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# Accountability policies in Germany

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## Résumé

German education policy almost turned upside-down since the turn of the century. In 2001 the first PISA study demonstrated that the educational performance of German students was below average when compared internationally. This finding led to a public shock, and this shock culminated in massive demand for education improvements and was followed by a landslide of reforms. Learning from best practices in other countries as shown in PISA, several reforms also focused on the expansion of evaluation and quality assurance. Generally, education policy in Germany is a matter of subsidiarity. It is within the authority of the 16 federal states (the L'ander) to shape their own education system. This makes coherent reform approaches in Germany notably difficult (Nevertheless, since the turn of the century Germany (and all L'ander) began to reform its education system in response to PISA (Tillmann et al. 2008)). German policy-makers were encouraged to engage in policy learning by focusing on – at least as defined by PISA – successful countries such as Canada, Finland or Sweden.

In the course of the reform process particular focus was put on the actual outputs of the education system. Correspondingly, evidence-based policy-making was promoted. The traditional German input-orientation which relied mainly on budget allocation according to teacher-student ratio, structured education plans, which were set up centrally was identified as a blind spot that prevented the implementation of appropriate reactions to problems (Lundahl & Waldow 2009). In response, a shift to output-oriented governance was introduced. Germany established a culture of performance evaluation, which was based on empirical evidence that was intended to guide policy decisions.

However, some considerable variations between the L'ander regarding evaluation mechanism exist. Some introduced evaluations organized by administrative authorities, while others relied on self-evaluation of individual schools. Hence, both centralized and decentralized evaluations were implemented. How can these different approaches be explained?

This paper aims to analyze why evaluation mechanisms were established in Germany and how differences between the L'ander can be explained. Using the theoretical account of partisan politics (Schmidt 1996; Busemeyer 2015) and historical institutionalism (Streek & Thelen 2005; Hall 2010) I argue that the design of evaluation mechanism is shaped and conditioned by governing party coalitions, existing institutions and historical legacies. In doing so, I will analyze a sample of four German L'ander with qualitative methods of process tracing and comparative historical analysis to show how and why (different) evaluation mechanism in secondary education emerged.

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**Mots-Clés:** accountability, education policy, Germany, PISA, tests