

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Situating the Empirical Field of Research and Its Frontiers

(Opening “mood piece” for the workshop....)

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Compared to other political regime forms, democracies codify and institutionalize mechanisms of accountability that involve all competent citizens of a polity. The most basic instrument of accountability is the periodic (re)election of representatives to legislative decision-making bodies, combined with the legislature's decisive role in the appointment and dismissal of government executives (in parliamentary systems) or the direct election of the chief executive (in presidential systems). But these fundamental institutional mechanisms tell us rather little about what actually goes on in a democratic accountability relationship between citizens and their representatives. What, if any, efforts do voters make to seek accountability and politicians to deliver it? How, if at all, is a relationship of accountability "consummated" in the democratic process in the sense of an equilibrium between voters' demands and politicians' supply? What is the "stuff" of accountability that is being transacted between citizen constituencies and their representatives? People may not like a politician's performance, but endorse her "mode" of responsiveness to voter demands, i.e. the kinds of benefits she strives to deliver to electoral constituencies. Alternatively, voters may fundamentally object even to the very mode by which politicians seek electoral approval and solicit the voter's validation of her accountability in the subsequent election.

The formal institutional barebones of democracy, usually enshrined in constitutions and laws specifying rules of the game (e.g. about electoral systems), may be of limited assistance in fleshing out the *contexts in which the demand, supply and consummation of democratic accountability takes place*. Some constitutions go further and incorporate bills of rights and institutional protections of civil liberties. They may affect citizens' opportunities for collective action and ultimately their capacity to hold politicians accountable in elections. But even with a Bill of Rights, much that shapes demand and supply of democratic accountability remains in the dark. On the demand side, formal democratic rules are certainly mum about the personal cognitive qualifications, psychological dispositions, and economic and cultural resources (education, disposable time, income) citizens may need to partake effectively in a political accountability relationship. On the supply side, formal institutions are even less helpful. Most constitutions say little about the role of representatives in building accountability relations other than in vague formula that demand representatives to follow the duties of their office "in accordance with their own conscience." Most constitutions, particularly all of those written before World War II, do not even mention political parties as vehicles of organizing accountability efforts, although they are crucial in the process of interest aggregation and political decision-making. Constitutions say even less about other vehicles of collective mobilization likely to play a role in the demand and supply side of accountability relations, such as social movements and interest groups.

Whether democracies have an "impact" on people's lives, however, depends critically on how political actors devise and enact accountability relations. Do democracies organize accountability relations differently than other political regime forms? And among democracies, what shapes the range of citizens' accountability demands and politicians' supply of accountability efforts, and ultimately the consummation of accountability relations in the interaction of the two sides? Accountability plays out in the use of public authority through legislative and executive state organs and may shape citizens' material life chances, but also their subjective sense of well-being and their satisfaction with and normative support for the prevailing political and cultural fabric of institutions ("legitimacy").

These general declarations about accountability designate objects about which theorizing and research may be worthwhile. Without reviewing the voluminous literature, in this "motivating piece" for the May 2011 workshop I will address only a few basic challenges and choices made in conceptualizing

accountability, without going in detail into the positive and normative theory of democratic accountability. I will then differentiate accountability relations to define the empirical object of the analysis in the “Democratic Accountability” project. The remainder of this sketch will briefly address several concrete challenges of theorizing about accountability relations and a few issues of empirical methodology.

1. What is Democratic Accountability?

Accountability is not limited to the realm of democracy, or even that of politics more generally, but designates *an evaluation of an actor’s performance in some domain of social organization relative to some specified standard (or rules) that may or may not then result in consequences*. This evaluation may concern (1) the extent to which an actor has made an effort to make her action transparent or (2) the content of the action itself.¹ If an actor’s performance diverges from the expectations of the standard template, she may face negative consequences, implemented *by or on behalf* of some constituency that has a stake in the performance standard. An actor that excels at complying with the standard, by contrast, may earn rewards and inducements. Sanctions and rewards are not necessary, but contingent aspects of an accountability relationship. Hence, we may define accountability in the following fashion:

“A is accountable with respect to M when some individual, body or institution, Y, can require A to inform and explain/justify his or her conduct with respect to M.” (Philip 2009: 32)

The choice of standards of performance evaluation, and the incident and modes of performance sanctioning, in accountability relations are domain specific and contingent. Professionals—such as judges, doctors, or accountants—face different standards and procedures under which they are held accountable than corporate managers. Both types may be subject to different ways of being held accountable than civil servants, and none of these agents may be held accountable in quite the same fashion as democratically elected politicians. For each class of agents, the *principals* that assess performance, the *target groups* on whose behalf performance is assessed, and possibly the *sanctioning procedures* that may be set in motion as a consequence of the evaluation process are different.

In the political realm, accountability often involves a *relationship of representation*, but representation, when analytically conceived, is not limited to democracy (Rehfeld 2006). Democracies specify certain formal rules of representation, but what acts make politicians representative or accountable within a given system of democratic rules is a complicated matter (cf. Manin et al. 1999a: 10-11). For example, the very actions that seem *ex ante* to be “responsive” to constituency demands, may turn out *ex post* to fail the accountability test, as they deliver results not endorsed by the constituents. Had agents only been less representative so that they would have been better accountable!

Also in formal institutional terms, contemporary democracies are only one very specific way of organizing representation and accountability relations. The constituencies represented are not functional groups, as in medieval estate assemblies, but territorial units. Democratic representation relies on

¹ My rendering here is strongly influenced by Philip’s (2009) meticulous effort to analytically define accountability relations.

periodic competitive elections in which constituents renew or withdraw the license of an agent to represent them, not an appointment of agents through a process of cooptation or lottery, to name only two alternatives. And the featured formal incentive of democratic office seekers is only wielding the power and prestige of the office, not particular personal resources, although rent-seeking and advantages in other currencies of social success may be a by-product.

Nevertheless, the rules of electoral democracy imply an “extrinsic” view of the motivational incentives base that moves agents, or those who vie to be elected as agents, to demonstrate their political accountability. It is not personal integrity and normative commitment to a substantive vision of the collective good, but the power and prestige of the office that make legislators accountable to their constituencies. If agents like the experience of being in elected office, they will *ex ante* seek to chart a course of action that makes them appear “responsive” to a sufficiently large set of electoral constituents at the time of the subsequent election. Accountability then works *ex post*, when voters get the chance to review what agents have delivered.

From the vantage point of voters, however, accountability evaluations may not be confined to retrospective assessments. Voters have not simply the mind of “peasants” with a myopic view backward on the past performance of their agents, but they may also reason like hyperopic “bankers” who want to assess the consequences of alternative future courses of action on offer in democratic competition:

- Past performance of the office incumbent is the retrospective element. It serves as *one* yardstick to assess the credibility of an agent’s promises of future performance.
- But prospective performance promises are not solely derivative of past performance, as circumstances of political action change and may make it uncertain, whether a candidate’s credibility on the past vouches for her credibility in the future. Besides, incumbents have to be compared to contestants who lack a retrospective performance track record, but cannot be simply ruled out as not credible. In their vote choice, citizens may have to arbitrate between the (bad) performance of incumbents against the lack of credible track record and reputation of untried competitors. More generally, voters do not just “sanction” past actions, but “select” strategically among alternatives for the future.²

The conundrum about the extent to which accountability is based on retrospective and prospective performance judgments of actual or potential representatives, and about the extent to which accountability may imply representation or not, speaks to the more general fact that *the literature on democratic representation displays a great deal of agreement over procedures of representation (periodic elections, civil liberties, etc.), yet very little over the substance of such accountability relations* (Manin et al. 1999b). Let me enumerate several difficulties in characterizing the substance of representative relationships—and the meaning of accountability as judging the performance of representatives—in order to situate the framing of the accountability challenge as framed in the current research project that is subject to the workshop:

² See on this distinction, applied to “naïve” and “strategic” economic voting, Duch and Stevenson (2008), preceded by the more general treatment of the cycle of democratic accountability in American politics in Erickson, McKuen, and Stimson (2003).

- There is the classical question: Do representatives act like “trustees” of their constituencies who may better understand the interests of their constituencies than the latter do themselves or as “delegates” who act on their constituencies’ explicit operational commands? As Rehfeld (2009) has recently shown, the trustee-mandate relationship is itself multi-dimensional. Do representatives have to act on the *means* demanded by constituencies or just act in the spirit of the *ends* they prefer in order to be electorally successful when they are held accountable? Can representatives draw on *independent sources of knowledge* of how to pursue objectives their constituencies like or do they have to rely on a *canon of knowledge imposed on them* by constituents, in the first place?
- Which constituencies are to be served in the accountability relationship, those that *elected the representative* or an aspirational, prospective constituency that the representative expects to be sympathetic to her office performance, when the next election approaches? In other words, can representatives craft the constituencies that approve their accountability, rather than serve the constituencies that elected them?
- How much are constituencies able to mobilize *cognitive capacity and informational resources, but also mobilizational vehicles* to create an effective demand for accountability and contribute to a working accountability relationship with political agents?
- How do constituencies trade off the “*competence*” of an agent against the *agreement of her performance with the constituencies’ aims* expected to be realized by the agent? How much agency loss is acceptable in exchange for competence? (Fox and Shotts 2009) Is a corrupt politician who gets some things done better than an honest, but ineffectual politician?

All of these questions pose pertinent and important issues of both positive and normative democratic theory. But in some ways, and even if they were resolved, they do not touch the fundamental question raised in the Democratic Accountability project at hand. Let us make some weak assumptions about democratic accountability relations that clear away conventional questions about political accountability to highlight the problem they leave unaddressed:

- Voters may have *little monitoring capabilities in general*, but critical minorities of rational information misers, in conjunction with informed elites as multipliers in the chain of information processing and dissemination, are able to subject politicians to a *modicum of oversight* that makes them accountable for their actions *ex post*. In anticipation, their actions will craft a mixture of responsiveness to manifest demands at the time of their actions and anticipated standards of voter assessment at the future time of (re)election.
- Politicians will thus walk a fine line between elements of trustee and mandate relations, but at least with regard to fundamental objectives, rather than means of political action, successful politicians will situate themselves closer to a mandate conception of representation.
- Voters take both competence and responsiveness of politicians into account, albeit with different weights, contingent upon specifics of the situation.

This minimalist rendering of democratic accountability between electoral constituencies and political representatives can be understood as a *principal-agent relationship*, albeit of a specific quality that still needs some detailing below. Under conditions of asymmetrical information, principals try to induce agents to align their actions with the former’s interests rather than to defect and solely pursue their own interests through public office. In addition to *ex-ante* mechanisms of candidate selection and socialization (inside parties) as well as contract design (term limits of the license to represent the

principal, compensation of agents, etc.), ex-post mechanisms subjecting agents to reporting about their activities, as well as the oversight of agents' conduct through institutional checks and balances are critical to maintain the accountability relation (cf. Strom 2000: 271-2).

Even if we answer these questions about accountability, what this leaves, however, is *an entire continent of questions that concern the “stuff” of accountability*. What sorts of performances and their consequences is it that constituencies want to hold representatives accountable for? What is it that constituencies seek from politicians in a principal-agent relationship of democratic accountability? Even the most sophisticated treatments of democratic accountability and representation—such as those of Manin et al. (1999)—seem to assume that *the currency and content of accountability is public policy*, or what I will characterize as the special case of a provision of large-scale club and collective goods in a non-contingent exchange relationship between principals and agents. In pondering whether to be representative or accountable, follow a mandate or a trustee conception of representation, or try to appeal to current or future constituencies that will hold her accountable, the agent will always have to consider two critical questions that rarely make it into the purview of discussions about democratic theory and representation:

- *A question of goods*: What types of “goods” and “services” shall politicians produce to benefit electoral constituents?
- *A question of delivery mechanisms and procedures*: Should benefits be delivered to voters with or without regard to their choices among parties and candidates in an election, i.e. conditional upon their individual partisan choice (and maybe their turnout choice), or unconditional under rules that define formal and legal access to benefits without regard to a citizen's partisan preferences?

2. Modes of Accountability. The Object of Research

The joint focal point of a theory of democratic accountability is that elected agents make an effort to deliver benefits for which principals have a demand. If elected agents deliver none of those benefits, they cannot stay in the game and will be dismissed by the voters when they are held accountable in a subsequent election. Among all the other moving parts that affect a relationship of democratic accountability, let us here focus on the nature of the goods delivered and the political process that triggers principals' access to the goods delivered by the agents.

I will first distinguish types of benefits and types of delivery processes involved in the democratic principal-agent accountability relationship (section 2.1.), but without a detailed engagement of the literature. I will then address three questions of conceptualization and theory-building that may be controversial: first, the level of analysis (individual transactions, individual politicians' and parties' portfolios of transactions, or portfolios of competing parties in the same system?) at which research accountability relations can be pursued (section 2.2.); next, the merits and problems of framing democratic accountability relations in terms of a principal-agent model (2.3.); and finally charges of “concept stretching” and normative “concept perversion” that are said to result from an expansive, inclusive use of the notion of democratic accountability for a wide variety of benefits and procedures involved in the voter-politician transaction (2.4.).

2.1. TYPES OF ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONS

The most common criterion to distinguish the content of democratic accountability relations has to do with *the scale of goods and services* that are at stake between electoral principles and political agents. I will argue that this is a start, but by itself insufficient. I add as a second defining element the nature of the *contractual process* that unfolds between voters and politicians. Finally, as a third and possibly residual element, I relax the assumption that all political exchange is about instrumental advantages, measurable in terms of economic resource allocation and control of organizational agenda control and decision-making powers, and add a symbolic, expressive trajectory dimension of services voters may demand and politicians supply.

The Scale of Political Goods

At one extreme, politicians may provide public goods everyone consumes in a non-rival fashion and the enjoyment of which excludes no one. At the other extreme, politicians may produce and distribute private goods the consumption is rival and strictly delimited to those who “pay” for their provision or receive it as a pure “gift.” In between collective and private goods are club goods that exclude non-members of the club (and maybe actually make them pay for the goods provision...), but involve non-rival consumption and non-excludability within the club. Club goods involve redistribution (between insiders and outsiders), collective goods do not.

Among club goods, politicians may focus on the provision of *large-scale or small-scale club goods*. This analytical distinction maybe read in the spirit of Hardin’s (1982) treatment of Olson’s (1965) treatment of group size in the provision of collective goods. Small groups can overcome the transaction costs of policing free-riding and constitute critical k-subgroups where members have a self-interest in supplying the good. Large groups cannot achieve this. When politicians produce large club goods, they provide benefits for social categories such as factors or sectors of production, or large territorial units. Small club goods, by contrast, accrue to narrowly circumscribed localities and small networks of constituencies. This benefits provision has an affinity to what the interest group literature calls “pork” pursued by and delivered to “special interests.”

A conceptualization of accountability mechanisms by the nature of goods and services candidates may announce to deliver or have delivered in order to win public office is useful, but ultimately insufficient for the following interrelated reasons:

- The conventional literature simplifies matters typically to the dualism of public goods for all and “special interest” advantages for well-defined constituencies. But very few goods ever meet the strict standards of a collective good. Political goods tend to be “positional” (benefit some, but hurt others) and not “valence” (a good everyone wants to enjoy). The old critique of spatial models of positional theories of party competition (see Stokes 1963; Budge and Farlie 1983) is wrong. To a very large extent, democratic politics is *not* primarily a struggle about the competence of agents in the provision of collective goods, but the distributional implications of goods that privilege some “clubs” compared to others.
- If collective goods are a vanishingly small share of the competitive struggle in which accountability processes are embedded, then the force of the goods division for theories of

democratic accountability processes rests on the distinction between large and small scale club goods. Sometimes it is indeed straight-forward to make that distinction, but often enough it is not. *Moreover, government actions may have a multiplicity of implications that make them simultaneously public, large-scale club, and small-scale club goods.*

Consider building a public school: Observers may see that activity as a contribution to a public good insofar as it improves the human capital of an economy with widespread, diffuse spillovers into productivity gains that translate into economic growth, a large-scale club or indeed a collective good. Others may identify the act of school building as a large-scale club good insofar as it improves the educational opportunities of some social groups, while other groups have to pay for the new service. Yet a third group of constituents may focus on its small-scale club goods implications insofar as it improves the attractiveness of a particular locality to employers and raises the economic well-being of identifiable families and neighborhoods by supplying jobs in the school.

Often enough, then, reasonable minds may disagree whether analysts can clearly discern the type of good produced by politicians, thus making it difficult to take that type as starting point to theorize about accountability relations. While we might see a sliding scale of goods it is often in the eye of the beholder, or the eyes of the respective constituency, to decide who is affected and has reasons to mobilize in favor or against the provision of that good.

Contractual Forms of Accountability Relations

Knowing the nature of the transactional mechanisms by which goods and services are delivered may allow us to determine why some goods are delivered under certain circumstances, while others are not. It may help us to establish the terms under which the demand and supply of certain accountability relations is or is not “consummated” in stable principal-agent relations. The critical distinction I would like to advance is that between “contingent” or “conditional” exchange between principals and agents and “non-contingent” exchange.

In an accountability relation based on non-contingent exchange, the agent produces benefits that accrue to citizens based on general non-partisan criteria, regardless of whether they contributed to the election of the officials who decided to produce the good or not. Principals may or may not support the politician who bestows benefits on them. They are servicing a leaky bucket in which voters may deliver their support to a candidate that directs conditional benefits their way, while hoping that enough other voters support the candidate producing a club or collective good that becomes available also to supporters of other parties.

By contrast, in a contingent exchange, the agent produces benefits explicitly for consumption by the individuals and clubs that supported her bid for public office. Benefits are “targeted” to the electoral constituencies in a politician’s or party’s support coalition. Rather than to tolerate the rampant opportunism of voters in a system of non-contingent exchange and dissipate candidate resources across a field of voters many of whom end up supporting competitors, targeted delivery of benefits under conditions of non-contingent exchange strives to lower the loss ratio of agents’ efforts. This greater specificity of allocating resources, however, comes at a cost. It requires agents to observe whether voters

support them—whether before or after voters are given a benefit. Moreover, agents would want to have some sanctioning power to punish principals who do not fulfill their part of the contingent bargain. The contingent relationship, however, does not fully reverse the principal-agent alignment: Agents remain accountable and are likely to be dismissed, if they do not deliver benefits sufficiently large electoral constituencies find desirable and superior to those of their competitors.

Certain institutional rules of vote secrecy in the ballot station may facilitate, but not ensure, non-contingent exchange. The announcements and activities of the agents' goods production are overt and public, while the critical action of the principals—vote choice in the ballot station—is confidential and secret. The principals have some measure of holding agents accountable through monitoring and sanctioning their conduct. But compared to a public vote, agents have to be inventive and resourceful to determine their principals' voting behavior. Vote secrecy increases the cost of targeted benefits provision. Even under conditions of ballot secrecy, agents have a variety of options to lift the veil of ignorance on the conduct of principals and determine their actions. There is a rather voluminous anthropological and sociological field research literature revealing the menu of direct and indirect mechanisms politicians have established to acquaint themselves with the actions of those to whom they target benefits. They range from heavy-handed direct forms of monitoring of what goes on in the ballot station to indirect modes of network control to the regulation of turnout (buying turnout or abstention). What they all have in common is to achieve some efficiency gain in producing votes for candidates who operate under a budget constraint, but wish to deliver targeted goods in the face of voter opportunism.

The better the monitoring and sanctioning of target voters, the more politicians can concentrate their efforts on just those individuals and small groups who are likely to make the difference between winning and losing elections. This does not imply that monitoring and sanctioning is perfect. Indeed, often enough even under the most refined arrangements voters find ways to defect from the contingent contract without detection. But the relative loss ratio of candidate effort may be sufficiently lower with targeted benefits production than with a dissipation of resources in a system of non-contingent exchange to justify the concentrated deployment of resources benefiting small audiences.

Interfacing the scale of goods and the modes of contractual relations between principals and agents gives us some leverage for developing empirical propositions about the probability of accountability relations and their potential to solidify around durable “linkages” between electoral constituencies and politicians and their parties. If goods are collective goods, almost by definition, exchange will be non-contingent. Since politicians commit to benefit everyone, regardless of choice, they have no motivation to monitor individual behavior of the voters. If there are reasonable budget constraints, they same will hold in case of unambiguously large-scale club goods. Politicians find it excessively costly and arduous to organize the delivery of large-scale club goods, like universal pension and health care schemes, within a framework of contingent exchange.

This is different when it comes to the delivery of benefits that have an unambiguously specific, localized operational goods and services content, in addition to whatever large scale club good implications they may have. Examples are construction and public works projects that put in place social and communications infrastructure and identify beneficiaries or even to government programs that target limited audiences with high risk exposure (say active labor market schemes for the unemployed, scholarships, disability pensions). Now politicians have a choice between a noncontingent delivery

mechanism (in the U.S. context often referred to as “pork” for electoral districts) and a delivery in “clientelistic” relations that establishes contingency between vote choice and receipt of benefits.³

Finally, when it comes to the delivery of “private” goods to individuals, it is quite likely that the delivery will be contingent. But even here politicians face a range of options. Depending on resources, for a limited number of constituents politicians may go through the trouble of providing individualized services without contingency relationship (“constituency service”). The primary calculation may be one of symbolic outreach and risk hedging to avoid negative publicity, if the denial of such services were to resonate with mass publics and the media might seize on this sentiment. Politicians will dedicate most resources for personalized service, however, to contingent exchange with principals who are likely to support them in future electoral contests.

Expressive and Instrumental Accountability

Most investigations of democratic accountability relations quite appropriately focus on “instrumental” relations between principals and agents. Principals find agents useful, if they deliver tangible, material benefits in terms of economic resources and organizational capabilities to set agendas and make choices about the allocation of material benefits. Agents find principals useful, as long as they deliver the votes and monetary resources to make (re)election bids viable. But political accountability relations may also be about less tangible, expressive rewards that should not be entirely discounted in the political game of democratic competition. From the perspective of voters, these rewards concern the identification with a larger collective cause that is crystallized around the exceptional emotional charge associated with an individual leader (“charisma”) or a social group (“identity”), identified in terms of partisanship or some ascriptive trait that gains affective and symbolic significance (descriptive representation: race, ethnicity, gender, language, religion).

Expressive group and personality identifications in electoral competition often conceal instrumental relations. To a certain extent, voters’ candidate or partisan identification may be the now proverbial “running tally” of the benefits that party has delivered over some course of time. And ethnic group identifications are often unthinkable without the presence of a “community of fate,” where inter-group inequalities (Baker and Huber 2010) make the tangible economic and political payoffs of *each* group member contingent upon the collective status of *all* group relative to other groups in a polity. Also the charisma that a voter may admire in a politician is often little more than a voter’s intense expectation to gain spoils from the candidate’s electoral victory. Nevertheless, time and again studies have found that there is a residual expressive element of descriptive representation, party identification, and charisma of political personalities that cannot be accommodated within a framework restricted to instrumental action. It may be important to examine the conditions under which this expressive element enters the mix or portfolio of politicians’ accountability strategies and when it matters effectively for politicians’ chances to hold office.

³ While it is true that the physical allocation of local goods cannot be withdrawn once in place, if voters defect from support of the partisan supplier, and thus has an element of non-contingency (cf. Magaloni et al. 2007: 185), local public goods, if not infused with a perpetual inflow of additional maintenance resources, have a tendency to degrade quickly. In this sense, also local club goods can be subjected to an ongoing clientelistic exchange.

The deployment of expressive sentiments may proceed at different levels of scale. At the most individual, personal level expressive principal-agent allegiance may be grounded in family ties and result in competition among nepotistic networks. At the next level up, expressive allegiance may congeal around small scale clans and cliques. Not by accident the process of development has often been associated with a progressive scaling up of political identities from small to large units (Gellner 1983) and the same can be said for the identities politicians may appeal to from small to large groups, ultimately encompassing the entire polity (nation and nationalism). In a similar vein, the distinctive appeal of political personality may range from establishing recognition in the intimacy of localized groups to the aspirations of being heralded as “father” (or “mother”) of the nation.

2.2. THE FOCUS OF INVESTIGATIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONS: DEMAND, SUPPLY, AND THE LEVEL OF ANALYSIS CONUNDRUM

Table 1 assembles the impressive range of democratic accountability mechanisms that result from a division of the field exchanges that may occur between politicians and voters by the scale of goods, the presence of instrumental and expressive relations, and the contingent or non-contingent nature of instrumental relations. Much of the political science literature has focused on accountability under the auspices of the “responsible partisan government” model which would be situated here in two to three of the twelve cells, namely the programmatic, non-contingent linkages at the collective and large-scale club good level. Theorizing about small club-goods special-interest group provisions have been ambiguous and vague, usually not examining when small goods provisions would have similar or dissimilar political causes and consequences, depending on whether it is framed as contingent or non-contingent exchange.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The table also brings into view a more fundamental problem that, to my knowledge, has not been addressed appropriately in the literature on accountability relations. What is the theoretically most fruitful way to frame the focal variable in democratic political accountability, the accountability relationship between voters and politicians? Is it a particular demand or investment voters and politicians make into one type of accountability relation? Or is the appropriate analytical focus a portfolio of expressive and instrumental contingent and non-contingent exchanges a politician tries to assemble in her “production function” of votes? Or is it the production of accountability relations across the system of competing parties?

Demand for, Supply of, and Consummation of Accountability Relations

There is a need to distinguish between *citizens’ demand for accountability*, both in terms of politicians’ transparency about their actions and the nature of their actions in light of the options depicted in table 1, as well as *politicians’ actual supply of accountability effort*, both in terms of words and deeds. Politicians engage in strategies to supply accountability efforts. Where citizens’ supply and politicians’ demand intersect, electorates confirm a politician’s accountability, relative to that of competitors. The accountability relationship is then “consummated” and we may talk about a relationship of political “linkage” between principals and agents.

Research on demand, supply and consummation of political accountability may require rather varied methods and involve different theories. In methods terms, demand studies probably involve population surveys establishing what benefits voters seek and how they appraise politicians' benefits production. Particularly in the study of accountability relations based on contingent exchange, the voters' perspective has been understudied, and the Democratic Accountability project does not remedy that problem.⁴ On the supply/effort side, we would want to observe, or have experts observe for researchers, what actions politicians undertake ("effort") in anticipation of being held accountable. Both mass and expert surveys must be combined to answer what makes the difference between "consummated" and unsuccessful accountability relations and what explains more or less durable principal-agent linkages.

On the theory side, *equilibrium theories* would want to establish the conditions under which it is likely that a specific supply of effort matches a popular demand and resulting linkages persist. Working backwards, equilibrium theories would then possibly want to predict the nature of demand and supply themselves in light of what actors may anticipate as feasible equilibria. Conversely, *non-equilibrium theories* may rather insist on studying discrepancies between demand and supply in order to understand why electorates and politicians sometimes cannot coordinate around viable linkages. Non-equilibrium theories may thus ultimately feed into accounts of democratic regime failure, when the gulf between popular preferences and elite effort to supply workable accountability relations becomes deep and persistent.

Currently most of the literature on accountability relations focuses on the elite supply of linkage effort. At least on the side of programmatic responsible partisan government, some of the literature has focused on the arc linking demand, supply, and consummation of the linkage mechanism when it comes to large-scale club goods (e.g. Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge, 1994). In a similar vein, the voluminous literature on retrospective and prospective economic voting can be interpreted as highlighting a special case of the existence and consummation of demand for and supply of collective goods, typically measured in terms of inflation, employment, and economic growth.

Equivalent trains of scholarship are all but absent in the literature on the contingent supply of targeted benefits. There are a few studies highlighting that clientelistic linkage effort does not always match demand and is often not consummated,⁵ because voters refuse to comply with politicians' expectations in their electoral conduct (Wang and Kurzman 2007). But there is no systematic literature that in the spirit of disequilibrium theory would examine why politicians sometimes persist with a supply of targeted benefits even in the face of mounting evidence that these efforts fail to translate into additional votes.

Let me emphasize that especially studies of the popular demand for clientelism are few and far between. It is one of the greatest limitations of the "Democratic Accountability" project on which this workshop reports that it does not include data and explicit theorizing of citizens' demand for different accountability relations. At the same time, it is clear that in most theories that try to predict the successful establishment of linkages many implicit claims are made about voter demand profiles. The

⁴ We managed to get a small battery of questions about clientelistic relations added into the 2009 Indian Election Study, however.

⁵ In this spirit, also see Calvo and Murillo (2004; 2009).

argument about the relationship between development and clientelism, for example, is for the most part predicated on diverse renderings of voters' utility functions over politicians' supply of goods and services and citizens' opportunity costs of making electoral choices based on politicians' programmatic rather than clientelistic efforts. As long as clientelistic benefits have a non-negligible value for voters, a free-rider logic almost invariably prevents them from voting on their taste for collective or large club goods (cf. Lyne, 2008).

Individual Accountability Mechanisms or Profiles of Mechanisms?

The literature on accountability mechanisms typically focuses on a single mechanism in play in democratic politics (say, programmatic competition, or clientelistic competition) and then tries to establish why individual voters embrace a certain demand or why politicians make an effort to produce a supply. More implicitly than explicitly, scholars assume that linkage mechanisms can be analyzed in isolation. This simplification is based on two decisions. First, many accountability mechanisms do not come into purview when discussing politicians' supply. This applies especially to modes of expressive identification that, in the tradition of the Michigan School, are seen as psychological processes within voters, not subject to the conscious and deliberate production of linkage mechanisms by politicians.⁶

Second, students of accountability assume a *strict and straight-forward trade-off between two dominant classes of instrumental accountability mechanisms*, namely clientelistic and programmatic exchange. While there are reasons to believe that there is some empirical trade-off between clientelistic and programmatic linkages, this empirical regularity may still make it necessary to examine outliers. There may be plenty of politicians and parties that fail to make a credible effort to produce either clientelistic or programmatic appeals. How can they possibly persist? Conversely, there may be a subset of "do everything" parties whose politicians excel in supplying both clientelistic targeted and programmatic effort. How can they combine these activities? So far, parties have been conceived to combine linkage strategies by distributing effort in different subnational locales with differential voter demand and competitive configurations (Magaloni et al. 2007). What is missing is a consideration of complex menus of linkage mechanisms pursued by politicians vis-à-vis one and the same electorate. Politicians' effort to demonstrate accountability, then is an n-tuple in a multi-dimensional space created by the different contractual forms of accountability relations (expressive, programmatic-instrumental and clientelistic-instrumental) and possibly the scale of goods they supply.

Some simplification may be necessary. In the Democratic Accountability project, the focus is primarily on two instrumental accountability mechanisms—the clientelistic provision of private and small-scale club goods and the programmatic provision of large-scale club goods. Scant attention is given to four other mechanisms, namely the provision of valence goods ("governing competence" of a party, for example) and the role of expressive benefits (charisma, party ID, socio-cultural group IDs).

In spite of the non-exhaustive nature of the project's coverage of linkage mechanisms, it opens up, maybe for the first time, an opportunity to study complex profiles of linkage mechanisms comparatively. Nevertheless, self-critically I must confess that much of the theorizing and empirical analysis submitted in the working papers emerging from the Democratic Accountability project are

⁶ Of course, the recent literature on ethnic mobilization goes some way toward satisfying what I call for, namely exploring whether collective identities are deliberately primed and produced by strategic politicians with instrumental interests in political survival. (see Wilkinson 2004).

still preoccupied with the traditional frame of examining one (or two) linkage mechanisms at a time, rather than profiles of linkage mechanisms more generally.

Parametric or Strategic Choice of Demand, Supply and Consummation of Accountability Mechanisms

Much of the literature, including papers hitherto derived from the Democratic Accountability project, buy into another simplification more sophisticated theorizing will need to reconsider. The problem of how voters and politicians choose accountability demand and supply profiles is framed in an entirely *parametric and decision-theoretic fashion*: Given an external, immutable nature, what are the best demands voters can make and the most attractive effort politicians can make to enable them to survive accountability tests? There is little consideration for *the strategic interaction among political parties*: Does the choice of party A's profile of accountability efforts (say, over the triplet instrumental-contingent/instrumental-non-contingent/expressive) depend on the choices made by parties B, C, D... who act on choosing their own accountability profiles either simultaneously or in a predetermined sequence? When choices are made simultaneously, are there empirically plausible ways to restrict the likely outcome space, say contingent upon an exogenously determined number of competitors in the party system and a fixed voter demand for accountability linkages?

In the analysis of spatial party competition over programmatic stakes, formal models of rational actor choices in democratic party competition have a hard time arriving at empirically relevant equilibrium predictions, when even they consider highly stylized, simplified games of competition that restrict parties' choice set to accountability efforts in the programmatic transaction branch (Laver 2005; Ordeshook 1997: 269). How much more difficult will it be to generate empirically informative equilibrium results, when voters and politicians can also choose over the transactional dimension of the goods that might constitute workable accountability relationships! Is it likely to become necessary to move toward a more or less behavioral approach that constrains the range of calculations actors can make, while still preserving the spirit of a strategic set-up in which a multiplicity of actors takes note of each others' choices, whenever they review their choices in the previous round of interaction?

An interesting and by-and-large unexplored question in this regard is *the relationship between political competition and the structure of accountability relations*. It is a common presumption that under conditions of monopolistic politics, with a hegemonic party or group of politicians in charge, clientelistic relations prevail, because they help politicians to solve the commitment problem they are facing with voters (cf. Medina and Stokes 2007; Robinson and Verdier 2002; Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros and Estévez 2007). But what about competitive political markets? Could not be there also conditions that make "competitive clientelism" far more auspicious for politicians than a switch to a non-contingent collective goods strategy, even if monitoring and sanctioning challenges are becoming more intense under conditions of competition?

2.3. PROBLEMS WITH THE PRINCIPAL-AGENT FRAMEWORK

My treatment of the problem of democratic accountability so far has been entirely driven by a principal-agent framework of the following kind: If citizens are principals endowed with preferences over accountability mechanisms, but also being handicapped by informational asymmetries that make it impossible for them to monitor political agents in detail, how can the agents' operational actions be restricted to a set of alternatives that does not stray too far from the principals' wishes? Obviously periodic elections are the fundamental design component of all democracies to achieve this objective. They are supplemented by party and legislative organization that restrict the flexibility of politicians' choices and thus make their promises more credible to voters *ex ante*. In addition, multiple mechanisms to improve the opportunities to monitor and sanction elected politicians after elections come into play to restrict the range of alternatives politicians may consider when producing accountability efforts (cf. Strom 2000). Nevertheless, the principal-agent framework in the study of democratic accountability relations faces at least two different kinds of fundamental theoretical challenges of which I find the second more serious than the first.

One challenge is inspired by normative democratic theory and complains about the lacking complexity and normative intuition underlying the principal-agent framework as adopted by positive democratic theory.⁷ The approach neglects too many things: It does not recognize that the group that is being served by agents may not be identical with those in charge of evaluating and sanctioning the agents. It ignores that accountability may concern the public transparency of action (reporting) or the justifiability of the actions themselves under some set of rules. It treats sanctions as an essential element of principal-agent relations, while it may be a contingent correlate only. And accountability means very different things in economics (alignment of interests under conditions of uncertainty), politics (normative justifications of representation), and law (establishing parameters of a relationship of agency who and what caused an action). Finally, the principal-agent model assumes extrinsic motivations that can be manipulated by "mechanism design" or incentive systems, while ignoring the intrinsic drives of actors to establish what they believe is good and right.

While all of this may be true, it may nevertheless be fruitful to employ a simple principal-agent set-up as a heuristic starting point to theorize about accountability mechanisms. For this reason, I find a second line of criticisms much more troubling, and I have no immediate response to it. It makes the reverse argument to the first line of criticism: Even in its stripped down simplification, the challenge of democratic accountability is already too complex to be satisfactorily framed in terms of a principal-agent regulative that lends its plausibility form business organizations. This critique essentially charges that the democratic accountability problem in the political realm has already moved beyond the domain of principal-agent relations, as conceptualized in the literature on the theory of the firm and corporate governance, in one fundamental regard. That literature assumes an, as it were, *unilateral relationship* in which the principals set objectives and seek to perform all the relevant monitoring and sanctioning of the agents (or write contracts to make such action superfluous), while the agents are passive recipients of this treatment. The agents may try to defect from the principals' purposes and instead pursue their own objectives, but they are not trying to persuade principals to redefine their objectives in line with the agents' recommendations or monitor whether the principals make good on their side of the contract.

⁷ I build here primarily on Philip's (2009) sharp account.

By contrast, at least in the variant of democratic accountability relations that involve contingent exchange with targeted benefits, it is also the elected politicians—as agents—that have a monitoring and sanctioning problem: In exchange for their services to the principals, they would like to align the latter's interests with their own in winning reelection. The political principal-agent framework here moves *from a unilateral to a bilateral agency problem*, with incentives and opportunities to defect available to both sides.

At this time, I am still uncertain whether (1) there is truly a difference between unilateral and bilateral principal-agent relations, as one moves from the arena of corporate governance in market settings to that of political competition and accountability in democratic politics settings and whether (2) that difference would matter for the purposes to which the principal-agent framework is employed in the study of democratic accountability.

With regard to the first point, also in the realm of market-based organizations, is there also an effort by made the agents to protect themselves from the opportunism of principals? Just consider the relationship between a law firm and its clients. To secure any service performance, a new client for sure, and even ongoing clients may have to supply an advance deposit, thus penalizing opportunism on their part. Also in doctor-patient relations, a deposit is necessary, unless proof of insurance removes the possibility client opportunism. In a similar vein, in their negotiations about employment contracts corporate executives have every interest in making conditions of dismissal from office for a company's Board. And is not monitoring and manipulating company boards one of the prime concerns in the task profile of CEOs?

With regard to the second point, the main purpose of introducing a principal-agent account here is to draw attention to the problem of opportunism of self-regarding participants with diverging preferences in an exchange under conditions of incomplete contracting and informational uncertainty. The combination of self-interest and uncertainty is exactly what a principal-agent model captures. What is unique about the democratic political setting is that this relationship unfolds under conditions of rules of competition that time and again compel the principals to consider alternatives to the incumbent agents and to choose between them in light of retrospective data as well as prospective commitments.

2.4. ANALYTICAL AND NORMATIVE OBJECTIONS TO A GENERALIZED CONCEPTION OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY STRATEGIES

A further challenge to the framework pursued in this research project concerns the very notion of democratic accountability. On the analytical side, critics charge that it constitutes an exercise of concept stretching. A great many heterogeneous phenomena are assembled under the umbrella of accountability that are better separated in independent conceptual packages. On the normative side, democratic theorists consider some of the phenomena here characterized as democratic accountability mechanisms as perversions of democracy, particularly the clientelistic and the charismatic linkage mechanisms. I will deal with these objections only very briefly, although they deserve fleshing out.

The Analytical Objection: Concept Stretching

The principle objection to a generalized conception of accountability concerns the inclusion of clientelism and—possibly—charismatic appeals. The generalized framework suggests a procedural and substantive equivalence and substitutability of modes of accountability that is, so the critics, misleading. Clientelism and charismatic politics defy democracy and thus do not constitute modes of democratic accountability.

Critics would charge that clientelism originates in a unilateral, asymmetrical relationship between a resourceful patron whose clients are entrapped in relations to which they have no alternative. Clientelism thus undermines the poor's capacity for democratic electoral choice among alternatives. By enabling wealthy individuals and their agents ("brokers") to buy votes directly or to provide targeted goods through control of public office and private funds in a generalized exchange over time, clientelism voids the baseline equality of democracy that weights all citizens' preferences equally in the political process of interest aggregation. Clientelism engineers "perverse accountability," as it may buy off people's policy preferences for a targeted handout (Stokes 2005).

The critics essentially weigh in by connecting procedures of democratic accountability to material distributions of resource control and de facto power over public decisions. But no procedural democratic accountability mechanism is immune from giving rise to and perpetuating asymmetries of wealth and power. Even in programmatic party competition, the "structural power of capital" restrains the responsible partisan governance of elected officials who may anticipate that capital owners can threaten to defect by entering investment strikes, if democratic politics threatens them with hostile policies. Programmatic party competition thus enables capitalists to extract compromises from workers, even though the former lack the voting power (cf. Przeworski and Wallerstein 1982).

Conversely, the extent to which clientelism buttresses entrenched asymmetrical relations of wealth and power may be subject to considerable historical and geographical variance that itself is in need of theoretical analysis. The characterization of clientelism as an exclusively monopolistic arrangement may belong to an earlier age by and large without multi-party competition. Over the past several decades since the advent of the "Third Wave" of democratization, new democratic polities have created a wide range of conditions of competition and competitiveness, even where politicians practice modes of clientelistic accountability. In a number of instances, party systems with powerful competitors emerge in which both main alternatives have a credible reputation for and practical track record of making energetic efforts to supply clientelistic accountability based on contingent exchange. Parties in some wealthy democracies of unquestionable quality have exhibited fairly strong efforts to invest in clientelistic linkages. Disinvestment in clientelism, then, may have less to do with problems of democracy than with political-economic challenges that undermine the viability of clientelistic modes of voter compensation (Kitschelt 2007).

Let me add to this objection a positive argument with a normative tinge: In developing countries, under conditions of democratic party competition, often enough networks of clientelistic accountability may be the only lever the poor have effectively at their disposal to extract scarce resources from the system. Particularly under conditions of weak state capacity to deliver public policy, for example because of the lack of a professionally trained civil service and an effective system of taxation,

clientelistic electoral politicians may be the only agents incentivized to assist the poor and to produce results on the ground that materially improve the lot of the worst-off in society.

If there is any relation between clientelism and the quality of civil and political rights under a liberal democracy, it is a highly attenuated one, net of a variety of other factors that shape democratic quality and satisfaction with democracy as a political regime form. For this reason, I would rather opt for keeping the analytical generality of the concept of democratic accountability, but then explore in detail, how different profiles of linkage mechanisms practiced by the major parties of a polity correlate with—and possibly caused by and causally consequential for—aspects of democratic “quality.”

I would apply an analogous strategy of defending an encompassing notion of democratic accountability vis-à-vis *charismatic accountability*. If it is compatible with competitive democracy and a modicum of civil and political liberties, there may be conditions under which political competitors deploy the appeal of a candidate’s personality as one or even the main magnet of attracting political followers in the democratic electoral contest.

The very general notion of democratic accountability mechanism to characterize a wide class of relations around which voters and politicians can coordinate therefore does not strike me as an exercise in concept stretching. Quite to the contrary, I find it insightful to treat a variety of strategic decisions politicians and voters make in accountability relations as interrelated and functionally equivalent.

The Normative Objection: Clientelism as Indicator of a Deficient Democracy

Let me propose to distinguish between an assessment of accountability relations by the political actors themselves, caught up in concrete political economic settings, and by political theorists and intellectuals worldwide. In most affluent democracies, but also in some democracies in developing countries, mass publics do express widespread revulsion with clientelistic politics. Yet at the same time, there are also many polities, where citizens see clientelistic accountability as the only technique through which they can generate any political leverage. And there may be some conditions under which the hopes of obtaining tangible benefits through clientelistic exchange are not entirely futile (Taylor-Robinson, 2010).

Democratic political theorists, by contrast, almost universally condemn clientelism and charismatic politics. For the very same reasons such theorists invoke, clientelism and charismatic politics are unpopular with intellectuals, more broadly conceived, around the world. The political theory of clientelism flies in the face of bedrock beliefs of Western liberalism in impartiality, universalism, and fairness of political rules. Clientelism operates through discretionary, localized, concrete decisions to apportion benefit to specific individuals and small groups that violates general principles of the rule of law. Clientelism defies conceptions of abstract universality of citizenship by direct vote buying, or at least by indirect techniques of compensating voters for their partisan allegiance in material terms. Both clientelistic and charismatic appeals as well violate democratic practices based on an ideal of abstract deliberation about the collective good and universalistic standards of rights and obligations, entitlements and contributions to the commonwealth. Charismatic authority appeals to the idiosyncracies of a particular human being without indication or proof of how she might contribute to a greater cause.

Through the lens of normative conceptions of democratic accountability, I have little to say in defense of either charisma or clientelistic democratic politics. Only a thin consequentialist, utilitarian argument might lend these forms of accountability a semblance of normative justification. And the validity of this argument rests on an underlying positive, empirical proposition that has not been thoroughly tested: Clientelism and charismatic authority may be preferable, if programmatic accountability is not feasible. They are “second best,” or “third best” strategies to establish democracy, if conditions are inauspicious to implement the very best strategies. The alternative, then, is only state failure and the shift to an authoritarian regime.

The normative skepticism about clientelistic or charismatic accountability, however, does not relieve positive theoretical and empirical investigations of probing into the relations among different accountability mechanisms. It should be important for normative theorists to understand the conditions under which citizens and politicians embrace certain profiles of accountability strategies and discard others.

3. Positive Theories of Democratic Accountability: Introduction to the Papers

A range of studies has documented and reviewed the literature on the origins and consequences of democratic accountability mechanisms, primarily and most comprehensively of clientelistic politics.⁸ Curiously, from a very recent effort to review the literature on programmatic politics I would draw the conclusion that there is no genuine body of research on programmatic party competition, or even more generally the responsible partisan government model.⁹ To this very day, there also is no dataset that would allow us to compare the “programmaticallyness” of parties and party systems across parties in all existing democracies. Similarly, efforts to establish such a gauge for charismatic partisan politics are still in their infancy, although an effort to distinguish a “populist” discourse in politics may be a step in that direction (Hawkins 2009).

Theoretical arguments surrounding democratic accountability mechanisms concern several baskets of questions that will make their appearance in the various conference papers and paper sketches. I simply highlight them before moving on to address briefly two fundamental problems of analysis, namely those of strategic interaction among actors and causal endogeneity. So far, papers produced for this project have struggled with these challenges, but have not often found convincing avenues to address them.

Beyond just detailing what demands for and efforts to supply mechanisms of democratic accountability are, the project allows us to address three baskets of questions. The questions all concern with politicians’ efforts to produce performances that voters may accept or reject as validations of

⁸ See Schmitt et al. (1977), Eisenstadt and Roniger (1982), Cox (1986), Hicken (2011), Kitschelt (2000), Piatoni (2001), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), Schaffer (2007), and Stokes (2007).

⁹ Cox’s (1986) dissertation book may be the notable outlier defying that generalization. On a more concrete level with regional data, I have participated in work on post-communist party systems (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Kitschelt and Smyth, 2002) and Latin American democracies (Kitschelt/Hawkins/Luna/Rozas/Zechmeister 2010) to establish the nature of parties’ programmatic appeals.

accountability. There is nothing in here from the point of view of voters themselves. This also makes it virtually impossible to address certain prominent questions in the literature on collective goods and clientelism that require individual-level voter data, such as whether politicians target marginal or core voters with contingent exchange.

The *first basket of subjects* concerns political features that may neither be antecedents nor consequences of politicians' choices of accountability strategies, but *correlates or "complementarities"* and their opposite, *incompatibilities and trade-offs*. This applies, for example, to the role of *party organization*. Investments in party organization may make it easier to implement certain accountability strategies. Conversely, choosing accountability strategies may trigger investments in compatible forms of party organization. Rather than establishing causal primacy, the first and foremost task of theory and empirical analysis is to shed light on *the logic of complementarities* that exist in political systems. Complementarities also surface in an analysis of monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms that parties appear to deploy, when they make a strong clientelistic effort. Contingent upon the availability of network ties to civil society associations, parties choose more or less direct methods of monitoring voters.

A logic of complementarities may also prevail in the *strategic interaction between political parties*. If all parties choose profiles of accountability strategies simultaneously and can continuously update these choices, albeit against the backdrop of sunk costs, it is impossible to say what comes first, a focal party's choice or that of its competitors. Political analysis may become an exercise in "pattern recognition" of empirical complementarities that then may be reconstructed in formal theoretical arguments.

Similar configurations of complementarity or incompatibility may also characterize the relationship between *democratic accountability strategies and institutions and practices of political governance*. Where parties put a great deal of emphasis on clientelistic responsiveness parties may work in an environment where the rule of law is relatively weak and state capacities are feeble. Where public authorities have little capacity to regulate social life with general, impersonal rules and to enforce such rules with a professional cadre of civil servants and judicial officials, politicians can allocate more public resources according to discretionary, partisan criteria in accordance with clientelistic network imperatives. Conversely, the fact that politicians thrive on clientelistic politics may motivate them to undermine general civil service professional impartiality and the rule of law in the administrative and judicial sector. Which way the causal arrow runs may be impossible to determine in a general way. Some case studies may highlight marginal changes in complementary practices that may originate with governance structures and then spread to accountability strategies, but other case studies may suggest the reverse causal flow over time.

The *second basket of research questions* deals with the exogenous causes of parties' linkage strategies. There is a well-trodden menu of conditions that has been examined in the literature as causal antecedents of clientelism, albeit without the benefit of a quantitative comparative analysis: economic development, the historical formation of state capacities, formal institutions of democratic preference aggregation and authoritative decision-making, and the presence of ethnocultural identities that are at variance with national identities coinciding with the legal borders of the polity. Add to that interactions among these conditions, or even interactions between conditions and correlates of party systems, and a rich field of competing arguments opens up.

The hegemonic explanation of democratic accountability mechanisms is the development thesis, and rarely a study fails to confirm some strong statistical relationship between development and democratic linkage profiles. The development thesis “works” both at the macro-level, as demonstrated here with the strong negative relationship between clientelism and development, and at the micro-level in that it is invariably the poorest constituencies inside a polity who are most given to clientelistic electoral accountability. The development hypothesis works much less well, however, to explain the strength of programmatic linkage mechanisms and programmatic party competition. There appears to be substantial evidence that development may be a foundational condition to erode the demand and supply side forces that foster clientelism. But these forces, by themselves, do not lead to the creation of programmatic parties and party systems. The politics of programmatic party competition is more complex than that of clientelistic relations.

The implicit quest of the papers assembled here is to salvage some other theoretical candidates of potential causal significance than economic development to account for democratic politicians’ linkage efforts, rather than witnessing everything getting caught up in the maelstrom of the development thesis. For example, are there independent historical initiatives to develop state capacity—net of a polity’s development level—that at some point in time can become consequential for parties’ choice of programmatic and/or clientelistic accountability profiles? Or can democratic institutions serve as exogenous forces that shape accountability mechanisms, once locked in place? Finally, how about ethnic pluralism within polities? It is conceivable that deep ethnic divides themselves result from the more or less clientelistic organization of democratic accountability mechanisms that reinforces ethnic networks in order to generate an infrastructure of monitoring and sanctioning contingent exchange. But there is also an argument to be explored that ethnic divisions, insofar as they are intertwined with substantial economic inequality and a corresponding ethnic division of labor, actually cause politicians to choose specific profiles of political accountability.

The final basket of papers examines relations between democratic accountability mechanisms, on the one hand, and economic and political outcomes that can be reasonably conceived of as consequences of political process features, on the other. There is quite some “causal distance” between democratic accountability efforts, on one side, and economic performance features such as GDP growth or improvements in Human Development Indicators. In spite of this causal distance, do accountability relations leave an imprint on economic growth? Surprisingly, this appears to be the case, even after applying stringent controls. Clientelism, however, appears to have rather different consequences for macro-economic performance than for the life chances of citizens, a point that can also be explored the relationship between clientelism and social policy. In all of these investigations, the hard part, however, is to find the causal mechanisms that link the political process to outputs of government policy, and these ultimately to economic performance outcomes and possibly other human development indicators. As an intermediate link, it is worth-while to examine the emergence of social policies in development countries and explore how they relate to politicians’ efforts to generate accountability mechanisms.

The quest for intermediate, intervening causal links is also critical in the purely political realm of outcomes, where scholars investigate the conditions of citizens’ beliefs in the superiority of formal representative democracy over other political regime forms. In the paper presented here, politicians’ choice of political linkage mechanisms appears to matter, with a prevalence of clientelistic practices clearly depressing satisfaction with democracy in mass publics. But the direction of the causal arrow

may once again be in doubt: Does clientelism cause low satisfaction with democracy, or is low satisfaction with democracy causally responsible for the mushrooming of clientelism? Initial explorations also generate the interesting result that clientelism has no effect on making citizens more likely to embrace authoritarian alternatives to democracy. Is clientelism generating a combination of disenchantment with resignation and acceptance of the status quo?

Two Major Challenges: Choice of Linkage Profiles in Strategic Interaction among Parties and Endogeneity of Causal Explanations

Altogether the current state of research with the democratic accountability dataset on the causes, concomitant correlates, and consequences of parties' efforts to build accountability linkages faces two major theoretical hurdles. One hurdle has to do with the interdependence of choices among competing politicians or parties. Each party makes its own choices contingent upon others. The other hurdle concerns the difficulty of drawing causal inference in a situation where causal arrows run plausibly in both directions.

The first concern with strategic interaction applies to all papers, including those that only try to identify elements of the political process *complementary* to the linkage strategies, without stipulating a causal-temporal order, such as politicians' choice of party organization, reliance on social networks, and interface with political governance structures in a polity at large. It is clear that parties make these choices in strategic interaction with what other parties in the same party system are doing, but theorizing about parties' linkage efforts rarely reflects this interdependence. For example, when do parties pursue converging or diverging linkage profiles in the hunt for electoral support? Is a strong clientelistic linkage effort necessarily predicated on a situation of political monopoly in which only one party can credibly focus on clientelistic contingent linkages, while all others have to resort to different linkage profiles, emphasizing programmatic linkages or expressive linkages based on group identification and leadership charisma?

Indeed, the necessity to conceive of the parties' choice of linkage efforts as a problem of strategic interaction among competitors may come more into view, when the object of analysis is conceived as political *choice over parties' entire linkage profiles* (contingent and non-contingent instrumental as well as expressive linkage appeals), rather than individual linkage efforts considered in isolation from one another. Treatments of individual linkage efforts in isolation from each other may suggest the misleading idealization of a disjointed process in which parties often operate in separate orbits, where one is mostly preoccupied with clientelistic linkage effort, another with programmatic linkage, and some others with the construction of expressive identities. Conceiving of all parties as making choices over all accountability relations simultaneously makes it clearer that they are in direct conflict.

The second major theoretical challenge I have dwelled on in this paper concerns the endogeneity of causal explanations and is mostly a challenge for research probing into the hypothetical "upstream" exogenous determinants of political linkage strategies and the presumed "downstream" causal consequences of democratic accountability relations. Causality presupposes a temporal sequence in which antecedents precede consequences, but are linked to one another through "mechanisms" that break down the causal relationship into smaller, spatio-temporally more contiguous steps. Drawing

inferences about the causes and consequences of democratic linkage efforts therefore would require a time series data set that is currently unavailable.

But the problems do not end there. The dataset on democratic accountability is an observational dataset in which individual units opted spontaneously into certain conditions. There is no randomized assignment of units to treatment and control conditions, thus creating a fundamental problem of selection bias. As Przeworski's (2004) brilliant discussion of the limits of causal inference from historical data suggests, non-randomized selection may make it impossible to stipulate the presence of "first causes" or "causes in the final instance," as Marxian historical materialism might have framed it.

On a more mundane level, in the statistical exploration of observational data such as in the democratic accountability dataset, the challenge of addressing causal inference poses itself typically as a quest for exogenous instrumental variables that correlate with the causal variable whose endogeneity is to be tested, but is not a plausible candidate for having itself a direct causal effect on the ultimate dependent variable of the investigation. It is typically very difficult to find instruments that meet both criteria of identification, and in the papers at hand, working with the democratic accountability dataset, the hunt for plausible instrumental variables to strengthen causal hunches has not even begun.

4. Research Methods: Data and Construct Validation

Let me finally provide a small update on data validity. I will not raise here the general question of what alternative research instruments may be available to generate data about parties' political linkage strategies and which of these may be better or worse. There is now a thriving literature about at least one linkage mechanism, that of programmatic appeals, and the conduiveness of studying it based on the analysis of party manifestoes, expert surveys, or population surveys. With regard to clientelistic and charismatic politics, there are not even systematic alternatives at hand. For now, the Democratic Accountability expert dataset may be the only game in town to study clientelistic partisan effort in a broad comparative framework. This project implemented an expert survey to capture phenomena about party organization and contingent exchange that are difficult, if not impossible, to capture with other methods, and we are now "stuck" with the data. All we can do is to take into account the potential pitfalls in the data generation process that are likely to generate random measurement error and systematic distortions.

Let me recall four big sources of validity problems in the expert dataset and briefly discuss what can be done about them. The following list is not exhaustive, but indicates threats that loom large in expert survey methodology. The first two problems we cannot really control in our dataset at all, while checks on the final two problems generate some hope that they are not too severe. The first two problems are the anchor problem in comparative research where subject who operate in localized contexts generate the data and the problem of aggregation. The second set of two problems are those of differential expert knowledge/ignorance and partisan bias.

- *Familiarity with parties in very specific, local settings provides experts with unique "anchors" to interpret the meaning of the scales on which they are rating parties. Contingent upon the anchor, similar scores on the same scale taken in different settings and from experts with different*

experiences mean different things, and different scores may actually mean the same thing, could they be scored by experts with the same anchor references. The same practice that may appear as a “strong” case of partisan clientelism to a Norwegian expert may strike a Nigerian or Ecuadoran expert as a feeble effort to deliver clientelistic benefits at best.

The anchor problem is of great significance and bests much comparative research. The way to handle anchor points is to give experts across contexts a fictitious example of an observation (a “vignette”) and let them score it on the scale. Systematic differences in scoring the vignette can then be employed to “correct” their actual scores of observations. While methodologically elegant, the provision of vignettes is a voracious time killer in actual surveys and typically too costly to implement on a large scale. In the democratic accountability survey, in the preamble to the section where experts score parties’ clientelistic effort, the survey itself therefore provided a vignette and an actual anchor scoring rule to prime the survey respondents.¹⁰ As a further hedge against anchor problems, the survey aspires to formulate questions as concretely as possible geared to operational, observable practices of partisan activists and politicians. It generally tried to avoid theoretically and ideologically loaded concepts. The notion of “clientelism,” for example, appears nowhere in the survey. Nevertheless, cross-national comparison remains beset by anchor problems that must be faced in specific uses of the data set.

- *Experts have particular experiences in localized settings, yet in the survey they are asked to pass judgment about each parties’ conduct in general or even about the prevailing practices of all parties in a political system in a single summary judgment.* Without question, large measurement error creeps in through **data aggregation**. At the same time, aggregation is necessary to summarize information. In the democratic accountability survey, the unit of observation and scoring is in almost all instances the individual party and its attributes in a country. Very rarely respondents are asked to pass judgments about the central tendency of all parties’ practices concerning a given feature across an entire polity. In most instances, we derive national central tendencies across all parties in a party system, however, through averaging the expert scores of individual parties and weighting the parties by their electoral level of support in the most recent election. In a few other instances, the survey has indirectly considered the possibility of heterogeneous practices inside the same party across different locales by making sure that jury experts are drawn from different parts of the country. The survey employed this technique especially in very large compound republics like India, where an over-sized sample of close to 80 experts was assembled with informants coming from more than a dozen states, including all larger states, and in Nigeria, a country with very deep regional divisions.
- *The expertise of the experts themselves may be limited, and differentially so.* Some experts may be more expert than others. In order to check and possibly control for a bias of differential competence in the data generation process, each module of the democratic accountability survey asked experts to indicate how certain they are of their judgments for each individual party they rate on attributes of their activities. If there were a robust correlation between experts’ levels of

¹⁰ This, of course, is a far cry from the demand of methodologists to provide a vignette question with a hypothetical observation that all responds score for each and every item in a survey. But the economics of time and finances prevented us from engaging in elaborate vignette construction. For the principle, see King and Wand (2007).

knowledge and their party scores on a given attribute, we would have reason to suspect that differential competence has biased the results.

- *Since the scoring juries are small (between 10 and 30 participants per country, with a total of slightly more than 1,400 respondents in 88 countries), there is always a chance that experts' **political bias** for or against certain parties distorts their scores.* The choice of experts proceeded in a two-stage selection. In a first stage, in each country the project PI recruited so-called "country anchors" chosen for their track record of superior competence in studying parties and elections in their own countries or their willingness and ability to digest the scholarly literature on their countries in an exhaustive fashion before launching the expert survey.¹¹ These country anchors then drew up encompassing lists of potential experts who were contacted with the request to complete the project questionnaire. About 20-50% of the contacted experts then delivered completed surveys. Bias may slip in at every stage of the process, first when drawing up lists of 20-50 experts who were contacted, then in the self-selection of experts who actually completed the questionnaire. The survey includes a partial control for political bias in expert scores by asking experts at the end of the questionnaire to indicate their personal sympathies/antipathies for each party in their country.

Table 2 reports on regressing experts' personal political sympathies for parties in their country and their subjective sense of competence to assess a party on the questions in the survey on the scores they assigned to parties on important measures of party attributes in three domains of the survey: that of party organization (part A), clientelistic targeting efforts and policing of the transaction through monitoring and sanctioning (parts B and C) and the parties' programmatic appeals (part D). Simple bivariate regressions between the bias and ignorance variables and these features of the parties were run for each of the 506 parties scored in the 88 countries. The N of expert judgments in each regression ranges from as low as 5 in a few instances where a substantial number of experts indicated "don't know" responses, to about 30. Especially in the few cases with a very small N of responses (<10), it is difficult for correlations to ever become statistically significant. Therefore I am reporting here for each set of 506 regressions (1) how many yielded a significant relationship at the .10 statistical confidence level; (2) how many parties showed a correlation of stronger than .60, regardless of statistical significance; and (3) whether the correlation was stronger than .70, regardless of statistical significance.

To put results into perspective, the following information should be kept in mind. In a universe of 506 regressions, by pure random processes on average 10% of the regressions could yield statistically significant correlations at the .10 level. A correlation of .60 essentially means that a touch of over 1/3 of a variable's variance is accounted for by its predictor variable, a correlation of .70 captures a touch under 1/2 of a variable's available variance. In each case, moving one of 10 respondents from a score of one extreme of a variable's scale to the other extreme may increase or reduce the size of the correlation by .20 or more.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

¹¹ In this vein, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were covered by doctoral candidates from the University of Florida, specializing in aspects of the politics of their respective country, some post-Communist countries by doctoral candidates affiliated with Central European University in Budapest or Duke University, some Latin American countries by doctoral assistants from the Catholic University of Santiago de Chile and a handful of OECD countries by Duke University doctoral candidates or post-docs.

The table demonstrates that in the case of each of the nine strategic variables from the survey the percentage of regressions that met any of the three criteria indicating that bias or ignorance most likely affect a party's score, is quite small. On political bias, one of the highest numbers of observations where experts' political sympathies predict their partisan scores is registered on the parties' policies toward defending national identity (D4), where 8.7% of the regressions (44 out of 506 parties) indicated that experts' judgments were associated with experts' personal party sympathies. In the final column for correlations equal to or greater than .70, the table indicates that in 22 out of 26 instances, or 4.3% of the total party set, that correlation was positive: Experts who were less sympathetic to a party also thought it was more nationalist. Intellectuals like political scientists may have a more cosmopolitan, internationalist outlook and therefore attribute to parties with whom they do not sympathize more nationalist positions than experts who find them more sympathetic. While this interpretation is plausible, consider the small number of parties that are affected (4.3% of the sample) and the likelihood that many of these correlations were generated by a random process.

Other than defense of national identity, the other two variables that may exhibit hints of partisan biased judgments are experts' assessment of the opaqueness of parties' financial dealings (A10_11) and expert scores of parties' propensity to spend on the disadvantaged (D1). In the first case, in 27 out of 30 cases of strong correlations ($\geq .70$) experts who are unsympathetic to a party attribute to it greater opaqueness of financial conduct (5.9% of parties). With regard to the perception of parties' views on redistributive spending, 5.7% of regressions indicate a statistically significant relation between sympathies and attributed party positions, and 4.3% of regressions have absolute correlations of .70 or higher. But note that the correlations now go in opposite directions, depending on the party. In 14 of the 22 strong correlations, less sympathetic experts attribute more miserly redistributive spending habits to political parties than more sympathetic experts, in the remaining 8 regressions the relationship is the reverse!

Overall, I conclude from these patterns that preciously few expert scorings of political parties appear to be biased by political sympathies. It may still be necessary to dig deeper and check how large the substantive size of the biasing effect of party sympathies is the small number of cases, where such sentiments may have affected judgments. But it is unlikely that these probes invalidate the available data, even where bias may have some effect.

Also with regard to the relationship of self-assessed knowledge about parties and expert judgments the regressions reveal preciously little ammunition to debunk the quality of the dataset. In a few instances of parties' programmatic assessment, between 4% and 6% of the regressions indicate a strong relationship between knowledge and party scores. This applies to the parties' left-right placements, where more knowledgeable experts tend to place parties further on the right, and in the opposite way to parties' attribution of redistributive policy propensities, where the more self-confident experts attribute greater redistributive inclinations to parties than the less knowledgeable experts.

Even though political bias and knowledge deficiencies may not do much to distort the data, the considerable "noisiness" and measurement error of a global cross-national data set of expert judgments commands certain precautions in the use of the data. For one thing, just as in psychological scale construction, it is wise to engage in *construct validation* such as to check whether the measures included in the survey covary with other measures of the same concept or of theoretically related phenomena.

Not finding such covariance would cast doubt on the validity of the new operational measures. This concerns, for example, the relationship between measures of clientelism and several of the World Bank's governance indicators. Not finding such a relationship would cast doubt on the empirical validity of the clientelism measure and possibly that of the governance indicators as well.

Furthermore, the coarseness of the expert measures probably makes it rather precarious to engage in very refined, subtle comparisons of specific scores attributed to individual parties and aggregations of scores to individual countries. This applies particularly to small differences among otherwise similar cases. These differences may be entirely an artifact of measurement error. As a consequence, comparisons of scoring differences among countries or parties *within a single region* that shares certain basic parameters of politics and society that may shape democratic accountability mechanisms—such as relative affluence, cumulative democratic experience, constitutional design (electoral laws, executive power), density of international flows of goods, services and information, or basic cultural parameters such as religious legacies—may therefore be less meaningful than comparisons *across entire global regions* set apart by big inter-regional differences in basic parameters that characterize the circumstances of democratic politics.

5. Instead of a Conclusion

The purpose of this introductory paper about the Democratic Accountability project has been *explicatory, defensive, and diagnostic*. It has been *explicatory* in that I attempt to clarify the notion of accountability in general and democratic accountability in the electoral process of party competition more specifically and then introduce an analytical menu of accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms constitute the property space of the observed objects on which the Democratic Accountability project ventures to perform analytical “work.” This work consists of finding complementarities among politicians' practices to organize the democratic political process and causal relationships that point either “upstream” to explain politicians' choice of accountability efforts in light of exogenous conditions or “downstream” to deploy accountability mechanisms as one explanation for political and economic outcomes that one reasonably might hypothesize to be affected by the nature of the political process of interest aggregation and resource allocation.

The purpose of this introduction has also been *defensive* in that I attempt to justify the use of an encompassing notion of democratic political accountability with many menu options within a broader principal-agent framework. This defense proceeds mostly in the realm of positive, analytical theorizing and empirical analysis, but it also acknowledges concerns about the normative implications of an analytically encompassing use of the accountability concept. The other defensive purpose of the introduction concerns the quality of the data generated in the Democratic Accountability project. I have argued that differential levels of expert knowledge about and sympathies for the political parties the experts rate are unlikely to distort the experts' party scores. At a minimum, this problem is confined to a small subset of cases that drown in the sea of parties scored in the course of this project.

Finally, the purpose of this introduction has been *diagnostic* to pinpoint several critical challenges that have not yet been mastered satisfactorily. Two of them stand out. The first has to do with the *appropriate unit of analysis and theorizing* in the study of linkage mechanisms. Is it individual accountability relations (demand, supply effort, consummation), is it the complex pattern of

accountability mechanisms around which voters and politicians configure a political party, or is it the “system” of accountability mechanisms in a polity, expressed by competing political parties? The tendency of the literature has been to operate and analyze at the most disaggregate level with theorems and arguments that do not take strategic interaction into account. This is also a liability of the papers drafted from the Democratic Accountability project, albeit a liability that may be heuristically justifiable for certain explanatory purposes. Moving to a more complex unit of analysis also calls for squarely facing up to the *strategically interactive nature of the playing field* on which parties elaborate their accountability relations. It is hard and elusive to theorize about strategic interaction, when the situation involves many moving parts that cannot reasonably be held constant, and this may be the reason why scholars have stayed away from this subject for so long.

The other challenge concerns *problems of causal inference* and the difficulties of controlling for *endogeneity and selection bias* in observational data sets not subject to experimental manipulation. For now, the Democratic Accountability dataset does not even have intertemporal depth, but provides a purely cross-sectional resource for analysis. This limits the opportunities for causal inference severely. It may be hoped that this project pushes the envelope of political science knowledge about accountability relations in competitive electoral democracies on a sufficient number of frontiers to make its weaknesses acceptable to scholarly critics. Over time, and with more and better data, it may become possible to address issues of endogeneity and selection bias in ways this current project cannot.

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Table 1. Goods Provision and Democratic Linkage Mechanisms

	POLITICAL GOODS		CONTRACTUAL FORMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONS		
	Non-rivalry of consumption?	Excludability?	intangible, expressive <i>“affective”</i> linkages	Tangible, instrumental <i>“programmatic”</i> linkages Non-contingency of exchange	Tangible, instrumental <i>“clientelistic”</i> linkages Contingent exchange with some targeting, monitoring, sanctions
Collective goods (“public goods”)	YES	NO	-some identity (“nation”) -leadership charisma	“valence” competition “competence” “governability”	none
Large-scale club goods	NO	YES, BUT ONLY LARGE GROUPS	-large group identity (ethnic group) -party identification - leadership charisma	positional issue competition (responsible partisan model of accountability)	none
Small-scale (“local”) club goods	NO	YES, BUT NOT INDIVIDUALS	-small group identity (clans) -leadership charisma	competition with pork provision (special interest group politics)	clientelistic group competition (Pork with contingency)
Private goods	NO	YES, EVEN INDIVIDUALS EXCLUDABLE	-nepotism	Constituency service (personalized assistance)	clientelistic personal (family) competition

Sensitivity Test: How Much Are Expert Scores Influenced by *Political Bias or Ignorance*? (N = 506 parties)

		Expert's Personal Sympathy for a Party (DY) (high = 1; low = 10)			Expert's Self-Assessment of his/her Confidence in her own Judgment of a Party's Features (1 = low; 10 = high) (A12; B13; C6; DY)		
		Relation significant at the .10 level	Correlation r >= .60	Correlation r >= .70 + N of positive correlations	Relation significant at the .10 level	Correlation r >= .60	Correlation r >= .70 + N of positive correlation
Party organi- zational features (part A)	A3: linkages to notables (1 = intense; 4 = weak)	9	25	11 (+: 6)	4	23	10 (+: 7)
	A6: centralization of power (1 = high; 4 = low)	11	27	16 (+: 6)	12	21	14 (+: 9)
	A10_11: opaqueness of party finances (2-8 scale; low = opaque)	26	59	30 (+: 3)	18	26	10 (+: 0)
Clientele- listic effort and transaction (parts B and C)	B15: clientele- listic effort (5-20 scale; high = strong)	13	28	11 (+: 5)	31	29	11 (+: 10)
	C1: monitoring (1-4; low value = high capacity)	6	39	16 (+: 7)	17	34	17 (+: 10)
	C4: sanctioning (yes = 1; no = 2)	9	30	15 (+: 7)	5	40	10 (+: 6)
(program- matic partisan appeals)	D1: policy: spending on the disadvantaged (1-10 scale, high = little)	26	22	22 (+: 14)	7	31	31 (+: 1)
	D4: policy: defense of national identity (1-10 scale; 10 = high)	19	44	26 (+: 22)	12	28	24 (+: 9)
	DW: left (=1) to right (=10) placement of parties	12	34	14 (+: 4)	29	68	20 (+: 20)