

From Limited Government to Democratic Accountability: Social Accountability Revisited

Enrique Peruzzotti (Universidad Torcuato Di Tella/CONICET)

Accountability –a concept that until the return to democracy had been foreign to the political vocabulary of Latin America— became the buzzword of democratization studies and is the guiding principle of the research agenda of the quality of democracy approach (QDA). The central assumption of the QDA is that democratic betterment depends of the capacity of democratic regimes to improve their system of governmental accountability. Guillermo O’Donnell, perhaps the most influential figure of the QDA, explicitly associated the problems of existing democracies to accountability deficits. He classified accountability mechanisms according to a horizontal/vertical axis, each plane respectively referring to the state and society distinction. The term ‘horizontal mechanisms of accountability’ referred to the intra-state system of mutual checks and controls of representative government. ‘Vertical mechanisms’ instead refer to the role of an external accountability agent rooted in society, be it the electorate, organized civil society or the independent media.

O’Donnell, as great part of the QDA, was fundamentally concerned with the malfunctioning that horizontal mechanisms exhibited in a subset of democracies of the region –which he designated as delegative democracies. Delegative democracies were polyarchies that combined well-functioning vertical electoral mechanisms with the malfunctioning of horizontal checks on government, which resulted in a) Executive encroachments over the jurisdiction of Legislative, Judiciary and other state agencies, b) Violation of individual civil rights and threats to the autonomy of civil society, and c) the capture and colonization of state agencies by unscrupulous groups or public officials.

The delegative democracy argument emphasized a specific dimension of democratic accountability: the legal and constitutional control of political power; O’Donnell’s was not concerned with overall performance of *all mechanisms of democratic accountability* but just with that network of agencies responsible of overseeing and punishing actions or omissions by public officials that may qualify

as unlawful. He understood accountability largely as *limited government*. The concept of social accountability was initially developed as a specification of such framework. It highlighted civil society initiatives that sought to call attention to the forms of governmental wrongdoing that troubled O'Donnell. It was conceived as an informal complement to the horizontal network of agencies of governmental control.

The debate left aside the political dimension of accountability altogether, largely because it assumed that a well-functioning electoral institutions and a public sphere were sufficient enough conditions to ensure governmental receptiveness to citizen's demands. Such assumption proved to be wrong. Many of the contemporary Latin American democracies exhibit accountability deficits of a political nature that stem from the inadequate workings of the system of vertical mediations. Unfortunately, the initial framework to accountability proved inadequate to understand this other sort of accountability deficit.

There is a need to elaborate a more comprehensive theory of democratic accountability, a framework where accountability is no solely conceived as a principle to control political power but also, and mainly, as a set of mechanism that seek to ensure the circularity between government and society.

TITLE:

Leveling the Playing Field? A Qualitative Analysis of Presidential Actions Curtailing Media Freedom in Latin America.

AUTHORS:

Marisa Kellam, School of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University

Elizabeth Stein, School of Global and International Studies, Indiana University

ABSTRACT:

After Latin America's "left turn", several presidents emphasized that the media, given their highly concentrated private ownership and traditionally conservative bias throughout the region, create an unequal playing field. Some leftist presidents, who lacked a viable electoral opponent as a result of the collapse of traditional party systems, transformed the media into their primary political opponents. These presidents rhetorically attack the media and justify more intrusive actions that limit media freedom as efforts aimed at leveling the playing field. We contend that presidents more likely succeed in discrediting and muzzling the media where horizontal institutions of accountability inadequately monitor and sanction presidents. The failure of constitutional checks and balances to protect media freedom jeopardizes the media's ability to serve as the citizens' watchdog. In previous research, using cross-national, time-series statistical analyses, we show that the independence and freedom of the media, as measured by Freedom House's Press Freedom Index, declines more when and where presidents face extremely weak electoral competition and hold positions contrary to the predominant ideological leaning of the media establishment. Recognizing the limitations of catch-all quantitative measures of media freedom, in this paper we employ comparative case analyses to better account for the evolution and devolution of media freedom due to presidents' behavior during 14 presidencies in 6 Latin American countries. Specifically we demonstrate that presidents' efforts to curtail media freedom depend upon (1) the competitiveness of presidential elections, (2) president-media polarization, and (3) the *de jure* and *de facto* institutional accountability framework.

Title

Poverty, Clientelism, and Democratic Accountability in Mexico

Author

Yuriko Takahashi, Faculty of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University

Abstract

This study examines whether the development of oversight institutions over spending dampened clientelism over time in Mexico. The debate has revolved around whether targeted social spending is subject to political manipulation in order to mobilize political support from the impoverished voters. I demonstrate that the degree of clientelism is determined by types of social programs and monitoring and oversight institutions over social programs, which may prevent office seeking politicians from exploiting social expenditures for their political survival. Focusing on the case of Mexico, I show that policy-oriented and institutional reforms, which significantly advanced under democratization, have tied hands of self-interested politicians, and constrained opportunities for particularistic distribution of social spending. Employing econometric analyses, this study compares the geographic distribution of Mexico's targeted anti-poverty spending (Pronasol, Progresas, Oportunidades, and Prospera) between 1988 and 2015, and demonstrates that anti-poverty spending became less clientelist and increasingly pro-poor in Mexico, where clientelism has traditionally prevailed.