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# **The conditions of successful civil society involvement in combating corruption: A survey of case study evidence**

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**QoG WORKING PAPER SERIES 2008:22**

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October 2008

ISSN 1653-8919

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### **Abstract**

Corruption interferes with and distorts the political and implementation processes, often to the disadvantage of the already disadvantaged. Yet our understanding of the factors that might propel a political system from lower to higher levels of probity (or vice versa) remains speculative at best. This article examines the role of one category of actors often touted as an important agent of change: civil society organizations. Considerable theoretical and empirical work exists on the expected and observed benefits of civil society for democracy more generally. Few studies have systematically examined the relationship between the richness of associational life and the quality of governance in a country. The results show that civil society does have some bearing on the extent to which corruption exists in a country, and that the primary mechanism seems to be that civil society engages in contestation and representation of public interests.

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Civil society is often pointed to as a key player in a meta-system of checks and balances in a polity, a countervailing force to the power of the state. Increasingly, discourses regarding ways to combat corruption have begun to mention civil society as a critical component of a broader effort to hold governments accountable. The OECD maintains, for example, that “Civil society plays a key role in fighting corruption. Today, this statement is unchallenged: it has become a leitmotiv of anti-corruption discourses” (OECD 2003). Other weighty actors on the international arena share this conviction and see a strong civil society as a key element of anti-corruption campaigns and development more generally (World Bank 2003). In a short summary of its development philosophy, the United Nations Development Programme states that: “Public sector management is increasingly seen as more than just modernising state institutions, it is also about fostering dynamic partnerships with civil society and the private sector in order to improve the quality of service delivery, enhance social responsibilities and ensure the broad participation of citizens in decision-making.”<sup>1</sup> In more concrete economic terms, projects to strengthen civil society constitute the single largest segment of USAID aid directed at reducing corruption (on the order of \$33 million USD in 2002).<sup>2</sup> These optimistic endorsements of civil society organizations resonate well with normative theories that see civil society as playing a central role in holding political and administrative officials accountable and limiting corruption, favoritism and clientelism (Ackerman 2004; Arato 2006; Avritzer 2002; Habermas 1996).

Some authors argue that civil society actors *cannot* exercise political accountability, however. Civil society actors by definition exist and operate outside the sphere of formal political authority, and therefore lack formal coercive and sanctioning power (Mainwaring 2003, 7). Civil society actors may in a diffuse, indirect way shape policy and affect the reputation of public officials through tactics such as framing and shaming (Gordon & Berkovitch 2007; Keck & Sikkink 1998; Risse 2001; Snow & Benford 1992), but these actions cannot, the argument goes, be considered as exercising accountability as actions do not directly result in formal sanctions (Mainwaring 2003, 7; **more refs**).

This paper seeks to bring some clarity into this discussion. After a brief consideration of the concept of accountability, the paper takes stock of the growing number of studies that examine cases in which citizens have partially or fully succeeded in holding public officials accountable. Building on existing research, the aim is to the extent possible to elucidate the conditions under which civil society actions are able to mitigate the abuse of public power for private gain. In particular, this survey seeks to assay the significance of three overarching factors or conditions that may affect the capacity of civil society to contribute to accountability efforts: the design of the accountability institutions in place, the role of the media and political leadership, and the nature of the organizations and associational landscape. A incipient body of literature already offers a few attempts to take stock of the case study research (Ackerman 2004; Avritzer 2002; Fung 2003; Fung and Wright 2003; Goetz and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.undp.org/governance/sl-par.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/democracy\\_and\\_governance/technical\\_areas/anti-corruption/types.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/anti-corruption/types.html)

Jenkins 2005; Houtzager and Joshi 2008; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006; Wampler forthcoming), offering invaluable observations and insights into the forms, forums and preconditions for meaningful civil society involvement in governance processes. Few of these surveys rigorously explore the factors and conditions that distinguish successful cases from those that fail to bring about change, however.<sup>3</sup>

The studies analyzed here deal with accountability campaigns at the local or regional level, a focus that mirrors the focus of research on civil society in anti-corruption efforts more generally. A more complete picture of the role of civil society in mitigating corruption of course also requires understanding the ways in which national and transnational civil society organizations contribute to bringing about legislation and institutional reforms needed for anti-corruption work to proceed. Research on the activities and impact of these organizations to date remains a future endeavor. This paper begins with a brief exploration of the concept of accountability and then turns to the case study review. The final section of the paper synthesizes the findings of existing research into an analytical framework that brings to light hypotheses for future research.

### **Civil society and accountability**

Accountability has, like other terms that come into vogue, attained numerous meanings and tends to be used to describe any desirable governing arrangement. Horizontal accountability, the most direct and effective form of accountability, refers to the formal power that institutions have to monitor and sanction one another. Vertical accountability generally refers to citizens' ability to impose sanctions on representatives through general elections.

Though a full review of the divergent ways to conceptually skin the accountability cat is well beyond the scope of this paper, three points need mentioning to clarify the definition used here. First, does accountability always imply an ability to sanction? Second, does the ability to sanction by definition derive from formalized institutional arrangements? Similarly, does accountability only refer to the imposition of formal sanctions, exacted via the state's coercive powers? And, finally, how do we define scope of issues for which public authority can be held accountable? Regarding the first issue, Schedler (1999) distinguishes between answerability, the capacity to demand answers, from enforcement, the capacity to sanction or bring about the enforcement of the law, and argues that accountability includes both dimensions. While most authors emphasize the ability to sanction as a key element of accountability, others use the term to refer only to the answerability dimension - the communicative process through which decision makers give an account of and justify their decisions and use of public authority (Chambers 2003; Warren 1996). Scrutinizing, challenging, and demanding justifications from authority regarding decisions and actions undeniably enhances the legitimacy of the democratic process. For the sake of conceptual clarity, however, the more specific conceptualization is

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<sup>3</sup> Wampler (forthcoming) study of participatory budgeting in eight Brazilian municipalities offers a notable exception.

used here; accountability implies some form of capacity to bring about sanctions for misdeeds.

The 'capacity to bring about sanctions' does not, however, need to be formalized in institutional arrangements, the second point of contention. Mainwaring (2003, 14) argues for a more restrictive definition, which places the empirical focus on institutions with 'legally ascribed sanctioning power'. As the empirical cases reviewed below suggest, however, such a delimitation risks missing processes that may prove essential to understanding why accountability works when, where and as it does. Examining only formal institutional arrangements may fall short of understanding why misconduct continues with impunity in one context and leads to sanctions in another. Perhaps the most compelling argument for broadening the analysis of accountability to include the actions of extra-institutional actors is simply that many institutions of accountability are designed to react to input from such actors. In an elucidating discussion of congressional oversight in the United States, Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz (1984) observe that much of the oversight carried out by Congress and other institutions was more akin to reacting to fire alarms than to carrying out the continuous surveillance that might resembled policing action. Fire-alarm mechanisms of oversight allow an institution to observe, albeit indirectly, a much larger portion of the administration at a much lower cost in terms of time and resources, which instead are incurred by civil society. McCubbins and Schwartz argue that an examination of only the police-patrol oversight mechanism will tend to lead to the fallacious conclusion that oversight and accountability functions poorly, as the scope of the analysis will exclude bulk of the ongoing oversight activity (1984). The definition used here therefore includes extra-institutional initiatives and processes that lead to sanctions being imposed.

Moreover, sanctions themselves may be formal and delivered by an institution wielding public sanctioning power, but may also be also exacted outside the framework of formal institutions. A media storm that severely tarnishes the reputation of a political officials may render him or her isolated and ineffectual and thereby force a resignation.<sup>4</sup>

The final point of conceptual contention deals with the 'jurisdiction' of accountability (Goetz and Jenkins 2005, 111). When referring to voters exercising accountability through elections, the concept generally refers to approval or punishment of the overall performance of elected representatives, including substantive policies pursued but even personal qualities. The aims of this review necessitate narrowing the scope; accountability refers here to efforts to redress violations of laws or norms of good governance, in particular the norm against using public power for private gain.

In sum, accountability refers to actions that lead to sanctions (formal or informal) of malfeasance, breaches of legality or the abuse of public power for personal. In

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<sup>4</sup> Including informal sanctions of course introduce conceptual ambiguity and raises questions regarding where to draw the line between a sanction and a minor setback. Restricting the definition to sanctions imposed by public offices also leaves room for ambiguity, however, as a formal sanction may liken a slap on the wrist. A sanction ought perhaps best be defined as a consequence that imposes a noticeable cost relative to the actor's circumstances or relative to the potential gains of abusing public power.

particular, two forms of accountability are examined in the studies reviewed below. Social, or societal, accountability is a form of vertical accountability that comes to light with the broader conceptualization of accountability that acknowledges that actors that lack formal authority to sanction may play a decisive role in redressing improbity (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006; Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2000). Civil society organizations may, for example, prod and pressure institutions of oversight to investigate and if necessary impose sanctions, or mobilize a media outcry that strips a politician of the political clout and legitimacy needed to continue an incumbency or political career. Social accountability operates between elections, is directed at specific issues or instances of misconduct, and tends to be confrontational (Peruzzoti and Smulovitz 2006, 10; Ackerman 2004, 450).

The second form of accountability examined here may be termed participatory accountability and includes institutional arrangements through which citizens associations participate directly in policy formation and implementation in an effort to mitigate corruption and clientelism. While social accountability is exercised *post hoc*, participatory accountability attempts to deter corruption by increasing transparency and public oversight, or break dependency on patrons by granting citizens direct access to managing public services and thereby eliminating the middle man. Participatory accountability increases transparency and may therefore lead to individually meted out sanctions for the abuse of public power. In successful cases it also eliminates opportunities for abuses and thereby has significant, negative implications for those who have previously benefited from corruption and clientelism.<sup>5</sup>

### **Social accountability case studies**

The cases of ex post accountability reviewed here indicate that social accountability generally operates by activating instruments of horizontal accountability – either judicial or political institutions with oversight powers and responsibilities – or by creating a media outcry that exacts damaging reputational costs on public officials. Many of the cases suggest that successful efforts to hold officials accountable require activating both of these mechanisms simultaneously.

Several cases treat the interaction between civil society organizations and the public prosecution in Brazil. The Brazilian public prosecution (*ministério público*), established in their current form by the 1988 constitution, consists of judicial offices at both the state and federal levels that are highly autonomous from both legislative and executive branches, but also from other offices in the judiciary (Kerche 2008, 259-60; Sadek and Batista Cavalcanti 2003, 207). The public prosecution has the responsibility “to defend the constitutional interests of citizens and society at large and to ensure that the public administration, and all its respective parts, complies with its constitutional responsibilities” (Sadek and Batista Cavalcanti 2003, 203).

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<sup>5</sup> In form, participatory accountability resembles other experiments in participatory democracy such as co-governance (Ackerman 2003), community monitoring (Olken 2003), empowered participatory governance (Fung and Wright (2003) and participatory development (UNDP 2002; World Bank 2003). Using the term participatory accountability rather than any of these terms focuses the analytical lens on examples of citizen involvement expressly intent on mitigating the abuse of public power for private gain.

Prosecutors have free hands to investigate and file claims on any form of discrimination or impropriety in the public sector, but it is up to the judiciary to adjudicate the claims, arrive at a verdict and issue sanctions (Sadek and Batista Cavalcanti 2003, 220). Civil society organizations have recognized the potential of these institutions and mobilized the investigative powers of the prosecutors to address administrative impropriety.

In one case, community associations involved the MP when a mayor refused to provide the resources needed for a citizens council to operate and participate in municipal affairs (Batista Calvancanti 2006, 40). Citizens councils, also stipulated in the 1988 constitution, are themselves instruments of participatory accountability and are intended to allow civil society organizations to participate in the formation and oversight of social service programs. When a mayor failed to honor this power sharing instrument, citizens associations turned to the MP, who then compelled the mayor to comply with the constitutional mandate.

In another case, civil associations in the state of Pernambuco prodded the public prosecution to push for the creation of a parliamentary commission of inquiry to investigate and indict politicians and police that were heavily involved in drug production and trafficking. By mobilizing the media, raising public awareness, arranging public demonstrations and involving the MP, civil society organizations succeeded in forcing those involved to resign and in some cases face criminal charges (Lemos-Nelson and Zaverucha 2006, 90-91). Those arrested and indicted included police chiefs, attorneys and even members of the state legislature (Lemos-Nelson and Zaverucha 2006, 93).

A study conducted in Delhi examines another successful effort to address abuses in the administration of a program to distribute basic food stuffs and kerosene, an operation that was run through so called fair price shops (Pande 2008). Individuals in charge of these shops routinely falsely recorded that households had received allocations and instead sold the goods for personal profit. Households that had been granted eligibility but were denied allocations at the shops began approaching a Delhi based NGO for advice. The NGO used the newly enacted freedom of information act to access records listing all households eligible for and having received benefits. Representatives of the NGO reported in interviews that they were only able to access all the needed records due to help from sympathetic bureaucrats (Pande 2008, 52). The NGO then arranged public hearings district by district, mobilized the residents of each distribution district to attend these hearings, and read lists of purported beneficiaries in order to discover discrepancies between eligibility lists and actual access to benefits. Volunteers of the NGO were on several instances harassed and physically threatened, sometimes with death. Because of the campaign, several shop owners, most also living at subsistence levels, were indicted and probity in the distribution food stuffs improved. The author is careful to point out, however, that the food program had been expressly designed to prevent politicians from affecting the distribution of benefits, and that politicians were disinterested may have been a factor that enabled the NGO to end the abuses (Pande 2008). The successful campaign therefore required open access to information, sympathetic bureaucrats that assured this access, disinterested politicians that abstained from obstructing attempts to bring breaches to light, and NGO volunteers

willing to risk their lives to address what must be considered the lowest possible level of corruption.

One of few comparative analyses of attempts at ex post accountability examines three separate attempts on the part of regional level NGOs in Indonesia to hold legislators in regional assemblies accountable for corruption related to budget expenditures. After the establishment of elections in 1999 did little to generate solutions to the country's problems, Indonesia sought to implement additional reforms to halt the country from descending into an "abyss of perpetually dysfunctional or low-quality democracy" (Davidson 2007, 78). These reforms included comprehensive decentralization and the enactment of anti-corruption laws, intended to increase accountability and reduce venality. Decentralization led largely instead to the capture of public resources by regional elites through budget misappropriations (Davidson 2007, 76-77). A small, professionalized civil society organization formed by a group of lawyers in the province of Padang mobilized and with the help of the provincial prosecutors office, secured the conviction and sentencing of a large number (43) of members of the Padang province legislature. The organization that initially submitted the report on the misappropriations used multiple strategies to bring about these legal repercussions, including gaining the attention of the local media, the backing of local university presidents as well as of local religious and student organizations. Perhaps more decisive to the ultimate success of the campaign, however, was the intervention of the Interior Minister of the national government, whose actions prevented the Supreme Court from overturning convictions made in district courts (Davidson 2007, 83). The Indonesian media saw the Minister's intervention as entirely politically motivated, as the convictions severely tarnished his own party's main rival. Similar attempts by civil society organizations in two other provinces led to legislators being brought to trial but without resulting in a single conviction. Davidson's comparison of two unsuccessful attempts with the Padang case leads him to conclude that the two key explanations to the successful case of social accountability were the skill and legal expertise housed in the organization spearheading the local efforts, as well as the intervention by national level officials from Jakarta (Davidson 2007, 89-93).

In some instances, formal institutions responsible for assuring probity have themselves taken initiatives to mobilize the assistance of civil society organizations in order to add weight to their own efforts. Returning again to the example of the public prosecution in Brazil, public prosecutors in Londrina, in an effort crack down on administrative corruption, sought publicity and public protest to counter the intense political pressure and witness intimidations that made indictments difficult to attain. The MP both reached out to community organizations to raise awareness of the administrative corruption and the political efforts to obstruct accountability, and also set up (telephone and internet based) channels via which the public could submit claims against authorities. Once approached, key CSOs mobilized eighty community organizations into an alliance and staged public demonstrations, which then attracted the attention of the media. With this enhanced public interest and transparency, the public prosecution was able to break the collusive networks. The city received Transparency International's Integrity Award in 2001 (Batista Calvancanti 2006, 44). Though not a civil society initiative per se, this case illustrates that the existence of a rich associational life may affect the effectiveness of

institutions of horizontal accountability that in theory should not rely on popular support to be able to carry out its oversight duties.

A final example of ex post accountability is illustrative in several respects. The case relates to the paying off of senators by members of the executive in Argentina to support a piece of labor legislation. The incident gave rise to a full blown media scandal after a senator leaked information to a major newspaper about the bribes. Civil society organizations became involved and sought to trigger several different mechanisms of horizontal accountability into action. Though institutions from all three branches of government became involved – the courts, three agencies from the executive branch, and a number of legislative commissions and committees – the incident led to not a single conviction. Several of key actors involved in the scandal did, however, resign from office as a result of popular and media pressure (Peruzzotti 2006, 257-264). The case illustrates that even if institutions of horizontal accountability break down, civil society may in fact be able to impose sanctions in the form of severely tarnished careers. Without the effective involvement of institutions with formal sanctioning power, however, punishment will not go beyond loss of political position and influence, and may signal to office holders that they may carry on with politics as usual with impunity.

### **Participatory accountability**

The preceding examples presented cases in which citizens' associations sought to hold officials accountable for misdeeds after the fact. A number of other studies have investigated institutions designed to allow for continuous citizen involvement in policy formation and implementation to minimize the discretionary power of public officials and also increase transparency, making it more difficult for public officials to ignore the public-private distinction. These institutional arrangements seek to increase ex ante accountability. One of the more thoroughly studied examples of such an institutional opening is participatory budgeting, which began in Porto Alegre, Brazil but has also begun to appear in other countries as well (Abers 1998; Abers 2003; Avritzer 2006; Baiocchi 2003; Wampler forthcoming). The process, most common at the municipal level, allows citizens' organizations to participate in formulating the municipal budget as well as monitoring investments and conveying citizens' back to government personnel regarding service provision (Abers 1998, 517).<sup>6</sup> The experiment has met with considerable success with respect to eliminating the brokering role of local patrons, but also greatly enhanced transparency and therefore also the capacity to hold municipal officials accountable.

Abers (1998) presents an in-depth longitudinal study of the Porto Alegre case reveals how participatory budgeting has made inroads into clientelistic networks and limited opportunities for favoritism, which had been prevalent in the municipality. As in many other Brazilian cities prior to the inception of participatory budgeting, neighborhood associations in Porto Alegre predominantly functioned as the infrastructure of clientelism, serving to mobilize votes under the leadership of ward bosses generally working for political parties and often not residing in the

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<sup>6</sup> Organizations participating in budgetary discussions include neighborhood associations and organizations representing special needs groups (for example individuals with disabilities).

neighborhood in question (Abers 1998, 516). In the initial years of the budget council, these neighborhood patrons, sometimes small-time politicians, attempted to hijack the process as well, promising sandwiches and children's shoes to those who voted for them to represent the neighborhood in the budget council. Once elected, one such patron then used his position to rally to pass a project to pave a road passing in front of his house, which was not in the neighborhood he purportedly represented. Persistent efforts on the part of the municipal government finally bore fruit, however, and neighborhood associations gradually became a meaningful forum for discussing community priorities and electing community representatives to participate in the budget council (Abers 1998, 524).

These participatory processes have not worked as well in all municipal settings as they have in Porto Alegre, however. A study comparing successful with less successful experiences identifies several factors that account for the extent to which participatory budgeting increases accountability and decreases clientelistic politics, three of which are relevant here: 1) political will on the part of the mayor, who must centralize power over budgeting decisions from various municipal offices, mobilize civil society organizations to participate, and then be willing to cede power to a considerable extent to the budgetary council; 2) a plurality of civil society organizations "because a broader base of groups, with diverse sets of interests, increases the cost of co-optation for the government" (Wampler, forthcoming); and 3) a willingness on the part of citizens groups to engage in contentious politics to defend their own projects. The extent to which civil society groups are willing to be contentious to some extent also depends on the existence of a rich associational life, as the government is less able to punish outspoken groups if there are many of them (Wampler, forthcoming).

In a similar vein, evidence from Mexico suggests that social welfare programs that have sought to increase public involvement in order to decrease the extent to which federal allocations are absorbed into local clientelistic networks are more successful in areas with a richer associational life. Fox (1994) presents a broad analysis of two consecutive such large-scale social welfare programs. The first major attempt to bypass local authoritarian bosses created an extensive network of village food stores to address the poor availability of staples in rural areas. In order to prevent the capture of goods by local bosses, the program (known as the National Basic Foods Company - CONASUPO) also required the creation of regional consumer organizations designed to monitor the distribution of food stuffs to local communities. The program met with varying regional success, and Fox argues that the main factor explaining this variation was the extent to which local and regional participatory and organizational traditions had existed at the community level prior to the program (Fox 1994, 162-164).

A more comprehensive poverty alleviation program replaced CONASUPO in the mid-1980s, this time with a more multi-pronged approach addressing several needs (e.g. water and waste water systems, health, food distribution, street paving). Like its predecessor, this new program (the National Solidarity Program, PRONASOL) sought to involve intended beneficiary communities in the planning and implementation of programs. By the mid-1990s, one hundred thousand local committees had been formed to participate in the local administration of

PRONASOL. As with its predecessor, the program met with varying degrees of success in challenging authoritarian local elites (Fox 1994, 167-8). And also like its predecessor, one of key factors that explains the varying level of success and failure this variation suggested was the “thickness” of preexisting citizens associations in recipient communities (Fox 1994, 172-174).

*Participatory accountability unhinged*

Evidence from the Brazilian and Mexican case has already illustrated that co-governance may, absent favorable circumstances, function poorly and ineffectively. Two unusually thorough studies examine two other programs that included community involvement and monitoring in the implementation of public development projects in India (Véron et al 2006) and Indonesia (Olken 2007) to mitigate corruption. Véron et al (2006) compare two districts, neither success cases in terms of participatory accountability despite careful attention to avoid pitfalls. Olken (2007) analyzes data on 608 road projects in which he was able to control the distribution of accountability structures (official audits, or community participation with three different designs). This randomized field experiment makes his study an exceptionally broad well founded analysis of attempts to detect and contain corruption through participatory monitoring.

Both studies examined national programs that called for the construction of local level infrastructure (roads in Indonesia, roads, schools, minor irrigation works, water and soil conservation measures in India). In both contexts, the policies were intended to provide public works but also badly needed employment opportunities. In an effort to curb venality, both programs forbade local public officials from contracting construction companies to do the work, and stipulated extensive local level monitoring of the flow of funds, jobs, and materials. Both studies came to the same conclusion, namely that community monitoring did little to reduce the overall leakage of funds, and moreover cited the same two reasons.

In both experiments, the monitoring process, though carefully designed to avoid such an outcome, suffered from elite capture (Véron et al 2006, 1933-1934; Olken 2007, 237). In the Indian case, the local ruling party hand picked the individuals to participate on each of the two monitoring committees, a violation of the program guidelines which required that these individuals be popularly elected. In the Indonesian case, Olken compared two systems of fielding villagers comments on road projects, one in which comment cards were distributed through schools and one in which neighborhood heads were asked to distribute comment cards. Cards distributed through schools yielded significantly more critical comments on the construction projects than those distributed by local elites, suggesting that the latter selectively gave cards to individuals expected to provide positive input.

The second problem noted in each of the community monitoring experiments was difficulty on the part of the community to overcome the collective action dilemma that such participatory monitoring entails. Véron et al (2006, 1933) observed members of that the monitoring committee in one district tended to be apathetic and dishonest, yet members were seldom voted out of office, and the authors attribute this failure in part to the considerable ethnic diversity and economic stratification in the area. Villagers could, in this district, also be bought off in the event that they

gained knowledge of misconduct. Olken (2007, 233-236) finds a different kind of evidence of free-riding in monitoring efforts. While the leakage of funds in the form of underpaid wages or enlisting the help of a cheap contractor (and consequently not hiring local labor) was less as a result of community monitoring, community monitoring had no effect on reducing leakage due to the theft of materials (building roads with inferior materials and pocketing the difference in cost). Reporting and retribution of corruption related to wage payments is directly in line with individual self-interest. In contrast, the quality of roads built relates to the longer term community interest, lowering the incentives for the individual community member to contribute actively to the monitoring effort.

Although these studies cast doubt on the effectiveness of community monitoring of development projects, they do not necessarily contradict the findings presented above. Unfortunately, as neither of these studies focus expressly on the role of civil society organizations, it is not possible to know the extent to which the communities studied sustained any associational activity. It would seem plausible to expect that a rich associational life would have helped to overcome the obstacles observed.

### **Synthesizing case study findings**

The cases discussed above are in many respects diverse. In some cases, the main aim has been to increase transparency and accountability, in others to redress corruption or clientelism in the administration of public goods and services, and in some it has primarily been to improve service provision. Contextual factors vary considerably as do the types of issues targeted. Despite this heterogeneity, certain patterns become apparent when comparing the cases. The commonalities in these cases in some respects echo conclusions advanced in previous research. Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) note, for example, that the media and judicial institutions both play a central role in social accountability, though they do not discuss in more general terms the attributes of these two institutions that might facilitate social accountability. Houtzager and Joshi (2008) review a series of preliminary analyses of citizen involvement in improving service provision and advance a number of insightful hypotheses regarding the necessary preconditions for social accountability. The conditions they deem favorable include reforms to enhance citizen voice, including decentralization and institutionalized participation; the involvement NGOs representing poor communities both in the process of reforming the policy for service provision as well as post hoc in the stage of holding providers accountable; and the existence of "...networks of collective actors that cut across class lines such as alliances of middle-class NGOs and membership associations or community groups..." (Houtzager and Joshi 2008, 3).

The discussion that follows attempts to evaluate and expand on these conclusions. In particular, three overarching conditions are considered: the institutional arrangements in place, factors that create an enabling environment, and the attributes of civil society itself that characterize successful cases.

### *Attributes of institutional arrangements*

In all of the cases examined here, civil society efforts to tackle corruption operated within the bounds of more or less formalized institutional arrangements either in the form of institutions of horizontal accountability, transparency enhancing legislation, or participatory governance arrangements. The mechanisms of horizontal accountability included the public prosecution in Brazil and legislative commissions. The freedom of information act in India presents an example of the transparency enhancing legislation, and the examples of participatory budgeting and attempts at community monitoring in India and Indonesia exemplify mechanisms of participatory governance. The institutional arrangements span a wide range with respect to the intended role of civil society, with the mechanisms of horizontal accountability designed to react to fire alarm signals from civil society actors monitoring public sector activity to institutional arrangements that presume continuous long-term involvement by community associations.

A comparison across this range suggests that all of these institutional arrangements must, in order to contribute effectively to enhancing the quality of government practices, possess the most fundamental qualities of an effective institution, namely authority and autonomy. For the institutions of horizontal accountability, authority lies in the power to access information, and most importantly in the power to impose sanctions. In the case of participatory structures, authority requires the delegation of control in meaningful issues to participatory arenas, and access to information to enable full monitoring of the use of resources in the policy process.

Autonomy rests in freedom from manipulation. For institutions of horizontal accountability, attempts at manipulation seem to come primarily in the form of political pressure not to act, to abstain from seeking evidence and pursuing indictments. With respect to participatory processes, threats to autonomy include elite capture and attempts on the part of clientelistic brokers to maintain their role as intermediaries between citizens and public goods and resources. The experiences detailed in the case studies attest to the difficulty in assuring authority and autonomy of institutions of accountability, and that even the most well-intentioned institutional mechanisms may fail if contextual factors are not favorable. I return to this point below.

### *Enabling environment*

Several of the case studies attest to the indispensability of a medial arena and journalistic corps that have the will and capacity to bring indiscretions to light. This will and capacity relate both to the extent the media are subject to political pressures but also on the extent to which conventions of investigative journalism exist (Waisbord 2006). The extent to which the media can play a role in exposing venality also depends on the extent to which the media has lenses focused at various political and administrative arenas at various levels of government. Media actors that focus only on national level politics will serve little in routinely scrutinizing local or provincial levels. Similarly, media channels owned by an economic elite that also dominates the political arena will in all likelihood perform this function poorly.

A factor which has received less attention presumably because it is the wildcard of political analysis, is the decisive factor in many cases: political will. Although it

defies systematic analysis, it is still a salient contributing explanation in many of the successful cases reviewed here. In the Padang case, in which a civil society group spearheaded efforts to end legislative corruption, a national level politician intervened to prevent the Supreme Court from overturning the convictions issued in a lower court. The campaign launched by a Delhi NGO to expose the embezzlement of basic food stuffs required the collaboration of sympathetic bureaucrats and the non-intervention of politicians who could potentially have quashed the effort. And the success of participatory budgeting in Brazilian municipal governments rests heavily on the willingness of the mayor to delegate meaningful power.

It is worth noting that political leaders may not at all be reform-minded but instead interested mainly in advancing their own political careers under the guise of fighting corruption. The Jakarta politician who assisted in convicting party-rival members of the Padang legislature is indicative of what in all likelihood is a common incentive for power holders to seek to impose sanctions on one another. Political leaders and public officials may also genuinely desire reform and see citizen mobilization as a welcomed counterweight to abusive power holders; the cases reveal that, for obvious reasons, political power is often used to obstruct accountability campaigns.

In a number of the cases, the political backing of civil society efforts have come from higher levels of authority than the level at which misconduct has occurred. While civil society organizations exert pressure below, their likelihood of succeeding increases considerably if they are able to catch the ear of actors in higher positions of authority that can either exercise their authority as principals and using instruments of enforcement, bring agents into line. The opposite may also be true, as the case of Londrina suggests. Institutions of horizontal accountability may increase their own effectiveness by mobilizing pressure from below to end abuses. Though dealing with a different set of actors, this observation resembles Keck and Sikkink's (1998, 12-13) finding that civil society campaigns in which local or domestic organizations mobilize international organizations tend to be more effective as they are able to exert pressure on national governments both from within the country as well as from the international community.

Though difficult to model and predict, certain conditions might increase the likelihood of political power being used to support social accountability efforts. In particular, the presence of viable political competition may provide the needed incentive structure for political leaders to support civil society efforts to break up collusive networks among office holders or administrative officers. Such interventions presume opposition parties that are sufficiently strong to expend resources and political clout to back a civic campaign, and preferably representatives of various parties in positions of power that have incentives to keep tabs on one another. Moreover, observers of the public prosecution in Brazil note that prosecutors tend to be more active in states with political pluralism where "any elite political faction does not hold a quasi-monopoly on political power" (Sadek and Batista Cavalcanti 2003, 212). Though systematic studies are lacking, the authors speculate that political pluralism allows the public prosecutors a greater degree of independence to investigate indiscretions. Not only does political pluralism create opportunities for civil society to form allies among the political elite, a lack of

pluralism may increase the ability of political power to exert pressure on institutions of horizontal accountability and render them less effective.

*Attributes of civil society organizations and networks*

The plots of the stories told in the case studies are shaped not least by the characteristics of the associations and associational landscapes involved and the tactics they use to leverage the system to redress abuses. The studies examined above, which included both ex post social accountability as well as a number of attempts at participatory accountability in a variety of contexts, all confirm Wampler's (forthcoming) conclusion regarding the importance of a rich associational life, with a plurality of organizations, for the success of participatory budgeting in Brazil. Wampler noted that a plurality of organizations made it more difficult for patrons or brokers in systems of clientelism to co-opt organizations and therefore capture the participatory process. Fox's (1994) study of Mexico arrives at a similar conclusion, that the extent to which community involvement in administering reformist social programs depended greatly on the preexistence of community and regional associations. In areas with a weak civil society, local and regional elites tended to capture programs to strengthen their own positions as patrons, thereby perpetuating the dependency of the rural poor rather than alleviating poverty. The two studies of failed attempts at community monitoring (from India and Indonesia respectively) unfortunately do not expressly discuss whether local residents had prior experience with local collective endeavors. The evidence from other contexts suggests, however, that such experience would have facilitated efforts to overcome the collective action dilemma involved in monitoring efforts and resisting cooptation.

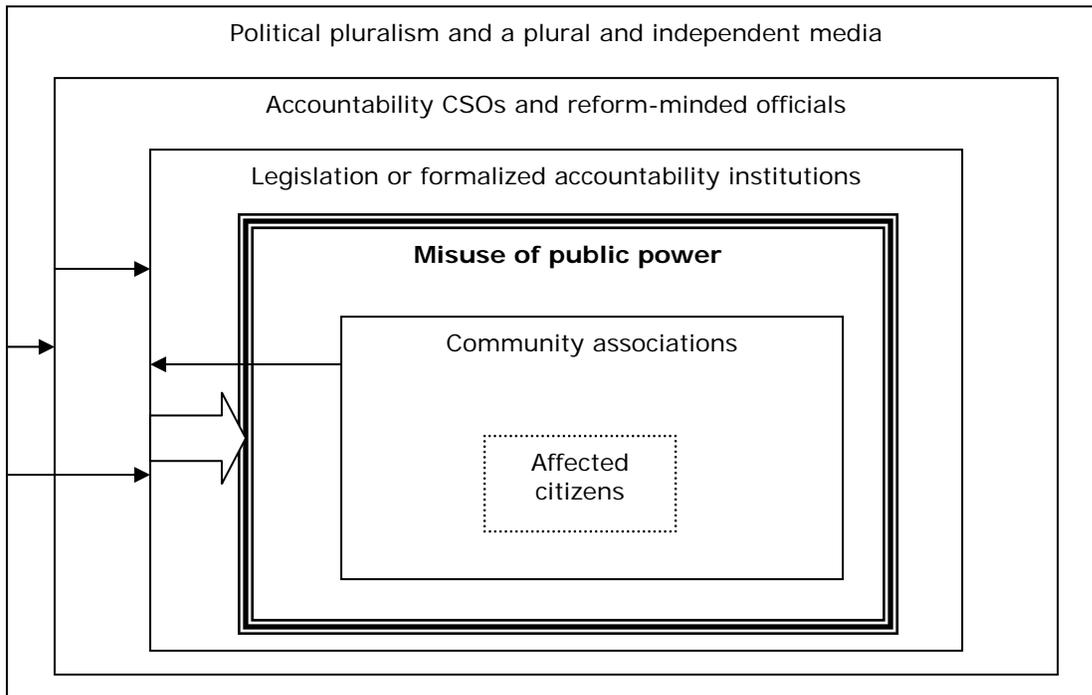
The examples of ex post accountability also provide compelling evidence that a plurality of community organizations may contribute to the success of bringing about enforcement. Such organizations generally act not so much as the driving force but as the communicative network that can mobilize a local population to gather vital information, as through the well used hotlines set up in Londrina, Brazil, and through the public hearings in Delhi, or to stage a protest that makes it more difficult for public officials to abstain from taking action.

Most of the ex post accountability efforts also owe their success to the efforts of more professionalized (rather than community-based) NGOs that doggedly seek and compile information, file claims and put pressure on institutions of horizontal accountability. In some instances these actions take place despite intimidation tactics from those that are the targets of their efforts. The studies of the public prosecution in Brazil present little or no information on the organizations filing claims. Reflecting on these experiences as a whole, however, Batista Calvancanti notes that larger and more well-established civil society organizations seem more adept at pressing the public prosecution into action than smaller local organizations (2006, 48-49). In sum, it is incorrect to claim that only one type of organization contributes to accountability efforts; a favorable configuration may be a smaller number of professionalized organizations to instigate efforts, but also an infrastructure of local organizations that can arrange a broad based mobilization if needed. These empirical findings mesh well with formal theories of political action and political corruption.

Both corruption or clientelism, but also impartial and universalistic institutions, can be analyzed as fairly stable equilibria in a meta game, with payoffs depending on how other players in the system behave. In a region or polity in which engaging in corruption is the most prevalent strategy, playing by the legal rules (by refusing for example to pay or accept bribes), will result in a much lower payoff for the individual, whether citizen, front-line bureaucrat or politician and have little or no impact on changing the overall payoff structure (Johnston 2005). Bringing about universalistic institutions requires increasing the payoff for impartial behavior and decreasing the relative payoff (including likelihood of detection and plausible sanctions) of using public power for personal gain. The problem is, who will act to change the incentive structure, since the principals in corrupt polities operate in the same payoff structure as agents. Principals have strong material disincentives to push for impartial application of rules, unless other relevant principals choose to change strategy at about the same time. Moving a system out of a particularistic equilibrium is therefore also a collective action dilemma for principals. Provided the polity is at least nominally democratic, voters and civil society actors can potentially change the payoff structure and create incentives for principals (both decision makers and institutions of horizontal accountability) to push for more universalistic practices in the public sphere.

For voters and civil society to perform such a function also requires them to overcome the collective action problem that Mancur Olson described as a primary impediment to collective group efforts (Olson 1965; Tarrow 1994, 21-22). All of the following require that a number of actors invest resources or forego an individual payoff to attain a collective good: community monitoring, demanding community resources rather than individual short-term benefits (i.e. resisting cooptation), staging a public protest, voting for an honest politician rather than one that has promised a payoff in exchange for a vote, arranging a successful public hearing, lobbying for institutional reform. It is therefore not difficult to understand theoretically why a history of collaboration - community or neighborhood associations that have, for example, coordinated access to a limited water source or pooled resources to build a well - would enable a community to overcome the problems of holding public officials accountable. Social movement scholars have noted that solutions to such collective action dilemmas generally do not come in the form of mobilizing individuals but rather mobilizing already existing organizations, who mobilize their members. As Marwell and Oliver point out, "Olson's 'large group' problem is often resolved by a 'small group' solution (Marwell and Oliver (1993:54).

Figure 1. Conditions and mechanisms of citizens' efforts to exercise accountability when adversely affected by the abuse of public power.



The broad arrow represents the direct exercise of investigative and sanctioning power involved in holding officials accountable. The line arrows represent key interactions that activate the formal accountability mechanisms.

In sum, whether citizens adversely affected by acts of corruption are able to hold public officials accountable is a factor of the political, associational, institutional and media landscape. Understanding the capacity of civil society to contribute to reducing corruption requires examining the interplay between community level associations, professional NGOs, institutions of horizontal accountability, institutions of participatory governance, reform-minded political and administrative officials, transparency enhancing legislation and the media. The case studies suggest that favorable conditions are not merely favorable but essential, and that success in most of the cases seems to have hinged on several of the factors discussed here. In other words, necessary conditions must be in place at several levels ranging from the specific situation to the more general context for social and participatory accountability to function. Figure 1 summarizes the relevant levels and the conditions that enable social and participatory accountability.

The arrows show the more crucial and decisive (though certainly not all) interactions among levels that seem to shape outcomes. The media, reform-minded officials and professional accountability CSOs, as well as community associations may all exert pressure on institutions of accountability to take action. CSOs may of course also appeal to the media and to sympathetic officials to intensify the pressure. And one case illustrated that actors in an accountability institution (the public prosecution in

Brazil) may also mobilize community increase their own efforts to exercise accountability.

The dynamics interactions suggested in Figure 1 do not occur in a social, political or discursive vacuum; the broader historical and contemporary context set the stage for specific accountability endeavors. In addition to myriad other factors, several forms of civil society activity beyond those discussed above may further explain the success of social and participatory accountability. The efforts of civil society organizations led to the creation of participatory budgeting councils in Brazil (Wampler and Avritzer 2004), and the enactment of a freedom of information act in India (Banisar 2006, 86). The anti-corruption efforts by national civil society organizations and other political actors may to some extent stem from the ever intensifying anti-corruption discourse at the international level.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Neo-Tocquevillian theories of democracy, as well as a number of weighty actors on the international aid and development arena see a strong civil society as a key ingredient in efforts to redress abuses in government. Other authors express skepticism regarding the potential of civil society organizations to play such a role due to their lack of formalized authority. This debate seems, in light of the findings of the analyses presented here, somewhat misdirected. The case studies reviewed here suggest that the relevant issue is not whether civil society organizations can participate in a larger process of checks and balances, but rather under what conditions and in what capacity.

The studies reviewed here suggest that institutional arrangements that grant civil society a significant and meaningful participatory role in policy formation and administration represent an avenue for breaking the self-reinforcing systems of corruption and clientelism, but only provided sufficient will on the part of political leaders to cede meaningful power, and the existence of a rich associational life prior to the introduction of participatory opportunities. In such institutions, civil society act in a policing capacity, continually overseeing the allocation of funds the quality of local public services.

In most of the cases, however, civil society acts in a more indirect capacity, sounding fire alarms in the hope of activating the investigative and prosecutory powers of institutions of horizontal accountability. Judicial institutions such as an autonomous public prosecution, effective freedom of information acts, strong anti-corruption legislation, the creation of an ombudsman to field citizen claims, and perhaps other legal measures may constitute institutional openings that civil society may utilize to break up collusive networks or hold individual officials accountable for misdeeds. Absent institutions that both have the capacity to investigate and prosecute abuses, civil society organizations can only resort to protests on a massive scale in the hope of dislodging a corrupt leader (e.g. the demonstrations that led to the resignations of leaders such as Collor de Mello in Brazil, Marcos and Estrada in the Philippines, Yanukovych in Ukraine.)

Participatory and societal accountability can potentially have tremendous long-term beneficial effects for a polity, in the best case transforming the payoff structure for political and administrative officials and thereby facilitating a solution to the social dilemma actors in power face with respect to establishing impartial and universalistic institutions. A few restraints on this optimism are however in order. The cases illustrate clearly that the transformative power of civil society is constrained by numerous factors, not least certain attributes of the polity itself. It would therefore seem implausible to expect civil society to play a routine role in accountability efforts in a polity in which corruption on a grand scale is endemic to the point that political competition functions poorly and the media collude with political power. Barring even such extreme examples, the cases suggest that civil society can enhance accountability only when anti-corruption efforts have already gained a certain momentum, meaning that sufficient political will exists to put anti-corruption legislation and institutions of accountability in place.

In sum, while civil society efforts are not the magic accountability bullet, the case studies suggest that an active civil society may play an essential role in enabling institutions of horizontal accountability to perform well. Institutions of horizontal accountability are seldom equipped with the resources to investigate and police all aspects of the political process and administration and are therefore often expressly designed to field input and reports of violations from citizens acting individually or collectively. Though a costly endeavor for civil society organizations, such efforts may provide a means for moving to an overall higher level of universalism, impartiality and rule of law.

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