

Civil Society and Political Accountability: Propositions for Discussion

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A. Introduction¹

How do civil society actors contribute to the construction and empowerment of institutional checks and balances? Civil society clearly matters, but when, how and to what degree? This paper attempts to identify some of the determinants of the extremely varied patterns of civil society impact on accountable governance. In the process, this essay explores the challenge of public accountability as it applies not only to the governance of elected regimes, but also to civil society actors themselves.

This paper draws on the analytical distinction between vertical and horizontal dimensions of political accountability. The former refers to power relations between the state and its citizens, while the latter refers to institutional oversight, checks and balances within the state (O'Donnell, 1999). This distinction locates civil society efforts to encourage accountable governance along the vertical dimension, as a counterpart to the electoral process. Indeed, electoral competition has been acknowledged to be insufficient for accountability since the origins of constitutional democracy. Until recently, however, the role of civil society actors in promoting electoral democracy has received much more attention than their role in promoting institutional checks and balances (Schedler, 1999b: 340).

Civil society demands for state accountability matter most when they empower the state's own checks and balances.² By exposing abuses of power, raising standards and public expectations of state performance, and bringing political pressure to bear, they can encourage oversight institutions to act, as well as to target and weaken entrenched opponents of accountability. Civil society campaigns may also drive the creation of certain institutional checks and balances in the first place. However, though civil society's contribution to accountable governance has been widely asserted, the causal mechanisms that determine the patterns of civil society influence on horizontal accountability have not been well-specified.³ We still lack analytical frameworks that can account for the conditions under which civil society actors manage to bolster the institutions of horizontal accountability.

In brief, civil society actors influence horizontal accountability in two main ways: directly, by encouraging the creation and empowerment of institutional checks and balances, and indirectly, by strengthening the institutions of vertical accountability that underpin them, such as electoral democracy and an independent media. The causal arrow also points in the other direction, however. Weak institutions of horizontal accountability can also undermine vertical accountability, which in turn weakens civil society actors. For example, inadequate election oversight bodies can permit less-than-democratic elections, and ineffective official human rights defenders can fail to stop frequent violations of basic political freedoms. Without adequate checks and balances, the minimum conditions for political democracy can remain weak or

¹ Thanks very much to Pablo Policzer and Eva Thorne for their comments on an earlier version.

² As O'Donnell observed, the impact of civil society pressure for accountability of public authorities "depends to a large extent on the actions that properly authorized state agencies may undertake in order to investigate and eventually sanction the wrongdoings" (1999: 30).

³ For example, Robert Putnam's famous subnational comparative study shows a clear *correlation* between indicators of civil society density and accountable governance (1993). However, the proposed *causal* mechanisms are imputed rather than documented or explained. Not coincidentally, his framework considers political actors and dynamics to be of secondary importance, mere reflections of historically predetermined social relationships. For a critique of Putnam's depoliticized explanation of civil society density and impact, see Fox (1996a)

incomplete. Therefore, one must explore the dynamic interaction between accountability's horizontal and vertical dimensions to identify civil society impacts.

This paper begins with a discussion of some of the challenges involved in developing a working definition of political accountability. The paper then develops several analytical propositions for discussion, viewed through the lenses of state and societal accountability, respectively. This approach complicates the vertical/horizontal framework by taking into account multiple levels of state-society relations, as well as the interaction between them (subnational, national and international). The empirical bases for these propositions draw primarily from two long-term research projects. One focuses on democratization in Mexico, the other on the role of the international actors in state-society relations, such as multilateral development banks and transnational advocacy coalitions.

B. Defining accountability

This essay is based on the following definition: political accountability limits the use and sanctions the abuse of political power. Public exposure is necessary but not sufficient to limit or sanction the abuse of power. Actors and institutions that promote accountability attempt to bind the exercise of power to specific benchmark standards. Political accountability can be promoted through both state and non-state institutions, and pro-accountability outcomes often depend on mutually reinforcing interactions between the two. The following conceptual propositions unpack some of the assumptions underlying this approach.

1) The relationship between democratic process and accountability is politically contingent.

The concept of accountability is caught in a definitional tension – is it a process or an outcome? Logically it involves both – as does the concept of democracy. The two concepts do not refer to the *same* processes and outcomes, however. Some analysts incorporate accountability into the very definition of political democracy.⁴ Such definitions implicitly suggest that democratic *processes* inherently generate accountable *outcomes*. There are both empirical and conceptual problems with conflating accountability with democracy.

How do we account for the extraordinary variation in the degree to which pro-accountability institutions actually manage to limit political power and to sanction its abuse? Empirically, whether or not democratic processes produce accountable governance outcomes varies widely – across states, within states and over time. Persistent human rights violations with impunity under elected regimes are only the most obvious example, as in the cases of repression of agrarian protest in Brazil and Mexico.⁵ Many consolidated democracies also experience extended periods and deep pockets of “low horizontal accountability.” For example, Japan, Italy, the US, and most recently Germany are known for tolerating quite long-term, systematic political corruption.⁶ Moreover, major institutions within democratic regimes are often

⁴ Schmitter's comment (1999) on O'Donnell (1999) underscored Schmitter and Karl's 1991 definition of political democracy as “a regime or system of governance in which rulers are held *accountable* for their actions in the public realm...” (emphasis in 1999 original).

⁵ In the less obvious arena of budget politics, see Healey and Tordoff (1995) for a comparative study of elected regimes' uneven accountability track record.

⁶ For a more profound US example, the 1980s Iran-Contra scandal revealed that major attacks on constitutional principles of checks and balances can elude horizontal accountability. Another notable example of a major wave of “low horizontal accountability” was the systematic use of state repression against African American and Latino movements for political empowerment, as well as antiwar dissidents in the 1960s.

insulated from citizen accountability as an integral part of their mission, such as central banks, intelligence agencies, and certain security forces.

Conceptually, a major collection of essays recently detailed many reasons why the relationships between electoral democracy, representative governance and accountability are far from consistent or obvious (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999). They show that electoral democracy is much more about voter choices than it is about the inherent vertical accountability of politicians to voters. To assume that accountability is built in to democracy, by definition, is an example of the common problem of assuming that all good things go together. If procedurally democratic regimes fail to produce accountable governance, does that mean that they are not democratic? This would be logically analogous to the concept of “substantive democracy,” in which regimes that fail to produce socially equitable policy outcomes are considered, by definition, to be less than democratic. Both accountable governance and policies that promote socio-economic equity are normatively desirable *outcomes* of state actions that may or may not emerge from procedurally democratic *processes*.

2) Transparency is necessary but not sufficient for accountability.

Some definitions suggest that transparency and “answerability” of authority are part of accountability, by definition. For example, Schedler proposes a broad definition that includes three dimensions: “enforcement, monitoring and justification” (1999a: 14). At the same time, he argues that “unless there is some punishment for demonstrated abuses of authority, there is no rule of law and no accountability” (1999a: 17). These two approaches are inconsistent. The first one suggests that transparency is enough, while the second suggests that it requires some kind of sanctions. How are we to assess the many cases in which transparency does not lead to any kind of sanctions? For example, most human rights truth commissions come to mind, not to mention many very transparent cases of corruption or electoral fraud. The World Bank has become significantly more transparent since the early 1990s, but its public accountability has lagged behind.⁷ If transparency is built into the definition of accountability, then the concept of accountability risks being diluted. To conflate means (transparency) and ends (accountability) could make it difficult to get at the key analytical problem here, which is to explain the conditions under which transparency does effectively contribute to accountability.

3) Accountability is inherently relational.

To operationalize the concept of accountability, one must specify who is accountable to whom. Accountability refers to power relationships between actors and/or institutions. The accountability relationships of different state institutions often point in different directions. Even in democratic regimes, for example, not all state institutions claim to be accountable to the ostensibly sovereign citizenry. For example, many central banks are designed precisely to be insulated from democratic institutions. This measure is intended to render monetary policy accountable to *other* institutions, most notably private markets and the international financial institutions.

Similarly, supreme courts are also designed to be accountable to non-electoral institutions, specifically constitutions. When majority will and constitutional standards conflict, supreme courts are mandated to side with constitutions. They are supposed to be supreme, after all.

Most multilateral economic institutions, such as the development banks, the IMF, the WTO or NAFTA, are also remote from processes of vertical accountability. Their decisions are formally accountable to nation-

⁷ This point draws from Fox and Brown (1998), a study that operationalized accountability in the limited sense of compliance with the World Bank’s own mandated social and environmental policies.

state representatives, via appointed functionaries that represent those nation-state institutions most remote from national democratic accountability mechanisms: finance and trade ministries. The European Union is a major exception to the trend, since it includes a regional parliament and therefore some degree of vertical accountability.

4) Accountability is inherently relative.

To operationalize the concept of accountability, benchmark principles are required. These standards are inherently socially and politically constructed, and may or may not be enshrined in law. Legal standards, moreover may or may not be seen as legitimate. Punishments may or may not “fit the crime.” After all, authoritarian regimes can use laws to hold dissidents “accountable.” Specific benchmarks are necessary for measuring and explaining varying *degrees* of accountability. A “relativist” approach is critical because some partial degree of accountability is usually the most one can expect, given the power of anti-accountability forces. In case of human rights, for example, even very limited constraints on the abuse of power involve matters of life and death.

C. Propositions for discussion

The following analytical propositions about the role of civil society in horizontal accountability focus first on state institutions, then on issues of accountability within civil society itself. These propositions focus on the interdependence between vertical and horizontal accountability.

I. Political accountability seen from the state:

This section briefly reviews several key state institutions of horizontal accountability in terms of their relationships with civil society: legislatures, the judiciary, and subnational governments. Then, to explore the interaction between vertical and horizontal accountability, the concept of “reverse vertical accountability” is introduced. If vertical accountability refers to citizen power over the state, then reverse vertical accountability refers to state power over citizens.

1. Legislatures, usually the most important counterweight to executive power, often suffer weak vertical accountability.

Legislatures are widely seen as more permeable and responsive than executives to organized citizens. This is sometimes the case, but the pro-accountability potential of each potential counterweight depends on their specific institutional characteristics. In the case of legislatures in which weak political parties with shallow roots in society control the lists that determine who is actually elected to congress, vertical accountability potential is weak. Where access to the mass media depends primarily on private money, then political parties must manage the tension between being accountable to voters versus private investors in politics.⁸ Where parties with shallow roots in society are combined with laws that forbid reelection, then civil society capacity to hold legislators accountable for performance is further reduced (over and above the usual high information costs involved in monitoring their actions).

⁸ Efforts to limit the influence of private money on elections by regulating contributions, the “supply side” are inherently limited. The “demand side” is a more promising arena of intervention – limiting political parties need for funds by eliminating their major expense, which is the cost of buying broadcast media time. Brazil’s laws limit the influence of money in politics by defining campaign access to prime time TV as a public good, removing it from the private market, and assigning time in proportion to past election results.

Civil society actors and opposition political parties have somewhat divergent interests in terms of the empowerment of legislatures as counterweights. Both have a stake in monitoring the government in power, and empowering legislative oversight is one of the most important means. For most opposition parties, however, this interest is primarily instrumental. Their leaders do not necessarily want to institutionalize such checks and balances, in case they should come to power someday. Moreover, they have an interest in bolstering legislative autonomy not only from the executive, but from voters as well.⁹ In contrast to parties, civil society organizations usually do not seek to govern. They therefore face fewer inherent conflicts of interest and can play critical roles in keeping opposition parties accountable should they come to power.

2. Judiciaries, one of the most important horizontal accountability counterweights, are rarely designed to be vertically accountable to civil society.

Judiciaries are designed primarily to be accountable to the rule of law, not to organized citizens (except in the few systems where some judges are elected). Formal accountability and responsiveness are not equivalent, however. Legal systems can be responsive to civil society initiatives, which in turn can encourage efforts to transform them (Méndez, O'Donnell and Pinheiro, 1999; Smulovitz, 1997). This is the assumption of key international actors, such as the Ford Foundation, which have made significant investments in public interest law around the world (McClymont and Golub, 2000). Such investments are critical because the costs of making even moderately responsive legal systems “work” consistently are inevitably high. Where the courts are relatively autonomous, they can serve to bypass obstacles to accountability in the legislative or executive branches, as in the case of the US civil rights movement. Two major questions remain, however. First, what factors permit the courts to gain the *willingness* to exercise the autonomy needed to play their role as horizontal counterweight? Second, what factors determine the judiciary's capacity to *enforce* the law?¹⁰

Post-authoritarian conflicts over whether to prosecute human rights violators are among the most notable cases of politically contingent enforcement of the rule of law. For example, Chile's judicial system did little to hold official human rights abusers accountable until recently. This was a dramatic example of transparency without accountability. However, after a wave of international civil society initiatives that successfully provoked action by judicial authorities in Europe, Chile's judicial system began to defend the rule of law by defining past disappearances as crimes subject to prosecution. However, Chile's judiciary was already internally divided, and international pressure appears to have tipped the internal balance. The judiciary's institutional powers did not change, but its willingness and capacity to act did, at least for a minority of judges. An approach that focused on formal institutional powers would not be able to explain

⁹ For further discussion, see Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999).

¹⁰ For example, this dilemma emerged recently in the case of a judicial resolution of a longstanding agrarian conflict in Mexico. Many decades ago powerful private ranchers invaded vast extensions of land officially titled to Huichol indigenous communities (also known as the Wixaritari). Recently, one of Mexico's most innovative public interest law groups, the Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos Indígenas, used both national and international law to win unprecedented victories in the courts, mandating the unprecedented restitution of at least one quarter of the land in dispute (Chavez and Arcos, 1999). This case seemed to demonstrate that the public interest law strategies can actually work in Mexico, when civil society actors invest in them. After the court decision, the state government involved declared the matter resolved. However, the disputed territory continues in the possession of the ranchers. In spite of support from the communities, the media and public interest groups, the courts have so far failed to induce the necessary executive action to uphold the law.

this process, since it was a shift in the balance of power between actors that led to a small but significant change in the correlation of forces, both within and between institutions.¹¹

3. Federalism, designed to promote horizontal accountability, can conflict with vertical accountability.

Relationships between different levels of government look vertical but can be understood as horizontal. In federal systems, local, provincial and national governments are supposed to checks and balances on one another. Each level of government usually includes its own combination of horizontal and vertical dimensions, insofar as provinces have both governors and legislatures, and municipalities have both mayors and councils. However, in some regimes these relationships are very imbalanced. Brazil's state and city governments, for example, combine a high degree of autonomy from the federal government with weak legislatures.¹²

Decentralization is widely assumed to bring government closer to the people, and therefore to encourage vertical accountability. However, subnational executive authorities often lack their own checks and balances at the provincial or municipal level. Moreover, some subnational governments are the size of small or medium-sized countries, so the information costs for monitoring them remain very high – for central governments as well as for citizens. Central governments share resources and power with subnational governments based on certain standards for their use, which raises challenges in terms of monitoring and enforcement of those standards.¹³

In addition, some subnational governments may fall short of the minimum conditions for political democracy. Policies that promote decentralization of authority and resources to subnational governments that are less than democratic may well strengthen authoritarian elites, at least in the short to medium term. Entrenched authoritarian subnational governments challenge national authorities to choose between the horizontal accountability embodied in the federal system of relatively autonomous subnational governments, and vertical accountability to citizens deprived of their democratic rights.¹⁴

Even where local governments are not overtly authoritarian, powerful institutional incentives may encourage exclusion of constituencies they are supposed to represent.¹⁵ The Mexican experience suggests,

¹¹ Thanks very much to Pablo Policzer, Ph.D. candidate in the MIT Political Science Dept., for sharing his insights on these issues.

¹² The low horizontal accountability of Brazil's subnational governments is related to the power relations between federal legislators and subnational executives, a pattern in which national congresspeople tend to be more accountable to governors and mayors than to their constituents (Mainwaring and Samuels, 2000). For a recent study of Brazil's weak subnational legislatures, see Setzler (2000).

¹³ For analysis of these issues in relation to large-scale flows of rural municipal anti-poverty funds in Mexico, see Fox and Aranda (1996) and Fox (1999).

¹⁴ For a comprehensive overview of this challenge in Mexico, see the cases detailed in Cornelius, Eisenstadt and Hindley (1999). On Mexican federalism more generally, see Ward and Rodríguez (1999).

¹⁵ A recent comparative assessment of rural municipal anti-poverty funds in Mexico, Brazil and Colombia stressed the importance of an empowered rural civil society for effective rural local governance. As Weins and Guagdani put it: "Local government's primary concern is likely to be vote appeal and patronage... If civil society is weak, then there will be no checks on local officials pursuing these objectives. Even if civil society is reasonably strong, it may function primarily in the urban areas [of rural districts]. If this is true, then "rational" local politicians will focus on satisfying urban voters and patrons, and neglect the concerns of rural people... Thus, unless rural civil society is reasonably strong, elected officials will likely discriminate against poor rural areas, retain the power to make

for example, that the horizontal accountability of rural local government has a *reciprocal relationship* with the nature and density of civil society at the grassroots level. Broad-based community participation can encourage more transparent and accountable local governance, while top-down rule by local elites can stifle the potential for vibrant civil society (Fox, 1999).

To develop a more general framework for understanding the relationship between federalism and horizontal accountability, one needs an interactive approach. First, one can safely assume that degrees of horizontal accountability of subnational governments vary widely within most national systems (O'Donnell, 1993, Fox, 1994b). Second, this variation is likely to include some that are more accountable (in both vertical and horizontal terms) than the national government, and others that are less accountable than the national government. Third, the balance of power between levels of government is both cause and effect of this variation in subnational accountability, but we know relatively little about the nature of this interaction. For example, under what circumstances do “advanced” subnational governments induce multiplier or scaling up effects, versus when do they remain isolated enclaves of accountability? Certainly programmatic political parties, dense civil societies and independent media are crucial for explaining the sustainability and replication of innovation, but what else? ¹⁶ At the other extreme, under what circumstances do subnational governments that lag behind progress at the national level catch up? If subnational political elites manage to exclude part of the electorate from democratic competition, then national political leaders will have little incentive or capacity to be accountable to those citizens. Electoral systems that over-represent the least accountable regions in national politics exacerbates this problem, as in Brazil.

5. Authoritarian clientelism constitutes “reverse vertical accountability” from citizens to state actors.

Citizenship is supposed to combine a balance of rights and duties. Sometimes, however, state actors gain the upper hand by holding citizens unduly accountable for certain behaviors, such as political dissent or culturally proscribed activities. Clientelism, for example, refers to relationships of political subordination in exchange for material rewards. Specifically *authoritarian* clientelism enforces such imbalanced bargains with threats of coercion. Other forms of clientelism enforce bargains with threats of the withdrawal of critical services. In terms of the concept of accountability, authoritarian clientelism violates fundamental democratic principles in two ways. First, authoritarian vote-buying renders electoral competition less than democratic, undermining the regime’s potential vertical accountability. Second, authoritarian clientelism obliges citizens to abstain from participating in organizations that will be accountable to them, weakening civil society. ¹⁷

Furthermore, regimes that use the allocation of public resources systematically to reward and punish citizens create a form of “reverse vertical accountability,” requiring clients dependent on such resources for their survival to be accountable to state patrons. These authoritarian relationships are rarely visible on election day, since the “bargaining” is usually subtle and takes places in advance. Nevertheless, the regions

decisions, and reward their financial backers with municipal contracts. The goal of strengthening municipal government is thus best achieved by taking action to strengthen civil society...” (1998: 11-12)

¹⁶ Brazil’s widely-admired participatory councils for municipal budgeting are one of the best cases of a Latin American local government accountability institution that has both been sustained and replicated, both nationally and internationally. These councils involve elected delegates and play both deliberative and oversight roles, and therefore combine dimensions of vertical and horizontal accountability, like legislatures. While early architects expected these municipal councils to empower the disenfranchised, one recent study found that they mainly empowered the already-engaged, as well as having the side effect of encouraging greater accountability within civil society neighborhood associations (Nylen, 2000). Among the growing literature on participatory budgeting, see also XXXX

¹⁷ This paragraph draws on Fox (1994a).

and social groups most vulnerable to these forms of control are rarely comprehensively monitored by civic groups even on election day, as the 1994 Mexican and 2000 Peruvian elections show. It is very difficult for even the most consolidated civic movements to monitor more than a minority sample of polling places.

Widespread confusion also persists regarding the relationship between authoritarian social programs and electoral politics, as seen in the US media coverage of the Peruvian election and its repeated references to Fujimori's strong electoral "support" in remote rural areas.¹⁸ In spite of the fact that the same reports referred repeatedly to charges of systematic fraud and electoral use of social programs, the use of the term "support" implies that pro-regime votes from remote rural areas reflect democratically exercised electoral preferences. Where people vote for the official candidate to retain access to government programs that feed their children, or out of fear of perceived possible reprisals, fraud is often not necessary. This problem reveals that the conventional concept of fraud is far too narrow to encompass the full range of actually-existing authoritarian electoral practices (Fox, 1994b; 1996b).

Because the power of vote-buyers depends in part on their capacity to monitor the compliance of clients, ballot secrecy becomes a critical democratic resource. For one vivid example, one of the patterns of ballot secrecy violations most widely observed by Alianza Cívica in the 1994 Mexican presidential election took a puzzling form: voters deliberately revealed their marked ballots to others. Alianza Cívica concluded that these voters apparently felt pressured to demonstrate to local bosses that they had kept their part of the vote-buying bargain. In the case of ballot secrecy, "formal" democratic procedures become most important to the politically weakest members of society.¹⁹

Authoritarian clientelism appears to be especially resistant to NGO efforts. Not only do election watchdog groups have great difficulties documenting its scope, but they have even greater problems deterring its practice. When Mexico's Civic Alliance documented efforts to influence voters ("coacción") in more than 25% of polling places observed in the 1994 presidential election, they also revealed their weak capacity to deter such practices (Fox, 1996b). Transparency was necessary but insufficient for accountability. Weakening authoritarian clientelism requires *on-going* monitoring of state action, as well as some capacity to protect dissidents from reprisals, and therefore depends at least as much on the empowerment of organized citizens as on external NGO oversight.

The concept of reverse vertical accountability may also be useful for grappling with the unresolved relationship between the concepts of clientelism and state corporatism. The two ideas are distinct but overlapping, with clientelism referring to (usually under-specified) practices and state corporatism referring to certain organizational forms. However, both concepts focus on state-society relations in which the accountability relations flow more from society upwards than from the state downwards: reverse vertical accountability.²⁰

¹⁸ For example, see Kraus (2000).

¹⁹ The full report appeared as Alianza Cívica/Observación '94 (1994). For further details on Alianza Cívica, see Aguayo (1998) and McConnell (1996).

²⁰ Reverse vertical accountability can also take the form of disproportionate state prosecution of certain criminalized activities. For example, one could argue that the large fraction of minority youth currently incarcerated in the US for *non-violent* black market activities constitute an example of what one could call "hyperaccountability." Drug crimes are often punished more severely than many violent crimes, such as killing spouses or pedestrians. As a result, the US now incarcerates approximately one quarter of the world's entire population of prisoners, and an estimated one in four African American males in their 20s are under the supervision of the criminal justice system, with long-term effects on the composition of the electorate because ex-felons lose their voting rights. This process has in turn embedded powerful vested interests into the political system that favor more state investment in sanctions (through incarceration) rather than crime prevention (through education and public health programs). These interests have become known as

6. Pro-market public policies may reconfigure rather than reduce state intervention, and therefore do not necessarily weaken levers of reverse vertical accountability

Pro-market economic reforms are usually associated with the regulatory withdrawal of the state from the market and social life. One might therefore expect such reforms to remove or to weaken the state's levers for inducing reverse vertical accountability. In fact, neoliberal economic reforms in several Latin American countries weakened state levers for channelling rural politics, contributing to the politicization of ethnic identities and the rise of broad-based indigenous protest movements (Yashar, 1999).

However, pro-market economic reforms may also be accompanied by social policies that maintain significant state intervention in economic and social life. In Mexico (and apparently Peru as well), the central state has withdrawn support for family farming and agrarian reform, but also introduced a series of highly interventionist programs that *re-regulate* rural social and economic life (Fox, 1995). The Mexican federal government now manages three national programs that require it to supervise and regulate millions of individual rural citizens in three new and unprecedented ways: plot-specific grain production patterns (PROCAMPO), individual land titles (PROCEDE) and maternal and child education and health practices (PROGRESA). PROGESA is officially based on reverse vertical accountability; if state bureaucrat monitors decide that mothers have failed to send their children to school, to provide labor to local clinics or to submit to mandated medical tests and classes, then the state will suspend their transfer payments. This is the formal dimension of reverse vertical accountability, electoral politics often add an informal dimension to the power relationship. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but before electoral politics was competitive in Mexico, most state regulation of rural life did not require institutionalized relationships with individuals.²¹

7. International actors have contradictory effects on state accountability.

Explanations of the construction of horizontal accountability need to bring transnational actors in to their frameworks. For example, to refer to international actors as the “third dimension” is conveniently straightforward (Pastor, 1999), but needs to be further developed to capture the range of patterns of interaction between domestic and international factors.

the “prison-industrial complex.” For example, in California, the state prison guard union is now more electorally influential than the state public teachers’ union, as reflected in campaign contributions and relative salary rates. This example shows how one kind of reverse vertical accountability can influence “normal” vertical accountability of electoral politics.

²¹ Increased electoral competition has had a contradictory impact on Mexico's changing mechanisms of state intervention through rural social programs. It is worth recalling that the *absence* of rural electoral competition facilitated one of the Mexican state's most successful experiments in power-sharing with rural civil society, its first major case of *concertación social*, or balanced state-society power-sharing. Launched by state reformists in 1979, the Conasupo-Coplamar rural food distribution program deliberately encouraged relatively autonomous mass participation from below as a counterweight to hold the implementing bureaucrats accountable (Fox, 1992a). This example of “reform by stealth,” in Hirschmanian terms, created major pockets of increased freedom of association under a still-authoritarian regime, as long as participation steered clear of electoral competition. The program generated a broad web of participatory co-management institutions that survived years of austerity, but by the late 1990s was finally targeted for elimination. In the Treasury Ministry's technocratic vision of social policy, a program that benefited entire communities and was co-managed with civil society organizations was to be replaced by a program that reached only subsets of communities, lacked any horizontal accountability mechanisms and was more vulnerable to electoral politicization because of individualized targeting. Mexico's increasingly open electoral politics then helped the rural food program, however, since its broad social constituency successfully lobbied the Mexican congress to protect it (Pastrana, 1999).

International actors have long been active in constraining both vertical and horizontal accountability in Latin America, most notably the US government and some private enterprises. Since the 1970s, however, the range of international actors has become considerably more diverse. Local and national pro-accountability civil society actors have found their own sets of transnational allies, ranging from churches and private foundations to human rights, environmental, women's rights and indigenous rights networks. These local/global coalitions are increasingly recognized to be significant political actors in their own right, as civil society campaigns use "boomerang" strategies to influence nation-states from both above and below (Brysk, 2000, Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999). These coalitions have been very influential in terms of raising public expectations and standards of horizontal accountability, as well as influencing related public policies. Non-state international actors usually lack the capacity to sanction, however, other than through their influence on their own governments. As a result, their impact on actual state *behavior* has been much more limited and uneven, which suggests limits of the boomerang strategy.²²

Since the end of the Cold War, the US government itself has invested significant amount of bilateral aid in institutions of horizontal accountability, as well as to support civil society organizations that work to improve vertical accountability. So far, these efforts have made a difference mainly at the margin (Carruthers, 1999). At the same time, however, in some countries the US government continues to invest in institutions that weaken horizontal accountability. The most notable recent example involves massive aid to the Colombian armed forces, whose involvement in repression is quite transparent.²³ Similarly, the multilateral development banks invest simultaneously in both pro and anti-accountability institutions within states, in part because they themselves are internally divided over whether to promote transparency, civil society participation and public accountability. Official aid funding therefore has "*net* accountability impacts" that vary widely both across and within nation-states.²⁴

II. Political accountability seen from civil society

If civil society actors are themselves publicly accountable, they may be more likely to contribute to the reform of the state. What are the institutional factors that encourage civil society actors to be accountable to public interests, rather than to very particular or private interests? This is one more way in which vertical and horizontal accountability are interdependent.

To identify mechanisms of vertical and horizontal accountability within civil society requires distinguishing between two different categories of associations. Membership organizations, whose main goal is to represent the interests and goals of their members are qualitatively distinct from non-membership-based *organizaciones civiles* (NGOs), entrepreneurial, service and advocacy organizations that pursue ostensibly broader, society-wide goals. Some civil society organizations reach across both categories, as in the case of human rights organizations composed of victims' relatives.

When discussing civil society organizations, public accountability and the reform of the state, it is important to keep in mind that many civil society actors primarily reinforce institutional arrangements that

²² Both in the cases of the trinational NAFTA institutions and the World Bank's policy reforms, actual institutional practices have lagged far behind enlightened new official accountability policies and discourses. For preliminary empirical applications of the Keck and Sikkink framework to these two cases, see Fox (2000a, 2000b).

²³ For example, "Human Rights Watch's evidence strongly suggests that, far from moving decisively to sever ties to paramilitaries, Colombia's military high command has yet to take the necessary steps to accomplish this goal" (press release, Feb. 23, 2000, <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/>).

²⁴ On MDB-state-civil society relations in Latin America, see Fox and Brown (1998), Feeney (1998); Fernández (1999), Garrison (2000), Tussie and Tuozzo (2000) and Valencia and Winder (1998).

limit public accountability and reproduce elitist political cultural legacies. This would characterize, for example, most broadcast media, as well as elements within some religious hierarchies, traditional charities and disaster relief organizations. Civil societies also include some movements that oppose the extension or consolidation of social and political rights sought by other movements, most notably women's rights. Looking at civil society in this broad sense of including its powerful pro-status quo elements reminds us that it includes forces of inertia as well as forces for change, as suggested by Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The following propositions focus mainly on how civil society actors may contribute to horizontal accountability by dealing with their own challenges of accountability as well.

1. The Iron Law of Oligarchy, though alive and well, is more of a powerful tendency than an all-powerful "law."

This classic sociological principle contends that the leaders of large membership organizations necessarily develop their own distinct interests, which encourages them to increase their autonomy from the base. This powerful tendency often undermines internal democracy within membership organizations, but to varying degrees that ebb and flow over time and across organizations. A large-scale cross-sectional study of 150 organizations found that combinations of horizontal and vertical linkages are critical (Esman and Uphoff, 1986). A longitudinal case study found that the existence of internal horizontal accountability mechanisms, such as *instancias intermedias de participación*, are crucial complements to conventional vertical accountability mechanisms, such as elections (Fox and Hernández, 1989, Fox, 1992b). In the absence of such participatory subgroups, leaders of large organizations only need to deal with atomized individuals who usually lack opportunities to share information and generate alternative opinions, counter-proposals and potential leaders. Participatory subgroups, in contrast, can increase member power (vertical accountability) by monitoring leader performance and brokering leader access to member votes and other resources. Members are no longer atomized. Subgroups may still be insufficient for accountability, however, since they may well constitute factions that only represent the interests of small minorities. However, as in the case of national politics more generally, organized factions that oblige those in power to be more transparent generate a public good even if they are only acting in their own self-interest.

It is important to keep in mind that membership participation is not the only possible means for influencing leadership accountability. Members may also have exit options, except for extreme cases of authoritarian state corporatism. Given exit options, members of an organization under oligarchic pressure will consider putting energy into pro-accountability strategies in so far as the array of allies, enemies and opportunities make the exercise of voice a plausibly effective approach. This is yet another example of the mutual interdependence between horizontal and vertical accountability.

2. Societal organizations can encourage state accountability without necessarily being formally accountable to their base

In Latin America, movements for democracy are defined by their opposition to authoritarian rule rather than by their internal power relations. However, "democratic movements" are only occasionally democratic themselves. Contradictory as it may seem, movements *for* democracy and accountability do not necessarily need to have formal internal democracy in order to have pro-accountability impact on the state. For example, in Mexico, repeated waves of protest by civic groups and opposition parties led to a significant degree of empowerment for the regime's newly-independent election oversight body. They thereby contributed to horizontal accountability without necessarily being internally democratic political parties or civic organizations. Armed protest even helped the process; the Zapatista uprising bolstered the bargaining power of groups that favored empowering the "citizenization" of election management, tipped the balance within an internally divided state and led to a major electoral reform agreement among the political parties in late January, 1994 (Fox, 1994c).

For a Brazilian example, the rural poor are represented primarily by two very different kinds of organizations, a formally democratic, decentralized, left-led federation of rural workers (CONTAG) and a direct action-oriented, highly centralized political organization that eschews formal internal democracy (MST). Observers across the spectrum agree that, in terms of increasing the state's public accountability in the area of agrarian reform policy implementation, the MST has been more influential than CONTAG (Navarro, 2000).

3. The accountability of mass media to civil society is problematic because it is simultaneously a market and a civil society institution

The mass media often act to fill the gaps left by ineffective state institutions of horizontal accountability. The media also plays a critical role in encouraging existing institutions of horizontal accountability to do their jobs.

The mass media are the most notable case of a societal institution that contributes to state accountability without necessarily being accountable to any other actor. Independence is one of the media's great potential strengths, but the media is a market as well as a societal actor. Some media are accountable primarily to market pressures, and few can ignore them. Only occasionally is there a convergence between market incentives and journalistic contributions to transparent governance. Others are accountable to specific ideologies, or to certain partisan political elites.

Broadcast media are especially vulnerable to state control, and often fall short of their potential contribution to more transparent government (as in Peru and Mexico, among others). In terms of electoral access, as long as media time is allocated according to purchasing power, then that dimension of the media will be most accountable to the campaign with the most money to spend on airtime. Since few media owners or top editors offer incentives to rock the boat, the role of professional norms and horizontal social capital becomes critical to encourage the media contributions to transparent governance that are so essential to accountability. This is why the NGOs, universities and membership associations that defend freedom of the press, individual journalists, and set high standards for contributions to the public interest are so important.

4. NGOs can be held publicly accountable even though they lack precisely-defined constituencies

NGOs usually lack a clearly-defined constituency, so defining their accountability processes is inherently problematic. They may be accountable to universal ideals of democracy, justice, or environmental sustainability, as many claim – or not, as some external critics argue. NGOs tend to zealously defend their autonomy, so who decides whether they are accountable to their ostensible goals, and who sets the standards? Since accountability is relational, however, NGOs can be accountable in many different directions. For example, they can be accountable to grassroots constituencies, though these power relations vary greatly in practice.²⁵ They can be accountable to charismatic leaders, political parties, or to certain religious faiths or ideological currents. They can also be accountable to their funders, whether private or governmental. One of the most promising sources of NGO accountability is to each other, through coalitions, as discussed below.

One of the most important sources of NGO accountability is the possible distance between the high standards they publicly set for themselves and their actual practices.²⁶ If the distance between goals and

²⁵ For discussion of social movement-NGO relations in Mexico, see Fox and Hernández (1992). For a revealing critique of NGO-community relations in Bolivia, see Rivera Cusicanqui (1990).

²⁶ On NGO accountability, see Cleary (1997); Fox and Brown (1998); Edwards and Hulme (1996); and Meyer (1999).

practices becomes very large, or very obvious, then the NGO will have a credibility gap. This is a major potential source of accountability because most NGOs need credibility to survive. They need credibility with the media to have a public voice, with grassroots partners to have popular legitimacy, with elites to influence policy, and with funders to gain the material support essential for institutional survival.²⁷ Since different NGOs often share these same goals, there is an element of competition that creates an incentive for mutual oversight, and therefore mutual accountability.²⁸

Many NGOs have also formed networks and coalitions, and these fora can serve to set at least some “rules of the game” for NGO accountability. When consolidated, networks and coalitions can constitute “mini-regimes” of self-governance within a given region or sector.²⁹ Coalitions that set explicit shared goals and carry out joint actions thereby set standards of mutual accountability. NGOs can sanction those who do not comply with these expectations by excluding them from the coalition, with an associated loss of credibility. The more general point here is that civil society actors can be held accountable, even if the processes are not clearly institutionalized.

5. Social movements and NGOs can contribute to political accountability through their influence on political cultures

According to conventional indicators of mobilization, social movement activity often declines after transitions to democratic regimes. Many observers conclude that social movement impact on politics therefore drops off. However, the character of social movement impact on politics is not necessarily obvious or fixed; its nature can adapt and change. Influence on state behavior has the great advantage of being tangible, but impact on political cultures, though more difficult to measure, matters greatly as well. Recall that much of conventional civil society activity in defense of organized interests is largely instrumental or focused strictly on material issues, and therefore does not necessarily contribute to changing the culture of politics. In this context, those social movements and NGOs that *do* focus on transforming political cultures make an especially important contribution to horizontal accountability.³⁰

²⁷ Most Latin American NGOs are funded by private or government grants. Large NGOs in other countries, in contrast, are often funded by contributions from individual supporters. This appears to complicate the dichotomy posed between membership associations and NGOs, but many large “membership organizations” are not actually *governed* by their members.

²⁸ In this sense, the dispersion and competition that sometimes seem to characterize the NGO sector may well be a hidden institutional strength. At the same time, competitive pressures also reduce incentives for NGO transparency.

²⁹ It is useful to distinguish analytically between networks, coalitions and movements, although the terms are usually used interchangeably in practice. Networks often involve exchanges of information, experiences and expressions of solidarity. Sometimes these exchanges generate networks of ongoing relationships. Sometimes these networks in turn generate the shared goals, mutual trust and understanding needed to form coalitions that can collaborate on specific campaigns. Networks, in contrast, do not necessarily coordinate their actions, nor come to agreement on specific joint actions (as implied by the concept of coalition). Neither networks nor coalitions necessarily imply significant horizontal exchange between participants. Indeed, many rely on a handful of interlocutors to manage relationships between broad-based social organizations that have relatively little awareness of the nature and actions of their counterparts. Social movement organization, in contrast, implies a much higher degree of density and much more cohesion than networks or coalitions, as well as higher standards of mutual accountability. For further discussion and application of these concepts to Mexico-US civil society relationships, see Fox (2000a). As Margeret Keck put it, “coalitions are networks in action mode” (personal communication, March 9, 2000).

³⁰ For detailed elaboration of this proposition, see Alvarez (1997); Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar (1998), as well as Peruzzotti (2000). For broad discussions of how to assess social movement impact, see Giugni, McAdam and Tilly (1999).

What is the link between political culture and accountability? Many analysts attribute the lack of accountability to particular sets of values. Others, such as World Bank corruption experts, focus more on institutions and incentives (Kaufmann, 1999). One does not need to resolve this debate to acknowledge that political cultures matter for horizontal accountability, however, because even if dysfunctional state institutions are not *caused* primarily by cultural factors, the process of reforming them may well require changing political cultures.

Political culture embodies attitudes, values and behaviors – all of which matter for state accountability because they influence what citizens expect of the state. In other words, changing expected *standards of behavior* is key for promoting accountability, within civil society as well as the state. This contribution broadens the societal *constituency* for the state’s horizontal accountability innovations, as well as reinforcing the legitimacy of the notion that the state should obey standards of accountability in the first place.

6. Transnational coalitions can change the balance of power among civil society organizations, with implications for their mutual accountability

When NGOs or social organizations form coalitions across national boundaries, some groups gain more access to resources, international media exposure, technical assistance and political support than others. Transnational ties can therefore change the balance of power – not only between civil society organizations and their targets, but also among different civil society actors. For example, NGOs often benefit more from transnational networking than grassroots membership organizations, in part because NGOs are less focused on short-term survival or self-defense and therefore are freer to make the open-ended investment required. Groups that manage to project their issues in ways that resonate with internationally influential civil society frames also gain more access to resources and media attention than others (Bob, 2000). Therefore local groups have incentives to represent their issues in ways that will resonate internationally. This can raise challenges for accountability within social movements or NGO networks, once a few interlocutors gain access international circuits and speak in the name of many who do not.

One study of a wide range of campaigns against World Bank projects explicitly addressed the issue of the degree to which US and European advocacy groups were accountable to their local coalition partners in the South, those directly affected by projects. Differences in power, priorities and culture between Northern and Southern civil society groups inherently risks throwing such coalitions off balance. Nevertheless, the study found remarkably few cases of so-called “green imperialism” (Fox and Brown, 1998). Ironically, the World Bank’s frequent attacks on Northern critics’ alleged lack of concern for the poor increased the pressure on them to be accountable to their Southern partners.

Mexico-US maquila worker support coalitions illustrate some of the relationships between vertical and horizontal accountability.³¹ A decade of maquila worker rights campaigns shows that cross-border coalitions often help to increase leverage over transnational corporations, sometimes leading to partial concessions (Williams, forthcoming). However, transnational civil society coalitions, even with access to mass media, high-level US politicians and trinational labor institutions, have had almost no success so far

³¹ The experience of US-Mexican coalition efforts to monitor and advocate for improved conditions in the maquila industry also show how differing campaign logics can raise issues of mutual accountability within coalitions. US-based organizers often prioritize US media impact, to influence both target corporations and congressional trade policy decisions. Mexican organizers, in contrast, focus mainly on longer-term worker organizing on the shopfloor and in the community. As a result, Mexican organizers formed their own Mexican-side network, to create a horizontal counterweight to balance US groups’ influence in the cross-border coalitions (Fox, 2000a)

at defending workers' right to freedom of association, which is key for vertical accountability.³² Specifically, the right to freedom of association depends in part on the functioning of the state's labor courts – an institution of horizontal accountability. So far, a decade of local and international concern, not to mention electoral democracy in northern states, has not made Mexican labor courts more autonomous from partisan and private sector interests. This case shows how weak vertical and weak horizontal accountability are mutually reinforcing, even when under international scrutiny.

7. The potential impact of civil society policy monitoring initiatives depends heavily on their capacity for “vertical integration.”

Most discussions of political accountability stress the importance of civil society monitoring of the policy process. The information costs required for effective vertical accountability are very high. Once civil society actors are armed with reliable information about state behavior, however, they can act strategically to bolster agencies of horizontal accountability within the state. Policy monitoring is critical to identify not only abuses of power, but also possible opportunities for civil society leverage. Civil society impact is as much about targeting and weakening the forces of impunity as it is about bolstering pro-accountability institutions. To be effective, civil society accountability strategies require reliable information about *where* precisely to target advocacy campaigns.

The national public policy process is increasingly entangled with multiple levels of authority, both above and below the national arena. National executive authorities share power not only with other national horizontal institutions, such as legislatures, but also with international financial institutions, private investors on the one hand, and with relatively autonomous subnational governments on the other. As a result, when national policymakers respond to civic and social organizations that are trying to hold them accountable, it is very convenient for them to emphasize -- or even to exaggerate -- the increased weight of either international or subnational policymakers. Decision-makers at different levels can step aside and point the finger elsewhere, and opaque policy processes make it very difficult for advocacy groups to assess their claims.³³ For example, the national government can, in the name of the federalism, sidestep all kinds of anomalies committed by state and municipal governments, as in the cases of Mexico's “Deep South” in the 1990s and the US's Deep South in the 1950s.³⁴

³² This is a major lesson of the high-profile Han Young campaign (Fox, 2000a).

³³ For example, many kinds of public policies that privilege private business interests can be justified as a response to international business pressures, even though that may not necessarily be true. This appears to have been the case of the 1991-1992 reform of the Mexican Constitution's [agrarian reform] Article 27. Most of the evidence suggests that it was President Salinas' initiative. The reform may have *intended* to attract foreign investment, but it was not a *concession* to direct, supposedly all-powerful pressures to open up the agrarian reform sector to market forces (after all, most of these lands are less than attractive to most foreign investors). Another notable case involves NAFTA and Mexican corn producers. The treaty allowed a buffer period of 15 years before the Mexican market had to open up fully to cheap US imports. Instead, the Mexican government decided to speed up this socially costly process – national trade policymakers decided to open up the corn market in the first two years. Publicly, NAFTA provided a convenient pretext that allowed the government to evade its responsibility. Here is example of an “accountability target” (NAFTA) that “looks” international, when the key decision-makers were actually national (though very few civil society actors had sufficient access to the relevant policy information to know this).

³⁴ In the Mexican context, “sur profundo” is Armando Bartra's phrase, based on his extensive research on democracy movements in the southern state of Guerrero (1996).

Turning to international actors, multilateral development banks often respond to criticism by attributing “problem projects” to national and local governments (as in the recent case of the political crisis following Bolivia’s water privatization).³⁵ This is sometimes true, but how can independent observers know when?

Conversely, when a national government makes a socially or environmentally costly decision, it may be very convenient to have the World Bank *look* like it forced them to do it, so that the direct political cost to them is reduced. The World Bank may implicitly accept bearing the burden of blame, as a political favor to its allies in the borrowing government. In short, public interest strategists need to know where the key decisions were made, otherwise their efforts will be mistargeted. This dilemma can be depicted as a process of “squeezing the balloon.” When civil society organizations they squeeze the balloon over here, it pops out over there.

Since one could describe the multi-level public policy process in terms on vertical integration, civil society efforts to influence public policies need to integrate vertically as well. “Vertical integration” of monitoring and advocacy strategies refers to the systematic coordination between diverse levels of civil society, from local to state, national and international arenas. One can find these vertical linkages either in specific sectoral issue areas, such as human rights, reproductive rights, the defense of biodiversity, or in broader multisectoral campaigns that cut across issue areas, such as the coalitions that campaign to increase the public accountability of the World Bank as an institution.

The most consolidated Latin American effort to vertically integrate civil society accountability campaigns in this arena is the Brazilian Network on the International Financial Institutions.³⁶ This coalition includes both many leading national NGOs and broad-based social organizations. Their main goal is to work with diverse civil society organizations to bolster the capacity of the federal congress to exercise its mandate to oversee the nation-state’s relationship with the international financial institutions. In other words, they use vertical accountability mechanisms to strengthen horizontal accountability at the *national* level. At the same time, they submit claims to the World Bank’s own horizontal accountability mechanism, the Inspection Panel.³⁷

Another approach to vertical integration starts with intensive, medium-term investments in local support for grassroots organizations, to increase their capacity for informed participation in and monitoring of the policy process. The Mexican NGO *Trasparencia* pursues a two-track strategy, encouraging greater transparency from above by putting relevant policy information directly into the hands of representative stakeholders, while also working with those same organizations to involve them in the process of policy

³⁵ Personal email communication, World Bank staffer, April 12, 2000. For charges of World Bank involvement in water subsidy cuts in Bolivia, see Shultz (2000). For details, see www.americas.org. It appears that the World Bank did pressure the government to privatize Cochabamba’s water system, as well as to cut subsidies, but then rejected the government’s particular approach because of efficiency and corruption concerns – allowing the Bank to deny involvement when privatization provoked widespread unrest.

³⁶ See Vianna (1998); Leroy and Couto Soares (1998) and www.rbrasil.org.br/. This “nationalization” of transnational advocacy differs significantly from the World Bank campaigns of the 1980s and early 1990s, which tended to link local and global groups while bypassing the national arena. See Keck (1998) for Brazil’s Planaflo case.

³⁷ Civil society Inspection Panel claims are based on the premise that socially and environmentally costly projects are the joint responsibility of the World Bank and borrowing governments. Though the Panel’s mandate is limited to investigating the Bank’s role, nation-states usually react defensively. In the Brazilian case, the Itaparica Panel claim provoked the federal government to lead an international campaign within the World Bank’s board of directors to dismantle the Inspection Panel. They almost succeeded, and the Panel’s future remains uncertain (Fox, 2000b). For details on the World Bank transparency and accountability issues, see also www.bicusa.org, and www.ciel.org.

monitoring from below.³⁸ Because this process is so labor-intensive, however, it is difficult to focus on more than a small number of regions and policies at the same time. Both Rede Brasil and Transparencia's strategies are based on the principle of "vertical integration" of policy advocacy.

8. Civil society actors can have a comparative advantage in policy monitoring, but sustained investments with uncertain payoffs are required.

Since transparency is a precondition for accountability, civil society institutions face the challenge of investing the resources required to generate reliable, convincing and widely-accessible independent evaluations of state actions. Where there is a large gap between state commitments and actual performance, civil society actors have an opportunity to empower those organizations and intellectuals with the capacity to document that gap.

Some civil society actors have focused their national policy transparency efforts on the multilateral development banks, in part because most nation-states share much more information with the banks than with their own civil societies. Therefore, internal development bank documents often contain important policy information that is not publicly available to a borrowing government's citizens. The development banks have increased their degree of public transparency significantly since the mid-1990s, but it turns out that they often lack their own sources of reliable information about the performance of borrowing governments, and instead tend to rely on government self-evaluations (Fox, 1997). For example, while development banks have made large investments in social and environmental initiatives, they rarely bolstered independent oversight mechanisms in either state or society.

Table One shows the actors and institutions that might do monitoring and evaluation of the actual results of public policies. This conceptual map shows why independent civil society policy monitors have a particular comparative advantage: *most evaluations of government/multilateral development bank social and environmental investments are either confidential, produced by interested parties, or both*. Evaluations that remain confidential lose most of their pro-accountability potential. Independent, public evaluations can fill the information gap and bolster accountability efforts. The information must be timely, credible, as well as both targeted and accessible to those actors most likely to use it (such as direct stakeholders in specific policy issues). Information does not generate advocacy or mobilization by itself, however. For transparency to matter, civil society, political party and state actors need to have the willingness and capacity to use it politically.

³⁸ For details, see www.laneta.apc.org/trasporencia/ and Fernández (1999).

Table One: Conceptual map of potential monitoring and evaluation actors

	Interested parties	Independent sources of monitoring and evaluation	Comments
Multilateral development banks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Operational MDB staff (those responsible for supervising projects and financial flows) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Technical departments of MDBs (social and environmental staff) * MDB evaluation departments (relatively autonomous from operational authorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Few projects are designed to include independent monitoring and evaluation * Most studies rely on official data on “inputs” (money spent) rather than documenting impacts and services actually delivered
Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Government officials directly responsible for MDB-funded programs * Government officials indirectly responsible (such as federal agencies that finance state and local governments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Government auditing and oversight agencies * Semi-autonomous evaluation units within government agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Few governments have effective, autonomous oversight agencies, and they generally are limited to corruption rather than assessing effectiveness * Few agencies have autonomous evaluation units, especially at state and municipal levels
National civil societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Direct project beneficiaries (including both target groups and “unintentional” beneficiaries) * Potential beneficiaries who were excluded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mass media (investigative journalists) * University-based researchers * Civil society organizations (NGO research networks and centers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Little public access to official data on resource distribution patterns and allocation criteria * Mass media are more adept at disseminating than generating systematic evaluations * Universities and NGOs often lack the independent, medium-term funding needed to carry out and disseminate autonomous public interest research

D. Conclusion

This essay's main theme is that civil society role both frames and is framed by the *interaction* between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of accountability. Weaknesses in electoral democracy can undermine horizontal oversight institutions, and vice versa. Conversely, strong oversight institutions can empower mechanisms of vertical accountability. This is the dynamic context within which actors that favor accountability come together in efforts to strengthen checks and balances.

Schedler has identified four main sources of pro-accountability reform: "governments (reform from above); civil society (reform from below); staff members (reform from within) and international actors (reform from the outside)" (1999b: 338). In each of these domains, however, pro-accountability actors are often weak, in relation to the other actors in their respective arenas. Pro-accountability initiatives most likely encounter resistance both within and between state and society, but the ways in which such conflicts unfold are not predetermined by a static initial distribution of power resources. The analytical challenge, then, is to develop a framework that can capture the process of dynamic interaction in which weak actors gain leverage. After all, pro-accountability initiatives often fail. Sometimes these failures nevertheless weaken the opposition and therefore constitute steps toward reform, yet at other times the failure of accountability efforts can actually bolster the forces of impunity. What makes the difference? Under what conditions can pro-accountability actors set off "virtuous circles" of mutual empowerment?

An interactive approach is needed to account for how different actors' capacities to pursue their goals changes through conflict and convergence. The strength or weakness of pro-reform forces is shaped through their strategic interaction with each other and with their opponents. An interactive approach also requires rejecting the still widely-held assumption that state and society are necessarily engaged in a zero-sum balance of power.³⁹ Pro-accountability actors within both state institutions and civil society need to find mutually reinforcing coalition strategies that bridge state and society, to make the whole stronger than the sum of the parts. In the iterative virtuous circles that bolster accountability, civil society and state actors manage to empower one another and then embed reforms into the state. These institutional levers, such as transparency and oversight bodies, then further empower pro-accountability actors within both state and society, contributing to successive rounds of change.

In conclusion, the question of which inter-institutional relationships most effectively promote horizontal accountability may involve more art than science, with the most promising institutional configurations depending on particular actors, times and places. Perhaps the challenge can be understood as a kind of political Feng Shui – the ancient art of placing things in balanced relationships to one another.

³⁹ Stepan's comparative discussion of regime transitions from military rule laid out four possible combinations, based on strong vs. weak states, and strong vs. weak societies (1985). The combination of strong states and strong societies is most promising for institutionalizing accountability.

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