection of the data has been done in 3 waves. The first wave of questionnaire has been distributed and was answered by respondents between late March 2010 until the first days of April 2021. The second wave was conducted between late April 2021 until the first week of May 2021. The first two waves have been conducted online in an online survey format as part of a larger study directed by Jennifer L McCoy PhD. Respondents were recruited by the company Kutatócentrum. The third wave of data collection was conducted by Zavecz Research Institute in personal interview format in the second half of August 2021. All three waves of data collection were designed based on results from previous waves and smaller pilot study results. Broadly speaking the three waves represent three

different research designs. The first wave involves the most complex approach and the last represents the simplest.

### 4.3.1 Design of the First Wave

#### Units

The first wave of the study involved 2163 respondents receiving the treatment and answering questions of the questionnaire. The survey deployed a between-subject design. The sample supposed to be representative of the Hungarian population conditioned gender, education, settlement type, income, and region, see further in Representativity section.

#### Treatment

The survey incorporated four different treatments. Each was a short text about the conditions of the Hungarian National Football Team. Two of the short texts presented the team in a positive way, giving positive information about the team and its future. Two short texts have painted a gloomy picture and provided negative information. Positive and negative news were intersected by government salience. Two texts argued that the government was salient in the current state of the Hungarian National Football Team - either it was portrayed as negative or positive. Two other texts argued that the government wasn't salient in the way the National Football Team recently fared. Allocation of respondents into different treatment groups was based on a stratified random selection process. Respondents were divided in subgroups conditioned on their party preference. The probability of receiving a given treatment was equal for all respondents, meanwhile in each treatment group the proportion of anti- and pro-government respondents was equivalent. As Parsons (2017) argues, stratified sampling increases precision of measurement, if between strata variance is high. Suspectedly, government evaluation has a high variance between respondent strata with different party preference

#### **Short Information on Football:**

Treatment 1: Positive news, high government salience

***After 30 years of failure, the rebuilt Hungarian football managed to improve***

*Hungary last qualified for an international men's football tournament in 1986, but recently it seems that hope has come alive. Our team performed excellently at the 2016 European Championships: they advanced from their group as group leaders; defeating the future champion: Portugal. Supporting the education of the youth, the development of the stadiums and raising the salary level of the Hungarian Football Championship may be the reason why the national team has reached this far in the 2016 tournament, the experts believe.*

Treatment 2: Positive news, no government salience

***After 30 years of failure, the rebuilt Hungarian football managed to improve***

*Hungary last qualified for an international men's football tournament in 1986, but recently it seems that hope has come alive. Our team performed excellently at the 2016 European Championships: they advanced from their group as group leaders; defeating the future champion: Portugal. In the next tournament, the Hungarian national team will be led by the young Dominik Szoboszlai, who was chosen as the best player in the Austrian Bundesliga, and according to goal.com, he is the 21st most talented young man in the world.*

Treatment 3: Negative news, high government salience

***The opportunities are there, but the successes are not stable***

*The Hungarian national football teams have achieved some great success recently, but the stable improvement is not visible in the team. Currently, the Hungarian national team is ranked 51st in the FIFA world rankings. The ranking does not count as upscale: since FIFA publishes such data, only under the leadership of János Csank and Lothar Matthaus have the boys been in a lower position. Experts say government-inflated football player salaries will not improve the quality of the domestic league, and newly built stadiums are underused.*

Treatment 4: Negative news, no government salience

***Successes are yet to come***

*A couple of Hungarian football teams have achieved great success recently, but the stable improvement is not visible in the team. Currently, the Hungarian national team is ranked 51st in the FIFA world rankings. The ranking does not count as upscale: since FIFA publishes such data, only under the leadership of János Csank and Lothar Matthaus have the boys been in a lower position. Stability is not yet in the team, individual flashes and not organized football dominate. The team hasn't teamed up yet.*

### Observations on Units

Each respondent received a treatment and was asked the research related questions after receiving the treatment. The following variables were manipulated; the extent to which the respondent thinks the government is responsible for the way football fares in Hungary. The opinion of the respondent on how they think football fared. Government approval. All variables were measured on a scale from 1 to 4. See Appendix 3.

### Setting

The setting was an online survey format. In the beginning of the survey the participant signed a consent form. The questions were raised in parallel with questions from other surveys. The whole survey took about an hour for the average respondent to fill. My questions consumed about 5 minutes of the total time.

## 4.3.2 Design of the Second Wave

### Units

The second wave of the study involved 1000 respondents among which 793 were able to receive the treatment and others left the questionnaire too early. The measurement strategy deployed a within-subject design. The sample supposed to be representative of the Hungarian population conditioned gender, education, settlement type, income, and region, see further in Representativity section.

### Treatment

The treatments have been simplified to reduce ambiguity of the research design, which partly stemmed from the four different treatments. In the second wave the variety of treatments was reduced to two different treatments. Respondents were allocated to treatment groups based on a stratified random sampling method stratified on party preference (incumbent and opposition). One treatment

was a short positive information about the current state of the Hungarian Football team. The other treatment was a short negative information about the state of the Hungarian National Football team.

### **Short information about Football**

#### **Treatment 1: Short, positive information about football**

##### ***After 30 years of failure, the rebuilt Hungarian football managed to improve***

*Hungary last qualified for an international men's football tournament in 1986, but recently it seems that hope has come alive. Our team performed excellently at the 2016 European Championships: they advanced from their group as group leaders; defeating the future champion: Portugal. In the 2016 season, we fought our way to 18th place in the FIFA World Rankings, which is our most distinguished ranking since the start of the rankings. In the next tournament, the Hungarian national team will be managed by the young Dominik Szoboszlai, who was chosen as the best player of the Austrian Bundesliga. According to goal.com, Szoboszlai was the 21st most talented young man in the world, while Péter Gulács, the national team, was also the best goalkeeper of the German Bundesliga in the 2020 season.*

#### **Treatment 2: Short, negative information about Football**

##### ***Successes are yet to come***

*The Hungarian national football team has achieved great success recently, but the stable improvement is not visible on the team. Currently, the Hungarian national team is ranked 51st in the FIFA world rankings. The ranking does not count as upscale: since FIFA publishes such data, only under the leadership of János Csank and Lothar Matthaus have the boys been in a lower position. Stability is not yet in the team, individual flashes and not organized football dominate. The pressure and failures are hard for the players to bear, which is also underscored by the fact that we have rarely managed to turn over and win our matches at a disadvantage in recent years, experts believe. The team hasn't teamed up yet.*

#### **Observations on Units**

The second wave design leverages a pre-and posttreatment measurement of government evaluation as it is advised by Clifford et al. (2020) to increase precision of measurement and without introducing extra bias. Clifford et al (2020) argue that raising the same questions to the respondent before and after they received the treatment introduces bias. This extra bias stems from the respondents' inclination to be consistent with their past selves. However, by analyzing the outcomes of six different survey designs the authors have shown that within-subject, pre-and post-treatment designs introduce a small amount of data but improves precision. Respondents usually don't remember



that they were asked already about something, which relaxed the consistency pressure. To increase precision the research design contained before and after measures of three items each about the evaluation of the government. The questions were designed to mean similar things. The questions were: *How satisfied are you with the government? How do you evaluate the government? To what extent do you agree with the decisions of the government in general?* See Appendix 4. The survey contained demographic features of respondents: age, education, and gender. Party preferences were also surveyed.

#### Setting

The setting was an online survey format. In the beginning of the survey the participant signed a consent form. The questions of this research were raised in parallel with questions from other surveys related to another research. The whole survey took about an hour for the average respondent to fill. My questions consumed about 8 minutes of the total time.

#### 4.3.3 Internal Validity in the Second Wave

The questionnaire of the wave was designed to run along other research projects in the same survey. However, in some respects it has failed to do so. The following trade-off between internal validity and generalizability have arisen. Measuring outcome close after the treatment may overestimate a non-lasting effect size. However, placing the measurement further apart means incorporating the effect of questions from other researchers into the measurement of the outcome variable. Within-subject measurements also make the design more vulnerable to such internal validity issues.

The following questions were raised in the questionnaire between my pre- and post-treatment measurements: questions about the role of the government in redistribution and questions about political media. My argument is that my treatment effect has been overpowered by other topics in the long questionnaire. Also, the questionnaire contained questions about Gyorgy Soros (highly politicized

figure in Hungary) Covid, the Holocaust. This introduced noise in my measurements and hence the second wave of observations produced insignificant and unrelated data.

The results from the second wave of observations offered little room for analysis. The design and sample size of the questionnaire undermined statistical analysis. Main effect size of the treatments was much smaller than errors arising from the sample size. I have found no statistical association between government approval and treatment type: positive or negative short information about football. Neither was I able to show association between party preference and responsibility attribution. Education levels weren't significantly associated with any variables of interest.

#### 4.3.4 Design of Third Wave

##### Units

The third wave of the study involved 1000 respondents and was conducted in person. The measurement strategy deployed a between-subjects design. The sample supposed to be representative of the Hungarian population conditioned gender, settlement type, income and region, see further in Representativity section.

##### Treatment

Treatment of the third wave was one short piece about the successes of the Hungarian national team. The story was positive and did not mention government salience in football. The control group received a question about how often they visit the matches of the Hungarian soccer team, which in my understanding is a neutral mentioning of football and a feasible placebo. Negative information wasn't provided for the respondents due to budgetary reasons.

Short information about football

The treatment:

*Hungary last qualified for an international men's football tournament in 1986, but recently it seems that hope has come alive. Our team performed excellently at the 2016 European Championships: they advanced from their group as group leaders; defeating the future champion: Portugal. In the 2016 season, we fought our way to 18th place in the FIFA World Rankings, which is our most distinguished ranking since the start of the rankings. We could not proceed from our group on this year's EC, but we played a draw against the world champion France, and a strong German national team. We scored a total of 3 goals: against world champions Attila Fiola, the player of Febérvár scored. András Schäfer and Ádám Szalai have pulled off goals against the Germans.*

Control:

*How often do you watch the Hungarian National Football National Team's matches?*

*(Always, usually, sometimes, never)*

Observation on Units

After the treatment respondents were asked to evaluate the government based on three questions all measuring government approval on a scale of one-to-five. The three-question average was used later in the analysis to increase precision of measurement. Questions followed from other studies. And later respondents were asked to answer three questions about their mood. They had to indicate to what extent they felt proud, strong, or enthusiastic. Measuring mood was designed based on the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988). See Appendix 5. Political party preferences, age, gender, and education of the respondents were also recorded.

Setting

The recording of the responses was carried out by Zavecz Research, an acknowledged polling firm in Hungary. The questions and treatments were read out to the participants in person, which increased the treatment effect, supposedly by lowering the cost of receiving the treatment (reading costs).

## 4.5 Representativity

The sampling of the three waves were done by public opinion polling institutions. The firms aim to reach representativity based on demographic variables. Zavecz claims that their polls precisely represent the society based on gender, age, education level and on region of residence (Zavecz

Research, 2021). Similarly, KutatóCentrum claims to be nationally representative based on education level, gender, settlement type, age, gender and region (researchcenter.hu, 2021). However, these factors might not be important from the viewpoint of this research.

The three different waves represent three different sample sizes. The question that arises is “in what way do these samples represent Hungarian society?” As Rudas (2006) argues, instead of looking at representativity researchers should defend their result by providing probabilistic statements about the sample size and possible related error of results. In Rudas' (2006) argument the question “Is this representative” depends on the outcome variables and hence is unanswerable without exogenic data. The first wave consists of roughly 2000 answers, the second is made up of 500 and the third wave has 1000 responses. So how do these samples perform in relation to the errors they produce? As Rudas (2006) presents in the case of a sample of 500 respondents, 95 percent of the samples drawn from the population (in this case 500 random citizens drawn from the Hungarian population) will measure results within a 3,1 percent interval around the estimate. Given that the researchers want to be sure that they have only a five percent chance of being wrong, the 3,1 percent interval means that an estimate of an effect of a variable on another, assumed to be less than 3,1 percent, will be undetectable. With the same conditions a sample of 1000 respondents can measure an effect assumed to be larger than 2,9 percent. A sample of 2000 can detect an effect larger than 2,4 percent. Error terms are also associated with the a priori assumption about the frequency of the observation. For further details consult the table from Rudas (2006) in Appendix 2.

## Chapter 5 - Analysis and Result

To some extent voters spoil accountability. Part of the electorate might perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation. Therefore, conditioning the evaluation of the government on information is about holding the government accountable retrospectively (Miller, 2012). Other parts of the electorate do not perceive football as a legitimate basis for government evaluation, but football induces mood changes of the electorate that are misattributed to the governments (Bower 1981, Schwartz and Clore 1983). These mistakes by the voters happen parallel to each other. Every event that could serve as - a legitimate or not, but - basis for government evaluation triggers different approaches from different parts of the electorate. Some might experience a mood change of the event and misattribute it to the government. Others might look back retrospectively on the most recent event and calculate their economic losses or gains exclusively from that event and use those calculations to make judgements of the performance of the government.

Analyzing the above-mentioned mechanism of accountability is also rendered more difficult due to the fact the citizens find intellectual shortcuts when facing difficult problems (Kahneman and Tversky 1974) and because (3) they tend to attribute positive events into the responsibility of the internal groups and attribute negative events to the out-group (Taylor and Doria 1981, Rudolph 2006, Healy and Malhotra 2013).

### 5.1 Responsibility Attribution

The first hypothesis of this study was that: In case of positive (negative) information about football voters attribute responsibility to the government for the positive (negative) information, hence government approval will rise (decrease).

As results show respondents attribute responsibility to the government with high variance. The following question was raised to the respondents:

*What role do you think the current government has in the way the national team has performed over the past few years?* Possible answers were (4 points) *the government played a huge role*, (3 points) *the government played a rather big role*, (2point) *the government played a small role*, (1 point) *the government played no role at all... in the way the national team has performed over the past few years*.

The average of the respondents has fallen in the middle; between a small role of the government and a rather big role. The average point - coded as indicated above - was 2.4 points. The dispersion of the result was large; 40 percent of respondents placed themselves on the two extremes of the scale. A quarter of the respondents had the opinion that the government had no role at all in the way the national team has performed over the past few years, meanwhile almost a fifth of respondents believed that the government played a huge role in it.

The findings underline the argument that parts of the electorate perceive subsystems of the society as independent from the government, others think they are closely linked. Therefore, there are differing opinions on whether in our example - football - forms a legitimate basis for government evaluation.

## **5.2 Group serving biases in Responsibility Attribution**

The second hypothesis of this study is that, incumbent party supporters attribute responsibility for the government more (less) when confronted with positive (negative) information about football compared to opposition party affiliates, hence their government approval will rise more (decrease less) than opposition party affiliates'.

This is a direct formulation of Rudolph's (2006) finding of group-serving biases in responsibility allocation. Results of this survey confirm the finding of Roberts. Supporters of the incumbent party attributed positive information about football to a larger extent than they attributed negative news.

Meanwhile the relationship among opposition supporters was reversed. The table below represents the opposition and incumbent supporters (without undecided) responsibility attribution habits. Attribution is conditioned on negative and positive news and party affiliation.

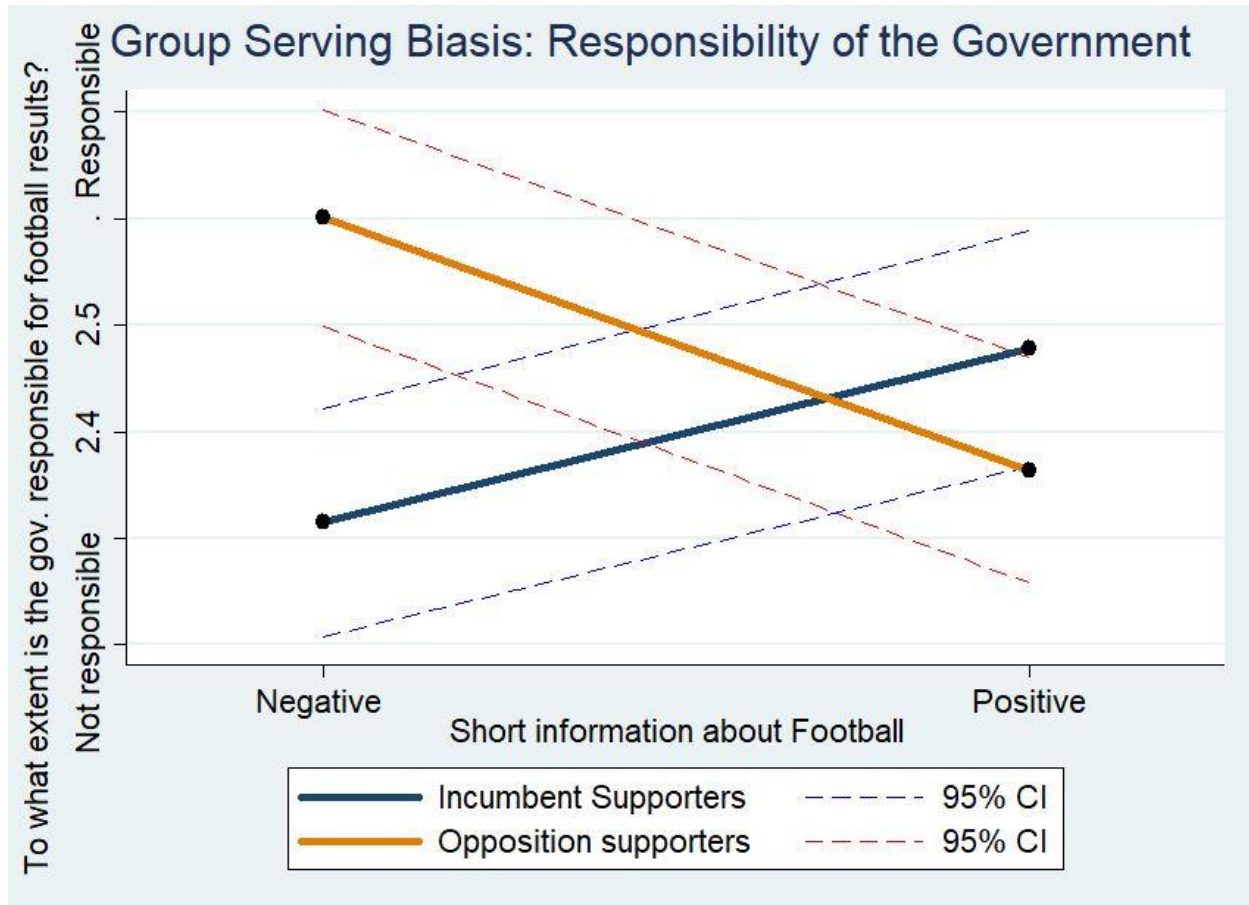


Figure 1: Group Serving Biases source: Own figure

As the table above tells, incumbent supporters attributed responsibility to the government when met with positive news ( $M = 2.48$   $SD = 0.92$ ) about football 0.16 points more compared to the scenario when confronted with negative news ( $M = 2.31$   $SD = 0.88$ ) measured on a 1 to 4 scale  $t(5331) = 2.1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This difference between treatment groups corresponds to an 8 percentage point change.

Opposition supporters score higher on average than incumbent supporters by attributing responsibility for football news to the government: 2.45 on a scale from 1 to 4. The difference of

scores between treatment groups within opposition supporters was 0.24 points which corresponds to a large, 8 percentage points difference. Opposition supporters confronted with positive news ( $M = 2.36$   $SD = 1.12$ ) about football tended to attribute the responsibility for it to the government to a lesser extent, compared to when they received negative news ( $M = 2.6$   $SD = 1.1$ )  $t(888) = 3.16, p < 0.05$ .

### 5.3 Government Approval in First Wave

I have analyzed how the main effect works out: how positive news about football relates to government evaluation compared to receiving negative news about football. The results show that those who received positive information about football ( $M = 1.94$   $SD = 1$ ) compared to those respondents, who received negative information ( $M = 1.86$   $SD = 1$ ) tended to report higher governmental approval  $t(2101) = 1.7, p < 0.1$ . However, the small effect size resulted in insignificant results when interactions and categorical associations were tested. The table below represents government approval scores conditioned on treatments (positive and negative news).



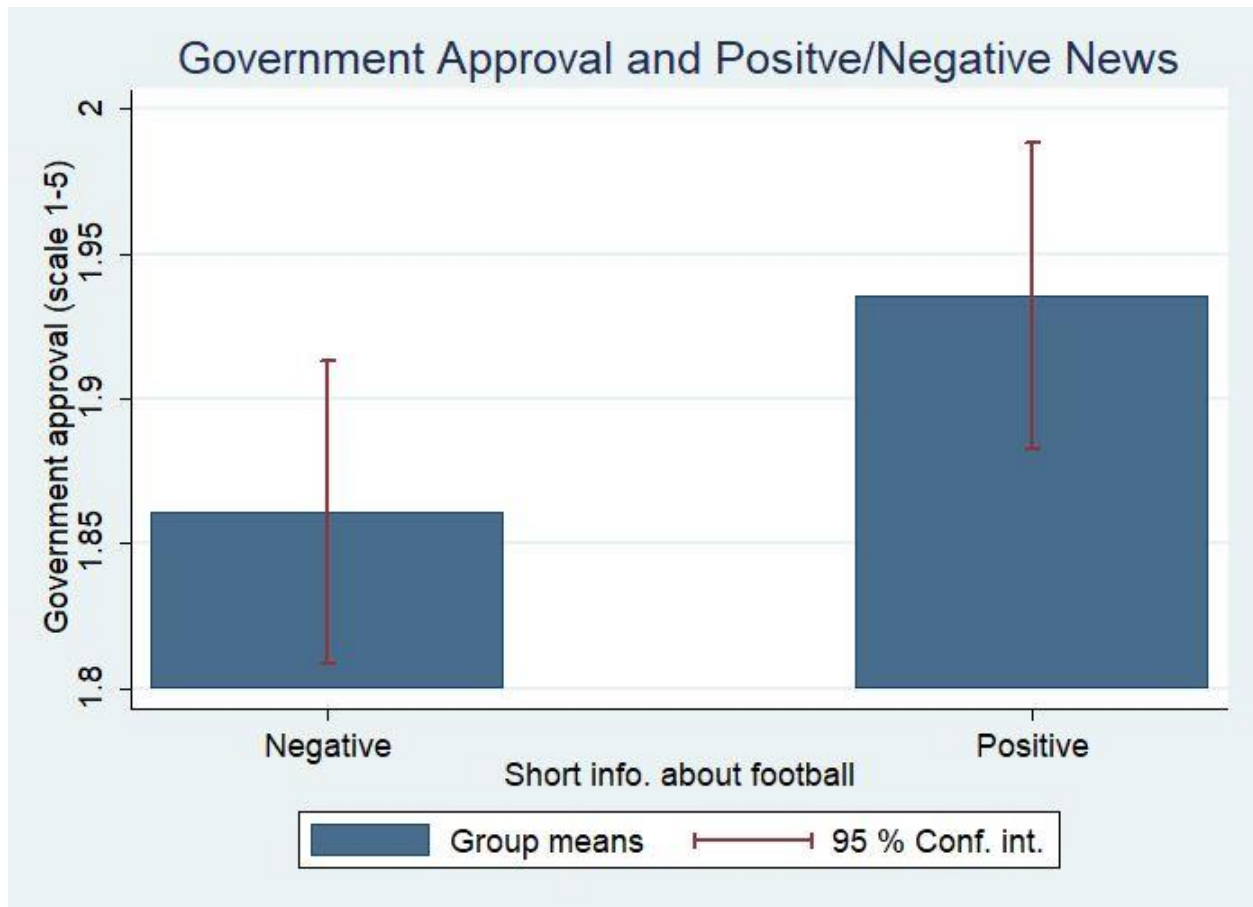


Figure 2: Government Approval and Positive/Negative News source: own figure

The first that results show is that government approval is low: 1.9 measured on a scale from 1 to 4. The difference between the two treatment groups' averages is 0.07, which substantially corresponds to a 2.3 percentage point difference in government evaluation. However, these results are less than robust and are substantially unimportant. Men respondents tend to respond to the treatment more intensively compared to women. Difference between respondents receiving positive news ( $M = 1.96$   $SD = 1.04$ ) and negative news ( $M = 1.82$   $SD = 1.02$ ) treatment groups average among men is 0.14 which corresponds to a 4,6 percent points difference and  $t(993) = 2.13, p < 0.05$ . Women on the other hand tend to care less and show no difference in government approval between treatment groups.

## 5.4 Education and Government Evaluation

Education levels have shown an interesting association with government approval and responsibility attribution when combined with positive and negative short information about football. The more educated the respondents were the more likely that the treatment affected their governmental approval. Firstly, running a simple analysis of variance I have detected that variance between educational groups' responsibility attribution was 2,6 times of those within the groups. The least likely group to attribute responsibility to the government for football was made up of those educated in secondary education. The most likely were those who had a college degree BA or MA. Comparing the two groups I have shown that people with college degrees tended to attribute responsibility to the government by 0.11 points more than those with secondary education, which is a significant result on a 95 percent confidence interval. However, the design of the survey may contribute to this effect. The setting of the survey was online, and the short information was read by the respondents. A case can be made that the more educated read with attentive care since their main source of communication is mostly written meanwhile respondents from other groups may have only skimmed through the text. Also, respondents holding college degrees were more prone to change their government approval conditioned on their treatment. Different treatment groups (positive and negative news about football) of respondents from primer and secondary education did not differ significantly in their government approval scores. However, respondents with college degrees approved the government for 1.9 points when confronted with positive news and 1.75 points when confronted with negative, which difference is significant on a 90 percent confidence interval. This experimental setting therefore hindered me from concluding about the educational effect in explaining

differences in responsibility attribution and government evaluation, since the treatment might have had heterogeneous effects on respondents with multiple educational backgrounds.

## 5.5 Government Approval and Mood in the Third Wave

The third wave of the study included 1000 respondents. I have adjusted observation techniques to further strengthen and refine measurement of outcome variables and variables of interest. I have measured government approval by asking three similar questions about the government and averaged the answers given (each on a scale from 1-5). This approach enabled me to produce a (rather) continuous scaled variable of government approval. The table below represents the frequency of each mean values of government approval of the third wave of the survey.

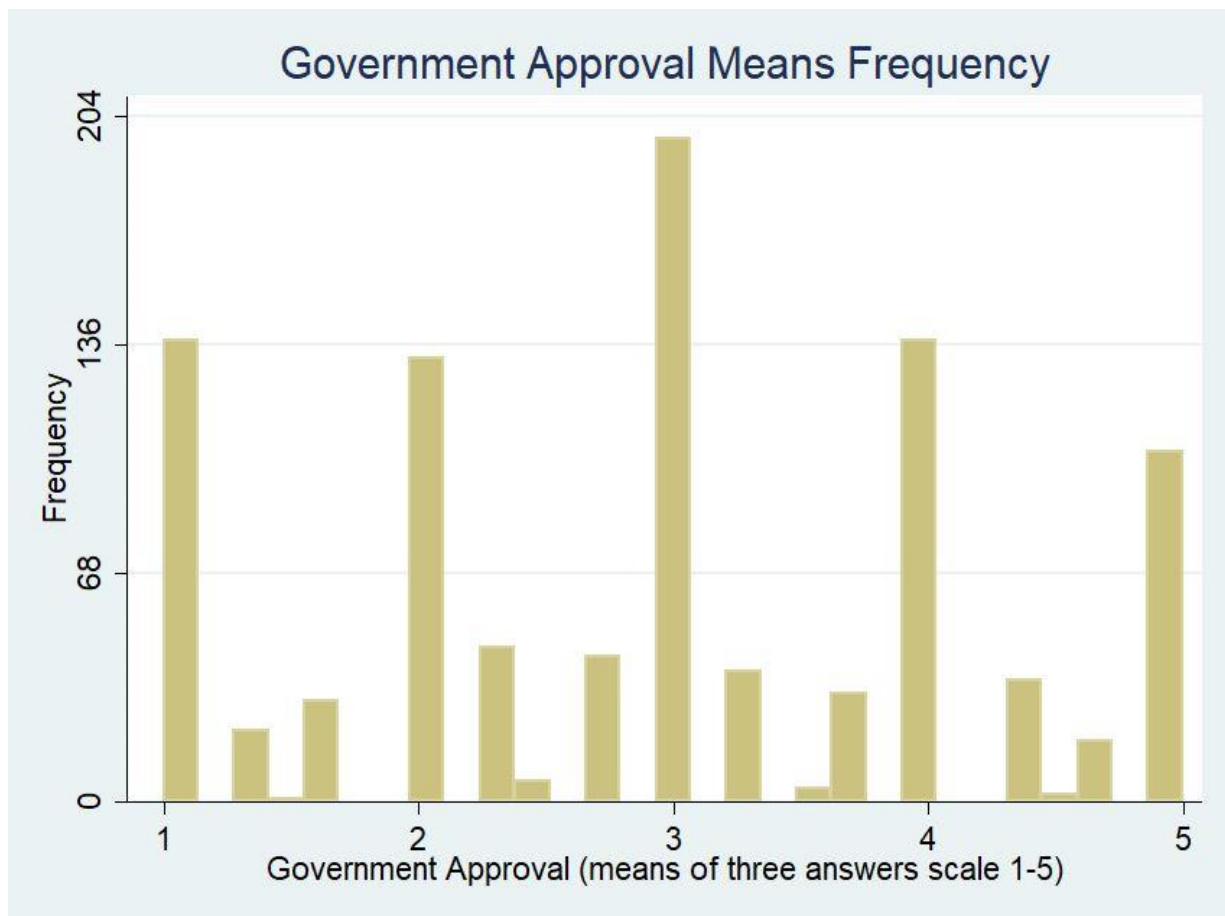


Figure 3: Government Approval Means Frequency, source: own figure

Most of the respondents gave the same answers to all three questions, this within subjectivity of the variable explains why the means are not centered around the mean (3) following a normal distribution. Public opinion about the government was highly polarized: a quarter of the respondents evaluated only on the extremes: give only 1 or 5 points to all three questions.

Measuring mood of the respondents I have applied three questions from the PANAS module (Watson et al. 1988). All three are positive affections: being strong, proud, and enthusiastic. The average of the three measures yields a (positive) mood variable. The frequency of values for mood is shown in the table below:

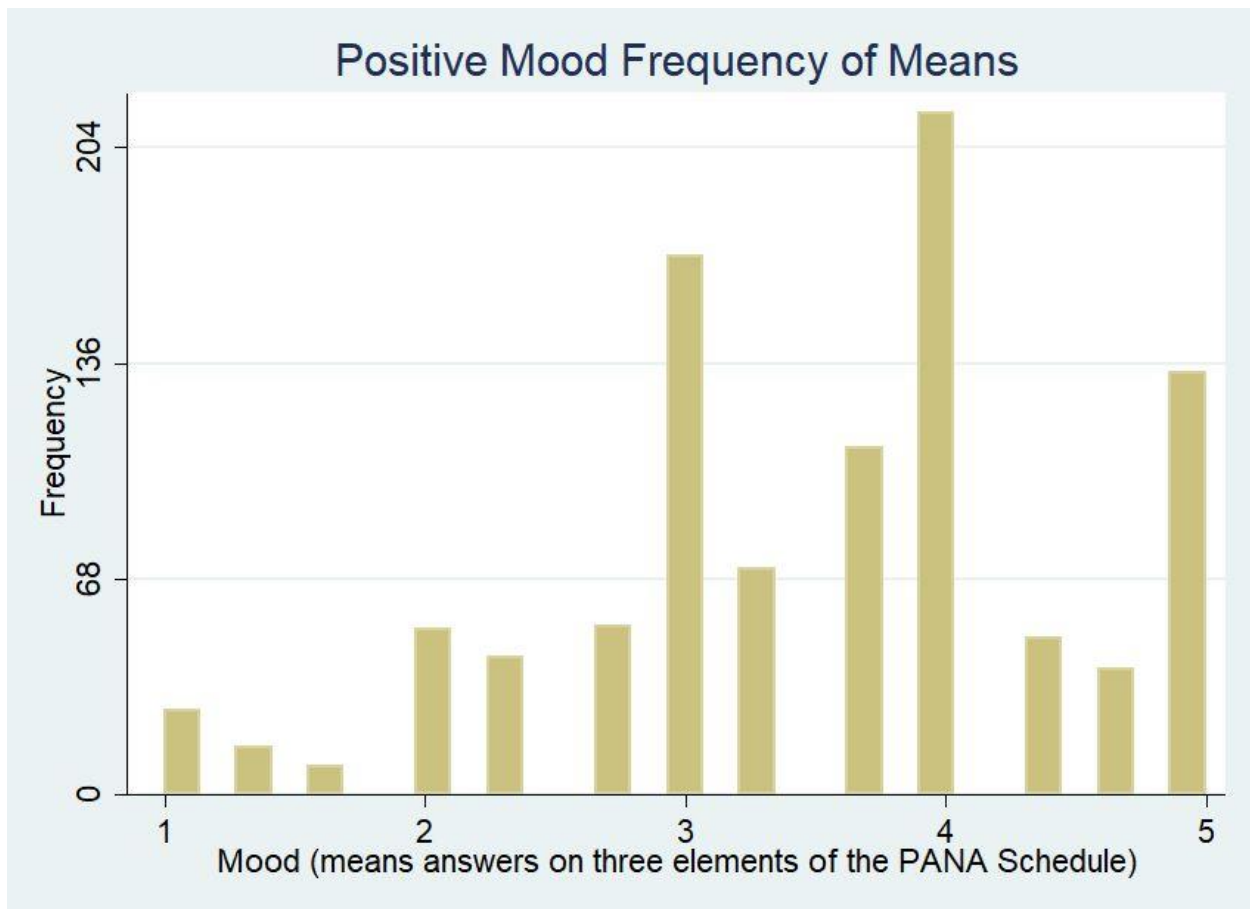


Figure 4: Positive Mood Frequency of Means, source: own figure

The sample of 1000 respondents were allocated randomly to control and treatment groups. Online surveys are hard to check whether the filling (and reading the treatment) was done with attention and care by the respondent. I have changed the data collection method in the third wave from online surveys to in-person interviews. The control group received a question about how often the respondent visits football matches. Treatment was a short and positive piece of information about how the Hungarian football club fared recently. Since allocation to either control or treatment was based on simple random sampling, I tabulated the two samples to check if by certain characteristics respondents are overrepresented in either treatment groups. The results are outlined below in the following table:

Proportion of...	Treatment group (499)	Control group (501)
Fidesz supporters	34%	36%
Resp. with college degree	18%	18%
Of female resp.	52%	53%
Resp. between 18 and 39	37%	37%
High income resp.	14%	13%
Resp. from small towns	30%	30%

Table 3: Balance of Treatment groups, source: own table

Without describing all categories in each variable and their proportion it stems from the table that the sample is rather balanced. The first row shows the greatest difference: incumbent (Fidesz) supporters are overrepresented in the control group. This fact strengthens the result since it offers a

prudent estimate for government approval of the treatment group. The overrepresentation of incumbent supporters in the control group means a higher government approval compared to the treatment group if the treatment was absent. During the third wave I have requested Zavec Research Institution, the pollster firm carrying out the registration of the surveys, to incorporate questions between the treatment variable of this study, questions about government approval and questions about mood. By request the questions were nonpolitical. This way could handle the trade-off between internal validity (true isolation of the treatment effect on outcome) and generalizability (presenting a lasting effect of the treatment on the outcome that could travel to altered settings). Questions of other research between treatment variables and government approval were concerned with nutritious eating habits, between government approval and questions. Questions between approval and questions on mood were concerned with individual acts for preserving a clean environment.

The third wave of observations showed great differences in treatment sub-sample and control outcomes of government approval. Those who were treated - received a short, positive informational text (read out loud) - were more optimistic about the government. Measured on a scale from 1 to 5, on average respondent receiving the treatment ( $M = 3.05$   $SD = 1.23$ ) have approved the government more than those respondents who were not exposed to the treatment ( $M = 2.81$   $SD = 1.24$ ),  $t(983) = 2.9$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . This difference corresponds to 5,7 percentage points, which is substantially very interesting. Such results indicate that positive information about football could influence election outcomes in certain cases, although government approval doesn't necessarily translate to voting decisions. The table below represents the difference of government approval between treatment groups.

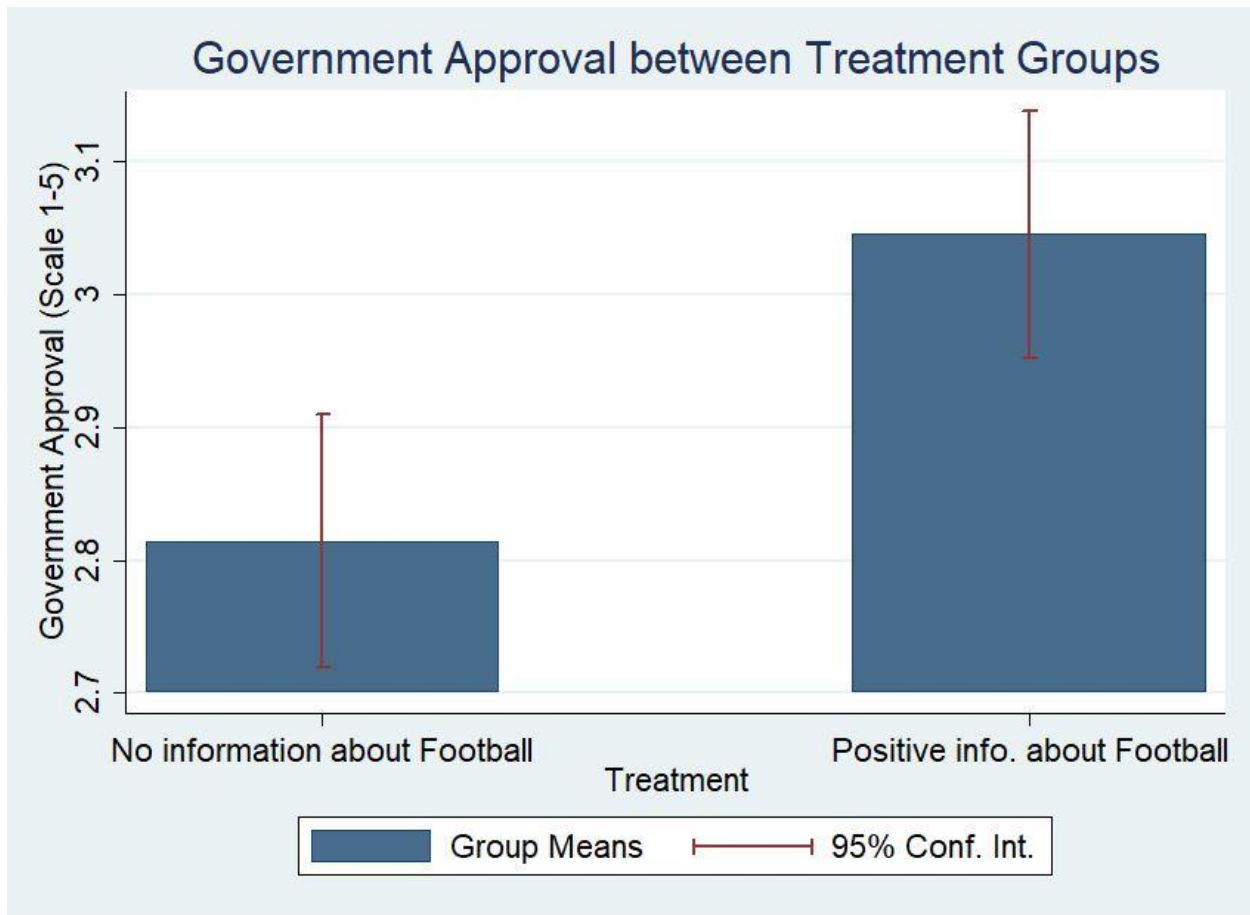


Figure 5: Government Approval between Treatment Groups, source: own figure

The fourth hypothesis (H4) mechanism was that in case of receiving positive information about football voters will experience an elevation in their mood, which is misattributed to the government and hence raises government approval.

Respondents in the treated group reported stronger feelings of pride, strength, and enthusiasm. The three emotions were measured on a scale from one to five (To what extent do you feel proud/strong/enthusiastic?) Results indicate a 0.17 point increase in mood for the treated group ( $M = 3.61$   $SD = 1$ ) compared to the control ( $M = 3.44$   $SD = 0.97$ ),  $t(998) = 2.8$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Differences of mood between treatment groups is represented in the figure below.

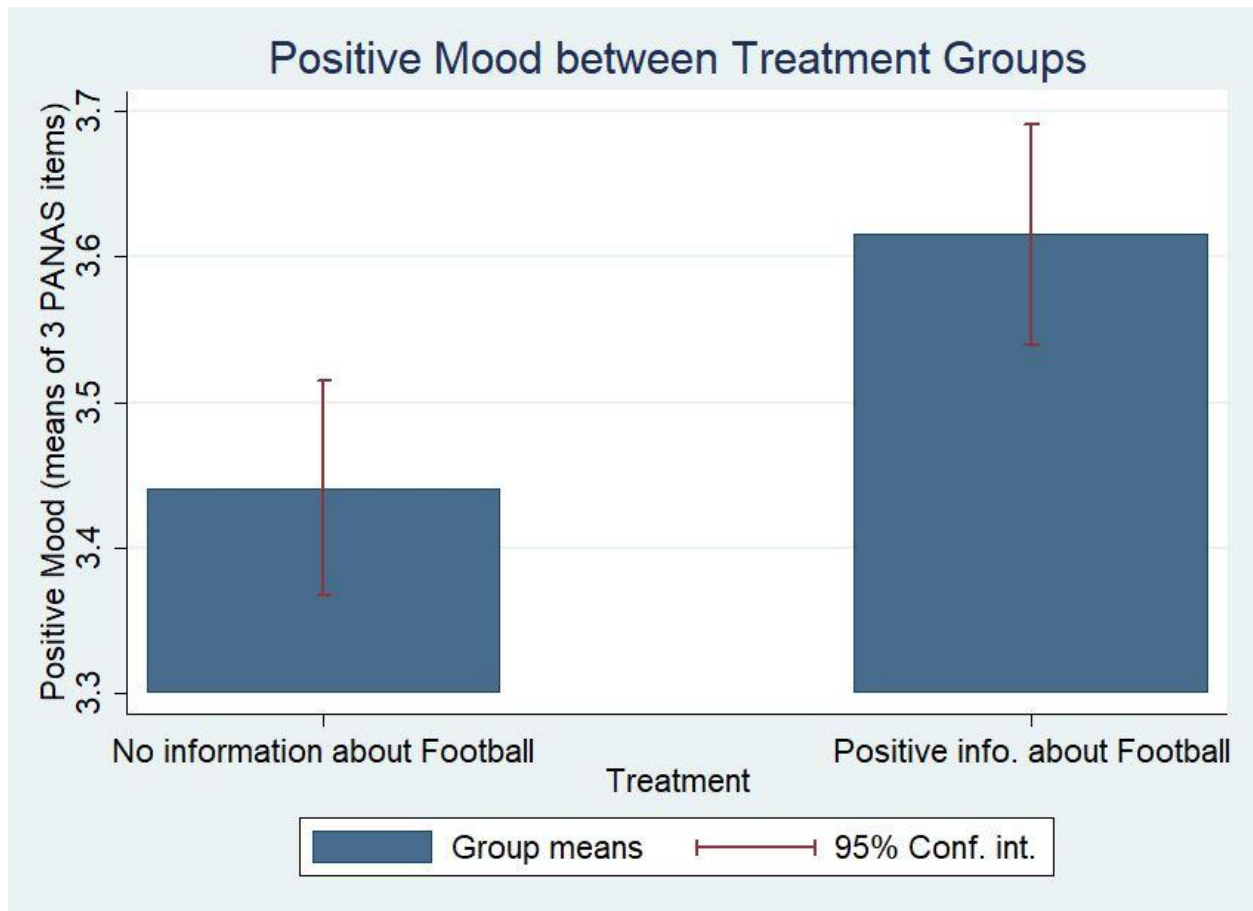


Figure 6: Positive Mood between Treatment Groups, source: own figure

## 5.6 Regression Results: Effect of Education and Increasing Precision of Average Treatment Effect

Measurements of mood and government approval in the third wave enabled the research to expand by taking the average of three answers of the respondent. Averaging produced outcomes outlined above in figure 3 and figure 4. As the figures show mood and approval are measured on a continuous scale, which enables a wider range of analytical tools to be used in presenting the effect of the short positive news about football on government approval and mood. In the section below I am going to present linear (OLS) regression analyses in approximating the treatment effect of the study. Later I am going to turn to the diagnosis of the regression analysis. Regression serves two goal;



increasing precision of the estimate of average treatment effect and shed light on interaction between the treatment and education level of respondents.

The third hypothesis of this paper is that politically sophisticated attribute responsibility for the government less when confronted with positive or negative information about football compared to the less sophisticated, hence their government approval will vary less. I approximate political sophistication by education.

The following linear regression can be expressed in a formula by estimating government approval from the interaction between treatment and education, controlled for self-reported party preference, age, income and settlement type (urban).

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Treatment + \beta_2 * Education + \beta_3 * Education * Treatment + \beta_4 * Age + \beta_5 * Party Preference + \beta_6 * Gender + \beta_7 * Settlement Type + \beta_8 * Income + \varepsilon$$

The table below shows the results of a linear regression to approximate the effect size of positive information about football on government approval. As the result show positive information about football does have an effect of government approval. Listening to positive information about football compared to not only being asked about football match visiting habits raised government approval by 0.29 with a standard error term of 0.09. The range of the outcome variable is still between 1 and 5. This corresponds to a 7.2 percentage point increase in government evaluation. The results are substantially interesting; although voting government approval doesn't necessarily translate to votes, a more than 7 percentage point increase in government approval could turn tides in policy decisions or election results.

<i>Government Approval (1-5):</i>	
	(1)
Pos. Info.	0.295*** (0.09)
Educ II	-0.0264 (0.11)
Educ III	-0.12 (0.138)
Pos. Info. : Educ II	-0.182 (0.146)
Pos. Info. : Educ III	-0.075 (0.186)
Age	0.0014 (0.002)
Undecided	-1.3122*** (0.088)
Opposition supporter	-2.01*** (0.074)
Gender (male)	-0.08 (0.065)
Settlement type (urban)	0.083 (0.0931)
Income	0.000001** (0.000)
Constant	3.796*** (0.150)
Observations	699
R <sup>2</sup>	0.533
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Regression Result, source own table

To check whether the treatment has a heterogeneous effect or a substantially different sized effect conditioned on education of respondents the regression incorporates interactions between treatment and education. However, these interaction terms are all insignificant. I reject my third hypothesis; I have found no evidence that would underline that politically sophisticated people change their government approval less conditioned on the treatment compared to unsophisticated.

Regression shows that income is a very important factor in government approval. A hundred thousand HUF (283 euro) increase in monthly income is associated with a 3-percentage point increase in government evaluation. Other factors play an important role as well. Those who have considered

themselves undecided supporters have approved the government less than incumbent supporters by 25 percentage points. Opposition party supporters approved the government on a lower level: results show a 50-percentage points gap between opposition and incumbent supporters. Using control variables strengthens the results of the survey, by making estimates of the main effect more precise. Eliminating demographic differences between treatment and control groups should be given by random sampling, however it is never perfect.

## 5.7 Regression diagnostics

The above-described regression explained 53 percent of the total variation of the outcome variable. Large part of the variation of the outcome was associated with partisanship. According to Wooldridge (2009) the assumption of the linear regression are that:

- Homoscedasticity: variance of the residuals does not depend on the values of the predictor variables.
- There is no multicollinearity in the independent variables: no perfect linear relationship among the predictors.
- A linear relationship exists between the dependent and the independent variable.

The figure below represents dispersion of residuals based on fitted values of the regression.

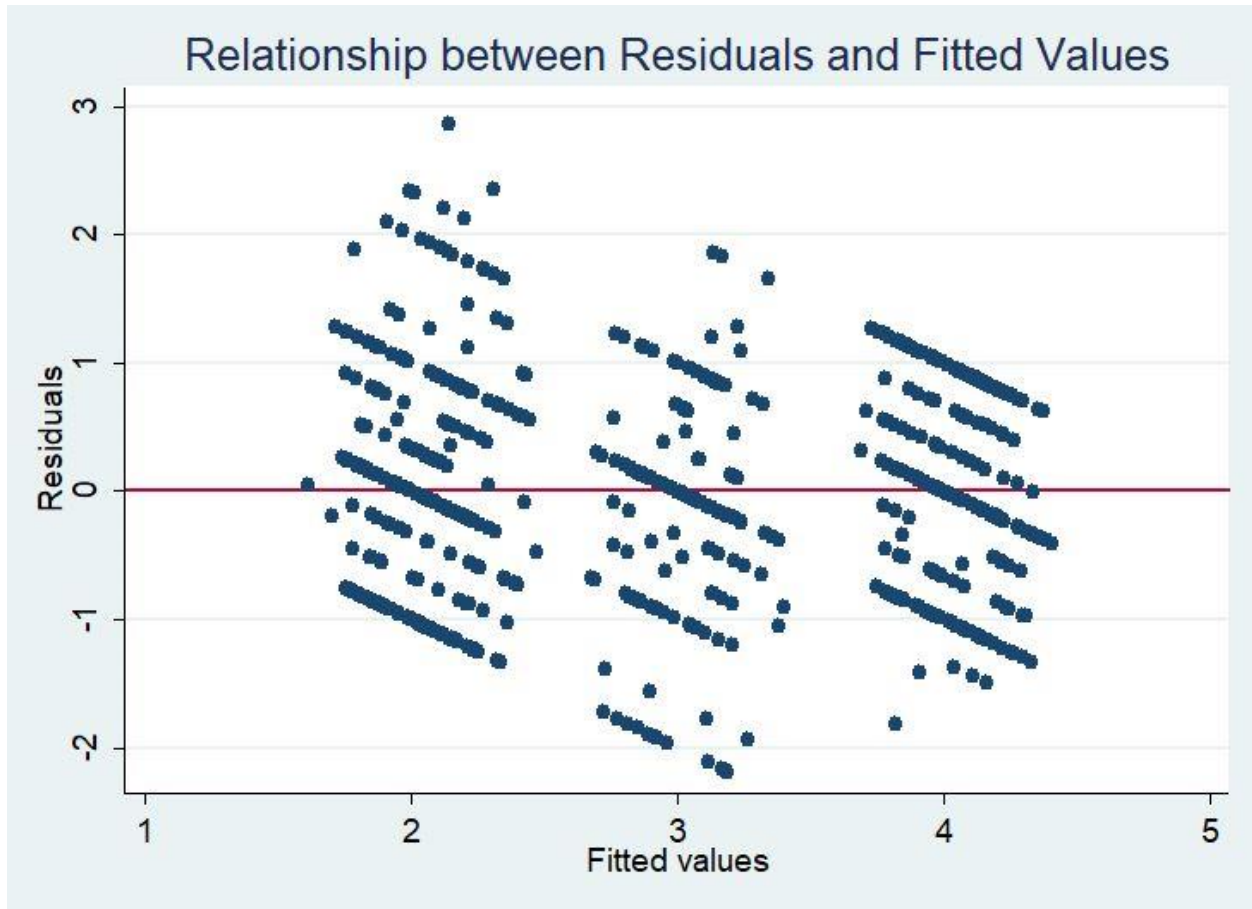


Figure 7: Relationship between Residuals and Fitted Values, source: own figure

As the figure shows there is a mild case of heteroscedasticity in the regression. As Breusch-Pagan test indicates that variance of residuals is conditioned on fitted values  $\text{Chi}^2(1) = 7.09, p < 0.01$ . This result stems from the categorical characteristics of the outcome and weakens the robustness of the regression, by making the standard errors less reliable. On the other hand, the OLS estimator remains unbiased, which makes regression a useful tool to estimate the treatment effect. From the used dependent variables, it is clear that there should be no multicollinearity among them. It is unlikely that perfect prediction of a given demographic feature is possible from the linear combination of others. Linear relationship between the outcome and independent variable can be assumed; the linear approximation explained more than half of the total variation in the outcome, which is mildly

convincing proof of linear associations. From the regression diagnostics I conclude that the regression is only useful in increasing precision of estimate of the treatment effect, due to heteroscedasticity and non-linear relationships in the data. Comparison of means and analysis of variance offers a more fitting analytical tool for hypothesis testing.

## 5.8 Education Salience in Government Approval

To check education salience in government approval and the hypothesized size difference in the effect of treatment (not direction of effect) across education levels I have deployed an analysis of variance approach. The model incorporated important demographic variables and the interaction between the treatment and education levels. Results are shown in the table below.

Effect	F	df	MS	P value
Treatment	7.6	1	6.4	0.006
Education	4.5	2	3.8	0.01
Treatment and Education Interaction	0.3	2	0.3	0.71
Opposition	44	2	37	0
Income	5.4	5	4.6	0
Age	1	67	0.8	0.6
Urban	0.6	1	0.5	0.4
Male	0.1	1	0.1	0.7

Table 5: Analysis of Variance Result for Interaction of Treatment and Education

The analysis of variance suggests that treatment effect, effect of party preference, effect of income and effect of education alone are significant factors. Variation between different treatment groups is 7 times the variation within treatment groups  $F(1) = 7.6, p < 0.01$ . However, the interaction between the treatment and education level seems insignificant: treatment effect doesn't depend on education. Analysis of variance for interaction between education and positive information about football also yielded insignificant results with respect to reported mood of respondents. Once again, this study finds no evidence that politically sophisticated are less likely to surrender to irrelevant events or heuristics when approving the government compared to less sophisticated.

# Chapter 6 - Concluding Remarks

## 6.1 Discussion

One of the central arguments of this paper is that the nature of most events implicitly implies that they can be perceived as politically greatly relevant, and a case can also be made parallel to the events relevance that it is (or ought to be) politically irrelevant. This analysis shows that the case of Hungarian elite football fits this argument. Voters think utterly differently about the political relevance of Hungarian football. Therefore, they also have different thoughts of the government's role in the results of Hungarian football. 25 percent of the respondents had the opinion that the government had no role at all in the way the national team has performed over the past few years, meanwhile almost a fifth of respondents believed that the government played a huge role in it.

Hungarian football is also a fruitful field to show group-serving biases of voters. Incumbent supporters and opposition voters react inversely to positive and negative treatments. Incumbent supporters tended to attribute positive news about football to the government, meanwhile opposition voters have done so when confronted with negative news. The analysis is inconclusive about how these responsibility attributions translate to variation in government approval. However, voters did evaluate the government more favorably when confronted with positive news about football compared to other treatments.

The table below presents the results of three waves of survey experiments conducted in Hungary during spring and summer of 2021. In the three waves of research the survey and measurement designs have been purposefully changed, but they remained the same in their central essence. All three surveys aimed to shed light on the effect of positive information about football on government approval. The first two waves compared how voters react and adjust their government approval in case of being confronted with positive information about football contrasted with receiving negative information.

The third wave compared government approval of respondents, who received positive information about football with those who haven't received information.

Study	Sample size	Noise	Effect size	Meaning	p-value
Wave 1	2000	Moderate	T = 1.7	2.3 %	0.09
Wave 2	500	High	T = 0.17	0.5 %	0.85
Wave 3	1000	Low	T = 2.8	5,6 - 7,2 %	< 0.01

Table 6: Comparison of Main Effects of three studies, source: own table

As the table shows, the first and the third wave of survey experiment reported significant change in government evaluation between voters, who received positive information about football compared to those who received negative or received none. We may thus update our knowledge about the political relevance of football. The last survey's result indicates a substantive ~ 6 percent difference in government evaluation between voter groups. However, we should also update these findings with the association between noise and substantial effect of the treatment. Noise in the observation means that survey questionnaires included questions from other researchers. Low noise means other questions in the questionnaire had low political relevance, e.g., questions about eating habits. High noise stands for a setting where other research questions were highly political, e.g., questions about redistribution, political media, prejudice against Jews in society. These findings let us conclude that the effect of positive (or negative) information about football on government approval is substantial and might influence election outcomes, but they are also temporary and other salient topics can override them.

What mechanisms can work behind such temporal, but influential effects? The analysis presented a strong case for the mechanism that positive news about football raises the general mood of voters. Voters misattribute this good mood to their government, which manifests in their



government approval. Hence, despite the political irrelevance of such good moods, analysis shows that voters condition their government approval on them. Results indicated a significant increase in mood for voters exposed to positive information about football compared to those who were not. Later the members of the former group reported significantly higher government approvals than the latter group. The difference between the two groups' government approval is somewhere between 5 and 7 percentage points. The result is substantially convincing since such differences in government approval can turn election results and policy decisions around. The research found no proof of the claim that political sophistication may facilitate such misattribution of general good mood to the government. Interactions between positive information about football and education levels were insignificant in association with the variance of government approval or reported mood.

## 6.2 Limitations and Further Research

The prime limitation of the research lies in the lack of data about duration of the effect of information about football on government approval and the lack of data about its magnitude. The three waves of survey have shown some effect; the first shown significant, but unsubstantial, the second have shown little and insignificant effects. The third survey showed substantially better government approval for those respondents, who received positive news about who Hungarian soccer fared recently, compared to those who did not. My explanation behind this variance of the effect size lies in the fact that the three-questionnaire contained other questions from different research, and the politically relevant information noise those questions produced influenced the size of the main effect of this study. However, I have no clear explanation how far my results could travel. What is the duration of the effect? What is the marginal effect of information about football on government approval? In an extreme example, could information about football turn masses of opposition voters into incumbent sympathizers?

The second limitation of the study stems from an exogenous factor. Between conducting the second and the third wave of survey experiments the European football championship begun and ended. This tournament amplified football in the public discourse. This condition doesn't affect the treatment effect result from the survey, but it might harm generalizability. In periods without international tournament with Hungarian participation voters might be less attentive for information of football.

Future research should eliminate obstacles in front of generalizability and could demonstrate how far findings travel, by comparing effect of information of football on government approval with news on different politically salient issues. It is important to bring forward how effect of the information of football relates to expert opinions on the state of the economy or news about general security in the country.

The research aimed to present how responsibility attribution works in the case of a politicized public issue as Hungarian football. It also attempted to uncover mechanism behind the phenomenon that irrelevant event having political relevance. Scientific literature of irrelevant events is contradictory. Healy et. al. (2010) claim that politically irrelevant events are those that are outside of the control of elected representatives. Conceptualization of irrelevant events is a challenging endeavor. How can an event be politically irrelevant that influences the political outcome? Despite the straightforward definition of Healy et. al. (2010) real life events are perceived differently by voters and intellectuals. Often strong cases can be made for both sides: that an event is irrelevant and that is highly relevant. Normative investigation is much needed into the benchmarks that helps us decide what events could objectively be regarded as irrelevant.

## Conclusion

In this work I explored, how Hungarian voters react to positive and negative news about how the Hungarian football fared in recent years. Specifically, I investigated whether voters condition their government approval to short information about the successes and failures of the Hungarian national football team. I predicted that voters would react to news about how the national team is faring - with more positive (negative) news about the national football team leading to higher (worse) evaluation of their government.

During this research I have designed three waves of experimental survey to show that such effect between short information about football and change in government approval exist. More than 3500 respondents have filled the three surveys altogether. According to the experiments results voters confronted with positive news about football reported higher government approvals scores compared to those who received negative news or no news at all. The average difference between the treatment groups' government approval dispersed in a range from 1 to 6 percentage points across the three waves of survey experiments deployed during the research. In my explanation this dispersion can be attributed to noise in the experiment introduced by politically relevant questions in the surveys from other research projects. Therefore, I conclude that the effect of short information about football on government approval is temporal and other politically relevant information can overwrite it.

Two branches of theoretical literature clarify the mechanism behind such effects. The first claims that voters make a mistake by misattributing politically irrelevant events to the government and hence these events influence their government approval. According to this line of reasoning voters might misattribute their general mood to the government (Healy and Malhotra 2013, Bower 1981, Schwartz and Clore 1983), and/or voters surrender their reason and attribute responsibility for irrelevant events to the government based on “folk-story” like explanations (Achen and Bartels 2004). The second

branch of literature comprehends Hungarian football as a politically relevant event, due to its historical politization by Hungarian regimes (Szabó 2019), and because the government made it the measure of its own value by thematizing public discourse about its involvement in football attempting to advance its politics of reunifying Hungarian in the Carpathian basin through football (Molnar and Whigham 2019).

The research showed that the two mechanisms could work in parallel. The quarter of observed citizens of Hungary claimed that the government had no role in how the Hungarian football team fared in recent years, but the fifth of the respondent deed a huge role of the government in the state of the team. As theoretical inquiries conceptualize political relevance of events that are outside of direct control of elected representatives so do citizens. In my understanding both conceptualizations are correct and useful in understanding real life example of such events. The paper builds a strong case for the existence of the mood misattribution mechanism. Respondent confronted with positive information about how the football team fared reported a  $\sim 6$  percentage point higher government approval and experienced a significant increase in their mood compared to voters who received no information on football. This research did not find evidence about political sophistication being a potential mediator between short information on football and change in government approval. This contradicts suggestions of Müller and Kneafsey (2021) about politically unsophisticated voters surrendering their reason and basing their evaluation of the government on irrelevant events.

The paper is novel in its theoretical approach. I suggest that conceptualization of real-life events as politically either relevant or irrelevant can be misleading. Often the case is that both concepts exist jointly, and the mechanisms implied by the two concepts seem to work parallel to each other. Objectively some events can be comprehended as irrelevant, since elected representatives have no direct control over them, yet cultural and historical perspectives can explain their relevance.

Hungarian football is an appropriate public subsystem to draw such conclusions from. The Hungarian public has diverging opinions about who is responsible for the results of the Hungarian national football team. Opposition supporters tend to attribute responsibility for failures to the government significantly more than incumbent voters, the reverse is true for successes; opposition voters tend to attribute less responsibility for the government, than incumbent supporters. This alteration suggests that voters do attribute responsibility to the government for football and feel strongly about the issue. Meanwhile the paper presents a strong case that voters also misattribute their general mood - and its elevation induced by positive information about football - to the government, when evaluating its office term. Understanding the multiple channels and mechanisms of how politically (ir)relevant events influence government evaluation could help us develop our democratic institutions to perform vehemently for greater public welfare. Institutions governing public accountability instruments and democratic representation should be further developed based on findings of research about how voters attribute and misattribute responsibility to the government.

# Appendix

1. Data Transparency: For replication, I attach the data from the tree waves of the survey experiment in excel format. Link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1A2yVWdhWVwn3RwvYXjdAKLrzqBcV3bc?usp=sharing>

- 2.

Real proportion in the sample: 2000 respondents	Observed proportion in 99 percent of samples	Observed proportion in 95 percent of the sample
5 %	3,7 % - 6,3 %	4,1 % - 5,9 %
20 %	17,7 % - 22,3 %	18,2 % - 21,8 %
40 %	37,2 % - 42,8 %	37,9 % - 42,1%
50 %	47,1 % - 52,9 %	47,8 % - 52,2 %
60 %	57,2 % - 62,8 %	57,9 % - 62,1 %
80 %	77,7 % - 82,3 %	78,2 % - 81,1 %
95 %	93,7 % - 96,3 %	94,1 % - 95,9 %

Performance of a sample of 2000, by Rudas (2006).

3. Wave 1 questionnaire

**Turning to a completely different topic: How satisfied are you with the performance of the Hungarian national football team in the last few years?**

(I am very satisfied (1), I am quite satisfied (2), I am quite dissatisfied (3), I am very dissatisfied(4))

**What role do you think the current government has in the way the national team has performed over the past few years?**

(Huge role (1), Large enough, Not too big (3), None (4))

**And overall, how satisfied are you with the current government?**

(Very satisfied (1), Quite satisfied (2), Quite dissatisfied (3), Very dissatisfied (4))

4. Wave 2 questionnaire

(raised after treatment) **Turning to a completely different topic: How satisfied are you with the performance of the Hungarian national football team in the last few years?**

(I am very satisfied (1), I am quite satisfied (2), I am quite dissatisfied (3), I am very dissatisfied(4))

(Raised after treatment) **What role do you think the current government has in the way the national team has performed over the past few years?**

(Huge role (1), Large enough, Not too big (3), None (4))

(Raised before and after treatment) **And overall, how satisfied are you with the current government?**

Very dissatisfied (5), Quite dissatisfied (4), So-so (3), Quite satisfied (2), Very satisfied (1)

(Raised before and after treatment) **And overall, how do you assess the performance of the current government?**

Unacceptable (5), Not very good (4), Medium (3), Pretty good (2), Very good (1)

(Raised before and after treatment) **And to what extent do you agree with the decisions of the current government in general?**

Strongly disagree (1), I do not agree (2), I somewhat agree (3), I agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

5. Wave 3 Questionnaire

(Control group) **How often do you watch Hungarian national football team matches?**

(Always, usually, sometimes, never)

(full sample) **To what extent do you agree with the statement made about the government?"**

(strongly agree, tend to agree, Somewhat agree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree)

The current government has made good decisions during its operation so far.

The current government is made up of competent politicians.

The current government is able to achieve what the country needs.

(full sample) **You can hear words related to feelings in the next question. Indicate your current mood, how accurately your feelings are described by words on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = no, I don't feel like this, 5 = exactly how I feel: ● enthusiastic, proud, strong.**



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